

The Importance Of Mind-Wandering

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Wired:

It's easy to underestimate boredom. The mental condition, after all, is defined by its lack of stimulation; it's the mind at its most apathetic. This is why the poet Joseph Brodsky described boredom as a "psychological Sahara," a cognitive desert "that starts right in your bedroom and spurns the horizon." The hands of the clock seem to stop; the stream of consciousness slows to a drip. We want to be anywhere but here.

However, as Brodsky also noted, boredom and its synonyms can also become a crucial tool of creativity. "Boredom is your window," the poet declared. "Once this window opens, don't try to shut it; on the contrary, throw it wide open."

Brodsky was right. The secret isn't boredom per se: *it's how boredom makes us think*. When people are immersed in monotony, they automatically lapse into a very special form of brain activity: mind-wandering. In a culture obsessed with efficiency, mind-wandering is often derided as a lazy habit, the kind of thinking we rely on when we don't really want to think. (Freud regarded mind-wandering as an example of "infantile" thinking.) It's a sign of procrastination, not productivity.

Read the full story: [*Wired*](#)