

A Song of Revolution

Reclaim Your Attention

"there has never been more demand on human attention than there is now. you've got these huge huge machines... the biggest one of all being capitalism. consumer capitalism, wants you to keep consuming things. it wants you to keep paying attention to the things that it is selling. google, facebook, meta, all of these things, amazon, they're all kind of machines for keeping the consumer wheel running, and they want your attention. your attention is the most valuable thing about you. they're not interested in your creations. they're interested in your attention, so that you will become obedient shoppers."

brian eno

This week, **we reclaim our attention** and write **a song of revolution**.

Step 1: Reclaim your attention

Do the most thorough 'digital detox' that you are capable of. No phone except for absolute necessities and emergencies. For every exception you plan to make, challenge yourself to see if you can abandon it. If you want help (in excruciating detail) about what this means, see the [Appendix](#).

Step 2: Write a song of *revolution*

Against this backdrop of fewer interruptions, you may notice that you see the world differently. You may find yourself double (and triple) taking more often.

1. Freewrite on this question: ***what future do I want for the world?*** Set a timer for 7 minutes and write (with pen and paper) for the entire time. Let anything and everything out onto the page. Just keep writing.
2. Sing a melody, the first one that comes to mind. The simpler the better. No instrument yet, just singing, clapping and dancing! Let the melody evolve naturally. If words start to appear, embrace them. Keep singing until the melody is stuck in your head.

3. Return to your freewrite. Find 3 simple lines that resonate with you and try to merge them with your melody! Revise as needed and keep it playful.
4. Once you have a melody and some words. Feel free to pick up an instrument and find some chords to support it. Simple chords are best.

Why so simple?

In the 20th century, various earlier social movements were inked by songs - songs that everybody knew, that were easy to learn and join in with. Now, when we really need them, we don't have any universal songs like 'We Shall Overcome' and 'This Land is Your Land'.

There are a few things to bear in mind about songs like these – songs intended for everybody to sing. They're often simple in melody. They're written with simple chords. There aren't large gaps between bits of singing - nobody knows what to do in those and everybody loses the beat. They're often marchable to, or danceable to.

Your song doesn't need to be a rally cry or a protest song, but as you write, keep in mind: power lies in simplicity.

appendix: steps for a week long digital detox

here's a more thorough breakdown of what we mean by taking a digital detox. be forewarned: this is going to be extremely difficult. if this were easy, there wouldn't be a problem in the first place. regaining control of our attention requires intentional effort, and this challenge is designed to help you experience that.

we recognize that, in addition to being broadly challenging, this assignment will also be uniquely difficult for different people. everyone has a different relationship with technology and varying

levels of dependence on it—for work, for family, for daily life. we've done our best to create an exhaustive plan that offers flexibility, acknowledging that not every rule or suggestion will apply to every individual.

we want to emphasize that this is not about creating some idealized state of existence or a standard you should feel bad about not meeting. we are asking only that you engage with this challenge fully and authentically for **one week**. at school of song, our foundational philosophy is to break down big challenges (e.g. writing songs) into achievable, time-bound tasks (e.g. month-long songwriting workshops). we're applying the same principle here: one week, one effort, and then you're free to resume your life as it was before.

if everything works out, at worst, you'll have had a particularly creative and mindful week. at best, you'll exit knowing you have a framework you can return to whenever you need to recalibrate your attention.

the overall goal of this assignment is to reclaim your attention by making a **significant reduction in its exposure to distractions**. we'll go through the most common distractors for people, outline the requirements of the assignment to mitigate those distractions. this is particularly challenging because the same technologies that are a source of distractions are also a mandated utility in many of our lives in 2025. for that reason, we'll also provide responses to the most common difficulties that arise from trying to get rid of them.

day 1: the setup

if you can, begin the setup today—sunday, january 19th. if you need to wait until monday, do it as early as possible.

the ideal

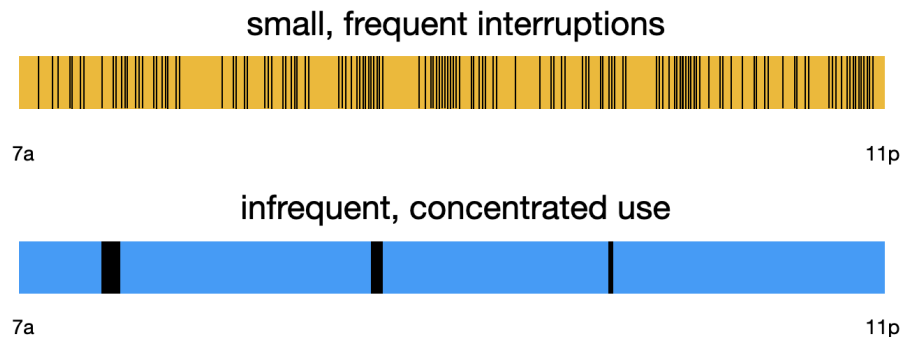
here's the ideal scenario: turn your phone off for the next seven days straight, and use your computer only to log in to zoom for lectures, q&a, and song shares.

if you're somehow able to do this without significant consequences, stop reading here and skip to writing your song. while you're at it, if you would be so kind, please let us know how to achieve this level of tech independence.

...for the rest of us

we're going to take a more tailor-fit approach to **reducing** our technology use. preparing for a week of detox will require significant setup work – that is, being on your phone. but it's a

necessary evil! we're facing the final boss head-on before laying it to rest. our aim for this week is to shift from **small, frequent interruptions** to **intentional, infrequent, concentrated use**.



step 1) ruthlessly delete your apps

go through your phone and delete (almost) all of your applications. this might seem like a pain in the ass, and it's going to be, but it is a crucial first step. for every app, ask yourself the question:

will my life or livelihood (or someone else's life or livelihood) be threatened if I delete this app?

if the answer is no, delete it. keep a piece of paper nearby with a pen, and write down any apps that you delete that you might want back after the detox.

here's a list of common worries:

*i need **social media** for my job, to promote an event, to coordinate with my friend, etc.*

still delete the apps. find every viable alternative to using the apps as possible.

for the things you absolutely cannot work around, map out all the times throughout the week that you will access your social media account. write down a plan before going in. for example: post a show's flyer, respond to comments/messages related to bookings, and then log off immediately. re-download the app, and be brief and exact in your use. delete the app immediately after this session.

*i need my **email** on my phone for work*

relegate all email checking to time when you're at your computer. if this is infeasible, delete your email app after work every day.

*i need my phone for **music***

if you have other means of listening to music (vinyl, an ancient iPod, etc), listen on those devices. if you don't, just take a break from listening to music on your phone. just sit there on your morning commute without headphones in.

alongside this, replace critical functionality with **analog alternatives**. for example,

if you use your phone as an **alarm clock**, go to a thrift store and buy a \$5 analog alarm clock replacement.

if you use your phone for **tasks** that come to mind throughout the day, find a portable notebook that you can write these ideas down in instead. during your scheduled phone / computer time, consult that list and go through the tasks in a concentrated matter.

if you use your phone for entertainment, read a **book**.

if you use your phone for **maps**, buy an atlas. or print directions on [mapquest](https://www.mapquest.com/).

and so on

step 2) ruthlessly limit notifications

for the remaining apps you have, ask a similar question:

will my life or livelihood (or someone else's life or livelihood) be threatened if I am not immediately notified by this app?

if no, turn off the notifications. choose one or two times throughout the day to respond to messages / calls in bulk. on iOS devices, you can set up '[focuses](#)' to only allow notifications from certain contacts. on Androids, there's '[do not disturb](#)'.

inform loved ones of the detox and that you're committing to it for 1 week. this will help with a) setting expectations and boundaries around communication and b) support more generally.

days 2 - 7: create physical distance

now that your phone is not much more than an expensive brick of glass and silicon, it should be slightly easier to ignore. but in addition to that, here are some actions you can take to deepen your detox:

1) delay your first phone pick-up of the day for as long as you. can sleep with your phone in another room. when you wake, wait for 30 minutes before looking at your phone. try to extend this day by day. as brian said, delaying your consumption will allow ideas to emerge:

"If you just get up and don't do anything—just sit in a chair, for instance, or sit on the floor or on the side of your bed—it's quite interesting, because at first it's very difficult to do, because your habit is to want to immediately consume things. If you can stick it out for a little bit, you find that instead of things coming into you, things start coming out of you."

2) set a schedule for phoneless time. as mentioned earlier, if you need to use your phone for specific, planned tasks, just set a schedule beforehand. get in and out of the phone-zone as quickly as you can.

3) leave the house without your phone. even if it's only for 5 minutes – just go outside and create as much physical distance from your phone as you can.

on day 6, once you've written your song using the instructions in the main body of the prompt, you can use your phone to record to voice memo.

other tips and FAQs

tip 1) **set up time to hang out with friends and family in person**

our time on our phones often gives us the (perhaps illusory) feeling of being connected to others. removing this constant tether can sometimes contribute to feelings of isolation. to get ahead of this, make a point to schedule intentional time with friends and family in person. these connections will help replace the sense of community your phone might otherwise provide.

tip 2) **go extreme on day one**

the more extreme you can go on the first day, the better. if you can do a **full detox**—avoiding your phone entirely for a full evening or even a full 24 hours—you will feel the effects most profoundly. this initial push often creates the momentum and commitment needed to stay on track for the rest of the week.

a p.s. on computers

while most of our instructions have focused on phones, computers are another potential source of distraction. you will need to determine whether your computer is another pathway by which your attention is being mined and take appropriate steps to address it.

this can become particularly tricky when it comes to recording songs. here's our advice:

1. **if you can write without a computer, do so.** use a notebook, an instrument, or any analog tools available to you. use the computer only for the final steps of uploading
2. **if your computer is your only means of making music,** then ensure you disable your internet connection while working. turn off wi-fi, unplug the ethernet cable, or block distracting websites to focus solely on your creative work.