

WHEN TO STUDY

WHERE TO STUDY

HOW TO HANDLE THE REST OF THE WORLD

Advice: As you read the following tips, underline, circle or otherwise note the suggestions you think you can use. Pick two or three techniques to use now. When they become habits and you do them automatically, come back to this article and pick a few more.

WHEN TO STUDY

1. Find out how you use and misuse your time before making any changes.
2. Plan two hours of study time for every hour spent in class. There are exceptions, but this is a good general rule. Students making the transition from high school or community college are often unaware of the increased workload expected of them. The benefits of following the rule will be apparent at exam time.
3. Study difficult (or boring) subjects first. If your chemistry problems put you to sleep, get to them first, while you are fresh. Most of us tend to do what we like first, yet the courses we find most difficult require the most creative energy. Save the subjects you enjoy for later.
4. Avoid scheduling marathon study sessions. When possible, study in shorter sessions. Three three-hour sessions are far more productive for most students than one nine-hour session. When you do study in long sessions, take a planned break every hour. Work on several subjects and avoid studying similar subjects back to back.
5. Be aware of your best time of day. Many students learn best in daylight hours. Observe yourself and, if this is true of you, schedule study time for your most difficult subjects when the sun is up. The key point is to determine your best learning time. If early morning doesn't work for you, find out what time is better.
6. Use waiting time. Five minutes waiting time for the bus, 20 minutes waiting for the dentist, 10 minutes between classes -- waiting time adds up fast. Have short study tasks ready to do during these times. For example, carry 3X5 cards with equations, formulas, or definitions and pull them out anywhere. Also, use time between classes or breaks during work to review class notes or notes on reading. A solid review of a lecture can be completed in 15 minutes, and even five minutes can be valuable if you are prepared.
7. Keep a calendar for the semester. Keep track of all your assignments, tests, and papers.
8. Make a weekly to-do list of important tasks and assignments that you need to complete. Be sure to prioritize the list and to do the most important tasks first.

WHERE TO STUDY

1. Use a regular study area. Your body knows where you are. When you use the same place to study, day after day, your body becomes trained. When you arrive at that particular place, it will automatically sense that it's time to study. You will focus your concentration more quickly.
2. Don't get too comfortable. Put yourself into a situation where your mind is alert.
3. Use the library. Libraries are designed for learning. Entering a library is a signal to your body to quiet the mind and get to work. Most students can get more done in a shorter time at the library.
4. Set up study groups. A study group doesn't take the place of individual study, but it forces you to articulate concepts and makes a review more fun and productive. Also, it helps keep your review on schedule and helps you to avoid procrastination.

HOW TO HANDLE THE REST OF THE WORLD

1. Pay attention to your attention. Breaks in concentration are often caused by internal interruptions; your own thoughts jump in to tell you another story about the world. If this happens too often, perhaps you need to find a different study time or place.
2. Agree with living mates about study time. This includes roommates, wives, husbands, parents, and/or kids. Make the rules clear and be sure to follow them yourself. Make explicit agreements

- even written contracts. Hang a "do not disturb" sign on your door. One student always wears a colorful hat when he wants to study. When his roommates see the hat, they respect his wish to be left alone.
3. **Avoid noise distractions.** Don't study in front of the TV. Turn off the stereo. Many students insist that they study better with music, and that may be true. Some students have reported good results with carefully selected and controlled music. The overwhelming majority of research indicates that silence is the best form of music for study.
 4. **Notice how others misuse your time.** Be aware of repeat offenders. Ask yourself if there are certain friends or relatives who consistently interrupt your study time. If avoiding them is impractical, send a clear (but gentle) message. Sometimes others don't realize they are breaking your concentration.
 5. **Get off the phone.** You don't have to be a telephone victim. Try saying, "I can't talk right now, I'm studying" or leave your answering machine on. Or avoid the whole problem by studying at the library.
 6. **Learn to say no.** This is a valuable time saver for students, and a valuable life skill. Many people feel it is rude to refuse a request. Saying "no" can be done effectively and courteously. Others want you to succeed as a student. When you tell them that you can't comply with a request because you are busy educating yourself, 99% will understand.

THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN YOU GET STUCK

1. **Ask: What is one task I can accomplish toward my goal?** This is a good technique to use on big, imposing jobs. Pick out one small accomplishment, preferably one you can complete in about five minutes, then do it. The satisfaction of getting one thing done often spurs you on to get one more thing done. Meanwhile the job gets smaller.
2. **Ask: Am I beating myself up?** When you get frustrated with a reading assignment, or when you notice that your attention wanders repeatedly, or when you fall behind on problems due for tomorrow, take a minute to ask yourself, am I judging myself too harshly? Lighten up. Allow yourself to feel a little foolish, recognize the feeling, and get on with it. Don't add to the problem by berating yourself.
3. **Ask: Is this a piano?** Carpenters who build rough frames for buildings have a saying they use when they bend a nail or hack a chunk out of a two-by-four. They say, "Well, this ain't no piano." It means perfection is not necessary. Ask yourself if what you are doing needs to be perfect. You don't have to apply the same standards of grammar to review notes that you apply to a term paper. The basketball player who refuses to shoot until the perfect shot is available may never shoot. If you can complete a job 95 percent perfect in two hours, and 100 percent in four hours, ask yourself whether the additional five percent improvement is worth doubling the amount of time you spend. Sometimes it is a piano. A tiny mistake can ruin an entire lab experiment. Computers are notorious for turning little errors into monsters. Accept lower standards where appropriate, especially when time is short.
4. **Ask: How did I just waste time?** Notice when time passes and you haven't accomplished what you planned. Take a minute to review your actions and note the specific way you wasted time. We operate by habit and tend to waste time in the same ways over and over again. When you have noticed things you do that kill your time, you are more likely to catch yourself in the act next time. Observing one small quirk may save you hours.
5. **Ask: Would I pay myself for what I'm doing right now?** If you were employed as a student, would you be earning your wages? Ask yourself this question when you notice that you've taken your third popcorn break in 30 minutes. Most students are, in fact, employed as students. They are investing in their own productivity and sometimes don't realize what a mediocre job may cost them.
6. **Ask: Can I do just one more thing?** Ask yourself this question at the end of a long day. Almost always you may have enough energy to do just one more short task. If you get in the habit of working until you are done, then doing one more thing, those end-of-the-day tasks will soon add up. The overall increase in your productivity will surprise you.

Adapted from: *Becoming a Master Student*, by David Ellis. (College Survival, Inc. 1984)