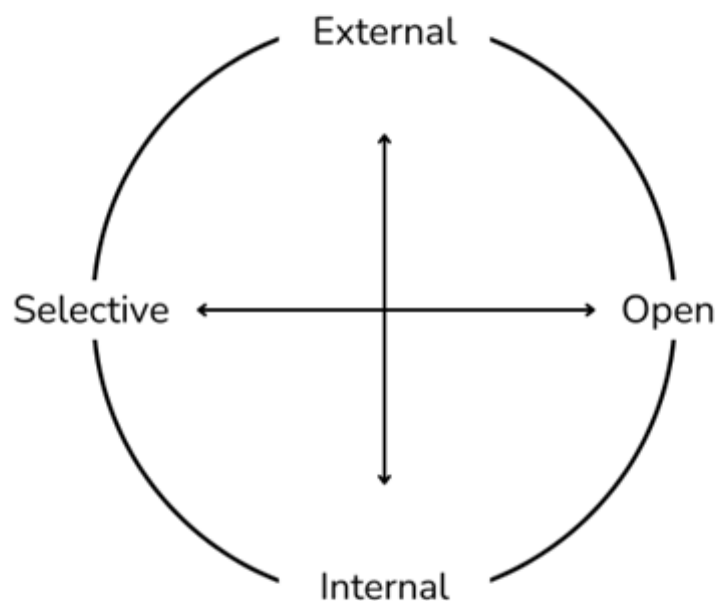




Key Advice

Theory of Attention

Your attention can exist in different states and naturally shifts between these, often without you noticing. However, you can learn to direct it more consciously. This figure illustrates a continuum of attention types to help you reflect on how your attention moves and how you might guide it more intentionally.



Selective attention

Your attention is narrowly focused on one point.

Helps you complete tasks efficiently and make fewer mistakes, but it's energy-intensive and not sustainable for long periods.

Open attention

Your awareness is broad and receptive to all internal and external stimuli. Enhances creativity by allowing new information to emerge.

External attention

Your focus is directed outward, on your surroundings, people or environment. Helps you learn from and adapt to external situations.

Internal attention

Your focus is inward, on thoughts, emotions or bodily sensations.

Increases self-awareness about your state of mind and supports impulse control.



Concentration is sustained attention; the ability to focus on one thing for a continuous period of time.

At any given moment, your attention is somewhere on this continuum between internal–external and selective–open. Here are a few examples:

- Checking the sign to see when the next bus arrives: external and selective.
- Focusing on your breath during a mindfulness exercise: internal and selective.
- Noticing your thoughts and any bodily sensations: internal and open.
- Walking outside while taking in sounds, sights, smells and movement around you: external and open.

During the day, we automatically shift to different types of attentional states when something catches our attention or we choose to focus on something. When we shift our attention consciously, we can focus more on what we find enjoyable and important in life.

Attention strategies

Attention is the ability to actively process specific information while ignoring other stimuli. This helps explain why we feel focused sometimes and easily distracted at other times. Three key factors play a role:

- Our interest or urgency in the specific information;
- The details to be ignored: or distraction;
- Our ability to steer in this: our 'attention muscle'.

1. Interest or urgency

Can you make the task more engaging or relevant?

- Connect it to your values or long-term goals;
- Spark curiosity or personal relevance;
- Set a clear, realistic deadline for yourself.

2. Distraction

Reduce external and internal distractions as much as possible.

- Use noise-cancelling headphones;
- Turn off notifications, close tabs and put your phone away;
- Choose a quiet, focused space such as the library.

Do you want to do this more systematically?

- Remove social media apps from your phone;
- Set screen boundaries (e.g. only Netflix in the evening);
- Close your door to minimise interruptions.



3. Ability

Focus is a skill you can train. The key is noticing distraction, and gently bringing your attention back to what you want to focus on.

Formulate a strategy:

- Look at regular moments in which you are distracted.
- Think about how you can systematically make this easier for yourself by:

- (1) increasing your interest;
- (2) reducing the distraction; or
- (3) starting a tiny habit to train your 'attention muscle'.

Even 1 or 2 minutes of focused attention builds the habit.

For instance, try [this one-minute attention practice](#).