

Ten Best Study Excuses (And What To Do About Them)

1. “I Don’t Know Where To Begin”

Take control. Make a list of all the things you have to do. Break the assignment into manageable chunks. Prioritize and schedule your time realistically! Use that break between classes to review notes or read chapters. Begin studying early, with an hour or two per day per class, and slowly increase as the exam approaches. Don’t skip classes near an exam—you may miss a review session.

2. “I’ve Got So Much To Study...So Little Time”

Learn to preview. Survey your syllabus, reading material and your notes. From your textbook and lecture notes, identify the most important topics emphasized, and areas still not understood. Previewing saves time, especially with non-fiction reading, and helps you focus in on the main topics. Preview or reviewing chapters before class will greatly help your understanding during class. It also helps to review previous class notes. Remember though, previewing is not an effective substitute for reading.

3. “This Stuff Is So Dry, I Can’t Even Stay Awake Reading It”

Find out what times during the day you are most alert. Plan to work on your most difficult classes and projects then. Find out if you are an auditory, visual or kinesthetic learner and what kind of techniques will help you learn. Then attack! Get actively involved with the text as you read. Ask yourself, “What is important to remember about this section?” Stay on the offensive, especially with material you don’t find interesting, rather than reading passively and missing important points. Take notes or mark key concepts. Discuss the material with others in your class. Study together. Meet with a tutor or your instructor to clarify questions.

4. “I Read It. I Understand It. But I Just Can’t Get It To Sink In”

We remember best the things that are most meaningful to us. As you are reading or hearing new information, try to elaborate with your own examples. You will be able to remember new material better if you can link it to something that’s already meaningful to you. Some techniques include:

- Mnemonics: Any memory technique that associates a complex concept or body of facts with a simple statement that is easy to learn and remember. For example, use the spelling rule “i before e except after c”. Or we all memorized ROY G. BIV to learn the colors of the rainbow.
- Grouping: Try to organize the material by grouping ideas and facts. Classify by using common characteristics that are meaningful to you. Keep the items in each group under 7 if possible. For example, group Shakespeare’s plays into the categories comedy, tragedy, and history.

5. “I Guess I Understand It”

Test yourself. Make up questions from your notes and reading. Keep in mind what the professor has stressed in the course. Don’t just memorize facts; try to examine concepts and relationships. Write the questions on notecards to test yourself. Get together with other students and try to come up with test questions. If there are things you don’t understand, it’s

better to find out before the test. You can often make test questions from textbook headings. For example, a section entitled “Bystander Apathy” might be changed into questions such as: “What is bystander apathy?”, “What are the causes of bystander apathy?”, and “What are some examples of bystander apathy?”

6. “There’s Too Much To Remember”

Organize it. Information is recalled more easily if it is represented in an organization that will make retrieval more systematic. There are many techniques that can help you organize new information, including:

- Write chapter outlines and summaries; emphasize relationships between sections.
- Group information into categories or hierarchies, where possible.
- Information mapping. Draw up a matrix to organize and classify material. Use color to make it more interesting and easier to categorize information. For example, if you were trying to understand the causes of World War I, you could make a chart listing all the major countries involved across the top, and then list the important issues and events down the side. Next, in the boxes in between, you could describe the impact each issue had on each country to help you understand the complex historical developments.

7. “I Knew It A Minute Ago”

Learn to review. After reading a section, try to recall the information contained in it. Try answering the questions you made up for that section. If you cannot recall enough, re-read portions you had trouble remembering. The more time you spend studying, the more you tend to recall. Once you can recall it well enough, schedule regular reviews of that information before exam time. You will be less likely to forget entirely what you once understood. In other words, you can’t overstudy. It is still more important how you organize and integrate new information than how much time you spend studying.

8. “But I Like To Study In Bed”

Test 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 likelihood that material studied will be recalled during the test. So try to sit up; don’t put yourself in a position to fall asleep!

9. “Cramming Before A Test Helps Keep It Fresh In My Mind”

Space your studying out. Start now and don’t procrastinate. Keep up on new and review material. Schedule an hour or two a day about one week before the exam and then increase study time as necessary. Recall increases as studying gets spread out over time.

10. “I’m Going To Stay Up All Night Until I Get This”

Avoid mental exhaustion. Take short breaks often when studying. When you take a study break, and just before you go to sleep at night, don’t think about academics. Relax and unwind, mentally and physically. Otherwise your break won’t refresh you and you’ll find yourself lying awake at night. Eat well, sleep, and get enough exercise. It’s more important than ever to take care of yourself before an exam and arrive with a rested mind!