



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

# STUDY SKILLS STRATEGIES

Håkan Fleischer

## Introduction

---

Everyone finds it hard to study, and all students need some kind of study skills strategy. However, you may also need an understanding of what it means to study in Sweden. In general, you are supposed to take the majority of the responsibility for your studies yourself. That is, you need make an individual plan and also ensure that you keep to schedule. All educational systems are different. In Sweden you should, of course, respect your teacher (as you would respect anyone else), but there is no need to be afraid of asking questions or requesting clarification when you don't understand something. Swedish university teachers are, more often than not, willing to help.

Study skills can involve many things, and in this booklet we discuss important factors regarding studies, planning, sleep, food, health and motivation. We also go through basic study skills that involve having an overview of the studies, reading, listening effectively to lectures and how to take notes and rehearse. Throughout this booklet, you will also be given opportunities to reflect and note what comes to mind after reading and what actions you should take. Fill those sections in, they will help you to keep on track and make you active in your search for improved study skills.

Let's start with a test. If you answer **yes** to two or three questions in each question area, you may have reason to take a closer look at those particular sections of the booklet. Do not be alarmed if you answer **yes** to two or three in several sections. All study skills are related, the way you perform one will impact the others. And best of all, you are already reading this booklet - so you've already started to do something about it!

### Study environment

1. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I usually study with background noise around me from the TV, radio or music.
2. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I have difficulties in concentrating while studying at home. I get a headache or become restless.
3. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I like to sit on the bed or on the sofa when studying and I don't think that much about how ergonomic it may be.

### Planning

4. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't understand how time flies when studying.
5. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't really know what I should read or do next week.
6. Y\_\_ N\_\_ If I would study as much as I should, I wouldn't be able to have a social life.

## Sleep, food and health

7. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I often feel too tired when studying.
8. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't have time to prepare proper food so I eat a lot of junk food.
9. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I am too often inactive for days.

## Overview

10. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I'm frequently surprised when given a school-related task.
11. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I tend to start reading the course literature that looks most exciting.
12. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't know which of the course books are most important.

## Reading (and interview)

13. Y\_\_ N\_\_ When I get to the end of a chapter, I can't remember what I've just read.
14. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't really know what information I'm looking for in the text, I just read.
15. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I get lost in the details of the books so I lose sense of the overall themes.

## Notes from books and lectures

16. Y\_\_ N\_\_ My notes are often hard to understand when I review them.
17. Y\_\_ N\_\_ It seems that I always take wrong notes on lectures.
18. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I don't have a specific strategy for reviewing my notes.

## Motivation

19. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I have a hard time understanding why I need to study these things.
20. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I feel that I study in a way I dislike.
21. Y\_\_ N\_\_ I feel that I can't really master the art of studying and therefore lose concentration.

## Study environment

---

It is important to have a good study environment. It is easy to fall into poor study habits like sitting on the couch or reading in a café. It might go well for a while, however, for several reasons, it is not a habit that is sustainable in the long run. Firstly, it involves an environment that is not designed for concentrated work which means you have to put in extra effort. Your spine may be put in an awkward position on the couch, or you may get sore shoulders from using the computer placed on your lap. The atmosphere of the café may seem stimulating, but in the end it distracts you, and makes you spend extra energy on concentration. Secondly, it is good to have a special study environment that you associate with

work. Once you get used to focusing on one thing in a specific place you are automatically mentally prepared when you go there. This is a classic tactic when dealing with people with sleeping disorders: The first thing a therapist tells the patient is to only sleep in their bed. The bed should not be used for watching television, eating or using electronic gadgets. Just sleep. In this way, you can associate the bed with sleeping and it will be easier to simply sleep. By the same token, this technique can be applied to your studies. Make sure you have a place purely for study and stick to it fairly persistently (of course you can make exceptions, but be sure to have a base to return to).

You also need good lighting in your study area. Firstly, the general lighting in the room needs to be reasonably bright, so that you do not strain your eyes. Secondly, you need to have good focused lighting for your reading (especially if you are reading traditional books). Most students also need to ensure that their study area is reasonably well organized. It might not be perceived as being particularly important, but messiness offers a lot of objects to distract the eyes. It draws away attention and therefore energy. The vast majority of students also require a reasonably quiet atmosphere around them when studying. Whether you want music in the background is a matter of taste. Personally, I fail to see how Death Metal at full volume provides a good study environment. However, calm and relaxing instrumental music might work (words tend to draw our attention unnecessarily). It is also important that you have a table to sit by and a chair that you comfortably sit on. It is not necessary to run off and buy an expensive office chair, a kitchen chair may be just as good. Maybe you need a little cushion for your back? It is worth mentioning that it's a good habit to keep your back as straight as possible. This lessens the risk of back pain, and keeps your body at a state of mental attention. Also, make sure you have the space to move around in your environment. Do not forget to get up and have a stretch at least once an hour! It is also important that the temperature is just right. You become lethargic if it is too hot and it is uncomfortable to sit in a cold room. If you have to choose, a slightly cooler room is preferable to a slightly warmer one.

Make sure to have things around you that remind you to work (and remove things such as smartphones and tablets you might want to fiddle with). If you can get things that you associate with entertainment out of sight, such as access to social media or the TV, and make sure that there are things that remind you of the work, such as textbooks, pens, syllabus printed on paper, etc., you are on your way.

Therefore, a good study area is essentially about physically creating the conditions for working as successfully as possible. This is done through furnishing, lighting, ergonomic considerations, air quality, noise, temperature and so on. On top of this, it is also about creating a mentally satisfying environment where, as much as possible, you will be reminded of the work ahead and can avoid being distracted.

Here are some questions to consider when it comes to your study environment:

- Are things in order around you?

- Is it quiet and peaceful around you?
- Are you sitting well, preferably with a straight back?
- Is the temperature suitable?
- Is there something in the room that reminds you of the importance of concentration?
- Can you remove or silence the noise in the room? For example television and mobile notifications?
- Can you be undisturbed?
- Can you study here regularly?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

## Planning

---

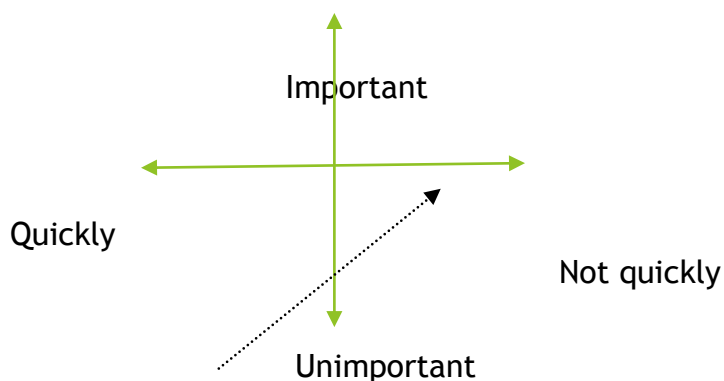
In order to succeed in your studies you need to plan ahead and review your use of time. As all students are aware of, it's very easy to let a few hours go by watching television or chatting on Facebook, ending up feeling stressed about your studies. Now I do not really mean that you should avoid all fun things when being a student. This is not to be advised, and actually it's equally harmful. The students who perform best are those who have a meaningful leisure time, yet do the important things first, and use the spare time as a way to unwind.

How much time should you devote to your studies? Yes, it is of course impossible to say off the cuff. A common estimation is that you should use about 2-3 times as much time for personal study as you spend on lectures. I think you should take that with a pinch of salt though: sometimes you can study more, sometimes a little less. My answer to the question is rhetorical: If you are studying full-time, it is reasonable that it totally takes up 40 hours per week of your time. This sounds a lot, but think of all the activities that are school-related: lectures, laboratory work, private study, writing essays, different types of practice etcetera. Can you accomplish everything in less time, then great! In contrast, do you feel that you do not really have enough time for your studies? Then perhaps you should look into how you are really using your time.

Experience suggests that the best way to use your time efficiently involves finding out what you actually do with your time. You can easily be surprised by how much time is wasted when added up. Below is a tool to keep track of your time. Keep a diary for a week and complete the form as thoroughly as you can to track your time usage:

	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa	Su
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-13							
13-14							
14-15							
15-16							
16-17							
17-18							
18-19							
19-20							
20-21							

Now that you have filled in your weekly schedule, can you see any patterns? Is there anything that surprises you that you spent so much time doing, such as watching TV? When you have looked at the schedule for a while, fill in the diagram below. It is based on two dimensions: firstly, whether the things you do are important or unimportant, and secondly, whether the tasks can be performed quickly or not.



The goal is, of course, that you should be able to remove things you have noted in the lower section of the diagram. You probably spend a lot of time on things that are unimportant and fairly time-consuming: watching films, spending time with friends, playing games and other such things. We all do. Some things are completely unimportant, but make you feel it does not cost much time: keeping up to date with the latest Facebook statuses, watching an episode of a television series or the like. If you have a centre of gravity in the lower section of the diagram, try clearing away things from there to free up time for things that you have noted in the upper section of the diagram. If you watch television ten hours a week, maybe you can take it down to five? Then you should also look at how much activity you have in the field at the top left, i.e. what is important and urgent. If you always lack time for your school work, the reasons certainly lies in that field.

The reasons why these activities are in this section of the diagram may be because you put things off. When procrastinating you suddenly view unimportant things as being more important to you. If you feel that you have problems with procrastination, try one of the following:

- Divide the tasks into small parts, so small that you are absolutely certain you can finish them.
- Make sure you have a clear goal with your study session.
- Use reminders on your smartphone.
- Allow yourself rewards for excellent work.
- Realize that not everything needs to be perfect. Just do it.
- Make small, efficient routines for your study that you can implement easily.

However, the best medicine for procrastination is planning. As chemist Louis Pasteur once said, fortune favours the well-prepared. It is therefore important that you plan for your studies properly. Firstly, it is imperative to have an overall plan of the study semester and the course, in order to be prepared for any extra heavy periods of studies. You don't want unpleasant surprises jumping out at you. This will be brought up later in this booklet when we go through the subject of goals. In this part we look at a different kind of planning, namely the operational. This type of planning is done from week to week. Make yourself a cup of coffee or tea and spend half an hour with your calendar. The planning is done in four steps:

1. Start by looking back at last week. You are right. The first week you do this, it may prove to be difficult to look back at the previous week as it may be blank, but keep going. You've got to do this every week. Look back. What did you accomplish? If you've planned to attend three lectures and perform five reading sessions at home at two hours each, what did you actually get done? Put a tick by each activity as a confirmation that you performed it. It may seem silly, but it's good to see for yourself what you actually accomplished, especially when the road ahead seems long and hard. If you did it last week, you can do it again!

2. Now also look at what you didn't manage to accomplish. Ask yourself the question: How was it that I did not do what I thought I would? Can I learn something from it (for example that you are too tired to study for two hours after you've been to a bar the previous day). In this way, you'll learn when you study best. Use that particular time.
3. Schedule your reading, the lectures and other activities. Try to use five or six hours a day for studying.
4. Don't forget to plan some fun activities as well. You need time to relax. If enjoyable activities are written in the calendar it is harder to feel guilty for having fun. Plan going to the gym, relaxing walks, time to read a good novel, spend time with friends or whatever you do to take the pressure off.

A few words on calendars too. It really does not matter what you use - as long as you use it. Some like analogue ones, others like digital calendars. I myself use a digital one so I can have my calendar available wherever I go, on the mobile and on the computer at home, a constant reminder of important academic dates. However, rumour has it that traditional ones can do this just as well. If you are not good at planning perhaps the best thing you can do right now is to go to the bookshop and get yourself a nice calendar that you like and will actually use.

- Do you have a routine for planning your week?
- Do you have control over your time-usage during the week?
- Do you have a good calendar?
- Do you know when you are best at studying, and do you plan to use that time properly?
- Do you make sure that you have time to do fun activities?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:



## Sleep, food and health

---

It's easy to preach regarding sleep and health. However, the thing is, it doesn't have to be so hard to maintain a lifestyle that will make you more alert, give you the energy to study better and which can also help you get more done. It simply requires that you take care of yourself and your body properly.

Exercise is important. You do not have to become a marathon runner or climb mountains to enhance your studies, but it can be good to get active regularly. Moderate daily exercise is sufficient. There are numerous studies showing that about 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity movement can pay dividends. Try taking a lengthy walk and plan it at the same time each day so that you can easily make a routine of it. Make sure that you also get some sunlight during daytime.

It is also important to consider what you eat. You do not need to follow a special diet, but it goes without saying that you'll have more energy if you eat what you already know to be reasonably sensible. Try to avoid fast food and cook yourself some healthy meals instead. You should avoid too much fat and sugar. Why not make a lot of healthy food at the weekend to munch on during the week? Also, be sure to drink enough water every day. Often it is dehydration that's causing your headache. It is easy to grab a cup of coffee when you're tired, but be aware that coffee is a diuretic. So, if you feel you must have coffee, then also have a large glass of water. Do not forget fruit and vegetables. Every day.

Finally, sleep is essential. While all young people are going to enjoy a late night out with friends occasionally, just make sure you don't have a packed day ahead. In general, it's thought you should sleep as much as your body tells you that you need. A common guideline is eight hours per night, but some people can get by with less while others need more. The best way to find out what you actually need is to go to bed at a decent time for a few nights in a row, as you get into a rhythm and see when you wake up by yourself. This will be your normal sleeping time, and you should use this as a guideline. Additionally, try to not be up too late too many nights in a row. You should also pay attention to the fact that it's not just the quantity of sleep that is important, but also the quality. Therefore, you should ensure that you have a quiet atmosphere to sleep in at a pleasant temperature. If you live in a noisy environment, earplugs and a blindfold can be helpful.

- Do you make sure to get around 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day?
- Do you drink enough water?
- Do you eat reasonably healthily?
- Do you get sunlight every day?
- Do you sleep enough?
- Do you get sufficient quality sleep, that is to say undisturbed?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

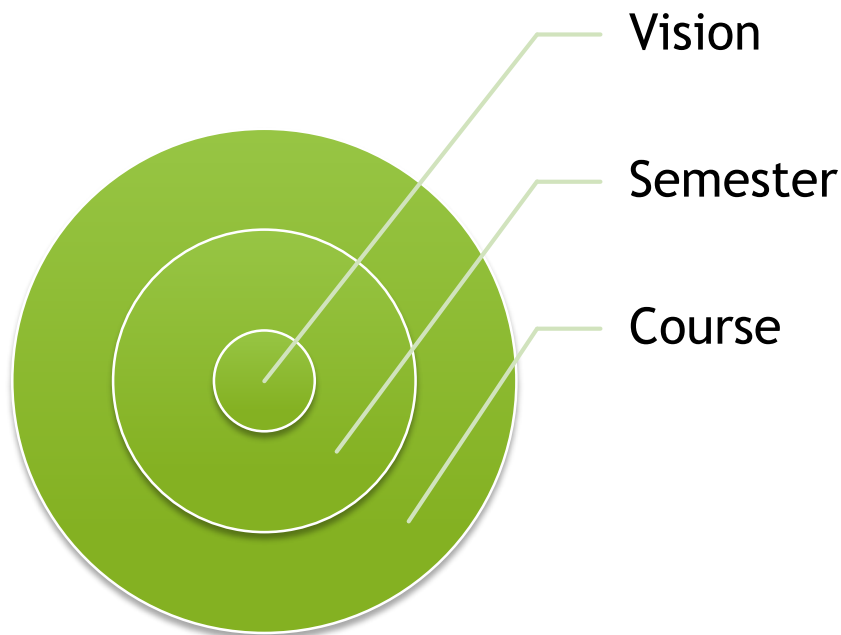
## Motivation

---

Finally, a few words about motivation to help you reach your goal. At the beginning of this booklet, you learned a way to plan your studies on a weekly basis, but it is also important to keep track of the greater goals, those you are actually aiming for with your studies. Not necessarily for planning's sake, but the sake of your motivation. The students who succeed not only know how to focus and make notes, they also have a long-term vision. Think about it, there's a reason why you have started studying.

Consider the model on the next page as a dartboard. In the middle you have your vision. The reason that you want to study is to be a nurse or an engineer. You know what you study, but you also need to sit down and figure out why. There are a lot of reasons for wanting to be a nurse. One might be to work with sick children, another to work with the elderly, a third working abroad, and so on. Look at your vision before you start your weekly planning or least now and again. It is especially important when you're facing tough times in your studies. This vision can then be broken down to a checklist for the goals of the study semester. Note these down together with your vision (you should do this at least once per semester, preferably at the beginning). When you start a new course, you also need to do an overview to get motivated. How will the next five weeks (or however long the period is) take me closer to my dreams?

What periods look easier and when does it look like harder work is required? Note this briefly in your calendar for the whole course if you can.



Now you have the weekly planning for you to follow. Together with this, you have a document that you read before planning, one containing your vision, and your overview of the study semester and the course. It doesn't need to be a lengthy one, but try to put it in writing. Don't think it, ink it. It is motivating to have a path to follow. Look at it as often as you need.

It is also motivating to know that you have actually accomplished what you set out to do. That is why you must record what you actually achieved during the previous week. Remember that everything is possible to master if you take action in small enough doses. It is easy to lose confidence when large chunks of work are presented. It may seem impossible to write a good essay, but you are certainly able to write five sentences. And five sentences are actually a complete paragraph, and so on. As soon as you feel uncomfortable and lose confidence that you can perform the presented task, break it down into small parts and congratulate yourself when you have completed the task. Of course, you must have planned for this - so that you have time. Therefore, never start to work on the last day, you simply can't work with small parts if pressed with time.

When you study you will eventually face setbacks from time to time. Make sure you do not become too disheartened. Instead of viewing the failed exam or the negative feedback as a judgement on you as a person, try to see what you can learn from the situation. Were you not prepared well enough? How could you improve for next time?

In an indirect way, exercise and proper diet also helps to keep your motivation up because it helps in developing endurance. You could also try to build your motivation into your surroundings. Why not try to put a motivational quote on the

mirror, or simply tell a friend that you have a hard time motivating yourself and ask for help in gaining inspiration? Take advantage of the resources around you in order to create your own motivation.

- Have you thought about your reasons for studying and written them down?
- Do you congratulate yourself when achieving good things?
- Do you make sure you can master your study task by breaking it down in small parts?
- Do you have motivational things, activities, quotes or people in your surroundings?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

## The study skills model

---

This is the study skills model that I have developed for Swedish conditions. The model contains five steps that you should work with in a developing spiral. The aim is not only that you have a concrete model to use while studying, but also that you allow yourself to get increasingly better at the art of studying. The different parts of the model are Overview, Interview, Read/listen, Recall and Adapt.

### Overview

The basic idea is to have an overview before you get into the details. This means that you need to have an overview of what a course means for your studies before you start taking it. It also means that you should have an overview of what your textbook contributes with in terms of overall knowledge before you start reading each chapter.

The first thing you need to do is to get an overview of the study semester. What courses are included? What will they require of you? Are any of the courses known to be harder and more challenging than any others? How much time do you think you need to spend on them? After this you need to go through your course and read the syllabus thoroughly. Read the course objectives properly. Check the reading

list and purchase the books. Get all the material listed from the very start of the course and do not think you should do it on an ad hoc basis, even if you know the listed material is only needed at the end of the course. Get it all at once.

Right, now that you have all the material in front of you, it is time to examine the books and other potential material. This is partly to get an idea of the content, but also for you to be able to set priorities and get an overall picture prior to study. You need to find a hook that makes it fun, exciting or interesting! Start with the first book. There are a variety of factors to consider. Begin with the cover. What does it feel like? Read the headline. Look at the table of contents, it's a fantastic way to get a handle on the book's main content. Does it seem dry and academic or fun and exciting? Look at who published the book. Leaf through the book from page one, but only spend a maximum of ten seconds per page. You will not read at this point; you should rather just get a feeling of the content. What are the headings on the page? Are there pictures and diagrams? Text in fact boxes? Page through until you reach the end. Is there a bibliography? What kind of sources are listed? Is it academic literature or another kind of text? Finally, see if there is a register of keywords. Here the author shows what concepts they consider to be most important in the whole book. Valuable information!

Go through the books and all other materials for the course. It is now time for me to reveal a secret. Not all textbooks are created equal! There is often a book that is considered a key text, and if you now compare the curriculum with the recommended books you might be able to figure out which one it might be. You also have your personal goals and desires with your studies to consider, and some parts of the literature might therefore seem more relevant than others. It is now time to divide the literature into three piles, which will form the basis for how to proceed with your studies during the course. Based on your schedule, your study goals and the syllabus, you should create three piles: A, B and C. Pile A is the Important pile. This is literature that you simply have to read, and can be all or part of a book. B pile is literature that you should read, but is secondary in nature. The C pile can be termed the "c'est la vie" pile, i.e. the literature or the chapters that you read when you have time.

The idea is that you now have a rough idea about the content of the general level, you know the course objectives and you have made a rough prioritization (you can always change it later, of course). You have also become an active student instead of a passive consumer of academic literature, which is very important. Have you made an overview over the semester?

- Do you know the course objectives?
- Have you made a thorough overview of the textbooks and other study materials?
- Have you divided the books in A, B and C piles?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

### Interview

The idea of this short stage is to make you become a little more active in your studies. It is good to know exactly what information you should look out for when you go deep into the books. Therefore, I suggest that you "interview" the texts and ask questions.

Start by looking at the book as a whole. What are the three main things you will want to learn from this book? Write down the answer on a post-it note and stick it to the front. Every time you pick up the book, look at the note before you begin reading. Then repeat this with each chapter. What are the main ideas of the chapter? What could you learn? Which parts seem to be the most important? Is there something you do not understand, that you will need to find out? Put a Post-It note inside the book with your answers for each chapter. Some books have their own checklists at the beginning of the chapters to guide your study. At this stage, however, those are unimportant. Do not let them replace your specific personal goal in reading the text!

- Have you written post-it notes on every book and on every chapter in the main books of the course?
- Do you know exactly what you should learn from every chapter or part of the books?
- Have you organised your priorities into piles A, B and C?

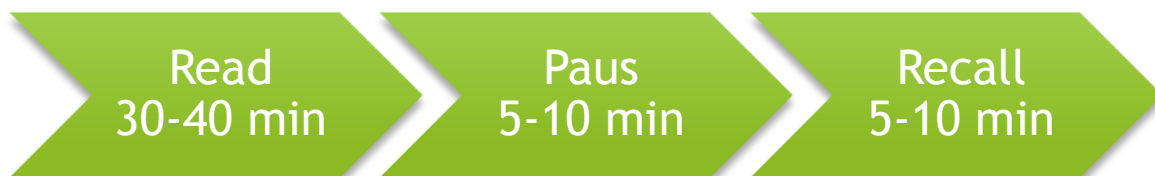
This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

### Read/listen

It is time to start reading the course literature and listening to lectures. Let's start with reading.

When you read, it is important that you do so for an appropriate period of time. It is better that you read for a shorter period of time, and that you can maintain focus through the entire session. It is impossible to say how long exactly you should read in one go, it depends on how difficult the topic is and the emotional state you are in. As a guideline, I recommend that you work around three hours in each shift. This does not mean that you focus on work and reading for three hours straight! I recommend that you divide the time as shown below. Repeat the cycle three times and then take a longer break.



Now let us examine the model in detail. The model is in three parts. The purpose of the first part is that you should not sit for longer than you can concentrate, though the length of this time may vary considerably. Do not feel that you are a "useless" student because you can only concentrate for 15 minutes! Instead, just read for 15 minutes and then take a break. As you read the text, do so on all three levels. If you are about to read for 30 minutes, you make an estimate of how far you will get in the book. It is best if there are natural divisions, such as chapters. If this structure does not function as an accurate indication of time (the parts may be very long), try to determine how long it will take in accordance to the model, so you do not end up stopping in the middle of an argumentation.

Now read through the interview - so that you can focus on what you will learn (on a post-it note, remember?). Skim through the text for a minute. Browse, look at the headlines. This gives you the overview. Now it is time for the most important reading. Now read the section quietly. You should certainly not rush. It is

important to point out that there are many study skills books about speed reading claiming that fast reading increases your comprehension. This is wrong! Research shows that superficial comprehension may increase in the short term when you read with a speed reading technique, but it will not help you to integrate the text long term as it leaves you without deep understanding. So read at your own pace. Remain calm and focused. The idea is that you should read it only once. If you read too quickly, you will still need to read the text again and you will not save any time. You'll just get stressed and not understand what you have read.

Here comes the next surprise: Do not try to take notes while you perform your main reading. This will be done later. It may be okay to underline with a pencil (but then try holding down the amount of underlining). Taking notes makes you lose focus on reading which makes you have to mentally go back into the text, to some extent restarting the reading process. It may sound strange, but all the micro-pauses are tiring. If taking notes while reading you will not be able to study as long as you would not taking notes. Trust that you are keeping the main messages of the text (the notes follow) in your mind. If the text is too complex, underline problem areas and shorten the reading time. If that doesn't help, only then you are allowed to take notes while reading. Of course, you also make sure that you are undisturbed while you read. No computer running, no announcements on the phone or anything that interferes.

Then comes the break. Do not be fooled into skipping it even if you feel full of energy. If you're in the middle of a text, finish it and then have a rest. The fact is that you need a break, both to build sustainability, but also for the brain to get the opportunity to digest all that you have read. You'll actually remember more around 5-10 minutes after you have read the text than directly after reading it. That is why the break is adjusted to that length of time. Try to do something else during the break. Get up, move around, wash the dishes or whatever you may fancy. When you get back on track, start the next session with five to ten minutes of recalling what you read earlier. It is now, when all the ideas are clear in your head, that you make your notes (this will be brought up in the next section). If you have difficulty with discipline, be sure to use an alarm clock so that you genuinely go back to studying after your break.

Lectures are a little different. They are often packed with information so you probably need to write some notes while they're taking place. A lot of time is also spent trying to find the structure of the lecture - trying to crack the code. If you made an overview of your material as described earlier, you may have some information about the lecture and have read through any distributed materials. But it's still good to be prepared. If you are not clear about how the lecture will be laid out, it may be appropriate to ask the lecturer before it starts. It is majorly important to remember when attending lectures to really be listening. It is easy to drift off. Therefore, try to listen actively and constantly put questions to yourself such as: "What can this mean? How does this fit with what was said earlier?" You will probably have made some notes during lecture, but they are not complete.



You are probably also pretty tired after having actively listened the entire time. Therefore get some fresh air or grab a cup of coffee and take a break for 5-10 minutes. Then sit down and make your notes, expand them and make them more comprehensible. Another good trick with lectures is to work in pairs. You and your fellow students agree to record a half an hour of the lecture each at the time. Then after the lecture sit together and combine your notes. Another way to do this is to work independently, but afterwards you sit together with a fellow student to expand your notes and discuss with each other what the lecture was about and how it can be interpreted.

- Do you read for an appropriate length of time with reasonable breaks?
- Do you read books at three levels, overview reading, main reading and reading rehearsal?
- Do you read in a relaxed and calm way?
- Do you focus on listening to lectures and not record any more than necessary?
- Do you work together with a friend at the lectures?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

## Recall

Time for the recollection. Now is the time to take notes. This is the third arrow in the model on page 14 - you can now do your notes, which is also your first rehearsal. I have discovered that many students have difficulty with the notes. How much and how little to note down is a common question. I think that the notes should be a sizable reduction of the text or lecture. The idea is that you should read the book once (of course exceptions are allowed) and then work with your notes. If they are just as extensive as the books themselves, it makes no sense. It may be appropriate to keep a ratio of between 1:10 and 1:30, depending on the literature and the way of taking notes. That is, one side of notes for 10-30 pages of text. See it as a guideline, however, and not as an absolute rule. How many notes you produce also depends on how difficult the text is. If you find it difficult to take notes, try some of these models:

The first model is the narrative notes. These are simply notes where you tell yourself what you read. It might start like this: "When you give a shot to a patient, it is important to remember that..." This is often an inefficient way to record though; it generates much text, takes a long time to produce and will also be difficult to repeat. The second notetaking model is outlined notes. Here you write keywords from the top down on paper with the facts you need to remember. The advantage is that there is less text, and it is easy to get the main content down on paper. A third way of notetaking is reflective notes. You divide the page into two columns. In one, write down facts, such as what main themes are important to remember. In the second, write down reflections, thoughts and questions that come to you when you make the notes. A fourth note-taking model is called the Cornell system. This is similar to reflective notes, but instead of drawing a long, narrow bar right down the paper, you create a small box at the bottom. That is, you make a data column and a reflection column. In the space at the bottom you also make a summary of two to three sentences of what you read. This is a combination of reflection and narrative notes. The fifth entry method I want to mention is the mind map. Put shortly, you type the subject in the centre and draw branches out from the middle with keywords. These branches can then branch further. The most important aspects end up in the centre, the less important furthest out. This is an efficient way of taking notes, but also takes a little longer. At the end of this booklet you will find a link to templates for Cornell notes and mind mapping, the two methods I think you should try.

- Have you tried an alternative way of taking notes?
- Do you rehearse in an optimal way?
- Are your notes condensed enough not to work yourself to death?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

### Adapt

The adaptation phase is a little different and not part of the regular study routine. However, once a week, after each submission and after each completion of the course, it may be good to consider how the study model has worked out for you.

Did you miss something important? If so, what can be learnt from it? Is there something that worked out unexpectedly well? Is there something you need to improve, for example, taking notes, listening actively or just keeping motivated?

- Do you think about how you study?
- Do you give yourself the necessary credit when things go well?
- Do you learn from the things that haven't worked?

This came to mind when reading:

These are my planned actions:

## Finally

---

No one is born with a perfect set of studying skills. It is however a skill that everyone can improve over time. The key is to practice. Now go through the boxes above and decide on one or two actions to take today. When you feel you have completed these actions, proceed to the next. Make a priority list of actions to take in order to improve your study skills.

Remember to use the university's resources for your studies. Libraries almost always have a communal study area. Also use the teachers themselves by asking questions about things you need to know to make your plans. Make demands and become an active student, it helps! Jönköping University also organizes workshops and lectures in study technique. If you're wondering about something in the booklet (or otherwise related to your studies), please contact me: Håkan Fleischer at email: [hakan@fleischer.se](mailto:hakan@fleischer.se)

## Some resources

---

- How to Study. A large collection of study skills information from big universities divided in sections. <http://www.howtostudy.org>
- Template for note-taking with the Cornell system. [http://lsc.cornell.edu/LSC\\_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf](http://lsc.cornell.edu/LSC_Resources/cornellsystem.pdf)
- Information about mindmapping. <http://www.mindmapping.com/sv/>
- The program Anki for making great rehearsals. <http://ankisrs.net>