

The Multi-tasking Brain?



Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many more students switched to doing homework and classwork on laptops, tablets, and even phones. One thing that is different about doing schoolwork on an electronic device is that there are so many possible distractions! Tiktok, YouTube and other videos, Instagram and social media, games...

they're all at our fingertips, right there on the screen with that English or math assignment. Sounds great, right? You can multi-task and have fun while you work! You can have it all!

There's just one problem with that plan: it doesn't work. You may feel like you're getting more done, but you actually accomplish less, not more. Unfortunately, our brains aren't wired for multi-tasking.

What happens next? It depends. Maybe you don't get enough sleep, and find it hard to pay attention in class the next day. Maybe you turn in work that's sloppy or just not your best effort—or you get behind and submit assignments late. Parents and teachers become frustrated, too—no one really enjoys being a nag!

So why does your brain have such a hard time with multi-tasking? Thousands of years ago, our ancestors needed to be highly focused to survive in their dangerous, unpredictable world. Their brains were designed to help them stay alive! And we inherited the same kind of brain—one that's meant to do one thing at a time.



Of course, sometimes it does feel like you're doing two things at the same time. However, that's not what's really happening! Instead, your brain is switching back and forth between networks—as if you were putting one conversation on hold to pick up another call. And, every shift costs time and mental energy. What's the result? Less work done, and less information remembered.

Now, turn to the next page to do a personal inventory.

Personal “Multitasking” Inventory

List all the “other” things you like to do during your time for homework and studying (for example, TV, music, answering calls or texts, TikTok, Instagram, snacking, web surfing, playing games, etc.). Discuss your list with your partner.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Based on Judy Willis, “Conquering the Multitasking Brain Drain,” Edutopia, 10.25.2016:

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/conquering-the-multitasking-brain-drain-judy-willis>

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Brain by Wes Brezell from The Noun Project <https://thenounproject.com/term/brain/189789/>