

# DEALING WITH DISTRACTIONS

Distractions are not necessarily bad or wrong, they are all a part of everyday life. It is the timing and frequency that is the issue - making sure activities are done in a way that also allows students to complete the necessary schoolwork at home.

*What steps can students take to manage these distractions effectively?*

## **1. Technology - TV, radio, music, computer games, internet, social media, mobiles etc.**

Have a clear distinction between your personal time and time allocated for schoolwork. You need to have quality relaxation and free time each night to give your brain a chance to recharge and you need to do your schoolwork without distractions so you can focus properly and complete it as quickly as possible.

- Decide how many half hour blocks of schoolwork you will do each afternoon/evening.
- Decide on specific times for these half hour blocks and write these down.
- Make a list of the things you are NOT TO DO when you are working on schoolwork.
- Each time before you start work, turn off all distractions and remove them from sight.
- Get everything together that you will need for the work to be done in that half hour.
- Set an alarm so you know when it is time to stop working.
- Sit down and don't allow yourself to get up at all during this half hour block.
- At the end of the time, set an alarm (maybe on your mobile?) so you are reminded when it is time to start the next half hour block.

## **2. Home - family chores, family activities, brothers and sisters, other relatives, pets, food.**

Some things you can try:

- Stay after school and work in the school library for an hour or so after school so at least you have completed a large chunk of work before you get home.
- Go and work at a friend or neighbour's house or a public library now and then – but only if it is a place where you can actually get work done.
- Explain to your family that you need to get a certain amount of work done for school each night. Ask to be excused for an hour or so (or whatever time you need) from family jobs or activities each night so you can get your work done.
- See if the family is open to the idea of a homework slot. This is a period of time in the evening allocated to when the students in the family do their work. It is a time when little brothers and sisters are kept out of the way and everyone has a chance to get some work done in peace and quiet.
- Make a 'do not disturb' sign and explain to your family that it is really important that when this sign is on your door you need to not be interrupted. Some families will be really understanding of this.
- Think about getting up early to work (maybe go to bed earlier so you aren't tired) or even getting to school earlier on a regular basis and doing work then. In some schools the school library will be open before school.
- If none of these work you will need to tell your parents of the struggles you are having getting work done at home and sit down together and discuss possible solutions.

## **3. Outside activities - seeing friends, sport, shopping.**

You will need to schedule time for schoolwork to make sure it actually happens!

- Fill out a schedule of all the activities you currently do. You need to see how much time you actually have available. If you have too many activities, your choices are to either reduce your extracurricular activities, or to find some extra time. This might mean getting up early or using pockets of time before activities.
- Write the word SCHOOLWORK in the blocks of time allocated to schoolwork each night. Highlight them so they stand out.
- Place the schedule somewhere where you will see it each day.

## Other techniques students use to manage distractions:

### Ultimate Distraction Destroyer

First set yourself a period of time to work uninterrupted. Put a notepad by your desk and every time you allow yourself to be distracted when you are trying to do schoolwork you put a mark on the page. If the distraction is more than a minute, record a mark for every single minute. And here's the hard part: you then donate a dollar (or whatever amount you have set) for every mark to a charity of your choice.

### One by One

Next time you are trying to do schoolwork, have your list beside you and put a tally mark next to each distraction when you lose focus and waste time on this activity. You can't fix everything at once. Work out what is your number 1 biggest distraction. Do homework and schoolwork in half hour blocks and for that half hour eliminate this distraction totally. You may need to ask your parents to help you at first until you become more disciplined.

### Dealing with Friends

Questions to ask yourself when facing a choice between friends and schoolwork:

- Do I really want to do this activity or is it just an excuse not to work?
- Can I do this activity with my friends another time instead?
- How urgent is the work I had scheduled for this time?
- Is it possible to reschedule the work I need to do without too much stress?
- Can I compromise: just spend a short time with my friends then do the work?
- Will I regret going off with my friends now? Is this the right thing to do?
- If I was looking at this tomorrow, what decision would I wish I'd made?

### Dealing with Online Issues

*Computer Games:* Awfully tempting and before you know it you have been playing patience for an hour. Avoid using them during time you set aside for schoolwork or at least if you do use them then write down your start time so you can monitor how much time you waste on them.

*On-line Messaging:* Deadly! Switch it off if you are doing work on your computer so you aren't tempted.

*Email:* Have you ever counted how often you actually check your email? Make a mark on a notepad each time you check your email in an afternoon. Many people become obsessed with email. Allow yourself to check, answer and send emails only at the end of your set working period.

*Internet Browsing:* If researching, don't get deflected from your task.

Two essential ways to manage your computer use:

1. Have set periods of time that you allocate to schoolwork where you do not play games, check email, browse or message.
2. Remove temptation by unplugging your dial-up cable or network card if possible when you are trying to work on things that do not require Internet access.

OR use software to help you manage your distractions. Visit [www.studyskillshandbook.com.au](http://www.studyskillshandbook.com.au) to find out the latest options.

Questions to ask yourself when you are caught in on-line distractions.

- Is this the best use of my time at this point in time?
- How long have I been spending on this distraction?
- How long am I likely to spend on this if I don't stop now?
- Can I set myself a task to complete before I give way to this distraction?
- How often have I been caught by this distraction this afternoon?
- Do I need to ask my parents for help managing this distraction?
- Who is in control here - me or the distraction?



*So how can you improve the way  
you manage your distractions?*



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