

WAYS TO IMPROVE CONCENTRATION

Even with the best will in the world, sometimes it can be hard to concentrate. Sadly, for most people, motivation does not have an on/off switch. And it's very easy, when lacking that incentive to work, to simply not even bother. However, before you put down that pen and start streaming the next episode of your favorite series, see if these tips don't provide you with the additional impetus you need to get reading and writing.

■ Preparations

- ▶ **Know *where* you work best.** If it's in the library, prepare your bag with everything you'll need the night before so that when you wake up you're half way ready to go. If it's at home, only have the essentials you'll need on your desk to avoid unnecessary clutter. Avoid working on your bed! That's just asking for trouble...

When considering this point, it's worth bearing in mind the following questions:

- When is the study location available? For example, if you're a night owl who works best in the early hours, Hohenheim library wouldn't be ideal.
 - Do you prefer studying alone or in a group?
 - Do you find you're more comfortable studying at a desk, or lying on the floor?
 - Do you work better with a certain amount of noise, or do you need complete silence?
 - In what environment is the lighting, temperature, ventilation, etc., ideal for you?
- ▶ **Know *when* you work best.** There's probably a time of the day in which you feel most efficient. Of course, life being what it is, you may not always have the luxury of choosing when you study. But, where possible, choose that time of the day to get your hardest work done.
 - ▶ **Make sure you're properly fed and watered.** If you work best with a little caffeine inside you, make a flask or a cup of coffee or tea as part of your preparatory ritual. But, don't forget water. Snacks can help keep any cravings at bay. And, yes, if you can, the healthier the better of course: fruit, nuts, etc.
 - ▶ If you're a person who finds that their mind wanders a lot, and that you have a tendency to remember all those important things you need to do when you're supposed to be working, **keep a note pad next to you** to jot them all down.

■ During studying

- ▶ **Take regular breaks.** Most people only work most effectively from 30 to 60 minutes. Ideally, during this break (of 10 minutes or so it should be added), you should reflect on what you've read or written. So, for instance, you could do something mundane like clean the toilet, or water your plants. However, if you feel you need a complete shutdown, watch a YouTube video, catch up

with the news, or read a book.

- ▶ **Don't give into mental fatigue, however tempted you might be to use it as an excuse that you're done for the day.** This will pass. However, you will need to *push* past it. Take a break and give your brain a ten minute rest.
- ▶ **Viewing your work as one massive block can be very demotivating.** Break your assignment down into manageable chunks that you can complete one by one.
- ▶ **If you feel yourself giving into procrastination remember: the sooner you start, the sooner you can finish!** Check out “**How to avoid procrastination**” in this series for more helpful tips.

■ Helpful habits

- ▶ **Exercise regularly:** going for a jog or a bike ride, taking a walk, or doing a little yoga to break up your study period is a great way to get your energy levels up.
- ▶ **Sleep enough:** aim to get a good night's sleep (the standard amount is between seven and eight hours). Tiredness seriously negatively affects concentration and motivation.
- ▶ **Eat well:** don't skip meals. And when you eat, eat lighter, healthier foods that won't fill you up and make you tired.
- ▶ **Drink plenty of water:** caffeine is a great energy booster, but what goes up must come down and you don't want to end up crashing. Therefore, make sure you always keep a liter bottle or a big glass of water on hand.
- ▶ **Undertake mind training:** there are plenty of methods online that can help you to improve your concentration. At the end of the day, improving your concentration is akin to learning a new skill.