

Study Tips

1. Plan your schedule

Don't leave it until the last minute. While some students do seem to thrive on last-minute 'cramming', it's widely accepted that for most of us, this is not the best way to approach an exam. Set out a timetable for your study. Write down how many exams you have and the days on which you have to sit them. Then organize your study accordingly. You may want to give some exams more study time than others, so find a balance that you feel comfortable with.

Some students like to finish one subject at a go by devoting certain number of days to it. Once done with it, they take up the next subject. It is not a good strategy mainly because you never know what may happen that may take away a few days of study time. The left over subject/s will suffer greatly. A better strategy is to do take up subjects by rotation so that you are preparing for all simultaneously.

2. Get ready and organize your study space

To be able to look forward to the study schedule, organize your study area. Clean it up, declutter it and if possible give it a new look by reorganizing the stuff around.

Make sure you have enough space to spread your textbooks and notes out. Have you got enough light? Is your chair comfortable? Are your distractions like your cell phone, laptop etc. out of sight?

Try and get rid of all distractions, and make sure you feel as comfortable and able to focus as possible. For some people, this may mean almost complete silence; for others, background music helps. Some of us need everything as per our schedule; some prefer to take each study session as it comes. Some have fixed break times while others might prefer to take a short nap when they feel the brain is tired. Think about what works for you, and take the time to get it right.

3. Use flow charts and diagrams

Some students like to use colourful highlighters to mark the study material. Some others prefer to stick post it sized notes on last pages of the chapter. Still others prefer to stick notes/reminders etc. on the wall.

Visual aids can be really helpful when revising. At the start of a topic, challenge yourself to write down everything you already know about a topic – and then highlight where the gaps lie. Closer to the exam, condense your revision notes into one-page diagrams. Getting your ideas down in this brief format can then help you to quickly recall everything you need to know during the exam.

4. Attempt previous years' exam papers

One of the most effective ways to prepare for exams is to practice taking past versions. This helps you get used to the format of the questions, and – if you time yourself – can also be good practice for making sure you spend the right amount of time on each section.

5. Explain your answers to others

Always offer to help out some friends in subjects or topics that are your strength. It reinforces the learning. Parents and little brothers and sisters don't have to be annoying around exam time! Use them to your advantage. Explain an answer to a question to them. That will help you to get it clear in your head, and also to highlight any areas where you need more work.

6. Form study groups with friends

Get together with friends for a study session. You may have questions that they have the answers to and vice versa. As long as you make sure you stay focused on the topic for an agreed amount of time, this can be one of the most effective ways to challenge yourself.

7. Take regular breaks

While you may think it's best to study for as many hours as possible, this can actually be counterproductive. Studies have shown that for long-term retention of knowledge, taking regular breaks really helps.

Everyone's different, so develop a study routine that works for you. If you study better in the morning, start early before taking a break at lunchtime. Or if you're more productive at nighttime, take a larger break earlier on so you're ready to settle down come evening.

You can take a 5 minute break every hour or two or you could reward yourself with a longer break after a longer study session.

Finally, remember that a break must be truly a break. Refrain from discussing studies or exams during breaks. Resist the temptation to call up peers to ask what they are doing or how far have they reached in their preparation. This invariably adds stress and the break becomes counterproductive. During a break, indulge in your favourite activity like music, catching up with sports news, sleeping, snacking etc. Sometimes, just standing at a window, balcony or terrace and staring at the greenery or sky helps. It is refreshing for the eyes and the mind. Splashing water on the face and eyes is also refreshing.

8. Sleep smart

Studies show that a study session sandwiched between 2 spells of sleep is a great idea as it really helps retention. For example, you may wake up early, say at 4am and study till 8am, then go back to sleep for 20-30 minutes. This will “seal” the learning done during the 4am-8am session.

9. Snack on 'brain food'

Keep away from junk food! You may feel like you deserve a treat or that you don't have time to cook, but what you eat can really have an impact on energy levels and focus. Keep your body and brain well-fuelled by choosing nutritious foods. The same applies on exam day – eat a good meal before the test, based on foods (like oats) that will provide a slow release of energy throughout. Sugar may seem appealing, but it won't help when your energy levels crash an hour or so later. Repeated consumption of tea or coffee can do more harm than good. Restrict the intake to not more than 4 times in 24 hours.

As a final tip, remember that being well hydrated is essential for your brain to work at its best. Make sure you keep drinking plenty of water throughout your revision, and also on the exam day.

10. Beat boredom

Do not isolate yourself and confine yourself to one space. This will lead to boredom and monotony. Sit in a different place once in a while when you feel bored. Sitting near a window, in a balcony, on the floor with a low table etc. helps to create freshness for the tired brain. Or you could change the furniture setting of the room or use favourite linen to brighten up your study space.

Good luck!