Choosing the Optimal Study Environment

A good work environment is essential to productive studying. Think about this environment in terms of the senses: sight, touch, smell and hearing. Choose a setting that is optimal for all of these senses. Check below for tips on how! Test them and evaluate what works best for you!

**Sight**

a) Lighting
   - Should be bright, steady, and even
   - Use 2 light sources → eliminates glare and too little light

b) Clutter
   - Remove everything on your table or desk except for materials needed to study
   - Organize your study materials using folders and binders, and store away what is not needed

c) Visual distractions
   - Turn off TV and computer, face away from window, remove photographs and books

**Touch**

a) Comfort
   - Find a comfortable chair that is a good height and width
   - Avoid hard and straight-backed chairs
   - Don’t study on your bed or couch

b) Temperature
   - Should not be too hot or too cold
   - Wear layers that can be added/removed

**Smell**

a) Air quality
   - Make sure air is well ventilated
   - Open window for fresh air

b) Sensory memory
   - Try to always study with the same smell – this could be a scented candle, incense or air freshener.
   - Using the same smell helps to instigate your sensory memory to make studying more efficient (Try and use a smell you can bring with you to exams!)
Hearing

a) General Noise: Can you concentrate if background noise? If not,
   • Too much may reduce concentration
   • If studying in public area, consider using earplugs
   • Put phone on vibrate or turn ringer off, check for messages at specific
     break times

b) Music: can you focus listening to music? If so,
   • Listen to instrumental or classical music (no lyrics)
   • Keep music at a low level in the background

Something else to consider: Time

a) Schedule studying for mornings and evenings (more likely to be alert)

b) Schedule lab work and field work for mid-afternoon (doing more active tasks
   will keep you alert during the mid-afternoon slump period)

c) Study for a maximum 2 hours at a time

d) Use the 20/10 method within those 2 hours
   • Study for 20 minutes at a time, take a 10 minute break. Use this as a
     base line and evaluate as you go
     ▪ You might need to start off working for 10 minutes for one course,
       but for another course you may by able to work for up to 45
       minutes at a time! This strategy will enable you to evaluate as
       you go, increase awareness and productivity.

References: