



Lesson 17: Study Skills

This lesson is about the different ways in which we can study. It prompts students to think about their study methods and how they might improve their own study skills.

Level: Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2 and above)

Time: 60-90 mins

How to use this lesson:

This lesson is designed to be done in class but most of Worksheet B (exercises 6 and 7) can be prepared at home if time is limited.

Worksheet A

1. This first exercise will help introduce the subject of studying. Ask students to tick the ways they have used, or that they currently use, to study. Give help with any unknown words. When they have all finished, elicit answers from different students and allow this to develop into a class discussion, asking students to tell you the advantages and disadvantages of each one.
2. Tell the class that they are going to look at a technique for studying published in 1946. Allow up to five minutes for students to read the information and, as they finish reading, to discuss the questions in pairs. Then ask pairs to report back to the class. Elicit as many different answers as possible. Prompt discussion with further questions such as:
 - ▶ *Do you think a book on study skills written in 1946 can still be relevant today?*
 - ▶ *Would we need a different set of study skills for students who study online? What could they include?*
 - ▶ *What about the other ways of studying listed in exercise 1 – what study skills could help?*

Finally, ask students if they think SQ3R is a good name for this method. Make sure everyone has understood that the '3R' part of the name refers to the three Rs of *Read*, *Recite* and *Review*. Does the name make the method easier to remember? (Students will be looking at mnemonics and acronyms in the next exercise so this is a good opportunity to introduce the idea.) You might want to point out that there is a slightly revised version of this method known as SQW3R, where *Writing* things down is an essential part of the process.

3. Ask students to read the instructions for the task. Explain that mnemonics are usually phrases that are easy to remember, with the first letter of each word representing something else. Acronyms use the initial letters to form a word. Go through the example given and make sure they understand that they need to focus on the first letter of each word in the phrase. (If you think your students might have heard of the breakfast cereal *Shredded Wheat*, you might like to mention that *Never Eat Shredded Wheat* is an alternative mnemonic for the same thing. This version also has the added advantage that it rhymes, making it easier to remember).

Students can spend up to ten minutes thinking about the items in pairs but ask them not to shout out the answers until everyone has had time to guess. Elicit suggestions from the class. If students cannot guess correctly after several attempts, you can begin to reveal the answers. After giving the answers, ask the class which of them might be useful ways to remember things.

There are mnemonics in many different subjects and professions. If students have heard of any others, ask them to tell the class. Also, ask if there are equivalents in their own language.

Answers

1. **Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain:** This is a way of learning the colours of the rainbow in order – Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.
2. **HOMES:** The letters represent the names of the Great Lakes in random order – Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior. You might also want to point out other mnemonics for this: *Super Heroes Must Eat Oats* (representing the Great Lakes starting with the biggest and ending with the smallest) and *Super Man Helps Every One or Some Men Hate Eating Oranges* (representing the Great Lakes from west to east).
3. **My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nachos:** This is a way of memorising the order of the planets (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune) starting with the planet closest to the sun. (When it was believed that Pluto was the ninth planet, the nachos in this mnemonic were replaced by **Nine Pizzas**.)



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4. **Eddie Ate Dynamite; Good Bye Eddie:** This lists the musical notes associated with a standard guitar tuning, starting at the bottom (E, A, D, G, B, E). Also, *Elephants And Donkeys Grow Big Ears*. You might want to mention *FACE* – a way of remembering the spaces on a treble clef in musical notation, or *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*, or *Every Green Bus Drives Fast* – for the lines on a treble clef. Both of these start at the bottom and move up.
5. **Big Elephants Are Ugly:** This is a way to remember the unusual spelling at the start of the word 'Beautiful'.
6. **STOP:** This is a way to avoid panicking and making the wrong decision when you are lost in a potentially dangerous situation. The letters stand for *Stay calm, Think, Observe, Plan*.

Extra activity

You might like to ask the class to create their own mnemonics. Depending on your students' courses, jobs or fields of interest, they might have to memorise complex lists or difficult ideas. Ask them if there is anything in their lives they have to memorise and ask the class to suggest ways of doing this. Further examples include:

- ▶ **Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally** (Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction – the Order of Operations in mathematics.) If you have maths students, they might like to suggest a different phrase for this, or a new mnemonic for another sequence they have to remember.
 - ▶ **King Philip Cuts Open Five Green Snakes** (Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species – the order of Taxonomy in biology). If you have biology students, ask them to suggest a different phrase. There is also the acronym – **FARM B** – used to remember the different classes of animals (Fish, Amphibians, Reptiles, Mammals and Birds).
 - ▶ **In 1492, Columbus Sailed the Ocean Blue:** This is a different kind of mnemonic – one which relies on a rhyme to help students remember the date when Christopher Columbus discovered America. Ask your students to think of an important date and make a rhyme like this.
 - ▶ There are also plenty of mnemonics for learning English – particularly spelling. Give the example, **Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants** to remember how to spell *because*. Ask students what words they have trouble spelling. Then ask the class to suggest a memorable phrase to help remember it. Using a different kind of mnemonic, students who confuse a.m. and p.m. when telling the time could benefit from remembering that *a* comes before *p* in the alphabet, just as *a.m.* comes before *p.m.* in the day. Encourage your class to be creative – ask them what problems they have learning English and get the class to suggest ways to remember the correct version.
4. Allow 5-10 minutes for pairs to look through the list and discuss the importance (or otherwise) of each piece of advice. Make sure they realise they can add their own advice if they feel something is missing from the list.

Explain that you want them to choose two items each that they are going to present to the class. Allow up to five minutes more for pairs to discuss their choices. Tell them that they must think of reasons or examples to justify their choices. They might also use a warning or a condition. For example, *Make time to socialise because but make sure it doesn't take over your life because ...*

When they are ready, ask pairs to present their points (*Student A* could present two points, followed by *Student B*'s two points; alternatively, they could take turns – *Student A, Student B, Student A, Student B*). After each pair has presented their four points, invite the class to react, before moving on to the next pair.

Conclude by taking a vote on which piece of advice the whole class thinks is the most important. You can do this by telling students to choose just one piece of advice that they think is the best. Then, read the list aloud and ask students to put up their hands if they think it is the most important. Tell them they should only vote once. Make a note of the number of votes each time. If time allows, allow further discussion about the results of the vote.



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Worksheet B

Most of Worksheet B can be set for homework if time is limited. However, it is worth doing exercise 5 in class.

- Students will understand the purpose of exercise 5 once they have done exercise 6. For the moment, however, encourage them not to read the text in exercise 6. Point out the headings *Get more out of a book* and *Get more out of a lecture*. If necessary, tell the class to turn over their worksheets so they don't read the texts. Ask them to spend a few minutes making notes about what they expect to find. Repeat the headings orally so that students remember what they need to write. Tell them they are predicting what they are going to read.

When students have finished writing, elicit as many ideas as you can from the class. Do not give feedback at this point, however, unless the answers are irrelevant.

- This can be set for homework if you prefer. If it is to be done in class, set a time limit of 10-15 minutes to read the texts and answer the questions. Those who finish first can compare their answers with another student while the others complete the task.

Check the answers to the questions and clear up any misunderstandings.

Finally, ask the class if they managed to predict anything from the texts when they did exercise 5. Point out that the first text says, *You might be right and you might be wrong, but you are more likely to remember what you read*. Ask them if they think this is true, and conduct a discussion on the usefulness of the advice given in the texts.

Suggested answers

- The phrase means that nothing of what you have read has stayed in your mind/memory.
 - You should start by looking at the title of the chapter, the introduction and the headings. You should also take notice of any photographs, illustrations or diagrams.
 - The writer probably thinks that listening to music while studying is not helpful and is probably a distraction.
 - You should do the assigned reading before the lecture at all costs.
 - Mistakes include not paying attention, going just because you have to, staying up late the night before, and thinking that you can sit back and let it wash over you (i.e. not listening actively).
 - Reviewing your notes stops you forgetting and gives you the chance to clear up any misunderstandings.
- This can be set for homework if you prefer. If you do it in class, set a time limit of 10-15 minutes for students to go back through the lesson and note down their answers. Remind them that they can add their own suggestions. Those who finish first can begin comparing their answers with another student while the others complete the task.

Aim to let all the students see at least one other student's notes (if the task has been set for homework, this can be done during the following lesson). Tell students that it is perfectly acceptable to 'borrow' a point from another student if they think it is missing from their own lists.

Elicit all the *Dos*, before moving on to the *Don'ts*. You may find it useful to compile a list on the board as you do this. Be aware that there may be a certain amount of overlap here. For example, *Do get plenty of sleep* and *Don't stay up half the night* amount to the same thing.

Round off the lesson by asking the class if there are any changes they would make to their own study methods based on the points they have discussed in the lesson.

Suggested answers

Do	Don't
▶ Try to predict what you are about to study	▶ Ignore illustrations
▶ Test yourself on your notes	▶ Have distractions in the room
▶ Review lecture notes within 24 hours	▶ Study for hours at a time
▶ etc	▶ etc



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Worksheet A

1. Which of the following ways of studying do you have experience of? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

- ☐ Attending lessons or lectures
- ☐ Studying online (using webcasts, webinars or online courses)
- ☐ Studying at home from a book or your notes
- ☐ Private lessons or tutorial sessions (one-to-one)
- ☐ Study groups (with fellow students)
- ☐ Courses on TV, on the radio or through podcasts
- ☐ Getting a friend to test you on what you have learned
- ☐ Writing key points in a list or on cards

2. Read the information below and discuss the questions.

What is SQ3R?

SQ3R is the name given to a study method which aims to help students get the best out of reading a textbook. The name comes from its five steps, and the letters stand for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review.

Survey

The first part of the process is to skim the chapter or section you are about to read. This involves a quick look at headings, titles, illustrations and the introduction and conclusion.

Question

Start to question what you are about to read. What is it about? What do you expect to learn?

Read

With your questions in mind, read the text.

Recite

Identify the main points of what you have just read and either write them down or say them out loud.

Review

Test yourself by trying to remember the main features of the text.

Q.1. Have you heard of this method (or a similar one) before?

Q.2. Do you think it would help you?

Q.3. How does this compare with your own study method?

Q.4. Is there anything you would add to the five steps?



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3. To remember lists of things, or things in a certain order, we often use mnemonics or acronyms. Working in pairs, can you guess what the following mean? There are clues to help you and there is an example at the beginning.

Example: **Never Eat Slimy Worms** (think about directions)

Answer: This is a way to remember the points of the compass in a clockwise direction (North, East, South, West).

1. **Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain** (think about colours)
2. **HOMES** (think about North American geography)
3. **My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nachos** (think about astronomy)
4. **Eddie Ate Dynamite; Good Bye Eddie** (think about music)
5. **Big Elephants Are Ugly** (think about spelling in English)
6. **STOP** (think about what you should do if you get lost)

4. With a partner, discuss the advice given below. You can add your own suggestions if you want to. Choose four pieces of advice that you think are the most important and then present them to the rest of the class, giving reasons.

How to study well

- ▶ Make a study plan
- ▶ Review your notes regularly
- ▶ Study first thing in the morning
- ▶ Avoid distractions
- ▶ Get enough sleep
- ▶ Take regular exercise
- ▶ Eat healthily
- ▶ Make time to socialise
- ▶ Study with a friend
- ▶ Limit your study time
- ▶ Reward yourself after each study period
- ▶ Create a pleasant study environment
- ▶ [your own ideas] _____
- ▶ [your own ideas] _____



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Worksheet B

5. Look at the headings in exercise 6. Without reading anything else, write down some of the things you expect to find in the texts. Compare your notes with a partner.
6. Read the texts below and answer the questions that follow.

Study skills

Get more out of a book

Most people have had this experience: you've been reading for some time but you haven't taken anything in. The way to approach this problem is to get organised. Set aside a time when you are not tired. For many, this will be early in the morning, but only you can say when you are at your best. Start by looking at the title of the chapter, the introduction and the headings. You should also take notice of any photographs, illustrations or diagrams. Then, train yourself to predict what you're about to read. This gives your reading a purpose. You might be right and you might be wrong, but you are more likely to remember what you read. Avoid distractions, like other people in the room, if at all possible. Turn off the computer and tell yourself you will deal with messages in an hour. Also, many people like the idea of listening to music while they study but, be honest with yourself – does this really help you to focus on reading? Finally, set a time limit and use that time profitably. About an hour is reasonable. One thing is for sure – a little each day is much better than sitting for long periods at a time. Very few people can study effectively for hours on end.

Get more out of a lecture

Many lecturers give assigned reading before the lecture. Don't even think of skipping this. It will help you follow what the lecturer says. Also, there is little point in going to a lecture if you are not going to pay attention. You will be in the room for a limited time and you should make the best possible use of that time. Don't go just because you have to, and don't stay up half the night if you have a lecture the next day. Although it's tempting to think that you can sit back and let it wash over you, this is a bad idea. You need to make the lecture work for you. Focus and listen actively, making notes as you go. Listen carefully for the structure and the main points of the lecture. Draw a line across the page if the speaker starts a new topic. If a lecturer repeats a point, or stresses it, that means it should be in your notes, perhaps underlined. After the lecture, make sure you read through your notes. Do this within 24 hours, as you will quickly forget it otherwise. This is the time to speak to someone about any points you haven't understood or have missed.

Text 1

1. In the first sentence, what does the writer mean by 'you haven't taken anything in'?

2. What should you read first in a book?

3. What does the writer probably think about listening to music while studying?

Text 2

4. In the second sentence, what does the writer mean when he says 'Don't even think of skipping this'?

5. What mistakes does the writer think students make about lectures?

6. Why is it important to review your lecture notes?



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7. Based on the material in this lesson, write a list of *Dos* and *Don'ts* for study skills. Add your own suggestions. Then compare lists with a partner.

STUDY SKILLS	
Do	Don't

Student's Copy

STUDY SKILLS