

# LEARNING SUPER SKILLS

Focus harder.  
Memorize better.  
Read it faster.  
Google stronger.

by David Tal

We've all seen them: those classmates who seem to make essays and exams feel effortless, those co-workers who regularly complete projects both early and under budget. "Good for them," we say aloud. But in the back of our minds, a part of us thinks, "How do they do that? What makes them better than me?" The answer? Nothing. Very few are born with superhuman abilities. But those few who we perceive as superhuman are just people who've made the extra effort to learn special skills that allow them to accomplish things more productively and efficiently

than those around them. Specifically, they learn skills that allow them to reach their full potential, a potential that exists in all of us.

In the end, everyone wants that edge. And we plan to help you get it. In school (and in your future career), there are a couple of basic skill sets we can all supercharge to make us super productive. They include: memorization, reading, researching, multitasking, and focusing. The following mini tutorials will teach you everything you need to learn to make these basic skills your super skills. Enjoy!



## read faster

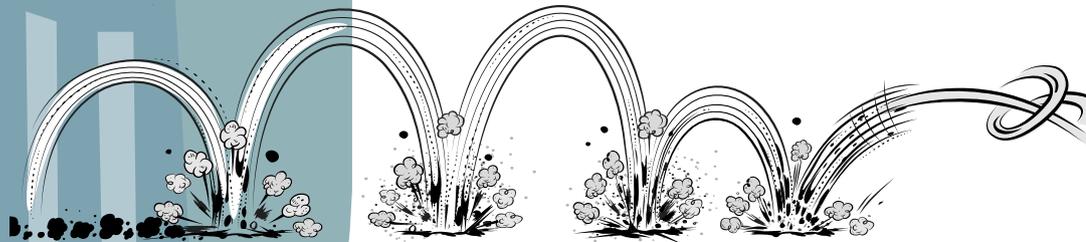
Ah, the ability to speed read. It's a skill that offers a variety of benefits. In particular, Abby Marks Beale, founder of Rev It Up Reading, says, "(Speed reading) provides the reading confidence and competence to get through your academic reading workload. Through increased speed, students increase concentration, which in turn supports increased comprehension, and ultimately better and longer retention. Reading becomes less of a chore and takes less time." Speed reading is also a skill that will support

you after graduation. Elizabeth Allen, author and founder of Super Fast Guides, says, "In the workplace, people are bombarded with written information, such as emails, reports, memos, etc. The quicker people can read and digest the information, the quicker they can act on it, and perform their job effectively."

Overall, speed reading is a skill that students across the nation pay good money to learn, and here you'll learn it within just a few minutes. Get ready!

### 1 *the finger*

Your eyes jump left to right as you read through a sentence (a motion called saccades). This is natural, but as you increase your reading speed, this can cause reading missteps which force you to reread sections of text. To help control this eye movement, use your finger (or a pen) to trace under each line as you read. Try doing this while you read as fast as possible.



### 2 *the small skip*

As you get used to reading faster with your finger to guide you, begin skipping the first and last few words of each sentence. Everyone has peripheral vision, and this ability works wonders while reading. So when you start a new sentence, skip to the third word and let your peripheral vision automatically read the first two words for you. Do the same at the end of the sentence, where you end on the third word from the last word. Start reading this way, faster and faster, until the process gets easier and easier.

### 3 *snapshots*

Once you're comfortable skipping three words in and out of a sentence, start stretching yourself and read four words in and out, then five. Advanced speed readers only need to take two snapshots of an average sentence to read it fully.

### 4 *intense practice*

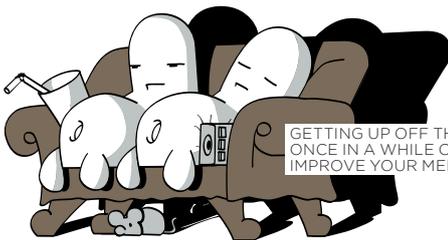
As you get better at using your peripheral vision to breeze through your sentences, continue to push yourself. This will heighten your perception of your future reading potential, and it will show you how much faster you can read with enough practice. In all, the more actively you practice the steps above, the quicker you'll see the results in your reading speed.

## memorize better

Memory is a tricky thing. Science has yet to reveal how it fully works. And there are many factors that can affect it. In general, a memory is information that the brain can recall, and this ability has a variety of applications. “Memorization techniques can obviously help students recall information quickly and effectively for exams,” says Patrick C. Brown, founder of Occam Education, “but it also forces students to become more disciplined. Techniques, such as spaced repetition, require

students to revisit material at increasingly longer intervals, and structure their academic/personal calendars accordingly.”

Meanwhile, in your post-grad life, effective recall can really help your career. Chris Tobias, author and founder of SchoolSkills.net, explains, “Remembering the names, history, and life details of your co-workers and business associates will greatly help you succeed in your post-grad professional life. How many kids does your boss have? Where did your co-worker go for their last vacation? These facts will help you connect with people in conversation, build trust, and create great working relationships. Remembering business facts — such as how many units you need to sell this month — will help you handle the ‘hallway conversations’ with expertise and professionalism. This also builds trust and makes you a valuable member of the team, and to clients.”



GETTING UP OFF THE COUCH ONCE IN A WHILE CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY

### Lifestyle habits to improve memory

what	why	how
<b>FOOD</b>	Brain foods include complex carbohydrates, fibre, and lean protein.	Matcha (green tea), coffee, grass-fed beef, wild salmon, blueberries & acai berries, cacao beans, greek yogurt, quinoa, eggs
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	By keeping your mind engaged with new experiences, you train it to remain more open to and absorb new information	Listen to music, mental exercises (e.g. anagrams), puzzle games, learning new skills or hobbies, stimulate five senses
<b>BREAKS</b>	Your mind needs regular breaks in order to properly absorb new information.	Rest, exercise, walk breaks

## WHAT ONE PIECE OF ADVICE HELPED YOU THE MOST IN GETTING THROUGH SCHOOL?

“My father shared this advice with me: Try to study subjects that you enjoy, the rest will come naturally.”

*Thomas Reed*

22 years old, president of P.S. Warren Geological Society at the University of Alberta & 4th year ‘Geology’ student

“There is ALWAYS more work/ studying that can be done — time is your critical resource. So spend the most time on the things worth the most. Spending four hours on a report worth one percent equals a time management fail.”

*Greg Overholt*

26 years old, executive director for Students Offering Support. Graduated in 2009 with a degree in BBA & Com Sci from Wilfrid Laurier University.

“‘Take hand written notes,’ I was told by a group of students who were volunteering their time at a ‘head start’ program for first year students. It helps you formulate your own thoughts, keeps away distractions, and is good practice since exams are hand written.”

*Mehria Karimzadah*

21 years old, Co-Founder and Chief of Operations for DEM Society at the University of Toronto Mississauga & 4th Year ‘Digital Enterprise Management’ student

“My mother told me that: in life, you prepare for the worst and work for the best. If a bad thing happens, do everything to prevent it from getting worse. After that, take the mistake as a lesson learned.”

*Angela Chen*

21 years old, president of the York Marketing Association at York University. Graduating in 2012 with a major in ‘Marketing and Strategy.’

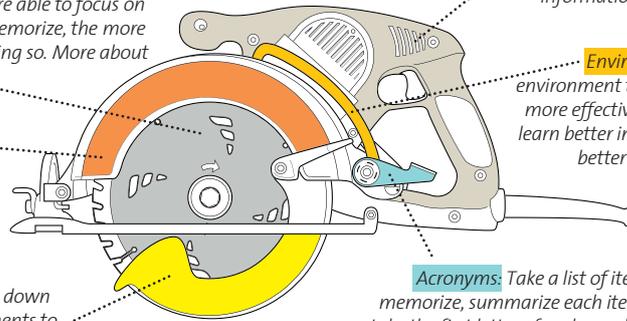
## MORE MEMORIZATION TOOLS

Depending on your learning style (visual, verbal, kinaesthetic, or auditory), one of more of these strategies might help you:

**Focus:** The better you are able to focus on the info you want to memorize, the more effective you'll be at doing so. More about this later!

**Association:** Attach images to words to assist in recall by linking to familiar things.

**Chunking:** Break things down into their smallest elements to make them easier to remember.



**Practice & Repetition:** Repetition encourages the brain to form stronger and faster neural pathways to the information you want to recall.

**Environment:** Adjust your environment to allow you to learn more effectively, e.g. some people learn better in silence, others work better with music blasting.

**Acronyms:** Take a list of items that you need to memorize, summarize each item in one word. Then take the first letter of each word and form them into a single word that can be easily remembered.

WHAT SKILL WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO LEARN TO DO BETTER IN SCHOOL?



"I would like to have a zombie-on-brains-like fixation on dry academic readings. My brain disagrees."

*Karl Gutowski*

25 years old, president of the National Finance Students Association at York University. Graduating in 2013 with a major in 'Finance.'

"Picking brilliant, dedicated people out of a crowd. Working with amazing people is the best thing you can do in school."

*Derek Bennet*

21 years old, chair of CUTC - Canadian Undergraduate Technology Conference at the University of Waterloo. Graduating in 2013 with a major in 'Nanotech Engineering.'

"I'm open to improvement when it comes to speed reading. It's important to be able to pick up and transfer information quickly. Efficiency is vital!"

*Tien Nguyen*

19 years old, vice president communications for the Engineering Science Student Society at Simon Fraser University & 2nd year 'Systems Engineering' student.

## Method of Loci

One of the little known but wildly effective memory techniques is the Method of Loci. Used all the way back in ancient Rome, this is a mnemonic device that's based on building relationships between spatial memories and the items to be memorized. How does it work? Basically, scientific research has shown that you can improve memory by associating something you need to remember with a place you're familiar

with. Because of the way your brain works (especially your hippocampus), associating something with a place, supercharges your ability to recall info. This is fairly easy when memorizing a single factoid. But this process is awesome when you're trying to memorize a list of related facts and info.

### NEED PROOF? TRY THIS EXERCISE:

Grab a deck of cards and pull out one random card for each room in your house or apartment (bathrooms and kitchens included).

Place the cards in any order you like, then assign each card to one room. Write down the order on a piece of paper.

In your mind, imagine yourself walking through your home, and placing each card inside an assigned room (preferably on a flat surface, e.g. a table, chair, bed, etc.) in the order you assigned to those cards. Repeat this step a couple of times, walking through your home in your mind, setting the cards as planned out in step two.

Open your eyes, shuffle the cards, then turn them over so you can't see their faces. Now walk through your home (in your mind), and see how many of the cards you can remember in the order you originally set out. Match your answers to the order you wrote down in step three. Chances are you'll be surprised by how many cards you remember correctly (and in the right order)! And as always, the more you practice, the better you'll become.



YOU CAN USE THOSE CARDS FOR SOMETHING OTHER THAN TAKING YOUR FRIENDS' MONEY.

"Wait, hold on a second," you say. "I don't have enough rooms in my place to match the number of things I need to remember?" Well, if that's the case, you can always "place your cards" in different parts of a single room (e.g. try placing one card on your desk, another on your dresser, one inside your closet, etc.). You can also try walking down your local street, and "placing your cards" in each of the different stores along said street.

*google stronger*



Learning how to research effectively is a vital skill you learn and use throughout your school and professional career. In our modern, tech-savvy world, however, much of our basic research takes place online. Sure primary research is important — interviewing people, conducting surveys, experimenting in the lab or field, etc. — but it's through your secondary research that you usually form the basis for your thesis, your methodology, your topic's supporting context. And much of that secondary research is now done online thanks to the world's ever growing penchant for transferring the sum of human knowledge to the web.

Unfortunately, with all this abundance of info out there,

most students have no clue how to research it properly. Yes, we, the technologically literate generation, can barely enter a proper Google query. In fact, a well known project conducted by researchers at Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries found that only about a quarter of students studied were able to conduct “what a librarian might consider a reasonably well-executed search.”

Well, that ends now. The following tips will have you doing online research like a pro. This means better information for your next project, better grades, and after graduation, more positive attention from your boss. Let's start!

## How to search online

In Google, there are things called operators: they are search terms that can help you get more specific and useful search results from your Google query. For example:

**You wanna find:** An article from *The Oatmeal* that explains how to use an apostrophe, but not a comma, written between the year 2009 and 2011.

site:theoatmeal.com “how” ~use  
“apostrophe” —comma 2009..2011

Only searches the pages of that site

Searches for the exact word or phrase within the quotation, not each word separately

Excludes this term from the search

Shows all results from the selected time range

Will also search related words



To become a Google power user, visit: [googleguide.com/advanced\\_operators.html](http://googleguide.com/advanced_operators.html)

**You wanna find:** A PDF report on globalization and its effect on various kinds of communities.

ext:pdf intitle:globalization and its effect  
“on\*communities”

Google calls this “the wildcard.” It fills in the blanks or replaces a missing or unknown word or words (in this case, the options can include: on local/indigenous/minority communities)

Searches only results of the file type you select, e.g. pdf, doc, xls, jpeg, etc.

Shows only results with that word in the article's title (in this case: globalization)

## Where to research

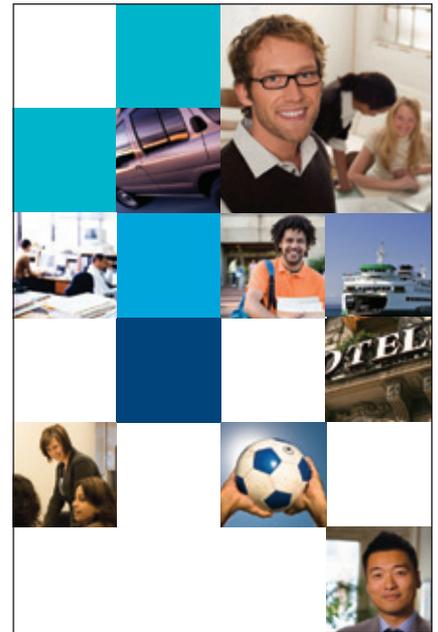
Researching online isn't just about how to search for information, but knowing where to search for information. When it comes to finding quality secondary research, keep these key tips in mind:

**Use Google Scholar:** This service is a free, online, searchable database of academic and scholarly work — the stuff you can cite on your papers.

**Your library:** Most libraries, especially those found in post-secondary institutions, don't just carry books. Their online resources may offer access to a huge number of databases that contain academic and scholarly reports and journals (those that aren't searchable online without a credit card), and free online subscriptions to newspapers and magazines.

**Bibliographies:** You know those long lists of academic reports, journals, and books found at the end of most academic reports, journals, and books? It's probably a good idea to start checking out those lists more carefully. They are an awesome source of information that will tell you where to find more relevant research sources for your project!

**Wikipedia:** Counter to what your profs might say, this is a great source of information when you want to read up on the basics of almost any topic. That said, because the information on Wikipedia is produced through online crowd sourcing, you can't trust the accuracy of everything you read there. So use Wikipedia to learn the basics about your subject, and where to find more accurate sources of information about it. And obviously, NEVER cite Wikipedia.



## Consider a career that builds on your education

You may be surprised to learn that the insurance industry has a career path that could take you exactly where you want to go.

Insurance affects virtually everything we do in life and in business. And because insurance is all around us, the industry has a wide variety of careers to match your ambitions.

Look for us on campus! Visit our Web site to find out more about our events and rewarding career paths in the insurance industry.

[www.career-connections.info](http://www.career-connections.info)



**CAREERCONNECTIONS™**  
find your place in insurance

## focus harder

Okay, so we know we said we'd talk about multitasking right now, but we have a confession to make: multitasking actually doesn't work. "The brain wasn't designed to multitask," says Margaret Moore, founder and CEO of WellCoaches.com, and co-author of *Organize Your Mind, Organize Your Life*. "We can only focus our attention well on one thing at a time." Sure, we can all breath and walk at the same time, but if you try to write a couple of work emails while in deep conversation with your significant other on the phone, your significant other may grow ever louder and more annoyed.

That's why instead of trying to multitask, we'll give you tips and tricks on how to focus more effectively. To be clear, focusing is about prioritization and sticking to a single objective. The better you're able to focus, the better (and faster) you'll be able to complete projects, big and small. Unfortunately, focus has a pesky enemy: it's called procrastination. Luckily, we've come up with some tips to both combat procrastination, and improve your focus.

**BLOCK FACEBOOK (AND OTHER addictive sites).** If you need to hunker down and focus on a project, consider giving your social media passwords to a trusted friend or family member, and have them change the passwords to lock you out until after you score your A+.

**BLOCK THE INTERNET.** FOR SOME of us, social media is not the only thing online that sucks up our time. For everything else, consider installing a browser plugin called LeechBlock. This ultra customizable plugin allows you to set the amount of time you allow yourself to visit a specific list of sites. Once you pass the allotted time you've set, LeechBlock will automatically disable your access to that site.

**CONTROL YOUR ENVIRONMENT.** Sometimes our homes offer too many distractions. If this is the case, consider working outside at a library, coffee shop, or park. Push in your earplugs (or earphones if you like music while you work) and let your fingers rip across your laptop keyboard.

**TAKING A VACATION FROM YOUR friends.** For the outgoing types out there, your usual vice is people and connecting with them. But if you need to complete a project that's worth 60 percent of your grade, politely ask your friends to not contact you until after you're done.

### Batching (the secret of efficiency)

Batching is the process of compiling all your most repetitive and tedious tasks and doing them all in one go, thereby minimizing the set up cost and time involved, and avoiding constant interruptions to your focus. This is a technique used throughout industry, but can be used in your personal life.

For example, instead of doing your laundry or dishes everyday, wait for them to pile up and do them all in one go (once or twice a week). Instead of spreading your research out over the course of a week, batch it down to a day or two to avoid

having to re-familiarize yourself with the previous day's research progress. Instead of checking and answering your emails every five minutes, aim to do it only three times per day. At work, instead of spreading your calls throughout the week, batch them all into one day to free the rest of your week for more pressing matters.

The time saving opportunities are endless. By finding those tasks in your life that can be batched, you replace a regular distraction with a single, focused period of time to accomplish the tasks.



### 80/20

Vilfredo Pareto, a little known economist who was recently popularized in Timothy Ferriss' bestselling book, *The 4-Hour Workweek*, developed a theory called Pareto's Law — today it's commonly referred to as the 80/20 principle. Originally, this law demonstrated the predictable distribution of wealth in society — that 80 percent of the wealth and income was produced and possessed by 20 percent of the population. The trick is that this principle not only holds true in economics, but in every aspect of life.

Take a look at your life and ask yourself, "Which 20 percent of sources are causing 80 percent of my workload or taking up 80 percent of my time?" Be thorough. It can be a toxic relationship with a friend/colleague/significant other; a hostile business client; a commute, a style of work; a membership (maybe you are a part of too many clubs or associations); an activity, etc. Find those sources that are eating up too much of your time and focus, figure out whether they are really essential to keep in your life, then focus on better managing, minimizing, or eliminating those sources from your life.

### Goal setting

"Set realistic daily and weekly goals (not your activities) that specifically include the quantity, quality and the pace of the goal," advises Dr. Kevin D. Gazzara, senior partner at Magna Leadership Solutions LLC. "(This way) you get positive and timely reinforcement of your accomplishments." Too many people try to accomplish ten or twenty things in a single day, then (surprisingly) they get discouraged when they only complete a handful of the items on their list. Sounds familiar? It should. It's called trying to multitask. Again, it doesn't work! Instead, focus on accomplishing one to three big goals per day. You'll be amazed at the difference this makes.

### Artificial stress

The essence of procrastination is putting things off until a "more convenient" time, or to the last minute before they're due. Steve Levinson, a clinical psychologist and co-author of the book, *Following Through: A Revolutionary New Model for Finishing Whatever You Start*, has some insight into this experience. "Procrastinators and non-procrastinators alike only do what they've decided they should when they actually feel like they must do it. The only difference between procrastinators and non-procrastinators is that it takes procrastinators a lot longer to feel like they must do it. In other words, they wait until 'the last minute.' That's why I believe that a key to overcoming procrastination is to learn how to deliberately make 'the last minute' come sooner."

To conquer procrastination, Levinson suggests creating artificial deadlines that force you to take action now, instead of an hour before the actual deadline. "Don't wait for the last minute to come on its own because it will come too late. Deliberately put yourself in situations that create pressure and urgency sooner." ■



### Eliminate distractors

We live in one of the most mentally stimulating periods of human history. With so much access to ... well, everything (thank you Internet), can people really be blamed for being distracted? No, but we can put in place measures to limit distractions. They can include: