

Multitasking Activity

Purpose: This demonstration is intended to demonstrate the deleterious effects of multitasking. Dichotic listening studies and more recent research on computer-aided multitasking suggests that individuals cannot attend accurately to more than one task at a time. This activity can be used to highlight for students how much information from the class they miss when they check their phones during instruction or the dangers of texting and driving.

Procedure: First have students complete the following task online. They should perform well on tasks involving only one objective and far less well on those tasks involving multiple points of focus.

Divided Attention Task

<http://www.brainhq.com/why-brainhq/about-the-brainhq-exercises/attention/divided-attention>

Classroom Demonstration

Once students have completed the divided attention task and you have debriefed the results, read them a passage from a text (for an example see the reading passage attached). As you read the passage, ask students to text a friend, if they can text someone in the class that is best because they can have a conversation with a back and forth dialogue, if not the demonstration should still be successful. Remind them that they must be texting the entire time while also listening to the reading.

Once you have read the passage, ask the students a series of basic questions based on the reading and then have them calculate their score. You can also divide the class in half and have one-half of the class simply listen to the text as you read and the other half text, there should be a significant decline in the student's ability to answer questions about the passage correctly in the group that was texting. (Questions to accompany the reading passage provided have also been provided)

Explanation: In addition to research on multi-tasking, Matthew Lieberman in his book *Social* explains that our default network is created in such a manner that when given two tasks, the one that we will attend to is the one that is of a social nature. Therefore, if students are texting their friends about plans for lunch or the weekend, this will become that task they focus on while the reading passage fades into the background. The implications to texting or using social media during class are obvious; this demonstration may help students to understand better the detriment they are inflicting upon their learning.

