

# When Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* breaks down the science of time so you can stop guessing when to do things and pick the best times to work, eat, sleep, have your coffee and even quit your job.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



I have a tendency to bump into people I know in uncanny places. For example, when I was on college exchange in the US, me and some friends took a trip to Toronto, Canada. After a long day of walking all around town, we went to a random liquor store to buy some wine. As we were queuing to pay, I noticed the guy in front of us.

*"Philippe, is that you?"* Sure enough, it was a guy I'd met at the exchange preparation seminar six months before. He was at a different school, but also happened to be in Toronto that weekend. While this is the kind of timing you can't plan for, for a lot of other things in life, you can.

That's what Dan Pink teaches us in his latest book, *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*. We use our gut to make many important decisions, like when to eat, sleep, or quit a project, when actually, science has already provided us with the right answers.

Here are 3 lessons about timing that'll help you structure your life in better ways:

1. Our emotions run through the same cycle every single day.
2. Knowing how you "tick" will help you do your best at work.
3. Taking a break or an afternoon nap is not counterproductive, if anything, it helps you save time.

Are you ready for an in-depth look at the most neglected of our most common key questions?  
Let's crack the code of "when!"

## Lesson 1: There's an emotional pattern each of us follows on any given day.

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If I asked you to divide your day into three parts, you'd most likely first think of morning, afternoon, and evening. For thousands of years, humans have lived through this pattern. However, if I asked you to write down the dominating emotion for each of those parts for a week, we'd spot another, much subtler pattern, as a study by Cornell University analyzing 500 million tweets has found:

1. **Morning peak.** Whether it's right after waking up or 1-2 hours later, most people feel pretty good early in the day.
2. **Afternoon trough.** You know how it's tough to stay awake after lunch? This is it.
3. **Evening rebound.** Once you knock off work, even the toughest days take a turn, don't they?

Regardless of age, race, gender, and nationality, we all go through some variant of this pattern on a daily basis. Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman, author of *Thinking Fast and Slow*, confirmed this with the Day Reconstruction Method. This holds powerful implications for how we should go about our day, but it's also a good pattern to be aware of to deal with your emotions more efficiently.

## Lesson 2: Figure out your chronotype to produce your best work.

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Keeping our daily, emotional cycle in mind, we can learn even more about ourselves if we combine it with something more familiar: our circadian rhythm. Over time, we naturally come to some insight as to when we have our highs and lows throughout the day. "I just can't get up before 7," "I'm a night owl," and "I love to get up early" are lines we've all said or heard before.

While it's easy to dismiss those as people not being used to certain behaviors, science says there's some truth to all of them. How you feel at certain times during the day is called your chronotype, and there are three major ones, says Dan:

1. **The lark.** People like me, who love to get up early, and have all their emotional highs and lows a few hours earlier than most people.
2. **The owl.** If you don't like getting up early and can really get to work around 9 PM, that's you.
3. **The third bird.** The majority of people, who are neither late, nor early, and just follow the standard pattern.

Over 50% of folks go into the last category, meaning they should do analytical, logic-based work in the mornings, when they're most alert. The more creative tasks, where it's helpful if your mind wanders, should be reserved for the late afternoon. Larks should do the same earlier, while owls might want to do cognitive work late at night.

Whichever type you are, doing boring admin stuff in the afternoon trough is always a good idea!

## Lesson 3: Regular breaks and nappuccinos help you save time, not lose it.

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Public awareness about health has risen dramatically in recent years, so the view that breaks are a waste of time is largely outdated, though still prevalent in some older companies and institutions. The science behind how much we should work and how much we should relax is surprisingly much in favor of chilling out.

Time tracking company DeskTime did a study using millions of data points from their software, determining **the ideal break to be 17 minutes for every 52 minutes of work**. That's one hour of down time for every three hours you work! While it's easy to think that there's no way this could lead to better results, they found that the quality of the work ended up being higher overall, compared to shorter or less frequent breaks.

But even if your boss won't allow so much "slacking," taking five minutes every hour to get up, move around, walk outside, get some fresh air, and have a glass of water, can make a significant difference in your productivity. Lastly, Dan recommends the 'nappuccino.' Ideally after lunch, you have a coffee, then set your timer to 20 minutes. If it takes you seven minutes to fall asleep, you'll wake up a little later, fully refreshed and with the caffeine just kicking in.

Saving time by doing less, what a great motto, don't you think?

## When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing Review

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What a great idea to view human performance through the lens of "when?" It's such an underrated question all around. Bravo, Daniel Pink, *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* is another smash hit in the making!

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why public companies should never have their earning calls before lunch
- How US hospitals could avoid \$12.5 billion in unnecessary costs each year

- What the “uh-oh” moment is, and how you can use it to get stuff done
- Why you should be conservative whenever you’re at an age ending with -9

## **Who would I recommend the When summary to?**

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The 19 year old college freshman, who needs to figure out how best to study, the 33 year old graphics designer, who’s stuck with the company’s 9-to-5 schedule, and anyone who’s never tried a nappuccino.