



ENHANCED

Learning

IMPROVING STUDY SKILLS

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Questions Answered

- What are study skills?
- What is the advantage to students who have study skills classes?
- What makes a comprehensive study skills class?
- What are some excellent resources for the details of study skills?
- How can I teach a sequence of study skills to students?

Study skills are learning strategies that facilitate the processing of information. Study skills help us organize and process information. They help us remember what we have learned.



Effective study skills encompass a wide range of behaviors that students can perform before, during, and after learning to help them retain and apply information

presented in the classroom. It is important for educators to promote and monitor the development of these skills, because study skills are most effective when students use them to come up with their own ways of organizing their studying.

There are three major categories of study skills:

- **Preparing to learn** Personal discipline, self-management, organizational skills, positive attitude toward studying, and the ability to self-monitor are study skills that help students with preparing to learn.
- **Processing and retaining what has been learned** Note-taking, outlining, listening, learning information from a text, and obtaining information from library resources are study skills that help students with the how-to of acquiring knowledge.
- **Demonstrating and applying what has been learned** Remembering or retrieving information from memory, test-taking skills, and demonstrating understanding orally or through writing are study skills that help students with applying knowledge.

Many students need to improve their study skills. They don't need another study hall or an after school study club. They need specific instruction on how to take notes and manage their time. Students who can improve their

study skills will obtain benefits in all of their subject areas. It takes them less time to read long and difficult passages. They are better able to manage their time, strengthen their memory, and study for tests.

ADVANTAGES OF BETTER STUDY SKILLS

In 2009, Ohio State University published results from a long-term study on the effectiveness of study skills. They found that students who had struggled in high school, were forty-five percent more likely to graduate from college if they took a study skills class as a freshman. Students who had been considered "average" in high school, were six hundred percent more likely to graduate from college after taking a study skills class! (Ohio State University, 2009)



The same authors also showed that, compared to a matched group, students who took the training course earned significantly higher grade point averages, both during the term they took the course (with and without

the course grade included) and during the term after taking the course. In addition, they were more likely to return for their next year of college. (Tuckman, 2003)

While researchers agree that study skills are necessary for success in school, teachers, under pressure to meet curriculum standards and requirements, tend to focus on content, rather than on teaching students skills to help them learn that content. Teachers may assume parents are teaching their children study skills, while parents may assume that study skills are taught as part of classroom instruction. As a result, many students fail to develop effective learning strategies.

HOW TO SET UP A STUDY SKILLS CLASS

In this paper we'll look at what could go into an effective study skills class. The best form for this type of class is to offer it as a regular class for upper intermediate grades through all high school grades.. In some schools it may be offered to all students as a part of the regular curriculum. In other situations it is offered as an elective, often as an English credit.

The best model for a study skills class is to keep the class size small—six to eight students. The content of the class should include the kinds of topics listed below.

Possible Content of a Study Skills Class

Getting Ready

- Using organizational tools, daily planner
- Establishing a good study environment
- Setting goals
- Maintaining motivation

Taking In Information:

- Mastering time management
- Avoiding procrastination
- Listening
- Note taking
- Textbook reading

- Using the SQ4R method: survey, question, read, write, recite, and review
- Becoming familiar with library research
- Improving concentration
- Understanding stress management

Processing and Recalling Information

- Knowing your learning style (visual, auditory and hands-on approaches to learning)
- Employing memory tools (mind mapping, matrices, acrostics, acronyms, narrative, rhymes, and imagery)

Output

- Preparing for tests
- Taking tests
- Critical thinking and writing
- Conducting research and report writing
- Employing methods of organization and time management
- Using technology

The teacher systematically goes through the content, providing direct, systematic instruction. Instruction should start with the most basic element of a skill and progress to more advanced elements. This class is not a study hall. Rather, it is a content class with detailed instruction on the most important skills the student will ever acquire.

Another component of the class is the coordination of class content with progress

RESOURCES FOR STUDY SKILLS

The following web sites contain excellent and detailed information on specific study skills.

www.ucc.vt.edu/stdyhlp.html

www.how-to-study.com

www.educationatlas.com/study-skills.html

www.studygs.net

Here are some books that cover study skills:

Study Skills for High School Students, Carol Carter and Dylan Lewis, (Lifebound, 2006)

reports from individual teachers. The study skills teacher periodically checks with all of the teachers for each of the six to eight students in the class, and asks about their performance and progress. If the progress report for a particular student indicates he is not doing well on tests, the study skills teacher works on additional test taking methods with that student. If the social studies teacher reports another student doesn't appear to have started on the South America report, the study skills teacher takes that information and helps the student apply the research and report writing methods to the social studies report.

The combination of systematic, direct instruction and ongoing monitoring of the students' application of the skills can make this class a tremendous help to many students.

Of course, this same content can be incorporated into an existing subject matter class and taught as individual modules or units. In some schools, it is given a special name such as Advantage Plus, and extra tuition is charged to cover staff costs. The class can be open to all students or offered only to those with academic deficiencies. There are many ways to provide this type of class, and I would highly recommend you consider it for your school.

Various resources for helping you research and implement a study skills class are presented below. You might find them very useful.

Keys to Effective Learning: Study Skills and Habits for Success (6th Edition), Carol J Carter, Joyce Bishop, and Sarah Lyman Kravits, (Prentice Hall; 2010)

Devine, T. G. (1987). *Teaching Study Skills: A Guide for Teachers* (2nd ed.). Needham, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

The Elementary and Middle Schools Technical Assistance Center, (EMSTAC), *Study skills Main Page*, Washington, DC.

Retrieved on 9/9/12 from www.emstac.org/registered/topics/studyskills/studyskills.htm

Study Is Hard Work: The Most Accessible and Lucid Text Available on Acquiring and Keeping Study Skills Through a Lifetime, 2nd edition, by William H. Armstrong, (David R. Godine, 2010)

Becoming a Master Student (14th edition) By Dave Ellis and R.W. Phipps, (Houghton Mifflin, 2012) This is a college level resource but has been used in many junior high and high schools.

Study Skills: Research-Based Teaching Strategies & Study Skills Organizers: Ready-to-Use Materials for the Classroom, Patricia W. Newhall and Leigh Joseph (Landmark School, Inc, 2001) available from www.landmarkoutreach.org/publications/teaching-guides-resources/study-skills-book-set

STUDY SKILLS RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are instructions for the middle school or high school student. As a teacher, you could hand out this series of suggestions to your students. You can also teach directly from this outline.

Study Skills

The majority of school success is due to motivation and time management. Anyone who tells you that they can get through school without studying, or that they make great grades without studying is pulling your leg. Success in school takes effort.

This means that, if you want to do well, you must be willing to set aside time to study. You may have to sacrifice at times. However, effective time management will allow adequate time for school, as well as for a social life or for free time to do the activities that you most enjoy.

In the following sections are some ideas and tools that will help you manage your time more wisely. These tools will work; you just need to apply them to your study habits.

Motivation

Motivation is the key to success in school. Although parents and instructors can provide students with some helpful hints to enhance motivation, they cannot motivate students. You are responsible for your study habits, for seeking resources and assistance, and for managing your time. You have to want to do well enough to put forth the effort.

Five major problems for students who study are:

- Not studying enough

- Wasting time when studying Have you ever read 2 or 3 pages of material only to discover that you cannot remember any of the material that you have just read?
- Having trouble getting ready to study "I better call a friend, sharpen my pencil, do some chores, etc."
- Finding a good place for studying.
- Using a good learning strategy



The following suggestions will help you avoid these problems:

1. **Set up a schedule.** Allocate more time for the most difficult classes. Make sure that you allot time for recreation and social activities -- you need to reward yourself for your hard work! And follow your schedule.
2. **Start studying for ten or fifteen minutes at a time and then build up to longer periods of time.** Most study skills programs suggest reading for ten to fifteen

minute increments your freshman year, twenty minutes your sophomore year, twenty-five minutes your junior year, and thirty minutes your senior year. So, work towards reading for longer periods of time. Just remember to be realistic. If you can no longer concentrate or remember what you have read, stop. There's no sense in wasting your valuable time.

3. **Take breaks.** Take breaks when studying. The average attention span for one task is approximately twenty minutes. Do not attempt to cram! Study small portions of material, take a break, and then study some more. We retain a great deal more if we learn in small manageable portions, rather than attempt to learn a great deal of information at once. Make these breaks mandatory. Even if you are enjoying your reading or studying, take some breaks. You do not want to get burned out.
4. **Reward yourself.** Reward yourself for studying, learning a difficult concept, or completing a project. Go to a movie, spend time with your friends, or do the things you put off in order to study. This reinforces your behavior. You are more likely to study again, and concentrate, if you know there is a reward at the end of completing a task.
5. **Find a good location to study.** Where you study can influence your concentration and your study habits. Make sure you are comfortable, but not too comfortable. Sitting at a desk is preferable to lying in bed.
6. **Use the same place for studying.** This will help you associate that particular location with studying and will facilitate concentration.
7. **Make sure it is a quiet place.** Seeking a quiet, well-lit study area is equally important. A radio playing in the background, a CD blaring next door, and

the sounds of an interesting conversation are but a few of the factors that can disturb a study area.

8. **Eliminate the obvious distractions.** Some of the more common distractions are telephone or texting calls, or friends and family stopping by to chat. Put away the newspapers, magazines, and unfinished projects. Even the sight of a textbook from another class can serve as a reminder of how far behind you are in another class, causing you to waste time worrying. Once you become aware of these simple distractions, you can eliminate them and improve your study skills.
9. **Remember that memory is context dependent.** Studying in a physical situation similar to the one in which you will be tested increases your chances to recall information. This is another reason why studying in bed does not work! Make your studying situation as similar as possible to the testing situation. When possible, go review your materials in the classroom.
10. **Memory is also state dependent.** Studying in an emotional mood similar to the one you experience during tests increases your chances to recall studied information. When studying, keep the same focus and enhanced attention you have in your tests. Being too relaxed during your study time would not match the level of activation you reach during your tests. You need to increase your concentration and activation levels while studying to increase your chances to recall the studied material when tested. The reverse is applicable to tests. If you get too psyched-up or tensed-up during your tests, you will not be able to recall your material, because the state of your test mood will not match that of your studying mood. This is the reason why it is so important to calm down in a testing situation. The Relaxation Screen (of the

Counseling Center Help Screens) provides a relaxation technique.

11. **Increase your reading effectiveness.** The following is an effective method for reading text material.

SQ4R Method

SURVEY: Briefly survey the chapter. Read the author's headings. Your aim here is not to go into detail, but to develop a general idea of the structure. This will prepare you for what you are going to read, and to grasp a general understanding of the chapter. Read any summary. This will remind you of what is important throughout the chapter. This step helps you to get acquainted with the chapter.

QUESTION: Think about the material as you are reading. Ask yourself questions about it. These questions will serve to keep you more involved with what you are reading. This will keep you focused on the more important material, without becoming overwhelmed by details. Try formulating questions as if you were the professor making up the test. This accomplishes two tasks: it facilitates concentration and it helps you prepare for the test.

READ: Read carefully and try to answer questions you have asked yourself. Remember, you read a text differently than you read a novel. A novel is read passively. Textbook reading requires more active involvement for concentration and retention. This increases your understanding of the material. If you become tired or distracted, stop reading. Remember, your job here is not to cover a number of pages, but to dig in. During this step, avoid reading aloud to yourself. Instead, read silently, as this is much faster.

WRITE: After you have answered a question, write the answer down. Sum up information in your own words. Restructure the information so that it makes the most sense to you.

RECITE: Recite to yourself what you have read. Recall main headings and ideas. Be sure to put ideas in your own words, as this will improve your ability to retain the material. Answer questions aloud and listen to your responses to see if they are complete and correct. If they are not correct, re-read the material and answer the question again. This form of rehearsal increases the likelihood that you will retain the material.

REVIEW: Reviewing is the key to figuring out what you know and what you need to concentrate on. The best times to review are right after reading, while the material is still fresh on your mind, and again before the test. Try to summarize major points in the chapter. And answer questions you posed to yourself while reading.

12. **Improve your memory.** Some students find that using particular memorization tactics can improve their memory. Here are a few of the popular memorization strategies.

- **Acrostics** Acrostics are phrases or poems in which the first letter of each word or line functions as a cue to help you recall the words that you are trying to remember. One popular example is the sentence "Every good boy does fine." This acrostic is used to remember the order of musical notes on a musical scale.
- **Acronyms** Acronyms are words formed out of the first letters of a series of words you are trying to remember. A popular acronym is "Roy G. Biv" which is used to remember the order of colors of the spectrum

(red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet).

- **Narrative** Some people find making up a story with the lists of words throughout a narrative aids retention.
- **Rhymes** Remember the phrase "i before e except after c"? You probably remember this well because it is a rhyme. Rhyming can enhance retention as well.
- **Imagery** There are two methods of imagery, which enhance retention of material. One involves *linking* items together visually in your mind. For example, if you have a list of groceries such as cereal, milk, toilet paper and tangerines, you might try visualizing a dairy cow eating cereal under a tangerine tree wrapped in toilet paper. Believe it or not the more bizarre the image, the more likely you are to remember it.

The second method is called the *method of loci*. This involves taking an imaginary walk in your mind through a familiar path, along which you associate items you are trying to remember. For example, you may take the same grocery list and place the items, visually in your imagination,--throughout your room. The tangerine may be the doorknob as you open the room, the cereal appears on the TV, the milk is hangs from the ceiling fan and a large roll of toilet paper sits on the chair at your desk.

13. **Be aware of the *interference phenomenon*.** When memorizing, also keep in mind that interference can occur. In fact, learning new material can interfere or cause you to forget old material. Try to memorize material for each class on a different day. This is also why it helps to review the night before, or a few hours before, the test. You have less chance of other information interfering with the acquisition of the test material.

14. **Go to class.** Attendance is crucial. Studies have found a positive correlation between class attendance and grades. In fact, the higher the attendance rate, the higher your grades are likely to be. Most instructors believe that their lecture material is important. If you miss class, you miss what is important to the professor; hence, what is most likely to end up on the test.

15. **Participate in class.** In order to learn more in class, it helps to become involved by participating in class discussions. Asking questions for clarification and maintaining eye contact with your instructor can increase your involvement and enhance concentration on the class discussion. Use active listening skills. This means hearing what your teacher is saying and trying to anticipate what he or she is going to say next. One other hint: if your course material is difficult, be sure to read the material *prior* to class. This may help you understand and follow more closely.

16. **If you need to miss a class.** If you have to miss class, let your teacher know. It is very helpful to have a reliable classmate from whom you can get the notes. Exchange phone numbers so that you can rely on each other for notes in case of an emergency.

17. **Take good notes.** Proper note taking skills can facilitate understanding of lecture material. Don't be a human tape recorder! Try not to write everything down. Be concise and sum up lecture material in your own words, whenever possible. Write down unfamiliar terms. Review your notes as soon after class as possible. You can fill in details that you missed and review the material while it is still fresh on your mind.

18. **Use your textbook.** Some teachers follow the book closely. In this case, it may be helpful to take the book to class and

highlight important topics or terms and write notes in the margins.

19. **Talk to your instructor.** If you are struggling in your class, talk to your teacher. He or she may be able to assist you or send you in the right direction to get the resources you need. However, do not wait until the last few days. Most instructors have little sympathy for students who become concerned about failing during the last few weeks of the quarter.

20. **Form or join a study group.** Get study groups together. Choose those students who seem interested in the class. Make sure everyone is familiar with the material before meeting, as you do not want to spend time re-teaching material to someone who has not learned the material.

It helps if these study groups serve to review material already learned or to clarify problem areas. Make sure everyone is motivated. Beware! Sometimes groups can become chatting sessions. Just make sure you all remember your purpose: to learn class material. After the test, reward yourselves with pizza and conversation.

21. **Start at the beginning.** Start studying from the first day. Be ahead in the reading material.

22. **Keep up in an organized fashion.** Some classes require more work or effort than others do. For example, math and foreign language are subjects which require daily work. These classes require knowledge of basic material which then builds on previous knowledge. If you don't keep up, you'll be lost.

SUMMARY

Effective study is an active process. It does not mean passively reading some material. It does not mean endless hours spent in a frustrated search for understanding. Rather, effective study involves actively digging in and mastering course material. Studying involves steady progress. It requires efficient use of

your study time and perhaps an actual reduction in time spent studying. Effective studying can produce a sense of competence, pleasure and mastery. ■

Resources

Devine, T.G., (1987) *Teaching Study Skills. A Guide for Teachers*, Second Edition, Allyn and Bacon: Newton, MA.

Dingfelder, S.F. (2004). *Learning How to Learn: A Psychologist's Course Combats Failure in College, and Now in High School*, Monitor, Vol 35, No. 4, 32.

Ohio State University (2009). One Class Increases Odds of College Graduation for Struggling Students. ScienceDaily. April 16, Retrieved September 8, 2012, from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090416064502.htm

Tuckman, B.C. (2003) *The Strategies-For-Achievement Approach for Teaching Study Skills*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, 2003 as part of a symposium entitled: Applying Psychological Principles to Teaching Self-Regulation and Learning Strategies.