

# How to Be Smart: Attention

When we say people are smart, we usually mean that they know a lot of information. But being smart also means that someone has a lot of ability to learn new things. Being smart at learning new things includes knowing and using your *thinking abilities*. There are ways you can use your abilities *better* when you are learning.

## What Does Being Smart Mean?

*Attention* is a very important ability that everyone has. Everything we do requires the ability to focus on some things and ignore others. The ability to pay attention is what makes us able to focus our thoughts on one thing and resist distractions. No one can learn without the ability to attend. We cannot attend to *all* the information our brain is receiving. In order to focus, we must resist attending to some things so we can focus on others. In school there is much to attend to and many things that are distracting. Students hear others talking, a noise in the hallway, or the beep of a computer; they see a flash of light from the window; and so forth. Schoolwork requires a lot of focus of attention.

## How Can You Be Smarter?

You can be smarter if you carefully use your ability to attend. Remember to be aware of how well you are attending. Be sure to notice if you are being distracted. If you are having a problem, do something to help you pay attention. You will be able to do more if you remember to “Think smart and look at the details!” (see Figure 1). Remember to think about how well you are attending when you do your work.

**Think smart  
and look  
at the details!**



Figure 1. Picture reminder to attend to the details.

It is smart to be aware of your level of attention. Also remember to notice if you are being distracted. Ask yourself, “Am I losing my ability to focus?” or “Am I getting distracted?” If so, change your seat, take a short break, stand up and stretch, or do something to help you attend better. Remember that you can’t learn if you can’t pay attention.

You should remember that Attention can be disrupted by loud noises or seeing something distracting. It is important to notice when your ability to attend is good or bad. If you are having trouble attending, figure out what you need to do to attend better.

## Resources

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- Goldstein, S., & Naglieri, J.A. (2007, October 22–27). Planning and attention problems in ADHD: What parents and teachers can do. *Attention*.
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