

# **HOW TO STUDY EFFECTIVELY**

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How to Study Effectively by Guy Montrose Whipple

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BY

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## INTRODUCTORY

Not long ago I was asked by a group of high-school students to present to them some suggestions on the technique of studying, with the idea that better knowledge of the methods by which school work could be prepared might increase their efficiency as students. A survey of the available literature seemed to warrant the conclusion that, despite the existence of a number of books upon the art of study, there was still room for another treatment that should be limited to the direct laying down of a series of rules or maxims, with just sufficient explanatory comment to make them readily intelligible and serviceable for the needs of the average high-school or college student. I judge that many students in our high schools and colleges are not now working under the best possible conditions, and that they would be glad to increase their efficiency, if only they knew how to do it. The rules which follow are intended to help these students. Most of the suggestions could also be profitably kept in mind by elementary-school teachers, whose business it should be as early as possible to develop right habits of study in their pupils.

While it is true that much of what is presented in the school is calculated to appeal directly to the native interests of students, to elicit their curiosity, and to challenge their attention, it is equally true that most studying is real work, and that most boys and girls have to acquire the art of studying as they have to acquire many other habits and skills necessary to success in life. Moreover, conditions in many elementary schools are unfortunately such as to promote only the most superficial kind of studying, to put a premium upon the mere committing to memory of words, to permit fickle and ill-sustained attention and the avoidance of hard intellectual work. Students in both high school and college have been studying, it is true, for years, but too often they have not been studying efficiently, have not formed right habits of mental work, and indeed, do not even know how to go about the development of an adequate method or plan for such work. They are often unable to recognize as such the problems set before them, nor do they have clear ideas as to the methods by which problems should be solved. Neither do they know fully how to deal with those 'lessons' that must be 'learned' more or less verbatim. For by 'studying' I mean to include the 'getting of lessons,' like learning a list of words in spelling, as well as studying in the sense of solving problems and making an investigatory examination and critical survey of a topic.

In what follows I propose no universal remedy *for these ills*. The fundamental differences between



stupid children and bright children will remain whether they are taught to study or not. No scheme of instruction will bring all students to the same level of proficiency. But the proficiency of each student may be increased by teaching him to use more skillfully what brains he has. Thus, Breslich\*, for example, shows that a weak section studying only at school, but under careful supervision, may be brought up to the performance of a strong section allowed to study at school without supervision, plus an hour and a quarter a day at home. Granting that these results are typical, how much time must have been wasted in the studying of the strong pupils?

Efficiency is the watch-word of modern industrial life. The school, after all, is a sort of brain factory. Its material is found in the subject-matter of the various studies and in the mental operations of its students. Studying is the method by which subject-matter is converted into ideas that shall be effective in the subsequent life of the students and by which at the same time the mental capacities of the students shall be drilled and trained. It is safe to say that failure to guide and direct study is the weak point in the whole educational machine. There is more than a fanciful analogy in the parallel between scientific management in modern industry and control of the technique of study in the modern school. The elimination of 'waste motion' in the

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\*See *Suggestions For Further Reading*, appended to the text, for references to books and articles dealing with studying.

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factory must be paralleled by the elimination of 'waste motion' in the school. The chief source of this waste lies in the process of studying.

## THE RULES

### 1. Keep yourself in good physical condition.

Your mental efficiency depends on the efficiency of your central nervous system. This system suffers like any other part of your body from inadequate exercise, insufficient sleep, ill-digested food, or confinement in ill-ventilated rooms.

**Sleep.** More students sleep too little than sleep too much. From the averages of the six best authorities we may recommend the following duration of sleep:

Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Hours	12.3	11.5	11.2	11.0	10.5	10.2	9.8	9.6	9.25	9.0	8.75	8.5

**Exercise.** Remember that exercise, particularly in the form of outdoor recreation and games, is valuable not merely for requiring strength, and skill, but also for stimulating the digestive, circulatory, and excretory systems of the body to the more active supplying of nutrition and removal of waste products. Further, that exercise carried on under pleasant auspices affords a useful antidote for mental weariness and monotony.

### 2. Attend to, remove or treat physical defects that often handicap mental activity, such as defective eyesight, defective hearing, defective teeth, adenoids, obstructed nasal breathing.