Tuesday’s Tidbits

Study Tips and Test Anxiety

Are you stressing out about final exams? Would some good study tips help? If so, read on! You might find some useful ideas here.

Most students have tried various study methods with some success. If your studying is effective, congratulations! If it’s not, you’ll find some study strategies here that you may want to consider trying. You need to find what works best for you.

In her article, “23 Science-Backed Study Tips to Ace a Test”, Lebowitz (2013) presents study tips based on scientific research. Some of them you may want to try include:

**Study before you go to bed.** Researchers at the University of Notre Dame suggest that you study for a few minutes right before bedtime. During sleep, the brain strengthens new memories, so there’s a good chance you’ll remember whatever you review right before falling asleep (as cited in Payne et al., 2012). Research also shows that it’s helpful to do some studying first thing in the morning when your brain has a lot of room to absorb new information.

**Space it out.** Lambert (2009) presents a principle called “spacing effect” which was developed by a Harvard physician and professor. It involves breaking up information into small chunks and reviewing them consistently over a long period of time. According to Kerfoot, this strategy helps increase knowledge and strengthen retention (as cited in Lambert, 2009).

**Quiz yourself.** A second principle developed by Kerfoot is called “testing effect” (as cited in Lambert, 2009). Testing yourself on the material rather than just reading it is a good way to prepare for your test. Ask yourself questions and see if you can answer them, or have someone else ask you questions about the material.

**Make up a sentence or story.** Research also shows that you’re more likely to remember a funny sentence or story because they help make the information more meaningful. For example, to remember the white blood cells in order of concentration, you could remember this sentence: Never let monkeys eat bananas (neutrophils, leukocytes, monocytes, eosinophils and basophils). A sentence like this will make the information easier to remember.

**Change locations.** Studying the same information in a different place every day makes us less likely to forget that information. This is because every time we move around, our brains are forced to form new associations with the same material causing it to become a stronger memory. Simply changing the location you study in improves retention.

**Write it out.** Research suggests you can retain more information when you hand write notes rather than type them. Recopying your notes or adding them to the ones you’ve taken when reading a chapter prior to class will help with retention of the material as well.

**Say it out loud.** Reading information out loud provides the opportunity to mentally store it in two ways: seeing it and hearing it. Talking it over with a friend is an added bonus!

**Study group.** Some students benefit from a getting together with other students every few days to review material prior to a test. If it works for you, go for it!

**Reward yourself.** Decide on a stopping place in the material you are studying, and when you get there, reward yourself. Knowing there’s a little treat waiting for you at the end of just a few pages makes it easier to get through the material. It can be a sweet treat, a quick walk, or whatever makes you happy.

Things to Think About

"Reality is the leading cause of stress for those in touch with it."
—Jane Wagner

“Stress should be a powerful driving force, not an obstacle.”
—Bill Phillips

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Contact Beth Smith, Librarian

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Work it out. Research has found that just a half an hour of aerobic exercise can improve your brain-processing speed and other important cognitive abilities (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). They also suggest you choose an aerobic activity that taxes both the cardiovascular system and the brain because the more complex the movements, the more complex the synaptic connections will become.

Some of these tips might work out well for you, so give them a try! Remember that the objective of studying is to retain information. Your ability to remember is affected by many factors such as distractions, stress, level of motivation, and time of day. To ensure your success, keep these things in mind:

- Don’t study in a place that has distractions for you. This could be a person, technology (iPod, texting, etc.), or a place! Select study locations that will allow you to concentrate on your studying.
- Know your high energy and low energy time of day. If you’re not a morning person, don’t try to study first thing in the morning.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff; accept that during this time you may not be able to keep up with everything. The house can be messy and dinner can be take-out. Don’t let yourself get distracted by busywork when you should be preparing for your exams.
- Don’t skimp on sleep. You should be getting on average at least 6 hours of sleep each day. Lack of sleep worsens your emotional state, ability to concentrate, and feelings of anxiety.
- Eat well and get some exercise. Practice the healthy lifestyle your future profession encourages others to do!
- Ask for help! Your instructors are the first people you need to speak with if you are struggling. Find out what additional resources are available to help you, like tutoring, and take advantage of them!

As you can see, there are many things you can try to help you study more effectively. Once you discover what works for you, you’ll find that you’ll retain more information and do better on your exams. One last thing to keep in mind is that regardless of how nervous you feel about your exam, make sure you remember to breathe while taking it! Your body needs oxygen and your brain does too! Try to relax and do your best. That’s all anyone can ask of you, and it’s all you should expect of yourself.

Tips to Minimize Test Anxiety

Get a good night’s rest before the exam. Don’t try to stay up all night by taking caffeine or drugs. You’ll feel tired, irritable, and distracted by the time of the exam.

Learn to recognize the underlying causes of your anxiety. Think about why you become anxious. Recognize that some thoughts are negative and self-defeating.

Don’t create disastrous scenarios for yourself or put your whole future on the line with a single test. It is unlikely that one test will ”make or break” your chances for a successful future.

Steer clear of fellow students who get tense. Panic is contagious, and just because others are nervous doesn’t mean you need to be too.

References


Good luck!