Study Skills, Note-Taking and Time Management

Is it possible to “cram” the night before an exam and get a good grade?

How can I remember all the information in my textbooks?

I didn’t do well on my midterm. Is there any hope for me?

My instructors talk so fast. How am I supposed to take notes?
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How do you study?

How do you study? Do you take notes? Or do you underline important parts? Do you highlight? Or do you just read and do nothing at all? Here is an excerpt from a biology textbook. Take 4 or 5 minutes to study it in whatever way you are used to.

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a disorder that affects the excitable cells, or neurons, of the nervous system. Neurons of the brain, usually those of the cerebral cortex, become hyperactive, or hyperexcitable. This neuronal hyperactivity leads to the development of seizures (convulsions) that tend to recur on a chronic basis. Seizures include brief episodes of uncontrollable motor, sensory or psychic disturbances that interrupt the individual’s normal activities.

Epilepsy may be idiopathic (essential), in which no brain pathology can be identified, or it may be symptomatic, or secondary, to a previous brain disease or injury. Conditions that may produce epilepsy are head injuries, including birth injuries; brain tumors; inflammatory conditions of the brain; hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar; toxic conditions, such as uric acid buildup or alcohol withdrawal; or lack of oxygen to the brain cells. The development of epilepsy seems to depend on a combination of genetic and environmental factors, in which persons with a genetic predisposition have greater chances of developing epilepsy when environmental conditions favor it.
We learn . . .

10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what we see and hear
70% of what is discussed with others
80% of what we experience personally
95% of what we teach to someone else

\[ William \text{ Glasser} \]
Saboteurs of Learning

The following can sabotage a student’s learning experience. Let’s learn what they are, so they can be avoided.

1. **Reading without a purpose.** If you don’t have a purpose for taking a course or reading a text, you need to find one, especially if it seems uninteresting. Become interested in the course. Before you begin to read, skim the introduction or summary of the chapter you’re about to read, or look at its table of contents. Also, be clear about your instructors’ expectations. Ask yourself, “What do I want to have learned more about after I’ve read this chapter? What is it that I need to know for an exam? What kind of exam will I have?” These questions may give you purpose for your studying and for the course in general.

2. **Distractions.** Students who are distracted do not learn well. Also, what distracts some people does not distract others. However, studying in front of the TV doesn’t serve any student well. You may need to ask yourself, “Where am I studying? Is it too loud? Too quiet? Too busy? Am I tired or hungry?” Find a place that works best for you. If you are tired, take a nap, or do some work that isn’t so intense; if you are hungry, have a snack. Remove the distraction, and you will have a much easier time trying to learn!

3. **Long-term memory storage interference.** Part of the reason students may have difficulty with remembering is that they did not learn material thoroughly before moving on. Picture a football game. The quarterback passes to the receiver who is waiting in the end zone. However, someone from the sidelines starts shouting at the receiver. The receiver turns his head, and as he does so, a player from the opposing team leaps in, steals the pass, and runs off with the ball. It was almost a touchdown, but there are no points for almost catching the ball. It works the same way with learning. If you don’t learn information thoroughly before moving on to new material, the initial information will be intercepted and won’t make it into your long-term memory. So ask yourself, “Have I really learned this material before I move on to try and learn more? Do I stay focused when I study? Do I frequently review my material?”

How do you know that you have learned something?

Did you know that most of the time, students don’t really know whether they have learned something (or not learned it) until they take an exam? Wouldn’t it be nice to know that you either know or don’t know what you studied before writing a test? That’s why proper study techniques are so important. Just as there are certain things that hinder your learning experience, there are certain things that ensure you will learn effectively for your exams.

Processes for Learning

1. Maintenance rehearsal is memorization by repetition. This process of learning is most effective when you need to memorize something quickly, such as irregular verb conjugations for your French course. For example, you might write out an equation many times in order to memorize it, or you might use flashcards to memorize definitions. However, rote learning is not an effective way to understand the relationship between things and it is an inefficient method to learn large quantities of information.

2. Elaborative rehearsal is memorization by relating new information with information you already know, which allows you to understand the meanings of and relationships between concepts and ideas. For example, you might rewrite a definition in your own words, think of an experience from your own life that is an example of a theory you learned in class, or create questions (and find answers!) about the material. Elaborative rehearsal is an effective method to learn material that you need to apply or explain as it allows you to recode the information into something meaningful.
Steps for Reading to Remember

In order to learn effectively, students need to apply certain study strategies to their class material. The following is a step-by-step process to ensure you not only learn material effectively, but you will also be prepared for exams.

Hourly Study Method

1. **Read only one paragraph at a time.** Have you ever read several pages of a textbook and realized that by the time you are on page three, you have completely forgotten pages one and two? Humans are not very good at trying to learn large quantities of information at one time. Smaller bits work better. It is easier to chew a bite of steak than try to fit the whole 16 oz. T-bone in your mouth at once!

2. **Read the paragraph once without making any marks.** Your brain needs a chance to process what is important. Not every single word will be important, but you need to read the whole paragraph to figure out what is.

3. **Decide what is important** in that particular paragraph and highlight or underline it. Make sure you are not highlighting more that 3 words in a row, or 4 if you must! Remember that 85% of the important information will be in only 15% of the words (from What Smart Students Know by Adam Robinson).

4. **Be the teacher and make up some questions** to test yourself with. Practicing with these test questions will be the only way for you to know that you have learned your material or not. Use your margins to jot down notes on which to test yourself in both your text and lecture notes. Remember, too, that not all texts will have headings where you need or want them. Write headings in if you need to. This will be your study guide to help you learn for exams! Here’s that epilepsy excerpt again, so you can see what to do.

5. **Test yourself.** When you write a test in class, are you allowed to use your textbook or your notes to help you out? Of course not! Make sure when you review your material, you test yourself with the questions you made for yourself. Expose only the headings and your marginal notes, and no peeking! This process may feel uncomfortable at first, but rest assured, you will be in the first stages of learning, and you will remember more as you review.

6. **Move on** to the next paragraph and follow steps 2 – 5.

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**Epilepsy**

- **Definition:** Epilepsy is a disorder that affects the excitable cells, or neurons, of the nervous system. Neurons of the brain, usually those of the cerebral cortex, become hyperactive, or hyperexcitable. This neuronal hyperactivity leads to the development of seizures (convulsions) that tend to recur on a chronic basis. Seizures include brief episodes of uncontrollable motor, sensory or psychic disturbances that interrupt the individual’s normal activities.

- **Symptoms:**
  - 3 symptoms
  - 2 types
  - 6 causes
  - 2 development factors

- **2 Causes:** Epilepsy may be idiopathic (essential), in which no brain pathology can be identified, or it may be symptomatic, or secondary, to a previous brain disease or injury. Conditions that may produce epilepsy are head injuries, including birth injuries; brain tumors; inflammatory conditions of the brain; hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar; toxic conditions, such as uric acid buildup or alcohol withdrawal; or lack of oxygen to the brain cells. The development of epilepsy seems to depend on a combination of genetic and environmental factors, in which persons with a genetic predisposition have greater chances of developing epilepsy when environmental conditions favor it.
7. **Repeat testing of previous paragraphs** to make sure you still remember. Keep reviewing until you have learned. Psychologists say you may have to review the key points up to seven times or more in order to learn them. But remember, it's quicker to test yourself on the important information 7 times rather than to read your entire textbook 7 times.

8. **Take a break.** Do NOT study for longer than an hour without taking a break. If you don’t, your retention of information in the second hour of studying will be only 50% of the first hour. Your break need not be long (10 minutes or so). Just make sure you take one.

9. **Review everything** that you went over in that study hour. Before taking your break, make sure you review that hour’s worth of studying by covering up the text, and testing yourself. You may want to quickly review again when you start studying again after your short break. That way, if you’re having difficulty with a certain concept, you can mark it in your book, and come back to it later.

**Weekly Study Method**

Take an hour or so every week to review everything you have learned from the beginning of the term. Test yourself to make sure you still remember what you’ve learned. You may have forgotten some things and will need to learn them again. Using this method, you can say goodbye to the ineffective “all-nighter” cram sessions before midterms and finals. You will always be prepared!

**Concentration**

Now that you know how to study properly, how do you keep your mind on your studies? Difficulty with concentration is a problem that affects all students at one time or another.

**What interferes with concentration?**

1. **Noise, people talking, music, TV.** If your attention is constantly interrupted, your mind will not be able to think, learn or remember effectively. Without interruptions, you can learn more and finish faster. If possible, choose the same time and place to study every day. Fewer distractions results in better concentration and improved learning.

2. **Daydreaming.** If your thoughts continually wander, stop to consider the cause of the distraction. Establish the habit of plunging directly and efficiently into your work. You may also try making a mark on a piece of paper whenever you find yourself daydreaming. This act will remind you to get back to work. Try to reduce the marks per hour or per evening.

3. **Being hungry and tired.** If you are hungry or tired, eat a little food, or take a short nap. Being alert when you study is essential if you are to think and learn.

4. **Personal problems.** Not thinking about personal problems is often difficult. If a problem continues to intrude on your thoughts while you are studying, it might be wise to deal with it first; otherwise, write it out on a sheet of paper and deal with it when you have finished your schoolwork. Then you can deal with the problem directly. If you cannot solve it yourself, get the help of a friend or a counsellor.

**What develops concentration?**

1. **Becoming motivated to learn.** View studying as an opportunity to learn. Wanting to learn stimulates concentration. Keep in mind that activity often comes before motivation; if you are having trouble getting started, try studying for just 10 minutes. After those 10 minutes, you will become sufficiently motivated to continue studying.

2. **Becoming interested.** The more you know about any subject, the more interested you become. For example, you may not care about snakes, but if you learned plenty about
them, you might become fascinated. Try to find an interest in any course you take. As you find out more, you’ll likely become more interested.

3. **Being organized.** Know exactly what your assignments are and get the materials you need to complete them. Good time management skills are essential to being a successful student. Follow a schedule, switch subjects often, and take breaks.

4. **Competing with yourself.** Don’t worry about all the work you have, just concentrate on what you are doing right now. Set a time when you think you should finish studying a certain subject, then see if you can beat it. Timing yourself prevents you from daydreaming and poking along.

5. **Asking questions.** Listen carefully in class, but if you don’t understand an assignment, be sure to ask the teacher for further explanation. It is impossible to remember what you don’t understand.

### Note-Taking

To take effective notes, you must prepare for the lecture, listen and take notes actively during the lecture, and then follow up with review to minimize forgetting. To review, employ the study method explained earlier in this booklet. Leave wider margins to incorporate those test questions for yourself.

**General tips:**

- Attend all your lectures.
- Be on time for class and do not leave early.

**Before Class**

- Complete the assigned reading(s) before class.
- Identify and look up unfamiliar terms and concepts.
- Note portions of textbook material which are unclear, and during the lecture, listen for the answers.
- Before the lecture, look over your notes from the previous one. This will warm your mind up to the subject.

**In Class**

- Be alert.
- Select a seat that allows you to see and hear clearly.
- Have a good attitude: decide that the lecture will be interesting and worthwhile.
- Write the name of the course, the date, and the subject of the lecture.
- Make your notes clear and easy to read.
- Develop abbreviations of recurring terms.
- Listen for clues:
  - “this is important” (make a note in the margin)
  - “finally,” “therefore” (important point about to be made)
- Leave spaces if you miss something -- fill in after class.
- Take notes of what the instructor puts on the board; copy diagrams, names, places, dates, and definitions.
- Pay attention at the end of class, and don’t leave early; important information often comes at end:
  - Summary statements may highlight main points.
    - Important ideas could be discussed.
    - A due date could be extended.
    - A pop quiz could be announced.
After the Class
To aid retention, review and edit your notes as soon as possible after the lecture while the ideas are still fresh in your mind. However, recopying notes takes valuable time; recopy only when necessary for clarity and conciseness. When you review your notes after class:

- Look them over to make sure that you will be able to read them easily in the future.
- Add new words or phrases if they add clarity. Fill in details or examples which may help you remember better; look up the definitions of new words.
- After filling in any gaps, write key words or phrases in the margin. Review your notes weekly.

Before an Exam
- In the days before an examination, review your notes thoroughly. Glance at the key words you have written in the margin and see how much you can remember before you reread your notes.
- Try to predict possible test questions, and be prepared to answer them. Test yourself as you go.

Note-taking Practice

Two Methods of Note-taking
Great note-taking takes practice. You have to find a method that works for you, and that may change depending on the class you’re in (for example, a science class versus an English class). Below are two common methods of note-taking; there are other methods as well, and good note-taking is all about figuring out which method works best for a particular course or topic. Remember, there are additional methods of note-taking – the key to developing good note-taking practices is to learn which methods work best for you and for the material you’re trying to learn.

The Cornell Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGL102</th>
<th>Sept. 7, 20xx</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 columns</td>
<td>Arrange your page into two columns; one column should be about ¼ of the page, and the other should be about ¾ of the page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main notes in class</td>
<td>Write the date and course information at the top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review w/in 24hr</td>
<td>Use the wide column to write your notes in point form and leave the narrow column blank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key words after class</td>
<td>Leave spaces to fill in extra information later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test and recite</td>
<td>Use bullets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Indent information to show relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within 24 hours, review your notes, clarify anything if necessary, and fill in any missing information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write key words, phrases and questions in the narrow column.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now, cover up your main notes column and use your key words, phrases, and questions to test yourself and practice discussing the ideas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mind Maps

Mind mapping is a method of note-taking that helps you to show the relationships between concepts and ideas. This technique requires you to be able to critically think about an idea and summarize it into key words. Many people like mind mapping because it allows them to visually track a lecture; however, you may find that some lectures move too quickly to make an effective mind map during class. If this is the case, try creating a mind map from your Cornell notes as an effective way of recoding the information you recorded.
Time Management

Why does it seem like time management skills are more necessary for post-secondary students than they were for high school students?

**High School Course**
The instructor has time to cover __________% of course material

**University Course**
The instructor has time to cover __________% of course material

University students have many demands on their time, and it is stressful if you don’t know how to balance it all (adapting to a new learning environment, getting homework done on time, studying for tests, working on major assignments, maybe working part-time to make ends meet, and trying to have some kind of a social life).

Time management is important because if you keep up with the assigned work, you can make it through successfully. **Unsuccessful students cite falling behind as the largest contributing factor to their failure.**

It may sound obvious, but keeping track of what you have to do ensures that you don’t forget to study for a test or keep a commitment. Schedules give you a visual picture of how much work is building up, so you can spread out your workload, which means you will be less likely to hit a crunch time and have to pull all-nighters to get everything done. Two different types of schedules will help you stay on top of it all: semester schedules, weekly schedules. Using these schedules in conjunction with task management principles allows you to make effective use of your time.

**Are there enough hours in a day?**

Weekly study time recommended for university level science courses = ___ hours/wk.

Study sessions should be a maximum of __________ minutes at a time.

Then take a break.

**Semester Schedules**

A calendar that displays one semester at a time (see page 16) will allow you to keep track of important dates and deadlines for assignments, midterms and final exams. Keep your semester schedule where you can see it, so you can plan how and where to spend your time.
**Weekly Schedules**

This type of schedule will give you a detailed picture of your week’s activities. Start by filling in your “must do’s”: classes, study hours, and even a reasonable amount of leisure activities. Refer to the step-by-step guidelines below when you’re ready to make up your weekly schedule.

Through conscientious use of time and common-sense planning, you can manage your time and make the most of your days. The key to managing your time is planning where it will go through developing and using a schedule. When you spend a little time making a schedule, you save a lot of time that you would otherwise waste.

**Planning Your Schedule**

Use a weekly schedule like the one on page 15 to plan your time. These “must-do's” should be written in pen.

1. Fill in your course schedule, including classes and labs.
2. If you have a job, write “work” in the appropriate time blocks.
3. Fill in your travel time to and from commitments.
4. Fill in realistic amounts of time for your meals.
5. Fill in any blocks of time committed to personal, family and household responsibilities.
6. Block out reasonable amounts of time, especially on weekends, for having fun and relaxing. If fun activities are scheduled, you do your studying ahead of time, and there is no need to feel guilty for not studying.
7. Include any other appointments.

The empty time blocks are those available for study and for leisure. Use pencil to allow for some flexibility in your schedule. Consider the following as you decide which subject to study when:

1. Study difficult subjects first because your mind is fresh and alert when you start studying.
2. Leave routine and mechanical tasks for last. Activities like alphabetizing a bibliography can be left until the end of your study sessions.
3. Schedule study for a particular course close to the time when you attend the class; plan to study and review the evening before the class meets or right after the class.
4. Build in a short break before you begin studying each new subject, and make sure you take short breaks during longer study sessions. A 10 minute break after 50 minutes is reasonable.

Set aside a time each week for analyzing the specific tasks that need to be done in the next week and planning when to do them.

**Regular Study Hours?!**

There are three important reasons you should schedule regular study hours.

1. **Practice makes perfect**: Repetition and review are two core principles of learning; the more you practice, the faster and better you learn. Study periods give you the opportunity to look over your textbooks and notes regularly, so studying for a test is a quick review, not a monumental task.
2. **Get more done**: Most students use up all their study time to complete homework assignments. Doing your homework is important, but on a light homework day, you can get much more accomplished.
3. **Become a more efficient learner**: It’s been proven that if you study at the same time and in the same place every day, you become conditioned to study. In other words, when you sit down at your desk and open your books, your brain knows what you’re there for.
Task Management
Your semester and weekly schedules allow you to quickly see what you need to get done and what
time you have available to get it done. But, how you use the time you have matters. A common mistake
students make is planning “to study” or “to write a paper” without a clear idea of what tasks they need
to do to accomplish the larger project.

Task management is a method of breaking larger projects into small, manageable, and measurable
tasks. Task management looks much like a “to-do” list, but the key strategy is to make sure each item
on the list is an action. For example, check out the chart below to see the differences between a “to-do”
list and a task list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To-Do</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write term paper</td>
<td>1. Select a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Check notes and text for background info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Narrow topic and create working thesis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Search databases and library catalogue for sources</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Selectively read sources and take notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Organize notes, group ideas, revisit thesis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Create outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Find additional sources (if necessary)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Write first draft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Revise, edit, proofread – write final draft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overcoming Procrastination
Almost everyone procrastinates about something at some point in their lives. In order to minimize
procrastination, it is important to understand why you procrastinate. While there are 7 types of
procrastinators, most of us don’t fit perfectly into any one category; in fact, we probably fit into each
category at one point or another.

1. The perfectionists
The problem: Perfectionists procrastinate because they’re worried about not doing well enough. They
usually finish on time, but they revise and change things continually trying to be perfect.
The solution: Work with a restricted time frame, be realistic about expectations, revise your work no
more than three times, and schedule time for relaxation.

2. The slackers
The problem: Slackers overestimate the time they have available and underestimate how long
something will take them. They usually refuse to worry about deadlines.
The solution: Break tasks into chunks, create task lists, make a schedule, and re-evaluate goals.

3. The fantasizers
The problem: Fantasizers tend to be “big picture” thinkers. They’re ambitious and creative, but hate the
details involved in achieving their goals.
The solution: Break tasks into chunks, and create strategic long, medium, and short-term goals.

4. The (un)fashionably late
The problem: The (un)fashionably late say they need pressure to start, never arrive on time, and will
find any reason to delay starting a project – even cleaning the bathroom!
The solution: Commit to starting a minimum number of days ahead, break tasks into chunks, and use a
reward system (e.g., 1 hour of work = a favourite show).

5. The nail biters
The problem: Nailbiters lack confidence in their abilities and often feel incompetent. They are not only
afraid of failure but also of success.
The solution: Develop a plan A, B, and C, and access available resources, such as Writing & Learning
Services, counselors, librarians, instructors, or tutors.
6. The work hogs

The problem: Workhogs can’t say no. They’re people pleasers who want to take on everything, and they underestimate what they’re capable of accomplishing in a set period of time.

The solution: Set realistic limitations and expectations about what you can accomplish, set aside time to relax, and create a list of excuses – and use them!

7. The scatterbrains

The problem: Scatterbrains are the types to forget about deadlines and calculate time poorly. They’re likely to ask their classmates when things are due and what they should be doing.

The solution: Consistently use a schedule and reminders. Track how long it takes to accomplish a particular thing, and then plan accordingly for the next time a similar project is assigned.

The Top 10 List of Ways to Use Your Time Wisely

1. Do it now. It’s a simple concept, but if you decide to tackle one of the items on your “task list” right now, your list will disappear before you know it.

2. Say “no”. There is nothing more tempting than an invitation to go out with a group of friends, and sometimes you really need a break from your books. However, if you can put a higher priority on studying for a midterm, for example, the results will be worth the effort.

3. Use your class time well. ATTEND. There is no real substitute for being in class. Information is better retained if you hear it firsthand, the more you learn in class, the less you have to learn on your own. TAKE NOTES. If you keep a good set of notes, studying for tests and exams will be easier and take less time.

4. Start projects as soon as they are assigned. Several assignments are often due in the same week just as midterms may all occur within a week. Scheduling time to work on projects as soon as they are assigned allows you time to produce quality work. “A” papers are rarely created the night before they are due.

5. Divide each task into small, manageable chunks, so the work won’t seem overwhelming. For example, instead of trying to learn a whole chapter of your chemistry textbook, set a goal of reading eight pages.

6. Use small pockets of time. If you have broken your homework into smaller chunks, you’ll be able to tackle one or two of them when you find yourself with 15 to 30 minutes of free time. For example, you could learn definitions while you are on the bus to school (as long as you are not driving!) or in line at the bank.

7. Use your best time well. Some people are early birds, so they should do as much work as possible early in the day. In contrast, night owls are better to save their work until the evening when they are most effective.

8. Don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today. If time allows, before the day is over, do one more thing that you were saving for tomorrow. In time, you will find that you aren’t procrastinating as much when you are rewarded with a lighter workload. Because procrastinators are often perfectionists, they may benefit from doing small tasks or pieces of assignments rather than trying to face the huge task of completing a large assignment.

9. Know what distracts you. A favourite show or game is a great way to relax, but if you start watching every show or lose track of time, you may look back at your day and wonder where it’s gone.

Finally, the number 10 way to use your time wisely is . . .

10. Stop Studying. Some people get carried away with trying to do too much. Make sure your studies don’t take over your whole life. It’s important to balance a variety of leisure activities with school work.
# Weekly Schedule

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<th>Sunday</th>
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