

**Digital Detox: Elevating Learning through Focus Fridays**

Luisa Honeywell  
1612 Claflin Rd  
Manhattan, KS 66506  
785-532-5804  
luisahoneywell@k-state.edu

Jason D. Ellis  
jdellis@k-state.edu

Katie Starzec  
kstarzec@k-state.edu

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### Introduction

The world is rapidly advancing technologically, altering interactions with one another, learning in classrooms, in the workplace, and perceptions of the world around us. People rely on handheld devices and are subconsciously attached to them as if they are a part of their bodies (Mohamed et. al, 2023). With billions of users engaging daily, social media has exceeded its initial purpose of connecting individuals to become an extensive force shaping opinions and behaviors. As society becomes increasingly intertwined with technology, the ascendancy of social media emphasizes the transformation of human interaction and highlights the need for critical reflection on its implications for privacy, democracy, and social cohesion (Wike, 2022).

Due to the rapid growth of technology, both benefits and challenges have affected learning opportunities in the classroom specifically with Generation Z students. While technology offers options for enhanced learning experiences, its overuse can lead to damaging effects. Generation Z, born into a digital age, often grapples with distractions such as social media, messaging apps, and online gaming during class time. This constant connectivity can alter their focus, leading to decreased attention spans and diminished academic performance (Mohamed et al., 2023). Moreover, relying on digital devices for retrieving information may weaken critical thinking skills and the ability to retain knowledge. Balancing technology integration with mindful usage guidelines is essential to mitigate these adverse effects and encourage a more beneficial learning environment.

### How it works

The term "Focus Friday" is designed to encourage students to dedicate their attention solely to classroom activities without the use of technological devices. Over an 18-week semester, students were instructed to refrain from using any form of technology for the 50-minute duration of class once a week. At the beginning of class every Friday, the course professor would uniquely split the students into small groups of three or four and make sure that each week would be different groups.

Enforcing "Focus Fridays" promotes a learning environment by canceling out distractions and encouraging face-to-face interactions among students. The idea is by putting away the devices, students can improve their focus, participate more actively in discussions, and collaborate effectively with their peers, which will help them develop valuable skills in critical thinking and interpersonal communication.

Throughout the semester, the instructor used these Fridays to complete career-building activities. The goal was to increase students' workplace professionalism and help them get the job they wanted. For example, one exercise was practicing how to negotiate terms and conditions when accepting a new job offer. A second was speed networking with other classmates. A third activity was mock interviews with alumni and other professionals.

### Results to date

**Table 1.**

*Students' Evaluation of Focus Fridays Over the Fall Semester (N=22)*

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither		Strongly Disagree	M	SD
			Agree nor Disagree	Disagree			

I like the idea of having one class day per week with no technology	10	8	3	1	0	4.23	0.85
Having one day of no technology should be implemented in other classes too.	5	11	4	2	0	3.86	0.89
Focused Fridays has helped me become more comfortable with communicating or sharing in class	5	10	6	1	0	3.86	0.83
Focused Fridays helped me be better at interacting with other students	6	9	6	1	0	3.86	0.99

*Note: Five-point Likert scale questions; 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.*

Students in an Agricultural Communications class were asked to give their opinions on how they felt about the Focus Friday concept. The first four questions were on a five-point Likert scale and the fifth question was a short answer. The question asked, “How would you improve Focus Fridays?” After getting the results back, we saw three trends in their answers.

The first trend seen was positive; these students saw nothing wrong with the activities and wished they were more popular in other classes. One student said “Focus Fridays were a great help throughout the semester because they connected multiple students. Implementing more Focus Fridays involving student learning and interactions will help create a better environment surrounding the idea versus sitting and listening to a different form of lecture”.

The second trend was positive, explaining ways to improve it for other classes. The students appreciated trying Focus Fridays but needed more structure to the activities, strongly enforcing the no device rule including lecture slides, and a more diverse group. A third group of students felt they were not challenged enough to get out of their comfort zones and feel heard during a group discussion.

### **Future plans**

Moving forward, educators should consider implementing regular “Focus Friday” sessions into their teaching routines and provide guidance and support to help their students navigate and maximize the benefits of focused learning opportunities. Additionally, consistent assessment and feedback from the students can improve the future of Focus Fridays. One way to maximize quality feedback would be to ask the students in an exit survey at the end of a semester for their opinions on the activities they completed during the semester.

### **Costs**

Focus Fridays are intended to cost nothing but the student’s time and attention. The goal is to come to class prepared to be off their device for 50 minutes and engage with the professor, the lesson, and their peers.

## References

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