

# Dealing With Distractions

We are constantly bombarded by things competing for our attention. So it's not surprising that trying to avoid distractions is an issue, not only at in school, but in all areas of life. It can be especially difficult when all the different areas of your life happen in the same place - for instance, when you write your research and organize your social life on the computer, or when the place you do most of your studying is also the place where you have home and family commitments.

University students were asked to name some of the most common distractions. Below are the top ten – and some suggestions as to how to deal with them.

Instant messaging and emails	Keep yourself logged out while studying. Switch on the pop-up blocker and mute the volume so you don't get distracted by alerts. Fix a time when you're going to look at your emails and messages, and how long you're going to spend on them - then set an alarm so you know when to stop.
Phone calls and texts	Mute your phone and put it somewhere you can't see it! Check it when you have a break from studying. Set up your voicemail to say that you'll be free at certain times, so people don't worry if they don't get an answer.
Social networking	An application like <a href="#">Leechblock</a> is good. It temporarily restricts the amount of time you're allowed to spend on certain websites. It's good to use it for a couple of days to break the habit and prove to yourself that the world doesn't stop turning if you don't check your Instagram every five minutes.
Surfing the web	Unplug your ethernet cable or temporarily disable your wi-fi. If you need to use the net for research, make a list of questions you need answered before you start, and stick to it.
Video games	Work somewhere very public like the library, or your department so you're not tempted. Give your game system to someone to look after until after your deadline! If the games you've playing are online, you could use <a href="#">Leechblock</a> to reduce the amount of time you spend on them. Or disable your internet connection.
Television	Check the schedules for the things you really want to watch and set reminders on your mobile. Or record them to watch later. Get out of the habit of turning the TV on when you walk into a room!
Food and drink	When I'm working at home, snacks are always calling me! So I set up my snacks at the beginning



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	of my study session and keep it on my desk so I don't get up and lose my concentration.
Tidying your room and other chores	I set a time to do these after lunch when my brain doesn't work so well. That way I'm not persuading myself that I HAVE to get them out of the way before I start studying.
Family commitments	"If I'm not careful I end up giving my family half my attention all the time (and not really focusing on studying with the other half). I think it helps to give them my undivided attention for some of the time, and then they're more likely to understand when I have to work.
Housework	Lower your standards! Neatening up once a day is fine, and no-one needs ironed pillow cases. I just had to tell myself, well, I've worked hard to get to college, and I deserve to have the time to study and do well. I'll clean the windows when I graduate!

★ The first step in getting control of your distractions is to identify them. Then get them in perspective and think in advance about strategies to deal with them.

★ Start by identifying what it is that's eating up your time. One thing you can do is to keep a time diary- set an alarm on the hour and write down everything that you've been doing (be honest!).

★ Sometimes the problem is that you're trying to do two things at once (e.g., write an essay and have an online conversation, or read a book and watch television.)

★ There are things that can double up usefully (for instance, thinking about a piece of work while jogging, or reading while on the bus), but in other cases it just means doing two things badly, and not getting any satisfaction out of either.

★ If your time diary says you're spending all day studying, but you're still not getting anywhere, ask yourself if doubling up is the problem. If it is, you need to think about setting some time and space boundaries between study activities and other activities.



## Habits

Instructions:

1. In the space below, list some things that stop you from managing time effectively.
2. Choose one to share with your mentor.
3. Discuss possible ways to overcome or avoid this problem.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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# Breaking bad habits: what do you need to change?

Good time management isn't a personality trait – it's a set of good habits. Identify your bad habits and work out how to change them.

Working in pairs:

- Write the things that stop you from managing time effectively in the left-hand column – leave the other column empty for now
- Choose one thing to share with your partner. Discuss possible ways to overcome or avoid this problem. Add anything that you think will be useful to the right-hand column.
- Share this with the rest of the group. If you hear other strategies that are appropriate for you, add them to your worksheet.

What do I need to change?	How could I do things differently?