



Gap Academy Study Tips

By Paola Breda, Principal

1. Of course, the first and foremost study tip is to never, ever, leave studying to the last minute, the proverbial 'eleventh' hour, or the night before the test.
2. Break down the required studying into manageable pieces. For example, if the test is on Friday, spend a short period of time on the preceding weekend creating a breakdown of what you need to study. Then start on Monday studying the first clump of stuff or the first chapter, or whatever you've determined to be your first section. Tuesday, study the second section, etc. On Thursday, review all sections.
3. Make review notes in short format or in list format. For example if you need to study the regions of Canada, for example, write them out in a list format: e.g. A) Western Cordillera B) Interior Plains C) Inuitian Mountains D) Canadian Shield E) Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Lowlands F) Appalachian Mountains G) Arctic Region. Then isolate the 1st letter of each word or section: WIICGAA. Make it into a fake word like this one, or a sentence made up of one word for each letter. Then funnier the sentence, the more likely you'll remember it. A group of my students once made up a great slogan for the time frame in which the Canadian provinces joined Confederation: **No Options, No Questions, But Maybe Perhaps Some Answers, Now!** Except for BC and Manitoba (remember you'll have to remember that they are inverted, this is a great slogan to remember several historical facts). For example, the 1st four provinces to join Confederation were N-New Brunswick, O-Ontario, N-Nova Scotia, Q-Quebec (No Options, No Questions – NONQ). Even the structure of the sentence makes these four a grouping separate from the rest. Newfoundland, which joined Confederation last, in 1949, and far later than the other provinces, is separated by a comma and a strong finish; the word Now! is stronger and separate from the rest of the sentence. Slogans like this can really help you remember things you need to remember. These lists can be used for many different subjects: Authors and Names of Writing Pieces in English, Science concepts, etc.
4. When making review notes, use colour coding for different sections. This will help you remember the topic later when you need to recall it. If it applies, use an appropriate colour for a certain section. If it's related to blood somehow, you can write in red ink, for example.
5. Make sure you have everything you might possibly need in the place you've chose to study, so that there is no possibility you will need to get up to get a stapler or a drink, a sharpener for your pencil, etc. Have everything handy, including a small snack and a bottle of water, even if you're not hungry when you start.
6. If you think you study best with music, use only a recognizable pattern of music, i.e. music you know well and music that's in the same order, like a favourite CD. Do not listen to the radio or a new CD; these will be distractive, rather than assistive.
7. Do not under any circumstance, stop for anything but a quick washroom break or a quick stretch - it's always harder to get started again.
8. Make a commitment in writing to yourself (simply write out 7:00 - 10:00 p.m.) for example, and do not give in to anything. The phone call can wait to be returned after 10:00 p.m., and you can save anything else until then too.
9. If you are overwhelmed by the entire amount of work, remove it from your visual area, and just take one section (or chapter) at a time. Place everything else under your desk or neatly on the floor beside you. Only concentrate on one section at a time. Even if at the last minute, you realize that you do not have enough time to study everything, you will be better off having studied at least 3/5 sections, than none at all because of anxiety over how much there was to do.
10. Use the key of self-talk which expensive 'confidence builder' conferences often recommend. "I know I can do this"; and "I know I'll do reasonably well". This helps give you the feeling of knowledge and gives you the determination to continue working.



Gap Academy

4 John Street, Weston, Ontario M9N 1J3 ☎ 416 249-1500 Fax 416-246-9155
www.gapacademy.com

11. Use visualization. After reading the material, lie down, close your eyes, relax, and imagine the material coming to life on a big surround sound theatre in your mind. Imagine a computer spelling the key word, and a comic strip explaining the concept.
12. Use concept keys. For example, attach the concept to something very funny or incongruous - something that you will remember. Remember, the funnier, the better. If you need to memorize a math formula, and it's short, you can imagine the Road Runner writing down only one piece of the formula as he runs through the scene. On his way back, he continues the next piece, and so on. Each time he completes one section of the formula, he says 'beep-beep'. If it's an environmental issue, imagine Ronald McDonald standing in a huge, oversized garbage can explaining the issue, while tons of garbage fall on him. It's raining newspapers into grey boxes beside him on the left and it's raining bottles into blue boxes on his right - or whatever. Remember, the more incredible the incongruity or the more strange the situation, the better. Things that usually don't fit together in regular life are also great for remembering: a sprinkler and a plugged in toaster with a plaque (listing your formula), etc. You get the picture.
13. Make up a stupid song to memorize a certain group of facts. Use a predictable tune so that it's easy to remember. For example, O Canada, the garbage is here to stay, but blue box combines, with all the re-cy-cl-ing. With glowing lights, we see the burning of all our forests now. God keep our trees.... You probably get the picture here, too.
14. Try to engage a friend who also has the same test to re-test you and you can do the same for them. But only after you've studied the basic stuff yourself. Otherwise, it gets too tempting to chat and not study.
15. If you do have a friend with which you can share studying, break up the work into two equal halves, and have the friend make up stuff to remember his or her half. You do the same for your half, and then meet halfway through the schedule (say Tuesday) to exchange study strategies. Then meet again on Thursday to retest each other.
16. Use a calming technique before the test or exam. Use self-talk as you enter the room: "I can do this"; and "I know some parts will be difficult, but I've studied and I'll remember all the stupid things I've used to memorize this stuff".
17. If you are writing an exam, or completing an assignment, read all the instructions. I can't tell you how many students fail because they don't read the instructions. They may know the material, but they haven't read the instructions properly. If you get nervous, just relax, breathe and self-talk.
18. Always underline the key words in the instructions, so you get the exact requirement. If it's an assignment, rewrite it in your own writing so that you clearly absorb the question. Some students write a great essay or report, but they do not answer the question, so they lose out regardless of how great the report was.
19. If you are writing an exam for a senior level course, there is usually a time allotment or a mark allotment. Do not do the exam in order. First, scan the entire exam. Then, start with the hardest part; you know, the part that's worth 50% of the exam. Then move on to the easier parts. In that way, you'll be fresher for the longer, harder, and more tedious part of the exam. When you're tired, after the second hour, you'll only have the portions worth less to complete, so it won't matter as much as if you had the larger portions to do.
20. If you draw a blank at the exam time, relax, and breathe. Next, imagine yourself looking through your binder for the answer. Imagine yourself seeing the text written on the page. Or imagine yourself listening to the teacher give the answer. Close your eyes for a few seconds and then write the first thing that comes to mind.
21. And finally, if you're writing a report, strive to complete it at least a few days before it's due, then leave it alone. Re-read it the night before and be prepared to make final draft changes. It's incredible how much you miss when you keep re-reading the same piece over and over again. It looks completely different after a few days later.

Good luck studying!