



SMART Study Tips

– abridged/amended “Ace That Test” by Megan Sumeracki

These tips are to help you learn how to learn more effectively and efficiently, so you can do well on your tests coming up and retain the information long term. They will help you be a more independent learner, take more responsibility, and indeed credit, for your hard work. These tips are based on scientific evidence. The science of learning is flexible. Use strategies in a way that works for you and adjust as needed. Your commitment and time are crucial. Be patient and persevere. Make the choice to believe you can do it. The more work you put in, the more you will believe in yourself.

HOMEWORK VS STUDY

Homework and studying are not the same, both are important. Homework is out of class work set by your teacher. Studying is independent learning for you to manage to do well in your tests. Throughout each week you must put aside time for studying and use good learning strategies.

YOUR BRAIN, SLEEP, EXERCISE, FOOD AND STRESS

Your brain and body are linked. Ensure you have good overall wellness. Sleep is important for your thinking and learning; develop good sleep routines. Screens undermine sleep, stop using them an hour before bed. Exercise improves your thinking and learning. Drink water. Nutrition is needed for a healthy brain. Eat fruit and veggies. If you get stressed and anxious, talk about it. This will help.

DISTRACTIONS AND FOCUS

Multitasking does not work; it destroys focus, and everything just takes forever to finish. Every session counts. Use time efficiently to achieve your study goals quicker. Distractions are challenging but you must remove them. Sort out your study space. Don't study by the TV. If you must have music, put it on a playlist. Put away your phone.

GET REAL

Sometimes you can be overconfident in your ability to remember. Passive learning i.e. re-reading and highlighting will make you overconfident. This is inefficient and ineffective. Overconfidence will lead you to stop studying before you should, while being real will help you get busy with effective study preparation. Spaced practice and Retrieval practice will make you get real.



SPACED – better than cramming

Spaced practice is all about planning and scheduling study sessions. You must not leave studying to the last moment. What works is carefully planning shorter sessions over a longer period. Spaced practice allows you to have a look again at previously learned material and will help you understand how learning over time works best for you. You will remember lots more, and you will reduce your stress, big time. Review newer material early on, then make time to review it again later, and then increase the gaps. Sticking with a plan can be a challenge. Make it routine to do shorter **Mixed** study sessions.



MIXED PRACTICE – better than blocking

Mix up your study to get a better understanding of how ideas are similar, or different within a subject, and between subjects. Use the Pomodoro technique. I.e. 25 mins study and 5 mins break. Then change topic and do again. To start it might feel a bit hard, and even seems like it slows you down, but soon you will get quicker and better. Slowing down and reengaging with different subject matter, leads to deeper understanding and quicker application.



ACTIVE LEARNING – better than passive

- **Examples:** make abstract concepts easier to understand by working with lots of real examples, this will help you make connections across the examples and better understand concepts. To make sure you understand concepts, talk with your teacher about examples.
- **Dual coding:** Combine visuals with words. Visuals help you understand and remember concepts. Visuals should be simple, showing the essence of the material; rough and ready is fine. Look at visuals that you see in the textbook, or that your teacher gives you, and think about how the text connects to the image. Make your own version.
- **Elaboration:** Describe and explain how things work - you will make more connections and understand things better. Ask and answer “how” and “why” questions, and then explain to yourself, talk to yourself, or use writing. You can also elaborate with someone else. Just make sure you've done the work upfront, so you know at least a bit about what you are talking about. When done, think about what you've missed, try elaborate to yourself.
- **Make Flashcards:** Reviewing material and putting Questions and Answers in your own words is Active Learning. Use them for Retrieval Practice. Do the harder Q and As more.
- **Making Notes:** In class, or when reading reference material, take notes, this helps with absorbing information, and these notes can be used in your revision. Make sure your notes are organised. Before writing down ideas and concepts, put them into your own words. If at first, this is too hard, just try write some of what you see and hear. During your study sessions you can always go back rewrite in your own words.



RETRIVAL PRACTICE - essential

Put your course materials away and use your memory to bring the material to mind. Try writing on a blank sheet of paper, answering practice questions, creating concept maps, and using your flashcards. Make sure you are bringing the information to mind *from your own memory* and *in your own words*. Then check your materials to see if you got it right. Using your memory can be hard, but don't get down, if you can't remember stuff straight way, keep going. The practice of using your memory will make your memory better.



THINKING – required

After you study: Think, and reflect on your learning, this will improve your understanding of yourself. Figure out what you know and don't know, then make good decisions.



Abridged/Amended for SMART Study:
Sumeracki, M. (n.d.). *Ace that Test:
A Student's Guide to Learning Better.*

<https://www.learningscientists.org/>