GET FOCUSED - 8 HOT TIPS

Feeling distracted because there’s too much to do? Feeling overwhelmed and unable to focus on the task at hand? Trying to do too many things at once?

We text while we’re studying, we sing along to the music we’re playing while we’re writing an essay, our parents might eat while they’re driving. We all do it, and unfortunately, the more we multitask, the harder it is to focus—no matter what we’re doing.

The problem with all of this multitasking we all do every day is that our brains are wired to focus on one thing at a time. While we’re constantly bombarded with all kinds of sensory information, our brain has to weigh it all and select what to attend to. Let’s give our brain a break and clear some of that input.

Maybe you can’t shorten your to-do list, but there are steps you can take to maximize your focus and become more productive at school and at home—and more relaxed when you’re done with your work.

1. Desk Declutter
   Step one is to clear the physical clutter. It’s not only our cluttered brain that hampers our focus, our cluttered desk can do the same. If you’re having trouble finding things on your desk that’s the first sign that you need to clear some clutter. Have a look at your desk and calculate the percentage of naked desk space you can actually see. You’ll know when it’s not enough! And you’ll quickly figure out what you can throw away, what you can put someplace else, and what you need to keep within reach. It’s a simple task that will make a big difference.

2. Focus Exercise
   Focusing on a demanding task strengthens your ability to focus on anything that needs your attention. Try this exercise to increase your focus. With a pencil in each hand, simultaneously draw a line with your right hand and a circle with your left hand. Repeat this several times, alternating objects drawn with each hand. Then try a triangle and square and reverse hands again. This may seem like multitasking but it’s actually a good exercise for your brain.

3. Jumping Jacks - Really!
   When you’re working on a project and you notice that your mind is wandering, get up from your chair and do 25 jumping jacks—it’s like pressing a reset button in your brain. You can also do this before you start something requiring major concentration.

4. Keep Your Brain Well Fed
   Your brain is 2% of your weight and takes 25% of your food energy. Eat every three to five hours and try to maintain a balance of protein, healthy fats, and carbohydrates—this is definitely not an excuse to keep a giant bag of chips on your desk!

5. Write Down Your Stressful Thoughts
   Concentrating uses some of the same areas of the brain as short-term memories. If you’re trying to remember a lot of things, they compete for space. If you think your working memory may be jammed with stressful thoughts, download some by writing them down and put them aside to focus on at another time.
6. **Control Distractions**
   Keep in mind that distractions and interruptions are a fact of life that we can’t totally eliminate, but we do have control over some of them and we can limit the impact they have on our focus. For starters, we can turn off our cell phone when we need to focus, we can play music without words (they can distract us even if we’re not singing along), we can warn our family that we’re going to be totally focusing on a project for whatever time, and we can hang a *Do Not Disturb* sign on our door.

7. **Set a Time and Place to Focus**
   Set a specific time and place when you need to focus—and mark it on your calendar. By defining a time, you prepare yourself mentally. And by deciding on the single thing you plan to do, it’s easier to put aside other demands and focus on your planned project.

8. **Alpha State**
   And don’t forget that strategy you learned at SuperCamp—ALPHA STATE: sit up, close eyes, breathe deep, peaceful place, look up-look down, open eyes, and focus.

Try to remember that focusing is a skill—the more you practice, the better you get. And the better you get, the less you’re distracted and the more easily and quickly you accomplish tasks—and learn.