Attention Boundary System

Solo guide

What you do: work for one real focus block and tally every interruption — and how long it took to get back in. You'll see the true cost. Then you set one boundary and run a second block, to prove that the boundary — not faster switching — is what protects the work.

THE ONE IDEA

The interruption itself isn't what costs you. Getting back into the work does. The interruption itself takes seconds; getting back into the work takes minutes. That recovery is the real cost — and a boundary protects it, by stopping the interruption before it lands.

Why two blocks. The first block shows you the real cost of interruptions — it's more than you think, because getting back in takes time too. The second block proves the fix: same kind of work, but with one boundary set, far less is lost. You need both to feel the difference.

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

USE THIS WHEN

You keep losing focus time to "quick" interruptions. You feel busy all day but your real work doesn't move. You have a real focus task you can do for two short blocks.

USE A DIFFERENT TOOL WHEN

A thought in your own head keeps pulling you off › Park It. Too many tasks compete for one slot › One-Card Cut. You're simply overloaded across the board › Capacity & Feasibility System.

The one thing that makes it work: use real work and a normal, busy time of day. A made-up task, or a quiet hour when nobody would interrupt you anyway, teaches nothing — the cost has to be your real day.

· WHAT COUNTS AS AN INTERRUPTION?

What counts as an interruption

Count anything that takes your attention away from the task you chose — even if you caused it yourself. A Slack message, a "quick" ask, a notification, but also your own urge to check your phone, switch tabs, or look something up. If your attention left the task, it's a tally mark. Don't debate the borderline ones — mark them and move on.

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· WHAT DO I NEED?

What you need

What	Why
A real focus task	Something you actually need to do that needs concentration. Two short blocks' worth.
A timer	Two blocks of about 25 minutes. Your phone is fine.
A tally sheet	One line per interruption: what it was, and roughly how long it took to get back into the work. Paper or a notes app.

Focus · Stay Focused · about 60 minutes (two blocks plus a look in between) · on your own.

· HOW DO I RUN IT?

How to run it — the four steps

1. Block 1 — just notice	25 min	Do your real work. Each time something pulls you away — a message, a "quick" ask, a notification, your own urge to check something — make a tally mark. Next to it, note roughly how long it took to get back into the work (10 seconds, 2 minutes, 5 minutes). Don't change how you work yet — just notice.
2. Add it up	5 min	Count the interruptions. Add up the "getting back in" time. Don't try to be precise — rough estimates are enough. This is the real cost — usually far more than the interruptions themselves took. Mark the one or two that did the most damage.
3. Set one boundary	3 min	Pick the single boundary most likely to stop the biggest drain you saw — not the easiest one. If two boundaries seem equally useful, choose the one that's easiest to repeat every day. Phone in another room, notifications off, a "back at 11" note to others, one set time to check messages. Write it down.
4. Block 2 — with the boundary	25 min	Same kind of work, boundary on. Tally again. Compare only two things: the number of interruptions, and the total getting-back-in time. Both drop — and the boundary changed it, not working faster.

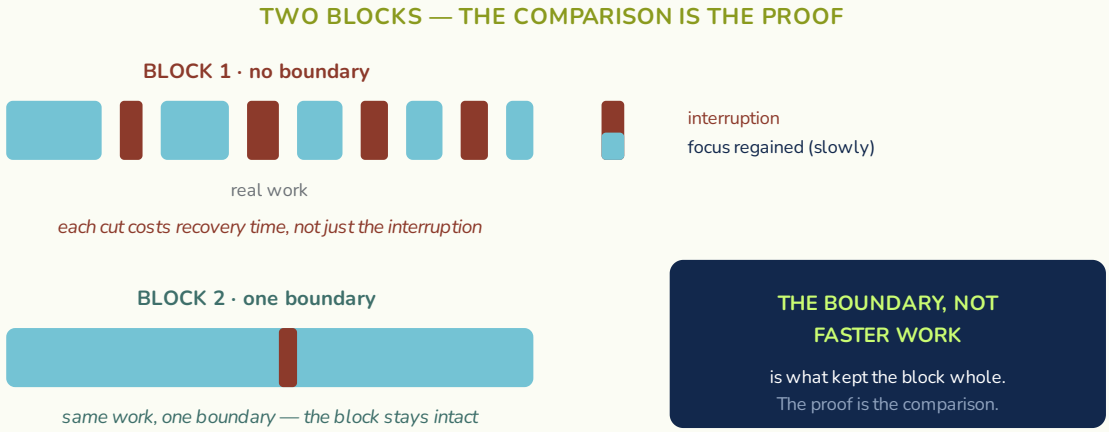
> **The step people skip is the boundary (step 3) — don't.** It's tempting to stop after block 1, having seen the cost, and feel you've learned the lesson. You haven't until you've set a boundary and felt block 2 go differently. The proof is the comparison, not the shock.

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If a genuine emergency interrupts a block: stop, and repeat the activity another day. You're measuring normal interruptions, not exceptional events — one real crisis mid-block makes the two blocks impossible to compare fairly.

· WHAT WILL I SEE?

What you'll see



In block 1 the work keeps getting cut, and each cut costs time to recover. In block 2, with one boundary, the same kind of day stays intact. The boundary is what changed it.

· A WORKED EXAMPLE

Watch the cost appear

Block 1. Someone sits down to finish a tricky piece of writing for 25 minutes. The tally fills up fast: a chat message (3 minutes to get back in), a "quick question" from a colleague (5 minutes), two phone notifications (1 minute each), and twice they reached for their phone themselves (2 minutes each). Eight interruptions.

THE COST, SEEN

The interruptions themselves lasted about five minutes in total. Getting back in took about fourteen. **"I thought the messages cost me a few minutes. The tally says I lost more than half the block — and most of it was getting back into the work, not the interruptions themselves."**

The boundary. The biggest drains were the chat app and the phone. The boundary: phone in a drawer, chat closed, a status set to "back at 11".

Block 2. Same writing, boundary on. Two interruptions instead of eight, both small — and recovery time fell dramatically too. The writing got done. Same kind of work, same time of day — the boundary changed the outcome.

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DID IT GO WELL?

What good looks like

DONE WELL

You tallied honestly, saw how much the getting-back-in time added up to, set one real boundary, and felt block 2 go differently. You can name a few boundaries you'll use before your next focus block.

A WEAK RUN

You stopped after block 1 ("interruptions are costly" — but nothing changed), or you picked a boundary you can't actually keep. Fix: run block 2, and choose a boundary that's realistic for your day.

TAKE IT BACK TO WORK

Set the boundary before the focus block — or the interruption sets it for you.

Before your next block, decide what counts as a real interruption and what waits. Boundaries are the answer, not one rule — keep a few ready.

IF IT DOESN'T GO TO PLAN

If it doesn't go to plan

What happens	What to do
No interruptions came in block 1	You picked too quiet a time. Run it again at a normal, busy part of your day — the cost has to be real to see it.
Most interruptions were your own (checking your phone, switching tabs)	That still counts — and it's useful to see. The boundary can be about your own habits: phone away, one tab, a set time to check.
You forgot to tally several interruptions	Don't restart — estimate them afterwards. The point is awareness, not perfect data; a rough tally still shows the cost.
You can't set a boundary — the interruptions are part of your job	Make the boundary smaller and real: a 25-minute window once a day, agreed with others, where they reach you only for true emergencies. Even one protected block is the point.
Block 2 was interrupted just as much	The boundary wasn't effective enough, or you couldn't hold it. Try a firmer one — physically move the phone, fully close the app — rather than relying on willpower.

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WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

If instead…	Use this
a thought in your own head keeps pulling your focus	**Park It** — write it down and return to the work.
too many tasks compete for one slot	**One-Card Cut** — pick the one thing.
you're overloaded across the board	**Capacity & Feasibility System** — right-size the load.

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