

## Clues to Concentration

**Intend to Concentrate.** Humans tend to do what they tell themselves to do. Therefore, it's easier to concentrate if you set a specific length of time to study and consciously tell yourself that "I will concentrate" for that length of time.

**Prepare to concentrate.** Have everything you will need before you begin to study, like books.

**Find a place that is quiet and will stay quiet.** Research is clear that certain sounds slow and even prevent learning. Some of those sounds are most types of music, talking, and intermittent sounds such as doors opening and closing, noise from children, pet sounds, etc.

**Study in the same place as much as possible.** You will associate that place with studying which enables you to begin concentration sooner, do it deeper, and get the job of learning done faster. Psychologists call this a conditioning effect and it also speeds learning.

**Study with a pencil or pen in hand.** According to an expert in concentration, Dr. Walter Pauk, you should study with a pencil or pen in hand and use it to take notes. Taking notes ensures concentration.

**Vary Your Study Activities.** If your study style is not to focus on one subject for long periods of time, then vary what you do. Read and take notes for a while, formulate questions and answers for a time, then recite and review to break the monotony. An example is to do math problems, then take notes from your psychology text, review the psychology notes, and then go back to math.

**Take regular study breaks.** It is normal for concentration time to vary individually from 5 minutes on up. Take a short 5-minute break when concentration wanders.

**Use a worry sheet.** Each time you catch yourself worrying about something, jot it down on a piece of paper. Then do something about each item as soon as you can.

**Eat Well Balanced, Regular Meals.** Research suggests those with healthy diets earn higher grades. Avoid quick uppers such as sugary snacks because quickly rising and falling blood sugar levels negatively affect concentration. High fat foods cause sluggishness and drowsiness. Choose to snack on fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Get Plenty of Nighttime Sleep.** Fighting sleepiness lowers concentration. If your living environment prevents sufficient nighttime sleep, elect to change it.

**Set up a specific system for studying and learning.** An effective step-by-step plan for studying and learning makes concentration easier.

**Set daily, weekly, monthly, and semester academic goals.** It is easier to concentrate and feel motivated when you have goals and can see yourself progressing toward those goals.

*Adapted from: Congos, Dennis H. (2011) Starting Out in Community College. Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill*