

Preparing for Finals: 11 Uncommon Study Habits of Straight-A Students

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By Lauren Bernhagen on 2/7/2014

When you think of finals, you might picture arduous all-nighters, mug after mug of strong dark roast, and sore neck muscles from bending over stacks of books. The bad news is ... studying for finals is probably something you can't escape (although if you do succeed at that, we'd like to hear your story!). The good news is this: finals don't always have to look like a wearying night of boring textbooks and lecture notes in the library!

Whether it's 3 a.m. the weekend before finals or it's 3 p.m. on your first day of classes, it's never too early or late to review these creative tips and tricks for fostering great study habits.

1. Paint

Or draw. Or color. "We all get stumped on a few multiple choice questions that we aren't prepared for or essays on topics covered at the beginning of the semester," suggests Paul Weiner, a painting and political science student at [Syracuse University](#). "Painting during the hours before a test can get you in a creative zone, especially if you spend plenty of time staring at and thinking about your own work." Don't be afraid to transform your test questions into art. Instead of writing out flashcards, draw them!

"Even better, painting is well known as a stress reliever," Weiner adds. Not only will you be making your studying session a lot more interesting, but your creative actions may also alleviate anxiety and tension.

2. Test yourself at random times

"I call on myself to remember certain material at odd times throughout the day," explains Nehemiah Mabry, a civil engineering graduate student at [North Carolina State University](#). "For instance, if I wake up in the middle of the night to use the restroom, I might require myself to recall a certain formula before I get back in bed."

Maybe for you, it's quizzing yourself each time you stand up to walk somewhere. Or perhaps you pull out a flashcard every time you take a sip from your water bottle.

You can map out the random times you plan to test yourself, or if you think you'll remember, carry some questions on a small notebook to pull out and look at whenever you have a chance. It may help to get a friend to remind you, or set an alarm on your iPhone for when you want to stop and quiz yourself.

3. Know when to stop

"Knowing when to stop studying or preparing for a test is a key thing," says Alex Zorach, founder and editor of [RateTea.com](#). "Most people are unable to continue focusing or studying beyond about two hours without taking a break. Being aware of when your attention is waning, and taking breaks, can increase your performance."

For all you go-getters out there, this might be a hard lesson to learn. Even though it's scary to

put down the book when a test is mere hours away, it may be more important to sleep, eat, or do something else during that time period so your brain can have a break.

4. Teach to learn

“It's often said that one of the best ways to learn is to teach,” explains Simon Tam, an author, speaker and nonprofit leader. “So when I was going through my MBA program, I decided to spend my extra time adapting and teaching the material to others.”

If you don't naturally enjoy teaching, this tip might sound intimidating at first. But don't fear! “Teaching someone” might be as informal as repeating all the different types of cells in the human body for your biology test to your sister as you drive to McDonalds. Or it could be as formal as getting a study group of younger students together and tutoring them in grammar.

With this tip, you can kill two birds with one stone. You might ace the test, but with Tam's suggestion, you could also be on your way to gaining a crowd of acolytes even before you graduate.

5. Pump some iron before you study

“Exercising before studying helps improve reading and comprehension and could improve test scores by as much as 17 percent,” says Alyssa Vincent, a digital PR manager for [One on One Marketing](#). Not only does exercise relieve stress, but it can help increase your concentration as well. **Students who worked out before class improved their test scores by 17 percent; this compares to the 10 percent improvement that was seen when students slept in!** It also states that the fittest students scored 30 percent higher on all tests than other students. So get lifting!

6. Get to know your professor

“Discuss the course material with the professor and teaching assistants,” suggests Harvard graduate Dr. Jonathan Farley. “They need to know that you care about the course, that you have done the work, and that you are intelligent. [Also] go to office hours. It is the best way to stand out, since hardly anyone goes (except perhaps just before an exam).” Not only does [getting to know your professor](#) help them understand you a bit better, but you might actually learn something more about them and the subject you're studying!

7. Pick controversial subjects

“I always picked the hardest, most controversial subjects I could,” says Alexis Chrzanowski, an account executive of sales and marketing at [Innovative Facility Solutions](#). “I would make a [pros and cons] chart, and whichever side had the least [is] the side I would ... fight for.”

If you have to write a paper for your final exam, picking a controversial subject, or even choosing the side of a subject that you don't completely agree with, can be key in helping you create a good paper. Sometimes, certain topics have more information about one side of the argument than the other, and often, that can be your best pick for a subject.

8. Let your nose help you learn

Lemon, rosemary and peppermint may increase the ability to concentrate, according to an article in the [Liberty Champion](#) entitled *Nose Knows: The Power of Smell*. Not only might these scents increase energy and help your brain feel revived, but basil in particular might actually improve your memory! As you may have already noticed in life, certain smells will occasionally bring a memory or past circumstance to mind. This is because the limbic system in our brains helps associate memories with smells. So if you bake a batch of chocolate chip cookies while you're studying, you might be able to recall all of those obscure details you learned earlier in the quarter. Who knows? You just might ace the exam thanks to chocolate.

9. Tap your pencil

An article from [The Study Gurus](#) encourages movement while studying. By using your hands to bounce a rubber ball while you're learning or string a yo-yo up and down, you may remember facts better. This may simply mean walking back and forth as you memorize. If you're a kinesthetic learner, this might be key for you. Kinesthetic learners learn by "doing something." Be creative in what this looks like for you. Tap your foot, twirl a piece of hair. It can look different for everyone.

10. Get on YouTube

"Search 'study music'," says Marissa Hu, co-founder and CEO of [Co-Ed Supply](#). "There are thousands of different videos with music that are meant to calm you without distraction." Hu explains that music can even positively affect and help with remembering specific things. This sounds like a necessity for someone who is studying for finals. [Spotify](#) is also a great program for listening to free music and finding great, premade playlists for studiers.

11. Put your phone under your pillow

"Not to hide [your phone]," Hu says. "But to use an app called [Sleep Cycle](#)! Using your phone's accelerometer, Sleep Cycle recognizes your sleeping patterns and wakes you up at your lightest point of sleep to give you a full rested feeling the morning of the exam." Sleep is perhaps one of the most important additions to studying. Without a good night's sleep, all that cramming could be all for naught.

Fill out the KWL chart about the article above.

<p><u>K</u> <i>(What did you Know?)</i></p>	<p><u>W</u> <i>(What do you want to know more about?)</i></p>	<p><u>L</u> <i>(What did you learn?)</i></p>