



## CONCENTRATION

**Most students are only able to concentrate for very short periods. It is not uncommon for students to be able to concentrate for just 90 to 120 seconds. You can learn to concentrate much longer, and possibly even much more deeply. Improving your concentration allows you to perform at a much higher level with less effort. It's a little like improving the mileage on your car.**

### Improving Your Concentration

**All of us have much greater mental ability than we use. With practice, you can concentrate for up to 10 to 20 minutes or longer. Use the following tips for improving your concentration.**

- find an appropriate study place
- consider listening to quiet music or tapes of "white noise" on headphones
- buy a clock with a second hand or digital seconds display
- set definite times for how long you plan to work (work in short stretches-20 to 30 minutes max)
- between 20 minute segments, be sure to take a real break

**As you prepare to concentrate, try to empty your mental foreground. Identify thoughts that are likely to distract you, and make a conscious note that for 20 minutes of concentration, you will postpone these thoughts. Use an old trick from meditation--when you feel yourself beginning to get distracted, resist by repeating the word "no!" and pull yourself back to the material. If you are completely distracted, check the clock to see how much time has lapsed. Don't be surprised if you can only concentrate for a minute or two. Your time will slowly begin to build and once it does, it tends to build rather quickly.**

### Difficulties Concentrating

**There are two basic kinds of distractions that interfere with concentration: internal and external.**

**External distractions include any noise, sight, or other stimulus outside your immediate vicinity. The best way to deal with these distractions is to structure your learning environment so that very few stimuli are present. By sharply limiting your visual and auditory fields, you will minimize your susceptibility to these distractions.**

**Internal distractions can be even more powerful than external ones. Just as you settle down to concentrate, you remember a phone call you forgot to return, or some recent emotional experience--like an argument with a friend. The best way to deal with these distractions is to use the mediation technique described above. Visualize your concentration as a screen that you can control (as in that favorite play station game) and move all the would be distractions off your screen.**