

Practical Study Habits

Writing Centre Learning Guide

Study is an important part of university life and there is no universal method that fits every student or subject. Developing practical study habits is largely a matter of working out what works best for you. There are, however, useful methods and guidelines you can follow to help maximise your learning.

Introduction

Study time is any time you do work related to university. An important aspect of effective study time is the ability to organise yourself and your environment in a way that best suits your learning. Try to become actively engaged in your learning by consciously aiming to implement the 12 strategies below.

1. Schedule study into your timetable

Planning is the key to getting organised and you should start from the beginning of the semester. A schedule will make you aware of how much time you actually have to study each week. Give yourself the best opportunity to benefit from your study time.

You should recognise your own body rhythm and use it to your advantage. Some students operate better in the mornings and others prefer the evenings. There should be a time of day when you know you are most alert and productive. Create a 24-hour 7-day a week timetable that includes the following information.

First, include ongoing information:

- lecture and tutorial sessions
- part-time work commitments
- travelling times
- lunch times/break times
- socialising times
- other regular commitments.

Second, add your critical dates:

- due dates for assessment tasks
- dates for clinical/professional placements
- consultations/appointments
- swot vac periods
- examination dates.

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2. Find a suitable study space

Our minds and bodies react to our environment, so choose a specific environment that you will come to recognise as your 'study space'.

- Find a peaceful place at home or the university that is situated away from family, friends and pets, as well as the radio, television, telephone and other potential distractions.
- Choose an environment where you feel comfortable; neither too hot nor too cold and that is well-lit.
- Ensure that the materials you require are within reach to avoid the hassle of having to go and find them.
- Tell family and friends not to interrupt you during your study time. Let them know when you are having an uninterrupted study session.
- Turn-off your phone and let people leave you a message. You can respond to them once you have finished your study session.
- Avoid the temptation to check your email or favourite social networking site, particularly when working on or near a computer.

3. Reduce unnecessary distractions

Unexpected distractions can break your concentration. After an interruption, it may take several minutes for you to get back your focus. So try to arrange your study time and place to have a low chance for distraction.

4. Set specific study goals

Simply sitting down to study has little value. Study goals will help you to stay focused and monitor your progress. Be clear about what you want to accomplish, which may include:

- completing assigned readings
- working on papers or projects
- revising lecture or tutorial notes
- studying for exams.

Be realistic and learn to adjust your expectations of yourself. If you find that your readings are complicated or that writing a new assignment is taking more time than anticipated, you should modify your schedule accordingly. Be sensible with your workload to avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Create your own incentives for successfully finishing a task. These can include calling a friend, checking your email, watching a DVD, eating a snack, or going for a walk.

5. Get started on your study

When choosing what to study, begin with your least enjoyable or your hardest subject. Tackle this subject when you have the most mental energy. The order in which you rank the difficulty of your courses may change as the semester progresses, so be flexible. Moreover, carefully and regularly review your course guide or *MyUni* to ensure you are up-to-date and focused.

6. Avoid excessive study sessions

Begin your assessment tasks immediately after they have been assigned, as the material will be fresh in your mind. Organise and space your workload into manageable bits over shorter periods, rather than several longer blocks. If you do too much studying at one time, you will feel exhausted and be less productive.

Aim to have your assignments completed several days before they are due, to give yourself time to thoroughly polish your work.

7. Schedule study breaks

Take short breaks in between study sessions to restore your mental energy. Approximately every half hour, schedule a short 'study' break. This break should not be for relaxation with television and snacks, but rather, used to recall what you have just learned or revised.

In addition to reading, you should say the words out aloud as this method provides feedback you can hear. It also forces you to arrange your material in a way that is natural for memory improvement.

8. Review your notes

Reviewing lecture notes on the day of the lecture will help reinforce the material. It will give you the opportunity to complete your notes by filling in any gaps or deciphering any unclear notations while the subject is still fresh in your mind.

At all times go through the feedback on work handed back to you by your lecturers/tutors. They should have written a comment telling you what you could have improved. Reflect on their remarks and apply that advice to your next assessment task.

Reviewing your materials on a weekly basis will give you the opportunity to identify problems in your understanding and is an effective way to begin preparing for exams. Waiting until shortly before exams to look through your study notes may result in gaps in your learning, which could result in confusion.

9. Ending your study session

Do not stop a study session at a difficult or daunting spot in the subject matter, as you will be less eager to return to it. If you pause at a point of interest, then you will feel more positive about returning to your studies at another time.

10. Plan trial exams

Get into the exam mode by clearing your study space and sitting past exam papers under exam-like conditions. This will also give you the chance to see your lecturer/tutor to clarify any uncertainties before the real exam. Look on *MyUni* for past exams for your courses, or ask your lecturer or School for copies of past exam papers.

11. Seek academic help if needed

Take responsibility for yourself. If you are struggling with a problem or concept, you must seek help as soon as possible. Do not wait until just before assignments are due and/or exams have commenced.

Foremost, consult your program/course coordinator or lecturer/tutor for clarification. Consult your course guide and *MyUni* for additional information. Allow yourself time to work through problems and actually understand the concepts.

12. Seek personal help if needed

If stress becomes a factor, there are a number of strategies you can explore. The Counselling Service runs workshops on stress management and relaxation. You can also make a personal consultation time with a counsellor to work on your issues. Contact the Counselling Service on 8313 5663 or check their website www.adelaide.edu.au/counselling_centre for more details.

If you have a disability that may impact on your general academic performance and/or exam results, make sure you have spoken to a Disability Advisor to arrange special considerations that may aid in improving your grades. If you require alternative exam conditions, you must register with the Disability Service before the cut-off date. Contact the Disability Service on 8313 5962 or check their website www.adelaide.edu.au/disability for more details.

Remember...

READING IS NOT THE SAME AS STUDYING...

Studying involves careful and contemplative reading. Work through textbooks, tutorial and lecture notes and other pertinent examples - visualise, vocalise, theorise and conceptualise the information in your own words.

UNDERSTANDING IS NOT THE SAME AS KNOWING...

You may understand the material you have been presented with, but you are unlikely to retain the information without regularly reviewing it. Rewriting your notes in your own words will help you to consolidate the material in your mind. Additionally, you should discuss the subject with peers to help deepen your understanding.

MEMORISING IS NOT THE SAME AS LEARNING...

Most exams are written to test what you have 'learned' not what you have 'memorised'. Hence, you should endeavour to make the information your own, that is, write definitions of terms and summaries of topics in your own words.

Useful resources

Effective study habits printable guide

<http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/ehuss/Huss-Survival-Guide.pdf>

Websites

<http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/ctlc/allu/skills-essentials/>

<http://www.usq.edu.au/learningcentre/alsoonline/effstudy/studytech/individuals>

<http://www.study-skills.ca/blog/2009/07/12/how-to-create-a-productive-study-space/>

<http://www.howtostudy.org/>

http://www.ucc.vt.edu/academic_support_students/study_skills_information/study_skills_checklist/index.html

Study skills quizzes

<http://www.studygs.net/attmot4.htm>

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/test-your-study-skills-quiz/>