

How To Strengthen Your Students' Focus And Improve Behavior

January 5, 2019 by Michael Linsin

In this age of distraction . . .

Of [smartphones](#) and Instagram.

Of texting and Snapchat.

Of clickbait and information overload.

. . . being able to focus on one thing for an extended period of time is a superpower.

It gives you a distinct advantage regardless of your field of endeavor.

For today's students, and in the years to come, single-tasking will be an even greater commodity.

This is one reason why lengthy independent practice is a core principle of SCM.

Other reasons include:

- Better comprehension.
- Deeper skill acquisition.
- Faster academic improvement.
- Stronger self-confidence.

Furthermore, getting lost in an assignment or project – also known as [flow experience](#) – is far from boring. In fact, it's extremely enjoyable.

But the question is, how? How do you get students who according to at least one study have the attention span of goldfish to spend more time on task?

The answer is, **you start small and build slowly.**

For example, you may schedule ten minutes of independent work per period for the first week of school (or if you feel the need to start over mid-year), then add a minute every week until you begin to notice diminishing returns – at which point you’ll go into a 2-3 week holding pattern.

Note: We’ll be sure to provide more specific grade-level guidelines in future articles.

The idea is to start conservatively with an amount your students can handle without trouble and increase gradually from there. In this way, you take advantage of the remarkable plasticity of the human brain.

You build mental strength and confidence bit by bit to avoid the shock, and sometimes outright rejection, of asking too much too quickly.

But make no mistake, continuing to gently push the envelope on what they can do, and ever thought possible, can be downright transformational.

It can even improve behavior, because your students will actually [begin looking forward](#) to getting down to work – making, in comparison, unruliness, silliness, and the like far less enticing.

You are, in effect, arming your students with an ability that fewer and fewer of their peers possess. It’s an ability that will put them far ahead of the curve in whatever endeavor, career, or dream they wish to pursue.

Looking in from the outside, the world views this ability to focus as good old-fashioned work ethic. But the truth is, it isn’t really “work” per se.

It’s a skill.

It's a skill cultivated by teachers who know that it isn't bouncing from one thing to next, multitasking, or trying to mimic worldly distractions that are the secret to deep learning.

It's exercising and disciplining the mind.

PS - How best to help students with ADHD improve this ability is a topic we'll cover in a future e-guide.