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# When is your head at? An exploration of the factors associated with the temporal focus of the wandering mind

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### Abstract

Two experiments employed experience sampling to examine the factors associated with a prospective and retrospective focus during mind wandering. Experiment One explored the contribution of working memory and indicated that participants generally prospect when the task does not require continuous monitoring. Experiment Two demonstrated that in the context of reading, interest in what was read suppressed both past and future-related task-unrelated-thought. Moreover, in disinterested individuals the temporal focus during mind wandering depended on the amount of experience with the topic matter—less experienced individuals tended to prospect, while more experienced individuals tended to retrospect. Together these results suggest that during mind wandering participants are inclined to prospect as long as the task does not require their undivided attention and raise the intriguing possibility that autobiographical

associations with the current task environment have the potential to cue the disinterested mind.



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## Keywords

Mental time travel; Experience sampling; Task unrelated thought; Mind wandering; Prospective/retrospective cognition; Spontaneous thought; Stimulus independent thought

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