



**Session: Paying Attention!**

**Date: 5/18/2017**

***Definition***

Reasons for poor grades, missed assignments, agitated relations between students and teachers most often stem from "not paying attention." Metaphorically, it takes less than a second to step from the safety of the curb into the path of an oncoming bus. Academically, it can take about the same amount of time to misunderstand directions, or not notice a deadline.

Who suffers the most when a student loses focus and misses an assignment, or misses a key step in solving a math problem? The principal, the teacher, or the student? Principals and teachers can recover quickly--but the student will incur the most harm when missing qualifying for entrance to college by a single SAT point.

*Let's measure your attention span* (just follow my instructions and enter all calculations in the box below)

A variety of teachers, counselors, and principals, came up with a focused academic action list to share with students. If students regularly take notice of the following, then perhaps they can perhaps, empower themselves to become more academically aware, thereby avoiding some frustrating, often avoidable situations:

**Your Body**—Try to eat some healthy food, get some exercise, and sleep regularly. Most importantly, notice when your body is talking to you. If you are falling asleep in class, losing your appetite, not leaving your room, or feeling depressed, then seek help immediately. Your mind cannot perform at its best when your body is being ignored.

**Directions**—Please learn from my own mistake. Read all directions carefully and slowly before you begin any assignment. If your teacher is talking before an exam, do not start writing in a hurry to finish. Listen



to any additional directions that might be given. You never want to fail an assignment solely because you did not complete it correctly.

**Deadlines and Due Dates**—All schools have official test dates. Make certain to write these on your calendar and keep your schedules up to date to avoid missing deadlines.

### *Paying Attention--Skill or Trait?*

Are people born with the ability to stay focused and pay attention? Or, can a person develop the skill of "keeping on track." Science and medicine continue to debate this. However, the fact remains that if it is a trait it can be lost; and, if it is a skill it can be developed through practice. For example, for those who play basketball pulling up to shoot a jumper is a skill that requires repeated attempts until all the movements to complete become involuntary. Some are better than others at shooting hoops. But, all can improve by practicing the movements.

The same is true for developing the skills for paying attention. It requires practice. When you are in class you may be easily distracted by other students; especially when the subject matter is boring to you. You can however, develop the skill to quickly regain focus by practicing techniques such as exercising the "attention muscle." Thus, when you sense that your focus has drifted, you can exercise the attention muscle to get back in focus. With practice the ability to maintain focus will be almost involuntary.

### ***Strengthen concentration.***

Twice a day, practice holding a specific object in mind steadily for 5 to 10 minutes. Choose something you won't have trouble picturing, but something that requires you to focus in order to see it clearly.

### ***Empty your mind.***

Another focus-killer is a head full of scattered thoughts. You know those days when you've got a million things going on and you're trying to remember them all at once and you keep forgetting things anyway? Emptying your mind can do wonders for scattered thoughts!

### ***Visualize for practice.***

If you've got an important goal or task coming up and you're feeling unsure about your ability to do it, visualize it first! Many studies have been done on the power of visualization, and the general consensus is that performing tasks and activities mentally over and over again is equally as effective as performing them physically! That means that visualization can serve as a powerful practice session that helps you master anything – including better time management!