Effective Study Skills:
Your Keys to Success
Key # 1: Thorough Note-Taking Skills
The Purpose of Note-Taking

- It helps you to pay attention to what is being taught
- It helps you retain knowledge
- It helps you record important points that you may be tested on, but that may not appear in your book
- Good notes highlight what your instructor believes is important for you to learn (and what you will likely be tested on.)
Note-Taking Tips

- **Date** your notes at the top of the page
- Put the instructor’s ideas into your **own words**
- **Highlight** or **underline** unclear ideas and/or unfamiliar words
- If you miss an entire idea, leave a **blank space** to fill in later. (You can ask a peer or your instructor to review this material with you after class.)
- Ask your instructor if you are allowed to **tape record** the lecture. If so, you can review the material later by listening to the tape(s) in the car, on the bus or train, at the Laundromat, etc.
The Five R’s of Note-Taking

- **Record** – During class, write the main facts and ideas.
- **Reduce** – After class, pick out the most important ideas and summarize them.
- **Recite** – Put the main ideas into your own words. You can do this out loud or silently to yourself.
- **Reflect** – After reducing and reciting, think about what you have learned – what makes sense? What are you still unclear about?
- **Review** – Even if you do not have time to reduce and recite, at least review your notes. Research shows that a brief review of your notes after class increases your retention of the material by 50%.
Three Note-Taking Methods

- **Outline** – An outline is good to use when your instructor presents the information in an organized or step-by-step manner.

- **Cornell Note-taking System** – This system is divided into three sections, helping you to effectively use the “5 R’s of note-taking”.

- **Mind-Mapping** – This form of note-taking consists of making a diagram (or map) of a concept or main idea. It is a note-taking system that is helpful to visual learners.

(The following slides show examples of each system.)
Outline - Formal

I. MAIN IDEA #1
   A. Supporting idea/information to I
   B. Supporting idea/information to I
      1. Supporting idea/information to B
      2. Supporting idea/information to B
         a) Supporting idea/information to 2
         b) Supporting idea/information to 2

II. MAIN IDEA #2
   A. Supporting idea/information to II
   B. Supporting idea/information to II
   C. Supporting idea/information to II
      1. Supporting idea/information to C
      2. Supporting idea/information to C

III. MAIN IDEA #3
Outline - Informal

- Main idea #1
  - Supporting information
    - Supporting information
    - Supporting information
  - Supporting information

- Main idea #2
  - Supporting information
    - Supporting information
    - Supporting information
Cornell Note-Taking System

**Note-taking area:** In this area, write your class notes. Make them as clear as possible.

**Cue-column:** During class, do not write anything in this area. After class, utilize the “5 R” system to reduce your notes to main ideas and important concepts. This column can later help you to recite, review and reflect on what you have learned.

**Summaries area:** In this section, summarize the main ideas on that page of notes into a sentence or two. This can help you to locate specific information quickly when needed.
Key # 2: Good Study Skills
Study Tips

- Schedule time to study.
- Be realistic about the amount of time you need to study.
- Study in a comfortable, non-distracting environment.
- Take a five-minute break each hour. Studies show that this makes studying more effective.
- Form a study group.
- Get tutoring / attend Supplemental Instruction sessions.
Reading your Textbook Effectively

- **Preview the chapter(s) – Read the introduction, subtitles, summary/conclusion**
- Ask yourself what the main ideas are, and what you need to learn from the reading.
- **Highlight or underline** main ideas and important information.
- Make an attempt to **read** (or at least **skim**) the pertinent chapter(s) **before attending class**. This way, the lecture material will already be familiar, and you will understand it more.
Studying for a Test

Studying for a test does not begin the night before the test, it begins the first night of class. By reading and studying every week for a test that may not come until the end of the session, you won’t need to do last-minute “cramming”. Here are some ways to study and prepare throughout the session...

- **Utilize the “5 R’s” of note-taking.** (Review this information in the previous section of this presentation if necessary)
- **Meet with your instructor or a tutor** to help you clarify any material you do not understand. Even if you think you understand, asking questions can only help!
- **Organize a study group** with other students in your class. Meet once a week – even for just an hour – to discuss/review material
- **Schedule** time in your calendar to study and read for each of your classes
Key # 3: Effective Test-Taking Skills
Preparing for a Test

- Identify the test type. (i.e.; essay, multiple choice, true/false, equations where you will have to show your work, etc.)
- Identify the information on which you will be tested. (what chapters, readings, class dates, etc.)
- Identify how much time you will have to complete the test.
- Choose your study materials (i.e.; notes, text, handouts, etc.)
- Schedule time to study.
- Get help from a peer, a tutor, or the instructor.
- Take a pretest if possible.
- Prepare physically by getting enough sleep, making sure you are not hungry, etc.
Ground Rules for a Test

- READ THE DIRECTIONS!!!
- Begin with parts that seem easier
- Watch the clock and budget your time
- If you don’t know an answer, make an intelligent guess
Mastering Different Types of Test Questions

- Multiple Choice
- True/False
- Essay
Multiple Choice

- Read the directions carefully! (Are you supposed to mark off one or more than one choice?)
- Read each question thoroughly
- Look for qualifiers such as “never” or “always”
- Eliminate incorrect answers first
- Skip questions you don’t know, and come back
True/False

- Read each question carefully
- Look for qualifiers ("never", "always", "in general", etc.)
- Skip questions you don’t know, and come back
- Remember, you have a 50-50 chance of guessing correctly!
Essay

- Read the question thoroughly
  - Read it more than once
  - Underline key points and main ideas
- Budget your time between thinking, outlining, writing and reviewing
- Write legibly! If the instructor can’t read your writing, you may lose points even though your ideas are correct!
Practice Tests

- Review old exams if the instructor makes them available
- Get together with peers or a tutor to make up practice test questions. Thinking about the important ideas that you may be tested on can help you to reinforce material.
- Don’t wait until the night before to take a practice test! If you do poorly with such little time left, it will only make you panic.
Conquering Test Anxiety

♦ Prepare.
  – The more you know about the material and what to expect the less anxious you will feel

♦ Put the test into perspective.
  – Find out how much the test is worth in your final grade.

♦ Make a study plan.
  – Studying the material ahead of time – rather than the day before – will make you feel calmer.

♦ Do the best that you can.

♦ Relax!
  – If you feel panicked, close your eyes, take some deep breaths, and remind yourself that you are well-prepared.
The Keys to Your Success – A Review

- **Key # 1**: Thorough Note-Taking Skills
- **Key # 2**: Good Study Skills
- **Key # 3**: Effective Test-Taking Skills
Questions to consider…

♦ Do you study throughout the semester, or do you wait until you have a test coming up to begin?

♦ Do you ask for help and/or make attendance tutoring appointments when you don’t understand something?

♦ Do you meet with classmates (even for 30 minutes before or after class) to review material?
Some Tips

♦ Buy a calendar or a planner, and use it! Fill in your class schedule, test dates, times you plan to study, and all of your extracurricular activities and work schedule. This will help you with your time-management skills!

♦ If you need help, seek it! If you are thinking about changing your major, having trouble in a particular class, or just need someone to talk to, we have the resources to help you!
Pitt-Greensburg Programs and Services

- Advising - 110 Millstein Library
- Learning Resources Center 104-105 FOB
- Tutoring 104-105 FOB
- Career Counseling – 217 CH
- Disability Services – 104-105 FOB

Do you know where these resources are located? Who to contact?
Goal-Setting

- Did you know that when you set goals for yourself, write them down, and revisit them throughout the semester, you are more likely to achieve those goals?

- Why might this be?
Goal-Setting

- Writing your goals down is like making a contract with yourself.
- Revisiting your goals every week or every day is a constant reminder of those goals.
- Being reminded of these goals can serve as the extra motivation you need to make good decisions, i.e. keeping to your study schedule and attending every class.
Goal-Setting

- Reward yourself! If the satisfaction of achieving your goal isn’t quite enough motivation for you, think of something you can do to reward yourself after you have reached your goal.

- “If I get all B’s or higher this semester, I will buy those shoes I want at Macy’s.”

- “If I don’t pull a single all-nighter for the entire semester, I will have a video game tournament in my room after finals.”
Goal-Setting

- Make your goals realistic for you. If you struggle with languages and you are taking Spanish this semester, it may not be realistic to have a goal of “all A’s this semester”.
- Take a few minutes right now to think about what you want to achieve this semester, and throughout your college career.
- Write down these goals and a plan for how you will achieve them. Don’t forget about your rewards!
Good luck in your continued endeavors here at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg!

Feel free to contact us:

Academic Advising
110 Millstein Library
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