



## Study habits for success

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I propose the following for consideration by all students:

### **What is study?**

Study is the act of absorbing information for its understanding and its further use as information and material that is able to be recalled for application to further learning and problem solving.

### **How do we do it?**

One of the best methods I have come across is the method of breaking information down into a set of short manageable handwritten notes which include major headings, sub-headings and point form “cue” words. That is, information is “chunked down” into digestible and memorable pieces of information which can be easily recalled assisting future problem solving and deeper understanding related to the topic in question.

For each subject, develop a folder (a manila folder will do) with a set of study notes and diagrams for the subject. Divide the notes per topic and try to have a consistent “look” about how you set out the notes; i.e. use of headings, use of subheadings, use of colours, ways of writing definitions.

Keep your notes in one place and use that place as your study HQ. Keep HQ reasonably organised and tidy, well lit, well ventilated, devoid of phones and music interruptions. David Glenn, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education, May 1, Vol 55, Issue 34 (2009)* says researchers find this study method works well.

### **How to maximise study time**

Most teachers tell their students to: Read carefully; write down unfamiliar terms and look up their meanings; make an outline; re-read each chapter.

The most important step: Put the book aside and hide your notes. Then recall everything you can. Write it down or say it out loud. Repeat as necessary.

This strategy works. When students study on their own, ‘active recall’ - recitation, for instance, or flashcards and other self-quizzing - is the most effective way to inscribe something in long-term memory.

### **Develop your active recall**

The central idea is that it is generally a mistake to only read and re-read a textbook passage. It’s much less effective than active recall, and it can give a false sense of confidence.

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When you've got your chemistry book in front of you, everything's right there on the page, it's very familiar and fluent so you say to yourself, "Yes, I know this." But when you go in to take a classroom test, or in real life when you need to reconstruct your knowledge, the book's not there. These findings about active recall are not new or faddish. The basic insight goes back decades.

Many teachers still use the recitation-classroom quizzes or students questioning each other. This strategy works. When students study on their own, 'active recall' - recitation, for instance, or flashcards and other self-quizzing - is the most effective way to inscribe something in long-term memory. The idea is that, after you've read something once, you've got what you're going to get out of it, and then you need to start applying the information.

### **Rote learning?**

Some may feel this approach suggests an old model of learning. Students memorise information and regurgitate it. I would suggest that a week after reading a complex passage, students who recited the material after reading it did much better at solving problems that involved analysing and drawing inferences from the material than the students who simply read the passage over and over.

A certain amount of memorisation is impossible to escape so it might as well be done effectively, and deeper learning will follow.

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*Warwick Dean has dedicated his life to teaching young people, serving in leading Melbourne schools before accepting the role of Headmaster at The Hutchins School Hobart.*

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