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LESSON

Managing Distractions



Distractions Are Everywhere!

You're all set to study. You've got your books and materials together. You've enjoyed a snack. You've changed into comfortable clothes. You've planned your whole evening, and you're even looking forward to getting your math homework out of the way and completing a long social studies project.

But things don't go quite the way you planned. The doorbell rings, and then your cousin who lives out of town calls. The cat sits on your papers, and the dog won't stop barking until you play fetch. When you finally get to work, you can't keep yourself from listening to the TV show that's on in the next room.

Does this sound familiar? Everyone's life is full of distractions. You just need to learn how to deal with them.



Where Do You Stand?

What would you do in these situations? Circle the approach you think would work best for you.

Situation 1:

It's late afternoon. You're doing your homework. A friend calls and wants to get together. What do you do?

- Finish your homework quickly so you can meet your friend later.
- Meet your friend and do your homework later.
- Tell your friend that you need to study, but you'd like to get together another day.
- Tell your friend you can't get together, then chat on the phone for an hour.

Situation 2:

You have a big test tomorrow, and there's a great movie on television. What do you do?

- Review your notes during commercials.
- Watch the movie and then stay up as late as you can to study for your test.
- Rent the movie from the video store and watch it another night.
- Do your studying quickly so you have time to watch the second half of the movie.

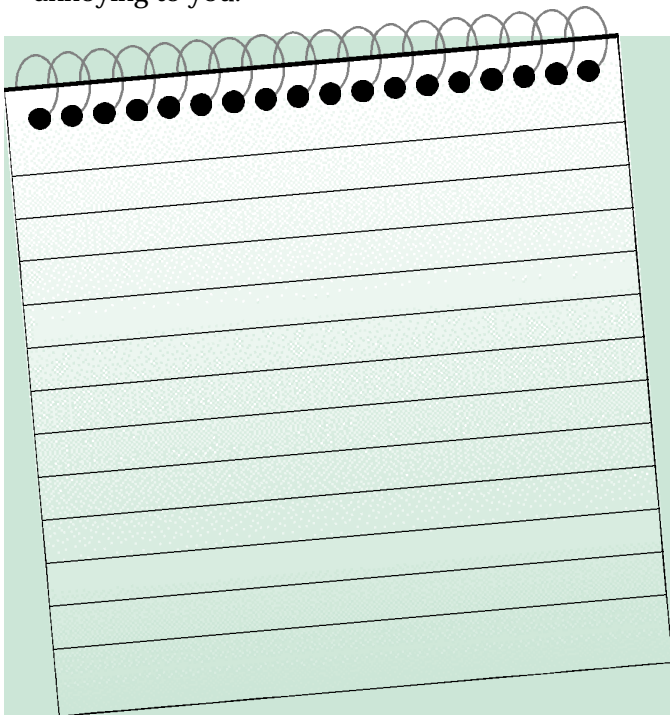
Rate Yourself

If you chose answer *c* for both questions, you know how to stick to a task. If you chose any other answers, you sometimes let distractions get in the way of doing your best work. Read on to learn how to get control of the distractions in your life.

Distractions, Distractions

What is distracting for one person may be soothing background noise for another person. For most people, though, the fewer distractions you have, the better you concentrate and the more efficiently you work.

In a small group, brainstorm a list of things that can be distracting when you're trying to study. Consider physical distractions in your environment that you can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell, and mental distractions inside your own head. Write your ideas below. Then reread your list and star the distractions that are most annoying to you.



Take Control

Make a list of at least five specific steps you could take to reduce distractions in your study environment. For example, your list might include making a rule for yourself, such as *No TV while studying!* or hanging a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the bedroom door.



Put the ideas on your list into practice for the next two weeks. Keep track of your school performance during this time. If your schoolwork improves, you'll know that your study environment has been affecting your school performance. It would be smart to incorporate these distraction reducers into your regular study routine.

Tips for Dealing With Distractions

Quiet, Please!

Studying in a quiet place might improve your grades. Comprehension rates usually decrease in direct proportion to the amount of sound in your environment. Try this experiment to find out how noise affects you.

Find a short poem. Memorize the first half of the poem with loud music or noise in the background. Spend as much time as you need to be able to write the lines perfectly from memory. Make a note of how much time you spent. Then turn off the music and find a quiet place to memorize the other half of the poem. Again, time yourself. Compare the amounts of time you spent memorizing each half of the poem. Did distracting noises affect your concentration?

Make Use of “White” Noise

If you find that noise affects you, you can sometimes turn off the sound and work in a quiet place. But some noises, like street or family sounds, cannot be turned off. In that case, you might be able to cover the sounds with “white” noise. White noise is bland, repetitive noise like the hum of a fan or rain falling on the roof. Your mind soon gets used to the sound of white noise and tunes it out. Since you’re close to the source of the noise, it can hide louder sounds that are farther away.

Get Rid of Inner Distractions

In addition to physical distractions in your environment, “inner noise” can also interrupt your concentration. Inner noise is made up of thoughts, worries, and daydreams that keep running through your mind. It can be every bit as disturbing as noise from outside sources. It’s hard to turn off your inner noise, but you need to do it if you’re going to be able to concentrate. Tell yourself to focus on one thing at a time. Promise yourself that you’ll think, worry, and daydream later.

Try this technique for clearing your mind. When you sit down to study, take a moment to calm yourself. Keep a blank sheet of paper handy. Write down thoughts that are taking up your attention. Get them out of your head and onto the paper. Whenever new distracting thoughts intrude, add them to your list. You can deal with them when you’ve finished your studying.

Music Can Make You Smarter

Some kinds of music have the same effect as white noise. Try tuning your radio to an “easy listening” station that plays soft music without sudden loud tones or distracting lyrics. Or listen to classical music. Studies have shown that certain pieces of classical music help your mind focus. Classical music can even make you work “smarter.”



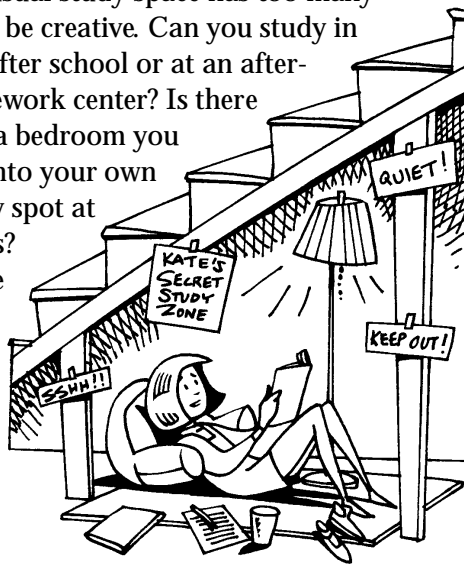
Try listening to classical music when you study. You might find it helps you concentrate.

Find the Best Place to Study

Some places have built-in distractions. You can't always expect everything to stop just because you want to study. Your family may not be willing to turn off the television just because you plan to study for a test in the living room. And if you have brothers or sisters, they probably won't be quiet on command! You may need to change your own study schedule to cut out distractions.

If your usual study space has too many distractions, be creative. Can you study in the library after school or at an after-school homework center? Is there a corner of a bedroom you could turn into your own special study spot at certain times?

Some people even use a closet for their own private "office."



Talk Over the Problem

Don't be afraid to discuss the problem of distractions with friends, family members, or your school counselor. Let your friends know when your scheduled study times are. Ask them to call at a different time or to be understanding when you say you will call them back later. Your family members may be able to come up with ideas you haven't even thought of for providing a quiet time or a new place for you to study. And a counselor or teacher may be willing to let you study in an empty classroom or may know of an after-school program you weren't aware of. Once you make up your mind to be more focused on your studies, you may be surprised how much others are willing to help.



Where Are You Going?

Summarize what you learned in this lesson. _____

Now use your summary to write a **Take Charge!** goal that will help you become a better student.

