

# SKILL OF DEEP FOCUS

FOCI

# **Skill of Deep Focus**

*FOCI Training Manual*

## 2 FOCUS SKILL

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## **PREFACE**

Apple Founder Steve Jobs, didn't let his kids use the iPad, or really any product their dad invented.

Microsoft Founder Bill Gates, imposed a cap on screen time for his daughter.

Google's CEO Sundar Pichai, didn't let his 11-year-old son have a smartphone.

These are not mere coincidences.

And just as you would have guessed, this has to do at least in part, with the negative impact of digital distraction on both learning and academic performance.

But why?

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*“Attention is a resource—a person has only so much of it.”*

*Matthew Crawford*

In fact, we are experiencing one of the biggest goldrushes in the past two decades. Only this time it is not gold that is being mined. It is our attention.

Swarms of internet and gaming companies make use of psychological hacks, similar to that of slot machine, to get us into an addiction loop so that we can use their product longer and more frequently.

Why are they doing this to us, and even to children?

Monetize our attention.

To put in perspective, each “click” on the ads, our voluntary or involuntary divulging of our attention, generates on average 1-3 USD for these companies, and in industry jargon this is called CPC: cost-per-click.

Just as you might have bet on, these ads are indeed very arousing to grab our attention and interrupt our focus.

It is just good business, nothing personal.

What’s so bad about distractions?

We all want some lovely distractions along the way.

But what is important is that we should be the one who makes the choice about when and what to divert our attention to, not to be trapped in distraction and procrastination loops, and to be left with little choice at the end of the day.

The ability to make this choice is our focus.

Sadly, the key decision-making region of our brain (prefrontal cortex) doesn't fully mature until the age of 25. It becomes more important that the young should be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to make the choice of what to focus on.

If left unchallenged, the deprivation of our focus due to commercial interest on our attention would create a chasm of a generation of a large base of low skilled and attention deprived workforce and on the other hand, an small elite group of executives, who can make full use of technological advances, and at the same time benefiting from laser sharp focus.

This is happening already, with 7-33% of undergraduates taking smart drugs to boost their focus. Whereas these drugs were originally developed to treat attention deficit problems.

The Matthew effect of "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" would aggravate in this age of attention economy.

Why FOCI?

With FOCI, we strive to democratize knowledge of countering the negative effects of distraction, and earn a sharper focus where we can have the choice to indulge in whatever distractions we choose to, and not be carried away unwittingly.

Because we all deserve this choice.

What should we do?

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The 2019 Nobel Prize winning work on economics attributes the universal traps of ignorance and inertia as one the main factors to poverty.

So.

Break the inertia by getting started today.

Acquire the skill and knowledge of improving focus, whether it is for yourself, or the young.

Let's do this.

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<i>Identify the 5 main types of vicious loops that could be affecting you all the time.</i>	
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**Focus Skill Foundation**  
**Discover your Achilles' heel of**  
**your performance**

*Identify the 5 main types of vicious loops that could be affecting you all the time.*

Making mistakes is usually not a problem.

We make mistakes. We become unhappy. We correct these mistakes.

Then voilà, we become happy with ourselves again.

**The real problem**

However, there are a few kinds of mistakes at different levels of sophistication, that tend to boil the frog.

Worse still, not only are these mistakes hard to detect, it is even hard to extract ourselves from them.

Because these mistakes tend to manifest as vicious loops - meaning the mistake aggravates itself, if left unchecked.

**Worst of all**

These vicious loops tend to interact with each other in a **domino effect** - in other words - these vicious loops may compound together to really burn us out.

We have all experienced good days and bad days with our work and studies.

The balanced probability is that one or more vicious loops have taken effect during those worse days.

So, if we learn to identify them, and pull ourselves out with the right techniques early, we will **gain the power to turn a bad day good.**



This focus model is formulated through extended observations and interviews with undergraduates of Cambridge University, over a span of several years, to answer a particularly intriguing question.

**Why would extremely privileged and intelligent young individuals fail to perform academically**, whereas many seemingly less intelligent students outperform.

And more importantly, why would the spread of overachievers and underachievers increase so dramatically, in a matter of just a few years.

The simplified conclusion we drew is that of a complex interplay of 3 factors.

Factor 1: Matthew effect - the better adapted get stronger and the less adapted get weaker.

Factor 2: Demanding work, aggravates the Matthew effect, as spelled out later, by the Cambridge Focus Framework - how 5 vicious loops throttle an individual's progress.

Factor 3: Differing levels of focus skills that these young individuals possess, of how to –

1. Tune out distraction
2. Manipulate motivation
3. Manage willpower reserve
4. Reproducibly get into flow

- which would help them counteract the 5 vicious loops.

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To illustrate Cambridge Focus Framework, we will go through a story of Amy, the profile of an “average”<sup>1</sup> undergraduate at Cambridge University.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that “average” capability refers to the capability profile of 50th percentile (median) of the cohort, instead of mean capability profile, which is subject to the massive skewing effect of a smaller number of highly gifted young individuals from all over the world in Cambridge University.

## Amy's Story

Amy used to be able to get into flow easily with her coursework before she entered university. **She was a top student in her high school and rather popular.**

Five weeks into the school term, **she finds her work much harder than before.** If she couldn't find the time to go through the notes before class, she would find herself scrambling through the class.

This frustration feeds on her, as she knows if she didn't get as much from these sessions as she could, she would have to spend more time catching up.

This is the Paralysis Loop, where **the “problem at hand” that is the challenging course, sets her into a mild frustration.**

This work is not beyond her, just much denser and the pace is much faster. When the **conflicting priorities of social life set in**, she feels tempted by bad decisions, which she would normally avoid. But then she caves in, her sleep takes a toll, and fatigue level quickly escalates.

This is Burnout Loop, where **fatigue sets in from the “problem at hand” - the intense coursework.** Willpower bankruptcy ensues, and as a result she starts to make a series of detrimental decisions that undermine her capacity to tackle the challenging course, and exhausting herself further.

The most dramatic outcome is that she gets very anxious and irritable. These **negative emotions seem to breed themselves**, Amy starts to feel her stress is out of control, and she feels that she is starting to put her attention on the wrong places such as, “why am I

not breezing through the course like in high school”, “why am I not as smart as some of my friends?”, and “how am I going to avoid the unavoidable crash in the coming exams?”, all instead of her work.

This is the Catastrophizing Loop<sup>2</sup>, where **willpower bankruptcy prevents Amy from controlling her emotion**, and results in aggravating thoughts, that further stress her out, leaving her less capable to take on the “problem at hand” - the intense coursework.

Even after major effort, adjustments, and taking time off, at the expense of work progress, Amy begins to cope better with her stress by pushing the problems to the back of her mind, choosing to forget how much she has missed out and will need to catch up. However, **the inevitable side effects of choosing to suppress these thoughts, is becoming less motivated**. She used to look forward to getting work done, the very trait that enabled her to excel in the past. She now subconsciously associates her work with recent failures. This change in perspective increases the mental effort she expends to try to get work done, and she now finds **temporary relief from diversion by reading news, browsing her feeds, in the midst of her work**, sometimes even late into the night, in her college library where she knows that she should really be getting her work done.

This is “Self-sabotaging Loop”, where **low willpower reserve tempts Amy into procrastination**, with many side effects such as guilt, and lower self-esteem, which may trigger another Catastrophizing Loop or an overdrive out of guilt may trigger another Burn-out Loop.

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<sup>2</sup> Note 46% of Cambridge students believe that they are depressed while 21% have been diagnosed with depression.

However, the worst blow to Amy is when the effect of natural addiction sets in. And the addiction<sup>3</sup> in Amy's case manifests in terms of "Mindlessness Loop", where Amy starts down the path of **digital distraction, mindlessly scrolling down feeds, sometimes even during her classes**. Mindlessness breeds mindlessness. The more she stays in this state, the more she craves instant stimulus from the smartphone and the more she feels she can't seem to focus as well as before. Not only does this distractibility reduce her ability to focus, **it also impacts her short-term memory, she can't seem to remember things as well, which prevents her from learning quickly**.

This is the "Mindlessness Loop", which is the **terminal phase to Amy's focus capacity**. As the Mindlessness Loop is stabilized by natural conditioning mechanism, (or addiction in its negative manifestation), it is a highly stable loop, and given enough time, **a sufferer usually won't realize they are in it and thus have little motivation to break it**, despite the obvious impact it has on their cognition, keeping their "executive control" (the fancier term for willpower) constantly low, and subjecting themselves to all the other vicious loops.

Now, instead of how her high school teacher would describe her as quick, smart and motivated, her tutors in the University would most likely describe her as average and unremarkable.

If Amy stays in this state longer than she can afford, she would **descend from an "average" student to a "struggling" student**,

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Addiction is the craving for something, and loss of control over its use, in spite of undesirable consequences. It rewires the brain, by subverting the way it registers pleasure, and corrupting positive drives and motivation, such as for learning and self-improvement.

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which answers the question before the start of the story - why do extremely privileged and intelligent young individuals underperform?

Focus Skill Level 1 to Level 4 would describe skillsets Amy could use to subvert the negative effects of these vicious loops or even outperform her peers.

*“Know yourself, know your enemy, and you shall win a hundred battles.”*

*The Art of War*

### **Build the foundation of focus skills**

Objectively appraise the level of impact that the vicious loops in Cambridge Focus Framework have on you, Forming the conceptual model of how each of these loops affects you, and how they interact with each other, would enable you to tackle them better with focus skills.

Biologically, we can never lose our worst selves. But **with the right skills training, we can learn to live above them.**

## 1) Paralysis Loop

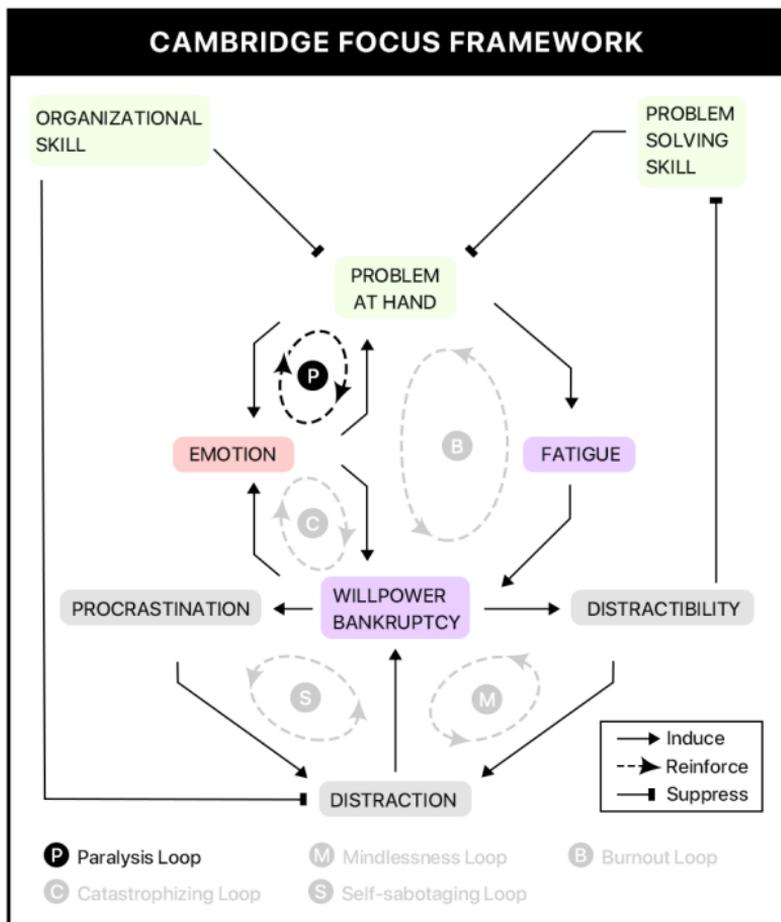


Figure 2. Paralysis Loop arises from the emotion from tackling the problem at hand, exacerbating the problem itself.

When you are solving a problem, you tend to get frustrated.

And the frustration is usually not helping, instead, for what you can usually perform well or get right, you tend to underperform.

A common symptom for students is to do well in daily coursework but not in examinations. And in formal interviews and presentations, they tend to **underperform below their real capability**.

For the better adapted, they would get better as they get deeper into the problem, and find their touch again.

For the less well adapted, they might even skip breathing for a few seconds as they get deeper into the problem and get even more anxious.

Paralysis Loop is a very sophisticated situation whereby **frustration of resolving a problem and natural stress response feed on each other**. And when enough stress is built up, it may trigger a Catastrophizing Loop which makes this loop even less tractable. This has been plaguing professional athletes, performing artists and high-stakes professions for millennia.

Breaking this loop is the highest hanging fruit, it is really about getting into **your peak mental performance** and that requires elimination of all other vicious loops as a prerequisite.

You can learn to counter the effect of this loop in **Focus Skill Level 4: Get into psychological flow** with the knowledge of tuning emotion states with breath pacing to help you tune into flow.

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**Rate from 1 to 5, how much this loop affects you (or your young).**

1 Insignificant

2 Minor

3 Moderate

4 Major

5 Severe



When you are distracted and become mindless with what you do.

And this mindless state further gets you into a more distractible state, and you seem to be carried off in an unproductive mindless state for quite a while.

A common symptom is for students to be very careless in coursework and examinations, and even in things they have got a good grasp, they underperform. And in the workplace, **strings of “sloppy” mistakes undermine the good work and effort invested.** And it is often characterized by either a blank look, or scrolling mindlessly on a smartphone late into the night, well past bedtime.

Mindlessness Loop starts off with a distraction while you are in a distractible state, this diminishes your conscious will, which in turn makes you even distractible. When your conscious will is almost depleted, you would transit into a **mindless state, highly distractible, awaiting the next stimuli that grab your attention, that keep you in this endless cycle.**

In fact, this has been exploited extensively commercially to reduce potential customers' conscious judgement with regards to making purchases, or continuously engaging with an app, even though one would most likely regret it later on.

Breaking this loop requires first building natural (or not so natural) triggers, to help you detect the presence of the vicious loop, and then proceeding to reduce the general distractibility.

You can learn to counter the effect of this loop in ***Focus Skill Level 1: Tune out distraction*** with the knowledge of the chaotic nature of your brain and how to bring it under control in minutes with bio-feedback.

**Rate from 1 to 5, how much this loop affects you (or your young).**

1 Insignificant

2 Minor

3 Moderate

4 Major

5 Severe



When you are going strong, but then you lose the traction.

And the loss in traction brings you more lethargy and you struggle to perform to the level that you really can.

A common symptom for students is to have oscillating academic performance. And in the workplace, someone who has fluctuating delivery who is seen as less dependable than someone else who is less capable. And it is often characterized by **a sudden loss of motivation that could be triggered by a bad night's sleep or an intense length of work.**

For the better adapted, they would be able to reboot quickly and get back on track almost without others noticing.

For the less well adapted, they might get stuck in this unproductive ditch, get anxious and begin to procrastinate uncontrollably.

Burnout Loop can start with frustration or stress at work progress, compounded with fatigue, or it can itself be triggered by fatigue, or bad sleep hygiene. However, the outcome is almost always that conscious will (commonly called motivation) is depleted and then, **work traction worsens, and more fatigue and stress ensue, feeding on each other.**

Breaking this loop is a high hanging fruit, it requires a fair amount of emotion awareness and basic skill of balancing fatigue and stress.

You can learn to counter the effect of this loop in ***Focus Skill Level 3: Sustain longer focus*** that gives the basic knowledge of how to detect and use techniques to regulate fatigue.

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**Rate from 1 to 5, how much this loop affects you (or your young).**

1 Insignificant

2 Minor

3 Moderate

4 Major

5 Severe

## 4) Catastrophizing Loop

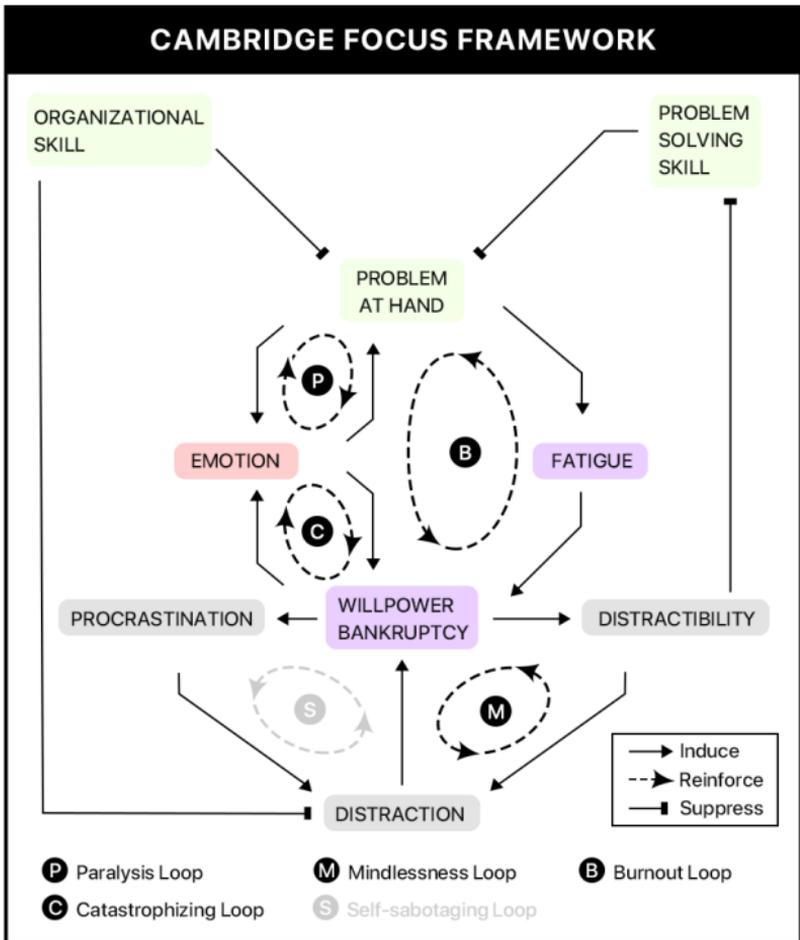


Figure 5. Catastrophizing Loop arises from emotion, depleting willpower reserve, which further destabilizes emotion state.

When you are stressed and become fixated with it.

And this fixation means that you can no longer think straight or act in your best interests. **Performance throttles all the way to the bottom.**

A common symptom is for students to be so stressed out about exams that they spend a disproportionate amount of time dwelling on the exams instead of preparing for it. In the workplace, they tend to avoid stressful tasks, such as giving a presentation even though they are very capable, and it would greatly benefit their career, instead, they give up opportunities to someone less capable than they are.

For the better adapted, they would be able to normalize this stress eventually, and get on with solving the problem.

For the less well adapted, they might get **uncontrollably stressed, which impedes any progress, or they might choose to forget about the problem** and procrastinate until the original problem really becomes an issue for them.

Catastrophizing Loops begin with stress and quickly end with total depletion of conscious will. This willpower bankruptcy, would almost always lead to the other vicious loops, as the absence of conscious will invites mindlessness and self-sabotaging via impulsive behavior.

This Catastrophizing Loop is totally manageable, breaking it requires the basic emotion awareness and basic techniques to regulate stress.

You can learn to counter the effect of this loop in **Focus Skill Level 3: Sustain longer focus** that gives the basic knowledge of how to detect and use techniques to regulate stress.

**Rate from 1 to 5, how much this loop affects you (or your young).**

1 Insignificant

2 Minor

3 Moderate

4 Major

5 Severe



When you experience a bout of impulse, especially when you anticipate effort is needed, you tend to follow the impulse, even though you know it is unwise.

And then later regret, along with other problems caused by the impulse, tend to preoccupy you, away from your work, until much later.

A common symptom for both students and in the workplace is procrastination, which means **they put off assignments and work until the very last minute, finding creative ways to fritter away time**, even though they can finish the work earlier and spend the time in much better and fulfilling ways. Worst, this squanders away their talents and opportunities, and corners them in life, with fewer and fewer options available to them.

For the better adapted, they would be conditioned to feel the emotion of “guilt” kicking in after a while and cut this loop.

For the less well adapted, they might not have built such an automatic protective mechanism, and tend to let it slide until external triggers such as an impending deadline bring them out of this daze.

**Self-sabotaging Loop is a result of human nature, where we tend to avoid pain and frustration and to seek out pleasure** - the more instant the gratification the better. Usually our conscious will keeps us in check from such destructive loops in which our impulse pushes us off the right track. However, when our willpower is worn down by either a Mindlessness Loop or Burnout Loop, we tend to fall prey to this Self-sabotaging Loop where we reverse the good work we have done and corner ourselves.

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Breaking this Self-sabotaging Loop requires a fair amount of investment, as it requires emotion awareness and the right skills to tame our human nature.

You can learn to counter the effect of this loop in ***Focus Skill Level 2: Terminate procrastination*** with the knowledge of how to use psychological techniques augmented with tech to terminate procrastination.

**Rate from 1 to 5, how much this loop affects you (or your young).**

1 Insignificant

2 Minor

3 Moderate

4 Major

5 Severe

Which of these vicious loops affect you more?

The root cause of a problem is often nonobvious.

Various loops are usually composed to confuse us, to lead us on a merry chase.

**However, willpower bankruptcy is a recurring theme for all these vicious loops, as escaping the conscious will poverty trap is always very tricky.**

Willpower is just another name for the neuroscientific description of the brain's prefrontal cortex's limited executive control capacity.

So, it is always more profitable to first identify the vicious loops that kick in and tend to deplete your willpower, and use the corresponding focus skill sets to banish the vicious loops.

There are not many moments that can have a profound impact on the way **our life unfolds**.

If you are here, and reading this line, and you have been pestered by one of these loops. **This could be your “defining” moment**, as the choice is now, literally in your hand.

If you press on, to acquire the skill to live above any of these vicious loops that have been throttling most people, you will accrue an edge that could set you apart, starting from this very moment you make this decision.

So, will you learn to control these vicious loops? It is not easy by the way.

## **NOTE**

A sloppy genius in a highly organized working environment can often perform really well.

For the scope of this focus training manual, memory skills (such as chunking, mnemonics and information organization), problem solving skills and organization skills are omitted. However, we can see from the interaction in the diagram, they take up a preeminent position in your performance.

For the purpose of simplification, one of the most destructive vicious loops is omitted.

The worst possible: Bad Life Situation Loop.

It is when one faces rejection from relationships such as parents, tutors or friends, because of a problem one fails on. For example, one may be addicted to games, so much so that one faces rebuff. This bad rejection escalates stress and stress aggravates the problem, and depletes one's willpower along the way.

So, if you are helping your young solve one of these vicious loops, be sure to be supporting and do not show unnecessary rejections, as this would only push him or her into a Bad Life Situation Loop.

## **Focus Skill Level One** **Tune out distractions at your will**

*Understand the perennial chaos happening inside your brain and bring it under control in minutes with biofeedback.*

What do Silicon Valley techies, investment bankers, corporate lawyers - the most well-paid jobs and students from top universities do in common?

### **Abusing Smart Drugs.**

The rate of abuse is between 7-33% for prescription drugs for attention deficit disorder. And to what end?

The edge.

To do better than others in entrance exams.

To secure a position in well paid jobs.

To win in the competition.

One should not be overly competitive.

But one should always be ready for competition.

We may not wish to subject ourselves to the side effects of these prescription drugs.

However, there is a lot to be gleaned from the mechanism of how these smart drugs work, and to **play this knowledge to our advantage**.

Our brain is divided into many regions responsible for different functions, such as seeing and hearing which process raw electromagnetic waves and soundwave signals into something intelligible, sifting through huge amounts of noise, all the time.

These processes are very computationally expensive, and we are doing them almost all the time.

What a smart drug such as amphetamine does, is to **tone down the sensitivity of brain regions** to external input, such as reducing peripheral vision.

Meaning we are less likely to pick out movement from the corner of our eyes and be distracted by it, and so doing, we can reclaim these brain regions for processing the information we want to focus on.

It is about **freeing up our preoccupied processing power** from taking in too much external input, which we don't need. Putting these assets directly under our conscious control gives us **the abundance of thinking power that we commonly call focus**.

Moreover, distraction, stress, and fatigue throughout the day disengage the different regions of our brain from working in synchrony with each other.

As a result, we are seldom as focused as what we can be.

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How can we put these dis-coordinated brain regions under our conscious will, and tone down sensitivity to distraction, so they obey our conscious decision, and focus on what is really important to us?

Just a few minutes of Focus Biofeedback.

**Find the intuition to control our attention** at will, to tone down our senses to distraction, and to find coordination with our different brain regions, with this training.

With these otherwise distracted brain regions back under your control, you can redirect this deepened attention to any other task, and enjoy the focus boost in a matter of minutes.

More importantly, it is effective brain training that, like weight training for your brain, **rewires your brain each time you do it.**

So, practice it.

Till you can tune your focus even without Focus Biofeedback.

For this control over your brain regions, your processing power, your attention, is a rare superpower.

Build up this edge.

You deserve it.

## **Objective**

Practice the following “If-Then”, and build this level 1 focus skill into your knee jerk in 66 days, the natural habit formation lifecycle.

### **IF**

**A:** you feel that you are distractible, **or**

**B:** you fail to receive focus streaks while you work

### **THEN**

**Step 1:** do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.

**Step 2:** label the source of your distraction and try to mitigate its effects.

### **If A: you feel that you are distractible**

The feeling of distractibility is the direct opposite of being fully engrossed in, for example, a movie or game, so much that, you might even miss someone calling your name.

This typically happens if you have been switching between many tasks, after long meetings, finishing a TV marathon, or if you didn't get a good night sleep.

This feeling of distractibility means you not only **feel foggy, but also are easily distracted** by internal thoughts and chatter. You tend to be attracted to sounds and movements, or do things mindlessly, like scrolling through webpages and social media way past your bedtime.

What essentially happens, is that your senses are toned up to be hypersensitive to any form of external stimulus you might receive, or internally generate. Someone walks by, and your peripheral vision fires up, triggering the internal thought, "Who is that?", **depriving you of the attention needed for the real problem** at hand.

In contrast, when you are not in a distractible state, your peripheral vision is toned down, so you don't even notice who walked by, and won't actively engage in the irrelevant internal thought of "Who is that?", as your conscious will is orchestrating the processing power of the different brain regions, to give you full focus to what really matters to you.

**If B: you fail to receive focus streaks while you work**

In FOCI, you can tell you are in this distractible state, when you cannot seem to form focus streaks, even if you are not necessarily forming distracted streaks. This is because your focus is fleeting, as it is often being interrupted by internal distractions or environmental stimuli such as noise or movements.

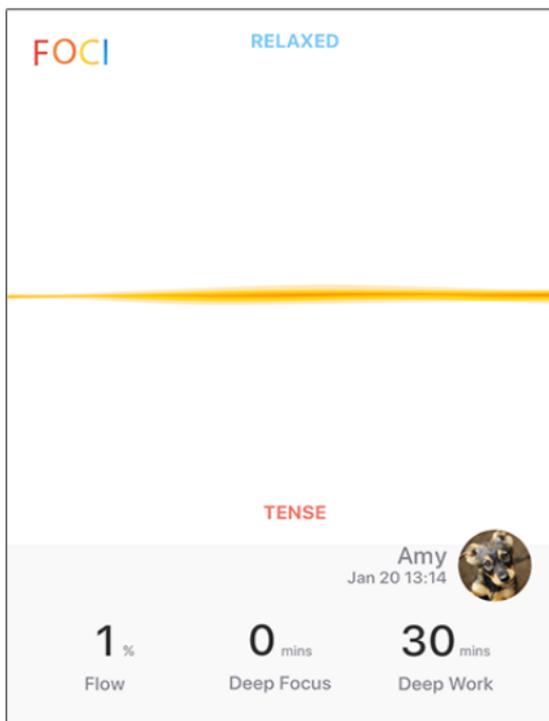


Figure 1. You can tell that you are in a distractible state, when you fail to get focus streaks while you work. This Deep Work Session Report shows Amy has worked for 30 min, but without any deep focus or focus streaks.

**Then Step 1: do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.**

Focus Biofeedback helps you bring distracted brain regions back under your control (at 90ish Focus Depth). With this you can direct this deepened attention to any other task, and enjoy the focus boost.

Let Focus Depth value guide you,

- 1) Relax your body as you breathe in.
- 2) Try to feel as much bodily sensation as you can as you breathe out.

Repeat these two steps to refocus the brain regions responsible for bodily sensations.

**The most common mistake is to skip step 1, “conscious relaxation”,** as it is absolutely essential to balance out “deliberation of focusing” - analogous to stage fright, in order to reliably get into deep focus as and when you want it.

You have the choice to use audio, visual or both. The efficacy of the choice depends on the individual and is contingent on the specific situations from which the distractibility originates.

With the audio, you can control the rain. As you go into deeper focus, the sound of the rain would get lighter and softer, and as you get into deep focus, you would begin to hear the birds chirping. (Best used with headphones.)

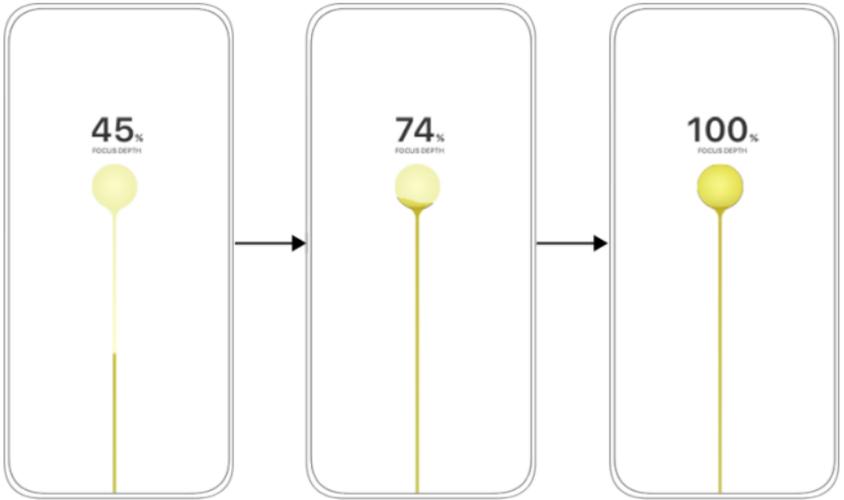


Figure 2. Focus Biofeedback Training helps us learn to consciously control our attention and reduce distractibility. Find the control of the liquid and fill up the bulb.

With the visual, you can try to control the liquid and fill up the bulb. This works on your visual brain regions. It usually takes less than a minute to tune up Focus Depth to 90ish. You would be able to feel the difference around that range.

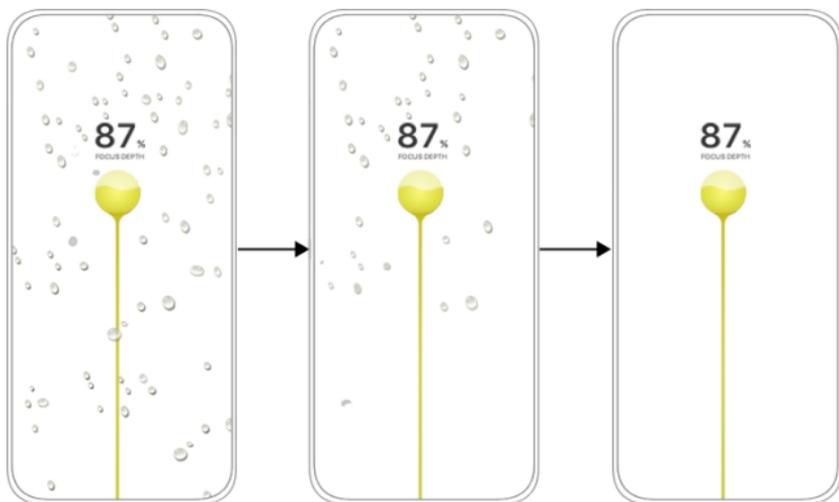


Figure 3. Sustain Focus Depth of more than 80% for the droplets to disappear and reduce your distractibility with this Biofeedback Training.

“Droplets on screen” is an approximation of the minimum amount of Focus Biofeedback needed to reduce distractibility. When you are in a more distractible state, there would be more droplets on screen. **The droplets would start to disappear when Focus Depth is above 80%.**

Important note, the Focus Biofeedback comes with inhale and exhale beats, which help us adjust our breathing to get into focus. **Breathe in and out with beats, with Focus Breathing Technique.**

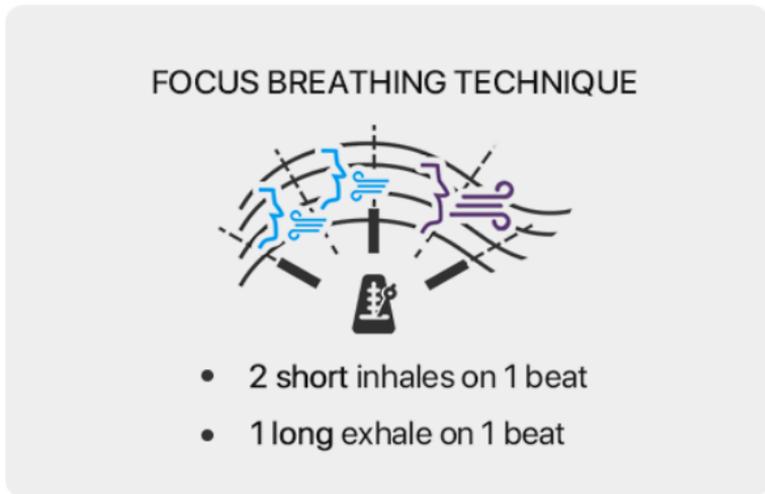


Figure 4. Focus Breathing Technique: Breathe in twice with one beat, and breathe out with one beat.

The 2 short inhales help maintain better flow of breathing, and prevent shallow breathing that tends to reduce lung compliance over time.

**Then Step 2: label the source of your distraction and try to mitigate its effects.**

Label the source of your distractions into 5 categorical types.

- 1) Internal thoughts (impending exam, to-dos)
- 2) Visual distractions (movements, flashing colors)
- 3) Noise (conversations, loud music)
- 4) Digital distractions (messages, social media)
- 5) Physical distractions (hunger, thirst, heat, cold)

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Mitigate the distractions if you can. For example, if you are distracted by a smartphone, you might turn off the notifications or put it away from sight. If you are distracted by noise or conversation around you, you can try wearing earplugs or perhaps noise-canceling headphones.

***Summary***

**IF**

**A:** you feel that you are distractible **or**

**B:** you fail to receive focus streaks while you work

**THEN**

**Step 1:** do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen

**Step 2:** label the source of your distraction and try to mitigate its effects

Build this Level 1 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days.  
Tick off a checkbox for each day you practice “If-Then”.

## 48 FOCUS SKILL LEVEL ONE

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## **Focus Skill Level Two** **Terminate procrastination in a snap**

*Power up the most well researched psychological technique with  
tech augmentation.*

Procrastination corners us into tight spots.

Wastes away our time, opportunities, and then leaves us with regret.

We have all experienced how corrosive it is.

However, it is our very **human nature to avoid pain and frustration and to seek out pleasure.**

The quicker the gratification, the better it is.

Not only that, when actions become knee-jerk, we don't even think before doing them.

It almost seems as if our conscious will is offline, and as if our meagre willpower is too feeble to do anything other than letting us be carried off by a stream of consciousness.

While this might sound like a description of procrastination, it perfectly describes psychological flow - our peak mental performance.

The same human nature, emotion, desire, habit can be bent to our will, or erode our willpower in almost no time, and lead us into a self-sabotaging loop.

**So why fight against our human nature, and not use it to our advantage instead?**

Emotion, desire, habit and conscious will are pseudonyms for 4 brain abstract networks that neuroscientists have deciphered in recent decades.

And we are going to exploit these recently developed knowledges: “mental contrast with implementation intention” - a simple step that is proven not only to improve academic performance, but also to reduce procrastination.

The logic is pretty simple, our mental imprint of **ideas, such as consequences to actions are usually in a fuzzy liquid form.**

Using **mental contrast would help us solidify this mental imprint**, together with the emotion and desire pertaining to it, to make the decision to stop procrastination or not.

This simple step of solidifying the idea (quitting procrastinating) and an emotion (fear of regret), and a desire (craving for catharsis), put our human nature as the weapon of our choice, instead of the hurdle we need to overcome.

When the notion of the consequences of our action are **in a fuzzy liquid form, it is human nature to lean toward immediate gratification.**

However once emotion and desire for consequences solidify with this simple step of mental contrasting, we work human nature to our favor.

Not only that, when used together with implementation intention in a sequence, it works habit in our favor, helping us solidify notions to break the inertia and get the ball rolling to start work.

Every time we repeat this particular sequence, it gets more into our habit until it becomes totally our knee-jerk.

For we are living in a ferociously fast-moving world, where the future is unknown, we deserve to stay ahead.

So, practice and get it into your knee-jerk.

## Objective

Practice the following “If-Then” and build this Level 2 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days, the natural habit formation lifecycle.

### **IF**

**A:** you feel that you are procrastinative, **or**

**B:** you receive a distraction streak, or its haptic alert

### **THEN**

**Step 1:** do a mental contrast self-talk for 1 minute.

**Step 2:** do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.

**Step 3:** do a 10-minute Deep Work Session, to break the inertia of getting started.

## If A: you feel that you are procrastinative

The feeling of procrastination is the direct opposite of feeling in control while doing things, like making your favorite breakfast, you don't need to think about what you should do, you just do it.

This typically happens when you **anticipate effort, negative emotions or even pain**. For example, starting a long and difficult task, working on something you find emotionally toilsome or are struggling with. At times, even the thought of the problem is enough to cause frustration.

This feeling of procrastination means that you not only actively avoid thinking about the problem, and are happy to be distracted, **you may even proactively seek out distractions to help forget the problem at hand**. For example, you might start to read irrelevant news, catch up on social media or even start to daydream, doing whatever helps you delay getting started.

What essentially happens, is “reason is the slave of the passions”. **Your desire and emotion make the decisions for you, and then you rationalize after-wards**. So even if you think “I have to finish up this trivial task first, to get it out of the way” or “I need to read this news to stay in the loop” sound like rational decisions, actually they are not. They are merely a **reflection of priorities decided by your desire and emotion**.

In contrast, when you are not in a procrastinative state, both your desire and emotion want to get the task at hand done, and you would no longer rationalize the delay, but rather see distractions as obstacles that prevent you from finishing the task. You know what you are doing, and you feel in control.

**If B: you receive a distraction streak, or its haptic alert**

In FOCI, you can tell you are in this procrastinative state, when you start to form distracted streaks. This is because your focus is offline, and you are likely to have been carried away by distractions for quite some time.

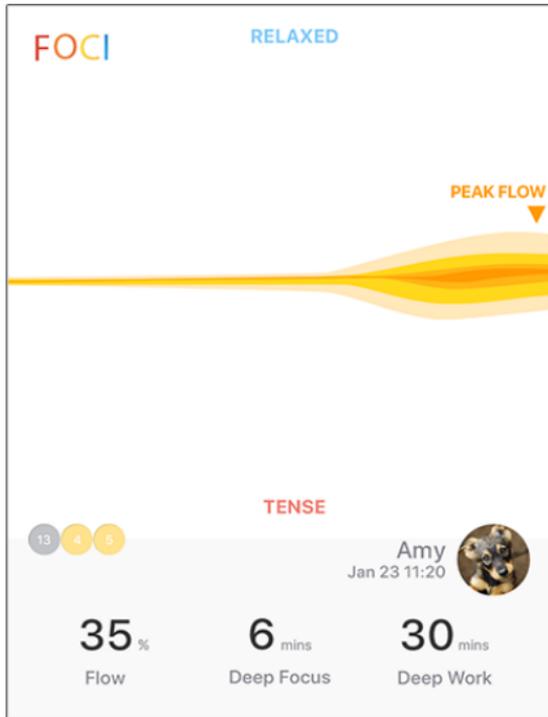


Figure 1. You can tell that you are in a procrastinative state, when you start to form distracted streaks. This Deep Work Session Report shows Amy was in a procrastinative state for the first half of the 30 min session.

**Then Step 1: do a mental contrast self-talk immediately for 1 minute.**

At the prompt of the cue keywords below, recall the relevant memories and the associated desire and emotion. The purpose of this self-talk is to construct **cues to help you remember and elicit the memories, desires and emotions** to work human nature to our favor.

There are two types of self-talk, the first one is easier to start with. If there are parts that are uncomfortable to you, you can omit them until you feel more comfortable with them.

## Self-talk 1

Your name,  
You know you hate procrastinating.  
It is toxic.  
And you don't deserve it.

Because in the end, you lose not just time, but the chance, the freedom to choose what you really want to do<sup>Cue 1</sup>.

It happened to you before.  
Regrets<sup>Cue 2</sup>, lost, and it might happen again this very moment, cornering you, into an unsettling future<sup>Cue 3</sup> you don't even dare to think.

But now, this moment, this chance, is in your hand.

Because every time you beat your worst self, you get better at it.  
Because it is difficult, and not anyone can do it.  
But you can do this<sup>Cue 4</sup>.  
Because you're your name

## Self-talk 2

I hate procrastinating.

It is toxic.

And I don't deserve it.

Because in the end, I lose not just time, but the chance, the freedom to choose what I really want<sup>Cue 1</sup>.

It happened to me before.

Regrets<sup>Cue 2</sup>, lost, and it might happen again this very moment...cornering me, to an unsettling future<sup>Cue 3</sup> I can't even dare to think.

But now, this moment, this chance, is in my hand.

Because every time I beat my worst self, I get better at it.

Because it is difficult, and not anyone can do it.

But I can do this<sup>Cue 4</sup>.

Because I am, I am.

**Cue 1**

Remind yourself of the goal that you are working towards. For example, the pride of doing well in the exam, getting a promotion, providing security to your family or yourself.

**Cue 2**

Remind yourself of regrets of procrastinating. For example, the embarrassment of missing a deadline, producing sloppy work, wasting time.

**Cue 3**

Remind yourself of an uncertain future that you would not want. For example, the fear of failing an exam, the rejection from admission into particular schools, or job.

**Cue 4**

Remind yourself of the achievements that you are proud of. For example, winning a competition, organizing a successful event, acquiring a new skill.

Self-talk makes use of psychological commitment and consistency, and would create cognitive dissonance - an unpleasant feeling, if the self-talk is inconsistent with your subconscious decision to pinch fear or bad memories in order to make yourself feel better.

The process of unpinching these memories is emotionally painful and challenging at the same time, however, the benefit is huge. You can use these memories to gather emotional strength, to make decisions that would otherwise be too hard to make.

The often misconstrued “iron will”, is in fact not willpower, as **our brain’s executive control is very limited biologically**. Because of that, “motivation” is often disappointing. That is, it was. Now, “motivation” can be whatever you want, if you master the skill of eliciting the right memory and associated emotion and desire. This skill of consciously manipulating your own motivation can give you an “iron will”.

**Then Step 2: do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.**

Focus Biofeedback helps suppress a Mindlessness Loop which often accompanies a Self-sabotaging Loop. Removing secondary complications is absolutely essential.

Let Focus Depth value guide you,

- 1) Relax your body as you breathe in.
- 2) Try to feel as much bodily sensation as you can as you breathe out.

Repeat these two steps.

You may want to use Focus Breathing Technique with the guidance from inhale and exhale beat.

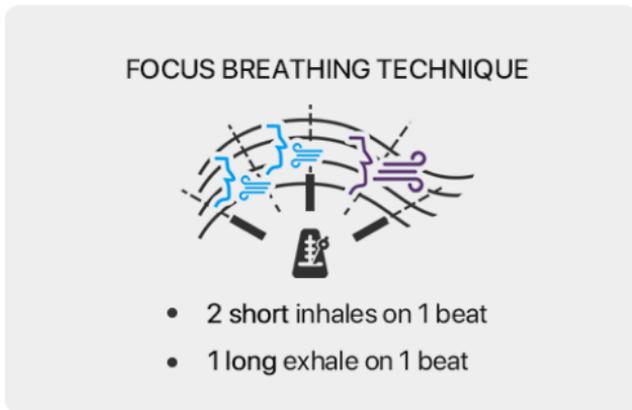


Figure 2. Focus Breathing Technique: Breathe in twice with one beat, and breathe out with one beat.

## 62 FOCUS SKILL LEVEL TWO

With the audio, you can control the rain. As you go into deeper focus, the sound of the rain would get lighter and softer, and as you get into deep focus, you would begin to hear the birds chirping (best used with headphones).

With the visual, you can try to control the liquid and fill up the bulb.

### **Then Step 3: do a 10-minute Deep Work Session to break the inertia of getting started**

Do a Deep Focus Session, for just 10 minutes. Not more, not less. Tell yourself, that after this 10 minutes, you can go back to whatever you were doing before that. This is a mini goal that helps you break the inertia that prevents you from getting started.

***Summary***

**IF**

**A:** you feel that you are procrastinative **or**

**B:** you receive a distraction streak, or its haptic alert

**THEN**

**Step 1:** do a mental contrast self-talk immediately for 1 minute

**Step 2:** do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen

**Step 3:** do a 10-minute Deep Work Session to break the inertia of getting started

Build this Level 2 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days.

Tick off a checkbox for each day you practice “If-Then”.

## 64 FOCUS SKILL LEVEL TWO

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## Focus Skill Level Three Boast a longer focus span than others

*Stay balanced with fatigue and stress more effectively with added emotion-awareness and the right countermeasures.*

What is the use of stamina which we don't need?

**It is never about how long we focus.**

It is about how much mental resources we have, how well managed they are, and yes, the convenient side effect is that we can prevail in mental endeavors where others will fail.

But that is not all, if we have the skill to manage our mental resources better, we will now have the freedom to choose between a life of just an achiever, or an overachiever.

As this skill of **psychological resilience, against both Burnout Loop and Catastrophizing Loop** described in Focus Skill Foundation is the chasm between achievers and overachievers.

And as you might have guessed, this mental resource we are referring to is indeed, our conscious will, what people describe as willpower, but in essence both are referring to our limited executive control capacity originating from the prefrontal cortex region of our brain.

Conscious will is nearly always limiting us.

That is to say, our capacity to ignore distractions, to delay gratification, to control stress and to resist temptations, is thin.

All these actions of self-control expend our conscious will. And **once exhausted, we can no longer do the right thing**, or stop ourselves from self-sabotaging.

So how can we break this limitation, to have an unlimited source of power?

We can't.

All resources can be depleted, all assets squandered, and we can bankrupt ourselves in a matter of less than an hour, if we fail to extricate ourselves from any of the vicious loops discussed in Focus Skill Foundation.

We can, however, **expand this limited willpower by first recognizing that it is limited**. Then it becomes a matter of cutting back waste and boosting replenishment.

### **Lowest hanging fruit: cutting waste**

Avoid slipping into or being trapped in a vicious loop, as this will deplete our conscious will extremely fast. And once our conscious will is totally depleted, secondary complications from another vicious loop would likely set in, making it even harder for us to recover.

The cheapest way to detect that we are slipping into a vicious loop is to use FOCI's **prompts such as Stress Alert, Fatigue Alert**, which helps us detect whether we are likely in a Catastrophizing

Loop or Burnout Loop. When we receive these alerts, take a short break to stop slipping further into the vicious loop.

Word of caution: the most tempting mistake when taking a break is to start on a path of digital distraction, reading and replying to messages, checking out social media. When willpower is low, this would likely set off both Mindlessness Loop and Self-sabotaging Loop.

### **Mid hanging fruit: willpower replenishment footwork**

We can speed up this recharge in minutes with a quick two-step process of gratitude **self-talk to trick our body to produce anti-stress and relaxation chemicals** (oxytocin) and then do a Deep Relaxation Biofeedback exercise to replenish our willpower reserve.

Deep Relaxation Biofeedback is a variant of Focus Biofeedback that focuses more on **calming both our brain and nervous system** to speed up conscious will recovery.

With gratitude self-talk and Deep Relaxation Biofeedback working in combo, you can get a visible boost in less than 3 minutes.

### **High hanging fruit: strategizing replenishment schedule**

Strategy is about stretching limited resources to fit our needs. Willpower is to a large extent regulated by our physiology, commonly called the mind-body connection. This is very intuitive, we have all experienced how lack of a good night's sleep would negatively impact the next day in everything we do, how aging takes its toll on us all, and how lack of exercise slowly drains our vitality.

**Our general physiology follows a very clear pattern**, we feel more “energetic” at different times of the day. We commonly call this morning / evening person; however, it is more complicated than simply our circadian rhythm. The type of work, activities, such as exercise, eating habits, and caffeine intake all interact to affect our willpower reserve.

**Learn the pattern from our daily emotion records**, so we can exploit it, to adapt our work and schedule to our natural physiology. We can schedule challenging tasks when we reach peak focus or energy level. We can schedule lighter tasks for when we tend to be in a lesser state.

Also, we can learn how different activities impact our willpower, what coincides with fatigue or stress streaks, what triggers distraction streaks.

With this knowledge, we can even start to anticipate an energy dip, and exercise willpower replenishment footwork even before the dip sets in.

### **The challenge**

Strategically control your pace of work and willpower replenishment schedule, such that, to others, you seem to have unlimited energy, and you don't seem to tire.

You know what is really happening beneath the hood - strategic management of your willpower.

So, start from the lowest and mid hanging fruit, get the hang of it first, then gradually learn your physiological pattern to strategize.

It is not easy, and that is why we do it.

## Objective

Practice the following “If-Then” and build this Level 3 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days, the natural habit formation lifecycle.

### **IF**

**A:** you feel that you are tired or tense, **or**

**B:** you receive a fatigue or stress streak, or its haptic alert, **or**

**C:** you anticipate an energy dip soon

### **THEN**

**Step 1:** do a gratitude self-talk immediately for 1 minute

**Step 2:** do a Deep Relaxation Biofeedback, and wipe out all the droplets on screen

## **If A: you feel that you are tired or tense**

The feeling of fatigue and tense is the direct opposite of feeling energetic and emotionally stable while working, like working after a well-rested weekend, you feel refreshed and can focus more easily.

This typically happens when you have **overstrained yourself, or endured considerable stress**, like working late nights to prepare for an exam, or to meet an urgent deadline.

This feeling of fatigue and stress means that you might feel exhausted, unmotivated, struggle to find a sense of purpose, or even feel irritable. You might start finding many things or people distracting and could even start a conflict.

What essentially happens is that your willpower has been depleted by fatigue and stress, and you are **unable to tune out external distractions, or put your emotions and cravings under control**, and as a result you would also be likely to slip into Self-Sabotaging Loop and Mindlessness Loop.

In contrast, when you are not fatigued or stressed, you would have sufficient willpower to tune out external distractions, to consciously motivate yourself, to put your emotions in check so you do not get overwhelmed by your own stress, and instead use it as a power source to drive your progress.

**If B: you receive a fatigue or stress streak, or its haptic alert**

In FOCI, you can tell you are in a fatigued or stressed state, when you start to form fatigue streaks or stress streaks. You can set up haptic alerts for fatigue and stress, and see when they form in the streak records.



Figure 1. You can tell that you are tired or tense, when you receive fatigue or stress streaks.

### **If C: you anticipate an energy dip soon**

Alternatively, you might be able to anticipate that you are about to have an energy dip, even before it hits you. Most people's willpower levels follow a clear pattern and are predictable.

### **Then Step 1: do a gratitude self-talk immediately for 1 minute.**

At the prompt of the cue keywords below, recall the relevant memories and the associated desire and emotion. The purpose of this self-talk is to construct cues to help you remember and elicit the memories, desires and emotions to coax our body to release distress chemicals.

### **Self-talk**

I am thankful for what I have got<sup>Cue 1</sup>.

I am thankful for people who matter<sup>Cue 2</sup> in my life.

I am thankful for challenges which are helping me grow<sup>Cue 3</sup>.

I am thankful to myself for choosing<sup>Cue 4</sup> to take on these challenges.

### **Cue 1**

Remind yourself of

- 1) something you have achieved that makes you feel proud.
- 2) something you have received or happened that gives you a sense of security or makes you feel privileged.

### Cue 2

Remind yourself of family, friends, companions or someone who helped you in some ways, that you really appreciate.

### Cue 3

Remind yourself of the growth associated with challenges. As we don't grow in comfort zones, there would be ways you would improve with new challenges, such as mastering new skills, getting better at things, acquiring new understanding or upgrading emotion resilience, or gaining the rare experience of dealing with adversity. These challenges are like vaccines to inoculate against stress for later on, making you all the wiser. So, what are the potentials for growth with the challenge at hand?

### Cue 4

Remind yourself, that it is you who choose to embark and endure the challenges. It is you who want to do well and to deliver. You have full autonomy of what you want to do and achieve in your life. All stress and fatigue are just part and parcel of your choice. But sometimes, it is hard, and that makes you want to get even more, right?

### How does it work?

The notion of “safety in numbers”, “love” and “self-sacrifice for the good of others” **brings a sense of security and safety**. This feel-good factor is effective in bringing down stress, so we are able to do things that fear usually withholds from us. As we are evolved as communities and societies to survive and thrive, we have inherited inbuilt mechanisms of social coordination. These hard-wired notions and feelings are usually not easily replicable to reduce stress;

however, gratitude self-talk is the rare opportunity we can use to **modulate tension inside us**.

And the gratitude self-talk is **composed with both growth mindset and sense of autonomy**, which makes it even more powerful than traditional self-talks, as it reduces dopamine deprivation from frustration or defeat, by framing one's attention to growth opportunities and at the same time gives you serotonin replenishment from the sense of autonomy.

**Then Step 2: do a Deep Relaxation Biofeedback, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.**

Deep Relaxation Biofeedback helps you quickly reboot, modulate stress and fatigue and build up your willpower. It is the advanced technique that requires an intuitive grasp of Focus Biofeedback, as it extends on Focus Biofeedback.

Let Deep Relaxation value guide you,

- 1) relax your body as you breathe in,
- 2) try to feel as much bodily sensation as you can as you breath out.

Repeat these two steps with Calm Breathing Technique.

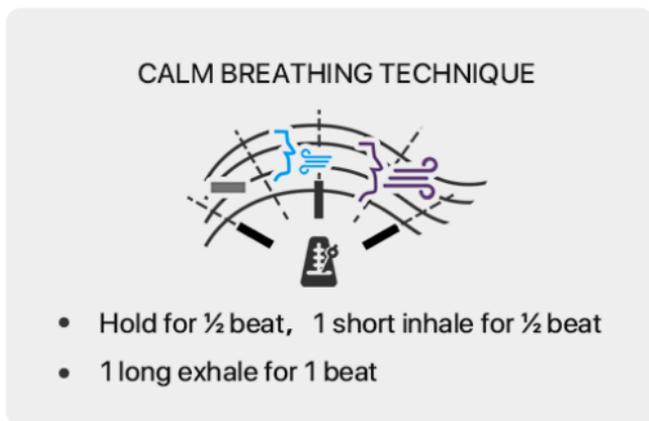


Figure 2. Calm Breathing Technique: Hold for half a beat, breathe in for half a beat, and breathe out for one beat.

And during this breathing, **if your mind wanders, as you notice, shift back your attention** to “Step 1: relax your body as you breathe in” and “Step 2: feel the bodily sensation as you breathe out”.

Similar to Focus Biofeedback, with the audio, as you go into deeper relaxation, the sound of the rain would get lighter and softer. With the visual, you can try to control the liquid and fill up the bulb.

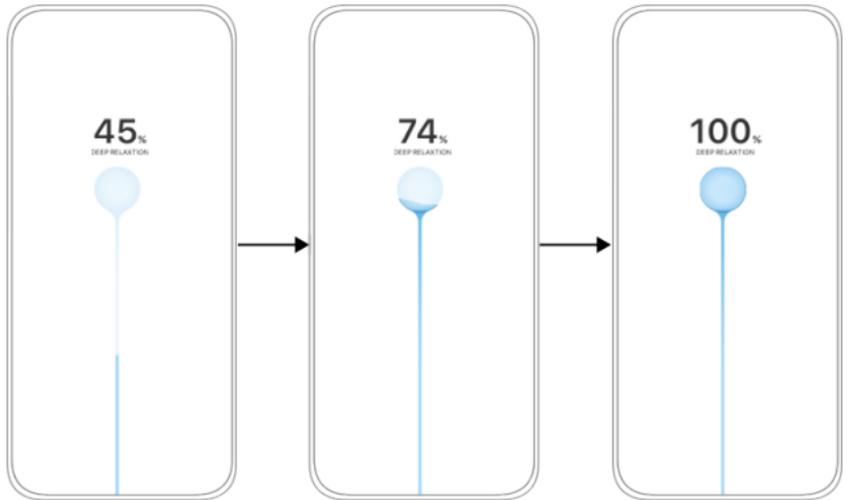


Figure 3. Deep Relaxation Biofeedback Training helps us learn to consciously reboot. Find the control of the liquid and fill up the bulb.

“Droplets on screen” is an approximation of the minimum amount of Deep Relaxation Biofeedback needed to reboot. **The droplets would start to disappear when Deep Relaxation is above 80%.**

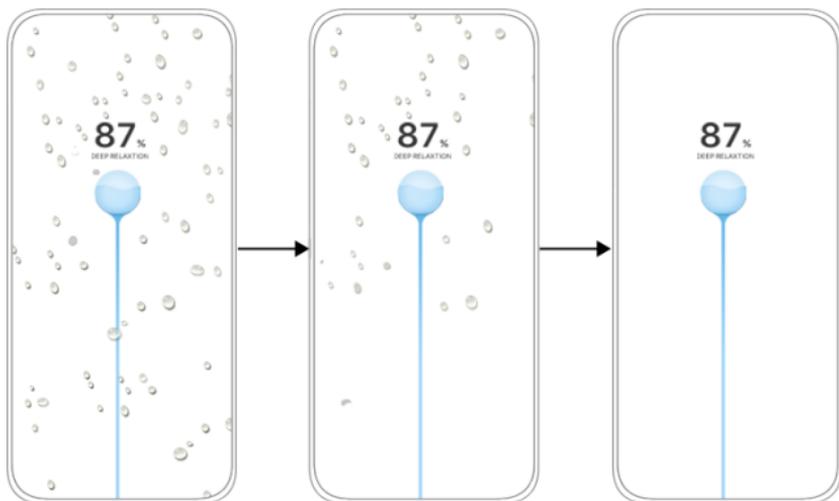


Figure 4. Sustain Deep Relaxation of more than 80% for the droplets to disappear to reboot from fatigue and stress with this Biofeedback Training.

## **How does this work?**

Sometimes a night long sleep doesn't give us the recuperation that we need. And there are restful nights that make us feel so refreshed when we wake up.

Physical rest alone doesn't give us the recharge we need.

What we can glean is that these restful nights are usually not plagued by dreams, especially not nightmares which leave us with undue tension even when we wake up.

So, what we really need is a **state of mind akin to not having dreams and nightmares.**

### **1) Quieten the mind**

The “notice and shift” footwork to bring attention back is the basic mindfulness training to rewire our brain to boost up willpower. This rewiring comes with morphological changes to our brain similar to what weight training does to our muscles.

Don't try to push the thought out of your mind. Just watch it pop in and let it roll right out again.

### **2) Recreate physiological relaxation**

Calm Breathing Technique, sets up a specific inhalation exhalation ratio, that especially when coupled with the calm breathing beats, is known to **calm our nervous system.**

## **80** FOCUS SKILL LEVEL THREE

You would find Deep Relaxation Biofeedback much harder than Focus Biofeedback, and in fact it is. But that holds the key to having nearly unlimited willpower.

***Summary***

**IF**

**A:** you feel that you are tired or tense, **or**

**B:** you receive a fatigue or stress streak, or its haptic alert, **or**

**C:** you anticipate an energy dip soon

**THEN**

**Step 1:** do a gratitude self-talk immediately for 1 minute

**Step 2:** do a Deep Relaxation Biofeedback, and wipe out all the droplets on screen

Build this Level 3 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days.

Tick off a checkbox for each day you practice “If-Then”.

## 82 FOCUS SKILL LEVEL THREE

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## **Focus Skill Level Four Triumph in getting into peak mental performance**

*Learn to tune your emotion states with breathing pacing technology to get into psychological “flow”.*

What is peak mental performance for?

What’s so bad about going easy on ourselves?

Not at all.

However, if we are looking for an enjoyable experience, our peak mental performance, also known as psychological flow, could be a contender for that.

It is about getting into a state where we are completely immersed in an activity. Our attention is focused. We are totally absorbed. Time seems to fall away. We are tired, but we barely notice. This is not an artistic description. This is a standard description of psychological flow state.

It is about boosting our productivity 5 times<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Cranston, S., & Keller, S. (in press). Increasing the “meaning quotient” of work. *McKinsey Quarterly*.

It is about halving the time we take to learn<sup>5</sup>.

If we consider the compounding effect of reproducibly getting into flow, and how it affects our happiness and the happiness of our future self, it is a highly profitable endeavor indeed.

Having said that, reproducibly getting into flow is no easy skill.

As it requires one to be able to

1. Consciously tune out distraction to be rid of Mindlessness Loop (Focus Skill Level 1)
2. Consciously manipulate motivation to curb Self-sabotaging Loop (Focus Skill Level 2)
3. Consciously manage willpower reserve to stave off Catastrophizing Loop and Burnout Loop (Focus Skill Level 3)

Withstanding all that, the remaining obstacle in getting into psychological flow is to balance our emotion state, in real time.

Yes, in real time.

This means we need to learn to prevent getting trapped in a Paralysis Loop and at the same time, learn to pick up the tempo of work that might get us into a Paralysis Loop.

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<sup>5</sup> Kotler, S. (in press). Create a Work Environment That Fosters Flow. *Harvard Business Review*.

In particular, are we too stressed to be focused, or not stressed enough. The right level of stress is essential to get into flow<sup>6</sup>.

**Psychological flow is about being balanced.** Too much to one side, we would be grazing against Paralysis Loop, but too much to the other, and we would be too relaxed to be able to dive deep into focus.

At the end of each Deep Work Session, we will be able to read into how we work in much finer granularity. With the session report, we can interpret the emotion balance between tense and relaxation, from the side to which the “focus bandwidth” is tilting.

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<sup>6</sup> Yerkes-Dodson law.

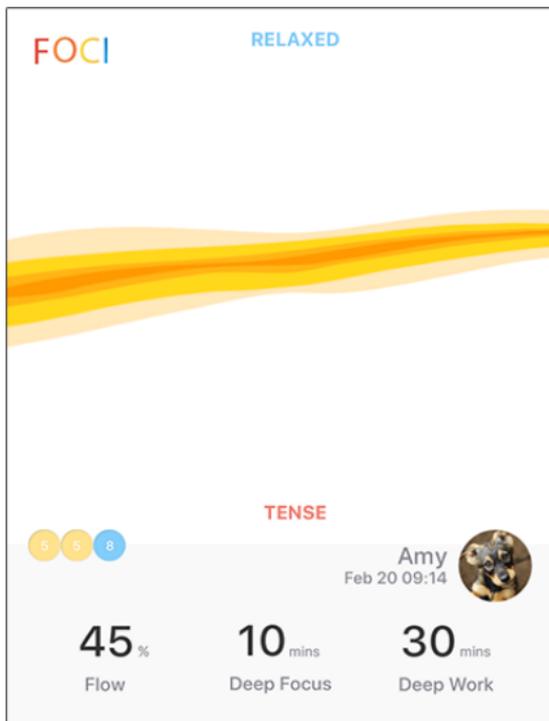


Figure 1. You can tell that you are too relaxed to get into deeper focus, when the “focus bandwidth” from Deep Work Session Report is tilting upwards to “relaxed”.

Too much upwards, it means that we were too relaxed, and that implies that we didn't pace our work tempo to step up focus.

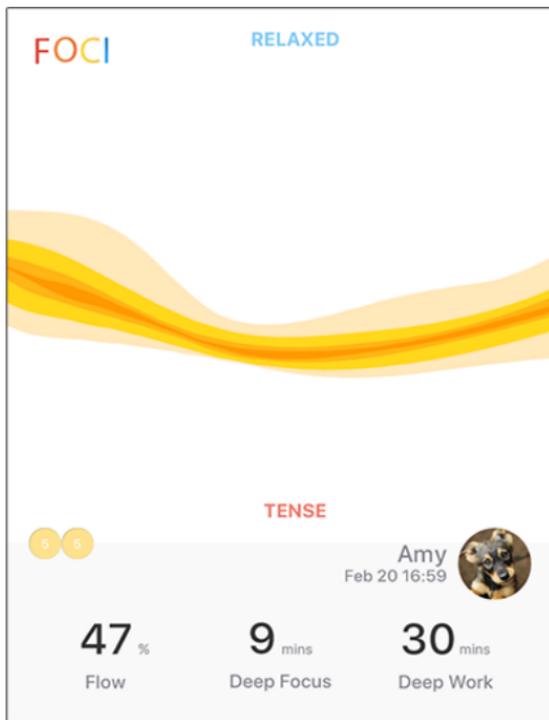


Figure 2. You can tell that you are too stressed to get into deeper focus, when the “focus bandwidth” from Deep Work Session Report is tilting downwards to “tense”.

Too much downwards, it means that we were too tense, and that implies that we probably slipped into a Paralysis Loop.

With the right balance, the “focus bandwidth” would be able to expand until we get into flow state. If, halfway through the session, we lost balance, the “focus bandwidth” would shrink.

If, however, the “focus bandwidth” is thin, even if relatively balanced, this almost always means one or more of the 3 prerequisite conditions are not met, and that the essential prerequisite Focus Skills, are not yet consolidated.

### **Prerequisite Focus Skill Level One** **Consciously tune out distraction to be rid of Mindlessness Loop**

Getting into flow needs a focus trackway, as your brain needs to “sync up” each brain region to focus on tackling the problem at hand.

However, when you are distracted, a part of your brain region has been “called upon” to engage in paying attention to some other tasks, and this would disrupt the trackway you have built, so you cannot get into flow.

Merely a flickering light has been shown to distract and reduce our capacity to focus cognitively. And the more distracting the environment, the greater a challenge it poses to focus. So careful management of our environment to reduce levels of audio and visual distractions is paramount.

General distractibility is high if we are already in a Mindlessness Loop, as each and every external stimulus gets magnified, further disengaging the different brain regions from working in sync on the task at hand. We can tune our brain into a less distractible state with Focus Biofeedback.

### **Prerequisite Focus Skill Level Two**

#### **Consciously manipulate motivation to curb Self-sabotaging Loop**

The most insidious way to procrastinate is to entertain internal distractions such as random thoughts or even sensible thoughts that might be work related, however not directly related to the piece of work at hand. It is estimated that an untrained mind spends 47% of the waking hours in this “mind-wandering” state.

These internal distractions interrupt the naturally long focus trackway to get into flow. It takes around 10-20 minutes of undivided attention on a task to get into flow. If internal distractions result in task-switching, it becomes even more costly, as it wears down willpower.

By recognizing that entertaining internal distractions and consequent task-switching is a form of procrastination, we can use the mental contrast self-talk to tune our motivation, to work our human nature to our advantage instead of against it. As we need sufficient time and internal drive in order to stay on course.

### **Prerequisite Focus Skill Level Three**

#### **Consciously manage willpower reserve to stave off Catastrophizing Loop and Burnout Loop**

Once Catastrophizing Loop or Burnout Loop sets in, conscious will depletion will occur in no time. Without sufficient willpower reserve, it is almost impossible to get into focus, let alone flow.

So, it becomes paramount that we avoid staying stuck in a Catastrophizing Loop or Burnout Loop, using the gratitude self-talk and

Deep Relaxation Biofeedback combo. And that we pace our work and willpower replenishment schedule with care.

**Overcoming the final barrier with tech augmentation.**

The final challenge is about finding the intuition to build flow and the instinct to balance work tempo.

Within a Deep Work Session, we can exploit the in-work flow stats to help us find the touch for building flow.

Finding balance is very hard, as it could take years of practice, to gain both self-awareness and control.

**Much as breathing reflects your emotion, it goes both ways, breathing affects your emotion states.** So, we can learn to pace our breathing to stay focused to build flow.

How does this work?

Breath Pacing is adaptive, and it changes according to your current emotion state, to always bring you back to balance. You may find that it seems to “rush” you a bit, and sometimes “slow you down”, all with the effort to bring you back to this subtle balance which gets you into flow.

When you first use it, there will be a learning curve, as you may need to pay conscious attention to the rhythm in order to follow it.

Maintaining breathing synchrony with the audio is like balancing a bike, with a little practice, it becomes intuitive and automatic, giving you a considerable focus boost when you work.

## **The flow challenge**

Getting into flow reproducibly is on par with running a marathon. The former is a challenge of mental discipline, fitness and prowess, while the latter is physical.

You can't run a marathon when you are unwell, much as you can't sustain a flow.

However, few could argue against marathon running being a hallmark of physical prowess, much as sustaining flow is the mental superpower, as well as an experience of sheer pleasure.

We only live once. We deserve the best. Don't we?

## Objective

Practice the following “If-Then” and build this Level 4 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days, the natural habit formation lifecycle.

### **IF**

**A:** you feel that you are focusing but not deeply enough, **or**

**B:** you receive strings of short focus streaks but not flow streaks

### **THEN**

**Step 1:** start a Deep Work Session

**Step 2:** use Focus Breath Pacing to work

### **If A: you feel that you are focusing but not deeply enough**

The feeling of shallow focus, is very different from your peak performing state, where you seem to be in the “zone” where things just come naturally, and you are in full control.

This typically happens when the task at hand is trivial and is losing your attention or if the challenge is a little too much.

This feeling of shallow focus means that you either feel too relaxed with your working pace, or that you feel you are struggling with the problem at hand or even frustrated (Paralysis Loop), which in turn throttles your momentum.

What essentially happens, is your emotion state is off balance. Possibly as a result of not managing the work tempo well enough, consequently you are either too relaxed or too tense. **In both situations, this imbalance forestalls getting into deeper focus.**

In contrast, when you are in flow, you are at the balance of relaxation and tension: the right amount of relaxation, keeps you calm in the face of challenges, and the right amount of tension, helps you maintain attention and get into deeper focus.

### **If B: you receive strings of short focus streaks but not flow streaks**

In FOCI, you can tell that you are in this shallow focus state, when you are forming a stream of short focus streaks, but not a flow streak. You can set up haptic alerts for Focus Slip Alerts, or see when they form in the streak records.

### **Then Step 1: start a Deep Work Session**

*“Chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken.”*

*Warren Buffett*

And that's right, we are using Deep Work Session to build a chain of habit such that in its entirety, it forms our deep work ritual to help us get into flow.

Why deep work ritual?

Ritual is a pseudonym for psychological conditionings that we deliberately build and maintain. All with the effort to make it easier to get into a state of flow over time.

And because it is based on a chain of habit, it is rare and hard to achieve.

Based on our estimation, partially from observation and interviews with undergraduates of Cambridge University, arguably privileged and intelligent young people, under a demanding academic system, only around 1 in 4 has a well-honed Deep Work ritual.

On the other hand, around 1 in 4 lack consciously maintained rituals and as a result, suffering Burnout Loop, Catastrophizing Loop, Mindlessness Loop and Self-sabotaging Loop more rampantly than they would otherwise be.

The relative rarity of this skill and the benefits are obvious.

**The good news is that you would already have the elements to build this chain of habits, if you have mastered Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 Focus Skill, with the benefit from tech augmentation.**

### **Tune out distraction**

**If:** you feel that you are distractible

**Do:**

Step 1: do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.

Step 2: label the source of your distraction and try to mitigate its effects.

### **Manipulate motivation**

**If:** you feel that you are procrastinative

**Do:**

Step 1: do a Mental Contrast self-talk immediately for 1 minute.

Step 2: do a Focus Biofeedback training, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.

### **Manage willpower reserve**

**If:** you feel that you are tired or tense

**Do:**

Step 1: do a gratitude self-talk immediately for 1 minute.

Step 2: do a Deep Relaxation Biofeedback, and wipe out all the droplets on screen.

Chain these 3 skills into a footwork together before the start of each Deep Work Session to build a robust deep work ritual.

To be prepared is half the victory.

Now when you are ready, you can step up your focus progressively until you get a flow, and you can use the flow metrics to help you build up your tempo.

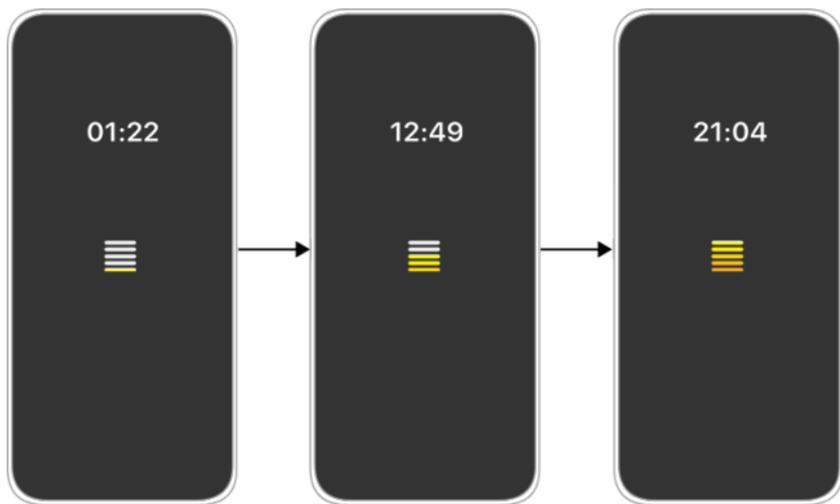


Figure 3. Getting into flow needs a focus trackway. You will need to sustain your focus in order to get into flow, and you can use the flow metrics to guide you.

### **Then step 2: use Focus Breath Pacing to work**

The centerpiece of getting into flow, is to maintain emotion balance, too much stress, we would get into Paralysis Loop, too little tension, we can't step up our focus.

And this is understandably hard, which is where tech comes to the rescue.

**Much as breathing reflects our focus, it goes both ways - breathing affects our focus.**

So, we can use Focus Breathing Technique together with Focus Breath Pacing, once learning of our physiological state is complete, which can help us maintain balance of tension all in real time, while we work.

\*Prerequisite: practice and learn to follow Breath Pacing without conscious effort.

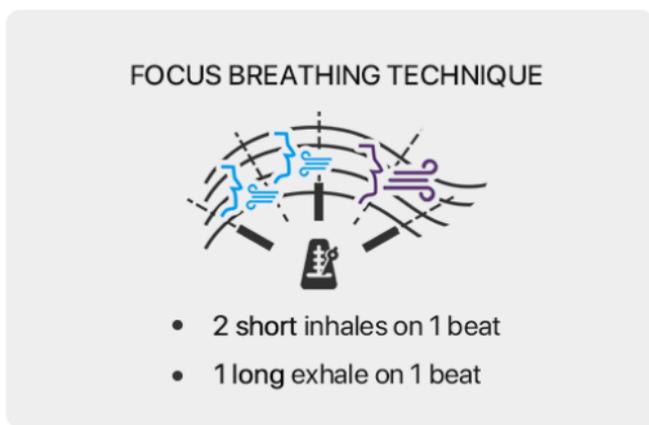


Figure 4. Focus Breathing Technique: Breathe in twice with one beat, and breathe out with one beat.

Maintaining breathing synchrony with the audio as you work, is like balancing a bike, with a little practice, it becomes intuitive and automatic, giving you considerable focus boost.

## 98 FOCUS SKILL LEVEL FOUR

It's worth the effort, as our alternative is years of training of self-awareness and mindfulness in order to replicate the effect of this tech augmentation.

Acquire the skill, so you can reproducibly get into flow, as and when you want to get into flow.

***Summary***

**IF**

**A:** you feel that you are focusing but not deeply enough, **or**

**B:** you receive strings of short focus streaks but not flow streak

**THEN**

**Step 1:** start a Deep Work Session

**Step 2:** use Focus Breath Pacing to work

Build this Level 4 Focus Skill into your knee-jerk in 66 days.

Tick off a checkbox for each day you practice “If-Then”.

## 100 FOCUS SKILL

DAY 1

DAY 8

DAY 15

DAY 22

DAY 2

DAY 9

DAY 16

DAY 23

DAY 3

DAY 10

DAY 17

DAY 24

DAY 4

DAY 11

DAY 18

DAY 25

DAY 5

DAY 12

DAY 19

DAY 26

DAY 6

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DAY 61

DAY 62

DAY 63

DAY 64

DAY 65

DAY 66