

Concentrating and Remembering

Concentrating

Concentration is your ability to focus your attention on one specific task and ignore everything else. There are two types of distractions that effect concentration:

1. Internal distractions such as hunger, anxiety, wandering mind; and
2. External distractions such as noise.

Tips to Effective Concentration

Create a study area at home

- Get a dedicated space with a chair, table, good lighting and ventilation (do not study on the bed).
- Avoid your cell phone or telephone (let your answering machine pick up messages).
- Clear away distractions such as distracting pictures.
- Let family and friends know when you will be working so they know not to bother you (learn to say "no" and / or put up a sign to avoid being disturbed or interrupted).
- Learn to ignore activities and noise that fall outside your focus of attention.

Study away from home

- If you are not able to create a place at home to study, go to your local library or find a quiet, comfortable and distraction-free place to study.
- Again, learn to ignore activities and noise that fall outside your focus of attention.

Develop a healthy lifestyle

- Make sure you are getting sufficient sleep. Lack of sleep effectives concentration and remembering.
- Eat balanced meals.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Exercise regularly.

Avoiding internal distractions

- Use time management strategies such as allotting study time when your energy level is high (make sure you study for harder tasks at your highest energy levels), creating a study routine, and setting realistic goals.
- Start assignments with some curiosity about the material and a positive attitude toward learning.
- Before you begin studying, take a few minutes to review the objectives, gather what you will need, and think of how you will generally accomplish the task.

- Create an incentive if necessary for successfully completing a task, such as calling a friend, a food treat, a walk, etc. For special projects (such as term papers, design projects, long book reviews, etc.) set up a special incentive.
- Changing the subject you are studying every one to two hours for variety or change the activity such as going from reading to writing.
- Divide your work into smaller manageable tasks that can be completed in a short period of time. Push yourself to complete one small task, and then move onto the next task. Focus on one small task at a time.
- If you have other assignments or issues on your mind write them down on a 'to do' list or take a small step to deal with them. Then get back to focusing on the task at hand.
- Take a 10 minute break for every 50 minutes of study. Walk around during your break. If we sit in one position for long periods blood tends to pool in our lower body and legs. Walking gets blood flowing more evenly throughout the body.
- Use positive talk to keep yourself motivated.
- When you feel yourself daydreaming or mind wandering, tell yourself to stop and re-focus. If you reading at the time, make a checkmark with a pencil in the margin of the book when your mind started wandering so that you can re-read the passage.
- Schedule in worry or think time, that is, set aside a specific time each day to think about the things that keep entering your mind and interfering with your concentration; when you become aware of a distracting thought, remind yourself that you have a special time to think about them; let the thought go ("Be here now").
- If you find yourself constantly worrying due to personal problems, look at the problem and think about how you will resolve the problem. When your problem is resolved you can concentrate on studying again. However, some problems you may need external help, if you are not sure or you find you are having difficulty understanding the material contact Student Support Services for help.

Remembering - Tips on remembering

Make the information meaningful

- In order to remember something you will need to understand it first.
- Read notes and read reading assignments ahead of time.
- Recite and review the reduced notes.
- Become aware of any negative attitude you may have about what you are learning. It usually makes it more difficult to memorize.

Use association and organization

- Read, analyze, and reduce notes into your own self-made system.
- Organize the material in order of how you would like to draw it out, and study first items that you want to remember for the longest.
- Create diagrams, plans, or tables and try to connect the facts to draw out the relationships and make the associations (i.e., use colour).
- Highlight / make a list of key words or concepts that are most useful in explaining the idea or content of the lesson.

- Make summary sheets or index cards with key information.
- Where possible link the material to your own experiences.

Recite, repeat and use visualization

- After reading the text a few times cover the material and recite it until you can say it without making errors (memorize out loud or in your head or write it down or explain it to someone).
- Try putting the concepts into your own words. This makes you think about it.
- Repeat a concept until you know it, then say it five more times.
- Use imagery where possible. Close your eyes and get a picture of the explanation and summary answer. Try to see it on the page.
- If you cannot retain everything, start by memorizing the most important information. See the key words underlined.

Stay motivated

- Memorization is easier if you are interested in the material.
- Try explaining the idea to a friend or family but without referring to your book or notes.
- Many books have question sections to review individual chapters, ask a friend or family member to ask these questions.
- Use index cards, either with key words and concepts, or a question on one side with the answer on the other. These can be readily reviewed and again you can get a friend or family member to ask the questions.

Review often

- Review the material several times over the course of a few days in order to consolidate your knowledge.
- Find whatever method works for you.
- If you find you are struggling to understand concepts, make a list of questions and consult your Instructor or Student Support Services.