

The student is thinking, "That old goat. Is he going to spend another 50 minutes on that stupid thing? We have been around it 16 times in other classes. Got it first in junior high school." Tuning him in, he finds that the old man sure enough is multiplying one-digit numbers on the big slide rule. Immediately the kid gags mentally and thinks, "What will I do with that soft tire on my Ford? When I put the car on the lot this morning, I noticed that the right, rear tire was half down. If that cussed thing is clear flat at the end of the period, do I shift her between classes or let her sit?" Fifty seconds later he checks in on the professor, who is multiplying two-digit numbers on the big slide rule. Immediately the kid begins worrying about the chemistry test he has to take Thursday morning. Fifty seconds later he checks in on the professor, who is dividing one-digit numbers on the big slide rule. The kid is in and out about six times. Then on one of the outs a very important question comes to his attention: "Which woman am I going to call for a date for Saturday night," he wonders. He mentally runs over the various possibilities he had earlier listed in the back of his notebook, and stops at the name Susan. He has had her out several times on Saturday night, and he remembers that she is plump and jolly, laughs and giggles a lot, that you can always have a good time out with Susie. He recalls that she usually fixes something good to eat at the end of the evening, and that comes free, and that is good, too. He sits there reveling in the idea of another Saturday-night date with Susan. Then all of a sudden a very dramatic possibility comes to his cortical centers. "I wonder if I could rate a date with that Martha Something-or-other who transferred in here from Amherst College, I think it was. Gee, what a female. I have never seen a woman like that before in my life--tall, sinuous, and glamorous. When that gal walks it's like watching a snake crawl." This lad is off on a mental tangent from which there is no return.

The next thing he hears is the bell for the end of the hour. When the bell rings he hears the old professor say, "Remember, when you take cube root--" "Cube root on a slide rule?!" In panic he grabs some mate going out the back door and said, "What is with this guy? How do you take cube root?" He doesn't know, either. He was out on some other mental tangent.

This is why you and I listen with 25 percent efficiency when we listen, because we are a bunch of island-hoppers. We hop from one island of attention to another. While we are on land we do very