



EBOOK

MOBILE PHONE MANAGEMENT





Nowadays, technology is a major component of our lives. There are now more mobile phones on the planet than there are people. Some of the most avid users of electronics are young people, with recent research finding that students check their phone on average every 8.6 minutes. Many of us check our phones twice as often as we think we do.

Of course, there is a reason why phones have become so important in our lives – some would even say that they are essential. They are a very useful tool. However, we also know that phones are a danger to students' concentration and learning. Developing phone management skills is now vital for young people. As with most good habits, it often falls on parents and educators to teach young learners how to use their phones without letting them negatively impact their academic success or well-being.

Book a Phone Management student workshop

MOBILE PHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

In 2018, France banned mobile phones from their schools in an effort to stop students from getting distracted during lessons. Only time will tell just how successful this decision was, but it was certainly [based on solid grounds](#). Research has found that mobile phones can hinder students learning and, as a result, cause a decline in their academic performance.

For example, [a recent study](#) found that UK schools who banned mobile phones saw a 6.4% increase in their students' grades, with this effect being particularly pronounced amongst struggling students. In [another fascinating study](#), students separated into two groups were taught the same lesson, but only one of the groups had access to electronics (phones and laptops). Those who had been allowed to use electronics performed 5% worse in the final exam than the other group who had no access to this technology.

We took a closer look at these findings to see what they can tell us about the causes of this decline in performance. Why do [mobile phones present such a threat to learning](#) for students?

Reduction in concentration

Mobile phones have the potential to be a great tool for students in the classroom, allowing them to find and share information. But [recent research](#) has suggested that they're more likely to become a source of distraction. Students can easily be tempted to text or check social media during lessons rather than concentrating, engaging and interacting.

Similarly, phones can be a distraction when studying – [it's hard to focus](#) on pages of notes and past papers when you have the temptation of social media and games right on your desk. Revision time is too precious for students to be wasting it with partial focus.

Reduction in memory



To commit information to long-term memory, students need to engage and interact with the material they are trying to learn. So, if a phone is next to them, all the notifications coming through will interrupt and [disrupt their recollection of the information](#) they are trying to take in.

[Research has even shown](#) that students are more likely to remember material if they are looking at the teacher during class. This is an easy finding to apply to phones: the less potential distractions students have, the more likely they are to focus on the teacher and have a [better memory of new material](#).

An additional point is that the waves emitted by mobile phones could cause a reduction in memory. Only small effects have been revealed [in such studies](#), so take these findings with a grain of salt. However, this could be a way to explain why students who use their mobile phones excessively have slower response times in memory tasks.

Recommended reading:

- [The consequences of electronics in class](#)
- [6 reasons to put your phone away](#)
- [French school mobile phone ban](#)

MOBILE PHONES AND WELL-BEING

We've discussed how they can harm students' academic performance, but a major issue with mobile phones is that they can also have a [negative effect on students' overall well-being](#).

[Social media is often to blame](#) for these negative effects. It is easy for students to become obsessed and spend hours scrolling late into the night. This is harmful for their quality and quantity of sleep, but it can also present them with a warped view of reality. Most people only show an idealised version of themselves on social media, which can lead others to think they should look or behave in a certain, often unattainable way in order to fit in.

But it isn't as clear cut as this – mobile phones have many ways of [influencing a student's well-being negatively](#). Here are the most important factors...

Reduction in sleep

Sleep is vital for students' success: it can help them [concentrate better](#), [increase their memory](#) and [decrease the likelihood](#) that they'll suffer from illnesses. On the other hand, sleep deprivation can hinder students' mental health and ability to remember new information. For example, [one particular study](#) found that sleep deprived students not only remembered 40% less than others, but were also less likely to remember positive experiences.

That is why proper [phone management strategies](#) in the lead up to bedtime are important. Mobile phones can easily distract students from getting [the proper amount and quality of sleep](#) by encouraging them to go to bed later. As a result, they'll find it harder to focus and learn in class the next day, and if they actually have an exam in the morning, this will hinder their performance. Keep in mind: the recommended amount of sleep for teenagers is 8-10 hours – much more than most believe.

Stress and anxiety

Mobile phones can have detrimental effects on students' psychological health. They [have been associated with](#) increased levels of anxiety, irritation and impatience.

Also, it's not just their presence that can cause these effects – [60% of students](#) report feeling very agitated when they cannot access their mobile phone.

[A little bit of stress is good](#) to avoid complacency. Too much of it can lower students' well-being, ability to focus and production of [BDNF](#), the protein that helps their brain make memory connections.

Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO)

[75% of young adults](#) who use social media [experience FOMO](#) (Fear Of Missing Out). Constant connection and the ability to curate which parts of your life you want to show can make students feel like others are always having more fun than them. [FOMO can lead to](#) lower moods and increased levels of anxiety. It can also encourage students to check their phones and social media more often, including during lessons, study time or instead of going to sleep.

Less meaningful interactions

[Research has shown](#) that mobile phones can lead students to enjoy interactions with others less. In one experiment, students shared a meal together. Those who had their phones on silent or off enjoyed their food and the company of others more than those who had it on or switched to vibrate. [Further research](#) that had participants completing surveys about their phone use supported these findings, noting that even moderate levels of phone use can negatively impact our ability to engage with others.

Reduction in exercise

The constant distraction of mobile phones can encourage students to stay inside and use only social media and the internet



to amuse themselves. This leaves them with less time for exercise, but also makes physical activities less enticing. However, [exercise is important](#) not only for students' physical health, but for their mental health too. [Recent research](#) supports this, showing that going for a walk, even just for 12 minutes, is enough to increase happiness, attentiveness and confidence.

Recommended reading:

- [FOMO, stress and sleeplessness, are smartphones bad for students?](#)
- [Sleep: a powerful revision technique](#)
- [Are smartphones causing more teen suicides?](#)

MOBILE PHONES AND REVISION

Mobile phones aren't just a distraction in the classroom – they can also get in the way of [effective revision](#). It can be tempting for students to spend hours surfing the internet when they should be revising instead. Deep down, they know they shouldn't have their phone next to them whilst studying. But it is a habit many struggle to break and, often, students try to convince themselves that their phone won't affect the quality or quantity of their revision.

To help highlight just [how bad mobile phones can be for studying](#), here are a few ways in which they affect a student's revision...

Multi-tasking is a myth

Many students believe that they're good at multi-tasking and can handle revision and phone notifications at the same time. This is actually impossible. Essentially, [multi-tasking is nothing but](#) switching between tasks rapidly rather than doing them at the same time. This [causes errors](#), [reduces productivity](#), and wastes precious time and energy.

Procrastination

75% of students consider themselves [to be procrastinators](#). Using a mobile phone is one of the most common ways to procrastinate on tasks such as revision. Fortunately, this is easy to overcome with just a few minutes of focus – after this, the brain's desire to see tasks through to completion takes over, [according to research](#).

Pen and paper are better for notes

It is not uncommon for students to use a laptop or mobile phone to take notes under the assumption that this will save them time and be easier. However, [research has shown](#) that, when typing on a keyboard rather than [writing with a pen](#), students are more likely to take notes verbatim. This doesn't allow them to engage with the



material as much as they would if they had to write it down in their own words – which leads to shallower learning and poorer recall at a later stage.

Recommended reading:

- [Studying With the Brain in Mind student workshop](#)
- [Multi-tasking is a myth](#)
- [“59 seconds think a little change a lot”, by Richard Wiseman](#)

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MOBILE PHONES

Most students have heard (from their parents, teachers or the media) that mobile phones have harmful effects. However, this doesn't usually stop them from having or even [using their phone when they shouldn't](#), because they can usually convince themselves that they have a good reason for it.

So, here are some misconceptions many students have about mobile phones and their own phone management skills:

“Completing homework or revision with your phone next to you doesn't change anything.”

Students often think they can revise or do homework just as well with or without their phone near them. However, [recent research has shown](#) that the mere presence of a mobile phone during revision, even untouched, is enough of a distraction for a student's performance to be 20% worse.

“You need your phone in your room at night.”

A classic argument for keeping their mobile phone nearby during the night is that students use it as an alarm in the morning. Luckily, there is a very easy fix for this: buying an alarm clock. This will improve students' sleep quality and quantity, as they will be less tempted to use their phone late after bedtime or in the middle of the night if they wake up.

“You can use your phone before bed as a way of relaxing.”

Unwinding before going to sleep is a great idea, but using a phone to do so is a mistake. Mobile phones emit a bright blue light that reduces the production of melatonin, the hormone that makes humans sleepy. Since social media and apps are [designed to be addictive](#), it's extremely hard for students to put down their phone early enough. Add this to the stress that FOMO can create, and students are almost certain to have a short, unrestful night.

Recommended reading:

- [Sleep your way to success](#)
- [Sleep myths vs facts](#)
- [Could a dawn simulation alarm get me up and running?](#)

MANAGING MOBILE PHONE USE

As we've said before, mobile phones are useful. The goal isn't to stop using them completely, rather to avoid excessive use that can massively disrupt students' lives. Having parents or teachers constantly telling them to put their phone away isn't a sustainable, long-term strategy for students. Eventually, they need to be able to regulate their phone use themselves. Here are some of our favourite strategies to help your students or your child [develop phone management skills](#):

Set aside phone-free time each day

Have a pre-determined period of time, every day, where students agree not to use their phone. One school in London has set up [the Family Phone Pledge](#) to encourage their students to do just that. This scheme involves both students and parents signing a contract in which they agree to not use their phone during mealtimes, charge them outside their bedrooms at night and have a completely phone-free weekend/holiday on a date of their choice. This is a simple but great way to introduce students to phone management skills and make them feel supported.

Put your phone away

Sometimes, it can be as easy for students as keeping their phone out of sight when they need to focus. They could do this by giving it to a trusted adult who will look after it for a determined period time or until they have completed a specific task.

Limit notifications

Changing settings to choose what they are notified of and when, is a great way for students to be less tempted to check their phone. This way, they can avoid being distracted by notifications, without fearing they might miss an urgent call. Using this strategy is beneficial in the long term too, as this can help students get into



the mindset that not all messages require immediate attention – if any at all.

Turn down the backlight

The light that phones emit stop students from feeling sleepy when the time to go to bed comes. Melatonin, the hormone that helps someone feel sleepy, gets released around 9pm. However, the bright, blue light from screens can interrupt its production. If students still feel alert in the lead up to bed, it's likely they won't fall asleep until later and therefore won't get the recommended 8-10 hours of sleep.

In fact, [research has shown](#) that students who use their phone in the hour before bed are almost three times more likely to get less than five hours of sleep. Of course, not looking at a screen at all before sleeping would be ideal – but if that's difficult, at least turning down the backlight and using a blue light filter app is a good start.

Tell your friends when you will be back online

This strategy can even get students to work together to reduce their phone use by agreeing not to contact each other for set periods of time. They can all focus on their work without receiving lots of notifications or having their friends worry about their lack of response.

Recommended reading:

- [5 ways to manage your phone better](#)
- [Don't be a slave to your phone](#)
- [7 tips to get smartphone use under control](#)

USING MOBILE PHONES IN A POSITIVE WAY

We've widely discussed the negative effects of mobile phones and how to use them less. However, at the end of the day, they are a useful tool.

This is why the key for students is in [managing their phone effectively](#) – when used in the right way and not in excess, they can be very beneficial. Here are some ways mobile phones can be useful for students:

Revision apps

There is a wide range of apps that students can use to prepare for exams.

One such app is [Quizlet](#). It allows students to revise using pre-made questions or flashcards on specific topics. They can also create their own flashcards based on the lessons they received, which can then be shared with and used by other students. This type of revision facilitates the use of [Retrieval Practice](#), one of the most efficient ways to study, which consists in recalling information often. This is how students can create stronger connections in their brains to help pass information onto their long-term memory.

Another key aspect of revision that apps can help with is organisation and planning. A great app for this is [Get Revising](#), which allows students to create study timetables. This way, they will know exactly when and what they will revise. This allows them to prepare the resources they will need, but also to make sure they space out their revision instead of cramming it. With a clear plan, students know what to focus on for each revision session. This can help increase their motivation and remove some of the stress in the lead up to exams.

Staying connected with loved ones

Keeping contact with friends and family, wherever they may be, is vital for revision. Students' social life shouldn't stop just because exams are coming up. For their well-being and to avoid burnout, they need connection, support and activities other than studying. Phones and social media can give them an easy way to plan their social life and events, as well as keeping in touch with people.

Apps to reduce phone use

Ironically, there are many apps that can help students use their phones less. For those just beginning to work on their phone management skills, this is a great solution. One of the most well-known of these apps is [Hold](#), which attempts to try and reduce screen time by rewarding students with points for every 20 minutes they don't look at their phone. They can then exchange these points for real-life prizes.

Recommended reading:

- [The best apps to help with revision](#)
- [What are the best ways to revise?](#)
- [Mobile phone addiction? It's time to take back control](#)



FAQ

What are the negative impacts of mobile phones?

One of the most worrying impacts of excessive mobile phone use is a deterioration in well-being. It can increase stress and anxiety, whilst also lowering self-esteem.

Are mobile phones a distraction in schools?

Yes. Research has shown that students who use their phones during class attain lower grades. Phone use lowers concentration and reduces the chance that new information will be retained in long-term memory.

Is it okay to be on my phone before bed?

No, because the light it emits can trick the brain into thinking it is daytime and stop the production of melatonin, the sleep hormone. If you must use your phone before bed, at least turn down the brightness and use a blue screen filter.

What can I do about my mobile phone addiction?

Change your phone settings to avoid your notifications distracting you, or even switch your phone off when you need to focus. If you lack the willpower for this, give it to someone you trust to look after for a set amount of time.

FURTHER READING

We have published many blogs that can help students understand why their phone and electronics use can be detrimental to them – and how to reduce it. Here are a few of our favourites:

- [Students: managing your mobile phone at night](#)
- [FOMO, stress and sleeplessness: are smartphones bad for students?](#)
- [Is technology the best solution for student learning?](#)
- [5 ways students can better manage their gaming time](#)

Our award-winning book [Release Your Inner Drive](#) includes, among many practical strategies for success at school, lots of tips for students to manage their mobile phone use.

We also run [Mobile Phone Management workshops for students](#), where we can teach your students directly about the negative impacts of excessive phone use, and how to avoid them.

For further reading, we recommend:

- Some of our favourite articles from the Guardian exploring whether to use mobile phones in the classroom or not: [“Should children be banned from using mobile phones in the classroom?”](#) and [“A tool or a distraction? How UK schools’ approaches to mobile phones vary widely”](#).
- The Guardian also wrote [a brilliant article with tips for students](#) to reduce their mobile phone usage.
- For a wider view of the impact of mobile phones on academic performance, we suggest [this paper](#).
- The Learning Scientists [have great insight](#) on the impact of mobile phones on student mental health.

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