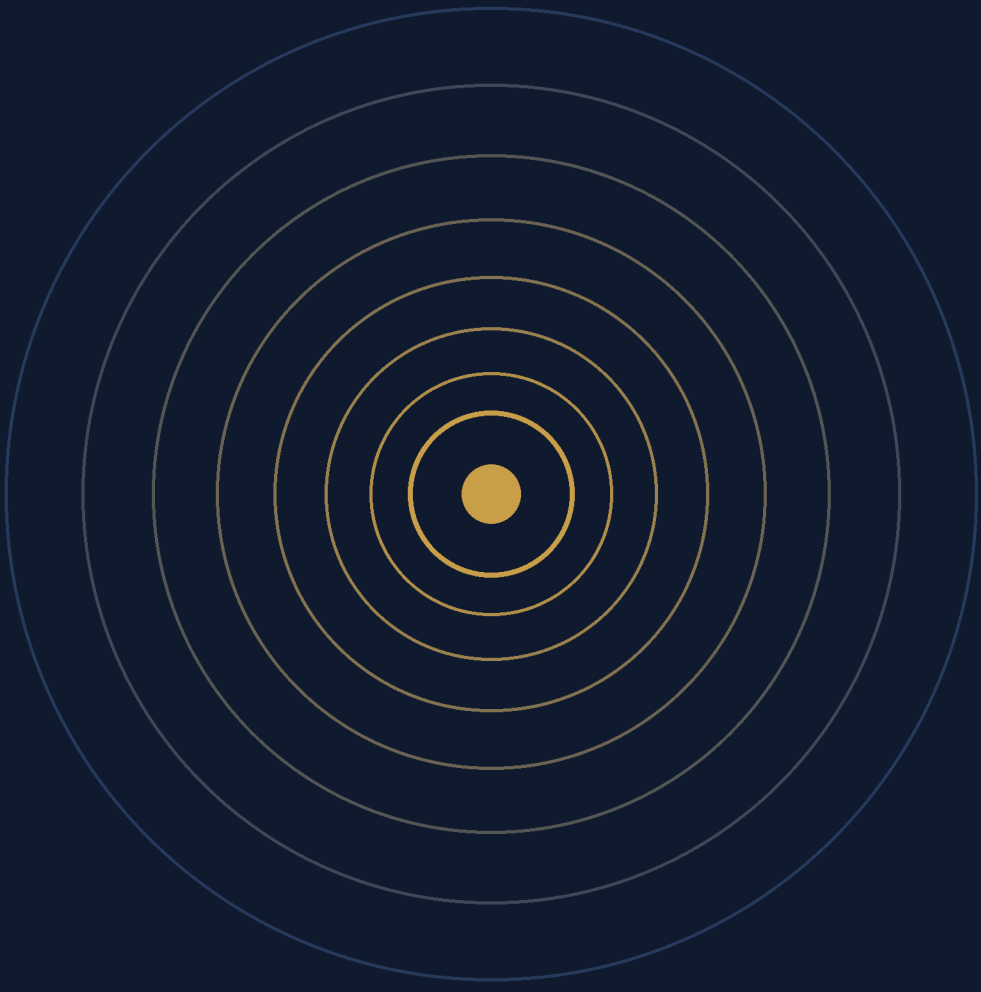
PROTECT YOUR ATTENTION · DIRECT YOUR ENERGY



DEEP FOCUS

A Purposeful Attention & Performance Operating System for the AI-Driven World

ABU TALIB

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A Purposeful Attention & Performance Operating System for the AI-Driven World

PROTECT YOUR ATTENTION · DIRECT YOUR ENERGY
DO WHAT MATTERS · CREATE MEANINGFUL IMPACT

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Publishing Note

DEEP FOCUS — A Purposeful Attention & Performance Operating System for the AI-Driven World

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About the frameworks. P.U.R.P.O.S.E. and D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. are original applied frameworks created by Abu Talib for this book. They are not scientifically validated diagnostic instruments, and they are not official frameworks of any researcher, university, company, or religious institution mentioned in these pages. Please read the Research & Framework Integrity Note at the end of the book.

Educational purpose. This book is written for education and personal development. It is not medical, psychological, legal, financial or religious-ruling advice. If you have a health condition, a diagnosed attention difficulty, or a question that requires a qualified scholar, please consult a suitable professional. The scenarios in this book are composite and illustrative; they do not describe real individuals.

On sources. Research claims are attributed to their sources in the text and listed in the References. Qur'anic and Hadith references are cited by chapter/verse and collection/number so that readers can verify them directly in trusted editions and consult qualified scholars for interpretation. English renderings are given for reading convenience and are not offered as authoritative translations.

On language. This book intentionally mixes professional English with Bangla, because ideas about attention live in the heart as well as the mind. English carries the technical terms; Bangla carries the stories, the reflections and the local texture.

For every learner, builder and parent
who wants to think deeply again,
and for the people who deserve our full attention.

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The Book at a Glance

Before we begin, here is the whole map on one page. You do not need to memorise it. Return to it whenever you feel lost.

The Deep Focus Journey

The Two Frameworks

Framework	What it answers	Where it lives
P.U.R.P.O.S.E.	*Why* and *what*: what deserves my attention, and why does it deserve it?	Chapter 10
D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S.	*How*: how do I protect, spend and renew attention inside a working session?	Chapter 11

Framework	What it answers	Where it lives
AI + Human Depth	*With what*: how do I use AI for acceleration without abdicating judgment?	Chapter 16
The Learning Loop	*For students*: how do I convert study time into learning?	Chapter 12

The Five Signature Ideas

- **Protect Your Attention.** Attention is finite, and it is the raw material of everything you will ever make.
- **Direct Your Energy.** Attention needs energy; energy needs sleep, recovery and a life in balance.
- **Do What Matters.** Clarity before activity. Busy ≠ Effective.
- **Create Meaningful Impact.** Output that benefits people, done with integrity.
- **Use AI Wisely.** AI for acceleration, not abdication.

Reading Paths

If you are...	Start with	Then read
A student	Chapters 1, 3, 12	5, 16 (student protocol), 20
An entrepreneur or owner	Chapters 4, 6, 13	10, 11, 16
A professional or leader	Chapters 3, 9, 14	11, 17, 19
A teacher, creator or parent	Chapters 2, 15	7, 17, 22
Short of time	Chapters 1, 10, 11, 19	20 (the 30-day challenge)

Preface by Abu Talib

> *Strategy First. Data Always. Growth with Purpose.*

I work in a field where attention is treated as a commodity. In digital marketing and growth strategy, we measure clicks, impressions, watch time, scroll depth and session length. Dashboards tell us, in real time, how successfully someone's attention was captured. The language of my profession is the language of capture.

After enough time inside that language, a different question begins to matter more than any metric: *what is all this capturing doing to the people who are being captured, and to those of us who build the systems that do the capturing?* I do not have a dramatic confession to offer in answer. What I have is an observation that grew steadily clearer while I worked with data, digital systems and learning: the scarce resource of our age is no longer information, and it is no longer even time. It is the quality of attention we are able to bring to the few things that deserve it.

This book is my attempt to take that observation seriously.

I wrote **DEEP FOCUS** for three reasons.

The first is practical. Most people I meet, whether they are students, founders, employees, teachers or parents, are not lazy. They are fragmented. They start the day with a sincere intention and end it having answered many messages, attended many meetings, opened many tabs and advanced very little of what mattered. They feel busy and vaguely ashamed, and they assume the problem is a lack of discipline. Usually it is a lack of *design*: no clear priority, no protected time, no boundaries, no recovery, and a tool set that is engineered to interrupt.

The second reason is generational. I worry about students in particular. Learning is one of the most beautiful human activities, and it is being squeezed between short-form content, constant notifications and, now, tools that can produce an answer before the student has had a chance to

struggle with the question. Struggle is not a bug in learning. Much of the research on how people learn suggests that effortful retrieval and productive difficulty are exactly what make knowledge last. A student who never struggles may never truly learn.

The third reason is about meaning. I did not want to write a book that treats human beings as output machines. A person who protects their attention in order to do more, faster, for its own sake has only invented a more efficient way of being lost. So this book begins with purpose, not with productivity. It asks what deserves your best hours before it asks how to protect them. And because I am a Muslim, it draws respectfully on the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah for moral direction, while being careful never to turn revelation into a productivity trick. Salah is not an interruption to be scheduled around. Family is not an efficiency problem. Success without integrity is not meaningful success.

A word about how I have tried to write. I have separated what research shows from what practitioners recommend, and both from what I am proposing myself. Where evidence is mixed, I say so. Where a claim comes from a company report rather than a peer-reviewed journal, I say that too. The two frameworks in this book, P.U.R.P.O.S.E. and D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S., are my own applied syntheses. They are not laboratory-validated instruments, and I would be doing you a disservice if I let them sound like it.

আমি চাই এই বইটা পড়ে আপনি নিজেকে দোষারোপ না করেন, বরং নিজের মনোযোগকে সম্মান করতে শেখেন। মনোযোগ শুধু কাজের যন্ত্র নয়; এটা আপনার জীবনের সবচেয়ে মূল্যবান ভালোবাসার ভাষা। যাকে আপনি পুরো মনোযোগ দেন, তাকেই আপনি সত্যিকারের গুরুত্ব দেন।

If you take only one thing from these pages, let it be this: **you do not need to do everything. You need to know what matters, protect your attention for it, execute with excellence, and live with greater purpose.**

Thank you for giving this book your attention. I do not take that lightly.

ABU TALIB

How to Use This Book

DEEP FOCUS is designed to work in three ways: as a book you read straight through, as a workbook you write in, and as a reference you return to. You can also use it as a companion for a course, a workshop, a team training programme or a student study circle.

The five parts, in one paragraph each

Parts I and II build understanding and inner direction: what attention is, why it is under pressure, what the cost of fragmentation is, and why purpose has to come before productivity. Part III gives you the two frameworks. Part IV applies them to specific lives: students, entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders, teachers, creators and parents. Part V deals with the sustainability layer, which is AI, energy, sleep, recovery and consistency. Part VI turns everything into an operating system, a 30-day implementation challenge, and a set of worksheets you can copy.

How to read the evidence

Not all claims are equal, and this book will not pretend that they are. Wherever I lean on evidence, I label its type. You will see these labels in the **Evidence Note** boxes and sometimes in the text.

Label	What it means	How much weight to give it
Peer-reviewed research	Published in an academic journal or conference proceedings	Strong, but always read the limits: sample, setting, replication
Preprint / working paper	Public research not yet peer reviewed	Interesting, provisional
Industry research	Company or consultancy reports and telemetry, such as workplace surveys	Useful for patterns; not designed as controlled science

Label	What it means	How much weight to give it
Practice concept	Ideas from coaching, training, or professional experience	Useful as a heuristic; not proof
Islamic source	Qur'an and authentic Hadith, cited by reference	Religious and ethical guidance, not a scientific claim
Original framework	Created by the author for this book	A tool to think and act with; not a validated scale
Author interpretation	The author's reasoning or synthesis	Judge it on its merits

One rule I have tried to follow throughout: **modern research and revelation are never used to prove each other.** Research informs how attention, learning and performance work in general. The Qur'an and the Sunnah give moral direction and meaning. I will show where they meet in practice, and I will not claim that a laboratory finding "validates" scripture.

The recurring features

- **Opening scene.** A short, realistic scenario. These are composite, illustrative scenes, not case studies of real individuals.
- **Evidence Note.** What the research says, how strong it is and what it does not say.
- **Reflect.** One or two questions to answer in writing. Do not skip these.
- **Action Step.** A small thing to do within 24 hours.
- **Key Takeaway.** The chapter in a few lines, sometimes with a Bangla summary (সারকথা).

A suggested rhythm

Read one chapter at a time. After each chapter, write your answer to the Reflect questions and do the Action Step before you read on. If you finish the book in a weekend but change nothing, the book has not worked. If you read one chapter a week and change one habit each week, it has.

What this book does not promise

It does not promise success, wealth, grades or transformation. It offers a set of practices, an honest account of the evidence and a moral frame. What you do with them is yours.

Introduction: The Battle for Attention

> *"A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention." — Herbert A. Simon, 1971*

Rifat is twenty-two, in his final year of university, and he is sitting in front of a chapter he needs to master by Friday. The chapter is open. His notes are open. His phone is face-down on the desk, which he considers a triumph of self-control.

Eleven minutes in, the phone lights up. He does not pick it up. He glances at it. That is all. Then he re-reads the paragraph he had just finished, because he cannot remember what it said. Twenty minutes in, he decides to look something up and opens a new tab. The something is relevant for about forty seconds. Forty minutes in, he opens an AI chat and pastes a question from the textbook, because it is faster. The answer is fluent. He copies it into his notes and feels a small wave of relief.

At the end of the evening, Rifat has been "studying" for two and a half hours. He has a page of notes he did not write in his own words, and a slightly foggy feeling. He could not tell you, without looking, what the chapter argued.

আজ রাতে রিফাত কোনো অলস কাজ করেনি। সে পড়তে বসেছিল, সময় দিয়েছিল, চেষ্টাও করেছিল। কিন্তু তার মনোযোগ ভেঙে গেছে বারবার, আর সেই ভাঙা টুকরোগুলো জোড়া লাগিয়ে কোনো গভীর বোঝাপড়া তৈরি হয়নি।

If you recognise Rifat, you are not weak. You are living inside an environment that was not designed with your attention in mind, or rather, was designed with your attention firmly in mind as a resource to be captured. Deep Focus begins with a simple acknowledgement: **the battle for your attention is real, it is largely invisible, and you are allowed to fight for it.**

Three shifts that make this book necessary

From scarce information to scarce attention. A generation ago, the hard problem was finding information. Today the hard problem is deciding what deserves to be attended to. The economist and cognitive scientist Herbert Simon put it sharply in 1971: a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention. It has taken us fifty years to feel how true that is.

From effortful thinking to effortless answers. For most of human history, getting an answer required doing some thinking. Search made answers cheap. Generative AI made *drafts, summaries, explanations and code* cheap. That is a genuine gift, and this book is not against it. But when the answer arrives before the struggle, something can be lost, and we will look at the emerging evidence carefully rather than dramatically.

From working hours to a working day without edges. Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index, based on survey data from 31,000 knowledge workers in 31 markets and on aggregated Microsoft 365 telemetry, describes what it calls the "infinite workday": meetings, emails and messages spilling into early mornings and late evenings. In its data, employees were interrupted roughly every two minutes by a meeting, email or notification. That is an industry report, not a controlled experiment, and we will treat it that way. But it describes something most professionals will recognise from their own calendars.

What Deep Focus is, and is not

In this book, **Deep Focus** is the intentional ability to direct attention, cognitive energy and effort toward a clearly defined high-value objective; to protect that attention from avoidable interruption; to stay engaged long enough to make meaningful progress; and then to review and recover intelligently.

Notice what is in that definition. *Intentional. Clearly defined. High-value. Avoidable. Long enough. Review and recover.* Deep Focus is not a mood or a personality trait. It is a practice with a purpose and a rhythm.

It is not:

- Ignoring emergencies, colleagues, students or customers who genuinely need you.
- Avoiding people. Presence with people is itself one of the highest uses of attention.
- Neglecting Salah, family, friendships, health or rest.
- Working without breaks, or turning life into a productivity contest.
- A promise that any technique will make anyone successful.

The journey ahead

The core thesis of this book fits in one line:

> **PURPOSE → PRIORITY → PROTECTED ATTENTION → DEEP THINKING**
> → QUALITY EXECUTION → REVIEW → RECOVERY → CONSISTENCY
> → MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Most productivity advice begins in the middle of that chain, at "protected attention", and tells you to switch off notifications. That is useful and incomplete. If you protect your attention for something that does not matter, you have simply become efficient at the wrong thing. So we will start earlier, with purpose, and end later, with impact.

REFLECT

Recall your last important work or study session. When did your attention first break? What was the trigger: an external notification, or an internal urge? And what were you avoiding, if anything, when you reached for the interruption?

ACTION STEP

Tonight, place your phone in another room for a single 25-minute session on one important task. Do not aim for perfection. Just notice what your mind does. Write down one sentence about what you noticed. You will use it in Chapter 3.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Attention is finite and under pressure from three directions at once: abundant information, effortless answers and a workday without edges. Deep Focus is the discipline of choosing what deserves your best attention and protecting it, in service of a life of purpose and benefit to others.

সারকথা: মনোযোগ সীমিত। কীসে মনোযোগ দেবেন, সেটা বেছে নেওয়াই জীবনের সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সিদ্ধান্তগুলোর একটি।

PART I — UNDERSTANDING DEEP FOCUS

What attention is, why it is under pressure, and what fragmentation really costs

CHAPTER 1

What Is Deep Focus?

> *"My experience is what I agree to attend to." — William James, The Principles of Psychology, 1890*

Nusrat teaches literature at a secondary school. On Thursday evening she has forty-two essays to grade and one hour before her daughter's bedtime story. She sits down with the first essay and, within ten minutes, has answered two messages from the school's staff group, checked the time twice and started a mental list of tomorrow's lessons. When she finally returns to the essay, she reads the same paragraph three times.

She is not lacking intelligence, commitment or care. What she lacks, in that moment, is *direction and protection*: a clear definition of what "done" looks like for this hour, and a boundary that keeps everything else at a distance long enough for her mind to settle into the work.

নুসরাত নিজেকে বলল, "আমার মনোযোগ কম।" কিন্তু আসল সমস্যা মনোযোগের পরিমাণ নয়; সমস্যা হলো সে ঠিক করেনি কোন কাজে, কতক্ষণ, কী ফলাফলের জন্য মনোযোগ দেবে।

Attention, concentration and focus are not the same thing

Everyday language blurs three ideas that are worth separating.

Attention is the general capacity to select some information or activity and, in effect, deprioritise the rest. Psychologists have long described attention as limited: we cannot process everything at once, so we choose, whether deliberately or by default. Daniel Kahneman's 1973 book *Attention and Effort* made the classic case for thinking of attention as a limited pool of effort that has to be allocated among competing demands.

Concentration is the felt experience of holding attention on something, often against pulls to look elsewhere.

Focus, as I use it here, adds something both of those lack: *a target.* You can concentrate hard on the wrong thing. You can pay attention to the wrong person, the wrong metric or the wrong tab. Focus, in the sense that matters for a meaningful life, is attention aimed at something you have chosen for a reason.

Deep Focus adds a further ingredient, which is *depth*: staying with that target long enough, and thinking hard enough, to make progress that shallow engagement cannot.

The definition

> THE DEEP FOCUS DEFINITION
>
> **Deep Focus** is the intentional ability to direct attention, cognitive energy and effort toward a clearly defined high-value objective, protect that attention from avoidable interruption, stay engaged long enough to create meaningful progress, and then review and recover intelligently.

Read the definition as a sequence of five commitments. Each becomes a chapter or a framework later in the book.

Element	Question it asks	Where we develop it
Direct	What exactly deserves my attention, and why?	Chapters 6, 10
Protect	What will I remove or block *before* the work begins?	Chapters 9, 11
Engage	Can I stay with one thing long enough to think?	Chapters 3, 11

Element	Question it asks	Where we develop it
Create	What output will exist at the end that did not exist before?	Chapters 4, 11
Review and recover	What did I learn, and what does my mind need now?	Chapters 11, 17

Shallow, deep and everything in between

Not all work needs Deep Focus, and pretending otherwise would be its own kind of foolishness. Computer scientist Cal Newport, in his 2016 book *Deep Work*, distinguishes deep work (cognitively demanding tasks performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your abilities) from shallow work (logistical, less demanding tasks that can often be done while distracted). Newport's distinction is a practitioner's framework rather than a laboratory finding, but it is a helpful lens, and I borrow the spirit of it with a slightly different emphasis.

My emphasis is that the categories are **relative to the person and the moment**. For an experienced accountant, reconciling a familiar ledger may be routine. For a first-year student, the same exercise demands everything she has. What makes a task "deep" is not the title of the job but the ratio between what it demands and what you currently have: if it stretches your thinking and matters, it deserves protected attention.

A useful rough map:

Type of work	Nature	Examples	Ideal handling
Deep	High thinking demand, high value	Strategy, writing, problem-solving, learning a hard concept, diagnosis, design	Protected blocks, no switching

Type of work	Nature	Examples	Ideal handling
Shallow but necessary	Low thinking demand, must be done	Scheduling, routine emails, admin, approvals	Batch into set windows
Relational	Human presence, high value	Listening to a colleague, teaching, mentoring, time with family	Full presence; not treated as "interruption"
Noise	Low value, low demand	Idle scrolling, unnecessary meetings, reflexive checking	Stop, simplify or delegate

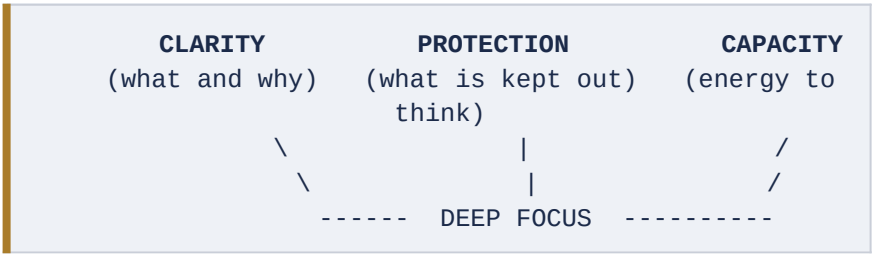
Notice that "relational" has its own row. Deep Focus is not solitary. Giving your child, your student, your patient or your friend your undivided attention is Deep Focus in one of its most important forms.

Deep Focus and flow

The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described *flow*, a state of absorbed, effortless engagement in an activity whose challenge matches one's skill, in his 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Deep Focus and flow overlap, but they are not identical. Flow is a state you can hope to enter; you cannot summon it on demand. Deep Focus is a *practice* that creates good conditions for flow when it is available and produces valuable work when it is not. Some of the best sessions of deep work feel like effortful wrestling rather than gliding, and they are no less valuable for that.

Three conditions that make Deep Focus possible

In my applied experience of designing systems for attention, three conditions seem to be present whenever a person is able to do genuinely deep work. This is an interpretive model, not a measured one.



Clarity means you know the specific outcome you are working towards. Vague tasks such as "work on the report" invite wandering because the mind cannot tell when it is making progress.

Protection means distractions have been handled *before* they arrive: phone away, tabs closed, colleagues informed, interruptions captured for later.

Capacity means you have the physical and mental energy to think: enough sleep, food, water and a mind that is not exhausted by the previous eight hours of switching.

If any one condition is missing, Deep Focus tends to collapse. Clarity without protection becomes frustrated intention. Protection without clarity becomes a quiet room in which you stare at nothing. Both without capacity produce staring at the page at 11 p.m.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Attention as limited capacity. *Classic theory (Kahneman, 1973); still influential, refined by later work.* The idea that attention is a limited resource that must be allocated is foundational in cognitive psychology, though modern models are more nuanced than a single "pool".

Deep vs. shallow work. *Practice concept (Newport, 2016).* A practitioner's framework, not a tested taxonomy.

Flow. *Psychological theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).* Well known and widely studied, but flow is a state and not a technique.

The Clarity–Protection–Capacity model. *Author interpretation.* Offered as a thinking aid.

Common mistakes

Mistaking intensity for depth. Gritted teeth and a locked jaw do not make thinking deeper. Depth comes from clarity of target and sufficient time, not from strain.

Treating Deep Focus as an all-day state. No one can or should think at maximum depth from morning until night. Later chapters show why short, protected blocks with recovery in between usually work better than heroic marathons.

Making everything "deep". If every task is urgent and important, nothing is. Deep Focus is for the few tasks that deserve it.

Using focus to avoid people. Deep Focus that damages relationships has missed its purpose.

REFLECT

1. What are the two or three kinds of work in your life that genuinely deserve your deepest attention?
2. Which of the three conditions — Clarity, Protection or Capacity — is weakest for you right now?

ACTION STEP

Write down one task for tomorrow that meets all three tests: it stretches your thinking, it matters, and its finish line can be described in one sentence. Write that sentence.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Focus is attention with a target; Deep Focus is attention with a target, protected long enough to think and create. It depends on clarity, protection and capacity, and it includes the deep presence we give to people.

সারকথা: মনোযোগ মানে শুধু চোখ খোলা রাখা নয়; কোন লক্ষ্যের জন্য, কতটা গভীরভাবে, সেটাই আসল প্রশ্ন।

CHAPTER 2

Why Attention Is Becoming Scarce

> *"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will." — William James, 1890*

For most of the twentieth century, a student who wanted to be distracted had to work at it. She had to walk to another room, find a magazine or call a friend on a shared landline. Distraction had friction. Today distraction has none. It is in the same device as the textbook, the lecture video, the calculator and the AI assistant, and it is engineered by very talented people whose professional success depends on how often we return.

I say this without hostility. I work in digital marketing and growth strategy, and I know how those systems are built and why. The point is not to blame the builders or the users. It is to see the situation clearly, because you cannot protect what you do not understand.

Four pressures on attention

1. The economics of attention

Herbert Simon's 1971 observation, that a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, became a business model. Many digital products earn revenue from time spent and frequency of return, and they are designed, tested and refined against those metrics. Notifications, infinite feeds, autoplay and streaks are not accidents. Whether any single feature is harmful depends on how it is used, but the *default* of the environment is to pull. That is an interpretation, but it is one that people who work in the field will readily recognise.

2. Workplace fragmentation

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index gives the most vivid recent picture from inside the modern office. The report draws on a survey of 31,000 knowledge workers across 31 markets, fielded by Edelman Data x Intelligence in early 2025, together with aggregated and anonymised Microsoft 365 telemetry. Among its findings: employees using Microsoft 365 were interrupted by a meeting, email or notification roughly every two minutes; the average worker received 117 emails and 153 Teams messages per day; meetings after 8 p.m. were up 16% year over year; and 48% of employees said their work felt chaotic and fragmented.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Label: Industry research. Microsoft's Work Trend Index combines a large survey with company telemetry. It is valuable for showing patterns at scale, but it is not a controlled experiment, it reflects users of one company's products, and it counts all pings as "interruptions" regardless of whether they were unwelcome. Treat it as a portrait of a trend, not proof of any specific cause.

3. Media multitasking and the nearby phone

Psychologists have studied whether heavy media multitasking changes how people attend. In a widely cited 2009 study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Ophir, Nass and Wagner found that people who reported heavy media multitasking performed worse on some tests of filtering irrelevant information and switching between tasks than light multitaskers. That study was correlational, and later research has produced mixed results, so the responsible conclusion is that the relationship is real enough to take seriously and unsettled enough to avoid dramatic claims.

Another much-discussed study, Ward and colleagues (2017) in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, randomly assigned university students to have their own phone on the desk, in a pocket or bag, or in another room while completing cognitive tasks. Participants

whose phones were in another room scored better on measures of working memory and fluid intelligence than those whose phones were on the desk, even though they had been told not to touch them. This "brain drain" idea has been influential, but later replication attempts by other researchers have produced mixed results, so I offer it as a suggestive finding and not as a settled law. It is also consistent with something most of us can verify by experiment: a phone within reach makes it harder not to check it.

In classrooms, Sana, Weston and Cepeda (2013) in *Computers & Education* reported that students who did unrelated tasks on laptops during a lecture scored lower on a later comprehension test, and so did peers who could see those students' screens. The lesson is uncomfortable and worth reading twice: distraction is partly *social*. One person's tab can cost another person's learning.

4. The internal pressures

It would be comforting if all distraction came from outside. It does not. A great deal of it comes from within: boredom, anxiety, the desire to avoid an uncomfortable task, or the reflex to seek a small reward. Research on procrastination by Sirois and Pychyl (2013) frames it as, in part, a short-term mood-repair strategy: we put off a task that makes us feel uneasy and turn to something that feels better right now, at a cost to our future selves.

This matters because it changes the remedy. If distraction were only external, a better lock would suffice. Because it is also internal, we need both an *environmental* strategy (Chapter 9) and an *inner* strategy (Chapter 8) that helps us stay with discomfort long enough for the work to become absorbing.

A note on the local context

আমাদের দেশে অনেক পরিবারে একটা স্মার্টফোনই এখন টিভি, লাইব্রেরি, বাজার, অফিস এবং বিনোদনের জায়গা একসঙ্গে। একজন ছাত্র যখন ফোন খুলে পড়ার ভিডিও দেখতে যায়, সেই একই স্ক্রিনে ফেসবুক, রিলস আর মেসেজ অপেক্ষা করছে। এখানে দোষ ছাত্রের

একার নয়; পরিবেশটাই এমন যে, সিদ্ধান্তের ক্লান্তি প্রতিবার তার ওপর এসে পড়ে। তাই মনোযোগ রক্ষা করা কেবল ইচ্ছাশক্তির প্রশ্ন নয়; এটা নকশারও প্রশ্ন।

This is an observation rather than a statistic. I mention it because it changes the advice: when one device is the classroom, the library and the entertainment centre, telling a student to "just ignore it" is not a strategy. Design is.

The hidden cost: what we stop being able to do

The most worrying effect of chronic fragmentation is not lost minutes. It is the gradual loss of *tolerance for depth*. When every gap is filled with a small stimulus, the ability to sit with one problem for forty minutes weakens through disuse. I offer that as a hypothesis, not a finding. But the researcher Gloria Mark, who has studied attention in digital environments for two decades, has argued in her 2023 book *Attention Span* that our attention in front of screens has become more fragmented and that this fragmentation is shaped by habits as much as by technology. Her work suggests that the direction of travel is toward shorter attention on any one screen unless we intervene with awareness and design.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Multitasking and attention research. *Peer-reviewed research, mixed in places.* Ophir et al. (2009) is correlational; Ward et al. (2017) is experimental but has faced mixed replication; Sana et al. (2013) is an experimental classroom study; Sirois and Pychyl (2013) is a theoretical review. Together they support a cautious conclusion: distraction has real costs for tasks that need working memory and comprehension, but the size of the effects varies across studies.

Attention Span (Mark, 2023). *Author-researcher's synthesis for a general audience.* Read it as informed interpretation.

Common mistakes

Blaming character. "I have no discipline" is often a wrong diagnosis of an environmental and design problem.

Trying to out-willpower a slot machine. If your environment is optimised to pull, do not rely on one moment of strength. Change the environment.

Believing you are the exception. Most people who think they multitask well have simply become used to a lower level of depth.

Moral panic in the other direction. Technology is not the enemy. A phone can also be the source of a lecture, a Qur'an app, a conversation with a distant parent or a way to build a business. The problem is *unchosen* use.

REFLECT

1. Where does your attention most often escape: from outside (notifications, people) or from within (boredom, avoidance)?
2. What is one place or moment in your week when you are least likely to be distracted, and what makes it different?

ACTION STEP

For the next 24 hours, keep a tally on paper: every time you check your phone without a specific purpose, put a mark. Do not judge the number. This is data.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Attention is scarce because the environment, the workplace, and our own inner habits all compete for it. Research points to real costs of fragmentation, with mixed findings on how large, and it invites us to design for attention rather than rely on willpower alone.

সারকথা: মনোযোগ হারানো মানেই দুর্বলতা নয়। পরিবেশ বদলান, নকশা করুন, তারপর নিজের ওপর ভরসা রাখুন।

CHAPTER 3

The Cost of Constant Switching

> *Capture it. Don't chase it.*

Farhana is a mid-level manager at a logistics company. On an ordinary Tuesday, her calendar shows six meetings, and between them she answers messages, reviews a spreadsheet, approves two purchase requests and helps a colleague with a presentation. At five in the evening she feels exhausted and asks herself the question that so many professionals ask: *what did I actually do today?*

She did many things. She completed almost nothing that required her best thinking. The quarterly analysis she promised herself she would start at nine is still a blank document.

ফারহানার দিনের প্রতিটি কাজই দরকারি ছিল, কিন্তু কোনোটাই সে পুরোপুরি শেষ করতে পারেনি। প্রতিবার এক কাজ থেকে অন্য কাজে যাওয়ার সময় তার মনের একটা অংশ পেছনের কাজেই আটকে ছিল।

What is attention residue?

The strongest single idea in this chapter comes from Sophie Leroy, a researcher in organisational behaviour. In a 2009 paper in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, titled "Why is it so hard to do my work? The challenge of attention residue when switching between work tasks", Leroy proposed that when people switch from Task A to Task B, part of their attention can remain stuck on Task A, especially when Task A was unfinished. She called this **attention residue**. Her experiments found that people who had to leave an earlier task unfinished performed worse on a subsequent task than people who had finished the earlier task. The effect was stronger under time pressure.

The idea is simple, and it matches experience. When you leave a document half-written to answer a message, you do not arrive at the

message with a clean mind. Some of you is still in the document, thinking about the sentence you did not finish. That means both tasks get an inferior version of you.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Label: Peer-reviewed research. Leroy (2009) is an experimental study of task switching in a laboratory-style setting. It supports the idea of attention residue, but real workplaces are messier and the size of the effect will vary with the tasks, the person and the interruption.

The wider evidence on switching

Laboratory psychologists have studied *task switching* for decades. Monsell (2003), in a review in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, describes how switching between tasks typically produces a cost in speed and accuracy compared with repeating the same task, and that the cost does not fully disappear even with preparation. Rubinstein, Meyer and Evans (2001) similarly found that switching between tasks incurred measurable time costs, which increased with the complexity or unfamiliarity of the tasks. Two cautions are important. First, these laboratory costs are often measured in fractions of a second per switch, and it is the *accumulation* across a day and the effect on complex thinking that matters most. Second, costs vary: switching between simple, familiar tasks is far less costly than switching between demanding ones.

Interruptions cost more than time

Gloria Mark and colleagues (2008), at the CHI conference on human factors in computing systems, studied what happens when people are interrupted during a work task. In their experiment with 48 participants, interrupted participants completed their work in *less* time than uninterrupted ones, and without a measurable drop in quality, but

they reported significantly more stress, frustration, time pressure and effort. In other words, people compensate for interruptions by working faster and harder, and the compensation has a psychological price. The finding is subtle, and it deserves a careful reading. It does not say that interruptions are harmless because the work still gets done. It says that the cost may be paid in *strain*, not in the quality of the output that day. Sustained over months, strain is not a small thing.

The unfinished-task problem and the shutdown ritual

If attention residue is worse when tasks are unfinished, an obvious question follows: can we reduce the residue without finishing every task? A relevant study by Masicampo and Baumeister (2011), published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, found that making a specific plan for an unfinished goal reduced the intrusive thoughts and the interference that unfulfilled goals produced in subsequent tasks. You do not necessarily have to complete the task; you have to *tell your mind where and when you will return to it.*

This finding is the scientific backbone of a habit that anchors the entire Deep Focus system: **capture it, don't chase it.**

When a thought or urge pulls at you during focused work, do not follow it. Write it on a Distraction Capture List, a piece of paper or a note beside you, and return to your task. The pull has been honoured. It has been recorded. It will be handled at a time you choose.

```
DISTRACTION CAPTURE LIST
-----------------------------------------
Time | Pull (what I wanted to do) | When I will handle it
09:12 | Check the exchange-rate news | Break at 10:00
09:26 | Reply to Sabbir's message | Message window 12:30
09:41 | Look up that book on attention | Evening reading list
```

A second habit that grows from this evidence is the **switch note**. Before you leave a task, take sixty seconds to write the next physical action you will take when you return. "Finish section 2 by drafting the comparison table; data is in the blue folder." That single sentence lowers the cost of returning and gives the unfinished task a plan, which is exactly what the Masicampo and Baumeister finding suggests can help.

Why this matters more for thinking than for doing

Not all work is equally sensitive to switching. Answering a routine email while listening to a colleague is not a disaster. Writing a strategy memo, solving a difficult problem or learning a complex concept requires holding many pieces in mind at once, and each switch scatters those pieces. That is why the same person can feel fine while processing messages and completely unable to think after a day of them.

REFLECT

1. Look at your last workday. How many times did you switch between meaningful tasks? Which switches were necessary and which were reflexive?
2. What is the one task you are most likely to leave unfinished, and what would a good "switch note" for it say?

A practical tool: the Personal Attention Audit

For three days, note in fifteen-minute chunks what your attention was on. Use just three columns: *what I was doing*, *what pulled me away*, *how I felt after*. You are not trying to improve yet. You are trying to see. Most people are surprised by the number of switches and by how many were self-initiated.

Time	What I was doing	Pull or interruption	Self-started or external?	Energy after (1–5)
09:00–09:15	Drafting proposal	Phone buzz	External	3
09:15–09:30	Email	Thought of an errand	Self-started	2

A full template is in Chapter 21.

Common mistakes

Believing you are immune. Sanbonmatsu and colleagues (2013), in *PLoS ONE*, found that people who multitask most often tended to overestimate their own multitasking ability. Test yourself with evidence, not confidence.

Over-correcting into isolation. The goal is fewer *unchosen* switches. A team that cannot reach its colleagues for a whole day has swapped one problem for another. Deep Focus works best with agreed norms, which we will build in Chapters 9 and 14.

Chasing every thought. The most productive response to an intrusive idea is not to fight it and not to follow it. Capture it.

> ACTION STEP
>
> Tomorrow, before your first deep task, put a pen and a sheet of paper next to you. Every time a pull arrives, write it down and go back. Count the entries at the end.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Switching costs attention twice: once for the interrupted task and again for the next. Attention residue is strongest when tasks are left unfinished, and a simple plan for when you will return can help. Capture the pull; don't chase it.

সারকথা: কাজের মাঝখানে হঠাৎ কিছু মনে পড়লে সেটা লিখে রাখুন, তারপর কাজে ফিরুন। লিখে রাখা মানে মনকে বলা, "আমি তোমাকে ভুলিনি।"

CHAPTER 4

Busy vs Effective

> *Busy ≠ Effective.*

Tanvir runs a small e-commerce business. He wakes at six and reaches for his phone before he has brushed his teeth. Customer messages, supplier calls, a payment problem, a team question, a social media comment that needs a reply. By nine he has handled eleven things. By noon, twenty-six. He goes to bed exhausted at midnight and thinks: *I worked so hard today.*

Three months later, revenue is flat. Tanvir knows, somewhere, that the business needs a better pricing model, a stronger supplier relationship and a new customer acquisition channel. Those are strategy tasks. They need hours of quiet thought. They have not been touched in weeks, because every day is consumed by responding.

তানভীর ভাবে সে ব্যস্ত বলেই ব্যবসাটা চলছে। আসলে সে ব্যস্ত বলেই ব্যবসাটা বাড়ছে না। প্রতিদিনের জরুরি কাজ প্রতিদিনের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ কাজকে খেয়ে ফেলছে।

Activity is not achievement

Being busy is the feeling of motion. Being effective is the experience of *arriving* somewhere that matters. The two often feel the same from the inside, because effort and fatigue are present in both. But one produces movement and the other produces *results*.

The signature idea of this chapter, **Busy ≠ Effective**, points to a trap that intelligent, responsible people fall into precisely because they are conscientious. Responding feels responsible. Replying quickly feels professional. Being available feels kind. In many workplaces, visible busyness is rewarded as a proxy for commitment. So we accumulate a life of small, sensible responses while the large, meaningful work waits for a "quieter time" that never comes.

The responsiveness trap

Four forces keep us busy in ways that do not compound:

- **The urgency illusion.** Urgent things announce themselves. Important things wait quietly. Left alone, we do whatever is loudest.
- **Reactive reward.** Answering a message gives an immediate sense of completion. Writing a strategy memo gives no such reward for two hours.
- **Identity.** "I'm always on" can become part of how a person sees themselves and is seen by others.
- **Avoidance.** Small tasks are a comfortable place to hide from a hard one.

None of these is a character flaw. Each is a predictable response to an environment that rewards the visible over the valuable.

Measuring output, not activity

The antidote to busyness is not less work. It is a different unit of measurement. Ask at the end of the day not "How many hours did I work?" but **"What exists now that did not exist this morning, and does it matter?"**

This is why one of the principles in the Deep Focus system is **Output before activity.** Decide what result you are producing before you decide what you will do. An output is something you can point to: a completed draft, a decision made, a solved problem set, a proposal sent, a lesson prepared, a difficult conversation held.

There is research to suggest that *progress* itself is powerful for how work feels. Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, in *The Progress Principle* (2011), drew on a study of thousands of daily diary entries from knowledge workers and argued that the single strongest daily influence on inner work life, meaning emotions, motivation and perception, was

making progress in meaningful work. It is a research-based book by academics rather than a controlled experiment, and I offer it in that spirit. But the intuition is helpful: when we protect time for meaningful progress, we may also feel better about the work.

The Stop / Simplify / Delegate Matrix

To move from busy to effective, examine your recurring activities honestly. For each one, ask four questions in order:

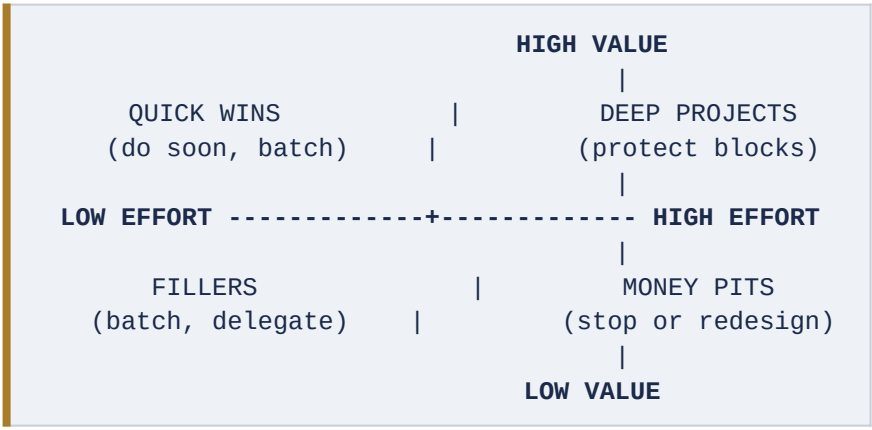
1. Should this be done at all? (**Stop**)
2. If yes, can it be made simpler, shorter or standardised? (**Simplify**)
3. If it still needs doing, does it have to be *me*? (**Delegate**)
4. If it has to be me, when in the week does it belong? (**Schedule**)

Activity	Stop?	Simplify?	Delegate?	Schedule
Replying to every customer query within minutes	No, but set response windows	Create standard answers for the top 10 questions	Train a team member for routine queries	Two message windows a day
Weekly report nobody reads	Yes, if no one objects for two weeks			
Reviewing supplier prices	No	Use a simple comparison sheet	No	Monday, 90-minute block

Most people are astonished by how many activities can be stopped or simplified when they finally look at them in one place. This tool appears again as a worksheet in Chapter 21.

The effort-value view

Another useful lens is a simple two-by-two of *value* and *effort*, which you can use during weekly planning.



Deep Focus lives in the top right. Most days are spent in the bottom left.

A Muslim perspective on time and effort

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, as narrated by Ibn Abbas in Sahih al-Bukhari 6412: "There are two blessings that many people are deceived into losing: health and free time." Notice the wording: *deceived*. People do not usually decide to waste their free time. They are quietly deceived into it, often by the sense that they are busy. The lesson here is religious and moral before it is professional: time and health are trusts, and we will be asked about how we used them. It is a reminder that "I was busy" and "I used my time well" are different sentences.

This is a religious reflection and an ethical prompt. It is not a scientific claim, and it does not need laboratory support. Its practical implication, which I offer as my own interpretation, is that reflecting honestly on how our time is spent is not a modern productivity fad but a very old form of accountability.

Common mistakes

Replacing one busyness with another. Some people react to this chapter by building an elaborate system, then spending a week configuring it. That is still activity, not output.

Ignoring the people cost. "Effectiveness" that consists of neglecting colleagues, customers, family or friends is not effectiveness. The output must include the people you serve.

Defining "important" by anxiety. A task is not important because it worries you. A task is important because it advances something you have decided matters.

REFLECT

1. What are the three outcomes that would make this quarter (or this semester) a success, and how many hours last week went into them?
2. Which "urgent" activity do you keep doing that, if honest, no one would truly miss?

ACTION STEP

Complete a mini Stop / Simplify / Delegate exercise for just five recurring activities from your last week. Circle the one you will stop or simplify first.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Busy is motion; effective is results that matter. Measure output, not hours; make deliberate decisions about what to stop, simplify, delegate and schedule; and treat time as a trust.

সারকথা: ব্যস্ত থাকা আর ফলপ্রসূ হওয়া এক নয়। দিন শেষে প্রশ্ন করুন, "আজ কী তৈরি হলো যা সকালে ছিল না, আর তা কি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ?"

CHAPTER 5

Deep Focus in the AI Era

> *AI for acceleration, not abdication.*

Mahin is a second-year business student. His assignment is a five-page analysis of a company's market strategy. He opens an AI assistant, types the prompt, and in forty seconds has a polished, well-structured draft. It reads well. It looks like something a good student would write. He reworks a few phrases, submits it, and gets a decent grade.

Two months later, in an interview for an internship, someone asks him to explain how he would evaluate a company's competitive position. Mahin discovers that he has no framework he can call his own. The knowledge went from the screen to the submission without passing through him.

মাহিন ভুল কিছু করেনি, এমন নয়। কিন্তু সে যা হারিয়েছে তা হলো সংগ্রামের সুযোগ, আর সেই সংগ্রামের ভেতর দিয়েই সাধারণত শেখা তৈরি হয়।

Two promises, one warning

Artificial intelligence is arriving in our work and study with a double promise. The first is **speed**: drafts, summaries, code, analysis and explanations in seconds. The second is **access**: expert-style help for anyone with a connection. Both promises are real, and this book does not treat AI as an enemy.

The warning is also real, and it is about *attention and thinking*, not about technology. When answers arrive before we have struggled, when drafts arrive before we have formed a view, we may stop doing the very thinking that makes us capable, and we may hand over judgment without noticing.

I want to state the principle of the whole book on this topic at once, and then unpack it over this chapter and Chapter 16:

THE AI + HUMAN DEPTH PRINCIPLE

AI = SPEED. HUMAN = PURPOSE + JUDGMENT + RESPONSIBILITY.

AI SPEED × HUMAN DEPTH = HIGHER LEVERAGE

Multiplication has a property worth remembering: if either factor is zero, the result is zero. Speed without depth produces fast mediocrity. Depth without any tools may be slower than necessary. Together they create leverage.

What the research says so far

The evidence base on generative AI and human thinking is young, moving quickly, and often based on self-reports and small or specific samples. I will present the most relevant studies, say what kind of evidence each is, and avoid conclusions the data cannot bear.

AI can raise productivity, inside its frontier

Dell'Acqua and colleagues (2023), in a Harvard Business School working paper conducted with Boston Consulting Group, ran a field experiment with 758 consultants. For tasks that fell *within* the frontier of what the AI could do well, consultants using GPT-4 completed 12.2% more tasks on average, worked 25.1% faster and produced work rated as more than 40% higher in quality than a control group. But for a task deliberately designed to fall *outside* the AI's frontier, consultants using AI were 19 percentage points less likely to produce correct solutions than those working without it. The authors described the boundary between the two as a "jagged technological frontier" because it is not obvious to the user where AI is reliable and where it is not.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Label: Working paper (not yet a peer-reviewed journal article at the time cited). A field experiment with a well-defined sample of professional consultants at one firm, using GPT-4-era tools in 2023. Tools have changed since, and results may differ for other jobs, but the *pattern* is instructive: AI helps a lot where it is strong, and can mislead where it is not, and users can't always tell which is which.

Trusting AI may reduce critical effort

Lee and colleagues (2025), from Microsoft Research and Carnegie Mellon University, surveyed 319 knowledge workers who shared 936 examples of using generative AI at work. They reported that *higher confidence in the AI* was associated with *less* critical thinking effort, while *higher self-confidence* was associated with *more* critical thinking. They also described how critical thinking shifts, when AI is in the loop, towards verifying information, integrating responses and stewarding the task. This was a self-report survey, and it measures perceived effort rather than actual thinking quality. But it offers an important practical clue: **the more we trust the tool relative to ourselves, the less we check.**

AI use and critical thinking, correlated

Gerlich (2025), in the journal *Societies*, surveyed 666 participants in the United Kingdom and reported a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.68$) between frequent AI tool use and critical thinking scores, mediated by what the author called cognitive offloading. This is a correlational, self-report study with a convenience sample, and correlation does not show that AI use *caused* lower critical thinking; people with weaker habits might simply use AI more. I cite it not as proof but as a warning signal that deserves follow-up in better-designed studies.

Unrestricted AI can help practice and harm learning

Bastani and colleagues (2025), in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, conducted a randomised field experiment in a high school mathematics setting. Students given unrestricted access to a GPT-style assistant performed better on practice problems while they had it, but performed worse than students who never had it on a later exam taken without AI access. A version of the assistant designed with safeguards, acting more like a tutor by offering hints and not full solutions, largely mitigated that harm. The message is not "AI is bad for learning." The message is that **how AI is used matters enormously**, and the default use, asking for the answer, may feel productive while undermining what the student retains.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Summary of AI evidence. Dell'Acqua et al. (2023): field experiment, working paper. Lee et al. (2025): survey, peer-reviewed conference paper. Gerlich (2025): correlational survey, peer-reviewed journal. Bastani et al. (2025): randomised field experiment, peer-reviewed journal. The consistent theme is not "AI makes people stupid" but "unstructured, uncritical AI use can reduce the effortful thinking that builds capability, and structure changes the outcome."

Offloading is not always bad

Psychologists Risko and Gilbert (2016), in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, use the term *cognitive offloading* for the use of physical action or external tools to reduce mental demands, such as writing a shopping list, using a calendar or using a calculator. Offloading is often smart. If I use a calendar so my mind is free for more important thinking, I have used an external tool to protect my attention.

The question, therefore, is never "Should I offload?" It is **"What am I offloading, and what happens to my capability if I do it repeatedly?"**

Offloading	Usually healthy	Often risky
Remembering appointments	Calendar and reminders	
Routine drafting of standard messages	AI draft, human edit	Sending without reading
Summarising a long document you need to skim	AI summary, then verify key claims	Relying on the summary when precision matters
Understanding a concept you are learning	Ask AI *after* you have tried to explain it	Asking first and copying the explanation
Making a judgment on a person, ethics or strategy	AI as one input among many	Letting AI decide

Why attention becomes *more* valuable, not less

Some people fear that if AI can produce fluent output, human attention matters less. I think the opposite is true, for three reasons.

First, someone has to decide what is worth producing. AI generates. It does not decide, on behalf of your life, which problem deserves a year of your energy. That is purpose, and it stays human.

Second, someone has to detect what is wrong. Verification requires knowledge and attention. The user who cannot notice an error will not correct it. In the BCG study, the cost of misplaced trust fell on the consultants who trusted a plausible answer.

Third, someone must be accountable. A doctor who uses an AI tool remains responsible for the diagnosis. A teacher who uses AI to prepare a lesson remains responsible for what students learn. A manager who

uses AI to draft a decision remains responsible for the people affected by it.

For Muslims, this third point carries additional depth. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught, in Sahih al-Bukhari 893 (and also Sahih Muslim 1829), that each of us is a guardian and will be asked about those under our care. That is a statement about accountability and stewardship, not about technology, and I bring it here as a moral frame: the tool does not carry our amanah. We do.

AI as another attention problem

There is also a quieter issue. AI tools can themselves become sources of fragmentation: another tab, another chat, another prompt-and-wait loop, another place to ask a question instead of thinking it through for a few more minutes. A person who opens an assistant every time a task becomes hard has reinvented the interruption in a more sophisticated form.

That is why this book returns to AI in three places: as one letter in D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. (the "U", Use AI Intelligently, in Chapter 11), as a full section on AI + Human Depth (Chapter 16), and as a study protocol for students (Chapters 12 and 16).

Three questions before you open an AI tool

1. **Have I tried first?** Have I spent at least a few minutes forming my own view, outline or attempt?
2. **What am I asking it to do?** Is it acceleration (formatting, drafting, summarising, brainstorming) or abdication (deciding, understanding, judging)?
3. **How will I verify?** What will I check, against what source, before I rely on the output?

REFLECT

1. Think of the last three times you used AI. In each case, was it acceleration or abdication? How do you know?
2. What is one skill you want to *own* rather than outsource, no matter how good the tools become?

ACTION STEP

For the next AI-assisted task, write your own three-sentence answer or outline *before* you open the tool. Compare it with the AI's version, and note one thing you did better and one thing the tool did better.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI multiplies what we bring to it. Used with purpose, judgment and verification, it is a remarkable accelerator. Used to avoid thinking, it can quietly erode the very capability we hope to improve. In the AI era, human attention becomes more, not less, valuable.

সারকথা: এআই আপনার গতি বাড়াতে পারে, কিন্তু উদ্দেশ্য, বিচারবুদ্ধি আর দায়িত্ব আপনার নিজের। আগে নিজে ভাবুন, তারপর এআইকে জিজ্ঞেস করুন, তারপর যাচাই করুন।

PART II — PURPOSE & INNER DIRECTION

Before you protect your attention, decide what it is for

CHAPTER 6

Purpose Before Productivity

> *Don't just become more productive. Become more purposeful.*

There is a question that productivity books almost never ask: *productive at what, and for whom?*

A person can become brilliantly efficient at a life they would not choose if they stopped to think. They can clear an inbox with elegance and neglect a parent. They can optimise a morning routine and lose a decade to work that no longer means anything to them. Efficiency is a multiplier. It multiplies whatever direction you are already facing.

That is why Deep Focus begins with purpose. Not because purpose sounds noble, but because without it, protected attention is a well-defended empty room.

Attention shapes experience

William James, whose 1890 *Principles of Psychology* remains one of the most quoted texts in the field, wrote: "My experience is what I agree to attend to." He was making a psychological point with a moral edge. Out of the endless stream of sensations, information and possibilities that surround us, we consciously and unconsciously select a tiny fraction. That fraction becomes our lived life.

If that is true, then choosing what to attend to is not a productivity decision. It is a decision about the *content of your life*. A person who spends five hours a day on feeds and two hours on family and work has not simply "used their time." They have, in a real sense, built a self out of what they attended to.

I do not want to overstate this. James's line is a philosophical observation, not a measured law. But it invites a set of questions that I think every reader should sit with, ideally on paper:

- What deserves my best attention?
- What is worth my life-energy?
- What am I becoming through repeated attention?
- Is my attention aligned with my values?
- Am I living reactively, or intentionally?

We cannot pursue everything

Every meaningful life is made of refusals. To say yes to deep work on one project is to say no to a hundred smaller ones. To say yes to a family dinner without a phone is to say no to a message that will keep. To say yes to mastering a discipline is to say no to being adequate at ten others.

This is difficult for capable people, because capable people are offered many opportunities. The temptation is to say yes to all of them, on the theory that more is better. The result is a life of thin attention spread over too many commitments, each done adequately and none done deeply.

> A PRINCIPLE FOR THE WHOLE BOOK
>
> **Every meaningful YES requires many intentional NOs.**
>
> A YES without any NO is a wish. A NO without a YES is emptiness. Purpose is the pairing of both.

The instrument of choosing is not willpower. It is *priority*, which we will build systematically in Chapter 10. But before priority comes a prior discovery: what, for you, is worth choosing?

Purpose is not a slogan

Many people hear "purpose" and imagine a grand mission statement. For most of us, purpose is much more ordinary and more demanding than that. It is a working answer to three questions:

1. **Whom do I serve?** (Family, students, customers, patients, community, the wider society.)
2. **What do I want to build or become?** (A capable body of knowledge, a business that treats people fairly, a household of peace, a body of work.)
3. **By what principles will I do it?** (Honesty, excellence, balance, fairness, and for Muslims, taqwa and the boundaries of halal and haram.)

You do not need to have these answered perfectly. You need a *current best answer* that you revise as you grow.

Why purpose supports attention

There is a research angle here, and it is worth stating carefully. Self-Determination Theory, developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan and summarised in their 2000 paper in *American Psychologist*, proposes that people's motivation and well-being are supported when three basic psychological needs are met: **autonomy** (acting from one's own choice), **competence** (feeling effective) and **relatedness** (feeling connected to others). Work that a person experiences as chosen, mastered and connected to others tends, according to this theory, to be sustained with less internal friction than work they experience as imposed.

I do not claim that "purpose" is a laboratory variable that causes focus. What I say, as an interpretation, is that purposeful work tends to give attention a *reason to stay*, and that when attention has a reason to stay, we do not need to rely on force. When the reason is missing, we fight ourselves all day.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Self-Determination Theory *(Ryan & Deci, 2000).* Peer-reviewed theory with a large body of supporting research across many settings. It concerns motivation and well-being; using it to explain focus is my extension, and I flag it as such.

James's quotation. A philosophical and psychological observation from 1890, quoted here for its insight, not as an empirical result.

A story of two students

Two students, Sadia and Imran, are studying for the same medical entrance examination. Both study about five hours a day. Sadia studies because her parents expect it, and her mind often drifts to the day when it will be over. Imran also feels the pressure, but he has connected the exam to something: he remembers his grandmother's illness and the helplessness of not being able to help her. He wants to be a doctor who explains things to patients kindly.

Both may pass. But on a Tuesday evening when a notification arrives and both are tired, they face different internal weather. For Sadia, the phone is a rescue. For Imran, it is a small betrayal of something he cares about. Purpose does not eliminate temptation. It gives the person a reason to return.

সাদিয়া আর ইমরান দুজনেই পড়ছে। কিন্তু একজন পড়ছে "করতে হবে" বলে, আরেকজন পড়ছে "কারণ আমি কাউকে সাহায্য করতে চাই" বলে। দিনের শেষে দুজনের ক্লান্তিও এক, কিন্তু ফিরে আসার শক্তি এক নয়।

From purpose to a working direction

Purpose is wide. To be useful in a Tuesday morning, it must be translated into a chain that narrows step by step:

```
PURPOSE      (why: whom I serve, what I stand for)
```

```
                              ↓
SEASON GOAL  (this year / semester: the few outcomes
                    that matter)
                              ↓
 MONTH / WEEK (what moves the season goal forward)
                              ↓
  ONE BIG OUTCOME  (today's single most important
                       result)
                              ↓
FOCUS BLOCK  (the protected time in which it will be
                       made)
```

The rest of Part II explains how the inner and outer conditions support this chain. Part III gives you the frameworks to run it.

Common mistakes

Waiting for perfect clarity. You do not need a lifelong mission before you start. A one-semester purpose is enough to begin.

Borrowing someone else's purpose. Social media and culture offer endless ready-made ambitions. If a goal cannot survive your quiet reflection, it may not be yours.

Using purpose as pressure. "I must fulfil my purpose" can become another whip. A mature purpose should make you calmer, not more anxious.

Confusing busyness with purpose. Many activities feel meaningful because they are demanding. Ask instead whether they serve the people and principles you named.

REFLECT

1. Complete these sentences in writing: "I want my attention to serve _____. I want to become the kind of person who _____. I refuse to let my attention be spent on _____."
2. Which "yes" in your life is currently costing you more "no's" than you meant to pay?

ACTION STEP

Write a one-paragraph *Season Purpose* for the next three months. Put it where you will see it during your deepest work sessions.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Purpose is the direction that makes protected attention worthwhile. Attention shapes experience; a meaningful life requires choosing what deserves it; and every meaningful yes rests on many intentional no's.

সারকথা: আগে ঠিক করুন কীসের জন্য বাঁচছেন ও কাজ করছেন; তারপর ঠিক করুন কীভাবে দ্রুত করবেন।

CHAPTER 7

Islamic Foundation of Meaningful Focus

> *"Success without integrity is not meaningful success."*

Before I write this chapter, a caution to myself and to you. The Qur'an is not a productivity manual, and the Sunnah is not a set of life hacks. To use revelation as a technique for time management would be to shrink it. What I offer here is different, and I hope more honest: an account of *values from the Islamic tradition that, in my reading, give the pursuit of focus a moral structure and a limit.* I will separate the religious meaning of each source from the modern application I draw from it, so that no one mistakes my application for a ruling.

I am not a scholar of Islamic law, and nothing in this chapter is a fatwa. Where a question touches a religious ruling, please consult a qualified scholar. I cite each reference so you can look it up directly in a trusted edition; translations vary slightly, and the wording below is given for reading convenience.

1. Niyyah: purify the intention

The source. Sahih al-Bukhari 1 (and also Sahih Muslim 1907), narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab: "The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended."

Religious meaning. Actions are evaluated by the intention behind them. The same outward act can be worship or mere habit, depending on niyyah.

Modern application (my interpretation). Before a focus block, pause and ask *why*. If you are studying medicine to help people and to seek Allah's pleasure through beneficial service, the study session carries a

different meaning from the same session done for status alone. This does not make the session easier, and it does not turn the study itself into a ritual. It gives the effort a direction. It is also the first step, "Purify Your Intention", in the P.U.R.P.O.S.E. framework.

2. Beneficial knowledge and asking for increase

The source. Qur'an 20:114 includes the supplication: "My Lord, increase me in knowledge." In its context, the verse addresses the Prophet (peace be upon him) regarding revelation, telling him not to rush the recitation of the Qur'an before its revelation is completed, and directing him to ask for increase in knowledge. The wording of the supplication is general.

Religious meaning. Knowledge is something we ask Allah to increase, and the verse sits within a discussion of care and patience with revelation.

Modern application (my interpretation). For a student or a lifelong learner, the supplication offers a humble frame: learning is both effort and gift. It cautions against haste. It fits well with the practice of studying slowly enough to understand, and with making du'a before a study block. I do not claim the verse is about study techniques; I claim that its spirit of patience and humility can inform how we approach learning.

3. Be keen on what benefits you, and seek help from Allah

The source. Sahih Muslim 2664, narrated by Abu Hurairah. In one English rendering: "A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone, (but) cherish that which gives you benefit (in the Hereafter) and seek help from Allah and do not lose heart..." The hadith continues with guidance not to say "if only" about what has already been decreed. Translations of the

middle phrases vary ("be keen on what benefits you"; "do not give up" or "do not lose heart").

Religious meaning. The hadith joins effort (be eager for what benefits), reliance (seek Allah's help) and perseverance (do not lose heart), and then teaches acceptance after the fact.

Modern application (my interpretation). It describes almost exactly the sequence that this book keeps returning to: choose what *benefits* (priority), *seek help* (which we place in P.U.R.P.O.S.E. as "Seek Allah's Help") and *keep going* (consistency). It also protects us from a toxic form of productivity: the endless replay of "if I had only..." The hadith teaches us to do our part with energy, and to place the outcome in Allah's hands.

4. Accountability and preparing for tomorrow

The source. Qur'an 59:18: "O believers! Be mindful of Allah and let every soul look to what deeds it has sent forth for tomorrow. And fear Allah, for certainly Allah is All-Aware of what you do."

Religious meaning. A call to taqwa and to self-examination with the Hereafter in view.

Modern application (my interpretation). Muhasabah, honest self-review, has a natural cousin in the daily and weekly review practices of this book. The Qur'anic verse concerns accountability before Allah and is far more than a planning tool; I include the review practices as a way of *living that accountability in ordinary work and study*. If a review habit makes you more anxious and less honest, it has missed its purpose.

5. Consistency in deeds

The source. Sahih al-Bukhari 6464, narrated by Aisha: "Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not

make you enter Paradise, and that the most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little."

Religious meaning. Moderation, sincerity and constancy are preferred over bursts of extreme effort. The reminder that deeds alone do not earn Paradise keeps effort humble.

Modern application (my interpretation). This hadith is one of the moral foundations of Chapter 18, "Consistency Over Random Intensity". A modest, regular practice of protected attention is better than a heroic week followed by collapse. The words "properly, sincerely and moderately" also warn against turning effort into self-punishment.

6. The rights of body, eyes and family

The source. Sahih al-Bukhari 5199, narrated by Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked whether he was fasting all day and standing in prayer all night, and told him: "Do not do that! Observe the fast sometimes and also leave them at other times; stand up for the prayer at night and also sleep at night. Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you and your wife has a right over you."

Religious meaning. Even in worship, extremes that neglect the body, rest and family are discouraged. Each has a right.

Modern application (my interpretation). This is the moral limit of any pursuit of focus. If your "deep work" destroys your sleep, your health or your family, it has crossed a line that the Sunnah itself draws. It is why Chapter 17 is about sleep and recovery, and why the Balance section of this book insists that **family is not an efficiency problem. They have rights.**

7. Time and health as blessings

The source. Sahih al-Bukhari 6412, narrated by Ibn Abbas: "There are two blessings that many people are deceived into losing: health and free time."

Religious meaning. Health and free time are blessings that people take for granted and lose.

Modern application (my interpretation). It invites honest stewardship. When we say "I have no time," it is worth asking whether we have used the free time that was given.

8. Excellence, responsibility and verification

Three additional sources are relevant to professional life and to AI use.

Ihsan in work. Sahih Muslim 1955, narrated by Shaddad ibn Aws, begins: "Verily Allah has enjoined goodness (ihsan) to everything..." The context of the hadith concerns even the slaughter of an animal, and it teaches that excellence and care are required in all things. *Modern application:* it supports the principle of "Execute with Excellence" as a moral quality, not just a performance standard.

Guardianship. Sahih al-Bukhari 893 (also Sahih Muslim 1829): "All of you are guardians and responsible for your wards and the things under your care." *Modern application:* it supports the idea of amanah in leadership, teaching, parenting and professional roles, and it reminds us that AI cannot hold that responsibility for us.

Verification. Qur'an 49:6: "O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify it so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done." And Qur'an 17:36: "Do not follow what you have no sure knowledge of. Indeed, all will be called to account for their hearing, sight, and intellect." *Modern application (my interpretation):* these verses were revealed in specific contexts, and I do not claim they address AI. But their ethic of verification and

accountability for hearing, sight and intellect is a powerful moral frame for how we handle fluent, plausible, unverified output.

Salah is not a productivity interruption

This is where some readers will be most concerned, so I will be direct.

Salah is worship. It is not a "break" to be scheduled around deep work, and it is not a distraction from it. The Qur'an says that "performing prayers is a duty on the believers at the appointed times" (4:103). Believers are described as those who are humble in their prayer (23:1–2), and the Qur'an teaches: "seek help through patience and prayer" (2:45).

A Muslim who arranges a day so that the prayer is squeezed in when convenient has the order reversed. In Deep Focus, **the day is organised around Salah, and not the other way around.** Focus blocks are placed *between* prayer times. Nothing in this book asks anyone to delay, shorten or neglect prayer for the sake of a work session.

Many Muslims describe the rhythm of Salah as giving the day a natural structure: a pause, a reset, a reminder of what is ultimately important. I offer that as an observation about lived experience and not as a scientific claim. Whether the prayer improves anyone's productivity is not the reason we pray. We pray because we are commanded to worship, and everything else follows from that.

Family is not an efficiency problem

A person who protects their attention for work but is emotionally absent at home has failed at something more important than a deadline. The hadith of Abdullah ibn Amr (Bukhari 5199) is explicit that a person's wife has a right over him, alongside the body and the eyes; I extend the principle, as my own interpretation, to the family more widely. In practice, this means:

- Deep Focus blocks must have edges. When the block ends, the person returns, phone away, to those who deserve their presence.

- Parents who are physically present but digitally absent should treat phone-free time with children as a form of Deep Focus.
- Being *interruptible* by family in an emergency is not a failure of focus. It is the correct ordering of values.

Halal, haram and character

Deep Focus is a means. The end must be permissible and beneficial. A brilliant, protected, expertly executed effort in a haram enterprise, or one that deceives, exploits or harms, is not meaningful success in any sense this book recognises. This is why the book's framework moves from *Purpose* through to *Meaningful Impact*, with "Benefit People" in its closing line. For a Muslim professional, that includes honesty in business, fairness in dealing, keeping promises and staying within the halal.

A note for readers who are not Muslim

If you are not Muslim, I hope this chapter is still valuable as a window into a moral tradition that treats attention, time, work, rest and responsibility as matters of the highest seriousness. The practical chapters of this book do not depend on the Islamic references, and you will find that the frameworks work with whatever ethical foundation you bring to them.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Label: Islamic source and author interpretation. The Qur'anic verses and hadiths are cited by reference for religious and ethical guidance, not as scientific evidence. The "Modern application" paragraphs are the author's interpretation. Nothing here claims that modern science "validates" revelation, and nothing here should be read as a religious ruling.

REFLECT

1. What is your intention for the next month of work or study? Can you state it in one sentence that includes benefit to others?
2. Where has your pursuit of productivity been taking from a right that someone else, or your own body, has over you?

ACTION STEP

Choose one focus block tomorrow. Before you start, pause for a moment, renew your intention, and if you wish, make a short du'a. Schedule the block *around* the prayer times, not on top of them.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Islamic tradition gives Deep Focus its moral frame: intention, beneficial knowledge, reliance on Allah, accountability, consistency, balance, excellence and integrity. Salah and family are not obstacles to focus; they define the life that focus is for.

সারকথা: নিয়ত শুদ্ধ করুন, উপকারী কাজে মন দিন, আল্লাহর কাছে সাহায্য চান, ধারাবাহিক থাকুন, আর শরীর ও পরিবারের হক ভুলবেন না। সালাত কাজের বাধা নয়; সালাত জীবনের কেন্দ্র।

CHAPTER 8

Inner Focus: Mindset, Emotion & Identity

> *"You cannot focus on the page if you are running from the feeling that the page gives you."*

Aisha has a research proposal due in ten days. The proposal matters. She knows it matters. Each evening she sits down to write, and each evening something odd happens: she becomes suddenly, intensely interested in reorganising her bookshelf, replying to old emails and reading articles about writing proposals.

She is not lazy, and she is not unintelligent. What she is avoiding is not the *work* but a *feeling*: the uncomfortable, exposed sensation of not knowing whether her idea is good enough. Her attention keeps leaving because the page is where the discomfort lives.

আয়েশা কাজ এড়াচ্ছে না; সে অস্বস্তি এড়াচ্ছে। যে মুহূর্তে অস্বস্তি শুরু হয়, তার মন সবচেয়ে কাছের সহজ কাজটার দিকে দৌড় দেয়।

Most distraction begins inside

Chapter 2 introduced the point that a large share of distraction is internal. Sirois and Pychyl (2013) describe procrastination as, in part, a *short-term mood-repair strategy*: we avoid a task that triggers negative feelings and choose something that relieves them now, at a cost to our future selves. If that is right, then no amount of notification-blocking will fully solve Aisha's problem. She needs an *inner* skill: the ability to stay in contact with discomfort long enough for it to pass, or for the work to become absorbing.

There are three inner layers worth working on.

Layer 1: The wandering mind

Even without any external distraction, attention drifts. Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010), in a well-known study in *Science* that used a smartphone app to sample people's thoughts through the day, reported that people's minds wandered for about 47% of the time sampled, and that people tended to report being less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were focused on what they were doing. This was a large real-world sampling study, and the causal direction of mood and mind-wandering is debated, so it should be read with care. But it supports a humble stance: a wandering mind is normal. The skill is not *never wandering*; it is *noticing and returning*.

That is precisely the capacity that William James praised in the quotation that opened Chapter 2: the faculty of voluntarily bringing a wandering attention back, over and over again.

Practice: Notice, Name, Return. When you catch your mind wandering, do three small things: notice it without self-blame ("I drifted"), name what pulled you if you can ("worry about the deadline"), and return to the anchor of your task. Every return is a repetition, like a curl in the gym for your attention.

There is limited but interesting evidence that structured attention training can help. In a small study, Mrazek and colleagues (2013) reported that a two-week mindfulness programme was associated with improvements in working memory capacity and reading comprehension test performance and with reduced mind-wandering, compared with a nutrition-training control group. The sample was small (48 participants) and the participants were university students, so it should be treated as promising and preliminary, not as a guarantee.

Layer 2: Emotion, avoidance and self-compassion

If avoidance is an emotion-regulation strategy, then the remedy must include kindness, not only rigour. A study by Wohl, Pychyl and Bennett (2010) found that students who forgave themselves for procrastinating

before a first exam procrastinated less before the next exam than those who did not. The lesson, held with the usual caution about a single study, is that harsh self-criticism can fuel the very avoidance it hopes to prevent.

For a Muslim reader, there is a beautiful resonance with the idea of tawbah, of returning after a lapse, with hope in Allah's mercy. It is not a productivity technique, and I do not present it as one. But the *posture* of returning without despair is one that many believers already know from their spiritual lives, and it is worth bringing to our work: we fell short; we return; we do not spiral.

Practice: The Five-Minute Doorway. When you notice yourself avoiding a task, do not promise to work for two hours. Promise yourself five minutes of the *hardest first step*, for example writing the ugliest possible first paragraph. Stay for five minutes. Then decide again. The purpose is to get *through the doorway*, because the dread is usually strongest before you begin.

Practice: Name the Feeling. Before beginning a deep block, complete this sentence in your notebook: "The part of this that feels uncomfortable is _____." Naming reduces the urge to run from a formless feeling. It is a simple practice, not a therapy, and if you find that your difficulty concentrating is persistent, distressing or affecting daily life, please speak with a qualified health professional.

Layer 3: Identity and repeated attention

What we attend to repeatedly shapes what we become. James Clear, in *Atomic Habits* (2018), popularised the idea that lasting habits are best anchored in identity: each action is a small vote for the type of person you wish to become. That is a practice concept rather than a research finding, but it fits well with the moral logic of this book.

Consider two sentences a student might say:

- "I'm trying to focus more."
- "I am someone who protects his study time."

The first sentence describes an effort. The second describes an identity. And identities, when they are grounded in values, are easier to defend at 10 p.m. when a friend calls with something entertaining.

But identity has a shadow. When we define ourselves by output, our self-worth becomes fragile. A day of little output becomes a verdict on us. This is the productivity trap at its most painful. A healthier identity draws worth from character and effort, not from any single day's results. For Muslims, the worth of a person is not measured by output; it is measured by taqwa and conduct. A person who fails at a task today has not failed at being a person.

Building an inner reset

Put these practices together into a compact inner routine before deep work:

```
   1. PAUSE      Sit for 60 seconds. Breathe. No
                      screens.
  2. INTEND     "For whom and why am I doing this?"
  3. NAME       "The uncomfortable part is ______."
4. COMMIT     "For the next 25 minutes, I will only
                      ______."
   5. RETURN     Each time I drift: notice, name,
                      return.
```

Five steps. Under three minutes. This is not a ritual with magical properties; it is a way of *entering* the work deliberately instead of falling into it by accident.

Common mistakes

Fighting the wandering. Trying to stop your mind from wandering usually produces more tension and more wandering. Expect the drift; practise the return.

Shaming yourself into focus. Harsh inner language may feel motivating, but may also strengthen avoidance.

Skipping the emotion. If you only fix the environment, the inner avoidance will find another exit.

Ignoring the need for help. If concentration is a persistent struggle, or is accompanied by low mood, anxiety or other concerns, seek professional guidance. This book is not medical or psychological advice.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Mind-wandering *(Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010, peer-reviewed; large sampling study, correlational).* **Mindfulness and attention** *(Mrazek et al., 2013, peer-reviewed; small sample, preliminary).* **Self-forgiveness and procrastination** *(Wohl et al., 2010, peer-reviewed; specific student sample).* **Identity-based habits** *(Clear, 2018; practice concept).* Together these support a modest, useful message: noticing and returning, kindness to oneself and a values-based identity can help attention, but no single technique works for everyone.

REFLECT

1. What feeling do you most often escape from when you begin a hard task: fear of failure, boredom, confusion, perfectionism?
2. What sentence about yourself, if you believed it, would make protecting your attention easier?

ACTION STEP

Next time you feel the urge to avoid a task, do the Five-Minute Doorway. Afterwards, write one sentence about what happened to the urge.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Much distraction begins inside. Noticing and returning, treating oneself with kindness after lapses and anchoring focus in values-based identity build inner focus that no app can provide.

সারকথা: মন ভেসে যাবেই। দক্ষতা হলো ভেসে যাওয়াটা টের পাওয়া এবং নিজেকে ভদ্রভাবে ফিরিয়ে আনা।

CHAPTER 9

External Focus: Environment & Boundaries

> *"Attention is finite. Design for it."*

Imagine two students with identical intelligence and identical intentions. One studies at a desk in the corner of the room, phone on charge in another room, notification sounds off, a glass of water beside her and a sheet of paper for capturing stray thoughts. The other studies on the bed with her phone next to her, three tabs open and the television murmuring in the next room. The outcome of the evening is, to a large degree, determined before either of them opens a book.

This is the central insight of environment design: **the best time to defeat a distraction is before it arrives.** Willpower is a limited and unreliable defence. Design is quiet and consistent.

Why environment matters more than resolve

Research on habits suggests that a great deal of everyday behaviour is cued by context. Wood and Neal (2007), in *Psychological Review*, review how habits are triggered by stable features of the environment: locations, times, preceding actions. If the context cues checking your phone, you will often check it, whether or not you have decided to. The corollary is helpful: changing the context changes the cue.

Another strand of research, on **implementation intentions**, offers a practical technique. Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2006), in a meta-analysis of 94 independent tests, found that forming "if-then" plans ("If it is 8 p.m., then I will begin my study block at my desk with my phone in the other room") had a medium-to-large effect on goal attainment, with an average effect size of about d = 0.65. This does not mean every plan works. It means that specifying *when and where* you will act is, on average, a more powerful move than merely intending to.

The Focus Environment: five zones

I think of the environment as five zones. In each, the principle is *reduce the number of decisions and the number of pulls.*

```
  ZONE 1  PHONE        Out of reach, out of sight,
                  notifications off
ZONE 2  SCREEN       One task window; unrelated tabs
                       closed
 ZONE 3  SPACE        Consistent place; clear desk;
                  good light; water
 ZONE 4  PEOPLE       Agreements about when you are
               and are not available
 ZONE 5  TIME         Fixed blocks; edges; a planned
                        end
```

Zone 1: The phone

Ward and colleagues (2017) suggested that even the mere presence of one's own phone could reduce available cognitive capacity, though, as noted earlier, replication attempts have produced mixed results. You do not need to resolve that debate to run a simple experiment: for one week, place the phone in another room during your deep block and compare your experience. If you need to be reachable for genuine emergencies, use a "favourites only" setting for calls from family, and turn everything else off.

The phone-distraction strategy in four steps:

1. **Distance.** Physically out of the room, when possible.
2. **Silence.** Notifications off for everything except true emergencies.
3. **Friction.** Log out of the most tempting apps, or move them from the home screen.
4. **Replacement.** Decide in advance what you will do during a break instead of reaching for the phone: water, stretch, walk, dhikr.

Zone 2: The screen

For work that must happen on a computer, close everything unrelated to the task. Use one window, full screen if possible. If you need to research, keep a "research list" beside you and batch your searches for the end of a section. If you are tempted to open a social site, write the urge on your Distraction Capture List instead.

Zone 3: The space

A consistent place cues consistent behaviour. If you can, use one place for deep work and reserve it for that purpose. Where this is not possible, create a simple ritual to "convert" any space: same lamp, same notebook, same first step. For students in shared homes, agree a signal (a closed door, a small sign, headphones) that means "focus block in progress."

Zone 4: The people

Boundaries with people are where Deep Focus most often goes wrong, in two directions. Some people never set any, and are therefore interrupted constantly. Others set them harshly, and damage relationships. The healthy path is *agreements*, not walls.

- **With family:** "From 8:00 to 9:30 I am doing focused work and my phone is off. If there is an emergency, knock or call the landline. At 9:30, I am all yours." The end time is as important as the start.
- **With colleagues:** Agree on response-time norms: urgent matters by phone; standard matters answered within a set window. Post your focus hours on your calendar.
- **With clients or customers:** Set clear communication windows and communicate them respectfully.
- **In a team:** Establish shared "quiet blocks" when meetings are not scheduled. When the whole team protects some time, no one has to protect it alone.

None of this means ignoring genuine emergencies. A system that cannot bend for an emergency is a badly designed system.

Zone 5: The time

Attention has edges. A block with a clear start, a defined outcome and a definite end is easier to enter than an open-ended "I'll work until I'm done." The length should suit the task and the person. There is no magic number. Many people find that blocks of 25 to 90 minutes work, with short breaks between. The right length is the one in which you can stay engaged without strain and finish with something real. Chapter 11 discusses this in the "Protect the Focus Block" step.

The Focus Environment Checklist

Use this before every deep block. It takes two minutes.

FOCUS ENVIRONMENT CHECKLIST

- Phone silenced and placed out of reach (or in another room)
- Notifications off on computer; email and chat closed
- Only the task's tabs and files are open
- Water and a light snack within reach if needed
- The One Big Outcome for this block is written where I can see it
- Distraction Capture List and pen at hand
- Family, colleagues or housemates informed of my block and end time
- Salah time checked; the block ends before it, with margin
- Lighting and posture reasonable; body comfortable
- A first small action is ready (the doorway)

When you can't control the environment

Not everyone has a private room or a quiet office. Some students study in crowded homes. Some professionals work in open-plan offices. In such conditions:

- Use headphones (with or without sound) as a "do not disturb" signal.
- Choose a different time (early morning or after others sleep) for your deepest tasks and use the noisy period for shallow work.
- Use libraries, mosques' quiet corners where permitted, or other quiet spaces for your two or three most important blocks a week.
- Ask for what you need. Many people are willing to help once they understand the reason.

The aim is not perfect conditions; it is the best conditions you can create *for the one thing that matters most today.*

An email and messaging protocol

Messaging is the largest single source of self-inflicted interruption for many professionals and students. A simple protocol:

1. **Turn off previews and badges.** Seeing a message without reading it still costs attention.
2. **Batch.** Check at fixed times, such as two to four windows a day, according to your role.
3. **Triage in one pass.** For each message: *do it now* if it takes two minutes or less; *schedule it* if it needs longer; *delegate it*; or *delete it*.
4. **Write better messages.** State the purpose, the decision needed and the deadline in the first two lines. Fewer back-and-forth messages mean fewer interruptions for everyone.
5. **Use status and auto-replies.** "In a focus block until 11:00. For urgent matters please call." is polite and honest.

6. **Define what is urgent.** Agree with your team that urgent means a phone call.
7. **Close the loop.** When you promise a reply, put it on your list.

The goal is not to ignore people but to answer them in a way that respects their needs and your ability to think.

Common mistakes

Relying on willpower alone. If you rely on your discipline against a system built to interrupt you, you will lose more often than you win.

Over-engineering. A week spent selecting apps is a week not spent doing the work.

Setting boundaries without explanation. People respect a boundary they understand.

Forgetting the end of the block. A boundary that never ends becomes a wall.

> EVIDENCE NOTE
>
> **Environmental cues and habit** *(Wood & Neal, 2007; peer-reviewed review).* **Implementation intentions** *(Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; peer-reviewed meta-analysis; average d ≈ 0.65 across 94 tests, with variation across studies).* **Smartphone presence** *(Ward et al., 2017; peer-reviewed experiment; later replications mixed).* **Focus zones and checklist** *(Original framework and author interpretation).*

REFLECT

1. Which of the five zones is your weakest? What one change would make the biggest difference?
2. Who in your life needs an *agreement* about your focus hours, and what would you say to them?

ACTION STEP

Write one "if-then" plan for tomorrow's most important block: "If it is ___ (time), then I will ___ (action) at ___ (place), with my phone ___ (location)." Then run the Focus Environment Checklist before you begin.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The environment shapes behaviour more reliably than resolve does. Design the five zones (phone, screen, space, people and time), make agreements with those around you, and defeat distractions before they arrive.

সারকথা: ইচ্ছাশক্তির ওপর নির্ভর না করে পরিবেশ সাজান। ফোন দূরে রাখুন, পরিবারকে আগে জানান, আর কাজের শেষ সময়টাও ঠিক করুন।

PART III — THE FRAMEWORKS

Two original frameworks: one for direction, one for execution

CHAPTER 10

The P.U.R.P.O.S.E. Framework

> *Clarity before activity.*

A NOTE ON STATUS

P.U.R.P.O.S.E. is an original applied framework by Abu Talib. It is a synthesis of research, professional practice, learning science, AI-era work patterns and Islamic ethical principles. It is not a scientifically validated diagnostic scale, and it is not an official framework of any researcher, institution or company mentioned in this book. Treat it as a structured way to think and act; adapt it freely.

Chapter 6 argued that purpose has to come before productivity. But *purpose* is a large word, and a Tuesday morning is a small thing. P.U.R.P.O.S.E. is the bridge between them: seven steps that convert a general sense of meaning into a specific, protected, high-quality day.

```
P — Purify Your Intention
U — Understand What Matters
R — Remove the Nonessential
P — Prioritize One Big Outcome
O — Own Your Attention
S — Seek Allah's Help
E — Execute with Excellence
```

The framework is designed to be run at three time-scales: once per season (the big picture), once per week (the plan) and once per day (the single outcome). In each step below you will find the meaning, why it matters, a professional example, a student example, a reflection question and an action step. Non-Muslim readers may replace step S with "Seek Support and Guidance" from whatever source they trust,

whether mentors, community, prayer or reflection in their own tradition, and the framework will still work.

P — Purify Your Intention

Meaning. Before acting, ask why. Clarify the reason behind the work, and, for the believer, align it with sincerity and benefit to others.

Why it matters. Motivation that rests on approval, fear or comparison is brittle. It collapses when the audience leaves. Motivation rooted in a considered reason sustains attention at the hour when nobody is watching. The Islamic frame for this is niyyah, discussed in Chapter 7 with reference to Sahih al-Bukhari 1. The psychological frame, as an interpretation, is that autonomy and meaning support sustained effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Professional example. A financial analyst prepares a report. Before starting, she asks: "Is my aim to impress my manager, or to give the client a truthful, useful picture?" Naming the second aim changes how she treats an awkward data point. She includes it, because honesty is part of her intention.

Student example. A university student studying pharmacology writes on the first page of his notebook: "I study this so that one day I can advise patients correctly and safely." When the material becomes tedious, that sentence gives him a reason to stay.

Reflect. *If nobody would ever see or praise this work, would I still do it, and how would I do it?*

Action step. Write one intention sentence for the day in the format: "I am doing _____ in order to _____ for the benefit of _____."

U — Understand What Matters

Meaning. Distinguish what is important from what is merely urgent, loud or familiar. Clarify the roles, responsibilities and outcomes that count in this season of your life.

Why it matters. Most people have never explicitly ranked what matters. Without a ranking, daily choices default to whatever is nearest. A useful way to understand what matters is to list the *roles* you hold, such as student, parent, employee, founder, child, friend, worshipper, and identify, for each, the one or two outcomes that would make you satisfied at the end of the season.

Professional example. A team leader lists her roles: manager, mentor, wife, daughter, learner. Under "manager" she writes: "Deliver the Q3 product launch." Under "mentor": "Help two junior colleagues to be promotion-ready." Suddenly her weekly calendar, which was full of status meetings, looks unbalanced: nothing in it serves the mentor role.

Student example. A final-year engineering student identifies three season outcomes: pass all exams with a solid understanding of core subjects; complete the final-year project; and maintain daily worship and health. Everything else, including the debate society, the side hustle and the gaming league, is now visible as a choice, not an obligation.

Reflect. *If I could only do three things well in the next ninety days, what would they be, and why those?*

Action step. Write your roles and, for each, one outcome for this season. Circle the two most important.

R — Remove the Nonessential

Meaning. Deliberately stop, simplify or delegate what does not serve your purpose. Say no with clarity and respect.

Why it matters. Attention is finite. Every commitment draws on it, including small ones. A mind carrying thirty open commitments cannot give one of them its full weight. There is research that supports the general principle that unfinished goals persist in the mind and interfere with other tasks (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2011), and a practical implication is that *fewer open loops* means *less background noise*.

Professional example. A consultant reviews his recurring commitments and finds seven weekly meetings that no longer serve a clear purpose. He proposes to convert three into a written update, delegate two and stop two. He reclaims roughly six hours a week for client work.

Student example. A student audits her week and discovers that she is a member of five group chats that generate hundreds of messages each day. She mutes four of them, checks them at fixed times, and keeps one for her study group with a norm that it is for study only.

Reflect. *What am I doing out of habit, guilt or fear of missing out that no longer serves what matters?*

Action step. Complete the Stop / Simplify / Delegate Matrix from Chapter 4 for your five most time-consuming recurring activities. Commit to acting on one within a week.

A word on saying no. A respectful no has three parts: appreciation, clarity and, where possible, an alternative. "Thank you for thinking of me. I can't take this on this month because I'm focused on ___. Could we revisit in ___, or would ___ be a better fit?" Saying no this way protects relationships while protecting attention.

P — Prioritize One Big Outcome

Meaning. Decide on the *single most important result* for the day (and the week) that would make the day a success even if little else got done. Make it specific and finishable.

Why it matters. When everything is a priority, nothing is. One Big Outcome (OBO) focuses effort, reduces the cost of switching and gives a clear finish line. Research on goal setting is helpful here: in their review of decades of work, Locke and Latham (2002) reported that specific and challenging goals tend to lead to higher performance than vague "do your best" goals, provided people have the necessary ability and commitment and receive feedback. An OBO is a *specific* goal for a single day.

What a good OBO looks like.

Vague	Specific OBO
Work on the proposal	Complete a full first draft of sections 1–3 of the proposal (about 1,200 words)
Study chemistry	Explain from memory the mechanism of nucleophilic substitution and solve 10 practice problems, then check answers
Improve the website	Rewrite the pricing page and publish it
Plan the team's strategy	Decide the top three priorities for next quarter and write a one-page summary

Professional example. A marketing manager's OBO for Wednesday is: "Decide the budget split across three channels and send the recommendation to the director." Every meeting invitation is judged against it. Two are declined; one is moved.

Student example. A student's OBO for Saturday morning: "Learn Chapter 5 of physics well enough to explain it aloud without notes and solve six past-paper questions." Notice that it is defined by *output*, not by "study for three hours."

Reflect. *If I could complete only one thing today, what would make the day worthwhile?*

Action step. Use the One Big Outcome Worksheet (Chapter 21). Write tomorrow's OBO tonight, in one sentence, with a way to know when it is done.

O — Own Your Attention

Meaning. Take deliberate ownership of where your attention goes: manage the environment, boundaries, urges and habits that determine it.

Why it matters. If you do not manage your attention, someone else's priorities will. The research surveyed in Chapters 2, 3 and 9 (on interruptions, task switching, environmental cues and implementation intentions) supports a design approach: change the conditions so that focus is the easy default.

Professional example. A software engineer schedules two "maker" blocks of 90 minutes each morning, blocks her calendar, sets her chat status to "focus until 11:00" and agrees with the team that urgent matters come through a phone call. She reviews messages at 11:00 and at 3:00.

Student example. A student leaves his phone in a drawer during study blocks, uses a paper timer and writes stray thoughts on a capture list. In the evening, he handles messages in one twenty-minute window.

Reflect. *Which single change to my environment would most reduce the number of unchosen pulls on my attention?*

Action step. Run the Focus Environment Checklist (Chapter 9) before tomorrow's first deep block.

S — Seek Allah's Help

Meaning. For the believer, acknowledge that effort is ours but outcomes are in Allah's hands, and ask for help, guidance, ease and blessing (barakah) in our work.

Why it matters. Without this step, effort can turn into anxiety and control. The hadith in Sahih Muslim 2664 joins effort and reliance: cherish what benefits you, seek help from Allah, and do not lose heart. The Qur'an also teaches: "seek help through patience and prayer" (2:45). In my own interpretation, this step lowers the burden of perfectionism: I do my part with care, and I do not carry the illusion that I control everything.

This step is *not* a technique for performance. Making du'a is worship and is valuable in itself, whether or not the day goes as planned. I

include it in a framework about work because a believer's work is part of their worship and their life, and it belongs in that frame.

Professional example. Before an important negotiation, a business owner prays two rak'ahs of voluntary prayer, asks Allah for guidance and clarity, and goes in prepared. He accepts the outcome with equanimity, and does not replay "if only" afterward.

Student example. A student makes a short du'a before beginning her study block, asking for understanding and ease, and, after the block, thanks Allah for the progress made. On days when the block goes badly, she reminds herself that effort is what she owns.

For readers who are not Muslim. Consider using this step to seek support from mentors, a trusted community, or a reflective practice from your own tradition, and to remember that not everything is under your control.

Reflect. *Where am I carrying anxiety about an outcome that I could hold with effort and trust instead?*

Action step. Before tomorrow's first block, take thirty seconds to renew your intention and ask for help in your own words.

E — Execute with Excellence

Meaning. Do the work well: with care, skill, attention to detail and integrity. Aim for the quality that a thoughtful person would be proud of, not for perfection that never ships.

Why it matters. Excellence (ihsan) is a value, not just a standard. Sahih Muslim 1955 speaks of Allah having prescribed excellence in everything. In modern professional life, excellence also compounds: careful work earns trust, reduces rework and builds skill. An Islamic reflection on excellence includes honesty: do not cut corners that harm others, and do not misrepresent what you have produced.

Professional example. An accountant completes a financial statement, then checks the numbers a second time with fresh eyes before sending. She notices a transposed digit that would have misled a lender.

Student example. A student finishes a practice problem set and, instead of ticking the box, checks each answer and writes down what error caused each mistake. Her learning deepens because she treated the quality of understanding, not just completion, as the goal.

Reflect. *What would "excellent, not perfect" look like for this piece of work?*

Action step. Define a two-line quality standard for tomorrow's OBO: "This is done when _____ and I have checked _____."

P.U.R.P.O.S.E. at a glance

Step	The question	The output
P Purify Your Intention	Why am I doing this?	One intention sentence
U Understand What Matters	What outcomes define this season?	Roles and season outcomes
R Remove the Nonessential	What will I stop, simplify or delegate?	A pruned commitments list
P Prioritize One Big Outcome	What single result matters today?	One specific OBO
O Own Your Attention	How will I protect this?	A prepared environment
S Seek Allah's Help	Have I done my part and asked for help?	A calm, trusting start
E Execute with Excellence	What does good look like?	A quality standard

The three rhythms

Rhythm	When	What you do
Seasonal	Every 3 months or semester	Run steps P, U, R for your life and work
Weekly	Sunday evening or a set weekly slot	Choose the week's 2–3 outcomes (step P) and place their blocks in the calendar (step O)
Daily	The night before, or morning	Write tomorrow's OBO; renew intention; check environment; begin

Common mistakes

Treating the framework as a checklist to finish. It is a way of thinking, not a form to fill in.

Skipping U and R. Many people jump to "One Big Outcome" and then find that the outcome is chosen from an unexamined list.

Using S as a technique. Seeking Allah's help should not be reduced to a way of guaranteeing results. It is worship and reliance.

Perfectionism in E. Excellence includes finishing.

> REFLECT
>
> 1. Run steps P, U and R for this season, on paper, in twenty minutes. What did you learn?
> 2. What is the single biggest barrier between you and a daily One Big Outcome?

KEY TAKEAWAY

P.U.R.P.O.S.E. moves you from meaning to a single protected outcome: purify your intention, understand what matters, remove the nonessential, prioritise one big outcome, own your attention, seek help, and execute with excellence. It is an original applied framework, not a validated scale.

সারকথা: আগে নিয়ত ঠিক করুন, কী গুরুত্বপূর্ণ তা বুঝুন, অপ্রয়োজনীয় ছাঁটুন, দিনের একটা বড় ফলাফল বেছে নিন, মনোযোগ নিজের হাতে রাখুন, আল্লাহর সাহায্য চান, এবং সুন্দরভাবে কাজটা শেষ করুন।

CHAPTER 11

The D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. Framework

> *Output before activity.*

A NOTE ON STATUS

D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. is an original applied framework by Abu Talib. It synthesises attention research, learning science, professional practice and AI-era work patterns into a repeatable working session. It is not a validated scientific model or a proprietary method of any other person or institution. Where research informs a step, I cite it and describe its limits.

If P.U.R.P.O.S.E. tells you *what* deserves your attention and *why*, D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. tells you *how* to spend that attention well inside one working session. It has nine letters, and it is meant to be run as a cycle:

```
                D  Define the Result
      E  Eliminate Distraction Before It Arrives
              E  Engage One Priority
            P  Protect the Focus Block
              F  Fuel Your Capacity
            O  Output Before Activity
              C  Check & Correct
            U  Use AI Intelligently
            S  Stop, Review & Reset
```

A helpful way to remember the flow: the first four letters (**D.E.E.P.**) are about *preparing and entering* the session; the last five (**F.O.C.U.S.**) are about *sustaining, producing, checking and closing* it.

```
BEFORE              DURING                  AFTER
  D  E  E  P   →   F  O  C  U          →  S
```

```
 define, clear,   fuel, produce,          stop,
engage, protect  check, use AI wisely    review,
                        reset
```

D — Define the Result

Definition. Before you begin, write, in one or two sentences, the specific result the session should produce and how you will know it is finished.

Why it matters. A vague target invites drifting because the mind cannot tell whether it is making progress. "Work on the report" has no finish line; "Write the two-page findings section with three supporting charts" does.

Research connection. Locke and Latham (2002), summarising decades of research on goal setting, reported that specific, challenging goals tend to lead to better performance than vague or "do your best" goals, when people have the ability, commit to the goal and get feedback. Defining the result is the smallest practical application of that finding.

Practical implementation. Complete this sentence: "By the end of this block, I will have _____, and it will be done when _____." Write it on paper and keep it in view.

Entrepreneur example. A founder's block result: "Decide our top three customer segments for the next quarter and write a one-page rationale." Not "think about strategy."

Professional example. A project manager: "Finalise the risk register with owners and dates for all high-severity items and send it to the steering group."

Student example. A student: "Learn how electromagnetic induction works well enough to explain Faraday's law in my own words, and solve five problems without looking at the solutions."

Common mistake. Defining an *activity* ("study for two hours") instead of a *result*. Two hours can pass with nothing to show.

Reflect. *What is the smallest, clearest result that would make this block worthwhile?*

E — Eliminate Distraction Before It Arrives

Definition. Prepare the environment and your mind *before* the session so that distractions are removed, blocked or captured rather than fought in real time.

Why it matters. Willpower is unreliable in the moment of temptation. Preparation is reliable because it is done in advance, when you are calm.

Research connection. Habit research shows that behaviour is often cued by context (Wood & Neal, 2007), and studies of "if-then" planning show that specifying when and where you will act improves goal attainment on average (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). The research on smartphone presence (Ward et al., 2017) is suggestive but has faced mixed replication; I use it only as a reason to *test* phone distance for yourself.

Practical implementation. Run the Focus Environment Checklist (Chapter 9). Place your Distraction Capture List beside you. Decide your "if-then" for the most likely distraction ("If I feel the urge to check messages, then I will write it on the list and continue.").

Entrepreneur example. Before a strategy block, the owner puts the phone in a bag in another room, closes the sales dashboard, and tells the team: "Available by phone for emergencies only, back at 11:30."

Professional example. A finance officer closes the email client, sets a chat status and puts on headphones as a "do not interrupt" signal.

Student example. A student turns on airplane mode, moves the phone to a drawer and logs out of two social apps from the laptop before opening the textbook.

Common mistake. Trying to "be disciplined" in an environment full of triggers. Design first; discipline is the backup.

Reflect. *What is the most likely distraction in my next block, and what will I do about it before I begin?*

E — Engage One Priority

Definition. Give the session to a single priority. One task, one problem, one chapter, one person. Do not mix in "just a quick" other things.

Why it matters. Chapter 3 described switching costs and attention residue (Leroy, 2009; Monsell, 2003). The simplest way to avoid paying them is to switch less.

Research connection. Laboratory research on task switching shows performance costs in speed and accuracy (Monsell, 2003; Rubinstein et al., 2001), and Leroy (2009) suggests those costs can carry over when a previous task is unfinished. The effect sizes vary by task, and nobody should aim for zero switching.

Practical implementation. Choose the single priority for the block, the one that best serves your OBO. Put everything else on the capture list. If you must switch, use a switch note: write the next action for the task you are leaving.

Entrepreneur example. A founder spends a 90-minute block on pricing only. When a supplier message arrives in his mind, he writes "supplier reply" on the list.

Professional example. A lawyer working on a complex brief keeps a single document open, with reference materials in a separate window opened only at set points.

Student example. A student decides that this block is *only* organic chemistry. If she remembers an assignment for another course, she writes it down and continues.

Common mistake. The "just one quick thing" trap, which often opens another chain of tasks.

Reflect. *What is the one priority I am giving this block, and what is on my capture list?*

P — Protect the Focus Block

Definition. Treat the block as a commitment: a defined start, a defined end, and a shield around it, with agreed exceptions for emergencies and for prayer.

Why it matters. A block that is easily broken teaches your mind that it will be interrupted. A protected block, with a clear end, is easier to enter with commitment.

Research connection. There is no scientifically established "perfect" block length, and I would distrust anyone who claims one. What research suggests is that sustained work benefits from breaks: for example, Ariga and Lleras (2011), in *Cognition*, found that brief diversions from a prolonged task could help maintain performance over time, compared with working continuously without breaks. Studies of deliberate practice have also observed that skilled performers often work in limited-duration sessions and not for many hours without rest (Ericsson et al., 1993), though the interpretation of that literature is debated (Macnamara et al., 2014). The practical implication is modest: *use blocks with edges and short breaks, and find the length that works for you.*

Practical implementation. Choose a block length that matches the task and your current capacity. Many people begin with 25 to 50 minutes and extend gradually to 90. Set a timer. Protect the block on the calendar. Plan to end *before* the next Salah, with margin, and treat that timing as fixed.

Entrepreneur example. A business owner blocks 8:30 to 10:00 every morning as "Strategy." He tells his team when he is unavailable and when he will respond.

Professional example. A manager blocks two 90-minute "deep" slots a week on the shared calendar and declines meetings that conflict, offering alternatives.

Student example. A student uses a 45-minute study block followed by a 10-minute break with no phone, walking, water and a few minutes of dhikr.

Common mistake. Blocks with no end. "I'll work until it's done" often means "I will drift until exhausted."

Reflect. *How long is a realistic, protected block for me right now, and where in my calendar does it belong?*

F — Fuel Your Capacity

Definition. Support the physical and mental energy that thinking requires: sleep, food, water, movement, breaks and a manageable emotional load.

Why it matters. You can protect the best conditions in the world and still fail to think if you are exhausted. Sleep loss, in particular, has strong effects on attention: a meta-analysis by Lim and Dinges (2010) found that short-term sleep deprivation had large effects on simple attention measures such as lapses and reaction time, with smaller effects on reasoning accuracy. Chapter 17 explores this in detail.

Research connection. Beyond sleep, I am cautious. Popular claims that willpower is a "battery" that drains during the day (sometimes called ego depletion or decision fatigue) have not held up consistently: a large multi-laboratory preregistered replication (Hagger et al., 2016) found an effect close to zero. Tiredness is real, but the "battery" metaphor may be misleading. What seems safe to say is that physical tiredness, hunger, stress and sleep debt make deep thinking harder, and that scheduling demanding work when you are freshest is sensible.

Practical implementation. Schedule your deepest block in your personal best time of day. Eat and drink sensibly before it. Take a short

walk between blocks. Protect your sleep as an input to focus, and not as a luxury.

Entrepreneur example. A founder moves his strategy block to after Fajr and breakfast, when his mind is clear, and moves email to the mid-afternoon slump.

Professional example. A doctor schedules charting and complex case reviews at her best time and routine administrative work at her lowest energy time.

Student example. A student who used to study until 3 a.m. shifts to earlier sessions and a consistent sleep time, noticing that her recall on practice tests improves.

Common mistake. Treating sleep as the first thing to sacrifice.

Reflect. *When in the day am I sharpest, and what is currently occupying that time?*

O — Output Before Activity

Definition. Make something *early* in the block: a sentence, a diagram, a summary from memory, a first solution. Produce before you consume.

Why it matters. Consumption feels productive but is often passive: rereading, browsing, watching, collecting. Production forces the mind to engage. In learning science, this is closely connected to retrieval practice: producing an answer from memory strengthens learning more than rereading (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006; Dunlosky et al., 2013).

Research connection. Roediger and Karpicke (2006) had students study passages and then either restudy them or take recall tests. On a test five minutes later, restudying did better; but two days and one week later, prior testing produced substantially better retention. Yet the students who restudied felt more confident. Output feels harder and works better in the long run.

Practical implementation. Start the block by writing, drafting or recalling, then consult sources to fill in gaps. For writing tasks, start with a bad first draft. For learning tasks, close the book and write what you remember. For analytical tasks, sketch your hypothesis before looking at the data.

Entrepreneur example. Before reading competitor reports, a founder writes what she believes is the market gap. Then she reads to test her belief.

Professional example. An analyst writes the "so what" of a report first, then builds the evidence.

Student example. A student starts his history revision by writing everything he remembers about the topic on a blank page, then checks his notes.

Common mistake. Beginning with "research" and never reaching production.

Reflect. *What can I produce in the first ten minutes of this block, before I look anything up?*

C — Check & Correct

Definition. Regularly compare what you have produced with the standard you set and with reality, then correct.

Why it matters. Without checking, we mistake fluency for accuracy and effort for quality. Checking is the heart of metacognition, thinking about one's own thinking (Flavell, 1979). It is also where feedback does its work: Hattie and Timperley (2007), in a review in *Review of Educational Research*, describe feedback as one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, when it is directed at the task and gives information about how to improve.

Research connection. Students often misjudge what they know. Kornell and Bjork (2007) describe how learners' study choices and self-assessments can be biased in ways that favour ineffective strategies.

Hence the need for an *external* check: a practice test, an answer key, a colleague's review, data.

Practical implementation. At the midpoint and end of a block, ask: Does my output meet the "done when" criterion? What is the weakest part? What would a critical reader challenge? Correct one thing before you stop.

Entrepreneur example. A founder tests his pricing logic against last quarter's actual sales data before finalising.

Professional example. A team lead has a colleague review a key decision memo for gaps and unstated assumptions.

Student example. A student checks her solutions against the answer key and writes down, for each error, *why* she made it.

Common mistake. Checking only for what you got right.

Reflect. *What evidence do I have that this is correct, and who or what could check it independently?*

U — Use AI Intelligently

Definition. Use AI tools as accelerators inside the block, with clear tasks, human judgment and verification, and not as a replacement for thinking.

Why it matters. AI can compress hours of drafting and organising into minutes. It can also create a false sense of understanding or shift the block from *thinking* to *prompting and pasting.*

Research connection. The evidence discussed in Chapter 5 suggests that AI improves performance inside its competence and can mislead outside it (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023); that greater trust in AI is associated with less critical effort (Lee et al., 2025); and that unrestricted AI access during practice can hurt later learning, while structured tutor-style use mitigated the harm (Bastani et al., 2025).

Practical implementation. Use the three questions: Have I tried first? What am I asking it to do? How will I verify? Assign AI tasks that accelerate (formatting, first-pass summaries, brainstorming options, quizzes) and keep for yourself the ones that require judgment (deciding, prioritising, ethical choices, final claims). Log important AI use in the AI Responsibility Check (Chapter 21).

Entrepreneur example. A founder asks AI to produce ten alternative names for a product line, then chooses using his customer knowledge and values.

Professional example. A consultant uses AI to structure a long document summary, then reads the source sections for the key claims before quoting them.

Student example. A student uses the TRY → THINK → ASK AI → VERIFY → RETRY protocol (Chapter 12): she attempts a problem, asks AI for a hint, and verifies with her textbook.

Common mistake. Opening AI at the first sign of difficulty.

Reflect. *Is my use of AI in this block acceleration or abdication?*

S — Stop, Review & Reset

Definition. End the block deliberately. Take two to five minutes to record what was done, capture what is unfinished with a specific next action, handle the capture list and prepare to rest.

Why it matters. Stopping well makes the next session easier. Research by Masicampo and Baumeister (2011) suggests that making a specific plan for an unfinished goal reduces its intrusion on later tasks. A short review also creates the basis for learning from your own patterns.

Research connection. Beyond the planning finding, this step is a *practice concept*: the daily shutdown ritual is popular in the productivity literature but has less direct experimental testing than some other elements in this book. I include it because the logic is sound and the cost is small.

Practical implementation. Use this five-line close:

```
   1. RESULT      What did I produce? (One line)
   2. NEXT ACTION What is the very next step for
                  tomorrow?
3. CAPTURE     Which items from my capture list need
                 action, and when?
  4. LEARN       What helped focus? What broke it?
5. RESET       Screen off, stretch, water, prayer or
                        rest.
```

Entrepreneur example. At the end of each day, a founder writes tomorrow's OBO and one line about what he learned.

Professional example. A manager closes her day with a two-minute review and sets her status to "offline," deliberately leaving work at the edge of the day.

Student example. A student writes what she can now recall without notes, and what she still cannot, and schedules a review for the day after tomorrow.

Common mistake. Skipping the stop and rolling straight into the next thing, or ending with a vague "that was okay."

Reflect. *What one line will I write at the end of this block that my future self will thank me for?*

The Deep Focus Session, end to end

```
BEFORE (5 min)   D  Write result and "done when"
                  E  Run checklist; phone away;
               capture list ready
                   E  Choose the one priority
                P  Set timer and end time (before
                     Salah)
```

```
                  DURING (25–90 min)
                   F  Water; posture; sleep-supported
                        energy
                     O  Produce first, then consult
                        C  Check midway; correct
                    U  Use AI only for acceleration;
                        verify

 AFTER (5 min)     S  Result. Next action. Capture.
                    Learn. Reset.
```

A day in three lives

Frameworks are easiest to understand in motion. Here are three composite, illustrative days. They are not case studies of real people and not promises of results.

Nadia, a final-year pharmacy student

The night before (P.U.R.P.O.S.E.). Nadia writes her intention: "I study pharmacology so that I can advise patients safely." Her One Big Outcome for tomorrow: "Explain the mechanisms of the main antihypertensive drug classes from memory and solve eight practice questions." She tells her flatmates she will be unreachable from 8:30 to 9:45 and puts her phone charger in the kitchen.

Morning block (D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S.). After Fajr and breakfast she sits at her desk. *Define:* the result is on a card. *Eliminate:* phone in the kitchen, laptop tabs closed, capture list beside her. *Engage:* only pharmacology. *Protect:* timer for 45 minutes, ending well before Dhuhr. *Fuel:* water, a proper breakfast, seven hours of sleep last night. *Output:* she starts by writing everything she remembers about the drug classes on a blank page, then reads the lecture notes to fill the gaps. *Check:* she compares her page with the notes and marks the missing items. *Use AI:* she asks an assistant to quiz her on the classes she found hardest, one question at a time, and checks the answers against her textbook. *Stop:*

she writes what she can now recall, what she cannot, and schedules a recall for two days later.

What matters here. Nadia did not study for a heroic number of hours. She studied with a target, a boundary, a production step and a plan to return.

Kamal, a product manager in a technology company

The night before. Kamal's intention: "To give my team a clear direction for the quarter, so that they can do good work." His OBO: "Decide the three priorities for next quarter and write a one-page rationale." He has agreed with his director that he will have two blocks this week without meetings.

Morning block. *Define:* the one-page rationale, done when three priorities are ranked with reasons and risks. *Eliminate:* chat set to "focus until 11:00"; email closed; headphones on. *Engage:* only the priorities. *Protect:* 90 minutes on the calendar, ending before Dhuhr. *Fuel:* a walk before the block. *Output:* he writes his own draft ranking first, then opens the data. *Check:* he asks a colleague to challenge his draft. *Use AI:* he asks an assistant to list risks he may have missed, and treats the list as hypotheses to verify. *Stop:* he writes the next action and handles his capture list at the 11:00 message window.

What matters here. Kamal used AI to *augment* his thinking after forming his own view, and made the priority decision himself.

Ruma, a freelance designer and mother of two

The night before. Ruma's intention: "To do honest, beautiful work for my clients and to be fully present with my children." Her OBO: "Finish the visual identity concept for the bakery client and send it." Her children are at school from 9:00 to 1:00, which is her protected window.

Work block. *Define:* three logo directions with rationale. *Eliminate:* client messages muted, phone on silent in another room, family aware that she is working. *Engage:* the concept only. *Protect:* 9:15 to 11:00 with a hard stop. *Fuel:* tea and a short walk to the school gate first. *Output:*

she sketches on paper before opening design software. *Check:* she compares her concepts against the client brief and rejects one. *Use AI:* she uses a tool to generate mood-board keywords, and does not use it to generate final designs, in order to keep the work her own. *Stop:* a five-line close, and the message window at 11:15.

Afternoon. When the children come home, her phone goes into a basket for the first half hour. She says "I'm here."

What matters here. Ruma's Deep Focus stops at a boundary she set, and the people in her life are not treated as interruptions.

D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. on one page

Letter	Core move	One-line test
D	Define the result	Can I state "done when" in one sentence?
E	Eliminate distraction early	Is the environment ready before I begin?
E	Engage one priority	Is there only one task in this block?
P	Protect the block	Does it have an end time and a shield?
F	Fuel capacity	Am I rested, fed and at a suitable time of day?
O	Output before activity	What did I produce in the first ten minutes?
C	Check & correct	What is the evidence this is right?
U	Use AI intelligently	Am I accelerating or abdicating?
S	Stop, review & reset	What is tomorrow's first action?

How the two frameworks fit together

```
P.U.R.P.O.S.E.   →   decides WHAT and WHY   (season, week, day)
```

```
D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. →   runs HOW                (each
                    focus block)
```

Use P.U.R.P.O.S.E. to choose the One Big Outcome. Use D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. to make it. Then review and rest, and repeat.

REFLECT

1. Which of the nine letters do you currently skip most often?
2. What would happen to the quality of your work if you ran a full D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. session just three times next week?

ACTION STEP

Run one full session tomorrow using the end-to-end template. Keep it short: 30 to 45 minutes. Afterward, write one thing that worked and one thing you will change.

KEY TAKEAWAY

D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. gives you a nine-step cycle for a single working session: define the result, eliminate distraction early, engage one priority, protect the block, fuel your capacity, produce first, check and correct, use AI intelligently, and stop with a review. It is an original applied framework, informed by research but not a validated model.

সারকথা: কাজ শুরুর আগে ফলাফল ঠিক করুন, বিভ্রান্তি আগেই সরান, একটাই কাজে থাকুন, সময় সুরক্ষিত রাখুন, শক্তি জোগান দিন, আগে তৈরি করুন, যাচাই করুন, এআই বুঝেশুনে ব্যবহার করুন, আর শেষে পর্যালোচনা করে থামুন।

PART IV — APPLICATION

Deep Focus in students, entrepreneurs, professionals, leaders, teachers, creators and parents

CHAPTER 12

Deep Focus for Students

> *Study Time ≠ Learning.*

Return to Rifat, the final-year student from the Introduction. Two and a half hours of "studying." A page of notes he did not write in his own words. A chapter he could not summarise.

The problem was never the two and a half hours. It was what the hours contained: notifications, tab-switching, copying an AI-generated answer and rereading. None of these is a strong way to learn. This chapter is about replacing them with methods that are supported by decades of learning-science research, and about protecting the attention those methods require.

রিফাতের সময় কম ছিল না। তার ঘাটতি ছিল পদ্ধতির। একই আড়াই ঘণ্টা যদি সে অন্যভাবে কাজে লাগাত, তাহলে হয়তো সে চ্যাপ্টারটা নিজের ভাষায় ব্যাখ্যা করতে পারত।

The core principle: Study Time ≠ Learning

We tend to measure studying by the clock: "I studied for four hours." But learning is a change in what you can *do* or *understand* tomorrow, next week and next year. Two students can spend identical hours and end up with very different knowledge, because what they did with those hours differed.

The unsettling finding from learning science is that **some of the methods that feel most productive are the least effective, and some that feel hard are the most effective.** Rereading a chapter feels smooth and reassuring, because the text becomes familiar. But familiarity is not knowledge. Testing yourself feels harder and produces more mistakes in the moment, which is why students often avoid it.

What the research says

The most comprehensive review

Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan and Willingham (2013) reviewed ten common learning techniques in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* and rated their utility based on the available evidence. In their assessment:

Utility rating	Techniques
High	Practice testing; distributed practice (spaced study)
Moderate	Elaborative interrogation; self-explanation; interleaved practice
Low	Summarisation; highlighting or underlining; keyword mnemonics; imagery for text learning; rereading

Two things are worth noticing. First, the most popular student strategies (highlighting and rereading) were rated low utility. Second, the two rated highest (self-testing and spacing) are exactly the ones that require *effort and planning*.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Dunlosky et al. (2013). *Peer-reviewed review article.* It evaluates techniques largely from studies in which students learned specific materials. Utility depends on the learner, materials and criterion tasks, and the review itself notes limits in the evidence for some techniques. It is a strong guide, not a law.

Retrieval practice

In Roediger and Karpicke's (2006) well-known experiments, students read prose passages and then either restudied them or took free-recall tests. Five minutes later, restudying produced slightly better recall. But after two days and after one week, students who had been tested remembered substantially more. Importantly, the students who had

restudied felt more confident about their memory than the tested students, even though they remembered less. **Retrieval is not just a way to measure learning; it is a way to produce it.**

Spacing

Cepeda, Pashler, Vul, Wixted and Rohrer (2006) conducted a quantitative synthesis of 839 assessments of distributed practice across 317 experiments in 184 articles. They found that the interval between study sessions and the length of the delay before the final test operate jointly: the gap that produced the best retention became longer as the retention interval increased. In plain terms, if you want to remember something for months, spreading your study across days and weeks is better than cramming it into one night, and the ideal spacing depends on how long you need to remember.

Self-explanation and understanding

Chi and colleagues (1994) found that students who were prompted to explain the material to themselves as they studied a text showed better understanding than students who read the text twice. Explaining in your own words reveals gaps that passive reading hides.

Interleaving

Rohrer and Taylor (2007), in a study on mathematics practice, found that mixing different types of problems within a practice session (interleaving) led to better performance on a later test than practising each type in blocks. Interleaving often feels harder and slower in the moment, and in that difficulty lies part of its value. The exact benefit depends on the subject and task.

Screens, distraction and reading

Sana, Weston and Cepeda (2013) found that students who did unrelated tasks on laptops during a lecture performed worse on a comprehension test, and so did nearby peers who could see the screen. Separately, Delgado and colleagues (2018), in a meta-analysis in *Educational Research Review*, reported that for informational text, reading

comprehension tended to be better on paper than on screen, particularly under time constraints. That does not mean screens cannot be used for learning. It suggests that, for demanding reading, the medium and the environment matter.

The Student Learning Loop

To convert these findings into a routine, I use a nine-step loop. It is an original applied framework: a practical synthesis, not a validated protocol.

```
DEFINE → LEARN → CLOSE → RECALL → EXPLAIN
                                     ↓
REVIEW LATER ← CORRECT ← CHECK ← PRACTICE
```

1. DEFINE. Write a clear learning target before you start. Not "study Chapter 6", but "By the end I can explain how supply shifts affect equilibrium price, draw the diagram and solve three problems." A good target uses verbs that show ability: explain, solve, compare, derive, apply, critique.

2. LEARN. Learn the material actively, in a focused block with the phone away. Read with a question in mind. Pause after each section and put the main idea into your own words. Avoid highlighting entire pages; instead, write short margin notes in your own words.

3. CLOSE. Close the book, shut the notes and turn off the screen. This step is uncomfortable, and that is the point.

4. RECALL. On a blank page, write everything you can remember about the topic: definitions, steps, examples, diagrams. Don't peek. This is retrieval practice.

5. EXPLAIN. Explain the topic aloud, as if to a younger sibling or a friend who knows nothing about it. Where you stumble, you have found a gap. Explaining is a form of self-explanation (Chi et al., 1994).

6. PRACTICE. Solve problems or answer past-paper questions on the topic. Where possible, mix problem types.

7. CHECK. Compare your recall page and your solutions with the source and the answer key. Mark what you missed.

8. CORRECT. For each error, write the *cause* (a misunderstanding? a careless slip? a missing formula?) and the *fix*. Keep an error log.

9. REVIEW LATER. Schedule short retrieval reviews at increasing intervals, for example the next day, three days later, a week later and two to three weeks later, with the exact gaps adjusted to your exam date. The intervals here are a practical heuristic of mine, informed by the spacing research, and not a formula proven for each subject.

```
Learning target → Study → Close book → Blank-page
recall → Explain aloud
→ Practise problems → Check → Correct errors → Review
later (spaced)
```

A Student Deep Focus Session (45 minutes)

This template puts D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. into a student's language.

Time	Step	What to do
0:00–0:03	Define & prepare	Write the learning target and "done when." Phone in another room. Capture list ready. Water on the desk.
0:03–0:18	Learn (15 min)	Study one section actively. Write margin notes in your own words.
0:18–0:26	Close & recall (8 min)	Close the book. Write everything you remember on a blank page.
0:26–0:32	Explain (6 min)	Explain the concept aloud. Note where you stumble.

Time	Step	What to do
0:32–0:40	Practise & check (8 min)	Solve 2–3 problems. Check answers.
0:40–0:45	Correct & stop	Write errors and causes. Set the next review date. Capture list. Reset.

Then take a proper 10-minute break: walk, stretch, drink water, make dhikr. No phone.

For deeper subjects, chain two or three sessions, with breaks in between. If your concentration is short right now, start with 25 minutes and extend over the weeks.

Deep Reading

Students increasingly read in fragments: a paragraph, a scroll, a swipe. Deep reading is a skill that needs to be rebuilt deliberately.

- **Read with a question.** Before you begin, write two or three questions the text might answer.
- **Preview first.** Skim headings, the first and last paragraphs, and any summary.
- **Read in small sections, pause, restate.** After each section, close your eyes or look away and say the main point.
- **Write in your own words.** One sentence per section.
- **Read the hard parts slowly.** Slow down where you feel confusion. That is where the learning is.
- **Prefer paper for demanding text, where you can,** and for screens, use a single window without notifications.

The Exam Preparation System

Exam preparation is where the misconception that "more hours equals better results" causes the most damage. A well-designed system uses time as a resource to be spread, tested and corrected.

Phase 1: Map (Week 1)

Convert the syllabus into a list of learning targets. Group them by difficulty and weight. Mark each as Red (don't understand), Yellow (partly) or Green (confident), using a quick self-test, not a feeling.

Phase 2: Learn and lock (Weeks 2 to 6, or as the timeline allows)

Each week, work through the loop on new topics, in sessions of the kind above. Two out of every five sessions each week should be *review* of earlier topics, using retrieval only.

Phase 3: Practice under conditions (the last third)

Use past papers and timed practice. Mix topics. After each paper, do a thorough error analysis: which topics, which kinds of mistakes, which time-management issues?

Phase 4: Final week

Do fewer new topics. Focus on your error log, weak areas and summary sheets you built from memory. Take mock exams under realistic conditions. Keep your sleep and Salah routine intact.

The night before

Do a light review, prepare your materials, and *sleep*. Chapter 17 explains why. Diekelmann and Born (2010), in a review in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, describe how sleep supports the consolidation of memory. Sacrificing sleep to cram may feel heroic, but it can undermine the very memory you are trying to strengthen.

THE EXAM PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- Syllabus converted into learning targets with Red/Yellow/Green status
- Weekly schedule with sessions and review sessions in fixed blocks
- Error log kept and reviewed weekly
- At least three timed practice papers or mocks completed under realistic conditions
- Spaced retrieval reviews scheduled for all topics
- Sleep, meals, movement and Salah maintained through the exam period
- Phone plan agreed with family or friends
- AI used only under the study protocol below

The AI Study Protocol

AI is a powerful study companion for those who use it well, and a trap for those who use it to skip the struggle. The protocol is:

> **TRY → THINK → ASK AI → VERIFY → RETRY**

TRY. Attempt the problem, question or explanation yourself first. Write your best attempt, even if it is wrong. Time-box it: at least 5 to 10 minutes for a moderate problem.

THINK. Look at where you are stuck. What exactly do you not understand? Write the question in one sentence.

ASK AI. Ask for a *hint*, an *explanation of the concept*, a *quiz* or a *check of your reasoning*, not the finished answer. Use prompts like these:

- "Here is my attempt at this problem. Don't give me the answer. Tell me which step looks wrong and give me a hint."
- "Quiz me on Chapter 4 with one question at a time. Wait for my answer, then tell me what I missed."
- "I'll explain this concept in my own words. Tell me what I got wrong or left out."
- "Give me three practice problems of increasing difficulty on this topic, without solutions. I'll check my answers afterwards."

VERIFY. Check the AI's explanation against your textbook, class notes or a teacher. AI can be confidently wrong. The Qur'anic ethic of verifying information (49:6) and of not following what we have no sure knowledge of (17:36) is a moral frame for this habit, as an application and not as a legal interpretation.

RETRY. Close the AI and solve a fresh problem or re-explain the concept without help.

Acceptable and helpful	Risky or unacceptable
Asking for a hint after a genuine attempt	Asking for the full solution before trying
Generating practice questions and quizzes	Copying AI-generated answers into notes or submissions
Explaining a concept in a different way	Using AI for graded work where it is not allowed
Checking your reasoning or grammar	Accepting the answer without verification
Summarising *after* you have read	Replacing reading with summaries

Integrity note. Follow your institution's rules on AI use. Presenting AI-produced work as your own where it is prohibited is dishonest, and honesty is not optional for a person of character.

Recall Bastani and colleagues' (2025) study from Chapter 5: in a high school mathematics setting, students with unrestricted AI access performed better while practising with it and worse on a later exam taken without it, while a version designed to give hints and not answers largely reduced that harm. The protocol above is built on the same logic.

The Phone Distraction Strategy for Students

Combine the five-zone design from Chapter 9 with a few student-specific moves:

1. **Distance.** Phone in another room during every focus block. If you use it for a timer, use a physical timer instead.
2. **Batching.** Choose two or three fixed times a day to check messages, for example after lunch and after Isha.
3. **Group agreements.** In study groups and family group chats, agree on "study hours" when nobody expects replies.
4. **Replace, don't just remove.** Decide in advance what fills your break: a walk, water, dhikr, a few pages of a non-study book.
5. **Ask for help.** If you cannot do it alone, ask a parent or friend to hold your phone during blocks. This is a commitment device, not a punishment.
6. **Capture, don't chase.** Keep a piece of paper for urges: "check score", "reply to ___", "look up ___".

The Student Scorecard

At the end of each week, rate yourself from 1 (rarely) to 5 (consistently). This is a **reflection tool, not a validated psychological or educational assessment**.

#	Statement	1–5
1	I began most study sessions with a clear learning target	

#	Statement	1–5
2	I studied with my phone out of reach	
3	I used recall and self-testing more than rereading	
4	I explained topics aloud or in my own words	
5	I practised with problems or past papers	
6	I corrected errors and wrote down their causes	
7	I scheduled and completed spaced reviews	
8	I tried before I asked AI, and I verified what it said	
9	I slept regularly and protected my health	
10	I kept my prayers, family time and responsibilities in balance	

Reading your total (out of 50): there are no "grades". Look at your two lowest items and choose one to improve next week.

The Weekly Learning Review

Spend 20 to 30 minutes at the end of each week:

1. **What did I learn?** List five things you can now explain without notes.
2. **What is still weak?** List the topics on your error log with the most repeated mistakes.
3. **What worked?** Which methods, times and places produced the best sessions?
4. **What broke my focus?** Identify the top two distractions and one countermeasure for each.

5. **Next week's targets.** Three outcomes. Place the sessions in your calendar. Add review sessions.
6. **Rest and balance.** Did I sleep, eat, move and pray as I should? Did I give time to family and friends?

Note-taking that supports recall

Notes are not a record of what the teacher said; they are raw material for retrieval. A simple, question-based approach:

1. **During class or reading**, write short notes in your own words on the right side of the page, leaving the left column blank.
2. **Within 24 hours**, write a question in the left column for each block of notes: "Why does inflation reduce the real value of savings?" "What are the steps of glycolysis and where is ATP produced?"
3. **For revision**, cover the right side and answer the left-column questions from memory. Check. Mark the ones you missed.

This is a variant of well-known question-based note-taking systems. It is a practical method rather than a validated protocol, but it puts the two most reliable learning principles, retrieval and spacing, into the structure of the notes themselves.

Subject-specific guidance

The Learning Loop is general. A few adjustments help in different subjects.

Mathematics and quantitative subjects. The unit of learning is the *problem*. After studying a worked example, close it and reproduce the solution yourself. Practise interleaved sets that mix problem types (Rohrer & Taylor, 2007), so that you have to *choose the method*, not just apply the one from this week's chapter. Keep an error log of mistake types: concept, procedure, arithmetic slip, misread question.

Sciences. Combine concept explanations with problem-solving. For each concept, be able to state it in words, draw or diagram it, and apply it to a novel situation. Use self-explanation: "Why does this step follow?"

Languages. Spread practice across days. Use recall (translate from memory, speak without a script, write without a dictionary), then check. Prefer short daily sessions over one long weekly session, consistent with the spacing research.

Humanities and social sciences. Read actively with questions; write a one-paragraph summary from memory after each reading; practise constructing arguments, not just recalling facts. Practise essay planning under time limits.

Memorisation-heavy content (definitions, anatomy, dates, vocabulary). Use retrieval with spaced repetition: attempt recall, check, and re-attempt the missed items sooner than the known ones. Meaningful organisation (grouping, stories, diagrams) helps, but retrieval still does the heavy lifting.

Religious memorisation. For Qur'an memorisation and revision, the guidance of a qualified teacher comes first. What I can say from a general learning perspective, without claiming it as religious guidance, is that regular, spaced revision and recitation from memory are consistent with the principles of retrieval and spacing described in this chapter.

Practical and professional skills. Practise the skill deliberately, get feedback, and reflect on what changed. Do not confuse watching demonstrations with being able to perform.

Study groups that work

A study group can be a powerful tool for explaining, questioning and correcting one another, or an excuse for social time. To keep it the former:

- **Prepare first.** Each person studies the topic alone before the meeting.
- **Agree the agenda.** Two or three topics, a time limit and a phone rule.
- **Take turns explaining.** One person explains a concept without notes; others ask questions.
- **Quiz one another.** Use past-paper questions or those you wrote yourselves.
- **End with actions.** Each person names what they will revise before the next meeting.

What to do when you procrastinate

Recall from Chapter 8 that procrastination is often a strategy for escaping an uncomfortable feeling. Try, in order:

1. **Name the feeling** ("I'm scared this will show I don't understand").
2. **Shrink the task** to a five-minute doorway: open the problem set and attempt only the first question.
3. **Change the place** or the time.
4. **Ask for a companion:** study alongside a friend, in silence, for one block.
5. **Forgive and resume.** A missed session is data, not a verdict (Wohl et al., 2010).

Exam day

- **The night before:** light review of your error log, then sleep. Prepare materials, route and timing.
- **Morning:** eat sensibly; make your prayers; avoid last-minute panic conversations.

- **In the exam:** read the whole paper; plan time; begin with questions you can answer; capture stray worries on a scrap of paper and return to the question; check answers if time remains.
- **Afterwards:** do not conduct a long post-mortem with friends before your next exam. Rest, and turn to the next task.

For a believer, a short du'a before the exam and trust in Allah after preparing is consistent with the framework of effort and reliance discussed in Chapter 7.

A sample two-week study rhythm

This is an example only. Adjust the subjects, block lengths and days to your situation.

Day	Block 1 (new learning, 45 min)	Block 2 (practice, 45 min)	Evening (retrieval review, 20 min)
Sat	Subject A: new chapter	Subject A: problems	Review: nothing yet (new week)
Sun	Subject B: new chapter	Subject B: problems	Subject A recall (day 1)
Mon	Subject C: new chapter	Subject C: problems	Subjects A and B recall
Tue	Subject A: next chapter	Subject A: mixed problems	Subject C recall
Wed	Subject B: next chapter	Subject B: mixed problems	Subject A recall (day 4)
Thu	Weak topics from error log	Timed past-paper section	Subjects B and C recall
Fri	Rest, family and worship; light review only		

Day	Block 1 (new learning, 45 min)	Block 2 (practice, 45 min)	Evening (retrieval review, 20 min)
Sat to Fri (week 2)	Repeat, adding review of week-one topics at day 7 and day 10	Include a timed mock	Retrieval-only evenings

For parents and teachers of students

If you support a student, the most useful things you can do are unglamorous:

- **Help the environment.** A quiet place, a shared rule about phones during study hours and the same rule applied to adults.
- **Ask about targets, not hours.** "What are you trying to be able to do by the end of the session?" is better than "How long did you study?"
- **Offer to be the listener.** A student who explains a topic aloud to you is doing valuable self-explanation, even if you do not understand the subject.
- **Protect sleep.** It is one of the most useful things a family can do in exam season.
- **Keep perspective.** A student who feels that love is conditional on results will not focus better. They will be more anxious.

A note for students who feel behind

If you have spent years studying in fragmented ways, do not despair. The methods above can be started at any time, with a single session. You do not need to be perfect. You need to begin with one target, one protected block and one attempt at recall.

আপনি যদি পিছিয়ে থাকেন, তাহলে আজ থেকেই শুরু করুন। প্রথম দিনেই সব ঠিক করতে হবে না। একটা লক্ষ্য, একটা নিরিবিলি সময়, আর একবার বই বন্ধ করে মনে করার চেষ্টা, এটুকুই শুরুর জন্য যথেষ্ট।

REFLECT

1. Which of your current study habits feel productive but might be low-utility (rereading, highlighting, copying)?
2. What is one topic you could test yourself on right now, without notes? What does the result tell you?

ACTION STEP

Tonight, take one topic you studied this week. Close everything and write what you remember on a blank page for five minutes. Then check. Schedule a second recall for three days from now.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Study time is not learning. Use clear targets, active recall, spaced review, explanation and problem practice; protect your focus with a phone strategy; use AI with the TRY → THINK → ASK AI → VERIFY → RETRY protocol; and protect sleep and balance.

সারকথা: কতক্ষণ পড়লেন, সেটা নয়; কী মনে রাখতে পারলেন এবং কী বুঝিয়ে বলতে পারলেন, সেটাই আসল। বই বন্ধ করে মনে করুন, নিজের ভাষায় বলুন, ভুল থেকে শিখুন, আর বিরতি দিয়ে আবার ঝালিয়ে নিন।

CHAPTER 13

Entrepreneurs & Business Owners

> *The business needs your best thinking more than it needs your constant availability.*

Return to Tanvir, the e-commerce owner from Chapter 4, who replies to everything and strategises about nothing. His problem is common to founders: the business needs him in two roles at once. As the *operator*, he is reactive and available. As the *strategist*, he needs long stretches of quiet. The operator role is loud and constant; the strategist role is silent and easily starved.

What Deep Focus means for an entrepreneur

For a founder or owner, Deep Focus means **protecting enough uninterrupted thinking time to make the few decisions that determine the company's direction,** while building a system in which the routine work does not depend on you being reachable every minute.

Software entrepreneur and essayist Paul Graham described, in a 2009 essay, the difference between a "maker's schedule" and a "manager's schedule": managers divide their day into hours and meetings; makers need half-day or longer blocks, because a single meeting can wreck an afternoon. It is an essay by a practitioner, not a study, but it captures something that many founders recognise.

Profile: Entrepreneurs and business owners

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Protected time for strategy, product, pricing, key relationships and hard decisions; a business that does not need you every minute

Dimension	Description
High-value work	Choosing the market and offer; pricing; hiring and developing key people; sales conversations that matter; building systems; financial clarity; studying customers
Typical distractions	Constant customer and team messages; firefighting; social media; "just one more feature"; new opportunities; comparing with competitors
How to protect focus	Daily strategy block; response windows; delegate and document; weekly review; one dashboard, not five; a "not now" list for ideas
What to measure	Outputs, not hours: decisions made, offers shipped, deals advanced, processes documented, cash-flow clarity, customer feedback collected
Where AI helps	Market research drafts, competitor summaries, customer-message classification, first drafts of copy, spreadsheets and analysis support, automating routine replies
Where human judgment stays essential	Strategy, pricing, ethics, hiring, customer relationships, brand values, final decisions, accountability

The Founder's Week

A founder's week can be designed around three types of time:

```
BUILD TIME     Protected blocks for strategy, product
                  and key decisions
  RELATE TIME    Customers, team, partners, mentors
              (scheduled, not scattered)
  RUN TIME       Operations, approvals, messages in
                  fixed windows
```

A sample structure, adaptable to your context and prayer times:

Time of day	Type	Purpose
Morning block (90 min)	**Build**	One Big Outcome for the day (strategy, product, offer, writing)
Late morning	**Run**	Message window; approvals; quick decisions
Midday		Prayer, meal, rest
Early afternoon	**Relate**	Team check-in, customer calls, partner meetings
Late afternoon	**Run**	Second message window; handovers
Evening		Family and rest. A five-minute plan for tomorrow.

Four moves for owners

1. Separate the operator from the strategist

At least three mornings a week, give the strategist the first block of the day. The operator can wait until 11:00 for anything short of an emergency.

2. Build a "not-me" system

If everything depends on you, you cannot protect focus. Document recurring decisions into simple rules: "Refund requests below X: approve." "Supplier delays beyond Y days: escalate." Train and trust the team, and review outcomes weekly.

3. Create a "Not Now" list

Founders are visionary, and visionaries are opportunity magnets. Every new idea feels urgent. Keep a written "Not Now" list. Review it monthly. Most ideas lose their shine in a month; a few become priorities.

4. Say yes to fewer, better opportunities

Use P.U.R.P.O.S.E. at the business level: What is our purpose? What outcomes define this season? What do we stop? A young business rarely fails from too little activity.

A worked example

Tanvir applied the Founder's Week for eight weeks. He did not become less busy overnight. But he did the following:

- Set a 90-minute morning block on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday for pricing and acquisition strategy.
- Created a response guide so that his assistant could answer common customer messages.
- Moved supplier calls to a fixed slot on Monday afternoons.
- Kept a Not Now list, and cut three side projects.

Within two months he had rebuilt his pricing structure and launched one new acquisition channel. I want to be careful here: this is an *illustrative scenario*, and I am not promising that these steps will grow any particular business. What it illustrates is the *shift* from responding to deciding, which is the shift Deep Focus supports.

তানভীর ব্যবসা থেকে সরে যায়নি; সে শুধু নিজের সেরা সময়টা সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সিদ্ধান্তের জন্য আলাদা করে রেখেছে।

Integrity and the entrepreneur

Deep Focus, in the hands of a business owner, is an amplifier of character. Focus on a business that misleads customers, exploits workers or violates halal boundaries is not something this book endorses. The Islamic ethics of honest dealing, keeping trusts (amanah) and fairness are, for a Muslim entrepreneur, the boundary within which excellent, focused work is meaningful. I say this as a matter of principle, not as a marketing point.

AI for the entrepreneur

- **Use AI to accelerate:** market scans, customer feedback categorisation, drafting ads or replies, spreadsheet formulas, summarising research.
- **Keep for yourself:** which customers to serve, what to charge, whom to hire, what to promise, what is fair.
- **Verify:** any statistic, legal or tax claim, competitor claim or financial projection produced by AI.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Industry and practitioner sources. Microsoft's Work Trend Index (2025) describes fragmented workdays among knowledge workers (industry research); Graham's maker/manager essay (2009) is a practitioner's observation. I know of no rigorous evidence that a specific founder schedule *causes* business success, so treat these designs as hypotheses to test in your own context.

REFLECT

1. How many hours last week did you spend on the two or three decisions that determine your business's direction?
2. What decision could you turn into a rule, so that it no longer needs you?

ACTION STEP

Block one 90-minute strategy slot for tomorrow morning. Write its One Big Outcome tonight. Tell your team when you will be available afterwards.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Owners must protect time for the few decisions that shape the business, build systems that do not depend on constant availability, and say no to distractions disguised as opportunity, all within integrity and amanah.

সারকথা: ব্যবসায়ীর সেরা সময় দরকার সিদ্ধান্তের জন্য, প্রতিটি বার্তার উত্তরের জন্য নয়। সিস্টেম বানান, অন্যকে বিশ্বাস করুন, আর সততার সীমার ভেতরে কাজ করুন।

CHAPTER 14

Professionals, Job Holders & Leaders

> *Meaningful impact comes from what we finish, not from how quickly we reply.*

Farhana, the logistics manager from Chapter 3, moves between meetings, email and messages. Her manager values responsiveness. Her team values access. Her own values include quality thinking. These pressures collide, and the individual professional cannot resolve them alone: focus at work is partly a *team and organisational* design problem.

This chapter covers four groups whose Deep Focus problems differ: job holders, corporate professionals, leaders and managers, and professional specialists such as doctors, engineers and researchers.

Job holders and corporate professionals

Deep Focus means delivering the few pieces of work that matter most for your role, at high quality, despite an environment of meetings, chat and email.

Dimension	Description
High-value work	The 2–3 deliverables that define your performance: analyses, designs, proposals, code, reports, client work, learning your craft
Typical distractions	Meeting overload; chat and email pings; open-plan noise; ad hoc requests; unclear priorities; "quick questions"
How to protect focus	Calendar-blocked focus hours; response windows; a clear weekly priorities list agreed with your manager; headphones as signals

Dimension	Description
What to measure	Deliverables completed, quality checks passed, decisions supported, learning milestones
Where AI helps	Drafting, summarising documents and meetings, spreadsheet and code assistance, organising notes, preparing agendas
Where judgment stays essential	Interpreting context, ethics, client relationships, final sign-off, accountability for errors

Five practices for the individual

1. **Agree on priorities with your manager.** Ask: "If I could deliver only two things this month, which should they be?" Clarity here protects you from a life of undifferentiated urgency.
2. **Block focus hours in the calendar,** and treat them as real appointments. Make them visible to colleagues.
3. **Batch messages.** Check email and chat at set times: for example, three or four windows a day, suited to your role.
4. **Manage the meeting load.** For each meeting, ask: Do I need to attend? Is there an agenda? Could this be a message? Can I send my input in advance?
5. **Use the capture list and switch notes** (Chapter 3) so that unavoidable interruptions cost less.

If you fear that batching messages will look unresponsive, discuss it with your team first: a norm agreed in advance is easier than a personal policy.

Conversations to have

- **With your manager:** "To deliver X at high quality, I need two 90-minute blocks a week without meetings. Can we try this for a month and review results?"

- **With colleagues:** "I'm checking messages at 11:00, 2:00 and 4:30. For anything urgent, please call."

Leaders and managers

The single most influential factor in whether people can focus at work is what leaders *model* and *reward.* A leader who sends messages at midnight and praises instant replies teaches the team that attention belongs to whoever pings first.

Deep Focus for leaders means two things: protecting your own time for the thinking that leadership requires, and *designing conditions* in which your team can protect theirs.

Dimension	Description
High-value work	Setting direction; making decisions; developing people; removing obstacles; building culture; important conversations
Typical distractions	Constant availability; meeting chains; escalations; being the default answer-giver; performance of busyness
How to protect focus	Decision blocks; delegation with clear ownership; "office hours"; written updates instead of status meetings
What to measure	Team outcomes, quality of decisions, clarity of priorities, retention and growth of people, meeting hours reduced
Where AI helps	Summaries of long threads, meeting notes, drafting communications, analysing feedback themes, scenario exploration
Where judgment stays essential	People decisions, ethics, fairness, difficult conversations, trade-offs, accountability

The Team Focus Charter

A team can agree on a few simple rules. Here is a sample charter, to be discussed and adapted:

> TEAM FOCUS CHARTER (SAMPLE)
>
> 1. **Focus blocks.** Each person has two protected blocks per week, visible on the calendar. Meetings are not scheduled over them, except in emergencies.
> 2. **Response norms.** Urgent = phone call. Same day = chat. Within 24 hours = email.
> 3. **Meeting hygiene.** Every meeting has a purpose, an agenda and a decision or output. Default length 25 or 50 minutes. If it can be a message, it is a message.
> 4. **After-hours.** Messages sent outside working hours do not require a reply until the next working day, unless marked urgent through the agreed channel.
> 5. **Respect for prayer and family time.** Meetings avoid prayer times and family commitments, and nobody has to justify them.
> 6. **Review.** We review the charter monthly and adjust.

The Microsoft Work Trend Index (2025) reports that meetings after 8 p.m. rose 16% year over year in its telemetry, and that 48% of surveyed employees described their work as chaotic and fragmented. Those are industry data, and I do not claim to know the cause in any given company. But they suggest that *team norms* are worth designing on purpose, and not leaving to drift.

Redesigning meetings

Meetings are where a great deal of organisational attention is spent. A few practical rules turn many meetings from a drain into a tool:

- **Purpose first.** Every meeting states its purpose in one line: to decide, to inform, to brainstorm, to align or to solve a problem. If the purpose is only "to update each other," consider a written update.
- **Right people, right length.** Invite people who need to decide or contribute. Use 25 or 50 minutes, not 30 or 60, so people have a moment to breathe between meetings.
- **Pre-reads.** Send materials in advance and start with the decision needed.
- **One owner, one note-taker.** Close with decisions, owners and dates, in writing.
- **Camera-off and phone-down norms.** In-person or on video, agree that attention belongs to the meeting for the time it lasts.
- **A weekly "meeting audit."** Once a month, review recurring meetings: keep, shorten, merge or end.
- **Protect prayer and family time.** Schedule around them, not across them.

If you are not the person who controls the calendar, propose a small experiment: for one month, try one meeting-free half-day per week and see what changes.

Leading with presence

A leader's Deep Focus also includes the people in front of them. When a team member comes to you with a real problem, the greatest gift is your full attention. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught that each of us is a guardian and will be asked about those in our care (Sahih al-Bukhari 893; Sahih Muslim 1829). For a leader, guarding the attention of the team, including your own attention to them, is part of that trust. That is my application of the hadith to leadership, and not a ruling.

Doctors, engineers and researchers

Some professions have a special relationship with interruption, because errors carry serious consequences.

Doctors and clinicians

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Full attention to the patient and to complex clinical reasoning; disciplined handling of interruptions
High-value work	Diagnosis, clinical decisions, communication with patients, safe procedures
Typical distractions	Pagers and alerts; charting demands; interruptions; fatigue
How to protect focus	Protected time for complex cases; interruption protocols for critical tasks; structured handovers
What to measure	Safe, accurate care; patient understanding; documentation quality
Where AI helps	Drafting notes, literature retrieval, administrative summaries, under institutional policy
Where judgment stays essential	Diagnosis, treatment decisions, ethics, consent, accountability

Engineers

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Sustained thinking about design, systems and debugging
High-value work	Architecture, design decisions, careful implementation, review
Typical distractions	Chat, meetings, context switching, alerts
How to protect focus	Maker blocks; batched code reviews; clear on-call boundaries

Dimension	Description
What to measure	Design quality, defects prevented, deliverables shipped
Where AI helps	Code drafts, test generation, documentation, exploring options
Where judgment stays essential	Architecture, safety, security, code review, trade-offs

Researchers

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Long uninterrupted time for reading, thinking, analysis and writing
High-value work	Framing questions, designing studies, analysing data, writing
Typical distractions	Email; administrative load; constant literature alerts
How to protect focus	Weekly writing days; protected reading time; batched admin
What to measure	Written output, analyses completed, quality of questions
Where AI helps	Literature discovery, drafting, analysis code, transcription
Where judgment stays essential	Question framing, interpretation, ethics, integrity of claims

In clinical settings, interruptions have been studied as a safety issue. For instance, Westbrook and colleagues (2010), in *Archives of Internal Medicine*, found that interruptions during medication administration by nurses were associated with a higher risk and severity of errors. That is one setting, and I do not generalise from it beyond the principle that in safety-critical work, *protecting attention during critical steps is a*

matter of safety, and not just of productivity. Decisions about protocols belong to institutions and clinicians, not to this book.

Common mistakes for professionals

Going solo. An individual who blocks time without telling anyone may look unreachable. Agreements beat secret rules.

Confusing responsiveness with value. Speed of reply is one virtue. Quality of thinking is another. Neither should be sacrificed entirely.

Leaders who preach and don't practise. If you praise focus but send messages at midnight, your team will follow what you do.

Treating meetings as the enemy. Good meetings are among the highest-value uses of time. The aim is fewer, better meetings.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Team norms and workplace fragmentation. *Industry research* (Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025) and *peer-reviewed studies* of interruptions (Mark et al., 2008; Westbrook et al., 2010). The Team Focus Charter is an *original applied tool*: it has not been tested in controlled trials, and results will vary by organisation.

REFLECT

1. What are the two deliverables that define your performance this month? How many focus hours did you give them last week?
2. If you lead a team: what behaviour of yours teaches people that attention belongs to whoever pings first?

ACTION STEP

Draft a three-line focus agreement (blocks, response norms, meeting rule) and share it with one colleague or your team for feedback this week.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For professionals, Deep Focus is both a personal practice and a shared norm. Agree on priorities, block time, batch messages, design meetings well, and, if you lead, model and reward attention. In safety-critical fields, protecting attention is a safety matter.

সারকথা: অফিসে মনোযোগ রক্ষা একা করা যায় না; দলের সঙ্গে নিয়ম ঠিক করুন। নেতা যেভাবে আচরণ করেন, দল সেভাবেই শেখে।

CHAPTER 15

Teachers, Creators, Parents & Lifelong Learners

> *The people we serve deserve our full attention, and so does the work we make for them.*

This chapter is for four groups whose Deep Focus is closely tied to *other people's* growth and to their own creative and personal depth: teachers and educators, creators and freelancers, parents, and lifelong learners.

Teachers and educators

Nusrat, the literature teacher from Chapter 1, has forty-two essays to grade. Her problem repeats across the profession: teaching demands *presence* in the classroom and *depth* outside of it, and both are under pressure from administrative work, messages from parents and the constant hum of devices in her students' pockets.

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Full presence in the classroom; deep preparation; thoughtful, individual feedback; teaching students *how* to focus
High-value work	Designing learning targets; explaining concepts clearly; feedback on student work; mentoring; modelling intellectual habits
Typical distractions	Administrative emails and forms; parent messages; classroom device use; back-to-back periods; grading piles
How to protect focus	Batched grading blocks; office hours for parent messages; classroom phone routines; planning protected in the timetable

Dimension	Description
What to measure	Student understanding (through retrieval checks), quality of feedback, prepared lessons, student growth, not hours spent
Where AI helps	Drafting lesson materials and practice questions, differentiating examples, summarising sources, organising feedback comments
Where judgment stays essential	Knowing your students, assessing understanding, fairness, pastoral care, ethics, the final grade

Practices for teachers

- **Teach the methods, not just the content.** Share the research on retrieval and spacing (Chapter 12) with students. Build low-stakes quizzes into class time. Students often do not know that rereading is a weak strategy, and they trust their teachers to tell them.
- **Set classroom norms for devices.** Sana and colleagues (2013) found that off-task laptop use harmed the learning of nearby peers as well as the user. A clear classroom device routine protects everyone.
- **Protect grading time.** Use a fixed block, one class set at a time, with a rubric to reduce decisions. Avoid grading with messages open.
- **Provide feedback that is specific and task-focused.** Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe feedback, when it points to how to improve on the task, as a powerful influence on learning.
- **Model attention.** Students learn what you attend to. Put your own phone away during teaching.

For teachers, the role is also a trust. In my own words, and as an interpretation and not a citation: the teacher's attention is among the most valuable things a student receives, and it should be given with sincerity and care.

Creators and freelancers

Sabbir is a freelance video editor and content creator. He spends most of his day inside social platforms: researching trends, watching other creators, responding to comments and checking analytics. He consumes a great deal of content and produces relatively little of his own.

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Protected creation time; a clear balance between consuming and creating; sustained craft
High-value work	Making the work: writing, editing, designing, coding, recording; refining craft; serving clients well
Typical distractions	Platforms and analytics; comparison with other creators; client messages at all hours; shiny new tools; endless research
How to protect focus	Create first, consume after; scheduled analytics reviews; client communication windows; a fixed "making" block
What to measure	Pieces published, clients delivered, skills improved, quality feedback. Not likes alone
Where AI helps	Ideation, first drafts, transcription, captioning, research scans, routine edits, invoice and admin drafting
Where judgment stays essential	Voice, taste, originality, ethics of what is published, honesty with audiences, client relationships

The Creator's Ratio

A useful principle for creators is **Output before activity** applied to the day: make something *before* consuming others' work. Try a simple ratio: for every hour of consumption (research, inspiration, trends), spend at least an hour creating. For many, the first hour of the day

belongs to making, not scrolling. This ratio is my own heuristic and not an empirically derived number; adjust it to your work.

For freelancers: boundaries with clients

Freelancers often lose focus to clients' urgency. Set expectations in writing: response windows, revision limits, working hours. Clear terms protect both quality and the relationship. If you serve clients in different time zones, decide which parts of the day belong to your deep work and which to communication.

Honesty and originality

Creators using AI face a special integrity test. Publishing AI-generated work as your own where audiences expect human authorship, or presenting AI-produced claims without verification, undermines trust. The ethic of honesty applies. Disclose where it is expected, verify what you publish and remember that the audience's trust is an amanah.

Parents

Shamima is at home with her seven-year-old son, Rafi. She is physically present. But her phone, in her hand, is a window to work messages, family group chats and news. Rafi is trying to show her a drawing. She says, "Wait, I'm almost done," and she says it three times.

শামীমা রাফিকে ভালোবাসে, সেটা নিয়ে কোনো সন্দেহ নেই। কিন্তু রাফির চোখে যেটা ধরা পড়ে, সেটা হলো মায়ের চোখ মোবাইলের দিকে। শিশুরা মনোযোগ বোঝে, কথার আগে।

Research supports concern about this pattern without justifying panic. McDaniel and Radesky (2018), in *Child Development*, studied "technoference," the everyday interruptions in parent–child interaction caused by digital devices, and found that greater technoference was associated with more child behaviour problems, as reported by parents. The study is correlational, based on parent reports, and should not be read as proof that phones cause behavioural problems. But it fits a broader intuition: children read attention as care.

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Being fully present with children and spouse in the time set aside for them; modelling focus and self-control
High-value work	Listening, playing, teaching, reading together, meals, prayer together, calm routines
Typical distractions	Phones, work messages, background TV, multitasking through the evening, the mental load of the household
How to protect focus	Phone-free zones and times (meals, bedtime, first hour after coming home); a place to put the phone; agreed work hours
What to measure	Not measured on a scoreboard. Ask: did my child feel seen today?
Where AI helps	Meal planning, scheduling, reminders, drafting messages, finding age-appropriate activities
Where judgment stays essential	Everything about the child's character, safety, values, discipline and love

The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught that each of us is a guardian and will be asked about those in our care (Sahih al-Bukhari 893). Parenting is one of the most literal forms of that guardianship. A parent's undivided attention is not an efficiency problem. It is a right that the child holds.

Three small parent practices

1. **The Arrival Ritual.** When you walk through the door, put the phone in a set place for the first 20 minutes. Greet everyone properly.
2. **The Protected Meal.** At least one meal a day with no devices for anyone, adults included.

3. **The Ten-Minute Full Attention.** Ten minutes each day with each child, doing what *they* choose, with your full attention. No lectures.

For parents who work from home: agree clear boundaries. "When my door is closed, I'm working. When it opens, I'm yours." The end of the block matters as much as the start.

Lifelong learners

Not every learner has an exam. Many readers of this book are adults learning for their careers, faith, craft or curiosity. Lifelong learners have freedom and a special risk: without deadlines or examiners, learning easily becomes *consumption*, such as collecting courses, saving articles and watching tutorials, without ever producing anything or testing understanding.

Dimension	Description
What Deep Focus means	Learning with a defined question, a protected time and a way to test understanding
High-value work	A single well-chosen learning project; retrieval and application; teaching what you learn; deliberate practice
Typical distractions	Course hoarding; passive video watching; jumping between topics; "learning" as a substitute for doing
How to protect focus	One learning project at a time; a small daily block; a project or portfolio piece; spaced review
What to measure	What you can do or explain now that you could not before; what you have built or taught
Where AI helps	Personalised explanations, practice questions, feedback on your explanations, curriculum outlines

Dimension	Description
Where judgment stays essential	Choosing what is worth learning; verifying; applying learning ethically

The Student Learning Loop (Chapter 12) works for adults too: Define a target, learn, close the book, recall, explain, practise, check, correct and review later. For a person learning the Qur'an, a language or a profession, the same principles of spacing and retrieval apply. The religious dimension of learning the Qur'an has its own etiquette and guidance from qualified teachers, which I do not address; I simply note that the human learning processes involved are shared.

The prayer in Qur'an 20:114, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge", is a reminder that learning is a lifelong humility. A lifelong learner asks for increase, and also does the work.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Technoference *(McDaniel & Radesky, 2018; peer-reviewed; correlational, parent-report).* **Classroom laptop use** *(Sana et al., 2013; experimental).* **Feedback** *(Hattie & Timperley, 2007; peer-reviewed review).* **Creator's Ratio and parent practices** *(Author interpretation; practical heuristics).*

REFLECT

1. Who in your life most deserves your undivided attention, and when do they get it?
2. If you create or learn for a living or by choice: how much of your last week was spent producing, and how much consuming?

ACTION STEP

Choose one person (a child, spouse, parent, student or friend) and give them ten minutes of fully undivided attention today, with your phone out of reach. Notice what changes.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For teachers, creators, parents and learners, Deep Focus is a way to serve: full presence with those who depend on us, protected time for making and learning, and honest, human depth in an age of easy answers.

সারকথা: যাদের আমরা ভালোবাসি বা যাদের সেবা করি, তারা আমাদের পূর্ণ মনোযোগ পাওয়ার যোগ্য। নিজের কাজ ও শেখার জন্যও সেই মনোযোগ দরকার।

PART V — AI & SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE

Leverage without abdication, energy without exhaustion, consistency without obsession

CHAPTER 16

AI + Human Depth

> *AI SPEED × HUMAN DEPTH = HIGHER LEVERAGE*

Chapter 5 made the case for why AI changes the game for attention. This chapter is the practical companion: how to work with AI so that it makes you *more* capable and does not quietly make you less.

The whole chapter rests on one division of labour:

> **THE CORE DIVISION**
>
> **AI = SPEED.** Generation, retrieval, summarisation, transformation, pattern-spotting and tireless first drafts.
>
> **HUMAN = PURPOSE + JUDGMENT + RESPONSIBILITY.** Deciding what is worth doing, deciding what is true and good, and standing accountable for the result.

Where AI can help

There is a long list of legitimate, valuable uses. Used with care, these can free hours for deeper work:

Use	How it helps	Typical safeguard
Research assistance	Finds starting points, explains unfamiliar terms, suggests sources to read	Verify claims and citations in original sources; AI can invent references
Brainstorming	Widens the option set; generates alternatives you had not considered	You choose; you supply criteria
Summarisation	Compresses long documents and threads	Read the source for anything you will rely on

Use	How it helps	Typical safeguard
Drafting	Produces a first version of routine text, code or documents	You edit for accuracy, tone and truth
Organisation	Structures notes, agendas, outlines, schedules	Check that nothing important was dropped
Routine automation	Handles repetitive processing	Test on small samples; monitor errors
Data analysis assistance	Suggests formulas, code, charts, patterns	Understand the method; check results with known cases
Learning quizzes	Generates practice questions and feedback on your explanations	Verify the answer key against trusted materials
Pattern exploration	Suggests connections across large text or data sets	Treat as hypotheses to test

Where humans must retain ownership

Area	Why it stays human
Purpose	Only you can decide what deserves your life-energy
Ethics	Right and wrong are not statistical outputs
Judgment	Weighing trade-offs, context and consequences
Context	Knowing the people, history and unwritten rules of your situation
Relationships	Trust is built by presence and integrity, not by fluent text
Critical thinking	Testing an argument requires understanding it
Verification	Someone has to check; that someone is you
Leadership	People follow people
Final decisions	The person who decides is the person who is answerable

Area	Why it stays human
Accountability	"The AI wrote it" is not an acceptable explanation for harm

For a Muslim reader, the Islamic frame from Chapter 7 applies directly. Amanah and guardianship (Sahih al-Bukhari 893; Sahih Muslim 1829) mean that responsibility stays with the person. The Qur'anic ethic of verifying information (49:6) and not following what one has no sure knowledge of (17:36) supports a habit of checking. These verses were revealed in specific contexts and do not mention AI; I offer the application as a moral analogy and not as a religious ruling on any technology.

Why fluent text is dangerous

Modern language models produce prose that *sounds* confident, organised and complete, regardless of whether it is correct. This is a special hazard for the attention-poor. When we are tired or hurried, fluency is easy to mistake for truth.

Psychologists studying automation have described *automation bias* and *complacency*, the tendency to over-trust automated aids and to under-monitor them, particularly when attention is limited (Parasuraman & Manzey, 2010, in *Human Factors*). The finding predates generative AI, but it matches the pattern seen in the BCG experiment (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023) and the Microsoft/CMU survey (Lee et al., 2025): the more we trust the tool, the less we check.

Four defences are practical:

1. **Know the tool's weak zones.** AI can be wrong on facts, numbers, citations, recent events, niche topics and anything that requires real-world verification.
2. **Ask for reasoning and sources; then check them.** A source that "looks right" may not exist.

3. **Match verification to stakes.** Low-stakes brainstorming needs little checking. Medical, legal, financial, safety or reputational content needs a lot.
4. **Preserve your own expertise.** You cannot check what you do not understand.

The three modes of AI use

To make the choice quick, I use three modes. It is an original applied model, not an empirical taxonomy.

```
ACCELERATE   Routine, low-stakes, well-understood
                        tasks.
             AI does the first pass; you review.

AUGMENT      Thinking tasks where you have already
                  formed a view.
           AI acts as a critic, sparring partner or
                    examiner.

  ABSTAIN      Where the struggle is the point
                   (learning),
             or where the judgment is ethical or
                    personal.
                  You do it yourself.
```

Mode	Examples	The test
Accelerate	Reformatting a report; drafting a routine reply; cleaning a data table; generating meeting-note structure	Could a careful junior colleague do this, and can I check it quickly?
Augment	"Here is my argument. What are its three weakest points?" "Here is my plan; what risks am I missing?"	Have I thought first? Am I using the AI to sharpen, not to replace, my thinking?

Mode	Examples	The test
Abstain	Learning a concept for an exam; deciding whom to hire; delivering hard news to a colleague; writing a heartfelt personal message; making an ethical call	Would outsourcing this cost me a skill, a relationship or my integrity?

The Dell'Acqua paper describes two working patterns among successful users: "centaurs," who divide tasks between human and AI, and "cyborgs," who weave the AI into a task continuously. Either pattern can work. What matters is that the *human remains the responsible integrator*.

The AI Responsibility Check

Before relying on AI-assisted output, run these ten questions. (A printable version is in Chapter 21.)

AI RESPONSIBILITY CHECK

1. **Purpose.** Do I know what this output is *for*, and does that purpose serve real people well?
2. **Try first.** Did I form my own view or attempt before using AI?
3. **Mode.** Is this Accelerate, Augment or Abstain, and did I choose the right mode?
4. **Accuracy.** Have I verified facts, numbers, quotes and citations against original sources?
5. **Understanding.** Could I explain this output without the AI, and defend it if challenged?
6. **Ethics.** Is anything here unfair, deceptive, harmful, plagiarised or a breach of confidentiality?
7. **Privacy.** Did I avoid sharing sensitive personal, client, health or confidential data in ways my organisation or the law does not permit?
8. **Honesty.** Have I disclosed AI assistance where rules or reasonable expectations require?
9. **Ownership.** Is the final decision mine, and am I prepared to be accountable for it?
10. **Growth.** Did this use leave my skills intact or stronger, or is something atrophying?

Working patterns that keep humans in charge

Human-first outline. Write the structure of the argument, plan or solution yourself, in rough form. *Then* use AI to fill, challenge or polish.

Draft → Critique → Decide. Ask AI to draft. Ask a second prompt to critique the draft harshly. You decide what to keep. Record why.

Reverse quiz. After learning something, ask AI to test you, with the rule that it must not give the answer until you attempt one.

Verification ladder.

Stakes	Example	Verification
Low	Ideas for a party theme	Common sense
Medium	A summary of a report you'll discuss in a meeting	Read the key sections of the source
High	Legal, medical, financial or safety content; published claims; grades	Original sources, expert review, institutional approval

No-AI zones. Choose two or three types of work or study where you deliberately do not use AI, because the struggle builds a capability you want to keep: for example, your first attempt at any new concept, your own reflective writing and your daily review.

AI time-boxing. Set a limit for a conversation with a tool. A chat that runs for an hour is often a form of procrastination.

AI and the attention problem

Because AI reduces friction, it can increase the *number of tasks we attempt*, and with them the number of switches. Guard against tool sprawl: three tools used well beat fifteen tried once. Turn off AI notifications where possible. Treat "prompt, wait, check, re-prompt" loops as work in their own right and give them protected blocks.

For leaders and organisations

If you lead a team, set clear norms for AI use: what may be used, what data may not be shared, what must be reviewed by a human, what must be disclosed to clients. Encourage people to say when they are unsure.

And do not reward speed alone, or the team will optimise for fast, unverified output.

For students, in brief

The full protocol is in Chapter 12. The essentials: TRY → THINK → ASK AI → VERIFY → RETRY. Do not outsource the thinking you are at university to learn. Bastani and colleagues (2025) suggest that the gap between using AI to *get answers* and using it to *get better at answering* can be the gap between short-term performance and long-term learning.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Label: Mixed. Dell'Acqua et al. (2023): field experiment, working paper. Lee et al. (2025): survey, peer-reviewed conference paper. Gerlich (2025): correlational survey. Bastani et al. (2025): randomised field experiment, peer-reviewed. Parasuraman and Manzey (2010): peer-reviewed review of automation complacency. The three modes and the AI Responsibility Check are the author's original applied tools. The AI field is moving fast: new evidence will refine, and may revise, everything in this chapter.

REFLECT

1. What is one task you currently do with AI that you should Abstain from, and one you currently do by hand that you should Accelerate?
2. If your AI use were reviewed by someone you respect, which of the ten questions would you be most uncomfortable answering?

ACTION STEP

For one week, keep a simple AI log: task, mode (Accelerate, Augment, Abstain), what you verified. At the end, note two patterns.

KEY TAKEAWAY

AI multiplies speed; humans supply purpose, judgment and responsibility. Choose the mode (Accelerate, Augment or Abstain), verify according to stakes, preserve your own skills, and never let fluency substitute for truth.

সারকথা: এআই আপনার হাত দ্রুত করে, কিন্তু সিদ্ধান্তের দায় আপনারই। কাজটা কোন ধরনের, আগে ঠিক করুন; তারপর যাচাই করুন; আর যেখানে শেখাই উদ্দেশ্য, সেখানে নিজে করুন।

CHAPTER 17

Energy, Sleep & Recovery

> *Direct your energy. Protect the body that carries your attention.*

Imran, the medical-entrance student from Chapter 6, is disciplined and purposeful. Six weeks before the exam he decides to sleep only four to five hours a night. He reasons that more hours awake mean more hours of study. For a week he feels heroic. In the second week his practice scores slip and he cannot understand why: he is studying more than ever.

Imran has forgotten that attention is a *biological* process. Purpose without energy is a car with a full map and an empty tank.

ইমরানের ইচ্ছাশক্তি কম ছিল না, কম ছিল ঘুম। ক্লান্ত মস্তিষ্ক দিয়ে বেশি ঘণ্টা পড়াটা অনেক সময় কম শেখারই আরেক নাম।

Capacity is the third pillar

Chapter 1 named three conditions for Deep Focus: clarity, protection and capacity. Capacity is the one most often sacrificed by ambitious people, and the one that undermines the other two. A clear plan and a quiet room mean little if you are exhausted.

Sleep

What the evidence says

Lim and Dinges (2010), in a meta-analysis of the effects of short-term sleep deprivation on cognitive performance, reported that the largest effects were on simple attention: attention lapses and reaction speed showed large effects. Working memory and complex attention showed moderate effects, and reasoning accuracy showed a small, non-significant effect. The authors highlighted sustained attention and vigilance as the functions most vulnerable to sleep loss.

Sleep also plays a role in memory. Diekelmann and Born (2010), in a review in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, describe evidence that sleep supports the consolidation of newly learned information. For students, that is a serious consideration: cutting sleep to study more may reduce the retention of what was studied.

For general guidance, a consensus statement from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society (Watson et al., 2015) recommended that adults regularly sleep seven or more hours per night for optimal health. Individual needs vary, and this is not personal medical advice.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Sleep and cognition. *Peer-reviewed meta-analysis* (Lim & Dinges, 2010) and *peer-reviewed review* (Diekelmann & Born, 2010); *professional consensus statement* (Watson et al., 2015). Sleep-deprivation experiments are often short-term and in controlled settings; real-life chronic sleep restriction can differ. If you have persistent sleep difficulties, please consult a healthcare professional.

The Islamic frame

The Qur'an mentions sleep among Allah's favours: "and made your sleep for rest" (78:9). And the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Abdullah ibn Amr in Sahih al-Bukhari 5199 that his body has a right over him and his eyes have a right over him, and advised him to sleep as well as to stand in prayer at night. My interpretation is that both sources support treating adequate rest as part of responsible stewardship, and not as a weakness or a luxury.

For readers who rise for Fajr, many find that an earlier bedtime is the practical means of doing so. That is a personal and practical observation, and not a legal or medical statement.

Practical sleep hygiene for focus

- **Keep a regular schedule** as much as your life permits, including a consistent wake time.
- **Create a digital sunset.** Put screens away for the last 30 to 60 minutes before bed. Leave the phone charging outside the bedroom if you can, and use a simple alarm.
- **Do a "shutdown" ritual.** Use the Stop, Review & Reset step (Chapter 11) to write tomorrow's first action, so your mind can release the day.
- **Guard the night before important events.** Sleep is part of exam and presentation preparation.
- **Seek help if needed.** Persistent sleeplessness deserves attention from a doctor.

Breaks and recovery within the day

Ariga and Lleras (2011) found that participants who took brief diversions during a long, repetitive task maintained performance better than those who worked continuously without a break. This is a specific laboratory task, not a universal rule, but it supports a common-sense practice: **brief, deliberate breaks between focus blocks help sustain attention.**

Good breaks are *actually restful.* Consider:

- **Move.** A short walk, stretching, wudu, a few minutes of fresh air.
- **Hydrate and eat sensibly.**
- **Look away from screens.** Rest your eyes on something distant.
- **Connect.** A short conversation with a person.
- **Make dhikr or a short, quiet reflection,** if it is part of your practice.

Avoid the "fake break": swapping your work screen for a social feed. It fills the hole in your schedule but does not necessarily rest the same faculties.

The four kinds of recovery

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) developed the Recovery Experience Questionnaire and described four experiences that help people recover from work: **psychological detachment** (mentally switching off), **relaxation**, **mastery** (learning or doing something challenging outside work) and **control** over one's leisure time. The specific measures are research instruments, and I do not reproduce them here. But their four categories offer a useful map for evenings and weekends:

Recovery type	What it looks like
Detachment	Not checking work messages after set hours; a real end to the workday
Relaxation	Quiet time, light walking, a hot meal with the family, prayer and stillness
Mastery	A hobby, a craft, a sport, learning something for pleasure
Control	Choosing how to spend free time, rather than letting it be consumed by defaults

Energy across the week

- **Know your best hours** and give them to your deepest work.
- **Vary intensity.** Balance demanding days with lighter ones.
- **Take a weekly Sabbath of the screen.** Some people set aside a portion of the weekend for family, worship, nature and rest, without work devices.
- **Plan for hard seasons.** Exams, launches, travel, illness and caring for family all change capacity. Adjust expectations rather than punishing yourself.

Deep Focus in Ramadan

Ramadan changes sleep, eating and energy. A few practical adaptations, as suggestions that you should adjust to your health and circumstances:

- Give your **deepest work to the period when you feel most alert,** which for many is the morning after Fajr and Suhoor, and for others is after Iftar. Test and adjust.
- **Reduce the number of commitments.** This is a season to simplify, not to add.
- **Protect worship first.** Do not use the productivity system to squeeze more out of the days; use it to remove distractions from the worship you want to prioritise.
- **Use shorter blocks** and more recovery.
- **Sleep in segments if needed,** and take care of your health. If you have a medical condition, follow your doctor's guidance.

When rest is not enough

Persistent exhaustion, low mood, loss of interest, or a feeling that no amount of rest helps may signal something beyond a tough week. This book does not diagnose or treat. If you are struggling, please speak with a doctor, a counsellor or a trusted person. Seeking help is an act of responsibility, not of weakness.

Common mistakes

Treating sleep as a variable to be optimised down. It is a foundation.

Fake breaks. Scrolling is not rest.

All-or-nothing recovery. A ten-minute walk is better than waiting for a holiday.

Guilt when resting. For the believer, the body has a right. Rest is not laziness when it is taken for the sake of service.

REFLECT

1. What is your actual, average sleep, and how do you feel at 3 p.m. on most days?
2. Which of the four recovery types is most missing from your week?

ACTION STEP

Set one fixed "screens off" time tonight, and write your plan for tomorrow's first action before you switch off. Track how you feel in the morning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Attention runs on a body. Sleep, brief breaks, real recovery and balance are inputs to Deep Focus, not obstacles to it. Rest is part of responsibility.

সারকথা: শরীর আপনার কাছে আমানত। ঘুম, বিরতি আর বিশ্রামকে সময় নষ্ট ভাববেন না; ওগুলোই মনোযোগের জ্বালানি।

CHAPTER 18

Consistency Over Random Intensity

> *"The most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little." — Sahih al-Bukhari 6464*

Some people attack focus like a New Year's resolution: a fierce week of dawn starts, colour-coded planners, apps and a promise that everything will change. Then a bad night, a sick child or an unexpected deadline breaks the streak, and the whole project collapses under the weight of "I've failed again."

This chapter is about the alternative: **modest, repeatable practice that survives bad days.**

The Islamic root of consistency

Chapter 7 cited the hadith narrated by Aisha in Sahih al-Bukhari 6464: "Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately and know that your deeds will not make you enter Paradise, and that the most beloved deed to Allah is the most regular and constant even if it were little." The hadith concerns worship and deeds in the fullest sense. My application to focus practices is an interpretation: it suggests that regular, moderate effort is valued over bursts of extreme effort, and that sincerity and moderation belong together.

What research says about habits

Lally and colleagues (2010), in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*, followed volunteers as they tried to make a new daily behaviour (such as eating a piece of fruit or doing a short exercise) automatic. They reported that the time needed to reach automaticity varied widely, with a median of around 66 days and a range from about

18 to 254 days across individuals and behaviours, and that missing a single opportunity did not materially disrupt the habit-formation process. The study is often summarised as "it takes 66 days to form a habit," which is a misleading simplification: the honest result is that it takes *different amounts of time for different people and behaviours*, and that one lapse is not fatal.

The practical lessons, framed as an interpretation of that research and not a guarantee, are three:

1. **Be patient.** Give a new practice at least two months of gentle repetition before judging.
2. **Expect variation.** Simple behaviours become automatic faster than complex ones.
3. **Do not catastrophise a missed day.** The process tolerates a lapse; the real risk is the second missed day, then the third.

Wood and Neal (2007), whom we met in Chapter 9, add that habits are triggered by *context cues*. Anchoring a practice to a stable cue (after Fajr, after lunch, after Isha) is more reliable than relying on motivation.

The Minimum Viable Focus

The enemy of consistency is a plan that only works on ideal days. So define, in advance, the **Minimum Viable Focus (MVF)**: the smallest session that still counts.

> MINIMUM VIABLE FOCUS (MVF)
>
> On a bad day, I will still do **one** focus block of **20 minutes** on **one** important task, with my phone away, and write a one-line result at the end.

You can choose your own numbers. The principle is that on a bad day, the target should be small enough that you can do it while tired,

distracted or unwell. A tiny practice done on a hard day protects the identity of "someone who does this" and keeps the chain unbroken.

The Two-Day Rule

If you miss one day, resume the next day. Never miss twice in a row. This is a practice heuristic (popularised in the habit literature, and consistent with the Lally finding that a single miss is not damaging), not a scientific law, but it is simple and it works as a psychological guardrail against the all-or-nothing spiral.

Seasons, not straight lines

Life has seasons: exam time, Ramadan, travel, a new baby, illness, a heavy work quarter. A rigid system built for an ordinary week will break in an unusual one. Instead, define three modes:

Mode	When	What changes
Standard	Ordinary weeks	Full system: daily OBO, 2–3 blocks, weekly review
Lean	Busy or demanding seasons	One block per day, MVF, minimal review
Recovery	Illness, grief, exhaustion, travel	Only worship, rest, essential responsibilities, MVF if possible

Switching modes is not failure. It is intelligence.

Measure gently

Tracking helps, but it can become obsessive. A few cautions:

- **Track the practice, not your worth.** A streak is information, not identity.
- **Use a simple tracker** (Chapter 20) and a weekly review.

- **Beware "streak anxiety."** If protecting a streak starts to make you neglect family, worship or health, the tracker has become the master.
- **Celebrate progress quietly.** Gratitude and moderation go together.

Consistency and the plateau

Around the third or fourth week of any practice, the novelty fades and progress seems slow. This is normal. The temptation is to hunt for a new system. Resist it. Most of the value of a practice comes from *doing it again*, not from finding a better one. Improve one element at a time: the environment, the start ritual, the block length or the review.

Consistency with mercy

If you slip, return. The posture of returning after a lapse without despair is one that many believers recognise from their spiritual lives. It is not a technique to enhance productivity, and I would not want it to be reduced to one. But it is a healthy inner stance for a long practice: *I fell short, I return, I continue.* Anxiety and self-punishment are poor fuel.

Obsessive productivity is not the goal

A warning worth repeating. If you find yourself feeling guilty during every moment of rest, tracking every minute, or judging yourself and others by output, you have drifted from the purpose of this book. Deep Focus is meant to make room for a fuller, more balanced life, not a more efficient treadmill.

Common mistakes

The heroic start. Beginning with a system so demanding that it fails within a week.

Perfection thinking. Believing that a missed day ruins everything.

System hopping. Changing methods whenever it gets hard.

Ignoring the season. Insisting on Standard mode during a Recovery season.

EVIDENCE NOTE

Habit formation *(Lally et al., 2010; peer-reviewed; volunteers and self-chosen behaviours; results varied widely).* **Context cues** *(Wood & Neal, 2007).* **Minimum Viable Focus, the Two-Day Rule and the Three Modes** *(Practice concepts and original applied tools; not experimentally tested here).* **Bukhari 6464** *(Islamic source; my application is an interpretation).*

REFLECT

1. What is your Minimum Viable Focus? Write it in one sentence.
2. Which season are you in right now: Standard, Lean or Recovery?

ACTION STEP

Write your MVF on a card. Put it where you will see it. Decide on a cue (for example, after Fajr or after lunch) that will start it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Consistency beats intensity. Define a minimum you can do on bad days, never miss twice, adapt to seasons, track gently and return with mercy.

সারকথা: কম হলেও নিয়মিত করাই ভালো। খারাপ দিনের জন্য একটা ন্যূনতম লক্ষ্য রাখুন, আর একদিন বাদ পড়লে পরদিন আবার শুরু করুন।

PART VI — IMPLEMENTATION

An operating system, a challenge and a set of tools you can use tomorrow

CHAPTER 19

The Daily Deep Focus Operating System

> *Clarity before activity. Output before activity. Recovery before collapse.*

An operating system is not a to-do list. It is a small set of rules and rhythms that decide, by default, what happens when you have not consciously decided. The Deep Focus Operating System (DFOS) has four rhythms: **daily**, **weekly**, **monthly** and **seasonal**, and a single principle in each: *decide before the day decides for you.*

```
SEASONAL   Purpose · Season outcomes · What to stop
           (P.U.R.P.O.S.E. steps P, U, R)
MONTHLY    Review · Adjust · Choose the next 30-day
                     focus
  WEEKLY     2–3 outcomes · Place blocks · Review
DAILY      One Big Outcome · Focus blocks · Shutdown
```

DFOS is an original applied system by Abu Talib, built from the frameworks in Part III. It is a template, not a rule. Adjust it to your life, prayer times, work and family responsibilities.

The Daily Rhythm

Anchor your day to prayer times and to your own energy pattern. Times vary by location and season, so the schedule uses anchors instead of clock times.

Anchor	Practice	Time needed
Night before	Write tomorrow's One Big Outcome and first action; prepare environment; screens off; sleep	10 min

Anchor	Practice	Time needed
After Fajr / on waking	Renew intention; short du'a; review OBO. No phone for the first 30 minutes if possible	10 min
Block 1 (best energy)	D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. session on the OBO	45–90 min
Break	Movement, water, no screens	10 min
Mid-morning	Message window 1; shallow tasks; meetings	30–60 min
Dhuhr and midday	Prayer, meal, rest	45–60 min
Block 2 (if energy allows)	Second focus block or learning session	45–60 min
Afternoon	Message window 2; relational work; collaboration	Flexible
Asr onward / evening	Family, exercise, community, light tasks	Flexible
Before bed	Shutdown ritual: five-line close; capture list; plan	5–10 min

Sample days

A university student

Block	Activity
After Fajr	10 min review of yesterday's error log
Block 1 (45 min)	Hardest subject: learning loop (learn, close, recall, explain)
Break	Walk, water, no phone
Block 2 (45 min)	Practice problems or past-paper questions; check and correct
After lunch and prayer	Lectures, group study, lighter tasks

Block	Activity
Evening (30 min)	Spaced review (retrieval only) of topics from 1, 3, 7 days ago
Night	Phone away; plan tomorrow; sleep

A corporate professional

Block	Activity
Arrival (15 min)	Review OBO and calendar; no email yet
Block 1 (90 min)	Deep deliverable; status set to focus; notifications off
11:00	Message window; quick approvals
After Dhuhr	Meetings and collaboration
3:00	Message window 2
Last 15 min	Shutdown: results, next action, capture list

An entrepreneur

Block	Activity
After Fajr and breakfast	Strategy block (90 min): pricing, product, offer, or hiring decision
Late morning	Run time: operations, decisions, team questions
After Dhuhr	Relate time: customers, partners, team
Late afternoon	Message window; handovers; document one process
Evening	Family and rest; five-minute plan

A parent working from home

Block	Activity
Morning routine	Present with children; phone in a set place
Work block 1	Deep task while children are at school or occupied
Midday	Prayer, meal and family
Work block 2	Messages and lighter work
On arrival home or after school	Ten-minute full attention for each child; then dinner
Evening	Family time; screens off; early night

The Weekly Rhythm

A weekly review is the hinge of the system. Set a regular time (Friday afternoon, Sunday evening or another slot that suits you) for 30 to 45 minutes.

WEEKLY REVIEW AGENDA

1. **Look back.** What did I complete? What did I not? What did I learn?
2. **Measure gently.** Score the week on the Deep Focus Scorecard (Chapter 21).
3. **Diagnose.** What were the top two distractions and the top two helpers?
4. **Decide.** What is the one adjustment I will make this week?
5. **Plan.** Choose 2 or 3 outcomes for next week. Place focus blocks in the calendar around prayer times and family commitments.
6. **Prune.** What can I stop, simplify or delegate?
7. **Nurture.** Have I made time for family, friends, health and worship? Plan one thing for each.
8. **Renew intention.** Purify the next week's intention; ask for help; end with gratitude.

The Monthly Rhythm

Once a month, take an hour for a broader look.

MONTHLY REVIEW AGENDA

1. **Season check.** Are my season outcomes still right? What has changed?
2. **Progress.** Which outcomes moved? Which stalled? Why?
3. **Patterns.** Review four weekly scorecards. What consistently helps or hurts?
4. **Systems.** What can be simplified, automated, delegated or stopped?
5. **Capacity.** How are my sleep, health, family and worship?
6. **AI.** Has my use of AI strengthened or weakened my skills? Any adjustments?
7. **Next 30 days.** Choose one focus area to improve and one to maintain.

The Seasonal Rhythm

Each season (a quarter, a semester or a phase of life), revisit P.U.R.P.O.S.E. steps P, U and R: intention, what matters, what to remove. Write a new Season Purpose. Choose the mode (Standard, Lean or Recovery) that fits reality.

The Minimum Toolset

Resist the urge to build an elaborate system. All you truly need is:

- **A notebook or a single notes app** for the daily plan, the capture list and reviews.
- **A calendar** for focus blocks, prayer times, family commitments and reviews.
- **A timer,** ideally not on your phone.
- **The Focus Environment Checklist.**
- **The Deep Focus Scorecard,** once a week.

Everything else is optional. Tools help, but they can also become another distraction.

Troubleshooting

Problem	Try this
I can't start	Do the Five-Minute Doorway (Chapter 8)
I get interrupted constantly	Agree norms with people; use headphones; move the block earlier or later
I lose the whole day to messages	Set two fixed message windows; use auto-reply; use a triage rule
I can't stay focused for more than 10 minutes	Start with 10 to 15 minute blocks; extend gradually; check sleep; if the difficulty is persistent, consult a professional
I feel guilty when I rest	Revisit Chapters 7 and 17: rest is a right of the body
I keep changing systems	Commit to your MVF for 30 days before changing anything
My workplace doesn't allow blocks	Use micro-blocks; talk to your manager; use early hours or after-hours hobbies for personal deep work

REFLECT

1. Which rhythm is weakest in your life: daily, weekly, monthly or seasonal?
2. What is the smallest version of this system you could run for the next seven days?

ACTION STEP

Print or copy the Weekly Review Agenda and put it in your calendar now, for a specific time this week.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Daily Deep Focus Operating System is a set of four rhythms (daily, weekly, monthly and seasonal), anchored to prayer times and personal energy, and supported by a minimal toolset. Decide before the day decides for you.

সারকথা: দিনের জন্য একটা কাঠামো, সপ্তাহের জন্য একটা পর্যালোচনা, মাসের জন্য একটা সমন্বয়, আর মৌসুমের জন্য একটা উদ্দেশ্য। সরল রাখুন।

CHAPTER 20

The 30-Day Deep Focus Challenge

> *A practical implementation challenge, not a promise of transformation.*

This is a 30-day *implementation challenge.* I deliberately avoid calling it a transformation, because I cannot promise what a month will do for any particular person. What I can promise is that each day contains one small, meaningful action, and that thirty small, deliberate actions, done in sequence, will teach you a great deal about your own attention.

How it works

- **Each day has one action.** Most take 10 to 30 minutes. Some fit inside your existing day.
- **Four weeks, four themes:** Awareness, Attention Control, Depth, Integration.
- **Missed a day?** Follow the Two-Day Rule: resume the next day. If you miss several days, pick up from where you left off and, if necessary, switch to Lean mode.
- **Keep it in a notebook.** Use the 30-Day Tracker in Chapter 21.
- **Balance.** Do not let the challenge displace your prayers, family time or sleep. If something has to give, it is the challenge.

```
 WEEK 1  Awareness         See where attention goes
       WEEK 2  Attention Control Protect it
WEEK 3  Depth             Use it to think and create
 WEEK 4  Integration       Make it a sustainable way
                      of life
```

Week 1: Awareness

Theme: You cannot manage what you have not noticed.

Day	Action
1	Write your own definition of Deep Focus and one sentence about why it matters to you. Renew your intention for the 30 days.
2	Tally every time you check your phone without a purpose today. No judgment. Count at night.
3	Personal Attention Audit, part 1: for your working or study hours, note in 15-minute chunks what you did and what pulled you away.
4	Personal Attention Audit, part 2: mark each interruption as *self-started* or *external*.
5	List your roles and, for each, one outcome that matters this season (P.U.R.P.O.S.E., step U). Circle the top two.
6	Track your energy every two hours (1 to 5). Identify your best two-hour window.
7	Weekly Review #1. What did you notice? Choose one pattern you will change next week.

Week 2: Attention Control

Theme: Protect it before it is attacked.

Day	Action
8	One 25-minute block with your phone in another room. Notice what your mind does.
9	Notification audit: turn off every non-essential notification on phone and computer.
10	Use the Distraction Capture List for one full block. Capture, don't chase.
11	Run the Focus Environment Checklist. Fix two items.
12	Set two message windows for the day. Tell one colleague, family member or friend.

Day	Action
13	Write one if–then plan for your most frequent distraction. Use it.
14	Weekly Review #2. Which change helped most?

Week 3: Depth

Theme: Use protected attention to think and create.

Day	Action
15	First full D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. session (45 minutes) on one Big Outcome.
16	Practise Output before activity: in the first 10 minutes of your block, write or recall before you consult sources.
17	Practise the switch note: before leaving a task, write the next action. Notice how it feels to return.
18	Students and learners: run the Learning Loop on one topic (learn, close, recall, explain, practise, check). Professionals: run it on one skill or concept.
19	Use AI with the three-mode check: try first, choose Accelerate, Augment or Abstain, then verify. Log it.
20	Extend a block by 15 minutes, or add a second block. Do not exceed what your energy allows.
21	Weekly Review #3 and Scorecard #1 (Chapter 21). Identify your two lowest scores.

Week 4: Integration

Theme: Make it sustainable, humane and yours.

Day	Action
22	Design your daily rhythm around prayer times and your best energy hours. Write it on one page.

Day	Action
23	Stop / Simplify / Delegate: act on one item.
24	Give ten minutes of undivided attention to someone who matters to you. Phone away.
25	Sleep protocol: digital sunset, shutdown ritual, fixed bedtime.
26	Define your Minimum Viable Focus and its cue.
27	Teach or explain something you learned this month to another person, or write a one-page summary.
28	Weekly Review #4 and Scorecard #2. Compare with Scorecard #1. Note what changed and what did not.
29	Write your Season Purpose and choose your mode (Standard, Lean or Recovery) for the next 30 days.
30	Reflect: What mattered? What helped? Who benefited? Give thanks. Choose one practice to keep for life.

After the 30 days

Do not expect a finish line. The point of a challenge is to give you *data about yourself*: what pulls you, what helps and what you are willing to keep. If you are like most people, some practices will stick and others will not. Keep the ones that serve you, discard the rest and return to the Weekly Review as your steady rhythm.

Some cautions

- **Do not compare.** Your challenge is not a competition.
- **Adjust for health and life.** If you are unwell, caring for family or in Ramadan, use Lean or Recovery mode.
- **Talk to a professional** if you notice persistent difficulty with attention, mood, sleep or anxiety.
- **Do not turn the challenge into a new source of guilt.**

REFLECT

1. On which day are you most likely to fall off, and what will bring you back?
2. Who could do this challenge with you, or check in on your progress?

ACTION STEP

Do Day 1 now. Write your definition of Deep Focus in your own words, and put the date of Day 30 in your calendar.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Thirty small actions, over four weeks, provide a practical way to notice, protect, deepen and integrate your attention, without promises of transformation and with full respect for your prayers, family and health.

সারকথা: প্রতিদিন একটা ছোট কাজ। ত্রিশ দিন শেষে হয়তো সব বদলাবে না, কিন্তু আপনি নিজের মনোযোগকে আগের চেয়ে ভালোভাবে চিনবেন।

CHAPTER 21

Worksheets & Scorecards

> *Copy these. Print them. Write in them. Adapt them.*

These tools are designed to be used, not admired. Photocopy or rewrite them in a notebook. Everything on these pages is an *original applied tool* by Abu Talib. **None of the scorecards or worksheets is a validated psychological, educational or clinical assessment;** they are reflection tools to help you notice and decide.

1. One Big Outcome Worksheet

Field	Your answer
Date	
My intention (why): "I am doing ___ in order to ___ for the benefit of ___"	
One Big Outcome (one specific result)	
Done when (how I will know)	
Quality standard (two lines)	
First small action (the doorway)	
Likely distraction and my if-then plan	
Focus block start and end (before Salah, with margin)	
Who needs to know my block times?	

2. Daily Deep Focus Planner

Time	Block	Purpose / task	Done?
After Fajr	Renew intention; review OBO		
Block 1	Deep focus		
Break	Movement, water, no screens		
Message window 1	Messages; shallow tasks		
After Dhuhr	Meetings; relational work		
Block 2 (optional)	Deep focus or learning		
Message window 2	Messages; handovers		
Evening	Family; rest; exercise		
Shutdown	Result · Next action · Capture · Learn · Reset		

3. Distraction Capture List

Keep beside you during every focus block.

Time	The pull (what I wanted to do)	When I will handle it

4. Focus Environment Checklist

Check	Done
Phone silenced and out of reach (ideally another room)	☐
Notifications off on computer; email and chat closed	☐
Only the task's files and tabs are open	☐
Water and a light snack ready	☐
One Big Outcome visible	☐
Capture list and pen at hand	☐
People informed of my block and its end time	☐
Prayer time checked; block ends before it with margin	☐
Lighting, seating and posture reasonable	☐
First small action ready	☐

5. Personal Attention Audit

Use for three days. Note in 15-minute chunks. Be honest, not harsh.

Time	What I was doing	What pulled me away	Self-started (S) or External (E)	Energy after (1–5)

After three days, answer: How many interruptions per day, on average? What share were self-started? What was the most costly switch? What single change would most protect my attention?

6. Stop / Simplify / Delegate Matrix

Recurring activity	Stop? (why)	Simplify? (how)	Delegate? (to whom)	Schedule (when)

7. Student Learning Worksheet

Step	Your notes
DEFINE: learning target (I can explain / solve / compare ...)	
LEARN: key ideas in my own words (margin notes)	
CLOSE + RECALL: what I remember with the book closed	
EXPLAIN: where I stumbled when explaining aloud	
PRACTICE: problems or questions attempted	
CHECK: what I got right and wrong	
CORRECT: cause of each error and the fix	
REVIEW LATER: dates for spaced review (day 1, 3, 7, 14...)	
AI use (TRY, THINK, ASK, VERIFY, RETRY): what did I ask, what did I verify?	

8. AI Responsibility Check

Question	Yes / No / Notes
Purpose: do I know what this output is for, and does it serve people well?	
Try first: did I form my own view or attempt before using AI?	
Mode: Accelerate, Augment or Abstain? Was that the right choice?	
Accuracy: have I verified facts, numbers, quotes and citations?	
Understanding: can I explain and defend this without the AI?	
Ethics: is anything unfair, deceptive, plagiarised or harmful?	
Privacy: did I avoid sharing data I should not share?	
Honesty: have I disclosed AI assistance where required?	
Ownership: is the final decision mine, and am I accountable for it?	
Growth: is my skill intact or stronger?	

9. Daily Scorecard (two minutes, at shutdown)

Rate 1 (not at all) to 5 (fully).

Question	1–5
I worked on my One Big Outcome today	
I protected at least one focus block	
I captured distractions instead of chasing them	
I used AI wisely (or did not need it)	
I gave my family and people the attention they deserve	
I kept my prayers and rest	
Tomorrow's first action:	

10. The Deep Focus Scorecard (weekly reflection)

> **IMPORTANT**
>
> This is a **self-reflection tool, not a validated psychological assessment.** It has not been tested for reliability or validity and must not be used to diagnose anything, to compare people, or to evaluate employees or students. Use it only to notice patterns in your own week.

Rate each dimension from 1 (rarely true this week) to 5 (consistently true this week).

Dimension	Prompt	1–5
Purpose	I knew why my main work mattered and whom it served	
Clarity	I began most sessions with a specific result in mind	
Attention	I stayed with one priority during my focus blocks	
Distraction control	I prepared my environment and captured urges instead of chasing them	
Energy	I slept, ate, moved and rested well enough to think	
Execution	I produced meaningful output, not just activity	
Quality	I checked and corrected my work	
Consistency	I kept a regular practice, or my minimum, on most days	
Character	My work was honest, fair and considerate of others	

Dimension	Prompt	1–5
Spiritual alignment	My work stayed within my values, my prayers and my responsibilities to family	

Total (out of 50): _____

How to read it. There are no bands, grades or labels, and a high total is not the goal. Look for (1) your **two lowest** dimensions, (2) any big gap between them and the others and (3) how the pattern changes from week to week. Choose *one* dimension to improve next week. If Character or Spiritual alignment is low while Execution is high, that is worth a serious pause: it may mean you are becoming efficient at the wrong thing.

11. Weekly Review

Question	Your answer
What did I complete that mattered?	
What did I not complete, and why?	
What did I learn (about the work or about myself)?	
Top two distractions and one countermeasure each	
Top two things that helped	
Scorecard total and two lowest dimensions	
One adjustment for next week	
Two or three outcomes for next week	
What can I stop, simplify or delegate?	
Family, friends, health, worship: what will I do for each?	
Renewed intention and du'a	

12. Monthly Review

Question	Your answer
Are my season outcomes still right?	
Which outcomes moved, and which stalled?	
What patterns do my four weekly scorecards show?	
Which systems should I simplify, automate, delegate or stop?	
How are my sleep, health, family and worship?	
Has AI strengthened or weakened my skills?	
Which area will I improve, and which will I maintain, next month?	

13. 30-Day Tracker

Mark ✓ for each item completed. Write a note in the last column if useful.

Day	Action done	Focus block done	Slept and rested	Note
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

Day	Action done	Focus block done	Slept and rested	Note
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				
29				
30				

KEY TAKEAWAY

Tools do not create focus, but they make it visible and repeatable. Use one or two consistently rather than all of them occasionally.

সারকথা: এই ছকগুলো ব্যবহার করুন, তবে শান্তি বা তুলনার জন্য নয়; নিজেকে বোঝার জন্য।

CHAPTER 22

The Higher Definition of Success

> *Success without integrity is not meaningful success.*

We began with a student in the glow of a phone and we end with a question that no productivity system can answer for you: *what is success?*

If success means output, then it is easy to measure and easy to pursue. You can count words written, deals closed, marks earned. But output alone does not tell you whether the work was honest, whether it benefited anyone, or whether the person who did it was becoming better or worse in the process.

Success has several layers

Layer	The question	Signs
Competence	Am I becoming skilled?	Quality of work, depth of understanding
Contribution	Whom does this benefit?	Value to people: customers, students, patients, family, community
Character	Who am I becoming?	Honesty, fairness, patience, humility, consistency
Balance	Is my life in proportion?	Health, family, friendships, worship, rest
Meaning	Does this align with what I believe matters?	Purpose, values, and for the believer, accountability before Allah

Deep Focus strengthens the first layer directly and can support the others. But it cannot substitute for them. A person can be brilliantly competent and morally hollow. A person can be dutiful and exhausted. The higher definition of success asks for all five, held together.

What the tradition adds

Surah al-Asr (103:1–3) is short: "By the passage of time! Surely humanity is in grave loss, except those who have faith, do good, and urge each other to the truth, and urge each other to perseverance." I will not draw a productivity rule from it. What I take from it, as an interpretation, is a sober frame for how we think about time and effort: the standard is not how much we did, but the faith, the good, the truth and the perseverance that our time was in service of, and the community that helped us.

Note the last phrase: *urge each other.* Success in this frame is not a solitary achievement. We remind one another, we support one another. The best use of Deep Focus may be one that leaves other people better off.

Benefit people

The Deep Focus journey ends, in the thesis of this book, at **meaningful impact.** Impact is not fame or scale. It may be a student who understood, a customer who was served honestly, a patient who was treated with care, a child who felt seen or a colleague who was supported. Ask, at the end of your week: *who benefited from my attention?*

In an age of intelligent machines

As AI becomes more capable, one might worry that human effort matters less. I think it matters more, in the ways that count. Machines can speed our work. They cannot want the good on our behalf, take responsibility for our choices, sit with a grieving friend or decide what our lives are for. Those remain the work of human beings, and they are worthy of our best attention.

A closing reflection

Imagine yourself at the end of a long and full life, looking back at how your attention was spent. What would you wish you had given more of it to? What would you be glad you refused?

আপনার সবচেয়ে বড় সম্পদ সময় নয়, মনোযোগ। কারণ একই এক ঘণ্টা কেউ কাটায় গভীরভাবে, কেউ কাটায় ছড়ানো মন নিয়ে, আর ফলাফল হয় আলাদা। যে মনোযোগ আপনি আজ কাউকে দিলেন, সেটাই আপনার সবচেয়ে সত্যিকারের উপহার।

REFLECT

1. Which of the five layers of success (Competence, Contribution, Character, Balance, Meaning) is currently strongest in your life, and which needs care?
2. Who benefited from your attention this week?

ACTION STEP

Write a short note (or make a call) of gratitude and attention to one person who has supported your growth. Give them your full attention while you do it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Success has layers: competence, contribution, character, balance and meaning. Deep Focus serves them all when it is guided by purpose and integrity, and when it benefits people.

সারকথা: সফলতা শুধু কাজ শেষ করা নয়; সৎভাবে, ভারসাম্য রেখে, মানুষের উপকারে কাজ করাই সত্যিকারের সফলতা।

Conclusion: What Deserves Your Attention?

> *"I do not need to do everything. I need to know what matters, protect my attention for it, execute with excellence, and live with greater purpose."*

We began with a boy in front of a chapter he could not remember, a teacher grading essays in the margins of a busy evening, a founder answering messages instead of building, a manager who ended each day unable to say what she had done, and a mother whose son wanted to show her a drawing. In each case the people were not lazy, foolish or uncaring. They were spread thin over a world that offers more than anyone can attend to.

The response of this book has been consistent from the first page. It is not "do more." It is:

Know what matters. Purpose comes before productivity. P.U.R.P.O.S.E. asks you to purify your intention, understand what matters, remove the nonessential, prioritise one big outcome, own your attention, seek help and execute with excellence.

Protect your attention. Attention is finite. D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. gives you a way to run each working session: define the result, eliminate distraction before it arrives, engage one priority, protect the block, fuel your capacity, produce before you consume, check and correct, use AI intelligently, and stop with a review.

Use AI wisely. AI is speed. Human beings supply purpose, judgment and responsibility. Accelerate where the work is routine, augment where you have already thought, abstain where the struggle or the ethics are the point.

Sustain it. Sleep, recovery, consistency and mercy toward yourself keep the practice alive across seasons.

Keep the frame. For those of us who are Muslims, the frame is not a garnish. Salah is worship, not an interruption. Family has rights and is not an efficiency problem. The body has a right over us. Sincerity comes before strategy, and integrity before success.

What I hope you keep

If you forget every framework in this book, I hope you keep four small things.

1. **A question.** Before you begin, ask: *what deserves my best attention right now, and why?*
2. **A boundary.** Protect at least one block a day, with an end, for something that matters.
3. **A habit of checking.** Do not accept fluent answers, from a person, a feed or a machine, without checking what you can.
4. **A place for people.** Give the people you love your full attention, without a phone in the room.

A last word on humility

I have tried to be honest in these pages about what is known and what is only proposed. The research on attention and learning is real, but it is also incomplete and evolving. The frameworks are useful, but they are mine, and they are not laws of nature. The religious sources are cited with respect and with the awareness that I am a student of them, not an authority. If I have erred, I hope the errors are corrected by those with more knowledge and that I am corrected with kindness.

What I am most confident about is the question that started it all. In a world engineered to take your attention, choosing where to place it is one of the few freedoms that is entirely yours. Use it well.

আপনার মনোযোগ আপনার জীবন। তাকে যত্ন করে খরচ করুন।

ABU TALIB

APPENDICES

Facilitator's guide, frequently asked questions, glossary and journal prompts

Appendix A: Workshop & Course Companion Guide

This appendix is for teachers, trainers, team leaders and study-circle organisers who want to use DEEP FOCUS as a workshop workbook, course companion, corporate training programme or student learning programme. Everything here is an original applied design by Abu Talib and has not been validated as an intervention; treat outcomes as things to observe and discuss, not to promise.

Principles for facilitators

- **Practice over lecture.** Aim for at least half of every session to be participants doing something: capturing, planning, recalling, explaining.
- **No shaming.** Distraction is a design problem before it is a character problem. Do not ask participants to reveal their scores.
- **Scorecards are private.** The Deep Focus Scorecard is a personal reflection tool and must not be used to rate, rank or evaluate individuals.
- **Respect diversity.** In mixed-faith groups, present the Islamic references as the author's own frame, and invite participants to bring their own values to the P.U.R.P.O.S.E. framework (for example, substituting "Seek support and guidance" for step S). Never pressure anyone.
- **Model the behaviour.** Start on time, put your phone away and end on time.

Session plan 1: 90-minute Deep Focus Essentials workshop

Time	Activity	Materials
0:00–0:10	**Opening.** Two-minute silent phone-away experiment; participants write one sentence about what their mind did. Introduce the definition of Deep Focus.	Timer; paper
0:10–0:25	**Why attention is under pressure.** Short talk on switching costs and attention residue (Chapter 3), with the caveats. Pair discussion: "When did I last lose an hour to switching?"	Slides or flipchart
0:25–0:45	**P.U.R.P.O.S.E. in miniature.** Participants write their roles, one season outcome and tomorrow's One Big Outcome.	OBO Worksheet
0:45–1:00	**Environment design.** Run the Focus Environment Checklist on a real task. Write one if-then plan.	Checklist
1:00–1:15	**A live 10-minute D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. session.** Participants work silently on their OBO with phones away, using the capture list, then write one line at the end.	Capture list
1:15–1:25	**AI and human depth.** Three modes (Accelerate, Augment, Abstain); the AI Responsibility Check.	Handout
1:25–1:30	**Commitments.** Each person writes one action for the next 24 hours and one for the next week.	Cards

Session plan 2: Half-day workshop (3.5 hours)

Add to the 90-minute plan: a full 45-minute focus session with a group debrief; the Stop / Simplify / Delegate exercise; the Personal Attention Audit method; team norms discussion using the Team Focus Charter (Chapter 14); and a closing planning session for the 30-Day Challenge.

Programme 1: Six-week student learning programme

Suitable for schools, universities and study circles. Sessions of 45 to 60 minutes, once per week.

Week	Theme	In-session activity	Practice for the week
1	**Study time is not learning**	Compare rereading with recall on a short passage; discuss the difference	Write learning targets for three sessions
2	**Retrieval practice**	Blank-page recall on a topic; peer explanation	Use recall in every study session
3	**Spacing and planning**	Build a two-week spaced review plan	Complete three spaced reviews
4	**Attention and the phone**	Focus Environment Checklist; phone distraction strategy; capture list	One phone-away block per day
5	**AI study protocol**	Practise TRY, THINK, ASK AI, VERIFY, RETRY on a real problem; discuss integrity	Keep an AI log
6	**Exam system and review**	Build an exam plan; error-log method; weekly learning review	Complete a timed practice paper and error analysis

Facilitator notes. Invite students to share methods that worked. Do not make any student feel that their previous strategies were foolish; most have been taught only rereading and highlighting. Encourage parents, where appropriate, to read the "For parents and teachers of students" section of Chapter 12.

Programme 2: Three-session team programme

Session	Focus	Outputs
1. Awareness (75 min)	Attention research overview; Personal Attention Audit briefing; team discussion of interruption sources	Each person runs a three-day audit
2. Design (90 min)	Share audit insights; draft the Team Focus Charter; meeting audit; message norms	A draft charter, a list of meetings to shorten or end
3. Sustain (60 min, one month later)	Review what worked; adjust the charter; AI norms discussion; commitments	A revised charter and a review date

Facilitator notes. Leaders must go first. Agree explicitly on after-hours expectations and respect for prayer and family time. Track *team-level* observations (meeting hours, number of focus blocks kept), not individual scores.

Programme 3: Four-week Deep Focus circle (peer group)

A small group meets weekly, follows the 30-Day Challenge (Chapter 20), and uses each meeting to share one lesson from the week, one difficulty and one commitment. Rotate the facilitator. Keep meetings to an hour and start with two minutes of silence.

Measuring outcomes responsibly

If you want to know whether a programme is helping, use simple, honest measures:

- **Self-reported reflections** before and after (for example, "How many focus blocks did I complete last week?").

- **Behavioural counts** (meetings held, focus blocks kept, spaced reviews completed).
- **Quality of output,** assessed by the participants' own standards or by an appropriate external measure (for a student, practice test results).

Avoid claims such as "increases productivity by X%" unless you have run a properly designed evaluation. Never present the Deep Focus Scorecard as a validated test.

Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions

Isn't Deep Focus a luxury for people who control their own schedule?

It is easier when you do, but you do not need full control to make a difference. Even in a demanding environment, you can often protect small blocks, agree simple norms and reduce reflexive switching. Start with one 25-minute block and one conversation. If your role genuinely allows no protected time, use early or late hours for personal deep work, and consider discussing with your manager the trade-offs of constant availability.

What if my job requires me to be constantly available?

Then define what "available" means. Many roles require *responsiveness to the right things*, not to everything. Agree on which channels carry true urgency, respond quickly to those, and batch the rest. If responsiveness truly cannot be batched, protect attention in other places: the start and end of your day, your commute, your personal study.

I have trouble concentrating all the time. Will this work for me?

This book offers general strategies, not treatment. External structure such as clear targets, short blocks, fewer distractions and captured urges is helpful for many people, and you can adjust block lengths to your own needs. But persistent difficulties with attention, especially if they affect daily life, work or study, deserve a conversation with a qualified health professional. Seeking such an assessment is a responsible step.

Isn't AI going to make deep skills obsolete?

AI is changing which skills carry the most value. The evidence discussed in Chapters 5 and 16 suggests that AI can raise performance on tasks

inside its competence and can mislead on tasks outside it. Judgment, verification, ethical reasoning, communication and the ability to think deeply about difficult problems seem more important, not less, as the tools improve. Nobody knows exactly how this will play out; the sensible response is to keep building your capability while using the tools well.

How do I do this while keeping Salah and family responsibilities?

Build your day around them. Place focus blocks between prayer times, end blocks with margin before each prayer and treat family time as one of the things the day is for. Chapters 7, 17 and 19 discuss this in detail.

How long should a focus block be?

There is no scientifically established perfect length. Begin with 25 to 45 minutes and extend gradually according to your task and energy. Take short breaks between blocks. If your best blocks are 90 minutes, use 90. If they are 20, use 20.

Should I listen to music while I work?

The evidence on background music is mixed, and individual differences are large. Many people find that music with lyrics interferes with reading and writing, while familiar instrumental music or steady background sound can help some people. Test it for yourself with a specific task and compare the quality of your output.

Is using AI for study cheating?

It depends on your institution's rules and on how you use it. Using AI to get hints, explanations, practice questions and feedback on your own attempts, where allowed, can support learning. Submitting AI-produced work as your own where prohibited is dishonest. When in doubt, ask your teacher, and always follow the rules.

Should I quit social media?

That is a personal decision. The aim of this book is *intentional* use, not necessarily abstinence. Some people find that removing certain apps

entirely works best; others do well with time windows and boundaries. Choose what serves your purpose.

How do I get my team on board?

Start small and lead by example. Propose a one-month experiment, such as a weekly meeting-free half-day, and measure something simple. Share the reasons and the evidence honestly, including its limits. The Team Focus Charter in Chapter 14 is a starting point for discussion.

What if I fail the 30-Day Challenge?

You cannot fail a challenge designed for learning. If you miss days, resume. If you stop, restart with a smaller version. The value lies in what you notice about your own attention.

Isn't wanting to be productive a worldly pursuit?

It depends on the purpose and the limits. Work done with a sound intention, within the halal, in service of others and without neglecting worship, family or health can be part of a life of worship and benefit. This book aims to keep productivity in its proper place: as a servant of purpose and not as its master.

How do I know if the research in this book is reliable?

Each claim is attributed to its source, and the type of evidence is labelled. Where evidence is mixed or limited, I have said so. Please read the Research Notes and, where a claim matters for an important decision, consult the original sources.

Appendix C: Glossary

Amanah. A trust; responsibility entrusted to a person, including time, health, knowledge, position and the people in one's care.

Attention residue. The tendency for part of one's attention to remain on a previous task after switching to a new one, especially when the previous task was left unfinished (Leroy, 2009).

Barakah. Blessing and increase in goodness, sought from Allah.

Busy ≠ Effective. A signature idea of this book: activity is not the same as achievement.

Capture list. A written list for stray thoughts and urges that arise during focused work, to be handled later.

Cognitive offloading. Using external tools or actions to reduce mental demands (Risko & Gilbert, 2016).

D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S. The book's original nine-step framework for a single working session.

Deep Focus. The intentional ability to direct attention, cognitive energy and effort toward a clearly defined high-value objective, protect that attention from avoidable interruption, stay engaged long enough to create meaningful progress, and then review and recover intelligently.

Deep work. A term popularised by Cal Newport for cognitively demanding work performed in distraction-free concentration.

Distributed (spaced) practice. Spreading study across time rather than massing it into one session.

Dhikr. Remembrance of Allah.

Du'a. Supplication.

Halal and haram. What is permissible and what is prohibited in Islam.

Ihsan. Excellence and beauty in conduct and work; doing a thing with care and consciousness of Allah.

Implementation intention. An if-then plan specifying when, where and how one will act (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

Interleaving. Mixing different types of problems or topics within a study session.

Metacognition. Thinking about one's own thinking and learning; monitoring and regulating it.

Minimum Viable Focus (MVF). The smallest focus session that still counts on a bad day.

Muhasabah. Honest self-accounting and reflection.

Niyyah. Intention.

One Big Outcome (OBO). The single most important, specific and finishable result for a day.

Output before activity. A signature idea: decide and produce the result before or ahead of consuming and rushing through tasks.

P.U.R.P.O.S.E. The book's original seven-step framework for direction: Purify Your Intention; Understand What Matters; Remove the Nonessential; Prioritize One Big Outcome; Own Your Attention; Seek Allah's Help; Execute with Excellence.

Retrieval practice. Recalling information from memory, as opposed to rereading it, in order to strengthen learning.

Salah. The obligatory prayer.

Self-explanation. Explaining material to oneself or others in one's own words as one learns it.

Switch note. A one-line note of the next action, written before leaving a task, to ease returning to it.

Taqwa. God-consciousness; mindfulness of Allah.

Task switching. Moving attention from one task to another, often incurring costs in speed and accuracy.

Tawbah. Repentance and return to Allah after error.

The Three Modes (Accelerate, Augment, Abstain). The book's original model for deciding how to use AI.

Appendix D: Thirty Reflection Prompts

Use these as a journal. One a day, or one a week, or whenever you need a pause.

1. What is one thing I am attending to that I would not choose to attend to if I stopped to think?
2. Who most deserves my undivided attention this week?
3. What is the most important thing I have been avoiding, and what feeling is underneath the avoidance?
4. If my attention were a budget, where is the money actually going?
5. What am I saying yes to that is costing me a deeper yes?
6. What does "enough" look like for this season of my life?
7. Which of my current habits do I want to still have in ten years?
8. What is one thing I do only because others expect it?
9. When did I last experience deep absorption in something worthwhile? What made it possible?
10. What is one relationship I have been neglecting because of busyness?
11. Where am I confusing speed with progress?
12. What would I do with an extra hour of full attention tomorrow?
13. What did I learn this week that I can explain without notes?
14. Which of my beliefs about my own ability to focus is helping me, and which is not?
15. Am I using AI to think better or to think less? How do I know?
16. What is the difference between being busy and being of benefit?
17. What is one skill I want to keep, even if a machine could do it for me?
18. What boundaries do I need to set with kindness?

19. Where does my body need rest that I have been denying it?
20. What one act of service could I do with my best attention this week?
21. If a person I respect saw my calendar, what would they conclude I value?
22. What would I like to be remembered for, and does my attention this week point in that direction?
23. When I fail at my plan, how do I speak to myself?
24. What did I complete this week that mattered to someone else?
25. What is one thing I can stop doing, starting today?
26. What is my Minimum Viable Focus, and what is its cue?
27. How do my prayers and my work relate to each other in my day? Is the order right?
28. What am I grateful for in my capacity to think, learn and work?
29. What do I want to ask Allah for help with, in my work and in my character?
30. If I could change one thing about how I use my attention, and could do it for the sake of those I love, what would it be?

A Research & Framework Integrity Note

This note summarises how the book was built and where its claims stand.

1. The frameworks are original. P.U.R.P.O.S.E. and D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S., along with the Student Learning Loop, the Clarity–Protection–Capacity model, the Three Modes of AI Use, the AI Responsibility Check, the Deep Focus Scorecard, the Minimum Viable Focus and the Daily Deep Focus Operating System, are **original applied frameworks and tools by Abu Talib.** They are inspired by a synthesis of research, professional practice, learning science, AI-era work patterns, Islamic principles and practical performance concepts.

2. They are not validated instruments. None of these frameworks or scorecards has been tested for reliability or validity, and none should be used as a diagnostic or evaluative instrument.

3. They are not the property of others. They are not presented as official or proprietary frameworks of any cited researcher, university or institution; of Microsoft or Meta; of Sabit International; of Coach Kanchon Academy; or of Islam itself. The mention of any organisation in this book is for citation and context only, and does not imply endorsement or affiliation.

4. Different kinds of sources do different jobs. The Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah provide religious and ethical guidance. Modern research independently informs how attention, learning and performance work. Neither is used to prove the other. Where I offer a modern application of a religious source, it is marked as my interpretation, and it is not a religious ruling. For matters of Islamic law and practice, please consult qualified scholars.

5. Evidence is labelled. Peer-reviewed research, working papers and preprints, industry research, practice concepts, Islamic sources, original

frameworks and author interpretation are distinguished in the text. Where evidence is mixed or limited (for example the smartphone-presence findings, the AI and critical-thinking correlations and the ego-depletion literature), I have said so.

6. The AI evidence is young. Studies of generative AI and human cognition are new, fast-moving and often based on self-reports, specific samples or specific tools. Expect revision.

7. This is not professional advice. Nothing here replaces medical, psychological, legal, financial or religious advice.

8. Corrections are welcome. If you find an error in a citation, a claim or a reference, please tell the author so that future editions can be corrected.

Research Notes

This section maps the book's main claims to their sources, with a note on the type and strength of the evidence. Full citations are in the References.

Verification note

The sources below were located and their key details (authors, journal, year, main findings) were checked against publisher, database or official-source pages while this manuscript was prepared. The Qur'anic verses and hadith texts were checked against sunnah.com and quran.com for wording and numbering. A number of classic works (for example James, Simon, Kahneman, Csikszentmihalyi, Ophir et al., Ariga and Lleras, Diekelmann and Born, Kornell and Bjork, Rohrer and Taylor, Rubinstein et al., Monsell, Masicampo and Baumeister, Sirois and Pychyl, Wohl et al., Mrazek et al., Killingsworth and Gilbert, Delgado et al., Locke and Latham, Hattie and Timperley, Flavell, Ericsson et al., Macnamara et al., Sanbonmatsu et al., Risko and Gilbert, Sonnentag and Fritz, McDaniel and Radesky, Westbrook et al., Ryan and Deci, Wood and Neal) are cited from the established literature. **Before commercial publication, the author or publisher should confirm page numbers, DOIs and exact wording against the original sources.**

Claims and sources by chapter

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
Intro, 2, 14	Employees interrupted about every two minutes; 117 emails and 153 Teams messages per day; meetings after 8 p.m. up 16% year over year; 48% describe work as chaotic and fragmented	Microsoft Work Trend Index (2025), "Breaking down the infinite workday"	Industry research: survey of 31,000 and Microsoft 365 telemetry; not a controlled study
1	Attention as limited capacity	Kahneman (1973)	Classic theory
1	Deep vs. shallow work	Newport (2016)	Practice concept
1	Flow	Csikszentmihalyi (1990)	Psychological theory
2	Heavy media multitasking and filtering/switching performance	Ophir et al. (2009)	Peer-reviewed; correlational; later findings mixed
2, 9	Smartphone presence and cognitive capacity	Ward et al. (2017)	Peer-reviewed experiment; replications mixed
2, 12, 15	Off-task laptop use lowered comprehension for users and nearby peers	Sana et al. (2013)	Peer-reviewed experiment
2, 8	Procrastination as short-term mood repair	Sirois & Pychyl (2013)	Peer-reviewed review

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
3	Attention residue	Leroy (2009)	Peer-reviewed experiments
3	Task-switching costs	Monsell (2003); Rubinstein et al. (2001)	Peer-reviewed review and experiments
3	Interrupted work: faster but more stress, frustration, time pressure, effort (48 participants)	Mark et al. (2008)	Peer-reviewed conference paper; small sample
3	Specific plans reduce interference from unfinished goals	Masicampo & Baumeister (2011)	Peer-reviewed
3	Frequent multitaskers tended to overestimate their ability	Sanbonmatsu et al. (2013)	Peer-reviewed
4	Progress in meaningful work and inner work life	Amabile & Kramer (2011)	Research-based book
5, 16	GPT-4 field experiment with 758 consultants (12.2% more tasks, 25.1% faster, over 40% higher quality inside the frontier; 19 percentage points less likely correct outside)	Dell'Acqua et al. (2023)	Working paper; field experiment
5, 16	Higher confidence in GenAI associated with less critical thinking (319 workers, 936 examples)	Lee et al. (2025)	Peer-reviewed; self-report survey

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
5, 16	Negative correlation (r = −0.68) between AI use and critical thinking (666 participants)	Gerlich (2025)	Peer-reviewed; correlational, self-report
5, 12, 16	Unrestricted AI access improved practice but harmed later exam performance; tutor-style guardrails mitigated harm	Bastani et al. (2025)	Peer-reviewed; randomised field experiment
5	Cognitive offloading	Risko & Gilbert (2016)	Peer-reviewed review
16	Automation complacency and bias	Parasuraman & Manzey (2010)	Peer-reviewed review
6, 10	Self-Determination Theory	Ryan & Deci (2000)	Peer-reviewed theory
8	Mind-wandering about 47% of sampled time, associated with lower reported happiness	Killingsworth & Gilbert (2010)	Peer-reviewed; large sampling study
8	Two-week mindfulness training and working memory/comprehension (48 participants)	Mrazek et al. (2013)	Peer-reviewed; small, preliminary
8	Self-forgiveness and later procrastination	Wohl et al. (2010)	Peer-reviewed; specific sample
9, 11, 18	Context cues and habit	Wood & Neal (2007)	Peer-reviewed review
9, 11	If-then plans, averaged of about 0.65 across 94 tests	Gollwitzer & Sheeran (2006)	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
10, 11	Specific, challenging goals outperform vague goals under certain conditions	Locke & Latham (2002)	Peer-reviewed review
11	Brief breaks help maintain performance on a prolonged task	Ariga & Lleras (2011)	Peer-reviewed; specific task
11	Ego depletion effect near zero in a multi-lab replication (d = 0.04; 23 labs; 2,141 participants)	Hagger et al. (2016)	Peer-reviewed registered replication
11, 12	Retrieval practice beats restudy on delayed tests	Roediger & Karpicke (2006)	Peer-reviewed experiments
11	Metacognition; feedback	Flavell (1979); Hattie & Timperley (2007)	Peer-reviewed
11	Deliberate practice: limited-duration sessions; debated interpretation	Ericsson et al. (1993); Macnamara et al. (2014)	Peer-reviewed; contested
11, 12	Learners misjudge what they know	Kornell & Bjork (2007)	Peer-reviewed
12	Ratings of ten learning techniques	Dunlosky et al. (2013)	Peer-reviewed review
12	Spacing: 839 assessments, 317 experiments, 184 articles	Cepeda et al. (2006)	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis
12	Self-explanation	Chi et al. (1994)	Peer-reviewed

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
12	Interleaved practice in mathematics	Rohrer & Taylor (2007)	Peer-reviewed
12	Paper vs. screen reading comprehension	Delgado et al. (2018)	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis
12, 17	Sleep and memory consolidation	Diekelmann & Born (2010)	Peer-reviewed review
14	Interruptions and medication administration errors	Westbrook et al. (2010)	Peer-reviewed; specific setting
15	Parent technology interruptions and child behaviour problems	McDaniel & Radesky (2018)	Peer-reviewed; correlational
15	Feedback	Hattie & Timperley (2007)	Peer-reviewed review
17	Short-term sleep deprivation and cognition (lapses g = 0.776)	Lim & Dinges (2010)	Peer-reviewed meta-analysis
17	Adults should regularly sleep seven or more hours	Watson et al. (2015)	Professional consensus statement
17	Recovery experiences	Sonnentag & Fritz (2007)	Peer-reviewed measure development
18	Habit formation: median about 66 days, range about 18 to 254; a single miss not materially harmful	Lally et al. (2010)	Peer-reviewed; wide variation
13	Maker's schedule vs. manager's schedule	Graham (2009)	Practitioner essay

Chapter	Claim	Source	Type and strength
8	Identity-based habits	Clear (2018)	Practice concept
2	Attention fragmentation on screens	Mark (2023)	General-audience synthesis

Religious references

Reference	Used in	Note
Qur'an 20:114	7, 15	Supplication for increase in knowledge; context of revelation
Qur'an 59:18	7	Accountability; look to what is sent forth for tomorrow
Qur'an 17:36; 49:6	5, 7, 12, 16	Verification and accountability for hearing, sight and intellect
Qur'an 4:103; 2:45; 23:1–2	7, 10	Prayer at appointed times; seeking help through patience and prayer; humility in prayer
Qur'an 103:1–3	22	Time, loss and the qualities that save from it
Qur'an 78:9	17	Sleep as rest
Sahih al-Bukhari 1; Sahih Muslim 1907	7, 10	Actions by intentions
Sahih Muslim 2664	7, 10	Cherish what benefits you, seek help from Allah, do not lose heart
Sahih al-Bukhari 6464	7, 18	Most beloved deed is the most regular, even if little
Sahih al-Bukhari 5199	7, 17	The body, the eyes and the family have a right

Reference	Used in	Note
Sahih al-Bukhari 6412	4, 7	Two blessings many lose: health and free time
Sahih Muslim 1955	7, 10	Excellence (ihsan) prescribed in everything
Sahih al-Bukhari 893; Sahih Muslim 1829	5, 7, 14, 15, 16	Every person is a guardian and will be asked

Hadith and Qur'an English renderings vary between translations. The reader is encouraged to consult trusted editions and qualified scholars.

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Sahih al-Bukhari: 1; 893; 5199; 6412; 6464. Sahih Muslim: 1829; 1907; 1955; 2664. Verified against sunnah.com. English renderings vary between translations.

About Abu Talib

ABU TALIB is a Digital Marketing Expert, Growth Strategist, Entrepreneur, Educator and Author.

His professional focus spans strategy, artificial intelligence, data, performance marketing, digital systems, education and human development, joined by a single theme: *meaningful growth*, the kind that is measurable and also worth having.

Working at the intersection of data and human behaviour, he has come to believe that the defining professional skill of the AI era will not be speed alone but the quality of attention, judgment and character that people bring to their work. **DEEP FOCUS** brings that belief together with the frameworks, evidence and moral grounding that he hopes will help readers, students, entrepreneurs, professionals, teachers and parents, to use their attention with greater purpose.

His guiding philosophy is:

> *Strategy First. Data Always. Growth with Purpose.*

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Reader Feedback & Course Idea

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Thank you for reading this far. The author, Abu Talib, is considering a practical online course or guided programme built on **DEEP FOCUS**. Whether it happens will depend on what readers actually need. Think through the questions below, then send your answers by any of the routes that follow.

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Back Cover

DEEP FOCUS

A Purposeful Attention & Performance Operating System for the AI-Driven World

You are not lazy. You are fragmented.

Notifications, meetings, feeds and now instant AI answers compete for the one resource you cannot get back: your attention. Most productivity books tell you to do more, faster. **DEEP FOCUS** asks a better question first: *what deserves your best attention, and why?*

Inside, you will find two original frameworks, **P.U.R.P.O.S.E.** for direction and **D.E.E.P. F.O.C.U.S.** for execution, alongside an honest reading of the research on attention, learning and AI; dedicated chapters for students, entrepreneurs, professionals, leaders, teachers, creators and parents; a practical 30-day implementation challenge; and ready-to-use worksheets. Written in professional English with Bangla reflections, and grounded in Islamic values of intention, balance and integrity.

Protect Your Attention. Direct Your Energy. Do What Matters. Create Meaningful Impact.

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Protect Your Attention.

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Execute with Excellence.

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Remain Consistent.

Benefit People.

Create Meaningful Impact.

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