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Studies show that listening to classical music benefits the brain. (USC Photo Illustration/Holly Wilder)

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Studying for finals? Let classical music help

With finals starting next week, music on USC's Classical California network can help students reduce stress, soothe insomnia and better absorb new information.

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A number of academic studies have zeroed in on classical music, showing that listening benefits the brain, sleep patterns, the immune system and stress levels — all helpful when facing those all-important end of semester tests.

DOWNLOAD THE APPS

- You can download the free KUSC and KDFC apps online and listen to the stations' Classic California programming anywhere. Visit the [Apple app store](#) or [Google play](#).

University research in France, published in *Learning and Individual Differences*, found that students who listened to a one-hour lecture where classical music was played in the background scored significantly higher in a quiz on the lecture when compared to a similar group of students who heard the lecture with no music.

Studying and classical music: A better learning environment

The researchers speculated that the music put students in a heightened emotional state, making them more receptive to information. "It is possible that music, provoking a change in the learning environment, influenced the students' motivation to remain focused during the lecture, which led to better performance on the multiple choice quiz," they wrote.

Worried about upcoming exams? Then pay attention to research from Duke Cancer Institute that found classical music can lessen anxiety. Researchers gave men undergoing a stressful biopsy headphones playing Bach concertos and discovered they had no spike in diastolic blood pressure during the procedure and reported significantly less pain.

But make sure you are listening to classical music, because not all music aids blood pressure, a University of San Diego study found. Scientists there compared changes in blood pressure between individuals listening to classical, jazz or pop music. Those listening to classical had significantly lower systolic blood pressure when compared to those listening to other musical genres or no music at all.



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music.

Anxiety, studying and classical music

If testing anxiety causes sleepless nights, classical music can help soothe insomnia. A team of researchers at the University of Toronto found that tuning into classical music before bedtime helped people fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. Works by Brahms, Handel, Mozart, Strauss and Bach were effective sleep aids because they use rhythms and tonal patterns that create a meditative mood and slow brainwaves, the study found.

So what selections do classical music experts favor for listeners trying to absorb new information? KUSC's Alan Chapman suggests pieces that are more restrained to provide a nice aura in the background. Skip over large orchestral pieces, particularly those with a dynamic that ranges from whispers to booming cannons. "*The 1812 Overture* would not be a good study aid, unless you were studying to be a demolitions expert," he observed.

Instead, he'd choose solo piano pieces, perhaps Mozart sonatas or French piano music by Poulenc, Debussy or Fauré. Mozart string quartets are also good choices, he said, for the regularity of phrase structure in Classic period pieces.

Guitar music is gentle enough to study by, as is lute music, which has enjoyable, dulcet tones. Sample Bach lute suites, Chapman suggested.

Elizabethan consort music from the late 16th century, played on viols, was intended to create a pleasant atmosphere at court without demanding attention, Chapman said, and is another good candidate for music to study by.

So before you turn to the books, turn on [Classical California](#).

About Classical California: *The USC Radio Group — a non-profit, listener-funded classical media organization — operates Classical California, which includes the most-listened-to network of classical music radio stations in America serving more than 900,000 listeners each week.*

KUSC, located in downtown Los Angeles, serves communities throughout Southern California and is broadcast on 91.5 FM in Los Angeles and Orange counties, 88.5 FM in Palm Springs,



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