Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine



Middletown

REACH Program

Handout #1

High Yield Study and

Test Taking Tips

Academic success is not a mystery. Speak to a dozen students that are at the top of their game, and it is likely that you will find that they are applying some of the same “keys” to success. This handout outlines some of those high yield nuggets that can be put into play right now to improve academic outcomes. What experience do you have with these study tips? Have you discovered others? Come to your first session prepared to share with your team your experience with these and other keys to effective studying.

**Time Management**

Allocate your time carefully and thoughtfully!

* Don’t put off studying for that next test with the plan of catching up over the weekend. It is well established that spacing out your study sessions over a longer period of time improves long term memory. In other words, if you have 6 hours to spend on a subject, it's better to study it for 2 hours each day for three days than to cram all 6 hours into one day.

Why does this work? One possible cause is that, over time, people forget what they learned in their initial study session. Then, when they come back to the material later, the new study session jogs their memory and they recall what they learned the first time around. That process — forgetting and retrieval — helps cement the new knowledge in place. (American Psychological Association website)

Also from the American Psychological Association website: “When it comes to spacing, students are often led astray by their own experiences, says Kent State University psychology professor Katherine Rawson, PhD, who also studies learning. "They cram right before an exam, and to be honest that's probably OK for doing fine on your exam," she says. "But the problem is that it's horrible for long-term retention. Students don't realize that they're really undercutting their own learning."

* Mix it up! No one can focus fully for hours and hours at a time. Give each subject one hour, take a short 5-10 min break, then change subjects. That’s right change subjects. It doesn’t matter if you haven’t “finished” – come back to it. Spacing out study time gives the material a chance to settle in your mind, and, as in spacing, the key may be in the learning, forgetting and relearning that helps the brain cement the new information for the long-term. Another factor could be that the mixing is allowing you to notice and process the similarities and differences among the courses you have in front of you, giving you a better understanding of the big picture.

**Make quizzing yourself part of your study routine**

* Don’t rely on simply viewing a video or reading your notes over a few times. This may increase your familiarity with the material…but can you recall the correct information? Can you retrieve it? Quizzing yourself, either with formal board style questions, or even more informal quiz sessions, helps to strengthen your long-term learning and will help you to remember the material at test time and beyond.

Taken from the American Psychological Association Website:

“University of Louisville psychologist Keith Lyle, PhD, used a captive audience — students in his undergraduate statistics classes — to prove the point. In one 75-person class, at the end of each class session he asked students to complete a four- to six-question short-answer quiz about material that had been presented during the lecture. Cumulatively, the quizzes counted for just 8 percent of the students' final grade. Lyle taught a second class using the same syllabus, but didn't do the daily quizzes. At the end of the semester, he found that students in the quiz class significantly outscored students in the nonquiz class on all four midterm exams.”

**Preparing for and viewing lectures**

• Preview course material before you read a chapter or view a video. Ask yourself “Why this lecture? Why now? How does it fit with this/other courses, or what we have already learned? What are the key concepts?” By preparing in this way you have a better idea of what is coming, making it easier to focus on, and process the key points.

* Connect those dots: Activating, and building upon, prior knowledge is key to your learning!
  + Test yourself before each new video or reading assignment by trying to summarize, orally or in writing, the main points of the most recent material that came before it.
  + Then ask, what is the relationship between that material and what you will be covering in the current material?

• Find the learning objectives – read them, understand them. Think about which objective each point in the video or reading is related to. Plug the details into the big picture. Remember, the objectives are what your professors expect you to know.

• Study from the handouts – read, think, question, organize. You should always be questioning the material. If the material doesn’t raise any questions for you, you probably aren’t fully engaged in it.

**When you study…**

* Make very brief notes during your reading or videos (be active!) – summarize, write down questions, indicate areas the instructor made special note of, link with arrows, use abbreviations. Don’t write down every word the lecturer says. It’s much more productive for you to summarize and get it down in your own words.
* Pay attention to definitions of all terms. Try to guess at the meaning of new words.

• Produce something when you study. Reorganize the material: rephrase, summarize, draw charts, tables, diagrams, concept maps. Look for links between points in a lecture, between lectures in a discipline, and between disciplines. Draw ideas together into one product. The content needs to become a system of interconnected ideas.

• Discuss the material with colleagues. If you don’t have that opportunity, recruit the family cat. What’s key is that you are able to explain the material. If you can’t explain it, you don’t know it.

• Draw on your prior knowledge. Relate new material to things you already know: build connections with previous learning and experience and make use of analogy.

• Ask questions. If you haven’t got a question, you couldn’t have understood the material fully. There is always more to learn.

• Use practice questions – regularly and often. A few days after studying a topic, answer some practice questions on it. Use the questions to identify gaps in your knowledge, and go back to handouts and texts to plug those gaps. Make sure that you understand why the correct answers is correct and why the wrong answers are wrong.

• Figure out your strengths and weaknesses. Make good use of your strengths, and practice any skills you are not good at whenever possible.

**Five point checklist for each lecture/handout**

1. Preview (which includes review of content you should already know that the lecture will build upon)

2. Watch/attend lecture in an active way, write brief notes, create questions, summarize

3. Create/study a study product that helps you to focus your studying on the key information (chart, table, summary notes, concept map, etc)

4. MCQ practice (a few days later). What are your strengths and weaknesses?

5. Review and redo product (ideally from memory, including additional details learned from MCQ study)

**Healthy body, healthy mind**

* If you are not well, your brain won’t function well. Sleep, exercise and good food are essential. Map out your time for these things and stick to that schedule. Schedule meals to relax and unwind with friends.

**Study Environment**

* Build up a routine. Study at regular times, in a regular place. Identify the distraction and remove them. Make them part of your reward at the end of your study block.

**Test Taking Tips**

• Rest well before exams – tired minds don’t perform well, however much knowledge they hold.

• Last minute studying rarely helps, and often breeds anxiety. Spend at least the last hour before the exam doing something that calms you.

• Test anxiety – the more you know, the less anxious you are likely to be. However, if you feel you are suffering from serious test anxiety you might:

See the Social Worker. She can help.

Practice meditation techniques (e.g. Mindfulness-based stress reduction)

Write down your concerns before exams

• Don’t rush in the exam. If you finish all the questions but misread half of them, you’ll do worse than if you cover 80% and get most of those correct.

• Don’t ignore any facts that are given in the question.

• Read questions very carefully – the wording is very important. You need to know exactly what the question is asking.

• If you run into vague terminology, define it in your own terms.

• Pay attention to key words in both question stems and answer choices. However, be careful not to choose your answer based upon quick keyword associations. The question distractors (the wrong answers) are likely related to the stem in some way, and therefore you must be sure that you are choosing an answer because it is the best answer for that question. Not just because you can associate your answer choice with the question in some way.

* Sometimes the context, or another clue in the question, requires you to think beyond

simple word association. Note that, as well as technical terms, small words like “not”,

“increase”, “never”, etc, are also key – they are a major part of the context.

• Try to answer the question before reading the answer choices.

• Read each answer choice very carefully, rephrasing difficult ones, and try to rule in or out as you go.

• Decide what you need to know to answer this question. Not everything related to the topic is going to be relevant.

• If you’re unsure of the right answer, eliminate wrong answers first.

• When a question is hard, don’t dwell on what you don’t know. Think about what you do know about the topic, anything that’s related, a definition, a concept, and work from there. Often, this can be enough to eliminate several answer choices and kick start your thinking on a question.

• If you’ve narrowed it down to a choice of 2 answers, re-read the question, remind yourself exactly what is being asked, and look for any clues you haven’t yet used. Now re-read the 2 choices carefully, thinking about the wording, how each clue in the question relates to each choice, and how the choice relates to the question being asked.

• Some questions are supposed to be easy. Don’t convince yourself you must be wrong just because the right answer seems obvious.

• Don’t change your answers without very good reason. Your first instinct is probably good. If you are going to change, you need to satisfy two conditions: you need a very good reason why your initial choice was wrong; and you need to be sure of a clear rationale for why your new choice is better.

• Trust yourself. Don’t panic. If you find yourself losing focus, close your eyes and breathe deeply.