

# Techniques for Improving Concentration\*

## Eliminate Internal and External Distractions:

- **Learn what works for you:**

You can control your feelings of hunger, tiredness and discomfort. You may not be able to control outside noise, temperature and interruptions, but you can choose the tools that work for you by knowing what you need.

- **Find your best study environment:**

The best place to study is the place where you are most able to concentrate. Where are you least likely to be interrupted by people, cell phones or other sounds? Your study area should have comfortable furniture; a chair that supports your back and is not too high or low for your text or computer; adequate lighting (avoid shadows). If you study in the Library, sit at a small table in the stacks area, away from the foot traffic and noise.

- **Use a study strategy:**

Manage your time. Create a regular study schedule and stick to it.

Break your semester assignments into smaller, manageable tasks. Allocate enough time for each task. Plan to read a certain portion of your textbook in ten minutes, then review the main points. Read difficult passages aloud and with expression.

Don't take notes or underline while you are reading. Instead, read your text and put a checkmark next to the material you want to note. Then, write your notes one section at a time and re-read them after you have written them.

Study your most difficult subjects first. If you have two subjects of the same discipline (i.e., Math) separate them with a dissimilar subject.

- **Take frequent breaks**

Reward yourself by taking at least one ten-minute break an hour. Get up, move around, relax, think about something else. After your break, renew your study by looking over what you have already read.

## Eliminate other causes of poor concentration

- **If your mind wanders while you are reading:**

Create a purpose for reading. Ask a general question, or form an opinion. Check the text for an answer or a response. Turn each subheading into a question to be answered by the paragraphs. Try to avoid looking up new vocabulary words or key phrases if you see them used in context. Make sure that you use new vocabulary in your notes.

- **If you can't find the time to study:**

Make a list of all your time commitments: classes, employment, volunteer work, sports, social and family obligations. Assign two hours of reading/study time for each hour of class. Be sure to mark off leisure time. Learn how to trade-off time when "something comes up".

Use semester, monthly, weekly and major assignment planners to project your time. Have you taken on more obligations than you can meet? You may have to cut job hours or social hours. Consider the time factor when choosing courses for next year.

- **If you procrastinate:**

It may be because you do not understand some of the course content or the learning strategies necessary to be successful in the class. Call a friend, discuss the assignment, objectives and how the new information relates to the overall course. Try challenging yourself to complete so many pages in so many minutes. You may also not understand "why" this course is important - ASK QUESTIONS! Learn to see each assignment as personal enrichment - you're doing it for yourself!

- **If your assignment seems too long or difficult:**

Plan semi-weekly reviews with a friend or study group. Break weekly assignments into smaller tasks that are accomplished one at a time. Write questions about areas of confusion. Bring questions to class; ask your professor to explain. Worrying about completing the assignments only diminishes concentration. Start it. Do it. Finish it!

- **If it's difficult for you to take notes and listen:**

Learn how to take notes. Sit in front of the class. Watch your instructor's body language. Write down anything written on the board. Listen for and write down main points; skip a line between each. Notes are an abbreviation - NOT a reproduction of the lecture.

- **If your mind goes blank during tests:**

Prepare adequately for tests. Get tutoring as soon as you realize that you don't understand the material. Avoid breaking your concentration. Build on success. Answer what you know; skip over difficult questions. Save the hardest for last. Learn breathing and relaxation techniques.