

Look at the picture. How many different things is the girl doing? Is this a good way to work, in your opinion? Why or why not?

Multitasking: Time saver or time waster?

Are you a multitasker? Do you watch TV and cook dinner at the same time? Do you often interrupt your work to check your e-mail? Do you talk on your cell phone while you're driving? If you do these or similar things, then you are one of many multitaskers. According to a survey, or study, by the magazine *Scientific American MIND*, 90 percent of American adults multitask regularly.

Most people say they multitask because they are too busy, and multitasking saves time. Popular electronic devices like computers and cell phones make it convenient to do several tasks at once, so people feel like they are getting more done. Melissa Brown of Evanston, Illinois, says she has no trouble listening to music, surfing the Internet, and sending text messages to friends while she does her homework.

Recent studies, however, show that Melissa and others like her are perhaps getting less done than they think they are. That's because with multitasking, there are actually many "microinterruptions" in which people stop one task, start another, and eventually return to the first one. These stops and starts make it difficult to concentrate, and so multitaskers actually waste time, according to a study at Microsoft Corporation. In the study, workers who interrupted their work to answer an e-mail or text message took an average of 15 minutes to return to the work they were doing before the interruption.



Some psychologists say that the human brain just isn't good at concentrating on two things at the same time. This doesn't matter if you're only preparing a salad and listening to the radio, they say. But if you're doing a difficult task that requires thinking, like writing a report, then multitasking can slow you down and cause mistakes. It can even be dangerous, as in the case of people who talk on the phone, eat, or even apply makeup while driving.

In short, even though most people believe multitasking saves time, studies show that the opposite is true. Experts, or people who know a lot about saving time, offer some basic advice: Try to focus on one task at a time. Check e-mail just once an hour, turn off distracting noise while you're working, and most importantly, avoid talking on a cell phone while you're driving.

1 Check your understanding

1. What percentage of American adults multitask regularly?
2. Why do people multitask?
3. What did the Microsoft Corporation study show?
4. What are three disadvantages of multitasking, according to the article?
5. What are two ways to save time, according to experts?

2 Build your vocabulary

A Many English words are based on Latin or Greek prefixes or roots. Find an example in the article of each prefix or root. Write it in the chart.

B Guess or use a dictionary. Write the meaning of the examples.

Prefix or root	Meaning	Example from reading	Meaning
1. multi	many		
2. micro	small		
3. psych	mind		
4. inter	between		
5. mis	wrong		

C Write six more words that begin with the prefixes or roots in the chart. Circle the correct part of speech. Use a dictionary if necessary.

1. _____ adjective / noun / verb
2. _____ adjective / noun / verb
3. _____ adjective / noun / verb
4. _____ adjective / noun / verb
5. _____ adjective / noun / verb
6. _____ adjective / noun / verb

3 Think about it

1. Do you multitask? If so, why?
2. Before you read this article, did you believe that multitasking saves time or wastes time? How?
3. What do you think about multitasking now? Why?
4. What advice can you give to people who want to manage their time better?