Techniques to improve your concentration

Concentration is the ability to keep one's mind steadily on a given subject for a stated interval. It can be developed—if you practice the following suggestions long enough.

- **Emotional worries or problems:** First, attend to all crises or serious problems. Either do something about them or decide what to do about it—later. Have faith that the world will still be there with its problems and joys while you take time out to study. Instead, enlist your emotions in your study as you must be totally involved.

- **Study conditions:** A regular time and regular place (well-lighted and quiet) will suggest study. If you find it compatible and profitable to study with others, fine. Use a straight back chair to encourage alertness. The room should be well ventilated and not above 70º. Only soft music, if you must.

- **Eyes:** Rest eyes frequently as eye staring can quickly cause fatigue. Look away from your book, blink hard several times, or palm your eyes to rest them. Avoid glaring reading lights or reading in the sun.

- **Purpose:** Place a value (purpose) on your reading—grades, units, or information to be gained. A more specific purpose can be developed by first surveying the reading material and forming questions from the title and headings. Then you would read to answer your questions.

- **Interest:** Some subjects will be more interesting to you than others. The above survey-question method to soften up the material before the serious reading will create interest as well as purpose. Interest will surge and subside. Expect this! Whatever, the responsibility for developing interest is yours.

- **Background information:** Recall what you already know about the subject. This will generate interest which serves concentration. If you find the material new and difficult, go to simpler sources for your initial reading.

- **Questions, Questions:** Ask questions as your survey the chapter. This will help develop your curiosity, interest, concentration and motivation. As you dig into the reading, ask more specific questions of concepts, statements and beyond—of your own analyses, inferences, synthesis or evaluation. Ask: Why? How? What if? How does this relate...?
• **Organize the material:** Chapters have an order or structure for the thought flow and development. Utilize this order as a hanger for details, relating and associating the details to the main ideas which make up the structure. You can concentrate and remember better if you have a clear sense of where you are and where you are going with ideas. This can be achieved if you "tie in" details to the major ideas (larger framework) as you read.

• **Visualize:** Create pictures in your mind as you read. The visual sense is most helpful in stimulating interest, concentration and memory as well as understanding.

• **Read faster:** The faster you read, the more you have to attend to the material, leaving less time for distractions or your thoughts to wander. Speed also binds the material closer as you are perceiving more and, the more you perceive of the whole, the more you will find it meaningful and interesting.

• **Self-recitation:** Engage in a split-second recitation-reflection after reading each paragraph or manageable portion to test your understanding before recording this understanding briefly. This self-recitation not only refreshes interest but keeps you actively involved which serves concentration.

• **Make notes:** Make brief notes in your own words following self-recitation. Copying passively not only is an absolute waster of time, but it actually decreases concentration. Underlining does not serve concentration as well as your own paraphrased notes.

• **Review:** Review your notes occasionally while reading a chapter. After you have completed your reading, review it again to be sure you have really "got it."

• **Warm-up:** the first 10-20 minutes is often a readiness period--a warm-up period to develop interest and mood for studying. Don't be disappointed if you fail to concentrate 100% at the beginning. If often takes some time to get into it. Hang in there! This is when most students close the book, feeling they just can't study tonight. Not so!

• **Lapses and fatigue:** If your concentration flags during the study period, take short breaks. Stretch, stand, rest your eyes, walk about, get a drink and then resume your studying. Later, when you feel you've had it with the subject, take a mental break changing to another subject. A review of your notes is encouraging and this refreshes interest and concentration. Change to an easier assignment.
If you are sure you've had it for that study session, quit for the time being.

**Some odds and ends**

Set goals for studying—so many pages or a set amount of time. Work to achieve these goals. At some point you may feel you are making no progress at all. This may well be the learning plateau which is part of any learning development. It helps fix and stabilize the learning. However, as you continue to study, there will be another leap forward—then followed by the learning plateau.