**SOME BASIC STUDY METHODS**

**Outline of Basic Study Methods**

1. Set your goals to learn and understand.

2. Change goals at different phases of studying.

3. Plan to read, study, and memorize.

4. Pay attention to your work.

5. Review 3 to 5 minutes when you start.

6. Preview the material.

7. Use the "spaced study" method. Review after.

8. Mark your book.

9. Test yourself often.

**1. Set your goals to learn and understand.** People usually learn much more while reading and studying when they set specific goals to learn. What we **want** affects what we **do** while studying. And what we **do** creates what we **get** for results.

Don't set other goals than understanding and learning because what you want is what your mind will try to get for you. Many students really do want other things out of studying. When they are in a hurry, their real goal is to finish fast. When they dislike a subject, their real goal is to avoid the work. Working for these goals lowers learning.

Also don't focus on such goals as these: Working fast, being perfect with no mistakes, and looking smart to other people. Instead, accept mistakes as natural. When you make one, correct it in peace. And accept the length of time that learning takes.

People who judge themselves are secretly setting other goals than true learning--namely, goals to be perfect and to punish themselves. They learn less.

**2. Change goals** for your reading at different phases of studying. When you are going to read a chapter for the first time, (1) think about your teacher's instructional goals for you and (2) think about wanting to understand the reading. Ask yourself questions that are appropriate. Get yourself in the mood so that you can search for an­swers. Reading feels different--more alert--when you are searching for something.

When you read a chapter for the second or third time, you will switch to the goals of trying to see relationships and memorizing information.

**3. Plan to read, study, and memorize.** You should plan to read once to reach the goal of understanding and to read later in order to study parts of the material in order to see relationships, memorize, and clear up confusions.

People who read their books only once and who don't study them usually have trouble. They forget the details, definitions, lists, and complex facts. They also forget material that has several parts, and they mix up similar ideas. Granted: Sometimes, if you read a chapter once shortly before an exam, you can learn enough. You might pass a multiple-choice test that only requires that you **recognize** the right answers. But reading once, without studying, does not usually teach you enough to handle a test which requires you to **recall and produce** complex details. Nor can you remember ideas long after.

When you see important information, you should memorize it intentionally and should test yourself to make sure you have got it. You can choose from several memory methods. Some are described in other Study Tips.

**4. Pay attention to your work**. When you work, concentrate on it, because your mind feeds on the information you pay attention to. You learn less when aren't paying attention.

There are always natural times when your attention wanders away and you think of something else. Here is what to do: Just quietly call your attention back and concentrate again on your work. After your mind has wandered, return to a place one or two sentences **before** where you were. The purpose is to refresh your memory for the information you need.

Do not waste time criticizing yourself because when you pay attention to your criticism, it causes your mind to wander again. Just quietly return to your work. People who pay attention increase their learning because they spend more total thinking time on their subject.

**5. Review before you study.** Start thinking about the subject before you study new material. A review warms up your mind and increases your speed of learning. When you begin a study session, spend three to five minutes leafing through past reading, class notes, and homework problems. Read slowly enough to see topics and key sentences. Don't read everything.

Your goal in reviewing is to remind yourself of what you were thinking when you studied last. When you successfully remind yourself and arouse memories, your brain will be ready to link the new information you take in today with the past learning. And those links create memory!

**6. Preview the material.** Try to find out a lot about today's material before you read it closely. Search in the table of contents, index, preface, summaries, headings, and key paragraphs.

Your goal is to see the overall picture so that you can fit the new ideas into it. You want to know the general story. You want to see the overall patterns before you study individual facts. Knowing the big picture increases your memory. It's dangerous to omit a preview. People who read word-for-word from the first page see the details as separate and unconnected items. They find it hard to integrate them.

**7. Use the "spaced study" method. Review newly learned information later**. Study a subject frequently in short sessions of 30 to 60 minutes. Short sessions cause efficient learning. Study the same topic again later in the day or in the next day or two. Don't let long gaps of more than 2 or 3 days separate your study sessions.

Study or review the **same material** again in the later sessions. This is important! Reading the same chapters two or three times will improve both your memory and your understanding. Contact with the same material twice or more.

Avoid studying for long sessions that are separated several days in time, because you will forget a lot and need to review too much when you study again. You will actually need to study a longer total time to learn the same amount of material.

**8. Mark your book on the first reading.** Mark your book in places where you want to return and study material. Mark during your first reading, while you read for understanding.

Your purpose for marking is to make it easy for you to find what's important when you study later. By looking for marks, you won't have to reread a lot to find what you want to memorize.

You can underline, if you wish, but you don't need to. It is enough to simply make checks in the margin. If you must study a book that's not yours to mark up, then write down notes and page numbers.

**9. Test yourself to check your learning.**

After you have studied to reach the goals of understanding and memory, you will need to know if you reached your goals. Find out by testing yourself. Students who do not check how much they have learned end up studying too little or even too much.

**Testing for understanding:**  Try to translate what you have read into your own words, your own mental images, and your own specific examples. Apply your learning to a new topic. If you can do this, you probably understand.

**Testing for long-term memo­ry:** Pick out important material and jot down some likely questions. Let some time pass. Let the ideas get a little cold in your memory. It's best to wait overnight, but even waiting 5 minutes is better than nothing. Then refer to your questions and try to recall the material. The delay is important to stop you from recalling ideas just from short-term memory. If you can recall "cold information", you have real memory.

**Don't use freshness and recognition as signals you have learned an idea. They can fool you.**

**(1)** As you read and study you will find that ideas stay **fresh and clear** in your mind for a few seconds or a few min­utes. You will seem to know them and remember them. But don't mistake that fresh memory for a signal that you've learned them forever. The ideas are still only in short-term memory. They can fade. You still must study.

**(2)** When you read a book and see words and ideas you've seen before, your mind will give you a **feeling of recognition.** Don't use that familiarity feeling as a signal of understanding. Familiarity is not understanding. It is only a shallow signal that our brains send us to let us know that we have seen or heard some of those ideas before. You should make deeper tests for understanding by trying to translate the ideas.