THE ACOUSTIC FOCUS RESET

A five-day experiment for matching concentrated work to a workable sound environment

Before you begin

This worksheet tests whether intelligible background speech is interfering with a specific task. It does not promise silence and it does not diagnose an attention disorder. Use comfortable listening levels, follow workplace safety rules, and never block alarms or signals you must hear.

1 Name the work

Choose one repeatable task that requires verbal memory or concentrated reasoning: drafting, editing, coding, calculation, or reviewing complex material. Write a finish line you can observe.

TASK	FINISH LINE	EXPECTED MINUTES

2 Audit the sound

For one minute, listen without changing anything. Mark what is present: nearby speech / distant speech / calls / steady ventilation / music / sudden impacts. Rate speech intelligibility from 0 (no words understandable) to 5 (complete sentences understandable).

SPEECH 0-5	DISTRACTION 0-5	ENERGY 0-5	LOCATION / TIME

3 Build one protected block

Change the smallest useful layer first. A: move to a quiet zone or quieter hour. B: increase distance or use an available barrier. C: use comfortable non-lyrical masking or noise-cancelling headphones. D: silence notifications and define when you will resurface. Do not change every variable at once.

DAY	TASK	ONE ACOUSTIC CHANGE	START / STOP	RESULT
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

4 Review the right cause

After each block, record output and error rate before judging how focused you felt. If performance did not improve, check other explanations: unclear scope, interruption, fatigue, anxiety, insufficient skill, or an unrealistic workload.

WHAT IMPROVED?	WHAT STILL INTERRUPTED?

5 Make one request

If the pattern is consistent, convert it into a specific adjustment: two protected focus blocks, access to a quiet room for memory-heavy tasks, fewer calls in a shared zone, or acoustic treatment at the source. Describe the task and evidence rather than declaring the whole office unusable.

Evidence note: Office studies support protecting some concentration-heavy tasks from intelligible speech, but effect sizes vary by task, person, and building. Headphones are one layer, not a complete acoustic design.

Sources: Haapakangas et al., Journal of Environmental Psychology (2020), PMID 33052159; De Croon et al., Ergonomics (2005), PMID 15764312; Hongisto et al., Indoor Air (2021), PMID 32735743. Educational information only.