

Study Smarter Not Harder

Do you ever feel like your study habits simply aren't cutting it? Do you wonder what you could be doing to perform better in class and on exams? Many students realize that their high school study habits aren't very effective in college. This is understandable, as college is quite different from high school. The professors are less personally involved, classes are bigger, exams are worth more, reading is more intense, and classes are much more rigorous. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you; it just means you need to learn some more effective study skills. Fortunately, there are many active, effective study strategies that are shown to be effective in college classes.

Reading is not studying

Simply reading and re-reading texts or notes is not actively engaging in the material. It is simply re-reading your notes. Only 'doing' the readings for class is not studying. It is simply doing the reading for class. Re-reading leads to quick forgetting.

Think of reading as an important part of pre-studying, but learning information requires actively engaging in the material (Edwards, 2014). Active engagement is the process of constructing meaning from text that involves making connections to lectures, forming examples, and regulating your own learning (Davis, 2007). Active studying does not mean highlighting or underlining text, re-reading, or rote memorization. Though these activities may help to keep you engaged in the task, they are not considered active studying techniques and are weakly related to improved learning (Mackenzie, 1994).

Ideas for active studying include:

- Create a study guide by topic. Formulate questions and problems and write complete answers. Create your own quiz.
- Become a teacher. Say the information aloud in your own words as if you are the instructor and teaching the concepts to a class.
- Derive examples that relate to your own experiences.
- Create concept maps or diagrams that explain the material.
- Develop symbols that represent concepts.
- For non-technical classes (e.g., English, History, Psychology), figure out the big ideas so you can explain, contrast, and re-evaluate them.
- For technical classes, work the problems and explain the steps and why they work.
- Study in terms of question, evidence, and conclusion: What is the question posed by the instructor/author? What is the evidence that they present? What is the conclusion?

Organization and planning will help you to actively study for your courses. When studying for a test, organize your materials first and then begin your active reviewing by topic (Newport, 2007). Often professors provide subtopics on the syllabi. Use them as a guide to help organize your materials. For example, gather all of the materials for one topic (e.g., PowerPoint notes, text book notes, articles, homework, etc.) and put them together in a pile. Label each pile with the topic and study by topics.