

## Where There is a System There is an A

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Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of material you need to learn and are you intimidated by how to begin? If so, this is a common reaction experienced by many students as they make the transition from high school to college. Without the proper tools, studying can often be difficult and inefficient, leading to procrastination and poor results. Developing effective study skills can enable you to achieve the outcomes you desire.

The first step to effective studying is **CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION**. In order to participate in class, you must be present! Skipping classes can impair your performance in many ways. One obvious result is that you miss valuable information that may be covered on exams. In addition, you also miss classroom discussion and the opportunity to question the instructor about material that is confusing to you. Classroom participation also means being prepared. It is important to organize your materials (textbooks, writing utensils, notebooks etc.) and bring anything that you may need to class. Being present and prepared lays the foundation for successful note taking.

**TAKING USEFUL NOTES** is the second step to effective studying. Note taking requires attending and actively listening to the professor. Active listeners concentrate on the lecture material, which keeps them alert and decreases their chances of daydreaming. Active listening involves trying to anticipate what the instructor is going to say next, consistently asking yourself what is the main idea being presented, and writing down key points of the lecture.

Although note taking is important, good notes alone will not suffice. **COMPLETING ASSIGNED READINGS** is a critical third step to effective studying. A common complaint by students is that textbooks are dry, difficult to follow, and they remember little of what they've read. Francis Robinson, a professor at Ohio State University developed a solution to this problem called the SQ3R method. The acronym SQ3R stands for **SURVEY, QUESTION, READ, RECITE AND REVIEW**.

### **SURVEY**

Scan the reading assignment quickly, taking no more than five minutes to glance over a chapter. When scanning, read the introduction and conclusion and observe all topic headings. Surveying will orient you to what the chapter is all about.

### **QUESTION**

Convert topic headings into who, what, where, when, why and how questions and then read to find the answers to these questions. Asking yourself these questions will increase your interest in the material, which leads to better comprehension.

### **READ**

Underline and highlight key words or phrases as you read the assignment. Use an asterisk, exclamation point or question mark to indicate an important definition, a significant formula, or a potential test question. Summarize key ideas in your own words

in the page margins of the book. This process will increase your understanding of the material being read.

### **RECITE**

Stop at appropriate intervals and recite to yourself from memory the main ideas of the assignment. Restating the material in your own words is the best way to test yourself quickly and easily to find out how much you have learned.

### **REVIEW**

Look over the material you have studied periodically to refresh your memory. Read over what you have highlighted and underlined and re-examine the notes you have made in the margins.

A fourth step to effective studying is to utilize **MNEMONICS**. A mnemonic is any kind of technique that assists you in memorizing information, excluding simple repetition. The basic principles of mnemonics are as follows:

1. Use mental pictures: Visual pictures or images are usually easier to remember than words. Therefore, turning information into mental pictures can greatly assist you in remembering information.
2. Make things meaningful: When you encounter information that has little or no meaning to you, incorporate it into your own life to give it meaning.
3. Make information familiar: Associate new information with previously learned information that is already familiar to you.
4. Form bizarre, unusual or exaggerated mental association: The more outrageous that association, the greater the likelihood you will remember it later. This is due to the fact that bizarre images make stored information more distinctive and therefore easier to recall.

Note: Adapted from Coon (1991), *Essential of Psychology* (fifth ed.).

Although mnemonics are useful, they are only an aid to effective studying. Familiarizing yourself with the material is needed before mnemonics can be utilized. This familiarization process takes time.

Structuring your time in a college setting can often be challenging; however, time management is the fifth crucial step to effective studying. Cramming the night before a test often leads to poor performance. Research suggests that it is better to learn small amounts of material on a daily basis and review it frequently. A formal time schedule decreases procrastination and the anxiety associated with waiting until the last minute. To prepare a schedule, buy or make a planner that shows all the hours of the week. Set aside time that is designated solely for studying. Make sure to also schedule time for fun, as a reward to sticking to your study commitments. Rewarding yourself is important because it keeps you motivated and renews your energy for future study sessions.

Finally, where you choose to study is as important as finding time to study. Study in a place that is quiet, well lit and free of distractions. One theory, known as the state-dependent learning theory suggests that studying in an environment similar to the test-taking setting will facilitate your performance on the test. Memory is often improved and material is more easily retrieved when your body is in a state similar to when you originally studied the information. Therefore, studying at an uncluttered desk and in a sitting position is most likely to match a classroom setting.

Following these six steps should make studying easier and less intimidating. Remember, studying will probably never be fun.....But learning effective study skills leaves you more time to have real fun without a guilty conscience.