

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.

I study by myself: 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.

Not too hot, not too cold: 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.

There is good lighting on my desk: 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.

I keep my desk free from clutter: Ensure that your desk is tidy and free of clutter before you start a study session. Before you begin spend a couple of minutes organising your desk. You will be amazed how much better it makes you feel to work on a desk that is neat and free of clutter.

I actively discourage interruption: 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.

I made sure the chair I sit at during study was suitable: During study you need to sit for a long period of time. Make sure that your chair is as comfortable as possible.

Assign study times and let your friends know! 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!

There are no TV / Radio / Internet distractions: 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.

Have necessary resources to hand: Always have the textbooks and equipment at hand that you are going to need for the study period.

I reserve my study desk for study and study only: 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?

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 my 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 daily and weekly 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?

Student Name: _____

Study Skills - 3

Motivation & Goal Setting

How to get and stay motivated?

First ask yourself the following:

What do you want from school?

What do you want in terms of career or college?

What will you need from school to go after the career/course/job you want?

The answers to these questions may not reveal themselves overnight. Students who have already been through the Leaving Cert have offered the following pointers as a way to get and stay motivated.

For each item, indicate how it applies to you. If you have already taken action on the points raised, 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.

Make a written statement of what you want to achieve in your Leaving Cert: Revisit the **Setting Targets** worksheet and be satisfied that you are happy with the target results you have set. Seek the advice of a teacher, parent, or your Guidance Counsellor when setting these targets. Writing down the targets I wanted to achieve made me focus more on what I really wanted.

Clarify what you want to do with these results: If you are not sure, arrange an interview with your school Guidance Counsellor as early as possible. You can explore careers and college options by doing the following:

Set 30/60 minutes aside each week to browse college literature or visit college web sites for information on courses and careers in further education.

Attend College Open Days* and careers exhibitions during the year. Select the dates of 2/3 events that you will attend this year.

Take the online Careers Interest Test on www.careersportal.ie and explore the career and courses that match your interests.

Avoid missing out on class time: The more class time you miss the greater the risk of missing important learning points.

Cut out the part-time job: Hard to let go if you have one, but think about it - you have a job of study that will bring you great returns if you do it well.

Believe you have a bright future: There were never as many career and college course opportunities for those taking their Leaving Cert. as there is now. I explored the alternative routes to getting my dream. I think it's very important to explore as many options as possible.

Look after your health: Eat well and get adequate sleep and exercise. An obvious point, but it's easy to neglect your health as examinations approach. Psychology is now revealing links between physical and mental health. A person's physical well being has a huge impact on their ability to concentrate and relax when required.

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

* For a listing of all college days and other important career events, go to www.qualifax.ie and select 'Career Events'

How efficient are you at understanding what you read?**Learning from Textbooks**

Textbooks are basic tools in every student's learning. Efficient use of the textbook is therefore a very important study skill. There are ways of improving your reading so that you can understand and learn more.

One of the key points is to become more active and engaged with your textbook. Let's face it, textbooks are rarely exciting in themselves. The following proven method of using textbooks will improve your ability to learn. If you follow the method outlined below your textbook can become the most important tool at your disposal.

The **SQ3R** system is a reading method practiced by many students with good success. Read down through the descriptions and have a go at using this method the next time you use a textbook.

For each item, indicate whether you currently use this method. If you do, 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.

S = SURVEY - the information necessary to focus more sharply on the material.

Spend a few moments browsing through the part of the book you are going to read. Take note of the way the author has organised the information. The headings and the sub-headings give you the best idea of the way the writer has arranged the key points. Be careful to note any diagrams, tables and maps there may be. Note the heading used and what is shown.

The purpose of this survey is to gather the information necessary in order to get focused and to decide what it is you are about to learn. This activity will help you formulate questions relating to the given subject.

Q = QUESTION – come up with questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? relating to what you are about to read.

One section at a time, turn the main headings into as many questions as you think will be answered in that section. The better the questions, the better your comprehension is likely to be. You may always add further questions as you proceed. When your mind is actively searching for answers to questions it becomes engaged in learning. So you will always be reading with the purpose of finding answers to the questions you have come up with.

R = READ - fill in the information around the questions you have come up with.

You will have accomplished much of the first two steps in only a few moments and so the time you will spend on step 3 will be reduced. Only now do you actually read the words in the section. Read each section with your questions in mind. Look for the answers, and notice if you need to make up some new questions. Note down your questions on paper.

R = RECALL - test how much of what you have just read you can remember.

After reading each section put the book to one side and try to recall the answers to the question you posed. Jot your points down in quick note form (see the note taking skills section). Look back again at the textbook (as often as necessary) and fill in any points you may have missed out on. Don't go on to the next section until you can answer those questions.

R = REVIEW - re-enforce what you have just learned.

When you are coming near to the end of your allocated time for this section of your study session, review all you have read. Go back over all the questions from all the sections in the textbook you covered during this session. See if you can still answer them. If not, look back on your notes and refresh your memory.

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

Are your notes helping you do your exams?

Read down through the tips offered by students who went before you and note the suggestions that you might need to act on. With the help of your Guidance Counsellor, teacher or parents, work out a plan to introduce the necessary changes to the way you take your notes.

For each item, indicate whether you currently use this method. If you do, 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 took notes as often as I could: I took notes when reading material from textbooks and other sources for the first time. Whenever possible I took notes in class.

I kept my notes brief but informative: I included information and not just headings in my notes but at the same time I kept my notes very brief. I'd advise that you only include enough key words or phrases that will bring the essential information/ideas to mind. Besides, one of the main reasons for taking notes is to save time, to allow more frequent revision. This won't happen unless your notes are brief and to the point.

I organised my notes for easy access: I placed my notes into a ring binder folder. I was able to divide my folder up into different Subject Sections. I had a separate section to deal with notes that I was still working on. As soon as I finished taking notes on a given topic, I would transfer them into a Subject Section I had created. The ring binder folder is flexible and allowed me add notes to any topic from time to time.

Alternatively you could use a separate folder for each subject and a separate folder for notes currently under construction. This approach will allow you to combine notes from different sources. You can get an overview of the whole topic more clearly.

My class notes had main points only: If you are taking notes in class do not try to take everything down that the teacher says in class. Spend more time listening and try to take down the main points.

Make your notes legible and easy to use: I discovered that it was very worthwhile making notes as clear and attractive as possible. The whole point in taking notes is that you refer to them often. As soon as I started to keep my notes in better shape I found it easy to refer back to them often. Up to then I had a tendency to clutter my notes. They must be easy and attractive to read. It is also a good idea to leave space to jot in additional notes later.

Watch for cues: It is essential that you note the main points covered in the textbook chapter or class. Be alert for clues as to what the teacher thinks is important. One of the essential skills in note taking is being able to identify the key points in what you are listening to or reading.

Use your own words: When taking notes I always tried to use my own words. You will remember your own phrases, sayings and expressions best. Definitions are an exception to this rule. Don't use full sentences.

Use visual cues and reminders: As the brain can deal with information much more easily when it is presented in maps or graphs, it is a good idea to have your notes in this format as much as possible. Use mindmaps where possible.

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

Student Name: _____

Study Skills - 6

Revising & Exam Preparation

Are you getting the most out of your hard work?

Tips for better Exam Preparation:

Below are some tips offered by students who achieved their goals and got the results they wanted. For each item, indicate whether you currently use this method/technique. If you do, 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 studied previous years exam papers: Get to know how the course is laid out in the exam itself by studying past exam papers. Then put your time into the material that is important in the course. Learn from your examination of past papers how the marks are allocated.

I got to know in advance how much is expected: Analyse past examination papers. Answer the questions in outline form. Jot down the *main ideas* and the *supporting ideas* for your answer. When you have completed the process refer to you own notes. Fill out and change your notes as necessary. This process involves testing, recalling and checking where the gaps or mistakes in your knowledge/understanding may be.

Practice against the clock: Write a complete answer to the question along the lines of your planned outline. Do this against the clock, allowing yourself the time that would be allocated in the exam itself. Don't use any notes or textbook during this exercise.

I isolated major topics: Be certain to isolate the major topics in your revision and learn them very well. While going over the contents of your notes try to anticipate possible examination questions.

I rewrote the main points as I went through my notes: Keep writing down the main points as you go through your notes. The writing process will fix the ideas in your mind.

I prepared for aural and orals months in advance: It's not good enough to start preparing for aural and oral sections of the exam paper a week or two before the test takes place. Practice should begin at the start of the course and continue right through the year. Know the amount of marks awarded for these sections and be sure to give the proportion of study time to them that reflects the amount of marks awarded.

Revising

Revising your subject questions, topics and themes are vital to your plan to help you get what you want from school. When you are first introduced to a topic in class you may understand it, but most of what you learn will be forgotten if you don't revise. In fact research shows us that without revision we will lose up to 90% of what we learn within 6 months. Revision helps you retain the material for a longer period of time. Revising also helps increase your understanding of the topic.

Revisit the material covered in class within two days: Educational Psychologists have discovered that it is most important to revise within 24 hours of first learning something. This will often be in the form of homework.

I included some revision in each study session: I set aside time at each study session to revise questions or topics I had learned in the past.

I became part of a study group: Four students in my class set up a study group. We would each prepare a topic and teach it to the group. Each person would have a set amount of time to teach the topic. This worked well because we had definite starting and finishing times. We gave about an hour and a half each week to this learning.

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

Student Name: _____

Study Skills - 7

Examination Performance

Can you deliver what you know effectively?

Below are some tips offered by students who achieved their goals and got the results they wanted. For each item, indicate whether you have used this method/technique in past exams. If you do, mark the box on the left - indicating that this contributes to achieving your target goals. If not, mark the box on the right, indicating that this is moving you away from your study goals.

Read the Instructions! Check the instructions at the beginning of each test paper carefully. There may be a small change in the exam format from year to year.

Read questions carefully: Read each question carefully. Highlight or underline the key words and phrases.

Check for compulsory questions: Tick the questions that must be answered in each section. Then tick off the question(s) you are likely to answer (using a different colour or symbol).

Allocate time for each question: This should be done before the exam itself. The amount of time spent on each question will be determined by the percentage of the overall marks going for the question. For example, the time you allow will double if the marks awarded are double those of other questions. Allow at least five to ten minutes at the start of the test to read over the paper and ten minutes at the end to read your answers. It's important that you try to stay within the time you have allocated for each question.

Begin with your best: Begin your exam with the question you feel you can best answer. If you do this you will build confidence in your ability to tackle the remainder of the test.

Plan your answer: Jot down an outline of your answers by noting the main points before you begin to work on the answer proper. It is good to let the examiner see this work.

Avoid clutter: Remember to allow plenty of space between points and sections and label all your answers clearly. Do everything you can to make the job of the examiner easier.

Keep an eye on the time: If you run over the allotted time when dealing with a question it may be better to leave a space and continue to the next question. Above all, avoid the disaster of not having time to attempt all the required number of questions.

Don't waffle: There are simply no marks going for repeating the same points or ideas. Be as clear and concise as you can. This does not mean that you don't explain things fully and give examples especially when you are expected to elaborate.

Understand typical question formats: Know exactly what is expected from you in an exam when asked to Compare, Contrast, Define, Discuss, Explain, Trace, Summarise, Describe and Outline. Take special note of words such as including, and, or.

Just a small dose of post mortem's: When your exam is over don't get involved in detailed post mortem's, turn your focus to the next exam. If you feel stressed or worried at the way things went it's best to chat with a sympathetic adult, or someone who can listen and offer you a balanced view of your performance.

If you have time to spare re-read your work: Don't stop working on your paper before time is up. There are no extra marks awarded for being finished early. Your exam is designed to be undertaken within the time allocated. If you have time left after you read over your paper read over it a second time. Ideas may come to you even at this final stage.

Use notes: It could happen that you discover that you have done something wrong, left a question out or perhaps misread a question. If time is not on your side, lay the correct answer out in note form first. Then elaborate on the notes. Try not to panic.

Bring a drink! Bring a drink of water into the exam hall with you in order to avoid dehydration.

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