



Concentration: Internal and External Distractions

Think of concentration improvement as a three-step process:

- Learn the causes of poor concentration and decide which apply to you
- Understand what you can do to control these factors
- Make control a habit

External Distractions: Learn the Causes	External Distractions: Control the Causes
Environmental distractions TV, chairs that are too comfortable, snacks, other people, etc.	Train yourself to study away from others and in silence.
Noise Music with words, conversations	Leave or rearrange a distracting environment. Go to a library or a classroom when you seriously intend to study.

Internal Distractions: Learn the Causes	Internal Distractions: Control the Causes
Physical distractions: hunger, drowsiness	Plan to study when you're most alert. Eat a high-protein snack. Do five minutes of light exercise to wake up.
Boredom, dislike, disinterest	Find a good reason for taking the class; talk with other students and the professor.
Anxiety about studies	Make sure you know how to study effectively. Put the course in perspective.
Intimidating study tasks	Break up large tasks into achievable subtasks. Do the most intimidating task first. Give yourself rewards for progress and punishments for avoidance.
Daydreaming	Separate daydreams from studying. When your mind starts to wander, write down the interrupting thought and continue studying. Or recall important points and then turn away from your book and continue to daydream. When you're ready to read again, do so. The trick is not to daydream and read at the same time.
Personal Worries	Identify and define the problem and develop a concrete, specific plan to resolve personal worries. Talk with someone who can help: a friend, a counselor, a specialist.

Develop the Habit of Focusing --+

Even if you lapse into old patterns of feeling distracted, keep requiring yourself to concentrate (using the controls outlined above) until you can routinely focus for fifty minutes of every hour when you study. You may also want to start a mindfulness practice (the practice of being in the moment), which can be applied to other situations, including studying. The worksheet on the back can be used to help you determining your distractions and plan for the future.

Internal Distractions	Describe the situation or tally the distractions	Plan for the Future?
Negative reactions to noise		
Daydreaming		
Personal problems and worries		
Boredom		
Anxiety or dislike for subject		
Intimidating study tasks		
Fatigue		
Other		
Internal Distractions	Describe the situation or tally the distractions	Plan for the Future?
Study Area		
Auditory distraction		
Visual distraction		
Furniture or work space		
Lighting		
Temperature		
Other		