



Stillpoint Psychology: Study Mastery

**Study Skills Workbook:
Unlocking your potential for
excellence**

Contents

Self-managing your study

The components of effective performance

Anxiety before tests

Anxiety during tests

Managing motivation

Organisation

Dealing with setbacks

Self-Care

Mental Health

Managing stress

The mindful student

Process and outcome

Study Techniques



The direction in which education starts a person will determine their future

Plato

Stillpoint Psychology: Study Mastery program

The Study Mastery Program is a unique targeted program that aims to directly apply psychological techniques to the problems of study.

Students face a variety of pressures that impact on their educational attainment and the combination of stressors can have the affect of disabling their potential. This program aims to identify each of the main stressors that students face and apply a psychological technique to either bypass, resolve or mitigate that stressor. The underlying philosophy of this approach is that being forewarned is forearmed, and students who learn these techniques will have additional tools to manage the stresses of study.

The approach to the problems of study is based on Aristotle's system of causation. Aristotle identifies four main factors that combine to create the cause of anything. He identified that causation operates at four levels: material (the essential substance), efficient (the processes that comprise the thing, formal (the shape and pattern that the thing takes, and lastly final (the end for which the thing created was made. By using this ancient approach the whole problem of studying can be broken down into its constituent parts, with small or major improvement made to each. As each factor is in symbioses with the other factors, small incremental improvements across many areas can combine to have a major effect.

Applying Aristotle's system of causation to study this program aims to improve a students' performance in the following ways:

Material Causation: learning about the physiological processes that comprise good mental and physical health. In addition students learn about ergonomics, posture, breathing and managing their physical environment

Efficient Causation: learning about the processes that comprise effective study. This involves learning how to manage time, attention and motivation. Students learn how to identify energy drains in their life and take steps to eliminate or mitigate them. By preserving energy and becoming more efficient in terms of the processes employed the overall level of effort employed to maximum effect

Formal Causation: this involves learning how to imitate the patterns of success so that they become part of the students own nature. Understanding what ideal studying would look like and using this as a yardstick by which to measure one's own behaviour can assist students to develop more effective attitudes by which to apply themselves. The relationship between attitude, motivation and behaviour is explored and students can learn how to adjust their outlook to be in concord with their behaviour.

Final Causation: The incorporation of teleological reasoning into this program helps students to define the overall purpose behind what they are doing. Without a meaningful goal it is hard for students to channel their energies towards specific outcomes. Students who have a reason for what they are doing will search for and utilise means. Understanding how goals define context and shape experience is a powerful lesson in how to achieve anything.

SELF- MANAGING YOUR STUDY



Learning to find leverage, efficiency and flow in your education

Students often find that the process of education itself does not give them all the skills they need to learn. Learning is a skill itself, and with greater self-understanding and psychological skills anyone can become a more efficient and effective learner.

Self-managing your study

LEARNING TO FIND LEVERAGE, EFFICIENCY AND FLOW IN YOUR EDUCATION

To improve your study ability this workbook aims to improve your self-awareness in different areas of study. By gaining self-awareness you have a more open perspective from which to make changes. You will learn in what ways you may be limiting yourself, and what areas you may have blind-spots. When we improve our understanding, we naturally gain greater leverage, control and effectiveness.

The study mastery workbook will explore all the main facets of study, and expose you to new information and challenge you to develop improved ways of managing. At the end of every module there will be a section titled 'maintain, accept, change, let go.' This is designed to help you to decide what changes, if any, to make in this area of study. Ultimately, it will be the degree to which you can implement improvements that will translate into more effective studying.

By asking ourselves what we wish to maintain, accept, change, or let go, we are enabling the development of self-awareness, and increasing our areas of influence and control. Furthermore, by gaining an understanding of what is not in our area of control or influence, we can avoid wasting effort needlessly.

The 'maintain' question, is asking you what you want to continue doing in this area. Being aware of what you are doing that is working and needs to be maintained helps to keep you stable and avoid making unnecessary alterations. Also, knowing what to maintain helps you become aware of your current strengths.

The 'accept' question, is asking what in this area you may need to accept that you cannot change. Sometimes, accepting that something is difficult actually makes it easier. Accepting that we may need to work harder to get a better result actually reduces our stress. Accepting is ultimately a choice that we make, to let something be as it is, without resisting it psychologically. Accepting does not mean liking something. For example, most mature people learn to accept the weather as it is, without becoming emotionally reactive towards it, even if it upsets our plans (a BBQ on a rainy day). Accepting what cannot be changed can give us greater equanimity and avoids wasting emotional energy resisting what is. As we learn to accept, we become less fearful of disappointment and more tolerant of frustration, this enables greater goal setting and perseverance.

The 'change' question, is asking you what in this area of study you may wish to change. This is a personal choice based on your understanding of what can be improved. Small changes over a long period of time have a large effect, so be willing to identify small things you can do better. Identifying what is not working can make us more open to find better ways of doing what we are doing. Flexibility enables improvement.

The 'let go' question, is asking you what in this area of study you are willing to let go of. Letting go may sound passive, but it is a powerful way of redirecting your energy to more reasonable and achievable areas. Letting go is subtly different from accepting, in that we accept what we cannot change, whereas letting go involves actively and willfully withdrawing effort from something. By letting go of unrealistic expectations, demands for certainty, and limiting self-beliefs we can enable dramatic improvements in motivation, energy,

Stillpoint Psychology: Study Mastery and Mental Health. appointments@stillpointpsychology.com.au

focus and performance. Letting go of bad habits can free us up to create new behaviours and put more energy towards our goals.

The chapter headings outline the areas that will be focused on. Each area is an essential component of study performance and with greater self-awareness, significant improvements can be made.

The chapter on 'The components of effective performance' will focus on outlining what enables success. By becoming aware of what elements can be developed we can enhance our strengths, and become more aware of what components may be undeveloped.

The chapter on 'Anxiety before tests', will focus on practical strategies to manage the stress and anticipatory anxiety that can arise prior to tests. Learning to identify anxiety and take steps to manage it can dramatically improve test performance.

The chapter on 'Anxiety during tests' focuses on how to deal with nerves and tension that can be a major distraction during an assessment. By learning to identify, and then harness the physiological aspects of test anxiety, performance can be improved.

The chapter on 'Managing motivation' focuses on dealing with the problem of what psychologists call 'ambivalence', that is the tendency we have to be in two-minds about something. Learning to identify and manage ambivalence can free up enormous drive to achieve goals, and face fears of failure.

The chapter on 'Organisation' focuses on how to effectively manage time so as to enhance our long term ability and to manage distractions. By learning how to plan and anticipate distraction we can reduce their impact. Furthermore, by learning how to manage time, we can continue to enjoy recreation and socializing even when we have many competing demands on our time.

The chapter on 'Dealing with setbacks', focuses on how to bounce back from disappointing results. It can be demoralizing to fall short of our goals, but learning how to reframe our efforts we can avoid feeling shame. Learning how to 'fail' is a faster route to success than trying our best to always avoid situations that may push us beyond our current abilities.

The chapter on 'Success and Failure', focuses on the different ways in which we unconsciously think about success and failure. The individual way in which you view success can be modified to enable your motivation. Similarly, recontextualising 'failure' can reduce your anxiety about putting forth effort.

The chapter on 'Process and Outcome', focuses on the way in which our way of working can influence how efficiently we are working. Whether we are primarily outcome or process oriented in our work can significantly influence how stressed or satisfied we feel in our work.

The chapter on 'The Mindful Student', focuses on ways to incorporate a different philosophy to your work. Mindfulness is an ancient practice that is very relevant to modern problems, particularly with regard to study and work. Developing mindful behaviours in work can increase your performance and your overall satisfaction.

The chapter on 'Self Care' deals with the inevitable stress of studying and identifies practical means by which we can reduce this impact on our mental health. Learning how to manage your energy and by identifying rewards and incentives can greatly enhance our resilience.

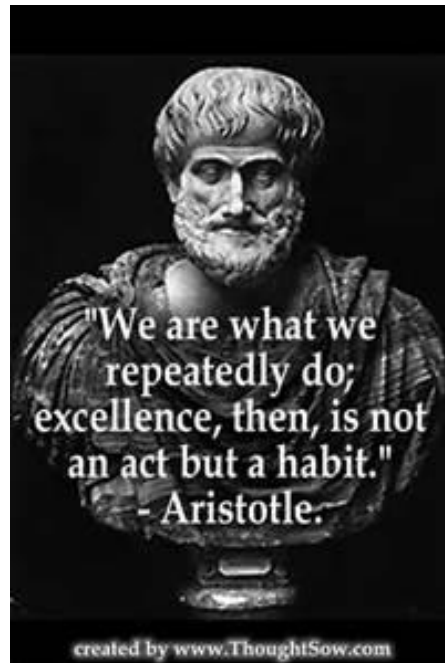
The chapter on 'Mental Health' deals with the very real risks to mental health that can arise due to sustained stress and pressure to succeed. Identifying the early signs of mental illness is key to mitigating its affects. Furthermore, by developing strategies to engage support we can recover our health more quickly.

The chapter on 'Study Techniques' deals with small tips and techniques that can be included into your study skills repertoire. Learning how to process information quickly and encode it can boost the efficiency with which you can assimilate new information. Furthermore, even utilizing practical things such as posture, ergonomics and respiration can add to the efficiency of your efforts.

Learning points

- Self awareness improves our ability to make changes
- Small changes in multiple areas can create big improvements
- Studying is a skill that can be learned, improved and mastered
- By using psychological methods we can gain self-awareness and enable self improvement

THE COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE



Harnessing the qualities essential for success

True success does not happen by accident. Effective performance happens when all the individual strengths are working together. Understanding the components and learning to manage deficits while maximizing strengths will improve your performance.

THE COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

HARNESSING THE QUALITIES ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

Efficiency

Studying can be likened to a system. Studying requires energy of varying kinds. The more efficiently that energy is used the more sustainable are our intentions. We develop efficiency by making our efforts count, and minimising wasted effort.

Focus

To achieve any outcome we need the capacity to focus our attention without distraction. This involves being able to direct our efforts towards outcomes that we can reasonably achieve. If our focus is diffused or distracted, we will not be able to maintain our efforts towards our outcomes. Some goals can be achieved only by repeated and sustained effort on singular outcomes. Identifying small goals that serve higher goals is one way of improving focus. Having a singular aim gives us an objective that comes to define our efforts, if we know what we are trying to achieve, we will know if we are moving closer or further away from it.

Motivation

Study is sometimes interesting, but often arduous and the rewards can be difficult to anticipate. Channeling our motivation involves having a clear idea of why we are doing what we are doing. If we have a 'why', we will have a 'will' to succeed. When we cannot find the motivation to do something it is usually because we want something else more, learning to find what your true motivations are can be very helpful in managing your energy. Resolving ambivalence – that is- having feelings that conflict with each other can free up your energy for sustained motivation. Most students desire success, but this very desire can interfere with their efforts. To be effective the desire for success needs to be channeled into successful behaviours, with the goal of success being the aim point.

Courage

Without the courage to face the fear of failure we will be unwilling to commit ourselves fully to any goal. If we live in fear of disappointment we may limit our efforts to protect ourselves from the shame of trying our best and falling short. Many students sabotage their efforts by being unwilling to put in their best, hoping instead that their natural ability will carry them through. By finding inner courage, students can become willing to continually challenge their abilities, and thereby improve more rapidly.

Strategy

If we have a fixed goal, and motivation to pursue it, the next step is to develop our strategy. Studying strategically involves identifying strengths and weaknesses and managing them effectively. If we can create a plan and an effective self-correcting routine we will be able to maximise the effectiveness of our efforts.

Tactics

Tactics are the small skills we develop along the way that identify, correct and improve our performance. Small skills such as breathing techniques to maintain focus, posture to maintain attention can make a huge long term improvement. By learning to think tactically we find ways to continually improve.

Learning activity 1

The qualities listed above are not the only ones that can support success. You may possess a particular unique trait or traits that enable your performance. See if you can list three additional qualities below, and outline how they enable success.

Learning activity 2

What does efficient studying look like?

What are some ways that you may be able to make your studying more efficient?

Learning activity 3

What does focused studying look like?

What are some ways that you may be able to make your studying more focused?

Learning activity 4

What do we do when we are highly motivated?

What are some ways that you may have increased your motivation in the past?

Learning activity 5

How does acting with courage relate to setting goals?

What are some ways of finding the courage to face obstacles?

Learning activity 6

What does developing a strategy look like, and how might it relate to study performance?

What are some ways that you may be able to think and act strategically with regard to your education?

Learning activity 7

What are some of the small skills/tactics you could use to improve your study?

ANXIETY BEFORE TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS



How to manage the stress of preparation

Preparation is the key to successful performance. However, it is common for the stress of an upcoming assessment or test to make us feel anxious.

Learning how to redirect feelings of anxiety can give us the ability to give our best performance on the day.

Anxiety before tests and assessments

HOW TO MANAGE THE STRESS OF PREPARATION

Anxiety before tests can occur in the days and hours prior to an expected test. On the positive side the feeling of tension and stress is an indicator that we see the test as important and therefore want to do well.

Unfortunately, if we are unable to manage this feeling of stress, we may try and manage it by avoidance. That is, we try not to think about the test, in the hope that it will go away. We might distract ourselves and even engage in study in areas that are less important. We may even do extra revision of the material, but due to our anxiety we might feel unsure of our knowledge, which can aggravate the anxiety. Left untreated, we might even talk ourselves into feeling like we are going to fail. For some students the anxiety before tests becomes so strong they become physically unwell and cannot sit the test and have to reschedule. Not uncommonly, when they finally sit the test, their confidence is so low they perform poorly. Knowledge requires a degree of presumption, and anxiety naturally pushes us to become doubtful, even of things we feel we know.

If we can identify that we have feelings of anxiety in the days or week before a test we can start to take steps to use this feeling to our advantage. The first step is to re-label the feeling as arousal/motivation; the feeling is really our whole body responding to the challenge presented to us. However, if we do not channel and focus that energy it will lead to restlessness, avoidance, poor sleep and decreased study.

Having re-labeled the feeling as arousal/motivation we can see it as raw energy for action, rather than a threat to our sense of emotional security. By not resisting the feeling we can harness it. We may find that our part of our pre-test anxiety is really a fear of failing. As humans we naturally withdraw from threats that we feel we cannot handle, as such, we psychologically withdraw ourselves from anything which threatens our sense of inner security.

The fear of failure is our fear that we will fall short of where we want to be and will feel shame, disappointment or even humiliation. Pragmatically, we can see that trying to avoid this fear is likely to bring about the very circumstance that will give us this feeling. By avoiding the fear, we avoid studying and then we become more likely to disappoint ourselves. Nevertheless, if we can find the inner resolve to face this fear, we can turn the whole experience into a personal challenge.

Every external test, is also an inner test. By identifying the inner struggle against our tendency to avoid challenges, we can find the willingness to face our self-doubt and confront our fears. When we have found the willingness to face our doubts about our own abilities, we can be honest with ourselves and do the serious work of applying ourselves fully to the test ahead of us. In effect, by making the

www.stillpointpsychology.com.au Study Mastery and Mental Health.
appointments@stillpointpsychology.com.au

situation an opportunity for personal challenge and development we can find the inner willingness to put in our best efforts. We can redefine failure as 'not trying' or 'avoiding', and therefore make success equate to its opposite: trying, and facing.

In the hours and minutes before the test, we are likely to feel the sense of anxiety return, possibly even more strongly. This can destabilise us if it leads us to doubt ourselves and doubt our preparedness. Here again, we want to re-label the feeling as arousal/motivation. The body responds very similarly whether we feel excited or anxious. If our arousal levels are elevated this will help us to focus and maintain our attention during the test. However, if we become too anxious we may become panicked and our ability to focus will deteriorate. The following graph illustrates the relationship between anxiety/stress and performance.



The moments prior to a test can be used to employ a basic breathing technique for managing feelings of anxiety. Ideally, we will be well practiced in this technique prior to the test, but even trying it for the first time will be of help. The technique is simple, breathe in, by pushing your belly button out and slightly downward, hold for a second or two, and then breathe out by relaxing and letting your diaphragm naturally fall back in, pause for a second, and then breathe in again. This style of breathing is naturally relaxing and will allow you to keep your attention on the present and not become concerned about the future. When we feel anxious we often have anxious thoughts, that seem to undermine us further. If they occur, the best strategy is to avoid focusing on the thoughts and maintain the breathing exercise.

Psychologically, we have to be willing to surrender to the moment when it comes to being tested. This means being willing to accept what arises, and being willing to accept our best efforts, even if they do fall short of our ideals. By relinquishing our desire to over-control our performance, we allow our mind to recall the information being tested. The more we try to force ourselves to work harder than we can, or remember what is not coming to mind, the more we block the natural efficiency of our mind. Effective performance involves preparation and commitment, but at the moment of being tested we need to be willing to let our best be what it is.

Recap of important points

- Anxiety is arousal; arousal is energy
- The fear of failure can limit or motivate us, depending on how we respond

- Avoiding what we fear will magnify it; facing what we fear generates courage
- Accepting uncertainty gives us leverage to manage it
- Learning to control our breathing gives us the power to manage our arousal levels
- Preparing for a test and learning to manage anxiety is the key to maximizing performance

Exercises

1. Identify the thoughts and feelings that arise when you think about being tested. What are the first thoughts that come to mind when you feel anxious before a test? For example: what if I do badly, I cannot handle this, I hate tests, etc.

Each time you have one of these negative thoughts and agree with it your anxiety levels will go up and your ability to perform will go down.

Identify some positive self-talk to combat these thoughts. Look for evidence that contradicts negative predictions and catastrophic thinking. For instance, if we fear that we ‘cannot handle this test’, we can identify that we are physically able to handle being in a test situation with a list of questions in front of us; if we are telling ourselves ‘what if fail?’ We can correctly identify that even failing would not be the end of the world, and that all we can reasonably do is prepare and accept the situation. If in doubt, think what you would tell a friend who was having these anxious thoughts.

When you think about being tested what do you feel in your body?

2. Identify your overall level of test anxiety by rating yourself from 1 (not anxious at all) to 10 (extremely anxious).

3. Rate your willingness to face those anxieties from 1 (not willing at all) to 10 (completely willing). Note that facing your anxieties does not mean believing them, but rather your willingness to not let those anxieties control your behaviour.

4. What makes you willing to face your anxieties as much as you do? If you wrote 6/10 as your level of willingness, what makes you six rather than a lower number?

5. What would make you more willing to face to your anxieties?

6. Now ask yourself 'am I willing to accept the potential risks and rewards of studying for tests?' Answer this question as a yes or no.

7. Ask yourself, how willing am I to accept my best performance on the day? Rate your level of acceptance between 1-10, with 1 being totally unwilling to accept my performance, and 10 being complete acceptance of your performance.

Rating:

8. What would make you more willing to accept your level of ability?

9. Looking at your overall attitude and approach to preparing for tests and assessments what do you intend to.....

Change: _____

Sustain: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/relinquish: _____

MANAGING MOTIVATION



Unlocking your motivation for action

Motivation is key to success. Where motivation is strong and directed success in study is sure to follow. Motivation is depleted by being unwilling to commit to goals. Often our motivation is a function of unconscious processes. By becoming self-aware we can unlock our capacity for action.

Managing Motivation

UNLOCKING YOUR MOTIVATION FOR ACTION

Low motivation or conflicted motivation can completely undermine our study plans. The signs of low motivation are well known: procrastination, low effort, distraction, lack of interest and disorganisation.

The experience of study can often be arduous and at times may feel like a waste of time. Therefore, it often takes some external goal to motivate us to commit to our studies. If our reasons for studying are just to 'keep our parents happy', or because we, 'feel we should', then our motivation for study may not be strong enough to maintain our focus.

We are naturally motivated to put our energy into whatever we feel will serve our overall good. Conversely, if we feel that what we are doing is futile, meaningless, or impossible, our motivation will be low. Therefore, rather than just trying to 'push' ourselves to study more, it is far more efficient to find our inner motivation. This can be achieved by seeing how our current study relates to our future goals and desires. If we can see that our current study may be necessary for our overall development we can see it as useful rather than merely obligatory.

We can develop intrinsic motivation for study by finding our inner desire for excellence. If we can find our inner willingness to excel, we will be motivated by whatever challenge is in front of us. Essentially, we can turn any endeavour into a method of developing self-mastery. Every increment of personal development improves our overall ability. Learning how to assimilate information, discover its meaning and significance and display that knowledge through assessment is actually teaching a range of useful self-disciplines.

By learning to focus on new material, our overall ability for clear thinking is improved. By coming to understand the meaning and significance of what we are learning we are coming to understand the world around us in a deeper way. Furthermore, learning to make meaningful connections makes our world more comprehensible. By learning to remember information we are cultivating our ability to assimilate knowledge into ourselves, with this ability we deepen our understanding. By learning to submit to being tested, we are learning the humility to be scrutinised and challenged, and thereby not be deceived as to our actual knowledge and ability. The skills being taught in education may be difficult to obtain in any other circumstance, therefore, there is a unique benefit to education that will create inspiration when it is recognised. When you come to see that the difficulties in education are the very means by which you develop, you can approach them with greater willingness, and eventually even embrace them.

Low motivation is overcome by owning what we are doing, and finding meaning in what we are doing. By understanding the benefits to committing to what we are doing, we will find the motivation automatically. If we instead feel resentful and victimised by the difficulties we face, we will become

averse to studying and when our will-power runs out, we will be unable to study at all. However, the meaning of what one is doing is very personal, and nobody can force you to see it a certain way.

Low motivation can also be a result of holding negative attitudes towards what we are doing. This can particularly be so if there is something else which we feel we would much rather do. Some of the common negative emotions triggered by study can be: shame, anxiety, and depression.

We may feel shame-prone in our studies if we feel we should be getting higher results than we do. This can be compounded if there are high expectations on us from family to be a high-achiever. This fear of shame can manifest as motivation to study harder, but more likely it will result in an unconscious desire to protect ourselves, by not trying our best. After all, it can feel humiliating to try our best and fall short, particularly if others seem to get higher marks with less effort. The humiliation comes from over valuing our abilities before they have been properly developed or consolidated. Any crutch you rely on to bolster your self-esteem will also be a source of anxiety, as we cannot rely on it. Even if we have done well in the past, we cannot rest on our previous achievements. This shame proneness can be reduced by seeing ourselves as a work-in-progress, rather than a final product that needs to be examined for weakness. If one takes the view of being an eternal student (*Ancora Imparo*), one never needs to feel ashamed about results, as one is always committed to learning and improving. By accepting that we can always improve, and that areas of relative weakness are unavoidable, we can become free of the shame-proneness that can interfere with our efforts.

We may feel anxiety as a result of having a fear of being tested. If we examine this fear, we will see that it is because we fear not being 'good enough'. Intrinsically, studying and being tested are benign, in that there is no physical danger. We react to threats via physiological arousal and anticipatory anxiety (worry), even when those threats are not essentially harmful. We are afraid of the feeling of disappointment we may feel in ourselves if we feel that we have fallen short. This fear can occur in students whether they have prepared a little, or a considerable amount. The most robust way to protect against fear of failure, is to detach our feelings of self-worth from our perception of our abilities. If we feel our self-worth as a human being really is dependent on getting high results, our anxiety is quite justified. However, if our self-worth is seen as independent from our results on tests we can engage in the test without fear of feeling invalid.

We may feel depressed by studying if we feel that our efforts will never be good enough. If we believe that our ambitions are hopeless, our efforts to achieve them will be poor. This can be a result of having over-ambitious or premature expectations of ourselves. It is far better to aim to improve rather than to excel, particularly in areas that we are not naturally strong at. Anyone can feel motivated to improve if they are willing to dismiss the idea that they 'should' be a lot better than they are. If we look for evidence that we 'should' be better than we are, we find that it is weak and circumstantial. It is often a disguised way of saying that we 'should' be better because we want to be, which is not a mature perspective. Reality is immune to our emotional demands. If we are willing to take the time and attention to develop we can grow. If we assume we are already fully developed we will find education a continual threat to our self-ascribed feelings of superiority. It is worth noting that the more we come to know, the more we become aware of what we do not know, and perhaps even cannot know, this is the beginning of the sense of wonderment, which creates a thirst for knowledge and a hunger for education.

Some students are quick to judge themselves harshly, as 'not smart', or 'not good at maths'. These beliefs reflect that the student has become discouraged about the subject; however, they are also highly limiting self-concepts that will impede the ability to commit to improving. Never give up on yourself, each difficulty is actually the invitation to improvement.

Recap of important points:

- Low motivation is often conflicted motivation (wanting different things simultaneously)
- Not knowing why you are doing something makes it harder to persevere when challenged
- Fearing failure will deplete your motivation
- Owning what you are doing creates a powerful motivation when other rewards are absent
- Any task is an opportunity for developing mastery
- Resting on your self-concept as a smart person will deplete your willingness to learn and be challenged
- Thinking of yourself as 'not as smart person' is a limiting self-concept
- There is always far more that you do not know than you do know, so stay humble
- Aim for improvement before expecting success

Exercise 1

1. Say to yourself, either aloud, mentally or written below, the reasons why you are studying.

2. Now, say to yourself what are your reasons for wanting to do well in your area of study?

When expressing your reasons for studying and your reasons for wanting to do well, how strongly did you feel it? Rate the feeling from 1-10, with ten feeling completely committed and one feeling not committed at all.

Rating: _____

3. Go back over your reasons again now, and see if you can feel any inner resistance to those reasons, that is the part of you that does not feel completely committed to what you are doing.

It is normal to have some doubts about what you are setting out to achieve. Often, these doubts will lead us to aim small, or not at all, this may limit our willingness to commit to what we really want. Doubts will have the power to deplete your energy and motivation. The three main areas of doubts are hopelessness, meaninglessness and helplessness.

www.stillpointpsychology.com.au Study Mastery and Mental Health.
appointments@stillpointpsychology.com.au

Hopelessness manifests in thoughts that makes us think that we are unable to achieve what we set out to achieve, and therefore, if we succumb to these doubts our motivation deteriorates.

Meaninglessness manifests in thoughts that what we are doing serves no useful purpose, and is therefore wasted effort, if we succumb to these thoughts we might do our work, but only to a passable level, as we see no intrinsic or extrinsic value in it. What we do not value we will not make any substantial effort or sacrifice for.

Helplessness manifests in thoughts that we cannot improve or be helped to get better, if we succumb to feelings of helplessness we won't seek out advice or support, nor will we feel that we can work on ourselves to improve. Learned helplessness is the habit of never putting in enough effort to get a result, strangely some students will unconsciously reduce their efforts when they come close to possibly achieving their goals.

4. Can you identify the inner resistance you might have for not being fully committed? It can be helpful to identify reasons why you do not feel committed. Reasons might include, that you feel there is no point to studying, or that the material is boring, or that you feel you won't be able to do well at it. Write your reasons for not feeling committed below.

5. Having allowed yourself to identify the reasons why you feel as motivated as you do, ask yourself what you are willing to commit to. Finding your commitment does not mean that any mixed feelings of resistance will go away, but by formally choosing your intention, you can consolidate your motivation.

6. Another step towards consolidating your motivation is to ask yourself how much you are willing to 'own your work', this means to what extent are you willing to put yourself into your work. Rate your willingness to own your own work below, rating yourself between 1 (not willing) to 10 (very willing) to invest yourself into what you are doing.

7. Each task you undertake can be seen to have two levels of significance. Firstly, there is what one is doing, such as an assignment which is a requirement for a course. Secondly, there is the level of mastery that the task can lead you to develop. Work that is undertaken without a sense of challenge will be experienced as boring and meaningless. You can find additional meaning in any task by making it an exercise in developing mastery/improvement. Even relatively mundane tasks can call on us to develop and practice the tools of mastery. Once developed the tools of mastery become self-mastery.

Write below what skills of mastery your current study demands of you. Examples might include: commitment, focus, organisation, self-discipline.

8 . Now review your earlier reasons for studying and your level of commitment towards what you are doing. Write out any additional reasons you now have for studying, and your level of commitment (X/10).

Reasons: _____

Commitment: _____

9. If you find that you have no additional reasons for studying or any greater level of commitment, you can review the reasons for your resistance and doubts in question four. It may be that the doubts and resistance you feel in relation to your study will need more time for contemplation, and may call on you to reassess your priorities. Becoming aware of doubts can itself temporarily increase our levels of anxiety, nevertheless, by being aware of the ways in which our motivation is conflicted is the first step towards resolving that conflict. Any inner conflict will deplete your ability to focus and commit. Below, write down the concerns and doubts you have that you feel you need to give more time to.

In exploring your motivation you may come to a point of being able to identify some new approaches. In relation to managing your motivation.....

Change: _____

Sustain: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish _____

ORGANISATION



Learning how to manage time effectively

Students who learn to manage time have less stress, higher results and greater enjoyment of their education. Although time is limited, we can maximize how we use it, reduce distractions and focus our efforts. When we manage time, we will have time for recreation and socialising

Organisation

LEARNING HOW TO MANAGE TIME EFFECTIVELY

Being disorganised can seriously limit our effectiveness as a student. It can result in wasted effort, lateness, forgetfulness and unnecessary stress. There are two related but separate components to disorganisation: the ability to organise, and the focus or motivation to channel our efforts. It is important to address both components to improve organisation.

Part of our disorganisation can be a lack of focus on what we are doing, whereby we are easily distracted and struggle to focus our efforts on the study that we are doing. This lack of focus can be seen as a result of our motivation. If we are not strongly motivated we will not be able to focus attentively on what we are trying to learn. If we have competing demands on our attention, such as external stressors (work, relationships, health, family situation) then our focus will be diminished.

One thing at a time

Students often feel pressure to manage multiple competing demands on their attention. This overwhelm of demands creates the feeling of stress and can affect mental health. It is important to note that no matter how busy we are, and how many demands are on us, we can only do one thing at a time in practice. Awareness that there is only ever one thing that can be done at a time can create a degree of mental space whereby we can focus effectively on what is to be done. If we learn to identify the demands on us and organize how they can be managed we can become singular in our focus and do one thing that requires our attention. Research demonstrates that focusing on one thing at a time with discipline reduces anxiety and improves performance.

To improve our motivation we need to have a strong reason for why we are doing what we are doing. The more we can 'own' what we are doing and see purpose in it, the more time we will willingly devote to it. Techniques for improving motivation are addressed in the previous chapter

Managing distractions

To deal with distractions we need to understand and address the concerns that are distracting our attention. Often, the distractions will not be important things, but rather things we would rather be doing. By being organised we will be able to make time to do those things, but we will undermine our motivation if we allow ourselves to engage in the pleasurable pursuits before we study. For more serious concerns that do require our attention (family concerns, financial concerns, relationships, etc) we need to outline what the issue is, and what attention we can reasonably give to it. By outlining the issue we can decide what action if any is required from us and then plan accordingly. If we do not listen to our concerns regarding important matters we may waste substantial mental thought without even coming to any effective actions. We become more efficient by understanding what things we can influence and what things we cannot, and thereby avoid wasting effort trying to change circumstances beyond our control. If we can reconcile ourselves to what we can and cannot do, we will avoid wasting effort on rumination, worry and attempts to control what is uncontrollable.

Time management

The skill of organisation involves learning how to anticipate, plan and maintain our focus. The most effective way is to segment our available time and allocate appropriately the study to be completed. Students often make the mistake of trying to study too much in the days coming up to major tests and assignments, this behavior is called 'cramming'. Learning how to organise and creating those habits is something that is best achieved prior to the more stressful periods of study. Another common error is to be unrealistic about how long one is actually capable of studying for. Studying is closer to a marathon event than a sprint. Effective organisation includes the factors of sustainability and reward. Humans are naturally motivated by pleasure and willpower will be found to be a poor substitute for rewards when it comes to maintaining focus. By factoring in rewarding activities into the end of our study periods we will maintain our focus. Also, by including planned breaks we can allow the material we have learned or revised to integrate more effectively. Periods of exercise are actually effective means of maintaining mental alertness.

In addition to the above, humans are generally naturally more adept at mental activity in the morning and again in the early evening. These are natural times whereby our capacity for study is at its highest. In contrast, the period following lunch until the mid afternoon, is characteristically our least attentive time for study. To deal with this, a study schedule would allocate the more challenging subjects to the morning, and revision to the evenings. Study undertaken during the afternoon can be broken up into smaller periods of around 30 minutes, with activity breaks included to maintain attention and reduce lethargy.

Handy hints

When managing due dates and exam preparation, one simple technique to use is to plan for all your assessments and tests as if the due date was one or two days prior to the actual date. By doing this you will reduce your stress about the impending date as you know that you have planned with one or more days to spare. It can take some discipline and practice to do this but the benefits outweigh the costs.

Many students allow the due dates for work to guide their study. Unfortunately, students often find that due dates for different subjects can occur close to the same time, this can lead to a high degree of stress as the work demands become overwhelming. By creating a work routine that proactively approaches the work to be done this can be somewhat avoided. The difference here is that rather than studying for when assessments are due, instead you approach your study more like a job, whereby you commit to working for a certain time, and then do what is most urgent.

Recap of important points

- Organisation is a function of motivation, focus, and planning
- Clarifying our motivation for studying will improve our ability to focus
- Distractions are inevitable, but can be managed by identifying and planning
- Using rewards as motivation will improve focus and motivation
- Rewards need to come at the end of periods of effort
- Creating a weekly planner with study periods, rewards and rest periods improves sustainable study

- Learning to do one-thing-at-a-time improves concentration and reduces stress

Exercise 1:

A. What are the three main reasons I have for giving my time to this study?

B. What skills and disciplines will I be developing if I apply myself fully to this study?

C. What is an enjoyable activity I will be able to engage in if I plan my time well?

D. What are three major distractions that are making it hard to focus on study?

i. What can I do about the first distraction? And, what do I have to accept is beyond my control about this?

ii. What can I do about the second distraction? And, what do I have to accept is beyond my control about this?

iii. What can I do about the third distraction? And, what do I have to accept is beyond my control about this?

Organisation

2. What is one way I could reward myself after a long period of study?

Regarding organization what do you want to.....

Change: _____

Sustain: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/relinquish: _____

MANAGING ANXIETY DURING TESTS



How to reduce anxiety during tests to improve your performance

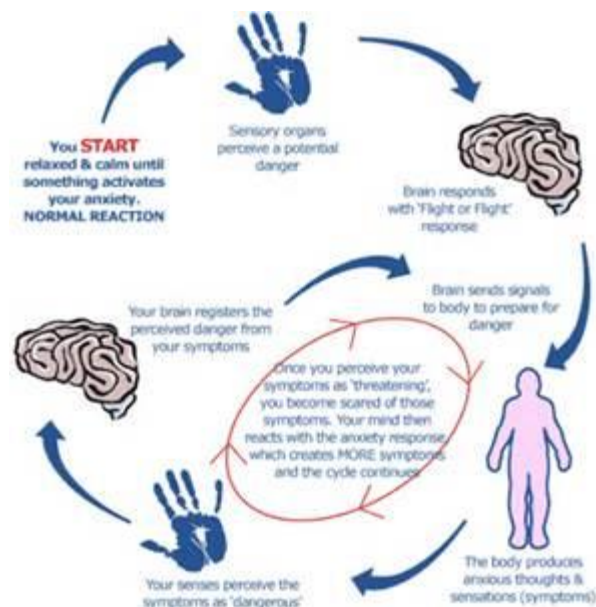
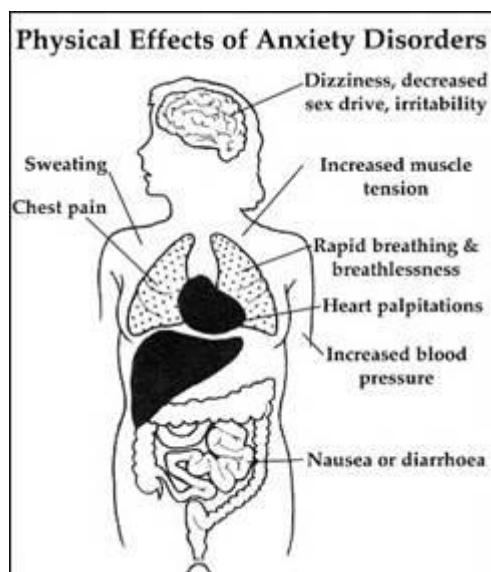
A test is meant to be a test of what you know about a subject, but unavoidably it is also a test of your ability to be tested. Many students feel that they do not perform well in tests due to anxiety. Nervousness, anxiety and discomfort can greatly reduce your test performance.

Managing Anxiety during tests

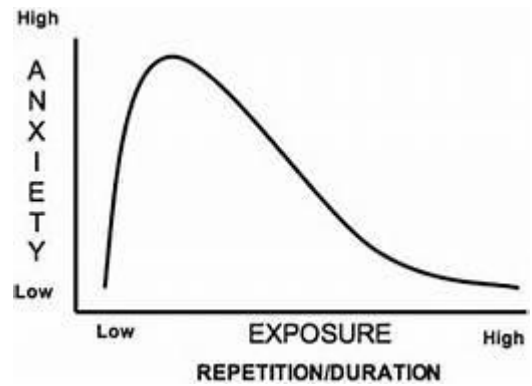
HOW TO REDUCE ANXIETY DURING TESTS TO IMPROVE YOUR PERFORMANCE

Aside from preparation, the second most important factor in performance is the ability to deal with the anxiety of being tested. Students who feel well prepared and have practiced being tested will generally be able to perform without significant anxiety. However, sometimes, it is the very mindset of preparation that can lead to performance anxiety. By trying very hard to do well, we can set up the fear of the opposite (doing badly). If we fear doing badly, we will be sensitive to anything which might upset our performance. As we approach a major test we may sense the feeling of anxiety in our body, and this may set our thoughts racing. As we desperately want to do well we fear these thoughts and feelings are an indicator that we are going to do badly. We might try to suppress these feelings, but that makes them worse. We might even feel like we are about to lose control. This sequence of events can then actually lead to the very thing we feared.

Anxiety during tests can be debilitating as it can make it difficult or impossible to express our knowledge in a test situation. If we have experienced it in the past we are more likely to experience it in the future, and it can even develop into having panic attacks. When we are highly anxious our body responds as if we are threatened. This leads to an activation of the body's stress response. A consequence of this is that our perception may narrow and it can become very difficult to understand the questions (so we respond ineffectively); or, if more severe, our perception can become vague and cloudy and it can become impossible to even read properly, let alone recall effectively from memory.



Anxiety can lead to panic when we sense ourselves losing control and then try frantically to regain it. Anxiety becomes panic when we try to suppress our anxiety. Anxiety can also be triggered by our own sense of arousal during a test. As we are highly motivated to do well our stress response is activated, however this response can make us feel overly nervous, which can trigger doubts about how prepared we are. We may fear that we are going to 'choke' on the test as we feel so nervous and uncomfortable that we cannot focus and therefore doubt our ability to perform. Unfortunately, these doubts coupled with our high levels of arousal (high pulse, rapid breathing, sweaty palms) can become self-fulfilling, as our doubts trigger our arousal, and the feelings of arousal trigger more doubts.



As the diagrams above show, anxiety occurs when an event triggers the activation of our fight/flight response. It is also worth noting that sometimes the body will even go into 'freeze' mode, making us almost incapable of any effective action. As we sense this arousal in our body, our mind interprets these sensations as evidence of danger or threat. This perception of threat then leads to further activation and sustainment of the fight/flight response. As this cycle repeats it tends to become aggravated, so that it repeats more rapidly and becomes more intense. This can lead to panic attacks.

Overcoming test anxiety is similar to facing other fears. By exposing ourselves to the feared situation we can learn to manage and eventually overcome our feelings. This is because fear is essentially about anticipating a catastrophe, if we are willing to sit through the feelings, even when they are intense, we notice that the catastrophe does not happen, and gradually the feelings subside. If we avoid the situation that triggers our anxiety we will come to believe more strongly that the situation really was very threatening and the only response open to us to run from it. This explains how anxiety can get worse if we do not know how to face our fears. The diagram above shows an anxiety reduction curve through exposure. By repeated exposures to the feared situation, allowing each time for the feelings of anxiety to subside before leaving the situation, gradually the fear reduces. When dealing with anxiety it is worth remembering that anxiety is always about what is not happening, but is feared to happen. As such, it is always safest to face the sensations of fear. Anxiety disorders develop when the activation of the fear-response becomes decoupled from real danger, and is triggered by thoughts about danger.

As anxiety is triggering arousal, and arousal is reinforcing the anxiety, we need a way to break the cycle. The easiest technique is to learn mindful breathing. Once the breathing technique is learned, students can practice completing practice tests in simulated timed conditions that mimic a real test. By learning how to manage arousal in the simulated tests, the skills can be transferred to real tests. Completing practice tests also helps to break the learned pattern of anxiety in real tests.

In conjunction with the learned breathing technique which will be outlined below, the student learns to hold their attention on their breathing rather than following their thoughts. In situations where we feel nervousness, invariably our thinking will be of an anxious quality. Learning to dismiss our thoughts

when they are unhelpful is a useful skill, as it allows us to fix our attention on our intended goals without distraction.

The feeling of anxiety is intensified by our desire to get rid of it, which is why our thoughts will tend towards escape (avoidant coping), or predicting catastrophe (prescient coping). Rather than arguing with our thoughts, we can just accept that the mind will always try and avoid anything unpleasant, and then ignore it. By being mindful of using our breathing technique we are naturally ignoring our thinking, and simultaneously reducing the level of arousal we experience. All feelings pass away in time. It is worth remembering this if we are experiencing overwhelm.

Recap of important points:

- Test anxiety is a learned response, and can be unlearned
- Learning to breathe deeply, slowly and mindfully can lower our levels of arousal
- When we learn to ignore anxious thoughts we can manage our symptoms
- Practicing being tested helps to unlearn our pattern of anxiety
- All feelings pass away
- Anxiety is always about what is not happening
- Anxiety disorders arise when thoughts about threats become triggers for fight/flight
- Performance anxiety robs you of the results you deserve

1. Learning mindful breathing is the first step towards dealing with test anxiety. The technique can be learned simply by following the directions below:

- A. Sit comfortably, and place one hand on your navel (belly button area)
- B. Start breathing by pushing your lower abdomen against your hand as you breathe in, breath out by letting the abdomen fall back inward
- C. Practice breathing this way and notice that your rate of breathing tends to slow down
- D. Continue breathing this way, but try breathing a little deeper, holding a little longer and leaving a small pause at the end of the outbreath
- E. If you notice yourself becoming distracted, return to the sensation of your hand being pushed out by your abdomen as you breathe in.
- F. As you breathe out see if you can allow your diaphragm to fall in a little further, expelling even more air from your lungs.

2. Having learned how to breathe deeply, it is now time to attempt practice tests, using the technique to remain calm. Make your practice test scenarios as realistic as possible, by making them timed, have someone else prepare the questions for you and maintain test conditions as much as possible. Now that you are familiar with the feeling of breathing deeply you will not need to keep your hand on your abdomen.

Managing Anxiety during tests

3. On the day of the test prepare yourself for the test by starting your breathing technique as early as possible and continue it throughout the test. During the test, try and retain a calm breathing technique, but do not unnecessarily distract yourself from the test to do so; if doubts and fears arise, return to the breathing technique and allow your mind to remain focused on the test.

In relation to managing test anxiety what do you plan to.....

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/relinquish _____

*For persistent performance anxiety it may be necessary to access professional help

MANAGING STRESS



How to identify and manage your stress levels

Important things, worth doing are generally hard. Committing yourself to any long term endeavour is likely to place demands upon you that are experienced as stress. Stress can be acute (an immediate crisis), or chronic (a long running problem). Finding the points of leverage can reduce stress.

Managing stress

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND MANAGE YOUR STRESS LEVELS

Any circumstance which imposes a demand, expectation or restriction on us can be considered a stressor. Taken as a definition, it would seem that undergoing an education is therefore innately stressful. However, stress is not necessarily a negative, in fact, a degree of stress actually motivates us to perform.

Studies on stress show that there is an optimal level of stress for peak performance, and, an optimal level for sustained performance. If we are not challenged we will not have much motivation or focus for what we are doing. If we are overwhelmed we will not be able to perform as we lose focus and may become unwell.

When we are highly stressed we can lose awareness of just how stressed we are, taken to extremes this can lead to burnout and a complete breakdown of our ability to function. When we are under stress our body copes by releasing stress hormones, such as cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine, taken together these actually have a numbing effect on us, so we don't feel the strain. This is a temporary adaption to a stressor, but when it becomes a constant state of arousal we risk burnout.

Burnout can be described as a state of complete emotional exhaustion whereby we lose our capacity to make ourselves do the things required of us. Lower levels of burnout result in a drop off of our motivation to put forward effort, and a lack of energy to persevere.

In managing stress, the first step is learning to identify our current level. The following questions can help to improve your awareness.

1. I would describe the level of stress I feel in relation to meeting deadlines/due dates as:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

2. I would describe the current amount of material I have to learn as:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- E. Comfortable
- F. Motivating/energising

3. When I think about my future the level of stress I feel is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

4. When I think about the choices facing me in life my level of stress is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

5. When I think about preparing for tests, the level of stress I feel is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

6. When I think about how important it is to my family that I do well, the level of stress I feel is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

7. When I think about the pressure I put on myself to do well, the level of stress I feel is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable
- E. Motivating/energising

8. When I think about all the things I have to deal with in life at the moment, the level of stress I feel is:

- A. Distressing
- B. Uncomfortable
- C. Acceptable
- D. Comfortable

E. Motivating/energising

If you are answering with lots of As then the risk of burnout is substantial, and would suggest the need to make some major changes, if possible. If you are answering with a large number of Bs then your capacity to sustain your efforts at the current level is likely to diminish over time, and this could make you more distressed as your energy to study falls just as the demands escalate in the semester/term. If you are answering with mostly Cs then you are coping adequately, but it suggests there is still some level of fatigue and stress to be dealt with. If you are answering with mostly Ds and Es then you are probably feeling good about your studies and this is likely to transfer into desirable results.

Internal stress

Stressors exist in the environment, but also exist internally. We often call internal stress 'putting pressure' on one's self. This can be motivating, but it can become unrealistic, unhelpful and distracting as well. The expectations we place on our selves become optimum when they are:

- Within reach – not unrealistic but play to our strengths and abilities
- Meaningful – relates to values of personal significance
- Challenging – compels us to leave our comfort zone to improve our abilities
- Measurable – the goal can be recognized and our approach to it identified
- Specific - it is something that we can describe

An example of a stressful way of putting demands on ourselves would be to demand 100% perfection from ourselves all the time. Not only is this not obtainable, it is difficult to measure and is not specific. Demanding this from ourselves would lead to a high degree of stress and probably mental health problems. A far more functional way of motivating ourselves would be to pick specific goals that are reasonable given our background, ability and experience and push ourselves towards them.

External stress

In dealing with stress we can seek to find the path of least resistance. We compound our stress levels when we waste effort trying to do what we cannot do, and avoid doing what we can do to help ourselves. Identifying how to respond is pivotal in reducing the level of stress we feel. By looking at each area in turn, we can increase our awareness of the options we may have, and thereby respond appropriately. If we look at the cause of stress, we will see that it is a demand that is made upon us, if we can reframe that demand or recontextualise it, we may be able to eliminate or reduce it.

In the area of stress we can effectively employ the questions relating to 'sustain, accept, change and let go'. By examining our points of leverage we gain greater mastery of the situation. A core features of stress includes a feelings of helplessness, therefore, becoming aware of what we can do to improve the situation gives us points of leverage.

Looking again at all the main areas of stress, answer the 'sustain, accept, change and let go' questions. If you are struggling with what to write, look at the worked examples to prompt you, then think of your own answers.

Regarding coping with meeting deadlines/due dates:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish _____

Regarding coping with the current amount of material I have to learn:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding thinking about my future:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding facing the choices in my life right now:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding preparing for tests:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding the pressure from my family to do well:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding the pressure I put on my self to do well:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Managing stress

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

Regarding the overall demands on me in life at the moment:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

***** Worked examples*****

Regarding coping with meeting deadlines/due dates:

Maintain: maintain schedule

Change: write out reminders

Accept: meeting deadlines takes effort

Let go/relinquish: that I find this easy

Regarding coping with the current amount of material I have to learn:

Maintain: homework schedule

Change: Find two extra study periods a week

Accept: I can only do my best

Let go/relinquish: my expectation that I get everything 100% right

Regarding thinking about my future:

Maintain: plan to study psychology

Change: be less pessimistic; be more flexible

Accept: the unknown

Let go/relinquish: my need for certainty

Regarding facing the choices in my life right now:

Maintain: school focus

Change: during exams, reduce part time work

Accept: responsibility for choices

Let go/relinquish: needing to feel 100% in control

Regarding preparing for tests:

Maintain: revision schedule

Change: practice breathing exercises, do practice tests

Accept: being tested is challenging, but I can face it

Let go/relinquish: my desire for comfort during exam time; my desire to find exams easy

Regarding the pressure from my family to do well:

Maintain: do my best

Change: ask for encouragement; tell them how criticism stresses me; ask them to trust me

Accept: I cannot control other people's expectations of me

Let go/relinquish: my fear of disappointing them

Regarding the pressure I put on my self to do well:

Maintain: desire to do well

Change: focus on process rather than outcomes

Accept: I cannot always meet my expectations

Let go/relinquish: defining myself by my grades

Regarding the overall demands on me in life at the moment:

Maintain: stay focused on education

Change: socialise less during exams

Accept: I can only rely on my best judgment at the time

Let go/relinquish: my demand for perfection

*****end of worked examples*****

DEALING WITH SETBACKS



How to manage difficulties without resistance

Everybody who challenges themselves will face setbacks. Learning how to use the energy of disappointment to motivate ourselves helps us to avoid self-pity and avoidance. Learning how to bend and flex rather than break is a skill that can be taught, but the key is self-awareness and courage.

Dealing with setbacks

HOW TO MANAGE DIFFICULTIES WITHOUT RESISTANCE

Education and studying is often an arduous and demanding process. Disappointments along the way are to be expected. How we deal with those disappointments is crucial to how we will be able to bounce back. Many students learn to try, but become discouraged when results do not materialize as expected, leading to low morale and withdrawal of effort.

It is often said that life is a learning process, however, we may not necessarily learn the most helpful lessons from setbacks. One response to a setback could be to learn not to try in the future and avoid disappointment. Or it could be to lower our expectations of ourselves, and thereby reduce our willingness to pursue our ambitions.

What we learn from our experiences will be strongly impacted by how we deal with the emotions that are triggered. If we are unable to fully process out and release the emotions we will end up becoming fearful of them, which will necessarily lead to avoiding circumstances that may trigger them. This response to setbacks helps to explain how some people become discouraged whereas others are able to use the emotions of disappointment, regret and anxiety to motivate themselves.

We can learn to use our emotions to motivate us when we learn how to be with what we are experiencing without resistance, that is, by accepting our feelings without judgment. However, before we examine how to deal with resistance, we are going to explore the ways we may have responded to strong emotions in the past.

Exercise 1.

A. Think of a time when you put forward effort and the result was not what you wanted. You may have felt a range of emotions, try and list the emotions you felt:

B. Now list how you reacted to those emotions, that is, what did you do, or not do? Write down the behaviours that resulted from those emotions:

C. Looking at the emotions you reported and the resulting behaviours, write down what you think was helpful about that reaction, and what you think was unhelpful about that reaction?

Helpful: _____

Unhelpful: _____

The way we hold our emotions significantly impacts how well we can face setbacks. The following is a description of the various ways in which emotions can be held:

Expression: this is our in-built way of managing emotions. Infants and small children will display their emotions openly without resistance. Expression includes: laughing, crying, smiling, frowning, talking openly, and doing what feels immediately desirable. The emotion is expressed fully when we act out, talk out or physically emote out what we are feeling inside. We are expressing our feelings when we do what we feel like.

Example: failing a test and crying about how disappointed you feel

Pros: releases the feeling relatively quickly and involves emotional self honesty

Cons: can make us fearful of facing the feeling again, as we felt overwhelmed by it, and we may feel embarrassed.

Suppression: this occurs when we sense an emotion, but rather than expressing it or feeling it fully, we push it out of the focus of our awareness. Children learn to do this when they become toilet trained, they learn to not act out the desire to defecate or urinate, but hold it until they are in the bathroom. Through childhood we learn to suppress the expression of our emotions/inner feelings so that they fit with the expectations of others. We are suppressing our emotions when we are aware of what we feel, but then either distract ourselves from the feeling, ignore it, and don't do what we feel like doing

Example: failing a test, feeling initially disappointed, and distracting one's self by playing online games for 5 hours

Pros: allows for short term functionality, and is a form of coping

Cons: does not process the feeling effectively, and may involve ignoring the significance of what has happened.

Repression: this occurs when we suppress a feeling for so long that we are no longer aware of having it. We may feel stressed, fatigued, up-tight, depressed, but are unable to recognise what we are feeling within. This occurs because we are using our emotional energy to hold the feelings out of

awareness, and so the strongest feeling we become aware of is simply the feeling of holding itself. We are repressing our feelings when we are deeply troubled by something that has happened, but instead we do our best to act as if it did not happen. If this happens over a sustained period we are likely to become depressed. If an emotion is too powerful for us to face, we are likely to repress it.

Example: failing a test, playing online games for five hours, then avoiding doing study as it generates anxiety. Gradually, a feeling of depression about studying emerges and going to school is boring
 Pros: keeps the sense of anxiety and disappointment out of awareness
 Cons: leads to a stunting of emotional growth, reduces motivation, leads to depressive symptoms, reduces long term adaptation to emotional distress.

Projection/Blame: this occurs when we project onto something or somebody else responsibility for what we are feeling. Essentially, we blame others for our emotional state, and ignore the importance of our own inner attitude to what has occurred. We use this method of handling emotions when we feel too guilty or powerless to face the inner feeling. This method of handling emotions can be seen as a way of transforming hurt/fear/disappointment into anger, which feels more powerful.

Example: we fail a test and blame the teacher for not teaching us better; the other students for distracting us; our family for interrupting our study.
 Pros: temporarily avoids feelings of guilt or shame
 Cons: denies personal agency and responsibility to manage the situation; leads to stunting of emotional growth and creates conflicts with others.

Denial: this is the emotional response that is most obvious to others but most unacceptable to ourselves. We are in denial when we refuse to acknowledge the feeling that we have. Denial takes considerable emotional energy to maintain, and the longer we enact this defense against our feelings, the more rigid and potentially volatile we become if the emotional energy becomes too strong to deny.

Example: failing a test, but refusing to acknowledge it, or the implications of failing; lies to others about it to maintain the façade of 'being fine'.
 Pros: protects the ego from damage in the short term
 Cons: is unsustainable, and accentuates our fear and avoidance behaviour.

Sublimation: this occurs when we have some awareness of a strong feeling, but instead of allowing ourselves to feel it fully, we engage in some activity that channels away some of the intensity of that feeling. As an example, we are sublimating when we feel intensely angry at someone we love, but then channel that anger a very punishing gym/exercise session. Any emotion that we feel is unacceptable to have, be it anger, fear, sexual excitement, regret or shame, may end up being sublimated. The downside of sublimation is that it does not enable us to deal with the emotion itself, and we may be in denial about it. Helpful sublimation occurs when we deal with an unacceptable feeling by channeling our efforts towards something worthwhile. For example, someone who feels unworthy, may sublimate that feeling into a drive to become a doctor or another prestigious profession.

Example: failing a test, feeling ashamed about it, then channeling effort into a subject that you feel good at.

Pros: channeling the feeling can lift mood, and may displace feelings that are temporarily unacceptable

Cons: does not address the actual feeling and does not result in functional adaptation to difficulties

Rationalisation: this occurs when we think about a problem, but ignore the feeling that comes with it. We rationalise when we detach ourselves from the feeling by thinking about the circumstance, without acknowledging its emotional implications and significance to us.

Example: failing a test, and then talking about it in a very matter-of-fact way which ignores how disappointed you feel about it.

Pros: prevents us feeling overwhelmed by feelings we cannot handle

Cons: prevents us from facing what we truly afraid of, which is the feelings themselves

Release: this occurs when the emotion is allowed to be felt without resistance. This can occur as a feeling in the body as if a tightening sensation was now being released. We release a feeling when we give ourselves complete permission to feel what we are feeling without judgment. That is, we feel our feeling without having to necessarily explain it or think about it. Animals are adept at releasing their emotions automatically, and do so without thought. When we feel the courage to face up to our inner feelings they may surge through us and in the moment it may feel very intense, however, being totally open to the feeling allows it to pass through us, and frees up our emotional energy.

Example: failing a test, and then feeling disappointed, allowing the feeling to come up. The feeling gradually becomes more like anxiety, this is allowed to be fully experienced. The anxiety gradually becomes more like a desire to do better. The desire to do better is fully felt, and is gradually replaced by a feeling of expecting ones-self to do better next time. That feeling is gradually replaced by a feeling of knowing that one can prepare better and that tests are nothing to be afraid of.

Pros: enables use of the emotional energy for adaptive purposes

Cons: can involve patience, focus and a willingness to face inner difficulties.

Exercise 2.

Try and identify which style of holding emotions you use when dealing with disappointments and setbacks.

To simplify the understanding of emotions, it can be argued that with every feeling we either: hold, act on, or release it. Sometimes, we will do all three, initially holding it (repressing, suppressing, denying), then acting on it (expressing, sublimating), and then finally letting it go (releasing). With emotions that are intense, unexpected or difficult to identify, we may find ourselves feeling the need to hold onto the feeling to avoid being overwhelmed. Nevertheless, the greater our openness to make space for the feeling, the faster it will arise and subside on its own. Emotions tend to persist to the extent that they are resisted. No feeling that is felt fully can last forever, and may pass surprisingly

quickly. With greater awareness of how to deal with emotional states, there comes ever greater fearlessness and a willingness to embrace challenges.

Below is a brief outline of the 'emergency emotions', that is the emotional states that accompany stressful situations. If the emotions are not handled as they arise, they can lead down to more negative and restricted states. If we allow ourselves to feel the feeling without judgment the feeling will tend to release and may change form to a less restricted emotional state. You can identify the quality of the feeling by the thoughts that accompany it.

Emergency emotions and cognitions:

Pride – I am better than these results; I deserve better than this

Anger – I should do better than this; they should have marked me higher

Want – I really want to feel more successful

Fear – if I can't pass a test I'm going to be a failure

Grief – why does this happen to me?

Apathy – there is no point trying

Guilt – I shouldn't have done what I did

Shame – I'm such a failure

Destruction – I feel like hurting/killing myself

Positive/adaptive emotional states:

Courage – I can do better than this and I will do my best

Neutrality – these results are not the end of the world, I can do better next time

Willingness – I will put more effort in next time

Acceptance – I accept that I need to work harder, it will make me a better student

Reason – I know how I will do it differently next time

Inspiration – I believe in the value of what I am learning, I am going to give this the time it deserves

The main reason we hold onto emotional states rather than releasing them is that we feel threatened by them. We can become fearful of our own feelings, which makes us defensive and reduces our vitality. Intense and threatening feelings trigger our own defenses in the form of resistance to the feeling, that is, we attempt to avoid feeling what we are feeling.

We may attempt to avoid feelings by telling ourselves that 'we shouldn't have to feel this way', even when we do. We might tell ourselves that we 'can't face feeling this way', even when we are feeling this way. Or, we might tell ourselves that there is no point facing up to our emotional state, so we may as well block it, even though blocking it actually keeps it blocked up inside us. Over a stressful semester of study we might accumulate a lot of unprocessed emotions. Not uncommonly, a feeling of exhaustion and low motivation occurs after a period of high stress, feelings of low mood can also occur. This can be seen as our natural response to recovering from holding emotional stress. Therefore, learning how to 'digest' emotions as they occur will free us up to cope more effectively, and be less fatigued after semester/term ends.

Exercise 3.

Learning how to let go of emotional states is a skill that can be used in any area of life that challenges us.

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, and think of a situation in life, about which you still feel some emotional reaction to, when you think about it, put your focus on what you can feel in your body. You may feel your pulse increase, or feel flushed, you may feel your fists tighten or shoulders tense up. Whatever reaction you can feel in your body, just keep your attention on it, noticing it, and not resisting it. You may feel judgments coming into your mind, which relate to how you are perceiving what happened, see if you can look past those thoughts, and maintain your attention on your inner emotional feeling state. If you feel an upsurge of feeling, rather than resisting it, see if you can keep your attention on it. After you complete the exercise, ask yourself if you noticed how the inner state changed as you kept your attention on what you were feeling. What you were experiencing was the unlocking of the holding of the emotional tension. By resting your awareness on the feelings you are giving yourself permission to feel them, which is the same process as releasing them. When releasing it is important to avoid being drawn into thinking 'about' the feeling, as this is actually a form of resistance. Not uncommonly people will feel a greater degree of inner turmoil than they were expecting, if this happens it is wise not to be self-critical about this. However, it probably indicates that we are carrying a lot of suppressed and repressed feelings, that will need to be released at some point.

Powerful emotional states that are not released can build up and can result in: tension, fatigue, muscle stiffness, gastrointestinal upsets, headaches and impaired immune function. Recreation that allows us to do what 'we feel like' is another useful way of releasing suppressed emotion.

In the area of dealing with setbacks and difficult emotions:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/Relinquish: _____

SELF CARE



Learning how to look after yourself

Maintaining your own psychological, physical and emotional health is the greatest gift you can give yourself. Learning how to care for yourself is not being selfish, but is enabling you to stay healthy and contribute yourself to whatever is meaningful for you.

Self care

LEARNING HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Learning to look after ourselves is one of the most important life lessons. Looking after ourselves is not an indulgence, but is the most effective way of maintaining our performance.

As a whole person we exist on inter-related levels of being. We have a physical body, a mental life, an inter-relational life, and an emotional life. If we experience too much stress on any level of being we will suffer on all the other levels as well. Therefore, it is important not to neglect any level. Managing these different levels becomes a challenge when we are under pressure, however, it is when we are under pressure that we are most dependent on all the levels functioning well together. We break at our weakest spot. Knowing what needs repair can prevent this.

Self-care on the physical level

Sleep is essential for emotional health and for effective learning. Poor sleep may be a symptom of stress or low mood. If we are unable to get to sleep, we may be suffering from anxiety. If we cannot get up without feeling very tired and lethargic, we may be experiencing depressed mood. If we find ourselves regularly waking before our alarm we may be experiencing stress. We may also be experiencing a combination of these.

We sleep most restfully when we can relax before going to bed. This can be achieved by having a winding down routine prior to going to bed, and by avoiding anything stimulating such as electronic devices. We may need to refrain from caffeine by the late afternoon, as it can limit our restfulness during sleep. Ideally, the bedroom should be dark, quiet, cool, clean and personal. Any step which improves these qualities will make sleep more restful, relaxing and restorative. Most adults function well on between 7-8 hours of sleep a night, however, adolescents frequently need more sleep than adults. Unfortunately, studies across the world show that students are often not getting enough sleep, and this is impacting on their motivation, health, focus and ability to learn. Key factors include: electronic games, using social media in the late evening, and not maintaining a regular sleep cycle.

Exercise 1

What could you do to improve your sleep in the following areas?

Relaxing prior to sleep: _____

Making the sleep space comfortable: _____

Removing distractions: _____

Taking a nap during the day won't be an option during school term time, but during your study periods prior to exams in may be possible. Small naps of between twenty minutes and an hour have been shown to reduce mental fatigue, improve concentration, renew motivation and consolidate memory. The natural time of day for a nap is after lunch, or between 12.30pm and 2.00pm, this period is called the circadian lull and is a period of natural inertia that facilitates napping. When napping, it is well to stay above the main blanket, remain clothed, set an alarm and if prone to sleeping too deeply, playing music quietly. If you are struggling to fall asleep at night it can be tempting to take long naps during the day, this should generally be avoided; long naps during the day can disrupt our circadian rhythm which regulates our sleep patterns.

Teenagers also experience an increase in physiological arousal in the evenings and this co-occurs with a period of reduced physiological arousal in the mornings. As such, it is more natural for teenagers to stay up later and get up later than it is for adults or children. Although the school day is not structured this way, it may be helpful to allow yourself time to sleep-in during exam time, particularly if you are staying up late.

Self care through nutrition and hydration

Nutrition and hydration also play a major role in self care. Having a jug of water available when studying can be an easy way of staying hydrated and minimising fatigue. Aside from normal healthy eating patterns and diet choices, your pattern of eating is also important. Heavy meals prior to studying seems to limit our ability to focus and our motivation. It may useful to have breakfast as your main meal, and lunch and dinner as your smaller meals. Eating a large breakfast on an empty stomach does not seem to have the same effect on concentration as a large meal in the middle of the day or the evening. Many people find snacking or chewing a helpful accompaniment to study, this is a way of maintaining stimulation and arousal when study is dull an uninteresting. Food also serves as a useful reward during breaks and after completion of study for the day. Many students report that green tea and herbal teas such as peppermint can be helpful in staying focused.

Exercise 2

How might you change your eating to support your current studying? You may consider, rewards, abstaining from some foods, or increasing the amount of fresh fruit you eat.

Relationships and self-care

Maintaining our relationships during intense study times can be difficult as we simply have too much to focus on. Nevertheless, relationship stress during exam time or when major assignments are due can be a major distraction. For students the main relationships of significance will be with peers, family, and potentially with a girlfriend or boyfriend.

We maintain our relationships, when we connect with others. Connecting involves mutual sharing in some form, and may involve talking, sharing in an activity or just sharing each other's company.

Exercise 1

Identify what are your three most important relationships:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Making even small steps to strengthen our relationships can make us feel more supported and this helps us to reduce stress during times of difficulty. Connecting with others need not be time consuming. Sending messages of support, interest or humour can renew our connectedness with others. Making plans to spend time with others in the future is another way of connecting, as it signifies that you value this relationship.

Exercise 2

Identify one way in which you could strengthen your relationships by connecting with the people you identified in exercise 1.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Often our relationships involve caring for and monitoring people who need us. These relationships can be very meaningful and rewarding, but can consume much of our attention and time. If we are burdened by school work this can put us in a difficult situation, as we may feel guilty over withdrawing from someone who needs our care, in order to focus on study. Similarly, we may undermine our studies if we are devoting our time and energies to caring for someone else. Each person needs to clarify within their own conscience how to deal with this. The majority of people choose to limit their own studies to support someone if they are in need, this might appear to be the most moral option. Nevertheless, the person we are caring for might not wish us to sacrifice our studies. In some circumstances we may need to ask others for help managing these situations.

Whatever our final choice in managing this dilemma, we will be most effective and untroubled if we can make a firm decision ahead of time as to how we are going to handle it. Making a commitment and sticking to it helps us to avoid wasting energy worrying or doubting what we are doing.

Exercise 3

A. Are there any relationships that are likely to require our time and attention, and may impact on how much time we have for studying?

B. How prepared do you feel to meet these demands on your time? Rate between 1 (not prepared and 10 (very prepared).

C. In managing a relationship that involves some care and attention, what do you wish to:

Maintain: _____

Change: _____

Accept: _____

Let go/relinquish: _____

Emotional self-care

It is important to have at least one activity in your week that makes you feel good, and allows you to forget about any stressful issues. Students that manage to maintain some form of recreation report lower levels of stress and high levels of satisfaction in their studies.

Exercise 1.

What is an enjoyable activity(s) that you would like to be part of your week?

Meditation

Meditation is a very common topic and many students will have some familiarity with it. Meditation can be described as a practice whereby a tranquil and non-reactive state of consciousness is experienced. The topic is too broad to completely describe in a workbook such as this, however, a brief outline of some basic techniques is included. Of note, some common pitfalls will be described so that practitioners will be fore-warned.

Meditation has been used since pre-history as a way of gaining mental clarity, relaxing, improving insight and attaining altered states of consciousness. In today's world it can serve as a very useful antidote to too much stimulation, stress, anxiety and distraction. For students it will be an invaluable practice as it allows the mind to become more tranquil and receptive, both key states for learning. Furthermore, given the level of pressure that students experience, it will serve as a powerful means of reducing stress.

What meditation is:

- Relaxed attention
- Mindfulness of inner states
- Natural awareness of “what is” without attempting to control or change it
- Non-grasping and non-controlling
- Openness to inner experiences
- Non-judgmental focus
- Allowing what is experienced to be fully experienced

What meditation is not:

- Attempting to force yourself to relax
- Straining to focus
- Becoming distracted by thoughts
- Identifying with mental activity
- Avoiding difficult feelings
- Resisting thoughts

Exercise 1

Find a place to sit or lie down where you feel comfortable and where there is little distraction. Turn your phone to silent. Wear loose clothing and take your shoes off. Put your attention on your breathing, noticing the in and out breath. Close your eyes. Do not try to change the way you are breathing, just notice how you are breathing. If you become distracted by a thought, bring your attention back to your breathing. As thoughts arise, refuse the temptation assign importance to them. Allow each thought to arise and subside on its own without attaching any judgment or comment to it. Maintain your attention on your breathing. You may feel an inner tension, or have judgments such as ‘this is boring’, or ‘im not doing this right’. Allow the thoughts to arise, but then return your attention to your breathing.

In this meditation the breath is used as an anchor for conscious awareness. Learning to maintain focus on it is practicing the ability to detach from mental content without becoming entranced by thinkingness.

Continue the breath meditation for the appointed time. For beginners, ten minute periods will be a good start, with practice it can be enlarged to thirty minutes or even an hour.

Exercise 2

Using the technique outlined in exercise one, when you feel relaxed and focused, bring your attention to what you can see behind your eyelids. Notice that it is dark but not completely, if you look you will see that there are small flashes of light and tone, and sometimes even apparent colours. Allow your attention to rest on what you observe behind your eyelids. If thoughts occur, bring your attention back to what you can see.

Exercise 3

Using the technique outlined in exercise one, when you feel relaxed and focused, bring your attention to any sensations you can feel in the body. See if you can feel any tension or pain, if so let your attention rest on it, without trying to change it. Once you feel able to do that, see if you can connect the sensation of breathing-in to that feeling you have identified. Continue the practice until you feel the sensations start to shift or change quality. You may feel tension release. It is common to feel relaxed after doing this practice for period of twenty minutes, you may feel heavy and want to have a nap. If that is appropriate you can do so, if you need to be wakeful you can get up and move about.

Exercise 4 – problem solving

Using the techniques from exercise one and three as a base, bring to mind a difficult experience or problem that you are grappling with. Allow your mind to think about the situation but maintain awareness of your breathing as an anchor point. Let your mind process the situation without judgment or avoidance, simply allowing it to play out. If you notice yourself being drawn into the problem, that is you lose awareness of your breathing or body, then return your awareness to your breath or body before returning focus to the problem situation. While doing this activity it is important to not “try” to solve the problem, but merely to allow the mind to process it without judgment. This technique allows your intuition to make new connections and consider different ways of managing.

Notes about meditation

Meditation is an extremely powerful personal development tool, as such there is no predicting how it will affect people. Whilst it is an innocuous practice, it can bring emotional problems and traumas close to awareness which may be disconcerting. If this feels overwhelming it may be appropriate to seek professional help. This process of bringing up difficult suppressed and repressed feelings is a way of releasing emotional blockages. With each emotional blockage that is released there is more energy available.

Learning activity

If you feel willing, experiment with meditation and see if it is worth integrating into your life.

MENTAL HEALTH



How to identify mental health concerns

Mental health issues are not uncommon for students. The act of studying intensely despite its benefits can lead to isolation, stress, and fatigue. Without some ways of managing these downsides, your education and performance can suffer.

Mental health

HOW TO IDENTIFY MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

Mental health can be seen as being on a continuum from low to high levels of function. Whatever our current level of mental health we are likely to be able to make some improvements if we can identify problems and then take steps to deal with them. Just like physical health, it is important to seek professional help if you are experiencing something concerning. Research shows that the majority of mental health disorders are either left untreated or are treated after a prolonged period of distress.

Early intervention is key to successful treatment in many instances. Unfortunately, It is common for people to make major adjustments to their lives to accommodate their symptoms (substance use, avoidance, anger issues, unhealthy relationships) before they consider seeking professional help.

Unfortunately the emergence of mental health problems can become gradual and may be more obvious to those around us than to ourselves. Becoming mentally unwell can be likened to a process of gradually losing clear self-awareness, as such, our symptoms may become quite severe before we recognize we have a major problem. Therefore, an objective measure can be effective to help us to understand how we are.

Attached is a copy of the Kessler 10 scale of psychological health that is freely available on the internet. Complete the questions and score your result. The K10 is a widely used measure of psychological distress that quantifies symptoms on the anxiety-depression spectrum.

| | None of the time | A little of the time | Some of the time | Most of the time | All or almost all of the time |
|---|------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel worn out for no real reason? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel nervous? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel hopeless? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel restless or fidgety? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel depressed? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel that everything was an effort? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| In the past four weeks, how often did you feel worthless | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Total score: | | | | | |

Scoring is based on norms developed by measuring the scores of specific populations. The following is a distribution of scores based on a survey of Victorian adults completed by the Department of Human Services (*Victorian population health surveys. 2001-2007, State Government of Victoria*)

- 64% of the population scored 15 or less
- 22% of the population scored 16-21
- 8% of the population scored 22-29
- 2.4% of the population scored 30 or more

If you are concerned by your scores then this might be an opportunity to pursue professional help. It is important to find somebody you can trust and tell them how you are feeling. Many people feel reluctant looking for help as they are not comfortable relating to others from a position of needing

support, nevertheless, reaching out and connecting with supportive people is the first necessary step. Approaching parents may be the best course of action, if they are unavailable for whatever reason, many schools offer a counselling service.

Common barriers to seeking help

There are some very common beliefs that people have that make them reluctant to seek help. Some of these beliefs are completely inaccurate whereas others contain some truth. For many people struggling with poor mental health, the first major struggle is with the feeling of shame and disappointment about feeling as if they have 'failed' in some way. It is well to approach one's self with the same compassionate attitude that we would extend to someone that we care about.

- **'Nobody knows what I am going through'** – it is common to feel that nobody else will be able to fully understand our situation. A trained professional does not need to know exactly what you are feeling in order to help you, just as a doctor does not need to have shared your symptoms to be able to help you. Feeling isolated is part of the symptoms of psychological distress. As distress is a personal and private emotion we cannot always tell how others are feeling, that is why it is important to try to express to someone what you are feeling. Every person alive has faced serious distress in their lives; therefore, being distressed does not make one different from others.
- **'I have nobody to talk to'** – when we feel isolated it is hard to know where to turn. There are numerous free helplines that you can access (see links at the end of chapter) that are confidential. These helplines will help you to access services in your area.
- **'I had a bad experience sharing my feelings once, I won't do that again'** – If somebody in the past has failed to show us understanding it can compound our feeling of isolation. Nevertheless, one bad experience does not mean that there are not sensitive and caring people who do wish to help you.
- **'If I seek help it means I'm a failure'** – your concept of failure is your own, and if you wish to apply it to yourself for not meeting your own standards you can. However, it is not helpful to be overly critical and demanding towards yourself, particularly if you are struggling. There is nothing written that says everybody must be completely self-sufficient all the time, in fact all our lives are interconnected in subtle and major ways.
- **'how can sharing and talking help?'** – when we hold emotional states inside rather than expressing them or releasing them we keep ourselves psychologically stuck. Talking allows us to access the feeling, process it, understand it better, receive support and acknowledgement and provide us with better insight into how to identify and manage our situation. Hiding our emotions may even make our symptoms worse over time.
- **'this can't be happening to me I am usually so strong'** – It can be humbling to reach the limit of one's ability to cope independently. It can be helpful to reframe one's concept of strength. Being strong might mean being connected and supported by others rather than being independent. Males often feel it is necessary to maintain a very strong persona, even to themselves, this persona is often built on ideas of being macho and tough. Seeking support for psychological health is no different from seeking a dentist when you have a tooth ache.

Support services

- 1300 22 4636 Beyond blue 24hour help line
- 13 11 14 Lifeline
- 1300 60 60 24 Nurse on call
- 000 for emergencies such as suicidal crisis

THE MINDFUL STUDENT



How to incorporate mindful approaches to study

Mindfulness is described by Jon Kabatt-Zinn, an expert in the field, as 'paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment non-judgmentally.' It has been shown to dramatically reduce stress and improve performance in education, sports and in the workplace.

The mindful student

HOW TO INCORPORATE MINDFUL APPROACHES TO STUDY

Mindfulness is a style of being that aims to blend conscious attention, skillful action and intention in a harmonious expression. That is, one is doing what one does without inner tension, conflict or hurriedness.

A mindful approach can help a student to maintain engagement and reduce feelings of stress and tension. Cultivating a mindful approach can be extended into other areas of life and is demonstrated to reduce anxiety and depression.

To define and describe mindfulness it is perhaps easier to describe what it looks like in practice. The absence of mindfulness in any area becomes obvious when the basics are understood. Mindful action could be contrasted with non-mindful action. The following pairs of opposites will delineate the differences.

| Mindful | Non-mindful (unconscious) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Present oriented | Distracted by past and future |
| Relaxed attention | Aggressive fixation/lethargy |
| Process focused | Outcome focused |
| Sensitive to environment | Imposes will on environment |
| Accepts difficulties | Easily frustrated |
| Infinite patience | Needs immediate outcomes |
| Non-resistant | Resists |
| Work expresses being | Work defines ego |
| Action is efficient | Action involves strain |
| Each action is a completion | Outcome alone is completion |
| Beginners mind | Knows-it-all |

Present oriented vs Distracted by past and future

Mindfulness involves resting attention on what is present in the here-and-now, which includes ones overall intention. By staying present oriented a mindful actor is able to exert effort in the here-and-now, and is less distracted by regrets from the past or anxieties about the future. Being present oriented, is a way of viewing work whereby what is in front of one is seen as sufficient and worthy of one's full attention.

Relaxed attention vs aggressive fixation or lethargy

Mindfulness involves a skillful ability to keep attention on what one is doing without straining and tensing. Whatever is being focused on is given enough attention to allow the focus to be continuous and relaxed. When we are straining to focus we may find ourselves tensing our body and furrowing our brow to concentrate. Learning this skill of relaxed attention allows for a very efficient method of working as fatigue is reduced and focus is sharpened.

Process focused vs outcome focused

This is a philosophical orientation as much as a psychological one. By focusing on the process, energy is exerted efficiently in the moment and this focusing allows for the identification and fixing of mistakes. Being too outcome oriented can make us overly focused on some expected end-state of our work, this can eliminate the enjoyableness of the process itself, and can make us too hurried in our work. Learning necessarily involves a process of integration and digestion of new information into pre-existing information. Process focus allows that integration to happen at a deeper level as what is being done is concurrently being contemplated rather than simply processed.

Sensitive to Environment vs imposes will on environment

Being sensitive to the environment (both inner and outer) means learning to integrate one's actions into the environment as it is, rather than seeking to impose one's will on it. This sensitivity also involves learning how to manage one's energy by taking breaks, stretching and being aware of when to hydrate and eat. Will power is a useful resource but a finite one, a mindful student would seek to find the most efficient way of acting which does not deplete this resource carelessly. It could be described as 'going-with-the-flow'.

Accepts difficulties vs easily frustrated

Mindful action involves accepting that learning requires extending one's self beyond current levels of competency. However, rather than feeling threatened and fearful of having limits, a mindful actor embraces challenges as a point-of-growth. Accepting that difficulties are part of learning and acting makes the process more challenging. When we expect ourselves to be better than we are at something we are vulnerable to upset. Accepting difficulties makes them easier.

Infinite patience vs needs immediate outcomes

The constant feeling of pressure that occurs when we are over-stretched by demands on us, necessarily creates tension in the moment. Mindful action is process oriented, which means the goal becomes secondary to the action, when the action requires attention. As there is no resisting of the process, whether learning something takes an hour, a day or a week is not a problem. In contrast, when we are in a very hurried and stressed mindset we are hungry for successes and progress that may still be beyond us; this sets us up for disappointment, rushing and making unnecessary mistakes.

Non-resistant vs Resistant

Mindful action involves adopting the focus that is least in conflict with the way things are. As such, there is no straining to be further along towards completion than we already are. By retaining focus on the present action with openness and attention there is no conflict with any self-expectations. When we are resistant we become conflicted in what we are doing. This arises when we want to be nearer completion or more capable than we presently are. Although a mindful actor is also intending to complete the activity, as they are process oriented they are not in conflict between what they are trying to do and what they are actually doing. Work tends to progress more smoothly.

Work expresses being vs work defines ego

Being open and available to the work we are doing means we are accepting and committed to what we are doing, without feeling it is somehow beneath us, or not important enough. Even if there is something else we would like to do, we do not allow that desire to make us conflicted with what we have in front of us to do. When we become too ego identified in our work, we can become conflicted

by the feeling that we should be better at it, or that the work is not important enough. This can make work an ego-threat as if we make a mistake or do not achieve a result we desire we will feel overly diminished or even ashamed. If we allow work to be a mode of being, whatever activity we engage in is allowing us the opportunity to express an aspect of being, therefore work is not necessarily a restriction of our freedom, but one of the ways in which freedom is expressed. Maximum freedom would include the most number of possible behaviours, work being one of them.

Action is efficient vs action involves strain

Efficiency of action involves applying effort with sensitivity and awareness. It means acting in a way that does not impose force on us, but rather allows the action to flow through us. Action becomes strained when we are divided in our intentions; that is, we would rather do something else; we want to be better than we are; we want to be finished before we really are finished. Paradoxically, when we are less strained in our efforts we often work more quickly in the long run as we make fewer mistakes and become less fatigued in our work.

Each action is a completion vs only the outcome is completion

This is a way of viewing each singular moment of action as the completion of each minor aspect of attention. This makes action a process of continuous completion, rather than feeling a need to hurry to the end. From a mindful perspective each action is sufficient and does not need a final end state to define it. Many students feel a sense of dryness and dissatisfaction with studying as they feel no sense of success unless a final end state is completed. A mindful awareness cultivates an appreciation of all the many thousands of smaller successful steps that comprise every endeavour.

Beginners mind vs knows-it-all

Mindfulness adopts an open perspective that is called 'beginners mind', which means that there is always an attitude of there being much more to learn. This is in contrast to approaching an activity as if we are above it, and it has nothing important to teach us as we feel we already know everything that is important to know about it. The beginners mind is open to possibilities, new perspectives, constantly seeks to improve, and never feels a task has nothing new to teach. The beginners mind approaches mastery as a direction not as a destination, by always seeking to learn, the student automatically makes improvements without feeling invalidated.

Cultivating mindfulness

Mindfulness can be called a meta-skill in that it can be applied to all other skills and even to itself. As such, it can be practiced in any situation and with immediate results.

To cultivate mindfulness the simplest initial practice is just to bring attention fully to what is happening in the moment; this includes bodily sensations, thoughts and events occurring in the environment. What differentiates this practice from ordinary awareness, is that there is a definite sense of stability and 'being present' with whatever is happening. If you try and maintain your awareness on what is occurring, you will notice that your mind easily draws you away into another mode of focus, we could call this a distraction. However, in mindfulness, a distraction becomes part of the practice, as when we become aware of being distracted we have actually recovered a degree of present orientation and mindfulness. The practice of simply being aware on-purpose is the beginnings of mindfulness, and reduces inner reactivity and resistance. Simply becoming fully aware of one's self in the here-and-now tends to reduce anxiety and stress. This is because the present moment when fully participated in is safe and sufficient.

In applying mindfulness to study, it can be useful to maintain awareness of bodily sensations and posture, breathing, and an openness to what is happening in the environment. Taking mindful pauses after reading sentences, paragraphs and pages can help to stay mindfully aware as well as improve the integration of the information.

Learning exercise

If you feel interested in exploring alternate forms of conscious awareness you can attempt to adopt a mindful approach to various tasks that you perform. For very challenging tasks it may not be easy to apply a mindful approach, therefore, it may be best to apply mindfulness in activities that are routine such as: walking, brushing teeth, showering, reading or writing.

When experimenting with mindfulness see if you can feel a lessening in tension and an increase in subtle awareness, both of these are indicative of a mindful approach.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE



Exploring the meaning of success and failure

There are many ways of defining success. Understanding what success and its opposite, failure mean to you can help you to clarify your goals and intentions. Concerns about success and fears of failure can create unnecessary distractions from learning.

Success and failure

EXPLORING THE MEANING OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Asking students to describe what is success and what is failure is very instructive. Each person seems to be walking around with a personal idea of what they think success and failure is, and often this idea is held uncritically. Some might even agree with each other on the major points. However, what becomes clear when you ask students about this is that there are very different opinions as to what constitutes success and failure. Although there are objective markers as to the relative level of ability displayed by a piece of work, whether that result counts as a 'success' or 'failure' is rather subjective.

Understanding how you are defining success and failure will give you key insight into how you are motivated (or not motivated) by what you are doing. When you explore the meaning of success and failure for you, you will see that there are distinct advantages and disadvantages of different perspectives.

Exercise 1

Briefly outline what you feel are the key elements of 'success':

Exercise 2

Briefly outline what you feel are the key elements of 'failure':

Now we will examine the consequences of different understandings of 'success' and 'failure'.

Results orientation:

Success = getting the results I set out to achieve

Failure = not getting the results I set out to achieve

Example: studying hard to get an 'A'

Benefits: this orientation will naturally lead to aiming for high marks and studying will tend to focus on

www.stillpointpsychology.com.au Study Mastery & Mental Health. appointments@stillpointpsychology.com.au

making sure that work fits the marking criteria; if the desired results are obtainable the motivation will be enhanced.

Drawbacks: if the desired results are not obtained there can be shame and disappointment; there may be little sense of satisfaction from the process as the outcome is the most important aspect, this can lead to motivation slumps; it may be difficult to predict what results are realistically obtainable, students may aim too high or too low

Outcome Orientation

Success = getting the final outcome desired (employment, university placement, scholarship)

Failure = not obtaining the desired outcome from study

Example: Studying to get entrance into a university course

Benefits: this form of motivation may lead to high levels of commitment as a discernible goal has been identified that is anticipated to be worthwhile.

Drawbacks: the outcome may not be reached, leading to feelings of shame, regret and disappointment with the education experience; the outcome is not determined until the end of the process, so all motivation is drawn through anticipation; achieving the goal may not be as rewarding as it was hoped.

Unreflective Orientation

Success = passing/turning up

Failure = not passing/ getting into trouble

Example: studying because you have been told to; studying to avoid scrutiny from parents/teachers

Benefits: low stress; avoids test anxiety

Drawbacks: low satisfaction from education; does not challenge the student; study can feel meaningless; reflects low self-worth; misses opportunities for development.

Superiority Orientation

Success = performing better than others who are identified as competitors

Failure = being out performed by those identified as competitors

Example: studying hard so as to get higher marks than one's brother

Benefits: the spirit of competition can be a powerful motivating factor; the desire to be better than others is similar to the desire to be the best one can be, leading to commitment to the process.

Drawbacks: may lead to hostility from peers; may lead to feelings of paranoia as others are felt to be threats to ones need for achievement; if we are out performed by others we may feel shame, humiliation or resentment; we may come to feel that this competition exists only in our heads and has no intrinsic meaning; students may feel in competition with a sibling who is naturally more adept at study, leading to feelings of disappointment.

Perfection Orientation

Success = perfection

Failure = imperfection

Example: studying hard because one desires to feel perfect

Benefits: this orientation can lead to high levels of attention to detail, efficiency and drive to improve;

being focused on avoiding faults can lead to very high quality work

Drawbacks: the desire for perfection may be based on a felt need to reassure one's self of inner value, therefore, when perfection is not achieved there can be feelings of intense self-loathing and disappointment; perfection is an aim point, but is not a destination, therefore there can be disappointment with effort if it fails to achieve perfection; students with a perfection orientation are at greater risk of burnout, anxiety, depression and self-harm

Improvement Orientation

Success = improving

Failure = not improving

Example: studying hard in order to improve as a student

Benefits: leads to a focus on process, which in turn improves outcome; generates satisfaction from modest gains in performance; is an obtainable outcome from effort; avoids the disappointment that can come from external motivations.

Drawbacks: may lead students to be content with modest improvements and not encourage high levels of striving; can lead to frustration when improvements are not achieved.

Duty Orientation

Success = fulfilling my duty to others

Failure = not fulfilling my duty to others

Example: studying hard to make one's parents proud

Benefits: students feel a high degree of satisfaction and achievement when they are able to meet the expectations placed on them by others, particularly family; students will generally be supported by those whom they are striving to satisfy and impress; students can feel like success is very meaningful as they have supporters.

Drawbacks: expectations placed on them may be unrealistic, and lead to overwhelming feelings of shame when they are not met; students feel a high degree of stress to always be pushing themselves; students may come to question why they are studying; students may be pushed to pursue subjects and careers that satisfy the ambitions of family, but are not necessarily ideal for them personally.

Excellence Orientation

Success = developing mastery

Failure = missing opportunity to develop

Example: studying hard to develop personally and challenge one's self

Benefits: can lead to continuous improvement and tends to lead to higher results; avoids getting into energy consuming competitions and comparisons; finds purpose in the process rather than just the outcome; generates confidence in one's ability to improve; mastery orientation tends to translate into other areas; sees areas for improvement as opportunities rather than something to be ashamed of; avoids feeling threatened by tests

Drawbacks: can be demanding and energy consuming; requires intense commitment

Exercise 3

Rank the different forms of motivation from the 1-8, with one being the motivation that most accurately reflects your own, and eight being the motivation that least reflects your own.

Exercise 4

Reflecting on your list, what three forms of motivation do you feel would most suit your education; that is, which ways of looking at success and failure do you feel will support you most?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Exercise 5

If there were differences between the top three motivations you identified in exercise 3 and the top three you chose in exercise 4, how do you think you could make those changes?

PROCESS AND OUTCOME



Improving efficiency by refocusing effort

For any long term pursuit, and gaining an education is certainly a long pursuit, it can feel as if only the end-point matters. This orientation can make the process arduous as success is always too far ahead to be felt. Focusing on process as well can be immediately rewarding.

Process and outcome

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY BY REFOCUSING EFFORT

Lao Tzu: *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*

The majority of students want to do well and achieve good results. However, wanting to do well can of itself set us up to feel frustrated, if we do not know how to achieve, and even ashamed if we do not meet our desired standards. The effect of these emotions such as frustration and shame, is to make us anxious about our studies in general. Nobody wishes to feel frustration or shame, so we naturally try and avoid these feelings, so if studying creates these feelings we are now in conflict with our ambition to succeed.

Dysfunctional perfectionism

Ambition ➡ Effort ➡ Mixed results ➡ Frustration/disappointment ➡ Avoidance

Procrastination ➡ Reduced effort ➡ Lower results ➡ Frustration/disappointment

As can be seen from this diagram, a common consequence of ambition can be frustration and disappointment. This is what could be called 'dysfunctional perfectionism'. High expectations in this instance actually leading to frustration, reduced effort and focus, resulting in poorer performance. Sometimes we may be able to use the pain of our frustration to drive us to do better in the future. However, if we do not know how to do better we may just repeat our previous results and feel doubly disappointed.

By being only outcome focused, we may be creating unnecessary stress, and actually undermining our performance. By reaching for the end goal, we are actually placing our focus on the weakest point of leverage (as we cannot control the outcome in the here-and-now). A more effective focus of our efforts is to place our attention on the process. That is, we do not look only for the results, instead we commit ourselves fully to the process. Ultimately, the process is the only thing over which we have any control, and this is the point of maximum leverage over our success.

A process orientation is also the least stressful area to focus on. By committing to our process and letting go of our focus only on results, we remain focused on the work that is in front of us, and become less fixated and even distracted by the end goal. Worrying about results is a very common concern of students, and this worrying does not necessarily translate into improved performance, and may even create a divided focus.

A commitment to process in study, is the same as committing to excellence, and is most likely to yield excellent results. It retains focus on the area of proximate control (process) and is the least stressful orientation to adopt.

Adaptive perfectionism

Process/Excellence ➡ Process Focus ➡ Efficient Effort ➡ Reduced Stress

Process and outcome

When we focus on outcomes, we may become overwhelmed by how we will achieve them, and this is understandable, as we cannot necessarily know how it can be done. Any goal directed behaviour will retain a mix of process vs outcome focus. Each individual will find that they have their own unique combination that suits them.

One way to determine if we are too outcome oriented, is to notice if we have thoughts or worries about outcomes that distract us from our current efforts. If we are too process oriented, that is, we do not know what we are trying for, we may lose drive.

Learning activity 1

- Try to estimate the approximate division of focus between outcome and process in your study?
-

- Now try and estimate what would be the ideal division between focus and outcome for your studying
-

- If you are looking to increase your process orientation, you could think of a quote or statement that reflects the importance of process, similar to the quote by Lao Tzu at the start of the chapter, and place it on your study desk or another prominent area to remind you.

Learning activity 2

- Describe the study outcome you are seeking to achieve. Write down what you are aiming for and three reasons why this is important to you.
-
-

- If you are looking to increase your outcome orientation, you could write down a motivational card that outlines your goals and place it on your study desk, or in another prominent area to remind you.

STUDY TECHNIQUES



Small developments in many areas equals a large improvement overall

Learning how to harness your energy and direct it effectively is an implicit skill that is central to effective studying. Identifying the many small areas that can be improved leads to a 'catalytic' improvement. As energy is released in one area it enables further release in related areas of study

Study techniques

SMALL DEVELOPMENTS IN MANY AREAS EQUALS A LARGE IMPROVEMENT OVERALL

There are a range of study techniques that can be learned which will improve your learning ability. Each technique is designed to improve the efficiency of your study by identifying an area of improvement that can be influenced.

Physiology

Central to your study is the effective working of your body and overall nervous system. Psychological stress is often reflected in physiological tension, particularly around the shoulders, neck and head. If the tension builds without relief it can be common to have tension headaches. Trying to force yourself to focus and study when you are feeling physical discomfort can become unsustainable.

One effective method for reducing neck and back strain is to improve the ergonomics of your study area. Ideally, you want your hand to be able to rest comfortably on the desk, and to be able to look direction at the material you are working on without having to tilt or strain your head. You can tell how ergonomically effective your position is, by sitting comfortably in a neutral position, with back straight and with your head looking forward; now, notice how far you need to move from that neutral position in order to study. If you are having to hunch over your work, not only are you straining your back, neck and head, you are also compressing your diaphragm which reduces your oxygen intake. Over extended periods you may find yourself becoming mildly hypoxic, which will cause fatigue, disinterest and poor focus. Ideally, you want to be able to breathe slowly, deeply and rhythmically as you study.

Studying necessarily involves long periods of sitting, for which the body is not ideally suited. It can be helpful to relieve the tension and strain created from prolonged sitting by learning some gentle stretching and postures. An effective method of stretching is to identify a point of tension, slightly increase the level of tension felt by extending the stretch, then breathing deeply and exhaling deeply, hold the stretch without increasing it, until you feel the tension relax noticeably. If you are holding the stretch and not feeling a reduction of tension over time, you may be straining. Yoga postures can be particularly effective for reducing tension in the body, and can create a corresponding release of psychological tension. You can undertake formal study in a yoga class, or learn postures through accredited books and websites. Learning to identify and release tension in your body will greatly improve your capacity to focus and reduce fatigue.

Tension in the body can also be reduced by using a technique called PMR (progressive muscle relaxation). This is best learned by actually doing it. It can be done seated or lying down on the ground. When done on the ground the effect is generally more rapid. The technique involves tensing muscle groups such as hands, shoulders, face and legs, by holding the muscle tense for around ten seconds then releasing it. The process if repeated all over the body with pauses between each set of tensing creates a sense of relaxation. Gradually, the tension is released as the muscles are interconnected, meaning that relaxation in one muscle tends to relax the muscles around it in sympathy. This also works in reverse, whereby tension in one muscle makes the surrounding muscles more tense. With practice this technique can be very effective as a way to relax, and also as a sleep enabler.

www.stillpointpsychology.com.au Study Mastery & Mental Health. appointments@stillpointpsychology.com.au

Managing your study space

It is easy to overlook your study space when you become stressed by school work. Nevertheless, the space in which you study will have a supportive or distracting effect depending on how it is maintained. Many students use their bedroom as their study space, and this means that the space can become distracting. However, with some simple techniques you can create and maintain a study space that will enable your studying.

When we enter a space such as a room, we immediately know if this is a space that is cared for or neglected. Although it is good to relax in one's bedroom, if we become careless in our use of this space it can become a messy, distracting and depressing environment. When you allow a room to become messy and disorganised you are really saying that you do not care about it enough to maintain it. This attitude can readily infiltrate whatever we do in that space, thereby affecting your studying.

The ideal study space has the following characteristics:

A designated purpose

Ideally a study space will be used only for study. In a bedroom a desk should be set aside as a study desk. If possible other activities that do not relate to study should be avoided. The space should be designed so as to maximally enable the main purpose that it is for, as such, things that do not relate to activities aside from studying should be stored elsewhere.

Clean and neat

The space should be cleaned regularly. The accumulation of dust can lead to mild but chronic respiratory problems affecting health and vitality. A clean space also demonstrates care and attention, just the qualities that should be enacted during study. Everything on the workspace should have a place that is suited to it's purpose. Stationery strewn across the desk will make being organised more difficult. Periodic cleaning of the space is required to remove things that do not serve the purpose of the space.

Free of distractions

The space should be free of distracting influences, such as: other people, electronic devices and outside noise. Asking family to respect your study time may be necessary to improve focus. Turning off the notification sound on social media devices during study is also helpful. Engaging in external socialising may be too distracting, particularly if the work is not very interesting. If music assists you to study, instrumental music has been shown to be more supportive of studying than songs, as even when we are not focusing on it, the brain attempts to interpret spoken words, which interferes with your processing of the work in front of you.

Personal

Adding items of personal significance such as: photos, motivational pictures, or indicators of success, or goals, can be helpful. Making the space your own can give you a sense of pride and ownership in what you are doing.

Cultivation of space

Effective students and workers employ the idea of maintaining a 'clear desk' policy. This involves always finishing work that is on the desk if possible, so that when you are done you have a clear desk, ready for whatever is next. This habit also trains the mind to work to completion rather than the point of disinterest. Maintaining an open space also allows room for new ideas and projects to form. It can be depressing to

work in a space that is surrounded by uncompleted assignments and other reminders of work undone. Having a system of folders for work can help to organise this space.

Organised

It is helpful to keep all subjects contained in separate folders and work on them one-at-a-time. The mind works most effectively when it has one item to focus on at a time and is generally depleted by multi-tasking. Being organised takes more effort initially but allows you to manage a higher level of work. Learning to manage your workload with less demands on yourself, reduces your stress and improves your confidence.

Ergonomic

Ideally, the desk should be at a height whereby the wrists comfortably rest on the surface when seated. The chair should be straight backed, padded and supportive. Swivel chairs are generally preferable to legged chairs.

Go to the stillpointpsychology.com.au website and follow the links to the resource page where a list of useful youtube videos related to study are available.

Learning activity 1

Assess your study space along the following criteria

| | Minimal/absent | Major improvements possible | Some improvements possible | Minor improvements possible | Ideal, only maintenance required |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Purposeful | | | | | |
| Clean and neat | | | | | |
| Free of distractions | | | | | |
| Personal | | | | | |
| Cultivation of space | | | | | |
| Organised | | | | | |
| Ergonomic | | | | | |

Using the self-assessment, outline what changes you could make in the following areas:

| Area of study space: | Improvements: |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Purposeful | |
| Clean and neat | |

Study techniques

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Free of distractions | |
| Personal | |
| Cultivation of space | |
| Organised | |
| Ergonomic | |