

# STUDY SUCCESS



**A GUIDE FOR  
MED STUDENTS**



ELSEVIER

# HOW LEARNING AT MED SCHOOL IS DIFFERENT AND HOW TO PREPARE

Everyone is smart at med school and that includes you! You didn't get to this point by being bottom of the class! Your ability to learn, retain and evaluate information will stand you in good stead at med school but be prepared for the approach to learning things to be a little different to what you may have experienced to date. Here are some of things to be aware of;

Normal school-life	Medical school-life	Medical student's thoughts
One textbook with all the information we need to learn	Lots of different books all with more or less information	<i>"Where do I even start trying to learn?"</i>
A reasonable volume of information to learn	Near-endless amounts of information to absorb	<i>"How is it possible to learn this much?"</i>
Purely scientific information needed to be learned	Scientific information alongside clinical information	<i>"How does this information relate to being a doctor?"</i>
Ample revision resources including past papers	Conflicting resources without standard past questions	<i>"How can I test myself at the right level?"</i>
Set-times to learn your material and homework	Do-it-yourself approach and completely independent learning	<i>"How should I structure my workload?"</i>

The good news is that many medical students and doctors alike have had similar thoughts to the above but you needn't join the list... Read on and learn how to maximise your learning, thereby saving time and reducing stress.

# LEARNING STRATEGIES TO GROW YOUR MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

The following evidence – based techniques were designed with success in mind and the good news is that they can be easily assimilated into revision routines. Read on to learn more...

## 1. Spaced practice: spreading out your learning works!

If you are used to the binge and purge way of learning, that is cramming at the last minute for exams, you may want to reconsider your strategy.

This method might in the past, have been effective for passing exams, but you are a life – long learner now and you need more effective methods. Evidence shows that studying your material in several sessions spread out over a long period, rather than repeatedly learning stuff in a short period, really helps to retain the material.<sup>2</sup>

Why is spacing out your practice better? Because it means you get a more gradual accumulation of knowledge rather than overloading your brain with information that you may find hard to retain. It has even been thought that using this method can potentially double the amount of information that is ultimately remembered, compared to other methods.

So we've learned that spacing out your study sessions helps, but how far should you spread your sessions out?

Interestingly, it all depends on how long you want to retain the information for. For a test in a weeks' time, the optimal inter-study gap should be between 20 to 40%, but for a test in a year time, the optimal study gap should be between 5 to 10%. The timing of these learning sessions has powerful effects on your retention and the table below gives some recommendations to help you plan.

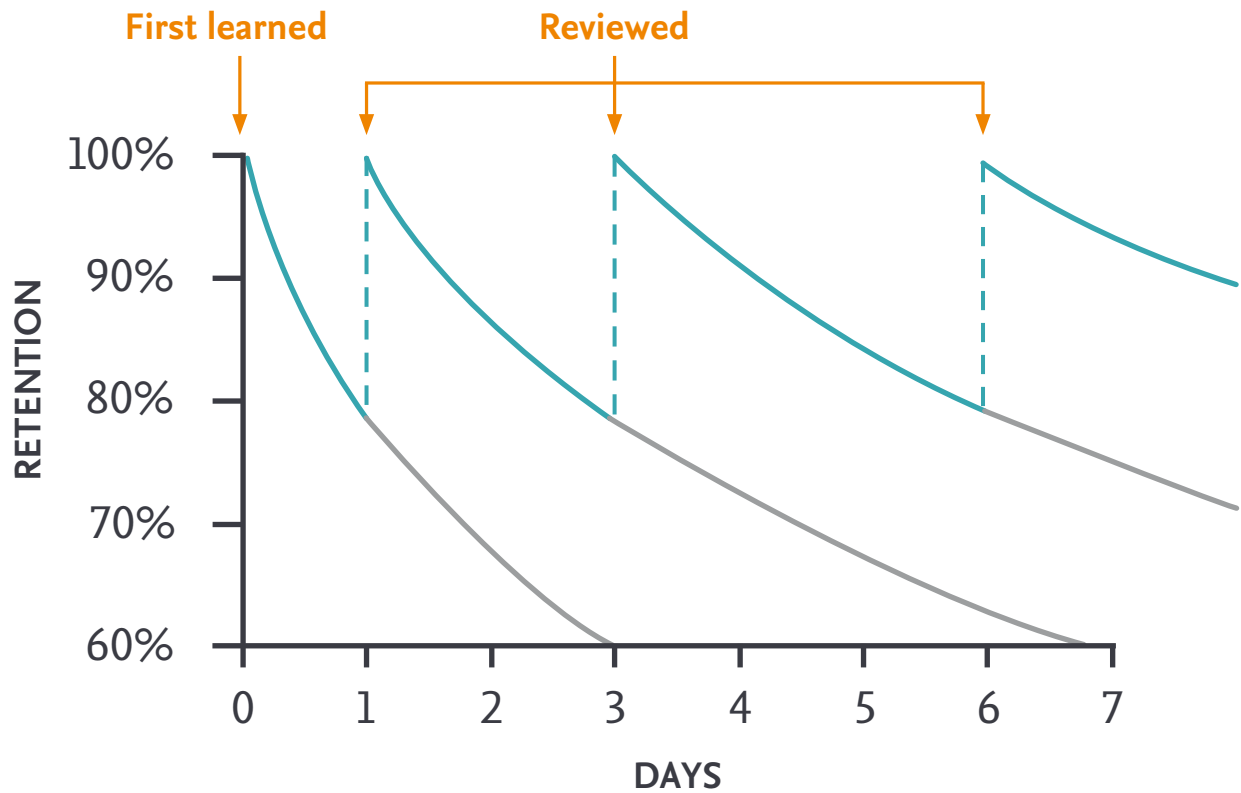
**Exam time is showtime! Plan your study sessions using the table below for maximum benefit**

Months away from your exam	The minimum time you should space out your learning sessions
1 month	Every 6 days
2 months	Every 10 days
3 months	Every 15 days
4 months	Every 17 days
5 months	Every 18 days
6 months	Every 18 days

As we can see, the optimally efficient gap between study sessions depends dramatically on when you are being tested.

Importantly, it is better to overshoot the duration between your revision than to undershoot. For example, for an exam that is 2 months away, a minimum of 10-day intervals for restudying the material is recommended, meaning 12 days is fine, but not 8. This is because if you keep the gap between sessions too short, it can give you a false perception of a high level of mastery, which You may find that not have retained of a high level of mastery that might not pay off when it comes to the exam.

Spaced repetition can turn the forgetting curve into the remembering curve!



Typical forgetting curve for newly learned information

