

Focus.



Loaded with Principles, Tips and
Advice that Anyone Can Apply

By John Connelly

Part of the "Very Easy Guide" Educational Personal Development Series

How to Think Like a Genius



a very easy guide

by John Connelly

How to Write a Great Essay in 8 Hours ...Or Less

a very easy guide

by John Connelly

HOW TO STUDY



by John Connelly

HOW TO LEARN A LANGUAGE

Quickly and Easily



Tips and Principles for Language Learning

By John Connelly

10 Books in 1

How to Unleash Your Creativity



Practical Techniques and Easy-to-Apply Principles

By John Connelly

Part of the "A Very Easy Guide" collection of short books

How to Take Great Notes

Quickly and Easily



a very easy guide

by John Connelly

HOW TO SPEED READ



a very easy guide

by John Connelly

How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Anything



a very easy guide

by John Connelly

HOW TO TYPE FAST



a short and easy guide
to touch typing

by John Connelly

Without express permission from the author, absolutely no part of this book may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any way.

The author accepts no liability for injury or harm that may come from the advice in this book.

BOOK 1: HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY AND REMEMBER ANYTHING

[Introduction](#)

[Section 1 of How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Anything – Mnemonics, Memory Palaces and More](#)

[Mnemonics and How We Have Evolved to Remember Things](#)

[Mnemonics: Playing to the Mind’s Strengths and How to Remember Anything](#)

[Mnemonic Tip 1: Create a Rhyme](#)

[Mnemonic Tip 2: Convert Digits into Words](#)

[Mnemonic Tip 3: How to Remember a Lists of Words](#)

[Mnemonic Tip 4: Create a Story](#)

[Mnemonic Tip 5: Rooting to Visual Memories to Create a Memory Palace](#)

[General Tips on Using Mnemonics and Optimizing the Recall of Encoded Information](#)

[Remembering People’s Names](#)

[Why is it so Difficult to Remember a Name?](#)

[Remembering Names Trick 1: Pay Attention](#)

[Remembering Names Trick 2: Internal and External Repetition](#)

[Remembering Names Trick 3: Create Links](#)

[Never Lose Your Keys Again](#)

[Did I Leave the Oven On?](#)

[“Fishing” For Memories](#)

[Relax and Focus](#)

[Re-Form Material to Remember It](#)

[Teach to Remember](#)

[Don’t Try To Remember Everything](#)

[Improve Your Memory by Trusting It](#)

[The Lifestyle to Create a Powerful Mind](#)

[Section 2 of How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Anything – Flash Cards](#)

[Introducing Flash Cards](#)

[The Basics: What are Flash Cards?](#)

[The Basics: What to Put on Flash Cards](#)

[Benefits of Flash Cards: Active Recall](#)

[Benefits of Flash Cards: Adaptive Self-Testing](#)

[Benefits of Flash Cards: Simple Format, Many Applications](#)

[Benefits of Flash Cards: Break Topics into Manageable Chunks](#)
[Benefits of Flash Cards: Think and Work in Questions and Answers](#)
[Making Flash Cards vs. Buying Flash Cards](#)
[Make Flash Cards Visually Striking](#)
[Practical Tips for Creating Flash Cards](#)
[What to Do When Questions are Answered Incorrectly](#)
[Dealing with Repeated Incorrect Answers](#)
[Use Multiple Decks](#)
[Create Decks that Rigorously Follow your Course](#)
[Flash Cards as Part of the Learning Process](#)
[Note Taking with Flash Cards](#)
[Expanding Understanding with Flash Cards](#)
[Establish Connections and Relationships](#)
[Flash Cards with Others: An Introduction](#)
[Flash Cards with Others: Having Fun](#)
[One-Sided Flash Cards](#)
[Studying with a System: Introducing Adaptive Testing](#)
[Studying with a System: An Example of a Simple System](#)
[Studying with a System: Implementing the “Leitner” System](#)
[Studying with a System: A “Total” Study System](#)
[Using Flash Card Software](#)

BOOK 2: HOW TO SPEED READ: A VERY EASY GUIDE

[Introduction](#)
[How to Use This Book](#)
[Introducing Speed Reading](#)
[Find Your Current Reading Speed](#)
[Section One: “Direct” Speed Reading Techniques](#)
[Technique 2: See More, and Move Your Eyes Less](#)
[Technique 3: Grouping](#)
[Technique 4: Reducing Subvocalization](#)
[Technique 5: Bringing It All Together and Forcing Speed with Pace Makers](#)
[Tips on How to Practice These Techniques](#)
[Section Two: Non-Direct Speed Reading, Comprehension, Retention, and Becoming an Effective Reader](#)
[Comprehension and Retention](#)
[Multiple Readings / Phases of Reading for Increased Comprehension, Retention, and Speed](#)
[Setting Your Purpose: Why are you Reading?](#)

Qualifying Books

[Previewing: An Essential Preliminary Reading Technique and How to Qualify a Book](#)

[Set a Clear, Book-Specific Purpose](#)

[Extended Previewing and Creating an Overview/Summary](#)

[High Value Text is Often at the Start and at the End](#)

[High Value Signposts: Transition Words](#)

[Varying Speed](#)

[Read the Majority of Non-Fiction the Same Way You Read a Newspaper](#)

[More Tips for Comprehension and Retention](#)

[Active Reading: Note Taking as you Read](#)

[The Effective Reading Model: Integrating Parts to Form a Strategy](#)

[SQ3R and PQRST](#)

[Read Multiple Books on a Topic and Learn from Multiple Forms of Information \(Syntopic Learning\)](#)

[Creating the Right Environment and Conditions for Reading](#)

[Practicing and Enjoying Reading and Becoming a “Book-Worm”](#)

BOOK 3: HOW TO STUDY

[Introduction](#)

[Build the Study Habit and Schedule Study Times](#)

[Time Box Tasks](#)

[Prioritize Assignments and Be Aware of Grade Boundaries/Percentages](#)

[Test Yourself Frequently](#)

[Start Work Early](#)

[Have Fun Away From Your Studies](#)

[Create Study Routines: 60-60-30, 50-50-10](#)

[Minimize Possible Distractions and Eliminate Multi-Tasking](#)

[Set Goals for Grades](#)

[Clarify Study Session Goals](#)

[Detach from Work While on Breaks](#)

[Why are you at School/College/University?](#)

[Find a Study Partner and/or a Study Group](#)

[Perfect Necessary Skills and Seek Feedback](#)

[Build a Relationship with a Tutor/Mentor](#)

BOOK 4: HOW TO WRITE A GREAT ESSAY IN 8 HOURS OR LESS

[Introduction](#)

[The Great Essay: Choosing the Right Question](#)

[The Great Essay: Begin with a Question](#)
[The Great Essay: Researching](#)
[The Great Essay: Planning](#)
[The Great Essay: Writing an Introduction](#)
[The Great Essay: Grab the Reader's Attention](#)
[The Great Essay: Writing the Body](#)
[The Great Essay: Keep on Topic](#)
[The Great Essay: Write with Clarity](#)
[The Great Essay: Present a Balanced Argument \(until the end\)](#)
[The Great Essay: Using Quotations](#)
[The Great Essay: Writing the Conclusion](#)
[The Great Essay: Editing](#)
[The Great Essay: Proof Read](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Create a Process](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Re-Phrasing](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Rapid Research](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Using Technology Effectively](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Do Not Backtrack When Writing](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Write the Easiest Section First](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Break Your Essay into Manageable Pieces](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: The 80/20 Pareto Principle](#)
[The 8 Hour Essay: Bringing it All Together](#)
[Further Essay-Writing Tips: Word Counts](#)
[Further Essay Writing Tips: Discover and Imitate Good Writing Styles](#)

BOOK 5: HOW TO TAKE GREAT NOTES QUICKLY AND EASILY

[Introduction](#)
[Using this Book: Tips for Studying Notes for Work](#)
[What is Note-Taking?](#)
[Note-Taking as Part of “Active Listening”](#)
[Benefits of Active Listening](#)
[Facilitating Active Listening Through Good Note-Taking](#)
[The Two BIGGEST Mistakes in Note-Taking](#)
[Preparation](#)
[Set a Purpose and Adjust Your Note-Taking to Align With It](#)
[Date and Title](#)
[Don’t Write Down the Details](#)

[When in Doubt, Write it Down](#)

[Cut Down your Language](#)

[Notice Key Words and Phrases](#)

[Abbreviations](#)

[The Cornell Method](#)

[Mind Maps](#)

[Capture the Most Important Information in a Square](#)

[List of General Advice / Advice on Form](#)

[Color](#)

[Taking Notes as Research for an Essay/Project](#)

[Flash Cards and Note-Taking](#)

[Introduction to Deconstructing](#)

[Presenting Form and Deconstructing and Establishing Hierarchy](#)

[Review and Rewrite Your Notes](#)

[Organize](#)

[Record Classes](#)

[Develop a Toolbox of Note-Taking Skills and Build Consistency](#)

[An Example Note-Taking Process](#)

[Set a Bench Mark – Your Perfect Notes](#)

[Tips for Staying Focused](#)

[Other Note-Taking Tips](#)

[Tips for Taking Notes on a Laptop or Tablet](#)

[Using Software – Synthesizing Notes with Outside Information](#)

[Using Software – Re-Energizing Paper Notes via Scanning](#)

[Using Software – Re-Energizing Working with Textbooks and Scans](#)

[Other Opportunities to Use and Practice Note-Taking Skills](#)

[Work Notes: – How to adapt this Books Advice for Note-taking in the Workplace](#)

[Work Notes – Should I be taking notes?](#)

[Work Notes – When to ditch the tech](#)

[Work Notes – Creating a Post-Meeting Report](#)

[Work Notes –Complete Pictures with the 5 W's](#)

[Work Notes – Optimization for Different Situations](#)

[Work Notes – Organizing and Processing](#)

[Work Notes – Objectives and Meeting Them](#)

[Work Notes – Sharing Notes](#)

BOOK 6: HOW TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE

[10 Reasons to Learn another Language](#)

[Why are You Learning a Language? Write Down Your Reasons and Create a Mind Map!](#)

[Choosing a Language](#)

[Speak from the Start and Become Conversational ASAP!](#)

[Learn and Use Words that YOU are Going to Use](#)

[Learning New Vocabulary: Essential, Popular, and Fun First](#)

[Using a Language Notebook](#)

[Audio Courses](#)

[Tips on Getting the Most from Audio Learning](#)

[Using a Personal Tutor](#)

[Writing in Your New Language](#)

[Introducing Immersion and Re-Kindling How we Learnt Language as Children](#)

[Deep Immersion – Jumping in the Deep-End of Language Learning](#)

[Learning a Language Through a Hobby, Passion, and Books](#)

[Be Active When Reading/Listening – Try to Work Out What a Word Means](#)

[TV, Music, Film, and More](#)

[Learning a Language Through Food](#)

[Language is Not the Only Form of Communication](#)

[The New You \(Being Matt Damon in "The Talented Mr. Ripley"\)](#)

[Structured Phrases and Scripts: Introduction](#)

[Maximizing Interactions](#)

[Questions and Answers – Don't be Afraid of “Interview Mode”](#)

[Structured Phrases and Scripts: Be Nice and Learn to Compliment](#)

[Maximizing Interactions: In the New Languages' Country and Finding Occasions to Interact](#)

[Maximizing Interaction: Lots of Different People](#)

[Maximizing Interactions: Overcoming Shyness and Perfectionism](#)

[Seek Out and Listen to as Much Negative Feedback as Possible](#)

BOOK 7: READING COMPREHENSION: 24 POWERFUL HACKS

[Introduction](#)

[Tip 1: Read Summaries Before the Main Text](#)

[Tip 2: Vary the Content Form](#)

[Tip 3: Listen and Read at the Same Time](#)

[Tip 4: Summarize the Material Yourself](#)

[Tip 4: Read Aloud, Move Slowly, Verbalize, and Follow Your Finger](#)

[Tip 5: Read the Text Repeatedly](#)

[Tip 6: Preview the Text](#)

[Tip 7: Don't Assume, Test](#)

[Tip 8: Use Many Techniques and Become Self-Aware](#)

[Tip 9: Re-Form Content](#)

[Tip 11: Make Predictions, Infer Meanings, Draw Conclusions](#)

[Tip 11: Manage Your Time and Energy Levels Effectively](#)

[Tip 12: Read Actively](#)

[Tip 13: Think Critically and Discuss](#)

[Tip 14: Apply What You Read](#)

[Tip 15: Set a Purpose](#)

[Tip 16: Reflect on the Text](#)

[Tip 17: Work on your Vocabulary](#)

[Tip 18: Improve Your Contextual Understanding](#)

[Tip 19: Activate Previous Knowledge](#)

[Tip 20: Visualize the Content](#)

[Tip 21: Work with Questions](#)

[Tip 22: Be Aware and Willing to Change Course](#)

[Tip 23: Be Guided by the Organization of the Piece](#)

[Tip 24: Don't Aim Too High or Low](#)

BOOK 8: EASY A'S: 12 POWERFUL HACKS TO GET THE A GRADE

[Introduction](#)

[Taking Responsibility for Learning](#)

[It's All about Strategy](#)

[Strategy Principle 1: Only Study What is Going to Be Tested](#)

[Strategy Principle 2: Build a Learning Timetable \(Commit to Working a Weekly Number of Hours\)](#)

[Strategy Principle 3: The Importance of Self-Testing](#)

[Strategy Principle 4: Set a Goal for Grades and Have a Vision for Why They Matter](#)

[Strategy Principle 5: Deconstructing and Chunking](#)

[Coping with Exam Stress](#)

[Exam Techniques: Recreate the Exam](#)

[Exam Techniques: Perfect Practice Makes Perfect](#)

[Exam Techniques: What to Do in the Exam](#)

[Working with Your Teacher/Assessor](#)

[Making the Most of Coursework](#)

[Learning Techniques: An Overview](#)

BOOK 9: HOW TO UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVITY

[Brainstorming and Idea Generation](#)

[The Principles of Brainstorming Applied to Other Areas](#)

[Returning the Filter – Focus and Selection](#)

[Produce Prolifically](#)

[Keep and Review Your Work](#)

[Externalize Creativity](#)

[Use Diagrams to Further Facilitate your Creativity](#)

[Combining Areas](#)

[Draw Inspiration from Everywhere - Radical Outside Ideas - Nature/Sciences, etc.](#)

[Study Your Craft](#)

[Mastering the Technical Skills](#)

[There Are No Rules in Creativity](#)

[How to Breathe New Life into Your Creativity – A Good Ol’ List.](#)

[Collaborate with a Diverse Field.](#)

[Find and Build an Editorial Relationship](#)

[Feed Your Creativity](#)

[Planning and Developing Other Meta-Skills](#)

[Letting Go of an Idea– Incubate the Idea and Involve Your Subconscious](#)

[Develop and Clarify a Creative Identity](#)

[Regularly Destroy and Reinvent Yourself as an Artist](#)

[Make Shit Work](#)

[Move Fast, Break Things, and Be “Antifragile”](#)

[Make Something Real For Others](#)

[Schedule Your Creativity](#)

[Accept and Embrace the Ambiguity](#)

[Don’t Settle for the First Idea](#)

[Good is the Enemy of Great](#)

[Limit Yourself to Save Options and Focus Creativity](#)

[Create the Art You Want to See – Scratch Your Own Itch](#)

[Find Passion and Soak It In](#)

[Imitate Works to Understand Them](#)

[Make Your Surroundings Conducive to Creativity](#)

[Final Ideas](#)

BOOK 10: HOW TO THINK LIKE A

GENIUS

[Introduction](#)

[Defining “Genius”](#)

[Re-Frame Failure and Never Give Up](#)

[Have Patience and Think Long-Term](#)

[Give Away Value All of the Time](#)

[Notice Connections and Transfer Lessons: Part 1. Building Understanding](#)

[Notice Connections and Transfer Lessons: Part 2. Transferring Your Skills](#)

[Habits: An Introduction](#)

[Habits: Changing Habits](#)

[Emotional Genius: Discover Your Motives](#)

[Social Genius: Avoid Comparing Yourself to Others](#)

[Social Genius: Choose Where you Try to Fit In](#)

[Work Like a Genius: Put A LOT of Hours in](#)

[Work Like a Genius: Don’t Just Toil, Produce](#)

[Work Like a Genius: Improve and Perfect Your Craft](#)

[Work Like a Genius: Summary - H.I.P.](#)

[Always Ask Questions](#)

[Become an Autodidact and Utilize Meta-Learning](#)

[The Wise Genius: Embracing Ignorance, Finding Humility and Understanding Yourself](#)

[Fuel Imagination, Creativity and Originality](#)

[Think like a Child](#)

[Flirt with Madness](#)

[Expect to be Discounted, Unsupported and Vilified](#)

[Simplify](#)

[Ambitious, Audacious Projects](#)

[Ambitious, Audacious Projects: Benefits](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 11: INSTRUMENT MASTERY MADE EASY

[Benefits of Learning an Instrument](#)

[Commit to an Instrument for Years](#)

[Why do you Want to Learn an Instrument? And the Importance of Strategy](#)

[Decide on Some Goals](#)

[Which Camp are You? Creative Hacker or Classical Perfectionist?](#)

[Keep it Simple. What is Impressive/Pleasing Often isn’t what is Most Technically Difficult](#)

[Think “Interest Management” Instead of Time Management](#)

[Choosing the Right Instrument for You](#)
[Is There an Easy Instrument?](#)
[Am I Too Old to Start? And Other Popular Questions](#)
[How to Make Practicing a Habit and Make Yourself WANT to Practice and Play](#)
[Practice Tips: Slow Down to Speed Up](#)
[Practice Tips: Small Chunk What You Are Learning](#)
[Practice Tips: Focus on Repetitions](#)
[Cover Songs and Playing Music You Love](#)
[Get Feedback. Record Yourself. Play in Front of Others.](#)
[Fix Mistakes or You Will Get Better at Making Them](#)
[Practice Tips: When You Think You Have “Got It,” You Probably Haven’t.](#)
[Writing Songs](#)
[Practice at Your Peak Times of Concentration](#)
[Play with Others As Soon As Possible](#)
[Experience the Rush of Public Performance](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 12: HOW TO TYPE FAST: A SHORT AND EASY GUIDE TO TOUCH TYPING

[Introduction](#)
[What is Touch Typing?](#)
[Why Learn to Touch Type?](#)
[How to Use this Book and the Importance of Practice](#)
[Equipment](#)
[Typing with Speed: Words per Minute](#)
[How to Measure Typing Speed](#)
[Correct Posture](#)
[Fatigue/RSI/Taking Breaks](#)
[Typing With Accuracy](#)
[Lesson 1: The “F” and “J” Keys](#)
[Lesson 2: The Home Keys](#)
[Lesson 3: Use Your Thumb for the Space Bar](#)
[Lesson 4: The Rest of the Keys](#)
[Capital Letters](#)
[Drills and Exercises](#)
[Drills](#)
[How to Practice the Drills](#)

[Summary of Practice Model](#)

[Comprehension](#)

[Using Audio](#)

[Other Tips on Typing and Writing Quickly](#)

[Studying and Touch Typing](#)

[Keyboard Shortcuts](#)

[Software](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 13: FOCUS: CONCENTRATION, ENGAGEMENT: TIPS AND PRINCIPLES

[Introduction – Welcome!](#)

[Introduction – Focus: A Skill that you Can Learn](#)

[Introduction – Your Focus and Mind acts Like a Child](#)

[Mental-Programs –Your Mind as a Computer](#)

[Mental-Programs – A Nightmare Start to the Day](#)

[Mental-Programs – Beginning with a Clear Slate](#)

[Mental Programs – How to Disengage](#)

[Distractions – Pre-Empting and Creating your Workzone](#)

[Mental-Programs – Turn It Off](#)

[Distractions – Working with Others](#)

[The Most Powerful of Distractions – The Internet](#)

[External Stimulus – The World Around Us](#)

[Internal Stimulus Introduction](#)

[Internal Stimulus – Meditation as an Exercise in Focus](#)

[Worry – Another Enemy of Focus](#)

[Free up Headspace – Write Everything Down](#)

[Flow – You Mind as a Cruise-Liner](#)

[Flow – Taking Breaks to Build Flow](#)

[Flow – Being Challenged](#)

[Flow – Repetition and Re-Capturing Flow](#)

[Work/Rest Cycles – Full Engagement](#)

[Work/Rest Cycles – Alternating to Bring Balance](#)

[Restoring and Building Your Ability to Focus](#)

[Clarify – Definition and Clarity](#)

[Clarify – Start/Stop Definition](#)

[Clarify– Lists](#)

[Simplify – Declutter](#)

[Simplify – Declutter Your Technology / Paperwork](#)

[Simplify – Batching Decision-Making](#)

[Simplify – Batching Preparation of Your Work Zone](#)

[Simplify – Batching Similar Tasks](#)

[Simplify – Email](#)

[Simplify – Hiring Others](#)

[Leverage – THE KEY](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 14: HOW TO GIVE AN AMAZING PRESENTATION

[Introduction](#)

[Benefits of Becoming an Ace Presenter and Why Giving a Great Presentation Matters](#)

[Relax. Breathe. And Try to Take the Pressure Off](#)

[Find The Venue Beforehand and Turn it into Your Living Room](#)

[Get Excited About Your Content](#)

[Model Other Presenters](#)

[Tell a Story](#)

[Body Language](#)

[Practice, Practice, Practice.](#)

[If Anything Goes Wrong, Don't Panic](#)

[Using Slides, Images and PowerPoint](#)

[Deliver a “Call to Action”](#)

[Have a Clear Focus / Message](#)

[Make Great Eye Contact](#)

[Keep it Short and Break it Up into Sections](#)

[Smile, Be Positive, and Upbeat](#)

[Applying the S.U.C.C.E.S.s Acronym](#)

[Business/Problem-Centered Presentations: Apply the “Situation-Complication-Resolution Framework”](#)

[Creating an Excellent, Diverse Body of Your Presentation](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 15: AUTOPILOT SUCCESS (BY HABIT)

[Why Habits are Important – Your Life as a collection of Habits](#)

[Habits Take Time and Effort to Change – This is an Opportunity, not a Problem](#)

[Which Habits to Change First – Find the Highest Leverage Area](#)

[Your Habits are Bricks in a Wall – Use Habits that Support one Another](#)

[Daily Habits, Weekly Habits, Monthly Habits](#)

[Creating Sequential Habits or “Routines”](#)

[Morning Routines and End of Day Routines](#)

[Simultaneous Habits](#)

[How to Make the Most out of Simultaneous Habits](#)

[The Three Elements of a Habit](#)

[Removing Bad habits by Finding Alternate Sources for the Reward](#)

[Removing Bad Habits by Disrupting the Trigger](#)

[People](#)

[Better / Healthier Rewards are Typically Less Stimulating, so Take Longer to Put in Place](#)

[Making the Reward More Powerful with Better Intrinsic Rewards and “Treat Rewards”](#)

[Leveraging “Treat Rewards” for Better Habit Creation](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 16: UNLIMITED SUCCESS BY SMART GOAL SETTING

[Introduction and what is SMART Goal Setting?](#)

[Important! – A quick aside.](#)

[Specific Goals](#)

[How Specific Should I be?](#)

[Measurable Goals](#)

[Attainable Goals](#)

[Action Orientated](#)

[R is for... Realistic](#)

[R is also for Relevant](#)

[T is for Time](#)

[Time Scheduling – WHEN are you going to work on it](#)

[SMARTER](#)

[Write Out Your SMART Goals](#)

[Creating a SMART Goal as a Group](#)

[RPM Goal Setting](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 17: BEST SLEEP OF YOUR LIFE

[The Benefits of Getting a Good Night’s Sleep](#)

[Sleep in Silence – Ear Plugs and Other “Quiet Room” Techniques](#)

[Sleep in the Dark – Eye Mask and Other “Dark Room” Techniques](#)

[What’s Done Before Bedtime Affects Sleep Wellness](#)

[Ideas on What Your Routine Should NOT Look Like](#)

[In the Evening, Limit Alcohol, Caffeine, and Drugs](#)

[No Screen Time Before Bed. Turn off the Tech!](#)

[What to Include in Your “End of Day” Routine](#)

[Go to Bed at the Same Time. Every Night. Without Fail.](#)

[Enjoy a Healthy, Awesome Lifestyle](#)

[Invest in an Excellent Bed](#)

[Minimize Aches and Pains – Buy Great Shoes, Great Chairs](#)

[Room Temperature](#)

[Only Use Your Bed for Sleep and Sex - Create an Awesome Bedroom](#)

[Waking Up Effectively – Use an Alarm](#)

[How to Wake Earlier](#)

[What to Eat and Drink Before Going to Bed](#)

[How Many Hours of Sleep Do You Need?](#)

[Keep a Sleep Diary](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 18: SUPERHUMAN PRODUCTIVITY: 18 POWERFUL HACKS

[Introduction](#)

[Establish Goals and Purpose](#)

[Create an Overall Plan to Achieve Your Goals](#)

[Eliminate the Unnecessary](#)

[Delegate as Much as Possible](#)

[Increase Your Energy and Vitality](#)

[Imagine Less Time](#)

[Fake Deadlines](#)

[Create a Process](#)

[Scheduling Rocks](#)

[Write Your Goals Every Day](#)

[How to Plan Your Day](#)

[Manage your Work Day and Energy Levels](#)

[Find Your Productivity Sweet Spot](#)

[Prioritize Prioritizing](#)

[Become a Monk](#)

[Do More With Less](#)

[The Power of Being Boring](#)

[A Final List of Productivity Hacks](#)

(BONUS) BOOK 19: MENTORS = MASTERY (SUCCESS THROUGH MENTORSHIPS)

[What is a Mentor?](#)

[Benefits of Having a Mentor](#)

[How to Get a Mentor and How to Get the Best Mentor for You](#)

[How to Recruit the “Hard to Get” Mentor](#)

[Where to Start – Baby Step Everything](#)

[How to Get the Most out of Your Mentor](#)

[Multiple Mentors and Overlapping Experience](#)

[Don’t be Shy or Proud – A Mentor is Good for the Novice and the Master](#)

[Loosen up Your Definition of “Mentor”](#)

[Other Ways to Get the Benefits of a Mentorship](#)

[Tai Lopez’s 33% Rule: Balance your Social Influences](#)

[Become a Mentor!](#)

[The Five Mentoring Techniques](#)

[What Does the Good Mentor Do?](#)

[Consider “Champions” over Conventional Mentors](#)

Thank you.

BOOK 1: HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY AND REMEMBER ANYTHING

Introduction

How to Improve Your Memory is divided into two sections. The first section is called, “Mnemonics, Memory Palaces and More” and the second is, “Flash Cards”. The first section will provide an excellent introduction to a variety of memory techniques – the second section, “flash cards”, will give you an effective overall framework for learning a course or large body of information. Integrate the mnemonic and other ideas from section one into your flash cards to create a still more effective learning system.

So, without further ado, let’s begin your crash course and build up your greatest asset: your mind!

Section 1 of How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Anything – Mnemonics, Memory Palaces and More

Mnemonics and How We Have Evolved to Remember Things

The human mind has not been able to evolve as quickly as the developments of the world around it. How we live now differs dramatically from how we lived just a hundred years ago. By looking back a thousand years, or further, we can see even more drastic changes to lifestyle and environment.

The simple fact is that the things we ask of our minds today are very different from what we asked of them in previous generations. There are qualitative and quantitative differences to how we need to use our minds in the 21st century. However, our minds have not had time to evolve and adapt to these new expectations, and therefore often struggle to perform.

The types of information that we used to want to memorize predominantly contained directions, images, and feelings. These were the things most important to survival and what we most often asked our minds to memorize.

In the modern world, however, there are many things we need to remember that do not fall into these categories, like formulas and phone numbers. These are not easy for the human mind to memorize because it is only relatively recently in human history that these demands have been placed on our minds.

Phone numbers, for example, are an essential part of everyday life, but most of us are hopeless at remembering a number sequence that long in a short space of time. Most people require multiple failed attempts and corrections to commit a number sequence to memory. This is because a ten digit code is quite alien to a human mind still expecting to hunt and forage for food.

To memorize a phone number initially, the best most of us can manage is to simply focus on the number and try to force it into our memory. However, this is not working alongside the strengths of the human mind and so is not an effective approach.

Memorizing a list of groceries, another daily memorization task in our world, is also a struggle. Although remembering a few objects is doable, memorizing seven or more items is difficult for most. This is because memorization of lists is another task our ancestors rarely had to perform, so such a feat does not play to the strengths of the human mind.

Understanding that our minds have developed strengths and weaknesses and learning where these originated is a solid foundation to using memorization tools. Indeed, all of the techniques in this book can be better understood from this premise: for better memorization, we need to utilize the strengths of the human mind. By manipulating information that is difficult to memorize, you can re-frame numbers, lists, dates, and formulas to make them easier to commit to memory.

Mnemonics: Playing to the Mind's Strengths and How to Remember Anything

A mnemonic device changes a chunk of information from something difficult to remember (something we are poorly developed to retain, e.g., a phone number), into something easier to remember (and that we are better developed to remember).

We will go through various mnemonic techniques in the following chapters. All of them work to engage your mind in a way that plays to its strengths. You have probably had some previous experience with mnemonic devices. You may already be using some in your day-to-day life. A few, though not nearly enough, are taught in schools.

In this book, you will also learn how to create your own mnemonic devices so you can make learning boring, difficult information fun and easy. It will be the difference between night and day. Memorizing material will begin to feel like swimming through water instead of treacle.

Mnemonic Tip 1: Create a Rhyme

It is easier to remember a phrase of words rather than a list of things. Even easier is remembering a phrase that rhymes, because a rhyme creates a stronger memory than a list of objects.

An excellent example is how people in England recall how many days are in each month. The rhyme goes:

“Thirty days hath September, April June and November.

All the rest have thirty-one.

Excepting February alone,

And that has twenty-eight days clear,

And twenty nine in each leap year.”

Remembering how many days are in each month is significantly easier using this rhyme than solely a list of months and numbers.

Even just the first two lines of the rhyme allow for an easy recollection of the number of days in most of the months in the year.

Another famous rhyming mnemonic is “righty tighty, left loosey.” This tells us which way we need to turn a screw driver in order to tighten or loosen a screw. The phrase is so simple that it is tough to forget.

These are just two examples of how rhyming can be used to manipulate information, making it more memorable. Work to create your own rhymes. The simpler they are, the better.

Mnemonic Tip 2: Convert Digits into Words

Remembering phrases is easier than remembering a series of digits. Similarly, whole words are easier to remember than single letters. By converting single digits or letters into whole words and then constructing them into sentences that are memorable, you can much more effectively memorize a list of numbers. This is because there is no meaning or reference point to a single number or letter, so they don't make a significant impression on our minds.

Actors can remember whole scripts and some manage to retain these for the rest of their lives. They can do this because the words and the phrases have such a clear meaning to them. The script comprises rich stories and interesting characters; a life the actor is going to inhabit. If they tried to remember the same amount of information in the form of only numbers or letters, they would have no chance.

This is an important aspect to every mnemonic device: the modification of material from that of lesser meaning to something of greater meaning.

For example, we can turn the number sequence 0 1 8 2 4 into the phrase "Only One Crate of beer tonight for me." Here, I have converted the numbers into words in the following way:

Only= 0 or Zero (the sound, "oh," here prompts us to the number)

One= One (we are using the same word / number)

Crate=eight (I am using a phonetically similar word here, but still, this is more than enough to make it memorable, and allows a clear link to the number 8)

Tonight= Two (as above, except now the first syllable of the word is the same as the number we want to remember)

For= Four (here we are using two words that sound the same)

This was a straightforward mnemonic device for the memorization of just five digits. For a longer series of digits, such as a whole phone number, the same process can be applied. Take time to practice this on your own phone number now. Or perhaps pick a random series of digits, and then re-code it into a sentence. It will seem difficult at first, but with a practice you can quickly become adept at this method.

This exact process can also be applied to letters. Perhaps the letters H P become the words “Harry Potter,” so, if you wanted to remember the code 01824HP, you could encode it into the phrase:

“Only one crate of beer tonight for me.” said Harry Potter.’

Read the sentence a few times aloud and visualize the scene in your mind. Imagine Harry Potter sitting at a bar drinking beer. He says, “Only one crate of beer tonight, for me,” and burps loudly. Imagining the visual of this will root the phrase deeply to your memory. Odd visuals such as this also play to your mind’s strengths. This, combined with a predominance to phrases, will mean that you can more effectively remember 0 1 8 2 4 H P than merely trying to focus on it. Indeed, you might find that this visual, the phrase, and by extension the number/letter sequence sticks in your mind for years to come.

Mnemonic Tip 3: How to Remember a Lists of Words

To better memorize a list of words, the goal again is to modify something that has little meaning into something which has a lot of meaning. An example of a series of words to remember might be if you were trying to remember the Great Lakes, in order, looking from left to right on a map.

The Great Lakes are:

Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, and Ontario.

It is not straightforward / natural to remember these five words in order because there is no meaning and no relationship between how they are ordered.

Therefore, we need to encode them into something which does have meaning: a phrase. A popular phrase for this is:

“Superman helps everyone.”

This is a very straightforward phrase but holds the information for where the Great Lakes are geographically. The phrase encodes the first letter of each of the Great Lakes into each syllable of the sentence. To clarify:

Super = S = Superior

Man = M = Michigan

Helps = H = Huron

Every = E = Erie

One = O = Ontario

The phrase also works well as a prompt for remembering the names of the lakes themselves. Remembering the phrase, and therefore the first letter of each lake's name, will often be enough to draw out the whole word from your memory. This is another key idea in memorization: information is linked, or bound together, in our mind.

And so, within a minute we can go from knowing none of the Great Lakes to knowing all of them and being able to point them out on a map. This is all due to the power of encoding/modifying information from something which has little meaning into something which has a lot of meaning.

Mnemonic Tip 4: Create a Story

The phrase we created earlier, “‘Only one crate of beer tonight for me,’ said Harry Potter,” encoded the number/letter sequence 01824HP into something easy to memorize because the phrase contains easy to grasp, memorable, and linked concepts. This all comes as a result of what was before meaningless information, feeding into another aspect of memorization: the power of storytelling.

The previous phrase could be the beginning of a story if you wanted to memorize a longer number/letter sequence. Creating a story will powerfully root the information and its order into your memory. It only takes adding a series of phrases to the above sentence to build what could be a long sequence that would otherwise be very difficult to remember.

Here is another set of random numbers with two letters on the end:

36829AK

Try and create your own phrase using the above series and add it onto the code/story we have already created with Harry Potter. Make this new phrase run on and tell a story. Be patient if words and a phrase don’t leap out at once. Remember to link the numbers to letters by using rhymes. Try to have fun with it and embrace your inner storyteller! Being able to quickly encode information in this way will serve you well for life, so stick with it.

Mnemonic Tip 5: Rooting to Visual Memories to Create a Memory Palace

The human mind is excellent at imagining locations familiar to us. This was important for the survival of our ancestors, and indeed still is for us today, to be able to clearly recall the layout of an area and our homes. We have adapted to be able to remember and visualize locations very well.

Creating a memory palace uses this powerful asset to encode information that is hard to remember into something that utilizes geographical and visual memories and plays to our mind's strengths. This creates something easy to remember that was previously very difficult.

First, choose a location you know well. This might be your home, where you grew up, your old school, or maybe your place of work. Now, let's try to encode a simple grocery list into a story within your chosen location.

The list is:

Cheese

Chicken

Eggs

Potatoes

Tomatoes

Pineapple

Now I will walk you through an example story that roots the above list to locations in my home, thus creating a memory palace.

I walk through the front door and see a mouse eating cheese in the hallway. Then a chicken eats the mouse and rushes up the stairs. I chase after it, but as I do, potatoes begin rolling down the stairs and I have to dodge past them. At the top of the stairs, I go into my bedroom where there is a tomato lying in my bed. It tells me that it wants to go on holiday to a beach where we can eat pineapples together.

Yes, this short story is absolutely ridiculous, and you might now be worried for my mental health. But this sequence of events powerfully roots the shopping list

to locations in my mind, and because the memory palace is my own home (which I know very well), I can easily imagine these absurd things occurring. I have now rooted a series of random objects into a story as well as onto visual memories I already have. I will now remember this list (for better or worse) for a good deal of time to come.

If you have a series of separate lists to remember, use a series of palaces. This will root the order of the list more powerfully to a certain location and allow you to recall the lists separately. This is how people can memorize the order of a dozen separate decks of playing cards. They create a dozen different Memory Palaces which they can enter separately.

The memory palace is excellent for remembering a list and its order because we are creating a sequential journey within the palace. I used the example of a shopping list, in which the order is unimportant. Whether you use it for ordered or unordered lists, creating a memory palace is an excellent way to remember a large amount of information that is otherwise difficult to remember.

General Tips on Using Mnemonics and Optimizing the Recall of Encoded Information

There are a few important rules of thumb that will make the information you encode more memorable.

1. Make things absurd and funny.

Things that are everyday or boring simply don't stick in the mind as much as something that is humorous and ridiculous. The list 'cat, eggs, and horse' could be re-imagined into a cat eating eggs whilst riding a horse. By being so outrageous, this image sticks in the mind more powerfully than something mundane. It also makes the encoding process easier and more fun! Try to think like a child and get creative in making your images, phrases, and stories as downright ridiculous and funny as you can.

2. Don't use more ideas than necessary.

A series of mundane events is much harder to remember than one ridiculous event. Therefore, try to compound and collapse words and ideas into the essential few. Less is easier to remember.

3. Utilize all the senses.

The mind remembers things more effectively when every sense is involved. The sense of smell in particular is a powerful sense that is rooted deeply to emotion and memory. If you create a mental scene in which you can smell eggs as well as see them, you will create a stronger impact on your mind, and make "eggs" easier to remember. Similarly, use the other senses to create a memory that is more vivid than just a visual.

4. Strengthen relationships to group information.

When remembering a list of items or when you want to relate sets of things together, there are a few things you can do to strengthen their relationships, thereby also strengthening the memory. An example might be to collapse words/objects onto each other. Alternatively, depict words/objects eating one another to cement their connection. You can also wrap objects around one another or imagine objects chasing or melting into each other. Use your imagination. Anything that might occur between two objects can be used to join

two things and better encode information.

Remembering People's Names

One of the most common memory improvements people desire is to become better at remembering names. It is a very common problem that we have all experienced – that moment when you know you have been told someone's name, but you simply cannot recall it.

As a social principle, we intuitively know remembering someone's name is important. There is something intrinsically valuable in a name. We like to hear our own name and feel a little slighted when someone doesn't remember it. It is embarrassing, frustrating even, when we are on the other end and can't remember a name we know we have been told.

Learning a few tricks will help you dramatically improve how well you remember names. These techniques will ensure you make better impressions, as you will never forget someone's name again. Everyone likes hearing their name, and as you begin to remember everyone you have met, even distant acquaintances you met long ago, you will notice how pleased people are as you easily repeat their name back to them.

There is a lot in a name, and with a few simple tricks, remembering the name of everyone you meet is something you can now master.

Why is it so Difficult to Remember a Name?

You are not alone if you struggle to remember names. Many people find it difficult to repeat a name they have heard just moments after they heard it. But why is this? After all, a name is a very short piece of information. Shouldn't it be easy to remember? The name is also usually a word we have heard before. For example, if you live in the USA and meet someone called "Tom", this is a popular name and only a three-letter word. How can "Tom" be difficult to remember?

The main reason for this memory goof is that when you meet someone for the first time, there is actually a great deal of tension and subconscious activity within your mind. Psychologically and physiologically we are programmed to quickly assess this person and decide whether they are a potential friend or foe, or even a potential mate, as well as simply whether this is someone we can like and trust. All of these things cloud our mental activity, so it becomes tough to engage our conscious mind, which is essential if we are to remember even a small piece of information, such as a name.

Another reason is that, when meeting someone for the first time, part of the conscious mind is engaged in deciding what it is you are going to say to this new person. Simple decisions take up conscious energy. You must make the decision of what greeting to use, whether you will shake their hand or not, or perhaps whether you will compliment them on the shoes they are wearing. All of these thoughts and questions need to be resolved, leaving little left for the memorization of a name.

The initial moments of meeting someone become so full of mental and physiological activity that memorization of even a short, simple name is very difficult. You have a finite amount of mental capacity, and if you leave it to its own devices, your mind will not focus sufficiently on the name you heard.

However, despite these obstacles, it is possible to become fantastically good at remembering names. Let's look at a few tricks that will make this process easier.

Remembering Names Trick 1: Pay Attention

As I just explained, our attention is normally diffused when we first meet someone. It is decidedly *not* focused on listening to and memorizing their name. A powerful way to improve memorization of names is to simply force our attention onto the name and focus consciously on it at the expense of other thoughts.

Indeed, conscious focus is always a powerful tool to increase our ability to remember things. However, when remembering names in particular, it can make all the difference because it is only a small word that requires recollection, and only the obstacle of diffused attention needs to be overcome.

Now, your focus does not have to be at the exclusion of everything else. All that is needed is a few seconds focusing primarily on the name. Do not worry about seeming distracted for a moment during the initial greeting period. A much better impression will be made if you remember the person's name five minutes later.

Remembering Names Trick 2: Internal and External Repetition

As with memorizing anything, the simple method of repetition will be of help when remembering names. The more you consciously expose your mind to a person's name, the more deeply the memory will entrench in your mind.

The easiest way to do this is to simply repeat the name in your mind a few times. So, if you meet someone called "Tom," simply repeat, "Tom, Tom, Tom, Tom, Tom" in your mind. This will create a stronger memory than hearing it just once.

A more powerful iteration of this principle is to repeat it externally in conversation. In this case you could simple say, "Tom. It's nice to meet you, Tom." Saying this short phrase repeats the word twice aloud. Saying things aloud creates a more powerful memory than only thinking it. The choice to say the word, mouthing it, and hearing yourself say it comprises a series of small events that increase memorization more than if you simply repeated the words in your mind. Continuing to repeat the name throughout conversation will further cement it in your memory. Don't repeat the person's name so many times that you sound crazy. Just say it whenever you have the opportunity to do so naturally.

The final way to apply this principle is to ask the person to repeat their name. To do this, simply pretend you didn't hear their name and ask them to say it again. Here, again, you are building a stronger memory by re-affirming the name.

You may have more trouble memorizing a name if it originated in a culture or country that is foreign to you. If this is the case, don't be too proud to ask them how to pronounce their name to clarify the sounds of the name (and, of course, to hear it twice). Then, repeat the name back to them to confirm your pronunciation is correct. The repetition and affirmation of the sounds in this short exchange will help you to memorize their name. Moreover, the correct pronunciation of someone's name can be just as important as remembering it at all. Therefore, taking the time to ensure you pronounce it correctly will separate you from other people this person has met who perhaps misinterpreted their name, making a still better impression.

Remembering Names Trick 3: Create Links

Another powerful way to guarantee you remember someone's name is to link/connect/anchor the name to a person you know with the same name. This works in a similar manner to previous mnemonic techniques, such as the memory palace, and associates the new information to information that you have already memorized.

You can create an even more vivid connection by using other memory principles. Perhaps create a moving, dynamic scene in your mind that is colorful and humorous to join this person to the person you already know. If you want to remember the person you have just met, "Tom," perhaps visualize the Tom you already know playing soccer with the new Tom you have just met. To make it more memorable, perhaps imagine them playing soccer with an egg. Do whatever it takes. It doesn't have to be especially clever, just memorable and unique.

It might sound excessive to create this scene and build an association to a memory of someone you already know. But creating and imagining this scene will only take a few moments, and once you have established it, you can guarantee the name of the person you have just met will be locked into your memory.

Never Lose Your Keys Again

Another common memory issue people have is misplacing items. For many of us, there are certain items that just keep getting lost. The quintessential lost item is the set of keys. If you haven't personally experienced this, I can almost guarantee you have a friend or family member who has, at some point, rushed through the house turning over anything and everything, only to eventually turn to you and ask exasperatedly, "Have you seen my keys? I can't find them anywhere!" Losing things is a common problem, and is another example of where better understanding of our memory and application of simple techniques can help us immensely.

Losing important items, like keys, is very frustrating, perhaps because it seems bizarre that we can lose something so central to our lives. We know we will need them again, so why can't we remember where they are? The answer is this: our habits simply don't support how important the item is. We never take the time to remember where we put them.

Losing our keys is better understood as a manner of disorganization rather than not being aware of their importance. It is not due to a bad memory, either. It is simply because when we go into "autopilot" mode and stop being consciously aware of what we are doing, we put the keys in an odd place.

So, how can we stop doing this and learn to always know where our keys (and all the other things we need) are?

Becoming more organized with where we put these objects is the easiest answer. If you often lose your keys, create a habit of always putting them in a bowl by your front door. Every time you enter your house, put the keys into this bowl, and then they will always be there when you need them. This will take some effort at first. For at least a week (a habit often takes at least seven repetitions before it becomes ingrained) you will need to do this every time you come in through the front door. Soon the habit will become second nature and the keys will always be in the bowl when you need them.

If you regularly misplace your keys, this could be just the tip of a greater disorganization that runs through your life. Similarly, the deeper cause could be utilizing very little conscious focus throughout your day-to-day life. Perhaps you are spending most of your energy trying to retain focus in other areas, leaving

little to no focus for staying aware of where you put your keys. If this sounds at all possible, save yourself the stress and consider working on focus and organization elsewhere in your life.

Did I Leave the Oven On?

Another common memory problem, similar to losing keys, is forgetting whether we have done something (an important, necessary action) and then fretting endlessly over it. This may take the form of forgetting whether we turned the oven off, locked the front door, or unplugged the iron. Often, indeed usually, we have completed these things, but nonetheless we get stressed and cannot recall with certainty what we did.

Occasionally forgetting whether we have done one of these things is unavoidable. We cannot always be perfectly aware of what we have just done; at times there are just too many pressures on us to be mindful of everything. However, if you regularly forget whether you have done something or often feel a pang of uncertainty, the following techniques can remedy this issue. These techniques can also be applied to the previous problem of not remembering where you put your keys.

In whatever activity you want to be more mindful of, if you make a stronger memory of performing the action, you will remember what you have done with increased clarity. You will then ensure a greater confidence when recalling what you have done (or where you put your keys).

To do this, simply repeat to yourself the action you are doing out loud a few times. And so, if you regularly feel uncertainty over whether you locked the front door, for one week make the effort to affirm out loud (or in your head if you fear odd looks from neighbors) every time you lock it by saying, “I am locking the front door.” For losing your keys, this takes the form of stating: “I am putting my keys in my pocket,” or perhaps, “I am putting my keys on the table,” each time you perform these actions.

Repetition creates a stronger memory, as does verbally stating it, so do both to make sure you never forget what you have done. The principle is always the same: create a stronger memory of what you have done and in turn you will never forget. But don’t worry; you won’t have to do this for the rest of your life. Just by doing this a few times you will become mindful of the tasks you complete and start remembering whether you turned the oven off or not.

“Fishing” For Memories

Another common memory problem is the inability to recall something that has been memorized. It has probably happened to you at some point: the feeling that you certainly know the answer to a question, but no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot remember it. Or perhaps the nagging feeling that there is something you were meant to remember, something important, but it simply won’t come to mind. There are a few simple techniques that can help you to retrieve these “lost memories.” I will apply the analogy of fishing to explain these techniques because the two share many similarities.

In order to “fish” out a memory, you need to first decide on the bait you will use to lure the memory from the recesses of your mind. As I have stated before, the mind works powerfully by association. So, by consciously letting your mind linger on memories that are closely related to what you are trying to remember (the closer, the better) you can wait for the memory to “bite” onto the bait through association.

There are many different kinds of “bait” you can use to evoke a lost memory. If it is something that you were thinking about earlier in the day, retrace the steps your mind went through. Focus on the things you were thinking about around the time of the memory. Let your mind go through the same motions it did earlier and, with a bit of luck, your mind will re-find the memory previously lost.

If you are trying to remember a certain word, another form of “bait” you can use is running through the letters of the alphabet consecutively from A-Z. When you land on the letter that begins the word, your mind will be encouraged to rediscover the forgotten word. For each letter, pause for a moment and let your mind relax. Visualize words beginning with the letter and lightly hold the intention of recalling the word.

A physical way of “baiting” your mind is to physically return to a location or expose yourself to a sensory experience that is related to the lost memory. For example, if you were at your desk at work when you discovered the name of a local business you need to contact (but whose name you now cannot remember), returning to your desk may prompt you to recall the name of the business. Again, this is thanks to the associative power of our memories.

Tricks like running through the alphabet in the attempt to find the first letter of

the word can be applied to many pieces of information you want to rediscover. The best “bait” will be as close as possible in relation to the lost memory.

You can use multiple forms of bait to increase the likelihood of recalling the lost memory. For example, return to your desk and then also use the alphabet method.

Working to recall memories by “fishing” with “bait” is similar to real fishing in that you also need to be patient. It may take just moments, or it may take much longer. The more you relax and expect to recall the memory in time, without letting yourself become frustrated and impatient, the more likely it is you will be able to “fish” the memory out. Just like real fishing, you need to choose the right bait and have patience.

Relax and Focus

Whenever you use your memory, whether it is studying or attempting to recall a piece of information, it is important to keep your mind relaxed. If you can combine this with a focused mind, you will be able to improve how effectively your mind operates. These two aspects will improve both memorization and recall. If you are trying to memorize or recall material whilst feeling a lot of tension and/or stress, your mind will not work nearly as effectively. It is therefore important to work in a relaxed and focused mode. The following are a few techniques and principles that can help you achieve this.

An important part of staying relaxed is not putting unneeded pressure on your mind. Whether you are memorizing or recalling material, do not strain your mind or become frustrated or desperate to make it happen. This might not always be possible, but still, make it the norm to not put your mind under strain. Instead, work to make the process consistently easy and light.

This is especially important if you find yourself coming up against a “wall” and cannot remember what you want to. Here, the more you push, the less likely you will be to remember. If you come up against a “wall” and simply cannot recall what you want, consider taking a break and expect it to return to your mind at a later date. This expectation, and almost forgetting about the problem, will help turn the impasse over to your subconscious for it to work on instead.

In order to improve your attention and focus, it is helpful to control and create an environment that helps you to think more effectively. Depending on how well you currently concentrate and what your habits are, it might help to experiment working in different locations. Consider social places, as well as working alone. Some people find that working at a library with others around them helps to pressure them into studying and working hard as well. Others find themselves distracted too easily with others around them. Experiment and find what works best for you.

Also, make sure that you have quiet if you need it and that if you are listening to music, it never distracts you. It might help to use earplugs to completely block out sound. Earplugs often come in handy at the end of the workweek, when what was previously an acceptably noisy office becomes a distraction and a drain on

the last ebbs of mental energy that you have. Here, earplugs can be the small but meaningful boost to your ability to concentrate.

Having an ordered and tidy workspace can also help you to concentrate, making you feel as clear and focused as the space around you.

Another way to improve your concentration is to become more relaxed and physically present. The most important part of this is sitting comfortably with good posture. Slouching or sitting uncomfortably will compromise how well you can concentrate and may of course lead to health problems later in life. If you are working at a computer, ensure the screen is at a proper height so as to avoid unnecessarily straining your neck.

If you are preparing to work on material or recalling material, take a few moments to clear and calm your mind. Imagining a dark sky or perhaps an empty room will help empty your head of thoughts. Try counting slowly backwards from ten whilst concentrating on your breathing.

Practicing all these small tricks will come together to make a real improvement on how well you concentrate, relax and focus. In turn, you will dramatically increase your memorization and recall abilities.

Re-Form Material to Remember It

A powerful way to improve the memorization of material (which is particularly useful if you are studying a course with a rote curriculum) is the regular practice of re-forming material into your own words. This simply means presenting the same material in a different way. This might be re-writing it so that it is phrased differently, or perhaps turning it into a series of pictures. Re-forming material will help to improve your understanding and memorization of material.

When we re-form material, we are forcing our minds to engage with the material in a deeper way. It is impossible to recall and recreate material if we don't understand it well. The more clearly we understand something, the better we will remember it. This is because with deeper understanding comes more detailed and meaningful connections between the material within the brain.

There are many ways to become proficient at reworking material to make it your own. By simply taking notes in class, you are changing the information from one form to another. Note taking is the process of picking out a topic's most important parts and then recording it on paper. This is an act of re-forming material. And so, by taking notes in class, you will improve your understanding and memorization of the material.

Choosing a medium that is significantly different from the original medium is perhaps the best way to boost understanding and memorization of the material. For example, if you are reading a journal that you want to memorize, consider re-forming the most important elements of it into a mind map or maybe put them into flash card form. This will create many new connections within your mind because you are forcing the information to separate and reform in a significant manner.

The most obvious time to use this principle is in school or other educational situations, but there are many other applications as well. Taking notes in a business meeting and re-forming them into a power point presentation might be one example of this. Use the power of re-forming material into your own words or into a different medium regularly. It is an excellent tool to boost understanding and memorization of any material.

Teach to Remember

A brilliant way to become better at remembering things, and to ensure you fully comprehend them, is to get into the habit of teaching the things you have learnt to other people. When you teach something to another person, you are employing many principles that assist memorization.

First of all, the repetition of the information is, as ever, a helpful aide. By teaching, you are exposing yourself to the material again. By verbalizing it, the material gets ingrained into your mind. And finally, because you have to re-form the material into your own everyday language, you entrench the material still further.

To be able to teach something to another person, you also must comprehend it to a high standard. Teaching is therefore a great test of your understanding. If you haven't learnt the material properly, you won't be able to explain it to someone else. To ensure that you are making complete sense, regularly confirm with whoever you are teaching that they understand what you are saying. Asking them to repeat it back to you can be a final test (and allows them to learn the material through teaching as well).

If you are studying as part of a course, an effective way to implement this principle is to work with a study partner or group. You can then take turns explaining to the other (or the group) what you have learnt. If you divide the work beforehand, you can also save time and spend half as much time (or less) researching and note taking.

Don't Try To Remember Everything

An important principle in improving how you use your memory is learning to rely on your memory at the right times. Recognizing the moments in which you should be using your memory and the times in which it is unnecessary will help save time and energy.

In the modern world, there are many pressures on our attention and many possible inputs for information that we might be expected to remember.

However, for many of these, the energy needed to memorize the material is simply not worth it. With numerous tools at our disposal, e.g., pen and paper, calendars, diaries, computers, and smart phones, there is no need to use energy attempting to remember what is not essential. Indeed, whenever it is possible, rely on these things to record information, and only use your memory to remember things of value.

Remembering important dates or when you have appointments is not necessary if you regularly use a calendar. Now, remembering a relative's birthday will prove useful because you will need to know this for the rest of your life.

However, is a colleague's birthday worth remembering? Not really. So write it on your calendar. Similarly, remembering your schedule for the coming weeks and months is entirely unnecessary if you own a diary. Don't place unneeded pressure on yourself to remember an appointment next Tuesday at 3PM. Just write it down!

By using the mnemonic techniques you learnt earlier, you could certainly remember these pieces of information if you wanted to. Don't waste time and energy creating a mnemonic device for something that you only need to remember for a few days, especially when recording it in a physical form serves your purposes just as well.

An analogy for this is when cooking a meal. You can try to remember to take the food out of the oven at a certain time, but this will require consistent clock-watching. By setting a timer instead, you can remove the consistent stress of trying to remember, guarantee it is done at the right time, and allow mental space to work on other things.

Other solutions for remembering things with tools include writing down addresses, setting reminders on your phone, saving phone numbers, and writing

shopping lists. The rule is: if you only need to remember something for a short time, if it is too valuable to risk forgetting, or if you can record it externally with little effort – record it.

Improve Your Memory by Trusting It

Many people believe that they have a bad memory. This can itself be an obstacle to improving your memory because, by believing this, you will put less conscious effort into remembering things.

A popular phrase is, “I am terrible at remembering people’s names.” And this is often true; most of us are very bad at remembering names. But when you say it regularly, you will validate the statement and then begin putting little effort into remembering the names of people you meet. By letting yourself off from being good with names, you will end up focusing less on trying to remember, and as we learnt, this focus and effort can be enough in itself to remember names.

If you can cease talking negatively about your memory and realize that you simply haven’t yet learnt the skill set, you will have taken a step toward improving how well you memorize things. Everyone can learn how to become good at remembering names, dates, formulas, or anything else. All it takes is application and practice. If you trust your memory, work at using it, and incorporate effective techniques, it will undoubtedly improve.

The Lifestyle to Create a Powerful Mind

Much of the following advice will not be new to you. However, I will reiterate old and new ideas in the hopes of revealing their importance in a new light. They are all essential building blocks to creating a good memory and a powerful mind for life.

1. Get enough sleep.

The human body needs to regenerate, and regularly getting a good night's sleep is essential to creating a lifestyle that enables the mind to grow. Sleep deprivation is a wide-reaching problem in modern society. Too many of us stay up at night watching TV or work too long in the office. Instead, go to bed at the same time every night and try to get the six to eight hours your body and mind need.

2. Enjoy a great diet.

A healthy and balanced diet will perfectly compliment the other steps and create a lifestyle that allows your mind to grow. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables as well as complete proteins with fatty acids from fish. All of this provides the fuel your mind needs.

Water is also very important. Try to drink 500ml of purified water as soon as you wake up. Throughout the day, don't let yourself get thirsty. As soon as you feel thirsty, your body is already dehydrated and dehydration is one of the biggest physical enemies to focus and memorization.

3. Push your mind.

Studies have shown that one of the most important elements to developing a strong mind is, perhaps obviously, pushing your mind and exerting it regularly.

The careers that we choose perhaps play the biggest role in how we use our minds on a day-to-day. So pursue a career that pushes you mentally (and, of course, a career that you enjoy).

People who work in mentally demanding fields (such as medicine, law, etc.) show greater improvements in IQ over tests performed in their youth than those who work in less demanding roles.

This is perhaps unsurprising, but should not be overlooked. If maintaining a

strong and sprightly mind is a priority for you, consider switching to a job role that is mentally challenging and pushes you to memorize material regularly.

4. Remove stress.

This ties in closely with ensuring you get enough sleep. Studies have proven that the ability to think clearly and remember new information is significantly reduced when the individual feels stressed. There are, of course, different kinds of stress. A positive stress that builds focus will help us to work, and this is to be encouraged. However, consistent, negative, worrying stress should be avoided.

A common form of stress in life is the avoidance of those things that are important. Perhaps we resist looking at our finances, or working at a relationship that isn't working. A powerful way to reduce this kind of stress is to simply address those things we have been avoiding. Easier said than done perhaps, but it depends on how we perceive what is easy. It is surely easier to reduce worry and stress within our life than to live with it.

A great technique for doing this is to set a timer for five minutes and begin to work on what you have been avoiding. Even if it is simply writing in a journal about the issue, this is still a powerful start and will build momentum. Take a break and then work for another five minutes. You will slowly build more energy and find yourself able to work through the issue. Do this for everything you are resisting, and eventually you will significantly reduce stress, letting your mind grow unimpeded.

Section 2 of How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Anything – Flash Cards

Introducing Flash Cards

Flash cards are a study tool that you have no doubt heard of before, indeed probably used at some point in your education. They are especially popular at schools in earlier ages, often used to teach vocabulary to toddlers, also older learners studying another language.

Too often flash cards are pigeonholed and understood to be only good for memorizing simple facts or learning languages word-by-word. However, their application can go much further than this. I will show you how to use flash cards for multiple purposes and how to incorporate them into complete learning systems that will allow you to tackle the greater part of any course you are studying brilliantly well, and with ease.

The Basics: What are Flash Cards?

A flash card is simply a piece of card that has a question on one side and the answer to that question on the other. They are normally small in size, most often found in a 3 x 5 inch form. This is their most popular size, but there is no reason they can't be smaller, perhaps business card sized, or much bigger, perhaps A4 sized or larger. However, the basic format is always the same: a question on one side, and the answer on the other. You can use flash cards both by yourself and with other people.

If you are working alone with a deck of flash cards, the standard process would be to go through the deck card by card, first asking yourself the question, then attempting to answer the question from memory, and finally flipping the card over to see if the answer you gave was correct. Repeat this process with each flash card in the deck.

If two people are participating in studying with flash cards, generally one person will ask questions and the other person will attempt to answer them. Once the answer is given, the person asking the questions will then confirm whether the answer given was correct or not. If the answer given was incorrect, the correct answer on the back of the card must be then conveyed.

The “question” side of the card does not necessarily need to be a fully formed question; it just has to be enough to prompt the appropriate answer from the student. For example, if you were studying the US presidents, specifically when each was born, on one side of the card there might be written: “Abraham Lincoln”, and on the other his birth date: “February 12th 1809”. And so, if you were using this deck of flash cards by yourself, you would first pick up the card and look only at the “question” side. In this case that would be “Abraham Lincoln.” Then you would attempt to recall his birth date. Finally, you would turn over the card and check the answer to see if you were correct.

Flash cards can be used for any subject or topic. They simply contain a chunk of information that needs to be remembered. All that matters is that this chunk is formed into the question and answer format.

The Basics: What to Put on Flash Cards

A flash card can be as detailed or simple as you want it to be. Working with 3 x 5 inch flash cards will encourage you to keep the information brief, and so this is recommended when you are first using flash cards. Keeping information to “bite sized” amounts will make memorization easier, and the entire process of studying with flash cards more manageable, as well as dynamically flexible. In a practical sense, this will also make the cards easier to handle, work with, and carry.

You can also use pictures on your flash cards. An example of this might be if you wanted to learn the names of countries on a map, in which case you would have a map on the “question” side of the card, and then on the opposite side the same map annotated with the correct country names.

If you are learning vocabulary for a new language, you should have the word written in the new language on one side, and then the same word translated into your native language on the other.

Benefits of Flash Cards: Active Recall

Each time you attempt to remember information from a flash card, you are performing “active recall.” Active recall is the deliberate attempt to recall a memory. When using a flash card, the question prompts us, and then we attempt to remember the answer from memory.

This contrasts with other actions the mind can engage in, such as when you recall something but not “actively.” That is to say, you remember something but didn’t try. Instead it just haphazardly entered your conscious mind. For example, if you are walking along a beach, you might recall memories of when you were young and walked on the beach, but the memories in this instance came up without your conscious attempt to recall them.

Active recall also differs from “passive” forms of learning such as reading or listening to a lesson. In these cases the information is simply passing over your mind – being introduced to your mind, rather than being drawn out from within it.

Testing yourself with flash cards utilizes active recall repeatedly, because with every flash card you attempt to answer the question it asks. But why is active recall so important?

When you attempt to actively recall something and answer a question on a flash card, there are a few things that happen. If you answer the question correctly, the act of recalling the information will solidify the memory into your mind.

Recalling it actively means this memory will now live on in your mind for longer than it would have if you hadn’t attempted to recall it again. It is impossible to say when the memory would have left you, maybe a day later or a week later, there is no way to know. But one thing is for sure: memories will deteriorate if they are not strengthened, and recalling them actively is an excellent way to strengthen them.

Using flash cards and applying spaced interval systems (we’ll get to those soon) that apply adaptive testing will ensure that the memory is further strengthened if it needs to be, and less so if it doesn’t. Using flash cards means that you utilize active recall and enjoy the benefits of using it to powerfully and dependably improve the memorization of material.

Benefits of Flash Cards: Adaptive Self-Testing

Another strength of using flash cards is that it is a form of testing, and if you use them by yourself, it is a form of self-testing. The benefits of testing are numerous, and perhaps obvious, nonetheless I want to take a moment to exemplify the benefits.

Testing with flash cards will give you an accurate reflection of how well you actually know a subject, as the information has been divided down into small chunks that fit on 3x5 inch cards. Once you have been tested, you know exactly what parts you know and what sections need improvement.

When using flash cards, there is little room to misinterpret how well you know a subject. There is no way to sugar coat how well you are doing. You will find out exactly how close you are to total comprehension of a given topic. Additionally, if you made the flash cards so they rigorously follow the course syllabus, you will be able to accurately predict how well you will do when you sit the exam.

Knowing how well you are doing in your course, and how much work you still need to do, will help you develop confidence if you are doing well, and/or apply realistic and accurate pressure to work on areas you are struggling with.

One of the main obstacles to good studying is being unaware of what needs to be learnt: students too easily confuse what needs to be learnt with what doesn't. Regular testing is the only way to solve this, and flash cards provide this solution elegantly well.

The flexible testing system of flash cards also means that you study the things you need to study and nothing more. In this manner you prevent yourself from re-addressing things you have already learnt and from spending too little time on what you still need to learn. This is a vital strength of flash cards. This reason alone makes them exceptionally useful study tools.

Developing your ability to understand how well you are learning and how best to improve your study techniques is a strong part of becoming an effective student. Through creating your own study systems with flash cards, you can always get an accurate representation of where you are at as well as what needs to be done to get the grades you want.

Benefits of Flash Cards: Simple Format, Many Applications

Creating and using flash cards is an exceptionally easy, straightforward process. It can take time to master their more complex applications, but to use them in a basic manner is easy. A flash card can be as simple as a picture of a cat on one side and the word “cat” on the other. The memorization process can begin with something as simple as this.

Flash cards are therefore applicable to any level of learning. Anything that needs to be remembered can be presented in the flash card format, making them very flexible in this respect.

Another reason to consider incorporating flash cards into your study skill set is that they can be used in a variety of ways. If you are a teacher, providing a few flash cards to a child or group is straightforward and allows them to teach themselves whilst monitoring their own progress. Flash cards might also be used by a medical student to help break down a course into manageable chunks. By developing and utilizing a good study system, he or she can effectively work through flash cards whilst the system adapts to how well he or she is memorizing the material, by increasing or diminishing exposure as needed.

Benefits of Flash Cards: Break Topics into Manageable Chunks

Creating your own flash cards for a course is a fantastic way to break up what you are studying and make it more manageable.

Feeling overwhelmed with too much information and not knowing where to start is a common problem that students face. If you leave material untouched for too long or miss a few classes, you are likely to find yourself presented with a stack of information without there being any clear place to begin.

Creating one flash card at a time is a simple but powerful act that forces you to create bite-sized chunks of information and to compartmentalize what may otherwise be extended and complex ideas, morphing it into something more manageable. Using flash cards that are only 3 x 5 inches can be a great way to force you to keep these chunks of information to a small size so that they can be memorized without excessive effort.

The act of studying with flash cards is also modular in a more general sense. Working with decks of flash cards that correspond to topics and subtopics means you can pick areas to work on easily. It is wise to encourage this practice by using different colors to denote certain topics. Making it clear which flash card is for which subject area re-affirms that there are clear divisions in your work. Even if these divisions and subtopics are at times arbitrary (perhaps you are dividing decks based solely on page numbers in your text book), ensuring that you keep things sectioned will prevent the flash cards, and the study process as a whole, from becoming overwhelming.

Benefits of Flash Cards: Think and Work in Questions and Answers

Another reason that working with flash cards is so effective is because they force you to think in terms of questions and answers.

Turning every element of your course into small questions and answers is a powerful study tool in itself. It pushes you to re-form all the information into the question/answer format, forcing a deeper understanding and initializing memorization immediately.

Let's now look at how to create and use flash cards in more detail.

Making Flash Cards vs. Buying Flash Cards

When using physical flash cards, you have the choice of either purchasing readymade ones or making your own. There are advantages for each, which we will cover now. More often than not, however, I would encourage you to make your own, for reasons I will make clear.

Purchasing flash cards is exceptionally easy, and saves time and effort. If you go online, it is easy to find quality flash cards simply by searching “flash cards” on Amazon or eBay alongside the topic you are studying. In most cases there will be decks of cards, often at very reasonable prices. For the sake of ease, buying flash cards ready-to-use is unbeatable. If the thought of making your own is too daunting and you just want an easy introduction to flash cards, purchasing them is advisable. It can also save you a lot of time to purchase them online and have them delivered to your home. So if you are drawing close to a deadline and need flash cards as soon as possible, don’t hesitate to buy them!

However, if you do have the time, it can be much better to make your own flashcards. First of all, it will be cheaper to buy cards and pens rather than purchasing readymade flash cards. For cash-strapped university students in particular, creating your own flash cards will be kind to overstretched bank accounts.

Making your own flash cards should also guarantee good quality. When purchasing flash cards online, there is always a risk that either the physical quality or the way the flash cards are written will not be up to par. However, by making your own flash cards, you can take the time needed to produce quality flash cards.

By creating your own flash cards, you can also be absolutely sure that everything you need to know is on the flash cards – nothing more and nothing less. Unless you buy flash cards from the specific exam board you are studying for, there is little chance that purchased flash cards will be a complete match for what you need to learn for a specific exam. Similarly, if you do decide to buy flash cards, check thoroughly that the ones you buy are as close a match as possible to the course you are studying.

Studying flash cards that contain unneeded information is a waste of your time. Even worse, if the cards do not cover necessary material, you will compromise

your exam performance and final grade. Of course, if you are studying a language or are studying for pleasure, there is no risk here. However, if you are studying for an exam, using a deck of flash cards that dovetails as completely as possible with the syllabus is a must.

Make Flash Cards Visually Striking

Flash cards come in many forms, but their simplest look is black text on white paper. There is nothing wrong with this, but there are many occasions in which including pictures and other visuals will help your studies. Even when you are using flash cards to learn rote facts, creating visually striking cards is a fantastic idea because it will improve your study experience. Let's now look at how you can create more visual impact with your flash cards.

The simplest manner to create visually striking flash cards is to incorporate pictures. If you are studying biology and need to learn the different parts of the leaf, you could draw a cross-section of a leaf on the "question" side with five blank boxes beside the parts you need to name. Then, on the other side, include the same image with the correct answers written in the boxes.

Taking time to draw images when creating flash cards can also be a good way to add some variety to studying.

If you are predominantly a visual learner and remember images well, embrace using images as much as possible because you will find these easier to memorize than just facts and ideas. Working in tune with your preferred learning style will make your studies more fruitful and rewarding.

Varying the color of ink you write in is another way to make flash cards more effective. If you are learning sentences in a new language, you can use different colors for nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. If you are a visual learner and are learning facts, just "words on the page," write in different colors. Then when you are initially learning the answer or are correcting yourself, take a few moments to look at the card and take in the aesthetic. This will stick in your mind more powerfully than just black words on white paper.

Another way to use different colors when writing text on a flash card is to break up different parts of the word and write them in different colors. For example, if you are studying chemistry you may come across a long word that can be broken into separate parts – parts that point to the origin of the entire word. In such a case you can use a different color for each part of the word, then on the answer side, break down the ontology of the word with its corresponding color/parts. For instance, the word "photosynthesis" could be broken into two parts: "photo" and "synthesis". Write these two parts in different colors, then on the answer

side write: “photo = light” and “synthesis = putting together”. You may choose to include a full definition of photosynthesis as well. Writing in different colors will make a stronger impression on the mind and help you to more clearly remember the root meanings of the word, as well as the full definition of photosynthesis.

Making the flash card itself a certain color can also help you to get the most out of your study experience. Using cards of different colors will help you to group the cards into different topics. If you make different decks different colors, not only will they be easier to work with, they will also help memorization as the set color for each deck will help your mind to associate the information together more effectively. The mind works through association, and the simple act of keeping topics linked by a certain color will help you to link the same facts and ideas together in your mind, improving memorization.

Practical Tips for Creating Flash Cards

If you are making your own flash cards, there are a few things to bear in mind in order to make them as practical and effective as possible.

Laminating your flash cards to protect them and make them more durable is a great idea – unless you are only going to use them a few times (and have created them perhaps a week before an exam), in which case there is no need to go through the effort. However, if you are going to use the cards multiple times, laminating them will ensure they survive being used many times, as well as being thrown in a bag or being studied in the rain whilst waiting for a bus.

Endeavor to always make flash cards out of card as well. Using paper flash cards will often result in the ink running through or being seen on the other side, which will obviously ruin any testing experience. Card is also just easier to handle and will make the flash cards more durable.

You may find it easier to make your flash cards on a computer. It is easy to create flash cards in Word or Excel. Simply create a large symmetrical table and then cut it out once you have printed it. Doing so will often be easier and more practical because you can more easily copy and paste pictures and repeat similar cards. However, it will help the learning process if you write on the cards and draw pictures yourself. Doing this is a more tactile and memorable experience that will help you to remember the information.

If you are working with children, making flash cards larger than 3 x 5 inches is a great idea because it makes them both easier and a little more fun to use.

Many stationary departments will sell decks of blank flash cards. These can be very useful as cutting out small cards to the correct size is time-consuming. The nominal cost will be worth it. If you purchase blank card decks, they may come with their own small box, but if not, most stationary stores will sell small boxes (certainly A5 size) that will make storing and transporting the flash cards easier. If not, small pencil cases or even elastic bands can be excellent for holding a deck of flash cards together.

It is also helpful to ensure that your flash card decks stay separate. It can be difficult and time-consuming to separate flash cards back into their respective topics. Always keeping flash cards as modular, separate decks will make study

sessions simpler to arrange and implement. When you are planning and executing your study sessions, make them as dedicated and clear cut as possible, for example, “study flash card deck B on organic chemistry.”

What to Do When Questions are Answered Incorrectly

When working with flash cards, you will be consistently asking yourself or someone else a question. When you (or they) give a correct answer, simply confirm that the answer given was correct and move on to the next card. However, when an incorrect answer is given, what to do next is not so clear-cut. There are a few options that can significantly affect whether the information will be remembered the next time.

There should always be exposure to the correct answer. Little progress will be made if whoever is being tested is not informed of the correct answer and given a chance to re-affirm the memory. (There may be odd exceptions to this rule, for example, if you are doing a quiz). If you are working with a system (which I will explain later in detail), the card must be moved to a stage where there will be re-exposure sooner rather than later. This is essential.

If you are working by yourself and give an incorrect answer, you can simply read the answer to yourself (doing it aloud will be more beneficial) to re-form the memory of the correct answer. Once you have read the correct answer, it may help to then ask yourself the question again and repeat the answer from memory. Doing this once or twice as a practice may be helpful, but attempt to do so quickly. Moving through a deck at a prompt, consistent pace is desirable.

What you do in response to a wrong answer might also depend on how far from the answer you were. If you were very close, simply re-reading the answer once aloud will be enough. If your answer was completely incorrect, re-test yourself a couple of times. Obviously your study goals affect how you should react to a wrong answer, so if you need to remember this card by tomorrow, consider continued testing until you recall it from memory easily.

If you are working with someone else, there are various options you can experiment with. You can ask them to try again if they were close to the answer, or perhaps give hints. Both of these are often preferable to just saying “wrong” and moving on. Offering hints will allow the individual to engage intellectually and will strengthen a weak memory more effectively, rather than simple re-exposure to the correct answer.

It is usually beneficial to be consistent when responding to incorrect answers

with yourself to ensure you are never lenient and that you move through work briskly. However, if you are a teacher or parent working with a child, be as flexible as you feel will be helpful and supportive.

Dealing with Repeated Incorrect Answers

You may occasionally get stuck attempting to remember a flash card. No matter how hard you try, you just can't remember the answer. As a result (if you are working with a "system"), you will be exposed to the flash card more often. But what should you do when even then you fail to remember the correct answer?

If you are experiencing this problem with one or multiple cards, you have a few options. You can...

- Make the flash card easier. Perhaps the information is too hard and you need to make it simpler to memorize.
- Reduce the amount of information on the flash card. There may be too much for you to remember as it is. Breaking it up so that the information fits onto two or maybe three flash cards, rather than just one, will improve your chances of memorization and consequently correct answers on testing.
- Increase the frequency of exposure. Perhaps at present you are leaving too much time between periods of testing, and so the memory of the answer has faded out by the time you come to test yourself again. Lessen the possibility of wrong answers by increasing the frequency of testing (this is especially advisable if there are multiple cards in the deck you are really struggling with).
- Alter/improve how you act when you get a question incorrect. Perhaps you are too passive in attempting to establish the information even as a short-term memory. Try reading it aloud, re-testing the card straight away, or writing down the answer.
- You can also utilize mnemonic tricks to make memorization easier. If you are attempting to memorize a formula, perhaps turn the letters into the initials of a memorable sentence or transform the information by associating it with things/animals/people, turning the formula into an interesting and dynamic visual scene. This will stick in your memory more than drab, grey ideas. For more mnemonic ideas, search online for free lessons on sites such as YouTube.

Use Multiple Decks

Creating multiple decks of flash cards will make studying easier because you can compartmentalize your course more clearly. If you use just one deck of flash cards and continually add to it, at some point it will become difficult to manage, both physically and in terms of creating flexible study schedules in which you cover a whole deck of cards in a session.

There are no definite rules, but the deck will become tougher to work with when it becomes larger than fifty cards. At this point it is wise to break the deck into separate topics. Also, when the deck gets too big you risk not gaining enough exposure to all the flash cards. Finally, decks too large are to be avoided because they are more daunting to begin studying, which may cause you to procrastinate.

Before you create your flash cards, it is best to decide on the topics and subtopics you are going to divide your course into, and then create decks that are of a reasonable and uniform size. This will make scheduling and implementing study periods with the flash cards much easier.

It can also be a good idea to predetermine which decks are more important than others and to prioritize the essential decks. You can then study the important decks more regularly than others, and the decks that carry extraneous information can be circulated into your study sessions less regularly. Be aware, however, that working like this can become a little complex. I would recommend that beginners create flash card decks of the same “value.” There are no definite rules, so experiment and find what works best for you.

Create Decks that Rigorously Follow your Course

To make studying with flash cards as effective as possible, the flash cards you use must rigorously adhere to the course you are studying. If you create flash cards that contain information that you won't be tested on, you will be wasting time. If you don't include what you will be tested on, you will lose marks before you even walk into the exam hall.

If you are working toward exam success and the highest grade possible, the best way for you to create a flash card deck that comprehensively follows the course is to create flash cards from previous exam papers. First, check with your teacher to ensure the exam won't deviate much from previous years. If it won't, find exam papers from the last few years, perhaps the last five, and from these create flash cards that allow you to answer these past exam papers brilliantly well.

If the above is not possible, do your best to find material that comes closest to the course syllabus. You can also ask your teacher where you can find questions that may come up in the exam or ask him/her to compose questions you can work from.

If you want to enjoy the material and expand your understanding beyond what you are going to be tested on, then absolutely make your flash cards more expansive. This is particularly wise if the subject you are studying is part of a field you are going to work in professionally for years to come. In this case the more groundwork and depth to the knowledge you build, the better.

Flash Cards as Part of the Learning Process

Another reason to make your own flash cards is that you can use the process of creating them a strong part of the learning process. To create flash cards for your course, you need to first find the vital ingredients that will be on the exam, then condense them into your own words, and finally, re-form them into small, testable pieces.

This short series of steps will often, in itself, be enough exposure to the course material for memorization (at least in the short-term). Following this with testing yourself or others will cement the information into your long-term memory. You should also use other flash card techniques to create a breadth and depth to your studying – techniques that will build deeper understanding and establish how all the elements of the course interact with one another.

The process of condensing information down by choosing what is vital to be learnt, posing it into questions and answers, and neatly mounting these onto small cards is a series of learning moments. These act as an excellent segue into the adaptive testing systems and active recall moments which can facilitate complete memorization of your course.

Of course there are many other forms of study that could constitute the initial exposure to information. It could be note taking in class, reading a text book, or listening to an audio recording. There are many possibilities, but regardless of which act precedes testing with flash cards, I would encourage you to make sure that you have learnt the information at least fairly well. If you move to testing with flash cards and most of your answers are incorrect, you did not learn the information at all, and the initial flash card test (and perhaps subsequent ones) will be a waste of time. If you then choose to continue without another mode of study, you will be relying on the method of correction you are using following incorrect flash card answers.

Flash cards can be the initial study approach if applied properly. Whatever the first learning process is, ensure that it is fairly successful, otherwise the initial flash card tests will be a waste of time, and you will be putting a large amount of faith in the correction process you are using.

Note Taking with Flash Cards

Note taking involves recording information and compressing a large amount of content down to a condensed summary. By creating flash cards, you are performing this process to re-form everything into questions and answers. Therefore, it is possible to replace the conventional forms of note taking you use and instead create flash cards. Consider adding the creation of flash cards to your note taking tool box.

Creating flash cards directly from the source can be a good approach if you are confident with the course already, or if you are on a tight deadline. Constructing flash cards directly from the course material will remove what are often unnecessary intermediary steps. You are immediately creating the means by which you will memorize and test yourself on the material.

It will often be possible to create flash cards directly from a lesson. So instead of taking notes in the manner you normally do, simply convert the information you hear directly into the flash card format.

Arrive to class with a deck of blank 3 x 5 flash cards, and then as you hear important ideas and snippets of information you think will be necessary to learn, record these on one side of the flash cards. Put the appropriate question on the other side that would prompt the answer. Perhaps write in pencil at first and then revise them at home, tracing over them in pen if you feel they are accurate and useful.

It is important that you create accurate flash cards. If you feel the accuracy of the flash cards is not what it should be, don't incorporate them into the testing system you are using. It may be a good idea to have a teacher or successful colleague evaluate whether they are an accurate representation of the class.

Taking notes like this may take time to master, and is perhaps best suited to classes in which there is little risk of you falling behind, as this task requires a higher level of concentration. However, if you can master this skill, you will save a lot of time and effort. This is because once you have created the flash cards, you can effectively use them exclusively to learn the course material.

A note taking skill that can always be applied with flash cards is to take notes from already assembled information. If you have a collection of articles or book extracts and want to condense them down to a workable form – differentiating

the unimportant from the important – creating flash cards can be an easy and effective approach.

Expanding Understanding with Flash Cards

Flash cards are best known for learning facts or vocabulary, but they can also be used to develop understanding of deeper concepts and to build depth and breadth of knowledge.

An example of a flash card used to develop understanding could have on the question side: “State three reasons the North won the American Civil War.” This is not as two-dimensional or “black and white” as the question found on the conventional flash card. It expands into deeper territory, and consequently, giving a definitive “yes” or “no” is not possible. There are also more than three possible reasons the North won the Civil War, so there must be previous experience of the three reasons given on the reverse of this specific flash card. It would be unfair and unwise to use such a flash card for the first time on a fellow history student. It would only be effective if they had learnt the three reasons specifically on the reverse of this flash card.

Using flash cards in this way is very effective. You can use the same kind of understanding based questions that might appear on an exam, and use flash cards to build on understanding as well as knowledge. If you are studying subjects such as English literature or history, flash cards can be helpful in memorizing deeper ideas and developing and solidifying understanding. Indeed, subjects like these (even at higher levels) can be studied effectively and, if desired, almost exclusively with flash cards.

It will be more difficult to test when using flash cards in this manner. It will not always be as straightforward as when learning rote facts and vocabulary. It will require you to decide how close you, or the person you are testing, came to the correct answer. Try to err on the side of being too strict to avoid incomplete learning, but also do not only accept word-for-word answers because this will be a waste of time and not be reflective of true learning.

When deciding on whether the answer given is correct or not, look for accurate paraphrasing as well as the presence of key words. It may be helpful to underline key words beforehand in order to be clear about which words must be in a possible answer. This will keep the testing more accurate without being unfeasibly rigorous.

Flash cards are predominantly known for learning key facts and ideas, but there

is no reason not to expand their use in order to teach yourself, and others, a deeper understanding of a given topic. Testing may be more difficult, but do not let this discourage you. In time you will develop an accurate ability to mark yourself and others.

Establish Connections and Relationships

Another fantastic use for flash cards is to assist in building your understanding of relationships. Flash cards are easy to manipulate and move around physically; therefore, you can establish relationships in a clear visual sense by rearranging them on a table.

First, decide what kind of relationships you will attempt to establish. If you are working on your knowledge of US presidents, first turn all the cards so they are on a surface with the president's names showing face up. There are then many ways you can manipulate the cards to develop your understanding of the subject. Perhaps if you are currently studying the historical differences between the Democratic and Republican parties, you could move the flash cards into two groups: Republican presidents on the right and Democrat presidents on the left. The simple act of moving them into position will help you to establish the connections, and the visual of presenting them in this way will help you to remember which president was part of which party.

Once you have established which party each respective president was a part of, you might then continue to develop your understanding by putting them in chronological order as well. Or you might order them by the length of term they served in office.

These are a few simple examples, but there are many ways to manipulate flash cards to establish connections. Another example would be if you were working with the elements of the periodic table. You could place the elements in groups according to which ones react in a similar manner when added to a certain chemical. There are many possibilities, so be creative.

Working with flash cards in this way embraces different modes of thinking. The tactile and visual dynamic of working with flash cards helps to build connections more organically. Be creative and build your understanding of the relationships that exist within a topic by using flash cards in this manner.

Flash Cards with Others: An Introduction

Flash cards are a brilliant way to facilitate people learning together. There are various study techniques and games that can be played with two or more people. All these study methods utilize flash cards and can make learning more effective, social, and fun.

Making flash cards as a part of a study group can be a great way for you to learn and work together. Working in this way helps you to bounce ideas off one another, identifying and establishing the key parts of the course. It is also a great way for a study group to pool notes from class, which can be followed by consolidation of the information down to the most important.

A study group might also work together to make a deck that contains the vocabulary and key terms from a course. This is easiest to do by working from a glossary of terms in a textbook.

If you are a teacher, or in charge of the learning of others, there are many ways to facilitate greater variation in learning by using flash cards. By providing a deck of flash cards to a group, you give them an excellent opportunity to work unassisted as well as to develop their interpersonal/team building skills. With children especially, the introduction of flash cards will help them improve and regulate their own learning, as well as the learning of their classmates.

Flash Cards with Others: Having Fun

Creating a quiz from flash cards is a very straightforward way to have fun with classmates, while still learning. To do this, simply divide the group into two, and then ask questions from a deck of flash cards. The more fun you can make the quiz, the better – so try to include prizes and perhaps give each team something to signal with when they know the answer, like a bell or a whistle.

This technique may seem elementary or childish, but proves to be both enjoyable and effective for all ages – even university students and adults in a professional setting.

Another game to play with flash cards is to put an entire deck of cards in a bag and then ask whomever you are studying with to reach in and fish out a card to answer. This will again make simple testing routines more interesting, especially for children, who will enjoy the novelty of the game.

With a group you can also play a game of “musical flash cards.” To play this game, sit in a circle, and then pass around a deck of flash cards whilst music plays. Stop the music at random, and whoever is holding the deck when the music stops, must answer the top flash card. Again, make it interesting by adding a prize. Perhaps sweets or maybe an early exit from class.

Because flash cards are a form of testing, they serve as a helpful tool for a teacher to assess how well a class is doing. On top of this, flash cards offer a great deal of flexibility and can be adapted into a variety of games that ensure the class has fun and stays engaged.

One-Sided Flash Cards

Flash cards do not always have to be two-sided. One-sided flash cards can be used to utilize different study techniques. Using flash cards in this way will mean that you need two packs: one for answers and one for questions. You will need a way to remember which are linked, that is to say, which questions correspond to which answers. Perhaps create a table that states all the paired questions and answers.

Once you have made your one-sided flash cards, you can use games and systems that are specific to one-sided flash cards. For example, a simple game of “pairs” will encourage your learning if you enjoy visual games, and can be played by yourself or with others. To play, take turns flipping over two of the cards, then attempt to remember where the “pairs” are, i.e., the corresponding question and answer cards. Eventually, you will endeavor to turn them both over on the same go. If you match a corresponding pair, you get another turn. Each time you match a pair you get one point, and whoever has the most points once all the pairs have been matched is declared the winner.

Of course, be sure that you are correctly pairing the questions with the right answers. This game is best played when a fairly strong understanding of the flash cards has already been developed and only revision is needed.

Studying with a System: Introducing Adaptive Testing

If you are using a deck of flash cards on your own, I highly recommend that you employ some type of “system” that dictates when you re-test yourself on each respective card. Studying with flash cards in this way means that you will be utilizing the effects of “spaced exposure,” which means you are exposed to the information you need to memorize repeatedly and over a long period of time.

Spaced exposure contrasts with “mass” exposure. Mass exposure occurs when you attempt to learn many things by repeated exposure over a short amount of time. Mass exposure is often referred to as “cramming,” which is a popular study approach for many students (normally because they procrastinated until days before the exam), and although it is conventionally seen as unwise, cramming does have its merits. Cramming does facilitate good retention into the short-term memory, but there is only a limited amount of information you can “cram” into your mind and retain in the short-term memory space. In order to memorize enough information to achieve a high grade in a course, there must be deposits into the long-term memory. In order to create real understanding and to take in information at depth, spaced exposure is also by far the superior method of learning.

Utilizing a system with flash cards ensures you correctly expose yourself to the material and use “active recall” to study at spaced intervals. The system will dictate the time interval between testing on a given flash card. Every system is designed to expose you more frequently to information you are yet to correctly memorize and less frequently to information you have already memorized.

A good system will ensure that you come as close as possible to testing yourself with the flash cards at the “right” time. By this I mean you test yourself regularly enough, but no more than necessary. So that when you come to the exam, you have them ingrained in your mind, and recollection of the information is easy. The goal is to test yourself on a flash card before the date that you would have forgotten the answer is, but as close to that date as possible so that you don’t waste time testing yourself more than necessary.

There is no perfect way to expose yourself to material so that you aren’t exposed to it more than necessary (or too little). There can only be best guesses and nominalized systems that create the best possible fit. Regardless, be sure to use a

system for learning from flash cards. Doing so will mean you use your study time significantly more effectively.

Studying with a System: An Example of a Simple System

I will now explain a simple example of a testing system you can use with flash cards. I recommend attempting to implement this system first so that you establish an understanding of the basic principles.

The simplest form a learning system can take on is to move the flash card to the back of the deck if it is answered correctly, and move it to the middle of the deck if you answered it incorrectly. Continue working through the deck from front to back. Working in this way, you will be continually exposed to those questions you have answered incorrectly, before you return to those that you have answered correctly. This ensures that you study (through active recall) the material you have yet to memorize. It will make it easier if you place a divider half way through the deck, and then place all incorrectly answered flash cards just in front of that divider.

This is the simplest method that embraces the spaced exposure approach, and by itself it can be very effective. Its strength is in being straightforward and easy to apply. So if you are new to flash cards and in a hurry to start using them, I recommend trying this method out first. Within perhaps an hour of working with them, you will be able to see how much more effective your studying is when you consistently tackle your weakest areas.

If the above system suits your goals and works well for you, stick with it. As with many things, what is simple is often best.

Studying with a System: Implementing the “Leitner” System

The “Leitner System” is slightly more advanced in how it applies the spaced exposure principle. This is a very flexible system that can be adapted to a variety of courses and study goals. Here is an example of how it can work:

There are five stages each flash card goes through. Each time you actively recall an answer successfully, the flash card gets moved up a stage. Each time you get it wrong, the flash card will move back down a stage.

It can be helpful to use five boxes or pencil cases – anything to help physically differentiate between each stage.

When a card is answered correctly, it goes up a stage, i.e., from stage 1 to stage 2. When a card is answered incorrectly, it goes down a stage, i.e., from stage 2 to stage 1. The stage a card is at dictates when it will be reviewed. In this example:

Stage 1 is reviewed daily

Stage 2 is reviewed once a week

Stage 3 twice a month

Stage 4 once a month

Stage 5 every three months

During your first session with the flash cards, each will begin at stage 1.

Following the initial test, each correctly answered card will be promoted to stage 2. Each incorrectly answered card remains at stage 1.

The following day you will work through stage 1 again (cards at this stage are reviewed every day) and test yourself on all the cards you answered incorrectly the day before, whereas the flash cards you answered correctly the previous day will not be reviewed until the following week, on whatever day you designate for your stage 2 reviews (perhaps this is every Monday).

It is important to keep the once a week reviews on the same day, e.g., every Monday, so that you can build the habit and ensure optimal testing. If you leave it until Wednesday and nine days pass between testing, you may lose some information, and flash cards that would have been committed to memory won’t be.

This process continues in the same manner: each day you review cards at stage 1 and then the next (and every) Monday you work through the stage 2 cards. When you work through the stage 2 cards, those that are answered correctly are promoted to stage 3 and will be reviewed every month (again, pick a day and stick to it). Those answered incorrectly are demoted to stage 1, and will therefore be reviewed the following day, and daily, until you answer them correctly and they return to stage 2. And so on, and so forth...

You can be as flexible as you want in your application of the Leitner System. The “stages” can be over any time frame you see fit. Also, there doesn’t have to be five stages – there can be as many as you want – though don’t use too many as this will become increasingly difficult to manage.

For a test that is a year away, the above example is an excellent application of the Leitner System. The daily review stage will mean competence is reached quickly, and by incorporating the fifth and final stage (which gets reviewed every 3 months) you will ensure that you retain the information long-term, without excessive exposure.

Studying with a System: A “Total” Study System

In order to become an effective student of whatever you are studying, it can be very helpful to work with a structured system. Using the Leitner System, in some form, will allow you to develop a regular protocol for remembering necessary information. I will now provide further advice so that you can create a “total” system. This will combine all methods to create an ideal studying experience.

In order to facilitate continued learning of a whole subject, it is advisable to slowly introduce more flash cards to the system (always beginning new flash cards at stage 1). As flash cards are promoted through the stages, and you memorize the course material, introduce more flash cards to the process.

Attempt to balance the speed at which cards are being promoted with the speed at which you introduce them. If you need to learn at a faster rate than you are, you will need more review sessions. You could perhaps make stage 1 a twice daily review and stage 2 a daily review, thus allowing you to learn faster and get through more new material.

Create and work a system that specifically caters to you and your study goals. However, do not attempt to take on too many study sessions too soon. The habit of studying itself will be difficult to instill, and attempting to memorize too much material will cause you to struggle to learn as effectively.

Creating a regular pattern to your flash card system is very important. The more habitual and repetitive you can make the system, the easier you will find it to implement, and the more energy you can devote to actually studying the cards.

Introducing flash cards at a regular rate is an important element. A sustainable rate, i.e., where flash cards move up stages roughly as fast as they are introduced, is most desirable.

To begin using a system, you need to establish the rate at which you need to introduce new information. In order to do this, you must be aware of the total amount of information you need to memorize. Ideally, do this by knowing how many flash cards worth of information your course constitutes. You also need to know the date by which the information must be memorized. Then you can create a Leitner-esque system which will bring about enough exposure to the collection of flash cards by that date.

Make it regular and easily habituated by introducing a new flash card each day for each sub-topic you are learning. This will help to make the process easily practiced and maintained. Working like this requires you to diligently dissect the course material so that cards can be introduced at the rate of one card per day. If you are yet to receive all the information needed for the exam, this will be very much an estimation at first. But don't worry about this. It is far better to have a structured approach to learning the course, even if the structure of the approach is based on educated guesses.

The more you can nominalize and create rigorous learning systems, the better you will be able to study and absorb information. The act of learning one thing per day will allow your memory to adapt into a pattern of learning. The ability to recall information will slowly improve as you work every day. Like a muscle gaining strength through regular exertion.

Using Flash Card Software

Using software that embraces the flash card principles is also recommended. Although you will not get the same tactile experience that can be so beneficial for some learners, there are nonetheless many advantages to using flash card software.

There are a few great flash card websites that a quick Google search will reveal. They all work in a similar way, with slight differences in the systems they utilize (as in the Leitner System, etc.). Experiment with using the top few options. Each will have different benefits that dovetail to varying degrees with your learning goals.

A tremendous benefit of using software is that there are already databases full of flash cards ready for you to use, and since they are digital, you can easily search and find many decks of flash cards. For more popular subjects, and language learning in particular, there will be all the flash cards you need waiting for you online.

There are also apps you can download to use on your smart phone or tablet. This, again, makes the flash card process something you can utilize at any time. Running through a deck of flash cards on your phone is even easier as you don't need to remember to bring additional items with you.

There are several strengths to using flash card software, and I would encourage you to take a few hours to experiment with the available software. However, as a day-to-day study tool, it is much better to make your own physical flash cards since you can then be confident that you are studying the proper information. On top of this, you encourage the learning process through the act of creating the flash cards themselves.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

BOOK 2: HOW TO SPEED READ: A VERY EASY GUIDE

Introduction

The aim of this book is to equip you with a host of ideas to help you take your reading to the next level. No longer will you have to trudge through books at a snail's pace. After reading this guide, you will be prepared for the fast lane with all the speed readers who have learnt these secrets. Your reading list will shrink rapidly as you devour books at a speed you only dreamt of before.

This is the second edition of what was a shorter eBook, now containing more ideas on how to read faster and new advice on using multi-step strategies for greater comprehension and retention. This edition offers an altogether more complete presentation of what it means to be an effective reader.

How to Use This Book

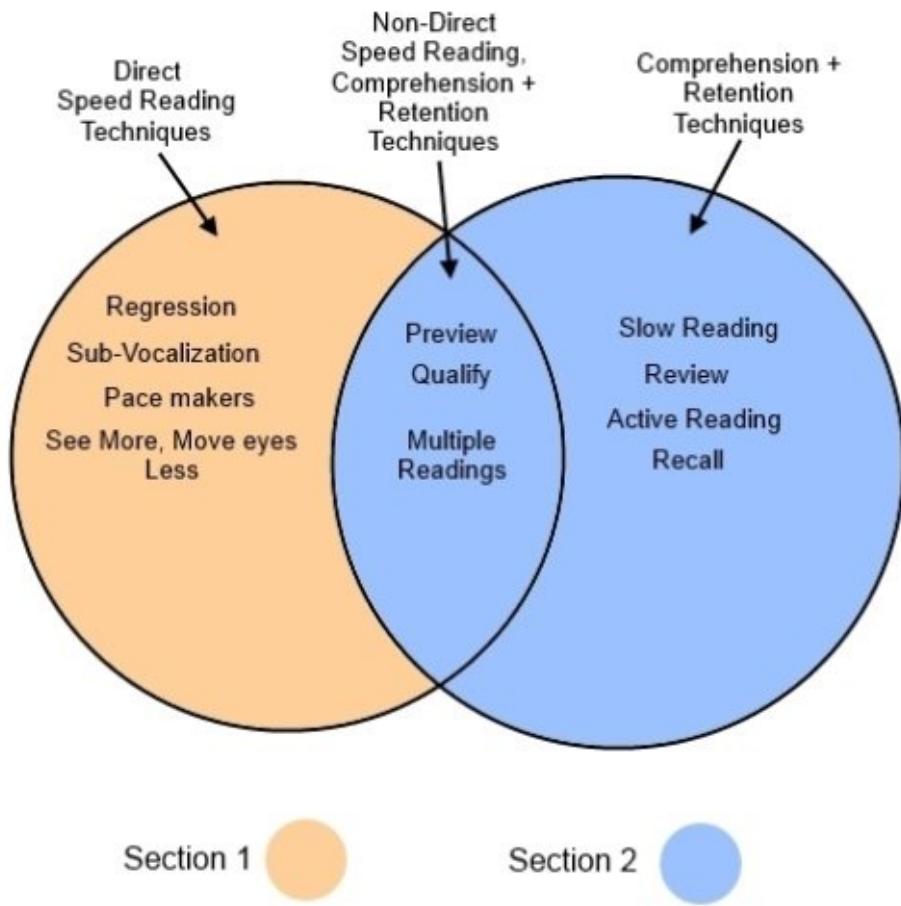
The purpose of this book is to be as fundamental as possible. It contains only what is necessary to read faster and with more skill. Nothing has been added that is not 100 percent useful. Therefore, take notes and avoid overlooking any section. I suggest reading this book more than once to ensure that the more developed ideas and strategies make sense. However, also feel free to “dip in and out” to reaffirm anything you are unsure of.

Please note that developing your reading habits is an on-going process, and attempting to apply all of this book’s techniques at once is unrealistic. Take time and be patient while working to improve your reading skills.

This book has been divided into two sections in order to make the subject easier to comprehend. The first section focuses on “direct” speed reading techniques. These approaches will alter how you interact with a text in a fundamental manner. Consequently, they will take time to adapt to and master.

The second section of the book introduces speed reading techniques that are “non-direct.” These methods are based on leveraging your reading to focus on high value areas of a text. Many of these techniques will also boost comprehension and retention. Later chapters focus specifically on how to strengthen your reading in these areas.

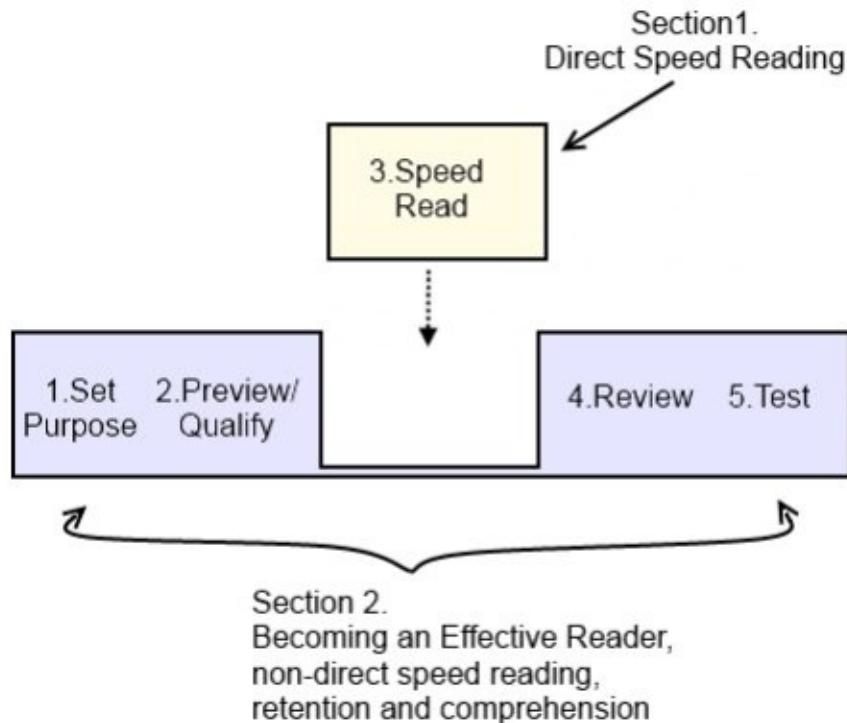
Below is a Venn diagram that illustrates the nature of this book’s two section divide.



Toward the end of the book, we will explore how these techniques can be integrated into multi-step reading strategies. These strategies will allow you to meet a variety of reading goals and make you a more rounded and effective reader.

Below is a diagram that situates the first section, “direct speed reading techniques”, within an example multi-step reading strategy.

An Example Multi Step Reading Strategy (and this book's 2 section format)



Don't worry if these diagrams aren't entirely understandable right now. The concepts, and how they align with one another, will become clear in time.

Introducing Speed Reading

The average reader, who has not learnt speed reading techniques, reads at a rate of roughly two hundred words per minute. There are various reasons for this, but most importantly this rate is significantly lower than it could be.

Most people assume that the rate they read at currently is the speed at which they must read. Or at least, they believe there is no way to increase their reading speed without losing all comprehension. Others assume their reading speed is a line drawn in the sand; a hard fact that cannot be altered.

This simply is not true.

By practicing the techniques in this book, it is possible to vastly increase the speed at which you read. It is possible to double and triple reading speeds to six hundred words per minute or more.

However, it is important to understand that speed reading is not going to be a like-for-like swap. The normal way of reading you learnt at school, and have used thus far, will still often be the best way to read. You cannot speed read at 600 wpm (words per minute) and have the same experience with the text when reading normally, at the rate of 200 wpm. Therefore, it is beneficial to think of speed reading as a tool most useful when reading certain texts with certain objectives.

When speed reading, a different kind of comprehension will be experienced. Often you will be able to grasp wider concepts exceptionally well but miss finer details. Short-term retention is possible with speed reading, but long-term retention can decrease dramatically. However, techniques in section two can effectively mitigate this.

It is important to align your reading techniques with both the nature of the text and your reading goals. For example, it is ridiculous to speed read poetry because you have neither the same interaction with the sounds of the words nor the time to take in the emotion of the phrases compared to normal reading. However, speed reading is of excellent help when reading a popular psychology book because the wider ideas are important, but the sounds and emotions of the text are largely irrelevant.

It should also be noted that experience with speed reading varies significantly

between readers. The following factors can influence how well you progress: intelligence, ability to think in parallel, and reading experience.

Find Your Current Reading Speed

The first step to improving your reading speed is to discover your current rate. Ascertaining the exact number of words per minute you are currently reading will be very helpful as a benchmark. With this figure in mind, you can compare reading rates as you begin to implement new techniques.

First, choose a book to read - ideally, a non-fiction book that is not too complex, either in a field you are familiar with, and/or on a topic that is fairly uncomplicated. By reading a book that fulfills these criteria, you will find a reading speed that is representative of your overall reading.

Then work through the following steps:

Find the average number of words per line. To do this, count the total number of words in the first seven lines of the book. Divide this number by seven to find the average. This will provide a sufficiently accurate average number of words-per-line for the book.

Make a mark at the first line where you are going to start reading. Using a stopwatch, time yourself reading for one minute. Read silently and at the speed you would normally. At the end of the minute, mark the line you reach.

Count the number of lines you have read. Then multiply this number by the average number of words per line (the figure from step 1).

Make a note of this number. This is your current reading speed measured in words per minute.

Perform this protocol and make a note of your score each time you master a new reading technique. Doing so will help you accurately keep track of progress.

Section One: “Direct” Speed Reading Techniques

Technique 1: Stop Backtracking

Re-reading text you have already read is a habit that can needlessly hamper your reading speed. You may not be aware that you do this, but likely you often do.

Take some time now to read a book normally. You will notice that occasionally your eyes drift back to text that you have already read. Sometimes this is to gain clarity, but other times it is for no discernable reason. Becoming aware of this bad habit is a great first step.

As a general rule, regressing and re-reading is unnecessary. If we do not fully understand what we have just read and need further clarity, we re-read consciously. However, even then re-reading a text is usually unnecessary because continuing to read will improve contextual comprehension and clarify what we were previously unsure of. Re-reading or “backtracking” is, therefore, usually a waste of time. So give your mind more credit, and work to keep your eyes from drifting backwards. Always make an effort to move forward through a text.

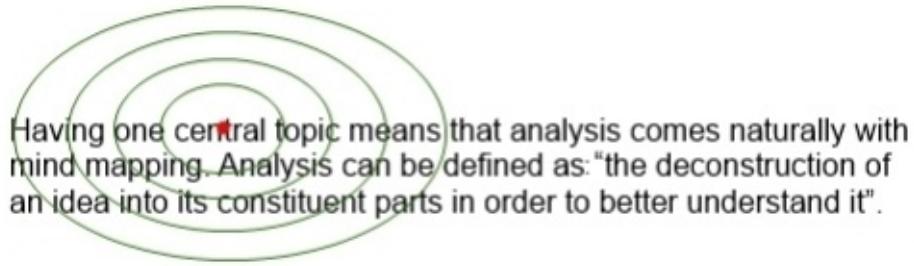
In order to rid yourself of the habit of backtracking, simply trace your finger under the text as you read, and make sure it is always moving forward and never back. This will make you more conscious of where you are in the text and prevent you from back-tracking.

Technique 2: See More, and Move Your Eyes Less

Fixating on every word is another barrier to higher reading speeds. It is a reading habit that we learn as children. Although it is perhaps the only way we can learn to read, fixating on every word in a passage is not needed to understand it. The time your eyes spend moving between words, although small, can be reduced, thereby increasing your overall reading speed.

To become aware of how you can see more by fixating on only one place, focus your sight in the middle of a sentence. Notice that you can read the words around the central word. Indeed, without moving your sight from the center, you may be able to read the whole sentence with your eyes resting on just this one place.

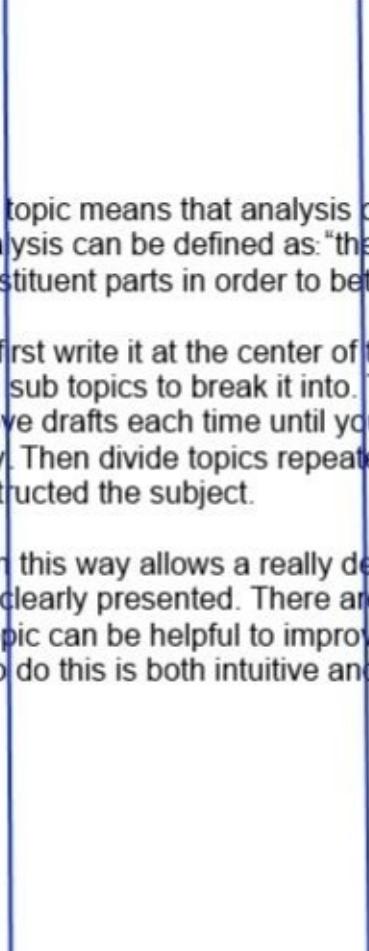
Below is a text that is dissected by circles. Whilst keeping your focus on the red dot, attempt to expand your field of vision so that you also see the circles around it and the words within them. You should be able to read the first five words of the paragraph by only fixating on the red dot. The text is taken from my book, *Total Mind Maps*.



If you are struggling to see the words around the word “central”, relax your eyes, and make them feel slightly lazy. Weaken your gaze, and soon you will be able to see more than you did before.

A useful extension of this technique is to draw two lines down the page to dissect it into thirds. Then, move your focus ONLY between these two lines. There is a text below to practice this technique with. Try reading it by only

stopping your eyes twice for each line of the text, whenever the line of text is intersected by a blue line.



Having one central topic means that analysis comes naturally with mind mapping. Analysis can be defined as "the deconstruction of an idea into its constituent parts in order to better understand it".

To analyze a topic, first write it at the center of the mind map. Then decide on the main sub topics to break it into. This may take multiple iterations, so improve drafts each time until you discover the most logical disassembly. Then divide topics repeatedly until you have completely deconstructed the subject.

Using mind maps in this way allows a really deep analysis to be easily created and clearly presented. There are many times when deconstructing a topic can be helpful to improve understanding; using mind maps to do this is both intuitive and thorough.

Now try this technique with the book you have been practicing with. Draw lines, lightly in pencil if the book isn't your own, down the page at intervals. Space these lines so that there are roughly three to five words on each side of the lines, just like in the picture above. Read by moving your focus between the blue lines so that your eyes zigzag down the page.

The pencil lines are helpful to start with, but once you have practiced this technique you will grow accustomed to guessing where best to fixate your eyes. Don't worry; you won't have to draw lines onto everything you read in future!

SIDE NOTE

These first two techniques (reducing eye fixations and ceasing to backtrack) are a great entry to learning to speed read. This is because, essentially, they remove blocks rather than push for speed. Consequently, these two techniques don't require a lot of practice to reach good comprehension.

Technique 3: Grouping

The reader understands words one at a time when reading normally. With the previous chapter's techniques, despite reading with fewer eye fixations, you still understand words one at a time. However, it is possible to look at a phrase and understand it without looking at each word individually. Reading like this, in groups of words, is faster because you can understand a group of words just as well as you do single words.

To clarify, with the previous technique you learnt how to fixate less often. You looked at the center of five words, and read them consecutively (i.e., whilst focusing on Word 3, you read consecutively: Word 1, Word 2, Word 3, Word 4, Word 5).

With this new “grouping” technique you will read all five words at once whilst still holding your focus on “Word 3”. You will learn to read them in one snapshot of information (i.e., you read: Words 1-5 all at once whilst focusing on Word 3).

To practice this, again draw lines down the page and dissect it into thirds. Then focus only on the points where the drawn lines dissect the text. But now, instead of reading each word, try and take in the group of words altogether so that you see two groups of words for each line of text. Force yourself to continue even if comprehension is bad. It will return. And again, work to relax your eyes and keep going. Slowly your comprehension will return, and things will make sense as your mind adjusts to reading in phrases.

When practicing, it is best to dissect the page in the same proportions as you did with “Technique 2: See More, Move Your Eyes Less,” with three to five words on each side of the dividing pencil lines. Attaining comprehension of word groups this size should be achievable with less than four hours of practice.

Grouping words together to understand them all at once, is a technique that builds excellently on the previous “See More, and Move Your Eyes Less” technique. However, this is a more difficult technique to learn, and more time may be needed to learn this technique than the previous techniques. Your mind will need time to adjust, as understanding entire phrases at a time is a new skill. Set a timer, and keep moving your eyes between the dissecting lines.

Comprehension will return in time, and you will be reading a lot more quickly.

This technique is best utilized when attempting to take in wider concepts of a text and when you don't need to understand the details, and also when multiple passes of the text are planned to sharpen comprehension (this will be explained in detail later).

Technique 4: Reducing Subvocalization

Reducing subvocalization will further increase your reading speed. It will allow you to learn visually instead of aurally, and will ensure that you are no longer constrained to read only as fast as you can speak.

When we learn to read as children, we read aloud. Reading aloud is a form of aural learning because we rely on understanding words via their sound. When we grow up, reading aloud progresses to “silent reading.” However, this is still learning in an aural manner. The only difference is that we are saying each word to ourselves rather than verbalizing it aloud.

It is necessary to ”sound out” each word when learning to read. How else would a teacher know that a child understands the combination of letters correctly? However, once we have developed adequate reading skills and recognize every word, it isn’t necessary to read and learn in this way. Now we can recognize and understand words just by looking at them. At this point, reading becomes visual learning rather than aural learning and speed is greatly increased.

To become conscious of how you currently sub-vocalize words, look at a word and notice that you cannot help but “say” it to yourself in your mind.

By sub-vocalizing words and reading aurally, we limit how fast we read to the rate at which we speak. As it is possible to understand words by just looking at them, we can switch to learning visually in order to read faster. Take the time now to read a longer passage. Notice how you can understand words without saying each to yourself.

It simply isn’t necessary to sound out every word to understand the majority of sentences. However, on occasion, subvocalization will be necessary, e.g., when reading new words, technical words, difficult words, and unexpected words. Most of the time, however, removing subvocalization is an efficient way to increase reading speed.

There are three levels that subvocalization can take on. Within the first level, the reader moves their lips and mouths each word they read. Children who have just begun to read silently do this. Adults who are not regular readers may also find themselves within this level.

If you move your lips whilst reading, the following techniques will discourage you from this habit:

Clench a wooden spoon, or similar object, between your teeth.

Hold water in your mouth.

Put your hand over your mouth. This will subconsciously remind you not to speak.

Lightly hold your tongue between your teeth.

The second level of subvocalization occurs when the reader still vocalizes the sounds, but in their larynx (throat). At this stage, muscles in the reader's throat move instead of their lips.

The third level of subvocalization is when the reader says the words in their mind. This is the most common form of subvocalization.

Levels two and three can be overcome by saying something else silently in your head instead of the words you are reading. For example, as you read, try to sub-vocalize, "One, two, three, four," or the letters, "A, B, C, D," each time that your eyes fixate on a new place.

Time yourself reading now, for one minute, whilst saying the letters, "A, B, C, D" repeatedly in your head. Each time your eyes fixate on a new place, say the letter/number in your mind instead of the word. Notice how it becomes easier and faster to read without saying every word to yourself. Your comprehension will be poorer than usual, but you should notice that much of the text still makes sense. With practice, comprehension will improve to a higher level.

Subvocalization limits your reading speed to the speed you can talk. The mind is capable of receiving information at a faster rate than the speed of speech, and it is capable of learning visually rather than aurally. By sub-vocalizing sounds other than the words on the page, you will cut down your reliance on sounding every word out and be able to read much faster.

It is, however, not desirable to remove subvocalization completely. Even after drilling subvocalization of other sounds, you may still find yourself sub-vocalizing certain key words or phrases without control. This is often necessary, and indeed encouraged, as the small boost subvocalization provides for

comprehension is necessary for high value and/or difficult sections of text. Consider yourself successful if you get to the point where you only sub-vocalize a handful of words on each page.

Technique 5: Bringing It All Together and Forcing Speed with Pace Makers

The best way to circumvent old reading habits is to use a physical item as a “pace maker” for your eyes as they move across the page.

The protocol here is straightforward. Take a pencil or similar object, and holding it flat against the page, move it along just below the words at the speed you want to read. Read quickly, at a faster pace than you typically do, and wait for your mind to become accustomed to this speed. It will take time for comprehension to return.

One second per line of text is a verifiable and easily implemented time space for practicing, so begin here. To practice reading like this, get a clock that ticks loudly. Then, when reading, move your pace maker in time with each “tick.” Alternatively, count in your head, “one Mississippi, two Mississippi,” so that you work through the text at the rate of one second per line. The 2nd method, counting in your head, will also remove sub vocalizing, further boosting your reading speed. The 2nd method is also more practical as you don’t need a ticking clock. Once you have mastered reading at the rate of second per line, work to increase the rate you read to two lines per second.

Speed reading like this forces your mind and eyes to read at the rate you want. Consequently, you must be patient in waiting for comprehension to return. It might take minutes reading at this rate or it might take hours, but in time you will adapt.

You can combine using a pace maker with the “grouping” technique to gain even more speed. To do this, draw lines to dissect the page or simply use your judgment as you read and guess what roughly constitutes a third of the text. Then swing the pencil, like a pendulum, between the dissecting lines, and take in a group of words at each point. Count seconds in your head to make sure you continue at a quick rate. This can be one second per line or two lines per second. Reading in this way utilizes all of the speed reading techniques you have learnt so far.

SIDE NOTE

It is a good idea to use a pace maker to guide your eyes whenever you are reading. If you don't have a pen, use your hand and follow a finger. Even when reading for high comprehension, guiding your way through a text with a physical item or finger will make reading easier and more effective.

Tips on How to Practice These Techniques

It will take time and practice to become proficient at using the previous techniques. In particular, when using a pace maker to force higher reading speeds you may struggle to keep up.

If very poor comprehension continues consistently with any technique, then cut down your work periods. Consider taking five minutes to practice a technique followed by a five minute break. Once you have become comfortable with this, try adding five minutes to the practice time.

Patience and consistent practice is the name of the game here. Don't worry if what you're reading makes no sense and just isn't "going in." It won't at first, and it might not for a while. Reading in these new ways is a significant adjustment for your mind and eyes. This is especially true for the last three techniques: grouping, eliminating subvocalization, and forcing speed with a pace maker.

It helps to monitor progress in order to build momentum and confidence in your new reading skills. Re-measure your word-per-minute score regularly, and take notes on comprehension and how you felt during reading.

If after thorough practice you find you aren't managing even limited comprehension with one or more of the techniques, then just use those techniques that you are having success with. Perhaps speed reading for you becomes simply moving your eyes less, but you still sub-vocalize and regress. If that happens, it's fine! You are still going faster and can always come back to try and integrate another technique later.

This concludes section one. From here on, I will refer to the previous "direct" speed reading techniques as simply "speed reading techniques". Therefore, apply whatever form of direct speed reading you have developed with these techniques. Together with the non-direct speed reading techniques we are about to cover, your reading speed will dramatically increase.

The next section is on non-direct speed reading techniques. These will give your reading even more speed. We will also address techniques that focus on comprehension and retention. Throughout we will work to integrate these

various techniques into multi-step strategies that will allow you to accomplish a variety of reading goals.

Section Two: Non-Direct Speed Reading, Comprehension, Retention, and Becoming an Effective Reader

Introduction to Section Two

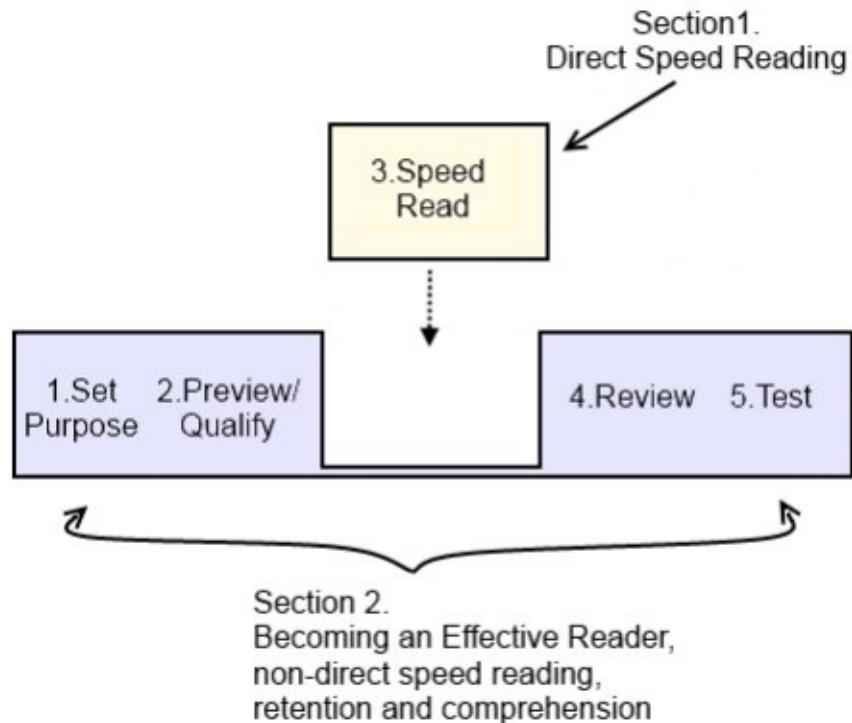
This section of the book will present a more developed, complex understanding of what it is to be an effective reader. You will learn techniques that focus on high value areas. These techniques can boost comprehension, retention, and speed. I refer to techniques like these as “non-direct” because when using them, you often skip text rather than “read” it. These techniques are closer to those used when “skimming” or “scanning” a book. In addition, in this section you will learn techniques that focus solely on boosting comprehension and/or retention.

The following techniques can be thought of as modules that complement the skillset you developed in section one. Together, they form multi-step reading strategies. These multi-step strategies can be tailored to meet a variety of reading goals.

With each technique I will explain how to perform it, the benefits of using it, and suggest where within a reading strategy it would best fit. At the end of this section, I will offer a variety of examples of multi-step reading strategies.

Below, again, is a diagram that illustrates the layout of this book and how it relates to an example multi-step reading strategy.

An Example Multi Step Reading Strategy (and this book's 2 section format)



Comprehension and Retention

Apart from speed, the other two main objectives when reading are comprehension and retention. Comprehension is synonymous with “understanding” - the degree to which you comprehend a text simply signifies how well you understand it. Consider that at least minimal comprehension is necessary in any kind of reading, as reading without understanding is pointless.

Retention refers to how well you remember the material you have read. This can be measured by how much you remember and how long you remember it for (think deposits into short and long term memory).

The importance of these elements, along with speed, will vary depending on what you are reading and why. For example, if you are studying for an exam, you want both comprehension and retention to be very high, in which case it is best to read with a strategy that amplifies comprehension and retention first and pushes for speed only if it doesn’t compromise the initial two.

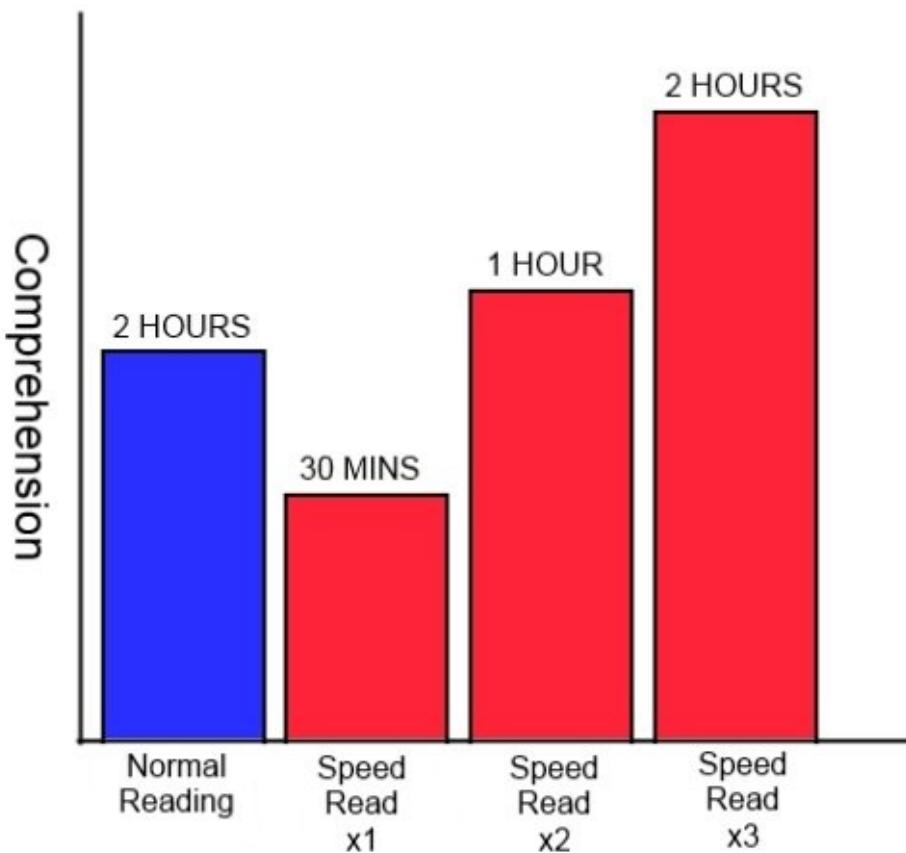
There are many connections between retention and comprehension in reading. Normally, boosting either one causes the other to be improved as well. Unfortunately, when attempting to boost retention and/or comprehension, speed will often be compromised. However, by intelligently applying reading techniques, all three aspects can be improved compared to normal reading.

Multiple Readings / Phases of Reading for Increased Comprehension, Retention, and Speed

A flawed understanding of reading is the idea that reading once, in a traditional way, is the best way to deal with the majority of texts and reading goals. This is often the only reading philosophy taught in schools. However, it is important to see the value both in reading a text multiple times and in using different reading techniques.

Speed can also be boosted by multiple readings of a text. This allows you to reach the comprehension level you want much faster. For example, it will often be the case that previewing a book (this will be explained soon) and then speed reading it twice will result in improved comprehension and will ultimately be faster than reading a book normally once.

The picture below offers this idea in a simple, comparative bar chart.



For many people, reading at 600wpm (words per minute) twice, as opposed to reading a text once at 200 wpm, will provide greater comprehension. And because the overall time spent reading a text twice at 600 wpm is still much lower, it's a no-brainer as to which option is best.

SIDE NOTE

The bar chart and wpm comparisons above are hypothetical examples demonstrating the principle of multiple readings. The actual times and comprehension gains for different strategies will vary according to your proficiency at speed reading, the nature of the text, etc.

Setting Your Purpose: Why are you Reading?

In order to become an effective reader, it is important to begin the habit of setting a clear purpose for a book before you begin reading. Setting a purpose will usually be the first stage in any multi-step reading strategy because your purpose will dictate which reading techniques you will utilize.

Your purpose can be applied to two levels. First, you must determine what your overall purpose for reading is. Second, decide what your purpose for reading this specific book is. An example of an overall purpose is: “Research a new career.” An example of a book-specific purpose is: “What training do I need to become a lawyer, and what salary can I expect?”

Setting these two purposes won’t always be necessary. If you are reading for pleasure, you can take your time with a book without worry. However, on many occasions taking time to set a clear purpose for your overall reading, and/or for the specific book you are reading, will help ensure you read more effectively. Effective reading can be understood as “reading with the right techniques to meet your purpose.” When the purpose is implicit, such as enjoying a fiction book, you don’t need to set the purpose. But most of the time, a clear purpose will produce more effective reading as you can tailor your reading technique/s accordingly. You can match the purpose with a strategy that gives you the comprehension and retention you need, in the least amount of time.

Qualifying Books

A clear overall purpose also allows you to better filter books and so only read those that give you the information you need. This can help save a great deal of time overall because, obviously, you then only read books that are helpful and avoid the ones that are not.

Often you will not need to qualify a book, but if you are researching/studying/learning it will prove useful. Qualifying a book means ascertaining whether the book will allow you to complete your purpose for reading. It involves discovering whether a book contains what you are looking for, before reading it.

An example of an overall reading purpose is: “Research and find reasons why Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo.” For this purpose, you can say that a book will be useful if it contains information about the reasons Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo. If you pick up a book and can tell it won’t fulfill the above criteria, then of course you can put it aside and not read it. This can save you a tremendous amount of time, as you don’t waste time reading the wrong books.

Consider also that qualifying a book based on quality is important. Why not try to read the best books you can? Look at reviews and critical opinions from others to do this. Working with technology makes this easier. You can search for critiques online, or simply look at reviews on the Amazon website to reveal the quality of a book.

Previewing: An Essential Preliminary Reading Technique and How to Qualify a Book

The process of “previewing” is the best way to qualify a book and see whether it is worth reading or not. It is also a valuable reading technique in itself and can be considered as another “non-direct” speed reading technique.

Essentially, previewing is a technique that addresses the highest value areas of a book. To preview a book, read the following list slowly, normally, and ideally whilst taking notes. If you are doing this to qualify a book, stop reading/previewing as soon as you realize the book won’t be of help to you. Then begin the hunt for another book that might.

To preview, read in order:

Title of the book

The blurb on the back

Contents page

Any details just inside the covers (details that pertain to content, not ISBN, etc.)

Introduction to the book

Conclusion to the book

Introduction to each chapter

Conclusion to each chapter

Smaller secondary headings

Boxed and underlined ideas

Going through the entire list above would be a very thorough and exhaustive preview. Performing the first six would be sufficient for most purposes.

The previewing process alone will sometimes provide enough information to complete your purpose for reading. When only a few ideas or basic comprehension is needed, the limited but strong summarizing nature of previewing is often enough.

SIDE NOTE

I use the phrase “high-value” to mean parts of the text that have the most “top-down” explanations. These are sections that explain the wider ideas, not the details. However, if your purpose is to find specific pieces of information, it is of course going to be these parts of the text that are high-value.

Set a Clear, Book-Specific Purpose

Once you have established that a book qualifies to be read, it is helpful to set a specific purpose for the book. A clear purpose for the book itself allows you to qualify passages of text as you are reading. You can then skip the unimportant parts (those that don't give you what you want). Setting a purpose for your overall reading allows you to skip unhelpful books, and similarly, setting a book-specific purpose enables you to skip unhelpful parts of the text.

The clearer and more specific the goal is, the better. Specific goals will make it easier to ascertain which parts of the text are helpful and which are not as you read. If your goal doesn't lend itself to specificity, it can help to manipulate it so that it is more specific. An example of doing this might be beginning with the book purpose, "find out why Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo," and then altering it into something clearer, such as, "find the three most significant reasons that Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo". With a more specific goal for reading in place, you can filter through the text and see what is extraneous and what is useful more easily.

Setting a purpose for each chapter is a further extension of this principle. At the start of each chapter, ask yourself the question, "what do I want from this chapter?" or, "what do I want to find in this chapter?" As you are reading, you can then see more clearly what material is extraneous and can be skipped. Upon finishing the chapter, take the time to determine whether or not you found the necessary information.

By integrating the techniques we have learnt so far, we can create an example "multi-step reading strategy" that looks like this:

Set purpose for reading

Qualify by previewing

Set purpose for the book

Speed read, skipping the unimportant

Extended Previewing and Creating an Overview/Summary

The process of previewing a book naturally lends itself to creating an overview of a book. This is also known as creating a summary. The overview/summary might entail a series of points on a page or perhaps a diagram laying out the most important elements of the text. It is simply a unique collection of the most important elements of the book.

Writing out a summary before you begin to properly read a book may seem odd, but doing so will enable you to map out the book and understand it essentially. This clarification of the book's core ideas will prime your conscious and subconscious minds so they know what to expect in the text, and can then better engage with the text in subsequent readings.

The summary can also be a powerful re-introduction to the text if you come back to the book at a later point. If the book is your own and you will be returning to "the shelf" at a later date, you can simply put the summary inside the front cover. If you come back to the book months or years later, looking at the overview will allow you to pick up exactly where you left off before.

Creating a summary can be another technique/module that fits into a multi-step reading strategy. Below is another example of how these modules might come together.

Set purpose for reading

Qualify by previewing

Set purpose for the book

Develop preview into summary

Set purpose for Chapter 1

Speed read Chapter 1

High Value Text is Often at the Start and at the End

You may have noticed that previewing often concentrates on the start and end of sections. This is because it is here that the high-value areas normally are. The introduction and conclusion of any length of writing will have the highest value density, as it is here that the main point and the most important evidence are summarized together.

Typically, text longer than a sentence adheres to the following format:

Introduction: States the main point and central idea.

Body: A series of points that give evidence/explanation/elaboration of the main point.

Conclusion: Re-emphasis of the main point stated in the introduction that is tied together with the ideas developed in the body. A handy mnemonic for remembering this can be $1+2=3$. What is stated in the intro, 1, and body, 2, is then brought together in the conclusion, 3. Hence, $1+2=3$.

The above format is true for paragraphs, chapters, and the whole book. All will have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

To obtain the comprehension you need at the fastest speed, focus on the start and end of each paragraph and chapter. Doing so will mean you read the essential, high value areas of the text first.

To what extent you focus on the start and the end of sections will depend on how much detail you need in order to meet your purpose for reading. Often, just the start and conclusion of a book or chapter will offer enough information. Rarely will your purpose dictate that you need to focus on the body of each paragraph.

To improve your awareness of where the high value areas are in a text, take a pen and underline or highlight these areas. (Remember, focus on the start and end.)

High Value Signposts: Transition Words

As well as taking into account the form of a text (intro, body, conclusion: 1+2=3) to find high value areas, you can also focus on higher value sentences within a text. Being able to pick out and focus on these can further boost your overall speed, comprehension, and retention. These high value phrases are often preceded by “transition” words. Recognizing these words and then slowing down to give more attention to what follows will mean that you read still more effectively.

Examples of transition words:

Consequently

Therefore

Because

Importantly

Furthermore

When you see words such as these, it will usually be a sign that what follows will be of higher value. Taking notes, underlining, or simply slowing down your reading speed may improve your comprehension of these high value ideas (more on these ideas to follow).

Varying Speed

When intelligently applying multiple reading techniques and speed reading, it is best practice to frequently alter your reading speed. Varying the speed at which you read is an excellent way to make sure you give more time to the areas of higher value.

Slower reading, and especially sub-vocalizing each word, will give a small lift to comprehension. This is not just applicable for different texts, but also within the same text. Altering reading speed throughout a book means that you will drop in and out of speed reading modes in order to dovetail with the value/difficulty of each section. Your WPM (words per minute) reading speed will, therefore, fluctuate up and down to align with what you are reading.

Although I am suggesting slowing down for high value areas, I am not suggesting that speed reading doesn't cater for good comprehension; it does. Subvocalization and slow reading simply ensure better comprehension. Similarly, even greater comprehension can be attained if we actually speak aloud when reading. (Do you ever find yourself reading something aloud when you really don't "get it"?)

However, we do not usually need the comprehension that comes with subvocalization, and still rarer do we need to say a word or phrase aloud to understand it.

To clarify, it is practical to speed read and not sub-vocalize most of the time, because the text is usually not sufficiently valuable or difficult. When it does become more valuable and/or difficult, subvocalization or reading aloud provides the needed boost in comprehension.

Read the Majority of Non-Fiction the Same Way You Read a Newspaper

Newspapers are an exceptionally good source for reading quickly. This is because the layout of a newspaper and the way it is written is designed to be as easy as possible to find and read the “high-value” sections.

Newspaper articles are written so that the most important ideas are laid out first. Details are then incrementally added (this is less true for features and opinion pieces). This means that you can read news articles from the start but stop at the point at which you feel you have enough detail. If the first paragraph explains the main point, and that is all you need, you can stop there. Often the first paragraph alone will offer enough information.

If you don’t currently practice the previous reading techniques when reading newspapers, e.g., focusing on high value, altering speed, multiple readings, etc. consider beginning here, as newspapers are an easy place to start speed reading. Consider also how it may be helpful to treat the majority of non-fiction as if it were a newspaper. Read only what you want or need to and stop when you obtain enough information.

More Tips for Comprehension and Retention

The following tips will help to boost retention and comprehension levels whilst reading. Use these alongside the previous techniques and principles whenever needed. Specific occasions when retention and comprehension might be especially valuable include studying, test preparation, revising, difficult reading, and technical reading.

Technique 1 - Measure retention and comprehension by asking yourself questions about the text after you have read it.

In order to measure how well you have understood a piece of writing, as well as how effectively you have retained it, answer questions regarding the text once you have finished. Ideally, these questions are specific to the text, but it can be just as helpful (and a lot easier) to try to recall the most important key points.

How many points you try to recall will depend on the information density of the text and what level of comprehension/retention you need. The higher the comprehension/retention you need, the more key points you should try to recall. For example, if you are studying a textbook, perhaps attempt to write down five key points every 500 words.

Reading whilst aware that you need to recall key points later will itself increase comprehension/retention since it will bring more focus and urgency to your reading.

Technique 2 - Put marks at the end of each page to monitor comprehension.

If comprehension is important, and you don't want to go through a text without understanding everything in it, it is helpful to make a note of your comprehension as you go. To do this, after reading a page put a little cross at the bottom if you felt your comprehension wasn't good enough or a tick if it was. You can then return to the pages marked with "X's" later and re-read them.

(This is only possible if the material doesn't build on itself, i.e. you don't need to understand page one to understand page two.)

This is also an excellent way to gauge whether your average reading speed should be increased or decreased. Consider that if you are placing more crosses than ticks at the bottom of the pages, your comprehension isn't good enough, and you may need to slow your reading down. If you rarely put any crosses,

perhaps on one in eight pages or less, speed up.

(Ignore this technique when first learning to “direct” speed read with the techniques you learnt in section one. You will have to persevere through bad comprehension until your mind adjusts to direct speed reading.)

Technique 3 - Repeat exposure and “cram” material for short term recall.

In order to effectively retain information into your short term memory (NOT long term), re-read and repeatedly expose yourself to the material.

Technique 4 - For still better memorization (and long term recall), practice active recall.

Reviewing and attempting to actively recall (remember from memory) is an even better way to retain information. This is especially the case for long term memorization. Actively recall material regularly in order to deposit it into your long term memory.

Technique 5 - Teach and/or discuss material to both comprehend and retain.

To improve your comprehension and retention of a text, discuss and attempt to explain what you have read to someone else. Explaining the material to someone else will develop your understanding as you have to re-form the material. It will also re-affirm the memory. Finally, attempting to explain the material well enough for someone else to make sense of it will make you very conscious of whether or not you fully understand it.

Technique 6 - Read critically and imagine discussing and/or debating with the author as you read.

The more you can engage with the material, the more you will understand it. Reading critically will help. To read critically, think about what you agree and disagree with as you read. Imagine debating with the author, and don’t accept everything you read at “face value.” Perhaps write your criticisms/opinions/ideas in the margin or on another piece of paper. This will help to consolidate and crystalize your thoughts.

Integrating one or more of the above techniques to your reading strategy is a fantastic way to boost comprehension / retention whenever they are needed.

Active Reading: Note Taking as you Read

Whether reading slowly or at speed, adding notes to what you are reading and reading “actively” is a great way to boost comprehension and retention.

Note taking includes:

Underlining and/or highlighting important parts.

Writing down key points in the margin or on another piece of paper.

Writing questions, comments, and opinions in the margin or separate piece of paper.

Drawing diagrams to bring together what you have learnt. These might include mind maps, Venn diagrams, or concept maps.

The greater your interaction with the text, i.e., the more note taking and annotating you do, the higher your comprehension and retention will become.

As always, focus on the more valuable areas of the text, and vary the level of notes and interaction to match your goals. For high comprehension, take a lot of notes. If you are speed reading and only need minimal comprehension, then keep notes light and focus on the most valuable sections of the text.

The Effective Reading Model: Integrating Parts to Form a Strategy

The various techniques and principles we have covered are best utilized by integration into multi-step strategies. These can be personally tailored to fulfill your overall reading purpose.

Below are example strategies for a series of different reading purposes. This list is not exhaustive, nor definitive. Mix and match steps to create the best strategies for you and your reading.

(Each strategy follows on from first establishing your overall reading purpose.)

Purpose: Search for simple information. (Stop as soon as info is found.)

Clarify what you want to find. Deconstruct it, and set a book-specific purpose

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Speed read

Repeat step 4 until you find information you want

Purpose: Search for more detailed, specific information. (Stop as soon as info is found.)

Clarify what you want to find. Deconstruct it, and set a book-specific purpose

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Speed read

Slow read until you find information you want

Purpose: To understand the text basically. (Minimal comprehension.)

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Speed read

Purpose: Good Comprehension

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Speed read

Speed read with note taking

Repeat step 4

Purpose: Great Comprehension

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Speed read

Speed read with note taking

Slow read

Purpose: High Retention. (Perhaps for a test.)

Create questions and/or goals for what material you want to retain

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Clarify/alter what you wrote for step 1 if you have reason to

Speed read

Speed read with note taking

Create test questions

“Cram” if test is soon; actively recall answers if test is at a later date

Purpose: Reading Critically

Preview

Extended preview, create summary

Create questions to answer

Speed read with notes

Slow read with notes

Return to questions

SQ3R and PQRST

I will now present two pre-existing reading strategies used by many readers. They are proven methods that target comprehension and retention. Both, especially SQ3R, are foundational for many students. Much of the previous work in this book is owed to their success.

SQ3R

Introduced by Francis Ford Pleasant Robinson in his 1946 book *Effective Study*^[i].

Survey: Gain a basic understanding of the text. This is “previewing” as we have learnt it.

Question: Write down questions you want answered through reading the book (similar to establishing a book-specific purpose.)

Read: Read through the text (normally, slowly) and attempt to answer the questions. Write bullet points, highlight, and take notes.

Recite: Write up the answers you found to the questions asked in step 2.

Review: Go over the text again. Look over notes and your answers.

PQRST^[ii]

Preview: Preview the text through summaries, introductions, and conclusions.

Question: Write questions about the text that you want to answer through reading.

Read: Read the text at normal pace.

Summary: Create a summary (synonymous with overview) of the text. Write down the most important points in notes and diagrams - everything that you have learnt.

Test: Return to the questions you asked in step 2 and attempt to answer them.

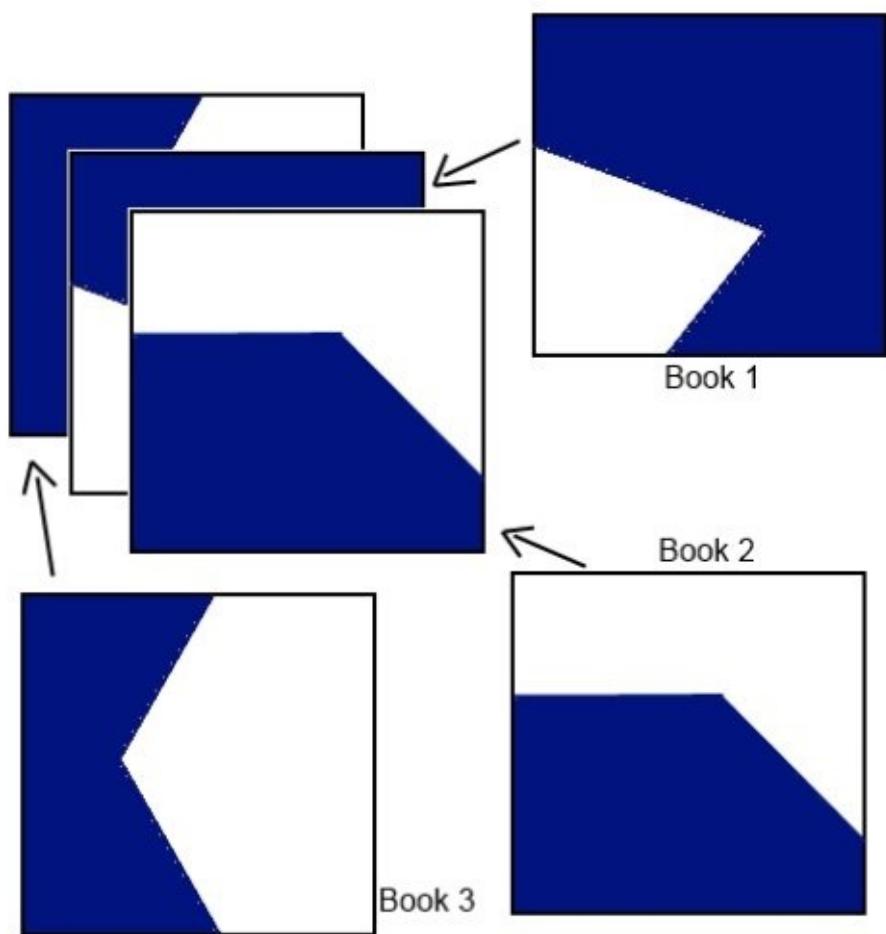
Read Multiple Books on a Topic and Learn from Multiple Forms of Information (Syntopic Learning)

An excellent technique to increase comprehension and speed is to read multiple texts on a topic. It can also help to learn from multiple forms, e.g., audio, reading, conversation, and video. By reading and/or learning from different forms, it is easy to gain multiple perspectives, thereby developing improved comprehension. This will also ensure that you gain complete coverage of a topic. Reading multiple texts to develop comprehension was first proposed by Mortimer J. Adler in his book *How to Read*. He called this “syntopic reading.”^[iii]

Comprehension can be developed excellently when the mind is exposed to an idea in a multitude of ways. When reading a series of books on a given topic, we learn about the same things but with different explanations, different examples, and subtly different takes on the topic. Thanks to these different perspectives, we can develop a more complete understanding.

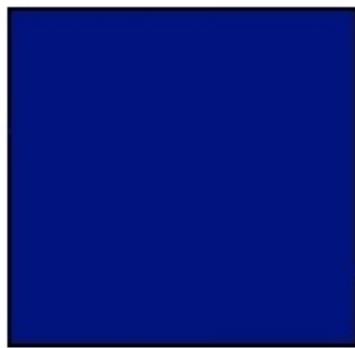
Not only does a variety of explanations of the same information help our understanding, so too does interacting with information in different forms. By learning from different forms, e.g., text, audio, conversation, video etc. we create different forms of memory including visual, emotional, and audio. This strengthens comprehension as you experience the topic in a multitude of ways. Learning through a variety of mediums also makes it more likely that you will engage your preferred learning style(s), and consequently, play to your strengths and learn more effectively.

Another benefit of reading multiple books and using numerous forms of information is that you can ensure (or at least increase the likelihood) that all the material you need is covered. Below are two pictures that express this:

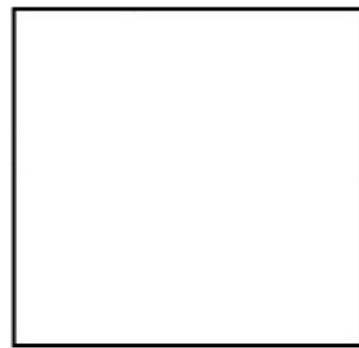


Whereby...

Total Coverage of
Required Material



No Coverage of
Required Material



Use syntopic reading and/or learning to develop understanding through multiple perspectives and to ensure you cover all the material you need.

Creating the Right Environment and Conditions for Reading

There are various things you can do to improve the effectiveness of your reading before you even open a book. The following are the building blocks of creating good reading conditions:

Good lighting. You never want to be straining your eyes. Get a lamp.

Make sure you are wearing glasses if you need them. This is perhaps obvious but needs to be said.

Read in a relaxed but alert state: breathe, stretch, or take a walk if needed.

Practice good posture with a straight back and relaxed shoulders.

Sit back in a chair that supports your neck and shoulders.

In addition, experiment with your reading environment to boost your focus and enjoyment whilst reading. If you haven't already, consider the following, and see what works well for you.

Sound:

Music: classical, rock, high tempo, low tempo

Silence (ear plugs)

White noise

Location:

Park bench

In nature: woods, fields, a beach

Alone in a room

Café/Bar

Candles/Incense

Moving images in background:

TV/Film playing in the background (muted)

Other People: Café/Bar

Which environment works best will often depend on what you are reading and why. If you are studying complex material, reading alone in a quiet, well-lit room will often be preferred. However, for casual reading for pleasure, sitting on the beach listening to your favorite band might work. It won't always be obvious what works best. For example, fast paced rock music can help some people to concentrate. If you haven't already, think about experimenting with these aspects in order to enjoy and get more from your reading.

Practicing and Enjoying Reading and Becoming a “Book-Worm”

The techniques we have explored will require varying amounts of time to master. The “direct” speed reading techniques in section one necessitate time set aside regularly and will alter how you interact with text at a more fundamental level. Learning to group words and eliminate sub-vocalization in particular will involve working through phases of poor comprehension and frustration.

The material in section two and building multi-step reading strategies will be easier to learn. However, whatever the technique, there will always be the need to practice. Also, make sure to push yourself to learn techniques that seem alien. The techniques that seem the trickiest and make the least sense may well be the ones that end up offering the most improvement to your reading.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 3: HOW TO STUDY

Introduction

The aim of this book is to give you tips to make your time studying as successful and enjoyable as possible. It contains my best advice on time management, goal setting, and how to get the best grades with the least effort. It's advice that also transfers brilliantly well to professionals, the self-employed, and anyone who manages their own projects and/or daily work cycle.

(If you fall into the non-student category, whenever you see the word "study" throughout this book, think the word "work" instead, and whenever you see "grades" think "work goals".)

There's nothing more to say, so let's get started!

Build the Study Habit and Schedule Study Times

One of the main reasons students don't get good grades is simple: they don't have the study habit. Being able to regularly make yourself sit down and learn the necessary material is an essential part of becoming a great student.

Both when you study and the length of time you study for should be as regular and routine as possible. This will make the habit of studying easier to begin and sustain over time. Working at the same time every day is the best way to do this, e.g., between 7 and 9 every morning. (This time works well as it is before classes.) Of course, your study time will depend on the courses you are taking and your other commitments.

Working at set times every day will help build the habit of studying. There will be less urge to procrastinate and do unimportant tasks because you know when you should be working and when you shouldn't. Eventually it will actually take more willpower not to study at these times because you will subconsciously expect to be utilizing your study time.

Time Box Tasks

To build a sense of urgency and avoid being overwhelmed with work, it is helpful to create definite periods of time or ‘time boxes’ in which you work.

Set a timer and do not work for more or less than the time you set. Then, take a break for a small timed period. Rinse and repeat. Working like this will help you overcome procrastination because you will not feel the sense of being overwhelmed by a project. One of the main reasons that students (or anyone) procrastinate is that they feel anxious about not knowing how to begin and/or that they will have to keep working for a long time. By limiting the time spent working on something to a set number, we can alleviate anxiety caused by either of these problems.

Working for a definite amount of time also helps stop perfectionism and curbs the desire to spend more time on a project than is necessary. Many people suffer from this. They work long hours to make their project as perfect as it can possibly be. Sometimes this leads to people doing great things. However, it is more often an enemy of productivity as it leads to a task dragging on for longer than needed. For example, if it takes 10 hours to complete an assignment to a 70 percent standard, is it worth working 20 hours to complete it to a 72 percent standard? Sometimes yes, but usually no. Time boxing is an excellent tool for stopping perfectionism in its tracks. It forces us to complete a task to a good standard and no more.

Both for study sessions and for whole projects, many students find they work more effectively by working to a time scale. In doing so, you will create a greater sense of urgency to your work, as you only think about continuing work until the timer sounds. The alternative of working for an unspecified amount of time makes both beginning and continuing work more difficult. It also encourages a slow, non-urgent work mode and/or perfectionism. To avoid this, use time boxing and set time limits for your work.

Prioritize Assignments and Be Aware of Grade Boundaries/Percentages

The extent to which a project affects your grade and how long it takes to complete will vary in relation to one another. Therefore, it is important to spend more time on those projects that contribute more marks and less on those that don't.

At the beginning of the academic year, you should deconstruct your course so that you know what percentage each module/exam/project will contribute toward the final grade. This will reveal which areas require more time and effort than others. It will often not be clear what the more valuable modules are until you do this.

You can then place more emphasis on the areas that contribute more to your overall grade and limit time spent on the less valuable. Re-adjust where you are placing your time and effort as you receive feedback throughout the year. Be flexible and note where you are struggling to get the grades you want. When you receive marks for coursework, rework these into your plans. For example, if you do very well in a piece of coursework, scale back the time you planned to spend revising for its corresponding exam, and instead, prepare for an exam on a topic you are struggling with. There is no way to perfectly balance this, as it will be based on guesswork. Simply do your best, and work as intelligently as you can.

Test Yourself Frequently

Always being aware of exactly how well you are progressing toward your final grade is essential in order to adjust your study plans and better understand what you need to work on. Apart from coursework and feedback in class, testing yourself is the best way to do this.

Gather past exam papers/questions and frequently test yourself with them. Ideally, use entire test papers from previous years (assuming the course hasn't changed too drastically). Also, test yourself in conditions similar to how you will take the actual exam. Giving yourself the same amount of time as you will get in the real exam is crucial. Set a timer and stick to it. Once you have completed the exam paper, mark it yourself or give it to a teacher/lecturer/fellow student to mark. Make sure whoever is marking it does so by following a correct answer sheet/mark scheme.

Ascertaining what level you are currently working at will reveal where your subsequent studies should concentrate. For example, if you are working on an essay-based exam, you might learn that the content of your writing is fine, but the quantity needs to increase. In this case, you can take further practice tests and simply work to write faster.

Start Work Early

Many people find studying in the morning works best for them. Try this yourself and see if you can join the club. Getting your studies out of the way first thing is an excellent way to get more studying done.

Starting work early is often easier because there is less chance of getting distracted and becoming involved doing other things. Watching TV, Internet browsing, or relaxing with friends are often best left until after you have done your studying. These activities then become rewards instead of distractions, and you can enjoy the rest of the day without worry that you should have done more. Studying earlier in the day within a definite “time box,” before you have a chance to get distracted by anything else, is a great way to increase the efficiency of your studying and enjoy your days more.

Have Fun Away From Your Studies

If you work intelligently, there is no need to work non-stop. Plan many breaks, and arrange for fun! Enjoyable activities boost your focus and memory. In the same way that muscles need rest after exercise to grow, so too your mind needs to relax after it is exerted.

It is helpful to get as far away as possible from your study and work habits. Take time to travel to another city, another country, or simply try to do something new. Getting away and having fun will mean that when you do return to studying, you will be completely ready to learn, to work hard, and get the best grades you are capable of.

Create Study Routines: 60-60-30, 50-50-10

Creating definite study routines will allow you to better manage your time. It is difficult and unsustainable to work constantly for hours at a time, so implement regular patterns in which you alternate between working and taking breaks. This is short-scale time boxing applied to a rigorous work/rest pattern.

Experiment with what works best for you as different stretches of concentration work well for different people. Some prefer a longer four hour work session to get into “flow,” while others prefer shorter ones so as to never feel overwhelmed by a project.

An example work/rest study routine that fits well into a normal day is to work for a 50 minute period followed by a 10 minute break, and every four hours take an hour break for a meal. However, there are no hard and fast rules. You might prefer to work for 90 minutes at a time, and then take a 30 minute break. The aim is to find what works well for you so that you can sustain working for a long period of time with good focus and minimum fatigue.

If you feel exhausted or too mentally strained with a routine, then work for smaller cycles. You can always increase the work time lengths if it seems doable later.

Make sure to always use a timer, and stop working when it sounds, even if you want to continue. You often won’t be aware that you need a break when you actually do. If you become successful with this habit, you will find you can create work-rest routines that are generative and allow you to work with focus for 6, 8, 10, or even 12 hour days whilst still feeling good.

Minimize Possible Distractions and Eliminate Multi-Tasking

One of the greatest enemies to successful work in the modern age is the abundance of distractions. When you are studying, it is imperative to make sure that you study and do nothing else. Your ability to focus all of your attention on the task at hand is a powerful asset. Attempting to do more than one thing at a time or switching between activities jeopardizes this.

Turn off your mobile phone and close the internet browser. If these remain a possible distraction, make it as difficult as possible to access them. For example, turn off your phone and put it out of sight or out of reach. Consider giving it to a friend or leaving it in another room until you are finished working.

These distractions will compromise how effectively you work, and even worse, can lead to you stopping work altogether. Just checking a website or your phone for a moment can cause a series of internal triggers, and in no time you will lose the motivation and focus you had. This can be a big obstacle for students and employees alike. If this sounds like your past studying attempts, make eliminating distractions a priority.

Set Goals for Grades

Setting goals for the grades you want will make it easier to ascertain the level of work required to receive them. The goal of simply “getting the best grades you can” is good, but not good enough. These goals need to be more specific and ideally very specific. Many students already have goals for the grades they want to achieve. If you don’t have any, start thinking about what yours could be now.

Having clear goals for the grades you want will make it easier to ascertain what you need to learn in order to achieve them. This is partly achieved by saving you from wasting time learning things you don’t need to. Some skills and information might take a lot of time to learn, but if they are beyond what you need to learn it will be a waste of time. For example, for an essay-based exam, there is no use learning a large amount of quotations (enough to get an A) if your target is a B grade and your grasp of concepts isn’t nearly strong enough to get a B.

Goals for grades will also allow you to celebrate successes and push you to do more when needed.

Once you have decided what your target grades are, find out precisely what you need to work on in order to achieve them. Then build your study schedule around working on these areas (with regular testing to ensure you are progressing well).

Clarify Study Session Goals

Every time you sit down to study, you should be clear about what you are going to do and what you want to gain from the session. Planning to “study for module A” won’t be nearly as effective as “50 minutes reading and annotating chapter 1.” It is far too easy to study aimlessly while naively believing that you are learning. Working in this fuzzy, diffused way will often mean you don’t learn or progress in your work. Instead, have focused, clear targets each time you sit.

At the end of the study session, you will also be able to check off the task, and this will also help you feel more motivated to continue on. The sense of incremental progress with each completed study session will build momentum and make each successive study session easier.

Detach from Work While on Breaks

When you take a short break from work, it is very important that you really do take a break.

If you are studying at a computer screen (perhaps you are writing up some lecture notes), the break you take must be away from the computer. If you are taking only 10 minute breaks every hour, it is important to make this break a time for your mind and body to separate from what you have been working on.

If you are working at a computer, opening a new browser and checking a news channel or a social networking site is no longer working, but is it truly taking a break? Not really. Instead, move away from the desk and away from the computer. Do something physical. Maybe take a walk or lie down. At the very least, don't look at a screen. The break needs to be spent on something different from what you have been doing. If you have been sitting at a computer screen, lying down outside on the grass for 10 minutes could help you to unwind sufficiently.

You might find it helpful to engage your mind with something else altogether. If you don't engage your mind with something else, like a video game or book, you might find your mind racing on with what you were doing. To get more mental separation and a better break, consider doing something that takes your attention away from what you were working on altogether.

Why are you at School/College/University?

Knowing exactly what you want from your course and what you are going to do afterward will further help you to focus and study well.

Perhaps you are career-driven and want to go into a certain industry after your course. If this is the case, research the job role you want, how much money you want to be earning, where you want to work, etc. Getting details will help you feel grounded and motivated to continue on with the course.

For some students, there is no definite job role at the end. This does not mean that you cannot find a clear purpose for studying hard. Maybe you enjoy the subject and want to study it for this reason alone. If this is the case, consider concrete things you can do to get more from it. This could be getting an article in your field published.

Understanding why you are studying and what you really want from your course is a great way to further boost your focus and enjoyment.

Find a Study Partner and/or a Study Group

Studying with other people is a great way to get more from your course.

Depending on your preferences for working and your personality, this can be a fantastic prospect or a daunting one. However, creating a study group, or at the very least one person with whom you regularly work, can help a lot. Explaining topics and quizzing one another will boost your comprehension and ensure that you thoroughly understand the material.

Make sure you choose the right people to study with. It might not be best to study with a friend you also go out partying with. Additionally, make sure you study with people of a similar ability. ‘Carrying’ someone who is struggling won’t be productive.

Working in a group can be a brilliant idea as well. This can be the most enjoyable way to work, especially if you are naturally highly social. Working in a group helps you to motivate one another and can provide many points of view.

Perfect Necessary Skills and Seek Feedback

There will inevitably be skills within your subject you need to master. These skills will usually require someone else to critique your ability. Seek as much feedback as possible in order to improve these skills.

Whether you are working in a laboratory or writing essays, the skills you have to develop cannot be marked and improved on entirely by yourself. You need an expert. This person will often be a teacher assigned to you. It might then be a matter of luck how helpful their critiques are and whether they are offered as regularly as you require them. If they aren't offered enough or aren't helpful enough, seek another tutor from the establishment to replace and/or work alongside to provide extra help.

In cases such as essay writing, you will need to practice regularly. Practice even if your work won't be marked. The more feedback you can get the better, so it doesn't hurt to ask other teachers to critique your work as well.

Whatever the skill set you are trying to develop, practice properly, practice regularly, seek feedback and then improve. Use this process again and again, until you develop your skill set into an art form.

Build a Relationship with a Tutor/Mentor

Having a go-between for you and your school/establishment will prove very helpful. Many centers will provide you with a ‘tutor,’ i.e., someone you meet with regularly in order to discuss your progress. If yours doesn’t provide this extra help, find someone who can take on this role for you.

Your tutor can provide guidance for your course and let you know what to expect. He or she can answer questions on any number of things. For example, a tutor might help you to find old exam papers to work from, or find out where an exam will be seated.

If anything goes wrong during your course and you need help (perhaps you fall ill and need an extension on a project), help and advice from your tutor could be essential. Also, if you have moved away from home and need guidance on everyday issues, for example, money management, eating out, etc. Having someone older who can guide you will make life easier.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 4: HOW TO WRITE A GREAT ESSAY IN 8 HOURS OR LESS

Introduction

My goal is to give you the very best advice on how you can become brilliant at writing essays. Having researched many books and articles, I realized there is a noticeable absence of well written and accessible guides to writing essays. In order to remedy this, I brought together the best information in the field and condensed it down into this short eBook.

Unlike many eBooks, there are no sections of “filler” information. I have edited and cut down ruthlessly to bring to you a book which, I hope, will give the clearest guidance. I also wanted to pack this eBook with practical and easily actionable ideas. I don’t want you to walk away from this eBook with a glut of information that isn’t directly helpful to your essay writing, so much of it you will be able to put to use right away!

This eBook is roughly divided into two sections. First, I will cover a step-by-step process to writing a great essay. Second, I will go through a series of principles and techniques that will allow you to create an essay at high speed. Fusing the advice from each section will provide you with a complete tool set to write a great essay in 8 hours or less. However, please bear in mind that the promise of an 8-hour essay is only possible for more modest essay lengths. For essays longer than 3,000 words, it is in my experience, difficult to write something of quality within 8 hours.

Now, let’s begin your crash course on essay writing!

The Great Essay: Choosing the Right Question

This advice is only applicable if you are given the option of choosing your essay topic/title. If this is not relevant for you, feel free to skip to the next chapter.

When choosing your essay title, it is important to achieve a suitably narrow focus. You do not want a title that is too expansive because it will then be harder to cover every important point that needs to be addressed. The other side of this is also true: you do not want to create a title that is so tight in its focus that you can't find enough sources, and so don't have enough of value to say on the subject.

There is nothing worse than sinking hours into an essay, only to realize that there is not enough material to create a piece of interesting work. Students normally go the other way and pick a very expansive title because they think that this will be easier to write, and in a manner it is. It is certainly a little safer to opt for a title that describes a broader topic, but be careful; your task can become daunting as you attempt to summarize large amounts of information, and are unable to find the time to closely analyze a given source.

Attempt to find a balance so that you do not run out of things to say, but also don't waste time covering huge amounts of ground at the expense of achieving a precise, focused analysis. Do a small amount of research before you choose a title in order to estimate how much material you can create for your essay title before you commit.

The Great Essay: Begin with a Question

Questions are the best way to begin an essay, as effective writing needs to address a question. An essay is then all about finding a resolution: an answer that becomes your thesis. Developing an essay around a question also helps our writing to be more specific and helps you stick to a definite course.

If you can choose your essay title, it is often a good idea to make it a question. If you have been given a title that is not a question (or feel it best to have a title that is not a question), always rearrange the title briefly to help your understanding and make working with the essay easier.

The answer to the question is the core of your essay: it is the ‘thesis’ of your piece. To write a high-quality essay, the thesis must be very clear and definite. A strong piece of writing comes from a confident and unambiguous answer to a question. Without this your writing will be weak and ineffective, and will not get you a good grade. These aspects build on each other like the foundations of a house: without a clear and narrow focus, a good question, and a strong thesis, your essay will be less likely to succeed.

When defining your thesis, it is also a good idea to use superlatives to make it as strong as possible. This is especially true for a piece of journalism or for commercial writing. Using superlatives will grab the attention of the reader and suck them into purchasing what you are selling. When studying, it depends on the establishment and what purpose you are writing for; inquire as to what is encouraged. A great essay title could be: “The Most Important Reason the North Won the Civil War.” Notice that this is more interesting and compelling than the more lackluster “Why the North Won the Civil War.”

The Great Essay: Researching

Researching your essay well is extremely important. It is essential you do not miss any of the important aspects that must be included in the essay. Therefore, it is best to initially cast a net to find what must be included. You may later do more specific research with a “hook and line” to discover the details that will create a complete picture.

For the preliminary “net casting,” it can be a good idea to find a short and succinct source; a source that provides a summary of everything you will be writing on. If your essay itself is relatively short, say less than 3,000 words, perhaps use three good sources that provide overviews of the topic. Find where these sources overlap and you will begin to understand the more important aspects to be included. This is not a precise art, but over time you will develop a feel for how much research needs to be done. But try to use at least three sources for the initial overview. Additionally, if a source seems more reputable and better written, focus more on that one.

These initial sources, which give a good overview of the topic, will act as a guide to your further research. Depending on how niche / how popular your essay title is, you will have to vary the time you spend researching. If it is a unique title that has not had much written on it before, you will have to spend a lot of time researching. However, more often than not this will only be necessary in the final stages of a university course. Up to this point you will be able to find quality information fairly easily.

The Internet is the easiest place to start researching, especially if you are struggling to begin to work on your essay. Quickly Googling the main aspects of your essay should reveal enough information to push you in the right direction. For the detailed research that comes later, use online databases of articles and, of course, the best library available.

The Great Essay: Planning

The plan is all about getting your best ideas down on paper so you know what you are going to address in the essay. Start building the plan once you have a good amount of research material assembled. When beginning to plan, don't feel that you must have a perfect collection of research and have read everything. Just have enough sources at hand to feel fairly confident that you could finish an OK essay with those alone. Once the plan is developed, you can flesh out the research as needed.

The plan you build is not a perfect model for the essay, so be flexible and ready to change things. The essay itself may turn out quite differently from the plan you make at first. Do not get attached to the plan you make, as it is nothing more than a possible course, a guide that helps you find the next step. If needed, return to the plan throughout your essay writing and amend, adapt, and improve it as you see fit, and as new ideas come to light.

A quick note on planning for essay-based exams:

For exam essays, making a plan is typically a good idea, but make sure it is a quick plan. There is nothing worse than wasting precious exam time by trying to create a perfect plan or to procrastinate on actually writing the essay by making a plan. Spend, at most, five minutes on this. Two minutes will probably be ideal.

The only thing you need to do is jot down the most important 3-6 points you want to cover and perhaps a note of quotations you can draw on to support them. A plan for an essay exam is normally a good idea, but you don't have to make one. If you are well prepared and have completed many practice essays, you may not need to. In which case you can leap into the essay writing and begin your introduction.

The Great Essay: Writing an Introduction

An essay must always begin with an introduction. The introduction is a paragraph in which you state, in the clearest manner possible, what your essay will endeavor to do (notice my introduction to this eBook). Openly state your thesis, keep it simple, and ensure your essay stays on point. The first sentence can be the thesis boiled down to its simplest form, e.g., "The most important reason the North won the Civil War is..."

The introduction needs to only be a short section of the essay. If it is a 3,000 word essay, a 300-400 word introduction would be a good target to aim for. If it is any less, you won't have enough words to clearly present your thesis. There are no hard and fast rules, but I would warn against going much higher than this. Anything over 500 words for a 3,000 word essay will become a waste of time and take up valuable words. Words better spent providing evidence to prove your thesis.

Writing the introduction is normally the first thing you will write, but it can be a better approach to leave writing the introduction until the end when you are writing the conclusion too. This is because occasionally you will have little idea how to answer an essay title. Perhaps you don't know which side of an argument you will support. In this case it can be best (and quicker) to simply begin researching and writing the essay. After you've begun this process, you will be better equipped to discover the side of the argument you find most compelling. You can then return at the end of the essay to write the introduction.

Make the introduction an interesting and poignant entry to your essay that contains the thesis. The introduction draws the reader in and makes them want to read more. If you write a good introduction, the whole essay becomes easier to write. It is the seed that can bloom into a whole essay. A strong introduction will inform the reader what to expect from the essay, helping to make the whole piece clearer, easier to read, and more compelling.

The Great Essay: Grab the Reader's Attention

The first line(s) of your essay and introduction can be important in keeping the reader interested. This advice is more valuable if you are writing an article for a publication or a blog article, and less so for an academic essay. If you are unsure what is appropriate, check with a teacher. Here are two possible ways to grab the reader's attention.

A quotation can be an excellent way to start an essay. A quotation that clearly presents your thesis, or perhaps a quotation that is famously associated with the topic you are writing on is an interesting and exciting way to kick things off. The more articulate and powerfully phrased the quotation, the more you will draw in the reader/marker.

A joke or a story can also be an interesting way to begin a piece of writing. This is especially true if you are writing for entertainment or in a more casual form.

These are just potential ideas; don't feel obliged to start your introduction with them. A "normal" sentence is absolutely fine. "There are many reasons why the North was victorious in the American Civil War..." This is good too.

The Great Essay: Writing the Body

Between the introduction and conclusion there is what I will refer to as the “body” of your essay. This is the core of your piece and is distinctly different from both the introduction and conclusion in regards to its purpose.

When writing the body of your essay, you are attempting to elaborate and describe your thesis whilst consistently providing evidence for why it is true. Depending on the nature of the question and how many words are required, the number of points can vary. A good rule of thumb is to have three main points to support the thesis. Each of these can have smaller sub-points, maybe again three for each. Every one of these contributes like bricks in a wall, and creates the overall presentation and argument for your thesis.

It is a good idea to start with your weakest supporting points and then move to the stronger reasons later. Your essay should always endeavor to be persuasive, making as strong a case as possible for your thesis. Moving from weaker to stronger arguments will create momentum for your argument, and when the conclusion finally comes, the reader will be primed to hear your closing arguments and most inclined to agree with them.

Throughout the essay, in the attempt to elaborate on and prove your thesis, it is essential to provide information from your research as proof. This is a careful blend of revealing your own ideas mixed in with the ideas of others.

The Great Essay: Keep on Topic

Throughout the essay, you need to always be drawing your writing back to the thesis and the central question your essay is endeavoring to answer. If you are not directly answering the question and giving evidence for your answer, you are wasting time. It is as simple as that. Depending on your current experience and skill level at writing essays, this may be an aspect to your work that can boost your grade powerfully.

This simple habit is often the key difference between people who can write good essays and those who can't. Many students think they will get marks for writing down any information related to the topic/essay question. They think they will accrue points for knowledge and understanding, but this is not the case. If your writing does not answer and directly relate back to the title, it is a waste of time.

Even university and college students can be guilty of this. They can raise a crucially important point, but then fail to draw it into the essay and comment on why and how it is relevant to their thesis. Do not be guilty of this; be sure to **ALWAYS** remain on topic.

Staying on topic contributes to the form of the piece as well. A paragraph should make a point at the start and then give the reasons why it is true. The last sentence of the paragraph summarizes the paragraph's point and puts it into the context of the whole essay.

When learning to keep on topic, it can be useful to make it very obvious that you are staying on point, for example, you can say: "another reason the North won the Civil War is..." Doing this is like writing with training wheels. Later when you have learned to write with more deft complexity, there is no need to use such simple sentence props. But as a beginner, in order to make sure you are always keeping on topic, writing in this manner can be brilliantly helpful.

The Great Essay: Write with Clarity

It is always important to write with lucidity and clarity. A great essay is easy to read and presents ideas in a coherent manner. The goal is effective communication, and writing with clarity is an essential element to this.

Always err on the side of simple and more easily understood language. Your sentence structure and presentation of ideas needs to be easily consumed by the reader. Until you develop your experience and abilities beyond the humble advice of this eBook, make writing with clarity a constant priority.

The Great Essay: Present a Balanced Argument (until the end)

Your essay is the presentation of your thesis and what you believe to be true, but it is important to also present the counterarguments to your thesis. An essay needs to be discursive; for every argument you make, present alternative arguments and then comment on which you find compelling and why. Rinse and repeat until the final section of your essay, just before the conclusion, then come down as strongly as possible on the side of the argument you believe to be true, and present your most compelling reasons for this.

Again, there is always room for flexibility; perhaps you go between arguments for your thesis in one paragraph, and then in the following paragraph argue why your thesis is stronger. Writing like this is a straightforward way to create good discourse.

Remember, balance is key to your piece, especially for an academic essay. For articles in journalism balance is less important. Here instead, attention-grabbing ideas and propositions are paramount.

The Great Essay: Using Quotations

Quotations are essential to a good essay. They are the evidence that support the ideas you are presenting. They are like soldiers going into battle to fight for their side of an argument. Look to find powerful and compelling quotations to support your thesis and to give due weighting to counterarguments.

The quotation always requires three aspects, normally in three distinct sentences. These three phases are:

Point

Quotation

Comment

The first phase establishes the context for the quotation and explains and emphasizes why you are using it, for example: “The following quotation demonstrates that industrial strength was a contributing factor to the North winning the Civil War.”

The second phase is the quotation itself.

The third phase is your own comment on the quotation. Here you explain how the quotation supports your initial point.

Use quotations regularly; every paragraph of the ‘body’ of the essay should be littered with quotations. However, take care not to make quotations longer than your own writing. Attempt to work them into your own writing, never letting them dominate the word quota more than necessary. Certainly no more than a quarter of your essay should be made up of quotations.

Additionally, find out how important quotations are in the essay-marking scheme. Sometimes they are essential, and you will be marked on having a certain number of them in your essay. Other times mark schemes view them as more like the icing on the cake.

If you are working to memorize quotations to use in an essay-based exam, be savvy by choosing those that can be used to make a variety of points. For example, pick a quotation that reveals a few themes, as well as the use of language, and so on. This way you can dramatically cut down the number of

quotations you need to learn, whilst always having quotations to use in the exam.

The Great Essay: Writing the Conclusion

The final section of the essay is the conclusion. This follows the closing arguments in the body of the essay and brings the entire essay together. The conclusion re-states your thesis alongside the most compelling evidence you have assembled in the body.

If you are unsure about writing your conclusion, go back to the introduction and see what you wrote there. The introduction and conclusion are similar in what they are attempting to do. Both of them talk about the essay as a whole and emphasize the goals of the essay. If you have already written the introduction, look to it for guidance and build upon those ideas to create a more detailed explanation of why your thesis is true. Work to tie the thesis in with the points and evidence you gave throughout the essay. Also mention in brief the counterarguments, along with why they didn't hold sway over the arguments in favor of your thesis.

Do not feel pressured to write the conclusion only at the end of your essay, nor to write your introduction first. If you have a very clear thesis and know exactly where your essay is going, it is easiest to write the introduction first and the conclusion last. Often, however, you will not be able to enjoy such clarity with your essay. In this case, it may be easiest to write your introduction last and perhaps compose your conclusion half way through, when you finally feel clarity as to where the essay must end. There are no definite rules, and often you will have to adapt your approach depending on how well you are engaging with the essay.

The Great Essay: Editing

It takes returning to an essay and reworking the ideas again and again to fashion something great. Editing will be half the battle, so always set aside time and expect to invest in reading over your essay and improving it repeatedly.

Editing improves the text, making it more effective in every way. Work on things like clarity, grammar, and creating balanced arguments. All of these things will need to be worked on and honed again and again to achieve a great essay.

Many students resist editing their essay because they believe it is not worth the time or because they are nervous about the quality of the first draft and perhaps feel embarrassed about reading it again. You must overcome this. Always re-read and edit the essay a minimum of two times.

The extent to which you need to edit your essay will vary based on the quality of the first draft. Obviously, the better research and preparation you do, the better this draft will be, but often even when these are both done excellently, there will still need to be an extensive re-working of the essay. Sometimes just to complete the first draft, you will have to skip between ideas in an odd manner and create a mess of sentences, which will inevitably take a lot of time to re-write and arrange coherently. The time you spend editing will vary for different essays, so expect the worst and set time aside to edit. This process will usually take at least as long as writing the first draft.

It can be a good idea to leave time between edits. “Sleeping on it” can be helpful, or at the very least, take a walk to clear your head. Unless you are writing against the clock, taking time away from the essay will enable you to take a more critical look at it when you return. Leaving time between edits will also help you to come to a deeper understanding of the essay topic. It may be that when you return, your conscious and subconscious minds have found new insights.

The easiest way to edit is in different phases, as doing it all at once in an effort to create a perfect essay can be too much (I will talk more about this in “The 8 Hour Essay”). These “sweeps” will become easier and quicker each time. At first, you will be re-organizing sentences and making the piece more logical. By the final sweep, you will be making small grammatical changes.

Additionally, ensure that you are well aware of the form requirements in your course and follow them precisely: cite quotations, make a complete bibliography, etc. Neglecting this area is the easiest way to lose marks. Formatting accurately only require a small amount of time, so there really is no excuse.

The Great Essay: Proof Read

Once you have edited your essay and are happy with it, do one final sweep to catch all the possible typos that may have crept into the text.

Changing the form you are reading in, for example, by printing the essay out and marking it on paper rather than proofreading on your computer is a great way to help catch typos, as it forces your eyes and mind to interact with the text in a slightly different way. If this seems too much effort (or you don't have the time), a quick trick is to change the font type and/or size. This will help you catch errors by altering the aesthetic of the words on the screen.

It is also a good idea to pass on the work to a friend or colleague – preferably someone with experience with writing and a good eye – as they should be able to catch errors you have missed.

The following section of the book will address how to create an essay at speed: “The 8 Hour Essay.”

The 8 Hour Essay: Create a Process

In order to make writing your essay as effective and easy as possible, it is a fantastic idea to create your own process to go through every time you write an essay. In this eBook I am providing a host of techniques that you can incorporate into your essay-writing process. However, make the final process your own and consider looking to other essay-writing resources, as this eBook doesn't contain every idea out there.

Perhaps give yourself an hour to research online, then an hour at the local library for your research time, and so on. In finding a process you can repeat, you will ease the pressure on yourself and find it easier each time.

Take the time now to use the tips given earlier in this book to make a step-by-step process for every element of the essay you are writing. Make it simple and effective. Later, I will show you a recommended example process for essay writing.

The 8 Hour Essay: Re-Phrasing

If you can become proficient at quickly rephrasing ideas into your own words, you can become excellent at writing great essays, fast. Ultimately, this is the central aspect to modern academic writing – to research ideas, understand them, and then write them up.

Now, I am definitely not talking about plagiarism. You do not want to plagiarize, ever. Increasingly, faculties and teachers have access to software that uncovers this. But more importantly, you shouldn't plagiarize because – and I know it sounds cliché – you really are cheating yourself, and worst of all, buying into an immature worldview that it is possible to get something for nothing.

To improve your rephrasing skills, practice is very important. Practice writing an essay, but attempt to minimize research and writing time by reading a paragraph or two and then re-writing it into your own words immediately. The better you can get at doing this, the better you will become at writing great essays quickly.

The 8 Hour Essay: Rapid Research

An essential element to researching effectively and quickly is to become better at qualifying potential sources. This means you can rapidly establish whether a source will help you to write your essay or not.

Students often waste a lot of time reading material that is close to the topic of their essay title, but not so close that they would actually use the source. This should be actively avoided. Reading around the topic is absolutely fine if you have a lot of time or want to enjoy the material more. But if you are attempting to write an essay quickly, it is of paramount importance to study only sources that will help you directly answer your essay.

Whenever you are confronted with a possible resource, ask yourself this question: “Is this going to help me write my essay?” Too often students act as if they are instead answering the question, “Is this vaguely related to my essay?” and then begin to read anything and everything they come across.

To quickly ascertain whether a source will be of help to you, it is a great idea to look at the contents page, checking if any of the chapter titles contain relevant key words or phrases. Skimming the introduction, the conclusion, and scanning a few of the pages will also help you to qualify the book more effectively.

Always ensure that the source you are using will directly help you write your essay; wasting time reading things that are related, but won’t help you directly, is one of the biggest barriers to writing a great essay quickly.

The 8 Hour Essay: Using Technology Effectively

When writing your essay, there will be many occasions in which the effective use of a computer will greatly increase your ability to create an essay both of quality and at great speed.

*The following techniques are written as if you are working on Microsoft software, but the same approaches are invariably applicable to Apple and other OS' as well.

The most obvious thing to say is that you should be writing on a computer/laptop. If you are writing on paper, even if only for the first draft, you will be sacrificing the various advantages there are to be had by using a computer. Indeed, at every point it is advisable for you to use a computer instead of pen and paper, as the benefits outweigh any drawbacks.

When you compose an essay on a computer, it is much easier to save and retrieve work, edit, and to type new material. In addition, using a keyboard is always quicker than writing with pen and paper. It may, of course, take you a certain amount of time to become competent and speedy with a keyboard, but in time (and with diligent practice) you will certainly be able to write at a prompt pace.

There are many touch-typing lessons available on the Internet. Go to YouTube or similar sites and you will be able to easily find short, quality lessons that will allow you to greatly increase your typing speed.

Buy and use a quality keyboard. If you are using a laptop, consider how the keyboard may not be as comfortable and easy to use as a standalone keyboard. It can also be worth your while to experiment with ergonomic keyboards. There are various designs, so perhaps go to a local tech store and ask to try out a few. If you are writing essays as part of a course, you are going to spend a lot of time with your keyboard, so invest in a quality one that allows you to write quickly and comfortably.

Using a large monitor, or perhaps investing in using two next to each other, will also help you to produce your essay more quickly. The space to have two separate “windows” open at the same time will make taking notes when you are researching online much easier, as you can type straight away from the text you are researching instead of having to minimize and maximize windows again and

again.

The space to have two windows open is also handy when editing, as you can have two documents open at the same time. On one side you can put material that needs to be placed within the essay, and the other can be the final essay as it takes shape. Being able to see and work with both simultaneously allows you to easily rearrange your essay without losing material and getting lost in what can become a repetitive copy and pasting process.

When researching online, you will come across many articles and web pages that may seem daunting – sources in which you know there is quality material, but you are reluctant to begin working with the information as it is. There are a couple of tricks to make researching these articles a little easier.

First of all, if you are looking at a long web page or article, you can make it much more manageable to work with if you copy and paste it into a Word document. Once you have done this, you can increase the font size, perhaps convert the font to something more readable, and also get rid of the margins so that text takes up most of the screen, allowing you to scroll down less often. Doing this will make the material easier to read, and will save your eyes, as well as your time, if you have a long article you want to read or scan.

It is also useful to utilize the search function in order to pick out the areas of the text you need to address. The shortcut to do this on a webpage or in Word is “ctrl f.” Become familiar with using this as it will save you a great deal of time. Using this function you can skip through what can often be needlessly drawn out articles and immediately find the snippets of information you need. This is another reason why working and researching with technology is more effective, as this function alone can save many hours compared to finding things in a book.

Other shortcuts you can utilize are “ctrl c” to copy, “ctrl x” to cut, and “ctrl v” to paste work. These can save time and energy, particularly when editing or rearranging your essay.

Finally, if the text is too small on a webpage you can use “ctrl +” to zoom in and “ctrl -” to zoom out. This is handy if the article you are reading is presented in an unhelpfully small manner and if, for whatever reason, you don’t want to transfer it to a Word document.

Become competent at using tricks like these when writing your essay and you will begin to see the full benefits of using technology to write essays at a much

higher speed.

The 8 Hour Essay: Do Not Backtrack When Writing

One of the most powerful ways to increase the speed at which you work is to always focus on doing one phase of the essay at a time. When you are writing your first draft, you are doing that and not attempting to do the final edit and create a perfect final essay.

One of the most common time-wasters when writing an essay is to continually review the work, editing and improving what you have just written. Producing your essay will be much quicker and more effective if you simply keep writing, and only write, when doing your first draft. Do not even re-read what you have written, let alone attempt to improve it.

This will be difficult for some, and it does take a degree of faith in what you are writing, but it is by far a more effective way to write. When you are writing, keep writing, and do not return to what you have done. Later, when it is time to edit, think of it as doing “sweeps” of editing. The initial work you do on the first sweep does not have to produce the perfect, finished article, as you will return to improve it again.

It will become frustrating if you spend too long at a certain point attempting to perfect a given paragraph. It will take up a disproportionate amount of time to bring it to a good standard because you do not let your mind have space to return to it later. Instead, keep the editing process progressive and know that you can return to do another editing sweep once this one is complete. It will otherwise become frustrating and you will lose momentum.

Whatever phase of the essay you are at, focus on that process alone – never back track when writing the first draft, and never attempt to edit something to perfection on the first pass.

The 8 Hour Essay: Write the Easiest Section First

When you are beginning to write your essay, the best place to start is the place you feel most comfortable. Begin writing on whatever aspect of the piece you most enjoy or feel that you could easily write about. There are a few reasons that writing in this way is powerful and will ensure you write better material with increased speed.

If you begin and continue to write on the topics you are most confident about, the essay writing will be easier. The easier it is for you, the faster you will be able to write. When you are working against the clock, there is no time to wait for inspiration or to figure out all the answers.

When you write from what is easiest, you build a powerful momentum in the writing process and you will notice yourself quickly going past word count milestones. This will increase your motivation and sense of achievement as you go, and encourage you to continue writing.

The sheer act of writing consistently from where you feel most comfortable will also mean that you are more likely to enter the state of “flow”. In this state, ideas come more easily to you and the working process as a whole feels effortless and enjoyable. When you write in this mode, you will become inspired where next to write as your mind begins to move in a consistent and powerful manner, like water flowing in a river.

The more you can write, the more you will develop understanding of the topic you are writing on. From this understanding, you will be able to further discover where the essay should go next. As you begin to write on one topic and work this out in detail, you will soon be able to address other topics more easily. This is because as you write, your thoughts and ideas will form and re-form organically, revealing insights and connections, which in turn will dynamically reveal possible next steps.

It is not just at the start that you should write from wherever feels easiest/most enjoyable; throughout the essay you should continue this practice, always taking the next step that feels like the most natural progression for your work. Of course, some elements are going to be trickier and you will not want to work on them, but by then you will have developed enough momentum to persevere through.

Writing in this way will make the essay process easier, more effective, and also (perhaps worryingly) enjoyable, as you work in tune with how your mind wants to engage with your essay title.

The 8 Hour Essay: Break Your Essay into Manageable Pieces

The easier you can make the essay writing process, the faster you will do it. A great tip to make essay writing easier is to break the essay into separate elements. The more you can break apart the essay, the more you will be able to work with it in a manageable, effective manner, and in turn complete the essay in less time.

The best way to break your essay into different parts is to do it at the planning stage. Part of the plan should resemble a contents page for the essay you are going to write. Each aspect of the essay needs to be laid out sequentially so that you can work through it step by step. You will need to adapt this plan as you work through the essay; feel free to modify it as you go, but always keep it to hand to make sure that you know (at least vaguely) what there is left to do.

This “contents page” plan will ideally break down your essay into chapters. Each chapter is effectively a paragraph. If these paragraphs are about a half a page, and you adhere at least roughly to the three-point essay structure I discussed earlier in this eBook, the plan for your essay might look something like this:

Introduction

Point 1: Reason A

Point 1: Reason B

Point 1: Reason C

Point 2: Reason A

Point 2: Reason B

Point 2: Reason C

Point 3: Reason A

Point 3: Reason B

Point 3: Reason C

Conclusion

With this essay structure, you would give three reasons for each point you make. For a standard argumentative essay of perhaps 3,000 words, this basic form can work very well.

Now, when planning your essay – or adapting it as you go – you need simply to write each point and reason alongside these bullet points. This can be a few words or a sentence. Breaking down your essay in this way will enable you to clearly see all the steps that the essay needs to take.

As you write your essay, it will help to make clear divisions between points by writing titles in a bold, different typeface. Be sure you still draw each of these points into the essay as a whole and always cement the main drive for your thesis. Of course, remove these titles when you come to the final editing and completing of your essay. Working with clear divisions and writing titles for paragraphs, works to create definite divisions between parts of your essay and helps you structure and work with your essay more effectively.

Breaking your essay into pieces like this will make the whole thing much less intimidating to work on. You can tackle the research, writing, and editing incrementally – one piece at a time, removing the fear of having too much to do. This fear is one of the reasons so many students leave essay writing to the last minute. The thought of writing 3,000 words and incorporating so many elements (which, at present, are a complete unknown) creates anxiety, which leads to procrastination. Breaking up your essay in this way will make it easier to begin and continue working.

Having manageable chunks of your essay will also make writing the essay easier because you are allowing your mind to focus cleanly on certain elements without it getting distracted and bogged down in others. When you are working on just one element of the essay, you restrict where your mind can go and allow it to work with precision.

Work to divide your essay into manageable pieces and you will make the whole essay writing process quicker and easier. It will allow better planning and organization, encourage your mind to stay cleanly focused on the topic at hand, and also prevent you from becoming perturbed by starting or carrying on with the essay.

The 8 Hour Essay: The 80/20 Pareto Principle

A useful theory to apply to writing essays is the Pareto Principle, which basically states that we can get 80 percent of the results for completing 20 percent of the actions. I would definitely encourage you to Google the Pareto Principle; it is such an important concept that really warrants additional research.

Applying this principle to essay writing will enable you to cut out all the unnecessary time and allow you to write a great essay within 8 hours (and quicker still with practice). When applying this to our essay writing, we attempt to find the most important 20 percent of actions, which will create 80 percent of the essay marks.

The 20 percent of tasks that matter are:

Finding excellent, quality resources. Be ruthless in selection and use only the most important ones. Attempt to cut down research sources to the most valuable few, as this will save time by avoiding reading excessive amounts, the same material, and from needing to switch between sources.

Planning the essay. This is essential, but again, moving away from excessive planning and forethought will allow for a much quicker essay to be written. As I described earlier in this eBook, a brief plan is very helpful. Plans are always tentative, however, let them move and adjust with time. Trying to stick rigidly to a plan and holding on to a thesis that isn't working will waste a good deal of time and create a poor essay.

Writing the piece. This sounds obvious, but there can often be a good deal of time wasted looking out the window or re-reading words already written when you could be writing more. Becoming brutally honest about when you are writing and when you are not will help to cut down on wasted time. Using time boxing (which will be explained in the following eBook) is a fantastic way to ensure we apply ourselves to the 20 percent of actual writing and remove the 80 percent on the wasted tasks between these moments.

Look at the other areas of your essay writing and always cut it down to the simplest and most effective actions, which earn 80 percent of results. If you continually work to improve your efforts in these areas, while diminishing the time-wasting habits, you will place yourself firmly on the track to writing a great essay within 8 hours.

The 8 Hour Essay: Bringing it All Together

Let's now take the time to build a workable process for writing a 2,000 word essay.

Think of this as a recipe for managing your efforts and ensuring you write a great essay as quickly as possible.

1 hour spent deciding on the title and speed reading some websites that provide an overview of the topic. Spend 5 minutes of this hour creating a plan.

4 hours spent writing at a rate of at least 500 words per hour. Move between detailed resources found in online journal articles and websites.

2 hours spent editing and improving the text. Do two passes, the first for 90 minutes and the next for 30 minutes.

1 hour building the bibliography, fine-tuning the conclusion, and proofreading.

(For each hour, work for 50 minutes and use the last ten minutes for a break. After four of these work 'hours', take an hour long break for a meal.)

I encourage you to read both of these eBooks twice to solidify the ideas which elaborate on the power of the above process, and then try to write an essay while sticking ruthlessly to the plan above. If you do, I promise that you will write faster and with greater effectiveness.

Further Essay-Writing Tips: Word Counts

Working with word counts has become the norm for the modern writer, and those pursuing essay-based subjects will inevitably develop an all too intimate relationship with the word count figure at the bottom of the screen. Make sure you use this aspect of modern writing to your advantage by following these tips.

Always work to the word count provided. Most assigned academic essays come with a word limit; you must pay close attention to this word limit and never go too far above or below it. Seek out the rules surrounding your essay and the word count. At some institutions you will lose marks if you go over or under the word limit by a certain amount. On these occasions in particular, be sure to strictly follow the word limit.

Even if there is no set penalty for going above or below the word limit, always respect the limit and attempt to stay as close to it as you can. Handing in an essay that doesn't respect the limit will frustrate whoever is marking it. It will appear, at the very least, that you are not aware of the form requirements, and at worst will mean you lose marks as a penalty.

Throughout the essay, it can be helpful to set yourself word count targets. Perhaps attempt to write 500 or 1,000 words per hour. This will keep you moving forward and push you to write through any blocks you might experience. However, do not become obsessive with the word count, as habitually checking it will distract you from writing quality content at a good speed.

It is inevitable that you will, at some point, find yourself obsessively looking at the word count, with a sense of frustration as it grows all too slowly: 10, 20, 50 words at a time. This is a sign of a kind of "writer's block" and can be caused by one or a combination of the following.

...you haven't done enough research and simply don't have a sufficient amount to say because you don't know enough. To remedy this, simply give yourself perhaps another couple of hours to find quality material, ensuring it correlates directly to the essay and gives you clear points and evidence to include.

...you haven't planned effectively, and the order or content of the essay is generally unclear, or at the very least, you haven't established what the next step is. Return to your plan and continue revising it, extending it, and making it clearer. It may be that all you need to do is find the next step, so again return to

your plan and identify the logical next step. Perhaps you will have to leave altogether the topic you were trying to work on in order to move to a topic you can write on more easily.

...you aren't moving the essay in the right direction. If it seems difficult to make any headway, perhaps you are attempting to write on topics/subtopics that just don't contain enough material for you to write on. Additionally, you might be arguing for something incoherent or illogical. If this is the case, go back to basics. Return to the title and make sure it is clear and that you understand it. Perhaps make a basic mind map to help reveal the clearest steps you can take to overcome the impasse. Further research also might be helpful here.

Further Essay Writing Tips: Discover and Imitate Good Writing Styles

If you will be writing many essays during your academic career or perhaps want to enter a profession that requires a lot of writing, it is a great idea to familiarize yourself with and begin to imitate better writing styles.

All writers develop a certain style with their writing. To develop your own in a positive way, read many texts that are similar to the style you wish to emulate. Don't feel ashamed to imitate. There are many different ways to present an idea, and it is important to be aware of them. If you incorporate different styles to your own writing, you will be creating something new. It will be writing with your "twist". You cannot imitate a style completely.

If you are only going to be writing academic pieces, always think about presenting things in a clear fashion. Therefore, you should incorporate the styles of writers who do this. Some of the textbooks required for your course may be written in a powerful and clear manner, while others may not be. Asking your teacher or lecturer which they find well written is a great way to reveal which you should be focusing on.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

BOOK 5: HOW TO TAKE GREAT NOTES QUICKLY AND EASILY

Introduction

This short eBook is intended to give you a host of practical techniques that will allow you to take fantastic notes. I have written this eBook as if I were addressing someone in education, but most of these ideas can absolutely be used in other applications. Note-taking is an essential skill that is needed in many environments, be it at school or university, or taking minutes in meetings at work.

Below is an example of good notes:

Most Imp

Quite Imp

Least Imp

● General Tips on Using Mnemonics

I will teach
this to →
the children I
am tutoring.

① Make things absurd and

Everyday, boring thi
Humorous & Ridicul
e.g. "Cat, eggs, and h
riding a horse."

② Don't use more ideas than

Haven't →
Heard this
idea Before

A series of mundane
ridiculous event.
∴ collapse & compac

③ Utilize all the Senses

Mind remembers better
Sense of smell in par
e.g. creating a meal
create a strong mem

Using this Book: Tips for Studying Notes for Work

I first wrote this book to address students. I wanted what I didn't have at school, a quick, easy to use guide for how to take notes well. This humble book on note-taking did relatively well but picked up some negative feedback from individuals who bemoaned its lack of advice for taking notes at work.

The truth is that the majority of this book's advice can be applied just the same, regardless of which environment it is within, so I saw no need to write a new book for "work notes." I then decided to add a few chapters at the end instead. These chapters firstly contain ideas on how to adapt and alter this book's advice if you are taking notes in the workplace followed by some work-specific content for note-taking. If you're a student, feel free to skip these and go straight to the free eBook, *How to Study*. If you want to improve how well you take notes at work, read through this whole book; everything in the student-centric section is foundational and applicable to work notes as well.

What is Note-Taking?

Effective note-taking involves being able to capture information, usually auditory (though also via other mediums), and then reforming it into pieces of shortened text/images. Maybe the information is needed for an upcoming test or for work on a new business opportunity. Whatever the application, good note-taking is in the accurate and rapid capturing and then re-forming of information.

Taking notes is an effective mode of capturing information. From a young age, we are encouraged to take notes in school, and soon it becomes a vital tool. Unfortunately, little formal teaching or advice is given on note-taking at school, and the usual answer as to why it is important to take notes is: “so you have something to study from for the exams.”

However, taking notes should be seen as more than just attempting to record information to be studied at a later date. Taking notes is an important part of the learning process and a part of “active listening,” which, if effectively executed, means you will gain much more from note-taking than simply capturing information onto paper.

Note-Taking as Part of “Active Listening”

One of the main reasons note-taking is so important is that it is an essential element of practicing “active listening.” This purpose is often overlooked, but embracing and practicing active listening will be an asset in your study skillset.

Active listening occurs when you are fully engaged with the content and involves accessing more of your mind. It differs from passive listening, which is when you simply sit and listen without activity. When listening “passively,” you will regularly struggle to pay attention and engage with what is being presented to you.

Active listening is important because it improves your ability to understand and remember information. Passive listening is like when water passes over a rock: it simply brushes off. In the same way, listening like this means you will not remember things as well. In order to remember what you are listening to and to make the ideas soak into your mind, you need to make your mind more sponge-like. Active listening is the key to transforming your mind to this state.

Through taking notes effectively, you will engage more intellectually, and so begin to listen actively. This is because to take notes, your mind must engage with what it is hearing. As you will be taking down only the important elements, and shortening them down into your own words, you will be forcing your mind to understand what you are hearing. It takes concentration and focus to listen and transform what you hear into notes; doing so ensures that your brain is listening to the words. If you follow the tips in this eBook and take notes effectively, you will be listening actively and will enjoy the benefits of doing so.

Benefits of Active Listening

If you practice and improve your skills in active listening, you will greatly improve your immediate learning. Full engagement with the content is the best way for you to learn the information straight off the bat. The benefits of doing this are significant, as a study or revision session is usually required at a later date in order to learn the notes you take in class. But with effective active listening, this later study session can be a session of testing and ensuring you learnt everything necessary, instead of learning things for the first time.

This is especially the case if the content matter is fairly straightforward or is perhaps simply building on information and ideas that you already know. In such a case, the initial class time in which you “actively listen” can be all the time you need to take in the material. This is perfect if you are on a tight schedule and have a lot of other studying to do, if you want to push to get the very best grades, or even if you don’t much care about your course and only want to put in the minimum time required. Whatever your goals, it is the wisest thing to listen actively so that you save a great deal of time later.

If you are still unconvinced, think of it this way: you have chosen to turn up to class and committed some of your valuable time that you won’t ever get back, so why not make the absolute most of it?

Another benefit of active listening is that it allows you to understand the information more deeply. A full participation of your mind with the subject matter will mean that you understand what you are hearing more.

Active listening will also help you to provide better ideas and feedback to the class, as you are engaged with the material at a higher level. This is essential if you are in a seminar class, a professional meeting, or even a lecture in which questions are encouraged at the end. Proper note-taking will improve your dialogue with others in these situations.

Not only does active listening bring an instant improvement to your comprehension of the material, it will also allow you to pay attention for much longer. If you are listening to something that has little interest or meaning to you, it will be hard to pay attention, even minimally, for an extended period of time. Taking notes as part of the active listening process will mean you can follow material you would normally struggle to pay attention to for significantly longer

periods of time.

Facilitating Active Listening Through Good Note-Taking

Taking notes does not always mean you are listening actively. This is especially the case for students who just copy down everything they hear. This is not good note-taking, nor is it listening actively. Copying down everything you hear means there is no intellectual engagement with the content matter. It may work to create a record of what was said. However, this is rarely even possible, as it is very difficult to take down information word-for-word as fast as it is given to you.

What does active listening look like? And how can you ensure you take brilliant notes while doing it? If you implement the following note-taking strategies, you will be participating with active listening and enjoy all the benefits listed earlier.

The Two BIGGEST Mistakes in Note-Taking

Before we begin to explore what constitutes good note-taking and explore “active listening” further, it is helpful to address two of the biggest mistakes when it comes to note-taking.

Biggest Mistake 1: Attempting to write everything down.

This is never wise when note-taking. And, unless you are a court reporter, you will certainly not be expected to write everything down word-for-word.

By attempting to record every word, you won’t benefit from the many advantages of proper note-taking. For example, you won’t be as effective at memorizing the material, as there will simply be too much of it. You will also have reduced comprehension because all your effort will go into copying down what has been said, rather than re-forming it or concentrating on what is valuable. And, unless you are well trained in short hand, you physically won’t be able to write everything down.

Biggest Mistake 2: Inconsistency – both in regards to whether you take notes at all and how you take notes when you do.

Taking notes only occasionally, when you feel like it, will mean you are only sporadically enjoying the benefits of effective note-taking.

Switching between different note-taking techniques will make it harder to organize and understand your work when returning to it to revise. You will also struggle to maintain the habit of taking good notes.

(This is not to say you can’t use a few different note-taking techniques. If the information or nature of the class is better suited to a different style of note-taking, feel free to change to it. For example, if a class has little information and the lecturer likes to switch between topics, perhaps mind mapping is better than the Cornell Method. However, try to minimize switching between note-taking styles just for the sake of it.)

Preparation

To listen actively and take excellent notes, you need to be as prepared as possible for the class you are attending. Many students think that a class does not begin until the teacher starts talking, and strictly perhaps this is true, but it is far better to think of lessons as more fluid and the whole course as an ongoing experience.

First of all, make sure that you do all the required reading for the class; this is an essential step to taking great notes. Start with the material that is necessary, material that will be at a significant disadvantage if skipped. For example, if you are studying literature, it is essential to have read the book or books on which the class is based. Further reading is great too, as there will probably be books recommended by the teacher which will help further your understanding. If these aren't provided, definitely ask.

Another step for preparation is to understand the context of the class you are about to take. The more you grasp the coming lesson's place within the course as a whole and how it aligns with other modules you are taking, the more meaning it will have. Knowing what information the class covers is only the first step; knowing that it will be on a topic that provides proof for what you learnt last week and that there will be a 33 percent chance of it occurring on the exam paper, is better still. Understanding the class's position in your studies will bring more confidence and clarity to your studies.

Preparation directly related to your note technique is also a fantastic idea. Look for long words that you can find abbreviations for, as this will save valuable time in class. By reading the part of the textbook you are covering, or even just being basically aware of what the class is on, you can create perhaps a half dozen abbreviations for the most popular long words. Take time to neatly write up the key for these abbreviations, and have it to one side as you take notes so you can easily reference them as needed. I will talk more about abbreviations later, as they are a valuable tool in note-taking.

Whatever the subject, the more preparation you do for the class, the more you will get out of it. Having a keen understanding beforehand of what is going to be taught will allow you to take in the most important elements and create the most complete and helpful notes. This will prime your mind and help ensure you take great notes.

Set a Purpose and Adjust Your Note-Taking to Align With It

It is good practice to clarify your overall purpose for note-taking; establishing why you are taking notes in terms of the "big picture" will help you take better notes. This is an extension of good preparation.

If you are taking notes as part of a learning qualification, i.e., you are at school/university/college, the overarching goal is to get the grade you want on an exam. This goal of a certain grade will be easier to achieve if you target material that you are going to be tested on. Therefore, be sure to draw attention to those parts when taking notes.

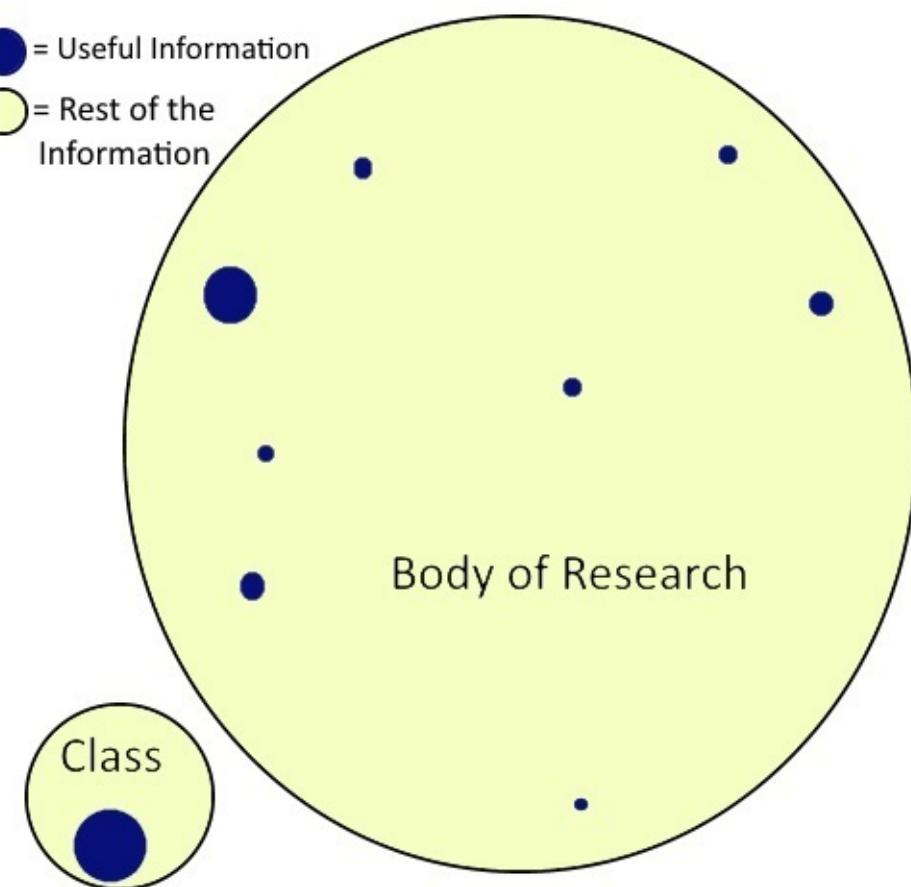
Depending on how grade-focused you are, you might highlight areas of your notes that are going to be included on the test, or you might ONLY take notes on things that are going to contribute directly to your grade. If you are being tested, do your best to establish what will be on the test and the likelihood that it will appear. Avoid pushing teachers too far, as the old question "will this be on the test?" doesn't sit well with many teachers. However, if you can, do find out, and then write down what will be included in as much detail as possible. For example, at the top of some notes you might write, "20% chance will come up on a test that contributes 33% of my final grade." This will help you to prioritize revision and learning at a later point. Some teachers/lecturers might freely offer you advice on what is going to come up on the exam; if not, gently push them to give you advice and hints.

By adjusting how you go about note-taking to align with wider study goals, you can streamline the process and make note-taking and studying generally more effective. For example, imagine you are taking a class that discusses three different books, but you are going to write an essay on only one of the books. Here, if you can decide which of the three you want to write on, you can take notes only on that book during the class, thus making your notes more focused and detailed where they matter. There will be no point (in respect to your grade) if you take notes on a book that you are never assessed on.

Of course, there is more to education than success in exams, but it would be remiss to not focus on this first, as grades are often the gateway to the next step in your career. Also, grade-focused learning helps bring clarity, focus, and drive to learning itself.

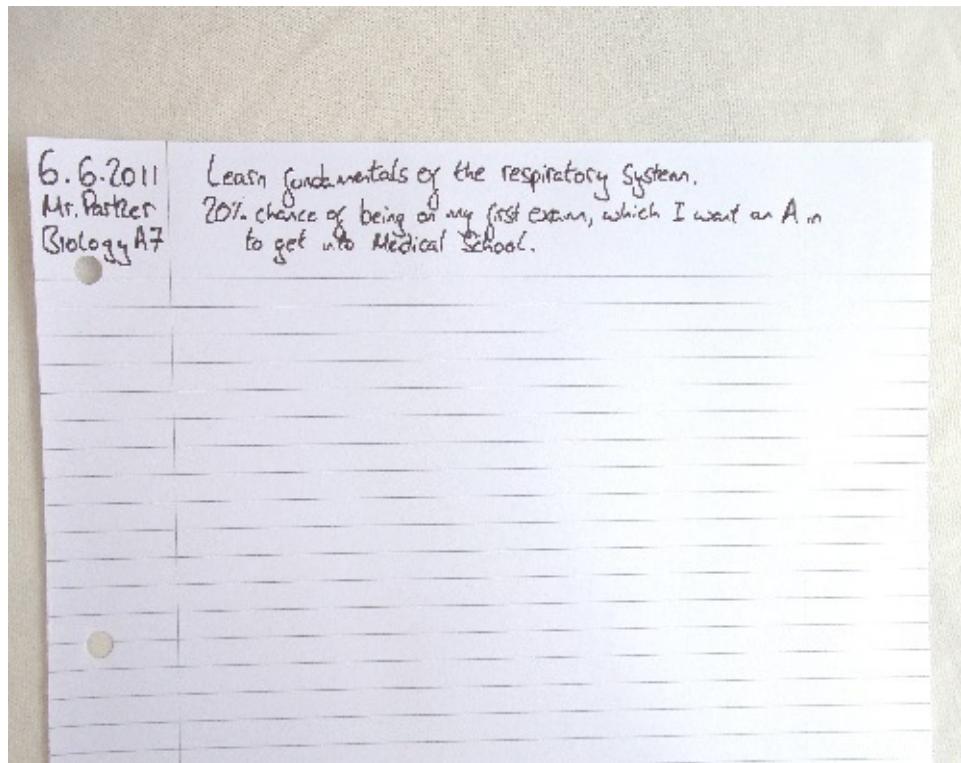
This is helpful in the classroom/lecture theatre, but even more so when you are researching and taking notes from a book. Here, there is greater danger of losing focus on what you need to take notes on – because you can read any part of many books, you have to work harder to stay focused. To reiterate, it is easier to get distracted when researching because you are working on more expansive grounds as compared to taking notes in class. You can end up way off the mark and far away from what is valuable.

The image below presents this.



Wherever you are taking notes, it is helpful to clarify and write down your purpose for note-taking. Writing your wider purpose might also help to keep you motivated whilst you work. For example, you might be reading a book on biology and trying to focus on learning about the respiratory system. In this case

you might write at the top of your notes:



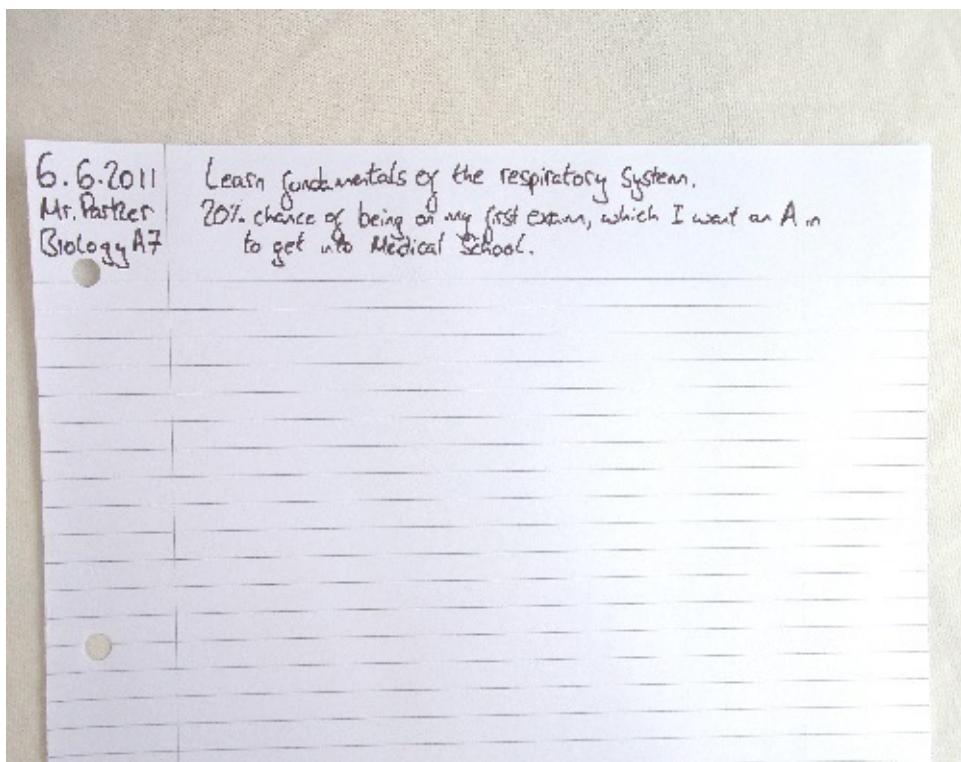
"Purpose: Learn fundamentals of the respiratory system 20% chance of coming on my first exam, which I want an A in to get into Medical School."

Date and Title

It is very important to date and title all of your work. This should be the first thing you do when you begin note-taking. Also, write the module, course, lesson, and teacher. These are just small details that will greatly help you when logging your notes later.

It only takes a few moments and will also help prime your mind for what you are doing. At the time there will seem little need as you know the date, and it is perhaps obvious what you are taking notes on and what module this is part of. However, clearly dated and titled work will make working with your notes much easier when you come back to them at a later date, as well as priming your mind. It will help cement the habit – a small reminder to your subconscious that you have a set process that you go through whenever you take notes.

Below is a picture of how this would look – notice the date, the name of the teacher and the module on the left hand side:



Don't Write Down the Details

Perhaps the clearest way to explain what it is you should be writing when taking notes is to suggest that you need to cut out all of the “details,” both in the speech your teacher is using and the specific content.

The details are the finer elements, the subtleties of an idea or segment of information; they are not needed for the main idea itself to hold value, and only add extra elements. Look out for the details and then eliminate them from your note-taking, as this will help to keep the unimportant away from your notes.

However, don’t cling too hard to this notion of eliminating “details.” It is simply a good rule of thumb and a clear way for you to understand essentially what is worthy of taking note and what isn’t.

The key information is circles in the above notes. Only these areas are essential notes, the rest are details that needn’t have been recorded. (Unless your purpose of note-taking was to focus on something in the details)

When in Doubt, Write it Down

One of the most common problems students often encounter when note-taking is the inability to decide what is important, and whether they need to take notes on something or not. The rule of thumb for this is to take notes if you are unsure. It takes time to think about whether something is important or not, so just get it down if you are unsure of its importance.

The decision to take notes on something or not will regularly be difficult and is a skill in itself. Some teachers will make it easy for you and teach in a straightforward manner, clearly highlighting important elements that need to be written down, and mentioning when they are digressing into non-essential ideas.

Of course, the problem can then be that, again, you take down too many notes and waste time writing down non-important information, resulting in you not really following what is being talked about. This is to be avoided. However, if you first learn to use skills, like using abbreviations or the Cornell note-taking method, you will be able to greatly reduce time spent writing. Then, as you begin to apply these principles, you can err on the side of caution and take down more notes than needed. In time, you will learn how to ascertain which elements are important and which are not.

Cut Down your Language

When taking notes, there is rarely time to write full sentences, and it is simply a waste of time for you to do so. With practice, it is just as easy to take down the same information but in broken up English, not full sentences with complete grammar. Doing this will free up valuable time and help you keep up with your teacher.

Your notes should read like a broken up series of ideas, not a consistent train of coherent thought. Use grammar only to break things up. Never worry about comma placement, semicolons, etc. There simply isn't time or necessity.

This is often a hard change for those who take essay-based subjects such as history or literature; those who are used to, and perhaps love, crafting full sentences that eloquently explain ideas. If you fall into this category, there will still be time for long and beautifully crafted sentences, but you will have to accept that when taking notes, it is just not practical to do so.

Notice Key Words and Phrases

All teachers will provide certain hints that what they are about to say, or have just said, is important. Some will do it deliberately, whereas others will not. There are some words or phrases that will always point to an important idea worthy of noting down. If you can learn to notice these key words and phrases, you will be able to improve your note-taking skills dramatically.

Phrases will include things like:

“To summarize...”

“The most important...”

“Three reasons why this is true are...”

“This is because...”

All of these phrases will lead into something that is important – something that you should note down. The above is a very short list of possible phrases; there are dozens more, and it will take time for you to notice the elements they all have in common. Simply put, they all indicate that what is about to be said will not be simply additional details, but instead something of reasonable significance.

Learn to pick up these small signs in the speech of your teachers and you will be able to recognize when you need to take notes more effectively. Think of them as sign posts to ideas of value, and note-taking is about taking down the information that is valuable.

Abbreviations

Using abbreviations is one of the most important elements of note-taking, a clear understanding of which will allow you to take notes at a much higher speed. Abbreviations are simply words shortened down to just one or a few letters. Speed is an essential part of great note-taking, and being able to write down a letter or two instead of a whole word, will help you to write notes much quicker.

The creation of abbreviations is an easy skill to master: the shorter the abbreviation is, the better. Of course, you need to remember what the letter/s stand for, so be prudent and try not to use the same letter/s for abbreviations to avoid confusion. Using symbols can be just as helpful as well. Below are some examples of each:

And: +

Therefore: TF

Because: BC

Open one of your textbooks now and take a few minutes to create your own set of abbreviations.

Abbreviations are especially helpful when taking notes in technical subjects where long words are repeated. It may not seem like much difference, but the time builds up if you have to write a word like “photosynthesis” repeatedly. Take the pressure off your wrist, and the clock, and abbreviate it.

Creating abbreviations is a flexible practice. It’s up to you how you shorten words; don’t be afraid to make them very short though. For “photosynthesis” you could shorten it down to “PS” or even just “P”.

Don’t be shy in using them either. They should be used for all subjects, without exception. For a class on American history, use abbreviations instead of writing out entire names:

Abraham Lincoln: AL

Thomas Jefferson: TJ

Benjamin Franklin: BF

It really is as simple as that.

It is important to create a key somewhere in your notes. Ideally, this will be at the top of the page so that you can easily refer back to it, and re-establish what each abbreviation stands for whenever necessary.

However, worrying that you might forget what an abbreviation stands for is usually unnecessary. Even if you forget to write a key, or lose the key, you can always refer to a text book, a teacher, or other notes to discover the abbreviation's meaning. Indeed, the context of the abbreviation will usually prompt you to remember the full word/s. The mind works powerfully through association, so nine times out of ten you will remember what the full word was by reading around it.

The Cornell Method

The Cornell method is probably the best-known and most widely used note-taking method out there. It is a brilliantly simple method that is characterized by how it divides the page you use.

To use the Cornell method, first take a page of lined paper. There will usually be a margin on the left of the page. From this margin, measure roughly 4cm in and then draw a line down the page from top to bottom. Next, draw a line across the page eight lines up from the bottom of the sheet. (The measurements are not set in stone, so feel free to modify them to your own taste.)

This will divide the page into three areas: the section across the bottom, the now extended margin on the left of the page, and a section on the right.

The right of the page will be where you will make your “normal notes.” The reduced area will have the effect of encouraging you to take fewer notes as there is simply less space to do so.

The section along the bottom of the page is where you write a summary of everything on the page. This will be no more than a couple of sentences, and depending on how you prefer to work, this summary can be written perhaps at the end of the class, later that evening, or on another day. Writing this summary will solidify your understanding of your notes and help cut them down further.

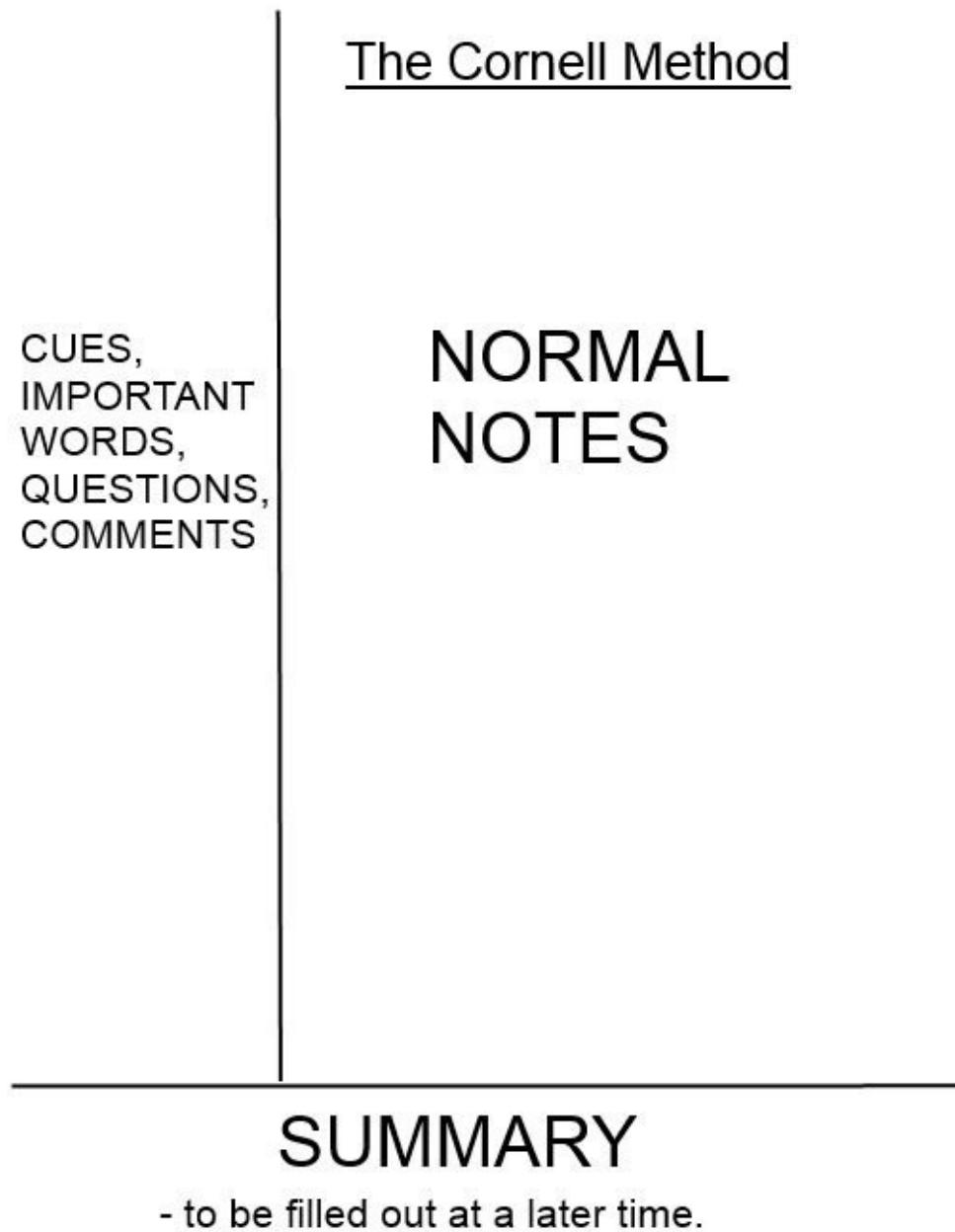
The section on the left of the page can be used in a few different ways. You may choose to use this area to write down the most important words, like names, dates, and essential ideas.

Another way to use the left side of the page is to record your own reactions to the notes you are taking. This is a brilliant way to encourage active listening, as writing down your personal reactions ensures that you engage fully with the lesson. Don’t worry about writing anything smart or insightful in these reactions. Perhaps comment on how something relates back to another topic, how you find something interesting, or maybe you write a few question marks to denote that you find it confusing.

Using the Cornell method is a straightforward technique for note-taking, and can be adapted in various ways to fit your own preferences. It can be helpful for studying and testing yourself later on, too. One way to do this is to use the left

hand area to write questions that correspond to the right side of the page. You can then test yourself by covering the right side of the page and attempting to answer the questions, slowly revealing the notes and “answers” on the right as you go. You can also test yourself by attempting to recite the summary at the bottom of the page.

Below is a clear illustration of the layout of the Cornell method.



And an example:

<p>I have heard → this idea in another book!</p> <p>This makes sense (since I remember the smell in many memories of holidays).</p> <p>Creating 1 Side summaries → of subjects is similar to this principle.</p>	<p>① Making things absurd + funny makes them easier to remember. Stay clear of boring and everyday visuals + ideas. This is particularly important when creating memory pictures. Here the more funny, the better. e.g. cats, eggs, toilet becomes a cat eating an egg on a toilet.</p> <p>② Less ideas is preferable to more ideas when trying to remember something. Use this idea with previous approach to absurd/funny ideas. Make one ridiculous event instead of multiple smaller ones.</p> <p>③ Many Senses are better than using just sight when creating memories. Sight, sight, sound, touch - these should all be included. The sense of smell in particular is strongly connected to memory, so make sure you use that where possible. But overall, the more senses that are utilized, the more likely the material will be remembered.</p> <p>④ To group information together, strengthen relationships. This can be through collapsing things - relating things - objects eating one another. Connectors are an important aspect to how memory works. Strengthening them helps create stronger memories that last.</p>
<p>① Funny + Absurd is easier to remember.</p> <p>② Collapse + compound ideas - less is more.</p> <p>③ Involve all the senses (smell in particular)</p> <p>④ Strengthen relationships to Group Information</p>	

Mind Maps

Mind mapping is an excellent tool that can make your note-taking much easier and more effective. There are certain times when the mind map is the ideal tool. Learning when and how to use mind maps effectively will help you significantly in taking your note-taking to the next level.

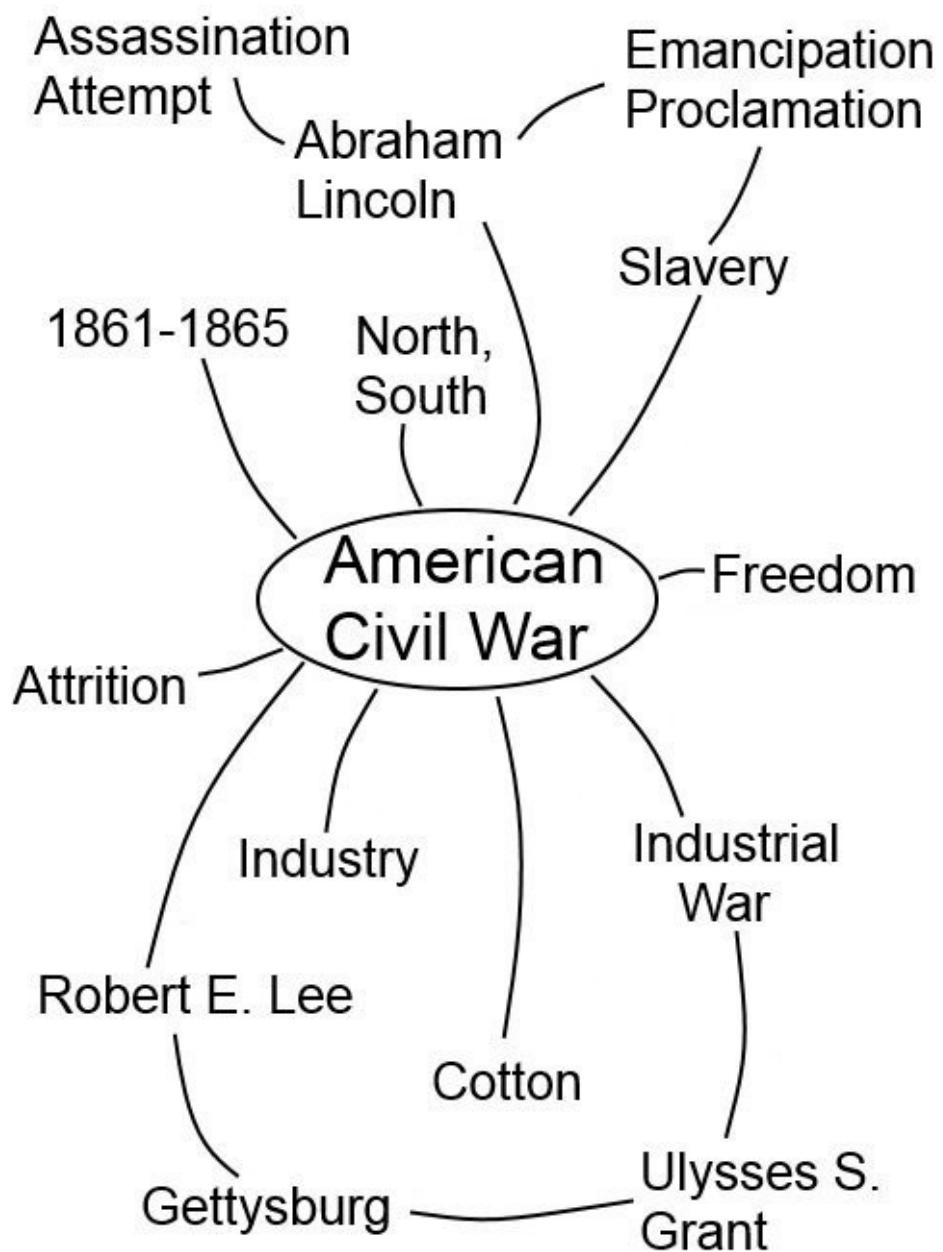
A mind map is simply a word or idea written at the center of a page, then from this, lines or “branches” curve outward, and on these lines or at the end of them, there are the related ideas, words, pictures, etc. From these branches, further related branches come outward. Usually topics are divided into smaller and less important ones as you move away from the center of the mind map.

The strengths of the mind map are in its ability to expand outward in an unplanned, flexible manner. If your teacher likes to flick between different ideas in a spontaneous fashion, the mind map can be very helpful because you can easily return to previous topics and build upon them.

Another strength of the mind map is its visual nature. Colors and pictures help to make a mind map memorable and effective. If you are a strongly visual learner, or if your subject involves a lot of pictures, then mind maps can be the ideal note-taking technique.

Sometimes it can be exceptionally difficult to listen and take good notes because either the subject matter itself does not grab you or the teacher presents it in a boring manner. Mind maps can be a fun way to break up the monotony. Use a full set of colored pens and work to draw funny and helpful images into your work. Doing so should help you pay attention whilst building great (and very memorable) notes.

Below is an example of a simple mind map that might have been taken during an introductory class on the American Civil War.



Capture the Most Important Information in a Square

A simple method to improve your note-taking is to simply make a small area on each page, and in this square write up the most important information. This is a similar principle to the Cornell method, only a bit simpler.

Put the square at the top or bottom of the page, perhaps so that it neatly fills a quarter of the page. Then write your conventional notes around it. During the class, fill the box with the most important ideas. Or perhaps, as a form of study at a later date, you can review the page of notes and put into the square the most important elements on the page.

Below is a diagram of the layout of this note-taking technique.

GENERAL NOTES

**ESSENTIAL
NOTES**

And an example:

① Watching things absurd + funny makes them easier to remember.
Stems others of boring and everyday visuals + ideas.
This is particularly important when creating memory palaces. The funnier, the better.

A good example of this is 'cats, eggs, horse' becoming a cat eating an egg while riding on a horse.

- I have heard this idea in another book before - (?).

② Less ideas is preferable to more ideas when trying to memorize something.
Fuse this idea with previous approach to absurd/funny.
Make one ridiculous event instead of multiple smaller + mundane events.

③ Many senses are better than using just sight when creating mnemonics.
Smell, sight, sound, touch - these should all be included.
The sense of smell in particular is strongly connected to memory, so make sure to use this element possible.
The more senses that are involved, the more likely the material will be remembered.

- This makes sense to me - I remember the smells in winter holiday memories -

④ To group information together, strengthen relationships.
They can be through:
- Collapsing things
- Relating things
- Objects eating one-another.

Connections are an important aspect to how memory works. Strengthening them helps create stronger memories that last.

① Funny + Absurd is easier to remember

② Collapse + compound ideas less is more.

③ Involve all of the senses.
(smell in particular)

④ Strengthen relationships to group information

List of General Advice / Advice on Form

The following are tips on how to improve the form and layout of your notes.

Give everything space. Indent, space out, and don't squash writing in. Similarly, use different notebooks before they become over-filled.

Although seemingly contrary to the advice above, also avoid too much white paper or “free space”. Try to fill the paper without over-loading it. Dense information is easier to work with and memorize than scattered information.

Get entire topics onto one page. Use the spatial bounds of a single page to force yourself to clearly outline a whole topic; again, the density will help you work with ideas.

Keep things as neat as possible – don't scribble or black things out, just put one line through mistakes and unnecessary information. This will prevent drawing unneeded attention to it.

So when you cross something out, it looks like this:

● General Tips on using mnemonics & Optimizing recall of encoded information

① Make things absurd and funny

Everyday, boring things don't stick in the mind
Hilarious & ridiculous things do.

e.g. "Cat, eggs, and horse" becomes a cat eating an egg while riding a horse.

② Don't use more ideas than necessary

A series of mundane events is harder to remember than one ridiculous event.
∴ collapse & compound words and ideas into the essential few.

③ Utilize all the Senses

Mind remembers better when ~~all~~ the senses are involved
Sense of smell in particular is rooted to memory.
e.g. creating a mental scene in which you can smell eggs you will create a strong memory.

④ Strengthen relationships to group information

Relate sets of things together.
Collapse words/objects onto each other
Or depict words/objects acting on another.

● Specific Tips for applying mnemonics

①

Instead of this:

● General Tips on using mnemonics & Optimizing recall of encoded information

~~Organize things by location~~
~~Find connections between things~~
~~Associate things with other things~~

② Don't use more ideas than necessary

A series of unrelated events is harder to remember than one related event.
∴ collapse & compound words and ideas into the essential few.

③ Utilize all the Senses

Mind remembers better when all the senses are involved
Sense of smell in particular is rooted to memory.
e.g. creating a mental scene in which you can smell eggs you will create a strong memory.

④ Strengthen relationships to group information

Relate sets of things together.
Collapse words/objects onto each other
Or depict words/objects acting on another.

● Specific Tips for applying mnemonics

①

Consider folding corners over to make clearer separations and/or draw attention to the more important pages of notes.

Choose narrow-lined paper, instead of wide-lined; this allows for more information to fit on a page, which helps you to have contained topics on a page.

Write PTO (please turn over) or draw an arrow to denote that an idea runs onto another page.

Make use of margins. Like with the Cornell Method, use margins to add further content and detail to your work.

Your handwriting may lapse, but the overall form and layout of your notes should be fairly neat. This won't always be possible, and don't worry too much – if it gets bad, it just means you have to write them up sooner!

Share your notes and suggest that your friends/colleagues/fellow students take notes in a different style or with a different focus. Then you can compare and build notes more effectively afterward. For example, one of your study groups makes a mind map, one uses the Cornell Method, and you use your own method of indenting and focusing on value. At the end you can share and swap notes. (As a rule, consistently create great notes for yourself with your preferred method – only do the above if you have invested and efficient colleagues and you are confident you can create better work together.)

Color

Using color is a great tool for creating notes. Using different colors can have the following benefits:

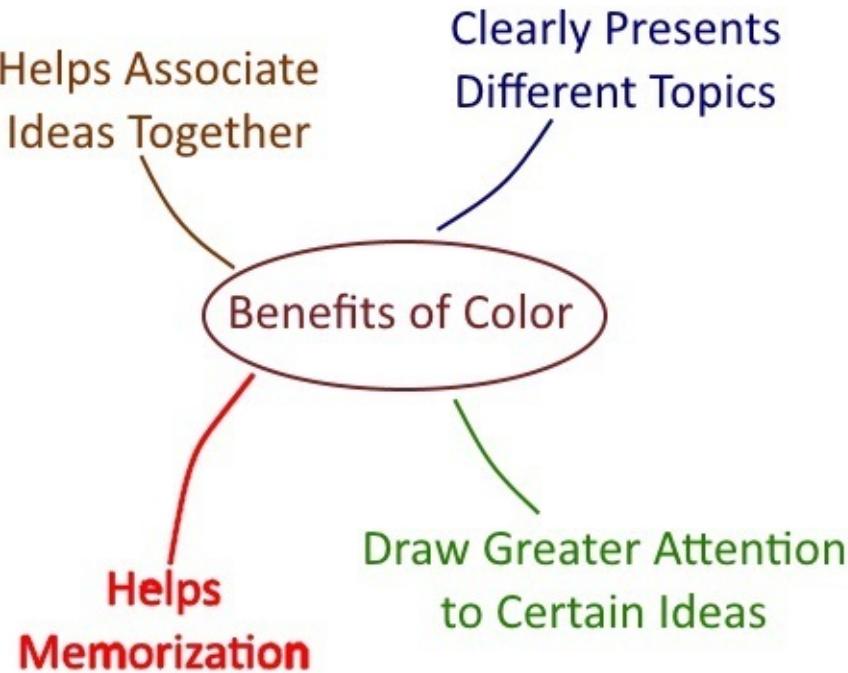
Clearly express different topics

Draws greater attention to certain ideas

Associates certain ideas together (which, in turn, makes both organization and memorization more effective)

Makes memorization easier because color creates a stronger memory

Below is a mind map of these benefits expressed. (Notice how the use of color helps)



There are a variety of ways to use color in your note-taking to utilize the above benefits.

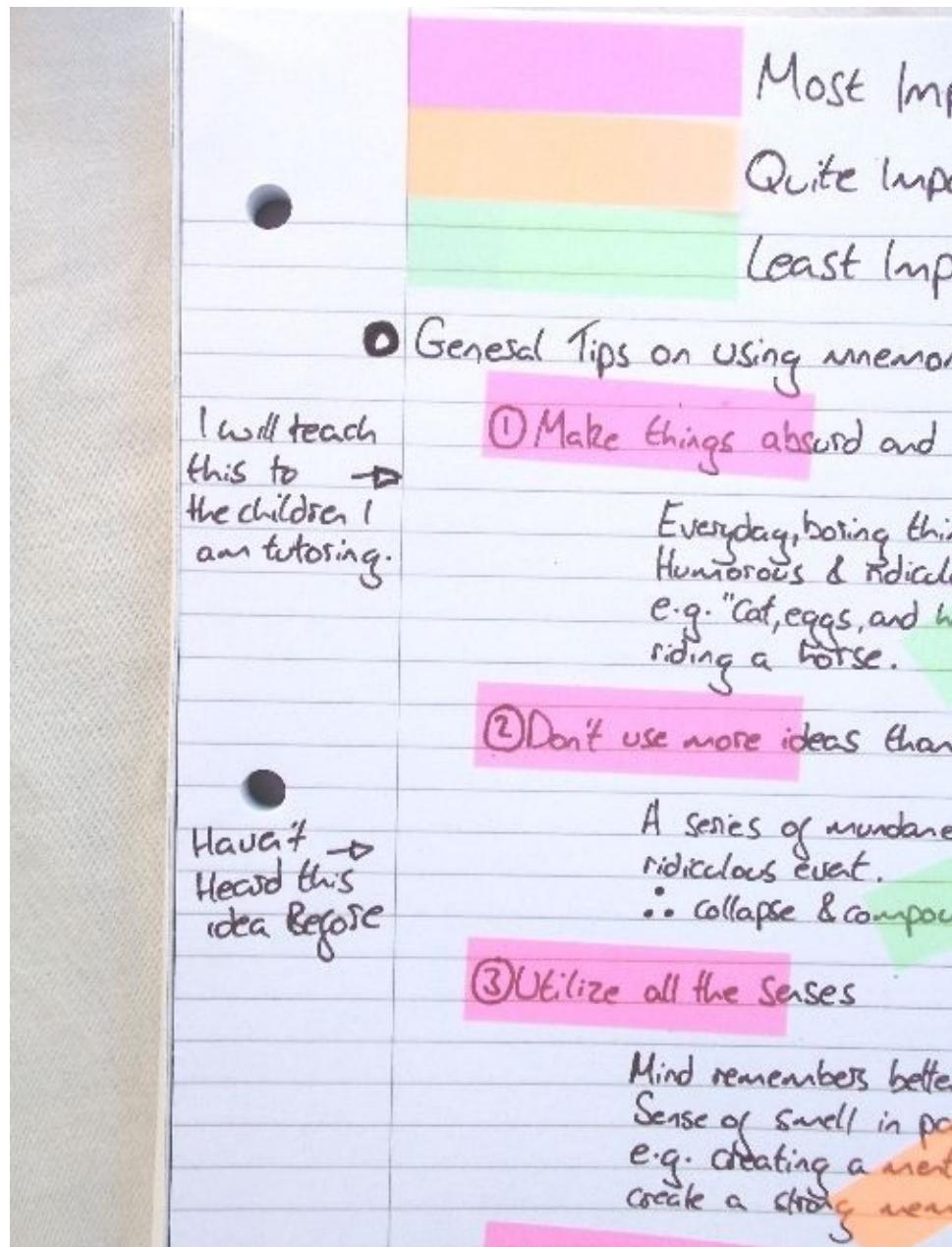
You can express varying levels of importance. An example of this would be to highlight the high importance sections in red, the medium importance sections in orange, and the low importance sections in green. These “traffic light” colors remind you to stop in order to study, memorize, and take more notice of the most valuable sections. Below is an example of this:

	Most Important	7-7-2011 Mrs Powell Mnemonics
	Quite Important	Purpose - Learn mnemonics to help get A's in Science.
	Least Important	
General Tips on Using Mnemonics & Optimizing recall of encoded information		
<p>I will teach this to → the children I am tutoring.</p> <p>haven't → Heard this idea before</p>		
<p>① Make things absurd and funny</p> <p>Everyday, boring things don't stick in the mind. Humorous & ridiculous things do. e.g. "Cat, eggs, and horse" becomes a cat eating an egg whilst riding a horse.</p>		
<p>② Don't use more ideas than necessary</p> <p>A series of mundane events is harder to remember than one ridiculous event. → collapse & compound words and ideas into the essential few.</p>		
<p>③ Utilize all the senses</p> <p>Mind remembers better when All the senses are involved. Sense of smell in particular is rooted to memory. e.g. Creating a mental scene in which you can smell eggs you will create a strong memory.</p>		
<p>④ Strengthen relationships to group information</p> <p>Relate sets of things together. Collapse words/objects onto each other. Or depict words/objects acting on another.</p>		
<p>⑤ Specific Tips for applying mnemonics</p> <p>①</p>		

For many subjects, you will repeatedly encounter similar forms of the same idea. These can be grouped together and highlighted in the same color. For example, you could use the same color for: dates, events, locations, or people. Or for a science subject, perhaps conclusions, theories, questions, definitions, and conclusions could each have their own color.

As with the majority of these techniques, stick to a certain mode of working, i.e., once you have a set series of representative colors, don't change them. Doing so

will only confuse you. Create a key and place it in the front of your folder for the subject.



If you want to memorize your notes, using color will be a great help. Colorful words and notes make a much greater impact on your memory than simple black and white ones.

Pictures and diagrams are also helpful aids to memorize your work. Spatial and meaningful images are much easier to remember because humans are better evolved to remember these things, rather than facts and numbers. Creating pictures and diagrams will take more energy than just using color, but will bring a marked improvement, so don't discount them – even if you have resigned yourself to not being "artistic."

Using color and imagery in your notes will also make your work more enjoyable and varied, so use it regularly, especially for those classes that you find dry, boring, and sleep-inducing!

Color is also useful when differentiating between your subjects. If you are organizing your notes, putting them in different colored binders will help bring clarity and orderliness.

Taking Notes as Research for an Essay/Project

This book focuses on taking notes in the classroom whilst listening to a teacher. There are, of course, other occasions in which you will need to take notes, such as when researching an essay or a project.

The majority of the techniques and ideas already presented will work just as well when researching – just as “active listening” will help with comprehension and retention, so will “active reading” and taking notes as you read a book.

To make note-taking while researching even more effective, consider performing the following:

Make sure you qualify the book – ensuring that it IS going to help you. Scan and look for the parts that you need – don’t just read the book from start to finish, hoping to find what you want.

“Survey” the material before you start. Pay close attention to titles and boxes of information, as these will be important, and reading them closely will prime your mind for the rest of the material.

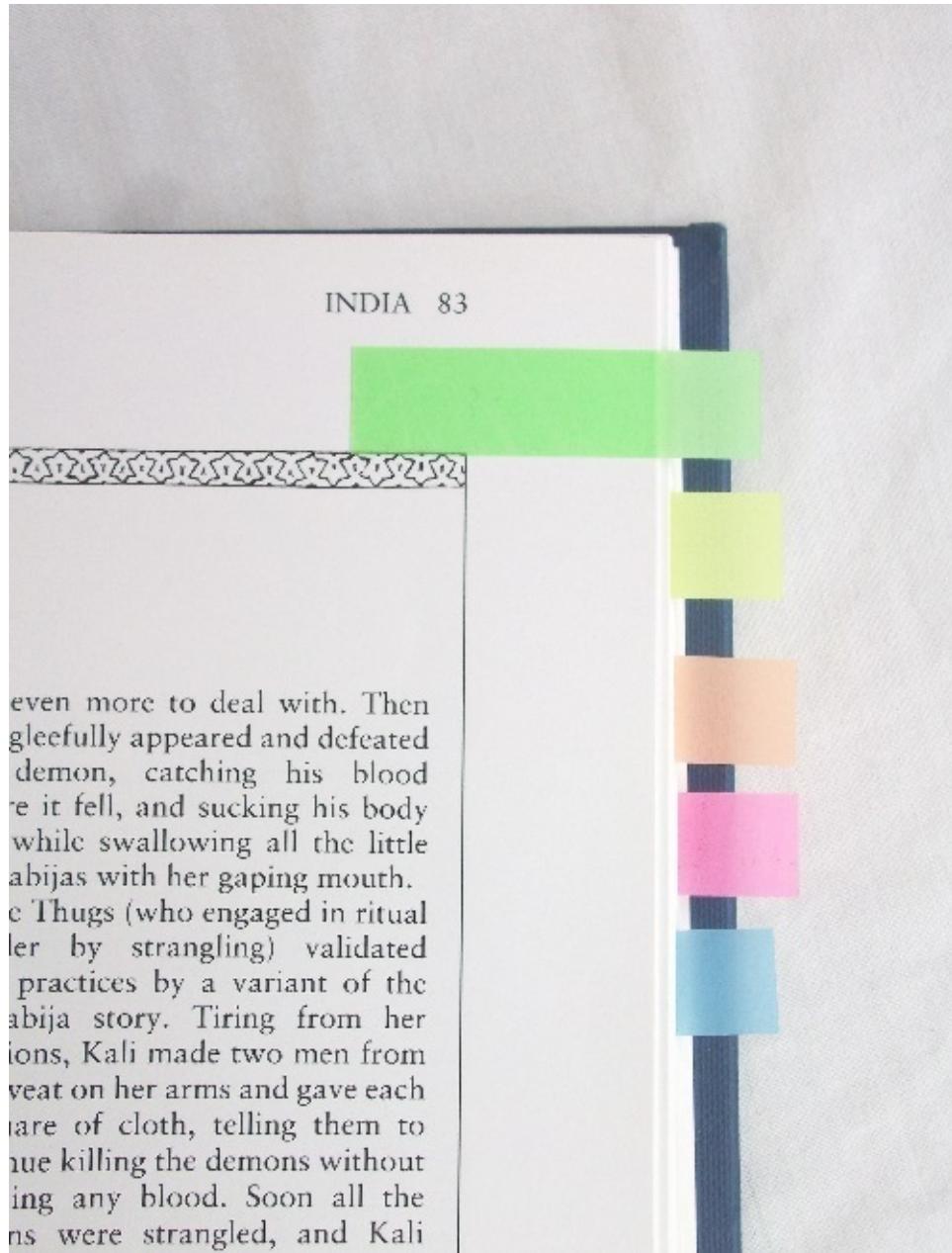
Deconstruct the book. (See deconstruction chapter.) Doing this chapter by chapter is usually easiest.

In your notes, clearly record where in the book the information was found. For example write “pg. 2, paragraph 3” if that is where you found the information. This will both make it easier to work with the book if you need to return to it, and allow you to accurately reference.

If you are taking notes on the whole book, it can help to do a page-for-page write-up in your notebook. To do this, simply number the pages of your notebook so that they align with the book you are taking notes on. Depending on the quantity and quality of information on each page of your target-book, you might need half a page, a whole page, or two pages in your notebook.

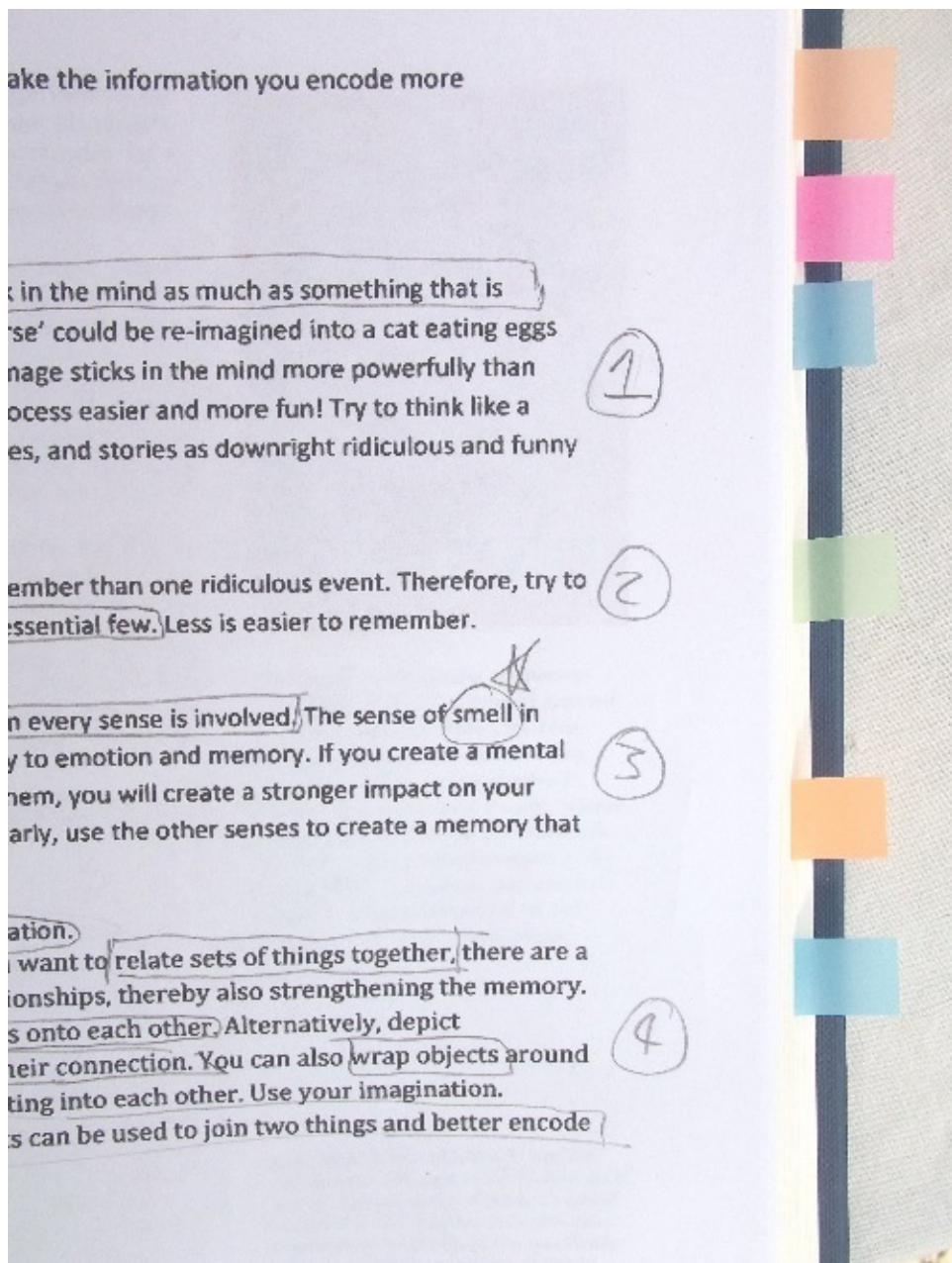
Write down the books’ titles and authors. If you are working from many books, you might lose track of which notes are from where. Again, this is necessary both if you want to return to the book in the future and for referencing purposes.

Use post-it-notes or something similar to create tabs for the pages/sections that are useful.



even more to deal with. Then gleefully appeared and defeated demon, catching his blood e it fell, and sucking his body while swallowing all the little abijas with her gaping mouth. c Thugs (who engaged in ritual ler by strangling) validated practices by a variant of the abija story. Tiring from her ions, Kali made two men from veat on her arms and gave each rare of cloth, telling them to ue killing the demons without ing any blood. Soon all the ns were strangled, and Kali

Write all over the book if you have money to spare and don't mind picking up another. Otherwise, write in pencil, and/or use a separate notebook and index.

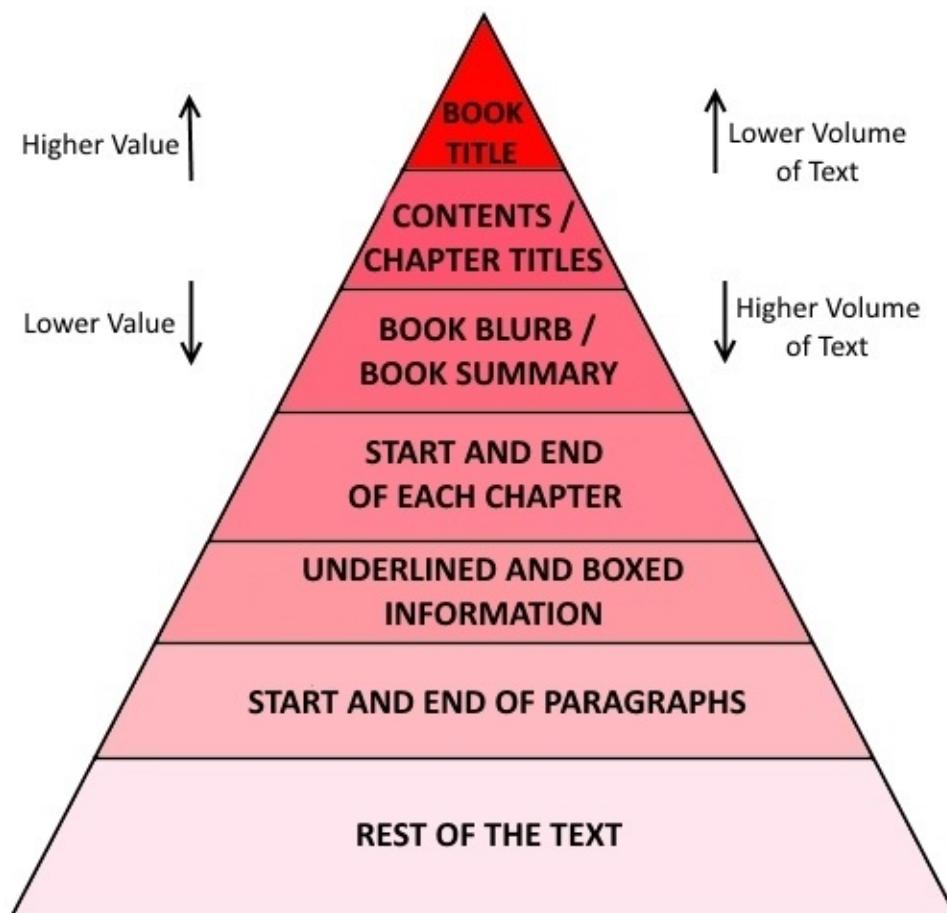


To help you focus on the most valuable areas of the book first, consider the following:

The beginning and ending of chapters and paragraphs, as well as the book as a whole. Normally, writing takes the form of: 1) introduction, 2) body, and 3) conclusion. In the introduction and conclusion, the “big picture” ideas are explained. In the body these are expanded upon. Oftentimes, focusing on the beginning and ending at each level will provide all the information you need.

Titles, underlined ideas, emboldened writing, and boxed writing.

The PYRAMID below presents this breakdown in value.



Flash Cards and Note-Taking

Note-taking involves recording information and compressing this content down to a condensed summary. By creating flash cards, you are performing this process and at the same time re-forming everything into questions and answers. Therefore, it is possible to replace the conventional forms of note-taking and instead create flash cards.

Creating flash cards directly from the source can be a good approach if you are already confident with the course or if you are on a tight deadline. Constructing flash cards directly from the course material will remove what are often unnecessary intermediary steps; you are immediately creating the means by which you will memorize and test yourself on the material.

It will often be possible to create flash cards directly from a lesson. So instead of taking notes in the manner you normally do, simply convert the information you hear directly into the flash card format. To do this, arrive to class with a deck of blank 3x5 inch flash cards, then as you hear important ideas and snippets of information, record these on one side of the flash cards. Later, put the appropriate question, which would prompt the answer, on the opposite side. Perhaps write in pencil at first and then revise them at home, tracing over in pen if you feel they are accurate and useful.

It is important that you create accurate flashcards. If you feel the accuracy of the flashcards is not what it should be, don't incorporate them into the testing system you are using. It may be a good idea to have a teacher or successful colleague evaluate whether they are an accurate representation of the class.

Taking notes like this may take time to master and is perhaps best suited to classes in which there is little risk of falling behind, as this task requires a higher level of concentration. However, if you can master this skill, you will save a lot of time and effort. This is because once you have created the flashcards, you can use them exclusively to learn the course material.

Flashcards can always be used to take notes from static sources of information, e.g., books and videos. If you have a collection of articles or book extracts and want to condense them down to a workable form – differentiating the unimportant from the important – creating flashcards can be a simple and effective approach.

Introduction to Deconstructing

When taking notes, it is helpful to deconstruct the subject. Breaking a topic apart makes it easier to understand, memorize, and work with. It also makes learning much more manageable as you don't become overwhelmed with too much information.

Why deconstruct a topic?

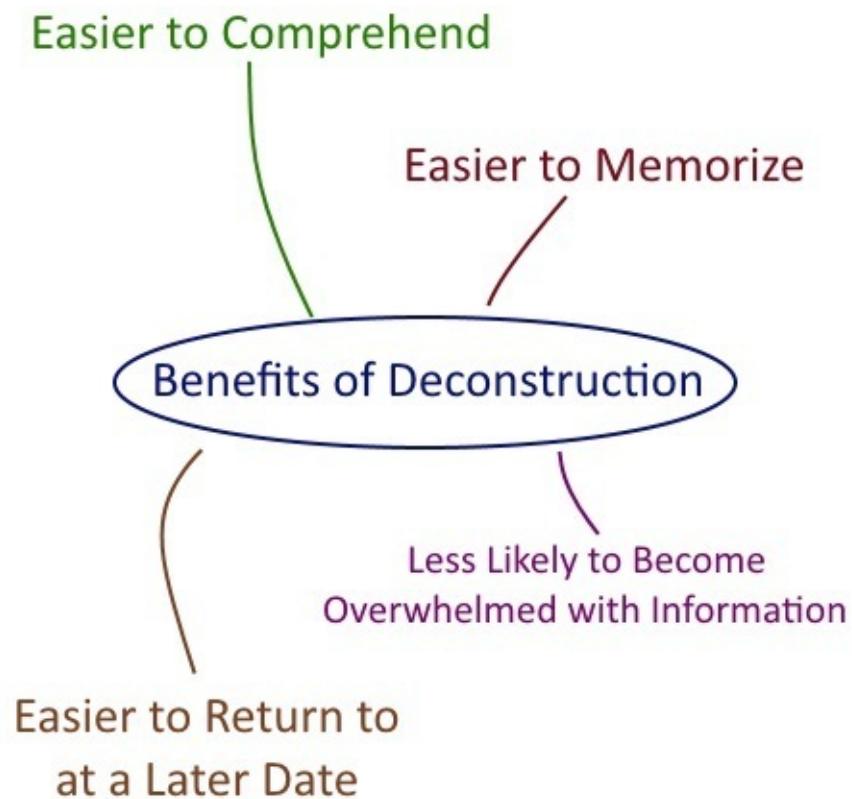
Easier to come back to later.

Easier to memorize at the time.

Easier to comprehend at the time.

Prevents you from getting overwhelmed with too much information and too many ideas.

Below is a mind map that expresses the strengths of deconstructing a topic.



If you are taking notes in class, it is usually straightforward to deconstruct your work; most of the time, the course leader will accurately and helpfully deconstruct classes. However, if you are working on your own project or essay in your own time, you will have to rely on your own skills of deconstruction. (If your course leader/teacher hasn't effectively deconstructed your course into manageable, "bite-size" pieces, follow this advice as well!)

Effective deconstruction of a topic is facilitated by ascertaining sub-topics that can exist as contained and distinct ideas – they don't overlap much into other topics and can be distinguished from one another.

To deconstruct a topic, consider first enlisting the help of others (unless you want to practice your deconstructing skills yourself). First, read up on the topic and see how others have deconstructed it. Consider asking a teacher, fellow student, or a mentor how they would deconstruct it, or simply look on Wikipedia or somewhere similar to see how others have broken down the subject.

If these don't provide the help you need (perhaps you are working on something too niche), consider the following as ways to deconstruct the topic.

Sciences:

Formulas

Important People

Important dates, timelines,

Conclusions

Theories

If you are working within literature or the arts:

Themes

Characters

Names

Ideas

Places

Motifs

For any book:

Chapter titles

Section headings

Page numbers

If a topic seems too big to work with, simply break it apart into arbitrary sections. For example, if a section on "American 19th Century History" becomes too long, simply break it into:

"American 19th Century History 1" and "American 19th Century History 2"

A good rule of thumb is that if you can't put all the core information onto an A3 Page, you should break the topic down.

Presenting Form and Deconstructing and Establishing Hierarchy

It will be helpful to map out this deconstruction on paper. If you choose to deconstruct a topic on lined paper, it is important to make distinctions clear – where one section ends and another begins. There are a few ways to do this well:

Skip 1, 2, 3, or more lines.

Skip a page.

Indent.

Make titles of sections clear: underline or draw clouds around them.

Below is an example of this.

● General Tips on using mnemonics & Optimizing recall of encoded information

① Make things absurd and funny

Everyday, boring things don't stick in the mind
Hundreds & ridiculous things do.

e.g. 'Cat, eggs, and horse' becomes a cat eating an egg whilst riding a horse.

② Don't use more ideas than necessary

A series of mundane events is harder to remember than one ridiculous event.
∴ collapse & compound words and ideas into the essential few.

③ Utilize all the Senses

Mind remembers better when all the senses are involved
Sense of smell in particular is rooted to memory.
e.g. creating a mental scene in which you can smell eggs you will create a strong memory.

④ Strengthen relationships to group information

Relate sets of things together.
Collapse words/objects onto each other
Or depict words/objects acting on another.

● Specific Tips for applying mnemonics

①

It can often be helpful to use a mind map to deconstruct a topic and present an overview. You might have a dozen pages of normal, linear notes (maybe using the Cornell Method) but to bring them all together and create a clear layout of all the separate pieces, one mind map might be helpful. Doing this allows you to clearly present the deconstruction of the topic.

Deconstructing and presenting a topic like this is useful before you begin taking notes, to summarize notes, and to re-work notes.

Review and Rewrite Your Notes

Many students think that once they have taken notes, it is unnecessary to review them until it is time for an exam. They file them or sometimes just stack them away, thinking nothing more of them until the exam date draws near. This is simply not good note-taking practice. Note-taking does not end when the class is over, as it is important to review and rewrite your notes.

It is important to reread your notes, ideally on the same day that you took them. Once you have reread them, write them up in a neater version. Writing your notes again will let you present them in a clearer and more accurate manner. This is important because there is a risk that when you put away notes, and don't return to them until exam time, you may be unclear as to the meaning of your notes and abbreviations. Writing them up later in the day will ensure you have accurate, quality notes you can study from at a later date, and that you never get stuck with incomprehensible information when you vitally need it.

In addition, going over your notes and writing them up is a great form of studying, as this will strengthen the information in your mind, removing the need for hard study at a later date. It will seem like a lot of work at first, but over time it will become second nature and you will save yourself a lot of time overall, as less study time will be needed further down the road.

Depending on the subject and how difficult the subject matter is, it can be best practice to leave writing up your notes for a week later, and when doing so, test yourself on what you learnt in class (which is especially easy if you used the Cornell method). Leaving a time gap between taking notes, testing yourself, and then finally writing them up, will cement the learning process still further. Again, this depends on how difficult the material was in class and how well you managed to listen actively. Experiment and develop good techniques that work for you.

You might turn notes that look like this:

General Tips on using mnemonics & optimizing recall of encoded inputs
Use things older and funny everyday and going things don't ~~feel~~
and funnies & ~~memories~~ can help. There becomes a lot
eating an egg while reading a book. Don't do weird ideas like reading

②

A series of multiple events is harder to remember than one isolated event.
... collapse compound words and ideas into ~~one~~ per.
Mind remembered better when all sense are involved. Sense of smell
~~smell~~ is related to memory.

Into something that looks like this:

Most Important

7.7.2011

Quite Important

Mrs Powell

Least Important

Mnemonics

Purpose - Learn mnemonics to help get A's in Science.

General Tips on using mnemonics & optimizing recall of encoded information

I will teach
this to →
the children I
am tutoring.

① Make things absurd and funny

Everyday, boring things don't stick in the mind.
Humorous & ridiculous things do.

e.g. "Cat, eggs, and horse" becomes a cat eating an egg whilst
riding a horse.

② Don't use more ideas than necessary

haven't →
Heard this
idea before

A series of mundane events is harder to remember than one
ridiculous event.

∴ collapse & compound words and ideas into the essential few.

③ Utilize all the Senses

Mind remembers better when **all** the senses are involved
Sense of smell in particular is rooted to memory.

e.g. creating a mental scene in which you can smell eggs you will
create a strong memory.

④ Strengthen Relationships to group information

Relate sets of things together.
Collapse words/objects onto each other
Or depict words/objects eating one another.

Specific Tips for applying mnemonics

①

Organize

It is important to have a good organization system for your notes. Being able to find what you want, when you need it, will be of invaluable help to your studies.

Create a folder for each of your subjects, or perhaps have a folder that is used for certain days when you have the same classes. Do whatever works best for you, just make sure you have a process. Then regularly, perhaps once a week, empty out your folders and place them into the relevant folders at home.

Ideally, this would be the time when you look over your notes again, test yourself, study them, and write them up. Keep one folder for long-term written up notes, as having all the best notes neatly written up and together in one place will make revising much easier.

Record Classes

It is a brilliant idea to record your lectures/classes in order to capture absolutely everything that is said. By using a Dictaphone, a laptop application, or a smart phone, you can easily make a recording and effectively remove much of the need to take notes altogether. However, it is best to think of recording a class as a safety net, rather than an effective tool for note-taking. It is rarely a good idea to just sit back and record your class. If you are recording a class, you should (if possible) be taking notes as well. As noted earlier in the “active listening” section, there is more to note-taking than just creating a record of what happened.

That said, it would be naive to ignore the option of recording your classes. Recording a class can be exceptionally helpful if:

You are participating in conversation regularly and cannot maintain attention on both the conversation and taking notes. This may be the case if you are taking a prominent lead in the conversation and what you say needs to be included in your notes. But if you are talking, you are of course not taking notes on what you say. Therefore, using a device in such an instance is an excellent idea.

There is a great deal of information that is absolutely essential for you to learn but would be unable to access from any other source. In this case, recording what is said is recommended. Especially if the teacher talks at a fast pace and you would struggle to take good notes at the speed at which the information is coming.

There is particularly sensitive material being discussed and if someone were misquoted damage could be caused in some manner. This could perhaps occur in a business meeting or an important seminar. On these occasions, it can be very important to have accurate records of who said what.

It is important to receive the permission of whoever is leading the class before you record it; they may, for whatever reason, disapprove of your recording their class. They might fear their teaching will appear on the Internet and be sold without them receiving payment.

Recording a class is a great idea, but I repeat: think of it as a safety net and nothing more. You should still attempt to take notes because doing so is an important part of listening actively, and the immediate experience of learning

will be mitigated if you simply hit the record button. It is all too easy to stop paying attention if you are recording a class because you know you can go over the material later at your own leisure. Don't give yourself the safety net if you don't need it, and instead force yourself to take notes.

Develop a Toolbox of Note-Taking Skills and Build Consistency

It is valuable to learn how to use a few different methods of note-taking. The tips and ideas presented in this eBook can be adapted and meshed together in a variety of ways to create diversity in your note-taking techniques. I would encourage you to try them all out and become competent at using each. Disregarding a technique or idea because it is alien to you or sounds unwise, might hold back your note-taking.

There will inevitably be a great deal of variety between your teachers' instruction styles, so your note-taking approach needs to vary as well. Some teachers will give hand-outs at the start of the lesson, and it may be best practice for you to annotate these throughout the class. Some teaching styles will require you to cut down notes on what is said significantly, as the teacher has a tendency to digress into off-topic matter. It will take time for you to adapt and find the strongest technique and approach for note-taking in each class.

The best way to make sure that you are working well and taking good notes is to simply ask your teacher whether you are on the right track. It might be the case that you are simply covering the wrong examples, or perhaps spending too much time writing definitions that will not come up on the test or easily found on a handout the teacher gave you in a previous class. It may be daunting, but take time to ask the teacher (as early on in the year as possible) how good your notes are and whether you need to change your approach for subsequent classes.

Create techniques that fit the nature of the subject and your own learning strengths and preferences. Perhaps for a scientific class where the teacher is logical and works through topics in a linear manner, it could be an effective note-taking approach to divide your page into two sides and write equations, formulas, and theories on the left, and examples, evidence, and proofs on the right side.

There are many iterations of note-taking, so explore the possibilities. I would encourage you to settle into one note-taking style for each class or perhaps have a few formats you use regularly. This will help you when returning to your notes later on. Also, consistency and familiarity with a note-taking style will breed more confidence and competence.

An Example Note-Taking Process

Below is an example of the process you might go through when creating notes for your class. It is helpful to get into a set working process with your note-taking. Consider writing a variant of this process (below is only an example, incorporate what works for you!). Stick it on your wall and make it the go-to mode for how you take notes in class.

Set your purpose, e.g., “focus on point B, 20% chance of being on exam.”

Do all background reading that is required (balance this with how important the class is and your other studies, e.g., if you are writing an essay on this 50 minute class and the essay is 30% of your final grade in the subject, you need to be well prepared). Use techniques listed in the “research” chapter to do ALL background reading possible.

Arrive early and get a good seat. Be earlier still if it is very important. Talk to the lecturer and other students if possible.

Pick up a hand-out if it is offered. Consider annotating it/using it as a base for your notes.

Open your folder for this class and look at the benchmark ideal notes that you created.

Take notes for the class in the style of your ideal notes.

After class, review your notes. At a later date, write them up into a form from which you can study.

Set a Bench Mark – Your Perfect Notes

(Move this section to the end of “Develop a toolbox of note-taking skills”)

It is helpful to create and maintain a template or “benchmark” for how your notes should look. You can then compare and improve your notes relative to this template.

Take this template with you to class and use it as a reference page to remind yourself of what you should be creating. Set it on the table before class begins and/or compare your notes to it at the end of class. You can then amend your notes so that they look more like your ideal set and utilize all the techniques you want. For example, you may have forgotten to write the date or forgotten to be reactive to ideas and write your own feedback on them. It is best to do this as soon as possible after the class, when it is not too late – waiting for three months until you want to revise may leave you enough time to forget!

Don’t feel tied entirely to this ideal note-taking style – if you want to do something a bit different for a certain class, go ahead! Also, tweak your ideal note-taking template if you feel some aspects aren’t working or could be improved upon.

Annotating your ideal note-taking page will help remind you of why you are doing certain things.

I have heard →
this idea in
another book!

This makes since
(for me) I remember →
the smell in many
memories of holidays.

Creating 1
site summaries →
of subjects is similar
to this principle.

① Making things absurd + funny makes them easier
to remember.
Stay clear of boring and everyday visuals + ideas. This
is particularly important when creating memory palaces.
Here the more funny, the better.
eg: cat, eggs, toilet becomes a cat eating an egg on a toilet.

② Less ideas is preferable to more ideas when trying to
remember something.
Use this idea with previous approach to absurd/funny ideas.
Make one ridiculous event instead of multiple smaller
ones.

③ Many Senses are better than using just sight when
creating memories.
Smell, sight, sound, touch - these should all be included.
The sense of smell in particular is strongly connected to
memory, so make sure you use that when possible.
But overall, the more senses that are utilized, the more
likely the material will be remembered.

④ To group information together, strengthen relationships.
This can be through - collapsing things
- relating things
- objects eating one another.
Connections are an important aspect to how memory
works. Strengthening them helps create stronger memories
that last.

-
- ① Funny + Absurd is easier to remember.
 - ② Collapses + compound ideas - less is more.
 - ③ Involve all the senses (smell in particular)
 - ④ Strengthen relationships to Group Information

Tips for Staying Focused

Taking notes in class is all about bringing your full attention to what is being taught. Small distractions and a wandering mind will greatly reduce your note-taking and ability to listen “actively.” It is important to stay focused throughout the class. Here are a few tips to make it easier to stay focused and consistently pay attention.

Sit as close as possible to the teacher. Studies have shown that those who sit closer to the front of the classroom will, on average, achieve a higher grade than those near the back. Sitting at the front will mean you won’t be easily distracted by what others are doing. By having more of your view filled with the teacher, as well as hearing more clearly, will also have a small but meaningful boost on your attention levels. If you are sitting in a lecture theater, try to sit far from the end of a row. In that case, if people leave at any point, they won’t have to get past you, which could disturb your concentration.

Doodling on your notes or on a separate page can be a brilliant way to keep your mind active whilst listening to your class. However, be careful as it may instead distract you. Use your judgment and see how it affects your concentration levels. Don’t try to draw the Mona Lisa, rather draw in a relaxed manner. Doodling will occupy part of your mind, helping you to stay alert in class. Doing pen tricks or similar things can help to keep a part of your mind busy and active as well, allowing you to pay greater attention. Of course, whatever you are doing, make sure it is not distracting to anyone around you.

Be sure to get to class early. First of all, this will ensure you get a good seat. It also gives you time to prepare the necessary equipment and perhaps to review the material covered in the last lesson. Also, the teacher themselves may be there early and have material on the board that can be taken down early. Perhaps you can talk with the teacher about the upcoming lecture or catch up with other students. All will be helpful to your notes, studies, and your general student experience. Whatever you do, don’t become the late person. This is the easiest path to collecting bad notes and a bad grade. If you arrive to class late, you may miss some material, and worst of all, it is all too easy to not take notes altogether, justified to yourself by the notion that, “It’s too late to begin now anyway.”

Be smart by using these tips to do everything possible to keep your

concentration levels high and your mind focused on what is being taught. If you do these things alone, your notes will improve immeasurably and you will be a step closer to a higher grade.

Other Note-Taking Tips

The following includes some general tips on note-taking.

Be as active as possible when taking notes. Circle things that are important and use exclamation marks and other symbols to make everything that you are taking down as meaningful as possible.

Use bullet points and lists, as these are an easy way to get information recorded. Again, use anything but the full sentence; this takes just too much time.

Use text speak or “txt spk”. This is an easy way to speed up your note-taking. If you use text speak when you are texting people on your phone and are used to shortening down words in this way, experiment with using the same process for your notes in class. All that matters is that you can understand your notes. If it helps, imagine you are texting a friend and then write in the same heavily abbreviated manner.

When studying your notes after class, reciting them out loud will make them more memorable. It may seem awkward, but this practice can help dramatically to bring life into otherwise dull or uninteresting notes.

Always ensure you have complete sets of notes for your course. If you are sick and can't attend a class, ask for notes from a friend or perhaps ask them to use your Dictaphone to record the class.

Finally, be sure to date and title all of your work in order to make filing it easier later on. If the pages get separated from your other notes, you can instantly recognize what part of the course the work is from.

Tips for Taking Notes on a Laptop or Tablet

This eBook is dedicated to improving note-taking skills using pen and paper. However, it will become increasingly easier and more helpful to turn to technology, using a laptop or tablet to take notes.

The benefits of using technology are numerous. It is easier to store notes and access them later, as well as having the ability to easily access the Internet and other resources. Also, if your handwriting is untidy or you struggle to write quickly with a pen, typing can be a preferable alternative.

If you are using a laptop or something similar, these tips will help you to improve your note-taking skills:

Learn to type faster. This is simple but very helpful: the faster you can type, the better your notes can be. A search on YouTube will quickly reveal some great videos that can help you out with this.

Using a program like OneNote is excellent for taking notes on a computer. It makes archiving your notes easier and you can easily mark certain pages with tags. You can then effortlessly cross reference different ideas and topics on different documents. OneNote can also be of great help for planning projects and your course as a whole. Indeed, even if you want to continue taking notes by hand, I would encourage you to use OneNote to help you organize and plan your study life.

If you are taking notes on a keyboard, get one that is whisper quiet. Disturbing your classmates with a keyboard that rattles along as you type will not help you make friends!

It goes without saying that regularly saving and backing up your work is essential. If everything is on your laptop, it can be all too easy for a spilt cup of coffee to undo many hours of hard work. It's also very simple nowadays to back up work; there are cloud based services you can use for free.

Using Software – Synthesizing Notes with Outside Information

Building notes with outside ideas using links or copying directly into your notes is easy with technology. This add-on content might take the form of filling gaps because the teacher or meeting leader hasn't provided enough information. It might be some ideas you think will get those extra marks or results. Perhaps it is additional content for your own interest and enjoyment.

The process is simple:

Google or search YouTube for the information you think will be helpful.

Hyperlink it into your work.

Alternatively, use the copy and paste function (or relevant function) to move the information into your text. This is especially easy in Evernote by using the “Evernote Web Clipper” function.

If you are only adding a small amount of information, you might drag and drop it straight into your notes. For longer content, consider a separate note or file and link to it from your core notes; do whichever is more practical.

It is much easier to do this add-on content “just-in-time” as you are taking notes, rather than waiting for a later date. If there is a hole in your knowledge, get into the habit of filling that space whilst your mind is primed to work on it. If you don't have time, make a small note to follow up on it and do your Googling as soon as possible afterwards.

If you are reviewing your notes at the end of the day, or at the end of the week, consider this an opportunity to synthesize other content into your notes to create a better body of work. Whilst reviewing your notes, you might notice gaps or think that a slightly different explanation might really help you understand an idea.

Even if you are fairly confident with your notes, it can be well worth spending a short amount of time researching what additional content is available online. You might be surprised with the depth and quality of an article or a simple YouTube video that explains a concept more eloquently than you received it in the class or meeting.

This is also a great way to create variety in the form of your notes. Putting helpful diagrams, short videos, quotations, or short articles into your notes will make them more rich, vivid and visual. This will make returning to them at a later date more enjoyable.

However, it is important to remember your purpose for taking notes in the first place. For example, if you are studying for a test, you don't want to build up this amazing collection of external information on different topics if you aren't going to be tested on them. Remain focused on the core objectives that these notes are working toward and only build in or synthesize content that contributes to that. If you find additional content you think is essential, share it with your peers and colleagues.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<http://collegeinfogeek.com/evernote-class-tips/>

Using Software – Re-Energizing Paper Notes via Scanning

To get the best out of both paper notes and digital notes, there is a straightforward answer; use paper notes whenever it makes sense to and then scan these and assimilate them into your digital notes at a later date. This is having your cake and eating it too; you get the pros of paper notes along with the pros of digital notes at the same time.

For creatives who need to draw on paper, this is a great way to store and organize their work whilst not compromising how they create it. For mathematicians with complex symbols that just aren't conducive to work with using a keyboard, this can be the best way to use software to bring rigorous organization to their work that a folder of paper just can't match.

The easy organization and filing of digital notes transformed from paper notes is obvious. However, there are still more advantages. For example, in programs such as Evernote, you can actually make your scanned paper notes searchable. Assuming your handwriting is not a hieroglyphic mess, you can search through your paper notes and find, order, and synthesize information as needed.

This can make organization of your notes not only easier but also more complex whilst still being useful. For example, you might be working on coursework that contains elements of different classes you took throughout the academic year. Even if you have organized the notes for each class or topic, because you are working on something that dips into different classes and spans topics, being able to effortlessly search through all of your notes, cherry pick what is most useful and then bring them together is invaluable. Using the scan and search strategy for paper notes here saves a lot of time.

As ever, getting into the practice of doing this as a ritual at the end of the day or week is the best way to go. Scan those paper notes as a habit and have them ready and waiting whenever you need them. However, if you do fall off the wagon and end-up accruing a large stack of paper notes that you just can't see where to start working with, scanning them all is a great way to begin the organization. Aside from the initial time spent actually scanning them, it is much quicker and easier to manipulate your notes, order them, and put them into well-organized files and folders when they are digital. The search function that allows you to skip through the notes themselves will again be useful in doing this.

Tagging each scan you create will be beneficial. Tags including the date, subject, teacher etc. are likely necessary. If you are taking notes at work, these tags might look like “date,” “meeting topic,” “who was present,” etc. These tags will make management of your scanned paper notes even easier.

It can be helpful to move beyond the obvious tags. For example, you might include tags including “possible topics for my coursework” or you might rank the notes in order of how well you understand or know them. For example, tagging a file “1” If you don’t think you understand it well and a “5” if you feel very confident with it. Of course, rely on solid testing to determine your competency on this; a gut reaction can be misleading.

If you have developed an unmanageable shelf that is full of paperwork, scanning your paper notes is also a great way to declutter your environment. Not only will you free-up space for other things, you will feel “lighter” working in a room where paper stacks aren’t looming around you.

Scanning paper notes is also a great way to back-up notes in case of emergency. This is useful if you are carting around a folder with all of your essential notes. Spilling a cup of coffee on this folder might obviously cause a massive upset to your work. Back them up digitally and you won’t be at the mercy of such accidents ever again.

If you are unsure whether to go with paper or digital notes, this is the best way to enjoy (most) of the benefits of both. While you can’t add hyperlinks on the fly to paper notes, you can be super-adaptive in how you take notes and get the best of both worlds.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<http://collegeinfogeek.com/evernote-class-tips/>

Using Software – Re-Energizing Working with Textbooks and Scans

IMPORTANT: Ask permission before scanning information from the relevant owner or authority, especially if you have plans to share it.

Scanning your paper notes is just the start when it comes to fully utilizing the scan and search function that Evernote and other programs can offer. Below are ideas on the different applications of this and how to do it well in each situation.

Textbooks.

If you have been a student, you've likely experienced the agony of picking up a bag overfilled with large and heavy textbooks. Scanning a textbook, or just its relevant parts, enables you to have it available with zero additional weight in your bag. This becomes essential if you are a science student and haul two or more heavy textbooks through your day. Scan the whole book if you are going to work through it or just scan the few pages you need if you aren't sure of the textbook's use in the long term. Consider also taking advantage of the local library and scan a variety of books. You can then have the relevant chapters from a dozen textbooks whilst everyone else in class only has the one large, heavy paper textbook.

As ever, the search feature will make the digital format faster and easier to manage.

You can also take advantage of the much reduced weight of a digital textbook by studying in a variety of situations. For example, if you take public transport to class every day, you could build the habit of glancing through a few digital pages on your smartphone whilst commuting.

Handouts in class and other “single-use” documents.

When you are given important documents that you cannot take away with you, what do you do? You scan and walk away with your own copies. Examples of these “single-use” documents might be a course syllabus or work that a teacher has created.

The work of members in your work-group, or scribbles from a colleague who takes excellent notes, could also be great occasions to bring out your smartphone and take a picture. Remember to always get permission first.

Practice exam papers.

If you complete a paper exam in class, it may well be an excellent resource to use in future. If you are shown practice exam papers that you aren't allowed to take away, scanning them is the only way to make use of them in future.

Consider using the search function to make finding commonalities between test papers that much easier. This can help you predict trends for what will come up in future. If you scan exam papers from the previous 5 years and find that one topic comes up every year, it is obviously a good idea to master this topic.

Don't rely on your predictions 100%.

Manage your scanned content.

Use the scan feature to assimilate any and all information that might be helpful to your future studies or work. Ensure that you tag and organize it efficiently; getting too "scan-happy" can lead to a lot of files to manage. Don't be afraid to cut-down on what isn't useful to you. If you are given a handout by a lecturer but know that you are only going to perform your coursework on one of the five options listed on the page, make the decision as soon as possible which you will do and then delete the additional, unneeded content. More digital notes and content on your computer or devices isn't a good thing if it doesn't help you toward your objectives.

Convert PDF's.

Another useful feature that Evernote offers is the ability to convert PDF's into note files that can be searched and managed more effectively. Increasingly, digital texts are made available to classes before or after they sit the class. However, they aren't always in the best format, for example, they're non-searchable or just different to the file-type you use for other work.

Being able to convert files is especially helpful as teachers or institutions can get stuck in their old or traditional ways while being slow to adapt to better formats for documents. Whether you are given an unwieldy paper handbook, a word document, or a PDF, you can easily convert them to the same note system within Evernote, or whichever digital form factor you prefer, and work with all of your notes in the same manner.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<http://collegeinfogeek.com/evernote-class-tips/>

<https://blog.evernote.com/blog/2010/12/15/10-evernote-tips-for-school-education-series/>

Other Opportunities to Use and Practice Note-Taking Skills

The note-taking skillset can be used in more situations than just during class and at work. This means that not only are there more opportunities to use the ideas in this book but also more opportunities to practice this skillset so that you can return to work or school with your note-taking skillset well-sharpened.

Below are some examples of these different occasions.

Journaling, diary keeping or thinking on paper.

There are many ways to apply your note-taking skills to journaling. For example, by not writing in complete sentences and instead using brief language that contains only the core ideas. This is possible with journaling because it is going to be for your eyes only. Again, think of it as thinking on paper; journaling typically isn't for expressing something to someone else clearly as you are trying to improve your thinking by externalizing it.

Oftentimes, you might not even intend to return to the notes and just want a kind of cathartic-offload of ideas. You can do this faster and more enjoyably with note-taking techniques.

Getting creative and brainstorming.

Using the more creative elements of note-taking will also improve your idea generation and more creative journaling endeavors. By including color, mind maps, and generally making a creative mess, you can really get your creative juices flowing.

Creating collages of ideas on paper or on a device is the same process that you would use when researching something or taking notes during a class. Creating notes is more like a creative act as you dictate the next ideas instead of having them dictated to you.

Conventions and conferences.

This is somewhat obvious but whenever you attend a convention or conference, you really need to bring the notepad or tablet and build the best set of notes that you can.

Whenever you are going somewhere to learn, you should be thinking about taking notes.

Taking notes whilst reading.

Taking notes whilst you read is a great way to increase both your comprehension and memorization. Therefore, whenever you read something, there is an opportunity to implement your note-taking skills. By doing so, you also create a more dynamic relationship with the text and facilitate your subconscious into engaging with the text more deeply.

When reading a novel, consider making small pencil notes in the margin about things that you like or maybe write these on a separate page. When reading a newspaper, highlight passages you love or put question marks beside ideas you aren't sure that you agree with.

Too often, people treat books, or whatever they are reading, as holy and the dynamic as a “one-way” relationship where they just passively absorb what is in front of them. Create a new dynamic by writing on or taking notes beside what you are reading and you will get much more from the experience.

Of course, you don't want to sabotage your fun and relaxation if you are reading for pleasure but consider that sometimes note-taking will actually improve your enjoyment. For example, underlining the odd paragraph in a newspaper because you think it is well written isn't going to sabotage your enjoyment. If anything, you are increasing your focus, comprehension and engagement with the text which isn't a bad start for enjoying non-fiction a little more.

Shopping lists, to-do lists and day-to-day notes.

Whenever you create lists or notes on a day to day basis, you can implement your note-taking skillset. When writing reminder notes for yourself, you might include color and the 5 W's to ensure the note is visually striking and contains the most important ideas. For example, the reminder “call Pete” written in black isn't as motivating and value-rich as “call Pete at 5PM to book plane tickets for next month's holiday” written in bright red.

However, shopping lists don't need to be as motivating or information dense. To save time, perhaps you can implement abbreviations. For example, “t-roll” instead of “toilet roll” or “btr” instead of “butter.” This is a small time-saver but if it means you can save energy on a daily basis, why not?

It is always valuable to notice how a skillset can be applied to different areas so you can practice and improve that skillset more widely.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/journal-writing-5-smart-reasons-why-you-should-start-doing-today.html>

<http://www.stevehall.com/blog/2007/07/journaling/>

<https://www.fastcompany.com/3041487/body-week/8-tips-to-more-effective-journaling-for-health>

Work Notes: – How to adapt this Books Advice for Note-taking in the Workplace

As stated at the start of this book, the focus is primarily on taking notes as part of studying. However, the advice is very similar for those wanting to improve their note-taking skills in the professional work environment. Indeed, the majority of this book's content transfers easily as each of the previous chapters can be almost uniformly applied to the work environment.

Below are some add-on ideas for the previous chapters that make them additionally relevant for work notes. If you're a student, keep reading for a more complete understanding of note-taking or if you'd rather, skip to the free *How to Study* eBook.

Advantages of Active Listening in the Workplace. Previously stated are the benefits of using active listening to memorize information immediately. This will still be useful at work but may take a bit of a backseat to other advantages that active listening can offer including improved focus, attention and improved comprehension of what you are listening to. These will lead to improved problem solving, decision-making, creative thinking and more. If you weren't already sold on the benefits of active listening as a worker because you thought memorization was its main advantage and that doesn't apply to you, guess again! The benefits of active listening are varied and exceptionally helpful in most situations, both in school and in the office.

The Importance of Preparation. If you are taking notes in a meeting or during a presentation at work, it will still be exceptionally helpful to know as much as possible beforehand. You can then set up your notes effectively and prime your mind for what is to come. Although we are focused on preparation based on thinking about an exam in school, preparation will still be helpful before taking notes at work.

Set Your Purpose. Setting a purpose in advance can be more essential for taking notes at work than it could be for taking notes during your studies. This is because your goals when studying may tend to be more obvious; you will usually be taking notes so that you can later memorize and synthesize the material for an upcoming test or exam. However, the purposes for note-taking in the workplace can be more varied, more changing, and grayer around the edges. Over a single day at work, you may take notes that have more than half a dozen

purposes.

If you have a very specific role in your job, the purpose of your note-taking may be fairly obvious but individuals are increasingly required to diversify what they do which means that the purpose of their note-taking must also diversify.

It may help to set a purpose and an outcome before you begin taking notes at work to clarify what you are doing. The outcome is the “what” goal and the purpose is the “why.” For example, you might have a purpose of “make improvements in the next quarter” and an outcome of “more educated about rival products.”

Setting a clear purpose and writing it at the top of your page in your notebook will ensure that you are always on-point in your notes and with your work.

Work Notes – Should I be taking notes?

Whether or not to take notes in a meeting, and what kind of notes to take, is an important decision. However, before this is addressed, it would be helpful to decide whether or not the meeting itself is actually necessary. Increasingly unnecessary or over-long meetings have crept into the world of our workplaces. Cutting these out would be important before you begin to address the questions regarding your note-taking.

Maybe the meeting is not needed or maybe just your own attendance isn't necessary. Ask yourself the question, "What are we trying to accomplish with this meeting?" and "what am I going to contribute or get out of this meeting?"

Once you have decided that the meeting, and your attendance, is necessary, it is worth debating whether or not taking notes is necessary. Don't just take notes for the sake of it but also consider the following reasons why taking notes might be helpful.

Presenting yourself as attentive and focused on the task(s). This can be helpful if you are fairly new to your job or are in the presence of someone higher-up who you might not normally see. However, always trying to impress by just taking notes may be unhelpful.

Improving your focus. Perhaps you are in a meeting at the end of the day on a Friday and you just know the content will go over your head if you aren't careful. Taking notes will help you to stay focused and aware of what is going on in this and similar situations. Even if you are just taking a simple but rough bullet point list of what is being said, your mind will stay on-point more effectively instead of having you staring at the clock.

Creating a record of in-meeting dialogue. Having a record of what was discussed or decided upon in a meeting can be exceptionally useful in the long run. These notes can be both for your own purposes and for the group. If you are creating a record on behalf of the group, ensure that you double-check important points and have the most accurate record possible. Don't be afraid to confirm points with other people who were present. If accurate records are important, it can be beneficial to designate a person to take notes that are super-accurate. Of course, using a smartphone, or something similar, to record the meeting is a great add-on idea as well.

Taking notes to “think on paper.” The advice of “thinking on paper” and “working from a list” can be very appropriate when it comes to improving your note-taking skills. If you need to do any kind of critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making or similar, it is helpful to externalize the process and write the important things on paper. This form of note-taking is departed from the classic alternative that entails simply recording what was said or done.

Creating a to-do list. If you are attending a meeting that is regarding which actions are to be taken next, it is essential to write these out; never rely on memory alone when you can make a clear record of what was decided upon (and what was rejected). Also, try double-checking with another attendee at the end of the meeting to view what the important “to-dos” were that others took mental or paper note of.

Work Notes – When to ditch the tech

Let's face it; reliance on technology has seen a large increase in the workplace. However, during important meetings, tech addiction can be a hindrance to having a productive time. Consider relying on good ol' pens and paper, especially in smaller meetings, to ensure that you don't turn the tech into an awkward third wheel that holds everyone back.

There are a few great reasons why relying on pens and paper will be more helpful than using an electronic device when taking notes in a meeting. Some are listed below.

Preventing possible distractions. If you are taking notes on a device, it is super easy to get distracted by other tasks and apps. These might be distractions that act on you; for example, an instant message or email. It might also be a distraction of your own making; for example, you think, "I'll just check a news website quickly." With just a pen and paper in front of you, it is much easier to stay focused on the task at hand.

Appearing more attentive. It can certainly appear and feel like attendees are distracted and not "on-point" when they are using devices. This may or may not be true but it's not an un-safe bet to assume some people are checking email, sites or social media. While you can still be distracted with a pen and paper, it is harder to get distracted and to appear distracted when only they are on the table.

Decreasing excessive screen times. Breaking up what can be hours of looking at monitors and devices by having meetings with colleagues can be a great break for both the eyes and the mind.

Reducing tech-induced barriers to human connection. A meeting is often as much about re-establishing working relationships and building trust as it is exchanging information. There is more humanity and more space for connection when there are less electronic devices sat between people. This can be a tough idea to explain so try to make the comparison yourself; have a meeting with laptops and then have a meeting with only pens and paper, comparing the mood in each.

Work Notes – Creating a Post-Meeting Report

Immediately after a meeting, it can be helpful to write a report that contains its core value(s). (Consider these ideas a close cousin of the concepts in the earlier chapter “review and rewrite your notes”.)

Below are ideas on why report writing is helpful and how to do it effectively.

Usefulness of the Proof of Dialogue. Having an accurate record of in-meeting dialogue may be helpful in the future in order to resolve conflicts. It is easy to have different interpretations of events and for those interpretations to change over time if they aren’t written down. If you consistently have accurate reports written up after each meeting, you will stand in good stead.

3rd Party Reliance on Reports. If you keep short reports and organize them well with your in-meeting notes, you will become a useful resource for colleagues. You don’t want to become a sap and end up doing all of the work; don’t let it come to that. Being generally known as a reliable colleague with an accurate account of the meetings will make you someone others know they can rely on for the information you keep and for the qualities of accuracy and reliability you will embody.

Usefulness (or reduced usefulness) of in-meeting scrap notes. Those doodles in the margin and incomplete thoughts will be less clear, or potentially meaningless, when you return to them in a few weeks or months. However, if you create an accurate report within a short time frame after that contains precisely what you need to know, you will have everything you need on hand.

Storing both in-meeting notes scraps and reports in records. To ensure you can refer to those doodles and incomplete thoughts if needed, you can simply attach them to the back of the written up reports and file both away together. If these are digital notes, perhaps they are just two files in a folder. If they are paper notes, simply staple the pages together and put them in a binder, duotang or folder.

Choose your own length. Reports don’t have to be pages long. Even just a few sentences to summarize the meeting in concise language you know you will understand in the future can be more than enough.

Replacement of in-meeting notes. Perhaps you don’t need to take notes during the meeting because the meeting is so straightforward. That doesn’t mean a few

sentences summarizing what was discussed won't be a helpful record. It can literally be one minute worth typed into your laptop.

Dating the reports. You MUST date each report. Consider also including a record of who was present. Use your judgement and include any and all information that might be relevant or useful if you return to this report in the future.

Work Notes –Complete Pictures with the 5 W’s

The core principle of taking notes is to capture in brevity what was said in a meeting. However, this can backfire when notes become too brief and skip important elements. Remembering the 5 W’s is a great way to ensure that you get the most important elements from the meeting down in your notes. This can be especially helpful for agenda meetings in which decisions on what actions will be taken next are made.

The 5 W’s are

WHO

WHAT

WHERE

WHY

WHEN

For example, in an agenda meeting, you might write in your notes:

“Research the market for our new product.”

However, a more helpful, specific action item might be:

“Adam will find our 3 nearest rivals by the end of the week and list 3 key features for each.”

By having the second, improved sentence in your notes, you are going to be substantially more aware of what Adam will be working on in the coming week. This will allow you to work much more effectively with Adam while holding him accountable and being more aware of what actions your business is taking at any present time.

While you are trying to implement the 5 W’s more often, it can be helpful to list them at the top of your notes; do this as part of your preparation before the meeting begins. This will act as a reminder throughout the meeting. Perhaps for each key point that is made, especially for actionable events, just run through the 5 W’s in your head and make sure that you have noted down each element in your book.

This habit will not only help you take better notes, it will also have the reverse effect of making your contribution to the meeting more focused. For example, a colleague might make a key decision to action something; however, they may forget to commit to a date to complete it by. You can then suggest that a date to complete it by might be helpful. Naturally, you won't always be able to fill the 5 W's in but be sure to include them if they are relevant. Also, don't push others too aggressively to include more W's into their action-items if it isn't your place to. If you feel that more clarity could have been established on a task, you might be able to bring it up with your superior or colleague(s) after the meeting. For example, you might say, "I think Alan could have created a more effective action timetable if he had designated who is going to assist him in Project Y."

Work Notes – Optimization for Different Situations

There are various occasions at work when taking notes will be useful. Let's dissect these occasions a little more in order to show further advice on how to optimize each of them.

Situation #1: A one-on-one meeting with a colleague or superior.

Taking detailed notes here is very important. Consider the following ideas on how and why you can optimize this time.

Taking notes will show that you're attentive. It would also be a great way to show respect and appear that you are paying attention.

Recording the meeting. Unless it is "information-lite," you are going to want to be 100% clear on what was said so recording with a device may be beneficial.

Taking 2 minutes at the end to sum-up. You want your understanding and notes to be completely accurate. If there is anything you don't understand, or any vagueness in your notes, try to double-check anything at the end of the meeting.

Preparing your knowledge of the individual. Before the meeting, remind yourself of their name, what they are working on plus any ways you can help or provide value to them. This is how to build a great relationship; remember the details.

Situation #2: A large brainstorming / conversation / exchanging of ideas.

The following will be helpful to optimize your notes on these occasions

Considering use of tech (or lack of). Pen and paper can help creativity and build relationships if you are generating ideas with others. If it is more of an exchange of ideas, or if relationships don't need any work, load up OneNote, Evernote or any program that lets you optimize recording and retrieving notes.

Designating someone to take notes or minutes. If everyone is contributing ideas, it is usually easier if just one person takes accurate notes. At the end, everyone who contributed should sign off on these notes.

Leave with something. When things get creative, or you are contributing a lot, it can be easy to leave the room without critical information or any notes at all.

Don't let this happen. Remind yourself to take notes down, even when the ideas are flowing.

Situation #3: Meetings with a client.

Preparation is king here. You want to know exactly how this meeting is going to go, what you want to get from it, and what you are going to give into it.

Pen and paper. Going in with a pen and paper can help foster human connection. You are selling yourself and the relationship you have with your client will be as important as the value you provide.

Situation #4: Different activities that can characterize the meeting.

There are a variety of actions that a meeting can be defined by. Below is a list of these actions, along with the kind of note-taking strategies you might utilize to make the most of them.

Making decisions. Within any business, there are regularly a myriad of decisions to be made. In a decision-based meeting, the group might first think creatively on the possible options. Non-linear note-taking with mind mapping and color is one way to help foster this in your books. Following this, analysis of the best decision might be performed by a linear note-taking process; perhaps someone reads the possible actions aloud whilst individually everyone uses the Cornell Method to assess the options (writing the possible action in one column and pros and cons in the column beside).

Solving problems. This is a similar process to making decisions. Again, a creative exchange of potential answers needs to be followed with a more linear analysis of which solution will be the best fit. Depending on the scope of the problem, and the possibility for lateral thinking, you might consider using Evernote or OneNote to bring in valuable external information.

Team building, sharing and checking in with one another. Teams work better when they come together and exchange their progress. It can be lonely and tricky when it feels like you are working alone. Consider using pen and paper to foster connection and perhaps having the meeting with drinks or food. This is a less serious form of meeting that is focused on building relationships instead of intense problem solving or decision-making.

Information Exchanging. This is a straightforward education of colleagues by someone who knows more about a topic. In this situation, detailed and complete notes need to be made by those who are learning. Bring the laptop or voice recorder and make sure you get everything that is valuable.

Situation #5: Whiteboards, TV's, and externalizing the group's notes.

It can be helpful to use a shared note-taking space when the meeting is based around solving a problem or making a decision collectively. This is an externalization of the thinking processes of the group in one place. Doing this on a TV or whiteboard can be a simple and effective way of amalgamating the process.

It can be best to do this at the end after everyone has created their own notes on how they want to tackle a problem or finish a decision. This coming together on the TV or whiteboard can then become a cherry picking of the best ideas in the room.

Work Notes – Organizing and Processing

One of the most overlooked elements of developing good note-taking habits is what you do with the notes after you have taken them. In the work environment, developing good organizational habits can be more important than in education. This comes down to the more varied nature of note-taking at work. In education, 9 times out of 10, you will return to the notes at some point to memorize them. However, at work, the notes might contain information to memorize or to-dos that you need to action by a certain date. They might also be an unneeded series of creative ideas.

Systemizing how you deal with your notes is the best way to not only deal with them effectively but to also deal with them happily with minimal stress. The first step to this is developing a habit of dealing with notes by processing them so that you have extracted the value from them. Typically, a weekly habit will be sufficient for this; ideally at the start or end of the week. This can then filter into how you plan the week to come if relevant to do items are in the notes.

Throughout the week, as you accumulate notes, you can simply deposit them into a tray if you are taking them on paper or into a file/folder if you are taking them on a device.

An excellent idea that comes from the eminent David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, is that everything that comes into your “inbox” should be handled ONCE. For a great, more detailed explanation of how to get organized, definitely pick up his book. Consider your unorganized notes an inbox; that’s essentially what they are.

If your notes contain actions for you to perform, enter them onto your calendar or into your plans for the coming week. For actions that filter down to people below you, pass on the action to them, perhaps via email, and record on your calendar when you will follow up with them. Remember to give them the 5 W’s so that you are all on the same page.

For information that you are recording for a current or future project, simply place it into a file that is as specific as it needs to be. Delete the rest.

Remember: Try to handle everything once and process all of your notes once a week.

Work Notes – Objectives and Meeting Them

In order to take excellent notes in a meeting, it is essential that you have an excellent meeting in the first place. There are a few core ways to ensure you are always part of a great meeting.

Defining the objective(s) of the meeting.

This is the usual failure that many meetings suffer from. With no objective, or possessing an un-clear one, you risk not achieving what needs to be done in which case the meeting might be considered a failure.

Defining the objective of the meeting will take some brainstorming and analysis of your wider goals. Try to make the objective as clear as possible; consider using the 5 W's to help with this.

If you are leading the meeting, ensure that everyone is aware of the objective beforehand so that they can prepare. Re-emphasize the objective at the start of the meeting by writing it on a whiteboard and ensure that you return to the meeting's objective at the end, assessing whether or not you completed it.

For your personal note-taking purposes, whether you are leading the meeting or not, it is helpful to write the purpose at the top of your notes so that you are constantly reminded of it.

Effective note-taking in a meeting cannot be separated from having an effective meeting in the first place. Ensure that you set the objectives of the meeting and recognize the action or mode of it so you can facilitate the best note-taking practices for yourself and the group.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

Successful Minute Taking Meeting the Challenge by Heather Baker

Work Notes – Sharing Notes

In most situations, notes are taken for the use of you and you alone. However, on occasion, it can be exceptionally useful to share notes with colleagues.

If you are working on something collaboratively, sharing your notes will be more obvious, perhaps necessary. However, even when it isn't so obvious to share notes, making them available to others can be beneficial. Below are some ideas on why to do this and how to do it well.

Be over-generous but don't be taken for a ride. Don't be precious with your work and think you shouldn't contribute anymore to the group's notes more than anyone else does. Over-deliver massively whenever you have the chance. Of course, if it becomes apparent others are getting by on your work, address the issue but, as a rule, put out notes and content without expectation of equal return from others.

Be accurate. If you are sharing your own notes, ensure that you have double-checked them for accuracy. You don't want your whole group or organization being pulled off-track because you're disseminating faulty information or action items.

Tech makes this 10x easier. Sharing your notes is made infinitely easier by using technology. Shared folders, or using programs like Evernote or OneNote, make it simpler to share your notes. However, a paper folder can still be used just as effectively and may even be more helpful as it can facilitate a higher level of editorial oversight. One copy of paper notes can tend to be better kept than what can become a digital dumping ground.

Regularly edit the shared area. Designate someone to regularly edit the shared area or organize it so that it is usable for everyone. Using an “other” folder for everything that isn't currently relevant makes it easy to hold onto things without deleting them.

Consider sharing more work. As well as notes from meetings and events you have attended, consider sharing other work to foster a greater sense of collaboration. This might include texts you have found useful, techniques for working, a side-project you are working on or a YouTube video that explains a key principle that can help the group. Diversifying and sharing additional different works can be a great way to improve everyone's effectiveness and

sense of collaboration.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 6: HOW TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE

Please take care in a foreign country. Talk to people, but be aware of your surroundings, local customs, and areas that may be dangerous. Take still more care if you travel alone and/or are female.

10 Reasons to Learn another Language

Since you bought this book, you are no doubt already eager to learn a new language. To reaffirm your reasons and expand your motivation so that you remain inclined to both finish this book AND do what it takes to learn your new language, I will now run through some of the benefits of learning a new language.

1. **Expands your social life.** If you go about learning a new language properly, you will talk to a variety of people. If these are natives of the new language (as they ideally will be), they will have a different cultural background than the people you normally associate with. And so, you will make interesting new connections that expand your social circle and experience of other people and ways of life. In the process you will find that people are – in different respects – more diverse and more similar than you had ever guessed.
2. **Language learning can (and should) be fun.** The stuffy, boring experience of language learning that you had in school is a far departure from how learning a language should be experienced. By putting into practice the ideas in this book and fully immersing yourself in learning your new language, you will have a whole lot of fun.
3. **Opens doors you didn't know existed.** In terms of the people you meet, the ideas you share, and how your mind adapts to the language, there will be new opportunities and connections that can only come from learning a new language. You will breathe new life into how you think and live, and reveal changes and possible opportunities you might not have expected.
4. **It is great for your mind** and will help stave off Alzheimer's and similar problems. Pushing your mind to learn all the new words, figuring out how to put them together, and problem solving to find the right combination to say what you mean are all processes that will all strengthen your mind and help it stay young and healthy. This will have the knock-on effect of slowing any onset of Alzheimer's or dementia.^[iv] Simply put, learning a new language will make you a little smarter!^[v]
5. **Learn more in other areas and become more cultured.** Even if you don't make it to a country of your chosen language, by learning the language (and especially if you immerse yourself as I recommend), you will become wiser

about the world and more cultured and informed about another country or countries.

6. It is super useful. You can now speak to someone who speaks another language – someone you would not have been able to converse with before! Depending on your jobs/plans/etc., this could end up being essential or simply something that comes in handy one day.

7. More employable/higher income. Even if there isn't a direct correlation between you learning a language and financial reward, i.e., there is no Paris business trip to talk with the European arm of your business, it will still be a helpful addition to your resume. If you're in an interview and say, "Oh, and I speak another language fluently," this certainly won't hurt your chances of getting the job/promotion. Adding, "And I taught myself," is perhaps still more valuable, as it shows you're someone who sets themselves tasks and achieves them.

8. It's impressive. There's no getting around it – there are certain kudos given to those who speak multiple languages. Why not become that person that others envy?

9. A good reason to travel. Perhaps the best reason to learn a new language is its immutable closeness with travelling. Traveling feeds language learning and language learning feeds traveling. The world just got a little smaller, a little easier to get by in – so take a trip!

10. Read/watch/listen to your favorite artist in their own language. Whether you love French film, Russian literature, or Japanese anime, there are many ways to enjoy art mediums more deeply in a new language. Tolstoy wrote in Russian, so it follows that you'll get a bit more from it if you read it in his language, as he wrote it.

Why are You Learning a Language? Write Down Your Reasons and Create a Mind Map!

To motivate yourself to take action and keep putting in the hours to learn a language, it is helpful to clarify the reasons why you want to learn it. Create a list now; feel free to include any reasons from the previous list that apply for you, but think of your own as well.

It can help to include a variety of motivations, even if the motivations are egotistical. This list's purpose is to motivate you, so don't worry if the reasons don't sound great on paper. For example:

"I want to learn Spanish so I seem cool and smart in front of my friends."

Perhaps this sounds a little childish, but hey, if it motivates you, write it down!

Also, get creative and think of secondary reasons that get you to the underlying benefits. For example, you might first have:

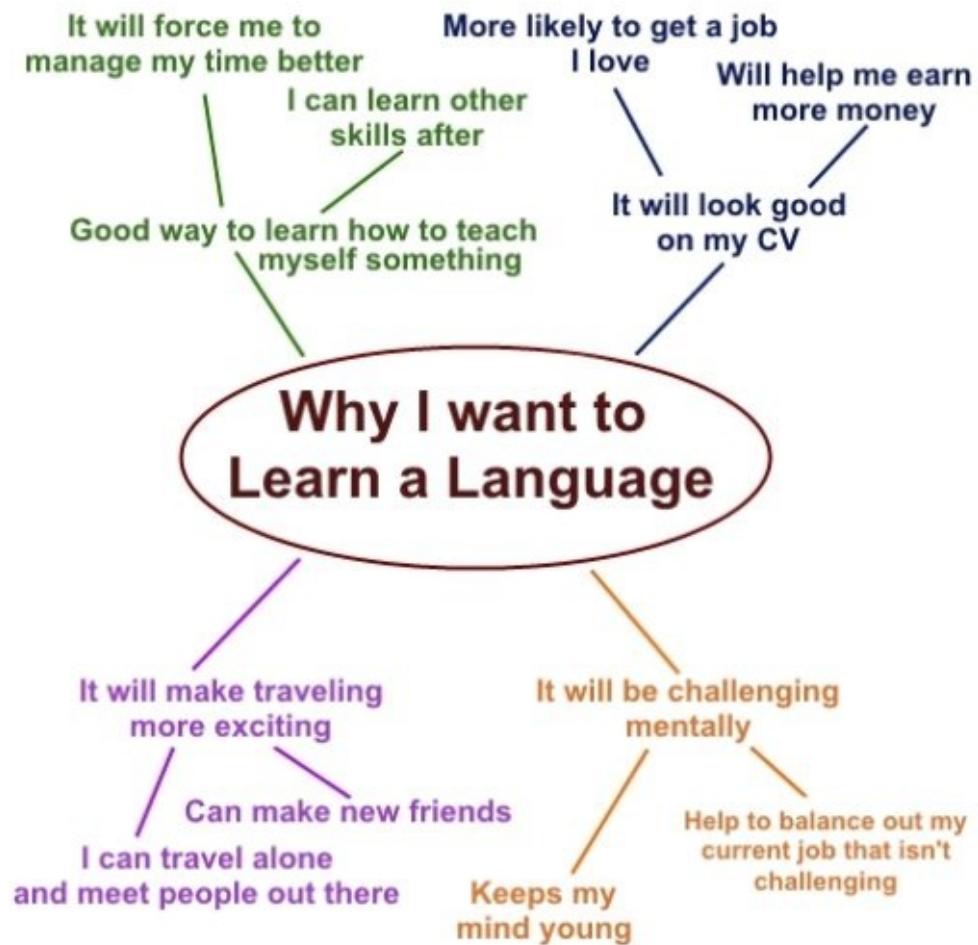
"I want to learn a language so I can speak to Spanish-speakers at work."

However, linked onto this might be the secondary (and possibly more motivating) idea:

"I want to make friends with the Spanish-speaking people at work."

Push until you can't think of any more reasons – don't settle only for what first comes to mind.

Once you have all of these reasons, make a colorful mind map. Mind maps are great for this kind of thing because they show the secondary connections clearly. Below is an example of what this might look like:



Keep your motivational mind map close at hand. Consider sticking it to your wall so that you can regularly remind yourself of why you are putting in the work to learn a language. You could also stick the map on the front of your language notebook that contains your work. Taking the time to read over your reasons/motivations before you begin a study session, or perhaps every morning, will help you keep the reasons why you are learning a language clear in your mind – keeping you motivated to carry through with the work on your work schedule.

(Both the “language notebook” and “work schedule” are tools I will explain later.)

Learning a language takes a lot of work, so utilizing this technique is ideal if you haven’t before. Many people who learn a language are unsuccessful because they don’t put in the time needed and therefore give up. Greater motivation and

regularly feeding the reasons why you want to learn a language will help you to keep going.

Choosing a Language

If you have the freedom to choose which language you want to learn, even if it is only a two horse competition, then there are a few things to consider.

An important aspect – an aspect which may already be a strong motivator – is to consider that you are choosing not just a language but also a culture, a history, and an entire people. Don't just pick a language because it is easy, because you think you should, or because you know other people who have. Choose a language from a country that interests you, that you want to visit, and that you might one day love living in.

It is best to think of choosing a language as if you are choosing a long-term partner. If you have suspicions that it might not work out before you begin, don't get involved. Once you have decided, ensure that you put in the time and effort to push through to becoming conversational; give the language everything you have and make a real commitment.

The difficulty of the language is another aspect to consider when choosing a language. If you're new to learning languages and have little reason for learning a specific one, i.e., you are no more motivated to learn Japanese instead of French, feel free to make life a little easier and choose French.

Of course, for English speakers there are certain languages that will be easier to learn than others. The Romance languages – those similar to Italian (think Roman-ce) – will be easier. Fortunately, these are all associated with vibrant cultures and rich histories.

If you would like a more detailed comparison, visit the website below to see a breakdown of language difficulty.

<http://aboutworldlanguages.com/language-difficulty>

Speak from the Start and Become Conversational ASAP!

The purpose of learning a language is (at least 99% of the time) to be able to accurately converse with someone else in that language. The sooner you are doing this poorly, the sooner you will be able to do it well. Therefore, it is important that you are speaking in your new language as much as you can and as soon as you begin learning the language.

The balance is normally way off with language learners. Some might spend only 20% of the time actually speaking, relying solely on audio books and just listening to the language hoping that they gain fluency. Don't make this mistake, and instead get talking as soon as you can. Then, get into conversations. Even if you are very limited and only able to talk about what kind of things you both like, how you are, etc. – this is a start. The goal from there is to have better conversations each time.

The best way to get to this conversational point is to utilize phrases and scripts that will allow you to “get-by” in the majority of basic day-to-day conversations.

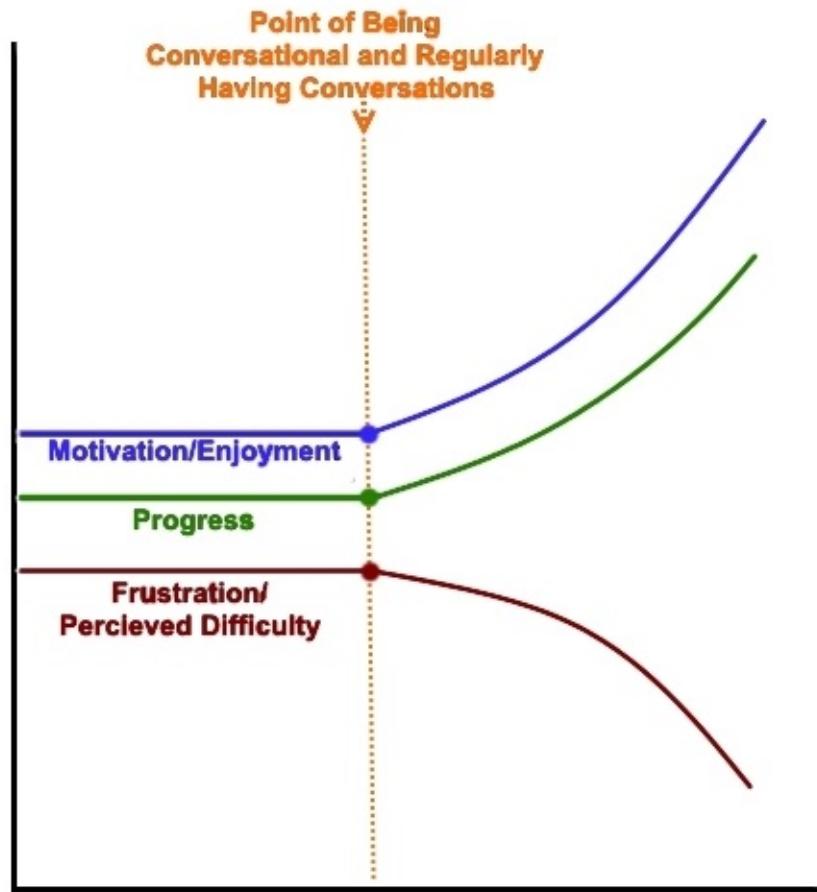
Benefits of getting to and regularly having conversation are...

You can actually talk with people!

You can meet new people from the culture.

You can get feedback on pronunciation so that you don't pronounce something the wrong way repeatedly, as some people do when learning from audio programs.

Below is a diagram that shows how reaching this point will make it easier to continue.



Learn and Use Words that YOU are Going to Use

It is important to learn vocabulary and phrases that you would use. (Because, again you are going to be USING this language, not just having it sit in your mind.) Often students just learn the same phrases: “Can I book a table at a restaurant?” or “Where is the bathroom?”, which are useful if you are a tourist in a new country, but less useful if you are not going to be out eating at restaurants all of the time.

It is important, therefore, to tailor your language learning to align with what you are going to be talking about.

Again, I would suggest that you endeavor to have normal conversations with people about normal things, and get to know them in the same way that you would if making friends in your own language.

Things like, “What do you do for fun?” or “Where’s the best place to get a coffee?” are perfect examples of these kinds of phrases.

The problem with many approaches to language learning is that they presuppose what you are going to talk about in your new language and/or delay speaking in the language to a later point.

Reverse this approach and instead ONLY learn language that you are planning to use (or need for learning/reading/listening to material that you love).

This will make language learning centered on practical application and applied use, resulting in better retention.

Learning New Vocabulary: Essential, Popular, and Fun First

For every new language, there will be a certain amount of vocabulary that will enable you to speak the majority of the language.

Focusing on words that are most abundantly used will take out the hard work and get you into conversations more quickly. Typically, 100 words will be enough to allow you to speak a great deal of a language. Learn these first. Google “most popular/used words” and the language you are learning to find these.

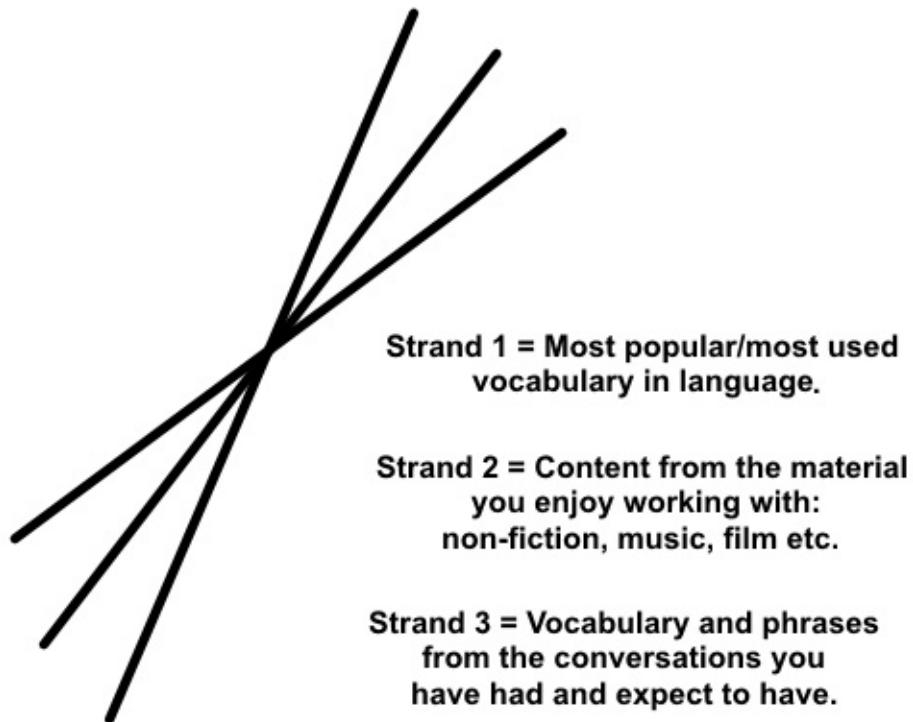
In terms of vocabulary, you want to first learn the most popular one or two hundred words. Following this, focus on the words that you have learnt through reading/absorbing material that you enjoy. Finally, learn the words in your scripts and phrases that align with the conversations that you are actually going to have in your new language.

Many of these words will overlap with one another, so the overall number of words won’t be very high. Getting to those basic conversations about how you are and what you did today is not as far away as most believe and most language courses situate you.

Creating a “language notebook” that begins with this entry level of vocabulary and phrases will mean that you have everything that you need in one place. This will be the key – the “on-ramp” to conversations, development of pronunciation, and taste of fluency that characterizes going from someone who can’t speak a second language and someone who does.

The diagram below shows how these three separate elements will align.

The Three Strands of the Rope
The Rope is the Collection of
Vocabulary and Phrases You Record and Use



Using a Language Notebook

Having one place where you keep all the material you want, need, and use is necessary when learning your language. In this notebook there will be the following:

The list of words that you want to learn in order to use your phrases and scripts.

The one to two hundred most often used words in the target language.

Vocabulary that you have learnt through immersing yourself via material that you love (more of this in the later “immersion” chapters).

Mannerisms, body language, ideas, etc. to help you appear as a native. (Again, this will be explained soon.)

The above is the core that you will need to get to that magic stage of having conversations with others, of enjoying the language, and even of being able to tentatively say that you can speak another language. Do the work and create a folder that contains these sections.

Leave space for your work to grow, as well. As you move into greater fluency, your scripts will improve and your vocab will grow through more reading and conversation.

Also include the reason/motivation mind map that you made. Remember to look over this regularly – every time you pick up your language notebook – as this helps to create a seamless habit.

A time table will also be helpful to get you to grips with a regular learning pattern. It might look something like this:

Monday	Audio course on commute	Watch Friends with Spanish subtitles whilst eating lunch	Study my vocab and scripts with flash-cards for 1 hour	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Tuesday	Audio course on commute	Watch Friends with Spanish subtitles whilst eating lunch	Read about Spain on Wikipedia	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Wednesday	Audio course on commute	Watch Friends with Spanish subtitles whilst eating lunch	Skype Spanish Friend	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Thursday	Audio course on commute	Watch Friends with Spanish subtitles whilst eating lunch	Study my vocab and scripts with flash-cards for 1 hour	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Friday	Audio course on commute	Watch Friends with Spanish subtitles whilst eating lunch	Lesson with my Spanish tutor	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Saturday		Cook a Spanish meal	Study my vocab and scripts with flash-cards for 1 hour	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep
Sunday		Go Flamenco dancing	Skype Spanish Friend	Read Spanish translation of Harry Potter before I go to sleep

Scheduling your study periods and creating small (ideally fun) habits that move you toward language fluency can be planned out on a timetable similar to the one above.

It is wise to use a balanced, holistic approach to learning your new language. Another tool you can add into your language notebook is a “language wheel”; this will help create balance and encourage you to work on your language in many areas.



Once you have finished this book, fill out your own wheel with fun, practical, and effective practices to facilitate your language learning in a balanced and holistic manner. Too many language learners do only one boring act, such as turning up to a class (until they get bored and give up).

Audio Courses

Alongside using a language notebook and the other principles in this book, it will be helpful for many learners to use an audio course in their work. Note that I say “help” – following an audio course is helpful, but not in itself enough to get you to learn a new language. Many make the mistake of thinking that one course holds the answers and that listening to a 20 hour program will be enough. Audio learning must be supplemented with talking to someone regularly (someone who is fluent) and getting that continual correction. This will develop a core of learning that is based on conversing, not just listening.

Problems with over-reliance on audio books include:

You become too “in your head” and don’t speak enough. However, some courses, such as Michel Thomas’s, are terrific at integrating speaking continually.

You learn words and phrases that aren’t current or often used, for example, you learn to say a formal “hello” instead of more popular greetings, such as the equivalent of “hi.”

You actually build up a fear of conversing in your new language and, like a musician who only plays alone, sabotage the majority of your progress and enjoyment by not sharing what you are doing with others.

This is NOT the fun part of language learning. Yes, you are learning a language, but you are not learning how to relate and converse with someone in that language. It is much more fun and much more real to actually talk to someone in your new language.

Audio books are helpful for the following reasons:

You can learn the majority of vocabulary, grammar and word order (depending on the course).

Audio courses can be taken with you wherever you go, and therefore are exceptionally flexible – whenever and wherever you find yourself, you can hit play and learn a little more.

Audio courses are helpful, but for most they cannot bear the weight of trying to learn a new language alone. Use them to provide a structured and easy guide through the language.

Tips on Getting the Most from Audio Learning

There are a few things that you can do to ensure that you get the most out of your audio learning.

The function to speed up and slow down what you are listening to is a powerful one. Don't feel obliged to go through the whole thing at the same speed. It is best to instead alter your speed whenever prudent. This is especially helpful if you are reviewing and re-listening to old material. You may also choose to use the faster than normal function and accelerate up to the higher speeds. Go as fast as you can whilst still ensuring that you comprehend and perform any tasks suggested. These higher speeds are also ideal for material that builds on the same ground in a rudimentary manner.

Slowing down what you are listening to is, of course, also a great idea. When learning new, tricky words, and any time that you are struggling, use this function.

Consider the times that you can integrate language learning into your everyday life, such as on your commute, or walk to the shops. Utilize those times alone and put your headphones in!

Using a Personal Tutor

A personal tutor is another great aid, if used properly. There are certain pitfalls to be avoided, however.

The most important thing is to not rely on the tutor to do the work or push you through the language learning process. Think of your tutor as a tool, a resource to use – not the magic pill sent from the gods to bring you to fluency in a few weeks. You are responsible for your language learning, and unless you are exceptionally lucky or pay very well, the personal tutor will not be able to provide the entirety of your language learning experience.

The main downside to a personal tutor is the cost and scheduling issues. If either of these is a problem for you, consider finding a tutor on the internet who can work with you via Skype or a similar program (often this will be a lot cheaper). Make sure they are qualified and come recommended before you pay. If they are underqualified, ask for a free lesson to see what they are like first.

This leads to using services such as Skype to communicate with others, which is a tremendous benefit of living in the internet age. If you are not actually in the country whose language you are learning, Skype could be the best way to ensure that you regularly speak with someone in your new language.

Freelance work websites are a fantastic resource to use now as well. Search “freelance” or “outsource” on Google to find websites that have many people willing to teach or just talk to you in their native language. These vary in price and quality tremendously, but most websites feature a review system, so you shouldn’t get ripped off if you are prudent.

Having someone you can regularly “touch-base” with over your scripts and have a conversation with is very valuable. If you aren’t taking a class and/or don’t have a fluent friend to help you, a tutor will be essential to keep these scripts on-track and accurate. Again, you cannot learn a language in isolation.

It will cost you a small amount of money, but using a tutor or finding someone online will usually be much less than a formal language course. Find a native speaker – someone speaking in their first language. This will give you a much more “pure experience” of their pronunciation.

Writing in Your New Language

It can be exceptionally useful to work at writing in your new language. This will suit some much more than others and isn't 100% necessary – think of it as a short-cut for those who like to write and/or like definite goals when working. However, even if you do not consider yourself a writer, this may be the ideal time to “dip your nib”, or more likely, “power up your word processor.”

One of the main benefits of writing in your new language is that it will provide a great way to develop and work toward tangible goals. Goals that can easily be crossed off a list and that you can “hang a coat on” are typically more likely to be carried through to completion. For example, the tangible goal of “write a 1,000 word article in French” is easier to carry through than the nebulous goal of “learn French”.

Setting yourself a goal and beginning a definite project, even though it is new and difficult, is easier because it has definite shape and definite steps to get there. To write a piece, you need to put words on paper.

There are various writing goals I would suggest. Below are some examples.

Start a blog in your new language and commit to adding a 500 word piece every month.

Write letters to a pen-pal at least every month.

Write poetry in your new language. This may sound overly-ambitious, but use it as an exercise in progressing your language skill. Yes, your poetry might be akin to what a five year old would write in that language – but if that worries you, just don’t show anyone.

Write a 1,000 word short story.

Write non-fiction articles about something you enjoy. This could be anything, perhaps karate, if you enjoy that. Just write something. Again, doing this in the form of a regular blog is straightforward and simple.

Writing will, of course, require a basic level of competency. Consider adding it into your arsenal of language techniques once you are having conversations and have been working with your language notebook for a few months. It might be the “second wind” that pushes you into the beginning of sounding fluent and honing the details and grammar in your language skills.

Writing in your new language is also a fantastic way to develop that deeper understanding of a language. You will have to learn a good deal of vocabulary and learn the structure of how words go together. Also, if you are a visual learner and find it helpful to see a word spelt out before you say it, writing regularly will be excellent for building and reaffirming your new language.

Writing, however, should not replace other phases of your language experience. Speaking is the goal (unless you have specific goals, perhaps to be a writer in your new language).

Introducing Immersion and Re-Kindling How we Learnt Language as Children

Utilizing immersion so that you are fully exposed to a new language is a brilliant technique to progress language acquisition. Typically, the more you can immerse yourself in a language, the better your language learning will be. There are various reasons why immersion is helpful.

You get to the point of being able to hold a conversation (the pay-off point) faster.

It's closer to how we learnt as children.

The next chapter is on “deep immersion” and is based on spending time in a new country and *only* speaking in your new language. This is the ideal way to learn a language, as you have so much experience with the language natively.

Following this chapter on “deep immersion”, I will explain other ways to immerse yourself in a new language that are less drastic and more applicable to the majority of readers learning a new language, but remaining in their own country. These ideas involve techniques such as choosing material you love to immerse yourself in the language and changing your environment/lifestyle to create a sense of immersion in your new language.

Deep Immersion – Jumping in the Deep-End of Language Learning

The ideal way to learn a language is to be in the native country and therefore be forced to speak the new language without the option of returning to your mother-tongue. This is going off the deep-end, so to speak, in terms of creating mass exposure to the new language. This is immersion at its fullest. The phrase “necessity is the mother of invention” really comes into play here. If you are only able to use the new language, then you *have* to learn it. This effectively forces your hand when it comes to motivation.

Complete immersion and being able to *only* communicate in a new language is also how we learn language as a child. Tune in to that sense of being lost and needing to communicate that you had as a child – use books to learn the words and phrases you need to get by.

However, it can be excessive to always speak in a new language, as well as potentially stressful and frustrating. Benny Lewis in his excellent book, *Fluency in 3 Months*, recommends returning to your mother-tongue at least one evening each week and one weekend a month. The purpose of this is to create a time of relaxation and renewal, preparing you for further language acquisition.

The popular notion that it is best to work on something a little and regularly is good. But better still is A LOT and regularly. Create massive immersion in the language and spend as much time as possible trying to speak the language.

If deep immersion is not possible, then bring yourself as close to that point as possible. Here are a couple of ideas that are less drastic and might hold the key for taking your language learning to the next level.

Learn the language with a friend, relative, or spouse and ONLY speak to them in the new language.

Seek out language learning classes which are based on “immersion.” In these classes, you are allowed to only speak in the new language once the class begins.

Learning a Language Through a Hobby, Passion, and Books

A key way to ensure that you stay motivated and keep learning the language is to fuse your current passions and interests with the new language you are trying to learn. This will help to immerse you, but to a lesser degree.

The simplest way this manifests is by choosing something you are passionate about and learning about it in your target language or enjoying your favorite book/TV/film in it. Doing this will bring a significant change in your motivation, as you can now think about all the cool things you are going to let yourself enjoy in the name of language learning. Find a book, TV, or film that you have been excited about and just dying to get into, then get it in your new language. This will make it much more likely that you will actually read and learn the language, as compared to just reading some dry example-texts.

Reading books that are written for children is often recommended for language learners because they are easy to read. This is true – they are easy to read – however, being motivated and enjoying what you are doing is more important. If you really want to read it, you will be more likely to get through it. What matters is the material – read something that you want to read, and you will learn the language as a secondary benefit.

Use parallel-texts to help make the process even easier. A parallel-text has the original text on one side and translation on the other. This makes it much easier to go back and forth and check up on things you are not sure about. This also removes the possibility of mistranslation on your part. Parallel-texts of many great works of fiction are available; however, these are limited in numbers, so you will have only a small selection of books to pick from. However, one good parallel-text of a fiction book that you love can be taken on trips or thrown in a bag – a brilliant way to make language learning enjoyable and something that you can take everywhere with you.

Reading will become a more intrinsic part of your language work once you have pushed through the initial stages and reached basic competency. Then, when it is more of a case of learning new vocabulary, you can use your reading to re-affirm and build up your knowledge.

It will help to read aloud in order to verbalize what you are saying. At first, this will help boost comprehension and keep your attention on the words rather than

falling into looking over them passively. Consider recording yourself as well – play-back your speech and listen for pronunciation, etc. Of course there will be hesitations, but even with them, see how you sound. Give this recording to someone who is fluent to critique your progress.

Reading actively by writing on the text or taking notes will also help, as it will boost comprehension and enable you to track areas of your reading that need improvement. Circle/highlight words you don't understand and come back to them, perhaps at intervals of every five pages. This will allow you to improve your vocabulary whilst not getting bogged down with a dictionary and having to stop all of the time.

Once you become good at reading and want to hone your knowledge, consider reading books that haven't been translated, i.e., they were originally written in the language you are learning. This will ensure that what you read has the clearest sense of meaning. However, don't worry too much about this, especially when starting out – if you love Stephen King books, get the Spanish translations and read them.

Be Active When Reading/Listening – Try to Work Out What a Word Means

When you see or hear a new word, it will usually be valuable to try to work out what the word means before continuing. Of course, if you don't have time, just write it down and come back to it later.

Working to figure out a word instead of just looking it up right away will help bring more of your mind to bear. This means that you will be more likely to remember the word once you know what it means. It will also help your general understanding of the language as you begin to see relationships and patterns throughout the language.

For some languages this will be easier than others. For example, German words naturally build on one another and come together to form words which, in English, would look like a series of nouns run together.

It will sometimes be possible to work out the meaning through the context of the words around it or by the sounds of the word and its similarity with words you already know. A combination of these factors will mean that as your language skills progress, you may find yourself able to figure out words without having to look them up at all.

TV, Music, Film, and More

Music can be a vibrant and interesting reflection of a culture. This can, therefore, be another part of immersion and your new identity as a language-speaker, fueling motivation and the language learning progress. Listen to the traditional music of that country to feel a little bit closer culturally, also consider finding and listening to music that is currently popular in the culture. Listen as well to the music that you enjoy normally, for example, if you enjoy punk-rock music, Google “punk-rock Spanish” to find some new bands to enjoy.

TV and film are superb ways to immerse yourself and learn a language. The easiest way to do this is to simply turn on subtitles in your target language. Many of the DVDs or programs you watch online will have this feature, easily enabling you to read the words in your new language. Watching TV or film in the language you are learning is fantastic as well; here, turning on English subtitles will help you to also hear the sounds that make up the language.

Turning on the subtitles in the target language, so that you are both listening and reading in your new language, can also be beneficial. Experiment and alter how you work to mesh with what stage your language learning is at.

Reading/watching/listening to the news in your target language is a practice some people find invaluable to keeping their language skills sharp. If you currently get a “news fix” each day, simply changing this input to the language you are learning will – without any additional time spent working – bring more life to your language learning.

Finally, consider cultural magazines/subscriptions based on your target country/language and learn a little bit more about the culture and stay “current” whilst learning the language.

Learning a Language Through Food

Cookery is an excellent gateway to a language and culture. It is also often one of the most important characteristics of a culture – many people are proud of the food that they call their own.

Sharing a meal with someone else is a simple pleasure that is universal. In many cultures, the family comes together at the end of each working day to share a meal and talk with one another. In a similar vein, it will often be the best way to get into conversation and meet people. If you are planning to visit this country or are there already, eating is often an occasion when you will come together with others. Having a well-developed understanding of local foods as well as the vocabulary and phrases needed to talk about them will be exceptionally useful.

If you are traveling alone, this can be the best time to strike up conversation with others – go to a restaurant, bar, or tavern and have a meal. No matter what your situation or language learning goals, making the cuisine a priority is always a great idea.

By immersing yourself in the cuisines of a culture, you give yourself excellent opportunity to learn some new meals through the language itself. Consider watching cooking programs to learn about recipes presented in your new language. Learning to cook the meals native to the culture of your new language is a brilliant way to make the language learning experience, as a whole, more fun and rich. It will also help balance out what might otherwise be trying and repetitive grammar lessons – cooking exciting, new meals will help keep you interested in the culture and the language.

Language learning is best practiced as a holistic exploration of a culture and its cuisine. Again, a key part of language learning is in the motivation. Food, having fun, and being passionate about the culture will help keep you motivated to continue working on the language.

Language is Not the Only Form of Communication

Language is not the only part of being able to effectively blend in and communicate in a new culture. Every language will have its own corresponding hand gestures, levels of eye contact, mannerisms, etc.

The best way to study speakers of your new language is, of course, to be in that country and converse with them. When you do, watch them closely (though don't look crazy) and take notes. Later, imitate what you see. Ask a native speaker to explain how you currently stand-out, what is wrong/different with your body language, etc.

If you cannot do this, Google "hand gestures, body language of___" substituting in "Spanish" or "French", for example. You can also study the TV and film of the culture to find out what characteristics are common. This may take a little time to do, but should show interesting and important subtleties to communication that will help you get by as a fluent local, not stand out as a tourist with no language skills.

Work to immerse yourself still further in the new culture to make your commitment to language learning more permanent. Go as far as you dare to create a new you, a caricature that borders on a cliché for the country. Consider doing one or more of the following:

Look at how people from the culture dress and present themselves. Create a look to imitate them – change your clothes, hairstyle, accessories, etc.

Put up posters, paintings, and other images both of the country and of things that people in that country would typically have on their walls.

Get the brands that are synonymous with the country and pepper their products throughout your house.

Adopt customs: if they take a siesta, consider adopting the custom yourself.

The New You (Being Matt Damon in "The Talented Mr. Ripley")

Creating as much immersion as possible in the language and every other part of the culture is the best way to go about really enjoying language learning and getting all the benefits that come with it.

In the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Matt Damon's character takes on a whole new identity to trick his way into the life of someone else. To do this, Damon's character copies voice intonation, studies mannerisms, and even becomes an expert in jazz to become highly convincing. Be a little like this, and push to really adopt a new series of traits that make you seem more native (though don't be crazy like Matt Damon's character).

Taking time to embrace this new persona – a true native of the language – will develop the motivation, fun, and roundedness to further your language learning efforts.

Structured Phrases and Scripts: Introduction

A key idea that will help you learn a language more effectively is to work on learning AND using useful phrases as much as possible. Develop these into scripts that you can re-use, hone, and recycle to become competent and continually improve the conversations you should be having regularly.

Create a list of phrases that you want to start integrating or that you have learnt already. Work on getting your pronunciation of these down to an art and you will be able to start having conversations. You can then cycle in words where necessary, and new phrases when you feel confident enough to. These scripts should contain phrases that are MOST likely to come up in conversation and that YOU will use because they align with your interests and lifestyle, e.g., you learn phrases based on genres of music and instruments because that is what you like and that is what you will talk about in your new language.

Again, ask for negative feedback on these scripts from someone native, ideally your friend/tutor who you converse with regularly. Ask them to suggest words or different phrases that you can integrate to sound more natural and more native.

Carry these scripts around with you in your language notebook. Practice saying them whenever you have time. Don't be afraid to get them out if you need help during a conversation. However, try to remember the phrase or word before you resort to looking it up to give your memory the chance to re-affirm/solidify itself, as active recall is the core to long-term memorization. (For this reason, flash cards are an excellent way to learn a new language. My eBook "How to Improve Your Memory and Remember Everything" covers this and other memory tools at length.)

It can help to rate the helpfulness of these phrases as you go. The more you use them, give them a higher number, e.g., saying "Hi, how are you?" might get a "10" because you use it every day.

The diagram below is a simple visual to help you remember the value of phrases and scripts for getting to those all-important conversations.

Phrases and Scripts On-ramp

Basically
Conversational
and Having
Regular
Conversations

Maximizing Interactions

It is important that you begin speaking the language and having conversations as soon as possible. The more you can converse with someone in the language (even in a very basic manner), the faster you will progress and reach fluency.

Gaining many reference experiences of conversing is, therefore, very important. The more you can speak, hear, and get feedback, the faster you will progress. In order to make the most of this, no matter what your situation/goal, do your best to have many conversations, with many people, and on many topics.

Depending on your situation and language learning goals, there are a variety of things you can try in order to maximize the number and effectiveness of these interactions.

Ideally, you are in the country that speaks your new language and can talk to locals as much as you want. The following chapter will address how you should go about this, and later I will provide tips for those stuck in their own country regarding how they can get speaking and conversing.

Questions and Answers – Don’t be Afraid of “Interview Mode”

The format of questions and answers can become your best friend for getting into and staying in conversations with people in your new language.

Pin people down and get asking questions, even if you seem a little weird. Also, add phrases to your scripts that help you smooth over meeting people. The following is a good one:

“I’m new to...trying to make friends and learn the language.”

This is so genuine and endearing that it would take someone cruel to shoot you down and end the conversation. And if they do, there are many more people to talk to, so don’t worry too much.

“How are you?”

“What music/film/TV show/book do you like?” (If you are at a book/music store)

“What do you like to do for fun?”

“What job do you have?”

“Do you like it?”

Use open questions to keep it going and get more interested. Things like:

“What do you like/dislike about it?”

Build your list of phrases and scripts to include questions and answers, and be ready to keep conversation going. Once you have these “in’s” to conversation, you will be able to build your skills rapidly.

Structured Phrases and Scripts: Be Nice and Learn to Compliment

(Take care, again, if you are a woman travelling alone with advice such as this and the previous “talk to everyone” ideas. Check to see what is culturally normal and err on the side of caution if in doubt.)

Learning how to compliment in a new language is a brilliant way to smooth over interactions and a great way to start conversations with people. Ensure you do it with a smile and sincerely.

Learning how to say, “That is a beautiful dog,” will get you warmed up and speaking to strangers with few problems. Have your other scripts ready if they seem like they want to talk to you. Leap into conversation when possible.

Native speakers will often be endeared to you because you are taking the time to learn their language. The fact that you have complimented them in their language as well just multiples this. If you then explain that you are trying to learn their language and make friends, whoever you are talking to has every reason to let you try out every word you know and become that local friend you can hone your language with.

Asking someone to explain their favorite part of the town/city you are in is another way to endear yourself to them. Who knows, if you get on well enough, you can spend the afternoon learning about each other and have that new cultural and language experience that is so priceless.

Maximizing Interactions: In the New Languages' Country and Finding Occasions to Interact

No matter where you are travelling and what language you are learning, there will be the same kind of situations when you can converse with a local.

These are situations such as:

Shopping: purchasing food at the supermarket, etc.

Public transport: when you are getting onto a bus, buying a ticket, etc.

Taxis: these are excellent because often you will be together with a local for a long period of time.

Stewards: in art galleries, museums, etc.

In the above occasions, you are talking to someone who is paid to be there and is obliged to talk to you. Take advantage of this!

For occasions and cultures where tipping is expected, you will be able to keep talking, mess up what you are saying, and yet the other person really is stuck with you. Seek out these occasions and always make the most of them. Think of it as a short lesson with someone new on the language you are learning. Ask them questions and use all the phrases and scripts that you sensibly can. And of course, tip them well for their time!

Make sure that you go out every day, and expect to have a conversation with someone new. Even if it is with someone that gets a little pinned down by your eager conversation, don't worry about it – smile, be polite, and if you think are becoming annoying, use phrases such as,

“I'm trying to improve my Spanish and meet people.”

“You seemed nice so I wanted to talk to you.”

When travelling on public transport, you can also make the most of it being “public” and strike up conversation with people as often as possible. There will always be people just waiting to have a good conversation with you and eager to teach you a little more of their language. Consider all the possible occasions when you can be social and talk to someone new.

If the prospect of this super social life sounds intimidating, take baby steps and first maximize interactions when shopping, etc., and build up to complimenting strangers and talking to people who are waiting or travelling.

When travelling to a new country, it will also help to pick out lots of activities or events, which naturally facilitate you interacting with people who speak the language – go scuba diving, take a tour, learn to abseil. Ideally, do things with the locals exclusively (once you have the basics of the language down). Joining a local salsa class or doing something similar is a great way to experience a taste of “deep immersion”. Choose to do things that really show off the culture and immerse you in those activities that are quintessential to the country.

Plan your itinerary and organize different clubs and activities with locals every day. Practice outside of this by talking to people at service counters, etc. Practice the scripts you are trying to get to grips with as well; have these lined up and ready to go weeks before you take the trip.

If you have the opportunity to take a month or longer in the country, getting a job is perhaps the ideal way to force yourself to learn the language. This approach of “throwing your hat over the fence” will be a massive motivator in learning the language. Getting a job in a bar when you are still building fluency will be a great test of your language skills. It is best to consider doing this once you are conversational. Working in a bar or restaurant will mean you have to talk a lot and therefore get to grips with the language, fast.

Maximizing Interaction: Lots of Different People

If you are in a new culture, make a point of talking to one new person each day as a minimum. Use the example situations to find those occasions: shops, taxis, waiting in line, etc. Talking with a variety of people will help you to get down the most valuable key phrases that you really need.

Another reason for talking to a lot of different people is that you will become more aware of the fluctuations in intonation, tone, dialect, etc. Becoming aware of the trends for WHAT is said is also very important. Try and find what form of “hello” is most prevalent, and then incorporate it into your own language.

The same goes if you are only staying in your own country whilst learning. When possible, find a few different people you can at least have a short conversation with regularly.

By interacting with a variety of people in a variety of situations, you become more adapted and aware of how to converse in your new language. If you only speak to the same few people, you might develop a slightly limited sense of what to say and how.

Maximizing Interactions: Overcoming Shyness and Perfectionism

An important principle to remember is that it is always best to try and say *something* rather than to avoid a situation or resort to pointing. Even if you are very unsure about what you are about to say – if it is your best guess, just say it!

You will rarely be able to perfectly say what you mean at first. Expect this and get used to being misunderstood. Tied into this is the importance of not worrying about what people think of you. If you are naturally shy, this might be the excuse you have needed to talk to a lot more people. Don't worry about embarrassing yourself. People might smirk, shrug, or even laugh as you fumble your way through their language. If anything, try to be glad when this happens; laugh it off and find the lesson in the situation.

Try to get to know and really meet people to ensure that you get the most from the language. You have to introduce yourself to do this. Tell them your name, where you are from, that you love their country, and that you're trying to learn the language. Also, shake their hand and get their name, because names are important.

Seek Out and Listen to as Much Negative Feedback as Possible

You need to get a lot of negative feedback in order to improve your language skills. Even if you follow an audio course perfectly, you will doubtless pronounce some things incorrectly. There is no getting around it – you need to talk in your new language, make mistakes, and be corrected.

Making friends with someone in your target language is the best way to facilitate your negative feedback. You can, of course, pay for a course; but really, in the long-term if you want to keep, use, and polish this new language, you need someone who can honestly and helpfully correct you.

It should be an on-going process of refinement – conversation, correction, conversation, etc. This is, again, another reason to become basically conversational, fast, because only from here can you talk to your friend naturally in their language and get corrected on words, details, and pronunciation.

This negative feedback should come from one or more of the following:

In a classroom with other students.

A friend that is learning the language as well.

A friend who is a fluent native (this is ideal).

A tutor via Skype or a one-on-one tutor.

Audio lessons that focus on pronunciation, where you can hear others being corrected (Michel Thomas' work is brilliant at this).

An acquaintance you meet, such as a taxi driver, etc. Just ask them at the end of the ride one way that you could improve.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 7: READING COMPREHENSION: 24 POWERFUL HACKS

Introduction

Thank you for purchasing this short eBook on how to increase your reading comprehension. If you have already read my book on speed reading, you will find some overlap in concepts between the two titles. There I briefly cover the topic of improving reading comprehension. However, in this title, I will go into much greater detail and offer different perspectives and more nuanced ideas. Ideally, read both to achieve a thorough understanding of how to become an excellent reader.

Without further ado, let's begin!

Tip 1: Read Summaries Before the Main Text

If you want to increase your comprehension of a text and are not reading for pleasure, read a summary of the text beforehand. A summary is the core elements of a text – the most important, essential ideas. By consuming a summary, you can rapidly reach a strong level of comprehension thereby increasing both your understanding and speed of reading.

Of course, whether you can find a summary will depend on how popular and mainstream the text is. If you are reading a New York Times bestseller, there will be many summaries online. Anything that is considered a classic in a field will also have numerous summaries available.. This can be a reason to go with texts that are more mainstream if you have the choice.

Reading multiple summaries will also be helpful if you can find them. Different summaries will take unique angles on the text and therefore you will get a more three-dimensional understanding. By reading 3-5 summaries, you will usually ensure you get the most important parts. Also, the crucial aspects will be incredibly clear as they will recur in all the summaries.

Think of a summary as notes by a professional on what they believe to be the most important parts of the book.

When you think of it like that, there is every reason to read a summary before you read the main text. Again, this method is useful unless you are reading for pleasure and want to discover and explore the text firsthand. If you do want to read like this – for pleasure – but still want excellent comprehension, consider reading the summaries afterward. You can then enjoy the twists and turns of the text but also obtain maximum comprehension afterward.

Along with reading summaries, there is also the option of listening or watching video content that summarizes the material. The variety of content form will help with comprehension. We'll cover this more in the next chapter.

Tip 2: Vary the Content Form

To gain excellent comprehension of a text, it is helpful to turn to other forms of content. Along with the written words, you can utilize audio and video content that can help develop your comprehension of the text.

Whether you are consuming summarized material before, during, after, or instead of actually reading your chosen text, you can use summaries that aren't only text. Audio summaries and visual summaries on YouTube are easy to find. Video content tends to be more compelling and explain things more effectively if you are a visual learner. These are important factors that may dramatically boost your comprehension. Audio summaries can be compelling too, and can be very practical as they make multitasking easy. For example, you might choose to listen to an audio summary of a text you are about to read whilst on your commute to work or school.

Tip 3: Listen and Read at the Same Time

An excellent way to use different content mediums for thorough comprehension is to listen to an audiobook and follow the written text simultaneously. This enables you to see the words, hear them read aloud, and keep moving at an effective pace. If you haven't tried this before, I highly recommend it. Just hit play on an audiobook and follow along reading the words off the page at the same time. You should notice an instant focusing of your mind. After all, it's being hit with the same content through two senses whilst being pushed consistently forward.

Listening to an audiobook and following on the page is also a great way to increase reading speed. If you find that you have excellent comprehension at a normal speed, consider increasing the audiobook to a speed of 1.25, 1.5, or even faster. If your comprehension remains at a strong level, keep increasing the pace. If your comprehension drops, slow down again.

This technique is an easy and effective 'in' to better reading with little effort. Pressing play and following along on the page is perhaps the easiest way to increase comprehension immediately. It will also help you stay focused on the text for much longer than you might normally. Of course, still take breaks, but you might be surprised with how well you can remain focused on the content.

Tip 4: Summarize the Material Yourself

Working with other people's summaries is a great shortcut to improving your comprehension. Another tool is to create and work with your own summary of the text.

There are a variety of ways to go about this. Below are some ideas on how you can create your own summaries to improve your comprehension:

Create a summary of summaries. Before or instead of reading the text, create your own summary based on the pre-existing summaries. This is an essentialist approach to working with a text. However, if you are working with a tight deadline or want to get a rapid “level-up”, this can work well. Simply find two or more summaries of the text, read them, and then paraphrase the pre-existing summaries to create your own summary. By re-writing the summaries, you will further increase your comprehension because...

The act of re-writing the ideas will improve your comprehension.

Analyzing and compiling the summaries will require a level of engagement that will increase your comprehension.

Re-reading and consistent exposure to the most important ideas of the text will build your comprehension even more.

Summarize as you read. Another technique you can use is to summarize the text as you read it. This might mean you write a 25 word summary of what you've just read at the end of every page, every two pages, or every chapter. Do whatever makes sense for the text and complements your goals with it.

To do this well, make it a regular, consistent practice and give yourself simple criteria for what to write. For example, if you are summarizing a piece of fiction, at the end of each chapter you might summarize the plot in 50 words and write your opinion of the text in another 100 words. This 150 word piece will only take a few minutes to compose, but will ensure your comprehension and retention of the chapter are strong.

This is also a helpful technique because knowing you will have to summarize the text will encourage you to focus. After all, you don't want to have nothing to say in the short summary you have committed to creating!

Create a summary at the end of the text. Once you finish the text, it will be

helpful to summarize the entire text – bring together the small summaries you have created, and perhaps compare these to any summaries you can find written by others. Then create one all-encompassing summary of the text that ties into your reading goals.

You can then refer to this summary whenever you need to. This final summary becomes not only a means to boost your immediate comprehension, but also a guide for future reference.

To make the summary as helpful as possible, consider anticipating what you will want to come back to the text for. For example, if you know you may return to the text because you have to do a piece of coursework on it, consider highlighting/summarizing those sections you think may be most applicable to that coursework.

Tip 4: Read Aloud, Move Slowly, Verbalize, and Follow Your Finger

There are a few simple, physical techniques you can use to help boost your comprehension. These typically sacrifice reading speed, but hey, you can't have everything! Below are these very practical tips explained concisely.

Read Aloud. Reading aloud will improve your comprehension for a few reasons. First, you have to focus more to speak a word, and with greater focus comes greater comprehension. Second, you will hear the words as well as see them, which will boost comprehension. This is the same principle as reading a text whilst listening to the audiobook at the same time. Absorbing material both visually and auditorily tends to improve comprehension.

Sub-Vocalize (if it is impractical to read aloud). When most people read, they tend to sound the words out in their head. They mentally hear each word as they look at it. This takes a lot of time and slows down reading, but for most it does help comprehension. Therefore, if comprehension is your main goal, continue sub-vocalizing and reading slowly. If you aren't currently sounding the words out in your mind as you read, start to. Typically, comprehension will not be worth the large dip in reading speed that comes with sub-vocalizing. However, if your goal is high comprehension, sub-vocalizing will help.

Follow Your Finger. Using a physical aid to guide your eyes as you read is a great way to help you stay focused on the next word. It doesn't have to be your finger – it might be a ruler laid flat against the page or a pencil pointed at the words you are reading. This will help you stay focused and keep you from skipping over words and ideas.

Tip 5: Read the Text Repeatedly

Reading a text more than once is perhaps the most obvious way to improve your comprehension. The more familiarity we gain, and the more we read a passage, the more our comprehension increases. Of course, re-reading doesn't guarantee improved comprehension. This isn't a one-size-fits-all answer to improving comprehension, but it is a good place to start.

It can be helpful to re-read a text with a different reading technique than the one you used the first time. This is because familiarity and/or boredom may cause you to become unfocused. If you read and listened to an audiobook at the same time on the first read through, it may be beneficial to read aloud the second time.

Also, before re-reading, consider clarifying what you want to get from the text. Write down a few questions you want to answer, or maybe, this time, take some notes on what seems most important. As you have already read the text, you should be able to better clarify what you want to gain. For example, your first read might only confirm that the text is relevant to a problem you want to resolve, but you don't actually find the answer. Now that you are confident the text is worthy of your time, you can focus on finding the answer.

Reading a text many times brings up the question of what trade-off between overall reading speed and comprehension you should be happy with. For many people, speed reading a text twice can actually achieve better comprehension than reading slowly once whilst taking less time overall. Therefore, even if you are reading for comprehension, multiple read-throughs at a higher speed can be a desirable and beneficial method.

There is no perfect strategy for all people and every situation, so do your best to gain experience and understanding of what works well for you.

Tip 6: Preview the Text

Another great way to improve your comprehension is to preview the book before you read it. Consider this time spent priming your mind and building up your understanding of the text. Reading summaries is previewing the text in a manner as you are learning about the text before actually reading it. However, previewing the text typically means reading actual parts of the text that give an overview. Reading chapter titles, the blurb on the back, or sections of text that are high-value (such as introductions and conclusions) are all great examples of previewing.

Previewing a text is like creating a scaffold or basic structure for comprehension, upon which you can later add more detail. The preview, like the summary, enables you to create shortcuts on your way toward a complete understanding.

Depending on your goals for the book, previewing the text is also a great way to find out whether the text is fit for your purpose or not. For example, if you are looking for a text that will enable you to solve a specific problem, previewing the book will likely reveal whether the text contains what you are looking for. This will obviously save you a great deal of time - it is much better to spend a small amount of time previewing a book to avoid reading entire texts that are not useful to you in the long run.

The best place to start with previewing a text is the blurb on the back of the book. From there, move to the contents page and then the introduction and conclusion. This should give you a definite sense of the content of the book. If you need more, read the introduction and conclusion paragraphs of each chapter. This will ensure you get a complete preview of the book. From this, you will know whether the book is useful to you and you will gain a core understanding.

Previewing a text is an important strategy used by many readers. Don't be one of the foolish who simply jump in and read from start to finish. Instead, dabble and dip into the key areas of the book and build up the structure of core comprehension. Once you have achieved this, move intelligently toward the details and what is necessary for your reading goals.

Tip 7: Don't Assume, Test

It can be appealing to assume that we have a solid comprehension of a text just because we have read it. But often we are either being too hopeful or just straight lying to ourselves. The only way to be sure that comprehension is good enough is to test it. The word “test” might bring up terrible memories of being bored and overworked at school, but tests don’t have to be awful! If you want to get the reading comprehension you want, they are immensely helpful.

The first step is to accept that your “guesstimates” for your reading comprehension are probably inaccurate, inconsistent, and overly generous. Typically, we confuse familiarity with mastery when it comes to reading comprehension. Yes, we may be able to loosely say what the text was about, but we probably didn’t engage with it fully, and we won’t remember it in a few hours or days. Don’t be overconfident with your comprehension. Instead, accept that testing will be necessary if you are serious about improving comprehension.

There are two aspects to effective comprehension testing.

First, test for the right thing. It is important that you are testing for what you deem to be good enough comprehension. The most obvious area is testing to see if you are following the book. A good way to test for this is writing 100 words at the end of each chapter summarizing what happened. To see whether your comprehension was good enough, re-read the chapter and see if you missed anything important in your summary.

Comprehension outside of this, such as reading critically, is a little harder to test for by yourself, but it is possible. For example, you might try to answer certain questions after you read a chapter. Examples might include: What are the arguments for and against this idea? What seems inconsistent in this argument? Etc.

Second, test often. As well as testing for the right thing, you will need to test yourself often - often enough that you don’t let your comprehension dip significantly.

It might be necessary to test yourself at the end of every page if the book is particularly dense, whereas other times the end of the chapter will be fine. The frequency should be determined on a case by case basis. After a period of testing, you might be happy to let yourself continue as usual. Ideally, you want

to test and then be confident in the reading strategy/s you have chosen for the text. For example, in the case of a ten chapter nonfiction book, you might test for comprehension at the end of the first five chapters, but if you pass these five tests you may choose to read the rest of the book without testing yourself again. Just be sure to continue the reading strategy/s you used in the first five chapters – don't get lazy.

Tip 8: Use Many Techniques and Become Self-Aware

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted topic, and as such, it is difficult to find one tool that gives you everything you want. Instead, seek to develop a broad skill set and be willing to implement multiple strategies and techniques. Learn to tailor how you read to the book and your goals.

Having said that, there are strategies that are closer to the easy, plug-and-play strategy of which we all dream. For example, reading and listening to an audiobook at the same time is a strong technique. It will improve comprehension without compromising speed.

Combining strategies will also work well. It is important not to consider these techniques as mutually exclusive unless it is obviously impossible or impractical to do both. It may add more time, layering strategies in this way. But if you are serious about reading comprehension and becoming a master reader, a variety of techniques is necessary.

Developing your reading comprehension skill set should also be an integral part of an ongoing improvement of your meta-learning (which simply means learning about learning). Meta-learning is characterized by becoming more self-aware and intelligent about learning. Therefore, it is essential to work on your awareness of how well you are getting on with your reading strategies.

Concretely, this might mean writing down your progress and journaling about the strategies you like and why.

Of course, aligning this with comprehension tests to reveal which technique works well will be helpful. There are other things to consider outside of the comprehension tests as well. For example, listening to an audio summary on your commute might suit your lifestyle perfectly. Reading whilst listening to an audiobook might feel so easy that you find you enjoy reading more altogether. There is more to consider than just “which tip will boost my reading comprehension the most”. Enjoyment, practicality, ease of implementation, etc., are also critically important. Work to develop your self-awareness and journal about what works and why, and you will become a more effective reader overall.

Tip 9: Re-Form Content

The more you engage with the content, the better your comprehension will be. A great way to increase your engagement is to re-form the content. This might mean re-writing the content in a different manner, such as writing questions and answers based on the content or changing the form of the content; for example, creating a slideshow of images that explains the content of the book.

Reforming the content will become easier the more you practice re-writing - summarizing the book in words is straightforward enough. This is a simple way to re-form content. There are, however, many different ways for to re-form content that can be more interesting. Below are some ideas:

Create a mind map. A mind map is a diagram with a topic or idea at the center of the page with connected ideas linked to it. Summarizing a book by making a mind map based on the contents page is an easy starting place to improve your comprehension. To do this, put the title of the book in the center and connect lines out to chapter titles. Under these titles write a short summarizing sentence and perhaps draw an image to represent the chapter.

Create a PowerPoint presentation. Turning the content into a PowerPoint presentation is a fantastic way to simplify and break down what you have been reading. Being able to explain it concisely in presentation form is also a great way to ensure you have fully understood the text. You can't explain what you don't understand.

Create flashcards. Deconstructing your book and placing the information on flashcards will help you understand each part of the book and what it contributes to the whole, which will improve your overall comprehension of the text. Consider creating a flashcard that summarizes each chapter/section and testing yourself.

Typically, the more creative you get with re-forming the content, the more you are going to engage with it, thereby increasing the resulting comprehension. For example, creating a mind map of a book using only images will be more creative and challenging than trying to summarize the book in words.

Of course, you don't need to go overboard – there's no need to create a three-act play describing the contents of your nonfiction book. However, by delving into

more creative and unusual ground, you will likely improve your comprehension. It is especially helpful if you can be creative in areas that you find the most enjoyable and compelling or that lean closer to your strongest learning style. Some people find critical thinking and discussion better for comprehension. In this case, discussing a book critically with a colleague might be best. A visual learner, on the other hand, may find creating a collage with pictures to be the best way to engage themselves and comprehend the book with which they are working.

Tip 11: Make Predictions, Infer Meanings, Draw Conclusions

Another way to effectively engage with the text and consequently boost your comprehension is to try taking the next intellectual step with the book's ideas. This can take on a variety of forms, such as predictions, potential conclusions, and inferred meanings.

The simplest manifestation of this is to predict what is coming next in the book. What is the next logical step of the story (or nonfiction concepts)? Remember, the point is to improve your engagement with the text, and by extension your comprehension. Don't worry if your predictions are inaccurate – as long as they are logical and don't demonstrate a lack of comprehension, you are increasing your engagement. For example, if you make a logical prediction about what a character in a fiction book will do in the next chapter and they don't do what you expect, don't be annoyed. It's fine – as long as your prediction was logical. If, however, you make a prediction that you realize is illogical, you are demonstrating that your comprehension wasn't good enough.

Another helpful practice is to infer meaning and possible conclusions from the text. This can extend beyond what you think might come in the following chapters and can even be done at the end of the book. An example might be reading a nonfiction pop-psychology book about the effect of social media on the millennial generation; upon finishing the book, you might draw your own conclusions that the book may or may not have pushed you toward. For example, you might think the book implies that social media will become even more prevalent in the future, even if that opinion is not explicitly stated.

Making predictions, inferring meanings, and drawing conclusions is a more developed way of engaging with a text. This moves beyond simple summarization. Assuming you are not being illogical in your reasoning, you will improve your comprehension because you will be engaging with the text at a deeper level. You will extend your comprehension beyond what can be tested easily. By building ideas on top of what the text offers, you are solidifying, demonstrating, and extending your comprehension.

This is also a great way to make the text more relevant to you, which can also help your comprehension. When reading the book on social media, you might ask yourself, "How do I think social media has affected me and my lifestyle?" This can make the text more relevant, interesting, and compelling. This, in turn,

will develop your comprehension. Just be sure that you keep your feet on the ground and build your arguments and ideas based on the content of the book. If you leap too far or get lost on a tangent, you might compromise your comprehension as you may solidify partial understandings and missteps in your reading.

Tip 11: Manage Your Time and Energy Levels Effectively

For consistently thorough reading comprehension, you need to be aware of how you are managing your time and energy levels. We aren't machines that can read for hours on end. Our physical ability to focus dips after a while. Therefore, it is important to work intelligently and manage your time to get the best reading comprehension possible.

This is absolutely essential advice if you have to read for extended periods of time. Personally, I take a break after 50 minutes whether I am working at a computer, reading a book, or doing anything that isn't relaxing. For many, taking a break more frequently (perhaps every 20-30 minutes) is ideal. It depends on what kind of work/reading you are doing and how mentally taxing it is, so consider this as well.

The work/rest cycle is an essential balancing act that you must master at some point. Rest is necessary for you to recuperate and return to peak reading comprehension levels. If you start reading and don't stop, your focus and comprehension will quickly and significantly deteriorate.

To manage your reading sessions and take breaks when needed, use a timer. Set the timer on your laptop/phone/tablet – whatever is most convenient to you – and make yourself take a break when the timer chimes. Don't think of it as an option - you must take regular breaks to maintain your focus and comprehension.

If you manage your time effectively and take regular breaks, there is no reason you can't read all day with good comprehension levels. Personally, I can read eight or more hours a day as long as I take at least a ten minute break every hour.

When you take your breaks, varying your activity is helpful. If you are reading inside and sitting down, a break spent walking in a park is a great way to refresh your mind. Consider eye exercises such as closing your eyes for a minute and alternating between looking at things in the distance and up-close as well.

Manage your time effectively, use a timer, and take breaks consistently. Do so and you will ensure you stay fresh and always at a solid level of reading comprehension.

Tip 12: Read Actively

Another way to improve your engagement with the text, and by extension your comprehension, is to take notes as you read. We've all had that experience of reading a passage only to realize that we weren't actually following it. Taking notes is a great way to eliminate this problem and always enjoy an improved level of comprehension.

Below are some ideas on how to leverage your note-taking to improve your reading comprehension:

Write on the text. Perhaps the easiest place to start with note-taking is to write directly on the text you are reading. This might mean highlighting parts that you find interesting, important, or challenging. You can also write in the margin beside the text or in any blank space you can find.

Writing on the text is a great way to ensure you stay focused and moving forward with the text. Moving between the text and your own separate notes can feel a little less immersive. If you don't need to take notes for any other purpose than solidifying your comprehension, penning the text you are reading can be a great option.

There is usually a good reason to take notes. Typically, readers don't take as many notes as they should. It can seem like too much work to both read AND decide how, when, and why to take notes on what you are reading. However, note taking is almost always a good idea. Along with boosting your general reading comprehension, it can have the following benefits:

By highlighting high value parts of the text, you can effectively create a summary of what you are reading. This will make returning to the text easier and less time-consuming.

You can be more critical of the text through note-taking. Write ideas and questions, underline things, and follow up on parts of the text of which you are critical.

You can find, highlight, and work with what is important to you. Especially when working with nonfiction, you might have certain questions that need answering. Taking notes makes it easier to find and record your progress.

You can enjoy reading more and engage your visual senses. This might mean

highlighting passages or drawing your own small diagrams in the margins. These small additions to the text will make the text individualized and more enjoyable to work with.

Taking notes is a fantastic way to get more from any text you are reading. There really are only positives to note-taking and it takes very little time to do. This is a straightforward way to increase comprehension and is typically a shortcut to achieving many of your other reading goals. Whether you are summarizing, criticizing, memorizing, analyzing, researching, or anything else - take notes!

Tip 13: Think Critically and Discuss

Perhaps the best way to become deeply engaged and boost your comprehension is to think critically whilst you read. This doesn't mean that you have to do a complete critical review of the book or become a literary critic overnight. No – it just means that you read with a critical eye to get more value out of books and increase your comprehension.

As I said in the previous chapter, reading with a pen in your hand and taking notes is a wonderful way to boost comprehension. Becoming critical of the text is a natural extension of this. It can be difficult to know where to start when trying to think critically, but this doesn't have to be rocket science. Below are some simple questions that will push you toward critical thinking

What do I like about the text?

What do I dislike about the text?

What is inconsistent with other ideas in the text?

Do the conclusions naturally follow from the premises of the argument?

Are scientific claims being backed up with enough evidence?

Is this book explaining ideas in an effective manner?

What do I like about the writing style?

There are a lot of questions to ask once you get into it. Your level of criticism should depend on your overall goals for the book. If you are a philosophy student and reading an anthology of philosophical ideas, it might be exceptionally useful to be highly critical, looking for evidence for arguments and whether the conclusions are consistent. However, for a pop-psychology book, it might be sufficient to stick to questions like, "What do I like about these ideas?" If you're reading light fantasy fiction, on the other hand, there really is no need to get critical – just enjoy the book.

Along with thinking critically whilst reading, it is useful to discuss the content of the book with someone else. Below are some reasons this is so helpful for your comprehension:

Every reader has a different experience and subjective interpretation. This will enhance comprehension and is best done through discussion.

There are probably elements that you've each missed. The discussion will help reveal gaps in each other's comprehension.

It will accelerate critical thinking as you can take differing points of view and argue for and against ideas.

You can talk about what you liked, what you didn't like, and why. Highlighting the positives will help affirm understanding and your enjoyment.

Both reading critically and discussing the book with another person are great methods for dramatically improving your experience and comprehension of a text.

Tip 14: Apply What You Read

If you are reading a nonfiction book, perhaps the best way to improve your comprehension is to apply the information to a real world situation. This is easy if you are reading a “how to” book such as this one. Indeed, for “how to” books, the best way to improve your comprehension is to simply implement what they teach as soon and as completely as possible. Suspend your disbelief and any criticisms you might have and simply begin putting into practice what you have read.

For other types of books, it can be trickier to apply what you read. Often, you will have to settle for the next best thing and re-form the content in some manner. This might mean writing an essay or creating a summary based on the ideas in the book. For fiction books, again this will be the best way to apply the ideas from the text.

If you are a student, consider all of your reading as material that will be applied at some point. Do your best, even if it isn’t a literal/direct application, to apply the material quickly. For example, a literature student who reads a classic novel should then write an essay on it. By doing this, they apply the ideas of the book in the context that is most relevant to them. Improved comprehension through the application of the texts’ content is an excellent tool and an essential one for students.

Tip 15: Set a Purpose

If you fail to define what effective comprehension means to you, you make it more likely that you will fail to read effectively. Therefore, you must set a purpose and define clear goals you want to achieve through reading. You can then match the best reading strategy to your goals to give yourself the best chance of gaining what you want from the book.

There are a variety of purposes your reading can take on. Below are some examples and suggested reading strategies.

Enjoyment. Here there is no need to take notes or do anything but take your time with the book. Consider joining a book club or listening to an audiobook if these things are enjoyable to you.

Selective research. Perhaps you are working on an essay or project and want to find information. In this case, it is important to preview the book and skim through it to get to the important areas as soon as possible. Also, boost your comprehension in high-value areas and take a lot of notes.

Retention and comprehension. Perhaps everything in the book is worthwhile and you need to grasp it strongly. Here, take notes, read slowly, summarize, and think critically. Essentially, utilize all of the ideas I have suggested and you should be able to amp up your comprehension to the max.

Without clearly defining what you want from a book, you leave the door open for wasted time reading unimportant areas and learning unimportant things. There is always a purpose for reading a book. The strategies you choose for reading the book should directly correlate with that purpose. Doing anything less is lazy reading and will diminish your comprehension, along with taking you longer overall.

Tip 16: Reflect on the Text

It pays to reflect on what you have read both periodically whilst reading and when you have finished the text. This is similar to critical thinking but is a more relaxed practice. A bad practice that some readers have is to read a text without thinking much. Once they are done, they just put it on the shelf without allowing any time for reflection. Instead, try to think and reflect on the text a great deal. This will boost your comprehension and retention of what you have read.

As I said, doing this both during and after reading the text is desirable. For this reason, it can be helpful to read a book “little and often” in order to give yourself plenty of opportunities to reflect on the contents. If you read through a book in one sitting, there is little time to truly digest it. On the other hand, if you read just 4 pages every day, you will have the whole day to think on those four pages.

If you aren’t in the habit of reflecting on what you have read, you will probably have to find extra time to begin this practice. Breaking up your reading is a great place to start as this gives you more opportunity to reflect. This doesn’t mean you have to read only four pages a day. Instead, introduce more breaks into your reading. Read for 40 minutes and then take a 20 minute break to sit and think about what you have read.

If you have trouble staying focused or knowing what to reflect on, try answering questions such as the following:

- Where do you think the plot is going next?
- If you were writing the book, would you have written it in this way?
- Who do the characters remind you of in your own life?
- Would you like to experience the things you are reading about?

There aren’t any definite rules for what your reflecting period should contain. Yes, you can go down a rigorous, critical route, but often a more daydream-like, casual reflection is more enjoyable and will be good enough for comprehension. Anything that gets you thinking and genuinely engaging with the text will be helpful. For fiction, light reading, and/or reading for pleasure, scheduling these small breaks to think about what you have read should also help you enjoy the text more. Over time, you will be a more reflective, thoughtful reader with better comprehension. If you are in a book club or discussion group, this practice will probably make you the most valued member as you’ll have a deep pool of ideas

and opinions on the text.

Tip 17: Work on your Vocabulary

If you don't understand what words mean, your comprehension is going to suffer. This is obvious but needs to be highlighted because although most readers know they should look up words they don't understand, many don't. Below are some (bad) reasons not to:

- It takes too long to look up a word. I will understand the word through context later.
- It is only one word, it doesn't matter if I don't understand it.
- I think I know what it means - I'm familiar with it.

The last is probably the most dangerous because it is all too easy to be familiar with a word but not truly understand its definition. However, if you want to be a top reader and have the best comprehension possible, you must always remedy gaps in your knowledge. Below are some ways to ensure your vocabulary is always up to par.

Keep a physical dictionary on your desk as a reminder. This is perhaps the best way to remind yourself that you are no longer going to let yourself sit in the dark with your vocabulary. Make looking up a word easy and natural by always having the dictionary on your desk. Yes, a digital one might be more convenient, but a physical one is a clear reminder that is hard to ignore.

Look up words you don't understand or only partially understand. Even when you think you probably understand a word, don't take the chance that you're wrong - look it up!

Improve your “bank” of vocabulary by learning new words regularly. If you are serious about excellent comprehension in general, you must expand your vocabulary. The more words you already know, the fewer you will have to look up in future. You will also become a more eloquent writer and conversationalist. A word a day is a good practice if you can get into it. Try to do it in your down time- perhaps in the bathroom, on your commute, or during a meal time.

Keep a glossary of jargon for your field. Every field has terminology that is specific to it. Build up a glossary of the most important words you need to know and you will become more effective at what you do. Consider making a set of flashcards with the term on one side and the definition on the other. Quizzing

yourself with these cards periodically is a great way to ensure you are always improving your vocabulary.

Tip 18: Improve Your Contextual Understanding

To improve your comprehension of a text, it is often necessary to improve your comprehension of the entire context of the book. This simply means that you read around what you want to understand better. For example, if you want better comprehension of a paragraph, read the paragraphs around it. If you want a better understanding of a chapter, read the chapters around it. Or if you want better comprehension of a book, read books that are similar to it.

Improving your contextual understanding is a straightforward way to boost your comprehension of a given text. It is also often the best way to move forward if you feel that you are stuck or stagnant in your comprehension. Rereading the previous text and skipping forward to read what comes next is the best way to have an epiphany or an “of course – that’s what that means!” moment.

Often, readers try to simply reread the text they are struggling with and don’t think to move forward regardless, but this can be the best way to understand the text with which you are struggling. Don’t think that you have to fully understand something before you can move on, because moving on can often give you the context needed to understand what you were stuck on.

Tip 19: Activate Previous Knowledge

Another way to improve your comprehension is to first work on activating your previously acquired relevant knowledge. Revising a topic that you have experience with to help your comprehension of a new text is always a good idea. It won't take long but will give you a definite boost.

Ideally, you will have notes and clear summaries of any previous work you have done on a topic. You can now reread these to activate your base knowledge. This is another reason to create notes and summaries when you work with a book – it enables a fast re-entry to the topic at a later date. However, if you didn't create anything, simply take the time to skim through any relevant books you've read before, and you should be able to reactivate any knowledge you have on the subject.

Take time to revisit all possible knowledge you can draw on that may have gotten a little rusty. Think of the books you read months or years ago that were similar to what you are about to read and glance through them. If you don't have much time, perhaps read a summary of each on Wikipedia. This may well be enough to rekindle memories of what those books contained. You can now read the new text at a slightly higher level of comprehension.

Activating previous knowledge is similar to improving contextual understanding, except you are relying on the experience you already have. This is obviously much quicker than reading new books on a topic. Think of it this way – if you've already read and worked with similar topics before, it is a waste of time not to take a few minutes to refresh that content in your mind. The old content will help you tackle the new text with a stronger base of knowledge.

Tip 20: Visualize the Content

We humans are exceptionally good at remembering locations and images. This is how the best memory masters remember entire decks of cards – they turn them into memorable scenes and link them to physical locations. Research 'memory palaces' if you want to learn more about the power of our visual memories. Because of this natural strength, developing our comprehension through visualization is a powerful tool.

This is exceptionally useful when working with fiction books. If you are a literature student and want to work on your comprehension of a text, take the time to visualize the scenes.

It is trickier for nonfiction books, but all the same, there are occasions when visualizing content is possible. An example might be reading an autobiography of someone that you are profiling, perhaps as part of your work as a journalist. If you want to thoroughly comprehend the text, it will be helpful to visualize the periods of the life of the individual about whom you are reading. If you're reading a book about Abraham Lincoln, perhaps visualize him giving speeches.

As well as using visual scenes, it will be helpful if you can incorporate other senses. These "mind movies" or "visualizations" will also help you enjoy the book in a more compelling and memorable manner - further boosting comprehension. As I've said, you may have to get more creative when moving into the nonfiction category, but whenever possible turn the text into a rich mind movie and you will experience improved comprehension.

Additionally, this can be exceptionally useful if you are working to improve the reading comprehension of a child because children tend to find the process even more enjoyable and rewarding than adults.

Tip 21: Work with Questions

Questions are often a catalyst for comprehension. After all, we ask question to better understand something, so it makes sense that working with questions is a superb way to improve your comprehension of a text.

There are many ways to work questions into how you read a text, and we have covered many of them already. Below are some examples:

- What did I like about the text?
- What do I think is going to happen next?
- What are the motivations of the main character?
- What are the consequences of the ideas in this chapter?

There is no end to the questions you can ask of a given text. If you want to add more variety and depth to your questions, try to cover the 5 W's: who, what, when where, why. Incorporate these "question words" and you will achieve a greater breadth of questions.

Tip 22: Be Aware and Willing to Change Course

The effective reader notices when they are unable to comprehend what they are reading. They then alter their reading strategy to compensate. Self-awareness, as simple as it sounds, is an important skill in itself. As I have said, it can be easy to trick ourselves into believing or hoping that we understand a text to a sufficient level. The best way to ensure adequate comprehension is to quiz yourself at the end of each section or chapter of a book.

Whenever it makes sense to do so, check in with yourself and evaluate your current level of comprehension. The worst thing you can do is develop an overconfidence or blind spot to words/ideas/concepts/events that you think you understand but don't.

Once you are able to notice dips in comprehension, you can effectively compensate with additional reading comprehension strategies such as note-taking, contextual reading, or reading aloud.

Tip 23: Be Guided by the Organization of the Piece

When reading nonfiction pieces, it is helpful to use the organization of the text to develop your comprehension. Therefore, follow the hierarchy of the text – start with the table of contents, and then move to areas that summarize or conclude the chapters. The author will have deliberately structured the book in a certain manner – use that to guide and dictate how you go about understanding the text.

Additionally, don't be afraid to skip around the text in a manner that best suits your comprehension. Many readers think they have to or should read from start to finish. However, there are no rules, and typically, jumping around between high-value areas to create a “scaffold” of comprehension that you later complete is helpful. This is especially applicable when trying to gain solid comprehension of a nonfiction work.

Below are the important areas of a nonfiction book that you should always consider hitting first. They order from what is typically most to least valuable.

- 1- Blurb on the back cover
- 2- Contents page
- 3- Introduction chapter
- 4- Conclusion chapter
- 5- Summarizing sections at the end of chapters
- 6- Introduction paragraphs
- 7- Conclusion paragraphs
- 8- Anything boxed, highlighted, or in bold

As well as being guided by the organization of the book, consider the organization of the text in its wider context. If you are in school, this means understanding the book in relation to the rest of the course. If you aren't studying, learn what the relevance of the book is within the field as a whole. No book exists in complete isolation so learn how it fits into the wider scheme of things. This is a great way to build another level to the contextual understanding you are trying to develop.

Tip 24: Don't Aim Too High or Low

It's a waste of time to try to read a book that is either too difficult or too easy. Take time to preview the book and also research other books that might be more appropriate for you. This won't take long and is made infinitely easier by digital resources such as Google and Amazon.

Ideally, a book should be at the edge or just outside of your comfort zone - something that stretches you but doesn't have you tearing your hair out in frustration. Of course, you won't always have the option to choose. If there isn't anything at your level or the course you are taking demands you dive into a book that is a poor fit for you, that's fine. Just accept that you will have to implement more of the strategies in this book to ensure your comprehension is at a high enough level.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

BOOK 8: EASY A'S: 12 POWERFUL HACKS TO GET THE A GRADE

Introduction

Thank you for purchasing *Exam Success: How to Get the A Grade*. This short, to-the-point eBook will enable you to dramatically improve your effectiveness throughout the study and examination process so that you can get the best grades possible.

There is no “filler” content in this eBook, so please make sure to take notes. But also don’t be afraid to revisit specific chapters to reaffirm things that don’t stick on the first read.

If you like this eBook and think it worth the small price asked, I would greatly appreciate it if you left a review on the Amazon website.

Now, without further ado, let’s work on getting you those top grades!

Taking Responsibility for Learning

Regardless of the quality of the education you are receiving, you should ultimately take responsibility for your own learning. The amount of energy you need to put into that responsibility will necessarily be higher if you are studying at a worse institution – there is no avoiding this truth.

If you want higher grades, you will need to take even more responsibility, and consequently you should apply more strategies from this book. That is not to say that you should cut out the help available at your institution – even the worst schools generally offer some help.

It's All about Strategy

One of the most fundamental reasons for lower performance on exams is that students have little to no deliberate strategy for how they study and sit exams.

This may sound obvious at first, but it is worth considering before we go any further. It is good **STRATEGY** that you need to put in place if you want to do well academically. Indeed, getting anything in life can best be understood as finding and implementing the best strategy. Whoever has the best study/work strategy will get the best grades, best jobs, most money, etc.

“Strategy” means the methodology you use to get from point A to point B. In academics, the clearest way to express strategy is to say that point A is how well you would score currently on an exam, and point B is you taking the same test but achieving the grade you want. How you get from your current knowledge and skillset to your desired grade – that is your strategy.

There is no getting around the need to create and follow a good academic strategy. If you don't bother thinking about it and don't consciously choose a good strategy, you are defaulting to a less-successful (likely terrible) strategy based on luck, habits, what you have done before, what your peers do, and what your teachers manage to spoon-feed you.

This book is all about giving you the tools to build a great strategy that enables you to study smart and get the grades you want. Just by reading this book, you will have pushed forward into the world of study skills and meta-learning (learning about learning), and that knowledge alone will give you an edge over other students.

As I said before, strategy is important in working toward anything in life. The tools and strategies contained within this book can also be transferred to projects in your professional or personal life. Perhaps re-read this book with a pen and paper to take notes on how you could transfer the principles to other projects, e.g.:

Learning a musical instrument

Working on a new business

Learning a new field altogether

Strategy Principle 1: Only Study What is Going to Be Tested

Everything that you do as part of your study strategy needs to be aimed toward your exams and getting the best grades possible on them. This is absolutely fundamental to working smart, and it is the first principle of a good learning strategy.

If you are thinking something like “Learning is about more than getting the best grades,” I would say that, yes, it certainly can be. But don’t kid yourself – much of what you learn in a course will be forgotten in the subsequent months, while a grade is lasting evidence that qualifies you for the positions and opportunities that will shape your life. If you’re still on the fence, let’s agree that you can also learn for fun, interest, or whatever reason—but only AFTER you have learned the course so well, and practiced exam papers so many times, that you know you could walk into the exam and get the top grade without a problem.

Just as the importance of a good strategy may sound obvious, so too may the principle of studying only the material that will be tested. However, many students don’t follow this principle rigorously, and even teachers will occasionally stray from this—perhaps because they enjoy talking about a subject, or don’t care about teaching, or just aren’t as rigorous in how they apply teaching methods.

The following advice will help ensure that you are as rigorous as you should be, and that you ALWAYS stick to the material being tested:

Ask your teacher for as much detail as possible on what will be tested.

Collect past papers. After reviewing past papers and exams, quiz your teacher/s as to which parts are likely to resurface on this year’s exam.

If possible, get a syllabus and all written material that details exam contents.

When being taught or working with others, be conscious of what is and what isn’t going to be tested. Avoid like the plague getting drawn into studying with others what isn’t on the exam. Studying unneeded material is easy to do when a teacher or colleague does this with you. If they’re studying or teaching it, it must be important – right?! But this isn’t always the case. If they are making the mistake of leaving the bounds of the course, don’t join them.

When taking notes, write the topic you are studying at the top of the page, and

make sure you only ever write a topic that is on your study timetable (which is created solely from material that will be tested). With the topic at the top of every page of notes, you will find it easier to avoid falling into unhelpful material.

Collect “final copies” of materials that need to be learned. Ideally, you will get a textbook that sticks to your course and nothing more. This book should then be your “bible.” If you are at University and taking a specific, niche course created by your lecturer, or if for another reason this type of material is unavailable, you will need to create a folder as soon as possible that contains 100% (no more, no less) of the material that will be on the exams.

If you are taking a course at University, it may be trickier to get together a final copy of material to be learned, as the nature of University studying is a little looser and more dependent on the lecturer’s prerogative, etc. In which case, again, push your teacher for as much information as possible. This will involve consistent enquiry as to what may come up on the test. Of course, there is the possibility of annoying your teacher here. That is a risk you have to take. To help mitigate this risk and encourage the instructor to give you the help you want, tell them how badly you want a great grade, and go into detail about why this course matters to you, e.g., you really want a job, to impress your parents, etc. Also, be the ideal student in class – always contribute, be attentive, do what is asked, etc.

Unless you are working from a book or source that you know will stick ONLY to information to be tested, have something on hand (ideally a syllabus) that you can refer to in order to cut out untested material.

When creating a plan for what you are going to learn, base it only off your bible of testable material. Don’t include anything “just for fun” or because it seems interesting.

Stick to working from that plan that is based off the bible. Trust in both, and rely on them entirely. Don’t get drawn into studying anything else.

To reiterate one final time: if it isn’t going to be on the exams, don’t try to learn it, and don’t even give it the light of day. Doing otherwise can be an insidious error because you mistakenly believe that you are “working” toward your study goals. In fact, you will be wasting time, as well as developing a false sense of competence which can lead to an inaccurate and poorly executed study timetable.

Strategy Principle 2: Build a Learning Timetable (Commit to Working a Weekly Number of Hours)

Once you have assembled all of the information that needs to be learned, you can create a timetable around that material.

In order to create this timetable, work through the following steps.

SIDENOTE: It will be helpful to read this whole book before you begin planning so that you can better understand the context of the following ideas.

Step 1: Decide how much time you will be able to commit to studying every week. Setting a clear amount of hours that you will work is essential for the following reasons:

You can easily plan what you are going to learn and when.

You will feel more in control of your studies, as consistent working will enable you to make consistent progress. Instead of emotional ups on weeks spent working a lot, and downs on weeks spent working too little, there will be a consistent satisfaction at working an appropriate amount.

Because of this consistency, as time goes by, it will get easier to make yourself sit down and work, and you may even come to enjoy and look forward to studying. I know that sounds ludicrous, but trust me: it's possible!

It is easier to adapt and build your studies around the rest of your life. Family, friends, a job - all of these things can be balanced and integrated, but first commit to a definite amount of studying each week (and, if possible, the other areas).

The next question becomes – how much time should I commit to working every week?

There is no one correct answer for how to calculate this figure. Below are some things to consider:

It should be a definite number of hours that you can always complete, and not an average. Sometimes events might make it impossible to complete the full amount, but this situation needs to be the exception, and in any case it should happen no more than once every 6 weeks.

The more time you spend studying, the more material you will learn and be able

to get through. There is no getting around this. If you want great grades, finding the time to study longer hours is necessary. The phrase “less is more” is often true, but when it comes to work and studying, more tends to be more (assuming you are also working smart).

If you work in the manner I suggest later (in timed chunks with lots of little breaks), your work will be challenging but not exhausting, so committing hours at a time to studying will not feel impossible or overwhelming.

Balance in your life is really important. As I said, working a lot is going to be helpful, but don’t neglect other things in life. If you are smart in how you budget your time, you can create a really balanced life; it may be lopsided in terms of where your time goes but not in terms of how satisfied you are with each respective part of your life. For example, a 2-hour meal 3 times a week with friends isn’t a big time commitment over a week, but it will be enough to keep you sane and social in a week that might otherwise be locked down for studying.

As I have said, it will be helpful to allocate time not only to studying but also to other things in your life (like 2-hour lunch dates with friends). Treating your life in this way, with hourly scheduling of social events, cooking, shopping, etc., may seem a little OCD, or mechanical. But if you want to pack in as much time as possible for studying, this is the best way to go.

Typically, it will make sense to first take stock of your current commitments. For instance, how much time do you need for your job, for friends, to relax, and to sleep? You can then just allocate the rest of your time to studying. I assume you want to get the best grades you can, so let’s say you are giving time for a variety of other things in life – but only the minimum amount of time you need for those things.

The weekly study hours aren’t set in stone week on week. For example, if you find you are struggling to fulfil other commitments or maintain your sanity, you can choose to study a little less the following week, or if things are going well with your studies, consider working a little more the following week. However, try to really prize consistency and your ability to stick to a number – it is important that you remain motivated and able to put in the hours studying (more tips on this to come). So, just because you have a good week, don’t go crazy and double how long you work the next. Maybe increase it by a couple of hours, and see how that goes.

As you progress with your timetable, you will become increasingly aware of

how much time you need to learn the remaining material. Therefore, you can predict whether you need to put in more or less time in future weeks in order to get the grades you want. For example, if you are getting the top grades when you do practice exams, and the real exams are still 6 months away, you can confidently decrease the amount you are studying each week (and perhaps ramp it up again when the real tests draw near just to make sure you are ready.)

As I said, the easiest thing to do (under the assumption you want top grades) is to set a minimum needed for each part of your life, and then put the rest into studying. Then, tweak these figures as you develop an understanding both of what lifestyle suits you, and of how much studying is necessary. With this in mind, below are some examples for how many hours someone might commit to studying, as well as the other parts of their life:

Student A

56 hours a week sleeping (8 hours a night)

20 hours a week part-time job

10 hours a week seeing friends

4 hours in the gym

20 hours studying

Rest of the time, relaxing, reading, commuting, eating, and everything else.

Student B

56 hours a week sleeping (8 hours a night)

20 hours a week seeing friends

8 hours volunteering for a charity

30 hours studying

Rest of the time, relaxing, reading, commuting, eating, and everything else.

Student C

56 hours a week sleeping (8 hours a night)

40 hours a week full-time job

10 hours seeing friends

20 hours studying

Rest of the time, relaxing, reading, commuting, eating, and everything else.

The above examples are straightforward enough. There are, of course, 24 hours in a day and 168 hours in a week. But the goal isn't to try and fill all of these hours completely – rather, make sure that you commit enough time to the most important parts of your life first. If you don't first make a commitment to a set number of hours to study, it is more likely that you won't get around to studying at all.

Knowing how many hours per week you are going to commit to studying is an important first step in building your study timetable. Next, you will need to work out how you are going to spend those hours!

Strategy Principle 3: The Importance of Self-Testing

Next, it is necessary to organize the material you need to learn onto the timetable, i.e., when to study what. As with this whole process, how you organize this material will not be an exact science, but it will require “best guesses” and estimates.

However, the following principle will help make the ongoing process of planning what and when you study a whole lot easier. This principle is simple:

Regularly test yourself to find out what you have learned. Then, study more of what you test poorly on, and study less of what you test well on.

Applying this principle to how you organize and timetable your studies will mean that you can be intelligent about how you work. Many students push through a lot of material; however, they are not necessarily working well when they do this, and they may be wasting a good deal of time because they aren’t distinguishing between material that they have already learned and material they still need to learn. That is so important that I will repeat it:

The good student always distinguishes between material that they have already learned and material they still need to learn.

The only way to find this out is simple: test yourself. And so, in order to revise and study effectively for an exam, it is necessary to test yourself regularly so that you have an accurate understanding of what you have learned. Ideally, this practice extends to knowing what grade you would get if you sat the exam now. Consequently, sitting a “mock” or “practice” exam (perhaps from a previous year) is the best way to ascertain your current state of learning.

This philosophy of consistent self-testing (ideally, with past papers) helps you decide how you organize your remaining study time. You simply put more time into the areas that need improving, and less into those that don’t. Your overall time spent studying can be increased if you are not on track to get the grades you want or decreased if you are on track.

Think of your studying timetable as an old sail-ship that navigates by compass and map. Testing yourself is like looking at your compass and map. It enables you to work out where you are currently (i.e. what you have already learned) in relation to how to get to where you want to be (i.e. what you need to learn to get the grade you want.)

You don't need to test yourself relentlessly, (though testing is itself a great way to learn the material). But you do need to make sure that you do it regularly enough that you can "adjust course" every couple of weeks and put your energy into the right areas.

You need to find out where there are gaps in your learning and then allocate more time to plugging them. This extends to every area of your studies: both with different subjects, and within a subject.

Understanding the value of working in this way helps clarify why it is best to start your "study timetable" as soon as possible. It stems from this fact:

Until you consistently score the grade you want in a practice exam, you can't be 100% sure of how long you need to study.

Of course, the closer you get to that point of acing a practice exam, the better estimate you can make. And so, it is super desirable to begin your study timetable as soon as possible.

To reiterate and break down this concept a little more, consider the following:

The sooner you start your study timetable, the more course corrections you can make. This means that any road blocks that come up, e.g., areas you find more difficult, or areas that take longer to cover than others, can be given more time.

If, overall, you are not making the progress you want, and it seems more hours are needed to get the grade you want, you can increase the number of hours per week you are spending. This might involve cutting time from other areas of your life, e.g., quitting a part-time job. This is prioritization done intelligently – from clear goals and data. You know what grade you want, you know your current progress isn't good enough. How badly do you want those grades? How important are they to your future? Make the hard decisions, and put the time in where it should go.

Starting sooner is also a sure-fire way to have a less stressful experience on the whole. Imagine NEVER feeling that you are behind. Indeed, if you are testing yourself correctly and learning the right material, you will always be well ahead of everyone else in your class.

If you typically don't get the best grades, you can easily turn this around by beginning work on your study timetable early, even perhaps in the summer before the course begins.

There are many reasons for beginning your study timetable as soon as possible, and so the question really is: why don't you start it as soon as possible?

The only barrier to beginning at the start of the academic year (or earlier) is that you don't have all the material you need. This can be surmounted with relentless pestering of your teachers, course supervisors, and anyone who has the information you need. Promise that you will continue coming to their classes if this is their worry. Do whatever it takes, and begin your study timetable early.

Further tips:

Why not start the study timetable the summer before the academic term begins? Or as soon as you know you are studying a course? You are going to have to learn the material at some point, so do your "future self" a favor, and get the work done sooner rather than later.

If you do want to start super-early, consider asking students from previous years for their work. Find the best students in particular; ask, borrow, or buy their notes, and start working from these materials as soon as you can. Also ask them for tips and shortcuts on the course. Just ensure you take into account potential changes in the syllabus, and never let these materials be a substitute for a textbook or for your instructor's information.

Strategy Principle 4: Set a Goal for Grades and Have a Vision for Why They Matter

It is difficult to hit a target that has not been defined. And this is very true when it comes to education and your studies. You need to know what grade you want, and have a reason why you want it.

Unfortunately, many teachers either remain unconvinced of the value of goal-setting, or they aren't aware of how to do it well. Indeed, you may recoil at the mention of "goals" and believe that setting goals for your grades is unnecessary. Below are some of the negative beliefs students have when it comes to goal-setting.

"I don't need to set goals. I will just try my best and get the best grade I can."

"I don't need to set goals. I am going to see how it goes. I might not be great at this course, so I won't think about how well I will try to do."

"I don't want to set myself up for failure by setting goals."

"Setting goals takes away the fun of learning."

"Setting goals is boring."

"Setting goals is a waste of time that could be spent learning."

However, these excuses are disproven by the following two ideas:

Setting goals enables you to better ascertain the skills and knowledge you need to achieve them—when you can actually see the knowledge gap, you are better positioned to know how to fill it.

When you have specific goals, it is much easier to create a vision for why you want these grades, and what you could do with these grades under your belt. The questions, "What next?" and "What is the point of studying?" are essential for motivating many students. Teachers often overlook this type of motivation because they feel their job/status/sense of the world is undermined by the questions like, "When am I going to use this in the real world?" and "What is the point of learning this?"

Clarifying your purpose for getting great grades is important because it will

provide the motivation needed to work the necessarily long hours. Below are some examples of what might be included in your vision/purpose for achieving your target grades:

I will be competitive for the graduate school I want to attend.

I will be able to get the job I want.

My parents will give me the money they promised me if I succeed.

I will impress all of my friends with how smart I am.

Just having a “sort of” vision isn’t as helpful as one with a lot of detail. Get down “into the weeds”—imagine the life you want a few years from now, and imagine how getting a certain grade will help get you there. Integrating all of these things into a synthesized and finished vision will bring enormous motivation to your studies.

Write this vision up as a paragraph, or even bullet points, and include any pictures with it to help further express your vision. These pictures might be the car or house you will buy from the job your grades will get you, or maybe a picture of students celebrating together after getting their results.

Stick this image and your written goals on the wall near where you study, and there will be a consistent boost to your motivation when you glance at it.

Below are some other ideas on how to bring life to your study goals/vision.

Turn your desktop background “wallpaper” into a collage of motivating pictures with your goal written in the middle, or make the desktop background a slideshow that changes every day where each slide is a motivating image of what you will get when you complete the course.

Look over your vision every morning and/or before bed for 5 minutes, and imagine having the things that are in the pictures. Imagining what it will feel like to reach your goals will motivate you to put in the necessary work.

Find people who have a similar vision or who have already achieved what you want. Then spend time with them, and ask questions about why they want it and/or how they achieved it. Some of their motivation will rub off on you! If you are working on exams to get into a college or university, find someone just as driven (ideally they are on the same course), and turn them into a study partner.

To summarize this chapter into two clear points:

If you set goals for the grades you want, you will be able to clarify what you need to learn to achieve them.

If you set a vision for why you want to get these grades, you will have the emotional motivation to study hard to achieve the goals you set for yourself.

Next you need to DECIDE that you will do what it takes to fulfil that vision and get those grades.

Commit to your goal, and become resolved to put in the necessary hours and work.

Strategy Principle 5: Deconstructing and Chunking

Students often struggle in their studies because they haven't managed and organized their course as a whole. They feel overwhelmed with everything they need to learn, and they don't know where to start. To avoid this paralysis, it is essential that you break down the course into manageable chunks. Breaking and working with the course in chunks will also help you to schedule and plan your study timetable more efficiently. Finally, it will be useful when you "course-adjust" after your regular self-testing sessions.

Simply put, deconstructing the course makes it easier to handle and work with in every way.

Below are some ideas to consider when you deconstruct your course:

Look for resources that have already broken down your course into chunks. If you are in a course at pre-university level, it is highly likely that the syllabus contains a clear breakdown of the course as a whole.

Work back from what you KNOW will be on the exams. Never add things, and minimize the guesswork involved so that you have a super accurate and clearly deconstructed layout of the course.

Look for natural breaks in the material. For example, if you are studying philosophy, you might break down the course into different philosophers. Or, if you are studying history, consider breaking the course into time periods.

Try to create some uniformity to the overall breakdown. Perhaps you can create segments based on a set number of pages in a textbook or a similar amount of time each section will take to cover.

Find the standard mode in the field for deconstructing the topic, and simply do the same with your studies.

Make the chunks of your course small enough so that you can cram all of the core ideas onto an A4 or A3 page (not everything you have to learn, but a close, detailed plan).

The best strategy, however, is to find someone who has already deconstructed the course, and then work from their model.

Once you have deconstructed your course, it will be a lot easier to schedule what

you work on and when. The allocation of time for different chunks of your course can at first be a like-for-like allocation whereby everything gets the same amount of time.

The sooner you start, and with consistent self-testing, it is possible adapt and improve your schedule with increasing efficiency over time. The more months there are between when you begin your study timetable and the exam, the more course corrections you can make, i.e., the more opportunity you have to allocate more study time to topics you are testing poorly on, and less time on topics you have already mastered.

For the majority of students, it is best to pause once a month to review progress and re-allocate how you spend your time. Of course, if exams are relatively close and/or you are putting in a lot of hours a week, it may be justifiable to review your progress more regularly. For example, if you are working 40 hours a week, it might make sense to re-adjust your allocation every two weeks, but if you only work 20 hours, adjusting your allocation every four weeks would make sense.

Coping with Exam Stress

There are a few reasons why exams, and the build up to them, can cause a great deal of negative stress in a student. After all, a year or more of work now rides on a few hours of your performance during the exam.

However, all is certainly not lost. You don't have to resort to stress and panic. Below are a variety of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you to beat stress at every step of the way:

Follow the advice of this book. Start learning your course early, and do lots of practice exams. This consistent practice will build your confidence and lower stress levels immensely.

Imagine the worst case scenario – it probably isn't that bad. Now, I don't know your situation, but most students can re-take the year or just the exams at a later date. This is harder for teenagers to hear, but another year at school really isn't *that* bad. In the scheme of things, it won't matter that you go to college a year later.

Don't succumb to other people's stress. When classmates and friends start worrying, stressing, and complaining in the weeks, days, or hours before an exam, don't join in! Steer the conversation away, or leave the room. Thoughts and feelings are infectious, so stay away from people who are overcome with negative emotions.

Be well-prepared practically for the exam. This means getting to the exam location with time to spare, bringing a spare pen, packing drinking water, etc.

Look after yourself physically, and maintain interests outside of your studies. If you make your life only about studying, then you are putting all of your eggs in one basket. Pursue some hobbies so that you can have "wins" and a good life even if your studies and exam results aren't the successes you want. And heed the age-old advice to get exercise, eat well, etc. so that your energy levels and mind are healthy. Steering clear of drugs is obvious but worth mentioning.

Meditate. This simple daily practice will help you think more clearly and prevent negative feelings and thoughts running riot and making you stressed. Two twenty-minute sessions of clearheaded meditation might seem like a big time commitment, but trust me – the time saved by having a clear head and

better decision-making will be more than worth it.

Steer clear of other negative influences. Don't watch the news, and don't watch negative documentaries or mindless sitcoms. Watch motivational videos, and listen to music that pumps you up.

Sleep enough, and sleep well. This is another obvious tip, but many people neglect their sleep needs. Some simple rules are: use earplugs and an eye mask, don't look at a screen before bed, have a warm comfy bed, get 6-8 hours of sleep every night, and go to bed at the same time every night.

Cut down the Information coming into your life and mind. TV shows turn your mind off, and frequently checking Twitter, etc. jumbles your mind with emotion. Block the Internet, TV, etc., and only allow yourself to use it for 1-2 hours a day.

Make these habits part of your routine, and schedule them as you would study sessions.

Exam Techniques: Recreate the Exam

The best way to ensure that the final, real exam goes excellently is to do lots of practice exams.

The more similar these practice exams are to the real thing, the better. Although this advice may sound obvious, few students act on it as well as they should.

Below are the two most important ways in which these practice exams should resemble the real thing:

Similarity of material. The material in the practice exam has to be as close as possible to the material on the real exam. I have gone over this time and again now. The overall process is straightforward enough – find out what will be examined, learn it with active recall, etc., do practice exams, and troubleshoot from feedback until you get an A on the practice exam.

Length of the exam. This is essential for correct exam practice. You must set a timer and obey it strictly. If the real exam is going to be an hour long, you MUST set an hour on a timer, and you MUST stop when time is up. Doing this repeatedly will ensure that you learn to manage your time well and work at a proper speed, and it will most accurately reveal your current level of ability. If you give yourself 2 hours in a practice exam when the real one is an hour long, how the hell are you going to get an accurate reflection of your current ability? In that instance, you've made the practice exam A LOT easier than the real exam.

The above two points are the two core elements of good exam practice – most unsuccessful students fail on one or both of these two key principles. Get as near-identical exam papers as possible, and time yourself completing them.

There are other factors to consider once you have mastered the above. These are:

Location of the exam. If you want to be a super-student, consider also the location of your practice exam. There is no getting away from the influence of our surroundings on state of mind, etc. If you do all of your practice exams in location A (say, your bedroom) and then do the final exam in location B (a large hall with 100 other students), you won't feel as comfortable in the final exam because the location is dramatically different.

The best way to solve this potential challenge is to do a few practice exams in the location where the final exam will take place. Get creative in finding a way to make it happen. If you can't do a practice exam in the exact location, consider training your brain to be happy sitting an exam anywhere – pick half a dozen novel places, and complete a practice exam in each. This habit will de-sensitize your mind to the impact of your environment. Choose somewhere surrounded by people like a library or café—it will train your mind to ignore the distraction of looking at others, which can be a problem for many students during the actual exam.

Consider the time of day. Another way to ensure you prepare optimally is practice sitting an exam at a similar time of day to the real exam. If your final exam is at 9AM, but you typically don't study until late in the day, it might throw you to suddenly have to focus so early in the day. This detail becomes still more relevant if you typically aren't awake at 9AM – in which case, physiologically and psychologically, you just aren't going to be at your best, and it will be a shock to sit an exam when your body thinks it should be sleeping. Shape your routine so that you synchronize with the final exam – it might just mean those few extra marks that make the difference.

Fill in details on the paper. Get into the habit of doing things like putting your student number, name, etc., onto the practice exam, and this step will come naturally in the final exam. This habit will further reduce both the chance of getting stressed AND the possibility of making a stupid error like putting down an incorrect student number or forgetting to put your name on the real exam.

Exam Techniques: Perfect Practice Makes Perfect

To thoroughly practice for the final exam and gain maximum confidence in your ability to get the grade you want, there are two aspects to consider:

Practice a lot. In other words, do a lot of exam papers.

Improve. Improvement involves a combination of self-assessment, and feedback from others.

The frequency with which you perform practice exams is an important part of building toward exam success. The more practice papers you do, the better – there isn't really a limit.

OK, maybe if you did five practice papers in a row and got full marks – 100% correct – you can consider yourself at the top of your game. In that case, you might be perfectly justified in relaxing your preparation and simply waiting for the exam to come around (assuming there are weeks rather than months to go until the exam). However, students often think that doing anywhere between 1-5 practice exams (in total) is enough no matter how well they score on the exams. But in reality, much more preparation is needed. How many hours? Well, the best answer is to keep going until you consistently get the grade you want – keep doing practice exams until you can score a top grade on five consecutive exams.

As well as practicing a lot, it is important to “practice perfectly.” This involves troubleshooting your performance on the practice exams so that you can avoid making the same mistakes in future. The more efficiently you can ascertain your existing gaps in knowledge and skill, and then integrate that information effectively into your future studies, the faster you will improve and get closer to the grade you want.

To facilitate this improvement and “practice perfectly,” you should practice self-assessment if possible. Find that mark scheme so that you know exactly what the examiner is looking for. Similarly, an answer booklet, if appropriate, will be extremely helpful.

For more skills-based exams, or where self-assessment is trickier, you will need to utilize someone who can give you the feedback you need. Find one or more teachers who will give you as much feedback as you desire, providing you with the most helpful and accurate feedback.

Experiment with a few different sources, and don't be afraid to ask for help from other teachers at your school, or even teachers from other schools. To get leverage and recruit this person or persons to your assessment team, utilize the following tactics:

Be exceptionally polite and appreciative of their time.

Be persistent without being annoying.

Let them know about your “vision” for yourself.

Offer to help them in some way, or perhaps give them some kind of value upfront so they feel obliged to reciprocate. For example, learn a basic amount of web design and give feedback on the style of their blog.

Meet them in person ideally, or write a letter. The further from an email in the dark, the better.

Let them know you are a fan who appreciates their work: “I dropped in on one of your lectures and found it fascinating.” Don’t be sycophantic or weird, but if you can find a way to compliment them and perhaps ask an engaging question, take advantage of that opportunity.

Ask some less obvious authority sources, e.g., people from the previous year who got a top grade. You could also reach out to someone doing a Ph.D. in your field.

Finally, don't assume that teachers who seem “higher up” at your institution will provide the best feedback. They might be pressed for time, or they might be in that position because they published a great book, and not because they are wonderful at providing feedback. And so, someone “lower down,” e.g., a Ph.D. student or newly qualified lecturer, might instead provide more helpful feedback.

Exam Techniques: What to Do in the Exam

Whether you are doing a practice exam or sitting the real thing, there are some universal principles that must be followed:

Carefully read the instructions on the paper, and follow them to the letter.

Consider what the examiner wants to see. Don't add personal opinion, pick up a different topic, or consider doing ANYTHING other than what you know is going to get you marks. Knowing the mark scheme and the course syllabus and doing a lot of practice exams will put you on track.

If you are filling out an answer booklet, ensure you check the back of pages, etc. Not finding and answering all the questions is the worst way to lose marks.

Below are some more techniques that are a little less universal, but worth applying whenever possible:

Annotate and make notes on the question itself. This might involve highlighting the key words, e.g., "argue," "compare," or "contrast," or crossing out parts of the question that are less important and/or distracting.

If they are shown, circle the number of marks available for that question, and make a note of how long you should spend answering it. This will help you to manage your time better. For example, as a general rule of thumb, if a question is 5 marks in a 100 mark paper, you should spend 5% of your time working on it.

Plan your answer. Planning/outlining becomes almost necessary if you are doing an essay exam and less important if you are working in an answer booklet.

Planning an essay might only take two minutes, but without it you can all too easily find yourself mismanaging your time and writing a poorly executed essay.

If your confidence is a little low, i.e., you aren't confident that you can answer all questions and get the top score, be strategic about the questions you do attempt to answer. If you are doing an essay exam, and have a choice of 3 essay questions, do a little plan for each, and don't risk making the wrong choice. If you are answering many questions in an answer booklet, scan through the booklet and put a tick next to questions you will try to answer first – this will prevent you squandering time on topics you feel less confident about.

Working with Your Teacher/Assessor

Your teacher is very important. No matter if you love or loathe them, it is important to develop a relationship with your teacher that contributes productively to you getting the grade you want. Many students are too standoffish, and they fail to make the most of their teacher – they just turn up to class, listen, speak when spoken to, complete (or not) homework/coursework, and then they go home. Be more pro-active and creative with your teacher – look for every angle to get them on board your pursuit of exam success.

It can be helpful at the start of the year (or as soon as possible) to describe for your teacher the goal you have for your grade in the course. Tell them how hard you are willing to work, and also explain the “vision” you have developed for why the grade is important to you. Be authentic and natural – don’t bounce around with phony enthusiasm. Having this conversation (and of course following it up by working hard and smart throughout the year) will put your teacher a little more on your side. They will then – perhaps only subconsciously – show you a little more favor, maybe even giving you that extra mark when they are on the fence. They may also offer extra resources, or perhaps provide help and opportunity down the road.

“What if my teacher and/or class is terrible?”

Sometimes you may face a teacher or class and just know that you’re getting a poor experience. This is unfortunate, but that’s life. Things won’t always go your way. Don’t cry about it – just suck it up and work on a solution. The worst thing you can do is nothing. The reality is that many of your classes are not going to be a learning utopia, and instead they will fall somewhere on the scale between great and terrible.

When a class is closer to the terrible end of the spectrum, you have to accept that more work and/or smarter work is necessary. If you are tempted to skip class, I would say that is a dangerous (but understandable) way of thinking. However, the only time I would say that it could be wise to stop turning up would be if you progressed so well in your study-timetable outside of class that you were completing past exam papers and getting the grade you want.

As important as your teacher is, it is important to appreciate that there are many more resources and mentors out there; learning is more expansive than a teacher and a classroom.

Making the Most of Coursework

In Timothy Ferriss' excellent book *The Four Hour Workweek*, he explains similar ideas to those in this chapter. I would recommend his book to students, as it also has many other smart-thinking toolsets that can be applied to work and study.

Often, when students receive a grade on a piece of coursework, they just sit back and look at the grade. However, receiving a grade (good or bad) is more of an opportunity than they realize. When you receive feedback on coursework, and the grade isn't as good as you would like it to be, go to your teacher/marker with a list of questions that will precisely reveal what it is you should have done to get the grade. The further you are from the grade, the more questions you should bring to the meeting. Below are reasons why this is helpful:

Once you find out exactly what you did wrong (and right), you can prepare to get the grade you want on the next piece of coursework you complete. This sounds obvious, but many students just plan to try harder next time, or put in a little more effort. Unfortunately, these vague aspirations are often illusory. Instead, identify definite, specific improvements that you KNOW will get you a better grade next time around.

Understand that we don't live in a perfect world, and your teacher/marker therefore perhaps didn't give your paper 110% effort while they were grading. As I have said, it is YOUR responsibility to get the grade you want. Therefore, you want to squeeze out every possible drop of feedback from your teacher/marker.

It is possible that the marker made a mistake with your paper and didn't give you the marks they should have done. Of course, it is also possible that, by inviting your marker to revisit your paper, you will reveal further mistakes that you yourself made and that were not addressed in your initial grade. The latter is a necessary risk as you DON'T want to make the same mistakes in future. Also, at many institutions, your grade can be revised up but not down. Look into this policy if you are unsure.

Asking intelligent, to-the-point questions, and generally being a bit of a "pest" will ensure that, next time, your marker really thinks over every deduction they

take, because they know you are going to ask them to justify it to you.

Assuming that you are now geared up to grill your marker at the next possible opportunity, here are a few further tips on how to make this meeting more effective:

As ever, it will help to **explain how much you want the grade**, how much you need it to complete your vision, etc. Use every opportunity to get your teacher to like you and want you to succeed (and this is perhaps even more if your teacher is also your marker).

Prepare well for the meeting. Draft questions the night before by considering feedback you have received on previous papers. Bring these questions along to the meeting, as well as the previous papers if that would be relevant. Compare and contrast elements of your paper with the marker's help so that you can better see which mistakes recur and need addressing.

Leave the meeting with a to-do list for your upcoming coursework. The to-do list should be clear and to the point. To create the list, ask yourself and the examiner questions like: "Of all the improvements that I could make, what are the 20% that will really make the difference?" This is the application of the Pareto Principle, which states that 80% of results come from 20% of actions. Or ask, "What ONE thing should I do next time to get the grade I want?" Make sure that you leave the meeting with advice that is clear, to-the-point, and that you KNOW you can apply on the next piece of coursework.

Learning Techniques: An Overview

This short chapter provides an overview of learning techniques. These are the tools and principles that will enable you to maximize your scheduled study periods so that you get the most out of them.

In no particular order, below are the keys to studying well:

Differentiate between “passive” and “active” learning techniques. And use more of the latter. A passive learning technique is one that involves minimal or no effort. It typically involves material washing over you, as in, for example, reading, listening, or watching a video. An active learning technique involves doing something. For example, writing, thinking, recalling information, criticizing, and discussing are all active learning strategies. Your initial exposure to material will often be something passive, such as reading a book; however, even here it is helpful to be “active” and take notes or annotate the book. Active learning techniques are more effective because they engage more aspects of your mind, thus improving memorization and understanding.

For skills-based learning, get a tutor. When it comes to writing essays, or performing experiments, it is more difficult to self-test. For that reason, it is especially helpful to get feedback from others. Ensure that the feedback is accurate, helpful, and available as much as you need it. Use your initiative to make this happen—consider utilizing online tools, colleagues, asking other teachers etc.

For short-term learning, focus on frequency of exposure to material. Essentially, this means that you need to read a fact many times in order to deposit it in your short-term memory. However, this should nearly always be accompanied with the following...

For long-term and/or deeper memorization, utilize “active recall.” Active recall simply means that you attempt to remember a memory—successfully doing so instills that memory a little deeper, and of course, proves that you know it. Active recall can take a variety of forms, e.g., using flash cards, practice exam papers, Q and A with colleagues, etc. If you are trying to memorize a topic of information, it can be helpful to lay out all the information on a mind-map and then attempt to reproduce the mind-map repeatedly. This practice utilizes spatial aspects of memorization, making it still more effective.

Utilize “spaced repetition” to solidify memorization and optimize your time spent studying. Spaced repetition refers to the spaces between active recall attempts. If you successfully recall something, you should try to recall it again at a later date. If you are unsuccessful in an attempt, make more frequent attempts to recall it. By doing so, you strengthen the memory more of things you are yet to memorize, and less for things you have already memorized.

Testing is key. I know I have said this many times now, but testing is an essential ingredient to making your study schedule work. If you hadn’t noticed, testing is also easily integrated with the principles of active recall and spaced repetition.

Encode information to make it easier to remember. The human mind is predisposed to remember some things more than others. For example, we are well evolved to remember stories, visuals, ideas, locations, associations, etc., but we are poorly evolved to remember sequences of numbers, formulas, dates, and names. And considering how much demand we put on our minds to remember information from the second list – those things that we are poorly evolved to remember – it is helpful to understand how to convert forms of information. This is how “memory masters” are able to remember decks of cards, lists of unrelated objects, and remarkably long sequences of pi. A quick example is the following mnemonic phrase: “My Very Easy Method Just Speeds Up Naming Planets.” Within this phrase is encoded the order of the planets in our solar system. The first letter of each word correlates to a planet, and the first word in the phrase correlates with the planet closer to the sun, and then moving out in order.

Therefore:

My = M = Mercury

Very = V = Venus

Easy = E = Earth

Method = M = Mars

Just = J = Jupiter

Speeds = S = Saturn

Up = U = Uranus

Naming = N = Neptune

Planets = P = Pluto

This is one example of encoding information. There are many more. If you are studying science in particular, you will help your studies immensely by becoming a master of memory techniques.

“Chunk” information into more manageable pieces. Just as it is overwhelming to plan your whole course, it is overwhelming to try and memorize a lot of material at once. Breaking it into pieces and giving these pieces definition will help your brain to remember all of the information. This technique will also make it easier to schedule and work within your study schedule.

Always have a specific goal for every study session. Don’t simply sit down and study generally. Instead, set a timer and work for 50 minutes (or whatever set length works for you) and have a very specific goal for what you want to achieve in that time. This will ensure that you work with focus, that you complete what is needed, and that you do a better job planning your time. Also, create or find an environment conducive to studying—turn off your mobile phone, block the Internet, work in a quiet environment, etc.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 9: HOW TO UNLEASH YOUR CREATIVITY

Brainstorming and Idea Generation

The first act of creating new ideas seems the natural place to begin this book. It is a part of the creative process that is often prized too heavily, as editing and idea selection can be just as important. However, it is here that the creative process usually begins, so it is here where we will start.

The act of “brainstorming” is the process of rapid idea creation. Brainstorming is widely used, but often without following the rules that allow the process to be optimized. The concept of brainstorming was first named by Alex Faickney Osborn and presented in his book *How To Think Up*. Below are the rules he formulated to make brainstorming effective:

Go for quantity – the more ideas the better. Through developing an abundance of ideas, it is more likely you will discover something great.

Don’t be critical until later. By reflecting and criticizing at that moment, you will stifle new and unusual ideas.

Push for new and unusual ideas. Following on from above; attempt to push creativity toward what is unusual and different.

Combine ideas with one another. Joining ideas together often allows for the creation of something new.

Of course, idea generation is the natural application of brainstorming. This might be recorded on lined paper in the form of a linear list, or in a more scattered and non-linear fashion like below:

Dry Cleaning Service

Thai Food Cart

Blog on Health

Natural Beauty Products

Ideas For a New Business

Maths Tutor

Marketing Consultancy

Innovative Fruit Bowl Designs

Create Wordpress Templates

Throughout this book we will return to the above rules and apply them in subtly different ways to facilitate a more developed approach to creativity across the board.

The Principles of Brainstorming Applied to Other Areas

Applying the principles of brainstorming to other areas of creativity will have the same turbo-charging effect as idea generation. Perhaps the closest cousins to brainstorming are “jamming” (with music creation) and “free-writing” (with writing).

The principles of pushing for quantity, removing judgement, pushing for the unusual, and combining ideas will all boost creativity, no matter the medium.

When free-writing, you write at the speed of consciousness and completely remove the filter, following your mind where it wants to go. A similar process takes place when musicians jam together.

Experiment by applying these principles to your own creative field – write out those 4 key principles and apply them regularly.

An important caveat to creating in this way is to make sure that you are recording what you create. This will enable you to return to work and be critical in editing your work. Just as brainstorming needs to take place on paper, so should free-writing and jamming be recorded. If you don’t record what you make, you cannot come back and track down the parts that you think are great – the parts that can become the valuable pieces of your next album/book/business.

Returning the Filter – Focus and Selection

“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.” – Scott Adams

Once you have performed your act of free-creation, you will need to return to your work and find what is great and should be kept. As with everything creative, there are no hard-rules for how to do this. However, below are some principles that might help in the process of deciding what to cut:

Follow your intuition...what feels best?

Pick the three best ideas.

Get some space between creation and editing – a few days, a night’s sleep, or at least take a walk.

Clarify your creative goals. What is your creative identity? What problem are you trying to solve? Who are your influences / who are you trying to imitate?

Following editing and cutting away what isn’t wanted, there is the process of “cleaning up” and establishing the polished final piece. This is an essential part of the creative process (especially if you are taking your art “to market”), though often the least enjoyable. Pay or befriend someone else to help with this phase, as being 100% accurate in editing and cleaning up your own work isn’t easy, and often is not even possible.

Produce Prolifically

The essential rules of brainstorming can be expanded to form “macro” principles that can be applied to your creativity in a broader sense. By being prolific generally (an extension of “Go for Quantity – the more ideas the better”), you can enjoy similar benefits to those enjoyed while being prolific when brainstorming.

“The best way to get a good idea is to have a lot of ideas.” – Linus Pauling, American chemist, author, and educator

Shooting for exceptional quantity in a wider sense (e.g., a lot of novels, albums, paintings, or whatever your craft creates) will provide the following benefits:

You will have the complete experience of the process, so you can refine every part, e.g., writing an intro, middle, and end to your novel.

It will help to decrease fears and self-criticism by getting over the finish line time and again.

More chances for experimentation, failure, and learning how to improve your work.

Greater quantity increases the chance of creating something exciting and hitting your target audience in the right manner, e.g., if you send 10 short stories to a publisher you are more likely to get picked up than by just sending 2.

Apply the brainstorming rules holistically and at the macro level to help optimize your creativity overall. Whenever possible, push for new and unusual ideas, combine what works, and hold back the criticism until a later point.

Keep and Review Your Work

Over time, you will inevitably build up a body of work. If you are prolific in producing work, as I recommend, this will happen sooner rather than later. It is important that you then keep your work, order your work, and review it regularly. The following are some of the benefits of doing this.

Whilst your creative career is new and fragile, if you don't keep and look back over work, you will be less aware of the improvements you are making. This will diminish your urge to keep going, so regularly look back at your work to remind yourself how far you've come and keep up motivation.

Other wider trends and patterns will become apparent that perhaps aren't clear when looking at individual pieces or across a small range of your work, e.g., you might notice that you stick to similar subject matter in your paintings. You can then better plan and integrate these recurrent aspects (or cut them out) to make better and more desirable work.

By reviewing a wide scope of your work, it will become clearer what mistakes you are repeating. Again, look for patterns and take notes on your work to help build your awareness of recurrent mistakes and the things you don't like.

It will reveal ways to synthesize your work and/or create something new, e.g., combining your best guitar riffs from a range of work to create one exceptional piece might create the kick-ass song you need to breakthrough in your industry.

Sentimentality hits us all. When you are grey and old, nostalgia is going to turn up at some point – reminding yourself of the poetry/songs/commercials you made on your creative journey will feel good.

Externalize Creativity

“Ideas are worthless until you get them out of your head to see what they can do.” – Tanner Christensen

Every “creative” can benefit from developing the external tools they use in the creative process. Using a workbook with various sections will allow you to contain these tools and have them ready and in one place.

A primary use for this workbook is as a dumping ground / collection for ideas. Also, consider including works from your creative influences – especially everything you love and might integrate into your work in future. Whether it is a collage of your favorite magazine ads or a folder of your favorite poems – build a collection.

It will also be helpful to have a space where you externalize the creative process itself; this will help free up mental RAM and act like a bicycle for your creativity – allowing it to go faster than if you try to do it all in your head.

This creative toolset can take on a variety of forms. It could be a series of notebooks, or neatly ordered plastic pockets in a folder – whatever works for you. The more organization you can bring to this workbook, the easier it will be to use. Using a digital notebook is also a great idea – making your creative work easily stored, digitally editable, and supremely portable. However, many find working with simple paper and pen to be an easier, more practical, and creative way to manipulate their work. If this sounds like you, consider writing up or taking photos of your work and putting it into a digital notebook regularly so that you can have the best of both worlds. Evernote and OneNote are both excellent programs for this.

The following are possible categories/folders you might include – they make a great start.

A list/montage of the creative people/minds that you love. Idolize your heroes, learn more about them, and write their lessons down. Include some biography if possible – perhaps their creative habits, what inspires them, etc.

The work you love. As I said before, you have to build up that collection of the things you love. It is important to write down what you like about them as well in order to better identify the trends and common themes you might want to integrate into your own work.

Work you admire for its creativity. As well as work you love, think about finding work that you can appreciate for its creativity. It might not be the art you want on your walls, but all the same, you know that it has quality and/or originality that can help inspire you.

Ideas you will be able to integrate from different fields. For example, you might be a musician, but in this section include images and quotations from Charles Bukowski because you think his work might be an excellent kicking off point for the lyrics in your music.

Idea creation and brainstorming: a shameless and messy space for writing down everything that comes to mind.

Idea synthesis. Here you can bring ideas together and connect and create the possible ideas that will form into lyrics or themes.

Records of old work, alongside annotations or separate notes that you made when reviewing them.

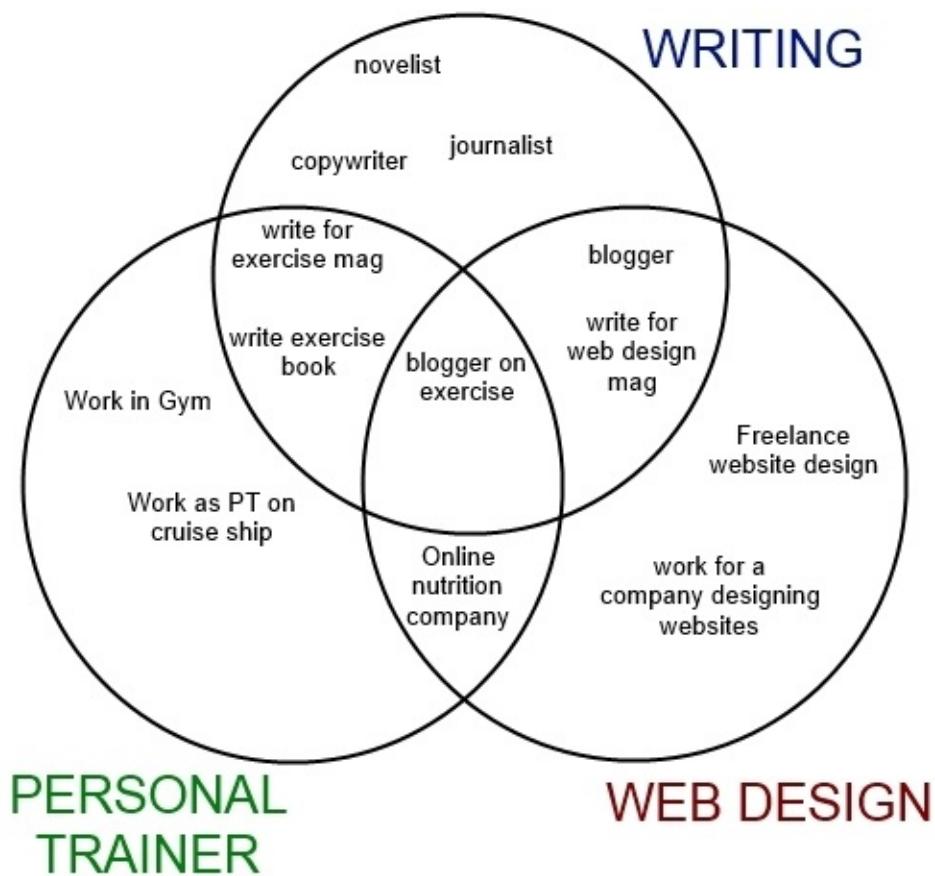
As your work grows, you might develop one folder for each of the above, then maybe a couple of folders ordered chronologically. No matter what kind of creative you are, use creative workbooks/folders to externalize your work and record everything.

Use Diagrams to Further Facilitate your Creativity

There are various diagrams that will help you create, organize, edit, analyze, and synthesize your creative work.

Venn diagrams, for example, will be helpful to synthesize ideas and draw inspiration from different places. Finding where work crosses over will reveal the commonalities that can breed the best, most appealing, and most original ideas.

Below is a Venn diagram that reveals potential career paths by combining three professional strengths.



Mind maps are also exceptionally useful. They are especially useful for:

With idea creation, thanks to the associative branches, you can build connections to new ideas rapidly and naturally.

Idea analysis and deconstruction of an idea. Do this by putting what you want to deconstruct in the center and then working outward.

Below is an example of how an idea generation mind map might look.

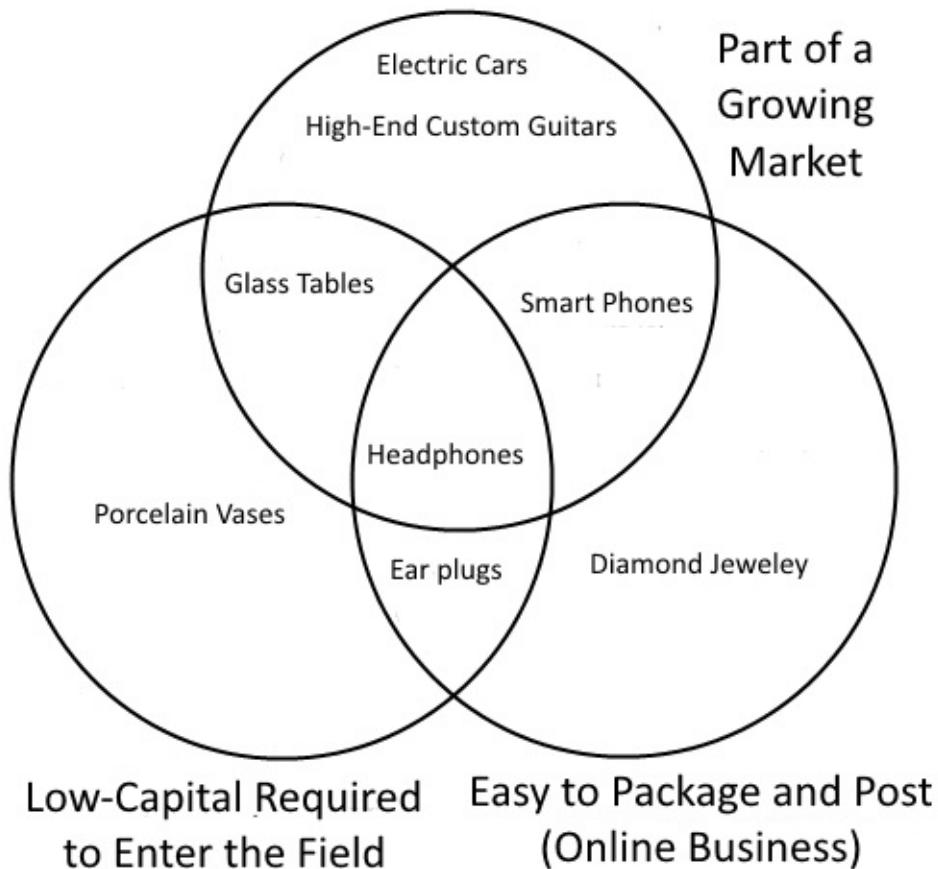


Combining Areas

Using ideas that exist in other realms/fields is often the easiest way to facilitate excellent creativity. Many creatives only look among their own field for influence, but by instead choosing radical influences you can create more innovative work. In business this is one of the best ways to come up with those *Blue Ocean* ideas that allow you to radically innovate value and find new, untapped markets. (The excellent book *Blue Ocean Strategy* by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne is well worth reading to explore this concept of new markets further.)

By taking influences from outside your field, you are standing on the shoulders of others, whilst being more creative than those in the rest of your field, who probably only draw influence from one another.

The Venn diagram below shows how overlaps in ideas can breed exciting, new, and creative results. This example demonstrates idea combination as part of the development of a new product:



The interesting part and tricky creative act on your end will be seeing how to “bridge the gap” to make something work. Creating a Venn diagram or drawing connections between two lists on opposite sides of a page are great ways to externalize this process and make it visual.

The synthesis of ideas can appear at all levels of your work – both on the small scale (such as when brainstorming) and more widely. An example of synthesizing wider principles for a novelist might include combining themes. An example of this is combining the theme of star-crossed lovers with time travel (which has been done in the novel *The Time Traveller's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger).

A more specific, character-based attempt to combine ideas might take the form of developing a character who has the traits of being both a hopeless romantic and someone who gets into fights – an unusual character trait combination such as this can be the springboard for an entire plot, a fictional world, and the rest of

the characters – all from a simple, haphazard combination of character traits.

Combining ideas in this way is perhaps the easiest way to make creativity accessible, formulaic, and effortless. If you are in a creative rut, this is a great way to get out!

The following is another example. I have created two lists of themes that can be combined to kick-off a new concept for a story. By splitting the ideas into distinct categories, whereby category A is character motivations and category B is sci-fi backdrops, it is straightforward to merge high-level aspects of a novel to create a core storyline. Below are the two lists.

List A (Character Motivations)

Star-crossed lovers from incompatible backgrounds.

A father and son reunited.

Saving the world from an extinction event.

Revenge for a lost loved one.

Trying to get home.

List B (Science Fiction Backdrops)

Time travel.

Journey to Mars.

Artificial Intelligence.

Aliens visit earth.

A science experiment gone wrong.

Even if you aren't interested in story writing, perform the following exercise to understand the value of fusing ideas:

Pick two themes from each of the above lists and write a few sentences of the story that could be spawned from it.

For still more practice, make a list of ideas that you can combine within your creative field; then perform the same practice as above and combine two ideas to create something new.

Draw Inspiration from Everywhere - Radical Outside Ideas - Nature/Sciences, etc.

It can be exceptionally useful to take inspiration not only from creative influences in your own field, but also from outside areas.

For example, the diversity and amazing development of animals and the natural world provides an exciting and deep source for inspiration and ideas. Known as “biomimicry,” the imitation of nature is the staple of many innovations.

Velcro is a great example of this – invented by George de Mestral, it is inspired by the similar hook-loop design found in plants whose seeds spread by attaching onto passing animals. This is a superb example of how an idea can be taken from another context and applied effectively to a new field.

Consider the value in finding inspiration outside of your craft and work to look further afield in where you draw influence and your ideas. Often, the further from your craft the idea is, the more innovative and creative its application will be.

Study Your Craft

Whatever the field your creativity takes on, knowing the “nuts and bolts” of your creative work will help enable your creativity. (Think studying time signatures if you’re a musician; rhyme and meter if you are a poet.) Developing your understanding and becoming a student of your craft will have the following benefits:

You can better work with others; especially “professionals” who went to music school and have the required qualifications.

It will be easier to understand and modify your creativity – you know what you are referring to and what part of your work you like or dislike.

By understanding your craft more deeply, you will be aware of aspects you previously weren’t, thus creating more areas in which you can be creative. For example, without studying the variations in time signature in music, you will be less able to consciously manipulate them to your own creative ends.

You don’t have to become a master, but at the very least it will help to know the essential terminology that most people use.

Having said all of this, the rules and structures of any creative field are helpful training wheels, but creativity is often found on the other side.

“Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” – Pablo Picasso

Mastering the Technical Skills

As well as developing your understanding of the nuts and bolts, there will be the necessary technical skills associated with your work, e.g., how well you are able to hold certain chord shapes on a guitar. Typically, sessions based on learning these techniques as well as the nuts and bolts “theory” I was referring to in the previous chapter should have one or more of the following:

Feedback loops with a mentor.

A clear focus that improves on one aspect at a time.

Part of an overall strategy for learning. Perhaps you are following a course of some manner, whether it is from a book, a video, or a weekly class.

There Are No Rules in Creativity

It is possible, however, to go for a more of a “home-run” and leap frog technical based sessions and the nuts and bolts theory. This flies in the face of the last two chapters, and thus is itself an important lesson in creativity – there are no rules!

Below is a strategy that skips the technical and skill based learning whilst still getting your creative work produced, published, and always improving (three cores to excellent creativity):

Cover and imitate material that you love, e.g., create art in the style of Banksy crossed with artist X.

Combine ideas from various artists alongside periods of “jamming” to create your own style.

Publish / perform your work and encourage a feedback loop to improve it. (Ask others what they think, create your own exhibit.)

Cycle steps 1-3, concentrating on improving and enjoying what you do.

Skipping the technical and theory based learning like this has a few strengths:

You have fun imitating what you love.

You skip what can be dry, boring, theory based learning.

You get a deep and keen understanding of the aspects of the art you love through covering others, so when you come to creating you are primed to integrate ideas with your own insights.

By skipping technical lessons, you remove the possibility of curtailing your creativity and being pushed into certain routes as an artist by learning things in a “formal” manner.

As I said, the above flies in the face of my initial advice to learn techniques and theory. There are different strategies for fostering creativity and creative work. Don’t worry about rules or right and wrong when it comes to applying a strategy for unleashing your creativity – experiment with your own ideas and those I offer, and find what works for you.

How to Breathe New Life into Your Creativity – A Good Ol’ List.

Having fun with your creativity and mixing up how you work is a fantastic way to make sure that you remain creative. The following is a list of ideas for making this a reality.

Use new and/or different tools. If you always use watercolors, have a go with oil painting. Always playing guitar? Pick up the ukulele and write a song with that instead.

Change your work process. Do you usually write the introduction to your novel first? Mix it up and write the ending or jump into a scene midway through the story.

Change where you do your creative work. Start doing your morning sketches in a cafe instead of your office.

Change who you are being creative with (or begin working with others if you aren’t currently). This is perhaps the best way to breathe life into what you are doing. Jam with someone new – someone passionate and talented, and then watch as your creativity sky-rockets.

Step back and think about re-directing where you are heading in terms of the genre/category/brand you operate in. For example, with your music, begin to create a sound that is more alternative than punk-rock.

Involve more senses in what you are doing and/or get more active. If you currently paint with a brush, have a go with your hands; this will develop a more intimate/tactile relationship with your art. If you play guitar, start playing standing up (perhaps also think about how you might develop some stage moves!).

Break some eggs. Imagine how you could make the creative process messier, wilder, or more provocative. This might involve throwing paint on the walls, writing poetry most would think crass, or including some nudity in your marketing ad campaign.

Focus on working with a certain emotion. What would your creative output look like if you tried to make it express more of a certain emotion, e.g., more anger, more pathos, more fear, or more joy? Bring a new angle to the work you have already made and edit with one of these in mind, or start from scratch and

focus on one of these emotions from the get-go. Consider starting this process by making a list of emotions and then picking one that feels most appealing or one you think will yield the most creativity.

Adopt someone else's style altogether (for a short period), e.g., create TV ads that imitate the style of Honda's commercials or create an album that plays off U2's trademark sound. Have fun embracing the style whilst still being creative and making something new.

Collaborate with a Diverse Field.

The people you create with will powerfully affect what you create; I mentioned this in the previous list and will expand a little more on it now.

Typically, the more diversity there is in the team of people you work with, the more creative your work will be. Professor Scot Page of the University of Michigan and author of *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Teams, School and Societies* suggests that this is part of the reason why Silicon Valley is such a hotbed of creative innovation. He argues that the diversity of academic backgrounds fuels the collaborative creativity.

The best people to collaborate with will not only be people who have a diverse background, it will also be those who have the strengths that you lack.

Turn your creative pursuit into a hot-bed of connections, networks, and teamwork. Get on-board with other people who love to create as much as you do; collaborate with them, bounce ideas off them, and enjoy going together to gigs/galleries (or whatever your creative field is). Turning your social life into a creative expression will mean that you are totally immersed, motivated, and collaboratively enthused with the creativity of other people.

Find and Build an Editorial Relationship

Another reason to work with others is to develop an editorial relationship. We aren't always the best judges of our own work, and someone else is always going to have another perspective.

Of course, make sure you choose someone whose opinion you trust and whose advice is typically accurate. A careful editorial eye will help provide the following benefits:

Reveal a fresh twist that you hadn't seen with a new suggestion or two.

Make sure you don't create/publish work that is terrible/offensive/foolhardy in a manner you hadn't noticed.

Help with the "polishing" stage and give the final edits that turn your work from something very good into something great.

Contribute creative ideas that can combine with your own.

Feed Your Creativity

“If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.” – Stephen King

Massive consumption of your art-form is an important fuel for improving your creative efforts. A diet of new creative material is increasingly easy, thanks to the digital age and the internet, so make the most of it! Subscribe to magazines, art journals, music subscriptions, etc., and you will have access to a never-ending stream of new material that you can enjoy and mine for ideas. Use websites like last.fm if you are a musician or Goodreads if you are an author. Find out what is new and what is generally thought of as high quality, and put it on your reading list. It can be easy to slip into listening to the same music again and again, so instead listen to a new album every day to make sure you are always getting that new hit of creativity.

Of course, it is very helpful to do this in your own field, e.g., watching films if you are a director. However, an expansive and deep consumption of creativity “across the board” will stimulate your creativity and encourage the cross-pollination of ideas from other fields.

Consider supercharging the value you get from these creative pieces by taking notes. Taking notes and consuming the medium “actively” will improve:

Your attention, so that you don’t just passively read/listen.

Your understanding and comprehension.

Your ability to remember the work.

Writing questions beforehand will also help to sculpt your interaction with the work. By answering questions such as those in the following list, you will get still more “value” from absorbing the material. Consider why you are consuming the creative work to shape how you can mine it for ideas/value. Ask, and later answer questions such as:

What do I love about this?

What do I hate about this?

What one aspect would I love to steal from this?

What one aspect can I integrate into my current project?

What influenced this piece?

How fresh/original is this?

What technical elements can I recognize? (E.g. time signature or what instruments are used.)

A word of warning: it is important to avoid letting your inner critic runaway with itself. You need to suspend a haughty high-criticism, especially if this filters into unhelpful self-criticism of your own work. Becoming critic-like, if done well, can fuel your creative urges through deeper enjoyment, understanding, and sourcing ideas for your own work. You might even decide to set up a review blog or something similar alongside your creative work. If you do, try to make these reviews positive and based on the pieces that you love. This will help direct your inner critic to help your creativity instead of distract or hinder it.

Planning and Developing Other Meta-Skills

Planning is one of many “meta-skills” that will help your creativity immensely. Some creatives work in a chaotic manner, and that suits them; however, for many, better planning will provide the structural training-wheels that can make creativity a little easier. Here are two benefits of planning that directly improve your creativity:

You can develop a more consistent voice/style in your work.

Overarching complexities and ideas can be integrated. For example, instead of a disconnected series of songs on an album, you might be able to plan themes that recur throughout, or the album as a whole might express a narrative story.

As well as creativity-specific benefits to planning, the following are reasons why planning is always a good idea:

Better focus on the next step by deconstructing the goal into manageable bite-size actions.

Easier to begin and continue work because you never feel lost.

You can balance your creative work with other areas of your life to make sure everything is in check. E.g., regular practice sessions, and no more sporadic, inconsistent guitar practice.

Planning and seeing “the big picture” is necessary (for most, it will at least help) to improve your ability to create.

Other meta-skills that will benefit your creativity include better time management, goal setting, and motivation. Consider reading up on and working to improve these areas so that the effects can trickle down to your day-to-day creative work.

Letting Go of an Idea– Incubate the Idea and Involve Your Subconscious

Your subconscious is exceptionally useful when it comes to applying your creativity. This is especially the case if you are attempting to find that one creative idea to unlock a problem, in which case a period of “incubation” and forgetting about the idea for a period of time is invaluable.

Getting space is essential here – try to forget about the problem/creative goal altogether. Take walks or do something else entirely and wait for your subconscious to feed back the answer. Inspiration and ideas will come to you – often at random times when you are concentrating on something else.

Taking breaks in your work will help facilitate this. This includes both regular 10 minute breaks and getting away at weekends. This will provide the water to help ideas and creativity germinate in your subconscious. Shelley Carson, writer of *You Creative Brain*, suggests that this distraction is necessary to allow you to disengage from the wrong solution your mind has been fixating on.

Once you have let go of the idea and removed yourself from work to allow your creativity to incubate, it is important to be ready for that answer. An expectation that you will get that creative spark will help here.

“*Whether you think you can, or you think you can't--you're right.*” – Henry Ford

Below is a process orientated approach to problem solving that first utilizes brainstorming and the conscious mind, and then turns the problem over to the subconscious.

Clearly set out the creative spark you need, e.g., “How do I create an advertisement that encapsulates this brand whilst mining a “blue ocean” of new clients?”

Brainstorm ideas and work consciously until you either feel you have hit a wall or run out of time (perhaps you have set a 2 hour goal for working).

Rewrite the goal in step 1 and expect your subconscious to bring back the answer. (Clarify it a little more with the progress you made in step 2).

Get busy with something else and try not to think about the advertisement. However, always be ready (carry a pen or smart phone for idea-capturing).

When you feel that creative spark – that answer you need – get writing.
(Remember to push through the initial ideas, as these aren't always the best.)

Consider also that as you improve with your creative endeavors, you will feel more of an intuitive sense for how a project should progress; learn to trust this and your subconscious mind.

“I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking.” – Albert Einstein

Develop and Clarify a Creative Identity

It will help to put into words and define your creative identity and mission. This is like your “brand” and is a distillation of what you are trying to achieve.

If you have a wider vision and clear creative identity, this will help others to identify who you are as well as help you to shape your work, allowing wider tones/themes. This creative identify can also be a guide if you ever feel lost and unsure as to what you are trying to do.

An example for a creative identity for a band might be:

“To create music that feels like you’ve had water thrown in your face – with punk-rock character that fuses a more hard-core tone alongside political lyrics.”

Again, there are no rules, so don’t try to make something similar to the above example, and also consider that your creative identity will be a dialectic back and forth between the intuitive nature of your art and the rational idea of what you think you want – this will be your creative evolution over time.

This is identity is not something that you need to hold yourself to, or something that becomes a fence to keep you in place. Instead, use it to remind yourself of what you want to be and the vision you want to fulfil.

Regularly Destroy and Reinvent Yourself as an Artist

Don't become too attached to your creative pieces or your identity as an artist. Not only is this advisable in order to prevent becoming "pigeon-holed," so too is it important to help your overall push for innovating, staying interested, and creating work that is meaningful.

Bob Dylan is an excellent example of this. When he "went electric," many fans were in uproar, but he made this (literal) change in creative tone a success, and possibly ensured his continued position at the forefront of musical creativity and popularity.

Ensuring your own continued interest is also essential for long-term creativity. And there is no better way of getting out of a creative rut than by destroying the creative-identity you have developed and taking a new tack altogether.

This may sound like it flies in the face of the advice to create your own identity, but it doesn't. Create an identity in order to clarify your artistic choices and keep you on track – revise and re-create this identity regularly, or whenever you want to, to foster innovation, your own continued interest, and to keep your audience on its toes.

Make Shit Work

You are going to have rubbish ideas, create ugly work, and fail at many things – and that is OK. You have to love these bad pieces of work. Laugh at them if you need to. Analyze them to find the lessons in them, if possible. Do not worry about them.

Also, consider making work that you know is terrible to make sure you are still being creative, not just trying to be good. Trying to be good at something will often hamper your creative efforts, as you play it too safe and stick to what you know works. This may become truer when you experience success and feel desperate not to let it slide. Remedy this by setting aside a period of time and make something that you know is *not* good.

Move Fast, Break Things, and Be “Antifragile”

“We have to continually be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down.” – Kurt Vonnegut

To be great at creativity, it is important to attempt a lot of things, run a lot of experiments, and experience those failures. As Mark Zuckerberg said,

“Move fast and break things. Unless you are breaking stuff, you are not moving fast enough.”

If you aren’t moving fast enough in your creativity that you “break things,” whether that is failing in what you do or breaking accepted assumptions and boundaries of the industry – if you aren’t moving that fast, you won’t be doing your best work. To chime in again with the advice of Mark Zuckerberg,

"The biggest risk is not taking any risk ... In a world that's changing really quickly, the only strategy that is guaranteed to fail is not taking risks."

Alongside this principle, it will help to integrate an approach of being “antifragile.” In his excellent book *Antifragile*, Nicalas Taleb attempts to redefine the opposite of fragile not as “robust” (something strong), but instead as something “antifragile” – something that is strengthened by adverse conditions. Embody being antifragile in your creative efforts; for all the set-backs, failures, or dreadful work you create, find lessons and endeavor to see it as a strengthening of your creative identity/career as a whole.

Make Something Real For Others

The best way to motivate and affirm yourself as an artist is – rather obviously – to put art out into the world. You have to produce in order to be a creative, but so too do you need to publish it to show the world. This idea is explored further in the excellent book *Show Your Work* by Austin Kleon.

Making something real and producing it for others will have many benefits, including:

Creates the opportunity for critical feedback. If your work never sees the light of day, you perhaps miss the best opportunity to improve it by getting feedback from others.

You can get paid. Perhaps there is only a 0.1% chance of your first novel putting bread on the table if you send it to a publisher. But a novel that you don't even try to get published has a 0% of putting bread on the table.

You can impress others with it. Friends, family members, a first date – why not tell them you have a painting at the local gallery or a new business website. If these are just ideas or prototypes at home, you don't look nearly as serious.

You can use it to help get a cool job or “pivot” into a new career. Show your prospective employer a blog full of drawings you have done and maybe they will believe in your creativity enough to give you that marketing-assistant role.

You will feel like a creative and not just someone “dabbling.” A creative is defined by the work they create. If you don't create and publish definite works, you are not a creative.

As noted in *The Lean Startup* by Eric Ries, the pressure of rapid execution and creating a prototype to show the world as soon as possible is the best way to see if it has value and iterate it for improvement. This is especially valuable in the business/product/start-up world; however, the same advice can be applied to other creative work as well. Until something tangible and functional is created, there is nothing to improve on, and so no way to test the market or adapt and improve it based on feedback.

Schedule Your Creativity

Unless you are a hard-core “artist” who prides him or herself on following inspiration, chaos, and a no-rule lifestyle, it will be worth creating – or at the very least experimenting with – deadlines and pressure to get work done.

The power of a deadline is a great way to facilitate better creativity.

Whether you work alone or in a group, a schedule of repeating goals is a great way to make these deadlines come around like clock-work. Below are some examples:

One song a week

One 2,000 word short story a week

One painting a week

Four poems a week

One business plan a week

Ten photographs a week

One sculpture a week

Scheduling when you work on these and breaking them into their constituent parts will make this still easier. If you are a musician, this might look like this:

Monday – try to come up with chord progressions

Tuesday – brainstorm lyrics and themes for the song

Wednesday – come up with a great hook with the chords / melody

Thursday – fuse the lyrics and music to come up with a verse

Friday – create the chorus

Saturday – practice and improve the song

Sunday – record and publish the song

The indie rock solo project *Into It. Over It* did this to an excellent effect by creating a song every week for a year. Arguably, the quality of the songs vary, but all the same, I recommend checking them out to see what can be possible when someone sets a goal for their creative output and sticks to it.

Accept and Embrace the Ambiguity

“The creative person is willing to live with ambiguity.” – Abe Tannenbaum

Being creative means that you have to live with a lot of ambiguity. You are creating something from nothing, and by reaching into what is possible, there can be an overwhelming feeling that anything is possible. Similarly, waiting on finding those insights and turning things over to your intuition/subconscious requires both acceptance and trust in the process and ambiguity.

If you are used to working a straightforward job role, you might find it tough to live in the sandbox that being a creative necessitates. It will feel uneasy; there are no right answers, no clear path to take. Understanding and accepting this will help unleash your creativity.

Don't Settle for the First Idea

Typically, the first ideas you have will not be the best ideas. In *Ingenius* by Tina Seelig, she suggests that it is often the third wave of ideas that yields the best ideas.

Using a mind map and building connections outwardly is great way to push through immediate ideas; it facilitates waves of ideas and connections. Below is an example – notice how the first wave of ideas is questions that lead to and hone the second wave of ideas.



To prevent yourself from landing and settling on an early idea, it is helpful to set targets that will ensure that you push through initial waves of ideas. For

example, set the goal of fifty ideas before you stop or set a time limit that you have to work for.

Good is the Enemy of Great

The phrase “good is the enemy of great” is often well suited to your creative work.

In *Hegarty on Creativity*, Sir John Hegarty expounds on the benefits of not settling for something that is good and to always push for more. He states that it is often the comfortable, first ideas that should be feared and shunned – they are often only signposts to great ideas.

“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.” – William Faulkner

Don’t stop creating just because something feels good...keep going and make sure you end up with something great.

Limit Yourself to Save Options and Focus Creativity

A terrific way to focus your creativity is to limit the options that are available, e.g., an artist might only allow him or herself to paint in six different colors. Limiting variables in this way can have the following benefits:

Beginning creativity becomes easier, as you are less likely to procrastinate, e.g., if you normally slave away trying to get the sound just right for your electric guitar/amp set-up, instead limit the options and just pick up the acoustic and play with that. You might get to a finished track in hours instead of days.

You can focus on one area of your craft and thereby improve it more effectively. Making this the area which yields the most value will make the practice still more effective, e.g., a writer might limit their short story so that the characters stay in one location. This would force the writer to focus on character/story development – core principles they might be lacking.

If you cut down dramatically on a certain variable, you necessitate the creation of something original. For example, Dr. Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham* has only 50 different words and is exceptional because of this.

Consider limiting the options or “variables” with which you work with in order to focus, improve, and foster your creativity.

Create the Art You Want to See – Scratch Your Own Itch

Get selfish with your creativity and create work that you really love to experience yourself. You want to become your own favorite band/artist/writer. Create what you love – what you think is missing in the world and what you would most like to experience. Don't strive to be a cheap rip-off of someone else (though be influenced); your creativity is best when it is an expression of what you love.

This principle applies to work and business, too. The best way to come up with an idea to make money is to remedy those things that you personally find annoying or create those products you want to use. You will then better understand what works, and feel motivated to push the project through to its conclusion.

Find Passion and Soak It In

Becoming immersed in what you are creating is the best way to not only get more ideas for your work, but also to fuel your passion and remind you why you are being creative in the first place.

If you play music, get in some live music at least every week. See the bands you love and enjoy the hell out of the experience.

Imitate Works to Understand Them

Finding what you love in a piece of music/art/literature is easier if you create your own copy of it. In music, covering a song is the best way to discover all the nuances that make it tick.

If you learn to cover your ten favorite albums, you will intimately learn everything that makes them what they are. Throughout the process, consider writing down the similarities between them. You might learn there is a certain chord progression you love, or that you love a four chord verse and a two chord chorus.

Make a list of the characteristics you admire. Practice spotting trends and patterns whenever you listen to music (or take in your creative field). These are the characteristics that you can and should adopt into your work to be successful – remember, create what you love and solve problems just as others have.

"The only art I'll ever study is stuff that I can steal from." – David Bowie

Also, work to find your creative heroes. Respect the hell out of them and learn all you can from their work. Don't put them on too high a pedestal, however, and remember they had to start from nowhere and their work isn't perfect. You can only see the final product they have created. To get there they spent years honing their craft, creating rubbish, learning from it, and moving forward.

Make Your Surroundings Conducive to Creativity

Building an environment where creativity can flourish is the goal of many architects and interior designers, especially those commissioned by art studios, innovation studios, and start-ups, as well as every business that needs to foster creativity (which is practically all of them). Whether you are creating at home or within a business, consider the following ideas to help make your environment more conducive to creativity:

If it is a group work-space, facilitate the possibility of many interactions and chance meetings. This is what Steve Jobs and his team endeavored to do with Pixar by making communal areas that were fed by all the offices. This increased the likelihood of chance meetings and collaborations.

Showcase the creative works of the business, your team, and yourself. This will help remind you of what you are trying to achieve and what “great” looks like.

Have environments that suit each stage of the creative process. For example, if you want somewhere where people can interact and be creative, make sure the furniture is adaptable so that people don’t feel stifled. If you are prototyping products, have all the possible materials on hand and ensure clear, open work spaces to work in.

Introduce fun and games into the environment. Rubik’s cubes, water pistols, etc. – these will stimulate minds and allow for a fun space to get creative.

Final Ideas

Here are some final pieces of advice to help foster creativity:

Work on your observation skills. The world is full of ideas and information that can fuel your creative works. Try and recall details of a room after you have left it or begin to sketch everyday – this will train you to observe and see what is actually there, instead of what you expect or guess there to be. By noticing details, you can find inspiration and opportunities to get creative.

Assumptions should be questioned to death. It is easy to rely or assume something to be true. The more central or “higher-up” in the project something is, the more important it is to establish it is based on a truth and not an un-tested assumption, as the error’s effects will be more far-reaching from this higher level. For example, if “characteristic A” is going to be the bedrock of your creative work/product, try removing it or consider an alternative – don’t just assume something has to be there.

Use questions to expand and focus your creativity. This is most applicable for ideation/innovation. Use questions to shape what ideas you want to create. A biased or non-specific question will create biased or non-specific ideas, so take the time to create questions that point toward the creative output you want to see. Questions are also helpful to facilitate feedback...questions such as, “What did you like about X? What could be better? If you were me, what would you do?” are essential for innovation and development.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

BOOK 10: HOW TO THINK LIKE A GENIUS

Introduction

I have tried to keep the self-help/motivation talk to a minimum. I don't want to deceive you into believing that tomorrow you can wake up as the next Edison, because becoming a genius is exceptionally difficult, and this eBook does not hold all the keys. Think of this eBook as a signpost at the bottom of a mountain – a mountain that dwarfs Everest – and at the top is the goal of achieving a genius-like brilliance. This eBook will give you direction, but it is you who will have to endure the long, difficult voyage to get to where you want to be.

Throughout this book I will move between principles and techniques. This will typically, though not always, entail first explaining an idea on how to think like a genius, then a practical technique to implement. Other times whole sections will be theoretical or practical. However, overall there is a balance that will, I hope, please both readers looking to fulfil intellectual curiosity, and those wanting practical advice for becoming more genius-like.

The attached, free eBook *How to Study* contains guidelines that not only apply to studying at school, but also advice that will help you succeed in any project you are working on. Think of the tips as not only a guide to studying, but also an additional guide to applying yourself to mastery in a given area. Another tool kit of straightforward, practical tips for unleashing your inner-genius.

Without further ado, let's begin your crash course on how to think like a genius!

Defining “Genius”

Before I delve into theories, techniques and my own ideas on how to think like a genius, it is prudent to clarify what we mean when we say “genius.”

The Oxford Dictionary defines genius as someone with “exceptional intellectual or creative power or other natural ability.”^[vi] Wikipedia mirrors this definition, whilst adding, “typically to a degree that is associated with the achievement of an unprecedented leap of insight.”^[vii]

And so, to simplify slightly, we can understand genius to mean, “Someone with exceptional ability that achieves an unprecedented leap in their field.”

We all know, roughly, what we mean when we say “genius,” but taking a moment to think on the definition is useful in beginning to work out how we can think and become more genius-like. Similarly, by thinking about the people who have been labelled “genius,” we develop our understanding and appreciation of what it is to be a genius. The names Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Sir Isaac Newton and Marie Curie are all synonymous with both exceptional ability and achieving leaps in insight. Researching the lives of these people, and reflecting on the definition of genius is helpful in the quest to emulate them. Contemplating who they are/were and what sets them apart is essential in thinking more like them.

Now we will address a character trait common with all geniuses, the implementation of which will push you powerfully toward thinking more like a genius.

Re-Frame Failure and Never Give Up

“I have not failed. I’ve just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” –Thomas Edison

If you can change your thinking so that you embrace failure instead of shying away from it, you will be taking a large step toward thinking like a genius. The trick is being able to re-frame failure so that the focus is not on the negative connotations. Endeavor to stop thinking of failure as something to be feared and resisted. Instead, come to accept it, as this is truly a cornerstone of thinking like a genius.

For a genius, there is perhaps no attribute more valuable than being able to try repeatedly in the attempt to reach goals, to forge on, even in the face of consistent defeat and ever-increasing odds. Of course, the genius is always pushing for success and thrives on it. But in order to reach victories, the genius understands that failure is a necessary and essential part of the journey.

The fear of failure is perhaps the greatest enemy to your ability to embrace failure and think like a genius. It paralyzes most people to the extent that they don’t take action because the thought of not succeeding at something is too overwhelming.

The reason the fear of failure is abundant in so many of us is unclear. Perhaps it is genetic or maybe it is caused by socialization. Doubtless there are many aspects of the modern world which seem to encourage the sentiment that failure is unacceptable. Perhaps through competitive sports there is an unhelpful idolization of winners and only pity for those who lose. Indeed, there has been the creation of the label “losers” to mock those who are not the best.

Using Edison as an example, re-frame failure to mean not getting the result you wanted, and nothing more. Not getting what you want does not mean that you are a failure. It means only that you did not get the result you wanted. So don’t involve your ego and avoid an emotional reaction. Take the failure/defeat in whatever context it occurs, embrace it, and see the lesson that it contained. If you are able to do this, you will be infinitely more likely to eventually achieve the result you desire. Even if failure comes in the most awful manner, still try to re-frame failure as mostly irrelevant. Do not become upset or unhappy, because life is not about getting everything right. It is instead about enjoying the ride,

learning from mistakes, and taking chances when opportunities arise.

Push your thoughts to always see failure as something good and helpful, not as something to be shunned and avoided. Embrace it as an everyday occurrence and in time you will bring greatness into your life. Failure is a part of life that should be enjoyed and is a necessary part of our tutorage toward mastery. Forget and replace everything you have learnt and the beliefs that make you fear failure – they only hold you back.

This isn't easy of course. It isn't easy to try at something again and again and not get what you want. However, that really is the only solution, the only way to get to where you want to be.

The following quotation is brilliantly worded and perfectly re-frames the notion of failure and success.

“You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don’t take.” –Wayne Gretzky

Have Patience and Think Long-Term

Being able to think long-term and see the “big picture” is an essential element of being able to think like a genius. The gifted and brilliant individuals in the world steer far clear of quick fixes and get rich quick schemes. Maybe they tried them in their younger days, but in their evolution to becoming bigger and better thinkers, they learnt to cultivate a long term attitude to their work and lives.

The famous adage “Rome wasn’t built in a day” is a simple but vitally important idea that needs to be understood and internalized on your path to thinking like a genius. Work to develop patience and industry in your work. Participate mostly in the long-term projects that will pay off well into the future. The further you look into the future, and the more you allow the long-term goals of your life dictate what you do today, the further you will align with the genius within you.

Practical: Lifestyle and Day-to-Day Perspective Changes

A useful technique for becoming more mindful of this is to make a list of how you would normally spend the day, living habitually and in the moment as you currently do. Then, make a list of how you would live if you worked from a more long-term perspective, working on those things that will provide the most long-term value in your life. It helps to consistently push your mind to work within the long-term mindset. You will notice a dramatic change in how you are inclined to do things differently.

An example of this in action might be your diet. Thinking in a long-term perspective, and considering the kind of health you want to enjoy for the rest of your life, will help shift your diet away from sluggish, unhealthy foods and toward the best foods available. Someone who thinks of how they will be living ten, twenty, or thirty years into the future will choose to eat a healthy and balanced diet. Those who think only of fulfilling immediate urges are more likely to consume the high sugar, high salt foods, which taste immediately sensuous, but won’t give you consistent energy levels and will contribute to the development of health issues in the long run.

The same positive switches will happen in other areas of your life as soon as you begin to adopt a long-term mindset. You will put meaningful time into relationships, as well as your intellectual and spiritual development, because you

know that “down the road,” these are the things that will have the most positive impact on your life. The everyday habitual actions which are immediately gratifying, like watching TV, aimless internet browsing, and so on, all pale in significance when you adopt a long-term mindset for yourself.

Thinking in this way is an important element of thinking like a genius, as the genius mindset is aligned with a state of patience and understands that slow development of the necessary knowledge and skills is essential to living a good life.

Practical: Goal Setting

When deciding which goals and projects to take up, again, move towards those which will serve you best for the rest of your life. Simple and true skills, like cooking and exercising, will serve you well, time after time. And so, the sooner you can develop them into strengths in your life, the better.

There are various ways to become better at thinking long-term. The clearest manifestation of thinking long term is to set goals for yourself. Setting goals weeks, months, years into the future works exceptionally well for many people.

A meditation/thought experiment that can help is to visualize who you want to be five, ten, twenty years from now. Imagine talking with this “future you” and discuss who you are, who you are going to be, and the changes you need to make to get there.

A long-term perspective can also help you bring depth to your character and wisdom to how you see other people. By contemplating the longevity of life, and seeing people as only ever at one part of life and thinking on how we were all children and that everyone grows old and dies. By seeing more than the fleeting moment of time you are in now, you will perceive people and life with greater depth.

Give Away Value All of the Time

“I never get tired of being useful.” –Leonardo da Vinci

The genius mindset understands the need to create and give away massive amounts of value, and to do this freely without the expectation of reward. Thinking like a genius does not mean living a life of isolation. It instead embraces our lives with others, and makes a point of being someone who is always giving of their time, energy, and talents.

Changing our attitudes and actions so that we think of others first is a significant step toward thinking like a genius. There are many rules in regard to treating others, the most common of which is “treat others as you want to be treated” (the golden rule). But I want to try to move this debate toward a more developed conclusion. The “platinum” rule, which states: “Do unto others as they would have done unto them.” is closer to how the genius’ mind thinks, because the genius discovers what other people want and need, then works to give this to them. This is how to be “useful,” as Leonardo understood it.

People tend to go through stages in regards to how they think and act toward others. The first stage is being dependent. This occurs when we are young and need to be provided with food, shelter, and love. The next stage is to be independent and able to support oneself. Here there are still exchanges and interactions with others, but the individual here learns how to manage alone. This is the progression through puberty and into adulthood. After this, we move fully into being an adult, developing quality interdependent relationships, existing in networks of giving, and sharing our lives so that we can support and build on one another’s happiness.

To think like a genius, you must take this interdependent stage further, to a final, evolved state in which you endeavor to give to others value – that is, what they define as value – as often as possible, and without the expectation of receiving anything in return.

Adopting this mindset will move you powerfully toward becoming a genius. In the initial sense, it is a very altruistic and loving way to live. You will feel emotionally powerful and happier by adopting this kind of lifestyle. But also consider that there is a tremendous amount of good that will flow back into your own life if you adopt this mindset. Looking for the return value to come back

into your own life arguably negates the altruism, but that is a long philosophical debate we won't get into here. Whatever stage of integration your morals and philosophy have with regard to this is your own issue. All I suggest is that you try the mindset of always giving value. In doing so, you will think like a genius and bring rewards to others as well as to yourself.

The first reason why giving value all the time is good for you is that it is the fastest and healthiest way to create financial abundance in your own life. Think what you will about capitalism and the state of the world as it is; if you can change how you think and interact with the world so that you give away as much value to others as possible, you will eventually become wealthy. Now, this eBook is about developing yourself into a genius, not making money, but I would argue that to fulfill your potential, finding and embracing financial independence and abundance is a powerful step to take.

Another reason to always be giving away value is that other people will feel obliged to repay the debt, with interest. If you do something as simple as making a meal for someone, they will be exceptionally inclined to return the gesture. This is effective in building both personal and professional relationships, as in both cases the rewards you receive from others will far outweigh what you put into them. The more you give to others, the more will return into your own life.

I also guarantee the emotional power of living like this will bring a sort of spiritual genius to your being because as you give more, you will feel a loving power. Indeed, this is perhaps the closest existent form of a practical approach to love. It is love rephrased and presented in a workable, everyday form. Giving people what they want and need, with abundant energy, is a dynamic form of love more real than the notion of caring for someone, or that of a state in which two people exist together in.

Practical: Understand Value and Provide it

There are a few steps to inhabiting this new way of thinking. The first is to become a student of value and to find, and understand, what other people define as value. Too often when trying to create and give value (normally to make money), people attempt to tell others what it is they should value. This is the wrong approach. Instead, learn what people value, and then give it to them. After a time, you can tweak and provide your own insights to the value you are providing, but only after a "relationship" has been established.

An error that is commonly made is to think that we need to gain abundance and complete control of our lives before we can give to others. This is a very popular train of thought, but is not to be trusted. Through the very fact that you are reading this, and are inclined to attempt to push toward fulfilling your potential and to become genius-like, I am sure there are already a great deal of things in your life that you can share and give to others. If it is as simple as sharing a meal, or giving your time to help someone, these are still significant. So start here and build upward.

Living a life where you are giving all the time, where you consistently work to understand what is valuable to others, and then give it to them consistently and abundantly, is a crucial element to thinking like a genius. Be sure to incorporate this principle into your thinking and daily actions, as it will put you on the side of the gods. It may take a little time for you to enjoy the full rewards of the return in your own life (particularly in regards to creating financial wealth), but have patience, because soon enough they will come.

Notice Connections and Transfer Lessons: Part 1. Building Understanding

“Realize that everything connects to everything else.” –Leonardo da Vinci

Another way you can think more like a genius is to become more adept at noticing and drawing the connections between seemingly unrelated things, and learning the lessons they share. This works to create a more complete and developed worldview, and is particularly useful when learning new skillsets, or taking on a new project. The genius is able to consider their experiences in other areas and notice how they relate to a new field. Everything truly has connected elements and parallel attributes to something else.

Encouraging this way of thinking is especially effective because it aligns the natural way in which the human mind works. The mind is built on connected elements; we are designed to live and remember things by connecting them to the things we already know. A great example of this is how memories build and connect with one another. When we are exposed to a certain smell, perhaps a perfume that someone we knew used to wear, we are then transported back to the memories and emotions we had at the time. Also, think on the development of language. Words build on one another to build sentences, and over time we learn and understand increasingly complex ideas. This shows how the human mind operates. We build on things that we already know by connecting previous ideas to new ones. This allows us to push our knowledge and experience forward. Expanding and fully utilizing this process to see connections and the full scope of lessons learnt will allow you to think more like a genius.

When you begin to encourage yourself to see the connections between things on a larger scale, you may at first need to draw associations that are a little farfetched. This is fine; don’t be shy of making odd connections between things. Sometimes smaller metaphors are required for us to understand bigger things.

The game of chess is an example through which we can learn lessons on strategy that translate to other areas of life. When playing chess it takes time to arrange our pieces into position before beginning the final moves, which push toward a checkmate position. This is an example of cultivating a patient and deliberate strategy, and how developing the board position of your pieces is needed before you reach the end point you desire. This lesson transfers wonderfully to how a battle might be fought in the real world, or, in a more everyday sense how we go about business moves, or the building of relationships and so on. All require

time and the adjustment of elements before we begin the final push for what we want. The above is one example that relates to the field of psychology, but if you are looking for more real-world examples, you need not go far.

Look for lessons and parallels in all things and you will build a more complete worldview and begin to think more like a genius.

Notice Connections and Transfer Lessons: Part 2. Transferring Your Skills

We can extend the notion of transferring connections and lessons to improve how you go about learning and mastering new projects. There will always be skills and developments to your character that, through improvement in one field, will allow you to more successfully engage the other.

The classic concept of the genius often entails someone who is good at many different things. Perhaps Leonardo da Vinci is, in this sense, the archetypal genius as he excelled in dozens of fields and contributed significantly to each of them.

It is important to be aware of the skills and lessons you develop in every pursuit you undertake, so that you can better choose your next goals, as well as your methods for reaching them. The skills Leonardo da Vinci developed often allowed him to better master new endeavors. For example, being a skilled artist allowed him to eloquently develop his understanding of anatomy thanks to his already highly developed drawing skills.

There are always skills and lessons that can transfer and help you work more effectively when pursuing a different goal or challenge. Even small developments of character, such as becoming more resilient to defeat, will put you in better stead when attempting to succeed at something else. For example, if you compete regularly in a sport you will understand what it is like to win and lose. More precisely, you will learn how to keep both in perspective and how to “keep your head” in either case. Developing this facet of your character will be very helpful if you decide to become an entrepreneur, as here too you will be exposed to many successes and failures, and the better you can deal with these ups and downs, the more successful in business you will be. In this way becoming a “jack of all trades” is a desirable goal, as it will allow you to better pursue excellence in new fields because you have learnt lessons that give you a head start.

Practical: Utilizing Connections and Transferable Lessons in Your Own Life

When you are attempting to bring success into your life, financial or otherwise,

it is essential that you work to the strengths you currently have. Take time to research and think creatively about how you can synthesize these strengths, and then choose goals and action plans that utilize them most effectively. Similarly, it is important to define weaknesses that may hold you back from reaching your goals, weaknesses that, if remedied and turned into strengths, would serve you well in future.

Gaining awareness of your own strengths and weaknesses will reveal how best to leverage your efforts to reach your goals. To do this, take time to journal and make a list of things you are excellent at, things you are good at, and things you are weak at. Fill the list with both concrete skills and more abstract character traits. For example, you could list both “a degree in electronics” and “excellent at organizing ideas.” Also, make a note of attributes that are important for you to develop at some point.

When you are deciding on a goal you want to reach or are choosing a new professional endeavor, work from this list and be savvy in choosing how you play to your current strengths. Also, work to develop weaknesses you want to turn into strengths. Again, think on these things with a long-term mindset.

Utilizing the interrelatedness of your skills and pursuing excellence in different fields is best considered an organic whole that is always dynamically evolving. Work to understand your own skills and attributes and purposefully shape where you are taking them. Doing so will ensure you think and act more like a genius.

Habits: An Introduction

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.”

—Aristotle

To become closer to your genius, it is necessary to develop a number of brilliant habits that push you toward your goals. You should therefore think of life as a series of habits, working first to understand your own, and then to mold them so that in time they bring you what you want.

Every day, the vast amount of things you do and think will be much the same as the day before. In the quest to inhabit your potential and think more like a genius, accepting this is an important step. It may seem an unappealing idea, especially in the modern age where there is an emphasis on doing what is new and exciting and spontaneity is prized. However, the reality is that our lives are rarely like this and humans are more adapted – thrive even – on habits and rituals that change very little over time. Once you understand this, you can start thinking about how to create habits that support the lifestyle you want and move you toward becoming a genius.

We have very little willpower to make significant changes quickly, and so we must instead attempt to push ourselves gently toward these habits. Working to build a collection of habits that encourage and align with our genius side will therefore take time and patience. This dovetails perfectly with the message that we need to think long-term. Becoming a genius takes years of repeated action. Creating a collection of daily habits that drive us toward our genius takes time, but it is one of the most important elements to getting there.

Habits: Changing Habits

(This whole section is devoted to practical techniques!)

The first thing to do to change your habits is to become aware of them. All the things that you do each day, or regularly – everything that constitutes your lifestyle as it is. An actionable step for this is to simply keep a log over the course of a day, noting all the actions that you perform. Attempt to live what would be a “normal” day for you, and do not deviate from your usual habits. It may be easiest to leave writing this log until the end of the day, as doing it throughout the day will take time, become annoying, and obstruct you from living normally. At the end of the day, break down everything that you did, with an estimation of how much time you spent doing each action.

To get a complete insight into your habits, perform this for seven days. This should give a suitably accurate snapshot of your life. When you are making these logs, be as strict as possible, write down everything that you do, be it good, bad, interesting, boring or embarrassing. The more honest you can be, the more effectively you will be able to build something better. Some of your habits will be positive and keep you happy, possibly pushing you toward goals. Others will be unhealthy and hold you back. Some of these habits you will have mindfully chosen, while others will have come into your life without much conscious choice. Regardless, note them all down.

Once you are aware of all the habits you currently have, it can be beneficial to journal on how you feel about them. It is important to avoid becoming harsh or judgmental even though many of your habits may be negative. Becoming consciously aware of them might make you feel guilty, unhappy, or anxious. Don’t fight these feelings if they come up, but try not to let them linger.

Consider also that many of the habits you do not like are, in fact, necessary to your emotional stability and are fulfilling an important objective. Do not become frustrated and attempt to strip them away immediately, as change takes time. Let these negative habits remain and instead focus on the positive fact that you are now conscious of them.

Next, you can work to add a new habit or remove one of the habits you currently have. Working to do this one by one is very important, as humans resist change. Enforcing change on yourself is no easy matter. There will be parts of you that

have a vested emotional interest in continuing what you are currently doing, so make changes slowly... one thing at a time!

Doing things that are new and building desirable habits will certainly always be challenging. Do not underestimate how hard it will be. No doubt you have tried before to pick up a new habit, whether it was practicing a musical instrument, exercising, or perhaps flossing. When you did, you probably noticed how difficult it was, and even though you consciously knew the benefits of instilling it, you still struggled. Typically, these new habits are easy for the first few days because we feel all the excitement and promise of how they will benefit us. However, once this initial momentum fades, completing the habit feels difficult, and the parts of our being invested in the new habit *not* taking root work relentlessly against our willpower.

Generally, thirty days is presented as the time frame needed to ingrain a habit. This is not a hard and fast law, but simply a guide that also fits in with the calendar months. So if you can endeavor to add a new daily habit to your life each month and work every day at instilling that new action into your life, you will be changing at a sustainable rate.

If you are removing a habit, it can be wise to initially understand why you are performing it in the first place. Doing something every day that consciously seems unwise will mean that there are probably emotional drivers, which aren't immediately obvious. It may then be better to fulfil these emotional drivers by creating a new, positive habit. For example, if you are smoking, it may be that you are bored much of the time, so to quit smoking it would be wise to find a new activity to occupy you and remove these feelings of boredom. In this way you stop smoking as a natural consequence.

Similarly, it is a brilliant idea to add a habit that works in your favor in a multitude of ways. For example, if you notice that you are smoking because you are bored and also decide that you would like to be more social, you could take up a social hobby, perhaps going dancing with a friend. By looking at the goals you have and the habits you want to build (as well as the ones you'd like to diminish), you can work to instill new habits that create progress in multiple ways.

Consider habits such as regularly playing on a sports team, as this will bring about many positives such as making you healthy, more social, encourage you to stop smoking (if you currently do), and have fun. Or perhaps if you play guitar,

you could begin busking to both earn money and do what you love. Implementing habits that move you forward in a multitude of ways is the smartest way to push toward your goals.

Making yourself accountable to someone is a fantastic way to make sure that you continue with the new habit. Creating small bets and forfeits will be the “stick” needed to pressure you into completing a new habit once the initial feelings of excitement fade away. People are more likely to perform an action because they fear the penalty, rather than desire the reward. For example, people will do anything to continue a job (even one they hate) because the alternative of having no income is too terrible. Utilize this part of yourself by perhaps promising to give money to a friend if you do not continue performing the new habit.

Another way to make habits more effective is to always make them daily habits, even when they generally aren’t. It is easier to do something every day than to try and do it every other day. This is because you are repeating the action in a more regular fashion. For example, it is easier to write a small amount every day than it is to write a lot once a week. No matter which habit you are trying to take on, the closer to daily you can make it, the easier it will be to add to your life.

Layering habits that support one another, and that chip away at long-term goals each day, is the surest way to become more genius-like. Think like a genius and see your life in terms of a collection of habits, then build the very best ones you can.

Emotional Genius: Discover Your Motives

To think like a genius, you need to think of yourself as the emotional being that you are. Attempting to work and live like an automaton gets you nowhere. Recognize that the conscious push to inhabit your genius side needs to be fueled by emotion. We are, after all, essentially emotional beings. There is no way to turn off the emotional states that rotate within us, and so the only course we can take is to work with them.

The manifestation of this way of thinking equates to always finding the emotional drivers of the goals you set yourself. Then feeding them as much as possible. You need to find the reasons for the desire to get to where you want to go. The path to success will inevitably be long and tough, so knowing what is at the end of it will help you to keep pushing forward through the hard times.

Work to discover what you really want, on an emotional level. This is the first step. However, be prepared, as it may not be what you expect. Perhaps you crave the approval of your peers or financial success. Whatever it is, do not shy away from it. Instead, accept it, because your reasons will give you the emotional energy you need. To find out what your motivations are, spend time journaling and thinking about what it is you most want, picture yourself getting what you want, and note every aspect of it. The most important emotional motivation will be the lynch pin of this picture.

Once you have discovered the emotional drive behind what you want, work to encourage and fuel it as regularly as possible. At the very least make it a daily action to look over what you want and to write about your goals. Picture the end result that gives you the most emotional fire. If you are able to contemplate and live out your goals whilst fueling their emotional drivers, you will take another step toward thinking like a genius.

Social Genius: Avoid Comparing Yourself to Others

In a world heaving with billions of people competing and working alongside each other, comparison is an inevitable part of human life. An essential component of thinking like a genius is to improve how you relate to other people – specifically stopping negative comparison of yourself with others, and to then choose the best social group for you. By working to avoid placing yourself and your achievements in relation to people in a negative manner and then building a supportive social group, you will become freer and more able to inherit the genius within you.

It is inevitable that sometimes you will compare yourself to others. Occasionally, this can be helpful as competition can drive us to succeed, but comparison generally leads down an unhelpful road. First of all, it encourages conformity and mediocrity when those around you expect less than what you are capable of. In this case “fitting in” can require you to shine a little less bright. Don’t let your fear of other people’s opinions ever restrict or curtail who you are, and what you choose to do.

Comparison to others is also unhelpful in that it can lead to negative feelings, drawn from the sentiment that in some way you are not living up to the successes of others. You should certainly be inspired by others, but never let the lives of others hold a mirror to your own failings. This is both unhelpful and illusory. Everyone has different opportunities and choices to make. Whenever you admire others to the detriment of your own self-esteem, place yourself firmly back on your own path.

In order to become the genius you can be, endeavor to think of yourself as a free agent in your own reality.

Social Genius: Choose Where you Try to Fit In

As much as you must try to separate yourself from negative comparisons with others, there can also be benefits facilitated by socialization. It is possible to use others to encourage and improve your chances of becoming genius-like. Once you have stopped trying to fit in and ceased comparing yourself to others, you can develop a more evolved relationship between your own success and the success of others.

A more evolved dynamic involves modeling your actions after the actions of those you want to emulate and becoming more like them via socialization. If you want to become more intelligent or wealthier, create a social group that includes intelligent or wealthy people. Encourage your desired achievements by spending time with people who are like this already.

If your social life involves people who don't possess characteristics you admire and desire, lessen the time you spend with them. Doing this slowly is important because it is not always easy to make new friends and it is healthy to possess a strong sense of community and friendship. You can then slowly alter your social group and choose to fit in with the people you have a high regard for.

Be sure to develop a mature understanding of the person you want to be, and what kind of characteristics you want to model yourself after. Many people want to encourage greater financial success in their lives and therefore believe they should spend time with richer people. Yes, this applies the principle previously stated, but only in a restricted and shallow manner. It is more important to develop relationships with people whose character you want to model yourself on, rather than based on what they materially possess. You may want a nice car, a lot of money, and a beautiful partner, and these are normal and healthy things to want. But don't be immature enough to think that these are the most important things in life. Many people who have these things did not gain them honestly and may lack happiness. Don't naively try to socialize and model your behaviors and actions after these people.

When choosing the social scene you'd like to become involved with, do it with maturity and integrate people who have the character you most want to have. The most important thing is to look for people who display true happiness. The secondary aspect is that they have a character you can admire, and then finally, consider whether they possess the success and ambition within areas that match

what you want for yourself.

It is important to keep your own counsel and decide on the goals and path you take. Whether you are deciding how to change your friendship group or perhaps your partner, always seek out the experiences and lifestyle that you want. If you can think and live in this way, you will better inhabit the genius within you.

Work Like a Genius: Put A LOT of Hours in

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.” –Thomas A. Edison

“Work is a necessity for man. Man invented the alarm clock.” –Pablo Picasso

“Life grants nothing to us mortals without hard work.” –Horace

An important part of becoming more genius-like is making sure you put in the hours working at your craft. This may be something you didn't want to hear. However, if you are eager to become genius-like, there is no way around it: a lot of hours, weeks, months and years will need to be spent working, and working hard. Every genius, no matter what their field, has had to put in the time to get to where they are.

It is essential that you develop the skill to work long and hard on your projects. By becoming industrious, you will be able to build and forge success in your chosen field. Without it, you won't come close.

Work Like a Genius: Don't Just Toil, Produce

It is also important to not only work many hours, but also to make sure that you are producing work. To clarify, I mean that you have to be creating definite works with definite results. Whether this is paintings, inventions, novels, or experiments, you must always make sure that you are creating physical work and real gains in what you are doing.

Producing a lot of work will also help to hone your skills and go through every aspect of the practice/field you are working in. However, this might not always be possible. For example, if you are creating a one-off experiment that takes months of preparation, you will not be able to create this again and again. However for the majority of pursuits, there will be the repetition of smaller tasks that are complete in themselves. By cycling through these regularly, you will experience the whole task and so be able to consider how to improve each aspect of it. For example, the process of writing and recording a song is a repeatable task for a musician. And so, each part of the song writing process can be improved upon. For example, it can have a more complex arrangement, more evocative lyrics, etc.

Practical: Consistent Production

Setting a physical, time-constrained goal is important. You want to be working toward something that can easily be shown as completed. Without a clear result, it can be easy to stop too soon or not actually make something of value, or even fool yourself into thinking that you are working when you aren't.

By setting strict time limits to your work, you will push yourself to actually create work. This is an important part of goal setting, and will help to push through internal blocks and perfectionism. With clear time frames and specific goals, you will be able to produce work rapidly.

It will help to deconstruct the overall project/goal into smaller tasks that contribute to the overall goal. Then, set short time frames to push through the completion of these smaller tasks.

It can help to make these time-constrained, definite goals repeatable, habitual

acts, which if completed will mean that you inevitably get to where you want to be. For example, if every week you write and record one song, then over time you will inevitably have an album ready to release.

This method is especially useful if you enjoy the process and don't mind having it as part of your life. For example, if you love painting and aspire to be a great painter, BUT have been struggling to find time to push things forward productively, it can help to set the small, regular goal of completing one painting a week.

To give you that extra push to produce, it can also help to enter competitions or tell everyone you know what you are doing. For example, you might tell all your friends that one month from now you are putting live a fashion blog with 10,000 words of content and fifty pictures. Make sure to set detailed, definite goals. Setting the goal to "create a fashion blog" is a little too vague, and your "lazy-self" might take over and do 100 words and two pictures, which wouldn't be very impressive. By telling others, you provide further motivation because you probably don't want to look foolish or lazy in the eyes of your friends.

Work Like a Genius: Improve and Perfect Your Craft

“Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect.” –Vince Lombardi

“Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren’t used to an environment where excellence is expected.” –Steve Jobs

Part of working like a genius is the push toward improvement, toward excellence. With time put in and consistently working to *produce*, you will quickly amass a great deal of work, whether it is a lot of inventions, experiments, products, and paintings – whatever. This is great – well done! But there is no guarantee this mass of work is any good. And the genius, of course, is not known for poor work. And so it is essential that you apply the principle of *improvement* to bring quality to your work.

This perhaps sounds a little contrary to the idea of producing, and it can be. There will always be a balance between quantity and quality in your work, between producing and improving. Ideally, both aspects need to be raised. However, first make sure that you are producing what is important, and then focus on improving it.

Whilst producing work against the clock, you will be working and attempting to get into the “flow.” This is not the time to analyze your performance or to look for ways to improve. Instead, set aside time specifically for being critical. It takes a different kind of thinking to be critical of your work than it does to actually create it.

Finding a mentor to help you on your path to mastery is also a fantastic idea. Check in with this person regularly to hear what they think of your work (which will also help to motivate you by inspiring you to reach their level of ability).

Working on one thing at a time is often the best way to integrate improvements. Of course, this depends on how big the changes are, but as a rule keep it simple and do one thing at a time. By doing this, you will make sure that you “bed-in” changes and improve at a rate that is sustainable, manageable, and not at risk of slipping back to a previous lower standard.

Being a student of your field is also essential. Without studying better practices

and idolizing the great minds who went before you, you will sacrifice valuable input that will help improve your work. Make sure you dedicate time to learning and understanding those who are better than you, and read all the “how-to’s” that can teach you more.

“Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others.” –Otto von Bismarck

Work Like a Genius: Summary - H.I.P.

To make your work more genius-like, instill the three pillars of “Hours, Improvement and Production.” The acronym H.I.P. is an easy way to remember this.

H = Hours

I = Improvement

P = Production

To make this still more memorable, remember the phrase, “Einstein shoots from the hip.” Imagine Einstein dressed as a cowboy quickly drawing his six-shooter and shooting a tin can off of a rock. This will anchor the phrase, “Einstein shoots from the H.I.P.,” thereby helping you to remember H.I.P, which in turn will anchor the memory for “Hours, Improvement, Produce.”

To implement these into a workable strategy, it is helpful to use SMART goals and a regular work routine for your craft.

The elements to consider are:

HOURS. Regular working time. This is as close to daily as possible and as high an amount of time as possible. If you currently work a 9-5 job, perhaps the most you can commit to is 1 hour of work a day and 4 hours each day on the weekend. The alternative is perhaps to work full days on your days off. Do what you can, but try to make work times planned and regular.

IMPROVE. You need a system where you regularly improve your work. Listening to audio books on your commute is perfect (these books need to be from the greats in your field that inspire and teach you to improve your work). In addition, check in with a mentor regularly; get their feedback and use it to push yourself to do better. Your own self-appraisal should also be regular. I recommend at least an hour every month doing this. Assess every aspect of what you are doing and attempt to improve it.

PRODUCE. Set targets for what you “produce.” Whenever possible, set clear targets for what you want to produce in your work to specific time frames. This will make it easier to monitor progress and create a sense of momentum.

Examples include writing 2,000 words a week, finishing one painting a week, or performing and writing up one experiment per week. Try and set something small and regular.

Always Ask Questions

"Don't think about why you question, simply don't stop questioning. Don't worry about what you can't answer, and don't try to explain what you can't know. Curiosity is its own reason. Try to comprehend a little more each day." –Albert Einstein

To think more like a genius, you need to fall in love with asking questions. To reach the next level in any field and to move closer to mastery, you need an inquisitive mind. Asking many questions is at the core of this mindset. If you know where you want to get to, through developing the habit of asking great questions will enable you to problem solve your way to success. Indeed, the inquisitive mind is perhaps the trademark of the genius type.

Remember when you were a child and everything warranted a question? Thinking like a genius requires you to move closer to that state of mind. Note how the questions we ask as children are often without logic or necessity, and therefore seem absurd to an adult. But these are often the best kinds of questions, as it is these that push us to new places and new modes of thought altogether. Thinking like a genius requires you to "think outside the box." It requires you to ask questions, and to push in directions that no one else dares.

Where other people accept and stop contemplating the world, the genius type pushes on and looks for answers. This begins with questions that others fail to ask. Newton asked why apples fall from the tree, and from this question he worked tirelessly, eventually finding the answers. Cultivating curiosity and a never-ending search for answers will be one of the greatest steps you can take to think more like a genius.

Asking questions that are broad and far-reaching is also beneficial. The genius knows no bounds to the questions he or she asks. Always work to think in terms of what is possible, not what has already been achieved, and you will think more like a genius. It can seem that there has already been so much achieved in the world, but when we begin to ask deeper questions such as, "How much further can we go?", "Is there other intelligent life in the universe?", or "How can I contribute most to others?", we extend and break our internal notions of what is possible. These questions expand our lives and reality. They also work to power the motivation within us. With these questions at the forefront of our minds, we push for bigger and better things – another essential element to inhabiting your

genius side.

Become an Autodidact and Utilize Meta-Learning

“Self-education is, I firmly believe, the only kind of education there is.” –Isaac Asimov

“Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.” –Chinese Proverb

The ability to teach yourself is exceptionally valuable in the quest to become genius-like. Leonardo da Vinci and many other geniuses were masters at teaching themselves^[viii].

Society often presents the idea that the best or only way to learn is from others; that you need to learn by attending a class, and that schools, colleges and formal courses are the best or only means to learn things. To become more genius-like, consider instead that you will have to teach yourself the majority of what you need to learn.

With all the technologies that are available today (central to which is the mind-blowingly valuable Internet), the opportunity to teach yourself new things is greater than ever. Consider how lucky you are, even compared to someone fifty years ago, in the range of resources at your disposal. Instead of a lengthy trip to a finite library, you can now instantly search thousands of websites, videos, download books and audio in seconds. It is easier than ever to be an autodidact and teach yourself anything and everything.

As well as embracing self-teaching, it will help to think on and monitor your own learning. This is known as meta-learning. John Biggs described this as "being aware of and taking control of one's own learning."^[ix] Increasing your awareness, knowledge and skillset in how you learn are parts of meta-learning. Below are tips on how you can take charge of your own learning so you can teach yourself anything and everything, become an autodidact, and move a step closer to thinking like a genius.

Practical

Listening to non-fiction audiobooks in your field (and other fields) is one of the best ways to stimulate your learning. It is just so damn easy to hit play on an audiobook. Find those times when you are able to multitask and listen to them whilst doing other things. The BEST times for this is when you are commuting,

walking anywhere, shopping, travelling, in the bathroom, etc. All these occasions are excellent for learning whilst you are doing something else.

Go for breadth as well as depth. By educating yourself in lots of areas and becoming a “Jack-of-all-trades,” you will be able to draw connections as well as familiarity with being a beginner.

Learn by imitating other geniuses. Pick up autobiographies of your favorite genius and get reading! Before bed, in the bathroom – whenever. Just make the time and read them habitually.

Find and pay for online exams to test your ability, but teach the course to yourself. Having the specific goal of completing an exam will help motivate you to get learning.

Check out websites such as khanacademy.com for free lessons on a wide variety of topics. Maybe spend a day studying any topic that grabs your attention. Follow old interests you’d forgotten about and notice how enjoyable learning for its own sake can be.

Learning a language can be a great way to broaden your mind and develop your ability to self-teach. Pick up an audio book series and maybe commit to doing just ten minutes a day.

“Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own.” – Johann Wolfgang Goethe

The Wise Genius: Embracing Ignorance, Finding Humility and Understanding Yourself

"I know one thing: that I know nothing" –Socrates

"The more I read, the more I acquire, the more certain I am that I know nothing." –Voltaire

It is helpful to think about how little you know. Assuming a loose, tentative belief in your own knowledge serves two very important roles in pushing you to think more like a genius. First, you will develop humility and a prudent sense of perspective about your knowledge. Second, you will open your mind to possibility; there is much more learning and progress for you and humanity than reflected by the world at present.

Alongside this humble, "assumed-ignorance" perspective, it is helpful to always work to better understand, before anything else, yourself.

"Know Thyself." –Ancient Greek aphorism

Only with self-understanding can you develop the purpose and discipline to reach mastery. The exertion of the intellect to decide what should be worked on combined with the emotional discipline to take the steps needed to get there are both essential.

"One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself." – Leonardo da Vinci

Fuel Imagination, Creativity and Originality

“Creativity is intelligence having fun.” –Albert Einstein

“Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will.” –George Bernard Shaw

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.” – Albert Einstein

An essential element of becoming genius-like is being creative and feeding your imagination. The genius works to create something original in order to create the unprecedented leap in their chosen field. Whether your field is inherently creative, e.g., music and the arts, or whether creativity is present in less obvious ways, e.g., problem solving an experiment, the skill of being creative and forming something new is essential to become genius-like.

Creativity is present in all walks of life and doesn't just have to be putting paint on canvas. By being more creative, you can better solve problems, and better leverage your time and talents to provide massive value to other people.

Practical

Unleashing your creativity is an important part to becoming genius-like. Below are some practical techniques for unleashing yours.

New experiences are a great way to keep your mind young and stimulated. Go to new towns, new cities, and new countries.

Take up a new artistic pursuit. Whether it is drawing, painting, etc., start small and just spend five minutes a day doing it.

Start meditating to clear your “head space” so that you can think more clearly and creatively.

Get some exercise to help blood flow and improve your well-being so that you can think more effectively.

Don't wait for inspiration and avoid perfectionism. Demand creativity of yourself: write/paint/create whatever comes to mind.

“Have no fear of perfection, you’ll never reach it.” –Salvador Dali

Ignore your own fears and internal blocks to being creative and be creative anyway.

“If you hear a voice within you say, ‘You cannot paint,’ then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.” –Vincent Van Gough

How NOT to stimulate creativity

Watching TV shows, films, etc. is a fantastic way to deaden both your mind and your creativity. Steer clear of anything that washes over you passively or is negative.

Think like a Child

“Genius is the recovery of childhood at will.” –Arthur Rimbaud

“The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm.” –Aldous Huxley

“Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recaptured at will.” –Charles Baudelaire

To think more like a genius, it is helpful to nurture your inner child. The following advice is all fairly practical and can help you to embrace both your inner child and your inner genius.

Make more time to “play.” If you don’t spend much time having fun or playing games at the moment, re-kindle this part of your life. Think of a new hobby or pursuit that excites you and is also enjoyable. This will enable you to have fun, think like a child, and to help you experience something new, thereby pushing your creativity forward.

Tap into awe/wonder at the world around you. By seeing life and nature as something brilliant and awe-inspiring, you will experience it more acutely (and happily) and so recognize how best to add value and contribute to it. To remind yourself how impressive the world is, it can help to simply journal on your daily life whilst focusing on what is good and what is impressive. This will keep you positive and in awe of the world – two child-like traits, two genius-like traits, and perhaps the two most important ingredients to happiness.

Spending time with children is obvious but needs to be said. The infectious energy and enthusiasm combined with the awe and curiosity is best seen firsthand, and who knows, some might end up rubbing off on you.

Question/buck societal norms. Children don’t care who is looking and don’t feel corralled into doing what everyone else is doing. Do the same, and follow your own path in order to think more like a child and more like a genius. Dance in the street, talk to strangers, and try to care less what people think of you.

Don’t take life seriously. Granted, children don’t have the worries that adulthood can contain, but these worries in adulthood are often over-blown anyway – what you fear most is rarely going to happen, and is often not as terrible as you imagine.

Flirt with Madness

“Some were brilliant bordering on genius. Others, genius bordering on madness”
–Erich Segal

“The distance between insanity and genius is measured only by success.” –Bruce Feirstein

A fall-out in the quest to think differently, to find new goals, to push boundaries, to work long, hard hours is either being considered mad by normal/mundane society (not so bad), or falling into real madness (definitely to be avoided).

The connection is interesting, however, and is helpful for us in its re-emphasis of the importance (and possible danger) of pushing the boundaries when attempting to become genius-like. To think more like a genius, you must tread the line a little more and do those things that are “out-there,” different and exceptional.

“I quite agree with Dr. Nordau's assertion that all men of genius are insane, but Dr. Nordau forgets that all sane people are idiots.” –Oscar Wilde

Expect to be Discounted, Unsupported and Vilified

“When a great genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign; that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.” –Jonathan Swift

When combining ambitious projects with following the beat of your own drum, you will find yourself in the minority. Geniuses in the past have found themselves outcast and opposed by the majority. Depending on the field of work, the resistance might range from lack of support to outright ridicule and vilification.

The genius will sometimes cross this line, so expect the same if you are pushing for something new. The common man and the public at large often don’t like or expect to hear something truly progressive. And as the genius creates “unprecedented leaps in their field” and works to provide value in areas of importance, the genius can be sure to be stifled and opposed in their work. The majority of people fear and dislike change. There may even be vested interests that stand to lose by the “leap” the genius makes.

In your own quest to think and become more genius-like, you should not let this worry you. If you find resistance, check that you are right in your assertions, that you are following good morals, and are thinking clearly. Check in with your mentor and people wiser than you. Resistance from others is a sign initially that you need to re-evaluate what you are doing. However, it may also be a sign that you are sufficiently thinking outside the box and have ruffled feathers because your work is suitably progressive. Do not be surprised or stop altogether if you come across opposition to your work. But be sure to reflect on whether the feedback has merit.

Without re-evaluation you risk being foolish. With too much credence to the opinion of others and the status quo, you risk sacrificing progress for stagnation, and your genius for mediocrity.

The life of Mahatma Gandhi reveals this lesson clearly, and is phrased beautifully in his following quotation. If you take up the mantle of becoming genius-like, do not be surprised to find resistance to what you say or do.

“First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win.” –Mahatma Gandhi

Simplify

“Any intelligent fool can make things better, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius – and a lot of courage – to move in the opposite direction.” –Albert Einstein

“Genius might be the ability to say a profound thing in a simple way.” –Charles Bukowski

There is a consensus surrounding the genius-type that states the drive for simplicity as important to how they work. Manipulating something into its simplest form helps to make it easier to work with, easier to understand, and also more elegant. It is often the quest of those wanting to seem intelligent who make something more complex than it need be, to impress and baffle those who cannot see the ugly complexity of their work.

“A genius is someone who takes a complex thing and makes it look simple. An academic does the opposite.” –Robert Fanney

Ambitious, Audacious Projects

Working on projects that are ambitious and audacious is an important part of thinking and becoming genius-like. This chapter is devoted to laying down the groundwork for you to work on such a project. This is a practical approach for implementing many of the ideas I have presented in this book.

First, choose a project that encapsulates the genius instinct and will bear exceptional results that would impress you. Projects like these are experiments in pushing your intellect and character. They will help to move back your perception of what is possible. They should be optimistic, either in the timescale or what you expect to achieve. The overall goal is to expand and destroy your limitations whilst not entirely removing the possibility of success.

The ideal project might be something completely different to what you have experience in but that you always thought might be interesting. It could be something you have a passing interest in, something you thought, “Yeah, that would be cool,” but never found time or energy to pursue. Embrace the scientist, the artist, the writer, the architect. If it helps, imagine you are Leonardo Da Vinci, and starting out on a new field after having mastered many before.

How much you work with others on this project is up to you. Working by yourself will enable you to push things and help make sure you don’t get distracted. However, to learn a little more about the subject and develop your ability to work with others, I would suggest at least a minimal amount of contact with a specialist. Consider again how technology and the Internet make it easier than ever to set up and work on outlandish projects.

If you are unhappy in your field of work at present, this project can be excellent for reaching into a new area. It can also look great on a CV (perhaps depending on just how “out-there” it is).

Be sure to set a time limit, and define what you need to produce and improve as you go. You want it to focus on the end point; you need something to SHOW for this project.

It is up to you how much time and effort you put into this project. I would recommend trying to complete it in a short time frame, such as over a weekend. Set something ambitious and audacious, and just see what you get done.

Consider projects such as the following (to be completed over a weekend):

Write a 10,000 word blog, novel, or set of short stories

Write and record a 3-track EP

Start a new business and make at least one sale

Become conversational in a language and talk to someone for five minutes

Perform twenty random acts of kindness

Create a 30 page comic book and get it printed

Note that all of the above goals create something tangible, something definite. It is important to also add a time scale, otherwise the project will drag on for too long. Make this timescale as short as you can imagine possible. (Even if you have never come close to achieving it before, just be optimistic, borderline arrogant in the target timescale. Again, a weekend is perfect.) This will help to push you to get more done, and never have the chance to procrastinate. Also, put in place a forfeit if you don't complete the project and a reward if you do.

The example goal below is far from effective:

“Write a story”

However, the goal below is an excellent example of an effective objective:

“Write the first draft of a 6,000 word short story by the end of the weekend. If I complete this, reward myself by buying the book/CD/videogame/film/TV show I most want from Amazon. And if I don't complete this goal, I have to burn 100 dollars.”

It is clear, motivating and time constrained, and so much more likely to be achieved.

Make sure that your ambitious, audacious projects have the character of the second example, NOT the first.

The previously listed example projects are all great because, really, anyone can do them. Though you won't have access to enough information to do many of them perfectly, that is not the point; this is a learning experience as much as anything else.

Make a new website using HTML in a weekend (with no experience).

Ridiculous? Yes, it is. Try it anyway. Use methods to deconstruct your time and set small targets for each part of what needs to be completed, and get to work.

Be curious, and soak up all the information and background information you can. It may not be information that is useful to you in the future, but that doesn't matter. What is important is developing the attitude and skillset to be able to take on and complete ambitious and audacious projects.

Ambitious, Audacious Projects: Benefits

If you want to think like a genius and develop your powers of mastery, take on an ambitious, audacious project to demonstrate and hone what you have learnt.

The following is a breakdown of the benefits of taking on an ambitious, audacious project and how it ties into the ideas we have covered in this book. Beside each benefit, there is the chapter it corresponds to written within the brackets.

You will have to teach yourself new things. (Becoming an Autodidact)

High probability of failure overall, and throughout the project you will have to push through many challenges and make many errors. (Re-frame Failure and Never Give up)

Use of creative and imaginative powers both for taking on the project and at every step you create something from nothing. (Imagination, Creativity, Originality)

Affirms how little you knew before, and tunes you into what is possible/tests boundaries. (The Wise Genius)

New fields/frames of knowledge will provide ideas and experiences that you can apply to other things. Utilize your current strengths to improve chances of success. (Notice Connections and Transfer Lessons)

Problem solve as you go. Question assumptions that might slow you down. Think and act on ways to work smarter and harder on your project. (Always Ask Questions)

Work a lot of hours, improve as you go, and always focus on producing the results you want. (Work Like a Genius: Hours. Improve. Produce.)

You are doing something new, exciting, fun and adventurous that bucks societal norms and will fill you with awe if you complete it. (Think Like a Child)

If you told someone what you were taking on, either the goal or the timeframe, they would suggest you're at least a little crazy. (Flirt with Madness)

Focus on only this project. Keep everything else in your life on autopilot or let it slide a little. Whilst working on your project, cut out the extraneous and only do what is valuable. A short timeframe will help with this. (Simplify)

Consider a project that someone else would pay you for or that someone else would be thankful for. (Give Away Value all of the Time)

Choose a project that would be exciting for you. Have you always wanted to be a musician? Then set the target of recording an EP in a weekend, no matter your experience. Fuel this enthusiasm by imagining playing the EP for friends or performing it live. (Emotional Genius: Discover Your Motives)

Begin with short projects that only take days to complete, then build upward. Think long-term, and begin bigger projects. Work hard, improve, produce and create massive value for others.

If you do all this, you will think like and become a genius.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

(BONUS) BOOK 11: INSTRUMENT MASTERY MADE EASY

Benefits of Learning an Instrument

There are many great reasons why you should learn an instrument. To further motivate you and ensure you are motivated to put in the long hours of practice, I've listed some of the best reasons below. Refer to them whenever you're feeling demotivated and struggling to sit down with your instrument!

Improves your ability to do math. Studies have shown that people who study an instrument also tend to have better math skills than those who don't. Counting notes, learning timing, music theory, and becoming aware of rhythm will all help you with math.

Improves your mind and ability to memorize material. Playing a musical instrument will improve the parts of your brain responsible for hearing, storing audio, and memory recall. Playing musical pieces from memory in particular builds better brains, as active recall is being worked so hard.

Coordination and hand eye coordination improve. Playing an instrument requires increased physical awareness and ability to dictate physical movements. This improvement can then be crossed into other areas like sports, typing, etc.

Better social skills. Great musicians learn from and play with others. This is obviously a great way to also meet new people at gigs, concerts, etc. Whether you are playing or just there as a spectator, a lot of people play, listen to, and love music. Join their gang!

Improved concentration and focus skills. It takes practiced attention to master an instrument. Hours spent working diligently on the next step, the next line of music, a difficult new chord, these are exercising the muscles of concentration hard. Becoming better at an instrument will therefore help you work harder in your career, projects, and anything that requires consistent focus.

Improves patience, perseverance, and resilience to failure. Someone who has put in a lot of time into learning an instrument, especially a more difficult one like the violin, is going to be more resilient to failure and more patient in their work. The world of business and nearly any other pursuit is dominated by people who keep pushing through when the going gets tough. Honing these skills via playing a musical instrument is great practice.

Relieves stress and helps creativity. Musicians everywhere find solace in their instrument to unwind and relax from other stresses in their life. In particular,

playing for fun and out of self-expression will allow you to unwind. Creativity ties into this – whether you are jamming or writing a new song, you are building new directions and new pathways in music and your mind, as well as building your creative muscle and identity.

It's impressive and cool. Everyone has a crush on a musician at some point. There's no getting around that you are going to be a little cooler for playing an instrument.

You become a better listener. Listening to others and your own recordings will help you to become a better listener in general. This can help you become more patient and aware as a friend and colleague at work by extension.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<http://www.effectivemusicteaching.com/articles/directors/18-benefits-of-playing-a-musical-instrument/>

An Evaluation of the Achievement in Reading and Arithmetic of Pupils in Elementary School Instrumental Classes. Friedman, B

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/6447588/Playing-a-musical-instrument-makes-you-brainier.html>

Commit to an Instrument for Years

It is helpful to have a strong commitment to the instrument you are going to learn. That doesn't mean you are going to make yourself play EVERY day for the next decade, or that you aren't going to let yourself play another instrument as well if it makes sense to. It just means that you don't pick it up and put it down again a few weeks later. The worst thing is to be a dabbler and not become familiar with your instrument, and therefore never get to a higher ability. Below are some more ideas to help you internalize this. Lack of commitment and dabbling is one of the biggest reasons people fail to learn an instrument, so let's try and squash that now!

The grass isn't always greener. Don't think that a different instrument will be more exciting or that a new hobby will be better than playing an instrument. Instead, put your blinders on and just focus on your instrument and the goals you want to reach in music.

It doesn't really matter which instrument you play, just that you play well enough to get where you want. Unless you have excellent reasons for switching to a different instrument, there is probably no need to. It doesn't really matter what instrument you play as long as it gets you those things that you really want. For example, if you want to play on stage and have fun with your favorite rock music, it doesn't matter if you learn bass, guitar, drums, etc.; of course, still pick the instrument you want to learn most, but then stick with it.

You can do anything, but you can't do everything. Whether this means you want to start another hobby after only recently picking up an instrument or whether you want to learn a second instrument, remember that you really can't do everything. Focus on doing some things really well and you will be happier and more successful.

Slow gains are most likely. Think of it like exercise. The reality is that it will take a lot of hours to get good. It's best to accept this up front. Think of it like exercise – you can't get that Hollywood body in six weeks, but in a few years of hard work, yeah, you can get pretty damn good.

Consider “fast in, fast out.” Often the faster something comes into our lives, the faster it will go out. Instead, try to make your instrument a slow, consistent push for mastery. That way you can enjoy years of getting good and mastery,

instead of a “flash in the pan” romance.

If you really hate it, quit. Of course, you aren’t marrying your instrument, so if it really isn’t working or another instrument really does makes sense (perhaps decide after consulting other musicians), then switch over or drop it altogether. Just make sure you do it for the right reasons, not because “it’s too hard,” or “I just think I might enjoy piano more,” or “I don’t have time right now,” or any other terrible excuse.

Why do you Want to Learn an Instrument? And the Importance of Strategy

Perhaps the biggest reason that people stop learning their instrument and don't become as good as they can or enjoy the instrument as much as they could is because they weren't clear about why they wanted to play an instrument in the first place. They don't know what the motivating goal of their learning music is, and secondly, they don't have a good strategy to get there.

Take some time now to consider why you want to learn an instrument, and don't be shy or lie to yourself. Below are some ideas what this might look like, but the final reasons have to be your own. Of course, there can be multiple reasons as well, for example you can be motivated both to write music and to get really good at your instrument. Below are some example goals/motivations for learning to play an instrument.

- You want to play with your friends in a band.
- You want to write music you love.
- You want to perform music.
- You want to impress someone or some people.
- You just want to experiment.
- You love the challenge and doing something new.
- You want to play your favorite songs.
- You want to write something new and different.
- You want to write the kind of songs that you love.

Write down your reasons and try to focus on the things that mean the most to you. Ordering your motivations from the most motivating to the least will also be helpful.

Decide on Some Goals

Once you know the motivations for learning an instrument you can decide on the best way to reach them and set some concrete goals along the way.

As we know, the biggest problem musicians have is that they give up at some point. Don't let that happen to you and, instead, reach at least the bottom rung of the exciting ladder you want to climb.

Deciding on what that minimal exciting point is important. Below are some ideas on what that might be. These are some exciting motivations morphed into concrete goals.

Play your favorite song.

Write and record a song and publish it on YouTube.

Impress your friends at an open mic night.

Get to a “level 7” grade in ability.

Play with your friends in a band.

It will help to work toward something that is very concrete and precise, and something that someone else can definitely see whether you have completed or not. For example, don't decide that you want to learn to play a few songs by your favorite band, but instead decide on your favorite two songs and learn to play them only.

Which Camp are You? Creative Hacker or Classical Perfectionist?

In order to better understand what advice to take on how to master your instrument, it can be helpful to consider the world of musicians divided into two groups and recognize which one you fall into. This isn't a perfect analogy, but it is helpful for our purposes. And so, in a very general sense it can be helpful to group musicians into two categories, which I'm going to call:

- The Creative
- The Classical

The creative individual is someone who probably wants to play an instrument because they love listening to music, they love certain music artists and want to cover their songs, and they want to write their own songs. The classical individual is someone who tends to be classically trained, probably picked up the instrument at a young age and wants to master the instrument, and is interested in being well trained, playing correctly, and playing in a band or concert.

This is a simplification, but most people tend to fall roughly into one camp more than the other, so it is helpful for our purposes. Below are ideas on how to optimize learning your instrument if you fall into the Classical camp:

Get a tutor as soon as possible. You do not want to develop bad techniques, because muscle memory can take a lot of undoing. If you learn to play the piano incorrectly it can take a lot of lessons to correct it, so learn from a master and get them to teach you how to play correctly straight away.

Choose a great tutor. This is kind of obvious but important, as you're going to need to be trained effectively. Find a tutor you get on with and is excellent at teaching. Ideally, they are excellent themselves, but it is also important that they are an excellent, motivated teacher.

Practice regularly. You are probably going to be better off with a "little and often" approach to practicing and, once you have a tutor in place, you can build your practice schedule around what they recommend and when you meet up with them.

Below are ideas for optimizing how you learn your instrument if you fall into the

Creative camp:

Ascertain what motivates you and get there as fast as possible. This is either going to be covering songs and playing them well, writing your own and playing them well, playing with others, or some combination thereof.

Play two covers at an open mic night or similar as soon as possible. This will cement yourself as a musician in your mind and can't go badly. Just practice two of the simplest songs you like until you can play them basically well. Play somewhere out of town if you are nervous about seeing someone you know there.

Write two songs and record and play them as possible. Just as with the covers, keep them simple, keep them enjoyable, and don't worry if they aren't *that* difficult or original. Just write them, record them, publish them on YouTube, and play them at the open mic night.

You can obviously pull techniques from both sides of the fence; however, the above advice is worth considering and you should at least start by locking in the kind of habits related to your group before you move onto the other. For example, it might be more important for a creative to perform two covers at an open mic night and join a band than it is for them to get a tutor and practice every day for six weeks. If they get a tutor and just work at practicing they might end up quitting the instrument because it doesn't mesh with who they are and what they want.

Keep it Simple. What is Impressive/Pleasing Often isn't what is Most Technically Difficult

The following advice makes sense for the creative hacker and someone learning a straightforward instrument such as guitar or piano.

If you're new to playing an instrument, you might be surprised how easy and rapid your gains can be. No, you aren't going to become concert level overnight, but you can pick up easy songs faster than you might think. For example, playing songs by The Beatles on guitar doesn't have to be difficult if you learn the straightforward ones and use the easier chords. And if playing The Beatles is what you love to do and/or is impressive to others, you can progress rapidly in playing guitar without having to learn the difficult, technical aspects of playing an instrument.

This is an important idea to consider when working toward your music goals – something enjoyable and/or impressive can be very simple, and if that is what motivates you, hit this goal first.

A brilliant example of this is the “4 Chord Song” by Axis of Awesome. Search it now on YouTube. They use only four chords and cover 38 songs! You can learn those four chords in a few hours, and you can then learn those 38 songs in any order you want – easy.

Think “Interest Management” Instead of Time Management

The traditional mindset when it comes to learning an instrument is that you need to schedule a certain amount of time to practice every day, every week, whenever – and that the game is to then manage this time as well as possible so that you improve as rapidly as possible. You’re probably thinking, “Yeah, that sounds pretty good, what’s the problem?!” Well, this works well enough for some people, but there is a different mindset that might work better for you. And that is to concentrate on maintaining your interest in the instrument more than managing your time.

For many people, practicing their instrument is boring, tricky, and something they put off doing. If you are following a standard course or system and perhaps learning to play classically, this may well be the main barrier to your playing a lot and loving your instrument. Lessons can mean that you learn to hate music, practicing, and your instrument, and so stop playing altogether.

To practice interest management, simply do everything you want with your instrument that excites you and maintains your interest, and trust that in time you will also get better. Play your favorite covers, write your favorite songs, or learn the chords that sound the most pleasing to you, whatever it is that makes you want to keep playing.

Learning to practice interest management instead of time management will enable you to find time everywhere to practice your instrument. All the time you spend that is “wasted” or just downtime where you don’t think about much, such as internet browsing, watching TV shows, etc., will be slowly eroded away as you fill your time more and more with playing your instrument.

The only downside of interest management is that you can develop poor technique and bad habits. This is the fabled reason not to learn an instrument by yourself. But if the choice is between putting in 30 hours a week with your instrument and loving it or getting bored and quitting after having an hour of lessons every day for six weeks, then surely the better thing is to accept and push through those bad techniques you pick up. You can always work to eradicate them when they become too big of a barrier or are pointed out by other people. And by then you will be so in love with playing your instrument, playing songs, and getting better, that putting in the extra time to improve your technique (and correct bad habits) makes sense and is easily done. You are effectively reversing

the classical approach of learning perfect technique and then developing love and passion for the music. Instead, you are fueling your love and passion for the music and using that as motivation and reason to push through the “boring” technical lessons that will at some point be necessary to allow you to do more of what you love.

This is an exceptionally helpful realization for many who have had bad experiences trying to learn an instrument at school. Experiment, do what works for you, and don’t become dogmatically obsessed with either love for the music or perfect technique.

Bibliography and Further Reading for This Chapter

<http://www.jefftk.com/p/teach-yourself-any-instrument>

Choosing the Right Instrument for You

Even if you feel totally convinced about which instrument you want to learn, read this chapter just to consider the alternatives and help you think about what you are getting yourself in for!

Choose an instrument you are passionate about (for more than a few days). The older you are the more this is going to make sense to you, but we all go through passionate times where something seems like it is amazing, and then times when we feel less passionate about that same thing. The goal when choosing an instrument is to choose an instrument you have felt passionate about for at least a while. This mean three or more months if you are a teenager and six months or more if you are an adult (as a rule of thumb).

Go to the music store and try a few instruments, but then commit to only one. Don't just think about it and read up on your instrument at home. Get to the music store and ask if you can play it as well as any other instruments that interest you. Of course, you are going to suck at playing all of them, but it will still get you thinking. You might realize an instrument is impractical for you – a piano is rather large, a violin is always shrill at first, an electric guitar can be played with headphones, an acoustic one can't, etc. Without trying instruments out or seeing them in the flesh, you can't get the best idea of what the instruments are like.

Understand/define what you want from learning the instrument. Knowing what you want from an instrument can be really helpful. For example, if you really want to play in a band and go on tour, it can be helpful to choose to play the bass guitar rather than going for the electric guitar, because there just tends to be fewer people who play the bass guitar. Or, if you know you are motivated to play late at night to help you relax after work, the always noisy drum-kit just isn't going to be a good fit for you. Know what you want from an instrument and then choose one that makes sense.

Is There an Easy Instrument?

The short answer is “yes” – some instruments are easier to learn than others. We’ll get into which is easier and why shortly, but first it’s worth thinking about why you might be considering moving towards an easy instrument, because if you want there to be ZERO work, and instant gratification and musical success, you’re out of luck. All instruments take time to learn to play well and even more time to master.

That being said, let’s explore the difficulty of different instruments.

The first thing to consider is that some instruments can easily make a certain tone while others require skill to do this. For example, to play a C note on a piano you just have to press a key – anyone can do this, and they can do it immediately. However, to play a C note on a violin takes a series of technical abilities – you have to hold the violin at least relatively well, draw the string over the right string in the right way, etc. I’m sure you’re getting the idea – there is just a lot more to do to even play ONE note on a violin than there is on a piano.

And so, choosing an instrument that can easily play a note without skill is a great place to start. Think guitar, piano, keyboard, drums, bass guitar, ukulele, etc. These are all easy to pick up and play within a few hours. If you spent a whole day learning a simple song with ZERO previous experience, you could play something very basic with these instruments.

The piano and guitar also allow you to cover your favorite songs relatively easily. Most people are more interested in playing a “tune” rather than the drum beat/bass line. If this is what motivates you and will keep you playing, then these really are the best places to start.

Other ideas to find an instrument that is “easy”:

- The ukulele is really small and convenient for playing anywhere. Also, it’s only got four strings, so it’s easier than the guitar!
- A keyboard and a pair of headphones is easy to play because no one can hear you if you suck. Being able to play by yourself for hours on end in the dead of night might mean “easy” for you. Also, a keyboard and headphones are fairly inexpensive.
- A bass guitarist is always in demand, so if you are eager to get into a band, this is an easy start. Also, the bass guitar is fairly inexpensive and

straightforward to pick up and play. A lot of bass lines in rock music are easy enough.

Am I Too Old to Start? And Other Popular Questions

A very popular question is, “I’m 20/30/40/50 years old – am I too old to start learning to play an instrument?” And the answer is no. You are never too old to start playing an instrument. If you want to play, play – it is that simple. It is easier to learn things as a child, but there are also drawbacks to learning as a child. And this returns us to perhaps the biggest necessity of learning any instrument – patient persistent practice. These words are not synonymous with most children, but as we get older we get a little wiser, a little more patient, and a little more persistent in what we do, so learning an instrument can actually be easier as an adult.

Adults are also more intelligent and analytical in how they think. Those complicated technical lessons and music theory are going to be more easily understood an adult. Also, we adults are more able to manage our time and be ordered in how we go about things. So, at least in my opinion, learning to play an instrument gets easier as we get older.

There are so many great benefits that can help you if you are retired or older. Being able to make new friends through music, keeping your brain stronger through practice, and building a hobby into your free time are three great reasons why learning an instrument in your later years makes sense.

How much does natural ability matter?

Another popular idea with learning an instrument is that some of us have “it” and others don’t. This is a myth, and though some may be a little more talented than others, everyone can improve and become great at playing an instrument. Playing an instrument, like most things, is about the perspiration, not natural ability.

How long is it going to take to get good?

It depends on how difficult your instrument is, how much you practice, etc. “Get good” is also too vague a proposition. “Get good” for me would be writing an album of songs I love and being able to play them well in public. “Get good” for you could be get to grade 7 or anything else. Defining your goals will enable you to work harder and more effectively, so set these and ask the better question of, “How long will it take me to reach goal XYZ?” and the answer is you’ll get there sooner the more you practice and the more effectively you put into practice

the ideas in this book.

How to Make Practicing a Habit and Make Yourself WANT to Practice and Play

One of the best ways to ensure you become great at your instrument and enjoy it as much as possible is to build it as a HABIT in your life. You want to be playing your instrument so regularly that it feels effortless to pick it up and play. If you can make this happen, you are in a great place and will get better and enjoy your instrument more and more over the coming months and years. Below are some ideas on habit building and how to make practicing your instrument effortless.

Focus on consistency, then proficiency. When you are first learning to play your instrument and the habit isn't instilled yet, or if you are returning to playing after a few weeks or more out, it is important not to focus on how well you are playing but that you are playing at all. Build up a consistent habit before you think about getting good at playing or even practicing that effectively. If you play your guitar every other day for 30 minutes for two weeks, consider that a really solid achievement that you can then build upon.

It will be exceptionally helpful if you can become self-aware enough to see the dip in internal resistance you feel as the habit begins to solidify. If you can accept and know that a new habit will be painful for at least the first few weeks and that you just need to push through, you will be able to pick up any project/hobby/goal, etc., and perform A LOT better than the average individual. Consistent action is the route to achieving anything.

Make your practice sessions effective enough that you progress. Ensuring that the practice sessions are at least reasonably effective will mean that you notice your progress over time. This is a fantastic way to encourage yourself to work harder and keep up the habit.

In order to draw your attention to your improvement it will be helpful to record yourself playing, perhaps once a week. After a few weeks you will definitely notice an improvement, assuming you are putting in a reasonable amount of time. This is also a great way to ensure you don't stagnate at any level. If you consistently improve you will be encouraged to consistently practice, which will create a powerful feedback loop. Ensure your practice sessions are at least OK to allow you to improve over time.

Make your practice sessions enjoyable. Doing something that you always enjoy in a practice session is a great way to encourage yourself to build the habit. The best way I have found for doing this is to cover my favorite songs for at least 10 minutes during a practice session. If you are new to your instrument, find a simple song you love and learn how to play it.

Ideally, a balance between fun and more technical practice that ensures progress is best. A practice session that is 100% technical can be a boring session, and a session that is 100% fun can stagnate your ability.

Reward yourself after every session. Giving yourself an extrinsic reward after a practice session is a great way to make yourself sit down and practice. For me, this is always going to be something chocolate related. But, of course, it could be anything for you. Perhaps you read your favorite book or watch your favorite TV show, or maybe play some computer games for a few minutes. It can be anything that makes you WANT to sit down and practice your instrument because you are looking forward to the reward that is coming after.

Punish yourself if you don't. OK, that sounds a bit much. But just as a reward can be enough to make yourself sit down and practice, so can the fear of something bad. Maybe you promise to burn a 5 dollar bill if you don't practice when you plan to. Oddly, it is definitely the case that we humans are more motivated to NOT lose something than we are to gain something.

Chain it to other habits and start early in the day. I have an entire book focused on putting habits in place, so I won't go into any more detail here. However, here are two more quick ideas that can make practicing your instrument a lot easier. First, start early in the day. For most people, their willpower diminishes throughout the day, so the sooner you get to work on something the more likely it is to happen. Build the habit of practicing for 10 minutes first thing in the morning and you will find it easier than doing it later in the day. The second tip is to chain the habit of playing your instrument to other habits, so that the other habits act as a mental "trigger" for the habit of playing your instrument. For example, after you shower in the morning you practice your guitar for 10 minutes.

Practice and commit with others. If you are practicing with a tutor you are a lot more likely to practice because there is a pre-commitment for you to turn up and work on your music together. Ideally, find a tutor who is a little too expensive and pay them up front for the next six weeks. You are MUCH more

likely to turn up to these sessions than you would be if you just committed to playing by yourself at home.

Playing with a friend can have a similar effect. This is a reason why being in a band is so great – you don't want to embarrass yourself by not being able to play your part in a song, so you both practice hard to be good in session AND you are committed to showing up to the practice sessions in the first place.

Play with others more committed than you and, ideally, who are better as well. If you play with other people who are super-committed to their music it is going to rub off on you, and you are definitely going to keep the commitments you share together because you know how seriously they take their music. Ideally, find someone who is better than you are at their instrument, too, and you will be encouraged and pushed to play better.

Practice Tips: Slow Down to Speed Up

In order to practice effectively, it can be exceptionally useful to alter the speed at which you play a piece of music. Typically, before you can play something at normal speed, it is easier and more effective to learn to play it slowly. Below are some reasons why this is helpful and how to make the most out of this technique.

Never drop a note. It is more effective to learn to play something slowly with NO dropped notes and then speed up than it is to play something at full speed and then work at no longer dropping notes. Playing something perfectly is obviously the goal. The question is what the fastest route to achieving it is, and the answer is to play it properly slowly and then speed up, NOT to play it improperly at full speed and then work to cut out the errors.

Keep going slower. The more complex the piece of music, the slower you are probably going to have to play it. Don't be afraid to really slow down if you are struggling. Consider doing this in a regular manner; for example, first try to play a piece at normal speed and then slow down by regular intervals until you are dropping only a few notes. Similarly, speed up slowly. If you can play a piece at half speed with NO dropped notes, then speed up a little. But don't go to full speed until you can play perfectly at the slightly slower speed.

The metronome is a key ally. Timing is obviously key when learning to play an instrument. The best ally in the fight for better timing is the metronome. This will enable you not only to play a piece at the correct speed, it will also enable you to slow down in an intelligent, consistent manner.

Becoming more aware of timing will always help. Being able to play to a metronome slower than the track calls for will make you much more aware of timing in general, and so enable you to always keep time effectively. Consider playing slower as an exercise in mastering the song, not just as an inconvenience.

Consider speeding up for fun/extra practice, but don't make a habit of it. It can be a great exercise to play faster than the track demands, but ensure you do this knowingly and while playing to a metronome. It is a bad habit of beginners and intermediates to speed up, thinking that they are demonstrating a greater competency by doing so.

Practice Tips: Small Chunk What You Are Learning

Another key to better practice sessions is to break pieces of music into smaller sections before you attempt to play the whole. This, alongside playing at slower speeds, is the key to the FAST learning of a new piece of music and mastering your instrument overall. The goal is to play with NO dropped notes at the correct speed – the faster you can get to this stage the better. Slow down to achieve this, but also learn to play sections perfectly before trying to play the whole piece. Below are some more ideas on how to make the most of small chunking your practice sessions.

Small chunking the music allows you to practice playing perfectly.

Remember, no dropped notes and perfect technique are the goal when practicing your instrument. By only playing short sections of music at a time you can focus on the perfect technique, e.g. playing with a neutral body and holding the instrument gently but firmly while never dropping a note, and playing at the correct tempo (depending on whether you are practicing slowly or at normal speed).

Actually draw on the sheet music/tabs/music where you will start and stop.

Take a pencil and actually divide up sections of the music. This will help you to not get carried away and try to take on more than you can. The chunks might be just a half dozen notes, a half dozen measures, or maybe a third of the whole song – it really depends on your ability and the difficulty of the song. Just as you should continue to slow down the music if you are still unable to play the piece perfectly at speed, so should you focus on shorter sections of music and then build on these until you can play the whole song perfectly.

Practice Tips: Focus on Repetitions

Playing at a slower tempo and breaking the music into sections will be the training wheels to play your piece while you work on perfect technique, not dropping notes, and keeping time.

The final piece of the puzzle is repetition. You will need to repeat the section of music that you are practicing, do this for a certain number of repetitions and, ideally, repeat your practicing of this section at least every other day. You should then notice improvements and be able to play both longer sections and at faster – closer to normal – speeds.

This is consistency in practice – consistency through repetitions both during the session, and consistency of sessions. Just for an example, the reps for the session might be ten times and the consistency of practice sessions might be every other day.

Just like gaining muscle in the gym, you will actually improve in your rests and the breaks in between practicing your instrument. However, it is important that you don't take too long a break or you might slide back and lose your "gains." There needs to be breaks, intervals between training, AND there needs to be consistency.

To summarize, below are the keys to practicing effectively:

- Always play to NOT miss a note. You want to play the music perfectly every time.
- Slow down the piece so that you can play it perfectly. When you can play perfectly, speed up toward normal speed.
- Small chunk the music down to sections so that you can learn to play it perfectly. Then build up to longer sections.
- Get the repetitions in and practice consistently. Repeat both in the session and repeat the session, ideally at least every other day.

Of course, a practice session can contain more than this process, but this is a very good core strategy to use when learning a piece of music. Too often, students try to take short cuts and believe that if they try and play the whole song

NOW, at full speed, without much consideration for technique, they will get to where they want to be. However, even if they can play it fairly well sooner (they probably won't), their long-term ability will definitely be sabotaged. Practice perfectly and follow the above tips.

Cover Songs and Playing Music You Love

Playing songs is no doubt a huge draw for learning an instrument. No one starts playing the piano so they can play scales well or learn the guitar so they can learn all the chords they can. No – they want to play songs. Below are some ideas on how you can integrate “covering” songs into learning an instrument to get the most out of the process.

The advice to practice perfectly still applies. It is much better to be able to cover one song well than a dozen songs poorly. Don’t dabble in a variety of songs; instead, try to learn a few perfectly well.

Covering songs is a great way to boost motivation. It’s more exciting to cover songs that you love. So, start here if you are new to playing music or whenever your motivation is beginning to drag. Just be sure to mix in some technical lessons and play perfectly well when you learn a cover.

Covering songs is a great way to build your knowledge. Through learning a new song you are going to learn new chords, new movements between notes, new scales, etc. But it will feel a lot easier and more desirable than being introduced to them formally with no motivation. For example, learning the C chord on the guitar is not as exciting as learning the second chord in your favorite song (which also happens to be a C chord). And so, learning songs and covering songs well is a great way to indirectly learn a great amount of music.

Remember your goals. If you want to perform in public as soon as possible or play in a band, it is a lot more important to play a few songs perfectly than lots of songs poorly. Adjust how you go about playing covers so that you reach the goals that excite you sooner. If you just want to write music, then cover the songs that you MOST want to sound like and you will begin to notice the patterns that you can then incorporate into the music that you write.

Change the key of the song so that you can play it effectively. We can’t all sing like Whitney Houston or, indeed, match the voices of many of our favorite artists. So be careful to change the key to one that works for you. This is not the time to be proud, especially if you are new. You want to play perfectly, not play for your ego.

Make the song your own by altering parts. This is a bit more of an intermediate/advanced tip. Once you are able to play a song perfectly well, it can

be good to alter the song to give it your own unique style. Experiment with the structure, the timing of notes, the rhythm, or alter a lyric – something small but meaningful to give it your own style and make it a little different. This is especially important if you're playing it in public, in which case people are looking for something a little unique. Choosing to sing a song that is sung by the opposite sex is a really simple way to make the song sound a little different, so start here if you're short on ideas.

Get Feedback. Record Yourself. Play in Front of Others.

As you now know, it is important to learn to play your songs perfectly, in time, with no dropped notes. Getting critical feedback is a great way to improve and stop making mistakes. Below are some ideas on how to make the most of critical feedback.

Be your own critic – record and play your music back to yourself. Before you get feedback from others, it can be helpful to just keep improving based on your own self-criticism. The main positive is that you are always available; the downside is that you aren't going to give yourself the best advice. To improve your knowledge and ability to critique yourself you can watch YouTube videos and read more books, but this will only take you so far. However, by critiquing yourself you can get in a lot of "reps" during practice sessions. The process is straightforward. Step 1: record yourself playing a piece of music. Step 2: play it back and write down one thing you are going to try and do better next time. And then just loop these two steps and watch yourself get better over time.

A great strategy for this is recording yourself at the end of every practice session and then, at the start of the next practice session, play that recording back. Focus on the sounds and notice your technique visually. If you are unsure what to look for start with: 1. Am I in time? (Use a metronome if you are unsure) 2. Am I in tune? (Use a tuner if you are using a guitar) And then focus on improving whatever aspect you decide on.

Record yourself and put it on YouTube. If you're feeling a little braver and want to get your music career going, upload your covers onto YouTube. Ask for comments that are as damning as possible and push to improve. This isn't about boosting your ego – this is about getting better. If everyone hates what you are doing, you probably need to put more work into improving.

Use a Skype session or similar online tool to get feedback from a pro. This is a great way to get feedback from a professional, and it can also be very cheap! Look at websites like Elance or Fiverr to get great deals on online music tutoring. This is exceptionally helpful if you are on the road or just want to "check in" with a tutor. Perhaps you have spent two weeks learning a new song and just want some tips on how you can improve your performance, in which case the online tutor is easy and instant to access.

Get lessons with someone who knows what sounds great. Real life lessons are going to be a lot more compelling and give your tutor the opportunity to get to know you, to see more of what you are doing, to hear more clearly the mistakes you are making, and clearly advise you on where you need to improve.

Join a band/group. This is going to increase your motivation to not make mistakes and also give you the opportunity to get feedback from others. Be sure to ask your bandmates/group where they think you can improve. Always leave your ego at the door and assume that you are making errors and need to remove them.

Play at open mic nights/other performance venues. Performing regularly is a great way to improve and get feedback. The best way to make this happen is to play in front of people who really know what they are listening to, so try to head to the bars or venues where, if anything, you are going to disappoint the audience because they so clearly know what they like and have a high expectation. Of course, if you are new to playing live and need to build your confidence, make it easy on yourself and first play at bars where expectations are low.

A final word on feedback and improvement:

Remember that even when you aren't making errors that doesn't mean you can't still improve. There is always space to improve. This might mean hitting notes with a little more passion, or improving how you sit, or how you project your voice, or your stage presence, etc. Consider yourself working toward a perfect performance that may not even be possible, and keep asking others and yourself what areas you need to improve.

Fix Mistakes or You Will Get Better at Making Them

It is very important that you recognize and fix missed notes and problems in how you play. If you continue to play while making an error, you will solidify the mistake and actually be practicing making mistakes.

It can be tempting to play things not quite perfectly or be technically lazy, but every time you do you are actually solidifying the muscle memory and getting more consistent and stronger in making the mistake. If you aren't practicing to get better, you are practicing to get worse.

This is one of the reasons it is so important to get feedback from others and ascertain the mistakes that you are making. As I have said, the best strategy is to slow down and focus on smaller sections of the piece of music. Keep slowing down and narrowing it down until you can play everything without error, and then speed up and play longer sections.

Make sure that you recognize and fix mistakes, otherwise you are just going to get better at making them.

Practice Tips: When You Think You Have “Got It,” You Probably Haven’t.

It is very tempting to stop practicing a piece of music or rest on your laurels as soon as you have played it without error. However, this is typically just a sign that you are beginning to get it. The goal is to be able to always play the song well, perfectly well. Just because you have done it once or a few times really isn’t enough. When you have played a section of music well, this is in fact the beginning of the most important, most valuable period of practicing. It is now that you solidify the dendrite connections in your brain and become truly competent at playing the piece.

Remember that you are trying to learn the instrument fast and effectively overall, not just race to being OK. Your overall time spent having to practice increases if you practice a song up until the point you “get it” and then drop it. When you play something well the first time, recognize this as the first stage. The next stage is to really solidify your ability. Play the song AT LEAST another five times, and continue to visit the song regularly in future sessions in order to retain your ability to play it well.

It can be all too easy to deceive ourselves into thinking that we have mastered something just because we did it right once or a few times. Don’t fall into this trap when playing music or when trying to master any subject. You need to prove that there was no luck in what you did. If you can play it five more times without mistakes you can consider practicing it less, but even then don’t drop practicing it altogether. Instead, just rotate the song/piece of music into your practice sessions a little less, perhaps half as much as you were when you were first learning it.

Bibliography and further reading for this chapter:

<http://www.essential-music-practice.com/faster-progress.html>

Writing Songs

For many people, creating new music is an important part of why they want to learn an instrument. If this is one of the goals/motivations you ascertained while reading the earlier chapters, pay extra heed to the following tips. And even if you aren't a fan of creating something new, I'll include some ideas which will hopefully push you toward getting a little creative.

Begin to create by first imitating. It is very hard to just begin creating music, even if you have excellent technical skill and know all of the chords, notes, etc. Instead, consider first working from the music that you love. Cover songs and make notes about the things that you like in them. Then, when you begin to create your own songs it will be a lot easier and, at least at first, you can create songs that are closer to a blend of other works you love to play.

Creating is fun. Don't take it too seriously; try to enjoy the music you create. It is important to write for yourself and really create the sounds that you wish already existed in the world. Perhaps the most fun you can have is when you write with others and begin to "jam" together. This will act as a great catalyst for both further practice and further writing, so don't be shy; start playing and writing with others as soon as possible.

Creating doesn't need to be daunting or perfect. Many people are scared to start writing songs because they think it is too difficult or beyond them. If this sounds like you, start slow and just tweak songs that you already love. Tweak covers and mix songs together. Also, don't be afraid to create something that is terrible. The route to writing great music is just like the route to learning how to play an instrument in the first place – practice, fail, practice, fail – and over time there is gradual improvement.

For more ideas on how to get creative and have fun while you do it, check out my book, which tackles this directly: *How to Unleash Your Creativity*

Practice at Your Peak Times of Concentration

If you are really serious about getting the most from your practice sessions, it will be helpful to do it when you are at your best. There are certain times of day or the week when you are more able to focus than others. If you aren't currently aware of when these times are, begin to look for them. Below are examples of instances that tend to be optimum for concentration:

- In the few hours after exercise.
- In the few hours after a healthy, nutritious meal.
- In the few hours after meditating.
- Earlier in the day.
- After a short power nap.

The following times are not conducive to great practice sessions:

- After a heavy or unhealthy meal.
- After a long day of work or something which causes you significant mental fatigue.
- After a long period of inactivity, such as watching hours of TV.
- After drinking alcohol.

This is fairly obvious advice, but you are probably currently underestimating the difference between how well you can concentrate at peak times and how poorly you play your instrument at other times. Of course, any practice is better than no practice. However, if you have the choice, practice at more optimal times and you will be able to make better gains in your practice sessions.

Play with Others As Soon As Possible

Playing with others as soon as possible is hugely helpful for everyone learning an instrument. Below are some ideas on why.

You can get some friendly competition going. If you are both learning the same instrument or complimentary ones, you can work off of each other and push to get better as a team. This is much more motivating.

You can create together. The creative process can be easier, more enjoyable, and more effective when done with a writing partner. John Lennon and Paul McCartney are perhaps one of the best examples of this. Find a writing buddy and get busy!

You can hold each other accountable. Maybe one of you doesn't want to play this week because they are a little tired. Well, it's times like this that a motivated second party is essential. With two or more people coming together, you are a lot more likely to make progress and keep commitments to practicing, writing, and playing songs together.

Experience the Rush of Public Performance

Just as you want to start playing with others as soon as possible, playing in public is also very beneficial to your progress. Below are some reasons why.

You will get the rush of public performance. Other people watching you perform is going to be exciting, and if you can tap into the thrill of it consistently you just gave yourself a great reason to keep on playing and practicing.

You won't turn it into a big deal and keep putting it off. It can be easy to get perfectionistic when it comes to playing your instrument and never feel quite good enough to play in front of others.

It's a great show of commitment to yourself. It's kind of like jumping in the deep end of the swimming pool. You know you mean business in learning the instrument if you are playing at open mic nights. Suddenly, more parts of your brain are going to be like, "OK, we're doing this, I guess I'm a musician now." Instead of feeling on the fence and as if you are only dabbling.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

(BONUS) BOOK 12: HOW TO TYPE FAST: A SHORT AND EASY GUIDE TO TOUCH TYPING

Introduction

By applying the tips within this book, you will be able to type much faster than you do at present. This will allow you to get more writing done, in less time.

I would like to mention fellow authors and educators in the field. I recommend purchasing these author's work if you want further help on touch typing beyond this short guide. In particular both Penny Cooper, the author of *Touch Typing Made Easy: Learn to Type in Quick and Easy Steps*, and Anne Dobson, the author of *Touch Typing in Ten Hours: A Few Hours Now Will Teach You a Skill That Will Be Valuable for Life*. In this book, *How to Touch Type*, I have expanded and evolved principles of touch typing to create a guide more specific and straightforward in various aspects. I do, however, highly recommend purchasing the above books if you are eager for different ideas and perspectives on the field of touch typing.

Now, without further ado, let's begin your crash course on touch typing!

What is Touch Typing?

The best place to begin this book is to clarify what exactly we mean when we say “touch typing.”

Simply, touch typing is the ability to type without looking down at the keyboard. You type by touch and memory of where the keys are instead of looking down to find them. Typically, touch typing is much faster and can be learnt without much difficulty (though practice is required!)

Depending on your previous experience, you may already type some or the majority of what you type without looking down at the keyboard. However, you may still have picked up bad habits that prevent you from touch typing perfectly well, which in turn will prevent you from typing at the highest speeds.

This book will start “from the bottom up” and present a straightforward methodology for first learning to touch type, and then to type with more speed.

Why Learn to Touch Type?

Learning to touch type is a straight forward skill to learn. Once you have learnt, there will be many occasions to utilize your new skill. The hours required to learn how to touch type will stand you in good stead for both future jobs and day to day tasks.

The obvious benefit of being able to type faster is perhaps clear: you will get more done in less time. Faster emails, reports, essays, novels – anything that you type will be faster with touch typing.

By typing without looking down, you will not have to keep glancing up and down, from keyboard to screen. This will be a less frustrating, easier way to type.

Focusing always on the screen in front of you, instead of looking down regularly, will also improve concentration on what you are working. And so, no matter what kind of writing you are doing, whether it be analyzing, note taking or creative writing, all will be improved by the boost in concentration facilitated by the switch to touch typing.

The benefits of learning to touch type are numerous. And, as the world fills with more technology and more computers, the ability to type properly and quickly will be useful in the majority of jobs. It is a straight forward skill that will save you hours, days, weeks of time. It only takes ten minutes to learn the fundamentals of touch typing, and then it is just a question of putting in the hours of practice needed to become competent.

Arguably, touch typing should be taught in schools from a young age. John Clare of *The Daily Telegraph* writes, "Given the ubiquity of keyboards and the growing expectation that secondary school pupils and university students will type their essays and coursework, I think [touch typing] is one of the most useful skills a child can learn - at any age from seven upwards."[\[x\]](#)

How to Use this Book and the Importance of Practice

Practice is the cornerstone of learning how to touch type. Even if you are a fast learner and work diligently, learning to touch type instinctively and quickly will require hours at the keyboard.

Depending on how eager you are to make progress, you can work through the lessons and hours of drills a bit at a time over weeks, or, work full time and try to get touch typing honed as soon as possible. It is important, however, to take breaks if you are going to do hours of drills at a time.

Depending on your current level, becoming competent at touch typing may take 2 hours, 4 hours, 8 hours, 12 hours or more.

Some writers, myself included, came to touch typing the long way. By putting in hours of typing, my fingers had to find the right buttons in order to allow my eyes to remain locked on the screen. In doing so, I picked up bad habits that took time to unlearn. The same might be the case for you. If you can type relatively quickly and rarely look at the keyboard, you will have to slow down again and learn the correct way of touch typing. Trust me, this will be worth it, as your typing speed will be able to reach new highs later on.

Take the above as further reason to learn how to type correctly as soon as possible. Touch type the right way, before you pick up bad habits, and hit speed plateaus “down the road.”

Equipment

You will of course need a keyboard and a laptop/computer/tablet to learn touch typing principles and to practice the drills in this book.

Some keyboards help more than others when it comes to typing. Using the keyboard on a laptop is something to be weary of. They are too flat and have keys that don't click down fully, which does not help typing quickly.

Also, consider that the screen you are looking at needs to be at a good height. Ideally, it is at or just below eye level. And so, if you are using a laptop, you will probably need to get a separate keyboard so the laptop can be elevated to a good height. If you are only reading this book to pick up the basics, or for a casual read, you perhaps need not worry. But if you really want to take your typing to the next level, get a quality standalone key board and get that screen close to eye level.

For performing the drills that come later in this book, it is helpful to write and read from one or two screens. Therefore, if possible, bring this eBook up on Kindle for PC/Mac and read this eBook alongside the program you are writing in. This will minimize distraction/eye movement. Two screens/monitors will make this process even easier. Then you can have this eBook on one screen, and on the other the writing program you are using.

If you want to practice touch typing by copying from a paper book, use a clip board or something to hold the book open, upright, and beside the screen. Again, this is in order to minimize eye movement, and thus help concentration and speed.

Typing with Speed: Words per Minute

Typing quickly is closely linked with touch typing. The better your touch typing technique, the faster you will be able to type.

When measuring typing speed, the commonly used speed measurement is “words per minute”. Your words per minute is simply the number of words you type, on average, per minute. Your typing speed will vary depending on what you are writing. Therefore, taking an average and copying “normal” text is important to ascertain a score that is relatively accurate.

Improving speed is a simple combination of correct technique multiplied by time spent practicing typing: the more you practice with proper technique, the faster you will be able to type.

Once you have good technique (through implementation of the lessons within this book), only practice is needed. The rate of improvement will eventually plateau, but at first the gains in speed will be good. Consistent and “time-constrained” typing (writing against the clock) is the best way to reach the typing speeds secretaries/typists/writers are able to reach.

The final chapters of this book offer further ideas on writing faster and more productively. But, essentially, the format is straight forward: proper technique multiplied by time spent practicing will improve your typing speed.

How to Measure Typing Speed

Being able to accurately measure your typing speed will be a great aide in helping you to become a faster typist. Once you have learnt to touch type, and always write with proper technique, you can work at speed and monitor improvements (whilst retaining good technique). This will help you build momentum in your work and keep you optimistic and eager to carry on. However, certainly don't measure speed more regularly than at one hour intervals, as expecting gains in less time is unrealistic.

To measure typing speed, follow this simple process:

Choose a text that is not too difficult to copy from. Either fiction or non-fiction is fine. Copying a non-complex Wikipedia article. Or, consider a novel with straight forward prose – a Harry Potter novel works well.

For practicality, it will be easiest if the text is beside the screen/software you are typing in. Ideally, copy from an eBook or something on screen rather than a physical book, as a physical book is hard to “prop up” (reducing eye movement is preferable.)

Set a timer for 3 minutes. Set it off, and begin copying the text into a writing program (Microsoft Word, Note, anything is fine really.) Stop when the timer signals the end of the 3 minutes.

Count the number of words you managed to type.

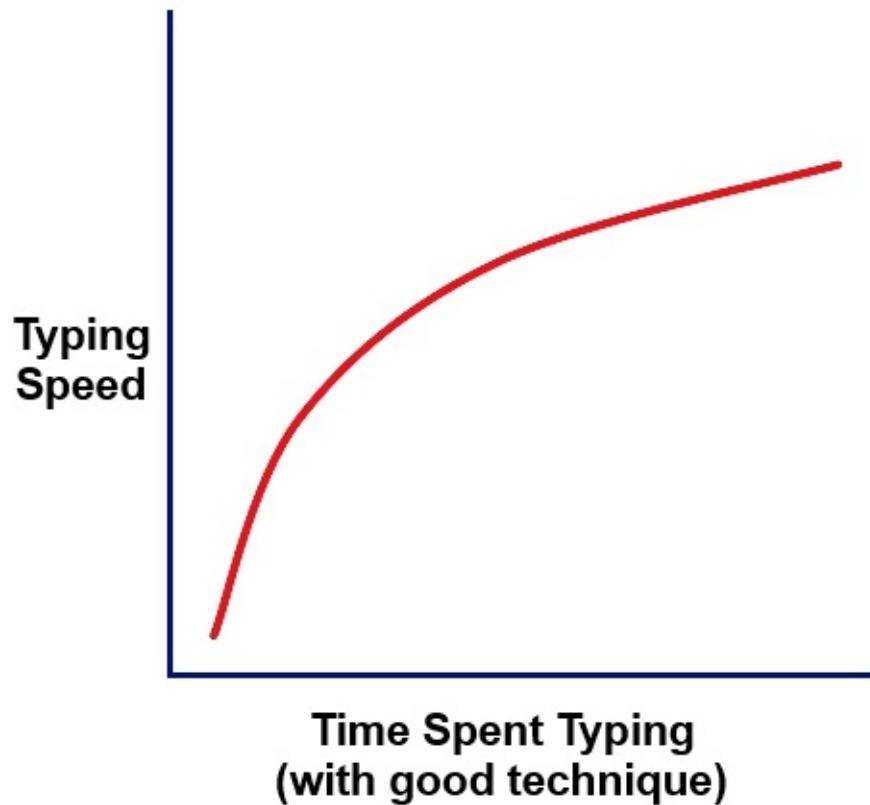
Divide this figure by 3 in order to find how many words you wrote, on average, per minute.

Make a note of this number, as it is your current speed of typing in words per minute (WPM). The typical typing speed is roughly 40 wpm.[\[xi\]](#)

By implementing the techniques in this book and with a reasonable amount of practice (think 8-10 hours), it is certainly possible to double your typing speed to the level of 80 wpm. Hitting the writing speeds reached by those whose jobs involve full time typing will be more of a challenge and will require the same input in time they spend. Those with higher typing speeds tend to practice 3

times more than those with lower typing speeds.[\[xii\]](#)

The diagram below shows how the return on investment practicing typing shifts. Minimal, good practice, will allow you to dramatically increase speeds, but top speeds will require A LOT of time.



Correct Posture

It is important to have good posture when you are typing. Not only will this prevent long term muscle strains and injuries, you will also help blood flow and improve your comfort as you work. Correct posture will help you concentrate, work harder, smarter and faster. The following should all be taken into account when correcting your seating posture.

Relax your shoulders, don't tense them or have them lifted.

Elbows and wrists should be roughly parallel to the table and the keyboard you are typing at.

Hands and fingers relaxed (and resting at the “home keys”, which will be explained soon.)

Keep your feet flat on the floor.

Legs should be close to a 90 or 100 degree angle, so that your thighs are roughly parallel with the desk.

The chair should have a back rest to support your lower back.

As I said previously, the screen needs to be at a good height. Looking down at a laptop resting on a table is not good (though many people work like this.) The easiest way to change this is to boost the laptop up with large books and use an external keyboard and mouse.

Fatigue/RSI/Taking Breaks

Writing for long periods at a time should be accompanied with regular and proper breaks. Essentially, all the ways in which you engage your body and mind whilst writing at your keyboard need to be reversed and exercised.

Consider the following in particular.

Looking at a screen is tiring for the eyes. (Essentially, it is a lightbulb.) On breaks, rest your palms over your eyes so they experience complete darkness and get a break. Similarly, consider black-out curtains and/or eye masks to help you sleep better and enable your eyes to fully rest at night.

Sitting in the same position encourages tension and stressed muscles. Every hour, if not more regularly, get up and just get a break from where you are: walk, lay down, do some stretches, some pushups, talk to someone.

Being inside for hours at a time can be draining: regularly go outside and breathe deep some fresh air.

Not only do all of these things help you to remain productive and fast at typing, they are just as helpful, if not more so, in helping concentration, memory, creativity, and general happiness whilst working. Taking breaks regularly is widely accepted as necessary in helping your mind and body to relax, recover and stay productive. [\[xiii\]](#)

The great writer D.B. Weiss noted how writing can isolate the individual.

“Writing can be a very isolating profession. By its very nature, you spend a lot of time barricaded in your house or office typing on your own.” D.B. Weiss.

Be wary of Weiss’s words and make sure you get balance. Take breaks, walk, get into nature, talk to other people, stretch and relax.

Typing With Accuracy

Typing rapidly is a main goal for this book. However, before you can think about typing fast, it is important you learn how to touch type accurately. Only then, once you have ingrained the habit of hitting each button with the CORRECT finger and NEVER looking down at the keyboard, should you start thinking about pushing your fingers to move as fast as they can.

Consider also that your speed is always going to be compromised by correcting mistakes or “typos”. Therefore, eliminating the need to correct mistakes will itself be a time saver. Although the occasional “backspace” is unavoidable, this really wants to be the exception.

(If you are free writing, or using the techniques described in the final chapters of this book, you may be able to ignore this advice. This is because pushing for speed, without editing or thinking too much, allows errors to creep in more regularly. The increase in productivity makes this trade-off worth it.)

Now let's begin to look at which fingers should be hitting which keys.

Lesson 1: The “F” and “J” Keys

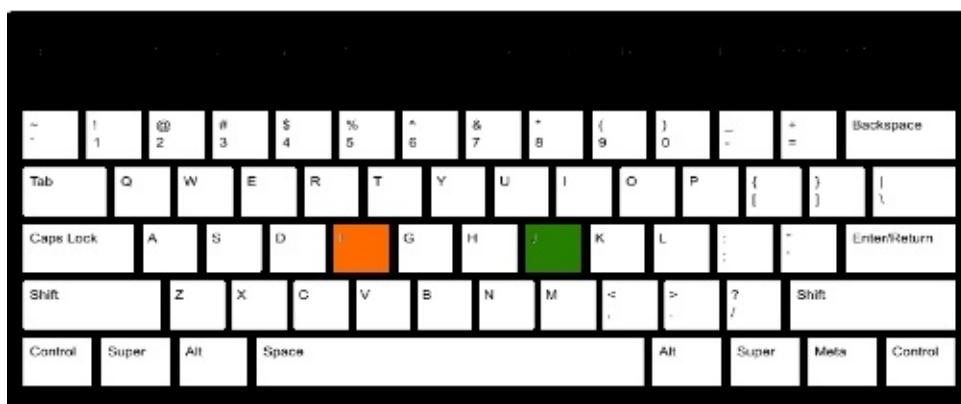
You may have noticed that keyboards have small bumps that protrude slightly from the “F” and “J” keys. This is no accident. They are there so that, by feel, your fingers can naturally return to a position that is optimal for typing. It is these keys that your index fingers must always return to. Your left index finger rests on the “F” key and your right index finger rests on the “J” key.

This small but significant design facet means that you don’t have to look down to the keyboard in order to find where these two keys are. And so, you can memorize the position of all of the keys in relation to these two points, without looking. This means you can type without looking down and sub-consciously process where your fingers need to go (after practice.)

It is important, not only that you begin typing with your fingers at these points, but also that your fingers always return to these buttons. These buttons need to be sought out by your index fingers and remain on them whenever you are not typing.

For many, this “Ah hah” moment will allow their typing to begin to take off. No more looking down, and an easy way to remember where your fingers should go – fantastic!

Below is a diagram to illustrate the new starting points for your index fingers. The orange F key is where your left index finger rests, the green J key is where your right index finger rests.



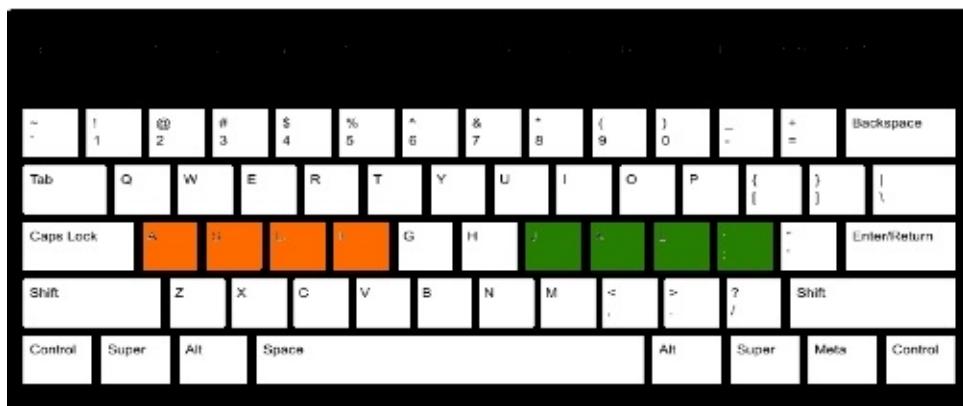
Exercise

Take the time to find the ridges on your keyboard again and again. Do this by feel alone. Close your eyes and trace your fingers over the keys until your index fingers rest on the “F” and “J” keys respectively.

Lesson 2: The Home Keys

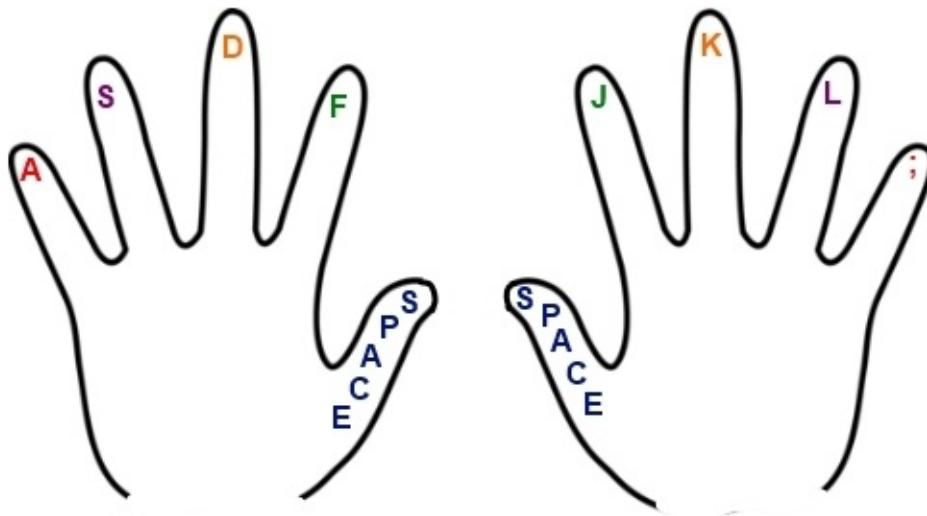
Now that you have found where your index fingers start and return to, you can locate the three keys beside them. It is here that the rest of your fingers should always come to rest. These are known as the “home keys”. These are the A,S,D,F keys for your left hand and the J,K,L,; keys for your right hand.

The picture below shows where your fingers and thumbs need to rest on a standard keyboard. The orange keys are for your left fingers, the green for your right fingers.



Whenever at a keyboard, it is important that you begin with your fingers resting at these keys.

Here is another diagram to make this clearer.



Exercise

If you haven't already, take the time to rest all of your fingers on the home keys on your keyboard. Again, close your eyes and find the keys by feel, all in relation to the "F" and "J" keys.

Run your fingers over them again and again, and repeat to yourself as you touch them what they are. I.e., say aloud: "A, S, D, F, J, K, L, semi colon" as you run your fingers from left to right across all of the "home" keys.

Type a few words, anything that comes to mind. Look at the keyboard and return your fingers to the home keys following each letter. Type each letter by moving the finger that is closest to the key. Once a finger hits a letter, return the finger to rest on its respective home key.

If you have had a little practice at typing, try to type by feel and don't look down at the keyboard at all. Using an eye mask is a fun, perhaps more theatrical, way

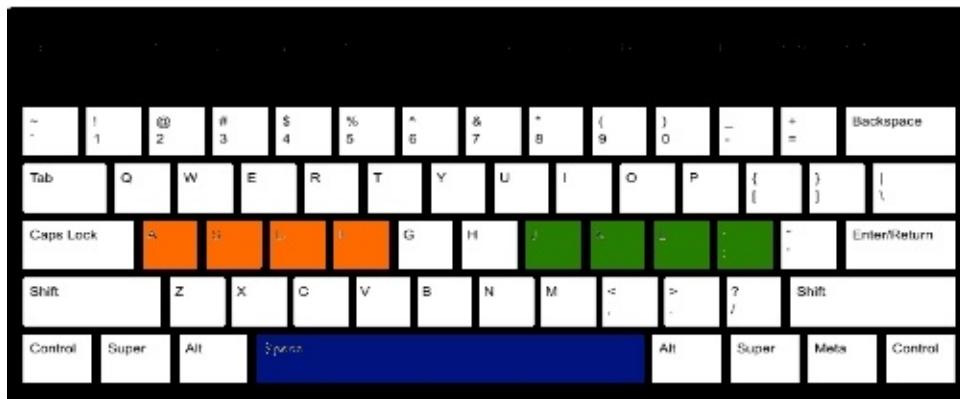
to do this. (If you hadn't guessed I think eye masks are super useful.)

Lesson 3: Use Your Thumb for the Space Bar

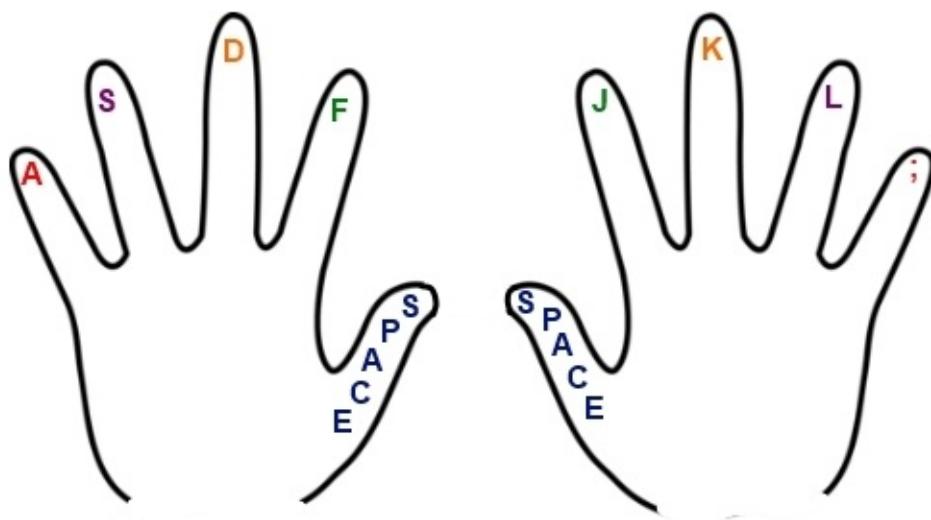
As the previous diagram of the hands showed, the space bar is always used by the thumb. The frequency with which the space bar is used means that switching to using the thumb can be a big improvement to intermediate typists who have picked up the bad habit of using their index fingers instead.

Always use the same thumb for the space bar. As to which thumb you should use, it should be the thumb corresponding to your dominant hand. And so, if you are right handed, always use the right thumb. If you are left handed, always use the left thumb. It is that simple.

Below is a diagram to illustrate how your fingers and thumbs correlate to the keys. Orange for your left hand, green for your right, and blue for your thumbs.



And here, again is the image of the hands. It is useful to draw or copy out these images and have them close by. They will be a handy aide to refer to regularly (pun intended.)



Lesson 4: The Rest of the Keys

The rest of the keys correlate to fingers in a regular fashion. Moving up and down to their nearest keys, your fingers will follow the lines of the keyboard. The only way to explain how they should do this is with a diagram. Refer to the following to make sense of it:

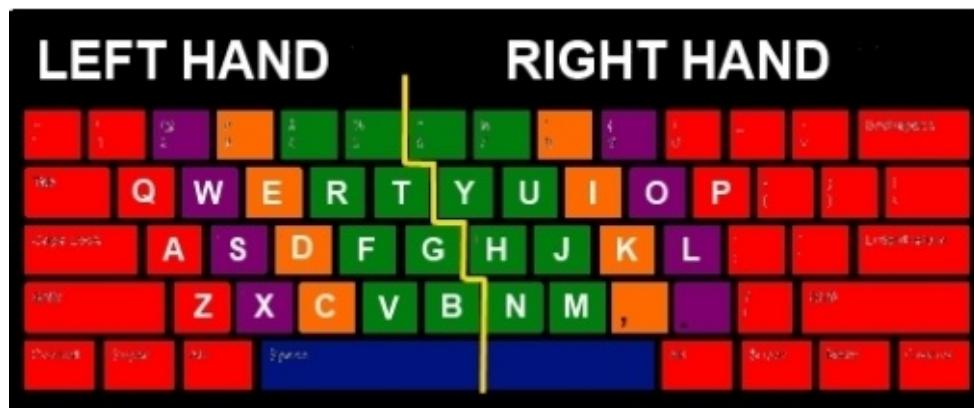
Green = Index Finger

Orange = Middle Finger

Purple = Ring Finger

Red = Little Finger

Blue = Thumb



Learning to use the correct fingers for the correct keys is the trick and main goal of learning how to touch type. Through consciously using the right keys, correcting yourself, and then a lot of drilling/practice you will habitually follow the diagram above.

Extra tips (for real beginners, and those wanting a bit of fun)

In order to help you clearly see and remember where your fingers should land, color code your keyboard and fingers so they correspond with one another.

Use coloring pens to color the tips of your fingers. Then, color the keys of the

keyboard. In order to make it clearer which colors your fingers are, it might help to draw lines of color along the top of your fingers. If you don't fancy drawing on your keyboard, buy small colored stickers and use these instead. You will certainly be able to find white stickers that can be colored in from the majority of stationers.

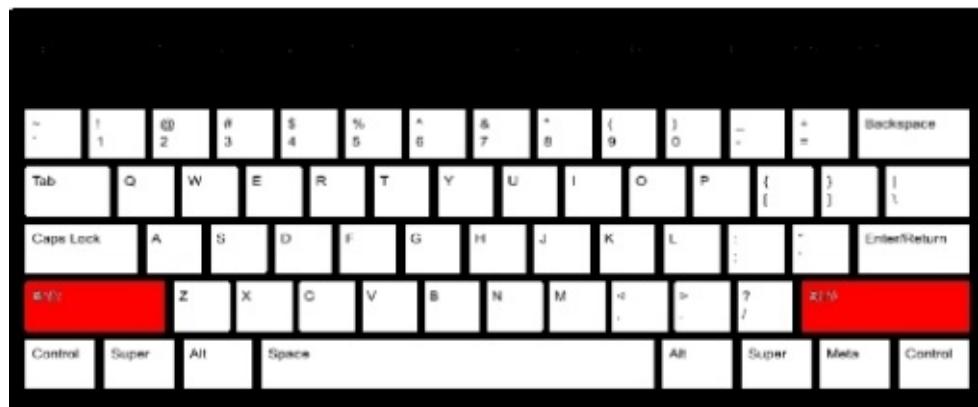
Of course, soon enough you aren't going to be looking down at the keys at all. But to orientate yourself at the start, and to make learning to touch type a little more fun, being able to link visually where your fingers should go is helpful.

(This tip can be very helpful for making learning to touch type more interesting if you are teaching children or visual learners.)

Capital Letters

Capital letters are a major part of writing. If you currently turn the caps lock on and off to write a capital letter, you have to stop this habit and switch to using the shift button. Holding one button for a moment is easier than pressing one, twice, and, as keyboards are designed to make the shift button easily accessible, your finger will find the shift button easier to “reach for”. Make sure that you always use your little finger for the shift button.

The image below shows the shift buttons.

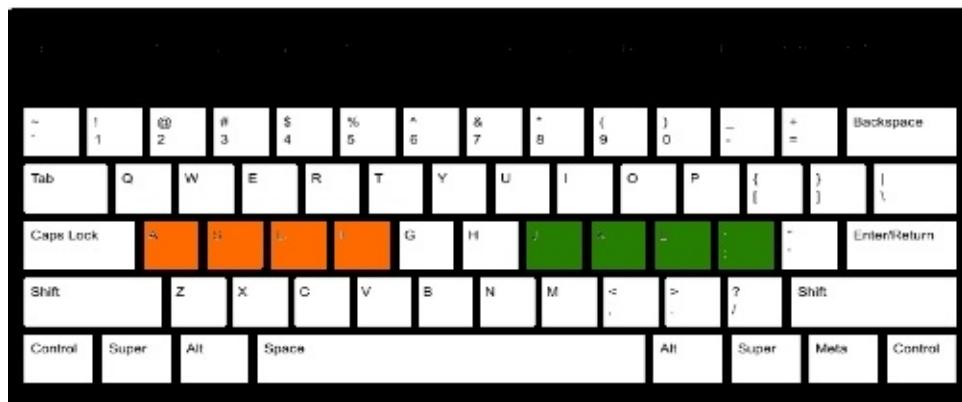


Ideally, the finger used to hold shift is on the opposite hand to the hand that is typing the capital letter. For example, if you are writing a capital “J”, your right hand will be touching the “J” key so your left hand, specifically your left little finger, will be holding down the shift key.

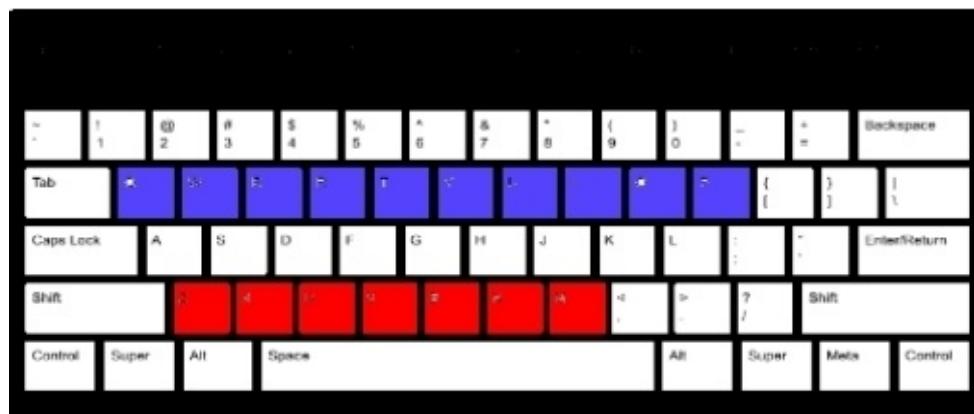
Drills and Exercises

Now we will work on the drills to turn your conscious typing of the correct keys, into an unconscious act.

It is important to keep your fingers resting on the correct “home keys”, whilst performing these drills. Here, again is the picture of where your fingers should be.



Attempt to keep your fingers on these as much as possible. As the drills progress, it will become trickier to keep your fingers on the home keys. The latter part of the drills will focus on the upper and lower rows of the keyboard. The blue keys in the diagram below constitute the “upper row”. The red ones are what I will refer to as the “lower row”.



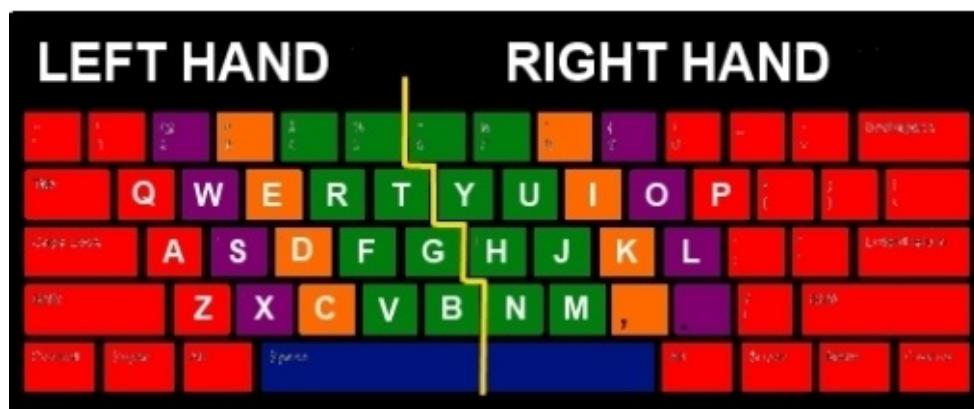
The following drills combine series' of letters combined into short word length sizes. The combinations of letters are design to cover a range of letters and give your fingers a "work-out" and cover the keys in a regular, evolving manner.

Drills

Work through the following drills section for the first 25 minutes of your practice cycles. The drills escalate between focusing on the home keys, the upper keys, the lower keys and all of the keys.

(If, after hours or practice you become bored with these drills / combinations of letters, feel free to create your own combinations OR, keep it simple and use the classic phrase, which uses all the letters of the keyboard: “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Repeat this instead, if preferable.)

Don’t forget to use the space bar with your dominant thumb, and your opposite little finger to find shift for capital letters. AND, remember, you are focusing on perfect form, the correct finger for the correct letter. Here is the diagram again that depicts this. Following it are the drills of letter combinations.



Fff jjj Ddd kkk sss lll aaa ;;; Aaa ;;; sss lll ddd kkk fff jjj Fds a jkl; fds a jkl; Fds a jkl; Asdf jkl; asdf jkl; asdf jkl; Adsf Jlk; jlk; adsf Dsfa lk;j dsfa lk;j Dsfa lk;j

frju deki swlo aq;p frju deki swlo aq;p jrqp; ikedowsl rufjeidk wiskoq fjrui dkslwo a;qpwo ikedowsl rufjeidk wiskoq fjrui dkslwo a;qpwo

Azsx jmdc fvkm azjx Jmkl azjx djcm djmc Hfnc jdmx kals zmjd Azjn sjdl skcn mfjx Jmkl azjx djcm djmc

Hfnc jdmx kals zmjd Azjn sjdl skcn mfjx

Ghty ghbn fhqp nvkd ls;aty ghvnb urjd iekd tiem rugh rie bnls xmfi ytnc oqzj ytnv urkq

zoid fght hvnu ksyn Ghty ghbn fhqp nvkd

How to Practice the Drills

Split your time between performing the drills (either the letter combinations or “the quick brown...”) and copying text from a book. Just as the speed test earlier, don’t make the book too tricky, think simple non-fiction or a Harry Potter novel. For each hour of practice, spend 25 minutes doing the drills and 25 minutes copying out the text you have chosen.

At the end of each of these 50 minutes, attempt to write for five minutes without looking down.

It might take you 4 of these 50 minute sessions, before you are able to touch type, it might take ten, or more. It really depends on your experience of typing.

When performing the drills or copying from your book, work to be typing with the correct keys, always. Look down when you need to, but encourage yourself to do so less when it seems possible to. Refer instead to the diagram of where the keys are and then find them in relation to the F and J keys you can find by feel.

It is essential that every hour you perform the five minutes forcing yourself to touch type. Perform this test copying from the book, not the drills, as you will eventually memorize the drills (which is OK, because it simply ingrains where each letter is.) Don’t look down when performing the five minutes test even if it is very difficult and you write a jumble of letters.

Take time to write the correct letters, with the correct fingers.

Be patient, if you are a real beginner, these initial 5 minute touch typing tests will be frustrating.

Whilst completing the drills or copying from the book, attempt to move away from looking down, but don’t worry if you can’t. Again, use the diagram and the F and J keys to find your way instead.

Once you are able to touch type without looking down (you complete the five minute test with only a few errors), continue with the same practice cycle except now attempt to write faster, as well as with good technique. This second stage is what I will refer to as stage 2, here you practice speed, having learnt perfect

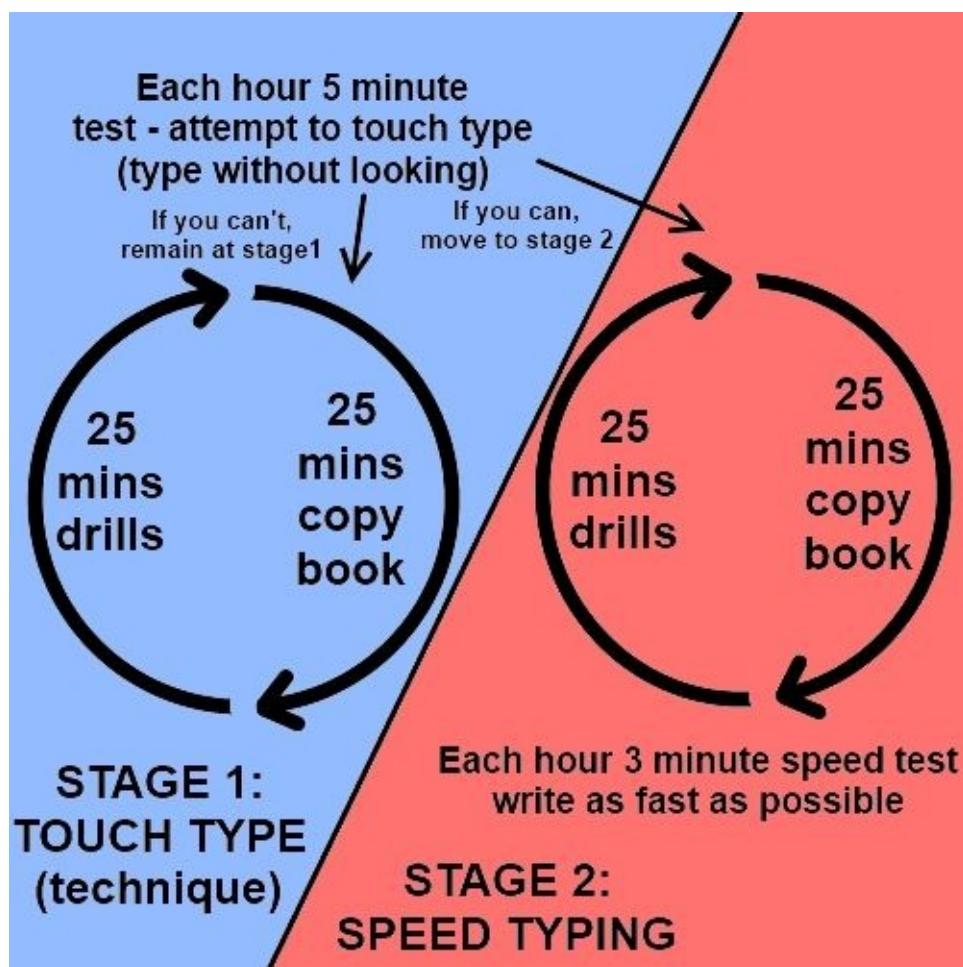
form and how to touch type in stage 1.

At stage 2, instead of focusing only on proper technique, you focus on both good technique AND typing quickly. (Make this only “prompt” typing if you have only just moved out of stage 1.) If you are able to move to stage 2, it is important to NEVER compromise your technique, no matter how much it appeals.

If you have not practiced for a while, and/or only just made it up to stage 2, you might want to return to stage 1 occasionally to re-affirm proper technique.

At stage 2 instead of the 5 minute touch typing test, do a 3 minute speed typing test to measure your WPM.

Below is the cycle of practice visually presented.



Extra Tips

When you are practicing the drills, experiment with the following as needed.

Stick on the wall the chart that shows where the keys are and the corresponding finger placements. Look at this as often as needed.

Find keys by feel using the F and J keys.

Say each letter aloud as you type it.

Color your keys and fingers to make sure that when you look down you are using the right keys. (This is more for fun and real beginners. If you are in a rush or OK at typing, consider skipping it.)

Summary of Practice Model

This practice model will be the key for you moving from a slow typer, to a fast, touch typer. So here it is in summary. Return to this chapter if you need quick and clear points to get you on track.

At stage 1:

Say letters aloud

Find home keys by feel and try to minimize looking down, instead consult the map and find the keys by feel

Color code if you want a bit of fun

Always write correctly, DON'T worry about speed.

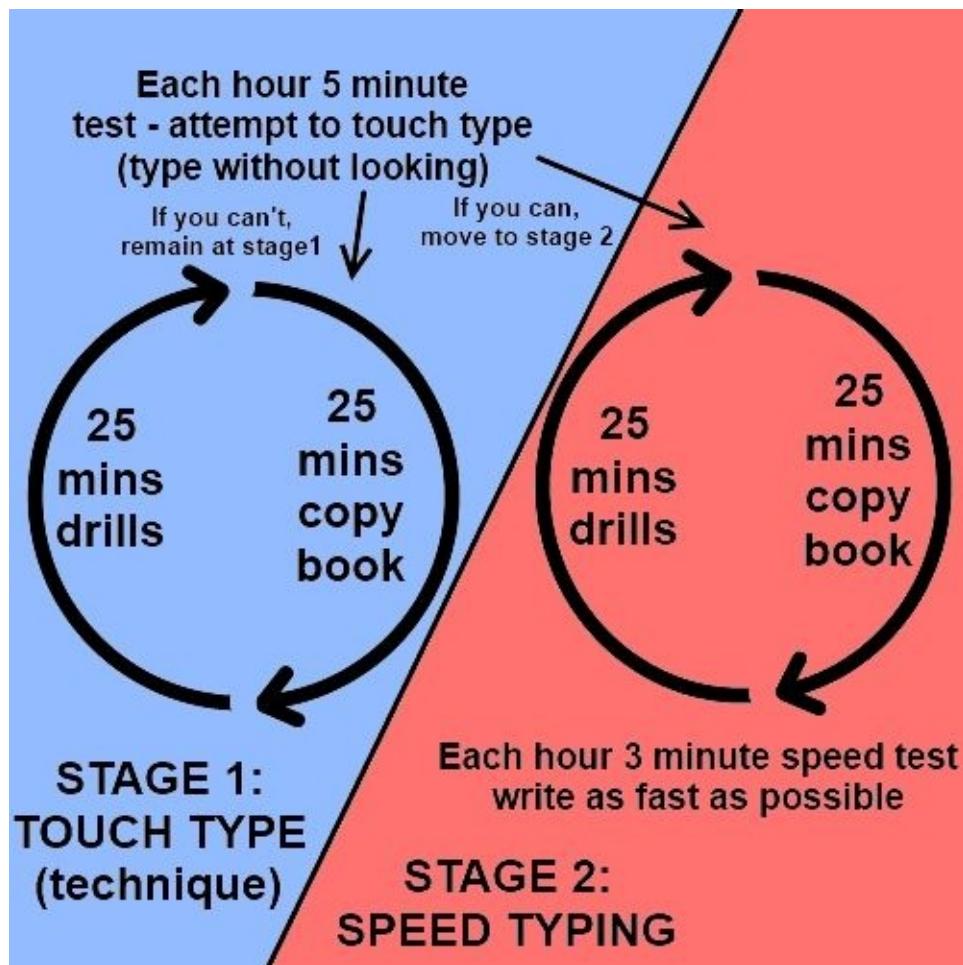
CYCLE the following hour practice time - 25 minutes drills (repeat either letter combinations or “The Quick Brown...”) 25 minutes copying book, 5 minutes attempting to touch type. (With a 5 minute break thrown in to make an hour.)

At stage 2 (ONLY after learning to touch type, which might take many hours or work.)

Attempt to write faster, but NOT at the expense of the technique you learnt in stage 1.

CYCLE the following hour practice time - 25 minutes drills (repeat either letter combinations or “The Quick Brown...”) 25 minutes copying book, 3 minutes speed typing, measure your WPM.

Here, again, is the model of this practice model:



The above is the nuts and bolts of learning how to touch type and how to type fast. The following chapters expand and build on these ideas to make your typing still more effective.

Comprehension

Whenever you have a book that you want to really understand in depth, consider typing it out again from start to finish. The precise attention to each word will mean that comprehension and memorization of the book is exceptional. By focusing on each word, each letter, you will often remember what you have typed up clearly.

Instead of using your chosen book, it might be helpful (at least until you get bored) to copy out this book from start to finish repeatedly. The principles and ideas will then be imbedded deeply into your mind, all the while you get a thorough typing work-out.

Using Audio

To force your writing speed to increase, it can help to transcribe audio material. This involves transcribing everything that you hear at the rate that is being said, which forces you to keep up and write at a high pace.

Many media players have a “faster-than-normal” playback function and play audio at 1.5X, 2X the speed of the standard track. These will be helpful for advanced typists (or perhaps if you are listening to a book read slowly.)

Transcribing material in this way is a fantastic way to improve your typing speed, but also a great way to stay focused and listen actively to the material. Consider doing this if you want to study a topic AND work on increasing your typing speed. If you are studying an essay based course, such as History, this might entail first recording a lecture, and then playing it back at double speed and trying to type it up. (Of course, the speed the lecturer talks will dictate how far you can push this.)

You will then both be studying and speeding up your typing. So when your essay comes round, you know everything you need to and can write about it quickly and easily. Who knows, you might become invaluable to other students who come to you eager for perfectly written lecture notes you produced as a by-product of typing practice.

Other Tips on Typing and Writing Quickly

The following are more tips that can compound your new touch typing skills and enable you to write even faster!

1-Free-writing

The process of free writing involves writing what comes to mind without editing yourself. Many find this process freeing, and much faster than constantly checking what they have just written.

This may well enable you to type faster than you did when copying out text and performing the previous drills.

Writing in this way is often more effective when you let the typos slide, and don't focus on perfect typing. And so, when free-writing, ease up, and don't try to write perfectly as you have been when performing the previous drills.

2-Write in “batches” or “phases”

Following on from the practice of free writing is the overall principle of writing in phases. Here you create periods where you only perform one step of the writing process; throughout the writing process, you do everything possible to keep these stages separate.

Depending on the project, writing will typically take on the following stages.

Planning

Researching

Writing

Editing

Proof reading

Consequently, when you are researching, you research and do nothing else. And the same applies for the other stages. Make sure that you are performing these stages, and not drifting back and forth. This will enable you to focus on each stage and so perform them faster and more effectively.

3-Use measureable makers to push yourself to write faster.

By setting word count goals to definite time scales, you will push yourself to think and type faster. Depending on the difficulty/length of what you are writing, this might mean attempting to write 500 words per hour, 750 words per hour, 1,000 words per hour or more.

Creating this set-structure to your writing is a great way to push through writers block.

4-Don't shoot for perfection.

The above processes encourage you to get writing and keep writing. The main blocks that normally slow writing down (aside from the technical slowness of not being able to touch type) is the writer either waiting for inspiration to write perfectly, or regularly going back to re-write things to improve them. By instead just focusing on words getting written (against the clock, ideally), you build up a body of work more quickly. The process of editing and re-writing can then be performed as many times as needed to amp the quality of writing, but only later on when the words are on the page.

Not only is this approach to writing faster, it also feels more fluid and enjoyable for many writers.

Studying and Touch Typing

Touch typing proves invaluable if you are a student. By being able to type, and not look at the screen, you can experience the following benefits as a student:

You can read something whilst either copying it directly, or taking notes from it. Brilliantly useful when researching.

Better concentration and creativity as your attention is not divided between looking down at the keyboard.

Take notes as fast as you can hear them. Useful for classes, seminars and lectures.

Transcribing a lecture, or copying out an important part of a text are both powerful ways to both study and work on your typing technique/speed.

The ability to write up reports and essays much faster will make your studying much more effective. All this, again, only for a day's worth of work to get the skill of touch typing down.

Keyboard Shortcuts

The following keyboard shortcuts are essential for improving the speed and ease with which you work with a computer. Below are the essential shortcuts for windows users.

(the symbol + below means press both keys simultaneously.)

CUT Ctrl + x

COPY Ctrl + c

PASTE Ctrl + v

UNDO Ctrl + z

SAVE Ctrl + s

PRINT Ctrl + p

SWITCH WINDOWS Alt + tab

SEARCH FOR WORD Ctrl + f

Software

There are various resources that can help you to learn touch typing. There isn't always a correlation between paid and un-paid ones, so consider first using the free ones and seeing how you get on. Simply google "touch typing lessons" to find websites that help you "reach" for buttons correctly.

Perhaps the best use for software is to test your reading speed. These will often be alongside the lessons, but if not, search "touch typing test" with Google, and this should yield a series of tests that can accurately work out your typing speed.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

(BONUS) BOOK 13: FOCUS: CONCENTRATION, ENGAGEMENT: TIPS AND PRINCIPLES

Introduction – Welcome!

The concepts of focus, concentration, and engagement all feed into and build on one another, so it seemed best to write a book that covers all of these areas synergistically. Although the book is titled Focus, you will also learn how to increase your concentration and develop full engagement with your work.

Introduction – Focus: A Skill that you Can Learn

Some people seem to possess an exceptional ability to focus. They get through work at an amazing rate and always seem to be engaged and “on”. It is important to realize that you can develop a similar level of focus. It is not something that you were born lacking. We are not all born with a fixed, unchanging ability to focus – it is absolutely a skill that you can develop.

The only reason you haven’t been able to focus as well as you might have in the past is because you haven’t developed the skill-set. It is that simple.

This eBook contains enough techniques and principles to allow you to focus, with unprecedented power, on anything. Many of these are very easy to implement, so you can experience real gains within a day of applying this book’s ideas.

Introduction – Your Focus and Mind acts Like a Child

Unless you have an organized, efficient work/life flow at the moment, your focus is often out of control. The best way to think about how your mind operates is to liken it to a child.

You cannot expect your mind to automatically focus on something just because another part of you knows it to be 100% valuable and necessary – it just won't happen. Without setting up the right conditions, boundaries, rules, and guidelines for your work and life, your mind will be left to do as it pleases. And so, you need to take pre-emptive measures to create the correct conditions and lead your mind by the hand, like a child, so that it can focus on what it should be doing.

Mental-Programs –Your Mind as a Computer

In order to create and preserve a state of focus, you need to keep your mind clear of all thoughts that are not related to what you want to be doing. The mind needs to be as clear as possible to be able to work effectively. To better understand how you can gain that clarity, it is helpful to think of your mind as a computer (as well as a child).

Just like a computer, your mind has a multitude of “programs” it can open at any one time, regarding a variety of things. These mental-programs are all the things that you have going on in your life at any one time, any train of thought and/or area that reflects your life.

Typically, we will all have many of the following mental-programs open at some point over the space of a week. (I have aggregated ideas into larger terms for clarity.)

Friendships

Love Life

Financial State

Financial Goals

Work Project A

Work Project B

Work Project C

Specific, smaller mental-programs might be:

Current events and news

Holiday plans

What you are having for dinner

Once your mind starts down one train of thought – once it opens a mental-program, it will often continue running on unless it is replaced by something else.

Once you begin thinking about something, there will be residual “background noise” that continues throughout the day as part of your mind continues to think

about the idea. In order to maximize mental focus, you need to avoid beginning thought patterns that aren't what you want to currently act on. To become positive and motivated, you also need to avoid negative emotional cues and begin positive emotional ones.

NO to mental-programs that aren't going to be acted on

NO to mental-programs that have a negative emotional effect

YES to mental-programs that you are going to act on imminently

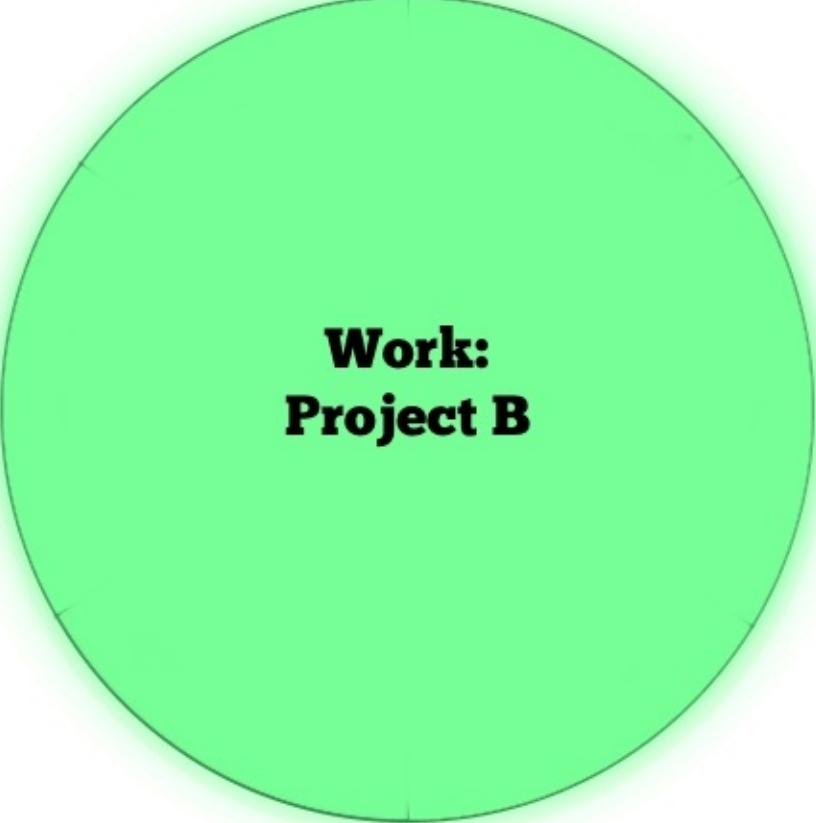
YES to mental-programs that have a positive emotional effect

It is essential to only open mental-programs consciously and proactively. That is to say, you start a mental-program up from a conscious choice because it is positive and/or you are going to work on it. Everything else you should try your best not to allow. Once a mental-program has started, it is tough to close it down – there isn't a little "X" in the top right corner that ends it instantly. (Remember, by mental-program, I simply mean a train of thought that runs on out of your control.)

If you open emails, think about calling someone, work on a project for a minute, etc., each will begin mental-programs that carry on in your mind, taking up valuable space and compromising your ability to focus. Your mind will start to look like this:



Instead of containing just one thing, one thing that you can focus on, your mind becomes cluttered. It is much more desirable for your mind to look something like this:



Work: Project B

Do your best not to expose yourself to anything other than what you are going to work on, try not to even think about it unless you want to move forward with it.

Beginning positive mental-programs that feed your mind, body, and spirit will allow your focus to grow throughout the day. Actions in which the world acts on you and those that are negative will reduce your ability to focus, so decrease or eliminate these.

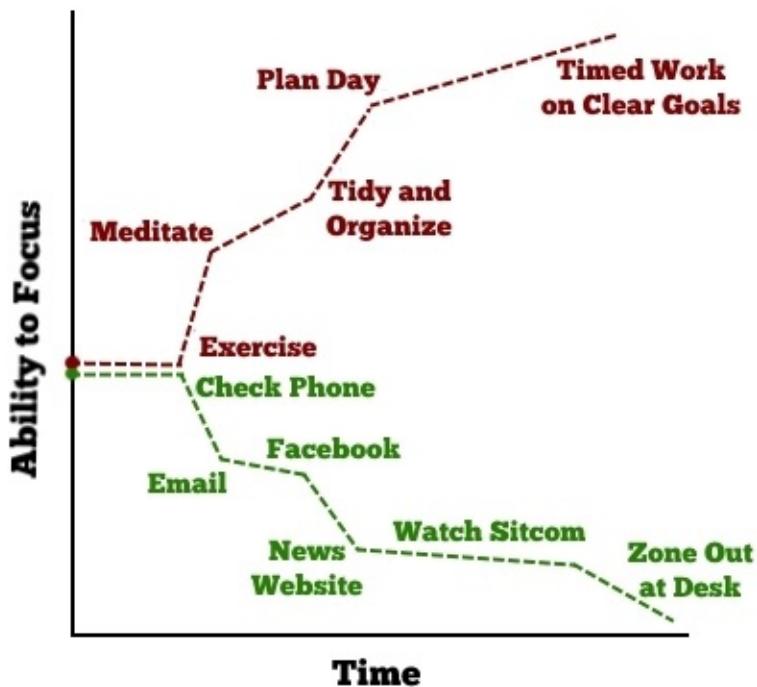
There are some things that are particularly hard to stop thinking about once you start. These are typically things like your career, finances, things you are worried about, your goals, thoughts about friends, having sex, taking a holiday, etc.; all of these things can make your mind whirr on and on.

Things like responding to friends on social networks, the news, and email all require you to think, reflect, and have ideas – often leading to bigger issues like money, sex, etc. They act like catalysts to still more thoughts and feelings. Save

all of these things until later in the day.

Don't open any mental-programs until you have taken care of you, your work, and what is important. If you have to open a mental-program (I would recommend waiting until you have exercised, etc.), but if you have to, make it an awesome one. If you immediately leap into working on your big project, that's fine – turn on and get writing if you write, or get selling if you sell. But do real work that will get you into "flow". Any other mental-program will kill your ability to focus later in the day, inch-by-inch.

Below is a line-graph showing two days. One is an example of a healthy day that builds focus through servicing your body and mind, and the other is a day that diminishes focus progressively by letting in the world and passive or negative things.



Mental-Programs – A Nightmare Start to the Day

Many people begin their days by opening many reactive and often emotionally negative mental-programs in their headspace. This is incredibly easy thanks to technology; in seconds we can be looking at social networks, news channels, emails, finance reports, etc.

Beginning your day like this will mean that you carry into your work projects things that are partially opened. Some of these thoughts you might not be able to impact at all, others you can impact but aren't planning on doing so now. Many will also affect you negatively emotionally and/or take up a great deal of mental space – all shove you back in your head and compromise your ability to focus, concentrate, and engage throughout the day.

Reacting to the world early in the day puts your mind on the back foot, and you end up feeling less in control and less focused. Beginning the day with things like exercise or meditation are great for this reason – they are entirely in your control and you can have “wins” outside of the influence of the world. They also feed emotional and physical needs, which feed your ability to focus as well. Your body, energy levels, etc. are, of course, all connected and therefore, all will help to build focus.

Reacting to the world also takes up a disproportionate amount of focus compared to the pay-off. Nine times out of ten, you will be better served by putting that focus in trying to move a project forward.

The popular advice of putting off opening email until later in the day is the best manifestation of this principle. If you begin the day by taking in people's needs, concerns, inputs, etc., you are not creating the space needed to focus on what you want to bring to your work or taking care of what is more important – your health, motivation, and emotional state.

Checking the news, your phone, email, watching TV, etc., are all reactive acts as well; each will open up a mental-program that makes you a little more passive and pushes the world into your head before you have time to re-affirm who you are.

Mental-Programs – Beginning with a Clear Slate

When you first wake up is typically when you have the “clear slate” that will allow you to maximize focus on a task. By getting a good night’s sleep, you will recharge your ability to focus by clearing your mental headspace. This is one of the myriad of reasons why getting a great night’s sleep is so important. Consider the following ideas to help ensure that you sleep well:

Get at least 7 hours.

Make sure you sleep in a dark room.

Don’t look at screens close to your bedtime.

Have a small snack after supper to keep your blood sugar up.

Make sure your bed is comfortable.

Sleep in a cool room.

Ensure there is quiet all night (get earplugs if your partner snores).

Use two alarms. One with music set to go off first, the other the “buzzer” set to go off a minute later. This will mean you aren’t jolted into consciousness.

Put the alarm across the room to prevent unplanned lay-ins.

Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning.

No planning, long-term thinking, etc. before going to bed.

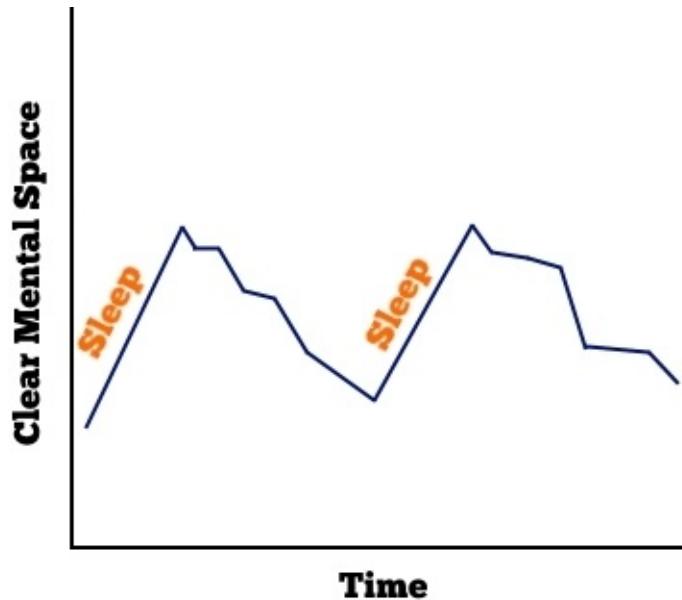
Read fiction, meditate, or stretch before going to bed.

Maintain regular meal times so your body can enter an overall routine of digestion.

Try binaural beats, guided meditation, or relaxing sounds before/as you go to sleep.

It is important to wind-down before sleep as well. Letting your mind work on problems, work, or checking email will not help it reboot as effectively. Get distance from “life” and relax: read some fiction or meditate before you go to sleep and you will find your sleep is much more restful than if you had been checking a news website, watching YouTube, and answering email.

The diagram below helps present the restorative effects of sleep on re-creating that clear mental headspace. The events and opening of mental-programs throughout the day are shown by the points where the line dips.



This is why many people find the morning the best time to focus/concentrate/engage. Working during this time is easier because there is less “background noise” from the other mental-programs that took up mental headspace earlier in the day and perhaps haven’t closed fully.

Going to sleep allows us to reboot our minds and return to a higher state of mental energy/capacity. Because of how tricky it is to end a mental-program once it has begun, endeavor to stave off anything that isn’t productive until after what is important has been completed. Also, make sure you sleep well.

Mental Programs – How to Disengage

As I said before, it is not easy to fully disengage your mind once you have begun a mental-program, so it is important to first do everything possible not to allow an unwanted/unhealthy mental-program to start-up. However, if it does, the best way to disengage is to fully engage with something else. Perform the following when you fail to block the stimulus and sense your mind rushing away from you.

Meditation

Exercise

Taking a short nap

Dancing

Playing a sport

It usually takes more than just reading or walking. These will help a little, but are a little too sedentary and will still leave space for your mind to think.

Listening to music and playing a sport at the same time (dancing to music is great) will overwhelm your mind and help you to tune-out of unproductive things and into something else. Alongside meditation, this is the most powerful way to do a “quick-reset” to an unfocused mind. Spending 10-30 minutes doing something like the above will help separate your mind from what you are doing. If you are in a rush, just doing 2 minutes of push-ups or jump rope might be enough.

Distractions – Pre-Empting and Creating your Workzone

Distractions are the enemy of your focus. Getting distracted can be characterized by opening mental-programs other than those you need in order to work optimally.

Anything that can wait until you have finished working should be made to wait. Sometimes distractions cannot be helped, however; emergencies or high-value things such as your manager needing to speak to you are, of course, unavoidable.

Therefore, you need to take every pre-emptive action possible to eliminate the chance of being distracted by something outside of the above.

Types of distraction can be characterized by either internal triggers or external triggers. An example of an internal trigger could be thinking about texting someone and then doing so, while an example of an external trigger is someone texting you, your phone chiming, and you checking it. Internal triggers begin with you and external triggers begin with the outside world.

Limiting the external stimulus is easier to do: block websites, ask people to leave you alone, turn off your phone, etc. The following few chapters will address how to prevent these external stimulus in more detail. Then I will cover ways to work specifically on preventing internal triggers.

Mental-Programs – Turn It Off

Every time you want to turn on a technological device, e.g., laptop or phone, just take a moment to think about whether you really want to use it.

When you wake up, do you always check your smart phone, tablet, or laptop? If so, you are starting your day in a reactive manner and inviting future distractions. Before you have given yourself a chance to clear your mental headspace with some meditation, water, exercise, etc., you are reacting to and looking at – essentially – a light bulb.

Not turning something on in the first place is also the best way to remove the possibility of it becoming an external stimulus for distraction. Similarly, turning something off is, obviously, the best way to end its ability to distract you.

Make use of the off-switch. Always take a moment before you turn something on, and consider turning something off if you want to begin to focus on something without distraction. A great way to remedy this is to schedule times when you allow yourself to turn technology on and times when something has to be turned off. Making the hour after you wake and the hour before you sleep technology-free times is the best way to begin putting this into action.

Distractions – Working with Others

People walking into your workspace and/or contacting you is an example of external triggers that many professionals have to manage.

If people regularly distract you when you are trying to work, you must politely tell them when you are free for chats and interruptions. Having structure will make this easier because they can always know when you are free to talk. Clear, defined times when you work and when you are on a break will make you easier to work with, minimize the possibility of distraction, and maximize your focus.

Make sure you let everyone in the office know your schedule. Consider printing out a note and sticking to your door – something like “free between 11AM and 12PM.” Following a schedule in this way will allow distractions to filter in productively and at the right time.

The Most Powerful of Distractions – The Internet

The Internet is a tremendous resource and contains such a depth of knowledge that it has supercharged industries and our everyday lives in many ways. However, if unchecked, it can act like a hosepipe of water that gushes out information and ideas. If we are not careful, we douse ourselves with content that is distracting and often addictive. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges to effective working in the 21st century is the distractive power of the Internet. This is especially difficult if you work at a computer, and still more so if you need a web browser to work.

By simply visiting a website, you will trigger one or more mental-programs to initialize. This will always sacrifice some degree of your focus.

There are a variety of ways to tackle this immense source of distraction. Here are a few ideas:

Use website or internet blocking software. This might be the God-send you have been waiting for. If you don't need the internet for set periods, block it. If you need to use your browser, just block those websites that typically distract you: Facebook, Twitter, CNN News, etc. Google search "Internet blocking software" or "website blocking software" and you will find a range of tools.

Schedule times when you can browse the internet freely and happily. Allow yourself to bounce between all those distracting websites: gossips, social media, news, games – anything you want. This will help get it out of your system so that you can return to work. What is important is that you keep to this schedule. This might take the form of spending from 5:00 to 5:30PM hitting all of the websites you want. This way you will preserve more focus on your work leading up to 5PM, and hey, you might also miss the rush of everyone else leaving work!

Increase the amount of work you have to do in a work session. If you have time to browse the internet, perhaps there isn't enough to fill your time and fully occupy your mind. If you feel enough of a push that you NEED to keep working and stay focused, you will.

Set a forfeit/bet with yourself not to go on the internet. For example, promise to give away a 10 dollar note if you go on your browser outside of the scheduled times.

Consider helping your overall ability to focus by practicing "technology fasts."

Take a break once a week from all forms of electronics – turn off the cell phone and don't turn on your laptop. This clean break from technology will give your mind the break it desperately wants and needs and makes returning to work and focusing cleanly that much easier. If you can't manage a whole day, try half a day. At the very least, make it an evening. Long-term, consider a technology fast for a weekend every month and a week every year. Start with an evening and notice how much more peaceful your mind feels. This will feed your ability to focus immensely.

If this technology fast sounds ridiculous or impossible, it is probably even more important for you to give it a go, as you may have become addicted to being constantly “connected.”

External Stimulus – The World Around Us

If you aren't already aware, the world around you has a powerful effect on how, and what, you think and feel. Do your best to block the negative, distracting, and unhelpful out so that you can always maintain your ability to focus.

People selling to you in the street, a crowded and chaotic airport, a shopping mall with videos playing – whenever possible, try to block these out.

Headphones, ear-plugs, or avoiding specific locations can all help with these situations.

Consider that when watching TV, you are not only (often) deadening your mind with the content of the show, you are also bombarding it with commercials designed to steal your focus so that you spend money.

All of these things have an impact on you. Endeavor to create a wall to only allow in what you want and what benefits you. If we are exposed to an idea long enough, we will come to believe that it is true. Therefore, choose not only to control inputs so that only positive mental-programs initiate, but also so that only positive and truthful memes/ideas are strengthened.

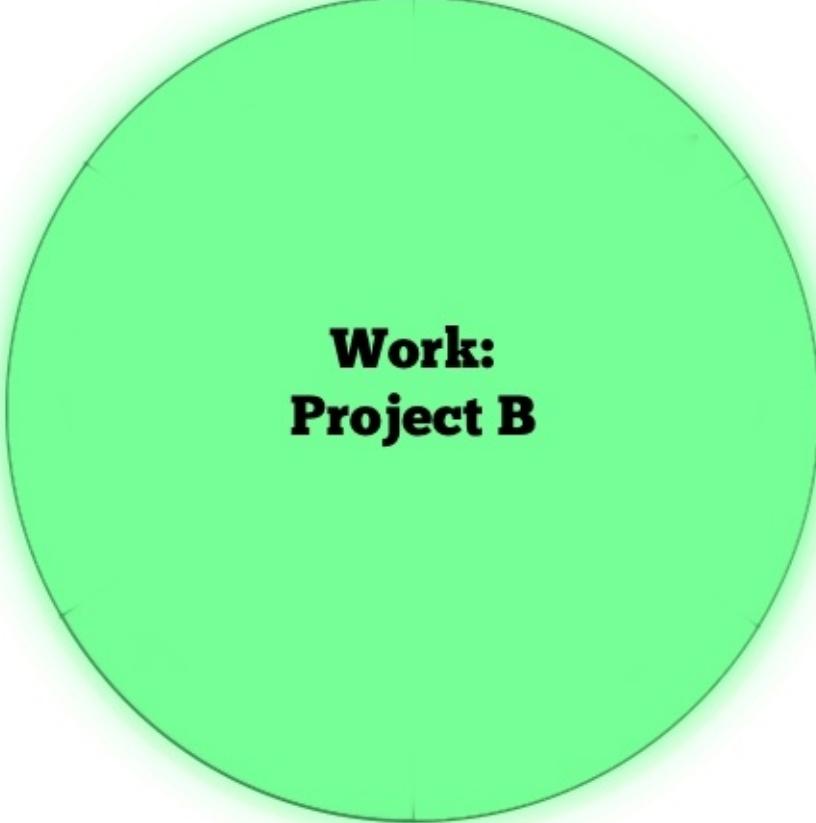
Internal Stimulus Introduction

There are a variety of techniques that can help you minimize the internal triggers that distract you and compromise your focus. By internal stimulus, I mean those thoughts, ideas, and mental processes that steal headspace and/or influence you to do something else. This is a continuation of the push to create headspace where everything is quiet, except for what you want to work on.

Again, you do not want a headspace like this:



You want this:



**Work:
Project B**

Internal Stimulus – Meditation as an Exercise in Focus

Meditation is the practice of focusing on one thing at the exclusion of everything else. This is practicing focus in its purest sense. Many people swear by meditation as the best way to stay calm and focused throughout their lives. Whether you have meditated before or not, I recommend putting aside at least 20 minutes every day to meditate and build up your ability to focus.

Below is a short guide that you can put into action right away. I am not a meditation expert, so certainly feel free to research this more; however, the following will be enough to get you started.

A quick guide to meditation

Sit cross legged on a cushion or something similar so that you are comfortable.

Keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed.

Close your eyes and pace your breath so that you repeatedly inhale for three seconds and exhale for three seconds.

Repeat a word silently in your mind each time you inhale or exhale. This is your “mantra” and can be any word you want. Try to make it a word that you don’t have any attachment to, but has positive connotations. Examples people use include: “hush,” “peace,” and “ohm.”

Try to empty your head of thoughts. Each time something comes to your mind, request that it leaves. Don’t force it and be patient. Don’t worry if things just keep coming up and the whole 20 minutes is spent with your mind racing.

Let your body relax and concentrate on different areas of your body, letting them willfully relax.

Use a timer (one that is set to a very quiet setting) and sit quietly for 20 minutes.

The above is a bare-bones meditation practice that will get you in the door, so to speak.

Meditating 20 minutes every day is a new habit you need to instill if you are serious about improving your focus.

Think of it like a little gym session for your focus. Similar to exercise and many other habits, you will only feel the full benefits of meditating gradually and over

time. If you only meditate three times a month, you won't make much progress. Similar to going to the gym only three times a month – you'd get a small boost at the time, but the long-term and noticeable results won't be there.

The more things you have to do and the more mental stresses you are taking on, the more important meditation is. It is a workout your focus needs; if you want to improve your focus, you need to start meditating at least 20 minutes every day.

Worry – Another Enemy of Focus

If your emotional state is regularly filled with worries, these will act as internal stimulus' that distract you from being able to focus. Below are some essential principles for tackling worry.

Accept what is out of your control and work to improve what you can control.

Remind yourself of the above two facts. Make sure you are taking action on what you can impact and working to accept what you can't impact.

Think about and concentrate on what is good in life and feel gratitude. There are always positives: you can read, you aren't in prison, you have time and opportunity to read books – there are three straight away.

Re-frame adversity and bad luck as opportunities to learn and improve.

Being aware of these concepts will help bring more awareness to your mental state, lessen worry, and free up some mental energy to focus.

Free up Headspace – Write Everything Down

Even if you take my advice and carefully only engage fully with things consciously, you will still find ideas springing up in your mind that you cannot ignore. To create the clear headspace that facilitates focus, you need to vent all of the important things that come to mind. It is important to be able to get these things out of your head. At present, they are nagging away at your mind and disrupting your focus. By getting them on paper, you will free yourself of the distraction. Having a piece of paper close or an “ideas” section in your note-taking software is essential for this process.

Of course, if it makes sense to add the idea right away to a specific list, put it there. For example, if you remember that you have to return some library books tomorrow, write it on your calendar and/or tomorrow’s plan immediately.

To prevent getting distracted with bigger ideas, life plans, projects, etc., schedule regular journaling and work through all of your ideas. It is better to fully engage with idea generation and assessment at a specific time rather than having it drip feed into your mind whilst doing something else. Give ideas the opportunity to come through and the space they need, and you will prevent them from interrupting you at other times and compromising your focus.

If, whilst working, you feel that you have to get writing on something because it is pressing on your mind, fine – work there and then. But consider that perhaps you need to schedule journaling periods more regularly (though it isn’t always possible to predict when an idea will strike!).

Flow – You Mind as a Cruise-Liner

Getting into that flow-state where time goes by without you noticing, where you feel in-tune and connected with the work that you are doing, requires slow and deliberate changes in focus. Making consistent, focused progress on one project is how your mind loves to operate.

Just like a cruise-liner, it takes time for your mind to get up to speed and work effectively with flow-like focus.

Yes, your mind can dance around with a variety of tasks and you can complete lots of things rapidly, but to get into that flow-state where you are immersed in something and doing your best work with focus – takes time to build up.

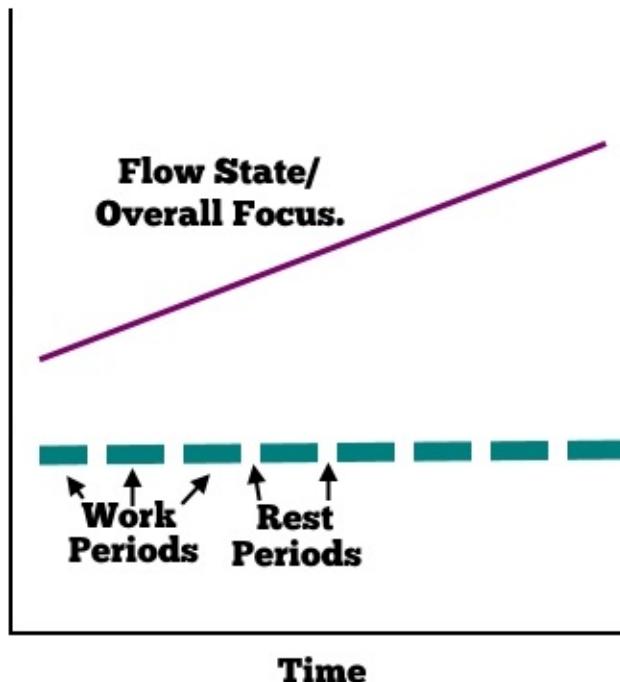
Because it takes time to get up to speed, it helps to schedule that into how you work. Realize that time will be needed for you to get moving on a big project and enter flow. Depending on what you are doing, it might take a few hours to feel like you are buzzing with productivity and a sense of flow. Therefore, it is important to try to schedule longer periods of time for working on a project (with small breaks peppered in).

Once you are moving, it is even more desirable to ignore and block obstructions until you have completed the defined, tangible objectives you have set. It took time and energy to get your mind up to speed, so make the most of it and remain in that flow-state.

Flow – Taking Breaks to Build Flow

Cycling in small breaks will allow your flow state to build throughout the day. If these breaks involve mental-programs like checking email, you will compromise your focus. They need to be restorative, non-mental acts that service another side of yourself – drinking water and doing stretches lets your mind rest perfectly, for example. Try to boost your physical state with rests so that you can better focus.

The visual below helps to present the idea that peppered, regular breaks actually help to build focus.



Flow – Being Challenged

To get into flow, you also need to facilitate a balance of being pushed whilst still being able to complete what you are working on. If something is too easy for you and you don't even have to try, you aren't really working and can't get into flow. If there is no chance of winning, at some point you will feel overwhelmed and unable to continue. Again, there needs to be a challenge, but one that you can complete.

Finding this sweet spot is not always easy; experiment with your work/job/career/passion to get to the point of being challenged. Consider, after each session or day of work, spending five minutes thinking on how it was as a challenge. If it felt a little too easy, think of a way to make it a bit more challenging the next day. If it was too difficult, give yourself a lighter workload for tomorrow.

Typically, people underestimate the level of challenge they need in order to reach the flow-state and experience high focus.

Being challenged also ties into having clarity in your purpose and goals. Just as you can't gain focus from working on something fuzzy, you can't be challenged by something fuzzy. You need to be challenged to get into flow-state, so you need to make sure that what you are working on has a clear and precise outcome. There is more on "clarity" in later chapters.

Flow – Repetition and Re-Capturing Flow

Regular, habitual work to get into focused flow-like work will strengthen your ability like a muscle. Like exercising in the gym, there will be a gradual improvement over time and you will become better at fully engaging and becoming flow-like in your work. If you habitually work on something and enter into a flow-like state, the next time it will also be a little easier and a little faster to capture it.

For example, the regular practice of playing guitar from 8 to 9PM will mean your mind comes to automatically expect to play guitar at that time. The cruise-liner will get moving a little faster because it is ready to go at that time of day.

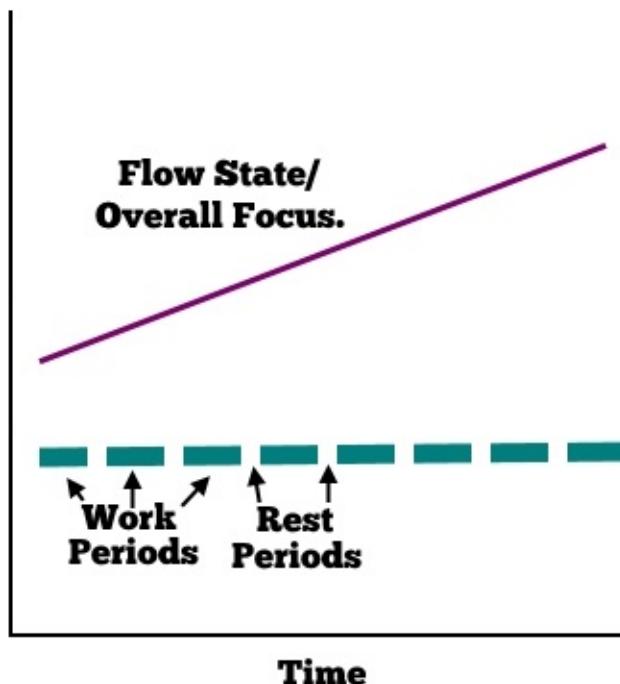
This is a valuable, but often under sung benefit to instilling habits and the mantra of “little and often.” By doing something regularly, you can better return your mind to the speed that it was at before – to the focus and flow-like state it enjoyed previously. Utilize this by making your project and flow-work a regular event.

Work/Rest Cycles – Full Engagement

Divisions between what you are doing and working on one thing at a time is necessary to give the deserved full focus to what is important. If you can't work on more than one thing at the same time, it follows that you are going to work in a linear manner and complete things one after the other. Scheduling and appropriately managing your time will provide the training wheels that allow you to focus, concentrate, and fully engage with the one thing you are doing in the moment.

If you create the right balance in your schedule, you will be able to draw focus from a sense that everything is being handled and that what you are doing is progressing well. This will create a wider sense of focus in your life that will feed down to focus in the moment.

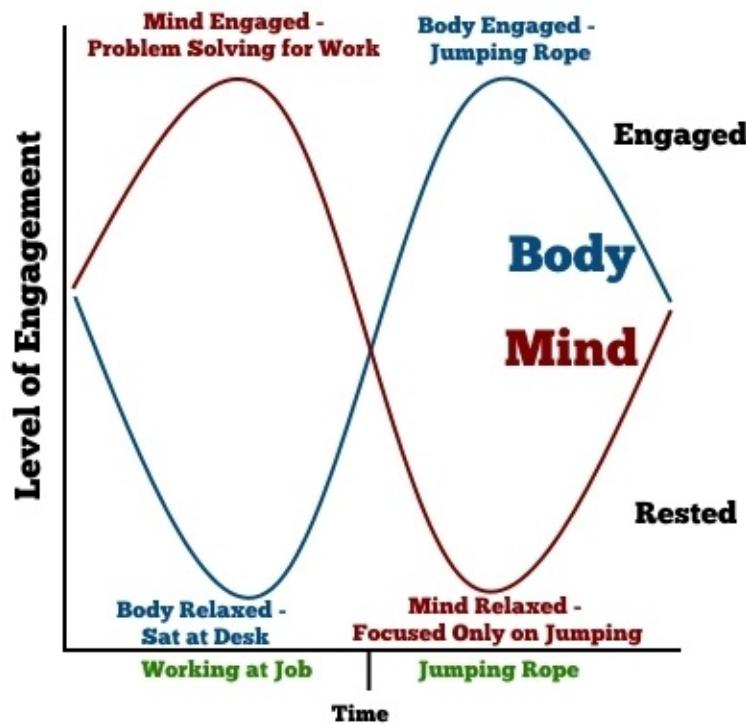
Another important aspect in building a work schedule is to align with an effective work/rest cycle. Here again is the visual that shows the growth of focus alongside a cycle of work and rest.



Work/Rest Cycles – Alternating to Bring Balance

To focus, you need to both respect your mind's need to take breaks, and when you do take a break, ensure that you disengage fully and, ideally, engage another part of your being.

The picture below shows how you can utilize cycles/waves of engagement with your body and mind respectively. If you can balance both so that you are always engaging one area whilst resting another, you will be managing your time/self in a very effective manner.



Just as muscles need to be rested and stressed alternately, so do other aspects of your being, i.e., the mind, social side, and spiritual self. Like a yin-yang effect, mental exertion and mental relaxation are necessary. Aligning them with exercise as shown in the diagram above is a highly effective way to build focus and get a lot done.

Boosting your physical well-being by itself is a fantastic way to build focus, as

you will enjoy many benefits (more blood flow, more oxygen in the blood, etc.). There are many great reasons to utilize a mental work/exercise alternating work-flow.

Restoring and Building Your Ability to Focus

There are various actions that will build your ability to focus by bringing balance to your life holistically. The following five are central to this:

Meditation – similar to going to sleep, this will create more mental space, more RAM to work with.

Exercise – get the blood pumping. 30 minutes CV every day is a great start.

Great food – eating well will keep your blood sugar stable and your mental faculties clearer. ‘Clean diet, clean mind’ is not a new idea, but is so important. Drink plenty of water, too.

Sex – we all want it, but try to make sure your sex life is thriving. It will help regulate your emotions and ability to focus.

Social life – again, keeping an even keel emotionally is essential, and having an excellent set of relationships/support network is a great way to facilitate this.

The above steps are nothing new; they constitute a balanced and healthy lifestyle that you are no-doubt familiar with. Realizing that they filter through into every area of life and will significantly boost your ability to focus, however, is important.

To help get the balance throughout your life that ensures your mental focus can thrive, it can help to try and do something every day that, at the very least, services these areas. Ideally, it will be something that brings the area to life.

Note that even if all of the above things are religiously performed, you will not be able to focus on a target you can’t see. Further, the power of leverage in “The Key” chapter will allow you to push through a great deal of resistance. Ideally, all these strategies will be in place and working in conjunction with one another to facilitate maximum focus.

Clarify – Definition and Clarity

In order to fully focus on your work, you also need to know what you are working toward, as well as what actions you need to perform to get there. Being able to clearly grasp what you are meant to be doing at each part of the journey on all your projects is a pre-requisite for focus in the moment. Ensuring that everything is measureable and quantifiable is the best way to remove the fuzziness and gain clarity in your work.

The more clearly you can grasp what you are meant to be doing, the better your focus will be. Ask yourself the following questions for all of your tasks/projects in order to ascertain if there is sufficient clarity:

Will it be obvious when the task has been completed?

Looking in from outside, could someone else easily say whether it has been completed or not?

How many minutes are you expecting to put into the task? How many hours into the project?

If you gave the goal and plan to someone else (who was as capable as you are in performing it), could they complete it?

If you can't answer the above questions with a solid "yes" or with clear timescales, you might want to consider bringing more clarity to your work. Think of it like this – if you can't see and hold what you are working on, you will not be able to focus on completing it. Poor focus in the wider sense (lack of clarity) will filter down to your focus in the moment.

Clarify – Start/Stop Definition

To focus well, it will help to set timescales whenever possible. Knowing when a task will start and stop will bring more clarity, thereby enabling your mind to focus a little better.

The time in between starting and stopping work takes on more meaning and allows your mind to grasp another detail of what you expect from it, and another detail brings clarity and facilitates focus.

Set a timer and work for set amount of time and give your goals deadlines for the week, month, year, etc.

Most people default to a series of unconnected to-do's, without order and lacking a timescale. Before beginning work, consider what you want to achieve and how long you expect it to take. Again, the more defined it is, the easier it will be to focus on and complete.

For example, if you are going to be working on your marketing business, decide when you will work on it, where you will do it, for how long you will work, and precisely what you want to achieve. Instead of “work on marketing business,” you might write, “cold call 4 people for marketing business between 3 and 4pm on Saturday at my desk in my office.” With this planned, you will be able to better focus and engage with your work when you get there. Otherwise, you will waste time and your focus planning and thinking of what to do at the time.

Planning in this way will also allow your conscious and subconscious minds to build up a bit of the mental momentum (again, think cruise-liner), as your mind expects to work at a certain time on a certain task.

Clarify– Lists

The natural progression from having clearly defined tasks is to write them down (remember, you need to free-up that mental RAM – don’t keep things in your head!). Working like this is a great way to give your mind the focus it needs. If you don’t currently use lists in every area of your life, begin to make the shift. Externalize what needs to be done and record it.

Crossing things off will also help build momentum and make you more inclined to take on the next task. After you have completed a few, you will feel as if the list has to be completed.

It is important that you make lists that can be completed AND cannot be added to. Known as “closed lists,” these will help you stay focused because you retain motivation by knowing that you can win, i.e., the list won’t grow indefinitely and is never too long.

You need to have the possibility of winning (completing the list), otherwise you won’t want to “play” and will be more inclined to give up. Creating a time-frame to complete the list is also necessary to tie into a wider sense of clarity and challenge.

Simplify – Declutter

Distraction can arise from having a cluttered, untidy environment. It only takes a little bit of stress to slowly nag at your mind. Your headspace will be a reflection of the surroundings you create for yourself. If your desk is a mess, your workspace is a mess, and your house is a mess, your overall balance and potential ability to focus will be diminished. The following are some quick tips to make things a little clearer.

Set a base-line for how everything should be, where everything ideally is placed. Write it down, or even take photos. With this page of how everything should be aligned, you can get everything “just right” when you do organize.

Spend 5, 10, or 15 minutes at the end of each day returning everything to its place.

If the above sounds like a little much, consider just setting a timed amount of time, say 5 minutes, tidying at the end of each day.

Schedule when you clean the kitchen, bathroom, and everything else as well. Everything being sharper and in its place will contribute to a feeling of focus.

These habits can be grafted onto the betting/forfeit system explained in the final “The Key” chapter to help make sure you take action.

Simplify – Declutter Your Technology / Paperwork

Another example of clutter is mail. Most people receive email and physical mail that they don't want, don't need, and have no intention of reading. Not only does this build up so that you can't find what is important, but also, each message saps a tiny bit of mental focus when you glance over it. Further, you just feel like an unfocused, disorganized person. Therefore, make it a priority to unsubscribe to mail and email: don't let anything into your house that you don't want to see or read!

If your computer desktop is currently awash with random and unordered files and folders, it will also help to bring these into line. Similar to your physical world impacting your internal state, an unfocused set of files and folders onscreen will hamper focus.

Perform and schedule the same kinds of organizing periods as for your home, i.e., define what perfect looks like for your computer desktop, then schedule a time to return everything to that point.

Simplify – Batching Decision-Making

Making decisions takes focus. If your work requires you to make decisions (it probably will, at least to some extent), it is even more important to prioritize when and how you make decisions.

Steve Jobs famously had a uniform that he wore every day – jeans, white sneakers, and a black turtle neck. The sheer number of decisions needed to lead one of the biggest companies in the world meant that the daily decision of what to wear got thrown out the window.

Take a leaf out of Steve Jobs' book and automate decisions, and/or batch decision-making so that you make them all at once, ideally when you have the focus to do it well.

Exerting your mental focus on decisions first thing in the morning, e.g., what to wear, what to have for breakfast, what to have for lunch, etc., can be a needless sink of focus. Instead, consider planning your meals and what you wear in order to batch these decision-making processes together. Do the same where possible in your work.

Simplify – Batching Preparation of Your Work Zone

Align everything in your work area so that nothing will distract you once you begin work, and batch any other actions that you might act on once you begin work. If you listen to music whilst you work, consider ensuring you have a playlist that is long enough to cover your work session. Even the small decision of what music you want to listen to next is a decision that will compromise your focus.

Also, ensure you have everything you need to work before you begin to preempt the possibility of getting distracted by having to get something. Just take a moment to consider everything – pens, paper, ink, and water beside your desk will all come in handy. With everything in place and batched in one phase of preparation, there is now no reason for you to get distracted, lose focus, and/or, heaven forbid, stop work altogether!

Simplify – Batching Similar Tasks

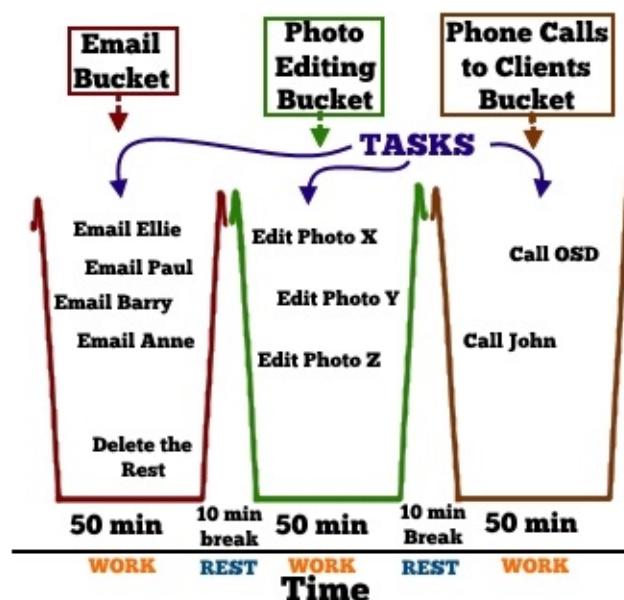
Another enemy of clean focus is multitasking (beginning and putting down multiple tasks).

However, there will always be small tasks that need doing. Imagine that you have been working with excellent focus for two days on an important project at work, but now there is a build of little jobs that need to be done. To preserve your focus both on the big projects and the smaller ones, the answer is “batching,” or completing them altogether. Make your phone calls one after the other, buy your stationary altogether, do your research all at once, etc.

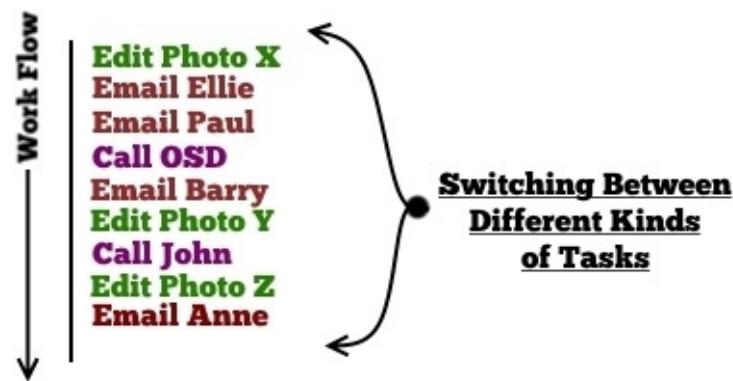
Working like this means you won’t become distracted whilst working on the big project, and the smaller tasks will be completed more quickly and more effectively because you develop focus specifically for them, i.e., you enter “phone mode,” and after a couple of calls you get into the flow of calling.

In order to preserve and grow your ability to focus, schedule these batched tasks and do them altogether. Email is the best example of this, but there are many more.

The diagram below shows three different kinds of tasks that can be corralled into their own “buckets” and then actioned altogether. At the bottom of the diagram is a time-scale for taking action on the batched tasks.



Many people work on things haphazardly or as they come up; this is much less supportive of your focus. The visual below shows how poorly thought-out working leads us to alternate between different kinds of task needlessly.



Simplify – Email

Many people struggle to manage the role of email in their work flow. Checking it often, randomly, or having it alert you immediately will compromise your focus. Instead, specify when you are going to look at and reply to email; schedule to perform this at wide time intervals.

Another way you can simplify how you work with email is to use auto-responders. There are various templates online, but something simple like the following will work well:

Hello,

Thank you for your email. I am currently only checking email at midday and 4pm. If it is essential to contact me, please call me.

Thanks for your understanding,

Paul

This will allow the important messages to get through and everything else to wait until YOU are ready to deal with them.

Simplify – Hiring Others

If you are currently performing acts that are not ideally suited for you, you will focus more effectively by hiring people to do them.

A great example is, again, email. If you currently spend an hour every day answering email, hire a personal assistant to do this for you, and you will make your day a little simpler so that you can focus on what you are good at.

Leverage – THE KEY

In an emergency when you have to start making decisions, your mind works without you having to try to focus; there is no urge to check Facebook or worry about your finances. In an emergency, you are motivated to focus, concentrate, and engage – there are consequences if you don't act, and your mind knows it!

To create intense focus, concentration, and engagement on projects outside of what is urgent (like an emergency) is more difficult. Nothing will immediately go wrong if, instead of working on your job, you spend five minutes browsing the internet, so the question is: why *wouldn't* you browse the internet?

The following is a quick and abridged strategy for time-management and gaining leverage over yourself. For some, it enables them to set-out a plan and follow it rigorously. This is a specific approach to time-management that plays on our fear of loss of money.

For many, the fear of the “stick” works better at motivating them to complete an action than the draw of the “carrot”, e.g., the fear of loss is more motivating than the draw of success. And so, write the following forfeit down and commit to completing it: “I will burn a 10 dollar bill if I don’t...” Fill in any task that you have been putting off. The fear of losing money, or indeed burning it in your own hands, is something that will prove very motivating. A popular alternative to this is pledging to give the money to a cause that you hate, e.g., pledging money to a political party you disagree with.

Make sure that you do burn the money if you don't complete the task (or give the money to a cause you hate if that is the method you want to use), otherwise you will lose trust in this leverage system. Consider deliberately losing the first task and making yourself burn the money to prove that you will. When you do, notice how annoying it feels – you won't want to lose again!

To execute a great day that utilizes all the advice in this book, create multiple bets for everything that you want to complete or batch tasks under one bet. This will force you to work and keep that focus intact.

Use this method to put into place an overall schedule/system that facilitates maximum focus on what is most important to you.

A series of bets based on creating this schedule might end up looking like this (remember, write each out and always follow through with burning money if you fail).

“I will burn 10 dollars tomorrow (date) if I don’t get up right away at...”

“I will burn 10 dollars tomorrow (date) if I don’t work for 10 hours (10 x 50 min work periods with 10 minute breaks) on project A.”

“I will burn 10 dollars tomorrow (date) if I don’t complete all of these tasks...
(1. Go to the gym 2. Read for an hour 3. Meditate 4. Only check email at 5PM)”

The above system works well for many, as it addresses each area of their life (and allows people who don’t usually get up super-early to do so).

Consider including things that you can perform in the 10 minute breaks whilst working on the bigger tasks. These might be walking around the block, juggling, meditating, etc. Tick them off as you work through the list to build momentum.

Sign your name after the bet and write them up on paper the night before.

Starting each day anew in this way will allow you to hit the ground running when you wake up and not begin to enter into those activities that aren’t conducive to focus, concentration, and engagement.

If you fail to complete something and have to burn the money, consider upping the amount next time, i.e., 10 dollars becomes 20 dollars the next time.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

(BONUS) BOOK 14: HOW TO GIVE AN AMAZING PRESENTATION

Introduction

I will use the word “presentations” predominantly in this book. But there are various synonyms such as “talk,” “lecture,” “speech,” or “public speaking” that correspond to nearly identical activities; you can apply all of the advice of this book to this list of other speaking engagements. Don’t feel constrained by terms – this book is about how to present ideas to people in any context.

Benefits of Becoming an Ace Presenter and Why Giving a Great Presentation Matters

You probably already appreciate the importance of giving a great presentation – you've purchased a book on it, after all! However, to motivate you even further and reveal all the benefits of becoming a great presenter, I have listed some reasons why being able to give an excellent presentation is so damn useful:

It's a high-demand (and potentially well-paying) skillset to develop. The best public speaking professionals can command six-figure paychecks for their speeches. Now, you're not about to enter that league simply by reading this book; but by becoming better at giving presentations, you will ultimately join a high-value niche of individuals. And even though six figures per speech is a distant dream at present, it isn't unreasonable to think that becoming great at presenting will push your career forward. Think promotions, pay-raises, better jobs, and opportunities—all from putting the advice of this little book into action.

Becoming an excellent presenter is transferable to other important areas and skillsets. Sales is the best example. Becoming adroit at giving presentations is very similar to the techniques and principles used for sales situations like cold-calling, business pitches, one-on-one selling, etc. All involve presenting yourself and your ideas. Therefore, applying the advice of this book will develop skills that can apply to other roles (roles that are also high-value and potentially money-making). Sales, management, marketing, customer service – these all share many characteristics with presenting and will be improved by implementing the advice in this book. Does hitting two birds with one stone sound good? Hitting half a dozen is even better.

Giving presentations can become a vehicle for other goals. Imagine a work environment where someone in your team has to pitch a presentation about a new product the company is developing. If you believe in this product and see its future value, you might volunteer yourself to give that presentation – not so much because you love presentations (though what's not to love!?), but because you know it's a great route to becoming deeply familiar with a product you believe in. Preparing and giving a presentation is always a fantastic way to revise, memorize, and understand a topic.

Relax. Breathe. And Try to Take the Pressure Off

One of the reasons you are reading this book is – no doubt – because you fear the worst.

Imagine the scene: it's crunch time, and you're standing in front of your peers who are watching you with beady, expectant eyes. For whatever reason, it isn't happening as well as you'd like it to, and you know the presentation isn't going right. And now slight nerves are creeping in, which in turn twist in your stomach, and spread out into waves of panic throughout your body. You can't think clearly and can't remember what to say next. Sweat forms on your brow, and into your mind creep desperate hopes of a sudden emergency that forces everyone out of the room, offering an end to this torture.

I'm not going to lie; this happens. But this needn't happen to you, and don't worry—that is the last time we will run through that nightmare scenario.

However, there is an important lesson to glean from the above scenario:

Don't let emotions or stress overload you at any point.

Below are three great reasons why being aware of emotional stress and managing it are so important to giving a great presentation.

Stress and/or any negative emotional overwhelm can spiral quickly. From a small sense of things being too difficult, if you don't manage it, you can soon feel MUCH worse.

A calm, relaxed emotional state leads to a calm and relaxed delivery. This will mean that your audience will understand you better, and they will be more likely to get onboard with your ideas and to take the action you want them to take.

If you look nervous, people are less likely to take you and your presentation seriously.

So, how can you reel in the pressures, and feel relaxed and confident, no matter how important the presentation, or how inexperienced you are?

Breathe. This is a big one. Before you begin your presentation, take controlled, deep breaths – count 3 seconds in, then 3 seconds out. Doing this for just a few minutes will help your mind and mood “settle.”

Throughout the presentation, make sure you take small pauses. This will help

your ideas “land” with your audience, but it also gives you a moment to become conscious of your breathing again. Similarly, if you feel overwhelmed at any point, take this as a sign to pause and breathe.

If you have more time to spare before your presentation, and/or if you have experience of it, meditate briefly. Just sitting for 10 minutes in a comfortable position whilst focusing on your breath – 3 seconds in, 3 seconds out – will make a meaningful difference.

Manage lifestyle aspects, especially closer to the time of the presentation. Being well-slept, getting a bit of exercise in, and having a healthy breakfast all contribute to emotional stability and your ability to manage stress.

Though it is helpful to be relaxed and aware of your breathing, don’t let this be to the detriment of a focused and upbeat energy in the presentation itself.

Find The Venue Beforehand and Turn it into Your Living Room

Visiting the venue before the time of the presentation is helpful. The main reason for this is obvious:

It will ensure that you give the presentation on time.

If you want to give the best presentation, a late arrival is simply unacceptable. Being late may mean that you have less time to prepare yourself and your resources, or even that you eat into your own presentation time. The worst-case scenario is that you don't find the venue at all and miss your own presentation! Don't take that chance; make sure you know exactly how to get to the venue, and how long it takes to get there.

It is also helpful to familiarize yourself with the room/hall/lecture theatre in which you will be giving the presentation. Doing so has a variety of benefits:

You can get to know the resources you will be using. For example, if you are connecting your laptop to a projector, you can ensure you know exactly how to work it. This will save stress and ensure that any "technical difficulties" aren't caused by you, and can be dealt with in a calm manner.

Other oddities of the venue can also be taken into account. Maybe the lights aren't all working, or the chairs are very uncomfortable – you don't know until you check the environment yourself.

If you are using handouts or any kind of audience participation activities, you can troubleshoot and prepare for any contingencies ahead of time.

You will generally feel more at ease and less worried when you do give the presentation. Indeed, the more familiar you are with the venue, the better the presentation you will give. Make it feel like your living room, and imagine everyone as guests in it. This will help you to give a more relaxed, focused talk, focused 100% on the delivery.

Consider taking this "make it feel like your living room" advice to the limit. No, don't put cushions down on the floor and bring your cat! But do spend time there in the hours or days previous to the talk. Ideally, you should practice giving your presentation there to really build your comfort.

When you practice at home, or even daydream about your presentation, you can visualize yourself in the exact environment. This will bring extra life to your

visualizations and practice sessions, again resulting in improved focus and relaxation when you give the final talk.

Being aware of exits and entrances is also handy. You want to know where you will be entering and leaving the venue, as well as being aware of where latecomers to your talk might appear from.

The above is an exhaustive approach to familiarizing yourself with a venue. However, at a minimum:

Visit the venue beforehand to ensure that you won't be late on the day.

Spend one minute looking around, so there at least aren't any odd aspects that will surprise you, *e.g.*, a broken projector, not enough chairs, etc.

Get Excited About Your Content

Steve Jobs was great at giving presentations. When he brought out a new product, the talk he gave to introduce it to the world was always engaging, captivating, and exciting. There are a few reasons why his presentations were so damn good, but perhaps the biggest is that he was really, really excited about what he was presenting. When he cared, you cared. Try to create a similar energy with your presentation, and you will begin to tap into the magic that Steve Jobs brought to the stage.

It is a phenomenon that we are all aware of: when someone in front of us feels a strong emotion, it gets transferred to us. We are emotional “permeable membranes” that absorb the emotional energy around us. And so, if you want your audience to be excited about what you are talking about, first YOU have to be excited about what you are talking about.

If you aren't already, the question then becomes, how do I get excited about my presentation? Below are some ideas on how to do this:

Put the question “Why is my content exciting?” at the center of a blank page, and then write all the answers that come to mind. Don't edit yourself. Keep going until you fill the page – the initial ideas often won't be the best. Consider doing the same with other questions that might help more, e.g., “What is awesome about this content?” “How will this benefit the audience?” “What value am I bringing to the audience?”

Tap into other reasons why you want to give a great presentation. Perhaps you don't care about the material, but you are excited about the promotion that may come your way if you do well. Therefore, channel the excitement that you have for the promotion – when you're talking about the content, imagine the money, prestige, and whatever else comes with the potential promotion. You'll be excited to give the talk, but for slightly different reasons. This isn't ideal, but it's a good workaround.

Ask yourself, “Should I be giving this presentation?” If you really can't get enthusiastic about presenting, and can find nothing exciting about the content, maybe you need a different job or a different course to study. Or maybe you need to find someone else to give the talk for the good of the class/company.

It is also important to consider how you express your excitement. You don't

want to be bouncing around the stage, and you don't want your energy to feel fake. A calm but definite passion for your message is what you are going for. Watch videos on YouTube to get a sense of the energy of presenters like Steve Jobs.

Both when preparing and practicing your presentation, remind yourself regularly of why the content excites you. It will help renew your enthusiasm and motivate you to put the work in to make it something special. Also, take a few moments – if not directly before the presentation, certainly in the morning – to review the reasons why your presentation is exciting to you. This will ensure that your excitement is fresh and ready to reach your audience.

Model Other Presenters

The best way to learn what great presenting looks like is to study the best. If you want to get really great at presenting, and have the inclination, you can skyrocket your skillset by joining a group such as Toastmasters and surrounding yourself with people who are passionate about public speaking.

A step-down from this approach is simply to attend live events and watch people present. Don't limit yourself to formal "learning presentations" – include comedians, musicians (if they have great stage presence), and any other occasion where you see someone really own a stage and put on a show. If your interest level is lukewarm, and you are simply looking to "hack" or touch up your presenting skills in a few days, utilizing YouTube is the next best way to model what a great presentation should be (and, of course, it affords you the luxury of attending a presentation in your pajamas).

Modelling presenters will help you immensely because you can really see what "good" looks like. Consequently, concepts in this book will hit home and integrate more fully into your understanding of public speaking. It is a powerful experience to be in the audience at a great presentation, and it gives you a sense of how you personally respond to a great presenter. As you experience the effects of good presenting (consider watching bad presenters, too, in order to contrast your experiences), the experience will also better integrate your understanding of how to present well.

Below are some ideas to help you get the most out of your efforts to model great presenters:

Don't be a crude like-for-like imitation of a presenter that you admire. Inauthentic, overly try-hard, or otherwise weird presenting will put off your audience. Perhaps try and find a presenter you admire who has a similar social style to you, *e.g.*, you're both a little timid but have great physical presence. Then, work to dovetail what they do well into your current presenting skills.

Currently, TED talks are perhaps the gold standard for what a great presentation should be, so make sure to watch some of those – as there are so damn many of them on YouTube now, you'll definitely find one that piques your interest. However, you should also branch out and watch Steve Jobs, Anthony Robbins, etc. Search for "Toastmasters" and "Toastmasters champion" to find

presentations that are among the highest regarded in the speech-making community.

When watching a presentation, be aware of the audience as well as your own reaction. How are the people around you/in the video reacting? Why do you think they are reacting in this way?

Take notes as you watch the speech. Answer questions like: “What kind of eye contact does the presenter make?” “What is the pacing of their speech, and the pacing of the overall presentation?” “Are they telling stories?” “What do I like about this presenter?” “How does the presenter/this presentation make me feel?”

Tell a Story

We humans love stories. We can't get enough of them: books, films, plays, TV – they're everywhere in society, and are fundamental to the human condition.

Telling a story in your presentation is a great idea. More specifically, including a story will provide one or more of the following:

It creates a bond between yourself and the audience, especially if you are the protagonist in the story. With this bond comes trust, and with trust, the audience will listen and be more motivated to believe in what you have to say.

It draws in the audience and makes them pay attention. No more bored expressions, or people sneakily checking their phones. Get people excited and engaged with the story and your presentation as a whole by enticing them with the promise of “what happens next.”

Emotional spikes are easier to elicit from the audience. Just telling the audience that product X will change people's lives doesn't do anything for them emotionally. Telling them that product X helped your kid sister to do something she loves and brought her to tears when she first used it – that kind of connection elicits an emotional response from listeners.

How to integrate a story into your presentation can be a tricky thing to master. Doing it well... that's probably going to take practice. It's rare that you have the perfect story to fit in; more likely, you'll have to get creative, make some connections, and alter a couple of details. But don't give up. Below are some ideas to consider when crafting your story:

Make it personal and relatable. Think: stories about when you were younger, stories with your family, stories with acts of kindness.

MAKE IT RELEVANT. I put that in uppercase, because you can't overestimate the value of relevance. A great story doesn't make it a great presentation. The story must be 100% in support of the presentation's core message.

To come up with a story that works and/or to refine it, use pencil and paper to work through many drafts and revisions. At the top of the page, write “What do I want this story to demonstrate?” This framework will help you to stay on point and make the story relevant.

Alter details if you have to, but don't lie big (especially if it might come back to

bite you!).

Remember what works in your favorite books and films, and include similar examples. No, that doesn't mean fill it with vampires! But it does mean take a moment to include elements of suspense, a problem that needs resolving, and characters that the audience cares about.

Body Language

Less than 10% of our communication is done with our words. Body language is therefore a huge part of interpersonal communication and a core element of a great presentation.

Great body language shows that you are relaxed, confident, assured, and composed. Don't underestimate how much people will judge you based on your physical comportment: how you hold yourself and move.

Below are the core elements for rock-solid body language and great physical presence onstage.

Be open with your arms and shoulders. Don't cross your arms. Don't put your hands in your pockets. It can, however, be OK to leave one hand in your pocket whilst you gesture with the other.

Stand up straight with relaxed shoulders. Definitely don't slouch forward. The best trick is to imagine a string going through your spine, out through the top of your head and directly up to the sky. Imagine that the string is taut and holding you perfectly vertical.

Use hand movements deliberately and regularly, but conservatively. Use gestures to express yourself, but don't try to overwhelm the content with excessive movements.

Imagine that you are talking to a group of friends about something you are confident and happy about. This relaxed, open, "happy" body language is what you want to transfer into your presentation.

Mute TED talks and other presenters on YouTube so that you can focus on how the presenters move and hold themselves. Follow the principles they follow, and imitate the odd gesture/technique if you can do it naturally.

Mute a video of yourself giving a talk and make notes on how you look. This may feel awkward, but it really is the only way to be fully conscious of how you hold yourself. Ask friends for feedback as well; if you're feeling brave, you can even post it on social media and ask for feedback there.

Ensure that you practice great posture and body language beforehand so that it is natural during your presentation. It is fine to take an occasional pause during a presentation to check your posture, but constantly being aware of your body is

distracting—it will make you feel and appear uncomfortable.

As well as your body language being important to a great presentation, your clothes and style are important, too. It is essential that you look your best. People judge style and appearance—accept it. If you aren't fashion conscious, ask a stylish friend for some advice.

Practice, Practice, Practice.

Probably the biggest secret to becoming a great presenter is to practice. This may sound obvious, but many overlook it. Some think, “How hard can it be to talk to a group of people? I talk to people all of the time, and I know the subject I’m presenting on in every detail!” Others think “I’m just not a public speaker, some people have ‘it,’ others don’t, and I simply don’t have ‘it’.”

However, few if any great public speakers are born that way, or are able to perform well just because they know the topic they are presenting on. *Everyone* needs to practice. And practice is what you have to do in order to be a great presenter, or even to give one good presentation.

Practicing your presenting skills is the only way to iron out all the gaps and weaknesses in the material you are going to present, and it is the only way to improve your presenting skillset generally.

Below are ideas on how to practice and how to get the most out of your practice sessions.

Feedback is essential. At first, record yourself and watch it again. Make changes and improvements based on the ideas you have learned in this book. Then, escalate to getting feedback from friends, family, and colleagues. Joining a local presenting group like Toastmasters is obviously an exceptional step to take if you can. Also, consider using online resources to upload videos of yourself. Use websites like Elance or Fiverr to find services that can give you feedback. These will vary in quality – you will have to pay more to get the best feedback.

Differentiate between sessions practicing the specific presentation you are working on, and practicing your presenting skillset more generally. In between giving presentations in your work/classes, try to work on your skillset so that you are sharp when it comes to future presentations. You can then work on making that specific presentation great, whilst already having good body language, eye contact, etc.

Find the time to practice your skillset can be difficult, so think of other “indirect” routes to improving your skills. For example, play guitar at open mic nights to practice being in front of a crowd, get a few shifts doing cold call sales to practice selling, or maybe become a tour guide at your local museum so that you can practice talking to small groups.

Create a strategy/process that integrates feedback and allows you to refine the presentation you are working on. This is especially helpful if you will be giving presentations on a regular basis. Your process might look like the following:

Plan my speech and what I am going to talk about

Draft my speech as best I can

Practice my speech in front of the mirror

Record myself on my smartphone, making corrections to the speech and how I present

Perform in front of friends and family to make sure I am confident

If Anything Goes Wrong, Don't Panic

If something goes wrong during your speech, don't panic. This is far from the endpoint, and it can even be spun to your advantage. The characteristic of vulnerability is deeply endearing. If in the overwhelming moment of trying to give an amazing presentation, you skip through ideas in the wrong order, or perhaps the technology you are using breaks down, just relax into the situation. Sure, be a little annoyed but don't get overwhelmed, also laugh if it makes sense to.

Even if it seems a little too optimistic, try to see a mistake as a positive, and just move on. Consider the following potential “re-frames” to make this shift in mindset:

It's interesting – an event to grab the audience's attention. Something going wrong might bring people back into being engaged with your message.

You show yourself to be fallible, vulnerable, and a little more likable—and being likable is half the game. If you're likeable, the audience is going to want to take your ideas on board.

The audience is perhaps entertained, so again, they are a little more engaged mentally. If you've laughed about it or made a joke, it might be still more entertaining. That doesn't mean that you should turn it into a circus act, but if it seems natural don't be afraid to laugh a little.

That's not to say that you want to self-sabotage aspects of your presentation just to make them more interesting, vulnerable, and entertaining. But if something does go a little (or a lot) wrong, there is an opportunity there to in fact make your presentation even better – it all depends on how you react.

This leads to another important idea: the audience wants you to do well. They want to be entertained, educated, and swept away into an interesting story. Depending on the situation, they may even be really rooting for you (for example, if everyone knows you are doing your first presentation, they're going to want you to do well). So don't think of the audience as an enemy that has to be fought and overcome. Just give them every reason to like you, like what you have to say, and really “get” the message you are trying to convey.

You should also consider the importance of humor in your presentation. Of course, you should be aware of the tone and what is expected from you, but you

can let yourself have fun and share a joke if it makes sense. You could even consider making a joke about your lack of experience in giving presentations. Say something like, “Hi, I’m new to this presentation game, and I’ve been up all night watching Steve Jobs on YouTube in preparation.”

Lightening the mood can be the best way to get over being nervous, because you no longer have to fight the nervousness internally. It can be incredibly stressful to try and appear perfect at something when you aren’t. By calling yourself out a little, you’ll feel more relaxed.

Using Slides, Images and PowerPoint

PowerPoint is a great idea for many presentations, but many presenters rely too heavily on technology and try to hide behind it. So, to help you avoid bad habits, I'm first going to warn you of how NOT to use PowerPoint.

Firstly, slides should be used to aid what YOU are saying; you should not be trying to aid or explain what is on the slide. Having one, short, punchy phrase (think Twitter kind of length) or one simple diagram is the ideal quantity of information for a slide.

Also, you do not need a slide for each idea. Instead, have a new slide for each change in section, or for every few minutes when you move on to a new topic. When it comes to how many slides you use, less is more. Ask yourself whether it is necessary to have each slide in the presentation. Does the slide add anything substantial? Or would your presentation be much the same without it? Another danger of excessive slides is that they distract from you and what you are saying. The presentation is about your content and your idea pitch, not the content of the slides.

Having first warned of the perils of using slides, let's now look at the advantages.

Images and videos can be a great way to build an emotional connection with the audience. For example, you can talk about the need to recycle, but showing pictures of environmental damage is going to be more effective (although you may want to add a story for extra impact). “A picture speaks a thousand words.” It’s a famous phrase, and it’s very true. You can say more through images, so it will often make sense to integrate them into your presentation. Also, using slides can help bring structure to your presentation. Using a new slide when you begin each new section will help you to pause, and it will also help clarify for the audience that you have moved on to something new.

Below are some ideas on how to make the most of a presentation using PowerPoint and similar software.

Be aware of the power of social media – choose and create lines that you think are perfect to be tweeted and put them on your slides. Make them 140 characters or less, and, if appropriate, make it easy for others to tweet and share your messages. You can also tweet them yourself and encourage others to retweet

them if they can.

Use simple, natural, and clean themes in your slides. Never let the style, colors, or themes distract from the message.

Be aware of branding colors of the institution or business you are presenting at. Integrate these into borders, or text colors. Small details like this will show your attention to detail.

Don't let the software dictate how you create a presentation. For instance, PowerPoint encourages the use of bullet points. Only use bullet points if you feel that they are the best fit for what you are doing.

To facilitate some suspense and a more “physical” presentation, it can be beneficial to draw the diagrams yourself on a whiteboard or something similar. This can bring a “slow-reveal” to what you are presenting, as you fill in parts of the diagram/chart/picture, explaining each aspect as you do. Drawing something yourself will also help to bring a warmer, more organic, and inclusive feeling, as opposed to clicking through slides mechanically.

Deliver a “Call to Action”

To make your presentation more effective, it is often helpful to use a “call to action” at the end. This concept is often used in sales or copywriting. Typically, it is the final push at the end of a sales pitch to get the prospect to buy an item. Of course, not all presentations are sales-based—the final call to action in your presentation might take a variety of forms and serve a variety of functions. A call to action is important because it helps ensure that people take action on your message. For example, if you want people to recycle more, buy your product, or tell their friends about a political message, you need to ask them to do so. That “ask” is your call to action.

The call to action might look different if the goal of the presentation is less action-based. For example, if it is an informative presentation only, you might still use a call to action to make your presentation more memorable, meaningful, and informative. For example, if you want to inform people about the future of artificial intelligence, this sounds like a purely informative presentation with no room for a call to action. But you might consider saying something like, “Next time you use X device, imagine if it learned each time you used it and reacted differently over time.” This call to action would help the audience leave with a memorable “take-away.”

A call to action has to be a firm command, and it always contain a verb. Below are some examples to consider.

Next time you do X, why not do Y?

Buy this now to get Y benefit.

Talk to your friends about the benefits of Z.

Think about how Z might be important.

Check out website A for more details on how to do B.

Take action today if you want to take advantage of this offer.

For sales presentations, it will also help to include a sense of urgency. For example,

For a limited time only...

Take action before this deal ends tomorrow.

Buy now before the price goes up.

The call to action will be on the scale somewhere between “essential” and “possibly helpful,” depending on the nature of the presentation and your goals. If it is a sales or persuasive presentation, the call to action will be essential. If it is informative, it will be less important.

Have a Clear Focus / Message

It is essential to have a very clearly defined focus for your presentation. This is the central message, the key take-away that you want each audience member to 100% internalize when they leave the room. It is important both that you discover what your focus is, and that you articulate it well for the audience.

A clear focus to your presentation is important because:

It ensures excellent communication with the audience. If what you are talking about seems grey and feels intellectually loose/unclear around the edges, it will be harder to explain it and thus harder for others to understand it.

When you create and communicate that clear focus, you can develop more complex ideas by working outward from that core. Only through clear expression of something definite can you build upward into more complicated ideas. Like building a house, only strong, well-defined bricks can be built upon. Ensure that the ideas that follow have a clear focus, themselves.

It will be a lot easier for you to both create the presentation and to give it. There will be a lot less “What should I talk about next?” and “Is this really what I want to say now?” because the whole presentation will have a clear focus from which all the related information will organically proceed.

To determine the focus of your presentation, you will need to refine your ideas into shorter summary sentences. Start by simply getting all of your ideas down on paper. Then, cut down your sentences and continually re-word phrases into more concise and accurate expressions. Ideally, you should be able to get it down to a sentence. The 140 characters that Twitter allows makes a very specific limit, and if you manage to get your focus to the length of a tweet, you can also then spread your message on social media to promote your presentation.

To clearly articulate the focus of your presentation, it is easiest to say it right off the bat and/or have it projected behind you. Consider returning to this core message throughout your presentation as well as leaving it onscreen at the end. Of course, including it on handouts, social media updates, posters, etc. will all help make your focus 100% clear. These steps help you communicate the focus perfectly; however, having a clear focus won’t always make the best presentation.

Some kind of “slow reveal” throughout your presentation can be a better way to

keep your audience's attention and pique their curiosity. Also, consider using pre-presentation marketing that perhaps focuses more on a sales-pitch message, *e.g.*, posters that focus on benefits of the presentation. That strategy will often be more effective to get people through the door than perhaps expressing explicitly the message of your presentation.

Through understanding the objective of your presentation, you can better decide how rigorously you want to communicate its core focus. It will, however, always be helpful to ascertain the focus for you to work on in the presentation, and to communicate it 100% at some point in your presentation—even if you only do so at the end.

Make Great Eye Contact

Making eye contact probably isn't a new idea to you. Good eye contact is advisable both when talking to new people and socializing at work. To a similar, and if anything, greater extent, making great eye contact is an important part of giving a great presentation.

Many studies have discovered that people who make higher levels of eye contact are considered to be:

Trustworthy and more honest. This translates to people believing what you have to say in your presentation.

Confident and powerful. If your audience sees that you believe in your message, they will be much more inclined to believe in it, as well.

Attractive and likeable. This one is obvious. If your audience likes you, they're going to like the presentation.

And so great eye contact really is essential to giving a great presentation. The above points should have sold you on the idea, but if they haven't, think of it this way – it is the easiest, fastest “fix” to improve your presentation. It takes time to tweak your ideas, your slides, and how you tell a story. But to simply look the audience in the eyes more – that adjustment can be instant.

Now, I hear some of you say “Yes, it doesn’t take any time to start doing it, but it’s kinda scary meeting that much eye contact when public speaking!” And the cure to this concern is simple: don’t quite look people in the eye. Instead, look at their foreheads, or at another point so close that it will only *seem* as if you are looking them in the eye. This will feel less stressful than full-on eye contact.

It can also be helpful to make more eye contact with audience members that you aren't in any way intimidated by. Don't try to stare down the business manager in the front row if he/she intimidates you. The same goes for the guy/girl you think is kind of cute in the second row. Ignore them, and pick whoever looks least intimidating to you; give these unintimidating people the lion's share of your eye contact.

If there is a large room of people, it can be difficult to know with whom you should begin to make eye contact and how to share it out through the room. There is no definite rule, except that you need to share your eye contact

relatively evenly with all areas in the room. Every “section” of the audience needs to be engaged regularly by your strong, confident eye contact. The simplest way to distribute eye contact is to divide the audience into three sections: left, center, and right. Then pick someone roughly in the middle of each section, and return to these three people periodically.

Making eye contact needs to feel natural and organic to the audience – don’t give people a stare that makes them fear for their lives. Imagine you are making eye contact with an old friend.

When getting feedback from friends/colleagues in your practice presentations, work to refine the amount of eye contact you make. Ask whether you are giving enough eye contact, and whether it feels like you’re creating the right kind of “vibe.”

Keep it Short and Break it Up into Sections

Many people who are still learning how to give a great presentation make the mistake of thinking that more content equals a better presentation. This mistake is common among people on the cusp of delivering something great; indeed, these people may have put in a lot of work to make a presentation they believe is awesome. But they tragically overstep the mark and mistakenly trade more content for clarity, communication, and a compelling overall presentation.

Keeping things brief helps for a variety of reasons. Below are a few:

Remember that time is precious, and your presentation is not only taking up one or two people's time, but a whole group's. It will come across as disrespectful and aggravating if you fail to stay on-point. You can even say "I want to respect your time, so I'm going to keep this focused, and no longer than it needs be." Making a statement like this will remind you to stay on point, and it will put everyone at ease.

Brief presentations tend to be the ones with the clearest focus. As soon as you start elaborating, digressing, or giving extra content, you risk move further away from the key message. Imagine that the audience has their arms open, and you are giving them things to carry out. By delivering excessive content, you give them more than they can carry, and they end up dropping items and possibly leaving with nothing at all. Give the audience the most important and briefest of ideas so that they can easily carry away those key points.

It's obviously easier to hold people's attention for shorter periods of time. Keeping your presentation brief will help keep everyone on board and prevent distractions of focus. Consider this tip especially if your presentation is approaching an hour in length. At some point, people are going to need to take a bathroom break, check phones, etc., and then the attention of the group will begin to drop off rapidly.

As well as keeping your presentation brief overall, it is helpful to break your presentation up into clearly defined sections. Clear sections help the audience both understand and remember what you have to say because you are giving them clearly defined and digestible chunks. It's like cutting up a big piece of food for someone to eat, instead of just handing them the whole thing and blithely expecting them to deal with it.

Breaking up your presentation will also allow small breaks for yourself and everyone in the room, even if only a few seconds for everyone to compose themselves and recharge. If your presentation is long (30+ minutes), then break it up into smaller, brief ones. Let people leave the room if they have been sitting for a long time, or work activities into the breaks so that people can physically learn about the message you have been sharing with them.

Smile, Be Positive, and Upbeat

No one wants to be presented to by someone who is unhappy, or afraid of smiling. Liberally dose your presentation with plenty of sincere and relaxed smiles. Better still, get yourself into a genuinely positive, happy mode, and bring that spirit into your presentation.

Smiling and bringing upbeat, happy energy will help because the audience will associate your presentation with positive emotions; in turn, they will want to believe in it and take action on the core message. Also, you'll enjoy it more – presentations can be enjoyable, I promise you!

Below are some ideas on how to bring upbeat, positive energy to your presentation by getting yourself pumped up and feeling good.

Get some exercise in beforehand. Go for a hard bike ride, a long run, or lift some weights. Get the blood pumping around your body and enjoy those natural endorphins. You will feel calmer, happier, and more focused. There really is no reason not to.

Listen to your favorite music really loudly before you begin, and dance around shamelessly (in private).

Go out for an amazing night/meal with your closest friends the night before. That positive energy will spill over into the following day. Don't turn up hungover or tired, though.

Watch an episode of your favorite comedy show earlier in the day. Let yourself laugh, and enjoy every second of it. Better still, watch it with some friends, and laugh together.

Eat something that is light and delicious. You don't want to be digesting a heavy meal beforehand. A roast dinner and dessert an hour before your presentation is sure to sabotage you by causing only feelings of lethargy and poor focus. Opt instead for a tuna salad or something similar.

As well as getting yourself into a great state, why not get the whole room pumped up and feeling good? Tony Robbins is a master of high-energy presentations, so watch him on YouTube if you want to see how it is done right. Below are some ideas on how you can do something similar:

Be aware of the mood in the room. Are people disinterested, interested, happy?

Try to guide them emotionally, as well as through the intellectual ideas you are discussing.

Include jokes and light ideas to balance out the more serious material you are covering.

Include fun activities that get the audience moving around. Have them high-five each other after they complete a task you have given them. Get their blood pumping, and get them socializing with one another. They'll feel more relaxed, more upbeat, and this will all lead to a better experience for them.

Applying the S.U.C.C.E.S.s Acronym

In the brilliant book *How to Deliver a Great TED Talk* by Akash Karia, Akash applies a strategy for delivering powerful messages first developed by Chip and Dan Heath in *Made to Stick*.

The acronym is a powerful takeaway that builds on other aspects I have talked about. It synergizes them in one easy-to-remember format. Let's walk through the elements now.

Simple

The presentation needs to have a simple message. By using the “have a clear focus” chapter of this book, you should be able to hone down your message into something very clear and very simple. Less is more.

Unexpected

By presenting a message that is unexpected, you will ensure a strong emotional reaction from the audience. The sense of “newness” and surprise will mean that the message hits home and is a compelling experience.

Consider also incorporating aspects of the unexpected in how you present your message. This might be a surprising twist in the story you tell, or an unexpected connection that leads you to a new conclusion.

Concrete

Definite, specific messages are better than vague ones. Where possible, move toward ideas and language that have definite dates, numbers, and facts. For example, don't just use the message “How to exercise more.” Instead consider something like, “How to put on 2 pounds of muscle in a month.” The latter message is better because of the concrete nature of the message.

Credible

Expressing a credible message is essential. To use a variation of the exercise example I began above, “How to put on 2 pounds of muscle tomorrow” is not credible. It just isn't. However, “How to put on 2 pounds of muscle in a month” is credible (though admittedly at the ragged edge of what the fitness community would accept as possible.)

Credibility in your message will sometimes mean a trade-off with a message that

sounds more exciting. You want your audience to be a little bit surprised with the message, but they should not dismiss it out of hand for being too unbelievable.

The more ambitious the message you are presenting, the more evidence you will need to show. This evidence might be offered through studies, third party sources, testimonials, etc.

Emotional

A good presentation needs to elicit strong emotions from the audience. Below are some ideas on how to do this:

Story-telling.

Focus on the benefits the audience will experience. “You will live 5 years longer if you exercise by doing X every day” is more emotional because it is benefit-focused. Whereas a message like “Scientists recommend exercise” feels cold and lacks a clear benefit to the audience.

Use emotive language. For example, “I feel amazing when I exercise” is more emotive than “Endorphins are released when humans exercise.”

Story

I cover this in detail in the “tell a story” chapter. Story-telling is key to great presentations.

That is it. A simple 6-step overview on how to deliver a fantastic message and give a great presentation.

Business/Problem-Centered Presentations: Apply the “Situation-Complication-Resolution Framework”

The author David McKinsey, in the excellent book *Strategic Storytelling: How to Create Persuasive Business Presentations*, outlines a framework that acts as excellent “training wheels” if you are attempting to solve a problem in your presentation, or if you have a more business-centric presentation.

Barbara Minto was the original creator of this framework, and her contributions to business and business consultancy are well worth researching if this is your field.

Below is a simplified version of the framework. For a simple planning method to create your presentation, use each of the following steps as a section of your presentation. When performing a more complex/business/problem-solving presentation, it can be helpful to adhere to frameworks like this to ensure that you stay focused, on-track, and to keep everyone “on the same page.”

Step 1: Identify the problem that you want to solve

Approaching your presentation in terms of problem-solution may itself be an important change in strategy when creating your presentation. But it is also essential that you attempt to solve the *right* problem. McKinsey states the importance of always trying to move “up the issue tree.” The closer you get to the core problem, the surer you can be that the problem you are trying to solve is the most critical.

Step 2: Identify constraints

What are the roadblocks to resolving the identified problem? Without knowing what the parameters of the problem are, you won’t be able to navigate to the best solution.

Step 3: Lay out all of the involved issues

You should effectively create a map of the terrain that you are going to navigate to get to your solution. This terrain depends entirely on the problem that you are addressing. For example, if the problem you are trying to fix is a new product that isn’t selling well, you might list issues such as:

Competition in the product’s niche has increased.

We have launched this product at a higher price-point than we normally would.

The product was well-received during market research, so we believe it to be good.

Step 4: Propose answers to the problem

Here, create rigorous action-plans that will solve the problem. Again, this is different from a TED talk. You aren't just going to be engaging and selling an idea; during a problem-solving presentation in "business," you are going to be creating a dialogue, and there will often be many ways to solve a potential problem.

A simple example might be if the problem is dipping profits in the business. In this case, you might propose three answers:

Release a new product

Begin a new ad campaign online

Cut costs by buying more efficient machinery

Step 5: Prioritize your answers

Whoever you are presenting to will want to know which of the solutions are better and why.

McKinsey suggests creating a 2 x 2 grid and using "impact" and "ease of impact" as the two axis headings. He also suggests "fit with values," "strategic alignment," and "fit with capabilities" as possible headings.

However you assess the solutions, the important thing is to assess each solution the same way. You can play each one off against the others to create a list of solutions from "best" to "worst" with reasons why.

Step 6: "Ghost Out" the solution process

It is essential to create a linear process for how the problem will be resolved. Choosing one of the preferred solutions and then applying it to a story board process will help reveal how the solutions will play out.

Doing this process on paper and/or drawing it on-screen can be helpful as you can walk through it step-by-step along with the audience. Stage 1 moves to Stage 2, etc. This is a lot more helpful than jumping around among points, or just

showing the entire process all at once on one slide. This is a great time to take feedback and questions from the audience both to help them understand what the proposed solution is and to troubleshoot your own processes. No matter how much prep you do, there is no guarantee that the solution you want to propose won't be easily shot down by someone who has specialized knowledge of the field.

Step 7: Test Your solutions, get feedback, and iterate your story

Seeing your presentation as part of an ongoing process is important to its overall effectiveness. Once you have chosen the best solution and it is being implemented, you will need to assess how well the solution is working. Course-correct, and get feedback. Return to this process if more problems come up, and be sure to return to the notes of your presentation to remind yourself of the problem-resolution process you/the business decided on.

McKinsey states the importance of feedback from all of the key members who are involved in the problem and the implementation of the solution. He suggests ensuring that these are done in cycles as part of an ongoing process of improving the business.

Final Ideas on this Framework

This framework will be most helpful for readers who are trying to solve problems and those giving presentations in a business/corporate setting. If you are giving a more relaxed, entertaining presentation or perhaps presenting as part of an education course, this framework might have sounded a little too rigid and dry. However, even in these cases, consider the following to glean help from this framework:

An overall process/framework to your presentation brings clarity and structure to your presentation.

Many presentations can be boiled down to a problem-solution format. Try doing this with your presentation to help your own understanding of the message you are conveying.

The problem-solution format is very compelling to an audience – don’t we all want answers to life’s problems? So if you can reform or adapt your presentation into this model (perhaps minus the rigid framework above), you might make your presentation more effective.

Creating an Excellent, Diverse Body of Your Presentation

In this chapter, I will list various techniques that you can use to make the “body,” or main content, of your presentation excellent. I have extended and altered many of the concepts that Akash Karia uses in *How to Deliver a Great TED Talk: Presentation Secrets of the World’s Best Speakers*. It is helpful to vary the kind of content that you give in order to hold the attention of the audience and keep your presentation interesting. Tailor the techniques that you use with the kind of presentation that you are giving and its goals. For example, if you want everyone to remember one core idea, try to make it more memorable with a rhyme or acronym.

Below are a selection of these techniques:

Demonstrate the Product. If you are doing a presentation on a certain product, it will be very helpful to show it off as much as possible. Ideally, this means demonstrating the “key benefits of the product.” For example, if you are giving a presentation on a new design of guitar, playing it for the audience will be exceptionally helpful. If you can’t demonstrate it, at least have the product to show and then talk through what its core value and functions will be.

Testimonial for Customers. Again, this strategy is more applicable to business/product launch presentations. Presenting the feedback from customers will help to show the all-important reaction from the market. To ensure your testimonials have the most impact, include real names, video testimonials where possible, and pictures of the customers—help the audience “put a face to a name.” The best testimonials feel honest and as if they are coming from someone we know.

Analogy and Similes. It is much easier to understand an idea by connecting it to something that we already know. Use an analogy that everyone in the audience will “get,” and you will also help cement the concept in people’s memory. This will be an even stronger memory if you make the analogy memorable by including humor or an unusual element.

Audience Participation. By getting the audience to perform some form of action, you will help make your message more memorable and understandable. Again, something humorous or unusual will help anchor the action to an even greater extent. For example, if you are doing a presentation on the benefits of a

new kind of car that gives off less carbon dioxide, you could ask the audience to dance for 10 seconds whilst breathing deeply, and then remind them of importance of oxygen and clean air. Yes, this example is a little tangential, but if it is applicable, don't be afraid to "shoe-horn" activities and connect them to your talk.

Quotations. Typically, someone else will have already said what you want to say better than you will be able to say it. Find the perfect quotation that articulates what you want to say. It can be helpful to leverage famous names or people with great credentials. For example, "CEO and PhD" gives so much power to what someone has to say. Find a quotation from people with this kind of background. Quotations are also a great way to begin the presentation as a whole, or to transition to a new subtopic.

Case Studies and Examples. This again ties into the idea of giving the audience evidence in the real world that your message/product/concept is strong. Never rely solely on your own opinions as to why something is true; find and demonstrate examples that illustrate your point. Case studies are closely linked with customer testimonials/product demonstrations. Integrate all of these techniques, and play them off against one another in order to show every positive aspect of the message you are presenting.

Rhymes, Acronyms, Take-Away Phrases. Make it as easy as possible for your audience to remember the essential ideas in your presentation by breaking them into bite-size chunks. Phrases that rhyme are much easier to remember and are also more appealing to us—therefore they are more likely to be believed. Acronyms are another great technique to make ideas more memorable. It might not be immediately obvious how you can "encode" your key ideas into rhymes or acronyms, so be patient with it, and practice. First, research your area to see if others have done it already. After that, you will just need to draft and redraft possibilities with pencil and paper. As ever, it depends on the kind of presentation that you are giving. However, by providing 1-3 key take-away ideas that have been distilled into acronyms or rhymes, you make it significantly more likely that your audience will remember the message and take action.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll

down and click on “write a customer review”.

(BONUS) BOOK 15: AUTOPILOT SUCCESS (BY HABIT)

Why Habits are Important – Your Life as a collection of Habits

Habits are the cornerstone of our lives. Therefore, if we want to improve how we live, understanding our habits and working to improve them is an exceptionally helpful pursuit. Your life is, of course, more than this – you have fears, emotions, passions, and relationships that exist outside of habits. However, viewing your life as a collection of habits is a good perspective to have. There are two main reasons for this – it is an accurate perspective, and it is a perspective that puts you in the driver’s seat of your life.

Life as a collection of habits is accurate. What we habitually do is, for the most part, who we are. It is rare that we make large changes in thought or action; on the whole, our lives are on autopilot. This might seem slightly negative on first blush, but think how differently you are living today from yesterday, how different this week is from your last, this month from the last. For most of us, there is little change. Therefore, repeated actions or “habits” seem to be the reality of the lives we live.

Life as a collection of habits puts you in the driver’s seat. Typically, habits get a bad reputation. We often associate “habits” as “bad habits” before “good habits” – to smoking and binge eating, rather than exercise and reading before bed. Despite this, viewing life as a collection of habits is positive, because habits are repeated actions, and actions come under the scope of our self-control. Although, for the majority of us habits are picked up accidentally as much as they are deliberately, the fact remains that we are all able to change our habits because they are actions that we perform.

Habits are the reality of our lives, and if we choose to take more control of them than we have in the past, we can direct our lives and improve them.

Understanding how to change our habits must therefore become a priority. If you are still unconvinced, hopefully on reading this book you will pick up enough evidence to “buy in” to a habit-centric perspective of life.

Habits Take Time and Effort to Change – This is an Opportunity, not a Problem

It is exceptionally difficult to change habits, and this probably isn't a surprise to you. I'm sure you've tried to start going to the gym, or eat healthier, or call your parents more, and found it difficult to make it stick. Changing habits is difficult – we all know this. However, many people see this as a problem, a difficulty, and an unfair, annoying part of life. And this is certainly one way to look at it. A better way, however, is to see this as an excellent opportunity for improving your life and safeguarding the progress you do make.

Imagine that creating a habit is like climbing over a wall. On one side is your current negative habit, and on the other side is the positive habit you want to have. Many of us bemoan the wall and think about how annoying it is that we have to climb it. A better perspective would be to see the wall as protection once we climb over it. Once the new habit is instilled, and you are on the other side of the wall, the wall of "habit" will protect you, and everything influencing you to not perform the positive habit will be diminished.

Do you think people who eat a healthy, nutritious diet for six months find it hard to keep eating that way? No, of course they don't. If you put a cake in front of them, if it isn't part of their diet, they aren't going to want to eat it. Indeed, it would take significantly more willpower for them to eat the cake than not to eat it. This is because they have performed the habit for so long that they are aware of all the rewards, and they identify as being someone who completes the habit. The "wall" of habit, therefore, protects them.

See the walls of habit as something that will protect your behavior and enable you to effortlessly do the right things. Yes, it is going to take time and willpower to get over the walls and change your habits. However, once you are over the wall, consider yourself safe. Barring any interruption and significant influence, it will be easy to keep going to the gym, to eat healthy, to sleep better, to socialize more, to do more at work, to read more – anything that you want to make a habit, it will feel easy.

The analogy of changing a habit being like climbing a wall and that wall being the protection is worth remembering. Imagine that the wall protects you from outside influences, your emotional desires, your ego, etc. Everything that can influence you to change is protected against by that wall. Also, over time

imagine that that wall will get a little higher. If you eat healthily for 6 years instead of 6 months, the power of habit is going to make it even harder for you to stop, and so there will be a higher wall that protects you from stopping the habit.

Which Habits to Change First – Find the Highest Leverage Area

It isn't always obvious where to start when it comes to changing your habits. You might be thinking, "Well, I want to exercise, and save money, and make friends, and do this, and that, etc.," and the list can go on and on. It is important to recognize both that there is no perfect answer to which habit to change first, and that the order you change habits in is not relevant when you think long-term. Five years from now it won't matter whether you started reading everyday this month or in six months. If you feel overwhelmed with wanting to change so many habits, feel solace in knowing you will get to everything eventually.

Having said that, tackling higher leverage habits sooner rather than later is, of course, desirable. Identifying those areas of life that are really holding you back at present will be more rewarding in the short to medium term. Imagine that you are maintaining a car – there is no need to clean the windows if you have a flat tire. And so, with your life and/or business goals it is helpful to see where you have really fallen behind and start there for habit change. For example, if you are obese, playing guitar every day isn't going to have as meaningful an impact as eating a little less.

If you still can't decide where to start, consider "playing it safe," instilling those habits you know will have a net-positive effect, and will be relatively easy to maintain. For example, you might be unsure whether you want to start eating an extra portion of vegetables at lunch or start playing guitar for five minutes every day. In this case, those vegetables are always going to be a good idea, however, in a few years you might not be so keen on guitar.

A second principle is to lean towards health goals if you aren't sure. Eating healthier, exercising, sleeping better – these are always going to improve your life in many ways, because they will improve your energy, ability to focus, think, etc. This is very similar to the previous principle of "playing it safe" when picking a new habit to instill – a health habit is always going to be something that is sustainable long term, and something that will have massive positive effects throughout the rest of your life.

There are no definite rules, so follow your intuition, as well as the above ideas, and simply instill habits as best you can. It can be helpful to talk the decision over with people who have already changed their habits for the better, as can journaling your habit changing journey.

Patience and long-term thinking is also important when you choose which habit to instill next. The biggest issue people have is that they attempt to take on too much and overwhelm themselves with too many new habits at one time. Which brings us to the next chapter...

Your Habits are Bricks in a Wall – Use Habits that Support one Another

Habits are difficult to change. Thinking of them as individual bricks that go into one wall of your collective habits is a helpful analogy. If that is too confusing, as we already have imagined changing a habit as going over a wall, perhaps consider that you are building many walls as part of a large mansion or castle that constitutes all the habits of your life.

However you think of it, changing habits needs to be a slow, consistent, deliberate practice, just like building. Below are some more ideas on how habit change should be considered as similar to building:

You only put down one brick at a time, or build one wall at a time. Because changing habits is so difficult, it is ideally done either one habit at a time, or at rate so slow that there is NO risk of the entire structure coming down, i.e., changing habits so slowly that you don't feel so much stress from the change that it sabotages other positive habits. Patience and consistent action are needed to build habits.

Habits rely on one another. The easiest way to build habits is to already have strong habits in place. The slow but steady increase in self-esteem and willpower that will come from putting one habit in place will make it a little easier to put the next one in place. And if the habits have a net-positive effect across your life, e.g., provide you with more energy, like a health habit does, you will find it even easier to add more habits to your life.

It takes skill and planning to build habits. Just like in construction, habit change is a skill and it is a skill that demands planning. You can't just haphazardly think, "I'm going to go to the gym for two hours every day," if you've never done a push up before – it's too unrealistic, and so planning is needed. Recognizing what you are capable of adding to your habits, choosing good habits, and integrating them well is a skill that takes time to master.

Building takes time; it is a long-term project, not a sprint. Adding goals to your life is NOT a sprint or something that you just get out of the way to move onto something else; it is a slow, long game that takes patience and time to perform.

Daily Habits, Weekly Habits, Monthly Habits

A habit is anything that you do consistently, something that has become easier for you to do than it is not to do. And so, there are habits that can be done daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, bi-weekly, or anything and everything in between. Simply put, anything that occurs consistently can be considered a habit. The habit might not even be tied to a specific timeframe; for example, it might be that whenever you visit your friend, you go to the same restaurant.

I am going to focus on explaining habits in relation to set time-periods, for example, daily or weekly habits, because this is a straightforward way to make changes to your life, your business, and help you meet your goals. Below are some ideas on how daily and weekly habits compare to each other.

Daily Habits. Daily habits are typically the hardest to initially change, but are then the easiest to keep in place. You need to put in that willpower every day to make the change, but because you perform the habit so regularly, there is little time for other influences to take you off-track. Daily habits are straightforward and can also be calming, again, simply due to their consistency. They are the best way to increase your sense of control and self-esteem in your own life, so start here if you are starting from scratch in building a collection of habits.

Weekly Habits. Weekly habits allow for significantly more variety than daily habits. There is seven times as long for you to fit in the actions you want, so there is more flexibility in creating your habits and finding time to fit them all in.

Over the space of a week, you should be able to build in habits that fulfil all areas of your life. This is the great strength of creating habits over this time scale.

The above pros and cons should give you a sense of the differences between creating habits in different time periods – consider them when you are deciding how to build your habits. Ultimately a balance of habits that are daily, weekly, monthly, and everything in between will probably be best.

Creating Sequential Habits or “Routines”

Performing one habit after the other solidifies the entire series into a collection that becomes a routine. This is a very powerful way to build habits and can make it significantly faster and easier to build new habits into your life and keep them. Below are some reasons why sequential habits or “routines” are so useful.

The initial habit also acts as a “trigger.” Completing a habit is possible only if there is some kind of “if-then” situation, or a “trigger,” whereby something happens or it is a certain time, and this then triggers you into performing the habit. For example, brushing your teeth might act as a trigger to then floss your teeth. Creating a sequence of habits means that each habit acts as a trigger to complete the next one. This makes completing a series of habits significantly easier, as you naturally perform one action after the other.

The good energy, boost of self-esteem, and feeling of self-control makes it easier to do the next habit. After completing one habit, you will be in a terrific mental state to then complete another habit. You will be feeling good and in control of yourself because you performed a positive action exactly as you intended to. It will now feel natural and easy to move onto doing something else. Completing a sequence of habits will create an easy flow into completing action after action, and there will be a mood of positivity and self-control throughout the whole period.

This can also be a great way to build up to more difficult habits. By building positivity from easier habits, you can then escalate into completing more difficult habits at the end of the routine. For example, you might hate tidying your house but enjoy meditating, in which case you might create a routine of every day spending 15 minutes meditating and then 5 minutes tidying your house. The first habit will feel easy and desirable to complete and then, once you have completed it, you will feel more in control and more willing to complete your other habit of tidying the house. Consider this when you are building routines – build a “downward slope” from easier, more enjoyable habits into the more difficult, less enjoyable ones. This is effectively “baby stepping” yourself into more difficult actions.

For the above reasons, creating sequences of habits can be significantly more

effective than putting them in place in isolation. However, both routines and standalone habits will be helpful.

Morning Routines and End of Day Routines

Routines are typically easiest to create at the start of the day and at the end of the day. This is because these are the easiest times to manage yourself, as your time is bookended by sleep. What these routines looks like is entirely up to you.

Again, it is best to think of the creation of these routines as a slow building process that will occur over time. You don't have to get it perfect right away, and you don't have to add everything at once. Never take on more habits than you think you can definitely complete, and only add another habit to a routine once you feel like the others are solid and your confidence and feeling of control over your current habits is strong.

The best morning routines, which are sometimes referred to as "morning rituals" in the personal development community, are those that prepare you exceptionally well for your day. They set the tone and ensure that you have a "win" before the rest of the day begins. This makes a good morning ritual exceptionally powerful for anyone who tries it, and allows them to achieve results and feel good about themselves before the rest of their day begins. This is especially helpful if your life is otherwise hectic or dominated by a career that demands a lot from you.

A good end of day routine is more focused toward you unwinding and getting great sleep, as well as preparing you for the following day. It is typically harder to instill a good ritual at the end of the day than the beginning for two reasons:

Your willpower is not as strong at the end of the day as it is at the beginning. As the day progresses, you will find it increasingly hard to exert your willpower on doing something new and/or difficult. This is just one of those things that seems to apply to everyone. And so, completing a morning routine is easier than completing one at the end of the day. This is also a great reason to schedule your day so that the more difficult, challenging activities come sooner rather than later in the day.

It is harder to get space from friends and family later in the day. Whether it is seeing friends, playing with children, or having sex and conversation with your partner, there are fewer clear barriers and distinctions at the end of the day than the beginning. Simply getting up earlier will allow you to find that extra bit of time to get things done, but saying "no" to people late in the day is harder. For

this reason, the morning ritual is easier to build and execute than a routine at the end of the day.

Simultaneous Habits

Another principle to consider when improving your habits is to work on establishing better “simultaneous habits.” These are habits that are completed at the same time as one another. This is effectively multitasking, but described through the perspective of habits. For example, when you commute to work (a habit), you listen to an audiobook (another habit).

Below are some reasons why simultaneous habits are a powerful tool to consider using when changing your habits.

They take ZERO extra time to do. This is obvious but worth noting. If you are completing a new habit at the same time as a habit that you are already performing, your net increase of time is zero. This is an excellent way to improve how you spend your time and fit more positive things into your life.

For many people, their biggest excuse is that they don’t have enough time to improve their businesses, their lives, their health, etc., but by finding habits you already have and then multitasking them with something new, these excuses are obviously no longer valid.

The first habit becomes more strongly ingrained, because of the increase in value from the second.

Doubling down and completing two habits at the same time creates such a dense period of “value” in your life that the first habit becomes harder to stop completing in future.

A great example of this is the following:

Mary is currently going to the gym every day for an hour. She is doing well and making progress in her training. However, she is having to put in more time and energy into her work life, which makes her less motivated to get to the gym. In this situation, the habit of going to the gym every day might come under threat. However, this is a great habit to have and Mary doesn’t want to lose the habit that was so difficult to put in place. In Mary’s case, adding an additional, simultaneous habit on top of going to the gym might be a great way to increase the value of going to the gym. An example might simply be to listen to an audiobook for the one hour she spends at the gym. This is straightforward and will mean that the time spent at the gym becomes more valuable, so the initial habit of going to the gym becomes harder to shake off.

Understanding where pressures might come from is helpful when deciding what the secondary habit should be. In the previous example, increasing pressure at work was putting increasing pressure on Mary, so the audiobook she listens to at the gym might be one related to her business. This is an excellent way to maintain the original habit and also help work on the area of life that is threatening to encroach on the original habit.

Adding a secondary, simultaneous habit is a great way to add more value to the time spent on the original habit, which in turn actually strengthens the original habit and makes it harder to quit. It might seem counterintuitive to actually try to do and achieve more in a certain period, if you are questioning a habit's importance. However, by doubling down and getting creative about Mary's gym habit, she found a way to get even more done in that space and consolidate her gym habit.

The first habit can be made easier / more enjoyable by the addition of the second. Just because you are multitasking and adding another habit simultaneously to an existing habit doesn't mean that the first habit will get any harder. Sometimes it will, yes; however, oftentimes the first habit can become even easier to perform. For a start, you will feel more effective and productive, which might make the initial habit more enjoyable.

Consider also using that secondary habit to directly make the first habit seem more appealing and enjoyable. Below are some examples of things some people don't find enjoyable but still have to do as a habit:

- Cleaning and tidying their home.
- Washing their clothes.
- Cutting their hair, shaving.
- Shopping for food, clothes, or anything else that is needed.
- Exercising, going to the gym, walking, running, etc.
- Commuting to work, whether it is a car journey, a train journey, or a long walk.

Adding a second habit to one from the above list is a great way to make habits like these, which are often put off, more productive and / or enjoyable. And even if you enjoy some of the above habits, you can still add in more value to your time by creating a simultaneous habit. For example, whenever you clean your house, you listen to an audiobook.

If you really hate performing a habit, such as those above, it will be helpful to

add a habit that is enjoyable at the same time. For example, if you hate cleaning your bathroom every week, add in the habit of listening to your favorite music whilst you do it. And so, for the hour it takes you to clean the bathroom, you might listen to an album from your favorite band. Or, you might consider a habit a waste of your time and don't get around to it, for example, you might think that going to the shops isn't that unenjoyable but it just doesn't feel productive enough when you do it. This in turn may lead you to getting pizza or other unhealthy food delivered. In this example, adding something productive to the time spent going to the shops to buy healthy food will ensure you perform the habit of shopping every week. The productive habits you might add could be chatting with a friend on the phone, or meeting a friend or lover to go on a date or hang out with. Or you can go with the old favorite – listen to an audiobook to make you feel more productive whilst you shop.

There is an even clearer trigger. Just as a sequence of habits creates a clear trigger to do the next habit, you will have a strong trigger to perform the new simultaneous habit. For example, “when I commute to work (a habit), at the same time I listen to an audiobook (a new, simultaneous habit).” By multitasking one habit with the addition of the second, you can leverage all of the work you put in to form the first habit, and so the trigger that you currently use for the first habit also triggers the second, simultaneous habit.

You won't have to create a trigger like you normally do with a new habit - you simply execute two habits simultaneously, instead of one.

It is easier to add a habit onto an existing one. It takes less energy to add a simultaneous habit than adding a new habit altogether, because there is already that pre-existing habit you are simply adding to. You aren't doing something entirely new, you are performing the same habit you are used to, whilst simultaneously performing the new habit.

Adding a secondary habit onto an initial one is incredibly easy. This is especially the case if you are adding onto a habit that is thoroughly ingrained or that you have to do. For example, commuting to work 5 days a week is something that many people have to do. It is a habit that is so damned strong that adding a second, simultaneous habit on top of it means that the second habit is always going to get completed, because the initial habit is a “must” they always complete.

There are probably other habits which you just always complete. Take a moment

to write them out now and use these as a beginning for the habits you want to add on to. Below is a list of examples:

- Showering
- Eating three meals a day
- Commuting to work
- Going to the toilet
- Getting dressed
- Shaving

The above are like rocks for many people, they will ALWAYS be completed. And so, adding habits onto them will be by far the easiest place to start. This might mean listening to your favorite music when you shave or perhaps reading a few pages of a book when you are sat on the toilet.

It is important to ensure you don't overload yourself with simultaneous habits and fall victim to the dangers of multitasking. If the habit you are adding on hampers your focus on the first habit to an unhelpful extent, it is not worth adding that second habit. However, many habits, such as those in the list above, can be done on "autopilot," and so are perfect for multitasking with a secondary habit. Simultaneous habits work best with those actions where your mind is mostly blank, like those above.

How to Make the Most out of Simultaneous Habits

It isn't that difficult to create simultaneous habits and make them successful. However, below are some principles to consider to help you make the most of them.

Think earphones. The easiest way to add simultaneous habits is to use earphones and listen to something whilst you are performing your original habit. The previous list of habits that are typically less enjoyable are all examples of things which can be done with minimal mental work, and so are ideal for multitasking with listening to audio.

Maybe you want to listen to a new album every week when you do your food shopping, or a non-fiction audiobook on business during your commute. These habits that you normally perform which can be multitasked, should be considered an opportunity to listen to something. If you aren't sure what to do, just stick with audio learning. Listen to something that will make you happier, healthier, help you earn more money, or make you more effective at your work.

Inventory your current habits. In order to find where the best opportunities are for adding simultaneous habits, it is important to become aware of all the current habits you have at present.

The best way to do this is to create a time log and write down everything that you do in a day. Do this for 7-14 days, and you will accurately find everything that you currently do and all the habits that you can add to.

Many of your current habits you might not be conscious of, or perhaps don't consider them opportunities for adding to. For example, having a shower every morning might seem like something you just do, but not really a habit that can be added to. However, there is nearly always a small addition that can be made. For example, when stepping into the shower you could think of 10 things that you are grateful for in your life, or turn on a podcast and listen to something that is fun and motivating whilst you shower.

The goal isn't to completely fill your life with habits stacked on top of each other, but to find where the opportunities are for small but meaningful changes. Then, with slow changes and progress, you can keep adding habits or take some away if you feel like they are too overwhelming and ultimately

counterproductive.

Get creative and think outside the box. As I suggested with the habit of showering, there are various strategies you can take to build simultaneous habits. Consider every possible angle for adding a habit to something you currently do. Below are more examples to give you some additional ideas:

- Complete your email whilst walking on a treadmill.
- Practice playing guitar whilst watching non-fiction that doesn't demand 100% attention, for example, a TED talk.
- Think of 5 things you are grateful for whilst you clean your teeth.
- Write up your goals whilst you wait for your bus.
- Mentally rehearse your sales pitches whilst you go for your morning run.

The Three Elements of a Habit

In Charles Duhigg's excellent book, *The Power of Habit*, he outlines the three parts that constitute the framework of any habit. If you are going to work at improving your own habits, it is essential that you are aware and in control of these three parts. The three parts are:

1. The trigger that catalyzes the action.
2. The action itself.
3. The reward that you experience for completing the action.

All habits, Duhigg argues, constitute these three parts.

The first part, the trigger, is what causes you to complete a habit. All habits will have a cause, i.e., when X happens, I do habit Y. For example, when I meet my friend at the bar, I drink my favorite beer. Here, the "when I meet my friend at the bar" is the trigger that causes me to complete the habit of drinking my favorite beer.

In the above example, the second part – the action – is me drinking my favorite beer. Another example would be: after I eat breakfast, I go for a run. Here the "I go for a run" is the action I complete after the trigger "I eat my breakfast."

The final part, the reward, is the positive or perceived positive experience that comes from completing the action. For example, after I drink my favorite beer, I feel relaxed and satisfied, and after I go for my run, I feel more awake and energized.

The trigger and the reward are typically harder to ascertain than the action, and so you will have to work a little harder to find these. There can also be multiple triggers and multiple rewards, which makes the process harder still. However, the reality is that these three elements constitute every habit that we humans build, so get used to this framework when you think about your habits!

To make this more memorable, writer James Clear has reworked these ideas into "the 3 R's of habit change." And so, the three parts of a habit become:

1. Reminder. This is the trigger.
2. Routine. This is the action.
3. Reward. This is the benefit you experience.

These 3 R's definitely make remembering the parts of a habit more memorable.

Try now to come up with some examples of these three R's for a variety of habits you currently perform.

Once you have broken down your current habits in this way, it will be significantly easier to manipulate and improve them. Also, creating new habits will become more effective because you can more effectively plan all of the constituent parts as your overall awareness and understanding of habit change improves.

The following chapters contain ideas on how you can alter habits through using this 3 part perspective.

Bibliography and further reading for this chapter:

<http://jamesclear.com/three-steps-habit-change>

The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg

Removing Bad habits by Finding Alternate Sources for the Reward

If you are attempting to alter a “bad habit” you currently perform, it can be exceptionally useful to recognize and replace the reward that you currently experience from the bad habit.

This is one of the biggest mistakes people make when trying to change a bad habit – they don’t regard the current positive impact that the bad habit has. Now, this positive impact might be incredibly short-term and not at all healthy, but there will still be a reward. The straightforward example of drug abuse is a clear example of this – short-term positive feelings, offset by negative medium and long term ones. You can feel “good,” “relaxed,” and “less anxious” for the next few hours if you take the drug, but sacrifice health and positive emotions later.

Whatever positives you are currently getting from a bad habit, recognize them and then try to replace them in another way. For example, if you currently eat unhealthily because it feels pleasurable and helps you to relax, you might consider going to a spa once a week, because this will also help you to relax and will feel good physically.

Finding the rewards your bad habits have and then replacing them with good habits is a great way to undermine the power of the bad habit. In the above example, by going to a spa once a week your overall levels of relaxation and sense of pleasure in your life will increase, so there will be less of a gap to be made up by comfort eating. Hopefully, after a few weeks of going to the spa, you would want unhealthy food less, or at least find it easier to do it less, because you are getting the rewards it offers elsewhere. If you still feel a little stressed and in need of comfort, you might then add in other habits like going to the cinema with a friend, or perhaps playing your favorite video game a couple of times a week, or whatever feels good and helps you to relax. These acts should further help to undermine the need for comfort eating, as the rewards that it provides are already being fulfilled in your life.

Recognizing the triggers and rewards that you experience will require a high level of awareness in general. This is an excellent thing in itself and can be further fostered by good habits, such as journaling and meditating. These acts will help you feel more in control and more aware of your mind and feelings, which will increase your awareness of the triggers and rewards of your habits.

Often, the trigger and the reward will be interconnected, so don't try to understand them in isolation. It will be easier to understand your habits if you look at both. For example, you might watch TV when you feel bored, and you feel stimulated and less bored when you watch TV. Feeling bored is the trigger, and being entertained / less bored is the reward you get. In this example, the answer is simple: if you want to watch less TV, you need to find something that you want to do that is interesting / exciting / compelling. The trigger and the reward are clearly intertwined here. This example is relatively straightforward; unfortunately, analyzing your own habits won't always be as simple as this example.

Removing Bad Habits by Disrupting the Trigger

It is helpful to use a variety of tactics to tackle a bad habit. Replacing the reward by getting it elsewhere is helpful – another tactic is to disrupt the trigger that causes you to perform the action of the bad habit. If the trigger is removed altogether, or at least diminished, the action is going to be significantly less likely to occur. Below are some ideas on how you can successfully disrupt a trigger.

Put another action between the trigger and habit action. By creating a delay between the trigger and the habit action you can create an important space in which to gain awareness and make a better decision, and hopefully not perform the bad habit you are trying to cut out.

This is a simple but very effective practice that is easy to implement. It works well because you are not telling yourself you can't perform the action and get the reward that you want; you are just asking yourself to wait a little.

An example of doing this might be making yourself chew gum for 10 minutes before you allow yourself to have a cigarette. Or it might be going for a 5 minute walk before you allow yourself to eat a chocolate biscuit.

Oftentimes, the desire to perform a bad habit will be greatly diminished and perhaps pass altogether just by delaying the bad habit. This might be because you gain more self-control, more self-awareness, and feel less like performing the bad habit, or maybe the feelings that typically trigger you fade away. For example, if you like to smoke when you feel anxious, waiting 10 minutes and chewing gum might be enough time for those anxious feelings to pass.

Extending the interrupting action over time is a good way to ratchet up the pressure on yourself to not perform the bad habit. For example, you might ask yourself to chew gum for 10 minutes before having a cigarette, but after a month of doing this, extend it to 20 minutes.

The interrupting action you put into place can be many things, and choosing an effective interrupting action will of course make habit change easier still. Ideally, choose something which reinforces a positive behavior and the characteristics you want to put in place. For example, chewing gum as an interrupting action is good because it is healthy. Chewing gum helps protect the teeth and suppresses appetite (which also makes it an excellent interrupting habit

if you eat too much and / or have food cravings). Having a healthy interrupting action is a small reminder to yourself that you are trying to live a healthier life, which further contributes to your overall motivation to stop the bad habit of smoking.

If you put in place an interrupting action, it is important that you are patient and allow yourself the cigarette (or whatever bad habit you are interrupting) once the time has elapsed. Beating yourself up or trying to force the process is counter-productive. After a few weeks you should notice a decreased desire to perform the bad habit, and might then consider adding further time to the interruption or other techniques to remove the bad habit.

Adding an interrupting action before you perform a bad habit is an excellent way to remove a bad habit because:

- You create a space of time for the emotions or whatever is pushing you to perform the bad habit to subside.
- You rekindle your conscious, responsible self that is in control and, even if only as a delaying act, you are still closer to the person you want to be.
- You can perform an action which reaffirms positive habits and a better way of living. For example, chewing gum is something healthy.

People

The people you surround yourself with are going to have a massive impact on your habits. “We are the average of the five people we spend the most time with” is an oft cited idea in the personal development community, and it is very true.

Oftentimes the “trigger” that causes us to perform a habit is related to other people, for example, the habit “when my I go to the bar with my friend, I drink my favorite beer.” Here, there is clearly a social element to the habit of drinking my favorite beer. The reality will often be more complicated than this. For example, if my friend never drinks alcohol, the influence he will have on me at the bar will not be to drink my favorite beer, so if I am trying to stop drinking alcohol it will actually be helpful to go to the bar with him rather than a friend who does drink alcohol. However, if he always has alcohol when he goes to a bar and always drinks with me, my friend’s influence is probably going to be part of the trigger that pushes me toward having that beer. Consider carefully what influence the people around you have as triggers for a habit.

If you want to add a new habit into your life, it is incredibly helpful to socialize with people who already have this habit in place. Completing the habit together is another way to consolidate the behavior change. If you have a friend who gets up at 6AM and goes to the gym every day, ask if you can join her. She already has the habit in place, so you can lean on her habit strength by exercising with her.

Another way you can use others to build a habit is to make yourself accountable to them. For example, you might tell a friend you will give him 10 dollars whenever you have a cigarette. This accountability and social influence will help you to stop the habit of smoking.

Of course, you can also combine techniques. This might mean the friend who gets up at 6AM and goes to the gym every day becomes your gym buddy and the accountability buddy – you go to the gym together, and if you don’t go you promise to give him 10 dollars.

If you want to cut down or cut out a bad habit, looking at the people who influence you and act as part of the trigger is an important place to start.

Better / Healthier Rewards are Typically Less Stimulating, so Take Longer to Put in Place

Bad habits are typically easier to pick up because the pay-off is more immediate. Positive habits, on the other hand, typically have a longer period before you get the positive effects. This is part of the “reward” – the third part of every habit. For this reason, it is often easier to build negative habits than it is positive habits.

The clearest example of this is with health habits. The rewards of eating unhealthy food, smoking, drinking alcohol, drug abuse, etc., are all near-instant. However, living healthily involves rewards that take a little longer to be felt. Eating comfort food, such as high-sugar foods like cake, will feel immediately sensuous and give you a sugar rush in just minutes, whereas a healthy meal full of vegetables will have a slower effect that may only be felt hours later.

Not only are the effects of bad habits faster acting, they are typically more stimulating. You can really feel the high sugar effects hitting you when you eat sugary comfort food, but the positive effects of eating a healthy meal aren't as noticeable. And so, in order to wean yourself off of bad habits and onto good ones, it is necessary to become a little more sensitive and more self-aware. Combining this with considering your “future-self” – how you will feel in a few hours, a few days, or a few years, even – will help you to change your focus and move toward positive habits instead of negative ones.

It can help to monitor how well you feel by writing in a journal. Writing on how you feel in general just once a day will help you draw your awareness to habits that are healthier. Meditation, walks, and quiet time spent doing something consciously will all help you to be a little more conscious as well, which will, in turn, allow you to focus more on long-term positives rather than short-term feel good actions.

Lowering your expectations for how good new, healthy habits will feel in the short term will also help you to be patient and persevere until the medium- to long-term rewards are felt.

Making the Reward More Powerful with Better Intrinsic Rewards and “Treat Rewards”

There are two forms of rewards that can come with completing a habit. There are the rewards that are intrinsic to the habit itself – the rewards that automatically come from completing the habit, for example the sensory feelings from smoking. And there are also rewards that are closer to “treats” that you can give yourself for completing the habit. An example of an intrinsic reward for exercise would be the release of endorphins you experience and the increased sense of focus and energy that you feel throughout the day. These are direct rewards caused by the exercise itself. An example of a treat reward would be watching your favorite sitcom whenever you get home from a gym session. Here, the reward of watching a sitcom is a treat because it is something you are choosing to give yourself as a reward for completing the habit.

This distinction is helpful when working to build your own habits, as you can better understand and build the processes which enable you to put positive habits into place and destroy negative habits.

The intrinsic rewards of a habit cannot be altered a great deal. The only way you can manipulate these is to perform the habit better or worse to experience different levels of intensity. For example, if you have the habit of going out with friends every week, you are going to experience the endorphins from the laughter, sense of connection, friendship, etc., that are part of the intrinsic rewards of this habit. Increasing the effectiveness of the habit would be a way to increase the intrinsic reward. This might mean going to more exciting places together or perhaps working to bring more good energy and love to the occasion. Doing this will help you have a “better” time and experience more intense intrinsic rewards, i.e., you will feel a greater sense of connection to your friends.

Working to do habits better is therefore an excellent way to make them easier to build and easier to keep in place. If you perform the habit better, you will experience better intrinsic rewards from completing the habit. Exercising more effectively will cause your body to change faster, cause more endorphins to be released, and give you better energy levels throughout the day. By experiencing greater intrinsic rewards you are much less likely to stop exercising, which means that if it is a new habit it will stay in place more easily, and if it is an old habit it is less likely to be pushed to the side by other influences (perhaps you’ve

got a new health habit, or have taken on a new hobby or a new project at work).

Leveraging “Treat Rewards” for Better Habit Creation

As I have said before, healthier, more positive habits are often less stimulating than negative habits are, so if you are transitioning away from bad habits and to positive ones it might be necessary to incorporate treat rewards in order to satisfy the sense of short-term satisfaction that you have been providing for previously. For example, if you eat high-sugar foods to feel good, going to the gym will not provide the same immediate rewards, and so you might consider adding on the reward, “After I go to the gym I can have my favorite smoothie and watch a sitcom.”

Using a treat reward is a lot more flexible than the intrinsic rewards. You are kind of stuck with the intrinsic reward – the only thing you can manipulate is the intensity. However, the treat really can be anything, and be as amazing as you can imagine. This means that working with treat rewards is a great way to ensure you build a habit and always complete it. It is also a lot easier to use this form of reward when you begin a habit, because you may have a technical limitation or lack of experience that prevents you from getting any intrinsic reward from the habit. For example, if you’re overweight and go to the gym for the first time ever, you aren’t going to be good enough at using the equipment to get really any intrinsic reward like endorphin release, so aside from the good feeling that comes from breaking through internal resistance and doing something that you want to do, there will be no intrinsic reward from exercising itself.

Deciding on what the treat will be shouldn’t be particularly difficult. However, below are some things to consider:

The healthier and more positive you can make the treat, the better. You don’t want to have a treat reward that is counterproductive in some way, e.g., not cake or cookies after working out at the gym. However, depending on the habit you are trying to push toward, if it gets you to take action it is worth considering indulging yourself to some degree – just don’t go overboard! The treat reward really can be anything that you enjoy.

For long term projects, it might be even more necessary to use treat rewards. For example, if you are working on a new business but don’t expect to turn a profit for 6 months, it is going to be hard to keep performing the habits you know are necessary to grow the business. In this example, you might decide

that making 5 sales calls in the morning would be a great way to start your day and an essential part of growing your business. However, there is going to be little short-term reward from completing these sales calls if you know the likelihood of making a sale is low and part of a longer 6 month strategy, so you might decide that you will let yourself play video games for half an hour after you complete those 5 sales calls. When the intrinsic rewards of a habit are a long way off, or if your habits are part of a project with a long-term goal, treat rewards are even more necessary.

Use bigger treat rewards to offset harder habits. The more daunting you find putting a habit into place, the more amazing you should make the treat reward. For example, if you are attempting to go for a run every morning and you haven't done any exercise for years, giving yourself a treat at the end of the run may well be necessary. The treat reward will push you to take action when you really don't have the motivation or desire to. You won't want to go for that run, but being able to shamelessly enjoy a smoothie and your favorite sitcom when you get back might be enough to get you to put your running shoes on and get out of the house.

The treat reward can change as needed. The treat reward can change as your motivation and comfort with the habit changes over time. Typically, as you complete a new positive habit you will feel more of the intrinsic rewards and also just get used to completing the habit without thinking about it. It will become normal to you. As this becomes the case, you can think about cutting back or removing the treat reward if it makes sense to.

Altering the treat reward will be especially necessary for those habits which only have a long term pay off, in which case you will have to start "big" with the treat reward until the habit becomes ingrained or the intrinsic rewards of the habit start to pay off.

An ideal treat reward supports the habit and won't need to change. The best kind of treat reward is one that actually supports the habit in some way. For example, if you enjoy smoothies, rewarding yourself for completing a gym session with a super healthy smoothie is perfect. When the treat reward is so entwined with the main habit like this, there is actually no need to ever remove the treat reward, and so it becomes part of the habit itself. There are plenty of healthy foods that also taste great, so creating a healthy food treat as a treat reward is always a great idea. Another example of this might be having a couple

of squares of 70% + dark chocolate as a treat reward after completing a tricky new habit. These small treat rewards can then be joined with the habit itself and always make performing the habit more enjoyable, rewarding, and make the habit as a whole that much more ingrained and sustainable over the long-term.

You can also use a treat reward for removing bad habits. Be creative in how you use treat rewards and consider using them to also pull you out of bad habits. For example, you might go to the cinema at the end of a week that you don't have a cigarette.

The treat reward doesn't have to be straight after the habit. It won't always be practical to "cash in" your treat reward after completing the habit, or you might want to put in place a larger treat that has to wait; it doesn't have to come directly after the habit. For example, you might promise yourself that you can go out for a meal on Saturday night if you complete your 5 sales calls every morning for a week.

Be intelligent with how you use treat rewards and you can make starting new habits and keeping them in place significantly easier.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on "write a customer review".

(BONUS) BOOK 16: UNLIMITED SUCCESS BY SMART GOAL SETTING

Introduction and what is SMART Goal Setting?

Goal setting using the SMART method has become increasingly widespread in the business, project development, and personal development sectors. SMART is an acronym which has been altered and improved upon over the years. However, the first use of the SMART acronym was by George T. Doran in a 1981 issue of *Management Review*. His original version of the SMART acronym looked like the following:

S for Specific

M for Measurable

A for Attainable

R for Realistic

T for Time Related

This is the essential core to the SMART goal setting process, so this book will focus on the above; however, there are so many excellent developments and alterations to the SMART acronym that it would be remiss of us to not spend some time with these, too. Below are some of the changes that have been developed over the years:

Instead of A being attainable, the A might be “agreed, aggressive, ambitious, achievable.”

Instead of the R being realistic, the R might be “relevant, resourced, results-orientated.”

Instead of the T being time related, the T might be “time-based, timely, timeframe, time sensitive.”

These different possibilities might seem a little overwhelming now, but don’t worry about that. Outlining them now is just a good way to get an overview of the possibilities. As the book progresses, we will work from the main SMART acronym I mentioned and then explore alternatives when it makes sense to.

Understanding what SMART goals are and how to use them is an important corner stone for better goal setting and achievement. This book is intended as an

easy introduction with some developments, interpretations, and ideas that will hopefully improve your use of SMART goal setting strategies.

Important! – A quick aside.

It is important to note that this book outlines many possibilities for what the SMART goal setting system can be. There is NOT a one size fits all best practice. I myself am still changing and adapting how I implement the ideas of SMART goal setting, because there really isn't any simple formula that ALWAYS works best in EVERY situation.

The SMART system has been adapted and improved upon so many times that there is now a multitude of possible ways to set your own SMART goals. The many ideas and iterations of the SMART system mean that you will have to use your experience to develop your own favored interpretation. This book simply offers the pros and cons of some of the different routes you can take. Please use your own judgement and experience to develop your own best practices.

If you are expecting easy “off the shelf” systems to use, this book isn’t going to give them to you. However, there will be many map-like guides and ideas that will improve how you go about setting and working both toward your own goals and the goals of your business.

I will return to this idea of “use your judgement, develop a variety of approaches” throughout the remainder of the book, just as a reminder not to become too dogmatic in your use of setting SMART goals.

Specific Goals

The first two parts of SMART goals – the S and the M – are typically always the same: Specific and Measurable. Let's start with the S and understand more about why a goal should be specific.

Ensuring your goal is specific means eliminating the gray areas around the goal and making it crystal clear. There needs to be a clear sense of what the goal is without vagueness or overlap with any other goal. For example, the goal of “write a book” isn’t as specific as “write a fiction book in the style of JK Rowling.” The second goal is more specific, and therefore a better goal to have.

Why are specific goals better than vague ones? Below are some reasons:

A specific goal is easier to achieve. A specific goal is easier to achieve because it is easier to understand what is needed in order to achieve it. With a gray, non-specific goal, it is much harder to decide what you need to do to get there, partly because there are so many possibilities, and also because it is harder to find a process that enables you to complete the goal.

For example, a non-specific goal like “write a book” leaves open too many possibilities and too many unanswered questions. A better goal would be “write a fiction book,” as this is more specific and therefore better. Of course, this could become still more specific, but just the small shift from “write a book” to “write a fiction book” immediately cuts down some of the possibilities for what the plan to get there could be – “write a book” might entail researching a non-fiction subject, but that possible plan is cut off if the goal of “write a **fiction** book” is used. The many possible routes to the objective just got cut down, which makes planning and taking action easier, and so completion of the goal is also much easier.

A specific goal is easier to be motivated by. If you aren't clear about what you are trying to achieve, it is harder to become excited by it. This is because you won't fully know what the consequences of completing the goal will be. Also, part of you will know it is less likely to happen because it will be impossible to have a clear, definite plan to achieve a non-specific goal.

Motivation is a very important aspect when creating and working towards your goals. Defining why you want to complete a goal is essential to drive you to take

action and push through set-backs. Compromising your ability to get motivated by a goal because you have chosen something too gray will put a needless barrier between yourself and completing great things.

A specific goal is easier to explain and easier to work on with other people.

If you are working with other people on a goal, there needs to be clear communication about what the goal is and what work you are all performing. If the goal itself isn't specific, it will be harder to explain and for other people to grasp. This will make working together much harder and the likelihood of the goal being completed greatly diminished. For example, the goal "increase the income of the business" is not as specific as "increase the income of the business by \$2,000." The second goal is easier to articulate and work on, both as an individual and for other people. Vagueness and ambiguity are the enemies of clear communication between people working on a project. Without a clear, specific goal it will be much harder to work successfully as a team and complete your goals.

How Specific Should I be?

There is no precise criteria for how specific the goal needs to be. In general, the more specific the goal is, the better. Go as far as possible in creating a detailed, specific goal up until the point that there are diminishing returns and you feel that any further specificity would perhaps hamper creativity. For example, the specific goal “write a fiction book that is like JK Rowling’s work combined with Stephen King and is set in the 15th century,” might be too specific and make the book harder to write, and the resulting book might be not as good as it would have been with a less restrictive goal. Knowing how specific to make your goal will come with practice. Setting a specific goal if you are a writer will certainly become easier after a few writing projects and you find where the “sweet spot” is that ensures a specific goal, but also one that isn’t too constricting.

Another technique to use when creating a specific goal is to decide on what the goal isn’t. This might seem counterintuitive, but often getting specific on what the goal isn’t is easier than deciding on what it is. If you are really struggling to develop your goal, it might be helpful to list all of the specific possibilities the goal could be on a list and then cross these off one by one until you are left with what you want the goal to be. Like a sculptor, you are cutting away everything that the goal isn’t until you have the specific goal you do want to work on. For example, if you were deciding on what genre of fiction book you want to write, you might write down the possibilities:

Romance

Adventure

Historical Drama

Thriller

Horror

Etc.

Then, using this list you can decide on what the goal isn’t by crossing out the genres which you know you don’t want the book to be. Working backwards from what you DON’T want the goal to be will help generate specificity when otherwise you might find it difficult to really pin down what you specifically want a goal to be.

Another powerful tool to use is to implement the “5 W’s” in order to make the goal more specific. The 5 W’s are:

Who is needed to complete the goal?

What is going to be completed?

Where is it going to take place?

Why does it need to be completed?

When is it going to be completed by?

These five 5 W’s are a terrific way to increase the specificity of a goal. Simply run through and answer the above questions, and you will quickly make the goal more specific. To ensure you get really great answers, it is helpful to generate many more answers and push beyond the initial, obvious answers. Then, once you have a large body of answers, cut down to those that seem like the best answers. For example, you might be trying to complete the goal “write a fiction book” and want to decide where you are going to write the book. The initial answer might be “in my office at home.” However, when you try to create many answers you might also come up with “on a park bench,” “in the coffee shop around the corner,” or “at the local library.” These other answers might end up yielding a better “where” for your goal than the initial answer that comes to mind. Don’t get too exhaustive, but also don’t instantly commit to the first, easy answer/s – push beyond what seems like the obvious and then edit your ideas to get the 5 W’s that are best for completing your goal.

Measurable Goals

The second letter – the M – of the SMART acronym is always “measurable.” A measurable goal is a goal that is defined by some kind of metric. The metric could be any number of things, for example: money, time, number of customers, number of words written, number of people talked to, number of products created, number of friends messaged, etc. These are all things that can have a definite number – they can be quantified with a specific measure.

A measurable goal is better than a non-measurable goal for similar reasons as to why a goal is better if it is specific. Indeed, the M of the SMART acronym can be understood as an extension of the S. Something that is specific is even more specific if it is measurable. For example, “increase the income of the business” is fairly specific, but “increase the income of the business by \$200 per month” is specific and measurable.

A measurable goal is easier to take action on because you can make a super-accurate plan for executing the goal. For example, if each of the products in the previous example’s business earns about \$200 a month, you might think, “OK, let’s just release one new product and we should also increase the income of the business by \$200.” This clear plan is only possible because the goal is specific AND measurable. Without a measurable goal, the plan to complete it might become anything you can think of, because there aren’t enough constraints to shape it effectively.

Sometimes you will have to get a little creative in order to apply measurable standards to a goal. It might not be immediately obvious or perhaps ideal to use a measurable standard; however, 9 times out of 10 a goal will be easier to complete, more motivating, and more effective in general if some measurable criteria are applied to it. For example, if you are trying to learn how to be more sociable and get better at making friends, it is tricky to add any measurable definition to a goal. However, some measurable element is typically better than nothing, and so you might add the measurable goal of talking to 3 new people every day. This might seem a little odd and it might be a little cumbersome to put into practice; however, having a definite, measurable goal for what you are trying to achieve will help you to take action, so applying a metric will be helpful even in this unusual example.

Making a goal measurable also means that you can accurately check-in with yourself to see how you are progressing. This makes it significantly easier to adapt and alter your plan and what you are doing, because you know exactly what the measurable results you want are, the measurable results you are getting, and how to make up the difference.

It also enables you to “keep score,” and by tracking measurable progress you can motivate yourself to keep working toward your overall goal and to improve the progress you have already made. The small motivation that comes from knowing you made a step toward completing the goal is made significantly easier if the goal itself is measurable.

Tracking progress also allows you to push forward and take on larger goals. For example, you might track your progress and see that you have been able to talk to 3 strangers every day and you’re feeling pretty good about it, and so you might decide to increase the metric for your goal and set a new goal of talking to 4 strangers every day. Measurable goals enable you to develop competitiveness and improve your progress consistently.

Clarity is the core idea with SMART goals. This begins with making a goal as specific as it can be, and is then developed by ensuring the goal is also measurable.

Attainable Goals

The next part of developing a SMART goal is ensuring that the goal is attainable. This means that you only create goals that are possible for you to achieve. For example, you might set the goal to “create a million dollar a year business in the next month.” This goal is specific and measurable, which is great, but it is not really attainable. Maybe a few people in the world can do this – those who have executed on business ideas before and have the resources and know-how needed, but for most people, the majority of people, this goal is not attainable.

Why is setting an attainable goal important? Below are some reasons.

If it isn't attainable, you can't achieve it. This sounds obvious, but oftentimes people decide to set goals in the name of really pushing themselves to do something amazing. And this can sometimes be a great idea – too often people are limited by not shooting high enough. A goal should be challenging and push you; however, there is a line that shouldn't be crossed. If it really is unattainable, setting it as a goal is unwise.

This isn't an exact science, and don't take the advice I am giving here as gospel. Think of these as guidelines and ideas that will improve and evolve how you think about goal setting.

If it isn't attainable, you won't feel motivated to work on it. A goal that is exceptionally difficult or impossible to achieve will not feel motivating. Again, there is a fine line here. A goal that is too easy and too attainable is not motivating, either. However, a goal that can be achieved, that is not impossible, is normally going to fare better than one which has no chance of success. For example, setting the goal of creating a business next year that earns \$10,000 is achievable for most people if they apply themselves well, but a goal of a million dollar business next month just isn't possible and therefore isn't motivating.

If it isn't attainable, no one will support you or work with you. Any goal that requires help, work, or advice from someone else is going to be a lot easier to achieve if the goal is attainable. No one is going to support you if they believe what you are doing is ridiculous. Of course, you might be on the right path, in which case some convincing is required; however, if the majority of people who know what they are talking about in relation to your goal think it is unattainable,

you should either rework your goal, forget about recruiting others, or become a real master in convincing people to help you.

Below are some ideas on how to create a goal that is attainable:

Ask advice from others and look at what has already been done. Specialists in the field will be an excellent resource for helping you understand whether your goal is attainable or not. If this isn't an option or is overkill, simply look to what has been done before and then attempt to recreate it or improve it a modest amount. Until you develop a solid understanding of the field you are working with and are fully confident that a goal is attainable, even if others doubt you, it will be helpful to rely on what others have already done.

Break apart the goal into smaller parts, and then build toward a goal that seems unattainable now. In order to push back the boundaries of what seems attainable, you need to create momentum and a series of successes. Once you have completed one goal that takes a bite out of a big goal, you can better judge what should come next. This enables you to bootstrap your way up with a series of attainable goals toward a goal that would have seemed unattainable at the start. For example, you might want to set a goal of earning \$100,000 next year, but that feels a little unattainable, as this year you only earned \$20,000. So you might decide to test the waters and set the goal of earning an extra \$5,000 in the first 2 months of the year, because this feels just about attainable. After those 2 months, if you are successful you can continue your optimistic approach and set a slightly higher goal for the following 2 months; however, if you were unsuccessful you can lower the next goal you set yourself. This is a great way to always be treading the line of what is attainable and what is impressively aggressive in terms of possibility.

Don't rush into setting goals. Meditate, journal, and think on your goals. It can be a waste of time to foolishly leap into a goal that feels exciting and awesome, only to realize later that it wasn't attainable. Allowing yourself time to reflect and work through possible problems will help you work toward something that feels more attainable. At the very least, it is helpful to get a night's sleep before you set a goal that will be worked on for a week or longer.

The last three letters of the SMART acronym – the A, the R, and the T – have been altered and improved upon in different ways over the years. Sometimes they are small alterations, and other times they are more dramatic changes.

The important thing is that you don't get too hung up on one perfect 100% right way to apply the SMART acronym – there are tweaks, different versions, and alterations that should perhaps all be considered. Take all the ideas in and then experiment with your own SMART goals to find what works best for you and best for certain situations. (I know I said this at the start of the book, but I wanted to reiterate it here.)

With that said, here are some of the other “A’s” that have been developed.

A for Ambitious. An ambitious goal is typically a good goal to have. This again brings up the debate of how “out-there” you should make a goal. In my opinion, a goal can be both attainable and ambitious, so don't think that these two have to be in conflict. Without getting into semantics too much, just remember that the best place for a goal is in that sweet spot where it is both possible and challenging to achieve, both attainable AND ambitious.

A for Agreed. Goals that have been agreed with by ALL the members of a team tend to be more effective. I have covered this already, but it is important to readdress if you are building goals as a group. Unless you all “buy-in” and agree to the goal, you are increasing the risk of problems down the road.

A for Acceptable. A goal that is “acceptable” has been interpreted in a few different ways. An acceptable goal might mean a goal that is aligned with the ethics of the individual or the group working on it. A goal that contravenes the moral code of an individual or a group of people is going to be an uphill struggle to work on because everyone involved will object to it, if not immediately then at some point while working on it. Even if this objection is only slight, it still means that there will be diminished focus on the goal. This is even more important if the goal is part of a business or a larger business group. Here, a mission statement or some sort of company policy on what is “OK” must be followed to preserve the other goals and ethical standards of the business.

A for Action Orientated. In my opinion, this is a very important part of creating and working with goals successfully. A goal that does not correspond to actions and definite behaviors is going to be only partially helpful – there needs to be a “what do we actually do?” aspect to the goal setting process. This is close to the forming of a plan of action or thinking in terms of strategy, i.e., “How do we get

from A to B?" not just "Where are we trying to get to?" Working on a SMART goal, I believe, demands a strategic plan attached to it, or else it is only partial. I believe this has been one of the best developments of the SMART goal system, so in the next chapter we're going to jump into this in more detail.

Action Orientated

Why is a goal that is action orientated so important? Below are some great reasons:

It's a great way to realize how possible the goal is. In order to ascertain if a goal is attainable, it is helpful to understand everything that needs to be done in order to complete the goal. This is assessing the situation with a critical eye and working up from what is possible. For example, you might think that a goal of creating a \$10,000 business in the next year is possible, but be unsure of whether it really is attainable for you. Creating a definite plan – a series of actions – for how you will get from a \$0 business to a \$10,000 business will reveal what is possible. Can you complete the series of actions to get there?

It draws your attention to what needs to be done. A SMART goal that is outcome-centric can risk becoming a little detached from reality and from action. The only way to complete a goal is obviously through taking action, and usually a lot of it. If the SMART goal neglects this and says nothing of what needs to be done it risks becoming speculative, unrealistic, and significantly harder to accomplish.

Below are some ideas on how to ensure the goal you develop is action orientated:

Focus on verbs. A verb is any “doing” word, a word which corresponds to an action. If there aren’t any verbs as part of your SMART goal, it isn’t action orientated. Examples of verbs might be: write, produce, create, design, build, learn, talk to, engineer, etc. These are all words that correspond to doing something – to an action. Work these into your SMART goal if you want an action orientated goal.

Deconstruct the goal – what are all the verbs you will use? It is worth noting that few goals are going to have only one verb as part of them – typically there are a variety of actions needed, so a variety of verbs will need to be present in your SMART goal. Considering all of the verbs that you will need to incorporate to complete your SMART goal will be a helpful way to get the most out of the action-orientated aspect of your SMART goal. For example, you might be trying to write a novel and consider that the only real verb involved in creating this

book will be to “write” it. However, there also needs to be planning, editing, revising, etc. By including ALL the verbs in your SMART goal you will create a more complete picture of what needs to be done. This is not only setting an outcome, but also recognizing every action that needs to happen to achieve it.

Imagine going through the whole process from start to finish and write down every different act that you will have to do. Walk through the process a few times mentally, and then keep designing and re-designing the series of actions needed to get there.

When forming a goal, use the sentence “By performing action X we will...”

Working backwards as well as forwards will be helpful when you are ascertaining the actions you will need to take. For example, you might be trying to create a business, but you will have to go backwards step by step from that outcome. Perhaps the last action to complete your new business might be finding a new accountant or making a plan for your second year in business. Looking this far into the future and then working backwards will help to reveal ALL the actions you will need to take. This will be a little exhaustive and may be overkill for some projects, but for those really detailed, complex goals, working backwards might be necessary to create a plan that is totally thorough.

R is for... Realistic

The R in the original SMART goals acronym is for realistic. This is a similar but slightly different take on what is offered by attainable, the difference being that for something to be attainable it has to be at least possible. For example, it is not possible to jump 100 meters in the air unaided. However, for something to be realistic it just has to be likely that it can be achieved. For example, writing a novel in a month is achievable, but if you haven't done it before it isn't really realistic. Substitute the word attainable for "possible" and you will perhaps have a better understanding of what I am trying to say. Realistic, on the other hand, means what is probably possible for you.

The difference between these ideas is somewhat blurry, and earlier when I described what is meant by attainable I crossed somewhat into the realm of what is "realistic."

I'm not a fan of using the word "realistic" in SMART goals, as it tends to promote safe thinking and goals that aren't big enough. However, it is certainly the case that a goal too out-there is unlikely to be executed well on. It is a balance, no doubt.

This is a somewhat difficult area of SMART goal setting to accurately explain and resolve, and an aspect that we will return to later. How realistic/achievable/attainable/possible should a goal be? It needs to be challenging but not impossible. But there is clearly ground for debate here. For now, let's explore a few of the other "R's" that have evolved into the SMART goal system.

R is also for Relevant

This is a popular alternative for the R in the SMART acronym. There are slightly different interpretations of how to make a goal relevant. My favorite is that a goal is relevant if the action, results, and alignment with other goals is the best it can be. For example, if you are researching a fiction novel you might believe researching the location you want to set the novel in is a good idea, and that you need to actually go there to do this. This might well be helpful, but if it is an excuse to procrastinate on writing the novel, or perhaps if the setting doesn't need to be researched *that* well for your novel, it would not be relevant.

Making sure that something is relevant can perhaps better be understood by asking, "Is this meaningful / significant / important / impactful to the outcome I want and the other goals of myself and the organization?"

Ensuring that a goal is relevant requires a little more tact and careful thought than other aspects of the SMART goal. However, it really is essential and I believe a more helpful question to ask than how realistic the goal is. Goals are often set that just aren't a match for the direction of the overall push of the individual or organization.

Consider the following questions when trying to ensure that a goal is relevant:

Relevant Timing - Is this the right time for doing this? The timing of your goal can be an important thing to consider. If you are working on a business, this will involve addressing the competition that your products or services are going to run up against. You need to do at least some market research to ascertain whether you expect to be well received by the market. Another example might be choosing the right time for a new fitness routine or personal financial goal so that it aligns with the current demands of other parts of your life – if you have just had a child or just moved into a new house, this might not be the best time to start something challenging like a new fitness routine.

Relevant People - Are you the best person to complete this? There might be other people in your organization who can execute on the SMART goal you have in mind, and they might be able to do it faster, better, or more effectively than you can, so, it might be MORE relevant for them to complete the SMART goal than for you to do it. Don't become dogmatic and only complete something if you are 100% the best person to complete it, but if it makes sense to, consider

delegation or talking to your team to find someone who is a better fit.

Relevant Context - Is this the best way to achieve your bigger goals? This is a big one and, as I said, essential to developing a SMART goal that is relevant. A great question to ask to ascertain this is: **What are the 20% of actions that will get us to 80% of our wider goals? Is this prospective SMART goal part of that 20%?** This is the Pareto Principle applied to the context of your SMART goal. The Pareto Principle basically states that 80% of the results come from 20% of the actions. In the quest to set SMART goals that are as relevant as possible and contribute as much as possible to your wider SMART goals, ascertaining what lies in the 20% is essential. For example, if your wider objective is to increase income of your business by 10,000 dollars next year, you need to find the 20% of actions that are most likely to make that happen. If your SMART goals don't fall into that 20%, they are not relevant enough.

A final word on creating a goal that is “relevant”. Often, your goals will fall on a spectrum of “relevance” – some SMART goals will feel more relevant than others. It is important to realize that you probably won’t be dealing with options that are 100% irrelevant or 100% relevant. Instead, you are trying to find things that are the most relevant and contribute the most they possibly can for your wider goal. For example, cleaning your office is somewhat relevant to building your business, but it is not the 20% that gets you toward your long-term goals. And so you want to find something that is more relevant, for example, creating a new product.

T is for Time

The T in the SMART acronym stands for time. Though there are differing approaches on how exactly to use time to optimize your SMART goals, timing of some form is used in all SMART goals.

The core idea is that a goal cannot be given an infinite amount of time to be completed. And although this may seem obvious, often businesses or individuals fail to acknowledge this and set goals without any time element in them.

The problem with not setting an amount of time to complete something is that the time spent to complete something will typically expand to the amount of time allowed. This is known as Parkinson's Law. And so, if we set no amount of time to complete something, it will keep dragging on and on, which is obviously never ideal. And even if the goal is completed, it will take substantially longer and be completed with more stress and difficulty than if a time limit had been applied to the goal.

Of course, that doesn't mean that adequate time shouldn't be given to complete a goal.

There are slightly different approaches you can take when integrating time into your SMART goal. Below is a list of these approaches:

Time limit the goal or set a “fixed deadline.” Setting a time and date when the goal has to be completed by is a great way to ensure the goal gets completed. This might simply mean that you move onto something else if you haven't completed the goal or perhaps that you have to complete an action no matter your progress on the goal. For example, if you are creating a product you HAVE to ship it on a certain date, no matter what state it is in.

Setting a time for when you HAVE to ship / publish / click send on a goal that you are working on is a fantastic way to stop being a perfectionist and to ensure that you get things done.

A more relaxed approach to this time limit goal is to have a benefit and / or reward system in place. For example, if you complete your goal of recording a 10 track album by the end of the month you will give yourself the reward of some new shoes (if that is what motivates you).

Projected time goal. This is when you state a goal that you want to complete something by, but there aren't any consequences. For instance, you are creating a new product to ship and you want to complete it within 30 days, but if it isn't finished you don't have to ship it regardless of its state, as you did with the "fixed deadline" approach.

A benefit of working with a projected time deadline is that you will still get the "push" psychologically to work on something – you have set a time to complete something by so it won't just drag on forever. However, the downside is that without any consequences it can be too easy to get to the time that you wanted to complete the goal by but still not have the goal completed, and then... you set another time that you want it to be completed by. Without any real consequences to *not* completing something by a specific time there is little to hold you to account, and so even though you have set a time to complete it by, it doesn't impact you enough.

In my experience there really needs to be some consequences, i.e., the "time limit /fixed deadline" I first described will be preferable. This doesn't have to be the "ship it no matter what" kind of deadline – though that will get you working hard! Below is a quick consolidation of the possible consequences you could put in place:

Accountability buddies. Tell the world when you want to complete something by so if you don't have it completed by the deadline you will feel embarrassed / annoyed / shamed to some extent. Announcing on social media that you will ship your new product / publish your new album by a certain date might be enough public accountability to get you to take action.

Ship it / publish it / share it / launch, regardless of progress. No matter how far you have gotten, you *have* to do some meaningful action with what you are working on – once you have reached the time limit.

A reward. Promise yourself a different kind of reward. Perhaps you buy yourself shoes, as in the example before. Or, if you are working as part of a team, you promise everyone a trip to somewhere exciting.

A punishment. This might be that you lose a certain amount of money, or that you perhaps have to go for a 10 mile run – anything that intimidates you and that you will fear to execute on.

Time Scheduling – WHEN are you going to work on it

Another application of “time” in the SMART goal framework is to allocate the time when you will work on your SMART goal. Essentially, this is scheduling the work load that you are going to complete.

Scheduling your work load is important because it adds another dimension of specificity to your SMART goal. And really, the more specific you get, the better – remember the first letter of SMART. Below are some reasons why scheduling when you are going to complete something will be helpful:

Scheduling makes it easier to complete. Our minds work much better when they are given specific parameters to complete something; for example, “read 4 pages before 5PM” is easier than “read some time.” Take a moment to think on those two previous statements and imagine how each would feel as a goal for tomorrow. The first statement will probably build a kind of intention or inner momentum as you begin to focus on making it a reality, while the second statement will probably just feel like a vague, gray wish that might occur. Scheduling WHEN you are going to work on something, as well as applying some kind of time limit to the goal as a whole, is a great way to make the whole thing more specific and easier for your mind to focus and take action on.

You can relax when you don’t need to be working on it. Without a definite plan for when you should be working on something, it becomes likely that you will feel constant stress that you could be working on it NOW or at any point. For example, “I will read at 4PM today for 30 minutes” is scheduled, and so allows you to relax and focus on something else for the rest of the day. However, “I will read sometime today” doesn’t allow you to relax for the rest of the day because your mind will always be holding onto the idea of when you will get around to reading.

You can work with others more effectively. Scheduling becomes even more important when you are working with others, because it allows you to align who is working on what, when.

As with most of this advice, nothing is set in stone. As ever, experiment with the concepts and see what works well for you.

SMARTER

The SMART acronym has been through many small alterations and developments. There is no fixed, perfect, 100% best version. Not only has the SMART acronym itself been altered, it has also been extended. I am actually a fan of extending the SMART goal system to SMARTER, and having read some of the variants of SMART, I think you'll be able to see that extending it begins to make sense, rather than replacing elements.

Working with a longer acronym does make it slightly less compact and straightforward to work with, so for day-to-day small tasks and projects you might consider sticking with just a straightforward SMART acronym. However, to ensure you get the most out of your work, why not make it that little bit better and more comprehensive and use a longer acronym?

Which leads to two more possible letters!

The first letter, the E can stand for a couple of different words:

E for “Exciting.” A goal that excites you and that you *want* to complete is going to be a more effective goal. For example, the goal “earn 10,000 dollars next year” isn’t as exciting as “earn 10,000 dollars so that I can go on a vacation to my favorite destination.” A more exciting goal tends to be a better goal because you are going to work harder on it, focus on it, and wake up earlier to hustle on it. A goal that isn’t exciting is a lot more likely to fall by the wayside and not be followed through on.

An exciting goal is just as important when you are working as a group. Although many business goals can be a little “stale,” there at least should be some goals which the employees can get excited about – something that challenges them and fires up their excitement.

For a goal to be exciting, it sometimes creates friction with a goal that is attainable – often what we definitely can achieve isn’t as exciting as what we can only just or maybe achieve. So this is another consideration when making a goal that is exciting. As ever, draw experience over time and just keep iterating on your goal setting process and understanding.

E for “Evaluated”. Another E that has been used as part of the SMARTER

acronym is “evaluated.” This can mean a couple of different things. Firstly, an evaluated goal might be a goal that adheres to a pre-established framework. This would be most appropriate when working as part of an organization that has guidelines for how processes / systems are to be executed on. A goal might need to be evaluated by a higher up in the business before it is worked on.

Evaluated can also mean part of a feedback system on the progress / completion of the goal. For example, you might decide that your goal should be evaluated every 2 weeks and then also at the end of the timeline. Evaluating how successful the goal was and every aspect of the work done will mean you can both evaluate the effectiveness of the SMARTER system used and the actual impact that the work completed has had.

Typically, it will make more sense to have “exciting” for the E in the SMARTER goal if you are working as an individual and “evaluated” for the E if it is being worked on as part of a business.

SMARTER – What is the last R? The last R of the SMARTER goal has been paired with the E when it stands for “evaluated” by a couple of authors to create:

- Evaluated and Reviewed
- Evaluated and Recognize mastery.

Both of these R’s build on the idea of evaluation and are used as part of working as a team with SMARTER goals. Reviewing and recognizing mastery are similar approaches for giving feedback to team members. The goal is to improve performance through rewarding good work (recognize mastery), and also to recognize errors for correction in the future.

Of course, there were many R’s used in the first R of the SMART acronym. So if you are creating your own goal system and want to use one of these, absolutely do so. This is a great way to make the SMART goal a little more relevant to you, and a little more effective. The two R’s can be anything you want.

Bibliography and further reading for this chapter:

Graham. (2013). *Essential Guide to Leading Your Team: How to Set Goals, Measure Performance and Reward Talent*. Pearson Education.

George M. (2011). *Rapid Instructional Design: Learning ID Fast and Right*.

Write Out Your SMART Goals

It is important that you write down your SMART goals. Assuming that your goal is SMART, or just hoping that it is, is a recipe for failure and a problem that many people who begin to use SMART goals experience – they assume that just because they know about SMART goals they will use the guidelines effectively. Writing down a SMART goal, whether it is with pen and paper or onto a device, will ensure the SMART goal setting is followed much more effectively. Writing out your SMART goals is helpful for the following reasons:

SMART goals are kind of long, complicated, and too much to remember.

Now, SMART goal setting isn't rocket science, but there is enough information / ideas within a SMART goal that make remembering it just too difficult. There is no need to try and remember every part of the SMART goal, so just write it down. Even for those goals that seem easy and perhaps could effectively be remembered, writing them down will help free up mental resources so that you can better focus and work on the goal, rather than trying to remember it.

It is too easy to stray away from the SMART goal. This might mean that when you are working you accidentally alter the goal to make it a little easier or perhaps a little harder, or maybe you change another important part of the goal. Not having a clearly recorded SMART goal makes it too easy to stray from the goal once you have begun working on it, which means you might achieve something you didn't mean to or not reach the target you should be aiming for. That isn't to say that you should never revise or alter a SMART goal after you have created it, but it is important that when you do change a SMART goal you do it consciously because you have the original one recorded.

If you are working with others, you avoid possible disagreements. Writing down SMART goals becomes a lot more important when you are working with others because it avoids differing ideas of what those SMART goals are. As I have said, SMART goals have enough information in them to make them too much to remember. This is multiplied by the fact that anyone can have a different interpretation and means that two people can have a different understanding of what the SMART goal they are working on is. Of course, the more people you add, the more likely it is that you will have a different recollection of the SMART goal you are working on. Avoid the possibility of disagreement and record precisely the SMART goal you are working on.

You can better edit, work on, and improve your SMART goal. It is important that you create the right SMART goal – each part of the goal needs to be accurate, precise, and what you really want to be working toward. Creating that SMART goal is so much easier when it is done on paper or a device.

Creating a SMART Goal as a Group

Creating a SMART goal as part of a group can be different from creating one individually. Below are some ideas on how to optimize the process if you are creating the SMART goal as part of a group.

Remind the group regularly of the SMART goal. There needs to be consistent “check ins” to go over the progress that is being made toward the SMART goal/s. Assign someone to manage these check-ins and schedule everyone to meet up to discuss progress. Whatever the benchmarks and the “M” – the measurable goal – they need to be consistently assessed in relation to the current actions of the team. This can be “evaluated” or “reviewed” if you are creating a SMARTER goal system.

Everyone has to agree on what is written down. There needs to be consensus and shared understanding of the SMART goal. Unless there are set management roles or an employer / employee divide, you should work as a group when creating a SMART goal. The more that everyone can “buy in” to the process of creating the SMART goal the better. Everyone needs to agree and believe in the SMART goal. What seems achievable for someone might not seem so for someone else.

It is important everyone understands the SMART criteria and the specific expectations of how your group will be using the SMART principles. This may take time and seem like a pain to perform at first, but once everyone is up to speed there are more people who can revise and improve the SMART goal, making the whole process and organization more effective.

If you are working as a group, make sure the SMART goal is available to everyone. It is important that everyone has access to the SMART goal/s that the group is working on. Ideally, everyone has a written copy. If you are working in a shared space, consider sticking the SMART goal up on the wall so that everyone can not only refer to it but also be reminded by it whenever they pass by it. Writing up the SMART goal/s is essential for everyone to have the same version of the goal.

RPM Goal Setting

A different goal setting approach has been created by Tony Robbins. And, in my experience, it works so well that it is worth considering to use instead of SMART, or together to compliment it.

The RPM goal setting approach stands for:

RESULTS The results are the outcome for your goal. Typically, the results will not be directly in your control but are affected by your actions. For example, you might want to lose weight but the amount of weight you lose isn't 100% in your control. Yes, you can control factors that will make it occur, but these are secondary. This is even more the case with business or financial goals that depend on a market, customers, etc.

PURPOSE The purpose of the goal is the reason why you are trying to complete it. This needs to be something exciting and meaningful to you. For example, the purpose of losing weight might be so that you look more attractive naked or so that you have more energy to get up the stairs at home. These things are meaningful, definite reasons for why you want to complete the goal.

MASSIVE ACTION The massive action is the strategy and way to get from where you are to the point that you have completed the results. For example, you might want to lose 10 pounds of weight as a result, and the purpose might be so you have more energy, in which case the massive action might be jogging 5 miles every day.

The RPM goal setting system can be an excellent substitute for the SMART system if you prefer a shorter acronym. However, the most important thing again is to realize what the essential elements to your goal setting are. Between the ideas of RPM and all the iterations of SMART and SMARTER, there are definitely enough principles to dramatically improve your effectiveness both at home and at work.

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

(BONUS) BOOK 17: BEST SLEEP OF YOUR LIFE

The Benefits of Getting a Good Night's Sleep

As you have purchased this book, you are no doubt already eager to improve how well you sleep at night. However, in order for you to better understand why it is so important, and to give you further motivation to implement this book's ideas, I have included this short chapter on the benefits of sleeping well.

Improved physical recovery. Getting enough sleep will help physical pains and aches to heal faster and more efficiently. Whether you're hitting the gym or perhaps getting a little older, getting good sleep (and enough sleep) will help you recover while feeling limber and pain-free.

Improved learning and memory. Research has suggested that sleeping well is helpful both before and after attempts at memorization. If you're a student trying to memorize material, you MUST take care of your sleep habits. Aside from those coursework deadlines that can inevitably drag up to the due date, a student's life should always have 7-8 hours of sleep every night.

Improved focus and concentration. This probably isn't a surprise to you – no doubt you have been sleep deprived before and likely experienced a hazy mental state where you struggled to get work done. For everyone, improved attention is going to be a massive help to their work and personal lives; better grades for students, better work done for professionals. We must also consider that sleep deprived children demonstrate ADHD-like symptoms which can lead to poor performance in testing.

Improved sex life. This might be a little more surprising, however, there is evidence to show that not getting enough good sleep can lead to lower testosterone levels in men.

It makes you happier. All of the improvements mentioned above are generally going to make you happier but you will also feel happier as a direct consequence of sleeping well.

It can save your life. In the United States, it is estimated that a tired driver causes one out of every five auto accidents. Everything that could be dangerous becomes a little more so when you have under-slept. Don't contribute to any cautionary statistics, ensure you sleep well and live safer.

Improved weight management. Sleeping well regulates the hormone "leptin" which is essential for you to feel satiated. With insufficient sleep comes

insufficient leptin. This makes you hungrier, even when you don't need to eat! Like many of these benefits, there are indirect corollaries that will compromise your eating habits. For example, impaired decision making from lack of sleep will affect your ability to choose healthy foods. This becomes a dangerous combination. Imagine, you're unnecessarily hungry from lack of leptin AND you're lacking the good decision making skills you normally have. Resisting that fast food place on the way home just became ten times more difficult.

Improved Creativity. Not only does sleep improve recording memories, it also helps you organize and re-organize memories which can spur creativity. Researchers at Harvard University have showed that the emotional element of a memory can be strengthened during sleep. This more vivid emotional connectivity may also help the creative process.

Improved Performance. A study at Stanford University discovered that athletes who sleep for 10 hours a night for seven to eight weeks noticeably improved their performance. 10 hours seems excessive for most of us but the principle is fascinating and straightforward. More sleep = better performance.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/9-reasons-to-sleep-more>

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/matters/benefits-of-sleep>

http://www.health.com/health/gallery/0,,20459221_5,00.html

Sleep in Silence – Ear Plugs and Other “Quiet Room” Techniques

The two most powerful “quick-fixes” for you to improve how well you sleep are the following steps:

Sleep in total silence. Think ZERO noise.

Sleep in the dark. Think pitch-black; ZERO light.

For the majority of people who will read this book, these two principles will be enough to dramatically improve the quality of their sleep.

Let’s address the first one; sleeping in a silent room. Why is sleeping in a silent room important? Simply put, noise can wake you up. If even on occasion you are being woken up by a neighbor slamming a door, a car alarm or a housemate cooking breakfast, this needs to be cut out. However, as well as the things that wake you up, there are those sounds that don’t wake you but still affect your rest by affecting you subconsciously. These small impacts can really add-up and create a worse night’s sleep.

Ear plugs are the best fix for ensuring you ALWAYS sleep in perfect silence. Some training is required to get used to using earplugs. Typically, it can take days to be okay with earplugs and weeks to feel 100% accustomed to them.

You can practice using earplugs even before you get into bed. Consider putting them in an hour before you go to bed to learn the feel of them. This will also help you to quieten your mind and force you to do things that help you slow down and get ready for bed. No noisy film, music, or conversations; these aren’t going to happen with earplugs. You can instead migrate to reading, meditating, taking a bath, tidying, and other things that help build up a feeling of peace and relaxation plus help you to get to sleep and to sleep really well.

Another way to practice using earplugs is to use in-ear headphones. Although these don’t go in as far as earplugs, they will still help you get used to the sensation of having something in your ears.

There are different kinds of earplugs you can buy. The best ones to use are the small disposable plastic/foam ones that you roll tightly into shape and then let them slowly expand in your ears. A box of these is very cheap and you can re-use them a few times to make the box last.

The technique for inserting these disposable foam earplugs takes a little time to

master. Below is a quick guide:

Roll the ear plug between your thumb and index finger. Begin rolling gently and then increasingly roll it harder until you are using all your finger strength. You want to create a really tight cylinder.

With one hand, lift the ear from the top; this makes more space in your ear canal. With the other hand, insert the earplug and push it in with your index finger.

IMPORTANT: Make sure you don't push the plug all the way in as there needs to be a small amount protruding so you can pull the plug out again! Seek medical attention immediately if you find it has gone in too far. By only rolling the plug $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length, you will leave enough plug free so that it won't fully go into your ear.

The above technique may take a few days or weeks before you are super-comfortable doing it. Again, practice before you go to bed so you can get used to putting earplugs in and are a master when you actually use them at night. If you sat down and practiced again and again, you'd probably master this in two hours.

Taking steps to live in a quiet house or on a quiet street is also helpful. However, it is rarely possible to guarantee a perfectly quiet night's sleep so earplugs really should be considered.

Whenever you travel, earplugs are a must. Anytime you are somewhere new, you are naturally going to be a little more "on edge" and likely to wake at the sound of something unusual. Enjoy perfect silence and you will ensure that you are never woken again.

Train yourself to feel relaxed with ear plugs in, practice rolling them and inserting them properly, and within a month you will be ready to enjoy a 100% silent night's sleep every night.

If you really can't go on with using earplugs, there are other alternatives. One is to play soothing music in your room while another is to play white noise. Both of these options mean you don't have to put anything in your ears! If you choose to listen to music, go for something minimal and not in the least exciting. Rock and pop music is far too likely to either wake you or rile your subconscious in some manner. Think classical or some minimalist instrumental / electronic music – less singing is going to better.

Another aspect of creating a quiet room is to prevent all possible noises from waking you, especially those that can get through the earplugs. The most obvious is taking care of your cell-phone; either turn it off or place it on silent. Waking up to a notification is a dreadful way to manage your sleep.

Other things that could wake you should also be minimized. Consider synchronizing your sleep to be closer with your children's if they typically wake you up in the morning. Think of anything else that could possibly wake you up and take steps to minimize its potential impact on your sleep. For excellent sleep, you need a silent room with no interruptions.

Sleep in the Dark – Eye Mask and Other “Dark Room” Techniques

To get a good night’s sleep, it is essential to cut out ALL light. This can take two forms; having a dark room or wearing an eye-mask to stop light from getting to your eyes. It is that simple.

By “dark room,” I don’t mean a “darker” room; I mean pitch-black, ZERO light. This is the benchmark to aim for.

Investing in some excellent blackout blinds or curtains that cut out all light can be more expensive than buying eye masks. The eye-mask is also more flexible in that it can be taken anywhere with you, e.g., on holiday, a weekend with friends etc.

Similarly to the ear plugs, it is helpful to train yourself to be okay using an eye mask. Consistency is paramount here, you just have to wear the eye mask every night and get used to it. If you haven’t used an eye-mask for a few nights in a row and you put it on that night, you are going to feel awkward and uncomfortable going to sleep. Plus, consciously or not, you might pull it off in the night. You just have to get used to it. Seven nights is a reasonable rule-of-thumb. You need to use the eye mask for seven nights before you can expect to be used to it, and sleep well.

The benefit of blackout blinds is that no training is required. Indeed, no matter how well trained you are using an eye-mask, occasionally you might have a bad night’s sleep and you may shrug off the eye-mask at some point; this can’t happen with the blackout blinds. I am personally a huge fan of using a sleep-mask, however, some people struggle to sleep with an eye-mask, even after they buy the most expensive, amazingly marketed one Amazon has to offer. So, if after trying all the eye-masks you can find and putting weeks into trying to train yourself, you still can’t get on with it, it’s not the end of the world – just commit to dark room blinds / curtains!

Another thing to consider is if you sleep with someone else. If either of you get up before the other, it is helpful to take all efforts to prevent light coming in. Here, the eye-mask can be helpful, especially if you know someone is going to get up a lot earlier and perhaps even more so if they are going to spend time in the room getting dressed etc.

If you are travelling, the sleep-mask is necessary. Whether you are catching a nap on a plane or settling down in your hotel room, the sleep-mask is necessary. Trying to avoid situations where you have to sleep on a plane can be helpful. Even if it is an extra \$100 dollars to get the flight that isn't through the night, consider the cost to your sleep routine. Is saving \$100 worth feeling less awake and productive for a couple of days?

Becoming borderline obsessive with creating a dark room is not a bad thing. Treat it like a hospital clean-room (for light) and be meticulous about keeping the room sterile from any light getting in. Using both an eye-mask and blackout measures to darken the room is ideal. Getting an excellent night's sleep shouldn't be something that you ever compromise on. Spend the money, train yourself with the eye-mask, and make a deal with your partner to help each other get the best night's sleep while allowing ZERO light to hit your closed eyes, and you will move closer to enjoying the benefits listed in the first chapter.

Another detail to consider is the background of LED's or standby lights from any device in your room. These should be turned off or blocked out completely as they can disrupt your sleep as well. If you get a great eye mask, this may not be necessary; just something to consider if you opt for the blinds or curtain solution.

When it comes to purchasing the eye-mask and black-out blinds, don't be cheap! Always go for the best. Cheap eye-masks come off too easily and let in light around the edges. You can easily end up getting an even worse night's sleep as you may wake up multiple times with an eye-mask awkwardly hanging off your face. Consider the benefits that you are going to accrue by sleeping even a little bit better, this is worth thousands of dollars over your life, perhaps even over just this year, so spend the money and get the best.

What's Done Before Bedtime Affects Sleep Wellness

The time spent immediately before going to sleep dictates the quality of sleep you will enjoy. If you do the wrong activities, you will have a poor quality of sleep. If you do positive activities, you will have a good quality of sleep.

Our minds and physiology cannot turn off and on like a computer. Instead, we need to guide ourselves – like an adult guiding a child – while slowly changing our mental and physical state so that we go from awake and alert to resting and asleep. Imagine that you need a “ramp” or “bridge” of activities to effectively move your physical and mental state from being awake to asleep. Trying to go from one to the other without a bridge of some kind will mean it will take longer for you to get to sleep and the sleep itself won’t be high quality.

Ideally, the one to two hours prior to laying down for sleep should be optimized for sleeping well. That might sound annoying but all it really means is that the things you do in this timeframe should be of a certain nature, e.g., don’t watch TV, do read a book, etc. You don’t need to do anything impossible or difficult, just make small choices and move away from things that are stimulating and lean toward things that are calming.

Creating a routine, or a “ritual,” that you do before going to sleep every day will help to improve your sleep significantly. By doing the same routine, you minimize time and energy spent making decisions like shall I tidy my room or shall I read my book? This is helpful in itself because decision-making keeps your mind active. This is also a potential cause of some anxiety; even the small decisions like should I iron my shirt now or wait until the morning?

Another reason why a routine is helpful is that you will better train yourself to go to sleep at the same time. Through completing the same actions before bed every day, you will activate a series of conscious and unconscious triggers. Your mind and body will then get the message, “I am going to sleep soon.” We humans respond exceptionally well to training; give us the same triggers at the same time every day and we will complete something like clockwork.

Of course, becoming bored, annoyed or feeling like you are in automation while mindlessly completing actions is possible when you do the SAME thing every day. However, you might be surprised how much you enjoy the feeling of routine. If you fill the time doing things that you love, like reading your favorite

series of books, taking a hot bath, meditating, listening to calming music, etc., these things that you love to do are going to make the routine feel awesome.

To create this routine before you go to sleep, it is essentially helpful to practice it EVERY day without fail. This is especially the case when you are new to your routine. Don't think about deviating from your routine unless you have been doing it for at least a month. After this period, you can enjoy a bit of flexibility and know that, by default, you will go back to the healthy, excellent-sleep-inducing routine that you have trained yourself to complete.

It is also helpful to take time to build up the routine. For example, if you're new to this don't try to do an hour long routine of things before going to sleep, instead do something for the five minutes before going to sleep like reading your favorite fiction book. After doing this for a week, you will be ready to build onto the routine. Building the routine slowly will also help you build motivation incrementally because even with a small 5 minute habit, you will begin to see improved relaxation and sleep.

Ideas on What Your Routine Should NOT Look Like

This chapter is going to explore the kinds of activities you should be avoiding in the time leading up to going to sleep.

Planning into the future and any decision-making. This is a very easy trap to fall in to. Planning what you are going to do in future, whether it is next week, next month, next year, etc., is helpful in general but doing it before bed is a sure-fire way to delay falling asleep. This may become especially hard once you have cleared away the TV watching, social media, and alcohol before bed and you find your mind projecting into the future. Don't beat yourself up if you do this. The best antidote is scheduling something like reading and meditation so that there isn't any opportunity for your mind to plan ahead.

Arguments, positive or otherwise. Whether it is a heated political argument, or an enjoyable and positive discussion about the best restaurant in town, an argument is going to activate your critical thinking and decision-making faculties. This is not "winding down" and your mind will be working on the argument rather than restfully going to sleep.

Responding to the world. Anything where you are being acted on by the world, especially if it is electronic, should be avoided. The time before going to sleep should be a sacred space for YOU to relax and prepare to go to sleep. Responding to inputs from the world (via email, social media, etc.) activates your mind and puts it on the back foot.

Anything else that turns your mind "on." Whether it is looking at your business accounts, or creating a checklist for a colleague at work, or even a meaningful conversation with a loved one, anything that makes you think needs to be cut-down or cut-out altogether. This can be easier said than done, especially if your spouse likes to talk politics! Instead, talk casually and lightly about things and do NOTHING that requires you to make a decision, think critically, problem solve, or think creatively.

Exercise. The endorphin release and general health benefits of exercise are exceptionally helpful for getting a good night's sleep in general. However, exercise in the 1-4 hours before you go to sleep is going to make it harder to actually get to sleep. Of course, "exercise" is a fairly general term. I am talking about medium to intense cardio exercise and weight lifting. A light walk, light

swim or light stretching is significantly less disruptive and can even help you relax. Experiment a little, see what your body responds to and go from there.

Looking at a screen. Using a device before bed is not conducive to good sleep.

Alcohol, Caffeine, Drugs.

In the Evening, Limit Alcohol, Caffeine, and Drugs

Alcohol is one of the biggest causes of getting a bad night's sleep. Though drinking can help you get to sleep faster, it certainly doesn't help the quality of your sleep.

In the journal, *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, subjects had their brainwaves monitored whilst they slept. Those who had had alcohol experienced both alpha and delta wave activity. Delta wave is good for restful sleep but alpha wave activity is normal for being awake in low activity. Having both forms of brain waves active reveals the disruptive nature of sleeping after drinking alcohol.

If you really want to improve the quality of your sleep, the simplest answer is to stop drinking altogether. However, if alcohol is a happy, perhaps unavoidable part of your life, taking steps to limit it before you go to sleep will be helpful. It takes, on average, one hour to process one unit of alcohol; use this as a rule of thumb and consider having a drink or two earlier in the evening rather than later to give your body a chance to process it completely. You can then be 100% sober when you go to sleep and enjoy your sleep without any of those pesky alpha waves disrupting you.

Caffeine falls under similar advice to alcohol; cut it out if you can but, at the very least, don't have any caffeine in the few hours before you go to bed. This means no tea, coffee, soft drinks or chocolate.

Other drugs like nicotine should be avoided before bed as well and ideally removed altogether. The more stable and consistent you can make your energy levels, the easier it will be to feel alert when you need to and sleep well when you need to. All drugs are going to compromise this consistency to some extent.

Making small inroads into your alcohol and caffeine habits by making the time before bed a routine of abstention is an easy way to cut-down in general. The hour before you go to sleep MUST be free of caffeine and alcohol so make this your first resolution. Consider adding extra hours onto this abstention period as you feel the positive effects and your motivation grow.

Limiting time you spend with people who always drink alcohol or coffee late in the day will also be helpful to slow your consumption. This is especially important when sleep is needed, like during the workweek. In these times

especially, stay clear of alcohol and caffeine in the evenings.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://time.com/3671777/drinking-sleep/>

Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research by Christian Nicholas

<http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/features/nix-nightcap-better-sleep>

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/effects-on-the-body/alcohol-and-sleep>

No Screen Time Before Bed. Turn off the Tech!

As smartphones, tablets, and other devices permeate through our lives and homes, it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw clear boundaries between time to ourselves and time spent looking at a screen. This has, without doubt, caused sleep patterns in the developed world to suffer. Looking at a lightbulb before you go to sleep, let alone being stimulated by email, social media, news articles, etc., is a recipe for a bad night's sleep.

If you do fall into using a device, you don't want to be doing something that requires you to make decisions, plan into the future, or respond to others. For example, watching TV is more relaxing before bed than answering work emails or messaging friends. Still, the TV watching isn't ideal as you are stimulating your eyes with the light and images.

Creating a cut-off period in the hour before bed is an excellent way to begin cutting down on the screen-time. If you find this difficult, start with less, perhaps just the last 10 minutes before bed.

There are apps and browser add-ons which limit the "blue light" and the brightness of the screen depending on the time of day. These can be necessary if you must pull an all-nighter for work or have some other legitimate reason for using tech late into the evening.

What to Include in Your “End of Day” Routine

Having covered what not to include in the hours before you go to sleep, let's now be more positive and think about the awesome things that you should include in these hours in order to make them super-conducive to getting the best night's sleep possible.

Cleaning and tidying. This is a great way to create a sense of inner peace and prepare your home or work for what you are going to do tomorrow. It builds a small sense of achievement, comfort, and control over your life. All of this will reduce anxiety and make you feel a little happier – not a bad way to fall asleep! There are a variety of ways to implement this habit. Perhaps you might do just 2 minutes of tidying or maybe 2 minutes of tidying and 5 minutes cleaning something like the kitchen sink.

Time with loved ones. Unless your family are an inescapable source of anxiety and stress, spending time with them before bed is a great way for you to unwind, relax, and feel a little happier. As ever, making the habit something really concrete and clear cut is helpful. For example, you might spend 5 minutes reading a story to your daughter or spend 5 minutes taking a shower with your spouse. Just remember to ensure this is “downtime” and not spent solving problems or discussing important matters.

Time with a pet. Stroking your animal companion is obviously going to have a calming effect and will help you forget the worries and ideas that normally swim in your mind. Similarly to meditation, exercise, etc., ensuring you spend time with your pet at some point in the day will improve your overall calmness and well-being.

Meditation. Meditating is a great way to improve your overall sense of calm and well-being. Meditating directly before you go to sleep, or at some point in the preceding few hours, will help you to unwind exceptionally well.

There are a variety of forms of meditation you can choose from. If you are pushed for time, a guided meditation might be the best way to go. These sessions can be as short as 5 minutes or as long as you want. Simply search “Guided Meditation” online, like on YouTube, for instance, and you will find an abundance to choose from. These guided meditations are targeted for a variety of goals. Just experiment with the ones designed to relax or search for “sleep

meditation” to find ones targeted for helping you to get to sleep. Check feedback in the comments and experiment with a few different ones to find what works for you.

Another meditation option is to do your own silent meditation. This involves simply drawing your awareness to your breath for 20 minutes. Whilst meditating, try to quieten all your thoughts without resistance or judgement. This is known as “transcendental meditation” and is practiced by many people for 20 minutes twice a day. If you can do this twice a day – 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening, you will not only sleep better but you will also enjoy significantly increased focus, clarity, concentration, calmness, and wellbeing.

Light stretching, light exercise. As I have said, -light- exercise before bed can be helpful for some to get to sleep. Think yoga or a walk around a park; anything you feel calm and relaxed after is beneficial. Consider experimenting with a 10-minute yoga routine from YouTube. Ensure it is a calm, relaxing one.

Light candles, dim lights. Altering your environment in the hour+ before you go to sleep is also a great way to help yourself unwind and prepare for a great night’s sleep. There are no hard and fast rules, just as with the rest of this advice, so experiment for yourself. I personally dim the lights an hour before bed and light a scented candle; works great for me! The visual signal of the room getting a little darker, combined with the soothing aromas from the scented candle, without doubt helps me to relax while sending more signals to my subconscious that soon enough it is going to sleep!

Journaling or writing in a diary. Writing in a journal or a diary is a great way to get your beliefs, ideas, fears, etc. onto paper. Many find this a relaxing and enjoyable act that makes it a good fit for an “end of day routine.” By getting everything out on paper, you will feel a little lighter, a little more positive about your life. Just be sure that you don’t try to work out problems or do any planning into the future as this may add some stress to your quiet time.

Gratitude. Writing about what you are thankful for is a great way to put a positive spin on your journal writing. Consider allowing yourself to write what is on your mind while also trying to write 10 things that you feel thankful for. Expressing gratitude, even if it isn’t part of writing, is always helpful. Give yourself a minute to think of 5 things that you are grateful for, even if you have no intention of writing them down. Try to really feel the emotion and

concentrate for at least a couple of moments – a list of things without feeling the emotion isn’t nearly as powerful.

Plan the next day. I have warned against planning into the future but a plan for the following day may be necessary and helpful. This, in fact, will allow you to relax because you aren’t forced to plan as you lay in bed.

Planning the night before can have some benefits over planning in the morning while preventing yourself from planning as you lay in bed. For example, you might have a tough phone call to make and if you have 10 hours to think consciously and subconsciously on the idea that you are going to make that phone call, it will be easier to make because you can “build up to it.” This works for some better than others.

If you are planning a workday, consider planning it at 5PM, or whenever your workday ends. If your work spreads into the evening, consider leaving an hour between when you plan the next day and when you actually want to go to sleep. In this hour, you can do your meditation, reading, etc., to calm your mind completely.

Read fiction. Escaping into a fantasy world is an excellent way to calm your mind. This is perhaps the best time for escapism and giving your mind a small vacation from its normal thought processes. Even just 5 minutes reading fiction will help you decompress and create the mental space to turn-off and get to sleep.

Fiction is much better than reading non-fiction because there is no analysis, no criticism, and no epiphany moments that come with non-fiction. All of these are too stimulating and do not contribute to a relaxed mind.

Audiobooks are another option. This is especially helpful when you have had a stressful day and/or the rest of your “end of day routine” has fallen apart. Pressing play on an audiobook while just laying down is easy and doesn’t require the same amount of discipline or habit building that tidying, meditating, expressing gratitude, etc., may require. If you are new to building habits and using an “end of day routine,” or if you ever fall off the wagon, using audiobooks is a great safety net.

Though audiobooks or even reading fiction may seem similar to watching TV or a film, there is no comparison in terms of how helpful they are for relaxing and helping you prepare for sleep. For starters, the combination of not looking at a

lightbulb and using your visual imagination instead of being spoon-fed will contribute more effectively toward quality sleep.

Warm bath, warm shower. This is a sure-fire way to help you to relax and sleep better. Take a half hour long hot bath before bed and you will get into bed warm, calm, relaxed and ready to sleep. Consider taking it to the next level by reading a book in the bath, practice a bit of meditative breathing, perhaps light a candle, or take some bath salts in with you. Similarly, a 5 minute hot shower will help you calm down, give you a break, and raise your body temperature so you can sleep more soundly.

Fresh air (and a bit of nature). If you have a garden, or are near parkland, a few minutes spent walking outside can be a great way to reconnect with nature while unwinding. Getting time in nature at any point in the day is a great way to increase your overall sense of peace and relaxation. Just a 5-minute walk in your garden as part of your end of day routine can help to calm you significantly, especially if your job or lifestyle typically means you spend most of the day inside or sat at a desk.

Hopefully you have noticed a trend; you want to create a smorgasbord of positive habits that will make you relaxed, happy, calm, present, and primed for going to sleep.

Integrating habits like these will not only improve your sleep, they will also transform your life. These are all healthy, holistic practices that will have positive effects throughout your days.

Go to Bed at the Same Time. Every Night. Without Fail.

Your mind and body thrives off of habit and doing the same thing every day. Yes, variety is important too but when it comes to getting a good night's sleep, variety is kind of the enemy. The closer you can get to going to bed at the same time every night, the better your sleep will be.

Cut out activities that diminish your chances of getting to bed at the same time every night. Make friends with people who play football in the evening instead of having friends who like to stay up late watching films. Your bedtime needs to be set in stone. It might feel a little childish but this is essential to guaranteeing better sleep. By going to bed at the same time every night, you will also make it easier to schedule the rest of the day and easier to schedule your "end of day routine." If you KNOW you are going to lie down for sleep, everything else becomes a little easier to plan.

It is important to stick to your schedule, even if you accidentally sleep in on a particular morning and don't feel tired. Lying in bed a little longer and waiting to fall asleep is better than second-guessing yourself and trying to go to bed later.

If you sleep with your partner in the same bed every night, this is a fundamental step to improving how well both of you sleep. Waking up the other person when you go to bed isn't cool but it is inevitably going to happen. Instead, try to align your schedules and you will end up sleeping better, be happier, and enjoy a better relationship.

As well as going to bed at the same time every night, it is helpful to build a clockwork-like routine throughout your life. The next most important clockwork habit to incorporate is your meal times. By eating at the same time every day, your body grows accustomed to when it will need to digest and metabolize food. Similarly, you can predict and be aware of your energy levels with more consistency. This will help you get to sleep at the right time and have a better quality of sleep.

Enjoy a Healthy, Awesome Lifestyle

How well you sleep cannot be looked at in isolation from the rest of your life; sleep is an interconnected part. Therefore, it is important to consider improving other areas of your life in the quest to improve how well you sleep at night. Below are the most important areas to address.

Exercise.

Get out of breath for at least 20 minutes every day and you will be doing an effective minimum for keeping yourself active and healthy. This will contribute significantly to sleeping better at night. Think of it this way, it is difficult to fully rest if you haven't fully exerted yourself. A thorough cardiovascular workout is the best way to go. A 20 minute "spin" class (high intensity cycling) for 6 days out of 7 is an excellent, easy way to guarantee you get a great workout. Once you have a great CV workout integrated into your life, consider adding a weights workout to build muscle as well as some stretching sessions. Get a personal trainer as well! The more rounded and healthy your exercise life looks, the better you will sleep.

Eat really well.

Ensure you eat super-healthily and your general well-being (and sleep by consequence) will improve dramatically. Tackle this area of your life in tandem with getting exercise and you should notice improvements across the board.

Meditation.

This is a helpful, easy way to build a more balanced sense of focus and well-being. Meditate daily and you will absolutely sleep better at night.

Everything that makes you happier while lowering stress.

An overall lifestyle that entails low stress and high happiness is going to help you sleep at night. That is not to say don't take on positive stresses as part of your work or challenges to push yourself – these are important. I'm talking about removing the negative stresses – bad relationships, bad habits, unhealthy amounts of TV watching, etc.

Invest in an Excellent Bed

An excellent bed is going to help you to sleep better. The main reason people don't have the best bed is because of the cost. However, consider all the advantages of sleeping really well and you will begin to realize that saying "I can't afford that mattress or box spring" is perhaps the best example of a false economy.

Fortunately, higher quality mattresses are becoming more widely available at lower prices. There are also a variety – the "memory foam" mattress has proved the answer for many people looking for a better night's sleep. The best thing to do is to get down to your local shop and try a variety of mattresses out. Don't be shy and ask to lay on the bed for 20 minutes or longer to get a sense of how your body feels.

Don't be cheap either, stretch for the best mattress. If it means you save an hour a week because you sleep that little bit better, that time adds up quickly. An excellent principle is to "put your money where your time goes." If you are spending 8 hours in bed every night, that is a third of your life; it deserves significant investment.

As well as a great mattress, fantastic pillows, and fantastic sheets are also an excellent investment. Go for maximum support, maximum comfort and maximum quality. You need to ensure that your bed improves your quality of sleep as much as possible. It will also feel great knowing that you have spent all the money you could on creating an amazing space to relax and sleep.

Minimize Aches and Pains – Buy Great Shoes, Great Chairs

The more comfortable and pain-free you can make your body, the more relaxing your sleep is going to be. As with the mattress, cost is the main thing that turns people away. This is a false economy. An excellent pair of shoes with orthopedic level support, as well as a desk chair that feels great, will ensure that you are ache free and can enjoy the best night's sleep possible.

Also consider stretching, spas, yoga classes etc. All of this will help you feel limber and relaxed when you lay in bed at night.

Room Temperature

The temperature of your room is a detail that should not be overlooked. Some studies have shown that for adults, the ideal temperature for their room is between 60 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit.

A cool room but a warm bed is what many people prefer. Try different combinations to test this for yourself. Maybe having a hot water bottle and a fan beside your bed creates your ideal sleeping environment. Perhaps you prefer an open window and a thick duvet.

As ever, experiment for yourself, find what feels the most comfortable going to sleep in and find what seems to create the best night's sleep.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://lifehacker.com/5971884/the-science-behind-sleep-and-how-getting-better-sleep-means-youll-need-less-every-night>

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/04/health/04real.html?_r=3&partner=rss&emc=rss&

Only Use Your Bed for Sleep and Sex - Create an Awesome Bedroom

Dedicating your bed to be somewhere you will only sleep will help you to enjoy better sleep every night. This is because you create another trigger for your mind and physiology. Every part of you knows that when you get into your bed, you are going to sleep and your body and mind will begin preparing for sleep. If you work in bed as well, you will send yourself mixed signals; “am I going to work or sleep?”

This isn’t a hard and fast rule – reading in bed, perhaps meditating isn’t the end of the world. What should be avoided is doing anything with your laptop, smartphone etc. in bed. Checking emails and looking at a screen will really not help to build that trigger – “this is where I relax and sleep.”

Below are some ideas on how you can ensure your bed becomes a zone of relaxation and sleep.

Allow NO “devices” in your bedroom. This may sound a little drastic but with a simple and clear rule of thumb like this, you can better guarantee that you will get results. If you leave your smartphone or laptop in another room, it becomes impossible to become disturbed by them or to let your bedroom become anything other than somewhere to rest.

Buy pillows, candles etc. The more you can physically turn your bedroom into a sanctuary of peace and relaxation, the better! Buy more pillows, get some candles, take down the stimulating posters and put up a picture of a calm ocean. Details like this will work together to affirm your new use of your bedroom and commitment to get that perfect night’s sleep.

Always keep your bedroom tidy and clean. It’s pretty hard to relax in a room that is a mess. The clutter is a constant reminder of a job you have to do in future and one that you have avoided in the past – this is not conducive to relaxing! Instead, make a habit of tidying your room at the end of every day and always make your bed in the morning. This will ensure you can relax 100% when you need to.

As a small habit, just taking 1 minute to make your bed can be a powerful habit to put in place. Creating this small space of control and preparation for later in the day is going to start the day in a positive, controlled way that is considerate

of your “future-self.”

Waking Up Effectively – Use an Alarm

Most of us use an alarm in the mornings to wake up. This short chapter contains ideas on how to use an alarm more effectively.

Choose a kinder alarm sound. Being woken by a brutal “beep beep beep” is disruptive and is not going to make you feel eager to start the day. Change to a kinder, less harsh sound that allows you to enter the waking world a little slower and a little happier. Make sure it is still loud enough to actually wake you up!

Some people swear by listening to music as an alarm tone. Experiment with this if you like, just be sure not to choose music you love so much that you just lay there appreciating it and then fall asleep when it is done.

Put the alarm across the room from you, or in another room. This is an old trick you probably have used before. By making yourself get up to turn off the alarm, you are forcing yourself to wake up a little more. Putting the alarm in another room altogether will increase the effectiveness – just be sure not to disturb other people in the house!

Use a dedicated alarm – not just your phone. By using a dedicated alarm instead of your phone, you will help create that sleep-focused environment. If you are using the same device, it is far too easy to check text messages, emails etc. before you go to sleep and when you wake up first-thing. Turn off your smartphone, put it in another room and use a dedicated alarm so that you are never given the option to begin or end your day with something counterproductive.

How to Wake Earlier

It isn't easy to change what time you wake up. Below are some ideas on how to make it easier on yourself.

Train yourself to get up with an alarm. Blogger Steve Pavlina recommends that you practice using your alarm repeatedly before you use it to actually wake yourself up. The process for this is simple:

Get undressed and set your alarm for 5 minutes in the future.

Lay down in bed and when the alarm goes off get up straight away, turn off the alarm and spend 10 minutes doing something.

Repeat

Over time, you will train yourself to instantly get up with your alarm and not hit snooze, ignore it, or turn it off right away. It might take hours or even days practicing this technique but, eventually, you should be able to train yourself to respond in the same way every time.

Alter the time you get up slowly. Perhaps the most important advice when it comes to getting up earlier, or to change the time you wake up generally, is to change slowly. For example, if you usually get up at 8AM, trying to get up at 6AM one day is probably going to be too difficult. Rolling back when you wake up by 30 minutes, or maybe only 10 minutes, is significantly more likely to be successful. Play the long-game and try to roll back (or forward) when you wake up slowly and over the space of weeks rather than days.

Appreciate that it is difficult and don't take on other challenges at the same time. It's going to take willpower if you're trying to get up earlier than you usually do so ensure the rest of your life is mostly on autopilot. If tomorrow is a big day at work with tricky challenges, don't add anything else onto your plate and just get up at the same time. You don't want to overstress yourself or make changes that aren't sustainable.

Build “Incremental Integrity.” The more promises you can keep to yourself, the more power you will have to make further changes. This slow-build of integrity and self-esteem will enable you to roll back what time you wake up. Practically, this might look like creating an hour long routine before you go to bed and completing that every day for a couple of weeks and then using the

willpower and integrity you gain from this to then wake up an hour earlier in the following week.

Do what works for you. As with the rest of the advice in this book, you will have to find the strategy that works for you. Don't just expect yourself to be easily trained by the method offered by Steve Pavlina. Try something seriously but be open to something else if it doesn't work.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2006/04/how-to-get-up-right-away-when-your-alarm-goes-off/>

What to Eat and Drink Before Going to Bed

What you eat and drink in the hours preceding your sleep can have a significant impact on how well you get to sleep and the quality of sleep you then enjoy. Below are some ideas on how you can optimize your nutrition to get the best night's sleep.

Be well-hydrated through the day. Stop drinking two hours before you go to bed. Most people don't drink enough. You need to be drinking over 2 liters of clean, quality water every day. As with all health aspects, the interconnectedness of ensuring that you are always hydrated will help you to sleep well.

A simple mistake many people make is drinking too close to bed and then having to get up to go to the toilet. If you hydrate well throughout the day and stop drinking 90 minutes to 2 hours before you go to bed, you will be able to sleep well without needing to go to the toilet in the night. The numbers above are what works for me, you are going to have to find what works for you.

Relaxing Drinks. Ditching the caffeine is essential. After that, drinking herbal tea can be relaxing before bed. A milky drink can help encourage sleep as milk contains the amino acid tryptophan, which helps create serotonin and melatonin – two sleep-inducing brain chemicals.

Eat a snack not long before going to sleep. A small snack can be a great way to help you sleep peacefully through the night. This is because your blood sugar can dip through the night to a level which is mildly agitating. Carbohydrate-rich foods like a bowl of cereal or some toast can be extra helpful because they release insulin which will help to clear amino acids, thus allowing more sleep-inducing amino acids to enter the brain.

No large meals close to bedtime. A large meal takes energy to digest and will not allow you to get the best night's sleep. You may even suffer from heartburn or indigestion. As a rule of thumb, eat your evening meal at least 3 hours before you go to bed. However, it is important that you don't go to bed hungry. If you feel a little hungry in the hour before bed, or want that snack to keep up your blood sugar through the night, just reach for that small, high-carb snack. Think a handful of nuts, a slice of toast, or a small ball of cereal.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/eat-right-sleep-tight>

How Many Hours of Sleep Do You Need?

There is no definite answer for how many hours of sleep you should be getting each night. It is therefore important that you become attuned to your own energy and emotional levels so that you can tweak the time you spend asleep so you feel and work at your best.

Having said that, there are guidelines for the number of hours that different age groups tend to need each night. Listed are the recommendations made by the National Sleep Foundation.

0 - 3 months: 14 – 17 hours

4 - 11 months: 12 – 15 hours

1 - 2 year olds: 11 – 14 hours

3 - 5 years old: 10 – 13 hours

6 - 13 years old: 9 – 11 hours

14 - 17 years old: 8 – 10 hours

18 - 64 need 7 – 9 hours

65+: 7 – 8 hours

As I said, these are guidelines; some adults function well on 6 hours of sleep a night so don't shun the idea of cutting down to 6 hours if you still feel great when you do. If you do adjust your sleep routine so that you are getting less than the recommended amounts above, take extra care to listen to your body. Don't take on other stresses. You might consider consulting a medical professional for further advice.

By completing the advice in this book to improve the quality of the sleep you get, you will need to spend less time actually asleep. 7 hours in a dark, silent room as part of a lifestyle of exercise, good diet, meditation etc. will ensure a better night's sleep compared to 9 hours asleep whilst doing the bad habits previously listed.

Altering how long you sleep should be done slowly so that you can let your body adjust while also monitoring how you are feeling both physically and mentally.

Consider planning out a strategy for how you can go about tweaking how long you sleep. Below is a simple example of what this strategy might look like:

If you are an adult aged 18 – 65, take the 8 hours a night midway point and try to adjust your sleep until you get to that amount. From there, begin adding all the habits to improve the quality of sleep you are getting. After that, if you feel awake and focused during the day, consider cutting down the amount you sleep each night. If you feel a little groggy and un-focused during the day, increase the amount you are sleeping each night.

This is a simple approach you might take to find the optimum amount of sleep you need each night.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://www.prevention.com/health/sleep-energy/are-you-getting-enough-sleep-based-your-age>

Keep a Sleep Diary

Whether you are adjusting the number of hours you are sleeping, or trying to improve the quality of your sleep, it will be helpful to monitor your progress by keeping a sleep diary.

The purpose of the sleep diary is to reveal and draw your attention to every aspect of your sleeping habits. This will enable you to better make changes as you will be able to clearly see the “cause and effects” of the lifestyle changes that you are making.

If you visit a doctor, or a sleep professional, it is common practice for them to ask you to start using a sleep diary. Visit these professionals FIRST if you are experiencing insomnia etc.

There are no definite guidelines for what you should record in your sleep diary, however, the following questions are regarded as “typical” by the UK National Health Service:

What were your sleeping times?

How long did it take you to get to sleep?

How many times did you wake up during the night?

How long did each awakening last?

How long did you sleep in total?

Did you take any sleeping tablets?

How well do you feel today?

How enjoyable was your sleep last night?

How much caffeine did you have before and after 5PM?

How much alcohol did you have before and after 5PM?

Did you do any exercise shortly before going to bed?

Did you take any naps during the day or evening?

Has anything made you anxious or stressed?

The above questions are an excellent start for keeping your sleep diary. Simply run through all of those questions every day and you will begin to notice trends, making it easier to see cause and effect and then take action effectively to improve the quality of your sleep.

Once you have mastered the essentials, not drinking, lowering stress, etc., you can begin to focus more on the questions:

How well do you feel today?

How enjoyable was your sleep last night?

These questions are not as black and white as the other questions so it can be helpful to add a scale. For example, a 1 – 5 scale for each question where 1 is “bad” and 5 is “excellent.” Over time, if you put all of the advice from this book into practice, you might have to adjust the scale as your sleep quality improves. For example, what used to be a “4” for you now feels like a “2” because you have gotten used to a higher quality of sleep.

Using OneNote, Evernote, or another electronic system is helpful for keeping track of your sleep. Consider also completing the sleep diary part a habit that is part of your morning or end of day routine. You can then complete the questions every day without thinking about it. Naturally, completing the sleep diary first thing in the morning will be best as you will then be more aware of how good the previous night’s sleep was.

In addition to the questions listed earlier, below are some more that you might want to include in your sleep diary:

What did you eat in the two hours prior to going to bed?

Did you do 20 minutes of exercise and get out of breath at some point in the day? (Not to be done before bed)

Did you complete your “end of day routine?”

What did the last hour of your day look like?

Did you look at a screen in the two hours previous to going to bed?

Create your own questions as needed and align these with whichever stage of improving your sleep you are at. If you are consistent in keeping your sleep diary, you will build momentum and draw attention to the improvements in your sleep habits that will further help your motivation. For example, going from a

“2” for quality of sleep to a “4” might not be noticeable over the space of six months unless you keep regular checks and monitor your sleep with a sleep diary.

Bibliography for this chapter and suggested reading:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/insomnia/Pages/bedtimeritual.aspx>

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

(BONUS) BOOK 18: SUPERHUMAN PRODUCTIVITY: 18 POWERFUL HACKS

Introduction

Thank you for purchasing this short eBook. I guarantee that if you implement all the ideas in this book *you will* experience a massive boost in productivity. There's no way you can't!

If you like this eBook and think it worth the small price paid, please leave a review on the Amazon website.

There isn't anything more to say, so let's dig in and learn how YOU can walk away with everything you need to ramp up your productivity!

Establish Goals and Purpose

If you're struggling to be productive and excel at your work (and life in general), it may well come down to a lack of goals. If you don't wake up excited and eager to get to work, or if you find your focus and productivity lagging, it won't hurt to address your goals and create a bigger PUSH.

No doubt you've heard that goals are important and that you should be setting them, but you still might not be sold on the idea. After all, planning and writing goals is more work, right?

Yes, of course, there is more work on "the front end". You'll have to put in some time now to set these goals, and it will take a little work to do it well, but you're going to save hours, days, weeks, and months of time working more effectively by having that boost in productivity that comes from an exciting goal. You may even save years if you realize that your wider goals aren't effective or the right fit for you.

This is surely the best and easiest way to 10X your productivity.

By quitting a project or job that isn't producing the income, happiness, or experience you want, you can move on to something better - much better.

Goals are helpful. Just accept it. If you're still on the fence, run through some exercises with me shortly. I guarantee you will feel more excited and eager to work and your productivity will skyrocket because of them.

Below are some tips for setting goals effectively:

- They need to be exciting to YOU. Don't do what others think best or what you think you should do. Set a goal that excites you.
- Make part of it measurable. For example, instead of "travel through India," set the goal "travel through India for 2 months."
- Make it believable. If you have never sold anything before, you aren't going to become the top car salesman in your county in 3 weeks.

Below are a few exercises you can do right now:

- Write 5 things that you want to accomplish in the next 5 years (remember, exciting but not ridiculous).
- Write 5 things that you want to accomplish in the next year.

- Write 5 things that you want to accomplish this month.
- Write 5 things you want to accomplish this week.
- Write 5 things you want to accomplish today.

Create an Overall Plan to Achieve Your Goals

Setting goals is a great start, but to give them a bigger push, you need to create a plan to achieve them. This is going to make you not only more excited to wake up and get to work but is also significantly more effective. Carefully determining the best route to achieve your plans is going to save time making missteps down the road and help convince you that they are attainable.

For all of your goals, create a plan in which you are confident. Creating the plan can be a little tricky but below are some key ideas to do this well.

Don't worry about making it perfect. You can't predict every step you'll have to take. Make a plan that maps out a general course with the knowledge that you'll revise your plans later.

Don't worry about changes. Plans are going to evolve. Ideally, you want something that is going to push you in the right direction for at least the coming weeks.

Specificity is helpful. Just as with the overall goal, you should try to make the plan for achieving your goal as specific and clear as possible. For example, if you want to get married to someone amazing within 3 years, you might set the plan to go out with your friends to a bar every weekend to meet new people.

The plan should be in your control. The goals you create are typically going to be outside of your control. Not always, but often. This is because the things you want are usually going to depend on others. Making money, making friends, getting an amazing physique – they all rely on externals to some extent, e.g., the market, other people, your genetics, etc. The plan to get there should, however, be 100% in your control. For example, running 5K once a week IS in your control, and losing 5 pounds by a certain date isn't an action but a result.

Recognize each specific part of the plan. Deconstruct your plan into each individual action and you will make it a lot easier to execute. For example, if you are creating a business, plan to do market research, create a logo, plan your finances, etc. Don't forget things you know you will have to work on or lump together tasks into the category of "everything else."

Below are some exercises that will help you create a dynamite plan. These are

exercises to get you thinking. They are simple with hopes of showing you the core of what is possible. Your final plan is going to be flexible and something that is relevant to you, so don't get hung up trying to force everything through this process.

- Take one of your 1 year goals and create a 10 step plan to get there.
- Take one of your 1 year goals and write down the 5 different kinds of tasks you will have to take to get there.
- Take the most important task and set a meaningful benchmark to complete this week. E.g., write a 500 word business plan.
- Get to work!

Eliminate the Unnecessary

It is important to consider what it means to be productive. It can be dangerous to get hung up on the word “productive” and think that we should spend all of our time working hard to be productive. Images of the factory worker or someone in a cubicle working 12 hours a day might come to mind. They might well be productive, but they also might not be.

What’s important is not to believe that filling all our time with work is necessarily productive. Rather, being productive is about doing more of what gives us the highest leverage to reach our goals - and these goals should be holistic and span all areas of your life. You don’t want to be an unhappy millionaire nor do you want to be wise but homeless. You also don’t want to have an amazing “Hollywood” physique but zero friends.

The easiest way to increase your productivity is to stop doing the things that don’t make you productive. On first blush, this seems trite, but we are all guilty of doing things that aren’t productive. Let’s spend some time working on cutting out the waste.

Let’s look at some of the techniques to cut out the extraneous, the unnecessary – everything that stops us from being productive.

- DON’T do actions that move toward goals you haven’t chosen or don’t make you happy. That doesn’t mean you have to 100% choose every goal for your company, but generally do things because you have chosen them yourself.
- DON’T do actions that deteriorate your energy levels or health. You aren’t going to work intelligently on things if you lack the energy to focus. Additionally, if you lose years off of your life because of bad health choices, this certainly isn’t being productive.
- DON’T do something to please or placate others. Get better at saying “no” to things that distract you or push you away from our goals. That doesn’t mean never do favors or go for drinks with friends – rather, be more mindful of the purpose of your actions.

Below are some ideas on how to eliminate things more practically.

- Create a time log of all the actions you perform for a week. Assess the

value each action has, perhaps giving it a number between 1 and 5 – 5 being most valuable. Then work to cut down the least valuable and do more of the most valuable.

- Eliminate things that other people put on your plate. Emails that aren't helpful, people distracting us in work hours – these things are dangerous distractions and should be cut back.
- Bad habits you've picked up (and perhaps been doing for years) should be audited, from checking your phone when you wake up to the coffee you have after work. Everything needs to be designated as helpful or unhelpful in the quest to reach your goals.

Delegate as Much as Possible

The second easiest way to increase productivity, after eliminating tasks, is to delegate the task to other people. Eliminate tasks that aren't productive for your goals, and then delegate **ALL** tasks that others can do – these two steps can easily make you ten times more productive by themselves.

This isn't a quest to become lazy and do nothing – this is about freeing up time so that you can do what is most productive for moving toward those exciting goals.

Unfortunately, most of us are brought up to think that we should be able to do everything ourselves. Yes, you should learn how to clean toilets, cook food, and do the majority of tasks that are a part of your profession/business... but this kind of thinking only gets you so far. Below are some ideas to consider that will hopefully push you a little closer to the delegation mindset.

Other people can do many actions better than you can. You aren't great at everything. Indeed, it's more accurate to say that you are great at very few things. Why insist on trying to do everything? Other people can cook better than you, clean better than you, and do much of what your work day consists of better than you. It's important that things get done well, right? So why are you trying to do everything?

Other people enjoy the job more than you do. If you don't love an action, why not consider letting someone else do it? This especially applies if they love doing that action. Some people love to plan events, so why would you insist on planning a birthday party for your children if someone else would enjoy doing it more than you would?

You can increase value by doing something else. Being great at something and enjoying it doesn't necessarily mean you should do it. I'm not saying you absolutely shouldn't, but it is worth considering the value of what you are doing or creating. The things that provide the most value to others will typically be the best paying and most productive things to do.

Do another inventory of all the actions you perform in your job and life. For

each action, ask the following questions:

- Can someone else do this better than me?
- Would someone enjoy this more than I do?
- Can I provide more value by doing something else?

These simple questions will prompt you to make better decisions, thereby enabling you to work more productively.

Of course, income is a crucial part of being able to pay others to work for you. However, outsourcing things through online websites like Elance is easy and can be cost effective.

Increase Your Energy and Vitality

You're going to accomplish more if you have more energy and are healthier. This won't be news to you, but unless you are already in the small percentage of people who truly take their health to the next level, you are probably underestimating the value of improving your health and energy levels.

Why is improving your energy such a good idea? Below are some ideas and how to make it happen easily and effectively.

You're spending time eating anyway, why not eat well? You're always going to be investing time eating and probably preparing your food as well, so why not use that time to make yourself more effective ALL the time by eating incredibly well? It takes 5 minutes to eat a meal that will make you feel sluggish and unproductive, and it takes 5 minutes to eat a meal that will make you feel alert and super-productive. Why not choose the latter? Go for unprocessed foods and plenty of fruits and vegetables and you will see your energy levels increase!

It's easier to improve your energy than to utilize more complex methods. I'm not going to lie, it isn't easy to discover where you are most valuable, set exciting but attainable goals, and work hard to meet them. It will take time to master this as a skill. However, by deciding to, for example, improve your nutrition by eating one apple every day, you set yourself up for a straightforward guaranteed win for your energy and productivity.

Work at improving your energy and vitality across the board. As well as improving your nutrition, spend time exercising (at least 30 minutes every day), ensure you get enough sleep (7-9 hours for most adults), and get into nature – all those cheesy things you know you should be doing. I know you're motivated by productivity (you've bought a book on how to maximize it, after all) but creating a direct correlation between health and wellness and effective work is a straightforward way to be more productive.

Imagine Less Time

It can be all too easy to make a project long and complex, creating more actions than necessary. An effective way to cut down to the MOST valuable things and leverage your time is to give yourself what seems like impossibly small amounts of time to reach your targets. This will often force you to eliminate and delegate incredibly well.

This is the best way to train yourself to apply these two principles ruthlessly. Without these kinds of thought experiments, it is easy to simply think “of course I’m doing what is most important”. However, in reality, you are doing things that you should have eliminated and/or delegated. By cutting your time short, you will be able to focus on the most important tasks that will enable you to efficiently reach your goals.

Let’s look at an example.

Mary’s goal is to create a \$10,000 per year business within 3 years. This is a straightforward goal that anyone could complete with planning and dedication. Her plan and list of steps to achieve this might look something like the following:

- Spend 2 months designing a business plan and product.
- Spend 2 months finding investors and creating a financial plan.
- Spend 2 months marketing and finding customers.
- Spend 2 months...etc.

However, if Mary gave herself only 6 months, she might plan very differently. A shorter plan might look like this:

- 1 week: Find a product, service, or niche where I can make 10,000 a year.
- 1 week: Find five ways to improve on what the bestsellers in that niche are doing.
- 1 week: Learn how to outsource production effectively and cheaply.
- 1 week: Order 100 units of the product.
- Etc.

The second, much shorter timeline encourages more specificity and aggressive

use of Mary's time. Assuming that Mary believes she can complete the second plan, why shouldn't she work on a faster timeline?

This is a great way to force yourself to think of how to do things faster and more effectively. For any and all projects you take on, consider asking these questions:

- What would I do if I just had 10 hours to complete this?
- What would I do if I just had 1 hour to complete this?

It might get silly and impractical, but even so, you will become more oriented toward the most important actions to take – even when you take it to the extreme.

For example, if Mary gave herself 10 hours to create that business, her plan might look like this:

- 1 hour: Contact nearby entrepreneurs and network with them.
- 1 hour: Ask where they think best opportunities are.
- 1 hour: Decide on three ways her product/service will be the best in the recommended niche.
- 1 hour: Get as much money as possible on credit from her bank.
- 1 hour: Learn how to outsource products well.
- 1 hour: Call outsourcers in China and order enough units to earn 10k a year.
- Etc.

This new plan is clearly unrealistic – she probably won't be able to create a \$10,000 business in anywhere near 10 hours. However, the pressure to do more in less time brings up new ideas and more efficient actions. The idea to contact and network with entrepreneurs to find great opportunities didn't come to mind when Mary planned a business with a 3 year timeline, for instance.

This doesn't mean that you should set impossible timelines. It simply means that you should consider what you would do with MUCH less time, as this will often encourage you to think of the actions that will have the greatest impact. You can then incorporate these into a more realistic timeline.

Fake Deadlines

There is a popular law in the personal development/business world called “Parkinson's law”. It states that a task will expand to fill the time it is given. If you give yourself 4 hours to do a task, it will take 4 hours to complete. Alternately, if you give yourself 10 hours to do that same task, it will take 10 hours to complete.

This may sound similar to the previous tactic, but it is different. Before, I recommended constricting the timescale of a plan to force yourself to make better decisions about the actions you plan to take. Now, I am suggesting that you condense timescales to make yourself work faster and with greater focus.

Writing is a great example of how to implement the tactic of forcing yourself to do more in less time by setting a timeframe. It can take me an hour to write 500 words and it can take me half an hour to write 500 words. Why not set an aggressive timeframe to force more aggressive and efficient work?

Of course, it is important that you still do a good job. If you end up cutting corners and finish with rubbish work, give yourself more time and do a better job. However, often you won't discover how fast you can work until you set a timeframe.

Remember to set a clear expectation for what should be completed in the timeframe – there needs to be a definite end point, e.g., write 500 words, clean all the dishes, organize all the paperwork, etc. within 15 minutes.

Create a Process

Once you find something that works and brings you a little closer toward your goals, repeat it. You don't need to go back to the drawing board after every step in the right direction – just take another step. Think in terms of systems and repeatable steps rather than starting over. Make the route toward your goals more straightforward by setting smaller goals that are effective and repeating them.

There are many examples of how this might manifest. For example, if you want to get in great shape and lose a certain amount of weight, there is no need to re-examine your actions every week. All you need to do is to set up a process that will get you moving in the right direction and then stick to it. If you are trying to get in shape and lose 10 pounds, this might mean you go for a 5k run every week and follow a certain diet plan, perhaps eating 2,000 calories a day and no more. This is a very simple plan that anyone could follow, and it means you don't have to try to reinvent the wheel every day, week, or month. There is no need to ask yourself how you will lose weight day after day. Instead, create a repeatable, systematic process that you are confident will get you results and stay committed.

Depending on the goals, the clarity and ease will vary. Health and nutrition are fairly straightforward in this regard. Simple, repeatable actions every week will make you healthier, fitter, and more energetic. Other goals, like making new friends or getting a new job, are perhaps less straightforward. For these, there will probably have to be more planning sessions and small changes of course. However, wherever possible try to make a process that you can repeat.

If you are trying to make new friends, perhaps commit to going to a bar and two different clubs with a friend every week to meet and talk to new people every week. This is a measurable, achievable step that will push you toward reaching your goal.

If you are trying to get a new job, perhaps commit to spending one hour every week improving your resume, and then spend one hour emailing it to at least five potential employers. This is a straightforward, easy process that might not be perfect, but will certainly build momentum.

Below are some reasons repeatable processes and systems are so helpful for increasing productivity and getting you closer to your goals:

They free up mental RAM. It can be exhausting to plan ways to reach your goals. Doing this every week or every day can be overwhelming. Asking yourself, “How do I get a promotion this year?” every day and thinking of steps to get there requires a lot of mental energy. Instead, have a system you can clearly and simply work with, and you can then focus mental energy on completing actions excellently and thoroughly.

They can help build momentum and confidence. If you are doing something repeatedly, there is a good chance you will notice small improvements. This will build momentum and a belief that you can complete your wider goals. For example, if you go out to two nightclubs every week for a month and make one great friend by doing so, you will believe that if you keep doing it you will reach your goal of having five close friends in your new city by the end of the year. Small successes will make the repeatable process more exciting and clearly worthwhile, thus building motivation to continue.

You can better plan your time and schedule your life. If you have committed to going to two clubs every week and spending two hours working on getting that promotion, you can easily plan your schedule for the coming weeks.

Without a clear plan and repeatable process in place, you will only know that you intend to spend some time in the following weeks making friends and getting a promotion. This will make it challenging when a family members asks when you’re available for a meetup – you won’t be quite sure how much time you have free or what times will suit you. But if you know Tuesday and Thursday you are going to sports clubs and Saturday mornings are spent doing two hours of job hunting, you will be confident in planning future dates.

Scheduling Rocks

Committing to certain times to work on your tasks/plans/processes is also immensely helpful. Below are some reasons why:

You can build “intention” for working on actions. If you know what you are working on and when, you will give yourself the space and time to build up “intention” to get it done. This is especially important if a task is difficult or outside your comfort zone. Knowing that you are going to make your cold calls every Friday is easier than knowing you have to do it at an undetermined time.

You can tailor your life for certain actions. When most of your life is scheduled, you can move things so that they balance effectively. Most people find it easier to work on the hardest tasks first thing in the morning because that is when they have more discipline. Therefore, you might decide to do your hardest tasks – your weekly cold calls – every Friday morning.

You can better plan your life and schedule things in. This is obvious. If you spend Thursdays working on your new business, you aren’t free to meet friends then.

Scheduling is certainly a great habit to establish. Below are some ideas on how to do this as effectively as possible:

Commit to a date AND time. As I have said, specificity with goals is important. These tasks are kind of like small goals – small process goals that move you toward your more exciting, long-term goals. Setting the date and time when you will work on your processes is important because it will help create the intention, enhance your ability to plan your life, and put ease in your scheduling. Don’t just say, “Friday morning I will do my cold calls.” Say, “Friday morning from 10am to 11am I will do cold calls.”

Treat it like an important appointment. These scheduled actions and processes are essential for you to reach your goals. Imagine them as appointments with your boss or someone you wouldn’t dare annoy or lose favor with. Often we tend to look at our personal “appointments” as less important than something we plan to do with others. However, the most successful people are great at completing things for themselves. Say no to unimportant invitations, distractions, and your own laziness.

Never miss a day. This may seem to be a repetition and extension of the previous point, but it is important. Don't miss the scheduled tasks you have in place. Build momentum and every day you will move toward solid results and develop the motivation to keep working. Even missing one day will set you back and missing days regularly will scupper your productivity rapidly.

Write Your Goals Every Day

So you've set your goals and have plans to execute on them. Hopefully, these plans are systemized, repeatable, and based on the most effective actions. This is great progress, and you've already done more than most people ever do to improve your productivity. But don't get caught up congratulating yourself – it's still a lot of work to execute these actions and achieve your goals. The next step is to firmly establish a process for writing your goals and planning your days.

One of the biggest mistakes people make when setting goals is to write them down once and then assume that everything they do in future will align with those goals perfectly. Many people think they will magically keep the goals in mind consistently – after all, they feel excited and motivated at the moment of creating them. But the reality is that we humans are a little lazy and forgetful and need to be reminded and re-orientated every day, otherwise we get distracted and slowly, or even unintentionally, give up.

Writing your goals and planning your day should be part of one holistic process. Everything needs to be aligned – you have long term, exciting goals, plans and processes that are 100% in your control, and a plan for what to do today in order to make progress.

There isn't a perfect, one-size-fits-all way to write your goals and plan your day, unfortunately. However, it is such a hugely important tool that I'd recommend getting knee-deep in learning how to do this from multiple sources. That being said, below are some pointers for how to plan your days well.

Do this all on paper. I love working with technology as much as the next guy, but when it comes to writing goals and planning your day, it simply goes better when you use pen and paper. Many self-help gurus claim that writing your goals helps the ideas absorb into the subconscious and gives them more meaning; this makes sense – it certainly feels more “real” when I write my goals on paper. Also, to-do lists (which will make up your plan for the day) are infinitely more rewarding when they are ticked and crossed off on paper.

The “RPM” framework is great. Tony Robbins created the RPM framework for working with goals. RPM stands for Results (goals as we have called them) Purpose (the reasons you want them) Massive Action (the actions to get there – plans, systems, to-do lists etc.). For each of your main goals, write the RPM.

Below is an example.

RESULTS: I will have a new job by the end of the year that pays at least \$30,000.

PURPOSE: I will be able to move to a better neighborhood, enjoy my work day, and impress my friends.

MASSIVE ACTION: Every week I will spend one hour improving my resume and one hour emailing about five job vacancies.

For every goal that you are going to work on today, write something similar to the above. To do this well, use language that excites you – say “I easily make enjoyable progress” instead of “I make progress”. When you come up with your purpose, try to use three different and distinct ideas that really amp you up. For your massive action, write down both the process you will do at a wider level and what you will do today. For example, you might commit to walking 20 miles over the course of a week and walking three today – in this case, write BOTH down for the massive action. This will help you stay focused on both the tasks immediately at hand and the bigger picture.

It is important that you write down your RPM for each goal **EVERY** day. Do this for the goals you are going to work on today, but also consider doing it even for the big goals that you aren’t going to work on today. This will help build momentum, intention, and excitement to work on them later in the week when you are scheduled to do so.

How to Plan Your Day

Increasingly, professionals and students are incorporating to-do lists and day plans into how they work. We'll get into how to do this effectively in a moment, but first a reminder...

The to-do list only comes after you have a goal in place, an exciting purpose and motivation, and a wider action plan to get there. Once these are established AND you have written them down, you can consider creating a to-do list for what you are going to work on today. Many people are action driven and prone to focus on the "to-do" aspect rather than concentrating on the exciting goals and why they want them. This is a key reason we all fall into procrastination and aren't as productive as we might be – we start making a to-do list before we clarify a goal, a purpose, and a plan. Even if these do exist, we often haven't fed and reinforced them TODAY. Feed them first by writing them down and following the advice in the previous chapter, then start planning your day.

Now that we've gone over that and you're tired of hearing about goals, let's build a plan for the day. Below are some ideas on how to do this incredibly well.

The to-do list is immensely helpful. If you don't currently use a to-do list every day, you're missing a trick. This is the building that goes on top of the foundation of goals/purposes/plans you have already built. The to-do list is powerful because we humans love the clarity and feeling of completion as we finish goals.

Remember to create a to-do list on paper to get that sense of completion as you cross off each task.

Work from systems and plans. The more you can have predetermined plans and systems that you load onto your to-do list, the better. If it's Friday and you've got the system of cold calling from 10am-11am every Friday, this can go on your to-do list. Ensure you do actually put this on a to-do list for the day, even though you've planned and scheduled it. The feeling of completion and progress from writing and crossing it off for the day will help you to keep moving forward.

Create a schedule for the day. An hour-by-hour plan for the day is also helpful. If you're working with others and have established deadlines, this will be especially necessary.

Don't play a game you can't win. Just as it is important that your big goals feel attainable, so should it feel like everything you put on your to-do list will get completed. The more repeatable actions and systems you have in place, the easier it will be to predict this. For example, if you always make five sales calls in an hour, you will be confident that you can also get that done today in an hour.

If your workload consists of extraneous tasks and odd jobs that aren't part of a system, it is helpful to leave them until you know you can effectively execute on them. If you get five little tasks in your inbox today and you know you can't take action on them all today, only plan to do the ones you can.

Be specific with tasks. This is the same logic that applies to the big goals. You want small to-dos that are specific and measurable. Don't be vague or unclear in what you expect of yourself. If you want to make some sales calls, specify the number you want to make. Ideally, also specify who you are going to call. The more specific the "to-do", the better.

An effective plan for the day is a to-do list AND an hour-by-hour schedule. Writing something down twice is not a bad thing – write actions both on the to-do list and on the schedule. Cross them off twice and you'll feel even more effective, which will build momentum to complete the others.

Manage your Work Day and Energy Levels

We aren't machines who can flawlessly execute on actions non-stop, so it's important to plan a day that is ACHIEVABLE. Don't add tasks that are likely not going to get done or are too difficult, but also consider that the day as a whole needs to be part of a sustainable and enjoyable week of work. Burning yourself out today will not be helpful, and burning yourself out in the first few hours of work is simply stupid. Part of this is managing your energy levels.

Below are some things to consider when doing this:

Take breaks away from work. Whether this is 10 minutes every hour or 5 minutes every 25 minutes, you need to have a system that allows you to walk away from your work. These small breaks will keep your ability to be productive high.

Take a day off every week. Just as it is important to take breaks throughout the day, you must take a day off every week to step away and get perspective on your work.

Exercise, meditate, and eat well. These are essential habits if you want to have the energy to be as productive as you can be. Exercise, meditation, and excellent nutrition will all help.

Find Your Productivity Sweet Spot

If you are in the wrong career altogether, you are always going to be facing an uphill battle to become productive. It doesn't matter how many tricks you employ and how many books you read, it just isn't going to work. Finding where you should be investing your time is, therefore, an important issue that must be addressed.

How exactly you go about finding this ideal place is tricky. After all, many people spend their lives working jobs they don't enjoy. However, not all is lost. Below are some ideas on how to find your ideal work that will leave you feeling accomplished and fulfilled.

Who do you most admire and why? The people you admire – be it celebrities, friends, or family members – may well be pointers for what kind of role you might enjoy performing.

What do you enjoy doing? Following what makes you happy is obviously a great place to start. If you love planning and ensuring that people have great experiences, perhaps becoming an event planner is for you. Keep experimenting and trying new things until something does excite you. If you haven't had much experience, try many jobs and see which aspects of each you enjoy.

What are you good at? Being good at something is crucial if you want to make money doing it, but don't rule yourself out just because you aren't currently skilled – success in most areas comes down to hard work. If you do enjoy planning events but haven't yet had much success at it, don't give up until you've done everything you can to practice and improve.

Plan out your ideal day – what would it look like? This can be eye-opening for the kind of lifestyle that you want to enjoy. For example, if your ideal day doesn't involve going into an office or living in a city, you can consider ruling out jobs that would involve these aspects.

Prioritize Prioritizing

Not every task and goal is going to carry the same weight or the same impact on your life. This is true at every level – from the monstrous goals you take on down to the small daily actions that you complete. One of the biggest mistakes people make is thinking that just because they are working and doing things that they are being productive. This isn't always the case. You need to be both working hard AND working on what is the most important.

Below are some ways to become awesome at prioritization.

Schedule prioritization first. If you don't make a point to do prioritization early in the planning/action cycle, you will succumb to the actions that others put on your plate and/or begin to do things you only think you should be doing. Instead, always start your day by determining what is most important. Number them, ideally, and then work from the most important to the least.

Set yourself free from the smaller things. Being productive isn't about doing everything and being incessantly busy throughout your work days. It is about doing the most important things. This means that a lot of other things are not going to get done (ideally, eliminate or delegate these things). This will probably be difficult to let go of, and at the same time a weight off your shoulders.

The most important things are often the least desirable. A vicious cycle occurs when you ignore something that might be important...it becomes a little harder to begin working on. This is a damaging fact that seems to be hardwired into us – when we put things off, they become harder to do. The one benefit of this is that you can use your internal resistance as an indication of the things that you should be doing. Ask yourself – “what high impact action/goal/project am I procrastinating the most?” There's a good chance that this is, if not the most important thing for you to be doing, pretty close to the top of the list.

80-20 thinking. The now ubiquitous 80-20 principle states that 80 percent of our results come from 20 percent of our actions. You're probably familiar with this idea. Well, put it into practice. Write down 10 actions that you can take in your business. Cross off the eight least important, and get to work on the other two.

What if I only had 1 hour... Earlier, I suggested the practice of discovering new solutions by imagining what you would do if you had dramatically less time. In a manner, this is a practice of prioritization. Do this every time you are planning

your actions. Ask yourself, “if I only had 5 minutes/hours/days to complete this, what would I do?”

A simple strategy for prioritization. Below is an easily executed framework for going about prioritizing your actions.

1. Brainstorm ALL possible actions that you can take to complete a goal.
2. Put them on a table.
3. Rate these in value from 1-5, 5 being most valuable. Put this in one column.
4. Rate all the tasks in terms of ease and estimated speed of completion from 1-5, 5 being the easiest and/or fastest. Put this in another column.
5. Order the tasks based on these scores.
6. Work through the tasks.
7. Add new tasks and reassess the list regularly. Add other columns if it makes sense to do so, e.g., a column for task status, notes on the task, etc.

Become a Monk

Okay, so monks probably aren't known for their superhuman productivity and great financial success, but that's not what I'm referring to. Instead, let's look at how detached the monk's life is from the "normal" world and the incredible level of focus they gain from this detachment. Consider how much the world around you impacts you as it desperately and constantly tries to get your attention. Why not become a little more monk-like? You might free up some mental space to get more done.

You don't need to escape to a monastery to do this. Simply make small, consistent changes to eliminate the things that distract you and move closer to an incredibly focused and productive lifestyle. Below are some ideas on how to do this well.

Notice how you like to work. Some people like to work on projects little and often, while others prefer massive periods of immersion. Think about when you have been most productive - what were the conditions? What type of lifestyle were you living? Experiment and emulate these highly productive periods.

Block the internet and other technology. Social media is killing your productivity. Unless you work in marketing or PR, you don't need to check Facebook. Emails, internet browsing, and watching YouTube take hours off of our work days. Slowly cut back the online time you allow yourself. Try internet or website blocking software if you need to go online but don't need YouTube, Facebook, or any other unproductive site you feel drawn to check.

Go on holiday (to work). If you want to create a highly productive period, it might help to leave your "life" behind. Check into a hotel in a city where you don't know anyone or go to a beach resort and get productive. Of course, this sounds boring and isn't financially feasible for everyone, but going somewhere where no one knows you for days or weeks at a time is a great way to guarantee a total elimination of distractions. (Leave the internet at home too!)

Do More With Less

There is plenty of time in our day-to-day lives that can be made more valuable. Often, there is time in our day when we are not fully engaged and can find space for accomplishing more.

The greatest example of this is commuting. If you aren't spending this time productively, you are wasting time. Try listening to audiobooks on how to get a promotion, how to get healthier, or how to achieve another goal. This is intelligent multitasking. Intelligent multitasking is not to be confused with what most people call multitasking, but is more like dumb multitasking. Dumb multitasking is switching between tasks rapidly or trying to have a conversation with a colleague while simultaneously emailing. These things only cut productivity.

Intelligent multitasking is a great way to boost productivity. Below are some ideas on how to do this well.

Audit your time to find spaces for multitasking. Create a complete time log for a day or a week and try to add in tasks that can be done at the same time.

Use headphones. Whether you are on the commute to work or at the gym, headphones are a great way to get more done in less time.

Redefine multitasking. As well as doing multiple tasks at the same time, consider taking care of multiple goals/areas of your life at the same time. Why not get exercise AND make friends if you are in a new city – the easy answer to this is to go to exercise classes or join a sports team.

The Power of Being Boring

Being productive can often be best achieved by taking out the things that add variety in your life. Routinization is a friend of productivity. This doesn't mean you mustn't ever have fun, but rather refers to creating and sticking to things like bedtimes and morning routines. Beyond that, systemize how you work and get creative – almost everything can be routinized.

Why is being boring and having routines so powerful? The routine frees up mental energy to focus on doing truly great work. If you always have the same breakfast, you don't have that decision to make in the morning, which frees a little mental RAM for the first job of the day. If the breakfast you always have is healthy and gives you energy, you're being doubly productive.

It also allows your body and mind to get into a rhythm. If you do the same physical things, e.g., sleep, eat, exercise, etc., at the same time every day your body gets into a rhythm, which will help you to continue these habits as your body expects certain things at certain times. This will also allow extra energy to spill over into your ability to focus and increase your productivity.

Take a few minutes now and think of all the ways that you are adding needless variety to your life. Are you mixing up your diet and sleep cycles in order to watch a late night film? Eliminating this tendency sounds boring, but will make you more productive in the long run.

If this feels like a little much, and an undue negative to being more productive, add variety to your life but in a conscious, productivity fueling way. For example, take a trip out of your city regularly. This will help you feel more energized and excited when you return to work and is a great way to experience variety whilst being a productive, monk-like routine-freak the rest of the time.

A Final List of Productivity Hacks

We've covered the big ones – the most important things (in my humble opinion) that will help you to become incredibly productive. Here's everything else that didn't quite get its own chapter. Enjoy!

Get up earlier. Waking up and beginning work early is one of those things that you have to try to truly understand. For many, the motivation is the feeling of getting a jumpstart on the day – to move forward on goals whilst other people sleep is a wonderfully productive feeling that builds momentum. Additionally, if you get up earlier by sleeping a little less, you are obviously creating more time to be productive.

“Eat That Frog.” For some reason, our ability to get to work on difficult tasks diminishes as the day goes on. It's almost like there is a reservoir of productivity and self-discipline that is spent as we go about the day's tasks. The problem is that this reservoir isn't refilled until the following day. Leverage this fact by doing the most valuable and difficult tasks early in the day.

Be around productivity. Surrounding yourself with people who are working hard and intelligently on similar goals is a great way to build social influence that pushes you toward being more productive. Consider finding where the best work gets done in your company and spend more time there or work at the library where the best students go to cram. Be where the best work is being done and where the most productive people spend their time.

Mess creates stress. The environment you work in will have an impact on your stress and ability to be productive. Tidy up your desk and you will feel more relaxed and able to get to work. If you don't believe me, spend an hour working at a messy desk and an hour working at a perfectly ordered desk and notice the difference in how you feel.

Find inspirational people to work with. Working with people who are productive and inspire you is helpful. Consider finding a group in town with similar goals, whether they are entrepreneurial, health- or music-related, or whatever else. If they work hard and inspire you, it will definitely help to make you more productive in your own work.

Hydrate. Most people don't drink enough, and staying hydrated is an essential

part of achieving the excellent physical vitality that facilitates hard work.

Get in shape. I've mentioned this already, but exercise and taking your physical health seriously is a great way to gain productive energy. There are no downsides to increasing your health and it is always worth the time invested. If you are prioritizing and don't know where to start, put health and fitness at the top and everything else will improve as a side effect.

Work for short periods and take small bites. If you are working on high priority tasks, it is often difficult to initiate activity and build momentum. To move past the intimidation factor, take baby steps. This might mean doing a small portion of the task – such a small portion that you will happily do it. Pending just a tiny amount of time on it also reduces the daunting nature of large tasks.

Doing taxes is something nearly everyone hates, but if you start doing 30 second chunks of it, you'll build momentum until your brain switches into productivity mode and wants to complete the project as a whole.

Turn off the TV. Most people still watch way too much TV. I actually love TV shows, so though I do recommend turning off the TV as much as possible, I think it is unrealistic and boring to expect ourselves to just cut it out altogether. Create a list of your favorite shows and watch these minimally and ONLY these. Watching fewer things and doing it more consciously will help you enjoy TV even more. The worst thing you can do is get home and turn off your mind by watching hours of TV shows or browsing the internet mindlessly. Take control, enjoy it, and do it minimally to get the most you can out of it without being overwhelmed.

Write a “not to do” list. There are many tasks that we add happily onto our to-do lists, but we should be just as eager to cut things out. Create a list of all the things you don't want to do and you'll make yourself a little more productive right away. Begin with things that are obvious, e.g., “don't waste time on the internet,” but also add things that you are trying to delegate or eliminate. For example, perhaps “don't do marketing tasks (delegate them)” might go on the list.

Experiment with goals in different time frames. It can be valuable to work on goals on a weekly level rather than daily. For example, set a series of marketing tasks to do within the week. When you complete these, you can take the rest of the week off. It is like a to-do list for a day, but it runs for a week. This usually

means I have a few highly productive days, then take the last few days of the week off altogether because my list is complete. Experiment with this. Perhaps create a to-do list that runs over three days a week or two full weeks and allows you to work very productively and take enough time off.

Reward yourself. A great way to build productivity is to reward yourself when you are productive and to penalize yourself when you aren't. This might mean letting yourself have a smoothie when you finish your daily to-do list or a trip to the cinema when you complete a small project. These rewards will encourage you to push through and remain productive. As well as rewards, consider penalties too – perhaps you have to give away a certain amount of money if you don't produce enough work in a day.

(BONUS) BOOK 19: MENTORS = MASTERY
(SUCCESS THROUGH MENTORSHIPS)

What is a Mentor?

You probably have some sense of what a mentor is already. After all, you bought a book on how to make the most of one. However, it's helpful to better define what we mean when we say "mentor" so that we can understand the benefits of having one and how to make the most of the relationship.

Let's start with a simple definition, then move to a more advanced one. Below is a simple, straightforward definition of what a mentor is:

"A mentor is an informal relationship between someone with a greater experience and/or ability who helps their mentee to improve."

This is clear and to the point. It contains the core of what mentoring is all about. Re-read this if you are new to notion of mentoring until it hits home. A more complex definition of mentoring is below:

"Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or progression development. Mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor), and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)."

This definition gives us a little more clarity and detail on what mentoring is. You probably won't fully understand the implications of the above definition, but don't worry, we will explore these ideas to enable you to learn principles and tools to allow you to get an amazing mentor and fully utilize them for your own success.

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

Second definition: Bozeman, B.& Feeney ["Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique."](#)

Benefits of Having a Mentor

This chapter will cover the benefits of having a mentor.

A mentor can teach you directly, tailor that learning, and solve problems.

The most obvious benefit of having a mentor is that you can directly learn the field in which you are being mentored. If you have a mentor in business, you can go to him or her and ask questions about what you should do to resolve a specific problem, or perhaps sit monthly classes with your mentor in which they cover what they believe you most need to learn.

Using a mentor to learn can be more helpful than using formal education, books, the internet, etc., because the mentor will understand where you are at and give you the right information at the right time. A mentorship is a developed relationship that is built over time, rather than a formal education class system in which you are fed information to cover a syllabus. Because of this, the mentor is better suited to understanding and resolving any problems you are having.

As well as resolving problems, your mentor can better anticipate what they should be teaching you. Again, because there isn't a formal "A then B" system to learning from a mentor, they can teach you material when they think the time is right.

Mentors influence you to get better. Most people believe the only help mentors can be is to teach a subject and give a master's perspective on how to succeed. However, a perhaps even bigger impact of the mentor is how they influence you. Just by being around them consistently, you should experience a significant change in success just by their influence.

You consciously model yourself on them. It is much easier to copy something than it is to create something original. Your mentor should have the successes that you are trying to create. For example, they have a PhD in Chemistry if they are your high school chemistry mentor. And because they have what you want, you can simply become a little more like them every day. Of course, focus on the things that you want for yourself – if they are rude and unkind but a brilliant chemist, then just imitate their habits and processes that make them great at chemistry, but leave their manners with him or her. Having a model to admire and imitate is hugely helpful for many people to progress in their field.

Their beliefs, ideas, etc. rub off on you. Just by being around your mentor you

will subconsciously absorb their beliefs and what they are like. This becomes truer the more time you spend around them, and the greater you look up to them. If you have a mentor who you admire tremendously and spend a lot of time around, you are going to subconsciously believe and think a little more like they do every day. If you don't see your mentor often and don't much like them, you are less likely to pick up their beliefs. Adopting their beliefs is exceptionally helpful, again, because you want what they have. The master chemist who believes working hard is good, and you need to master the knowledge of the periodic table first, and you need to be patient with experiments, etc., is a mentor with beliefs that will benefit you if they rub off on you, too.

Mentors inspire you to get what they have and be more like them. Being inspired and motivated by the success and status of someone else is going to encourage you to keep working. If you see your PhD chemistry mentor experience the benefits of being a lecturer and having published papers on chemistry, you are going to retain your motivation to work hard, long nights to become as capable as they are, because you can better see the "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Improved social connections and opportunity to network. Developing a relationship with a mentor, if done well, will ensure that you have access to all of the great social contacts that they have worked their entire life to build. This is a benefit to having a mentor that cannot be overstated. They have already made massive progress in your chosen field and will have had to build relationships over time. Through your mentor you can access these relationships and make them work for you, which will be a powerful tool that could save you years of effort. A quick note on how to do this...

Don't be too pushy or do anything that isn't "win-win" when you are trying to build social connections through your mentor. Make it natural and focus on being a great mentee to your mentor first! Try to move toward occasions where you can connect to the people they know organically. This might be making yourself available to help your mentor when he/she works on a project with others, or maybe you politely ask if you can be introduced to someone they know, etc.

Your mentor will have access to equipment, buildings, or other "assets" you aren't even aware of. Your mentor will probably have better equipment or at least better access to locations or things that could be of help to you. This will

greatly vary of course, but returning to the PhD chemistry mentor example... this is a clear occasion when your mentor is going to have access to equipment that will be useful to you as well.

Your mentor can help give you opportunities, jobs, and access to projects.

This is kind of an extension to the previous benefit of social connections, but it is so valuable it deserves its own mention. Many, many people find jobs and great opportunities through the relationship they have with their mentors. Again, mentors have years of experience and will know the people that can possibly hire you. You can skip ahead of other people who may even have a better resume than you, because you have that special relationship with your mentor.

It is important to note that that the better the mentor you have, the more of the above benefits they will offer. That is not to say that you should only choose a mentor who will get you a job down the road, but these are things worth considering. It can be helpful to look outside of a potential mentor's qualifications and think along the lines of:

- What social connections do they have?
- How well thought of are they in the community?
- What is the likelihood that knowing this person will advance my career?

Too often, people fail to appreciate the benefits of having a mentor and think of them as more like a personal tutor. However, a good mentorship will facilitate a series of positive effects, often a lot more powerful than just teaching. After all, formal education and books can go much of the way to offering knowledge, but the above positives and the mentor's "influence" cannot be easily found elsewhere. For these reasons, it is more important to get a mentor than most people realize. A great mentor will bring so much more than just know-how and problem solving. Look beyond this and see them more as an all-encompassing "level-up" to your career and success that you need to have on your side.

How to Get a Mentor and How to Get the Best Mentor for You

So by now I'm sure you're sold on getting a mentor. The next question many ask is, "How do I get a mentor?" However, a better question is, "How do I get the best mentor for me?" because not all mentors are created equal, and it is important that you get one that meshes with you and your goals. Below are some ideas on how you can not only find someone to mentor you, but also how to find the best mentor for you.

Decide on your goals and what you want from the mentorship. Before you track down your dream mentor, it is important to have at least a basic understanding of the goals you want to achieve. This will both help you to get a feeling for which mentor will be suited to you – the mentor who either has what you want (the body, the business, the grades – whatever it is) or knows how to get it. It will also help you convince your ideal mentor when you find them. They aren't going to want you to have wishy washy, unclear goals – they want you to be motivated toward something definite that they can help you reach.

Get a mentor through social connections. If this is a struggle, you're not connected enough. The best way to find a mentor is through social connections. Either make friends and connect with people who will know a great mentor, or at least ask the opinions of people who are "in the know," and use them to track down a mentor that is suitable for you. If you don't know enough people or don't know where to start asking, this may be a sign that you aren't connected enough and need to work on this before you get a mentor. Talk to people at your local gym/entrepreneur meetup/college, etc., and find someone best suited to mentoring you to get what you want. Often, the best mentors will only agree to help you after you have built up a bit of a relationship with them, so don't be surprised if it takes some time to move the relationship toward the mentoring dynamic.

Search online. Duh. Of course, going online and checking relevant Facebook groups, forums, Googling the leaders in a field, etc., is a great way to track down people who are qualified to mentor you. This is perhaps obvious, but if you aren't tech savvy you are missing a trick, as you can save a lot of time by going online. Also, it helps to become active in an online group so that you get a reputation as someone who is qualified and motivated, which will help convince people to mentor you.

Money always helps to get a great mentor. Offering to pay and, ideally, pay well, is a great way to attract an excellent mentor. The ideal mentor certainly isn't 100% money driven, but it would be unrealistic to say paying well won't help you to attract a mentor, and a better one at that. Most people like money. Deal with it.

Who is everyone recommending? Who is “famous?” The person who everyone recommends to you is probably going to be the best mentor. If you talk to everyone at the local gym about who the best personal trainer is for reaching your goals, and 90% of people say the same person – this is your future mentor. You want to find whoever is “famous” – perhaps they have a following online, or perhaps they are just well known in the local area, but whatever and whoever it is, this is the best mentor for you.

Pursue a few and build multiple relationships. Finding a great mentor should be part of a wider strategy to build relationships with a variety of people who can help you and who you can also help. There is no fixed contract and formal agreement that means you can only have one mentor, so consider talking with a few before you decide on who is best to commit to. An overall network of talented people who can help you may even be better than one good mentorship. Work at building that network first and a good mentorship, or multiple ones, should sprout naturally out of it.

Know what you will offer. It is important to know what you will offer your prospective mentor. It is NOT a one way street of you receiving all of the value – you are not going to take and take from the mentor with nothing given in return. Now you probably won't be able to help them with their goals per se, but you should always offer things like:

- Masses of energy and positivity.
- Commitment to do your best.
- Attention to everything they say and recommend.
- Helping them with their projects whenever you can.

Be clear with yourself and articulate to any prospective mentor that these things are a given if they take you on.

Don't settle too soon. You want a GREAT mentor. It is important to have a great mentor. Nine times out of ten you aren't going to be in such a rush that you can't consider a few alternatives and pick the best mentor/s possible. Consider things like their social connections, the time they will have available for you, etc.

It is a more complicated thing than just going with the first person who seems qualified. The most qualified individual might not have the time or inclination to help you, whereas the second most qualified might have more energy and the eagerness to take on a new project (which could be mentoring you!). So, don't settle on any one crude judgment, and take in a wide perspective of your future potential mentor. Make sure you get a GREAT mentor, not an average one.

Consider remote mentorship. It may well make sense to utilize a "remote mentor" – whereby you spend most of your time communicating via phone or Skype. This is an increasingly excellent route, as better software (check out Skype and Basecamp) make sharing projects and work together easier than ever.

How to Recruit the “Hard to Get” Mentor

If you are trying to get a mentor that is a little better known or hard to access in some way, it can be helpful to rely on some solid techniques for breaking down the barriers and building a relationship and, ultimately, a mentorship. Below are some ideas on how to make this happen.

Be patient and build a relationship first. It is important not to try and jump into something if the person you want to mentor you is a little “out of your league.” Instead, develop a relationship slowly and be patient. First, make them aware of who you are, and then every few weeks push the relationship a little further toward them mentoring you.

Use multiple channels of communication but, again, build this up slowly.

Talking in person is obviously best, but don’t be shy of dropping an email or Facebook message to your prospective mentor. Again, do this slowly and respectfully, but also do it consistently and on multiple channels so that they become familiar with who you are and what you are about.

Always be kind and understanding of their time commitments. You have to accept that they are the person in position of power and you are trying to build up to their level. This means you have to be understanding if they are a little short with you, and if they can only offer you very limited amounts of time you have to take it. Be thankful no matter what they give you, but also be optimistic that you’re taking the right approach and moving toward that mentorship.

Offer value whenever possible. As I have said before, it is important not to consider the mentorship a one way street. This is even more important when you are building up to gaining a mentor who is hard to get. Try to offer meaningful pieces of value to him or her. This might mean that you send your prospective mentor a book you think they will like, or perhaps you offer a new idea for some content they are working on. Get creative and think of the talents you have and the problems/opportunities that your prospective mentor is facing, and then consistently offer great pieces of value to them.

Don’t obsess too much over one mentor. Spending a lot of time trying to get someone to be your mentor might be a waste of time if you can find the value they would offer elsewhere. For example, perhaps there is a mastermind group nearby who can offer you similar opportunities and advice. This is especially

important if you are planning to put in a consistent, possibly time consuming strategy using the above ideas. Be sure (or at least confident) that their mentoring you is going to be worth the rejections, and work to make it happen. Don't obsess too much or waste your time if you can help it.

Where to Start – Baby Step Everything

Perhaps the biggest barrier to getting a mentor is just not knowing how to go about developing that relationship or finding someone to help. The answer is simple – start really small and build up your mentors. Find one person who is slightly better than you are at what you want to accomplish and make friends with them. Don't talk about them being your mentor, because that isn't really the situation you are in. Over time, you can start building more of these little relationships and pushing toward people who are better and better. In this way you can build up a snowball of momentum and mentorship-like relationships that will ensure you get all the perks of having a mentor AND be able to both easily start and keep moving forward.

Think of this as a long-term, ongoing process for learning from others who are better than you in a variety of areas. Don't just think, "I need a master to apprentice myself to NOW," and then get too intimidated by the situation and give up.

Of course, if you have already a bit of experience in your field, and/or are a little more ballsy in general, shoot for that more formal mentoring relationship and find a real Master who you can be apprenticed to.

How to Get the Most out of Your Mentor

Just turning up and expecting results to flow is not the best way to utilize your mentor. There are certain attitude changes and principles to follow that will enable you to really make the most out of your mentor. After all, you've gone to all the effort of setting up this awesome opportunity to work with a pro, so why not make the most of it?! Below are some ideas on how to make this happen.

Suspend doubt and disbelief. Don't be critical of them or their advice.

Remember that they are on a higher level, and you are trying to build off of their ideas and experience. To make the most of this, it is important to stop being critical and, even if their advice sounds wrong or unwise, you HAVE to do it. Remember that they got the results you want. You need to imitate them relentlessly and follow their advice like they are the center of your universe. Of course this has limits – use your common sense and don't join a cult if they ask you to. However, many mentees retain their critical disposition TOO much and question advice that their mentor offers. Leave your judgments at the door and jump in.

Be upbeat and positive. This is the main thing you can offer them. Let's face it, there is little that you are going to be able to teach your mentor. However, the main thing that nearly ALL mentees can offer is the enthusiasm and positivity that can fade with experience and success. Remind your mentor of how exciting their field is by bringing a borderline annoying energy and enthusiasm to your work. When it comes to offering them "value," this is going to be your ace of spades, your favorite move, because it is the main thing that you can rely on and 9 times out of 10 that your mentor has less of.

Fully commit to them and the process. You have made the decision to get a mentor, now commit to working hard and following the process that they lay out. Just sitting back is not going to be enough; they are NOT going to do the work for you.

ALWAYS be punctual and respectful of their time. This is somewhat obvious, but you have to respect their time. Don't expect to keep a mentor if you are late to your meetings with them. Remember that they are helping you out here, and the onus is on you to do well and work hard.

Maintain your relationship with them. Think of your mentorship as a

relationship that needs regular work and deposits of “goodwill.” If you are not in contact with one another for a few weeks or a few months, consider ensuring that you message them regularly to “touch base” and, ideally, to catch them up on your work.

The ideal mentor is one so aligned with your projects/work and such a good fit for you as a person that it will make sense to keep them in your life for years. With this in mind, there needs to be consistent communication between the two of you. As they are the mentor and have more time pressures than you, make up the difference and put the work in to maintain the relationship. As I said, you want to look at this as a long-term relationship that is going to continue pushing value both ways for many years.

Don’t be ALL business with your mentor – make them a friend. The previous point leads to this one. The ideal mentor is someone that you like and who likes you. Becoming friends and wanting to spend time with each other should feel natural and like an obvious progression. This might not always be possible – sometimes you will perhaps just need their know-how and it might not be practical for the two of you to be friends. However, it will typically be the case that the mentor you choose is not the right fit if the two of you don’t build some form of friendship that extends beyond that of mentor-mentee.

The goal of making them a “friend” might sound a little too cutesy and unneeded. You might think, “I just want results and to move forward in life, not make friends with everyone.” Well, that is a pretty cynical way of living life, but even if this is how you think, there are benefits to building a friendship with your mentor, such as:

- The social connections and opportunities you experience through them are 10 times more likely to happen.
- They will be a lot more willing to do favors for you and help you out in any way that they can.

Know the limits of your mentor and set clear expectations. Having clear expectations of what you expect to achieve and how you think your mentor will be able to help you will make the process of mentorship easier and more effective. This should be addressed BEFORE you begin working together and be part of the “find the best mentor for you” process. But maintaining those clear expectations and setting targets throughout your work together will ensure you both continue to get the most out of the relationship.

The easiest way to feel disgruntled with your mentor will be if you don't clearly articulate to them what you want to achieve and they unknowingly take you down a slightly different path. If they are a great mentor, they will clarify the expectations and goals you want to achieve, so consider this as both something you need to work on together and a sign of a good mentor in the opening stages.

Multiple Mentors and Overlapping Experience

It is often best practice to have more than one mentor, even in one area. This will allow you to gain a better understanding of the subject matter and enable you to reach your goals even faster. Below are some ideas on why multiple mentors are helpful, and how to make the most of using multiple mentors.

Hearing something many times will help it “sink in”. By having multiple mentors you will no doubt be exposed to the same ideas many times. This will help you to really focus and gain an excellent understanding of the core concepts that ALL of your mentors teach.

Rarely is there one perfect way to master an area. Different perspectives will help round out your understanding. Different interpretations and modes of teaching will give you a more complex and nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Not everyone is going to have the same way of doing things, and by having a variety of mentors you will learn a variety of routes to mastery in your chosen area.

You can gain more of the other benefits and develop a massive social network. Having many mentors will enable you to get more of the other benefits, such as access to equipment and their social connections. As long as you are able to keep up with what is expected of you and return enough value to your mentors, you can have a handful of mentors who are all happy to introduce you to their social networks.

However, there are also downsides to having multiple mentors. Below are some of the drawbacks and how to address them.

More time/time management will be needed. Of course, more mentors will probably be more demanding of your time. To tackle this, work more strategically. For example, every other meeting with each of your mentors might be done via Skype to save the time you spend commuting to see your mentor. Another technique is to introduce your mentors to one another so that you are bringing value to them all.

Multiple mentors might mean conflicting opinions. There are nearly always multiple routes, and if you decide to take one route and side with one mentor over another, they may become annoyed or less motivated to help you in the

future.

Less immersion together. If you can spend a lot of time learning from ONE mentor, this is a great way to immerse yourself in the knowledge, energy, and opportunities that the mentor has to offer. The more mentors, the more diluted the process might become, and you might get a few okay experiences instead of a single awesome one.

Use your judgment to decide how many mentors you want to learn from. It will depend on what your goals are and what kind of mentors are available to you. As I said, one really immersive mentorship can be amazing, but multiple smaller ones can provide excellent variety to your experience. In a crude sense, think of it as breadth vs. depth. Many mentors can bring breadth of knowledge and experience, whereas one will bring a greater depth of experience and knowledge. Make the call for what is best for you.

Don't be Shy or Proud – A Mentor is Good for the Novice and the Master

Whether you are beginner, intermediate, or advanced, having a mentor will greatly help you to push to higher levels of ability in your field. Below are ideas on how a mentor will help at each respective level, and why you need mentors even if you think you don't.

As a beginner, the only way is up. Being a novice is obviously a great time to get a mentor. All the same, the beginner might come up with excuses for not getting a mentor. They might think they need to get a little better and be really sure that they want to commit to a field before they get a mentor. Or perhaps they are nervous and feel that they might let a mentor down. Of course, these are just excuses for not getting out there and finding a mentor – typically, these are just expressions of shyness or lack of confidence.

The best way to push through is to just start small and build up consistency before you think of mastery. Concretely, this might be going to a group meetup and connect with people who are working on similar goals. Do this once a week or month at first, and build up your confidence until you feel able to reach out to someone. Baby steps is the key idea here.

Individuals who are intermediate or advanced tend to be fluent, but often not masters in their field. Those at an intermediate or advanced level may feel too proud to work with others or falsely believe that they can do it all themselves. This is a very easy trap to fall into. Below are some reasons why you need to avoid this trap:

- There is more than one way to complete something. Your way might work well, but so do other ways. Remember the adage, "There is more than one way to skin a cat."
- Social connections and other perks of mentorships are always helpful. The benefits of meeting and discussing things and working through problems is exceptionally helpful, even if you are at a high level, and is often the key to level up your progress, no matter where you are at.
- The more advanced you are, the easier it is to forget core principles and early lessons. Mentoring with people at different ability levels will help solidify these ideas and improve your core abilities.
- There is always a higher level and more to learn. Even if you KNOW

you are at the top of your field, there is always something more to learn and some way that you can improve, and probably some way in which someone else is outperforming you even if it is only in one small way. Networking and mentoring with others is a great way to improve and reach an even higher level.

Loosen up Your Definition of “Mentor”

Throughout this book I have been describing a fairly formal situation between a mentor and mentee. However, this rigid understanding of a mentorship can be damaging if it forces us to be too inflexible in the learning relationships that we create.

A mentor can be a much looser relationship than we typically think. Put simply, a mentor is someone who you meet or talk with regularly, and through this contact you can improve in one or more areas. This might mean you see the mentor every day for 3 hours, or it might mean that you email them every 6 months or longer. It can also be anything and everything in between. The mentor might be at a much higher ability than you, perhaps at only a slightly higher level, or maybe they are at a slightly lower level but have a better understanding of some ideas that you know you can benefit from.

Often, we get a little intimidated by the idea of mentors and entering into “mentorships.” We tend to put too much weight on it and so don’t develop these exceptionally helpful relationships. A mentor might just be a friend who is slightly better than you are at something with whom you talk regularly with and learn from. Yes, sometimes mentorships are rigorous and can look like a “master and apprentice” kind of connection, but often they are much more informal, “lighter” relationships that look more like friends hanging out.

If you are new to trying to improve your work, life, business, health, or whatever, and the word “mentor” is intimidating, aim for something more relaxed – just make a friend who is doing a little better in a subject you want to master, and talk to them occasionally about your progress. It doesn’t have to be any more complicated or rigorous than that.

A great example of this might be befriending someone at your local gym who is in better shape than you and exercises there regularly. This is perfect ground for developing a really “light and easy” mentorship that is really just a friendship with hopes that their knowledge and good habits will rub off on you.

Aligning with a looser, lighter understanding of what a mentorship is allows for a much wider and more relaxed overall social life that naturally meshes with improving in the areas you want to. Also, try and blur the line of how you conceptualize friends and mentors so that you try to develop more relationships

that are both. This means you can have more mentors and more friends that push you toward mastery – some might help you a lot to push forward, while others are perhaps just friends and role models. Making more successful friends is also a much easier place to start building mentors in your life if you don't want a more formal mentorship, and it is also a more sustainable and enjoyable social reality in the long-term.

Other Ways to Get the Benefits of a Mentorship

Below are some ideas on where you can get the benefits of having a mentor, without having a mentor.

Social influence of a location. One of the biggest benefits of a mentorship is having the influence of someone who is at a higher level than you. Both consciously and subconsciously you are getting their influence, which will guide your behavior over time toward excellence. Another way to get this is to get influenced by the location that you are at; for example, go to the gym to exercise, to learn more, study at the library, or, if you want to be a master painter, work at a gallery. Draw on your external surroundings to influence and reaffirm the identity you want and your pursuit of mastery.

Social influence of a group of people. As well as the location, the group of people around you are going to have a huge impact on your goals. This might start with going to the gym at a busier time so that you can be around people exercising hard. Ideally, you want to be interacting with others and perhaps be part of the group – this might be an exercise class, or maybe an entrepreneurship meet up.

Social influence via the internet and YouTube. Thanks to the internet it is easier than ever to get social influence, and though the medium won't be as powerful as real life interactions, the content quality and who you are influenced by tends to be better and more compelling. For example, the influence of being around a mentor is super-powerful for making you want to work hard and take your ability to a higher level – this shot of motivation can also be had by watching masters of your field on YouTube. You will probably need to watch more video content to get the same amount of influence and motivation as a real life mentor, but using YouTube is obviously more convenient, near-inexhaustible, and on-demand.

This may seem a little trite, but many people underestimate the influence of being around masters and how motivating it is, AND they don't appreciate that the consumption of video content can have a similar effect. If you aren't convinced, choose an area you are working toward, perhaps health, then on a day off spend eight hours just consuming video content from the people you find most motivating and helpful on the subject. At some point your ability to be critical or not get motivated will dissolve, and you will feel a great urge to take action. This social influence is lighter than offered from a mentor and takes more time to seep in via video, but is possible all the same.

You can learn anything from a book. Read more. It is almost certain that what you want to achieve has already been done by someone else. Don't try and recreate it or break the mold. Read relentlessly, as others have likely made books about how to achieve what you want to do. This is the best way to learn HOW to get what you want to achieve done.

Troubleshoot with the internet and read everything. Another benefit of having a mentor is of course being able to troubleshoot problems and ask them directly how to resolve an issue. Again, the internet is increasingly good at stepping in here, so use forums and Google the question itself, and you will often get the answer that you need.

Many of the above ideas are ideally integrated whilst having a mentor at the same time.

Tai Lopez's 33% Rule: Balance your Social Influences

It is possible to get too hung up on the idea of mastery and then try to gear all your social influences so that they entirely align with mentorships or mentor-like friendships. However, it is important to balance who you spend time with so that you aren't skewing in any one direction too much. Tai Lopez recommends balancing who you spend time with so that roughly a third of the time you spend is with people who are better than you, a third is with people who are at your level, and a third is with people who are worse than you. "Better" and "worse" might mean a specific pursuit you are trying to master or in the general context of your life, where "better" are the people you consider happier and more successful – whatever success means to you.

Most people spend too much time with people who are at the same level they are, perhaps because this is where we feel most comfortable and where we are most likely to find people to interact with. For example, you are probably going to befriend people you work with, and they are probably going to earn a similar amount of money as you. So, at least financially, it is just more likely that you are going to spend time with people at a similar level as you. Add into that the restaurants you visit, places you shop, places you vacation, etc., are financially driven to some extent, and it really becomes clear that you are going to be corralled into spending time with people on a similar budget.

However, it is very important to spend time with people at a higher level, because you can gain all the benefits of having a mentor. You're probably sold on this idea now because you're knee deep in reading this book! So let's focus on the other two areas and consider the benefits of spending time with people who are at a worse ability or similar ability...

People at a lower level are a great opportunity for you to teach. Spending 33% of your time with people who are at a lower level is fantastically helpful. Indeed, you will then become a mentor yourself. Again, detach yourself from the formal notion of mentorship; if you have a friend who is less successful than you and you have some social influence on them or occasionally help them troubleshoot their problems, consider yourself a mentor. This is such a big idea – how YOU can be a mentor – that we'll spend some time on it in the next chapter.

People at the same level are easier to connect with and relate to. You are going to be able to relate a lot more effectively with someone who is at the same

“level” as you are. You are going through the same things, you are more likely to have similar beliefs, interests, and opinions about the world, and similarities are a great way to ensure you have a great friendship. In terms of your work toward mastery, someone at the same level will be able to better understand the issues you are currently dealing with and, if they are either just ahead or just behind where you are at, the “next step” or solution to your current problem may be fresher in their mind than it is with someone at a higher level.

Become a Mentor!

So this book has been about how to find and get the most out of a mentor, as well as getting all the benefits of a mentorship from other places. However, this is ignoring the tremendous value there is in BEING a mentor. And, as this ties in perfectly with Tai Lopez's 33% rule, let's explore what you can gain from being a mentor.

You can test your understanding and knowledge. If you can't teach it, you don't know it. If you can't teach someone else how to become at least as good as you are, you're probably missing part of the picture yourself.

The best test will come from the questions of a novice or the obvious gaps between where they are, where they want to be, and whether or not you can see them. Also, you will become a lot more conscious of the route to mastery in your field and more aware of what it takes. For example, there might be some improvements you made but you weren't fully conscious of how or why you did them, but by teaching your field you will be forced to better understand what was effective, because you will have to consciously explain it. A precise example of this might be, if you are an expert personal trainer and, whilst teaching someone to get stronger you ask them what their lifestyle looks like and realize they are neglecting sleep, and though you didn't consciously ensure you got enough sleep on your route to mastery (it just worked out that you sleep well), you can now clearly see the connection between insufficient sleep and poor gains in the gym.

You can cement your understanding and knowledge. Active recall is the best way to reaffirm memories. As well as testing your own understanding and knowledge, you can also solidify your knowledge. Every time you bring up a memory, also known as using "active recall," that memory gets a little stronger. And so, if you are regularly talking about material and teaching it to others, you are going to strengthen the memories that you have and you aren't going to forget the lessons you learned and your overall knowledge base.

It affirms a more abundant, altruistic, and value-giving reality. Stop trying to take all of the time. Being a mentor is a great way to give value to other people. If you are always trying to take from others and get better yourself, you are going to be less happy and actually less excellent at what you do. It tends to be whoever is giving and openly shares their successes that will end up doing

better themselves, because they have an abundant mentality focused on progress.

If you are in doubt, there is nearly always someone at a lower level.

Hopefully you are convinced of the merits of mentoring someone, even if it is just helping a friend who is at a slightly lower level. However, you might think that there isn't really anyone you can teach; perhaps there is no one geographically nearby or you think you aren't good enough to teach anyone.

Well, typically there is ALWAYS someone at a lower level. If you have been playing guitar for four weeks and only know six chords, teach the kid down the street how to play those six chords and you will benefit from being a mentor! If you don't know how to find someone to teach, embrace the internet, advertise on local meetups, or just ask around. Unless you live in the wilderness there will probably be someone you can teach. Worst case, try to teach someone via Skype for free!

The Five Mentoring Techniques

There are different techniques that a mentor can implement. An excellent study conducted in 1995 called *Working Wisdom* articulated five key techniques that can be applied. This is the DNA of what makes a great mentorship. Look to satisfy these areas whether you are a mentor or mentee. The five areas are:

Accompanying. Here, the mentor works alongside the mentee in order to make a commitment toward the mentee's goals. Working together enables the two to share the load and ensures the mentee feels cared for and supported in their work. For example, a personal trainer might do pushups at the same time as you so you feel supported, cared for, and able to "model" good behavior.

Sowing. Here, the mentor puts in place the seeds of change that the mentee will have to go through. Sowing means that the mentee is exposed to ideas that might not make sense at the time but that, in time, will enable them to face a challenge successfully. For example, a business mentor might say "it is important to get your first hire right," even though the mentee isn't close to the stage of hiring anyone yet and is still in the planning stage. Here, sowing the idea will ensure the mentee can digest the idea over time and have the lesson at hand when needed.

Catalyzing. This step involves a change in the mentee facilitated by the mentor. This isn't quite pushing the mentee into the deep end of the pool, but it is pushing them to think and react in a certain, relatively dramatic manner. This might mean a guitar tutor invites the mentee to an open mic night and pushes them to play one song in front of the public. If this is the mentee's first occasion playing in public, a catalyzing push from the mentor may be helpful or even completely necessary to prevent stagnation in the mentee's progress.

Showing. This is simply where the mentor demonstrates what the correct way to do something is. For example, the swimming student who has never done front crawl correctly may well benefit from being able to see how to do it correctly, and so the mentor demonstrates how to do it.

Harvesting. Here, the mentor helps the student to be more aware of the process they are going through. The mentor is attempting to "pick the fruit" and ensure the mentee moves in the right direction and is conscious of the lessons they have learnt. An example of this would be a business mentor asking their mentee what

lessons were learned after the mentee orders the production of 1,000 units of a product and sell nothing in six months, in which case, the mentee ideally responds, “If I haven’t sold any units of a product, order a small batch,” or perhaps, “Do more market research and create a better product.”

Bibliography and Further Reading for this Chapter:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mentorship>

Aubrey, Bob and Cohen, Paul (1995). Working Wisdom: Timeless Skills and Vanguard Strategies for Learning Organizations.

What Does the Good Mentor Do?

Let's delve a little more into exactly what a great mentor will do for you. Below are some ideas on what you can expect from a great mentor (or what you should try to perform if you are a mentor). Many of these idea are drawn from the excellent book *9 Powerful Practices of Really Great Mentors*.

Explore Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. Motivation is an important element to anyone's success, and it is an essential role of the mentor to explore, nurture, and grow the motivation of the mentee. For intrinsic motivation, this might involve the mentor asking questions such as, "How will you feel when you succeed in this area?" or, "How much fun is this going to be when you are really good at it?"

To encourage extrinsic motivation, the mentor might ask questions such as, "What opportunities will success enable you to take advantage of?" or perhaps, "What are you going to spend the money on that you'll earn through mastery of this area?" Of course, it really depends on what the mentee is working on and what motivates him or her. For example, someone who is pushing for progress in their career or has an entrepreneurial aspiration is probably going to be more motivated by money than someone who is working at becoming a better artist. However, everyone is different and there might well be an artist who wants to earn good money, too. A great mentor has to uncover what the specific motivations of their mentee is, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Identify and Pursue "Stretch Goals". There needs to be goals – definite targets that the mentee is working toward. If the mentor doesn't help the mentee explore and define those goals, they are not doing their job properly. The motivations should help define what the goals are. For example, if someone is more motivated by money in their business goals, then the goals should be more financially orientated, or at least enabling good financial success sooner rather than later. Concrete, clear goals will enable the development of a plan, which leads to...

Foster Strategic Thinking. A great mentor will encourage their mentee to think more about the best practices for getting from A to B. Good strategy is necessary in any endeavor. It is essential to consider the practice, the process, and the best route, and then ensure that the mentee is taking the steps to get there.

Strategic thinking is, sadly, something not taught in schools, yet is so essential in the pursuit of any goal. It will be a significant impact on the mentee if they can at the very least recognize and value strategic thinking. This will be a victory in itself. From there, good practices for strategic thinking in general, and specifically for the mentee's endeavors, will need to be fostered.

Without a plan for how to achieve their goals, the mentee will typically perform poorly, and if the mentee doesn't learn how to set their own plans and be a good strategic thinker without their mentor, they will perform well when being mentored but poorly when they strike out alone.

Model Emotional Intelligence. The mentor needs to be able to connect with their mentee at an emotional level, and also be an excellent example of how to correctly use emotional intelligence. For example, the mentor needs to demonstrate clear patience with the progress of their mentee, and imbue patience onto the mentee so that they work diligently and consistently. As I have said, mentorships are much more than just an imparting of knowledge; they need to ideally be a friendship that contains emotional support and is an example for the mentee to follow. A mentor that neglects their own emotional intelligence and/or that of their mentee will typically sabotage the progress of both.

The above are four of the most important keys to becoming an excellent mentor. Read the book I recommended for a more in depth look at these points. If you are going to become a mentor, or are looking for a mentor, consider using the above as a checklist to ensure that the mentorship goes excellently well.

Bibliography and further reading for this chapter:

9 Powerful Practices of Really Great Mentors. By Stephen E Kohn and Vincent D O'Connell

Consider “Champions” over Conventional Mentors

There is a great argument that the conventional mentor and mentor like roles are often not as helpful for you as being around the actual “champions” in a field. This idea comes from Jeanette Cajide and is so compelling that it makes sense to explore it a little more.

Jeanette differentiates between a mentor and a champion. She considers a champion someone that has “skin in the game” for you to succeed – someone active and eager for you to succeed and is willing to work with or for you to make that happen.

The champion is much rarer and harder to find, and the relationship is closer to the conventional, formal master-apprentice relationship, except that the champion will work for and with you to make you successful. Expect the champion to push for you even when you aren’t around.

Jeanette argues that the conventional mentor is typically too passive and unwilling to take a real risk on you, or take risks on your behalf. The mentor may give advice and connections, but won’t invest money, won’t give you the opportunities, and won’t build things with or for you.

Of course, finding a champion is going to be a lot harder than a conventional mentor. However, they are going to be A LOT more impactful on you and your progress. It is perhaps also important to consider it a spectrum – you want to find mentors who are closer to the “champion” like status.

Bibliography and further reading for this chapter:

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/252500>

That brings us to the end of this book. If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll

down and click on “write a customer review”.

Thank you.

Thank you for making it to the end of the collection.

If you want to show your love, [click here to go to the review web page](#) (US customers). Or [click here for the UK](#).

Alternatively, (and for other countries) go to the eBooks web page and scroll down and click on “write a customer review”.

All the best,

John Connolly.

Endnotes

- [ii] Robinson, Francis Pleasant (1978). *Effective Study* (6th ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
- [iii] Gopalakrishnan, Karthika (2009-01-08). ["Students tackle stress as board exams draw"](#). *The Times Of India*.
- [iii] Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*, (1940)
- [iv]<http://www.mnn.com/health/fitness-well-being/stories/worried-about-alzheimers-dementia-learn-a-second-language>
- [v]<http://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-10-languages-smarter.html>
- [vi]<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/genius>
- [vii]<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genius>
- [viii]<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autodidacticism>
- [ix] Biggs, J. B. (1985). The role of meta-learning in study process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 55, 185-212.
- [x] Clare, John (2005-06-01). Should children be taught to touch-type? If so, from what age? And what's the best way of doing it? *The Telegraph*.
- [xi]<http://www.ratatype.com/learn/average-typing-speed/>
- [xii] Ibid.
- [xiii]<http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/w/taking-mini-breaks-at-work>