

Study Tips

“The purpose of studying is to master course material. Studying should not be something that is done only in preparation for a test. It should be on-going: an almost daily event.” — Roger Prior

Studying is a set of activities one engages in to become intellectually prepared for subsequent learning or for exam writing. Many subjects — and biology is no exception — are incremental in nature: the topics, to a certain extent, build on one another. If you get behind, or miss some of the foundation material, then you fall into “catch-up mode” and will have a more difficult time demonstrating success in the subject.

Studying is *not* doing homework; it is something you do in addition to homework. Homework is assigned; studying is not. Herein lies the difficulty that many students face. They do their homework diligently. The homework gets handed in, checked, marked, or whatever. All is well. Then the exam is announced. If the students haven’t studied, then the only knowledge they have of the unit material is little residual tidbits that stuck in their minds for some reason. Faced with an exam, and sometimes with very little knowledge of the material it covers, the students have no choice but to attempt to cram as much knowledge into their brains in as short a time as possible.

If you study properly, you shouldn’t have to cram!

Studying properly takes time. Once you understand this and obtain some studying strategies, you will have a whole new perspective on schoolwork — and your marks will probably go up!

SEVEN SUGGESTIONS TO MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDYING

1. PICK YOUR STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Effective studying will require your undivided attention. Select a place that is free from distractions (no TV, no music, no window to daydream out of, etc.). Make sure it is somewhere you will be comfortable, as discomfort can become another distraction.

2. MANAGE YOUR TIME; SCHEDULE YOUR STUDY TIME

There are only ever 24 hours in a day. Add up the number of hours you spend in class, traveling, socializing, working, eating, etc. If you plan on spending 30 minutes a day studying each subject, you will have to find it from within the 24 hours. As a student, you should probably spend as much time on academics as you do on recreational activities. Pick your study times, but don’t wait until just before you go to bed, because you won’t be alert enough. Save your TV, listening to music, computer games and email for then, because these activities do not require the same high level of alertness.

3. GET ORGANIZED AND SET YOUR PRIORITIES

Ensure that you have all your homework done. Studying is different. It is reinforcing knowledge that your teacher will assume you already have. At any given time, you might have several different topics or subjects you could study. Make a list of them. Determine which ones are more important and which ones will require more time. Turn this into a study schedule. Before you set about to study, check to make sure that you have handy all the materials that you will need. Study, then update your study schedule.

4. STAY CAUGHT UP

If you fall behind due to absences from class, then you will have a bigger burden. In addition to doing the required homework assignments, you will have to catch up. This will take up more time and allow less time for effective studying.

Getting a copy of a friend’s notes is a valuable first step in getting caught up. You will have to study those notes and make some sense out of them before you are really caught up.

5. REVIEW OFTEN

Build your own review notes on a daily or weekly basis. Begin to condense the volume of material you get in class into succinct summaries. You will need the volume to get the details; the summaries will give you a better overall picture.

6. READ

This is one of the things the textbook is for. Each topic of study in a course will have a textbook reference or chapter. Read it! Develop some reading strategies that will help you understand it. Here are a few suggestions:

- A. Pre-read the section. Skim over it to get an idea of what it is all about
- B. Study the headings. They introduce the sections of material. Use each heading to try to figure out what each section will be about.
- C. Increase your active reading. Reading requires more participation than staring at a page full of words. Ask yourself questions on the material as you go through it. Find the answers. Engage more than just your eyes.
- D. Summarize the sections. After you complete a section that had a heading, go back to the heading. Check yourself. Do you know what the section was all about.
- E. Make notes on sections after you have read them. Put the notes into your own words — no copying from the book!

7. STAY HEALTHY

To stay healthy, you have to eat properly, get enough sleep, and have some other interests (sports, work, and/or leisure-time activities). Don't fall into the trap of spending so much time on other activities that you are robbing yourself of valuable time for sleep and schoolwork.

So, what is studying? Basically, studying is that set of activities that you engage yourself in to make sense out of a topic that you are expected to know. It may mean you are doing any number of the following unassigned activities:

- *making lists*
- *practicing vocabulary*
- *drawing and labeling pictures*
- *summarizing processes*
- *putting text into point form*
- *quizzing yourself*
- *making up study questions*
- *answering study questions*
- *putting information into your own words*
- *rewriting class notes*
- *reading*
- *making outlines*
- *drawing charts or timelines*
- *practicing problems*
- *answering textbook questions*
- *categorizing information*
- *looking for relationships*
- *developing memory aids (mnemonics etc.)*

The purpose of studying is to firmly embed information in your memory so you will have it available, whether for a test or for the next increment of knowledge.