

Metacognition

Your Life Hack for Success in College

Have you ever been reading a textbook and suddenly realized you have no idea what you read? Have you ever received a test back and realized that you should have used a different strategy for studying? If so, you're already practicing metacognition.

Metacognition involves being aware of your own thought processes—things like:

- Planning and controlling which strategies you use to learn,
- Monitoring what you do and don't know (and what to do about it), and
- Reflecting on which learning strategies worked for you, and which didn't.

Dr. Sandra McGuire, who has written about this topic, describes metacognition like a brain outside of your real brain that's looking in to see what your real brain is doing and how well it's doing it. Some students do this naturally, but for those who don't, it can be learned. So, how can you learn to be more metacognitive? By practicing the art of *thinking about your thinking*.



Flip this page over to discover some metacognitive strategies that are used by successful college students. As you practice these strategies, do some *thinking about your own thinking* by reading more about why these strategies work. Gaining knowledge about how you learn and learning to control your own thinking is powerfully motivating... and may just be your best life hack for succeeding in college.

Want to know more? Check out these resources:

Chew, S. (2011). *How to get the most out of studying: A video series*. [<http://www.samford.edu/how-to-study>].

McGuire, S.Y. (2018). *Teach yourself how to learn: Strategies you can use to ace any course at any level*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Putnam, A.L., Sungkhasettee, V.W., & Roediger, H.L. (2016). Optimizing learning in college: Tips from cognitive psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 11(5), 652-660.

Sample Metacognitive Strategies

| | What To Do | Why It Works |
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| Strategies for Reading | Spend five minutes <u>skimming the reading</u> , looking at the headings and subheadings. If there are questions at the end of the chapter, see if you can answer them. | It activates your prior knowledge and helps you connect new knowledge to what you already know. |
| | Write <u>notes in the margins of the text</u> , noting connections with things you've learned before; summaries, diagrams, or pictures of key points in your own words; and questions you still have. Use sticky notes if you prefer not to write on your text. | It keeps you on task, and ensures that you're accessing your own understanding, rather than memorizing. |
| | <u>Teach someone else</u> the material in your own words. | It forces you to consider what's important, and to explain things as if the topic was new to you. |
| Strategies for Note-Taking | <u>Print your instructor's slides or notes</u> , if provided, and bring them to class. Take your own notes, by hand and in your own words, alongside your instructor's. Abbreviate and paraphrase! | It enables you to focus on your own thinking, rather than writing down everything your instructor is saying. |
| | Any time you encounter something you're not sure you understand, <u>star it and come back to it later</u> . If you need help understanding it, visit your instructor during office hours. | It ensures you're monitoring whether or not you understand the material, and prevents you from missing anything important. |
| Strategies for Test Preparation | <u>Space out your studying</u> over several days. Replace cramming sessions with short, more frequent study sessions. | It requires you to think about the information frequently, and in different ways, which makes it stick. |
| | <u>Use aids like flashcards wisely</u> . Don't copy definitions from the text—write them in your own words and include real-life examples. | It ensures you're not merely memorizing, and that you're thinking about how the information can be applied. |
| | <u>Quiz yourself</u> by predicting the questions that will occur on the test. Create a practice test, and answer your own questions (or trade with a friend). | Creating questions requires deeper thinking, and answering the questions checks your knowledge. |
| | <u>Re-organize and synthesize your notes</u> , combining textbook and class notes, and organizing them into charts or concept maps. Do not simply re-copy your notes! | It requires you to compare and combine information, which enables you to make connections. |
| Strategies for Test-Taking | <u>Make a judgement call</u> on each question. How confident are you in your answer? Star the questions that worry you, and revisit them before you submit your test. | It requires you to evaluate what you know and don't know, and gives you a record of your pattern of answers. |
| | <u>Predict your grade</u> before you receive your test back, then compare your prediction with the grade you receive. | It requires you to evaluate your accuracy in predicting what information is important, and which strategies will enable you to learn best. |
| | When your test is returned to you, spend a few minutes <u>reflecting on your performance</u> . Are there patterns to your mistakes? Which strategies worked for you? Which didn't? | Critiquing your own learning strategies enables you to plan for future changes in your study habits. |