Be a Strategic Learner: Use Your Time Wisely!

**Goal Setting**
There are several styles to setting goals, here are some examples:

- **Study Goal** – General and non-specific. *I will read my biology textbook.*

- **SMART Study Goal** - More specific or detailed. *I will read chapter 3 of my Biology 120 textbook during this study session.*

- **Outcome Goal**: Outcome goals are goals designed to obtain some outcome or end result.
  - *My goal is to obtain a mark of 80% or higher in my Biology 120 course this term.*

- **Process Goal**: Process goals identify steps to follow in order to achieve some goal. They fully describe how and what you are going to do.
  - *To obtain a mark of 80% or higher in my Biology 120 course, I will...*
    - review my lecture notes and create flashcards of important terms nightly.
    - meet with my lab partner to answer chapter practice problems on Saturday afternoons, and attend the Student Learning Services Biology 120 weekly study sessions, mock exam and lab final review sessions.

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Source: Frank Christ; Louisiana State University, Centre for Academic Success (2018)
Images: by Student Learning Services (2018)
7 Strategies for maintaining concentration

1. **Reduce distractions.** Turn off your phone or put it in another room. Disable social media on your computer and reduce other environmental distractions.

2. **Create an organized workspace.** Declutter. Studies have shown that clutter can lead to increased levels of anxiety and a decrease in focus and retention of information.

3. **Take a few minutes to sit peacefully and clear your thoughts between study sessions.** Sit peacefully and observe your breathing. Doing this a few minutes throughout each day not only reduces stress, but also allows you to consolidate what you’ve learned and helps bring a fresh focus to work.

4. **Manage internal distractions.** Get a sheet of paper and record worries, tasks, and ideas that come to mind while you study. Shift your attention from internal distractions to the task at hand.

5. **Focus on your most difficult tasks during your best work times throughout the day.** Do you work best in the mornings? Afternoons or evenings?

6. **Try the ABC Technique** to help you regain focus. Whenever you are distracted while studying, stop and be **Aware** of the distraction, pause and **Breath** for a few minutes, and then **Choose** whether to address the distraction or dismiss it and resume your studies. You may also want to record the number of times you become distracted by putting a checkmark on a sheet of paper each time you become distracted.

7. **Try the Index Card Technique** to train your brain. Write the words “focused and concentrated” in big colourful letters on an index card. Keep this card visible and refer to it each time you become distracted. Repeatedly referring to this card can help you train-your-brain to regain focus more quickly.

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**Take Breaks**

- **Take regular breaks.** Breaks can help restore energy and mental clarity.
- **Reward yourself.** After completing some time studying, reward yourself. Looking forward to a reward after completing a task can help you stay motivated. Note-to-self: you must complete the task to get the reward!
- **Consider scheduling shorter study sessions, e.g., 20 - 30 min.** For many, the ability to concentrate decreases over time.

**Wrap Up**

- **Re-evaluate your progress frequently.** Ask yourself if you are on track in meeting your goals. Are there any barriers preventing you from proceeding or slowing you down? Reflect and adjust your study approach as needed.
- **Make yourself accountable by sharing your goal with someone.** Ask this person to check-in with you regularly and consider how much progress you’ve made.
- **Challenge negative inner monologue.** Do you have limiting thoughts such as “this is too hard” and “I’m not good at this”? Take notice of these thoughts and work to have more helpful thoughts like “I can do this”, “With effort, I’ll be able to complete this task”.

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“My favourite things in life don’t cost any money. It’s really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time.” -Steve Jobs

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*Sources:*
- Frank Christ’s PLRS system