Activity sheet

# Activity: Attention shifting (From Castle and Buckler, 2021: 134‒5)

## Part 1:

Give your learners a copy of this activity (face down) and tell them what is required of them before you ask them to turn the sheet over to begin (otherwise students might start looking for the sequence before you finish explaining the task!).

The person completing the task should locate the square with 00 and cross that box, then 01, 02 etc. up to 99 within a two- or three- minute time restriction (in reality 99 will not usually be reached in the time given). The task therefore requires shifting of attention from the number just ‘found’ to the next number in the sequence, something that requires fast and efficient scanning of information.

Learners should be instructed to stop after the designated time period.

Record the scores in a dataset (that may perhaps be used in a mathematics lesson at a later date). This is a rudimentary measure of learners’ attentional shifting ability.

## Part 2:

In pairs, one person will be the first to complete the task. The other will act as the ‘distractor’.

The person completing the task should again locate the square with 00 and cross that box, then 01, 02 etc., up to 99.

The distractor should repeat random numbers at their partner to try and make it difficult for him or her to concentrate on the task. Alternatively, they could repeat times tables or any other mathematical distraction.

Learners should be instructed to stop after the designated time period and swap roles.

Record the ‘distracted’ scores in the original dataset and there is now an opportunity to compare attentional performance with and without distractions.

Intuitively, you might predict that students will remember more with no distraction. We would tend to agree but have seen students’ record higher scores under distraction. Upon questioning, some students have said that it is so ‘noisy’ when they are trying to study at home that they are unable to concentrate unless it is equally noisy (see our discussion of context dependent memory). Although totally impractical we hope you can appreciate the implication of this during test or examination conditions where silence is expected.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 32 | 10 | 57 | 02 | 83 | 22 | 47 | 24 | 63 | 06 |
| 51 | 25 | 88 | 43 | 15 | 91 | 68 | 89 | 12 | 49 |
| 65 | 59 | 17 | 38 | 85 | 74 | 34 | 09 | 62 | 70 |
| 20 | 75 | 52 | 30 | 50 | 42 | 56 | 77 | 84 | 92 |
| 03 | 82 | 28 | 07 | 71 | 69 | 95 | 46 | 98 | 26 |
| 11 | 48 | 78 | 35 | 64 | 93 | 37 | 80 | 76 | 16 |
| 86 | 45 | 58 | 19 | 97 | 61 | 99 | 33 | 23 | 40 |
| 67 | 31 | 73 | 08 | 90 | 21 | 72 | 94 | 04 | 14 |
| 41 | 79 | 01 | 00 | 39 | 87 | 81 | 29 | 66 | 44 |
| 96 | 60 | 54 | 13 | 27 | 55 | 05 | 53 | 36 | 18 |