



FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS

Allotting time to study doesn't always mean you'll stay focused the entire time. Your mind wanders, distractions sneak in, and next thing you know, an hour has gone by and you haven't really accomplished much in the way of studying. Try these tips for staying focused. If you still find yourself getting stuck or overly distracted, make an appointment with an OAR staff member to develop an individualized approach to staying focused while you study.

TIPS FOR STAYING FOCUSED

- *Location, location, location*: Find places to study that you use *only* for studying. According to Pauk & Owens (2014), "Psychologists emphasize that a conditioning effect is created between you and the desk: If you nap or daydream a lot while sitting at the desk, the desk can act as a cue for napping or daydreaming. By the same token, if you read or work in bed, you make it difficult to work energetically and fall asleep easily. To avoid this negative conditioning, use your desk only for studying. When you feel the urge to nap or daydream, leave your desk to nap or daydream elsewhere" (p. 23). It's likely that you don't always study at your desk in your dorm room, but these same principles apply wherever you choose to study. For example, it may be difficult to stay focused on your studies in the common areas in the dorms if you also hang out with your friends, watch movies, or nap in those same spaces.
- Eliminate or reduce noise distractions: Choose a place to study that is quiet or that has an acceptable noise level. While some students are able to stay focused with soft music playing in the background, others need absolute quiet to study. Experiment until you find the location and noise level that works for you. This may even mean a different setting for different subjects.
- Technology – a *blessing* and a *curse*: In many ways, technology has made studying more convenient and personalized for today's college students. However, technology is also the biggest distraction for college students in the 21st century. To stay focused on the task at hand, keep your phone out of range or turn it off while studying. Close all computer programs except the one(s) you are using. You can peruse Facebook, get lost in YouTube videos, or check out your friends' latest pictures on Instagram – just keep these things separate from your study space and study time. There are many online apps that can help to block sites, or limit your daily access.
- Materials for studying: Make sure you have *all* your study materials at your desk, or wherever you choose to study. This way, you don't lose time or disrupt your focus because you have to go back for your notebook, textbook, calculator, or anything else you might need.
- Establish a "*worry pad*": Have you ever started studying, only for stray thoughts to start making their way into your brain? Maybe you suddenly remember that your best friend's birthday is coming up in a few weeks and that you need to get a present, or maybe you forgot to return your parents' call last night. Keep a worry pad with you while you study. Put such stray thoughts on your worry pad, and then immediately return to your work. After you have finished studying, you can give these concerns your undivided attention.
- The *STOP! Technique*: The STOP! Technique relies on what psychologists refer to as self-talk, and is useful for the random thoughts that creep into your head that are not worth writing on your worry pad. When you feel your mind start to wander and your focus clearly strays from your work, tell yourself, "Stop!" Say it out loud, and say it with authority. Acknowledging that your mind is wandering, that you're becoming less productive, and that you intend to regain your focus is often just what your brain needs to get back on track.

Cited and adapted from: Pauk, W., & Owens, R.J.Q. (2014). *How to study in college*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning; The University of Tennessee.