

How to Study and Succeed

By using the following method you will be able to learn better, in less time, and get higher grades. These tips will work for you in all your courses.

1. Prepare your body:

Get enough sleep (7 hours every day) and exercise so that you will be alert in class. Sleep studies have shown that people who say they don't need that much sleep, and who often sleep less, do not perform as well as they would with more sleep, and also are more prone to serious diseases. It's like people who say they drive well when they are a little drunk—they're fooling themselves.

Every once in a while during class, take a deep breath and hold it briefly, this will calm you and energize you. This is especially important for early afternoon classes, as this is most people's natural drowsy time.

2. Prepare your mind:

I recommend daily meditation. Read my little article on meditation. Meditation increases a person's mental sharpness.

Example of a student who did very well in my course (spring 2010)

She read all required readings carefully, five times. She took notes in class and edited them at home. To study for tests she made study cards (flash cards) based on the readings and on her revised class notes. She was the first student in ten years to get a perfect grade (or even come close) on one of my tests. Her final grade was a high A.

3. Read it the day before I talk about it:

An important study strategy in this course is to read the required material just BEFORE it is discussed in class, and BRING THE REQUIRED MATERIAL TO CLASS so that you can follow the lecture more easily. By doing this you are preparing your mind for the lecture, and what I say in class will make more sense right from the first time you hear it.

Also, your note taking will be greatly reduced if you use this method, and you will be able to concentrate better on the lecture and discussion. You will need to take notes, but if you are taking a lot of notes you tend to miss what is being said, since it is hard to concentrate on two things at the same time, and the professor is usually talking faster than you can write.

4. Read actively:

And READ ACTIVELY. Don't just skim over the material, but read so that you know what every word and sentence means. Look up words and abbreviations you're not sure of in the DICTIONARY (or in a book's glossary, if it has one).

I will put questions on the tests asking you to define words *and abbreviations* in the readings, just to test whether or not you read actively. If I find you are not reading actively then I will know you are not learning the material.

5. Annotate what you read, and ask in the next class about what you didn't understand:

When you preread the class material, ANNOTATE it. Mark the points that you think you may need help with. Underline or highlight important points and write notes and questions in the margins. If the lecture/discussion does not answer your questions, then ASK them in the next class—the whole class will benefit from your asking questions.

6. Read by asking questions:

Ask questions about the readings as you read them. Questions like:

- How does this reading fit into this topic and the course?
- What is the professor trying to get at by requiring this reading?
- What is the main point of the author of this reading (and several subpoints)?
- How does this reading connect with previous topics and readings?
- What has that paragraph I just read got to do with the author's argument?
- What did I learn from this reading? Can I summarize this reading in a few words?

And, once again, if you can't come up with good, clear answers to such questions, bring it up in class.

7. Reread, never read just once:

Then, before the next class, REREAD your material from the previous class and read the material for the next class. Or, instead of rereading the previous material, go over your mental or written summary of it and connect it to the material that follows it.

And don't be afraid to read something three or even more times.

8. How much time should I put in?

On average I would suggest you expect to give two hours of study for every class hour. However, this will vary tremendously from person to person.

9. Study groups can help if they're done right:

It may also be helpful for you to form a STUDY GROUP—two or more students from your class—to study together, especially just before tests—actually, just before the last class before a test, so that you can ask questions in class that arose in the study group, before the test.

Warning about study groups: They are effective, but their effectiveness can be greatly reduced when deadbeats attend. A deadbeat in this context is one who hasn't studied the material well before attending the group.

Principle: Study groups are only for students who have already studied the material.

10. Never wait till the last minute:

This should be obvious from what I've said above: Keep up day by day; don't wait until just before a test to study for the test. Your brain assimilates things better if:

- It's prepared—in this case, by prereading the materials for the upcoming class. This way it's waiting to grab onto the important concepts that it otherwise might not recognize and let slip by.
- It has time to relax before the tests. The brain does a lot of processing when it doesn't seem to be doing anything special. Let it work for you by not rushing it.

11. Visualize success:

And a key element, which I will be teaching in the course (but it's so simple, you can get started right away): AFFIRM, IMAGINE, and/or VISUALIZE yourself being successful in the course. Go to a quiet spot, sit down and relax, and let whatever vision of success feels good to you go through your mind. Make your visualization *clear and vivid and enjoyable*, that way it will impress your subconscious and become a belief. When you believe you are a success—you are.

Principle of visualization: See it always happening, having already happened, or happening now, never put it in the future. You have to believe you are already a success; you have already done well on that test. Not "I will do well on the test," but "I always prepare well and always do well on tests."

Example: In your mind see yourself going to class happy, glad to be able to attend and learn what is being taught. See it so clearly you feel it. See yourself being calm while writing a test, and then see yourself reading the list of grades and yours is really high, etc. Just use your imagination, but make it feel good. *Feeling the feelings of success* is what you want to experience in your visualization period.

Principle of visualization: See it and/or affirm it so clearly you FEEL it happening to you right now.

Summary:

- Take care of your body and your mind.
- Read actively, and use a dictionary.
- Read and annotate class material before it is taken up in class.
- Ask questions in class about what was unclear to you in the readings.
- Reread until you can honestly say "I know everything in these textbook chapters and in my notes." Don't be surprised if you have to read the material—carefully—five times.
- Expect to spend two hours of studying for every class hour—and maybe more.
- Form a study group if you think it will help you, but enforce a no-deadbeats rule.
- Affirm and/or visualize success in this and in everything you do.

Take care of your body and mind

+ Good study habits (i.e., working efficiently)

+ Hard work

+ Affirming and visioning success until you feel it

= Success