

## Introduction

Staying on task can be difficult, but it can be particularly challenging when you are surrounded by constant distraction and worry about the Covid 19 pandemic. This can be exacerbated when you are stuck at home with family members or roommates for long periods of time or don't have regular lectures or tutorials to direct your focus.

## Understanding how focus influences productivity

Daniel Goleman asserts that **focus is the inner driver of excellence** and distinguishes between three types of focus:

“Inner” focus refers to self-awareness and self-management and handle our distressing emotions so they don't interfere with getting things done, marshal our positive emotions to stay motivated in working toward our goals, and bounce back from setbacks

“Other” focus describes how well we attune to people: our empathy, which allows us to understand how people perceive things, how they feel, and what we can do to help them be at their best.

“Outer” focus has to do with how well we can sense the large forces that shape our world – such as the Corona Pandemic.

### Focus and concentration

Concentration refers to the mental effort you direct toward whatever you're working on or learning at the moment. The ability to concentrate on something in your environment and direct mental effort toward it is critical for learning new things, achieving goals, and performing well across a wide variety of situations. Experts define focus as the act of concentrating your interest or activity on something. With so much going on it can become difficult to focus and concentrate on studies.

Goleman (2020) asserts we have to learn to be more **intentional about focusing** – for instance, carving out a space in our day when we can concentrate without such distractions. The more distracted we are, the less content we capture because our brain is unable to make the connections between what we already know about a particular subject and what we do not know about it.

### Techniques to help focus

- **Strengthen focus** concentration is like a mental muscle. Build your focus by concentrating on short activities and building up to longer more intense activities.
- **Focus on what you know.** Sometimes worry is based on too much focus on questions that have no answers. Resist letting yourself spiral out of control with “what ifs.” Ensure you're planning for contingencies, but then get back to a focus on the present. Spend time on meaningful activities like delivering on work-related tasks or staying connected with family or friends through virtual coffee or online games
- **Focus on something specific,** for example, an assessment, a chapter to summarise, making a mind map of a section you studied, etc.

- **Focus on the benefits of work** – look at your goals again and understand that you are still on track, just differently
- **Focus on One Thing at a Time** while multitasking may seem like a great way to get a lot done quickly, it turns out that people are actually rather bad at it. Juggling multiple tasks at once can dramatically cut down on productivity and makes it much harder to hone in on the details that are truly important
- **Stay in the Moment** Staying engaged in the here and now keeps your attention sharp and your mental resources honed in on the details that really matter at a specific point in time
- **Take Short Breaks** Shift your attention to something unrelated to the task at hand, even if it is only for a few moments. Researchers have found that even taking very brief breaks by shifting your attention elsewhere can dramatically improve mental focus

## Additional Resources

Daniel Goleman on Focus: The Secret to High Performance and Fulfilment

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTfYv3IEOqM>

## Summary

Focus and concentration can be difficult in our everyday life with high levels of distractions. It is particularly difficult in a global pandemic. It is important to become aware of how your focus and concentration affects your studies and your success as a student.