

STUDY SKILLS

Developing Your Study Schedule

Many educators believe most students need an average of two hours of study time for each hour they are in class. So a student taking fifteen credits would need thirty hours of study time per week. However, many students find that this simple formula just doesn't work for them. In order to get a more accurate figure, you really need to consider the number of credits that you have, the difficulty of the courses that you are taking, the goals you have set, and how quickly or how slowly you work. You may need to increase your study hours, for example, if you are taking very difficult classes of 3 to 1 (three hours of outside work for every hour in class) or even 4 to 1.

There are several things to keep in mind when you set up your study schedule:

1. Do not use your experience in high school as a guide to how much study time you should allow. If you want to do as well in college as you did in high school, you will need to allow more time for studying; if you want to do better, you will need to allow much more time for your studies.
2. Think of school as a full-time job (i.e. 8:00am to 5:00pm.) Dedicate these hours, where possible, solely to school work. Schedule study time for the hours that you have between classes. Instead of going back to your apartment to drop off your books or watch television, find an empty classroom or go to the library and begin your next reading assignment. Take a few minutes to count how many hours you have between classes for one week and then add them up for the whole semester (fourteen weeks). You can turn this so often wasted time into very valuable study time by planning effectively.
3. Review your notes immediately after class each day. Studies have shown that one's retention of classroom material drops to less than 50% within one hour of class and below 25% within twenty-four hours. By reviewing the material immediately following class, however, you'll retain about 83% of the classroom material. You can use this time to review the notes you just took in your previous class or to fill in things you may have missed writing down while the material is still fresh in your mind. The key to keeping the retention at this level is to do an additional review within 24 hours of class, and then to go back and review your notes on an on-going weekly basis.
4. Most school terms have a "snowball" effect in which work tends to accumulate during the last half or last third of a term. You should keep this in mind and schedule time to complete term papers and projects as early in the semester as possible. By referring to your semester calendar, you can decide which tasks should be completed during the next week. Remember to look ahead for exams or long-range assignments and to include these tasks in your plan. The key is planning ahead.
5. Make a realistic schedule. You need to include time for relaxation, hobbies, or just having fun with your friends. If you over schedule yourself or don't include time for the "pleasures of life" you will not follow your time plan. However, schedule these "pleasures of life" as a reward for your hard work. By completing your schoolwork between the hours of 8am and 5pm you should have time for yourself in the evenings. The more practice you have at scheduling your time, the more you will learn just how much you can do.
6. Be flexible. You may find that during the week, something unexpected may come up, or some tasks may just simply take longer than you had planned. Allow some flexibility for those situations. If your schedule is too rigid, you will just end up frantically trying to fit everything in.

TIME MANAGEMENT STUDY STRATEGIES

Organizing your work and scheduling your time can make a huge difference in how much time it takes to do your work. One thing that can make a difference in whether or not you accomplish your goals is your level of motivation. You can keep your level of motivation high by using some specific techniques.

STUDY IN ONE-HOUR BLOCKS

One effective strategy for keeping yourself motivated is to study in sixty-minute time blocks (unless you are a kinesthetic type of learner and then perhaps blocks of 30 minutes.) As you schedule your study tasks, break down tasks so that they can be accomplished in a one-hour block of time. Then plan to read, do problems, write, or study for fifty minutes

TAKE BREAKS

After each study block of fifty minutes, you should plan a ten-minute break. Be realistic about the kind of activity that you plan for a study break. Taking a ten-minute nap will not work, and going out to play a quick game of basketball inevitably will lead to a longer game of basketball--watching television will have the same effect. What can you do in ten minutes? You can grab a snack, work on a crossword puzzle, take a short walk (even if it's just around the library) or play a hand or two of solitaire (a good concentration builder). Doing aerobics or just stretching are also great activities for a break between study periods.

SWITCH SUBJECTS

By periodically switching subjects, you can get more done without becoming bored and tired. If you have a long time block available for study (for instance 6:00-11:00), you should switch subjects every hour. Occasionally, you will find that you are really progressing on an assignment and want to continue working on it. In such cases, you should do so. However, most students find that after an hour they are only too willing to work on something else for a while.

STUDY DIFFICULT SUBJECTS FIRST & AT YOUR PRIME TIME

In your study schedule, plan to work on the hardest, most difficult, or most boring subjects or assignments first. Make sure you are scheduling these items at your "prime time"-the time of day when you are most awake and have the most energy. You will probably find it is easier for you to complete assignments for your favorite class when you are feeling tired, but this is usually not the case for the more difficult ones. If you leave these until last, you may find that you worry about them as you work on other tasks, and it often feels like a heavy weight hanging over your head.

PLAN REWARDS

Students use many kinds of rewards to stay motivated. In your study schedule, plan rewards for yourself after you have finished studying or have completed a tough assignment. If you follow your plan and complete some of your study tasks before you go out or watch television, you can also eliminate the guilty feelings that often accompany these activities. Planning rewards can be great motivators in helping you complete your assignments and stick to your study schedule.

PLAN TO WORK AHEAD

To be in control of your time, learn to work ahead on your assignments. You will find college much less stressful if you get out of the habit of doing Tuesday's assignments on Monday night. Get into the habit of doing the work due for Tuesday on Saturday or even Friday. Always being a little ahead of the game will give you a feeling of security and control. Make sure to always work ahead on long-range assignments such as term papers or projects. Even planning just an hour a week to work on these tasks will prevent you from cramming them in at the end along with all of the other things you have to do. The key is planning.