

Succeeding at Learning 101: Practical Advice for Learning More in University Courses

Below is a list of practices suggested for university students. These come from faculty observation and from research on student learning. We hope they will be helpful to you. We suggest you pick at least two (and mark them) which you promise to try out this term.

General things you should know about how people learn

- You can grow your intelligence in a subject. You have, in the past, learned new things that were hard. You can do it again. Struggling with a topic is not a sign that you are dumb or can't "do it"—it's a sign that you are learning. Give it time and **practice**.
- People construct new learning based on things they already know. If you try to identify how something new relates to something you already know, you will better understand and remember it. Research on brain neurons has shown this. Concentrate on making connections between things you already know and how they relate to things you are trying to learn.
- Rest your brain. It needs sleep to put things together and apply concepts.

In class

- Communicate with instructors. Do not suffer in silence. **ASK**. Someone else in class will be so grateful. It's hard (if not impossible) for instructors to understand how you will "hear" their lecture. It's been a while since they learned this material. Help them out.

Every week

- After each lecture (or week) write up a few questions you think would be reasonable for the instructor to ask on an exam. Share questions with friends. Check with a TA or the instructor to see if your questions are "on target". This way you won't end up saying "I studied and studied, but what I studied wasn't on the exam!"
- Study both alone and with study groups. Neither is sufficient on its own, and everyone will find their own balance. But don't mix social events with study groups.
- When reading the book, after each short section (page, paragraph) cover up the text and see if you can summarize what it said and imagine why you need to know it and how you might be examined on it. Examine graphs and diagrams especially closely – what should you be learning from it?

Homework

- After you have finished your homework and turned it in, discuss it with others. Did you solve problems different ways? Talking (or arguing) about what you learned from the homework makes it more likely you will retain it for the exam. Maybe you will identify something you don't fully understand. Be sure to read any feedback on homework carefully.

Exams (and after exams)

- If you don't know how to answer something, start by writing down what you are looking for (in your own words) and what you know. In multiple choice, cross out wrong options.
- Make **specific** plans for how to improve after an exam. Write down something measurable you will do differently, then check each week that you've done it. Just like getting in shape, a specific plan will more likely lead to progress. Find a partner and share progress.