Study skills from The Macquarie Dictionary

1. the various skills such as different levels of reading, the use of all the available ways of accessing texts, the practice of making notes and summaries, etc., which assist one to master a subject under study.

Summary Article: STUDY SKILLS
From Encyclopedia of School Psychology

Study skills are the processes individuals use to digest and learn information. Although the term is typically used to characterize student learning in school, study skills are used by individuals across the life span who may be engaged in study activities ranging from the acquisition of a driver’s license to completing a continuing education class associated with a job or career.

In a basic way, study skills are critical for maximizing learning. Just as an automobile mechanic must possess specific tools to tune an automobile engine, so study skills are the tools of learning. Unfortunately, from elementary school through college, many students do not know or possess a solid knowledge of effective study skills and strategies. Poor study skills can lead to an array of negative consequences. Students that drop out of school, for example, produce enormous costs for society and many will never realize their potential.

EFFECTIVE STUDYING

There is no doubt that effective study skills can transform learning. Still, what are the most effective study habits? What is the most efficient way to study? Psychologists interested in the learning process—school psychologists, cognitive psychologists, and educational psychologists—have defined how people learn and how to get the most from their study time. Hettich (1995) suggests that time management skills, memory techniques, and note-taking strategies are critical for maximal learning. Sedita (1995) notes that, while not a panacea for all academic difficulties, study skills (and the learning of study skills) can improve educational experiences for both students and educators.

The fundamental task of primary school is to teach children to read. Subsequently, from elementary school forward, people read to learn. After learning to read, people need to learn effective study skills. The first step to doing this is for an individual to identify his or her most effective learning style. Petch (1991) indicates that while there is not a right or wrong way to learn, students who learn best use tools that complement their particular learning styles. For example, auditory learners should use tape recorders, reading aloud, discussions, and debates to increase their knowledge. Visual learners should focus on note taking, charts, note cards, and visual activities; and kinesthetic learners need to employ tactile approaches such as typing, calculators, writing, and other such activities.

How do people determine their preferred learning method? Skillful, observant, teachers can often help students identify and learn to accommodate to their most natural and strongest learning modality. Another source of information is a psychoeducational evaluation, which is often part of an evaluative process completed by a school psychologist and which may involve a battery of psychological assessment tools. When used by a skilled and appropriately trained examiner, cognitive assessment tools
instruments, achievement tests, and processing instruments can help identify cognitive strengths and weaknesses, and provide remarkable insights into individual learning preferences. Educators can request that the school psychologist collaborate with their instructional curriculum through the administration of learning style indicators to entire classes of students, thus larger numbers of students learn their preferred learning styles. To this end instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985) and Gregorc Style Delineator (Gregorc, 1982) represent a brief glimpse into the types of tools that often can be used with entire classes of students.

Students may also adopt multisensory approaches, which effectively blend auditory, visual, and kinesthetic approaches that can help them more effectively study and learn.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that study skills are critical to maximal learning, too few teachers and schools actually assess study skills and teach effective instruction in this domain. Students more typically complain to teachers about studying long hours for particular examinations, while often claiming relative ignorance for any rationale about a low grade. In truth, some students study without adequate attentional focus, others memorize concepts without translating terms to broad concepts, and others read without knowing how to maximize recall. The most effective students, however, use specific study strategies.

**STUDY STRATEGIES**

Nwafor (2001) suggests that effective study strategies must include:

- Identification of important information
- Note taking
- Retrieval of relevant prior knowledge
- Organization of key information
- Elaboration of new ideas
- Summarization of new knowledge
- Monitoring of comprehension

Without qualification, the more students learn about study skills, the more effective is the teaching/learning partnership (Perkins, 1995). However, building a workable conceptual framework around study skills remains on the periphery. It is clear that students who make classroom study material personally meaningful, who use repetition to obtain memory storage, and who link new knowledge with previous knowledge are more successful on classroom examinations. These three points alone are key to student learning:

1. New knowledge must be personally meaningful.
2. Repetition facilitates memory storage.
3. Linking new knowledge with old knowledge results in learning.

Still, students typically internalize poor study skills and sometimes believe that memorization is the only way to learn. To effectively learn, however, students must:

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Learn that sophisticated study skills and learning strategies can only be used if students have a knowledge base to which new material can be related.

Understand that study skills are truly useful and the reasons the skills are useful.

Understand that study skills are multifaceted and must incorporate multiple elements.

Understand that when properly applied, effective study skills can produce documented gains in educational outcomes.

Understand that just as learning any new skill takes practice, whether it is learning to ski or throwing free throws in basketball, so too, learning study skills takes lots and lots of practice.

Ormrod, in two classic texts (1990, 2000) highlights seven key elements that characterize effective study techniques:

1. Learning to Select Important Information: Students are continually confronted with a barrage of information. Typically, students are confronted with more information even in a single class than can be easily accommodated in working memory. Unfortunately, students do not typically know what is important to select and to learn. Students must learn to identify key points.

2. Learning to Summarize Information: Summarizing is an effective way to review major points taught in classes and to group and organize general points. Summarizing helps with repetition, serves as a key review, and helps transfer new information into long-term memory. Students must learn to effectively summarize the overall major points.

3. Learning to Organize Information: Students typically do not know how to effectively organize classroom learning or how to organize the material. Listing facts is not organizing information. Organization is critical as it helps “chunk” new information into usable blocks of material, which can be more easily processed. To maximally learn, material needs to be effectively organized and grouped around central concepts.

4. Learning to Take Effective Notes in Classes: Students vary from writing virtually every facet spoken in lectures to writing virtually nothing. On the other hand, given that a relationship has been demonstrated between note taking and academic performance (Hale, 1983), effective note-taking strategies are important. Students must learn to tie notes to instructional objectives, summarize main ideas, and include details to link main themes with overall knowledge.

5. Learning to Underline Appropriately: Students commonly use highlighters or underline various components in textbooks. Given that underlining can be more time efficient than outlining an entire text, students should learn to underline main ideas and supportive details underscoring major themes. They should also use underlining as a focusing tool. Simply underlining entire texts is not helpful; students must learn how to underline and use highlighters most effectively.

6. Learning to Construct Questions: Students who study effectively turn individual headings into questions to focus their attention. Clearly, turning each heading into a question can facilitate processing and encoding. Have you ever completed reading a section in a book only to realize you cannot recall virtually anything you have read? Try turning each heading into a question. Turning headings into questions can help facilitate learning.

7. Learning to Facilitate Elaborative Processing: Elaboration is a process where new information is
attached to previously learned material to facilitate a relationship. What is the meaning behind a particular section or paragraph? What is the meaning behind a certain section in a text? What is the relevant point the author is attempting to emphasize? Can the material be related to a particular application in the reader’s life?

Smith (2000) outlines a four-step approach to organize learning called the PARS Approach:

1. **Purpose**: Why are you reading?
2. **Ask**: Ask questions related to the purpose.
3. **Read**: Find answers to those questions.
4. **Summarize**: Record information in your own words.

Another approach to learning that is taught to students of all ages is the five-step SQ3R approach. This approach is especially helpful for students with difficulties in reading comprehension or for those who have trouble dissecting and analyzing written text.

1. **Survey**: Start by quickly surveying or scanning the text. Briefly look over the title and the body of the text in order to ascertain the main points, paying special attention to pictures, italicized words and phrases, questions, and first and last sentences in a paragraph.
2. **Question**: Question yourself as you survey. For example, if reading an article titled “How To Make a Pie,” ask yourself questions as you go through the text. Some questions may be: What type of pies can be made? What ingredients are needed? How long does it need to bake? Within each question, ask more questions. What happens if the oven is too hot? What if one bakes it too long or not long enough? This adds a second level of processing to information gathering, and by asking your own questions, the answers that you come up with are processed in your own words, making understanding and retention easier.
3. **Read**: As you read, read to answer your questions, and answer your questions in your own words. It may be helpful to write down your questions before you start reading and write down the answers to each question as you learn. In essence this allows for translating sometimes technical information into easily understandable material.
4. **Recite**: Recite questions and answers out loud. Recitation helps anchor the material and strengthens the use of auditory learning.
5. **Review**: Effective learners continually review previously learned material. To maximally learn, review the notes on the reading within 24 hours. Then, review the material at another time, approximately one week later. Finally, review monthly until the examination.

MODELS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING STUDY SKILLS

**A University-Based Model**

Study skills can be learned in diverse ways. Tuckman (2001) details a *Strategies for Achievement Approach* taught as a complete course at The Ohio State University. With a thorough curriculum and textbook developed to teach study skills to college students, the program was based on achievement motivation research and draws from contemporary research in educational psychology.

The approach teaches four specific achievement strategies:

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1. **Take Reasonable Risks:** Students must set challenging but attainable goals; students must break goals into smaller, workable pieces.

2. **Take Responsibility for Outcomes:** Students must believe in their abilities and must develop a specific study plan.

3. **Search the Environment for Information:** Students must learn to ask questions, and must see what they learn.

4. **Use Feedback:** Students must monitor self-action, and they must provide individual instructions to themselves.

The model covers four specific cognitive components: learning from lectures, learning from textbooks, preparing for examinations, and preparing speeches and papers. While initially developed as a traditional classroom curriculum, The Ohio State University course has shown impressive gains in grade point average.

**A Self-Study Guide**

Loulou (1995) has developed a unique guide, *How to Study for and Take College Tests* for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Offering a plan to assist students to prepare and study for tests, the guide reviews strategies for multiple-choice, essay, and other assorted examinations. In addition, time management, organization, and planning strategies are examined.

The curriculum has applicability for college students and could be invaluable for secondary school students as well. It offers a workable, down-to-earth model; for example, some of the simple, succinct guidelines are:

- Use organization, planning, and time management to maximize success.
- Read assignments, listen in class, and take notes.
- Reread assignments, highlight key points, and review.
- Review, review, review (daily and weekly).
- Look for false answers on multiple-choice tests.
- Look for key words on tests.
- Write formulas to review.
- Place tabs on key sections.
- Number notes.
- Use flash cards for definitions.

**STRATEGIES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Pilcher and Miller (2000) note that not all students learn in the context of traditional classrooms—more than 750,000 students annually learn through distance education coursework. They have carefully analyzed the available research on distance learning and cognitive strategies, and note that note-taking is a prominent tactic to maximize learning, with metacognitive strategies including planning, monitoring,
Planning: Students need to set goals, learn to skim material, and use questions to maximize learning. Successful students skim chapters BEFORE reading the material, while unsuccessful students do not use skimming.

Monitoring: Students must learn to monitor their own learning. In general, monitoring improves acquisition, generalization, and transfer of knowledge and distinguishes successful from less successful learners. Monitoring can include self-testing.

Self-Regulation: Students need to develop self-regulatory strategies such as learning to modulate their reading rate. Self-regulatory strategies also include reviewing strategies and test-taking skills.

In addition to specific cognitive study skills, effective students have a:

- Study schedule with specific study times
- Daily and/or weekly study pattern
- Setting conducive to study
- Quiet and organized study location
- Persistent attitude to study regularly
- Pattern of self-talk to reinforce studying
- Support network to reinforce studying
- Relationship with an instructor to reinforce learning
- Pattern of note-taking, skimming, and self-testing

CONCLUSION

Students who use study skills experience greater academic successes—research shows a definitive relationship between study habits and academic success at both high school and college levels. At the same time, large numbers of students do not know or use effective study skills. Conceptually, it is ironic that while study skills are key to maximizing learning, study skills are not routinely taught in the educational environment. That is, while children are effectively taught to read in the primary grades, few students learn that while we subsequently read to learn—from the primary grades forward—we must also learn effective study strategies to master learning and development.

Can study skills enhance educational outcomes? The answer is an unequivocal yes. The only question is how to teach students the specific tools to reach their learning goals.

See also Academic Achievement; Homework; Learning Styles; Mathematics Interventions and Strategies; Reading Interventions and Strategies; Writing Interventions and Strategies

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