time. If circumstances upend your schedule, this isn't a failure; it's an expected part of applying this strategy. When you next get a chance, simply fix the schedule for the time that remains in the day so that you remain intentional about where you direct your focus.

Tip #2: At first, schedule more time than you think you need.

Novice time blockers chronically underestimate how long common work activities actually take. If you're new to time blocking, you can save yourself unnecessary schedule fixes by inflating the time block sizes you think are reasonable by 20–30 percent. After you've been time blocking for several months, you'll begin to develop a more realistic understanding of these durations and can begin building more-accurate blocks without needing this extra padding.

Tip #3: Capture email and instant messenger communication in their own blocks.

Many knowledge workers don't consider checking email or instant messenger channels a standalone activity. They instead think of it as something that's always done in parallel with primary work. I *highly* discourage this mindset: all of these quick checks of communication channels significantly reduce your cognitive capacity due to neural network switching costs. Batch your email or instant messenger time into their own blocks. When you get to one of these communication blocks, do nothing but communicate, and when you're not in one of these blocks, don't communicate at all. If your work requires you to check these tools often, then schedule lots of blocks to do so, but refuse to let this behavior be something that occurs informally in the background.

Tip #4: Use "conditional blocks" to add flexibility to your schedule.

If you're unsure how long a given activity might take, break it into two blocks. The first block is dedicated to working on the activity. The second is assigned to activities that are conditioned on what happens during the first block: *if* you need more time for the original activity, then use the second block to finish it; on the other hand, *if* you've finished the original activity, use the second block for the backup activity you identified. In this way, you can avoid unnecessary schedule fixes when confronting work of ambiguous duration.

>>> USING THE COLLECTION COLUMNS

On the left-hand side of the daily pages are two lined columns labeled "tasks" and "ideas." Their purpose is simple: if while you're executing your time-block schedule you come across a new task or relevant idea, you can jot it down in these collection columns to deal with later, and then return immediately to executing the current block.

For example, perhaps someone sticks their head into your office to ask you to do something for them, or while walking back from a meeting, you have a sudden brainstorm about how to tackle a pressing problem. By writing down these cognitive intrusions in a designated area in this planner, you avoid the need to divert your attention from the current time block to handle them in the moment. You can be confident that you won't forget them, as they're written right there in black and white on your daily pages. If you're without such a collection space, the fear of forgetting would likely drive you to drop everything to handle the

new obligation right away, a reaction that cedes control of your schedule from your intentions to the whims of other people.

If you need to take action on this new information later in the same day, then the collection columns will hold it for you until you arrive at a good time to fix your block schedule to include this work. If the information is less urgent, then it will remain safely recorded in the collection columns until you complete your shutdown ritual at the end of the day (we'll get to this soon), during which you'll transfer it to whatever permanent system you use to track your obligations.

>>> METRIC TRACKING

Part of the art of time blocking is figuring out what work to schedule. Some of these choices are obvious, like allocating blocks for preexisting appointments or projects with impending deadlines. But you'll still often find yourself needing to schedule more discretionary, non-urgent endeavors. It's here that personal metrics can help nudge you toward the long-term results that matter most to you.

A personal metric describes a behavior that you think is important with a quantifiable value. Many readers of my book *Deep Work*, for example, track each day how many hours they spent working without distractions on cognitively demanding tasks. They accept my argument that this "deep work" should be prioritized in an increasingly competitive knowledge economy. Their daily deep work hour count is a personal metric that captures how well they're living up to this commitment.

Some jobs might yield metrics that capture behaviors specific to the particular type of work. If you're in sales, for example, the number of sales calls you

make each day might be important, while if you're in a leadership position, you might instead want to track how many different team members you checked in on during the day. Some metrics are quantified as numbers while others are binary: you either did them or you didn't. Perhaps, for example, you maintain a simple checkbox to indicate whether you ended the day with an empty inbox or filled out your online time sheet.

You can also track personal metrics that are only loosely relevant to your work. In my own case, for example, I'm a strong believer that a healthy body supports a healthy mind. Accordingly, each day I track the following information: how many steps I take, whether or not I exercised, and whether or not I ate healthily. These personal metrics aren't, strictly speaking, describing work activities, but I track them alongside more work-specific values, as they ultimately do affect how much useful thinking I'm able to extract from my brain.

The open box above the collection columns is the space for recording these metrics each day. You simply jot down the name of each metric, followed by the relevant value—be it a number, a tally of hash marks, or a simple check. Tracking personal metrics serves a couple of purposes. The first is psychological. The knowledge that you'll be recording information about a key behavior at the end of the day can motivate you to dedicate time to that behavior when building your time-block schedule, as you don't want to have to record a disappointing metric value.

The second purpose is informational. The metric tracking boxes will contain a record of how well you did, day after day, in executing key behaviors. This record can reveal useful trends. For example, if you're tracking deep work hours, you might notice that these values dip precipitously on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Further investigation might reveal this is because you have a series of regular meetings on those days that are spread out enough throughout the day to break up any long, uninterrupted stretches of time. Once the problem is

identified, simple fixes might be possible. In this case, perhaps you reschedule one of the meetings to free up a morning block for deep work on these days.

To summarize, if something's important to you, track it in the metric-tracking box. This simple habit can inject much more intentional behavior into your daily schedule.

>>> THE SHUTDOWN RITUAL

One of the most important pieces of my system's daily scheduling discipline is executing a shutdown ritual that helps your mind shift more completely from work mode to non-work mode. The details of this ritual are straightforward. At the end of each day's time-block schedule, your final step is to shut down work. To do so, first make sure your personal metrics have been recorded. Next, go through the tasks and ideas in your collection column, deciding for each what you want to do with it. In some cases, you may need to add new tasks into your task system, while in other cases you may need to update your calendar, or even shoot off a quick message.

Once you've finished going through your collection columns, you should then briefly review any other potential sources of unresolved work obligations. For most people, this means taking one last look at your email inbox, to ensure you didn't miss something urgent, as well as reviewing your calendar and obligation-tracking system. When done with these checks, look over your weekly plan (which we'll discuss in more detail next), updating it as needed. The goal here is to convince yourself that there's nothing being forgotten, or missed, or being kept track of only in your brain, and that you have a reasonable plan for the days ahead. All of these reassurances are the precondition for enabling your brain to fully shift its attention from work to life outside of work.

To make this transition, complete the shutdown ritual by marking the "shutdown complete" checkbox that's preprinted in the metric-tracking space. (I put this checkbox in the metric area because recording whether or not you've completed this ritual is itself a personal metric.) Later in the evening, if you feel a generalized background hum of work anxiety, and your mind begins to fret and wants you to think about that email you have to write, or to endlessly review your plan for an upcoming project, you can arrest this rumination with a simple reminder: "I wouldn't have checked the shutdown complete box if I hadn't completed the shutdown ritual that convinced me I'm fine to avoid work until tomorrow." In this way, you address the anxiety without engaging with the specific topics fueling the anxiety.

I came up with this ritual early in my career as a graduate student, with the only difference being that I actually said the phrase *shutdown complete* out loud instead of checking a box. (Over the years, as I've written about this strategy, the phrase *shutdown complete* has become a shibboleth of sorts for my more devoted readers, an eccentric reality that makes me inexplicably happy.) In my experience, when facing a period of intense work anxiety, I'd find myself frequently returning to the disclaimer for about a week, after which my mind learned I wasn't going to indulge in any interesting rumination, diminishing its urge to fret. You'll likely experience a similar effect. If you strictly follow this shutdown ritual, you'll soon discover that not only are you working harder when you work, but your time after work is more meaningful and restorative than ever before.

>>> THE WEEKLY PLANNING PAGES

So far in these instructions, we've been discussing the various elements of the daily planning pages. There is, however, another type of page that you'll