

CONCENTRATION

STUDENT COUNSELLING

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

If you would like to make an appointment to see a counsellor to learn more about this topic, please contact the counselling service on your campus.

Distance students can contact any one of the campuses. Please tell the receptionist if you need an urgent appointment.

CONTACT DETAILS

ALBANY

Health and Counselling

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (09) 443 9783

Email: Studenthealth@massey.ac.nz

MANAWATŪ

Student Counselling Service

Turitea Campus, Palmerston North

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (06) 350 5533

Email: s.counselling@massey.ac.nz

WELLINGTON

Student Counselling Service

Hours 8.30am - 5.00pm

Monday - Friday

Phone (04) 801 2542

<http://crow.massey.ac.nz>

<http://health-counselling.massey.nz>



CONCENTRATION

The ability to concentrate, or to give something our undivided attention, is a very useful attribute for students. As adults, we are able to pay attention to tasks for considerably longer than children can. (The average three-year-old is said to have a concentration span measured in seconds!). Most adults can give something their undivided concentration for between 20 to 50 minutes.

However, the bad news is that this can only happen if we are in good health both physically and mentally. As soon as we are not functioning at our best – our concentration is affected. This means that if you have had any emotional upset or even a bout of flu, your concentration will probably be one of the first things to suffer and also, one of the last things to return to perfect working order. This is very important information as it allows you to stop blaming yourself for concentration difficulties.

The simplest strategies to put into place when you are having concentration difficulties are often also the most effective. They may sound very simple, but are easily forgotten when the pressure is on.



STRATEGIES:

- Decide ahead of time what you are going to do. It is very easy to spend a lot of unproductive time planning when you should already be working.
- Make lists or block out time slots in advance.
- Make sure your room is at a comfortable temperature - it is not easy to concentrate if you are drowsy from being in an overheated room, or shivering with cold.
- Get rid of any extraneous distractions. This list is endless and dependent on what you find distracting as an individual. It may include, email, cell phone, Facebook, TV, radio, magazines, friends (sitting in your room when you are trying to study), loud music, food etc.
- Have a set place for concentrated work. This should NOT be your bed, it should preferably not be your bedroom (but that isn't always possible). Beds are there mainly for sleeping - not studies. Studying in bed confuses your body and can also contribute to sleep problems, which can contribute to concentration problems.
- Your chair and desk (where you need to study - not sleep) should be at the appropriate heights for you - you can't concentrate if you are in pain from OOS (occupational overuse syndrome).
- If you must play music, make sure it is background music not something you are going to listen to actively.
- Make sure that you have had enough (good, healthy) food to eat; that you have had sufficient rest, otherwise it is difficult to stay awake. Remember your brain needs protein, vitamins and minerals, which are essential for healthy nerve conduction.
- Take breaks. It is highly unlikely that you can concentrate for more than 50 minutes. Anything longer is usually a good way of fooling yourself - whilst daydreaming.
- If you really, really get stuck with something, put it aside and come back to it. Your brain is a wonderful time-sharing machine. Whilst you are doing something else it will be working away at finding out more about the difficult thing you were struggling with before. You may find, to your surprise, when you try it again at a later stage that you have a far better idea of what to do.
- Your retrieval system improves when you can access something more freely. Practice makes perfect. If you can be putting something into your memory twice (seeing and hearing) at the same time, it strengthens the memory trace and makes it easier for you later.
- Be an active learner. It is much easier to concentrate when you are fully involved in what you are doing. Draw diagrams, pictures or squiggles, use highlighters, make mind maps, talk to yourself, use pretty colours. It all helps to keep you focussed.
- Start with questions, old exam or test papers are great. Read them first and try to answer where you can. Then when you start to work your way through the material, you will be actively looking for answers and that tends to keep you awake and concentrating. It can also give you a reality check on what you do or don't know (pleasant or unpleasant!)
- Spend time on the things you don't know, the rest you will just need to brush up on.
- If you are struggling to concentrate try estimating how long you CAN concentrate for without stopping (even 5 minutes) then set your alarm clock. Turn it away and give it your best shot. When it goes off, take a break. Set it again. Repeat the process. If you find you are still able to concentrate at the end of the time, then set it for longer and longer until you have built up to your normal concentration time. If you find your mind is wandering even within the time you have set, there are still things you can do: Shorten the time you are trying to concentrate. If this doesn't work and unwanted thoughts are still coming into your mind (e.g., you keep thinking of things you have to do around the house, or you think about your ex who has just dumped you) write down ALL the thoughts. Keep doing this until there are none left, then put them aside to think about in your breaks. (Setting time aside as a specific worry time is sometimes useful).
- Look at your motivation, there is a pamphlet on this as well. You may be finding it difficult to concentrate because you have lost motivation.

**CONCENTRATION IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS!
DO IT!**