

# How to Study Accounting

Studying is defined as applying oneself to learning.

The purpose of studying accounting is to obtain the textbook and technical knowledge of accounting plus the experience necessary to succeed in the accounting profession.

Research has shown that the greater your involvement in studying, the more you retain. Retention means how long you are able to remember the concepts and practices. The four groups of study activities are shown from the lowest percentage of retention (about 10%) to the highest level of retention (about 98%):

- Hearing
- Seeing
- Saying
- Doing

Let's also look at why you are studying manual accounting when you hear so much about the use of the computer to complete accounting tasks in business. It is true that computers have become an integral part of accounting. However, you must first know the basics of accounting, the language of the profession, and the flow of the accounting cycle before you can effectively enlist the aid of a computer. A computer is only a tool to perform routine accounting tasks and print the results more quickly and attractively.

Now, let's begin our journey learning manual accounting. To do so, we shall work our way through the hierarchy of retention.

**Hearing** alone will only take you to the lowest level of retention. This means that if the only activity you enlist in your learning process is listening, you will retain very little. However, this does not mean that listening is not important as a learning tool. There are several things you can do in the area of listening.

Attend class equipped with paper and pencil to **take notes**. Use a tape recorder or digital recorder if this fits your needs and the instructor agrees. Also, take your textbook to class to refer to as the presentation progresses.

Be prepared to listen to questions asked and answers given, as well as classroom discussion.

The second level of retention adds **seeing** to hearing to increase the amount you remember. Two resources are critical to this level: your instructor and your textbook.

First, **observe your instructor** carefully. Take note when he or she makes references to textbook examples, shows illustrations on handouts, distributes material on transparencies or overhead projections, or shows examples drawn in chalkboard presentations.

Second, **know your textbook** and what it contains, how it is structured, and where you can find various tools.

So far, we have looked at only half of the retention hierarchy. Hearing allows you to retain the least. Hearing and seeing together increase your chances for retention. However, if you add saying or **verbal participation** at the third level, you will significantly increase what you remember. There are several ways in which you can strengthen your learning by hearing the sound of your own voice speaking about the subject.

**Ask questions.** Sometimes you may feel confused and feel unable to formulate a question. Don't let that stop you. Try to avoid the sweeping negative statement, "I just don't get this." Narrow your question to the place your understanding went off the track.

**Volunteer answers.** Be an active and enthusiastic learner!

**Participate** in classroom discussions. You may be surprised how your own life experiences have prepared you for this course in accounting. You have owned things, owed money, bought items, sold things, incurred expenses, and earned an income. You may have filled out a W-4 form when you went to work for an employer, and received a W-2 form from the employer at the end of a calendar year. You may have had a checking account. Each of the activities mentioned are ones that you will experience in accounting. Your

experience is valuable—share it in class. Use your personal experiences to visualize accounting tasks. See how each task fits into the accounting cycle. The **discussion questions** at the end of each chapter provide material to spark conversations and support discussions.

**Study with a partner** or group. It will serve not only as a way to get acquainted, but it will also provide you with support. The give-and-take of studying as a team will help both of you learn. You both win because your voice is a powerful tool for teaching others as well as strengthening your own learning.

Finally, outside of class, **talk to yourself**. Yes, talk to yourself! For example, study glossary terms aloud, reread your notes aloud, talk your way through an accounting transaction. Let your brain hear you. You will decrease your journalizing and posting errors considerably with this technique. Don't be bashful. It will be much easier for you to speak up in class as the terminology becomes more familiar.

Let's add the last retention builder to the hierarchy—**doing**. So far, we have investigated

- hearing only
- hearing plus seeing
- hearing plus seeing plus saying

and now,

- hearing plus seeing plus saying plus **doing**.

You may have heard it said that accounting is best learned through the end of a pencil. In other words, you can read and listen all you wish, but until you actually do it, it does not become yours. An analogy might be one of studying to become a surgeon or an auto mechanic by only reading and hearing about your profession—until you try it, you do not have a working knowledge of the subject. Therefore, let us suggest that you thoughtfully and conscientiously complete all assignments your instructor makes whether they are questions, exercises, or problems.

Accounting is like a pyramid. What you learn in each new chapter builds on knowledge from previous chapters. If the base of the pyramid is not firmly in place, your accounting skills will be weak.

To summarize, in looking at "How to Study Accounting," you have seen that you need to put into force all levels of action to give yourself the highest level of retention—hearing plus seeing plus saying plus doing. You have also seen how important it is that you know your textbook—how it is structured and where to find the things you need.