Attention Span

Description

Attention span is the amount of time an individual can sustain focus on, or stay engaged with, a particular task or stimuli before becoming distracted or experiencing a decline in their concentration. Attention span varies widely based on a variety of factors such as device distractions, engagement, relatability, motivation, interactivity, mood, and time of day.

Why is this important?

Determining the appropriate length for assessments, activities, and other miscellaneous tasks in and outside of the classroom is important in ensuring students are getting the most out of their time and cognitive load. This consideration is especially important when it comes to online courses, as students appear to have shorter attention spans online as opposed to face-to-face. In general, there are conflicting views on students' average attention span, but the nature of the task is emphasized as most important, with students being able to spend more time focusing on a task if they find it relevant and meaningful.

Implementation Examples

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Break up lectures with polling or questions		▷
In-class work to increase engagement	✓	▷
Self-guided, interactive multimedia learning modules or tutorials	✓	
Multiple modes of instruction (reading, videos, animations)	✓	

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Practical Applications

✓ In traditional educational settings (face-to-face lectures), focus on dynamic teaching methods with opportunities for active learning to engage students and sustain interest over longer sessions

✓ Online courses need special consideration as students experience shorter attention spans due to a variety of factors such as digital distractions and decreased direct engagement with instructors and peers

✓ Online courses should offer a variety of media such as reading, videos, or animations

✓ Develop authentic performance tasks that are relevant to students' lives

✓ While there is no consensus on ideal length of time, consider chunking learning into 5-7 minute segments. Chunk online videos into 4-6 minute segments with opportunities to pause, rewind, and other interactive elements such as embedded assessments

Sources: Bradbury (2016), Cicekci et al. (2019), Fajardo et al. (2023), Geri et al. (2017), Lagerstrom et al. (2015), Manasrah et al. (2021), Mukhtar et al. (2020), Rani et al. (2020), Subramanian (2018)

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