

Staying focused with your writing

“One reason so few of us achieve what we truly want is that we never direct our focus; we never concentrate our power. Most people dabble their way through life, never deciding to master anything in particular.” ~ Tony Robbins

Before you begin to write your book, let's discuss Focus and Concentration and how this has an impact not only on your life, but also on writing of your masterpiece!

According to research by the National Center for Biotechnology Information of the National Library of Medicine, the average attention span in the year 2000 was 12 seconds. By 2015, it has shrunk to 8.25.

Are you still with me? Please, take your nose out of your smartphone for just a moment more...

We often joke about how electronic devices and instant Internet gratification have shortened our attention spans to that of small furry mammals, but what the above statistic shows is that this is no joke at all.

We are increasingly logging in to our social media accounts and then forgetting what it was we were going to do there and instead watching a video of a teenager in Wisconsin's dramatic backyard do a face-plant or a kitten in Australia do a yoga routine.

The other really important part of this aspect is to understand that there are two types of people as explained below:

Through time people: Being a 'through time' person is to be conscious of time passing, to be aware of the interaction of events, time to attend a meeting approaching. It is also to be able to plan, and work to a plan, and to multi-task.

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In time people: Being an 'in time' person you are less likely to be aware of time passing, less likely to plan or stick to a plan and can become side-tracked.

Understanding which 'time' type you are will help you achieve success a lot easier.

Following are some guidelines to help you with focus and concentration.

Where is the Noise Coming From?

What are your main distractions? It may seem simple enough to identify them and they're usually related to technology. But for the purposes of really uncovering the distractors that hound you, we'll need to make a slightly deeper analysis. In addition, not all distractions are of a technological nature. Let's take a broader view.

Research into distractions, which refers to them as 'noise', identifies two broad categories – external inference and internal interference.

Tips and Techniques to Improve Your Focus at Work

Learning how to improve your concentration and focus is nothing more than mastering a few techniques, or making a few lifestyle changes. Sometimes, it just takes forming a new habit and you'll see results immediately.

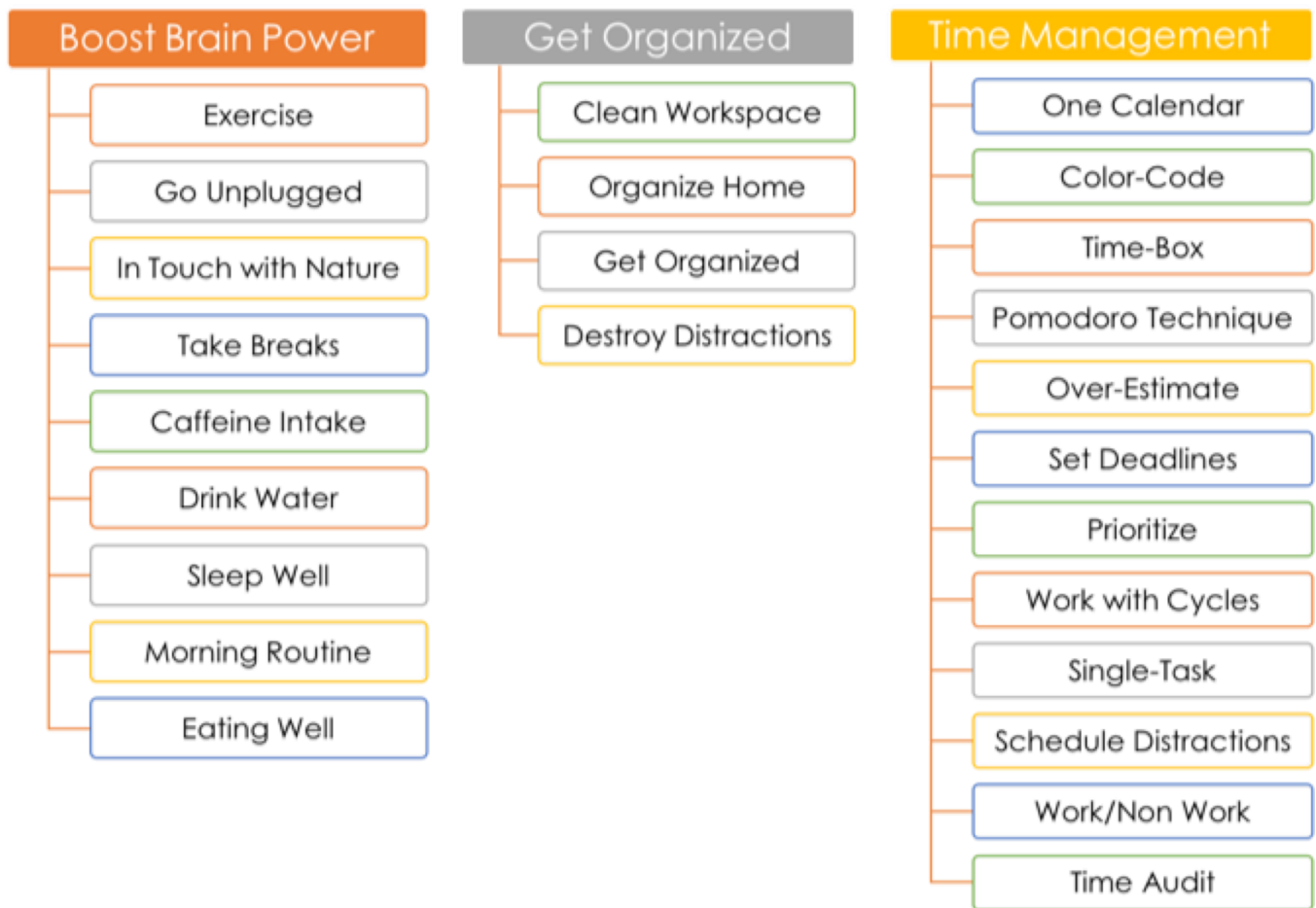
You probably know many of the techniques already. They're methods most people know, but we fail to implement them. Sometimes, this is simply because we don't understand just how important they can be in boosting focus and concentration.

You'll see some techniques you're already using and find a few that you can easily implement in your daily life. First, we'll look at tricks and healthy habits, and then ways to get organised for better focus and time management techniques. Use this as a toolbox of techniques and choose those that are most feasible and effective for you.

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Exercises to Improve Your Focus and Concentration

In addition to getting organised and learning new habits, there are other beneficial exercises that you can perform daily to help you improve focus and concentration. The exercises below are all easy to practice. You don't need to spend a great deal of time on these exercises. Something like 5-10 minutes per day is enough to produce results (although more doesn't hurt).

These exercises include:

- ✓ Mindful meditation
- ✓ Noting distractions

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- ✓ Mantra techniques
- ✓ Deep breathing
- ✓ Visualisation
- ✓ Ambient sound meditation
- ✓ Music for focus
- ✓ Memorise something
- ✓ Don't move
- ✓ Counting backwards
- ✓ Fix your gaze
- ✓ Switch hands
- ✓ Do puzzles
- ✓ Mindful work
- ✓ Learn a language

Create Your Focus and Concentration Action Plan

Now, it's time to put everything together and create an action plan that you can use to begin improving your concentration and focus.

Start by reviewing the tips on "Tips and Techniques to Improve Focus at Work." Then, go over the learning activity from above and look at the exercises you've chosen to try. Now, answer the following questions.

Health and Nutrition:

1. How can you add 15 to 20 minutes of physical activity into your day? Be as specific as possible (For example, walk to the train station and back during morning break at work).
2. How many glasses of water do you drink each day? How can you get a few more glasses in?
3. How many cups of coffee or other caffeinated beverages do you drink in a day? How many would you like to be drinking and at what times (For example, two cups in the morning)?

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4. How many hours of sleep do you need in order to function at your best? What steps can you take to ensure that you get that sleep?
5. What is your morning routine? If you don't have one, what would you like your morning routine to be like?
6. Do you eat breakfast every day? If not, how can you make it easy for yourself to get the nutrition you need before you start your day?

Based on your responses to the above questions, create a daily schedule that maps out:

- ✓ Your morning routine
- ✓ Breakfast
- ✓ Food and beverage intake throughout the day
- ✓ Exercise and other breaks
- ✓ Bed time (including a bedtime ritual if you need help sleeping)

Make several copies of your answers and put them in places where they can be used as reminders, such as by the bed, on your fridge, your desk at work, and so on. The goal is to create new habits that become second nature over time. When that time comes, you can get rid of the reminders, but for now, keep them around so you remember and don't cheat.

Getting Organised:

1. Pick a day in the next week to organise your workspace. This includes your desk, walls, paper files, and digital files. Clean and organise everything.
2. Decide on times throughout the day and set times during the week for regular tidying up. Put a big clean up on your calendar once a month.
3. Choose a method for de-cluttering your house and continuing this theme choose specific days on next month's calendar for de-cluttering. A good way to do this is to set aside a different day for different areas of the house.
4. Go through the techniques to reduce distractions and create a plan that incorporates them. Try starting with just one tip at a time. Master that one tip

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and then move on to the next. Wherever possible, set deadlines and put things on your calendar.

Time Management:

1. If you are using multiple calendars, integrate them into one. Choose colours for identifying key categories.
2. Front-load your schedule so that you get more done earlier.
3. Consider using time boxes for daily tasks.
4. Break large projects into small goals and steps that you can attach a deadline to.
5. Make sure that you're single tasking and not multi-tasking.
6. Try the Pomodoro technique one day this week and see if it works for you.
7. Consider performing a time audit.

Mindfulness:

Take your newly created calendar and add a daily mindfulness activity. Start by scheduling 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times per week. Eventually, move it to five days a week.

For some great mindfulness resources, please take a look at <http://www.mindfulnesscds.com/>

Conclusion and Next Steps

Achieving and sustaining focus is harder in today's complex and technologically driven world than ever before. The technologies that distract us and divert our attention aren't going anywhere. In fact, it's a situation that will likely deepen as our lives become more entwined with technology.

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It's hard to maintain focus, but it's really just a matter of learning techniques, habits and exercises to help you concentrate, as well as gaining the self-awareness to understand when and how you are distracted. This is where the mindfulness exercise is very useful.

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