Distractions

I have no problems making specific goals and setting aside enough time to study but I am always getting distracted by family, friends and my dog. I can't seem to get back to what I was doing before I was interrupted and I never get enough work done.

Distractions are a part of everyday life and while you can't avoid them completely, you can take steps to lessen their impact on your study time. Family, friends, television, other responsibilities, fatigue, emotional distress, and hunger are all distractions that can prevent you from focusing on your studies.

Strategies for Reducing Distractions

Setting boundaries

Working on an online course when there are other, more interesting things to do takes discipline. Setting boundaries is one way to support your decision to do course work. Setting boundaries could mean turning the ringer off on the phone, shutting the door to the computer room, asking your children, spouse, or roommate to give you time alone to study. Setting boundaries could also mean consciously deciding not to think about a personal problem until a later time and redirecting your attention back to your studies when your thoughts wander. While setting boundaries may feel like you are depriving yourself of good things like the company of loved ones, it also acknowledges your need for time and space to accomplish your goals.

Get the support of co-workers, family, and friends.

You may need to negotiate for time at the computer and for uninterrupted time while you're there, particularly if you have small children or share access to a computer with a roommate or co-worker.

Choose a good place to study.

Choose a place, if possible, that does not have a view of other activities you want to be involved in, with good lighting and enough space to spread out your course materials.

Competition for computer access at home or work can be distracting. Decide which course work can be done away from the computer, and which tasks must be done on the computer, such as reading and responding to messages. Online course pages, such as assignment directions, can be printed off.

Keep a distractions list.

Often while you are trying to concentrate on your course, other tasks will come to mind, such as appointments or errands. Write these down as they occur and set the list aside. Often writing them down will clear them out of your mind until you're ready to take care of them.
Try to study when you are rested and fed. Hunger and fatigue are powerful physical distractions. Fix a snack to eat while studying. Drink water while studying; a well-hydrated person thinks better than a dehydrated one. If you feel fatigued, close your eyes for a minute or exercise them by moving them up and down and side to side, and focusing them far away and close by. Take stretch breaks.

Working Smarter, Not Harder

You've probably heard the phrase, "work smarter, not harder." No marks are given for being the student who spends the most time studying.

Strategies

Prioritize.

Decide what tasks must be done immediately, over the next couple of days, or over the next week. Instead of only recording deadlines for assignments in your calendar, set start dates to remind you when you should be beginning to work on assignments. You may need to adjust your start dates, but this step will help you to avoid doing all of your work at the last possible minute.

In an online course, leaving work until the last minute is setting yourself up to be a victim of technical problems. You should build into your schedule some time for technical problems, as they seem to happen most when you can afford them the least.

Set goals for each study session and for each task within a session.

Spend a few minutes at the beginning of each study session to decide what you are going to do. Assess your progress at an appropriate interval (every 30 minutes for longer study sessions, every 10-15 minutes for shorter sessions).

Summarize work and set tasks for the next session.

Take a few minutes at the end of each study session to review your progress. Identify what task or tasks you need to do at your next study session, and any information or resources you need to get before working on the course again, such as asking the instructor a question or requesting resources from the library.