

# 30 STEPS TO BEAT STRESS AND SUCCEED IN EXAMS

By Ashwin Sanghi, Author and Entrepreneur



Ashwin Sanghi

He ranks among India's highest-selling authors of English fiction. He has written several bestsellers (*The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant*, *The Krishna Key*, *The Sialkot Saga*) and a New York Times bestselling crime thriller called *Private India* (followed by *Private Delhi*) together with James Patterson. Sanghi has also co-authored several non-fiction titles in the 13 Steps series (the latest one being *13 Steps to Bloody Good Marks*). Ashwin was included by *Forbes India* in their *Celebrity 100* and is a winner of the *Crossword Popular Choice* award. He was educated at Cathedral & John Connon School, Mumbai, and St Xavier's College, Mumbai. He holds an MBA from Yale University.

Most schools and colleges are busy telling students what they should learn but they never seem to tell them how they should learn. If one can break the repetitive cycle of mistakes that students may be making, one can lower their stress levels and thus enable them to perform better.

I have put together a list of thirty pointers (randomly chosen) from my recently released book *13 Steps to Bloody Good Marks*. Hopefully these will be of use to students and teachers alike.

1. Be consistent - One of the key stress busters is to work through the year rather than only before exams.
2. Manage time - Minimize 'black holes' or non-productive time. For example, do you really need fifteen minutes in the shower?
3. Set realistic goals - Set incremental goals thus avoiding dejection. It's easier to work towards achievable results daily.
4. Planning is a must - Students must prepare a plan for the entire term or semester at the beginning of the period.
5. Maintain task lists - Your daily task list should have four sections—homework, revision, class preparation and everything else.
6. Use spare time wisely - For example, a lecture is cancelled and one has an hour to spare before the next class. Brush up on prior material.
7. Prepare for class in advance - Familiarize yourself with the lesson before it is ever taught in class. This dramatically increases absorption in class.
8. The front row actually helps - It focuses your attention entirely on the lecture rather than allowing distractions from students in front of you.
9. Don't miss classes - Each class is like a brick in a wall. A missing brick at the lower levels can affect stability of the entire wall.

10. The Forgetting Curve is real - This theory shows that if you review anything new that you have learnt within 24 hours of learning it, you prevent yourself from forgetting up to 80 per cent of it.

11. Make notes - Make notes by hand (not electronically) and pay attention to what you are noting down. As we write, we create spatial relationships in the pieces of information that we record thus improving recall.

12. Avoid procrastination - It is said that the secret to getting ahead is simply getting started. Avoid procrastination at all costs.

13. Try the Pomodoro Technique - The human mind cannot efficiently focus on any single task for too long. Spend 25 minutes on a given task with a timer. Then take a break for a few minutes before starting the next task.

14. Multitasking is a bad idea - Think of your computer or phone that slows down when multiple web pages or apps are open or running simultaneously. Avoid doing that to yourself.

15. Try SQ3R - This is a reading and comprehension method that is named for its five steps—Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. Skim through the chapter, and then frame questions before actually reading. Then close the book and attempt to recall what you read.

16. Master the keywords - Whenever you read a chapter, you will find that one particular word can communicate the essence of a paragraph. Build a list of such keywords to expand upon during an exam.

17. Use Mind Maps - Mind maps are diagrams used to visually organize information. These can tremendously boost your overall recall.

18. Use mnemonics - For example, the sentence, 'My Very Easy Method Just Speeds Up Naming Planets' helps memorize the names of the planets in the right order—Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

19. Use flash cards - All you need is stacks of index cards on which you can write questions on one side and answers on the other to quiz yourself repeatedly.

20. Sleep over it - Just review your summarized notes for a couple of minutes right before slipping into slumber. Remember that the brain strengthens new memories during sleep.

21. Explain it aloud - After studying your material, explain it aloud to friends or family. This results in the material being reinforced within your brain.



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22. Make a study sheet - Your effort should be to condense all the information from a particular topic into a single sheet. This forces you to pick up only the most vital points. Review repeatedly.

23. Differentiate between 'Do' and 'Read' subjects - Subjects such as maths or physics are 'do' subjects while languages or social sciences are 'read' subjects. Repeated practice is vital in 'do' subjects.

24. Build your network - Group study can be useful if you can avoid distractions as a group. Do not be wary of asking for teachers' help outside the classroom.

25. Organize - De-clutter your desk, arrange your books and study materials. Have a predetermined place for everything—notes, homework, extra paper, supplies. It prevents you from wasting time.

26. Sleep, exercise and diet - Try and get at least six hours of sleep daily. Exercise helps blood flow to the brain. Snack wisely on healthy and nutritious foods.

27. Understand brain rhythms - Each one is made differently. We have individual 'peak periods' when we are most alert. Plan your study schedule around these.

28. Question patterns - Analyze question papers of earlier years and practice on model test papers. Remember that practice makes perfect.

29. Read exam questions carefully - Do not be in a tearing rush to start answering questions. Scan the paper to decide which questions you will attempt and in what order (as well as the time you need for each).

30. Review answers - Always set aside some time to review all your answers and to ensure that your answer sheets are correctly ordered.

It was the great scientist, Albert Einstein, who defined insanity as 'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.' Break the cycle once and for all! **HER**