

## SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDYING

Adapted from the University of Washington Study Skills Program.

The study skills necessary to succeed in college include: academic reading, writing, locating information (including Internet and other research methods), effective note-taking, listening for key concepts, completing assignments according to instructor expectations, recalling information and facts, taking quizzes and tests, using library, technology and media resources, computer literacy, preparing written reports, participating in discussions, making oral reports, performing labs and experiments, and many others. Each person differs in her or his study habits. What is successful for one student may not work for another. However, the suggestions have enabled students to develop more effective study skills.

### I. SELECTING COURSES

- A. Choose a few large credit courses rather than too many small credit courses.
- B. Avoid taking too many lab courses in one semester.
- C. If possible, choose subjects during the quarter that are closely related, in order to work efficiently and benefit from any duplication.
- D. If you get into an elective course that is not what you expected, drop the course as soon as possible.
- E. Thoroughly investigate a so-called “snap” course before enrolling.

### II. CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

- A. Get a seat where you can hear the instructor and read the board.
- B. Be active part in class discussions; volunteer—do not wait to be called on.
- C. Take regularly scheduled tests; make-up exams are usually more difficult.
- D. Present the instructor with a legitimate reason for class absence. Always communicate with your instructor before or immediately after an absence.
- E. In a lab course, try and select a capable student for a lab partner.
- F. If the instructor has not explained something to your complete understanding, be sure to raise a question. Also, be sure you understand the assignment. If something is not clear to you, it may not be clear to others who will appreciate your asking a question that helps them as well.

### III. TAKING USEFUL CLASS NOTES

- A. Use a large loose-leaf notebook that holds 8 ½ x 11” ruled paper.
  - 1. Stiff-backed notebooks are usually better than the zipper style notebook since the latter many times serves as a general catch-all and a weekend bag.
  - 2. Small notebooks will not hold photocopied material very well. The lack of space cramps outlining. Small notebooks can become disorganized and are easily misplaced.
- B. Subdivide your notebook according to courses, and mark the different sections with tabs to eliminate wasted time in finding the place. Consider a color-coding system (folders, notebooks, highlighters) to differentiate between courses.
- C. Lecture notes with a pen are easier to read but harder to correct. If you make corrections often, use a pencil. Keep a sharpened pencil handy.
- D. In taking lecture notes, use the split page technique. Leave the left 1/3 of the page blank for outlining later. Take your notes on the right 2/3 of the page.
- E. Notes taken in logical form following the instructor’s outline are easier to understand when reviewing.
- F. Take down ideas and not the instructor’s words verbatim. Re-state what he or she says in terms that you will later understand.
- G. If you miss information, leave a blank space in your notes so you can fill it in later.
- H. Take down only the significant things said, or you will be so busy writing that you will miss much of the lecture.
- I. The use of abbreviations in taking notes is helpful.
- J. When the instructor emphasizes a point, he or she may later ask it in a test. Underline, highlight, or asterisk such key points.
- K. Knowing the type of test or quiz the instructor is going to give will help you take notes.
- L. Immediately (or as soon as possible) after the class period, re-read your notes and rearrange them as necessary into good outline form. In some courses it may be useful to summarize each day’s notes. Some students find it helpful to transfer notes to flash cards as a means of reviewing the class material and for later use in preparing for quizzes or exams.
- M. File your notes away at the end of each semester. They may prove useful later on.

#### IV. STUDY ENVIRONMENT

- A. Have a particular place to study so that when you sit down to work, the force of habit will get you into a study frame of mind--relax and do your pleasure reading some place else.
- B. Your study environment should be as quiet as possible.
- C. It is best to study alone, avoiding too many distractions.
- D. Your study area should be equipped with supplies like pencils, paper, books, dictionary, etc.
- E. If your study desk is clear of distracting objects, concentration will not be easily disrupted.
- F. It is important to have adequate light.

#### V. STUDY PERIODS

- A. Set aside a definite time to study each subject. Schedule it as you would schedule a class.
- B. When studying, a five-minute rest period every hour helps to eliminate fatigue, tenseness, and eye strain.
- C. Small amounts of coffee, tea, coke, etc., will help you keep awake and alert, but too much will lead to neural fatigue and cause work errors.
- D. If you are physically fatigued, you need to rest; studying at such time is of little value. Either take a nap or get your eight hours of sleep.
- E. The use of Benzedrine, "no-doze," and other drugs to keep awake will prove harmful and counter-productive and are best to avoid.

#### VI. COMPLETING ASSIGNMENTS

- A. Develop an interest in the course. Motivation is the most significant factor necessary for learning. Effective learning is best achieved by the person who is interested, or who makes an effort to develop an interest in the course, and who engages with the material in a meaningful way.
- B. Know what you are supposed to do. Understand the directions—ask questions for clarification. Clarify with the instructor, rather than with another student.
- C. Record assignments on a calendar or other organizing tool (color-coding with highlighters can help with getting information at a glance). Include the date the assignment is due and other pertinent information.
- D. Keep your books, assignments, notebook, etc. in the same place to save time.
- E. Begin working the first day of the course and keep up-to-date.

F. Familiarize yourself with the textbook for each course, noting title, author, author's position, preface, forward, introduction, table of contents, glossary, and index. Study the general outline of the book.

G. Reading a chapter assignment:

1. Read introduction and summary paragraphs first to as to get the general idea of the chapter contents.
2. Glance through the chapter noting the topical headings. Steps 1 and 2 should take about five minutes.
3. Read the chapter thoroughly. In reading the chapter, a useful technique is:
  - a. Ask yourself a question before reading each headed section by turning the heading into a question. This tends to make reading more interesting and meaningful.
  - b. Read to find the answer to this headed section.
  - c. Write a brief summary phrase from memory in your own words of each headed section, which will answer the question.
  - d. After reading the entire chapter by this technique, re-read your notes and then try to recite them, re-reading them as necessary.
4. This technique may be coupled with underlining or highlighting key words, phrases, facts, figures, etc.
5. Research has shown that at least one-half of the time used in studying should be devoted to reciting what you have read by verbally summarizing the chapter, making up sample test questions on the chapter, and answering the questions found at the end of the chapter.
6. It is often helpful to discuss what you have read with some other member of the class.
7. In reading an assignment, it is also a good idea to write notes in the margin of your book, noting significant points or ideas on which you or the instructor may disagree with the author.
8. Think ahead as you read. Try to figure out what the author is trying to get at and the conclusions he or she will likely reach. Critically questioning what you read helps with retention.

H. As you read your assignment, think of concrete examples to support each theory or idea, which also aids retention.

I. It is best not to share your books or notes with someone else. Own your own books, keep your own notes.

J. If you have several preparations to do in one evening, do the hardest ones first.

- K. Plan to complete an assignment in one sitting if possible. Do not start another assignment when only half finished with the first one.
- L. It is a good idea to review assignments and previous day's notes just before class. This will give you a better understanding of what the instructor is going to talk about.
- M. Begin studying immediately; do not wait for the inspiration. If you do not feel like studying at the regular time, go through the motions, and concentration will usually follow. Offer yourself incentives or rewards for your progress.

## VII. STUDY AIDS

- A. When trying to learn something that has little meaning, use mnemonic devices, e.g., 30 days hath September, in 1942 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, etc.
- B. Since most forgetting takes place within 24 hours after original learning, it is an excellent idea to review your class notes right after the lecture and to review reading assignments as soon as possible. Such reviews will increase learning as much as 50 percent!
- C. Study continually during the quarter instead of cramming at the end. Cramming is not consistent with good laws of learning--such learning results in confusion and what is learned is soon forgotten. Reviewing things already learned should not be confused with cramming.
- D. Spaced study is best. Four one-hour study periods will generally produce better results than one four-hour study period. When memorizing and doing highly concentrated work, study periods should be shorter than usual and need to include breaks.
- E. Learning is always easier if you can put meaning into what you are doing.
- F. Use the whole method of learning, e.g., in memorizing poems, plays, speeches, etc., repeat the whole section until the general pattern becomes clear. After this, work on the more difficult parts.
- G. Tie new information to old bodies of knowledge. Historic events take on new meaning and interest when seen in relation to present issues. Physics and chemistry become interesting when you see their applications for everyday life.

## VIII. PREPARING FOR EXAMS

- A. Find out what type of test the instructor is going to give. You should study differently for objective and essay exams.
- B. Find out what material the test will cover, and if possible, how much emphasis will be placed on class notes and outside reading.
- C. Find out if the tests will be announced or otherwise, and how many tests there will be during the quarter.

- D. In studying for an objective examination, study significant facts, dates, statements, and ideas.
- E. In studying for essay examination, study causes, effects, definitions, explanations, illustrations, comparisons, listings, evaluations, and descriptions.
- F. Shortly before the test, meet with a small group of students for a study session, each bringing a number of questions that he/she thinks might be asked on the test. This type of study session is best after each student has thoroughly reviewed the material to be covered in the test.
- G. Some instructors will hand out old examinations as study guides. These exams will give you a fair idea of what to expect.
- H. Study the questions at the end of the chapter assignment. Often these questions serve as a source for test questions.
- I. The night before exam, make a brief review, but it is not a good plan to work late. To be your best for a test, a good night's sleep is essential.

## IX. WRITTEN EXAMS

### A. General Considerations

1. The first thing to do is to read through the test briefly to see how long it will take, and if an essay examination, how much time you can devote to each question.
2. Start answering the questions from the beginning, skipping any you do not know in hopes of finding clues later in the test.
3. Go through the test a second time and answer questions previously omitted that you can now answer due to clues picked up in the test.
4. Go through the test a third time and answer questions on "hunches" and guesses if penalties are not involved.
5. Write neatly and present a well-organized paper, as instructors are usually influenced by the appearance and general structure of the paper.
6. Take all of the test time. Proofread your paper if you finish before time is called.

## B. Objective Examinations

1. Find out if wrongs will be subtracted from or if two points will be subtracted for wrong answers. If you are not to be penalized for guessing, answer every question.
2. In true/false exams there are key words one should watch for. The following words usually indicate true items: sometimes, generally, in general, usually, often, frequently, and in certain cases. The following words usually indicate false items: always, everyone, in all cases, rarely, and never.
3. In a true/false exam, after answering all the questions you can, mark all the remaining ones either true or false and you will most likely get half of them correct. However, do not use this method if you are penalized for guessing.
4. If not penalized for guessing, eliminate multiple-choice items down to two or three and make your best guess.
5. In matching questions, find out if one response can be used more than once. If not, cross off the items used, and guess at blanks with remaining items.

## C. Essay Exams

1. Briefly outline each question before answering.
2. It is best to answer all questions, even if you are uncertain of your information. Formulate the best answer possible, for an honest attempt will usually receive some credit.