Can you learn easier, faster, and so that you remember the material longer? THERE IS A WAY!

DO NOT "multitask" in class or when you study.

It's that simple. (Your ability to pay attention is required, though.)

You may not have heard that "multitasking" makes learning more difficult and take much longer, but there is solid and accumulating research to prove it. There's even research showing that people who *think* they're good at "multitasking" are actually worse at it than people who prefer to focus on one thing at a time.

Bottom line: DO NOT use your laptop in class unless you're taking notes or for instructor-required activity. Don't tempt yourself with Facebook during class. Don't even try to play fantasy football or shop for shoes and pay attention to class material at the same time.

DO NOT text, email, talk on the phone, watch TV, or do other things that require your attention at the same time you're studying. (Yes, soft, *instrumental* music when you're studying can be fine because hearing the music at low volume doesn't compete with the brain physiology in use when you focus on reading the text or studying your notes.)

It all boils down to paying attention. ***You can't learn what you don't pay attention to.*** If you're distracting your attention away from class or away from your studying, you're wasting time and making it harder to learn.

Here's a quick summary plus citations at the end if you want to check any of this out and/or if you want to find strategies to put you into your best focus zone:

- You can't do two things at once that require using the same part of your brain, especially if what you're trying to do is to take in, manipulate, or store information. Prove it to yourself: think right now about two completely different things at the same time, like your last vacation and what you ate

for lunch yesterday.

- When you think you're "multitasking," you're actually switching back and forth between the two activities. This is bad for two reasons: you don't catch the information from one source when you're focused on the other source, and when you switch from one source to the other, your brain must reorient to the prior source, which adds further to the amount of information you're missing. "Think of it as if you are trying to use Word and Excel at the same time and every time you switch programs, you have to quit the program you're working on and restart the program you're moving to," says Russell Poldrack (he's co-author of the "Striatum" article, below).
- When you try to "multitask" when you're studying, you activate the striatum, a part of your brain designed to handle repetitive tasks, not to consider information in a way that leads to long-term recall. Multitasking while studying means you're likely to forget the material quickly *and* that you will not understand the material as well.
- When you think you're "multitasking" you are experiencing what some neuroscientists have called a "mental brown-out." This means that—literally—you do not have as much brain power to apply to either task. Your learning ability devoted to either one of the tasks goes down.

If you want to be a "monotasker" when you're studying and when you're in class, how do you break your "multitasking" habits and start learning easier and better? In other words, how do you learn to focus and pay attention in order to make learning much easier? Get a copy of *Find Your Focus Zone* by Lucy Jo Palladino. Its information, tips, and exercises will show you how to do this.

- People who think they're good at "multitasking" actually stink at it: Ophir, E., Nass, C., & Wagner, A. D. (2009, September 15). Cognitive control in media multitaskers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 106* (37), 15583-15587.
- Mental brownout: Just, M. A., Carpenter, P. A., Keller, T. A., Emery, L., Zajac, H., & Thulborn, K.R. (2001). Interdependence of nonoverlapping cortical systems in dual cognitive tasks. *NeuroImage, 14*, 417-426.
- Striatum: Foedre, K., Knowlton, B. J., & Poldrack, R. A. (2006). Modulation of competing memory systems by distraction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 103* (31), 11778-11783.
- Task switching: Rubenstein, J. S., Meyer, D. E., & Evans, J. E. (2001). Executive control of cognitive processes in task switching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance, 27*, 763-797.

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