

Swedish while living in Sweden and working for Kraft. Once, after a three-hour-long language lesson, I mentioned to her that, after our lesson that day, I was going to start working on a work presentation. She gasped in horror.

“No!” she said. “You must allow your brain the time to let what you’ve learned sink in! If you don’t, so much of what you’ve learned with me this afternoon will be forgotten!”

What the tutor was talking about is *context shifting*—the concept of switching from one subject to another and the impact that has on personal productivity. The graph below illustrates that if you are 100 percent focused on a single project, you are 100 percent productive. But the minute you introduce another project, you lose 10 percent of your productivity on both projects because of the loss that occurs switching between them. From there you can see the diminishing return as more projects are added to your day.

WASTE CAUSED BY CONTEXT SWITCHING

Number of Simultaneous Projects	Percentage of Working Time Available per Project	Percentage of Time Lost to Context Switching
1	100%	0%
2	40%	20%
3	20%	40%
4	10%	60%
5	5%	75%

Gerald M. Weinberg, *Quality Software Management: Systems Thinking* (Dorset House, 1992), p. 284.