

July/August 2022

ENGWellness Undergraduate Newsletter

Produced by: the ENGWellness Ambassador



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Enjoying Your Summer

Admittedly, having a school term in the summer can seriously put a damper on summer activities. Staying inside to complete assignments, study for midterms, and attend classes can be very draining. I remember when my school term was online in the summer and the drained feeling I got was unmatched by any other time in my life. However, in retrospect, I think I've discovered a couple things that could really help to make your summer school term better. Firstly, *schedule your time*. Believe it or not, you can make time for yourself when you want it in the school term. This is why in some ways a summer school term is a good thing: you can make time to do things during the day that you regularly wouldn't if you were working full time. Second, the breaks you take during the day can be super effective, which makes getting work done that much easier. Walking, playing sports, sitting outside, hanging out with friends, literally everything is better with nice weather, so make the most of it while it's here.

Wellness Break: Power Naps

Does your energy start to dip in the afternoon? Maybe you start to lose focus after staying attentive for too long?

POWER NAP!

Don't actually go to sleep. Just lie down in a comfortable area, close your eyes, and think about nothing in particular for 15 to 20 minutes. While some light exercise can help you recharge your mental energy, the opposite works too. Power naps prevent burnout, thus increasing productivity in the long run. Think about that crisp awareness you get sometimes in the mornings. That's the goal of napping, to recharge your mental energy to a state where you can think effectively and efficiently. Naps have also been proven to have [health benefits](#), so it's a win-win situation! Here's an excellent resource on [how to power nap!](#)

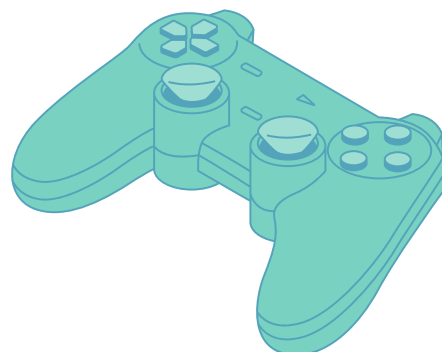
Studying 101: What NOT To Do

Let's preface this section with the statement 'everybody is different', but we thought it would be important to highlight some of the ineffective things students do when studying or when exam season arrives. Some people work well with what others might consider poor habits, but don't adopt a specific practice just because it's working for your friends and you feel like it should work for you. You may need to modify, refine, and adapt something to meet your particular needs - but that's the joy of being human! The following is a list (based on current data, in no particular order) of the most ineffective study habits compiled from multiple studies (including our own observations).

Neglecting Fun.

Being a student has its fun side, and that side shouldn't be neglected even though you have work to do. In fact, taking the time to enjoy yourself is correlated with better academic performance! Not only that, but a good mood improves the value of perceived rewards, like the gratification of new knowledge, the accomplishment of completing something, etc. An improved mood increases the intrinsic (internalized) reward felt by people when doing an activity which can assist with motivation [1]. Studies have proven a link between mood when studying and mood during information recall (i.e. during a test). Feeling in a particular mood when studying can have significant benefits (improved learning, thinking, memory, judgment), especially when you assume the same mood state when you are being tested [2]. Now we know what you're thinking... and no, being sad while studying and being sad while tested will NOT have the same results as being positive. Why? Because a relaxed and positive mood prompts our brains to be more strategic in it's use of resources for processing information and paying attention [3]. Basically, a positive mood increases cognitive flexibility. A negative mind is usually a pre-occupied and emotionally burdened one which tends to reallocate precious mental resources in unexpected (and often unhelpful) ways. Participation in intramural and recreational programs also have linked improvements with grade point averages (instead of distracting from them) [4]. Interestingly enough, modest gaming and computer use doesn't have a negative impact on performance either (and we stress the word modest!) [5].

Given the multitude of demands you're all working with, we can understand how fun often takes a back seat to everything else. Just remember that there is actual value in having a good time once in awhile, with the added benefit of improved cognitive function. Find the time (any time) for something that you enjoy. Even five minutes here or there can make all the difference.



Studying 101: What You SHOULD Do

Let's again preface this with, 'everybody is different'. The following is a compilation of the latest research for what are considered the best (or most optimal) study habits and strategies (in no particular order). As with the above, don't neglect the baseline needs for productivity (good nutrition, adequate hydration, and modest exercise) along with sleeping. These habits work best when you are at your physical and mental best. Here we go!

Chunking

Our brains LOVE correlations and information that relates with other bits of information. In fact, it's much easier to retain and recall information if it is chunked together. But what is chunking besides a very uncomfortable word to type? Chunking is breaking down information into meaningful groups, even if they are comprised from different chapters or subjects. It's essentially how we organize the information in our brains (and into smaller more meaningful groups or units). This way of organizing the information optimizes the organization within our memory and improves how we learn [11].

Check out some of these recommendations for how to use chunking to improve your studying [here](#) and [here](#).

Space out your study sessions.

And no, we don't mean 'spaced out' as in, you're completely out of it. Space OUT your study sessions and then wait for a while. This is the opposite (and more beneficial) habit to the brute force studying method. Spacing out your study sessions (or what topics/courses you are studying) leads to more robust memory formation [12].

Research shows that distributing learning over time and repeating information over increasing periods strengthens memories and buffers against information decay (forgetting). There are two particular techniques that utilize the spacing concept:

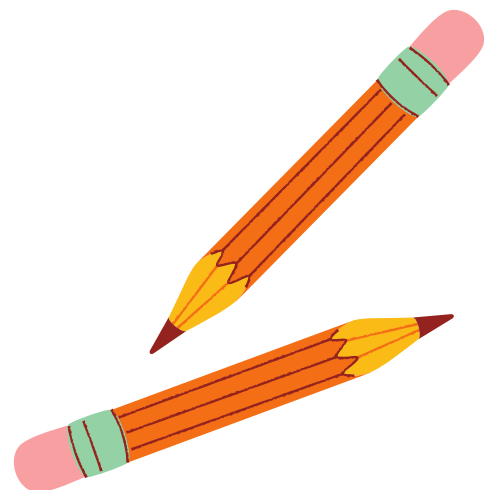
Spaced Repetition: The first time you use spacing and revise your study material, wait for a few minutes and go back to it. Then wait for 30 mins. Then 1 hour... then four. Eventually, you should break up the studying of certain subjects by longer and longer intervals (days). This practice reinforces the information in your memory and limits the amount of information decay!

Distributed Practice: Is the same as spaced repetition above, but without increasing the time intervals. So you would study specific subjects/courses every 30-40 hours as an example. You distribute your learning over time which helps to solidify those neural pathways.

Academic Supports

Below is a list of academic supports and resources for you to use now and in your upcoming term. Further information on each is provided by clicking the [hyperlink](#).

- [AccessAbility Services](#) provides academic support for University of Waterloo students who have either permanent or temporary disabilities. [AccessAbility](#) supports full-time, part-time, graduate and undergraduate students as well as students completing a degree through the Centre for Extended Learning.
- [Warrior Virtual Study Halls](#) are weekly, virtual study sessions facilitated by a Peer Success Coach to introduce new academic skills and create study goals and answer questions.
- [Peer Success Coaches](#) offer in-person or virtual one-on-one appointments for personalized support to address academic challenges and create a plan for success. Coaches are upper-year students with experience overcoming their own study roadblocks.
- [Student Leadership Program](#) provides opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills and apply their new knowledge in a campus leadership role. Learn from home, or at an in-person workshop.
- [Foundational Training Program for Peer Leaders](#) can help students develop core skills for working in a peer-to-peer program at the University of Waterloo, with workshops offered online and in-person.
- [Mentor resources](#) are available online to support students in mentor or peer leader roles.



Additional Resources

The following mental health supports are available to you
[Counselling Services](#): 519-888-4096

The following crisis supports are available to you as well
[Crisis Services Canada](#): 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645
[UW Special Constable Service](#): 519-888-4567 ext. 22222

Academic Support

- [Student Success Office](#): Compilation of learning and life skills resources.

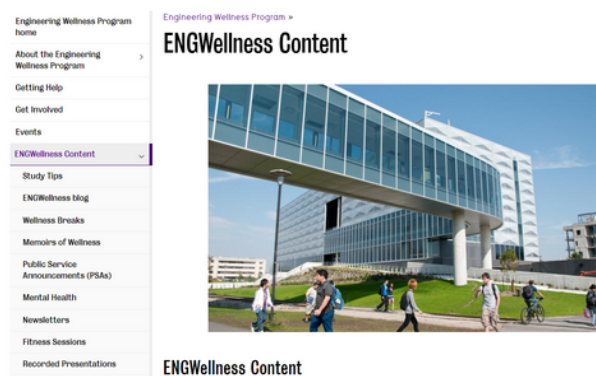
Contacts to book a one-on-one coaching session:

Sam Vandekerckhove (MME) - srvandek@uwaterloo.ca /
ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca

Leah Foster (ECE) – ljsims@uwaterloo.ca / ENGWellness@uwaterloo.ca

ENGWellness Content

Check out our ENGWellness resources including mental health pages and PSAs. All resources as well as previous newsletters can be accessed under the [ENGWellness Content](#) section of our website.



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