

Step Seven Study Smart

Students who “study smart” find that they spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

Find a Good Place to Study. Although it’s usually best to have one place where you study regularly, it doesn’t matter where you study, as long as it has a surface for writing, it’s well lit, and it’s comfortable. In addition to paper, pens and pencils, your study area should be equipped with a calculator, dictionary, and thesaurus.

Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others can work with music or the TV on. If you like to listen to music when you study, try playing classical music softly in the background. (Bach and Vivaldi are both good choices.) Research has shown that classical music can actually improve your concentration.

“I like to listen to music while I’m doing busywork-type homework, but not when I’m studying.” Maria

“The library is a really good place for me to study. It’s quiet, and I don’t have any of the distractions that I have at home.” Greg

Get Started. Getting started on your studying is often the hardest part. Don’t put it off until later, don’t make excuses, and don’t wait until you’re “in the mood.” If you have a hard time getting started, begin with something simple, or a subject that you like.

Know Your Learning Style. We all learn differently. Some learn best by seeing the material (visual learners) and some learn best by hearing the information (auditory learners). Some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners) and some learn best through the use of technology. Think about how you learn, and adjust how you study accordingly.

Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, reading, and demonstrations. If you’re a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts and diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and use color in your notes.

Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, films, and music. If you’re an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme.

If you're a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Move around while you study, use objects whenever possible, and role play ideas and concepts.

If you're a technological learner, use computers, the Internet, and high-tech equipment to keep you interested, motivated, and focused.

"I must be a visual learner because I have to see what I'm trying to learn." John

As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the wider variety of methods you use while studying, the more you remember. William Glasser, an expert in the field of education, has stated that,

"Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else."

Organize Your Study Time.

- Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done, and the order in which you are going to do it.
1) Study vocabulary 2) Do math 3) Read history pages 25 - 40
- Prioritize your work to make sure you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- Always allow more time than you think you'll need.
- If you have something to memorize, work on that first, and then go over it again at the end of your study session.
- Do difficult assignments first, while you're still fresh and alert.
- Alternate types of homework (read English, do math, read history).
- Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. After studying for 20 minutes, try taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, etc.).

"When I study, I take short breaks between subjects." Brad

Know How to Study for Tests.

- Know what the test is going to cover so that you'll know what to study. For essay tests, it's important to understand the big picture and to know main points and key facts. For fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tests, you need to know more detailed information.
- When reviewing a topic, ask yourself, Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How (5Ws + H).
- Pay particularly close attention in class the day before a test. This is when teachers often go over information that you need to know.
- Have all of your reading done ahead of time.
"I try to get all of the reading done a couple of days before the test. Then I just need to skim and review." Greg
- If your textbook has review questions, know the answers to all of these questions. Also, go through your textbook and make sure that you know the meanings of all the words in **bold** and *italic* print.
- If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use the review sheet to come up with questions that you think might be on the test.
- You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of a mirror.
- Review often and review out loud. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. *Review is the key to learning anything!*
- Write down any names, dates, formulas, and/or facts that you need to remember on an index card. Take this card with you the day of the test, and go over it as often as you can before you take the test.

Use Tricks to Help You Memorize Information.

- Use flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.
"If you have a lot to memorize, spread it out over a period of time, and just keep going over and over it." Brad
- Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Do this until you know it.

- Right before you go to sleep, go over any information that you want to remember. Your brain will commit it to memory while you sleep.
- Use acronyms to help you memorize. For example, the acronym HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- Use the first letter of the words you want to remember to make up a silly, ridiculous sentence. For example, if you need to remember the names of the planets for a test, just make up a silly sentence like, “My very elegant mother juggled seven ugly neckties.” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune). As soon as you get your test, say this sentence to yourself, and at the top of your test, write MVEMJSUN (the first letter of each of the planets). When you need to write in the names of the planets on the test, you’ll have your memory cue ready.

This technique can be used in many ways. For example, if you need to remember the five main causes of the Great Depression, take five key words, and then use the first letter of each of these words to make up a silly sentence.

- Look for an easy or logical connection. For example, to remember that Homer wrote the Odyssey, just think, “Homer is an *odd* name.”
- Information is easier to remember if it’s grouped or categorized. Use lists and diagrams to group related terms, facts, and ideas.
- Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help trigger your memory. For example, a ridiculous image could help you remember that Hawthorne wrote The Scarlet Letter. Just visualize a large red letter “A” with a big thorn sticking in it saying “Ha!” It can be fun coming up with your own ridiculous images, and, they work.

Know How to Write a Paper. The key to writing a good paper is to spread it out over as much time as possible. Writing a paper should be a process, not a one-time event.

Go through the following ten steps when you have a paper to write. 1) Choose a topic. 2) Gather information. 3) Make an outline. 4) Write a rough draft. 5) Read your paper out loud. 6) Think of ways to improve your paper, and then rewrite it. 7) Have someone else read it. 8) Write the final draft. 9) Check for spelling and grammatical errors. 10) Make sure that your paper looks neat and clean, and turn it in on time.

It's very important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take your paper out and read it again, you'll see and hear things that you didn't notice before.

Remember to always identify another person's words or ideas by using quotation marks or footnotes. If you present another person's words or ideas as your own, it's plagiarism.

Use Tricks when Making a Presentation or Speech.

- Use props whenever possible. Props (posters, books, sports equipment, etc.) give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of your props.
- To help add enthusiasm and energy to your voice, pretend that you are telling your best friend something really important.
- Effective speakers make eye contact with those in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.

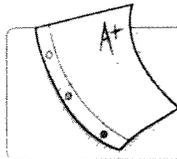
Have Good Computer Skills. If you don't know how to type or how to use a computer for word processing, see your counselor, and sign up for a keyboarding or computer class as soon as possible.



REVIEW

Step Seven Study Smart

- Find a good place to study.
- Get started.
- Know your learning style.
- Organize your study time.
- Know how to study for tests.
- Use tricks to help you memorize information.
- Know how to write a paper.
- Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.
- Have good computer skills.



Step Eight Use Test-Taking Strategies

In order to do well on any test, you must study hard and be prepared. Having done that, you can further improve your test performance by using these test-taking strategies.

Get Off to a Good Start. Have everything you need for the test with you when you go to class (pencil, erasable pen, calculator, etc.). If you have a couple of minutes before the test starts, try to relax.

As soon as you get your test, write anything that you want to remember (facts, dates, equations, formulas, etc.) at the top of your test. Put your name on the test, and read the directions carefully.

Develop a Plan. Before you begin answering questions, quickly look over the entire test and develop a plan. For example, if a one-hour test has 25 multiple-choice questions and 2 essay questions, you could plan to spend 10 minutes on the multiple-choice questions, 20 minutes on each essay question, and 10 minutes checking over your answers.

Mark the Questions that You Want to Return To. As you go through the test, put a dot or light check mark by any answer that you aren't sure of. After you've gone through all of the questions, go back to the ones that you've marked, and try them again.

Don't spend a lot of time on difficult questions, and don't panic if you don't know the answers to the first few questions. Sometimes it takes a few minutes for your brain to get in gear.

"If you're not sure of an answer, always go with your first instinct." Greg

Increase Your Odds on Multiple-Choice Questions.

- As you're reading a multiple-choice question, try to come up with the answer in your head before you look at the answer choices.
- If you're not sure of an answer, eliminate the choices you know are incorrect by crossing them out. Then make an educated guess.
- If two of the choices are similar or opposite, one of them is probably the correct answer.

- Read all of the answer choices. At least a couple of the answers will probably sound like they could be correct. Don't be tempted to mark the first answer that sounds good.

"Use the test to help you take the test. Sometimes questions give you information that can help you answer other questions." John

Look for Key Words in True/False Questions. Statements with *always, never, every, all, and none* in them are usually false. Statements with *usually, often, sometimes, most, and many* in them are usually true. Read True/False questions very carefully. One word will often determine whether a statement is True or False.

Know How to Approach Essay Questions.

- Read each question and then start with the easiest one. This will give you confidence, and it'll give you time to think about how to answer the harder questions. Note how many points each essay is worth, and adjust the time you spend on each question accordingly.
- Before you do any writing, brainstorm. Jot down the key words, ideas, and points that you want to cover in your answer. If you have time, organize your ideas into a simple outline; if not, just number your ideas in the order you want to present them.
- Begin writing. Use clear, concise, complete sentences, and write legibly. (Studies have shown that when two identical essays are graded, the one that's easier to read gets the higher grade.) In your opening paragraph, restate the question, and tell the reader what he/she can expect to learn from your essay. In your middle paragraphs, present examples, details, evidence, and facts to support the points you're making. In your final paragraph, restate the most important points, draw conclusions, and write a brief summary. Finally, reread your entire essay and make corrections.
- If you don't know the answer to an essay question, take a couple of minutes to write down what you do know about the subject. You may hit on something and get partial credit. If you don't have time to complete an essay, write your teacher a note explaining that you ran out of time. Then briefly list the points you would have covered. Again, you might get partial credit.

Improve Your Math Test Scores. 1) Before you start to solve a problem, try to estimate what the answer will be. 2) If you're having difficulty with a problem, try drawing a picture or a diagram. 3) Don't spend too much time on one problem. If you get stumped, go on, and come back to it later. 4) Show all of your work. Even if you get the wrong answer, if you were on the right track, you may get partial credit.

Be Prepared for Open Book Tests. Use the following tips to help you locate information quickly during an open book test. 1) Highlight your notes. 2) Put self-stick notes or bookmarks in your textbook to help you locate important information. 3) Write down all of the information that you know you'll need on a separate sheet of paper.

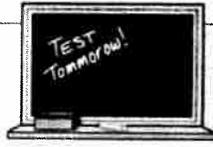
Check Your Answers. If you have time, check all of your answers, even the ones you know are correct. You may have made a careless mistake. *Always use all of the time that you're given.*

Go Over All Returned Tests. Once your test is returned, go over each question you missed and write in the correct answer. You may see one or more of these questions again. Also check to make sure that your test was graded correctly. (Teachers sometimes make mistakes.) Keep a record of your test scores, and keep returned tests in your folders.

REVIEW

Step Eight Use Test - Taking Strategies

- Get off to a good start.
- Develop a plan.
- Mark the questions that you want to return to.
- Increase your odds on multiple-choice questions.
- Look for key words in True/False questions.
- Know how to approach essay questions.
- Improve your math test scores.
- Be prepared for open book tests.
- Check your answers.
- Go over all returned tests.



Step Nine Reduce Test Anxiety

A little anxiety before a test improves your concentration and alertness. Excessive worry, or test anxiety, can lower your test score.

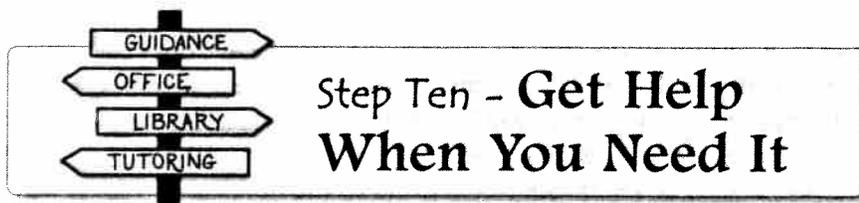
It's possible for students with test anxiety to get themselves so worked up that they can't think clearly. The brain is like a computer in that it contains a great deal of information. This information is useless, however, if you're not able to "access" it when you need it. Having test anxiety is like not having the password for your computer. The information is there, but you can't get to it.

To reduce test anxiety, study enough to feel confident that you know the material. Then try to replace the worry and negative thinking with thoughts that are positive and relaxing. Some of the following suggestions may help you:

- Start studying early. Cramming increases test anxiety.
- Mentally practice going through the testing experience. Close your eyes and see yourself calmly and confidently walking into the test. See yourself answering the questions correctly, and then see yourself receiving the grade you want. Go through this mental imagery exercise several times before the day of the test.
- The night before a test, review the material, and then get a good night's sleep.
- Walk into the test with your head up and your shoulders back. How you act can definitely affect how you feel. If you act confident, you just may find that you feel more confident.
- Try these five common relaxation techniques:
 - 1) Take a deep breath. Then slowly release the breath, along with any tension. Do this until you feel your body relax.
 - 2) Start at the top of your head, flexing, and then relaxing each part of your body.
 - 3) Close your eyes and let your arms hang down at your sides. As you relax, visualize the tension from your head, neck, and shoulders flowing down your arms and out through your fingertips.

- 4) Close your eyes and visualize warm sunshine washing over you, melting away the tension, and relaxing all of your muscles.
- 5) Think of a place where you feel very relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and visualize being in that place.

The more you practice positive thinking and relaxation techniques, the better you'll get at using them. If you continue to have problems with test anxiety, talk to your guidance counselor.



When you have a problem, do something to resolve it.

At some point, you're going to have a question or a problem concerning a class, school rule, teacher, or fellow student. Most questions can be answered, and most problems resolved, just by talking to the right person (e.g., secretary, principal, librarian, teacher, counselor).

If you need academic help, or if you have a class-related problem, talk to your teacher. If you feel like a class is too difficult for you, or if you're having a problem with a teacher, see your counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or harassed by another student, tell a counselor, teacher, or principal immediately. If you ever have a problem and you don't know where to go for help, talk to your counselor.

Every student has his/her share of normal teenage problems. Some students, however, have problems that are so overwhelming that they can't pay attention in class or concentrate on their schoolwork. Even though they may put up a good front, these students need to get help.

If you are dealing with any of the following, please talk to a parent or counselor immediately: alcohol, drugs, a pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, a health concern, problems at home, depression. Thousands of students across the country are struggling with these same problems. The smart ones get help.

*"If we did all the things we are capable of doing,
we would literally astonish ourselves." Thomas Edison*