

Effective Studying:
Creating Good Habits

Wilfrid Laurier University
Study Skills & Supplemental Instruction Centre

Welcome to effective studying: creating good habits. In the following workshop, we will briefly discuss how to establish a study pattern that is effective, while reviewing several techniques to assist you in achieving your study goals. Let's begin

The Study Loop

- ◇ Set a goal.
- ◇ Do the actions needed to achieve the goal.
- ◇ Recite.
- ◇ Reflect.
- ◇ Break!

We often think of studying in a very detached manner— simply as this thing that we, as students, do- or should be doing. By thinking of studying as a process with steps that can be monitored you will find it is much easier to keep yourself on task and on track. Try these steps for creating a successful study session: set a goal for yourself; Do it; recite and reflect (these concepts will be explained in further detail in a few minutes), and finally, take a break before getting started again.

Setting Yourself up for Success

- ✧ Try finding a suitable study spot, like the library.
- ✧ Ensure you have all the necessary tools (paper, pencils, texts, calculator).
- ✧ Turn off the phone, the TV, and your internet connection.
- ✧ Set up a time limit for each of your sessions, planning breaks in-between.

Before you get started on this process, you need to ensure that you have a suitable working environment. If you are in a location that will offer too many distractions for you to get any work done, you need to move.

A good study space will already have minimal distractions, so if you are able to, consider the library on campus (or your public library if you're living a distance from campus).

If you'll be working from home, make sure that you have a space that will still offer the same effect—

minimal distractions. It's not a good idea to work in a spot that is typically associated with comfort, so try a desk, or the kitchen table as oppose to the couch.

Make sure that you have everything you need before you begin, so you don't have the excuse of getting up to get that text book that you forgot in the car.

You can also do a great deal by getting rid of the potential for interruption—don't take phone calls during your study session—turn off your cellphone. Keep the tv switched off, and avoid the temptation of online messaging.

Make sure to set a reasonable time limit for each study session—schedule in breaks so that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. In general, study sessions should be about 45 minutes to an hour, followed by a brief 15 minute break.

Limit Distractions

Distractions can come from places other than your cellphone. If you find your mind wandering, try:

- ✧ Making note of each of your distractions
- ✧ Ensure that you're working in a space with minimal distractions
- ✧ Schedule time to complete tasks that are acting as a distraction

Even with a good schedule in place, it can be difficult to accomplish all of the tasks you have laid out for yourself in a day. Distractions can quickly creep in from every angle

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worry about a sick loved one, to the laundry that is accumulating on the floor. It may seem nearly impossible to rid yourself of all of these distractions, but there are ways to combat those things that are keeping you from sticking to your schedule.

While studying or reading, make a small tick on a piece of paper each time you notice that your thoughts have wandered. Sometimes minimizing distractions can be as easy as realizing just how distracted you are. Also, by making that small gesture each time you notice that you are thinking about something else, you can consciously redirect your thoughts back to the task at hand. This will take time, but hopefully as you continually redirect your thoughts, you will be making fewer and fewer distraction marks on that page.

Along the same line, it can be helpful to make a brief list of the things that are distracting you. If you find that you suddenly can't stop thinking of cleaning the bathroom once you sit down to do research, make a note of that task on your weekly schedule, and during your next study break, find time in your schedule to complete the task. By recognizing that you do have other tasks, and fitting them into your schedule, you can free yourself up to focus on the task at hand.

Goal Setting

What makes an ideal goal?

- ◇ Concrete
- ◇ Specific
- ◇ Measurable
- ◇ Realistic
- ◇ Balance between your academic and personal life.

Perhaps the most important factor in developing effective study habits is goal setting and monitoring.

A good goal is concrete, specific, measurable and realistic while maintaining your personal and academic life. For example, instead of saying “I would like to get an A+ in my advanced Calculus course”, set smaller goals that you can monitor throughout the course of the term “I would like to finish reading the first 3 chapters of the text, and make study aids by Thursday night”.

One of the most important factors for good goal setting is actually getting into the habit of setting goals for yourself, and reviewing those goals on a regular and ongoing basis.

Recitation and Reflection

Recite:

- ✧ Take some time to write out what you've learned and compare this to your notes—is there anything you're forgetting?
- ✧ Constant review of the material that you've learned and studied is essential

Reflect:

- ✧ Were you able to achieve the goals that you set out for yourself at the start of the session
- ✧ Connect any new information to things you have already learned in the course
 - Does the new info support previous learning?
 - Is there any contradictions?

Review is an essential part in recalling information in the future. It is essential that regular reviewing becomes a part of your daily and weekly study regime, as this will save you time when it comes to preparing for exams. Keep your questions written out, and return to them a day or two after you've read your chapter. Are you still able to answer them? Constant review will also point out gaps in your understanding, allowing you to return to material to go over difficult concepts long before final exam panic sets in. During the recitation portion of your study session, take a few minutes to write out everything that you've learned during your current study session. This can be done in point form, or in paragraphs depending on your preference. Once you're done, compare your recitation notes to your text, or your study notes to see if you've forgotten something important.

Once you have completed your study session, take some time to reflect on the goal you set for yourself at the beginning of the study session. Were you able to achieve it in the time frame that you set out for yourself? If you're finding that you haven't been able to get the task you wanted to accomplish in the time frame you've set out for yourself, try to assess why. Were you focused during the time you were studying? Did you simply underestimate how long it would take? Perhaps you need to break your goals down into smaller tasks. This reflection period should be used to determine how well you are meeting your goals.

Tips for Remembering

- ✧ Mnemonic devices.
- ✧ Creating meaning.
- ✧ Association.
- ✧ Chunking.

Although we can agree that memorizing isn't the best way to learn new information, remembering things does have a role to play in your study sessions. Here are some tips for remembering.

Mnemonic devices allow you to associate new information with a phrase or word that will act as a memory trigger in the future. Often this is useful when trying to remember items in a list. HOMES is a mnemonic device for recalling the names of the great lakes—Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior.

Something that is more useful than using this sometimes very abstract mnemonic devices is to try and create a memory device with meaning. In general, the more closely related to your life something is, the better able you are to remember it later on. This concept can apply to the recall of new words—try working a couple of these new words into your more regular vocabulary each week. The more you use them, the better able you'll be at recalling them later on.

Association is another good memory trick. There are typically two ways to think of association. You can associate new information with older information—things you already have little trouble remembering. Or you can associate words. Arteries carry blood away from the heart. Notice in this association that the thing to remember—arteries—starts with the same letter as that of its function—to carry blood away.

Finally, there is chunking. Chunking is helpful for memorizing lists. In this strategy, you chunk bits and pieces of the things you need to remember into meaningful pieces. A n easy example to illustrate how chunking works is to think of how you might memorize a grocery list. Instead of writing out all of the things that you need in one long list, chunk them into meals. For example, if you have a list that consists of milk, buns, eggs, hamburgers, cereal, and potatoes you might have trouble recalling all of the things you need. However if you break that into two smaller lists based on the meals you are planning to prepare you'll have an easier time. Your new lists might be broken down into breakfast: milk, eggs and cereal, and dinner: hamburgers, buns, and potatoes to make french fries. As you can see, it's far easier to remember the two smaller and more relevant lists than it is to remember the longer one.

Cue Cards

- ✧ Question/cue on the front
- ✧ Answer/description on the back
- ✧ Carry a few all the time for making good use of small breaks in the day
- ✧ Benefit of learning material out of its regular context

Cue cards are a fantastic study tool, and if you haven't tried them before, now is the time to start.

Cue cards will be most useful to you if you're able to work with them on a regular basis throughout the course of the term—

remember, constant review will alleviate your stress during exams. For this reason, start creating your cue cards early on in the term and use them to help you study throughout the duration of your course—not just before exams.

Cue cards are an incredibly portable study tool, and you can bring them with you anywhere, allowing you to study with ease while waiting for the bus, or in between classes.

Also, cue cards take the information that you're learning out of context. Often, we study material in the same order that it has been presented to us in, and then we get confused when we see it all out of order on an exam. Without realizing it, the order that we've been studying in has

acted as a recall tool, and we have trouble recalling information when presented out of order. Cue cards do the rearranging for you, and well before you are shocked by it on an exam.

To create your cue cards, simply write the question, or key word or cue on the front of the card, and write the answer or description on the back. Visual learners may want to write the answer out on one side and draw a picture on the other to use as the prompt.

Practice

- ◇ Active reading is a challenging technique that takes some practice.
- ◇ In order to make the most of the information here, it is essential that you continually practice new skills.
- ◇ Changing formed habits is not easy, so don't be discouraged if it seems challenging at first—don't give up!

It is not easy to simply start using new study strategies, and it takes time and practise to develop new habits. At first, new study techniques may seem tedious, and you may feel like the time you're spending that task could be put to better use. Rest assured that it takes time to develop all new habits, and after some time you'll find it becomes easier and less of a burden with each passing week.

Don't give up!

Still Have Questions?

For even more help with improving your time management skills, or for advice on other ways to improve your study habits, visit our website:

www.wlu.ca/study

Call to book an appointment: 519.884.0710 ext. 2220

For more assistance, visit our website, stop by the Study Skills Office, or call to book an appointment—you'll be glad you did!