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WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO STUDY: MORNING, NOON OR NIGHT?

If you are a student, studying is part and parcel of your life. It takes patience and practice to establish the best time for you to study. For some people, mornings are better¹ for studying, while for others, evening or night time enables to focus better on their studies.

According to the science of “good timing” – also known as chronobiology² – peak performance is hardwired into our DNA. Our biological clock, which is an inner clock embedded inside our brain since young, actually helps us decide when is our perfect timing for studying. Although new discoveries prove that timing may not be everything, it is important if you want to create and perform at your best consistently.

That said, science has indicated that learning is most effective between 10 am to 2 pm and from 4 pm to 10 pm, when the brain is in an acquisition mode. On the other hand, the least effective learning time is between 4 am and 7 am. While there is really no one best time of the day to study, let’s take a look at the benefits of studying in the morning versus the other times of the day.



Studying in the Morning

Most people would think that morning is the best time to study, as our brains tend to be the sharpest in the morning after a refreshing night’s sleep and breakfast. The natural light available is also good for your eyes and keep you alert. This period is great for opening a textbook to learn a new theory, or just reviewing your lecturer’s notes from the previous day because mornings generally give you a better recollection ability.

Studying in the Afternoon

In the afternoon, students’ brains are good at integrating new information with what they already know. During this time of day, students are able to create connections and make the information they have learned more meaningful.

Mornings and afternoons are better for studying also because if you get stuck midway through your study, you can always call your peers or teachers to clarify quickly, as it is the time when people are most active, or even visit the library for more information.

Studying at Night

For some students, they have more energy later in the day. Hence, the evening or night time is a more effective time for them to read and study. Studying at this time also helps to improve your concentration and creativity as there are fewer distractions, and with everyone in bed, there is definitely peace and quiet. Sleeping after studying is also said to consolidate information and improve recall. One thing to note though, do make sure you are still getting an average of 8 to 9 hours of sleep nightly.

Interestingly, some research has suggested that studying at your most tired time can help your brain retain higher concentrations of new skills, such as speaking a foreign language. This apparently even has a name to it: sleep-learning³. Because during slow-wave sleep, the memory-consolidation process does its best work and your brain could be receiving the restoration and reactivation that it needs during its time of rest. This means that studying before bedtime can help your brain learn new things, even in your sleep.

How to find your best time to study?

That said, different timings work for different students and you can find your best time of the day to study if you consider the following factors⁴.

Firstly, when are you most alert? Think about that, but different qualities of memories and alertness seem to be better at different times of the day for different people. For example, you can have a better visual memory in the morning, but your critical thinking ability peaks in the afternoon. Secondly, if your optimal time is prone to distractions, such as dinner time, which might disrupt your routine, it is best to find another timing. Lastly, make sure you select a time that you can stick to consistently, at least for a few days every week because consistency helps ensure you study daily and improves the quality of your study time.

Just like each student has a unique learning style, different students may learn better at different times of the day. But if you study at the same time every day, you will condition your mind and body gradually and soon, you will be in your best frame of mind for study. Once you know what works best for yourself, you can start your studying routine more effectively and efficiently.

¹What Is the Best Time for Studying?, Improve Study Habits, <https://www.improvestudyhabits.com/what-is-the-best-time-for-studying/> by Michael Borgers (Oct 27, 2018)

²Chronobiology: The Science of Time, <https://www.chronobiology.com/about-chronobiology/>

³Can You Learn Anything While You Sleep? Live Science, <https://www.livescience.com/64920-how-learn-during-sleep.html>, by Bahar Gholipour (March 8, 2019)

⁴The Best Time To Study, Master of Memory, <https://masterofmemory.com/the-best-time-to-study/>

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