

Improving Your Study Skills

June 2002



Introduction

Welcome to Fort Sam Houston, home of the Army Medic. Congratulations on your assignment to attend training at the Academy of Health Sciences. You will find this training to be both challenging and rewarding

Read this material carefully and completely; then put the study skills to good use. The development of good study skills will help you complete the course in order to earn your Military Occupational Specialty and become a part of the U.S. Army Medical Department team.

Always focus on success. Your cadre and staff are committed to providing you with the quality leadership and training necessary for you to reach this objective. Use your chain of command and noncommissioned officer support chain.

Again, welcome to Fort Sam Houston

“Army Medicine Starts Here”

Learning to Learn

Your path for most effective learning is through knowing:

- Yourself
- Your capacity to learn
- The process you have successfully used

There are four steps to learning.

Begin by answering the following questions then plan your strategy with your answers and with other "study guides."

1. Begin with the past

What were your previous learning experiences?
Did you:

- Like to read? Solve problems? Memorize?
- Ask questions about what you studied?
- Review?
- Have access to information from different sources?
- Like to study alone or in groups?
- Need several brief study sessions or one longer one?

What are your study habits?
How did they evolve?
Which worked best?
Worst?

<p>3. Consider the process & the subject matter (cont'd.)</p>	<p>What kinds of resources and information will help me?</p> <p>Will I only rely on one source (for example, a textbook) for information?</p> <p>Will I need to look for additional sources?</p> <p>If I don't understand, do I ask why?</p> <p>Do I stop and evaluate (agree/disagree)?</p> <p>Do I just need time to think it over and return later?</p> <p>Do I need to find a mentor, like my instructor or my drill sergeant?</p>
<p>4. Review</p>	<p>What did I do right?</p> <p>What could I do better?</p> <p>Did I follow through?</p> <p>Was I disciplined?</p> <p>Did I succeed?</p> <p>Did I celebrate my success?</p>

Use Good Study Habits

Prepare yourself to succeed in your studies. Try to develop and use the following habits:

- **Take responsibility for your actions.**
Responsibility is recognition that to succeed you must prioritize your time and resources.
- **Stick to your values and principles.**
Don't let friends wrongfully influence what you consider important.
- **Put first things first.**
Follow up on the priorities and goals you have set for yourself and don't let others distract you.
- **Consider yourself in a win-win situation.**
You win by contributing your best to a class.
- **Try to understand others' viewpoints, and then attempt to be understood.**
When you have an issue with an instructor, put yourself in his/her place and ask yourself how you can best make your argument, given the situation.
- **Look for better solutions to problems.**
If you don't understand the material, do not just re-read the material. Try that first; if it does not work, try something else! Consult with the instructor, an academic advisor, or a classmate.
- **Continually challenge yourself.**

Manage Time Wisely

Guidelines:

- Monitor your time
- Reflect on how you spend your time
- Be aware of when you are wasting your time
- Know when you are productive

Planning and recording your time:

- Have a "To Do" list. Write down things you have to do, then decide what to do at the moment, what to schedule for later, what to get someone else to do and what to put off for later.
- Have a daily/weekly planner. Write down appointments, classes, and meetings in a logbook or chart. Always know what's ahead for the day. Always go to sleep knowing you're prepared for tomorrow.
- Have a long-term planner. Use a monthly chart so that you can always plan ahead. Long-term planners also serve to remind you to plan your free time constructively.

Planning for an effective study schedule:

- Allow sufficient time for sleep, maintain a well-balanced diet, and participate in leisure activities.
- Prioritize your assignments.
- Take time to prepare for discussion/classes before class.
- Schedule time to go over lecture material immediately after class. Remember, without a review, the chance of forgetting is greatest within 24 hours.
- Schedule 50-minute blocks of study.
- Locate a place free from distractions to focus on your studies.
- Schedule as much study time as possible during daylight hours.

Setting Goals and Making a Schedule

Determine your goals, list your activities, and calculate your current time available to determine how you are managing this time by using the chart below:

Set Your Goals:			
List your major goals:	More Important		Less Important
Long term			
Long/short term			
Short term			
Determine how you spend your time:			
<u>Column I:</u> List the amount of time you spend in weekly activities in hours.		<u>Column II:</u> Multiply your recurring daily activities by five (weekdays) or seven (weekly) to estimate the number of hours you engage in these recurring activities in a week.	
<u>Class time</u>	_____	<u>Commuting/Travel time (multiplied by 5=)</u>	_____
<u>Study Time</u>	_____	<u>Meal preparation/eating (multiplied by 7=)</u>	_____
<u>Employment/Internship</u>	_____	<u>Personal care (multiplied by 7=)</u>	_____
<u>Volunteer Activities</u>	_____	<u>Sleep (multiplied by 7=)</u>	_____
<u>Exercise</u>	_____		
<u>Regularly scheduled functions (Clubs, church, etc.)</u>	_____		
<u>Socializing with friends</u>	_____		
<u>Chores and Errands</u>	_____		
<u>Other</u>	_____		
<u>Total A:</u>	_____	<u>Total B:</u>	_____
Total A + B = Total C: _____ hours			
There are 168 hours in a week. Subtract Total C from 168 = _____ Uncommitted hours (168 - total C)			
Evaluate Your Time Management:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much time have you set aside to meet your goals (above)? • Does your time allocation reflect the priority of your goals? • Can your uncommitted hours be reallocated to meet your priorities? 			

Tips for Making a Schedule:

Training calendar:

- Pick up a copy of your training schedule.
- Enter important dates, such as tests, PT, projects, holidays, breaks, parades, etc.
- Post this schedule in your study area so you can see it, review it, and chart your progress.

**This is simply the “*big picture*” –
don’t include *too much detail***

Projected weekly schedule:

- List all ongoing daily activities such as daily training schedule, parades, PT, study time, and appointments.

**This is the more detailed view: plan
your activities in blocks of hours
throughout the week**

Actual weekly schedule:

- Modify and detail the Projected Weekly Schedule.
- Evaluate the time you use and change your schedule according to priorities.

- Ask yourself:
 - Are you using your time to best achieve your goals?
 - Are you studying when you said you would?
 - Can you identify areas where you can use your time more efficiently?

Daily schedule or "to do list"

- Complete the night before or the first thing each morning.
- Include things you intend to accomplish that day.
- Include assignments, appointments, and errands.

Check off items you have done to give yourself a sense of completion.

Benefits of following a schedule/written plan:

- Makes tasks seem more manageable and less overwhelming.
- Tasks are more likely to be completed.
- If followed, prevents last minute cramming for tests.

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Preparing to Learn	
Learning to Learn	2
Use Good Study Habits	5
Manage Time Wisely	6
Setting Goals and Making a Schedule	8
Tips for Making a Schedule	9
Managing Stress	11
Concentrate	14
Studying	
Memorizing	15
Organizing Projects	17
Avoid Delay	18
Reading Skills	
Easier Reading Comprehension - SQ3R Method	19
Reading Speed and Comprehension	22
Tips on Highlighting and Underlining Text	23
Taking Notes from a Textbook	23
Reading Difficult Material	24
Tests	
Preparing for Tests	25
Anticipating Test Content	26
Review Tools for Tests	27
Overcoming Test Anxiety	28
Organizing for Test Taking	30
Cramming	31
References	32

Resource Centers offer publications to include Soldier Training Publications (STPs) for U. S. Army Medical Department (AMEDD) military occupational specialties (MOSs), field manuals (FMs), trade periodicals and Internet access:

AMEDDC&S Learning Resource Center

Post Learning Resource Center

Post Education Center

Stimson Library, Aabel Hall, Bldg 2840, Stanley Road

Main Post Library

Managing Stress

First, you must learn to recognize stress:

Symptoms of stress include mental, social, and physical manifestations. These symptoms include exhaustion, loss of/increased appetite, headaches, crying, sleeplessness, and oversleeping. Escape through alcohol, drugs, or other compulsive behavior are often indications. Feelings of alarm, frustration, or apathy may accompany stress.

If you feel that stress is affecting your studies, the first option is to seek help through your instructor.

Stress management is the ability to maintain control when situations, people, and events make excessive demands.

Managing your stress:

- **Look around** and see if there really is anything you can change.
- **Try to be positive** by giving yourself messages about how well you can cope rather than how horrible everything is going. “Stress can actually help you memorize provided it is short-term and not too severe. Stress causes more glucose to be delivered to the brain which makes more energy available to neurons.”

- **Don't overwhelm yourself** by worrying about your entire workload. Handle each task as it comes; prioritize.
- **Try to "use" stress** by flowing with it and trying to use it in a productive way.
- **Selectively change the way you react**, but not too much at one time. Focus on one troublesome thing and manage your reactions to it/him/her.
- **Reduce** the number of events going on in your life and you may reduce stress.
- **Change the way you see things** and learn to recognize stress for what it is. Increase your body's feedback and make stress self-regulating.
- **The bottom line of stress management is** "Don't upset yourself - develop a *thick skin*."
- **Avoid extreme reactions**
 - Why hate when a little dislike will do?
 - Why create anxiety when you can just be nervous?
 - Why rage when anger will do the job?
 - Why be depressed when you can just be sad?
- **Set realistic goals for yourself** - by realizing your potential and capabilities.

- **“Don't sweat the small stuff”** – try to prioritize a few truly important things and let the rest slide.
- **Work off stress** - by participating in physical activity such as jogging or sports.
- **Get enough sleep** - lack of rest just aggravates stress.
- **Do something for others** - to help get your mind off yourself.
- **Remove yourself from the stressful situation** - if only for a few moments daily. Give yourself a break.
- **Avoid self-medication or escape** - alcohol and drugs can mask stress. They don't help deal with the problems.
- **Learn how to relax.**
- ***Most importantly***, if stress is putting you in an unmanageable state or interfering with your training, **seek professional help from your instructor, academic counselor or Drill Sergeant.**

Concentrate

- **Stick to a routine**, efficient study schedule.
- **Study in a quiet area.**
- **Take a study break every hour.** Walk around if you've been sitting in one place for a long time; move to a different area
- **Avoid daydreaming** by asking yourself questions about the material as you study it.
- **Before class, look over the notes** from the previous class and read the material pertaining to the class so you know the lesson the instructor will cover.
- **Pay attention.** Use attentive looks/expressions.
- **Resist distractions.** Sit in front of the room away from disruptive classmates; focus on the instructor, listen, and take notes.

Memorizing

- **Acronyms and Acrostics (for information involving key words):**

An acronym is an “invented” combination of letters. Each letter is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: BRASS is an acronym for how to shoot a rifle—Breath, Relax, Aim, Sight, and Squeeze.

An acrostic is an invented sentence where the first letter of each word is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: EVERY GOOD BOY DOES FINE is an acrostic to remember the order of G-clef notes on sheet music--E, G, B, D, F.

- **Rhyme-Keys: (for ordered or unordered lists):**
First, memorize key words that can be associated with numbers. For instance, bun with one, shoe with two, tree with three, door with four, hive with five, etc. Next, create an image of the items you need to remember with key words. For example, if you had to remember the four basic food groups - dairy products; meat, fish, and poultry; grains; and fruit and vegetables - imagine cheese on a bun, livestock with shoes on, a sack of grain suspended in a tree, and opening a door to a room stocked with fruits and vegetables.

- **The Method of Loci (for approximately twenty items):**

Select any location in which you have spent a lot of time and have easily memorized material in the past. Imagine yourself walking through the location; selecting clearly defined places--the door, sofa, refrigerator, shelf, etc. Imagine yourself putting objects that you need to remember into each of these places by walking through this location in a direct path. Again, you need a standard direct path and clearly defined locations for objects to facilitate the retrieval of these objects. For example, if you had to remember George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Nixon, you could imagine walking up to the door of your location and seeing a dollar bill stuck in the door; when you open the door Jefferson is reclining on the sofa and Nixon is eating out of the refrigerator.

- **The Image-Name Technique (for remembering names):**

Simply invent any relationship between the name and the physical characteristics of the person. For example, if you had to remember Shirley Temple's name, you might ingrain the name in memory by noticing that she has "curly" (rhymes with Shirley) hair around her temples.

- **Chaining (for ordered or unordered lists):**
Create a story where each word or idea you have to remember cues the next idea you need to recall. If you had to remember the words Napoleon, ear, door, and Germany, you could invent a story of Napoleon with his ear to a door listening to people speak in German.

Organizing Projects

- **Begin early**
Start early. You'll have more time to finish the project and you guarantee yourself adequate time to do a good job.
- **Determine how much time to use.**
How long the presentation or paper should be.
How hard the material is to research.
How much time you have to complete the project.
- **Break the project down into manageable sections.**

Avoid Delay

- **Avoid delay by doing the project at hand.
Become motivated.**

- **Ask yourself:**

Why am I doing this?

What if I don't do this?

What will happen if I do this later?

- **Reward or punish yourself**

At the completion of your task give yourself a reward. If you fail to complete the project, deny yourself that reward.

Remember, there is nobody here to hold your hand. If you fail to complete your tasks, you may fail.

The fault and consequences will be yours alone. It is much easier to have fun when there are no projects in the back of your mind.

Finish your projects so your fun time will be more enjoyable.

Easier Reading Comprehension

SQ3R Method

(Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review)

Before you read, *survey* the chapter:

- Title, headings, and subheadings
- Captions under pictures, charts, graphs or maps
- Review questions or teacher-made study guides
- Introductory and concluding paragraphs
- Summary

***Question* while you are surveying:**

- Turn the title, headings, and/or subheadings into questions.
- Read questions at the end of the chapters or after each subheading.
- Ask yourself, "What did my instructor say about this chapter or subject when it was assigned?"

Ask, "*What do I already know about this subject?*"

When you begin to *read*:

- Look for answers to the questions you first raised.
- Answer questions at the beginning and/or end of chapters or study guides.
- Reread captions under pictures, graphs, etc.

- Note all the underlined, italicized, and/or bold printed words or phrases.
- Study graphic aids (charts, tables, examples).
- Reduce your speed for difficult passages. Re-read parts that are not clear.

Recite after you've read a section:

- Orally ask yourself questions about what you have just read and/or summarize, in your own words, what you read.
- Take notes from the text, but write the information in your own words.
- Underline/highlight important points you've just read.

Use the method of recitation or review which best suits your particular learning style; but remember, the more senses you use, the more likely you are to remember what you read.

Review: an ongoing process

- Day One

After you have read the entire chapter, write questions for those points you have highlighted, underlined or made comments in the left-hand margins. If your method of review included note taking in the left hand margins of your notebook, write questions for the notes you have taken.

- Day Two

Page through the text and/or your notebook to re-acquaint yourself with the important points. Cover the right hand column of your text/notebook and orally ask yourself the questions in the left-hand margins. Recite or write the answers to any questions from memory. Make "flash cards" for those questions that give you difficulty. Develop mnemonic devices for material that needs to be memorized.

- Days Three, Four, and Five

Alternate between your flash cards (see page 30) and notes and test yourself (orally or in writing) on the questions you developed.

- Weekend

Using the text and your notebook, make a Table of Contents and list all the topics and sub-topics you need to know from the chapter. From the Table of Contents, make a Study Sheet.

Now that you have consolidated all the information, periodically review the sheet/map so that at test time you will not have to cram.

Reading Speed and Comprehension

- **Tips for speed reading and understanding**

Scan the chapter first. Identify the sections to which the author devotes the most amount of space. If there are many of diagrams for a particular concept, then that must also be an important concept. If you're really pressed for time, skip the sections to which the least amount of space is devoted.

Read the first sentence of every paragraph more carefully than the rest of the paragraph.

Take notes on headings and the first sentence of each paragraph before reading the chapter itself. Then close your book and ask yourself what you now know about the subject that you didn't know before you started.

Focus on nouns and phrases in each sentence. Look for the noun-verb combinations and focus your learning on these.

Rather than reading and re-reading your text, take notes in this form so that you've re-written the important parts of the text. You can study your notes rather than re-reading the text itself.

Tips on Highlighting and Underlining Text

- Read a section first, and then mark (underline or highlight) important points.
- Circle special vocabulary.
- Number important or sequential ideas in the margins.
- Underline information as if making brief notes from which to study.
- Underline all definitions and terms.
- Mark/label examples that represent main ideas.
- Make notes in the text.

Taking Notes From a Textbook

- Read a section of your textbook chapter
- Then take notes after you read the section.
- It is tempting to take notes as you are reading, but this is not an efficient technique as you are likely to take down too much information.
- Evaluate what you are reading

- Decide what are the main and sub ideas.
- Paraphrase the information.
- Then write it in your notes. Do not copy information directly from the textbook.
 - Putting the textbook information in your own words will force you to become actively involved with the materials.

Reading Difficult Material

- **Read the title and the first paragraph.**
Now decide if you have enough background to begin reading. Get a grasp of how the material is organized. If you need more background, get some from another source.
- **Look for main ideas**
Look for titles, headings, and subheadings. Pick out topic sentences. Review graphs, charts, and diagrams.
- **Look up words in the dictionary**
Look up unknown words whose meanings are important to your understanding of the material.
- **Monitor your comprehension**
Periodically stop and ask yourself, "What have I learned?" Connect this to what you already know.

- **Re-read**

If you do not comprehend/understand an idea, go back and re-read. Restate difficult ideas in your own words.

- **Read to the end**

Do not get discouraged and stop reading. Ideas will become clearer the more you read. When you finish reading, review to see what you have learned, and reread those areas or section that are not clear.

- **Write while you read**

Underline, make notes, and/or write summaries that help you focus on important concepts as you read.

Preparing for Tests

To do well on tests you must first learn the material and then review it before the test. The following are techniques to better understand the material.

Learning and Overlearning

- Review your notes soon after class.
- Review notes briefly before the next class.

- Schedule some time each week for a longer review.

Reviewing

- Organize your notes, texts, and assignments.
- Estimate the hours you'll need to review materials.
- Draw up a schedule that blocks units of time and material.
- Test yourself on the material.
- Finish your studying the day before the exam.

Anticipating Test Content

- **Pay particular attention to any study guides** that the instructor hands out. For example: key points, particular chapters or parts of chapters, handouts, etc.
- **Ask the instructor what to anticipate on the test** if he/she does not volunteer the information.
- **Just prior to the exam**, pay particular attention to points the instructor brings up during class.
- **Generate a list of possible questions** you would ask if you were creating the exam, then see if you can answer the questions.
- **Review previous tests** graded by the instructor.

- **Talk with other students** to predict what will be on the test.
- **Pay particular attention to clues** that indicate what an instructor might include on the test. For example, when an instructor:
 - Says something more than once
 - Writes material on the board
 - Pauses to review notes
 - Asks questions of the class
 - Says, "This will be on the test!"

Review Tools for Tests

- **Create study checklists** that can help you identify all of the material on which you will be tested -- list notes, formulas, ideas, and text assignments for which you are accountable. This checklist will enable you to break your studying into organized, manageable chunks, which should allow for a comprehensive review plan with minimal anxiety.

- **Create summary notes** that briefly map out the important ideas of the course and the relationships of these ideas. Such summary notes should display lists and priority of ideas. A bit of artistic flair will provide you with a visual framework that aids recall.
- **Record your notes** and significant portions of text on audiotapes so you can review material with a tape recorder. Make a tape of important information and listen to it while walking or relaxing.
- **Create flashcards** for definitions, formulas, or lists that you need to memorize. Put topics on one side of the card, answers on the other. Flashcards help you recognize important information and quickly retrieve information.

Overcoming Test Anxiety

Before the test:

- **Be prepared!** Learn your material thoroughly.
- **Get a good night's sleep the night before the exam.**
- **Approach the exam with confidence.**
View the exam as an opportunity to show how much you know and to receive a reward for the studying you've done.

- **Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach.** Eat a small snack or some other nourishment before the exam. You will be able to concentrate better if your stomach is not growling and your blood sugar is not low. To improve your overall mental performance, try to always eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods.

Ideas for healthy snacks:

- Bagel with peanut butter
 - Whole-wheat crackers and cheese
 - Yogurt with fresh fruit
 - Oatmeal-raisin cookies and milk
- **Allow yourself plenty of time** to do things you need to do before the test and still be a little early.
 - **Relax just before the exam.**
 - **Don't try to do a last minute review.**

During the test:

- **Read the directions carefully.**
- **Budget your test taking time.**
- **Change positions to help you relax.**
- **If you go blank, skip the question and go on.**
- **If you're taking an essay test and you go blank on the whole test, pick a question and start**

writing. It may trigger the answer in your mind.

- **Don't panic** when students start handing in their papers; there's no reward for being the first done.

Organizing for Test Taking

- **Begin reviewing early**
This will give your brain time to get comfortable with the information.
- **Conduct short daily review sessions**
You can ease into more intense review sessions prior to major exams.
- **Read text assignments before lectures**
This will help you identify points that the instructor considers important and that are already somewhat familiar.
- **Review notes immediately after lectures.**
This will help you identify information that you do not understand while the lecture is still fresh in your memory--and other students' memories as well. When you review immediately, you'll have time to clarify information with other students.
- **Review with a group.**
This will enable you to cover important material that you may overlook on your own.

- **Conduct a major review early enough** to allow you to talk with the instructor if necessary.
- **Break up the study tasks into manageable chunks**, especially during major reviews prior to exams. Studying three hours in the morning and three in the evening will be more effective than studying at a six-hour stretch. *Studying while you are mentally fatigued is usually a waste of time.*
- **Study the most difficult material when you are the most alert.**

Cramming

Cramming **may be** useful in *emergencies*; it is not good for *long-term* learning.

Unstructured cramming can actually be a waste of time.

Strategies for cramming include:

- Preview material to be covered.
- Be selective: skim chapters for main points.
- Concentrate on reviewing and learning main points.
- Don't read information you won't have time to review.

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