

# MONITORING FOCUS & MINIMIZING DISTRACTIONS

**Monitoring** involves your in-the-moment awareness of how you're doing with a task. For example, when you are reading or completing a problem set, you can ask yourself if you are focused and engaged in your learning task, or is your mind elsewhere?

You can **monitor** your attention level and what distractions take you away from your intended focus by using this worksheet as a guide. You will engage in metacognitive monitoring over a period of at least **3 days**, specifically noting the distractions you face and how you manage them. In order for this to be a useful to you, it is important that you **record your observations as you go** rather than trying to remember everything after the fact.

## Instructions

- 1. Identify your distractions:** Complete the attached template with the following information:
  - List all the devices, sounds, alerts, internal thoughts, or people that take you away from focusing.
  - For each distraction, record how often it occurs and how long it takes you to get back to what you were doing before the distraction.

*Distractions can be **internal**, such as your thoughts and emotions about what you are working on or what you would rather be doing, or **external**, including technology, noises or other people.*
- 2. Review your observations and reflect:** Think about those distractions you faced repeatedly.
  - Were there certain times, places, or circumstances that promoted the distractions? Environments that minimized the distractions?
  - Which distractions affected you the most?
  - How could you arrange your learning environment to manage the distractions you faced most often? What choices or adjustments can you make to keep that distraction to a minimum?
- 3. Minimize future distractions:** Review the suggestions on p. 3 and consider the following questions:
  - What are 2 strategies you can commit to in order to minimize the distractions you faced?
  - What is your plan to stick with those strategies even during a busy week or when you are juggling multiple responsibilities?

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Distraction</b><br>(List each separately) | <b>How often did it happen today?</b> | <b>How long did it take to get back to focusing?</b> | <b>Other observations</b> (times, places, circumstances, etc.) |
|-------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Day 1       |  |                                       |  |  |
| Day 2       |  |                                       |  |  |
| Day 3       |  |                                       |  |  |

# MINIMIZING DISTRACTIONS - TIPS

1. Put your phone/smartwatch out of sight and/or turn off notifications with productivity apps.

Research studies have shown that turning off notifications is not enough to prevent the distraction; even the presence of a silent phone– even if it is not yours – will be distracting.

2. Set a time limit (e.g. “Pomodoro® Technique”).

Pomodoro technique is a strategy where you break up your work into short time limits and use a timer to alert you when time is up. In that specific system, they recommend the following:

- Choose a specific task.
- Set timer to 25 minutes.
- Work on the task until the Pomodoro® rings, then check it off your list.
- Take a short break (Start with 5 minutes).
- Every 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break.

3. Try working in locations with lower levels of noise.

Try out different locations and monitor how it goes for you. You may like the campus library's quiet study spots ([www.lib.uiowa.edu/about/studyspaces/](http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/about/studyspaces/)) or maybe an empty dorm lounge will work better for you.

4. If other people are distracting you, try scheduling separate social and study times.

Though studying in a group can be very helpful, it can also be easy to become get distracted by others! If you notice this happening, try scheduling separate hangout times and use those as a reward for productive study sessions.

5. If you enjoy background noise, choose instrumental music without lyrics or white/brown noise.

Watching a show or listening to a podcast or music while you are trying to study might not **feel** like would affect your focus. Though it might feel more enjoyable to try and do both at once, lots of research shows that this type of multitasking can result in reductions in comprehension and efficiency.