

**Lesson 5: Increasing Concentration/ Taking Charge of Your Physical Environment**

**A/Concentration** is the ability to block out *external and internal distractors* in order to stay focused on one specific item or task. Concentration is a flighty process; you can concentrate one minute and then easily become distracted and lose that concentration the very next. The following are important points about concentration:

- Concentration requires a concerted effort on your part to train or discipline your mind.
  - Concentration involves monitoring not only your thoughts and emotions, but also your environment.
  - External and internal distractors consume space in working memory, disturb your brainwave patterns, and affect the flow of stimuli throughout your memory system.
1. **External Distractors** are disruptions caused by things in your physical environment, such as noises, people, television, enticing or harsh weather, clutter, and lighting. You can use strategies to train your mind and your attention not to respond to external distractors—unless of course they involve an emergency or potential danger.
  2. **Internal Distractors** are disruptions that occur inside you physically or emotionally. Worries, stress, anxiety, depression, sickness, hunger, pain, daydreams, and anticipation of upcoming events are examples of internal distractors that reduce your level of concentration.

**B/ Taking Charge of Your Physical Environment: An Ideal Study Area**

To increase your ability to concentrate, give careful attention to three elements in your physical environment: the noise level, the lighting, and the workspace.

Depending on the noise, lighting, and workspace, the location where you study may be highly conducive to learning, or it may be filled with distractors that reduce your ability to concentrate. Studying in an ideal study area not only improves concentration, but it also increases motivation and reduces the tendency to procrastinate (postpone or delay work).

**1. The Noise Level**

People have different tolerance levels to noise. Some students need a silent environment in order to concentrate; others can tolerate minor sounds or noises without becoming distracted. Contrary to some students' beliefs that they can study in noisy environments, research shows that noisy environments, music with lyrics and frequent variations in rhythm, and the auditory and visual stimuli from television interrupt thought processes and brainwave patterns, causing concentration to turn on and off and on and off in split-second intervals.. However, soft, classical, and instrumental music does not cause the on-and-off pattern and may enhance learning by helping the mind be more receptive to new information. Monitor the effects of the noise level in your study environment and be willing to change your study location and environment until you find one that increases rather than decreases your level of concentration.

**2. The Lighting**

Proper lighting is important in any study area. If you have too little light, your eyes can easily become strained and tired. Some lighting can create shadows or glare on your books. To avoid many of the problems created by poor lighting, have *two* sources of light in your study area. This may include an overhead light and a desk lamp or two lamps in different locations. Two sources of lighting may seem like a minor detail, but sometimes ignoring small details leads to vision and concentration problems.

**3. The Workspace**

Trying to study in an area that lacks sufficient space to spread out your textbooks, open your notebooks, take notes as you read, or use other study materials and supplies creates distractions. A work surface cluttered with items not related to studying also creates distractions. To be conducive to studying, select a workspace that is clutter-free, provides ample work space, and has minimal visual stimuli, such as photographs or memorabilia. If necessary, use your goal-setting skills to write a goal to create your ideal study space. Your ideal study space should also be equipped with a comfortable chair that is an appropriate height for the table and for your legs. Avoid trying to study on the floor, in a recliner, on a couch, or on a bed.

- *Do not waste your valuable time trying to study in an environment filled with distraction. Take charge of your environment by taking responsibility and seeking an alternative place to study or by modifying the existing environment so it has few or no distractions.*

**Task :** Below (in the chart) are four cases of students who have concentration problems, read each case carefully and find the decision(s) each student should/ would make to take charge of his/her physical environment.

Description of the Student Situation	Solutions/ Decisions
Robert has a short attention span and is easily distracted. He tries studying in the library, but ordinary library noises and the movement around him are too distracting.	
Joel grew up in a house with a large family, so studying in a noisy environment seems normal. Joel usually studies in the cafeteria, but he is not pleased with how little he accomplishes while studying there.	
Heather often studies in a student lounge area even though the fluorescent lighting bothers her to the point that her eyes do not focus well.	
Marshall prefers studying at his kitchen table, but he realizes that he frequently leaves the table to get drinks or snacks. Work that would normally take an hour to finish at school is taking him much longer at home because of the frequent breaks.	

## Correction of the task

Description of the Student Situation	The Student's Solution
<p>Robert has a short attention span and is easily distracted. He tries studying in the library, but ordinary library noises and the movement around him are too distracting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Work in a quiet environment with less movement, such as an empty office or a conference room.</li><li>■ Move to the back of the library away from foot traffic.</li></ul>
<p>Joel grew up in a house with a large family, so studying in a noisy environment seems normal. Joel usually studies in the cafeteria, but he is not pleased with how little he accomplishes while studying there.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Avoid trying to study in the cafeteria, which is designed for eating and socializing.</li><li>■ Study in a quieter setting at school or at home.</li><li>■ If some sound is needed, turn on a small fan to break the total silence.</li></ul>
<p>Heather often studies in a student lounge area even though the fluorescent lighting bothers her to the point that her eyes do not focus well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Move to a room with windows so there is a combination of natural lighting and fluorescent lighting.</li><li>■ At home, use a desk lamp and a ceiling light.</li></ul>
<p>Marshall prefers studying at his kitchen table, but he realizes that he frequently leaves the table to get drinks or snacks. Work that would normally take an hour to finish at school is taking him much longer at home because of the frequent breaks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Modify the environment by removing all kitchen and food items from the table.</li><li>■ Create a box of school supplies for the table to convert it into a work or study area.</li><li>■ Sit facing away from the refrigerator.</li><li>■ Resist the temptation to move from the table.</li></ul>