

HOW TO STAY FOCUSED

WHILE WORKING FLEXIBLY

How to stay focused with a flexible working schedule

Productivity expert Chris Bailey knows a lot about finding focus — and losing it. The best-selling author and TED speaker gives his insights into the wandering mind and reveals how we can better control our focus to remain productive from anywhere.

How our attention works

The science behind our attention shows that we have two modes that we move between: we spend 53% of our day in a focused state where we're perceptually coupled with a task that's in front of us, something Bailey refers to as "hyperfocus" and the other 47% of the day is spent in a mode called "scatter focus" where we're not focused on anything in particular.

It's the combination of these two modes that make up our attention. They both have their unique benefits that we need to be able to take advantage of.

Activating focus modes

Hyperfocus is when we're solely focused on the task that's in front of us. This is the best state for productivity. Being unfocused – or scatter focused – is the best state for creativity. If you think back to when

your best ideas have struck, you probably weren't focused on anything.

There are ways to enter into hyperfocus or scatter focus thoughtfully and deliberately. When we are successful in doing so, we learn to develop intuition and strategy at the beginning of each task to determine how much of each we will need. We can then improve because we're able to manage our attention much more successfully.

Synchronise your schedule with your energy levels

Each of us has a period of the day when we're wired to do our best work and have our deepest periods of focus. When you consider the fact that energy is an important ingredient in how much we accomplish, bringing awareness to how your energy levels fluctuate can work wonders for productivity.

Align your tasks with the periods when you have the most energy. Morning person? Then schedule your high-concentration tasks for before lunch. Keep in mind that when we have the most energy, we're the most productive — and when we have the least amount of energy, we're the most creative. So plan your day according to the ebb and flow of your energy.

How to measure the quality of your attention

1. Vigilance: how long we can focus on something for
2. Metacognition: how long our mind wanders for before we can catch it
3. Deliberateness: how much of our time we spend intentionally

All three are important, but if you can control which percentage of the day you work and act with intention, you can calculate one of the most critical measures of productivity in a knowledge economy.

The more control you have of your attention, the greater proportion of the day you'll be able to focus and the more productive, creative and happy you'll become.

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