

General Study Tips

Location

Where do you study best? It varies for different people, but you need to take the time to learn what works best for you, based on your learning styles and your personal preferences. In general, be aware of how many distractions you have in a space, how you handle distractions, and what you need to have around you to focus best.

Dorm: If you are the kind of person who is easily distracted by other people and by a changing environment, your dorm might be the best place because you have more control over those distractions. A drawback to studying in your dorm is the lack of accountability or the potential to work through your break times. You need to find methods to keep yourself on task (both in terms of doing your work and taking appropriate breaks), try the Time Management Tips handout!

Library: If you like to have people around you, but want a generally quiet space, the library might be a good option. It allows you to get into a different space than the one you sleep and socialize in, which can help you mentally. You also have access to books and resources. But there are more potential distractions, so you need to be aware of how distractions affect your studying.

Outside: Studying outside has the biggest distraction variables at play. There could be people talking loudly, you have the weather to contend with, and perhaps construction or any number of things. However, being outside has the benefit of fresh air and a beautiful natural campus which can be very calming.

Timing

When are you most productive and on what? One way to help improve your study skills is to pay attention to when you are able to study best and utilize your own habits to your advantage. This is less concrete than location and requires a bit of introspection. But just try to notice when certain types of assignments are easier and which times it might be harder.

Are you more productive and alert in the mornings? Try to wake up an extra hour earlier to get some quality work in. Are you a night-owl who can stay up and get a lot done? Set a timer for yourself on when to go to sleep to make sure you don't stay up all night.

One important aspect of timing that you should always keep in mind that studies have shown that you have maximum retention and understanding if you review new information within 1 day of learning it.

Study Methods

Interweaving/Interleaving: This is a somewhat recent study technique that is growing in popularity. It involves mixing up your studying between different topics, and has been proven to be especially effective in math and science applications.

Oftentimes typical studying means doing all of your chem homework, and then all of your English homework, then all of your calc homework, etc. This is called blocked learning/studying. But interweaving says that by mixing up your topics can be more effective in terms of overall comprehension and retrieval. So you would do English homework for half an hour, then move on to Chem, and then maybe back to English, and then calculus. It may seem disorganized, but this method helps you form connections in your brain because you automatically start to sort what is different and similar between different topics. Though it is still relatively new, this study method could be especially effective for people with ADHD.

[\(https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-interleaving-effect-mixing-it-up-boosts-learning/\)](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-interleaving-effect-mixing-it-up-boosts-learning/)

(P)SQ3R: This is a reading comprehension tool for any kind of reading, but especially for textbook chapters. Simply reading a textbook chapter does not set you up for success. Chances are you will quickly forget the information, or you won't fully understand it. Using a studying tool like (P)SQ3R only takes up a bit more time and it drastically increases your ability to recall and understand the information.

Preview: This isn't included in typical SQ3R methods, which is why it's in parenthesis, but it is an important step in the learning process. In this step you want to preview what you already understand about a topic, if anything. What do you know about this topic? Have you had a previous class on it? Do you have any lived experiences that have taught you something about this topic? As students you know much more than you probably realize, and it is important to understand what knowledge you are already bringing to a topic or class.

Survey: Now you will want to open the chapter itself, but just skim it. You want to get a general idea of what the chapter is about by reading the introduction, the conclusion, any study questions, and any charts, graphs or pictures. You might also go back to preview and realize that you know a few more things after surveying the chapter.

Question: This helps frame your reading and gives you a goal. What are the main things you want to learn from reading this chapter? You can also try turning headings into questions. If the heading is "The Battle of Saratoga" you can ask "What happened during the Battle of Saratoga?"

Read: Now you want to actually read the chapter to look for answers to the questions you created. Take notes using a note-taking method (some listed below) or highlight the text. You want to engage with the text in some way to help you remember the main points later.

Recite: After reading, look back at the questions you created as well as any already included in the chapter. Did you answer them? If not, go back and look for the answers.

Review: Put the material down for at least a few hours, work on something else or take break. Then return to the material within a day and review what you learned, keeping note of any outstanding questions for you to ask your professor.

[\(https://in.nau.edu/academic-success-centers/sq3r-reading-method/\)](https://in.nau.edu/academic-success-centers/sq3r-reading-method/)

Quizzing: Tests and quizzes are hard and anxiety-producing. One way to help make them a bit better is to practice. Quizzing yourself and your friends not only helps you review the material, but it helps you practice the format of a test or quiz so that its not so scary when it happens in class.

Note Cards: This is a good way to learn a multitude of terms or concepts. Write the term on one side and the definition on the other. Quiz yourself by trying to remember the definition, and then flipping the card over to see if you're correct. If you get one right put it in pile A, if you get it wrong put it in pile B. Once you are done, review pile B until you get them all correct.

Open-Ended to Multiple Choice to True/False: This method requires a friend, and bit more preparation, but it can be really useful when preparing for a multiple choice or short answer test. Come up with some questions together, or use a study guide given to you by your professor. Go back and forth and pose the questions to each other. As the answerer, first try to come up with an open-ended answer to the question. If you can't get it, your friend comes up with 4 possibilities, like a multiple-choice question. If you still can't get it, your friend turns it into a true/false question or eliminates 2 of the possible answers. This method allows you to find the answer in guided ways, rather than simply looking up the answer if you aren't sure. It also helps the other person because they have to think about what potential answers to the question could be, and why they are wrong.

Essay Practice: If you have a test that you know will involve a longer essay, practice writing one. This goes for all tests, but the more closely you can create the conditions of the test you are anxious about, the better prepared you will be for the test itself.

Feynman Technique: Physicist Richard Feynman believed the best way to understand something is to teach it! This is especially useful when learning something that is new to you, or something that is very confusing. This method works well because it forces us to articulate what it is our brain, and it shows us what parts we do and don't understand about a topic.

Step 1: After you have done some initial studying, either from reading a textbook or listening to a lecture, pretend like you have to explain this to someone who knows absolutely nothing about the topic, maybe a higher schooler or even a child. Be as basic as possible. This helps you understand what you already know.

Step 2 (with someone else): Take what you have and teach it to a friend, they don't even have to be in your class. Encourage your friend to ask lots of question, even if you can't answer them. See if your friend understands the concept by the end of your lesson. They probably won't and that's okay.

Step 2 (alone): Or if you don't have a friend, write down the information as if you were explaining it to someone else; in other words, pretend to teach. Then after you write everything down, underline or highlight aspects of your writing that aren't as clear or don't make sense.

Step 3: Look at the questions that your friend asked and try to find the answers. What else would you need to know so that your friend could understand?

(<https://www.colorado.edu/artssciences-advising/resource-library/life-skills/the-feynman-technique-in-academic-coaching>, not exactly the same method but similar)