

STUDY SKILLS GUIDE

*Study Tips & Test Preparation Strategies
for High School Students*

2nd Edition

Edited by Stacy Farrell

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Study Skills Guide, 2nd Edition

Study Tips and Test Preparation Strategies
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Introduction

Why study?

*“Our most precious resources,
our greatest hope for the future,
are the minds and hearts of our
people, especially our children.”*

Ronald Reagan

WHY STUDY?

Do you ever finish reading a page, and then promptly forget everything you just read?

That happens to me, too! All. the. time.

Until I have “pegs” upon which to hang new facts and ideas, most of it slips away. Fortunately, as I become familiar with a subject, my retention steadily increases.

Brain Mechanics

As I learned a little about how our brains work, I discovered that sort of “forgetfulness” is pretty common. Few people possess photographic minds—able to immediately grasp and retain information the first time they encounter it.

Most people need repeated exposure before they comprehend new ideas and begin to connect them to what they already know.

If you (or your students) struggle to understand and retain what you learn, be encouraged! There are strategies you can learn and practice that will help.

Study Skills

This resource presents concepts to help you develop effective study skills. In particular, it covers how to:

- Establish and follow a study schedule.
- Increase your concentration during study times.
- Strengthen your “memory muscle.”
- Take notes effectively.

Why Study?

Before we launch into the explanation of how you can develop effective study skills, let's talk about your goals.

Are you (or your students) only studying what is necessary to pass a test? Or are you studying to truly understand the material?

The destination determines the path....

Study for a Test

It is possible to excel at taking tests without actually learning the material on the tests.

All too often students strive to master memory techniques simply to pass exams—to the neglect of thoughtfully processing and gaining a true understanding of the information covered.

In those instances, students may earn an "A" for their efforts, but have they earned an education?

Study for Understanding

Sometimes it makes sense to limit your effort to only what is required to temporarily store information before taking a test.

But—*if you want to become a truly educated person*—do not make a practice of superficial learning.

Pursue Knowledge *and* Understanding

Use the strategies in this guide to excel in your coursework—but don't stop there. Use them to capture and truly comprehend the lessons contained in your courses.

Pursue both knowledge *and* understanding.

I hope the strategies, tools, and tips within these pages help to deepen and enrich your learning adventure.

Stacy Farrell, Editor

Part One

Be Strategic

*“Let our advance worrying
become advance thinking
and planning.”*

Winston Churchill

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Your outlook deeply influences your productivity. Consequently, if an approach can change your attitude, it may also give you the power to change your actions.

If you approach study times haphazardly—expecting to suffer through long hours of rote memorization and overwhelming assignments—don't be surprised when you feel discouraged.

That state of mind can seriously undermine your performance.

But if you approach study times strategically—armed with tools and techniques that enable you to reduce study time *and* improve your grades—most likely, you will feel empowered.

That state of mind can substantially increase your effectiveness.

Strategic Planning Steps

Effective, reality-based time management is one of the most significant skills a student can develop.

Many students have crammed for a test at least once. However, if cramming has become your habit, it's time to experience the benefits offered by proactively scheduling study times.

With a little strategic planning, you can reduce your stress, increase your retention of the information you study, and actually enjoy your learning experience.

Here's a roadmap:

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1. Choose a calendar.
2. Review your assignments and due dates.
3. Break assignments into bite-sized tasks.
4. Estimate the time needed for each task.
5. Schedule detailed “study appointments” in your calendar for the upcoming week.
6. Honor your study appointment commitments.

Choose Your Study Calendar

To get started on a study schedule, you will need a calendar. Choose one that you can easily access every day.

Your calendar can be a physical planner, software on your computer, or an app on your phone.

Experiment a little, and work out a personalized plan. The goal is structure—not rigidity.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

TIME	8:00 am	9:00 am	10:00 am	11:00 am	12:00 pm	1:00 pm	2:00 pm	3:00 pm	4:00 pm	5:00 pm	6:00 pm	7:00 pm	8:00 pm	NOTES
MONDAY														
TUESDAY														
WEDNESDAY														
THURSDAY														
FRIDAY														
SATURDAY														
SUNDAY														

When Are Your Assignments Due?

Avoid the stress of cramming for the unexpected. Review your notes and course syllabuses to be sure you have correctly identified all due dates.

Create a quick reference list of those dates, and also record them on your calendar. Be sure to keep your list and calendar updated.

Divide and Conquer

You may have heard that the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. Likewise, the best way to tackle big assignments is by breaking them down into bite-sized tasks.

Divide your assignments into specific tasks. Next, estimate how long it will take to complete each one.

How Much Time Do You Need?

Tell yourself the truth. Be realistic about time.

Here are a few questions you can ask to help you determine how much study time you actually have available—and how much time you will need for each assignment:

- How many weekdays do you have available to study?
- How many opportunities to study will you have between now and your due dates?
- How well do you understand the course material?
- Do you need intense study or only a quick review before taking any upcoming tests?

The question of how long a study session should be is a significant one. For this reason, we will discuss the topic further in the next section.

Schedule Your Study Appointments

Determine which tasks you need to complete in the coming week. Next, group them into logical study sessions. Then, block out the appropriate amount of time for each study appointment.

Like study duration, study timing is a critical factor in studying effectively. Please see further tips and explanation in the section titled, “Study Session Timing.”

Keep or Reschedule Your Study Appointments

Honor your commitment to study.

Life happens. Study appointments are flexible, but treat them like you would any other appointment.

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If you schedule a study session and something comes up that requires you to change your plans, reschedule your study appointment immediately.

Use the **Study Schedule** at the end of this section to help you plan your study appointments.

STUDY SESSION DURATION

The Case for Short vs. Long Study Sessions

Study-session timing is largely dependent on your schedule, learning style, type of material, and ultimately, your goals.

For instance, if you are easily bored or distracted, you may need to study in shorter bursts.

Likewise, shorter study sessions may be best when the material you're studying is overwhelming or centered around a difficult concept.

However, if you're someone who prefers to just "get it done," then larger time blocks may work best.

No matter what your study style is, consider capping your maximum hours of study per day at 6 hours. Bear in mind that is the upper limit—burnout awaits beyond.

Speaking of burnout, brain fatigue really does occur, which brings me to my next point....

Identify How Long You Can Study in One Sitting Before Your Brain Gets Tired

The best way to determine how many minutes at a time you should study is to check in with yourself after specific intervals.

To perform this check-in and identify your optimal study time, use a timer and evaluate your thinking at different intervals—15 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, and so on.