

Study Well

People study in many different ways and study is often about finding what works best for you. These are some general guidelines to help you improve on your own study technique. Although these guidelines have been written with the trainee in mind, the principles for effective study are applicable to all students.

Attitude

It is important to have the right attitude towards study but we all have memories about how we felt about school. For many people, these will be negative memories of being embarrassed by exam marks or not knowing the answer in class. Homework may have got in the way of sports or socialising and it was a low priority. These negative feelings about school linger in many people and they can interfere with learning new skills or studying for exams that are part of being in the ADF. There is a big difference however, between school and the ADF. At school it was often difficult to see the relevance of what you learned but in the ADF what you learn is important for the work you do, your own safety, the safety of the people who work with you as well as for your career progression and prospects. The ADF expects you to study but for some trainees study is not a priority and this often leads to difficulties with their course or even to failure. To ensure success, make sure other activities such as watching TV, going out with mates or phone calls home do not take priority over study.

Study Environment

This is often difficult to control in a communal living environment. Try, if possible, to:

- have a well-lit study area
- make sure it is not so hot that you fall asleep, or too cold
- study at a desk so that you feel in 'study mode'. Studying while lying on your bed means you can't write out notes or test yourself properly and you may fall asleep.
- make your study area as quiet as possible. Often this will be hard and you may need to put on some music or TV to drown out other noise in the block. If you have to do this, don't put on music or a TV program that will distract you.
- keep distractions around your desk to a minimum e.g., don't have computer games, TV, or pictures of loved ones around your desk as this will make it easy to get sidetracked

Routine

Trainees who do well in the ADF normally have some sort of study routine. They have set aside a certain time each evening and study at that time so that it becomes a regular habit. The sooner you start a pattern, the easier study will be.

When to Study

Studying late at night when you are tired from the day's learning is not a good idea. You will have only a short attention span and little of the work you are trying to learn will "sink in". Some trainees find that they can study straight after classes as they are still thinking of the course but many need a break and prefer to study after dinner. The main point is to study when you feel alert and able to concentrate and learn the material. Trying to study when you are too tired is a waste of time. It is better to do other tasks e.g., ironing, washing or relaxing instead.

Revision

Revising each night over what you have covered in class that day helps you to remember what you learned during the day and often makes it easier to study for the exam. If you have the time, read ahead to the next day's lesson to prepare you for what your instructor will talk about. If you have not understood what your class covered that day, ask for some help as most courses get progressively harder and if you haven't understood the basics then it is often difficult to follow the next day's lesson.

How to Study

Some trainees 'study' by just reading over their notes but this is not usually very effective. A more effective approach is a more active one involving:

- reading over your notes many times
- organising your notes, highlighting or underlining important words or points
- writing out your notes in a summary or point form
- testing yourself by trying to remember your notes without looking at them. Write out questions for yourself and think about what questions you would put in the exam if you were an instructor. many trainees also find it helpful to ask each other questions
- practise using maths formulas and complete the revision problems if you are a technical trainee. Put up a chart around your desk of all the formulas that you have learned.
- use prompt cards - write out a formula or definition on one side and the answer on the other. Put some into a pocket and go through them if you are waiting somewhere or have a few spare minutes.

Tip

A good study method works on similar principles to learning about a new sport, hobby or someone special. The process is the same of finding out information about this activity or person, thinking about this information or conversations, reading and re-reading information or letters and talking about it/him/her with friends and family. You are going over the information many times and in different ways so that you learn it off by heart.

How to keep motivated

Often trainees find it hard to start on study. If you are like this:

- don't wait until the mood strikes you, start on something and often once you've made a start you will continue
- start on something easy or interesting as this will often get you involved
- read over your class notes and what you learned during the day
- study in short bursts

Tips to keep your motivation going:

- vary what you do, but if you are going really well on one topic, don't stop
- have breaks every 30-45 minutes as this helps you to concentrate. If you study for 1-2 hours without a break, you will not be studying effectively
- give yourself a reward, such as making a phone call, having a chocolate bar, watching a TV program, etc., after you have finished a hard or important topic
- try to finish each study session on a positive and interesting note
- think about your goals in the ADF eg. the postings you want and the things that motivated you to join

How to pass exams

Exams in the ADF can be a source of major stress for many trainees. Trainees can feel worried about exams for a number of reasons. Some feel worried, as passing the exam and staying in the ADF are really important to them. Others have bad memories of exams at school and lack confidence in their ability to pass. For some, it has been years since they were at school and had to work out of books, while others never studied at school and now they have to learn how to do so very quickly. Other trainees feel pressure from family members to do well in the navy or to follow in the footsteps of another family member who has been in the Defence Force. Some have a family to support and have the pressure of knowing that loved ones are relying on them. Still others know they haven't done enough preparation or even any study for the exam. No matter how worried you feel, there are a number of things that you can do to help pass exams.

Before the Exam

The most important thing you can do is to prepare and start studying early for the exam. Sometimes it is hard to do this when you only have a day or two before the exam but for much of the time exams are days or weeks later. Some trainees cram for exams by studying only a few hours before an exam. Often this makes them confused and anxious and can lead to failing the exam.

Make sure you study effectively by going over your notes many times and testing yourself in different ways without looking at your notes. You need to be able to understand the work and remember it. If you don't understand the work, ask someone for help and ask before you get into difficulties. Lots of trainees find they need to ask their instructor or mates for help at some stage during their course. Many trainees are studying work that is new to them and the pace of training means that they have little time to learn it. You need to understand it not only to pass the exams but to do well.

Listen to what your instructor says will be in the exam and write this down. Make sure you know this but don't forget to cover other parts that could be in the exam too.

It is also important to keep a balanced lifestyle when you are studying so that the pressure does not get too much and affect your results.

In the Exam

1. Read the instructions carefully so you know what you have to do. Ask if you are unsure.
2. Read through the exam paper during reading time, working out the best order to answer the questions in. Generally do the easy questions first to build up your confidence before you move on to the harder questions.
3. Do not miss answering questions that are worth lots of marks.
4. Read the questions carefully, underlining the key words such as "not", "never", "only" etc.
5. Don't spend too long on any one question or section if you don't understand it.
6. As soon as you can begin writing, write out any important information you are worried about forgetting.
7. Read all the options for multi-choice questions. If there is no penalty for guessing, then guess intelligently, ruling out the answers that are obviously wrong.
8. If you cannot decide on an answer, write down the answer that was your gut reaction, which is normally your first response when reading the question.
9. Don't rush through the exam as this often leads to making silly mistakes.
10. If the exam has a time limit, look at the time now and then so that you do not run out of time and end up panicking.
11. Before you leave the exam room check that you haven't missed any questions or sections, check that you have put the answers in the correct answer boxes and most importantly, check over your paper for silly mistakes that could cost you the exam.

How to Deal with Exam Anxiety

It is quite common to get nervous before and during an exam. Some 'nerves' help to keep you alert and focused. It becomes a problem only when you are so worried that you cannot think clearly but there are ways to control how nervous you feel.

What to do to control exam anxiety:

- prepare well so that you are confident and ready
- think of past exams when you have done well
- mentally rehearse the exam and see yourself passing it

- have realistic expectations. Expecting to get 100% is usually unrealistic and can make you feel more anxious. Work to the best of your ability and circumstances.
- do something physical before the exam eg. push-ups, a 5 minute run, to reduce adrenalin and to help you feel more relaxed
- take a few long, deep breaths and say 'relax' to yourself
- avoid others who are panicking or who make you feel more worried
- don't panic if you can't think of the answer immediately as many tests have hard questions to test out how much trainees know

If you get a mental block in the exam, stay calm. Move on to another question that you know the answer to and then come back to the question later. If you still can't remember the answer try "brainstorming". Write down all you know about the question topic to try to jog your memory. You can also try to think of something else that is calming for you and unrelated to the exam. When you focus back on the exam you should be calmer and able to think more clearly.

Further Resources

Your local library and the Defence Library Network are good places to search for additional general information on study techniques. An Internet search under relevant key terms (such as "study tips") produces a number of potentially useful sites. The institution you are studying with will also have a range of resources for students. Contact the institution's Student Services Department for more information. Alternatively, to address more specific study concerns, you may prefer to consult your regional Psychology Support Section or Defence Community Organisation (<http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/>).