

## **Ten Traps of Studying (Baylor University)**

Trouble-shooting the Ten Traps of Studying

(Handout created by Paul L. Foster Success Center, Baylor University)

*Trap #1: "I don't know where to begin."*

Solution: Take control. Make a list of all the things you have to do. Break your workload down into manageable chunks. Prioritize! Schedule your time realistically. Don't skip class- you may miss the review session. Use that hour between classes to review notes. Interrupt study time with planned study breaks. Begin studying early (5 to 7 days before the test) increasing daily study time as the exam approaches.

*Trap # 2: " I've got so much to study...and so little time"*

Solution: Preview. Survey your syllabus, reading material and notes. Identify the most important topics emphasized and areas still not understood. Previewing saves time, especially with non-fiction reading, by helping you organize and focus in on the main topics. Adapt this method to your own style and study material: but, remember, previewing is not an effective substitute for reading.

*Trap # 3: This stuff is so dry, I can't even stay awake reading it.*

Solution: Attack! Get actively involved with the text as you read. Ask yourself, "What is important to remember about this section?" Take notes or underline key concepts. Discuss the material with others in your class. Study together. Stay on the offensive, especially with material that you don't find interesting, rather than reading passively and missing important points.

*Trap #4: "I read it. I understand it. I just can't remember it."*

Solution: Elaborate. We remember best the things that are most meaningful to us. As you are reading, try to elaborate upon new information with your own examples. Try to integrate what you're studying with what you already know. You will be able to remember new material better if you can link it to something that's already meaningful to you.

*Trap #5: I guess I understand it.*

Solutions: Test yourself. Make up questions about key concepts in your notes or reading. Examine relationships between concepts and sections. Change section headings to questions and see if you can answer them. For example, change the section heading "Bystander Apathy" to "What is bystander empathy?" or "What are its causes?" or "What are examples?" and see if you can answer the questions.

*Trap #6: There is too much to remember.*

Solution: Organize. Information is recalled better if it is in an organized framework making retrieval more systematic.

- Write chapter outlines and summaries; emphasize relationships between sections.
- Group information into categories or hierarchies.
- Make charts to organize and interrelate material.

*Trap #7: I knew it a minute ago.*

Solution: Review. After reading a section, ask yourself questions over what you read. Re-read portions you do not remember. Review notes and write questions about them. Review notes daily and weekly. Even if you know it perfectly, study it again later. You cannot over study; however, how you organize the information is more important than how much time you spend studying.

*Trap #8: But I like to study in bed.*

Solution: Context. Recall is better when study context (physical location, as well as mental, emotional, and physical state) are similar to the test context. The greater the similarity between the study setting and the test setting, the greater the likelihood of recall at test time.

*Trap #9: Cramming before a test helps keep it fresh on my mind.*

Solution: Space it out. Start studying now. Keep studying as you go along. One week before the exam study at least hour or two a day, then increase daily study time as the exam approaches. Recall increases as review gets spread out over time. Repeated review of the material over many days and weeks develops neural pathways to the stored information in your brain so you can retrieve it when you need it.

*Trap # 10: I'm gonna stay up all night 'till I get this.*

Solution: Avoid mental exhaustion. Take short breaks often when studying. Before a test, have a rested mind. Lack of sleep plus stress causes your body to produce a chemical that actually blocks information retrieval. Before you go to sleep the night before the test, don't think about academics. Relax and unwind, mentally and physically. Take care of yourself before an exam! Eat healthy, sleep, and get enough exercise.