Plainwork Studio

# Learn Faster: 8 Study Methods Backed by Research

A practical guide with weekly plan and printable worksheets

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# Introduction: why most studying feels productive and isn't

Most students study the way they were never taught not to: they re-read the chapter, highlight the important lines and copy their notes into neater notes. It feels like work, the page becomes familiar, and familiarity feels like knowing. Then the exam asks a question in a slightly different way and the familiar page is gone.

In 2013 a team of cognitive psychologists led by John Dunlosky reviewed hundreds of studies on ten common learning techniques and rated how useful each one is (Dunlosky et al., *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2013). Two techniques came out with the highest rating, *practice testing* and *distributed practice*. Re-reading and highlighting, the two most popular habits, were rated low.

This guide turns that research into a weekly routine you can actually follow. Each chapter explains one method, why it works, how to use it tomorrow, and the mistake people make with it. The worksheets at the end turn the chapters into a plan.

You do not need to study longer. You need to make the time you already spend do more.

# Chapter 1: Test yourself before you feel ready

**What it is.** Retrieval practice means pulling information *out* of your memory instead of putting it *in* again. Flashcards, practice questions, closing the book and writing down everything you remember, explaining a topic out loud without notes: all of these are retrieval.

**Why it works.** Every time you successfully recall something, the memory becomes easier to find next time. In a well-known experiment, Henry Roediger and Jeffrey Karpicke (2006) had students read a text and then either re-read it or take recall tests on it. After five minutes, the re-readers did slightly better. After one week the picture had flipped: the students who had tested themselves remembered far more. Re-reading wins the short race and loses the long one.

**How to use it.**

1. After reading a section, close the book and write the three to five main points from memory.
2. Turn headings into questions ("What are the three stages of mitosis?") and answer them before checking.
3. Do practice questions early, not only in the last week.
4. Check your answers right away. Feedback turns a wrong guess into a lesson instead of a habit.

**The common mistake.** Waiting until you "know it" to test yourself. Testing is how you get to know it. Struggling to recall is not a sign of failure; it is the part that builds the memory.