

Expression écrite (Annales 2027)

Multitasking Is Killing Your Brain

Our brains weren't built to multitask, they are designed to focus on one thing at a time, and bombarding them with information only slows them down.

MIT neuroscientist Earl Miller notes when people switch from one task to another, there's a cognitive cost. When we complete a tiny task (sending an email, answering a text message, posting a tweet), we are hit with a dollop of dopamine, our reward hormone. Our brains love that dopamine, and so we're encouraged to keep switching between small mini-tasks that give us instant gratification.

This makes us feel like we're accomplishing a ton, when we're really not doing much at all (or at least nothing requiring much critical thinking). In fact, some even refer to email/Twitter/Facebook-checking as a neural addiction. Multitasking lowers our work quality and efficiency as it makes it more difficult to organize thoughts and filter out irrelevant information, and it reduces the efficiency and quality of our work.

A study at the University of London showed that subjects who multitasked while performing cognitive tasks experienced significant IQ drops which were similar to what you see in individuals who skip a night of sleep or who smoke marijuana.

Multitasking has also been found to increase production of cortisol, the stress hormone. Having our brain constantly shift gears pumps up stress and tires us out, leaving us feeling mentally exhausted. Some studies have shown that even the opportunity to multitask, such as knowledge of an unread email in your inbox, can reduce your effective IQ by 10 points.

The constant thrill of a new email in our inbox keeps us ever-distracted. A McKinsey Global Institute Study found that employees spend 28% of their workweek checking emails. Cognitive damage associated with multi-tasking could be permanent.

A study from the University of Sussex (U.K.) ran MRI scans on the brains of individuals who spent time on multiple devices at once (texting while watching TV, for example). The scans showed that subjects who multitasked more often had less brain density in the anterior cortex. That's the area responsible for empathy and emotional control.

No matter how you spin it, multitasking is no good.

Adapted from an article by Larry Kim in Observer.com, 2 February, 2016

Questions 1: According to the journalist, what are the negative effects of multitasking? (80 words, ±10%) Answer the question in your own words.

Question 2: "Whether imposed or chosen, multitasking is a defining feature of modern society." Discuss. (180 words, ±10%) Illustrate your answer with relevant examples.

Thème (Annales 2016)

Un dimanche après la messe, j'avais douze ans, avec mon père, j'ai monté le grand escalier de la mairie. On a cherché la porte de la bibliothèque municipale. Jamais nous n'y étions allés. Je m'en faisais une fête. On n'entendait aucun bruit derrière la porte. Mon père l'a poussée, toutefois.

C'était silencieux, le parquet craquait. Deux hommes nous regardaient venir depuis un comptoir très haut barrant l'accès aux rayons. Mon père m'a laissé demander : « On voudrait emprunter des livres. » L'un des hommes aussitôt : « Qu'est-ce que vous voulez comme livres ? »

A la maison, on n'avait pas pensé qu'il fallait savoir d'avance ce qu'on voulait, être capable de citer des titres aussi facilement que des marques de biscuits.

On a choisi à notre place. Nous ne sommes pas retournés à la bibliothèque. C'est ma mère qui a dû rendre les livres, peut-être, avec du retard.

Annie Ernaux, *La place* (1983)