



Management of Physical and Social Environment

An important aspect of self-management is the ability to restructure or modify, when necessary, one's physical and social environments to learn more effectively. Therefore, it is important to understand how environmental and social factors influence learning and how you can become more resourceful in making the necessary changes in your environments.

You can take actions to adapt to your environment, as well as change your environment to fit your needs. For example, although you cannot control the room assignment for a course, you often can determine where you sit, as well as your level of concentration during the period. If you sit near students who are carrying on a conversation during a lecture, you can move your seat. If you are in a discussion and there is considerable noise outside, you can ask to shut the window or close the door. In other words, even when you cannot select the optimal learning environment, you can take steps to adapt or modify the physical environment. Even when you do select the environment for learning,

modifications to the environment can be made by disconnecting the phone, allowing the answering machine to pickup messages, or placing a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door.

Some of the students in my classes are athletes and fraternity or sorority members who are required to attend a “study table” for a number of hours per week to study under supervision in a specific location. Because of their many time pressures, the requirement of a specific place for study is not a bad one. However, many students report that their mandated study environment often is not conducive for effective study. Some complaints include too many individuals in the room, high noise levels, and friends more interested in talking or listening to music (i.e., headphones) than studying. This is a situation where management over one’s physical environment is not an easy task but can be achieved with some ingenuity. The following strategies have been used by students in this environment: setting specific study goals for each evening, selecting a location in the room that is most conducive for study, reducing visual contact with certain individuals, and limiting socializing to breaks outside the room.

Self-management of social environment relates to the ability to determine when you need to work alone or with others, or when it is time to seek help from instructors, tutors, peers, and nonsocial sources such as a reference book, additional textbooks, or the Internet (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997).

A recent experience provides a good example of the need for self-management in this area. A student mentioned in class that she did not do well on her biology exam, because she did not prepare for the type of questions it contained. I suggested she meet with her instructor to discuss her present performance and learn more about future exams. She agreed. When she returned to class the following week, I asked her about the meeting. She stated that she went to the instructor’s office, but because other students were waiting to see him, she left and did not return. In chapter 1, I mentioned that when certain learners confront obstacles, they find ways to succeed; they don’t give up! If a meeting with an instructor can lead to higher academic performance, you must develop strategies to obtain the information. This may mean making an appointment, waiting outside the office, finding out when the instructor arrives in the morning, or walking with the instructor to his or her next class. In other words, your job is to obtain the information. It is easy to convince yourself that you sufficiently tried to complete a task or that the task was too difficult. Unfortunately, these attributions do not help you attain the information you need.

Motivational beliefs and perceptions often play an important role in explaining individual differences in the willingness and ability to manage physical and social environments. For example, as reported in chapter 3, students who perceive themselves as academically competent, feel in control of their academic success, and have a mastery orientation view help seeking as an effective learning strategy and are more likely to seek help (Newman & Schwager, 1992). In a study of the characteristics of students who attend voluntary review sessions, Ames and Lau (1982) found that students' participation was related to their attributional patterns and past performances. Students who did poorly on earlier exams, but attributed their poor performance to low effort and a lack of knowledge rather than to low intelligence, were much more likely to seek help than students who attributed their poor performance to lack of interest, the difficulty of the exam, or the instructor. After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

- Improve your attention and concentration.
- Select or modify study environments.
- Work more effectively in groups.
- Prepare for and benefit from meetings with tutors and instructors.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION?

In chapter 3, I pointed out that a student may be motivated to engage in a task but may have difficulty persisting, because he or she easily becomes distracted. The problem is that even though the student may be capable and motivated, he or she may lack the self-discipline or self-management to overcome environmental distractions, anxiety, or competing emotional or physical needs.

It is necessary to learn how to deal with attention and concentration. Although these terms often are used interchangeably, there is a slight difference in meaning. **Attention** is a selective process that controls awareness of events in the environment. During the discussion of the information processing system (chapter 2), I pointed out that the nature of attention determines the stimuli that are processed or neglected. Because of our limitations in attention span and ability to focus on a stimulus, it is necessary to constantly refocus on the stimulus or message. **Concentration** is the term used to identify the continual refocusing on a perceived stimulus or message. Note that *focus* is the key word identifying attention and *refocus* is the key word identifying concentration (Wolff & Marsnik, 1992).

Chapter 2 discussed the key to learning as attention. Information cannot be acquired unless one is attentive. Unfortunately, many students are not aware when they are not paying attention. Have you ever caught yourself daydreaming as you turned pages in a textbook and realized that you did not recall anything you read? Have you tried to study but had so many things on your mind that it was impossible to accomplish anything? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you will benefit from the information in this chapter.



EXERCISE 7.1: SELF-OBSERVATION: EVALUATING STUDY ENVIRONMENTS

Directions: The purpose of this exercise is to help you identify your best study environment. You may study in many different locations: dorm room, apartment, home, fraternity, sorority, or athletic study hall, and library. Identify two or three different study locations that you have used to study this term and rate your behavior in each location on a 5-point scale. Identify the location by writing it next to the letters A, B, or C. Complete your ratings by writing in the number 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 for each location.

A:
B:
C:

1	2	3	4	5
Very		Moderately		Not at all
descriptive		descriptive		descriptive
of my		of		of
behavior		my behavior		my behavior

<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Locations</i>		
	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>
1. I begin studying immediately.			
2. I study with little interruption from others.			
3. I spend time on the phone.			
4. I spend time daydreaming or sleeping.			
5. I find the temperature conditions satisfactory.			

Behavior	Locations		
	A	B	C
6. I find the chair, table, and lighting satisfactory.			
7. I concentrate on what needs to be accomplished.			
8. I take the appropriate number and length of breaks to maintain concentration.			
9. I return to studying immediately after my breaks.			
10. I attain my study goals.			

Average Rating

— — —

Average your ratings for each of the locations you rated. The lower the score, the better you rated the location. Which location did you rate the best? Is the information consistent with your perceptions? How can you make use of the information in this exercise? Do you need to alter or change your study environment? If, so, what changes might you make?

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION?

Students have difficulty concentrating on tasks, because of external and internal distracters. External distracters are environmental sources of interference (e.g., noise, such as the TV), interruptions (e.g.,

telephone calls), uncomfortable study areas (e.g., clothes and books piled all over the room), and disruptive roommates. Internal distracters refer to sources of interference from within, such as irrelevant thoughts (e.g., “I forgot to return my library books today”), worry (e.g., “I don’t know if I can learn this material”), physiological and emotional distress (e.g., headache), and daydreaming (e.g., thinking about next weekend’s party).



EXERCISE 7.2: SELF-OBSERVATION: BECOMING AWARE OF MISDIRECTED ATTENTION

It is important to identify the types of distracters that tend to interfere with attention (Ottens, 1991). Think about academic situations in the present or past where your attention was misdirected. In the following space, identify the situation and type of distraction. Consider the following questions: Do your distractions tend to be more internal or external? Do your distractions tend to occur in certain situations (e.g., tests or lectures) or locations (e.g., studying at home or school or in the library)?

Where Attention Got Misdirected	Type of Distraction (Internal or External)



HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION?

You will be better able to enhance your concentration if you deal with known distracters before you begin studying, reading, or listening to a lecture; adopt strategies that encourage concentration; monitor your concentration as you study; and deal with distractions when they occur. Table 7.1 contains a list of suggestions to help you manage both external and internal distractions.

TABLE 7.1
MANAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DISTRACTIONS

Ways to Reduce External Distractions	Examples
Establish a study area with minimal distractions	Study in the library or designated study area in the dorm.
Have necessary materials available	Borrow notes before a study session.
Control noise levels	Ask your roommate to lower or shut off the stereo, close the window, or change your seat location in lecture hall.
Move to the front of the lecture room	
Reduce interruptions	Place a sign on the door: "Midterm Exam: Do Not Disturb," place a message on the answering machine: "Call after 10 p.m."
Protest	"Please, I'm trying to concentrate on this reading." Avoid visual contact with distracter.
Ways to Discourage Internal Distractions	Examples
Pay attention to, and whenever possible deal with, your physical state	Take a short nap before your study, get something to eat or drink, or take an aspirin for your headache.
Carefully determine when you will study in your time-management plan	If you get tired late in the evening, don't schedule study times when you are likely to be tired or don't attempt to study during your dinner hour.
Daydreaming	Make a checkmark on a notepad whenever you catch yourself daydreaming. Monitoring concentration can help keep you on task.
Deal with boredom	Alternate different subjects when you study, take study breaks every 50 minutes or so.
Instead of worrying, take action	Talk to the instructor or teaching assistant about course issues or problems, find a tutor, call your girlfriend or boyfriend to resolve a recent disagreement before you begin studying.
Use Strategies that Encourage Concentration	Examples
Monitor concentration	Constantly ask yourself questions like: "Did I understand what I just read?" "Am I beginning to daydream?" "Am I trying to understand the lecture?"

continued

TABLE 7.1
MANAGEMENT OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL
DISTRACTIONS (CONTINUED)

Use self-reminders or self-directives	“You’re starting to worry again about your test performance, just relax and get back to the question” or “I better start asking myself questions because I didn’t understand what I just read.”
Set goals	“I want to complete chapter 4 this evening and answer all questions in the study manual.”
Manage your time	“I need to find 3 hours in my study plan this week to research library material for my paper.”
Take breaks	Take a 10-minute break for every 50 minutes of study or work longer if you can maintain your concentration.
Use active learning strategies	Write and answer questions, outline, or summarize material.



EXERCISE 7.3: DEALING WITH DISTRACTERS

For each of the following situations, identify the type of distracter by placing an *I* (for internal) or an *E* (for external) in the space provided. Next, refer to the suggestions in the previous section on ways to improve concentration and recommend how each student could improve his or her concentration.

- 1. Alicia is about to study for her history exam when her roommate comes rushing in to tell her about her date for Saturday night.

Recommendation:

- 2. While Tony is working on his calculus assignment, he remembers that he forgot to put money in his checking account and his tuition check will bounce.

Recommendation:

- 3. While Ralph is taking notes in his biology class, workers start drilling outside the window of the lecture hall.

Recommendation:

- 4. Each time Carole starts studying for her French exam, she is reminded of her low quiz scores and wonders if she is going to pass the course.

Recommendation:

- 5. As Mary is reading her economics text, she realizes that she turned five pages and does not remember one thing she read.

Recommendation:

- 6. Alex has trouble concentrating when his professor starts talking too fast. He gets frustrated with the professor and stops taking notes.

Recommendation:

- 7. Felicia starts studying at about 10 p.m. and soon finds she is too tired to complete her history assignment for the next day.

Recommendation:



Student Reflection

I was never the one to receive help in high school. If I could not understand any subject matter, I just told myself that it was too complex for me. I thought that students who sought extra help in subjects they did not understand were people who were “teachers’ pets.” I often believed that they were too concerned with their academic learning. I reasoned that these types of students developed into nerds, because they did nothing but study. My fear was that if I gained extra help I would become one of them.

Table 7.2 summarizes the procedures for monitoring and dealing with attention and concentration problems.

TABLE 7.2

Procedures for Monitoring and Dealing With Attention and Concentration Problems

Procedures	Examples
1. Review your time-management plan and determine which tasks you will attend to during each study session.	“I need to read and study two chapters in my psychology textbook today.”
2. Before you begin studying, determine whether there are any distracters that may influence your concentration.	“I have one internal and one external distracter that will interfere with my reading. My two roommates are playing cards in my room and I must call my mother and wish her a happy birthday.”
3. If a distracter is present, determine whether it is internal or external and refer to the list of strategies to deal with it. If no distracter is present, begin using strategies that encourage concentration.	“I’ll go to the library tonight to study and call my mother before I leave.”
4. Monitor concentration as you study.	“I have turned two pages but don’t remember what I read.”
5. If attention gets misdirected, refer to the list of strategies to maintain concentration. If concentration is broken, maintain your use of learning strategies and take short breaks during the study session.	“I better start asking myself questions so I can maintain my focus on the material.”
6. At the end of the study session, make a check next to each task that you completed in your time-management plan.	“Ok, I’m finished with my math problems and research for my anthropology paper. What’s next on my list?”

HOW DO I SEEK ACADEMIC HELP?

Earlier in the chapter, I presented research to indicate that students who perceive themselves as academically competent and who feel in control of their academic success are more likely to seek help. The paradox is that students who need the most help are often less likely to obtain it. Students who are comfortable and capable of eliciting help from others are often able to solve their problems and, in addition, acquire greater knowledge of how to obtain help in the future. Newman (1991) identified a sequence of decisions and actions that play an important role in both help seeking and the self-management of learning:

- *Awareness of a need for help.* The student is aware that knowledge is lacking or comprehension is incomplete. Awareness is a key factor in both seeking and benefitting from help. Individuals are not likely to seek help if they do not know what they do not understand. You should not wait to be jolted by a low exam score or poor grade on a paper to decide that you need help. Instead, you should evaluate your understanding of the content in each of your courses on a regular basis throughout the semester.
- *Decision to seek help rather than taking alternative actions.* When some students realize they are in trouble, they head for the registrar's office to drop a course rather than consider alternative strategies such as obtaining a tutor, joining a study group, or meeting with the instructor or teaching assistant.
At times, many self-directed learners have academic difficulties. However, they learn how to use the services and resources available to them. Are you aware of the services provided by your college or university? Do you have a learning center for academic assistance? Are tutoring services available?
- *Decision regarding the type of help to seek.* Some problems can be solved by seeking nonsocial assistance. For example, students in math or science courses can benefit from purchasing review books that provide numerous opportunities to solve different types of problems. They can also borrow other textbooks from the library that explain information in different ways.
- *Decision regarding the target person from whom to seek help.* The target person could be a friend, study group, professor, or tutor. Keep in mind that you're not limited to one source of help. Ask yourself: How soon do I need the help? Who is most likely to provide help in the shortest time frame? Who is most competent in providing the help?
- *Employment of a help-seeking strategy.* Prepare before you meet with the person who can help you. First, determine what

it is that you do not understand about the material. Second, make an appointment (if possible) with your tutor, teaching assistant, or instructor. Third, carefully review the content and make a list of the specific questions you want answered at the meeting. Categorize the different problems you have trouble solving (e.g., underline foreign language passages that you have trouble translating or list terms that you don't understand). You will benefit more from these sessions if you are prepared for the meeting. It is not acceptable to walk into a session and say something like: "I don't get it," or "I don't know what is going on in this course." Many times, you will spend more time *preparing* for a productive session than you spend with the person in the session.

- *Processing of the help.* Good notes should be taken concerning the advice obtained so they can be referred to after the session. You may wish to bring a tape recorder so you can listen and think during the session instead of writing.

Consider the advice you received when you sought help in terms of how it could change your learning and study behavior for the remainder of the course. What did you learn that could be applied to new chapters or units in the course? What are some immediate changes you should make to improve your performance in the course? How can you best keep pace with the new material in the course?

HOW CAN I WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY IN GROUPS?

Each semester, when I introduce a group project, one or two students will ask to work individually because of negative experiences with group projects. Many students do not realize that it is difficult to escape team involvement in the workplace. That is to say, it is unlikely that one would approach his or her supervisor and ask: "Can I work on a project by myself?"

Recently, I had an opportunity to teach an educational psychology course to training specialists working for some of the most successful computer companies in the country. During a discussion in class, the students mentioned that their companies had no difficulty hiring bright mathematicians, scientists, or computer specialists. Their problem was that some of their personnel did not function well in group settings. Because teams complete most projects, there are often delays in completing projects because of problems in interpersonal relations.

One of the most productive sources of social support is working in learning or study groups. Reports from studies indicate that cooperative

TABLE 7.3

Procedures for Forming and Studying in Groups
1. Notice who is in your class. 2. Identify two, three, or four interested students. 3. Contact the students to arrange a meeting time and place. 4. At the first session: • Exchange names and phone numbers. • Conduct an overview of the subject matter. • Discuss each member’s particular interest in a topic. • Assign each member an equal number of text pages or notes to lead the discussion of each topic in the course. • Discuss possible test questions. 5. Before you end the first meeting: • Make sure every member has a clear set of goals for the next session. • Be certain that each member understands his or her particular assignment. • Discuss any problems that occurred during the first session. 6. At the second meeting, discuss the content and begin testing each other. (Smaller groups may begin testing each other during the first meeting if they complete their planning over the phone or in person before the meeting.) 7. Identify topics or sections of the content that the group had difficulty understanding. 8. Decide how the group members can obtain additional help, if needed (e.g., one group member may contact the instructor or teaching assistant to answer questions, another member may decide to research a question or topic in greater depth).

learning can promote higher academic achievement, higher level thinking skills, and increased friendships (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Table 7.3 presents some recommended procedures for forming and studying in groups (Frender, 1990). The following are examples of how one student found different ways to use cooperative learning in different classes:

Student Reflections

During the course of the semester, I have found group studying to be an essential part of my success in my different classes. The following are examples of how I have used group study this semester:

• Before a test in biology, I met with two friends to review the material for the exam. We heard that the professor’s exams came straight from his lectures. Therefore, we basically went straight through the notes and discussed what was presented each day. As we proceeded, we learned some information from



each other that we did not have in our notes. Also, discussing the material helped us learn it more thoroughly.

- There are practicals in my biology laboratory in which students are required to identify different things seen in the lab and perform different tasks learned in lab throughout the semester. I studied in a group for my practical so we could quiz each other. We used pictures and drew diagrams, and asked each other to label them. We wrote down different procedures learned in lab as we discussed how we did them. Most important, we discussed the reasons behind each activity that occurred during the lab.
- In chemistry, there are many problems that must be done after reading a chapter to prepare for a test. My friends and I usually read the chapter by ourselves, then get together to do the problems. This way, if we don't understand something, we can ask each other and get help solving the problems. This procedure speeds up the learning process because we don't need to go back and refer to the chapter as much.
- In math, I meet with my friends to discuss problems that we couldn't solve individually. The individual who solved a problem correctly explains to the rest of the group how he or she did it.
- In my English course, I get together with one of my friends to read each other's papers. Usually after I write a paper, it is hard for me to identify my own errors. When someone else reads it, he can tell me what parts he doesn't understand and what needs improvement so I can make the necessary adjustments.

HOW CAN I HELP MAKE MY STUDY GROUP MORE PRODUCTIVE?

Not all group experiences are as positive as the examples identified in the student reflection section. Numerous interpersonal skills affect the success of group learning and study. A key factor in determining how one deals with group problems is influenced by how the group was formed. For example, one may have more freedom in developing policy and procedures in your group when the members self-select, such as a study group, as compared with a situation where an instructor places students in specific groups to complete an assignment or project. The following are four categories of important skills used in collaborative settings (adapted from Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994).

Forming skills are needed for organizing the group and for establishing minimum norms of appropriate behavior. One of the major problems facing most groups is dealing with individuals who do not meet their responsibility to the group. Group members need to discuss their expectations and how they will deal with problems that occur

when they first meet. It is important to be fair in dealing with group members. For example, a group member may have had a serious personal or family problem that prevented completion of a task. This is no reason to exclude the person from the group. However, if during a project a member does not complete his or her work, the rules established at the beginning of the work should be used to deal with the problem. The basic rule should be: fair, but firm!

Another area of concern is how group members treat each other. Some of the principles groups might adopt include:

- There are no dumb ideas. People should feel free to be imaginative.
- When you disagree with an *idea*, be sure you don't attack the *person*.
- Mutual respect will allow the project to flow much more smoothly.
- Be slow to draw conclusions about your fellow group members. We are all more complex than we first appear to be. Avoid prejudging.

Group members should discuss additional behaviors they believe are vital for effective interpersonal relations at the first meeting. One of the most important behaviors to stress is that personal criticisms are not a part of effective group functioning.

Functioning skills are the second category of cooperative skills. They involve the management and implementation of the group's efforts to achieve tasks and to maintain effective working relationships among members. Such skills include expressing support and acceptance for the contribution of group members, asking for help or clarification about what is being said or done, offering to explain or clarify another student's position, and motivating the group with new ideas or suggestions when enthusiasm wanes.

Formulating skills are directed at helping group members understand and remember the material being studied in the group. Such skills include encouraging group members to summarize what was covered, adding important information when something is left out of the summary, reviewing important information, and using learning strategies to remember important ideas. Formulating skills can be implemented as group members fill different roles. Depending on the task to be completed, the following roles should be assigned:

- A facilitator, whose job is to help organize the workload and keep the group focused, and who reminds members of the policy and procedures of the group.
- A recorder, whose job is to take notes and keep attendance.

If possible, specific responsibilities should be assigned to all group members.

Fermenting skills are used to stimulate academic controversy so that group members will rethink and challenge each other's positions, ideas, and reasoning. Examples of such skills include challenging ideas but not people, formulating a coherent and defensible position on an issue, and probing and eliciting information for achieving answers and solutions to problems. The major concern at this level is to ensure that the group members do not stop investigating when the first solution is presented. Sometimes the first answer or the quickest solution is not the best one. Each group member needs to help stimulate the thinking and intellectual curiosity of others.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

Sending Messages Effectively

One of the most important functioning skills in group dynamics is learning how to send messages effectively. Johnson (2003) identified some key skills for this purpose:

1. *Clearly "own" your message* by (a) using personal pronouns such as I, me, and my and (b) letting others know what your thoughts and feelings are. You "disown" your messages when you use expressions such as: "most people," "some people," and "our group," making it difficult to tell whether you really think and feel what you are saying or are simply repeating the thoughts and feelings of others.
2. *Describe the other person's behavior* without including any judgment, evaluation, or inferences about the person's motives, personality, or attitudes. When reacting to the behavior of other people, be sure to describe their behavior ("You keep interrupting me") rather than evaluating it ("You're a rotten, self-centered egotist who won't listen to anyone else's ideas").
3. *Describe the ways the relationship can be changed* to improve the quality and quantity of interaction among the individuals involved. To maintain and improve a relationship, the quality of the relationship needs to be discussed and reflected on periodically.
4. *Make the message appropriate to the receiver's frame of reference.* This same information will be explained differently to an expert in the field than to a novice, to a child than to an adult, or to your boss than to a coworker.
5. *Ask for feedback* concerning the ways your messages are being received. To communicate effectively, you must be aware of how

the receiver is interpreting and processing your messages. The only way to be sure is to seek feedback continually as to what meanings the receiver is attaching to your messages.

6. *Describe your feelings by name, action, or figure of speech.* When communicating your feelings, it is especially important to be descriptive. You may describe your feelings by name (“I feel sad”), by actions (“I feel like crying”), or by figures of speech (“I feel down in the dumps”).
7. *Use nonverbal messages to communicate your feelings.* Nonverbal messages are very powerful but inherently ambiguous. When people cry, for example, it may be because they are sad, happy, angry, or even afraid. When utilized with verbal messages, however, nonverbal messages clarify, strengthen, enrich, emphasize, and frame the message.
8. *Make your verbal and nonverbal message congruent with each other.* Every face-to face communication involves both verbal and nonverbal messages. Usually these messages are congruent, so by smiling and expressing warmth nonverbally, a person can be saying that she has appreciated your help. Communication problems arise when a person’s verbal and nonverbal messages are contradictory; if a person says, “Here is some information that may be of help to you,” with a sneer and in a mocking tone of voice, the meaning you receive is confused by the two different messages being sent simultaneously.
9. *Be redundant.* Repeating your message more than once and using more than one channel of communication (such as pictures and written messages, as well as verbal and nonverbal cues) will help the receiver understand your messages (pp. 132–133).

Receiving Messages Effectively

One of the most important skills in receiving messages involves giving feedback about the message in ways that clarify and encourage the continuation of discussion. Gordon (2001) provided some helpful information when he encourages listeners to become **active listeners**. This means letting others know that we recognize the feelings behind what they are saying. Read the following possible dialogue between you and a friend. Which comment do you think will gain the most response from your friend? Why?

Friend: “That was the worst test I ever took.”

You: “Don’t worry about it. Let’s get a pizza!”

Friend: “That was the worst test I ever took.”

You: “You are really upset about the test.”

Gordon believes that the second dialogue would most likely encourage greater dialogue, because you attempt to communicate that you understand your friend's feelings. Active listening involves recognizing the feeling and meaning of others, and then restating this meaning so others feel understood and accepted. This type of listening provides a sort of mirror for the person to see himself or herself more clearly.

Many individuals do not use active listening. Instead, they want to give advice as to what others should do about their situation without recognizing feelings. In fact, in some families, students grow up without being able to openly express their feelings. Here's an example:

Student: "I can't complete all the work demanded in my courses."

Parent: "I have many pressures in my job, too. I wish I was in college and all I had to think about was my courses!"

Is this the type of response that will encourage you to discuss your feelings, or is it more likely to encourage you to walk away or change the topic? Think about your closest friends. Are they more likely to recognize your feelings than other individuals in your life? If you were the student's parent, what type of active listening response would you give? Remember, don't start by trying to give advice.

The following is a partial list of feeling words. Think of other words that could be added to each list.

<u>Happy Feelings</u>	<u>Upset Feelings</u>
accepted	angry
appreciated	anxious
better	disappointed
cheerful	embarrassed
joyful	hurt
excited	irritated
good	sad
proud	stupid
satisfied	worried

The following are other examples of active listening:

Message: "I can't complete all the work demanded in my courses."

Response: "You seem upset about your course work."

Message: "I can't believe it that my boyfriend [or girlfriend] said that I was an inconsiderate person!"

Response: "Your boyfriend [or girlfriend] really hurt you."

Message: "I finally made the dean's list."

Response: "You seem proud of yourself."

As you can see from these examples, the responses reflect back the meaning of the message in a clear manner. The listener focuses on the feeling expressed and avoids trying to solve problems for others. This strategy helps to confirm and validate an individual's feelings, as well as to set the stage for any necessary problem solving by getting individuals to discuss the reasons behind their feelings. Try using active listening with a member of your class, close friend, or parent and evaluate the nature of your communication with this individual.

Key Points

1. Successful learners restructure their physical and social environments to improve their learning.
2. Self-management of one's social environment relates to the ability to determine when one needs to work alone or with others, to seek help when needed from instructors, tutors, or peers, or to seek help from nonsocial sources (e.g., textbooks and reference materials).
3. Students may lack the self-discipline or self-management to overcome environmental distractions, anxiety, or competing emotional or physical needs.
4. Motivational beliefs and perceptions account for individual differences in the willingness and ability to control one's physical and social environment.
5. Students have difficulty concentrating on tasks, because of external and internal distracters.
6. Interpersonal skills for group learning and study can be categorized into four levels: forming, functioning, formulating, and fermenting.
7. Students can improve their communication skills by learning how to send and receive messages more effectively.
8. Learning how to become an active listener can improve communication with others.



Follow-up Activities

1. Use the Self-management Process to Improve Attention and Concentration



Complete the following self-study during a period of 2 to 3 weeks. Your report should include each of the following processes and should

be approximately five to eight typed pages in length. See Appendix A for detailed information on how to conduct a self-management study.

Self-observation and evaluation. What problem(s) do I have regarding attention and concentration? What are the symptoms of my problem (i.e., when, where, and how often does my problem occur)? How much of an impact does this problem have on my academic performance? What factors (e.g., beliefs, perceptions, feelings, physiological responses, or behaviors) contribute to this problem? What do I need to change to reduce or eliminate my problem(s)?

Goal setting and strategic planning. What are my goals? What strategies can I use to reduce distracters and maintain concentration? When will I use these strategies? How will I record my progress?

Strategy implementation and monitoring. What strategies did I use to improve my attention and concentration? When did I use these strategies? What method(s) did I use to record my progress (e.g., documents, charts, logs, tally sheets, checklists, or recordings)? When did I use these methods? How and when did I monitor my progress to determine if my new plan was working? What changes, if any, did I make along the way?

Strategic-outcome monitoring. Did I attain the goal I set for myself? Have the modifications in my attention and concentration improved my academic performance or personal life? What strategies were the most and least effective? What changes, if any, do I need to make in the future?

2. Assess Group Dynamics

Use the procedures for forming and studying in groups discussed in this chapter and evaluate the effectiveness of one of your study groups according to each of the necessary group skills: forming, functioning, formulating, and fermenting. In other words, report on how well your study group effectively performed in each skill area and make recommendations on how your group could function more effectively.

3. Visit With an Instructor

Newman (1991) identified a sequence of decisions and actions that play an important role in both help seeking and self-management of learning. Use Newman's suggestions discussed in this chapter to meet

with one of your instructors. Write a summary of how you used his recommendations and evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting.

4. Practice Active Listening

The following are a series of statements made by my college students. Provide responses to each statement that demonstrate active listening responses.

1. This course sucks!

Response:

2. I don't know how I will ever finish this term paper.

Response:

3. I can't believe my girlfriend left me!

Response:

4. I'm so tired, I can't study any longer.

Response:

5. My instructor must think I am an idiot by asking me such an easy question.

Response:

6. It doesn't matter how much I try, I can't get higher than a C in my writing course.

Response:

7. I know I will make first string on the volleyball team.

Response:

Answers to Exercise 7.3

1. E 2. I 3. E 4. I 5. I 6. E 7. I

