

Hi guys. Patrick Sherratt here. In this topic, we are going to look at some different approaches to studying when you are not in the classroom. Ever since you started school, you have developed particular likes and dislikes towards both the content you learned and the way you learned it. These individual preferences have become study habits that lock you into the same approach. The problem is your approach may not be as effective as it could be. The research findings in this area can offer some interesting ideas to consider.

Where you study

There are a number of different factors that can influence the way you take information in. For instance, research shows that where you study can make a difference. Do you study best at home by yourself, in the library, at a friend's place or someplace outside? Everyone will have a different answer but research is now showing that using different places could help. If you study in a variety of different locations, your senses are linking different experiences to the information – different states of lighting, sound, temperature and so on, which are all firing different neural systems in your brain. Researchers suggest that this variety will help reduce neural system fatigue (NSF).

When to study

What you study and when, are also factors to consider. Again, the latest learning research suggests mixing things up. Studying the same information in lots of short bursts over a longer period of a week or two is better than studying in one long session. Also, try changing subjects often. Spend up to 50 minutes in a study session reviewing one subject, then after a 10 minute break, move on to another subject for 30 minutes. Different subjects often require different types of thinking so by mixing up the content, you are using different areas of your brain. Furthermore, if you can consider the content in a broader concept or in a wider context, this type of big-picture thinking also activates different areas of the brain.

Taking breaks

Researchers are now suggesting that the break times between study sessions actually helps you learn too. This may sound strange but allowing your brain some time for incubation - a period of development, after a study session helps it embed the information into the developing brain-cells. If you don't take time to rest, and continue bombarding your brain with information to learn, it can literally seize up in what is commonly known as brain-lock. So studying in lots of short bursts with plenty of breaks seems to be more effective than long periods of intense study with very few breaks. Having said that, if your study is so boring, some research suggests that a long study session that enables you to get through it quickly is better than a number of short ones that drag it on and on.

Relaxation

Relaxation is another tool researchers suggest could be helpful to improve learning. If you deliberately try to relax during your break sessions, it slows down the electrical process of your brain activity known as brain-waves. Slowing your brainwaves down to what is known as alpha state enables you to recover from neural system fatigue much more quickly.

A good way to relax is to close your eyes, and take a deep breath in. As you exhale, you say to yourself: 'relax, relax, relax.' Repeat this process until you feel yourself feeling totally at ease.

Another way you can cause your brain to relax is through music. Like a tuning fork that starts to vibrate when another one comes near it, your brain tends to synchronise with the sounds around it. If you play relaxing music, such as classical baroque music, the frequency of the sound causes your brainwaves to slow into alpha state. You can also find specifically designed alpha-inducing music for learning and memory retention on the internet. This music helps train your brain into accessing the slower brain-wave frequencies through a process called brain entrainment.

Positive Emotion

How you feel about the subject content makes a big difference. Your positive emotion plays a key role in how well your brain-cells communicate and connect because when you are curious, intrigued or enjoy the content being learned, your brain releases a variety of 'happy chemicals' that help strengthen the connections throughout your brain and enhances your memory retention.

Learning Styles

There is a lot of research – some of it contradictory, about the value of learning styles to develop students' whole-brain learning. Some researchers suggest that by doing a learning styles questionnaire you can find out how your brain is most dominantly wired to learn. They suggest that with this knowledge you can match the way your brain is strongly wired to the way you review and retain information. In-turn, this should improve your recall. For instance, you may be a visual learner, someone who learns best by seeing pictures, studying diagrams, or looking at charts. Putting your class notes into a visual format like a mind map would enable you to see the information and better recall it.

There are a whole host of other styles that illustrate your learning preferences. You can play with these learning style ideas by undertaking the questionnaire at the website: www.passingexams.co.nz You can then chart your results to see your learning style strengths and weaknesses.

My suggestion is to not take your questionnaire results too seriously. Like has been mentioned with the other study approaches, mix them up a bit. Study your information in lots of different ways. For instance, rewrite your class notes into visual formats, and record them onto audio devices and listen to them repeatedly. Make sense of them analytically, then bring feeling and emotion into the ideas by acting them out aloud as if you are on stage. Try studying independently and studying with others. Mix them up!

I will leave you with a short summary of the key points from this topic.

Overview

Study in a variety of different locations.

Use short study sessions, repeating the same material over a two-week period.

Switch subjects if you find yourself tiring of it. Your brain likes novelty.

10 minute breaks reduce neural system fatigue.

Deliberately relax to help your brain become more receptive.

Use relaxing music such as classical baroque music.

Create ways to feel more interested or excited about your topic. Positive emotion helps memory.

Do the learning styles questionnaire at www.passingexams.co.nz

Mix up your learning styles. Review your class notes and rehearse your recall in a variety of ways.

Module 1 Learning Matters: Topic 4. Approaches to Studying

Video Transcript