

Building Your Study Skills

Five tips for making the most out of studying:

1. Identify the time(s) of day when studying is the most effective, then schedule and prioritize your work accordingly.
2. Plan your reading strategy.
3. Alternate subjects as you study, preferably two dissimilar subjects.
4. Be honest with yourself in assessing personal strengths and weaknesses.
5. Adapt your study skills to each class.
6. Start a study group with students in your classes.

Identify the time(s) of day when studying is the most effective, then schedule and prioritize your work accordingly.

- Make studying your job. Keep regular study hours.
- The “study two hours for every hour in class” rule really is true, as you’ll see at exam time. Try different schedules until you find one that works for you, and keep in mind that the “two hours for one” rule doesn’t distinguish between focused time and unfocused time.
- Some people complete their best work in the morning. For others, the same benefits are experienced by staying up late. Experiment with different times of the day and pick a time that’s best for you.
- Also use waiting time. Five minutes waiting for the bus, 10 minutes waiting for a class to start, 15 minutes waiting in line for another appointment---waiting time adds up fast. Have short study tasks ready to do during these periods. Have 3 x 5 cards with facts, formulas, or definitions and pull them out anywhere.

Plan your reading strategy

- Set clear starting and stopping times. Tasks often expand to fill the time we allot for them. Try scheduling a certain amount of time for an assignment, and stick to it. You may often find that you can decrease study time by forcing yourself to read faster.
- Three three-hour sessions are usually far more productive than one nine-hour session. A nine hour session includes more unfocused time, such as phone calls, breaks, daydreaming, and doodling. Three shorter sessions will likely yield more focused and productive study time.

Avoid studying the same subject for more than an hour at a time.

- If you must study in a large block of time, work on several subjects and avoid studying similar topics one after the other. For example, if you plan to study sociology, psychology and computer science, schedule computer science in between psychology and sociology.

Be honest with yourself in assessing personal strengths and weaknesses.

- Set realistic goals. Don't set yourself up for failure by telling yourself you can do a four-hour job in two hours.
- Allow flexibility in your schedule, Unexpected things will happen, so plan for them.

Adapt your study skills to each class.

- The study tips for one class may not work for another. For instance, using a mnemonic helps a lot when you're studying biology, but is pretty worthless for a calculus class based on formulas.

One last option; Study Groups

- Study groups can provide an opportunity to discuss class material and clarify areas of confusion. When you explain something you've learned in class to someone else, you begin to understand it better, so students who utilize study groups tend to get better grades than those who don't.
- Ask classmates who seem to share your interest in doing well in class. Look for people who stay alert in class, take notes, ask questions, and respond to the instructor's questions. A group of four to six people works best.
- Hold study group sessions in a place that is free of distractions and has room to spread out books and notes.
- Study groups should meet for no more than two to three hours at a time. Having a time limit will help the group focus.
- If possible, try to meet on the same day and time each week. Treat the study session as if it were a class or appointment to ensure that everyone attends.

Don't feel pressured to use all of the techniques listed or to tackle them in order.

Note suggestions you think will be helpful. Pick one technique to use now, and when it becomes a habit, select another one. Repeat this cycle and enjoy the results as they unfold in your life.

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