

## **How to Study**

### **METR 3123, Spring 2016**

Effective study habits are essential for learning complex material and for refining your powers of concentration. Knowledge and the ability to concentrate can take you far in life (\$\$\$, power, good job, trophy spouse, etc). My advice is based, in part, on lessons I've learned the hard way – by NOT following the advice.

### **Reading**

Read in a distraction-free environment representative of the test-taking environment. No TV or radio. If you read with friends, make sure everyone shuts the hell up. Maybe it's better you read alone -- throw everyone out, or just go to the library. If you lose track of time when studying, you're doing it right.

### **Test yourself**

Ask yourself questions. Did the paragraph you just read make sense? How does it relate to the paragraph before it? Study with a pad of paper by your side. Can you reproduce a derivation step-by-step on a pad of paper? Do you understand all the assumptions underlying the derivation? Make a running list of questions you have about the notes, readings or problem sets and ask me about them throughout the semester (i.e., not just the day before an exam).

Note: If you find yourself re-reading the same sentence over and over again, ask yourself whether the sentence is poorly written or you're having trouble staying focused (or some combination of the two). Do some honest self-assessment and then proceed accordingly. If you want to track down alternative texts, you can browse the library or ask me for recommendations. If you're simply getting tired, you can

pound some coffee or study during the time of day when you're most alert. If something doesn't make sense because you need to review some background material (e.g., trig identity, quadratic formula, etc) then dig up your old class notes and brush up on that material!

### **Join a study group**

Study in a group after you've already studied extensively by yourself. Ask questions of each other, and if an explanation by you or others is not clear (or sounds flaky), pick it apart until you find out where the trouble spot is.

### **Don't cram for dynamics exams**

Cramming six weeks of material into one nightmarish all-nighter will not end well. Study the lecture material after each class so you'll have time to absorb it (sleep on it), identify trouble spots, and fix the trouble spots. Try to finish studying early in the evening the night before the exam so you'll have time to decompress. Have a good dinner and watch something relaxing. Slasher movies always worked well for me – "Dr. Butcher, M.D.", "The Evil Dead", "I Dismember Mama", "Bloodsucking Freaks", "Chopping Mall", "I Spit on your Grave", "Rabid Grannies", "Pieces". Ah, the memories!

### **Protect your time**

There are many demands on your time, e.g., friends, family, church, phone calls, eating, football, shopping, parties, road trips, filling out tax returns, watching tv, arson, job stuff, doing laundry, petting the dog, clipping the cat's claws, taking the cat to the vet because it ate a cactus, and so on. Many of the claims on your time are legitimate. So, if you want to make study time a high priority, you will need to be selfishly and ruthlessly protective of it.