**Listening to Music While Working Hurts Performance**

Listening to Songs While Performing Tasks Can Impair Concentration, Study Finds

By [Bill Hendrick](http://www.webmd.com/bill-hendrick)  
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Reviewed by [Laura J. Martin, MD](http://www.webmd.com/martin-laura-j)

July 29, 2010 -- Pull out those earplugs to your iPod if you’re studying for a test or performing a task. And turn off the stereo. What you hear while trying to concentrate can be distracting and impair your ability to memorize and recall information.

That’s the finding of a new study by researchers at the University of Wales Institute, who say they’ve found that listening to music seems to impair task concentration as well as the ability to remember.

Nick Perham, PhD, and colleagues at the Wales Institute in Cardiff signed up 25 people aged 18 to 30 to examine their ability to recall information while listening to various sounds.

They were asked to recall a list of eight consonants in a specific order in a test known as serial recall. They were tested under several different conditions: in a quiet environment, while music was playing that they liked, and while music was playing that they disliked.

They were also tested while a voice repeated the number three or spoke single-digit numbers randomly.

The study participants performed best while in a quiet environment or while listening to a voice repeating the number three over and over -- what the researchers called a steady-state environment.

“The poorer performance of the music and changing-state sounds are due to the acoustical variation within those environments,” Perham says in a news release. “This impairs the ability to recall the order of items, via rehearsal, within the presented list.”

Perham concludes that to reduce the negative effects of background music when recalling information in a specific order, people “should either perform the task in quiet or only listen to music prior to performing the task.

“Listening to music you prefer prior to, rather than at the same time as task performance, does increase performance,” he tells WebMD.

**Music vs. Performance**

The researchers say their study does not necessarily negate findings by scientists in the 1990s that concluded, among other things, that listening to the music of Mozart increased concentration, the so-called Mozart Effect.

“Those studies are more to do with therapeutic interventions rather than performing tasks while background music is being played,” he tells WebMD. “However, this seems to refer to listening to music prior to task performance to increase mood and arousal, and this is definitely not the case when trying to recall information in order while background music is playing,” Perham says.

The researchers say their findings “may have implications for studying skills in which students typically [study] for examinations while listening to music.”

The study is published in the September issue of the journal *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

<http://www.webmd.com/brain/news/20100729/listening-to-music-while-working-hurts-performance?ecd=wnl_men_080310>