8 The Hazards of Multitasking

We live in a fast-paced world, and many people these days seem to feel as though it is necessary to complete as many tasks as possible at the same time in order to keep up. Multitasking, as this behaviour is known, may provide some with the sense that they are making efficient use of their time, but this is far from the truth. What is more, juggling more than one can handle can have detrimental effects on a person's physical health and mental well-being.

Contrary to popular belief, the human brain is ill-equipped to process multiple forms of information simultaneously – so ill-equipped that what we believe to be multitasking may not even be possible. When people attempt to engage in multiple activities at once, what their brains are actually doing is frantically switching between tasks. Rather than giving their undivided attention to a single activity, people engaged in multitasking are able to focus on each thing they are trying to do for only a few seconds at a time. Repeatedly moving between tasks is, unsurprisingly, exhausting and makes it extremely difficult to filter information and recall it afterwards. Ultimately, multitasking is counterproductive in that it slows us down. Seeing one task through to completion before beginning another one is far more efficient, as the time it takes the brain to jump back and forth and refocus on an activity it was previously engaged in is time wasted.

If that wasn't bad enough, multitasking can lead to poor health. When the brain, the control system for the body's nervous system, attempts to conduct multiple tasks at the same time, it almost always releases stress hormones and adrenaline. When this happens, the adrenaline provides a temporary energy boost, often resulting in the body accomplishing what it has been tasked to do, however inefficiently that may be. At the same time, though, the release of stress hormones causes blood pressure to rise, which most people know can be dangerous because it makes the heart work harder. While being stressed from time to time is to be expected, experiencing it all the time, as an increasing number of us do, can make us sick. In fact, the chronically stressed not only experience headaches, digestion problems, and a general sense of unease on a regular basis, but they are also vulnerable to exhaustion, depression, and viruses, and are more likely to develop potentially fatal conditions, such as heart disease. All in all, while multitasking may seem like the only way to cope in a world full of stimuli, its potential to damage both our health and productivity is reason enough to avoid it.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage?

Write

TRUE	*if the statement agrees with the information*
FALSE	*if the statement contradicts the information*
NOT GIVEN	*if there is no information on this*

20 The brain can focus on several things at once for extended periods of time.

21 Switching between tasks makes it hard to remember information.

22 The boost that adrenaline provides helps increase a person's overall efficiency.

23 People who experience stress from time to time are the most likely to develop serious conditions.

fast paced adj. nhanh, hối hả **juggle** v. tung hứng, lo liệu đồng thời nhiều việc **detrimental** adj. độc hại **simultaneously** adv. đồng thời **frantically** adv. cuống cuồng **filter** v. lọc, thấm qua **counterproductive** adj. hiệu quả đảo ngược **see through** phr. (không từ bỏ) làm đến cùng **back and forth** phr. đi qua, đi lại/ qua lại **chronically** adv. kinh niên **unease** n. bất an, bất ổn **all in all** phr. nói chung, nhìn chung

LIVEWORKSHEETS

9 Books in the Middle Ages

The story of how the written word emerged from the shadows of the medieval period

At the beginning of the European Middle Ages, books were extremely rare. Those that existed were produced entirely by hand and were very expensive, meaning that other than the Catholic Church, which produced them, only the wealthy ever saw them, let alone owned them. Furthermore, education was only available to the clergy and the most affluent members of society. This meant that the vast majority of the population spent their lives labouring in fields, remaining completely illiterate, with everything they knew about history and mythology limited to the spoken-word stories and songs delivered to them by the bards, minstrels, and poets of the day. Society functioned in this manner for hundreds of years during this period until the printed book was introduced, marking a turning point in European society and changing how information was passed onto future generations.

The main reason so few books existed had to do with the fact that making one was an arduous process that took years to complete. Animal hides had to be cured to produce pages, and then ink had to be made by mixing pigments derived from various sources. This was followed by preparing quills with which to write and ruling lines on each page to guide where the script would be placed. Only once all these preparations had been completed could a scribe actually write the book, which involved transcribing every word by hand. Afterwards, illustrations could be added, the pages could be decorated with borders made of gold, silver, and copper leaf, and everything would be bound together. Essentially, the labor intensiveness involved in finishing a single copy of a book meant that very few were ever made and that only the elite could buy one.

Without a doubt, it was the Catholic Church that maintained control over most books during the Middle Ages. Some monasteries even made it their mission to keep libraries full of the literary, scientific, and philosophical works of the ancient Greeks and Romans, preserving them through the ages. The ability of monasteries to have so much information yet keep such a tight rein on it was due to the fact that the Church was the most important facet of society at the time, above even the nobility, and that clergy members were among the few people capable of scribing and illustrating. Tasks like these were in such high demand among people wanting copies of the Bible that by the 14th century, certain monasteries were set aside for the sole purpose of producing them.

In 1445, a man by the name of Johann Gutenberg forever changed the lives of people in Europe, and eventually the entire world, with his invention of the printing press. Gutenberg's press could produce books quickly and cheaply, which resulted in two major changes in European society. The first was that papal authorities were no longer able to control literature and information; not only could books be printed outside of monasteries, but they were also available at such low prices that even the common man could purchase them. The second was that written works found their way to the general public. This incited more people to learn to read and write, which increased literacy rates considerably.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage?

Write

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24 Oral accounts provided historical knowledge during the Early Middle Ages.

25 A special technique used in monasteries kept books preserved.

26 The power of the Catholic Church was equal to that of the nobility.

27 The printing press loosened the control the Church had over information.

let alone phr. chưa nói đến, huống hồ **clergy** n. giới tăng lữ **affluent** adj. giàu có **bard** n. thi sĩ, nhà thơ **minstrel** n. người hát rong **arduous** adj. khó khăn, gian khổ **hide** n. da **cure** v. xử lí **pigment** n. chất nhuộm màu **quill** n. bút lông **scribe** n. người sao chép bản thảo **transcribe** v. sao chép lại **border** n. bờ, mép, viền **monastery** n. tu viện **keep a tight rein on** phr. khống chế chặt chẽ, kiểm soát **facet** n. mặt, khía cạnh **set aside** phr. để dành, dự trữ **papal** adj. (thuộc) giáo hoàng **incite** v. khuyến khích, khích động **literacy rate** phr. tỉ lệ biết chữ

LIVEWORKSHEETS

10 Europe's Commercial Revolution

The social and economic effects of international trade and colonisation

Europeans were introduced to spices, silks, and other goods from the Middle East during the Crusades, a series of holy wars aimed at driving Muslims from the region. Over the course of nearly two hundred years of war, many Middle Eastern products had become highly sought after, so when the Crusades finally came to an end in 1291, trade between Europe and the Middle East did not. Business between the two regions was carried out freely until 1453, when Constantinople was conquered. This made land routes inaccessible, motivating Europeans to find new ways of reaching the Middle East, and by extension, Asia. These developments, combined with the rise of England, Portugal, and Spain as European powers, ushered in an age during which lucrative trade networks were established and new lands were colonised.

Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage to the New World and Vasco da Gama's circumnavigation of Africa six years later were among Europe's first successes. Not long after, colonies were set up in the Americas, and trade routes connecting Europe to the rest of the world were established. In addition to spices and silks from the Middle East and Asia, Europeans began to import raw materials from Africa and the Americas to use in the production of goods that would be sold both domestically and abroad. Known as the Commercial Revolution, this period of European economic expansion between the 16th and 18th centuries had wide-reaching consequences.

One of the most immediate effects was inflation. Prior to the Commercial Revolution, much of Europe's gold and silver had been used to trade in the Middle East. With gold and silver mines exhausted and little money remaining in circulation, a downward trend in prices occurred. However, gold and silver began to pour into Europe once precious metals were discovered in the New World. Spain alone imported more than 180 tonnes of gold and more than 16,000 tonnes of silver from its colonies between 1500 and 1650, and as this new money entered circulation, prices rose dramatically. Inflation was further compounded by a rising demand for goods from a population recovering from the Black Death.

The Commercial Revolution also impacted society profoundly. The currency surplus was beneficial for labourers, who could demand higher wages, but it also meant that it was costlier for the nobility to hire them. As a result, many members of the aristocracy had to sell off properties piecemeal to maintain their lifestyles. The buyers were not other members of the nobility but newly wealthy merchants, many of whom fenced off the land, breaking with the tradition of the aristocracy permitting the peasants to cultivate it. With no fields to tend, farmers moved to cities and ultimately became the new urban workforce.

Although trade during the Commercial Revolution was highly profitable, war, weather, and piracy could cause major losses. Consequently, organisations called joint-stock companies were established to mitigate these hazards. Considered the forerunners of modern corporations, these businesses were privately owned companies that sold stock to investors for a share of the profits. The money earned from selling shares was used to fund projects and acquire trade goods. And although there was still a chance that shipments would be destroyed, stolen, or lost, given the fact that there were generally numerous investors, the risk borne by the company and each stockholder was minimal.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage?

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28 Trade between the Middle East and Europe stopped when the Crusades ended.

29 Spain imported more gold and silver from the Americas than any other European state.

30 The aristocracy once allowed poor farmers to use their land for agricultural purposes.

31 Joint-stock companies minimised financial risk because multiple people invested money in them.

Đáp án-Dịch nghĩa-Chú giải trang 346

colonisation n. thuộc địa hóa spice n. gia vị the Crusades phr. cuộc Thập Tự Chinh sought after phr. được săn đón lucrative adj. có lời, sinh lời circumnavigation n. đi vòng quanh bằng đường biển raw material phr. nguyên liệu thô domestically adv. trong nước downward trend phr. xu hướng đi xuống precious metal phr. kim loại quý the Black Death phr. Cái Chết Đen surplus n. thặng dư piecemeal adv. từng phần một, dần dần tend v. trông nom, chăm sóc joint-stock company phr. công ty cổ phần

LIVEWORKSHEETS