

Study Skills

by Christa Upton

So you have to learn something. How are you going to remember it all? How are you even going to *read* it all?

Like the old saying goes, “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!” Even in studying this “Study Skills” paper, you might want to tackle only one major point each day! That would get you through this paper in two five-day school weeks: you would be tackling five study skills tips the first week and five organizational tips the second week.

In addition to the tips laid out here, silliness can aid learning! (Who knew?) Laughter can relax the body and makes learning easier. And the sillier your memorization technique, the easier it is to remember.

So, here are some tips to get you started on your new study skills journey:

I. Reading

- A. Pay attention to headings. Maybe you are the type of learner that is helped by reading only chapter and section headings first. Then you know where you are going. OR, maybe you learn better by reading through a section first and then fitting it into the big picture. One way is like looking at a map first; the other way is like enjoying the journey and then figuring out where you are!
- B. Tackle only a section at a time. Take a break and do another subject in between sections if you are getting overwhelmed.
- C. Underline lightly in pencil as you go. But don't underline too much! This only makes a mess of the textbook. Underlining may not be needed at all if the textbook already has a lot of **bold** or *italics* and such.
- D. Draw symbols or icons in the margins relating to the content. For instance, draw spice jars next to a part about India's exports.
- E. **Give extra attention to anything in bold.** If something is in bold, that usually means they want you to know it!
- F. When searching for answers to questions following a section, first think what the question is related to. If the question is about windmills, don't search the book's section about solar power! Find the section in the text that fits best. Then, look in areas that are in bold first.

II. Organizing the Information and your Thoughts

- A. One way to organize is to outline. Take a look at this paper. I have chosen to write about five main categories of study skills: Reading, Organizing, Taking Notes, Summarizing, and Memory Techniques. Each one is listed under a large Roman numeral. Points relating to each category are listed under capital letters. If you have points under THESE, you can use Arabic numerals, then lower-case letters, then lowercase Roman numerals. Example:

“Report on Candy”

- I. Chocolate
 - A. Hershey’s
 - 1. With Almonds
 - 2. With Peanuts
 - 3. Plain
 - a. Snack size bar
 - b. Regular bar
 - c. Extra large bar
 - B. Nestlé’s
 - 1. Crunch
 - 2. Mint Crunch
 - 3. Powdered, for drinks
 - a. Hot drinks
 - b. Cold drinks
 - i. Regular
 - ii. Malt flavored
 - iii. Deep dark
- II. Hard Candy
 - A. Werther’s
 - B. Jolly Ranchers
 - C. Lollipops
 - 1. Tootsie Pops
 - 2. Gum-filled
 - 3. Regular

- B. Another way to organize is to make a chart. You can write your categories at the top, such as: “Medieval Period,” “Renaissance Period,” “Baroque Period.” Then put information under each category, such as type of artwork, music, architecture, famous people, etc. **Use pictures, simple drawings, or symbols whenever possible, because “a picture paints a thousand words.”** Categories next to each other can help you compare and contrast.
- C. If you have enough information about each topic, make a separate page for each topic. For instance, if you are studying many topics about Native Americans, including their homes, you might have one page for just their homes. You might get a blank map of the US and draw a picture of each kind of home in the appropriate geographic location—teepees in the West, pueblos in the Southwest....

III. Taking Notes

- A. Don't take down too much. Think about what is most important and what the main points and ideas are.
- B. Especially if you taking notes from a lecture and you need to write fast, develop your own abbreviations. For instance, if you are listening to someone talk about the Bible, maybe "AB" becomes the abbreviation for Abraham. Or Tab. is your abbreviation for Tabernacle. Just don't forget your abbreviations or you might be in trouble! ☺
- C. If you can, look over your notes soon after you have written them. If something doesn't make sense, check with your book or teacher.

IV. Summarizing

- A. The best way I can summarize good summarizing is: think how you would explain the information to a five-year old child. Put this into full, complex sentences, add necessary details, make sure it makes sense, and voila! you have a summary!
- B. Don't put too little into a summary. If you don't include enough context, it won't be as helpful in learning and may not be as clear.
- C. Don't put too much into a summary. It's not a re-telling; it's a summary.

V. Memory Techniques

- A. **Pictures:** One memory technique I have already touched on is drawing pictures. Even if you are a terrible artist, stick figures, blobs with labels, etc. can be very helpful. For instance, if you need to remember that white blood cells fight bacteria, then draw some "white blood cells" with swords fighting little "green alien bacteria." **(It helps if the bacteria have mean, angry expressions on their faces. ☺)**
- B. **Pneumonic devices:** These are words or sentences made up to remember the first letters of a series of items or such. For instance, the five letter names of the treble clef lines in music are: E, G, B, D, & F. Many piano students learn "Every Good Boy Does Fine" to remember these letter names. A funnier version is "Eggs Go Bad During Fevers."
- C. **Stories:** Let's say you need to remember that George Whitfield started an orphanage. So, you decide that Whitfield saw a "white field" of baby diapers in his orphanage!
- D. **Songs:** Many memory songs have been developed for learning, such as the memory songs by Larry and Kathy Troxel. (I HIGHLY recommend these!!! <http://www.audiomemory.com/index.php>) But you can also make up your own. Try singing the periodic table to your favorite pop tune, or singing the parts of the digestive system to "Three Blind Mice."

General organizing of your school stuff helps in studying, too. That way you can focus on studying the material and not finding it! We all know that it is easier to find our socks if they don't end up in the stuffed-animal box! But it takes work to organize anything. But, it's worth it!! Try these tricks:

- I. Pick a color for each subject. Use this color (say, green for science) for all spiral notebooks, folders, binders, etc. I tried to keep the same colors from Jr. High all the way through college! (Okay, I'm a little weird. You don't have to do that! ☺)
- II. Use a file folder system for papers. File names could be:
 - A. Completed Papers
 - B. Math Papers to Fix
 - C. Writing Papers to Edit
 - D. Sample Finished Work
 - E. Maps
 - F. Charts
 - G. Science lab reports
 - H. Or whatever you need to file!
- III. Post important charts on your door, such as decimal equivalents.
- IV. Tape handy reference charts on the inside of notebooks, such as grammar abbreviations on the inside page of your grammar notebook, etc.
- V. Write ALL assignments and pages due, with their due dates, in ONE place, such as a spiral-bound notebook or a personal calendar. Check each assignment off as it is completed and turned in. If some assignments have extended due dates, break the assignment into chunks and decide what days you are going to complete each step.

For instance, for a research paper due in 2 weeks, you might write on your calendar:

- A. Monday: go to library and gather resources
- B. Tuesday: take notes on half the books
- C. Wednesday: finish taking notes
- D. Thursday: organize notes
- E. Friday: write outline of paper and reward self with M & M's ☺
- F. Monday: write rough draft
- G. Tuesday: complete rough draft
- H. Wednesday: revise paper
- I. Thursday: edit paper
- J. Friday: write and edit bibliography, title page, and cover; turn paper in and breathe a sigh of relief!

Now how did you do learning THIS paper? There will be a quiz tomorrow! (Just kidding. ☺)

Sources:

- My wonderful, creative, fun Mom
- A Beka books [can't remember which one(s)]
- My funny, intelligent son who draws fantastic "scary bacteria"

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