

# "STUDY SMART" GUIDE



## Counselling Services

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Revised September  
2007

**ALGONQUIN**  
COLLEGE

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## SEVEN LUCKY TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDYING

### #1

#### Organize Before Bad Habits Form

Establish a balanced life style including study, recreation, exercise, etc.

Set priorities. Studying gets priority over housework or part-time job.

Get it on paper - allot time to each activity and each subject to form a schedule.

Get advice, cooperation, and support from family.

Try your schedule for a week, then refine it.

Start modestly if you're rusty and increase gradually to 20 hours per week.

50 to 90 minute study periods (shorter if concentration is poor) and timed breaks.

Reward yourself frequently.

### #2

#### Find a Good Study Environment

Avoid distractions and temptations. Your neighbourhood library is a good place.

Select a cool temperature.

Have good lighting.

Sit upright at a desk.

### #3

#### Take Good Notes in Class

Read related text book material prior to the lecture.

Take notes at a comfortable speed.

Reduce information to point form and short phrases.

Develop your own shorthand and abbreviations.

Soon after class fill in gaps and check spelling.

Ask questions in class when confused.

### #4

#### Study for Depth of Understanding and Good Recall

Structure and organize material.

Note author's or teacher's organization and themes.

Reduce material to essentials by underlining, outlining, summarizing, or listing new terms and their definitions.

Put subject matter in your own words.

Relate or associate new material to:

Previously learned material, labs, fieldwork, concrete situations, something that is easy to remember, e.g., a formula, phrase, rhyme, word, etc.  
Recite the material from memory to be sure you know it and move it into long term memory.

## #5

Review study material periodically  
Once a day review, recall, and integrate that day's material.  
Review each subject at least once a month.  
Condense and further integrate your notes during review.  
Review prior to tests, but don't cram.

## #6

Start Preparing for tests at the start of the term  
Doing homework and attending class regularly are the best preparations for tests.  
Listen for clues the teacher gives as to what might be on tests.  
Ask what type of test you'll have.  
Study in detail and for understanding for multiple choice tests.  
For essay tests integrate and organize material around themes. Outline answers to possible questions and commit to memory.  
For fill-in-the-blank and short answer tests, study in detail, particularly definitions, and commit to memory.  
Start your review for tests early. Allocate time to sections of the subject matter. Establish review priorities. Usually lecture notes are most important.  
Arrive early and well rested for a test. Read test instructions and questions carefully.  
Allocate time to questions and pace yourself.  
Learn from test results. Don't be discouraged. It may take a test or two to know what to expect.

## #7

Manage your test anxiety - don't panic  
Some anxiety is normal and can increase motivation and alertness.  
If you have little time for review, select the most important material for review and work at a pace at which you can absorb the material.  
Think constructively: "I'm going to do my best, that is all I can do." Push negative thoughts out of your mind.  
Reduce anxiety by slowing yourself down and pacing yourself.  
Use muscle relaxation exercises to reduce physical tension.

Stop your mind from spinning by repeating the word relax to yourself or focus on your breathing.

Warning!

You'll lose in the study game if you procrastinate or try to become a "superstudent" overnight.

Select one or two of these suggestions in this brochure to implement today. When you have successfully done so, implement another, and so on.

# TIME MANAGEMENT

Procrastination and a haphazard approach to schoolwork are typical of many students. Students may procrastinate because studying is hard work and often boring. There is really only one way to deal effectively with this problem and that is to establish a study routine and set priorities. That is what time management is all about.

## Study Routines

### Advantages

1. Keeps time from slipping away.
2. Takes advantage of the fact that a habit or routine once formed has a momentum of its own.
3. Helps to put the student in the right frame of mind for studying. Certain times of the day become associated with studying.
4. Gives the student the security of knowing she/he has a workable plan.
5. Forces the allocation of time for various needs and desires and helps to establish priorities.
6. Helps to condition others to your needs and encourages them to work their expectations around your schedule.

## Why Don't More People Use Them?

1. Studying is hard work and implementing a schedule is hard work. Few people become good students just as few people become good managers. Successful people are in part successful because they manage their time carefully.
2. Schedules must be specific and detailed to be successfully implemented. Most people do not plan their schedules in sufficient detail. For example starting time, quitting time, and break time need to be specifically indicated.

3. Objectives must be realistic. Change must take place gradually. Start with an achievable number of study hours and build on your success.
4. People fail to clue in other members of the family to the schedule to get their support and cooperation.
5. People fail to reward themselves to sustain their motivation. Establish a specific reward for achieving a specific goal or objective.
6. Schedules need to be revised after a trial period. Eventually a routine is established which is generally workable.

## Planning a Schedule

1. How many hours per week do you want to set aside for schoolwork? Most students find it necessary to study 15 to 20 hours per week. Make a list of other activities you want to work into your schedule and the approximate amount of time you wish to devote to them.
2. On a schedule grid, block out time for classes and other activities. Write all of your appointments for each week down on a timetable using colours to represent different types of activities (e.g. blue = class, red = tests/assignments, yellow = work, etc.). Now you can see where you have free time.

### Consider the following points:

1. Daytime is usually more productive than night time study.
2. Spread your study time throughout the week so no one day will be too heavy.
3. While you will want to use some of your free hours (spares) during the day to relax, the spares provide an opportunity to get homework out of the way, thus reducing study in the evening.
4. Get your studying in before your recreation.
5. Usually students are able to concentrate for 50 to a maximum of 90 minutes. Plan breaks accordingly.
6. Specify the length of your study breaks to keep yourself honest.

7. Don't burn the candle at both ends. You need a good night's sleep to concentrate in and out of class.
8. Give some thought to where you will do your studying and indicate this in your schedule. Also try to find a place to study that is well lighted, ventilated, cool and free from distractions.
9. Consider when to study what. You may wish to set aside some of your study periods specifically for particular subjects.
10. Decide on a specific treat to give yourself at the end of the week if you get in the number of hours you have set for yourself.
11. Now get the cooperation and support of your family.
12. Implement your schedule for one week. Keep track of the time you do spend on your schoolwork on another schedule grid. At the end of the week compare the two. Make adjustments and refreshments in light of your experience.
13. An important complement to your schedule is a checklist of assignments, test, etc. At least once a week allocate time for the various assignments and tests.
14. Early in the semester allot time to term papers and the like. Set aside part of a holiday, a weekend, or perhaps a block of time each week for each of those term projects.

## SCHEDULE GRID

TIME	M	T	W	TH	FR	ST	SU
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-13							
13-14							
14-15							
15-16							
16-17							
17-18							
18-19							
19-20							
20-21							
21-22							
22-23							

### WEEKLY SCHEDULE

SUBJECT	ASSIGNMENT	ESTIMATED TIME	DUE DATE	TIME

MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	
SUNDAY	

For more info on Time Management, click on this:  
[http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/downloads/time\\_management\\_2003.PDF](http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp/downloads/time_management_2003.PDF)

# EFFECTIVE READING

## Guidelines

1. Find a quiet, distraction-free setting where you will not be interrupted.
2. Begin the process with a general scan of the reading material.
3. Go back after the first reading and begin to underline or highlight key words or concepts; if there are side-bars, pay particular attention to matching the information from the side-bars to the content.
4. If you are unsure of the vocabulary, use a phonetic dictionary (to decode unfamiliar words) and a thesaurus (to aid in word comprehension).
5. To assist in your understanding of the content, use your own prior knowledge as well as the context and visual cues.
6. Ask yourself what the passage is about and put it into your own words.
7. To become a faster, more efficient reader, practice on a regular basis, beginning with easier passages. Gradually increase the complexity of your reading (e.g. short novels to technical subject material).

## The SQ3R Method

The **SQ3R** system can be used to enhance reading skills. These are the steps:

**S** Survey - Skim through the material, noting title and main headings, first and last paragraphs, words marked in boldface or italics and pictures and charts.

**Q** Question - Formulate questions using "w" words such as: what, when, where or why, as you are reading.

**R** Read - Use active reading skills; pick out important information, highlighting key points. Try to find out the answers to the questions that you have formulated.

**R** Recite - After reading the passage, periodically stop and try to recite to yourself what you can recall from the material read. You may wish to make some notes containing pertinent information that can become part of your study notes.

**R** Review - This part of the process involves going back over the material, paying particular attention to important sections, headings and sub-headings. Use some of your supplementary written notes as part of this process along with what has been highlighted in the textbook.

# TAKING NOTES

## Taking Notes on Your Readings

- If you underline in your text books, do so only after you have gone through a survey and first reading of the material. Underline only important words and phrases, not entire sentences. Review for each course every week.
- When studying books you cannot underline, summarize the main points and facts on 8" x 11" paper in note form. Summarize in your own words. Leave a two-inch margin at the left for "recall clues" which will enable you to quiz your recall of the material. The large column on the right may be divided into two columns, one for summary of textbook material and the other for related points from your lecture.

## Critical Points

1. Take notes at a speed at which you are comfortable. If you try to get more down, the resulting stress will decrease your efficiency and exhaust you before the day's classes are finished. Work for gradual improvement.
2. Reduce information to point form and take down those points in short phrases. Keep asking yourself, "What is the point the teacher is making in his/her ramblings."
3. Develop you own shorthand and abbreviations: sg = something, b/c = because, vs = versus, con = conclusion, ref = reference, w/o = without, etc.
4. Make your left-hand margin equal to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the width or the page. Later use this margin to concisely summarize the notes using key phrases, dates, names, etc., which will serve as recitation clues during the review.
5. As soon after class as possible check your notes to see that they make sense. Studies have shown that reviewing your notes within 24 hours of the class increases retention of the information by 60%. Fill in gaps, check your spelling, and prepare any questions for clarification at the

next meeting of the course. You will now have time to reflect on what the teacher said. Structure the notes. Rewriting the notes is not necessary. Simply label points "I", "A", "B", "1", etc. and underline important material. Also at this time do your left margin summary (point number 4).

6. Read textbook material related to a lecture prior to the lecture so the new vocabulary and concepts will not be completely foreign to you.
7. Focus your attention on what the teacher is saying. Don't get distracted by looking out a window or at a friend. Don't reduce your concentration by doodling. Don't focus on the teacher's mannerism.
8. As you progress through your course and gain a deeper understanding of the material, you will want to condense and summarize your lecture notes integrating the material around key themes and course objectives. This should be part of the review process.
9. If you are not adept at taking lecture notes, you will have to spend more time taking notes from your textbooks to compensate.
10. Ask questions in class when you don't understand the point your instructor has made.

# STUDYING FOR GOOD COMPREHENSION AND RECALL

## The Problem

The problem is usually two fold: (1) forgetting and (2) superficial understanding of the material.

The techniques and principles described below require that the student become actively involved with the material. In contrast to passive reading and reviewing, these techniques force the student to think about the subject matter and do something with it.

## Study for Short Periods

- Break large tasks down into small pieces. Study one piece, take a break, and then study some more.
- You will retain more information if you learn in small manageable portions. Most study skills programs suggest working for 10-15 minute increments, and then slowly building up to 20 and 30 minutes increments over time.
- Just remember to be realistic. If you can no longer concentrate or remember what you have read, stop. There's no sense in wasting your valuable time.
- Praise yourself for studying well, learning a difficult concept, or completing part of a project. This reinforces good study habits.

## Eliminate Distractions

Put away all materials from other classes or projects. Even the sight of a textbook from another class can serve as a reminder of other things that are competing for your attention. This can cause you to switch your focus away from the task at hand.

## Relate or Associate the Material

Making associations is critical to memory. New information tends to be remembered if it is (a) tied to information that is already filed away in the mind, or (b) associated to something that by nature is easy to remember.

## Mnemonic Devices

Mnemonic devices are very simple examples of making associations to enhance memory. A mnemonic device is a formula, phrase, rhyme, word, etc. which is easily remembered and which is associated to the information that is to be remembered.

### Examples:

#### Acrostics

Acrostics are phrases or poems in which the first letter of each word or line functions as a cue to help you recall the words that you are trying to remember. One popular example is the phrase "Every good boy does fine". This acrostic is used to remember the order of the notes on a musical scale, E-G-B-D-F.

#### Acronyms

Acronyms are words formed out of the first letters of a series of words you are trying to remember. A popular acronym is "SCUBA" which is used to remember the phrase "Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus".

#### Narrative

Some find making up a story with the lists of words throughout the narrative aids retention.

#### Rhymes

Remember the phrase "i before e, except after c"? You probably remember this well because it is a rhyme.

#### Imagery

There are two methods of imagery which enhance retention of material:

LINKING items together visually in your mind. For example, if you have a list of groceries such as cereal, milk, toilet paper and tangerines,

you might try visualizing a dairy cow eating cereal under a tangerine tree wrapped in toilet paper. Believe it or not the more bizarre the image, the more likely you are to remember it.

The METHOD OF LOCI. This involves taking an imaginary walk in your mind through a familiar path along which you associate items you are trying to remember. For example, you may take the same grocery list and place the items (visually in your imagination) throughout your room. The tangerine may be the doorknob as you open the room, the cereal appears on the TV, the milk is hanging from the ceiling fan and you may envision a large roll of toilet paper in place of the chair at your desk.

### Structure the Material

The mind can remember a lot of information if the data is structured or organized. A couple of central points are easily remembered. They in turn trigger the recall of sub points. The sub points in turn trigger the recall of even more detailed material and so on.

Break a definition into its component parts and determine how those parts relate to one another and to the definitions of related words. Take for example the word photosynthesis: "the synthesis of complex organic materials, esp. carbohydrates, from carbon dioxide, water, and inorganic salts, using sunlight as the source of energy and with the aid of a catalyst, as chlorophyll."

### The definition has four parts:

1. The synthesis of carbohydrates
2. From carbon dioxide, water and salts
3. By the energy of sunlight (photo)
4. With chlorophyll as a catalyst

In this structure form the definition is easier to remember. The two elements of the word itself, photo and synthesis will remind you of numbers (1) and (3).

## Recite the Material

This is the most powerful technique for imprinting material on the mind and moving it to longer-term memory.

The recall method or recitation method improves memory and learning in other ways:

1. It forces you to decide what is most important in what you read.
2. It forces you to put the material in your own words.
3. It brings you to full alertness because it is a very active and demanding technique.
4. It reveals whether you really did grasp the material.

Implement the recall method gradually to keep your frustration at a tolerable level.

## Do Homework Problems

Be sure to do homework problems as they are assigned or you will get too far behind to catch up. Subject matter in courses like math and accounting tends to build on itself, so you must master each segment of the course as you go.

## Review Periodically

Periodic review is necessary to keep material learned retrievable.

An important aspect of the review process is further condensing and integration of the material being reviewed.

As part of your review, be sure to recite the material. This method is the most important technique for ensuring later recall. Future recall will be required if you have to use the information in your field work and if your tests will be of the essay, short answer, or fill-in-the-blanks type.

## Motivation and Attitude

All of the above techniques require commitment and hard work. To sustain the motivation necessary to complete the work involved, your concerns or the goal to which they lead have to be important to you. If you have insufficient commitment, you should reassess your educational/vocational objectives or the means of achieving those objectives.

# PREPARING FOR EXAMS

## General Comments

Preparing for exams should begin right from the start of each semester. Be on the alert from the start of the term for clues your teachers will drop as to what might be covered on exams. Be alert to favourite themes and concepts to which the teacher keeps returning.

Ask your teacher what type of exam it will be, i.e., multiple choice, essay, etc., and for what material you are responsible.

Begin your review with your class notes. Next move to textbook material that is required reading and which relates to the lectures. Then review required reading unrelated to lecture content. Finally review recommended readings.

Give some thought to how much time you will allot to your review for a test or exam. Obviously the amount of time should reflect the weight given the test in determining your mark for the course. At the time of mid-term and final exams it is particularly important that you allocate sufficient time for each exam. Establish a schedule and pace yourself accordingly.

Review the night before a test, but be sure to get a good night's sleep. Don't try to cram too much information in your head the night before the exam. Limit yourself to class notes and focus on the most important material.

Have an adequate breakfast or lunch prior to an exam to get your blood sugar (energy level) up.

Allow sufficient time to get to your exam so that you don't have to rush. When you arrive at the location of the test stay by yourself; don't become involved in the hysterical conversation so characteristic of anxious students just prior to an exam. It is too late to cram at this point. Just keep your mind on something neutral. No negative thoughts; no anticipation of what lies ahead - these thoughts only generate anxiety.

Do not become depressed by low test scores. Review our exam paper carefully after it is scored, and learn from your mistakes.

## Essay Tests

Essay test questions usually require that course material be well integrated and organized in your mind and that the information be committed to memory. Themes and concepts are emphasized. Specifics and details are less important.

### How to Prepare:

- Anticipate what the questions might be.
- Organize the course material around a number of key themes, concepts, or principles.
- Formulate questions around these themes and develop answers in outline form to these questions.
- Include some examples and facts to illustrate and substantiate your points.
- Commit answers to memory.
- Practice recalling the outlined material without looking at your notes.

### Writing the Test:

- Allocate the time you have to the questions to be answered. Some questions may be worth more points so they should be given more time.
- Read the test questions carefully. Underline key words in the question.
- Consider the question from your perspective and try to appreciate what your teacher might be looking for.
- Jot down a few words representing points you will cover. Go directly to the heart of the matter.
- Illustrate and document general statements with specific names, dates, examples, etc.
- Keep your penmanship legible.
- If you begin running out of time, list things in point form.

## Essay Test Strategy

### T.O.W.E.R.

**T**hink about the question. Write jot notes in the margin.

**O**utline jot notes into a logical sequence.

**W**rite a draft.

**E**dit draft.

**R**ewrite

## Short Answer and Fill-In-The-Blank Questions

### How to Prepare:

- Study in more detail than with broad essay questions.
- Anticipate what material is likely to be covered on such a test and **commit it to memory.**
- Fully understand the definitions, principles, laws, etc., but don't spend time integrating the material into themes.
- Practicing the new terms must be done on an on-going basis.
- The use of 3x5 inch index cards is very useful for learning new words.

### Short Answer Test Taking Strategy

- Read the question carefully. Look for clue words before the blanks (a, an, the these, those, they).
- Answer the question making sure the answer "fits" the question.
- If you are stuck, flag the question and come back to it. Often the answer can be found in another question.

## Tests Involving Problems Such as Math and Accounting

### How to Prepare:

- These tests will probably consist of a number of problems.
- Do the problems given as homework or lab work for these courses and practice similar problems on your own. Enough problems and variations on the problems must be done so that procedures, steps, principles, etc. become second nature.
- In subjects like accounting, math and electronics the material builds on itself. Each segment of the course of study requires mastery of proceeding material. Weekly mastery of small sections of material through homework problems is required to master the highly complex and interrelated structure of knowledge that comprises these academic disciplines.

## Multiple Choice Tests

### How to Prepare:

- Course material should be studied in detail.
- Don't need to memorize material.
- You will be called upon to **recognize** the correct or best answer, not to recall it from memory.
- Have to understand the material and be able to apply it.
- Questions will often involve the application of the material in complex situations requiring judgment, insight, and in-depth knowledge.

### Writing the Test:

- Begin by reading the instructions carefully.
- Pace yourself by determining how many questions you must complete one quarter of the way through the test.
- When you are one quarter of the way through the time, take note of how many questions you have completed and adjust your speed accordingly.

- Haste can result in misreading a question, or failure to comprehend its full meaning.
- Important to absorb every word in a question and appreciate the complete meaning and intent of the question.
- Read slowly.
- Underline key words and elements.
- Rephrase or translate the question into your own words to make sure you understand the more difficult questions.
- Consider all the data in a question, but do not assume that all the data are relevant to answering the question.
- Cross out any distracters.
- With the test question clearly in mind, you are ready to consider each alternative answer.
- Read each answer carefully.
- Eliminate those answers that are incorrect or have little merit re-read the question and make your choice from the remaining answers.
- Do not be fooled into favouring answers simply because they contain impressive technical jargon or familiar phrases from your textbook.
- Don't skip questions of which you are unsure.

## Intelligent Guessing Strategies

Research shows that use of "Intelligent Guessing Strategies" can significantly raise test scores. Learn the following strategies and use them when all else fails!

### Statements/Words Most Likely to be True

- The most "general" statement
- The most complete statement
- "All of the Above"
- The longest choice
- If two choices are opposite, choose one of them
- Answers in the middle, especially with the most words

### Statements/Words Most Likely to be False

- Absolute statements
- Unfamiliar/unknown words and phrases
- Humorous alternatives, insults or jokes
- If alternatives range in value, eliminate the two extremes
- Statements that contain reasons or qualifying answers
- If two choices are nearly the same, choose neither one

# EXAM OR TEST ANXIETY

## Normal Anxiety

Most people experience some anxiety in an exam or test situation. For most it is a normal level of anxiety that increases their alertness and motivation, consequently improving their performance. It is important not to be intimidated by this anxiety. It becomes a problem if you start thinking, "I'm going to pieces; I'm going to start blocking; I'm going to fail the test." "Manage the anxiety; don't be panicked by it."

## Adequate Preparation

Adequate preparation is an important factor in keeping anxiety from developing because knowledge and good preparation enhance confidence. Most people who claim anxiety caused a mental block on an exam couldn't remember because the material was not learned well enough in the first place.

## A Realistic Attitude

Students with anxiety problems tend to exaggerate the importance of tests and underestimate their capabilities. We can change our emotional reactions by changing our attitudes. Negative, self-defeating, and irrational attitudes and thoughts must be replaced with rational attitudes.

### Examples:

#### Irrational:

I just know I'll do poorly on this test.

#### Rational:

I've kept up with my homework; I should do as well as my classmates.

#### Irrational:

I'm going to panic and forget everything.

#### Rational:

I can manage my level of anxiety.

#### Irrational:

If I fail this test I'll be out of the program.

#### Rational:

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This is just one test; I'll have other chances to demonstrate my competency.

To err is human. Learning is often a trial and error experience.

Four overlapping steps to change anxiety-producing attitudes to rational, constructive attitudes:

1. When you feel yourself becoming anxious, become aware of what is going through your mind. Often you will hardly be aware of these thoughts. What are the attitudes underlying these thoughts?
2. Look at the situation from a detached perspective. What is the objective reality? Reflect on some of the comments above. Come up with a concise statement of the rational attitude toward the situation.
3. When you find yourself anxious and/or thinking negative thoughts, push them from your mind and say to yourself, "That doesn't make sense." Then say the rational statement from step number 2. Repeat it as often as you feel you need to, and listen to what you are telling yourself.
4. Combine your attitude reprogramming with the anxiety management techniques described below.

## Techniques for Managing Exam Anxiety

### 1. Scheduling and Pacing

- A couple of weeks or so prior to midterms or final exams, sit down and schedule your time.
- Allocate study time to your various subjects. This will ensure that each test gets an appropriate amount of study time and will give you a sense of being in control of the situation.
- Get sufficient sleep and recreational time to keep fresh and let off steam.
- The schedule is a means of forcing yourself to pace yourself and not get into a study frenzy.
- No late night cramming the day before an exam. Lack of sleep and cramming will leave you feeling confused and unable to recall material.

### 2. Attention Diversion Techniques

- **Focus on your breathing.**

Stop thinking and become absorbed in the natural, rhythmic process of breathing. Make some effort to slow down your breathing by slowly and completely exhaling. Breathe deeply - from the stomach.

- **Listen to restful music.**

Focus your complete attention on the music.

- **Take a fantasy break.**

Imagine yourself in a pleasant situation, for example lying on a beach with the warm sun beating down on you.

### 3. Muscle Relaxation

A commonly recommended technique for anxiety control is muscle relaxation. The muscles of the body tend to tighten as anxiety increases. By relaxing the muscles we can reduce the anxiety. The relaxed state can be achieved by first tensing the muscles more than they already are, and then letting go of the tension. Tense each muscle group for five (5) seconds, relax for twenty-five (25) seconds and repeat. The following may be used

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as a guide for muscle relaxation while sitting in a chair with arms resting on the arms of the chair and legs uncrossed:

- Make a fist with your right and left hands and squeeze the fists lightly. Experience the muscle tension in the hands and forearms.
- Bend your arms at the elbows and harden the bicep muscles.
- Tense your shoulder and neck muscles by shrugging the shoulders. That is, bring your shoulders up toward your ears and hold the position.

### The Importance of Exercise and Eating Well

Ensure that you start the day with a healthy breakfast. You need to feed the body as well as the mind. Taking care of yourself involves forming positive habit patterns and committing to a regular exercise routine! Start now. Be more productive and enjoy yourself.

### For more information on relaxation:

<http://www.uhs.uga.edu/stress/relax.html>

[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\\_05.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_05.htm)

<http://www.aboutbreathing.com>

<http://www.yogadirectory.com>

# Overcoming Procrastination

(Material from the University of Lethbridge Counselling Services)

Procrastination is the avoidance of a task which needs to be accomplished. At first, procrastination may seem to make your life more pleasant, but over time it usually leads to stress, disorganization and sometimes even failure. Most of us procrastinate at one time or another. In fact, research shows that 90% of all university students procrastinate. Although procrastinators often attribute their behaviour to laziness, procrastination is actually very complex. Procrastination is a coping mechanism. It often involves emotions, thoughts, skills and attitudes that may be subconscious.

Procrastination is a natural reaction to: Environmental Factors - distractions, poor study habits, interruptions, etc. Physiological Factors - stress, fatigue and illness, etc. Psychological Factors - fear of failure or success, unrealistically high expectations, low motivation, lack of knowledge, avoidance, etc.

## 3 Steps to Overcoming Procrastination

1. Identify the cause of your behaviour. Be honest in your assessment and consider all of the factors that might be getting in the way of your school work.
2. Acknowledge that your behaviour is stopping you from reaching your goals.
3. Commit yourself to altering your behaviour. The following suggestions may help.

## Specific Strategies for Overcoming Procrastination

If **Environmental Factors** are your problem, try:

Studying in the same place, at the same time, everyday

Make studying a routine

Studying where there is big table, a comfortable chair and good lighting

Ensuring that your study space is reasonably quiet, uncluttered and distraction-free.

If **Physiological Factors** are your problem, try:

Eating nutritious foods regularly

Getting enough sleep

Exercising frequently

Practicing stress management techniques, such as deep breathing or muscle relaxation

Reducing your alcohol intake

If **Psychological Factors** are your problem, try:

Introducing a personal time management system

Planning your days and weeks in advance

Making priority lists

Setting study goals

Studying at your most alert times of the day

Joining a study group

Reminding yourself why you are here at College.

Are you simply unsure where to begin? Read the assignment thoroughly; get clarification on the requirements, if necessary. Try one of these ideas:

- **The Chunking Method** - break the assignment down into simple steps and tackle the assignment one step at a time.
- **Five Minute Method** - Tell yourself that you will work on the assignment for 5 minutes. After 5 minutes you can stop. However, once you have worked for 5 minutes, there is a good chance you will continue.
- **Swiss Cheese Method** - Start anywhere in your assignment; do anything. There are no rules stating that you must start reading at the beginning of the chapter or write the introduction to your essay first. Begin with the part that interests or inspires you most.

Are you afraid of failure? Practice positive self-talk. Visualize your success. Remember that:

- 100% perfection is unattainable.
- Your grades are not a reflection of your self worth.
- Failure can be a learning experience.

Sometimes people need assistance in order to overcome their tendency to procrastinate.

**If procrastination is a chronic problem for you, please do not hesitate to make an appointment with a counsellor in Counselling Services (at ext. 7200).**

# SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING GOOD PAPERS

## Choose a Topic

- Choose a topic that interests you.
- Where possible, make the topic relevant to your work or life experiences.
- Narrow your topic down to a manageable statement that can be covered in the number of pages assigned.
- Provide a focus for your paper.

## Research the Paper

- You can be reasonably sure that other authors have, already covered your topic, or parts of it. Find them.
- Some sources of information:
  - Internet
  - Text books
  - Libraries: catalogues, reference sections, special collections, periodical listings, reading rooms, librarians
  - Professors
  - Fellow students
- Keep track of your research and what you find.
- As you do your research, define your paper in greater detail.
- As you see the direction your paper is taking, focus your research on those areas that are pertinent to that direction.

## Write the Paper

1. Be prepared to write at least three drafts.
2. Organize your notes and reference material in the order dictated by your outline.
3. Using your outline as subject headings, start putting your ideas down on paper. Ideally use a word processor so that changes can be made easily.
4. Reread this rough draft, adding, deleting and inserting ideas where appropriate.
5. Recopy this rough draft into a clean working copy. Make some effort to smooth out the rough spots, spelling mistakes, etc.
6. Put this working copy aside for 2-3 days. Reread the paper after 2-3 days with a critical eye. Ask yourself some of the following questions:
  - a. Are the points clearly stated and well developed?
  - b. Do the ideas follow each other smoothly, do they flow or are they disjointed?
  - c. Has the question been well developed? Have arguments for and against been well stated?
  - d. Does the material presented support the conclusions reached?
  - e. Does it make sense?
  - f. Are all quotations supported by appropriate references?
  - g. Are my footnotes, bibliography and other supporting material accurate and well presented?
  - h. If I were a teacher reading this paper, what mark would I give myself?
  - i. Write a final copy of the paper. Proofread it for errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction.

7. Type the copy to be handed in:
  - a. Double-spaced
  - b. White 8  $\frac{1}{2}$  x 11 paper
  - c. 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch margins all four sides
  - d. Title page.
  
8. Final proofreading.
  
9. Make a photocopy for your files.
  
10. Hand the paper in on time.

## CHECK OUT THESE HELPFUL WEBSITES FOR MORE STUDY SKILLS INFORMATION

[http://counseling.uchicago.edu/resources/virtualpamphlets/study\\_skills.shtml](http://counseling.uchicago.edu/resources/virtualpamphlets/study_skills.shtml)

<http://www.studygs.net/>

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocs/study/index.html>

[http://www.athabascau.ca/counselling/study\\_skills.php](http://www.athabascau.ca/counselling/study_skills.php)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/career/study-t.html>

<http://www.howtostudy.org/>

<http://www.educationatlas.com/study-skills.html>

<http://www.iamnext.com/academics/archives.html>

[http://www.uleth.ca/ross/counselling/study\\_skills\\_handouts.html](http://www.uleth.ca/ross/counselling/study_skills_handouts.html)