

PLAN THE PATH'S MUSIC TO STUDY BY

For those of us who need a little background music to study by, the right soundtrack can make all the difference between flow-state focus and downright distraction. When music pairs well with the task-at-hand—whether cramming, reading assigned literature, or writing a paper—it serves to not only make the studying experience more enjoyable, but research shows that it can increase concentration and productivity.

Let's run through five of the most common types of study sessions, from science-exam cramming to creative writing, and discuss some albums that serve as ideal soundtracks. The albums referenced span genres and continents and were released between 1976 and 2025. We can't promise these album recommendations will make you ace your exam, but they will make you the most popular DJ at the group project meet-up!

STEM-test cramming Think memorization— heavy science exams, computer and coding work. We recommend:

- **Biosphere** — *Cirque* (2000): Norwegian ambient musician Biosphere makes music that is equal parts atmospheric and alien. Cold, introspective electronic textures that are perfect for deep focus.
- **Lusine** — *Sensorimeter* (2017): Seattle's Lusine

music has been described as "bewitching." On *Sensorimeter*, his craft is honed further with the help of driving beats and playful vocal samples.

- **Boards of Canada** — *Music Has the Right to Children* (1998): This album, considered essential listening by fans of '90s trip-hop and electronic, sounds strangely timeless. Intricate, mathematical beats collide with faded nostalgia, and the result is as joyous as it is haunting.

Writing essays and papers Think long-form writing, response papers, and analytical writing assignments. We recommend:

- **Erik Hall** — *Canto Ostinato* (2017): American musician Erik Hall re-interprets a 20th-century classic by Dutch composer Simeon ten Holt. Hypnotic and delightful compositions play out across a piano, electric keyboard, and organ.
- **Tragic Magic** — *Julianna Barwick and Mary*

Lattimore (2025): A renowned harpist and acclaimed vocalist collaborate on this warm, soothing collection of songs. Recorded at the Paris Philharmonic, this album was co-produced by Fleet Foxes' Trevor Spencer.

- **Max Cooper** — *On Being* (2025): Electronic music has never felt so lush and evocative. A blend of epic melodies and glitchy textures, *On Being* is an awe-inspiring accomplishment.

Reading literature Think assigned reading, books for English class, and "just one more chapter before I go to bed." We recommend:

- **Pat Metheny** — *One Quiet Night* (2023): Musical legend Pat Metheny proves that jazz and guitar do belong together. For best effects, read alongside this album late on a stormy night.
- **Glenn Jones** — *Fleeting* (2016): A virtuoso of American Primitive Guitar, Glenn Jones recorded this album in a friend's New Jersey house,

without soundproofing. His songs pay homage to nature, the seasons, and his home of the Pacific Northwest.

- **Cocteau Twins** — *Blue Bell Knoll* (1988): A wonderfully macabre album for the spookier side of reading, this dreamy, ethereal recording has a dark, edgy underbelly. Music publication Pitchfork has called it one of the best albums of the 1980s, and British magazine *Drowned in Sound* gave it a perfect 10/10 score. (cont'd)

PLAN THE PATH'S MUSIC TO STUDY BY (cont'd)

Creative inspiration Think studio art classes, creative writing projects, and creative brainstorming. We recommend:

- **Fela Kuti**—*Zombie* (1976): Politically charged and musically explosive, few albums have had the lasting impact on music of Kuti's *Zombie*. Mixing jazz and funk with traditional Yoruba and highlife music, this album is singular, exciting, and very, very funky.
- **STS9**—*Artifact* (2005): Before they headlined festivals and sold out stadiums, jam-band

Deep Research Think library late nights, taking notes, and scanning through sources. We recommend:

- **NTO**—*Apnea* (2021): With *Apnea*, Hungarian techno producer NTO has created the all-nighter's ideal album. Minimal, bouncy, and fresh, *Apnea* is a tribute to the chiller, more somber side of techno.
- **Blood Orange**—*Essex Honey* (2025): Each of Blood Orange's acclaimed albums center around a specific concept or theme; for 2025's *Essex Honey*, the inspiration was the musician's

STS9 made more understated music, blending electronic, acoustic, and nature sounds. On *Artifact*, the band presents a dazzling and soulful set of songs.

- **The Last Dinner Party**—*From the Pyre* (2025): The last dinner party is a contemporary band with a very vintage inspiration. Taking cues from the 1970's extravagant prog-rock projects like Yes and Jethro Tull, this all-female British rock band is at their most epic on this 2025 album.

own childhood in working-class, Black neighborhoods in East London. Hopeful and nostalgic without ever veering into cheesiness, Blood Orange's most recent full-length album has already cemented its legendary status.

- **SpectraSoul**—*How We Live* (2017): While few genres are as polarizing as Drum 'n' Bass, *How We Live* by UK DnB giants SpectraSoul is hard not to love. Smooth, liquid vocals and gritty beats combine on this album that's perfect for both the classroom, and the dance floor.

We hope you've enjoyed these recommendations, and that you may have discovered a new album or two along the way. Does the right music unlock your study flow? Put on an instrumental album you love, crack open that notebook or laptop, and start finding out!