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Increasing Attention in the Classroom – Tips for Teachers

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Attention plays a very important role in students' success in the classroom. *Attention* allows students to "tune out" unrelated information, background noise, visual distractions, and even their own thoughts. By doing this, students are able to concentrate and focus on the *important* information being given by teachers. All students can have problems attending to their teachers from time to time. However, students with learning disabilities, processing problems, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can have more frequent and significant problems attending to their teachers. Therefore, teachers have a critical role in keeping students on task and attentive. Here are some strategies both regular and special education teachers can use to increase focus in their classrooms:



Structure the classroom effectively. Try to arrange desks in a way that allows all students to equally be able to focus on you. You should also be able to move around the room to get to all students easily in order to respond to questions and better control behavior.

Keep directions/lessons clear and concise. Begin lessons with examples and activities that attract students' attention and that get them ready for the information that follows. Use both verbal and written instructions during lessons. Ask the students if they understand the directions, and see if they can repeat them back to you. Provide follow-up directions in writing and highlight or underline key words.

Monitor your talking. Decrease the amount of time you lecture, and try to incorporate more questions to get the students involved. Students are more likely to participate and engage in what they are learning if they feel like they have a choice and a *voice* in the activity or lesson. Questions also help students focus on what is more important to learn. Ask questions at the end of a lesson, but also before the introduction of new material.

Develop signals. Use special signs to let students know that it is time to focus attention. You can hold up your hand and have all of the students hold up as many fingers as you to signal that they are listening. You can also use bells or other musical instruments, give a countdown, hold up color-coded cards, turn on and off the lights, or clap a rhythm until all students are repeating it. A timer can also be effective.

Engage through movement. You can provide opportunities for physical tasks in the classroom. Students can go up to the board to write their answers to questions. They can also help pass out papers, erase the board, or collect materials. Students will listen and focus more if there is a chance for active participation. You can even set aside time to do some stretching before or between lessons.

Vary teaching styles. Recognize that students' learning styles can be very different. You can show information visually through graphic organizers, charts, maps, or software. You can also engage students by incorporating dance, drama, music, puppets, experiments, and other forms of active or hands-on learning activities. Students can also learn by doing projects or giving presentations with another classmate or in small groups. Remember, relating the topics of discussion to the students' interests greatly helps increase classroom attention and participation.



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