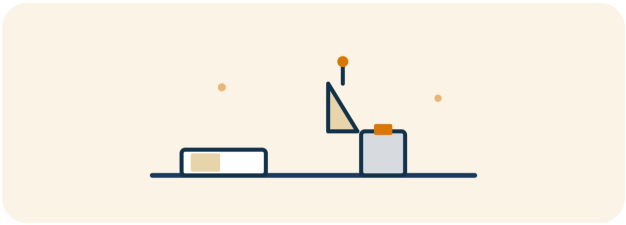
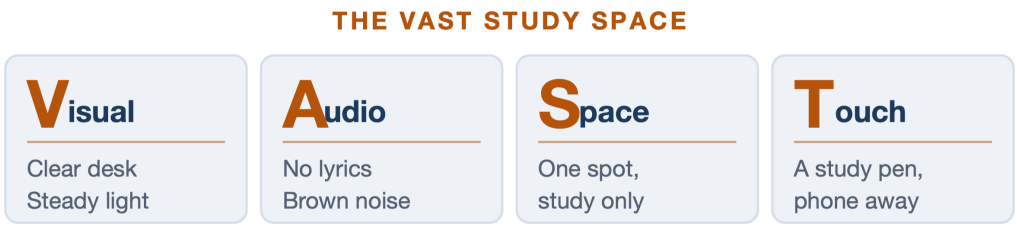
The VAST framework

Four sensory signals that tell the brain it is work mode



THE STUDY LAB
TutorWow

01 Signals the brain reads



The senses teach the brain what to expect from a place. A bed means sleep because it has meant sleep a thousand times. A spot that gets used for sleeping, scrolling, and occasionally studying sends no clear signal, so the brain reads it as an easy-option zone and reaches for the easiest thing available. That is rarely the maths problem set. This is conditioning, and conditioning responds to a designed space.

VAST is a checklist for that design. It names the four sensory channels the brain uses to read a location, Visual, Audio, Space, and Touch, and gives each one a setting that says "this is for work". Set them deliberately and, over a couple of weeks, walking into that space starts to pull focus on the way a bed pulls sleep. You are building a cue the brain obeys without a decision.

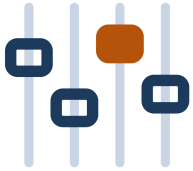
The core idea

- **Places carry meaning to the brain.** A mixed-use spot gives no clear signal, so the brain picks the easy option.
- **Four channels carry the signal.** Visual, Audio, Space and Touch each tell the brain what a place is for.
- **Cues build with repetition.** Hold the settings for a fortnight and the space starts pulling focus by itself.

Why a designed space beats a tidy one

A clean desk helps, and VAST goes further than tidiness. It is about consistency across four senses, so the same signals fire every time you sit down. A lamp used only for study becomes a switch the brain reads as "start". Coffee-shop ambience rehearses the exam hall. Each channel, set the same way each session, layers into a single clear message, and clear messages are what condition behaviour.

02 Set each channel



1. Visual: match the view to the task. Open, wide views suit generative work like essays and planning. Enclosed spaces, a corner desk facing a wall, suit analytical work like proofs and memorising.
2. Audio: no lyrics for deep work, brown noise for sustained concentration, coffee-shop ambience for lighter review since it mirrors a real exam hall.
3. Space: clear the surface down to the one task in front of you, and use a desk lamp switched on only for study, so the light becomes the cue to start.
4. Touch: pick one object as a study trigger, a pen used only for homework, or a certain jumper. Over a few weeks the brain links it to focus.
5. Set one channel first, hold it for a week, then add another.

In practice. Reserve the trigger object and the study lamp strictly for study. The moment you use that pen for a shopping list or that lamp for reading in bed, the cue weakens. Its power comes entirely from meaning one thing.

A worked example

Your room is a mixed-use corner, so you set VAST one channel at a time. Week one, Space: you clear the desk to just the current subject and put in a small lamp you switch on only when you study. Week two, Audio: you add a two-hour brown noise track for maths and coffee-shop ambience for reading. Week three, Touch: a red pen that touches nothing but homework. By week four, switching on the lamp is enough to make you feel the shift into work, before you have opened a single book.

03 One channel first



Watch out. The mistake is trying to set all four channels perfectly on the first night, then abandoning the lot when it feels like a production. One channel, held consistently, conditions far more than four channels set once and forgotten. Start with the one that is easiest for your room and let it earn its keep before adding the next.

Choose one channel tonight, set it, and hold it for a week before you judge whether the space feels different to sit in.

Set your four signals

Cover the guide and fill these from memory. No marks, just recall.

The Visual and Audio I will use:

What I will clear off the surface, plus my study lamp:

My touch trigger object:

The one channel I will start with this week:

Make it stick. Come back in two or three days and redo the exercise from memory, without looking. The gap between attempts is what fixes it.

New to TutorWow? A free 30-minute call shows exactly where the gaps are and how to close them.

Book a free call →