WHAT WORKS

**Regular Attendance:** Students who are in class can hear what the teacher thinks is important, know about changes in assignments and tests, meet with other students, and gain the benefits of being part of the class. This contributes toward academic success.

**Prioritizing Activities** Know what you want in the short and long term. Make choices based on your goals to achieve success.

**Getting Help Early:** Know how you are doing in each course. If you need help, get it immediately. Instructors and tutors are your best resource when you need help. Aunt Jo may be a math whiz, but she might be more focused on helping you get the right answer than on helping you learn the content.

**Disciplined Effort** Studying regularly, preparing for class, planning regular review sessions, and even putting in extra time when you need to pays off. This does not mean that you turn into a workaholic. A discipline person has time for a well-balanced life.

**Building Vocabulary:** Learning the vocabulary of each subject you are studying means that you “speak the language” of that discipline. You will be able to listen/read in that field and understand. You will be able to communicate your ideas with precision.

WHAT DOESN’T WORK

**Absence:** Unless you sign up for an independent study course, the class is designed with student attendance and participation in mind. You will miss important information, some of which will be on the test, and opportunities if you do not attend class.

**Overloading:** Students who try to do too much often find they don’t do anything well. Worse, they may crash and burn toward the middle- or end-of-term.

**Going it Alone:** Efficient and effective workers and learners are team members. Knowing how to work collaboratively is a modern job skill. Learn it now.

**Magic Bullets:** Audio tapes to play as you sleep, vitamins that enhance your learning, and other commercial gimmicks don’t work. Only work works, so save your money.

**Limited Vocabulary:** If you cannot use the language of the subject, you cannot understand the text or the lecture well, and you may not even understand the test questions when they come. Precise and specific use of the language of a subject is an indication of understanding.
**LEARN MORE IN LESS TIME**
Efficient learners follow a routine of study. Whether consciously or not, they use the following steps.

**SELECT** what needs to be learned. Select the main ideas from text and lecture; select vocabulary and formulas. If you have been told that something will be on the test, select that. You need to be able to say, "This is what I am going to learn."

**INTEND TO LEARN** what you have selected. Much of our learning is unintentional, but you do not want to leave school learning to chance. Decide to learn what needs to be learned. Set that as a goal.

**RECITE** what you intend to learn. Review the content, then reproduce the information from your memory either by writing it or by saying it out loud. Check that you recited correctly.

**OVERLEARN THE CONTENT** by reciting perfectly at least three times. Most often, learners repeat information imperfectly many times before they get it all right. Overlearning compensates for the many imperfect repetitions.

**USE SPACED PRACTICE** to ensure better retention. The best cycle is to review and recite within 24 hours of hearing or reading the information. Then review weekly to remember the information. The graph below, from *The Brain Book* by Peter Russell, shows how review helps memory.

**ALLOW CONSOLIDATION TIME** for the information you have learned to get firmly established in your long term memory. After a 45-50 minute study session, take a 10-15 minute break from any study at all.

**CELEBRATE** a little when you have accomplished your goal. Cross the goal off your "to-do" list, brew a pot of tea, or call a friend. Create your personal reward system for a job well done.
WHAT WORKS

Spaced Practice: Review a lecture or reading within an hour of the first time through. Review again with 24 hours. Review again within 7 days. After three reviews, you will retain between 70% and 80% of the information. Then before an exam, one or two times through the material brings it back up to near-perfect recall.

Key Idea Notes: Take notes that reflect concepts and patterns — the main ideas. Most student notes are too detailed. When you listen or read for the minimum notes possible, you are much more likely to concentrate on what’s most important.

Good Health: Being fit means that you will be alert and ready to learn. Exercise, good nutrition, and good rest are an investment in your future.

Natural Drugs: Serotonin, the brain’s own “feel good” drug, actually enhances learning. Your brain produces serotonin when you have a good attitude. So “psych yourself up” for study.

Relating: Correlating what you are learning to other information in the course, to your own experience, and to concepts in other courses. This will help you understand and recall what you are learning.

Multisensory learning: The more you use your senses when you learn, the easier it is to recall the information. Taking notes, reading and reciting aloud, using color, and discussing with others are all examples of multisensory learning.

WHAT DOESN’T WORK

Cramming: Cramming doesn’t work for long term learning. It may get you through a quiz, but information learned by cramming is soon forgotten. You need to learn for long term recall.

Verbatim Notes: Don’t try to capture everything in a lecture or reading. Pay close attention to material and distinguish main ideas from trivia.

Poor Health: Illness, fatigue, and absenteeism all result from poor health. It does not promote success.

Artificial Stimulants: Even “legal” drugs do more to inhibit clear thinking than they do to help it. Avoid them.

Rereading: Select what you will learn the first time through the text; make certain you understand that information; learn it.

Single sense learning: Using just one sense is less effective than multi-sense learning. Effective reading and listening both require active inquiry and association. Taking notes during reading and listening keeps attention focused and adds another sense.
WHAT IS TEST ANXIETY?

Anxiety comes from stress. Stress is the body’s response to demands put on it. Stress can be both positive and negative.

Good stress brings us to a peak performance. It feels good. Any professional performer trains both physically and mentally to achieve that peak amount of stress.

Negative stress, though is an excess of stress. It feels awful. In a testing situation, negative stress can come from either not being ready, not having prepared enough, or from psychological factors like worry or the belief that you will do poorly. It will be heightened by outside stresses like a fight with your parents or being hungry.

Negative stress in a testing situation is test anxiety.

Sometimes test anxiety is a reasonable reaction: the anxious person has not trained adequately for the performance.

For most people, the cure for test anxiety lies in adequate preparation and appropriate testing strategies.

PREPARE FOR THE TEST

Prepare intellectually by figuring out what will be on the test. Look at the course syllabus, old tests, chapter questions, lecture notes or study aids. Ask the teacher what will be on the test or take some time with your study group and brainstorm possible test items.

Make a study sheet for every topic you think will be on the test. These sheets contain the information you will learn so well that you can recite it from memory.

Set a schedule for learning your study sheets. Allow lots of time. Schedule review time, too.

Overlearn the material. It is not enough to recite it once perfectly. You need to review all of the material repeatedly until the test is done.

Prepare mentally by using positive self-talk. Psych yourself up. Visualize yourself taking the test and doing well. Create a practice test, do it, and see that you can do well.

Anticipate what might disturb you during the test and plan what you will do if this happens. It’s absolutely predictable that you will encounter some test questions that will throw you. Visualize how you
will skip the question and proceed to the next, returning later to answer this question.

Remind yourself how well you have prepared. Expect to do well.

**Prepare yourself physically by being especially conscientious about eating well, exercising, and sleeping well.**

If you choose to stay awake all night, overuse caffeine and cram, you run a high probability that you will feel ill on exam day. When you are ill, you are more likely to forget material.

**Prepare for the unexpected.** Get up extra early so that you will have time for unexpected problems. Think through what could go wrong -- sickness, a dead battery, a late bus, a full parking lot. Plan what you will do if a problem arises. You will have extra confidence if you have plans.

**EXAM STRATEGIES**

**Before the test.** The night before the test, you should gather everything you will need for the test. Have a blue book and scantron answer sheets. Have pencils, scratch paper, calculator -- whatever you will need for the test.

Arrive early and review your study sheets sitting in the classroom. Visualize your success.

Listen to everything the teacher says while distributing the test.

Then, jot down on your scratch paper what you are most worried about forgetting. You will have created your own "crib sheet," but it will not be cheating. Rather, it will reduce stress. You no longer have to worry about forgetting that information.

**During the test answer the easiest questions first.** Work through everything you know, building your confidence. Doing the easy items will also be a review for you.

Do not change an answer unless you can explain why you are changing your first response.

Plan your time so that you will complete the test. Pay particular attention to point distribution so that you will be sure to complete the big point questions.

Relax intentionally. At the end of each essay question or at the end of every 15 or so objective questions, you need to take 30 seconds to relax: take several long, deep breaths; roll your shoulders and head; relax your muscles; smile.

**Finished?** Review your paper. Make certain you have an answer for every question.

If these suggestions do not work for you, please visit a counselor. Some people experience truly debilitating anxiety and need professional help to learn to compensate.