

# Say 'no' to interruptions, 'yes' to better work

July 14 2014

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Modern office workers are expected to multitask regularly, often juggling multiple projects and priorities over the course of a day. Studies have shown that the typical employee in an office environment is interrupted up to six times per hour, but how does that impact the finished product? New research published in *Human Factors* evaluates how ongoing interruptions can negatively affect the quality of work.

"People don't realize how disruptive interruptions can be," said Cyrus Foroughi, coauthor of "Do Interruptions Affect Quality of Work?" and a PhD candidate at George Mason University's [human factors](#) and applied cognition program. "There is value in determining whether interruptions affect the quality of the tasks that many people perform regularly, such as [writing](#) essays or reports."

Foroughi, with coauthors Nicole Werner, Erik Nelson, and Deborah Boehm-Davis, designed a study assessing how varying levels of [interruption](#) affected writing quality in an essay project. Two groups of participants were given time to outline and write an essay on an assigned topic. One group was interrupted multiple times with an unrelated task, and a control group had no interruptions. Independent graders scored the finished essays on a numbered scale.

The researchers found significantly lower quality in essays completed by the participants who were interrupted during the outline and writing phases than in essays of those who were not interrupted. In addition, those participants who were interrupted during the writing phase wrote considerably fewer words.

"Interruption can cause a noticeable decrement in the quality of work, so it's important to take steps to reduce the number of external interruptions we encounter daily," said Foroughi. "For example, turn off your cell phone and disable notifications such as e-mail while trying to complete an important task."

Provided by Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

Citation: Say 'no' to interruptions, 'yes' to better work (2014, July 14) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-07-say-no-to-interruptions-yes.html>

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