



DOUGLAS COLLEGE

Learning Centre

## IMPROVING CONCENTRATION

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You can make the best use of your study time—and actually spend less time studying—if you are able to stay focused. Poor concentration can mean it takes longer to learn material and longer to get assignments done. Fortunately, it is possible to improve your ability to concentrate.

The first step is to *know yourself*. No two people are exactly the same, so you need to analyze your personal concentration patterns. Start paying attention to how you study, so you know what works and what doesn't work for you. What helps you concentrate? What makes it hard to stay focused? Once you have a better idea of the answers to these questions, you are on your way to improving your concentration powers.

The following list was made by experienced students. These are things that help *them* concentrate. Feel free to change any of the ideas and add your own. Then, choose the ones that you think could have the greatest positive impact on *your* concentration and try them out.

Keep track of your studying and concentration so that you can evaluate the strategies. Usually it takes awhile for better concentration to develop, so don't give up on a strategy until you've given it some time to prove itself.

### **Create Your Best Study Environment**

- Limit the distractions in your environment. Find or create a quiet place, free from distractions and interruptions. Recognize what distracts you the most and eliminate those things. If you use the computer to study, do you find yourself on Facebook, doing email, googling, playing video games? If so, try studying away from the computer or turn off the computer.
- Use the same location each time you study. If possible, make it a place that you use only for studying. If your mind starts to wander, and you need a break, go somewhere else. (Or, try the opposite. Find a new place

to study. Maybe an unfamiliar place would keep you from thinking of other things to do.)

- If you study with music, choose music that does not distract you. Many students study to a background of classical music.
- Make sure you have the materials you need (texts, paper, etc.) before you start.
- Don't get too comfortable. Study in a chair at a desk or table, not propped up on your bed.
- Let anyone who might distract you (family, friends, roommates) know that you need uninterrupted time.

### **Make Time Work for You**

- Start soon after you get your assignment, so you won't be caught up and distracted by anxiety.
- Overview your task before you start. Plan how you will tackle it.
- Break your work into steps, so it will be less overwhelming. Steps will also help you make use of shorter blocks of time.
- Know the hours when you are at your peak wakefulness—are you a day person or a night person?—and use that for study time.
- Try to study at regular times.
- When you take a break, set how long it will be. Then return to studying when the time is up. Making your snacks ahead of time means you don't waste time getting them on your breaks.
- Don't try to study for long stretches without breaks.
- Set a timer and study until it goes off. Then set it again, so you will know when your break is over.

### **Motivate Yourself**

- Set up rewards: "I'll finish taking notes on this chapter, and then I'll... [call a friend, go for a walk, catch up on Facebook, etc.]
- Remind yourself about your overall goal for taking the course.
- Set short-term goals so you can "see the light at the end of the tunnel."
- Make a list of what you need to do. Cross things off as you accomplish them. Reread the list if you need help to stay with your task.
- Make up questions to answer about your study material. Finding the answers will help you focus.

- Use positive “self-talk” to help you stay focused. Say encouraging things to yourself.

### **And When Your Mind Wanders...**

- Don't worry or get frustrated if your mind wanders. It's normal. It's also normal to concentrate for longer periods with more practice, so don't give up.
- Take short breaks when you start to lose focus. Shake, walk, let it out!
- Notice when you are distracted. Go over that material again right away.
- Make a star on your work where you lost concentration. Review those sections again later.
- Switch to another subject or another assignment.
- Write a list of all the things you have to do—school and non-school tasks. Then you'll know you won't forget about them, but you can let them go at the moment.

### **General Tips**

- Take care of your health: eat well; sleep enough; exercise frequently; breathe deeply.
- Alternate the subjects you are studying so you stay fresher.
- Take time to summarize your material and reflect on what you have learned.

Check on yourself to make sure you are learning the material and/or making progress on your assignment. You could ask yourself questions, or summarize what you've read, or refer to your list of steps to see how far you've come.