Some Quick Study Habits, Strategies, Tips  (Slattery)

1. Sit close to the instructor on the first day of class (… keep doing it if you dare)

2. Use the Cornell system for Notetaking
   a. Thoughts / Reflections / Feelings / Questions [on the Left side]
   b. Content [on the Right side]
   c. Web Links for Cornell notetaking:
      • http://www.wonderhowto.com/how-to/video/how-to-take-notes-5247/view/
      • http://coe.jmu.edu/learningtoolbox/cornellnotes.html

3. Practice the “5-and-5” approach of previewing & reviewing notes each class
   a. Preview: 5 minutes before class to write down questions of curiosity for the upcoming lecture;
   b. Review: 5 minutes after class to write a summary of the class (in your own words);
   c. Bonus: On the last page of notes for each lecture, rate the class/lecture on a scale of 1-10 on 2 items:
      • “How confident am I about today’s material (how well do I know it)?”
        • 1 = ‘I have no clue what that was all about;’
        • 5 = ‘Most of what was presented made sense to me but I definitely need to review more;’
        • 10 = ‘Great class - I understand this stuff really well’
      • “How important was today’s lecture material?”
        • 1 = ‘not too important - not likely to be on the test;’
        • 5 = ‘Some good material - may appear on a test but not likely to be a major focus;’
        • 10 = ‘Very important material - come back to review this or clarify with professor or TA’

4. Use Note Cards (not just as Flash Cards)
   a. Practice carrying note cards around with you to jot down reminders, curiosities or observations you make in class or around campus - use these to guide questions with professors or others in your study group;
   b. Use note cards to help organize your thoughts for papers and essays - have a card (or more) for each paper/project and use it to jot down ideas or thoughts related to these. Ask friends if they have thoughts about topics you will be writing about and have the cards ready for jotting down reminders or notes.

5. Choose the right study environment
   a. Find places that are for studying ... and nothing but studying (Note: places where you socialize or sleep are good for socializing and sleeping but not for studying);
   b. Studying in new, interesting places has been shown to improve focus & memory of course information and material. Mix it up - explore campus for different places to study - try new buildings, different campuses, etc.;
   c. Know what time of day works best for you to study (are you a morning person?, night owl?, prefer the afternoon? ... go with what works best for you and save optimal time for your most challenging study needs and assignments);

6. Stay physically prepared
   a. Sleep (get enough)
   b. Eat (a well balanced diet - monitor caffeine, sugar, etc.)
   c. Exercise (keep your body active & alert)
7. **Use the “2-8 / 8-2” principle to your advantage**

[The “2-8 / 8-2” principle states that “time” tends to expand & contract based on how we use it. Thus, if someone has 2 hours of work and 8 hours to complete it (2-8), they will take all 8 hours to complete the work; by contrast, if someone has 8 hours of work and 2 hours to complete it (8-2), they will get the work done in 2 hours.]

So, how does this work? It is based on human nature and the effect DEADLINES have in helping us to be focused in completing tasks. Thus, in both cases, the common link is that the work gets done at the deadline. In the 2-8 situation, time gets wasted because the deadline is too far away - we don’t ‘have’ to complete the task now (there’s plenty of time) so we become involved in distractions; in the 8-2 situation, we become very efficient because the deadline forces us to identify priorities and make decisions on what we absolutely need to do (and what can ignore or let go).

**Lessons from this include:**

a. Make Deadlines your friend … if you have a lot (or too much) free time, create some deadlines in your schedule - you don’t need to wait for professors or others to create them for you - make your own. For example, schedule exercise, meetings with friends or professors, or other commitments in the middle of a large block of open time - this will help you to complete readings, assignments, homework or other school tasks by creating a deadline for completion before you move on to your scheduled event or activity;

b. Define your priorities - priorities are based on your values (what’s important to you) - each day, clarify what people, activities, tasks or work are most important to you and be sure to make time for these - this means that you may need to set limits on other, less-important time demands that can become distractions (for example, email, checking Facebook, etc.).

8. **Use your Professors**

a. Go talk to them - take a deep breath and see if you can get comfortable with this. Professors want to see you succeed and will generally be open and welcoming to your questions. In professional life, such visits are called “consultation” - it is an important skill - don’t wait until you graduate to begin practicing consultation - start now and visit your professors.

When you do your visit, consider the following guidelines about the HOW you ask your questions:

- **AVOID ‘show-me’ questions** [ professors can always ‘show’ you how to solve a problem or what to notice in a reading, however, this is unlikely to be very helpful to you in deepening your understanding, helping you to remember material or to apply it on exams. Do the following instead ...

- **PURSUE ‘how do you THINK through this question or problem?’** [ asking professors how they ‘think’ through questions or problems gives you insight in how information and knowledge is being APPLIED - learning how to apply information increases memory of concepts and flexibility in answering questions on exams.

b. Get a feel for what’s important to professors when constructing exams

  - Do they “Cover the material presented”?
  - Do they test for “Important concepts and issues”?
9. **Use Study Groups**
When you get together in a study group, consider discussing some of the following:
   a. Work at understanding what the professor is looking for - notice how each person may pick-up on different clues or ideas - make note of these and be better prepared;
   b. What do you see that other students don’t?
   c. What do they see that you are missing?

Other notes on study groups:
   a. Have rules / guidelines for the group such as no social time or distractions while you meet [if you commit to a study group, make that time a priority - turn off phones, etc. - there will be plenty of time after the group to catch up with the world];
   b. Choose a convenient, comfortable space (and consider moving it around every once in a while to keep things fresh and interesting);
   c. Stay focused - set a deadline for the group (1 hour, 1 ½ hours, etc.) and stick to this time frame.

10. **Prepare & present a lecture yourself**
For papers or exams, pretend that you are the professor for your course and that you are going to give a lecture on the material (for the exam or paper). Get a friend or two to attend your “lecture” and teach what you are studying. [Tip: This is a great exercise to use in a study group!]
   a. You will learn what you know (and what you don’t know)
   b. The general strategy is: Read it Speak it Write it

11. **Be Curious! ... Get Answers**
   a. When you find yourself saying “I don’t get it ... no big deal - it won’t be on the test”... get an answer anyway (from the professor/TA, a friend, classmate, etc.) - chances are, it will be on the exam.
   b. When you get questions wrong on exams ... don’t put the exam away, find out why you got it wrong and what was expected by the professor for getting a correct answer. Don’t delay - schedule a meeting with your TA or professor the week following the exam to get answers while the material is still fresh on your mind.

12. **Avoid the ‘Reward First, Work Second’ trap**
When completing work, you can either:
   1. Work first, then get a break/reward; or
   2. Take a break first, then get to work.

Now, in general, **both** approaches work (there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to approach things). **However**, the first approach works much better than the second. If possible, strive to complete your work before taking a break or rewarding yourself with TV, internet time, texting, or other distractions.

13. **Use Dead Time**
[“Dead Time” refers to time spent in situations where you are effectively “stuck” (and have very limited options for going anywhere else). Commuting time on the bus and waiting in a laundro-mat doing laundry are common examples]

If you are “stuck” ... do something productive such as reviewing notes, jotting down ideas for a paper on your note cards, or previewing chapters in a book you will be reading later. Avoid simply letting the time pass by listening to music, checking email or texting someone.