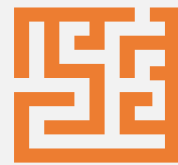


Managing your University learning experience

Talk 6



**Concentration –
the ability to focus**



We explore



Distractions, external and internal



What is concentration?



How to overcome distractions



Concentration techniques

Distractions

Distractions

Notice how your mind reacts strongly to an intrusion, such as:

the ping of a new text message,

an e-mail pop-up alert,

a sudden noise in the street outside

the sound of radio, television or music in a neighbouring room

This natural alert reaction contributes to our difficulty in concentrating on a task, especially the task of studying at university

Distractions



- Humans and animals are very alert to detect change in the world around them
- For survival, we are conditioned to quickly react to a change – perceiving it as a possible threat

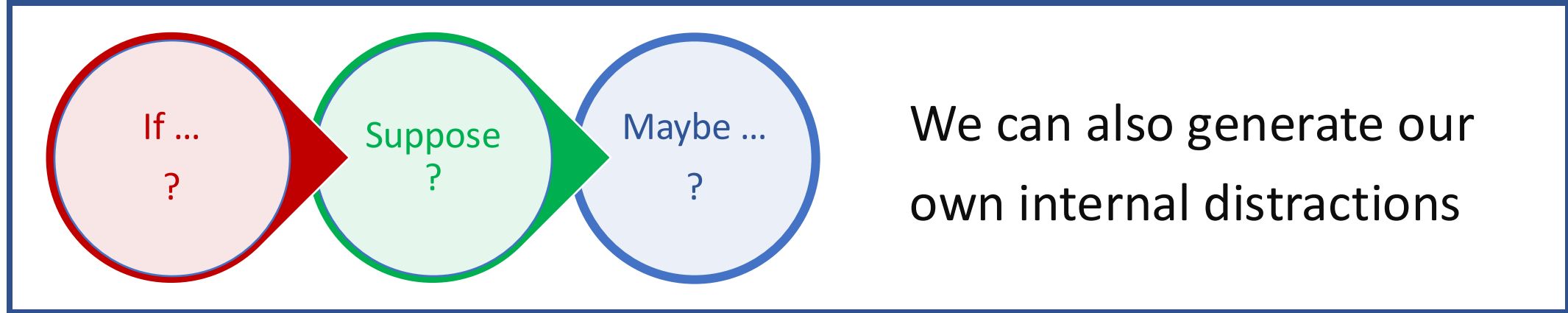
Distractions



Our brain will naturally give priority attention to refocusing for a moment on any new external distraction

Concentration on the task in hand is lost

Internal Distractions



- A common internal distraction at university is worrying about something that is far away in the future, such as a difficult exam
- This happens in many situations but especially when we are very tired and unable to focus - so make sure to look after yourself !

What is concentration?

What is concentration?

Concentration is the ability
to focus
on the task in hand
despite external and internal
distractions

What controls our concentration?

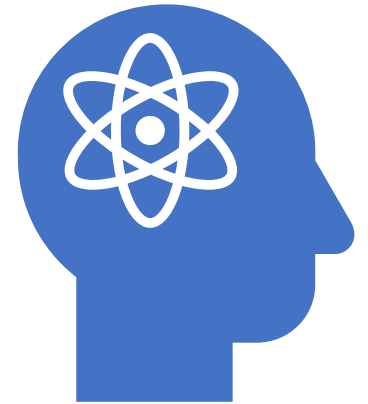


Concentration is related to our memory



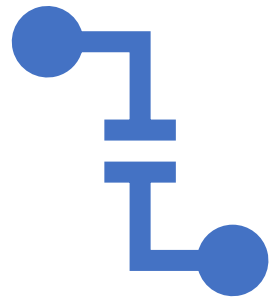
We have 'long term memory' for storing all the facts and events that we come across in life

and 'working memory' which is a temporary storage space in which we assemble the information and conduct the reasoning, learning and comprehension that we need to perform a task




What controls our concentration?

The process that controls concentration is linked to our 'working memory'.



Our 'working memory' can get easily overloaded if there are distractions

Concentration is our 'spotlight'

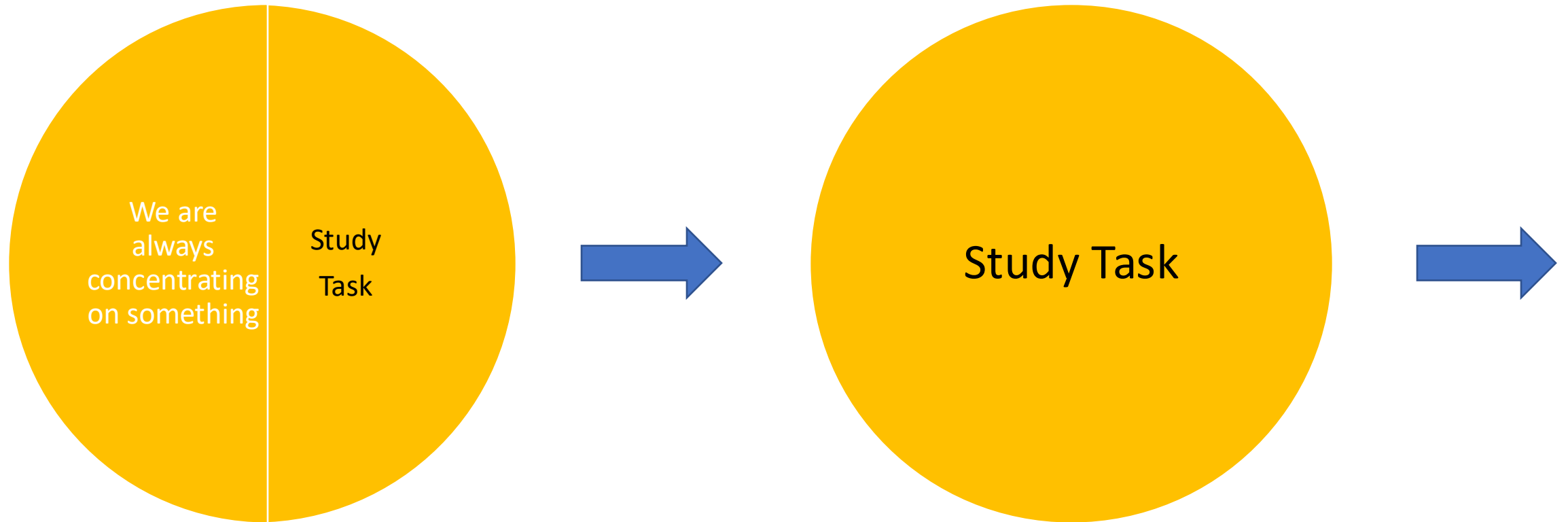
A photograph of a flashlight lying on a dark surface. The flashlight is dark-colored and has a wide, bright beam of light shining out from its lens, illuminating a large area of the surface in front of it. The beam is soft and diffused, representing a broad focus.

Concentration has been described
as our 'mental spotlight'

The beam of our
'spotlight' can be
broad or narrow

Concentration can help
us to shine a light into
the world around us
and also into our mind

Concentration during a study session

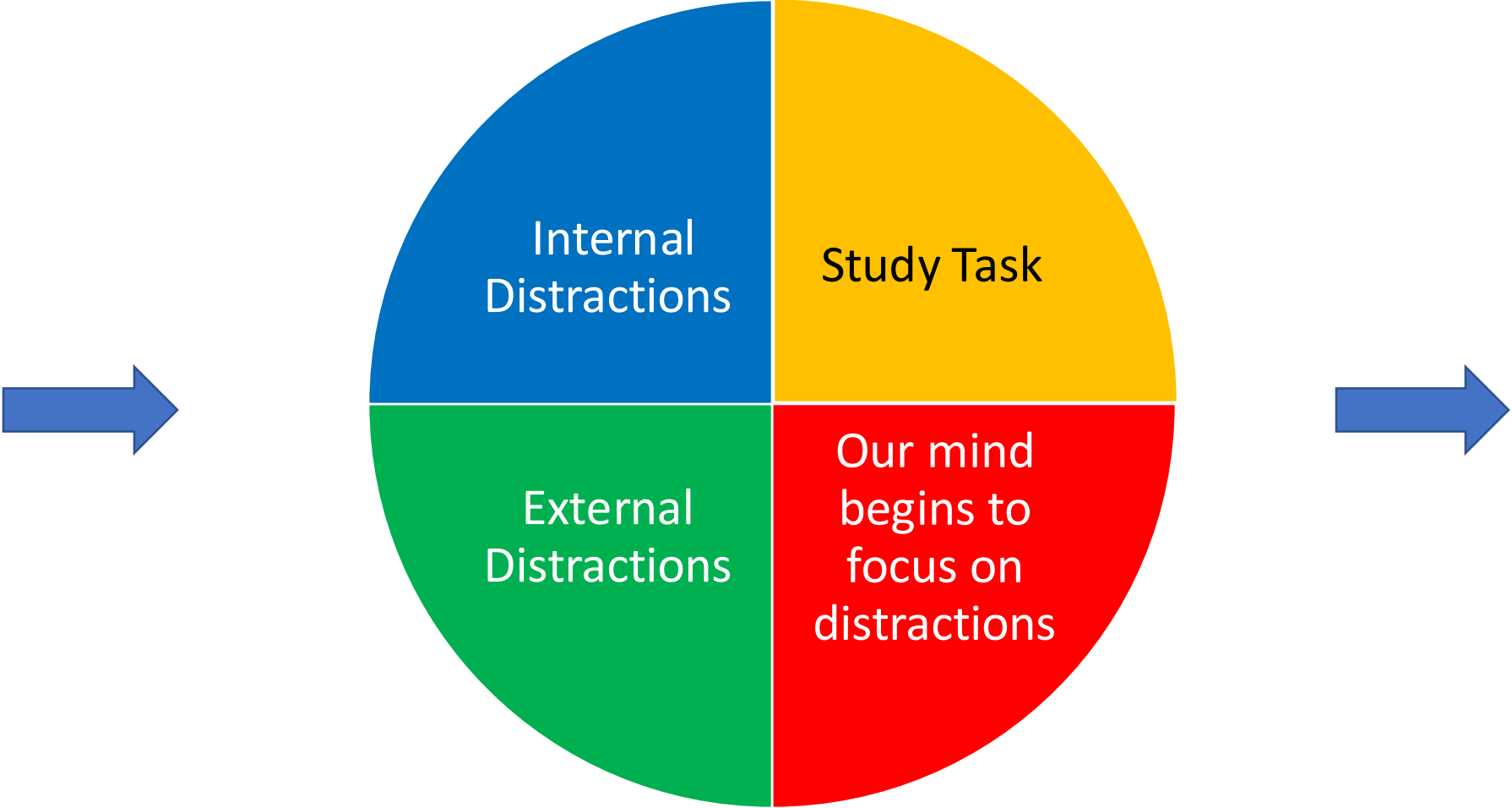


Concentration during a study session

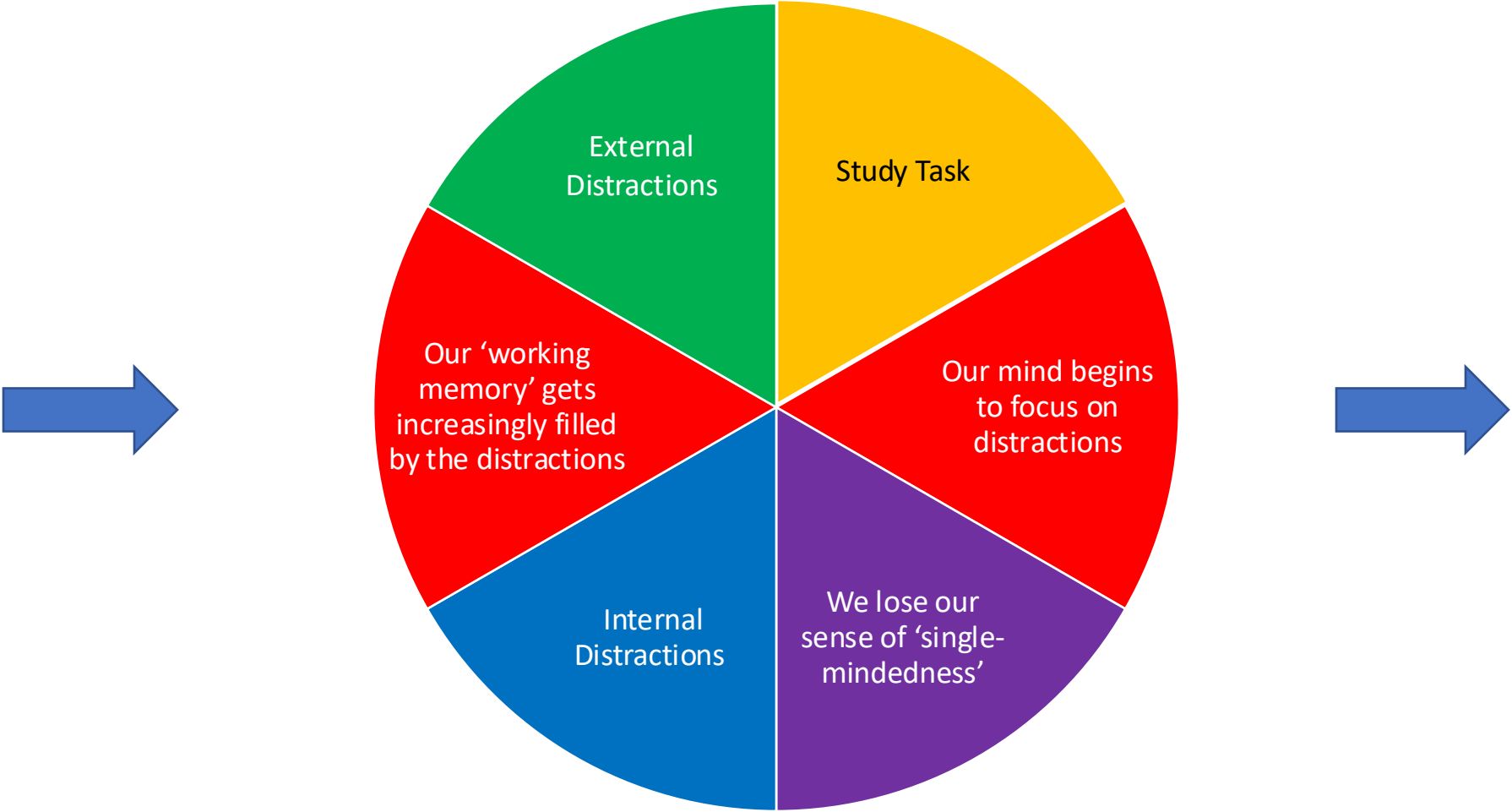
We perceive that we 'lose concentration' from our task, although in reality we are just moving our concentration to a distraction



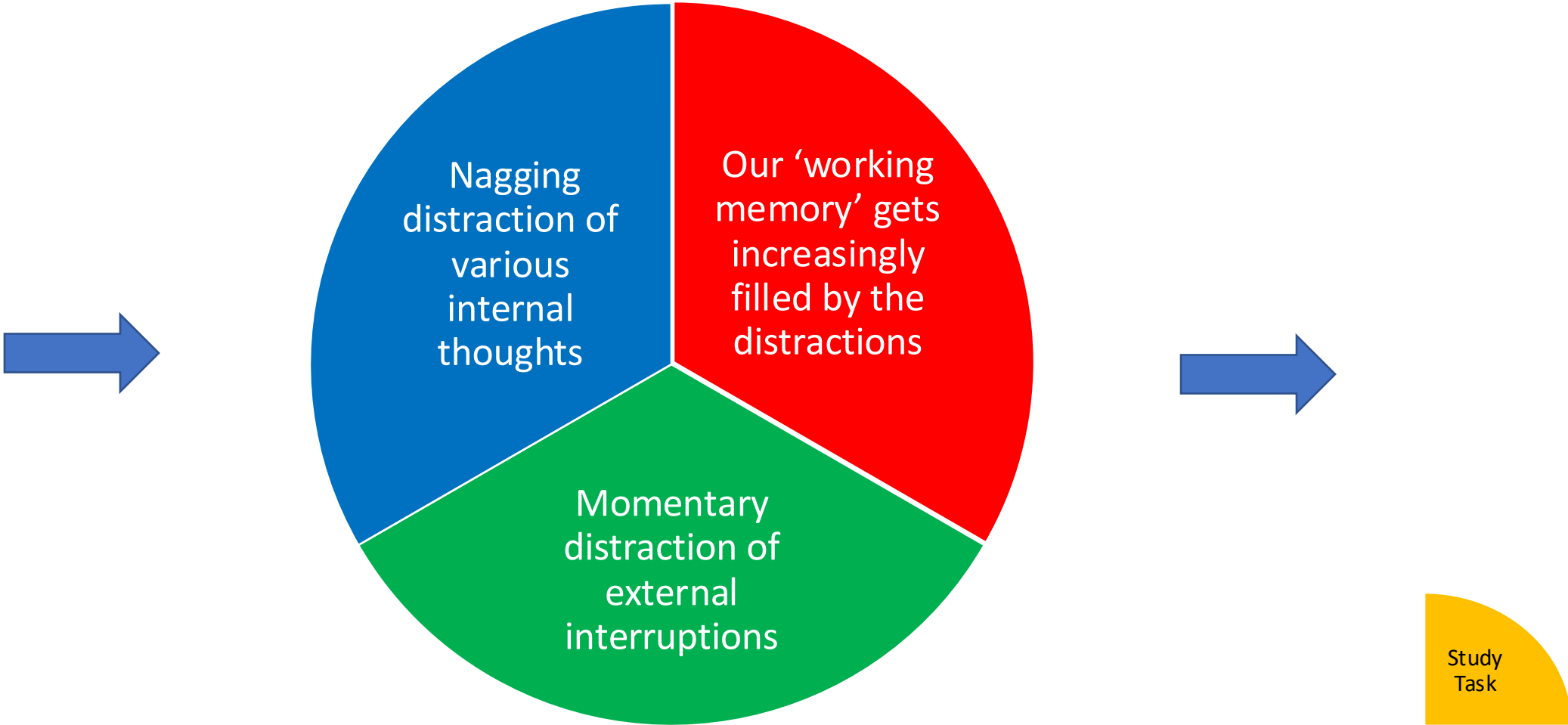
Concentration during a study session



Concentration during a study session



Concentration during a study session



Concentration during a study session



Our mind can move completely away from the study task, even if we are still staring at a book or our lecture notes

Distractions - how to overcome them

External Distractions, how to overcome them

Use a quiet space each time for your study sessions
and make each 50-minute study period as tech-free as possible

External Distractions, how to overcome them

Use a quiet space each time for your study sessions
and make each 50-minute study period as tech-free as possible

Sign out of e-mail.

Phone on silent and phone out of sight if possible.

Close any internet pages that are not required for the study session etc.

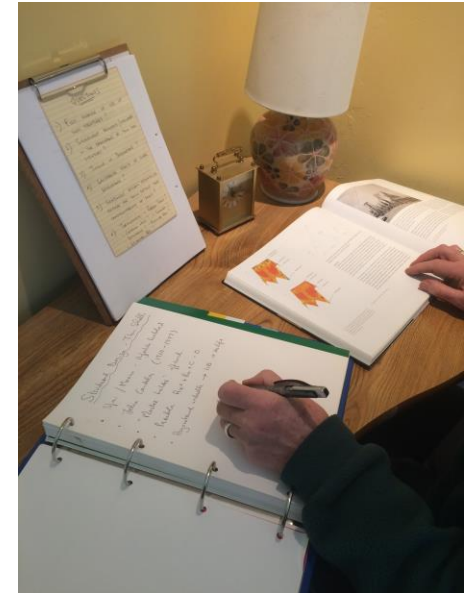
Radio off.

Television off.

Music off.

External Distractions, how to overcome them

Arrange everything that you need to get through a 50-minute study slot, so that you are not hopping up and down to get another book, set of notes, pen etc., tempting the possibility of being distracted by someone or something



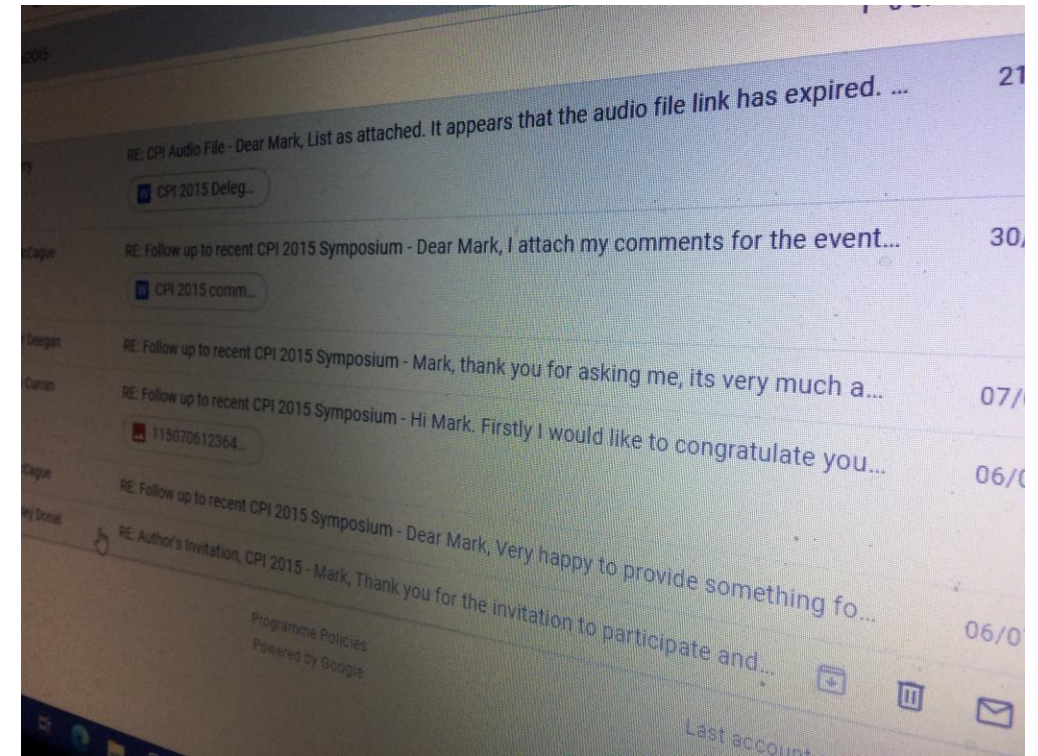
Only set out on your study desk the bare essentials that you will need for each 50-minute study period – material needed to answer one or two study questions, that you have set for yourself

External Distractions, how to overcome them

If you 'reward' yourself during the break between 50-minute study slot by checking for text messages, e-mails, etc., just use the time to see if anything is urgent and important.

If not, do not reply until the end of the full 2 to 3 hour study session.

Replies generate more replies and these may just be a distraction during study!



Internal Distractions, how to overcome them

- Try not to get too tired or anxious. Internal distractions increase in these situations, making it very difficult to focus on study
- Try to clear your head of any worries before you start studying – tell yourself “I will worry about that later.” The worry may even disappear!
- Remember the importance of taking regular exercise each day

Concentration techniques

Concentration techniques

You have to decide to concentrate

Consciously create the external space: free of external distractions

Consciously create the internal space: tell your mind that you have a single task to do over the next 50 minutes

Concentration techniques

You must have a target in mind, such as a study question that you have set up for yourself

Remember all that we have learned about the habits of the 'Active Learner'

Compose questions for each study slot

Keep a written note of the study questions in front of you


Concentration techniques

Use trigger words while studying material
to re-focus regularly

Putting trigger words in our 'working memory' will help to keep on mind continually focussed on the study questions and will help us to avoid providing room for those internal distractions to creep in

Triggers: "relevance?" "fact?" "opinion?" "link to what I already know?" etc etc

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1. Accept that the mind is naturally disposed to being distracted by external factors and inner thoughts

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