

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES



Sensory Toys for Fidgety Librarians: How Fidget Toys Help Shine a Light on GALILEO

Hallo . . . be thy names!

- Olivia Bushey
 - Research Services Librarian for the Humanities
 - Favorite fidget/sensory tool: (TACTILE)
 - Favorite anxiety quote: "Aaugh!" Charlie Brown
- Gail Morton
 - Research Services Librarian for the Sciences and Health Sciences
 - Favorite fidget/sensory tool: daily walks outside (MOVEMENT)
 - Favorite anxiety quote: "Pray, hope, and don't worry." Saint Padre Pio
- Lee Olson
 - Head of Research Services and Research Services Librarian for STEM
 - Favorite fidget/sensory tool: calming café jazz music* (AUDITORY)
 - Favorite anxiety quote: "Do not be anxious about anything." Phil. 4:6



Who & How We Help

Student population

- undergraduate/graduate
- multi-campus
- professional programs
- in-person/virtual
- multi-cultural



Faculty

Reference interaction

- interview Where do we go first? Who? Where? When? Why?
 - Enter the tools (for us)
- Discovery Search
 - Enter the tools (for students)
 - Why not Google/ChatGPT? Are we communicating clearly? How do we know the information is getting across? What is the end result (research project/paper)?



FiDget tOys aidE refeREnce InteractioNS

Mercer University Libraries' Discovery Search uses the GALILEO platform to launch research.

While this is our go to resource, using it efficiently includes:

- Knowing the tools and how to access them
- Which database to use (federated or individual)
- What order according to the information seeker (narrow first or expand)

How do I communicate this information to the researcher

- Virtually
- In person
- On the phone
- Through video conferencing



This Can All Be Very Stressful.



Calming to Clarity

- Approaching each situation requires a sense of calm which in turn helps with clarity and as a result makes us better researchers.
- Our offices are filled with sensory objects personalized in nature --for the purpose of maintaining tranquility in a whirlwind of citation checks, research help, and the "my paper is due tomorrow" student.
- According to Karina Aguilar, reporter from the Torch newsletter, "Fidget toys are objects that work as tools to aid with focus and attention-these sensory objects allow the brain to process irrelevant or extra sensory information."



Presentation Overview

Research librarians at Mercer University find that the use of sensory objects heightens focus on research tasks and strategies in our everyday work environment.

Our presentation includes:

- What is a fidget/sensory tool
- Advantages to neurodivergent persons
- Interesting facts
- Best practices
- How fidgety tools work



What is a sensory/fidget toy and . . .

- According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), the word fidget "As a modifier, forming nouns (in some cases proprietary names) denoting any of various small objects which are (or are designed to be) manipulated by the hands in order to relieve stress, impatience, excitement, etc., as in **fidget spinner**, **fidget toy**, etc."
- CHADD (2019), distinguishes the difference between a fidget toy and a fidget tool explaining that a tool, "like the squeeze toy, allows quiet activity that doesn't bring your focus towards it. The fidget toy, "ends up capturing your attention because you either need to watch it to maintain control or you are actively trying to do neat tricks with it."





... what does it do

- Liu (2025), suggests, using sensory fidget toys "provide a one-of-a-kind and efficient method for coping with stress, enhancing focus, and finding solutions to problems that arise on a regular basis."
- Kriescher, on the contrary, finds that objects that facilitate fidgeting have no bearing on learning outcomes (2020).





Then . . .

Classroom distractions from the past - or are they?



(guess the two movies depicted on this slide for a prize)



and Now

Popular fidget tools/toys now



(some things stay the same – which fidget object appears both then & now?)



Neurodivergent & Fidgets

What is neurodivergent?

According to the Oxford Dictionary "People who differ in mental or neurological functioning from what is considered typical or normal"

How does fidgeting help?

- For adults, it is possible that fidgeting serves as an unconscious method to boost [...] alertness to enable them to focus more on the task stimuli and keep pace with it, thus performing better when fidgeting." (Son et al., 2024)
- "[O]verall, fidget devices had a significant positive effect on student academic performance and behavior in the classroom" (Schoenen et al. 2024)
- "[...] you have to personalize. Find your feel. What feels right for one of us won't necessarily feel right for you." (Hallowell & Ratey, 2021)



Examples from the Wilds of the Library

Background – Department head (experience of staff), and self

Tactile Feedback

- Sensory Regulation
 - Iow-level sensory input helps occupy fidgety hands or the need for movement
- Physical grounding
 - Think of it as "helping my brain settle into my body."
- Replaces unhelpful fidgeting
 - Instead of biting nails, tapping, or pacing, the device becomes a regulated, quiet fidget.



Did You Know?

- Komboloi (KOHM-boy-ay) beads or worry beads one of the earliest known fidget toys originating from the monks of Mount Athos. (Rise of sensory fidget toys) (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).
- Catherine Hettinger the inventor of the fidget spinner did not receive any money for it. She could not afford the \$400.00 patent renewal. About a year or so later it became a hit (Created an object . . . ,2024).
- The Smithsonian National Museum of American History may get a fidget spinner to represent the impeachment trial of President Trump – Since phones were not allowed the spinner kept the politicians attentive (McClone, 2020).



Best Practices & Examples

Research librarians become better communicators and researchers due to stress reduction, and as a result, "SHINES A LIGHT" on how to use GALILEO that suits our patrons best.

- Recognize and utilize a variety of ways to show a student how the databases work within GALILEO (verbal, faq, chat, video, etc.) - LI feedback responses/Project Outcome?
- Familiarity and skill with research databases
- A personalized choice of fidget/sensory tools--either for personal or student stress reduction (anecdotes - e.g., Zoom backgrounds, anxiety blob, paper clips, collectibles)



Personalized Sensory Tools on Display





How does this work?

(our experiences – calming jazz, paper clips, tchotchkes, mynoise.net)

Tell us your fidget story.





Thanks y'all!

Questions, concerns, petitions to the Almighty . . . comments upon the weather



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