

CONCENTRATION AND LEARNING

What is Concentration?

Concentration is thinking. It is active involvement in the task at hand whether that is reading a textbook, listening to a lecture or planning a schedule for writing a major paper.

How can I avoid distractions?

- ***Set up an environment that is conducive to study.*** Plan your own quiet corner away from distractions. Include a desk stocked with all the tools you need, a comfortable chair and good lighting.
- ***Study on campus*** after class to avoid the distractions in your room and housing unit. Then go home and RELAX.
- ***Take care of basic physical needs*** such as hunger, sleep etc. first. Plan short naps and periods of exercise to revive you.
- ***Do something relaxing before going to bed at night*** so that you're not dreaming about the exam you have the next day. Listen to music; read some good fiction.

What if my mind still wanders?

- ***Plan ahead.*** Before you tackle any assignment, make a short priority list.
- ***Be realistic in setting your goals.*** If you're 2 chapters behind in your psychology reading, realize that you won't finish in one 2-hour session. Instead break the assignment up into several 5-6 page sections and spread it over the entire week.
- ***Just do it!*** Once you have decided on a plan of action, plunge into it. Ideally start with the hardest tasks first, or if you start with the easiest set a deadline.
- ***Deal with your personal problems.*** If the same problem is preventing you from concentrating, STOP! Decide on a plan of action. This may include talking with a counselor or friend. Then after you have completed your work, deal with the problem.
- ***Don't daydream.*** One of the worst time wasters is daydreaming. Instead establish the positive habit of plunging directly into your work.

Are there some techniques I can use to monitor my concentration?

- ***Maintain a positive attitude.*** Keep in mind your long term goals. Try to make as many practical applications of the material as possible.
- ***Use the checkmark technique.*** Have a sheet of paper handy by your book. When you catch yourself not concentrating, put a checkmark on the sheet. The mere act of doing this will remind you to get back to work. Students report that when they first tried this system, they accumulated as many as twenty checkmarks per textbook page; but after one or two weeks, they were down to one or two checkmarks per page.
- ***Chart your progress in a course.*** Know how you are going to be graded and set realistic goals for the grades you hope to achieve. Decide how much study time you need to reach this goal.

How can I improve concentration while reading?

- ***Break the material up into small sections*** using the subheadings.
- ***Preread*** and ask questions.
- ***Talk to the author.*** Use self-talk to monitor your comprehension and stay actively involved in the materials Agree! Disagree! Ask questions!

Are other outside problems interrupting your concentration?

- ***Use campus resources****. There are many resources free and available to you on campus. Learn where these resources are. You can get help in everything from career counseling to emergency funds and budget planning; from learning disability diagnosis to personal counseling; from improving roommate relations to help writing an English paper.
- ***Don't forget your greatest resources -- your own professors.*** If a particular course is causing you great anxiety, make an appointment with your professor and discuss it. Ask to see your last exam. Try to discover the kinds of mistakes you're making and learn from the experience.
- ***See your academic counselor.*** He/she is trained to answer your questions and is ready to help you.

*The student's Fingertip Guide to Student Services at Purdue University

Adapted from Walter Pauk, How To Study in College and Francis P. Robinson, Effective Study.

