### **Essay on Factors Influencing Attention:**

What commands our attention is determined by a number of factors. Some of these are related to the stimulus while others relate to personal factors. The former are referred to as objective factors and the latter as subjective factors. Some of these factors are explained here with examples instead of elaborate descriptions.

For instance, we tend to notice objects which provide strong stimulation to our sense organs like an exceptionally loud noise or bright light (intensity). An object that is unusually large (size) or moving (movement) draws our attention. Anything which stands out from its surroundings, for some reason or the other, attracts our attention (distinctness).

For example, though it appears rude, we cannot help glancing at a person who is seven-foot tall, walking in the street or a three-foot dwarf. Similar behaviour is exhibited when we see a foreigner in an unusual attire walking on the street. Anything which is repeated (repetition) continuously also catches our attention. For example, the repetitive sound of the bell of a fire engine stands out among other stimuli, a sudden alteration in the stimulus (change) is likely to attract our attention.

The clock which is ticking continuously may not draw our attention but when it suddenly stops, it may at once attract our attention because of the sudden uncharacteristic silence. It may be seen that these characteristics or factors, such as intensity, size, movement, distinctness, repetition and change are attributes of the stimulus or external environment and are known as objective factors.

Attention is also determined by certain subjective or personal factors. An individual's needs, motives, interests, past experience, culture etc. influence attention to a very great extent. For instance, a person who has just finished a big meal may not be attracted by the smell of the food which is placed in the room as strongly as a person who is starving (need).

A person waiting for a letter (motive) will hear the postman's call immediately in-spite of traffic noise and other noises. You may take notice of the score in a cricket match (interest) from a radio commentary, while other people in the same room continue their conversation without even noticing that the radio is on.

Thus, it can be seen that attention is not a simple process, but is influenced by other processes like learning, motivation, past experience, etc. Thus, we also see that attention is a complex process influenced by objective and subjective fac1. tors.

#### **Essay on the Phenomena of Attention:**

Now let us try to understand certain phenomena of attention which are as follows:

#### 1. Phenomena of Attention:

Suppose you are listening to a lecture on biology. Your awareness of the sound of the words is more intense at certain moments and less at others. This illustrates the phenomenon of fluctuation. This property of fluctuation is integral to the basic process of attention and occurs even when there is no other sensory stimulus which is competing for your attention. Our attention, therefore, varies in intensity from moment to moment.

## 2. Shifting of Attention:

The intensity of attention to a certain stimulus is also affected by the presence of other stimuli competing for your attention. This is referred to as shifting of attention. This means a person's attention, though focused on something, usually moves to other things in one's environment.

For example, when a biologist sits at a laboratory table dissecting an animal his attention may be focused on the animal. Nevertheless, he may also be marginally aware, at the same time, of the odour of chemicals, voices of other people working in the laboratory, the creaking sound coming from the rotating ceiling fan, etc.

Not only does attention shift briefly from major activities to peripheral events and back again, but it has been demonstrated scientifically that quick shifting of attention from stimulus to stimulus is necessary for perception. Just as continuous and unchanging pressure can numb the tactile sense of a particular area of the body, similarly continuous and unchanging attention to exactly the same visual stimulus causes the perception of it to be distorted and fragmented.

Experiments with images fixed on the contact lenses have shown that because attention has been forcibly tied down to one constant visual stimulus, the person soon becomes unable to see that stimulus or image, and it fades away. If the person blinks or moves one's eye rapidly, the image momentarily reappears. Shifting of attention, therefore, is necessary for perception; it prevents negative adaptation.

### 3. Distraction of Attention:

Another phenomena related to attention is what is known as distraction of attention. We have already seen what is shifting or fluctuation of attention. Here, the attention wavers and gets back to the stimulus or the attention process shifts from one part of the stimulus to another.

This is an inherent feature of the process of attention or perception caused by psychological factors. But there is another phenomenon which is called distraction of attention. Here the attention does not merely shift from one part of the stimulus to another. Our attention wanders away and we start attending to something else.

This must be a very common experience to students while listening to a lecture or reading a textbook. Here attention does not automatically come back. The student has

to make an effort to get back to the book or lecture. Distraction is caused by a number of causes.

## 4. Span of Attention:

Yet another phenomenon related to attention is that there are limitations to the number of objects or stimuli that can be attended to in one act (period) of attention. That maximum amount of material that can be attended to in one period of attention is referred to as span of attention.

This phenomenon can be demonstrated by the number of figures or letters an individual can notice in one flash of attention. If you are able to note five digits or five letters in a single act of attention, your span of attention is five units. If you are able to note eight letters, then your span is said to be eight and so on.

This span also varies depending on the nature of the stimulus. When meaningful words are presented you may be capable of attending to a word containing more than eight or ten letters in a single act of attention. This is because the mind rapidly supplies certain parts which are not actually noticed. In this case, the process involved is not attention alone. It goes beyond attention and is known as perception.

# 5. Filtering of Attention or Sensory Gating:

This phenomenon provides one of the bases for the process of selective attention.