Let’s begin with a little experiment: Whatever you do, as you’re reading this short article, don’t think about polar bears.

This is, you may have recognized, a classic thought exercise from the writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In Winter Notes on Summer Impressions, in a passage that launched a thousand psychology theses, he wrote, “Try to pose for yourself this task: not to think of a polar bear, and you will see that the cursed thing will come to mind every minute.”

“‘I’m interested in trying to make people better at finding stuff,’” said Corbin Cunningham, a graduate fellow in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences at Hopkins, and the lead author of a study published last month in the journal Psychological Science. “Imagine you’re a professional searcher like a radiologist. The act of finding something kind of comes with two parts: It comes with knowing what you’re looking for and being able to disassociate from distracting information.”

Read the whole story: The Atlantic