The Importance of Paying Attention

We live in a complex world in which we seem to always feel the pressure to do a variety of tasks faster and better. As a result, many of us have adopted the paradigm of multi-tasking as a way to cope with and manage these demands. This way of trying to do multiple things at once, however, may not serve us as well as we would like to believe.

Attention is the cognitive process of focusing on one thing in the environment while ignoring other things in the environment. Giving your undivided attention to something allows you to observe, consider, and understand it more deeply than if you were to divide your attention among multiple things at one time.

When you perform routine, mundane tasks such as talking on the phone and loading the dishwasher, your motor memory takes over much of the task of placing dishes into the machine so that more of your attention is on your conversation. Thus, you can juggle these kinds of activities reasonably well simultaneously.

If you are being exposed to new information in class, or are trying to reason through novel homework tasks, asking your brain to divide its attention among tasks means that it cannot focus on deep learning. Deep learning involves actively relating new information to information, experiences, and skills that you already possess so that it is more firmly anchored in your memory. One reason that people “forget” things is that they did not pay enough attention up front for the information to ever get stored in long-term memory. If you are texting or talking to someone or thinking about a project that you have to complete later in the day, you are not focused on what is going on in class at that moment. Thus, you never get that information, so you have no chance to process and store it.

Whether you are trying to learn new information or work on something highly detailed, it is better to devote your attention to that task and leave other tasks for later. The result you get will be better, and it will take less time to complete.

Consider Total Wellness this Fall

The Oklahoma City County Health Department offers free Total Wellness classes to all residents of Oklahoma County. These 12-week classes focus on making healthier dietary choices, increasing physical activity, reducing body weight, and developing new, healthier lifestyle habits.

The next set of classes begin the first week of September, and they are offered at multiple locations around OKC, including here on campus. Contact the City County Health Department for more information or to enroll in the program: Total_wellness@occhd.org (405) 425-4352
Influenza, also known as the flu, is a viral infection that can affect humans. Flu symptoms can range from very mild to very serious, and sometimes fatal. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that annual deaths caused by the flu or by complications from the flu range from a low of 3,000 to a high of 49,000. Typically, the average is given as about 36,000 although it is impossible to know for sure. The virus affects the nose, throat, bronchial airways, and lungs of those infected, and seasonal strains impact most harshly infants and young children, the elderly, and those whose immune systems are already compromised. The viruses that cause the flu are most commonly spread by droplets when people with the flu cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets may land and remain for a period of time on hard surfaces, so touching infected surfaces is a less common secondary way of becoming infected. Flu “season” is typically the fall and winter months, with peak incidences reported in January and February. Local health departments should have the 2013-2014 supply of seasonal flu vaccine beginning in October. Private pharmacies and physician offices may have their supplies on hand sooner. Symptoms of the flu include a fever or feeling feverish, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Less commonly in adults than in children is the presence of vomiting and diarrhea. The onset of symptoms tends to be very rapid once you get the flu, but you may have been exposed to the virus days prior. This sometimes leads people to believe that the flu shot made them sick even though it cannot. Infected people may be able to infect others a day before they begin to show symptoms and up to a week after becoming sick. The best way not to get the flu is to get a vaccination each year at the start of flu season. The flu shot contains a deactivated virus that cannot cause the illness. For those concerned about the effects of thimerosal, this preservative is present in most, but not all, flu vaccines. The potential risk for harm from contracting the flu greatly exceeds any from thimerosal, but you can ask your healthcare provider about receiving a thimerosal free vaccine.

Wash your hands often, especially after touching hard surfaces such as table tops, phones, door handles, chairs, computer keyboards, and so forth. Use a mild soap, lather and rub your hands together vigorously for about a minute, and then rinse and dry well. Viruses (and bacteria) are capable of mutating (changing) themselves, so you aren’t trying to kill all of them. You simply want to wash them off of your hands so they have a lower chance of infecting you. A supplement to hand washing is a hand sanitizer, a product that often has an alcohol base and is designed to disinfect your hands between washings. It is important to remember that these products are not a replacement for hand washing, and you should wash your hands with soap and water after every few applications of the product. For maximum effectiveness and safety, observe expiration dates, and keep the product out of reach of young children.

A Comparison of Bacteria and Viruses

It can be easy to get confused about which germs cause which illnesses and why your doctor sometimes prescribes antibiotics and sometimes tells you to just rest and drink plenty of fluids. Bacteria are single-celled organisms that may or may not be beneficial to humans. They may live in our intestines and help digest our food (good bacteria) or they may cause illness. Illnesses caused by bacteria can be successfully treated with antibiotics. Viruses are molecular (smaller than a cell) entities that are not usually considered a living thing in the traditional sense. Viruses reproduce by invading host cells and taking them over. Antibiotics do not work against viruses, and some viral infections (HIV and Herpes) can be treated, but not cured.
A commonly asked question of prospective college students is whether they intend to be enrolled full-time or part-time. Most of the time, people shrug off this question without giving much thought to what it suggests or how their decision might impact their lives. A college course load is compared to work because it involves...work. With only 24 hours in every day, and no way to borrow time from anyone else, you must realize that you cannot add commitments to your day without giving up something. If you work, have children, take care of a home, and enjoy leisure time, it is likely that your days are already full. Adding full-time college enrollment is the equivalent of adding another full time job. What will you drop out of your life in order to work in the time that is necessary for your academic success?

As a general rule, we advise you to plan for about 2 hours outside of class to study and complete homework for every hour that you are in class. There is no set amount of time, however, because what you need for your success depends on the type of class it is and how your strengths and weaknesses fit with the content and requirements. You may not need to spend much time at all working outside of some classes because of the course design. Others may require several hours each day from you. Even classes with “easy” content may require a lot of your time because of the number and type of tasks they require. Nothing can substitute for good planning, so always consider every commitment in your life (job, kids, travel time, church, volunteering, eating, and so forth) as you schedule each semester.

Set specific and realistic goals for yourself. If you plan to clean the garage or organize closets, make a list of the tasks that you want to accomplish. It is very easy to feel overwhelmed by tasks that involve multiple steps or that take your attention in various directions. Break large tasks into smaller ones and focus on completing those pieces. Also, viewing a really large job in its individual pieces makes it easier to give yourself a break to do other things as you complete the smaller pieces.

Learn to set priorities. All goals and tasks in life are not equal. Some things must get done, but others can wait until later or not get done at all. If you discipline yourself to get the most important things on your priority list done each day in a timely manner, you will have fewer situations in which you feel rushed or panicked by things that catch you off guard. Also, you may find that you have more time to devote to other tasks and activities or that you feel less stressed because you have accomplished something. Take the time to take care of your health. Burning the proverbial candle on both ends will only result in making you exhausted, cranky, and ill. Rather than push yourself to work all night (a situation that is often counterproductive), work until you are tired, sleep for a few hours, and then get up and work more. For many people, that time in the middle of the night when everyone else is sleeping is an ideal time to study or get other tasks done in peace. Then go back and sleep until time for you to wake up.

Feed your body things that will nourish you and keep you well. Get up and stretch and walk around so that your muscles can relax. Meditate. Enjoy each new day and know that whatever challenges you might be facing will not last forever.
Student Support Services houses a variety of services designed to enhance the performance and well-being of students at Oklahoma City Community College. All services are confidential and free to current students.

- Services to Students with Disabilities, including providing accommodations for documented disabilities, interpreting and captioning services for deaf and hard of hearing students, and assistive technology.
- Professional counseling by licensed providers.
- Learning support specialists to assist with academic needs such as learning styles, study skills, test-taking, and general health and wellness issues.
- TRIO Grant Programs (Upward Bound and Trio Student Support Services) designed to help first generation college students learn more about college before they arrive and how to be more successful once they are here.

For more information about our services and how to access them, please visit our website at http://www.occc.edu/support/ or call us at 682-7520. We are located on the first floor of the Main Building (Area 1F8) near SEM Entry 3.

Hamburger Stroganoff

Cook pasta according to package directions, omitting salt and fat. Drain and rinse under cold water.

Heat oil in a large, nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add beef to pan; cook 4 minutes or until browned, stirring to crumble. Add onion, garlic, and mushrooms to pan. Cook 4 minutes or until most of liquid evaporates, stirring frequently. Sprinkle with flour and cook for 1 minute stirring constantly. Stir in broth. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 1 minute or until slightly thick. Stir in salt and pepper.


Per serving:
322 calories
9.8 grams total fat
23.9 grams protein
35.1 grams carbohydrates
2.1 grams fiber
82 milligrams cholesterol
3.2 milligrams iron
541 milligrams sodium
70 milligrams calcium

8 ounces uncooked medium egg noodles
1 teaspoon olive oil
1 pound ground beef, extra lean
1 cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic
1 (8-ounce) package pre-sliced cremini mushrooms
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup fat-free, lower sodium beef broth
1 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
3/4 cup reduced-fat sour cream
1 tablespoon dry sherry
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Your family will love this lighter, healthier version of an old classic.