# Do Nothing[[1]](#footnote-1)

It’s the start of the semester. Time to do nothing. First let’s get our preconceptions out. What do you think will happen when you do nothing? Write it down on the reverse side of this page.

### Step 1: Conducting the Experiment

This exercise requires that you go to a relatively busy public space (a mall, square, plaza, street corner, park, sidewalk, etc.) and literally do nothing for ten minutes. That means just stand there and be unoccupied. Don’t be waiting for someone, taking a break, sightseeing, or otherwise engaged in a normal kind of activity. Also don’t daydream, fantasize, think about the past or the future; don’t entertain yourself with plans or internal dialogues. Don’t whistle, hum, fidget, look in your purse, play with your keys, take notes, or anything else that might distract you from just being there and doing nothing. Do, however, observe the reactions of others to you, and pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings during these ten minutes.

### Step 2: Thinking and Writing About the Experience

After conducting the experiment, answer the questions below.

The purpose of this exercise is to get you to see that changing your perspective (from “doing something” to “doing nothing”) makes everything different. It helps turn the ordinary world into a strange place. It makes you more aware of your own sense (or lack) of self and how identity is constructed in society. You can’t take for granted that you “just know” what other people are doing or thinking or how the meaning of a situation is being defined or interpreted. Divested of your usual perspective as an everyday actor, you’ll learn how the most mundane activities (like just standing around) can become major objects of critical inquiry.

* Where did you do nothing?
* When did you do nothing?
* What did you do while doing nothing? (What pose did you take?)
* Describe other people’s reactions to you.
* Why did they react as they did?
* How did you feel AND why did you feel that way?
* Why do you think I had you do this assignment?

**(Complete on the back of this page or in a journal).**

**Name: Period: Doing Nothing**

* Where did you do nothing?
* When did you do nothing?
* What did you do while doing nothing? (What pose did you take?)
* Describe other people’s reactions to you.
* Why did they react as they did?
* How did you feel AND why did you feel that way?
* Why do you think I had you do this assignment?
1. From McGrane, B. (1994). The Un-Tv and the 10 Mph Car Experiments in Personal Freedom and Everyday Life. Berkeley: Small Press [↑](#footnote-ref-1)