

A general rule: study for +- 45/50 minutes, take a 15/10 minute break (respectively). You can repeat this process two to three times. Having breaks in between study periods assists with keeping your concentration high. You cannot study for hours without having regular breaks.

Practical Study Tips:

- 1) Where to study: A room with good lighting that is free from disturbances, eg: noise.
- 2) Organise your study space: desk, books, and materials you need. You cannot study lying on your bed. Your mind has associated bed with sleep.
- 3) Switch off Cellphones when studying: tell your friends you will contact them at a certain time.
- 4) When you are having a break in between your studies: get some fresh air, eat or drink something. Don't sit in front of the television or radio - you will find it difficult to start studying again.

Dealing with distractions:

We all get distracted from studying whether it is by a friend or not being able to focus fully on the content. In order to deal with these everyday distractions it is important to think of your goals. For instance, a short term goal could be to pass a test and your long term goal to get your diploma/degree. It is important to set boundaries with your friends and to be assertive, putting your needs first. If you are battling to focus try study for 10 minutes, then increase studying by 5 minutes each time. Lastly, reward yourself after completion of your study period. You could meet up with a friend; read your favorite novel, or watch a movie.

Don't cram or 'cross-night':

Cramming is the opposite of effective studying. You may need to revise the day or night before an exam to refresh your memory, but if you try to cram information that you haven't yet studied properly, you will at best only remember some of the information short term. You need to rest and get enough sleep during the exam period so that your brain can function optimally.

Please remember if you need any guidance with developing study skills, or would like to talk about any of your study-related concerns please do not hesitate to make an appointment at the Student Counselling Centre.

This is an initiative of the

Student Counselling Centre
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effective studying

Effective Studying

Where does effective studying begin?

Effective studying does not begin just before an exam or test. It is a habit that you can start to develop and implement at the beginning of your academic year/course/semester. If you want to succeed in your studies, you have to develop good study habits.

Keys to effective studying:

1. Attendance in lectures: take the necessary materials and sit in a position in which you won't be distracted. Concentrate during lectures.
2. Take comprehensive notes: if you have to take your own notes in lectures, develop a note taking system that is efficient. If you are given notes, make sure you have read and understood them. It is also helpful to make your own notes.
3. Ask questions: during or after the lecture if you don't understand something. You can also research what you don't understand further in the library.
4. Read through your notes: as soon as possible after the lecture and before your next lecture for that subject. This will help you to assimilate (take in) the information.
5. Summarise: your notes and make sure you are familiar with the material. Clarify any words or concepts you don't understand. Try to do any extra reading before the next lecture. Spider diagrams (mind maps) and Acronyms are examples of two different ways in which you can summarise your work.

Importantly, use what suits you best. For example, if you learn better with visual aids spider diagrams may be more helpful; whereas if you are an auditory learner you might prefer to recite, say out loud, what you have learnt.

By taking this step by step approach to studying you will find that by the time tests or exams arrive you are already quite well prepared because you have already gone through a large part of the learning process.

This means that you will only have to revise. Importantly, this will put less pressure on you at test/exam time. If you take this approach to studying you will still be able to find time to relax in your test/exam preparation time, which will reduce your exam stress substantially and increase academic performance.

Note: learning is an accumulative process. The more regularly and frequently you study the more you will understand and remember. Memory is only one part of learning and gaining knowledge.

The SQ4R Study Method

Survey: Quickly look through the chapter for the main ideas.

Question: Establish a purpose. Formulate questions in your mind as to what could be important to take note of. Turn headings and sub-headings into questions and generate your own questions.

Read: Read your chapter carefully, identify main ideas and reduce reading speed for difficult passages.

Recite: close the chapter and try answering, orally, some of the questions you formulated.

Record: Make and write out your notes. This is the most important step in the studying process. Use methods that suit your learning style. If you learn better with visual aids you might need to make use of spider diagrams or mind maps. If you are more of an auditory learner you might prefer to recite what you have learnt out loud. Other methods include: flashcards, summary notes, posters and highlighting important words.

Review: Look at your notes frequently. You could review by writing or saying it out loud. It is important to go over your study notes more than three times over a number of consecutive days. Our brains are designed to forget information to keep us sane. So in order to memorise the information you need to trick your brain into thinking it is important.

What else can you do?

Manage your time well during the academic year: Keep a diary; record your time commitments, both personal and academic; block off all your academic dates for the year; draw up your course timetable; and fill in any deadline submission, test or exam dates.

Live a balanced life: Although your studies should be a priority, it is also important to make time to relax, rest, exercise and spend time with friends and family.

Develop a personal study plan/routine: A study plan is not only something that you draw up to prepare for exams, it is a tool to guide your studying activities throughout the course of the academic year. It is a framework against which you can develop self-discipline in your studies and time management skills, which will ultimately benefit you in life and the work place. A study plan is the foundation for academic success.

Note: A study plan is meant to provide structure to your studying, but there needs to be a degree of flexibility. If you are the kind of person that tends to stick rigidly to a timetable and not compromise, then you might need to be a bit more flexible. If you are a person who struggles with self-discipline, then you may need to stick to the timetable as closely as possible until a routine is established.

Recommendation: It is best to probably draw up your timetable on a weekly basis. However, you should do this in the context of term/semester submission and test/exam dates.

Step 1: Schedule in – Lecture times; Tests/assignment deadlines; Practical aspects of the course; and other commitments – time to see friends, sport, relaxation, etc. You can write commitments that could change in pencil.

Step 2: Block off time each day that you know you can dedicate to studying (study blocks)

Step 3: Break each subject down into smaller sections.

Step 4: Start to slot subject sections in to the study blocks. Some subject sections might take longer than others. Don't try to 'finish' a section in a study block if you are not finished going through the material, rather carry it over to another study block.