

THE SCHOLAR'S ASCENT

The Scholar's Guide to Elite Study Habits

5 Science-Backed Strategies to Transform Your Academic Performance

Created by Dr. Goodluck Ijezie-Desbois, PharmD

A Product of The Scholar's Ascent

"We rise not by accident, but with intention."

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A Letter from Dr. Ijezie-Desbois

Dear Scholar,

If you had told me as a teenager that I would one day earn a Doctor of Pharmacy degree, I would not have believed you.

I grew up navigating the foster care system. There were no tutors, no study guides on the shelf, and no family tradition of academic success to lean on. What I did have was a stubborn refusal to accept that my circumstances defined my ceiling — and eventually I discovered something that changed everything: the right study strategies can level any playing field.

The methods in this guide are not guesswork. They are drawn from cognitive science, learning psychology, and the hard-won lessons of students who have walked difficult roads and still reached the top. I used many of these techniques to survive organic chemistry, pharmacology, and the pharmacy boards. They work.

What You Will Learn

- **Active Recall** — the single most effective study technique
- **Spaced Repetition** — how to remember what you study
- **The Pomodoro Technique** — focus without burnout
- **Cornell Note-Taking** — capture and retain information
- **Error Analysis** — turn mistakes into mastery
- A complete **7-Day Action Plan** to implement it all

This guide is your starting point. The Scholar's Ascent platform goes much deeper — with video lessons, interactive tools, and a community of learners who are proving every day that where you start does not determine where you finish.

You belong here. Let's get to work.

— *Dr. Goodluck Ijezie-Desbois, PharmD*
Founder, The Scholar's Ascent

Personal Study Audit

Before you build new habits, understand where you stand today.

Instructions: Rate yourself honestly on each category below using a scale of 1 (needs significant work) to 5 (strong and consistent).

Category	1	2	3	4	5
Time Management — I plan my study sessions in advance and stick to a schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note-Taking — My notes are organized, clear, and useful for review.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Test Preparation — I prepare for exams over multiple days using proven methods.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mindset & Motivation — I stay resilient when material is difficult or grades dip.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-Advocacy — I ask questions, visit office hours, and seek help when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focus & Environment — I study in a distraction-free space with full concentration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My Total Score: _____ / 30

Reflection Questions

1. What is the biggest obstacle to your academic success right now?

2. When you perform well on an exam, what did you do differently?

3. If you could change one study habit this week, what would it be?

TIP

Return to this audit after completing the 7-Day Action Plan on the final pages to measure your progress.

Strategy 1 — Active Recall

The single most powerful study technique backed by decades of research

What Is Active Recall?

Active recall is the practice of actively retrieving information from memory rather than passively reviewing it. Instead of re-reading your textbook or highlighting notes, you close the book and ask yourself: "What do I remember?"

Why It Works (The Science)

Research in cognitive psychology shows that every time you successfully retrieve a piece of information, the neural pathway to that memory becomes stronger. This is called the **testing effect**. Studies demonstrate that students who practice retrieval retain 50–70% more material than those who only re-read.

How to Practice Active Recall

- 1 Study the material** — Read, attend lecture, or watch the lesson once with focus.
- 2 Close everything** — Put away your notes, textbook, and slides.
- 3 Write or recite from memory** — On a blank page, write down everything you can recall about the topic.
- 4 Check your work** — Open your notes and identify what you missed or got wrong.
- 5 Focus on the gaps** — Study only the material you could not recall, then repeat the process.

PRO TIP

Turn your notes into questions. For every concept, write a question on one side of a flashcard and the answer on the other. Quiz yourself daily.

Quick-Reference: Active Recall Methods

Method	How It Works	Best For
Blank Page	Write everything you know from memory	Broad topic review
Flashcards	Question on front, answer on back	Definitions & facts
Practice Problems	Solve without looking at examples	Math & science
Teach Someone	Explain the concept out loud	Deep understanding

Strategy 2 — Spaced Repetition

Beat the forgetting curve and remember what you study — permanently

The Forgetting Curve

In the 1880s, psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered that we forget roughly 70% of new information within 24 hours unless we take deliberate steps to review it. The solution is simple: review material at strategically increasing intervals.

The Optimal Review Schedule

Review Session	When to Review	Purpose
Review 1	Same day (within 24 hrs)	Catch material before it fades
Review 2	Day 3	Strengthen the memory trace
Review 3	Day 7	Move into medium-term memory
Review 4	Day 14	Solidify long-term retention
Review 5	Day 30	Lock it in permanently

Sample 7-Day Spaced Repetition Plan

Day	New Material	Review
Monday	Learn Chapter 5	—
Tuesday	Learn Chapter 6	Review Ch. 5 (Day 1)
Wednesday	Learn Chapter 7	Review Ch. 6 (Day 1)
Thursday	—	Review Ch. 5 (Day 3) + Ch. 7 (Day 1)
Friday	Learn Chapter 8	Review Ch. 6 (Day 3)
Saturday	—	Review Ch. 7 (Day 3) + Ch. 8 (Day 1)
Sunday	—	Review Ch. 5 (Day 7) + Ch. 6 (Day 5)

TOOL

Free apps like **Anki** automate spaced repetition scheduling. Combine them with active recall flashcards for maximum retention.

Strategy 3 — The Pomodoro Technique

Structured focus sessions that prevent burnout and build momentum

How It Works

The Pomodoro Technique breaks study time into focused intervals (called "pomodoros") followed by short breaks. It leverages the brain's natural attention cycle.

The Pomodoro Cycle

- 1 **Choose** a single task to focus on.
- 2 **Set a timer** for 25 minutes — work with full focus, no distractions.
- 3 When the timer rings, **take a 5-minute break** (stand, stretch, breathe).
- 4 **Repeat.** After 4 pomodoros, take a longer 15–30 minute break.

When to Use It

- Starting a task you have been avoiding (procrastination buster)
- Studying for long periods without losing focus
- Working through problem sets or writing assignments
- Preparing for exams over multiple days

Daily Pomodoro Tracker

Task / Subject	Pom 1	Pom 2	Pom 3	Pom 4
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Total Pomodoros Today:

TIP

If 25 minutes feels too long at first, start with 15 minutes and work up. The habit of focused blocks matters more than the duration.

Strategy 4 — Cornell Note-Taking

A structured system that turns note-taking into an active learning tool

The Cornell Method

Developed at Cornell University, this system divides your page into three sections that work together to help you record, review, and retain information.

Cornell Note Template

Topic: _____ Date: _____

<p>CUE COLUMN</p> <p>Write questions and keywords here AFTER the lecture. Use these cues to quiz yourself during review.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>NOTE-TAKING AREA</p> <p>Record main ideas, facts, and details during the lecture. Use abbreviations. Skip lines between ideas.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
<p>SUMMARY</p> <p>After class, write a 2–3 sentence summary of the main ideas in your own words.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>	

When to Use Cornell Notes vs. Mind Maps

Situation	Cornell Notes	Mind Maps
Linear lectures with structured content	Best choice	Possible
Brainstorming and connecting ideas	Possible	Best choice

Exam review and self-quizzing	Best choice	Less effective
Creative subjects (art, literature)	Possible	Best choice
Science and math problem-solving	Best choice	Less effective

KEY

The power of Cornell notes is in the review step. Cover the right column, use the cue column to quiz yourself, then check. This is active recall built into your notes.

Strategy 5 — Error Analysis After Tests

Turn every mistake into a roadmap for improvement

What Is Error Analysis?

Error analysis is the process of systematically reviewing your mistakes after a test or quiz to understand *why* you got each question wrong — not just what the correct answer was. This turns every exam into a powerful learning tool.

The 4 Types of Errors

Error Type	What It Means	How to Fix It
Concept Error	You did not understand the material	Re-study the concept, visit office hours, watch a video lesson
Application Error	You understood but could not apply it	Practice more problems of this type
Careless Error	You knew it but made a silly mistake	Slow down, double-check work, use checklists
Test Strategy Error	Ran out of time or misread the question	Practice timed tests, read questions twice

Error Analysis Worksheet

#	Question Topic	Error Type	Why I Got It Wrong	My Fix
1
2
3
4

5

Pattern I Notice:

.....

My #1 Action Item to Improve:

.....

PRO TIP

Do error analysis within 48 hours of getting your test back. The material is still fresh enough to learn from your mistakes effectively.

Your 7-Day Action Plan

Implementation is everything. Knowledge without action is just information.

Use this plan to put one new strategy into practice each day this week. Check off each task as you complete it.

Day 1 — Audit & Commit

- Complete the Personal Study Audit on page 3
- Identify your weakest category
- Write down one specific goal for this week
- Set up a dedicated study space free from distractions

Day 2 — Active Recall

- Choose one topic you studied recently
- Close your notes and write everything you remember on a blank page
- Check against your notes and identify gaps
- Create 10 flashcards from the gaps

Day 3 — Spaced Repetition

- Review the flashcards from Day 2
- Download or set up Anki (free) on your phone or computer
- Enter your flashcards into the app
- Schedule your next review sessions using the spaced repetition table

Day 4 — Pomodoro Power

- Set a timer for 25 minutes and study with zero distractions
- Take a 5-minute break (stand up, stretch, hydrate)
- Complete at least 3 full pomodoro cycles
- Log your pomodoros using the tracker on page 6

Day 5 — Cornell Notes

- Use the Cornell method for your next lecture or reading session
- After the session, fill in the cue column with questions
- Write a 2–3 sentence summary at the bottom
- Use the cue column to quiz yourself before bed

Day 6 — Combine & Stack

- Use Pomodoro timing while doing active recall practice
- Review all flashcards created this week (spaced repetition)
- Teach one concept to a friend, family member, or even yourself in the mirror
- Reflect: Which strategy felt most effective? Write it down.

Day 7 — Review & Level Up

- Retake the Personal Study Audit — compare your scores
- Identify which 2 strategies you will continue using permanently
- Set goals for next week
- Explore The Scholar's Ascent platform for deeper resources

REMEMBER

You do not need to be perfect. You need to be consistent. Small daily improvements compound into extraordinary results.

Ready to Go Deeper?

This guide is just the beginning. The Scholar's Ascent has everything you need to transform your academic life.

Join The Scholar's Ascent

Access our full library of tools, strategies, and community support.

thescholarsascent.org

What Is Waiting for You Inside

Resource	Description
Core Toolkit	Video series covering every strategy in this guide — and beyond.
The Lexicon	A curated academic vocabulary builder with definitions, examples, and memory aids.
Interactive Tools	Study planners, habit trackers, and self-assessment dashboards.
Community	Connect with other scholars proving that potential has no prerequisites.

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