

B2-C1 English Listening Worksheet

How to Improve Your Attention Span: The Science of Focus

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TED-Ed: 4 ways to fix your attention span - Shannon Odell (5:26)

This TED-Ed video examines why concentration is difficult in a world of constant notifications, how different parts of the brain manage competing information, and which practical strategies may help people focus more effectively.

Before your lesson: Watch the video, answer the questions and complete the vocabulary activities. Prepare ideas for the discussion. Use the timestamps in the answer key to check your answers.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2uQWfV6Jr4>

Listening Comprehension

Answer each question using information from the video. Write brief answers in your own words.

No.	Question
1	What two average times did researchers report for staying on one computer application?
2	Why do these figures not necessarily mean that attention spans are getting shorter?
3	What does the prefrontal cortex help us decide, and how does the parietal cortex handle that information?
4	What makes a signal likely to redirect our focus? Give two examples from the video.
5	Why does the narrator say that getting distracted is inevitable?
6	Which kind of puzzle might help you focus better, according to the video?
7	According to a theory mentioned in the video, what happens to attention over time, and how does multitasking affect it?
8	Besides resetting attention, how can breaks help when you are learning a new skill?
9	What did the study comparing 15-minute outdoor and indoor walks find?
10	How do mindfulness meditation and closing extra tabs help attention in different ways?

Phrase Match

Match each expression heard in the video (1-10) to its correct meaning (A-J).

Expressions (1-10)	Meanings (A-J)
1. set out to measure	A. stop paying attention to what is happening around you
2. stuck with a single task	B. the main causes responsible for a problem
3. a flood of information	C. keep you interested and mentally engaged
4. competing signals	D. prevent distracting sights, sounds or thoughts from interrupting your focus
5. hold your attention	E. a very large amount of incoming information
6. building in breaks	F. focus on what you are experiencing right now
7. zone out	G. deliberately including pauses in a routine
8. block out distractions	H. started with the aim of finding out the size, amount or duration of something
9. staying in the present moment	I. different inputs demanding attention at the same time
10. the biggest culprits	J. continued doing the same activity instead of switching

Synonym Match

Match each word heard in the video (1-10) to the closest synonym (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. fundamentally	A. consolidate
2. sustained	B. unusual
3. novel	C. elaborately
4. inevitable	D. approximated
5. intricately	E. drains
6. depletes	F. advantageous
7. momentary	G. prolonged
8. beneficial	H. unavoidable
9. solidify	I. brief
10. estimated	J. essentially

Use the New Language

Choose 5 words or expressions and write your own sentences.

No.	Your sentence
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. When do you find it easiest to concentrate, and what makes that time of day different?	1. Do phones damage our ability to focus, or simply expose us to more competing signals?
2. Which apps or notifications are most likely to pull you away from a task?	2. Should employers protect uninterrupted working time, even if colleagues must wait for replies?
3. Have you ever become so absorbed in an activity that you lost track of time?	3. Is multitasking a necessary modern skill or mostly an inefficient habit?
4. Do you work best in silence, with music, or in a busy place? Why?	4. How could schools make tasks challenging enough to hold students' attention?
5. What do you usually do during short breaks, and does it help you return to work?	5. Can pressure to be constantly productive actually undermine concentration?
6. When did you last have to block out distractions to finish something important?	6. Are digital platforms ethically responsible for features designed to grab and hold attention?
7. Have you tried meditation, breathing exercises or a walk to improve focus?	7. Which professions are most vulnerable to the consequences of momentary lapses in focus?
8. How have your concentration habits changed since you were younger?	8. If you redesigned the working day around cognitive limits, what would you change and why?

60-Second Summary Challenge

Without looking at your notes, summarise the main message of the video in 60 seconds. Explain why attention is easily disrupted and describe two ways to improve focus. Try to use at least two expressions from this worksheet.

Access the Video Transcript

The video has English captions. To read the transcript, open the video on YouTube and select **Show transcript** from the description or available video controls. The transcript is not reproduced in this worksheet.

[Watch the video and access its captions](#)

Answer Key

Listening Comprehension

- [0:33-0:40] Users stuck with a single task for **40 seconds**, down from **75 seconds**, measured five years earlier.
- [0:43-0:53] It does not necessarily mean our attention spans are fundamentally getting shorter. Our attention is **being pulled in more directions than ever before**.
- [1:21-1:33] The **prefrontal cortex helps us decide what to pay attention to**. The **parietal cortex shines a mental flashlight** on that prioritised stream of information while ignoring the rest.
- [1:38-1:53] The brain redirects our focus if something is **particularly novel, unexpected, or emotionally charged**, such as a knock on the door, a notification, or a passing thought.
- [1:55-2:05] The ability to **constantly scan our environments and quickly refocus** was key for human survival, so getting distracted is inevitable.
- [2:19-2:32] **A more difficult, intricately patterned puzzle** may work better than an easier one because tasks that appropriately challenge you tend to hold your attention best.
- [2:43-3:05] Some researchers theorise that attention is a **limited resource**. It **depletes over time**, leading to more mistakes and an increased chance of distraction. Multitasking **increases the demand** for this resource, exhausting attentional stores more quickly.
- [3:18-3:33] During breaks, our minds **replay the neural activity patterns** of what we have just learned, helping to **solidify the memory for the long term**.
- [3:51-4:03] A **15-minute walk outdoors** led to **greater improvements in lab-based attention tasks** than the same walk indoors.
- [4:03-4:17; 4:23-4:59] Mindfulness means **staying in the present moment**, for example by focusing on the sensations of breathing, to train attention. **Closing extra tabs** helps get rid of distractions.

Phrase Match

1=H, 2=J, 3=E, 4=I, 5=C, 6=G, 7=A, 8=D, 9=F, 10=B

Synonym Match

1=J, 2=G, 3=B, 4=H, 5=C, 6=E, 7=I, 8=F, 9=A, 10=D

Example Sentences With the Phrases

No.	Example sentence
1	The researchers set out to measure how long people stayed on one task.
2	She stuck with a single task rather than checking her phone.
3	After opening her inbox, she faced a flood of information.
4	The lecturer struggled to ignore the competing signals around him.
5	An interesting challenge is more likely to hold your attention.
6	Try building in breaks during long periods of study.
7	He needs a few minutes to zone out after a difficult meeting.
8	Noise-cancelling headphones can help you block out distractions.
9	Mindfulness involves staying in the present moment.
10	Constant phone alerts are among the biggest culprits behind interruptions.

Teacher note: Model answers follow the video closely; accept equivalent listening answers supported by the video. Timestamps are approximate. Sentence-writing and discussion responses are open-ended.