



# Limiting Distraction to Increase Focus

Foundations: A Student Success Series

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Multitasking

Reducing Distractions in the Classroom

Reducing Distractions when Studying

Strategies to Increase Focus





# Individual Differences, Neurodiversity, and Neurodivergence.

All brains are different!



2 Things for  
you to  
Remember:

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1. Humans are not  
good at multitasking

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2. If you think you are  
a good multitasker,  
go back to #1.



Let's try a simple experiment....

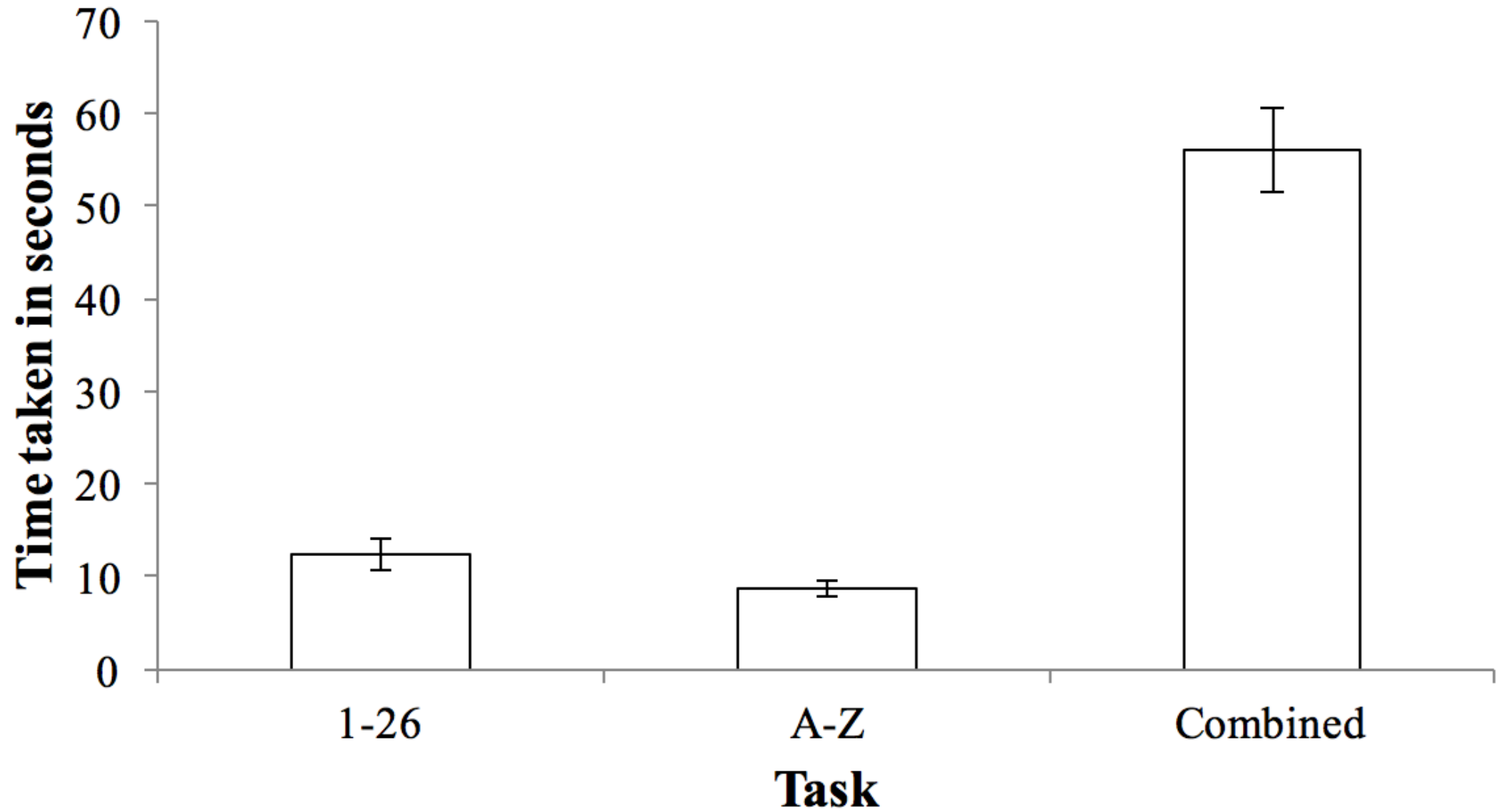
Recite the following out loud:

Count 1-26

Say the letters from A-Z

Now, alternate between the numbers and letters.





Average amount of time to re-focus after  
a distraction...?

23 min 15 sec

So, getting distracted 3  
times a day may cost you  
one hour of time!





What could be a distraction?

- Internal thoughts?
- Music?
- Background noise?
- Videos?
- Friends?
- Social Media?
- Phones?







# Reducing Distractions in the Classroom


# Reducing Distractions in the Classroom


- Should I take notes on paper or on the computer?
  - When distractions are removed, both result in similar levels of performance
  - Computers *may* invite more distractions to you/others





## Reducing distractions when taking notes on your computer

- Only have your note-taking app open
  - Turn off any chat/email notifications
  - Don't open up a web browser—too easy to endlessly go from website to website
  - Think of something you want to look up? Jot down a note so you can look it up later
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A photograph of a lecture hall. In the foreground, many students are seated at desks, each with a laptop open. They are looking towards the front of the room. At the front, a large projection screen displays the text "Heart Muscle: The Heart As a Pump". A lecturer in a white coat is standing near the screen, and another person is visible to the left. The room has a high ceiling and a wooden door on the left side.

What about  
distractions we  
can't control?

Choose where you sit, how you sit, and what you are holding.

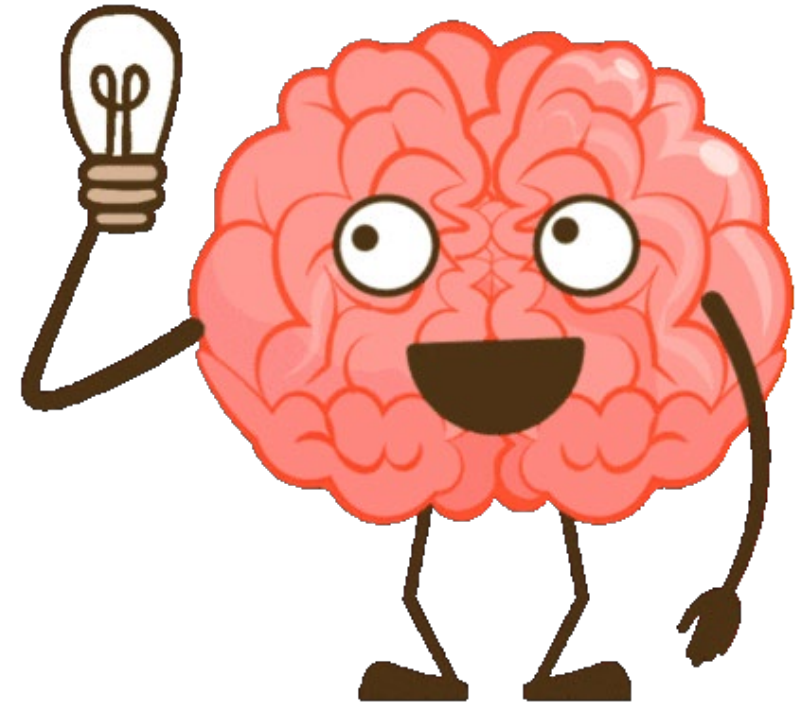
- Front of room
  - Less distracted by screens in front of you
  - More social pressure to pay attention
- Does looking out the window distract you?
- Do people walking by the classroom distract you?
- Are friends next to you distracting you?
- Be aware of how you sit – does it encourage active or passive engagement?
- Do you need to be holding something (a fidget, a pencil, a pen) – what else can support or cue you to engage?

# Mind Wandering (+/-) in the Classroom

- Students at the first 1/3 of the classroom report less (-) mind wandering (Lindquist & McLean, [2011](#))
- Is there something you're worried about? Something you need to do later?
  - Unfinished business creates internal distractions
  - Parking lot: Jot down your thoughts, reminders, etc. right before class or have a place where you can quickly jot them down during class
- Strategy: Ask yourself regularly (every 5-10 min)
  - Am I attending/focused?
  - Do I have any needs to address?

Turn mind-wandering  
into mind-wondering!

- Melissa Norton





# Reducing Distractions when Studying

Which is the best place to study?







## Control your environment



What kind of environment ***motivates*** you to work and helps you concentrate?

What activities most ***distract*** you from your work?

# Your phone as a distraction...



# What can we do about cell phone distraction?

- Get radical.
- Silence it or power off.
- Put it in another room or at least where you can't see it.
- Avoid pulling it out just to check it. If you have to, be very aware of the time it takes to re-focus.
- If using, apply screentime apps or other ways to set limits and [inspire focus](#)



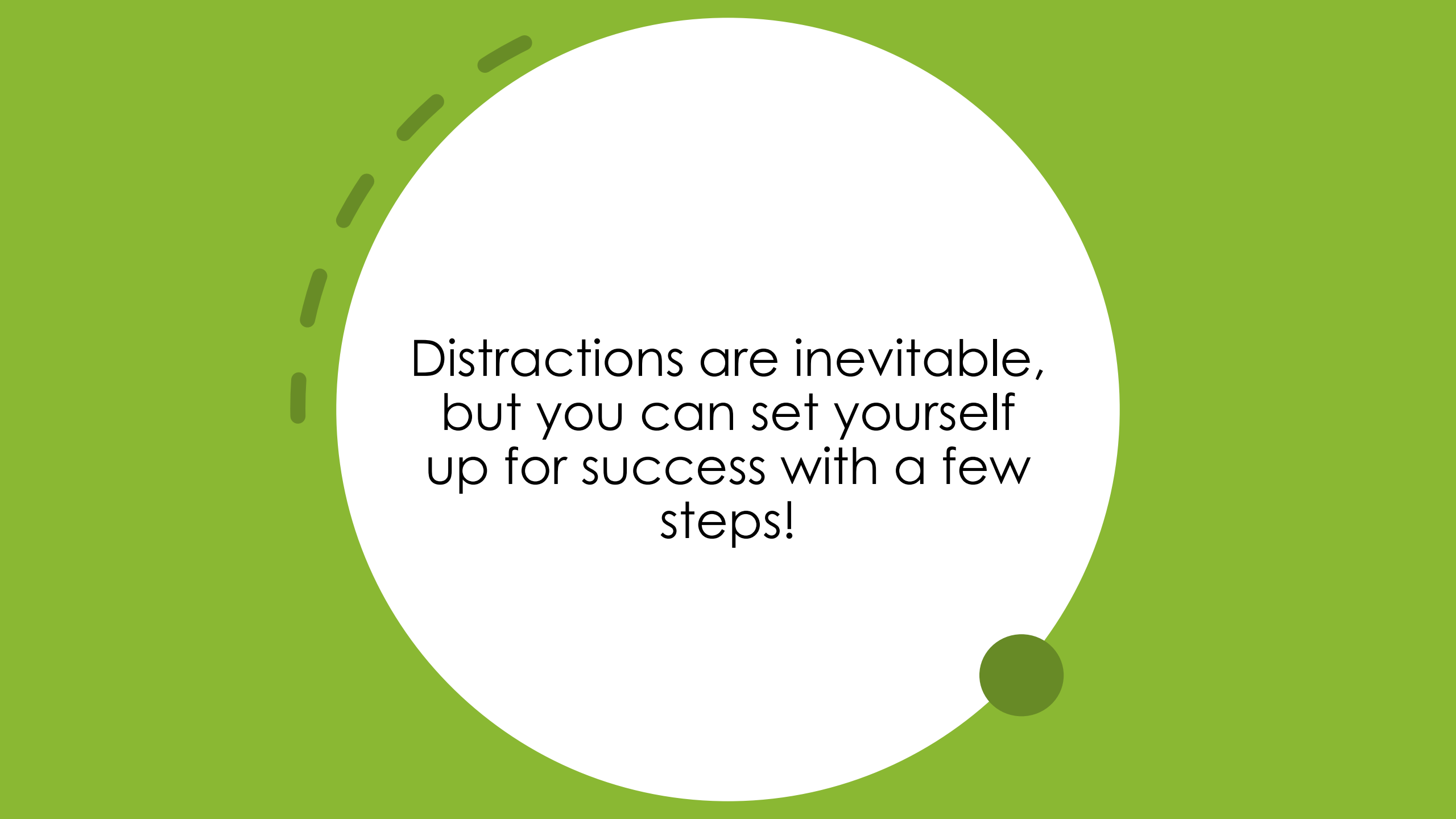
# Mind Wandering when Studying

- Reading out loud reduces mind wandering.
  - Listening to text increases mind wandering.
- Increase your interaction with the material
  - Question yourself
  - Take notes
  - Explain
- Strategy: Ask yourself regularly (every 5-10 min)
  - Am I attending/focused?
  - Do I have any needs to address?

# The Importance of Breaks

Taking short, effective breaks is essential to maintaining focus

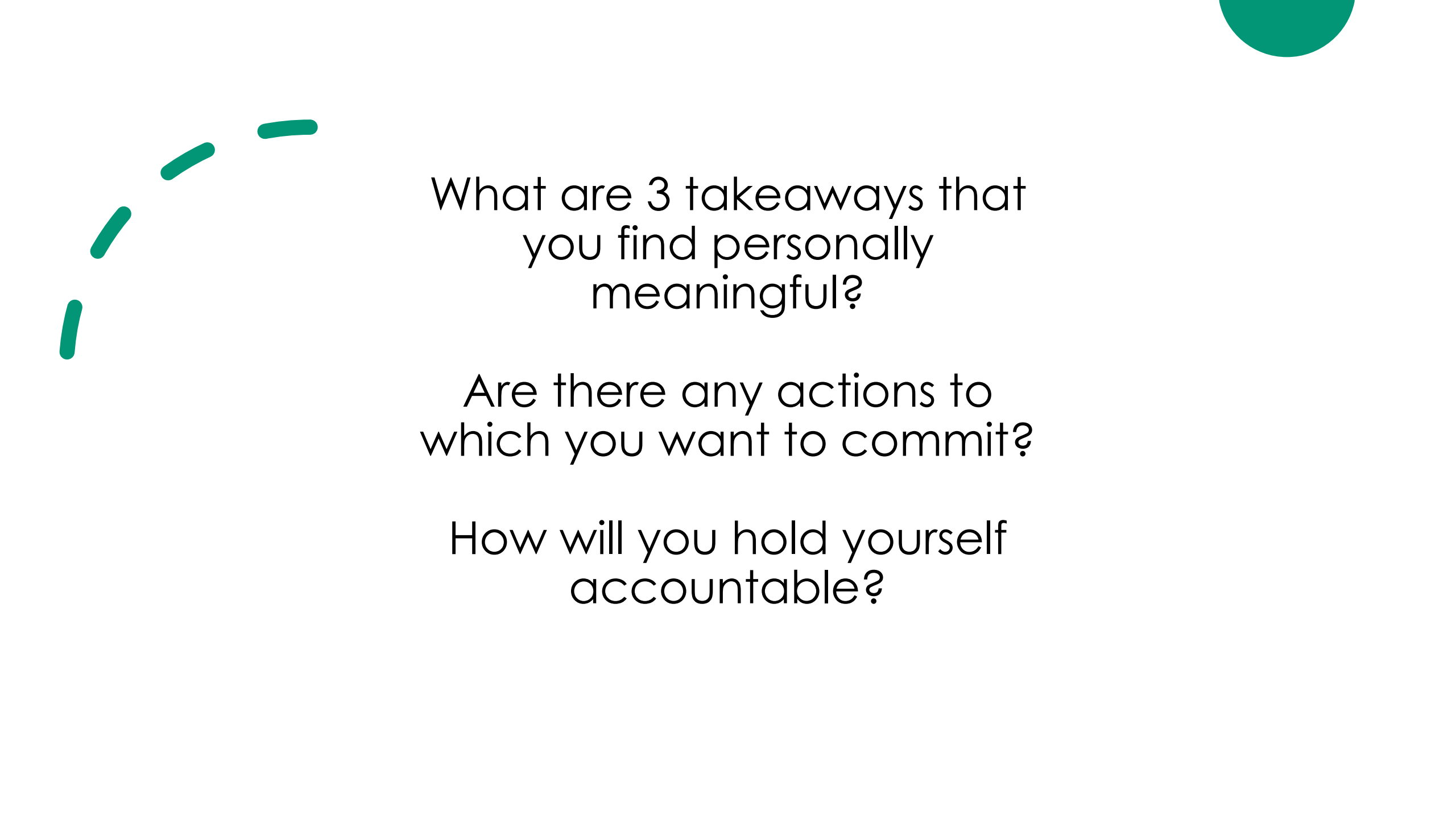
- 20-20-20 rule
  - every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away, for 20 seconds
- Try movement (don't ignore your body)
  - pushups, jumping jacks, simple exercises, stretching, quick walk, etc.
- Chose non-distracting activities
  - limit phone or media use
  - [Wonder Box](#)
- Hydration and Nutrition
- Engage in brief stress-reduction techniques
  - stress greatly impacts focus!!



Distractions are inevitable,  
but you can set yourself  
up for success with a few  
steps!

# Strategies for Increasing Focus

1. Be aware of the major factors **for you** that can lead to distraction. Internal? External?
2. Make a plan for external distractions:
  - Phone/computer
  - Environment
3. Make a plan for internal distractions:
  - Parking lot
  - Pomodoro method
4. Place meaning/value on your task – you have to care!
5. Get sufficient sleep each night (and other self-care!)
6. Engage in check-ins to raise awareness.



What are 3 takeaways that  
you find personally  
meaningful?

Are there any actions to  
which you want to commit?

How will you hold yourself  
accountable?