THE STUDY PROCESS

An average beginning college student has spent over 22,000 hours studying from the time he or she began school until the twelfth grade. This enormous amount of time could have been reduced considerably through dynamic study skills. But most students are never taught how to study. It's a process they are expected to learn on their own.

Effective studying does not simply consist of reading, underlining, and rereading. Your new study process will consist of reading, writing, thinking, and recollecting. It is based on the layered learning process and actually takes less time than your old method of studying. It may seem longer at first, but each step takes less time, and because it is so well structured, you will have better recall at test time.

Time and time again students have proved that reading and recalling is much more effective than spending all of their time reading and highlighting. The only way to learn is to actively participate in absorbing and integrating it. Study reading is an active process, not a passive one.

Prepare by Browsing Through Texts

Survey to get an overview of the book, turning pages quickly to get a feel for how many pages there are. Underline headings, subheadings, concepts, and main ideas. This will give you a good idea of what the book is about and how it is organized.

Begin to structure your notes around the design of the book. Decide how much material you wish to learn. Draw a chart that will help organize the material. Place the more important information at the top, details to the right. Leave more room under topics and titles that involve more pages. Draw these main branches before reading to help your mind organize and store the data better. Here is an illustration of how you would set up your paper:

Preview Assigned Chapter

Move quickly, skimming through the chapter much faster than your usual reading rate. Your purpose here is to find out what is important and how it is presented, not to read it. Check all boldfaced headings, turning each into a question you will answer later. Also check copy under the chapter titles, each of the subchapters, and the main ideas. This will only take a few seconds per page, but it will give you important clues to the material and help you later to read it faster, because you will be prepared for new ideas. Look over the visual aids, such as maps, charts, diagrams, illustrations, and pictures to help you grasp each point more quickly. Then read any summaries or questions included at the end of the chapter. Summaries are usually helpful because they include the points the author thought were most important.

Before proceeding with your study, set two goals. Set a comprehension goal: decide how well you need to know the material. Will you be tested? If so, how thoroughly? Set a time goal for your particular section or chapter based on how well you need to know it. In easy or familiar material, your goal may be fifteen pages an hour. But whatever your goal, make sure it is only for one chapter or section—setting lengthy or unrealistic goals only leads to disorganization and failure. By achieving both these goals, you will speed your study time greatly.

At this stage you should have in your notes the chapter title, subtitles, and all major ideas. You should already know a lot about the material.

Understand, Don't Memorize

Now is the time to read the chapter as quickly as you can understand the ideas. After each page or major idea, go back to your notes and add the supporting details to them. Do not proceed more than a page without writing something down. This is an important step to textbook comprehension and retention. Explain the material by continually summarizing it in your own words, using your own words. The old way of studying was to read and forget. Get into the habit of reading and recalling. You will find even the most boring books become interesting.

Reduce the size of underlining seemingly important thoughts; do not use highlighter, Magicmarker, or felt-tip pens. Such a study method is premature; you are not in a position to judge what is most important until you've read the entire chapter. Postpones learning: you may simply color the material, rather than understand it. It is permanent; have you ever tried to erase it? It gives all material equal weight. It distracts; have you ever tried to read a used book marked with highlighter? It devalues the book; it ruins the appearance and resale value of the book.

Instead, use a pencil to mark important ideas. Whenever something looks valuable, put a check mark in the margin, just to the side of the passage. This marks what is important, but it is not permanent. Later, during a review you can revalue your marks and leave them in place. Distract them, or add a second mark for emphasis. This system is one of the most valuable tools you can use. Not only is it flexible, but it is quite inexpensive. Continue reading each chapter, marking what is important with a check and adding to your notes until you are finished.

Review Material

Go back through the chapter and reread it quickly to refresh your memory. Answer the question chapters, see relationships, and complete your notes. Look at your notes. Do you now have details to support each main idea? Can you study that chapter from your notes? The answers should be yes. Your goal has been to get the material out of the text into your notes, then into your mind. Textbooks are often wordy and difficult to understand. Put the ideas in your own words and you will learn the material much more quickly.

The following questions can help you evaluate textbooks and other nonfiction works:

- Do you clearly understand the author's goal? If not, check the preface, how, why, and introduction.
- Do you understand the author's perspective? Do you agree with them? Why did the author write the book? Minor ones? Check the table of contents for these answers.
- Are the conclusions drawn by the author? Do you agree with them? Why did the author write the book? Minor ones? Check the table of contents for these answers.
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Studying and Learning AIDS

Studying

and with better comprehension? If that sounds impossible, it’s not. The human brain is capable of seeing and understanding material as fast as one can turn pages, and some people do read that fast. John Stuart Mill, Theodore Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy all read exceptionally fast, as have been many others. They were what are known as natural readers, people who read with excellent comprehension. Gifted readers come from every walk of life, for reading is a skill not related to age, occupation, heredity, or intelligence. The only reason that you may not read fast now is because your natural gifts may have been smothered in school.

The way reading is taught in most public schools is the same technique used a century ago. Curiously, the average American reads at about the same rate today as 100 years ago. Most people read between 100 and 400 words per minute, the national average. But slow readers are severely penalized throughout life and are simply unable to keep up because of the tremendous volume of reading required today. It is hoped that schools will change their methods of reading instruction so that someday all students will be rapid readers. In theory, the only things that should decide reading rate are the student’s background in the subject, the purpose for reading the particular material, and the ability to turn pages. Some readers, tested in difficult textbook material, have read thousands of words per minute with excellent comprehension. That’s over a dozen pages per minute. Yet some of these superreaders used to read at rates of only 200 words per minute. So it is certainly possible for the average reader to increase his or her reading speed considerably.

What limits your reading rate? Poor habits, such as subvocalization (pronouncing words to yourself), regressing (going back to reread material already covered), prolonged fixation (stopping and staring at one word and mentally following it as you lose your place and wandering between lines). These poor habits cause tired eyes, boredom, low speeds, and low comprehension. It is not that you lack in training. Because we are taught to read at 100-400 words per minute, we believe this is our “normal.” But these rates are no more normal than 10 and 20 miles per minute. Improving your rate only takes proper practice and a habit.

A book cannot give the kind of help necessary to make a dramatic increase in your reading skills. But, until you can get some professional help from a well-trained, rapid reading instructor, there are some positive steps you can take.

Hand Reading

As children, we were generally taught not to underline words with our fingertips. But this method actually helps increase speed and comprehension. It builds speed in reading because it prevents unnecessary backing up and rereading, which consumes about one-sixth of your reading time. It also prevents unaugmented, prolonged fixations—the habit of staring at one word or phrase for a long period. Reading with your hand on the page imprints nothing in your mind. The only attention to a spot instead of allowing your eyes to move and mind to wander. Start under the first word and move it along at a comfortable rate by reading each word. Be sure to pick up your finger at the end of each line, lifting it to begin the next one. Read directly above your fingertip, and watch your rate soar.

How to Adjust Speed

Do not read everything at the same rate. You should read light fiction quickly and technical texts at about one-half that rate. When you read easy material, speed up and you will enjoy reading more. A common misconception is that reading faster ruins enjoyment. This is not true. When you were in first grade, you probably read at a rate of 10-50 words per minute. Now you may read 100-500 words per minute, a full ten times faster! Did you lose any enjoyment from books? Of course not, and, in fact, you may enjoy books more now than when you read slowly. Decide upon your purpose and read to the level of comprehension you require. When your purpose in reading is entertainment, read faster than usual. If you are responsible for retaining the material, take notes often, reread difficult passages, and read at your maximum rate of comprehension, not to memorize.

See Yourself as a Good Reader

Do you see yourself as a slow reader or as a fast reader? Do you have a good self-conception of yourself? Always push yourself, being prepared to read more quickly. Believe you can get what you want, when you want it and you will have it. By this means you can make your goal. Seeing yourself as a fast reader can make you a fast reader.

Set back, close your eyes, and picture yourself as a reader reading rapidly with excellent comprehension. Imagine yourself as a desk or table where you know well, moving down the page, not only comprehending what you have read, but quickly recalling it from your notes. Practice this routine twice a day for about 15 minutes. Within several weeks you should see a notable improvement in your reading speed.

Range of Vision

One reason you might read slowly is that you read with a narrow, constricted, “hard focus.” You have disciplined your eyes to see only a couple of words at a time. This severely limits your speed. Your reading focus is different from your visual focus. The difference is easy to see when you look outside your window. Do your eyes focus—what do you see on a spot three inches by five-eighths of an inch? What you see is an entire panorama with everything in focus. You should see a page in the same way.

In order to regain your usual range of vision for reading, you must acquire the habit of adjusting your eye position. Do not acquire the use of both hands and a large book. Flip through the pages of the book quickly, turning them from top to bottom and pulling the front pages close to your eyes down the page by brushing down each line of type. Have one edge of your right hand. Your fingers should be extended and relaxed. Follow your eyes down each page with your eyes, trying to see as many words as possible. Start by brushing each page in two or three seconds, gradually reducing the time spent on each page until you can go as fast as you can turn pages. Pace yourself, starting at twenty pages a minute, slowly increasing to one hundred pages a minute within one to two months. This practice works helps your eyes see more words at a time by preventing zooming in or focusing only on individual words. Practice for five minutes a day for several weeks. Remember that it is unlikely that you will read faster without practicing. Reading is a skill, and as with any other skill, all the instruction in the world won’t help you unless you actually practice what you learn.

Some students are afraid that if they go faster, they’ll miss words. But they already know most of the words they are about to see. There are over 600,000 words in our language, but 400 of them compromise sixty-five percent of printed material. These are structure words that have no meaning, but tie the sentence together. For example, in the second sentence of this paragraph, the structure words are but, of, the, about, to. Remove those words and the sentence is choppy, but still readable. (I already know most words they see.) Since you’ve read those 400 words many times, don’t let them slow down your reading by dwelling on them.

A famous psychologist, James Cattell, determined that you already know about 400 words a second or 24,000 words per minute that we’re capable of seeing and understanding. An Australian psychologist, John Ross, has reported that the human mind can process per second 1,000,000 words. He defines depth information as nonfiction technical material, which readers may wonder whether or not they can comprehend material by reading at a faster rate. You can. Just practice and you’ll see results immediately.

Do not worry about understanding everything the first time you read. You can see and understand everything, but merely reading something does not ensure retention. You will retain information by practicing recall, not by reading more slowly. Usually the more slowly you read, the more the mind wanders, with little comprehension and recall.

The ideal speed on which to read is a purely mental or intellectual plane. Do not clog or block information in your mind by negative emotion—such as anxiety, worry, and fear of “not getting it.” If you develop an open, positive, “go-for-it” attitude, you will read much better.

At higher rates of speed it’s also helpful to talk to yourself. Discuss aloud the topic of each paragraph for additional clarity and reinforcement. In order to get the comprehension you need at faster speeds, it helps to have an adequate background. Read the material in the following manner in several ways: (1) from reading other material on that subject, (2) from personal experience, and (3) from perusing. The purpose of perusing is to become familiar with the main ideas and to organize those ideas into a pattern. This organizing step is crucial to developing speed in reading textbook material.

One other hint that will help you read faster is often overlooked. Hold your book four to six inches farther away from your eyes than usual. Your eyes won’t have to work so hard because the farther objects are from your eyes, the less movement it takes to see them all. So be sure your material is at least fifteen inches from your eyes; you’ll enjoy increased speed and comprehension, and reduce fatigue.

Improving Concentration

Readers with the best comprehension are usually fast readers. The more slowly you read, the more changes there are for you to daydream and lose concentration and hence, comprehension. Comprehending well is a process of a habit, not a mystery. Actually, comprehension is a twofold process: (1) perceiving and organizing information, and (2) relating that information to what you already know. Several factors determine the degree of comprehension you’ll get from the material you read. Those factors are your background in that subject, your reading skills, and the organization and presentation of that material.

There is virtually no comprehension when the reader does not have the necessary vocabulary and background. Comprehension is largely dependent upon what you already know. The more you already know, the better the comprehension.

There are a number of ways to improve concentration. Background is the reason a beginning law student might read at 70-200 words per minute, yet a practicing attorney can read the same material much faster. Therefore, the best habit to get into that will build comprehension is to gain the necessary background for that subject.

Two excellent ways to accomplish this are listening to lectures and reading other, easier material on the same subject.

Greater Meaning

Reading is an active process, not passive. Anticipate ideas and read with a purpose—to answer the questions you want. In other words, actively searching for the information you want. Have questions in mind before you read, not afterward. If you begin reading a book...
with questions, you'll complete your reading with the answers. Think about the ideas in larger chunks and read to understand them. Be confident that you can get what the author meant, and don't hesitate to argue with the author while reading. Save critical analysis for later, so you won't slow down your concentration, and miss the flow of the material. Put pencil checks in the margins of the sections you would like to go back to.

Understanding, Not Memorizing

In order to have a smooth, continuous flow of information in your mind, don't stop to memorize facts. Save that process for later when you study your notes, and then continue. At all times you should read as rapidly as you can understand the ideas.

Cultivate a Positive Attitude

You must care about what you are reading or studying. If you don't, create a need to care. Use positive reinforcement. You might say to yourself, "Once I get this reading done, I'll be able to do something I enjoy more." Don't use negative reinforcement or a self-threat, such as, "If I don't get an A in this class, I'll lose my scholarship." If you maintain a strong, receptive attitude, you will find comprehension will be easier because you are not fighting yourself. Fighting reading is much like panicking while swimming. The secret is to relax.

Upgrade Poor Habits

It's difficult to comprehend what you read when you are tired, sleepy, depressed, or in pain. Some students complain that their comprehension is poor while doing their reading at three in the morning. At that hour, many couldn't comprehend the morning newspaper. It is critical to be not only alert, but relaxed. Be comfortable and in tune with the subject of the book. Reading posture definitely affects comprehension. Sit at a desk when possible. Study in an upright position with the book flat on the table, fifteen inches or more away. The more stretched out and relaxed your study position, the more you will encourage its usual result—drowseness, poor concentration, or sleep. If you want comprehension, speed, and retention, sit up alertly and act like you are serious about accomplishing the task.

Layered Learning Process

The study procedure described in the previous section is an extremely useful tool for comprehension. Basically it involves approaching the material on several levels, and taking notes after each. As a review, here are the steps:

1. Review the material, becoming aware of its structure, complexity, and organization.
2. Prepare and preview the material more slowly, noting bold-faced headings, summaries, subtitles, visual aids, and topic sentences. Add main ideas to your notes. Set your purpose: Exactly what level of comprehension do you need? How far away is the exam? With your purpose in mind, set a realistic chapter or section goal.
3. Read the material, a chapter at a time, marking as quickly as you can understand the ideas. Stop after each page and add details to your main ideas.
4. Review your notes and text, filling in gaps, viewing the overall content and organization, and refreshing your memory.
5. Think, discuss, and recall the information.

Organize

Your mind seeks organization, logical sequencers, and order. Give it a chance to comprehend the material by grouping ideas and details into meaningful blocks. Restructure the material into easy-to-picture thoughts. Use every possible combination of thought pictures that will work. When you perceive the unity and structure of the material you are studying, you will grasp its meaning much faster. Strive toward understanding the structure as well as the details.

Write as You Read

Get in the habit of immediately recapping on paper what you have read. Because you will understand each point better, the following point will be that much clearer. Comprehension depends upon understanding each preceding idea. The better you understand and recall one idea, the more likely you will understand the next. Stick to each part of the study process, and you will find comprehension becoming a habit.

TAKING NOTES

Efficient notes are vital to straight A's. Most of your notes should be drawn from notes taken in class and from the text. Your notes show how well you understand material presented. Students are not usually taught how to take concise, creative notes. Most have to learn from others or through trial and error. Learn the following basics and then use your creativity to develop the formats that work best for you and the subjects in which you are interested.

Summarize, Don't Duplicate

Your notes should not be a re-creation, but rather a synopsis, a synthesis. Accuracy is your first consideration. But beyond that, try to reconstruct the material in your own words. This is the beauty of good notes: They are more understandable and interesting than a text or lecture. Include as many examples as time or necessity permits.

Shorthand

It is time-consuming to spell out each word you choose to include in your notes. You can phonetically abbreviate by using the consonants of a word to create a phonetic representation that you will be able to write rapidly and interpret easily for review. Look at the following sentence from a lecture given in a literature class:

Jean-Paul Sartre is a French existentialist who was born in Paris in 1905.

Your notes might read as follows:

Sartre, exists, Paris, 1905.

Use as many symbols and abbreviations from math as you can. The following table shows shorthand that can be used for shortcuts in notetaking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMBOLOs</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; &lt;</td>
<td>Greater than, more than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; = &lt; =</td>
<td>Less than, equal to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>The same, equals, not the same, different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ -</td>
<td>Infinity, a great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x - x</td>
<td>Toward, going</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>From</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Therefore, because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + + +</td>
<td>Infinity, a great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Positive, good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- - - +</td>
<td>Negative, against</td>
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<tr>
<td>! ! !</td>
<td>With</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? ?</td>
<td>Down, under, decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$ $ $ $</td>
<td>Dollars, money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R R R R</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Format of Subject

Each subject group has basic characteristics that help you organize your information and thoughts that are particular to that subject. Notetaking stumps many students because in some textbooks the information on each page is not well organized. Some books may go for a dozen pages without bold-faced headings or changes in organization. Difficulty in studying and taking notes often arises from such textbooks. Fortunately, most textbooks are better written today than they were years ago. Many have chapter summaries, bold-faced headings, and questions to answer. But when you see a book that does not indicate what is important by its format, use the information in the table that follows to help organize your notes and study procedure. It includes the basic formats for three main subject areas.

In order to take notes well, you must be proficient at sorting information. To understand an idea, you need to see its parts as well as its whole. Depending on the subject, the parts are quite predictable. For the main idea, it is often in the first two sentences of each paragraph. To do that, look for phrases like "most importantly," "first of all," "it must be emphasized that..." Any similar phrase is the author's way of telling you that something important is being said.

Second, find supporting details and examples to explain the main ideas. These usually follow the
main idea and often include stories or data, such as names and dates. Next, isolate the information you need by sorting smaller facts from filter data, such as the author's primary experiences and opinions. This is easy because the facts are often proper nouns, places, or numbers. Once isolated from the facts, the remaining material can often be identified as filler.

Tests often follow a sequence. For example, certain math tests might follow the sequence: background information, statement of laws, axioms, or theorems, examples, problems presented to be solved. When you take notes for a math class, don't simply copy an important theorem. Ensure comprehension by examining the other parts of the sequence of information.

Creative Approach

The more unusual and eye-catching your notes are, the more you will enjoy studying them and the easier it will be for you to recall the information contained in them. Don't use a standard outline form. Its two major drawbacks are inflexibility and difficulty in recalling. Use pictures, cartoons, arrows, different colored pens, and different size headings. Helpful, creative notes take very little practice, but if you need some ideas, refer to the samples that follow.

Sample Notes for Chemistry

These notes, based on the format for exact sciences, include subject description, laws, examples, problems to solve, and solutions.

**Activation Energy**

\[ \text{Activation energy} \]

\[ \text{Energy released} \]

Heat of Reaction

Application to chem. problems—only 2 of 3 sources needed

Catalysts

\[ \text{HCOOH} \rightarrow \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{CO} \]

**Sample Notes for History**

Categorize your information so that you will follow the flow of events better. This format allows a better understanding of dates as well as major events.

**THE CIVIL WAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Major Figures</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Ft. Sumter bombarded</td>
<td>Beauregard</td>
<td>War starts!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Battle at Bull Run</td>
<td>Beauregard, McCollum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Sherman</td>
<td>Grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Grant vs. Sherman</td>
<td>Grant vs. Pemberton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample Notes for Novels**

This format includes background on author, characters, settings, problems, events, crises, and solutions.

**THE STRANGER,** by Albert Camus

AUTHOR: Camus, Albert

WORKS: "The Stranger"

BELIEVED IN: decisions, you are what you do, action, commitment, responsibility, true to self.

**CHARACTERS**

Major

Meursault

Minor

Maman, Raymond

Old woman, Father

Mother, Comrade

Caleb, Security

Maison, Judge

Protector, Chabrin

Arabs

**CONFLICTS**

Men vs. men

Condemn & decision vs. apathy

Meursault vs. normal world

Arabs vs. Raymond

Prostitutes vs. Meursault

**EVENTS**

Meursault's death

Meur & Marie, Raymond

Confronts brothel-friend & Arab, beach scene

**CRISES**

Meursault killed Arab, imprisoned, trial is late, Meursault reads to jail, found guilty, Chaplin and God rejected, to be decapitated

**SOLUTION**

Meursault is reborn, good feelings at end, a spiritual rejuvenation.
Sample Notes for Philosophy

In these notes, the left-hand side was prepared in advance, from the texts. Then the page of notes is taken to the class lecture so that additional comments can be made on the right-hand side.

**BACKGROUND ON ARTIST**
- Current society is?
- Scan pictures atron.
- "A is A.
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**A's ANALYSIS OF E.C.**
- (-) Dep. mgmr.
- (-) Laws
- Property laws
- Class. of owners
- (-) Treasury law on $S
- (-)access these moneys
- (+) must add solitudes

**(D'S FOR CLASS)**
- Implications of this crit.
- Generalize?
- Conceptualize w/US
- Concept
- (a) define "decisiveness"

**Keep Notes Together**
An ingenious way to learn a subject quickly and with better understanding is to take notes in tandem. Take class lecture notes on a page opposite the notes you took while studying the text. Ideally, you should read the text and take notes prior to the class lecture. Put your notes on the left-hand side of your paper, leaving the right half for class work. Then when the professor lectures, you will not only understand his or her comments better, but you won't have to write as much. If you keep your notes on the same topic together on a page, you will take fewer notes and understand more. Other students in class may be writing frantically while you relax and jot down only an occasional supporting detail. Even if you can't take text notes in advance, bring your lecture notes home and reverse the process.

**STEPS TO BETTER RECALL**

**Pay Attention**
Being aware is the first step to developing better recall. Begin to notice the part of the page on which information is located. Notice how it's presented, and take an extra look at visual aids. Surprisingly, many people do not even know what color their walls and curtains are, what their license plate number is, or even their Social Security number. Knowing these things may not be very important, but learning to be more aware of your surroundings can be very helpful in developing memory skills.

**Get Information Right**
Make sure that you correctly understand the data. This sounds like a simple rule, but particularly in the case of remembering statistics, people rarely focus on the numbers themselves. They pay attention to the significance of the numbers. At gatherings where new people are introduced, make sure you understand a person's name and its spelling. Then repeat it for clarification and reinforcement.

**Develop a Positive Attitude**
Telling yourself you can remember is part of developing a healthy self-image. Faith in yourself relaxes and encourages stronger mental processes through opening previously closed thought channels. We can only do what we believe we can.

**The Need to Remember**
Most of the time, the incentive to remember information is already there. But every object of memory is made much stronger when you intensify your desire to recall. If you met someone at a party who interested you, your desire to remember the right name and phone number would be strong. Similarly, when you know you'll be tested on a book, your efforts increase appreciably.

**Use Repetition**
Immediately after a learning activity, preferably within an hour, refresh your memory through a review. We use both long-term and short-term memory, and most of what we take in goes into our short-term memory. For example, when you look up a number in the phone book, you remember it just long enough to dial it. Then you promptly forget it. This is, of course, short-term memory. To transfer memory data into long-term recall, we need to repeat it and use it for reinforcement. The ideal way to study and memorize is to spend six sessions, each lasting one hour, on a subject, rather than six hours straight. In this way, data are reinforced sufficiently to be filed in long-term memory.

**Create Mental Pictures**
Often called the key to memorizing, mental pictures enable your mind to work in its more natural
state. Usually, your mind stores images and pictures, but not words. For example, you might remember the four letters m-i-t-a. Most people picture a glass of milk or a car, but not the words. By creating mental pictures, you can remember more facts. Change words and ideas into pictures and simply study the pictures, not the words.

Your memory skills will improve if you practice creating mental pictures about what you want to recall. The more unusual and absurd the mental picture you create, the more likely you will be able to recall the word or information associated with it. Use the following ideas to create vivid mental pictures:

1. Imagine some kind of action taking place.
2. Form an image that is out of proportion.
3. Create in your mind an exaggerated version of the subject.
4. Substitute and reverse a normal role. For example, in order to remember to mail a letter, imagine the letter carrying you out to the mailbox and stuffing you inside.

**Memory Skills by Association**

Probably the simplest method of remembering by association, the process of recalling one item because another reminded you of it. This system requires no more than some awareness and a quick mental picture. For example, if you wanted to remember to bring a pen to class, simply imagine black, goofy ink all over the door knob where you live. Make a quick but strong mental picture of it. Then when you leave for class, reach for the door knob and the picture will trigger the mental picture of the pen and you'll remember your pen.

Improve your memory skills by practicing word associations using mental pictures. For example, in associating the words table and dance, first form a clear picture of a table in your mind. Visualize a table that you use frequently, one familiar to you. In order to associate table with dance, imagine the table, standing up on two legs, dancing wildly, with the other two legs straightening in the air. Because it is such an absurd picture, it will stick in your mind. Each time you think table, you will also think dance.

Linking words can continue in a similar manner. For example, if you wanted to link the words diamond to dock, you might create a mental picture of a huge, six-foot-tall, all-white, overlaid, pointed-bottomed duck dancing and whirling, with feathers flying. Using the method of linking through mental pictures, you have created a chain of associations: table → dance → dock. In this way, you never try to memorize more than one word at a time. The process is then repeated with other pictures. The system of forming associations by using the link method will help you to memorize lists of numbers, letters, names, and anything.

**Contrasting Subjects**

Apparently our subconscious needs time to sort and categorize information for long-term storage and retrieval. To facilitate this process, do not kind of classwork is expected. Exactly what will you do on a dissimilar subject in the interval. For example, you might like to do some physics before you go to class; it saves time and increases your understanding. As you read, add illustrations of yourself or bring them to class. Add class lecture notes to your home test notes, always trying to consolidate and unify them.

**Interference**

Cut down on distractions that might ordinarily follow a study session. It is best to study before a restful, quiet time or even before bed. Then your mind will have time to relax, sort, and store the necessary information.

**Study Wholes**

Whether the subject is a Shakespearean play or an assignment in anatomy, your mind functions best with complete pictures to remember. Even if you have to memorize only one part of a chapter, become familiar with all of it. For example, if you had to explain to someone why a local beach has low and high tides, it would be much easier if you also discussed how our tides are simply opposite from those on the other side of the world. For some reason our recall varies even within the whole picture we are learning. Use the BEM concept for better recall. We remember material best from the beginning, second best from the end, and our recall is weakest on the middle. Therefore, spend more time on the middle to allow for this tendency.

**Practice Material**

Frequently review, repeat, recite, and use the material you wish to remember. Almost any information learned becomes familiar, and even second nature, through usage. Try to integrate the data into daily usage. There is no substitute for practice.

**Practice Under All Conditions**

If you practice recalling only under "prime" conditions — conditions under which you do your best — then you will not do your best test. Whenever you have a test, at the very least, discontinue the library, study the cards and practice recalling.

**PREPARING FOR TESTS**

The first and most obvious preparation for taking tests is to study beforehand. But an effective study procedure that will help ensure success is one that is planned from the beginning of the course and not disrupted by interruptions such as having to study for other classes or being distracted by outside disturbances. Concentrate on knowing something about almost everything. Rewrite your notes into a new format, trying to see the material from new angles. Review sessions are helpful, but only get together with others if they are good students. Otherwise, you will be really "soaked" for information, and learn nothing. A C student usually doesn't enlighten an honor student.

**First Few Weeks**

To ace your tests, start the first week of school. Find out about your instructor. What is his or her favorite topic or author? Is student creativity encouraged, or is the class run by the rule? What kind of classwork is expected? Exactly what will you do on a dissimilar subject in the interval. For example, you might like to do some physics before you go to class; it saves time and increases your understanding. As you read, add illustrations of yourself or bring them to class. Add class lecture notes to your home test notes, always trying to consolidate and unify them.

**Middle of Course**

Try to study a little every day. This is a lot more effective and less stressful than cramming. Ask questions when you don't understand course material. Don't put them off, or you will forget about them. See your professor for extra help early in the term, not the day before a test. This shows a genuine interest on your part, and the extra contact will pay off at test time. Most important, be sure to introduce yourself and make the most favorable impression you can. In your particular field of interest, it's also helpful to ask your professor if he or she has any suggested reading material outside of assigned class texts. The secret is to show some genuine interest in your class subject. Your professor will find that if you approach most subjects with an open mind and a positive attitude, there will be a wealth of material to stimulate and interest you. Allow your interest to extend to your professor. He or she is likely anyone else and appreciates the personal touch.

Read as much background material as possible. The more you read about a topic, the greater your understanding of it, and the faster you will be able to use it. Gaining a wide background in a subject area is much easier than forgetting it once, you will forget it again unless you have a chance to review it. A positive attitude is crucial the few days prior to an exam. The upcoming test is not an execution; it is a chance to show what you have learned. Your instructors want you to get good grades because they are proud and often fun to use. You might put a possible test question on one side and the answer on the other. Make some notes on any data you seem to forget easily. Certain things appear very easy to remember, and others seem easy to forget. But remember, if you show that you have studied the material, your professor will be more willing to write it down.

**Last Week Before Exam**

Find out what kind of exam will be given, and other information accordingly. If an objective test is scheduled, use memory techniques and concentration details. For a subjective or essay exam, discuss your library, study the cards and practice recalling.

Don't know if a mistake is expected. Exactly what will you do on a dissimilar subject in the interval. For example, you might like to do some physics before you go to class; it saves time and increases your understanding. As you read, add illustrations of yourself or bring them to class. Add class lecture notes to your home test notes, always trying to consolidate and unify them.

**Last Hours**

You have already run the hardest part of the race. If you have kept up during the term, you have already passed the exam; now it is the day before the exam. If the day before the exam is a Saturday, then you have the choice between A and B. Others may have exam fever, but you can relax a bit. Get a full night's sleep and be sure to eat and get some exercise the day of the exam. That encourages better blood circulation and hence a better supply of oxygen to your brain during exam time. You will be able to think more clearly. It is best to exercise in moderation so that you are invigorated rather than exhausted. A brisk walk before the test is a good way to prepare.
1. True-false questions. Pay special attention to the question, as true-false questions can be very tricky. It is possible to have an answer be both true and false, or an answer that is true in one context but false in another. Be sure to read the question carefully and think through your answer before marking it as true or false.

2. Multiple-choice questions. These questions often test your knowledge of specific facts or details. Be sure to read each option carefully and eliminate any obviously incorrect answers before selecting the best one.

3. Sentence completion questions. These questions require you to fill in the blank with the correct word or phrase. Be sure to consider all possible options and choose the one that best fits the context of the sentence.

4. Conclusion—Include the significance of each event, with your first impression. Be sure to not only state your conclusion, but also support it with evidence from the text. You'll usually need at least partial credit. That's better than nothing.

Aftermath

When you complete a test, be sure to reread all your answers. Check the wording of the questions again. Eliminate careless errors, and you can save a lot of disappointment later. Take as much time as you need. When you think you have finished the test, turn it upside down on your desk. Think about it for a few minutes, giving your mind some time to relax and come up with some answers. If you still agree with what you have written, turn it in. But sometimes those few moments spent thinking about the questions will help you recall the answer that gets an A. Once your corrected test is returned, look it over. Check your errors, and find out not what they were, but what kind of errors they were. Were they from answering questions too quickly, poor organization, a missed assignment, or incorrect notes? Understand why you made errors, and avoid the problem on the next test.

Review These Points

Preparing for Tests

1. First few weeks of classes: Find out about your instructor. Ask questions ahead.
2. Midterm: Study every day. Ask questions.
4. Last few days before test: Brush up on your weak areas. Think positively.

Examine the following format:

1. Introduction—Introduce your topic.
2. Background—Give historical or philosophical background data to orient the reader to the topic.
3. Thesis and Argument—State the main points, including causes, effects, methods used, dates, places and results.

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