Focusing is the ability to effectively filter and sort information to prioritise on what is important and relevant. Focusing is essential in an age of information abundance, overload and constant change. This ability to prioritise and avoid distractions to achieve goals, objectives and tasks has been made increasing more difficult with the emergent of new technologies and ways of working that have increased the distraction level and amount of information available.

Employers recognise and value this skill as the ability to focus can have significant positive impacts on wellbeing and reduce stress levels but it also enables individuals to be more efficient and effective workers who will drive productivity.

Focusing has some overlap with other employability skills such as managing ambiguity, resilience and prioritising.

**How can I develop focus skills on my course?**

- If you are taking part in a group project, think about ways you can help the group focus on the project aims by summarising progress regularly, verbalising if the group is going off track and reminding the group of the aims and objectives of the task. Even time keeping on behalf of the group can be a good way of keeping focus on a piece of work.
- Essays are a fantastic way of developing your focus and prioritisation. By planning your time out well, researching a range of sources and then streamlining and shaping your arguments and perspective in a clear and coherent way will develop your ability to focus. Remember CeDAS can help with essay writing skills including the ability to focus.
- Presenting work verbally during a seminar by prioritising the key points you want to make, editing out less relevant content, being concise and summarising at the end.
- Practice your written summarising skills when revising sections of your coursework or even make short verbal recording on your phone to summarise key sections to develop focus and concision.

**How can I develop focus skills outside of my course?**

- Look for volunteering opportunities or join a student society where you will have the opportunity to work on a specific project or piece of work and develop your focus to manage the project and deliver on time.
- Research and learn from good resources that would help develop your ability to focus and prioritise such as *Deep Work Rules for Focussed Success in a Distracted World* by Cal Newport or watch one of these inspirational TED talks to increase your focus and productivity.
• Observe others in your peer group or in other areas of your life who prioritise and focus well – ask them what tips and techniques they use that might help you.

• Taking on a part time job or join a club or society to hone your skill in managing your time and practice prioritising when having conflicting demands.

• Practice tailoring your CV for a specific job – this will develop your ability to focus on the important elements of your academic and work experience that is relevant to the job, leaving out less relevant and unimportant details. Check the CV and applications section of the Careers Moodle site for help with tailoring your CV.

How do people use this skill in the workplace?

Royal Holloway graduates have used focusing skills as:

• A Law Trainee evaluating legal evidence and devising a strategy to win a case
• A Clinical Psychologist conducting a service user assessment and considering what would be the best clinical intervention considering all the historic and contextual factors
• A Government Policy Adviser making decisions on the wording of a government policy based on research data
• A Management Consultant helping a client creative a profitable business strategy by researching the company’s competitors and conducting a market analysis

How will employers assess my ability to focus?

If you are applying for a role and the job descriptions states they are looking for someone who can focus and deliver, make sure you can demonstrate this on your CV. You may also be asked specific questions on an application form or in an interview which are designed to assess your skills in this area. Examples of questions that could be asked include:

• Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?
• Can you give me a specific example of how you determined priorities in scheduling your time?
• Can you tell me about an example of a situation in which you had to demonstrate focus and determination in order to succeed?

If you’d like to get some help with structuring your answers for application forms or interviews using the STAR technique, visit the CVs and interviews section of the Careers Moodle site.

ShortListMe, Graduates First and eCareersGrad are available on the Moodle page to help you practice interview skills, case studies and psychometric tests.

If you would like to get more ideas on how you can ‘sell’ your skills on your CV then please watch our VIDEO CV workshop series, Part 3: Selling your 'Skills' on your CV (panopto.com)
If you are applying for a graduate scheme or Year in Industry and are invited to an assessment centre, it’s very likely that you’ll be assessed on your focusing skills both in a group exercise but also possibly through a presentation. Assessors will want to see that you can understand what is required and pay attention to the important information given and help the group deliver on time. Sometimes in group tasks, you are given an information pack with both relevant and irrelevant information and you will need to use your focusing skills to understand what information to pay attention to in relation to the specific task. If you’d like to practice a group activity keep an eye out for the Assessment Centre workshops that run during the Autumn and Spring terms. These will be available to book via The Careers Portal.

You can make an appointment to speak with one of our Careers Consultants via the Careers Portal where we can give feedback on your CV or application or help you to prepare for interviews and assessments, as well as help you think about your career options.