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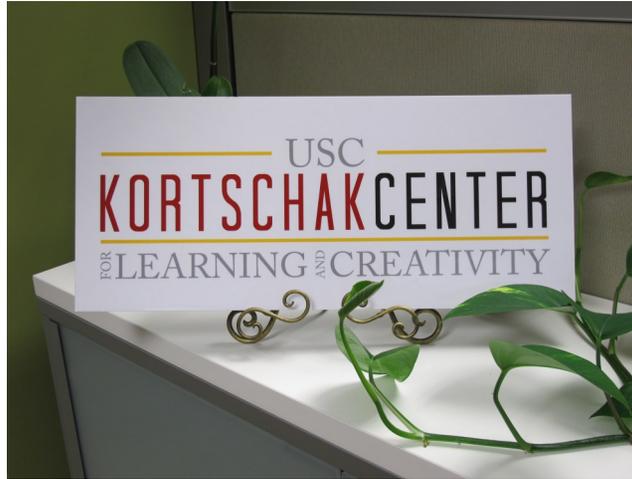
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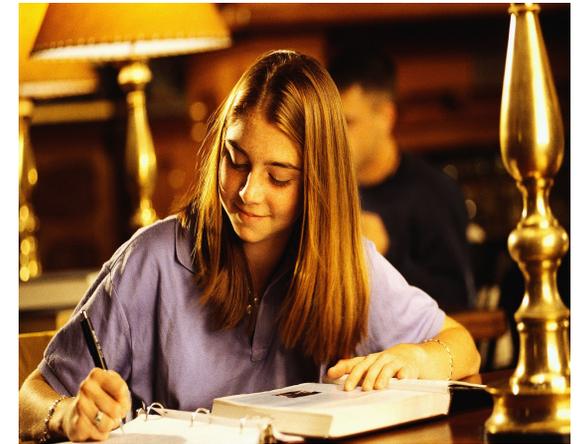
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Tips and Strategies to Enhance Concentration in College Students



Brought to you by:

Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity
3601 Trousdale Parkway
Student Union, Suite 311
Los Angeles, California 90089-0896
Phone: 213-740-7884
<http://kortschakcenter.usc.edu>

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Concentration

Everyone has difficulty concentrating at times. What follows will help you understand the things that can make concentration difficult, and outlines some of the ways in which it is possible to improve concentration.

Introduction

Concentration is often seen as something that comes naturally to some people or in certain situations, but not others.



Actually, our ability to concentrate is not a single thing that comes or goes but depends on many factors and can be greatly improved. Does your lifestyle promote a sense of alertness and concentration?

Do you:

- Address emotional upset/ignore it?
- Get good sleep/work late at night?
- Eat healthily/eat fast food or skip meals?
- Exercise/use alcohol or drugs to relax?
- Organize and prioritize/work long hours?
- Set realistic goals/have vague ideas?
- Take regular breaks/work straight through?

Causes of Poor Concentration

- Lack of sleep
- Poor nutrition
- Depression, anxiety or stress
- Negative feelings about yourself or your work
- Distractions
- Difficulty in managing time
- Medication
- Alcohol or drug usage

Improving concentration relies on addressing some of these causes, as well as other obstacles you may identify. Like with any other skill, concentration is something we can learn to do. Concentration problems are not a reflection of *you*, and there is something constructive you can do

Tips to Develop and Improve Concentration

Examine your emotional state. It is harder to concentrate when you are anxious, depressed, or stressed. Research on the underlying causes of the emotions as much as possible. If you already have strategies that maintain a sense of well being, could they be incorporated into your educational lifestyle?

Get enough sleep. Poor sleep habits affect concentration and memory. The effects of sleeping too little build up over time. Your mind will be more alert after a good night's sleep, and a regular sleeping pattern can improve concentration for a longer period of time.

Eat well. A good breakfast helps concentration. Keep your blood-sugar on an even keel all day with complex carbohydrates like fresh fruit and whole-grain cereal with skim milk.

Get regular exercise. Exercise helps improve blood flow to the brain, enabling blood-sugar to reach it.

Know when you can concentrate. Concentration is harder when you are tired, so tackle the most difficult tasks when you are mentally and physically fresh. Stop working when you get too tired to concentrate well, and keep regular sleeping patterns. Studying at the same time every day can help you frame this time as "study time".

Be specific in your estimates of time & set goals. This means that you must be realistic! Don't set goals that are vague, such as "I'm going to study all day Saturday", as this can be discouraging. Setting clear goals may focus your attention on the specific task at hand and provide important feedback about your progress.

Put other things out of your mind. Jot things down that are on your mind before you study, then set this list aside. Add to this list anything that distracts you as you are studying.

Effective Study Strategies

Plan regular breaks. Study for short periods of time: 20 to 30 minutes is ideal for the best concentration. Take a 5 minute break after each study session. Take a longer break after 90 minutes of studying. Studying in small chunks helps absorb and review the previous session. These sessions also allow you to realistically estimate what you can achieve within that time. Future success after this type of studying will thus increase your work rate and self-confidence.

Find a specific space only for studying. A good choice is either a library/study room. Do not study on your bed, as this may confuse your body and contribute to sleep issues.

Ensure your place has a suitable temperature so you don't feel drowsy or cold, enough light that is not too harsh, good ventilation, a comfortable chair, and a desk to for your materials.



Learn effective study skills.

- Think about how the work fits into the bigger picture and make connections between things you already know. This promotes a positive attitude and develops motivation to remain focused.
- Complete a calendar with all your commitments for the term. Then work out a reasonable length of time for each working day/week and allocate hours/days to study, rest, etc.
- Determine whether you are an auditory or visual learner, but try to include both styles as memory traces will be strengthened further.
- Choose topics you find most easy or interesting, and intersperse work on them with topics that might be more difficult.