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How To STUDY

Second Edition

*Use Your Personal Learning Style to Help
You Succeed When It Counts*

by Gail Wood



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INTRODUCTION

What do comfort and feeling good have to do with learning? Lots! When you have the right attitude and can focus on your studying in a style that's right for you, you learn more with seemingly less effort. In the 20 minutes a day that you'll spend with this book, you'll learn how to learn!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

To get the most out of studying, you need to find what works best for you. Other people can't tell you how to study. All they can do is to tell you what works for them. If you learn the same way as they do, their tips might be helpful. But if your style is different from theirs, those tips might not be very useful to you. In fact, they might even be a waste of your time.

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH STUDYING

This book asks a lot of questions to help you learn how to study effectively. But there are no “right” or “wrong” answers here. Every question is designed to help you discover how *you* learn, and to help you do more of what works for you—whether you’re reading a text, listening to a lecture, writing a paper, or preparing for a test.



For example, in order to understand what you’re reading right now, you are doing something that works for you. Maybe you’re reading this out loud. Or “hearing” your voice in your head as you read this silently.



Perhaps you are making pictures on paper. Maybe you’re reading this as you’re walking. You might be reading all this in an orderly way, making a kind of outline in your head as you go along.



Each of these ways is a different learning style. And the early chapters in this book focus on helping you find your own learning style. Later chapters help you work with your learning style so you can use it more often.



The icons shown to the left stand for the five learning styles you’ll find out about in this book. Once you’ve identified your learning style in

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Chapter 2, “Discovering How You Learn,” you can look in the later chapters for the icon that stands for your style to find study tips that will help you take advantage of your strength.

You’re more comfortable when you’re using your own style because you’re understanding more. And when you’re comfortable, you’re more receptive—you find it easier to get involved with what you’re studying, as you’ll see in Chapter 9, “Getting Involved in Learning.” When you’re involved with what you’re studying, it doesn’t feel like work; it becomes something you enjoy.

Getting satisfaction from what you’re studying requires careful planning. Dividing big jobs into little ones makes overwhelming tasks more bearable. There’s a chapter in this book on that, too. Sometimes people can’t pay close attention to their studying because something else needs to be done. Spending a few minutes on that other job before studying will ease the conscience—thus making studying more productive.

Also, some people work best if they work on several things at once. Maybe you’ve heard, “Can’t you just do one thing at a time?” Well, for you perhaps the answer is, “No, I can’t. I work best if I go back and forth between two or three projects. If I try to stick to one job at a time, I get distracted and don’t work well.” Many people work best this way. The

trick is in paying close attention to yourself, in asking yourself, “When am I really focused? When am I feeling bored? When do I feel I’m “getting it”? When do I feel lost?” There are chapters here that help you use your learning style to understand and remember what you’re reading or listening to.

At one time or another, everyone has dreaded the idea of studying for a particular exam, whether because the topic was extremely difficult or painfully boring. In such instances, studying with a partner might be the way to go. It’s often easier and more enjoyable studying with someone else. The partner, or study buddy, can be a classmate, friend, coworker, or a family member. If your study buddy is studying the same topic you are, you can work as a team in developing questions and finding the answers. If your buddy is someone from outside class or work, she can act as your student as you teach her what you’ve been studying. Or she can act as your coach by asking you such questions as, “What part of this interested you most? Why? What sticks out in your mind?”

Once you’ve become more relaxed with the subject through working with a study buddy, you can work on your own, in a way that’s similar to working with a partner. Later in this book, you’ll find chapters about working with a study buddy and working on your own. It’s all part of discovering what works best for you.

USING THIS BOOK IN 20 MINUTES A DAY

For most people, 20 minutes is just about the amount of time they can spend concentrating; then they need to take a break. That’s why the chapters in this book are written so each one can be read in about 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, you may find your thoughts drifting, even if you’re interested in the subject. If you stick to 20 minutes, you’re apt to remember more, because you’ll be concentrating the whole time. However, since everyone learns at his or her own pace, you might find that 20 minutes is too long. If you find your mind wandering before time is up, try working for 15 minutes at a time. If that’s too long, try 10 minutes. Take a break for 10 or 15 minutes, and then return to your study.

Since everyone reads differently, the number of words or pages you can cover in 20 minutes may be more or less than one chapter of this book. That’s OK. Just spend your 20 minutes (or less, depending on what works best for you) studying the material and going through the

exercises, and don't worry about how much material you're covering. You're becoming your own teacher here. Your job is to find your pace. Give yourself the time it takes—whether you cover 20 lessons in 20 days, or 20 chapters in 40 days. Work with your own abilities and preferences so you can make the most of your time. The chapters are written in sequence, each one building on the ones that came before it. But that doesn't mean that you have to read them in this order. Look through the table of contents. Which chapter title interests you most? Try reading that one first. You want to get out of this book what *you* want to get out of it. Enjoy yourself as you learn!



There are lots of activities and exercises in this book. Give yourself the time to do them. If this book belongs to you, you can write answers to some of the exercises right in it. But for some longer exercises—and for all the exercises if you borrowed this book from the library or from a friend—you'll need to write or draw on separate paper. The symbols shown beside this paragraph are used in this book for such exercises. The best thing for you to do is to get a notebook that you can devote specifically to your notes and questions as you read along. Then you'll have a record of your answers and of your progress as you learn more about how you study.



NOTE: If you read the first edition of this book, you'll see some additions, and a few changes, in this, the second edition. In two years, there have been some changes in schools and in businesses.

- More and more students and workers speak a first language that's not English. What if English isn't your native language? This edition helps you become more comfortable and more fluent when using English in school, in the office, and at home.
- More and more schools and offices have computers—often requiring students and workers to use them. Whether it's your first time in front of a computer terminal, or you wish it were your last, this edition includes ways to use your learning styles to master the computer—and use it as a helpful tool to improve your study habits.

Also, for you to have a clearer sense of what kind of impact this book has on how you study, take the Test Your Study Smarts Survey that follows.

For an honest look at how understanding—and using—your learning styles can effect your studying, take this survey now, before you read this entire book, and take it again, after finishing the book. That way you can see any changes that might occur in the ways you study.

If this isn't your book, make sure you use a separate piece of paper to record your answers!

What's tricky is that if you don't know how you feel, or what you do or don't do, and just guess, the survey won't be accurate. It's important to spend some time thinking about how you really feel and what you really do—or don't do. O.K.? Ready? Let's go!

TEST YOUR STUDY SMARTS SURVEY

Circle the number that reflects how you feel, or the likeliness of what you do or don't do. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. (Remember, it's important to think carefully and to respond accurately for the survey to work!)

As the numbers go up, it means the feeling, or likeliness, increases. Number 1 means "dread"—you feel awful. Number 2 means you're not dreading it, but you feel pretty uncomfortable. Number 3 means you feel a little uncomfortable. Number 4 is neutral—you don't care one way or the other. Number 5 means you feel a little comfortable, but not very much. Number 6 means you feel pretty comfortable. Number 7 means "delight"—you feel terrific, couldn't feel better.

For each question, think about being in a learning or studying situation, such as being in a class.

If you spoke another language before English, do this section first. If English is your first language, skip this section. Think about your feelings towards your *first* language, your "mother tongue."

How do you feel about reading?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about listening?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about writing?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about speaking?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In this section, think about how you feel using English.

How do you feel about reading?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about listening?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about writing?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about speaking?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about math?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
How do you feel about algebra?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

For this section, circle the answer that you feel applies to you now.

Are you comfortable working with others?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you take notes (in writing or on cassette tape) while you read or listen?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you ask yourself questions as you read or listen?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you ask yourself questions as you write or calculate?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you make pictures in your head as you read or listen?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you make pictures in your head as you write or calculate?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you re-read what you've written?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Do you read what you've written out loud?

Never Rarely Sometimes Usually

Note: Parts of this test are similar in concept to a student self-assessment questionnaire I developed a few years ago at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York, with Dr. Ivan Smodlaka, director of College Testing, and Dr. David Adams, who was then the director of Institutional Research at the College. We found that when students were more *comfortable* reading, writing, listening, and speaking—they got more out of what they studied. Students' grades increased more than students who did not feel more comfortable.

CHAPTER 1

What do you do first?
In order to get the most
out of what you're
studying, you need to be
in the mood. It helps if
you're relaxed and
comfortable. It also helps if
you're studying where,
when, and how you
like to work.

GETTING STARTED

A successful study session involves preparation. You have to get yourself ready so that you can get off to a good start. This means you've got to have all the things you need for the task and you need a good place to do it in. And maybe most important of all, you need to be mentally ready to begin. This lesson will help you find out how to get ready for productive study.

GETTING IN THE MOOD

You probably know what it's like to have to do something you don't feel like doing. Whether it's studying, washing the dinner dishes, or training a new person on the job, it's easy to put off doing an unpleasant task.

PROCRASTINATION

You can come up with plenty of excuses for not doing something:

- "I can't do the dishes now because I have to pay the bills."
- "I can't train Tony this morning because I'm expecting an important call."
- "I can't study now because I have to get a haircut."

At some time or another everyone *procrastinates*. The first step in conquering this problem is to recognize the actual reasons for procrastinating:

- You're not sure you can do it.
- You're afraid it will involve too much time and effort.
- You're uneasy in new situations.
- You don't want to be disturbed.
- It's hard for you to get started.

Knowing why you're procrastinating will help you overcome the tendency to put things off, and you'll find it easier to get moving.

Trick and Treat to Beat Procrastination

We all like to be rewarded for a job well done. And if we know there's going to be a reward at the end, we'll be more motivated at the start. You can apply this to studying: Trick yourself into working now by promising yourself a treat later.



Before you read any further, think of a reward you can give yourself after you complete this lesson or before you begin the next one. Here are some suggestions for rewards to give yourself:

- Telephone a friend.
- Have a nutritious snack.
- Spend time with your pet: cat, dog, goldfish, hamster, hedgehog.
- Take a walk or exercise.

Next, take out a notebook and make a list of other rewards you'd like to give yourself—rewards that don't take a lot of time, aren't expensive, and are easy to do right where you are.

Use Procrastination to Get Something Done

Let the studying you *have* to do take turns with something else. Distract yourself from one job by doing the other. This works especially well if both tasks are the kind that make you want to procrastinate, like studying your psychology textbook and cleaning out your closet. Watch the clock; don't spend more than 20 minutes on one job. You can set a time less than 20 minutes if that works better for you—15 minutes, or even 10.

FINDING THE RIGHT CONDITIONS

To help you be at your best, you need to identify what helps you stay both alert and calm. Everyone is different, so it's important to get in touch with what works for *you*.

Dealing with Trouble

Josie is reluctant to sign up for a management course she needs to take to be considered for promotion. "I have so much trouble studying," she says, "I can't find the time. There are so many other things I have to do. And there's no place for me to study! I can't study at home because my brother's always playing the radio, and my neighbor's dog barks constantly."

If Josie can find the right study conditions for herself and make time in her schedule, she'll be on the road to becoming a manager.



WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

To help you get started finding your ideal study conditions, think about a project you completed. How did you feel before you began it, and how did you feel after finishing it? What did you do to get yourself started?

You might want to think about when you had something really important to do, such as gathering tax information or balancing your checkbook.

In your notebook, answer the following questions:

1. What time of day do you work best—morning, afternoon, or evening? How early or late in the day are you able to think clearly?
2. Do you prefer quiet, or do you need background music?
3. If you like background music, what kind?
4. Where do you like to work—at a desk, on a couch, on your bed?
5. What do you like to have around you when you work? Do you have a favorite pillow? A pet? Write whatever comes to mind. Remember, you're trying to get in touch with what helps keep you calm and alert.
6. What about eating—do you prefer working during or after a meal? What foods leave you feeling clear-headed and energized?



The answers to these questions give you your ideal conditions. Read on to find out how you can make your ideal conditions when they don't occur naturally.

GETTING WHAT YOU NEED

Sometimes, the conditions of your ideal study situation just can't be met. Maybe you're a morning person, but you're at the office in the morning. Or, you're an evening thinker, but you work the night shift. What can you do? Of course, you can utilize the thinking time on days or nights when you're not working, but in order to make learning stick with you, it's a good idea to study each day, even if only for 20 minutes or so. You need to find time every day, not just on weekends.

Ask yourself: "What is it about my special time that helps me?" Write some ideas in your notebook. Then read on for ideas on how to plan your day to create your ideal study situation.

After a Rest

If your best study time is after a rest, then you're the kind of person who needs to work when you're refreshed. Try taking a nap before your

study session. See if that helps. Or try going to bed earlier and waking up earlier. This way you could study *before* going to work or school.

When You're Relaxed

If you study better when you're really relaxed, like when you're in bed, put yourself to bed early!

Actually, reviewing something you want to remember for a half hour before you go to sleep and then re-reading the same material as soon as you wake up is a great way for anybody to study. Your brain is especially receptive then. Maybe you've had the experience of waking up in the middle of the night, suddenly remembering something, like "Tomorrow is my brother's birthday!" Such instances are spontaneous; you didn't plan to remember his birthday just then. But when you study upon waking, you're being deliberate; you're directing your brain to help you remember.

This technique can be used to come up with ideas and solve problems, too. Before going to sleep, try talking to yourself about an idea you want to come up with or a math problem that's presenting a challenge. Keep a pad of paper and a pencil by your bed so you'll be ready for the answers in the morning!

At a Desk

If you work best sitting at a desk, but you'd like to use your two-hour bus trip each day to study, re-create your desk on the bus! Buy a lap board from an office supply or art store. Glue a pencil case to a corner, so your tools will be easy to reach. Decorate the board with photos of favorite people or feel-good sayings you come across in magazines or fortune cookies—just make sure you leave the study area bare! If you need more light, try a miniature flashlight; some come in pens or on key chains. And make sure to take advantage of your real desk when you can.



With Background Noise

If you like noise around you, do a little study of yourself first. What kinds of music or TV make you comfortable? Keep in mind that the music you enjoy most might not work as background music for studying.

Read one section of this book with one kind of background sound, another section with another kind, and so on. Which section did you remember best? Some kinds of sounds, like TV or vigorous music, command your attention, making it difficult to focus on what you're studying.

The clue is to find what's comfortable so you get *the most out of studying*. You might find that soft classical music works best.

When It's Quiet

Do you think best in silence? Then you need to block out as much noise as you can. Get up early, go to bed late, study *after* the kids have gone to school. The rest of the time, create quiet: close the door to the living room, wear earplugs or headphones—or do anything you can to block out sounds.

Josie, from the box on page 3, might even be able to work something out with her brother. Maybe he would wear headphones so she could have quiet to study. Or maybe she could use headphones with music playing so softly that it wouldn't disturb her concentration but would still block out the noises around her.

Try different approaches to see what works for you. There are even machines you can buy that make *white noise* to block out distracting sounds. If you're thinking of buying one, make sure you hear it first. What works fine for one person might not work at all for another!



In your notebook, make a list of alternate places to study, keeping in mind the best types of environments for you. Your local library is a good place to start!

KEEPING CALM

When you're calm, you can think clearly and deeply. You'll find it easier to make connections and to remember what you've been studying.

What Keeping Calm Can Do

Lenny freaked out when he saw the chemistry book: "I'm never going to get through that!" He felt so intimidated by the heavy book that he didn't open it until the day before the first quiz. But putting off studying only makes matters worse. If Lenny had spent time calming himself down, he could have opened the book the first time he saw it. He could have put himself in the mood and taken charge of his studying. He might even have become interested in chemistry!



PICTURE YOURSELF CALM

Think of a place that makes you feel calm. It can be a real place you've been to, some place you've seen in a movie or photograph, or a fantasy place you made up. Close your eyes and get a clear picture of this place in your head. Try to imagine yourself really there. Sense what you see, hear, feel, and smell.

For example, if you're imagining yourself on a beach . . .

- See yourself sitting on the shore.
- Hear the gentle waves lapping the shore and an occasional seagull calling.
- Feel the warm sand on your toes and the gentle breeze on your shoulders.
- Smell the salt water.

By using your four senses in this imagination exercise, rather than just one or two, you heighten the sensation of peace and relaxation, making a mental image seem like reality.



AS EASY AS BREATHING

Another exercise you can do to become calm is deep breathing. You may want to first put your mind in your special imaginary place.

- Listen to one of the sounds in your special place, perhaps the gentle waves lapping the shore. Put your hand over your heart and listen to your heartbeat.
- With this sound in your head, and sitting comfortably with your back straight, breathe in, feeling your chest fill with air.
- Breathe out, feeling the emptiness in your chest.
- Repeat breathing in and out several times, inhaling and exhaling, feeling calmer each time you breathe out.

Use this technique when you feel stressed—because of an upcoming exam, an enormous chemistry book, or a looming deadline—and you'll feel more relaxed and ready to begin.

IN SHORT

Keeping calm helps you remain clear-headed. Rewarding yourself, before and/or after studying helps you get in the mood. Working only for as long as you can stay alert and pay attention—20 minutes at a time for most people—helps keep you in the studying mood. Studying in a favorite place, at a time of day when you're at your thinking best, helps you make the most of your study time and efforts.

Practice Tips

Here are some ways you can practice the suggestions of this chapter in everyday situations. Doing so will make you feel experienced and more comfortable when you use these same methods to get started studying.

- The next time you find yourself feeling anxious at work or at home, try imagining a special place and practice deep breathing to calm yourself.
- The next time you find yourself not wanting to do something that needs to be done, reward yourself before and/or after doing the task.
- Before doing something you've never done, do something familiar that you can easily accomplish in a short period of time.
- Before doing something new, review what you have done that's similar.

CHAPTER 2

You like surprises and your friend Harry hates them. You love movies, but Harry would rather listen to music. You like different things because you think differently. You and Harry will probably get more out of studying if you combine your different styles.

DISCOVERING HOW YOU LEARN

Suppose you and your friend Harry are in an American history class, studying the events that led up to World War I. Films and tapes of speeches about the period are in the school library. Since you love movies, you might get more out of watching the films. Since Harry prefers listening, he might get more out of listening to speeches. If you were to just listen to the speeches and Harry were to watch the films, neither of you would fully understand what you're studying.

PEOPLE THINK AND LEARN DIFFERENTLY

How do *you* learn? We all have two eyes, two ears, a nose, but we each look unique. People aren't the same on the outside, and they're not the same inside either. Everyone has their own *learning style*. You were born with yours and Harry was born with his; different parts of everybody's brain are—well, different!

Think of a person as a seesaw. It's pretty unusual for someone to be a perfectly level seesaw, with all learning styles having the same strength, or weight. For most of us, the seesaw is tilted. Where it goes up, we have more learning strength, and where it goes down, we have less. We tilt one way or another but we all stay in the air because one side compensates for the other. It's important to know how you learn best, so you can do more of what works best for you.

You can find clues about how you learn best by looking for a similarity in the things you like to do. You learn in many different ways, and you have your own *combinations of learning styles*. Usually, you're comfortable doing certain activities and you get more out of these activities because they match your learning styles.

The purpose of this chapter is to help you get in touch with the styles with which you're most comfortable. Once you've identified these styles, you can move on to the later chapters that focus on a specific style of learning.

FIVE LEARNING STYLES

There are five different learning styles. Most people have at least one dominant style, but everyone uses a combination of learning styles, sometimes depending on the activity they're doing.



- **Eyes.** If you like to watch movies and draw or paint, or get involved in other activities that rely on your eyes, you are probably a *visual learner*. Visual learners mainly use their eyes to learn.



- **Ears.** If you'd rather listen to the radio than read the paper, if you like listening to music and/or lectures, or participate in other activities that depend on your ears, you are probably an *auditory learner*. Auditory learners mostly use their ears to learn.

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