

Tips for the ultimate study experience in 2023

Part B

Part 5 – How to study more efficiently

1. Take regular breaks

Study sessions will be more productive if you allow yourself to take planned breaks. Consider a schedule of 50 minutes spent working followed by a 10-minute break.

Your downtime provides a good chance to stand up and stretch your legs. You can also use this as an opportunity to check your phone or respond to emails. When your 10 minutes are up, however, it's time to get back to work.

At the end of a long study session, try to allow yourself a longer break, half an hour, perhaps before you move on to other responsibilities.

2. Take notes in class

The things that your teacher talks about in class are most likely topics that he or she feels are quite important to your studies. So, it's a good idea to become a thorough note-taker.

The following tips can help you become an efficient, effective note-taker:

- Stick to the main points.
- Use shorthand when possible.
- If you don't have time to write all the details, jot down a keyword or a name. After class, you can use your textbook to elaborate on these items.
- For consistency, use the same organisational system each time you take notes.
- Consider writing your notes by hand, which can help you remember the information better. However, typing may help you be faster or more organised.

Recording important points is effective because it forces you to pay attention to what's being said during a lecture.

3. Exercise first

Would you believe that exercise has the potential to grow your brain? Scientists have shown this to be true!

In fact, exercise is most effective at generating new brain cells when it's immediately followed by learning new information.

There are short-term benefits to exercising before studying as well. Physical activity helps wake you up so you feel alert and ready when you sit down with your books.

4. Review and revise our notes at home

If your notes are incomplete, for example, you wrote down dates with no additional information, take time after class to fill in the missing details. Swap notes with a classmate so you can catch things that you missed during the lecture.

- Rewrite your notes if you need to clean them up
- Rewriting will help you retain the information
- Add helpful diagrams or pictures
- Read through them again within one day

If you find that there are concepts in your notes that you don't understand, ask your professor for help. You may be able to set up a meeting or communicate through email.

After rewriting your notes, put them to good use by reading through them again within the next 24 hours. You can use them as a reference when you create study sheets or flashcards.

5. Start with your toughest assignments

Let's face it: There are some subjects that you like more than others. If you want to do things the smart way, save your least challenging tasks for the end of your studies. Get the hardest things done first.

If you save the toughest tasks for last, you'll have them hanging over your head for the whole study session. That can cost you unnecessary mental energy.

Furthermore, if you end with your favorite assignments, it will give you a more positive feeling about your academic pursuits. You'll be more likely to approach your next study session with a good attitude.

6. Focus on key vocabulary

To really understand a subject, you have to know the words that relate to it. Vocabulary words are often written in textbooks in bold print. As you scan the text, write these words down in a list.

Look them up in a dictionary or in the glossary at the back of the book. To help you become familiar with the terms, make a study sheet with the definitions or make flashcards.

7. Join a study group

Studying doesn't always have to be an individual activity.

Benefits of a study group include:

- Explaining the material to one another
- Being able to ask questions about things you don't understand
- Quizzing each other or playing review games
- Learning the material more quickly than you might on your own
- Developing soft skills that will be useful in your career, such as teamwork and problem-solving
- Having fun as you study

Gather a few classmates to form a study group.

Part 6 – How to study for tests

1. Study for understanding

Cramming the night before a big test usually involves trying to memorise information long enough to be able to regurgitate it the next morning. Although that might help you get a decent grade on your test, it won't help you really learn the material.

Within a day or two, you'll have forgotten most of what you studied. You'll have missed the goal of your classes: mastery of the subject matter.

Instead, commit yourself to long-term learning by studying throughout the semester.

2. Begin studying at least one week in advance

Of course, you may need to put in extra time before a big test, but you shouldn't put this off until the night before.

Instead, in the week leading up to the exam, block off a daily time segment for test preparation. Regular studying will help you really learn the material.

3. Spend at least one hour per day studying

One week out from a big test, study for an hour per night. If you have two big tests coming up, increase your daily study time, and divide it between the two subjects.

The day before the exam, spend as much time as possible studying all day, even.

4. Re-write class notes

After each class, you should have fleshed out your notes and rewritten them in a neat, organised format. Now, it's time to take your re-done notes and write them once again.

This time, however, your goal is to condense them down to only the most important material. Ideally, you want your rewritten notes to fit on just one or two sheets of paper.

These sheets should be your main study resource during test preparation.

5. Create a study outline

Early in the week, make a long outline that includes many of the details from your notes. Rewrite it a few days later, but cut the material in half.

Shortly before the test, write it one more time; include only the most important information. Quiz yourself on the missing details.

6. Make your own flashcards

Another way to quiz yourself is to make flashcards that you can use for practice written tests.

First, read the term on the front side. Encourage yourself to write out the definition or details of that term. Compare your written answer with what's on the back of the card.

This can be extra helpful when prepping for an entrance exam like the GRE, though there are a growing number of schools that don't require GRE scores for admission.

7. Do sample problems and essays from your textbook

There are additional things you can do to practice test-taking. For example, crack open your book, and solve problems like the ones you expect to see on the test.

Write out the answers to essay questions as well. There may be suggested essay topics in your textbook.

Part 7 – Memory improvement techniques

1. Study right before bed

Although you shouldn't pull all-nighters, studying right before bedtime can be a great idea.

Sleep helps cement information in your brain. Studies show that you're more likely to recall information 24 hours later if you went to bed shortly after learning it.

Right before bed, read through your study sheet, quiz yourself on flashcards or recite lists of information.

2. Study small chunks at a time

If you want to remember information over the long haul, don't try to cram it all in during one sitting.

Instead, use an approach called spaced repetition:

- Break the information into parts
- Learn one new part at a time over the course of days or weeks
- Review your earlier acquisitions each time you study

The brain stores information that it thinks is important. So, when you regularly go over a topic at set intervals over time, it strengthens your memory of it.

3. Tell a story

Sometimes, you just need to make information silly in order to help it stick in your brain.

To remember a list of items or the particular order of events, make up a humorous story that links those things or words together. It doesn't necessarily need to make sense; it just needs to be memorable.

4. Change study locations often

Studying the same information in multiple places helps the details stick in your mind better.

Consider some of the following locations:

- Your desk at home
- A coffee shop
- The library
- Your backyard
- A park

It's best to switch between several different study spots instead of always hitting the books in the same place.

5. Swap topics regularly

Keeping your brain trained on the same information for long periods of time isn't beneficial. It's smarter to jump from one subject to another a few times during a long study session.

Along those same lines, you should study the same material in multiple ways. Research shows that using varied study methods for the same topic helps you perform better on tests.

6. Quiz yourself

Challenge yourself to see what you can remember. Quizzing yourself is like practicing for the test, and it's one of the most effective methods of memory retention.

If it's hard to remember the information at first, don't worry; the struggle makes it more likely that you'll remember it in the end.

7. Go old-school: use a pen and paper

The act of writing answers helps you remember the information. Here are some ways to use writing while studying:

- Recopy your notes
- Write the answers to flashcards
- Make a study sheet
- Practice writing essay answers

Writing by hand is best because it requires your attention and focus.

8. See it & hear it

Say information out loud, and you'll be more likely to remember it. You're engaging your eyes as you read the words, your mouth as you say them, and your ears as you hear yourself.

Scientists call the benefit of speaking information aloud production effect.

Part 8 – 10 Study hacks backed by science

1. Grab a coffee

Drinking coffee (or your preferred high-octane beverage) while you study may help keep you alert so you don't doze off mid-session. There's even evidence that caffeine can improve your memory skills.

However, avoid sugary beverages. These could cause your energy level to crash in a few hours.

2. Reward yourself

Studies show that giving yourself a reward for doing your work helps you enjoy the effort more.

Do it right away, don't wait until the test is over to celebrate. For example, after finishing a three-hour study session, treat yourself to an ice cream cone or a relaxing bath.

3. Study with others

Working with a study group holds you accountable so it's harder to procrastinate on your work.

When you study together, you can fill in one another's understanding, and you can quiz each other on the material.

Besides, studying with a group can be fun!

4. Meditate

It may be hard to imagine adding anything else to your packed schedule, but dedicating time to mindfulness practices can really pay off.

Studies show that people who meditate may perform better on tests, and they are generally more attentive.

Mindfulness apps can help you get started with this practice.

5. Exercise

To boost the blood flow to your brain, do half an hour of cardio exercise before sitting down to study.

Aerobic exercise gives your brain a major dose of oxygen and other important nutrients, which may help you think clearly, remember facts and do your best work.

6. Play some music

Listening to tunes can help you focus. Studies show that the best study music is anything that features a rhythmic beat.

It's smart to choose a style that you like. If you like classical, that's fine, but you could also go for electronica or modern piano solos.

7. Grab some walnuts

A diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids helps your brain do its best work.

Good sources include:

- Fish: cod liver oil, salmon and mackerel
- Flaxseed
- Walnuts
- Vegetables: spinach and Brussels sprouts

To calm your pre-test jitters, eat a mix of omega-3 and omega-6 foods.

8. Take regular breaks

Your brain needs some downtime. Don't try to push through for hours on end. Every hour, take a break for several minutes.

Breaks are good for your mental health. They also improve your attention span, your creativity and your productivity.

During a break, it's best to move around and exercise a bit.

9. Get some sleep

Although studying is important, it can't come at the expense of your rest. Sleep gives your brain a chance to process the information that you've learned that day.

If you don't get enough sleep, you'll have a hard time focusing and remembering information.

Even during busy test weeks, try to get seven to nine hours of sleep each night.

10. Eliminate distractions

It's hard to get much studying done when you're busy scrolling Instagram. Put away your phone and computer while studying, or at least block your social media apps.

Turn off the television while you work, too.

If you're studying in a noisy area, put on headphones that can help block the distracting sounds.

Key takeaways

You're a busy person, so you need to make the most of every study session.

By now, you should understand the basics of effective studies:

- Schedule study time
- Study regularly
- Minimise distractions
- Read for information
- Write the important stuff down
- Use creative memory tricks
- Quiz yourself
- Be good to your body and your brain

Put these study tips to good use, and you'll soon learn that you've learned how to study smarter.

Source: 2023

