


Activity 1

Multitasking Mania

DOES MULTITASKING WITH MEDIA DISTRACT YOU FROM HOMEWORK?

To multitask or not to multitask, that is the question. Scientists are divided over whether multitasking is good or bad. One theory says that people can only multitask if they are really good at both tasks, while another claims that we don't actually multitask—instead, our brain switches between tasks. Most scientists agree, however, that your performance on any task is worse when multitasking than when doing it on its own.



SMART START: Compile several short worksheets in math, reading, science, etc., including the answers. There are many websites that have free printable worksheets if you do not have any on hand (for example, schoolxpress.com/fwsindex.php or tlsbooks.com). If you have girls of differing ages, make sure to provide worksheets for each grade level.

Here's how:

1. Introduce multitasking. Take a survey to see whether your girls think they are good at multitasking. Ask girls how often they multitask while doing homework.² Explain that questions exist about whether people can really multitask and if it is beneficial to multitask. Then, deliver the **SciGirls Challenge:** Does multitasking with media while working on homework affect your ability to

You'll Need:

For each small group

- ♦ worksheets (See Smart Start.)
- ♦ pencils and paper
- ♦ stopwatch or clock
- ♦ multimedia (e.g., cell phones, computer, TV)
- ♦ Internet access



successfully complete the homework?

2. Brainstorm. Break into small groups¹ and ask girls to brainstorm media tasks that they engage in while doing homework.³ At least one girl in each group will be tested on the worksheets, so you may want to group girls who are comfortable having their work "graded" with girls who aren't.

To gather ideas on possible media tasks, watch the *SciGirls Explore DVD*. (Select Multitasking Mania: Research.)



3. Plan. Ask your girls how they think homework completion changes with media multitasking. Design your own experiment to test multitasking ability.^{3 4} Here are some things to consider:

- ★ Types of media tasks
- ★ Number of tests to complete
- ★ Homework subject (girls should complete a new worksheet with each test)
- ★ How many people will participate (sample size)

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¹⁻⁷ See **SciGirls Seven** strategies on page 3.

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- ★ How to measure success (for example, how many problems are correct, how long it takes to complete the worksheet).

Watch girls test multitasking on the *SciGirls Explore DVD*. (Select Multitasking Mania: Test.)



Watch Christena and the SciGirls discuss how to set up their experiment on the *SciGirls Explore DVD*. (Select Multitasking Mania: Mentor Moment.) ⁷



POINTER: This is a great activity to point out the purpose of controls. A control experiment serves as the standard by which to compare the multitasking results. In this experiment, the control is completing a worksheet in silence, with no media distractions.

4. Encourage predictions. Predict which media tasks will be easy or hard to perform while doing homework, or rank media tasks from least to most distracting. Then, start testing!

5. Communicate results. Have each group create a presentation of their data. How did results compare to predictions? Do results differ with worksheet subject? Discuss whether girls think it's helpful for them to multitask with media and homework. ⁶

6. Continuing exploring. How does multitasking ability change with age or gender? Create a survey to collect information and then design another experiment to find out!

Mentor Moment

Dr. Christena Cleveland is a social psychologist with a passion for overcoming cultural differences among people. A professor at St. Catherine University in Minnesota, she studies group behavior, such as how different cultural groups perceive “healthy” and “unhealthy” behaviors. She has published numerous articles on groups and has traveled all over the world to conduct research and speak at conferences. Christena uses her work to help leaders understand and overcome the cultural divisions in their organizations.

