<u>Strategies for Improving Attention</u>[2]

<u>A. Input of Information</u>

<u>Maintaining Consistent Alertness</u>

- Preferential seating in class
- Ensuring adequate sleep for alertness during work or class times
- Reduction in "chunk size" of work, frequent breaks (or opportunity to move around)
- Use of hands for physical activity (i.e., "stress ball", piece of plasticene, doodling)
- Consultation with physician re: medication trial to determine if this will facilitate alertness
- Use areas of strength (i.e., interests/abilities) in school/workplace

<u>Taking in lnformation Deeply Enough</u>

- Stress on rehearsal strategies or verbal mediation (e.g., "How am I going to accomplish my goals?") through self-talk or note-taking
- Self-testing techniques to see if material is being understood
- Paraphrasing
- Repetition of instructions or explanations
- Demonstrate activity to illustrate understanding of material/instructions

<u>Passive or Excessively Active Processing</u>

- Reminder cards ("Am I being passive or is my mind <u>too active</u>?")
- A disciplined approach to thinking more deeply about a subject (e.g., "What are the things you already know that this new material reminds you of? How is it pretty much like it? How is it new and different?")
- Acquisition and long term pursuit of knowledge and expertise in areas of interest
- Keeping score of how often there are "mind trips" and/or "wake up calls"
- Recording and making use of ideas which are generated during periods of daydreaming or creative thinking
- Encouragement of high quality processing of information in a "top down" fashion (e.g., "What are the major concepts involved?" "How does this new information fit into the overall scheme?")

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[2] These strategies were developed by Mel Levine, M.D. for use with children experiencing attentional difficulties. Areas of need are identified by using Dr. Levine's Questionnaire of Areas of Information Processing Tool B, p. 47). Dr. Teeya Scholten, C. Psych. and other staff of the Calgary Learning Centre have adapted these strategies for use with adults in 1993.

<u>Determining the Importance of Information</u>

- Stress on development of paraphrasing and summarization skills
- Games emphasizing vigilance and attention to fine detail
- Margin monitoring, underlining and circling skills when reading/studying
- Practice crossing out irrelevant information (e.g., in math word problems)

<u>Filtering Out Distractions</u>

- Minimizing distractions at home, work and school
- Use of consistent background sounds (e.g., use of ear plugs, music on a walkman) when reading or studying
- Frequent, but timed breaks from study

<u>Ability to Satisfy Oneself</u>

- Use of high motivational content for learning - give choices (i.e., What are you most interested in learning today - option a) or b)?")
- Stress on sharing, timed delays of gratification (e.g., "When it's break time, in another 20 minutes, there'll be a chance to do . . .")
- Identification and acknowledgment of areas which are not interesting and in which there will be low motivation
- The establishment of "getting satisfied" time allocations at home
- Everyday use of the vocabulary of "insatiability" (e.g., "You want to be doing exciting things!") with minimal "moralization"/judgment about it (e.g. Avoid saying things like: "You're never satisfied with anything! Isn't anything interesting enough to keep your attention for long?")

B. Output of Information

<u>Preview of Outcomes</u>

- Application of "what if ?" exercises to imagine future outcomes - in behavioral, social and/or cognitive-academic areas
- Stress on articulating and describing <u>final products </u>(i.e., "What do I want this to look like when I finish? What is it I want to say in this report? What do I want this person to think about me? How do I want my behavior to be in the lunch room?")
- Diagramming of previewed outcomes
- Practice estimating answers

Behavioral Control

- Review of alternative (cognitive - academic, social, and/or behavioral) strategies and selection of strategy which has the best chance of working out (i.e., "best-bet"), along with "back-up" strategies in case it is needed
- Use of hypothetical case studies for above review
- Submission of work plans and social survival plans
- Using flow charts to diagram alternative choices involving acting or inhibiting behavior and the respective consequences
- Review of outcomes and exploration of other alternatives that might have worked better

Pacing of Activities

- Development of time management (in scheduling procedures at home and in school).
- Serve as a time manager at school/work
- Stress on time estimation ("How long should this take me?")
- Elimination of incentives for quick completion of tasks (i.e., no advantages to finishing or "getting it over with quickly")
- Use of time landmarks for writing/reading, projects (i.e., where you should be when...)
- Discussions of time and time management

Consistency of Effort

- Regularly-scheduled work breaks
- Conscious attempts to document graphically "on times" and "off times" for effort
- Self-description - verbally and/or in writing- of what it feels like to be running out of "mental energy"
- Rotation of homework or reading sites at home
- Getting assistance in getting started without being "accused" (i.e., "jump starting" efforts by saying, "It's 7 p.m., didn't you say that you wanted to begin your project at that time?")

Self-Monitoring

- Stress on mid-task and terminal self assessment ("How am I doing?" or "How do I think I did?")
- Use of self-grading and commenting before submitting tests/work assignments - with credit for accurate monitoring
- Proofreading exercises (e.g., COPS - Capitalization, Organization, Punctuation, Spelling)
- Routine proofreading of own work at least 48 hours after completion

- Use of hypothetical case studies to demonstrate the impacts of poor self monitoring on behavior and interpersonal relating
- Inclusion of "quality control" measures in work and social plans
- Building self-monitoring as a step in planning actions or strategies

<u>Learning from Experience</u>

- Stress on very consistent consequences for actions
- Need for changing incentives in order to maintain their novelty
- Use of personal diaries to document outcomes of actions - possibly in diagrammatic form
- Lists of "What I've Done Right Today" and "Where I Went Astray Today" with a stress on lessons learned for the future
- Use of a "mentor" (with whom one has a valued relationship) at home/work/school to whom the one can feel accountable for attaining the personal goals which have been set