



## WORKPLACE CASE—Connecting to Workplace Training

David and Carlos were taking a real estate course as part of their training to become sales agents. Carlos, who was an active participant in the discussions and even volunteered to role-play as a difficult client, enjoyed the course. David found it frustrating. Carlos was so involved in the activities he lost track of time. David, on the other hand, felt unprepared for the activities and pressed the instructor for the correct answers to the situations being discussed by the group. On his evaluation of the course, Carlos stated he liked the many viewpoints expressed. David's evaluation listed several suggested improvements, among which were more lecture and reading materials, detailed, accurate answers to questions, and clear, step-by-step instructions.

1. What learning style do you think David prefers? What might he do to develop his non-preferred learning style?

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2. What learning style do you think Carlos prefers? What might he do to develop his non-preferred learning style?

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3. In the real estate business where you need to deal with all kinds of people, which learning preference(s) would make for a more successful real estate agent?

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4. Can you predict who will be more successful in the real estate business? Why do you think so?

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# 3

## Creating Concentration

### Terms

- arm-swing rule
- concentration
- effective learning space
- ineffective learning space
- learning environment
- learning influences
- mental learning environment
- mind wandering
- physical learning space
- physiology

### Chapter Goals

After studying and working with the information in this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the influences that affect your concentration and understand the effects of mind wandering.
- Identify the makeup of an effective physical and mental learning environment so you can make better choices for improving your concentration while learning.

**J**errold, who is taking a finance course on the Internet, has completed the curriculum and is now preparing for the final exam. Once he is ready, all he needs to do is to log in and take the exam sometime before the end of the week.

As a stock clerk at the local supermarket, he has little time during the day to study. His nights are not much better, as he volunteers at the fire department and spends time with his girlfriend.

If things are quiet at work during his 45-minute lunch, he pulls out his study materials. He also pulls out his cell phone and spends a few minutes to check in with his girlfriend, or a coworker stops by to chat. When it's time to get back to work, Jerrold is frustrated because he has spent most of his time talking and eating, but not studying. When he finds time to study at home, he usually begins after 9:00 p.m. when he's quite tired from the day.

His typical study place is in bed with the television on. If he is interested in the study material, he will roll over on his side and ignore the TV. Sometimes he sits in a recliner or on the couch with music playing. Occasionally, he gets telephone calls or his cat begs for attention by sitting on top of his study material.

Tomorrow is the last day he can take the exam and he doesn't feel ready at all. He wishes he had another week to study.

**What do you suggest Jerrold do at work to be able to concentrate better during the short time he has for studying? What can he do at home?**

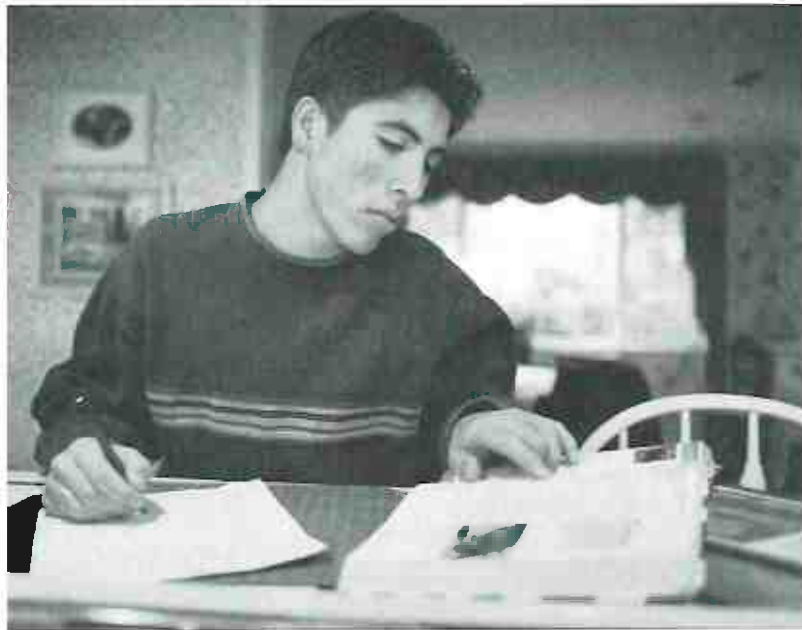
**C**oncentration is the art of being focused and the ability to pay attention. Without concentration, you have no memory of what you hear, see, and read. Concentration is a frame of mind that enables you to stay centered on the activity or work you are doing. You know when you're concentrating because time seems to go by quickly, distractions that normally take you off task don't bother you, and you have a lot of mental or physical energy for the task. Your mind and body are naturally "going with the flow." You have probably experienced intense concentration—a time when you were so focused on what you were doing that you didn't hear someone approach and jumped in surprise when he or she touched you or spoke. Maybe you played, or watched, a play-off game where the outcome came down to the final seconds. You were probably quite focused at that time!

Good concentration is a result of being active, mindful, and conscious. Knowing how to concentrate is directly related to your ability to learn. Many influences affect concentration—the amount of time and energy you spend in the learning process. The influences discussed in this chapter are those that specifically affect your concentration.

An **effective learning space** is one where concentration comes easily and more learning occurs. An **ineffective learning space** causes you to waste time and makes learning difficult. You can learn how to increase your concentration by being aware of and choosing the appropriate physical and mental learning environment.

In this chapter, you will learn about 1) becoming aware of the influences in your learning space, 2) understanding how these influences affect you, and 3) creating an effective learning space for improving your overall learning. You will also discover the available opportunities that make your learning easier and more enjoyable.

What does good concentration feel like for you? When does it happen?



©Getty Images/PhotoDisc

*What helps you concentrate and focus like the person in this photo?*

## Self-Check ✓

The following self-evaluation will give you an idea of how familiar, or unfamiliar, you are with some of the topics and terms discussed in this chapter. After reading each statement, circle the letter Y, S, or N to indicate the answer that is most appropriate for you. Answer honestly. Rate yourself at the end; then complete the information on your Self-Check Progress Chart.

Y = yes; frequently    S = sometimes    N = no; never

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. I read and study in a quiet, distraction-free environment.                          | Y | S | N |
| 2. I read and study without a radio or television on.                                  | Y | S | N |
| 3. I resist taking phone calls or checking e-mail while reading or studying.           | Y | S | N |
| 4. I work at an uncluttered desk or table with good lighting.                          | Y | S | N |
| 5. I am aware of the room temperature and can make myself comfortable.                 | Y | S | N |
| 6. I am aware of, and try to reduce, mental distractions before learning.              | Y | S | N |
| 7. I am usually relaxed when I have a lot of studying to do.                           | Y | S | N |
| 8. I know several ways to increase my concentration while reading and studying.        | Y | S | N |
| 9. I reserve most of my reading and studying for the time of day when I am most alert. | Y | S | N |
| 10. I enjoy learning.  | Y | S | N |

### Rate Yourself:

Number of Ys \_\_\_\_\_ × 100 = \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Ss \_\_\_\_\_ × 50 = \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Ns \_\_\_\_\_ × 0 = \_\_\_\_\_      **Total** \_\_\_\_\_

# Your Learning Influences

A **learning influence** is something that affects how well you concentrate while trying to learn. Some are physical; others are mental. Some influences are helpful in keeping your concentration, while many others are distracting. The helpful ones are considered positive, while the distracting ones are considered negative.

## ACTIVITY 1

Below is a list of common influences that can affect your concentration. Think about how each of the influences affects the way you concentrate; and decide whether it is positive/helpful (+), negative/unhelpful (−), or sometimes helpful/sometimes unhelpful (=). For example, if you find yourself very focused when you are under time pressure, place a plus (+) in the blank. If you find you are continually distracted by time pressure with little ability to focus, place a minus (−) in the blank. However, if you find you are both focused and distracted equally, place an equal (=) in the blank. Add other influences that can affect your concentration.

<b>Location</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Hungry	<b>Type of Written Material</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> One-on-one instruction
<input type="checkbox"/> At your desk	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Familiar content	<input type="checkbox"/> Group interaction
<input type="checkbox"/> At a table	<b>External Environment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Unfamiliar content	<input type="checkbox"/> Research
<input type="checkbox"/> On a couch	<input type="checkbox"/> Warm	<input type="checkbox"/> Wide columns	<input type="checkbox"/> Hands-on learning
<input type="checkbox"/> On a recliner	<input type="checkbox"/> Cool	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrow columns	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual demonstration
<input type="checkbox"/> In bed	<input type="checkbox"/> Well lit	<input type="checkbox"/> Large print size	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Dimly lit	<input type="checkbox"/> Small print size	<b>Purpose/Usability</b>
<b>State of Mind/Being</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Noisy	<input type="checkbox"/> Good copy quality	<input type="checkbox"/> For a meeting
<input type="checkbox"/> Interested	<input type="checkbox"/> Quiet	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor copy quality	<input type="checkbox"/> For your boss or instructor
<input type="checkbox"/> Not interested	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> For a presentation
<input type="checkbox"/> Alert	<b>Distractions</b>	<b>Delivery of Information</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> For a test
<input type="checkbox"/> Sleepy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other people	<input type="checkbox"/> Lecture	<input type="checkbox"/> For pleasure
<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed	<input type="checkbox"/> Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion	<input type="checkbox"/> For background knowledge
<input type="checkbox"/> Stressed	<input type="checkbox"/> E-mail	<input type="checkbox"/> Reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Time-pressured	<input type="checkbox"/> Television	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not time-pressured	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> On computer screen	
<input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
<input type="checkbox"/> Tired			
<input type="checkbox"/> Well rested			

## Mind Wandering: The Enemy of Concentration

Your mind must focus before it can learn. When you focus, you concentrate on the learning material and content. **Mind wandering**, on the other hand, is the enemy of concentration. Also known as daydreaming, mind wandering is a momentary lack of mental concentration or focus. It can last a second, five seconds, thirty seconds, or longer. It is natural—and necessary for learning.

All human beings daydream. Unfortunately, many students do it too much. They are great at mind wandering and often not so great at focusing.

When you read or study, some mind wandering may be helpful. If you are building a mental bridge of knowledge from the new information to the old, then mind wandering can be productive. For example, if you are learning about the installation of electrical sockets, your mind may wander to the time you got an electrical shock as a child when you stuck your finger in a socket—that thought is important for your learning.

However, if, while installing the sockets, your mind wanders to your plans for the coming weekend, that thought is not productive. Not only will it delay the completion of the project, but you will also have a higher chance of getting an electrical shock because you weren't focusing on the task at hand. Nonproductive thoughts break your concentration, slow down and interrupt your learning process, and ultimately affect your ability to understand the information you are trying to comprehend. It is important to be aware of the mental thoughts that cause your mind to wander and break your concentration.

### NETBookmark

To feel concentration first-hand, go online to find out what others write about in the area of concentration. Go to your favorite search engine and type in "concentration" or "concentration and memory." (You will find listings about concentration camps but look for those sites that relate to learning.) Be aware of how focused you are while you are searching and reading. Think about what makes you so focused.

For links to additional information about concentration, go to:

<http://sskills.swlearning.com>



Which photo more closely resembles your learning space?

## ACTIVITY 2

Think about the wandering thoughts that break your concentration when you read, work, or study. List below as many specific thoughts as you can.

1. Being hungry
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have listed as many thoughts as possible in Activity 2, compare them with your classmates' answers. You may remind each other of items you forgot. Continue to add to your list as you remember thoughts that interfere with your concentration. This can help you get a realistic picture of just how many miscellaneous thoughts cross your mind when you believe you are concentrating.

From Activity 2, did you discover any mental distractions you would like to eliminate forever? Unfortunately, you may be able to avoid them only temporarily. For example, you can stop thinking about how hungry you are by eating a snack, but eventually you will be hungry again. Mind wandering can be reduced, but not totally eliminated. Now that you're aware of what breaks your concentration, you have a fighting chance of doing something about it!

**EFFECTS ON LEARNING.** So what happens when your other thoughts get your mind off track? If your mind wanders on your way home, you might miss your stop, drive past your exit, or even worse, get into an accident. When your mind wanders at work, you have a higher chance of making a mistake or doing something wrong. It's the same while reading or studying—you will spend more time than needed, make more mistakes, and understand less. Though some daydreaming is needed, students tend to do it too much. From the common-sense ideas presented in this chapter, see which of them you want to start doing that can immediately reduce your mind wandering.

### Ways to Improve Concentration

Since mind wandering is a natural and human characteristic, you can never get rid of it forever. If you were asked to never daydream again while reading or studying, could you do it? The honest answer is no! Nonetheless, if you recognize the fact that you are daydreaming, you can at least learn how to reduce it. The very first step in reducing mind wandering is to catch yourself doing it. Then you can do something about it. By reducing mind wandering, you will be able to learn more in less time with better concentration.

### Success tip

According to the research of Becky Patterson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of the University of Alaska and author of *Concentration: Strategies for Attaining Focus*:

- An average college student's concentration period while reading is only 16 minutes!
- Young children have concentration periods that last for just 20 seconds!

It is amazing that we ever learn anything with such small intervals of concentration. By understanding that our concentration naturally doesn't last very long, we have to work at keeping it.

**Challenge yourself to focus more by:**

- using many of the active reading and learning strategies in this book.
- setting up a place to work that enables you to focus for longer periods of time.
- reading and studying at your more alert times of day.

## ACTIVITY 3

With a partner or on your own, consider what you can do to reduce mind wandering while learning. Keep track of your strategies below. As you continue to work through this book and learn more ways to develop good concentration, refer to this list and add more items. If you run out of room, use another piece of paper. Remember, mind wandering cannot be eliminated, only reduced.

1. Catch myself when I start daydreaming!
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## Checkpoint

**1** What is a learning influence?

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**2** What influences you positively when you learn?

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**3** What influences you negatively?

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## Your Learning Environment

As human beings, we react to our environment. When it is warm, we get sleepy. When it is noisy, we become distracted. When we have a lot on our minds, we have a hard time concentrating. A **learning environment** is the combination of influences that are present while you are learning or working.

There are two learning environments: physical and mental. Your physical environment includes external surroundings, such as room type, lighting, and noise level. Your mental environment is your internal state, which includes your attitude, how you feel, and what you are thinking about.

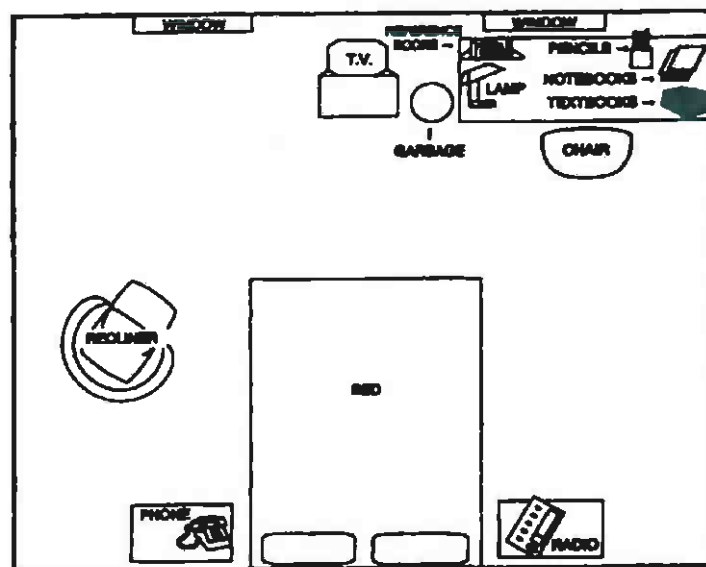
Both the physical and mental environments directly affect how well you can concentrate when learning or working. In turn, how well you concentrate directly affects how much you learn and how much time you have to spend in the learning process.

### What's Around You?

Your **physical learning space** is the place where you choose to read and study. It may be in your bedroom or kitchen, at the library, or at work. You could be seated in a reclining chair, on a couch, or at a desk or table. The room could be noisy or quiet. It could be filled with clutter or be neat and organized. All of these influences can affect your learning.

#### ACTIVITY 4

To understand physical influences that can affect learning, look at the sample floor plan below:



1. Highlight or circle the influences that might distract you while reading or studying.
2. Working in a group, discuss the influences that increase concentration and those that hinder it. For example, a desk might promote concentration, while a bed might cause sleepiness.

## ACTIVITY 4 (continued)

- Then, if you think an influence affects concentration negatively, brainstorm about things you can do to eliminate or change it. For example, clear the clutter off the desk and use the desk when studying to concentrate better and learn faster.

Now visualize the place (or places) in which you read, study, and learn. It could be some place at work or at home. Then using the sample diagram above as an example, sketch a simple floor plan of the space. Place an X or other marking that indicates where you are in the room. Be sure to include where the following items are as they pertain to your location. Identify what you can do to make your personal learning place more conducive to learning.

desks	television	other people	textbooks	pets
tables	radio	pens/pencils	lighting	clutter
chairs	dictionary	doorways/door	sources	telephone
bed	windows	computer	food/drink	

*“The average person puts only 25% of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50% of their capacity, and stands on its head for those few and far between souls who devote 100%.”*

—Andrew Carnegie,  
Industrialist and  
millionaire

## 15 Options for Achieving Concentration

You are ultimately in charge of how well you concentrate. As you read through the following strategies for increasing your focus while learning, checkmark the strategies you think are most useful so you can refer to them later.

**1. CHOOSE YOUR WORKSPACE WISELY.** Consider the following equation:

If a Bed = Sleep  
and a Desk = Work,  
then a Bed  $\neq$  Work.

For years, students have chosen a bed, the floor, a couch, or a comfortable chair as places to study. Yet, the brain associates these locations with relaxing or sleeping. A desk or table, on the other hand, is a place that our brain associates with working. If you think about it, that’s why schools and libraries are filled with tables and desks, not beds! If you try to study in a place where you usually relax, you will find learning to be more challenging and time-consuming.

By moving to a desk or table to do your reading and studying, you can concentrate better, thereby getting more work done in less time. A desk or table also has a convenient writing surface and plenty of space to spread out. At the other locations, you are often distracted, either because you want to move to a different body position or you need to balance the learning material.

Some ideal work spaces include an empty classroom, office, or conference room, or a quiet cafeteria during its off hours. An uncluttered desk in your room can work as long as you eliminate distractions like the television, loud music with lyrics, the telephone rings, and the e-mail dings. Some students study effectively in a library carrel but less

successfully on a comfortable couch. Be aware of room temperature. Many libraries are overly warm, which can make you feel sluggish or sleepy.

**2. MANAGE YOUR CLUTTER.** Your desktop or tabletop should be clear of clutter, except for the materials you need for studying. You should have enough room for your elbows, reading material, a notebook, and any other necessary items. If your desk or table is cluttered, try the **arm-swing rule**; that is, gently sweep a semicircle of clear space in front of you using the length of space from your elbow to your fingertips. You may end up with a clutter fortress piled up around the semicircle, but nothing directly in front of you. When you have learning to do, clutter is a distraction.

**3. ENSURE GOOD LIGHTING.** Some people require a bright space, while others prefer a dimmer environment. It is easier to learn when the lighting is just right for your eyes. For example, if fluorescent lights bother you, place a lamp on your table, or sit by natural sunlight. If outside light bothers you, draw the curtains.

**4. FEED YOUR BODY RIGHT.** What you eat plays an important role in how well or how poorly you concentrate. Protein foods (such as cheese, meat, fish) and vegetables keep the mind alert, while carbohydrates (such as pasta, bread, and processed white sugars), make you sleepy. Caffeine (commonly found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, and chocolate) acts as a stimulant in low doses. In high doses, it can cause jitters, heart palpitations, diarrhea, and sleeplessness. So when you want to concentrate, eat more protein in relation to your carbohydrates, and limit your caffeine.

**5. AVOID FOOD.** Food and serious learning don't mix well. Think about it. When you try to eat and study at the same time, which gets more of your attention? The food, of course! You will be more effective if you eat first, then study. If you want to study while you eat, review material or read background information that requires less concentration.

**6. CREATE ROOM TEMPERATURE COMFORT.** Room temperature is also important. An overly hot room makes you sleepy, while an overly cold one makes you think about getting warm. You end up focusing more on how warm or cold you are than on your learning. Getting

## ■ Focus on Ethics

You're taking an online course with people you don't know, and you've been assigned to work on a team project. You have been given the responsibility to write the final report, but your mother is sick and you have taken on a lot more responsibilities around the house. You are under a lot of pressure, but don't want to let your teammates down, so you don't say anything.

You keep putting off getting started and you tell your teammates you're working on it. On the day before the course ends, you send an e-mail to your teammates telling them that you're very sorry but you were not able to get the work done.

Where did you go wrong? What could you have done differently to avoid this situation? Would you have acted differently if it was a traditional face-to-face class rather than an online course?

comfortable in a fixed temperature environment may mean putting on a sweater or turning on a fan. By working in a room that's a comfortable temperature, you will improve your concentration, resulting in more effective and efficient learning.

**7. LISTEN TO YOUR OWN THOUGHTS.** Listening to anything but your own thoughts interferes with good concentration. Eliminating distractions such as vocal music, television, telephones, e-mail beeps, and other people can greatly increase the amount of learning you can accomplish.

**8. LISTEN TO MOZART.** Though you may disagree, listening to music with words *does* interfere with your ability to learn. You may think you are "tuning it out," but when you hear a song that you like, you may find yourself tapping your feet, humming along, or daydreaming. If you need music while studying, try classical music. Research shows that playing classical music softly in the background, especially Mozart, may boost your brain power while you are studying. Classical music helps you focus and concentrate better than music with words.

**9. TURN OFF THE TELEVISION.** Watching television also interferes with your concentration when studying. Instead of focusing on just learning, you are adding listening AND watching. In a half-hour period, if you do your work only at the commercial breaks, you might be lucky to accomplish five minutes of work. Even if you can hear a television in another room, you will be distracted. Your concentration should be on your learning, so it is a good idea to stay away from the television when trying to learn.

## ACTIVITY 5

During your next learning session, work without music for ten minutes. Then turn your favorite music on at your usual volume, and work for another ten minutes. Then, listen to classical music for another ten minutes. In which ten-minute period did you get more done or learn more? Some say that silence is more distracting than music, but that too can be tuned out with a little practice. Write a few sentences to describe the more effective learning situation for you.

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**10. HOLD ALL CALLS AND IM'S.** Receiving telephone calls or engaging in IM conversations during your study time is both distracting and time consuming. Thanks to other human beings and answering devices, you have the ability to hold your calls until you complete your work. If you choose to study between 7:00 and 8:30 in the evening, you can leave a message on your answering machine, or you can tell the person answering the phone for you to let your callers know that you will return their calls after 8:30. If you don't respond to your friends' text messages, they will think you are away from your computer, which you are, and they will get back to you later. Both ideas will provide uninterrupted time for studying.

**11. LET E-MAIL WAIT.** Checking e-mail is just like answering the phone. If you choose to wait until you are finished with your work, your concentration will stay on track.

**12. MOVE TO A QUIETER PLACE.** Reading or working when other people are around can make concentrating difficult. If you do your reading or working in a public place such as a library, it may be quiet, but other people will always be moving around. If you read or work at home, your family may interrupt you more often than necessary. If you read at work, your boss or coworkers will inevitably interrupt you. In all cases, you have the ability to prevent these distractions. At the library, find a quiet corner of the building where few people go. At home, explain to your family your need for uninterrupted time, and move to a place where you can close the door. At work, move to a place where no one will find you, such as an empty conference room or the cafeteria during off-hours. These options provide more uninterrupted work time and a better chance of increasing your concentration.

**13. DUMP YOUR TO-DO LIST.** If while you are reading or working, you find yourself thinking of other things you need to be doing, try writing them on a piece of paper. At inappropriate times your mind will almost always wander to things you need to do. Keeping track of your thoughts on paper and referring to the paper from time to time can be very effective for clearing your mind and focusing on your work in front of you.

### Focus on Technology

While reading from a computer screen can sometimes seem daunting and slow, there are certain features that can make the process better than reading paper documents. When you use eBook software like Microsoft<sup>®</sup> Reader you may find that having a search function, post-it note capabilities, and the ability to easily carry hundreds of thousands of pages of text with you is well worth the few drawbacks.

To get started reading eBooks go to Microsoft's web site (search online for "Microsoft Reader") and download Microsoft's Reader software. There are versions for desktop, laptop, tablet, and pocket PCs. Once you have downloaded the software you will have access to thousands of eBook titles—many of which are available free.

To take on the task of learning means you realize and accept that you don't know everything. It essentially means you will make mistakes along the way in your quest for knowledge.

There is every reason in the world to believe that you can achieve anything you want.

**14. TAKE SHORT, FREQUENT BREAKS.** Since people concentrate for about 20 minutes or less at a time, it would make sense to capitalize on your natural body rhythms and take a *short* break every 20 to 30 minutes. Generally, do some quick physical activity like getting a bottle of water or walking around the block. If you are fully concentrating and involved in a task, then work until a natural break occurs.

**15. SET A TIME GOAL.** If you know you have only 25 minutes to work on a project and you want to get through half of it, you will be more apt to finish if you stick to a time frame. Another example of this occurs when you naturally set goals by saying you will read until you reach the end of a chapter or an article. It may help motivate you to keep going and stay focused.

## What's on Your Mind?

What your mind thinks about while you are learning is called your **mental learning environment**. As you have already discovered, you often have many things on your mind that are unrelated to the learning task. You also have natural breaks in your concentration. It is during the breaks that you sometimes talk to yourself.

You may say negative or non-productive statements such as, "I don't know how I'm going to finish all of this tonight," or "I'm going to fail the test tomorrow." You might say positive or productive statements, such as, "I really learned a lot today," or "I'm glad I've kept up with my work." The kind of self-talk you choose is based on your attitude and your physiology.

**DEVELOPING POSITIVE SELF-TALK.** To take on the task of learning means you realize and accept that you don't know everything. It essentially means you will make mistakes along the way in your quest for knowledge. *Accepting this reality will greatly improve your self-confidence and your ability to develop positive self-talk.* You will no longer dread mistakes, but welcome them.

A high level of confidence in your ability to try new things and think new thoughts will make your learning easier. In Chapter 1, you learned how important it is to develop a positive belief in yourself. You were also shown how to think positively. (You may want to take time now to go back and review Chapter 1.) Making the commitment to be a lifelong learner is a positive step toward a successful future. *There is every reason in the world to believe that you can achieve anything you want.*

Developing a positive attitude about your ability to learn makes the amount of time and energy you spend more enjoyable. Only you are in charge of your own attitude and learning!

**BECOMING AWARE OF YOUR PHYSIOLOGY.** Your **physiology**, simply defined as how your body feels, affects your thoughts and concentration while reading and studying. Here are a few things to consider when you want to learn.

1. *Get Enough Sleep.* If you are feeling tired or ill, you will daydream and think more about getting sleep than about the work in front of you. You may try to continue to study, but you will waste a lot of time and find learning difficult. When you are really exhausted, you may wisely decide to put off the learning activity in favor of getting some sleep so that you don't waste your time. Your best option is to find a way to get enough sleep on a regular basis.
2. *Learn at Your Peak Time(s) of Day.* Your physiology changes throughout the day, with certain times of the day better for learning than others. Your ability to concentrate is easier when you feel fully awake and more difficult when you do not. Some individuals consider themselves morning people, while others consider themselves night owls. Planning your study time around your peak times of the day or when you feel best will make the time you spend more effective.
3. *Take Care of Human Needs.* If you are hungry, need to use the bathroom, or feel ill, your concentration will be interrupted with these basic human functions. Do what you can to take care of them so your comfort level will be maximized for good concentration.

**“Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”**

**—Abigail Adams, Second First Lady of the United States**

## Taking Control of Your Concentration

Blaming external or internal factors for your inability to concentrate is easy to do. However, you can take an active role in setting up a learning environment that maximizes your concentration needs.

### ACTIVITY 6

Complete the blanks below to explain how each item affects your ability to learn.

If I am tired, I \_\_\_\_\_

If I am rested, I \_\_\_\_\_

If I am hungry, I \_\_\_\_\_

If I am not hungry, I \_\_\_\_\_

If I feel ill, I \_\_\_\_\_

If I feel well, I \_\_\_\_\_

Compare your responses with those of others in your class, and discuss the effects of each. Talk about what you might do to improve your concentration in all of the above situations.

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## ACTIVITY 7

In Activity 1, you created a list of learning influences and decided whether each influence was positive, negative, or both. Using the columns below and the information you learned in this chapter, rearrange your learning influence list into the two categories below. (Hint: The negative influences are usually on the mind-wandering side, and the positive influences are usually on the concentration side.) You are encouraged to add more influences to either side of your list as you think of them. Review your two lists. Do you now know what you need to eliminate or add to create an effective learning space? Remember to add to your list on page 64, Activity 3.

### Mind Wandering Is a Result of ...

Being tired \_\_\_\_\_

Learning late at night \_\_\_\_\_

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### Concentration Is a Result of ...

Being well rested \_\_\_\_\_

Learning earlier in the day \_\_\_\_\_

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## Checkpoint

**1** What elements of your physical environment distract you the most?

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**2** What elements of your mental environment distract you the most?

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**3** What can you do right now to ensure better concentration for reading, learning, and working?

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## CHAPTER SUMMARY

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1. Many influences affect the way you learn. Some are positive, and others are negative.
2. Concentration is vital to learning. Mind wandering is the enemy of concentration. Distractions are the primary cause of mind wandering.
3. You lose concentration and waste time when your mind wanders. Mind wandering can prevent you from understanding what you are trying to learn.
4. Mind wandering is effective only when it relates to the material you are learning.
5. Reducing mind wandering is the same as increasing concentration. There are many ways to improve your concentration while trying to learn. The first step in reducing mind wandering is to catch yourself doing it.
6. An effective physical learning environment consists of an appropriate place to learn without distractions.
7. An effective mental learning environment consists of a high level of learning self-confidence and an awareness of how you feel.
8. Taking control of your learning environment with specific strategies can help you concentrate better.

## CHAPTER ASSESSMENT

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### Terms Review

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate key terms on the left.

arm-swing rule

concentration

effective learning space

ineffective learning space

learning environment

learning influences

mental learning environment

mind wandering

physical learning space

physiology

1. What your mind thinks about while you are learning is considered your \_\_\_\_\_.
2. An uncluttered desk or table, good lighting, and no distractions are ingredients in a(n) \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ enables you to learn more in less time.
4. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ distracts and forces you to waste learning time.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is the enemy of daydreaming.
6. Your \_\_\_\_\_ is the combination of influences that are present while you are learning or working.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is also called daydreaming.
8. Sweeping away clutter in your work area is called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. How your body feels is considered your \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The combination of all your \_\_\_\_\_ affect how well you concentrate while trying to learn.

## Review

### TRUE or FALSE Review

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The average college student concentrates for an average of 46 minutes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Daydreaming happens when you fall asleep during the day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Though mind wandering takes you off task, it can be helpful when you are relating new information to old.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Students can effectively study for exams while watching television.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The recommended music to listen to while studying is classical music, especially Mozart.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Reading in bed encourages mind wandering because it is a place the body has learned to relax.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Taking phone calls while studying has been shown to increase test scores.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. If you believe you can, you can; if you believe you can't, you probably can't.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Reading and studying at your peak times of day will help you learn more in less time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Eating a big pasta meal before studying will make you sleepier than if you had chicken and salad.

Answer the following questions based on the information you learned in this chapter.

1. What are learning influences? Which ones influence your learning the most?

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2. What is the relationship between mind wandering and concentration?

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3. What are some typical causes of mind wandering for you?

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4. How is mind wandering both a good and bad influence on learning?

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5. Name at least six things present in an *effective* learning environment.

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6. Name at least six things present in an *ineffective* learning environment.

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7. Which concentration-sabotaging habits are you guilty of (for example, watching TV or answering text messages while studying)?

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8. Of the many suggestions in this chapter for concentrating better, which ones are the most useful for you?

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9. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10 being high, how would you rate your level of learning self-confidence? What can you do to make it even higher?

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10. Going back to Jerrold in the chapter scenario on page 58, what might you suggest he do to be able to concentrate better? How does your answer compare with your opinion when you started working on this chapter?

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## CASE STUDIES

### for Creative and Critical Thinking



#### ACADEMIC CASE—Thinking About On-Campus College Life

Shaquille and Cole are dormitory roommates who are both attempting to prepare for the same Introduction to Psychology exam the following morning. On his way out the door after dinner, Shaquille invites Cole to walk with him to the library for a couple hours of studying. "I think I'll just stay and hang out here," Cole replies, lounging in a recliner with his psych book propped between his legs.

Shaquille nods and heads to the library, where he finds an empty study room with a desk and a lamp. He shuts the door, settles in, and begins to review the material. He takes short stretch breaks every half-hour or so and works for 2 1/2 hours. He finishes by 10 p.m., just in time to watch his favorite TV show with several friends.

Cole, on the other hand, finds that the television in the dorm lounge next door is competing for his textbook's attention, as is his ringing telephone, which he answers frequently. His friends down the hall invite him to see a band at the student union, and although he knows he has to study, he says, "I'll just go for a half hour, guys, but then I have to get back here and study." Two hours later, Cole gets back to his dorm, and Shaquille is already in bed for the night. Feeling quite drowsy, Cole sits down in the recliner and cracks open his psych book again. "Man," he thinks to himself, "there's no way I am going to pass this exam."

1. Do you think Shaquille or Cole will do better on the test? Why?

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2. It is obvious that Shaquille created an environment conducive for concentrating and learning. List the things he did that prove this.

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3. Though Cole had more fun, do you think he could have made wiser choices? What should they have been?

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## WORKPLACE CASE—Connecting to the Home Office Environment

Will worked as a mortgage broker in a large office in downtown Los Angeles. He hated the traffic and wanted to find a way to work more from home. He approached his boss who was supportive of the idea. Learning to work at home was new for Will, but he really wanted to make it succeed.

The problem is that Will is a good neighbor and a great car mechanic on the weekends. Whenever someone has car trouble, he stops what is doing to help. Now that he is home more often during the week, his neighbors have started calling and coming to his door more frequently with “just a little problem.” And, as usual, Will drops everything to help. After a few months, Will’s boss complains about his work. “You’re way behind in your customer calls, and when I try to call you, you’re never there,” said his boss. “What ARE you doing?!”

1. What would you advise Will to do to improve his ability to concentrate on his work without alienating his friends and neighbors?

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2. What office work habits can Will bring into his new home office that would improve his effectiveness?

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3. At what point do you think Will should go back to the downtown office?

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4. What other concentration challenges do you think Will faces working from home? What might he do about them?

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# 4

## Learning Time Management

### Terms

- academic calendar
- daily activity log
- goal
- learning goal
- long-term goal
- monthly calendar
- palmtop calendar
- procrastination
- productive time
- rewards
- short-term goal
- syllabus
- unproductive time
- weekly activity log
- weekly project planner

### Chapter Goals

After studying and working with the information in this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify several short-term and long-term goals so you can make smarter choices about where you spend your time.
- Use daily and weekly time logs to analyze how you spend your time.
- Understand how much time is needed for learning.
- Use a weekly project planner to track assignments and daily responsibilities, and use a calendar to schedule school deadlines, appointments, and social events.
- Define procrastination, identify several ways to overcome it, and use effective strategies to master your time.

It is Friday morning, and Juanita isn't thinking about the weekend. She is thinking about Monday, the day of her job interview at Wicks and Sticks, a wholesale candle and gift company she would really like to work for. Though Juanita has been on job interviews before, she feels this one is really important. She *loves* making her own candles and even has a few designs of her own. "What better way to make money than to do something I love!" she thinks.

She has put a lot of mental energy into wishing she had the job. She realizes that the more she knows about the company, the better her chances are for being hired. Though this interview has been scheduled for two weeks, she has been so busy with schoolwork, committee meetings, and work at the sandwich shop that she hasn't found the time to do any background research on the company.

To make matters even worse, she's in her cousin's wedding this weekend. Tonight is the rehearsal dinner, and tomorrow is the wedding.

On Sunday, she's expected to spend time with family and out-of-town guests. If she's lucky and not too exhausted, she may have a few hours Sunday evening to surf the Web for more information about the company. Unfortunately, she doesn't have enough time now to call the company and request the annual report or any other background information.

**What could Juanita have done to be better prepared for this important interview?**