

# Stillness Lost

The frequent texting, the flipping back and forth between apps on your tablet, the intermittent glancing at notifications of social media updates.

What these actions both cause and represent is a lack of stillness – that inner state of restfulness needed to focus on an activity for a significant amount of time.

Chances are that many of you suffer from a lack of stillness. I'll admit that I do, too. And chances are that, like me, many of you don't really like it, but find it tricky to remedy given the technological expectations and noise of the world in which we live.

Some people are able to own smartphones and tablets and use them temperately without much difficulty. But in my experience, they represent a minority. It's not surprising, really. After all, it's the job of the makers of these devices to encourage you to use them frequently and *intemperately*. I've especially noticed this when I moved from a Galaxy III to an iPhone 5. The iPhone 5 is harder to leave in the pocket. Why? It's more efficient than the Galaxy. It beckons me to pick it up again and again to check my email.

A lack of stillness has detrimental effects on our lives. Aristotle and others throughout Western tradition have regarded contemplation as the highest activity of human beings, and intimately connected with happiness. Frequent flipping around on our phones and tablets doesn't really promote contemplation, as you might have noticed.

It can also have detrimental effects on the lives of those around us. In an NPR [article](#) from earlier this year, pediatricians and psychologists recounted that children whose parents spend an inordinate amount of time glued to their phones or computers are more likely to act out and feel uninteresting and unwanted.

A lack of stillness is also the enemy of education.

In order to grow in wisdom, one must have stillness in

his or her life. One must be able to give sustained attention to books in order to more fully plumb their depths. One must take the time to patiently struggle through problems in order to move on to more difficult ones in the future. One must have periods of silence in which he can assess and reflect upon the ideas that he has encountered. Through a still, inner constitution, mere information becomes knowledge.

At this time, however, school districts are increasingly putting into students' hands the very devices that rob us of stillness, and that have a strong potential to rob students of their education.

If your school district doesn't already have iPads for all of its students, an initiative is most likely on the horizon. In some cases it's done with the good intention of saving money that usually goes to the astronomic costs of textbooks. Most of the time, however, I find that the reason for pushing iPads on students is a superficial attempt to fulfill the "T" (for "Technology") in STEM education.

When it comes to iPads and education, I believe that the costs ultimately outweigh the benefits. What students might gain in access to information, they will ultimately pay for in the stillness they lose with increased screen-time.

The founders and CEOs of technology companies [know this](#), which is why they severely limit their own children's exposure to the devices that have made them rich. Apparently, their attitude is "Do as I sell, not as I do."

In his 1934 poem "The Rock," T.S. Eliot famously lamented, "Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

Where have "life," "wisdom," and "knowledge" gone? They probably departed on the same train as stillness.