

Learning Resource Center Study Skills Handout - #3



Four Pointers to Help You Manage Your Study Time Effectively

Time is an unusual commodity. It cannot be saved. You can't stockpile time like wood for your stove or food for the winter. Because time is so elusive, it is an easy commodity to ignore. The following time management techniques focus on when to study, where to study, how to handle the rest of the world, and things you can ask yourself when you get stuck. They are designed to help you manage your time so it will not be wasted.

I. When to Study

- (a) Study difficult (or boring) subjects first. We tend to study what we like first, yet the courses we find most difficult often require the most creative energy. Save the subjects you enjoy for later. If you find yourself avoiding a particular subject, get up an hour early to study it before breakfast. With that chore out of the way, the rest of the day can be a breeze.
- (b) Be aware of your best time of day. Many people learn best during daylight hours. If this is true for you, schedule study time for your most difficult subjects when the sun is up.
- (c) Use small blocks of time that get overlooked and are usually wasted. Travel time (time spent on the bus or on the train) can be valuable for getting your reading completed.

II. Where to Study

- (a) Use a regular study area. Your body and your mind know where you are. When you use the same place to study day after day, they become trained. When you arrive at that particular place, you can focus your attention more quickly. Avoid eating and watching television where you study. Use your study area for study and make it a ritual.
- (b) Study where you'll be alert. For most students, in bed, your body gets a signal - it's more likely to be "time to sleep" rather than "time to study!" For that reason, don't study where you sleep. Just as you train your body to be alert at your desk, you also train it to slow down near your bed.
- (c) Use a library. Libraries are designed for learning. The lighting is perfect. The noise level is low. Materials are available. Entering a library is a signal to quiet the mind and get to work. Most people can get more done in a shorter time at the library. Experience it for yourself.

III. How to Handle the Rest of the World

(a) Pay attention to your concentration. Breaks in concentration are often caused by internal interruptions. Your own thoughts jump in to tell you another story about the world. When that happens, notice the thoughts and let them go.

(b) Make a list of your priorities – things you have to do (studying, going to class, doing homework, eating, and doing chores) and things you would like to do (talking on the phone, watching television, and reading). Using these priorities, make a daily schedule; remember to include your sleep and relaxation time.

IV. Things You Can Ask Yourself When You Get Stuck

(a) Ask: What is one task I can accomplish toward my goal? This is a useful technique to use on big, imposing jobs. Pick out one small accomplishment, preferably one you can complete in about five minutes, and then do it. The satisfaction of getting one thing done often spurs you on to get one more thing done. Meanwhile, the job gets smaller.

(b) 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? Ask yourself this question when you notice that you have taken three popcorn breaks in 30 minutes.

(c) Ask: Could I find the time if I really wanted to? The next time you are tempted to say, "I just don't have time," pause for a minute and question the thought of this statement. Suppose someone offered to pay you to find a few more hours to study. Could you find the time when a sum of money is involved? Remember that when it comes to school, vast sums of money are involved.

Finally, remember: never give up. Keep going until the task is complete and your goals are met. Some people keep going even when they get stuck or fail again and again. To such people belongs the world.

GOOD LUCK!

*Ellis, David B. (1985). **Becoming a Master Student** (p. 47-52)*