Effective Learning Strategies
The Learning Process

People tend to learn something totally new by first getting the general idea in their minds and then filling in the details.

Here are some learning and memory techniques that will help with the process.
Learning Strategies

- Divide
- Outline
- Engage
- Revise
- Vary
- Incubate
Outline

An outline of a topic gives people a framework on which they can add details to get a picture of what they are learning.

Textbooks, articles and essays usually start with an introductory overview.

Scenes in movies and TV often show a long shot before they zoom into the close ups.

If you ask someone to draw a house, they will usually draw the walls and roof before they fill in details like doors and windows.
Outline

When reading, writing, explaining and in exams, order your information from the general to the detailed

When researching a new topic:

Dictionaries, Encyclopedias (if needed) → Text Books → Specialised Books → Journal Articles

When reading academic writing:

Look at all the headings, subheadings → Look at all the pictures and captions → Read the first and last paragraphs → Read first sentence of each paragraph → Read the whole text

When structuring assignments and answers to exam questions:

Introduction gives thesis and overview → Body paragraphs give details → Conclusion repeats the overview
Divide

Make study tasks more manageable by dividing them up into a series of smaller tasks

How do you eat something the size of an elephant?
One bite at a time.

Divide your study time into chunks of about 50 minutes and take a break every hour.

Break up your assignment into smaller tasks and focus on each task one at a time.

Focus on one paragraph at a time when writing your assignments.

Don’t try to read everything at one time. Break up your reading into articles or chapters or even parts of these.
Vary

People are more alert to changes in their environment and tend to lose concentration when things remain the same.

We often only become aware a cricket is chirping when it stops

The human brain is more able to pick up variations between things than be able to judge if something is right without comparing.

Many people can’t judge if two shades of pink are the same until they try them on together

Lines that are crooked become apparent only when seen in comparison with other lines.
Vary

**We can concentrate better if we vary our study tasks regularly.**

Change study tasks every hour or so. Alternate tasks that require intense concentration with more routine tasks. Intersperse study with physical and leisure activities.
Incubate

We learn more if we give our brains time to process

The solution to a problem often appears if you leave it and focus on something else.

Leave your assignment draft overnight. You will see corrections you did not notice before.

If you have a reading that is difficult to follow, reread it the next day. It will be clearer then.

It is the same with maths problems.
Revise

The more we revise the more we remember

Review your lecture notes on the same day or the day following the lecture. Summarise your lecture notes for each week. Reread these throughout semester.

Make notes on your readings. Reread the notes a week later and again before exams.

Use the little bits of time on the bus, between lectures or waiting for someone, to quickly review one set of notes.

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Engage

Learning involves attention and concentration

Don’t just read – *do something* with the information

Study Actively

- Underline
- Highlight
- Map
- Rewrite

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These strategies work together. For example:

- Incubation occurs when you vary your tasks
- Revising is easier if you divide it up into manageable chunks
- Engagement is easier in short bursts. Divide tasks and vary between concentrated and routine tasks
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