HOW TO STUDY ACCOUNTING

There is no substitution for hard work and a sincere desire to learn in Accounting. Accounting is a difficult, though not impossible, subject to master. Consider it a foreign language and seek to understand it as you would Spanish, French or another language that is new to you. In order to master the language, there are certain things that you must do.

Reading the Textbook to Understand “WHAT”

1. Read the chapter, preferably before the first lecture on a new chapter. The first time through the chapter, read to gain familiarity with the terms and concepts being presented. Don’t expect to understand everything the first time you read the chapter. However, it will be a tremendous help to be familiar with the terms during the lecture.

2. Study consistently. Don’t skip Chapter one and plan to make up for it in Chapter two. Each chapter in accounting builds on previous chapters. If you do half-hearted work in Chapter 1, you will have difficulty in Chapter 2 and be lost by Chapter 3.

3. Accounting books are condensed. Almost every sentence is important. Look over the chapter for content and then read carefully. You will have to read each chapter several times to gain a clear understanding of the concepts being presented. Pay attention to those concepts that your instructor stresses.

Read to Understand “WHY”

1. This is a technical subject, it is logical, it requires reasoning.

2. Strive to be able to say, “I understand why they do that.” If you can understand “why” in accounting, there is very little to memorize.

3. Try to explain each new topic in your own words. Getting the ideas into your own words is better than being able to quote the book.

4. Be critical. Ask your teacher for the reasons behind accounting methods that you do not understand.

Work Problems to Understand “HOW”

1. You may be able to understand why they do that, but you must also be able to do it yourself (sometimes without your textbook or notes). This is a do-it-yourself course.
2. To be sure that you understand “how” as well as “why” work the problems which illustrate the reading material in each chapter.

3. Remember “why” and “how”
   a. Do not just keep up, consolidate and review as you go. Understand as each chapter builds upon the previous chapter.
   b. If possible rework one problem each week from some previous chapter. Rework problems that contained concepts that were difficult for you.
   c. DO NOT wait until exam time to do the homework. The purpose of the homework assignments is to help you to understand the concepts. If you wait until exam time to do the homework, you are cramming and cramming is seldom effective.
   d. Never wait until exam time to review. The review-as-you-go plan produces better results. It does not take as long and saves the last minute worry and the sacrifice of other courses that go with cramming (also, refer back to #c – cramming DOES NOT work).

Working Problems

1. **Read the problem.** Read the instructions. Read to understand what is being asked of you, and then read to understand why it is being asked of you. This is especially important on exams.

2. Work the problems without “page flipping” back to the chapter.
   a. When in doubt, look back at the chapter but NOT until you have tried to do the problem on your own. This indicates that you do not understand or remember the chapter material. You are not prepared for an examination.
   b. The “page flipping” method is guaranteed to waste a maximum of your time and to produce a minimum of results.

3. **Work the problem.** Check your solutions against the solutions presented in class. Do not use class time to copy down the problems. You may (or may not) get the points for completing the homework assignment, but you will spend valuable class time copying, not listening. You will also miss out on the opportunity to understand the material.

4. Be neat and orderly. Sloppy calculations, messy papers, and general carelessness cause most errors in the working of accounting problems.

5. Note the part of the problem with which you have the most difficulty and ask questions during the classroom session. Be sure that you understand the
correct solution.

**Make the Best Use of Classroom Time**

1. Classes are never interesting unless you take part.

2. Be prepared before you come to class. Not only will you be bored if you have not prepared for class (because you cannot participate), but your grade will suffer and you will be very uncomfortable (Accounting instructors ALWAYS learn your name and are subject to call on you at any time).

3. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

4. Don't get upset if your instructor has to look up the answer (everyone has to look it up sometimes, it’s a difficult subject).

5. Students who make failing grades also fail to attend classes, fail to pay attention during class, fail to do their homework, and fail to ask the instructor or tutor for help. Stay out of these ruts.

6. Be specific in your study; concentrate on the things that seem to be the most important:
   a. Note items that the instructor emphasizes in class.
   b. Determine the topics for which most problems were assigned.
   c. Scan problems and questions that were not assigned for homework problems that could be used on an examination.

**Preparing for and Taking Accounting Exams**

1. Do not stop with just “getting the idea.” Be sure that you can work problems without the aid of the textbook or your notes.

2. Every exam has an element of speed. Have your “how's” and why's” right at your mental fingertips. If you are slow (especially to understand what the question wants you to do), then you probably need more study.

3. Students are not parrots. On a good exam, you should be expected to give back something more than what was in the textbook. A good exam should not be (and will not be) a carbon copy of a homework problem. It will probably approach the material covered from different angles to test your ability to reason and understand, rather than your ability to memorize.

4. When taking exam, many points are lost because the student does not READ THE PROBLEM. Read first, and then write. Make sure your work is neat and
orderly and make sure to show all calculations. Instructors do not like to grade messy papers and many extra points are lost when the instructor simply gives up on trying to follow sloppy work. Be nice to your instructor and your instructor will be nice to you.

5. An open book exam is not a freebie. In fact, they are usually more difficult. Spending one hour the night before an open book exam tabbing pages will not earn you a passing grade. Study harder!!

6. Examinations need not be a source of worry. Conscientious effort seldom goes unrewarded.

What does accounting have to do with me (I'm not an Accounting major)?

1. Relate the things we talk about in accounting to things that you already know – places you have worked, your family’s business, your personal budget, other courses. Try to see how this might help you do what you want to do in the future. See if you can use it right now – as a treasurer for campus organizations, in a part-time job, in a personal bookkeeping system, to understand the business section of the newspaper.