

How to Take on College Studying Your Cramming Days Are Over

In college, you may be shocked by the workload you suddenly face. Read a whole book for the next class? A test on three chapters when the semester has hardly begun?

Think of college as a full-time job, in which you spend about forty hours a week on class, labs, section meetings, and study groups and doing homework. And you're largely responsible for deciding exactly how much time to allocate to each task. Getting organized and using your time well are key to succeeding academically.

Decide Where and When to Study

Come up with a specific plan for where and what you'll study during any gaps in your schedule. In addition to making use of transitional times during the day, it's generally a good idea to avoid studying too late at night, when you tend to be tired, work inefficiently, and forget much of the material you cover. The best places to study have the following qualities:

- good light
- comfortable temperature
- good desk space

Beyond that, different environments have their own pros and cons. Ultimately, the decision of where to study depends on two factors: the environment in which you are best able to concentrate and the type of work you are planning to do. For completing problem sets or brainstorming possible test questions, you may want to study with a group or at least in a setting where others in the class are available for discussion. When you are reading Friedrich Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* or working on a research paper, by contrast, you are probably better off in a less social environment.

Develop Good Study Habits Early On

Here are some simple tips to help you improve your study habits:

- Have a routine for where and when you study.
- Decide in advance what you'll study, choosing reasonable and specific goals that you can accomplish.
- Do things that are harder or require more intense thought earlier in the day.
- Take breaks so that you stay fresh and don't waste time looking at material but not absorbing it.
- Make use of "dead" time right before and after class and in breaks between other activities.
- Get to know students whom you respect and can study with or call and ask questions.
- Keep up with the workload and seek help at the time you need it. You don't want to become paralyzed by stress or get so far behind in the work that it is too late to begin studying the material you've skipped.

Do the Reading

There's a big difference between reading effectively and merely skimming the text without thinking about your relationship to the material. To read more effectively:

- Read assigned materials before class so that you'll be able to ask questions about the material and have a context for understanding the material.
- Take notes on the reading instead of highlighting the text. It's a more active form of learning, because it requires you to think through and rephrase the key points. Later, you can highlight the important ideas from your notes on the reading and your class notes. Having written notes apart from the text will also be a great help when it comes time to review the material for tests.