

Use **Chrome Extensions** to Reduce Distraction and Increase Productivity

by Joan Green, MA, CCC-SLP

YOU'RE FINALLY MAKING HEADWAY on a project after putting it off for weeks and you have an urge to take a little break. Before you know it, hours have passed, and you missed the deadline.

Ugh. Can you relate?

Individuals with attention-related challenges often have an excellent ability to focus—it's just that often the focus is in the wrong place at the wrong time. You may have read some interesting posts or caught up with friends you haven't seen in a while, but your project remains unfinished and now you are out of time. Stress returns. This world of pop-ups, notifications, addictive gaming, and social media can spin out of control fast.



Help may be just a few clicks away. There are Chrome extensions that you can use on your PC, Mac, or Chromebook, often at no additional expense, to help you focus your attention on what you need to do. Some work in subtle ways to declutter the view, while others read text aloud to help you focus. Or they may remind you to take breaks or make a game out of avoiding distractions. There are also Chrome extensions that block websites that are the most likely offenders to sabotage effective time management. These Chrome extensions are available for download in an online store that includes their descriptions and user reviews. They appear to the right of the Chrome omnibox, where you enter the URLs for websites. The Chrome web store is found at <https://chrome.google.com/webstore>.

Joan Green is a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist with many years of experience helping children and adults who have communication, cognitive, literacy, and learning challenges. In 1992, she founded Innovative Speech Therapy in the Washington, DC, area (<https://innovativespeech.com>). She always has an eye out for affordable cutting-edge technologies to help others thrive in life. Her practice recently evolved into an online tech coaching practice to help people of all ages and abilities leverage the benefits of technology. She also provides online courses and customized professional development programs. Green received her undergraduate as well as graduate education at Northwestern University. She has published four books, including *Assistive Technology in Special Education, 3rd Edition: Resources to Support Literacy, Communication and Learning Differences* (2018).

To benefit from Chrome extensions, you need to be signed into the Chrome browser using a Google account that has permission to download items. Please also keep in mind that these Chrome extensions will not work on your phones and tablets, but there may be apps by the same name that are available in your device's app store.

This is the perfect time to reexamine your use of technology and think about how to leverage its benefits to promote focus. What are your pain points? Is it the dread of getting started on something you don't want to do? Are you always hearing the call of your favorite game? Feeling lonely and wanting to connect with friends online? New sources of distraction are everywhere. Many of us are also experiencing internal distractions caused by unsettled emotions.

The Chrome extensions described below do not exert brute force to mandate compliance. They merely help the user to stay on task by making it a little less convenient to be lured into a distracting activity and gently reminding them to get back to their self-selected goals.

As with all other productivity tools, it will take some trial and error to figure out how to make them work for you in your setting and you will need to commit to using them for them to have the desired effect.





Mercury Reader. Mercury Reader declutters websites. When on a website, just select the little red rocket ship to customize the view and get rid of the ads.



Pause by Freedom. This extension challenges you to pause for a few seconds before visiting a distracting website. Fifty of the top distracting websites are already included in the extension; they can be removed and others can be added.



Pocket. Rather than being lured to read an interesting article when you discover it, save it for later by clicking this Pocket extension. Save yourself from the distraction and rest assured that it will be there later for your viewing or listening pleasure.



Marinara Pomodoro. How long can you reasonably focus deeply on a particular task? Would 25 minutes be reasonable? It often depends on the nature of the task, how you are feeling at a particular time, and what is going on around you. Set the timer, and at the appropriate time you will get a gentle reminder that the time is over and you should take a break. There are long breaks and short breaks. During the designated focus time, certain sites that you have determined to be especially distracting will be off limits.



Read and Write for Google. Are you the type of learner who can focus best when words are highlighted and read aloud as you read along in the text? This Chrome extension offers a read-aloud function that is free. There is also a premium version that will declutter the screen and offers additional study and productivity tools.



Dayboard. Do you find yourself opening multiple tabs that lead you toward distraction? Dayboard encourages the user to enter up to five tasks to get done “today.” These are shown each time a new tab is opened, or one at a time until they are completed so you are reminded of your priorities. The user can also block sites until tasks are completed, as well as determine how much time they can spend on them each day.



Forest: Stay Focused, Be Present. This extension turns your focus into a game and rewards you with trees. If you successfully focus, the sprout will grow into a tree. Eventually you may end up with an entire forest. If you get distracted before the time interval is up, your tree will perish.



Blocksite—Website Blocker for Chrome. Easily enter any websites or website categories that you deem to be distracting or harmful, and they will be on the blacklist. Block them when you choose to focus. There is also a work mode timer that helps you manage your attention. Sync between computer and mobile devices to manage your time. 



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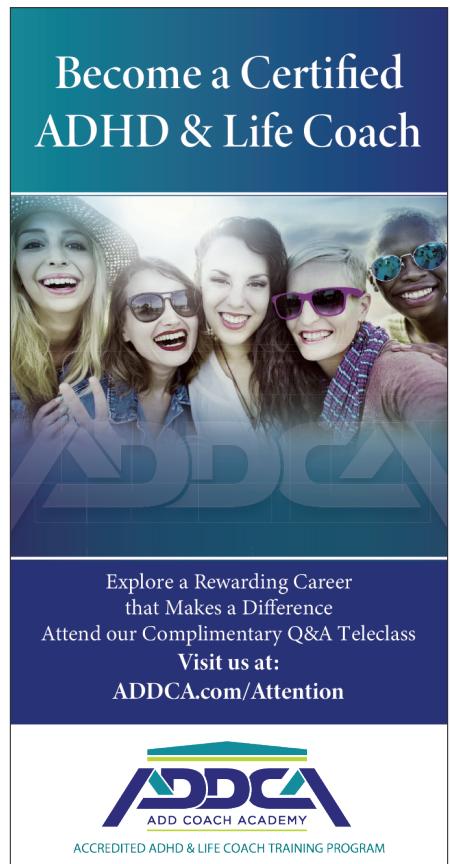
Linden Attention Learning Center

Toll-Free: 800.233.9117
DrLinden@LindenALC.com
LindenALC.com

Laguna Hills, CA
25201 Paseo de Alicia, Suite 118

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