

Insider's Guide to Studying

OXFORD LEARNING INSIDER'S GUIDE TO STUDYING GIVES STUDENTS THE TIPS THAT THE PROS USE. THESE ARE THE TIPS THAT TEACHERS WISH THAT THEY HAD KNOWN WHEN THEY WERE STUDENTS!

Tip 1: Review with a Pen and Paper

Before beginning to study, students need to know WHAT to study. So, the first step is to grab a pen and paper and read over all notes, writing down subject headings, subheadings, and bolded words. This helps to give a clear picture of the study material.

As studying progresses, students should continue to write down any and all meaningful keywords. This creates study notes, which can then be used as reference material during the study process. Rather than continually looking through a textbook, or flipping through notes, students can just refer to their own study notes.

Get an Edge: Focus on writing down the ideas or concepts that are the most challenging, or that are the most difficult to remember.

Bonus! The physical act of holding the pen and writing makes study time active rather than passive. Reading over notes is passive; writing down keywords is active. Active studying is good studying!

Tip 2: Mnemonic Devices

The term “mnemonic device” is just a fancy way of saying, “trick to help you remember.” While understanding is always better than memorizing, there are times when you’ll need a few tricks to help the brain remember. Usually these times involve long lists, dates, or examples.

Do you remember the names of all five of the great lakes? The mnemonic acronym HOMES will help you remember them all, lickety-split! H.O.M.E.S (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior.)

What about the planets? My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nuts (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.)

Mnemonics generally work on word associations, or are built on acronyms, but there can be other forms as well, such as poems and rhymes.

There are plenty of classic mnemonic devices that exist, but students shouldn’t be afraid to come up with their own—it will help them remember. Memorizing a pre-existing list is helpful, but creating one of your own is better!

Here's how:

1. Take the first letter or a key word of the item to remember and write it down
2. Repeat for all items
3. Create a sentence. Pick the first words that pop into your head. It doesn't have to make sense!
4. Write the sentence out a few times while saying the words that the acronym refers to.
5. Practice reciting the items and the created sentence together until you've got it memorized!

Bonus! Keep the mnemonic device simple. There's no point in creating extra work trying to remember a device that is more complicated than what you set out to remember in the first place. Don't worry if the acronym that you created doesn't make sense—if you remember it, go with it!

Tip 3: The Fake Test

There's a test coming up. How will you do?

One way to find out is by taking the wait-and-see approach. The other is to practice taking the test until you've got it perfect! This is a take-charge approach to studying that helps students anticipate test questions and discover how well they'll perform on the actual test.

Here's how it works:

1. As you read over your notes, use a separate sheet of paper to write down questions about what you are reading. (This uses the pencil-to-paper style of ACTIVE studying that keeps students engaged during the study process. See Tip 1)

Bonus! keep track of where to find the answers to your fake-test questions. For instance: Q: When did Christopher Columbus sail for the New World and what were the names of his three ships?
(page 37, first paragraph)

2. As you read, pay special attention to the challenging concepts. Create more questions for these concepts. Really test yourself. After all, that's what a test is designed to do—assess how well you understand something. So dig in and ask the tough questions. Go for those bonus marks!
3. Now that you have read over all of the study material, and have a sheet filled with questions— what's next? Put the fake test aside and wait a day or two. Then, when you sit down to study next, begin with your fake test. Did you pass or fail? How many questions did you answer correctly? How many were you unable to answer?
4. Go back and study some more, and focus on the questions that you answered wrong or that you were unable to answer.
5. Start early! Building a fake test that really challenges your topic knowledge takes time. You won't be able to properly test yourself if you left studying to the last minute. The extra time required to get organized and create a fake test pays off. As the saying goes: practice makes perfect.

Tip 4: Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing. It means: summarize, re-word, interpret, translate, and/or restate. It's a key study skill. When it comes to studying, paraphrasing is the opposite of memorizing. That's because it helps students make sense of the material. It helps students to understand, which, when it comes to learning and studying is crucial!

Scenario: it's study time. The books are cracked open, and you've got a pen and paper ready to go. You're in the process of making study notes. You've created some mnemonic devices to remember lists and you're in the process of creating a Fake Test.

But how do you turn the act of making study notes into actual studying? That's where paraphrasing comes in.

It's a simple five-step process:

1. Grab your textbook or notebook and Read a passage.
2. Cover the passage with a book or a piece of paper.
3. Recite what you've just read using your own words (paraphrase)—don't look! No cheating!
4. Check. Re-read and check that what you're reciting is accurate.
5. Repeat. Keep reading, reciting, and checking until you've got it 100% right.

Bonus! If you're having trouble putting it in your own words, imagine that somebody is asking you this question "what does that mean?" Try to answer that question in your own words. You can also try using, "in other words" before you paraphrase.

Tip 5: Study Buddy!

Want a quick tip to cut the amount that you have to study in half? Partner up! Study buddies are a great way to divide study material, save time, and gain new perspectives.

Here's how it works:

- 1. Select a Study Buddy.** The best study buddy is someone who you will be able to work well with. It's nice to partner up with your friends, but if you're going to spend your time gossiping or discussing video game high scores, then it won't be time well spent.
- 2. Set a Schedule.** Select a time and place to meet up to study.
- 3. Divvy up the Workload.** If there are two chapters to study, each student is responsible for one chapter.
- 4. Talk it Out.** A study buddy isn't about sitting down together and quietly reading side by side. A study buddy helps you learn, helps you discover areas that you need to focus on, and helps you cut down on the amount of studying you have to do on your own.
- 5. Prepare.** Before you meet for the first time, do your review.
 - Make study notes: write down titles, headings, and keywords, and make a copy for your partner
 - Create your own mnemonic devices
 - Create a fake test for your study partner
- 6. Teach it.** Take turns teaching a unit or section to one another. Review the material, but don't read word for word from the text or class notes—boring! Don't know where to start? Even if it seems awkward, just start at the beginning: "Chapter 5 is about atoms. Atoms are broken down into three basic elements..." Your study buddy can help you fill in gaps as well as point out important areas that you might have overlooked.
- 7. Paraphrase.** This is just a fancy word for putting it your own words. If you're reciting word for word from a text book you're just memorizing. If you can explain it in your own words, then you're on your way to real understanding.
- 8. Pay Attention to Class Examples.** Sometimes teachers give examples in class that are not in the textbook. Teachers sometimes include these on a test to see if you were paying attention in class. Remember that films, pictures, and handouts can turn up on tests, so don't overlook these examples—even if they seem silly.
- 9. Share.** Your impressions and opinions about the material might offer a new perspective on a subject. A different viewpoint can give you insights and ideas that you hadn't considered.
- 10. End with a Test.** Pass each other the fake tests that you've created and quiz one another. Correct each other's test and see how you did.

Sometimes teachers assign study groups, usually with 3-5 (or more) students per group. While a larger group might decrease the amount of material that you have to review on your own, it can also be a recipe for disaster. A too-large group can too easily lead to socialization and procrastination, so it's important to follow the above tips and stay organized.