SENSORY TIPS FOR THRIVING IN THE CLASSROOM

In addition to the tips below, consider talking to your instructor about adjusting the classroom and course format so you can feel and work at your best. In addition, schedule some time in the Library's Sensory Room to explore your senses and figure out what specific stimulation might be helpful.

HOW CAN I EASE MY TRANSITION INTO CLASS?

- Ease yourself into the schedule you will have during the semester before the first day of classes.
- Use a "ritual" to let your body know it's time for a class to start (i.e. refilling your water bottle, positioning a notebook on your desk).
- Try the color orientation technique (recommended by Lynne Maclean per Oregon State):
  -Pick a color
  -Look forwards, side to side, behind you. Write down or draw 3 things in the room that color.
  -Assess your feelings. If it helped, repeat the technique with a different color.

HOW DO I SCREEN OUT FLUROSCENT LIGHTS AND BOTHERSOME NOISES?

- Go to the classroom during "offline" times or weekends. Try sitting in different places in the classroom, paying attention to lights and shadows to determine where the light hits, where your eyes experience glare, what is least distracting (i.e. near windows, with back to windows). Test out classroom noises too and see which space in the room best matches your sensory needs.
- Ask instructors to experiment with adjusting the lights depending upon the activity at hand; (dim lights might mean focus on screens while brighter lights might be a cue to talk with classmates)
- Try caps, blue light blocking glasses, and anti-glare laptop screens to reduce glare.
- Rotate to different seats for several class sessions & note which location works best for you.
- Use electronic earphones that allow you to hear the instructor but block background noises.

I NEED TO FIDGET SOMETIMES. HOW CAN I DO IT PRIVATELY AND DISCREETLY?

- Squeeze silent items like ONO Rollers, squish balls, plush animals, worry stones.
- Explore using acupuncture rings that you can roll up and down your fingers quietly.
- Try out a Mesh-It Sensory Pen designed for both writing and fidgeting.
- Fidget quietly by using twistable (rather than clickable) pens, rolling a pen between your hands, or gently spinning it under the desk.
- Buy inexpensive rubber pen grips (they muffle sounds from pens and provide tactile stimulation).
- Use a desktop privacy screen to create a private fidget zone.
- Ask the instructor to allow you to stand in the back of the room and rock from foot to foot.
- Trace one of your handprints on paper and color the design.
- If doodling helps you, try combining your doodling with note-taking by using mind mapping (the University of York has a great guide to mind mapping in class).

WHAT IF I'M FEELING PANICKY OR OVERWHELMED DURING CLASS?

- Rub each finger on one hand with a finger on your other hand. Breathe as you cross each finger.
- Sensory Grounding: Think of 3 things you can see, 2 things you can hear, 1 thing you can feel.

- Leave the room and take a wellness break for a few moments:
  -Thirst and hunger can spark "hanxiety". Check your thirst/hunger levels.
  -Go for a short walk outside and absorb the natural sights and sounds.
  -Use deep breathing techniques with one hand on the belly.
  -Call a supportive friend.
- Keep a favorite poem, prayer, scripture, affirmation, or photo handy.
- Give a self-hug by extending your arms across your chest with hands on the opposing shoulders.
- Try hand self-massage techniques (by Inspire Culture, Learning, and Libraries) or squeezing the pressure point between your thumb and pointer finger.
- Reach out via online chat to friends or family for support even while still listening to the lecture.
- Eat sour candy–psychologists are finding that sour tastes reduce anxiety!
- Bring ice cubes in a ziploc bag & squeeze them when you feel anxious.

WHAT IF I'M FRUSTRATED BY THE LECTURE OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS?

- Pause and Write Technique: Stop for a moment and write out (or draw) your thoughts & feelings.
- Ask for clarification or reflection from classmates or the instructor in private.

OH GREAT, GROUP WORK! WHAT CAN I DO WHEN FEELING STRESSED OUT BY GROUP WORK?

- Do a group warm-up: Say hello and share names. Take a minute to process the activity and share anything you'd like about your work style (I prefer to present rather than take notes; I like to jot my ideas on paper first then share out).
- Ask the instructor if there is an alternative assignment that you can do individually.

UGH!! HOW DO I HANDLE THE STRESS THAT COMES WITH CLASS PRESENTATIONS?

- Fidget with quiet items (like worry stones or acupuncture rings) behind the podium.
- Look slightly above the audience or at their foreheads if eye contact makes you uncomfortable.
- Practice presenting (and answering likely questions) in front of friends or even stuffed animals!
- Ask the instructor for sensory adjustments like lowering the lighting.

HELPFUL RESOURCES:

- Penn State Berks Counseling Services, 610-396-6082
- Holcomb Crisis Intervention (24-hour mobile response team) 610-379-2007 or 1-888-219-3910.
- Penn State Crisis Line, 1-877-229-6400 (or text LIONS to 741741 for 24/7 support)
- For help with study strategies: Penn State Berks Learning Center, 610-396-6138
- For help with accommodations: Penn State Berks Disability Services, 610-396-6410

This guide is based on the following sources:
-Focus in the Classroom by Academic Success Center at Oregon State University (https://success.oregonstate.edu/sites/success.oregonstate.edu/files/2024-11/Focus_in_the_classroom_24.pdf).
-Community Agreement created by Professor Lupe Kasper for SOC 119 at Penn State Berks.
-Advice from Berks Student Success Center staff.

Sensory Survival Tips for the Classroom

This handout provides tips to help you relax and concentrate effectively in classroom settings. If you need additional accommodations, please consider talking to your instructor about your experiences and how they can help support your academic needs in the classroom.

How can I ease my transition to the classroom?

- Use a cue, physical movement, or "ritual" that can let your body know it’s time for a class (like refilling your water bottle or positioning a notebook on your desk).