Strengthening Your Study Skills

Are you experiencing difficulties in a subject because your study skills could use some work? Do you study as efficiently as you could? Are you organized well enough to learn the material? Are you wondering what you can do to strengthen your study skills? The three articles in this handout, Study Tips for Students, Time Management, and Note-Taking, will help you with your study skills.

Study Tips for Students contains general tips for you to follow. Consider highlighting the ones most relevant to you or add your own best "tips" to the list.

The **Time Management** chart is accompanied by a lengthy explanation of how you might improve your Time Management skills.

The **Note-Taking** sheet is meant to help you improve your note-taking skills. Included with it is a copy of the Cornell Style Format, one of the better formats in general use. You don't have to use Cornell Style, but use a format which works well for you.

Study Tips for Students

Class:

- Attend class!!
- Ask questions in class.
- Find a study buddy/group in class
- Take meaningful, not copious, notes

Time Management:

- Be realistic; know yourself and be honest about how much time each project will take.
- Stick to your goals.
- Leave flexibility in your schedule.
- In addition to your schedule, write out daily tasks on a card and post it. Order them from "most stressful" or "most difficult" to least stressful. Try to tackle the stressful ones first.
- Use the daylight hours.

Studying:

- Study in a quiet, well-lighted environment and take study breaks.
- Review your notes every day.
- Study for fifty minutes and take a ten-minute break.
- Tackle large tasks in small pieces.
- Set a time limit on tasks.
- Always reward yourself for each accomplishment and for good habits.
- In addition to your regular study hours, study right before you go to bed so that you make use of your subconscious.

Reading:

- Read sections both before and after class.
- Make a list of questions as you read.
- Work out examples on your own.

Review:

- Keep a list of definitions or theorems.
- Use chapter reviews and summaries.
- Attend help sessions.
- Talk to your instructor.

Assignments:

- Keep up with your assignments, especially long-term ones.
- Don't skip "easy" questions or problems.
- If you can't do a problem, write down all the information you can.
- Be sure to check, edit, and proofread your assignments.

Exam Preparation:

- Study throughout the semester, not just the night before.
- Know the exam content and format.
- Sleep the night before. Be rested, comfortable, and well fed.
- Avoid starchy and greasy foods.

Exam Taking:

- Take all quizzes seriously.
- Write notes or formulas on the top corner of the exam.
- Read the directions carefully.
- Scan the test to familiarize yourself with the overall content.
- Do the questions you know first, then go back to the harder ones; circle the ones you skip to make sure you don't overlook them in the end.
- Don't rush through questions. Write down all the ideas you have. Make sure your answers are clear and complete.
- Check your exam when you are finished.
- If you are suffering from anxiety or blocking, spend five minutes relaxing, breathing deeply and steadily, without thinking about the test. Concentrate on relaxing your whole body. Continue with your exam.

Time Management

Time management is perhaps the most important skill that any student needs for succeeding in college, yet many students are not managing their time as efficiently as they should. If you haven't established clear, attainable goals for yourself, you can be more easily distracted from what must be done by those activities which might be more fun but less fruitful.

In order to manage your time better, you must 1) prioritize activities based on your values and goals, and 2) organize the activities you must accomplish. One means of doing so is by completing the time management chart included here. Complete such a chart for a full semester, filling out a new one with each new semester.

Fill out the chart like this:

1. Mark **class hours** and scheduled **work (job) hours**.
2. Mark **meal times** (21 hours/week): You can use this time for eating, morning grooming, breaks with your friends, or whatever, but establish regular eating habits for good health, mental concentration, and academic success.
3. Mark two to three hours of **study** for every credit hour on your schedule, preferably as close as possible after class. **Fifty percent memory loss occurs within 48 hours if material isn't reviewed, recited, reworked, or discussed promptly after receiving it.**

Each study hour should be marked by the course you should study ("study Chemistry"; "study Accounting"), not just "study." These hours should occur as closely as possible after the class so that you can 1) make sure that your notes are complete and organized, 2) make connections with previous materials, and 3) study for exams more efficiently. By marking specific study hours, you are committing to studying each course. If you decide to exchange one course study period for another, you can, but be sure to still devote time to both or all subjects.

Panic over tests or papers or assignments can govern how you study, but spaced learning works much better. Establish your goals and set a particular schedule of study.

4. **Sleep hours** should be listed at 8 hours a night with the same bedtime and wake time. You should be in bed by midnight at the latest if you want to put in a full day beginning at eight A.M. the next day. Think of college as a full-time job that begins at 8 each morning.

If you are scheduling your classes and obligations around your fun activities, then you may need to assess your reasons for being in college.

Using the Chart

No two weeks are alike in your life, but look to see where your week is consistent, specifically with scheduled classes and study time. Plan your free time wisely so that you can enjoy it guilt free.

Plan Your Work – Work Your Plan

Hours	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							

Note Taking

Note taking is an art that students are not usually taught, yet it's one of the skills upon which college success depends. You might experience difficulties in your content-area courses because you have not learned how to take notes for that class, how to edit your notes after class, or how to use your notes to review course materials and study for an exam.

The following suggestions can help you strengthen your note-taking skills:

Good note taking depends upon:

- Good listening
- Organization
- Knowing what to write down
- Knowing shortcuts
- Knowing and applying the Cornell Style Format (or other note taking format)

Good Listening

Good listening can help you get the most out of what professors have to say. Three things can help you accomplish this:

1. **Sitting where you can easily see and hear the professor:** Where you sit in class is important. Sitting near the window or next to a noisy entrance can be very distracting, thus reducing their concentration on what the professor is saying. Sit close to the professor and away from distractions whenever possible.

2. **Observing the professor closely for clues as to what is really important:** You can receive more information in your classes by carefully observing your professors than you can by trying to write down everything the professors say. By observing your professors' body language and tone of voice, you can discern what the professor sees as most important; they might strike certain postures, talk in a particular tone of voice, repeat something, or raise their eyebrows when they're trying to emphasize something. Be sure to note anything written on the chalkboard or whiteboard and pay particular attention when professors talk about an upcoming test.

3. **Understanding the bigger picture of what the professor is trying to get across:** If you don't understand the broad picture surrounding the lecture topic, then you're less likely to understand the topic itself. Knowing the main topic makes the details fall into their proper place. If you don't understand and are getting lost in the lecture, raise your hand and ask; if you don't feel comfortable doing so, ask the professor after class or during office hours.

Organization

In order to study efficiently, you need to take good notes and to keep those notes well organized. If you take notes in a spiral-bound notebook, you can't edit material or rearrange pages into subject categories. Instead, take notes on loose-leaf sheets of paper that you can then organize in a three-ring binder. Insert any class handouts in the binder, placing them near the related pages of notes. Use dividers to separate handed-back assignments from class notes and handouts. Organization takes extra effort but will save you time in the long run.

What to Write Down

All students need to listen carefully during lectures so that they can separate what's important from what's not. Outline the important lecture topics and subtopics rather than trying to record everything the professor says. Lecturers can deliver about 125 to 140 words per minute whereas students write about 25 to 30 words per minute. Writing down topics in your own words in brief, summarizing sentences will help you focus on these main points. Don't take the time to write down definitions which you know are in the textbook, and avoid writing haphazard, unrelated details.

Shortcut Tips

Students who use the following shortcut tips will have more efficient notes:

Long-hand	Short-hand
minus	-
plus	+
equals	=
number	#
per	/
without	w/o
with	w/
within	w/i
leads to	→
times	X
for	4
to be	2b
first, second, third	1st, 2nd, 3rd

Create your own shortcuts for commonly used yet long words. For example, write s/p instead of social psychology. Again, jot down main ideas rather than frantically trying to scribble every word.

Cornell Style Format

The most widely accepted note-taking format is the Cornell Style Format (following page). Follow a regular process for taking notes in the Cornell Style Format:

1. Write notes in outline form on the right side of the vertical line.

2. As soon as possible after class, review the notes and write questions on the left that correspond to the answers in the notes on the right.

3. At the bottom of the sheet, summarize what the notes are about.

4. At the end of each week, review and answer the questions from all of the notes for that week by covering up the notes and attempting to answer the questions on the left side.

Using the Cornell Formal consistently takes less time than you might think. Reviewing your notes before a test then becomes a true review rather than relearning.

Cornell Style Note Taking Format

Subject_____	Chapter _____ Pages _____ Date _____
Question:	Notes:
Summary:	