

Study Skills Tips: Improving Concentration

Concentration means focusing all your attention on a single subject. This sounds simple, but many people have difficulty concentrating and end up wasting valuable study time. Like other skills, concentration can be learned through practice and repetition. As you read on you will see what common distractions break concentration and how to overcome them, along with some general study tips. Both internal and external distractions can produce barriers to effective concentration. Once you identify and overcome these obstacles, your study time will be more effective, satisfying, and enjoyable.

External Distractions

External distractions can range from a loud neighbor's music to your chair being uncomfortable. It is important to control as many variables around you as possible when studying, below are some external distractions to watch out for.

Noise

Noise can be a great impediment to concentration. Choose a quiet place to study away from high traffic areas and doors. Studying in lounges exposes you to noise and other interruptions. Do you think you study better with music? Test yourself by reading two similar passages of a difficult text, read one in a quiet setting and the other with some music. Then see how much you remember of the two passages; test yourself and be honest! If you do want sound, make sure to choose music with no words, or try a fan or other white noise source to block distractions.

Lighting

Your eyes function best in natural light, but you may study effectively in artificial light. Eliminate glare, flickering or contrasts between light and dark. When you study in a poorly lit room you will then be causing eye strain and reducing your concentration even with the use of lamps.

Physical Setting

Be consistent when and where you study. Find a place that works well for you, and then routinely study there. Your mind will be more conditioned to concentrate if you establish study habits.

- Don't study on your bed; it sends conflicting signals to your body. Sit upright or even perch on the edge of your chair. An alert posture adds to an alert mind.
- Pay attention to temperature - high temperatures may make you sleepy; low temperatures may

distract you.

- Make sure you have everything you need: books, highlighters, paper, dictionary, etc., that way you do not need to interrupt your study time to gather materials.

Internal Distractions

Internal distractions can vary from your fear of failing to daydreaming about your perfect vacation spot. It is important to control your internal distractions and move on. However, many people would say it is much easier to control external distraction, we think you can do both, below are some internal distractions and ways to overcome them.

Anxiety

You can often reduce anxiety by talking with someone about your worries. If you are concerned about a class, talk with your instructor or classmates. If you have personal concerns, use the resources available to you (check out the Community Resources located on the Student Services webpage.) Talk with someone who is most appropriate for your needs. One tip, keep a journal. This can help you think through your difficulties and add a measure of perspective.

Daydreaming

Daydreaming can be a useful activity, but it may interfere with studying. Jot down thoughts that distract you during study time, and then use a study break to think about them. Promising yourself to pay attention later will help you return to the task at hand.

Hunger and Fatigue

Hunger and fatigue can leave your brain in a fog. Eat regular, well-balanced meals, and avoid eating sugary snacks for a quick boost that will leave your brain in a slump 20 minutes later. Make sure to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Trying to study when you are tired wastes more time than it's worth. Don't nap regularly; it interferes with your sleep cycle. Take a 5-minute break every 30 to 40 minutes. Walk around, get a drink of water - do something that gets you moving. Schedule exercise and activities for late afternoon, this makes a good break after a day of studying, at a time when many people are at a physical low. Activity can also help reduce fatigue.

Motivation

It can be difficult to concentrate on learning material that doesn't hold your interest. You can increase your motivation in a number of ways.

- Focus on the results. Clarifying your long-term and short-term goals often helps you envision your future.
- Try to find practical applications for material you are learning. How can this apply to your life outside of class?
- During study sessions, switch subjects rather than trying to work on a single topic for hours at a time. This will help hold your interest.

Once you have mastered the art of maintaining concentration you can move on to these general study tips that will only excel you farther into super student success!

General Study Tips

- Make good use of daytime hours. Physiological "freshness" of your brain means 1 hour of daytime study may be as effective as 1 ½ hours at night. Plus, getting things done during the day leaves more free time at night.
- Approach studying as you would any exercise. Warm up your brain by reviewing notes and assignments just before class; you will take in more information during lecture. Reviewing your lecture notes shortly after class as a "cool down" activity helps to solidify learning.
- Vary your study activities. Don't follow reading with reading. Instead review art history photographs, review biology terminology flashcards, practice French with a study partner, or find a physical activity to get you going.
- Get enough sleep. An alert brain takes in much more information than one that is fatigued. Pulling all-nighters is useless in the long run, and will interfere with your concentration.
- Learn how to organize your time. People who are involved in many activities generally make more efficient use of their time and get better grades.