



### How can I study better?

This is a question I am often confronted with. Often, we begin by looking at what this student's current routine is and find that they are already studying well. At other times, we find the student is struggling to motivate himself to study and finds every distraction going to avoid the books. However, different as they may seem, both students often have the same issue- their beliefs are getting in their way. One believes he is not doing enough; the other often believes there's no point studying, or he is incapable of studying.

So, in order to study better, the first thing I would address is my mindset and my beliefs. I can list off all the criteria for good study habits, (no distractions, good light and ventilation, all your equipment organised, even a lovely printed study timetable), but none of this is of any use to me if my beliefs get in the way of using them.

### Step 1: Become aware of your beliefs

To achieve your goals, (study, sporting or otherwise), remember that it is ultimately the actions you choose, not chance, that determines your reality. You have the power to achieve anything, but **you must first believe that you can**, and certainly not hold the belief that you can't.

So, to study better, it is useful to become aware of (1) what you are doing, and (2) what you want to achieve. Sometimes you find the two don't go hand in hand. You may (1) want to do better in school, but (2) do not work much at schoolwork. So, what now? Now you need to become aware of your beliefs. (3) What thoughts/beliefs are making me behave the way I am?

**We follow our beliefs, not our goals.** So, the answer to the third question is important to become aware of. If we are to change our behaviour, we must change our beliefs.

Understand your beliefs.

- Your beliefs govern your habits and behaviours. Your habits will enable you to achieve your goals or not.
- What you believe you will always seek proof of. We sometimes engage in actions that don't support our goal, but instead prove our beliefs. So, we follow our beliefs, not our goals.
  - In action this looks like:
    - Goal: To study maths and get a H5 in the LC.
    - Belief: "I'm not great at maths, it's my worst subject, It's very hard".
    - Resulting behaviour: I hit a gap in my learning as I study, and instead of seeking help, I give up and move to another subject.
    - Outcome: Maths is my worst subject as I don't fill in the gaps in my learning the way I would in other subjects, because I don't believe I can do better.

But there is a way to change this outcome

The alternative is to become **aware** of a negative thought and **see this obstacle as the way forward**.

“If I can show myself that I can do this question with the help of \_\_\_\_, then I know that I AM Capable of doing well in maths”. So, I seek help, and fill the gap in my learning.

Use empowering “I am”, “I trust” and “I will” statements to pull you towards your goals, and help you to uncover and become aware of any negative beliefs you may have that could stop you from pursuing your goals (these are the “but if..” thoughts that come after you think of your goal). Too often we give up, without even realising we did.

Self-awareness is the key, so you can choose what to think, what to believe and how to act.

### **Step Two: Set a goal**

To motivate yourself it is important to have a goal. If you write down your goal, you are 39% more likely to achieve it. Do this now. Write down your goal (it could be target grades for each subject, or it could be a course/job you want to pursue, for example)

What beliefs follow your goal? At this point you may be able to identify some smaller goals. These may come in the form of thoughts or beliefs that go against your goal. Such as “Ah but, it’s too hard”, “I’m tired”, “I don’t know where to start”. Tackle these one by one and check out their accuracy.

- “Am I really tired..... If yes, I need to change my routine, so I won’t be tired tomorrow”.
- “Where to start.... if I just start somewhere, then I won’t have to worry about this anymore”.
- “It’s too hard.... Well have I tried yet? If no, then try. If yes, then I need to ask for help, so get started”.

If you are having trouble getting started, begin with a subject you like.

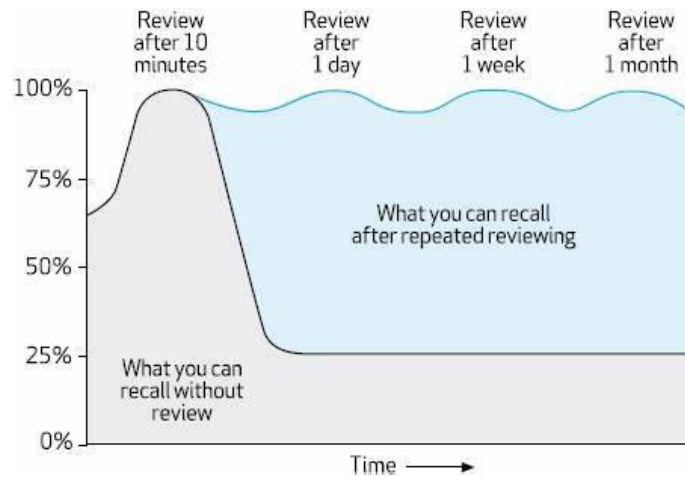
### **Step three: Meet your goal**

Study should focus on the gaps in your learning. So, it’s important to identify an area you are unsure of. It means you can work on an area that really needs work. It is our tendency to be drawn to the things we know, the familiar. But in study you are looking for gaps in your knowledge. So, if you set a goal to revise an English poem, to help you to get your desired grade, begin by identifying what you know and don’t know about this poem. You could look at past questions, and orally answer them to find gaps in your knowledge (writing can be slower, but if you prefer to write do it. This is your study session). The SQ3R method of reading outlined below is a useful way to become aware of the gaps in your learning.

#### **Use SQ3R for reading**

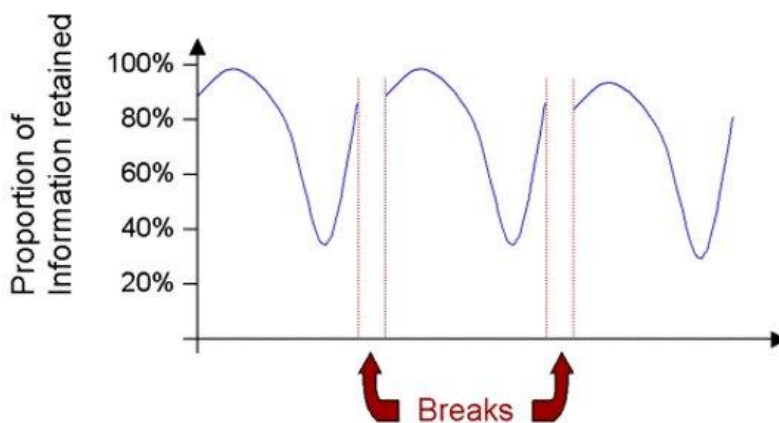
- S= Survey. What is the chapter/page/poem about? This prepares your brain for what’s coming.
- Q= Question. Turn every heading, bold or highlighted word, graph, into a question. Try to mentally answer each question you come up with. You are checking for **gaps** in your knowledge. If you come to a word or phrase you do not recall, you will be more focused when you read about it, because you are aware of the gap.
- R = Read. Only now read the definitions/paragraphs/your notes etc, knowing what you remembered and what you did not will help you to stay active and focused.

- R= Recite. This is the time to learn off. If you are an oral learner say things over and over and ask people to test you orally. If you are a visual person you might write main points or do a visual representation such as a mind map as you explain the topic to yourself again and again.
- R= Revise. We know that repeated retrieval enhances long-term retention. This is because memory works through neural connections in the brain. To recall information, we need a strong connection. These neural connections are strengthened each time we recall a topic or each time we practice. “Practice makes perfect”, Why? Because practice requires us to revisit a skill many times. Study works the same way. The more often you recall information, the stronger the neural connection becomes and the easier it will be to recall in the exam. So, revise what you covered yesterday again today (briefly). Revise it again in a week. This will help you to recall this learning for a much longer period:



**You study best at the beginning and end of a study session**

Don't forget to take regular short breaks while studying, as this too helps concentration and learning. We study best at the beginning and end of breaks, so try to have many beginnings and ends in two-hour block (a walk to have a glass of water every 30/40 minutes or so).



**Focus on tasks not time**

If you tell yourself, “I’ll study business for 1 hour”, you haven’t set any tangible/visible result. You could sit there listening to “Dance monkey” and flicking through the business book but learn very little. If I believe I cannot study, and then I sit down and don’t manage to study, this feeds my negative belief and takes me further from my goal. We need to see we can achieve our goals in order to dismiss any negative beliefs we have. Feeling successful is what keeps us striving. So, we need our study sessions to feel successful.

So, set “tiny tickable tasks” that you can achieve. This will help you to be task focused.

Have definite criteria for success? This sounds like: “My tickable task is to learn the sources of finance for business and be able to name, explain and give an example of long, medium- and short-term sources of finance”.

So now if I can “name, explain and give an example of long, medium- and short-term sources of finance” after whatever amount of time (an hour/30 minutes), I will feel successful as I have achieved a task. This success will help me to keep going and set a new task.

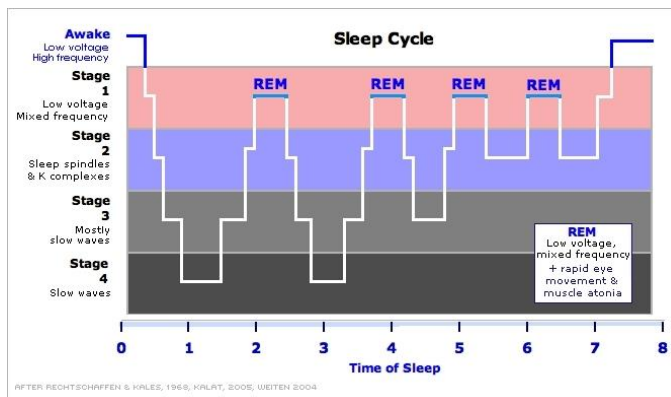
Keep a record of this revision work, as it too spurs you on when you see how well you are doing, and how much you have achieved. It also helps you to do that all-important quick recall revision the next day and in a week from now.

#### **Step Four: Have a good balance and routine**

Don't forget study is not done in isolation from other factors within yourself. Too much study is not good for anyone. Have a look at the information sheet on routine on the Colaiste Choilm Website, and make sure you are looking after your BACE needs. If you are doing work assigned by teachers and/or study, you are already looking after Achievement. So, make sure to look after the three others: Body (eating well, water, exercise, sleep etc.), Connections and Enjoyment.

#### ***Sleep is so important for learning***

We have all heard the phrase “Sleep on it”. What does it mean? It refers to the consolidation of learning that takes place while we sleep. If you get a good number of REM sleep periods during sleep, you will more easily recall and understand what you have learned today. The best time to sleep (biologically, not just my advice) is from 10pm to 6am. So, try to sleep during this period (not 2am-12pm or you will miss REM periods of sleep).



#### ***Water for Learning***

Water boosts your brainpower. When you drink more water, you improve your cognitive performance. Even mild dehydration can impair cognitive function. So, when you need to focus, study, take a test, or use all your brainpower, keep a glass of water next to you and keep sipping.

There are some more study skills resources at [https://careersportal.ie/studyskills/index\\_more.php](https://careersportal.ie/studyskills/index_more.php) or using the following links:

[Learning Skills Workbook](#)

[Place of Study](#) (example below)

[Organisation](#) (example below)

[Motivation and Goal Setting](#)

[Reading Skills](#)

[Note Taking Skills](#)

[Revising and Exam Preparation](#)



[Examination Performance](#)

# Study Skills - 1

## Place of Study

### Is your place of study optimised for efficient and rewarding study?

Below are some tips offered by students who achieved their goals and got the results they wanted. Read through each item and decide if it applies to the way you currently study. If it does, mark the box on the left - indicating that this contributes to your study success. If not, mark the box on the right, indicating that this is moving you away from your study goals.

- |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | <b>I study by myself:</b> If possible do your study/school work in a room by yourself. Arrange with parent/guardian that you have a place of study that is quiet and is separate from others in the house.                                                                                                                          |    |
|    | <b>Not too hot, not too cold:</b> It is important that the temperature is comfortable in the room you study in. A room that is too warm or stuffy or too cold can have a big impact on your ability to concentrate.                                                                                                                 |    |
|    | <b>There is good lighting on my desk:</b> A desk lamp is useful to avoid eye strain. Place your lamp on the opposite side to the hand that you write with. This way you will avoid shadows falling across your page.                                                                                                                |    |
|    | <b>I keep my desk free from clutter:</b> Ensure that your desk is tidy and free of clutter before you start a study session. Before you begin spend a couple of minutes organizing your desk. You will be amazed how better it makes you feel to work on a desk that is neat and free of clutter.                                   |    |
|  | <b>I actively discourage interruption:</b> Getting distracted by others can be very annoying and frustrating. Get the support of your parent or guardian on having your study place free from interruptions and noise. Turn off your mobile as soon as you start study.                                                             |  |
|  | <b>I made sure the chair I sit at during study was suitable:</b> During study you need to sit for a long period of time. Make sure that your chair is as comfortable as possible.                                                                                                                                                   |  |
|  | <b>Assign study times, and let your friends know!</b> It is important that you inform your friends, parents and family members of your study times. Arrange to text, phone or see friends outside study times. You will not lose friends by letting them know what you want!                                                        |  |
|  | <b>There are no TV / Radio / Internet distractions:</b> Reduce or cut out distraction from TV and music during your study times. Research tells us that it is better for students to work without background music or radio. If this is difficult for you to forego then try rewarding yourself with them during study break times. |  |
|  | <b>Have necessary resources to hand:</b> Always have the textbooks and equipment at hand that you are going to need for the study period.                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
|  | <b>I reserve my study desk for study and study only:</b> Never use your study desk for leisure activities such as listening to music. Get your brain to associate your place of study with study activity and nothing else.                                                                                                         |  |

### What actions can you now take to increase your study success?

# Study Skills - 2

# Being Organised

## How organised are you?

The following is a list of key items regarding the way you organise your study. Read down through the tips offered by students who achieved their goals and got the results they wanted.

For each item, decide how it applies to the way you currently study. If it does, mark the box on the left - indicating that this contributes to your study success. If not, mark the box on the right, indicating that this is moving you away from your study goals.

**I used a Timetable:** It is vital that you draw up a timetable at the beginning of each week. Remember that the purpose of the timetable is to make your life easier. It will help you get more organised and take control, which in turn will result in less stress.



**I never neglected to include leisure time into weekly timetable:** Include your leisure activities into the timetable also. This will increase the chances of you sticking to the timetable you draw up.



**I set myself precise learning goals:** It is strongly recommended that you spend time before you begin your study/homework session asking yourself 'what do I want to know at the end of working on this topic or question?'. Ask this for each topic/subject and write it down on a list before you start the session. Be as specific as possible on what you aim to know. This approach will give you focus and a sense of purpose.



**I set time limits:** In your Leaving Cert. examination you will be expected to work against the clock. Your study should also involve working against the clock. Allocate a set time for each study topic or question. Your teachers will be able to suggest how much time is reasonable to study any given question.



**Prioritise:** Subjects taken at Higher Level demand more time and carry more Leaving Cert. points than subjects taken at Pass level. The time you put into subjects taken at Honours Level should therefore be greater than the time given to your Pass Level subjects. Keep this in mind when drawing up your weekly and daily timetable.



**I took frequent short breaks:** Educational Psychologists tell us that it is better to take frequent short breaks rather than infrequent long breaks. A 5-10 min break every 40 min is best for concentration and productive study. Try building this option into your timetable.

## What actions can you now take to increase your study success?