

Can you multitask?

Business



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Ah, multitasking. The age-old skill that so many claim to have. Are you a multitasker? Do you want to know a secret? Everyone who has ever claimed to be a multitasker is a liar! Have you ever actually eaten cereal while watching television successfully, or has your bowl of Cheerios dripped down your chin, forcing you to stray away from crucial moments of your favorite show? I'm going to go with the latter. But don't worry- you're not alone! So many of us believe we are multitaskers when we are actually what's called switchtaskers. Yes, that's a real thing.

The term “ multitasking” was originally used to describe the functionings of a computer. To multitask is to execute two or more tasks simultaneously successfully. Not to kind of watch T. V. with cereal dripping down your chin. For example, have you or anyone you know turned down the radio in your car to look at street signs better when you neared your destination? If you find yourself agreeing, possibly chuckling inside and nodding your head, do you realize how absurd that sentence sounds? You turn down the volume to see better? The reasoning behind this is that the human brain can become overwhelmed with being forced to comprehend multiple things at once.

That's why it is so difficult to sit in the driver's seat jamming out to Pit Bull while also looking for 13 Rock O'Dundee Road. Now, switchtasking is a different story. Switchtasking is a cognitive flexibility that involves the ability to switch attention from one task to another. In other words, when you think you're multitasking, you're not. If you don't believe me, there are plenty professors and scientists who agree with me, and will surely tell you the same.

The late Clifford Nass, for example, has done much research on this topic and mentioned in an interview, “ We have never found something that [“ multitaskers”] can do better than people who aren’t.” In this interview, Nass was discussing people who claim to be multitaskers. Ironically enough, he found that on average, individuals who claim to be multitaskers actually cannot switchtask better than those who don’t claim they can multitask well. In conclusion, when you try to focus on more than two things at once, your prefrontal cortex lobes (the parts of your brain involved with complex behaviors) become overwhelmed you actually get less work done, and the quality of your performance is poor (so just eat the cereal first!). Now, do you still think you’re a multitasker?