

Brain Overload: How Multitasking Hijacks Your Focus and Increases Anxiety

Level: Advanced (C1–C2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article discusses the work pressures that the modern worker is under and how the common solution of multitasking is not helping.

Business topic: Productivity, work culture, work hacks

Business language: Words and phrases for expressing quantity

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, carrying out a survey and case study, presenting findings

Groups: Whole class, pairs, small groups, one-to-one

Key:

1. *pressed*
2. *overwhelm*
3. *harassed*
4. *procrastination*
5. *adjunct*
6. *flabbergasted*
7. *complexion*
8. *plodder*
9. *toggling*
10. *prone*
11. *hack*
12. *dodge*
13. *process*
14. *dubbed*

4. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to read the statements and then find the relevant parts of the article in order to determine if the statements are True or False. Encourage students to not only correct the false statements but also be ready to explain what supports the true statements. Have them share their answers in pairs or small groups before eliciting answers from the whole class.

Key:

1. *False. A quarter (25 per cent) of Brits have sent an email from the toilet.*
2. *True*
3. *False. Talking on the phone while driving is as dangerous as drinking while driving.*
4. *False. Interleaving is an academic technique for switching between multiple topics.*
5. *False. People who have a habit of multitasking are more impulsive and have less executive control.*
6. *True*
7. *True*
8. *False. Work that generates revenue and drives things forward is meaningful and more satisfying.*
9. *True*
10. *True*

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss the questions in small groups. Monitor and write any useful vocabulary on the board. Elicit the main ideas that arise from the discussion from the whole class.

2. Reading for gist

- a. Have students skim the article and choose the main idea. Then ask students to scan for phrases that support their answer.

Key:

2 (Suggested phrases: Brain overload, multitasking hijacks your focus, human brain can't cope, doing too much at one, forced to multitask to keep on top, etc.)

3. Key words

- a. Have students work individually to match the key words to the definitions by referring to the section number given in brackets. Have students compare their answers in pairs. Elicit answers from the whole class.

5. Business language – expressing quantity and increase

- a. You could set up this activity as a Total Physical Response (TPR) activity. Put the table on the board or on the walls of the classroom and have students physically add the words to the table. This could be done as a competition or as a group activity. If you are teaching online, you could set up virtual whiteboards to do the same.

Key:

Fraction / %: a quarter, a third; thirteen per cent, two per cent

Quantity: many, most, some, top three

Increase: ballooning, ever-swelling, growing

- b. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the task. In some instances, more than one answer is possible (e.g. *many* vs. *most*) but encourage students to examine the context given in the sentences.

Key:

1. *a third*
2. *top three*
3. *ballooning*
4. *many*
5. *Most*
6. *some*

- c. Have students think of one more example of a fraction, a quantity and an increase to add to the table. Have them share their answers in pairs or small groups before eliciting answers from the whole class.

Key (Possible answers):

Fraction: half, three-quarters (In US English, quarter is called fourth so three fourths)

Quantity: several, a little

Increase: mushrooming, snowballing

- d. Ask students to write their six sentences individually and share them in pairs or small groups. Ask students to give each other feedback on correctly using the new language. Monitor and provide as much individual feedback as possible.

6. Discussion

- a. Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together, so they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

7. Wider business theme – A case study: evaluating productivity hacks

- a. Explain that students are going to carry out a survey on popular productivity hacks and also test out one of these hacks and present its effectiveness to the class. Testing out one of the hacks requires a period of time but choose the period of time that works best for your class. This could be a week, a day or even just testing it out in class by having students imagine how it could work.

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Ask them first to brainstorm (or if they have internet access, research) a list of popular productivity hacks. Encourage them to refer to the three mentioned in the article: *checking email only twice a day, handwriting a to-do list and the pull system*.

Have students read the rubric and check understanding by eliciting examples of questions. Then, have students write the questions for their surveys. Ask students to answer each other's surveys and evaluate the different productivity hacks. Regroup students so they can share their findings with others.

Ask students to choose one productivity hack based on the results from their surveys and their classmates' evaluations of the different hacks. Have students try out this hack for a period of time. Equally, students could test it out in class by imagining how it might work.

Once students have tested the productivity hack for a period of time, have them create a presentation. The presentation needs to include what made them evaluate this hack as being the most productive, how someone could apply

the hack to their everyday work life, and what effect the hack had (or would theoretically have) on their focus or productivity. Encourage students to use the useful language provided.

Ask students to present their hacks and their findings. This can be in whole-class or in small groups. If this task is graded, get students to record and send their presentations.

If there is time, encourage follow-up questions and further discussion based on the presentations.