

# 11 Efficient Ways To Eliminate Distractions And Regain Focus



You live in a small town (let's call it town A), in the suburbs of a big metropolitan city. On a sunny day, in the middle of the week, you need to take a drive to another town (town B).

The fastest and most efficient way to get to town B is by taking the highway. It will take you some time to get to it as you live in downtown A, but once you reach it, you'll be in B in no time. Now imagine that for some reason, the highway is closed and you need to take inner roads.

At first it might seem faster because you don't have to go "all the way" to the highway, you start making your way through to B as soon as you leave your house. But once you start going, you realize there are a lot of traffic lights and stop signs on the inner roads. You need to stop so many times, that the time of your trip gets doubled.

You start wishing you could've taken the highway.

What stop signs and traffic lights are to your trip, distractions are to your focus and productivity. Trying to work on a task while constantly getting interrupted from an endless amount of sources will dramatically increase the time it takes to finish that task.

Minor distractions might seem innocent at first, but studies have shown that it takes on [average 21 minutes](#) to regain your focus after being interrupted. Make no mistake, distractions are one of the biggest productivity killers.

Let's get on the highway of productivity and examine the best, battle-tested, tactics for eliminating them.

## Kill instant notifications

Notifications from the various programs you use to keep in touch with people are some of the biggest distractions around.

Close out from Skype (or put on Do Not Disturb mode), email clients, social media sites and any chat programs.

If you need a piece of information from someone for the particular work you are doing, get it beforehand and close that communication channel while you work.

## Put the phone away

Put your cell phone on silent or vibrate. Ideally, place it in another room. Most smartphones are very powerful and you

can literally hear them vibrate if they are close to you, so put them as far as physically possible.

“But what if I miss a really important call or message?”, you might be thinking.

Chances are, you won’t.

If you work uninterrupted for 50 minutes, followed by a 5 – 10 minute break (the ideal way to divide your time), you can check on your phone during your breaks.

You can also schedule a specific time during the day when you’ll receive and return calls. You can record your voice-mail to reflect that information. When someone calls you before or after that scheduled time, they would know when to expect to hear from you. This way you make sure you are not distracted while focusing on your tasks, but also ensure that other people won’t get offended by not being able to reach you.

## **Close all unnecessary programs**

If you work on a computer, keep open only the programs you need for the particular task.

If you are writing, keep only a word processor open. Consider writing in “full-screen” mode for even less distractions.

If you need an internet browser, keep only one tab open.

If you don’t need the internet at all, consider unplugging the cable or disabling the wireless. This will eliminate a lot of distractions. Small caveat, depending on what programs you have installed, some might pop up notifications that they are unsuccessfully trying to connect to the internet. In other words, you might be creating more distractions by not being connected, than by being connected. It is something worth testing.

## **Open all necessary programs**

Make sure you have opened all needed files and software applications before you start your task. You run the chance of getting distracted while looking for that file with your notes for the project or for the shortcut that opens that additional piece of software that you need.

Take a minute before you start to mentally walk yourself through what you need to do. This will help you gather your thoughts and see what files and programs you need in order to get the job done.

## **“Train” other people**

A lot of the distractions and interruptions in life come from the people around you. Be it colleagues, family, friends, neighbors and even pets.

The best way to prevent them from happening is to set some ground rules and clearly communicate them to everyone. Politely explain that you prefer to work in chunks of uninterrupted time and you would appreciate it if they respect your focus by minimizing all communication with you during those blocks of time.

It also helps to explain that both parties are better off if you give them your undivided attention during one of your breaks, than to give them only half (or less) if they interrupt what you are currently doing.

Figure out some sort of a Do Not Disturb (DND) sign. This will tell people when you are “in the zone” and when it is OK to come talk to you. The DND sign can be a closed door to the office (if you have one), putting on headphones or anything that makes sense to you. Just make sure you communicate to the outside world the meaning of this gesture.

Do not abuse the DND sign by keeping it on all the time. This will make it seem like you are constantly busy (even when you clearly aren’t) and people will not respect it. Put it up when you actually need your focus, but make sure to

take it down to let people know you are open to their needs.

If you work from home, consider turning off the doorbell ringer to prevent being distracted by neighbors, the mail man or the random people that walk up to your door asking for donations or selling things.

## Use headphones

Often times, you'll need to work in a noise environment. From outside urban noise such as traffic and construction to noisy neighbors and chatty co-workers, any noise can be very distracting.

A good remedy is to use headphones and listen to music. If music is distracting for you, use the headphones simply for noise cancellation or play some [white noise](#) to cancel out the distractions.

Headphones also make [a very good DND sign](#) so you can kill two birds with one stone.

## Clear visual clutter

Clear your desk, and especially your notes.

Don't be that person:

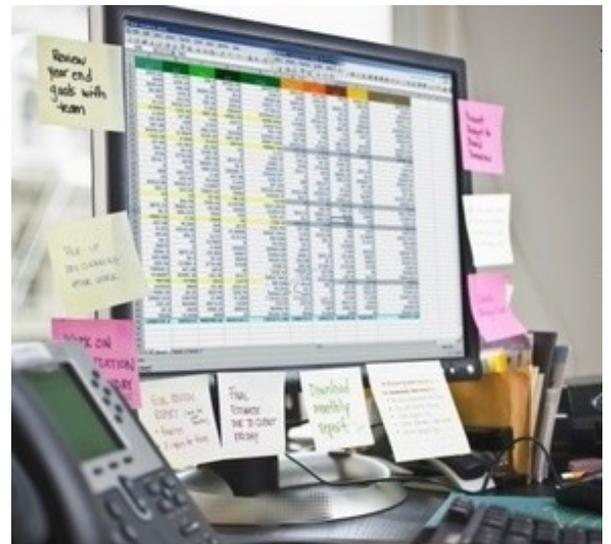
Clear the walls and shelves around you from anything that can be a distraction by randomly grabbing your attention while you are focusing on something else.

## Clear computer clutter

The same way you cleaned up your physically desk, clean up your digital one as well.

Clear your desktop or start screen from unnecessary files, shortcuts and programs.

If your work involves an internet browser, use an [ad blocker](#) to eliminate all banners, pop-ups and other distracting ads that can steal your attention away.



## Take care of all physical necessities

Keep a bottle of water or your favorite beverage within your physical reach. Consider adding a snack as well. It can be very distracting to have to get up and go to another room to get a drink of water so be prepared.

Take a trip to the bathroom during your breaks so you minimize having to break your focus for nature calls.

## Adjust room temperature

If you have control over the room temperature, set it to whatever is comfortable for you ([25 degrees C or 77 degrees F for maximum productivity](#)).

If you work in a traditional office setting, a local coffee shop, library or in any place where temperature control is not possible, be prepared. Have extra clothes handy. If you have your own space (such as a cubicle) consider getting a small fan for those hot and humid days and a small heater for cold and icy ones. All of these will prevent you from having to break your attention in order to do something to warm up/cool down.

## **Turn off your clock**

Being constantly aware of what time it is can be a major distraction. Especially, if you have limited time to do something, watching the minutes pass by faster than expected can be very stressful as well.

Eliminating time from the equation will allow you to concentrate on getting the job done, not on how much time it takes to do it.

Hide the clock on your computer, put away your cell phone, take off your wrist watch and remove any alarm or wall clocks from the shelves and walls around you. It is a very liberating feeling not to have to worry about time.

To make sure you don't miss an important meeting or some other time-specific event, create an alarm on your computer or cell phone.

## **Over you now**

Distractions can be one of the biggest productivity killers so it is important to be proactive and try to minimize them. It takes some time and preparation to set your surroundings for maximum focus, but the gain in productivity and attention make it worth the effort. After all, it is always more efficient to take the highways, than to take inner roads.

**What are some other ways to remove distractions? Share in the comment section below:**