Study Skills: “Multi-Tasking”

Doing homework is not always the most exciting thing, especially when there’s a new CD we want to listen to, a new show we want to watch, or friends we want to hang out with. So of course we think it would be a great idea to multi-task and do two or more of these tasks at the same time. While this might make the short-term homework experience more enjoyable, it is not good for long-term learning. Doing multiple tasks at once actually, on a small, unconscious level, makes our performance worse on at least one of the tasks. While this is not always the case (e.g. you can walk and chew gum at the same time without harm to either activity), it IS when it comes to doing homework. Follow this activity to see how trying to do two different things at once is detrimental to performance.

Activity

You will have one minute to do the following:

1st line: write the sentence “Switchtasking is a thief”
2nd line: write the numbers 1-21 (i.e. 1 2 3 4 5, etc.)

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You were probably able to get both tasks done in the allotted amount of time. Now try again.

The first line is still dedicated to the sentence “Switchtasking is a thief” and the second line the numbers 1-21, but this time you will write one letter and then one number, repeatedly, until your time is up (i.e. S 1 w 2 i 3 t 4 c 5 h 6, etc.).

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Were you able to finish both lines?

If not, you have shown that you are heavily affected by something called “switchtasking”, commonly misreferred to as “multi-tasking.”

If so, you’re pretty good at switchtasking, but undeniably it took you a bit longer to finish this task. Over time, this leads to significant loses of study time, and overall comprehension ability.
Switchtasking is defined as attempting to do multiple attention-requiring tasks at the same time. Each switch in attention incurs switching cost, which includes a loss of time, decrease in performance, and an increase in stress levels. When most people say they are “multitasking,” they are most often referring to switchtasking.

Background tasking, on the other hand, is defined as performing a task while something mindless or mundane occurs in the background. Examples include: delegating tasks to employees while you work on more valuable activities, putting a machine to work on a large job while you answer email, and exercising while you listen to music. Background tasking can improve productivity overall.

When we try to do too much at once, our performance suffers. Learn when you can do multiple things at once, and when it’s best to approach one task at a time.

So... What is one thing that you're going to do today to avoid switchtasking and focus instead?

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCeGKxz3Q8Q&feature=youtu.be