Step Seven

Study Smart

Students who "study smart" find that they spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

Find a good place to study. Although it's usually best to have one place where you study regularly, it doesn't matter where you study as long as it has good lighting, a surface for writing, and it's comfortable. Equip your study area with paper and pencils, a calculator, dictionary, thesaurus, and one-volume encyclopedia.

Some students need it to be quiet when they study; others can work with music or the TV on. If you like to listen to music when you study, consider listening to classical music. Research has shown that classical music can actually improve your concentration. You, of course, must determine what works best for you.

> *"I like to watch TV while I'm doing busywork-type homework, but not when I'm studying." (Maria)*

> *"If I have a problem studying, I change locations. It's kind of like taking a break." (Greg)*

Get started. Getting started on your studying is usually the hardest part. Don't put it off until later, don't make excuses, and don't wait until you're "in the mood." Begin with something simple or a subject that you like, and just get started.

Know your learning style. We all learn differently. Some students learn best by seeing the material (visual learners), some learn best from hearing the information (auditory learners), and some learn best by doing (kinesthetic learners). Think about how you learn and adjust how you study accordingly.

Visual learners learn best from films, pictures, TV, reading, and demonstrations. If you are a visual learner, take notes, use flash cards, charts, and diagrams, form pictures in your mind, and make use of color in your notes. Auditory learners learn best from lectures, discussions, TV, films, and music. If you are an auditory learner, read aloud, have discussions, listen to tapes, review information out loud, and use memory tricks involving rhythm and rhyme. If you are a kinesthetic learner, you learn best from role playing, labs, and hands-on activities. Try moving around while you study, use tools and objects whenever possible, write or type notes, and role play ideas and concepts.

> *"I must be a visual learner because I have to see what I'm trying to learn." (John)*

As a general rule, the more senses you involve and the wider variety of methods you use while studying, the more you remember. William Glasser, a well-known author and expert in the field of education, says that,

> *"Students learn 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what is discussed with others, 80% of what they experience personally, and 95% of what they teach to someone else."*

Organize your study time.

- Before you start to study, make a plan. Decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you are going to do it. Make sure that your plan is realistic.
- Prioritize your work in order to make sure that you have enough time for the things that are the most important.
- If you have something that seems overwhelming, break it down into smaller parts.
- If you have something to memorize, work on that first, and then go over it again at the end of your study session.
- Always allow more time than you think you'll need.
- Study your least favorite subject first to get it out of the way.
- Alternate types of assignments (read English, do math, read history, etc.).
- Know when and how to take breaks. Research has shown that students learn the most during the first and last ten minutes of any study session. Try studying for 20 minutes and then taking a short break (get a drink, get up and stretch, etc.).

"When I study, I take short breaks between subjects." (Brad)

Know how to study for tests.

- Know what the test is going to cover so that you'll know what to study. For essay tests, it's important to understand the big picture and to know main points and key facts. For fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice tests, you need to know more detailed information.
- Pay particularly close attention in class the day before a test; teachers often use this time to go over information that's going to be on the test.
- If a teacher gives you a review sheet, study it until you know everything on it. Then use the review sheet to come up with questions that you think will be on the test.

"If a teacher gives us a review sheet, I study that first." (Maria)

- Have all of your reading done ahead of time. If your textbook has review questions, go over them, and be sure you know the answers.

"I try to get all of the reading done a couple of days before the test. Then I can just skim and review." (Greg)

- You really know something if you can explain it in your own words. Try teaching the material to yourself in front of a mirror.
- Review often. When you review, you move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. Review is the key to learning anything.

"When I have a test to study for, I first study by myself. Then I get together with friends to review." (Sarah)

Use tricks to help you memorize information.

- Use study cards or flashcards to memorize vocabulary words, facts, and lists.

"If you have a lot to memorize, spread it out over a period of time, and just keep going over and over it." (Brad)

"Notecards really help me memorize things, especially vocabulary." (Jermaine)

- Write down what you want to memorize and stare at it. Close your eyes and try to see it in your mind. Say it, and then look at it again. Repeat if necessary.

- If you are an auditory learner, use rhyming or rhythm to help you memorize things. Make up a rap or memorize to a beat.
- Right before you go to sleep at night, go over any information that you want to remember. Your brain will commit it to memory while you sleep.
- Use acronyms to help you memorize. For example, the acronym HOMES can help you remember the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior).
- Use the first letter of the words you want to remember to make up a stupid, silly sentence. For example, let's say you need to remember the planets for an upcoming test. Just make up a stupid sentence like, "My very elegant mother just scooped up nine piglets." (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto) As soon as you get your test, say this sentence to yourself and at the top of your test write MVEMJSUNP - the first letter of each of the planets. Then when you need to write in the names of the planets on the test, you already have your memory cue written out. This technique can be used in many ways. For example, if you have to remember the 5 main causes of the Depression, take 5 key words and use the first letters to make up a ridiculous sentence.
- Look for an easy or logical connection. For example, to remember that Homer wrote the Odyssey, just think, "Homer is an *odd* name."
- Use ridiculous, unforgettable images to help you trigger your memory. For example, a ridiculous image could help you remember that Hawthorne wrote The Scarlet Letter. Just visualize a large red letter A with a big thorn sticking in it saying "Ha!" Sometimes associations need to be a little more complicated. For example, to remember that Dostoevsky wrote Crime and Punishment, visualize a guy named Dos playing with a toy while he's snow skiing (Dos-toy-ski). Someone yells to him, "You can't play with a toy on a ski hill! That's a crime and you'll be punished!" Get the idea? It can actually be fun coming up with your own silly associations and images, and, they work.

Know how to write a paper. The key to writing a good paper is to spread it out over as much time as possible. Writing a paper should be a process, not a one-time event. Start off by brainstorming and taking notes; then make an outline. From your outline, write a rough draft. Rewrite the paper until you have it just the way you want it, and then write the final draft. It's important to put your paper away at least once or twice during this process. When you take it out and read it again, you'll see and hear things that you didn't notice before.

To get a good grade on a paper, you must 1) follow the directions exactly, 2) make sure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors, 3) have someone else read your paper to give you suggestions, 4) make sure your paper looks neat, and 5) always turn your paper in on time.

Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.

- Use props whenever possible. Props, such as posters, books, or sporting equipment, give you something to look at and something to do with your hands. You can also put notes on the back of them.
- When you give a presentation or speech, pretend that you are telling your best friend something really important.
- Effective speakers make eye contact with those in their audience. If this is difficult for you to do, look at their foreheads instead.

Learn word processing. If you don't know how to type or use a computer for word processing, see your counselor and sign up for a keyboarding or computer class as soon as possible.

Step Seven Review

Study Smart

- **Find a good place to study.**
- **Get started.**
- **Know your learning style.**
- **Organize your study time.**
- **Know how to study for tests.**
- **Use tricks to help you memorize information.**
- **Know how to write a paper.**
- **Use tricks when making a presentation or speech.**
- **Learn word processing.**

TEST HINTS

* GET STARTED

* FIND A GOOD STUDY SPACE
  MINE IS: _____

* USE TRICKS TO MEMORIZE INFORMATION
  MY BEST TRICK IS:
  _____

* KNOW YOUR LEARNING STYLE
  MY LEARNING STYLE IS: _____

* ORGANIZE YOUR TIME, TAKE BREAKS

* START WITH THE TEACHER'S REVIEW SHEET

* USE THE STRATEGIES THAT WORK BEST FOR YOU:
  MY BEST THREE ARE:
  _____
  _____
  _____