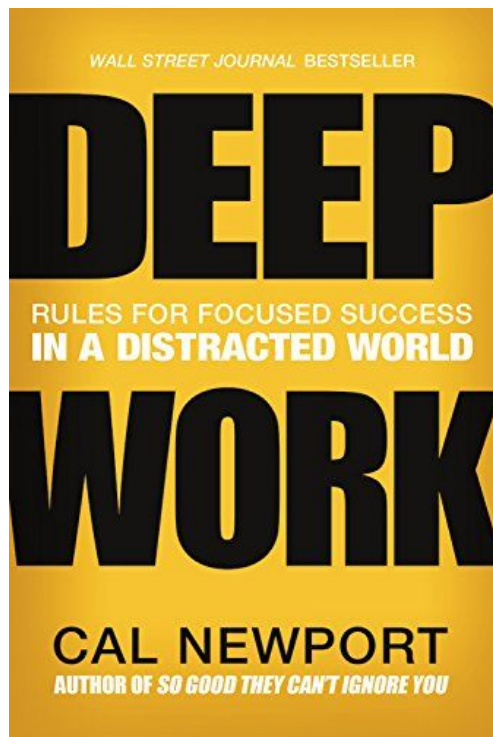**Favorite Quote:**

"Leave the distracted masses and join the focused few."

Summary: *Deep Work* is an intensely-researched composition which urges us to ruthlessly minimize "shallow work" in favor of "deep work" to create things that actually matter.

Shallow work: *Noncognitively 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.*

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.*

The goal of this book it to convince you that deep work is becoming increasingly rare and valuable, and that those who decide to prioritize this skill (15-20 hours per week) will thrive.

On a tactical level he suggests:
- Quitting social media
- Drastically changing your email practices
- Pre-scheduling every minute of your day
- Striving for 2-4 hours of deep work per day

Impressively, Cal wrote this book in a year he also published 9 papers.

"With the rise of the internet and the lowbrow attention economy it supports, the average forty-hour-a-week employee—especially those is the tech-savvy Millennial generation—has seen the quality of his or her leisure time remain degraded, consisting primarily of a blur of distracted clicks on least-common denominator digital entertainment.."

Author: Cal Newport is an associate professor of computer science (with tenure) at Georgetown University and the author of six self-improvement books. He also writes the Study Hacks blog focused on academic and career success.

Newport completed his undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College in 2004 and received a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2009 in computer science under Nancy Lynch. He then spent two years as a postdoctoral associate at the MIT computer science department. In 2011, he joined Georgetown University as an assistant professor of computer science and was granted tenure in 2017. His work focuses on distributed algorithms in challenging networking scenarios, and incorporates the study of communication systems in nature.

Part I: The Idea
Deep work is valuable, rare and meaningful.

Overview: the skill of practicing deep work is valuable ($), rare, and meaningful. Part I introduces the author's premise along with forces that inhibit our capacity to concentrate on deep work.

- "The reason knowledge workers are losing their familiarity with deep work is well established: network tools." This is a broad category that that captures communication services like email, SMS, social media (Twitter, Facebook) and infotainment (BuzzFeed, Reddit).
- "What the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation." -Nicholas Carr
- "An increasing number of individuals in our economy are now competing with the rock stars of their sector." [related to increased competition of the globally-connected talent pool]

The economic rewards of deep work will be distributed across 3 primary camps of knowledge worker:
1. **High-skilled workers:** adept at working with intelligent machines
2. **Superstars:** the top performers in their respective domain, e.g. programming, consulting, etc.
3. **Owners:** those with capital to invest in the new technologies, e.g. angel investors, VCs,

Two core abilities for thriving in the new economy (both of which require deep work):
1. The ability to quickly master hard things.
2. The ability to produce at an elite level, in terms of both quality and speed.

Deep Work is Rare

- "Generally speaking, as knowledge work makes more complex demands of the labor force, it becomes harder to measure the value of an individual's efforts."
- "Clarity about what matters provides clarity about what does not."

On the cult of the internet: "In such a culture, we should not be surprised that deep work struggles to compete against the shiny thrum of tweets, likes, tagged photos, walls, posts, and all the other behaviors that we're now taught are necessary for no other reason than that they exist."

Who you are, what you think, feel, and do, what you love—is the sum of what you focus on.

—Winifred Gallagher

Many fashionable office trends fly in the face of deep work:
● Open offices to encourage serendipitous collaboration
● Constant connectivity via always-on chat tools like Slack, etc.
● Active social media presence to increase community, brand, content distribution, etc.

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.

Busyness as a 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.

Your email inbox: making it the center of your day will ensure that your mind will construct an understanding of your working life that's dominated by stress, irritation, frustration, and triviality.
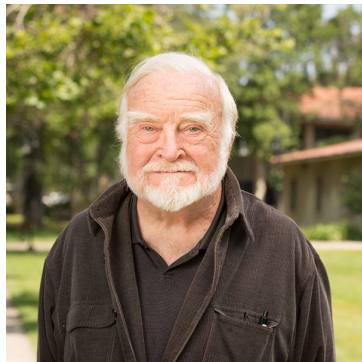
Ironically, jobs are actually easier to enjoy than free time, because like flow activities they have built-in goals, feedback rules, and challenges, all of which encourage one to become involved in one's work, to concentrate and lose oneself in it. Free time, on the other hand, is unstructured, and requires much greater effort to be shaped into something that can be enjoyed.

—Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of Flow

A philosophical argument for depth: the author builds most of his case for depth by leveraging the work of Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, e.g. *All Things Shining* (a book they published together). The main argument is that fulfillment and meaning come from *outside* the individual by becoming immersed in craftsmanship.
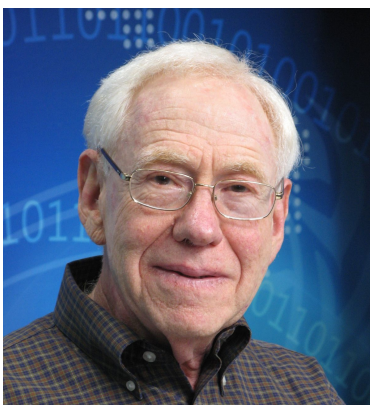
The Enlightenment's metaphysical embrace of the autonomous individual leads not just to a boring life, it leads almost inevitably to a nearly unlivable one.

*—Hubert Dreyfus, Sean Dorrance Kelly*

Part II: The Rules
Work deeply, embrace boredom, quit social media, drain the shallows

Rule #1: Work Deeply. One of the hardest things to do is to be *intentional* with each moment of your day. Very often we slip into shallow work autopilot: emails, texts, IM, slack, social media. The antidote is carefully crafted routines and rituals designed to be cognitively conducive to deep work.

The Eudaimonia Machine: a theoretical building architecture containing 5 rooms designed to optimize for deep work: gallery, salon, library, office, deep work chambers. This concept represent an ideal work environment for deep work and productivity. However, in real life we instead find ourselves with distracting open offices, constant connectivity, needy inboxes, and incessant meetings.

> *I have been a happy man ever since January 1, 1990 when I no longer had an email address. I'd used email since about 1975, and it seems to me that 15 years of email is plenty for one lifetime. Email is a wonderful thing for people whose role in life is to be on top of things. But not for me; my role is to be on the bottom of things. What I do takes long hours of studying and uninterruptible concentration.*
>
> *—Donald Knuth, famous computer scientist, mathematician, professor @ Stanford*
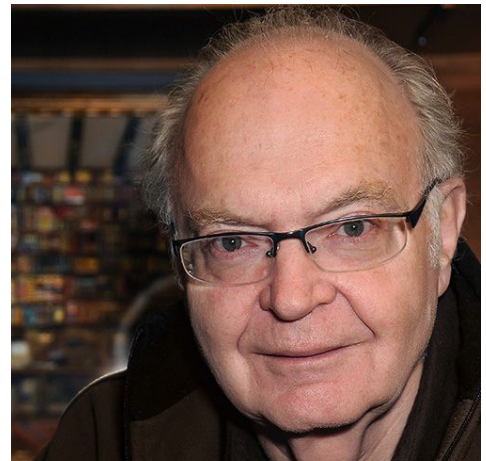
Newport argues that the best deep workers are thoughtful when planning their depth sessions. In advance they tend to decide on:

- **Place & time:** they have favorite locations that encourage depth and schedule their time there accordingly, e.g. going to a well lit office on a less busy floor for 3 hours per day
- **Rules & output:** they self-impose bans on things like smartphones and internet to reduce distraction and agree on a level of output for the depth session, e.g. I will write 50 pages; complete a research assignment; design 20 presentation slides, etc.
- **Food & exercise:** a plan for nourishment and exercise to support and stimulate the mind.

Grand gestures: this strategy suggests you do something BIG to catalyze your deep work endeavors:

- **Book a hotel room.** This is what J.K. Rowling did to finish *The Deathly Hallows.*
- **Go to a cabin.** This is what Bill Gates did during his famous *Think Weeks*.
- **Visit an island.** The habit of MIT physicist Alan Lightman who travels to an island in Maine which doesn't have internet or phone service.
- **Build a separate structure on your property.** If you have the space, and you're inspired by Dan Pink and Michael Pollan, you can construct your own writing cabin on your property.

- **Book a roundtrip flight to Japan.** The tactic of Peter Shankman, an entrepreneur and social media pioneer, who spent $4,000 for 30 uninterrupted hours of flight time in order to finish a manuscript.

On open office designs: "Both intuition and a growing body of research underscore the reality that sharing a workspace with a large number of coworkers is incredibly distracting—creating an environment that thwarts attempts to think seriously.

On 4DX: Newport advocates for using *[The Four Disciplines of Execution](#)* *(4DX)* methodology for HOW you manage new processes, both personally and professionally. The author credits 4DX with doubling his research output (4 papers increased to 9 papers).

Rule #2: Embrace Boredom. The goal of this is to 1) improve your ability to concentrate intensely, and 2) overcoming you desire for distraction.

On the negative impact of multitasking:

So we have scales that allow us to divide up people into people who multitask all the time and people who rarely do, and the differences are remarkable.

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. —Clifford Nass

"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."

On productive meditation: focus your attention on a single well-defined professional problem while you're walking, jogging, driving, or showering. Ideally, structure this thinking into three parts:
1. Variables: the main points of the challenge at hand
2. Next-step question: an action-oriented question for each variable exploring potential solutions
3. Consolidate: review what you learned, decided, identified in the thought exercise. Lock it in.

On memorization: the author walks us through how to memorize a deck of cards (!) and makes reference to mental athletes like Joshua Foer and Daniel Kilov who worked to cultivate exceptional levels of **attentional control**—their ability to maintain their focus on essential information.

Rule #3: Quit Social Media. Network tools like Instagram are not exceptional. They are tools, no different than a blacksmith's hammer or an artist's brush, used by skilled laborers to do their jobs better.

For the vast majority of people, social media isn't actually improving anything but rather destroying our ability to concentrate.

The services [social media] aren't necessarily, as advertised, the lifeblood of our modern connected world. They're just products, developed by private companies, funded lavishly, marketed carefully, and designed ultimately to capture then sell your personal information and attention to advertisers.

With the rise of the internet and the lowbrow attention economy it supports, the average forty-hour-a-week employee—especially those is the tech-savvy Millennial generation—has seen the quality of his or her leisure time remain degraded, consisting primarily of a blur of distracted clicks on least-common denominator digital entertainment.

One of the chief things which my typical man has to learn is that the mental faculties are capable of continuous hard activity; they do not tire like an arm or a leg. All they want is change—not rest, except in sleep.

—Arnold Bennett

Rule #4: Drain the Shallows. We spend much of our day on autopilot—not giving much thought to what we're doing with our time. *This is a problem*. Leverage constraints to ruthlessly eradicate shallow work from your hour, day, week, month, e.g. Basecamp's 4-day work week, preschedule all hours of the day, etc. Related, we tend to vastly underestimate how much of our day is spent on shallow work.

I'll live the focused life, because it's the best kind there is.

—Winifred Gallagher

Many of today's business/self-help books are a collection of references stitched together with often-borrowed thinking. This isn't meant to be a critique of this book, but rather an acknowledgement of the nature of human knowledge. With that in mind, one might find it helpful to see a list of people the author references in this thoroughly well-researched book which undoubtedly required many hours of deep work:

Carl Jung	Antonin Sertillanges	Donald Knuth	Adam Marlin
Mason Currey	K. Anders Ericsson	Wilhelm Hofmann	Clifford Nass
Mark Twain	Adam Grant	Roy Baumeister	William Powers
Woody Allen	Jorge Hirsch	Jerry Seinfeld	Teddy Roosevelt
Peter Higgs	Richard Feynman	Walter Isaacson	Joshua Foer
J.K. Rowling	Marissa Mayer	Robert Caro	Daniel Kilov
Bill Gates	Alissa Rubin	Charles Darwin	Baratunde Thurston
Neal Stephenson	Neil Postman	Mason Currey	Malcolm Gladwell
Jason Benn	Evgeny Morozov	David Brooks	Michael Lewis
Nate Silver	Winifred Gallagher	Mark Zuckerberg	George Packer
David Hansson	Mihaly	Jack Dorsey	Arnold Bennett
John Doerr	Csikszentmihalyi	Clay Christensen	Jason Fried
Erik Brynjolfsson	Hubert Dreyfus	Andy Grove	Radhika Nagpal
Andrew McAfee	Sean Dorrance Kelly	Tim Kreider	Clay Herbert
Tyler Cowen	Santiago Gonzalez	Ap Dijksterhuis	David Allen
Sherwin Rosen	David Dewane	Bluma Zeigarnik	