

it is really hard to
focus when there are
too many things to do

/ James Saunders

/ 2023

Everyone is busy. We tend to have too many things to do, and not enough time to do them. Or we don't manage our time effectively. Or we try to do everything at once and fail. In *it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do* the players are presented with a collection of tasks which involve completing different series of actions, including playing melodic patterns, sequences of object sounds and samples. Individual players may cue these sequences, affecting the behaviour of the group as a whole. Once a sequence has been started, players must complete it while trying to manage the completion of any unfinished sequences. Simultaneously, other instructions modify the way they complete these tasks, necessitating decisions as to how best to proceed in order to do the best they can.

at least 15 players with pitched instruments, objects, and sample playback

duration: variable



SETUP

Each player needs their own setup comprising:

Table, with enough space to hold the objects and sample playback devices, and the score (a music stand may also be used if needed, but this should not obstruct the view of the player and table)

Chair

Pitched instrument

Sample playback setup (device with speaker)

16 objects:

bell (handbell, desk bell, bicycle bell etc. any pitch)

whistle (any pitch)

harmonica (C or G or D)

shaker (e.g. maraca, egg shaker, tin with rice in etc.)

squeaker (e.g. squeezey dog toy)

small wooden box (resonant)

metal tin (resonant)

empty glass bottle

empty plastic bottle

wine glass

keys

pencil

newspaper (a few sheets)

glass with a marble

plastic bag (quite crackly)

polystyrene block

The pitched instrument may be of any type, providing it can play specific required pitches in the melodic patterns.

The sample playback setup should allow each player to play the samples by cueing them quickly, with the audio coming from a localised source (not a PA). An example might be a sample playback app on a phone or tablet with buttons assigned to individual samples, using the device's speaker or an external portable speaker. It may be useful if the interface gives a grid arrangement to easily locate the samples. The samples will need to be recorded individually by each player in preparation.

The objects may vary slightly (e.g. the pitch and type of bell), and players should be encouraged to source the items individually where possible. If it is impossible to source enough of some of the objects, alternatives may be used providing all players have a version of the object. In this case, simple items should be chosen which produce sounds in distinct ways similar to the preferred items listed. The object lists will also need to be amended to name the replacement objects. Where possible, give each a simple single word label similar to those in the lists provided.

Spread the players throughout the performance space. They should be far enough apart to be distinct, but not so far that they are too separated: they should appear as a loose group. All players place their score, objects and sample playback equipment on their table.

As far as possible, arrange the objects on each table in the same layout, so that when players reach for a specific object, all of them move in the same way.

SOUNDS

OBJECTS

Each of the objects should be used to produce a sound in a simple way as indicated below. These are normally one-hit or sustained sounds as indicated, but not repeated or rhythmicised. Objects are used for the SEQUENCE # actions (see below)

CUE	OBJECT	ACTION
bell	bell (handbell, desk bell, bicycle bell etc.)	strike or activate bell once (let ring if possible)
whistle	whistle (any pitch)	a single blow (short or sustained)
harmonica	harmonica (in C or G or D)	a single blow, in or out (short or sustained)
shaker	shaker (e.g. maraca, egg shaker, tin with rice in etc.)	a single shake or sustained
squeaker	squeaker (e.g. squeazy dog toy)	a single squeak
box	small wooden box (resonant)	a single strike with the finger
tin	metal tin (resonant)	a single strike with the finger
bottle	empty glass bottle	a single blow across the opening (short or sustained)
plastic	empty plastic bottle	drop on table (and allow to bounce)
glass	wine glass	a single strike with the finger
keys	keys	suspend with fingers; a single rattle (short or sustained)
pencil	pencil	drop on table (and allow to bounce)
paper	newspaper (a few sheets)	tear a strip from the paper
marble	glass with a marble	circle the marble around in the glass
bag	plastic bag (quite crackly)	manipulate with hand (friction sounds)
polystyrene	polystyrene block	manipulate with hand (friction sounds)

SAMPLES

Make a recording of each of the listed sounds (if this is not possible source existing recordings online). Each sound should be a relatively short event so that it has a clear sonic identity. Samples are used for the SEQUENCE # actions (see below)

CUE	SAMPLE
aerosol	a short spray of an aerosol
alarm	a short burst from an alarm device (e.g. clock, smoke alarm, car alarm etc.)
balloon	pop an inflated balloon
beep	a single button press on a device to produce a beep (e.g. microwave, control panel etc.)
bike	a single toot on a rubber-ended bike horn
bubbles	blow bubbles through a straw in a glass of water
car	a short toot on a car horn
door	slam a door (house, car etc.)
bell	ring a doorbell (just a bell sound, no melodies)
gate	shut a metal gate sharply so that it activates the latch (and possibly squeaks)
ice	drop some fresh ice cubes into an empty glass
match	strike a match sharply and let it flare.
meal	pop the plastic of a ready meal with a fork in a quick burst
ruler	hold one end of a ruler on a desk and strike the free end to make it 'boing'
saucepan	strike a resonant saucepan with a wooden spoon
tape	attach the end of a roll of packing tape to a desk and pull the roll sharply

Assign the recorded samples to your playback device so that it is clear which sample is being cued. If using an app, it may be possible to label samples, or if on a phone/tablet taping a sheet of paper with the buttons labelled will normally work.

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

In the piece, players give spoken instructions to manage the structure of the provided material. All players may give instructions at any time, and all players must try to respond to all instructions. Players may shout out pattern or sequence numbers to cue material, instruction cues to affect the current material, or numbers to manage the duration of the performance.

The following instructions are possible:

PATTERN

This cues one of the numbered melodic patterns, replacing the # with the corresponding number (e.g. 'pattern 4' to cue pattern 4).

Players begin playing the patterns as soon as possible after hearing a cue and continue until they have completed it.

Patterns should be attempted to be played in unison, but this will be affected by individual player choices and the disruption provided by other actions.

Pitches in the patterns should generally be very short to produce a cloud of points. Occasionally playing one pitch as a sustained sound to connect to the following pitch is also possible.

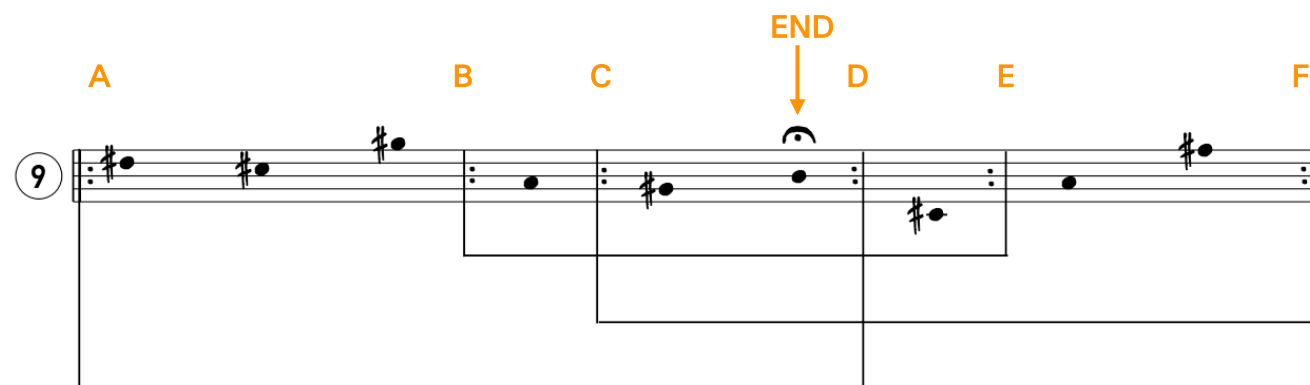
The rhythm and density of the pitches can vary (a lot) from sporadic to a regular pulse.

The dynamic and articulation of each pitch can be determined by each player individually, while being aware of the choices made by other players.

Pitches can be played in any octave, but where possible maintain the contour. Where a pitch is not available on an instrument, either transpose it up or down by an octave or omit it.

Each pattern comprises a short group of pitches, framed by interlocking loop brackets (see below). Any route through this material can be followed: for example, in the pattern below, loops can be made between points A-D, B-E, C-D, and C-F.

The fermatas indicate the completion point of a pattern. When players are trying to complete a pattern, they must reach this point in order to stop.



SEQUENCE

This cues one of the sequences of physical objects or samples, replacing the # with the corresponding number (e.g. 'sequence 11' to cue sequence 11).

Players begin playing the sequence as soon as possible after they hear a cue and continue until they have completed it.

Sequences should be attempted to be played in unison, but this will be affected by individual player choices and the disruption provided by other actions.

Players should sound each object or sample in the sequence individually in the given order. Samples or object sounds may overlap if they sustain slightly, but are generally short.

#

A spoken number sequence is used to manage the duration of the performance.

A performance may start with any number. The piece ends when one player shouts '0' (zero).

A higher starting number may result in a longer performance, although this is largely determined by the players' decisions.

Any player may shout out a number which is either one higher or lower than the previous number (e.g. if the last number was '22', then another player may shout out '21' or '23')

Players may not shout out more than one number in sequence; they must wait for another player to shout a number before shouting another number.

GENERAL CUES

The other cues are used to manage the way the main material is played:

FASTER	Play faster than your current tempo.
SLOWER	Play slower than your current tempo.
BACK	Play the current sequence of pitches, objects, or samples in reverse, working backwards from the point when the cue is given. If the beginning of a sequence is reached when reading it backwards, it is complete.
FORWARD	Play the current sequence of pitches, objects, or samples forwards as normal.
HOLD	Sustain the next sound until directed to <i>continue</i> . For samples and non-sustaining objects or instruments, hold the playing position even if the sound dies away (do not repeat).
WAIT	Stop playing, and stop any currently sounding pitches, objects and samples, until directed to <i>continue</i> .
REPEAT	Repeat the sound played immediately before the cue, playing it in the same manner, until directed to <i>continue</i> .
LOOP START / LOOP STOP	These cues mark the beginning and end of a looped group of sounds. After the cue to start remember the starting sound and continue playing until the stop cue, remembering the stopping sound. Then loop the sequence of sounds (which may be a mix of pitches, objects and samples) between these points until directed to <i>continue</i> .
COMPLETE	Finish all current sequences being played then wait for everyone to stop.
STOP	Stop all current sequences and await a new cue. This cue resets everything.
CONTINUE	Cancel the current wait, loop, hold complete or repeat cue.

OBJECTS

SEQUENCE 1	SEQUENCE 2	SEQUENCE 3	SEQUENCE 4	SEQUENCE 5	SEQUENCE 6	SEQUENCE 7	SEQUENCE 8		SEQUENCE 17	SEQUENCE 18	SEQUENCE 19	SEQUENCE 20	SEQUENCE 21	SEQUENCE 22	SEQUENCE 23	SEQUENCE 24
bottle	pencil	glass	bag	bell	paper	box	whistle		car	bubbles	saucepan	match	aerosol	door	ice	bell
harmonica	keys	bottle	shaker	whistle	box	tin	polystyrene		door	gate	balloon	ruler	gate	match	alarm	gate
whistle	pencil	plastic	marble	bell	pencil	box	bottle		alarm	aerosol	meal	tape	tape	ruler	bike	bell
bottle	box	tin	bag	shaker	box	glass	polystyrene		bell	gate	saucepan	ruler	gate	alarm	bell	gate
harmonica	keys	glass	marble	whistle	paper	tin	harmonica		beep	bubbles	beep	match	aerosol	ruler	car	bell
squeaker	box	marble	keys	shaker	box	box	bottle		alarm	gate	balloon	tape	match	door	beep	door
whistle	bell	bottle	pencil	squeaker	paper	glass	paper		door	aerosol	door	ice	aerosol	match	alarm	bell
harmonica	pencil	marble	bag	harmonica	pencil	bell	keys		bell	tape	saucepan	tape	tape		car	door
whistle	glass	glass	shaker	squeaker	paper	box	whistle		alarm	gate	meal	ruler			ice	gate
bottle	pencil	bell	keys	shaker	box	tin	harmonica		beep		door	match			bike	bell
squeaker	glass	tin	marble	whistle	pencil	box	shaker				ruler				bell	
harmonica	bell	plastic	shaker	harmonica		bell	keys								ice	
squeaker	box	bottle	pencil	bell		tin	paper								beep	
harmonica		plastic		whistle		box	bottle								alarm	
bottle		glass		bell			polystyrene									

SAMPLES

SEQUENCE 9	SEQUENCE 10	SEQUENCE 11	SEQUENCE 12	SEQUENCE 13	SEQUENCE 14	SEQUENCE 15	SEQUENCE 16		SEQUENCE 25	SEQUENCE 26	SEQUENCE 27	SEQUENCE 28	SEQUENCE 29	SEQUENCE 30	SEQUENCE 31	SEQUENCE 32
bag	tin	shaker	bottle	plastic	marble	bag	harmonica		balloon	bubbles	door	ruler	saucepan	aerosol	bike	match
paper	glass	polystyrene	whistle	pencil	keys	plastic	marble		tape	aerosol	gate	bike	meal	beep	car	ice
polystyrene	tin	shaker	bottle	keys	bag	bag	keys		balloon	bubbles	door	car	ice	alarm	bike	bubbles
paper	marble	polystyrene	whistle	pencil	keys	polystyrene	marble		meal	balloon	balloon	bike	meal	beep	car	ice
polystyrene	glass	bag	squeaker	shaker	bag	squeaker	bell		tape	aerosol	saucepan	ruler	bubbles	car	beep	aerosol
bag	marble	shaker	whistle	plastic	marble	polystyrene	harmonica		meal	bike	meal	car	saucepan	bell	alarm	ice
paper	keys	keys	bottle	pencil	keys	plastic	keys		tape	balloon	balloon	door	beep	alarm	bike	match
polystyrene	tin	bag	squeaker	keys	paper	bag	bell		balloon	aerosol	gate	car	aerosol	car	alarm	bubbles
paper	marble	polystyrene	harmonica	shaker	marble	squeaker	marble		meal	bike	door	ruler	ice	beep	car	ice
bag	glass	shaker	bottle	pencil	paper	polystyrene			tape	balloon	meal	door		aerosol	horn	aerosol
	keys	keys	harmonica	plastic					meal	bubbles		bike		car	alarm	bubbles
	tin		whistle						balloon			car			beep	
												ruler				
												beep				

it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do

/ James Saunders
/ 2023

①

Musical notation for exercise 1: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

②

Musical notation for exercise 2: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

③

Musical notation for exercise 3: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

④

Musical notation for exercise 4: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑤

Musical notation for exercise 5: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑥

Musical notation for exercise 6: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑦

Musical notation for exercise 7: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑧

Musical notation for exercise 8: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑨

Musical notation for exercise 9: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑩

Musical notation for exercise 10: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑪

Musical notation for exercise 11: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑫

Musical notation for exercise 12: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑬

Musical notation for exercise 13: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑭

Musical notation for exercise 14: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑮

Musical notation for exercise 15: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

⑯

Musical notation for exercise 16: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Staff 1: quarter notes G4, A4, B4, C5. Staff 2: quarter notes G3, F3, E3, D3. Repeat sign at the end.

it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do

/ James Saunders
/ 2023

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do

/ James Saunders
/ 2023

[Bb]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do

/ James Saunders
/ 2023

[Eb]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

it is really hard to focus when there are too many things to do

/ James Saunders
/ 2023

[F]

The image displays a musical score for guitar, consisting of 16 numbered measures. Each measure is presented as a system with a treble clef staff and a bass staff. The notes are written in a rhythmic pattern that suggests a 4/4 time signature. Measure 1 starts with a low bass note (F2) and a treble note (F4). Measure 2 features a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with a low bass note (F2). Measure 3 continues the treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 4 shows a more complex treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 5 has a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 6 features a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 7 has a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 8 shows a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 9 features a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 10 has a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 11 shows a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 12 features a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 13 has a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 14 shows a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 15 features a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). Measure 16 has a treble staff sequence with a low bass note (F2). The notes in the treble staff are primarily quarter notes and eighth notes, with some beamed eighth notes. The bass staff contains mostly low notes, including the F2 octave pedal point.