

Attention control.



Control Centre Skill No.4: Attention Control



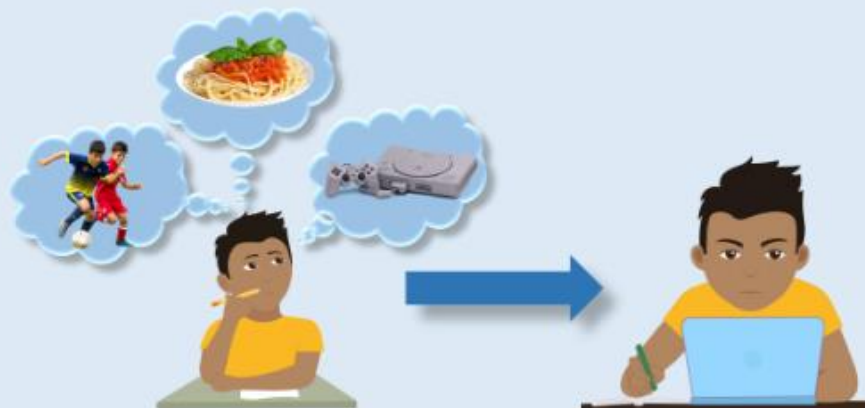
What is Attention Control?

Attention Control is sometimes called 'Concentration'.

When someone has good attention control, they can choose what they focus on and what they ignore. People with good attention control can focus all their thoughts on what they are listening to, watching or doing.

Some people **think** they have bad concentration skills when in fact they just have **different** concentration skills.

The next pages of this booklet explain these different sorts of concentration or 'Attention Control'.



Some people find it easy to focus on one thing for a long time ...

We call this 'Focused Felix' type of attention.

That's because sometimes cats can really stare at the same buzzing fly or swimming fish for ages!



Focused Felix Attention Control is really good for:

- Completing a task made up of one topic
- Completing an activity which needs you to stay in one place
- Carrying out a task or job which needs accuracy
- Doing something which is new or complicated
- Getting a task done in the right amount of time
- Checking work for mistakes

Some people find it easy to focus on one thing for a long time ...

We call this a 'Focused Felix' type of attention.

We named it that because sometimes cats can really stare at the same feather or swimming fish for ages!

People who are good at this type of attention are great at blocking out thoughts that are not relevant or linked to what they are saying or doing at that moment.

It is almost as if they have a big net on their 'brain window' which only lets thoughts in that are relevant and important for the task they are doing or the information they are listening to.



Some people find it easy to focus on one thing for a long time ...

Focused Felix Attention Control is really good for:

- Listening to someone and taking in what they are saying and being able to ask relevant questions.
- Completing a task made up of one topic
- Completing an activity which needs you to stay in one place
- Carrying out a task or job which needs accuracy
- Doing something which is new or complicated
- Getting a task done in the right amount of time
- Checking work for mistakes



Some people are good at focusing attention on lots of things, one after the other, really quickly.

We call them 'Quick Switching Squirrels'.



That's because squirrels dart their eyes and focus from one thing to another really fast.

Squirrel Attention Control is great for:

- Noticing lots of things around you
- Keeping track of lots of different things that are happening
- Noticing a sequence of quick-fire events
- Reacting quickly to a sudden event
- Gathering information quickly and making predictions about what might happen next

Which is best? Single focused or quick switching attention?



Neither. They are just useful in different situations.

Sometimes it is important to focus attention on one thing. There are lots of jobs which need this.

Cat Attention Control is good for any job that needs a person to be accurate:

- An electrician (imagine if they focused attention and got the wires mixed up!)
- A hairdresser (it would be terrible if they switched attention and gave someone a bald patch!)
- A surgeon (imagine if the surgeon kept switching attention when they were in the middle of sewing someone up!)
- A bank assistant (I wouldn't want them to switch attention and give me the wrong money!)



Squirrel Attention is great when someone needs to keep track of lots of things quickly



- A TV producer has to keep attention on lots of things happening so they keep the TV programme on track
- A teacher has to keep track of how everyone is getting on so they can give the right help to students quickly
- A police officer has to take in lots of information and react quickly
- A fire rescue worker has to take in lots of information quickly and make fast decisions to rescue those in danger
- An air steward has to keep track of safety information and notice the needs of lots of passengers all at the same time.



Even within the same task, you may need to use both sorts of Attention Control

E.g. When playing a game of basketball, you need to keep track of:

- The opponents as they move around the court and swap positions.
- Your own team players so you know who is free to pass the ball to.

This means taking in lots of information very quickly and needs strong **Squirrel Attention** control.

If you then get a shot at the basket, you have to focus your attention **like the cat** - on that **one thing**, the basket, without it switching away to something else.



Blocking Outside Distractions

Some people have a brain that finds it easy to block distractions.

They find it easy to keep a focus on **one** thing.

They are able to **block OUTSIDE distractions**, such as movement or noise.

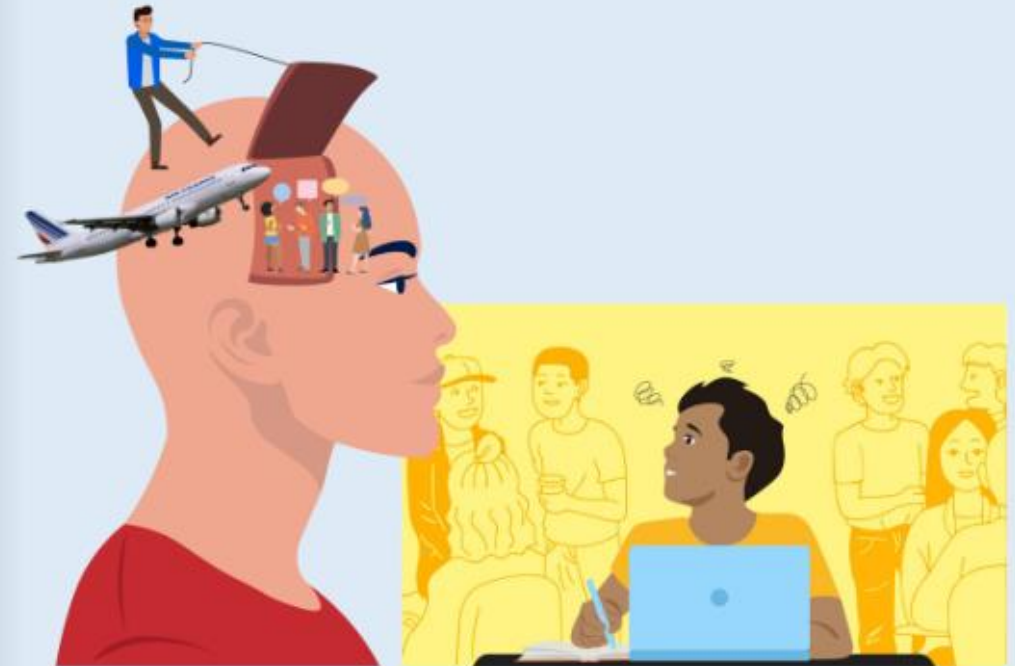


It is a bit like having a great net or sieve that only lets things in that **help** to complete the task.

Blocking Outside Distractions

Other people find it really hard to block distractions.

They are easily distracted by OUTSIDE movements, smells and sounds.



It is as if they do not have any net or sieve that only lets things in that help to complete the task.



Blocking Inside Distractions

Some people find it hard to **block INSIDE distractions**: their mind wanders to different thoughts and ideas about things that do not help to complete the task. They find it hard to keep their thoughts only on the thing they are doing, watching or listening to.

They are easily distracted by INSIDE thoughts.

When their mind wanders, they may miss information or instructions.



This can make it difficult to finish tasks accurately or in time.

Good attention control	When it is a difficulty
	
<p>I am completing a task about fractions in maths.</p> <p>All my thoughts are about the fractions we are learning.</p>	<p>I am finding it hard to keep out thoughts which are not to do with fractions.</p> <p>My thoughts wander and keep changing to other things like food, my interests or things I need to get done.</p>

Blocking Inside Distractions

Beware! Good attention is **not** just about keeping still!

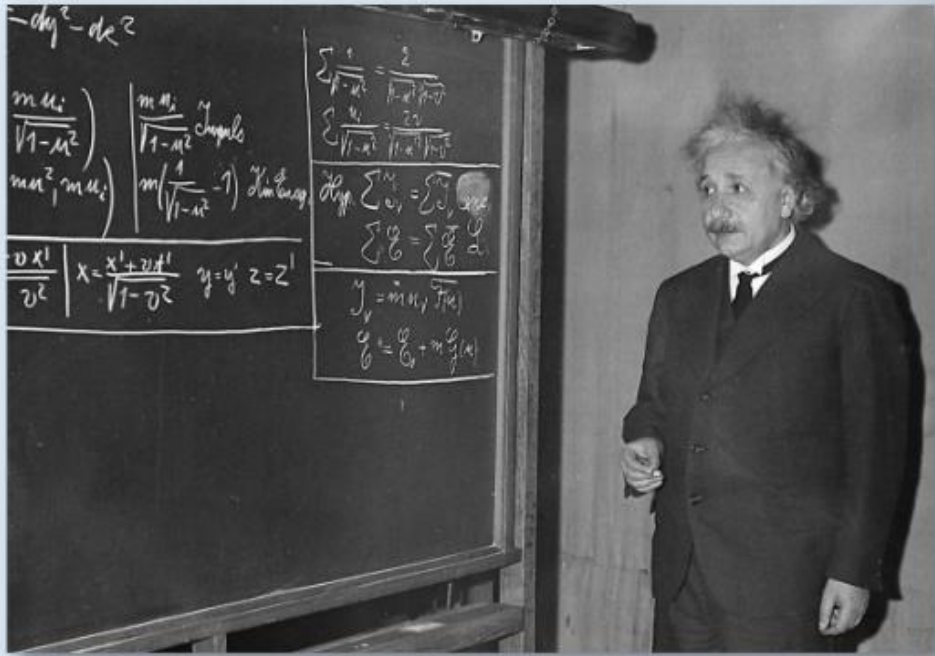
It is about being able to keep all of your thoughts on the the words you are reading or listening to, the images you are looking at or the task you are doing.

Good attention control	When it is a difficulty
	
<p>Some people may look as if they are focused, but their thoughts are actually on lots of other things – not the task.</p>	<p>Other people may be moving and look distracted, but they are actually focusing all of their thoughts on the task.</p>

Is Mind Wandering Bad?

No! Mind wandering can be a great thing. It is just making sure your mind wanders at a **helpful** time.

Some of the best writers, scientists and inventors had a mind that wandered – that is why they came up with such amazing ideas!



The trick is to practise awareness and control of your attention – it take LOTS of practice – but you will be able to do it in the end. Then, you will be able to choose when to stay focused on one thing and times when it is fine to let your mind wander.

Attention Control



Squirrels are great at:

- Noticing lots of things going on around them
- Spotting dangers and keeping safe
- Switching attention from one thing to another rapidly
- Letting their mind wander to link experiences and generate new ideas
- Making connections between unrelated ideas

Cats are great at:

- Staying focused on a task until they have finished it
- Blocking out sounds and movements around them
- Blocking out inside thoughts and being able to redirect all thoughts back on to the task
- Getting totally absorbed in a task

What kind of Attention Control do you use at different times?

It's important to know your own Attention Control for different tasks and situations. It means you can Prep4Best and let people know what helps you focus at your best.

Have a think about your Attention Control.

- When is your Attention Control more like the squirrel? Focusing on lots of things very quickly? Is this the right Attention Control for the task?
- When do you focus on one thing for a long time like the cat? Is cat Attention Control helpful at that time?
- Are you more often a squirrel or a cat? Does this help you to do well in life?



How **others** can help you with Attention Control Skills

How others can help you

- **Relational (Emotional) Safety Needs:** support you in making sure you feel absolutely safe, happy and confident around your peers and adults in the school. This will make a big difference to how well you are able to focus attention on tasks



- **World Around Me Emotional Needs:**



Check you feel certain of the task and confident you can do a good job of it before you start. Feeling certain of what is expected of you will help you to feel give you a sense of control. This will help you to focus attention better.

- **Prep4Best:** help you consider which type of Attention Control will be needed for a task – will you need to focus on one thing for a long period or lots of things very quickly?
- **Pre-mortem Prep4Best:** What might stop you from focusing at your best?
- What could work to help you still be able to focus?



- **Use coaching to help improve Attention Control over the longer term:** The more you practice, the stronger your skills will get.



How to help **yourself** with Attention Control skills

What you can do to help yourself



- **Check your basic needs:** before you start a task. Have you hydrated your brain with water? Have you had a snack? We cannot focus our attention at our best if we don't feel physically great.

If you don't feel physically great, find a way to improve this before you start. Ask for help from an adult if needed rather than feeling bad and struggling to do your best.

- If it's something you cannot do anything about right now (e.g. lack of sleep), try doing a quick fix (e.g. energising with a splash of water to the face); then ask a trusted adult to coach you to solve this in the longer term.



- **Sensory Needs:** go through the Sensory checklist (Sensory Needs cards).



Is everything ok for you? Do you need noise cancelling earbuds to block out sound? Do you need a weighted cushion to help your body to get the right pressure to help you feel physically calm?

Do you need the blinds shut to reduce glare and brightness?

How to help **yourself** with Attention Control skills

What you can do to help yourself

- **Check whether you feel you can do a good job of the task.** (another World Around Me need). If you don't feel you can do a good job, ask for some help some scaffolds to get you started. It's really hard to focus attention really well when we don't feel we can do what we're being asked.



- **Chunk tasks into bite-size pieces.** Give yourself the challenge of staying focused until you have completely finished one chunk. Then, after each chunk, take a 2 minute break before going on to the next one.
- If it's possible, after you have finished a few chunks, take a 5 minute break - dance to a song, play a game or do something which makes you happy and relaxed.



- **Work at increasing the length of your Attention Control** (just like a runner, the more you practice, the better you'll get). Use a timer. Start by trying to focus completely on one task for 5 minutes. Did you keep all thoughts on that one task? After you have achieved it, reward yourself with a break.

**Work at increasing your time
of focus each week.**



