

Six Things You Can Do to Learn Better:

- Learning is making connections, so it only happens when your brain is active. This means that you only learn when you are *consciously engaged in your learning*—studying on autopilot is just a waste of time. Neurologically, learning has the structure of an analogy—that’s why analogies and mnemonic devices work so well as learning tools. The more of these you can create, the more and better you will learn—because the *process of creating* them helps you understand better and remember better.
- Never read any assigned reading unless you know your purpose for doing the reading. Stop when you’ve accomplished your purpose. (You’ll spend a lot less time reading and you’ll remember better because you’ll read actively. But remember, you need to be honest and thoughtful about your purposes.)
- When you read, stop after every chapter and write a 3-5 sentence summary. (Take no more than 5 minutes to write the summary.) Review your summary (and notes if you have time) within 24 hours. The review moves information from short-term to long-term memory, but it loses effectiveness rapidly, so it has to happen within 24 hours to work well.
- Your attention span naturally drops after 20-30 minutes, so set a timer to remind you to get up and stretch every 20 minutes. This will increase blood flow, keep you more active, and increase your comprehension. Use this short break (30 sec. to 2 min.) to think about what you’ve been doing.
- Your attention span drops significantly after 2 hours, so every two hours take a real break—10-15 minutes. Do something that involves different senses—listen to music, smell something strong, explore some new textures. (Engaging multiple senses opens more learning pathways and makes your experience richer and easier to recall.) When you return to studying, take five minutes (no more) to write a summary of what you have done so far.
- Make and keep a planner—most students radically underestimate how long it will take to do things. If you keep a record, you will learn how long it takes you to do certain tasks and you can set aside time for those tasks so that they don’t overwhelm you. (Being overwhelmed is stressful and bad for learning.)
- A bonus tip: Challenge yourself frequently with new and difficult material. The only way to grow (and keep) new brain cells and the only way to physically increase the size and capacity of your brain is to learn new and difficult material. It’s the fastest way to learn, and pushing your limits is the only way you’ll ever know how good you really are.