NEWS LESSON

An Alert Can Interrupt You Before You Open It



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Which notification is genuinely worth interrupting you for?
2. Does a silent phone still tempt you to check it?
3. Would you prefer one daily update or messages as they arrive?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**glance**	☐	A	happening all the time
2	**shift**	☐	B	to prove or show clearly
3	**controlled**	☐	C	to move or change from one thing to another
4	**demonstrate**	☐	D	beliefs about how people should behave
5	**differ**	☐	E	to look at something quickly
6	**constant**	☐	F	continuing without being stopped
7	**expectations**	☐	G	to be not the same as someone else
8	**uninterrupted**	☐	H	done in a careful, planned way, often by scientists

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The slowdown depended on how relevant the message seemed and how often people usually checked their phones. Switching off alerts is a social negotiation as well as a setting.

1 You sit down to read an article, but before you reach the third paragraph, a notification appears. It might be a message from a friend or an offer from a shopping app. You glance at it and return to your reading. The interruption seems harmless, yet your concentration may already have been affected.

2 Try reading a long article while your phone lights up beside you. Even if you resist opening the message, part of your attention may shift towards wondering who contacted you.

3 A study published in Computers in Human Behavior in 2026 investigated the immediate effects of social-media-style notifications. Participants completed a task requiring attention while researchers measured their responses. Notifications produced a temporary slowdown in processing lasting approximately seven seconds. The disruption was related not just to the alerts themselves but also to how relevant they appeared and people's usual phone-checking habits.

4 This finding helps explain why constant availability can feel tiring. Our attention is repeatedly invited to move from one activity to another, even when we do not respond to every message. A phone sitting nearby may become a regular reminder that something else could demand our attention at any moment.

5 However, the research should not be exaggerated. The experiment measured a short-term effect in a controlled task. It does not demonstrate that smartphones permanently reduce intelligence or explain every concentration problem. People also differ in how they use devices, and many apps offer genuine practical benefits. Some people tackle the problem by switching off unnecessary alerts or putting the phone out of sight during important tasks. The aim is not to reject technology but to take back control.

6 The challenge is deciding which interruptions deserve our attention. An urgent call from a relative is not the same as a discount notification from a shop. Yet both may be allowed to interrupt important work if we leave every alert switched on.

7 An important part of the debate concerns social expectations. If friends, colleagues and managers assume that every message deserves an immediate reply, silencing notifications can feel rude rather than sensible. Yet constant responsiveness carries a cost that is not always visible in working hours or task lists. Teams can make concentration easier by agreeing which messages are urgent and when a slower response is acceptable.

8 Individuals can also separate essential alerts from promotional ones, schedule periods of uninterrupted work and leave devices out of reach while reading. None of this requires rejecting digital communication. Think of a group chat in which a colleague expects an answer within minutes: the alert is the same, but now it carries pressure to reply. Concentration depends on other people's expectations as well as our own habits.

9 Simple changes can create more control: limiting non-essential notifications, keeping phones out of sight during demanding activities or agreeing on times to respond to messages. Rather than asking whether phones are good or bad, perhaps we should ask who is choosing when our attention changes direction.

Sources: Computers in Human Behavior. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Teams can agree which messages are urgent. T F NG
2. The experiment demonstrated a permanent loss of intelligence. T F NG
3. Most companies now ban messages after six o'clock. T F NG
4. The writer suggests that a phone can distract you even if you never touch it. T F NG
5. People who check their phones more often always showed a longer slowdown. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

demand	essential	exaggerated	genuine	insist	permanent	resist	temporary

1. The delay was only _____ , and attention returned to normal within seconds.
2. I thought the email was from my bank, but it was not _____ .
3. The headline _____ the findings: the study never claimed that phones harm everyone.
4. It is _____ to keep your phone charged before a long journey.
5. It is hard to _____ looking at a screen that keeps lighting up.
6. Some jobs _____ a reply within minutes.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. When I finally checked my phone, three friends _____ me. (MESSAGE)
2. The study _____ in Computers in Human Behavior in 2026. (PUBLISH)
3. If you had turned off the alerts, you _____ your place. (NOT LOSE)
4. Participants _____ to ignore the alerts, but many still looked. (TELL)
5. Alerts _____ much more common over the last ten years. (BECOME)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs, adjectives and nouns have a fixed preposition after them. Learn the whole chunk, such as responsible for, not just the single word.

at for from of on to with

1. Some people are addicted _____ checking their phones.
2. How well you concentrate depends _____ how tired you are.
3. Sleep problems may result _____ late-night scrolling.
4. She was accused _____ ignoring her friends because she replied late.
5. Parents often argue _____ their teenagers about screen time.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Who should decide what counts as an urgent notification?
2. What would you switch off if you could try it for only one day?
3. Should apps have to earn the right to interrupt you?

9 Role-play: the ten-minute reply rule

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the manager

You want your team to answer work messages within ten minutes, even in the evening. Explain why. Ask at least two questions, then decide: agree a rule, change it, or keep it.

Student B · the employee

You want to switch off work alerts after six o'clock because you can't concentrate or rest. Explain how it affects you and suggest a rule that works for both of you.

Useful phrases

I'd like to switch off alerts after six.
Which messages are really urgent?
I can't concentrate when my phone keeps buzzing.
We're a small team, so I need quick answers.
Could we agree a time to reply?
That's a fair compromise.

Afterwards, tell the class: what rule did you agree, and is it fair for both people?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 C · 3 H · 4 B · 5 G · 6 A · 7 D · 8 F

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 NG

5 Vocabulary

1 temporary · 2 genuine · 3 exaggerated · 4 essential · 5 resist · 6 demand

6 Verb forms

1 had messaged · 2 was published · 3 would not have lost or wouldn't have lost · 4 were told · 5 have become

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 on · 3 from · 4 of · 5 with

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**