

STUDY TIPS

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Optimize Your Time to Maximize Your Productivity

1. Keep a “time journal” for at least one week to examine how you spend your time.
2. Identify activities that are not essential. Reserve time every day for some leisure, exercise, meals, and eight hours sleep at night.
3. Find out when you study best and schedule your most important homework at that time.
4. Prioritize your assignments.
5. Break difficult or time-consuming assignments (like a major term paper) into several parts: brainstorming, research, outline, rough draft, second draft, and final paper.
6. Study difficult or boring subjects first because they require more energy and concentration. By studying difficult subjects first, you will work more efficiently to get to the subjects you enjoy.
7. Honestly evaluate your output. Look for ways to do more in less time.
8. Work “smart.” Recognize when your mind is drifting, and take a 15-20 minute break. By doing something you enjoy, you will return to your studies recharged and ready to work.
9. Create a positive study environment, which is pleasant and non-distracting. It would be preferable not to have a TV, radio, or telephone/cell phone in the room when you are doing your homework.
10. Stay organized. Organization saves time and reduces stress. Writing your assignments in your school planner and keeping all class materials organized in a binder will help you complete your homework quickly.
11. Learn to say “no.” After all, time is vitally important. Once it has slipped by, it will never come back. In fact, many people in the U.S. say “time is money.”
12. Being a successful student is a full-time job. Spend at least three to five hours doing your homework and completing the reading assignments that will be covered in the next day or two.
13. Do NOT procrastinate! Do the work now, enjoy the free time later.

Tips on Reading Faster and Comprehending More

1. Pre-read or skim (look over the reading material quickly) in order to get a gist or general idea of the contents.
 - a. If you are reading a book, skim the book's "Table of Contents," "Preface," and "Introduction." Read the first paragraph, summary, and/or conclusion of every chapter. Read the "Chapter Review" (if there is one) before you read the chapter and after you have completed it. Read and re-read the headings and subheadings as well as the key terms and words in bold font.
 - b. Write down answers to the key questions that appear in each chapter.
 - c. Write down answers to questions your professor has hinted may appear on the exam.
2. Read to understand the text. Do not be obsessed with memorization.
3. Read actively, not passively. Are the author's arguments valid? How does the material you are reading correspond to previous readings and/or your class lectures? What are the major concepts?
4. Examine the visual aids. Although a course textbook is not as easy to read as a novel, the author is still telling a story. Pictures, graphs, timelines, charts, tables and boxes, along with their headings or captions, are important visuals that should be carefully read. Everything in the chapter adds up to a story. You will develop a more comprehensive understanding of the book if you pay attention to all the parts of the story.
5. Read with a pencil. Students should take notes as they read (preferably writing the page number when they start taking notes from a new page in the book). Most book chapters follow an outline format. Usually, the chapter will already be divided into sections with titles and subsections with titles.
6. Establish a schedule for reading. It is advisable to break-up the assignment into manageable segments. You should allow enough time to understand each section. For example, if given one week to read a forty-page chapter that the teacher will be going over in class, you could break that down into four blocks of ten pages every day over four days, or seven blocks of six pages every day over seven days, and so on.

Tips on Better Note-Taking

1. Do not attempt to write down every single word the teacher says in class. Try to write down only the most important ideas or points.
2. Review your notes the same day. This will allow you to expand your notes with additional points if you were unable to write something down. Revise and expand your notes. This will help you remember what went on in class.
3. Create your own shorthand or abbreviations for words that you write frequently. For example: example = ex.; Branch = br.; And = +; because = b/c. If you are afraid you will not remember what something stands for, write it down in your notes or even the textbook itself.

4. If the instructor writes something on the board, write it in your notes. Instructors give many hints about which points are important and which might appear in the examination.
5. Possible signals of important points: if the instructor is excited or tells you an item is important, if the instructor repeats or periodically refers to something, if the instructor reads from their notes, etc.
6. Review key terms and ideas in the textbook. Compare notes with your classmate(s), and fill in any “gaps” between them. Make sure you have got your major points correct.
7. Date and number your notes.
8. Take notes in outline form. Some instructors will even give you an outline of what they intend to discuss in the class. Some instructors may jump around in their lectures, making it difficult to write their lectures in outline form. If you still want to develop an outline, rewrite your notes in outline form after the class.
9. It may be helpful to draw a vertical line two inches from the left side of your paper. This space can be used to write down key terms, summaries of the points in your notes, additional notes, and questions. This allows you to read your notes much faster.

Tips on Retaining What We Read, See, or Hear

1. It is preferable to study for several one-hour periods with 15 minute breaks in between, rather than studying for 2-4 hours non-stop. In this way, you will be able to remember much more of the class material.
2. Eliminate noise and visual distractions when studying. For instance, make it a point not to watch television, listen to music, use the telephone/cell phone, use your computer or engage in “instant messaging” while you are studying. If you must have music on in the background while you study, you should select music without lyrics and keep the volume down.
3. Always keep the “big picture” in mind. All the points made by your instructors and textbooks are part of a bigger picture, and there is some connection between them all. You will understand the material better if you look at the “big picture” first, and then fill in the picture with specific information. For example, if you have a general picture of the automobile and specific information about the automobile’s engine, you will have a much better understanding of the automobile.
4. Think about the importance of the subject to your life. This will make studying the material much more enjoyable.
5. Create associations and cross-reference your notes. Take what you already know and applying it to the new information you are learning.
6. Active learning increases memorization. People remember 90 percent of what they do, 75 percent of they see, and 20 percent of what they hear. When you read, try standing, walking, gesturing, and reading aloud. Going over the information even once in this fashion can make a huge difference.

7. Recitation and repetition. Reciting your notes and important passages from your textbook will increase your retention because you are using speech, sight, and hearing. The second, and just as important, part of memorization is repetition. Repetition is a simple and reliable technique of memorization.
8. The index card strategy of learning. When you write information down, you tend to remember it better. Index cards are portable (can be carried and read anywhere--on a school bus, in the cafeteria, or while in lines), cheap, simple, and efficient.
9. Index cards work because
 - (a) they have a game like quality and bring back happy memories of childhood when your parents and teachers made learning a game by using "flash cards" to teach you mathematics, spelling, foreign words, and the meaning of terms.
 - (b) they encourage repetition and thereby facilitate memorization.
 - (c) it is easier to learn many small chunks of information than one long list of information.
10. When using the index card strategy:
 - (i) write a term or a question on one side of the card. Then write the answer on the other side of the card.
 - (ii) memorize 10 cards at a time rather than trying to memorize 100 cards at one sitting?
 - (iii) study 10 cards, then take a break before you take on the next 10 cards.
 - (iii) separate the index cards into two stacks: one you have mastered and one you have not. This makes it easy to focus your efforts on the stack that needs to be mastered.
 - (iv) revise the index cards last thing at night and in the morning.
11. Learn to relax! Don't become stressed over exams. Prepare for exams throughout the semester and you will avoid stress.

Tips on Acing Objective Exams and Doing Much Better on Essay Exams

1. Do not wait until the last minute to study for a test. You will be tired and stressed from studying late the previous night, both of which could negatively impact your test-taking performance.
2. It is critically important to get at least seven to eight hours sleep the night before a test.
3. It is very important to have a positive attitude about your abilities before and when taking exams. If you have attended the classes, done your reading assignments and homework, taken good notes, put time and effort into studying, then you should take the exam with confidence.

4. If it is your first test in a class, ask the instructor how he/she constructs his/her tests. Are there true/false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, or essay questions? After you take your first test, you should have a fairly good idea what to expect in future tests with the same instructor.
5. If you are puzzled about the wording of a particular question on a test, ask the instructor. While the instructor will not give you the direct and complete answer, he/she will probably clarify the question and sometimes even give you a hint about the answer he/she expects you to give.
6. If you do not do well on a test, go to the instructor immediately afterwards and ask him/her what he/she would recommend so that you can do better next time. At the very least, it brings it to the forefront of your instructor's attention that you are putting forth every possible effort to improve and do well in his/her class.
7. Ask students that previously took the class/instructor what the tests were like, or even see if someone has a copy of the old tests.
8. Relax just before and during an exam. If you have studied for an exam, you should do well in it..
9. Skim through the entire test once before you begin answering the questions on it
10. Pace yourself. You definitely do not want to run out of time for a test, but you also do not want to rush through the test, increasing the chance for mistakes. You want to have a little time left over. You may want to answer the easier questions first and save the harder ones for last so that you know how much time you have left to spend on them.
11. Do not get stuck on a question. If you do not know an answer, go on to other questions and come back to it. You should make a mark (a star or asterisk) next to that question or a note to yourself so that you do not forget to return to those problem questions.
12. Answer EVERY question. If you do not answer a question, you will definitely get it wrong. Even if you have to guess, there is at least a chance you will get it correct.
13. If you do not know an answer to a multiple choice question, there are techniques you can use to increase your odds of selecting the correct answer.
 - a. Eliminate the answers you know are wrong. This will narrow down the answers you have to choose from.
 - b. If it is to fill in part of a sentence, then eliminate the answers that do not grammatically fit—single/plural, present/past/future, word begins with a vowel/consonant. It could be that the instructor made an error when writing the test, or it could be that there is a good hint of what answers might not belong.
 - c. If two words are very similar, choose one of these two.
 - d. If two quantities are almost the same, choose one of these two.

- e. If you are unable to narrow down the answers, then select one letter, and use that same letter for any other questions in which you have to guess without being able to narrow down the answers. This may increase the probability of getting at least one of the answers correct.
14. Read ALL the answers even if you think you found the correct answer, as it may not be the BEST correct answer.
 15. Watch for similar questions in matching sections. If every answer is only used once (and the instructor may explicitly say so on the test. As you answer the questions, you can scratch them off and narrow your choices for other questions.
 16. Read every word in true/false sections. These are typically tricky questions, since just one word can change whether a sentence is true or false. Look for words like *all*, *most*, *sometimes*, *never*, *and*, *rarely*. Watch for *not*, *no*, and *except*. Whenever you see a question or sentence with words like *always* or *never*, often the answer will be false.
 17. Review your answers. Make certain you put the answer that the question was asking for. Some words like EXCEPT or NOT can totally change the meaning of a question and are easy to overlook. Make sure your answers are legible. Make certain you did not skip any questions or leave any blank. You should review your test/exam if you have extra time. Remember, you already allotted yourself the entire test period to be there, and once you leave, it is too late to correct it.
 18. As far as writing good essays are concerned:
 - a. Unless you are asked for your opinion, you should avoid using “I” (the first person) in your essay.
 - b. Make certain that your handwriting is legible and that there is enough space between words on the same line and in between lines so that it is easier for your instructor to grade the essay.
 - c. Write a brief outline. This will help you organize your thoughts, save time, and write more effectively.
 - d. You should incorporate key terms, concepts, and issues into your essay. You must produce supporting statements for those terms, concepts, and issues. This is the “substance” part. However, substance by itself does not demonstrate understanding. This is the “significance” part, or the “so what?” part. Why are terms, concepts, and issues in your essay important? How do they relate to each other? How do they answer the essay’s question? How do they relate to the bigger picture that your instructor has been emphasizing for the course.
 - e. Give examples that will show that you understand the ideas in your essay. .
 - f. Do not engage in padding your essay or filling space with irrelevant or unnecessary information. Your instructor knows all the tricks that students use in writing essays.

- g. The essay should be written in a well-organized fashion. The introduction should provide an overview of the main points and topic statement. Typically, an essay will have three main points, and a paragraph should be allotted to each. In your concluding paragraph, summarize the main points that you made in your essay (these points should be similar to the ones you indicated in your introduction). You should have one or two sentences that answer the essay question overall and brings a sense of closure for its reader.