Measuring Attention Spans
Portfolio Sample

Measuring Attention Spans

(No active animations)
It’s more productive to design for interest than for attention span.

This preliminary draft of a learning tool shows how to rethink “attention span.”
Skills Used

- Applied principles of learning and memory
- Quiz construction
- Analytical thinking
- Contributing to the field
Measuring Attention Spans
Measurements of attention span circulate among school communities and e-learning developers.

Educators, parents and thought leaders lament society’s dwindling attention span.
Let’s look at some ways attention span is measured.

Indicate whether each one is True or False.
Ways to Compute Attention Span in Children

Add one minute for each year of their age. For example, 4 minutes for a 4-year-old.
If user selected TRUE, this screen appears.

That would mean 4-year-old Elizabeth borrows her mother’s smartphone for 4 minutes before losing her focus and giving it back.

But her mother is always telling her, “Sweetie, you can only play with it for 20 minutes and then you have to give it back.” And Elizabeth never wants to give it back.

Leads to next “True or False”
If user selected False, the next True-False screen appears.
Add one minute for each grade in school. For example, 6 minutes for a 6th-grader.
That would mean 12-year-old, 6th-grader Jason can only focus for 6 minutes on his game station, which would please his parents beyond their wildest imagination. But Jason’s parents are constantly telling him to put the game station away, and he can’t let it go. “Give me another half hour!” he says. “I just figured out how to get to the next level!”
If user selected False, the next True-False screen appears.
Multiply age by 2 or 3. For example, a 10-year-old might have an attention span of 20-30 minutes.
If user selected TRUE, this screen appears.

That would mean Rosikjan can stay engaged in conversation on the phone for 20-30 minutes. But her mother catches Rosikjan pretending to be asleep under her blanket almost every night. Mama tells her, “Say goodbye and give me your phone! Morning will come too soon.”

And Rosikjan is always begging to talk longer.

Leads to “What about adults?”
If user selected False, the “What about adults?” screen appears.
What about adults?

Let’s look at some ways their attention is measured.
Multiply age by 2 or 3. For example, a healthy 50-year-old might have an attention span of 100-150 minutes.
Wow. No wonder legendary business leader Peter Drucker was so productive in his later years. At 92, his attention span must have been 184-276 minutes.

(Maybe it helped that his kids were grown up and gone.)

Leads to next “True or False”
If user selected False, the next True-False screen appears.
How to Compute Attention Span in Adults

Hmm. That would mean María’s nosy neighbor probably isn’t so nosy. María says the woman’s face is plastered to the front window every morning, keeping track of all the packages delivered in the neighborhood. That seems unlikely, since deliveries take 15 to 90 seconds, which is longer than a 12-second attention span.
If user selected False, the next True-False screen appears.
Add or subtract 25% to or from 20 minutes, depending on whether the person is easily distracted. Example: Shandra is a focused individual and can therefore concentrate for 25 minutes at a time. (25% of 20 is 5. Add 5 to 20 and you have the 25 minutes.)
That’s odd, because Shandra says she has not been able to concentrate on anything after spending four years as a stay-at-home mother of two little children.

“People think I’m tuned in,” she says, “but my mind feels shot! I interviewed for a job the other day and I was hanging on for dear life trying to process what these adults were asking and telling me. It was as though I wasn’t even there. I don’t talk to adults. But they offered me the job. Whatever. I took it.”
If user selected False, the “Check your answers” screen appears.
Time to Check Your Answers
No, wait a second. We gotta talk.

About distraction.
What is distraction?

Stop and think about it and you’ll realize that distraction is *paying attention in another direction*. You may get tired of listening to a caller and find yourself looking up the weather on your phone.

You gave your attention to listening and then switched your attention to the weekend weather. You seem to have plenty of attention.

Leads to next screen.
What is distraction?

If you get tired of listening to the person talk, and then the person starts talking about something that interests you, you might start paying undivided attention without any effort. This is as true of children as it is of adults. Age doesn’t matter.

The simple lesson is...
Attention expands with interest

where interest is defined as a desire to think.
So, forget about measuring attention spans.
Instead of building clever and entertaining techniques to hold attention, give yourself a break and design with The Four Factors of Interest.
After working for years with people of all ages and abilities, I noticed that interesting environments are characterized by four ingredients, which are...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaningfulness</th>
<th>from the learner’s point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Momentum</td>
<td>from the learner’s point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>from the learner’s point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable challenge</td>
<td>from the learner’s point of view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When people are interested, they want to think, and they pay attention.
People often think they’re playing a game when you design with The Four Factors.
There’s always more to explain, of course.

For instance, people can’t give you much of their attention when they’re worn out or sick or they have to find a bathroom, or if they’re full of anxiety or another emotion. Their brain space is already mostly consumed. Attention span is not the problem.
That’s my gift to you – **The Four Factors of Interest**. They contain most of the learning psychology you’ll ever need. The Four Factors can make your career a storybook of delight.

Remember...
Attention expands with interest.
I leave a tiny e-book sitting quietly on Amazon about The Four Factors. It’s called *How to Be an Interesting Teacher: Mastering the Four Factors of Interesting Learning Environments*. 