

Taking Study Skills Seriously

This is an exercise that asks students to work on what are typically called “study skills” in a way that introduces some intellectual rigor to the topic. One typical study tip is to “Avoid distractions like the TV and try to ignore the telephone. Your friends can leave a message!” Well, why is that such a good idea?

Don't underestimate the value of slowing down every once in a while to model (and demand) some intensive, active reading. After a session in which we discussed the article in conjunction with some other readings about concentration and persistence as keys to successful college studying, I might ask students to return to the article and answer the following questions—in writing—for homework. For most of us, the article itself is not difficult reading; however, you're likely to find that students read impressionistically and thus miss a lot of crucial information as well as nuance in texts that aren't particularly dense.

Read “Multitasking Can Make You Lose...Um...Focus” by Alina Tugend from *The New York Times* 25 Oct. 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/25/business/yourmoney/25shortcuts.html?pagewanted=print>

- 1) Where in the article can you find a succinct definition of multitasking?
- 2) Look carefully at the long, complex sentence that begins the fourth paragraph of the article. Rewrite the sentence following these guidelines:
 - Use more or less all the words in the original—don't leave out or add anything that will change the meaning of the sentence
 - Don't use the “Although” at the beginning the sentence
 - You can split the sentence into 2 or 3 sentences if you want
 - Keep the direct quotation intact and in quotation marks
- 3) In the 10th paragraph (beginning “That is so far in the past”), Tugend says “As we are required, or feel required, to do more and more things...” What is the effect on you as a reader of her pausing and rephrasing? Why do you think she wants to *qualify* her assertion like that?
- 4) Tugend tags the findings of “The Cost of Interrupted Work,” a study by Professor Gloria Mark, “Interesting.” In what sense are Professor Mark's conclusions *interesting*, given the overall subject of the article? What is Tugend trying to draw your attention to here? What's happening with the logic of the argument in this section of the article?
- 5) Alina Tugend is the author of this article from the *New York Times* Business section, but she is not, herself, an expert on multitasking. Where does she get the information to make her case? List her sources.
- 6) This is another question about authority: What do you learn about Tugend's sources that would lead you to think they are reliable and that their assertions are valid?

From here, move on to an exploration of the sources. This could segue into a unit on information literacy and using the library, or it could be a useful reminder of why those things matter for critical thinkers. It will also be an introduction for most students to the work that academics actually do and the values (and value) of scholarship and the production of knowledge.

The sources cited in this article include:

Rubinstein and Meyer. "Executive Control of Cognitive Processes in Task Switching." *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. <http://www.apa.org/journals/releases/xhp274763.pdf>

Mark, Gudith, and Klocke. "The Cost of Interrupted Work: More Speed and Stress." <http://www.ics.uci.edu/~gmark/chi08-mark.pdf>

Dux, Ivanoof, Asplund, and Marois. "Isolation of a Central Bottleneck of Information Processing with Time-Resolved fMRI." *Neuron* 52, 1109–1120, December 21, 2006.

Miller and Wilson. "All My Circuits: Using Multiple Electrodes to Understand Functioning Neural Networks." *Neuron* 60 Nov. 2008.