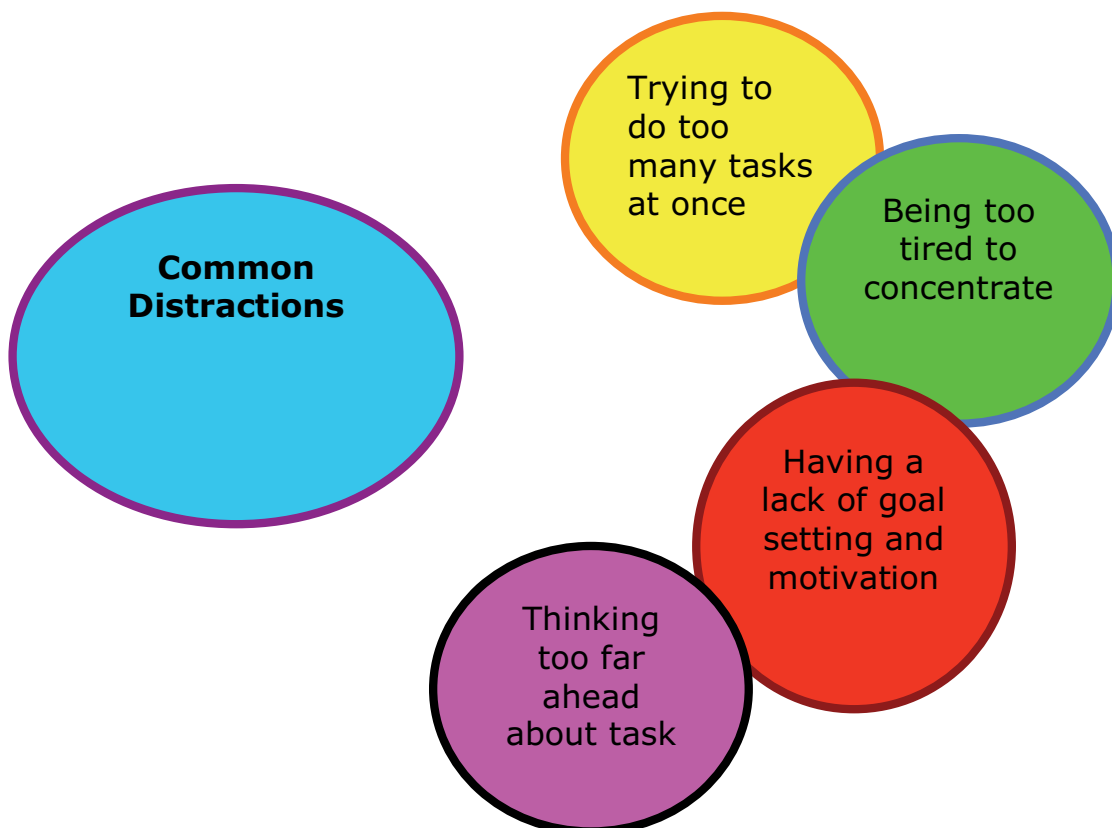


Chapter 3 Concentration and Attention

Concentration refers to the ability to focus on what is most important in any situation while ignoring distractions (Moran, 1997). We all have different ways in which we concentrate. For some of us, having music in the background helps us zone in and pay attention. For others, having complete silence in their environment helps them concentrate. The trick is to find out what suits you and helps you to concentrate.

Recent research has shown that we never really lose our concentration. What actually happens is that we get distracted and begin to redirect our attention away from the task at hand. For example, if you are beginning your study for exams, and you hear the television in the background, for most of us we begin to focus our attention on the television and end up losing all our concentration for the task of studying.



Tips for dealing with distractions

- Keep your study area as neat and tidy as possible.
- Exercise everyday to help clear your mind.
- Set your study area up to suit your learning style. If you are a visual learner have plenty of visual aids around your study area. If you enjoy background music make sure you have a radio or your favourite music in the background.
- Keep yourself motivated by having a constant reminder why you are studying and what you are working towards.
- Make sure you have a good night's sleep.



In order to maximise the learning experience we must be concentrating. Maintaining our attention on one particular task takes practice. We all have different time thresholds for the length of time that we are able to keep our attention. Discovering your threshold is the key to successful study. Your threshold for attention may vary depending on how tired you are and the time of the day that you are beginning your study.

Remember we often have a preference for the time of day we study. **Morning or Night**

Be an
Active
Learner!



How to keep your attention while in class or lectures.

- As the Girl Guides say, Be Prepared! Try doing some of the assigned reading before class. This will help you follow your lecturer easier by having the background knowledge before you go in. It will also help you to pick out the most important points of the lecture.
- If you find that you get tired really easy in the lecture then bring in a small snack with you to boost your energy. Drinking plenty of water before and during the lecture can also help keep energy levels up. Taking a swift walk out in the fresh air before the lecture can also wake you up and get your blood flowing.
- If you are predominantly a kinaesthetic learner and find it hard to sit still and keep your concentration, try keeping a small doodle pad with you during lectures. Doodling while in a lecture can help increase your concentration level
- Keeping your focus on the lecturer can help you keep your attention. By focusing on the lecturer as if you were in a one to one conversation you are more likely to absorb more of what they are saying.

Concentration Techniques

Concentration strategies can be split into two main areas:

(1) **Learning mental self regulation.** Learning mental self regulation requires recognising the possibilities of your mind as well as its limitations. Try out different methods of study at different times to understand when the optimum time is for you to be able to concentrate and effectively learn.

(2) **Arranging factors that you can immediately control.** Arranging factors that you can immediately control refers to your ability to arrange your environment to suit your taste. For example, if you concentrate better with background noise, simply open a window or turn on your radio.



Time-out

Remember to take short breaks. Lectures are usually 50 minutes long, and that's about the length of time most people can direct their attention to one task. Your concentration time-span might be less (20-35 minutes) or longer (perhaps 90 minutes). Similarly, when you are studying, try to time the length of time you can study before you begin to lose your

concentration. Keep your study periods within this time frame. Break your study into time blocks that suit your concentration span. In between these blocks make sure you get up and walk around. Go get some fresh air and get the oxygen circulating around your body again.



8 Golden rules of Concentration

- 1.** Study at the same time each day. A regular schedule can help you frame this as "study time".
- 3.** Set a timer for the amount of time you are able to hold your concentration (e.g. an hour). Train yourself to keep studying until the timer goes off.
- 4.** Take breaks. A three minute break for every 30 minutes of study is a good guideline. Take a longer break after 90 minutes.
- 5.** Set goals for your session that are realistic (number of problems to solve, pages to read, etc.) When you have met one of your study goals, reward yourself with a short break. Then, return to your study area. Keeping a simple weekly timetable can help you with this.
- 6.** Study in an area away from distractions such as a library, study lounge, or an empty classroom. Tailor your study area to suit your specific learning style.
- 7.** Make sure you have everything that you need before you begin. Getting up and down to get a book, or a set of notes can break your concentration
- 8.** Ensure that you are sleeping enough, eating well, and getting regular exercise. Your mind will be more alert, and you will be less likely to fall asleep or daydream.

Tips for being an active learner	
1. Visual Learner	Use mind maps or highlighters
2. Auditory Learners	Read out loud or record your essay onto an audio tape and listen to it
3. Kinaesthetic Learners	Move around while learning or type/write out your notes

Study Skills Manual

Break it up

Sometimes it helps to break a subject into smaller sections

Breaking a subject into smaller sections can make the task of studying less overwhelming. It also allows you to plan your study into block times where you can deal with one section at a time.

Subject needed	Smaller Sections	Time
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____4. _____5. _____6. _____7. _____8. _____9. _____10. _____	

Subject needed	Smaller Sections	Time
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____4. _____5. _____6. _____7. _____8. _____9. _____10. _____	

Activity Time



Test your concentration

This is a simple and easy game to test your concentration level.

What you need?

A deck of cards.

How to play?

All you need to do for this game is to get 15 matched pairs of cards. Mix the cards up at random and then place the cards face down on the table.

The aim of the game is to find the 15 matched pairs, but you can only turn over 2 cards at a time. If the 2 cards that you turn over are not a pair you must place the cards back on the table face down, in the same location you picked them up from, and turn over two new cards.

When you discover a pair you can leave the pair turned face up or take the pair from the table.

To complete this simple game of pairs successfully you need to concentrate carefully and use your memory to remember where similar cards are located and to turn over as many pairs as possible.

To make this game more difficult try setting yourself a 2 minute time limit and see how many pairs you can get. Then try beating your record.

Use this game as an experiment to test what distracts you. Try doing the game in the area where you usually study.

If you find that noise or a particular picture distracts you from concentrating then eliminate that stimulus when you are studying.