

Evidence-backed study tips for students

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The science is in: New study tips to help students succeed in 2026

Last-minute cramming is out, while consistent yet spaced-out study sessions are in, according to new tips to help students get the best start for the school year.

As the 2026 school year commences, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is promoting evidence-based study tips for students, recommending that they adopt a study routine that uses targeted, shorter sessions and features variety to help support effective learning.

AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan said that the approach was grounded in cognitive science and drawn from successful evidence-based practices being used by teachers in schools across Australia.

“There is an extensive body of research into how the brain works, how new information is processed and how it is transferred into our long-term memories, which is what we describe as ‘learning’,” she said.

“While the learning process is complex in many ways, effective study habits are not rocket science and can be developed by all students, especially those beginning high school, who are taking on more responsibility for their own learning, as well as students who are heading toward Year 12, the HSC or VCE.

“AERO’s tips aim to give students the tools to reduce the cognitive load of learning new content and improve their ongoing retention and recall as they start the new school year.”

AERO’s top tips for study success are:

1. **Set-up for study** — Students learn best in a safe, learning-focused environment. At home, this means setting up a calm, uncluttered study space, free from distractions. That includes putting your mobile phone away! You could also try your local library if you don’t have a quiet space at home.
2. **Map it out**— Having a clear plan helps you keep track of your learning and reduces the cognitive load. Set goals for what you need to learn, write out the steps to get there, and track your progress throughout the year. Your teachers can help with this; they do it too!
3. **Space it out** —Space studying topics out over multiple study sessions, rather than cramming them all into one. This again helps manage the cognitive load

and helps connect new information to what you already know, embedding it in your long-term memory.

4. **Test yourself** — Before you start a new topic in a subject area, test yourself by trying to recall information from a previous topic, without looking at your notes. Even if you don't get it all right, the act of trying will help solidify the information in your long-term memory. Repeating this regularly will improve your recall over time.
5. **Switch it up** — It's natural for students to think spending two hours studying one topic, for example, trigonometry is the best way to sharpen that skill, but research shows variety is the spice of learning. Try four shorter sessions covering trig, algebra, calculus, and statistical analysis, for example. It will force your brain to actively recall a variety of information, making future recall easier. It will also fend off boredom!

“AERO's advice around how students learn best draws on findings from cognitive science, neuroscience and educational psychology, informing our practical, proven guidance,” Dr Donovan said.

“If students cultivate good study habits early, when it comes time for exams they will be confident that their learning throughout the year has been retained and can be recalled.

“While cramming was the exam preparation norm for a long time, the science does not back it up.

“Creating a learning-focused environment, setting clear goals with logical steps, and using spaced, varied, and repeated practice have been proven to lead to better learning outcomes.”

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About Us

AERO is Australia's independent education evidence body, established in 2021 and funded by the Commonwealth, state, and territory governments.

Our vision is to achieve excellence and equity in education outcomes for all children and young people through the effective use of evidence. AERO's role is to generate high-quality evidence, make it accessible, and encourage the adoption and effective implementation of evidence into practice and policy.