

Effective Study Techniques

Being an effective student means using your time well, making notes that are useful and organizing your ideas. This guide summarizes study strategies that are known to make a difference.

1. Be actively engaged in your learning
2. Spread out your study time
3. Test yourself
4. Mix-up your practice (practice interleaving)
5. Use notes and summaries
6. Take short breaks

First: Be actively engaged in your own learning

An effective student is one who is aware of their active role in their own learning journey. Actively participating in your learning means you're not just 'receiving' knowledge, but actively building your knowledge, skills and attitude to meet your academic and professional goals.

To ensure you're an active learner

- Do your part before coming to class
 - o pre-read and ensure you know how the upcoming lecture relates to the course objectives (Check the Learning from Lectures Guide)
- Pause and ask questions often, engage with the text you're reading, engage with your classmates during the session, and engage with your TAs and Course Leaders.
- Actively look for connections between different ideas and different parts of your courses.

Second: Spaced learning

Spreading out your study sessions over time or "spacing" your study sessions leads to improved learning compared to cramming your study time and covering all the material in one sitting.

Spaced learning seems to be particularly effective when combined with self-testing.

To implement spaced learning strategy

Plan ahead: divide your study topics and periods up and space them out rather than cramming them. Make your study schedule look like a high school timetable with different periods of individual study split up and distributed throughout each week.

Third: Self-testing

Self-testing as a study technique is very powerful for two reasons:

1. It helps you identify what you do and don't know or any gaps in your understanding
2. It helps you practice 'retrieval' of information through a variety of ways, which makes it easier to recall the information in the future.

Methods of Self-Testing:

1. Creating summaries without referring to the original text, then checking for any gaps in understanding

Making your own summaries of a lecture or a series of lectures under test conditions in the absence of the original text is an effective learning technique. This technique helps you put in effort to recall the material which helps you retrieve the information for longer and learn more deeply.

The format of your summary does not matter, as long as it makes sense to you and as long as you practice 'remembering' or 'retrieval'.

You can use:

- Concept maps
- Comparative tables
- Short notes

Make sure you leave a space between attending or studying a lecture and writing the summaries. This space can be as short as 1 hour or as long as a couple of days, but make sure you do this within 5 days from learning so that 'some forgetting' has happened, but not much forgetting.

2. Writing questions while studying to compile your own question-bank
 - o Make focused questions (simple questions about specific details that will require you to recite information e.g. definition questions)
 - o Make complex questions (questions that require in-depth understanding of a concept or more such as case-studies, analysis questions, reflection questions).

Tip: Check past exam papers and try to use the format and style to write different questions.

Recalling the material that you learned is great, but it is also important to fit this learning into the bigger picture. Questions and mock-exams help you practice using the learning to construct a relevant and complete answer.

Fourth: Mix-up your practice (Practice interleaving)

Interleaving is a learning technique that involves mixing together different topics or forms of practice, in order to facilitate learning. For example, if a student uses interleaving while preparing for an exam, they can mix up different types of questions, rather than study only one type of questions at a time.

In math, statistics, or physics you can mix up the types of problems you solve instead of focusing on just 1 type until you master it. In studying English language, instead of focusing on

vocabulary used in 1 situation, vary the situations (e.g. Speaking about university life, you can learn about classroom-context, socialization, speaking with peers, speaking with faculty and staff, language you will need to use in the food court etc.)

Practicing different concepts in the same time (during the same study session), makes you master the skill of discrimination (that is how to answer different problems using the relevant information, a skill you will find very useful during exams and assessments.

Fifth: Improve Focusing by Getting Rest

Some find it difficult to focus while studying for long hours and that's perfectly normal.

If you struggle with focusing try alternating between focusing and resting to get the best out of your study time.

A common method that is used to help you schedule the focusing and resting sessions is known as the Pomodoro or the Timer method. Below are the steps to use the Pomodoro method:

1. Set your timer to 25 minutes and start studying on a focused mode free of distraction
2. Once the 25 minutes are over, take a 5-minute break and rest or do whatever you like (stretch, check you phone, grab a snack)
3. Once the 5-minute rest is over, go back to focused studying for another 25 minutes.
4. Repeat the cycle of focusing and resting 5 times, or 5 pomodoros, then take a longer break of 30 minutes. Then repeat steps 1-4 as many times as you need.

When you follow this timer or pomodoro method, your brain will be more at ease knowing there's time for rest soon. Make sure you use the focusing time to really focus, when a distraction pops up, simply bring back your attention to what you're studying until it's break time. You can also use a 'distractions paper' to note down any distracting ideas that need attention, and during your break time deal with these pressing distractions.

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