Deep Work

Use one of these four deep work strategies, but be intentional about it.

I'm glad that Cal isn't one of those "one-size-fits-all-advice" kind of people. He knows that different things will work for different people, so when making his case for deep work he suggests four different strategies:

1. **The monastic approach.** Monastic comes from monastery – the place where monks live. It means shutting yourself off completely, for example by moving to a cabin in the woods to write a novel, and not come back until it's finished.
2. **The bimodal approach.** This prioritizes deep work above everything else. You could set a 4-6 hour block each day for deep work, for example, where you lock yourself in your office, similar to the monastic approach. However, once that block is over, you're free to do everything else that might be on your plate.
3. **The rhythmic approach.** This chunks down your work into time blocks, similar to the pomoderic technique, and uses a calendar to track your progress. For example you'd plan your week ahead of time and put 10 blocks of 90 minutes on your calendar, and make working with timed blocks a habit.
4. **The journalistic approach.** If you have a busy daily routine, this works well. What you do is to simply dedicate any, unexpected free time to deep work.

I'm currently alternating between 2 and 4, depending on the kind of day that's ahead of me, but would love to move completely to 2 over time. Being intentional about your deep work approach requires monitoring how you spend your time, so one of your first steps in making this decision should be to track your habits. You'll quickly be able to separate productive from unproductive time and spot patterns.

Make the most of unproductive time with productive meditation.

This is an idea I really like and have recently been using more and more, without knowing I'd find it in this book. Cal calls it *productive meditation*, and it comes down to using your "unproductive" time to do deep thinking.

For example, if you're taking the subway to work each morning, and know you have 30 minutes to and from work, in which you can't do much else, **use this time to try solving a complex problem in your mind**. Commuting, showering, household chores, buying groceries and taking a walk (with or without your dog) are all great opportunities to think.

Ever since getting an activity tracker, I try to walk 10,000 steps per day, which is why I often end up taking a long 1-2 hour walk in the evening. I often spend this time thinking about how I can make Four Minute Books more remarkable, what I could create that is so new and unfamiliar that it takes things to a whole new level, and so on.

The next time you have some "down time", in which you do menial tasks, latch on to a big problem, try to see sub-problems of it, break it down and solve it.

Quit work at the same time each day, and stick to it.

Cal has a habit of ending his work day at 5:30 PM, every day. No emails, no internet, no to-do lists, no computer after that. He describes his practice in 7 year old blog post, and while his systems evolve, planning both work and free time have remained a constant factor.

Your brain needs some space each night to wind down, and it won't get that if you have an as-much-as-possible work ethic. **Limit yourself by quitting work and not checking email, or, even better, shutting down your computer, at the same time each day**. This way, you'll have a fixed slot of free time every day to recuperate.

Your mind will keep working below the surface, but you won't burn yourself out by working around the clock.

For example, I let inbox pause move my email to my inbox at 11 AM and 6 PM. After I check it for the second time at 6 PM, I wrap up work and shut down my laptop (most days, it's a work in progress), so I can then exercise and have a proper dinner, and I feel much better for it.