

BEST STUDY SKILLS

1. Don't attempt to cram all your studying into one session.

Ever find yourself up late at night expending more energy trying to keep your eyelids open than you are studying? If so, it's time for a change. Successful students typically space their work out over shorter periods of time and rarely try to cram all of their studying into just one or two sessions. If you want to become a successful student then you need to learn to be consistent in your studies and to have regular, yet shorter, study periods.

2. Plan when you're going to study.

Successful students schedule specific times throughout the week when they are going to study -- and then they stick with their schedule. Students who study sporadically and whimsically typically do not perform as well as students who have a set study schedule. Even if you're all caught up with your studies, creating a weekly routine, where you set aside a period of time a few days a week, to review your courses will ensure you develop habits that will enable you to succeed in your education long term.

3. Study at the same time.

Not only is it important that you plan when you're going to study, it's important you create a consistent, daily study routine. When you study at the same time each day and each week, your studying will become a regular part of your life. You'll be mentally and emotionally more prepared for each study session and each study session will become more productive. If you have to change your schedule from time to time due to unexpected events, that's okay, but get back on your routine as soon as the event has passed.

4. Each study time should have a specific goal.

Simply studying without direction is not effective. You need to know exactly what you need to accomplish during each study session. Before you start studying, set a study session goal that supports your overall academic goal (i.e. memorize 30 vocabulary words in order to ace the vocabulary section on an upcoming Spanish test.)

5. Never procrastinate your planned study session.

It's very easy, and common, to put off your study session because of lack of interest in the subject, because you have other things you need to get done, or just because the assignment is hard. Successful students DO NOT procrastinate studying. If you procrastinate your study session, your studying will become much less effective and you may not get everything accomplished that you need to. Procrastination also leads to rushing, and rushing is the number one cause of errors.

6. Start with the most difficult subject first.

As your most difficult assignment or subject will require the most effort and mental energy, you should start with it first. Once you've completed the most difficult work, it will be much easier to complete the rest of your work. Believe it or not, starting with the most difficult subject will greatly improve the effectiveness of your study sessions, and your academic performance.

7. Always review your notes before starting an assignment.

Obviously, before you can review your notes you must first have notes to review. Always make sure to take good notes in class. Before you start each study session, and before you start a particular assignment, review your notes thoroughly to make sure you know how to complete the assignment correctly. Reviewing your notes before each study session will help you remember important subject matter learned during the day, and make sure your studying is targeted and effective.

8. Make sure you're not distracted while you're studying.

Everyone gets distracted by something. Maybe it's the TV. Or maybe it's your family. Or maybe it's just too quiet. Some people actually study better with a little background noise. When you're distracted while studying you (1) lose your train of thought and (2) are unable to focus -- both of which will lead to very ineffective studying. Before you start studying find a place where you won't be disturbed or distracted. For some people this is a quiet cubical in the recesses of the library. For others is in a common area where there is a little background noise.

9. Use study groups effectively.

Ever heard the phrase "two heads are better than one?" Well this can be especially true when it comes to studying. Working in groups enables you to (1) get help from others when you're struggling to understand a concept, (2) complete assignments more quickly, and (3) teach others, whereby helping both the other students and yourself to internalize the subject matter. However, study groups can become very ineffective if they're not structured and if groups members come unprepared. Effective students use study groups effectively.

10. Review your notes, schoolwork and other class materials over the weekend.

Successful students review what they've learned during the week over the weekend. This way they're well prepared to continue learning new concepts that build upon previous coursework and knowledge acquired the previous week.

We're confident that if you'll develop the habits outlined above that you'll see a major improvement in your academic success.

The following tips and strategies will help you be a more attentive listener:

Listen for meaning

Listening for meaning is a form of active listening. Active and attentive listeners not only pay attention to words, they also focus on the intent of each word—the message a word is intended to communicate. To decipher messages, first determine the central idea being communicated. Then pay close attention to anecdotes, explanations, and other details meant to clarify meaning. While you work to improve listening skills, always pay close attention to the central focus of what is being relayed.

While you're listening, and after the listen task has ended, check your comprehension. Did what you learn make sense within the context of the topic or central idea being communicated? Monitoring and checking comprehension makes sure that you're active listening strategy is working.

Adjust your note taking style to the lecture

Ineffective listeners often attempt to jot down every detail from a lecture. They are under the impression that a detailed outline equates to good notes. Students who utilize this strategy often get discouraged when they review their notes only to find the breadth, detail and lack of focus in their note-taking is confusing and leaves them unable to identify central themes and important topics. Effective listeners adapt their note-taking to the teaching styles of their teachers and lectures. They focus on central ideas and jot down details that expand on, or clarify, the central concepts of a lecture.

Tackle difficult to understand material

It's not uncommon for students tune out professors when they start discussing confusing or complex topics. Even when it's possible to hear every word during a lecture, it can be very difficult to process confusing or complicated concepts. Good listeners harness their mental faculties to process what is being presented.

Concentrate and pay attention

People who struggle with listening often have a difficult time concentrating. Good listeners must work to develop the ability to concentrate and ignore distractions. This requires the ability to tune out personal worries, thoughts about family members and friends, and thoughts about upcoming activities. Those who can hone the ability to concentrate can improve listening skills.

Be prepared

If you do not complete required reading or review notes from previous lectures prior to class, it is very difficult to process information and attentively listen to lectures. This is why you should never neglect to complete reading or other class assignments. Attending a lecture prepared provides you the background knowledge required to be an effective listener—and an effective student.

Focus on what's important

One of the keys of effective listening is the ability to concentrate on central ideas and main focuses. It is a mistake to only be concerned about facts and extemporaneous detail during a lecture. In other words, effective listeners focus on the stories or ideas behind the facts. They then are able to pick up on the supporting fact, details and evidence for the main concepts, ideals and topics being discussed.

Choose to be interested

Many people tune out lectures because they're bored or disinterested. As a result, they neglect to take notes on key concepts. Effective listeners become interested in the subject material, so they can process the information and pay attention to classroom lectures.

Time Management

Step 1. Prepare a Term Calendar

At the start of each new term, before you get heavily involved in your studies or other activities, prepare a calendar that covers the entire term. Your term calendar can look like a regular monthly calendar, or it can employ a different format. Whichever format you choose, your term calendar should outline the following:

- Assignments with their due dates
- Tests with their dates
- All school activities
- All out-of-school and extra-curricular activities

Step 2. Prepare a Weekly Schedule

Unlike your term calendar, which is planned out in its entirety at the beginning of each term, your weekly schedule is prepared at the beginning of each new week. Each Sunday sit down and prepare your weekly schedule. Although you'll prepare your weekly schedule each Sunday, you should update your schedule as the week progresses and new items arise. To prepare your weekly schedule do the following:

- Write down on your calendar each class you have for each day of the week
- Take a look at your term calendar and write down on your weekly calendar items that need to be completed, or are occurring that week (i.e. assignments, tests, events, etc.)
- Go back and review all your class notes and your schedule from the prior week to see if there is anything you need to add to this week's schedule that is carrying over.
- Add to your weekly schedule any out-of-school and extra-curricular activities you'll be participating in during the upcoming week.
- Note down the day and time for each assignment, study session, work group or project you'll be completing during the week. These may be occurring in the evening, after school, or during school.

Step 3. Prepare a Daily Schedule

You'd think a term calendar and weekly schedule would be sufficient to effectively manage your time, but they aren't. You also need to prepare a daily schedule. Each evening, prepare a daily schedule for the next school day. Place a check mark next to each item to be completed as it is completed. To prepare your daily schedule do the following:

- Jot down everything from your weekly schedule that you need to do for the coming day.
- Write down everything from your previous daily schedule that wasn't completed and needs to be completed the next day.
- Check your daily schedule for the current day to see if there are any other school activities that you need to include for the following day.
- Include any other activities from your weekly schedule that need to be included in your next day's schedule

Test Taking Strategies

Begin Reviewing a Week Before the Test

About a week before a test, sit down and put together a test preparation plan. Every test you take is going to be a little different – as will each test preparation plan you develop. In your plan you should decide how many hours you'll need to study and how to allocate those hours.

Your plan should (1) identify the most important study materials and techniques for the test (ie. reviewing notes, practice problems, etc.) and (2) how much time to allocate to each. For example, if you're preparing for a geometry test then the most effective study technique may be working practice problems assigned by your teacher. If it's a history test you're preparing for, then reviewing lecture notes and group study may be your best avenue for improving performance.

Now, let's make one thing clear. **To improve test performance you should begin reviewing a week before a test** – not studying. You should be employing effective study habits and techniques throughout the entire semester. Good reviewing is no substitute for poor studying. Don't expect to start studying one week prior to a test and perform well. **The key to improving your test performance is to employ effective study habits and techniques all semester and then employ effective reviewing techniques one week before a test.**

1. Be prepared.

There is no substitute for preparation. If you haven't studied throughout the semester. If you haven't reviewed prior to test day. If you don't know the test material, all the test taking strategies in the world won't save you. Preparation is key.

- Spend as many hours as necessary to understand the material that will be covered on the test well enough to achieve a high score.
- Since teachers often slightly modify information on tests to determine if students have good understanding of concepts, spend time on honing test-taking skills.

2. Always arrive early and take a moment to relax.

- You'll increase your confidence if you take time to relax.
- You'll be able to narrow your focus for the upcoming test.
- Arriving early may allow you time to ask any last minute questions of instructor or listen to explanations being provided to other students. Some study resource suggest that it's better to arrive on time to avoid "brain pickers", student who ask questions right before a test, but we disagree. We believe there is more to be gained by arriving a little early.

3. Listen attentively to last minute instructions given by the instructor.

- It is not uncommon for teachers to alter test details at the last minute.
- If you miss test instructions, test taking anxiety will increase.
- If you miss test instructions, don't be scared to ask for instructions to be repeated.

4. Do a memory dump.

A memory dump can be a particularly useful strategy for improving performance certain types of tests.

- As soon as you begin the test, write down information that you will likely need to know for the test and you fear you may forget. (ie., formulas, equations, dates, lists, etc.)

5. Read the test directions very carefully and watch for details.

- Test questions and directions often contain valuable information. Always read all directions carefully to ensure you understand what is being asked.
- It is not uncommon to have two correct answers on a multiple choice question. Pay attention to details.
- Frequently, test instructions will notify students that they only need to complete two questions, but there will be 5 options.

6. Plan how you will use the allotted time.

- Take a moment to estimate how much time you'll have for each section of the test and each question. Allow enough time for more difficult sections or sections that are weighted more heavily in the final test grade.
- Pace yourself so you can complete the test in the allotted time frame.
- Complete the questions you know first then come back and tackle the problems you're not sure about after.

7. Look for cues.

- If two answers are similar, they're usually not the correct answer.
- Pay attention to grammatical matching between the question being asked and answers. If an answer seems right but doesn't match grammatically with the question, it probably isn't the correct answer.
- Look for cues from other questions.

8. Answer all the questions.

Even if you're running out of time and can answer all the questions fully, it's important to answer all questions. Many professors will give partial credit for partially completed questions or if you're able to show your work. (Note: There are some tests in college where you are docked points for guessing. This is rare and usually be announced by the professor prior to the test.)

9. Maintain a positive attitude.

- Do not lose confidence or waste time if you encounter confusing or difficult questions. Answer the questions you know first.
- If you have no clue about the correct answer, make an educated guess if it will not count against your score.
- Disregard patterns. It is probably coincidence if a string of multiple choice answers that you know are correct are "a."

10. Rely on your first impressions.

- The first answer that pops in your mind is usually the correct answer. Don't change answers unless you're sure the answer you've chosen is wrong.
- It may be counterproductive to review answers and make changes – especially if you're struggling to get through the test.

11. Plan to finish early and have time for review.

- Go back and answer difficult questions after answering easy ones.
- If you are required to complete an essay, review it for spelling and grammatical errors.

12. Consider every test a practice session - analyze your performance.

- To determine whether your test taking strategies are working, take time to evaluate your performance after each test.
- Be sure to take note of where you're struggling. Are you struggling with essays or multiple choice questions?
- Arrange to meet with teachers to discuss low test scores to determine what you can do to improve. This is highly recommended if you struggle with essay questions.

Top Study Skills

Time Management

1. Make a weekly or daily "to do" list
2. Use a calendar/planner
3. Get up early to get stuff done
4. Reward yourself when tasks are complete
5. Schedule your "me" time (so it doesn't eat up study time)
6. Read the syllabus and make plans from it
7. Prioritize and schedule what you need to do – be realistic!
8. Set aside study/class work hours each day
9. Have a spot where all studying takes place
10. Make or join a study group

Note-Taking

1. Copy professor "board" notes and check his/her web page
2. Paraphrase professor's words
3. Take up as much space as needed
4. Review your notes every night
5. Create your own abbreviations
6. Jot down any ideas that the professor repeats
7. Notice verbal cues – "Now this is important"
8. Highlight your book/class materials
9. Write down all examples
10. Rewrite your notes after class

Reading

1. Read more than once
2. Highlight and take notes
3. Make margin notes
4. Don't put off reading assignments until the last minute!
5. Review after reading
6. Keep from dozing off: don't read right before going to bed, and don't read in bed
7. Read and understand captions and figures
8. Make a glossary of terms
9. Pace yourself
10. Pay attention to key concepts and end of chapter reviews

Test Preparation

1. Make flashcards
2. Rewrite/re-read your notes; reorganize into categories
3. Get help if you need it: use PASS and other learning resources
4. Don't cram!
5. Know the test format
6. Get all of your questions answered
7. Verbalize what you know – tell/teach the material to someone else
8. Be caught up on all work for the test
9. Identify your problem areas
10. Take advantage of extra credit