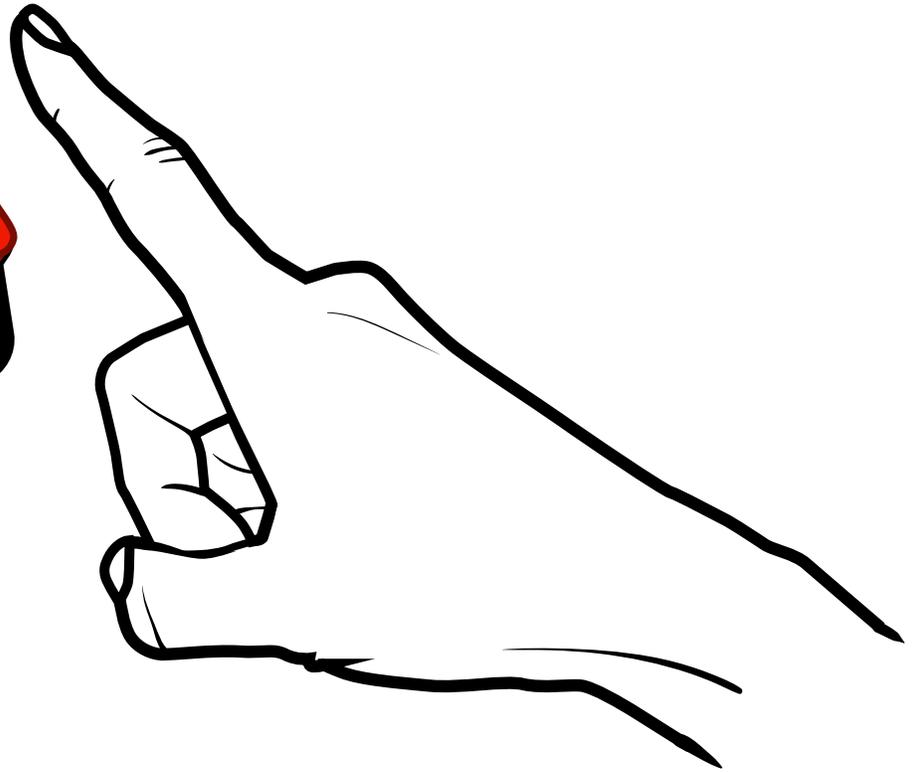


# *Distraction*

## *Deactivator*

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*Five ways to start working  
distraction-free right now*

*— from Work at Home Geek —*

*"Distractions, like butterflies that buzz around my head..." - Paul McCartney, Distractions*

## I left the office behind. Why am I still Distracted?

Working in an office carries with it built-in distractions that can kill your productivity. Less well known is the experience of dealing with distractions when you work at home. Sure, you're working independently in your own space, but you now have to navigate things like children, pets, your spouse and the guy next door whose best friend is his leaf blower.

Before you go medieval on the leaf blower guy, there are some things you can do to relieve yourself of unwanted distractions. Put your axe away and consider these five tips.

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### 1 Put. that. email. down.

"Email is for closers."

I used to be one of those people with their email tab open 24 hours a day. One day that little number kept popping up so often that I couldn't focus on what I was really supposed to be doing. So I closed it. I didn't realize how much I loved it until later, when I went to click on the tab to check my email and realized it wasn't there. I was sold.



It's not always possible to close up email, especially if you're on a deadline and your client is sending you stuff you need to complete the project. If that's the case, try creating a filter and a folder for that client and stay in there while you're working. That way the only emails you'll see right away are relevant to the work at hand.

Think of email as a reward for getting tasks accomplished, or, you know, closing.

## 2 Get rid of visual distractions

Visual noise can be just as bad as auditory noise. Some people have a hard time with any kind of movement going on in their line of sight and other people can remain blissfully unaware while a 747 lands on their desk.

I am not one of those people.

I have a very hard time focusing when something is continually catching my eye. I worked on a project once with a guy who was a leg shaker. You know what I mean? He was constantly pumping his leg up and down like an oil derrick on crack. I couldn't move from where I was sitting, so I taped a piece of cardboard to my computer monitor to block out the visual noise.

I also suggested decaf.



Facing a wall can be a solid way of blocking out those moving distractions. If that's not possible, try wearing a hat with a visor. If you can't wear a hat because of reasons, then my cardboard trick is probably your best bet. Obi Wan did it with Luke Skywalker and he turned out pretty well. Or, you could just get human horse blinders: <http://panasonic.net/design/flf/works/wear-space>

**What about visual noise that isn't moving?** It can be just as debilitating to your productivity. Try to get rid of any messy piles of paper, which contribute to mental chaos and an uncomfortable feeling that you need to be doing something else than the work at hand. If you have to stuff it in a drawer temporarily, at least it's out of sight. I've hidden more than a few paper piles in my day, it's very rewarding.

Similarly, a messy computer desktop can be a big distraction and you may not even realize it. Take some time to organize your files and folders so that they're at least not right on top of each other, possibly in danger of reproducing without your consent.

You don't have to be Mary Poppins spit-spot tidy every day. Just remove as much visual noise as you can and you'll soon notice how much easier it is to focus.

### 3 Turn off notifications

Those little red badges all over my phone and computer are an itch I just have to scratch. There's something about them that I have a really hard time resisting. I got sucked in by a red badge on my NextDoor app and now all I can think about is that neighbor with the psoriasis problem. Hrrmph.

Turning off our phones is the easiest thing to do, but it's not always possible. You might be waiting for an important call, or in my case, I often need to make sure I can be contacted when my kids are out.

We can simply stop looking at our phones while we're working. That way we won't see all those alerts popping up like candy-coated popcorn. But because our phones are very often also our clock and music player, it's super hard to just turn it over and not look at all. So what to do?

A while back I decided to try turning off every notification in all my iPhone apps. At first I thought I would die, or at the very least start sobbing uncontrollably. But I was fine. I am fine. It's actually been one of the best things I've done and I don't even turn them back on when I'm not working.

The computer is slightly more difficult. If I'm working on my laptop, I can't exactly turn the screen off. Same as the phone, I've turned off my notifications. Because much of my work involves being in my web browser (where I'm writing this now), this is why I close my Gmail tab. Remember, *Email is for closers*. When you've completed your task, you can check your email.



If you're on a Mac, you can also turn on Do Not Disturb and you won't get those pesky notification interruptions. Click on the little list icon in the upper right corner of your screen. There's a toggle switch that says "Do Not Disturb." You need to swipe up with two fingers on your trackpad. Click that toggle switch to ON and you're temporarily safe (it automatically turns back on the next day).

## 4 Consider ending your hunger strike

Hunger can eat up productivity like a dad inspecting the Halloween candy. As soon as those pangs start gnawing at your insides, your thoughts are going to wander all over the place. Be a good shepherd for your flock of thoughts and rein them back in by having something to eat. Maybe you're not an in-between meals kind of person, but that growling is telling you that your body needs to eat. Pay attention and snack up. Sometimes even a handful of almonds can quiet down the rumbling enough to keep you going until mealtime.



## 5 Coffitivity

Let's do a fun thing and contradict the very nature of this list. Sometimes being just a tiny bit distracted can actually boost your creativity.

"According to a peer-reviewed study out of the University of Chicago, 'A moderate level of ambient noise is conducive to creative cognition.' In a nutshell, this means being a tiny bit distracted helps you be more creative."



That quote comes from one of my favorite web apps, **coffitivity.com**. I use it both at home and when I'm working anywhere in public and getting too much distraction from nearby conversations. For some reason, a clear conversation within earshot is hugely distracting, but a low level of several ambient conversations is not.

Wow, science!

Check it out. It's free or you can pay to access their whole library of different places.

## 6 Take off your clothes

I thought that might get your attention. I'm not really saying you should work naked, although I'm not saying you shouldn't, either. Especially if it's February 5th, which is National Working Naked Day. I would recommend that you don't celebrate at your local Starbucks.

Listen, we work from home, right? So ditch the tie, Don Draper. Loosen your collar and get comfy. It's **your** office, so why are you dressed like Jane Fonda in *9 to 5*?



But hold on to your dirty sweatpants, Annie Wilkes, there's a balance between working comfy and just being a murderous slob. Sure, I've had my share of days where I had to get some things done before showering, but I also find that it's kind of a nagging distraction. Besides the potential smells involved, it just feels oogy (to quote our friend Annie). Getting clean and putting on a fresh pair of yoga pants can do wonders for your productivity.

What about those times when you have to work in someone else's office? Dressing too casually comfy might signal to others that you don't care much about the work. But working in a tightly buttoned collar and itchy polyester is not exactly conducive to getting things done. Again, go for balance here. Think about *The Office*. More Pam than Jan, more Jim than Michael.

### But wait, that was six things

I threw in that last little bonus thing because I like you.

If this has been helpful for you, I would love for you to share it with others. Email it, post it on twitter or LinkedIn, or print it out and slip it under the next toilet stall.

I have a lot more I'd love to share with you, fellow work at home geek. If you're not already subscribed to get my regular emails, please sign up here: <http://bit.ly/WAHG-subscribe>

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*My name is D.J. Billings and I created this list for you. I made the illustrations, too. You can find out more about why and how I work at home and get access to some super cool resources right here: <http://www.workathomegeek.com/about>*