

Reading: Multitasking

1 See if your brain can multitask (do more than one thing at the same time). Try these experiments.

1 Rub your stomach with your right hand. Keep rubbing and then start to pat your head with your left hand. What happens? Now change the movements so that you pat your stomach and rub your head. What happens?



2 Lift up your right foot and turn it round and round clockwise. Keep turning your foot and then lift your right hand and draw a circle anticlockwise in the air. What happens?



2 Which of these actions can you do at the same time? Which can you not do together? Why not?

- 1 write a letter and listen to music
- 2 talk on the phone and write an email
- 3 listen to the radio and watch a film
- 4 drive a car and talk on your mobile phone
- 5 chop an onion and watch TV

3 What happens to efficiency when people multitask? Read the article and find out.

4 Find the words and phrases in the article with these meanings.

- 1 at the same time
- 2 finishing dates for something which give you very little time
- 3 change
- 4 to become worse
- 5 difficult
- 6 gave most of their attention to something

5 Answer these questions.

- 1 Why do people need to multitask?
- 2 Why is multitasking inefficient?
- 3 Where is the part of the brain we use to multitask?
- 4 Who are better at multitasking: older or younger people?
- 5 How did great engineers and inventors complete difficult tasks?



One thing at a time

ARE YOU GOOD AT multitasking? Many people need to be these days because it's part of their job. They have to work on two or three projects simultaneously and work to tight deadlines, too. So they rush through the day, taking calls, writing emails and eating their sandwiches at the same time and as a result they make mistakes. The brain needs time to switch from one task to another so multitasking means things take longer than they should. Researchers estimate it costs companies an average of 2.1 hours of work each day.

The area of the brain that we use for multitasking is just behind the forehead*. It allows us to leave something unfinished and then return to the same place later to continue. Unfortunately this part of the brain is the first to deteriorate as we grow older. Young people who can multitask now won't be so good at it in 20 or 30 years' time.

So will employers continue to ask us to work on more and more projects at the same time? They shouldn't because they'll find it leads to more mistakes and lower productivity. Our brains don't work well that way. Employers should remember that the great engineers and inventors of the past didn't multitask. When they had a challenging task, they concentrated all their thoughts and energy on it until the job was completed. Focus, not multitasking, brings success.

forehead: the part of your face above your eyes