

Proven Study Tips

For Psychology Courses and Beyond!

Before exploring the list below, consider taking an inventory of your current study habits by taking Virginia Tech's [Study Skills Checklist](#).

Spacing Your Studying Overtime is Better Than Cramming

A study completed with Psych 111 students by [Dr. Gehring](#) and [Dr. Schreier](#) indicated that students who wait until the last minute to study consistently earn lower exam grades.

- Start preparing for exams *a minimum* of two weeks in advance. Not sure how to develop a two week study plan? Consider using this guide developed by [Dr. Yates](#) called the [Two Week Exam Countdown](#).
- The brain understands bests when information is learned and relearned over time, so spend time studying, let it rest, then study it again.

Testing Yourself is Better than Just “Going Over” Notes

“I spent a lot of time studying my notes and knew everything but I did terrible on the test.” Does this sound familiar? Just going over notes leads to a sense of overconfidence and this passive strategy doesn't lead to true learning. However, testing yourself shows what you *don't* know. Psychologists have proven that studying and testing on materials leads to better test performance than only studying.

- Read a chapter, [close the book and write down or draw what you can remember](#). You probably will feel a complete sense of panic and won't remember much, which is completely normal! Open the chapter and review what you missed.
- Draw the instructor's powerpoints/chart/graphs from memory.
- Create exam questions yourself, or use practice tests located in the textbook or distributed by the instructor.
- Consider taking notes using the [Cornell Note-taking System](#), a format that promotes self-testing while reviewing notes!

Try Teaching the Material to Others, or Explain it to Yourself Out Loud

- Give a mini-lecture to a friend and teach them by using the instructor's powerpoints.
- Explain concepts aloud to yourself, as if you were teaching it to others.
- Remember: if it is important enough to be on a powerpoint, it is important enough to be on an exam!

Time Management Really Means Energy and Attention Management

- Set up your physical space so you don't have to decide to study—keep your phone in your backpack.
- Study *at least* 30 minutes a day per class. [Use a calendar to record all of your commitments \(classes, work, clubs, etc\), then add in your 30 minutes of daily study time per class.](#)

Check Your Understanding with Your Instructor

Going to office hours doesn't mean that you are doing bad and isn't viewed as a sign of weakness!

- Check out [this advice](#) on how and what to talk about during office hours.
- Use this one-on-one time to check your understanding of a concept.

Set a Grade Goal

Write your final grade goal on the class syllabus. If you earn below that on a test or below a 75, attend office hours (see advice above for tips on attending office hours).

Remember that Growth and Learning Happen When Things are Difficult!

Highlighting sentences in a book is easy, but you probably won't remember the information well. Doing some of the practices above *is a lot of work*. You may feel like you are not making a lot of progress. But what you are doing is learning in a deeper, more meaningful way, which is guaranteed to help you succeed!

Thank you to Dr. Bill Gehring for sharing several of the strategies listed on this page! For more information about many of these strategies, you should also check out the article in *The Scientific Mind* called "[What Works](#)" (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan, & Willingham, 2013).