

Distracted by Everything: Being Wired At All Times

By Karine Manoukian

Resources

Watch and Listen to [Distracted by Everything - Frontline: Digital Nation](#)

Listen to [Multitasking: Does It Work](#) from *Forum*, KQED

Listen to [Multitasking Brain Divides And Conquers, To A Point](#) from *All Things Considered*, NPR

Read [Wired For Distraction: Kids and Social Media](#) by Dalton Conley, *Time Magazine*

Read [How Does Media Multitasking Make Kids Feel? It's a Mixed Bag](#) from *Mind/Shift*

For Advanced Learners:

Read [How \(and Why\) to Stop Multitasking](#) by Peter Bregman, *Harvard Business Review*

Critical Issue

In today's world, we are immersed in technology. Students, inundated with communication possibilities, are attempting to multitask digitally at every turn. Researchers are saying that people cannot multitask successfully. Professors at MIT are modifying their expectations in and out of the classroom with regard to what they assign, how they teach, and how they assess their students. Professors and researchers alike feel that it is not possible to absorb and learn while multitasking. Students, on the other hand, are certain they can do many things well at the same time, and they feel that it would be unfair for the professors to restrict their multitasking options.

Preview Activities/Introductory Questions

1. To introduce the topic, write the word *multi-tasking* on the board. Have students brainstorm all the words they can think of, associated with multitasking. Write the words on the board.
2. Discuss the following questions with the class:
 - What is multi-tasking? Give examples of multitasking with technology.
 - What is your preferred method of communicating with friends?
 - How many types of communication methods do you use - cell phone, email, texting, social networking sites such as Twitter, etc?
3. Ask students to work with a partner and list the advantages and disadvantages of multitasking or doing many things at the same time. Review the lists as a class.

Vocabulary Check

Before viewing the clip, ensure students understand the following terms:

mutual understanding
to be wired
to do someone a disservice

to be amenable
scintillating
discretion

drinking the Kool-Aid
new species

Video Clip

View the video clip [Distractions by Everything - Frontline: Digital Nation](#) (at 4:05-8:05 minutes)

Focus Questions

Use the following questions to frame the discussion of the clip. Play the clip. Play the clip a second time if the students request further listening. Ask students to respond to the following questions individually and then discuss them with the class.

- Professor Sherry Turkle has been teaching at MIT for over 30 years. In what ways, does she say that students are different today than in years past?
- How has technology changed the way that teachers are teaching?
- Professor Turkle believes that students are wrong to think that a “multitasking learning environment” will help them succeed as students. She believes that in order to learn certain things, we need to be still, quiet and focused on one thing at time. Do you agree with the professor’s opinion? Is it possible to learn while multitasking? Why or why not?

Follow-up Questions

In pairs invite students to discuss the following questions. Follow up with a discussion in the class as a whole.

- Should students be allowed to have access to cell phones/laptops in class?
- Describe the pressures, socially and professionally, to multitask with technology? Explain the current social rules for using technology in the company of others. For example, when is socially acceptable to check messages and text when in the company of others?

Post-Viewing Activities

1. As a reflection activity ask students to free-write in response to:

How do you see the wired world for students and business people in 5 years? In 10 years?

2. Suggest that students go online and take a quiz at:

[Be Honest: Do You Have a Balanced Relationship with the Technology in Your Life?](#)

Contact Assignment

1. Ask students to keep a digital log of how often they are online/offline.
2. Suggest that students design a questionnaire with questions to ask other students and/or people in the professional world about their multitasking habits.

Questions could include:

- How often are you wired? For example, is your cell phone on 24/7?
- When would be comfortable without your phone or Blackberry?
- When do you absolutely need to be wired?