

How to Study

Remember taking your final-year high school textbook, highlighting every word and memorizing everything? Forget that approach.

At university (and in life), you need to scan a large amount of information quickly and retain what matters most.*

How do you do that?

First, do not get discouraged. Something that initially takes a long time and feels overwhelming will become easier with practice. Learning to absorb complex information efficiently is one of the most valuable skills you will acquire in medical school.

Then try the following:

1. Decide how much time you have. For example, allow three hours for Chapter 1 of Alberts (you may have plans for the evening!). Decide what you want to achieve: review the slides and chapter, retain the essentials, and note questions for the tutorial. You may also make notes to help with revision before the exam.
2. Aim to understand and remember the essentials: the key terms and concepts listed at the end of each chapter and the course learning objectives. You do not need to memorize everything.
3. Read the first page of the chapter to see what it covers. Read the headings of all its sections carefully to get an overview of what you need to learn.
4. Look at the key concepts and terms at the end of the chapter. Which ones do you not understand? Focus on those as you read. A brief first look is enough; you can return to anything unclear later.
5. Read the chapter alongside the lecture slides. Move quickly through material you already understand, points that received little attention in class, and minor details or examples. Spend more time on important ideas you do not yet understand. Study the figures carefully: they help you visualize the ideas. After each section, close the book and try to explain the main point in your own words. Check what you missed, then mark just a few key points or write them in your notes.
6. It really is all right not to read every word or cover every detail. Use the learning objectives to decide what matters most, and stop when the time you set aside is up. Protecting time for rest and the rest of your life is part of studying sustainably.
7. At the end, return to the key concepts and terminology. Try to answer a few questions without looking, then check your answers. Note anything you want to ask in the tutorial. Were there important topics discussed in class that you should add to your list?
8. Do not worry if you miss something. Learning is cumulative: you will encounter many concepts again and have chances to fill gaps. You do not have to master everything on the first pass. Keep walking!

* What matters depends on your purpose. In Biology I, aim to build a foundation for later study and to pass the course. You may return to the same text later with different goals. Ask which points serve your goals; we will discuss the exam in the tutorial and another "How to..." guide.