

PLAN THE PATH'S GUIDE TO STUDYING

The inconvenient truth about studying is that it's as individual as a fingerprint. While study tips and lists of study skills abound, no one can tell you the best way to study, except...you. Some of us thrive in a study environment filled with music and healthy distraction; others need complete, locked-in focus. Some people find that intense exercise results in hours of focus and productivity, whereas others find that any workout beyond a long walk leaves them depleted instead of ready to work. While no list of study tips can be a one-size-fits-all, there are some highly effective study hacks that are often overlooked. Experiment with the tips below to learn more about your own optimum study style:

- **Body double** Body-doubling is a productivity trick that ADHD brains have been singing the praises of for decades, and scientific research is finally beginning to back them up. It refers to working independently, but alongside, others. The key to body doubling is that you're working in the company of others, but on independent tasks. Recent research studies published in the journal *ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing* found that body-doubling—either in-person or virtually—helped neurodivergent learners complete tasks more effectively and efficiently.
- **Implement visual schedules; use visual notes** In the era of all-things-aesthetic, planners finally have their moment to shine. A quick query on TikTok, Pinterest, and more of popular hashtags like #PlannerTok and #PlannerGirlie will yield seemingly infinite posts and pictures of well-organized and well-decorated stationery. For studying, the value of planners and visual schedules is more than surface-level. Ideal for visual and conceptual learners, visual planners allow students to map out their assignments, schedules, priorities, and obligations in a way that makes individual sense. A variety of planners, templates, prompts, and formats can be mixed and matched until you find a system that helps you stay on track.
- **Utilize digital flashcards** There are a variety of platforms for creating, using, and sharing virtual flashcards, and they each serve subtly different purposes. As a tried and true online tool, Quizlet is one of the original websites for creating decks of online flashcards; it is both extraordinarily user-friendly, and it includes fun features that allow you to turn your study sets into memory games. More ideal for language learning or studying complex terminology (looking at you, pre-med) is Anki, a downloadable software that allows users to create, customize, and organize sets of study terms. While it's not quite as intuitive for beginners as Quizlet, it has a superior algorithm based around spaced repetition.
- **Take it outside** We already mentioned that taking your work outside could be a refreshing change of pace, but did you know that getting outside before your homework also makes a tangible difference in how you study? The benefits of time outdoors on brain health and mood are well-documented, and it doesn't take much to reap the perks. Research from UC Davis Health backs up the positive impact that as little as 20 minutes of fresh air and movement each day can have on concentration and attention span.

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- **Schedule time for consuming leisure** In all seriousness, have some fun! Specifically, remember to continue consuming media (books, music, TV) that genuinely relaxes or inspires you. Especially during college, we can try to keep up with so many required readings, assigned films, lecture videos, and study playlists, that we forget how healthy it is for us to enjoy our favorite music, art, and film. Even if it means scheduling intentional blocks of time to read for pleasure or catch up on your favorite show, keeping up a practice of intentional media consumption can keep your mind fresh and free from mid-semester burnout. Proceed with caution though: don't let your "downtime" derail your studying.
- **Change up your scenery** Maybe you're not bad at studying, but you are working in a location that doesn't fit your learning style. Instead of trying to complete your assignment in your dorm room, how would it feel to study outside on the quad, or in town at your favorite cafe? Different subjects also suit different workspaces: finding a cozy reading spot in town can be great for plowing through an assigned novel, but for typing up a lab report, a well-lit campus nook with fast WiFi might be more ideal.
- **Schedule—and honor—rewards** In an ideal world, the sheer love and joy of learning would be enough to motivate us to complete all our tasks, but getting things done in the real world takes strategic planning. And don't underestimate the power of rewards. Figure out what (reasonable) treats motivate you the most: splurging on brunch one weekend with friends, ordering a new video game for your dorm, or buying that viral Korean skincare product ... These are just a few ideas to get you thinking creatively about which small rewards would make it worth your while to hit the books. Note: the key to this study method is honoring your word to yourself and holding yourself accountable.

As you can see from the wide range of approaches that exist, no singular approach to studying will work for everyone. Outside of a few ground rules—nutrition, hydration, and adequate sleep—we each need a routine uniquely our own. While none of these tips will make studying as fun as binging your favorite show or spending time with your friends, finding the right combination can help make your study sessions more efficient and effective, hopefully resulting in grades that are worth celebrating however you like!
