



10 Real World Study Tips to Improve Processing and Retention

Learning is a complex process, and the ability to process and retain new information is actually a brain function that can be manipulated to your advantage.

While you could spend a lifetime studying the learning process, we've simplified things for you here by collecting ten top tips to help as you process and retain new information. By manipulating your own learning, you can make it easier for your brain to process, store, and retrieve these new pieces of knowledge. If you're interested in simple tips to streamline your studying, check our top ten real world study tips.

1. Exercise

[A 2013 study](#) published in the journal, "Psychology of Aging," confirms what many scientists have long suspected. Physical activity and exertion have a direct, positive impact on cognitive processing.

To Try It at Home: Try implementing a quick exercise program at home before you begin studying or taking a test. Walk briskly, bike, jog, do jumping jacks, or crank out some push-ups. By getting your blood flowing, you prepare your body for improved cognitive function.

2. Make It Relevant

People learn best when they learn progressively. This means that by connecting new knowledge to existing knowledge, you're likely to process it more deeply and better encode it for future retrieval.

To Try It at Home: To put this into practice, always relate what you're trying to learn with what you already know. Try to find connections to the real world and in your community. Convince yourself that what you're learning is important and interesting. Then, learn it in small pieces. Master one step before moving on to the next. Relate your new knowledge to things you already know. This way, you'll always have context for the next step in your learning process.

3. Make Your Mind Work

Any method of forcing yourself to pay closer attention will ultimately be helpful in the learning process. A [2010 study out of Princeton](#) showed that presenting text in an unfamiliar font that is relatively hard to read, such as Comic Sans, (like this document), leads to better memory for text contents compared to a more familiar font, such as Arial.

To Try It at Home: Try to encourage your own deeper processing by writing notes by hand or even transcribing class notes into your own words. When reading texts distributed digitally, consider changing the font to something less familiar in order to help you focus more closely.

4. Break Up Your Learning

The most efficient way to study is in short, highly focused bursts. If you try to study for an extended period, your focus and intensity will falter. Instead, you are better off giving it 100% for a shorter period, then taking a break and returning again when you're ready to focus.

To Try It at Home: To practice this at home, set a timer and challenge yourself to stay focused for 20 minutes at a time. Reward yourself with breaks in between study sessions so that you are always approaching your work with a fresh mind.

5. Know When to Move On

It's easy to get caught up in difficult concepts or complex information. Sometimes, it's hard to know when to move on if you can't wrap your head around something, but moving on is an important skill when it comes to prioritizing your studies.

Sometimes, the conditions just aren't right for learning. You might be a little tired or hungry. Perhaps the neighbor's dog is barking or you feel a headache coming on. Maybe your head is just spinning from too much calculus.

To Try It At Home: If you find yourself feeling frustrated spinning your wheels, or you recognize that the study conditions are less than ideal, you should always take a break. Return to your work with renewed energy and if the problem still seems impossible, be sure to ask someone for some help moving forward.

6. Meditate

The benefits of mindfulness have been well-documented over the past few years as it becomes a more and more mainstream practice in schools across the country. Meditation is often considered an integral part of mindfulness, and its effectiveness as a study tool is also documented.

To Try It at Home: To retain more information from class lectures or readings, take a few moments beforehand to meditate. Find a quiet place where you're unlikely to be interrupted. Set a timer for five minutes and sit comfortably on a chair or on the floor. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. If other thoughts enter your mind, simply acknowledge them and gently return your attention to your breath.

7. Warm Up Your Brain

Just like exercising works to warm up your body for studying, brain exercises have also been shown to warm up your brain for tests. By engaging your brain in thoughtful reflection before you take an important test, you ensure that you're ready to go as soon as the test begins.

To Try It at Home: To get your mind moving and stretching before a test or other important academic challenge, count backwards from 100 as quickly as possible, skip count by random numbers, or list a noun for each letter of the alphabet.

8. Get a Good Night's Sleep (Yes, Every Night)

It turns out your mom is probably right about this one. It's been fairly well researched and extensively proven that sleep deprivation has an adverse effect on cognitive performance. What you may not realize is that simply getting one good night's sleep before a test or other big event isn't enough. Sleep deprivation has a long-lasting impact, and it can follow you for weeks if you don't catch up on missed sleep.

To Try It at Home: Avoid the impact of sleep deprivation by maintaining good sleep consistently. Think of sleep as an integral part of your overall health and academic performance and prioritize it the same as you would studying, eating, or attending class.

9. Turn Off the Wifi, Especially During Class

Wireless Internet access is an especially distracting phenomenon. Even if you eliminate other distractions in your study space, it's likely that your computer or other devices remain connected to the Internet. The seemingly small interruptions of emails and on-screen notifications can easily add up to big-time distractions.

To Try It at Home: Turn your Wi-Fi and cell phone off completely when you sit down to a dedicated study session. Better yet, leave the technology in another room entirely if at all possible.

10. Sleep On It

If you're scheduling study sessions, it might be wise to break them up with a good night's sleep. Doing so can improve your recall and reduce the time spent re-learning information you've already practiced.

To Try It at Home: Implement this at home by scheduling your study of the same material in the evening and then again the following morning. Sleeping between study sessions will improve your recall.

Learning is a science that can be improved by recognizing that cognition changes according to controllable conditions. Use these simple learning hacks to streamline your mastery and get a step ahead.