

Keys to success



What are learning skills?

Learning skills are skills and strategies that you can use to improve your academic performance in college.

Time management and organization: start off organized	Do you have trouble keeping track of your assignments and finishing them on time? The more organized you are, the easier it is to meet assignment deadlines and improve your marks.	Page 3
What is your learning style?	Do you know how to optimize your learning skills? Knowing exactly how you learn will make your learning experience more productive and successful.	Page 3
How to listen and take notes from a lecture	Do you have trouble paying attention in class? Are your notes difficult to study because they are unorganized and messy? Practice strategies to get more out of your lectures.	Page 4
Memory	Do you have trouble remembering what you have learned? Use these approaches and improve your ability to remember what you study.	Page 5
Study strategies: the dos and don'ts for studying	Do you study for three hours but only remember what you read in the last 40 minutes? How you study is just as important as what you study.	Page 5
Thinking and reading	Are you overwhelmed by the amount of assigned reading? Is it difficult to find important points? Use these reading strategies to help you think logically and read critically.	Page 6
Strategies for success on tests and exams	How do you prepare for tests? Improve your test marks by using these preparation and writing techniques.	Pages 6 and 7

Time management and organization:

Start off organized

- Learn and practice organizational skills.
- Create routine and order for yourself to establish a sense of predictability.
- Turn organization into habit through repetition.
- Take control of things such as the organization of class notes, binders, backpacks, lockers, homework and spare time.

Tools for organization include:

- Semester timetable (a schedule for all your class times).
- Course outline for each subject (a description of each course you are taking).
- Binder for each subject (divided into sections for notes, assignments and tests).
- Agenda (your main tool for time management).

Organize your binder:

- Put timetables and course outlines in each binder.
- Use labeled dividers to separate notes, assignments and tests.

Organize your time:

- Label the weeks in your agenda and mark due dates for all your work.
- Mark reminders for each one of your tasks.
- Make time for work and play in your schedule.



What is your learning style?

Make your learning experience more productive and successful by determining your learning style. Complete the online questionnaire at www.vark-learn.com to understand what kind of learner you are.

Visual learners: learn through seeing

- Learn best by looking at graphics, charts and diagrams.

Auditory learners: learn through listening

- Need a quiet study space and prefer listening to reading.

Tactile learners: learn through moving, doing and touching

- May find it difficult to sit still when studying.
- Record lectures and listen to them while exercising.

How to listen and take notes from a lecture*

Anticipate what the lecturer will discuss:

- Check the course outline for lecture topics.
- Complete all related readings before you go to class.
- Look to see if the lecture notes or PowerPoint presentation(s) for the lecture have been posted and are available for you to read.

Use the two-column Cornell Note format and make organized notes:

Column 1	Column 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen for main ideas by asking yourself, "What is the main point of this lecture?"• Write main and sub-points/ ideas here.	<p>Write your name, date and page number here.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen for details by asking yourself, "Is this information connected to and supporting the main point of the lecture?"• List all the details here.• Use as few words as possible.• Use abbreviations and symbols.• Use coloured markers to connect details; underline and/or highlight important information.• Leave spaces so that you can add information later.• Leave empty space to separate topics.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a note of the information you do not understand in this space.• Write study questions here.• The focus of this area is for the information you do not understand completely.	



Look for cues from the speaker:

- Important information will be repeated or emphasized by the speaker; be sure to make note of these comments.

Be an active listener:

- Sit close to the speaker so you can see and hear well.
- Leave space in your notes for information you might have missed.
- Ask questions during or after the lecture.

*Taken in part from <http://www.landmarkoutreach.org/TwoColumnNote-takingMethod.htm>.

Memory

- Using imagination and creativity is an effective way of memorizing information.
- Memorizing information is not the same as understanding it.
- Create acronyms using the first letter of each word in a list to form a new word.
- Create acrostics using the first letter of each word in a list to form a sentence.
- Review your notes daily – repetition is the key to memorization.



Study strategies: the dos and don'ts of studying

The dos (things you should do to improve your studying):

- Review your notes daily.
- Study somewhere that resembles the test environment (e.g. sitting at a desk in a quiet place).
- Study during the time of day when you work best.
- Control the flow of information by breaking your time into chunks (e.g. 10 minutes for memorization; 45 minutes for intensive review; five to 10 minutes pause; repeat). During pauses, think of what you just studied and give your brain time to fully process the information.
- Recite information aloud.
- Create a picture, chart or graph to summarize material.
- Review key terms and special vocabulary before reading.

The don'ts (things you should not do when you are studying):

- Study while listening to music.
- Study on your bed, at the kitchen table or in front of the TV.
- Study in large groups.
- Leave studying until the night before the test.
- Stay up all night studying.
- Discuss the test with classmates just before the test.

Thinking and reading

Prepare to read:

- Be alert and ready to learn.
- Know your purpose. When you have a purpose in mind before reading, you are better able to focus on, comprehend and retain the content.
- Have a positive attitude and tell yourself that it is important for you to learn; you will understand and remember the information and you will improve your reading skills.
- Focus on the task of reading by setting clear, achievable reading goals.
- Choose a place to read that you associate with academic work and has good lighting and few distractions.

Use a strategy

- Begin your readings by reviewing the chapter objectives and summary to get the main points from the chapter.
- Note any new vocabulary, then read the chapter in full, filling in the details and getting definitions.
- Finish your reading by answering 'chapter summary' questions.

For more information about reading strategies, please visit Student Academic Learning Services (SALS) or SALS ONLINE.



Strategies for success on tests and exams

Arrive on time

- Avoid the 'brain pickers' (other students who ask questions to which you may or may not know the answers) who can create anxiety right before a test.

Do a memory dump

- As soon as you can, write down any information you remember about a subject.

Read directions carefully

- By reading directions and questions very carefully, you will ensure proper completion of your task.

Budget time wisely

- Quickly review the test to determine its format and the value of each question before beginning.
- Allow enough time for sections that may take more time or are worth more marks.

Make it easy on yourself

- Completing the easiest questions first will increase your confidence and decrease your anxiety.

Practice relaxation

- Sit with proper posture.
- Slowly breathe air deep into your lungs.
- Avoid stimulants like caffeine or energy drinks.

Strategies for success on tests and exams

– types of questions



Different types of test questions require different approaches. Below please find some techniques to keep in mind.

True or false:

- The statement, including those with multiple points, must be 100 per cent true as written for you to be able to mark it true.

Multiple choice/objective tests:

- Cover the options before reading the question/statement, think about the answer, then uncover the options.
- Eliminate any answers that are obviously wrong.
- Choose the best answer, which may not necessarily be the most familiar answer.
- If you are stuck, select the 'all of the above' option.

Short answer:

- Decide how much time to spend on these questions based on how many marks are associated with them.
- Keep responses brief and to the point.

Essays:

- Underline or circle the important words in the essay question and determine if you are being asked to analyze, interpret or describe in your answer.
- Think before you write and take a moment to construct a brief outline of your response.
- If the essay asks you to answer multiple questions, number them on the sheet and be certain to address each in order.
- Be concise and avoid wordy sentences.
- Depending on the type of essay, you may want to avoid personal opinions. Your answers should be factual and cite supporting evidence.
- If you are running out of time, outline the remaining points you wish to make.
- Check your spelling and grammar when you are finished.
- When proofreading, ask yourself if you answered the question appropriately.

Open-book exams:

- Open-book exams are sometimes given when a student needs to refer to charts or other materials in the text. You must prepare for an open-book exam as thoroughly as you would for a closed-book exam. You won't have time to re-read and look for formulas during the test.
- Number and index your textbook pages so that important information is easy to find.



Student Academic Learning Services
www.durhamcollege.ca/sals

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