

## Study Skills

These 20 tips are probably familiar, but how many do you actually put to practice when you study?

1. Designate **an area for study only**, and always study in the same place. It should be free from clutter and distractions, well-lit, ventilated, and at a comfortable temperature. Don't study in bed because your mind and body associate it with sleeping. Also, when you recall the information, you won't be in bed! Study and recall environments should be similar for maximum recall.

2. Before you begin, spend 5 minutes breathing deeply and **clear your head** of daily clutter. Otherwise, your mind will wander to unfinished business.

3. Put on your thinking cap! Good study is about creating positive habits. If you associate a particular item with studying (eg a hat, sweater, shoes, a special pencil) it will be another re-enforcer that tells you "now I am studying". **Rituals aid concentration**. Unfortunately, these same rituals can easily become time wasters – making a cup of coffee, etc.

4. Establish your **optimum concentration span** (the time you can study without your mind wandering) and break your study periods into multiples of this unit with 10-min breaks in between.

5. Set aside a unit of time for study and dedicate it 100% to study and nothing else. If you allow for distractions they will quickly multiply (eg checking email, making coffee). **Study in short intensive bursts**. Try to study at the same time every day.

6. BEGIN! It is the best way to finish. **Time spent before beginning is time spent worrying**.

7. Don't over commit yourself. One hour of maximum concentration is more effective than three hours of mind wandering.

8. Break your workload into **small tasks** to avoid being overwhelmed by the volume of material. Create a realistic schedule and focus on one day's study at a time. Break each day into small units.

9. **Set long-term goals**. If your goal is to pass a midterm or final, look beyond that goal to the super-objective – getting into med school or grad school, getting a great job. Poor goal setting leads to "that'll do" syndrome.

10. Do important or difficult stuff first when you are fresh.

11. **Test yourself**. It is the only way to check that you have understood and retained information. This could be by doing assigned problems and THEN grading them with the answer key. Approach material from many different angles (text, problems, flash cards, etc) and create many associations between individual items.

12. Something half-learned isn't learned at all.

13. If you are bored, switch tasks.
14. Do rote memory learning before you fall asleep for the night.
15. **Little but frequent studying results in better recall than studying the night before.**
16. Distinguish between what you need to memorize and concepts that need to be understood.
17. If your mind wanders, take a 5 minute break, stand up, and **leave the room**; otherwise you will create an association between the study area and poor concentration.
18. More completion of individual tasks your biggest reward while studying. Only allow yourself a physical reward at the end of the session, otherwise the rewards (chocolate bar, a jog, cup of coffee) become distractions rather than motivators.
19. Make a clear distinction between study and relaxation, otherwise they will merge into one another. You'll soon find yourself eating into relaxation time with extra studying (or vice versa) or ruining relaxation time by worrying about studying.
20. Schedule **8 hours of sleep** into your study timetable – write it down.

Modified from: Powell, M. *Mind Games*; Gusto Company: New York, 2004.