



Hi graduate friends,

It's hard to argue that our distractions are increasing by the day! As I check the news, scroll through my social media, dream about all the things I want or don't want to do, and respond to my friends' and family's messages, finding a block of time to focus on complex tasks has become quite a challenge.

One way you, as a researcher, could tackle this *problem* is by looking at it from a research perspective. If you were tasked with methodologically solving someone or a group's distraction problem, what would you do? You'd probably gather information on existing distractions through a data collection method (e.g., observations) and then go about analyzing that data, right? What Chris Smith (2020) suggests in his blog post titled *5 ways to find your writing focus in testing times* is a similar approach. Here's how it goes.



**1. Create a distraction diary:** Smith proposes keeping a distraction diary to take note of distractions every time they occur. These distractions could be internal (e.g., anxiety about something, daydreaming, etc.) or external (Facebook notifications, phone calls, etc.), so make sure to include both. After a while, if there are any patterns in your *observations*, you'll definitely be able to point them out!

**2. Use obstacle thinking and prepare a battle plan:** Decide on concrete actions you can take to tackle those particular obstacles. Sometimes it helps to change your perspective and think about what is preventing you from reaching your goals, as opposed to focusing on what you can achieve. For example, to prevent getting distracted by Twitter, you can turn your phone off, leave it in another room or with another person, use an app blocking software, disconnect the internet, etc.

**3. Get a 'When-then' plan:** Ok so you've decided on those actions. Next, you must turn them into habits, and a when-then plan can help by connecting those actions to other activities. For example, you can say... *when I review my notes, I will leave my phone with my roommate, when I can't focus, I'll do 5 sit ups, or when I read articles, I'll hold a fidget toy.* "Make the action you will take unambiguous so it becomes a simple rule to follow."



**4. Maintain focus by using constraints:** Break down your work into small and manageable tasks that you will not be afraid to do. You can also use a Pomodoro timer to structure your time and help avoid distractions more consciously in a constrained space.

**5. Accept and park anxious thoughts:** You probably have practical worries which consist of things you can actually do something about, along with some hypothetical worries which are things that may not even exist (e.g., what if...?!). Write them down so your mind is at ease that they exist somewhere. Then set aside a time to go through them and decide if you can actually do anything about them or not. If you can't, cross the thoughts off the list, and if they keep coming back, plan for ways to manage the emotions that come with it (mindfulness, talking with friends, journaling, etc.)



Take lots of care and make tiny changes,



Aldean Ellis (he/him), from your [Learning Development & Success](#) team!

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**Reference:** Smith, C. (2020, April 28). 5 ways to find your writing focus in testing times. *Prolifiko*.  
<https://prolifiko.com/find-your-writing-focus/>

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