

STUDY SKILLS

Introduction -

Study skills are a set of skills that can enable you to study and learn efficiently – they are an important set of transferable life skills.

It is imperative to recognize that study skills need not just be academically related but also to apply in day to day activities. Students who want to understand how to perform better could practice some of these techniques.

There are generally three kinds of learners and it will be helpful to understand which category you fall under based on your first inclination.

Visual learning -

If you learn better with pictures, graphs and diagrams then it's important to find material that is pictorial and make some notes and diagrams that are visually appealing. It is important to make sketches during a lecture and make small diagrams for later. It could also be helpful to be closer to a visual aid like in a classroom setting. There will always be accessibility when it comes to using your eyes. Sometimes there might be the need to use a combination of both auditory and visual elements especially if you're audio-visual. You could multitask and listen to what you are seeing as well.

Auditory learning –

If you're someone who needs to keenly listen to every word someone is saying and will frown and feel lost if you cannot hear clearly then you are probably an auditory learner. It's important to read aloud and find yourself in an environment where there isn't too much noise otherwise you will get distracted easily. Try and plan ahead and request for your own space and in a classroom setting move to the front of the class and do not hesitate to ask questions often. Listen to podcasts and get someone to read out your lesson for you with your eyes closed.

Kinaesthetic learning –

If you find yourself feeling restless and uncomfortable when you're trying to learn especially because you are not allowed any movement then you are probably a kinaesthetic learner. You probably need constant stimulation and activity with a few well planned breaks and rewards which we will talk about more in the next part. You could use your whole body to learn. Try and volunteer to participate in classroom activities. Always keep a pen and notebook with you. You are an experiential learner and you'll need to actually do something to learn and remember. Spend time in the lab and go back home and safely apply what you heard and saw in a text or in class.

I once had a student who was experiencing high stress due to academic pressure. He had the thought that he had to pass in order to get freedom from his parents. This resulted in him feeling anxious and stressed constantly. Due to this he wasn't quite studying at all, he wasn't able to do anything. I happened to take him to the basketball court where we realised that he was a kinaesthetic learner. The more we played the better he felt. What we realised from this experiment is that when he moves, and does something actively, he feels a lot better. He was used to only *thinking* about his academic responsibilities and *feeling* anxious about the same. However, he wasn't *doing* anything about this, in this case that would be to study. The action was missing, this helped him realise that all he needed was initiative.

Combinations –

Sometimes you might need a combination of two or more where you'll need to do something while observing and learning. It would help to ask others who know you about some blind spots and use that to your advantage

Memory and Observation –

Learning and studying also requires you to remember and accurately retrieve what you have learnt. Some people remember events that are important. At times we may not find it useful if our memory fails us. We will learn how to use memory to our advantage:

Cues –

Cues are basically hints that help the brain recognize what it has experienced at some point and has maybe safely stored in the long term memory. It could be something that we have perceived through our five senses. It would help to become aware of the place we were in

when we studied something and also the mood we were in. Eg: visualising the room you studied in.

Rehearsal –

There are no shortcuts when it comes to repeating what has already been learnt. Our brain tends to filter out something that hasn't been given enough importance. Our brain remembers auditory and visual stimulus only for a few seconds in the short term memory. It is important to recall and attach important meaning to it through repetition to be able to retrieve it.

Chunking –

This refers to learning through categorising a few similar kinds of information into chunks. It could be by just remembering the first letters of all the paragraphs you need to learn. I still remember what my friend and I chunked in the tenth grade history paper. It was D.W.E.R.E.R.V.R. (each stood for something like D for development, W for western civilization and so on). We were so glad and we had a good laugh after that. We also learnt to remember song lyrics and other guitar parts as musicians that way. The breakdown really matters.

Individual differences –

Everyone learns and studies differently. There is no particular way and fixed method but you will eventually find yours. I remember when my brother was extremely sick he would ask me to read aloud what was written in his textbook. He is six years older to me and I had no way of understanding what any of what it meant. I now remember it was business studies and realized that reading out loud helped me as well. Sometimes students whisper the answer to themselves during exams and I hope they don't get caught for cheating in an exam.

Some people learn better in quiet environments while others need something around them that keeps them more focussed. I know a few who listen to music while studying and some like to eat or chew gum. They say it works for them.

In my interaction with students who come to me for counselling seem to learn better in a one on one setting where they have my undivided attention. We learn through play and by activating the five senses.

An activity –

Focus on what you are listening to right now. Only focus on your ears. I can in this moment hear the keys clicking away as I type, sounds of the fan, birds chirping and someone's footsteps. You've probably heard something similar. Listen closely. You'll hear the sound of your own breath. Take a few deep breaths.

Now look up from your screen and observe five things of your favourite colour. I just saw a blue towel, T-Shirt, book, a bin and a deodorant. I can almost smell some of these things.

Now take a break and go do something you like.

Conclusion –

Spend some time in the present and recognize that learning is a process and you can find your own way of learning. Go through what you have read above once more and you will have the skills you need. Maybe read it aloud this time if you are auditory.

References –

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2. Keys to foster study skills and learning attitude. (2008). *Navigating Problem Based Learning*, 128–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-7295-3827-5.50008-6>
3. Credé, M., & Kuncel, N. R. (2008). Study habits, skills, and attitudes: The third pillar supporting collegiate academic performance. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(6), 425–453. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00089.x>