

## Clearing the “Mind Clutter”

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

Do you ever feel as though your mind is going a mile a minute? Are the thoughts whirling around in your brain so demanding of your attention that you can't seem to focus? When this happens we feel overwhelmed and unable to concentrate. Here is one simple and very effective way to clear what I call “mind clutter” – i.e., those intrusive thoughts that hamper our ability to focus.

1. **Take out a pad of paper and a pen or pencil.**  
(Note: Typing or texting may not be as effective as writing manually.)
2. **Start writing on the paper whatever thoughts are in your head. Do *not* think about whether the words make sense or are grammatically correct, and do *not* judge them. Just write.**
3. **If your mind goes blank at any time, write “I don't know what to write” over and over until other thoughts emerge. Trust me, they will!**
4. **After 30 minutes, stop writing.**
5. **Go back to the task at hand. You will find it much easier to concentrate because the “mind clutter” will be gone.**

I first learned of this tool when I read *The Right to Write* by Julia Cameron. However, I have seen it described in other places in slightly different ways. The important point is to write continually for 30 minutes, without stopping to think. Just keep the pen moving over the paper. After about 30 minutes you will have depleted your current store of mind clutter and cleared some space for focused, purposeful thought.

Here are a few suggestions for using this technique, *some of which are contrary to others*. Experiment, and then choose the ones that work best for you.

- Write first thing in the morning before you get out of bed to help you clear your mind before you face the day.

OR

- At any point during the day when you find that mind clutter is preventing you from being effective, take out a pad and pen and start writing.
- Write in whatever form works best for you: narrative, bullet points, sentence fragments, or any combination of these.

- Write without intention other than to clear the mind clutter. You can write specific reports or memos later, when you have re-gained the clarity to do so effectively.

- Throw away the pages after you have finished them. You may read them before you toss them or not; it's your choice.

OR

- Keep the pages and re-read them later to see whether they contain a kernel of an idea that may be useful to you.
- Read the pages with a sense of curiosity. I often am surprised by what I write because I haven't thought consciously about the ideas.

Putting thoughts down on paper is a way to acknowledge their presence and move beyond them. It also may help to organize them. *Writing without intention and without judgment are critical success factors in clearing mind clutter.* The point of taking a short period of time is to deal definitively with distracting thoughts so you can move on with a sense of clarity and purpose. Having said that, often I find a bonus in the form of an idea hidden among the words and phrases that addresses an important issue I've been mulling over, or that helps me see something from a different point of view. Sometimes I even find I have created my “to do” list for the day! In my experience, once I write down the “stuff” that is running around in my mind, it either goes away or fades into the background, allowing me to focus on what is most important at the time.

I encourage you to reduce your mind clutter by taking 30 uninterrupted minutes each day for one week to write your thoughts. Not only will you be able to focus more easily afterward, but you may find the answers to your challenges in those pages! At the very least, you will gain a sense of peace. Aren't those outcomes worth half an hour each day? ➔

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