

How to AVOID CRAMMING for Tests

Basic Principles about Review

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I. ORIGINAL LEARNING must take place. You have to learn the material before you can review it; this is done in class and each week by reviewing your notes.

II. EARLY REVIEW is most efficient, most productive.

A. Before you attempt to learn new material in class or through reading:

- Glance over previous chapters or notes.
- Run through your mind what you know already.

Since memorization of new material is most effective when it is associated with the material already known, this process brings all available mental "hooks" to the surface.

B. Immediately after learning:

- Rework your notes, adding material that comes to mind. (Don't recopy; this is wasteful.)
- Order and organize what was learned. (Star, use arrows, additional comments, etc.)
- Integrate new material with what you already know.

Forgetting is most rapid right after learning. Review helps combat this.

Relearning is easier if it is done quickly. Don't wait until it's all gone.

III. Space initial early reviews to support original learning. Several brief periods spread over 5 or 10 days is usually enough to ensure good recall for intermediate review.

IV. Intermediate review is important when work is spread out over several months or longer. For example, when the final is 4 months away, follow this schedule:

- original learning
- immediate review of limited material same day (5-10 minutes)
- intermediate review of material covered so far, after 2 months
- final review, before exam

Intermediate and final reviews should stress understanding and organization of material.

V. Final review is a REVIEW, not "cramming" of unlearned material. No new learning takes place except to draw together the final main currents of thought.

- Be brief. Review entire semester's work in 2-4 hours. (Set a limit and stick to it.)
- Outline and organize from memory. Don't bother copying.
- Recite (in writing or out loud to a friend or self)

VI. USE SPACED REVIEW rather than **MASSED PRACTICE**. 60 minutes used in 3 groups of 20 minutes each is more effective than 60 minutes used all at the same time.

- break up learning period for any one subject
- avoid fatigue
- review and strengthen previous learning
- increased motivation, better concentration

Concentration

The Problem

In many colleges over 8% of the students report problems concentrating on their studies. Most of these students blame outside distractions for their problems.

Many research studies manipulating noise levels and distractions have found that such disturbances may increase, decrease, or not even affect concentration. These researchers have therefore concluded that distracters don't cause concentration problems directly. It is the way the distracters are interpreted by the students that disrupts their study.

Creating a Study Environment

- [1] Find a place to study and keep it for study only.
- [2] Tool-up the environment with all study needs.
- [3] Control noise level and the visual environment to acceptable levels.
- [4] Avoid relaxing while working; create a work atmosphere.

When to Study

- [1] Best during the day and early evening; you'll remember better.
- [2] Best when there are the fewest competing activities in progress.
- [3] Best when adequate rest periods are provided.
- [4] Stop studying when fatigue or lack of attention occurs.

How to Study & Concentrate

- [1] When distracters are present, become intensely involved.
- [2] Keep a pad of paper handy to jot down extraneous thoughts that cross your mind while studying, get them out of your mind and on to paper.
- [3] Set study goals before you begin each period of study
(number of pages, number of problems, etc.)
- [4] Design adequate rewards after specified goals are attained.
- [5] Break-up the content of study by mixing up subjects and building in variety and interest and removing boredom.
- [6] Make the most of rest periods-do something quite different.
- [7] Don't try to mix work and play.
- [8] Start with short study periods and build to longer periods only as fast as you maintain concentration.
- [9] If necessary, make a calendar of events to clear your mind of distractions.
- [10] Realize that you won't lose friends, respect, or a "good time" just because you're studying... these will keep.
- [11] Plan the length of your study period by the amount of material you have decided to cover, not by the clock. (Often the clock is one of the most serious distracters.)

Diagnostic Matters

It is probably necessary that you identify which subjects are related to the most serious concentration problems. You may notice that you really don't give yourself a chance with these subjects because of the time, order, or place you use to study. It may also be valuable to assess what your motives are for studying in the first place? What is your reward for your efforts?

3 R's for Academic Survival

Here is a lean and wiry system containing all the essential techniques for mastering textbook assignments. This is an "exam passer".

- R1 **READ.** Read the chapter paragraph by paragraph. Read and re-read until you can answer the question: "What did the author say in this paragraph?"

- R2 **RECORD.** Once you are able to **describe** what is in the paragraph, you will want to retain that learning by **underlining, making notes in the margin, or making notes in your notebook.**

- R3 **RECITE.** Cover up your notes or printed page and **recite** aloud. Remember! If you can't say it now, you won't be able to say it tomorrow in class, nor write it in a week on an exam; so while you still have a chance, try and try again, until you can say it.

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SQ3R Method for Thorough Study

Step 1: SURVEY - Look over material critically. Skim through the book and read topical and subtopical headings and sentences. Read the summaries at the end of chapters and books. Try to anticipate what the author is going to say.

WRITE these notes on paper, in sequence; then look over the jottings to get an overall idea or picture. This will enable you to see where you are going.

Step 2: QUESTIONS - Instead of reading paragraph headings such as "Basic Concepts of Reading," change to read, "What are the Basic Concepts of Reading?" These questions will become "hooks" on which to hang the reading material.

WRITE these questions out; look over the questions to see the emphasis and direction; then attempt to give plausible answers before further reading.

Step 3: READ - Read with smoothness and alertness to answer the questions. Use all the techniques and principles demonstrated in class.

WRITE notes, in your own words, under each question. Take a minimum number of notes-use these notes as a skeleton.

Step 4: RECALL** - Without looking at your book or notes, mentally visualize and sketch, in your own words, the high points of the material immediately upon completing the reading.

- a. This forces you to check understanding.
- b. This channels the material into a natural and usable form.
- c. This points up what you do not understand.
- d. This forces you to think.

Step 5: REVIEW - Look at your questions, answers, notes and book to see how well you did recall. Observe carefully the points stated incorrectly or omitted. Fix carefully in mind the logical sequence of the entire idea, concepts, or problem. Finish up with a mental picture of the WHOLE.

**Note: More time should be spent on recall than on reading.