



Study Skills Worksheet

All I ever needed to know about studying I learned from my high school physics teacher...I just ignored it until I got to college and then found out he was right. Thanks Mr. Mackey and here is what I learned...

1. There isn't much new under the sun, the human brain, so far as we can tell, is the same today as it was 10,000 years ago. The skills that worked for the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans still work today. The drag, the thing we all hate, is that we have to *do* it!
2. If you understand a few fundamental things about how your brain works, you can help your brain study.
 - a. Like all other parts of your body, your brain works at its optimal levels when it has increased blood flow. Sit down in your favorite chair and put your feet up, relax, what happens to your circulation? It goes down! Lie down on your bed to study, even worse! You should alternate moving and sitting when you study. This means you need to get up every fifteen to twenty minutes and walk around your house or do jumping jacks, or something to increase your circulation. Don't worry though, you can take your notes with you!
 - b. Heard of multitasking? Think you're good at it? You're wrong. Research shows and has shown for a long time that we, as humans, are not really very good at doing many things at the same time. We can do it, but what test results reveal is that for everything we add we do everything we're doing a little bit worse. This is why people drive off roads while talking on cell phones, putting on makeup, reading the newspaper, texting, brushing their teeth, doing their hair, etc. while driving. Every distraction you add to your study environment cuts down on your ability to do one thing well. This means you need to:
 - i. Turn off the TV, iPod, music, cell phone, etc. if you want to learn in an optimal environment.
 - c. Our brains really dig patterns. This is why you can remember the words to a song you have not heard in years, for example. Your brain is being reinforced by two patterns, the pattern of the music and the pattern of the words (which usually rhyme—another pattern—in music).
 - i. You need to organize the work to be studied into patterns, better known as groups. Think about it, if I tell you right now to remember these numbers...7347511052, you'll most likely remember the first few and maybe the last one. If I tell you to remember (734) 751-1052, you might have a better chance of remembering. Why? Phone numbers are broken into patterns. The pattern is always the same. Scientists know that when you are given the numbers as a group, your brain tries to remember each individual number or ten individual things. By breaking it down into the area code, prefix, suffix pattern, your brain is tricked into seeking three groups rather than ten individual numbers.

- d. Ok, so now you're thinking, you just told me music is a pattern, so why can't I listen to music while I study? The answer is this, state dependent memory and poor multitasking. While you are listening to words with lyrics your brain, whether you want it to or not, is following along with the words. This means it is scrambling what we are trying to learn with the words of the song. Next, state dependent memory causes us to remember things best when we hear the same song again. So unless you think your instructor is going to crank up your favorite tune while you study, music playing is not helpful.
 - e. Patterns which are helpful, which you can use at home
 - i. Colors—putting things in categories by color is very helpful.
 - ii. Location—studying a specific thing in a specific place is helpful, i.e. at the door in your room, at the desk in your room, in the living room, in the laundry room.
 - 1. A million years ago when I was in college I had a test in which I had to be able to explain who the candidates were for all the parties for all of the presidential elections from 1865-1914. I had to know how each presidential and vice presidential candidate was nominated, what their campaign goals were and how their views helped them to get elected or not elected. I divided my basement into different decades, the decades into different elections and then put the different parties on different color notecards. (Note that putting them in different places meant that I would have to walk to them!)
 - a. On test day this meant when I was asked about a particular election my thought pattern would be something like, "Let's see the 1868 election is in the laundry room, the republicans are red and they are on the washing machine, the cards on the washing machine say that the candidate was..."
 - b. If you're asking does this mean I was walking around my basement moving from card to card, reciting out loud what I was reading and worrying my family that I might actually be insane...the answer is yes.
 - c. My grade in my class was an A. I don't like B's.
3. In short
- a. If you want to succeed at the studying game, you've got to break things down. Textbooks must be made into notes, notes must be made into notecards, notecards have to be categorized and then everything must be memorized in a way which is helpful to your brain. Much of what you have to do in school involves recalling information. Learning how to store information is the first step in that process.
4. One more note
- a. Studying with friends can make things much more enjoyable. You can quiz one another on your notecards, laugh at a funny way of putting things, laugh at how your teacher taught the subject. You just have to make certain to remain on task and you do have to run through your notecards alone too. Your friends won't be able to help during the test!