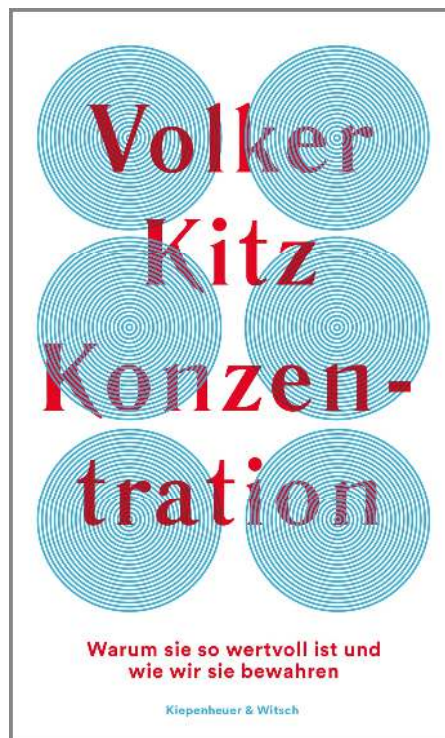


CONCENTRATION

Why It's So Valuable And How We Can
Preserve It



Sample translation pp. 11-30, 81-91
Translated by Sophie Schlondorff

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[pp. 11-30]

• **Itinerary** •

Stephen King will challenge Mozart ...

Head

How to distract yourself from distractions

Eyes

How to calm the images

Ears

How to find the soundtrack for concentration

Nose

How to breathe concentration

Mouth

How to promote concentration with sugar (without eating any)

Neck

How to keep disruptions from being a pain in your neck when working

Shoulders

How to choose between being alone and with others

Chest

How to concentrate effortlessly

Back

How to stop putting things off

Arms

How to decide what to get done simultaneously

Elbows

How to reduce pain

Hands

How to test concentration

Belly

How to eat to improve concentration

Navel

How to control your impulses

Skin

How to concentrate

Backside

How to avoid being careless

Lap

How much water you should drink

Legs

How children learn to concentrate

Knees

How to fortify yourself with restlessness

Feet

How everything fits together

Evidence, suggestions

Acknowledgments

In this book, Stephen King will challenge Mozart ...

... and reveal a trick from the Italian artworld to Goethe. There's a professor who won't let sleeping dogs lie and another who forces his students to wear an embarrassing t-shirt. At two-thousand-eighty-two meters above sea level, the world's most dangerous water drips from a shower. A cat turns down a birthday invitation.

You yourself will feel the vibration of a smartphone and believe your eyes – though there's no reason for either.

All of the above occurs in the search for what human beings learned in their time as wild animals and what their survival depends upon to this day: concentration.

Without concentration, nothing works and nothing is fun – not work, love, play, or conversations with friends. Not being alone or with others, reason or creativity. Not even restful sleep.

Without concentration, it's all for nothing.

Yet concentration is becoming increasingly fleeting. People's minds are being flooded with more and more stimuli: information, inquiries, applications, all sorts of distractions, disruptions, and external expectations. Initial studies suggest that electronic media might be changing human brain structures. The ability of test subjects to concentrate was worse after fifteen minutes of internet consumption than after reading a printed magazine.

The news that our attention span is now shorter than that of goldfish (which apparently can manage to concentrate for nine seconds) captured the world's attention.

That turned out to be nonsense.

Yet it isn't significantly better either. Concentration has become a fragile and precious commodity. In our heads, we're constantly all over the place – and we don't stay there for long either. Many people wish they had more time, more peace and quiet. But even when they do have time and peace and quiet, they have difficulty becoming engrossed in one thing – a book, hobby, conversation, even a romantic dinner for two. Mostly in silence, this collective lack of concentration is wreaking social havoc, to an extent we hardly want to imagine, damaging both business outcomes and marriages.

Many people feel a growing longing to once again engage fully in something, with someone, with themselves.

I'm no exception. I traveled all the way to the Himalayas and participated in a silent retreat to get my concentration back. The insights I gained there were comforting. First, all people struggle with the stream of thoughts in their heads – even those you'd least expect. Second, over the millennia, certain behaviors have been proven to prevent this stream from killing us.

I dived into the kaleidoscope of concentration, into psychology and medicine, philosophy, literature and music, economics and ethics, history and the future – a kaleidoscope whose many facets I have unfolded on the following pages. The itinerary follows the body, because concentration affects the whole person. It begins in the head, the seat of concentration (how exactly it sits there is one of the most exciting questions in modern science). It runs through the hands, with which we get caught up in multitasking, and navel, around which so much revolves, all the way down to our feet, which so often want to carry us to a different place, whether real or imaginary. In between, I write about the thin air at the meditation monastery.

It is still possible to concentrate today and it can still be deeply satisfying. Take, as a case in point, the woman who was concentrating so intensely that the police had to free her. She is also someone you will meet in this book.

Volker Kitz, summer 2021

Sex is forbidden in the Himalayas

If I throw my head back so far that it hurts, I can make him out, high above me in a slender conifer tree. In a moment of distraction, he stole a woman's bag, a battered, faded imitation leather handbag. It required little strength but lots of cunning and speed. Now he's holding onto a branch that's bent to its limit by the wind and the little creature's excitement. He pulls a banana from the bag. Examining the remaining contents with darting eyes, he purses his lips in disappointment and drops the bag, sending it falling down to the ground, where it plops into the mud. The woman breathes a sigh of relief. Holding the banana by its stalk in one hand, the monkey pushes on its end with the other. The peel bursts open, and the monkey pulls it down, one strip at a time. With a vigorous movement of his head, he thrusts his teeth into the soft mass, chewing hurriedly, as if afraid we might climb up to scrape the loot off his tongue.

But we're just sitting down below, watching. We alternate between looking up at the monkey, who now seems to be grinning, at each other's faces, at our anoraks zipped up tight against the high-altitude winds, into the valley far below us, and then back down at our plates.

There's a lot to look at when you aren't talking.

We haven't spoken for days. At lunch, we sit and chew and chew and chew, and I would feel – well, apish – if the others around the table weren't chewing silently too.

They took our phones away, put them in transparent bags, and locked them up.

In addition, we've agreed to follow six rules. The first states: No killing. This made us smirk, since we'd come to this remote location fully expecting *not* to murder each other like in some Agatha Christie mystery novel. But then they told us that this rule also applies if a creature crawls over our bed, no matter how small, poisonous, or dangerous. Furthermore: No sex, no alcohol. No lying or stealing. These are the five basic rules of Buddhist practice. Here they also added: No speaking.

These rules alone already have an effect on my concentration. On how I perceive my surroundings, daily life, and behavior. Self-restraint requires concentration. Exceptions are only allowed to the no-speaking rule – and only a few: emergencies, and unavoidable everyday organizational tasks,

such as shopping at the little store outside the gate on the way to the valley.

“If it’s easier to say ‘toilet paper,’ say ‘toilet paper.’”

Before the pantomiming becomes too grotesque, just say “toilet paper.” This is what the resolute woman with the crude German accent gave us permission to do. A German woman who lives up here in the Himalayas as a Buddhist nun – and who has been entrusted by her fellow brothers and sisters to oversee rules and order.

The air is thin, with little oxygen; we’re at an altitude of over two thousand meters. I made my way up the steep paths in increasingly smaller busses and taxis, finally covering the last meters on foot.

The goal: a silent retreat in seclusion. I want to forget about thinking so that I can think clearly again. I want my concentration back.

That’s why I escaped from the barrage of thoughts of the big-city crowds, from all the attractions, breaking news, and TV series, from the pinging and vibrating alerts, from projecting future scenarios and grappling with the past, from my itchy fingers. From the ever-increasing effort it takes me to read, let alone write, a longer text without giving in to the urge to open or answer messages on my smartphone, surf the net to look up X or Y (and then explore the questions that X or Y raised). Or to listen to a song or watch a trailer. I fled from the multiplying occasions in which I forgot something (my bank card in the ATM, carrots at the supermarket checkout; “Welcome to the club,” the cashier said. “The world would be a different place if people concentrated more”).

For ten days I’m cut off from the rest of humanity. Not even my family could call or send me a message straight into my pocket.

A conversation I had at work before leaving went as follows:

“And what if it’s the end of the world? How can we reach you then?”

“If I’m the only one who can save us then, we’ll have to seriously reconsider my compensation.”

“Very funny.”

If you stop talking to others for a while, something exciting happens: you also stop talking to yourself. Even the silent monologue of your thoughts disappears. The brooding, chasing, and circling – all gone. My thoughts evaporated faster, more suddenly, and more surprisingly than I would have thought when I was still thinking.

The monkey has clambered away in search of new prey, a new distraction. My palate explores the mass of food in my mouth.

In my head, silence reigns.

What now? We'll see. A meditation course awaits me here, in the environment of this small Buddhist monastery. Exercises, instructions for how to concentrate for people like me, people from the restless Western world.

Head

How to distract yourself from distractions

... the alarmclock next door at cockshout clattering the brains out of itself let me see if I can doze off 1 2 3 4 5 what kind of flowers are those they invented like the stars the wallpaper in Lombard street was much nicer the apron he gave me was like that something only I only wore it twice better lower this lamp and try again so as I can get up early Ill go to Lambes there beside Findlaters and get them to send us some flowers to put about the place in case he ...

Lines like these – or rather, fifty pages of lines like these – made the writer James Joyce world famous. A woman lies in bed, unable to sleep, thoughts streaming through her head. It's Molly, the wife of the assistant teacher Stephen Dedalus. These fifty pages form the conclusion of the novel *Ulysses*. In the book, based on Homer's *Odyssey*, James Joyce described in 1922 the advertising canvasser Leopold Bloom's wanderings through Dublin for a day. His path also crosses with Molly and Stephen's lives. The novel describes the events from the perspective of one person and then another, turn by turn. What was revolutionary about it was that Joyce wanted to faithfully reproduce how thoughts flow through a human mind; he didn't want the organizing hand of a writer to be discernable. This approach culminates in the final chapter, in which Molly's inner life flows without punctuation.

In literature, this technique became known as "stream of consciousness." In reality, our thoughts probably stream through our heads even faster, more wildly, and less linguistically elaborated than anyone could ever capture in a novel. Nonetheless, literature borrowed the term from psychology. The psychologist William James used it in his 1890 work *The Principles of Psychology*, which is considered the foundation of scientific psychology in the United States, to describe the noise in our heads. Consciousness, he noted, is not a "chain" or "train" in which thoughts pass in an orderly way, but rather a rushing, disjointed stream.

In order to survive, both in the long term as well as through the day, we need to find a foothold in this stream, a perspective. We need to create

“light and shade, background and foreground,” as William James called it. To do so we use attention. “Everyone knows,” James wrote in a formulation that has become famous, “what attention is. It is the taking of possession by the mind in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought.” William James called the ability to focus and sustain this attention *concentration*. Even though he was writing in English, he seemed to feel that a German word was most appropriate to describe its opposite: “*Zerstreuung*,” absent-mindedness.

Concentration is focusing attention on one thing – through willpower. This sounds so self-evident as William James described it, but psychology would only discover later how difficult it is. And what methods there are to maintain concentration.

•

What electrical waves can be measured through the head of a person who is concentrating exceptionally intensely?

- n) Alpha waves
- o) Gamma waves
- p) Delta waves

[Answer: The twelfth letter of the alphabet – from the back. Or the fifteenth from the front.]

•

The cabaret artist and writer Ilhan Atasoy knows over a thousand poems by heart. Just call out the name of a poet or poem, and he’ll recite the verses. He takes this skill on tour. Every day, for decades, before going to bed, as a goodnight ritual, he recites at least ten poems to himself. He can probably concentrate brilliantly.

Because whatever takes effort can be trained – including concentration. There are various exercises for various preferences. One concentration exercise is simple and can be fun, though most people only know it from their school days: memorizing and reciting a poem.

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In a large-scale experiment in China, ten thousand students were given a headband with a light that lit up green, yellow, or red. This head “traffic light” was supposed to let teachers see whether their students were

concentrating on the lesson or needed “support” (or maybe just a more interesting lesson). *BrainCo*’s headbands can also be purchased for home use. According to the company’s vision, everyone should be able to control and train their concentration.

To develop a device that measures concentration *through* the head, first you have to understand what happens *in* the head. This is both difficult and simple. On the one hand, our brains follow the classical laws of chemistry and physics. Nerve cells, so-called neurons, “fire” – that is, they connect, sending signals via connections, the synapses. In the process, chemical substances and electrical currents flow – not spectacular processes in of themselves. On the other hand, the brain remains a mysterious lump of meat, even for researchers who have been studying it for years, because they are unable to describe as distinctly as many had hoped where exactly, how exactly, and when exactly what flows where, is active, and why. Especially not in such a general way. What happens in our brains when we concentrate depends on what we concentrate on – for example, whether we use our eyes, ears, or imaginations.

On the other hand, a concentrating mind is surprisingly easy to detect from the outside. You simply have to measure the electrical voltage on its surface. The idea is not new; for over a hundred years, electroencephalography, or EEG, has been making currents in the brain visible via electrodes on the scalp. The more concentrated a person is, the higher the frequency of these brain waves, which produce characteristic oscillations that scientists refer to as follows:

Delta waves: at most four cycles per second (deep sleep)

Theta waves: four to eight cycles per second (light sleep)

Alpha waves: eight to thirteen cycles per second (relaxed waking state with eyes closed)

Beta waves: thirteen to thirty cycles per second (average concentration as soon as someone opens their eyes or thinks with their eyes closed)

Gamma waves: more than thirty cycles per second (exceptionally intense concentration)

Researchers found that monks with many years of meditation practice produced frequencies more than thirty times higher than those of “normal people.”

So the idea of using a head “traffic light” to measure others’ or one’s own concentration and to track progress while practicing is not outlandish. But a medical EEG usually uses twenty-one cables that hang from the scalp like colorful braids. To use electrodes in a narrow designer headband you have to sacrifice accuracy. And even the most rapidly cycling beta waves won’t tell the Chinese teacher whether a student is concentrating on the lesson or on something else. Maybe she’s extremely focused on playing an online game on her smartphone under the table.

The Chinese experiment came to an abrupt end in any event when parents complained because the schools were sending their children’s mind data to central computers for evaluation.

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“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.” It was with this mixture of wonder and exasperation, fascination and disgust that the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky described his battle with his thoughts in 1863. He had returned from his first trip to Western Europe, where he had been to Germany, France, England, Switzerland, and Italy – the classic Grand Tour itinerary. His report *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* was mediocre. In the gambling halls of Wiesbaden and Baden-Baden, he had discovered roulette tables, which were forbidden in Russia. Gambling had become his personal polar bear, which he was unable to banish from his mind and which drove him to write the novel *The Gambler*.

Over a hundred years later, the American psychologist Daniel Wegner conducted scientific research on the intrusive bear. His test subjects were divided into two groups. One was instructed to suppress any thoughts about the white bear for five minutes and then to think specifically about it for five minutes. The other group was told to do the opposite: to imagine the bear intensely first and then to block it out. Everyone was asked to think out loud, so that Wegner could record what went through the subjects’ minds, their “stream of consciousness.”

The results showed that we can control our stream of thoughts. But only a little. And it can take revenge on us. None of the test subjects succeeded in suppressing thoughts. Even during the “strictly forbidden” phase, the white bear haunted their minds more than once a minute on average. That’s a lot for something you don’t want to think about! Dostoevsky was not wrong in his assessment that the “cursed thing will come to mind every minute.” In another experiment, subjects were given a pendulum and told to not let it

swing in a certain direction under any circumstances. The pendulum moved – precisely in the forbidden direction.

According to one explanation, if we want to suppress a thought, it becomes especially present in the mind since it has to know what thought it is supposed to be suppressing. The mind acts like a gatekeeper meant to recognize and keep out white bears, which is precisely why it focuses on white bears.

Yet the real surprise came from the group that was supposed to begin by suppressing thoughts of the bear. It haunted the minds of the subjects in this group much more than those who had been instructed to think about it often from the beginning. If we suppress a thought, apparently this creates a backlog in the brain. The intention not to think about something gives way to its opposite. Wegner called this phenomenon “ironic process.”

Ironic processes have now also been studied in more ordinary phenomena than pendulums and white bears. For example, if smokers suppress their thoughts about cigarettes for a week, they end up smoking more afterwards than a comparison group. And a five-minute ban on thinking about chocolate makes people crave it even more.

Ironic processes also get in the way of concentration, as Wegner showed. The more we insist on *not* being distracted by something, on *not* paying attention to it, the sooner it slips into our consciousness. This is especially true in stressful situations. Subjects were asked to concentrate on half of a list of city names. If they were put under pressure by being asked to also remember a number, they were – ironically – able to remember a particularly large number of words from the *other* half of the list, to which they didn’t even want to pay any attention.

What psychology calls “focused distraction” – not suppressing thoughts, but redirecting them – offers one way out of this predicament. Imagining a red Volkswagen when the white bear appears in the mind’s eye, for example. While even with this method thoughts of the polar bear could not be eliminated in experiments, it helped subjects pay less attention to it. The rebound effect was not as strong.

[...]

[pp. 81-91]

Neck

How to keep disruptions from being a pain in your neck when working

A company is stiff-necked and misses the boat. This wouldn't have happened to René Descartes. A smartphone refuses to be turned off. Too much jam isn't the key to happiness either.

The neck, more than any other part of the body, reveals the interplay between concentration and distraction: with concentration, it rests, whereas movement on its part betrays distraction. This is obvious when we turn our head. But even when our thoughts alone wander off, when only the “covert attention” in our mind shifts, our neck also reveals this. With an electromyograph, a group of researchers was able to detect a twitch in the neck muscles at that moment – at least in rhesus monkeys.

It is this constant interplay between concentration and distraction that helps us find our way in the world. But what exactly is the right balance? This question has occupied philosophy for millennia. According to Plato in ancient Greece, the neck should rest as much as possible. For him, the path to the truth led through “seeing,” through undistracted engagement with an object. The Church Father Augustine turned this into the Christian idea of contemplation. He, too, assumed that humans attain the greatest knowledge when immersed completely in something. For him, this was a way to behold God. “This is a delight to me,” Augustine wrote, “and, as far as I can get relief from necessary duties, to this gratification do I resort.”

René Descartes saw things differently. He was not only a philosopher but also a mathematician and natural scientist. For him, “*être attentif*,” being attentive, was a prerequisite for following trains of thought, avoiding errors – in short, the prerequisite for enlightenment. But concentration alone, Descartes believed, does not lead anywhere. We can only gain knowledge if our necks remain flexible, if we allow ourselves to be distracted, are receptive to the unexpected, to wonder and amazement, to a “sudden surprise of the soul.”

Today, almost four hundred years later, some even see disruption as the true objective. According to these people, only what interrupts concentration moves us forward. To describe this, the US economist Clayton M. Christensen coined the term “disruptive innovation.” Disruption jolts society out of routines, turning our focus onto new things. It shatters old structures.

A textbook example of this is the company Kodak. Since 1894, it focused on film (color film in particular), playing a pioneering role worldwide and driving amateur photography forward. Kodak also developed a digital camera early on. Yet the company necks were too stiff to recognize just how dominant digital technology would become. Failing to keep pace, the trailblazer of analog film fell behind. If the company had been more open to a “sudden surprise of the soul” it could have adapted. On the other hand, had it concentrated less on color film, it might not have produced such excellent products earlier on.

Christensen described this predicament as the “innovator’s dilemma” in his book of the same name. This dilemma persists to this day. No philosopher can relieve us of the task of constantly reexamining the interplay of the neck, the relationship between concentration and distraction.

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Surveys document the frequency with which the neck jerks during the workday. Over the last few years, the proportion of people in Germany who report frequent “disturbances and interruptions” has neither increased (despite constantly new communication channels) nor decreased (despite constant efforts to create more favorable working conditions):

46 percent (2006)

43 percent (2012)

45 percent (2018)

Observing the workday of office workers in the United States, sociologist Gloria Mark identified the following intervals:

11 minutes, 4 seconds: average period of time they concentrate on a task

23 minutes, 15 seconds: time required to get back to an interrupted activity after a distraction (additional minutes are then needed to pick up the lost thread)

Mark concluded that it is only possible to concentrate for three to four minutes at a time. She calls this “fragmented work.”

Every now and then, an interruption points us in the right direction, towards an idea that saves the day. But in day-to-day work, brilliant solutions are not hiding behind every disruption. Too much disruption result in mistakes, stress, and frustration. This insight has led to the development of a separate field of international research, “human interruption management,” which aims to increase awareness about the many interruptions people are bombarded with at work, how they react to them, and with what consequences.

Communication is responsible for most of the interruptions in daily office life. Hierarchies are becoming flatter, and teams are project based, dynamic, and agile. New networks are constantly emerging. While, in the past, spontaneous contact only occurred over the telephone and through the office door, today questions, answers, and comments bubble up on more and more screens, in chat groups, and through distribution lists. They’re offered up and expected in real time. Any given individual is in touch with more and more people. Local circumstances produce additional distractions, everything from noise, commotion, heat, cold, messiness, and lack of space to the system of “hot desking,” in which everyone has to find, grab, and move to a free desk every day.

Human interruption management has identified antidotes to this. While they may not sound impressive, they work. Take, for example, the simple “Please do not disturb” sign from hotels. Research shows that even those who hang it on their door for just an hour or two a day work with greater concentration. This sign can be copied for the digital realm; many messenger services offer the option of setting a corresponding status. And it isn’t the end of the digital world if you deactivate the automatic tone for incoming e-mails and only check your inbox at certain times. Concise responses, even one-word answers (“Yes”) sound brusque. But they can keep interruptions brief. The key is to agree on the tone – and to not take it personally.

These days it seems particularly difficult to distinguish between urgent and non-urgent messages. This has to do with the fact that, for many, the original purpose of cell phones – making calls – has gone out of fashion. Because so many people prefer texting, we’re constantly having to crane our necks to check whether something that requires an immediate reaction has arrived flashing, vibrating, or silently. We could create more room to concentrate on other things by reviving an old rule: If something really *is* urgent, call, don’t write.

•

A concentration exercise while walking: Keep your eyes up. Pay attention to how many other people seem to have fallen under the spell of the ground. If a neck is tilted downward, its owner is usually somewhere else in his or her thoughts – unless there really is something truly interesting happening on the ground.

•

Spirit level, movie theatre, encyclopedia, speedometer – these are just a few of the things that have been replaced by just *one* device today: the smartphone. It makes many problems easier to solve. But sometimes we put our phones aside to concentrate on something else. Yet psychological research has shown that there is an art to this putting aside. Otherwise, the mere presence of our smartphone interferes with our concentration.

This has to do with the neck. Things that are what psychologists call “salient” and “relevant” threaten to distract us. Salient means conspicuous, which can be anything that enters our field of vision through the mobility of our neck. We ourselves determine what we perceive as relevant.

Since smartphones are super-relevant for many, they are suitable objects of study. While solving concentration exercises, one group of subjects was asked to place their smartphones next to them on the table. Another group stowed them away in a drawer or pocket. A third left them in the room next door.

Group three, which had not brought their devices into the room, performed best. The worst performers were the group that had placed them in their field of vision. Even though not one of the test subjects in this group reached for their smartphone and they all affirmed that they hadn’t even thought about it, it interfered with their concentration – simply by being on the table. Whether the display was face up or down made no difference. Not even switching the phone off or muting it prevented this effect.

The researchers concluded that the mere presence of a smartphone consumes mental resources. Apparently, the brain has to resist the constant temptation to check the device, or at least to think about what messages *might* arrive. This suppression effort drains our attention and makes it difficult to concentrate on other things. The researchers called it “brain drain.”

The more someone self-reported that they were dependent on their smartphone in everyday life, the stronger this effect was. This sounds like an irony of fate: Those whose phones were particularly important to them also suffered particularly from the devices' presence.

Nowadays, many people keep their phones nearby at all times – at work, while studying, watching TV, eating dinner, reading, sleeping, and even while having sex. This could be making it unnecessarily difficult for us to concentrate. Other things that are important to us and within sight can, of course, also produce a similar effect.

So, if we really want to focus, it can help to get our necks moving first, to look around with our eyes, and to ask: What am I going to put away?

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Two jam-tasting stands were set up in a supermarket. One offered twenty-four varieties, the other just six. Naturally, the larger selection attracted more curious individuals, who swiveled their necks to survey the assortment. But it was precisely this that apparently also flustered them. Not only did just as many prospective customers sample jam at the small table as at the big one, but they also decided to buy ten times as often.

With this experiment, researchers demonstrated the phenomenon of “overchoice” or “choice overload.” Initially, a wide selection – like anything new – attracts our attention. But when we take a closer look, it makes us unhappy. The reason is simple: too many options overwhelm our concentration. The more we have to move our necks to keep everything in view, to compare, the harder it is to concentrate on anything. This creates discomfort. In the end, we're dissatisfied with our choice or never even make one.

We also don't work as well when given too many options, as another experiment has shown. Here, students were given the chance to improve their grades by writing a voluntary essay. One group was offered a choice of six topics, the other thirty. Not only did those who had fewer options choose to write an essay more often, they also wrote better essays.

If the selection is manageable, we can register it without having to crane our necks too much. We feel better. We have an easier time deciding and are more satisfied with our decision. We're less distracted by the fretful question “What if I'd made a different choice?”

We've known about the phenomenon of overchoice for fifty years – in other words, from a time when our choices were ridiculously limited. Today, there are so many options for booking a trip, choosing an electricity contract, buying a TV, finding a job or a partner that our ability to concentrate is reaching its limits.

So, if you're in the business of selling, it's best to keep the selection small. Those who want to make a decision feel more comfortable when the selection is limited to a level that is manageable for their ability to concentrate: for example, relying on a recommendation or seeking advice in a store with a reasonable range of products. Or simply making a brave decision without insisting on seeing and comparing "everything" first.

More often than not, the differences aren't that significant.

[END OF SAMPLE]