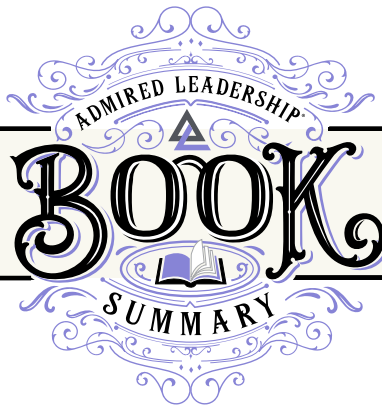




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



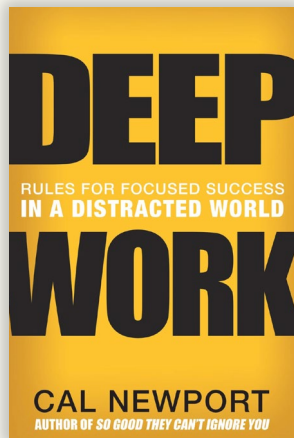
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# Deep Work

Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World

BOOK AUTHOR: CAL NEWPORT

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Most people with some level of commitment to learning and productivity have a sense that our culture of constant distraction – open workspaces, online social media and networking tools, e-mail onslaughts, and so on – can hurt our ability to concentrate. In **Deep Work**, writer and professor Cal Newport explains why the ability to concentrate without distraction for long periods of time is essential to producing meaningful work in today's economy, and he gives us a few practical tools to grow this ability in our personal and professional life.

## Key Quote

*“Our work culture’s shift toward the shallow (whether you think it’s philosophically good or bad) is exposing massive economic and personal opportunity for the few who recognize the potential of resisting this trend and prioritizing depth” (p. 8). — Cal Newport*

## KEY POINTS

**Deep Work Is Valuable.** Three types of people will excel in the new digital age: people who are very skilled at working with machines, people who are clearly the very best in their field, and people with capital. The first two types of people become that way by learning to do “deep work.” Deep work is defined as “professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate” (p. 3).

**Deep Work Is Rare.** Popular trends encouraged by businesses – things like common workspaces, instant messaging, and social media engagement – hurt people’s ability to do deep work. Busyness is not the same thing as productivity.

**Deep Work Is Meaningful.** Skilled craftsmen have known for centuries that the deep focus required to do their work brings a high level of satisfaction. We have lost the idea that “depth generates meaning” with knowledge work and would do well to recover it (p. 82). “Deep work can generate as much satisfaction in the information economy as it does in a craft economy” (p. 75).

**Rule #1: Work Deeply.** Craft your own schedule for working deeply based on your goals and obligations, ritualize how you do your deep work, make the occasional “grand gesture” to work alone and unplugged for an extended period of time, collaborate with other deep workers (but only when necessary), incorporate disciplines in how you work, and invest in deep work by taking breaks from your small obligations.


**Rule #2: Embrace Boredom.** Undistracted focus is something you train for and practice regularly. Schedule your distraction time and then give in to it. Schedule your focus time, and keep it sacred, too. Use time like walking or commuting to focus on only one defined issue or problem. And work to train your memory in order to strengthen your ability to concentrate.

**Rule #3: Quit Social Media.** Accept the internet as a tool but set a “stringent” boundary on how much you will use it. “Adopt a tool only if its positive impacts on [your personal and professional life] substantially outweigh its negative impacts” (p. 191).


**Rule #4: Drain the Shallows.** Schedule your time into blocks or related tasks, leaving room for unexpected insights. Ascribe weight to your tasks and bias your time towards deep work tasks. Communicate with your boss about expectations. Set a reasonable time to finish your work each day and commit to it by learning to say no.

**Key Concepts:**

To fully understand what deep work is, it’s important to have a clear understanding of what deep work is not. Deep work is not shallow work, which is defined as “non-cognitively demanding, logical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate” (p. 6).



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**DEEP WORK IS VALUABLE**

Newport explains to us that in our new economy of rapid expansion and technological advances there are three main categories of people who will greatly succeed. They are “those who can work well and creatively with intelligent machines, those who are best at what they do, and those with access to capital” (p. 28). While there is no secret to quickly gaining access to capital, the other two categories – working well and creatively with intelligent machines and being the best at what you do – are accessible through dedication and hard work (p. 29).

This is where the ability to learn hard things quickly comes into play, as this skill can land you in either of those successful groups if applied efficiently. “The two core abilities just described depend on your ability to perform deep work” (p. 32).

## DEEP WORK IS RARE

A paradox exists within the workforce. If deep work is as valuable as ever in our constantly changing economy, then why don't we see it being implemented and supported in the workplace? Newport defines this phenomenon as “The Principle of Least Resistance: In a business setting, without clear feedback on the impact of various behaviors to the bottom line, we will tend toward behaviors that are easiest in the moment” (p. 58). It's easier when we can gain access to information immediately. But deep work requires organization and foresight.

An easy way to quantify our productivity is by doing a lot of work that is visible to others. Writing hundreds of emails per day or maintaining an online presence both fall into this category. These tasks don't necessarily add value to our work or to the world, but without clear indicators of success, this public busyness takes precedence. Seeking satisfaction in this type of busyness becomes especially dangerous when combined with the tendency to blindly follow all things internet. Our assumption tends to be that if Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram exist, they must be meaningful and helpful. It's this lack of discrimination that fosters our addiction to distraction (p. 69).

## DEEP WORK IS MEANINGFUL

While the first two chapters focus on pragmatic reasons to employ this new style of living, it's here that we learn how depth will give our life meaning in profound ways. We need a compelling reason to convert when faced with the difficult task of changing habits and priorities.

**Neurologically:** If you practice being in a state of deep concentration, you will rewire your brain to associate that state with meaning and satisfaction (p. 76).

**Psychologically:** Deep work facilitates a state of “flow,” which is when you are voluntarily stretching your limits to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. It's been proven that humans can draw the most satisfaction and happiness from their lives when engaged in a state of flow (p. 83).

**Philosophically:** It's important to cultivate craftsmanship in our profession. It's not the specifics of the job that matter, but the meaning derived from craftsmanship as a sacred approach to work (p. 86).

In other words, deep work will give our professional lives another layer of meaning crafted by intense concentration over dedicated periods of time. Now that we understand that deep work is rare, valuable, and meaningful, it's time to start looking at how we can realistically apply this to our own daily lives. In his book, Newport makes the case for and provides the training regimen to foster focus in our age of distraction. Newport has outlined four rules for us to simplify this process.



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### **Rule #1: Work Deeply**

This rule asks you to question the widely accepted use of open office plans, regularly scheduled meetings, and an inbox that can't be ignored (p. 95).

There is an emphasis on ritualizing when and how you do deep work. This saves you the mental energy of having to decide each and every time whether or not to go deep.

Use collaboration but only when it's useful to help advance your work to the next level.

It's important to have a "shutdown ritual" so that, when you have finished your work for the day, you can let go and use the remainder of your evening for relaxation and recharging for the next day.

### **Rule #2: Embrace Boredom**

Newport truly treats his mind as though it were a muscle he is strengthening (p. 155). And you must "wean your mind from a dependence on distraction" (p. 157).

Limit internet use to carefully considered chunks of time, and avoid it completely during non-internet chunks. In this way, we can train our minds to be okay with being bored, and begin to wean ourselves off of the need to be constantly distracted.

### **Rule #3: Quit Social Media**

To develop a deep work habit, we need to fight to find a middle ground in our hyper-connected and overly-distracted world (p. 181).

Make sure that the benefits of using social media tools outweigh the negative aspects. Just because they have some benefit does not necessarily justify their use, so we need to be as mindful as a craftsman would be when selecting tools. Doing so will help in structuring leisure time.


The mind craves engagement, and if we treat our free time as though it were a day within a day, we can make great use of this time by avoiding meaningless distractions often found in social media.

### **Rule #4: Drain the Shallows**


Take a hard look at everything that is filling up your work life to determine where you can consolidate and what shallow work tasks might be less important than they initially seem (p. 215).

To do this will require you to schedule every minute of your day so that you already have a mindful plan of what you want to accomplish and how. Having this set ahead of time will make choosing not to participate in shallow work easier.

Be mindful of your inbox and only respond to emails that have clear importance. In doing so, we are questioning the convention that every email deserves a response, and we are ultimately preserving our time and energy.



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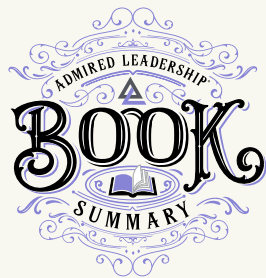


## CONCLUSION

After learning what deep work is and the potential it has to drastically increase productivity and meaning in our lives, Newport asks us to decide if this is important to us, noting that a deep work lifestyle is not for everyone.

While the path to a deep work lifestyle requires an incredible amount of dedication and strategy, it will eventually lead us to work less but produce more. A life lived deeply is a life that is rich in meaningful work and personal satisfaction. “A deep life is a good life.”

Newport, Cal (2016). **Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World**. New York: Grand Central Publishing.



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