

CHAPTER 4 • THE READER'S GAUGE

The Thought Margin Scorecard

A ten-minute look at where your thinking capacity is going – and why you keep ending competent days feeling mentally empty.

How to take it

There are 24 statements, in eight groups of three. For each one, think about the **last two weeks** and score how often it has been true.

STANDARD KEY	0	1	2	3	4
Most statements	never	rarely	sometimes	often	almost always
Statements marked (reverse)	almost always	often	sometimes	rarely	never

Thirteen statements describe a drain, where *more* of it means *less* margin. Score those with the key flipped, as you answer. Then every number you write down means the same thing: **higher always means more margin**. That is the whole trick. There is no second scoring step later.

Answer quickly and honestly — your first instinct is usually the true one. The first four groups measure what drains your margin; the last four measure what refills and protects it. The gap between them is the whole story.

Part A — Where the margin leaks

GROUP 1 • DECISION LOAD

the sheer volume of choices you are carrying

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
1.	I face more decisions in a day than I can make well. <i>(reverse)</i>	
2.	By evening I feel "decisioned out." <i>(reverse)</i>	
3.	I end most days with mental energy to spare for a hard choice.	

Group 1 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____

GROUP 2 • CONTEXT SWITCHING

how often your attention is yanked from one thing to another

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
4.	My attention gets pulled to something new before I finish what I am on. <i>(reverse)</i>	
5.	I juggle several unrelated tasks in a single hour. <i>(reverse)</i>	
6.	I can stay on one thing until it is done.	

Group 2 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____

GROUP 3 • INTERRUPTION EXPOSURE

how porous your attention is to notifications and other people

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
7.	Notifications or people interrupt my focused work. <i>(reverse)</i>	
8.	I check messages without meaning to. <i>(reverse)</i>	
9.	I get long stretches with no interruptions.	

Group 3 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____

GROUP 4 • OPEN LOOPS

the unfinished commitments that keep running in the background

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
10.	Unfinished commitments keep resurfacing in my mind. <i>(reverse)</i>	
11.	I carry a running list of things I have not decided or closed. <i>(reverse)</i>	
12.	When I set something down, it stays down until I choose to pick it up.	

Group 4 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____

Part B — Where the margin refills

GROUP 5 • RECOVERY*whether you actually restore, or just stop*

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
13	I wake up feeling mentally restored.	
14	I get real downtime where I am not "on."	
15	I cut my sleep short to get everything done. <i>(reverse)</i>	

Group 5 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____**GROUP 6 • REFLECTION TIME***room to think about how things are going, not just do them*

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
16	I have time to think about how things are going, not just push through them.	
17	I step back to make sense of what I am learning.	
18	My days are too full for any reflection. <i>(reverse)</i>	

Group 6 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____**GROUP 7 • ATTENTION RESTORATION***whether you actually rest the faculty you spend all day using*

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
19	I can read or think deeply without my mind wandering.	
20	I reread the same thing because I did not absorb it the first time. <i>(reverse)</i>	
21	My breaks give my attention a real rest — no screen, no new input.	

Group 7 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____**GROUP 8 • PLANNING BUFFER***the slack in your schedule that absorbs the unexpected*

#	STATEMENT	SCORE 0-4
22	My schedule is booked solid, with no slack. <i>(reverse)</i>	
23	One unexpected task can derail my whole day. <i>(reverse)</i>	
24	I build in buffer time for the things I cannot predict.	

Group 8 average (add the three, divide by 3): _____

Reading your profile

Step 1 — Average each group of three. You will have eight numbers, each between 0 and 4, each pointing the same direction: higher is healthier. **Those eight numbers are your Margin Profile — the real output of this tool.** Write them where you can see all eight at once.

Step 2 — Read the shape. Circle your lowest group: that is your highest-leverage target. Then compare your two families. Average groups 1–4 (the **Leak family** — how well the drains are sealed) and groups 5–8 (the **Reserve family** — how well the account refills). The gap between the two families is the most honest sentence this tool will speak about your life. It tells you whether to plug leaks or make deposits first.

GROUP	AVERAGE (0-4)	FAMILY	FAMILY AVERAGE
1 · Decision Load		Leak	
2 · Context Switching		Leak	
3 · Interruption Exposure		Leak	
4 · Open Loops		Leak	
5 · Recovery		Reserve	
6 · Reflection Time		Reserve	
7 · Attention Restoration		Reserve	
8 · Planning Buffer		Reserve	

My lowest group — the one I circled: _____

The one change I am making for the next thirty days: _____

Optional — the Index

If you want one number to track over time, average all eight group scores and multiply by 25 for a 0–100 figure. Use the Index for exactly one thing: comparing yourself to yourself, this month against last. The profile is for diagnosis. The Index is just the trend line.

INDEX	AS A ROUGH COMPASS
Below 40	Running on borrowed capacity, with judgment the first thing to go
40–59	Functioning with no slack — one rough week from overdrawn
60–79	Genuine room to think when it counts
80 and up	A consistent surplus, rare in modern life, whose work is keeping it

My Index today (optional): _____

What this is and is not. A self-assessment, not a clinical test, and not a validated instrument — a structured way to see your own patterns, the way a food journal shows you your eating without being a lab report. Scores move with mood, workload, illness, season and how candidly you answered on a given day, not only with the interventions in this book. The most useful things here are the *shape* and the *gap*.

Your lowest score is not your weakness. It is your highest-leverage move. Change one thing for thirty days, then take this reading again.

What I noticed in my shape

One or two lines, written now while it is fresh. Reflection is a deposit — Chapter 7 — and this is the cheapest place in the book to make one.

Photocopy-friendly. From Thought Margin: Reclaiming the Capacity to Think in the Age of AI by Rachael-Renée Rychling. Free to print for personal use. If rest has genuinely stopped working — or depletion has brought persistent low mood, lost interest, or hopelessness — the highest-leverage move available to you is a conversation with a doctor or a mental-health professional.