
Study Skills

Study Skills are...SKILLS! Like playing an instrument, the more you practice, the better you get. Learning to be a student is part of the educational process. Be patient but persistent with yourself. Accept that studying takes time.

Learning to be a successful student will make your education more enjoyable. Expect to be overwhelmed in the beginning. It is part of the process. With practice, you will improve.

By the time you graduate from college to goal is to have mastered the material that has been presented to you. You want to think like a person in your chosen discipline. To do this you need study skills.

Reading is not studying. Recognition of content is not enough. You need to be able to recall information without cues. Cramming is not studying. To get a good grade, you need to *comprehend* the material.

The goal of studying is to encode the information into your long-term memory. To do this, you need to DO something with the new information to make it “stick.” One way is to organize it into patterns that make sense to you. We’ll cover how in this booklet, and explore other strategies as well.

Tests are a very important assessment tool, but they can also be stressful for students. We’ll see how learning to take notes and study properly makes taking tests less stressful.

Enjoy reading this booklet. Experiment with some suggestions. Add a new technique whenever possible. Then sit close to the front of the classroom and stay awake!

PRACTICE TIME MANAGEMENT

In college, no one is responsible for your time except you. Parents, instructors and school counselors no longer monitor your actions. Here are some tips to help you manage your time effectively.

- At the college level, expect two hours of study for every one hour of class. Plan this into your class load.
- Never miss a class. If you must miss a class, check in with the instructor beforehand. Be on time. Do not get behind.
- Keep a calendar. Think about your schedule in three sections: long term (semester), short term (a week) and daily. Include study time, assignment due dates and test dates.
- Make a reasonable daily to-do list. It feels great to accomplish your goals.
- If possible, study at the same time each day. Studying after a class period is best, before a class is second best.
- Don't procrastinate. If you aren't careful, you can spend more energy thinking about putting it off than it would take to just do it.
- Don't over schedule. Allow some free time for flexibility and fun. Balance helps focus.

CHOOSE YOUR STUDY LOCATION

Choose a specific place so your body and brain get into the habit of studying when you are there. Your place should have:

- Peace and quiet (no music is best, music without words is second best, white noise like a fan might be helpful)
- Good light
- Good ventilation
- Comfortable furniture (not so comfy that you fall asleep)
- No phone (turn ringer off)

TIP: Use bits of free time or waiting time wisely. If you are prepared, that time spent

Sounds like a library! Notify your friends that you are unavailable and hang out a “do not disturb sign.” Get to work.

STUDY DELIBERATELY

Before you begin to study, relax and clear your mind. At the start of each session write down attainable study goals (finish reading the chapter, write opening paragraph). Choose a time of day that you are most alert for intense reading. Study your most difficult subject first. Study for 50 to 90 minutes per sitting then relax for 10-15 minutes. A short walk is perfect to clear your mind and stretch your body.

TIP: If you think of something that you need to do, jot it down so you don't forget.

If you daydream, briefly get up and stretch. Then get back to work. If you cannot focus, quit and come back to studying when you can. Learning usually happens through layers of understanding. Don't be alarmed if your brain needs to process information several times before you “get it.” This is normal!

TAKE EFFECTIVE NOTES

- In general taking notes helps you stay focused. Your mind can't wander as easily when your hand is writing. Note taking is a more complete way to process information than listening alone. Taking and using notes comes with practice. Experiment with different techniques to find the best one for each class.
- Note taking supplies consist of your favorite pen or pencil (and a spare), and wide lined paper that can be bound in some fashion with a designated section for each class. Keep any class handouts in this folder.
- Write on one side of the paper only. Prepare your paper before class according to whatever note taking system you choose. You can either draw columns or fold the paper.
- Blank space is powerful for making topics stand out. It also makes reading easier. Skip lines to show a new idea. Leave gaps for future information.
- Avoid doodling on your notes. It will be distracting later. Personalize notes with thoughts, relevant illustrations, and connections you have made.
- Figure out what is important, then write, write, write!
You will learn how much detail you need.
- Include a heading that has the class name and date.
Number your pages. Legibly write all key concepts, summaries, assignments, announcements and important dates.
- After class is over do SOMETHING with your notes within 24 hours. Compare them with the book, type, summarize, code, rewrite, clarify...experiment to find what works best for you.
- Your notes will be your best study guide.

TIP: When taking notes from something other than your text book, save time by always putting full bibliographic citations in your notes.

Here are some proven systems you might try:

CORNELL SYSTEM

Divide your paper into two columns making a larger column on the right where you take your main notes. Leave a good sized margin (2 1/2") , on the left side of the paper, where you summarize information as it becomes clear. This section can also be used for key points, including important terms and examples. When you quiz yourself, fold paper to show only this summary.

HARVARD SYSTEM

Like the Cornell System the main column is for your main notes and a smaller column on the left is for summaries. With the Harvard system you add a third section, a two inch margin at the bottom of paper, for assignment and test info.

OUTLINE FORMAT

Some people take notes in this format. Others find it easier to rewrite their class notes into this format.

- I. First main topic
 - A. Subtopic
 - 1. Detail
 - 2. Detail
 - B. Subtopic
 - II. Second main topic
-

MIND MAPS*

More flexible than an outline, a mind map is a form of organizing where information is grouped intuitively. Generally the central idea is in the center of the page with subtopics starting in the upper left hand corner and continuing clockwise. Using shapes and colors allows you to make connections between concepts in a way that is clear to YOU.

Even if you don't take lecture notes in this format, organizing them this way as a study method is a proven memorization technique.

*Mind Map Sample:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind_map

TIP: *Mind mapping is also useful for brain storming for a paper. Save all editing until the ideas are on paper.*

FIGURE OUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT

The instructor is paid to create a learning environment and should have a reason for what is covered.

Good instructors give you clues. Pay attention to what is said.

- The main point is...
- We will focus on...
- Three reasons why...
- For instance...
- On the other hand...
- Again...
- All of that shows...
- As I've said...
- To summarize...

TIP: *Use your initials in your notes to differentiate between your teacher's thoughts and yours.*

Pay attention to body language. Does the instructor lean forward or speak louder if making an important point? What is written on the board? Write down all main topics, concepts and vocabulary.

New terms and definitions should always be noted. Distinctions between things should be written down. If something is repeated, emphasize it in your notes.

Tests are usually given on what is emphasized in class. If information is being delivered in different modes, it is important (lecture, movie and activity on same topic).

Ask yourself "what is the point?" Write it down.

WRITE MORE, WRITE FASTER

If you aren't sure if it is important, write it! Don't limit yourself to only taking notes during lectures or writing only what is on the board. Take notes during discussions, movies, Power Point, and activities.

Using phrases instead of sentences improves speed.

Abbreviations and shortcuts save time. Concentrate on making up shortcuts for words that are used over and over. *Never assume you will remember what your shortcut means.* Make a note of abbreviations in the margin.

Use symbols to indicate special importance. Making a key in the margin helps you be consistent.

Sample Key:

Box = assignment

Underline = vocabulary

Draw a picture if that is easier than explaining something in words. An example of this is a timeline.

Ask teacher to repeat if necessary. If you still don't get it, mark a section with a question mark in the margin to show you need to clarify an area later.

If the teacher talks fast, taping may help. Continue to take notes during class. Then listen to the tape as soon as you can and augment your notes from class.

REVIEW YOUR NOTES

Review the notes within 24 hours of lecture if possible, for sure before the next lecture. You want to review, not relearn the information.

Fill in gaps and clarify weak areas of understanding before the next class.

TIP: *You are more likely to retain the information if you find it yourself. Before asking the instructor for the answer, try to figure it out using the text book or an online search.*

TURN NOTES INTO A STUDY GUIDE

Code your notes for studying in a way that makes sense to you. *Do this at least once a week.*

ORGANIZE NOTES

Determine if it is necessary to rewrite in another form. Typing is a good way to reorganize notes. Typing allows you to search easily. If you rewrite your notes, add new notes and delete incorrect or redundant information. Keep all previous versions.

CODE NOTES

Make up a system of symbols, underline, highlight, color code, etc. Make a key and be consistent with codes.

REDUCE NOTES

A key word or phrase in the margin is perfect. When you study, fold your paper so only the key word shows.

CREATE MEMORY AIDS

Mark what needs to be memorized verbatim. Then make mnemonics* like the following:

Memory trick for spelling BEAUTIFUL:

Boys Eat Apples Under Trees In Fall

Under Leaves

Acronym for National Aeronautics & Space Administration NASA

*Learn more about mnemonics at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mnemonics

VISUALLY ORGANIZE NOTES

Make the information make sense to you. Outlines, charts, diagrams, tables, timelines, and pictures that make concepts clear may be essential. Graphically align and connect information.

*Find samples of graphic organizers at:

<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/weeklytips.phtml/31>

INTERACT WITH THE TEXT

You cannot read a text book like a novel. Interacting with the text by highlighting, questioning, summarizing, and note taking makes connections that help you remember. (Writing in the book is covered in the next section.)

BEFORE THE QUARTER BEGINS

Examine the book to see how it is organized. Read the table of contents and preface. See how the index and glossary look.

BEFORE THE LECTURE

Read the text that will be covered.

BEFORE READING ASSIGNED TEXT

Provide your brain a framework to hold the information.

Read the introduction and the summary of the chapter.

Read headings and subheadings.

Study the graphics. Read the captions.

QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND

As you read make inferences, predict and visualize. Asking and answering these types of questions before, during and after reading helps move the information into your long-term memory.

- How will I need to use this content ?(compare/contrast, vocabulary)
- How does each subsection connect to the last subsection and the larger section?
- What do I not understand but hope to understand?
- Make connections (this reminds me of)
- What if...why....I wonder?
- Who, what, when, where, why, how?
- What is the main point?

TIP: Do not highlight more than one third of the text. Consider one color highlighter for main point and one for supporting text.

TIP: Note cards come many colors and sizes. They are great for portability. They are perfect for formulas, equations and definitions. Bind them. carry them. Study them any time you have a few minutes!

STEPS FOR READING EACH SUBSECTION

Have a highlighter and pencil or pen in hand.

Break studying into subsections that the text format provides. Read one subsection at a time. Do not move ahead until all steps are completed.

- Read heading.
 - Read paragraph.
 - Decide “what is the main point” (usually the first of last sentence of the paragraph).
 - Highlight the main point...what REALLY matters.
 - Think after every paragraph. Summarize the main point in the margin in the form you expect to use it later.
 - Work the examples. Answer all questions provided along the way.
 - At the end of each subsection go back to the start of that section and read just the highlights.
 - Write key words in the margin even if the text already did it for you.
 - Write notes (see next page).
 - Take quizzes where provided.
-

MONITOR COMPREHENSION

- Check comprehension at the end of every paragraph. Do not move on until you can paraphrase what you just read.
- Read difficult sections out loud so you can hear the information.
- If you fall asleep, go back to the beginning of the section. If you get interrupted, review from the beginning of the section.
- Explain concepts to someone or to yourself.

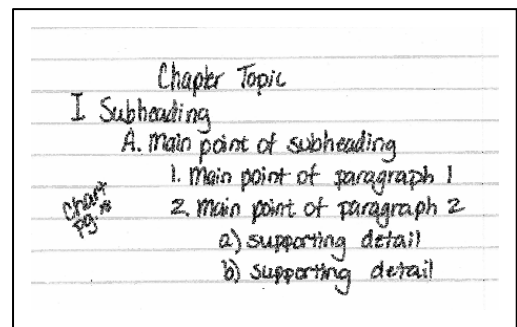
TRANSFER TEXT INTO NOTES

After you finish reading, move the information from the text to your brain via your notes. The structure the text provides is a pre-set outline if you use section headings and special effects to guide your outline sections.

Your notes should be a distilled version of the text. Do not use complete sentences. You are learning better if you turn the information into your own words.

Do not intermingle book notes and class notes...yet.

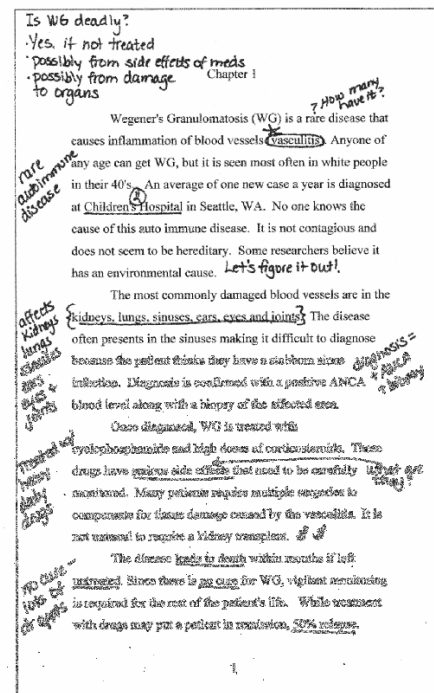
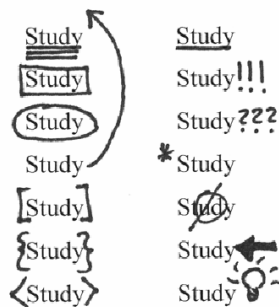
Sample structure of outline written from text:



WRITE IN YOUR BOOK

That is what margins are for! If you can't write in your book, use Post it Notes.

Tie things together with arrows or brackets Use stars to show importance. Emphasize with words (Aha! WOW! Huh?). Create your own symbol system.



PREPARE FOR YOUR EXAM

Be real. Tell yourself you do not HAVE to get an 'A.' You probably won't eliminate all anxiety but you can manage it. Stay balanced by continuing to sleep, get proper nutrition and exercise as you prepare.

Know what to expect. Prior to the exam ask your instructor...Is the test a quiz or an exam? Is it comprehensive? Is the test objective or subjective? What will it contain? (multiple choice, True/False, essays, etc.) Do we have the entire period? After the first exam you will have a better idea of a teacher's style.

Break material down into manageable chunks. Retention is better if you study over many sittings on many days.

Try to know *everything* that was covered in class.

Over learn. It gives you confidence and helps you avoid test anxiety.

MERGE YOUR NOTES

Reading/reviewing notes and text is inefficient. You are learning when you organize and integrate information from all sources (text, lectures, notes). Now is the time to merge your book notes and class notes into one condensed set of notes. The syllabus is a good document to use to generate practice questions. Study the quizzes. Before the test try to study until you can mentally visualize your notes and the text.

STUDY IN A GROUP

You reinforce your learning by teaching someone. If no one in the group understood a concept, you can elect one person to get clarification from instructor. Be sure to study, not just chat.

- Create sample test questions
 - Quiz each other
 - Debate (reconstruct imaginary dialog between historical figures)
-

TAKE THE EXAM

BEFORE THE TEST

- Be physically prepared. Avoid being hung over. Eat breakfast. Avoid caffeine and sugar before class.
- Arrive early.
- Don't converse with anyone who is anxious (anxiety can be contagious!)
- Breathe deeply.
- Visualize something relaxing.
- Use positive self talk.

TIP: Ask if it is ok to write on the test. As soon as it is passed out write your mnemonics, underline key words, etc.

DURING THE TEST

- Take about one minute to scan the entire test.
- Budget your time.
- Read directions twice before writing.
- Ask the instructor if you are not sure what you are being asked to do.
- Write legibly.
- Answer everything you KNOW first.
- Go back and answer the more challenging questions spending the most time on the questions that are worth the most points.
- Watch for tricky words (always, never, only).
- Use the course “jargon.”
- Don’t assume the instructor knows that you know something. Elaborate. Prove everything.. Show all of your thought process.
- Draw a graph to illustrate a point.
- Essay questions require that you write in complete sentences and paragraphs.
- Fill the space the instructor gave you.
- If you are tense or stuck take a mini break (get a drink, go to the bathroom, sharpen your pencil).
- If time allows, review your answers. If you finish before everyone else, you might want to go back and be more thorough.

TEST STRATEGIES

- Skip a tough question and come back to it later. You want to be sure you have time to answer the questions you know best.
- Double check that you answered ALL parts of the questions.
- Look at surrounding questions for clues.
- Translate difficult questions into your own words.
- Read all multiple choice options. Use a process of elimination. Go with your first impression of the remaining answers.
- If there is an “all of the above” choice and you are *sure* that two of the answers are correct, go for it.
- If ANY part of a True/False question is false, the answer is false.
- If you are running out of time, give some sort of answer. Bullet ideas. Never leave a question blank.
- Never pay attention to patterns of answers. You want to save your energy for answering the questions.
- Make a short outline for an essay question.

TIP: *A Quick and Dirty Essay Method:*

- *Select three good points*
- *State your second strongest point first*
- *Put your weakest point in the middle*
- *Place your strongest point last*

AFTER THE EXAM

Remain positive. There will be other tests!

Reward yourself (a walk on the beach, a hot bath, a good book, a visit with friends).

Then get ready to do it all over again for the next exam!

TIP: If the teacher provides you a handout of a drawing, draw yourself to transfer the information to your brain.

MATHEMATICS

Math is a little different than most classes but probably not as different as you think. If math gives you trouble, schedule a class that meets frequently. Then get help immediately if you are stuck. Consider the math lab, a study group or a tutor if you find you need extra help.

- Read the next section of text before class. Even if it doesn't make any sense.
- Take notes during class, copy all of the steps.
- Review lecture notes before starting homework.
- Check your answers after a few problems. You don't want to practice wrong.
- Work problems until you understand them (not until the homework is done).
- As you do your homework, write down sample problems on note cards including directions.
- Define terms on note cards. Use memory tricks for formulas and vocabulary.
- Make warning or hint cards to study (things that always give you a problem).
- Start studying several days ahead of the test.
- Mix up practice problems and work them.
- As soon as the test is passed out write down your memorized reminders.
- Answer easy questions first.
- Check your work if time allows.

TIP: When taking notes in math, fold your paper down the middle. Write the steps on the left side and work the problems on the right side. Write assignment and test info at the top of the page.

RESOURCES

Barb Moburg, Skagit Valley College instructor, Study Workshops

Learning Strategies Database:

<http://muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/reading.html#TextBook>

Links to a Better Education:

<http://www.chemistrycoach.com/lbe5.htm#Reading%20Textbooks>

Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudis. *Strategies that Work, teaching comprehension to enhance understanding*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers., 2000.

Study Skills Self-help Information:

<http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html>

Test Anxiety:

<http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/stresstestanxiety.shtml>
