MOTIVATION AND CONCENTRATION WORKSHOP

CONCENTRATION
Concentration Worksheet

Self - Assessment Exercise:

Check the statements that apply to you:

☐ I am easily distracted when I study.
☐ My mind wonders when I read.
☐ I can’t seem to find the time to study.
☐ I tend to procrastinate and put off studying to do something else.
☐ My mind goes blank on a test.
☐ If I do not like the instructor, I lose interest and do not pay attention.
☐ If the subject does not relate to my career goals, I lose interest.
☐ If an assignment is too difficult, I usually do not stick with it.
☐ I do not have a career goal, or a reason to study.
☐ It’s hard for me to take notes and listen at the same time.

☐ Others:

Possible causes for poor concentration:
(Check the statements that apply to you).

Internal Factors:

☐ Physical distractions - Irregular eating, sleeping, and exercise patterns, depression, anxiety, chronic pain or other related health and mental health issues.

☐ Emotion preoccupation or distraction - Personal issues or crisis ie. relationship break-up, job loss

☐ Excessive worry - Preoccupation and fear about future, failure, etc.

☐ Negative self-talk - Critical, comparative or perfectionist thinking

☐ Lack of career direction

☐ Lack of clarity or confusion regarding course work or expectations

☐ Other:
**External Factors:**

- [ ] People talking
- [ ] Noise distractions – TV, people talking, music, telephone
- [ ] Light too dim/bright
- [ ] Temperature too high/low
- [ ] Time pressures
- [ ] Social distractions – invitations, family needs, time with friends
- [ ] Discouraging words from others
- [ ] Lack of adequate materials or resources to complete the task
- [ ] Physical danger or threat
- [ ] Other:

**Spontaneously answer the following question:**

I am most focused and alert when I ..................................................

**Strategies for Improving Concentration**
Recognize: Concentration strategies will require practice before they become habitual. Considerable change will likely occur within 4-6 weeks of practice.

| Environment         | - Find a comfortable and ventilated study environment  
|                     | - Find a place that you use exclusively for study so that the environment becomes associated with concentration  
|                     | - Make sure you have everything you need to study  
| Be Comfortable      | - Make sure you have adequate light  
|                     | - Sit up straight to aid concentration  
|                     | - Avoid studying in bed, so it is associated with sleep  
| Reduce Distractions | - Take the phone off the hook, turn off the TV, etc.  
|                     | - Clear away clutter and distractions  
|                     | - Try not to get annoyed with distractions, that will make them more influential  
| "Park" Your Worries | - Create a "concern" notebook and every time your mind wanders to a worry, record your thoughts  
|                     | - Notice themes and take action to address your concerns  
| Schedule "Worry" Time| - Set aside a specific time each day to think about concerns  
| Schedule Your Time  | - Estimate the number of hours you will need to study for each course each week; identify other fixed obligations  
|                     | - Create a schedule with adequate study time  
| Goal Setting        | Goals should be:  
|                     | - Meaningful & Desired - Realistic & Achievable  
|                     | - Specific & Defined - Stated in the Positive  
|                     | - Internalized - In Writing  
|                     | - Measurable - Prioritized  
| Think Small         | - Break study goals into small achievable tasks  
| Honour Your Body    | - Eat healthy, get enough sleep and exercise frequently  
|                     | - Attend to any medical or health concerns  
|                     | - Allow for love, laughter, leisure and personal interest time  
| Take Breaks         | - Take short breaks; concentration time is approx 30-90min  
|                     | - Take a walk, oxygenate your brain which helps alertness  
| Change is Good      | - Every couple hours change the subject you’re working on  
|                     | - You pay more attention when your mind is challenged with new information  
| Reward Yourself     | - Give yourself a reward when you have completed a task  
|                     | - Keep the task small and reward meaningful  
|                     | - For major assignments choose special incentive rewards  
| Active Study Methods| - Ask yourself questions, dialogue with your material, quiz yourself, summarize, take sides of an argument, critique  
| Chart Energy Levels | - Note when you study best and schedule your more demanding or less interesting material for these times  

Concentration Techniques:

If you find your mind wandering try some techniques to get your mind on the right track and paying attention to your study material.

“BE HERE NOW” TECHNIQUE:

- When you notice your thoughts wandering, say to yourself, “BE HERE NOW”
- Focus on your study or lecture and maintain your attention as long as possible. When your mind wanders again, repeat, “BE HERE NOW”.
- Each time your mind wanders, gently bring it back by repeating “BE HERE NOW”.
- Do not try to keep specific thoughts out of your mind.
  - The more you try not to think about something, the more you end up thinking about it
  - Simply recognize the thought, allow it to be and erase it from your mind by saying, “BE HERE NOW”
- It is normal to have to do this several hundred times per week
  - With practice, you will notice that your attention becomes more focused and your wandering thoughts become less frequent
- You may also use this technique to regain your concentration when you become distracted by an external distraction (ie. background noise)
  - Just say, “LET THEM BE OUT THERE”, and redirect your focus to your study or lecture

PRACTICE RELAXATION AND MEDITATION:

- Learn CONTROLLED BREATHING
  - Put one hand on your upper chest and one on your stomach, the hand on your stomach moves out as you breathe in
  - Try breathing in for a count of 4 and out to a count of 4 for 4 min.
  - This technique optimizes oxygen intake, helping the brain to be alert
- Learn PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION
  - Tense and relax each major muscle group (ie. feet, calves, thighs etc)
  - Tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, relax for 10-15 seconds
- Learn MEDITATION
  - Imagery meditation involves actively visualizing scenes that are tranquil, safe and relaxing to you
  - Choose scenes that are imagined/remembered and incorporate as many of your senses as possible (smell, taste, tactile, visual)

With practice, these techniques may be effectively implemented during a lecture, study period or exam.