LEARNING
DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESS

LDS "How to" Series: Learning large amounts of information

Learning in a university setting can feel overwhelming due to the volume of information that you need to know. The strategies which have been successful for you up until this point may no longer work, and you may find yourself looking for more efficient ways of learning[1]. Below, you will find some strategies which can help you learn, synthesize, and understand large amounts of information.

In professional and graduate studies, we are aiming to move beyond simply memorizing facts, and would like to understand the information. This means that we need to use **active learning strategies**[1].

What is active learning?

Active learning involves strategies that make us analyze and connect with what we are trying to learn[2]. During active learning, we are using the information rather than passively reading or highlighting it. Applying the information allows us to better remember it later[3], and allows us to understand it on a deeper level.

What are some strategies for learning large amounts of information?

When trying to learn large amounts of information, the key is finding **a system that works for you**. All of these strategies require time, focus and effort, but with practice you can make your learning efficient.

Chunk the information	- Break the information into manageable parts - Ex. An 80 page chapter can be divided into 4 x 20 page increments - You can chunk your study time into shorter, extremely focused increments
Read actively	- Do your readings before class if you can - When you read, try to summarize the information to yourself after each paragraph - With each paragraph, add to your summary - Use your summary as the basis of your notes
Study actively	- Answer practice questions - Make connections between lessons, chapters and systems - Teach the material to someone else - Use study groups to test your own knowledge and fill in knowledge gaps
Create your own mnemonics	- Remember long lists by associating the information with something else - Create a song or rhyme (the alphabet song is a mnemonic device for the 26 letters) - Utilize visualization to create a mental image of what you need to remember

Create something with the information	- Do this soon after learning it - Create study sheets, mind maps and summaries **in your own words** - Organize the information into related chunks - Identify questions that you have about the material, and ask them!
Use spaced practice	- Immediately after learning something, look at it every few days - As you begin to understand it, you can go longer between studying it - This prevents us from forgetting it soon after it is learned
Do practice tests	- Create your own practice tests to both use the information and predict what is most important - Use online question banks if they are available for standardized testing - Try to re-create your test environment when you are completing practice tests
Make a study schedule	- A schedule can help you keep organized and keep your studying on track - This can be rigid or flexible, depending on your preference - Make sure you schedule time to eat, sleep and be social
Stay healthy	- Your brain requires sleep and fuel to function optimally - Studying after a good night sleep is more effective than studying when exhausted[5] - Make time for things that you love – whether this is exercise, knitting, or playing an instrument - Downtime allows our brains to make connections[4] – this can help us understand material
Start early	- Memorizing the night before a test is stressful, and does not promote long term understanding - Start studying the material early, and make connections between subjects

These strategies may seem time consuming. However, your goal is to understand the material without having to re-learn it. Utilizing active learning strategies can help prevent needing to re-read an entire chapter, or having to listen to a lecture for a second time. These strategies take practice, and you may need to try a few before you find one that works for you.

The last strategy is to ask for help! Your professors and program want you to succeed, and there are many avenues to seek help at Western. Reach out for help early and get connected with as many supports as you can.

References

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