

Mind Wandering



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Mind wandering is a state in which we allow our minds to roam freely in their own mental space for a while, which is to say that we apply a minimum of effortful discipline to our thinking while we are doing it. Since mind wandering and daydreaming are indistinguishable from laziness they sometimes fall under suspicion, which is unfortunate because they are essential to creativity. Cognitive scientists have begun referring to the distinctive pattern of interaction among brain regions, whenever we are *not* engaged in an effortful mental task, as

the *Default Mode Network* of the brain. Mind wandering is a fully conscious activity that consumes every bit as much metabolic energy as an effortful mental exercise like working through a difficult math problem. Meandering among the less attended pathways of your mind, you encounter latent images and ideas that you apprehend and incorporate into ever broader networks of association by means of your attention. This is how ideas are formulated and developed, without effort. This is half of what we call thinking.

The other half is effortful and systematic. Systematic thinking utilizes whatever rules, logic and biases are available to arrive at decisions, take action and produce results. Systematic thinking strives to confine itself to what has already been learned. Systematic thinking is judgmental and restrictive in the service of competence and reliability. Systematic thinking is effortful. The common misbelief that only systematic thinking is productive leads to exhaustion, paralysis and distress. The fruits of thought are grown organically and harvested systematically. Systematic thinking and mind wandering should resonate and alternate in their own natural rhythm. Thinking doesn't need to be so hard. Trust me. Call me.

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