

Deep Work Summary (5 Minutes) and 20 Quick Takeaways

Deep Work is a 2016 book written by Cal Newport. As the subtitle "Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World" implies, the book provides guidance on organizing your life and focusing on what is important. In this Deep Work summary, I will share 20 quick takeaways that will provide you the most valuable lessons from the book.

Deep Work Summary and 20 Lessons Learned

#1 What is Deep Work?

Deep work is a task that requires your full attention. It's the work that cannot be done if you are multitasking. You should put everything aside (it means not checking emails or social media) and focus on only the deep work. This is how you become creative and gain achievements in fields like business, science, or art.

#2 What is Shallow Work?

Shallow work is the task that you can do while you are distracted. Imagine watching your kid, listening to the news on the radio, and doing the task at the same time. You don't have to focus on the shallow work to complete it. However, the result of the shallow work is not new or valuable.

#3 The Trend is Deep Work

Companies look more for "knowledge workers" who can complete complex tasks. Navigating through a challenging job requires deep work. Shallow work can be automated or skipped. This means those who do this kind of work are at risk of losing their jobs. On the other hand, deep work is harder and more complicated so people who do deep work (high-skilled workers) have more job security.

#4 Superstars Are Wanted

Before the technology evolved and allowed people to work remotely, companies had relied on the local labor market for open positions. It wasn't very competitive to get a job even if you are not specialized enough in a certain area. However, companies hire country-wide and even worldwide now. They are looking for "superstars" who are able to learn quickly and complete difficult tasks that require deep work. This creates opportunities for some while it makes it harder to find jobs for others.

#5 Deliberate Practice

Deliberate practice is the key to accomplishing deep work. In order to focus on a specific task, you need to have uninterrupted concentration. This allows your brain to fire neural circuits continuously so the skill you are trying to gain becomes a part of your brain.

#6 Do Not Multitask

If you do multiple tasks at the same time, your attention will be divided into different work. This will lower your performance and cause average or below-average results. High-quality work is the result of how much time you spent multiplied by how intensely you are focused.

#7 Why is It Hard to Do Deep Work?

In our modern world, technology pushes you to pay attention to multiple things at the same time. Activities like responding to emails, tweeting, sharing information on social media, and answering calls can easily take up your entire business day. You may feel like it was a productive day but the value of these shallow work activities are lower than the value of the deep work you could have done instead.

#8 The Easier The Work, The Less Valuable The Results

People tend to do the easiest tasks because these tasks don't require much energy and time. That's shallow work. Your performance may seem high since you complete many tasks at a given time. However, the result would be misleading because it's hard to measure the depth of the work. Most of the time, there are no clear metrics to determine the quality of the deep work. In the absence of an accurate performance rating, workers do easier but less valuable work.

#9 Company Priorities

The company you work at may ask you to be responsive on Twitter, Facebook, or any other social network even though the company products are not benefiting from the digital world. This would scatter your attention and prevent you from doing the deep work that actually contributes to the company's success. As I mentioned in this Deep Work summary earlier, deep work matters more to society as well as your company than shallow work does.

#10 Deep Work and A Good Life

Winifred Gallagher, a science writer, completed many studies that examined the relationship between attention and good life. The outcome of these studies is clear: Attention management is extremely important for having a good life. It's even more important than the environment you are in and the circumstances that surround you. By managing your attention and focusing on the deep work, you can train your brain at a neurological level and reshape your life positively.

#11 Develop a Deep Work Routine

Developing a routine helps you maintain your focus and work on what is more important. The routine also helps you overcome distractions. These distractions can be basic desires such as

eating or having sex or technological desires like checking your emails or social network timeline. If you build a routine and make deep work a regular part of your life, these distractions won't be able to get in your way easily.

#12 Monastic Philosophy

One way to get away from distractions and focus on the deep work is to follow monastic philosophy. This requires disconnecting from the world completely for a certain period of time. You can turn your phone off, close your door, put earplugs on, and don't have anything in your eyesight that may distract you so you can pay full attention to the deep work.

#13 Bimodal Philosophy

It's not easy for some people to follow monastic philosophy because of the professional necessities like being available when your customers need to contact you. Bimodal philosophy can be more useful in these cases. You can alternate between periods of time to focus on. For example, you work on business development in one week and customer relations in the next. Another example is what some academics do: They give classes in one semester and do only research in the next one.

#14 Rhythmic Philosophy

For some people, rhythmic philosophy works the best. They schedule the same time of the day to do the deep work. They use the "chain method". Every day, they add a new link of deep work to the process. Focusing on the deep work at the same time every day trains your brain to be prepared and work at maximum capacity.

#15 Journalistic Philosophy

If you don't have control over your daily schedule (let's say you have a demanding manager at work and several kids at home), journalistic philosophy may be more practical for you. People who follow journalistic philosophy take advantage of the breaks they have during the day to focus on their most important work. This philosophy requires being able to switch to the deep work mentality quickly because you will have multiple small amounts of time periods scattered along the day to do the deep work.

#16 Make A Plan

No matter what philosophy you follow, it's important to create a routine and build habits. Make a plan about how you will do the deep work. Ask detailed questions like;

- Where will you do the deep work?
- Will there be somebody knocking on your door?
- How long will you do the deep work?
- Will you need to eat or take a break?
- Will you turn off your phone or put it away?

#17 Control Your Environment

Changing your environment may help you better to focus on the deep work. J.K. Rowling stayed in a hotel to finish the last Harry Potter book. Bill Gates got away from work and went to a cabin to read and focus. Don't hesitate to make a gesture to focus your time and energy on the work more valuable to you. At the end of the day, this work will improve your life and make you happier.

#18 Deep Work is Boring But Rewarding

Focusing on the deep work and not having distractions will cause boredom. Think of boredom as proof of your ability to concentrate. If you start looking for things to get distracted, remember that you are on the right path to success. Getting bored is part of the process. It will worth it.

#19 Use Social Media Wisely

The cost of social media is more significant than the benefits it provides if you use it for entertainment purposes. Think about how social media can contribute to your success and happiness in both your personal and professional life. Identify your top three goals and determine what activities help to reach those goals. You can use the “80/20 rule” or “Pareto’s principle” during this process. 80% of the results come from 20% of the activities. Find what those activities are. Check if you can do these activities on social networks. Use them only if they provide more benefits and costs.

#20 Schedule Your Day and Know Your Limits

Most people can do deep work a maximum of 4 hours per day because it's an exhausting process. You can start by doing deep work one hour per day and gradually increase it. Schedule time blocks in your workday for deep work and eliminates shallow work as much as possible. Most people need to spend 30% - 50% of their on shallow work like attending meetings and sending emails. If you need to spend more than 50% of them, make a plan for transitioning to deep work.

Keep in mind though: The goal is not to strictly follow your schedule. It is to use your time effectively and intentionally. There will be times you will need more time to do a specific task or your will need more break to rest. By the time, you will get better at estimating your time.

This wraps up the Deep Work summary. I'd highly recommend checking out the quotes as well to hear the author's ideas through his own words.

Top 10 Quotes from Deep Work

- “Deep Work: Professional activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capacities to their limit.”
- “Deep work is necessary to wring every last drop of value out of your current intellectual capacity.”

- “Shallow Work: Noncognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks, often performed while distracted.”
- “Without structure, it’s easy to allow your time to devolve into the shallow – email, social media, web surfing.”
- “To succeed with deep work you must rewire your brain to be comfortable resisting distracting stimuli.”
- “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.”
- “Those who use their minds to create valuable things [are] rarely haphazard in their work habits.”
- “When you’re done scheduling your day, every minute should be part of a block. You have, in effect, given every minute of your workday a job.”
- “Figure out in advance what you’re going to do with your evenings and weekends before they begin.”
- “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.”