Videoconferencing: Strategies to Improve Your Attention and Other Useful Tips

Minimize distractions: When you're watching alone, it's easy to get distracted or 'multi-task' during a video call.

- Reduce environmental distractions:
    - Turn off notifications on your computer and silence your phone.
    - Set your computer up in a quiet room with minimal visual distractions (e.g. reduce clutter).
    - Ensure the room is a comfortable temperature.
    - Dim the brightness on your screen to a comfortable level.
    - Set your video conferencing settings to 'speaker view' in order to only view the person speaking instead of 'gallery view' which enables you to see every participant at once. This will help you focus on the person speaking and minimize any distractions coming from other participants' rooms.

- Reduce internal distractions:
    - Try to put life's 'to-dos' and worries out of your mind.
    - Eat before the call to reduce hunger as a distraction.
    - If you're fatigued, try to find time to rest prior to the call.

In order to avoid disruptions, ensure everyone in your household knows you're on a video call and that you will not be available.

Ask if any of the slides or resources will be available beforehand, or get a copy of the agenda in order to prepare in advance. If there is no agenda, ask the organizer to outline the following:

- The purpose of the meeting (Why are you having this meeting?).
- The desired outcome (What do you want to get out of this meeting?).
- Meeting format/expectations.
- Meeting logistics (Meeting time, log-in details, etc.).
- Participant expectations (Pre-work, required reading, research, work to bring to the meeting, etc.).

Actively engage. It's easy to sit back and observe when you're on a video call or lose focus altogether. Try to think of questions or comments and write them down throughout the meeting to stay engaged and to assist you in remembering the content later. You can also use the chat window to ask questions during the call if the organizer has set this up.

Make other people aware of your difficulties. Let the organizer of the virtual meeting know you might need to take a break away from your computer to manage your symptoms.

Always have a backup plan. Live-streaming and virtual tools can fail without explanation, so it's important you aren't rushing for a new solution during crunch-time. Make sure you have plans in place for those "worst-case scenarios".

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Technical Tips!

- Plug directly into your router to ensure you don't disconnect from the internet and your video call during high traffic times.
- Clean your computer screen of any unnecessary files that may slow your computer down.
- Avoid setting up your computer in front of a window as this will shadow your face and make it difficult for others to see you.

Videoconferencing can be challenging, but focus on the positives! You can better control your environment, it saves time, and provides a great way to connect if meeting in person is not possible.