

Success in Philosophy

Students committed to learning will find many possible paths to success. No path is error free, but the path best for you may not look like the same path as another student. For this reason, students should continuously assess their academic progress in courses and adjust their academic strategies accordingly.

While there is no magic formula, the following suggestions may improve your ability to succeed in philosophy and increase your retention of knowledge.

This information was adapted from: <http://www.philosophypages.com/sy.htm> and <http://www.wikihow.com/Study-Philosophy>

Tips:

1. **Use the SQ4R method of reading:** Reading a book and studying a book are two different things. Before you read, **S**urvey the chapter. **Q**uestion while you survey by turning the title, headings and learning objectives into questions. When you begin to **R**ead, look for answers to your questions, re-read captions and study graphics. **R**ecite by orally asking yourself questions after each section. **R**elate what you have already studied in class – how are these new concepts similar/different? How do they build on one another? **R**evision is an ongoing process.
 - a. Do all assigned readings before class and come to class prepared to discuss your questions the concepts presented. This is invaluable to your gaining intellectual independence.
2. **Historical relevance:** Consider the context in which the philosophical theories were written. Historical events, who wrote it, what audience it was written for all influence the interpretation of philosophy. Your textbooks and internet sources should give you ample information concerning this.
3. **Determine the theses:** Some theses are obvious and explicitly stated, but many are not. You will need to consider the key passages and ideas you spotted during your first and second readings to help you determine the main idea the philosopher is trying to argue.
 - a. A thesis can be positive or negative, meaning that it can accept a particular philosophical idea or reject it. Identify the idea being addressed first. Then, use the writer's statements about that idea to figure out if the thesis is positive or negative.

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4. **Take your time!:** Reading philosophy is intense. Each person's needs are different but never the less, do what you need to give yourself enough time and a quiet place to study and think about what you have read.
5. **Secondary sources:** Spot crucial passages and identify central theses by reviewing the material and looking over other sources and what they have to say about it.
6. **Locate supportive arguments:** Philosophers do not merely state opinions but also undertake to establish their truth. The methods employed to support philosophical theses can differ widely, but most of them will be expressed one of the forms of logical argumentation (appeal to force, argument, ignorance, pity, emotion, or authority). That is, the philosopher will (explicitly or implicitly) offer premises that are clearly true and then claim that a sound inference from these premises leads inexorably to the desired conclusion.
7. **Assess the arguments:** Ask whether the premises made by the author are true. Try to come up with a counter example that proves the statement wrong. If the premises are true, ask yourself whether the inferences derived from premises to conclusion are sound.
8. **Look for connections between philosophers:** See which way each philosopher incorporates, adopts, rejects, or responds to the work of those who have gone before.
9. **When in class:** Be prepared with the daily readings completed and listen actively; do expect conflicts or disagreements but be respectful of others making every effort to see the other person's perspective without taking offence and making personal attacks; participate full while letting others talk too and ask questions!
10. **A lot of philosophy is confusing at first:** Realize that you can keep calm if it is confusing because the majority of philosophy is "gotten" through the discussion in class.