CourseMints

GUIDE

Digital Detox

Reclaim Your Time and Attention from Your Phone

SELF-PACED PDF COURSE

COURSEMINTS.COM

CourseMints

Digital Detox

Reclaim Your Time and Attention from Your Phone

COPYRIGHT

© 2026 CourseMints. Published by Morvex Corporation Limited, Studio No. 28, 2 Old Brompton Road, London, England, SW7 3DQ. Registry Nr: 17034959. info@coursemints.com

All rights reserved. No part of this guide may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form without written permission from the publisher, except as allowed by the license below.

YOUR LICENSE

This guide is licensed to the buyer for personal use. You may download it, read it on any of your devices and print as many copies as you need for yourself. Please do not resell, share, upload or redistribute it, in whole or in part.

DISCLAIMER

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or replace care from a qualified health professional. Talk to your doctor before you change any treatment, medication or care plan, and get help promptly for any symptom that worries you.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

Contents

	How to Use This Guide	4
CHAPTER 1	Why Your Phone Is So Hard to Put Down	6
CHAPTER 2	What the Research Really Says	10
CHAPTER 3	Audit Your Screen Use	14
CHAPTER 4	Redesign Your Phone	18
CHAPTER 5	Phone-Free Zones and Times	22
CHAPTER 6	Social Media, News and Messages	26
CHAPTER 7	Replace, Don't Just Remove	30
CHAPTER 8	Families, Kids and Screens	33
CHAPTER 9	The 21-Day Digital Reset	38
CHAPTER 10	Keeping It Going: Your Personal Tech Rules	42

How to Use This Guide

Your phone is one of the most useful objects ever made. It holds your maps, your music, your photos, your bank, your friends and a good part of your work. This guide is not about throwing it away. It is about making sure you decide when you use it, instead of it deciding for you.

Most people who pick up this guide recognize at least a few of these: reaching for the phone without meaning to, losing an hour to scrolling and feeling worse afterward, checking it first thing in the morning and last thing at night, half-listening to people while glancing at a screen, or feeling restless when it is out of reach. None of this means you are weak. Many of the apps on your phone were designed by talented teams whose job is to capture as much of your attention as possible. You need a design of your own to match.

How the guide is organized

The first two chapters explain why phones are so hard to put down and what the research honestly says about screens and wellbeing. The next five chapters are the tools: auditing your use, redesigning your phone, creating phone-free zones and times, using social media, news and messaging on your terms, and filling the time you win back. Then comes a chapter for families and children. The guide ends with a 21-day digital reset and a chapter on keeping your new rules going.

Each chapter explains the mechanism in plain language, gives you numbered steps, shows an example and ends with an exercise and Key Takeaways. The people in the examples are fictional composites written to show the method; they are not real customers or testimonials.

This guide is about everyday life: mornings, evenings, meals, relationships, family and free time. If your main struggle is staying focused during work sessions, our *Deep Focus Flow* guide covers that in depth.

The companion planner

The *Digital Detox Planner* holds the printable pages you will use along the way: the screen-time audit, a day-by-day 21-day reset plan with trackers, and your app rules. Print it, or fill it in with a PDF editor, on a device other than your phone if you can.

What you need

- [ ] Your phone, and about 20 minutes to look at its built-in screen-time report
- [ ] The *Digital Detox Planner*, printed if possible
- [ ] A basic alarm clock and, if you use your phone as a watch, an ordinary wristwatch
- [ ] A charging spot outside your bedroom
- [ ] A conversation with the people you live with, so they know what you are trying

⚠ CAUTION

When to get help

Most people can change their phone habits with the tools in this guide. Talk to your doctor or a mental health professional if your phone or internet use is tied to persistent low mood, anxiety or loneliness; if you have tried repeatedly to cut back and cannot, despite serious harm to your sleep, work, studies or relationships; or if you are gambling, betting or spending money online in ways you cannot control. Gambling problems in particular are a recognized condition with effective treatment, and confidential helplines exist in most countries. If you ever have thoughts of harming yourself, contact emergency services or a crisis line straight away.

CHAPTER 1

Why Your Phone Is So Hard to Put Down

01

It is easy to blame yourself for checking your phone too often. A more useful starting point is to understand how the pull works, because once you can see the mechanism, you can design around it.

Built to hold attention

Many of the most-used apps make money from advertising, and advertising revenue depends on how much time and attention users give. That creates a powerful incentive to design for engagement. In the late 1990s the researcher B.J. Fogg founded the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab to study how computers can change behavior, and a generation of designers learned its principles. Fogg's model is simple: a behavior happens when **motivation, ability and a prompt** come together at the same moment. Phones excel at all three. Motivation is supplied by curiosity and social reward, ability by the fact that the phone is always in your hand, and prompts by notifications, badges and your own boredom.

Five design features that keep you scrolling

1. **Variable rewards.** In the 20th century the psychologist B.F. Skinner showed that animals rewarded unpredictably keep responding longer and harder than those rewarded every time. A feed works the same way: most posts are dull, then one is funny, flattering or alarming. You never know when the next good one will appear, so you keep pulling. Refreshing a feed is a lot like pulling a slot machine lever.
2. **No natural stopping point.** Infinite scroll and autoplay remove the cues that once told you to stop, such as the end of a page or an episode. The designer usually credited with inventing infinite scroll, Aza Raskin, has since spoken publicly about regretting how much time it consumes.

3. **Social reward and obligation.** Likes, comments, streaks, read receipts and "seen" indicators tap into a deep need for approval and belonging, and create a sense that you owe a reply.
4. **Red badges and notifications.** Notifications interrupt you at the app's convenience, not yours, and red counters make unfinished business visible. Each one is a prompt to open the app, where the feed waits.
5. **Personalization.** Recommendation systems learn what holds your attention and show you more of it. That can be wonderful (a feed full of your hobby) or draining (a feed tuned to outrage or envy), and it gets more precise the more you use it.

THE SCIENCE

The hook cycle

In his 2014 book *Hooked*, the product designer Nir Eyal described how habit-forming products work in a four-step loop: a **trigger** (a notification, or an internal feeling such as boredom), an **action** (opening the app), a **variable reward** (something new and interesting) and an **investment** (posting, following, building streaks), which makes the next trigger more likely. The book was written to help designers build such products; Eyal's later book, *Indistractable* (2019), addresses users trying to resist them. You can use the same loop in reverse: remove triggers, add friction to actions, and reduce the investment that pulls you back.

Triggers come from inside too

External triggers (pings, buzzes, badges) are the obvious ones. The more powerful triggers are often internal: boredom, a moment of anxiety, loneliness, tiredness, or a task you would rather avoid. The phone offers instant relief from each of these feelings, so your brain learns to reach for it whenever they appear. Over time the reach becomes automatic, triggered by situations (waiting in line, the first minute after waking, a pause in a conversation) as much as by feelings.

What about dopamine?

You may have heard that phones “flood your brain with dopamine” and that a “dopamine detox” can reset it. The reality is more nuanced. Dopamine is a brain chemical involved in motivation and learning: it is especially active when you anticipate a possible reward and when something turns out better than expected. That helps explain why unpredictable rewards are so compelling. But dopamine is not a “pleasure chemical,” you cannot drain it by avoiding your phone, and a dopamine detox is not a medical treatment. The useful idea underneath the slogan is sound: if you spend time away from highly stimulating apps, ordinary activities become more appealing again, and cue-driven habits weaken.

Is it addiction?

Researchers usually speak of **problematic smartphone use** rather than addiction, and “smartphone addiction” is not an official diagnosis. Gaming disorder is recognized by the World Health Organization in its international classification of diseases, and gambling disorder is a well-established condition. For most people, though, heavy phone use is a habit problem shaped by design, not a disease, which is good news: habits respond well to changes in environment, routine and rules.

EXAMPLE

Theo watches himself

Theo, 29, a physical therapist, decided to notice every time he picked up his phone for one ordinary Tuesday. He reached for it while the kettle boiled, at every red light, in the bathroom, between patients and while his girlfriend was telling him about her day. Most pickups had no purpose; he could not remember what he had been looking for half the time. The trigger was almost always the same: a few seconds of empty time or a flicker of boredom. Seeing the pattern was the first step to changing it.

EXERCISE

What pulls you in?

Which of the five design features affect you most? Tick them and add the apps involved.

- [ ] Variable rewards (feeds, refresh): _____

CourseMints

PLANNER

Digital Detox Planner

Screen-Time Audit, 21-Day Reset and App Rules

COMPANION TO DIGITAL DETOX

SELF-PACED PDF COURSE

COURSEMINTS.COM

INSIDE THIS PLANNER

Contents

	How to Use This Planner	4
PART 1	Screen-Time Audit	5
PART 2	The 21-Day Reset	8
PART 3	App Rules	12

Three-day trigger log

For three ordinary days, note each pickup, or as many as you can for a few hours each day. Keep it short: “Tue 7:05,” “bed,” “news,” “boredom,” “N,” “12.” In the last column write **+** (felt better), **=** (no change) or **-** (felt worse).

Day and time	Where	App	What prompted it	Meant to?	Minutes	After

The three situations and feelings behind most of my unplanned use: