

AlumNode Virtual Coffee Break #DeepWork

Focus sessions in a team will make you thrive

Brought to you by LSA5 Buddy Group NL
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slido



What are important tasks at work?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Background



Only **38%** of academics able to cope with job demands, especially

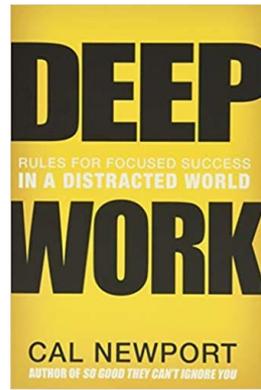
enough time to work on research, including writing high-quality articles and grants

- **60%** of time dedicated to administrative tasks and teaching → work done in extra hours
- Continuously no time for research: frustration, ↓work satisfaction + ↓self-efficacy → major impact on well-being → leaving academia?
- Doing research = most enjoyed, reason for profession
- Writing grants and papers required to advance in one's career



What is deep work?

Newport, Cal *“Deep Work - Rules for success in a distracted world”*



Deep work = ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task

→ Skill to quickly master complicated information and produce better results in less time

Four "rules" for changing mindset and habits to support this skill:

1. Work Deeply
2. Embrace Boredom
3. Quit Social Media
4. Drain the Shallows

I kind of know that I just need to focus more on the more demanding tasks... but this is not possible in my full work schedule with all the other tasks...

A yellow thought bubble with a black outline and a small tail at the bottom, containing the text above.

The Eisenhower matrix (Urgent-Important Matrix)

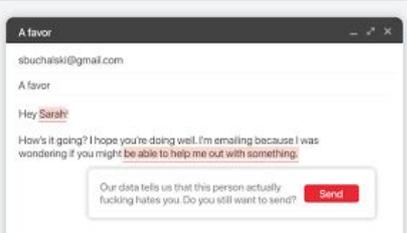
Urgent

Not Urgent

Important



Not Important



Please go to the Miro board and indicate how much time on average passes between “I should take some time to work on this” and “I completed this task”

Why do we struggle getting the deep work done?

- High levels of attention and being able to focus on one task while shielding oneself from distracting information and other tasks is required – *“now not the right moment”*
- Absorption in day-to-day business, especially urgent tasks
- Usually no external deadlines (hence *never urgent*)
- Easy to free scheduled time for meetings (students, PhD students,...) – hard to say no (*“They need me to move on”*)
- Habit of *“I can do it over the weekend”*

Business model: Deep-Work Retreats

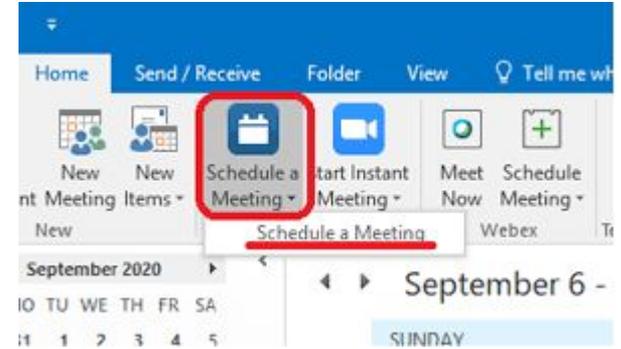
(<https://www.ifocusandwrite.com/online-academic-writing-retreat>)

Need to really schedule time for deep work

Deep work focus sessions:

“Just another meeting” – but during time of meeting work on deep work

With 1-3 other academics (no matter what discipline) – social pressure



Structure of a focus session

Check in (15 min)

Set the goals for your session

Present to your peers what you will work on.

Formulate a deliverable as outcome of the session.

Peers feedback validity.

Do the work (90 min)

Work on the agreed-upon items

Disconnect from any distractions such as emails or other notifications not on the computer and the phone

Check out (15 min)

Report your progress and route onwards

Tell your peers what you worked on and what you achieved.

Note down immediate next steps for how to continue.

What kind of tasks are suitable?



DO

- Work on stuff that will bring you further in your career (paper/grant writing, revising paper where one is co-author, targeted reading, thinking about own strategy, data analysis when needed for a paper)
- Important but not urgent
- Stuff that requires deep focus / is cognitively demanding
- Work package that is feasible and predictable in time frame

DON'T

- Work on stuff only important to other people but not you (teaching, grading, reviewing, admin, emails)
- Urgent tasks
- Shallow work
- Too short tasks (not 5 smaller things even if they would require deep work)

Break-out rooms - task

Imagine you'd have such a deep-work focus session scheduled with your peers this afternoon. **What is the one task that you plan to work on?**

- Think for 1 minute, put your work suggestion as a sticky note on the miro board.
- Pitch it to your break-out room peers. (1 minute per person)
- The peers will give feedback on importance and depth (1 minutes per pitch)
(note the feedback as 👍/👎 + why)
- If voted 👎 , move to red sticky note (and delete name 😊)

Welcome back from the Break Rooms

How was your experience in the rooms?

Was it easy to define suitable tasks?

Would they be feasible in 90 minutes?

How strict were your group members?

Are you excited to dive in and see this in action?

Further Learnings

Thoughts on deep work sessions

- **Preparation is key:** be ready to deep work (material and mental state)
- **Timing:** 15 min. Check-in, 90 min. work, 15 min. Check-out
- **Be strict** with each other
- **Bite-Sized work chunks:** Not too small, not too large
- **Time-Boxed:** Let this help you with 80/20
- **Huge Task?** Break it into bite-sized chunks and tackle them back-to-back

Wrap-up and questions

More on today's topic in the blog of the GSO:

<https://gsonet.org/karrierewissen/deep-work/>

Today's slides will be on the Miro board (soon).

Schedule your own Deep Work!

On the Miro-Board, there is an agenda.

Please fill in availability until tomorrow (Friday), we'll send a reminder to check the agreed-upon slots.

Questions?

Focus session matching

Provide a tool where the participants of the coffee break can find time slots in the next week to get together and try a focus session.

Further Learnings

Thoughts on deep work sessions (prep for coffee break)

- Prepare before the focus session what to work on exactly, like which documents are necessary, what do I really want to achieve, to optimise time spent in focus mode and to get into the mood of wanting to achieve something
- Take a brief moment before the focus session to disconnect from thoughts regarding previous meetings/tasks
- 1 hour is a bit short, maybe 1.5 hours of effective working time (plus 15min check-in and 15min check-out - 2h in total)
- Keep chatting at beginning brief (unless emergency ;)) to stay in high-motivation zone ("angefixt sein")
- Questions in between to the others ... aren't great
- Be strict with the tasks that the others suggest to really ensure everyone is only working on deep Work.
- Don't choose tasks that are too small, then you'll be done before the end of the session and will have to switch tasks which is against the idea of deep focus. Better choose something that's too big and make a proper dent in it
- Maybe keep a list of real-deep-work-stuff that can be worked on during the rest of the week
- Adjust tasks to time of the day/week (it's okay to not start research into a new topic on a Friday afternoon ;))
- Make use of focus session providing a natural end to the task - will allow "finishing something" even when it might not yet be perfect perfect
- How to handle if you have some actually super important, non-negotiable, has-to-be-done-now, work items even though a deep work session is scheduled? (Just do it, does not help to put pressure on you, I guess.)
- For longer/larger work items, it's helpful to have multiple deep work sessions back to back.