

Digital tools and settings to minimise distraction

Phones, tablets, laptops, apps and websites have been designed to keep us engaged with them. The people who design them understand how to keep our attention and distract us from the reason we picked up the device in the first place. Colours, animations and notifications are all designed to draw us in, leading us to forget what we wanted to do, and lose time doing things we didn't intend to.

There are tools and settings that can minimise these distractions. Some settings or tools may not be available or work on older phones, tablets or laptops.

These include simplifying layouts, reducing distractions and using voice commands to control your device.

Look for the cog icon . This is usually on your home screen, in your app list on phones and tablets, or in the Start menu on Windows. Try searching for the name of the feature you're looking for.

[My Computer My Way](#) from AbilityNet also offers step-by-step instructions to change settings to meet your needs.

You can set up shortcuts on your smartphone for quick access to settings you find useful.

Contact Alice Holland, Digital Inclusion Worker, with any questions or if you would like support to change your settings.

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Visual

These settings minimise eye strain and reduce visual stimulation by reducing how vibrant and colourful your device looks

- Greyscale/monochrome mode – remove all colour to stop colours catching your eye whenever you look at your device
- Dark mode – switch white backgrounds to dark colours which is easier on the eyes and the screen feels calmer
- Night light, Night Shift – reduce blue light, helping your brain to know it's evening and prevent you feeling “wired” or wide awake
- Animation effects – reduce moving effects on screen such as when opening apps so your phone feels more like a tool and less like a video game
- Lower brightness or auto-brightness – dim your screen to make it easier on your eyes and less appealing to look at

Reading and focus

These settings help to prevent you from getting side-tracked:

- Immersive reader, reader mode – remove ads, pop-ups and navigation menus so you are left with only the text you want to read (see [Reduce screen clutter below](#))
- Text-to-speech / Select to Speak – your device reads content aloud, so you don't have to look at the screen
- Background sounds – ambient sounds to help you focus e.g. ocean waves
- Ad blocker extensions such as uBlock Origin and Adblock – block adverts and visual clutter from websites before they can distract you

Notifications and interruptions

Notifications buzz and beep and break your concentration. To prevent this, you could try:

- Focus / Do not disturb mode – silence all incoming alerts, notifications and calls
- Turn off notifications per-app – stop individual apps interrupting you, or only the notifications you want
- Mute conversations – silence specific chats or group messages within apps like WhatsApp without leaving them
- Silence unknown callers – calls from numbers not in your contacts are sent straight to voicemail
- Remove notification badges – hide the little red circles with numbers in them to reduce the urge to clear or respond to them
- Hide previews – stop notification content being shown on your lock screen so you aren't drawn into a conversation, article or promotion
- Mute system sounds – turn off clicks and whooshes which have all been designed to keep you engaged
- Airplane mode / turn off Wi-Fi – pause all incoming notifications, emails and other distractions so you can focus on the thing you want to do, the document you want to create, the book you want to read

Screen time and usage limits

Knowing how much time you spend on your device can help you see where your time goes and how to change it

- Digital wellbeing (Android) /Screen Time (iOS/macOS) – how long you spend on your device and individual apps, and lets you set limits
- App timers – set a daily limit for time spent on specific apps and receive an alert when you reach it
- Screen time schedules – set times where only essential apps are available, such as overnight
- Downtime scheduling – schedule times where only certain apps are available which can help you focus in the day or wind down in the evening
- Usage dashboards / weekly reports – a summary of your screen habits over time so you can spot patterns

Apps, emails and habits

Small changes to apps can reduce the temptation to pick up your device or keep it in your hand for “just one more” video, photo, article...

- Remove social media apps from the home screen – keep the most important tools visible so you don't see distractions as soon as you unlock your phone
- Uninstall apps. If you still think you need it, go through your browser to the website – an extra layer of friction makes it harder to tap the app by reflex
- Kiosk/pinning mode (Android) / Guided Access (iOS) – keep an app in view until you unpin it to stop you switching quickly between apps
- Apps that make you wait such as One Sec – makes you pause before opening distracting apps helping to break the reflex habit
- Website blockers such as Cold Turkey and Freedom – block distracting websites for a set time so you are not tempted to visit them
- Unsubscribe from email chains and newsletters – that tiny unsubscribe button, usually at the bottom of an email, will prevent you buying things you

don't need, reading things that only make you angry, or pulling you into endless scroll

- Charge your phone outside your bedroom – removes the temptation to check it first thing in the morning and last thing at night
- Place your phone face down – stops notifications catching your eye and reduces the urge to check the screen

Reduce screen clutter on websites and documents

- remove distracting parts of websites such as ads and navigation menus
- change text size, style and spacing
- change background colour
- read webpage text aloud

Options vary depending on browser or programme used. Not all websites are supported.

Browser	How to access
Microsoft Edge	F9 or More  > Immersive Reader icon in the address bar
Microsoft Office Word, OneNote, Outlook, Excel, Teams	View > Immersive Reader Teams: Hover over / tap message > More icon  > More actions > Immersive Reader
Google Chrome	More icon  > More tools > Reading mode Highlight text > right click > Open in reading mode
Mozilla Firefox	Reader view icon  in address bar
Apple Safari	Reader icon in address bar  > Show Reader To return: page icon in address bar  > Hide Reader