


# 10 Highly Effective Study Habits

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By John M. Grohol, Psy.D. ~ 9 min read

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**Effective study habits -- studying smarter -- can be learned to improve your ability to better retain reading material. These habits include approaching study with the right attitude, choosing the right environment, minimizing distractions, setting a realistic schedule, and employing memory games, among others.**

Students grapple with many issues in their lives, and because of all of the competing things for your attention, it's hard to concentrate on studying. And yet if you're in school, you have to do at least a *little* studying in order to progress from year to year.

If you want better grades, you need more effective study habits. The key to effective studying isn't cramming or studying longer, but **studying smarter**. You can begin studying smarter with these ten proven and effective study habits.

## 1. How you approach studying matters.

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Too many people look at studying as a necessary task, not an enjoyment or opportunity to learn. That's fine, but researchers have found that **how** you approach something matters almost as much as what you do. Being in the right mindset is important in order to study smarter.

Sometimes you can't "force" yourself to be in the right mindset, and it is during such times you should simply avoid studying. If you're distracted by a relationship issue, an upcoming game, or finishing an important project, then studying is just going to be an exercise in frustration. Come back to it when you're not focused (or obsessed!) by something else going on in your life.

Ways to help improve your study mindset:

- *Aim to think positively when you study*, and remind yourself of your skills and abilities.
- *Avoid catastrophic thinking*. Instead of thinking, "I'm a mess, I'll never have enough time to study for this exam," look at it like, "I may be a little late to study as much as I'd like, but since I'm doing it now, I'll get most of it done."
- *Avoid absolute thinking*. Instead of thinking "I always mess things up," the more objective view is, "I didn't do so well that time, what can I do to improve?"
- *Avoid comparing yourself with others*, because you usually just end up feeling bad about

yourself. Your skills and abilities are unique to you, and you alone.

## 2. Where you study is important.

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A lot of people make the mistake of studying in a place that really isn't conducive to concentrating. A place with a lot of distractions makes for a poor study area. If you try and study in your dorm room, for instance, you may find the computer, TV, or a roommate more interesting than the reading material you're trying to digest.

The library, a nook in a student lounge or study hall, or a quiet coffee house are good places to check out. Make sure to choose the quiet areas in these places, not the loud, central gathering areas. Investigate multiple places on-campus and off-campus, don't just pick the first one you find as "good enough" for your needs and habits. Finding an ideal study place is important, because it's one you can reliably count on for the next few years.

## 3. Bring everything you need, nothing you don't.

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Unfortunately, when you find an ideal place to study, sometimes people bring things they don't need. For instance, while it may seem ideal to type notes into your laptop to refer back to later, computers are a powerful distraction for many people because of their versatility. Playing games, checking your feeds, texting, and watching videos are all wonderful distractions *that have nothing to do with studying*. So ask yourself whether you really need your laptop to take notes, or whether you can make do with old-fashioned paper and pen or pencil. Keep your phone in your purse or backpack to keep distraction at bay as much as possible.

Don't forget the things you need to study for the class, exam, or paper you're focusing on for the study session. Nothing is more time-consuming and wasteful than having to run back and forth regularly because you forget an important book, paper, or some other resource you need to be successful. If you study best with your favorite music playing, try and limit your interaction with your phone while changing tracks. Your phone is a potential time-sink and one of the worst enemies of concentration.

## 4. Outline and rewrite your notes.

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Most people find that keeping to a standard outline format helps them boil information down to its most basic components. People find that connecting similar concepts together makes it easier to remember when the exam comes around. The important thing to remember in writing outlines is that an outline only works as a learning tool when it is in your own words and structure. Every person is unique in how they put similar information together (called "chunking" by cognitive psychologists). So while you're welcomed to copy other people's notes or outlines, make sure you translate those notes and outlines into your own words and concepts. Failing to do this is what often causes many students to stumble in remembering important items.

It may also be helpful to use as many senses as possible when studying, because information is retained more readily in people when other senses are involved. That's why writing notes works in the first place – it puts information into words and terms you understand. Mouthing the words out loud while you copy the notes before an important exam can be one method for involving yet another sense.

## 5. Use memory games (mnemonic devices).

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Memory games, or **mnemonic devices**, are methods for remembering pieces of information using a simple association of common words. Most often people string together words to form a nonsense sentence that is easy to remember. The first letter of each word can then be used to stand for something else – the piece of information you're trying to remember. The most common mnemonic device example is "Every Good Boy Deserves Fun." Putting the first letters of every word together – EGBDF – gives a music student the five notes for treble clef.

The key to such memory devices is the new phrase or sentence you come up with has to be more memorable and easier to remember than the terms or information you're trying to learn. These don't work for everyone, so if they don't work for you, don't use them.

Mnemonic devices are helpful because you use more of your brain to remember visual and active images than you do to remember just a list of items. Using more of your brain means better memory.

## 6. Practice by yourself or with friends.

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The old age adage, practice makes perfect, is true. You can practice by yourself by testing yourself with either practice exams, past quizzes, or flash cards (depending what kind of course it is and what's available). If a practice exam isn't available, you can make one up for yourself and your classmates (or find someone who will). If a practice or old exam from a course is available, use it as a guide – do not study to the practice or old exam! (Too many students treat such exams as the real exams, only to be disappointed when the real exam has none of the same questions). Such exams help you understand the breadth of content and types of questions to expect, not the actual material to study for.

Some people enjoy reviewing their materials with a group of friends or classmates. Such groups work best when they're kept small (4 or 5 others), with people of similar academic aptitude, and with people taking the same class. Different formats work for different groups. Some groups like to work through chapters together, quizzing one another as they go through it. Others like to compare class notes, and review materials that way, ensuring they haven't missed any critical points. Such study groups can be helpful for many students, but not all.

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