

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT AND LEARNER

Your main job as a student is to learn and master the material in your classes. To do this you need to be a strategic and effective learner. Many things can impact your learning including your mindset, your thinking, how you learn, and when you learn. In this handout we share evidence from cognitive science about how to approach your classes.

Your Mindset and Thinking Matters

Having the right attitude, or mindset, about learning is important. Successful students have a **Growth Mindset**, which means they understand that intelligence is developed with deliberate practice and by learning from mistakes. When you accept that learning may be difficult, and that you will face challenges, you can focus on making progress. You can develop a Growth Mindset by using the word **Yet**. If you say you don't know something or can't do something yet, you can focus on how you learn it and become more confident. Practice using the word yet when talking about your classes. I haven't learned this...**yet**. I don't understand this...**yet**.

How you think about your thinking, or **Metacognition**, also impacts your learning. Reflecting on your own learning helps you know when you've learned something and when you haven't. You can include metacognition by creating a metacognitive journal: a daily reflection of planning, monitoring, and evaluating during your learning. In planning you think about the learning you will be doing. Ask yourself: What is the goal? How long will it take? Monitoring is your awareness of how your learning is going. Are you focused on the task or distracted? In evaluation, ask yourself how your learning went. Did you understand everything? Do you need any questions answered?

How You Learn Matters

What you are doing when you learn can help you remember and understand material better. **Testing yourself** on the material is one of the most effective learning strategies to use. Flashcards, Quizlet, and practice tests are all great ways to test yourself. You want to actively recall information instead of simply becoming familiar with it. Wait to flip that flashcard over and force yourself to describe the answer. Cover your notes and try to remember everything on the page. Solve the chapter review questions before looking at the answers. By trying to remember the information you actually strengthen those memories and are less likely to forget.

When You Learn Matters

Not only is the way you study important, it's also important to think about when you are studying. The best way to study is by using spaced practice. **Spaced practice** is where you study smaller amounts over the course of several study sessions or days. Instead of having one huge study session (cramming), you can learn and retain a lot more material by breaking those into shorter study sessions.

Studying in multiple, shorter sessions helps you to elaborate and form connections in your memory. This works because memories fade quickly after studying, so when you space out your studying, you retain more information and strengthen your memories. It also lets you revisit material you might have forgotten and gives that information a boost in your memory.

To learn more about using mindset, metacognition, and memory, visit learning.uiowa.edu