

Need help?

4. Use the check mark strategy.

A key towards developing better concentration long-term is to begin to notice when you are having trouble concentrating. To help with this, put a check mark on the side of your notes or on a separate piece of paper. When you do this, you start to notice your concentration difficulty, which allows you to—gently—pull yourself back to the task at hand. If you do this consistently, you will find over time that the number of check marks declines.

Library

Research help. Our librarians are experts in research and they love to share their knowledge.

Lansdowne: 250-370-3622

Interurban: 250-370-4630

camosun.ca/services/library/

Disability Resource Centre

Services and accommodations for students with a documented disability, including anxiety and depression.

Lansdowne: 250-370-3312

Interurban: 250-370-4049

camosun.ca/services/disability-resource-centre/

Counselling

Confidential career, personal, educational and cultural counselling for all registered students.

Lansdowne: 250-370-3571

Interurban: 250-370-4925

camosun.ca/services/counselling/

Academic Advising

Help with decisions about course selection, transfer options and education planning.

camosun.ca/services/academic-advising/

Writing Centre

Help with academic writing: how to write essays, create outlines, argue logically, integrate quotes and develop a thesis

250-370-3491

camosun.ca/services/writing-centre/

Help Centres

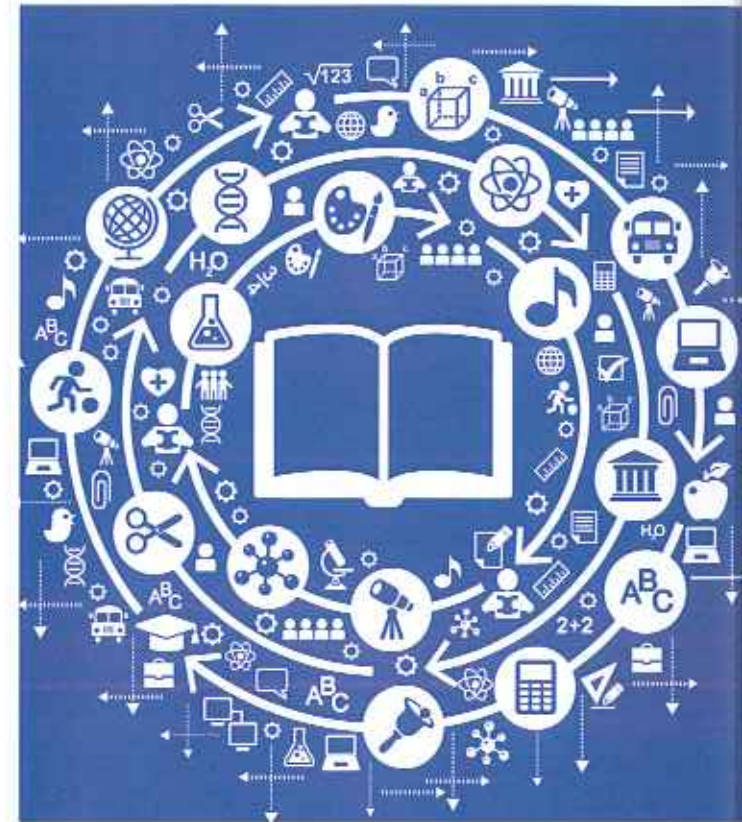
One-on-one tutoring, tips and tools for all levels of English and math coursework.

camosun.ca/services/help-centres/



LEARNING SKILLS

Concentration



Concentration

Recognizing concentration difficulties

As with many problems in life, the first step in correcting concentration difficulties is to recognize that you are having difficulties concentrating. It is very unlikely that you are going to attempt to improve your concentration if you haven't noticed that you are not concentrating well! So what is the experience of not concentrating well like for many people? Perhaps, one or more of the following is familiar to you:

- While reading a textbook, rereading parts over and over without realizing it.
- While reading a section of a chapter, suddenly realizing that you are thinking of something else even as your eyes continue to move across the page.
- After reading a chapter, not being able to recall what the chapter was about.
- Tuning out of lectures, perhaps writing notes without thinking about them.
- Daydreaming.
- Being distracted by things or people while studying.

Dealing with *external* distractions

Generally, the best strategy here is quite straightforward: remove the distraction or remove yourself from the distraction. Here are some specific strategies towards that:

1. Reserve an area that is only for work.

For many students, it is very powerful to remain at the college after classes are done in order to do an hour or three of work before going home. Often, if we go home in the early to mid-afternoon, it is very difficult to avoid distractions at least until after supper. Alternatively, consider the possibility of going back to the college or perhaps to a public library after supper or on the weekend. At home, try as much as possible to work in an area that is only used for work. This means (ahem) not in front of

Internal and external distractions

While studying, people can lose concentration because of two types of distractions. External distractions are things like noise, clutter, and a temperature that is too high or too low. Internal distractions are the mental noises that are going on inside us, whether from worry or boredom or excitement about something. Clearly, the appropriate strategy for dealing with concentration difficulties will depend on the type of distraction that you are experiencing.

the TV or in bed.

2. Try to use the same place for studying as much as possible.

It is human nature to take in and be aware of our surroundings. While helpful in many situations, it is not so useful to be constantly checking our environment while studying. If you use the same place for studying, you may find that you become more used to your surroundings and able to turn them out.

3. Use a clutter free environment.

We all have different preferences for our environment. Some people require tidiness in their surroundings, while others feel a bit uncomfortable without some clutter. Nevertheless, the more distractors that we have around us, the more likely that our attention will be caught by them. Don't fool yourself into thinking that a mess is a good thing for you!

4. Choose a work area that has the right amount of noise for you.

The relaxation that music or other noise provides can outweigh any distraction that it causes. However, if you do study with music, it is important to choose music that is not too distracting. Most likely, that means instrumental music—if you are singing along, that's probably not good! Also, be careful that you are not fooling yourself in thinking that the music is helping. It might be helping your study, but it may conversely



be true that you are simply enjoying it and not studying as well as you might.

Dealing with *internal* distractions

1. Take short, frequent breaks.

It is unproductive to attempt to work for extended periods without breaks, so plan on taking a short break after no more than an hour. It is best to remove yourself from your work area while taking a break, but be careful not to start doing something that might take longer than your intended break time (e.g. switching on the TV, starting a phone conversation, checking Facebook).

2. Form specific and short-term study objectives.

One of the best ways to ensure that you will have difficulties studying is to sit down to work without any clear idea of what you are going to get done and when you intend to get it done by. Rather than, for example, sitting down with the vague intention of reading a chapter of your textbook over the evening and then maybe getting to that assignment if you're not too tired by then, it is far better to set a goal or a set of goals. So, for example, plan to read and take notes on pages 47-55 in the next hour followed by a short break. Then, work on the goal for the next hour (or less).

3. Test yourself regularly.

One of the keys to maintaining concentration is to be as active in your learning as possible. You will concentrate better while organizing or memorizing information than when passively taking in information. So, when you are reading or reviewing your notes, be sure to put the material aside for a moment and attempt to recall what you have just read.