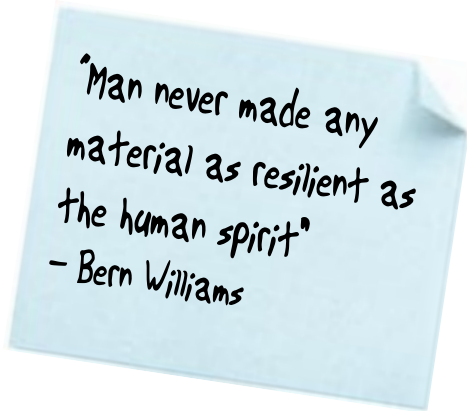


Let's get on with it



01 Come prepared

Tutors or lecturers sometimes expect you will have a basic familiarity with the subject. Even if that is not true, it pays to do some preliminary reading on the subject, so you have a broad overview of the subject before the lesson.

Instead of trying to keep up, you will then be able to focus your attention on the information that fills in the gaps in your knowledge.

A sports fan who knows the basics of the game understands what is going on far better than the novice - and enjoys it more. In the same way a moderate amount of pre-preparation will enable you to relax and concentrate on really understanding the class. If you are trying to work out what the tutor meant five minutes ago, you will be missing what she's currently saying!

02 Warm up to the subject

You already know the importance of a specific study sequence, i.e. get the **big picture**, **learn**, **explore** and **rehearse**. Even a **short** rehearsal of your notes from the previous lesson, brings back the material, and gets your brain "warmed up" for the coming subject.

03 Sit as if you mean to be there!

It is a fact that students who sit towards the front, and at the centre of a class, perform better in tests. Why?

04 Imagine the lecturer is talking to you personally

This alone is a big help in keeping you focused. It would be very impolite (and unusual!) to doze off during a one-to-one conversation.

05 Concentrate on what's being said, not how

Some teachers and instructors do have distracting mannerisms!

But if you have done your pre-preparation you will be looking to see how the lecture material fills in the gaps in your knowledge. In this way it becomes easy to focus on the subject, not the presenter.

06 Keep your questions flowing

Just as much as active questioning is the key to effective reading, it is also the key to effective listening.

The same sort of questions apply to lectures as books:

- What's the main idea here?
- What does she mean?
- Where is it leading?
- Does this agree or disagree with my current viewpoint?
- How could I re-phrase that to make it clear?

07 Always record in your notes when you are confused or unsure

An obvious symbol would be "?" This alerts you to the specific part of the lesson where you got "lost". Ask the tutor - or even a fellow student - later.

An Australian study (Pond 1964) surveyed high achieving students versus low achieving students.

High achievers:

1. Had better attendance records at lectures, i.e. put in more hours.
2. Did more preliminary reading.
3. Made comprehensive notes and revised notes the same day.
4. Were more familiar with library facilities.
5. Were better organised and had a work plan for each day.

The biggest factor was no. 3.

09 Use paper that is already hole-punched, and file in a ringbinder

This type of note book is ideal, because you can insert subsequent notes in the correct order. Another really good habit is to make your initial notes on one side of the paper only. Then when you review your notes in your ring binder later, you can use the back of the previous page to write in any additional comments.

It also helps enormously to talk over your notes with someone else - checking you both got the essential detail.

10 Write up a fair copy quickly

Within six hours of the end of the lecture, and ideally within an hour, take your preliminary memory map and re-write it out as a fair copy. This not only acts as a key review, but it is a way to clarify any points on which you may need further guidance.

08 Listen and watch for the clues!

Lecturers always highlight the most significant facts of their presentation, but they do so in different ways. A point is usually significant if:

- The lecturer becomes more animated. A change in tone or volume is a clue.
- The lecturer introduces the point with a phrase like, "in conclusion" or "the key elements are".
- The lecturer presents material on the board. Record any diagrams or material from the board, as they are significant.

A study was conducted at University College, London on students who achieved more than their entrance exam score would have predicted.

It found they had a strong interest and motivation in their subject, because they had related the subject to their long term goals.

Remember: 70% of what you learn today can be forgotten tomorrow without a specific review!



Activity

Make a postcard note of each of the previous suggestions and try them out during your next class, lecture or training session.

11 Make study a habit

Wouldn't it be lovely if it was really easy to settle down to study?

There are times when every student finds it hard to study, but some people always find it difficult to "settle down".

Here's a sure fire way to make studying such a natural habit that you will no longer have to steel yourself for it.

A habit is merely what psychologists call a “conditioned response”. The first time you do something, it is a deliberate, conscious action. After enough repetitions your reactions become automatic.

Research indicates that a habit starts to form when something has been repeated between about twenty five and thirty times. You can use this information to make studying easier.

→ Resolve to sit down every day for one month. Ideally at the same time and in the same place.

Every day it will gradually get easier. After fifteen days it will become noticeably easier.

→ Every day, when you have finished, reward yourself with something specific. A favourite record, a talk with a friend, a small snack. The intention is that your subconscious will register the connection between regular studying and feeling good.

→ Remind yourself that after twelve to fifteen triumphs you will have laid the foundation for a study habit and, therefore, success.

Repetition and Reward are the two “R’s” of good habits.

One month is all it takes and, after that one month, your real reward is that study will have become a lifetime good habit.

12 Assess yourself

Get into the habit of working out how your work will be assessed.

Past exam papers give you a good clue. Probably the best source, would be a talk with your teacher or tutor. Ask them what produces good grades and what loses marks. Of course, any grades and comments on work you have previously submitted is also a good indication.

When you are able to judge the quality of your own work, you are the boss. That’s why the idea of thinking up typical questions is so important. When you are continually inventing your own questions, and then answering them, you are truly in control of your own learning.

That’s why it is important to look at marks constructively. Ask why you got the mark or grade you did. Ask what you would have needed to do to get a better grade. Then grades become constructive. It’s not important that you made a mistake. What is important is learning why you made a mistake, then practise getting it right.



13 Devise a question bank

Professor Phil Race of the Polytechnic of Wales* has compiled 500 tips for students. It’s a great list and here’s one of the very best ideas. A Question Bank.

At some stage all your knowledge will get tested. How? By questions. Why wait for someone else to ask you the questions? Submit **everything** you learn to this simple test ...

What questions would I need to ask in order to get someone to show they understood this or could do this?

If you submit **every** chapter, or even **every** new section of a textbook or **every** lecture to this test, you will build up a Bank of Questions. You can supplement these questions with old exam questions.

If you compile these questions into a special Question Bank Notebook, and then use it to regularly test yourself - you will be completely familiar with the way you will ultimately be tested.

You will indeed “Show You Know”. You’ll also keep interested and focused on the subject. There is no need to give a full or written answer to the questions in the Question Bank. It will be enough to answer them aloud or jot down the main points.

Studies show that students who practised inventing questions for six weeks were able to anticipate 80% of the ultimate exam questions!

Taken from: Rose, C. and Goll, L., 1992, Accelerate Your Learning, The Super Skills Supplement, Unwin Brothers Ltd, England