12 Steps for Effective Studying

Studying effectively is a process, not an event. The process leads to success.

1. Plan a definite time for studying every day. This will discourage procrastination and prevent a pile-up of work. Studying every day, even for a short period of time, keeps you from falling behind. Prioritize your list and begin completing the most difficult material first.

2. Know the purpose of and understand each assignment before leaving class. If you understand what to do and how to do it, your study time will be shortened. Keep a record of all assignments in a special section of your notebook or on a separate calendar.

3. Predicting the amount of time you need for each assignment causes you to work smarter as well as harder and more productively. By keeping track of the actual amount of time you spend on your assignments, you are more likely to concentrate and less likely to become bored.

4. Time yourself to see how long it takes you to read five pages of your textbook. This will help you determine the amount of time needed to complete a reading assignment. Because a textbook is loaded with information, you may have to read some sections more than once. Even instructors have to reread material. Allow time for reflecting and thinking about what you have read.

5. Reading assignments are usually completed and due prior to the instructor lecturing on the material. Take a little time before class to review the material so you are ready to participate in class discussions and are prepared for any quizzes.

6. Adopt a textbook reading strategy, (like SQ4R), or whatever works for you. Pay attention to charts, diagrams, and special "boxed text" areas. They are definite aids to understanding the material.

7. Every time you study, spend at least ten minutes reviewing the material from your previous study session. These "refresher shots" are part of the secret for long-term memory retention. This habit of frequent review also results in less time needed for studying prior to a major exam.

Know the percentages! We retain:

- 10% of what we read
- 20% of what you hear
- 30% of what we see
- 50% of what we see and hear
- 70% of what we talk about with others
- 80% of what we experience personally
- 95% of what we teach to others

8. Study during the day. You are probably less efficient at night.
9. Study for 30 to 40 minutes and then take a 5-minute break, or if your concentration and discipline will allow, study for 50 minutes and take a 10-minute break. Get up walk around, stretch, drink some water, or eat a light snack. Taking regular breaks refreshes your mind so you can concentrate better, finish faster, and retain more.

10. If you do study at night set a "stopping time" for yourself. This "time frame" will encourage hard work in anticipation of the clock going off. You may even set a goal for yourself to complete an assignment before the time limit. This increased impetus may help you to concentrate.

11. Do not cram the night before a test. Distribute your review in half-hour segments over a period of days. If you do not adopt a structured study schedule, you will not master required course material and you will set yourself up to fail.

12. Learning is accumulative. New ideas must be incorporated with previous material from lectures, readings, and any other assignments such as labs. You have to continuously make the connection in your mind from new material to previously learned material and/or experiences. Putting it all together is easier if you schedule time daily to read, to think, to write, to reflect, and to review.

Improved learning is the natural result of this 12 Step approach to studying and effectively using your time.

Not having enough time to study means you lack organization, so by managing your time, you have control over your life and a chance to do more of what you want to do.

Be proud of what you can achieve through daily accomplishments!

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