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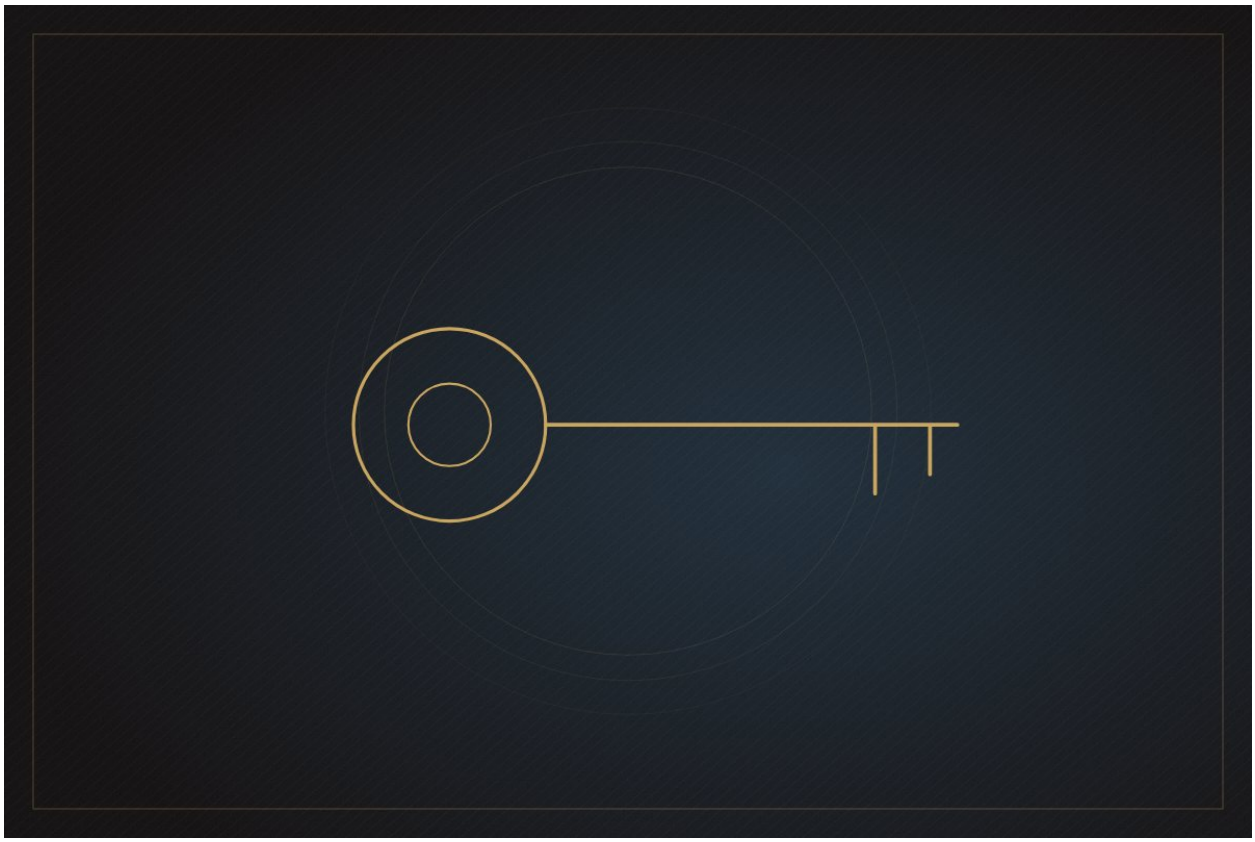
Practice

Work in blocks with short breaks: the Pomodoro technique and what science says

A tomato-shaped kitchen timer, an experiment on attention and a simple way to work without burning out

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Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



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In the late 1980s the Italian student Francesco Cirillo was struggling to concentrate on his studies. He took a tomato-shaped kitchen timer, *pomodoro* in Italian, and set himself a small challenge: to work for just 10 minutes without being distracted. From this personal experiment grew a method used by millions of people today.

How it works

1. **Choose a task.**
2. **Set the timer for 25 minutes** and work only on that task.
3. **When the timer rings, take a 5-minute break.** Get up, drink some water, look away from the screen.
4. **After four blocks**, take a longer break, 15 to 30 minutes.

If something else comes to mind during a block, you write it down on a piece of paper and carry on. The block is not interrupted.

What science says

The Pomodoro technique as such has been little studied in rigorous trials. But the idea behind it, that short breaks preserve attention, has support.

In 2011 the psychologists Atsunori Ariga and Alejandro Lleras asked participants to perform a monotonous attention task for 50 minutes. Most of them, as usually happens, became less and less accurate over time. But a group that took two very short interruptions, turning to a different task for a few seconds, showed no such decline.

Their explanation: the mind gets used to a goal that stays unchanged for a long time, just as we get used to a constant noise and stop hearing it. A short interruption "refreshes" the goal, and attention returns.

> *A break is not wasted time. It is the part of the work that makes the work possible.*

How to adapt it

- **25 minutes is not a law.** For creative or deep work, some people prefer 45–50 minutes with a 10-minute break. Experiment and see what suits you.
- **A break must be a break.** If you open social media during the five minutes, attention does not rest; it simply switches task.
- **Count blocks, not hours.** "Today I did six blocks" is a more honest measure of focused work than "I was in the office for eight hours".
- **Do not use it when you are in flow.** If you are deeply absorbed and it is going well, there is no need to stop just because the timer rang.

The technique is simple, perhaps too simple to be taken seriously. But often, when we struggle to start, this is exactly what we need: not a grand plan, but a small promise for the next 25 minutes.

Sources

Cirillo, F. (2018). *The Pomodoro Technique*. New York: Currency. WorldCat

Ariga, A. & Lleras, A. (2011). Brief and rare mental "breaks" keep you focused: Deactivation and reactivation of task goals preempt vigilance decrements. *Cognition*, 118(3), 439–443. doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2010.12.007

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