

25 Ways To Get The Most Out Of Now

Whether you are reading this early in the semester, when you feel fresh and excited about classes, or near the end, when you are tired and frazzled, it's easy to find yourself struggling to keep up with the studying you need to do. These suggestions provide you with ways to be more efficient and thus to maximize your study time.

Read them over, try them out, and use the ones that work best for you.

When to study

1. *Study difficult (or boring) subjects first.* The most difficult courses need more energy, so go after them when you feel fresh, and save the ones you enjoy for later. You'll feel great when you have that hard or boring subject out of the way.
2. *Remember your best time of day.* We discussed this earlier in the semester. Some of us really cook in the mornings, others of us in the afternoons, and some are night owls. We can't always control our schedules very much, but as best you can, do your studying when you are most alert and ready. And remember that, for many people, studying in daylight is more efficient than studying after dark.
3. *Use "wait" time.* You have at least 10 minutes between classes. You may have to wait at the bank, or in the grocery line, or while you do your laundry. Keep flash cards or summary sheets handy so that you can use that time.
4. *Study in short sessions rather than marathons.* Short sessions are much more productive than studying for hours at a time. Build in at least a short break every 50-90 minutes.

Where to study

5. *Use your best study area.* By now you probably have figured out which places work well for you and which don't. Go with the best you have access to. And beware of studying on the bed, sofa, or recliner. By now you're tired, and it's too easy to fall asleep if you get too comfortable.
6. *Use the library.* Libraries are made for study – chairs and tables, good lighting, lots of books around. But don't let it become your place to socialize. Studying together is great, but if the group can't stay on task, then you will have to go it alone.

Ways to handle the rest of the world

7. *Pay attention to your attention.* Sometimes our own thoughts jump right into the middle of our concentration. Notice, and let go of the thought. If you're distracted because you're thinking about getting something else done, either 1) write yourself a note to remember to do it later; or 2) do the other thing and then get back to studying.

8. *Agree with living mates about study time.* Especially if you've had some conflicts during the semester, it's a good idea to try and nail down some agreements for the rest of the semester.
9. *Put away your cell phone.* You really will survive if you don't return a text message immediately. Turn it off, put it away, and focus when you need to study.
10. *Learn to say "no."* Most people will respect your wishes when you tell them that you can't do something because you need to study. If they won't, you may have to be more assertive. If they're your friend, they'll back off and let you study.
11. *Hang a "do not disturb" sign on your door.* Then you don't have to say "no" – the interruption doesn't happen in the first place.
12. *Get ready the night before.* Put the things you'll need in the morning in your backpack. Make sure you have something ready to wear. If you're writing a paper tomorrow, get your materials together. It will save you time and frustration the next day.
13. *Check ahead.* If you need to buy something, call or check the internet to make sure the store has what you're looking for. If you need to talk with a professor, check her office hours, or email her to see if she's available. Avoiding trips that end with frustration can save you a lot of time.
14. *Avoid noise distractions.* Some people seem to do OK with music in the background. Some of us do OK with some types of music (classical or jazz instrumental) but not others. But some of us really need it quiet to fully concentrate. Do your best to control your study environment. If you can't control it, try going somewhere else that is more controlled.
15. *Manage interruptions.* There are people in the world who never seem to get that they are interrupting others, or don't get that they should stop. If you can, avoid those folks when you need to study. If you can't avoid them, try something like: "What you're saying is important. Can we schedule a time to talk about it when I can give you my full attention?" If nothing works, mark where you were as soon as the interruption takes place so that you can go back to it when you're done.

Things to ask yourself if you get stuck

16. *Ask: What is one task I can accomplish toward achieving my goal?* If you're looking at some really big task, pick out some small portion that you can do quickly. Then you'll feel good about yourself and want to do more. Before long, the task isn't so big anymore.
17. *Ask: Am I being too hard on myself?* When you're having trouble finishing an assignment, or you can't seem to keep your attention on task, pay attention to what you're telling yourself. Don't berate yourself – it only makes it harder. Gently remind yourself to get on with it.
18. *Ask: Is this a piano?* Carpenters who construct rough frames for buildings have a saying for when they bend a nail or accidentally hack a chunk out of a 2 x 4: "Well, this ain't no piano." Often, perfection is not necessary. So ask yourself if you're putting too much pressure on

yourself in a given situation. Sometimes it's not a piano. Of course, sometimes it is a piano – what you do needs to be just right (think of how a small programming error can wreak havoc in a computer program).

19. *Ask: Would I pay myself for what I'm doing right now?* If you were employed as a student, would you be earning your wages? Would you be working your way to a promotion? You are, in fact, employed as students. You have employed yourself, investing your future earnings, and paying quite a bit to be a student. Mediocrity can really cut down on your options. Strive to be an excellent student!
20. *Ask: Can I do just one more thing?* At the end of a long day, ask if you can do just one more small task. This can really increase your productivity.
21. *Ask: Am I making time for things that are important but not urgent?* It's easy to find ourselves running around, trying to take care of all manner of tasks, putting out all kinds of fires, so that we don't do the important things in life, such as praying/meditating, reading for enjoyment, exercising, spending quality time alone or with family and friends. When we get really busy, we tend to put these things off until we have more time. If we aren't careful, that day won't ever come.
22. *Ask: Can I delegate this?* Study groups can help with this – split up the material, and have each person responsible for reviewing the material for the rest of the group. Writing groups can edit and critique each others' papers, or brainstorm topics. If you have to miss class, ask a classmate to summarize the lecture.
23. *Ask: How did I just waste time?* Notice when you don't accomplish what you intend to do. Notice what you did and the specific ways you wasted time. You'll be more likely to catch yourself in the act and correct it next time.
24. *Ask: Could I find the time if I really wanted to?* The next time you're about to say "I don't have time," ask yourself if that's really true. Suppose someone offered you \$10K to find 4 more hours of study in a week. Do you think you could do it? If you could for \$10K, you can do it anyway.
25. *Ask: Am I willing to promise it?* If you want to find time to do something, promise yourself and promise someone else that you'll do it. That greatly increases the chance that you'll do it.