



# **70** ways to **minimise distractions and focus better**

The most effective productivity strategies  
practised by top performing students

Dr Jane Genovese

# Focus is the new IQ

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"I find it hard to focus and think. Sometimes I give up and just sit there and do nothing."

-Year 10 student

Does this sound like you?

Do you have trouble staying focused when you study?

Do you escape to the awesomeness of the Internet?

If so, you may find the strategies in this resource useful!

These strategies are super simple and easy to implement. But like anything, it takes a little practice to make them part of your daily routine.

The good news is the more you carry out these actions, the sooner they'll become habits and you won't have to think about doing them.

The strategies in this resource are grouped into five major categories:

1. Engineer your environment
2. General tools and strategies
3. Mindset
4. Rest and renewal
5. Miscellaneous

The first four categories contain strategies used by students and explained by students in their own words. There are 50 strategies in total.

The final 20 strategies are those used and recommended by thought leaders, scholars and productivity experts around the world.

Treat this resource like a buffet. You don't have to try all the strategies. Take what you like and leave what you don't like.

What works for one student may not work for another. But be sure to try at least one or two strategies at the focus buffet!

Dr Jane Genovese

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**1. "I leave my phone in another room."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**2. "I make sure I have water, an apple, etc with me depending on the time of day so I won't have to get up."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**3. "I keep all electronic devices out of my room."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**4. "I study when the house is quiet and people are out."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**5. "I clear away clutter to create a space that helps me to focus."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**6. "I remove distractions from the outset."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**7. "I'll turn my phone off and put it in the room furthest from where I am."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**8. "I do a quick check in -  
Is the lighting good?  
Temperature good? Am I  
hungry? Get snacks.  
Always get snacks."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**9. "Working in front of my mum at the kitchen bench helps me to stay focused."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**10. "I clean my room every morning."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**11. "I throw my phone  
across the room."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**12. "I set a timer with  
scheduled breaks."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**13. "I give my phone to my  
parents. I give my  
computer to them if I don't  
need it for homework."**

**-Year 11 Student**



**14. "I create a pleasant study space. This encourages me to start studying and stay there longer."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**15. "I listen to music to drown out background noise."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**16. "I turn the air con on to a desired temperature."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**17. "I study in a well lit, quiet area and clear space."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**18. "I put my devices in a place where I cannot see or reach them."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**19. "I go to the library to study to avoid getting distracted as much."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**20. "I tell my siblings to go away."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**21. "I avoid going on social media after school on weekdays for more than half an hour as it wastes a lot of time."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**22. "I turn off all notifications on my mobile phone and keep it in a drawer."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**23. "I beg my little bro to please ... be quiet ..."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**24. "I put on noise cancelling headphones."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**25. "I wear earplugs."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**26. "I reward myself only AFTER doing certain tasks (not before)."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**27. "I use an app which locks me out of specific websites."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**28. "I use flipd. This app locks me out of downloaded apps on my phone."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**29. "I use a social media blocker as a google extension."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**30. "If it's social media I tell my friends to tell me off if I go on it."**

**-Year 11 Student**



**31. "I listen to motivating music and block out unnecessary background noise."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**32. "I practise mindfulness activities and meditate before studying."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**33. "I use [the app] Forest to not distract myself."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**34. "I use the app Self Control."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**35. "I exercise and then study."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**36. "I have a specific time when I start studying."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**37. "I tell myself *Homework or sleep. Which do you prefer? Do you want to be up at midnight doing homework?* No thanks. So just get on with it."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**38. "I tell myself *I am not to leave the room until I have finished everything.*"**

**-Year 10 Student**

**39."I specify time to study and section off my subjects in small amounts of time so I don't get bored after a long amount of time and go through a rotation of subjects."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**40."I tell myself *I'll regret it later if I don't do it now.*"**

**-Year 11 Student**

**41. "I give myself little rewards. I say, *Do an hour of maths and then you can have some food!*"**

**-Year 10 Student**

**42. "I think about the consequences that will happen if I don't do my work."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**43. "I try not to make plans beforehand so I don't have to cancel and feel like I'm missing out."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**44. "I tell myself *It's due tomorrow. Do it!*"**

**-Year 10 Student**

**45. "I don't start any new Netflix shows that I will get distracted by."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**46. "I break my study into small chunks so it doesn't stress me out."**

**-Year 10 Student**



**47. "I give myself a short break between school and study time."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**48. "I make a study schedule that fits the periods during the day when I am most awake (i.e. study in the morning)."**

**-Year 11 Student**

**49. "I make sure I get enough sleep so I can concentrate properly."**

**-Year 10 Student**

**50. "I eat before I study."**

**-Year 11 Student**

# Other Strategies

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51. Wear a hoodie and headphones to signal to others that you're busy.

52. Work in a location that has no Wifi.

53. Use the Pomodoro technique: work for 25 minutes (no distractions) then take a 5 minute break.

54. Look at pictures of cute baby animals (research shows this helps!).

55. Go for walks and take regular breaks.

56. Don't get derailed by your thoughts. Keep a notepad nearby to capture any random thoughts. Simply write them down and carry on with the task at hand.

57. Take a power nap (15-30 minutes).

58. Engage in high intensity, vigorous exercise.

59. Do the most difficult thing first (never start the day by checking Facebook, Instagram or email).

60. Set up everything the night before (put out all the books, notes and stationery you need).

61. Leave yourself a post-it note each night that says what you need to do the next day.

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# Other Strategies

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62. Avoid working late at night. You'll wake up grumpy and it will be harder for you to focus.

63. Ask yourself, "What's the highest value thing I can do today?" Write it down on a whiteboard, post-it note, etc. Stick it on your wall.

64. Write short to-do lists (no more than three items). It gives you the perception that you're making progress, which will help you to stay on track.

65. Create a distraction list. Jot down when and where you are most easily distracted. Start to recognise the things that can potentially derail you so you can deal with distractions from the outset.

66. Use the online program *Complice* to help you set clear goals and intentions for each day.

67. Be aware of secondhand distraction. If you study with someone who multitasks and gets easily distracted, research shows this can affect your ability to focus and learn. Surround yourself with focused students.

68. Use Internet blocker applications such as *Freedom* and *StayFocusd*. The key is to activate these at the start of every study session.

69. Single-tasking is a skill. Cultivate this skill by doing one thing at a time (e.g. Go for a walk without listening to a podcast).

70. Put your laptop away. Take notes by hand.

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# Final Thoughts ...

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So there you have it. Seventy different strategies and tools to help sharpen your ability to focus in the age of distraction!

At this point, it's easy to fall into the trap of overwhelm ("There's so many strategies! I don't know which one to try ... I won't try any of them!").

Treat the 70 strategies like different dishes at a buffet. You don't have to try every dish at the focus buffet. Start by trying a few simple dishes, see what you think and go from there.

Right now, the only thing you need to do is be in action.

Remember, there are strong forces in your environment that can easily sabotage your ability to focus (e.g. Facebook, Youtube and Instagram). It's the job of thousands of people at these organisations to figure out how to pull your attention away from what's most important (so you spend more time on these sites!).

But you have a choice where you place your energy and attention. You don't have to put it on Facebook or random cat videos. Like the many students I surveyed to create this resource, you can choose to deal with potential distractions before you sit down to study.

Here's my challenge to you: choose one strategy in this book that you are going to try right now. Go do it. Then once you've done it, check in with yourself: did the strategy work? Could you focus better as a result? If it didn't work, what other strategy could you try? Grab your plate and head straight back to the focus buffet!

One or two strategies could be game changers for you. You just have to keep at it until you finally strike gold. But trust me, it will be worth it.

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# About me

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I'm Dr Jane Genovese.

I spend my days studying the practices of people who are disciplined, highly focused and willing to step outside their comfort zones and take risks when it comes to learning.

I spend a lot of time interviewing people and reading books/journal articles on topics such as learning how to learn, the psychology of motivation, how to make and break habits, and behaviour change.

I experiment with each new idea and strategy, applying them to my own life. Once I'm satisfied that the strategies work, I make them accessible to others through resources like this, presentations, online learning experiences, books, mind maps and my email newsletter.

To subscribe to my monthly newsletter, go to [Learningfundamentals.com.au](https://Learningfundamentals.com.au)

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