

How to Avoid Distractions

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In today's fast paced, technology-reliant world, it can be tougher than ever to focus on taking care of business without getting **distracted**. Many of the thoughts, behaviors and devices that play an important role in daily life can become hindrances when trying to focus. In order to stay on task and get things done, it's essential to create an environment for yourself in which you can work without having your attention pulled in different directions. This includes measures like turning off your phones and other electronics, scheduling specific times to work and meeting a quota of work and other tasks that you set for yourself.

Method 1

Method 1 of 3: Creating a Distraction-Free Environment



1 Shut off your phone and other electronics. Before you dive into working, cleaning, writing or whatever else you need to do, turn off or silence your cell phone and anything else that might prove to be a distraction. This includes the TV, video games, etc. Technology is arguably the biggest distraction in modern society, and being surrounded by beeping, buzzing, flashing devices can really hold you back.^[1]

- Unless you use your computer for work, shut it down or set it to hibernate.
- Disable sound alerts for texts, emails and tweets to keep yourself from looking at your phone every time there's activity.^[2]
- If you have an especially hard time keeping yourself on task, put away potential distractions somewhere that it would be a hassle to get them back out.



2 Put your music on pause. When you really need to buckle down, work in silence and give your thoughts room to stretch. Your mind naturally fixates on melodies, rhythms and lyrics. Music can uplift your spirits and make the time pass faster, but by subconsciously following along with a song playing in the background, you'll be limiting your ability to concentrate whether you realize it or not.^[3]

- Save the tunes for after you've finished a particular project, or for times when you're performing light, mindless tasks.



3 Find out where you work best. If you work from home or are involved in creative endeavors, pick a place where you can work comfortably for long periods of time. This could be a small corner desk, a well-lit sunroom or your favorite coffee shop. The point is to surround yourself with an atmosphere that makes completing tasks easier.

- Be careful of surroundings that can dull your focus in other ways. People tend to associate spaces with their common uses, so trying to work in a quiet bedroom may just make you sleepy.



4 Make sure you won't be interrupted. As best you can, try to insulate yourself from being distracted by others when you have big projects that demand your attention. Situate yourself someplace where people are unlikely to pass by and pull you out of your zone. If you work in an office, for instance, shutting the door can relay the message that you'd prefer not to be bothered. This may not always be possible if you share a space with coworkers, customers or children, but you should at least be able to single out which interactions are necessary and which aren't.^[4]

- Organizing your duties in their most efficient logical order can also keep you from having to interrupt your own work later on.
- Putting on a pair of headphones, even if they're not playing anything, will make you appear busy and discourage people from trying to start casual conversations.

Method 2 of 3: Ignoring and Overcoming Distractions



1 Be aware of when you're getting distracted. The second you notice yourself reaching for your phone to check a text message or opening a webpage unrelated to work, stop and cut the distraction off at the pass. In order to combat the most common distractions, you must be able to recognize when they're stealing your attention away. Practice staying mindful of resisting distractions by repeating a phrase like "be here now" or "this is not what I need to be doing" when you catch your attention drifting. Being vigilant of your mind state can help snap you back to reality.^[5]

- Many distractions simply have to be ignored. The brain is well-equipped to block out smaller, less intrusive distractions, but with a little practice you can learn to build up your focus and attention like a muscle.
- Most people lose so much time to extraneous activities because they fail to notice when they're getting distracted, and only become aware of their mistake once the damage has been done.^[6]



2 Resist the urge to procrastinate. Be disciplined about making yourself start working. Procrastination is a major distraction because it allows you to convince yourself that you'll be better off performing a task when you feel more prepared. Once you realize that you'll never get anything done unless you do it now, you won't feel so tempted to put things off.^[7]

- Procrastination is a childish mentality. It can cause you to avoid responsibility in favor of feeling good right now.
- Research has shown that people rarely meet with more success when they put things off until later as opposed to doing them right away.



3 Focus with intention. Sometimes you have to remind yourself to actively focus. Many people never truly learn how to stay focused and find it difficult to keep their minds from wandering when there's work to be done. Try to shut off your own mental distractions so that you can zero in on checking items off your to-do list. It's not enough to simply know that you need to focus; you have to apply yourself to the action you're performing in the moment.^[8]

- It can help to remember that the best way to get everything done is to put all your effort toward one thing at a time. Start by seeing a specific task or project through to completion, then move onto another, then another, until you've met your goal for the day.



4 Get away from the source of your distractions. Physically remove yourself from a certain set of distractions that's leaching your mental power. Pack the materials you need for work or a creative project and head down to the library or a quiet cafe where you can peacefully resume your labors. By isolating yourself, you'll be able to literally escape the distractions that you just can't ignore. If you're powerless before a certain distraction, sometimes you just have to cut and run.^[9]

- Even if you're unable to literally leave the worst of your distractions behind, there are still things you can do to rid them from your mind. Leave your phone at home, turn off your wi-fi and close every tab you have open that isn't helping you with your current task.^[10]
- An ideal working environment is one where there are as few distractions present as possible. This can mean persistent annoyances like cell phones, computers and social media, but it can also include anything that reminds you of what you'd rather be doing.

Method 3 of 3: Working More Efficiently



1 Set aside specific times to work. Find out what time of day you do your best work and structure your to-do list around those hours. If you're a morning person, wake up and get busy before you stall out and lose motivation. Night owls can divide their chores up between regular working hours and free time after everyone else has gone to bed. Most people are realistically only able to stay focused for a few hours a day, so be sure that you're making the best use of that time.^[1]

- Develop a habit of working at the same time every day, and make yourself stick to it.
- If you keep odd or irregular hours, let others know when you're working to keep from being bothered.



2 Do your most important work first. Have a clear idea in mind of what you need to get done and take care of the biggest challenges first. That way, you'll at least be assured that the most crucial tasks have been dealt with. Be able to prioritize wisely so that any leftover work can be knocked out with minimal time and energy. After a while, the anxiety of facing a mountain of unfinished work will disappear.^[12]

- When you have a proposal to outline, meetings to schedule and emails to answer, it can be easy to start feeling overwhelmed. By completing the outline first, however, then using the rest of your day to get your schedule in order and follow up on correspondences, you can save yourself a lot of rush and stress.^[13]



3 Give yourself a daily minimum of things to do. Rather than looking at everything you need to do at once, assign yourself one or two daily goals to achieve. Keep these goals small and attainable. You might find that you have a hard time motivating yourself go out and build a fence around your backyard if you can only think of how much time, effort and expense it will take. If you instead tell yourself that you only need to dig the holes for the posts one day, then plant them the next day, and so on, your responsibilities will no longer seem so daunting.[14]

- Start with modest, specific daily minimums and build them up as you grow more confident. You're much more likely to exceed your expectations if you resolve to spend ten minutes on the treadmill, rather than simply saying "I have to exercise today."
- With few exceptions, most goals will take time to accomplish. Break yourself of the habit of thinking you need to get everything done immediately or all at once. Plotting manageable short-term goals keeps you from biting off more than you can chew.[15]



4 Take breaks judiciously. Take frequent, short breaks and use them to take care of your physical needs and renew your motivation. A good guideline is to break for 12-15 minutes after every hour of work you do. Use that time to go to the bathroom, drink a glass of water, have a snack or rest your eyes. Don't succumb to the temptation to send personal texts or see what's on TV. The more you let your thoughts stray, the tougher it will be to return them to the task at hand.^[16]

- Most people can only maintain their focus for about an hour at a time or less. It can be counterproductive to force yourself to keep working beyond this point, as it becomes more likely that you'll start making mistakes or miss important information.^[17]
- Go for a quick walk or do some light stretching during your breaks to keep your blood flowing. This can help you stay mentally sharp and ready to jump back into things.



5 Get plenty of rest. Aim to get a full night's sleep every evening. Exactly how much sleep you may need will vary, but most people require at least six hours a night to function at their best. When you're rested, your ability to think and perform goes way up. Sleeping puts your mind at ease after obsessing over productivity all day, and gives you a much needed break from thinking about what all you have to do tomorrow.^[18]

- Turn off all electronic devices at least an hour before bed—these can keep you wired.^[19]
- If you're extremely busy, supplement the amount of sleep you get with short naps throughout the day.



Expert Q&A

Question

How can teenagers avoid distractions?



Alyssa Chang
Life Coach
Expert Answer

Leave your phone outside of your bedroom at night, and choose a cut-off time for technology.

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 0

Question

How can I get out of the habit of listening to music while I work?



Community Answer

Not having music playing when you're used to it being there can be a distraction of its own. Try to eliminate background music gradually by switching to instrumental tunes or less intrusive styles and lowering the volume every so often until you're accustomed to silence.

Helpful 27 Not Helpful 4

Question

How do I manage working for longer times without losing my interest?



Community Answer

Try the Pomodoro technique. Concentrate for 25 minutes and take a five minute break.

Helpful 16 Not Helpful 0

Question

How do I get 100% concentration while studying?



Community Answer

Study in a place where there are no distractions, and just focus on one subject at a time. Don't think that you have to do everything at once.

Helpful 44 Not Helpful 9

Question

How can I avoid my mobile while studying?



Community Answer

Give your phone to a parent, roommate, or study partner and ask them not to give it back to you until you've finished your work.

Helpful 25 Not Helpful 5

Question

How do I avoid distractions in class while I'm taking a test?



Community Answer

Try to think about what your goal is. Think about what it will do for you and motivate yourself by saying that you can get through it no matter what. This will boost your morale, improve your concentration, and help you achieve your goal.

Helpful 24 Not Helpful 7



Tips

- Keeping a day planner or journal is a good way to outline your daily minimum goals and track your prime productivity times.
- Come up with self-imposed deadlines. Tell yourself, for example, "I'm going to have this project finished by the end of the weekend." The pressure of an impending deadline helps many people take action toward completing their goals.
- Eat throughout the day. Keeping your blood sugar up makes you more alert, improves organization and attention to detail and provides you with energy to tackle what's in store for you. Fix yourself a hearty breakfast in the morning, and make sure you're getting something to eat every few hours, even if it's just a small snack.
- Be able to reorder your priorities as your work piles up.
- Find little ways to reward yourself when you meet a goal or complete a big project.
- Remember that ultimately, your own level of mental focus is what makes you more

or less prone to distraction.



Warnings

- There will always be something there to distract you. Unless you can train yourself to disregard natural distractions, you'll never be able to accomplish as much as you need to.
- Some people may have less freedom to turn off their electronic devices than others. If your responsibilities require you to be on your phone, tablet or computer regularly, you might have to exercise a little more personal discipline in deciding what's a productive use of your device and what isn't.

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This article was co-authored by [Alyssa Chang](#). Alyssa Chang is a nutrition coach and trainer, based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She uses her extensive background in brain-based neuroscience to work with clients on improving their connections with their brain and body to heal, reach goals, and move pain-free. She holds a BS in Kinesiology and Exercise, Nutrition and Wellness from the California State University, East Bay and is certified in Precision Nutrition, Z-health Performance and is certified by the National Council for Strength and Fitness. This article has been viewed 128,631 times.

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