How to Trick Yourself into Improving Your Performance

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You've probably heard by now that trying to multitask is a terrible idea. One main reason is that our neural wiring does not allow us to split our attention: when we try to attend to two things at once, all we actually do is switch our focus back and forth between them. Darting our attentional spotlight around in this way decreases our performance, as multiple studies have shown. The consequences can be deadly: texting while driving is more dangerous than drunk driving.

Even magicians use a 'divide-and-conquer" approach with spectators' attention, forcing us to split our focus by overwhelming our processing capabilities—which in turn renders us much less capable of figuring out the hidden methods underneath the magic.

All in all, the evidence is there that you shouldn't multitask. But new scientific data suggest that you *should tell yourself you're multitasking*—even if you're not. The lie might improve your performance.

The research, published last month in Psychological Science and conducted by scientists from the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University, tested 8,242 research participants across a series of 32 studies.