

ARTICLE SUMMARIES

I. THE PROBLEM OF SENSORY OVERLOAD

Jetter, Alexis, "Trying to Do Too Much?" *Good Housekeeping*, January 2007, p. 122.

Multitasking typically requires us to begin a new task before completing one or more existing tasks. It also requires us to engage in a sort of "warp-speed juggling" act. A growing number of individuals today feel that they are overstretched and overbooked. Many do not realize that it is largely impossible to do two things well at the same time.

Multitasking and related forms of sensory overload involve stress, which causes the brain to release the fight-or-flight hormone cortisol into the human body. Sometimes stress is a good thing, such as when an individual is rushing to meet an important deadline. Ongoing stress caused by multitasking and other kinds of sensory overload, however, can make a person sick, as the brain and body do not have enough time to recover between releases of cortisol. Although cortisol is the human body's most powerful anti-inflammatory drug, too much of it being released too frequently can render immune cells unable to fight infection when they actually need to. In addition, stress that is experienced regularly over time can end up killing neurons in the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain that multitasking individuals rely on most in order to change between tasks and store information.

Dynes, Michelle, "Multitasking: Beneficial or Bogus?" *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle*, April 15, 2008, online edition.

Given today's busy lifestyles, individuals typically try to do several things at the same time. Such multitasking is not always effective, however, because time and accuracy frequently get sacrificed in the process. This means it actually takes people longer to complete tasks, and they typically contain a larger number of mistakes.

Psychology professors and other experts acknowledge that there are limits to human attention. Even though multitasking appears to be increasing, the abilities pertaining to human attention are not. When someone attempts to perform two or more tasks simultaneously, he or she taps into a limited attention pool. As a result, his or her capacity to concentrate effectively becomes stretched, resulting in a drop in performance on one or more of those tasks.

According to experts, it is virtually impossible to accurately complete two or more tasks at the same time. For this reason, it is quite dangerous for somebody to talk on the phone while driving, even if he or she is using a hands-free headset to do so.

Cain, Carol, "Auburn Hills Company Helps People Use Time Productively," *Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 2007, online edition.

Increasingly today, individuals of all ages are in need of more down time. It is becoming increasingly difficult for many people to take a break from their work without experiencing a sense of panic that they will miss something very important.

New companies, launched by productivity experts, are emerging that help individuals cope with their everyday experiences with sensory overload. They can assist people and businesses in various ways, such as by educating individuals about the causes of information overload and teaching them to reduce the stressors they encounter in their everyday lives.

O'Dwyer, Davin, "I Want It All and I Want It Brief," *Irish Times*, June 9, 2007, online edition.

The global desire for up-to-the-minute news is resulting in a new form of information overload that demands around-the-clock coverage and attention. Because individuals today find it virtually impossible to adequately process all of the information that bombards them each day, a new reality is emerging: the 24-second news cycle, within which the news headline, its content, and its recap are condensed into just three little words. Examples include "Popemobile hijack proof" and "Iraq still dangerous."

This new breed of 24-second news cycle works for many people because we are living in the age of a "burst culture." This means that individuals today increasingly consume their culture in short bursts, rather than exposing themselves to longer, more informative doses of information. In part, Web and mobile communications are responsible for this shift because they regularly encourage surfing rather than reading and instant-messaging and texting rather than talking. As people have grown accustomed to processing plenty of small bits of information in these forms, they have begun demanding that other types of cultural products begin providing content in similar ways. In the process, information nuances become sacrificed in favor of concision.



Skenazy, Lenore, "Americans Long for a Chance to Rest, Replenish and Reboot," *Advertising Age*, November 12, 2007, p. 32.

People are growing tired of receiving endless streams of terrible news from around the world. From car bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan to other types of terrorist actions, many individuals feel bad enough about the state of our world and do not desire access to any additional information that makes them feel even worse.

Increasingly today, information overload is a problematic form of sensory overload. Some experts say that the mega-trend of the past decade should be labeled "Survival of the Fastest," as information bombards individuals around-the-clock each day. "We are [now] processing information at 400 times the rate of our Renaissance ancestors," explains Cheryl Swanson, a former anthropologist who now works as a brand strategist. "People are tired of terrible."

According to Swanson, the effects of such information overload are numerous. Individuals end up stealing information-processing time from sleep, either by intentionally working late into the night or finding themselves with so many thoughts running through their heads that they are unable to successfully drift off to sleep. The erosion of dinnertime is another problematic reality; today it lasts approximately five minutes, with many individuals never even sitting down. (In contrast, dinnertime in the 1960s averaged 45 minutes in length, and in the 1990s it averaged 15 minutes in length.) Anxiety and additional mental and neurological disorders, including attention-deficit disorder, are also becoming more common as various forms of sensory overload continue to increase.

Elder, Jeff, "Trends to Watch in 2008," *The Charlotte Observer*, December 21, 2007, online edition.

Sensory overload is on the rise. Mobile technology is allowing individuals to stay plugged in anytime, anywhere. Although consumers regularly claim that they enjoy being able to access all sorts of information and media content on the go, some are finding themselves in need of a good "detox," which would require them to cleanse themselves of all electronics in order to restore balance and peace of mind. In addition, as current trends continue, individuals are at increasing risk of becoming less social.

Swogger Jr., Glenn, "Cool Off on Health Scares," *The Washington Times*, July 2, 2008, p. A23.

As the problem of sensory overload intensifies on various fronts, individuals increasingly experience a continuous environment of anxiety and unease that can lead them to become skeptical or even entirely overwhelmed. Americans today are finding themselves bombarded with numerous forms of warnings and bits of unsettling, conflicting information that contribute substantially to a climate of fear.

Although the media provides consumers with an abundance of information, the content they regularly provide is frequently filled with biases and distortions. As a result, individuals who already find their senses to be overloaded find it increasingly difficult to make adequate sense of the world around them and obtain a balanced view. Sensory overload and uncertainty, then, produce emotional consequences that more readily enable individuals to be exploited. It has been shown, for example, that scared or confused people tend to become easy prey for agenda-driven activists, politicians with suspicious motives, and quacks of all kinds.

-----, **"The Overflowing Brain," *Publishers Weekly*, September 29, 2008, p. 73.**

According to Torkel Klingberg, a professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, today's trends toward multitasking, information overload, and other forms of sensory overload may ultimately exceed the limits of the slowly evolving brains of humans. Data suggest that there is a noteworthy gap between the brain's capacity to process incoming information and the rapidity of today's high-tech devices. As a result, some experts maintain that life in the information age is placing insane demands on individuals of all kinds.

II. VARIOUS TYPES OF SENSORY OVERLOAD

Johnson, Carolyn, "Nuts and Bolts," *Boston Globe*, January 15, 2007, online edition.

Visitors to this year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, regarded as the world's annual "gadget mecca," experienced sensory overload as a wide range of the latest electronic devices appeared to blur together. They were greeted by a cacophony of aisles upon aisles of images from giant flat-panel television screens and sounds vibrating through the air from booming, state-of-the-art audio systems. The moody blue lighting and mesmerizing rows of intriguing images made it challenging for many visitors to make sense of what they were experiencing upon their arrival.



Serrano, Anthony, "The Uberclubs," *The Times*, March 30, 2007, p. 18.

New Yorkers are often well familiar with experiencing sensory overload, especially those who frequent the city's hippest nightclubs. PM (located at 50 Gansevoort Street), for example, welcomes visitors into a massive lounge that assaults the senses with the sights and sounds of a giant tropical paradise. Similarly, the ultra-modern design elements of Club Aer (located at 409 West 13th Street) typically threaten sensory overload for those who dare to enter.

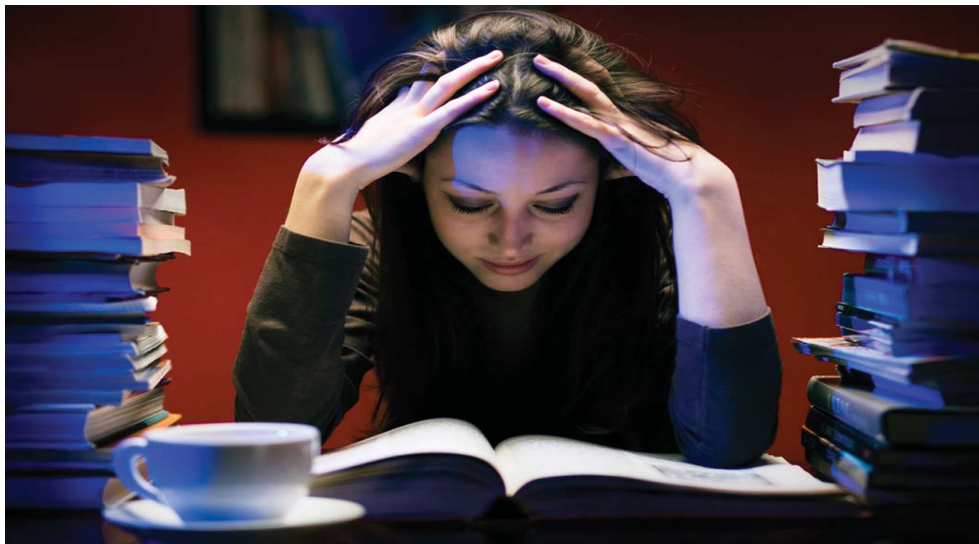
Plowright, Catherine, "Visiting Practices in Hospitals," *Nursing in Critical Care*, March/April 2007, p. 61.

Although visiting a critically ill patient may be emotionally difficult for visitors, such visits can be even more challenging for the patient by unintentionally producing sensory overload. This may be especially problematic when visiting times are quite limited, in ways that benefit the medical establishment rather than their patients. In recent decades, nurses and others have been advocating more flexible hospital-visiting arrangements that take into account the needs of critically ill patients. The primary benefits of unrestricted visiting hours, from the patient's perspective, include the reduction of feelings of deprivation for the patient, improvement of the role of family members and loved ones as a support system, and the reduction of sensory overload as visits are spread out more widely throughout the day.

Millegan, Lisa, "Stanislaus State Players Struggle with the Absurd," *The Modesto Bee*, May 9, 2007, online edition.

A double bill of classic theater performances at California State University, Stanislaus is producing sensory overload in audience members. The combined presentation of Jean Paul Sartre's "No Exit" and Eugene Ionesco's "The Lesson" has been described as making attendees feel "a little like a kid who stayed too long at the country fair—dizzy, overwhelmed, and exhausted."

These works of absurdist theater include a strange room filled with black-and-white spiral mazes on the floor and ceiling, a demented professor who won't stop running, and a variety of illogical situations. Further contributing to the sensory overload that is experienced, cast members are encouraged by their director to shout continually and overact their parts. Some critics maintain that this theatrical experience doesn't quite work because it is so overwhelming.



Schleck, Dave, "Big vs. Huge," *Daily Press*, May 20, 2007, online edition.

In the past, IMAX movie theaters were used primarily to screen documentaries. Nowadays, they enable moviegoers to experience action-filled Hollywood movies on a giant screen. Watching such films on an IMAX screen, however, can result in sensory overload. This is because the semicircular IMAX screens tend to envelop their audience members, resulting in an engrossing viewing experience whenever things on the screen soar, rumble, or explode. For some, watching a film such as *Spider-Man 3* on an IMAX screen can be a bit overwhelming.

Horsley, Paul, "Fusion Really Works: High-Energy Show Comes Close to Sensory Overload," *The Kansas City Star*, June 18, 2007, online edition.

Quixotic Performance Fusion's energy-filled show combining sight, sound, and dance is the latest trend, but it produces occasional feelings of sensory overload among its sold-out audience of families, dance enthusiasts, and curious onlookers. Quixotic was formed in 2005 by a handful of Kansas City performers, with the goal of combining as many different art forms as possible into one giant artistic production.

The on-stage performers are surrounded by a huge wall of projection screens that display somewhat disconcerting geometric patterns, fast-moving images of dancers, and glimpses of other forms that are not readily distinguishable. Various types of music and unique lighting techniques are utilized to emphasize and further accentuate the on-stage actions in ways that cause powerful reactions in the audience members.

Wright, Diane, "Opera Rocks Out in Wild, Sensory 'Tommy' Update," *The Seattle Times*, June 27, 2007, online edition.

The Who's rock opera, *Tommy*, is opening this weekend at the Everett Performing Arts Center. Michael K. Lee, who plays the lead role, maintains that this is the most colorful and electrifying show in which he has ever performed. "It's sensory overload," says Lee. "There's video and still projections, and the colors are very vibrant." The goal is to enable audience members to see the unfolding actions through the eyes of a contemporary teenager.

Audience members are entertained by a huge projection screen that is as tall as the stage, dozens of moving lights, recurring strobe effects, and a combination of punk and heavy-metal music that spans several eras. All of these elements are creatively utilized to tell the story of a young man who, after being traumatized in his childhood, experiences the world around him as an individual who is blind, deaf, and mute.

Kaufman, Sarah, "An Indian Oasis Amid Modernity," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2007, p. C5.

Travelers to India often experience sensory overload upon their arrival. Margaret Jenkins' "A Slipping Glimpse," offering 90-minutes of on-stage dance from various performers, is intended to evoke that same sense of sensory overload. Choreographer Jenkins created the show to evoke the extreme degree of sensory overload that visitors to India typically encounter. The resulting performance is filled with unbound energy, plenty of movement, and so many competing images that the average audience member can become overwhelmed with all of the layering that is occurring, longing for a clearer sense of direction as it progresses.

Hatfield, Michelle, "College Campus without Scents?" *The Modesto Bee*, October 2, 2007, online edition.

Although the beauty industry offers countless products to help people smell good, competing fragrances often result in sensory overload for individuals who are sensitive to such scents. Although the odors from perfumes, colognes, deodorants, lotions, and related products are pleasing to many, they can be overwhelming for others, who sometimes develop headaches as a result. For these latter individuals, fragrances can be as offensive as secondhand smoke from cigarettes.

"One person's cologne is another person's poison," explains Wallace Carroll, a doctor who specializes in allergies and immunology. To avoid this at-times-unpleasant form of sensory overload a group of students at California State University, Stanislaus, is attempting to institute a fragrance-free policy on their campus. They seek to prevent individuals from encountering Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, which scientists say can produce symptoms including nausea, dizziness, headaches, and other ailments.

Hartlaub, Peter, "Forget 'Ice Capades'—'High School Musical' a Frosty Sensory Overload," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 22, 2007, p. E1.

In past decades, ice shows were simple, entertaining events. Today's new breed of ice show, however, is anything but. "For anyone going to 'High School Musical: The Ice Tour' who hadn't seen one of these productions in 25 or 30 years, the sensory overload could have been enough to cause a nervous breakdown," explains Peter Hartlaub, who attended the recent ice-skating show at Oakland's Oracle Arena. "The production had a chronological narrative that clumsily recapped the events in both 'High School Musical' and 'High School Musical 2,' but the show was more about the production values than the story or even the music."

The skating in the show is top-notch, yet it becomes overshadowed by images pouring forth from the drive-in-size video screen and all of the "shiny stuff to look at." Critics believe that this is the type of sensory overload that is popular with children and teenagers, but a bit too overwhelming for their parents.



Menzies, David, "Sensory Overload," *Marketing Magazine*, December 10, 2007, p. 62.

The advertising industry attempts to use sensory overload in order to sell products of all kinds. In the past, gum came in the typical flavors of cinnamon, peppermint, and spearmint. Today, nobody quite knows what they will encounter the first time they pop a piece of "Fuse" flavored gum in their mouth. Similarly, deodorants in the past came in scents such as musk and pine, so users knew what they were buying. Today, Axe deodorant is marketed in the enigmatic fragrances of Kilo, Phoenix, Touch, Tsunami, and Vice. Such product offerings tend to boggle the mind at the same time that they appeal to the senses. According to advertising experts, today's consumers enjoy the mystery and intrigue that comes with buying contemporary products designed with names and descriptors that bombard, or even overload, their senses.

Cowherd, Kevin, "All the News that Will Fit on TV Screen," *The Baltimore Sun*, January 14, 2008, online edition.

Viewers of CNN and other cable news networks today encounter sensory overload on a regular basis. That is because cable news shows continue to cram as much information on the screen at the same time as they possibly can. Many frequently utilize split-screens, so that a news anchor can be seen on-screen along with the reporter to whom he or she is talking. Large headlines pertaining to what they are talking about accompany such images, as do the typical "crawls" filled with textual news briefs along the bottom of the screen. Elsewhere on the screen the viewer can typically find the current time, along with the weather and temperature in various cities. The result of all of this is frequently an overloaded brain, one that is bombarded with so many visual stimuli that it cannot adequately absorb.

Fischbach, Bob, "Backstage Spectacle as Dazzling as 'Phantom' Performance," *Omaha World-Herald*, February 19, 2008, online edition.

When audience members attend a performance of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical, *Phantom of the Opera*, they enjoy beautiful scenery, breathtaking costumes, fiery explosions, and appealing melodies. However, when it comes to sensory overload, the real action occurs behind the scenes, involving the various real-life dramas and complications that the audience never sees. Backstage at this and most other theatrical productions, frenzied preparation, last-minute obstacles, and minor mishaps abound. The production stage manager is responsible for making everything run as smoothly as possible, even when things are on the brink of getting entirely out of control. During a recent *Phantom* performance, for example, a trapdoor got stuck open, a spotlight could not be directed to the proper location, dry ice needed to be replenished, an actor injured his knee after slipping and falling backstage, and a mechanical monkey was unable to crash its cymbals together on cue.

Bury, Paddy, "Sensory Overload as Taliban Fighters Attack from All Sides," *Irish Times*, August 8, 2008, online edition.

Soldiers fighting in Afghanistan encounter sensory overload on a daily basis. This is especially the case when they are the victims of a Taliban ambush. As rocket-propelled grenades explode around them, they must seek protection for themselves and their fellow fighters as bullets fly over their heads. They must effectively avoid falling shrapnel as they begin to return fire. They must make sense of radio communications amid all of the noise and confusion that surrounds them. Life in such conditions is constantly tense, disconcerting, and exhausting.

Finlayson, Nic, "First-Class Sensory Overload," *AdMedia*, October 2008, p. 24.

Sensory overload is commonly encountered by travelers to India. The population is quite dense, leaving little room for personal space. The gap between the rich and the poor is noticeable everywhere. The range of typical sights—including car accidents, camels, cows, beggars, and businessmen—is eye-catching and colorful. Travel is chaotic, with animals in the middle of roads and vehicles swerving around them, endangering the well-being of bikers. Old food, animal and human feces, trash, rabid dogs and monkeys line the streets. The resulting smells and textures assault the senses, in the same way as an overwhelming nightmare.



III. Information Overload

May, Thornton, "2035—Information Rules," *E-Doc Magazine*, January/February 2007, p. 63.

In 2035, information managers will be key individuals in businesses and societies. This is because the amount of information that bombards individuals will continue to intensify in the coming decades. Already today, nearly 720 million individuals around the world use the Internet to access information, and the average global family owns 11 technological devices. Although these devices hold the potential to improve human communication, they simultaneously pose the risk of information overload. Fostering such concerns, a recent study by Stanford University researchers revealed that up to 14 percent of U.S. computer users are already exhibiting signs of compulsive online behavior.



Hurst, Lydia, "Terror Plots and Information Overload," *Toronto Star*, May 6, 2007, p. A10.

Intelligence organizations around the world are experiencing information overload. Many are so overwhelmed by the range of information they regularly collect that they can barely find the time to process it all, let alone to analyze it effectively. The world's recent technology revolution has been both a blessing and a curse for intelligence services of all kinds. Computers make their work easier by searching for suspicious words, phrases, and patterns, yet their obsession with data collection makes it quite challenging for them to keep up with the resulting information flow.

Washington, Thomas, "Information Overloaded," *Education Week*, August 1, 2007, p. 26.

It is increasingly common today for students to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. This means that they are unable to focus on any one specific topic or item for longer than several minutes at a time. Some people believe that this condition has resulted from information overload more than from some inherent inability to concentrate. To survive in today's information-packed world, we are continually being trained to move quickly from one piece of information to another as a survival tactic. Knowledge acquisition today is more about dismissing irrelevant material than comprehending relevant information in substantial depth, and that reality is proving increasingly to be the case for both young people and adults alike.

Washington, Thomas, "We're on Information Overload," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 6, 2008, p. 9.

Individuals of all ages are having trouble concentrating nowadays. It appears that we have reached the tipping point of information overload. For many people today, an aversion to reading things in depth is an adaptive tactic that enables them to survive in today's information-cluttered culture. Jumping quickly from one topic to the next is akin to bushwhacking a path through the muddle of messages that bombard us each day.

Out of necessity, a growing number of individuals find themselves scanning instruction manuals, skimming thick novels, and rapidly maneuvering through the blogosphere rather than reading such items thoroughly and scrutinizing them to obtain deep meaning. Today, we live amid a culture of searchers rather than readers, individuals who seek to absorb only a sliver of the information to which they are exposed.

-----, "Survey Finds Information Overload," *Community Banker*, April 2008, p. 16.

The findings of a new LexisNexis survey reveal that more than seven in 10 white-collar professionals say they experience information overload in the workplace. In addition, more than two in five white-collar professionals believe they are at risk of experiencing an information "breaking point." The average worker now spends nearly 2.5 hours each day conducting online research, often having to sift through large batches of irrelevant information in order to locate the information they actually need.

-----, "Instant Manager: What is Information Overload and Do You Have It?" *The Times*, May 29, 2008, p. 7.

It is easy to fall into the trap of information overload. Yes, the world today offers individuals endless information, but it is what they decide to do with that information which determines whether it causes them to ultimately become overwhelmed.

The symptoms of information overload are many and include distraction, memory difficulties, procrastination, stress, worry, and the sense of feeling overwhelmed or "frozen." To avoid such unpleasant states, individuals should strive to do a lot with limited doses of relevant information rather than to seek out tons of information that may prove to be inconsequential or irrelevant.

Davis, Jenny, "Information Overload," *ABA Journal*, July 2008, p. 14.

It is not uncommon today for working professionals to become overwhelmed by the continuous barrage of mailings, e-mail messages, and various other bits of time-wasting, brain-clogging, and often irrelevant information they encounter every day. A growing number of individuals today say that they have become overloaded by the quantity of information they must deal with on a regular basis in order to do their jobs. Workers today frequently miss important meetings as a result of information miscommunication. They also frequently miss deadlines because they are unable to locate the specific information they need in time.

Brandel, Mary, "Information Overload: Is it Time to Go on a Data Diet?" *Computerworld*, August 25, 2008, p. 18.

In recent years, the growth of information sources such as blogs, e-mail, instant-messaging, news aggregators, and social networks has been exponential to the point that there are very few individuals who have not yet experienced some type of information overload. Today, ideas and discussions occur around the clock, via millions of different blogs, discussion groups, forums, and media offerings. In addition, these ideas and discussions occupy a larger piece of human consciousness than in the past, thanks to the growing existence of mailing lists, RSS feeds, Twitter messages, and Web surfing.

According to IDC, a leading market-research firm, the problem of information overload will only intensify in the years to come. This is because by 2011 the size of the digital universe is predicted to be 10 times what it was in 2006. As a result, information, which should be useful to individuals, is becoming more and more of a troublesome distraction. According to experts, if overload is the problem, then the solution is for individuals to "unload." But doing so is frequently easier said than done. It takes a lot of discipline to avoid reading an e-mail message that has just arrived. The same is true for RSS feeds, which provide up-to-the minute information. Perhaps products such as Twitter, which limit messages to 140 characters in length, will prove especially useful in this regard. Even if people cannot avoid processing information entirely, limited-length messages can at least enable them to process information more rapidly and move on to other tasks.

Kinsley, Michael, "Too Much Information," *Time*, December 1, 2008, p. 84.

The 2008 presidential election was the first to be dominated by the Internet. Especially for younger voters, the Internet has emerged as the predominant source of information. Nowadays, it seems that everyone has a blog, and the opportunity for everyone to express their opinions is appealing. The problem, however, is that there now appears to be more people writing blogs than reading them. The end result of this trend is information overload, as so many blogs seem to be entirely unnecessary to read. Although it is true that blogs represent a unique new literary form, it is also unfortunate that so few of them actually seem to be worth reading on a regular basis.



IV. Multitasking as a Form of Sensory Overload

Stroud, Jerri, "Cell Phones are Morphing into Multitasking Main Machines," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 11, 2007, online edition.

Multitasking represents a growing form of sensory overload as the human brain attempts to devote attention to more tasks than it can adequately perform at the same time. Today's advanced cell phones, which represent multifunctional lifestyle tools, contribute to the multitasking phenomenon. Many of the latest models feature larger

screens, typewriter-style keyboards, Internet access, and other appealing features that enable users to check the news or weather while they synchronize their calendars with their computers and send text-messages to others. The latest third-generation (3G) technology allows such phones to surf the Web at speeds that approach high-speed wired access, making them all the more appealing to their users.

Aratani, Lori, "Teens Can Multitask, but What are the Costs?" *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2007, p. A1.

Many of today's students engage in multitasking on a daily basis. They say it reduces their stress levels and makes them feel more productive. Researchers do not yet know what sort of long-term impact multitasking may have on teenage development. Some fear, however, that multitasking will ultimately have negative effects with regard to the abilities of young people to focus adequately and to develop effective analytical skills.

Multitasking may be particularly problematic for teenagers because their brains are still developing. Some cognitive neuroscientists believe that the biggest problem with multitasking is that it restricts depth of knowledge with regard to any of the tasks that are being performed simultaneously. As a result, individuals are far more likely to be satisfied with very superficial levels of knowledge and investigation.

Findings of a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report reveal that when students are "studying" while sitting at their computers, they are simultaneously involved in various forms of multitasking 65 percent of that time. Many young people feel that their multitasking abilities make them superior to older individuals. They also believe that they experience no negative outcomes with regard to efficiency.

Collins, John, "Multitasking Devices Set to Boost Mobile Phones," *Irish Times*, March 30, 2007, online edition.

Mobile phones as we have come to know them in recent years will soon be a thing of the past. The next generation of mobile phones will represent a new breed of multitasking devices that can enable their users to listen to music, watch TV, communicate over the Internet, and perform numerous other tasks. The telecommunications industry continues to make rapid advances that encourage multitasking in various domains. Adaptable technologies that can be provided with solid support at affordable prices are the wave of the future.

Myers, Jimmy, "When Juggling Multiple Tasks, Men Inferior to Women," *St. Joseph News-Press*, May 14, 2007, online edition.

When it comes to listening to music and balancing a checkbook at the same time, women are better at doing so than men. Recent study findings from a psychology student at Missouri Western State University reveal that when accuracy is considered women are more effective at multitasking than men. Another recent study found that when listening to a book on tape men and women use different parts of their brains to process the incoming information. That study found that men use only one area of the brain while listening to the book's content, whereas women use several areas of the brain. This may prove to be one reason why women tend to be more effective at multitasking than their male counterparts.

Popely, Rick, "Multitasking Drivers are Everywhere," *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 2007, online edition.

From talking on a cell phone to applying makeup, eating, or sending a text message, multitasking drivers have become a very common phenomenon in recent years. More than 80 percent of respondents to a recent nationwide survey characterized themselves as multitasking drivers. This is all the more startling because statistics provided by the National Highway Safety Administration reveal that in approximately 80 percent of vehicle accidents the driver is distracted for three seconds or less before crashing. In addition, a 2005 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that people who use a cell phone while driving are four times more likely to be involved in an injury-causing accident than those who avoid cell phone use while driving.

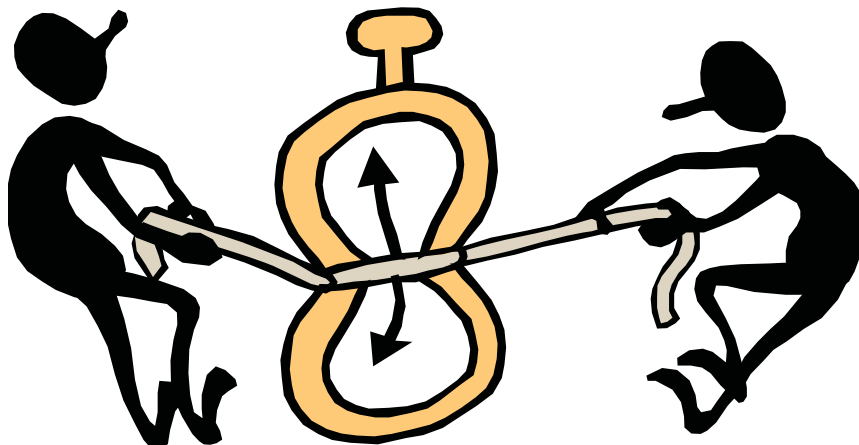
Colley, Andrew, "Net Users Multitasking in Front of Telly," *The Australian*, February 26, 2008, p. 31.

MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube are popular online sites today. However, even as individuals may be spending increasing amounts of time each day using the Internet, such activity does not appear to be reducing the amount of time they spend in front of the television. Wireless technology makes it quite easy for people to surf the Web and watch TV at the same time because they can use their computers on their laps while putting their feet up to watch their favorite programming. Juggling both types of content at the same time, however, can be challenging for the human brain, and it is also producing a decrease in face-to-face communication and outdoor activity.

Harlow, John, "How We Squeeze 31 Hours into a Day," *The Sunday Times*, April 13, 2008, p. 8.

Some people believe that "multitasking maketh modern man." They may, in fact, be right. Researchers have found that the typical middle-class person who lives in a city now uses so many advanced gadgets on a regular basis that he or she is able to cram into a 24-hour period the same amount of tasks that took people 31 hours to complete just a decade ago.

It is not uncommon for today's multitasker to read e-mails using a handheld BlackBerry while eating breakfast, or to conduct a conference call using a Bluetooth headset while driving. People today also regularly change television channels using a remote control while at the same time e-mailing friends with their laptop computer and texting friends with their cell phone. Nowadays, it appears that eating is even less of a priority for many people than their Internet activities.



Savolainen, Reijo, "Filtering and Withdrawing: Strategies for Coping with Information Overload in Everyday Contexts," *Journal of Information Science*, May 2007, p. 611.

The existence of the Internet has made the issue of information overload more common than ever before. Various studies have demonstrated that information overload is a real problem, both in and out of the workplace. It has a negative impact on individuals' job satisfaction, task performance, and information literacy. The concept of information overload is perhaps best understood as the experience of having insufficient time available to make effective use of the range of incoming information pertaining to specific situations. Most people characterize the experience of information overload as making them feel overwhelmed. Problems stemming from information overload have been documented in various fields including communication studies, information science, psychology, and sociology.

A growing number of individuals today experience information overload in their daily interactions with various media, including television, newspapers, and the Internet. One strategy that individuals commonly use to cope with information overload is the "filtering strategy." This encourages them to weed out information that they regard as irrelevant from the media sources they choose to use. A second strategy for coping with information overload is the "withdrawal strategy." Following this approach, individuals intentionally restrict the number of information sources they expose themselves to daily in order to prevent feelings of being excessively bombarded with information. The filtering strategy, when carried out in a disciplined way, is effective at allowing media users to deal with the glut of information they encounter on a daily basis. The withdrawal strategy enables media users to further minimize the amount of information that bombards them daily in order for them to achieve a sense of comfort and peace of mind.

Gordon, Andrea, "Simple Fun," *Toronto Star*, November 24, 2007, p. L1.

Given the wide range of sights and sounds that bombard them constantly while they play with today's state-of-the-art toys and video games, children are at risk of sensory overload on a daily basis. To combat this reality, parents can provide their children with the kinds of less technological toys that have proven popular in past decades.

InquisitiveKid.ca is an online toy store that sells hundreds of minimalist playthings. According to the online store's owner, Peter Emmenegger, "A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. The child's imagination is the engine of healthy play." As a result, the range of toys that Emmenegger sells includes wooden building blocks, wooden animal figures, and all-natural handmade dolls.

These sorts of offerings counter the "education toy" craze that pressures parents to turn their children into geniuses by the time they are two years old. They also avoid the risk of kids getting burnt out while playing with high-tech toys and games. The overarching goal of "simple fun" is to simplify the toys that children play with in a way that electronic toys and games cannot.

Perez, Juan Carlos, "Users Tap RSS Tools to Ease Info Overload," *Computerworld*, November 26, 2007, p. 18.

In the workplace, many employees find that they encounter internal communications overload, resulting from the steady stream of e-mail messages, voicemail messages, and intranet postings that take a huge toll on worker productivity. To help alleviate such information overload, a growing number of companies are in the process of installing RSS tools for use by their employees. Targeted RSS feeds can provide workers with fewer, more relevant messages in a more timely fashion. In contrast, e-mail messages and related communications containing the same sorts of information are often readily deleted or ignored.

Raymond, Jeff, "Yoga Helps City Students Escape Hectic Schedules," *The Daily Oklahoman*, February 26, 2008, online edition.

Is it possible for the average 8-year-old to find peace and quiet within himself or herself nowadays? If he or she engages in yoga for kids, the answer is yes. The primary goal of yoga classes for children is to provide young people with effective ways to reduce the stress of their overcommitted lives and the sensory overload they encounter from their televisions, iPods, video games, and related media offerings. An additional benefit is that children get some exercise while participating. During a typical yoga session, children ride on imaginary roller coasters and imagine taking a trip to the circus. While doing so, they learn to breathe effectively in order to allow their daily stresses to float away. After they master such techniques in a group setting, the children are empowered thereafter to use the same techniques at any point, and in any location, during their daily lives.

Reyer, Liz, "Improve Life and Work by Taming the Multitask Demon," *Star Tribune*, May 13, 2008, online edition.

This is the reality of multitasking: if someone is attempting to do three things at once, they are actually only doing one, and most likely less well than if focused on it entirely. To reduce the sensory overload that accompanies multitasking, individuals need to change their personal ideas about how they approach daily tasks. They also need to set an intentional goal to multitask less. Although some individuals multitask continuously because they fear that they might miss the breakthrough call of their career if they don't, such a reason is a bit delusional and can readily be debunked.

In order to effectively tame the multitask demon, a person needs to alter their behavior by prioritizing, delegating, and setting boundaries. To prioritize, an individual makes honest decisions about what sorts of things need to be done immediately, what sorts of things need to be done in the near future, and what sort of things do not actually need to be done at all. To delegate, an individual passes on some important tasks to others. To set boundaries, an individual needs to limit their accessibility as well as their dependence on cell phones, BlackBerries, and related devices so those tools no longer rule their life.

-----, **“How to Avoid Information Overload at Work,”** *The Times*, June 5, 2008, p. 7.

Not all sensory overloads are someone else’s fault. Often, individuals intentionally choose to overload themselves with incoming stimuli and information. Some do so because they are aiming for perfection, not realizing that it is impossible to achieve. Others are time perfectionists who set unrealistic deadlines for themselves time and time again and must overload themselves from the outset in order to meet deadlines. Still others arrange unnecessary meetings for which they and their coworkers must utilize information in order to prepare, overloading themselves and their colleagues in the process. Such tendencies must be identified and minimized in order for individuals to reduce the stress and sensory overload they experience on a regular basis.

Giorgi, Elizabeth, “The One Thing: It’s Meditation,” *Reading Eagle*, June 28, 2008, online edition.

The minds of people who experience sensory overload in its various forms are always busy. As a result, individuals find it difficult to slow down their minds amid the modern landscape of television screens, computers, and cell phones that encourage them to remain tuned-in around the clock every day. Meditation offers a release from such sensory overload. It involves training an individual to empty his or her mind of sensory distractions for a specific time period by focusing on something specific (such as a repeated word or phrase) and bringing attention back to that thing whenever the mind begins to wander.

Meditation has been shown to reduce stress and provide enhanced mental well-being. A growing body of evidence further suggests that it can improve certain medical conditions. For individuals who regularly experience sensory overload, its most impressive benefits include calmness, balance, centeredness, harmony, and peacefulness. As a bonus, it represents a non-medication way for individuals to experience positive health outcomes.

Hargadon, Steve, “Beating Information Overload,” *School Library Journal*, August 2008, p. 17.

To avoid information overload, individuals should treat RSS feeds more like a newspaper than like e-mail. This means they should not feel the need to read every item contained in the feeds each day. It also means they should not feel the need to go back and catch up on everything they may have missed if they are out of contact with their technological devices for a few days.

