

## Digital Minimalism

Author	Goodreads Link	Rating
Cal Newport	<a href="https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40672036-digital-minimalism?ac=1&amp;from_search=true&amp;qid=eKFdNGYBKo&amp;rank=1">https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40672036-digital-minimalism?ac=1&amp;from_search=true&amp;qid=eKFdNGYBKo&amp;rank=1</a>	****

### Favorite Quotes

"Simply put, humans are not wired to be constantly wired."

"Where we want to be cautious . . . is when the sound of a voice or a cup of coffee with a friend is replaced with 'likes' on a post."

"Conversation enriches the understanding, but solitude is the school of genius."

"You cannot expect an app dreamed up in a dorm room, or among the Ping-Pong tables of a Silicon Valley incubator, to successfully replace the types of rich interactions to which we've painstakingly adapted over millennia. Our sociality is simply too complex to be outsourced to a social network or reduced to instant messages and emojis."

### Overview

Minimalism is the art of knowing how much is just enough. Digital minimalism applies this idea to our personal technology. It's the key to living a focused life in an increasingly noisy world.

In this timely and enlightening book, the bestselling author of Deep Work introduces a philosophy for technology use that has already improved countless lives.

Digital minimalists are all around us. They're the calm, happy people who can hold long conversations without furtive glances at their phones. They can get lost in a good book, a woodworking project, or a leisurely morning run. They can have fun with friends and family without the obsessive urge to document the experience. They stay informed about the news of the day, but don't feel overwhelmed by it. They don't experience "fear of missing out" because they already know which activities provide them meaning and satisfaction.

Now, Newport gives us a name for this quiet movement, and makes a persuasive case for its urgency in our tech-saturated world. Common sense tips, like turning off notifications, or occasional rituals like observing a digital sabbath, don't go far enough in helping us take back control of our technological lives, and attempts to unplug completely are complicated by the demands of family, friends and work. What we need instead is a thoughtful method to decide what tools to use, for what purposes, and under what conditions.

Drawing on a diverse array of real-life examples, from Amish farmers to harried parents to Silicon Valley programmers, Newport identifies the common practices of digital minimalists and the ideas that underpin them. He shows how digital minimalists are rethinking their relationship to social media, rediscovering the pleasures of the offline world, and reconnecting with their inner selves through regular periods of solitude. He then shares strategies for integrating these practices into your life, starting with a thirty-day "digital declutter" process that has already helped thousands feel less overwhelmed and more in control.

Technology is intrinsically neither good nor bad. The key is using it to support your goals and values, rather than letting it use you. This book shows the way.

## Notes

### 1. Follow a Philosophy

Newport explains his philosophy:

- Digital Minimalism: A philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else.
- By arguing technology use requires a philosophy, Newport is at odds with the majority of tech writers—who he uses as examples—who treat social media and tech usage as something to hack.
- Instead of swearing off of Instagram just because, Newport says you should follow a philosophy.

Why?

Because if you tie your philosophy to your values, it's easier to see why you should change certain behaviors if they don't align.

*I'll use myself as an example.*

One of my values is community. If I claim to use Instagram because I feel connected to my friends when we comment on each other's posts or send messages after viewing Instastories, then this particular app is OK to use, right?

Nope. Newport would argue I'm substituting true connection with quick hits of social satisfaction from likes and comments.

And I would mostly agree. Spending time together, whether in person or with a phone call fosters a closer friendship (and has all the positive hormones associated with human interaction). And, we have to consider the other downsides of Instagram.

When I'm using the app a lot, I whip my phone out an embarrassing number of times. I just have to snag a picture of the poke bowl in front of me, or the funny sign I walked by, or the person carrying a belly-up sleeping bulldog on the train.

At the end of the day, what am I building? A disappearing timeline of trivial events instead of a meaningful body of work or closer friendships. And, the

constant capturing pulls me out of the moment and makes me feel compulsive-and act-compulsive.

## **2. Step Away from the Phone (aka Digital Detox)**

In the second chapter, you'll find the first step on the path to digital minimalism.

The digital declutter as Newport puts it has three steps.

1. Spend 30 days on a break from optional technologies in your life; to find the optional tech in your life, "consider the technology optional unless its temporary removal would harm or significantly disrupt the daily operation of your professional or personal life."\*\*
2. Rediscover hobbies, activities, and behaviors you enjoy and find meaningful.\*\*
3. After 30 days, reintroduce optional technologies intentionally (this step reminded me of the reintroduction phase of Whole30, or any elimination diet).

Those who failed to complete the 30 days had implementation problems, writes Newport. For the majority, it was either a failure to plan how to spend their free time, or a lack of creating a mindset of making a permanent change.

## **3. Spend Time Alone**

We are a solitude-deprived society.

According to the research Newport describes, our society has vastly increased its anxiety as solitude decreases.

An entire chapter is spent describing the benefits and practices around solitude (I'm a big fan — I spent much of last summer's weekends solo hiking and wandering around the woods and I never slept better or had more time to think deeply).

I'll boil it down to the meat and potatoes:

- Take walks: Lincoln, Thoreau, Nietzsche, Wendell Barry (and every other man Newport could think to reference) all did their thinking on their feet.
- Journal: Newport tries to reinvent the diary/journal by calling it “writing letters to yourself,” but make no mistake, the 12 Moleskines he refers to are his diaries.
- Spend time away from your phone: I don’t think I need to explain this very clear, simple directive.

#### **4. Replace Social Media with Real Connection**

- Two main recommendations:
  - Batch texts and emails
  - Hold conversation office hours

Anyone who’s read anything in the productivity world knows the concept of batching.

Tim Ferriss made it popular with [The 4-Hour Work Week](https://amzn.to/2VLAf1Q) (<https://amzn.to/2VLAf1Q>), but the concept has been around for a long time.

It’s when you do one task, often a menial one, for a set amount of time. The most popular example is with emails. You set certain times of the day where you go through all your emails; then, you don’t open your inbox until your next batching time.

Newport recommends trying to do that with text messages and other digital distractions. You could answer all Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram DMs once a day, or once a week. Cutting down on the attention residue that inevitably happens if you switch to answer texts, emails, etc helps you feel less distracted and out of control.

Conversation office hours was something I hadn’t really thought about before this book. Newport used a few examples of people he knows who let family and friends know when they can be reached via phone. For one, it’s during his commuting hours. The people in his life know that he welcomes any calls during those times.

Another way to use office hours is if you're someone with regular habits; Newport mentioned a friend who can be found at the same coffee shop at set hours each week. He welcomes friends to stop by and chat.

I think these examples are great, but they're also a passive way to keep in contact with friends and family; I think they work if supplemented with an active effort to connect, too.

## 5. A Time for Everything and Everything Has a Time

The next section gets into this concept more, but one theme you'll find across all Newport's writing is the value of slotting everything into your calendar.

Using himself as an example (in his other book, [Deep Work](#), he explains how he writes books, teaches computer science at the university level, makes time for his kids and wife, as well as pursues hobbies and stays in shape.

He schedules his week out down to the hour so he can see how the time will add up to him accomplishing what he wants.

For me, when I tried to add everything to my calendar like Newport, I failed to keep the blocks of time free because last minute plans often came up or work ran long, or a friend wanted to chat, or I needed to cook/grocery shop (you get the picture — life happened).

So, since January, I've used a very high-tech scheduling mechanism to help me spend my time on my big goals. I make empty bubbles representing a block of effort I want to spend on a certain task.





APRIL	CARDIO CLASSES	INVO	YOGA	WEIGHTS	PULLUPS	KB/ABI
APR 1-7	4/1 CLASS 4/12 YOGA 4/11 TRX 4/14 SPIN	4/16	4/13 DL 4/15 SQ	4/12 4/15 4/16	4/14 KB 4/15	
APR 8-14	4/11 SPIN 4/12 AB 4/14 DANCE 4/15 RAN	4/13 DL 4/14 SQ	4/19 4/12 4/14	4/1 KB	0	
APR 15-21	4/16 RAN 4/16 SPIN 4/17 TRX	0	DL 4/17 SQ 4/19	4/15 4/19	0 0	
APR 22-28	4/22 PFIT 4/23 SPIN 4/24 TRX 4/25 YOGA	DL 4/23 SQ 4/24	4/22 4/24 4/25 YOGA	4/22 4/24 4/25	4/22 4/24 4/25	
APR 29 - MAY 5	4/30 RAN	5/2 SQ 5/2 DL	5/4	4/30 KB 4/30	0 0 0	

My personal tracking system for fitness this year.

For fitness, I had decided I wanted at least four classes or cardio sessions a week, two weight lifting sessions (squats and deadlifts), three pull-up sessions, and two floating sessions for abs, kettlebells, or handstand practice. So far, it's worked better than any system I've used (from apps, to spreadsheets, to calendars). I think it's because I can see in a glance what I still need to do for the week and I figure out how to slot it in.

## 6. Spend Your Free Time in Worthwhile Pursuits (Reclaim Leisure)

Newport's directives:

- Fix or build something each week.
- Schedule low-quality leisure time.
- Join clubs, groups, etc.

The most successful social leisure activities share two traits. First, they require you to spend time with other people in person...the second trait is that the activity provides some sort of structure for the social interaction,

including rules to have to follow, insider terminology or rituals, and often a shared goal.

In the book, Newport references CrossFit and a few other fitness-related groups as fitting the traits he describes. But, he also mentions board games, which makes me think of my friends who play Dungeons and Dragons or other in-depth, weekly RPGs.

For me, I've joined a number of groups throughout the years. I actually used to do CrossFit myself and the community was a close one. The downside with CrossFit is the cost.

I'm all for finding free groups or creating your own centered around a particular interest or hobby. When I moved to New York, I joined a veterans writing group. We met in person for two hours each week and the social connection led me to two close friendships. The newest group I've joined is a book club. Personally, the activities I've joined where you pay — such as CrossFit, writing classes, and art classes — haven't led to friendships outside of class times; it's always the more community driven groups where I've made real friends.

- Fix or build something each week.\*
  - As for fixing and building things, many city-dwellers won't have access to his suggestions, such as changing the oil on a car, and home improvement DIY. That said, I still agree with him about the value in fixing or getting your own stuff done.
  - There's such a sense of pride and accomplishment that can't be found if you outsource (through TaskRabbit or a similar service).
  - For example, I used my drill and (fun, purple) toolbox to hang key hooks, install floating shelves, fix a chaise chair foot and more. And while gross, even snaking a clogged shower drain can be satisfying.
  - I've always fallen on the side of DIY (because I'm thrifty and I like figuring stuff out) but you don't need power tools to gain the benefits of learning a skill. A sewing kit costs \$5 or less and fits the size of my palm; use one to mend buttons, small holes, or to



sew on patches. (And there are plenty of things you can do outside of my limited examples, maybe it's as simple as fixing some earrings that broke or finally figuring out how to program your LED candle remote).

- Schedule low-quality leisure time.\*
- For low-quality leisure time, Newport makes the argument that if we give ourselves boundaries, it's better all around; we get to indulge in YouTube, Instagram scrolling, etc, but, we're restricted to a set amount of time. He mentioned that the mind doesn't like all-out restrictions, which reminded me again of dieting, and how many food plans include cheat meals or days for the psychological benefit of avoiding the deprivation mindset.
- His solution is to add to your weekly plan (for years, Newport's advocated planning each week down to the hour) blocks of time for your favorite low-quality leisure. Over time, he says, you can decrease as you fill in more time with quality leisure and activities.

## Critique

While I enjoyed the book, Newport has a few blind spots. For one, he defaults regularly to only using male historic figures for examples. I find that a bit lazy and expected. Do we really need another reference to Thoreau? Seriously? What about Anne LaBastille (a woman who left society to live in the Adirondacks with her dog in a hand-built cabin), who was also a writer who retreated to the woods?

He also failed to explore the concepts of residencies. For centuries writers, artists, and other creators have escaped to secluded colonies or remote places to work on art. In the U.S., there are dozens of artist residencies and fellowships where technology use is discouraged and deep thinking and flow states are encouraged. We've recognized the value of this time away from distractions for centuries, yet Newport neglects to mention this at all.

Crafting, cooking, and other hobbies are also missing from his discourse on leisure pursuits. He defaults to using guitar and fixing cars/house DIY. Again, those are fine, but they're gendered and easy — he didn't explore

one step further or mention what many people already spend their free time on; this might be because those many people are women, and he has a bias toward his perspective. Crafting fits his definition of quality leisure time, and I'd argue so does cooking.

## Resources

The following resources are courtesy of Matt Bunday, who shared them with the group who met up with me to discuss the book.\_\_\_\_

Tools Matt uses:

- Time tracking: <https://qotoqot.com/qbserve/>

- News Feed Eradicator for

Facebook: <https://chrome.google.com/.../fjcldmjmhkklehbaiciaiopjklhlg...>

- 

Redirector: <https://chrome.google.com/.../ocgpenflpmgnfapjedencafcfakcekc...> (redirects distracting websites to other places)

- Focus: <https://heyfocus.com/> (another layer of blocking, useful for Pomodoro timing too)

- Sloth worth: <https://qotoqot.com/sloth-worth/> (Shows you how much money you've spent browsing the web)

- Monitor your mobile use with Screen Time for the iPhone: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT208982>

#books

#booksummaries

#productivity