

TWELVE WAYS TO STUDY SMARTER

The Academic Resource Center, 332 Murphy Center, Viterbo University

1. ATTEND CLASSES.

Don't make the mistake of cutting classes and trying to teach yourself from the text. The instructor will use class time to highlight the important information, which is what will be on the tests. You learn from class interactions, and someone else's notes just aren't as meaningful as your own.

2. KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR'S METHODS.

Tailor your study strategies to meet the class format (lecture, discussion, small group). Find out your instructor's testing format, marking system and expectations.

3. SCHEDULE REGULAR STUDY PERIODS.

Reviewing your notes on a regular basis is the single most successful method for long-term memory. Reviewing by talking aloud is even more effective. Set aside a specific time to rehearse your notes and/or reading or chances are it won't get done. This is a typical review schedule, but you may want to add to it if you're having difficulty with a particular subject:

- 1st review: same day (reduce to key words, concepts)
- 2nd review: later the same week
- 3rd review: 1 week later
- 4th review: 2-3 weeks later
- 5th review: monthly

4. ESTABLISH A REGULAR STUDY AREA.

When you consistently study in the same place, you become conditioned to study there. Your mind will automatically kick into gear, even when you don't feel like studying. A regular study area also gives you a place to keep your notes, texts, pens, etc. You won't spend precious study time gathering your supplies.

5. STUDY SHORT AND OFTEN.

The general rule is to take a 10-minute break for every 50 minutes of study. Your brain takes in information faster and retains it better if you don't try to overload it. Four short study periods are more effective than two long ones for two reasons: (1) frequent repetition is the key to building your memory, and (2) if you leave a long time between study periods, you may forget a good portion of the material you studied previously.

6. STUDY YOUR MOST DIFFICULT SUBJECTS FIRST.

You're most alert when you first sit down to study, so you'll be in the best shape to tackle the tough stuff. You'll also feel better getting the worst out of the way, and you won't be tempted to spend all of your time on easier or favorite subjects.

7. STUDY WHEN YOU ARE WIDE AWAKE.

For most people, one hour during the day is worth 1 ½ hours at night. That's why it is more efficient to use the hours between classes and other small pockets of time during the day wisely. The point is to schedule your study time when you are more alert. Remember also, that it's better to wake up early to finish homework, than to try to get through everything when you can't think straight.

8. SET A SPECIFIC GOAL FOR EACH SUBJECT YOU STUDY

For greater efficiency, develop a specific goal each time you study. Don't decide just to 'study math,' decide to answer the review questions at the end of the chapter. Or instead of 'studying marketing,' decide to complete the outline for your marketing paper. Set a goal of how many pages you want to read in a particular sitting. Try hard, but don't worry if you don't reach your goal within the allotted time. Reschedule the task into your next study period.

9. START ASSIGNMENTS AS SOON AS THEY ARE GIVEN.

A little work on an assignment each week will allow you time to give attention to its quality. If your assignment is due near the exam time, as many major papers are, you'll avoid using valuable study time completing your paper.

You may face an overwhelming task if you let your work pile up. If you find yourself falling behind, you may need to make some changes in your time management, your study skills, or your social life. Identify problems as soon as possible; don't let them become unmanageable.

10. VARY YOUR WORK.

Try to give yourself some variety in the type of studying you are doing. Reading for three hours not only is boring, but it's likely that your processing ability will decrease. Alternate the kind of studying activity as well as the type of subject matter you are studying.

11. PROBLEM SOLVE.

For courses that require you to solve problems, such as math, physics, and chemistry, spend a good portion of your study time working on problems. Much of the testing content will be presented in problem form, so you'll be preparing yourself for exam time. If you get stuck on a homework question, don't spend the rest of the night on it. Go on to the next question and ask for help the next day.

12. REWARD YOURSELF.

When you complete one of the goals you set for yourself, give yourself a reward. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate – a magazine, snack, movie, a chat with friends, or TV show. The reward system gives you an incentive to reach your goals, and a pat on the back for achieving them.