

# Insights from Deep Work by Cal Newport

***“My commitment to depth has rewarded me. In the ten-year period following my college graduation, I published four books, earned a PhD, wrote peer-reviewed academic papers at a high rate, and was hired as a tenure-track professor at Georgetown University.” – Cal Newport***

**Shallow Work:** non-cognitively demanding, logistical-style tasks that can be completed in a semi-distracted state. Shallow work includes answering email, sorting documents, and running errands. The less engagement your work requires, the more shallow it is.

***“In an age of network tools, knowledge workers increasingly replace deep work with the shallow alternative—constantly sending and receiving e-mail messages like human network routers, with frequent breaks for quick hits of distraction. Larger efforts that would be well served by deep thinking, such as forming a new business strategy or writing an important grant application, get fragmented into distracted dashes that produce muted quality.” – Cal Newport***

Any task that you complete while in a semi-distracted state will likely be automated in the near future (completed by software programs and/or robots). Or the task will be completed by several thousand people around the world who are willing to do it for far less money than you are doing it for. The more shallow work you do, the less rare and valuable your skills are, and the more likely you’ll be replaced by a cheaper alternative.

**Deep Work:** hard but important intellectual work completed during long uninterrupted periods of time. Deep work requires a state of distraction-free concentration to push your cognitive capabilities to their limit and create new value that is hard to replicate. Here are 3 Examples of Deep Work:

- Writer Mark Twain worked in a cabin isolated from the main house, requiring his family to blow a horn to attract his attention for meals.
- While writing the Harry Potter books, JK Rowling’s only tweet for the first year and a half after joining Twitter was: “This is the real me, but you won’t be hearing from me often I am afraid, as pen and paper is my priority at the moment.”
- CEO Bill Gates famously conducted “Think Weeks” twice a year, during which he would isolate himself in a lakeside cottage to do nothing but read and think big thoughts. One think week led to the famous “Internet Tidal Wave” memo which led to development of Microsoft’s powerful web browser.

If you want to develop skills and produce work that the world considers rare and valuable, you need to develop a daily deep work ritual.

## 4 Deep Work Ritual Requirements:



**dedicated workspace**

***“Your ritual needs to specify a location for your deep work efforts. This location can be as simple as your normal office with the door shut and desk cleaned off (a colleague of mine likes to put a hotel-style “do not disturb” sign on his office door when he’s tackling something difficult). If it’s possible to identify a location used only for depth—for instance, a conference room or quiet library—the positive effect can be even greater.” – Cal Newport***



**exact end time**

***“Give yourself a specific time frame to keep the session a discrete challenge and not an open-ended slog.” – Cal Newport***  
By establishing a clear end time for each deep work session, you give yourself permission to focus intensely and experience discomfort because you know exactly when the discomfort will end.



**easy starting sequence**

***“Your ritual needs rules and processes to keep your efforts structured. Without this structure, you’ll have to mentally litigate again and again what you should and should not be doing during these sessions and keep trying to assess whether you’re working sufficiently hard. These are unnecessary drains on your willpower reserves.” – Cal Newport***



**power-ups**

***“Your ritual needs to ensure your brain gets the support it needs to keep operating at a high level of depth. For example, the ritual might specify that you start with a cup of good coffee, or make sure you have access to enough food of the right type to maintain energy, or integrate light exercise such as walking to help keep the mind clear.” – Cal Newport***

***“If you don’t produce, you won’t thrive—no matter how skilled or talented you are.” – Cal Newport***