

Study Strategies for Success

- 1. Find or create a good place to study.** It is important to work in a space where you can focus and have access to all the materials you need. Everyone's study space preferences are different; here are some questions to keep in mind when choosing your ideal study space:
 - Do you prefer to work in silence, or do you need some kind of background noise in order to focus? If the latter, what kind of background noise is ideal (talking, music, white noise, etc.)?
 - Do you need privacy to study, and if so, where are you best able to find it?
 - Do you need access to technology (computer, phone, etc.) in order to study, or are those things likely to be more distracting than helpful?
 - Where will you be able to get comfortable enough to focus, without getting so comfortable that you get distracted or fall asleep? (It's best not to study on your bed or in other places where you are used to sleeping or engaging in leisure activities.)
 - How much space do you need?
 - How much light do you need?
- 2. Limit study sessions to 1-2 hours (with 10-minute breaks once per hour).** That's the maximum length of time most people can productively focus on one task or topic; beyond that, your ability to process information may be impaired and you may become more prone to distraction. Be sure to take short breaks while you're studying, and longer breaks between subjects or assignments if you're able to do so.
- 3. Do your most important or difficult studying when you are most productive.** Are you a morning person, a night owl, or somewhere in between? Engage in some self-reflection to determine when you are most able to focus and keep that in mind when scheduling your study sessions.
- 4. Resist the temptation to multitask.** Even though multitasking may make you feel more productive, it actually slows you down and reduces the quality of your studying because the human brain is only capable of focusing on one task at a time, and "task switching" has been shown to slow people down and increase the likelihood of making errors.
- 5. Work to improve your time management skills.** To study for long-term retention, you need to budget enough time to cover all the material with sufficient breadth and depth. Schedule times to study subjects multiple times throughout the week. By managing your time, you can increase how much work you accomplish, reduce stress, and have more free time.

6. **Set SMART goals for studying.** The SMART framework can help you narrow down exactly what you are working towards and develop a concise action plan to help you achieve your goals.

One example of a SMART goal is, “**By the end of the day on Wednesday** [time-based], **I plan to study for my upcoming calculus exam** [relevant] **by completing practice problems for chapter 2** [specific, achievable] **until I can solve every type of problem without looking at my notes** [measurable].”



Specific

What, exactly, do you plan to do?



Measurable

How can you evaluate whether or not you were successful?



Achievable

Is this goal realistic, and are the steps to achieve it relatively clear?



Relevant

Is this worthwhile and clearly related to future goals?



Time-based

When will you get this done?

7. **Maximize your study time by engaging in spaced practice.** Long-term retention increases when you study one subject several days a week (and alternate between subjects), rather than cramming. When you study a subject several times throughout the week, you build pathways to your long-term memory, which can make retrieving information easier.
8. **Avoid “cramming” as much as possible.** Cramming can lead to poor long-term retention, which means you often have to re-teach yourself the same information later on. Also, cramming all night before an exam is not as helpful as you feel like it’s going to be; generally, people forget a significant percentage of new information they’ve learned within 24 hours, especially if they’re also sleep-deprived.

Additional resources and further reading:

- [The Learning Center Academic Skills Series: Spaced Practice](#) [video]
- [How to Plot Your Schedule](#)
- [Time Management and Productivity Strategies](#)
- [Spaced Practice: The Learning Scientists](#)
- *Study skills apps:*
 - [Pocket App](#)
 - [Focus@Will](#)
 - [Quizlet](#)

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