

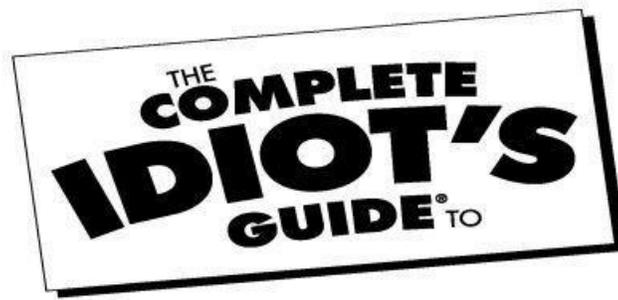
THE
**COMPLETE
IDIOT'S
GUIDE®** TO

Study Skills

*by Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D., and
Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.*



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Study Skills

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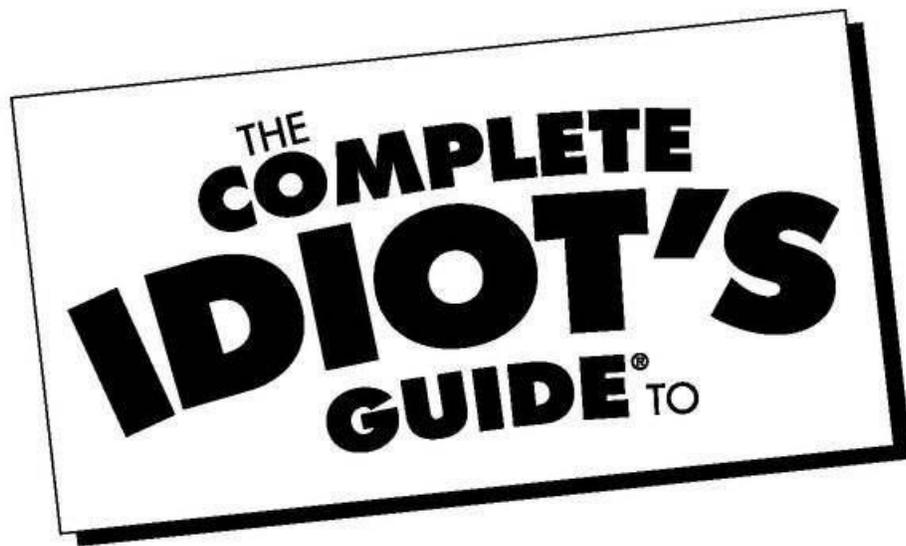
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*This book is dedicated in memory of Vera Hansen—and to all life-long learners
everywhere.*

Introduction

We want this book to be your guide, your companion, to achieving greater academic success and achieving the success you desire—ideally, without your having to make great sacrifices or changes to do so.

Our agenda? Simply put, we want to help you succeed in school. We want to empower you to achieve the success you desire. We want you to view learning not as a struggle, but as a success. We want you to not only become a better student and develop an appreciation for learning, but also use these skills to move forward with your life and career beyond college. We'll help you break bad habits and establish new good ones.

We are both college professors, career experts, and parents. We know firsthand the academic struggles that some students face. We know that some school systems appear to do a poor job in preparing students for the rigors of college-level work. We know the pressures some parents put on their children to succeed—and the ensuing frustrations that come from not knowing how to achieve the success your parents desire from you.

We wrote this book to help you. We truly believe you'll be able to use many of the suggestions, tools, and tips in this book to perform at a higher academic level.

What's in It for Me?

Simply put, this book could change your life for the better. It might not seem as though grades are all that important, especially if you are a good student already. But believe us when we tell you that developing many of the habits and methods in this book now will also serve you well later in life.

This book can help you perform better academically. If you're struggling with grades, this book will help you pass your classes and feel confident about yourself. If you are doing average work, this book will help push you to higher levels of academic success. And even if you are currently a top student, you can learn still new things to improve your study habits and keep you achieving those top grades!

Besides doing obvious things like making you feel better about yourself, increasing your self-confidence and self-esteem, and making your family proud, achieving better grades will open more career doors (some employers screen applicants by grades) and help you gain entry to graduate school if you decide to continue your education.

Our goal is to help you become a strategic learner, a student who possesses effective and efficient study skills strategies for reading textbooks, taking class notes, studying for exams, and writing papers. More specifically, this book will help you become a better student by showing you how to

...

- Find the one best study method for you.
- Study more efficiently and effectively.
- Actively listen and learn.
- Manage your time and avoid procrastination.
- Prepare for classes and take better notes.
- Perform better on all types of tests.
- Conduct thorough research.
- Write well on everything from essays to term papers.
- Manage your stress and achieve balance.

Finally, this book will also help you be happier and more successful in general. You can easily apply many of the strategies in this book to life situations. You can use the time management or writing skills you'll develop (or the many other tips and tools you'll learn) to achieve personal and professional success.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized in five parts around something we call the TEST Method, a guide for developing solid study skills.

What does TEST stand for?

- Taking responsibility for learning
- Establishing success in the classroom
- Succeeding with writing
- Tackling tough issues

TEST is not some simple system for improving academic performance. It's a philosophy of becoming a better student that results in smarter study skills and higher performance in the classroom—a philosophy that you can incorporate into your life.

Part 1, “Pre-TEST—Laying the Groundwork,” focuses on clearing your mind about academic success while preparing for success by examining study myths, rules for improving your grades, and study tips from top students.

Part 2, “Taking Responsibility for Learning,” highlights the information you need to understand about yourself—and methods to improve any deficiencies—before you can achieve greater academic success. These include managing your time issues, finding your learning style, and reading strategies.

Part 3, “Establishing Success in the Classroom,” stresses the tools you need to succeed in school, with special emphasis on four areas: class preparation and note taking, study tools, testing techniques, and special techniques for key subject areas.

Part 4, “Succeeding with Writing,” spotlights the importance of writing in achieving academic success and covers such key issues as research methods, writing essentials, and success in specific types of writing assignments.

Part 5, “Tackling Tough Issues,” gives you solutions to some common problems students face when they're attempting to improve their grades. We include ways to manage stress and achieve balance, as well as tips for times when your grades are not improving.

Extras

As you work your way through the book, you'll encounter some extra bits of information that we believe you will find helpful as you attempt to improve your study skills and achieve better grades.

Here's what you can expect:



Study Suggestions

Concise and useful tips and ideas for improving your grades.



Study Stories

Short anecdotes and inspiring words from real students who have achieved academic success.



Study Stressors

Activities, habits, and other things you'll want to avoid in order to improve your studying skills.

Acknowledgments

We've had some amazing students over the years—and not all of them were top academic performers. All truly valued learning and did their best to improve their academic performance. Many of these students are quoted throughout the book, graciously offering you, the reader, their wisdom and insights into academic achievement. This book is dedicated to all of our students.

Specifically, we would like to thank the following people for their enthusiastic input and support: Heather Albright, Emily Ball, Patrick Bauer, Steven Bennett, Laura Boyd, Jim Bureson, Cayla Culver, Peter Dzuba, Maria Forlivo, Stephanie Griggs, Matt Guy, Tracy Heidenfelder, Micaela Hermann, Jessica Hoch, Amber Janney, Erin Lovell, Megan McDonough, Ben Millar, Sabrina Otaibi, Sarah Petty, Marissa Pilson, Renee Poulin, Jill Sears, Morgan Seedarne, Jessica Walton, Laura Whalen, Adrienne Wilhelm, and Nicole Zarrella.

And a special thanks goes to our editor, Randy Ladenheim-Gil, for encouraging us to develop the best study skills book on the market—one based on our years of experience as college professors, solid educational research, and the advice of proven strategic learners.

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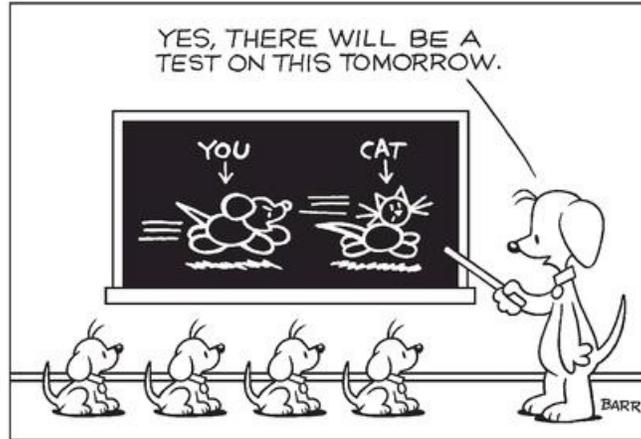
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Part 1

Pre TEST Laying the Groundwork

Before you can truly begin using the TEST Method we discuss in depth in the other parts of this book, it's helpful for you to review these three chapters.

You'll find information on the most common study myths, rules for studying, and tips from top students. Once you've read these chapters, you'll have a strong foundation for understanding how to use the methods we discuss in the rest of the book.



Chapter 1

Five Myths About Studying

In This Chapter

- Learn the truth behind common study misconceptions
- See the connection between studying and success
- Take a first step toward studying smarter
- Move beyond these five myths

Congratulations! By opening this book and reading this first chapter, you are starting the process of studying smarter and moving beyond some of the common misconceptions students often have about studying. Believing in these myths can actually block you from obtaining the academic success you desire.

If you're like the typical student, you may have breezed through high school on your way to college—or you may be in high school right now. But what you're probably discovering is that the study skills (if any) that might have worked for you in high school do not work for you in college. Of course, you may also be the type of student who has always had to work hard—maybe harder than you think you should—to get passing grades in high school, and for whom school is a constant battle.

For whatever reasons, many students have misconceptions about learning in school. Certain myths result in counterproductive, exhausting, and sometimes very bad study habits—all of which can result in weak academic performance.

This chapter is all about debunking the most common myths about studying to help you get started becoming a strategic learner, developing better overall study skills, and earning higher grades.

Studying More/Longer Results in Good Grades

Some people seem to think that the solution to getting better grades is simply committing more time to studying. In some ways, it would be nice if it were true. Then again, we should be happy it's not true: who wants to be stuck indoors all day staring at a computer screen or reading a textbook?

While it's true that you may need to commit more time to studying, preparing, reading, and writing, it is certainly not true that simply putting in more time will result in any kind of positive change.



Study Stories

"It is strange, but I find that I am studying less now that I am in college—but I am studying the more important stuff. I have figured out which information is important in a textbook and which information is just a waste of space in my memory, and have adjusted my studying accordingly."

—Emily B.

Many of our students over the years have told us that they barely spent any time studying while they were in high school, so when they entered college, they assumed they needed to study longer to earn the grades they so easily had achieved in high school. Guess what? Just putting in the hours did not give them the results they sought. They had to find a better way.

We know a professor who has a chart that shows his students the grade they can expect based on how many hours they study. How sad that he perpetuates the myth that studying more will result in better grades.

Using the tools and resources you'll find in later chapters of this book will help you develop an efficient study system that works for you. You'll still need to devote a lot of time to studying—but you'll learn that what matters most is not the number of hours you commit, rather the quality of studying.



Study Stories

"My first semester of college was kind of a wake-up call for me. I remember doing poorly on my first couple of exams and the pressure I felt from my folks to get the kind of grades I got in high school. So I doubled my efforts for the second round of tests and felt confident that all that extra time would improve my grades. Well, the midterms came and went, and so did my hopes for doing well in college. I was lost about what more I could do to improve my grades."

—Steve B.

If you Google “study skills,” you’ll find a lot of people and organizations trying to sell you the one study system that will help you achieve amazing academic success. Maybe you already believe this myth because others have told you so. Maybe you thought this book was going to provide you with the “one” method.



Study Stories

“One thing I learned was that I had to adapt or change my study method according to the class. I couldn’t study for a religion class the same way I studied for a finance class. But making sure I had enough time to study for each class—even if it meant carrying a planner with me at all times—was a big part of my success.”

—Sarah P.

Unfortunately for all the unsuspecting buyers of these “proven study systems,” no one system works for all students. Instead (and this philosophy is the premise of this book) each student has to discover the best system, partly based on issues such as personal learning style, available time, and reading and writing abilities. What worked for your mom, dad, or sister—or what works for your roommate—will not necessarily work for you. Furthermore, what works in one subject may not even work in others.

The reality is that studying—and finding the study method that works for you and leads you to becoming a strategic learner—takes practice and involves some trial and error until you find what works best for you.

The focus of this book is to guide you to becoming a strategic learner. We’ll help you discover the most important aspects of academic success. We’ll also guide you in developing a study system that consists of an inventory of study strategies that will help you achieve all your academic goals.

Knowing the Course Material Is Enough

One of the recurring themes of this book is the importance of knowing—really knowing—what is required of you in every course you take. Read the course syllabus very carefully and ask the professor about any areas of it that you don't understand. There's no excuse for not understanding what you need to do and learning if it is clearly addressed on the syllabus.

You might be asking yourself, "Aren't I graded on the course material, and thus shouldn't knowing it thoroughly be enough to earn the grades I seek?" Logically, the answer is yes, but that's the basis of this myth.

The truth is that college and college-level courses are designed to go much deeper than simple knowledge of the material. These courses are designed to make you apply the basic knowledge—terms, theories, and models—to new situations, to deepen your understanding of the topic.

Thus, while you certainly need to thoroughly understand the course materials, you'll often need to become much more proactive about your learning and find a way to deepen your level of understanding.



Study Stories

"I would describe my study method as proactive. I don't wait until I don't understand something or until I have a test to study. I stay on top of my work and start on projects soon after they are assigned. Each day I think about each of my classes and what is going on in them: what we are learning, what projects are in progress, and when the next tests are. If I didn't understand something from the day's lecture, I'll study it so that I don't get behind."

—Cayla C.

You'll find some great tools and suggestions later in this book for how to get to this deeper level of understanding that most professors seek from students.

Cramming the Night Before Will Keep Material Fresh

One of the common “urban legends” of college is that most students stay up the night before big tests and study in one concentrated effort. The story goes that if you study in this manner, the material will be fresh in your head and you’ll be able to easily recall it for the test.



Study Stressors

Avoid cramming for an exam. As a last resort, it’s better than nothing, but you’ll accomplish very little of the detailed thought processes and analysis you get from studying daily. Plus, you’ll face exhaustion because of the lack of sleep, have much higher levels of anxiety, and face higher chances of illness from a weakened immune system. If you do have to cram, focus your energies on basic terminology and lists that can be easily memorized.

The truth is that the best students do not—except out of sheer necessity at times—pull all-nighters. Instead, these high-performing students have learned the importance of studying over a longer period of time, actually learning and retaining the material rather than relying on short-term memory to perform well on tests and exams.



Study Stories

“I break up studying over several days and over the course of the evening and day. Cramming never works for me, so I try not to do it. I will have longer sessions on nights before big tests, but I never stay up much later than what is normal for me before tests. I know that if I take the test tired the next day, I will not do as well as if I was rested.”

—Laura B.

This book will show you the power of long-term learning and the advantages of studying daily, which often results in fewer hours committed to studying—and certainly does away with the sleep deprivation and other problems associated with cramming and all-night study sessions.



Study Stories

“I recommend beginning to study for a test at least three nights in advance, because I have found that you don’t actually learn when you cram the night before. And not only does that hurt your chances of doing well on the current exam, but it also means that, come finals time, you’ll have to work twice as hard to study since you didn’t learn the material the first time.”

—Meghan M.

Writing Has Very Little Impact on Learning

We're guessing the person who started this myth was not very fond of writing because a vast amount of research shows just the opposite: writing has a very powerful impact on learning, retaining, and understanding course materials. Some researchers believe that writing helps students develop new knowledge—by sorting through previous understandings, drawing connections, and uncovering new ideas as they write.



Study Stories

"I learned pretty early in college the power of writing stuff in helping me learn the material better. I would rewrite my class notes, take notes while reading the textbook, and even write my own study guides. I knew it helped me do better on tests, but it took longer to realize that not only was I remembering the material better over a longer period, but I was also able to begin making connections between classes."

—Jill S.

The truth is, there is great validity to the idea that the more you write and rewrite your lecture and book notes, the more information you'll retain. You'll also be more likely to begin making the deeper types of connections and discoveries that are so important to academic success.

In terms of study skills and academic success, we'll show you in later chapters the value of writing and rewriting your classroom notes, writing reactions to textbook readings, and even writing study guides before major tests. Of course, we also devote several chapters to succeeding with written assignments, such as essays and term papers.



Study Stories

"I rewrite my notes and form a study sheet for tests. This helps because not only am I *reading* it for at least the second time, I am also *writing* it for the second time. I have a photographic memory, so seeing my notes multiple times really helps me."

—Amber J.