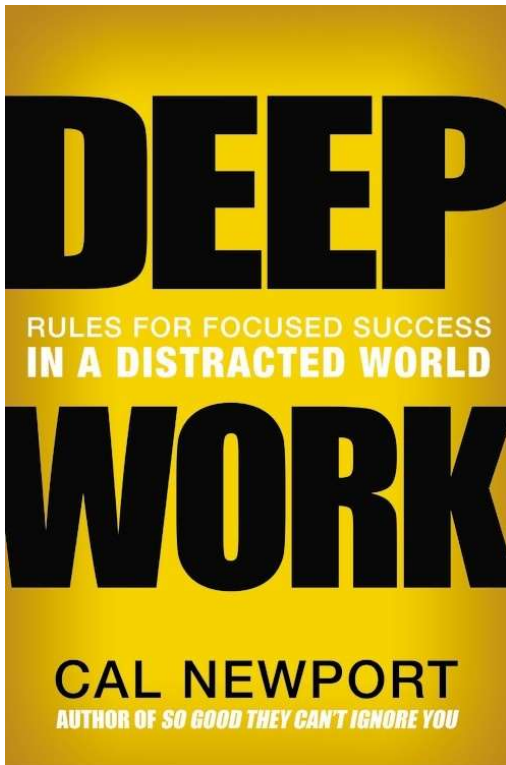


Deep Work by Cal Newport



Introduction:

In today's world, distractions abound, making it increasingly difficult to focus deeply on important tasks. Cal Newport's "**Deep Work**" introduces the concept of deep, undistracted concentration as a rare and valuable skill in our modern economy. This introduction sets the stage for exploring how cultivating deep work can lead to heightened productivity and success in a world filled with shallow distractions.

He discusses the history and benefits of "deep work," which involves tasks that require cognitive strain and concentration and provides strategies for including it into daily life in a world filled with technology.

About the author:

Cal Newport is a computer science professor, writer, and researcher known for his work on productivity and personal development. He holds a Ph.D. from MIT and has authored various books, including "Deep Work," which explores strategies for achieving focused success in a distracted world. Newport's practical insights and research-based approach have earned him a widespread following and made him a sought-after speaker and consultant.

"Deep Work" by Cal Newport consists of two parts: the first one explains the idea of deep work, while the second one suggests strategies that help adopt this behavior. So, here you can read a short "Deep Work" summary by chapter:

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Part 1. The Idea

Chapter 1: Deep Work is valuable.

In 2012, Nate Silver gained fame for accurately predicting election results on his New York Times blog. He later received job offers from ESPN and ABC News. David Heinemeier Hansson created the popular website framework Ruby on Rails and is now a successful software company partner. John Doerr, a venture capital partner, invested in companies like Twitter and Google, making him wealthy. These individuals succeed due to their skills or investments.

Two perspectives explain their success: personal traits and broader economic trends. MIT economists Brynjolfsson and McAfee argue in "Race Against the Machine" that digital technology is reshaping labor markets, benefiting high-skilled workers, superstars, and investors. This explains the success of people like Silver, Hansson, and Doerr.

The High-Skilled Workers

High-skilled workers like Nate Silver excel in today's economy due to their ability to leverage advanced technologies like data visualization and analytics. These technologies enhance their capacity for abstract and data-driven reasoning, making their contributions valuable. Silver's proficiency in working with complex machines, demonstrated through his data analysis and simulations, exemplifies the success of high-skilled workers who can effectively collaborate with intelligent technology.

The Superstars

David Heinemeier Hansson is a prime example of a "superstar" thriving in the modern economy. Thanks to advancements in technology, it is now possible for companies to hire the best talent from anywhere in the world. This means that top performers like Hansson can work remotely and serve multiple clients efficiently. Moreover, with the rise of "winner-take-all" markets, where consumers prefer the best performers, superstars benefit even more. This trend extends beyond traditional fields like entertainment to include industries like programming, consulting, and design, where remote work is becoming increasingly common.

The Owners

In the new economy, people like John Doerr, who have money to invest, will do very well. With the rise of technology, investing in businesses can bring big rewards, especially since technology reduces the need for more workers. This means that those who invest in companies can earn more money with little effort. Overall, there are three main groups that will succeed in this new economy: those who can work well with technology, those who are good at what they do, and those with money to invest. While there are other factors at play, joining one of these groups increases your chances of success. Next, we will talk about how you can become part of these successful groups.

How to Become a Winner in the New Economy

For succeeding in today's fast-changing economy, you need two important skills: the ability to learn difficult things quickly and the talent to produce high-quality work. E.g., Nate Silver is good at analyzing complex data to make predictions, and David Hansson created a popular software tool called Ruby on Rails. But it is not just about knowing stuff—you must use your skills to create valuable things that people want. This means being able to focus deeply on your work and deliver top-notch results. So, if you want to do well in this new economy, you need to be able to learn fast, work hard, and produce great stuff.

Deep Work Helps You Quickly Learn Hard Things

Succeed today, learn complex tasks fast and produce quality work. Sertillanges highlighted intense focus for mastering topics, later supported by Ericsson's idea of deliberate practice. This involves concentrated skill practice with feedback. Neuroscientists suggest this enhances skill development by growing myelin around neurons. Deep work—undistracted focus—is crucial for mastering the skills needed in today's economy.

Deep Work Helps You Produce at an Elite Level

Adam Grant excels in his role as a professor by focusing intensely on his work without distractions. He publishes numerous articles and authored a highly popular book because he prefers to work on one task for extended periods without interruptions. This deep focus allows him to produce exceptional work efficiently. Grant's approach serves as a valuable lesson: to achieve our best results, we must concentrate deeply on our tasks and avoid getting sidetracked.

Chapter 2: Deep Work Is Rare

Modern businesses prioritize trends like open offices, instant messaging, and social media presence over deep work. E.g. companies like Facebook and Square adopt open office layouts for collaboration, while IBM sends millions of messages daily. Despite promises of increased collaboration and responsiveness, these trends contradict the importance of deep work. Open offices create distractions, real-time messaging interrupts focus, and social media demands constant attention. This chapter aims to explain why deep work is undervalued in today's workplace and how cultivating a deep work ethic can lead to better results.

The Metric Black Hole

Tom Cochran, the chief technology officer of Atlantic Media, conducted an experiment revealing that the company spent over a million dollars annually on email-related labour costs. This highlighted the challenge of measuring the impact of distractions like email on productivity, creating a "metric black hole" where the bottom-line impact of deep work is elusive. Despite this challenge, behaviours hindering deep work persist in business culture due to biases and shifting forces. Understanding these mindsets and biases is crucial to steer businesses away from distractions and towards deep work.

The Principle of Least Resistance

Workplaces emphasize constant connectivity despite evidence showing it harms productivity. Disconnecting, as shown by studies like Leslie Perlow's at the Boston Consulting Group, boosts productivity and well-being. The principle of least resistance drives the persistence of connectivity culture, leading to behaviors like frequent meetings and hasty email forwarding, ultimately reducing productivity. These trends detract from deep work in an economy increasingly valuing depth.

Busyness as a Proxy for Productivity

Professors at research universities have clear metrics like the h-index to measure productivity, but other knowledge workers lack such clarity. There is reliance on visible busyness as a proxy for productivity, reminiscent of the industrial era. Marissa Mayer's ban on remote work at Yahoo reflects this mindset. Despite its outdated nature, busyness persists due to the absence of clear metrics and job ambiguity. Even those who value deep work might be influenced by ideologies prioritizing visible busyness over meaningful productivity.

The Cult of the Internet

In an Internet-centric culture dominated by technopoles, deep work struggles against constant connectivity and social media engagement pressures. Serious professionals like Alissa Rubin pushed to engage in shallow behaviours like weeding, overshadowing their primary value in focused work. Neil Postman and Evgeny Morozov caution against blind adoption of Internet-centric ideology, which marginalizes deep work despite its focus on quality and craftsmanship. Without clear metrics linking productivity to bottom-line impact, shallow work prevails, perpetuating the dominance of Internet-related activities.

Bad for Business. Good for You.

Despite the importance of deep work in today's business environment, it often takes a backseat to shallow tasks. This is due to the difficulty of deep work, the prevalence of shallow work, and the cultural bias favouring Internet-related activities. However, this presents an opportunity for individuals to stand out by mastering deep work, as it becomes increasingly rare and valuable. By prioritizing deep work, individuals can achieve greater success and fulfilment in their endeavours.

Chapter 3: Deep Work is meaningful.

In this chapter Newport discusses deep work from the viewpoint of three arguments: neurological, psychological, and philosophical.

A Neurological Argument for Depth

When Winifred Gallagher faced a tough time dealing with cancer, she found something interesting about how attention affects happiness. Instead of dwelling on her illness, she focused on enjoyable things like watching movies, taking walks, and having a drink. Surprisingly, this made her feel much better than she expected. It shows that managing where we put our attention can make a significant difference.

According to Newport, we often think that our feelings are often controlled by our circumstances. But our brain plays a significant role in shaping how we see the world. This means we can choose what we pay attention to. This idea also applies to work. Even if we think shallow tasks are harmless or fun, spending too much time on them can make our day feel tiring and stressful.

A Psychological Argument for Depth

There are people who think that happiness comes from relaxing, but that is not always true. Free time can feel aimless and hard to enjoy because there is no structure to it. On the other hand, work can bring mental pleasure. When you have clear goals, face challenges, and follow rules, it can be engaging and fulfilling.

This feeling of deep involvement and satisfaction is what psychologists call "flow." It happens when you are fully focused on a challenging and meaningful task. Flow is a key part of deep work.

A Philosophical Argument for Depth

Descartes, a philosopher from a long time ago, was skeptical about many things. He believed that people searching for truth were more important than God or the King. This made it hard for people to figure out what was meaningful and what was not, which caused confusion.

In a book called "All Things Shiny," Dreyfus and Kelly talk about how we can bring back a sense of sacredness. They say that instead of looking for meaning outside of ourselves or things, we should realize that meaning is already there. E.g. if someone makes wheels, they should not have to decide what part of the wood is important – the wood itself is valuable.

When we appreciate what we do and see its value, we find meaning. This is what deep work is all about.

Part 2. The Rules

Rule #1: Work deeply

Newport says you can a way that suits you best for Integrating deep work into your professional life. Scheduling deep work, you can pick one of the following approaches, which he calls “philosophies”:

The Monastic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling

The approach described here is about eliminating or significantly reducing shallow tasks to prioritize deep work. An illustration of this observed in the practice of science fiction writer Neal Stevenson, who deliberately withholds his email address from his website. By doing so, he communicates his desire to avoid interruptions. Stevenson recognizes that responding to substantial number of emails can detract from the quality of his writing and slow down his progress. This deliberate exclusion of shallow tasks allows him to maintain focus and productivity on his primary creative endeavours.

The Bimodal Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling

The bimodal philosophy of deep work, exemplified by Carl Jung, involves dividing your time between deep work and shallow activities. Jung did not eliminate distractions entirely; instead, he reserved specific periods, such as retreats, for focused deep work. According to Newport, the key is dedicating at least one full day to deep work, rather than just a couple of hours in the morning. However, people may struggle to find such extended periods due to inflexible work schedules. Nonetheless, communicating your need for deep work time limits to colleagues can often lead to their respect and cooperation.

The Rhythmic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling

Consistently practicing deep work sessions can turn them into habits, making it easier to dive deep without much effort. Newport shares a story about comedian Jerry Seinfeld, who revealed his secret to success: he writes a joke every day and marks it off on a calendar. Over time, seeing a chain of crosses build up provides motivation and establishes a rhythmic routine for productivity.

The Journalistic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling

The journalistic philosophy is about being able to switch quickly from doing intense work to doing easier tasks. Mastering this skill is not inherent, yet it is entirely attainable through learning and practice. E.g., Walter Isaacson, a well-known magazine journalist, used this approach. He would spend time with his family, then go to his room for about twenty minutes to work deeply, and then return. Whenever he had free time, he could switch to doing deep work. This method helped him to draft a nine-hundred-page book in addition to his articles.

It is important to choose a philosophy that fits your situation. If you pick the wrong one, it could disrupt your deep work routine before it becomes a habit. So, take your time to find the approach that works best for you.

Rule #2: Embrace the boredom.

Reach deep concentration, Newport suggests spending more time feeling bored. By "boredom," he means when your brain relaxes after intense work. But when we are bored, we often turn to our phones or the internet, which can harm our brain.

Constant multitasking makes it hard to focus and damages our memory. So, if you grab your phone whenever you are bored, you are training your brain to get distracted, which goes against deep work. Combat this, Newport recommends:

1. **Taking Breaks from Focus, Not Distraction:** Instead of having an "Internet Sabbath" day, where you avoid technology once a week, schedule breaks from focusing to give in to distractions. Avoid the internet during your focus time, both at work and at home, to train your brain to resist distractions.
2. **Working Like Teddy Roosevelt:** Roosevelt pursued many interests while excelling in his studies. He committed eight hours daily to studying, aside from class, training, and lunch. Through intense focus during study sessions, he managed to allocate time for other activities afterward.
3. **Productive Meditation:** Use idle moments, like walking or driving, for productive meditation. Think deeply about a pressing problem instead of letting your mind wander. This way, you can make effective use of otherwise wasted time.

Rule #3: Quit social media

In 2013, digital media consultant Baratunde Thurston took a 25-day break from the internet due to burnout. Disconnecting helped him enjoy offline activities and showed the negative impact of excessive internet use on concentration. Instead of quitting entirely, Thurston suggests a "craftsman approach," being selective about online tools to improve productivity and well-being. By reassessing our relationship with technology, we can achieve a healthier balance between online and offline life.

Apply the Law of the Vital Few to Your Internet Habits

Famous writers like Malcolm Gladwell, Michael Lewis, and George Packer opt out of using Twitter, prioritizing deep work over constant accessibility. They recognize the negative effects of distraction and addiction and choose tools that significantly contribute to their goals. Their decisions reflect the "craftsman approach," which involves evaluating how each tool impacts important activities.

E.g. Michael Lewis prioritizes narrative-driven stories and finds Twitter unsuitable for deep research or focused writing. The craftsman approach encourages prioritizing what truly matters and being mindful of how tools affect goal achievement.

The Law of the Vital Few: The Pareto Principle states that 80% of results come from 20% of causes, emphasizing the importance of focusing on high-impact activities. Businesses prioritize high-revenue clients over low-value ones, and individuals like Gladwell, Lewis, and Packer invest their time in activities that support their critical goals. By aligning time and attention with high-impact tasks, success and efficiency are maximized, emphasizing quality over quantity in managing resources.

Quit Social Media

Ryan Nicodemus simplified his life by having a "packing party," where he packed all his belongings into boxes as if he were moving. Over the next week, he only unpacked items he needed, realizing most stuff remained untouched. This led him to get rid of unnecessary possessions.

Inspired by Nicodemus, you can apply a similar approach to social media. Take a 30-day break from all social platforms. Afterward, ask if your last month would have been better with those services and if people noticed your absence. If the answer is no, quit using the service permanently.

Social media can be addictive and distract from deeper work. People overestimate their importance on these platforms. Dropping off without notice allows you to evaluate your true impact as a content producer. In most cases, you will find that social media is not as crucial as you thought.

Do not Use the Internet to Entertain Yourself

Arnold Bennett, an early 20th-century English writer, criticized the squandering of leisure time and advocated for treating it as a "day within a day." He encouraged activities like reading great literature for self-improvement. Today, despite the rise of the Internet, leisure time is often wasted on low-quality digital entertainment from sites like BuzzFeed and Reddit, causing constant distraction. Bennett's solution, still relevant today, is to plan leisure time thoughtfully. Structured hobbies, reading, exercise, and spending time with loved ones offer better alternatives to mindless scrolling, enriching life and preserving concentration. Engaging in meaningful activities during leisure time allows for true living, rather than mere existence.

Rule #4: Drain the shallows.

37signals (now Basecamp) experimented with working only four days a week during the summer and found that their productivity remained the same. Co-founder Jason Fried clarified that the goal wasn't to cram the same workload into fewer days but to reduce overall work. With less time, employees became more efficient and careful with their time. Additionally, they gave employees a month off to work on personal projects uninterrupted, resulting in innovative ideas. These experiments highlight the effectiveness of prioritizing deep work over shallow work for increased company success.

Schedule Every Minute of Your Day

Many young adults in Britain underestimate the time they spend on activities like watching TV, thinking it's around 15-16 hours per week when it's closer to 28 hours. Similar discrepancies exist for sleep and work. To address this and improve time management, try scheduling every minute of your workday. Divide your day into blocks and assign tasks to each block, adjusting as needed. While some worry this approach may be too restrictive, it fosters thoughtfulness with time and can enhance creativity and productivity without sacrificing spontaneity.

Quantify the Depth of Every Activity

Scheduling your day helps you see how much time you spend on shallow tasks, but deciding what is shallow can be tricky. Clarify, ask yourself: "How long would it take to train someone new to do this task?"

Example:

1. Editing an academic paper would take a long time to train someone new, so it is deep work.
2. Making a PowerPoint presentation about sales figures would not take much training, so it is shallow.
3. Attending a planning meeting might seem important, but a new person could catch on quickly, so it is shallow too.

Knowing this helps you prioritize deep work over shallow tasks. Spend more time on tasks that require your expertise and less on ones that anyone could do quickly.

Ask Your Boss for a Shallow Work Budget

Have a conversation with your boss to determine what percentage of your time should be dedicated to shallow work versus deep work, aiming for 30 to 50 percent on shallow tasks for balance. This agreement supports prioritizing deep work and justifies workflow changes to minimize shallowness, allowing effective time allocation for value-generating activities. For self-employed individuals, establishing a shallow-to-deep ratio helps optimize time and attention, fostering deep work that drives business forward. If your current role doesn't support deep work, consider transitioning to one that values depth to ensure success in today's information economy.

Finish Your Work by Five Thirty

Fixed-schedule productivity involves setting strict time limits for work each day and organizing tasks, accordingly, prioritizing deep work over shallow tasks. This approach, effective across various fields, enhances time management and focus on meaningful work, ensuring valuable tasks receive full attention during peak productivity.

E.g. if you set a rule to stop working at 6:00 PM every day and organize your tasks accordingly, you will find yourself prioritizing deep work during the hours leading up to that cutoff time. This might involve scheduling important meetings or focusing on tasks that require intense concentration earlier in the day, while leaving shallow tasks like email responses or administrative work for later in the afternoon. By sticking to this schedule, you will ensure that your most valuable and impactful work receives your full attention when you are at your peak productivity.

Become Hard to Reach

Email is a major distraction for knowledge workers, often monopolizing their attention. Its constant flow of messages can make us feel powerless to control our workday. However, we can reclaim some authority over email's role in our lives. I will share three tips to help regain control:

- 1) Use a sender filter to reduce unnecessary emails,
 - 2) Adopt a process-focused approach to minimize back-and-forth messages,
 - 3) Be selective about responding, following a professorial mindset of only engaging with clear and relevant emails.
- These strategies can help us manage our inbox better and focus on more meaningful work.

Tip #1: Make People Who Send You E-mail Do More Work

Many authors provide their email for feedback, but I have taken a different approach. I use a sender filter, directing people to a specific email address for relevant proposals. This reduces overwhelming messages and resets expectations, giving me more control over my time. Others like Clay Herbert and Antonio Centeno have similar filters, showing how this strategy can help manage incoming communication effectively. It is a small step toward better email management, especially for entrepreneurs and freelancers.

Tip #2: Do More Work When You Send or Reply to E-mails

Take a moment to reply to emails with a process-centric approach, outlining steps to move forward efficiently, reducing back-and-forth and mental clutter. Though it may require more time upfront, it saves from unnecessary follow-ups later, fostering focus amidst email chaos. Adding a conversational touch can make responses approachable without sounding too technical.

Tip #3: Do not Respond.

When I was studying at MIT, I noticed something interesting about famous professors: they often did not respond to emails unless the sender made a good case for why they should. They believed it was up to the sender to convince them that a reply was necessary.

E.g. a vague email asking for a meeting might not get a response, but one with clear details and benefits might. Try this approach, you can follow three simple rules: do not reply to unclear messages, ignore topics that do not interest you, and skip messages where a reply will not make much difference. It might feel strange at first, but it can help reduce email stress by focusing on important communication.

Conclusion:

Deep work is super important. It helps you do your best work and feel more satisfied. Do deep work, you need to focus hard on important tasks without getting distracted. It is not just about working more but working smarter by doing stuff that really matters.

Do deep work well, you need to practice and create a good environment for it. This means blocking out specific times for deep work, avoiding distractions, and setting clear goals. Taking breaks and relaxing sometimes to keep your brain fresh is also important.

In a world full of distractions, mastering deep work gives you an edge. You will be better at solving problems, producing innovative ideas, and standing out from the crowd. So, learning how to do deep work is not simply good for you—it is essential for succeeding in the future.

Top Key Insights from the book

- 1. Value of Deep Work:** Deep work, which means focusing intensely on challenging tasks, is important in today's world because it is becoming rare and valuable.
- 2. Practice Makes Perfect:** Deep work is a skill that you can improve with practice. It is like learning to play a musical instrument or a sport; the more you practice, the better you become.
- 3. Minimize Distractions:** To do deep work effectively, it is essential to minimize distractions. This might involve setting aside specific times for deep work, turning off notifications, or finding a quiet place to work.
- 4. Balancing Deep Work and Rest:** Deep work requires mental energy, so it is important to balance it with periods of rest and relaxation. Taking breaks and allowing your mind to recharge is essential for long-term productivity.
- 5. Continuous Improvement:** Deep work is not something you achieve once and then forget about. It is a skill that you can continuously improve over time by refining your habits, routines, and environment.

Pro-tip:

- 1. Create a Ritual:** Establish a daily ritual to transition into deep work. E.g. start your day with a brief meditation session followed by reviewing your most important tasks for the day. This helps signal to your brain that it is time to focus.
- 2. Time Blocking:** Allocate specific time blocks for deep work in your schedule and stick to them religiously. E.g. designate 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM every morning for uninterrupted deep work sessions.
- 3. Embrace Boredom:** Allow yourself to experience boredom without immediately reaching for distractions like social media or browsing the internet. Use this downtime to let your mind wander and generate creative ideas.
- 4. Set Clear Goals:** Clearly define your deep work goals to stay focused and motivated. Break down larger projects into smaller, manageable tasks with clear deadlines. E.g. instead of aiming to "write a book," set a goal to "write 500 words per day."

5. Batch Tasks: Group similar tasks together and tackle them during designated blocks of time. E.g. schedule all your email responses, phone calls, and administrative tasks for a specific time slot rather than overseeing them sporadically throughout the day. This minimizes context switching and maximizes productivity.

By implementing these pro-tips, you can enhance your ability to engage in deep work, achieve greater levels of productivity, and focus in your professional and personal life.

Thank you for reading this article.

The Multipliers