

ACADEMIC SUCCESS TIPS
Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
Office of Student Programs and Professional Development
Sandra LaBlance: s-lablance@northwestern.edu

Time Management

- Prepare for each block the day before it begins
- Know what you plan on doing and when
- Follow your study plan
- Be organized
- Plan for the unexpected – pad your time management
- Your schedule should allow extra time for exam preparation
- Be prepared to take the exam one to two days before the exam

Study Skills

Find a method that works for you – make it active and visual

1. Use the SQ3R Method: **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecite, **R**eview
 - Survey your lecture notes and chapters by reading topic headings, introductions and summaries.
 - Question the material you are reading by changing topic headings into questions that you must answer. Use the question for the topic of your concept maps.
 - Read the material in your lecture notes/syllabi and slides with the chapters for clarification. Actively read by drawing your concept maps, writing out note cards for detailed information and talking out loud through the material.
 - Recite the material after you have drawn the concept maps and note cards. Talk yourself through the concepts and details to make sure you understand. Create a mini-lecture.
 - Review the material by writing a one to two page summary of your concept maps and note cards. Your summary page should have enough detail and clarity that you could use this for a presentation to teach others the material. If you are unable to pull together a clear, concise and meaningful summary, refer back to the lecture notes, chapters, your lecturer and classmates to gain a better understanding of the topics.
2. Find a Location to Study
 - Be comfortable, but not too comfortable. If you lose concentration frequently, it could be the location.
 - Create some urgency in your study. Set time limits that you must meet.
 - Replicate your exam situation. Complete a final review of all the material in your exam space using a time limit (three hours if it will be a three hour exam). Focus on questioning yourself on the material. Try to complete this at least two days before the exam so you will have time to fill in the blanks.

Self-Confidence

- Create positive self-talk. If you find yourself using negative and self-defeating self-talk, STOP! Reprogram yourself for success.
- Aim for the top, not for the median. Don't overprotect yourself by saying you'll be lucky/happy to get the median.
- Don't compare yourself to others. Find methods of learning, study, test-taking, self-reward and relaxing that work for YOU. Don't think about what others are doing – their methods may not work for you. Pay attention to what works for you and what doesn't. Always assess what you are doing.

Healthy Lifestyle

Diet

- Always eat breakfast, lunch and dinner – snacks in-between should be healthy.
- Five a day! Get your fruits and vegetables.
- Water-Water-Water. Keep yourself hydrated, at least 64 ounces a day. You should drink your water throughout the day – starting when you get up in the morning.
- Avoid caffeine in large quantities. If you drink a 16 oz. coffee every day, add 16 oz. of water to your suggested daily intake.
- Avoid alcohol in large quantities. No –binge drinking, especially as a reward.

Exercise

- Make exercise a part of your time management plan – and do it!
- At least 30 minutes per day, five days a week.
- Cardiovascular exercise (walking, running, biking, hiking, swimming) is great for stress relief and to refocus a tired mind.

Sleep

- What does your body need? If you need eight hours, get eight hours of sleep.
- If you need a nap during the day set your limit to 20 minutes.
- Set a bedtime and a waking time each day and stick to it. Try to keep the same hours on the weekends as you set during the week.
- Don't forgo sleep the night before an exam.

Stress Management

Use relaxation techniques 20 minutes every day, seven days a week

- Progressive Relaxation
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Guided Imagery
- Self-hypnosis
- Prayer

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Before an exam

- “Practice” taking the exam trying to replicate exam conditions.
- The night before the exam, practice relaxation techniques before bed and in the morning as you are waking.
- Avoid people who are anxious about the exam. “Create space” between yourself and others who are taking the exam.
- Set a reasonable reward for yourself to look forward to for doing your best

During an exam

- Find methods to use during the exam: for example, taking a break for deep breathing to calm yourself, if you feel anxious, use this as a cue to relax.
- Focus your attention on the test – don’t waste time worrying.
- Use positive self-talk throughout the exam.

After the exam

- Don’t review the exam with others. This will add more anxiety as you wait for the exam results.
- Enjoy your reward knowing you did the best you could for this exam
- Prepare for the next block making note of what you did well for the test block just completed and what you need to change.

If you need help or support with your academics, don’t wait too long before seeking assistance. Speak with your course directors, faculty, clerkship directors, attendings, residents, and/or deans if you are struggling to understand the material. If you need guidance in developing a study plan or learning issues contact Sandra LaBlance at 312-503-0428 or via e-mail at s-lablance@northwestern.edu