

# Why Most Learners Study Wrong: 10 Study Method Myths vs. Facts.

**Brought to you by Lourens Breytenbach**

Most learners approach studying incorrectly because they focus on passive effort rather than active engagement.

Students often spend hours passively rereading textbooks and highlighting notes, which creates a dangerous "illusion of competence". Because the material looks familiar when it is right in front of them, they **mistake simple visual recognition for true memory recall.**

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Furthermore, many students believe that simply "trying harder" by grinding through long, exhausting study sessions will yield better results, but this often leads to burnout, diminished concentration, and severe test anxiety.

True learning actually requires deliberate mental struggle to physically rewire the brain—a biological process known as neuroplasticity.

**Here are 10 persistent study method myths and the actual facts behind them:**

1. Myth: Rereading and highlighting are the best ways to study.

**The Truth:** These are passive activities that trick your brain into thinking it knows the material. If you color a page solid orange,

you have actually highlighted nothing. Instead, **the most effective method is active recall**, which forces your brain to pull information from memory without looking at your notes or the answers.

2. Myth: Cramming the night before a test is an effective strategy.

**The Truth:** Cramming only temporarily holds information in your short-term memory 13-15. For long-term retention, **you must use spaced repetition**—reviewing the material at gradually increasing intervals over several days or weeks to permanently lock it into your brain.

3. Myth: You should study one subject entirely before moving on to the next.

**The Truth:** Focusing on the same information for hours on end is not advantageous. A technique called "**interleaving**" (mixing different subjects or problem types in a single session) is much more effective because it forces the brain to temporarily forget and then retrieve information, strengthening the memory pathways.

4. Myth: If studying feels difficult and frustrating, you are doing it wrong.

**The Truth:** Mental struggle is a biological requirement for learning. This "**desirable difficulty**" signifies that your neurons are physically firing and wiring together to build stronger connections. If you are not mentally sweating, you are likely not truly learning.

5. Myth: Multitasking while studying saves time.

**The Truth:** The human brain cannot actually multitask; it simply switches contexts rapidly. Multitasking while studying drains cognitive resources, **reduces learning efficiency by up to 40%**, and can temporarily lower your effective IQ by up to 10 points.

6. Myth: Studying in bed is a good way to stay comfortable.

**The Truth:** Your brain heavily relies on environmental cues. If you study in bed, your brain associates the space with sleep, which reduces your alertness and focus, and simultaneously ruins your sleep quality. You should always use a dedicated, distraction-free study space.

7. Myth: Long marathon study sessions are required for good grades.

**The Truth:** The brain's cognitive capacity diminishes rapidly without breaks. Sitting at a desk for 6 hours often results in only 20 to 30 minutes of actual studying. Working in short, intense bursts (like 25 to 50 minutes) followed by mandatory short breaks is vastly more efficient for maintaining high focus and preventing burnout.

8. Myth: Sleep is a luxury, and pulling an all-nighter is sometimes necessary.

**The Truth:** Sleep is the fundamental "infrastructure" of learning. During deep sleep, the brain replays the day's learning and consolidates fragile short-term memories into permanent long-term storage. Pulling an all-nighter prevents this consolidation, essentially erasing the information you tried to learn.

9. Myth: Memorizing complex jargon means you understand the topic.

**The Truth:** Memorizing technical terms is often just defining a word using other words, which masks a lack of true understanding. According to the Feynman Technique, true mastery only occurs when you can explain a complex concept using simple, plain language, as if you were teaching a 12-year-old.

10. Myth: Reading the correct answer after getting a practice question wrong is enough to learn it.

**The Truth:** Simply recognizing that the correct answer "makes sense" is an illusion of learning. If you get a question wrong, it is a genuine knowledge gap, not just a "silly mistake". You must actively review and retrieve that specific information on a different day to ensure you have actually corrected the gap.

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