A Treasury of Study Skills Strategies

Abstract: Thirty years of developing, refining, and teaching courses in study skills have led the presenter to a multitude of useful sources of strategies for both secondary and postsecondary students. A compilation of 180 practical ways to help students improve their skills in time management, organization, motivation, concentration, memory, reading, listening, note taking, test preparation, test taking, and report writing will be provided. These strategies have been gleaned from dozens of books and websites over the course of three decades. Each of the strategies listed may be found in several sources, but no single source contains all of them. Thus, access to this collection of ideas should save considerable time and expense for educators, parents, and students interested in the area of study skills. Instructional activities for utilizing this inventory are described. Lists and descriptions of numerous resources are also included.

Class Activity: Discuss the value of inventories taken by retail businesses. Tell the students that they will conduct an inventory of their study habits and study skills by placing a check beside the strategies that they regularly use. They should know that they will not be judged or evaluated on what they check or don’t check. In order for the exercise to be of any value they must be brutally honest with themselves.

Possible uses for the checklists:

1. As a lesson planning guideline for the instructor in planning for groups or individuals.
2. As a supplementary resource for students independently addressing their own unique set of study strengths and weaknesses.
3. As a study guide for review of completed class units or an entire course.
4. As a pre- and post-inventory activity used by students. Ideally, the post-inventory at the end of the course indicates growth.
5. As a tool for journaling. Students could do weekly journal activities indicating which strategy they plan to try out for a given week and the rationale for making the selection. In each successive week, students can reflect on the effectiveness of the strategy from the previous week and then choose another one for the current week. See attached sample.

Recommended Resources: Also attached is an annotated list of books and websites used over the years in developing the study skills strategies checklists. They have been helpful to the presenter as either as course texts or as supplementary materials.

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Study Skills: Journal Entry Directions

Your journal grade for the marking period will count toward your overall grade. You will be assigned two (2) entries per week. Each week you will have the opportunity to set goals and to reflect on your progress. Please put the date on each entry.

Beginning of the Week: Goal Setting

Which new study strategy do you plan to practice this week? Why did you choose this particular strategy? How do you plan to make it work? What results do you expect? What else do you hope to accomplish in school this week? Write at least four (4) sentences.

End of the Week: Reflection

How did things go for you in school this week? What kind of progress did you make with your chosen study strategy? Explain. What was the most interesting thing you learned? What was the highlight of your week in school? What would you do differently? Write at least four (4) sentences.

Sample Entry

“My new study strategy will be to use a monthly calendar. The reason I chose this strategy is that I often forget about tests and assignments and I sometimes miss appointments and meetings. I plan to make this work by bringing my student planner to each class and by marking down information about tests, quizzes, due dates, events, etc. I will then check my student planner every night at the start of my homework session. As a result, I expect to be better prepared for tests and feel like I am more on top of things in my life in general. I also hope to be able to hand in all homework assignments on time this week”
Books

Authors teach at Golden West College (CA) and the Community College of Denver. Features a learn-by-doing emphasis, and encourages readers to think critically about their choices and goals.

Author is a professor of English at University of Montana, Missoula. Contains several hands-on ideas for building study habits and mastering essential skills.

Provides 12 units of practical, hands-on activities for building basic study skills.

Includes helpful strategies for both academic achievement and career preparation.

Contains a variety of useful tips and practice activities for improving performance in school.

Includes ways to create an effective work environment, excel in class, use the library, do online research.

Greene, Lawrence J. *Winning the Study Game.* Minnetonka, MN: Peytral Publications, 2002
Many practical activities for building good study habits and skills are provided.

Green, Gordon W. *How to Get Straight A’s in School and Have Fun at the Same Time.* New York: Forge, 1999
Suggests several ways to improve test taking, report writing, and note taking.

Authors have taught at the University of Arkansas, UCLA, MIT, and Princeton. Contains over 600 tips for developing critical “college level” skills and habits.
Shares various learning strategies that can be applied for school success.

College text with numerous practical activities. Draws frequently on personal experiences of actual college students. Author taught reading and writing at Atlantic Cape Community College.

Contains 200 specific strategies for developing skills and attitudes for achieving academic success with a minimum of stress. Includes websites and other resources for parents and students.

Presents a system for applying what psychologists and educators know about how people think and learn.

Marrs, Barbara L. Learning and Using Study Skills, 2nd ed. New York: Phoenix Learning Resources, 1999
Includes activities designed to help students improve their study skills and habits in 16 critical areas.

College text with many practical applications and supplemental materials. Author teaches at Niagara County Community College.

Author was an assistant director of college admission. Contains a wide range of strategies, tips, and tools needed for success in school.

Newport, Cal. How to Win at College. New York: Broadway books, 2005
Author is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Dartmouth College who presents a guide for getting the most out of the college experience based on interviews with hundreds of college grads from across the nation.

Authors teach at University of Georgia and Texas State University. Emphasizes decision-making processes, methods of learning actively, and individual learning styles. Many examples of the experiences of actual college students are included.
_Hundreds of students from across the U.S. share their techniques for succeeding in college. Includes a wealth of practical ideas._

_Begins with an inventory for evaluating strengths and weaknesses. Chapters correspond to 11 skills covered by the inventory._

_Author is a director of Admissions at the University of Victoria (Canada) and worked for several years as a study skills instructor. Covers seven basic elements of complete study skills._

_A pioneering work in the field by two professors from the University of Pennsylvania. Sections are still referenced today at postsecondary institutions including the University of Hawaii and the Milwaukee Institute of Technology._

_Author is a cofounder of the Princeton Review. Includes a step-by-step method that guides students through the learning process and hundreds of practical tips for high school and college students._

_College text emphasizes 10 basic reading skills and includes a specific study skills tip with each chapter. Authors teach at Queensborough Community College._

**Internet Resources**
Numerous colleges and universities now have links designed to inform students about effective study strategies. The presenter has found the following resources to be particularly helpful in this regard:

Bucks County Community College (PA):
[http://www.bucks.edu/student/perkins/study/](http://www.bucks.edu/student/perkins/study/)
The information found on the Tutoring Center’s **Basics of Effective Learning** link was field-tested at the school’s Study Skills Seminar and was developed to provide the basic information students need to be successful at the college level.
Columbus State Community College (OH):
http://www.cscc.edu/service/s/peertutoring/resources/
The Peer Tutoring Center’s Resources link offers study resources on 8 topics including math test taking, memory tips, notebook organization, problem solving, listening, test anxiety, and test taking.

Dartmouth College:
http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/index.htm
The Academic Skills Center link provides a variety of resources - including videos, handouts, and tutorials - for maximizing academic success

Purdue University:
http://www.purdue.edu/sats/asc/studentsupport/index.html
The Academic Success Center link offers several handouts on time management, staying focused, lecture note taking, problem solving, reading speed, textbook usage, and test taking.

North Carolina State University:
http://www.ncsu.edu/tutorial_center/studyskills.htm
This NC State Undergraduate Tutorial Center link includes the following downloadable handouts: Tips for Math and Physics, Notetaking, Textbook Attack, Tips for Specific Types of Tests, Stress Management, Study Skills, Ten Traps to Studying, Test Taking, Test Review, Time Management, and Writing Reports

University of Texas at Austin:
http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/slc/study
The Sanger Learning Center’s Study Skills link shares specific strategies for Time Management, Goal Setting, Critical Reading, Studying Texts, Writing, and Taking Tests.
Study Skills Strategies

TIME MANAGEMENT and ORGANIZATION

☐ Use a monthly calendar
☐ Use a weekly schedule
☐ Use a daily “to do” list
☐ Keep regular study hours
☐ Prioritize your tasks to be done
☐ Set goals before starting homework
☐ Bring all supplies needed for school each day
☐ Assemble all supplies needed at study location
☐ Write down all assignments
☐ Review your weekly schedule often and revise as needed
☐ Maintain a well organized notebook
☐ Work on difficult subjects first during study sessions
☐ Plan study sessions for the time of day when you are most alert
☐ Divide study time among the various subjects on your schedule
☐ Break up large assignments into a series of small steps
☐ Make good use of time between classes
☐ Put handouts and loose papers into notebooks or folders by date
☐ Plan at least one hour of study time for each hour of class time
☐ Plan blocks of study time at least one hour long
☐ Try to schedule study periods before and after class
☐ Attend ALL classes

MOTIVATION

☐ Set long-term goals (3-10 years) and work to achieve them
☐ Set short-term goals (1-2 years) and work to achieve them
☐ Set monthly goals and work to achieve them
☐ Set weekly goals and work to achieve them
☐ Set new daily goals each day and work to achieve them
☐ Try to have a positive attitude about all of your classes
☐ Try to find a genuine interest in the subjects you are studying
☐ Make a chart linking long and short range goals
☐ Complete a career interest inventory
☐ Identify career clusters that match your values, interests, and talents
☐ Research potential careers
☐ Link your academic challenges with short-term and long-term goals
Identify a specific role model
Visualize yourself being successful in school
Reward yourself for using study time effectively and for meeting your goals
If you are having trouble, ask for help

CONCENTRATION
- Create a study space where you can focus
- Vary your study activities
- Practice relaxation techniques
- Take short breaks during study sessions
- Tell friends not to call during study hours
- Use outside help for tutorial support when needed
- Study during the time of day when you are most alert
- Set a specific goal or purpose for each study session
- Avoid daydreaming by setting a finishing time for an assignment
- Jot down thoughts that distract you while studying and address them later
- Take care of yourself by eating right, exercising, and getting enough sleep

MEMORY
- Write down information you need to remember
- Repeat aloud at least 5 times information to be remembered
- Visualize what you need to remember by creating mental pictures
- Use catch words (acronyms) and catch phrases
- Review notes before beginning each assignment
- Pay attention to charts and diagrams
- Consciously intend to remember what you are studying
- Use index cards for memory work
- Use the “divided page” method for memory work
- Use a “cover card” for memory work
- Conduct weekend reviews of all notes since the last test
- Test yourself repeatedly on the material to be learned
- Distribute your memory work over several sessions
- Engage several senses in your memory work
- Study right before going to bed
- Create your own graphic organizers
- Put notes into your own words
- Apply the Memory Peg System
- Overlearn the material by studying beyond the time needed for mastery
READING
☐ Survey (or preview) assignments before beginning to read
☐ Turn chapter headings into questions and look for answers as you read
☐ Stop at the end of each section and recite aloud – or write – the answers
☐ Review all of your questions and answers when finished reading
☐ Look for main ideas as you read
☐ Read difficult material aloud
☐ Highlight, diagram, underline, or make notes of key information as you read
☐ Try to get the meaning of unfamiliar words from context clues
☐ Look up the words you don’t know from the glossary or dictionary
☐ Move a 5x7 card down the lines of the page as you read

LISTENING
☐ Do some advance reading
☐ Sit where you can hear well and avoid distractions
☐ Take notes while listening
☐ Focus on hints of importance: repeated items, gestures, voice changes

NOTETAKING
☐ Do some advance reading
☐ Take notes in every class
☐ Date and label all notes
☐ Write on only one side of a page
☐ Write down what the teacher puts on the board
☐ Write down definitions and examples
☐ Write down enumerations (lists of items)
☐ Write down statements repeated by the speaker
☐ Compare notes with a classmate
☐ Sit where the teacher will see you
☐ Leave spaces between the main points
☐ Continue to take notes during discussions
☐ Take notes right up to the end of class
☐ Write down key words and phrases, not sentences
☐ Use a shorthand system of abbreviations and symbols
☐ Listen for cue words (a critical point, the chief causes, don’t forget …)
☐ Revise and recopy (or word process) notes after class
☐ Highlight or underline key points in your notes as you review them
TEST PREPARATION

- Go to every class
- Ask the teacher about the test content and the types of questions
- Conduct 3-6 study sessions for each test
- Apply specific memory strategies
- Make up practice test items after each class
- Study with classmates that are interested in learning
- Put key terms and definitions on study cards
- Review all notes since the last test each day
- Make a brief outline of the test material
- Study previous quizzes and tests
- Don’t stay up too late the night before a test
- Eat a good breakfast on test day
- Keep a relaxed and positive mental attitude
- Use deep breathing exercises
- Study enumerations (lists of items)
- Prepare brief outlines of possible essay questions
- Attend review sessions and office hours
- Determine and take advantage of your learning style

TEST TAKING

General

- See tests as a chance to show what you know, not as a punishment
- Breathe deeply and feel confident that you have done your best to prepare
- Quickly scan tests before writing anything
- Budget your time
- Read all directions carefully
- Underline important words in the directions
- Underline important words on test items
- Answer the easy items first
- Use information found in other test items
- Write legibly and clearly
- Proofread all answers before handing in tests
- Watch the time and pace yourself
- Use all the time given
- Ask teacher to explain unclear items
- For difficult questions, consider the teacher’s point of view
- Change answers only if you are positive you have made a mistake and have confidence in the alternative
Objective Tests
- Anticipate multiple choice answers first, then look for them
- Read ALL choices before answering multiple choice items
- Eliminate incorrect choices
- Be aware of the number of items in both columns of matching test sections
- Cross off “used” matching items
- Watch out for qualifying words, such as some, often, may, can, and usually, which allow for exceptions
- Watch out for absolute words such as all, never, always, only, and must, which do not allow for exceptions
- Fill in blanks with intelligent guesses based on what you know

Essay Tests
- Read all the questions
- Brainstorm all facts, ideas, concepts, etc. in writing as they come to mind
- Organize thoughts in a brief outline before answering the question
- Use a 3 part structure: introduction, body, conclusion
- Write complete sentences
- Build each paragraph around one main idea
- Be specific. Support main ideas with reasons, examples, details
- Use transition words throughout the answer (first, second, finally, however, also, in addition, similarly, for example, therefore, in conclusion)
- Proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation errors or lack of clarity

WRITING REPORTS
- Start long term projects the day they are assigned
- Determine the purpose of the report: inform, explain, persuade
- Make note of the expectations in terms of format, length, sources, etc.
- Develop a limited topic
- Have a clearly stated thesis
- Prepare a scratch outline
- Use a 3 part structure: introduction, body, conclusion
- Check with your teacher before you start writing
- Use 3x5 cards for collecting your notes and works cited
- Select your key points and organize your support
- Group similar ideas and information under major headings
- Take care not to plagiarize
- Go to office hours with specific questions or problems
- Consult the school librarian for support with accessing information
- Assess the quality and reliability of Internet sources
- Document your sources; give credit where credit is due
- Allow time to revise your early drafts
- Acknowledge opposing opinions and counter those arguments
- Ask a friend or classmate to read your paper and give you feedback
- Go to the campus tutoring center for support and feedback
- Check for spelling, grammar, and word choice
- Proofread for accuracy and clarity; put yourself in the place of your instructor
- Include information and ideas from class discussions, readings, and notes
- Save your word-processed work frequently