



The Myth of Multitasking

Dr. Spencer Kagan

Director of Educational leadership

To cite this article: Kagan, S. The Myth of Multitasking. San Clemente, CA:

Kagan Publishing. Kagan Online Magazine, Spring/Summer 2015.

www.KaganOnline.com



Brain science informs us that our popular understanding of multitasking may be wrong—dead wrong in some cases! Let's look at these myths, what brain science has to say about the subject, and the practical classroom applications to improve student focus and learning.

The Myths About Multitasking

First, let's lay out the myths:

I can get more done when I multitask. **False!**

Multitasking is a style. Some people may need to focus, but others can multitask well. **False!**

Our brain is a parallel processor, and we are designed to do many things at once. **False!**

I learn better when I'm doing lots of things at once. **False!**

The truth is that distractions diminish our ability to learn and achieve.

Brain Science and Multitasking

Yes, it's true that the brain does many things at once, but the bulk of what the brain does never reaches our consciousness. At one moment, the brain is involved in regulating many internal bodily processes, scanning the environment for threats and opportunities and deciding which of all the stimuli it is processing should reach consciousness and, of those that reach consciousness, which should be tagged for memory storage. But these processes occur outside of our conscious awareness. If they did not, our attention would be so divided, we could not function. To function, our awareness needs to be focused.

When we try to do two things at once, both things are impaired. We think we are multitasking, but in reality we are task switching. Task switching always reduces performance on both tasks compared to completing one task at a time.

Perhaps the best thing we can do to minimise disruptions to learning is to provide our students fully engaging instruction.

Driving while talking on the mobile phone is extremely dangerous task switching. I'm not even talking about taking your eyes off the road to text, mess around with a maps app, or to take a hand

off the wheel to hold the phone—I'm just talking about driving while having a conversation. Researchers found that complex conversations while driving reduced drivers' ability to respond to visual targets as much as 30%! This study was with real cars on actual highways. Texting is much worse! Texting takes attention away from the road for about 5 seconds. When driving 55 mph, this is the equivalent of driving blind for the full length of a football field. Dangerous! So dangerous in fact that you are 23 times more likely to crash while texting.

Having a complex conversation with a passenger, talking on a mobile phone, texting while driving, listening to music while driving, and mind-wandering all cause car accidents. Why? Our minds only have a finite ability to focus on a task. When that focus is taxed by another task, there is less mind space to dedicate to the current task. Research shows that even with simple tasks, performance is impaired when doing two things at once, even when those two things aren't believed to interfere with each other. Simple tasks take longer and are completed with more errors when completed simultaneously rather than sequentially. Focus is better than multitasking! So what does all this mean for your classroom? Let's look at some action steps you can take.

Action Steps

Engaging Instruction. Perhaps the best thing we can do to minimise disruptions to learning is to provide our students fully engaging instruction. When our students are engrossed in learning and interacting with classmates over the curriculum in a fun and meaningful way, there is no time to get off task.

Teach Students the Myth of Multitasking. Take a few minutes each year to set the multitasking record straight. Knowledge is power, and students who know the deleterious effects of multitasking have the power to change their learning and studying habits.



Inform Parents About the Multitasking Myth. Students study at home with their music blaring, texts chiming, mobile phones ringing. The social media pull of Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and whatever the next craze is all compete for students' limited attention. If students study in a more focused, unplugged environment, they get through homework quicker, learn more, and have more free time to connect with their friends electronically (or even in person!).

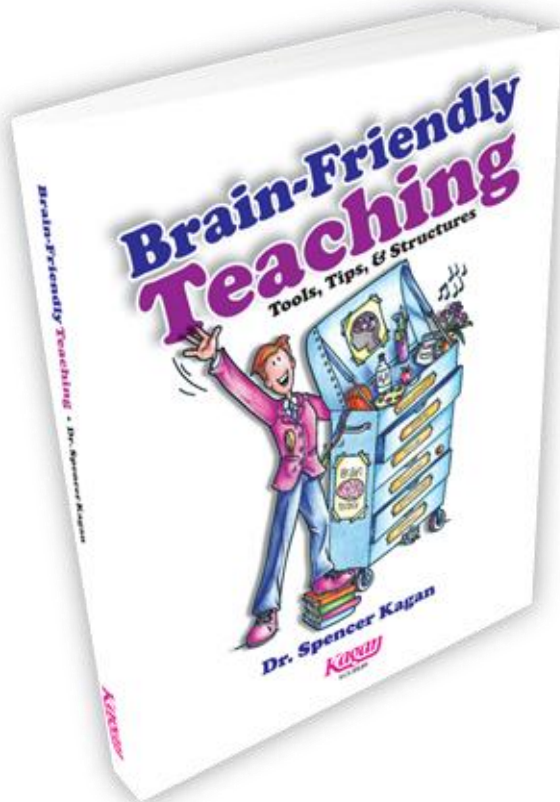
No Smartphones. Smartphones are probably the biggest attention-stealing culprits. Social media, apps, texting, videos, the Internet... all compete for attentional space. Have a strict rule about mobile phones in the class, and adhere to your policies.

Music. The tempo, texture, and lyrics of music you play in the classroom can help or hurt learning. While studying and solving problems, use music without lyrics at approximately 60 beats per minute to create relaxed alertness.

No Headphones. Some teachers allow students to wear headphones and listen to their own music while working independently. Because we have no control of what students are listening to, if learning is the goal, no headphones is a better option.

Dedicated Distraction Time. Our students have become addicted to technology. We know focused learning is much better than learning interrupted by distractions. Tell students that if they keep learning time focused, they will have a few minutes to plug back in. Knowing that they will have their time to reconnect to cyberspace, they will be more able to postpone distractions for a while and focus on the task at hand.

Multitasking is one of the many brain-based learning concepts addressed in Dr. Spencer Kagan's new book



Brain-Friendly Teaching

Tools, Tips, & Structures

Dr. Spencer Kagan (All Grades)

Become a brain-friendly teacher! Put the power of brain research and theory to work in your classroom. Your students will learn more, learn more quickly, retain and recall more, and like learning more. Dr. Kagan's extensively-researched book distills the world of brain science into 6 essential principles that will align your teaching with how your students' brains naturally learn. For each of the 6 brain-based principles, you will find practical tools, tips, and structures to easily make the leap from theory to practice. Teaching is so much easier and more successful when you do it the brain-friendly way. 512 pages.

Item Code: BKBF

Cost: £33.00

www.T2TUK.co.uk online shop.