



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS®

College of
Engineering

Concentration Tips

A, B, C Focus Times

In order to manage your time effectively, you first need to be in tune with your focus and energy levels throughout the day. What time of the day do you feel more alert? When do you feel sluggish? In other words, when do you perform the best for certain tasks and when do you have to fight with yourself to stay focused?

Everyone operates on an individual set of physiological patterns. Whether you're a morning person, night owl, or a middle-of-the-day powerhouse, you can adapt your study time to capitalize on your peak patterns.

The key is to take advantage of your peak focus times by structuring your study accordingly. Think through your energy throughout the day and label each block of time as A (peak focus), B (medium focus- perhaps it's an ideal time but the setting is subpar), and C (lethargic/tired/not peak focus time and not ideal studying conditions). Then look at your task list and label each item according to the level of focus it requires.

Needing to work through some complicated problem sets or create an intense study guide? Choose a Focus A time of day.

Creating an essay outline or reviewing a study guide? Focus B time will work for this.

Are you making flashcards for an upcoming quiz or rewriting notes from yesterday's class? Focus C should be sufficient; it doesn't require a lot of in-the-moment brainpower but you are still spending time immersed in your studies.

Each student will consider the difficulty of tasks differently, so make sure that you're categorizing your tasks into Focus A, B, and C according to *your* needs and no one else's.

Top Ten Tips for Increasing Concentration

1. Start assignments with some curiosity about the material and a positive attitude toward learning.
2. Designate a place where you go only to study. Use proper lighting.
3. Identify your distractions. Find ways to decrease them or to postpone them until study breaks (e.g., taking the phone off the hook, turning off instant messenger).
4. Decrease noises around you while studying. If you need some background music it should be soft. Keep the TV off.
5. Use "active study" techniques: sit straight in a chair at a desk, start out with questions about the material, outline chapters, underline key phrases after reading a section, write notes in margins, ask yourself what you have learned.
6. Divide your work into smaller manageable tasks that can be completed in a short period of time. Push yourself to complete one small task, then move on to the next task. Focus on one small task at a time.
7. Use times of peak alertness for studying difficult or less interesting topics. When you are tired or hungry concentration will be lowered.
8. When your mind starts to wander come up with some cue words to say to yourself (e.g., "Focus." "Get back on task.") to focus your concentration again.
9. Take breaks when you have completed tasks or when you feel concentration has decreased. Breaks should be approximately 10-15 minutes.
10. If you have other assignments or issues on your mind write them down on a "to do" list or take a small step to deal with them. Then get back to focusing on the task at hand.

Be Here Now Concentration Exercise

This deceptively simple strategy is probably the most effective. When you notice your thoughts wandering astray, say to yourself

"Be here now"

and gently bring your attention back to where you want it.

FOR EXAMPLE:

You're in class and your attention strays from the lecture to all the homework you have, to a date, to the fact that you're hungry. As you say to yourself

"Be here now"

you focus back on the lecture and maintain your attention there as long as possible.

When it wanders again, repeat

"Be here now"

and gently bring your attention back.

You may notice that your mind often wanders (as often as several times a minute at times). Each time just say

"Be here now"

and refocus. Do not try to keep particular thoughts out of your mind. For example, as you sit there, close your eyes and think about anything you want to for the next three minutes except cookies. Try not to think about cookies...When you try not to think about something, it keeps coming back. ("I'm not going to think about cookies. I'm not going to think about cookies.")

When you find your thoughts wandering, gently let go of that thought and, with your "Be here now," return to the present.

You might do this hundreds of times a week, if you're normal. But, you'll find that the period of time between your straying thoughts gets a little longer every few days. So be patient and keep at it. You'll see some improvement!

Source: <https://www.k-state.edu/counseling/topics/career/concentr.html>