

The Power of Effective Studying



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INTRODUCTION

Today many people have to study, not just for school or college, but for their careers too. In this guide, you will learn tips and tricks to help you get the most from your study time; to ensure that you remember as much as possible and pass your exam.

Remember that passing an exam is not just about your ability to cram information into your brain, but also your understanding of and ability to apply this information. Your mental attitude is a very significant factor in passing exams. There are incredibly intelligent people in the world that fail exams because they mentally talk themselves into failing despite the fact they can easily pass the exam.

In this guide to effective studying you will learn how to get the best from your study time, and how to improve your mental attitude so you pass the exam first time!

If you want to discuss studying techniques or anything in this guide, please feel free to visit the Shaping Your Destiny forums at <http://www.shapingyourdestiny.com/forum/index.php> .

5-STEPS TO STUDYING SUCCESS

Step 1

The first step is to get a study area. For many of us our living conditions may not be ideal, but there must be an area where you can study. If necessary, use a library if your home environment is not suitable. You need a place where you can:

- Sit comfortably and upright
- Have plenty of natural light
- Be undisturbed whilst you study
- Have some peace and quiet
- Have a desk or table to place your study materials on
- Have access to the Internet or books for research purposes

Step 2

The second step is your state of mind. You may have heard people telling you how hard the exam is, or that you will never pass, or 80% of people fail it. Throw those thoughts out of the window. They are rubbish. Remind yourself that people do pass it, and you are one of those people. Prepare yourself to study by telling yourself how well you absorb information and learn new things – this will help you immensely when you start to study. Anytime any doubts enter your mind, counter them with a positive thought affirming how well you are going to do. A positive attitude will take you a long way to passing your exam.

Each time you find yourself telling yourself how hard this is, how you are not good at the subject and so on you MUST stop yourself. Catch yourself saying it and immediately stop it. Now say the positive version of what you were saying. Repeat this three times to yourself. For example, if you were saying how you will never remember everything, you would say 3 times to yourself (in a loud and positive voice) “I have an excellent memory and will remember everything with ease.”

If you have lots of facts to remember, then use a peg system or something similar, as detailed in one of the programmes mentioned in the Useful Resources section. A complete description is beyond the scope of this guide, but these are very efficient methods for remembering facts.

Always study when you are feeling alert and awake. Never study when you are feeling tired or sleepy. Study for periods of 20 minutes and then take a 5 or 10 minute break, and then return to your studies. This does require discipline, and for some an alarm clock to remind them when to stop and when to start again. After about 20 minutes, the average person's concentration begins to waver.

Before you start to study and during your 5 to 10 minute study breaks do some exercise. Run up and down the stairs, go for a quick brisk walk, or anything so long as it is exercise! This gets your blood flowing and more oxygen to the brain. It also wakes you up and gets you back into a peak state for successful studying.

How you perceive studying will also affect how you perform at studying. You may have a mental picture of studying as being hard and something not enjoyed. You have to change this otherwise you will struggle through your exams.

Make studying fun – make it into a game. Picture yourself in your mind enjoying studying, having fun, and the success of having passed the exam. You will learn more of this in a little while under Visualisation. You can make studying a competition – push yourself to beat your arch-rival or to out-perform everyone in your class.

Give yourself rewards for studying. When you create your study plan (in Step 4 below), give yourself rewards at the end of each day or week. If you don't complete your studying – don't give yourself the rewards. This helps motivate you. Set yourself a reward for passing your exam as well – something really special that means failing the exam no longer an option. A motivational “carrot” like that works far better than any “stick” that you can think of. Your rewards do not have to be big or expensive, just something you enjoy and really want.

Step 3

The third step is to use the right study materials. Listen to what other people who have passed the exam used, flick through books in book stores, or find reviews and information on-line that can help you. There are huge numbers of resources on the Internet on just about every subject imaginable. Many Internet portals (such as AOL) have areas specifically dedicated to studying. These resources can greatly enhance your chances of success.

Amazon.com is an excellent source of book reviews, so use it wisely when choosing any books. They are not always the cheapest though, so feel free to shop around. Remember that there is such a thing as information overload, and that you can have too much study material. Choose it wisely and well.

If you haven't got the money to buy the books you need then go to your local library and borrow them, or borrow them from a friend. If you are taking exams for your job, try and persuade your company to buy your study materials.

Step 4

A study plan is a vital part of success for any exam. Think of it like a set of goals for your life. Without a clear study plan, you will not know what to study, when to study it, and how long to study it for. A good study plan ensures that you cover all the topics that you need to learn for your exam, and that you do not succumb to last minute panic.

Take a piece of paper and list all the topics that you have to study for your exam. Break it down into fairly high level topics. For example, if you were studying History you may write down: Pre-Christ, 1AD-500AD, 501AD-1000AD, 1001AD-1500AD, 1501AD-1750AD, 1750AD-1900AD, 1900AD-present. This gives you broad categories for study. Write down next to each one sub-headings of topics you have to study, e.g. for 1001AD-1500AD you may write down The Norman Conquest of England, The Discovery of America, and many more. How you write this down will vary according to what you have to learn and the type of information you need to learn.

Next work out how many weeks you have before your exam. Write the figure down so you don't forget it. On a blank piece of paper, write down the date of every Monday before the exam. By the very last Monday, write "Final revision". These Monday dates represent the entire week for studying purposes. Also write the date of the Monday following your exam, and write "Reward Day" next to it.

Assign the subjects you have to learn (or chapters of the book you have to read) to each of the Monday's on your piece of paper. Make sure you leave plenty of time for you to actually do the revision required. Write down next to each subject how many hours you have to spend studying it that week. Err on the side of safety, and always estimate more time rather than less. It is much better to be ahead of schedule than behind it.

Now you have to stick to your study plan. When you revise make notes on what you are reading. You can use Mind-maps (see the Useful Resource section) or just write down the important points from each topic.

When you come to your final revision week, you need to revise all the notes that you have taken whilst you have been studying. Condense these down into shorter and shorter notes until literally a word or picture will spark a succession of memories of relevant information. This final week is not for last minute panic, but for making sure you understand what you have learnt and have absorbed it properly. Spend time this week doing practise tests as often as you can – this will hone your understanding and highlight any gaps in your knowledge.

Back to the Monday after the exam we wrote down. This is your “reward” day. You will write two things down here. The first is what you will give yourself if you keep to your study plan. This may be a trip somewhere, a great meal, buying yourself a present or whatever. Something you really want, which will help motivate you to study. If you don’t keep to the study plan then you don’t get it!

Also write down what you are going to do if you do not stick to your study plan. Perhaps you’ll do the yard work each week for a month, give something you value away, or anything. This is something you would prefer not to do, which will help motivate you to keep to your study plan.

To ensure you keep your bargain with yourself, show what you are planning to do to a parent or friend who will make sure you get your reward for keeping to your study plan – or for not keeping to it. This helps your self-discipline and keeps you focussed on the studying.

Step 5

The fourth step is how you study the material. This is broken down into a number of stages:

1. Find out what you need to know to pass the exam, i.e. the exam criteria
2. Get a general overview of the subject
3. More in-depth reading of the subject
4. Review of the subject
5. Test questions
6. Review your notes
7. Pass the exam

Whilst you are studying your books you should be making notes on what you are reading. The notes should serve as a summary of the topic and be enough to remind you what you need to know to pass the exam. Also, take notes of subjects you are not quite sure on or need to investigate further. Then follow these up and ensure you clarify any areas you are not sure about. There are many forums on the Internet where you can post your questions and experts will answer and clarify it for you. Ask your classmates, your tutor (if you have one), or do your own research, but *make sure* that you do follow them up and clarify the points you do not understand.

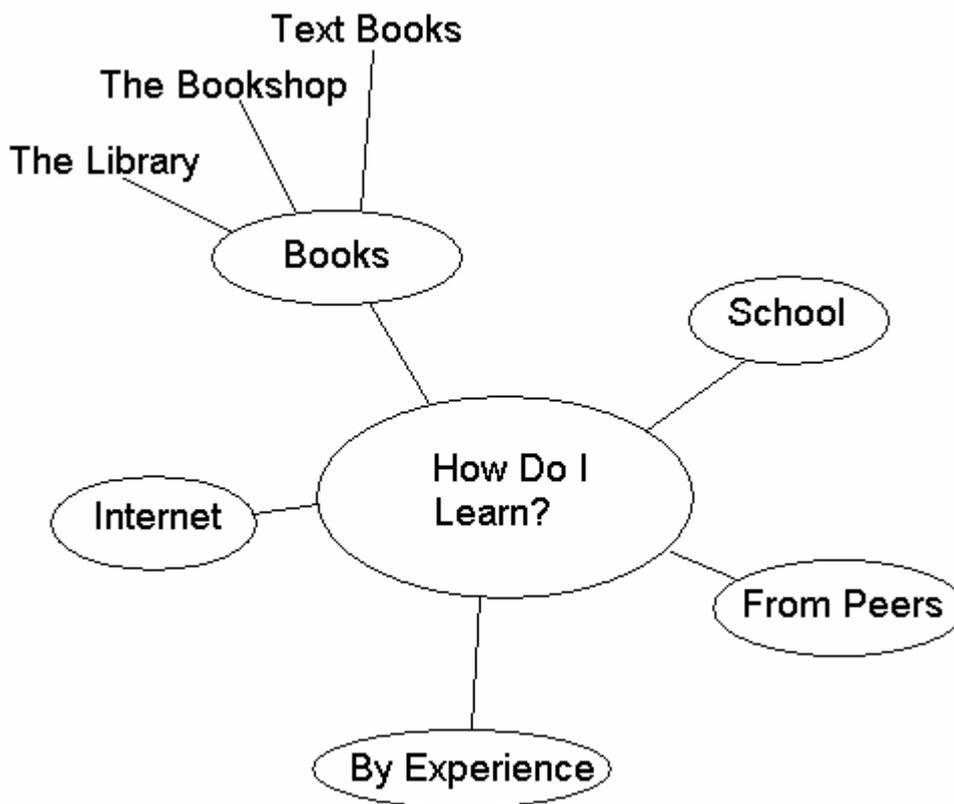
A rough time scale for these would be that you review your notes and do test questions for about a week before the exam. For 1 or 2 weeks before this, you review the subject and your knowledge of it. Then for anything from 2 weeks upwards before this, you read your main study material. This time scale ensures that what you read will be retained in your brain, and that you build a useful knowledge of the subject, not just the bare minimum to pass the exam.

STUDYING TIPS

Mind mapping

Mind mapping is an excellent method of learning information, particularly if you learn visually, i.e. by looking at things. It involves drawing a picture detailing what you are learning. These can be as simple or as complex as you want, depending on your needs and the time available to you. They are one of the best ways of easily summarising information so it can be reviewed very quickly. They are great to read just before your exam to remind you of the pertinent facts.

Here's a very simple mind-map of how you might learn as an illustration.



To get more information on exactly how to mind map, obtain one of the programmes from the Useful Resource section.

Speed Reading

This is an essential technique for any student who wishes to get the most out of the studying in the least amount of time. It does take some time to get a good grip on speed reading, but this is time very well spent. Properly learnt, speed reading allows you to read a book much quicker as well as retain and understand the information. If you are serious about making the most of the time you spend studying then I highly recommend learning to do this. There are some resources included in

the Useful Resource section that will teach you how to speed read. You can learn the basics of it in just a few hours, and then work on refining it and reading faster and faster.

Memory Improvement

I know a lot of people who complain their memory is poor, which makes it hard for them to study because they cannot retain facts. The memory is like any muscle in your body, and can be improved with exercise and use. With all the modern conveniences, most of us no longer use our memories. Telephone numbers are programmed into phones, addresses, birthdays and personal details are in PDA's or diaries. We don't really use our memories any more.

Improving your memory will not only give you a boost studying, but also improve your quality of life, and in particular your quality of business (if you are in business). Imagine being able to remember everyone's name and their likes at a meeting. It gives you an excellent edge that makes you stand out from the crowd. For studying you no longer need to worry whether you will remember the facts, your memory techniques ensure the facts are there at your beck and call when you want them.

To succeed at studying, memory is a vital tool. In the Useful Resource section you will find some memory programs that will help you improve your memory.

Visualisation

Visualisation is a tool that is useful not just for studying, but for almost any situation in life. This was briefly touched upon earlier in this document. Without going into a great deal of detail, which is out of scope of this guide, visualisation involves picturing an outcome or situation in your mind and believing that it will happen.

With regards to studying, you picture in your mind yourself studying and learning everything very easily, retaining it well. Picture yourself sitting the exam and completing it with ease. Picture yourself getting your results and finding that you have passed and got an excellent result.

It is very important that when you visualise you fully associate yourself with the picture. This means that you are in the picture itself, not watching it like you watch a television. You have to make the image as real as possible. Use as many of your senses as you can (touch, feel, smell, sight, and taste) to make the images as real as you can. This makes the image more real to your sub-conscious, which will then believe that it is true and make it happen.

Perform your visualisation daily for about 10 minutes or so. When you are performing the visualisation exercise, make sure you remain positive and that any negative thoughts or images that come into your mind are counteracted by a positive thought / image.

Stay positive and focus during the day. Whenever you are tempted to say something negative to yourself, such as “I am really not understanding this” it is vital that you catch yourself and change it to a positive pattern. In this example you may then repeat to yourself a number of times “I understand and absorb this information easily.”

The positive visualisation and programming discussed above will greatly increase your chances of passing the exam. Often during the exam we are our own worst enemy. I have a friend who failed his driving test a number of times because he talked himself into failing it. Eventually, his parents came up with a ploy to make sure he passed his test. They booked the test for him and didn't tell him. They then took him out for a driving lesson and whilst he was driving around they asked him to stop and jumped out to pick up some shopping.

Whilst he was waiting in the car for his parents, the door opened and a stranger got in. Naturally, he was a bit disturbed. The strange turned to him and said, “Good morning sir, time for your driving test.” He passed that one with flying colours.

In this case, he didn't have time to talk himself into failing, it was sprung on him with no prior knowledge and he passed.

I'm Stuck!

When you are stuck with your studying or you don't understand a concept it can be very difficult. In this situation, the following steps will help you out.

- Take a break and come back to it a bit later. You will find that you then approach the problem from a different angle.
- Ask one of your classmates for help, though be careful as they may understand it no better than you.
- Look on the Internet or in your books for more information
- Ask your tutor to explain the concept to you until you understand it.

THE EXAM

If you have a choice for when you sit your exam, make sure you book it for when you perform at your best. If you are always tired in the afternoon, don't sit your exam then, sit it in the morning when you are awake. If you have an afternoon exam, then eat sparingly during the day and eat good food. Don't eat stodgy junk food as it will just make you feel heavy and lethargic.

On the night before the exam get out everything you need for the following day, i.e. your notes, your ID, and anything else you need and place them in a prominent place where you will not forget them. Under your keys or wallet is a good place as you have to leave with your keys. Then get an early night so you are in peak state for the next day.

On the day of the exam don't eat a large breakfast or drink a lot. Eating too much makes you feel sluggish, and drinking too much will make you want to go to the toilet a lot, which will disturb your concentration. Arrive at the exam centre in plenty of time. On your journey there, review your notes again – if possible. Whilst you are waiting to take your exam, review your notes again and review the areas you feel you are weaker on.

Breathe deeply whilst sat in the exam to keep yourself calm and to ensure plenty of oxygen gets to your brain.

When presented with the exam paper, the first step, if you can, is to read through the entire exam paper from front to back. Don't answer any questions right now, just write little notes on each one; any pointers or important things you don't want to forget. This method means there are no nasty surprises awaiting you over the page, which will dramatically reduce any nerves you may have.

If the exam is computer based or you have no way to read the questions ahead, ensure you read each question thoroughly before answering it. Bear in mind that some exams are badly worded to try and catch people out. If the exam is multiple choice, often two of the answers will be very similar; so make sure you read them very carefully. Make notes, draw pictures, and work things out by hand if you have to.

Allocate a rough time to each question based on the number of questions and the time available. For example, if you have 10 questions and 2 hours to complete the exam, this equates to about 12 minutes per question (120 minutes divided by 10). This ensures you are not going to get caught

short and run out of time. Stick to this rough guide throughout the exam. This ensures you have at least answered all the questions. Generally, any unanswered questions mean you get zero points for that question, which reduces your chances of passing. Remember that usually you can go back through the exam to finish off or add to your answers.

Now start work on the question you considered the hardest. This may sound like a bizarre way to do it, but it really makes a lot of sense. You get the hardest questions out of the way first as these are going to consume more time and be more taxing on you. When you first enter the exam room you are at your freshest, and most mentally alert. After sitting in an exam for two hours, your brain may be aching and your concentration fading. That is not a time when you want to hit a question that really makes you think. That's a time when you want a real easy question.

Answering the hardest questions first also means that if time runs short, you can skip through the easy ones very quickly and gain back some points.

Once you have answered the hardest question, go to the next hardest, and so on. As the questions get easier and easier, so you will answer them quicker.

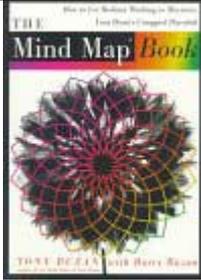
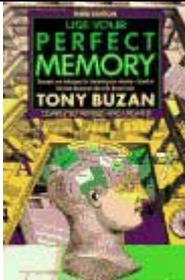
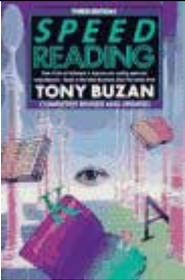
On a psychological level, saving the easiest questions for last is like eating the food you don't like first and saving your favourite bits for last. You get excited knowing that the hardest part is over, and everything from here on is easy. It gives you a tremendous mental boost to know you are not going to turn the page and find the question from hell staring out at you laughing manically in your face. You face the hardest questions when you are mentally most alert, and the easiest when your concentration begins to lapse.

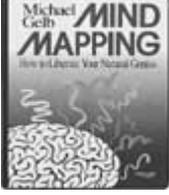
If you find yourself running out of time, then you need to stop working on the hard questions and go through and answer all the questions you thought were easy. Answer these so that you get points for them, and then return back to the harder questions and try to finish them off as well.

USEFUL RESOURCES

To ensure you do the best in your studies, the following books and resources are recommended.

Click on the picture of the product to be taken to it.

Name	Author	Link	Description
Shaping Your Destiny Study Forum	Jason Johns	Study Forum (hyperlink)	A forum for the discussion of studying techniques, tips, and tricks.
The Mind Map Book	Tony Buzan		Learn the secrets of mind mapping from one of the world's experts. Discover exciting new ways to improve one's memory, concentration, creativity, ability to learn, and more.
Use Your Perfect Memory	Tony Buzan		Buzan has devised an ingenious system for memory improvement, geared to handle each specific memory problem--from everyday names and phone numbers to special programs for card players to showing students how to prepare for and get optimum results on exams.
Speed Reading	Tony Buzan		Excellent book on speed reading, very easy to read. Full of useful techniques and tricks.
Mega Maths*	Kevin Trudeau		4 audio cassettes plus 60 minute VHS video and 185 workbook. Learn how to do sums in your head quicker than a calculator and amaze everyone!

Mega Memory*	Kevin Trudeau		<p>8 audio cassettes plus workbook, pocket guide and bonus cassette. Learn how to use your memory to remember facts, figures, and faces.</p>
Advanced Mega Memory*	Kevin Trudeau		<p>6 audio cassettes plus interactive workbook and 54 minute VHS video. Further to Mega Memory, learn how to perform “miracles” with your memory!</p>
Mega Speed Reading*	Kevin Trudeau		<p>6 audio cassettes plus 30 minute VHS video and 24 page workbook. Learn how to massively increase not only your reading speed but your comprehension and retention too.</p>
Mind Mapping*	Michael Gelb		<p>4 audio cassettes plus a mind map chart. Excellent way to learn how to mind map</p>
Accelerated Learning Techniques*	Brian Tracy & Colin Rose		<p>6 audio cassettes / CD's plus 96 page workbook and bonus cassette / CD. Discover how to use your memory, how to learn, and how to improve your learning success.</p>

* Note these products are available on a 30 day *free* trial.

CONCLUSION

If you study correctly and follow the above guide you will learn a lot about the subject you are studying, and pass the exam with flying colours. I am sure of your success, as I am sure you are too.

Should you have any questions or comments about this document, or want some help or advice on studying for your exams, then please feel free to contact me at the email address below and I'll be happy to help.

Good luck with your studies!

Jason

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Achieve your goals. Discover your true self.

Realise your dreams. Create the life you've always desired.

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