

Improving concentration levels

You need to be able to concentrate in order to create networks in your brain. What should you do if your mind wanders, or you can't concentrate at all? Below you will find a number of causes with possible solutions. Choose one or two and try them out for at least two weeks.

Reasons you might lose concentration

1. You're too distracted by friends.

2. You're a chronic multitasker

3. You don't like a particular subject of your degree programme

4. You actually don't like a lot of the subjects of your degree programme

5. You're finding the course material too difficult.

6. There are things going on in your private life.

7. You study for too many hours at a time.

Possible solutions

- Make clear agreements with yourself and with your friends
- Learn to say 'no'
- Make a schedule: this way, you'll be able to see whether you can afford to be distracted by friends
- Find another place to study
- Make sure you're digitally unavailable
- Turn off all social media notifications and put your mobile devices away

Biologically, our brain can't multitask at all. It can switch very quickly between networks, making you think that multitasking actually does work. It often feels good. There's that sense of urgency and importance again. You don't have to stop doing it completely. Decide to which study tasks you are going to devote your full attention and during which tasks you can multitask.

Find ways to make it fun (be creative!).

Go talk to an academic counsellor. Perhaps this degree isn't right for you?

Talk to a lecturer, mentor or academic councillor. In most cases, they will be able to help you by teaching you new skills or sharing new strategies.

Stress reduces your executive functions, including your concentration. Watch video 10.

Your brain needs regular breaks to process and re-energise. Otherwise, it can't sufficiently connect and associate the material. The solution? Study in shorter blocks. Find out how long you can study effectively in one go before you have to take a break. And should you take a shorter or a longer break? And what's the best activity for those breaks? Getting a bit of exercise, having a drink of water, or doing a chore?

Continue to develop a sense of what your main distractions are and how to overcome them. The more focused you are, the more efficiently and effectively you can plan the time you spend studying.