

“Ten Habits of Highly Successful Students”

Author – Jessica Rose

Publication Date: July 7, 2014

Published by <https://thoughtcatalog.com>

Before I realized I wanted to be a scientist, I didn't give a hoot about studying. I went into college with no idea how to study. None. Zip. Zilch. I didn't really believe in studying in high school, because I was under the delusion I was going to be a rock star. (I was not exactly what you might have called a “successful student. I didn't fail out or anything, but I didn't exactly have perfect attendance. I once came to class and a teacher didn't know who I was. I had to explain to her that I was in fact in her class, and to look at her class register. She replied that she figured I dropped the class, since I hadn't shown up. Nope, I just didn't want to go to PE first thing in the morning. Point being — I wasn't always a 4.0 student.) But when I decided science was my goal, I had to make changes. I decided to ditch some behaviors that were not beneficial. I worked every day to make the difficult routine habitual, and eventually it become easy to manage. I think developing positive habits can help students succeed and decrease anxiety related to studies and grades.

1. Beware of catastrophic thinking.

Resigning yourself to failure before you begin is not an option if you want to succeed. Failure isn't something I let myself think about anymore, because I know the work can be done if I put in the requisite time and effort. Academic success is much more about hard work than inborn talent. Most students believe that people are naturally good or bad at a subject and that just can't be changed.

You have to keep yourself out of bad mindsets such as that. Classes can be hard, and tests looming over you can give you anxiety. I get that. Try to study when you are in a positive mood, and try not to get stressed out while studying (putting your phone away can help with this). You can learn this material, you can improve, and you can learn anything, except maybe like, advanced organic chemistry — and you know what? That's okay. That sort of thing shouldn't be pushed on innocent students.

If you are doing well in some courses but not others, it is easy to become frustrated and start thinking negatively. Don't become defeated; you may just need to shift your priorities a bit. If you are struggling in Chemistry and succeeding in Communications, maybe add in more time for studying Chemistry and less time for Communications. Makes sense, right?

Low test scores also foster negative thinking. So you received a poor grade on your test. That sucks, but it happens. We all have our weak points, and it just means you may need to revise your methods. Don't panic; one bad grade doesn't ruin a semester. I only know this because I once got a horrible grade on a group project early in my college career and it gave me a full-blown panic attack. I was convinced I'd never be able to get my score up, that I'd fail this class, never get into medical school, and would have to become a reality TV star to pay off my student loans. I got a 97% in that class. So believe me when I tell you, one grade doesn't have to be the end of the world.

Take a deep breath and re-evaluate. Before you decide you've wasted your time studying, analyze the questions you missed, and find them in your lecture or textbook notes. If you can figure out where your problems are coming from, you can fix them more easily. This will keep

you from feeling like you can't change how you are doing in the class. If you can find a pattern, you can add extra study time to lecture reviews or to textbook reviews. Or you may realize you need a tutor. This is all about finding what works for you. Do what you need to in order to stave off negative thinking.

2. Master time management.

This is really crucial. If you want to have time for everything, you need to figure out how to make everything fit into your schedule.

I take on far too many activities, I understand this about myself. I want to do activities on campus, I want to be a student athlete, I want to invest time in giving to other people, I want to work part time outside of classes, and I want to go to school full time. My time management skills formed out of absolute necessity.

Think about how you spend your time now and design a new schedule. Are you allowing enough time for sleep? I'm bad about this one myself, but caffeine actually cannot make up for losing a good night's sleep. Try for at least six hours. Seven or eight would be even better. Have you dedicated enough time for focused study? These are things you should consider when coming up with a new schedule. Keep a calendar of all the dates of all tests, term-paper deadlines, and other important assignments. Be sure to include your own long-range personal plans as well. Plan ahead as much you possibly can to decrease anxiety about upcoming tests and assignments.

A critical part of time management for students is studying effectively. You can stare at a textbook for five hours and still not comprehend what you read. You have to make sure the time you're dedicating to studying counts. Spaced study is more effective than massed study. Divide your work into four hour long periods instead of one four-hour period. Alternate subjects if you'd like, but avoid interference (ex: don't try to study French, then Norwegian, you're going to mix things up because the subjects are so similar). Determine the amount of study time you need to do well in each course. I recommend spending at least one to two hours studying for each hour spent in class. Create a schedule that makes sense. And schedule open study time, things come up that may interfere with your set schedule. This open time can help fill in those gaps you miss.

3. Study effectively

It's important to realize cramming and studying for hours isn't what you need to do. You need to study smart. Work smart, not hard, as they say. I'm not sure who "they" are, but I agree with them on this. Here is a list of things that will help you study more effectively:

1. Read the chapter before you go to the class lecture about it. It helps to know what the professor is talking about before you get there.
2. Only keep what you need to study with you while you're studying. Ditch anything that can distract you before you start.
3. Question what you're reading, and test yourself on it often. Generate questions after you read to go over concepts, compare and contrast, and make yourself generate examples.
4. Practice retrieving the information without your notes or book, and do it in the same way you are tested. If you are required to do essays, multiple choice, or fill in the blank, practice using the information in that way.

5. Know what each class expects of you.
6. Do not study isolated facts. I only encourage notecards to work on what you are struggling with. They're good for quick study breaks in between class or work, or to review things you struggle with before a test. Knowledge isn't obtained in small isolated facts. Key terms and definitions aren't going to help you really comprehend material.
7. After the class, re-read the chapter and highlight what you think is important. After class you may be more prepared to focus on certain sections of material.
8. Go through and highlight what you have difficulty remembering. You might want to make these points into flash cards as well. Keep the cards and review them before a test or quiz. Isolated facts aren't how you should study, but keeping that card with you and looking over it before the test can be beneficial.
9. Spend 15 minutes a night, at least, on each class' study guide. This kind of spaced out study helps encode the information into your long-term memory, and will help you recall it faster and more accurately later.
10. Honestly evaluate how long you should spend on an assignment. Most students drastically underestimate the time they need to study and get assignments done. Learning isn't fast. You can't skim and learn and comprehend material. Review is important.

4. Learn when it's time to take a break, and push through when you can.

Sometimes we all hit a wall when we're studying or working on an assignment. Taking a break when you feel frustrated can actually help. I've found if I walk away for more than 15 minutes, it's easy to get distracted. Even a short break will help you push through. Finding a short exercise routine to do during this time is something I've enjoyed. It gets me up and moving, and working out doesn't sound so terrible in 10 minute increments. Plus, exercise balances neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, which is good for your brain. I'd recommend taking a break for at least 10 minutes every hour so it's easier to study for longer periods of time.

HOWEVER, most of the time when we want to take a break from studying it's not because we have put in our very best effort, and after hours of toiling have just finally grown too tired to continue. Most of the time we want to take a break because *Big Bang Theory* is on, or because someone sent you a bunch of videos of guinea pigs and you need to watch them. Getting in the habit of studying when you've scheduled time to do it every day will make the laborious become routine.

5. Reward yourself when you deserve it.

Chances are you don't want to be studying. I don't blame you, Netflix has a lot of things we haven't seen yet. Taco Bell is probably open. You could be charging things you don't need to your Amazon credit card. There are a lot of possibilities regarding how you can spend your time — and your preference probably isn't studying. If you have trouble studying regularly, giving yourself a reward when you achieve a goal may help. To motivate yourself when you're having trouble sticking to your schedule, allow yourself an immediate reward for completing a specific task. Understand that your behavior is completely under your control. You can shape your behavior if you can critically analyze what needs to change. These routines will increase the likelihood that you will continue to foster these habits, which will make you a more successful student. Space out the rewards as your routine becomes easier for you to complete.

Be honest with yourself as well. If you really earned a reward, then you should get it so it acts as positive reinforcement for your good behavior. If you didn't accomplish what you set out for,

don't go ahead and reward yourself anyway. Doing this helps drive me to accomplish what I set out to.

PS, If you want to know more about conditioning behavior, hit up B.F. Skinner. He's more of an expert than I on the matter, though I did take a psychology class in college.

6. Ask for help when you need it.

I'm horrible at this, because I do not like to admit that I can't do something myself. Asking for help does not equate to your failing. On the contrary, you are pushing yourself toward accomplishing what you need to. That's awesome, not something to be ashamed of. Ask for help it as soon as you think you need it. Putting it off will just stress you out more.

Just to clarify — this does not mean ask google. Find someone who has knowledge about the subject you need help in and consult with them. You can use the Internet too, but it can be incredibly beneficial to have someone to talk it out with and ask questions until you truly understand. It also gives you a good chance to practice those people skills.

If you have trouble asking for things, watch Amanda Palmer's TED talk about the art of asking. Amazing.

7. Take care of yourself

Stay healthy. You can't have a healthy mind without a healthy body. These huge meat sacks called our bodies are being piloted by 3lbs of neurons, treat yours well. Eat right, work out, get sleep, stay hydrated, don't leave your drink out unattended at parties — you know where I'm going with this.

8. Learn how to decrease test anxiety.

Let's talk about dealing with the dreadful feelings associated with test days. The truth is once you've nailed studying, you're going to see improvements on your test scores. However, I understand how debilitating test anxiety can be, and how much stress they can bring on. These are a few tips to help you continue to improve your studies. Just remember, you got this.

Have a great morning: I have a specific test morning routine. Includes a great breakfast, shower, some comedy to put me in a good mood, dance party, review the material, etc. Find your routine. Get in a good mood. I do encourage you to eat, exercise (a small amount, gets your brain activity up and running), and to review the material. Other than those basics, do what makes you feel good. Only drink coffee if it won't make you spaz out. Get enough sleep the night before the test. Staying up all night will actually be worse for you. Study properly before, and eliminate cramming.

Test preparation: Ask the instructor to specify the areas that will be assessed on the test. Take any practice tests the book or your teacher may offer. Use review guides, end of the chapter review questions, whatever you can do to prepare.

Now, you're taking the test: Arrive early. Worrying about being late will only increase anxiety. Be prepared. Water, pencils, calculator, whatever you need. Read through the directions thoroughly. Write important facts or formulas in the margins if you are worried about forgetting them. Read through the test first, focus on what you know and answer those first. Then go back

and work on the things you are unsure of. Answer every question, even if it is a guess. Focus on one question at a time. Relax and stay confident. Go back over the test once you've finished. Make sure you've answered every question. Don't change questions you're unsure of, trust your first instinct unless you are positive you made a mistake the first time. Don't freak out if you are the very last soul there taking the test. Take your time, work at your own pace. Don't worry about anyone's progress but your own.

Post-test: If the teacher goes over the test, take notes on anything you may have gotten wrong. Make time to ask your teacher about questions you missed even if they don't have a specific review time in class. If you get to keep the test, save it for future studying. You may want to review it before a mid-term or final exam.

9. Focus on one thing at a time.

Stop multi-tasking. Focus when you study. No one is good at multi-tasking. Once your attention shifts, you are giving up some attention. Focus on one task without distraction. Research shows we are bad at multi-tasking, but we are REAL good at fooling ourselves into thinking we are good at multitasking. Ditch the distractions. Each one is taking away from your concentration and effort. For every distraction you decrease the amount you learn and increase the amount of time it takes for you to learn.

Organize your space: try to work at a desk or table, not in your bed or comfortable chair that might encourage napping. Try to only use this space for studying.

Minimize distractions: Do everything you can do eliminate distracting noises. Turn off your phone and minimize your social media tabs (it sucks, I know). Don't study with the TV or music on. It's distracting you, even if you think it's helping. This is how your brain works, no way around it. If you must use music, listen to soft instrumentals, nothing with lyrics. It will distract you. Reward yourself later with watching TV or listening to music.

10. Create specific and realistic goals.

Your goals must be specific. You won't achieve your daily goals if they are not realistic. Can you actually master 3 chapters in one sitting? Probably not. If you can, you shouldn't need this article. You'll have much better results if you divide large tasks into smaller units. If you have course outlines with advance assignments, you could set systematic daily goals so that you would be able to cover everything that is coming up on your exam. If you aren't used to studying for long periods of time start with relatively short periods of concentrated study, with breaks in between. Ex: Read one major section, then take a five or 10-minute break.