Optimism its the best
Way to see life
CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS SKILLS

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WORKSHOP GOALS

• What is concentration and focus
• Become more self-aware of own traps and triggers
• How to better manage distractions
• Develop a refocusing plans; routines
What does “concentration” mean?

What signals good concentration?

Why do we lose it?
CONCENTRATION

The ability to direct one’s full attention to appropriate cues in the present task instead of being controlled by irrelevant external and internal stimuli

Almost every external event will trigger a cognitive and emotional shift in the performer and a corresponding change in the response of the body
CONCENTRATION CHARACTERISTICS

- Attentional Capacity
- Attentional Readiness
- Attentional Selectivity
Lost Concentration…When?

- Attention to irrelevant cues

- Left the here and now
  - i.e. thinking of past or future outcome

- Inappropriate divided attention
  - Ex.: Can’t remember name after introduction because also focusing on making a good impression

- Become aware of gaps in experience
  - Ex.: Reading book chapter and pages later become “alert” and don’t know what was read

- Performance level suffering (Leading a meeting, mentoring)
  - Not always, but more often than not
Types of Attentional Focus

- **BROAD**
  - Assess
  - Analyze

- **NARROW**
  - Perform
  - Rehearse

- **EXTERNAL**
  - (Direction)

- **INTERNAL**
  - (Width)
Counting Passes
Types of Attentional Focus

- Assess
- Perform
- Analyze
- Rehearse

(Broad vs. Narrow) (Direction vs. Width)

- External
- Internal
Types of Concentration

- Assess: Moderating a discussion, Presenting research
- Perform: Solving an equation, Reading in noisy setting
- Analyze: Planning essay answer, Clinician forming a diagnosis
- Rehearse: Monitor neck and shoulder tension, Deep breath to relax, Mentally rehearse a skill, Memorize a fact

External vs. Internal
Broad vs. Narrow
QUESTIONS?
• Many students tend to think that distractions and obstacles hurt their performance

• What actually hurts their performance is how/where they choose to focus when distractions and obstacles occur
CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS
(OR SITUATIONS THAT MAY REQUIRE REFOCUSING)

- After mistakes
- When stressed out
- When not sufficiently motivated
- When over-motivated
- Pre-event thoughts
- Non-ideal conditions
- Delays
- Overwhelmed with distractions
- Poor performance at the beginning of event
- Criticism from advisor or peer
- Mind wandering
- Doubt own ability
ATTENTIONAL PROBLEMS?

INTERNAL DISTRACTERS:
Within ourselves, thoughts, worries, concerns, stress

EXTERNAL DISTRACTERS:
Stimuli from the environment
FOCUS GRID!

- The goal is to find as many consecutive numbers as possible
- You have 30 sec to find as many consecutive numbers as you can
- Start with the number ____
- GO!
LOST CONCENTRATION

Attending to past events
“I can’t believe I did not know the answer to that question”

Attending to future events
“What if I don’t finish this chapter by August?”
HOW DO WE STAY IN THE PRESENT?

- Focusing can be learned
- Mental skills, like physical skills, must be practiced
ATTENTIONAL SELECTIVITY PROBLEMS

• Three common problems
  • Selecting the wrong focus of attention
  • Becoming distracted, or allowing one’s focus to drift
  • Becoming stuck in one focus and unable to shift attention when needed
QUESTIONS?
STRATEGIES FOR EXTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

Simulated Performance Experiences

• Try to make practices as much like performance as possible
• Enables you to become so familiar with the stimuli associated with your task that they are no longer distracting
• Over-train for worst case scenarios
  • Distracting noise into the room
  • Performing with ½ time
  • Technology issues; Plan B
  • Example: Crying baby
EXTERNAL (CONT.)

- **Mental Rehearsal**
  - Not reacting to purposely induced external distractions
  - One student mentally rehearses a scenario while the other attempts to distract the performer
    - Then rates his/her achieved concentration
  - Helps you screen out distractions by building a “wall” around you or by accepting the distraction but not judging it
STRATEGIES FOR INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

• **Attentional Cues and Triggers**
  • Use verbal and kinesthetic cues
    • Focus your concentration and to refocus once it has been lost
  • Cues must focus on
    • positives rather than negatives
    • the present rather than the past or future
    • the process rather than the outcome
  • Must be individualized
STRATEGIES FOR INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

• **TIC-TOC for self-talk**
  - Use the words TIC-TOC to trigger a response
  - TIC = any self-statements or thoughts that are irrelevant to the immediate task
  - TOC = switching to a task relevant focus
  - Strategy entails becoming aware of TICs and immediately making them TOCs
INTERNAL (CONT.)

• Turning Failure into Success
  • Mentally rehearse successful performance after a failure/error
  • Dwelling on the failure is even more harmful than making a performance error
  • Use positive self-talk to refocus attention and address why mistake occurred

• Use of Biofeedback
  • Monitors physiological relaxation
# FOCUSING/REFOCUSING PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distractions</th>
<th>Where Your Focus Should Be</th>
<th>Coping Response</th>
<th>Attentional Cue</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative thoughts and self-doubts stemming from last meeting w/ advisor</td>
<td>Positive thoughts</td>
<td>Thought-stopping technique, replace with positive self-talk</td>
<td>Positive imagery or statement of successful performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Present Moment Confidence</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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ROUTINES: HOW PHYSICAL TENSION & ATTENTIONAL DISTRACTION HURT PERFORMANCE

Situation
(Conference Presentation)

Physical Response
(Muscle tension; Shallow, quick breathing)

Attentional Response
(Worry over consequences of failure; Narrow attention on self)

Performance Problems
(Rushing, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, inability to focus on task-relevant cues, lack of pace)
ROUTINES (GUIDELINES)

• Create physical and mental feelings that you want

• Develop a rhythm

• Rehearse your performance

• Develop your “lock-in” cue
Using a routine

Situation
(Conference Presentation)

Physical Feelings
(Feeling energized, loose, and ready. Breath to relax body)

Attentional Focus
(“I am ready” / approach questions with confidence)

Performance Consequences
(Not rushing, focusing on task, good recall, confident posture)
TAKE HOME MESSAGES

• The 3 Ps of Proper Focus
  • Present
  • Positive
  • Process