

Hello!

Welcome to the sixth issue of the ZSB newsletter.

Our focus this time around is **concentration and how to improve it.**



'Concentration is goal-oriented motivation.' (Andreas Tenzer)

When you are preparing for exams, writing papers or trying to meet other deadlines, you notice: your mind won't work, your motivation is decreasing, you feel overwhelmed and your performance is going downhill quickly.

There are a lot of reasons you might experience concentration problems during your studies. They can be fuelled by being overtired, a lack of motivation, distractions, not enough exercise, poor time- and self-management, and stress.

Do you want to improve your concentration? Then keep reading!

Here is an **initial exercise** to enhance your awareness and focus your thoughts:

Find a quiet and pleasant spot, take your time and read this newsletter carefully to the end, then write down three things that you want to do to increase your ability to concentrate in future.

Concentrate better by...

Creating external calm

Create a pleasant, quiet and productive working atmosphere for yourself, with a well-organised desk, enough space and potential distractions turned off (TV, cell phone, music, etc.).

It's often hard to do without a smartphone for a long period of time. It can be helpful to decide in the morning how often and at what times you want to look at your phone.

You can let important people in your life know what your study times look like so that they don't distract you.

Creating internal calm

If you're restless or scattered and pretty much anything is more interesting than studying, you'll be unfocused and ineffective when you study. You can create more inner calm if you take care of or finish incomplete or urgent tasks before you start studying.

Are your thoughts still wandering while you study? Then ask yourself this: 'Does it really make sense to distract myself right now?' And be aware of the consequences: you won't be able to finish what you planned to study so you'll have to use up some of your free time.

Are you afraid of missing out on something while you study? Write it down on a notepad in the morning or in your study breaks so that you can think about when to do these things outside of your study periods.

Rituals can also help increase inner calm – for example, always studying in the same spot or always starting at the same time. You can also pick out favourite pieces of clothing that you always wear to study and which get you in the mood to study.

Planning what you're going to do

Before starting to study you should look through the material to get an overview and figure out what you want to do when, and how. What exactly needs to be done, and what is especially relevant? Is the amount of material you've planned for each study session realistic?

Taking study breaks

Do you feel like time is racing by and running out and you can't afford to take any breaks? The opposite is true: you should consciously plan and take study breaks, because the capacity of the working memory is limited and study breaks increase the amount of information retained. You should use the night to sleep so that you are better-rested when you study the next day.

Rule of thumb: after a maximum of 90 minutes of intensive study, plan a break of 5 to 15 minutes during which you get up from your study space and don't do any activities that tax your working memory too much (so no computer games, for example). And you should take a break whenever you notice that your concentration is waning.

Keeping your body and mind fit

When you study in a focused way, your brain is working hard. If you want to study efficiently, you should be well-rested and awake. Nighttime sleep in particular (seven–eight hours are recommended) supports the processing and retention of the material.

And don't forget to eat a balanced diet at regular intervals (e.g. five meals per day, three smaller and two bigger, with lots of fruits and vegetables) and to drink enough (approximately two litres of water depending on your height and weight).

To be able to concentrate for a longer period of time, you also need enough oxygen and movement. For example, going for a walk at the same time each day during a longer (planned) break could be a helpful ritual for you. Even 30 minutes of movement each day significantly reduces stress hormones.

Setting priorities

You can work in a more focused way if you're able to stay calm and relaxed and you cultivate positive emotions. To do this, it can help to set priorities about which material you need to learn and to ask yourself the following questions:

- What can I study in less detail?
- What can I leave out?
- Which topics are really important?

Try to also have 'the courage to leave gaps' if time is running out and ask yourself this question: 'What is the worst that can happen if I haven't completely understood topic xy?'

The bottom line: you can improve your ability to concentrate by doing little things

Did you manage to concentrate on reading the newsletter attentively up to this point?

Congratulations!

Here are the tips as a checklist for you:

- Create external calm
- Create inner calm
- Plan what you're going to do
- Take study breaks
- Keep your body and mind fit
- Set priorities

Now you can take some time to think about and write down what you would like to change. And remember: little steps are also steps!

Good luck!

The Toolbox

Featuring in this issue: Eight exercises to improve concentration

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

Have you seen...?

... this brief and practical book to help you learn more about concentration strategies?

Steiner, Verena: „Konzentration leicht gemacht. Die wirksamsten Methoden für Studium, Beruf und Alltag.“

What's next

Be sure to read our September issue:

Keeping cool – Dealing with difficulties

Missed a newsletter?

No problem. You can find the issues on planning your semester, staying motivated, preparing for exams, exam anxiety and relaxation here.

On Course with the ZSB

The Student Counselling Office team (ZSB) is there to support you during your studies, no matter what's happening in your life. In our **newsletter, 'On course with the ZSB'**, we want to give you ideas and information that will help you succeed during your studies.

We wish you inspiration and success!

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