

# improve your concentration

## concentration

Make It Happen:

time management

**concentration**

reading

listening

memory

taking tests

writing papers

self-regulation

learning styles

motivation

EVERYONE struggles with the ability to concentrate at certain times. Our ability to concentrate is not a constant. It fluctuates with different periods of our lives, seasons, and even of our day. Some individuals may have more factors interfering with or competing for their attention than others.

Your ability to concentrate can be significantly improved by identifying the factors that may be causing interference, experimenting with different concentration techniques and behavioral habits, and evaluating what techniques & behaviors do and do not work for you.

Ask yourself the following questions and place a check by the areas in which you will experiment with new techniques and behavioral habits.

Your Body	
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you practicing healthy personal habits that affect your ability to concentrate?	Maintaining a good diet, getting enough rest (7-9hrs—see CFL Sleep handout), and regular exercise can all improve concentration.
<input type="checkbox"/> Are medical issues interfering with your ability to focus?	Consider whether hearing, eye sight, or a disorder (such as ADD/ADHD) could benefit from medical intervention.
Your Brain	
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you lacking interest in the subject matter?	<p>Try to create interest by finding ways to be curious about the subject.</p> <p><b>In class:</b> Arrive prepared to participate: look over course material, do assigned readings, and prepare questions or opinions.</p> <p><b>Reading:</b> Preview the text (see CFL Reading handout), create a framework of topics on the subject that will give context for more detailed information.</p> <p><b>Studying:</b> Find unique ways to make material meaningful for you—relate it to other courses, to knowledge you already have, or to your life. Speak with classmates about their interpretations.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you lacking motivation?	Identify specific ambitions or goals that may be fulfilled through success in school or in a class. Picture yourself successfully achieving that goal. Focus on the positive aspects of a course or instructor.
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you feel overwhelmed with stress or anxiety?	Try practicing positive self-talk ("I can do this!"), remind yourself to take it one small step at a time (see CFL Task List handout), and focus on the task at hand.
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you find yourself daydreaming or personal emotions distracting you?	Allow yourself to focus on emotions and relationships by designating time in your schedule to reflect or talk with a friend. Designating a time for personal reflection allows you to temporarily put emotions aside and focus on the subject at hand. Consider visiting the SPU Counseling Center (206-281-2657) for help with processing emotional issues that become unmanageable.

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Your Environment	
<input type="checkbox"/> Where do you sit in class?	Try sitting in a location that physically eliminates the amount of distractions between you and the speaker. Identifying a professor's subtle non-verbal cues can give clues regarding the importance of the information. It is no secret that students who sit front and center in a course are generally more engaged with the material and get better grades in the course.
<input type="checkbox"/> Where do you read, write, and study material outside of class?	Try studying in different environments to see where you can best focus. Weigh the number of distractions (social atmosphere, objects, noise, facebook/myspace, instant-messaging, TV) against the positive factors (good lighting, comfort, convenience of location, needed materials at hand). Find study locations that work for you outside of your day-to-day living environment.
Your Time	
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you planning ahead, scheduling routine study sessions, and balancing demands on your time appropriately?	Good time-management comes through practice. Try using a combination of a Quarterly Calendar, Weekly Schedule, and Prioritized Task List to develop good habits (see CFL Time Management handouts).
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you setting realistic goals for how long your mind can focus during study?	Observe yourself to see how long you can concentrate before getting restless. Set goals for your study sessions that you can achieve without losing focus. Stick to these goals and reward yourself when they are reached. Challenge yourself to improve. Be aware of what times during the day your mind is most alert and awake. Plan to work on tasks that require a higher level of focus during these times.
<input type="checkbox"/> Are you having trouble getting started?	Find a regular time to study each day so that you set a pattern of behavior for yourself. Try breaking your assignments or study into small chunks that do not seem as overwhelming.
Your Organization	
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a system for organizing your course materials that allows you to find information quickly and easily?	Physically organizing your materials can sometimes help you to mentally organize information. Searching for past information to reference can break your concentration. Try investing time in organizing binders or files for your work to see if it will impact your ability to access and recall the information.
<input type="checkbox"/> Do you maintain an organized and accessible task list?	Keeping a single notebook dedicated to writing to-do list items in can help you clear your mind of those items. You can later return to the list in order to prioritize tasks by importance and urgency, setting achievable goals for yourself to accomplish. (see CFL Task List handout).

Evaluate what techniques or behaviors work best for you and visit the Center for Learning website, [www.spu.edu/depts/cfl](http://www.spu.edu/depts/cfl), for CFL handouts and further information on improving your concentration.