

ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER

STUDY SKILLS LIBRARY

Getting Focused

Discussion

Distractions make it difficult to stay focused on your studies. Whether it is working on a project, creating a model, or writing a research paper, distraction affects them all. Every day we are confronted by diversions such as television, Facebook, online shows, cell phones and friends. Sometimes getting easily distracted is the result of insufficient motivation to complete your work. Motivation is your desire to move forward. So what causes distraction? Is it merely being unable to focus? Or could lack of motivation be the cause? This article will help you pinpoint the cause of your distractions and will point you in the right direction.

Types of Distractions

The internet, your cellphone, your friends, and your home are the source of many distractions just waiting to happen. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and email are waiting on the internet. Text messages and phone calls also draw your attention away from your work. Whenever we are distracted, we leave our work; every time we come back to our work, we must refocus and refresh our memory. Therefore, it is important to recognize how your individual distractions affect you in order to eliminate them from your study area.

Prepare Your Study Area

Where you study may contribute to distraction. Make sure that your study area is clean and not too comfortable. If it's too comfortable you may doze off or daydream. Keep your area clean and have the tools and materials you need to begin and finish your work. You do not want to spend time looking for items that you need because you left them at home. When you begin studying, intend to have non-disruptive studying for the designated time set aside – 20 to 50 minutes is most effective. Don't sabotage yourself – put away your cell phone, iPod (if music distracts you), and close Facebook or else you might get diverted and spend valuable time surfing the web. Bring small snacks and beverages so that when you get hungry you will have something immediately available. Remember: you are trying to develop a habit of studying in an environment where you're not easily distracted. And consider other study locations – maybe a coffee shop, a spot in the library; *whatever works best for you*. Become consistent so that studying becomes a natural and productive part of your daily routine.

Study Buddies and Study Groups

If you don't like studying alone, consider a study buddy. Get to know someone in your class. Make sure that your study buddy is not someone you're extremely friendly with and hang out with on the weekend. Remember, your goal is to study; studying with one of your best friends may be unproductive. Studying with a study buddy can also help you stay on track. If you see your study buddy focused on their work, it should help you stay motivated. For many people, starting a regular study group may be helpful. (If you know you will be distracted by a study group, don't join one!) However, if you learn better through discussion with others, consider this option. At the beginning of the term, form a small group which

meets regularly. Again, when considering a study group, be cautious not to simply pick your friends because that may be less productive and add to the list of distractions. Joining a study group or having a study buddy that helps and encourages you can make studying easier, more enjoyable, and more productive.

Face the Facts

Despite your attempts to eliminate them, some distractions are inevitable. Rather than becoming frustrated with little distractions out of your control, learn how to handle them. Often while studying, other things may come to mind. You may be reading or studying and suddenly remember you need to clean your room or the trash needs to be taken out, and pretty soon three hours have passed as you clean up the entire place. Instead of becoming consumed by these distractions, keep a notepad or piece of paper handy and jot down a note to yourself to come back to later. Writing the distraction down helps it leave your mind.

Reading

Distraction while reading is also a problem. Have you ever found yourself rereading a page for 30 minutes and still missing the main idea? Here are some ways to help you concentrate while reading.

First, you need to know why you are reading the material. Which class is this for? What type of reading should I expect from the class? The readings that are assigned are unique to your class. For example, a reading for sociology class will be different than your English class. So, knowing what type of reading to expect can be helpful.

Second, scan the text or chapter before you begin. This would include the introduction, the conclusion, any headers and the index. Once you begin, read the entire section without stopping. If you do not understand something, wait until you are done reading to return to your question. If you still do not understand the passage, then write it down and ask your professor during class or office hours.

Lack of Motivation

There may be other reasons for your distraction. Your motivation may not be what it used to be. Perhaps you lack the energy to get out of bed and go to class. You might also find it hard to begin your homework and when you do, you usually end up doing something else. Your lack of motivation could be the underlying factor to being easily distracted. People who have low or no motivation at all often try to come up with excuses of why they can't or shouldn't do this or that. There are many reasons for lack of motivation such as: lack of faith in one's abilities, low self-esteem, procrastination, the feeling that there are more important things to do, or being unaware of the importance and usefulness of the subject. These are the reasons that you need to be aware of so you can change the way you think.

Overcoming Lack of Motivation

As a student you are here for college. Being a college student should be your main priority. You need to re-identify your academic goals. Remember why you picked this college, why you selected your major, and what you want to do with it. You need to ask yourself, "Why am I in college?" and what do you want to do after graduation. This will help you remember why you are here in the first place and give you motivation to finish your classes and graduate. Something that you should remember is that California

Polytechnic State University is one of the hardest schools to get into. Every year there are approximately 37,000 incoming freshman who apply and only 4,000 freshman spots are available. This means that you had motivation in high school to get into this college. Coming to the realization that many actions can bring benefits and improvements to your college experience helps to overcome lack of motivation.

Concentration

Most students begin the term with every intention of staying on top of their studies. However, as the quarter progresses, everything starts to pile up. Part of the problem may be your inability to concentrate as you study which is crucial to studying and being productive. Here are some suggestions for staying focused which may help you reduce stress.

Schedule Your Study Time According to You

Saying you will study at home during your two-hour break is often ineffective. You know you will find something else to do and push back the study time, or never get to it at all. Instead, set aside specific study times. Make these times consistent and regular. Write your study times into whatever you use: a planner, a calendar, or your phone.

Prioritize Your Studies and Create Your Plan of Attack

Prioritizing your studies before you begin will help you follow a more structured plan to execute for your allotted study period. When prioritizing your studies, start with your most challenging classes first (most commonly, these are the classes that require the most attention). You will feel more accomplished if you get the harder tasks out of the way. You also may feel a sense of relief as you move on to your easier classes.

Set realistic goals for yourself. If your goals are realistic and achievable, you'll be encouraged to complete them. However, don't overcommit to more than is possible. You will burn out and lose motivation quickly.

Take Study Breaks

Avoid overworking yourself and getting burnt out early in the term. Studies have shown that 45% of the time we get distracted from our work causing us to forget where we left off and 25% of the time we forget to even come back to the task at hand, so it is crucial to take short active breaks of approximately 15-20 minutes so you feel refreshed and ready to go. Keep in mind though, that if you take long breaks it may be difficult to return to the material and pick up where you left off.

Reward Yourself

Rewarding yourself may be an effective method of boosting your productivity. Since you know yourself better than anyone, you know what reward will best motivate you. Set rewards before start studying. If you reach your goal without distraction, reward yourself. This reward may be anything from taking time off without feeling guilty to going out for ice cream. Find a way to acknowledge and reward your hard work and concentration.

General Health

It may not be obvious that exercising and eating right will affect studying, but it really has a remarkable impact. College students often neglect physical health due to stress or lack of time. However, if you work out regularly and eat right, you will feel better and your mental health will improve. This means when you sit down to study, you will feel energized and your mind will focus more easily. Now you can hit the books and be productive! Good luck!

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