

Taming the Beast: Dealing with Techno-Distraction

Saturday, April 19, 2025 12:30 PM

Introduction: What's the problem?

TECHNO-DISTRACTION,... **DIGITAL DISTRACTION**,... We all have an idea of what those terms might mean, even when we first encounter them. They're that quagmire of potential side quests that tempt us away from the task that we sat down at the computer (or with the device) to accomplish, hoping (vainly?) that tech would make our task simpler.

What are some tools for helping with the problem?

The [Resources section](#) lists a post by [IAskManyDumbQuestion](#) reviewing several apps that can help lessen the distractions that our devices present. I found the post very helpful and don't feel a need to reinvent the wheel, but I'll mention here some of the tools reviewed there.

Know thyself

Some of the apps are time recorders to let you see what you're spending time on.

Focusing your attention

The **POMODORO TECHNIQUE** is a method that breaks a work or study session of about 2 hours duration into 4 **POMODORI** (literally, 'tomatoes'). Each pomodoro consists of a 25 minute interval spent actively working on a task without interruption followed by a 5 or 10 minute break. The technique gets its name from the technology used when its originator Francesco Cirillo came up with it: a tomato-shaped kitchen timer.

Some of the apps IaskManyDumbQuestion reviewed were Pomodoro timer apps, but the technique is kinda minimalist in its approach, so searching the app source for your platform for "Pomodoro" will turn up several worthy candidates.

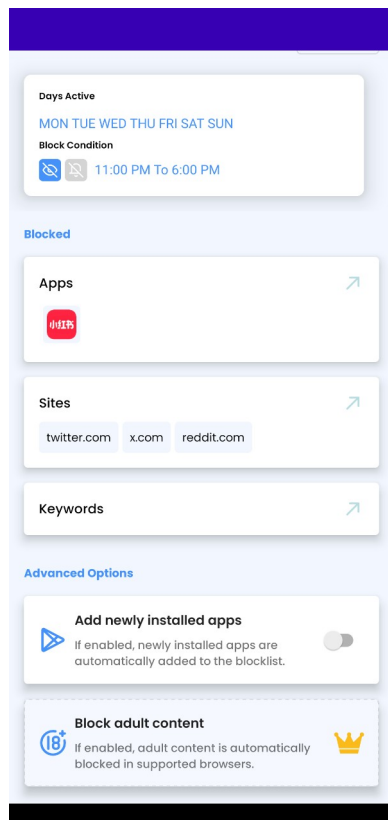


Figure 1: Part of the settings for the Stay Focused app showing that the Rednote app and the reddit.com, twitter.com, and x.com websites are blocked all the time except for between 6 PM and 11 PM each evening.

Restricting what you allow yourself

There are 2 flavors of restriction lists. If there are just a few particular apps or websites, you can create a **BLACKLIST** of those apps and use an app blocker app to restrict when you can access them or enforce conditions on how much time you can spend on them. Figure 1 shows the setup for such a blacklist in the **Stay Focused** app.

For even tighter focus, some blocker apps will let you set up whitelists: lists that block everything not on the list during the times or conditions that you specify. This sort of list is useful when you want to crack a whip over yourself to stay on a particular task during certain periods, for instance.

Are technical solutions sufficient?

While apps can help deal with the distractions of technology, one might question whether that is more than a bandaid. The [Resources section](#) lists some books and lectures that deal with the psychology of distraction and present some possible methods for overcoming it.

Along these lines, some advocates of the Pomodoro Technique scoff at timer apps that claim to be pomodoro timers. These advocates insist that the physical setting of a low tech timer (I don't think that they insist that it be tomato-shaped) for alternating periods of work and break is an essential part of the method.

Some resources

"Digital Distraction." Digital Responsibility,
<https://www.digitalresponsibility.org/digital-distraction>

(accessed April 14, 2025).

"From the Archives: Avoiding Techno Distraction." Writing Center (Wake Forest University). Posted on September 8, 2015. <https://writingcenter.wfu.edu/tips-and-tricks/from-the-archives-avoiding-techno-distraction>

Gerber, Sasha. "Student Voices: Considering Tech and Distraction." Sanford School of Public Policy (Duke University). October 10, 2023. <https://sanford.duke.edu/story/student-voices-considering-tech-and-distraction/>

Gazzaley, Adam. *The Distracted Mind*. Boston, MA: PBS Distribution, 2012.

In OCPL as a DVD or through Hoopla as an evideo

Gurung, Regan A.R. "Fostering Learning in a World of Technological Distractions." American Psychological Association. September 1, 2024. <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/classroom-distractions>

u/IAskManyDumbQuestion, "List of Apps and Extension for Killing All the Distractions," r/JEENEEtards, Reddit, February 28, 2023, https://www.reddit.com/r/JEENEEtards/comments/11emyb8/list_of_apps_and_extension_for_killing_all_the/

LoJacono, Matt. "Crown Lecture Explores Techno-Distracton and its Consequences." Sanford School of Public Policy (Duke University). October 8, 2023. <https://sanford.duke.edu/story/crown-lecture-explores-techno-distracton-and-its-consequences/>

Newport, Cal. *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*. New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019.

In OCPL as a paper book or through Libby as an ebook or eaudio

O'Brien, Terrence. "The Best Apps for Distracton-Free Writing." *Wired*, August 21, 2024. <https://www.wired.com/story/best-apps-for-distracton-free-writing/>

Wikipedia contributors, "Pomodoro Technique," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomodoro_Technique (accessed April 17, 2025).