

Preparing to Study: A Good Study Place

You need a good study place to be prepared to study. You should be able to answer **YES** to all of the following questions:

1. Is my Study Place available to me whenever I need it?

Your Study Place does you little good if you cannot use it when you need it. If you are using a Study Place that you must share with others for any reason, work out a schedule so that you know when you can use it.

2. Is my Study Place free from interruptions?

It is important to have uninterrupted study time. You may have to hang a **DO NOT DISTURB** sign on the door or take the phone off the hook.

3. Is my Study Place free from distractions?

Research shows that most students study best in a quiet environment. If you find that playing a stereo or TV improves your mood, keep the volume low.

4. Does my Study Place contain all the study materials I need?

Be sure your Study Place includes reference sources and supplies such as pens and pencils, paper, ruler, calculator, and whatever else you might need. If you use a computer for your schoolwork, it should be in your Study Place .

5. Does my Study Space contain a large enough desk or table?

While working on an assignment or studying for a test, use a desk or table that is large enough to hold everything you need. Allow enough room for writing and try to avoid clutter.

6. Does my Study Place have enough storage space?

You need enough room to store your study materials. Be sure you have enough storage space to allow you to keep your desktop or other work surface clear of unnecessary materials that can get in the way.

7. Does my Study Place have a comfortable chair?

A chair that is not comfortable can cause discomfort or pain that will interfere with your studying. A chair that is too comfortable might make you sleepy. Select a chair in which you can sit for long periods while maintaining your attention.

8. Does my Study Place have enough light?

The amount of light you need depends on what you are doing. The important thing is that you can clearly see what you need to see without any strain or discomfort.

9. Does my Study Place have a comfortable temperature?

If your Study Place is too warm, you might become sleepy. If it is too cold, your thinking may slow down and become unclear. Select a temperature at which your mind and body function best.

Having a good Study Place is important for good studying!

Now you have a chance to evaluate your study place to see how it measures up:

Where do you do your homework most of the time? _____

Is it quiet, and free of clutter? _____

Do you have enough privacy to really concentrate? _____

Do you have the materials you need there? _____

If there is anything you think needs to be changed about your typical homework space, what is it?

Get Organized!!!

Now that you have your study space set up, how do you make sure that everything else is organized, too? Here are some organizational tips for you...

Notebooks

Most teachers will require that students maintain an organized notebook in their classes. Whether the choice is a looseleaf notebook, a spiral bound notebook, or a combination of both, the notebook should be clean and orderly. Each entry should be dated. Subject notes should be kept separate from other subjects. Dividers should be clearly labeled. For example, don't take notes on a geography assignment in the math section of your notebook. Remember to keep a section free to use when you just need paper for homework. Make your notebook sections Doodle-Free Zones - no drawings or marks or notes that don't belong. The purpose of the notebook is to help you keep track of -and remember- the material for each day's classes, and to organize the material later to prepare for tests and quizzes.

Book Bags and Lockers

A book bag and a locker are two easy ways to be prepared for class. You need to have a place to keep the items you need such as: pens, pencils, notebook, assignment pad, personal reading material, textbooks, folders, and a calculator. Some students keep other supplies such as paper clips, a ruler, whiteout, colored pencils and tape. Students should be careful to keep the bag and the locker organized and cleaned out - and make a habit of checking it regularly. Students should NOT carry ALL their books around all day, however, as that could put a strain on backs and shoulders. It is recommended that students make frequent trips to their lockers to drop off heavy books.

Assignment Pad

Students should write all homework assignments in the assignment pad provided by their team teachers. Often, students write down assignments for different classes in multiple areas, thus having difficulty at the end of the school day remembering what to bring home. The assignment pad should be easily accessible during class, and throughout the day. Once at home, a clearly defined assignment pad will help students remember the list of assignments needed to prepare for the next day.

At Home

Students in the middle school and high school should expect between a half hour to an hour and a half of homework every night on an average. Some teachers will give daily, regular homework; while others will give homework irregularly. Long term projects are to be considered daily homework in that students are expected to work on them every night. Teachers recommend that students work in a designated study area

which is quiet, well-lit, and is close to school supplies like a stapler, a dictionary, a computer, and a wastebasket (for cleaning out that book bag!) Teachers also recommend that Quiet Hours be kept in the household - no television, no phone calls, no stereos, and no video games allowed during this time. (Sorry kids!)

Before going to bed at night, students should check to see if their homework is finished and in a safe spot in the book bag. Then they should put the book bag near the door so there won't be any last minute Screaming- Search-Sessions when the bus pulls up in the morning.

Ok... so I've got my space and my materials organized...

Now What???

Highlighting:

We all know that it is a good idea to highlight important or interesting passages. There are several ways to do this. The *worst* is to use a yellow highlighting marker (or hot pink, or whatever color you like). The main problem with this is that you will tend to find almost every sentence to be important or interesting! As a consequence, every page will become yellow (or hot pink, or whatever). Not only does this defeat the purpose of highlighting--because if *everything* has been highlighted, then really *nothing* has been!--but the pages of your text will become damp, curl up, and be generally messy.

A slightly less messy, but equally useless, technique is to use a pen or pencil to underline important or interesting passages. I guarantee that you will wind up underlining every sentence on every page, and you will have gained nothing.

A good technique is to draw your eye's attention to a passage by drawing a *vertical line* in the margin. This only works if you are allowed to write on the text, though. Don't write in books that don't belong to you! The trick is to I like to use the right margin and to make my line a right square bracket. (Find the example on this page.) This way, even if you've slipped into the error of marking (i.e., vertical-lining) every sentence on every page, at least you haven't ruined the page. Later, when you re-read the text (*note that I said 'when', not 'if'*), you can then use a different highlighting technique (e.g., underlining) to highlight more important passages. If you must, you could use yellow highlighter for a third round. Each time you read through the material, you will become clearer and clearer about what really matters.

Be sure to pay attention to people's names, unfamiliar vocabulary, definitions, and examples that support the main ideas (once you have figured out the main ideas!).

Number events in the Margin

If the text you are reading includes events that happened in some order, or steps to follow in a process, you can write numbers in the margins next to them (or put post its on the page) to make sure you notice them later and get the order straight.

Make Notes in the Margin

You could also make notes in the margin of the text (*if* there's room, and *if* the text belongs to you). If the book doesn't belong to you, you can use small post it notes. The same technique you use for marking a special part of a novel can be used for a science article or a Social Studies text book! Write the main ideas in your own words, or write questions so you remember to go back and ask your teacher.

Copying Your Notes Over at Home

Of course you should study your class notes at home. This includes handouts and other information you have. There is a problem, though, because just *reading* them is too passive. Studying must be *active*. It is too easy when *just* reading passively to have your mind wander or even to fall asleep! You are not really reading if your eyeballs are just rolling over the words on the page.

If you don't do something *active* with your notes, you run the risks of having unorganized notes or of misplacing them.

What you can do is to *study your notes by re-writing them*. The main idea behind re-writing your class notes (besides making them more legible and organized) is that the very act of copying them is one of the best ways of studying them!

As you re-write your notes, or copy over information from a handout, you might discover that there are gaps in your notes or that you don't understand something that you are writing. That is good – as long as the test isn't the next day you can ask your teacher the question you developed.

People who are very visual learners find it easier to recall information if they can picture what they read in their minds. If you are one of these people, neat and well organized notes can make it easier for you to 'locate' the information you need.

It is definitely extra work, but it is also a really effective study technique.

What else can I do to study?

- ❖ You can make an outline of the main ideas.
- ❖ You can make a timeline of events.
- ❖ You can invite a friend over and study together. Take turns asking each other questions. You can also make up practice quizzes for each other and trade them. If you can ask a good question about the material, you probably know it fairly well. When you correct the quiz you gave your friend, you will have another chance to review the material. Plus, it is fun!
- ❖ Make your own flashcards for vocabulary, important people's names, or significant dates or places.
- ❖ You can practice reading your notes out loud – some people need the auditory input to process information well. If you are one of those people, close the door and read out loud! Try this:
 - Look at a main idea or topic, and then look away and recite the details out loud without looking. Then check to see if you were right. Repeat if you had lots of mistakes.
 - Tell a story out loud. “Once upon a time, there was this guy King Henry the Eighth. He was an arrogant man, and he...” Tell an historical event in your own words to see how well you really understand it.
 - Make up a song or rhyme to memorize.

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

When you are reading, there are several helpful tricks you can use to make sure you understand what you read. The most important general rule, however is this:

Think About Your Own Thinking!

- ✓ Notice when you lose focus. Go back and re-read.
- ✓ Read more than once if you don't have a clear memory of the text.
- ✓ When you feel confused, get specific. What is confusing? If you can ask a specific question, you can get specific help!
- ✓ Visualize what you are reading. If you can see it in your mind, or sketch a picture of it, you will have a better understanding and memory of it.

Don't let this happen to you!

Before you read:

- ✓ Preview the text. How is it set up? Are there picture, or diagrams? Have a look at those to get your mind warmed up. Are there separate sections in the text? Look to see if they have section titles to help you figure out the structure.
- ✓ Check the assignment. Do you have to answer specific questions about the text? If so, read the questions first. Do you have to take notes? If so, get your post its and paper ready!
- ✓ Think about what you already know about the topic.

While you read:

- ✓ Keep a word web or concept web as you go. Add to it as you discover each new idea or piece of information.
- ✓ In your notes, write down significant information and page numbers. Or, use post its to mark these places. Write notes on the post it so that you remember why you marked it!
- ✓ THINK!!! How does this information connect to what I already know? Am I understanding this as I read? What questions do I have about this text?
- ✓ Make predictions and develop opinions about what you are reading.
- ✓ Recognize facts and writer's opinions as you read.

- ✓ Ask questions as you go along! Some might be answered by the next paragraph, or some might be answered by your teacher the next day. Questions help you to have a purpose for reading and keeps your reading *active*.
- ✓ If you are reading a story (a novel, short story, play...) think about characters and the relationships they have with each other in the story. Think about the setting, the problem, the solution, and the order of major events in between.

After you read:

- ✓ Review the sections you have marked.
- ✓ Review your word web or concept web.
- ✓ Retell or write a summary of what you read.
- ✓ Re-read! Especially the parts that were confusing.
- ✓ Review your notes. Are they pretty complete or did you just jot down a few things here and there? If they are not complete, skim through the text you just read and add to your notes.
- ✓ Make a timeline of events.
- ✓ Make a vocabulary list.
- ✓ Develop opinions about the reading. (“Should King Henry the Eight have beheaded so many of his wives?” “Would I have wanted to be the president of the new country when America was born?” “Precipitation is my favorite part of the water cycle because...” “Dividing fractions is fun because it is so much easier than it seems like it should be!”

A definition of reading comprehension...

“Intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader.”