

# Students know about learning strategies—but don't use them

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Credit: Wikipedia

Many university students don't use common learning strategies, despite knowing that they exist, finds a study in open-access journal *Frontiers in Psychology*. Specific training on how and when to use learning strategies could help more students to maximize their academic potential.

The first year in university is a steep learning curve for many students. Living away from home, managing finances and balancing socializing with classwork are all new challenges. Another big change is planning and organizing their own learning, including dealing with various forms of academic assessment, from multiple-choice exams to essays.

New students typically work out their own strategies for learning, often through trial and error. However, strategies to prepare for one type of test or assignment may not work for another. As a result, students may find themselves underprepared and struggling. Even post-graduate students can encounter new challenges, such as writing a Master's thesis, that might require different learning techniques.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies are a very effective way for students to maximize their academic potential, and considered essential for academic success by educational researchers. "SRL refers to evaluating, planning, and executing your own learning," says Nora Foerst of the University of Vienna. "SRL includes many different learning strategies, such as planning your approach, structuring your learning content, rewarding yourself after accomplishing a goal or making realistic demands to avoid frustration."

Previous studies found that many students know about common SRL strategies. However, researchers are less sure how often students actually use the techniques, whether they can use them effectively, and whether they know which techniques are most appropriate in specific learning situations.

These unknowns inspired Foerst and her colleagues to survey students enrolled in Bachelor's or Master's programs in Psychology or Economics at the University of Vienna on their learning [strategy](#) knowledge and actions. The scientists asked students whether they knew about beneficial SRL strategies for specific learning situations. They also

assessed whether the students put the techniques into practice, and if not, why not.

As expected, most students could correctly identify many SRL strategies. However, fewer students actually applied them while studying. In some cases, as many as one-third of the students who correctly identified a [technique](#) as beneficial admitted that they didn't use it in their own learning.

Both Psychology and Economics students showed a similar discrepancy between knowledge and action. Psychology students were slightly better at identifying the strategies, likely because their curriculum included information about SRL techniques.

The survey revealed a variety of reasons for not using self-regulated learning strategies. Many students felt they didn't have enough time to use the strategies, or were unable to apply them effectively. Some failed to see the benefits of the strategies for specific tasks, or believed that using them would be too much work.

So, how can universities increase the number of students that benefit from self-regulated learning strategies? "We want this study, and future studies, to encourage universities to provide more SRL training for their students," says Foerst. "Specifically, it appears that students need hands-on training to learn how and when to apply SRL strategies for specific learning situations. In addition, they need help to understand that the techniques could save them time and enhance their learning outcomes."

**More information:** Nora M. Foerst et al, Knowledge vs. Action: Discrepancies in University Students' Knowledge about and Self-Reported Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01288](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01288)

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