

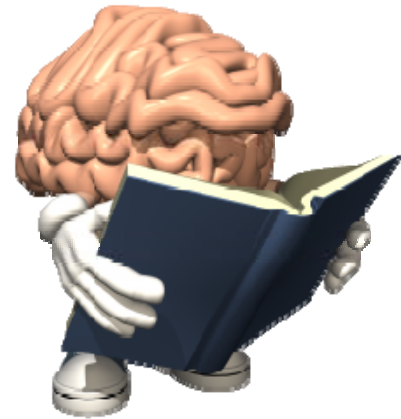
Strategies for Successful Students

STRATEGY 1: LET YOUR BRAIN DO THE WORK WHILE YOU SLEEP

Sleep is necessary for learning. Adult learners often have trouble remembering what they studied. One reason is that many adults do not get enough sleep necessary for the transfer of information from short-term to long-term memory. **Long-term memory is created while you are sleeping.** It generally takes 3-5 nights of sleep for long-term memories to fully form.

What we do right before we go to sleep can help us build long-term memory. This means that if you review what you were supposed to learn right before you go to sleep, you increase the chances that you will remember it.

Right before you go to sleep, look over the content you studied earlier in the day. It is not necessary to spend much time on it.



STRATEGY 2: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

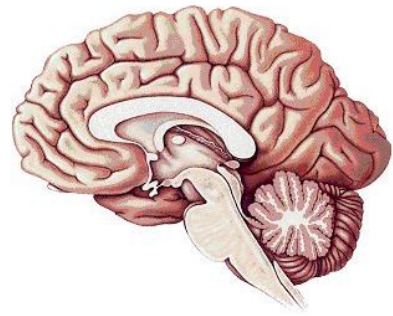
Unfortunately, a quick review before going to sleep is not enough. It is almost impossible to learn new material so you remember it without lots of practice and review. Here are effective ways to review material. Your chances of driving the information into long-term memory are better if you practice all of them.

1. **Spread your study sessions across several days.** When you learn something new you should review it within about 24 hours and again in 7 days. You have a window of about 7 days from the time you learned new content or skills to review it in order to create lasting long-term memory.
2. **Alternate different subjects or types of math problems.** You will remember more if you switch topics and types of exercises rather than study each type in one block at a time.
3. **Explain it to yourself in your own words.** Ask yourself “why does it make sense that. . .?”
4. **Quiz yourself.** A very effective way to review material after you have studied it is to quiz yourself. Make up questions about the material first, then review followed by a quiz.
5. **Make mind maps.** Make visual representations of what you’re learning.



STRATEGY 3: MAKE EVERY EFFORT COUNT

The brain is like a muscle: the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes. Did you know that learning new material literally changes our brains physically? Academic success is all about using that muscle and making an effort.



1. **Check your thinking about intelligence.** Do you think people either are smart or not? If so, that mindset is not helpful. Almost no one reaches their goals without a lot of effort. Adopt a “growth mindset.” If you are not getting the results you want, did you give it 100%? Do you need to change your study strategy?
2. **Ask questions.** Many people are afraid of asking questions or making mistakes for the fear of looking stupid. Actually, the reverse is true. Successful students are not afraid to ask questions when they don’t know something or want to know more.
3. **Learn to see mistakes as opportunities for learning.** Nobody likes making mistakes, but we all make them. The important thing is to learn from our mistakes. Mistakes can be our best teacher if we take the time to learn from them.

STRATEGY 4: MANAGE YOUR LEARNING PROCESS

Most adults lead very busy lives. It is hard to find time to attend classes and study. It can also be challenging to find a good place to study where there are no distractions. You will need discipline and support from your friends and family.

1. **Make a plan.** Set a goal for how much material you will review. Schedule a time. If you own a cell phone, you can use its built-in calendar and even set a reminder. Or use an appointment book.
2. **Set a regular time to study.** Analyze how you spend your time, and where you can save time in order to find time to study. Plan where you can study without too many distractions. If it’s possible, change the place where you study from time to time. You’ll remember more that way.
3. **Learn to set boundaries and say no to distractions.** Tell your friends and family that you need their active support. Don’t assume they know what you need. Setting time boundaries is a skill that will help you make time for the things that matter the most to you.
4. **Keep your papers and notes organized by date and topic.** Binders with tabs are a helpful way to organize papers.
5. **Reward yourself when you have met your study goals.** Watch your favorite TV show *after* you’ve studied. Or treat yourself in some other way that’s meaningful to you.

STRATEGY 5: PRACTICE POSITIVE SELF-COACHING

We all talk to ourselves. We can learn to guide this self-talk to be sure it is productive and moving us in the direction we want to go. Doing this can help us conquer our doubts and fears. We all have challenges trying to blow us off course.

Positive self-coaching is used extensively for improving performance in the training of Olympic athletes as well as by artists.

It usually doesn't work to just quit thinking negative thoughts. Many of us are not even aware of our negative self-talk. It's like a tape that plays in the back of our minds, and kicks in when we feel in doubt about our own abilities. It's more effective if we actively use positive self-talk.

First, you need to come up with a self-coaching script or affirmation that's meaningful to you. Here are some sample affirmations for an adult learner.

- ❖ I am persistent; I do not give up easily. I finish what I start.
- ❖ I am able to learn and accomplish my goals.
- ❖ I am an interested, positive, hard-working student.

Activity

Now is the best time to create your own affirmations. Be sure to write them as if they are already a fact. Finish each of the following sentences with two different affirmations for yourself here:

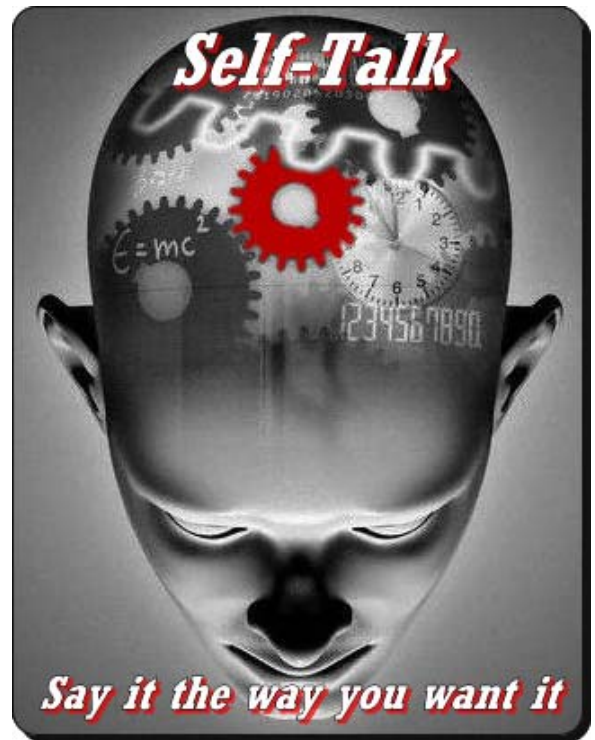
I am _____

I am _____

The next step is to use the script on a daily basis. A good plan is to read it first thing in the morning and at the end of the day. It is most effective to read it aloud. It is especially helpful when life gets challenging and you feel low on positive energy. **Replacing negative thoughts with positive ones will help you to stay focused on what's important.**

What do you need to help you remember to use this script on a daily basis? Think of ways that you can start right away (e.g. right after you brush your teeth or before going to sleep):

Here's the thing: **This strategy must be combined with practice and review in order for it be effective.** Just like athletes and musicians have to practice all the time, so do the rest of us.



BONUS STRATEGY: DRINK WATER

The brain is over 80% water. Our brains need water to work properly. (The neurons in our brains need water to make strong connections, which are electrical impulses. Water conducts electricity.) Brain cells need two times more energy than other cells in the body. Water provides this energy more effectively than any other substance.

The body does not process other liquids like soda and juice the same way. There is no substitute for water. Drink plenty of water.



YOUR NOTES: