Review Strategies

Why review?

Information can be recalled effectively for up to 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, your ability to remember information decreases rapidly. By spending a few minutes reviewing material soon after you learn it, you can significantly reduce the time needed to relearn the knowledge when you need it. Timely review of course material enables you to improve the quality of future learning by building on a well-remembered foundation. This foundation allows your mind to make connections and linkages that it would not otherwise make.

Deciding what review strategies to use or what approach to take for an assignment before you begin can save you time later. Many students jump into an assignment or a study strategy and discover midway through the process that a different approach would have produced better results and saved time.

Some suggestions on how to approach an assignment or a study task:

1. Decide what you need to accomplish.
2. Determine how can you accomplish the task. What strategies can you use?
3. Decide what strategy is most appropriate for the material. You may need different learning strategies depending on the task. Ask yourself questions such as:
   - What kind of thinking and learning is required?
   - Do I need to learn facts and details or important ideas?
   - Am I expected to apply this to a new situation?
   - Am I expected to evaluate the material?

Some Review Strategies for Different Kinds of Learning Tasks:

Memorizing Facts

Identify what needs to be memorized. Create lists or study sheets of terms, parts, rules, data, or any material that you need to be able to recall exactly. Reviewing facts several times over a week is much more effective than one long study session. Practise reciting that material whenever you are waiting in line or while driving.

Memorizing is much easier if you also understand the process, concept, or relationships behind the facts because you will have a framework to use to organize the facts.
Understanding Concepts and Relationships Between Ideas

Look for connections between the new information and what you already know. Draw a concept map with the idea you want to understand in the middle of the page. Think of related ideas, processes, or examples and write those in whatever way makes sense to you around the concept in the middle. This strategy can also be used to gather ideas before writing a paper. Ask yourself how this concept is related to concepts covered earlier in the course.

Applying Ideas to Problems or Unfamiliar Situations

If you need to review course material as part of learning how to perform a task, procedure, or process, think about how the information affects the outcome of the procedure. Identify useful background information that will help you do the process. If appropriate, practise or think through the procedure or process, and identify key concepts or facts as you go through it.

For example, to paint a room, you will have to know:

- what tools are needed to do the job
- how to work with the paint, such as whether it will cover the existing paint or whether you will need a primer, what steps you need to know if you want to achieve a special effect by using a glaze
- other variables that affect the painting process, such as the kind of paint you should use, the surface you're painting on, the time of year, and ventilation required.

In this example, your knowledge of paint, tools needed to paint and the type of surface you're painting, will determine how successful you are with the painting process and the quality of the final product.

Taking Notes and Synthesizing Information

Taking notes is a way to limit the amount of information you need to learn. Note-taking is a process of making choices about what is important in the text and synthesizing or transferring that information to your notes. There are many note-taking systems; most students use some combination of marking the text and taking notes. In an online course, you will not have to take lecture notes, unless you also have in-class meetings or have audio- or video-enhanced lecture classes. You will have to know how to synthesize information from more than one source, particularly if your instructor uses websites as course resources.

Note: in dealing with online course materials, whether they are course content, or recommended websites, you will have to decide whether you will print them out and how much you will print. Some ways to minimize the amount of material you print out include:

- Copying and pasting material from multiple sites into a word processing document. Make sure you also copy and paste the URL of the site from which you found the information so you can go back to the site.
- Using the Compile feature of WebCT to pull together online course content into a print-friendly format. (See the Course Tools section of the Using WebCT module for instructions on how to use the Compile tool).

While you're reading, decide why you need notes - to study for a test? as supporting evidence for a paper? for future reference? You may need to make detailed notes for a test but only a short summary of the important ideas and the URL if you want the information for future reference.
Here are some suggestions on how to take notes that will help you learn course material:

1. Finish reading before you take notes or mark the text. You need to understand the full context of a paragraph or section before you decide what you need to record.

2. Be selective. Mark or note only meaningful words, phrases, and sentences. This step is difficult because to be selective you must read critically and think about what you have read. When taking your own notes, try to summarize ideas in one or two sentences.

3. When taking notes, use your own words. Unless you need a specific quotation of an author's ideas, writing down ideas using another person's words is a waste of time. You need to understand what you're reading well enough to write it using your own words.

4. Work quickly. Read, go back for a mini-overview, make your notes or markings, and move on.

5. Write clearly. Your notes are no good to you if you can't understand them later. Write in complete ideas, not disembodied words or phrases. If you are writing by hand, write neatly.

6. Cross-reference. If you find an idea that relates to a previous one, include that connection in your notes. It will help you when you are reviewing your notes.

7. Use visual aids. Draw, copy, or include diagrams, charts, and other graphics. With online materials, you can save images and insert them directly into your notes or print them and include them in your course binder.


**Reviewing for Class Discussions**

Often instructors will assign readings before an online class discussion. You may wonder what you should be contributing to the discussion and find it difficult to say something about what you've read.

Here are some suggestions on how to review readings to participate in class discussions:

1. Ask questions about what you don't understand. Note any words, concepts, or arguments that you do not understand. Be specific; rather than saying you didn't understand Chapter 3, tell your instructor exactly what concept or section you need clarified.

2. If you have a strong reaction to what you read, make a note of it. Write why you agree or disagree with the author's point of view and present your reaction (and reason for it) to the discussion. If your perspective of a topic has changed since the beginning of the course, discuss how it has changed and what course material has contributed to that change.

3. Use an example from your own experience that is directly related to the concept in the text. Describe your own experience, how it is related to the concept, and what you understand about the concept based on your experience. Include a comparison of your own experience to the author's position. Focus your discussion contribution on how your experience enhances your understanding of the course concept rather than on a detailed description of your experience.

4. Comment on another student's contribution by bringing up supporting or contradictory material from the reading.
5. Connect ideas across different course materials and summarize what you understand about a topic based on the different texts.

6. Summarize a short passage into a single word and explain why you chose that word to summarize the text. This approach will help you (and your classmates) identify important ideas in the course readings.

7. Write down one possible real-world application for the principle, theory, or procedure you learned from a course text. Try to think of an application that is different from examples that may have been included in your text.