

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center

School of Nursing

Bren's Study Tips for Nursing School

These are tips, not instructions! If you have a good method of studying that is working well for you, keep on doing what you're doing! But if you are looking to study a little more effectively, read on and pick out anything that may be helpful! Basic rules for studying: ***Plan It, Do It, Review It!***

1. First of all, ***PLAN IT!*** – don't let it be random (leads to random grades!)
 - a. Is it in your planner, like everything else important in your life?
 - b. Do you have a place set aside to study?
 - c. Plan out each day's study – what subject am I going to work on today? Tomorrow? The day after? What do I need to have available during this study session? Studying should be an *active* activity, with your eyes moving from one resource to another, keeping the brain engaged. That activity moves information to long term memory faster than just passively reading text.
 - d. Have I gotten rid of all my distractions? Phone, email, TV – these all nibble away at your concentration and the amount of time you actually spend studying!

2. Gear your study habits to the type of learner you are. We are all a mixture of three types of learners, but we all have one that just feels more natural.
 - a. Visual – have to see it before it makes sense
 - b. Auditory – have to hear about it or talk about it (try tape recorder)
 - c. Kinetic – have to touch it, do it, move it, sing it (both kinetic and auditory)

Try this - think about how you like to get directions: Do you want to look at a map? You are probably a visual learner. Do you want someone to tell you how to get there? Probably an auditory learner. Do you want to write the directions down yourself? You're probably a kinetic learner. So once you know how you learn best, try to incorporate it into your studying!

3. Now you are ready to **DO IT!** There's a reason we tell you not to cram – cramming only moves information into short-term memory for a very short period of time. **Fairly short, repeated exposure** to concepts helps move information into our long-term memory banks. Research has shown that it takes a minimum of **7 – 10 exposures** to information before it is really starting to move into long term memory! Remember, you are trying to keep this information for years, not weeks! Think **career**, not just nursing school! 2 hours every day will make the information a part of you forever – yea! 14 hours in one day – you will keep about 20% of what you crammed in (not a good investment of your valuable time and effort!)
4. Now, before you go on, I know that this is looking more and more complicated . . . but it really isn't. Doing a-d of the following section will only take you a couple of hours – truly!
5. We learn naturally by going from simple concepts to complex concepts. Your textbooks are absolutely chock full of information – “gotta know” stuff, “good to know” stuff and “stuff that may come in handy *someday*”. They are a complex resource! Use your resources to sort out what is most important to know first!
 - a. Start new concepts by reviewing anatomy and pathophysiology. You must know body systems very well, as well as how they function, because you will be teaching these concepts to patients and families!
 - b. Get a layman's overview of the concept you want to learn about. Try Wikipedia, then WebMD. These online resources are not always absolutely accurate but they give you a quick overview.
 - c. Now look at your ATI book and Saunders NCLEX review book – here you get good exposure to that “gotta know” information in a short compact format.
 - d. Look at the Powerpoint presentations available to you.
 - e. Classroom time – take notes (handwritten), actively listen to lecture (no other activities, such as looking at Facebook). After class, compare notes with your friends and talk about the concepts. By now, that's **9 exposures!** Woo-hoo!!

Using these resources give you exposure to words/concepts in short, compact formats, before reading more about them in the textbook.

6. Before you start to read your textbook, scan the chapter and know what it is covering. Look at the vocabulary lists and objectives for the chapter. Look at the summary and the questions at the end of the chapter – can you already answer most of those questions? If you can, then you have a good basic understanding of the concepts. Now you are ready for the textbook to add that “good to know” (*“make me an excellent nurse”*) information! The best part is – when you do finally get to the textbook, it will seem easier (because it’s not brand-new info) and richer (because you are picking up the finer details). Win-win for everyone!
7. Our brains are all a little ADD – they do not learn by looking at one thing for a long period of time. We need to keep our eyes moving and our brain engaged with our activity (studying). Sitting with our book open in our lap for 3 hours is usually not effective studying – learning does not occur by osmosis! Have your notes, PowerPoint’s, ATI and NCLEX books, etc. available and cross-reference while you read.
8. 30 - 45 minutes is usually about as long as effective learning is taking place by reading. After this amount of time, take a break – get something to eat, take a walk, do something physical – for about 15 minutes, then come back and start again! You do have to be disciplined enough to be able to come back to it – refreshed and ready to start learning again!
9. You don’t have to have complete understanding of a concept in your first few exposures. Your brain will continue to mull over all of the information and put pieces together, while you are consciously thinking of other things or sleeping! Have you ever been so frustrated with trying to understand a concept that you just gave up and went to bed? And as soon as you opened your eyes the next morning, it was clear and easy to understand? Your unconscious thought processes never sleep and they were hard at work, while you rested. Give your brain a break after a couple of hours of studying one subject and when you come back to studying, change to a different subject. You’ll get double coverage for half the effort!
10. Pay close attention to all the helps in the books – bold words, tables, graphs, etc.

11. Use whatever appeals to you – colors, making up songs, making up movements – anything that will jog your memory.
12. Consider writing your notes by hand – this seems to meet the kinesthetic needs of many students (much more so than typing them on the computer) and moves information into long term memory faster. Plus you can use colored inks, draw connecting lines for concepts, etc.
13. Take advantage of “down time” for memorization work – let your brain absorb information without a lot of effort! Plant sticky notes all over the house with information that you just have to remember, such as lab values, vital signs, protocols. Use bold print, so you can see it from several feet away. Do not write too small – just basic information that will trigger your memory to recall the other details. Then when you need the information, it is easier to remember (“sodium levels – left side of bathroom mirror – 135-145!) Even when you don’t actively look at the notes, your brain will remember what it has “seen”.
14. Start a study session on a new body system with review of the anatomy and pathophysiology of the body system – what is the basic function (or functions) of the body system? Know how it is supposed to work before you start thinking about how it is not functioning well. (A & P, patho, basic concepts – all are “gotta know” stuff!)
15. Simulate testing conditions while you study – it can be counter-productive to study under conditions (music, phone, food, TV, people talking) that will not help jog the memory during testing. Study in a quiet atmosphere, use earplugs, scratch paper (jot down questions, notes). Use the tests in your ATI and NCLEX books (ATI website) to provide a realistic testing situation – set a time limit and try to replicate any test anxiety you may feel, so that you can work on this in a controlled environment!
16. Now you have finished the first go round and are ready to **REVIEW IT!** Do it all over again, yes, really, truly! This is why you must plan your study time – to do it well takes time! Focus on your ATI and Saunders the second time around, if really pressed for time.