



# HAROLD

Psychology student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, in the second year of my Psychology bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

Besides university, I spend a lot of time with my fraternity.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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In the beginning of my studies, I mostly used *summarizing*, in the *copy & paste* kind of way. Sometimes, if I had some spare time or when a course was really challenging, I made some *flashcards*, but by the time I made them the exams were already up. In terms of results, I wasn't doing great, but I wasn't doing too bad either: I passed most of my exams. I had no idea what I could do differently, because I did not have the time to invest in finding out, as the fraternity simply takes up a lot of time.

## MY JOURNEY

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In the Study Smart training, I was confronted with the fact that what I was doing was not effective at all, and that I could use more effective strategies without necessarily investing more time. This idea appealed to me a lot, so throughout the Study Smart training I tried to find out which strategy I could apply that would be more effective but not too big of a change from my original strategy. Therefore, I changed my 'copy-paste' summaries to the *Cornell method*. This method entails writing a summary in your own words and adding a keyword or question in the margin. This also means that I don't have to make flashcards anymore: I can immediately start *testing myself*, without losing time creating flashcards! Of course, it was a challenge at first, since it is a very different way of summarizing, and copy-pasting is simple and easy. Now I really try to write things down *in my own words*, which takes more time, but my summaries have also gotten much shorter, so in the end the amount of time I spend on summarizing is pretty much the same. Furthermore, I realized that the fact that I forget things I've learnt for the first meeting is not a problem. As a result I stopped putting the summarizing & learning off to the end of the course. Now, if I have forgotten something I had learned before and I learn it again, I know that I will most likely remember it. And repeating the materials is much easier now that I have summaries that I really understand and can explain to myself. It still costs me a lot of energy to give answers to the questions and keywords, but I know it is worth it.

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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All in all, I now use the more effective manner of summarizing: the Cornell method. I have stopped making extra flashcards, instead I use the keywords in the margin to test myself and check afterwards whether my answers were correct.



# NICK

Media Studies student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), in the 'Media Studies: Digital Cultures' master's program.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

I play soccer twice a week (training and games) and I have a job in an electronics shop.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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I chose for Maastricht University because of its Problem-Based Learning (PBL) system, allowing me to learn and collaborate with other students. The PBL classroom made me very enthusiastic and I became very active in my tutorials. I figured that answering my peers' questions during the tutorials, using the notes I had made during lectures, were enough to make sense of and remember the course literature.

## MY JOURNEY

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In my first course, I often got feedback from my peers and tutors that I was reading out my notes too much in the tutorials, not explaining things in my own words. Furthermore, using this strategy of 'explaining' my notes to my peers, I failed my first exams. So I went to my tutor and asked her for some tips on how to best learn in the PBL system. At my previous university, I was told what I had to know and simply crammed all the information during the last days before the exams. My tutor told me that simply cramming the literature would not help me much in PBL. She told me to engage more actively with the materials, not just writing down what the lecturer said, but really thinking about it: what does this mean?, why is this the case?, does this relate to something else I already know?: a study strategy focused on *elaboration*. Answering the other students' questions could then be my kind of testing, because I love participating in the tutorials. Thanks to the tips my tutor gave me I now plan my studying much more (which I never did before). She helped me with the planning throughout the course, but also between my soccer trainings and my job. Getting in this routine took me a long while, and sometimes, I did not stick to my planning. Because it was tough for me, I asked my tutor to check up with me from time to time. By the end of the semester, I had gotten used to the planning and my study sessions, and now I plan and execute my study sessions naturally! Some external control through my tutor (and peers) helped me a lot.

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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Thanks to my tutor, I now know how to use more active learning strategies. I still try to answer other students questions, but now I try to recall the information from my memory, based on active *elaboration* when I learn, so that it really is a test for myself as well. Furthermore, my tutor helped me to integrate distributed and interleaved practice into my study sessions, which really helps me a lot.



# MELANIE

Health sciences student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, in the third year of my Health Sciences bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

Besides university, I have a job at a nursing home, where I am responsible for the activities for the residents. This job takes up a lot of time, as I work there most weekends and mostly also 1 or 2 evenings in the week.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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The first two years of my Bachelor, I have mainly studied through highlighting the study material. I used to reread the highlighted information, summarized that information (copy-paste style) and lastly, made flashcards of the summary. There is a lot of repetition in this process, which made sure that I knew most information. Therefore, I mostly received good grades. However, throughout the bachelor, the amount of reading increased a lot, and I could no longer get all of this done in combination with my job. Therefore, I started looking for different strategies that could help me study my materials in a shorter time-period. Some of my friends recently participated in the Study Smart training and got some interesting insights there.

## MY JOURNEY

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My friends told me that highlighting is not effective, but it still helps me to stay concentrated while reading. I start out highlighting information in a more selective way since I don't want to end up with completely yellow book pages. Afterwards, I make a summary. I started to decrease the rereading in between to save some time. Instead, I now really think about the highlighted information, try to explain it to myself, and write down those explanations in my own words as the summary. This is an *elaborative* study strategy. I also draw pictures or models related to the material since my friends said that drawing pictures helps to structure and remember information. Lastly, I create flashcards, with which I test myself throughout the course. Highlighting, explaining the material to myself and summarizing the text I do before my tutorials, the flashcards I create after my tutorials and test myself throughout the course. If I find out I don't know something (because I cannot explain or answer the flashcard), I go back to the summary. This process takes out much of the repetition I had before, and it actually helps me remember the materials much better. It still costs time, but I have the feeling, it actually benefits me.

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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I now skip rereading and use highlighting only as a starting point for summarizing, I summarize more actively by explaining things to myself while writing the summary, and lastly I quiz myself in a distributed fashion.



# EVA

European law student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Law, in the first year of my European Law bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

I've always wanted to study law, and came to Maastricht to do so. Like every other student, I love hanging out with friends, but my main focus is on my studies.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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I started law school with the same learning strategies in mind I have always used: highlighting & rereading, and sometimes some summarizing. High school was always easy enough, so I could easily pass all my exams using these strategies. When I came to Maastricht, I was overwhelmed by the amount of reading, the complexity of the materials, and the fact that it was all in English (which is not my native language). Halfway through the first year I was barely passing any course even though I spent a lot of time studying. I realized this cannot be the best way to go through college! So, I made an appointment with a student adviser.

## MY JOURNEY

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I explained to the student adviser that I wanted to do the best possible, but I simply did not know how to do better. The student adviser explained that I was studying in an ineffective manner and that I should focus on actively engaging with the materials. Next to that, I should maintain a good balance between studying and my personal life! Currently, I'm trying out different learning strategies, in order to see which one works best. So far, I really like the idea of spreading out my learning more, without investing extra time, and I enjoy to use quizzes as a form of repetition. I've found some other students who are very motivated and together we make flashcards online and share our questions with each other. We also get together quite often to talk the materials through and really explain things to each other. This makes studying more fun, but it also helps me to know what I understand well enough to explain and what I could read more about. In the beginning, I was not sure whether I covered all important concepts and I did not know what I had to learn. Getting together with my friends makes it easier and the tutorials are a great way to check each other's understanding of the topics.

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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Sometimes I still use highlighting, but now I mostly focus on quizzing myself and spreading my learning. For example, if I get the same question right three weeks in a row, I am assured that I know that piece of information and move on to other subjects. This way, I always know where I stand: what I do know, and what I do not know yet.



# JUAN

International Business student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the School of Business and Economics, in the second year of my International Business bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

I love gaming, either on my PC or on the PlayStation. I spend way too much time on this, but it helps me relax and get my mind off university every once in a while.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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I already studied psychology in Canada, and there we received a lot of instruction on effective learning. I don't even remember what I did before that. Since my time in Canada, my study technique included spreading my learning over time, actively summarizing while asking questions to myself and quizzing myself using old exams, textbook questions and flashcards. This has worked for me in studying psychology, and now helps me through IB.

## MY JOURNEY

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At Maastricht University, I participated in a course on learning strategies, explaining which ones are effective and which are not, and why. Overall, it showed me that I was indeed doing a good job. The trainers had a good tip how to summarize in a different way, for example with the Cornell method, where you use the margins on your summary page to write down keywords and questions. This way, I no longer had to make flashcards to quiz myself, which is really time-efficient. I also had to adapt my strategies a little to the problem-based learning system at UM. Before, I could start a planning at the beginning of a period, because I would already know all the literature resources I had to read at the start. Now, I actually also do know the reading, but I also have to make sure that I am prepared for the right tutorial at the right time. In the beginning, this was challenging in terms of planning, but now I've found a way; I read and summarize the Cornell way (while asking myself questions) before the tutorial I need to be prepared for. In the tutorial, I use my summary and gather some questions that are raised in the tutorial. Then after I've prepared for the next meeting, I go back to the questions addressed in my tutorial, my summary and textbooks. I complete all the information adding what I learned from the post-discussion. I repeat this for each problem. At the end of the period I go through all the questions once more and -if available- I complete some old exams!

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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I actually never really changed much, except my summary routine. Now I use active summarizing, distributing my learning and quizzing!



# SADIE

University College Venlo student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Science and Engineering, in the third year of my University College Venlo bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

I spend every free moment watching movies and TV series. I am currently bingeing on Suits and Lucifer.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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In my first two years, I was mostly reading articles over and over again. I made summaries by reading other people's summaries and copying information from those summaries, but also articles and textbooks. At the end of the period I'd spend days and nights trying to cram all those summaries into my head.

## MY JOURNEY

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At some point, I got sick of the cramming and the stress that goes with it, and I started trying to find information online on how to study. I really want to do my best and invest a lot of time and effort, but I felt like there had to be a better way to direct that effort. I found an article comparing different strategies, and it turns out I had been using all the wrong ones! I challenged myself to try one new strategy each course period. I started by testing myself, which was confronting (since in the beginning I felt like I wasn't remembering anything), but in the end I really knew a lot more, and it was less stressful than cramming at the end of the period. I mostly used test questions from old exams or questions that I found in the books. If I could not find any questions, I wrote everything down what I knew about a certain topic or tried to answer our learning goals of that week without my notes. I wrote as much as I knew about that topic and checked afterwards what I missed or had wrong. I still find it difficult to judge whether I covered all relevant topics, but I find the learning goals are guiding me in that regard. In the next period, I added *distributed practice*. That is a lot of planning! But I managed to combine it with self-testing and added it to my already existing routines. I now have my fixed study sessions, planned in my agenda next to the tutorial meetings, exams, and free time. Changing my strategies takes a lot of time, but slowly, I'm getting where I want to be!

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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To me, trying to apply all the new strategies at once was overwhelming, so I'm slowly transitioning, trying out what does and does not work for me. Currently I've integrated self-testing and distributed practice. In the evenings, I'm really tired, but I have the feeling that I accomplished something that day, that is a good feeling.



# MATTY

University College Maastricht student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Science and Engineering, in the first year of my University College Maastricht bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

Hitting the gym.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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I've only just started my studies, and so far what I've been doing is mostly rereading lecture slides. I haven't had a test yet, so I don't know exactly what to do just yet. That's when I participated in the Study Smart course.

## MY JOURNEY

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The Study Smart course showed me different options of studying, which really helped me see that I was not on the right track. I should instead start studying actively, and I should make sure to get feedback on what I'm doing. So I tried to schedule more short sessions of learning, in which I ask myself questions while reading, and I answer them immediately, using the materials. Furthermore, I try to find old exams or tests in the textbooks, and expand on these questions (so not just trying to answer the question, but really trying to recall as much information about the topic as possible). Furthermore, throughout my day, I try to recall information that I have learned, for example while working out. The topics that I have tried to recall, are the topics I will then go back to after finishing my workout, to make sure I recalled everything correctly. If there are topics that I cannot get into my head and/or on which there are no old exam or textbook questions, I create flashcards. During tutorials, I also try to remember the information without looking at my notes, and I always try to get my tutorial group to draw schemes on as many topics as possible. Because I already practice test myself at home, I am not so afraid anymore to present in front of others. Testing myself gives me the confidence that I can also explain it in the tutorial meetings. Sometimes, it can be really frustrating, if you studied a topic for many times, but still cannot explain it without your notes. But it is comparable to the gym: no pain, no gain!

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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I realized that my study effort was quite low (just reading the lecture slides), so I'm attempting to at least actively practice retrieving information several times. If I don't understand a topic, I first ask my friends. We meet up and explain the topic to each other, challenging each other. That really motivates me. And it also boosted my participation in the tutorials, I am now able to actually contribute something, because I can remember what I read during my self-study.

# MARCEL

Biomedical Sciences student

## PROFILE

I'm a student at the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, in the third year of Biomedical Sciences Bachelor.

## MAIN OTHER ACTIVITIES

Sports and active in a sports association.

## PREVIOUS LEARNING STRATEGY

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In my first year of my studies, I wrote mainly summaries, highlighted and reread them one or a few days before the exam because I didn't have the time to really study them. But I barely passed my exams, and I was not satisfied with the way I studied and the way I passed my exams. I had already the idea that I was studying not the right way. When I participated in the Study Smart training, my preconception was confirmed.

## MY JOURNEY

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In the study smart training, I learned that I had to study in a more active way. And now, I'm summarizing less, highlighting less and actually work with the material. Before I go to bed, I go through the lectures again and tell the story to myself, I explain the stuff to myself and repeat it in a different way. This really helps me to recall things better. I work much more explicit with the materials, not passively writing down. And I also try to challenge myself and explain it without my notes, so that way, I practice the retrieval.

However, I'm still not completely satisfied with the way I study. It is really hard for me to actually break old habits and to start studying earlier, without the pressure of the exams. Developing the habit of starting earlier and actively studying takes a lot of time and energy. And it is easier to rely on your own, old habits, than making new ones. I like the strategy to explain things out loud, but I cannot do that in the library. So I mainly study at home, but there I find it sometimes hard to motivate myself to start studying. And with practice testing, I would like to do it more, but it is really hard to time: I first need to know the content before I can test myself, right? But during the Study Smart training I was told that simply trying to retrieve the information actually helps. Afterwards I need to check, whether I got it right or what the correct answer was, but this already helps.

## CURRENT PREFERRED LEARNING STRATEGY

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I really like to explain things to myself, to repeat it before I go to bed, to talk through concepts and processes and to study more actively. This is working really well. However, I would like to add more practice testing to my studying and to start earlier. This is still difficult to implement, because breaking old habits takes time.