

Sure-Fire Massage School Study Strategies

By RJ Nikola, LMT, BA

After working as a massage therapist for 20 years, 18 of which I taught massage, and the past 13 years as a school owner, I developed study strategies for massage students. I give you this list, which I hand out to each of my students in their orientation packet.

I. MANAGING YOUR TIME WISELY IN SCHOOL.

Once you have enrolled in school, it is smart to manage your time wisely to assure you receive the successful education you paid for - with the ultimate goal of graduating, getting licensed and obtaining a rewarding career in the massage profession.

1st: Prioritize your daily and weekly schedule to make certain nonessential activities do not get in the way of your #1 goal, which is to attend classes, clinic, study, & do homework. You can have down time to enjoy yourself on a regular basis so long as you schedule it in, try not to do too much, and not let it negatively affect your schooling.

2nd: Schedule time to rest. Depending on your individual body needs you want to get an appropriate amount of sleep daily. 6-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep should be sufficient for the average adult.

3rd: Make sure you have dependable transportation and allow enough time to get to school on time; especially on bad weather or bad traffic days...(check the weather forecasts, and traffic reports on radio/TV).

4th: Eat healthy to keep your immune system strong; especially during cold and flu season (winter) because going to school can be stressful at times...like exam days!

5th: Keep upbeat & positive. Scientific studies have shown that a happy disposition reduces anxiety, pain, and stress that weakens your immune system...(makes you sick over time).

II. NOTE-TAKING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS.

Each instructor will have note-taking strategies specific for their courses. However, here are some general tips that may help you.

1st: The whole purpose behind notes is to jot down in your notebook or course manual or textbook those important things that will be on tests or items that interest you. How can you tell if something will be on a test? Ask the teacher. They can either say something like, "This is going to be on the test" or "The test will cover pages 112 through 153" or "These items will be covered on the test" or even "Be able to explain these principles on the test". Statements like these tell you what's going to be on the test or where the information can be found.

2nd: You can take notes in an outline form. That is, you write main topics in all caps or highlighted in a box more toward the left side of the page, while sub-topics (those items that fall under or are related to the main topic) are written beneath the main topic and indented. You can draw a bullet or star or even a number to highlight and divide each of the sub-topics for easier identification later on when you study from the notes.

3rd: Sometimes when taking notes you can miss something important the teacher is discussing. You are encouraged to ask teachers to repeat specific items, like: “Could you repeat that?” or “I don’t understand...could you explain that further?” As long as students don’t ask them to repeat themselves constantly, the teacher shouldn’t really mind.

4th: If outline form note-taking doesn’t work for you, then you might try a note-taking style called mind mapping. With mind mapping you take notes from the center of the page out. That is, the central topic of the day is written in the center and all sub-topics branch out (like branches of a tree) from there. In mind mapping you can use colors to identify certain sub-topics. You are also encouraged to doodle...that is, draw graphics, cartoons, etc. that directly relate to the topic you are taking notes on, like: if the subject is history and you are taking notes on Paris you might draw the Eiffel Tower or nazi tanks going past the Eiffel Tower or a swastika flag hanging from the Eiffel Tower. The graphics and colors and the branching out from the center of the page are a more visual way of taking notes.

5th: Use a tape recorder in class to record what is being said. This way you can play it back later and transcribe your notes at a slower rate with more time to spend on lecture details. Just remember if you want to bring a video recorder to class, first ask the teacher and make certain your classmates are OK with the idea. Some people are not comfortable being photographed, especially when disrobing occurs in a hands on course.

6th: I remember one student who brought a digital camera to class and would take photos of the teacher’s notes or slides or overheads being projected on the white board. But, he was careful to put the camera away when it was time for hands on or ask permission to take photos during the teacher demonstration. These are all techniques used by people to help remember the important things for later on when studying for a test, or licensing exam or to refer back to in their practices after graduation.

7th: When I use overhead transparencies, I have even been asked by students if they could make copies of my transparencies during break time. And that is perfectly fine as long as there is not a lot of photocopies. Also, you must consider how much photocopying might violate the teacher’s right to privacy or royalties in intellectual property (copyright violations). Please, be respectful of the teacher and their individual rights.

8th: I encourage students in some classes to make 3” x 5” index cards for studying later on. So, taking notes on these cards, like a question on one side of the card and the answer on the other side, or a diagram on one side and the description on the other. These can be great in detail oriented classes like Anatomy or Shiatsu, and of course, teachers may encourage that to help get better grades on tests.

After all, we want you to succeed in school. Taking notes is a memory aide just as re-reading your notes, or the student manual or hand outs or the textbook.

III. EFFECTIVE LEARNING & STUDY TECHNIQUES.

Effective ways to study are different for every individual. For the most part, people fall into three categories of learning styles & studying is easier and more effective when they fall into one or more of these categories.

1st: Auditory Learning. Some people are good listeners by nature. These are the auditory learners. It is as if they can actually see the words, or that words organize logically in their brains. Whether they hear it or read it, words are the key for them. So, their learning or study strategy involves: listening to lecture, writing notes, asking questions, talking about the topic, and of course reading from a book or their notes.

2nd: Visual Learning. Some people like to see it. For them anything visual helps them learn and retain information. Using pictures, diagrams, drawings, movies, overheads or slides are all good for their learning process. They are observant like the wise old owl.

3rd: Kinesthetic Learning. Then there are those individuals who learn more by touch and movement. They are very touch oriented. They usually like to touch or be touched by others. These are experiential learners, “hands on” learners, “doers” of the word not only hearers...so to speak. And, you would naturally think that anyone in massage school would fall into this category of learning and studying, but it is not always the case.

For these kinesthetic learners, they find it easy to study if it involves touch or movement. They need to practice it on themselves and on others. If the teacher says a muscle moves this way or that, they must try moving their muscle in that motion to truly learn. If a teacher talks about a meridian pathway on the arm, they must trace it, feel it, sense it with their hands to become real for them.

And, of course, some students are a blend of these three learning categories and so blend the three in their study techniques. So, we encourage you to discover which category or blend of categories you learn best in and use these techniques to assist yourself in the learning process.

Listen to your teacher, take notes, say it over in your head, and ask the teacher to clarify terms (words you do not know how to spell or what they mean). Make visual learning aids like charts or diagrams or 3 x 5 cards, or even draw on yourself, take photographs, ask for copies of overheads used in class. Practice those hands on techniques, pair off outside the classroom with classmates to go over protocols or form study groups to review and learn together; especially for the courses you find challenging. And lastly, if class ends a little early, don't be afraid to ask your teacher to stay after class to explain difficult concepts to understand or show that demo one more time so you can feel what its like.

IV. USING APPLICABLE TECHNOLOGY 4 EDUCATION.

1. A photocopy machine is available at either campus for student usage. At the SLC campus it can be found in the Learning Resource Center on the main level. At the Cedar campus it can be found upstairs in the teacher's office area. We encourage you to make copies of blank homework papers or handouts lost in transport. We discourage using the copy machines to make copies of completed homework or coursework assignments of classmates, which is considered cheating and grounds for dismissal. We also discourage using the copy machine to make copies of entire trademark or copyrighted publications. Federal law allows making incidental photocopies (small amount) of educational material for classroom instruction.

2. Photography in the way of digital cameras, video recorders, and camera-equipped cell phones to assist in your classroom educational coursework is allowed with a strong note of caution: you must first ask and receive permission of the instructor and your classmates for each given instance of usage. The instructor may desire privacy in respect to the intellectual property they have created to teach the course. Additionally, fellow classmates may have reservations regarding their privacy; especially with respect to disrobing in a class where cameras or recording equipment reside. Ask first & get permission each time before using these devices to record slides, transparencies, or hand-written notes on the whiteboard or demonstrations in class.

3. Each campus of the school houses a library of books, magazines, videos, and charts related to bodywork healing modalities. Most of these items can be checked out and removed from campus for brief periods of time, while other materials can be used so long as they remain on school premises. Just ask the front desk personnel and they will help you check materials in and out of the library. The library at the SLC campus is found on the main level in the hallway between treatment rooms in clinic. At the Cedar campus the library is found on the main level of the school just off from the kitchen area in view of the front desk. Additionally, both campuses are near the city public libraries. In SLC we are located across the street from Library Square. In Cedar city the library is just a mile up Main street behind the park at 303 North 100 East. Students are encouraged to go to the libraries for quiet study time, research and internet access.

4. Computer(s) are available at both campuses for student usage. At the SLC campus they can be found in the Learning Resource Lab, while at the Cedar campus it is found up at the top of the stairs. These computers have standard desktop publishing software for doing homework --- just save files as PDF documents and take to staples to be printed off for a nominal cost. Internet access is available at the local city library.

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