

Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World is a 2016 book by Cal Newport. It focuses on cultivating the ability to work consistently and focused to improve your artistic results and productivity.

A 3 Minute Summary of the 15 Core Lessons

#1 “Deep Work”

Newport defines deep work as, "the professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that pushes your cognitive capabilities to their limit". Basically, deep work is work that you do with all of your focus on the job at hand, resulting in greater productivity and better results. It's similar to the "flow" state many psychologists reference.

#2 4 Hours Only

Newport also states that you can only do about four hours of deep work every day. This isn't a matter of concentration or practice; it's a matter of human biology and psychology. The brain eventually gets tired from focusing so hard on a single task or process and requires rest. Beginners will usually average around a single hour of deep work per day. In a way, your mind is a muscle that you can stretch to reach the theoretical four-hour maximum.

#3 Deep Workers Win

Deep work consistently provides better results and a more excellent portfolio of work than traditional labor and strategies. Emphasizing deep work and doing all you can to make this time as productive and consistent as possible will yield fantastic dividends in the long run.

#4 Drop Social Media

One of the ways in which you can engage in deep work is to drop social media. If you don't want to get rid of social media entirely, you should at least make it so that you can't engage with the Internet or your devices during your deep work period. This will eliminate distractions and help you make the most of your time.

#5 Manage Your Tech

We all have a high number of gadgets and computers in our everyday lives. But we don't think very much about how these gadgets affect our thinking and our working habits. Before purchasing or using a new device, consider the value it can actually add to your life. Only use new devices if there are concrete gains and you can control how you use them.

#6 The Maker is Becoming More Important

Newport suggests that culture is shifting to celebrate the "maker" or the deep thinker. This trend is most visible within pop-culture and content creation as people find their unique voices and reach wider audiences. The best way to make the most of your "maker" status is to perform deep work frequently.

#7 Uninterrupted Time is Necessary

In order to perform any time span of deep work, you must have a stretch of uninterrupted time. It's virtually impossible to engage your brain in deep work if you are constantly interrupted. Make sure that you have a quiet or isolated workspace as you begin to work on your project or job. Turn off all devices and make it difficult or impossible for your mind to retreat to social media during this timeframe.

#8 Practice Makes Perfect

Like with virtually all skills and habits, the more you engage in deep work, the easier it will be and the longer your sessions will last. Expert deep workers find it easier to achieve even greater results and make the most of their deep work sessions than beginners. Don't get discouraged if you don't make it through the four-hour session on your first try.

#9 Focus on Progress, Not Outcome

Newport suggests that too many people focus on the bottom line or end result of their effort. This can stifle the act of creation and ruin your motivation. Instead, he advises focusing on the progress you make or the actual process of creation itself. This lends itself better to deep work as a concept and will make you happier during your labor.

#10 4 Strategies for Managing Willpower

Newport understands that managing your willpower is incredibly difficult, so he has four strategies you can use to open yourself to deep work. The first is to give up your email and other easy distractions that tear your attention away from your task or objective, at least while you're working.

#11 Bimodal Behavior

This doesn't necessarily refer to a sleep schedule. Instead, Newport recommends that you should schedule regular retreats or periods of intense concentration and isolation to create opportunities for deep work. Long morning walks or sessions in an art studio where you won't be bothered by others are both perfectly fine examples.

#12 Rhythmic Behavior

Newport also suggests that you adopt a rhythmic lifestyle, at least in relation to your artistic endeavors. Make sure that you follow a habit that is consistent, and which allows you to perfect your artistic techniques rhythmically. Set aside a set time every day in which you can practice your art and you'll become better at it and be able to call upon a deep work session more easily.

#13 Journalistic Behavior

Finally, don't be afraid to utilize so-called "journalistic" behavior, which is best summarized as "jumping in whenever you can". Some lifestyles are too hectic and some jobs are too demanding for set schedules. In this case, make peace with the fact that you may need to take advantage of any downtime you have and use it for deep work. Align yourself with the motivations of journalists and jump on every opportunity you can grab.

#14 Create Time to Recharge

No one's willpower is infinite, and the mind requires time to rest. Be sure to give yourself a section of time each day after performing deep work to recharge. Let this time be exclusively for recreation or otherwise are removed from your artistic work, such as your job if it isn't related to your craft.

#15 Deep vs. Shallow Work

Newport also describes shallow work so people can more easily recognize it. In a nutshell, shallow work is not cognitively demanding and is often logistical in style: usually busy work or the like. This kind of work doesn't take much effort and does not produce real value for the world.

Top 10 Quotes from Deep Work

1. "If you don't produce, you won't thrive—no matter how skilled or talented you are."
2. "Clarity about what matters provides clarity about what does not."
3. "Who you are, what you think, feel, and do, what you love—is the sum of what you focus on."
4. "Two Core Abilities for Thriving in the New Economy 1. The ability to quickly master hard things. 2. The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed."
5. "What we choose to focus on and what we choose to ignore—plays in defining the quality of our life."
6. "To simply wait and be bored has become a novel experience in modern life, but from the perspective of concentration training, it's incredibly valuable."
7. "If you can't learn, you can't thrive."
8. "The task of a craftsman, they conclude, "is not to generate meaning, but rather to cultivate in himself the skill of discerning the meanings that are already there."
9. "Efforts to deepen your focus will struggle if you don't simultaneously wean your mind from a dependence on distraction."
10. "If you service low-impact activities, therefore, you're taking away time you could be spending on higher-impact activities. It's a zero-sum game."