

# Is Facebook hurting your grades?

There are a lot of ways to get distracted in class and even note-taking on the computer may be a bad idea.

BY LAIRA MARTIN

**Y**our iPhone quietly vibrates in your pocket. What could have been a quick text message becomes a full-blown conversation, and the next thing you know, class is over. You've just been distracted.

"Having my phone near me tempts me to check a message for a second," said Ashley Mendia, a third-year at Brooklyn Law School. "But I know that second turns into 10 minutes, which turns into 30 minutes, so I can't even [allow that small] distraction."

Whether they're emails, instant messages or phone calls, distractions from your laptop, tablet and phone are many, and they can hinder your educational experience. Nearly 90 percent of law students who used laptops in class were engaged in unrelated online activities for at least five minutes, while 60 percent were distracted for half the class, according to a study by the University of Louisville Law Review.

To eliminate the temptation of reading news online during class or study time, Mendia uses a news app to read the top stories before she gets to class. Then she puts her phone on silent and tucks it away in her bag.

"I get my news fix every morning through a news app," Mendia said. "Knowing that I will be updated with whatever happened the day before gives me a sense of relief, so I don't have to check the news throughout the day, which keeps me off unnecessary websites and social media."

Apps such as SelfControl for Macs or Cold Turkey for PCs, can block specific websites and apps for hours at a time, leaving you with no choice but to steer clear of Facebook and Twitter when you need to be focused.

Brittney Herson, a third-year at SMU Dedman School of Law, segments her study time so she can have a much-needed break after focusing on her work for an extended period of time.

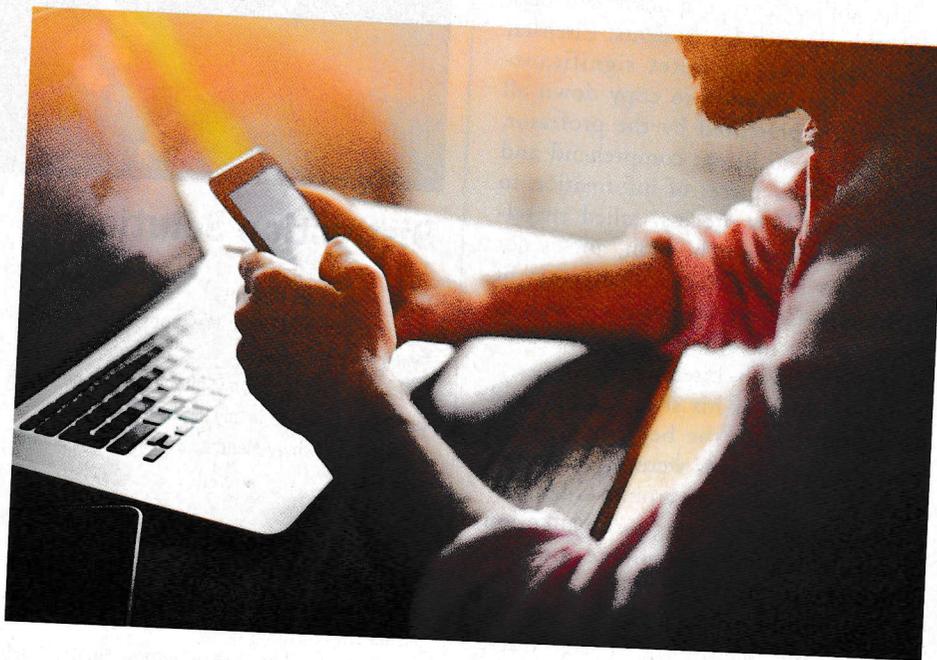
"When I need to study or write a paper and have a hard time getting into it, I set a timer for 30 or 40 minutes and force myself to work just for that period," Herson said. "By the time the alarm goes off, I'm usually into the groove of working and can easily keep going."

And if she isn't in a groove, she can take a quick study break, reset her alarm and start the process over again. But no matter how much discretion one uses in class or

be awkward, having a private chat with your professor could lead to a better seat and is well worth it, said Suffolk University Law School professor Steven Eisenstat.

"Students feel like they are somehow ratting out students to their professors ... and that's an uncomfortable position to be in," Eisenstat said. "But I think they have every right to do it, and they should do it."

If seats are not assigned, there is no need to talk to the professor.



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while studying, neighbors can be equally, if not more, distracting.

"It seems like, unfortunately, my greatest distractions are related to other people and their behaviors during class," said Chelsea Neubecker, a second-year at SUNY Buffalo Law School. "I guess there's not much I can do about them if I don't want to get on anyone's bad side. However, I do feel sometimes that if I had noticed the behaviors of others early on, I could have changed my seat in the classroom."

Neubecker is not alone in this feeling of "telling on" other students. While it may

"Find a seat near a group that is taking the class seriously," Eisenstat said.

The Boston-based professor has banned laptops in his class since Fall 2006 and has never regretted it, he said.

"The distractions are for everybody," he said. "I can't see a way that you take care of that problem other than saying, 'Look, I have very specific use for where laptops are uniquely designed to enhance what I'm trying to convey in the class as a teacher, and I'll allow the use for those circumstances. The rest of the time, you can't use them.' That's my answer."

Not only do laptops disturb users and their neighbors in class, they actually lead to less effective note-taking, according to a recent study conducted at Princeton University and UCLA.

“For years I suspected that laptop note taking, in and of itself, had a deleterious effect on many, if not most, students’ understanding of what was being discussed in class,” Eisenstat wrote in an article about the study. “[Students] were typing, almost verbatim, everything I was saying in class.”

Even if all Internet distractions were eliminated, taking notes on a laptop lessens the learning process. In all three experiments conducted in the study, “students who handwrote their notes outperformed their counterparts who typed their notes on assessments.”

The ability to type quickly can be a note-taking crutch for students, Eisenstat said. Hand-writing notes significantly lessens one’s ability to copy down all information presented by the professor, forcing them to listen, comprehend and select particular pieces of information to write down. This process, called encoding, increases comprehension, and is not limited to law students. Professors at Dartmouth College who teach computer programming have imposed laptop bans for this very reason, Eisenstat said.

While some of his students opposed the laptop ban at the beginning of the semester, their minds were often swayed by the time finals came around when they realized they were paying more attention in class, taking more useful notes and performing better on exams.

“Opposition to the policy in the four classes at the beginning of the course ranged from between 34 and 44 percent, but by the end of the course, the opposition had been reduced by almost 50 percent, to between 18 and 24 percent,” Eisenstat wrote.

By choosing to handwrite notes, students can easily eliminate all computer-related distractions while increasing classroom comprehension.

Jordan Posner, a third-year at University of Baltimore School of Law, uses both methods of note-taking, often in conjunction with one another.

“I find with handwritten notes, you focus a lot better on the teacher,” he said.

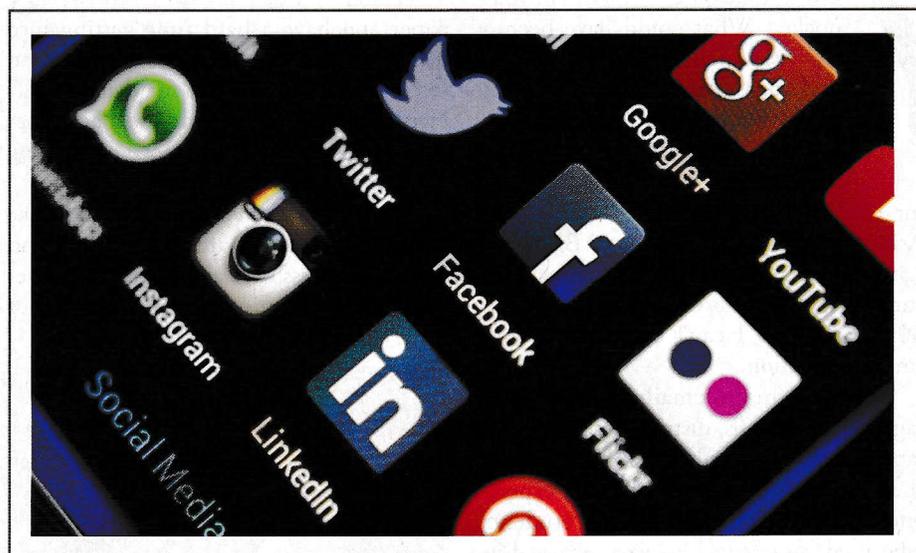
“And then you can go back to type them up, and it adds an extra layer of repetition.”

At the end of the day, discretion and self-control are all students can really depend on.

“Distractions are a part of life and are compounded by our reliance and obses-

sion with social media,” Herson said. “It is what it is.”

Experimenting with different ways to eliminate distractions can help you find what works best for you, because as Ryan Cunningham, a second-year at South Texas College of Law puts it, “Everyone has their own processes.”



## Distraction Solutions

### The device: Cell phones

**The distractions:** Text Messages, Phone Calls, Social Media, Games

**The solution:** “I put my phone on ‘do not disturb’ and leave it in my drawer or bag, out of sight,” said Ashley Mendia, Brooklyn Law School student.

### The device: Laptops and Tablets

**The distractions:** The Internet, Instant Messaging, Emails, Online Shopping, Social Media ...everything really

**The solution:** “A month before finals, I try to ‘unplug’ from all my devices,” said Lucy Galstyan, a 3L at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles. “Setting a strict schedule with blocks of time specifically dedicated to relaxation or break time motivates me to study.”

### The distraction: Facebook

**The solution:** “I frequently deactivate my Facebook account during finals season so I’m not event tempted to go on,” said Brittney Herson, who goes to SMU Dedman School of Law.

### The distraction: Noisy law libraries

**The solution:** “Law libraries aren’t as quiet as depicted on television,” said John Nickel, a second-year at Louisiana State University, Paul M. Hebert Law Center. “I always keep ear plugs in my book sack. They’re found cheaply at Walgreens or CVS.”

### The distraction: Netflix, Hulu and HBO GO

**The solution:** “I use my meal breaks as my downtime,” Mendia said. “In the morning, I will watch the show I missed the night before while I cook and eat breakfast. I get to indulge in my TV shows while also unwinding during these set times, and it makes me really productive during the times in between. The hard part is limiting yourself to one episode.”

### The distraction: Classmates looking at Facebook and Instagram

**The solution:** “iChat and Google Chat aren’t a bother because the text is small, but Facebook and Instagram are full of pictures, which are more distracting,” Nickel said. “To combat this problem, I make sure to show up early on the first day of class to get a spot in the front row. If there are no seats in front of you, there is no threat of computer distractions.”