

WHAT'S UP

PREPARING FOR EXAMS

Zack studies with his favourite Metallica album blaring in the background. His brother prefers silence. Zack is sure that the music helps – he says he concentrates better. His father tells him that it's just an excuse to listen to music and that he should study in a quiet room like his brother. His mother is not so sure – she used to listen to music as a child while studying. But then, that was Abba. His parents wonder how loud Metallica music can help anyone study better.

Can music help you study? Does it matter what type of music it is? And how loudly (or softly) it is played? The answers depend on how your body works best.

Some of us have brains that work better when there is music in the background. Zack may be one of those people. Or, his father may be right – Zack may actually concentrate better in silence but may love his music too much to switch it off! Or, he may actually do better listening to Abba instead of Metallica.

For that matter, his brother may study better listening to Metallica. And, perhaps his mother should have listened to hard rock music while she was preparing for her exams as a child. Who knows what would have worked for each of them.

How can we find out what works best for each student? That's a question that education experts have been asking for a long time. Today, we know that when it comes to learning, all sorts of things make a difference. Your study zone (or physical environment) is just one of them. Music forms part of that physical environment.

What's your ideal study zone?

Zack claims that Metallica music is what he needs in his study zone. His brother says his zone needs to be quiet. Both may be absolutely right. There are children who say that a fast food outlet works best for them. Believe it or not, it could be true. There may be something about the sounds, smells, colours and air-conditioning that make that outlet a great place just right for those children. In contrast, other children find that a peaceful corner at the public library is better. At home, some prefer to have the TV on while studying while others find it distracting.

What works best for you? Remember, it's not about what you like to do but rather what helps you concentrate on studying. You may love watching TV but having the TV on while you study may not help you to focus at all. Browse through the following items and select those which describe your ideal study zone:

I concentrate well and stay on task (*tick all that apply to you*):

when there's music in the background. Type of music: _____

early in the morning. at midday. in the evening. late at night.

after a bath. after playing. after a nap.

when I'm twirling a pen. while swinging my legs.

by staying silent by reading out loud.

when I have lots of paper to draw charts, mind maps and to write key points.

when I'm alone. with friends. with my siblings. with an adult.

indoors outdoors.

Go ahead and add more points to describe your favourite study zone. Being aware of what you prefer will help you to pick the best times, places and conditions for studying. But first, see if there are any unhealthy habits in your list and try to get rid of them.

Discard unhealthy study habits

Some of your study habits may not be healthy. For example, eating while you study is not a good idea. Because you are concentrating on studying, you may eat far more than you realise, unless you are able to carefully control what you eat and the amount. If you must munch on something, try fresh celery, bean sprouts and baby carrots!

Some older teenagers say that smoking cigarettes helps them concentrate. Imagine that – ruining their health just to study for an exam. And, while fast food outlets may be cool and comfortable for you, what you eat and drink there may not be healthy. Besides, why spend money when there are lots of free spaces around?

Even if an unhealthy habit helps you study well right now, you should break the habit because there's no need to risk your well being for an education. Our bodies are able to adjust quickly as you switch to healthier study habits. And, good health certainly helps your brain work better.

Be flexible in the real world

In an ideal world, each student should be able to find a zone that makes that student feel like learning. In the real world, it may not always be possible. Zack and his brother have to study in the same room. But, they can compromise: they can study at different times. Or Zack can turn down the music and his brother can use ear plugs. But, you can't demand that the public library play your favourite album loudly just because that's what helps you to study! So, it's also important to learn to be flexible by not being affected if your study space is not ideal to you.