



HOW TO STUDY: SKILLS FOR STUDENTS



You're busy, you're juggling your course work and a job, not to mention family and friends – do you need help with managing your time to study?

With thanks to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) website, this guide is a reminder to make sure you understand what you are learning, look after yourself, and most importantly, don't waste a precious minute!

- Managing your time
- Where to do it
- Learning to read – reading to learn
- Noting it down
- Where to get it – sourcing information
- What learning style are you?
- Further help



Managing your time

When to do it – Morning person or night owl? When do you concentrate best? Some people prefer a short session at a particular time each day, others decide which days of the week might work better for longer periods of study. What works for you?

Procrastination is the killer – Be honest, you probably won't manage hours of study time after a long shift at work, a full day of tutorials and lectures, (or the morning after a late night out!), concentration is harder, you might just feel tired or defeated. Given your other commitments - what is possible? Try not to put it off using other things as excuses – plan to do it and stick to it, and if it doesn't happen, don't feel guilty – be realistic!

Give yourself a break – Make sure you have time to rest and recharge – if you are working and studying it is really important to build in proper breaks – just talking to friends, listening to music, watching TV, or going for a walk can help.

Sneak in an extra session – You don't have to be sat at a desk in the library to study – what about using travel time (trains and buses) to read short chapters or notes? Write a few key points on a card to take with you to read in a queue, or take a small book, or make a recording on your iPod for longer waiting times. (NB: studying and driving yourself could be unsafe!)

Are you easily distracted? – Turn off your phone, tell other people you really need the time to study and won't be available. Close your door, or go somewhere they won't bother you.

Don't waste time rummaging – Hunting through books or notes can waste time – use post-its or bookmark pages, make sure your notes are in order or indexed – then you can go straight to what you plan to read. Cross-reference your notes with useful book titles, chapters and pages, or websites, noted in margins. Use different colours to link topics.

Make a (contingency) plan – Be clear about deadlines, dates, and time you have for study, assignments, or exam revision.

Don't leave things to the last minute and make sure you have a plan B if disaster strikes. It goes without saying – back up computer work on a flash-drive or external hard-drive after every session.

Are you on track? – Test yourself occasionally – to check whether or not you have understood and learned something. Be fair on yourself, look for positives and negatives, it's too easy to just find faults. Discuss what you've read with your tutor or other students on your course. Try a sample question or swap your set textbook for another on the same subject.

Where to study? – House? Library? Station waiting room? What works for you? Wherever you choose to study, make sure you won't be interrupted, and it is quiet – or at least there are no distractions. It all depends on you, and your study style.

Keep things safe – Keep your books and notes safe. If you share a house or live in student accommodation, you may have to keep your books and notes in your bedroom. However, that's where you should relax and sleep, so it's important to keep study stuff in a specific place (bookshelf, box or desk), rather than strewn all over your bedroom.

Studying alone – If reading and making notes on your own makes you feel isolated or lonely, try linking up with others who are also studying. Quiz each other, discuss what you have read, go to a different house or venue to study together, e-mail useful information around your group (links to websites, or if a relevant programme is coming up on TV or radio), share journal or newspaper articles with each other, or get each person to 'specialise' in a particular topic, so they can share key learning with the others. Try something scary: ask another student to read your assignment and give you honest feedback, before you hand it in! Do the same for them – it gets you used to peer-reviewing.

Learning to read – reading to learn

Try a technique called 'SQ3R' to help with all the reading you'll be doing:

- **Survey** – read the contents/chapter headings of text books to see if they'll be relevant, then scan the chapters themselves – to see if you'll need to read the whole section or not
- **Question** – how does the bit you choose to read help with your study? What will you use it for? Do you need to make notes or is it just for background? Is it a completely new subject or have you come across the ideas and information previously?
- **Read** – depends on your concentration levels, could be a paragraph, page or chapter at one go.
- **Recall/Reflect/Recite** – what did you read about? Do you need to read it again? (check you actually learned something!)
- **Review** – answer your own questions: did it help with the topic? How can you use the information? Was there anything you didn't understand? Do you need further reading, discussion or research?

Noting it down

Making good notes means that you won't have to repeat great chunks of reading or other studying, instead you can use your notes for assignments or exam revision. It could be even more effective to do some of the following:

- Keep relevant notes and related materials together in a folder or file
- Underline or highlight key points (use different colours if it helps you link topics)
- Make substantial notes for anything new, then review them to pick out key points (précis)
- Keep a record (use postcards, or a backed-up database) of every different piece of material you use – books, websites, newspapers or journals. Learn how to use the preferred referencing style (eg Harvard) for recording the source, so you can put these references in your assignments or exams – essential!

Never assume you'll remember where you found information – you'll invariably waste time trying to find it again if you haven't noted it down.

Where to get it – sourcing information

- Set texts, from recommended reading lists, other students or your tutor, book references/footnotes
- Journals, magazines and newspaper articles – subscribe, share, or use library copies
- Television and radio – look out for, (and record), programmes – the news, documentaries, discussions or exposés, about relevant topics – you can usually search up to 7 or 8 days ahead on key words on your freeview or Skybox, or look in TV guides
- Websites – ensure you use a reliable (or official) website, especially if you are going to use it as a reference (use the full web address for the relevant site, page, and make a note of the date you accessed it, as most useful websites update content regularly).

What learning style are you?

People don't learn in the same ways, but most have a preferred way of learning – Honey and Mumford identified 4 distinct styles – which description is nearest to you?

- **Activist** – 'hands on', prefers active learning sessions, learns by doing, quick and decisive. Likes debate, to do, active learning sets and practical workshop sessions. Could feel isolated or frustrated when studying alone. Will need to make time to understand theories and reflect on learning.
- **Pragmatist** – 'show me', likes to test things out in practice to see if they work, enjoys real-life examples, evidence or proof are important. Case studies, reports, commentary all make sense. Might need to make sure they do recognise the importance of underlying theory or wider professional debate.
- **Reflector** – 'tell me', prefers to think about what they have learned, carefully considering how things might work, rather than jumping to conclusions. Might prefer own reading to practical sessions. Could end up taking too much time thinking and not have time to learn all the material or test things out in practice. Can join in discussions when others are bouncing quick ideas around by asking 'why do you think that?' or 'what made you decide...?'

- **Theorist** – 'convince me', enjoys concepts and theories, can analyse information (from published texts, reports, written debate, websites), to build up their understanding. However, should try to remain open to different approaches, and creative or unproven views.

Although most people have a preferred style, varying learning activity helps ensure you don't get upset if material is presented in a particular way – you'll become more adaptable and able to respond to different situations without becoming stressed!

Try mixing lone study (text books, journals, TV, radio, websites, or i-Pod recordings) with your lectures, tutorials or group discussions. Follow a library session by taking a couple of friends for coffee and talk over what you've just been reading.

Try an old exam question on your own, and discuss with others how you'd all approach structuring the answer.

Further help

Never feel bad about asking for help if you need it, most people are only too happy to pass on their experience and support you. If you are new to studying on your own, or finding it difficult, try

- Your tutor, or someone else in the department
- On-line, try searching under 'studying', 'learning'
- Complete the Honey and Mumford 'Learning Styles Questionnaire' (search on-line for a free version)
- Other students – either those on your course, or in the years above
- Placement supervisor or colleagues working in the department or clinic
- Text books, websites, journals (including Mental Health Nursing Journal!), TV, radio
- GP or student health centre if you are getting really stressed or upset
- University or college learning support services (for example, help with dyslexia)

Look after yourself, remember your '5-a-day', get enough sleep, and make sure you balance your life and study – with neither at the expense of the other!

Reference:

Honey, P and Mumford, A (1982). 'The Manual of Learning Styles'. London: P Honey.