



**MY**



**BEST IDEAS  
ABOUT THE DEEP LIFE**

**CAL NEWPORT**





## INTRODUCTION

The idea of “the deep life” as a goal to cultivate became an organizing framework for my essays and podcast soon after the coronavirus pandemic began. The themes relevant to this goal had long been latent in my work, but it wasn’t until the severe disruptions of 2020 that I began attempting to coalesce them into something more coherent.

In this guide, I’ve gone back through my essays from this formative era and found seven that I think were particularly interesting, or useful, or, in some cases, downright provocative. I’ve appended a short commentary from me on each to help place them in their context. These essays provide a good representation of how I began to conceive of the deep life and the right ways to pursue it.

I hope you enjoy them!

Cal Newport





## THE DEEP RESET

In many ways, this essay on “the deep reset,” which I wrote early in the pandemic, provides the philosophical foundation for much of my writing to follow. It argues that positive transformation is a natural and important reaction to tragedy and hardship. This was me making sense of all the dislocation that was happening in the world and trying to turn it into fuel for creating something good. I got a lot of nice notes about this one...

<https://calnewport.com/7best1>



A photograph of a person standing on a dirt path in a forest, looking away from the camera. The trees have yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn. A large, white, stylized number '2' is overlaid on the image, centered within a white circle.

# 2

## ON THE STRUCTURED PURSUIT OF DEPTH

This short essay, which followed a series of essays about different “systems” for cultivating depth in your life, contains a vital idea: being very practical and systematic about pursuing a very ambiguous and philosophical goal, such as seeking a deeper existence, is valuable. We shouldn’t get paralyzed trying to figure out in advance the “best” way to live our lives. It’s often in concrete action that true insight arises.

<https://calnewport.com/7best2>





### **ON PAGE AND PRODUCTIVITY**

This is a foundational essay on my concept of “slow productivity,” which I think about, in some sense, as my response to the question of how to reform the role of work when pursuing a deep life. This central story of *The Scientists* becoming a source of inspiration for slow productivity is one I repeated later on the Tim Ferriss Show and then again in my upcoming book on this topic.

<https://calnewport.com/7best3>





## ON SLOW PRODUCTIVITY AND THE ANTI-BUSYNESS REVOLUTION

This essay distills an idea that I began to increasingly explore in my writing on slow productivity: the desire to attribute all contemporary struggles with overwork and burnout to first year grad student seminar-style arguments on capitalist exploitation and internalized narratives makes sense, as it makes you feel smart and sparks righteousness, but it falls way short in truly understanding out current disillusionment with work. I still get yelled at about this view (especially from certain types of journalists) but it's one I continue to strongly defend.

<https://calnewport.com/7best4>



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Michael Crichton, 27, M.D. and prolific

## ON MICHAEL CRICHTON'S BUSY AMBITION

I liked this essay because it built on an obscure piece of primary source research (an older interview with a young Michael Crichton) that I stumbled across. This idea that there are two types of ambition is one that really helped me, and a lot of other people, make sense of themselves. I am 100% a Grisham-type. Recognizing this has been very important in plotting my personalized path toward a deeper life.

<https://calnewport.com/7best5>





## **BRANDON SANDERSON BUILT AN UNDERGROUND LAIR IN SUBURBAN UTAH**

I think I had more fun writing this essay than almost any other of the past few years. Early in the pandemic I had been posting case studies, rich in photos, of the different types of innovative deep work environments people had set up during the pandemic. I like these case studies because they underscore the aesthetic and philosophical components to deep thinking. But then Sanderson came along and pushed these ideas to such an absurd and wonderful new extreme. The underground lair in a suburban cul-de-sac is simply sublime!

<https://calnewport.com/7best6>





## IN DEFENSE OF THINKING

This short essay is important because its the seed of an idea that might one day soon develop into what comes next. I'm very interested in the topic of thinking as an activity to isolate, and train, and respect, and perhaps even use it as the foundation for a more meaningful life. These ideas seem increasingly important in an age of AI and computation displacing more and more analog computation. Stay tuned to see this idea develop more...

<https://calnewport.com/7best7>