

STUDY SMART, STUDY LESS



By: Nina Boord

This article is all about studying well in the shortest amount of time possible. Often times, you can spend a lot less time than you usually do studying and still receive the same (or an even better) grade on that test. These are tried-and-true real, time-saving tips that work in both college and high school.

Rewrite everything in your own words

When taking notes, it is often tempting to copy down everything your teacher, professor, or textbook says. You can't miss any information that way, right? Wrong! Unfortunately, copying word-for-word is one of the most common mistakes students make. Reword definitions in your own words in a way that you can understand. If you can't reword something, chances are you don't understand it. Make a note to look it up or talk to your teacher later. Rewriting forms connections in your brain, while copying does absolutely nothing. When you word things yourself, be sure to add connections, pictures, or anything at all (acronyms, mnemonic devices, examples) that will help you remember that information. Making connections like these is really really important for learning quickly and will cut down on your study time.

This brings me to another important point: being able to teach someone else the material. Go through the material like a teacher would. Pretend to explain it (or actually explain it) to someone not in your class or who doesn't know anything about the subject. If you can do this, you're ready for the test. This is an efficient way to ingrain information in your mind. You can do this in your head, or you could even explain it to your dog. Or your pet beta fish. They're both great listeners. Keep in mind that if someone asks for help in your class, it's actually helping you further internalize the information when you explain it to them.

Make Use of Your Class Time

You are required to be in school for at least 7 hours a day, so make use of that time! This means you should be paying attention in class. Like really paying attention. And taking good notes. The better notes you take in class, the less time you will need to spend reviewing/rewriting them later. This also includes any time in class or at school in general where you have time to yourself. Make an effort to get minor assignments done early so you can focus on the major ones when you get home. More time when you get home = more sleep!

Kill Your Perfectionism. Kill it now!

If you're anything like me, you love your notes neat and beautiful. While neatness and organization are important, there is such a thing as too neat. It really does not matter how your words are spaced or which colors you use or whatever. These notes are probably going in the trash at the end of the year anyway. What matters is 1. They are legible 2. They are organized in a way that you can understand 3. They make sense. I've recently come out of my OCD-perfectionist way of note taking and although my notes aren't quite as nice, the time I save is definitely worth it.

This applies to assignments and projects as well. Going above and beyond is great, but it is often unnecessary (unless you are trying to get a glowing recommendation letter, in which case, shoot for the stars). Now, I'm not saying not to go above and beyond! I'm only pressing that, for all of the overachievers out there, realize that spending an extra four hours on an already-A-material essay might be better used somewhere else. This is especially important if you are taking on a heavy course load. In all honesty, a 91

looks the same as a 98 on a transcript (at least it does for most public schools) so if you can save yourself from the extra stress and get a little more sleep, that's always a good thing.

SCHEDULE Your breaks

You've probably heard a million times to take breaks as you study. The key is to do it right. Every student on earth should download a podomoro app (most are free!) or you can just look up podomoro timer on your computer. (If you use your phone, I highly highly recommend turning it on airplane mode or using an app like Forest that eliminates distractions!). Force yourself to take a break every 25 minutes or so. This makes work a lot easier.

Scheduling your breaks for a certain time period forces you to take breaks without feeling guilty AND without getting sidetracked.

Also: Move!!! Do some jumping jacks or yoga or push ups or something to get your blood flowing during your five-minute breaks. Meditation is great too (just try clearing your mind for 5 minutes. It's a lot harder than it sounds.) This gets the blood flowing, keeps you awake, and actually helps your brain internalize what you learn. During long breaks (which you should take after 3-4 25 min study/5 min break intervals), try taking a walk outside. Exercise + fresh air keeps you awake and focused.

Focus on Concepts Rather Than Facts

Concepts are more difficult to learn but are more easily retained. Facts are easy to learn, but you tend to forget them quickly. This tends to be class-specific, as some classes are more concept-heavy than others. AP sciences are great examples of concept-heavy classes. There's a huge push nowadays to make classes (APs and IBs especially) more concept-heavy with a smaller emphasis on rote memorization (hence this year's switch to make the AP US Government exam more like the AP US History exam, emphasizing analyzation instead of recollection.)

Let's use Chemistry as an example. There are a LOT of trends to know for any Chemistry class. Like, a lot. Many students try to memorize these trends instead of understanding why they happen. Not only is this less effective, but you tend to forget these "facts" very quickly. For instance, you need to know that an atom's atomic radius decreases from left to right on the Periodic Table but increases going down. Ionization energy (the amount of energy it takes to remove an electron from an atom), in contrast, increases from left to right and decreases going down. Now you're probably like....what? But I didn't have to memorize these things! That's too much work. Knowing concepts allows you to figure out facts without having to memorize them.

Going left to right = more protons = protons pull on electrons more = atom is smaller and it's harder (more energy) to remove electrons

Going up to down = more electron energy levels = electrons are farther away from the protons = atom is bigger and it's easier to remove electrons

These concepts of protons and electrons apply to a bazillion more trends like these. If you know the concepts, chances are sometimes you don't even need to know the facts (especially on multiple choice exams). This can save so much time and energy!

Last but not least: Timeblock

Timeblocking (or timeboxing) is a really useful technique. It requires some self-discipline, but it's easy to implement. All you have to do is say "from 4:30 pm to 6:00 I'm going to do nothing but write my English

essay.” Once it turns 6:00, you move onto another task, regardless of whether the first task was completed or not.

Timeboxing:

- Battles perfectionism. You’re never going to get everything done in time if you are worrying about every detail.
- Forces you to do the tasks you don’t want to do. For things like, say, cleaning, that we tend to put off, it’s great to know that after 30 minutes, or whatever time you set for yourself, you can quit. It makes tasks a lot less daunting.
- Breaks projects into chunks. This is often the best way to get things done anyway. Spend twenty minutes every day and before you know it it’s done. This is also a more effective way to study.
- Forces you to want to finish. Once, you’re rolling on a task, you are inclined to finish it. You’ll work faster knowing you only have 10 more minutes to finish something or you’ll have to work on it again.

Write down each task and the time you want to do it by. Don’t try to store this information in your head. Writing it down makes sure you’re on track and that you’re accountable. Also: be ruthless. It’s easy to be like “just one more minute! Just five more minutes! Just ten more minutes!”. As soon as the time hits, hit that red x in the upper left corner of your screen and move on to something else.

Don’t just stop here! Try out some of these methods and see which ones work best for you, the way you learn, and your schedule. 😊