

STUDYING VS. HOMEWORK

| STUDYING | HOMEWORK |
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| Student-driven. | Instructor-driven. |
| Independently giving time and attention to acquiring meaningful understanding of course material. | Completing a graded (or instructor-reviewed) assignment or activity. |
| Student is <u>not</u> held directly accountable for the completion or quality of their studying. Studying carries no point or grade value toward the final grade. | Student is held accountable for completion and quality of their homework. Homework carries a point or grade value toward the final grade. |
| There is always studying that can be done. | When there is no homework there is nothing the student must do. |

Most of what takes place in college is studying, with “assignments” (the college word for “homework”) scattered throughout in various forms, such as papers, projects, outlines, and such.

College students are expected to spend time outside of class giving meaningful attention to their course material in an attempt to deepen and expand their understanding of course material. Professors rely on their students to spend this time outside of class engaging with course information so that in-class time can be better spent helping students engage with and think critically about the material, and to analyze, extend, evaluate and apply it.

What is involved in studying?

Studying is, of course, different according to what subject is being learned, but in general it involves: 1). preparation for in-class learning; 2). reviewing and deepening understanding of in-class learning; and 3). using and committing course material to long-term memory in meaningful ways.

1. Preparation for in-class learning.

This often involves reading a textbook or some other reading material that forms the basis of instruction in the next class. It may be a chapter which represents the subject matter of the class lectures for an entire week, or it could just apply to the next class. Occasionally the reading may constitute the basis of two or more weeks’ worth of class lecture and discussion.

When students read in preparation for class they are not usually expected to master or completely retain the information. They are, however, expected to have engaged with the material enough so that they have, at the minimum, a broad understanding of the major ideas associated with the current topic. Students can then attend class with a prepared to engage with the information at deeper levels.

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2. Reviewing and deepening an understanding of the student's in-class learning.

As soon after class as possible, the student now reviews what took place in class – their class notes, the supplemental activities, videos, etc. and then, *with their textbook open beside them*, reviews, clarifies, edits and deepens their understanding of the material covered that day.

Taken as a whole (i.e., readings + lecture notes + PowerPoint slides + videos, etc.), what is the *story* of this content? How does it fit together as a whole? What are the key ideas, terminology, concepts and examples that, taken together, form an understanding of the whole?

Students tend to fragmentize their studying; they memorize terminology via flashcards, they read the textbook and then set it aside to never be seen again until the test; they take lecture notes and never take the time to correct, complete, refine and edit them.

To correct this tendency, students must spend meaningful time after class bringing the whole picture together as one multi-faceted picture with several pieces. Then, once understood as the story *thus far*, they are now ready to learn more of it.

3. Using and committing course material to long-term memory in meaningful ways.

Take any favorite serial television show, movie series or serial books; almost anyone could take a pop-quiz on their favorite series and score well. They know the characters, the plot lines, the back stories, the central and side conflicts, the locales, and more without ever intending to commit these to memory. Why is this?

- a. **Interest.** Anything is fascinating if examined closely enough. Even if the goal is not to entertain, if approached with curiosity almost any material can be made interesting.
- b. **Meaning.** The events, characters and story lines are meaningfully interconnected. This interconnectedness holds it all together as one. Like string in every kitchen's junk drawer, pull on one end of it and the contents of the whole drawer come spilling out.
- c. **Learned in meaningful chunks over time.** We could never sit down and watch, in one sitting, an entire season of a show we knew nothing about at the outset, and expect to remember all the pieces. But because we are exposed to the story gradually, in meaningful units, it has an additive effect and we just keep adding to our understanding and memory of the details.

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Students who study gradually – building their understanding over time, and taking the time necessary along the way to really understand the information, will be more than halfway to their goal of being ready for an exam with little to no actual exam prep. Names, dates, a list of the “10 things that...” can easily be stored in memory through the use of mnemonic devices (associations used to put “sticky-tape” on a concept or term in memory). This only works however, if the information has first been fully understood. It does no good to memorize a term’s definition if a student cannot compare it, contrast it, provide an example of it, or discuss and explain it in a sentence of their own. On the other hand, concepts well understood but in need of a “hint” to pull it up from memory are easily managed. The names of the Great Lakes? Easy: HOMES (Huron, Ontario Michigan, Erie, Superior). The best mnemonics are the ones created by the student. Add humor, visual images and plenty of rehearsal and they’ll be set to go!