

There are 3 main aspects to managing poor concentration.

You need to:

1. Identify the causes of poor concentration and decide which apply to you.
2. Learn how to control these causes
3. Ensure that your control becomes a habit

IDENTIFYING AND CONTROLLING THE CAUSES OF POOR CONCENTRATION

External causes

Identify the cause	Managing the cause
Environmental distractions: Examples: TV, snacks, other people, cellphones, music with words, conversations	Train yourself to study away from others and in a quiet environment Re-arrange a distracting environment or leave e.g. go to a library, study centre or classroom.

Internal causes

Identify causes	How to control causes
Physical distractions - Hunger - Drowsiness	Eat healthy food and avoid artificial stimulants. Plan to study when you are most alert. Do 5 mins of light exercise to wake up.
Boredom, dislike, disinterest	Increase your motivation find reasons why you need to attend class; work together with other students and consult the lecturer. Also, keep the bigger picture in mind.
Anxiety about studies	Make sure you know how to study effectively. Understand the course requirements and what is expected of you.
Feeling overwhelmed by study tasks	Divide large tasks into achievable smaller tasks. Reward yourself for progress in completing tasks. Take short breaks every 40-60 minutes.
Daydreaming/ wandering thoughts	Separate daydreams from studying. When your mind starts to wander, write down the interrupting thought and continue studying. The trick is not to daydream and study at the same time.
Personal worries	Identify the problem and develop a concrete plan to deal with the personal problem. Write down what is worrying you. Speak to a counsellor or someone whom you trust.

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Contact details

South Campus: 041-5042511
North Campus: 041-5043222
Missionvale Campus: 041-5041106
Second Avenue Campus: 041-5043854
George Campus:

In case of an emergency:

- Mandela University Protection Services: 041-504 2009/3483
- Suicide Emergency Line: 0800 567 567 or SMS 31393
- Life Line: 0861 322 322 (Counselling available 24/7)
- SA Anxiety Group 24-hour helpline: 0800 12 13 14

Note: Student Counselling services are confidential, free of charge to registered Mandela students, and offered by qualified counsellors and psychologists.

Student Counselling, Career and Development Centre
<http://counselling.mandela.ac.za>

email – counselling@mandela.ac.za



mandela.ac.za



Improving your
Concentration

Your brain is a muscle, and just like the other muscles, it may need to be strengthened by doing various exercises.

The following list may assist with developing your focus for longer periods of time.

1. Increase the strength of your focus gradually

Start by breaking up the hour into smaller manageable time slots. An example of this is the Pomodoro Method: Set a timer to study for 25 minutes, followed by a 5 minute break before going on for another 25 minutes. In that break, you may need to stand up and stretch, or take a few deep breaths. When you are comfortable with this study period, add another 5 minutes to your study time. Until you are able to focus for at least 45 minute periods.

2. Create a distraction to-do list

Keep a piece of paper or notebook next to you while you are studying. If you remember that you need to do something during your study period, quickly jot that down, and get back to studying. After your study session, schedule and prioritize the to-do list. This will help you to stay on task, and also remember the important information or things you still have to get done.

3. Coping with distractions

Train yourself not to give in to distractions. For example, when someone enters the room, or when a door slams, do not allow yourself to get distracted. Rather, quickly return to what you are doing and focus on what is in front of you. Practice sustaining your concentration and avoiding being distracted in a variety of settings.

4. Exercise

Moderate intensity exercise aids with increasing your attention span, and also has healthy benefits for stress management.

5. Meditate

Meditation can help to keep you cool, calm, and collected. Start the mornings off by simply breathing deeply and bringing your awareness to how you are feeling in the present moment, and letting it go. Just 10 to 20 minutes of meditation can improve your attention after just four days.

USEFUL TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE YOUR CONCENTRATION

Here are some techniques to help you improve your concentration:

Mindfulness: Be here now

Practice mindfulness throughout the day. Mindfulness is focusing completely on what you're doing, slowing down, and observing all of the physical and emotional sensations you are experiencing in that moment.

This is a simple strategy. When you notice your thoughts wandering, say to yourself: "*Be here now*" Gently bring your attention back to where you want it.

Example: You are studying and your attention strays from the study material. You think about the party you are attending on Saturday, the chores you need to do at home and the assignments you still need to complete. Say to yourself: "*Be here now.*" This will help you to focus on your studying.

When your mind wanders again, repeat "*Be here now*" and gently bring your attention back. You may notice that your mind wanders frequently. Therefore each time just say: "*Be here now.*"

You may need to practice this technique several times a week. As you persevere, you'll find that your concentration will improve.

Worry or think time

Set aside a specific time in the day to think about the things that keep entering your mind and interfering with your concentration.

The following steps can be applied: Set aside a specific time e.g. 12h30 – 13h00 every day. When you become aware of distracting thoughts, remind yourself that you have a special time to think about them. Let the thought go and use the technique: "*Be here now*" to refocus your attention. Be sure to keep the appointment with yourself at that special time to focus on the distracting thoughts of the day.

Make controlling these causes a habit

Even if you sometimes lapse into old habits of distraction, keep trying these methods to improve your level of concentration.

If you have any more study or academic related queries; visit CTLM(*Centre for Teaching and Learning*) offices on North campus: R-Block R107 or contact them at 041 504 3207

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