

Active Study Strategies

Studying = Thinking!

Studying ≠ Memorizing: You need to remember some information to get started, but then make sure you can apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate with the target material.

1. **Make Connections:** Connect with unfamiliar concepts using information you already know. In your notes, recall related content from other courses, other units in the same course, and your personal experiences.
2. **Make Content Memorable:** Analyze by creating visual organizers (ie: tables, mind maps, and organizers)
3. **Teach yourself and Others:** Use your own words to describe, elaborate, clarify, extend, and explain. Also, create examples, write questions, and answer textbook questions.
4. **Test yourself:** Make flash cards and use old exams to check your knowledge.

Make your own Study Questions

Create practice questions that force you to think critically. Even the act of writing the question will help you process information. Here are some examples:

REMEMBERING: List, find, name, identify, locate, describe, define

EXAMPLE: *When was the Canadian Charter of Rights enacted?*

UNDERSTANDING: Interpret, summarize, explain, infer, paraphrase, discuss

EXAMPLE: *Why did most provincial premiers oppose the new constitution?*

APPLYING: Using and applying knowledge, solving problems, designing, manipulating

EXAMPLE: *Should protesters be allowed to target specific religious groups?*

ANALYZING: Identifying and analyzing patterns, recognizing trends, comparing and contrasting

EXAMPLE: *Compare and contrast the Canadian Charter with the US Bill of Rights.*

EVALUATING: Critically examining, making judgements, critiquing, defending

EXAMPLE: *Should Canada keep the British crown as its head of state?*

CREATING: Use information to create something new, construct, plan, produce, devise

EXAMPLE: *Envision a scenario when the federal government would invoke the notwithstanding clause.*

Improve your writing and study skills! Book an appointment with a writing advisor and/or academic coach on OSCARplus. Questions? Email skills@mcmaster.ca.



Studying: Setting up for success

Study challenges not only include what strategies you are using to review material they can also include ones related to your space, schedule and mind-set. Here are top tips to setting yourself up for successful studying.

1. Manage Study Time

• Make a realistic plan	• Focus on what you do not already know
• Break sessions into concrete goals	• Avoid cramming
• Focused study for 30-minutes, with a 5-minute break in between	• Spread studying over multiple days
• Mix it up and switch courses between breaks	• Review often, ensures you do not have to spend time re-learning material

2. Set up learning environment

• Have all your materials accessible in one space	• Declutter your space
• Schedule time for each course and study time	• Share your schedule with others in the home
• Avoid distractions (phone, TV, etc.)	• Work when you are most productive
• Make a list of contacts and resources to get support/guidance when needed	• Have reliable internet access

3. Stay motivated

• Focus on why you are doing this task	• Find the purpose of this task
• Be accountable to someone	• Think of a reward when complete
• Break tasks into smaller, manageable chunks	

4. Study schedules

• Will help you stay on track	• Think of your study schedule as a job schedule
• Use calendars: weekly and/or monthly to enter your lectures/labs/tutorials	• Use calendars: to enter 2-3 hours of studying per 1 hour of lecture
• To-do lists will help prioritize tasks	

5. **Avoid distractions:** keep windows on computer minimized, turn off phones/TV's/tablets and stay off social media.

6. **Reward yourself:** keep in mind that the reward should be equal to the task.





ACADEMIC SKILLS: WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Directions: Fill in scheduled commitments (class, work, appointments, etc.). Next fill in the time you need to study: allow two hours of study time for each hour in class. You can go further and schedule meals, breaks and self-care.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:30 a.m.							
7:00 a.m.							
7:30 a.m.							
8:00 a.m.							
8:30 a.m.							
9:00 a.m.							
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10:30 a.m.							
11:00 a.m.							
11:30 a.m.							
12:00 p.m.							
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11:30 p.m.							
12:00 a.m.							
12:30 a.m.							

Online Learning: Staying Motivated

“Two things contribute to your motivation for any task: what you expect from yourself and what value you place on achieving a goal. The key to motivation is understanding that you have the power to change both your expectations of yourself and the value placed on a task.” (University of Michigan)

What are the benefits of increasing your motivation?

- Increases persistence
- Increases active learning
- Higher critical thinking
- Better engaged with learning materials
- Expands to other areas of life (personal or professional motivation)

You will get discouraged and demotivated at times. Refocus attention by asking yourself key questions.

1. What are your reasons for doing this task?

- Why do you need to accomplish this task? Is it that you want to complete it because you are interested and passionate or because you don't want to face a punishment?
- What is your purpose for accomplishing the task?
- How much do you value the task? If it has a low value, what can you do to increase its worth?
- Will this course help you with future courses?

2. What help do you need?

- Do you need help with your writing, with organizing your time, or with your math skills? There are offices on campus that can help. Use this opportunity to develop your skills.

3. Are you in control of your work? Here are some ways to manage your tasks:

- Use SMART goals. Ask yourself: Is it specific? Measureable? Attainable? Realistic? Timely?
- Use calendars and to-do lists to stay on track
- Consider restructuring the task so that you can finish it more easily

4. Do you know why you're struggling with motivation? Check in with yourself:

- If you're starting to procrastinate, try to figure out why.
- Ask yourself if you need to re-evaluate your goals
- Find supporters to cheer you on, provide resources and help you stay accountable.

5. Are you expecting perfection? It's important to allow for setbacks.

- Have a plan in mind for when this happens and accept that you can take control of the situation
- Be prepared to adjust your plan

6. Have you given yourself any rewards?

- Enjoy a job well-done
- Give yourself a reward that's realistic and will actually help keep you motivated.

References:

<https://sass.uottawa.ca/en/mentoring/tools/motivation>

https://mcgill.ca/counselling/files/counselling/staying_motivated.pdf



ACADEMIC: EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING

CHECKLIST:

BEFORE lecture	DURING lecture	AFTER lecture
<input type="checkbox"/> Consult learning objectives for the lecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Listen for signposts (see 'Emphasis' below)	<input type="checkbox"/> Review my notes by:
<input type="checkbox"/> Review available slides	<input type="checkbox"/> Trust myself to process & paraphrase	<input type="checkbox"/> Making connections
<input type="checkbox"/> Read assigned content	<input type="checkbox"/> Write questions for my professor on sticky notes	<input type="checkbox"/> Comparing/contrasting
<input type="checkbox"/> Choose a note-taking strategy that will keep me mentally engaged	<input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize content over neat handwriting	<input type="checkbox"/> Summarizing
<input type="checkbox"/> Date & page # my notes		<input type="checkbox"/> Asking questions
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sorting info (in charts, tables, & graphics)
		<input type="checkbox"/> Review readings & slides

LISTENING TIPS:

Listen for **INTRODUCTIONS**

Get to class on time!
Don't underestimate how useful it will be to hear the context of a lecture as well as what will be highlighted.

Listen for **EMPHASIS**

Signposts (prof. slows down/writes on board, prof. says "this is key", or "here are three main points") reveal important information.

Listen for **CONCLUSIONS**

Listen until the last moments!
Conclusions usually summarize information and clearly highlight key messages.

CHALLENGES (& SOLUTIONS!):

- Professors sometimes speak quickly; it is difficult to know what is worth writing down.
 - ✓ Trust yourself to identify main points and compare notes with peers to fill in gaps.
- Sometimes lecture halls contain distractions like people talking or misusing electronics.
 - ✓ Know what distracts you and prioritize your focus (eg. don't sit with chatty friends).
- Transcribing everything your instructor says takes your focus away from processing.
 - ✓ Identify main points and write them in a way that makes sense to you.

SUGGESTED METHOD (THE CORNELL SYSTEM):

CUES	19/06/18 p. 1	Cues: Key words, relevant textbook pages, diagrams, anecdotes Notes: Important point form details recorded during lecture. Summary: After class, summarize main ideas and themes. When reviewing your notes, make connections (with your life, with course content), compare/contrast, summarize, and ask questions.
	NOTES	
SUMMARY		

★ **REMEMBER:** Effective note-taking is about processing, not recording.



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FOUR LEVELS OF QUESTIONING

LEVEL 1: SUMMARIZING/DEFINITION/FACT QUESTIONS

- what is the definition of...?
- who did ...?
- when did ... occur?
- how much/many...?
- what is an example of...?

LEVEL 2: ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS

- how did ... occur?
- why does ... occur?
- what are the reasons for ...?
- what are types of ...?
- how does ... function? how does the process occur?
- what are my own examples of ...?
- what causes ... to occur?
- what results when ... occurs?
- what is the relationship between ... and ...?
- how is ... similar to/different from ...?
- how does ... affect or apply to ...?
- what does ... mean?
- what conclusions can be drawn from ... information?
- what is (are) the problem(s), conflict(s), issue(s)? what are possible solutions/resolutions to these problems/issues?
- what is the main argument or thesis or an author? how is this argument developed?
- what evidence, proof, support is offered?
- what are other theories, arguments from other authors?

LEVEL 3: HYPOTHESIS/PREDICTION QUESTIONS

- if ... occurs, then what would happen?
- if ... changed, then what would change?
- what does theory x predict will happen?
- -what hypothesis or theory explains this data or given information?

LEVEL 4: CRITICAL ANALYSIS/EVALUATION/OPINION QUESTIONS

- is ... good/bad? Why?
- Correct or incorrect? Why?
- Effective or ineffective? Why?
- Relevant or irrelevant? Why?
- Logical or illogical? Why?
- Applicable or not applicable? Why?
- Proven or not proven? Why?
- Ethical or unethical? Why?
- what are the advantages or disadvantages of ...? Why?
- what is the best solution to the problem, conflict, issue? Why is it best?
- what should or should not happen? Why?
- do I agree or disagree? Why?
- what is my opinion? What is my support for my opinion?

Thorpe, J. (1999) *Method of inquiry: strategies for thinking and learning*. Ryerson Polytechnic University. Available at the Ryerson University Learning and Teaching Office.

ACADEMIC

HOW CAN YOU USE THESE QUESTIONS?

Simple: take any concept or statement, put one of these question “keys” in front of it, put a question mark at the end and poof! Now go look for an answer!

Remember that these questions at these levels may already be at the end of your chapters or in your study guide or learning objectives. So survey the chapter, find and use them if they are relevant to your learning.

Group Work: Study and get projects done together!

“Where” will we meet?: McMaster subscribes to a number of tools to help you connect and learn!

- Microsoft Teams: Share a workspace with a newsfeed, private chats, video calls, and file-sharing.
- Microsoft OneNote: Share pictures, drawings, and notes on this digital bulletin board. There are also audio recording and dictation functions. OneNote can be used in Teams for easy access.
- Microsoft OneDrive: Store files in the cloud and share them with individuals.
- Microsoft Sway: Create visually stunning presentations and newsletters online.

How will we get stuff done?

Build rapport: Share information to help group members understand each other.

- Personalities: Who thrives with deadlines? Who procrastinates? Who is shy in meetings? etc.
- Interests: Any shared hobbies or favourite shows on Netflix?
- Commitments outside of class: Who provides care for a family member? Who works part-time?
- Strengths: Who is a strong writer, organizer and/or public speaker? Who has tech skills?
- Weaknesses: Who is afraid of public speaking or anxious about writing? Support each other!

Appoint roles for meetings: Appointed roles increase efficiency. Change roles regularly.

- The LEADER is responsible for completing one stage in a project. In a study session, this person plans the meeting and identifies topics to discuss.
- The TIMEKEEPER ensures the group stays focused and does not get side-tracked.
- The NOTE-TAKER writes down important discussion points and records decisions that are made. Notes are shared with the group after each meeting.

Create a project plan (for group projects)

1. Brainstorm all necessary tasks for completing the project.
2. Create a schedule by planning backwards from the due date. Plan to finish 3-5 days early to account for setbacks.
3. Appoint a leader for each stage of the project. Leaders must get stages done on time, but group members must help.
4. Set deadlines for stages of the project.
5. Schedule meetings for every stage of the project.
 - Update your project plan at each meeting to reflect actual progress.

Create a study plan (for study groups)

1. Review the syllabus to identify major themes for each week.
2. Create a schedule of meetings for the whole semester.
3. Appoint roles for each meeting.

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