

Study Skills Tips for January

With the beginning of the new year, it's always a great time to reassess your academic approach. The key to making the most of this opportunity is focusing on the things which will bring the biggest return.

1. Simplify Your Organisation System

Every student has an organisation system. True, the definition of 'organisation' may be looser for some students than others, but everyone has a way they stay organised.

Maybe you're the 'Type-A' student and you have a clearly defined system. You'll know that you're 'Type-A' by the file folders you both own and use, the folded socks in your drawer, and all the lists by which you keep track of important information. You probably have a calendar, a planner, and you know exactly which clothing is clean and which is dirty.

But not everyone fits in such a naturally organised world. These students can be called 'Type-B.'

If you're a 'Type-B' student, you're not alone, but organisation probably requires more effort. 'Type-B' students tend to prefer 'piling systems' to filing cabinets. Calendars often seem like too much work, so they'd rather just put everything in their backpacks and find it later. Students on the far end of the 'Type-B' universe may even find themselves sorting laundry via the "smell check" method.

Regardless of whether you are a Type A or B student, one of the biggest difference-makers this year is your organisation system. Few things will save time and improve academic performance the way an effective organisation system will.

A great organisation system has at its centre one goal: replace your brain.

The more organised you are, the less you have to think. Your organisation system should be simple enough that you don't have to make any decisions about where you put new assignments, where to find completed assignments, or what to do with graded assignments. You shouldn't have to go through a mental checklist every time you study because your organisation system does it for you.

The fewer decisions you need to make, the more your thoughts and energy can focus on things that matter. Consider these four questions to determine how simple your organisation system is right now:

- Do you have good systems in place to manage and organise both the paper and digital resources for school?
- Do you have a system to make sure that all assignments and due dates are marked on your calendar/planner?
- Do you have a system to focus on what needs to be done today and not just what's due tomorrow?

When you can answer each of these four questions without thinking, you'll know that your organisation system is simple enough to be a major asset this year.

2. Break the 'Cram Cycle' Before it Starts

By the end of the semester, students often find themselves overloaded and overwhelmed, having to rely on cramming for final exams to get through to the break. They are exhausted and in survival mode. Thriving academically no longer matters. All that matters is the break at the end.

If you've ever felt this way, you've experienced what we call the 'Cram Cycle.' Students get busy during the semester, which leads to exhaustion. When you're exhausted, the only thing you want to do is zone out for a bit. After an afternoon of zoning, students are forced to put all their effort into completing assignments that are due tomorrow. We call this 'cramming.' As students work on only

that which is due tomorrow, long-term assignments pile up and create even more busyness, which leads to exhaustion, and the 'Cram Cycle' begins to accelerate.

Most students only get out of the 'Cram Cycle' when the semester ends.

But this year can be different. If you want to stay out of this dreaded cycle, commit yourself to doing some independent learning at least five days a week, even when you don't have anything due the next day. Use every day as a review day, spreading out your study sessions for big tests and projects across multiple days instead of letting them pile up. This approach takes more effort initially to create these habits, but you'll reap the benefits when you're free of the 'Cram Cycle'.

3. Supercharge Retention with Scientifically verified Study Strategies

Everyone knows that taking notes is a good idea. Reading your textbooks seem like a great thing to do. And you've probably learned that it's best to have a consistent place to study, one which is quiet, clean, and comfortable enough (but not TOO comfortable).

But what are the strategies that have been scientifically verified to boost your retention?

One of the best things you can do is to take a break in the middle of your study sessions. In one study, psychologists wanted to find out whether there was any difference in 'spacing' a study session (this means to take a break in the middle) or 'massing' instead (which means that you hammer it out all at once).

The researchers took two randomly chosen, equal groups of students, gave them the same amount of study time, gave them the same material, and tested them on the material afterward. The only difference was that one group took a short break in the middle and the other group didn't. The results were incredible.

The group that studied with 'spacing' performed 50% better than the group that studied with 'massing'. That means in the same amount of study time, you could potentially boost your retention by 50% by just taking a ten-minute break.

Learn more this year about how to improve your results and be more efficient and effective with your schoolwork by working through the units on www.studyskillshandbook.com.au . Our school's access details are:

Username: olmc@olmc.nsw.edu.au

Password: 64 results