

# Study Skills Handbook

**Study skills help us get organized, be more productive...and ultimately be more efficient!**

This handbook includes tips and tricks to help you make the most of your time and effort. Throughout its pages, you'll find information on:

[General Study Tips and Tricks](#)

[How, Where, and When to Study](#)

[Getting \(and Staying\) Organized](#)

[Time Management Tips](#)

[Reading Textbooks Effectively](#)

[Effective Note-Taking](#)

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[Getting the Help You Need for Academic Success](#)

[Test-Taking Strategies](#)

[Discipline-Specific Study Tips](#)

You can jump to a specific section or read the entire handbook.

If you get stuck, we are here for you—expert tutors can help with questions from chemistry to essay review, learning chemical reactions to minding all of those standing prepositions. To start a whiteboard, find your subject after clicking “Work with a Tutor or Career Coach.”

## General Study Tips and Tricks

When you study is just as important as where you study.

*Record lectures (if allowed) and/or audio notes for yourself while you study.*

Work backwards when planning your time.

*Struggling to find time to study a specific subject? Reward yourself. If you have something to look forward to—like a 5-minute walk after 10 practice problems—you'll work harder and stay on schedule.*

*Feeling intimidated by a big assignment? Break it into a few small pieces so it will be easier to tackle and get started.*

Rewrite it...again! Writing helps you soak up the concepts as you see the information with your eyes then rewrite it with your hands.

Staying on track is easier than catching up! Expert advice and pointers from your peers help you solidify concepts, retain information, and get a jump on studying for the next big assignment.

There are as many approaches to studying as there are learners. While successful studying depends on what works best for you, these seven tips can help you get started and think about studying in a new way.

1. When you study is just as important as where you study. In addition to having an organized study space, it is important to make wise decisions about your best time of day for studying.

*Knowing your natural rhythms and preferences can help you maximize the time spent studying.*

*Night owls prefer working after the sun goes down. Early birds are up and working at first light. Beyond the time of day, successful habits like building in breaks and using notes effectively can maximize your comprehension of the material. Organizing your study space in a way that works best for you can also increase your chances for success.*

*If you're not sure what works best for you, try a few different study skills until you find something that fits your unique learning style. Not sure where or how to start? Check out [How, Where, and When to Study](#)*

2. Work backwards when planning your time.

*Write due dates and exams for your entire term in a planner or calendar. Not only can you see if you have more than one large assignment or exam in the same week, but you can also work backwards so you know where to start.*

*By planning your work, you'll be more likely to stick to a schedule and less likely to cram. Want more ideas? Check out [Time Management Tips](#).*

3. Record lectures (if allowed) and/or audio notes for yourself.

*By recording your notes or a lecture and listening to it later, you can digest the material, repeat parts as needed, and draw larger conclusions than had you just listened to it once. You can also turn down time into study time by replaying your notes.*

*This strategy works well to capture the main ideas from the text, then review them later. But remember, always ask your professor before you record lectures, or refer to your syllabus for further information.*

*Need help reading your textbook more effectively? Check out [Reading Textbooks Effectively](#).*

4. Struggling to find time to study a specific subject? Reward yourself. If you have something to look forward to—like a 5-minute walk after 10 practice problems—you'll work harder and stay on schedule.

*Giving yourself incremental goals and rewarding yourself, with a short walk for example, makes concentrating easier, particularly in online courses. Want more tips for staying motivated and learning while taking online classes? Check out [Taking Classes Online](#).*

5. Feeling intimidated by a big assignment? Break it into a few small pieces so it will be easier to tackle and get started.

*Often time, large assignments mean "group work." Breaking up the assignment into specific areas means each person can share responsibility. Need more pointers for working with a group? Check out [Working on Group Projects](#).*

6. Staying on track is easier than catching up! Expert advice and pointers from your peers help you solidify concepts, retain information, and get a jump on studying for the next big assignment.

*While tutoring is certainly helpful if you are struggling with a course or concept, it can also help you prepare for big exams, see your way through projects, and work on class content that really interests you. You need more than just academic help when you're falling behind. Curious about where to turn for help, pointers, or study tips? Check out [Getting the Help You Need for Academic Success](#).*

7. Rewrite it...again! Writing helps you soak up the concepts as you see the information with your eyes then rewrite it with your hands.

*Taking careful notes, particularly in science and math, then rewriting them can help you draw conclusions and understand steps that weren't evident before.*

*Wanting some tips for your specific course or discipline? Check out [Discipline-Specific Study Tips](#) or start a whiteboard to work with an expert in your subject area.*

# How, Where, and When to Study

## How Do I Study: Knowing Your Learning Style

How you learn is as important as what you learn. While some people are happiest alone in a quiet room reading, others function best when surrounded by peers actively exchanging ideas. Similarly, while some prefer doodling on a pad to sort out their own ideas about a project, others prefer to follow step-by-step instructions to reach a goal. There's an entire spectrum of learning styles—as many individual learning styles as there are learners. This section looks at the types of learning styles and how you can work with your learning style to maximize your time spent studying.

### Learning Styles

Once you determine your learning style in each category, your preferred times, places, and methods of learning will make much more sense to you. Instead of feeling alone or misunderstood, you'll feel validated and reassured. With some experimentation, you'll be able to adapt your approach and life to get the most out of your education.

#### Social vs. Independent

Just as the name sounds, social learners function well in a group setting, bouncing ideas off classmates to understand and learn and to complete their work. Independent learners, on the other hand, learn best when they can study on their own.

#### Spatial vs. Verbal

Spatial learners can mentally imagine things and see how they function and move in space. On the other hand, verbal learners feel more comfortable following written instructions or diagrams to complete projects.

#### Applied vs. Conceptual

Whenever possible, applied learners like to approach a project from a practical, hands-on perspective. If they can compare a concept to something they already know or have experienced and can hold in their hands, they can quickly learn it. In contrast, conceptual learners comfortably live in the mental realm, working on projects they can flesh out with language and the exchange of ideas.

When you're reading about an unfamiliar topic or a new subject, try comparing it to a topic or subject you already understand. For instance, if you're reading a new educational theory, compare it to your own educational upbringing. Or, if the theories behind an article or idea seem foreign, think of how they compare to and contrast the values and beliefs in your own worldview. Identifying similarities and differences based on what you already know will increase your understanding of unfamiliar topics and new subjects.

#### Auditory vs. Visual

People with auditory learning styles learn best by listening to lectures and hearing idea exchange. Visual learners prefer to see ideas in writing, pictures, or some other visual representation.

#### Creative vs. Pragmatic

As you might imagine, creative learners prefer to experiment with ideas and projects. Less comfortable following risks and intuition, pragmatic learners are logical thinkers who prefer to follow step-by-step instructions and clear guidelines when learning a new concept or completing a project.

## Choosing a Learning Strategy

Knowing your learning style can help you choose a strategy that maximizes your strengths. For example, if you prefer to hear

lectures and the exchange of ideas (auditory) and are less comfortable with experimenting to find the answer (pragmatic), you may want to watch videos and tutorials before getting started on your work. On the other hand, if you are visual and prefer to take a creative approach to problem solving, it might be best to jump right in and doodle your way through a tough question before trying to consult an outside source.

**Studying Nursing?** Use visual aids to learn new material. Your textbook will likely have many charts, photographs, and other visuals to help you learn the material. Pay close attention to these when you are reading each chapter. When you are studying, make your own tables, flowcharts, concept maps, or other graphics to help yourself learn and remember important processes and concepts. Another effective visual technique is to label blank diagrams of anatomical structures, such as muscles, bones, and nerves.

No matter what your learning style, it's helpful to keep in mind your intent, your instructor, and the course set-up. Working within these constraints, you can maximize your time by choosing strategies that work well for you.

### **Learning with Intention**

Deciding the reason for learning something can determine how you go about it. For example, if you're studying for a test or quiz, memorization and absorbing information is your key task. However, if you're conducting an experiment, your main goal is to take careful note of each step and what happens at every point in the process. Discovering your purpose for learning something will determine how you take in the information and how long you will retain it.

### **Adapting to an Instructor**

Each of the categories of learning styles can apply to instructors' teaching styles as well. For instance, some instructors might encourage group work. Other instructors might prefer to lecture only, leaving little time for questions and discussion.

You can still find ways to learn the ways you know best. For example, if your instructor is one that requires lots of group work and interaction, and you're an independent learner, you can adapt by studying the curriculum and notes on your own outside of class. Similarly, if you're a highly social person, and your instructor doesn't make room for discussion or group work, you could arrange a study group with classmates to help hash out ideas.

### **Adapting to a Discipline**

Some disciplines lend themselves to facts and figures, where others favor discussion and the exchange of ideas. When faced with a course or discipline that doesn't match your learning style, you can adapt by pushing the boundaries of your learning style and finding work-arounds so you can absorb the information in the best way possible.

If you're an independent learner in a class based heavily on discussion, you can adapt to learn the way you know best—take careful notes based on these class discussions, assignments, and texts. Review these notes independently to learn the material but also highlight points you may want to bring up in a class discussion about the material.

On the other hand, if you're a social learner who thrives on classroom discussion and find yourself in a class where the instructor lectures and provides diagrams and charts, try translating that static information into writing. You can also arrange a study group with the goal of discussing ideas from class and exchanging ideas based on the material.

Knowing your preferred learning style is just one piece of the puzzle when maximizing your time spent studying.

## Where to Study: Setting Up Your Workspace

Where you study can have a profound impact on retention of the material. There are many options available—from the quiet of a library to the low hum of a coffee shop. Experiment with your study space, and then develop consistency. Being consistent with a routine will help you get to work faster and keep everything at your fingertips. But, if studying starts to feel dull, don't forget to try mixing it up again.

Designating your perfect study spot is essential to success. Don't be afraid to play around with different environments, noise levels, and amount of activity. Just don't overdo it. Too much noise can be just as detrimental as not enough.

Here are a few tips to find your best area:

- Try your school's library, union, or designated quiet space.
- If you study at home, choose a quiet, organized room away from family distractions, or even try working outside for a bit.
- Mix it up until you find an area that fits—some people thrive in the low constant conversation in a public place. Others need to work in the library. Do you like being around people but can't stand the noise? Try putting earbuds in but not turning on your music.

As you look for the ideal spot, there are a few things to keep in mind. Studying in the same place most of the time can build consistency. You'll have your materials at hand, and your brain will associate the location with studying. If you feel a need to mix it up, keep everything you need in a pencil pouch or binder. You can grab the binder and be off to meet up with your group or seek out a better location.

## When to Study: Work with Yourself

Knowing your learning style and preferred environment can go a long way toward making the most of your time. The last piece of the puzzle is knowing when to study.

### Determining Your Optimal Study Time

You probably know whether you're a morning person or a night owl; you can use this self-awareness to arrange your days.

Below are several tips and tricks for maximizing your effort.

1. *Give your brain a rest.* No one can concentrate for long periods without faltering. Getting up for a drink or a snack, a five-minute walk, or even standing up and doing a few toe touches will reinvigorate you.
2. *Switch things up.* Rather than studying one subject for extended periods, spending an hour on one subject and then switching to another can provide the needed break and give you a fresh perspective.
3. *Make time for work and family.* It is challenging to juggle all of your responsibilities. Here are some tips for making it all work.
  - Save your most difficult tasks, such as studying for exams and writing papers, for the time when you are most able to concentrate. You can save other tasks that aren't as difficult, such as searching the library or Internet for books and articles, for times when

Minimize digital distractions during study times. Most people have multiple devices that keep them plugged into the Internet and connected with friends. However, these devices can be distractions when you need to study. To avoid responding to notifications or texts, put away your device, out of sight, so you can focus on what you're reading. If you're reading on a device, turn off the wifi to avoid any distractions that being fully connected could cause.



your powers of concentration are waning. During times when your brain is tired and restless, run errands, do laundry, or complete other tasks that require less mental acuity.

- Schedule time for your family and friends and stick with it—whether it's Saturday morning or one evening a week. If you have children, consider planning an exclusive activity just for the two of you.
- Once school is in full swing, you might not have as much time to do all the household chores you once did. Know what you can let slide and decide what you need to stay on top of.
- Thirty minutes of focused time can make a big difference. Try getting up a bit earlier, staying up later, or setting aside time after classes to work on campus for a few minutes.

### **Assessing Over-Commitment**

In general, you should spend two to four hours working with the material outside of class for every hour you spend in class, which includes both preparations before class and studying and reviewing after. This can seem like a lot to ask. Depending on your schedule, you might have to shift some of your other activities or eliminate some of them altogether until your schedule opens up a bit more.

To help decide what stays and what goes, make a list of everything you do on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Order the list by things that need to get done, such as grocery shopping, and things that are optional. By comparing the list to your goals, you can decide which activities to keep and which to put on hold.

### **Becoming an Efficiency Expert**

Here are some tips for using your time wisely:

- Prioritize the most important tasks.
- Make lists that you review and reorder daily.
- Multitask, such as reading a chapter while your dinner cooks.
- Make use of those in-between times, such as waiting for a bus, to study.
- Schedule classes at off times when campus won't be as busy.
- Schedule classes consecutively to cut down on commuting time.
- Prepare for busy mornings the night before.

### **Tackling Procrastination**

We put off tasks for a variety of reasons, but the main cure for procrastination is to face it head on. Here are some tips for getting back to work:

- List the tasks you're putting off.
- Determine the real cause—am I bored or is the task intimidating?
- Split up a monumental task into smaller ones.
- Get the help you need from an instructor, tutor, or classmate.
- Schedule a reward for yourself when a task is complete.
- List your distractions and how you might avoid them.
- Turn off social media.

Juggling multiple demands can leave you feeling worn. As you approach school, work, family, and life's demands, be sure to schedule time for yourself to recharge.

## Think About It

How, where and when should you study? Your learning style, preferences, and other commitments influence your unique approach to studying. As you think about organizing your work, consider the following questions. It may be helpful to jot down notes or keep a list of key points you learned and want to implement.

- How can you take advantage of your learning style?
- How can you adapt your learning style to different courses, instructors, and assignments?
- What are the characteristics of a good study area?
- What does it mean to use your time wisely?
- How can you confront procrastination?



## Getting (and Staying) Organized

After you create a routine that caters to your unique learning style and needs, it's important to stay with it. Consistency will help get you from the first class to the final assignment. A key part of consistency is staying organized—from organizing your workspace to your time and assignments.

While you read, annotate if you can.

Annotation involves taking notes in the margins or white spaces of the page or on sticky notes. Write down any questions you have or insights you have about the passage or piece you are reading. Writing as you read will help you remember more of what you read. It can also provide an easy way to locate important ideas for essays or tests that you will complete later.

Many tools exist to help you stay organized. Just like each person has an individual learning style, each person's style of organization is different. It's important to try several different systems until you learn what works best for you.

### Organizing Your Workspace

It's difficult to work with a messy space. Experts recommend several tips and tricks to keep your area tidy and functional—so you always have what you need when you need it.

1. Toss what you don't need. Purging extras and unused items helps streamline your space so everything has a place to go.
2. Set aside time each day to clean up your work area—throw out scratch paper you don't need,

put work back with the rest of your course material, and pick up the pens and pencils. By consistently putting work away, you'll always have it where you need it. Bonus—you can wipe off the area before the dust bunnies begin making demands.

3. Make piles of work—either by subject or purpose (for example, project notes, scrap paper, etc). At the end of the week, look back through the piles and toss what you no longer need. Are you scared you'll need something? Take a picture of it before you toss it.
4. Designate space for each thing you need—pencils, paper clips, rulers, and that graphing calculator should all have a place.
5. Create folders for courses or projects. Everything you think you might need can go into the folder until the term is over. After the course is complete, you can decide if you still need it or if it can be safely recycled.
6. Try an actual inbox. By visualizing the work you need to complete, you can stay on task and finish quicker.

An organized workspace should work for you—make sure you have what you need, and try not to keep things you don't.

### Organizing Your Time

With limited time, it's important to manage it wisely. At the start of each semester, sit down with your syllabus and mark key dates—when is homework due? Are there any projects or recurring deadlines such as discussion board posts? When are the exams or papers due?

Marking key dates in a calendar or planner can help you quickly isolate weeks with multiple deadlines or demands on your time. By noticing these weeks and working backwards, you can start preparing early enough so that you aren't rushed or frazzled.

#### Keeping Track of Deadlines

Keeping important dates in a single calendar can help you plan for weeks with multiple assignments or other commitments. At the start of the semester, jot down all the due dates from your syllabus. By

listing everything, you can work backwards to plan your studying and other tasks.

Always remember, studies have shown that the sooner you start a task, the sooner the task will be completed. Keeping track of deadlines and starting early can help you manage your to-do list.

Want more tricks for organizing your time and keeping track of deadlines? Check out [Time Management Tips](#).

## Organizing Your Assignments

It's hard to keep track of multiple things. By organizing your assignments and other to do's, you can stay on top of what needs your attention and decide what can wait for another day.

### Organizing on the Computer

If you are using a computer to study, make sure you create a computer file for each course. In that file, include all of the files related to the course with names such as *Notes* and *Reading List* to help you quickly access what you need.

Using a Cloud drive can give you access to your courses anywhere and can come with perks like a calendar and to-do lists. Most schools have access to a Cloud drive. It's worth spending some time to see what tools are available or investigating other tools online. If you're not sure, check with your tech support to see what tools you may have.

### Organizing with Pen and Paper

If you're using pen and paper for your classes, make sure you keep a separate notebook or folder for each class. For classes that are mostly lectures, spirals or other bound notebooks work great. However if your instructor distributes supplementary materials, consider using a 3-ring binder with loose-leaf paper for taking notes and plenty of room to add assignments and other handouts to the binder with a 3-hole punch. If you use this method, keep all of your notes and materials in chronological or reverse chronological order. Clearly label notebooks and folders with the name of the course.

## Think About It

- What are some prominent barriers to organization? How can you overcome them?
- What is one organizational tool you want to start using today?
- What is the importance of staying organized?

## Time Management Tips

One of the biggest challenges in college is managing a variety of subjects and deadlines. Attending college full time takes the same amount of time as a full-time job. For each hour you spend in class, you will likely need two to four hours of preparation time outside of class. Each course will have its own assignments and objectives, and your deadlines may overlap in ways that feel inconvenient or overwhelming. Keeping up with your coursework and meeting your deadlines involves careful planning and time management. The following techniques can help you to stay focused and productive even during your most challenging semesters.

### Record Major Projects and Deadlines

Most courses will have a few major papers, tests, or projects. At the beginning of each semester, record these due dates in a planner or calendar (paper or electronic).

For example, if you keep track of major events such as birthdays or important social events on a wall calendar, consider writing down your major assignments there as well. This will give you a sense of how to respond to invitations or other requests for your time as the semester progresses. It will also give you a sense of which weeks or days will be the busiest. For example, the week when you have two midterm exams and a 10-page paper due will not be the best week to host out-of-town company or purchase tickets to a sporting event. On the other hand, a week of fewer deadlines would be a good time to schedule some much-needed fun or relaxation.

### Use a Planner or Electronic Calendar

You will also want to create a central place to store deadlines for both minor and major assignments. These would not only include tests and essays but also reading assignments and shorter homework tasks.

Most smartphones have an electronic calendar where you can enter multiple reminders and events for each day. If you prefer a pen-and-paper format, you can also purchase an academic planner. If you go this route, look for a planner that has one-half to one full page for each day of the week so that you have plenty of room to add or revise deadlines. Whichever format you choose, fill in each assignment and the class name on the day it's due. This way, you can easily see how much reading, writing, or other work is due on each particular day. When you find out about new assignments throughout the semester, add them to your planner or scheduler. Then, establish a set time, such as Sunday afternoon, to preview your agenda for each upcoming week.

### Make a Daily To-Do List

Just as you will want to stay mindful of the big picture for each semester and week, you will also want to create a plan of action for each day in your semester.

One way to do this is by making a to-do list each morning. This involves checking your planner or calendar for upcoming due dates and making a list of what you need to do each day. Writing the tasks on paper will help you remember them, and it will give you the ability to cross off each item as you complete it. Crossing off a to-do list provides positive reinforcement that will motivate you to keep going. Here is an example of what that might look like:

While you study, write down new vocabulary words and definitions in a personal glossary or on flashcards. As the semester progresses, pay attention to recurring prefixes, roots, and suffixes, and learn what these mean so that decoding unfamiliar words becomes easier. Store the cards on a keyring so you can use them during breaks between classes or while commuting.

## To-Do List: Tuesday, September 9

- 9:00 a.m. English class
- 10:00 a.m. Spanish class
- Read Biology Chapter 3 for class on Wed
- Choose topic and outline for English Essay 1
- 1:00 p.m. Spanish study group/prepare for past-tense verbs quiz
- Complete Algebra homework due Wed: p. 107 odd #s only

## Create Blocks of Uninterrupted Study Time Each Day

When making your weekly or daily study schedule, choose times for studying when you are less likely to be interrupted and when you are the most mentally alert. For example, if you have a two-hour break between classes on campus, this might make a good time to catch up on reading or do research at the school library.

When choosing these times, stay mindful of the times of day when you are most productive or have the least distraction. During your study times, minimize distractions by keeping social media sites closed, turning off text message alerts, and notifying family members or roommates of your schedule. Also, consider taking a 10-minute break approximately each hour or between major tasks. For example, if you plan to complete work for three courses during a three-hour study window, you might take your breaks after completing the work for each course or halfway through a chapter or task. Some productive ways to spend your breaks include getting a healthy snack, stretching, playing with a pet, or taking a quick walk. Avoid activities that might cause you to lose track of time like social media or video games until after the study session is over.

## Divide and Conquer Larger Assignments

Most courses will include a few major tests, essays, or projects. To avoid cramming or procrastinating, break up each major assignment into smaller parts, and create personal deadlines for each task. For example, if you have a midterm that will cover five chapters of your textbook, you might spend five days preparing and assign yourself one chapter to review each day. If you have a major essay to work on over the course of two weeks, you might assign yourself a separate step of the writing process for each day until the essay is due. The following example demonstrates a steady, systematic approach.

- Monday: Meet with writing tutor to create outline
- Tuesday/Wed: Online research/gather evidence
- Thursday: Body Paragraphs 1 & 2
- Friday: Body Paragraphs 3 & 4
- Sunday: Introduction and Conclusion
- Monday: Bring to class for peer review, revise after class
- Tuesday: Submit to Smarthinking for Grammar & Documentation review
- Thursday: Final revisions
- Friday: Paper due

Budgeting your time in this way makes it possible to seek help from an instructor or tutor when individual steps become difficult.

Write your papers systematically. Most literature courses include analysis essays. In this type of essay, students explain how the writer developed a theme or what the text means. Writing an analysis essay typically involves many steps:

- Planning your paragraph topics/points of analysis
- Re-reading the text to collect examples and details for each body paragraph
- If required by your assignment, reading what other literary critics have said
- Writing a draft and getting feedback
- Revising and expanding on your ideas.
- Make a timeline of what step you will accomplish each day until the paper is due.

## Think About It

- During what times of the day are you most alert?
- How many days or weeks do you have to prepare for each major assignment?
- What distractions will be most difficult to avoid when you are studying?
- What smaller rewards would motivate you to stay productive before each break?

Through self-awareness and planning, you can achieve the productivity and time management necessary for college success.

# Reading Textbooks Effectively

Have you ever gotten to the end of an article or chapter only to realize you have no idea what you just read? Some of the work you complete outside of class involves reading textbooks and other resources. The following techniques will help you read textbooks and other class reading assignments efficiently and accurately.

## Buy the Book

Not a trivial step! To do well in class, it's important to have the resources. Some required texts are hard copies, but ebooks have become increasingly popular.

If you purchase an ebook, make sure that you have the technology to read it. Some ebooks may require you to install special software or to use a specific browser. You may also need to set up a username and password to access an ebook.

Purchasing texts and other resources may seem daunting. If you know you won't need the resource in the future, you may want to investigate a limited access ebook (where you can only use the book for the duration of the semester) or check the book out from the library as a cost-saving measure. Even if these options are not available, remember that required textbooks are not optional. See your instructor or academic advisor immediately if you experience any hardship or delay in acquiring the book.

**Studying Math?** Practice often and soon after you are first exposed to the material. For each new type of problem, practice until you can achieve correct answers without referring to a previous problem or the instructional materials.

## Preview

At the beginning of each semester, set aside some time to preview the book and compare it to the syllabus. This will give you a bigger picture of what you should expect to learn in the class. Previewing the book involves the following steps.

- Read the title page, and skim the introduction if there is one.
- Read the table of contents and notice how the book is organized. What are the chapter topics, and how are those topics grouped together into units?
- Preview one or two chapters to get a sense of how the information is organized and developed. What types of headings are used to divide each chapter? How are bigger sections sub-divided? What graphics or formatting techniques have the authors used to call attention to vocabulary, case studies, or other special content?
- Take note of any tools in the back of the book, such as a glossary or an index. How will you use these tools when you are doing assignments later?
- If you are using an ebook, practice using any special tools such as highlighting, bookmarking, or note-taking. Similarly, locate the "Help" or "Technical Support" features.
- After your preview, think about what topics seem most interesting, challenging, or similar to what you already know.

## Make a Plan

After you get a sense of how the book is organized, make a plan for how you will complete reading assignments for each class period or week. Instructors will typically list reading assignments and the dates they are due on a syllabus. Check to see how many pages are part of each reading assignment and how much time you will spend on each chapter or unit. Then, decide what day and time will work best for completing each assignment. Reading each week's assignment the day before class is a good way to make sure you have enough time to finish before class and to consider the ideas you need to participate in a class discussion or activity. Choose a time of day when you are most alert and when you have the least distractions.



## Read with SQ4R

You may have noticed that the process you use to read for pleasure does not always work for reading textbooks. The information in textbooks is dense but highly organized, and a technique called SQ4R will help you to use the textbook's structure to your advantage. It also helps you to stay alert while you are reading and to retain the information in a meaningful and systematic way. SQ4R involves six steps: *Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Relate, and Review*.

### Survey

This step involves previewing the chapter before you read it from start to finish. Surveying helps you to start thinking about the topic so that the information is easier to understand. It works like this.

- Read the introductory paragraph.
- Read each heading and the first sentence beneath each heading. This is often referred to as a topic sentence because it states the main topic of the section.
- Take note of any graphics or definitions.
- Read the concluding paragraph or chapter summary.

**Studying Science?** Use active reading to learn new material. When reading your textbook (whether it's an electronic or hard copy), use pen and paper to take notes. Outline the key points of each chapter and section. Make your own sketches of diagrams and figures. Copy definitions for all terms that are new or unfamiliar on notebook paper or flashcards.

### Question

Use the headings to create questions about what you expect to learn from the chapter. Some students prefer to write down questions before reading. If the chapter has questions at the end, you might read those before reading the chapter. You can also formulate a question as you arrive at the beginning of each section.

### Read

Read the chapter one section or one paragraph at a time, and look for

answers to your questions as you read. Before moving onto each new paragraph or section, pause to complete these next two steps: Recite and Relate.

### Recite

When you finish reading a paragraph or section, take a moment to answer the question(s) you formulated or to paraphrase what you just read. This can be as simple as looking away from the page and asking yourself, "What did I just learn?" or "What was this section about?" If you have trouble completing this step at first, re-read the section. During this step, some students choose to highlight the important concepts. For example, if the section topic is "factors that cause heart disease," you could highlight the word or phrase that identifies each factor.

### Relate

In addition to reciting what you just learned, it's also important to relate what you learned to what you already know. At the end of each paragraph or section, ask yourself these questions: What information was most surprising? How does the information relate to something you personally experienced or observed? How does it relate to what you have learned in other classes? For example, after reading about the topic "factors that affect heart disease," one might recall news stories about individual factors or other biology or nursing courses that covered the topic of heart disease.

### Review

After you have read the chapter, review the section headings in order. How well do you remember what each section was about? If any words in a paragraph are in bold font, these are also concepts or definitions you should remember. If you have trouble remembering the main content of each section, re-read it.



This SQ4R process turns the big task of reading an entire chapter into the smaller and more manageable tasks of reading and comprehending individual sections. It also helps you to start and finish with a big picture overview of what you learned.

If the material still feels overwhelming, communicate these challenges to your instructor as soon as possible. The instructor may have office hours for helping students outside of class, or your school may even provide access to tutoring in that subject. You can also join with a Smarthinking tutor and speak with an expert in your field or a tutor that specializes in reading for more tips and tricks.

## Outline to Study or Review Later

If the information in a chapter will be included on a test or final exam, you may choose to outline the chapter during the review process. This serves two purposes. First, writing or typing information is an effective way to put new information in your long-term memory. Making an outline also gives you a running record of what you learned over the course of a semester, which will come in handy if there is a major final exam.

In the formal outlining method, each major section is labeled with a Roman numeral (I, II, III, etc.). If the main sections are divided into smaller sections, those sub-sections are labelled with A, B, C, and so on. Finally, the supporting details can be labeled 1, 2, 3, etc. Outlines use indentations to show what information is contained within each sub-section and major section. Here is an example of how that works:

### *Chapter Title*

#### *I. Major heading*

##### *A. Sub-section*

- 1. Supporting Detail*
- 2. Supporting Detail*
- 3. Supporting Detail*

##### *B. Sub-section*

- 1. Supporting Detail*
- 2. Supporting Detail*

##### *C. Sub-section*

- 1. Supporting Detail*
- 2. Supporting Detail*
- 3. Supporting Detail*
- 4. Supporting Detail*

#### *II. Title of Second Major Section*

##### *A. Sub-section*

- 1. Supporting Detail*
- 2. Supporting Detail*

##### *B. Sub-section*

- 1. Supporting Detail*
- 2. Supporting Detail*
- 3. Supporting Detail*

The number of details you use will depend on how much information is in each sub-section. As a guideline:

- You don't want to write down every detail.
- Use the headings to decide what details to include. For example, if a sub-section was entitled "factors that cause heart disease," and if the section described four factors, you would list each factor on a separate line labeled 1, 2, 3, and 4 and write a brief description of each factor.
- When you see words in bold in a section or paragraph, look for ways to include that important information in your outline.

### Think About It

- What topics and features do you notice when you preview a new textbook?
- During which days and times do you tend to do your best reading or thinking?
- What challenges can you overcome by using the SQ4R method?
- What information do you want to remember for an upcoming paper or exam?

# Effective Note-Taking

Studies have shown that immediately after hearing someone talk, we only remember about half of the material, no matter how closely we thought we were listening. With some tools, recalling lectures and course information can be easier. And if we recall it, it's much easier to study!

## Tips for Taking Notes in Lecture

It can be challenging to know what's important and what isn't. Knowing what to write down can help you make the most of your notes, both now and when you review in the future.

### Pay Particular Attention to Opening Comments

Opening remarks often state the lecture topic and will help you understand what to focus on in your notes. Statements that don't relate to this opening idea, often called "asides," might not be as important as those that do. How do you know if your instructor is discussing the main idea or getting ready to discuss something related but not critical? Listen for key phrases like "Oh, really fast..." and "Did you know..." Anything that indicates it's not critical is generally a hint that it's a great time to listen and discuss—a chance to apply what you just learned.

### Decipher the Lecture

Are you discussing the fall of Rome, the theory of the two-party political system, or how to titrate reagents? Knowing the purpose of a lecture can affect what you write down and how much detail you include.

As you take notes, always capture:

- The speaker's main idea
- The main points
- Specific facts or evidence provided

If you need to recreate the procedure, show work on a similar problem, or cite the evidence, take careful notes. Your notes will be critical to success later. On the other hand, if you're having a course discussion about recent research in educational policy, an overview with key points will likely suffice. If you don't know what you'll need, more is preferred to less—you can always rewrite your notes later, but it's hard to recreate them.

### Read the Speaker

As we speak, we naturally give clues about what is important. Reading the speaker can help you decipher what to put in your notes. Here are some things to watch for:

- Repeated ideas are important ones.
- Changes in voice, such as volume, speed, or note, often indicate a shift toward an important point.
- Keep track of numbered points, e.g. "There are three important..."

Write down the main bullet points from the slide or board

- Take special note of ideas the instructor indicates are important by saying things like "Of special importance is..."

**Studying History?** In addition to reviewing your textbooks and lecture notes, find and read relevant primary resources such as a historical figure's diary entries, newspaper clippings from a prior era, or the transcript of a discussion between two influential people. Widen your search further by looking for audio or video sources, such as the recording of a presidential address or documentary footage of a political protest. You can even conduct your own research, such as by visiting a historical site or interviewing someone who lived through the event.

- Highlight ideas that the instructor says might be on the exam.
- Pay attention to your instructor's particular non-verbal cues such as pounding the table, pacing, or special hand movements for associated key ideas.

As you listen to lecture:

- **Ask Questions**

Why is the instructor giving the facts in this order? How does the information relate to what you learned in previous lectures? What information are you still unclear about that you could ask the instructor to clarify later? Jotting down questions like these will keep you actively engaged throughout the entire class or lecture. You're a participant rather than just a sponge.

- **Stay with It**

If you find yourself getting confused, don't stop taking notes, but do your best to translate what the instructor is saying into language you understand. Write down terms you don't understand that you can look up later. By staying involved even when you're confused, you'll be able to use your notes later to make better sense of what you heard.

- **Connect Facts to Ideas**

Rather than listing the facts you hear during the lecture, make sure that you keep the speaker's central idea in mind and relate the facts to it, even in your notes. How do those individual facts relate to the main idea the speaker is trying to get across?

- **Think Faster Than You Hear**

Believe it or not, speaking takes longer than thinking. So while the speaker conveys an idea, think about ways you can convert that to a shorthand of your own. Relate it to ideas you have already heard.

- **Make the Most of the Lectures**

Attending every lecture will give you a full picture of the main ideas your instructor wants you to take away from the entire course. You'll be able to connect the ideas from one lecture to the next, and the ideas will build in ways that allow you to remember key ideas when it comes to test time. Although borrowing notes from fellow students is better than nothing, doing so often falls short because other people might not focus on the ideas you view as important or write them in a way that is familiar and useful to you.

- **Come Prepared**

Reading the assigned reading before each lecture gives you the advantage of seeing the connections between the text and your instructor's notes and helps you fill the gaps in each. Also, textual readings often provide a preview of the day's lecture and will help you better understand and take notes on the information your instructor presents.

Discuss the ideas you are learning about with classmates, the instructor, or someone you trust. If you can explain coherently and accurately to someone else, it is a good bet that you understand the concept. Discussion can also help you answer other questions that may have arisen during the initial reading and offer a new way to process and digest the information.

- **Sit Front and Center**

If you're listening to a live lecture, sit as close to the front of the classroom as possible. This serves several purposes: It helps you hear, it cuts down on distractions from other students in the class, and it puts the speaker and their ideas front and center.

- **Avoid Distractions**

Avoid sitting next to friends if they might distract you from paying attention. If you're learning online at home or in another remote setting, make sure to minimize distractions by setting aside a private space where you can hear and

take good notes. Texting your friends or responding to Facebook posts or Tweets will distract you from paying attention and taking good notes, so turn off social media when you get to class. Get plenty of rest, and make sure you've had enough to eat before class so you're refreshed and ready to listen.

### Listen with an Open Mind

It's easy to jump to conclusions or to think you see the end of the story. As you listen, keep an open mind about the material—you'll be better able to focus on the important aspects and more able to ask questions. Biases...we all have them! Being aware of your own biases can help you understand the speaker's point of view and ask informed questions. When you find yourself challenged or stretched by a speaker, keep taking notes. When you review the notes later, consider:

- Why did you strongly agree or disagree with the speaker?
- What prior opinion did you have before hearing this information?
- What research may be necessary to fully understand both your view and the speaker's view?

Avoid oversimplifying complex ideas. Asking the questions why, how, where, what, and who will help you better consider your own positions and those of others.

## Deciding How to Take Notes

### Taking Notes on a Computer

If you prefer to take notes on a computer, keep a separate computer file for each class. Name and date each lecture so you'll be able to easily refer back to it. Keeping a small notebook nearby to include drawings that relate to your notes is a good idea as well if you use this method; just make sure to cross-date the paper notes with the computer ones.

Even if you take your notes on a computer, you might find it easier to study from your notes if you print them out and can mark them up with a pen or a highlighter, drawing special symbols, maps, or other illustrations to aid in studying.

### Using the Text to Take Notes

If your class involves analyzing literature, you might find that your textbook is a great place to write information you can use for studying your instructor's comments about it later. For instance, if you are looking at the symbolism in the specific words of a poem, you might circle those words and write what they represent in the margin of the text with an arrow connecting the two.

### Taking Notes on Paper

If you prefer to take notes on paper, use pen since it is less likely to smudge, and make sure the paper is 8 ½ by 11 so you'll have enough room to write what you need and even draw images, lines, and arrows, etc. that might help you make larger connections.

### Using an Informal Outline

Whether you're using a laptop or a pen and paper to take your notes, you can create an informal outline to help you condense and recall lecture notes into a form that will really help you review the materials.

### Using Special Symbols and Colors

*Special symbols.* You can make special notations of things with symbols like stars, bullets, and highlighting that will catch your eye as you review your notes and remind you of important things like the following:

- Tests
- Things that were unclear to you that you need to clarify
- References to useful books, textbook chapters, or websites the instructor mentions in class

#### *Informal Outlines*

*Main topic*

*Main point*

*Detail*

*Detail*

*– Example*

*Color coding.* Some students find it helpful to color code their notes. For example, they might use a specific color for definitions of key words and another one for things their teacher mentioned might be on the test.

## Dealing with Common Note-Taking Problems

It's not always easy to take notes in lectures. Some common problems and easy-to-implement solutions are below.

- **Fast-talking instructors:** If you're getting behind, leave blanks in your notes for words you didn't understand or concepts to ask about later. Also, come up with abbreviations for long terms that your instructor mentions frequently.
- **Ideas that don't fit:** If an idea seems like it doesn't mesh with the others, put it in parentheses or jot it in the margins of your notes to clarify later.
- **To write or not to write:** If everything that comes out of your instructor's mouth seems to be equally important, reading background from the assigned text or another book on the subject can give you an understanding of the basics so you can take notes only on the important details.
- **Wait, how do you spell that?** You can lose important concepts if you take too long to figure out how to spell something. Just write them the best you can, and after class, find out how the words are spelled by checking the textbook or asking the instructor or a classmate.
- **Laptop distractions:** Close all of the windows on your laptop, so nothing will prevent you from paying attention to the lecture.
- **Keeping up with PowerPoint:** If you missed a slide or two, check with your instructor to see if she keeps her lectures online as a part of class materials.

## Editing Your Notes

### Fill in Missing Details and Rearrange Information

In the first five or ten minutes after a lecture, taking time to look over your notes can make them a much more useful study aid in the long run. This is the time to fill in any blanks you might have left because you could not keep up recording the information. You might also use this time to ask your instructor for clarification on any questions you marked in your notes. If you have recorded your notes on a computer, you can use this time to rearrange information that relates better in a different place by copying and pasting them.

### Include Memory Triggers

In the margin of your notes, write one-word summaries or questions beside paragraphs that will help you remember the central idea contained in those paragraphs. These trigger words and questions can help you study for a test later.

### Think About It

- How can you sharpen your listening skills?
- What are the benefits of doing the assigned reading?
- How can you adjust your note-taking for the course and the instructor?
- How can you anticipate what will be discussed before the lecture?
- How can you identify the most important points during the lecture?
- What techniques can you use to edit your notes?



# Taking Classes Online

Online classes offer the convenience and flexibility to complete coursework at a time and location that works best for you, but they come with their own special challenges. The online environment requires you to participate and manage time a little differently than you will for classes that meet face-to-face. Another challenge is becoming familiar with new technology. If you are new to online learning, the following steps can help you to be more prepared and successful.

## Access the Technology

The first step for success in an online course is to make sure you can access the course. Online courses are usually located in a course management system. This is a special website where all of the information for the course is located and where students “attend” class lectures or discussions. Most schools that use course management systems have a link on the college website to login. Before the class begins, make sure you have the technological requirements to use the course website. These may include some or all of the following.

- **A username and password:** Sometimes your academic adviser or a technical support specialist can help you find this.
- **Access to a computer or laptop:** You will probably want something larger than a smartphone to access and use the class website.
- **An Internet browser and Internet service:** You will need to be connected to the Internet and to have a browser that is compatible with the course website.
- **Browser plug-ins or special software:** Some course management systems will ask you to install special software when you login the first time. Ask your campus technical support if in doubt or if you need assistance installing any extra software.
- **Electronic textbooks:** In some cases, online students have the option to purchase ebooks rather than hard-copy textbooks. If so, you will want to purchase these and make sure you can access the book as soon as the class begins.

If you have trouble logging into your class website, contact your instructor as soon as possible to find out who can help you with the process. Your college website may also offer online video tutorials or other tips about how to begin using the course management system.

## Familiarize Yourself with the Class Website

After you are able to login, your next step is to become familiar with how the class website works. Usually, each course has a homepage with a menu. The course menu will be a list of categories that you can click on to see more information. Some common course menu categories include “syllabus,” “announcements,” “assignments,” “calendar,” or “discussion.” The first time you login, click on each of these menu options or “tools.” Within each section of the course website, you might notice documents that you can download or open. As you tour the site, look for the following:

- **The syllabus:** This is the first document you should open. Sometimes a syllabus is located in a “Course Info” folder. The syllabus will provide an overview of the course, a schedule of the topics the class will cover, and information about the main assignments as well as the instructor’s policies. This is usually where you will find out what part of the textbook you should read for each week. When you find it, save a copy to a flash drive or the computer you plan to use for schoolwork. You may need to access it during times when you cannot get online or when Internet service is unavailable. If you cannot locate the syllabus, contact the instructor.

As you’re reading, keep a dictionary close by, or use an online dictionary any time you are working on a reading assignment. As soon as you run across an unfamiliar word, look up the definition, and jot it down. That definition will help you understand the reading passage as a whole better.

- **Announcements:** If the menu includes this option, this may be where the instructor posts updates or reminders. Plan to check this section twice a week if not daily.
- **Lectures or Readings:** Some instructors will post a weekly lecture or PowerPoint slides for each week's topic. The purpose of this is usually to supplement the rest of the assigned readings, such as a textbook chapter. In other words, you may need to read more than each week's lecture to learn all the information you are supposed to learn each week.
- **Discussion:** This is the main place where you will participate in the class. When students attend classes on a campus, a major part of many class sessions is discussion about each week's topic. The instructor will usually ask students to introduce themselves here and then ask them to post something about each week's topic.
- **Assignments:** An "assignments" section of a course website may include individual PDF or Word documents that give instructions for different assignments you are supposed to turn in. Instructors will usually update this regularly and only post the assignment the class is currently working on. Future assignments may be posted later in the semester. If your instructor posts assignment instructions, be sure to download and save them in case you need them at a time when you cannot get online.
- **Grades:** This section of a course website usually helps students determine what grade they have earned so far and possibly what assignments are missing.

These are just a few of the features of online courses, and each course and instructor will have a slightly different style for delivering and organizing the course information. The instructor might use different names for these features, such as "assessments" instead of "assignments" or "modules" instead of "lectures" or "units." The most important thing is to tour the various links and folders and to get a sense of how each course is organized before the course is fully underway.

## Attend Class Regularly

One of the main differences between online courses and on-campus courses is the way students attend class. When the course is on campus, there are specific days and times when all of the students gather in one classroom. You will attend your online class by visiting the website. Even though your instructor may not require you to be online at a certain time, you will still need to visit the website often and participate regularly. Attending an online class takes more time, but you can usually attend at times that are more convenient and flexible. Most students find that it's best to visit the class website every day to make sure they are not missing any major announcements and that they don't get behind on the discussion board. Although you should check for announcements and other updates regularly, you will attend class in two main ways: Class Lectures and Discussions.

## Class Lectures

For most (but not all) online courses, instructors will post notes, lectures, videos, or PowerPoint slides about each week's topic. This replaces the on-campus format where students read the textbook chapters or other reading assignments from the syllabus and then listen to the instructor's lecture on campus during the class session. When a course website has lectures or notes online, students are usually also supposed to read a textbook or another course text. The following tips will help you get the most out of online lectures.

- Check the syllabus or course schedule, and read the weekly assignments from the textbook or other required texts *first*.
- Stay consistent with the schedule, and watch or read each online lecture at the recommended time. Avoid procrastinating or cramming lectures in one sitting or one week.
- When watching or reading the online lecture, pause when you have questions, and write or type your questions in case you need them later.
- If something from the lecture seems confusing, look for information about that topic in the textbook. If the information still does not make sense, contact the instructor for clarification.



## Discussions

The other way that online students participate in class is by posting discussions. For most online classes, instructors require students to post a certain number of times each week or each semester. Make sure that you are aware of those requirements when the course begins. For example, an instructor may require students to create one original post each week and respond to two classmates' posts. For each post, there may be a question or special instructions. Additionally, instructors will usually tell students early in the semester how long each discussion post should be. Typically, discussion posts are between two and four paragraphs. They are less formal than an essay but not as informal as an email, and they should follow some of these features.

- **Structure:** Discussion posts are usually more than one paragraph. Each paragraph should have one main point or topic and match the prompt or discussion post instructions. If a prompt has two questions, for example, you might write one paragraph for each question.
- **References to the Weekly Readings:** The purpose of a post is usually to show that you have read and understood the material but also to show what the information means to you personally. Check with your instructor about whether you should use formal citations (APA, MLA, etc.) when you mention ideas from the course texts. Even if formal citations are not required, you will want to give credit to the textbook or author when you describe those outside ideas. This could be something as simple as "Our textbook explains that..." or as formal as "Smith and Roberts (2015) described...."
- **Professional Distance:** Although you may be encouraged to share personal experiences or beliefs, be mindful of the fact that this is an online, academic environment. When you are choosing personal experiences to share based on each discussion prompt, prioritize personal examples that are safe for work and that do not violate others' privacy. Anything shared online can be screenshotted or copy/pasted even if your classmates have to login to read what you post. If you are in doubt about whether a classmate's level of disclosure is appropriate for the course, reach out to the instructor before following that classmate's example. The goal is to be personable, sincere, and relevant without oversharing experiences that are too personal.
- **Formal Grammar & Mechanics:** Because this is an academic discussion, proofread your posts for errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar before you publish them to the board.

## Communicate with the Instructor

There may be times when you feel uncertain about where to access an assignment or about what steps you should be taking between discussions and assignments. You may also experience technical difficulties when downloading documents that the instructor has posted. When these situations arise, contact the instructor for help. Many course management systems or course websites have a "contact the instructor" tool that allows you to email or message the instructor directly from the site. You will also want to keep your instructor's email address handy in a location that you can access if the course website is down. If a classmate or the instructor mentions an assignment or a lecture that looks unfamiliar, ask the instructor where you can find it. If you are having trouble using the technology, ask the instructor how you can get technical support or answers to your technical questions.

### Think About It

- What aspects of your online class will be easiest and most challenging to use at first?
- How are the various aspects of your course organized on the website?
- How often are you expected to post discussion comments and other assignments?
- What technical support or "help" features are included in the course management system?

With a proactive approach, online courses can be fun and rewarding, and they can prepare you for successful online communication in the workplace and beyond.

# Working on Group Projects

Steve Jobs once said, “Great things in business are never done by one person; they’re done by a team of people.” Collaboration has become increasingly popular in the workplace, so naturally, group projects have become increasingly popular in college courses. You will likely work on a group project at some point during your college education. Working with a group requires different strategies than working alone, but with careful planning and cooperation, you and your team can accomplish great things.

Group projects can take many forms, but two of the most common are group presentations and group essays. The success of the group project depends on how well you and your classmates collaborate.

The best group projects happen when everyone plays an equal role and does a fair share of the work. The following techniques can ensure that all members know what is expected and how to complete the assigned tasks. They will also ensure that the finished product is well-organized and consistent.

## Choose Members Wisely

In some cases, the instructor will decide which students are part of each group. However, if you get to choose your group, prioritize classmates who have the following qualities:

- **Participation:** These students attend class regularly (or post in online discussions) and stay alert and engaged when others are talking.
- **Communication:** Students who take turns during discussions and respect other points of view tend to work well in a group. Classmates who are reluctant to participate in class or who hide in the back on their phones may not work well in a group.
- **Punctuality:** Look for students who tend to turn in assignments on time and who come to class prepared. If the class is online, look for classmates who post early during each week’s discussion period rather than at the last minute.
- **Leadership:** If your group will have a leader, the person serving in that role should be organized and effective at motivating others. A strong leader is not a person who does everything for the group but, rather, someone who can bring people together and keep everyone on the same page. If this sounds like you, consider serving in that role yourself!

## Analyze the Assignment

When you receive the assignment instructions for the first time, meet as a group to figure out what the final product should look like and how it should be organized. For an essay or PowerPoint, this could involve planning paragraph topics or slide topics. You might even share your plan or outline with the instructor or a tutor for feedback. Always bring a copy of your assignment instructions to a tutoring session and explain to the tutor that the assignment is a group project. The topics and ideas that you decide to cover should match the assignment requirements. Even if the instructions require certain sections, decide how to further organize and develop each section. As you create this plan with your group, allow time for individuals to suggest changes and ask questions.

**Studying a foreign language?** Watch a movie or a show in the foreign language. Think of favorite movies or television shows with characters so familiar they seem like your best friends, and play them in the language you’re studying. You can even add closed captions in your native language if needed. Watching your favorite movie or show in another language can help you comprehend how the language sounds and add to your growing stock of idioms, phrases, and vocabulary. Reading a comic or listening to music in the target language can also be helpful.

## Divide the Work

After you have a clear idea of what your final product will include, decide which group member will be responsible for completing each section or task. In some cases, each group member will write a different section of a report or presentation. In addition to dividing content, you may want to divide tasks such as compiling everything together or proofreading. When dividing content and tasks, establish clear deadlines, and follow up with the instructor if a member consistently misses deadlines. You might also consider having the same person who writes the introduction also write the conclusion. The person filling that role may decide to read the body of the report before writing the introduction and conclusion, and, if that is the case, adjust your timeline and deadlines accordingly.

## Choose a Consistent Format

If each group member is writing a different section of a report or essay, decide how each section should be developed before each member writes a draft. For example, many papers will have one main idea or purpose, expressed in a thesis. If that is the case, create the thesis as a group before completing individual tasks. Then, when developing each section, use the following techniques for consistency.

- Begin each body paragraph with a topic sentence. The first sentence of a section should give the paper's one main idea and the section topic. It should show how the section topic is connected to the project's larger purpose. After that, each individual paragraph in the section should have a topic sentence that gives the paragraph's topic.
- Choose a consistent order of information for each section or body paragraph. For example, suppose a group was writing a paper about treatment options for depression, and each group member was writing a section about one treatment option. The group could decide to develop each treatment option with three paragraphs:
  1. Statistics and evidence that prove the treatment option works
  2. Reasons why the treatment option can be effective
  3. Potential drawbacks or side-effects

All group members would use these same steps in this same order to ensure reader friendliness and consistency.

Choosing a consistent format also works well when writing group PowerPoints. In these situations, decide as a group how many slides each member will write and what type of information members will provide on each slide. Similarly, choose a consistent style for headings and bullet points. You might decide whether bullet points will be complete sentences or phrases. If each bullet point is a phrase, the points on each page should generally start with the same part of speech.

## Review and Revise Content

For written group projects, budget enough time for all group members to review a draft of the whole text before the project is due. For example, you might set your deadline for the first draft for one week before the due date so that you have a few days for the group to look at the project as a whole. Set up a window of time for group members to share suggestions or comments via email. During this read-through, focus on the quality and consistency of ideas and the level of detail. This time should be devoted to modifying the structure or details so that the content of the document is consistent and effective. During this time, it will become apparent if some sections are too detailed or others are too thin, which will allow the group to request that individual group members modify their contributions as needed. Check to see if each person's contribution meets these criteria:

- The introduction provides the background information readers need to understand the body.
- Each section begins with a topic sentence that connects the section topic to the larger purpose of the paper.

- Within each section, all other paragraphs begin with clear topic sentences.
- Each section has about the same amount of text (unless the assignment requires otherwise).
- The information in each section is presented in a consistent order.

During this phase, many groups choose to submit the project to a tutor for feedback. Students may submit a group essay or PowerPoint to the Essay Center or work with a live tutor. The live tutoring service at Smarthinking has an option for students to meet on a whiteboard as a group, look at a document together, and call in a tutor if needed.

## Proofread and Edit

The final step for written projects is to proofread for mechanical errors. These might include issues with commas, citations, verb tenses, or other lower-order aspects of a document. This job could be delegated to one or two specific group members with strong grammar skills. Group members doing this task should look for errors but also issues with style and consistency. For example, check to see if the following are the same across all sections:

- Whether or not to avoid 1<sup>st</sup>-person (I, me, we) or 2<sup>nd</sup>-person (you, your)
- Which citation format to use for in-text citations (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.).

Groups may also submit documents for a Grammar & Documentation review at Smarthinking to receive feedback in only surface-level errors.

## Pitfalls to Avoid

At times, collaborating with others and managing the many deadlines of group projects can feel challenging. When that happens, some of the following pitfalls can occur. As you are working on the project, be careful to avoid some of these situations.

- **Overlooking confusion or conflict about the assignment instructions:** If two or more group members disagree about what format the project should follow, take a proactive approach. Ask the instructor to clarify the assignment requirements, preferably via email so that all group members have a written record.
- **Working on individual assignments before making a group plan:** Though it may feel tempting to get started right away, the final product cannot be consistent if the group does not choose a format and make a plan first. Making these decisions ahead of time can save a lot of extra revision later.
- **Doing all the work yourself or more than your fair share:** Some students prefer to work alone, or they may feel "If I want it done right, I have to do it myself." However, if the instructor is grading each student individually, the instructor needs to assess each student's effort. If a group member is missing deadlines, communicate that to the instructor, and ask whether the group should redistribute those sections.
- **Turning in a final product before reviewing and revising as a group:** Putting together the final product involves more than just pasting each student's work into the same document. The project you turn in should look like the work of one cohesive team and not several individual members. Adjustments to headings, topic sentences, and wording are often necessary after the work has been compiled and before it can be turned in.

## Think About It

- What types of classmates motivate and inspire you to do your best?
- What role or task would each group member do best?
- What plan or structure will help your group achieve its goals?
- What timeline will make it possible for your team to collaborate?

Group projects may require extra planning, but they prepare you for success in the workplace and beyond. They can also make learning more enjoyable and meaningful.

# Getting the Help You Need for Academic Success

Whether you start college right out of high school or after a long break between the two, you'll need help from time to time, and you'll need to know where to find it. Many useful resources are available both online and offline. Also, much of the help you need you'll find through the kindness of an instructor, tutor, or a classmate.

## Barriers to Asking for Help

### Embarrassment and Fear

Even though there is no shame in admitting you need help with a course or an assignment, many students fear taking that first step. The first step to conquering fear is to admit to it. The second step is to face it. In school, that means acknowledging that you need help and reassuring yourself that many other students are in the same situation.

### Time Constraints

If you're already struggling to keep up with homework as it is, finding the time for getting help might seem like something else you just can't squeeze in. Actually, getting the help you need will save you time in the long run because you'll be able to move ahead with an assignment instead of struggling and wondering how to proceed.

### Feeling Anonymous

Maybe you're attending a large class in a large college and feel like just a number. Maybe you're new to the online classroom, and you feel disconnected from the learning process. Or maybe you're attending a commuter college and don't feel a part of campus life or your classes. The solution to this is to connect with those who can help you: your instructor, classmates, and even a tutor. With the multiple ways to connect available today—email, instant messaging, video conferencing, and even the tried-and-true telephone call or face-to-face meeting—you can find one that fits the best for you to establish contact and work through a challenging assignment or course.

## Sources of Help

### Your Instructor

Approaching instructors can be intimidating, but, believe it or not, they will most likely really want to help. Whether you visit during office hours or send them an email, you can let them know exactly how you're struggling. Just make sure you leave enough time before an assignment is due or a test is looming to make contact.

The following are some ways they can help.

- Clarify definitions and ideas
- Explain assignments
- Point you toward additional resources

Before you meet with your instructor, make sure that you're prepared for your discussion. Here are some questions to ask yourself so your meeting will be productive.

- What exactly do I need help with?
- What examples of the type of help I need can I provide the instructor before the meeting?

Working with a tutor or other expert can help you solidify your understanding of the subject, while diving deeper or moving forward. When you work with someone on a class, it's important to come prepared. Bring the question you are working on, any work you've tried, your best guess at next steps, and a great attitude. Your tutor may ask you some questions to help discover knowledge gaps. It may take more time, but your tutor, academic advisor, professor, and academic support staff are here to help you learn and progress.

## **Your School's Library or Learning Center**

Often the library or academic learning center will have online or printed study guides that pertain to many subjects. Reference librarians offer excellent help when doing research. They can point you to resources on online databases to find articles you wouldn't be able to access free just by doing an Internet search. Many of these resources will probably be free with the cost of your tuition.

## **Smarthinking Tutors**

You found this guide through Smarthinking—we also have experts here to help you in your course. To see what courses are covered, click on your homepage, then “Start a Session with a Tutor or Career Coach.” You can choose to drop in (like office hours) or schedule a time in advance. You can also drop off your question, and a tutor will respond (very similar to email).

## **Classmates**

No one will understand your struggles better than classmates since they're going through the same texts, assignments, and tests as you are. Getting acquainted with a classmate, even in an online classroom, is a good idea for a variety of reasons, such as having someone to ask about assignments or lectures you missed during an absence or asking questions about something that doesn't make sense to you.

If you're a social person and have the time in your schedule, forming a study group with a few other students can be a lifesaver when studying for a test or writing something you would like someone else to look over. An ideal study group will include 3-6 people.

Here are some tips for working with a study group:

1. Assign one person to keep track of how long you study and to keep the group focused.
2. Quiz each other on your class notes.
3. Break the material for a test or a project into parts and have each group member focus on that area and then present it to the rest of you.
4. Meet at a certain regular time so that you're less prone to put off meeting at all.

## **Think About It**

- What prevents you from getting help?
- How can you best prepare to get help from others?
- What are the characteristics of a good study group?



# Test-Taking Strategies

Taking tests may not be everyone's favorite part of college, but there are ways to make the process less stressful and more successful. Think about a test as your opportunity to show what you have learned and to learn more about yourself. Using a few effective strategies will help you prepare more efficiently and perform your best.

## Studying Effectively

The methods that you use for studying have a major impact on how well you do on a test. It can be difficult to know where to begin or how much time to spend preparing. As with other coursework, test preparation works best when it is well-planned and spread out over time. Some of the most effective studying techniques include the following.

### Establish an Effective Timeline

For most tests, you will need several days to prepare. Starting the process a week before ensures that you have enough time to review all of the material but not so much time that you will forget important information. Decide how many days you will commit to studying and how much time you will spend each day reviewing material. Spreading out your review over several smaller chunks will also help you retain the information better than if you study everything in one long session.

**Know Your Instructor's Exam Policies.** Instructors will often write information in the syllabus about exam-day requirements or will explain what you can expect on an exam before it occurs. Take some time to consider what the instructor is saying. If you know you will need to write essays, spend time practicing timed essay writing. If you expect to encounter objective questions, like true-and-false, fill-in-the-blank, or multiple choice, make sure you spend some extra time studying terminology and history. Check to see if you will be allowed any notes during your exams, and, if you are, make sure your notes are organized and easy to navigate so you can find information quickly.

### Decide What You Need to Review

Before you begin your review, make a list of what you need to know for the test. Some instructors may provide a study guide. If not, you can make your own. One way to do this is by looking at your syllabus. What topics have been covered during the days and weeks between the last test and the test you are about to take? If this information is not located in your syllabus, look at the textbook chapters or other materials that were assigned before this test. Then, make a list of the major topics covered. Think about how these topics are related to one another and why they are part of the overall unit. For each major topic you are responsible for reviewing, make a list of the smaller ideas you should review and remember. Your textbook's table of contents

may have a list of big ideas and subtopics for each chapter. After you make a list of the topics you should cover, decide how much time you will devote to each major idea. You might also take note of which concepts you know best and which concepts are more difficult. Plan to spend more time reviewing the ideas that you find most difficult.

### Take Advantage of Chapter Reviews

If your textbook has a list of questions at the end of each chapter, test your ability to answer each of those questions. If you have already answered those questions for previous homework assignments, look back through your responses, and review the information about answers you missed or struggled with before.

### Create Index Cards or Flashcards

On one side of the card, write the concept, word, or idea you need to remember. On the other side, write what you need to know about it. For example, if you are memorizing definitions, you can write the word on one side and the definition on the other side. During a single study session, you might create

cards for one chapter and then use the cards to test yourself after you are finished. When you look at each card and decide your “answer,” also decide how confident you are about your answer before you look at the back. This activates another part of the brain that helps you to retain the information. Later, you can use all of your cards to do a quick review of the whole unit. Another technique that can work well is to create separate piles for concepts you know well and for concepts that you are still learning.

## Setting Yourself Up for Success

Making good decisions the night before and the day of the test can also set you up for success. The habits on the next page can help you to feel alert and confident when it’s time to take the test.

## Test Taking Tips and Strategies

### Get Plenty of Rest

If at all possible, try to get enough sleep the night before the test. Most people perform best after seven or eight hours of sleep. Notify roommates or family members that you have a test the next morning. Some people get a better night’s sleep with earplugs or white noise to cancel background noise in the next room. Avoiding screens an hour before bed can also help you to fall asleep faster.

### Feed Your Brain

The foods that you eat before a test can also affect your mindset and your mental stamina. Eating a breakfast high in healthy protein or whole grains can ensure that you have a steady supply of mental and physical energy. Foods high in sugar may cause you to feel alert at first but crash later. If your test is later in the day, you might also have a healthy lunch or snacks before your test. One thing to avoid is a large, heavy meal right before an afternoon test, especially if eating large meals makes you feel sleepy in the afternoon.

### Breathe

Being mindful of your breathing can also have an impact on your performance on the test. When we are anxious or stressed, we have a tendency towards short, frequent breaths instead of long, full breaths. This type of shallow breathing causes less oxygen to reach the brain. You can increase the amount of oxygen that goes to your brain by breathing deeply and slowly.

### Arrive Early But Not Too Early

Arriving to class 10 minutes before the test will give you enough time to choose a good spot, organize your belongings, and take a few deep breaths. Arriving earlier than 10 minutes may cause you to become more anxious or to engage in conversations that will distract your focus. If you do interact with classmates, keep it light and positive. A few words of positive encouragement will help you feel happy and confident instead of worried or frustrated. When you arrive, make sure your phone is set to silent, and avoid reading emails or social media. Take a few minutes to read any instructions or reminders your instructor has written on the board. Make sure your pens and pencils work and that you have scratch paper if permitted or needed.

### Preview the Test

When you receive your copy of the test, take a couple of minutes to skim the test from start to finish. Take note of the number of questions, types of questions, and time allotted. Then, decide approximately how much time you should spend on each section. For example, if you have 50 minutes total for a test that includes 15 multiple choice questions and an essay, you might plan for 15 minutes to answer the multiple choice, 30 minutes to write the essay, and 5 minutes to review your work. If you are taking a math or science test, think about which questions will take the longest and how much time you will need to solve the more complicated problems.

## Answering Multiple-Choice Questions

For this type of question, you will get to decide which answer is most correct from a list of choices. If your test includes multiple-choice questions, a few techniques can make the process more efficient:

- Read the instructions to make sure you know how to mark the correct answer. Should you circle the answer or write the correct letter choice in a blank space?
- Create your own answer to the question before reading the choices. Then, compare your answer to the available choices, and choose the option that best matches your answer.
- When you see two answers that look similar at first, analyze how they are different so that you can determine which answer is most accurate.
- Use the process of elimination. Decide which choices are clearly wrong first, and then examine remaining choices more closely. If you must guess from the remaining choices, you will have better odds of guessing correctly.
- If you do not know the answer, consider coming back to the question later. You may find clues in a question that comes later in the test. To make sure you remember which questions you left blank for later, mark the blank ones with an X or an \* (ideally in pencil so you can erase it after you fill in the answer).

## Creating Short Answers

For this type of test question, students write their own answers rather than choosing from a list. The first step is to make sure you know how long each response should be. The instructions will usually make this clear. Instructors will often share information about this during a review session or class period before the test. One way to decide how long your answer should be is by analyzing the question. For example, a question that says “describe” or “explain why” will probably need a few sentences.

If your response should be a complete paragraph, consider planning your response before you begin to write. For example, if a question reads, “Describe two major causes of the Great Depression,” your first step is to choose the two you will describe. Then, use transitions and/or topic sentences to make it as easy as possible for your instructor to understand your response. An example would be *One major cause of the Great Depression was* or *Another factor.*

## Writing Essay Responses

Essay responses take the longest amount of time, but planning your answer carefully will help you to write these essays more efficiently. The key to writing them well is effective organization. The following process works well for many students:

- Use the question to decide how the essay should be organized. If the question says to describe causes, you will probably want to include a separate paragraph for each thing that caused something to happen. If the question includes words like “explain why,” you will probably want a separate body paragraph for each “reason why.”
- If you have enough time, list a few details to include in each paragraph.
- Write the body paragraphs first. Start with a topic sentence that gives the paragraph’s overall topic, and provide as many details as you can to develop the topic sentence. You might begin with the body paragraph that you know the most about. This will boost your confidence and get the creativity flowing.
- Write the introduction and conclusion last. This will prevent you from wasting time choosing the best, creative opening sentence. The best introduction will probably come to you after you know what ideas you are introducing.
- Allow a couple of minutes to proofread for spelling or mechanical errors.

## Think About It

- What information should you know for the upcoming test?
- Why is this information important to the overall subject you are learning about?
- What information will you study each day leading up to the test?

A thoughtful and systematic approach will help you to perform your best and celebrate a job well done.

# Discipline-Specific Study Tips

From Math to Foreign Languages, we've asked our tutors for the best tips to help you study each area.

## Math

**Participate in demonstrations.** As you read the textbook or watch any instructional videos, do the examples on paper. Ask yourself why steps are being done. If certain steps are confusing or unclear, ask your instructor or a tutor for help. If your instructor demonstrates equations or formulas during class, complete the steps along with the instructor, and ask questions about steps that are confusing.

**Practice often and soon** after you are first exposed to the material. For each new type of problem, practice until you can achieve correct answers without referring to a previous problem or the instructional materials. Frequent practice will give you familiarity and flexibility to succeed later in the course or in future math courses.

**Divide and conquer.** Don't try to learn too many sections at once. You are building and reinforcing connections in your brain. Remember, studying 8 hours in 1 day is not equivalent to studying 1 hour for 8 days. You don't train for a marathon by waiting until the day before and running all day. You practice regularly and build up strength so you can complete the marathon.

**Explain the math in your own words.** You can do this through writing or by explaining it to someone else. Using correct terms and clear explanations will help you process and better maintain the material.

**Take practice tests** without referencing the notes or textbook. If your instructor or your homework software doesn't give you a practice test, check your text or make your own. There is often a practice test at the end of a chapter and solutions in the back of the book. You can also make yourself a practice test from your homework. You can put homework problems on notecards with the answer on the other side. Shuffle the cards and do the test from there. That tells you what you need to practice. It will also help alleviate anxiety on test day because you will have "been there, done that."

## Business

**Learn definitions.** A lot of the homework problems and test questions will require applying definitions from the course. Learning the definitions early gives you a head start on some of the most challenging work.

**Begin reviewing material early.** Skim material each week to get an idea of the topics covered. Start strong at the beginning of the semester as the first several chapters provide the foundation for the rest of the course.

**Practice.** Review slowly and deliberately, and make margin notes or flashcards of anything that isn't clear. Try redoing problems from class or attempt problems from the end of chapters in your textbook. Make sure you understand each section before you move on.

**Ask questions.** Keep a list of concerns or questions to ask in class, or to raise with your instructor or tutors outside of class. Ask the question right away so that you are able to continue moving forward.

**Keep the "big picture" in mind.** As you practice problems, keep the overall course idea in mind. If you struggle, go back and review the concepts, as well as the specific steps to solve the question at hand.

## History and Political Science

**Create and use study aids.** When studying history and politics, you are likely to come across many names, places, events, and terms that are unfamiliar. Remembering this new information is the first step to understanding the material and succeeding in your course. Creating and studying flashcards, on index cards or online, is a common and effective way to learn this information.

**Consider different interpretations of historical events.** Much of what historians and political scientists do is interpret the past by assessing the causes or effects of certain events or evaluating the significance of certain people, actions, and ideas. Why did the Roman Empire collapse? What effects did the Watergate scandal have on American politics? These are questions without simple or “correct” answers. Seek out which topics are being discussed or debated in your area of study to deepen your understanding.

**Make connections to current events.** Making connections between the past and present can help make history and politics more relatable and easier to understand, and observing current events in the news is one way that you can make these connections. A lawmaker might be proposing a bill to address a historical grievance, or a conflict taking place on another continent might be part of a longer story that stretches back decades, centuries, or even millennia. See what connections you can make between the course content and current events.

**Locate and study primary resources.** In addition to reviewing your textbooks and lecture notes, find and read relevant primary resources, such as a historical figure’s diary entries, newspaper clippings from a prior era, or the transcript of a discussion between two influential people. Widen your search further by looking for audio or video sources, such as the recording of a presidential address or documentary footage of a political protest. You can even conduct your own research, such as by visiting a historical site or interviewing someone who lived through the event.

## Computer Science

**Keep up with the course readings and exercises.** When learning programming languages or new software application, make sure that you complete your assignments on time and that you understand the material before moving to the next module. Almost all work will build on foundational knowledge of previous modules.

**Get all the practice you can.** Find sample exercises or try to solve some common problems through coding or application development. As you progress through lessons, go back to old exercises and attempt them again with your expanded knowledge and compare your work.

**Begin with the end in mind.** Before starting an assignment, take a few moments to fully grasp what the final product will look like. If you can start with the vision of a completed product, you will be less likely to encounter issues trying to add functionality you did not plan for earlier in the project.

**Draw and/or write your plan before you start a project.** Consider mapping all the steps in your project before you begin. This will highlight any errors or inconsistencies along the way that you can resolve before you must rewrite code or struggle to debug.

**Consider alternative methods.** Whether it’s writing code or using an application, there are often several ways to accomplish the same result. If you are stuck on a problem or concept, consider alternative ways you may be able to reach a resolution.



## Languages

**Keep a notebook.** When you come across words, phrases, or grammar rules that are difficult to remember, jot them down in a notebook. This will save you time because you are creating your own resource made only for you and tailored to your own learning style. Even the process of writing something down can cement that word or phrase to your language competency.

**Making flashcards** is another handy way to improve while on the go, or waiting in line, or just for fun. A few flashcards to help with vocabulary or phrases can add to your study routine and provide extra benefits. You can even keep flashcards on a keyring and add to your collection as the semester progresses.

**Learn the context of new words.** When learning a new language, learn the context of a word instead of just memorizing the definition. By learning the context, you'll find the word is easier to use and apply.

**Watch a movie or a show** in the foreign language. Think of favorite movies or television shows with characters so familiar they seem like your best friends, and play them in the language you're studying. You can even add closed captions in your native language if needed. Watching your favorite movie or show in another language can help you comprehend how the language sounds when spoken by natives and add to your growing stock of idioms, phrases, and vocabulary. Reading a comic or listening to music in the target language can also be helpful.

**Check cognates** (words related in two or more languages)! These can triple your vocabulary and are easy to remember. But beware of "false friends" that may seem to mean the same thing. Look up each cognate you find before you put it to use.

## Psychology & Sociology

**Learn the vocabulary.** Pay close attention to new vocabulary in your textbook and from your instructor. Write down new vocabulary words and definitions in a personal glossary or on flashcards. As the semester progresses, pay attention to recurring prefixes, roots, and suffixes, and learn what these mean so that decoding unfamiliar words becomes easier.

**Keep track of important theories.** Each time you study a new concept, you will probably learn about several theories that have been developed by researchers. Most theories are by a person, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. If there are several theories about the same topic, such as "positive reinforcement," notice how they are similar or different.

**Relate concepts to personal experience.** Each time you learn about a new theory or concept, relate it to what you have seen or experienced in your own life. Doing this helps you commit the ideas to long-term memory. For example, if you are studying Erikson's 8 Stages of Development, think of a friend, family member, or television character who matches the age and characteristics for each stage.

**Master APA formatting.** If you are writing papers, you will probably be asked to use APA style. This mostly affects the way you should give credit to outside sources. The best way to learn APA is to observe how professionals use it. If your textbook uses APA's author-year citations (Smith, 2017), notice them, and occasionally look up the author on the reference page to see how the citations and references match up. If APA poses a challenge, you can get help from a Smarthinking writing tutor.



## Literature

**Learn literary terms.** An introductory literature course will usually define key literary terms at the beginning of the semester. Your textbook may have a list in an early chapter or an appendix. Some examples include theme, setting, characterization, plot, symbolism, imagery, irony, metaphor, and foreshadowing. Individual types of literature such as poetry will have additional specialized terms like stanza and meter. As you read each text, write down examples of each literary term.

**Read the introduction or preface.** If you are using an anthology, there is probably a brief introduction for each text. This might include an author biography and a blurb about the text itself or the time period in which it was written. Reading them will improve your understanding of the author's theme and the content.

**Read the texts closely.** Ideally, you should read each assigned text twice: once to comprehend the ideas and a second time to look at how the author develops a theme and what literary devices the author is using. Reading closely involves noticing word choices and smaller aspects of the story and considering why the author made certain choices.

**Annotate as you read.** Take notes about parts of the text that seem important and where the author uses literary devices. Some students prefer to write directly in the margins with a pencil; others prefer sticky notes or a separate sheet of paper. You might also keep a log of memorable quotations with the speaker and page number.

**Make connections.** Good literature remains relevant because it strikes a chord with many people across the centuries and around the world. As you read, try connecting the situations in the text with your life experiences, your friends, or your favorite characters on TV. Likewise, look for references to classic literature in contemporary TV shows, songs, and movies.

**Make a study guide for each text.** If you will be required to know about the text later for an essay or test, make a study guide with a few important details. Try including the setting, characters, plot, symbols, and other literary devices the author used.

## Philosophy

**Divide long sentences into sections.** Philosophical readings often contain lengthy sentences that have a number of important ideas. If you divide these sentences into smaller but complete sections, it is easier to analyze and locate the main point that is being made. Compile the ideas from each section and then put your points together to help form an understandable interpretation of the philosophers' ideas.

**Be prepared to read more than once.** Take the time to read carefully and thoughtfully. Read in small sections to digest a bit at a time.

**Consider the context prior to reading.** What do you know about the philosopher? What is the historic context? What is the cultural context? What questions have you before you begin? Jot down what you know or what you think you know! That way, you have a basis for understanding.

**Make real-life connections.** To remember abstract philosophical concepts, connect them to the news, your favorite T.V. show or song, your conversations with your friends and family, your other classes, or anything else you encounter on a daily basis. For instance, applying Kant's theory of aesthetics to the view from your window on your ride home from class can help you retain the concepts from that theory. The more you use theories to understand the world around you, the more memorable and valuable they will become.

**Recognize the role of interlocutors.** Philosophers often make use of interlocutors (voices in the text that question or challenge their theories) to create a dialogue about their philosophical musings. It is important to recognize the different voices and the role they play in helping to either further the philosophy or prevent it from moving into the realm of the absurd. Differentiating between these voices and the main points of the philosophical view will help you have a clearer understanding of the readings.

**Practice essay exams.** If you know an upcoming exam will include essay questions, practice outlining or drafting responses before the day of the test. Practicing will keep your mind in top condition and reduce your test anxiety.

## Nursing

**Learn the lingo.** As with any career field, nursing comes with specialized vocabulary. Become familiar with common nursing terminology, and practice using it during class discussions and writing assignments. Pay close attention to the word choices and writing styles in professional nursing journals and required textbooks.

**Use flashcards.** Each time you learn a new vocabulary word, fact, or medication, write it down on an index card. You can even color-code your cards by each category. For example, write all HTN medications on a blue card. When you come across that medication, you will link the name with a blue card.

**Divide the material into smaller chunks.** When you are reading a textbook chapter or writing a paper, break up the task into smaller parts, and assign a specific time or day to complete each task. Study a little each day rather than cramming all of the information into a single study session. For example, learn and memorize a few concepts or medications at a time before studying others.

**Use visual aids.** Your textbook will likely have many charts, photographs, and other visuals to help you learn the material. Pay close attention to these when you are reading each chapter. When you are studying, make your own tables, flowcharts, concept maps, or other graphics to help yourself learn and remember important processes and concepts. Another effective visual technique is to label blank diagrams of anatomical structures, such as muscles, bones, and nerves.

**Review often.** Don't assume you have retained everything you reviewed during a single study session. Throughout the semester, review previous reading assignments and notes to make sure you are developing a comprehensive and cumulative knowledge of the material.

**Use practice questions.** Students successful on NCLEX do on average 3,000-5,000 NCLEX style questions throughout a nursing program. Plan to do a set number of extra questions each day or week to work towards success.

**Share your knowledge.** A good way to learn information or to evaluate how much you understand is to teach it to someone else. If you can effectively explain a concept, then that means you understand it.

## Science

**Use active reading to learn new material.** When reading your textbook (whether it's an electronic or hard copy), use pen and paper to take notes. Outline the key points of each chapter and section. Make your own sketches of diagrams and figures. Copy definitions for all terms that are new or unfamiliar.

**Practice the equations and formulas.** When you are completing practice or homework exercises, learn how to solve each equation. Keep practicing each equation until you can get the correct answer without referring to the steps in your textbook.

**Connect concepts to real life.** When you are reading about abstract concepts, brainstorm real-world situations when each concept applies. Think about how each concept applies to the people, plants, and objects around you. Many textbooks will include real-life examples and case studies, so be sure to read these carefully.

**Form a study group of 3-6 people.** Encourage all members of a study group to take turns explaining problems or concepts to the group—and answering their questions. You may find that trying to answer questions asked by one of your peers helps you to see and think about problems or concepts in a way you haven't before.

## Think About It

- How are study tips similar and different across different areas?
- If you were to write study tips for someone starting a class in your major, what would you tell them?
- Which study tip was the most useful?

Congratulations on completing this guide. Smarthinking tutors are here to help you see connections, understand, and learn your discipline.