

Working Memory

Definition: A mental scratch pad used to keep track of what you are doing. It is very short term (seconds to a couple of minutes). The Working Memory subscale assesses the capacity to hold information in mind for the purpose of completing a task, or to keep track of what you are doing

Examples: When cooking, knowing you put the salt in the chili. It is like a post it note (for information you need only for a short while then throw away) versus a file (for information you need to retrieve much later on).

Basic approach:

- 1) Preview
- 2) Increase Attention
- 3) Write it down

Pay attention to important information. Get good at recognizing what it important.

Talk with your teacher/professor before the class to preview the important things that will be learned in the lecture. Preview the material in your textbook the night before.

Teachers/professors can make eye contact or develop a signal for important information. This is likely to help all students.

Slow down the rate of information in a presentation. Allow the student additional time to process.

Break information or tasks down into smaller chunks.

Change tasks more frequently. When focus fades, switch to another task. Work on math for 10 minutes, then history for 10, then English for 10.

Take frequent short breaks. Introduce a motor activity or relaxation activity during the break.

A work partner or coach can check in periodically to check work, this is another way to provide a break.

Lengthy tasks, or those that are monotonous or tedious should be avoided. Or intersperse with more engaging tasks.

Reduce the number of distractions in the environment.

Sit near the front of class to improve attention, limit distraction.

Stay “in the middle” of an activity to increase arousal and increase focus.

Pre-organize material. Have copies of lecture notes before the lecture.

Allow for additional time to respond to questions and to provide other sorts of output (assignments).

Chart performance and struggles to determine if time of day is an influence. Some people struggle in the morning, others as the day wears on (afternoon). Avoid the most complex tasks at

times of the day that are problematic.

Present information in multi-modal format. Use verbal, visual, demonstrations and allow hands on experiences when possible.

Keep new information brief and concise. Repeat often.

Teach self-talk mediation strategies for keeping on task.

Use written check lists of step required to complete a task.

Learn/teach active listening strategies.

The student should paraphrase what has been heard in a lecture. This is rehearsal. And you can check for accuracy.

Teach/learn memory strategies. Link new information to things you already know. Create rhymes with the first letter of each word in a long list that must be memorized.

Chunk information. Group details.

Use frequent rehearsal in short bursts.

Adapted from Ylvisaker and colleagues (1998).