

STUDY SKILLS

INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

Introduction to Study skills

Study skills or *study strategies* are approaches applied to learning. They are generally critical to success in school, are considered essential for acquiring good grades, and are useful for learning throughout one's life.

There are an array of study skills, which may tackle the process of organising and taking in new information, retaining information, or dealing with [assessments](#). They include [mnemonics](#), which aid the retention of lists of information, and effective [notetaking](#). More broadly, any skill which boosts a person's ability to study and pass exams can be termed a study skill, and this could include [time management](#) and motivational techniques.

Study Skills are discrete techniques that can be learned, usually in a short time, and applied to all or most fields of study. They should therefore be distinguished from strategies that are specific to a particular field of study e.g. music or technology, and from abilities inherent in the student, such as aspects of intelligence or [learning style](#).

The term *study skills* is used for general approaches to learning, skills for specific courses of study. There are many theoretical works on the subject, and a vast number of popular books and websites.

▲ Types of study skills

▲ Methods based on memorization such as rehearsal and rote learning

One of the most basic approaches to learning any information is simply to repeat it by rote. Typically this will include reading over notes or a textbook, and re-writing notes.

▲ Methods based on [communication](#) skills e.g. reading and listening

The weakness with rote learning is that it implies a passive reading or listening style. Educators such as [John Dewey](#) have argued that students need to learn [critical thinking](#) - questioning and weighing up evidence as they learn. This can be done during lectures or when reading books.



A student studies for his final exams using the PQRS method.

One method used to focus on key information when studying from books is the **PQRST method**. This method prioritizes the information in a way that relates directly to how they will be asked to use that information in an exam. PQRST is an acronym for **P**review, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **S**ummary, **T**est.

1. **Preview:** the student looks at the topic to be learned by glancing over the major headings or the points in the syllabus.
2. **Question:** then questions to be answered once the topic has been thoroughly studied are formulated.
3. **Read:** reference material related to the topic is read through, and the information that best relates to the questions is chosen.
4. **Summary:** the student summarizes the topic, bringing his or her own ways of summarizing information into the process, including written notes, spider diagrams, flow diagrams, labeled diagrams, [mnemonics](#), or even voice recordings.
5. **Test:** then the student answers the questions created in the question step as fully as possible, avoiding adding questions that might distract or change the subject.

There are a variety of studies from different colleges nation-wide that show peer-communication can help increase better study habits tremendously. One study shows that an average of 73% score increase was recorded by those who were enrolled in the classes surveyed. [\[citation needed\]](#)

▲ Methods based on cues e.g. [flashcard](#) training

Flash Cards are visual cues on cards. These have numerous uses in teaching and learning, but can be used for revision. Students often make their own flash cards, or more detailed **index cards** - cards designed for filing, often A5 size, on which short summaries are written. Being discrete and separate, they have the advantage of allowing students to re-order them, pick a selection to read over, or choose randomly to for self-testing.

▲ Methods based on condensing information, [summarising](#) and the use of [keywords](#)

Summary methods vary depending on the topic, but most involve condensing the large amount of information from a course or book into shorter notes. Often these notes are then condensed further into key facts.

Spider diagrams: Using spider diagrams or [mind maps](#) can be an effective way of linking concepts together. They can be useful for planning essays and essay responses in exams. These tools can give a visual summary of a topic that preserves its logical structure, with lines used to show how different parts link together.

▲ Methods based on [visual imagery](#)

Some learners are thought to have a visual [learning style](#), and will benefit greatly from taking information from their studies which is often heavily verbal, and using visual techniques to help encode and retain it in memory.

Some memory techniques make use of visual memory, for example the [method of loci](#), a system of visualising key information in real physical locations e.g. around a room.

Diagrams are often underrated tools. They can be used to bring all the information together and provide practice reorganizing what has been learned in order to produce something practical and useful. They can also aid the recall of information learned very quickly, particularly if the student made the diagram while studying the information. Pictures can then be transferred to [flash cards](#) that are very effective last minute revision tools rather than rereading any written material.

▲ Methods based on [acronyms](#) and [mnemonics](#)

A **mnemonic** is a method of organizing and memorizing information. Some use a simple phrase or fact as a trigger for a longer list of information. For example, the points of the [compass](#) can be recalled in the correct order with the phrase "Never Eat Shredded Wheat". Starting with **North**, the first letter of each word relates to a compass point in clockwise order round a compass.

▲ Methods based on [exam](#) strategies

The **Black-Red-Green method** (developed through the Royal Literary Fund) helps the student to ensure that every aspect of the question posed has been considered, both in exams and essays. The student underlines relevant parts of the question using three separate colors (or some equivalent). **BL**ack denotes '**BL**atant instructions', i.e. something that clearly must be done; a directive or obvious instruction. **RE**d is a **RE**ference Point or **RE**quired input of some kind, usually to do with definitions, terms, cited authors, theory, etc. (either explicitly referred to or strongly implied). **GRE**en denotes **GRE**mlins, which are subtle signals one might easily miss, or a '**GREEN** Light' that gives a hint on how to proceed, or where to place the emphasis in answers.

▲ Methods based on [time management](#), organization and lifestyle changes

Often, improvements to the effectiveness of study may be achieved through changes to things unrelated to the study material itself, such as time-management, boosting [motivation](#) and avoiding [procrastination](#), and in improvements to [sleep](#) and [diet](#).

Time management in study sessions aims to ensure that activities that achieve the greatest benefit are given the greatest focus. A **traffic lights** system is a simple way of identifying the importance of information, highlighting or underlining information in colours:

- Green: topics to be studied first; important and also simple
- Amber: topics to be studied next; important but time-consuming
- Red: lowest priority; complex and not vital.

This reminds students to start with the things which will provide the quickest benefit, while 'red' topics are only dealt with if time allows. The concept is similar to the [ABC analysis](#), commonly

used by workers to help prioritise. Also, some websites (such as [FlashNotes](#)) can be used for additional study materials and may help improve time management and increase motivation.

▲ IT Skills

Why use the computer?

Quite simply, if you use a computer, in the long run you will save yourself an immense amount of time. You will also be able to congratulate yourself that you have come to terms with computer technology.

Fears

Learning to use new technology frightens some people, especially when they see quite young children effortlessly manipulate the keyboard and produce 'all singing, all dancing' documents. There is no need to fear a computer, it can't bite you, it won't swear at you and it won't blow up! The worst thing it can do is lose your work, but losing work is not usually the fault of the computer; but the fault of the operator who does not save their file regularly or properly.

Remember, providing you take things step by step and practise regularly, you can succeed. You have only yourself to blame if everything goes wrong when you decide to try some advanced techniques before you've mastered the basics such as opening files, keying in information and saving them. Aim to walk before you run, then you will begin to understand what you are doing - a sure recipe for success.

▲ Attending lectures and seminars

Do:

1. Prepare in advance: read the relevant texts.
2. Be ready to work hard and be an active note taker and contributor.
3. Be brave about speaking out at seminars.
4. Make sure that you get two sets of lecture notes to copy up if you are absent.
5. Ask for help after the event if you are unsure about what has been said.

Don't:

1. Miss a seminar without letting anyone know.
2. Avoid telling the seminar leader if you cannot make your presentation slot.
3. Miss a seminar because you have not read the texts: it will still be useful.
4. Assume that everyone in your seminar group knows more than you do.

5. Leave it until the end of term to copy up notes on missed lectures.

▲ Learning from lectures

▲ The purpose of lectures

Lectures are an opportunity to find out how one lecturer makes sense of the wealth of information and research that has been undertaken on a topic. A good lecturer will use the lecture to give you an overview of the main themes, develop your understanding of the issues, guide you on how to find out more about the subject and the reading you need to undertake. You may also gain details of relevant current issues, explanations of complex material or questions to answer that develop your own thinking and research. The aim is not usually to give you a definitive and comprehensive set of 'facts' on the subject. You are expected to supplement the lecture with reading and interpretations of your own.

▲ Lectures that develop understanding

The finer details of the subject should be available in lecture hand-outs, web-pages or in the recommended reading. This should mean that you do not have to spend the time in the lecture making detailed notes. If you have lecturers like this, your best strategy is:

- focus on listening to the lecture
- note how the different themes or issues interconnect, so you gain a good overall grasp of the subject
- make a brief note of key themes
- note any additional references
- read about the subject of the lecture before and after in order to pick up details

▲ Information-rich lectures

Some lecturers will use the lecture to bombard you with information and expect you to take this in at speed. If so, most people will find it difficult to listen and take detailed notes, and it is unlikely that anybody will have a complete set of lecture notes. If you have lecturers like this, your best strategy is:

1. Browse through relevant text books before the lecture. This will give you an idea of what information is in the books - and which you may not need to note in the lecture. You can come back to this after the lecture.
2. It is hard to make sense of lectures where information content is high. Reading something about the subject in advance will help to make more sense of what is said.
3. Listen carefully for topic headings and references so that you can chase missing information after the lecture.

4. Resist the temptation to write everything down if you can avoid this. It is very hard to catch a complete set of lecture notes.

5. Form a group and go through the lecture notes so you can fill in gaps. Between you, you will have most of the information you need and discussing the notes will help you to understand the subject.

▲ Top tips for learning from lectures

Before the lecture

- prepare for lectures - find out what is in the books on the subject so that you are aware of what you do not need to note in the lecture
- form an opinion about the subject of the lecture
- set yourself questions and leave spaces to have these answered during the lecture

During the lecture

- listen to 'make sense' rather than to make notes
- listen for 'signposts' about what is coming next or for summaries of key points
- listen for answers to questions you set in advance
write yourself questions so you can trace answers and information after the lecture
- make brief notes of essential points

After the lecture

- read your notes and fill in any gaps
- discuss the lecture with other people
- consider how the lecture changed or developed your opinions of the subject
- label and file your notes

▲ Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Personal development planning or PDP means creating opportunities to think through, in a structured way, questions such as:

- What do I really want to achieve from life?
- What kind of person do I want to be?
- Am I clear about my personal goals and ambitions?
- Am I making the right decisions to get me where I really want to be?
- Am I in charge of my life and my studies - or am I just hoping it all will work out somehow?

It has been recognised that students need structured opportunities to think about, and plan towards, their future. The exact content really depends on you. How much of your time do you want to give now to planning your future?

▲ What are progress files?

All universities are required to offer progress files to students. The term 'file' is misleading. Progress files really include three elements:

1. A process of personal development

Development planning can be a very personal process - or it can be a process required by your employer or tutor. As the word "development" suggests, PDP is something that happens over time. It isn't a last minute thing. PDP works best when you:

- Think deeply and in structured ways about your life and ambitions. What does success mean to you personally?
- Have the right information to make good choices.
- Have people you can trust to share your reflections.
- Have opportunities to experiment and test yourself in new areas so that you have a better understanding of your abilities and limits.
- Have opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to achieve your ambitions.

In the work place, the personal development process may be linked to your annual appraisal or supervision.

2. Personal records of learning and achievement

These are your own personal records rather than those provided by the university.

3. A formal transcript provided by the institution

A formal transcript will be provided by the university, usually in addition to a degree certificate, it records more information about your learning and achievement than the traditional degree certificate.

▲ Benefits of PDP to academic performance

Some advantages of taking a personal development approach to your studies are:

- Gaining a clearer focus to your learning.
- Helping to keep yourself motivated.
- A better understanding of how you learn and how to improve your performance.
- More enjoyment and less stress from your learning as you become consciously skilled.
- More awareness of how to apply your learning to new problems and contexts.
- Reflective thinking skills that can strengthen academic performance.

▲ Benefits of PDP to professional life

- Clearer ideas about the kind of life and work you want.

- Greater confidence in the choices you make.
- Greater confidence in the skills, qualities and attributes you bring to the career of your choice.
- Being in a better position to compete for jobs.
- Being better able to discuss your skills, personal qualities and competences with employers.
- Better problem-solving and planning skills.
- Developing the positive attitudes and approaches associated with successful professional life.

Many employers now expect employees to understand their own performance - and to know how to adapt to meet times of increased workload, stressful situations or conditions of change. Employees are expected to respond well to change. Whilst some employers offer training, it is more typical for employers to expect graduates to arrive ready to manage both their own performance and the performance of other people. Time devoted to understanding what influences your own performance can be very well spent. It is also important to be aware of how your behaviour affects other people.

Employees are often expected to show personal commitment to their continuous professional development (CPD), actively seeking out information, training and events that will keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. Knowing how to learn, and how you learn best, will be invaluable in the work place.

▲ Benefits of PDP to personal life

- A better understanding of yourself and how you ‘tick.’
- Being in a better position to make appropriate choices to meet your aspirations.
- Greater awareness of your needs and how to meet these.
- Greater awareness of the unique contribution you can make.
- Developing a positive, forward-looking approach.

▲ The Ten Study Habits of Successful Students



Successful students have good study habits. They apply these habits to all of their classes. Read about each study habit. Work to develop any study habit you do not have.

Successful students:

1. **Try not to do too much studying at one time.** If you try to do too much studying at one time, you will tire and your studying will not be very effective. Space the work you have to do over shorter periods of time. Taking short breaks will restore your mental energy.
2. **Plan specific times for studying.** Study time is any time you are doing something related to schoolwork. It can be completing assigned reading, working on a paper or project, or studying for a test. Schedule specific times throughout the week for your study time.
3. **Try to study at the same times each day.** Studying at the same times each day establishes a routine that becomes a regular part of your life, just like sleeping and eating. When a scheduled study time comes up during the day, you will be mentally prepared to begin studying.
4. **Set specific goals for their study times.** Goals will help you stay focused and monitor your progress. Simply sitting down to study has little value. You must be very clear about what you want to accomplish during your study times.
5. **Start studying when planned.** You may delay starting your studying because you don't like an assignment or think it is too hard. A delay in studying is called "procrastination." If you procrastinate for any reason, you will find it difficult to get everything done when you need to. You may rush to make up the time you wasted getting started, resulting in careless work and errors.



6. **Work on the assignment they find most difficult first.** Your most difficult assignment will require the most effort. Start with your most difficult assignment since this is when you have the most mental energy.
7. **Review their notes before beginning an assignment.** Reviewing your notes can help you make sure you are doing an assignment correctly. Also, your notes may include information that will help you complete an assignment.
8. **Tell their friends not to call them during their study times.** Two study problems can occur if your friends call you during your study times. First, your work is interrupted. It is not that easy to get back to what you were doing. Second, your friends may talk about things that will distract you from what you need to do. Here's a simple idea - turn off your cell phone during your study times.
9. **Call another student when they have difficulty with an assignment.** This is a case where "two heads may be better than one."
10. **Review their schoolwork over the weekend.** Yes, weekends should be fun time. But there is also time to do some review. This will help you be ready to go on Monday morning when another school week begins.

These ten study habits can help you throughout your education. Make sure they are your study habits.

▲ **Motivating Yourself to Study**



If you find that you lack motivation to study, welcome to the club. Just about every student experiences this problem at one time or another.

Motivation is important for good studying. When you are motivated, you will find it easy to stay focused over a period of time. When you are not motivated, you will not only find it difficult to stay focused, but you will find it difficult to get started in the first place.

Here are some ways to increase your motivation to study.

1. **Reward yourself for studying.** For example, after a successful study session, have a treat like a nice big ice cream cone. Go crazy and add some cherries and nuts.
2. **Study with your friends.** Don't make it party time, but you can have fun as you do this.
3. **Remind yourself of your long-term goals.** Achievement of your goals likely requires educational success. Educational success requires studying.
4. **Eliminate distractions.** If you are surrounded by things you would rather do than study, you will probably do those things instead of studying.
5. **Develop interest in what you have to study.** This will make studying more enjoyable.
6. **Take breaks.** When you feel that you need to take a break, try to stop at a point where you are at something that is easy for you. This will make it easier for you to resume studying after your break.
7. **Establish a comfortable environment.** You will be more inclined to study if you feel comfortable.
8. **Establish reasonable goals for a study session.** You probably won't get very far if you look at your study session as "mission impossible."
9. **Use a motivational poster.** Place the poster where you can see it as you study. The poster should include positive words and a picture depicting success. You can buy one or even make your own. You can also read inspirational stories about real people who have achieved success through effort.

10. **Just do it.** Once you do, you will feel a lot better than if you are worried about getting it done.

Finally, if these suggestions don't do it for you, just think about the consequences of not studying.

▲ Becoming a Flexible Reader

To become a flexible reader, you need to know how to select and use a reading style that is consistent with your purpose for reading. There are three important reading styles you should learn to use. Each has its own purpose. Knowing when and how to use these three reading styles will make you a flexible reader. Read to learn about the three reading styles used by flexible readers.

Study Reading is the reading style used by flexible readers when their purpose is to read difficult material at a high level of comprehension. When using the Study Reading style, you should read at a rate that is slower than your normal reading rate. Further, as you read you must challenge yourself to understand the material. Study Reading will often require you to read material more than once to achieve a high level of comprehension. Sometimes, reading the material aloud will also help you improve your comprehension.

Skimming is the reading style used by flexible readers when their purpose is to quickly obtain a general idea about the reading material. The Skimming style is most useful when you have to read a large amount of material in a short amount of time. When using the Skimming style, you should identify the main ideas in each paragraph and ignore the details in supportive sentences. Because you are only looking for the main idea in each paragraph you read, a lower level of comprehension is to be expected than when using the Study Reading style.



Scanning is the reading style used by flexible readers when their purpose is to quickly locate a specific piece of information within reading material. The piece of information to be located may be contained in a list of names, words, numbers, short statements, and sometimes even in a paragraph. Since you know exactly what you are looking for, move your eyes quickly over the reading material until you locate the specific piece of information you need to find.

Before you begin your next reading assignment, identify your purpose for reading. Decide if you are reading for a *high level of comprehension*, *trying to get a general idea about what you are*

reading, or looking for specific information. Then use the reading style that is appropriate for your reading purpose.

▲ Improving Concentration



Many students have difficulty concentrating while studying. Being able to concentrate while you are studying is essential to doing well in class and on tests.

Here are 10 suggestions for improving your study concentration:

- ✓ Study in a quiet place that is free from distractions and interruptions. Try to create a space [designated solely for studying](#).
- ✓ Make a study schedule that shows what tasks you need to accomplish and [when you plan to accomplish each task](#). This will provide you with the structure you need for effective studying.
- ✓ Try to study at the time of day you work best. Some people work well early in the morning, others late at night. You know what works best for you.
- ✓ Make sure you are not tired and/or hungry when you study. Otherwise, you won't have the energy you need to concentrate. Also, maintain your physical fitness.
- ✓ Don't try to do two tasks at the same time. You won't be able to concentrate on either one very well. Concentration means focusing on one thing to the exclusion of all else.
- ✓ Break large tasks into series of smaller tasks that you can complete one at a time. If you try to complete a large task all at once, you may feel overwhelmed and will be unable to maintain your concentration.
- ✓ Relax. It's hard to concentrate when you're tense. It's important to relax when working on a task that requires concentration. Meditation is helpful to many students.
- ✓ Clear your mind of worrisome thoughts. Mental poise is important for concentration. You can get distracted by your own thoughts. Monitor your thoughts and prevent yourself from following any that take you off track. Don't daydream.
- ✓ Develop an interest in what you are studying. Try to relate what you are studying to your own life to make it as meaningful as possible. This can motivate yourself to concentrate.
- ✓ Take breaks whenever you feel fatigued. There is no set formula for when to take breaks. You will know when you need to take a break.

Studying without concentration is like trying to fill a bucket with water when the bucket has a hole in its bottom. It doesn't work.

▲ KWL Chart



The KWL chart was designed as an instructional reading strategy teachers could use to guide students' textbook reading. However, you can use KWL to help you learn about a topic. Here is what a blank KWL chart looks like.

K	W	L

The **K** in KWL stands for what you already **know** about the topic. Complete the **K** column by thinking about and writing what you already know about the topic.

The **W** in KWL stands for what else you **want** to know about the topic. Complete the **W** column by writing the questions you want to answer about the topic.

The **L** in KWL stands for what you **learned** about the topic as you read your textbook and use reference sources. Complete the **L** column by writing the answers to the questions you wrote in the **W** column. Also, write in the **L** column other information you learned as you answered the questions.

▲ Managing Your Study Time

There are only so many hours in a day, a week, and a semester. You cannot change the number of hours, but you can decide how to best use them. To be successful in school, you must carefully manage your study time. Here is a strategy for doing this.

Prepare a Semester Calendar

At the beginning of a semester, prepare a Semester Calendar. Update it as the semester goes on. Here is what to do to prepare a Semester Calendar.

- Record your school assignments with their due dates and your scheduled tests.
- Record your planned school activities.
- Record your known out-of-school activities.

Prepare a Weekly Schedule

Each Sunday before a school week, prepare a Weekly Schedule. Update it as the week goes on. Here is what to do to prepare a Weekly Schedule.

- Record your daily classes.
- Enter things to be done for the coming week from your Semester Calendar.
- Review your class notes from the previous week to see if you need to add any school activities.
- Add any out-of-school activities in which you will be involved during the week.
- Be sure to include times for completing assignments, working on projects, and studying for tests. These times may be during the school day, right after school, evenings, and weekends.

Prepare a Daily Organizer

Each evening before a school day, prepare a Daily Organizer for the next day. Place a \checkmark next to each thing to do as you accomplish it. Here is what to do to prepare a Daily Organizer.

- Enter the things to do for the coming day from your Weekly Schedule.
- Enter the things that still need to be accomplished from your Daily Organizer from the previous day.
- Review your class notes for the day just completed to see if you need to add any school activities.
- Add any out-of-school activities in which you will be involved the next day.

Your Weekly Schedule should have more detail than your Semester Calendar. Your Daily Organizer should have more detail than your Weekly Schedule. Using a Semester Calendar, a Weekly Schedule, and a Daily Organizer will help you make the best use of your time.

▲ Preparing to Study: A Good Study Place

You need a good study place to be prepared to study. You should be able to answer YES to all of the following questions:

1. **Is my Study Place available to me whenever I need it?** Your Study Place does you little good if you cannot use it when you need it. If you are using a Study Place that you must share with others for any reason, work out a schedule so that you know when you can use it.
2. **Is my Study Place free from interruptions?** It is important to have uninterrupted study time. You may have to hang a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door or take the phone off the hook.
3. **Is my Study Place free from distractions?** Research shows that most students study best in a quiet environment. If you find that playing a stereo or TV improves your mood, keep the volume low.
4. **Does my Study Place contain all the study materials I need?** Be sure your Study Place includes [reference sources](#) and supplies such as pens and pencils, paper, ruler, calculator, and whatever else you might need. If you use a computer for your schoolwork, it should be in your Study Place .



5. **Does my Study Space contain a large enough desk or table?** While working on an assignment or studying for a test, use a desk or table that is large enough to hold everything you need. Allow enough room for writing and try to avoid clutter.
6. **Does my Study Place have enough storage space?** You need enough room to store your study materials. Be sure you have enough storage space to allow you to keep your desktop or other work surface clear of unnecessary materials that can get in the way.
7. **Does my Study Place have a comfortable chair?** A chair that is not comfortable can cause discomfort or pain that will interfere with your studying. A chair that is too comfortable might make you sleepy. Select a chair in which you can sit for long periods while maintaining your attention.
8. **Does my Study Place have enough light?** The amount of light you need depends on what you are doing. The important thing is that you can clearly see what you need to see without any strain or discomfort.
9. **Does my Study Place have a comfortable temperature?** If your Study Place is too warm, you might become sleepy. If it is too cold, your thinking may slow down and become unclear. Select a temperature at which your mind and body function best.

Having a good Study Place is important for good studying.

▲ Procrastination

Procrastination is putting off or avoiding doing something that must be done. It is natural to procrastinate occasionally. However, excessive procrastination can result in guilt feelings about not doing a task when it should be done. It can also cause anxiety since the task still needs to be done. Further, excessive procrastination can cause poor performance if the task is completed without sufficient time to do it well. In short, excessive procrastination can interfere with school and personal success.

Why Do Students Procrastinate?

There are many reasons why students procrastinate. Here are the most common reasons:

1. **Perfectionism.** A student's standard of performance may be so high for a task that it does not seem possible to meet that standard.
2. **Fear of Failure.** A student may lack confidence and fear that he/she will be unable to accomplish a task successfully.
3. **Confusion.** A student may be unsure about how to start a task or how it should be completed.
4. **Task Difficulty.** A student may lack the skills and abilities needed to accomplish a task.
5. **Poor Motivation.** A student may have little or no interest in completing a task because he/she finds the task boring or lacking in relevance.
6. **Difficulty Concentrating.** A student may have too many things around that distract him/her from doing a task.
7. **Task Unpleasantness.** A student may dislike doing what a task requires.
8. **Lack of Priorities.** A student may have little or no sense about which tasks are most important to do.

How Do I Know if I Procrastinate Excessively?

You procrastinate excessively if you agree with five or more of the following statements:

1. I often put off starting a task I find difficult
2. I often give up on a task as soon as I start to find it difficult.
3. I often wonder why I should be doing a task.
4. I often have difficulty getting started on a task.
5. I often try to do so many tasks at once that I cannot do any of them.

6. I often put off a task in which I have little or no interest.
7. I often try to come up with reasons to do something other than a task I have to do.
8. I often ignore a task when I am not certain about how to start it or complete it.
9. I often start a task but stop before completing it.
10. I often find myself thinking that if I ignore a task, it will go away.
11. I often cannot decide which of a number of tasks I should complete first.
12. I often find my mind wandering to things other than the task on which I am trying to work.

▲ What Can I Do About Excessive Procrastination?

Here are some things you can do to control excessive procrastination.

1. Motivate yourself to work on a task with thoughts such as "There is no time like the present," or "Nobody's perfect."
2. Prioritize the tasks you have to do.
3. Commit yourself to completing a task once started.
4. Reward yourself whenever you complete a task.
5. Work on tasks at the times you work best.
6. Break large tasks into small manageable parts.
7. Work on tasks as part of a study group.
8. Get help from teachers and other students when you find a task difficult.
9. Make a schedule of the tasks you have to do and stick to it.
10. Eliminate distractions that interfere with working on tasks.
11. Set reasonable standards that you can meet for a task.
12. Take breaks when working on a task so that you do not wear down.
13. Work on difficult and/or unpleasant tasks first.
14. Work on a task you find easier after you complete a difficult task.
15. Find a [good place to work](#) on tasks.

Above all, think positively and get going. Once you are into a task, you will probably find that it is more interesting than you thought it would be and not as difficult as you feared. You will feel increasingly relieved as you work toward its accomplishment and will come to look forward to the feeling of satisfaction you will experience when you have completed the task.

▲ Improving Reading Fluency

As a student you are faced with the need to read a lot of information. You will not get the most out of the time you allot for studying if you read inefficiently. Here are some ways you can improve your reading fluency.

- ✓ Do your heaviest reading assignments when you are most alert. A physical task takes more time to accomplish when you are tired. The same is true for a reading task.
- ✓ Focus on what you are reading. Your reading will be slowed if you are distracted. Distractions can be external such as a TV playing, or internal such as worrying about something you have to do the next day.
- ✓ Look over the reading material before you begin reading. You can quickly scan a page by looking for headings, bullet points, and things in bold. As you do this you may find that there is some text you can skip.
- ✓ Avoid reading word by word. Try to read blocks of words. Your eyes can take in four to five words at a time. Work on expanding the number of words you can read at a time.
- ✓ Don't pronounce each word in your head as you read it. The action of pronouncing words, even if not aloud, slows you down.
- ✓ Use a pen or pencil or even your finger as a pacer. Your eyes and brain will try to keep up with the pace you set. You can work on increasing your pace of reading.
- ✓ Avoid straining your eyes. Reading with insufficient light, at an uncomfortable angle, or in bed lying down can result in eye fatigue that will slow your reading or cause you to stop for periods of time. Blinking your eyes from time to time can help ease eyestrain.
- ✓ Try not to let your eyes stay in the same place on the page for too long. Move on whenever you find yourself stuck.
- ✓ Don't use a highlighter. If you do, you are likely to pay excessive attention to everything on the page.
- ✓ Avoid going back to read something unless absolutely necessary. Rereading interrupts your reading flow and slows you down. You can always go back later to review material.
- ✓ Focus on key words in the sentences. You can read more fluently by quickly moving past conjunctions (e.g., and), prepositions (e.g., as), and articles (e.g., a).

▲ A Strategy for Reading Textbooks



SQRW is a four-step strategy for reading and taking notes from chapters in a textbook. Each letter stands for one step in the strategy. Using SQRW will help you to understand what you read and to prepare a written record of what you learned. The written record will be valuable when you have to participate in a class discussion and again when you study for a test. Read to learn what to do for each step in SQRW.

Survey.

Surveying brings to mind what you already know about the topic of a chapter and prepares you for learning more. To survey a chapter, read the title, introduction, headings, and the summary or conclusion. Also, examine all visuals such as pictures, tables, maps, and/or graphs and read the caption that goes with each. By surveying a chapter, you will quickly learn what the chapter is about.

Question.

You need to have **questions** in your mind as you read. Questions give you a purpose for reading and help you stay focused on the reading assignment. Form questions by changing each chapter heading into a question. Use the words who, what, when, where, why, or how to form questions. For example, for the heading "Uses of Electricity" in a chapter about how science improves lives, you might form the question "What are some uses of electricity?" If a heading is stated as a question, use that question. When a heading contains more than one idea, form a question for each idea. Do not form questions for the Introduction, Summary, or Conclusion.

Read.

Read the information that follows each heading to find the answer to each question you formed. As you do this, you may decide you need to change a question or turn it into several questions to be answered. Stay focused and flexible so you can gather as much information as you need to answer each question.

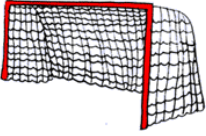
Write.

Write each question and its answer in your notebook. Reread each of your written answers to be sure each answer is legible and contains all the important information needed to answer the question.

As you practice using SQRW, you will find you learn more and have good study notes to use to prepare for class participation and tests.

HINT: Once you complete the Survey step for the entire chapter, complete the Question, Read, and Write steps for the first heading. Then complete the Question, Read, and Write steps for the second heading, and so on for the remaining headings in the chapter.

▲ Setting Goals



A *goal* is something you want to achieve. A *short-term goal* is something you want to achieve soon. Examples of short-term goals are finishing your homework and doing well on tomorrow's test. A *long-term goal* is something you want to achieve at some later date. Examples of long-term goals are writing a paper and passing a class.

To set appropriate goals, you must know what is important for you to accomplish. Then you must set specific and clearly stated goals. If you do not have clearly stated goals, your effort will lack direction and focus. Write your goals to have a record of them.

▲ THE THREE W'S OF GOALS

Each goal you set should state **WHAT** you will do and **WHEN** you will accomplish it. Implied in each goal you set is your **WILL** (determination) to do it. For example, a goal for a research paper might be stated as follows: *I will* (your determination) *finish gathering information for my research paper* (what you will do) *by November 20* (when you will accomplish it).

CHARACTERISTICS OF APPROPRIATE GOALS

Your goals should be:

1. ***within your skills and abilities***. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses will help you set goals you can accomplish.
2. ***realistic***. Setting a goal to learn the spelling of three new words a day is realistic. Trying to learn the spelling of fifty new words a day is not realistic.
3. ***flexible***. Sometimes things will not go the way you anticipate and you may need to change your goal. Stay flexible so when you realize a change is necessary you will be ready to make the change.
4. ***measurable***. It is important to be able to measure your progress toward a goal. It is especially important to recognize when you have accomplished your goal and need to go no further. Failure to measure your progress toward a goal and recognize its accomplishment will result in effort that is misdirected and wasted.
5. ***within your control***. Other than when working as part of a group, accomplishment of your goal should not depend on other students. You can control what you do, but you have little or no control over what others do. You may do what you have to do, but if others don't, you will not accomplish your goal.

Many times your *parents, teachers, and counselors* will set goals for you. Be accepting when they do. These are people who know what is important for you and are very concerned with your success. They can also help you accomplish the goals they set.

SET GOALS IN SCHOOL THAT PROVIDE YOU WITH DIRECTION AND LEAD TO SUCCESS.

▲ Study Groups



A study group can be helpful when you are trying to learn information and concepts and preparing for class discussions and tests. Read to learn about the benefits of a study group. Then read on to learn about how to start a study group and the characteristics of a successful study group. Finally, be sure to read about the possible pitfalls of a study group.

Benefits of a Study Group

A study group can be beneficial in many ways. Here are the most important benefits:

1. A support group can "pick you up" when you find that your motivation to study is slipping. The other group members can be a source of encouragement.
2. You may be reluctant to ask a question in class. You will find it easier to do so in a small study group.
3. You may become more committed to study because the group members are depending on your presentation and participation. You will not want to let them down.
4. Group members will listen and discuss information and concepts during the study sessions. These activities add a strong auditory dimension to your learning experience.
5. One or more group members are likely to understand something you do not. They may bring up ideas you never considered.
6. You can learn valuable new study habits from the other group members.
7. You can compare your class notes with those of the other group members to clarify your notes and fill in any gaps.
8. Teaching/explaining information and concepts to the other group members will help you reinforce your mastery of the information and concepts.

9. Let's face it - studying can sometimes be boring. Interacting with the other group members can make studying enjoyable.

▲ Getting a Study Group Started

Study groups don't just happen. Here is what you should do to get a study group started:

1. Get to know your classmates by talking with them before class, during breaks, and after class. When selecting a classmate to join your study group, you should be able to answer YES for each of the following questions:
 - a. Is this classmate motivated to do well?
 - b. Does this classmate understand the subject matter?
 - c. Is this classmate dependable?
 - d. Would this classmate be tolerant of the ideas of others?
 - e. Would you like to work with this classmate?
2. Invite enough of these classmates to work with you in a study group until you have formed a group of three to five. A larger group may allow some members to avoid responsibility, may lead to cliques, and may make group management more of an issue than learning.
3. Decide how often and for how long you will meet. Meeting two or three times a week is probably best. If you plan a long study session, make sure you include time for breaks. A study session of about 60 to 90 minutes is usually best.
4. Decide where you will meet. Select a meeting place that is available and is free from distractions. An empty classroom or a group study room in the library are possibilities.
5. Decide on the goals of the study group. Goals can include comparing and updating notes, discussing readings, and preparing for exams.
6. Decide who the leader will be for the first study session. Also decide whether it will be the same person each session or whether there will be a rotating leader. The leader of a study session should be responsible for meeting the goals of that study session.
7. Clearly decide the agenda for the first study session and the responsibilities of each group member for that session.
8. Develop a list of all group members that includes their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Make sure each group member has this list and update the list as needed.

▲ Characteristics of a Successful Study Group

Once started, a study group should possess the following characteristics to be successful:

1. Each group member contributes to discussions.

2. Group members actively listen to each other without interrupting. Only one group member speaks at a time.
3. The other group members work collaboratively to resolve any concern raised by a group member.
4. Group members are prompt and come prepared to work.
5. The group stays on task with respect to its agenda.
6. Group members show respect for each other.
7. Group members feel free to criticize each other but keep their criticisms constructive. This can encourage group members to reveal their weaknesses so that they can strengthen them.
8. Group members feel free to ask questions of each other.
9. At the end of each study session, an agenda including specific group member responsibilities is prepared for the next session.
10. Above all, the positive attitude that "we can do this together" is maintained.

▲ Possible Pitfalls of a Study Group



A study group can be a very positive learning experience. However, there are pitfalls to be avoided. Here are some cautions:

1. Do not let the study group get distracted from its agenda and goals.
2. Do not let the study group become a social group. You can always socialize at other times.
3. Do not allow group members to attend unprepared. To stay in the group, members should be required to do their fair share.
4. Do not let the session become a negative forum for complaining about teachers and courses.
5. Do not allow one or two group members to dominate the group. It is important that all members have an equal opportunity to participate.

The information you just read will help you decide when a study group is appropriate for you and will help ensure its success.

▲ Using Reference Sources

As you go through school, you will need to use reference sources to find information about topics, locate facts, and answer questions. Here are five types of reference sources you should use. Each type is available in print forms, on CD-ROMs, and on the Internet.

1. **Dictionary**

A **dictionary** provides information about the meaning, pronunciation, and spelling of words. Unabridged dictionaries attempt to be complete by including all words currently in use in a language. They provide extensive information about the words included. Abridged dictionaries omit words that do not regularly appear in books, magazines, and newspapers. Specialized dictionaries provide detailed information about the words that apply to a particular subject such as space, math, biology, psychology, and many more. They include technical words that are rarely used outside of the subject.

2. **Thesaurus**

A **thesaurus** contains synonyms for commonly used words. A synonym is a word that has the same meaning or nearly the same meaning as another word. For example, "simple" is a synonym for "easy." A thesaurus contains many more synonyms for a word than does a dictionary. A thesaurus can help you precisely express your ideas when writing.

3. **Encyclopedia**

An **encyclopedia** contains articles on a variety of subjects. The articles are written by experts on each of the subjects. In addition to articles, encyclopedias may include illustrations and diagrams, definitions of some words, and references to additional information. A general encyclopedia includes overview articles on a wide range of topics. A subject encyclopedia contains longer and more detailed articles on specific topics, events, or fields of study.

4. **Almanac**

An **almanac** is an annual single-volume reference source that contains useful facts about a wide range of topics. You can learn about countries of the world, government, historical events, and many other topics. Because almanacs are revised each year, the information is current.

5. **Atlas**

An **atlas** is a collection of maps. The most common atlas contains maps that show the political and physical features of countries throughout the world. A political map shows government boundaries. A physical map shows the features of the earth's surface such as mountains, deserts, and bodies of water. You may also use a road map to learn how to get from place to place. There are also specialized atlases for such things as weather across the world, oceans of the world, and even the anatomy of the human body.

Wherever you study, be sure you have access to each of these important reference sources.