

# Study **Stress** and Music



What is the impact of background music on learning? Given that about 75% of students listen to music with homework, we ought to know.

Take a journey into the psychology of music listening on human behaviour.

Teachers monitor student study habits in the classroom, but not in the home. Generally, we encourage pupils to work in a distraction free environment, but is this falling on deaf ears? My research suggests that about 75% of students listen to music when they do homework. Many have asked me “is this good or bad?” but the relationship between music listening and learning is too complex for a polarized answer. My study and subsequent investigations have found four factors that determine whether or not music in the background is appropriate as a learning ‘arouser’ or a distractive. Essentially, this is what students and teachers will come to understand from my presentation *Study, Stress and Music*.

What I will tell you here is that the greatest ‘at risk’ student who allows himself to get distracted from background music is the extroverted teenage

boy. Studies have found that this type of student lacks the metacognitive thinking required to differentiate listening-music based on the requirements of a learning task. Yet for a mature student, task complexity will determine whether or not to have music playing in the background, as well as the characteristics of that music, and the appropriate volume level.

Understanding the effect of music on cognition is important. We all want to be efficient learners, and we owe it our pupils to give them knowledge (including their self-knowledge) that impacts their personal growth and academic progress.

Any positive aspects of listening to music whilst working are related to music’s emotional content. Emotions are 24 times stronger than thoughts, so

when we worry or have an emotional disturbance, our focus is compromised.

*...the little emotions are the captains of our lives  
and we obey them without realizing it.*

*- Vincent Van Gogh, 1889*

**Music** deals with the representation of emotion through the medium of sound. The primary reason humans are drawn to listen to music is to moderate their emotional state. In a very real sense music connects us with the inner world of our emotional self.

**Stress** occurs when there is a *perception* that a given challenge is greater than our skills. Stress can be good or bad, depending on how we deal with it. Good stress causes a narrowing of attention, whereas bad stress causes a focus on negative outcomes. Bad stress can interfere with brain circuitry making learning more difficult. Physiological changes resulting from stress include increases in pulse rate, blood pressure and body temperature. Most students are confronted with stress in their student lives.

Can listening to music alleviate stress, and therefore moderate our physiological state?

We wish to know whether music can assist in, or whether it will distract from, the learning process. And if students do choose to listen to background music when studying, what type of music is suitable and with what tasks?

This presentation explores these questions in an enjoyable and interesting manner. It includes an engaging mix of talk, visual stimulation as well as illustrative musical extracts performed on the piano.

Further, should you be interested in acquiring a 10-hour mp3 selection ideal for students to study with, then please contact me.

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