Focus & Concentration

Common Problems
- I’m so easily distracted.
- I can’t concentrate because I’m worrying all the time.

Some Solutions
International students have unique worries and stressors (e.g. cultural adjustment, language issues). If these worries are interrupting your work, try jotting them down.

Writing down the worries allows your mind to go back to work, at least for awhile.

Study in short blocks of time. Try the 50-10-10 approach: study for 50 minutes then take a 10 minute “power break” where you get up and move. Try going up and down the spiral staircase in Stauffer!

Sleep is key to concentration. So, don’t study when very tired and make sure you get a full night sleep. Taking a 15 minute nap early afternoon can help, too.

Seek professional help. If distractibility is a chronic or acute problem, make an appointment to talk to us. You might also consider talking to our cross-cultural counsellor, Arunima Khanna.

For more information, go to our online Reading module. Open the pdf file pp. 16.

Speaking Out!

Many students worry about speaking out at university. They are often concerned how others will judge their ideas. When you are still acquiring English, speaking can cause even more anxiety as you worry about making mistakes, poor pronunciation, or your “accent”. The truth is most people don’t care if you make a language error or have a different “accent”; they just want to understand you.

Formal Presentations
- Practice out loud several times. Memorize the introduction. Time yourself.
- Ensure that you can correctly pronounce all key vocabulary.
- The audience remembers the last few minutes so make your conclusion strong.

Speaking in a Group
- Promise yourself that you will say something in each discussion. Try asking a question instead of adding an opinion. It’s easier and safer.
- Read the relevant materials before the discussion so you know the content and vocab.
**READING**

**Good news! Reading skills are transferrable.** So if you are a good reader in your native tongue (L1), you will be a good reader in English if you use effective reading skills and regain your confidence. If you are a poor or slow reader in your L1, you will need to acquire effective reading skills. We can help!

**Improve Your Comprehension**

**Common Problems**
- I struggle with understanding the content.
- I can’t find the main idea. I get lost in the details.

**Some Solutions: Read Actively**

**Turn Headings into Questions**
Before reading a section, turn the heading into a question so that your mind is ready to find the answer.

**Construct the Concept or Idea**
Construct a diagram or “mind-map” to show the conceptual relationships in a selection of readings. Also, doing something while you read keeps the mind busy and focused.

**Improve Your Vocabulary**
Write key terms and their definitions into a subject-based dictionary. Review the words regularly.

For more information, go to our online Reading module. Open the pdf file pp. 23-25.

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**LECTURES**

**Common Problems**
- I can’t understand what the instructor is saying.
- The instructor goes too fast.
- I can’t listen and write at the same time.
- I don’t know what is important to write down.

**Some Solutions**

**Tape record the lecture** so you can listen carefully without having to write much. Use the counter to note important points in the lecture.

**Use abbreviations & symbols** to speed up your writing. Make up your own code.

**Recognize “cues”**. Instructors use cues to signal the direction of the lecture and importance of the information. For example, a cue such as “Most importantly...” tells you to listen up while “I remember when...” might signal a tangent is coming.

**Print out the lecture slides** and preview them before class. Look up any new words. While in lecture, make notes on the slides.

**Use the “Cornell” method**. After the lecture, reorganize your lecture note with the Cornell method.

For instructions on Cornell method, go to our online Reading module. Open the pdf file pp. 26 & 29.