

FAST FACTS

Preparing Your Study Space

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Academic success isn't a happy accident—it takes planning and hard work for it to be accomplished. Good study skills are essential for academic achievement; innate intelligence alone can't take the place of careful and diligent study. The way you go about preparing for your work can mean the difference between an "A" or a "C" on an English paper or between acing or failing "Intro to Computing." It's not enough simply to know good study strategies—you have to implement them as well. Even the best strategies can be foiled by the effects of a poor study environment. It's worth the effort, then, to carefully plan not only how but also where you study.

Choose a location

The importance of finding a private, quiet study space where you can work undisturbed can't be overstated. Tell your friends you need an hour or two alone to study free from distraction. Isolate yourself, if possible; unplug the telephone and lock the door. Turn off the television and radio; or, if you work best with background music, tune in a radio station that doesn't broadcast commercials. Quiet CDs or tapes also work well.

When selecting a study spot, be careful that you don't choose a location that signals inappropriate cues. You may think, for instance, that your bed will be a comfortable place to read, but if your body and mind are trained to think of it as a place to rest you'll probably be asleep within a few minutes' time. Likewise, if you use the kitchen table as a study spot, you might find yourself raiding the refrigerator every few minutes for something good to eat.

You may find that you work better in a location away from your apartment or residence hall. Carnegie Mellon students report that good study spaces are available on campus but that some detective work may be needed to track them down. The third floor of Hunt Library is dedicated to quiet study; you might find that to be a comfortable place to work. Empty classrooms are also good places to study undisturbed, especially during evening hours. (But be sure to study in a group or with a friend—for safety reasons.) If you do choose to work on campus, pick a location where you and your friends don't normally go. For example, if you're a student in H&SS, it might be a good idea to choose a study spot in Wean, Doherty or some other building where H&SS classes are not normally held. This will minimize the chance that you'll run into someone you know and get waylaid from the task at hand.

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Regardless of the spot you choose, take the time to make the environment as conducive to study as possible. Make a habit out of first inspecting and preparing your study space before you begin to work; when you ritualize your study preparation in this way, you encourage yourself to clear your mind and begin to focus on studying.

Your surroundings should be comfortable. Make sure the room temperature and noise level are within acceptable limits. Choose a comfortable chair under good lighting. Remove any potential distractions that happen to be nearby—copies of *The Tartan*, for example, or anything else that has the potential to take your mind off your work.

Clear your desk or table so that only your work is in front of you. Organize the area so that you can find things quickly. Each time you prepare for a study session, carefully consider the materials you'll need. It's important that everything be in order *before* you start to work; you'll lose precious momentum if you're forced to interrupt your study to search for a paper clip, eraser or some other item. Also, searching for some trivial item you think you need is sometimes just an easy excuse to procrastinate.

Here's a short checklist of items you'll find useful to have on hand while studying:

- Calculator
- Sharpened pencils
- Pencil sharpener
- Pens (various colors)
- Colored pencils
- "Hi-Liters"
- Notebook or notepad
- Post-it notes
- Dictionary
- 3" x 5" file cards



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