

## IMPROVING FOCUS

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Here are some suggested activities aimed at lengthening the amount of time you can focus on something as a conscious choice. Many people can concentrate easily on favorite subjects but have difficulty extending that focus to other areas. These activities, which become progressively challenging, expand your length of concentration and provide a conscious experience of holding focus. They are intended to be gamelike.

1. Begin with the game of Concentration. This may be played with a deck of cards, or there are numerous commercial games with matching pictures that range from a few simple cards to many pairs. Cards are placed face down. Each player turns up two cards (which must be visible to all players). Every time two matching cards are turned up, the player has an extra turn. Usually good visual memory means that this game will be aced, and it makes a good base for moving on to more difficult tasks.
2. Scatter different items on a tray. A group looks for a given amount of time, perhaps 10 seconds. Then, while eyes are closed, one item is removed. Who can tell what is missing? That person gets to remove the item next time. This game can progress from a few items to many items. It can also be more fun if extra points are given for each detail given about the missing item.
3. I Spy with a Distant Eye. "It" chooses an item from another room (that everyone has had access to) and describes it: "I spy with my distant eye something in the cafeteria that is yellow and oblong." Others try to guess. They can be told they are "hot" (near the object) or "cold" far away.
4. With your eyes closed, imagine a piece of chalk writing your name on a chalkboard. Can you hold the whole word, from the first letter to the last, without it fading away? Obviously, this is easier for short names. A nickname might be used to begin with, and then a full first name, and finally, first and last names. Some people prefer to do this with eyes open, seeing the letters in the air in front of them.
5. With eyes closed, see if you can see all the digits in your address. Can you expand to see all the digits in your license plate? Your phone number? How many digits can you visualize without losing the first ones? See if you can increase the number with practice.
6. Visualize an equilateral triangle, resting solidly on its base. See it in your favorite color. Now, holding on to the image, change its color. Change it again. Change its size. Keeping the outline firm, allow it to grow and shrink as you choose. The hardest thing to do will be to keep it one color and size for even as long as 10 seconds. Try to better your time with practice.
7. Note what you are doing now. Then remember what you were doing just before this. And what did you do before that? See how many steps backward you can take in your memory: 3 steps? 5 steps? Even more? See yourself doing what you remember, don't just recall in words.
8. Sit or lie down and imagine a deep clear pool. See a hand drop a pebble into the pool. Watch the pebble sink down, down, and down until it reaches the bottom of the pool. Now see the hand drop another pebble into the pool. Again focus your gaze on the pebble as it sinks all the way down to the bottom of the pool. Now another pebble is dropped.... and another... watch the pebbles carefully as they sink. Note the way they pile up at the bottom of the pool. How many pebbles can you keep track of? (This is a very relaxing and soothing exercise. Some people use it for falling asleep.)

9. Place a large piece of paper on a table so that it is near the hand you draw with. Choose a three-dimensional object in the room, like a lamp or a chair. Situate yourself so you can see the object but are not looking at your hand. Now, with your pencil on the paper, pretend that you are moving that pencil slowly along the edge of the object you have chosen. Very carefully, record with your pencil all the edges of what you are looking at. When you have gone all the way around, look at the drawing you have made. You may be surprised by what you see. This is a good way of learning to really look at what you want to draw. And you must really focus to do so.
10. Choose or create a favorite place to be. This could be a special room or a garden or a mountain meadow--any place filled with beauty and peace. Allow yourself to visualize this place completely, filling it with all the sights and sounds and smells and feelings that belong to this place. Just relax and enjoy your special place for a while. Now think of something to add that will make your place even more special. Visit this place over and over again, daily, or whenever you want, and add or rearrange what is there to make it even more wonderful. You can add new furniture or pictures to your room, plant new flowers in your garden, allow animals to visit your mountain, etc. Whenever you are upset, taking "trip" to your special place can comfort and restore you. Even just remembering that you have this special place you can visit whenever you want can be calming and reassuring.
11. Take a ruler and a piece of string into your back yard and measure off one square foot. Set a timer for five minutes. Now carefully observe everything you can see within the square foot of space. At first you may see only blades of grass that all look alike. But if you look very carefully, you will see differences in each grass blade. You may see different bugs and insects, perhaps a trace of a spiderweb. Even when you think you have seen everything, keep on looking. When your timer goes off, think about all that you saw in your square foot. The next time you may want to set your timer for six minutes or even more.
12. Look up at the stars at night. Find a particular star that you choose for your very own. Be sure to see where this star is in relation to the other stars around it. It might be part of a well-known constellation, or it might just be well-known to you. Watch your star from time to time on different nights. Does it have a particular color? Does it twinkle in any special way? As the weeks go by, you will find that the star patterns have shifted and your star along with it. Keep track of where it is going. If it slips over the horizon, remember to watch for it later in the year and notice when you can see it again. Has it changed in any way? You will find it reassuring to touch base with your star again and again and to watch the slow progress of the star patterns overhead. It will become a point of orientation for your life.