

Deep Work: Rules for focused success in a distracted world

By: Cal Newport

Introduction

- **Deep Work:** 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.
- JK Rowling, on the other hand, does use a computer, but was famously absent from social media during the writing of her Harry Potter novels – even though this period coincided with the rise of the technology and its popularity among media figures. Rowling’s staff finally started a Twitter account in her name in the fall of 2009, as she was working on The Casual vacancy, and for the first year and a half her only tweet read: “This is the real me, but you won’t be hearing from me often I am afraid, as pen and paper is my priority at the moment.”
- Deep work, of course, is not limited to the historical or technophobic. Microsoft CEO Bill Gates famously conducted “Think Weeks” twice a year, during which he would isolate himself (often in a lakeside cottage) to do nothing but read and think big thoughts.
- **Shallow Work:** Non cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted. These efforts tend to not create much new value in the world and are easy to replicate.
- In an age of network tools, in other words, knowledge workers increasingly replace deep work with the shallow alternative – constantly sending and receiving e-mail messages like human network routers, with frequent breaks for quick hits of distraction. Larger efforts that would be well served by deep thinking, such as forming a new business strategy or writing an important grant application, get fragmented into distracted dashes that produce muted quality. To make matters worse for depth, there’s increasing evidence that this shift toward the shallow is not a choice that can be easily reversed. Spend enough time in a state of frenetic shallowness and you permanently reduce your capacity to perform deep work.
- Network tools are distracting us from work that requires unbroken concentration, while simultaneously degrading our capacity to remain focused.
- Our work culture’s shift toward the shallow (whether you think it’s philosophically good or bad) is exposing a massive economic and personal opportunity for the few who recognize the potential of resisting this trend and prioritizing depth.
- Learning something complex like computer programming requires intense uninterrupted concentration on cognitively demanding concepts.
- To remain valuable in our economy, therefore, you must master the art of quickly learning complicated things. This task requires deep work. If you don’t cultivate this ability, you’re likely to fall behind as technology advances.
- **The Deep Work Hypothesis:** The ability to perform deep work is becoming increasingly rare at exactly the same time it is becoming increasingly valuable in our economy. As a consequence, the few who cultivate this skill, and then make it the core of their working life, will thrive.

Chapter One – Deep Work is Valuable

- In this new economy, three groups will have a particular advantage: those who can work well and creatively with intelligent machines, those who are the best at what they do, and those with access to capital.
- Two Core Abilities for Thriving in the New Economy:
 - The ability to quickly master hard things
 - The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed
- The two core abilities just described depend on your ability to perform deep work.
- It isn't enough for Nate Silver to learn how to manipulate large data sets and run statistical analyses; he needed to then show that he could use this skill to tease information from these machines that a large audience cared about.
- If you don't produce, you won't thrive – no matter how skilled or talented you are.
- To learn requires intense concentration.
- This brings us to the question of what deliberate practice actually requires. Its core components are usually identified as follows:
 - Your attention is focused tightly on a specific skill you're trying to improve or an idea you're trying to master
 - You receive feedback so you can correct your approach to keep your attention exactly where it's most productive.
- The first component is of particular importance to our discussion, as it emphasizes that deliberate practice cannot exist alongside distraction, and that it instead requires uninterrupted concentration.
- If you're trying to learn a complex new skill (say, SQL database management) in a state of low concentration (perhaps you also have your Facebook feed open), you're firing too many circuits simultaneously and haphazardly to isolate the group of neurons you actually want to strengthen.
- To learn hard things quickly, you must focus intensely without distraction. To learn, in other words, is an act of deep work. If you're comfortable going deep, you'll be comfortable mastering the increasingly complex systems and skills needed to thrive in our economy. If you instead remain one of the many for whom depth is uncomfortable and distraction is ubiquitous, you shouldn't expect these systems and skills to come easily to you.
- Though Grant's productivity depends on many factors, there's one idea in particular that seems central to his method: the batching of hard but important intellectual work into long, uninterrupted stretches. Grant performs this batching at multiple levels.
- **Law of Productivity:** High-Quality Work Produced = Time Spent X Intensity of Focus
- By working on a single hard task for a long time without switching, Grant minimizes the negative impact of attention residue from his other obligations, allowing him to maximize performance on this one task.
- By seeing messages that you cannot deal with at the moment (which is almost always the case with email), you'll be forced to turn back to the primary task with a secondary task left unfinished. The attention residue left by such unresolved switches dampens your performance.
- To produce at your peak level, you need to work for extended periods with full concentration on a single task free from distraction. Put another way, the type of work that optimizes your performance is deep work.

- Deep work is not the only skill valuable in our economy, and it's possible to do well without fostering this ability, but the niches where this is advisable are increasingly rare. Unless you have strong evidence that distraction is important for your specific profession, you're best served, for the reasons argued earlier, by giving serious consideration to depth.

Chapter Two – Deep Work is Rare

- To summarize, big trends in business today actively decrease people's ability to perform deep work, even though the benefits promised by these trends (e.g. increases serendipity, faster responses to requests, and more exposure) are arguably dwarfed by the benefits that flow from a commitment to deep work (e.g. the ability to learn hard things fast and produce at an elite level).
- Tom Cochran, CTO of Atlantic Media, observing his own behavior, he measured that in a single week he received 511 e-mails and sent 284. This averaged to around 160 e-mails per day over a 5-day workweek. Calculating further, Cochran noted that even if he managed to spend only 30 seconds per message on average, this still added up to almost an hour and a half per day dedicated to moving information around like a human network router.
- The result: he discovered that Atlantic Media was spending well over a million dollars a year to pay people to process e-mails, with every message sent or received tapping the company for around \$0.95 of labor costs.
- **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.
- **Clarity about what matters provides clarity about what does not.**
- Knowledge workers want to prove that they're productive members of the team and are earning their keep, but they're not entirely clear what this goal constitutes. To overcome this gap, many seem to be turning back to the last time when productivity was more universally observable: the industrial age.
- Knowledge workers, I'm arguing, are trending toward increasingly visible busyness because they lack a better way to demonstrate their value.
- Busyness as Proxy for Productivity: In the absence of clear indicators of what it means to be productive and valuable in their jobs, many knowledge workers turn back toward an industrial indicator of productivity: doing lots of stuff in a visible manner.
- With technology accelerating since the 1990's, we were no longer discussing the trade-offs surrounding new technologies, balancing the new efficiencies against the new problems introduced. If it's high-tech, we began to instead assume, then it's good. Case closed.
- Among them are the realities that deep work is hard and shallow work is easier, that in the absence of clear goals for your job, the visible busyness that surrounds shallow work becomes self-preserving, and that our culture has developed a belief that if a behavior relates to "the internet", then it's good – regardless of its impact on our ability to produce valuable things.

Chapter Three – Deep Work is Meaningful

- **A deep life is not just economically lucrative, but also a life well lived.**

- Attention – that is, what we choose to focus on and what we choose to ignore – plays in defining the quality of our life.
- Like fingers pointing to the moon, other diverse disciplines from anthropology to education, behavioral economics to family counseling, similarly suggest that the skillful management of attention is the sine qua non of the good life and the key to improving virtually every aspect of your experience.
- Our brains construct our worldview based on what we pay attention to.
- Who you are, what you think, feel, and do, what you love – is the sum of what you focus on.
- This theory tells us that your world is the outcome of what you pay attention to, so consider for a moment the type of mental world constructed when you dedicate significant time to deep endeavors. There's a gravity and sense of importance inherent in deep work – whether you're Ric Furrer smithing a sword or a computer programmer optimizing an algorithm. Gallagher's theory, therefore, predicts that if you spend enough time in this state, your mind will understand your world as rich in meaning and importance.
- Many knowledge workers spend most of their working day interacting with these types of shallow concerns. Even when they're required to complete something more involved, the habit of frequently checking inboxes ensures that these issues remain at the forefront of their attention. Gallagher teaches us that this is a foolhardy way to go about your day, as it ensures that your mind will construct an understanding of your working life that's dominated by stress, irritation, frustration, and triviality. The world represented by your inbox, in other words, isn't a pleasant world to inhabit.
- The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile.
- Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like flow activities they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one's work, to concentrate and lose oneself in it. Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much great effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed.
- Human beings, it seems, are at their best when immersed deeply in something challenging.
- To build your working life around the experience of flow produced by deep work is a proven path to deep satisfaction.
- Whether you're a writer, marketer, consultant, or lawyer: your work is craft, and if you hone your ability and apply it with respect and care, then like the skilled wheelwright you can generate meaning in the daily efforts of your professional life.
- Our obsession with the advice to "follow your passion" for example, is motivated by the (flawed) idea that what matters most for your career satisfaction is the specifics of the job you choose. In this way of thinking, there are some rarified jobs that can be a source of satisfaction – perhaps working in a nonprofit or starting a software company – while all others are soulless and bland.
- You don't need a rarified job; you need instead a rarified approach to your work.
- Deep work is the key to extracting meaning from your profession.
- I'll live the focused life, because it's the best kind there is. A deep life is a good life, any way you look at it.

Rule #1 – Work Deeply

- People fight desires all day long.

- Desire turned out to be the norm, not the exception. The 5 most common desires these subjects fought include, not surprisingly, eating, sleeping, and sex. But the top 5 list also included desires for “taking a break from hard work... checking e-mail and social networking sites, surfing the web, listening to music, or watching TV.
- They tell us that you can expect to be bombarded with the desire to do anything but work deeply throughout the day, and if you’re like the subjects from the study, these competing desires will often win out.
- **You have a finite amount of willpower that becomes depleted as you use it.**
- Over time these distractions drained their finite pool of willpower until they could no longer resist.
- The key to developing a deep work habit is to move beyond good intentions and add routines and rituals to your working life designed to minimize the amount of your limited willpower necessary to transition into and maintain a state of unbroken concentration. If you suddenly decide, for example, in the middle of a distracted afternoon spend web browsing, to switch your attention to a cognitively demanding task, you’ll draw heavily from your finite willpower to wrest your attention away from the online shininess. Such attempts will therefore frequently fail. On the other hand, if you deployed smart routines and rituals – perhaps a set time and quiet location used for your deep tasks each afternoon – you’d require much less willpower to start and keep going. In the long run, you’d therefore succeed with these deep efforts far more often.
- Decide on your depth philosophy
- You must be careful to choose a philosophy that fits your specific circumstances, as a mismatch here can derail your deep work habit before it has a chance to solidify.
- **The Monastic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling** – Attempts to maximize deep efforts by eliminating or radically minimizing shallow obligations. Practitioners of the monastic philosophy tend to have a well-defined and highly valued professional goal that they’re pursuing, and the bulk of their professional success comes from doing this one thing exceptionally well. It’s this clarity that helps them eliminate the thicket of shallow concerns that tend to trip up those whose value proposition in the working world is more varied.
- If you’re inside this pool – someone whose contribution to the world is discrete, clear, and individualized – then you should give this philosophy serious consideration, as it might be the deciding factor between an average career and one that will be remembered.
- **Bimodal Philosophy of Deep Work** – Asks that you divide your time, dedicating some clearly defined stretches to deep pursuits and leaving the rest open to everything else. During the deep time, the bimodal worker will act monastically – seeking intense and uninterrupted concentration. During the shallow time, such focus is not prioritized.
 - Believes that deep work can produce extreme productivity, but only if the subject dedicates enough time to such endeavors to reach maximum cognitive intensity – the state in which real breakthroughs occur. This is why the minimum unit of time for deep work in this philosophy tends to be at least one full day. To put aside a few hours in the morning, for example, is too short to count as a deep work stretch for an adherent of this approach.
- Those who deploy the bimodal philosophy of deep work admire the productivity of the monastics but also respect the value they receive from the shallow behaviors in their working

lives. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to implementing this philosophy is that even short periods of deep work require a flexibility that many fear they lack in their current positions.

- **The Rhythmic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling** – Argues that the easiest way to consistently start deep work sessions is to transform them into a simple regular habit. The goal, in other words, is to generate a rhythm for this work that removes the need for you to invest energy in deciding if and when you're going to go deep. The chain method is a good example of the rhythmic philosophy of deep work scheduling because it combines a simple scheduling heuristic (do the work every day), with an easy way to remind yourself to do the work: the big red X's on the calendar.
- In much the same way that maintaining visual indicators of your work progress can reduce the barrier to entry for going deep, eliminating even the simplest scheduling decisions, such as when during the day to do the work, also reduces this barrier.
- By supporting deep work with rock-solid routines that make sure a little bit gets done on a regular basis, the rhythmic scheduler will often log a larger total number of deep hours per year.
- The decision between rhythmic and bimodal can come down to your self-control in such scheduling matters. If you are engaged in an intellectual dogfight, you'll likely have no trouble recognizing the importance of finding time to focus on your ideas. On the other hand, if you're writing a dissertation with no one pressuring you to get it done, the habitual nature of the rhythmic philosophy might be necessary to maintain progress.
- **The Journalistic Philosophy of Deep Work Scheduling** – The approach in which you fit deep work wherever you can into your schedule. This name is a nod to the fact that journalists are trained to shift into a writing mode on a moment's notice, as is required by the deadline-driven nature of their profession.
- This approach is not for the deep work novice. As I established in the opening to this rule, the ability to rapidly switch your mind from shallow to deep mode doesn't come naturally.
- **Great creative minds think like artists but work like accountants.**
- There's no one correct deep work ritual – the right fit depends on both the person and the type of project pursued. But there are some general questions that any effective ritual must address:
 - **Where you'll work and for how long.** Your ritual needs to specify a location for your deep work efforts.
 - **How you'll work once you start to work.** Your ritual needs rules and processes to keep your efforts structured. For example, you might institute a ban on any internet use, or maintain a metric such as words produced per 20-minute interval to keep your concentration honed.
 - **How you'll support your work.** Your ritual needs to ensure your brain gets the support it needs to keep operating at a high level of depth. For example, the ritual might specify that you start with a cup of coffee, or make sure you have access to enough food of the right type to maintain energy, or integrate light exercise such as walking to help keep the mind clear.
- But keep in mind that finding a ritual that sticks might require experimentation, so be willing to work at it.
- **The Grand Gesture** – By leveraging a radical change to your normal environment, coupled perhaps with a significant investment of effort or money, all dedicated toward supporting a deep

work task, you increase the perceived importance of the task. This boost in importance reduces your mind's instinct to procrastinate and delivers an injection of motivation and energy.

- In all examples, it's not just the change of environment or seeking of quiet that enables more depth. The dominant force is the psychology of committing so seriously to the task at hand.
- Sometimes to go deep, you must first go big.
- The combination of soundproofed offices connected to large common areas yields a hub-and-spoke architecture of innovation in which both serendipitous encounter and isolated deep thinking are supported.
- **The Whiteboard Effect** – For some type of problems, working with someone else at the proverbial shared whiteboard can push you deeper than if you were working alone. The presence of the other party waiting for your next insight – be it someone physically in the same room or collaborating with you virtually – can short-circuit the natural instinct to avoid depth.
- **Discipline #1: Focus on the Wildly Important**
- The more you try to do, the less you actually accomplish. Execution should be aimed at a small number of wildly important goals.
- If you want to win the war for attention, don't try to say no to the trivial distractions you find on the information smorgasbord; try to say yes to the subject that arouses a terrifying longing, and let the terrifying longing crowd out everything else.
- **Discipline #2: Act on the Lead Measures**
- Once you've identified a wildly important goal, you need to measure your success. In 4DX, there are two types of metrics for this purpose: lag and lead measures. Lag measures describe the thing you're ultimately trying to improve. When you receive them, the performance that drove them is already in the past. Lead measures, on the other hand, measure the new behaviors that will drive success on the lag measures. In the bakery example, a good lead measure might be the number of customers who receive free samples. This is a number you can directly increase by giving out more samples.
- In other words, lead measures turn your attention to improving the behaviors you directly control in the near future that will then have a positive impact on your long-term goals.
- **Discipline #3: Keep a Compelling Scoreboard**
- They then elaborate that when attempting to drive your team's engagement toward your organization's wildly important goal, it's important that they have a public place to record and track their lead measures.
- To maximize the motivation by the scoreboard, whenever I reached an important milestone in an academic paper, I would circle the tally mark corresponding to the hour where I finished the result. This served two purposes. First it allowed me to connect, at a visceral level, accumulated deep work hours and tangible results. Second, it helped calibrate my expectations for how many hours of deep work were needed per results. This reality, which was larger than I assumed, helped spur me to squeeze more such hours into each week.
- **Discipline #4: Create a Cadence of Accountability**
- Put in place a rhythm of regular and frequent meetings of any team that owns a wildly important goal. During these meetings, the team members must confront their scoreboard, commit to specific actions to help improve the score before the next meeting, and describe what happened with the commitments they made at the last meeting.

- I discuss and recommend the habit of a weekly review in which you make a plan for the workweek ahead. I used a weekly review to look over my scoreboard to celebrate good weeks, help understand what led to bad weeks, and most important, figure out how to ensure a good score for the days ahead.
- The clarity of this goal, coupled with the simple but unavoidable feedback of my lead measure scoreboard, pushed me to a level of depth I hadn't before achieved. In retrospect, it was not so much the intensity of my deep work periods that increased, but instead their regularity.
- At the end of the workday, shut down your consideration of work issues until the next morning – no after dinner email check, no mental replays of conversations, and no scheming about how you'll handle an upcoming challenge; shut down work thinking completely. If you need more time, then extend your workday, but once you shut down, your mind must be left free to encounter Kreider's buttercups, stink bugs, and stars.
- **Reason #1: Downtime Aids Insights**
- A shutdown habit is not necessarily reducing the amount of time you're engaged in productive work, but is instead diversifying the type of work you deploy.
- **Reason #2: Downtime Helps Recharge the Energy Needed to Work Deeply**
- Validate attention restoration theory (ART) claims that spending time in nature can improve your ability to concentrate.
- The study argues that walking on busy city streets requires you to use directed attention, as you must navigate complicated tasks like figuring out when to cross a street to not get run over, or when to maneuver around the slow group of tourists blocking the sidewalk. After just 50 minutes of this focused navigation, the subject's store of directed attention was low. Walking through nature, by contrast, exposes you to inherently fascinating stimuli which invokes attention modestly, allowing focused-attention mechanisms a chance to replenish.
- The core mechanism of this theory is the idea that you can restore your ability to direct your attention if you give this activity a rest. Walking in nature provides such a mental respite, but so, too, can any number of relaxing activities so long as they provide similar inherently fascinating stimuli and freedom from directed concentration. Having a casual conversation with a friend, listening to music while making dinner, playing a game with your kids, going for a run – the types of activities that will fill your time in the evening if you enforce a work shutdown – play the same attention-restoring role as walking in nature.
- Only the confidence that you're done with work until the next day can convince your brain to downshift to the level where it can begin to recharge for the next day to follow. Put another way, trying to squeeze a little more work out of your evenings might reduce your effectiveness the next day enough that you end up getting less done than if you had instead respected a shutdown.
- **Reason #3: The Work That Evening Downtime Replaces is Usually Not That Important**
- To succeed, you must first accept the commitment that once your workday shuts down, you can not allow even the smallest incursion of professional concerns into your field of attention.
- This ritual should ensure that every incomplete task, goal, or project has been reviewed and that for each you have confirmed that either 1 you have a plan for its completion or 2 it's captured in a place where it will be revisited when the time is right. When you're done, set a phrase that you say that indicates completion "Shutdown complete". This provides a simple cue to your mind that it's safe to release work-related thoughts for the rest of the day.

- When you work, work hard. When you're done, be done.

Rule #2 – Embrace Boredom

- The ability to concentrate intensely is a skill that must be trained.
- Efforts to deepen your focus will struggle if you don't simultaneously wean your mind from a dependence on distraction.
- People who multitask all the time can't filter out irrelevancy. They can't manage a working memory. They're chronically distracted. They initiate much larger parts of their brain that are irrelevant to the task at hand... they're pretty much mental wrecks.
- Once your brain has become accustomed to on-demand distraction, it's hard to shake the addiction even when you want to concentrate.
- If you eat healthy just one day a week, you're unlikely to lose weight, as the majority of your time is still spent gorging. Similarly, if you spend just one day a week resisting distraction, you're unlikely to diminish your brain's craving for these stimuli, as most of your time is still spent giving in to it.
- Instead of the internet sabbath, instead of scheduling the occasional break from distraction so you can focus, you should instead schedule the occasional break from focus to give in to distraction.
- The idea is that the use of a distracting service does not reduce your brain's ability to focus. It's instead the constant switching from low-stimuli / high-value activities to high-stimuli/low-value activities, at the slightest hint of boredom or cognitive challenge, that teaches your mind to never tolerate an absence of novelty.
- To simply wait and be bored as become a novel experience in modern life, but from the perspective of concentration training, it's incredibly valuable.
- Deep work requires levels of concentration well beyond where most knowledge workers are comfortable. Roosevelt dashes leverage artificial deadlines to help you systematically increase the level you can regularly achieve – providing, in some sense, interval training for the attention centers of your brain.
- Productive Meditation – The goal is to take a period in which you're occupied physically but not mentally – walking, running, driving, showering – and focus your attention on a single well-defined professional problem.

Rule #3 – Quit Social Media

- The first point that we increasingly recognize that these tools fragment our time and reduce our ability to concentrate.
- Willpower is limited, and therefore the more enticing tools you have pulling at your attention, the harder it'll be to maintain focus on something important. To master the art of deep work, therefore, you must take back control of your time and attention from the many diversions that attempt to steal them.

- The notion that you would quit the internet is, of course, an overstuffed straw man, infeasible for most. No one is meant to actually follow this – and this reality provides justification for remaining with the only offered alternative: accepting our current distracted state as inevitable.
- I won't ask you to quit the internet altogether, but I will ask you to reject the state of distracted hyper connectedness that drove him to that experiment. There is a middle ground, and if you're interested in developing a deep work habit, you must fight to get there.
- **The Any-Benefit Approach to Network Tool Selection** – You're justified in using a network tool if you can identify any possible benefit to its use, or anything you might possibly miss out on if you don't use it.
- The problem with this approach, is that it ignores all the negatives that come along with the tools in question.
- In other words, once you put aside the revolutionary rhetoric surrounding all things internet, the sense that you're either fully committed or a curmudgeon, you'll soon realize that network tools are not exception; they're tools, no different from a blacksmith's hammer or an artist's brush, used by skilled laborers to do their jobs and occasionally enhance their leisure.
- **The Craftsman Approach to Tool Selection** – Identify the core factors that determine success and happiness in your professional and personal life. Adopt a tool only if its positive impacts on these factors substantially outweigh its negative impacts.
- Whereas the any-benefit mindset identifies any potential positive impact as justification for using a tool, the craftsman variant requires that these positive impacts affect factors at the core of what's important to you and that they outweigh the negatives.
- The first step of this strategy is to identify the main high-level goals in both your professional and personal life.
- Once you've identified these goals, list for each the two or three most important activities that help you satisfy the goal. These activities should be specific enough to allow you to clearly picture doing them. On the other hand, they should be general enough that they're not tied to a onetime outcome.
- A good activity in this context would be something like: "regularly read and understand the cutting-edge results in my field."
- The next step in this strategy is to consider the network tools you currently use. For each such tool, go through the key activities you identified and ask whether the use of the tool has a substantially positive impact, a substantially negative impact, or a little impact on your regular and successful participation in the activity. Now comes the important decision: keep using this tool only if you concluded that it has substantial positive impacts and that these outweigh the negative impacts.
- Of course Facebook offers benefits to your social life, but none are important enough to what really matters to you in this area to justify giving it access to your time and attention.
- **The Law of the Vital Few** – In many settings, 80% of a given effect is due to just 20% of the possible causes.
- As we noted, many different activities can contribute to your achieving these goals. The law of the vital few, however, reminds us that the most important 20% or so of these activities provide the bulk of the benefit. Assuming you could probably list somewhere between 10-15 distinct and potentially beneficial activities for each of your life goals, this law says that it's the top 2 or 3 such activities.

- To abandon a network tool using this logic, is not to miss out on its potential small benefits, but is instead to get more out of the activities you already know to yield large benefits.
- Stop using them, cold turkey. After 30 days, ask yourself the following 2 questions about each of the tools you temporarily quit:
 - Would the last 30 days have been notably better if I had been able to use this service?
 - Did people care that I wasn't using this service?
- If your answer is "no" to both questions, quit the service permanently. If your answer was a clear "yes" then return to the service.
- The average 40-hour-a-week employee has seen the quality of his or her leisure time remained degraded, consisting primarily of a blur of distracted clicks on least-common-denominator digital entertainment.
- Put more thought into your leisure time. When it comes to relaxation, don't default to whatever catches your attention at the moment, but instead dedicate some advance thinking to the question of how you want to spend your "day within a day".
- If you give your mind something meaningful to do throughout all your waking hours, you'll end the day more fulfilled and begin the next one more relaxed, than if you instead allow your mind to bathe for hours in semiconscious and unstructured web surfing. To summarize, if you want to eliminate the addictive pull of entertainment sites on your time and attention, give your brain a quality alternative. Not only will this preserve your ability to resist distraction and concentrate, but you might even fulfill Arnold Bennett's ambitions goal of experiencing, perhaps for the first time, what it means to live, and not just exist.

Rule #4 – Drain the Shallows

- If you not only eliminate shallow work, but also replace this recovered time with more of the deep alternative, not only will the business continue to function; it can become more successful.
- The value of deep work vastly outweighs the value of shallow, but this doesn't mean that you must quixotically pursue a schedule in which all of your time is invested in depth.
- In this sense, we should see the goal of this rule as taming shallow work's footprint in your schedule, not eliminating it.
- To summarize, I'm asking you to treat shallow work with suspicion because its damage is often vastly underestimated and its importance vastly overestimated. This type of work is inevitable, but you must keep it confined to a point where it doesn't impede your ability to take full advantage of the deeper efforts that ultimately determine your impact.
- Your goal is not to stick to a given schedule at all costs; it's instead to maintain, at all times, a thoughtful say in what you're doing with your time going forward – even if these decisions are reworked again and again as the day unfolds.
- Lots of things come up during the typical knowledge worker's day: Having regularly occurring blocks of time to address these surprises keep things running smoothly.
- "What makes sense for me to do with the time that remains?" It's the habit of asking that returns results, not your unyielding fidelity to the answer.
- What percentage of my time should be spent on shallow work? For most people in most non-entry-level knowledge work jobs, the answer to that will be 30-50%.

- Fixed-Schedule Productivity – Fix the firm goal of not working past a certain time, then work backward to find productivity strategies that allow you to satisfy this declaration.
- Clear in your refusal but ambiguous in your explanation for the refusal. “Sounds interesting, but I can’t make it due to schedule conflicts.”
- Less mental clutter means more mental resources available for deep thinking.