

Efficient thinking comes from learning what to ignore

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

Let's begin with a little experiment: Whatever you do, as you're reading this short article, don't think about polar bears.

This is, you may have recognized, a classic thought exercise from the writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, in a passage that launched a thousand psychology theses, he wrote, "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."

In clinical terms, this phenomenon—of being told to suppress a thought, which then only makes that thought more persistent—is called [Ironic Process Theory](#). Several studies in recent decades have confirmed Dostoyevsky's observation: Essentially, it's not helpful to be told what *not* to think about.

But new research out of Johns Hopkins finds that being told to ignore specific information can actually work, and can make people more efficient in finding the information they're seeking.

"I'm interested in trying to make people better at finding stuff," said Corbin Cunningham, a graduate fellow in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences at Hopkins, and the lead author of [a study](#) published in the journal *Psychological Science*. "Imagine you're a professional searcher like a radiologist. The act of finding something kind of comes with two parts: It comes with knowing what you're looking for and being able to disassociate from distracting information."

Read full, original post: [The Art of Ignoring Things](#)