



# Study Tips Guide



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# Introduction

Embarking on a course of study is an amazing thing! You've chosen to devote your time to improving your knowledge and skills and increase your likelihood of getting a great job. But when the excitement of enrolling has worn off and assessments loom on the horizon, many people struggle to get into an effective study routine. Thankfully, there are ways to build your confidence and turn you into a study pro!

Studying requires discipline and many people find this a challenge, particularly if they have been out of the education world for a while. Learning to study effectively is a valuable skill and one that will help

you to study smarter, not longer. Without these work strategies in place, students can feel stressed, frustrated and reluctant to work on their assignments.

Within this guide, you will find tips and tricks that will help you to study in the most effective way possible. It covers how to set up your workspace, work through your educational material and keep your mind and body healthy. Each section provides a general understanding of the processes required for productive, efficient study and will help you to complete your course successfully. This guide is particularly useful for those within the vocational education sector.





# Your Study Space

## Be comfortable

But don't get too comfortable. While it may be tempting to study in bed or stay in your pyjamas all day, this will not prepare your mind for a productive day of work. Get up, get dressed and tell your mind that it is study time.

Sitting at a desk or table is ideal. Sit upright with your hips back in your chair and keep your leg area obstacle-free. If possible, have your computer at eye level and your keyboard close. This should help you maintain good posture and feel comfortable no matter how long you're studying.



## Group or solo study?

Some people like to study alone whereas others prefer to work in groups. Either is absolutely fine and completely dependent on you, however, if you do choose group study then try to limit the numbers to 2-3 people. Any more than this and you risk becoming distracted. The benefits of working in a group are that you can educate your group members and they, in turn, can help teach you.

## Find a place that works for you

Before you begin studying, find a space that works for you. Finding the perfect place to study can make the difference between a productive day of work or hours filled with procrastination and frustration. Make sure that your space has everything you need, for example, good lighting and peace and quiet. If you like to play music or burn incense while you work, then find a space where you are allowed to do so.

Make sure that you have all the equipment required for your study such as paper, pens, laptop etc so that you don't need to leave the space to get anything.

Your perfect study environment may not be at home.

## Remove distractions

If you want to focus on what you're studying, then it makes sense to remove any distractions that could pull you away from your work. Keep your work area free from dirt and clutter and move your phone away so that you don't have notifications distracting you.

## Decorate

Adding pictures, lamps or house plants could all help motivate you and prime your brain ready for learning. In fact, research has shown that house plants not only purify the air we breathe but also relieve stress, lift your mood and help improve cognitive function! 1

Customise your workspace so that it's a place you want to go to each day and you will be on your way to study-





# Time Management

## Plan your time

Setting up a study routine could be the best thing you do during your course! Not only does it prime your brain for learning but studying also becomes easier over time. Create a study timetable and mark out when you plan to study and do other activities. Your timetable could look something like this:



	TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY				
MORNING	6:00		GO FOR RUN		GO FOR RUN		SPORT					
	7:00	 BREAKFAST/GET READY										
	8:00	PREPARE FOR LECTURE			PREPARE FOR LECTURE							
	9:00								 BREAKFAST/GET READY			
	10:00											
AFTERNOON	11:00	LECTURE	WORK	WORK	LECTURE	WORK	STUDY	FREE TIME				
	12:00											
	13:00	 LUNCH										
	14:00	STUDY	WORK	WORK	STUDY	STUDY	STUDY	STUDY				
	15:00											
	16:00											
	17:00											
EVENING	18:00	 DINNER			 DINNER							
	19:00	 DINNER										
	20:00	FREE TIME	FREE TIME	FREE TIME						FREE TIME	FREE TIME	FREE TIME
	21:00											
	22:00				BED TIME							
	23:00											



## Make to-do lists

People tend to worry about tasks that are not completed. Therefore, you may think that writing a to-do list would highlight our incomplete tasks and make us worry more – but it doesn't. These lists reduce worry by tricking our brains into thinking the tasks are already done.

To-do lists also make you use your time more effectively. By having your work listed in front of you, you will be able to prioritise tasks and work through everything more efficiently.

Of course, there are right ways and wrong ways to compile to-do lists. Here are a few dos and don'ts for you to consider:

### Do

- Have more than one list. Separate your work life from your personal life and don't mix and match your jobs. Group your study tasks and everyday tasks.
- Keep the tasks small and manageable. If you can't tick items off the list regularly then you won't feel like you are achieving anything, which will lead to frustration.
- Be precise when writing your tasks. Don't simply write 'Do reading' because there is no definitive end point. Instead, write 'Read chapters 4-6' which has a definite end point when you can tick it off your list.
- Keep your list up to date. Always add things if they come up so that you are on top of your upcoming tasks.
- Tick off items when they're done. Acknowledging the completion of a task is satisfying and will help motivate you to keep working down your list.

### Don't

- Come up with a huge list. This will make you feel as though you have too much to do and may lead to worry.
- Write your list and then forget about it. Yes, it was helpful to make a list, but now it's time to do it!

## Prioritise

When planning your time, make sure that you know when your assignments are due and check that you have allocated an appropriate amount of time. Prioritise the most important or urgent tasks and if you find a particular topic challenging then make sure you have allocated more time for it.

While it may be tempting to drop a more unpleasant task to the bottom of your priorities list, getting it out of the way may be a better decision. By completing the most challenging tasks first, you will feel a sense of achievement (and relief) when it's done.

## Take a break

Studies have shown that we work better in shorter bursts rather than longer sessions so make sure you break up your study time with helpful breaks.

One technique popular with students and workers alike is the Pomodoro Technique. This technique is incredibly simple – you set a timer for 25 minutes, get down to work, and when the timer goes off you get a 5 minute break. Then you repeat. Not only is this technique supposed to help with productivity, but it also reduces procrastination and improves endurance. Grab a timer and try it yourself!

Of course, everybody studies in a different way and so what is right for someone else might not be right for you. Experiment with blocks of study time and see what you find to be most productive.



# Study Skills

To study effectively, there are some basic processes and skills that are important to learn. Once you have these in place you are well on the way to studying like a pro!

## Find your rhythm

If your body and mind aren't working in unison then it will be a struggle to find an effective rhythm to your work. Checking your phone while studying is one way that you will throw off your rhythm. Remove distractions and try to focus on the task at hand.

## Take notes

When reading an article or course material, try to take notes as you go. Write down headings and key points and elaborate on them in your own words. Make sure that you include all technical words and acronyms as these will likely be required in your assessments. By taking notes you are repeating the information which will aid retention.

Don't overcrowd your notes. Focus on keywords and points so that you can easily find the most important information.

Revisit your notes after 24 hours to go over what you learned. This repetition will help you to recall vital information for exams and assessments.

Make sure that you date each set of notes so that you can easily find them during your revision sessions. There is nothing more frustrating than spending a long time searching through disorganised notes for important information!

## Ask for help

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Sometimes we can spend so much time sifting through information on the internet and in the course guides that it eats into our precious study time. If you're struggling then reach out to your trainer, friends or classmates and see if they can help. Even discussing a topic with someone else could help you find that elusive answer!



## Reading and comprehension

How you read your course material is just as important as what you read. When you look through a piece of writing you want to make sure you gain as much from it as possible and there are some simple ways to do this:

### 1. Skim

Before you read something, take a quick look at the title, summary and main headings to clarify the purpose of the material. This will help guide your reading and comprehension. Skimming an article or chapter may also help you to realise that it's not relevant to you - and that is incredibly valuable. Don't spend your time reading something that won't help you!

### 2. Ask questions

Don't simply read a piece of writing, question yourself about it. Either quiz yourself on what you've just read or ask yourself further questions. For example, if you've read that customers are loyal to brands, ask yourself why that happens, or how a brand inspires loyalty. By asking these questions you're trying to explain the topic, and this deepens your understanding.

### 3. Don't re-read the text, re-read your notes

After you've read a piece of text, don't simply reread it to take in the information, keep notes as you go and revisit these to remember and understand the key points. This will prevent you from wasting time that could be better spent doing something else.





# Learning Hacks

Preparing a workspace and allowing adequate time are the first steps to take when getting ready to study, however, there are additional ways to make sure your study time is as productive as possible. Supercharge your study sessions and make sure that you work harder, not longer, with these top tips:

## Read aloud

Answering questions or reading your notes out loud may help you to retain information. Research conducted in 2010<sup>2</sup> revealed that by allowing your brain to hear as well as read information, you are giving it a better opportunity to learn and remember.

## Mnemonics

Mnemonics is essentially a way to organise information to make it more memorable. There are a few ways in which this works:

Chunking divides information into bitesize pieces that make it easier for your brain to absorb. You may already do this without realising - for instance when you break someone's phone number into chunks so that you can remember it. If you need to remember something but you keep forgetting parts of it then chunk it up and see if that helps.

Acronyms are abbreviations of longer phrases and are formed by the first letter of each word. They are spoken like words such as FBI or NASA. Acronyms can help us to recall names or phrases simply and effectively.

Acrostics are similar to acronyms except they place new, more memorable words against each first letter. For example, you may have used MVEMJSUNP (My Very Easy Method Just Speeds Up Naming Planets) to remember the order of the planets in our solar system.

Other mnemonic activities include memory palaces, rhyming and adding words and phrases to music. Everyone's brains work in different ways when it comes to remembering information and finding a technique that works for you could provide the key to unlocking your study potential!

## Explain it to an 8-year-old

If you can explain the key concepts of what you're studying clearly and concisely to someone that knows nothing about the topic then it proves that you know what you're talking about. Rather than focussing on your assessments, think about how you would teach the material instead.

When you think in this way, your brain will organise the information more logically and coherently. Of course, all learning techniques take practice and so this may not work for you straight away. Give it a go and see whether it improves your information retention and understanding.

## Infographics

Infographics are essentially a visual representation of information. They are a collection of images, graphs, diagrams or graphics that create an easy-to-understand overview of a topic. They usually contain minimal text and can be a valuable accompaniment to your learning materials. When writing your notes, you could draw images, divide the information into sections or add other visuals that help you retain facts.

## Drink water

Our brains are 75% water so it makes sense that they need plenty of water to function well. Studies have shown that dehydration can lead to dizziness, confusion, irritability and lack of concentration – none of which you need when you're studying. Keep a bottle or glass of water with you at all times to make sure you keep your brain in excellent condition!

## Hand write some of your notes

While you may be able to write faster when you type, the extra cognitive function required to hand write notes has been proven to help improve retention and recall of facts. Try taking hand-written notes during your lectures and see whether you remember more of the key points.



# Stay Motivated

Motivation is what drives us to keep working and feel energised about what we are doing. Unfortunately, many of us struggle to feel motivated; especially during slow periods or times of stress. Luckily there are a few ways to improve your motivation, reduce procrastination and get yourself back on track:

## Create a goal

Remember why you are doing what you're doing. Create a goal and focus on that, whether it be to gain a particular job, get good grades or simply to prove to yourself that you can do it. Write your goal on a piece of paper and keep it near you when you work to keep you motivated.

## Positive language

Use positive language when thinking about your work such as "learning this will help me in the future" rather than negative language such as "I will be a disappointment if I don't get this done". Simply changing your outlook can banish negative thoughts and boost your productivity.

## Break things down into manageable chunks

Tackling everything at once will be overwhelming to say the least. Breaking down your work into manageable pieces will help you to focus and make you feel like you are achieving your goals.



## Reward yourself

Celebrate your achievements (big or small) by rewarding yourself. Whether the reward is a coffee, snack or something bigger, it will support your work and keep you motivated. By creating a healthy work and reward cycle, you will set up a subconscious link between study and reward and may retain more important information!

## Just start!

This may seem like a difficult thing to do if you feel completely lacking in motivation, but it does work. Action leads to motivation, which in turn drives more action, which leads to more motivation...see where this is going? So sit at your desk, open a book or access your online learning material and trust that motivation will come. Getting started could be all the motivation you need!



# Assessments

When it comes to assessments, correct preparation and time allocation are key. It is also advisable to take a look at the assessments ahead of time to get an idea of what you will be doing and how long it will take you. These tips and tricks should help you:

## Plan it out

When writing a report or essay, make sure that you're covering all the main points by planning your structure. This may include:

- Title page
- Contents
- Introduction
- Main body of work
- Conclusion
- References

Not only does this work like a to-do list but it will also make sure that you include all the crucial information.

## Start early

Leaving things until the last minute creates unnecessary stress and may cause you to make mistakes. Whether you have a report due or exam to study for, starting early will give you enough time to get the work done and allow your brain to function without excessive pressure. By starting early, you can also bring up any questions you may have with your trainer.

## Flashcards

These can be a valuable tool when organising your revision notes. Rather than writing pages and pages of information, you can break down the topics into chunks and have them on easily accessible cards.

## Finish assignments on time

**(or earlier if you can)**

Even though you are given a deadline for your submissions, it is always advisable to finish early. This will allow you to revisit your assessment, ask questions to your trainer, make changes and feel confident that you have done your best work.

## Referencing

This is an important part of assignment submission. It gives credit to those who provided the research/content of your assignment in a standard and clear way.

The main functions of references are:

- To maintain intellectual honesty and avoid plagiarism.
- To acknowledge those who created the work and ideas you have reproduced.
- To allow the assessor to determine whether the referenced source is relevant to the point you are making in the assignment.

References normally consist of two parts – the note within the assessment text where you mention the source and the full reference which is provided in a list normally at the end of the body of work.

A reference could look like this...

Note within assessment text: "In Management For Beginners (Smith, 2012) the author states that..."

Full reference:

Smith, A (2012) Management For Beginners. Jones Publishers: London, pgs 10-12

Your assessor/trainer will advise you how they would like you to format your references.

Cheating is classed as the process of circumventing the assessment practices in an unethical manner. Plagiarism is classed as cheating. Plagiarism is the practice of claiming original ownership over an idea and incorporating it into one's work without consent and knowledge of the original author.

Plagiarism can include:

- Unintentionally presenting work from another individual as one's own.
- Handing in an assessment copied from (or very similar to) the work of another student.
- Submitting work without adequately referencing the sources used.
- Handing in the work of another person and claiming it as your own.

Cheating and plagiarism could result in a student being excluded from the unit or the entire course. If you have concerns about cheating or plagiarism in your work then please speak to your trainer.





# Taking Care of Yourself

## Take the pressure off

Even though gaining your qualification is important to you, it is also important that you do not stress yourself out to a point where you can't work to the best of your ability. Research has shown that stress affects the brain's cognition, attention and memory<sup>3</sup> – all of which you need to study. Take time to relax and do the things you enjoy to create a perfect study/life balance.

## No more all-nighters!

While it might seem like a great idea to cram as much information as possible the night before an exam or stay up for hours completing an assignment, it has a detrimental effect on your brain. Lack of sleep can create feelings of stress and make your brain perform poorly. It is also likely that you won't retain as much information from an all-nighter as you would have through structured, planned study time.

## Exercise

A healthy brain and body go hand in hand. It has been proven that regular aerobic exercise boosts the size of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that assists with learning<sup>4</sup>. Exercise also indirectly improves our mood and our ability to sleep which helps our memory – what's not to love?

## Eat well and stay hydrated

You are what you eat and so make sure you're taking in what will help your body the most. Try to get a balanced diet and make sure that you're including 'brain foods' such as fish, nuts, fruit and vegetables.





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