

## **Ten Traps to Studying and How to Avoid Them**

(Adapted from UNC-CH's Counseling Center, <http://www.unc.edu/depts./unc-caps/TenTraps.html>)

### **“I don't know where to begin”**

It's time to take charge and get organized! Start by making prioritized lists of everything that you have to do. Making an ABC list can be helpful, listing things as “A” that are most important. Break your time down into manageable blocks so that you are able to stay focused. Try to maximize your time usage. Using a planner with all of the hours of the day can really help. Plan on taking breaks and reward yourself for your hard work. Begin studying early for an exam (an hour a two per day) and increase the amount of time spent each day as you get closer to the actual exam.

### **“I've got so much to study, and so little time”**

Break your studying down into steps. Preview, review your syllabus, reading material, and notes. Find the most important topics and areas that you do not understand. Previewing helps save you time, especially with nonfiction material and textbooks. Previewing also helps you organize and focus on the main topics. Also pay attention to headings that are in bold. These subjects or concepts are always important. Go visit your professor or instructor during office hours and ask questions and for feedback on the most important concepts. It may be intimidating to talk to them, but they are there to help you!

### **“This stuff is so dry, I can't even stay awake reading it”**

Don't let the material beat you! Use active learning strategies to help you really understand what you're reading. Ask yourself what is most important to remember, take notes or underline key material. Form study groups or find a study partner to discuss the information with and to share ideas. Don't attempt to spend long periods of time reading the material without a break. Plan on reading for no longer than half an hour to an hour at a time and take short breaks to stay focused and reward yourself.

### **“I read it. I understand it. But I just can't get it to sink in”**

It's time to take the next step. Find ways to have the material be more meaningful to you and be able to find your own examples. Try to blend the new material you're studying with content you already know. You will be able to remember things better if you can make a connection to something that you already has meaning to you. Here are some techniques:

- **Chunking**: An effective way to simplify and make information more meaningful. Use the colors of the spectrum as an example. The colors are Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet. You could either memorize each color separately, or else “chunk” the information together by spelling the name “Roy G. Biv”. It is much easier to remember the “chunks” versus seven.

- **Mnemonics:** This is any memory-boosting technique that helps you associate new information with something you already know. The mnemonic “trick” can be visual, linear, or auditory. Examples include acronyms, acoustics, jingles, sayings, and songs.

<b>Mnemonic</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example</b>
Acronyms	Each letter in the word represents the first letter of a fact you need to memorize	FACE (spaces on the musical scale: Face)
Acrostics	Create a sentence using the first letter of each word	Every Good Boy Does Fine (lines on the musical scale: EGBDF)
Jingles	Set information to a quick song	In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue
Sayings	Create a saying or adapt an existing one	“What’s up, DOC? Denotes the order of the phases of the moon by the shape of the letters: D: Waxing half moon with the curve on the right O: Full Moon C: Waning crescent with the curve on the left, heading toward a new moon
Songs	Set information to a tune	“The Alphabet Song”

### **“I guess I understand it”**

Make sure you know the information. Make up questions about key information in your notes or reading. Keep in mind what the instructor has emphasized during classes. Have study groups or a study partner quiz you on the materials. Use Who, What, When, Where, and How kinds of questions to prove that you know that information.

### **“There’s too much to remember”**

Organize! You can remember information more easily if it is a framework that makes finding information more systematic and streamlined. Here are some examples:

- Write chapter outlines or summaries, focus on the relationships between sections
- Group information into categories or hierarchies when possible
- Information mapping. Draw up charts or matrixes to organize interrelated material. For example, if you are studying WWI, you could make a chart listing all the countries involved across the top, then list the important issues and events down the side.

### **“I knew it a minute ago”**

Keep reviewing. After reading a section, stop and try to remember the information you just covered. Try to answer questions you created for the sections. If you can’t remember enough, re-read the sections and take notes/underline key information.

### **“But I like to study in bed”**

Even though you might be comfortable, your recall will be better when the study context (physical location, as well as mental, emotional, and physical state) are similar to the test context. The more similar the study setting is to the actual test setting, the more likely it is that you will remember the material during the test.

### **“Cramming before a test helps keep it fresh in my mind”**

Studies prove that long-term memory and recall are greatly improved when you study continuously versus over a period of time versus cramming. Start with an hour or two a day for about a week before the test, and then increase your study time as the test gets closer.

### **“I’m gonna stay up all night ‘til I get this”**

Avoid complete mental and physical exhaustion. Take short breaks often and reward yourself when you complete tasks. Before a test, be calm and try to get a good night’s sleep the night before. Relax and unwind, mentally and physically when you take your breaks. Eat well, sleep, and get enough exercise before the exam so you will be at your best.

*Additional Reference:* Rozakis, Laurie (2003). Test-taking strategies and study skills for the utterly confused. McGraw-Hill, N.Y.