

The incredible power of ignoring everything

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The Washington Post:

Fyodor Dostoevsky, the 19th Century Russian author, once famously challenged his brother to try out a strange task: Don't think about a polar bear right now. "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," Dostoevsky writes in "Winter Notes on Summer Impressions."

Since then, people have puzzled over what happens in the brain when we try intentionally to ignore things. Can we actually succeed in ignoring certain information — and improve our focus on everything else? Or does trying to ignore something actually divert the brain toward that thing, sucking up brain space like Dostoevsky's polar bear?

In the past, psychological research has been divided. But a new paper from researchers at Johns Hopkins University reconsiders that debate, and suggests that learning to ignore certain things is a powerful tool for helping people focus.

Read the whole story: [The Washington Post](#)