

10 TIPS

for more focus, less distraction and better study performance

Do you have difficulty concentrating and focusing? No wonder in a world where you receive signals 24/7! Especially when our automatic response to stimuli is: reacting. Such an automatic response is more dominant than the response not to react and to keep your attention on, for example, your study assignment. If you could use some tips to keep your attention on your assignment, work or study, go ahead and read the following tips from the Study Success Research Group. These tips have been compiled on the basis of scientific insights from cognitive psychology, neuropsychology and educational science and from our own research into stress, engagement and study performance.

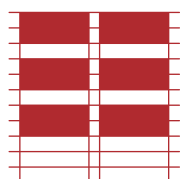
1



Stop multitasking

A lot of people believe they are good at multitasking, but actually your brain just quickly switches between the different tasks you are doing. Your working memory can really only handle one task at a time. So choose one task to focus on and only start the next one when the first one is finished or when you have no energy left for it. And if you want to listen to music while you're studying, make sure to listen to instrumental music as lyrics will put an extra strain on your working memory, which takes away from your attention to the subject matter as well as its thorough processing.

2



Work in time blocks and take plenty of breaks

On busy days, you tend to continue studying for as long as possible. Taking breaks may seem like a waste of time, but rather this is extremely important and will help keep you focused. The optimal use of your breaks is going for a walk, listening to your favourite music or doing a meditation exercise. A good method to alternate time blocks of attention with short breaks is the Pomodoro Technique. This technique includes alternating short time blocks of 25-50 minutes (during which you are concentrating on a specific task) with short breaks. After a few time blocks, a longer break follows. By the way, our maximum attention span is 50 minutes. So if you do that, you'll be doing the best you physically can. Several apps based on the Pomodoro Technique are available. Check it out: Brain focus, Focus To-Do: Pomodoro Timer, en Clockworktomato.

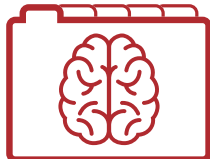
3



Put away your smartphone

Your smartphone is probably one of the biggest distractions you need to resist. Did you know that every time you look at it, you need 5 to 15 minutes to be able to focus again? It's a lot easier to defy the distraction of your smartphone if you can't see or hear it. So put it away – at least as long as you want to be focused. If that's not enough, (temporarily) turn off your notifications, remove your biggest distractor (e.g. Instagram) or go offline while you're studying. Research shows that after one day without notifications, you will already experience a positive effect on your concentration. Just imagine what you could get done if you did that for a couple of days in a row!

4



A clear head

A clear head makes it easier to focus. Piles of work at your workplace may distract you, because you can literally see the work you still have to do. Tidying up your desk will give you a clear head. To-dos that are constantly flying through your head also cause a lot of stress. Schedule them by writing them down in your diary or write them on a to-do list. Your subconscious will then tick them off as 'done'. In addition, lists can help to organise your day and prioritise tasks.

5



Train your attention muscle

Attention can be trained like a muscle. There are several exercises you can do in order for you to concentrate better and longer, and to more easily resist distractions. If you do a few mindfulness exercises every day, you will soon notice an effect. Taking a 'breather' for a few minutes will do wonders. If you want to start mindfulness, try the Headspace app.

6



Your brain in start mode

You can use rituals to put your brain in a ready-to-use mode, which means you can condition your brain and tell it that 'we'll get started in a minute'. If you turn it into a ritual that is useful for your studies, such as cleaning up your desk, you'll kill two birds with one stone. Another example of a ritual is briefly checking your favourite website or doing a meditation exercise before getting started.

7



Keep moving!

Regular exercise is crucial for a good focus. Various studies have shown that moving, even from between 10 and 40 minutes, improves concentration and focus. Even a short brisk walk can have a positive impact on your focus, productivity and well-being in general. Exercise strengthens your focus for up to 2 or 3 hours after your workout. In addition, exercise increases self-confidence in your ability to complete (difficult) tasks, reduces stress and ensures a better night's sleep. A win-win!

8



Eat, sleep, drink, repeat

A good night's sleep and eating and drinking sufficiently are essential for good focus while studying. Your prefrontal cortex (the area in which you process information and make decisions) needs sufficient rest, which is achieved with about eight hours of sleep per night. Research has also shown that drinking enough water is good for your focus. A 5% water deficiency already reduces your concentration by 25%! In addition, water and tea have a positive effect on the functioning of neurotransmitters in your brain. Coffee and energy drinks only have a temporary effect, so those are less useful.

9



Don't be afraid to make choices

Everyone around you seems to have the same fun, busy life. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is lurking, while you probably won't even be happier if you joined in and participated in everything. You forget that you 'may' join in instead of 'must', and that you can and should make choices. So strive for JOMO. This term was coined by blogger Anil Dash and stands for the Joy Of Missing Out. You then focus on the positive effects of what you are doing now and not on the chance of missing out on something. An evening of hanging out on the couch, for example, gives your brain the chance to process information, come up with creative ideas and yes... focus!

10



Increase your motivation and reward yourself

If you're not motivated, it's hard to concentrate. But how do you motivate yourself? It helps to keep the final goal in sight. Try to see how the study tasks, lectures and assignments contribute to the big picture: the profession for which you are being trained. Another important, and proven, tip from students for more motivation is: reward yourself. Completed a difficult task? Reward yourself! That way, you will condition yourself in a positive way, making it easier for you to start an assignment next time; you can already feel the reward.