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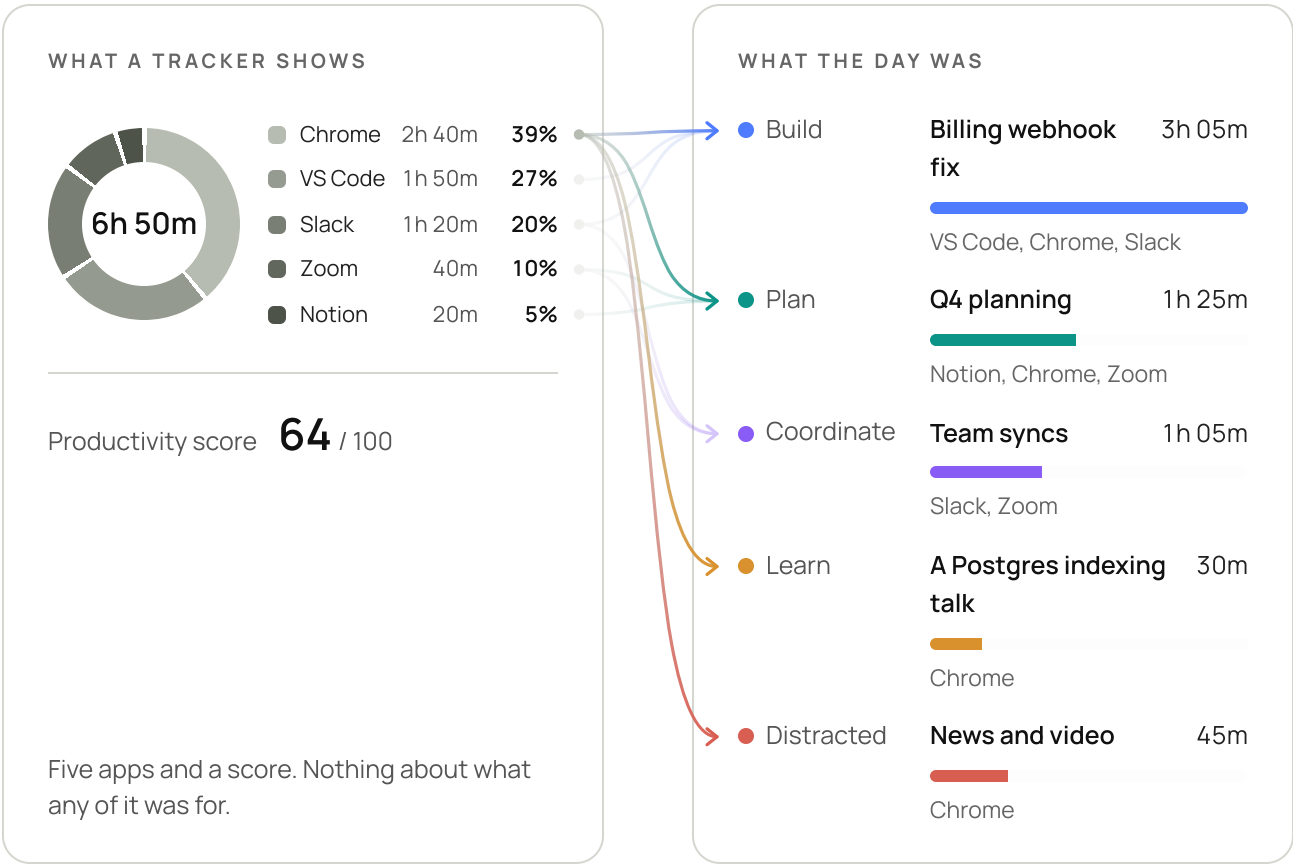
Your day is not a pie chart

Srikar Appalaraju · October 5, 2026 · 6 min read

Disagree, or see it differently? Write to founders@dtangle.ai →

Ask anyone who works at a computer where yesterday went and you will get a story. It will be confident, tidy and mostly wrong. Not because people lie, but because a day at a screen does not happen in the shape we remember. It happens in pieces.

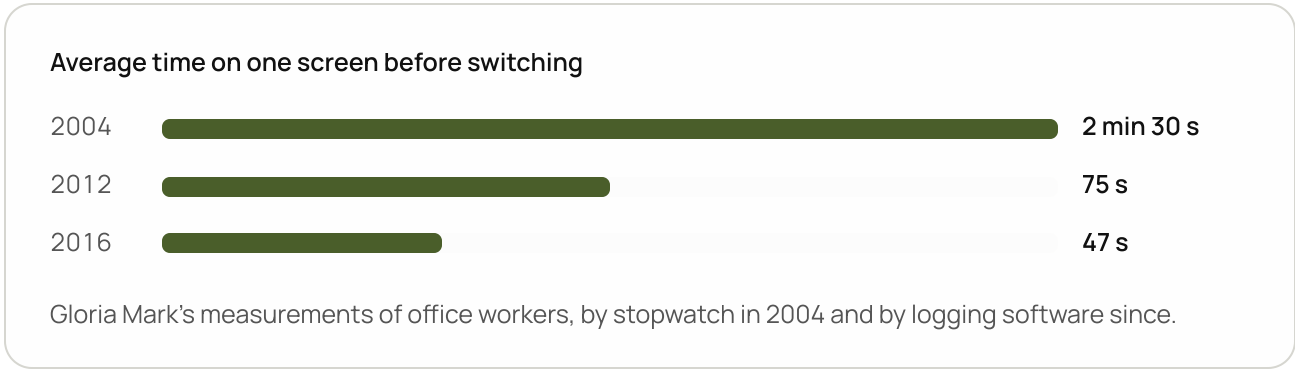
Activity tracking was supposed to fix that. For twenty years apps have promised to show you your own day. Most of them hand you a pie chart. This essay argues that a pie chart is the wrong picture of a working day and sketches a better one.



One illustrative day, two ways. Chrome is the biggest slice of the pie, but it was four different things: docs for the fix, research for the plan, a talk worth watching and 45 minutes of news.

Why it matters

In 2004 Gloria Mark's team at UC Irvine followed office workers with stopwatches. On average they stayed on one screen for two and a half minutes before switching. Logging software later put the figure at 75 seconds in 2012 and 47 seconds in 2016.[1] Switching is not free. A study of 137 people at three Fortune 500 companies counted close to 1,200 toggles between apps and websites a day, costing just under four hours a week in reorienting: about 9% of a working year.[2] Microsoft's own telemetry puts interruptions by meetings, email and chat at one every two minutes of core work hours, 275 a day, for its most pinged users.[3]



Gloria Mark's measurements of office workers, by stopwatch in 2004 and by logging software since.

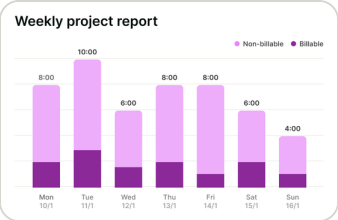
None of it is visible from the inside. People asked to estimate their own screen use are rarely accurate: across 106 comparisons with logged data, self reports agreed only moderately.[4] We misremember which hours were deep and which were scattered, so the advice we take is aimed at a day we imagined.

That is the case for tracking. Nothing you have is more important than your attention. It decides what gets built, what gets learned and what a day was for. It is also the one input nobody measures well. You cannot protect what you cannot see.

Five ways it goes wrong

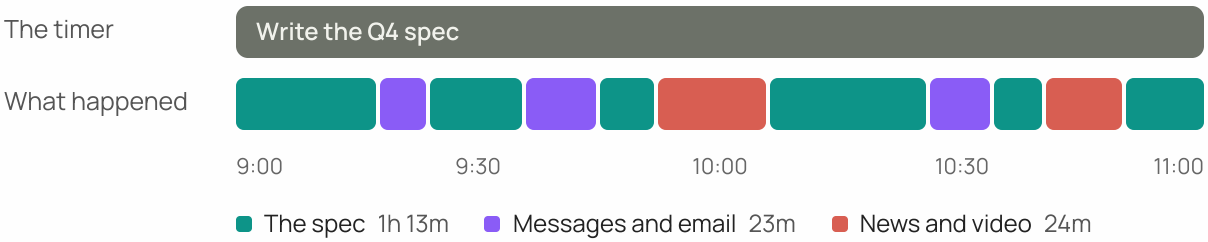
The tools exist. They fail in five recognizable ways.

Timers make you the bookkeeper. Start a timer, name the task, stop it, repeat a dozen times a day. A timer records what you meant to do, not where your attention went. The moment it becomes a chore you stop. Researchers who study self tracking call this lapsing and find it is the normal life of a tracker, not a personal failing.[5]

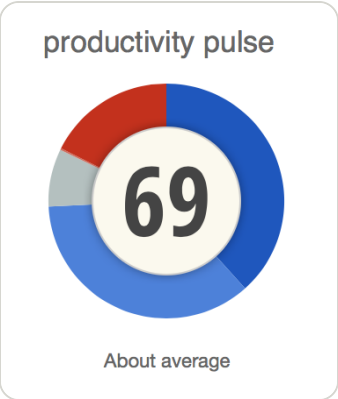


Toggl Track's weekly report: what all that starting and stopping adds up to.

9:00 to 11:00, logged and lived



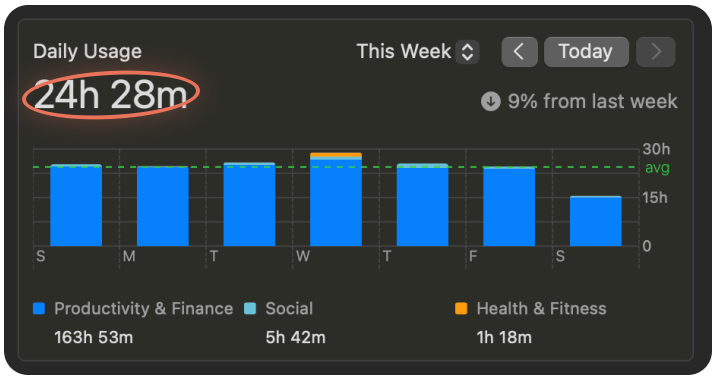
The timer says two hours of one task. The day says eleven stretches, with two minutes in five spent somewhere else.

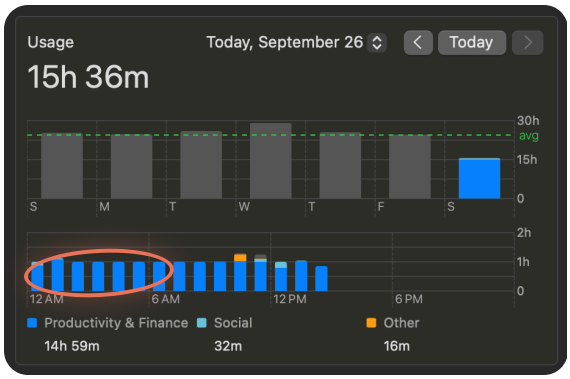


RescueTime's Productivity Pulse: a whole day as one number.

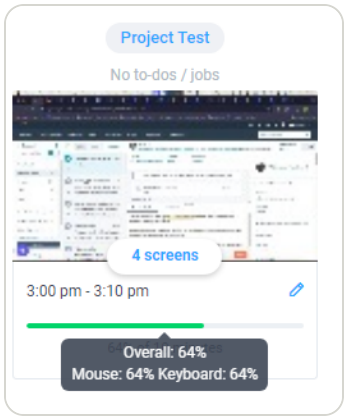
Dashboards count apps, not work. Automatic trackers remove the bookkeeping, then file every minute under the app it happened in and grade the app from a list. RescueTime boils that down to a Productivity Pulse, one number from 0 to 100 averaged from the grade each app was given in advance.[6] But the same browser is research at ten and a detour at eleven. The same chat window is coordination one hour and escape the next. Two hours of "Chrome" is not a finding. Work runs in threads that cross apps, so slicing a day by app cuts every thread into confetti.

Screen time gives totals without a story. Here is my own Mac. Over one week it reports a daily average of 24 hours 28 minutes, longer than the days it was measuring. It files almost all of it under one label: Productivity & Finance, 163 hours. In the day view every hour since midnight holds a full hour of use, 15 hours by mid afternoon. Was that code, email, a spreadsheet or a build left running? It cannot say. A total with an arrow next to it tells you that something changed, never what or why.





Screen Time on my Mac. **The week:** a daily average longer than a day. **The Saturday:** an hour of use logged in every hour since midnight, nearly all of it filed under one label.

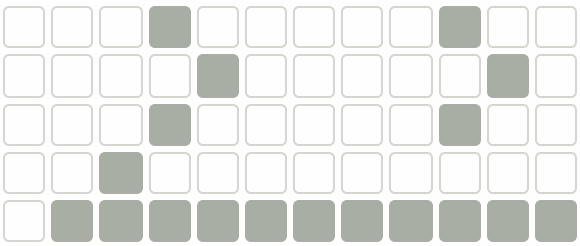


Hubstaff: a picture of your screen and a score for your mouse.

Bossware points the camera the wrong way. Much of the tracking sold today is bought by employers to watch people, not by people to understand themselves. About a third of UK employers already use it to log browsing, email and screen activity.[7] Much of it scores you on motion: Hubstaff's activity rate is the share of seconds in each ten minutes with any keyboard or mouse input.[8] Motion is easy to fake. In 2024 Wells Fargo fired more than a dozen people for "simulation of keyboard activity."[9] Tracking that can be used against you is tracking you learn to route around.

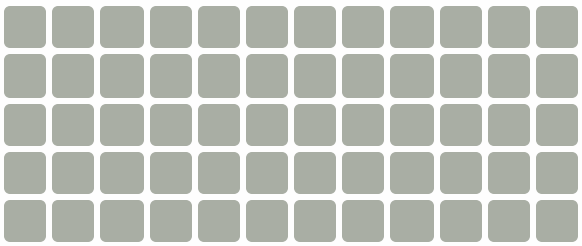
Ten minutes, scored by keyboard and mouse

Reading a design doc, then replying



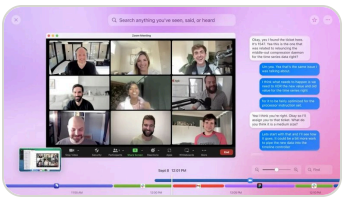
30% activity

A mouse jiggler, nobody at the desk



100% activity

Each square is ten seconds, filled when a key or the mouse moved. Thinking scores low. A jiggler scores perfectly.



Rewind: every frame of your screen, searchable. Switched off in December 2025.

Recording everything is a haystack. Capture the screen every few seconds, make it searchable and call it memory. You can find the moment you saw something. You still cannot see the shape of your day. And a memory kept inside someone else's product lasts as long as the product: Rewind stopped capturing on December 19, 2025, two weeks after its maker was acquired.[10]

Underneath all five is the same gap. They sort by rule: an App Store category, a list of grades, a count of keystrokes. None of them reads what the work was. Where AI has arrived it serves the manager's analytics or searches a recording. It never tells you what your day was about. Each one either asks you to do the analysis or hands you raw material and walks away.

The ones that came before



ulogme's barcode of a day, from Karpathy's 2014 post.

The most honest attempts came from engineers scratching their own itch. Andrej Karpathy's ulogme logged window titles and keystrokes on his own machine, because a record of everything he did felt too private for someone else's server, then drew his days as timelines.[11] Sourcegraph's Thyme set out to measure human time and focus from the terminal.[12] Both were open source. Both kept the data at home. Both have since gone quiet.

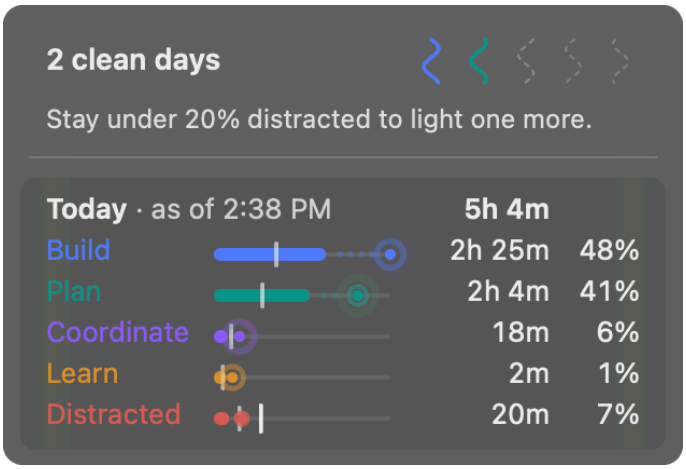
They proved that logging is the easy part. What they left to you was the reading: you were still the analyst of your own day, staring at a chart and deciding what it meant.

What we built instead

At dtangle we took a different bet on productivity. We felt it starts with attention: not the hours you logged or the apps you opened, but where your attention went and what pulled it away. So we built it in layers.



dtangle runs quietly on your Mac and in your browser, with nothing to start or label. AI turns the raw minutes into strands of work, each built from whatever apps it took. It keeps track of how they connect: what interrupted what, what is still open from yesterday. Every morning it reads yesterday back to you in five lanes. Through the day it coaches gently, with the hours worth protecting and a drift caught while there is still time. A working day that stays under 20% distracted lights a strand. Five braid into a band.



dtangle in the menu bar. Two clean days lit, the next one pulsing while today stays on track. Below, today's lanes: the bar is today so far, the tick your usual by now and the ring where each lane is heading.

There is no leaderboard and no team average. Your baseline is you: your usual for this weekday, your clean days, your bands. Someone else's day says nothing about yours. It is you against yourself. The only fair comparison is with the person you were last Tuesday.

It is yours, too. It is not a manager's dashboard. You can delete any day, on every device, whenever you like.

We call this detangling. Attention arrives tangled. A tracker's job is not to count the knots but to show you which thread to pull. That is the bet behind dtangle. This is the first of what we will write about it.

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