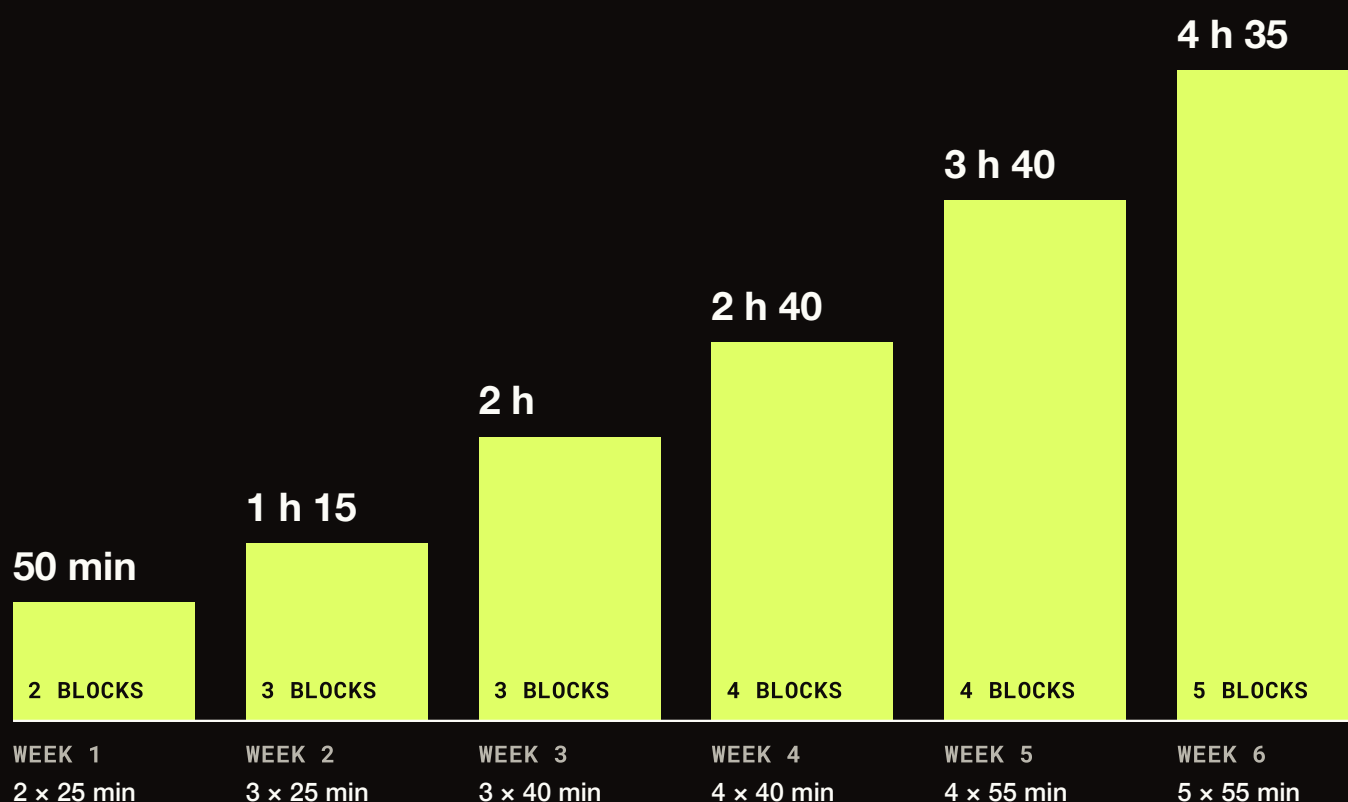


DEEP WORK IS A SKILL. HERE IS THE TRAINING PLAN.

The Deep Work Protocol is a six-week ladder from 2 blocks of 25 minutes towards 5 blocks of 55. You climb one step at a time, at the pace your own results set, and you measure the gain with your own count of finished work.

DEEP TIME A DAY, BY WEEK

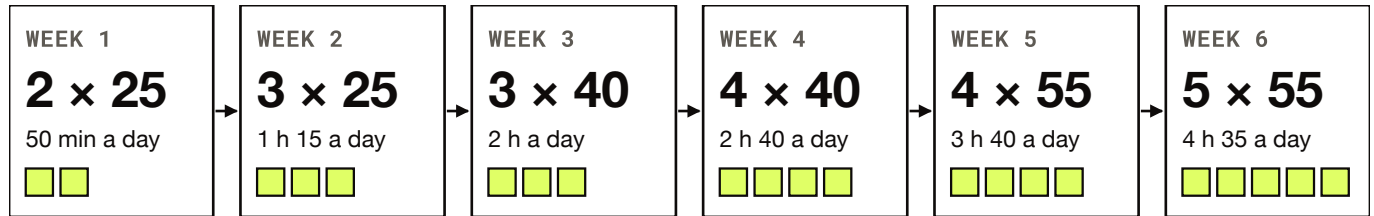


6 WEEKS · 50 MIN → UP TO 4 H 35 A DAY · 24 SOURCES, EACH GRADED · 1 TRACKER FOR THE WALL

HOW THIS WORKS

You train deep work the way you train for a run: a load you can finish, raised one step at a time. This workbook is the plan, the log and the evidence in one place.

THE LADDER AT A GLANCE · BLOCKS A DAY × MINUTES EACH



THE MEASURE IS YOURS

Before week 1 you count one ordinary week: how many pieces of meaningful work you finished. In week 6 you count again, the same way. Week 6 divided by baseline is your multiple.

The plan aims for 3 to 5 deep-work blocks a day.

How much more you finish is for your own two numbers to say.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ **A timer.** Kitchen timer, watch, or the free one at solvelabs-app.vercel.app/deep.
- ☐ **Paper.** This workbook, printed, and a pen that lives with it.
- ☐ **Six weeks,** after one week of counting. Seven in all, and more if you repeat a week.

WHAT A TRAINING DAY TAKES OUT OF YOUR DAY, BREAKS INCLUDED

WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6
55 min	1 h 25	2 h 20	3 h 25	4 h 55	6 h 05

Counted with a 25-minute long break in week 4, and with 15-minute breaks and a 45-minute meal in weeks 5 and 6. Add two minutes a day for the log and ten for the shutdown.

THE ORDER

- 1 Read the case** (pages 3–7). Twenty minutes. It is why each rule in the plan exists, with the strength of the evidence stated.
- 2 Count your baseline week** (pages 8–9). Change nothing yet. Set up the method while you count.
- 3 Set up the method** (pages 10–18). Seven one-off decisions, your shallow windows, and five plans you write yourself.
- 4 Pin up the tracker** (page 20) and run the six weeks (pages 21–35). One briefing and one log a week.
- 5 Do the sum** (page 36), then hold your level (page 39).

Baseline week starts _____

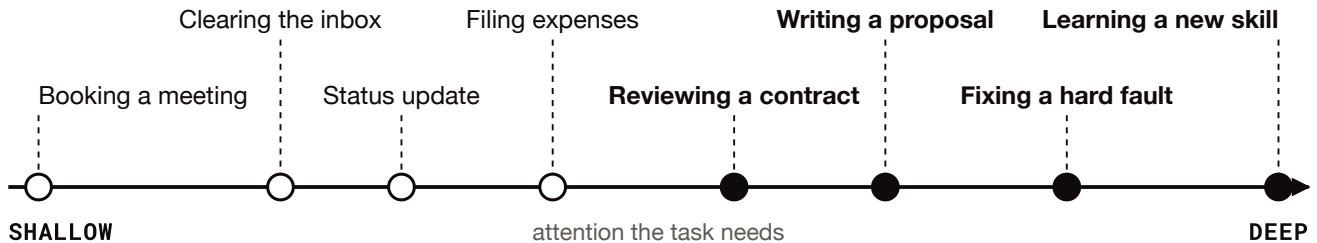
Week 1 starts _____

The work I want more of finished _____

DEEP WORK IS ONE HARD TASK, HELD

A stretch of time on one demanding task, with your full attention and nothing else open. The term is Cal Newport's.

WHERE YOUR TASKS SIT



WHAT IT IS

The work that produces what you are paid or known for: the written page, the solved problem, the finished design. It uses everything you know, and it leaves something behind that did not exist before.

WHAT IT IS BESIDE

Shallow work keeps the day moving: mail, messages, scheduling, most meetings. It needs doing, it survives half your attention, and a week of it leaves little to show.

Newport's test. How long would it take to train a bright recent graduate to do this task? If the answer is months, it is deep. If it is days, it is shallow.

IF YOUR JOB IS	DEEP	SHALLOW
WRITING	Drafting the argument of chapter 3	Formatting references, answering the editor
SOFTWARE	Designing the data model; tracing a fault	Ticket grooming, stand-up, most code-review chat
RUNNING A BUSINESS	Next year's pricing; the pitch itself	Invoices, scheduling, approving requests
STUDY	Working problems with the book closed	Re-reading notes, organising files

MY THREE DEEP TASKS

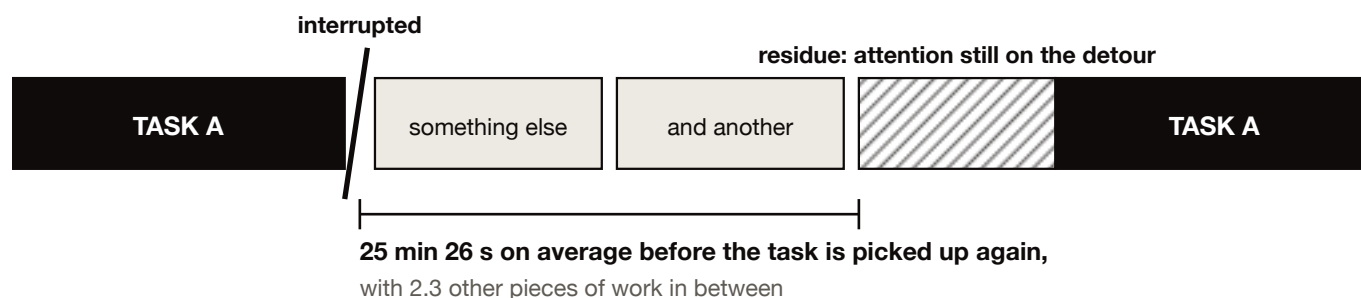
SHALLOW WORK THAT TAKES MOST OF MY DAY

Newport, Deep Work, 2016. The definition and the test are his; the examples are ours.

EVERY SWITCH LEAVES SOMETHING BEHIND

When you leave a task unfinished and start another, part of your attention stays with the first. A block exists to remove the switches.

ONE INTERRUPTION, AS THE FIELD STUDY RECORDED IT



IN THE LABORATORY

Sophie Leroy named the effect **attention residue**. In two experiments, people moved to a second task while the first was still open in their minds, and they did the second task worse. People who had finished the first task carried less of it with them.

IN THE OFFICE

Gloria Mark's team followed 24 office workers minute by minute for three days each. 57% of their stretches of work were interrupted. 77.2% of the interrupted work was picked up again the same day, and the average gap was 25 minutes 26 seconds.

AVERAGE TIME ON ONE SCREEN BEFORE SWITCHING (MARK)

2.5_{min}

2004

75_s

around 2012

47_s

recent years

Read these numbers for what they are. The 25 minutes come from one small study with a wide spread (standard deviation 54 minutes), so treat it as an order of size. The 47 seconds measure how often people switch screens. They say nothing about how long you are able to concentrate. Switching is a habit, and a habit can be trained.

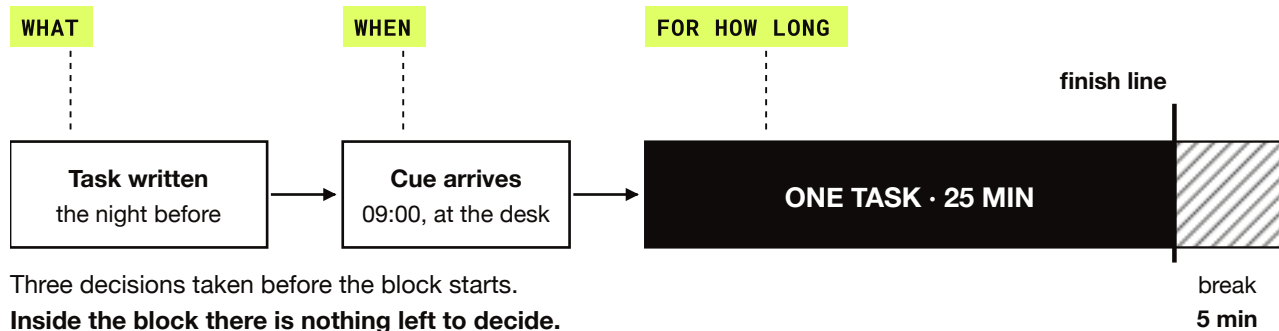
What the plan does with this. One task per block, with a finish line, so nothing stays open behind you. Every time you leave the task by your own choice you make a tally mark and restart. The tally is your switching, counted.

Leroy, 2009, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes · Mark, González & Harris, 2005, CHI · Mark, Attention Span, 2023. Full references on page 41.

A BLOCK IS A DECISION MADE IN ADVANCE

The hard part of deep work is the start, and the start is hard because it is three decisions at once: what, when, and for how long. A fixed block takes all three the day before.

ANATOMY OF A BLOCK



Three decisions taken before the block starts.

Inside the block there is nothing left to decide.

.65

effect size (d) of
an if-then plan on
reaching a goal,
across 94 tests

WHY DECIDING IN ADVANCE WORKS

A plan of the form “if it is 9:00 and I am at my desk, then I open the draft” is called an implementation intention. Gollwitzer and Sheeran pooled 94 independent tests of such plans. People who made one were clearly more likely to do what they had intended: an effect of $d = .65$, which sits between medium and large on the usual scale.

You write five of your own on page 18.

WHY 25 MINUTES

Because you can finish it on day one. In 2025, 94 students studied for two hours with 25-minute blocks and 5-minute breaks, with breaks sized to their work time, or with breaks at will. All three groups got the same amount done, and fatigue rose a little faster under 25/5.

WHAT THAT TELLS YOU

25 is a sound place to start and nothing more. No length has been shown to beat the others. So the plan starts where finishing is certain and makes the length yours to raise, first in week 3.

TRY IT NOW: TURN ONE INTENTION INTO A BLOCK

Something I have been meaning to do _____

What, exactly _____ When _____ For how long _____

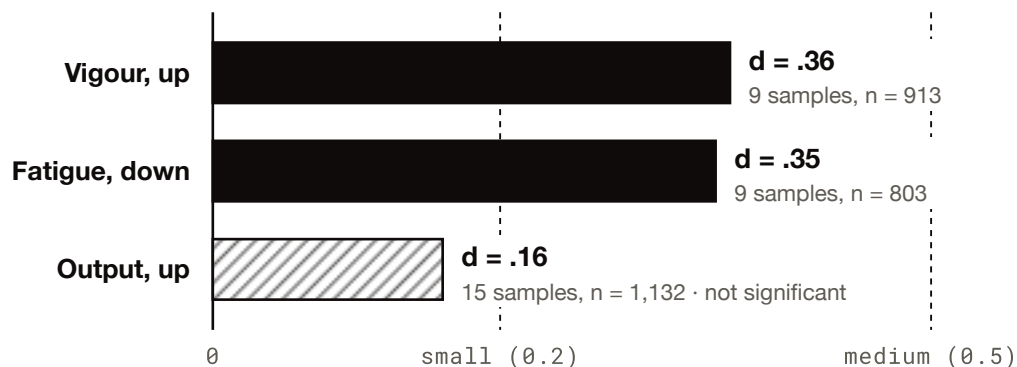
A block has an end. “Work on the report” has none, which is why it is easy to put off. “Draft the findings section until the timer rings” can be started at 9:00 and is over at 9:25.

Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* · Smits, Wenzel & de Bruin, 2025, *Behavioral Sciences*. Full references on page 41.

THE BREAK IS PART OF THE BLOCK

A break you fixed in advance protects your energy for the next block. A break you take when you feel like it tends to come late and run long.

WHAT BREAKS OF UP TO 10 MINUTES CHANGE · META-ANALYSIS, 22 SAMPLES, N = 2,335



87 STUDENTS, ONE STUDY SESSION	BREAKS WHEN THEY FELT LIKE IT	BREAKS FIXED IN ADVANCE
WORK STRETCHES	Longer	24 minutes, or 12
BREAKS	Longer	6 minutes, or 3
FATIGUE, DISTRACTION	Higher	Lower
CONCENTRATION, MOTIVATION	Lower	Higher
TASKS COMPLETED	Similar	Similar, in less time

FIXED AGAINST FREE

The table is Biwer and colleagues' comparison. Students who chose their own breaks pushed on for longer, then rested for longer, and felt worse for it. Those on a fixed pattern got as much done and finished sooner.

WHY A PAUSE HELPS AT ALL

Ariga and Lleras gave 84 people a monotonous 50-minute attention task. Performance fell steadily, except in the group that was briefly pulled away twice: their performance held to the end. Attention fades on a task that never lets go of it.

What is shown and what is not. Short breaks reliably leave people more energetic and less tired. Their effect on output is small and not statistically secure, and it grows with the length of the break. Energy is still the point: it is what gets you a second, third and fourth block in the same day.

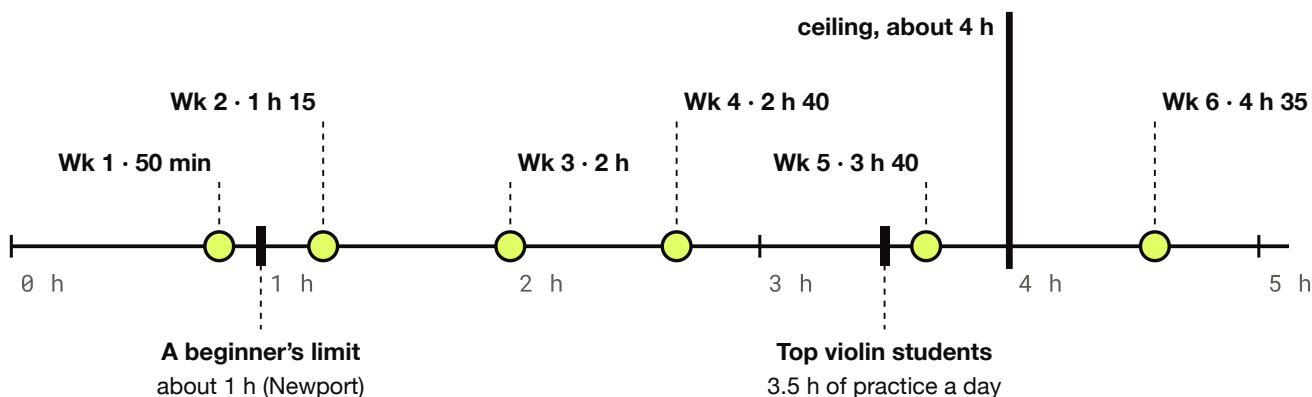
What the plan does with this. Every break has a length before the block begins: 5 minutes in weeks 1 and 2, 10 from week 3, one long break of 20 to 30 minutes from week 4, and in weeks 5 and 6 at least 10 to 15 minutes after every block with a proper meal break. What to do in those minutes is on page 16.

Albulescu et al., 2022, PLOS ONE · Biwer et al., 2023, British Journal of Educational Psychology · Ariga & Lleras, 2011, Cognition. Full references on page 41.

FOUR HOURS A DAY IS THE CEILING

Deep work is costly. The people who do the most of it stop at about four hours a day, and the top of this ladder is set against that.

DEEP TIME A DAY: THE SIX WEEKS AGAINST THE EVIDENCE



THE UPPER END

Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer studied violin students at a Berlin academy. The best practised alone for about 24.3 hours a week, roughly 3.5 hours a day, in sessions separated by rest. Ericsson's review of other fields found little further gain beyond about 4 hours a day.

THE LOWER END

Cal Newport, reading the same research, puts a beginner's limit at about one hour of intense concentration a day. So week 1 asks for 50 minutes, under that hour, and each later week adds one step to a load you have already finished.

2_h

Week 3. Three blocks of 40. Already a strong day.

3_h 40

Week 5. Four blocks of 55. Level with the best violinists.

4_h 35

Week 6. Five blocks of 55. At or above the ceiling.

What the plan does with this. Week 6 asks for 4 hours 35, which is at or above the roughly four hours found in elite performers. So the top of the ladder is a level to test, and many people will settle at 4 × 55. That is a full result. **The move-up rule decides where you stop. The calendar has no vote.**

How far to trust it. These were musicians in their twenties, not people with inboxes, and “about 4 hours” is a pattern in what experts report. Nobody has measured it as a limit of the human brain. Use it as an order of size: one to four hours, reached by training.

Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993, *Psychological Review* · Newport, *Deep Work*, 2016. Full references on page 41.

COUNT ONE ORDINARY WEEK

Change nothing this week. Keep this page on your desk and fill in one row at the end of each day. It takes two minutes.

WHAT COUNTS AS A FINISHED PIECE

Something another person could use, or that you would still list as done in a month: a proposal sent, a feature merged, a section written, an analysis completed. Count it on the day it is finished.

WHAT STAYS OUT OF THE COUNT

Replies, meetings attended, things started. They are real work and they are measured in the other columns, as the time they took from the deep kind.

DAY	FINISHED PIECES (TALLY, AND NAME THEM)	DEEP MINUTES (ROUGH)	LONGEST STRETCH ON ONE TASK (MIN)	I INTERRUPTED MYSELF (TALLY)	OTHERS INTERRUPTED ME (TALLY)
MON					
TUE					
WED					
THU					
FRI					
SAT					
SUN					
WEEK					

Baseline count

Finished pieces this week

Baseline deep minutes

Total for the week

Self-interruptions

Total for the week

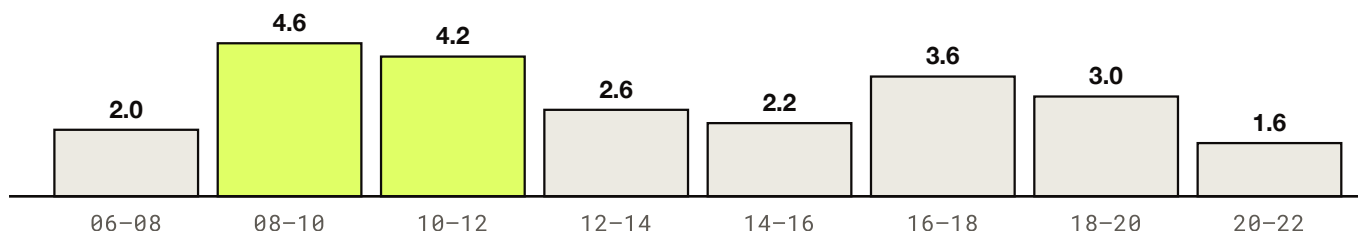
Copy the baseline count to the tracker (page 20) and to the sum on page 36. Deep minutes are rough on purpose: time on one demanding task with nothing else open, to the nearest ten.

FIND YOUR BEST HOURS

During the same week, score your alertness in each two-hour band you are awake: 1 is foggy, 5 is sharp. Three seconds a time.

BAND	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	AVERAGE
06–08						
08–10						
10–12						
12–14						
14–16						
16–18						
18–20						
20–22						

HOW A FINISHED GRID READS



WHAT THE GRID IS FOR

Your blocks go at the front of your day, in your first good hours (page 11 has the rule and the evidence). For most people the grid confirms the morning. If yours peaks later, it shows you where your front of the day really is.

HOW TO USE IT

Average each row. Block 1 starts at the beginning of your best band that leaves room to finish every block before dinner. The other blocks stack directly behind it.

My best band _____

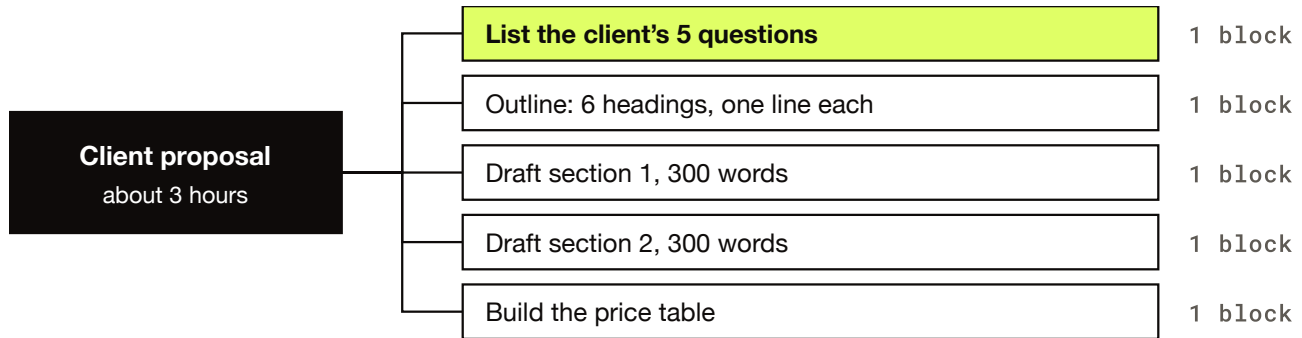
Block 1 will start at _____

What sits in those hours now, and where it can move to _____

WRITE TOMORROW'S TASK TONIGHT

One task for each block, written the evening before, sized so it ends when the timer does.

CUTTING A LARGE JOB INTO BLOCK-SIZED TASKS



and so on, until each piece ends somewhere you can point to

1 · A VERB AND AN OBJECT

“Draft the findings section”, where you would have written “report”. You should be able to start typing within ten seconds of reading it.

2 · A FINISH LINE

A number or a thing: 300 words, the first three problems, the table filled in. It tells you when the block has done its job.

3 · ONE BLOCK LONG

If you doubt it fits, cut it in two. A task finished early is a good block. A task too big ends the block with nothing closed.

WRITTEN LIKE THIS	REWRITE IT LIKE THIS
Work on the presentation	Write the three claims of the talk, one sentence each
Chapter 4	Draft the opening of 4.2, 250 words, no editing
Look into the churn numbers	Chart monthly churn for 2025 and write two lines on what it shows
Revise for the exam	Past paper 2024, questions 1 to 4, book closed, then mark them

NOW YOURS: THREE TASKS FROM YOUR DEEP LIST ON PAGE 3

AS I WOULD NORMALLY WRITE IT

AS A BLOCK: VERB, OBJECT, FINISH LINE

Order. The hardest task goes in block 1, which starts before mail is open (page 11). Each week's briefing has a queue where you list the week's tasks before it starts.

DEEP WORK FIRST, SHALLOW WORK ON A SCHEDULE

Your blocks go at the front of the day, stacked, and finished before dinner. Mail, messages and admin get fixed windows of their own.

1 · FIRST, BEFORE ANYTHING OPENS

Block 1 starts before email, chat and news. What you have not opened cannot follow you in.

2 · STACKED, DONE BEFORE DINNER

Blocks run one after another from the morning on. The last one ends before dinner. Evenings are for the shutdown and rest.

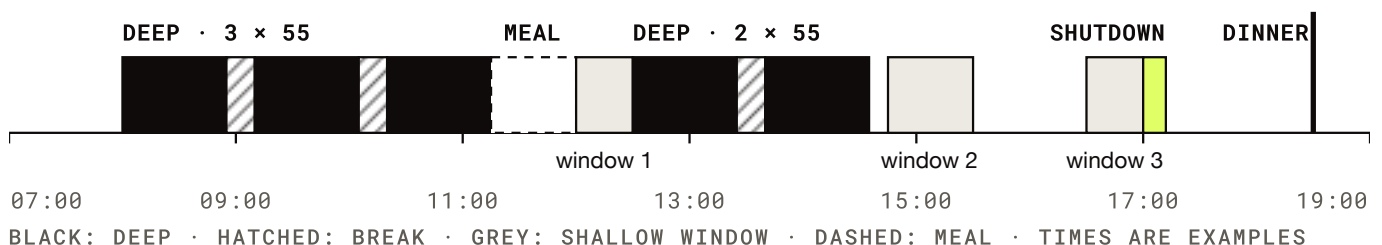
3 · SHALLOW WORK IN WINDOWS

Email, messages, admin and meetings you control go into two or three fixed windows. The first opens after block 1 at the earliest.

AN EARLY WEEK · WEEK 2, THREE BLOCKS OF 25 · MAIL FIRST OPENED AT 10:00



A LATE WEEK · WEEK 6, FIVE BLOCKS OF 55 · MAIL FIRST OPENED AT 12:00



BLACK: DEEP · HATCHED: BREAK · GREY: SHALLOW WINDOW · DASHED: MEAL · TIMES ARE EXAMPLES

WHY THE FRONT OF THE DAY

Schmidt and colleagues reviewed the research on time of day: attention and executive control rise and fall across the day, on a pattern set by your chronotype. Many adults are sharpest in the first half of their day, before anyone else has claimed the hours.

IF YOU ARE AN EVENING TYPE

May and Hasher found control over distraction strongest at each person's own peak, and evening types peak later. Your rule reads: your first good hours, protected. Find them with the grid on page 9, start there, and still finish before dinner.

WHY WINDOWS

Kushlev and Dunn had 124 adults check email three times a day for one week and as often as they liked for another. Daily stress was lower in the three-times week. Each message opened before a block is also an unfinished task (page 4).

Schmidt et al., 2007, Cognitive Neuropsychology · May & Hasher, 1998, JEP: Human Perception and Performance · Kushlev & Dunn, 2015, Computers in Human Behavior. Full references on page 41.

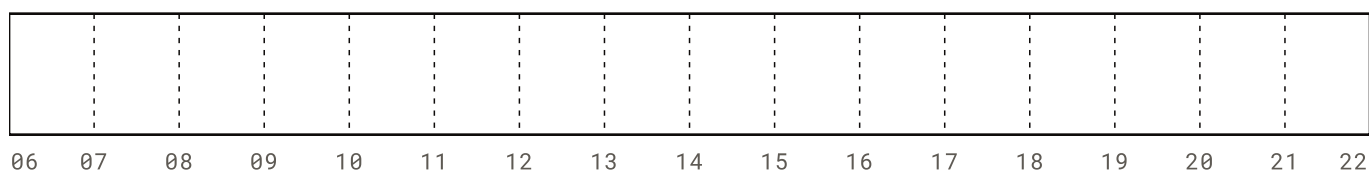
WRITE YOUR SHALLOW WINDOWS

Two or three fixed times a day for everything that is not deep work. Decide them once, write them here, and tell people.

My first block starts at _____	Mail, chat and news first open at _____
All blocks done by _____	Dinner is at _____

SHALLOW	FROM, TO	WHAT GOES IN IT
WINDOW 1		
WINDOW 2		
WINDOW 3		

DRAW YOUR DAY: SHADE YOUR BLOCKS, HATCH YOUR WINDOWS, MARK THE MEAL, THE SHUTDOWN AND DINNER



WHAT GOES IN A WINDOW

Email and chat. Admin, forms and approvals. Calls you place. Meetings where you choose the time. Reading that keeps you informed. Deal with each item to a decision: answer it, schedule it, or delete it.

HOW LONG

Start with thirty to forty-five minutes and adjust after a week. An inbox goes faster when it is the only thing you are doing. Set a timer for the window too. What is left when it rings waits for the next window.

IF YOUR JOB NEEDS FAST REPLIES

Keep the rule and shorten the gap: a 15-minute window after each block. The break stays a break. For the truly urgent, give people a way to reach you that is not the inbox.

TELL PEOPLE ONCE

"I answer messages at _____, _____ and _____. For anything that cannot wait, call me."

Put it in your status, your email signature, or the message on page 13. Named times are easier for other people to live with than a general promise to reply soon.

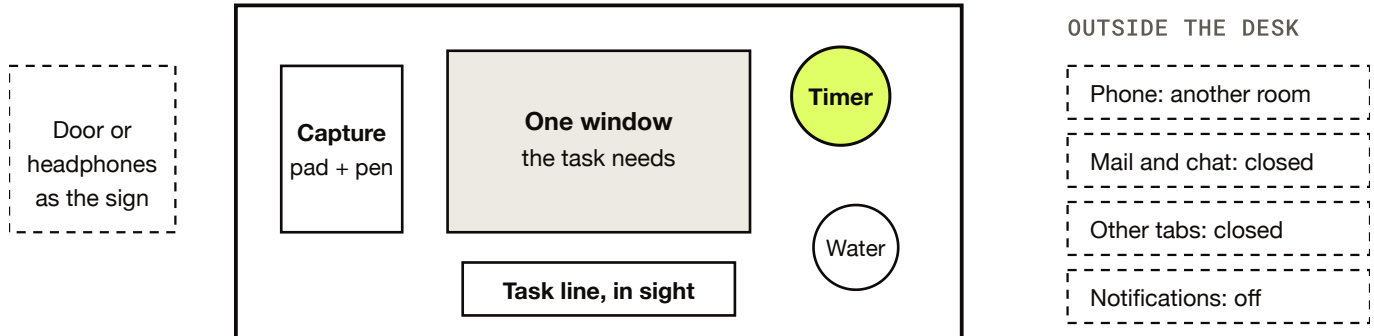
Where I will post my times _____

Meetings I can move into a window _____

SET UP THE ROOM ONCE

Fifteen minutes today, so that every block afterwards starts with the room already on your side.

YOUR DESK DURING A BLOCK



- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ A place for the phone, outside this room.
A shelf, a drawer, a bag by the door. Decide it once. | ☐ Notifications off on the computer during blocks. Mail, chat and calendar pop-ups, all of them. A focus mode on a schedule does it for you. |
| ☐ A clean window for the task. A separate browser profile or desktop with only what the task needs. | ☐ A timer you can see at a glance. On the desk or at the edge of the screen. |
| ☐ A capture pad and a pen beside the keyboard. For the thought that arrives mid-block. Week 1 shows how to use it. | ☐ Water on the desk before the timer starts. So that fetching it is never the reason to stand up. |
| ☐ Blocks booked in the calendar as meetings. For the whole week, at the front of each day, visible to colleagues. | ☐ The people who interrupt most have been told. One message, sent once. Use the wording below. |

THE ONE MESSAGE

"I am on one task from _____ to _____ each day and back straight after. If it cannot wait, _____."

The last gap is the route for a real emergency: a call to a landline, a knock, a colleague who knows where you are. People leave you alone more easily when one exists.

Sent to _____

On (date) _____

Where my blocks happen, if my usual desk is the wrong place _____

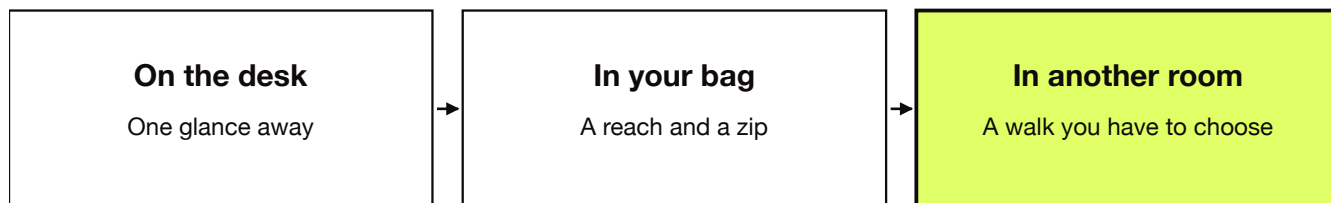
WHAT USUALLY PULLS ME OUT OF WORK

WHAT I WILL CHANGE IN THE ROOM TO REMOVE IT

GIVE THE PHONE ANOTHER ROOM

It is free, it takes ten seconds, and it turns “do not check” from an act of will into a fact about the building.

THREE PLACES FOR A PHONE



EFFORT NEEDED TO CHECK IT

checks during a block: none possible

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS, IN ORDER

2017 · THE CLAIM

Ward and colleagues reported that people scored lower on tests of mental capacity with their phone on the desk than with it in another room, even switched off.

2022 · THE RETEST

Ruiz Pardo and Minda repeated the second experiment with the same tasks, registered in advance. Where the phone was made no difference.

2024 · THE TOTAL

Parry pooled 56 results from 27 studies, 7,093 people. A small effect on working memory remained. Four other mental functions showed none.

Our reading. A silent phone lying on the desk costs you little by being there. It costs you when you pick it up, and each pick-up is a switch of the kind on page 4. Distance works because it makes the pick-up impossible. That is the whole reason, and it is enough.

IF YOU ARE ON CALL

Keep the ringer on and the phone across the room, face down, with calls allowed from the few people who matter and everything else silenced. You will hear what you need to hear.

IF THE PHONE IS YOUR TIMER

Use a kitchen timer, a watch, or the timer in a browser tab on the computer. The timer is the one thing that must be in sight.

Where my phone lives during blocks _____

Who can still reach me, and how _____

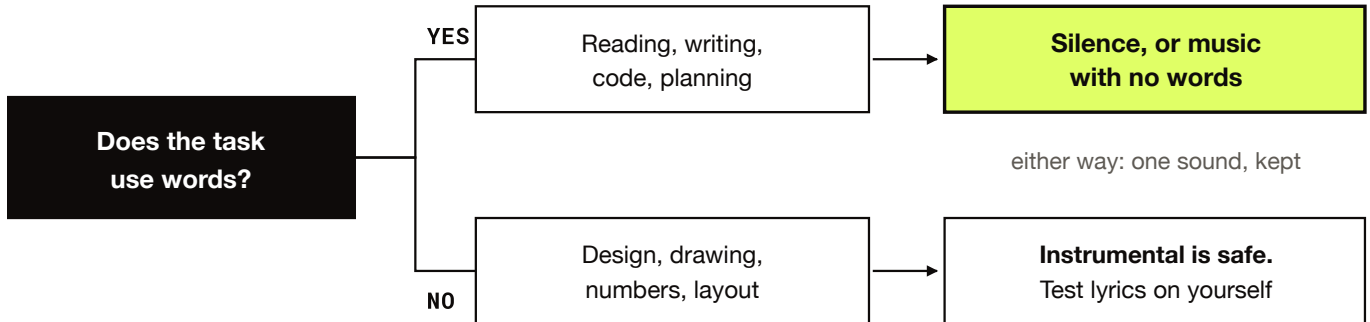
What I will use as a timer _____

Ward et al., 2017, Journal of the Association for Consumer Research · Ruiz Pardo & Minda, 2022, Acta Psychologica · Parry, 2024, Media Psychology. Full references on page 41.

CHOOSE ONE SOUND AND KEEP IT

Silence first, music without words second. The same choice every block, so the sound itself comes to mean that work has started.

CHOOSING YOUR SOUND



WORDS COMPETE WITH WORDS

Vasilev and colleagues pooled 65 studies of reading with sound in the background. Music with lyrics lowered comprehension ($d = -0.35$). Instrumental music had an effect of about zero. A 2023 study by Souza and Leal Barbosa came to the same order: lyrics got in the way of mental tasks.

BINAURAL BEATS: AN OPTION TO TRY

One pooled analysis of 22 studies found a moderate benefit ($g = 0.45$) across memory, attention, anxiety and pain together. A later review looked at the proposed mechanism, the brain's rhythm following the beat: 5 studies found it, 8 did not, 1 was mixed. So the benefit is possible and unproven.

ORDER	SOUND	USE IT WHEN
1	Silence , or earplugs	You have a quiet room. Nothing has been shown to beat it.
2	Instrumental music or steady noise	You need to cover an office or a household. Low volume, one playlist.
3	Binaural beats , on headphones	You are curious. Try them for one week and compare your focus scores with the week before.
LATER	Songs with lyrics, radio, podcasts	The break, the commute, the washing-up.

My one sound for blocks _____

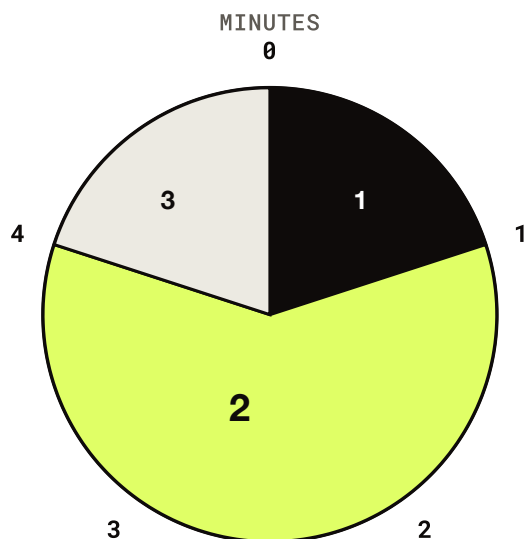
Where it is saved, ready to start in one tap _____

The Solve Labs timer at solvelabs-app.vercel.app/deep has focus sound without words built in, if you want the timer and the sound in one place.

Vasilev, Kirkby & Angele, 2018, Perspectives on Psychological Science · Souza & Leal Barbosa, 2023, Journal of Cognition · Garcia-Argibay et al., 2019, Psychological Research · Ingendoh et al., 2023, PLOS ONE. Page 41.

FIVE MINUTES AWAY FROM THE SCREEN

A break restores you when it uses a different part of you than the block did. Eyes far, body moving, mind idle.



1 · MINUTE 0 TO 1: CLOSE THE BLOCK

Stand up. Fill in the log row: tally, focus score, what got finished. Start the break timer.

2 · MINUTE 1 TO 4: LEAVE

Walk to another room or outside the door. Look at something more than six metres away. Drink water. Stretch whatever the chair shortened.

3 · MINUTE 4 TO 5: COME BACK

Sit down and read the next task line. When the timer ends you are already facing the work.

IN THE BREAK	AFTER THE LAST BLOCK OF THE DAY
Standing, walking, stairs	Phone, messages, mail
A window, the street, daylight	News and feeds
Water, tea, fruit	“One quick reply”
A few words with someone, about anything else	A second task, however small

Why the right-hand column waits. Each of those opens something new, and you would carry it into the next block. Minutes away from the screen cost you nothing to come back from.

WHEN YOU CANNOT LEAVE THE ROOM

Stand at the window and look at the furthest thing you can see. Roll your shoulders. Close your eyes for one minute. Any of these beats staying in the chair with the screen.

AS THE BLOCKS GROW

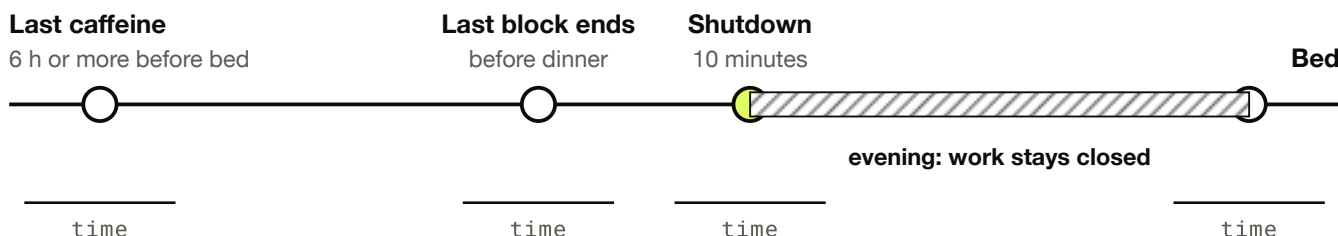
From week 3 the break is 10 minutes, so the middle part doubles. Week 4 adds one break of 20 to 30 minutes halfway. In weeks 5 and 6, take 10 to 15 minutes after every block and a proper meal away from the desk.

MY THREE BREAK MOVES

END THE DAY ON PURPOSE

A fixed ending lets you leave work at work, and it is where tomorrow's blocks get their tasks.

YOUR EVENING, WITH FOUR TIMES TO FILL IN



THE TEN-MINUTE SHUTDOWN

- 1 **Close the log.** Fill in today's last row and mark the tracker on the wall.
- 2 **Empty the capture pad.** Each note becomes a task, a calendar entry, or nothing.
- 3 **Write tomorrow's tasks,** one for each block, in the form on page 10. Hardest first.
- 4 **Park what is open.** For anything unfinished, one line with the next action. It is now on paper and can leave your head.
- 5 **Close everything** and say a fixed phrase, aloud if you can bear it: "Done for today."

SWITCHING OFF

Sonnentag and Fritz reviewed the research on recovery from work. People who mentally leave work in the evening report less strain and better well-being. Staying switched on predicts exhaustion.

SLEEP

Lim and Dinges pooled 70 studies of sleep loss. The largest damage was to simple sustained attention, with lapses rising sharply ($g = -0.776$). Reasoning suffered least. Attention is what a block runs on.

CAFFEINE

Drake and colleagues gave 12 adults 400 mg of caffeine six hours before bed. Measured sleep fell by about an hour. Their advice: the last one before 5 pm.

Shutdown at _____ Last caffeine by _____ In bed by _____

My closing phrase _____

FIRST RUN, TONIGHT

Tomorrow's first task _____ Still open, and its next action _____

Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015, Journal of Organizational Behavior · Lim & Dinges, 2010, Psychological Bulletin · Drake et al., 2013, Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine. Full references on page 41.

WRITE YOUR FIVE IF-THEN PLANS

These are the decisions the block cannot take for you. Write each one in your own words now, while it is easy.

IF

a cue you will meet anyway
a time, a place, an event

THEN

one action you can see
small enough to do at once

Strong: If it is 9:00 and I have sat down, then I start the timer and read the task line.

Weak: I will try to focus more in the mornings.

1 · STARTING If it is ____ and I am at ____, then I ____.

If _____

then _____

2 · THE URGE TO CHECK If I want to look something up or check a message, then I ____.

If _____

then _____

3 · SOMEONE INTERRUPTS If a person comes to my desk mid-block, then I say ____.

If _____

then _____

4 · THE BREAK ENDS If the break timer rings, then I ____.

If _____

then _____

5 · A BAD DAY If it is ____ o'clock and I have not done a block, then I ____.

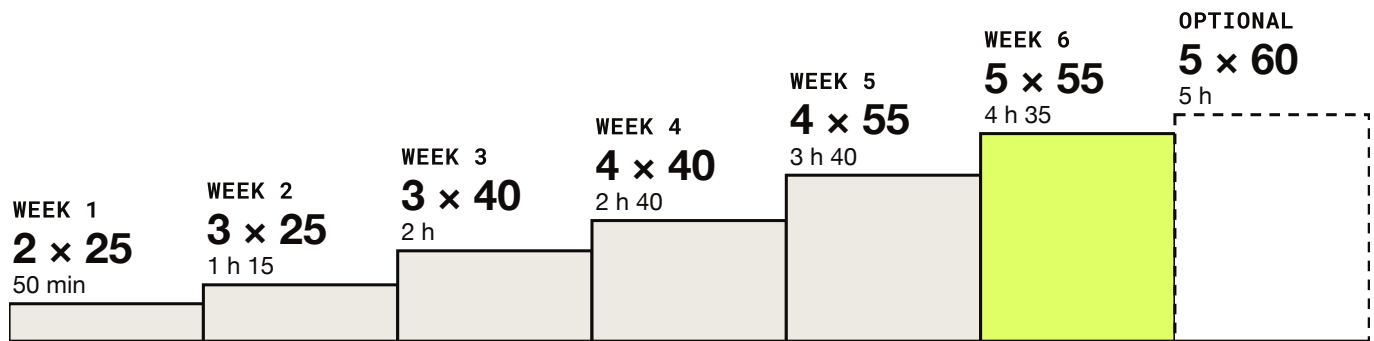
If _____

then _____

Put them where the cue is. Copy plan 1 onto a card by your screen and plan 3 onto the back of your door sign. A plan works at the moment its cue appears, so that is where it should be readable.

SIX WEEKS, ONE STEP AT A TIME

Each week raises one thing: the number of blocks or their length. You move up when the week says you are ready.



WEEK	BLOCKS	MINUTES	BREAKS	DEEP TIME A DAY	WHAT ROSE
1	2	25	5 min	50 min	The start
2	3	25	5 min	1 h 15	+1 block
3	3	40	10 min	2 h	+15 min
4	4	40	10 min + one long (20–30)	2 h 40	+1 block
5	4	55	10–15 min + meal break	3 h 40	+15 min
6	5	55	10–15 min + meal break	4 h 35	+1 block
OPTIONAL	5	60	as week 6	5 h	+5 min

AT THE END OF EACH WEEK: COUNT THE DAYS ON WHICH EVERY PLANNED BLOCK WAS FINISHED

5–7 · MOVE UP

Start the next week of the ladder.

3–4 · REPEAT

Run the same week again. Repeating is part of the plan.

0–2 · STEP BACK

Go down one week and rebuild from a load you finish.

WHAT “FINISHED” MEANS

You reached the timer’s end without leaving the task by choice. If you left, make a tally mark and restart. A restarted block that reaches the end counts in full.

THE FLOOR

On a bad day, do one 25-minute block. It still counts as a day trained. Seven days are on the page and five are needed, so two a week are yours.

Where this ladder comes from. No study has tested this exact sequence. It is Solve Labs’ method, built from the evidence on pages 3–7: start under a beginner’s limit, fix the blocks and the breaks in advance, raise one thing at a time, and let the move-up rule decide how far up you go.

SIX-WEEK TRACKER

THE DEEP WORK PROTOCOL

Start date _____

Fill one circle for every finished block. In the square, your focus for the day, 1 to 5. A day is completed when all its circles are full.

WEEK	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	TARGET · RESULT · DECISION	
WEEK 1									2 × 25 min · 5 min breaks Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK 2									3 × 25 min · 5 min breaks Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK 3									3 × 40 min · 10 min breaks Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK 4									4 × 40 · 10 min + 1 long break Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK 5									4 × 55 · 10–15 min + meal Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK 6									5 × 55 · 10–15 min + meal Days completed ____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK

BASELINE COUNT

→

WEEK-6 COUNT

=

× MORE

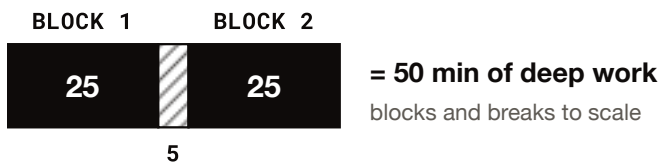
5–7 days completed: move up · **3–4:** repeat · **0–2:** step back one week. The counts are finished pieces of meaningful work in a week.

Deep blocks first. All done before dinner. A bad day's minimum is one 25-minute block. It counts as a day trained, not a completed day.

LEARN TO FINISH A BLOCK

Two blocks of 25 minutes with a 5-minute break between them. Output is a side effect this week. The job is to finish.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
2	25	5_{min}	50 min



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

Deep work stops being something that happens when the day allows. It has two booked places at the front of your day, and you turn up to both.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

Starting, and the pull to check something a few minutes in. Expect both. Meeting them and carrying on is the training.

WHY THIS LOAD

50 minutes is under the hour a beginner can hold (page 7). The only open question each day is whether you start.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: THE CAPTURE PAD

When a thought arrives mid-block (a message to send, a thing to look up), write three words on the pad and return to the task. It is kept, so you can let go of it. Empty the pad at shutdown.

Marking the log. Self-interruptions: one tally mark each time you leave the task by choice (phone, mail, another tab, the kettle), then restart the timer. **Focus:** circle 1 if your mind was elsewhere for most of the block, 3 if you drifted and came back, 5 if you stayed on the task throughout.

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON			
TUE			
WED			
THU			
FRI			
SAT			
SUN			

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	

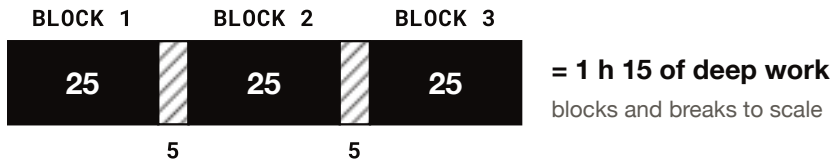
Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished pieces, total for the week _____

ADD A THIRD BLOCK

Three blocks of 25 minutes. Same length and same breaks as last week, one block more.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
3	25	5_{min}	1 h 15



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

Your deep time goes from 50 minutes to 1 hour 15. The third block follows the first two directly, and all three are done before your first shallow window opens.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

A third block that feels flatter than the first two, with an unopened inbox waiting behind it. A focus score of 3 there is normal. Record it and keep the block.

WHY THIS LOAD

Number rises before length, because a third short block is easier to finish than two long ones, and finishing is still what you are practising.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: THE 60-SECOND START

The same three moves before every block: clear the screen to one window, read the task line, start the timer. Done identically each time, the start stops being a decision.

Stacking three blocks. Block, 5 minutes, block, 5 minutes, block: one hour and twenty-five minutes from start to finish. The hardest task takes block 1. Give block 3 a task with a short, certain finish line, then open your first shallow window.

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON			
TUE			
WED			
THU			
FRI			
SAT			
SUN			

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	

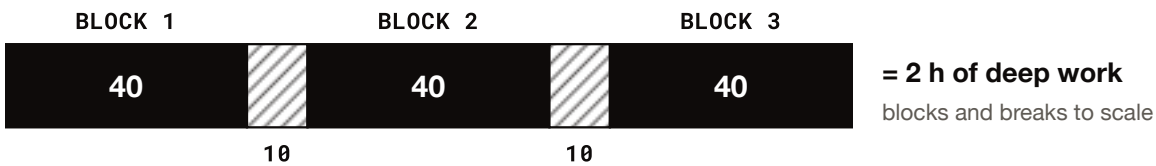
Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished pieces, total for the week _____

STRETCH THE BLOCK TO 40

Three blocks again, each 15 minutes longer, with 10-minute breaks. In proportion, this is the largest step on the ladder.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
3	40	10_{min}	2 h



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

Each block grows from 25 to 40 minutes and your deep time reaches 2 hours. The number of blocks stays where it is, and the break doubles to 10 minutes.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

Minute 25. You have trained yourself to stop there, and the last fifteen minutes will feel long. Repeating this week once is an ordinary result.

WHY THIS LOAD

Length rises alone. Forty minutes is long enough to get properly inside a problem, and three of them already make a strong day.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: THE PARKING NOTE

When the timer ends mid-thought, write one line: the next action, in words you could act on cold. The next block starts from that line, with no warm-up needed.

Resize your tasks. A 40-minute block holds about 1.6 times what a 25-minute block did: 300 words become 480, five problems become eight. If a task ends before the timer, start the next one from your queue and note both as finished.

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON			
TUE			
WED			
THU			
FRI			
SAT			
SUN			

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	

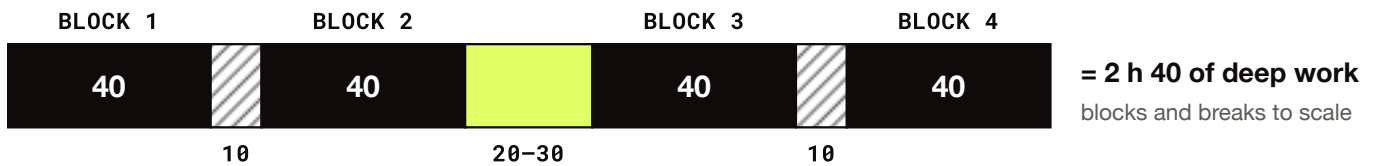
Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished pieces, total for the week _____

ADD A FOURTH BLOCK

Four blocks of 40 minutes in two pairs. Ten minutes between the blocks of a pair, and one long break of 20 to 30 minutes between the pairs.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
4	40	10 + 25 _{min}	2 h 40



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

A fourth block, and 2 hours 40 of deep time. With its breaks, your deep morning now covers about three and a half hours of the clock.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

Keeping other people out of a morning that long. And block 4: expect it to carry your lowest focus score at first.

WHY THIS LOAD

Two pairs with a real break between them ask no more of any single sitting than last week did. The extra 40 minutes come from a second sitting.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: THE RESET WALK

Spend the long break outside the building: ten minutes on foot, something small to eat, daylight, no screen. Come back to a task line that is already written. The walk makes the second pair a fresh start.

Book the whole morning. One calendar entry from the start of block 1 to the end of block 4, marked busy. Put your shallow windows in your status or signature, so that people know when you answer (page 12).

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	LONG BREAK AT	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	

Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished pieces, total for the week _____

BEST BLOCK THIS WEEK

Which one, and what made it work.

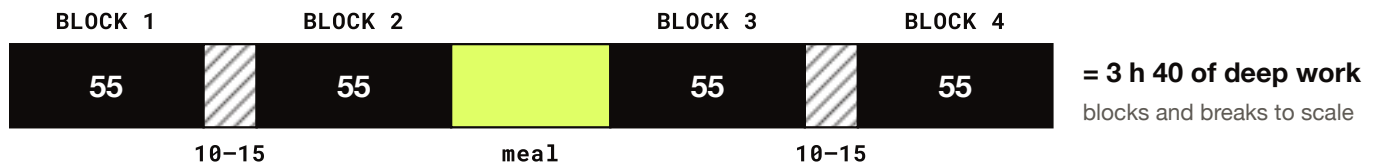
ONE THING TO CHANGE NEXT WEEK

In the room, the timing or the tasks.

STRETCH THE BLOCK TO 55

Four blocks again, each 15 minutes longer. Take 10 to 15 minutes after every block, and a proper meal break in the middle.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
4	55	15_{min} + meal	3 h 40



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

Blocks of 55 minutes and 3 hours 40 of deep time. With the breaks and the meal that is close to five hours of your day, so block 1 has to start early.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

The middle of a 55-minute block, where nothing marks your progress. And reaching block 4 with something left to give it.

WHY THIS LOAD

Length rises alone again. Four blocks of 55 put you level with the best violin students on page 7.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: THE MIDPOINT MARK

Halfway through, look at the timer once and write one line on the pad: where you are against the finish line. If you are behind, shrink the finish line now. One glance, then back to the task.

This may be your level. 3 hours 40 is close to the roughly four hours that elite performers sustain. Many people settle at 4×55 , and that is a full result. Go on to week 6 only if this week gives you 5 completed days of 7 and your focus scores hold. The rule decides.

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	MEAL BREAK AT	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	

Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished pieces, total for the week _____

BEST BLOCK THIS WEEK

Which one, and what made it work.

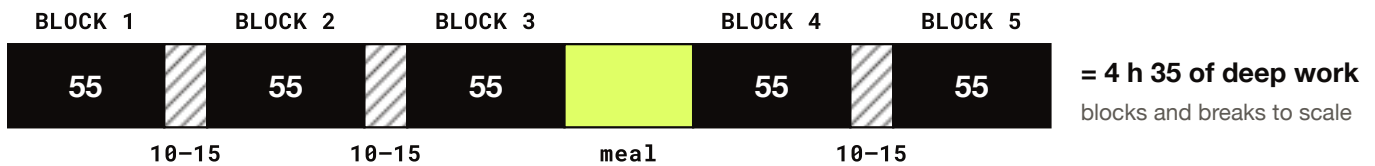
ONE THING TO CHANGE NEXT WEEK

In the room, the timing or the tasks.

ADD THE FIFTH BLOCK

Five blocks of 55 minutes: three before the meal break, two after. This is the top of the ladder, and the week you count.

BLOCKS A DAY	MINUTES EACH	BREAK	DEEP TIME A DAY
5	55	15_{min} + meal	4 h 35



BLOCK 1 STARTS BEFORE MAIL, CHAT AND NEWS · SHALLOW WINDOWS FOLLOW · PAGE 11

WHAT CHANGES

A fifth block and 4 hours 35 of deep time, all of it finished before dinner. Shallow work now lives entirely inside its windows.

WHAT WILL BE HARD

Block 5. And the days when life takes the afternoon: on those, four blocks is a good day.

WHY THIS LOAD

Five full blocks is the destination of the plan. It sits at the ceiling, so treat it as a level to test this week, with 4×55 as the level to return to.

TECHNIQUE TO ADD: FRONT-LOAD THE DAY

Order the five tasks by how much they ask of you. The hardest goes in block 1. Block 5 gets deep work with a clear shape: revising your own draft, checking an analysis, problems you know how to begin.

This is the week you count. Each evening, tally your finished pieces exactly as you did in your baseline week (page 8), in the right-hand column of the log. The week's total is your week-6 count. If you settled at an earlier week, count your last week at that level instead.

PLAN THE WEEK · BOOK THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR

DAY	BLOCK 1 STARTS	MEAL BREAK AT	ALL BLOCKS DONE BY	MAIL FIRST OPENS
MON				
TUE				
WED				
THU				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

THIS WEEK'S TASK QUEUE · HARDEST FIRST

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
MON	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	
TUE	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	
WED	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	
THU	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	

One row for each block. Tally: a mark each time you leave the task by choice, then restart. Circle your focus, 1 to 5.

DAY	#	START	TASK	TALLY	FOCUS	WHAT GOT FINISHED
FRI	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	
SAT	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	
SUN	1				1 2 3 4 5	
	2				1 2 3 4 5	
	3				1 2 3 4 5	
	4				1 2 3 4 5	
	5				1 2 3 4 5	

Days completed _____ Tally _____ Avg focus _____ Deep min _____

Finished (week-6 count), total for the week _____

COUNT THE WEEK

Go down the last column of both pages and count the finished pieces, by the definition on page 8. Write the total above, on the tracker, and in the sum on page 36.

BEST BLOCK OF THE SIX WEEKS

Which one, and what made it work.

DECIDE EACH WEEK, THEN DO THE SUM

Five minutes at the end of every week, from the totals at the foot of that week's log.

WEEK	DAYS COMPLETED (OF 7)	TALLY (TOTAL)	AVERAGE FOCUS	DEEP MINUTES	DECISION
WEEK 1					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
WEEK 2					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
WEEK 3					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
WEEK 4					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
WEEK 5					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
WEEK 6					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
REPEAT					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back
REPEAT					☐ Up ☐ Repeat ☐ Back

5–7 days completed: move up. **3–4:** repeat. **0–2:** step back one week. The spare rows are for repeated weeks; the last page has room for more.

AFTER WEEK 6

YOUR MULTIPLE

WEEK-6 COUNT

÷

BASELINE COUNT

=

× MORE FINISHED WORK

WEEK-6 DEEP MINUTES

÷

BASELINE DEEP MINUTES

=

× MORE DEEP TIME

Reading your number. It is one week against one week, counted by you, so read it as a direction and a size. If you settled below week 6, use your last week at the level you hold. If that week was unusual (a holiday, a deadline), count the next one as well and use the average. If your baseline was 0, your multiple has no number: write the count and be pleased with it.

WHAT MADE MY BEST BLOCKS WORK

WHAT I WILL CHANGE NEXT ROUND

THE PLAN EXPECTS BAD DAYS

Each of these has happened to everyone who has trained this. Each has a move that keeps the training alive.

A BAD DAY

MINIMUM: 1 × 25

Illness, a crisis, no sleep. Do one 25-minute block on the smallest task in your queue and fill one circle. It counts as a day trained.

The move-up rule still needs five full days, and each week has two spare days for exactly this. A week with three bad days is a week you repeat, which costs seven days and nothing else.

A BLOCK THAT KEEPS BREAKING

HALVE THE TASK

Three tally marks in one block usually mean the task is too large or too vague to hold. Stop, spend two minutes cutting it by the rules on page 10, and restart on the first piece.

Keep the block the same length. Shortening it teaches you to stop when it gets hard.

A MISSED WEEK

STEP BACK ONE

A week with two or fewer days completed, or none at all, sends you down one week on the ladder. Coming back at 3 × 25 after a break at 3 × 40 is a load you will finish on the first day, and finishing is what restarts the habit.

Use a row of the second-round tracker and carry on from there.

A WEEK OF LOW FOCUS SCORES

CHECK FOUR THINGS

Mostly 2s is information. Look, in this order, at your sleep and your last caffeine (page 17), at whether your blocks sit at the front of your day (page 11), at the size of your tasks, and at your sound (page 15). Change one of them for a week and compare the scores.

“I CANNOT FIND 25 MINUTES”

5% OF THE DAY

25 minutes is 5% of an eight-hour day. It is nearly always there in one of three places: the first 25 minutes of work before mail is opened, the 25 before the first colleague arrives, or the first half of lunch.

If none of those is yours to give, do the block on a project of your own, at home. The skill transfers.

MY BAD-DAY BLOCK: WHERE AND WHEN IT HAPPENS, WHATEVER ELSE DOES

WHEN THE DAY BELONGS TO OTHER PEOPLE

Travel, open offices and calendars full of meetings. The blocks get smaller and move. They stay.

TRAVEL

MINIMUM: 1 A DAY

Decide before you leave: one block a day, and where. A hotel desk before breakfast and a train seat both work. On a plane, the phone is in the bag overhead and the timer is your watch.

Fold the week's log page into your passport or notebook. A travel week usually counts as a repeat, and that is the plan working as designed.

AN OPEN-PAN OFFICE

SIGNAL, THEN MOVE

Headphones on is the sign; say so in the one message on page 13. Sit facing a wall or a window if you can choose. When someone comes over, use plan 3 from page 18: "I am in a block until twenty-five past. I will come to you." Write their name on the pad.

If the floor is too loud to think, book a small room for your blocks, or put them at the edges of the day.

A DAY FULL OF MEETINGS

BLOCKS GO IN FIRST

Book the week's blocks before the meetings arrive, on the planning table of each briefing. Blocks come first in the day, so the surest fix is a first meeting that starts after them. Failing that, a 30-minute gap between two meetings holds one 25-minute block.

On a day with five hours or more of meetings, do the one-block minimum and take it early. Then ask for one meeting-free morning a week. It is a normal thing to ask for.

WORKING AT HOME WITH OTHERS IN

A SIGN ON THE DOOR

Agree the block times at breakfast, in the same words as the one message. A sign on the door with the time you will be out works for children old enough to read a clock. Headphones on means the same thing it means at the office.

SOMEONE ABOVE YOU INTERRUPTS

AGREE IT ONCE

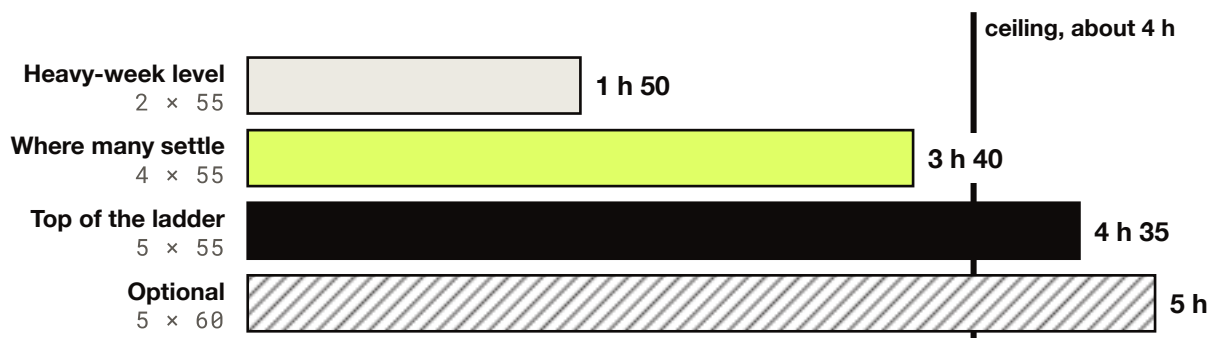
Show them the tracker. Say what the blocks are for and when they are, and ask which hours they would rather you kept clear. Most managers prefer two predictable hours of your best work to eight interrupted ones.

THE SITUATION MOST LIKELY TO BREAK MY WEEK, AND WHAT I WILL DO

HOLD THE LEVEL YOU REACHED

You now have a level you can finish five days in seven. From here, keeping it is the training.

DEEP TIME A DAY AT EACH LEVEL



HOLD IT

Keep filling the tracker, on the second-round page. A week of 3–4 completed days means the same level again. A week of 0–2 means one step down, then back up by the usual rule. Held over 250 working days, 4 × 55 is about 900 hours of undivided work.

THE OPTIONAL 5 × 60

Open to you after a week at 5 × 55 with 5 completed days. It adds 25 minutes and takes the day to 5 hours, beyond the ceiling on page 7. Try it for one week and keep it only if your focus scores stay where they were.

A HEAVY WEEK

Deadlines, travel, illness in the house. Choose your heavy-week level now: two blocks at your current length, first thing, before mail. Keep the shutdown and let the rest go. The week after, return to your level. One 25-minute block stays the floor on any day.

66

days, median, for a daily action to become automatic. Range: 18 to 254.

SIX WEEKS START THE HABIT

Lally and colleagues followed 96 volunteers who each repeated one new daily action in the same setting. The median time to reach their plateau of automaticity was 66 days; the quickest took 18 and the slowest projection was 254. Missing a single day made no measurable difference.

So at 42 days your blocks may still take some will. That is expected. The second-round tracker carries you through the weeks in which they stop needing it.

MY LEVEL

I hold (blocks × minutes) _____

My heavy-week level _____

Second round starts on _____

I will try 5 × 60 in the week of _____

What I will use the deep time for _____

Lally et al., 2010, European Journal of Social Psychology. Full reference on page 41. The levels are ours and, like the ladder, have not been tested in a study.

WHERE SOLVE LABS FITS

The training plan is complete without us. This page is what we make, and where each one sits in the day you have just built.

FIRST COFFEE

THE WORKING DAY

EVENING

MORNING

LION'S MANE POWDER

For focus. Two scoops stirred into your first coffee, before the first block.

The caffeine is the coffee's. The Lion's Mane has none.

WORKING DAY

BRAIN TECH

Two capsules after breakfast, with water.

Its zinc contributes to normal cognitive function, and its vitamin B6 to the reduction of tiredness and fatigue.

WIND-DOWN

REISHI

Two scoops in cacao or herbal tea, after the shutdown on page 17.

It supports the evening wind-down that the next day's blocks depend on.

THE DEEP WORK SYSTEM

START THE SYSTEM FROM £5

The three are the Deep Work System, from £5 plus £4.95 UK delivery.

solvelabs.world/pages/deep-work-system



FREE · OPTIONAL

A TIMER FOR YOUR BLOCKS

The Solve Labs app runs 25- and 30-minute blocks with the breaks between them, and has focus sound without words. For the 40- and 55-minute blocks, any timer will do. Open it on your computer, so the phone can stay in the other room.

solvelabs-app.vercel.app/deep



Food supplements. Not a substitute for a varied diet and a healthy lifestyle. Keep to the recommended daily amount on the pack. If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, taking medication or under medical care, speak to your doctor first.

Questions about the plan or the products reach us through solvelabs.world. We read them, and the next edition of this workbook is built from what you tell us did and did not work.

24 SOURCES, EACH GRADED

SOURCES

Strong: a meta-analysis or many studies agreeing. **Moderate:** a sound single study, a review, or a pooled result with open questions. **Weak:** small, contested, or an author's argument. The grade is for the sentence in bold, which is what we use the source for.

MODERATE · Leroy, S. (2009). Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 109(2), 168–181.

Two laboratory experiments: attention stays on an unfinished task and the next task suffers.

WEAK · Mark, G., González, V. M. & Harris, J. (2005). No task left behind? Examining the nature of fragmented work. *Proceedings of CHI 2005*, 321–330.

24 office workers: 57% of work stretches interrupted; resumed after 25 min 26 s.

MODERATE · Mark, G. (2023). *Attention Span*. Hanover Square Press.

Time on one screen before switching: 2.5 min, 75 s, 47 s.

Behaviour, not capacity.

WEAK · Newport, C. (2016). *Deep Work*. Grand Central Publishing. **The term, the training-graduate test, and the beginner's hour (his reading of Ericsson).**

STRONG · Gollwitzer, P. M. & Sheeran, P. (2006). Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 69–119.

94 independent tests: if-then plans raise goal attainment, $d = .65$.

MODERATE · Smits, E. J. C., Wenzel, N. & de Bruin, A. (2025). Investigating the effectiveness of self-regulated, Pomodoro, and Flowtime break-taking techniques among students. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(7), 861.

94 students: no difference in output between 25/5 and two other break patterns.

MODERATE · Biwer, F. et al. (2023). Understanding effort regulation: comparing 'Pomodoro' breaks and self-regulated breaks. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*.

87 students: fixed breaks, less fatigue and distraction, similar completion in less time.

STRONG · Albulescu, P. et al. (2022). "Give me a break!" A systematic review and meta-analysis on the efficacy of micro-breaks. *PLOS ONE*.

22 samples, $N = 2,335$: vigour $d = .36$, fatigue $.35$, output $.16$ (n.s.).

MODERATE · Ariga, A. & Lleras, A. (2011). Brief and rare mental "breaks" keep you focused. *Cognition*.

84 people, a 50-minute attention task: two brief diversions prevented the decline.

MODERATE · Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. Th. & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*.

Top violin students: about 3.5 h of practice a day; little gain beyond about 4 h. Musicians.

MODERATE · Lally, P. et al. (2010). How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

96 volunteers: median 66 days, range 18–254; one missed day did not matter.

WEAK · Ward, A. F. et al. (2017). Brain drain: the mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2(2), 140–154.

The original phone-on-the-desk finding, contested by the next two.

MODERATE · Ruiz Pardo, A. C. & Minda, J. P. (2022). Reexamining the "brain drain" effect: a replication of Ward et al. (2017). *Acta Psychologica*, article 103717.

Pre-registered replication: no effect of phone location.

STRONG · Parry, D. A. (2024). Does the mere presence of a smartphone impact cognitive performance? A meta-analysis of the "brain drain effect". *Media Psychology*, 27(5), 737–762.

56 results from 27 studies, $n = 7,093$: a small effect on working memory only.

STRONG · Vasilev, M. R., Kirkby, J. A. & Angele, B. (2018). Auditory distraction during reading: a Bayesian meta-analysis. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

65 studies: music with lyrics $d = -0.35$ on reading; instrumental music about zero.

MODERATE · Souza, A. S. & Leal Barbosa, L. C. (2023). Should we turn off the music? Music with lyrics interferes with cognitive tasks. *Journal of Cognition*, 6(1), 24.

Lyrics interfered with cognitive tasks; supports the same order of advice.

MODERATE · Garcia-Argibay, M., Santed, M. A. & Reales, J. M. (2019). Efficacy of binaural auditory beats in cognition, anxiety, and pain perception: a meta-analysis. *Psychological Research*.

22 studies: pooled effect $g = 0.45$ across memory, attention, anxiety and pain.

MODERATE · Ingendoh, R. M., Posny, E. S. & Heine, A. (2023). Binaural beats to entrain the brain? A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*. **14 studies of the proposed mechanism: 5 for, 8 against, 1 mixed.**

STRONG · Lim, J. & Dinges, D. F. (2010). A meta-analysis of the impact of short-term sleep deprivation on cognitive variables. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(3), 375–389.

70 studies: lapses of simple attention take the largest hit ($g = -0.776$).

MODERATE · Drake, C. et al. (2013). Caffeine effects on sleep taken 0, 3, or 6 hours before going to bed. *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 9(11), 1195–1200.

12 adults, 400 mg, 6 h before bed: about an hour less sleep.

MODERATE · May, C. P. & Hasher, L. (1998). Synchrony effects in inhibitory control over thought and action. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 24, 363–379.

Control over distraction is best at a person's own peak time of day.

MODERATE · Schmidt, C., Collette, F., Cajochen, C. & Peigneux, P. (2007). A time to think: circadian rhythms in human cognition. *Cognitive Neuropsychology*, 24(7), 755–789.

Review: attention and executive control vary across the day, by chronotype.

MODERATE · Kushlev, K. & Dunn, E. W. (2015). Checking email less frequently reduces stress. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 43, 220–228.

124 adults: email three times a day, lower daily stress than unlimited checking.

MODERATE · Sonnentag, S. & Fritz, C. (2015). Recovery from job stress: the stressor-detachment model. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(S1), S72–S103.

Review: switching off in the evening goes with lower strain.

Left out on purpose, because their own sources do not support them: "a 47-second attention span", "23 minutes to refocus", 52/17, "90-minute focus cycles", "flow makes you five times more productive", "21 days to build a habit".

SECOND ROUND

Start date _____

For repeated weeks and for holding your level. Write in the target, cross out circles you did not plan, fill one for every finished block. Square: focus, 1 to 5.

WEEK	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	TARGET · RESULT · DECISION	
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK
WEEK _____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □	_____ × _____ min · breaks _____ Days completed _____ / 7 ☐ MOVE UP ☐ REPEAT ☐ STEP BACK

FIRST COUNT

→

COUNT THIS ROUND

=

× MORE

5–7 days completed: move up · 3–4: repeat · 0–2: step back one week. The counts are finished pieces of meaningful work in a week.

Deep blocks first. All done before dinner. A bad day’s minimum is one 25-minute block. It counts as a day trained, not a completed day.