FOCUS:
Case Study: Focus and Frustration

Review Joe’s situation (see case study below). Then come up with a recommendation for Joe’s study habits. What 3-5 things can he do to study effectively, know the material, and succeed in exams and assignments? Be specific—how much time will each step take, what does each step involve, and what will each step produce (notes, outlines, schedules, study group review, other ideas)?

Instructors: Hand out Joe Falco’s story in class and ask students to complete the recommendation activity for the next class session. In groups of 3-4 students, have them compile a group recommendation for Joe of at least 3 steps he should take to prepare for class. Give them 10 minutes. Then have groups share the results with the class, asking for specifics whenever possible. Write these on the board and have students take notes. This becomes the class strategy for building study skills for the rest of the semester.

Imagine this situation:

On Monday, Joe Falco attends his history class. He gets there a couple of minutes before class starts, he brings a notebook and pen, and he takes notes from the professor’s lecture and class discussion. He paid attention throughout the class, except for a few minutes in the middle when he caught himself thinking wistfully about his date last Friday night. But he regained his focus and paid attention through the rest of the class. He feels good: he took almost a page of notes, and he even had some ideas about how what happened to Herbert Hoover’s presidency might relate to what’s happening in the Bush administration’s economic crisis. He might even ask about those ideas next class.
Then class was over. He closed his notebook—he took a page of notes, so he feels accomplished. He put the textbook and his notebook in his backpack, headed off to lunch, caught an art class, and went to work.

On Tuesday night, he was exhausted—two more classes on Tuesday plus extra hours at work had tired him out, and then he got home to find that his baby sister needed to be watched. By the time she was in bed, he was ready to crash himself. He talked with his girlfriend on the phone for half an hour with the tv on and finally went to bed.

On Wednesday morning, he checked the history class syllabus. He realized that he had a one-page analysis due on The Great Depression from chapter 9 in the history text, and that he had to read chapter 9 first before writing the analysis. Stressed, he pulled out the history text and skimmed the chapter. Then he tried to write out a page of ideas, but he could only come up with half a page, and it wasn’t very focused. He changed the font from 12 point to 14 point, so at least it looked like a fuller page.

Now it was too late for breakfast, so he skipped it and a shower, threw some jeans on, and took off to school. A bus had been in an accident on the freeway, blocking all but one lane and slowing things down to a crawl.

He rushed into class 10 minutes late, hungry, sweating and out of breath, and discovered other students working on a pop quiz on Monday’s class notes. He hadn’t looked at them since class on Monday, so he couldn’t remember much. In the five minutes remaining in the quiz, he tried to recall as much as he could from his reading and the class discussion, but all he could do was offer a generic summary. Stressed and knowing he failed the quiz, and predicting that his one-page analysis wasn’t good quality work, he sat back for the rest of the class period and tried to get it together, but his mind kept drifting. Once, when the instructor called on him with a question about The Great Depression, he couldn’t answer.

Leaving class, he began to wonder whether he should just withdraw.