What happens to your breath when you’re working and how does it compare to when you’re reading a book or meditating?

We saw in a previous Spire IRL post, A Work Break, that working at a computer changes breathing patterns. This time, we’re comparing it directly to reading a book and meditating, two relaxing activities.

We put a Spire on two members of the Spire. Each person worked for 20 minutes, read for 20 minutes, then meditated for 20 minutes...an average day here at the Spire office :).

First, we looked at working on a computer versus reading a book. Computer work involves a lot of reading. Whatever you’re looking at while at work – an email from your boss, the latest quiz on Buzzfeed, or watching platypus
playtime videos – chances are you’re engaging in inconsistent behavior. Much different than reading a book, right? Let’s see.

Look at the difference between reading a book and working at a computer – very interesting!

This behavior results in more erratic breathing, as seen in the graph, and even has a short ‘breath hold.’ The reading task overall had slower breathing and longer pauses between the breaths and even had a big sigh (romance novels, amirite?) in the middle.

Why is working at the computer so different from reading a book? They both involve reading, but computers are much more interactive and usually involve lots of fits and starts as one task ends and another starts. Unlike getting into a book, where you’re able to focus on one activity continuously, without the constant starting and switching that you do while working on a computer.
Now let’s compare those with a simple meditation.

As you can see, each breath is even more smooth and slow than working and reading. One thing that’s fascinating, however, is that even though the users were very relaxed and meditating, each breath is unique! Or, as we like to say at Spire: each breath is a snowflake. This makes sense because our state of mind is also always evolving and changing.

After that, the Spire team members did a second meditation, this time without any guidance or music. Let’s see what happened.
This time we see an even more dramatic difference! The breaths are even more dramatically slow, smooth, and consistent...yet all still snowflakes! (It’s important to keep in mind that the two people that did the exercise were experienced meditators.) The next time you sit down to work, take notice of what your breath is doing and think, is there an activity I’m engaging in (ahem, multitasking too much?) that is affecting my breathing patterns? Remember, your breath is available to help you refocus, too! And it will only take a few minutes out of your day.