

DISTRACTION, OR LOSS OF CONCENTRATION

This is a very big topic - blamed for a great many mistakes or problems on our orienteering courses. Typically, something happens on the course, eg a fall, seeing another competitor, seeing another control which is not on your course, coming to a drinks control, coming to a map change, getting very tired near the end of the course, or on reaching the top of a hill, etc, which breaks our concentration on the task at hand. Subsequently we fail to regather our concentration effectively, and we make a mistake in our routine or in our navigation. We could forget to punch the control, or forget to reorientate our map, and head off in the wrong direction, or suddenly decide to change our plan.

You can do a lot of work at home to help yourself improve your concentration at events.

Part 1 Causes of distraction

Make a list of all the things that have caused you to lose concentration on your courses. Select two situations which seem to happen regularly, eg from the start to the first control, or out in the forest when you see other orienteers.

For each one, write down as much as you can about the situation, using the following Prompts:

1. What happens, when and where?
2. How do you react?
3. What are your thoughts and feelings about the segment BEFORE the break in concentration?
4. What are your thoughts and feelings AFTER the break in concentration occurs?

Part 2: How to make an action plan to improve concentration.

Now try to analyse the situations, so that you can work out a plan for next time, whereby you regather concentration effectively. You will have to practice the sequence of correct actions in your mind a few times, in order to successfully do it while orienteering. We call this "mental rehearsal". If you are having trouble doing this by yourself, talk to a club coach.

The following is a checklist to look at while writing your plan

1. What actions do I need to take? Put them down in order.
2. What should I look at and / or listen to?
3. Do I need to control any particular body responses?
4. What navigation skills should I focus on?
5. Is there any technical skill I need to train outside the situation?
6. Is there any desirable emotional state or feeling?
7. Can I use any favourite cue words to refocus/give myself encouragement?
8. What is the desired level of arousal and how can it be achieved?

(Arousal refers to how keyed up and alert, or how relaxed you are. If you are too excited to concentrate well, you need to calm down; if you are being careless and don't feel "switched on", you need to concentrate more intensely)

Part 3: Sample action plan to improve concentration

RELOCATION AFTER LOSING MAP GROUND CONTACT

This plan applies if you feel "lost" and cannot fit the terrain to where you think you are on the map.

1. *Stop*
2. Take a deep *breath*, and let it out slowly.
3. Think "*CALM*"
4. *Orientate* your map to North with the compass. Put it on the ground if you are feeling very confused, or twisting it about in your hands to try to "make it fit."
5. Look at where you thought you were on the *map*, and see if you can see any of the major features on the map, nearby in the terrain.
6. Look for large features in the *terrain* around you, particularly noting large hills, direction of slope, and of any other linear features, eg Watercourses.
7. Look further afield on your map, including back to where you were *last certain of your position*, and see if there are any other possible locations, or likely mistakes you might have made on route.
8. Try to match a group of features on your map to what you see on the ground. Matching linear features with point features often provide a good "fix".
9. If you think you have positively identified your location, move off in what you think is the right direction, *matching features* along the way. As long as things fit, you can proceed, otherwise, you have to go back through the relocation procedures.
10. If all else fails, move out to a definite *linear feature* such as a track or road. You can also proceed along a safety bearing back to a known area, or the assembly area.
11. When you are certain of your position, or have found the control, *proceed carefully*, without rushing, checking map to ground, and compass direction, until you have got back into your normal rhythm.
12. You may like to put your map on the ground face down, pretend you are at the start, pick it up, and "*start again*". Remember, mistakes are there to learn from, and if they make you irritated and angry, or rush to make up time, you are likely to make even more!

This is a long list of thoughts and actions, but when you have been through it a couple of times, and imagined yourself working through the steps, you can summarise it. The cue words should spark you to complete a number of routine checks and actions.

- Stop
- Breathe
- Calm
- Orientate
- Search map and terrain
- Last certain position
- Match map and terrain
- Linear features?
- Proceed carefully
- "Start again"