

Academic Study Skills



E-BOOK

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I. Overview of Academic Study Skills

Quite often, students who lack strong study skills and who do not succeed academically share common characteristics. Compared to successful students, students with poor study skills are frequently disorganized, lack clear goals and plans for studying, do not draw upon specific study strategies, and do not monitor their level of understanding or comprehension. They usually don't know what they don't know. Such students also have difficulty selecting appropriate study strategies for the content and nature of the topic at hand.

In contrast, students who are able to monitor and direct their own study experience, also known as *self-regulation of learning*, experience increased academic success. Furthermore, students who possess the ability to regulate the study process often experience increased interest in learning, increased feelings of competency, and increased optimism about their ability to be successful.

Learning to reflect on what it takes to master academic material may not only help you to succeed in the classroom, but also to become a lifelong learner who applies goal oriented strategies to a variety of situations. This e-book will present you with a number of proven study skill strategies that can start you on the road to academic success.

II. Know Your Learning Style

A learning style is a way of learning. Your preferred learning style is the way in which you learn best. By identifying your learning style and then using effective learning strategies you will be able to improve your ability to recall information much more easily and smoothly. Three learning styles that are often identified in students are the **auditory learning style**, the **visual learning style**, and the **tactile/kinesthetic learning style**. Read about each of these learning styles to identify your preferred learning style.



Are you an auditory learner?

Auditory learners prefer information that is presented in an auditory language format. Do you seem to learn best in classes that emphasize teacher lectures and class discussions? Does listening to audiotapes help you learn better? Do you find yourself reading aloud or talking things out to gain better understanding? If YES, you are probably an auditory learner.



Study suggestions:

- *Underline, highlight, or circle printed material.*
- *Borrow others' notes, compare to own.*
- *Draw pictures in notes to illustrate concepts.*
- *Use a variety of colors—in pens, pencils, markers, highlighters, paper, etc. for different categories or concepts.*
- *Write it out!*
- *Use outlines, pictures, graphs, charts, and diagrams.*
- *Draw out ideas.*
- *Work with many colors.*
- *Make sure you can take any visual materials away with you—from class, tutoring and study group sessions, etc., so you can go back and look at them*
- *Take lecture notes*



Are you a visual learner?

Visual learners learn best when information is presented in a written language format or in another visual format such as pictures or diagrams. Do you do best in classes in which teachers do a lot of writing at the chalkboard, provide clear handouts, and make extensive use of an overhead projector? Do you try to remember information by creating pictures in your mind? Do you take detailed written notes from your textbooks and in class? If YES, you are probably a visual learner.



Study suggestions:

- *Study in groups and talk things out.*
- *Get a mini tape recorder.*
- *Record lectures, tutoring and study group sessions, etc. (makes a permanent verbal record of material).*
- *Read texts out loud (into recorder).*
- *Listen to lecture/text tapes while driving, walking, working out, etc.*
- *Dictate papers, to be typed later.*
- *Read questions aloud.*
- *Use word association.*
- *Work out problems aloud.*



Are you a tactile/kinesthetic learner?

Tactile/kinesthetic learners seem to learn best in hands-on learning settings in which they can physically manipulate something in order to learn about it. They learn best by doing. Do you learn best when you can move about and handle things? Do you do well in classes in which there is a lab component? Do you learn better when you have an actual object in your hands rather than a picture of the object or a verbal or written description of it? If YES, you are probably a tactile/kinesthetic learner.



Study suggestions:

- *Trace letters of words with finger (to memorize spelling, for example).*
- *Use finger as a guide while reading material.*
- *Take and type out or rewrite class notes.*
- *Get hands-on experience—in science or computer labs, for example—don't just watch someone else do it.*
- *Use models—of the human brain, DNA, etc.*
- *Write out everything.*
- *Draw charts or diagrams of relationships.*
- *Use musical rhythms as patterns for memorization.*
- *Make up dances for different ideas.*
- *Study or brainstorm while walking or working out.*
- *Turn ideas into material objects.*
- *Incorporate building or putting things together into studying.*
- *Organize ideas by rearranging sentences that have been cut out.*
- *Use movement whenever possible.*

◆ To conclude, remember that your learning style is your strength. Go with it whenever you can. When you can choose a class, try to choose one that draws heaviest on your preferred learning style. When you can choose a teacher, try to choose one who's teaching method best matches your learning style. When you choose a major and future career, keep your learning style firmly in mind. You may also want to try to broaden your learning styles—it never hurts to try to improve one's auditory comprehension if one is, for example, a primary visual learner. Taking a multi-sensory approach will both help overall comprehension and ability to retain information through many avenues for learning.

III. Learn and Apply Proven Memorization Strategies

Concentration and memory work together but one does not necessarily lead to the other. Concentration involves directing your mental powers or your efforts towards a particular activity, subject, or problem. Memory is the ability to remember information, experiences, and people. College students are confronted with two kinds or types of memory work. The first and more common is general remembering or remembering the idea without using the exact words of the book or professor. General memory is called for in all subjects, but the arts, social sciences, and literature probably make the greatest use of this particular kind of remembering.

The other type of memory work is the verbatim memorizing or remembering the identical words by which something is expressed. This type of memorizing may be called for in all subjects but especially in law, dramatics, science, engineering, mathematics, and foreign languages where the exact wording of formulas, rules, norms, law, lines in a play, or vocabulary must be remembered.

In fact, foreign languages are the ideal subject area for the use of memory techniques: the process of learning words is essentially a matter of association; that is, associating what is initially a meaningless collection of syllables with a word in a language that we understand. Traditionally, this association has been carried out by repetition - saying the word in your own language and the foreign language time and time and time and time again.

This whole tedious way of acquiring vocabulary can be eliminated by three proven techniques:

1. **Using mnemonic techniques to link foreign and own-language words: the *LinkWord (or Keyword) Technique***
2. ***The Town Language Mnemonic***
3. ***The One Hundred Most Common Words***

Let's now look at each one in more detail:

1. The LinkWord (or Keyword) Technique

The LinkWord technique uses an image in your mind to link a word in one language with a word in another language. The following are examples of use of the LinkWord technique:

EXAMPLE: English: French vocabulary

rug/carpet = *tapis* - image of an ornate oriental carpet with a tap as the central design woven in chrome thread

grumpy = *grognon* - a grumpy man groaning with irritation

to tease = *taquiner* - a wife teasing her husband as she takes in the washing

This technique was formalized by Dr. Michael Gruneborg. LinkWord language books have been produced in many language pairs to help students acquire the basic vocabulary needed to get by in a language (usually about 1000 words). It is claimed that using this technique this basic vocabulary can be acquired in just 10 hours.

2. The Town Language Mnemonic

This is a very effective mnemonic strategy designed by Dominic O'Brien that is a sophisticated variant of the LinkWord system described above.

The fundamental principle rests on the fact that the basic vocabulary of a language relates to everyday things: things that are typically found in a small town, city, or village. The basis of the technique is that the student should choose a town that he or she is very familiar with, and should use objects within that place as the cues to recall the images that link to foreign words.

EXAMPLE:

Nouns in the town

Nouns should be associated to the most relevant locations: the image coding the foreign word for *book* should be associated with a book on a shelf in the library. The word for *bread* should be associated with an image of a loaf in a baker's shop. Words for vegetables should be associated with parts of a display outside a greengrocer's shop. Perhaps there is a farm just outside the town that allows all the animal name associations to be made.

Adjectives in the park

Adjectives should be associated with a garden or park within the town: words such as green, smelly, bright, small, cold, etc. can be easily related to objects in a park. Perhaps there is a pond there, a small forest, and perhaps people with different characteristics are walking around.

Verbs in the sports center

Verbs can most easily be associated with a sports center or playing field. This allows us all the associations of lifting, running, walking, hitting, eating, swimming, driving, etc.

3. The One Hundred Most Common Words

In his book *Using your Memory*, Tony Buzan points out that just 100 words comprise 50% of all words used in conversation in a language. Learning this core 100 words gets you a long way towards learning to speak in that language, albeit at a basic level. According to Buzan, here then are the 100 most common words used in conversation; these typically comprise around 50% of all words used:

1. a, an	2. after	3. again	4. all	5. almost
6. also	7. always	8. and	9. because	10. before
11. big	12. but	13. (I) can	14. (I) come	15. either/or
16. (I) find	17. first	18. for	19. friend	20. from
21. (I) go	22. good	23. goodbye	24. happy	25. (I) have
26. he	27. hello	28. here	29. how	30. I
31. (I) am	32. if	33. in	34. (I) know	35. last
36. (I) like	37. little	38. (I) love	39. (I) make	40. many
41. one	42. more	43. most	44. much	45. my
46. new	47. no	48. not	49. now	50. of
51. often	52. on	53. one	54. only	55. or
56. other	57. our	58. out	59. over	60. people
61. place	62. please	63. same	64. (I) see	65. she
66. so	67. some	68. sometimes	69. still	70. such
71. (I) tell	72. thank you	73. that	74. the	75. their
76. them	77. then	78. there is	79. they	80. thing
81. (I) think	82. this	83. time	84. to	85. under
86. up	87. us	88. (I) use	89. very	90. we
91. what	92. when	93. where	94. which	95. who
96. why	97. with	98. yes	99. you	100. your

IV. Time Management

Efficient time management will not make you a perfectly efficient student. Very few people can stick to a detailed schedule day after day over a long period of time. In fact, many students who plan a study schedule and find themselves unable to continue it become impatient and often give up the scheduling idea completely.

The following method of organizing time has been helpful to many students and does not take much time. It is more flexible than many methods and helps you to establish long term, intermediate, and short term time goals.

Personal Time Survey

To begin managing your time you first need a clearer idea of how you now use your time. The Personal Time Survey below will help you to estimate how much time you currently spend in typical activities. To get a more accurate estimate, you might want to keep track of how you spend your time for a week. This will help you get a better idea of how much time you need to prepare for each subject. It will also help you identify your time wasters. But for now complete the Personal Time Survey to get an estimate.

The following survey shows the amount of time you spend on various activities. When taking the survey, estimate the amount of time spent on each item. Once you have this amount, multiply it by seven. This will give you the total time spent on the activity in one week. After each item's weekly time has been calculated, add all these times for the grand total. Subtract this from 168, the total possible hours per week. Here we go:

1. Number of hours of sleep each night _____ X 7 = _____
 2. Number of grooming hours per day _____ X 7 = _____
 3. Number of hours for meals/snacks per day - include preparation time _____ X 7 = _____
 - 4a. Total travel time weekdays _____ X 5 = _____
 - 4b. Total travel time weekends _____
 5. Number of hours per week for regularly scheduled functions (clubs, church, get-togethers, etc.) _____
 6. Number of hours per day for chores, errands, extra grooming, etc. _____ X 7 = _____
 7. Number of hours of work per week _____
 8. Number of hours in class per week _____
 9. Number of average hours per week socializing _____
Be honest! _____
- Now add up the totals: _____
Subtract the above number from 168 - _____ = _____

-The remaining hours are the hours you have allowed yourself to study.

1. Long Term Schedule

Make a schedule of your fixed commitments only. These include only obligations you are required to meet every week, e.g., job hours, classes, church, organization meetings, and so on.

2. Intermediate Schedule - One per week

Now make a short list of MAJOR EVENTS and AMOUNT OF WORK to be accomplished in each subject this week. This may include non-study activities. Example on following page...

- Quiz Monday
- Term paper Tuesday
- Soccer game Tuesday night
- Finish 40 pages in English 101 by Friday
- Finish 150 pages in History 106 by Friday

These events will change from week to week and it is important to make a NEW LIST FOR EACH WEEK. Sunday night may be the most convenient time to do this.

3. Short Term Schedule - One per day

On a small note card, each evening before retiring or early in the morning, draw up a detailed daily schedule. Write down specifically what is to be accomplished. Such a schedule might include:

Tuesday

- o 8:00 - 8:30- Review Geology
- o 9:30 - 10:30- Preview Math and prepare for test
- o 4:45- Pick up dry cleaning on the way home
- o 7:00 - 10:15- Read Ch. 5 & 6 (Psychology)
- o 10:30- E-mail friends

Carry this card with you and cross out each item as you accomplish it. Writing down things in this manner not only forces you to plan your time but actually causes you to make a promise to yourself to do what you have written down.

Study Hour Formula

To determine how many hours you need to study each week to get good marks, use the following rule of thumb: study two hours per hour in class for an easy class, three hours per hour in class for an average class, and four hours per hour in class for a difficult class. For example, "Basket Weaving 101" is a relatively easy 3 hour course. Usually, a person would not do more than 6 hours of work outside of class per week. Advanced Calculus is usually considered a difficult course, so it might be best to study the proposed 12 hours a week. If more hours are needed, take away some hours from easier courses, i.e., Basket Weaving. Figure out the time that you need to study by using the above formula for each of your classes.

Easy class credit hours	_____	x 2 = _____
Average class credit hours	_____	x 3 = _____
Difficult class credit hours	_____	x 4 = _____
	<u>Total</u> = _____	

Compare this number to your time left from the survey. Now is the time when many students might find themselves a bit stressed. Remember, it is not only the quantity of study time but also it's the quality. This formula is a general guideline. Try it for a week, and make adjustments as needed.

V. Read Faster and Better with SQ4R

The SQ4R Study Method

What is SQ4R?

The **SQ4R** study method is very useful for reading assignments, as it can help you improve your understanding and memory of important information. The SQ4R method challenges you to become an active reader. SQ4R is a versatile study strategy because it engages the reader during each phase of the reading process.

Briefly,

- Readers first preview/**SURVEY (S)** the text material to develop predictions and set the purpose for the reading by generating **QUESTIONS (Q)** about the topic.
- They then **READ (1R)** actively, searching for answers to those questions.
- After that, they monitor their comprehension as they summarize **wRite (2R)** & **RECITE (3R)**.
- Finally, they evaluate their comprehension through **REVIEW (4R)** activities.

S = Survey

This is the first step, one that can help save time. Begin by scanning and previewing the chapter before reading it. Consider supporting features such as the title, boldface headings, illustrations, graphs, and margin notes and summary. Ask yourself: What is the chapter about? What major topics are included?

Q = Question

Turn headings into questions and try to figure out what information will follow. Ask yourself Who?, What?, Where?, When?, Why?, and How? (the 5 W's and 1H of journalism). By asking these questions and then seeking the answers to the questions, you can concentrate and focus your efforts.

R = Read

Now read the material that follows the first heading. Look for answers to your questions, spending most of your time on material that seems important. This question & answer process can help you become an active, rather than passive reader.

R = Recite

After you complete a section, look away from the material. Now see if you can recite the important points. This recitation will make clear exactly what you know and what you don't know. Reread as necessary until you can recite all of the important points in a section.

R = Record

As you recite important points (above), you also may want to record or write down all the information you feel you must remember. Record this information on a separate sheet of paper or on study cards. This recorded information could be in the form of questions and your answers.

R = Review

Now go back over all the material. Reread the headings. Study until you can recite to yourself all the important ideas in the chapter. Refer to your written notes as you review.

Variation:

A variation of SQ4R is called PSQ5R.

Reading a paper or a chapter:

PSQ5R is a formula that stands for the basic steps in learning from reading in an efficient manner. The P stands for **Purpose**, the S for **Survey**, the Q for **Question**, the 5 Rs for **Read Selectively**, **Recite**, **Reduce-record**, **Reflect**, and **Review**. Let's look at each one in more detail:

1. Purpose

Before reading, ask yourself why you are reading this particular article or chapter, and what you want to get out of it. When you have accomplished your purpose, stop reading. For instance, if your purpose in seeking a number in the telephone book is specific and clear, and once you find the number, you stop "reading." Such "reading" is very rapid indeed, perhaps 100,000 words a minute! Perhaps it should be called by its proper name, "scanning", but when it suits your purpose, it is fast and efficient. This principle, of first establishing your purpose, whether to get the Focus or Theme, or main ideas, or main facts or figures, or evidence, arguments and examples, or relations, or methods, can prompt you to use a reading method that gets what you want in the minimum time.

2. Survey-Skim

Glance over the main features of the piece- the title, the headings, and the lead and summary paragraphs- to get an overview of the piece and to find out what ideas, problems, and questions are being discussed. In doing this you should find the *focus* of the piece; that is, the central theme or subject, what it is all about. In addition, you may learn the *perspective*; that is, the approach or manner in which the author treats the theme. This survey should be carried out in no more than a minute or two.

3. Question

Compose questions that you aim to answer:

1. What do I already know about this topic? In other words, activate prior knowledge.
2. Turn the first heading into a question, to which you will be seeking the answer when you read. For example: "*What were 'the effects of the Hundred Years' War'?*" - and you might add "on democracy, or on the economy"? Or "*What is 'the impact of unions on wages'?*"

4. Read Selectively

Read to find the answers to your question. By reading the first sentence of each paragraph you may well get the answers. Sometimes the text will "list" the answers by saying "*The first point...., Secondly,....*", and so on. In some cases you may have to read each paragraph carefully just to understand the next one, and to find the focus or main idea buried in it. In general, look for the ideas, information, evidence, etc., that will meet your purpose.

5. Recite

Without looking at the book, recite the answers to the question, using your own words as much as possible. If you cannot do it reasonably well, look over that section again.

6. Reduce-Record

Make a brief outline of the question and your answers. The answers should be in key words or phrases, not long sentences. For example, "*Effects of 100 Yrs' War? - consolidate Fr. King's power, Engl. off continent*". Or, "*Unions on Wages? - Uncertain, maybe 10-15%*".

7. Reflect

Recent work in cognitive psychology indicates that comprehension and retention are increased when you "elaborate" new information. This means to reflect on it, to turn it this way and that, to compare and make categories, to relate one part with another, to connect it with your other knowledge and personal experience, and in general to organize and reorganize it. This may be done in your mind's eye, and sometimes on paper. Sometimes you will at this point elaborate the outline of step 6, and perhaps reorganize it into a standard outline, a hierarchy, a table, a flow diagram, a map, or even a "doodle." Then you go through the same process, steps 3 to 7, with the next section, and so on.

8. Review

Survey your "reduced" notes of the paper or chapter to see them as a whole. This may suggest some kind of overall organization that pulls it all together. Then recite, using the questions or other cues as starters or stimuli for recall. This latter kind of recitation can be carried out in a few minutes, and should be done every week or two with important material.

Reading Books:

When reading books, there are several stages to go through, and one must make a judgment at the end of each stage. The question to answer is "*Have I gone far enough to achieve my purpose?*" If you have, STOP. If not, go on.

Steps:

- Before reading, note who the author is and the date of publication. Read the preface and table of contents. Look at the diagrams and pictures.
- Skim through the first and last chapters. Frequently these are introductory and summary chapters, and may give you all the information you need.
- Read the first and last chapters and skim the intervening chapters. This takes you into the book in greater depth, and allows you to decide which, if any, of the intervening chapters you should read.
- Read intervening chapters as demanded by your purpose.
- Go into the glossary, index, and appendices as needed.

Skimming and selective reading are speedy and efficient techniques for getting what *you* need out of books and articles. Many students think it is cheating not to read every word in a book. Not true. You are actually cheating yourself when you waste time reading material not essential to your purpose.

For more reading tips, check out ESL Pro's [Learning English Reading Workbook](#).

VI. Test Taking Strategies

General Test Taking Strategies

- ✓ Budget your time, and make sure you have sufficient time to study so that you are well prepared for the test.
- ✓ Take careful notes in class and ask questions about items you may be confused about.
- ✓ Ask the instructor to specify the areas that will be emphasized on the test.
- ✓ Make sure you go to the class right before the test; it's another prime time for the instructor to give out more hints or the format of the test.
- ✓ Go over any material from practice tests, homework assignments, sample problems, review material, the textbook, class notes, and so on.
- ✓ Eat before a test; having food in your stomach will give you energy and help you focus, but avoid heavy foods which can make you groggy.
- ✓ Don't try to pull an "all nighter"; get at least 3 hours of sleep before the test.
- ✓ Put the main ideas/information/formulas onto a sheet that can be quickly reviewed many times, as this makes it easier to retain the key concepts that will be on the test.
- ✓ Try to arrive at least 5 minutes before the test will start.
- ✓ Set your alarm and have a backup alarm set as well.
- ✓ Go to the bathroom before walking into the exam room-you don't want to waste any time worrying about your bodily needs during the test.

Multiple-Choice Test Taking Strategies

- ✓ Read the question before you look at the answer.
- ✓ Try to answer the question in your head before looking at the possible answers; this way the choices given on the test won't throw you off or trick you.
- ✓ Eliminate answers you know aren't right. Often one or two answer choices can be quickly dismissed.
- ✓ Read all the answer choices before choosing your answer.
- ✓ If there is no guessing penalty, always take an educated guess and select an answer.
- ✓ Don't keep on changing your answer; usually your first choice is the right one, unless you misread the question.
- ✓ In "All of the above" and "None of the above" answer choices, if you are certain one of the statements is true, don't choose "None of the above". On the other hand, if you are certain one of the statements is false, don't choose "All of the above".
- ✓ In a question with an "All of the above" choice, if you see that at least two correct statements, then "All of the above" is probably the answer.
- ✓ A positive choice is more likely to be true than a negative one.
- ✓ If there is an "All of the above" option and you know that at least two of the choices are correct select the "All of the above" choice.
- ✓ Usually the correct answer is the choice with the most information.

Reducing Test Anxiety

Test anxiety can result when you worry excessively about doing well on a test. This can become a major hindrance on test performance and cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses, among other things. The following tips can help you reduce test anxiety:

- ✓ Being well prepared for the test is the best way to reduce test-taking anxiety.
- ✓ Spread out your studying over a few days or weeks and continually review class material. Don't wait until the night before the test to try to learn everything.
- ✓ Try to maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the test and during it.
- ✓ Exercising for a few days before the test will help reduce stress.
- ✓ Get a good night's sleep before the test.
- ✓ Show up to class early so you won't have to worry about being late.
- ✓ Stay relaxed. If you begin to get nervous, take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.
- ✓ Read the directions slowly and carefully.
- ✓ If you don't understand the directions on the test, ask the teacher to explain it to you.
- ✓ Skim through the test so that you have a good idea of how to pace yourself.
- ✓ Write down important formulas, facts, definitions and/or keywords in the margin first so you won't worry about forgetting them.
- ✓ If possible, do the simple questions first to help build up your confidence for the harder questions.
- ✓ Don't worry about how fast other people finish their test; just concentrate on your own test.
- ✓ If you don't know a question, skip it for the time being (come back to it later if you have time), and remember that you don't have to always get every question right to do well on the test.
- ✓ Focus on the question at hand; don't let your mind wander on other things.

Best of luck in your studies!

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