

Optimizing Attention: Self-Monitoring Strategies

This handout provides a list of strategies to help you monitor your attention when studying. These tips can help you increase productivity, maintain focus, evaluate your attention, and complete your study/work goals.

Know your off-task warning signs	Knowing your off-task warning signs can allow you to redirect and focus ASAP!
Self-script	<p>An internal script that you can use to tell yourself that you are off-task and need to refocus.</p> <p>Example: "I'm on Facebook instead of reading. I need to focus on my reading so I can complete all of my work. I'm going to read the next 5 pages and then give myself a two-minute break to check Facebook."</p>
Thought pad	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Keep a small notepad with you when you work.2) When you find yourself thinking of something off topic, jot it down on the note pad and return to your work.3) Then give yourself time during a break or another designated time in the day to acknowledge, review, and reflect on the thoughts you jotted down.
Attention checks	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Set a timer for a duration of time of your choosing based on how long you typically sustain attention (e.g. 5 mins, 10 mins, 15 mins).2) When the timer goes off, determine whether you are on or off task.3) You can set multiple intervals over the course of your study time (1 hour of studying could include 4 attention checks at 15-minute intervals).
Pomodoro technique	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Set a time for your desired work time (e.g., 10, 15, 20, 25 minutes).2) Work until the timer goes off, and then take a brief break (2-10 minutes depending on the length of your work-time chunk).3) Considering keeping the timer where you can see it to remind you to stay on task
Study techniques	Try studying with a partner(s) who you believe will help maintain the focus and promote work productivity

Use a plan

Use our Optimizing Attention tools to design a plan and then put it into action.

Worked consulted

“Tips & Tools.” Learning Center, learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/.