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AP Language and Composition

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Winter Break Reflection

In list of 24-hours without technology and meaningful conversations, by far the most interesting request was to “Sit in silence for 10 minutes with no distractions”. Everything else is so clear cut, but what even is silence? What is a distraction? What are ten minutes? I found myself more interested with the parameters of this challenge than the actual challenge.

I used to define silence as the absence of sound, but as my understanding of acoustics changed, so did this definition. It appears that there is nary an absence of sound. Sound is merely waves of particles traveling through the air, detected by your ears. Particles are almost always moving; sound in some capacity virtually always exists. The quietest place on Earth, an anechoic chamber in Minnesota averages at about -9.4 dBa. But here’s the problem: Even in this room which breaks our sound measuring scale, there is ample sound. It is said that if one spends more than thirty minutes in this room, it will drive them mad. Without the usual hum of the natural world, one can hear their own body function. Every heartbeat, digestion, or swish in the mouth. Perhaps to experience true silence, one could hinder their own ears useless, but aural mutilation is *so* 1888.

Ten minutes appeared to be well defined -- until I remembered AP Physics. As much as we would like it, time is not constant. Two objects with differing relative forces experience rates of time thanks to “special relativity”. Although time never seems to speed up or slow down to the

person, it very well does. Astronauts age about .01 seconds less than us on Earth for each year they spend in the ISS. Whose ten minutes is my marker? Furthermore, are we using a decimal system, or some convoluted base in which 10 secretly means 9? I asked Siri, but she said she didn't understand. Nobody understands.

The most intriguing part of this challenge is the “distraction” part. Which distractions am I to block out? Distractions from school? Hunger? Isn't everything a distraction from our mortality and inevitable demise? Perhaps I should just sit in a corner and feel very bad for myself for a while.

These parameters haunted me. It taught me that not everything needs to be hyper-analyzed. I have been given so many fantastic resources, but maybe I need not use all of them all of the time. Eventually, I came to peace by doing the only sensible thing: took a 10 minute nap. It was a good nap.