

HOW TO STUDY

By Amari Luu

Know the Class

You should have a general understanding of who you are and what you are good at. Know what classes you can take or enjoy, or the subjects you know you can handle yourself in. Don't take an AP class that would make you uncomfortable or you know you are generally bad at. (I didn't take AP Music Theory because I'm practically tone deaf). This isn't to say that you should only take easy classes. Take AP classes if you want to challenge yourself in a subject. This can be great for subjects you are passionate about as it allows you to delve deeper into the topic.

Know the Teacher

As you certainly know, every teacher has their own way of doing things. Within the first few weeks of school, get to know the teacher and how he/she manages the class. Are they a hard grader? Do they curve tests? How lenient are they with late work? What do tests look like? Are there pop quizzes? Always be on the teacher's good side. You get a lot more leniency and mercy if you do this.

Prioritize Timing

Some classes simply require more time than others. Although there are class difficulty hierarchies you can look up online, every person is different. Always do the more difficult work first. This ensures that you are at the top of your energy level when work gets difficult. If you have a lot of harder assignments and get tired, split up the time block. Put an easier assignment in between your work for harder assignments.

Another, perhaps more important, way to prioritize assignments is by grade. Prioritize the classes where you know you can't get a bad grade in. If there is a class where you are on the borderline between an A and a B, do the work for that class before the work for the class where you are in a solid A+ range. If you cannot finish both assignments, doing the borderline class assignment might bring your grade to an A while not doing the A+ class assignment might result in the loss of a few points but still retaining an A.

A final way to prioritize assignments is by due date. You should not put one assignment to the last minute because you wanted to do an assignment due two weeks from now.

Remove Distractions

People have probably told you not to have your phone around when you're studying. This is extremely true and you should definitely do this. Put your phone in a completely different room so you aren't tempted to grab it.

Do your work ASAP

If a homework assignment is due next week, you might be tempted to put it off. If there are more pressing concerns or difficult work, by all means, do that homework first. But if you have nothing else, don't ever procrastinate. You will most likely forget about that assignment until the day it's due. Do your work as soon as possible.

Connect Classes

Although it doesn't typically happen, sometimes there are a few certain classes in your schedule that have very similar concepts. For example, my AP Biology and AP Environmental Science classes were very similar in some units, if not outright identical. When these things happen, you can study for both classes at the same time. When I studied for biology, the same concepts carried over to environmental science.

Although classes with near identical content may seem great, the truth is that they are very rare. That said, basic concepts still carry through. Virtually every single science class teaches the scientific method at some point. Find general concepts like that and apply them to all the classes possible. This will make it a lot more efficient to study and answer questions. When a test stumps you, think back to previous class knowledge.

Especially with math, you can use new/more advanced techniques to solve otherwise tedious problems. For example, AP Physics 1 is touted as being algebra based. However, algebra is often annoying and time consuming. In this case, I was able to apply what I learned from my AP Calculus class to solve the same equation. Whenever possible, use higher level techniques taught in other classes to solve problems (unless the teacher requires you to show a certain type of work).

Understand the General Concept First

Oftentimes, we are forced to memorize absurd numbers of vocabulary words (across all my classes, I might have as many as 2-3000 vocab words, names, dates, equations and concepts to know). Unless you have a perfect photographic memory, it's nearly impossible to get everything without some tricks. The best way to go about learning terms is to first understand the general concept of the unit. For instance, I know that the mid to late 1800s European continent was marked by patriotic fervor. Importantly, you have to know the basics as to why this happened. In the Europe example, revolutions and war had pushed leaders towards creating powerful states. By knowing the general nature of the unit, I was able to build vocabulary off of that knowledge. Every time a new vocab word, name or date was introduced, I was able to connect it to the general concept of that unit. Think of it like a tree: the general concept is the trunk. The individual vocab and ideas are the branches. It's much easier to build the branches off the trunk than the trunk from the branches.

Apply Concepts

Once you know the general concept, know how to apply it to the test questions. This goes outside of just the designated studying time. When you are doing day to day tasks or even hanging out with friends, take a few moments to try and apply what you learned. Image yourself as a scientist using the scientific method when you are trying to fix your calculator. Put yourself in the shoes of an American Revolutionary when you are watching a movie. How might he/she have historically reacted or thought of the situation? What would a statistician make of your friends' taste in music? By keeping these thoughts in mind, you are enhancing your knowledge of the subject even more.

Practice

When it comes to studying for math, practice is the best solution. Do as many demo problems as you can find. A memorized formula means nothing if you don't know how to use it. Look up practice problems online, get a practice book, have your peers come up with some or ask a teacher for it. Something I have seen time and time again is that my friends will just look over notes and formulas in preparation for a test. This is not an effective method. One of my friends who took this measure ended up getting an 18% on his first calculus exam.

When you do practice problems, you also highlight to yourself what you need the most work on. Prioritize understanding those problems first.

Find Others

Remember, high school academics is not a battle you have to fight alone. Find friends and teachers to help you along the way. Calculus is not the easiest subject for me so I have one of my math nerd friends re-explain the concepts to me during lunch or over a call. In return, I help him with English and History (my strong suit). Don't be afraid to approach a teacher and ask them for extra assistance. Although some are irritable, the vast majority of teachers appreciate that you are brave enough to advocate for yourself.

One of the best ways to test and reinforce your knowledge is to teach others. In the two weeks prior to the AP European History exam, I would hold video call sessions where I would explain to my friends the concepts we had to know. Teaching others is often difficult, but it is by far the one of the best ways to reinforce your own knowledge base.