

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Describing studying
- » Looking at the reasoning behind studying
- » Identifying study strategies
- » Making yourself a well-rounded student

# Chapter **1**

# Developing Study Skills and Why Studying Is Essential

Studying vexes students year after year. They need to prepare for tests, quizzes, and exams, complete homework, or write papers. These aren't easy tasks, and study advice isn't always helpful. Advice can be overwhelming or just plain ineffective. Everyone has a strong opinion:

- » "Create flashcards."
- » "Go to a quiet library and study alone."
- » "Read each passage out loud until you've memorized it."
- » "Rewrite all your class notes three times."
- » "Write six drafts of your paper."
- » "Take your practice test in reverse order."

Despite the well-intentioned advice, the reality is that for many students studying is a frustrating experience. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can discover how to study and improve your study skills.

This chapter serves as a starting point to the world of studying. Here I present my definition of studying, lay out why it's necessary to build study skills, and present a wide array of study strategies that can help you be a better student.

## Defining Studying

*Studying* refers to anything that occurs outside of the classroom, including actions like completing homework, writing a paper, solving problems, or preparing for a test or quiz. Successful studying is influenced by a variety of factors, such as the following:

- » **Personal reflections:** Your personal strengths, weaknesses, and preferences influence how you study and learn. You need to know yourself in order to develop a personalized study approach. See Chapters 2 through 4 for guidance on this topic.
- » **Preparation:** With appropriate preparation, the actual act of studying can be a breeze. Preparation includes things like setting a study schedule, assignment planning, and managing your mental and physical health. I discuss these items and more in Chapters 6 through 8.
- » **Your physical environment:** As you study, the sights, sounds, and people around you will greatly impact your ability to complete work successfully. Imagine trying to read a tough research paper with a loud TV in the room. Sounds impossible right? Check out Chapter 5 for a discussion on the importance of your study environment.
- » **Skill building:** You're not born with study skills. They're something that you need to develop over time with practice and hard work. Discovering and mastering a few study skills and strategies will greatly improve your ability to study. Chapters 10 and 11 have lots of ideas for you to try out.  
  
Developing other skills that you can use in the classroom such as notetaking and test taking are also important to being a good student. Chapters 12 and 16 give plenty of advice you can use.
- » **Task management:** Certain tasks and assignments, like written papers or standardized tests, present some unique challenges. Chapters 15 and 16 discuss all the key elements

you need to understand to tackle these tasks with confidence.

» **Technology:** Technology is an integral part of academic life. You can use various tools to improve your studying, but tech can also distract and hurt your ability to study. Chapter 14 presents ideas on how to use technology effectively, while avoiding some of the downsides.

Studying is a largely self-directed task. You personally decide when, where, and how to study, and often these decisions are made without much outside guidance. Self-directed doesn't have to mean studying alone. Studying could be with a partner or with a group, as long as the study remains independent and isn't part of a group course or formal tutoring program.

## Understanding Why Study Skills Are Crucial

Classroom learning is an important part of your academic life, but it's only half of the equation. To succeed, you also need to master study skills and work effectively outside the classroom.

Some assignments can't be completed well without diligent studying. You can't write a paper in an hour or study for a test in a night. You'll make mistakes, forget material, and turn in below satisfactory work. Studying doesn't have any shortcuts.

Moreover, classroom instruction represents a small portion of the time it takes to understand and master difficult concepts. Typically, a class only meets for a few hours each week. Teachers provide an overview of materials, highlight key concepts, and show examples. There may be very little repetition, and some material might not be covered at all in-depth during class. There is hardly enough to build a deep and strong understanding of tough material during class time only. You must learn, review, practice, and memorize information outside of the classroom on your own.

Independent study is essential, and it is worthwhile to build study skills. Like any activity, the more effort you put into developing your skills the better you become. The good news is that I am here

to help, and this book will guide you through all the critical elements step by step.

## Recognizing Your Learning Preferences

*Learning preferences* represent your preferred methods to learn, remember, process, and retain material. You're a unique individual with a unique brain, so that means you'll likely have a personalized set of learning preferences. You need to know your own preferences and consider how those characteristics impact studying.

One tool to think about learning preferences is the VARK model that Neil Fleming developed in the 1980s. The VARK model outlines four major learning preferences: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic. Here is what each category means:

- » **Visual:** Individuals with this preference like when information is presented visually. They may have good spatial awareness and can easily remember details from drawings or images.
- » **Auditory:** These individuals prefer to utilize the sense of hearing, which could mean speaking or listening. They might enjoy music, discussions, and lectures, and might be able to recall conversations with ease.
- » **Read/write:** A person with this preference enjoys the act of reading and writing. They respond to information displayed as words and text, and they have strong reading comprehension skills.
- » **Kinesthetic:** Someone who identifies with this category may find success through doing, which can include hands-on activities, movement, or role-playing. Individuals may prefer activities with physical movement and will remember material when they can establish a physical connection.

There are lots of different learning style classifications, and you're welcome to use any of them in addition to the VARK learning categorization. The exact theory and categorization don't matter as long as you use the information to understand how you learn and then apply that information to improve your study habits.

If you're unsure how to determine your own learning preferences, I have a couple tips:

- » **Think about what classes and assignments you enjoy and then consider what those classes imply for your learning preferences.** For example, someone who prefers reading and writing may find English class easier, because the course and associated assignments involve frequent reading and writing.
- » **Look at your personal life for clues.** Do you like to draw, graphic design, or watch movies? These are tasks that visually inclined people may prefer.

See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on this topic.

## Approaching Studying Deliberately

Successful studying starts when the instructor hands out the assignment. You should take several actions right away that will make your study sessions faster, more efficient, and more successful. Here are three essential preparation tasks:

- » **Set a schedule.** Set specific dates and times when you'll study each day, week, and month. Track those times in a calendar. Chapter 6 explains how to complete this task.
- » **Break down assignments.** Divide large assignments into smaller chunks that you can tackle separately. Doing so helps to make assignments less intimidating and reduce the chances for procrastination. Chapter 7 guides you through that process.
- » **Prepare.** Conduct some basic preparation to ensure your study session goes smoothly. This includes things like planning where to study, bringing essential materials, and mentally preparing. Consult Chapter 8 for tons of preparation tips.

# Strategizing Your Studying

Studying shouldn't be a haphazard endeavor. Approach studying with a concrete plan that utilizes all the study skills in your toolbox. These sections outline some of the most important tools, strategies, and approaches to keep in your toolbox.

## Coming up with ideas — brainstorming

Brainstorming is a critical study skill. A well-executed brainstorm can help you come up with ideas for assignments like papers or research projects. By choosing a topic confidently with a brainstorm you can start the assignment promptly and avoid indecision and delays.

A basic brainstorm involves writing out all of your potential ideas without considering the merit. After the brainstorm is complete, you review all the options and choose the best one. Chapter 9 provides a step-by-step guide to the entire brainstorm process.

## Finding a study strategy for you

There are many ways to study, and what works for one person may not always work for someone else. You need to find your own unique approach through practice, experimentation, and trial and error. Here are some different options to consider as you build your approach:

- » **Dual coding:** This strategy recommends using visual and verbal elements as you study. For example, to memorize an important historical event, draw a comic strip of the event and write the important details in the speech bubbles.
- » **Leitner system:** This study strategy provides organization to flashcard memorization. When using this method, you review cards based on how well you remember the material.
- » **Mind map:** With this visual study tool you create charts, graphics, bubbles, and any other visuals to demonstrate and explain a topic.
- » **Pomodoro method:** This time management strategy recommends alternating between study sessions and breaks to make sure you're attentive and focused.

- » **Spaced repetition:** Involves spacing out your review of important materials over several study sessions to make sure that you can recall that information from memory and to give you lots of time to develop and deepen your understanding of material.
- » **Study cycle method:** This five-step study strategy also includes a classroom component. The steps are as follows:
  - Preview the material.
  - Attend class.
  - Review the material.
  - Study the material.
  - Check your understanding.

Chapters 10 and 11 provide a full list of study strategies and tools to apply on your next assignment.

## Touching on reading and notetaking

Reading and notetaking remain critical skills in all different types of academic settings. Any time you spend improving these two skills will help your academic performance:

- » **Reading:** The SQ4R method is a popular tool to use on your next reading assignment. To use this method, do the following:
  - Survey the reading.
  - Formulate questions.
  - Read the material.
  - Reflect on the material.
  - Record main points.
  - Review the material.
- » **Notetaking:** Try the outline method when you take notes by organizing the information with headings, subheadings, and bullets. This approach helps you organize notes and shows relationships between topics logically.

Read Chapter 12 for more reading and notetaking strategies.

## Considering study strategies for neurodivergent students

*Neurodivergent* refers to someone who has brain functions that are different from what's generally considered typical or normal. The term doesn't imply impairment but rather differing abilities. Neurodivergent individuals face a unique set of challenges, so I highlight several strategies and tips that are particularly relevant:

- » Ask for reasonable accommodation.
- » If you feel comfortable, initiate conversation with teachers and classmates about your strength and weakness.
- » Try strategies, like body doubling, to improve your study experience.
- » Create a physical study space that is comforting and soothing.

For more information, consult Chapter 13 which covers this topic in greater depth.

## Addressing Studying-Related Topics

Several types of academic assignments are particularly challenging for students and require a detailed examination. Here are some important ones I cover in this book:

- » **Technology:** Use technology as a tool to improve your studying and make sure it isn't a hindrance. In Chapter 14, I list ways to minimize distractions, offer apps that can assist in a variety of study-related tasks, and discuss how to effectively use artificial intelligence and avoid plagiarism.
- » **Writing papers:** Papers are probably students' least favorite assignment because they can be challenging. On your next paper, work through a five-step strategy:
  - Plan.
  - Brainstorm.
  - Outline.
  - Write.
  - Edit.

Check out Chapter 15 for additional writing tips.

- » **Standardized tests:** You'll take a standardized test at some time or other, and you have to do more than just read an exam prep book to ace the test. Success on test day starts with an effective study process and preparing appropriately. I discuss all these points in Chapter 16.
- » **Profession and vocational exams:** These exams are slightly different from an in-school test and require some tailored approaches. You need to manage your personal and professional commitments, make a strong study plan, and prepare for any practical testing components. Read Chapter 17 for advice on this topic.

