

Ten Study Methods That Work

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Studying effectively is not a matter of chance. Educators and psychologists have researched study methods for years. Some of the best studies come from the top universities: Stanford, Indiana, and Chicago where precise experiments with student groups have shed light on the most effective study methods. Students who follow these methods learn more easily, retain material for longer periods of time, and save themselves hours of study time. The ten study methods researchers have found that work are:

1. Making and Keeping a Study Schedule

Set aside certain hours of each day for study just as you do for nourishment and sleep. Keep the same schedule faithfully from day-to-day. The amount of time needed for study will vary for each individual based on skills with the subject matter. An average of two hours of study each day for each hour in class is recommended. Going to class is only the beginning; the real work begins afterwards!

2. Studying in an Appropriate Setting — Same Time, Same Place, Every Day

If concentration is your problem, then the right surroundings will help you greatly. Your study desk or table should be in a quiet place – free from as many distractions as possible. You will concentrate better when you study in the same place every day. It's a mind set. For example, when you sit down at the kitchen table, you expect to eat. When you sit down in an easy chair, you watch TV, etc. Developing the habit of studying in the same place at the same time everyday will improve your concentration.

3. Equipping Your Study Area With All the Materials You Need

Your study desk or table should be equipped with all the materials you might need to complete the assignment, e.g., pencils, pens, erasers, paper clips, stapler, dictionary, snacks, and liquid refreshments, etc. For some assignments, you may require a calculator or other supplies. With your materials at hand, you can study without interruption. If you have an answering machine, let it do its job during your study time. You can return the calls after you have finished studying. Taking your snack food and drinks to the study location will eliminate those endless trips to the kitchen which break your concentration.

4. Not Relying on Inspiration for Motivation

Can you imagine an athlete-in-training waiting for inspiration to strike to practice in preparation for an event? Of course not. They train daily to stay competitive whether they want to or not.

Like the athlete, you must get in training for tests and examinations by doing the assignments and preparing daily through review to be ready for the action.

5. Keeping a Well-Kept Notebook Improves Grades

Researchers tell us that there is definitely a relationship between orderliness and high grades. Knowing where to find your materials when you need them is crucial. Keep a special section for each subject in your notebook as well as a semester calendar so that you can write down all important assignments as they are announced. Having all of this information together in one place is vital to your success. A well-kept notebook is a part of good time management. If you've ever misplaced an important assignment, you know how much valuable time can be lost looking for it.

6. Keeping a Careful Record of Assignments

Put it down in black and white—including the details—and keep it in your notebook. Knowing just what you are expected to do and when you are expected to do it is the first giant step toward completing important assignments successfully and on time.

7. Making Use of “Trade Secrets”

Flash cards aren't just for kids! They are a legitimate study tool. Use the front of the card to write an important term, and on the back, write a definition or an important fact about that term. Carry your flash cards with you. Use them during “dead time,” such as standing in a check-out line, waiting in a doctor or dentist's office, riding a bus, or waiting at the Laundromat. Keep a set in the glove compartment of your car for long lines at your favorite fast food drive-in restaurant or bank. Post them on your bathroom mirror to review while shaving or applying make-up. You'll be surprised how much you can accomplish during those otherwise “dead times.” Think about developing your own “trade secrets” that will improve your study skills.

8. Taking Good Notes as Insurance Against Forgetting

Learn to take good notes efficiently as your instructors stress important points in class and as you study your assignments. Good notes are a “must” for just-before-test-reviewing. Without notes, you will need to reread and review the entire assignment before a test. This may require you to read anywhere from 100-300 pages of material in one sitting. With notes, you can recall the main points in just a fraction of the time. The time you spend in note taking is not lost, but in fact, is a time-saver.

9. Overlearning Material Enhances Memory

Psychologists tell us that the secret to learning for future reference is overlearning. Experts suggest that after you can say, “I know this material,” that you should continue to study that material for an additional one-fourth of the original study time. The alphabet is an example of overlearning. How did you learn it? Probably through recitation which is the best way to etch material into the memory trace. Manipulate the material as many different ways as possible by writing, reading, touching, hearing, and saying it. In an experimental study, students who overlearned material retained four times as much after a month than students who didn’t overlearn.

10. Reviewing Material Frequently

A student who does not review material can forget 80% of what has been learned in only two weeks! The first review should come very shortly after the material was first presented and studied. Reviewing early acts as a safeguard against forgetting and helps you remember far longer. Frequent reviews throughout the course will bring rewards at test time and will alleviate pre-test anxiety.

Although these ten study methods do work, there is one other component needed when using all of them – taking responsibility for studying by following through on assignments. All the study methods in the world won’t help you if you don’t help yourself. As with most everything in your life, your motto should be, **“I’m responsible for my success!”**

If you put forth the effort to study effectively, the improved skills will soon become a habit and be just as natural as breathing. The result can be better grades, greater knowledge, and higher self-esteem. These skills will also serve you well in your professional and personal life.