

Deep Work – Cal Newport

Summary

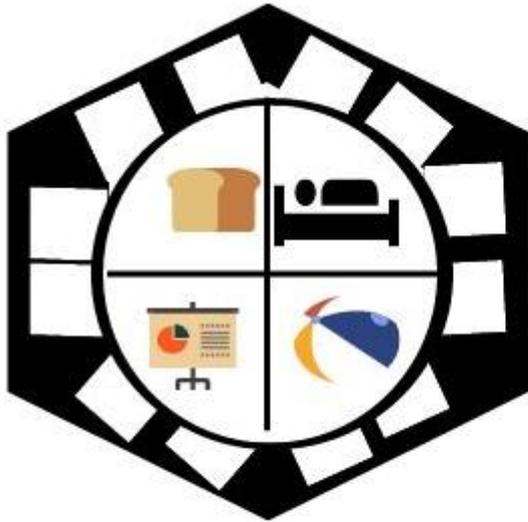
DEEP work is becoming increasingly rare in our attention economy where there's an increasingly amount of distractions. That said, expertise ('talent') is more highly valued than ever. **DEEP work is the ability to spend (4 or more) disconnected, uninterrupted, undistracted & fully focused hours a day practicing new skills OR generating high-level output whilst leveraging an expertise** (measured in months required to teach someone else. <1m = shallow)

- When the brain becomes accustomed to on-demand distractions (phone, social media, email, ...) it reduces its ability to manage working memory, ability to filter out relevant information, ability to focus on a specific task without distraction and otherwise the engagement of larger parts of the brain (mental resource depletion) than is necessary
- Be relentless. Most every day of most every week you should be pushing your mind to grapple with activities which dramatically impact your life quality. Leave the socially conformed mindset of artificial busyness, email compulsion and social media posturing.
- "Many people don't use their spare time constructively, seeing it as a prologue or epilogue for their worktime"

Essence

- The people that will thrive in the future economy will be **highly tech-skilled workers** (people who are good at working with machines), **superstars** (the top percentile of every industry. It's a 'winner-take-all' market out there. Especially considering digital skills where you directly compete with the whole world) and **owners** (people with enough capital available to invest, preferably in high-level tech startups which commonly have unprecedented ROI). You get there by
 - → QUICKLY MASTERING COMPLEX SKILLS/TASKS
 - → ABILITY TO PRODUCE AT AN ELITE LEVEL (QUALITY & SPEED)
 - = **DEEP WORK**
- It takes time to ease into a state of deep focus. NOT on will-call!
- Define clearly: **Where you'll work deeply, what you'll be working on & the rules** (closed windows, no phone, darkened, no blogs/fb/twitter)
- Navigating a nature environment restores mental resources, urban environment depletes it
→ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0272494495900012>
- **4 hours of intense focus per day MAX**
- Zeigarich effect: Letting unfinished tasks take up mental resources after the work day has been completed → Schedule in uncompleted tasks in the coming days.
- The brain is capable of continuous hard activity, only change in activity is needed (I doubt this)

- The damage of shallow work is deeply underestimated & importance is overestimated, which makes the working day incredibly fragmented & aids in an inability to accurately gauge time use.
- **Serendipitous creativity:** combination of different disciplines thrown together in a large reconfigurable building leads to improved inventiveness. (on working spaces)

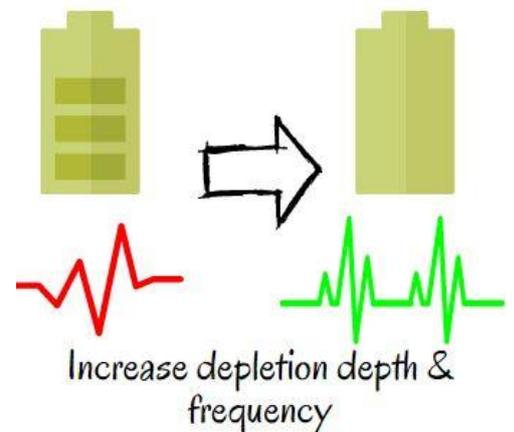


Coworking space (hub & spoke)

- Central room with main compartments
- separate offices for deep work
- long hallways around central room for serendipitous encounters

1. Improve the frequency of deep work & the intensity of mental resource depletion

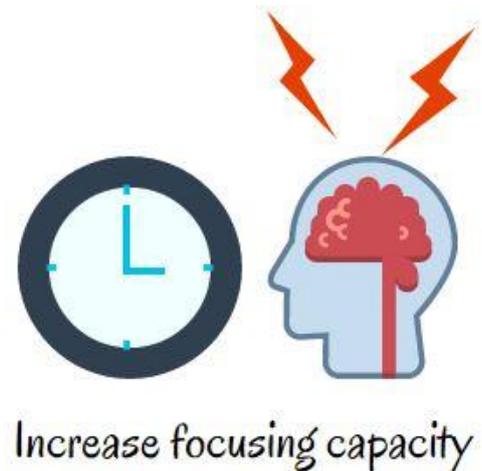
- Most common distractions: eating, sleeping, sex, checking mail/social media, surfing the internet, watching television, bathroom breaks & listening to music.
- **Monastic approach** → Maximize deep efforts by eliminating or radically reducing shallow obligations → retreat to quiet/distractionless environment for a long stretch of time Secluding yourself is best option when you're in a distractionful/hostile environment.
- **Rhythmic approach** → Increase the frequency of deep efforts by scheduling them frequently in the calendar
- **Journalist approach** → Whenever you find leisure time during the week, switch to deep work mode "My muse comes at my schedule"
- **Grand gesture approach** → lock yourself in room until desired output/rent a fancy hotel room/schedule in a round trip flight + Radically change your environment coupled with a investment of money or effort to increase the perceived importance of the task
- Leverage the **whiteboard effect** by working side-by-side with someone else to bounce ideas off and drive competition/surrounding (back-and-forth approach)



- The **four disciplines of execution**
 - Identify a small number but critically and ambitious **outcomes** to pursue with deep working hours
 - Track lead measures (trackable indicators of progress)
 - Keep a scoreboard in front of you (key goals, focusing questions and progress indicators)
 - Regular reflections on scoreboard where you set specific actions for the coming week
- **Forced downtime/endtime with a shutdown routine**
 - Aids insight, helps to recharge ability to do deep work (any activity which gives freedom from “directed concentration”). Parkinsons law (forces you to work faster & implement tactics/habits to increase per hour output). Say no to any and all access to your time and energy, raise the bar high for access to you.

2. Increasing your focusing capacity

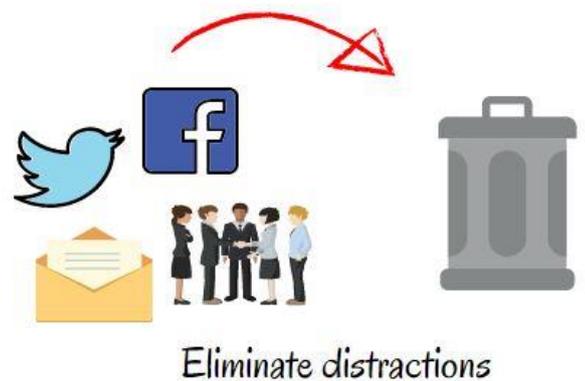
- → Daily straining of your mental muscle/focusing hours. Focusing ability must be trained regularly and consistently. Feeling bored + craving distraction = Mental workout
- **Practice boredom** = concentration training. When the brain becomes accustomed to on-demand distractions (phone, social media, ...) it reduces its ability to manage working memory, ability to filter out relevant information, ability to focus on a specific task without distraction and otherwise the engagement of larger parts of the brain (mental resource depletion) than is necessary. Constant switching between tasks teaches brain to never tolerate absence of novelty.
- **Practice disconnectedness**. Plan periods on a daily/weekly basis where you have no access to the internet/phone. Schedule in daily when you’ll use it. If you find early in your offline-time that you need “crucial” internet-access;
 - Switch to a different scheduled offline task
 - Schedule your online tasks sooner BUT wait an extra 5 minutes (conditioning)
- **Roosevelt dashes** → Use periods of hyper-focus with incredibly short deadlines. See it as interval training for the brain
 - Find a deep-work activity and give yourself half as much time to complete it.
 - Write & read faster
- **Productive meditation** → Occupy yourself physically & focus your attention on **one** single well-defined professional problem. Zlotoff incubation question. **“Zlotoff walking”**
 - Be wary of distracting thoughts that keep you of your 1 question



- ii. Don't loop over things you already know (brain likes to ramble to conserve mental resources)
- **Structure your thinking** by asking **relevant** questions
 - i. **Find the relevant outline:** What are the relevant pages/functionality that's needed for this project?
 - ii. **Next step questions:** How can I build page x & what does it need to look like?
 - iii. **Consolidate & affirm your answer:** I will reach key objective x by strategies x, y & z which have tactics x, y & z. which will be tracked by indicators x, y & z
- **Memory training** to build up attentional control (ability to focus undistractedly on work)

3. Removing distractions & input (social media/email/internet being the main ones)

- **Internet sabbatical** (don't touch any social media for a x stretch period of time)
- **Internet sabbath** (don't touch social media for a select period in your day/week → time-block it + batch social media scheduling)
- **CRAFTSMAN APPROACH TO TOOL SELECTION** → adopt a tool ONLY if the positive factors (success/happiness) substantially outweigh its negatives. For each tool ask yourself;
 - What are **my main** professional/personal goals?
 - What are the highest leverage strategies & tactics outlined to reach these?
 - Will this tool (/social media) aid me SUFFICIENTLY in achieving these goals? Rank the tool according to **no impact, high impact** or **negative impact**.
- **Structured down-time** → What will you be doing when you're NOT working? Put thoughts into what you'll do with your leisure time so you don't fall victim of whatever pops-up or catches your attention.

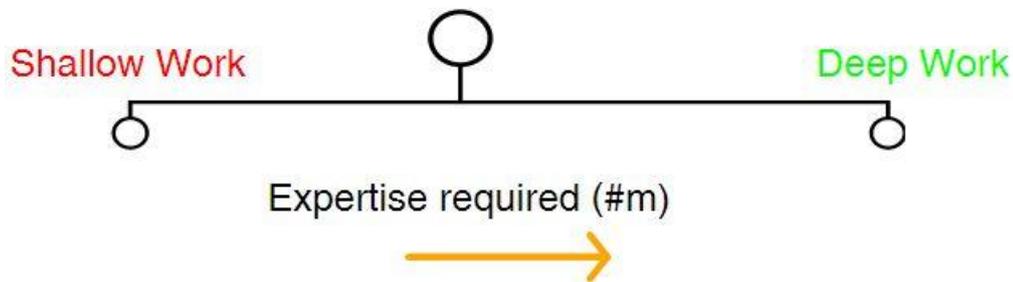


4. Draining the shallows (replacing non-deep work/input with deep work activities – especially on the job)

- **Schedule EVERY minute of your day** (time block each period). This isn't about restraints but about thoughtfulness, asking yourself daily; "what is the best way to spend my time?"



- **Quantify depth of activities** → How long would it take (in months of training) to teach the activity that I'm doing to a smart, recently graduated college graduate with no prior experience in my field?



- **Reduce shallow time at work** → Ask your boss how much time should be spent on shallow work (arguments that can be used: people can only do 4 hours of solid work/day, re-engaging takes a lot of mental resources, people overestimate their time worked, busy doesn't equal productive, 36signals productivity experiment (4day week & month off), sleep deprivation and professional performance.
 - i. Set a budget for shallow work/day in percentage & track time spendage in both shallow workday tasks and deep work (paying a highly skilled developer to send email/attending low ROI meetings is wasteful)
 - ii. **HOW MUCH TIME IN YOUR "BUSY" SCHEDULE ARE YOU PRODUCING VALUE?**
- **Become hard to reach.** Have a filter for incoming email & remove general purpose email.
 - i. "To maximize life quality output, I minimize input that doesn't correlate to my goals. It helps me get GREAT work done FASTER. Therefore I'm purposely hard to reach, I'm reachable at..."
 - ii. **Do not reply to email** if it's ambiguous & hard to generate a reasonable response to, not a question/proposal that interests you, nothing really good/bad would happen if you don't respond.
 - iii. Craft email in a way that reduces the mental resources necessary for the other person to answer it. When answering emails/messages: How can I respond that will ensure the least amount of back and forth and bring this project to the swiftest close (remaining questions)

Practical

- How can I improve my environment to allow more deep work?
- How can I actively measure deep work? (hours/day)
- How can I remind myself daily to focus on deep work (or get me back on track when I've fallen off?)
- Disconnect fully on Sunday (sleep in & then do review → no screens after that)
- Disconnect daily (no fb, twitter, blogs, phone, whatsapp & people from 7:30 till 11:30)

- Use the chain method (Have a daily scoreboard visible on all days that represents deep work hours)
- How can I improve the deadline-driven nature of my work to enforce deep work? (increase pressure)
- How can I schedule in more deep work?
- Have areas for deep work & convergence in your workplace (soundproof offices with gathering areas for inspiration)
- What could I focus my deep working hours on to considerably impact my life quality? (business output or personal skill learning?)
- How can I implement regular memory training to increase my ability to give a task full attention?
- When will I time-block social media to schedule posts? (check at 20-20:30 max & schedule on Sunday, 3-4/w)
- What social media is essential to achieve my main aim the next 3 months? ("Does this tool significantly & positively impact my most important strategies to achieve my top goals?")
- What types of social media posts should I schedule for highest ROI (images, funny, tips & tricks)
- Do a social media abbaath (don't touch it for x number of days). After the trial ask yourself questions p206.
- Write down 3 output-related tasks you could do during your off-time (train & bus)
- What arguments can be made for more deep work in the workplace? (people overestimate their time of REAL work, high-performance work is limited per day, sleep restriction leads to poorer work performance, case studies of 37signals)
 - <https://signalvnoise.com/posts/893-workplace-experiments>
 - <https://signalvnoise.com/posts/3186-workplace-experiments-a-month-to-yourself>
- Schedule every minute of your day (time blocking)
- How can I set up a filter so crap emails/spam gets automatically filtered?
- How can I answer emails so the project in question gets solved in the least amount of back-and-forth? (include cases & suggested dates)
- How can I craft emails so the recipient has to exert minimal mental resources in responding (include cases & suggested dates)
- For your working professional time, set a certain ratio of deep vs shallow work and track how many hours you spend in each.

Questions (CTM)

- Name the four main ways to increase deep work & list three strategies for each approach