

Study Skills

Retrieval Practice

Retrieval Practice

Test-taking is information retrieval. Practicing retrieval is a way of testing how well you can recall facts, concepts, or events. You are literally testing your memory. By practicing retrieval, you are actually making the connections in your brain stronger so that retrieval gets easier.¹

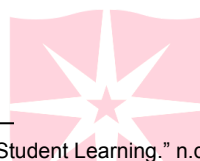
Retention using your long-term memory has been shown to increase when using retrieval practice as a study technique.²

How to do it:

1. Study for 20-30 minutes doing more than just re-reading your notes (see the other Study Skills info sheets for how to study notes).
2. After you have been studying for 20-30 minutes, put all your materials away.
3. Write, sketch, or map out everything you can remember. Be as thorough as possible, make connections where it's appropriate, and give details.
4. Pull your materials back out and check your accuracy.

Tips:

- Take as many practice tests as you can. Make your own if you need to.
- You and a classmate each make your own, swap, take them, and correct each other's.
- Flashcards are a well-known version of retrieval practice. If you use them, make sure you do more than copy definitions or information from class or textbook. Use details and connections to enhance your knowledge of the topics.
- Check your work when you are done. Retrieval practice helps most when you are retrieving the correct information.
- When you miss something or remember it incorrectly, note it and make it a focus of your next round of studying.



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¹ "Using Retrieval Practice to Increase Student Learning." n.d. Center for Teaching and Learning. <https://ctl.wustl.edu/resources/using-retrieval-practice-to-increase-student-learning/#:~:text=Retrieval%20practice%20is%20the%20strategy.>

² McDermott, Kathleen B. 2020. "Practicing Retrieval Facilitates Learning." *Annual Review of Psychology* 72 (1). [https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-051019.](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-051019)

All other information on this handout was adapted from: <http://ctl.wustl.edu/learningcenter/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/All-Color-Posters.pdf> and "How to Make Note Taking More Effective" handout.