Study tips for students

Do we really learn best when it's quiet or does some background noise help to focus the mind? Smartphones distract attention and reduce learning, mainly because of their potential to offer activities more inviting than exam revision. But what about background sound alone? The answer depends both on what sort of sound, and on what a student is trying to accomplish. Researchers in Rice University in Houston compared students’ comprehension of verbal material when reading in the presence of background speech, instrumental music or white noise. Their scores were most depressed in the presence of background speech, whereas the presence of music slightly improved comprehension. Their studies suggest that when you read and when you try to remember any verbal material, background speech will inhibit your ability, whereas instrumental music will have at worst no effect. When you write essays, however, it’s best to reduce background noise as much as possible. In summary, parents should call for quiet conditions when children are writing essays. When reading and trying to incorporate new material, however, they should consider allowing some background music, particularly if it’s instrumental and their child is an extrovert.

Most important of all is to minimise background conversations altogether.