

Do doodle: Research shows doodling can help memory recall

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Doodling while listening can help with remembering details, rather than implying that the mind is wandering as is the common perception. According to a study published today in the journal *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, subjects given a doodling task while listening to a dull phone message had a 29% improved recall compared to their non-doodling counterparts.

40 members of the research panel of the Medical Research Council's Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit in Cambridge were asked to listen to a two and a half minute tape giving several names of people and places, and were told to write down only the names of people going to a party. 20 of the participants were asked to shade in shapes on a piece of paper at the same time, but paying no attention to neatness. Participants were not asked to doodle naturally so that they would not become self-conscious. None of the participants were told it was a memory test.

After the tape had finished, all participants in the study were asked to recall the eight names of the party-goers which they were asked to write down, as well as eight additional place names which were included as incidental information. The doodlers recalled on average 7.5 names of people and places compared to only 5.8 by the non-doodlers.

"If someone is doing a boring task, like listening to a dull telephone conversation, they may start to daydream," said study researcher Professor Jackie Andrade, Ph.D., of the School of Psychology, University of Plymouth. "Daydreaming distracts them from the task,

resulting in poorer performance. A simple task, like doodling, may be sufficient to stop daydreaming without affecting performance on the main task."

"In psychology, tests of memory or attention will often use a second task to selectively block a particular mental process. If that process is important for the main cognitive task then performance will be impaired. My research shows that beneficial effects of secondary tasks, such as doodling, on concentration may offset the effects of selective blockade," added Andrade. "This study suggests that in everyday life doodling may be something we do because it helps to keep us on track with a boring task, rather than being an unnecessary distraction that we should try to resist doing."

More information: Andrade J.; What Does Doodling do?; *Appl. Cognit. Psychol.* 23: 1-7 (2009); DOI: 10.1002/acp.1561

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