

LESSON PLAN

Defeating Distraction

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grade 9 to 12

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Overview

In this lesson, students learn how to manage distraction when using digital media tools and practice avoiding the “phone loop.” Students learn about the “phone loop” and simple strategies for avoiding it from a video, then rank those strategies based on how useful they think they will be in their own lives. They then think of different things they do with their phones, sort those into ones that have an obvious end point (like checking the weather) and those that don’t. Students try a number of different exercises designed to help them use their devices more mindfully, then write a reflection on the activity. They then identify ways in which apps’ and devices’ design features may make it easy to lose track of how much time we spend using them, then brainstorm ways they can change those features or their own habits

to promote more mindful use. Finally, students design “paper prototypes” that show how they would change an app to encourage better habits and more mindful use.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts: Students will understand that...

Digital media have a real impact:

- How we use digital media tools affects ourselves and others, including our physical and mental health

Digital media experiences are shaped by the tools we use:

- Digital tools’ affordances and defaults influence how we use them, including whether that use is healthful
- Reflecting on this influence can help us use tools in a more mindful way

Key questions:

- How does the design of phones and apps make us spend more time using them than we want to?
- How would we change that design if we could?
- How can we use them as if those changes had been made?



Essential knowledge: Students will know...

- Reading media: Impact of different affordances and defaults, such as autoplay
- Media health: Strategies for mindful use of digital tools

Performance tasks: Students will be able to...

- Understand and analyze how affordances and defaults influence how we use digital tools
- Develop and apply strategies for mindful and healthful use of digital tools
- Identify how changes to design features could support more healthful use
- Reflect on the role that digital tools play in our lives

Student-friendly outcomes:

We will learn how the features and default settings of digital tools, like autoplay, can impact our physical and mental health, and discover strategies for using these tools more mindfully.

We will think about how the design of phones and apps can make us spend more time on them than we want, and consider what changes could make them healthier to use.

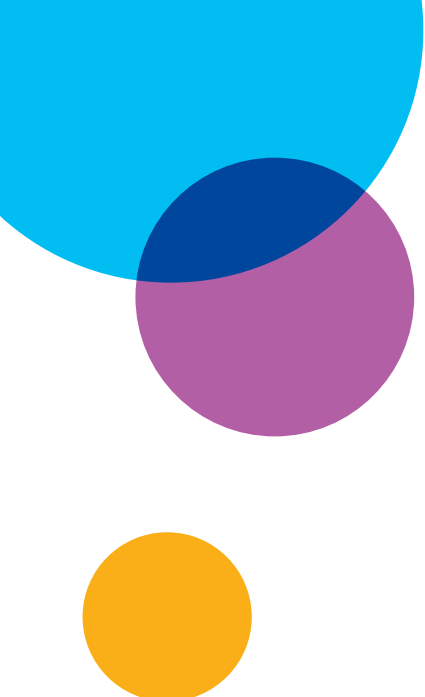
We will analyze how digital tools influence our habits, develop strategies for healthier use, suggest design improvements, and reflect on how digital media affects our lives.

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to distribute the following documents:

- *Defeating Distraction: Strategies*
- *Phone Activities*
- *Defeating Distraction Exercises*
- *Designed for Distraction*
- *Paper Prototype: Mindful by Design*

Prepare to show the video [Defeating Digital Distraction](#)



If you plan to conduct the “Paper Prototypes” activity, you may want to familiarize yourself with [prototyping apps and software](#).

Procedure

Start by asking students:

- Do you ever feel like you spend too much time online, on your phone, or on a particular app?
- Do some things you do online make you feel worse instead of better?
- Do you ever turn on your phone to do one thing and wind up doing five more?
- Are there times in your day when you don't look at your phone, or don't have your phone with you at all?

DEFEATING DISTRACTION

Explain that just like everything else in our lives, we develop habits around using phones and apps. But we can change habits if we understand how they formed.

Now show students the video [Defeating Digital Distraction](#). (Click on “CC” to activate closed captioning.)

After students have watched the video, ask them which of the strategies in the video they think would be most helpful to them in managing their use of digital devices.

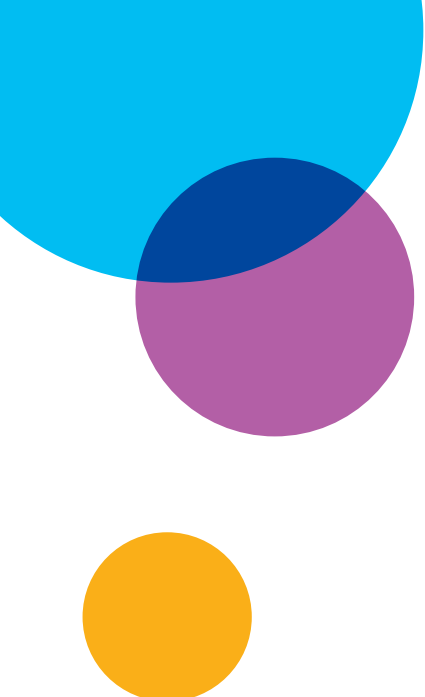
Distribute the handout *Defeating Distraction: Strategies* by ranking the strategies in the order of how useful they think they would be.

When students have finished, ask them to share their ranking:

- Which strategies did they think would be more and less useful? Why?
- Is there a general agreement in the class about the ranking?
- If so, why do they think their peers agree with them?
- If not, are there any patterns in who ranks the different strategies differently?

PHONE ACTIVITIES

Next, tell students to think about all of the different things they do with their phones. (If students do not have phones, they may think about



things they do with other digital devices such as tablets, computers or game consoles.) If you like, you can have students do this in pairs or small groups.

They should be able to think of at least ten different things. They can think either in terms of apps (email, each different social network app, and so on) or why they're using your phone (contact your parents, check the weather, check in with your friends, and so on.) They can also use a mix of both.

Distribute the *Phone Activities* handout and ask the students to sort the activities into those that have a clear purpose (such as checking the weather) and those that do not (such as watching videos). Next, have them pick two activities that do have an obvious end point. These could be ones they do the most often, or ones that are most likely to get them caught in the “phone loop.”

For each activity, have them write what the purpose of the activity is (for example, checking the weather forecast) and how they will know when they're finished (for instance, when they know what to wear for the day.)

DEFEATING DISTRACTION EXERCISES

Distribute the handout *Defeating Distraction Exercises* and go through the activity with the students. Explain that building better habits is just like any kind of exercise. It takes time and practice, and you have to keep going even if you don't succeed right away.

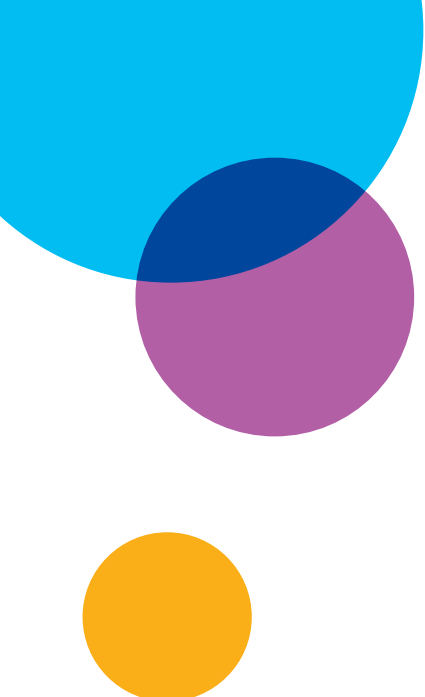
If students have digital devices in the classroom, you can have them try the “Do Just One Thing Challenge” and “App Trials” exercises in the class.

Have them do at least **two** of the exercises and write a reflection on the experience for the next class.

If you like, you can have students share their experiences with the class as well. Remind them that they shouldn't feel bad if they found any of these exercises hard to start with. If you were trying to lift weights, you wouldn't feel bad if you couldn't lift a fifty-pound weight right away – you'd start with smaller weights until you got stronger.

DESIGNED FOR DISTRACTION

Now have students think about the features of their phones or favourite apps that make it easy to lose track of time, that keep them coming back to the app, or that make them stay longer.



If you think students need more grounding in the idea that we are influenced by digital tools' features and defaults, show the Digital Media Literacy 101 video [Digital Media Experiences are Shaped by the Tools We Use](#).

Have them use the *Designed for Distraction* handout to record at least four features and identify how each one affects them.

Next, ask students to identify two features they can adjust to make them less distracting. These could be settings within the app itself, their web browser, or their phone.

Once students have done this, they should identify two features where they can change their habits to better control how they use them.

PAPER PROTOTYPE: MINDFUL BY DESIGN

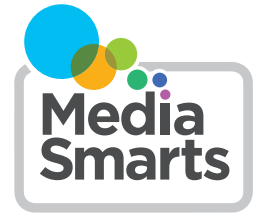
Distribute the assignment sheet *Paper Prototype: Mindful by Design* and go through it with students. Explain that they are going to imagine that they could make tech companies change their products in any way you wanted, then choose one of the apps they've thought about in this unit and re-design at least three things about it. These changes should encourage better habits and more mindful use.

The redesign will have three parts:

1. A written explanation outlining three ways you would change the app and why. You can change either the app's features, defaults or both. (For instance, you could either remove autoplay as a feature, or have it turned off by default.)
2. A **paper prototype** of the redesigned app.
 - a. Paper prototypes are simple design sketches that show you one "screenshot" of an app. The purpose is to show how that part of an app works. You can have students use post-its, stickers, markers, or construction paper to draw attention to key information, or have them use a prototyping app like Figma or Penpot.
3. A written explanation of how each modified feature will encourage healthier habits and more mindful use.

If you like, you can have students do this activity individually, in pairs or in small groups.

DEFEATING DISTRACTION



Defeating Distraction: Strategies

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RANKING STRATEGIES

Don't do this activity until you've watched the [Defeating Digital Distraction](#) video.

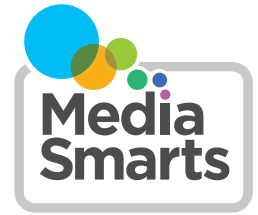
Here's the list of strategies from the *Defeating Digital Distraction* video.

Rank them in order of usefulness:

Put the one you think is most useful at the top of your list. Then rank them in order of usefulness.

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|--|----|
| • Make it harder to turn on your phone (or other device) | 1. |
| • Tell yourself what you're going to do before you use your phone and what you'll do when you're done. | 2. |
| • Set a timer or use screen time reminders. | 3. |
| • Choose times of the day when you don't use (or don't have) your phone. | 4. |
| • Choose times of the day to do things you enjoy on your phone | 5. |

DEFEATING DISTRACTION



Phone Activities

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Think about all of the different things you do with your phone.

You can think of them either in terms of apps (email, each different social network app, and so on.) or why you're using your phone (contact your parents, check the weather, check in with your friends, and so on.) Or you can use a mix of both!

Then you'll think about which ones have are finite, with a clear end (like checking the weather) and which aren't (like watching videos.)

DEFEATING DISTRACTION

Now choose **two** activities that you've identified as having a natural end. These might be the ones you do most often or the ones that are most likely to get you stuck in a "telephone loop."

For each of these three activities, answer two questions: **What am I doing?** and **How will I know when I'm done?**

ACTIVITY #1:

What am I doing?

How will I know when I'm done?

ACTIVITY #2:

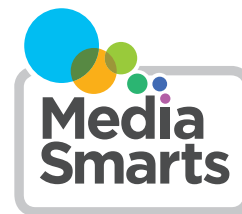
What am I doing?

How will I know when I'm done?

ACTIVITY #3:

What am I doing?

How will I know when I'm done?



DEFEATING DISTRACTION

Defeating Distraction Exercises

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Building better habits is just like any kind of exercise. It takes time and practice, and you have to keep going even if you don't succeed right away.

Here are some exercises you can do to build better tech habits. If you don't have a phone, use whatever device (tablet, laptop, etc.) you mostly use instead. Try at least two:

THE DO-JUST-ONE-THING CHALLENGE

- Pick one of the finite activities that you just identified, like checking the weather.
- Unlock your phone (or other device).
- Do just that activity. Stop when you've reached the end point you identified (for example, when you know what the day's weather is going to be.
- Lock your phone.

APP TRIALS

- Pick one of the activities that has no natural end, like playing a game, scrolling your social media feed, or watching videos.
- Decide how much time you'd like to spend doing it (for instance, five minutes watching videos.)
- Set a timer going with that time.
- Do the activity until the timer goes off, and then close that app and put your phone away.

PHONE PENNY MARATHON

- Guess how often you check your phone every hour.
- Fill one pocket with pennies or other small coins or objects.
- Pick an hour of the day when you usually use your phone at least once, or set a timer for an hour.
- Each time you unlock your phone, move one of the pennies to another pocket.

- At the end of the hour, count the pennies in the second pocket to see how many times you unlocked your phone.

If you don't have any pennies or other small items you can use (or you don't have pockets), use this variation:

- Set your phone face-down in front of you.
- Each time you unlock your phone, put it down a bit further away when you're done.
- How far away from you is the phone at the end of the hour?

NOTIFICATION SPRINTS

- Choose a frequency for checking your notifications (how often you will check them - for instance, once every hour, or once every half hour.)
- Don't check any notifications outside of that time (except for ones that are clearly emergencies.)
- When the time comes, check all your notifications, respond to any that need responses as quickly as possible, then put away your phone.

RABBIT HOLE JUMP

- Think about times and places where you often take out or turn on your phone without thinking. List at least two.
- Brainstorm other things you could do at those times. These could be things you plan ahead to do with your phone (read an e-book, do a language

DEFEATING DISTRACTION

lesson, and so on) or things you can do without your phone (do a breathing or grounding exercise, read a physical book or comic, watch license plates and try to come up with the funniest things the letters could stand for, and so on.)

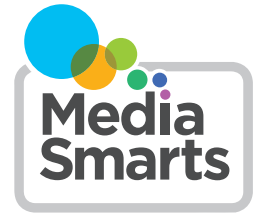
- Pick two of those things and write down how to be ready to do them (bring a book, make sure your language app will be the first thing you see when you turn on your phone, and so on.)

THE “TEN MINUTES LATER” METHOD

- When you feel the urge to take out or turn on your phone, set a timer for ten minutes and put your phone away.
- If you still want to use your phone after the ten minutes have passed, turn it on and do whatever it was you wanted to do.

Once you’ve done at least **two** of the exercises, write a short reflection that answers these questions:

- How hard or easy were the exercises? What were the hardest or easiest parts?
- Did anything surprise you when doing the exercises?
- How hard do you think it would be to do these exercises every day? What would make it hard or easy?
- Which of these exercises would you be most likely to keep doing? Why? (If there are none that you would keep doing, why not?)



DEFEATING DISTRACTION

Designed for Distraction

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Think about the **features** (what you **can** do) and the **default settings** (what's **easy or obvious** to do) of your phone or your favorite apps. Which ones make you lose track of time, draw you back to them, or cause you to spend more time on them?

Write them down in the table below.

In the left column, list the features of your favorite apps that distract you. In the right column, write down how they affect you.

FEATURE OR DEFAULT	HOW IT AFFECT YOU

Now go through the list you just made. Try to find **two** features or defaults that you can actually **change**, either in the settings of the app, your internet browser, or your device.

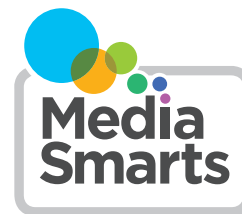
Feature/default:

Change:

Feature/default:

Change:

DEFEATING DISTRACTION



Paper Prototype: Mindful by Design

Imagine that you could make tech companies change their products in any way you wanted.

Choose one of the apps you've thought about in this unit and re-design at least three things about it. These changes should encourage better habits

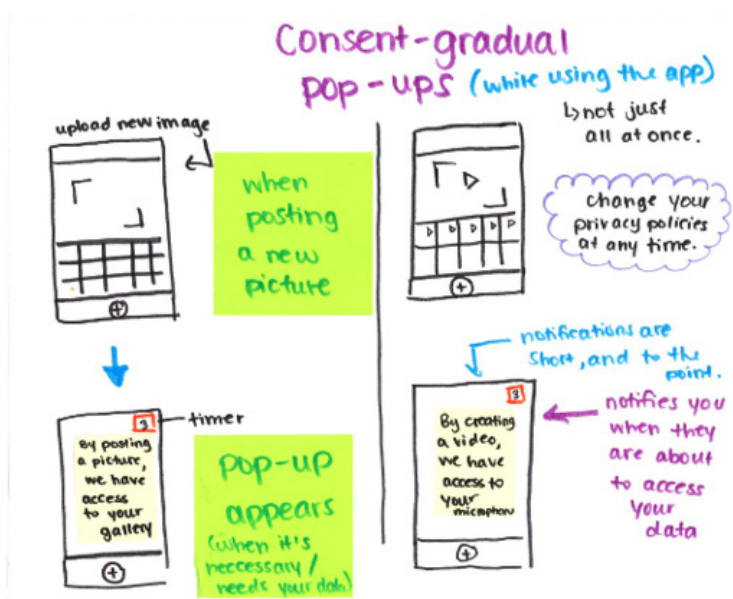
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Paper prototypes are simple design sketches that show you one "screenshot" of an app. The purpose is to show how that part of an app works, so they don't necessarily have to look good or have a lot of detail. You can use post-its, stickers, markers, construction paper or anything else you want to draw attention to key information.

Here's an example of paper prototypes that students made about how they would prefer to decide whether or not apps can collect their data:



3. A **written explanation** of how each modified feature will encourage healthier habits and more mindful use.