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for tomorrow

**HOW2 IMPROVE YOUR CONCENTRATION
(LSD3)**

**NMMU STUDENT COUNSELLING, CAREER
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There are 3 main aspects to managing poor concentration.

You need to:

- identify the causes of poor concentration and decide which apply to you.
- learn how to control these causes
- ensure that your control becomes a habit

1. IDENTIFYING AND CONTROLLING THE CAUSES OF POOR CONCENTRATION

External causes	
Identify causes	How to control causes
<p><i>Environmental distractions:</i></p> <p>Examples: TV, snacks, other people, cellphones, music with words, conversations</p>	<p>Train yourself to study away from others and in a quiet environment</p> <p>Re-arrange a distracting environment or leave e.g. go to a library, study centre or classroom.</p>

Internal causes	
Identify causes	How to control causes
<p><i>Physical distractions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunger • Drowsiness 	<p>Eat healthy food and avoid artificial stimulants.</p> <p>Plan to study when you are most alert. Do 5 mins of light exercise to wake up.</p>

Internal causes (continued)	
Identify causes	How to control causes
Boredom, dislike, disinterest	In order to increase your motivation find reasons why you need to attend class; work together with other students and consult the lecturer. (See pamphlet SS2: <i>How2 motivate yourself</i>)
Anxiety about studies	Make sure you know how to study effectively. Understand the course requirements and what is expected of you. (Refer to pamphlet SS7: <i>How2 manage test and exam anxiety</i>)
Feeling overwhelmed by study tasks	Divide large tasks into achievable smaller tasks. Reward yourself for progress in completing tasks. Take short breaks every 40-60 minutes.
Daydreaming/wandering thoughts	Separate daydreams from studying. When your mind starts to wander, write down the interrupting thought and continue studying. When you are ready to read again, do so. The trick is not to daydream and study at the same time.
Personal worries	Identify the problem and develop a concrete plan to deal with the personal problem. Write down what is worrying you. Speak to a counsellor or someone whom you trust.

Make controlling these causes a habit

Even if you sometimes lapse into old habits of distraction, keep trying these methods to improve your level of concentration.

2 USEFUL TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE YOUR CONCENTRATION

Here are some techniques to help you improve your concentration:

- **Be here now**

This is a simple strategy. When you notice your thoughts wandering, say to yourself:

“Be here now”

Gently bring your attention back to where you want it.

Example

You are studying and your attention strays from the study material. You think about the party you are attending on Saturday, the chores you need to do at home and the assignments you still need to complete. Say to yourself: *“Be here now.”* This will help you to focus on your studying.

When your mind wanders again, repeat *“Be here now”* and gently bring your attention back. You may notice that your mind wanders frequently. Therefore each time just say: *“Be here now.”*

You may need to practice this technique several times a week. As you persevere, you’ll find that your concentration will improve.

- **Coping with distractions**

Train yourself not to give in to distractions. For example, when someone enters the room, or when a door slams, do not allow yourself to get distracted. Rather, quickly return to what you are doing and focus on what is in front of you. Practice sustaining your concentration and avoiding being distracted in a variety of settings.

- **Worry or think time**

Set aside a specific time in the day to think about the things that keep entering your mind and interfering with your concentration.

The following steps can be applied:

- Set aside a specific time e.g. 12h30 – 13h00 every day.
- When you become aware of distracting thoughts, remind yourself that you have a special time to think about them. Let the thought go and use the technique: “*Be here now*” to refocus your attention.
- Be sure to keep the appointment with yourself at that special time to focus on the distracting thoughts of the day.

References:

1. <http://www.k-state.edu/counselling> accessed web-page on 30/05/2005
2. <http://www.utexas.edu/student> accessed web-page on 30/05/2005