

CONCENTRATION TRAINING

Concentration is a skill that can be trained like any physical skill. Like training in physical skills, training in concentration requires the right attitudes, the right setting, and warm-up exercises.

Right Attitudes

You can't concentrate if you don't want to study, so try to find out why you don't want to. Here are some typical reasons and what you can do about them.

- 1. I don't want to be at University anyway.** Check out Counselling Service or Course and Careers Service.
- 2. The subject is too hard.** Why is it hard? Have you missed some lectures? See your lecturer. Is it beyond your capacity? Check out Counselling or Course and Careers. Are you talking yourself down for some other reason? Check out Counselling. Maybe you just need some warm up exercises.
- 3. The subject is boring.** Do you *have* to study it? If so, learn to be strict with yourself or promise yourself a reward for getting a certain amount done.
- 4. I'm too tired.** Decide if it is more important to sleep or work.
- 5. Envy and fear of missing out - Everyone else is watching a good TV show.** Either watch it too, or begin some self-discipline.

Right Setting

The right setting is whichever one *you* find best to work in. Some students like loud music - others like silence. Some work better indoors - others work better outdoors. In any case, you will probably need pens and pencils, paper, some books and notes, and a calculator.

Right Timing

This includes both *what* you want to study and *when* you want to study. What you want to study will depend partly on deadlines, but take your own inclinations into account. If you're not thinking too clearly, then work at routine jobs, such as recording notes, drawing diagrams, typing up final drafts.

Warming up

Some people have a warming up ritual - like getting a hot drink, shutting the door, and circling the room three times. Rituals like this give you space to switch off other activities and tune into study. You could try relaxing exercises, some yoga, physical

exercises (particularly ones that stretch your spine). Maybe you don't need a ritual at all. Then you can begin to flex your mind by some preliminary thinking, eg

- Routine tasks: filing lecture notes, doing diagrams
- Revising previous work, summarising notes, reviewing a book
- Thinking ahead: brainstorming your topic, thinking about who you will be presenting it to and why and how you should present it

Concentrating

This means focusing on your work to the exclusion of everything else. When you are concentrating intensely you are unaware of noises, discomfort or anxieties. At first you will probably be able to achieve only **ten minutes at a time** of this sort of concentration. With practice, you can increase the period. If you can only concentrate fully for two minutes, then **do not panic** - it's more important to use your own concentration pattern than to train for a marathon.

Loss of Concentration

Means either something dramatic has happened to disturb you, or your mind wants a rest. If something dramatic has happened (the T.V. set has blown up) then either you have to take action or you don't. If you don't have to take action then get back into study by a warming up exercise. If your mind wants a rest, then give it a rest. This means allowing yourself a few minutes of daydreaming and/or physical loosening up.

By working to your own concentration span and giving yourself short daydreaming breaks, you will find that you can work efficiently for longer periods. When your efficiency drops, then it is time for a longer break.

Guilt

Many students feel bad when they are not studying. Their logic is "Any time not studying is wasted time". This is nonsense. Your brain needs a rest after concentrating, just as your legs need a rest after running. Athletes know the importance of a good diet and adequate rest. These are just as important for students. Athletes don't feel guilt for eating well and resting properly, so why should students?

Other students feel guilty because they are not studying at all, or very little. It is pointless wasting time feeling guilty. Instead, try to find out (with help from the Counselling Service if you want it), why you don't want to study.

