DEALING WITH COMMON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

**Internal Distractions**

- **Boredom/Dislike of Subject**
  - To combat boredom and dislike, find some reasons which satisfy you for taking the course and passing it. If you can’t find any, talk with other students and/or the instructor. Form study groups to liven up your study times.

- **Anxiety Caused by Subject**
  - One helpful way to diminish anxiety is to check your study skills, and make sure you know the most efficient ways to learn the subject. Check out the anxiety section of the SLAC website for more tips.

- **Personal Problems and Worries**
  - When personal worries interfere with studying, do something concrete to help. Talk with a friend or family member or, if necessary, telephone or go to the campus counseling center (www.counseling.txstate.edu/).

- **Daydreaming**
  - Learn to separate daydreams and studying by beginning to channel your daydreams. When your mind starts to wander, stop and recall important points you have just read. Then turn away from the book and try to continue the fantasy for a few minutes. When you’re ready to read again, do so. The trick is not to daydream and read at the same time. Also, make sure you are spending more time studying than daydreaming.

- **Complexity of Study Task**
  - A good way to deal with a complex study task is to break it up into small sections. Set a goal to accomplish a small section rather than the entire task. Try devising a system of “rewards and punishments” for having or not having accomplished what you intended to do.

- **Negative Reactions to Noise or Environment (Your Feelings and Self-Talk)**
  - Be aware that it is not just the external distractions that bother you. For example, if you can hear your friends having fun while you are studying, you may be upset not only because of the noise but also because you are worried that you are missing out. Figure out why you are having negative reactions to the noise or the environment, and adjust your feelings and self-talk to overcome them. Addressing both the external and internal issues will improve your concentration.

- **Fatigue**
  - Get a good night’s sleep, and don’t take daytime naps any longer than 10 minutes. Plan to study during the times when you are most alert, and build in short breaks while you are studying. On your break, drink water or walk around to keep yourself awake. Adjust the study and break times depending on your fatigue level.
Determine which distractions affect you.

- **Study Area**
  - Designate a specific area as a place of study. It should not be a place where you normally eat or sleep, but it should be an area that you have selected specifically for studying. Staying on campus to study in the library may be a better choice than going to your dorm room or apartment to study.

- **Auditory Distractions**
  - If you find yourself paying more attention to people than to your books, train yourself to study away from others and in silence. Another option is to get noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs. If you prefer to have some music, listen to white noise or sounds of nature instead of vocal music.

- **Visual Distractions**
  - Choose a place to study where you cannot see people walking by and where you are away from the window. If you are studying at your personal desk, hide unrelated pictures and notes to minimize distractions.

- **Workspace/Furniture**
  - Know your preferences in regard to workspace/furniture, and create or find a study area that fits your needs. If you want to study in a clean environment, clean your space briefly before you start. Also, gather all the necessary materials beforehand so that your study time is not interrupted because you need to find your textbook or laptop charger.

- **Lighting**
  - Dark rooms can cause eye strains and reduce concentration. Make sure your study area has enough light. Also, make sure that the lights do not flicker or cause glare.

- **Temperature**
  - Warm temperatures can make you sleepy while cold temperatures may be uncomfortable. Dress appropriately and layer up so that you can take off a jacket if you are too hot or vice versa. At home, adjust the thermostat to your preferred temperature.

- **Electronics**
  - Use the Pomodoro Technique. Dedicate 25 minutes to focused studying followed by a 5 minute break in which you can use your phone or your computer for pleasure. Immediately after the 5 minutes, go back to studying for another 25 minutes. For electronic solutions and additional tips, check out the “Dealing with Electronic Distractions” handout in the Concentration section on the SLAC website.

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