

How to Excel through Self-Development

Taking Charge of Your Career and Your Life

Harold L. Taylor



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HAROLD L. TAYLOR

HOW TO EXCEL THROUGH SELF-DEVELOPMENT

**TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR
CAREER AND YOUR LIFE**

How to Excel through Self-Development: Taking Charge of Your Career and Your Life

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CONTENTS

	Introduction	7
1	Know where you want to go	9
1.1	Take charge of your career	9
1.2	Excel in your present job	10
1.3	Your future starts now	11
1.4	The basics of goal-setting	12
2	Plan your self-development	14
2.1	Aim for quality, not quantity	14
2.2	Your personal needs analysis	16
2.3	Distance education is on the increase	17
2.4	Develop skills over your lifetime	18
2.5	Selecting your courses	19
2.6	Selecting the training organization	20

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3	Optimize the learning process	21
3.1	Have a growth mindset	21
3.2	Develop a strategy	21
3.3	Coping with the information explosion	22
3.4	Keep up with the times	25
3.5	Technology is having an impact on learning	26
3.6	Maximize your personal energy.	27
4	Enhance your classroom experience	28
4.1	Plan ahead	28
4.2	Be a good listener	29
4.3	Take good notes	30
4.4	Organize your note-taking	31
4.5	Reviewing your notes	32
4.6	Don't avoid the coffee break	32
4.7	Don't stifle those yawns	33
5	Develop good study habits	34
5.1	Use your brain's associative powers	34
5.2	Best study methods	35
5.3	The best time to study	36
5.4	The best place to study	38
5.5	Avoid fatigue	40
5.6	Doing research online	41
5.7	Don't put off those term assignments	42
5.8	Don't always study sitting down	43
6	Write your exams with confidence	44
6.1	Attend the classes	44
6.2	Get a head start	45
6.3	Learning requires repetition, rest and review	46
6.4	Your approach to the exam is important	47
6.5	Know your terms	49
7	Manage your time for results	51
7.1	Plan and schedule	51
7.2	Life involves a series of choices	53
7.3	Time management laws and principles	55
7.4	Get an early start	58
7.5	Utilize any idle time	59

8	Make the most of your memory	60
8.1	Get the information into long-term memory	60
8.2	Boost your power of recall	61
8.3	The story-telling technique of remembering	63
9	Don't buckle under pressure	65
9.1	Stress makes learning difficult	65
9.2	Recognizing stress	66
9.3	Avoid burnout	67
9.4	Relieving stress	69
10	Summary of strategies for students	71
10.1	Manage your time	71
10.2	Maximize your classroom experience	72
10.3	How to study	73
10.4	Improve your memory and recall	75
10.5	Writing exams	76
	About the author	77

INTRODUCTION

If you want to get ahead in your career, you have to do more than put in time at the office. You must upgrade your skills or learn new ones, expanding your knowledge base in your field or related areas through additional training. If you are a manager who has been out of school for some time, you may find that your study skills are a little rusty. Magnify that problem by other commitments, such as a spouse, children, volunteer work and a full social life, and you may have a time problem as well.

This book has been written with you in mind. If you would like to rebuild your self-discipline, hone your exam-writing skills, redevelop your power of concentration and improve your ability to recall information, review the information in this book. There's more here than a series of ways to excel in school while balancing a heavy workload. The book shows you how to examine your strengths and weaknesses, set personal and career goals, build a self-development plan and put that plan into action.

Whether you are a business professional looking to improve your skills and advance your career or someone looking to change careers or a full-time student creating a career, this book can help you excel in your studies. And regardless of your reason for learning, whether prompted by work dissatisfaction, a desire for new challenges, physical limitations or financial necessity, it's important not to rush into anything. Assess your current situation, the need for change, the opportunities available, the advantages of proceeding with your plan, any resulting costs and personal sacrifices that may be involved, and whether you have the full support of the significant people in your life.

Of course, self-development need not be for the purpose of career advancement or anything associated with work. It can be for pleasure, challenge, pride in achievement, for social interaction – or even for health reasons. Learning has been linked to memory improvement, brain health, and even as a deterrent to dementia and Alzheimer's.

The contents of this book will assist you in succeeding in whatever self-development activity you undertake – from a one-day live seminar to a postgraduate degree program at a university.

Each chapter has been written so that it stands on its own, so don't worry about jumping ahead. If your only problem is memory and recall, scroll to that chapter and review the suggestions and techniques described there. On the other hand, if writing exams gives you nightmares, start there. But if you feel you could use some advice in all the areas covered, start at chapter one and work your way through. There is a natural progression beginning with goal setting and needs analysis and continuing through the necessary steps to successful completion of the self-development program you have selected.

If you don't feel you have time to read this book, skip to the last chapter for a summary of 75 quick tips for students.

Anyone can succeed if his or her desire to succeed is strong enough. But there is usually an easy way and a hard way to arrive at a destination. I have attempted, through this book, to make your trip a little easier – and a lot more pleasurable. Have an enjoyable and successful journey.

1 KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

1.1 TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER

Many people never plan their careers; they simply get comfortable in a job, and in time, inertia sets in. They stay in their job as long as they have no reason to quit, and make little if any attempt to further their advancement. They leave only when they are retired, fired or offered a better job.

Don't leave your career in the hands of your employer. A company may keep the management inventory records, recommend courses and seminars to attend, conduct performance appraisals on a regular basis, and make recommendations to individuals concerning their future. But it's you, the individual, who has the most at stake. It's your life that is being directed – or misdirected. And you are the only one who really knows what you want to do with the rest of your life.

Your company doesn't know your real motives, ambitions and aspirations; your dreams, likes or dislikes; your family situation; personal goals – or even the talents that lie hidden within you. The company doesn't really know what turns you on, what you find challenging, satisfying or intellectually rewarding.

Regardless of what you or your employer may think, career planning is *your* responsibility. Job boredom is *your* problem. Lack of opportunity for personal growth, financial gain or career advancement is a failure on *your* part. It's your responsibility to take charge of your own life, set your own goals and plan your own career.

Individuals who reach the top in any profession are those who have conscientiously followed their own plans for self-development and growth. Where you are today is a result of the decisions you made or didn't make in the past. Your future depends on the decisions you make now.

When planning a career, it is important to consider more than simply financial needs. Take into account the amount of time and energy you will have left for your family, friends and other interests. When you acquire anything – including success – you are paying for it with your time and energy. You are trading away your life an hour, a day, a year at a time, in order to reach your goals. You will probably be spending more time and energy on your career than on any other activity. You are paying for your knowledge, skills and experience with that precious commodity called time. Spend it wisely. And don't spend it all. Leave enough time and energy to purchase those other precious activities such as family time, leisure time, moments with yourself, with nature, with God. Choose your own future, set your own goals, and work on your career. But recognize that nothing is free in this world; everything costs varying degrees of time. And time is life.

1.2 EXCEL IN YOUR PRESENT JOB

Make sure you have a solid foundation in your current job or position before preparing for the next one. Sometimes individuals take courses to prepare themselves for advancement before they fully master their current job. Excel at what you do. Always do a better job than the position requires. Take online courses, read books and attend seminars related to your job. You will soon be so skilled, knowledgeable and proficient at what you do that you will force yourself into a higher position – if not with your present company, then with a different one or in a business of your own.

You will never be fully trained for a higher-level job until after you get that job. Then you will grow into it quickly through actual experience, reinforced by the confidence gained by having excelled in your previous job, and complemented by training acquired at this new level.

There's a danger in advancing too quickly. It is important that you build confidence and a strong self-image before taking on a completely new set of responsibilities. You can't launch a new career from a shaky platform.

In a way, it's similar to what might happen in high school. If children do not fully understand grade nine math, promotion to the next grade will cause them even more stress and confusion, and they might not just fail math, but also those subjects that require a knowledge of math or for which math is an asset.

Be prepared to grow into a job and then out of it. But don't underestimate the time it takes you to grow into it. This time can be reduced if your boss is an effective delegator and a competent leader. And it can be reduced further still if you accept the responsibility for developing yourself.

Even if your career goal requires that you to change companies or start up your own business, don't make the jump before reviewing your present status. Are you on a solid footing with your current employer? Are you exceeding the requirements of the job? Are you worth more than you're being paid? Gaining friends as well as business contacts? Helping to achieve company goals and assuring yourself of a super recommendation? A job is a job and doesn't require any base; but a career is built on a solid foundation.

1.3 YOUR FUTURE STARTS NOW

What one postpones, one frequently abandons. That's the reason why so many young people who quit school "just for one year," intending to return after a year in the work force, never return to full-time studies. People put off a cruise for "one more year" and may never experience the cruise. Or postpone a trip. Or delay starting a new business. Or never get around to enrolling in that evening degree program. That's why it's so important to do it *now*. Delaying anything gives inertia a foothold.

Do you long to go into your own business? Or write a book? Or become the head of a Fortune 500 company? If you do, don't put it off. Find out *now* if it's really what you want to do, and if so, get started. I'm sure you don't want to spend the rest of your life dreaming about what *might* have been.

If you keep yourself busy enough, rushing from job to job, you won't realize you're not getting anywhere. It's important to pause from time to time and take inventory. One thing's certain. If you find you do want to achieve something, chances are you can do it – if your desire to succeed is strong enough. We tend to become precisely what we imagine ourselves to be. All that we need are concrete goals and a step-by-step plan of action to get us there.

So don't *wait* for opportunities; make your own. If you want something in the future, the time to start is now, in the present. First, put your ambitions in writing. Don't be discouraged by the fact that your goals may not be reached for another three or more years. It's better to reach success in the long term than to never know what success really feels like.

If you have not yet drawn up goals for your personal and professional life, now is a great time to start. Think ahead ten years. Where will you be if you make no changes to your present career, lifestyle, education, investment portfolio, etc.? How old will you and your family be? What education will the children be able to afford? What job will you be working at? How much money will you be earning? What will you own? What hobbies will you have? What accomplishments will you be able to look back on? Ask questions about things that are important and meaningful to you.

If you're not happy with your answers to these questions, repeat the process; but this time assume that your "dreams" have come true. What does this new scenario look like ten years down the road? You may see a different person, with greater skills, accomplishments, interests and personal achievements. If you prefer this to the first scenario, draw up specific goals for yourself and plan now how you're going to reach them. Almost anything can be accomplished in ten years or less. The hardest part is figuring out what you want, and getting started.

1.4 THE BASICS OF GOAL-SETTING

Briefly, here are some basics of goal setting that you should keep in mind:

1. Put your goals in writing. Writing them down provides focus and commitment. And if you are unable to express your goals in writing, it will be equally difficult to achieve them.
2. Make sure they're realistic; that is, can they be reached by anyone with the same abilities and opportunities that you have? Avoid pie-in-the-sky goals that are beyond your reach.
3. Be specific. Assign target dates. Avoid vague goals such as "to be happy," "to be fulfilled," "to be rich" or "to be intellectually mature." Think of the things that would make you happy or fulfilled and put them down in concrete terms. For example, a measurable goal would be "to earn \$150,000 per year by May 31, 2020, as a self-employed sales agent."
4. List your goals in order of priority. Hopefully you will be able to accomplish them all. But which ones are most important to you? Work on these first.
5. Make sure that your goals are compatible with one another, and compatible with goals of the significant other people in your life as well. One of your goals could involve starting up your own business while you are still employed full time. Another goal could be to spend more quality time with your family. The two may not be compatible. Which one is more important to you? Can one of them be changed? Can one be temporarily delayed? Can you achieve both by selecting a certain type of business? Remember that personal goals are what provide meaning and direction to your life.

Here is a four-step plan for success:

Step 1: Decide in your mind what you want to do with the rest of your life. Choose a challenging but realistic set of goals.

Step 2: Develop an action plan to achieve these goals within a specified time frame.

Step 3: Act now. Don't delay until a more convenient time. There is no such thing as a more convenient time.

Step 4: Be persistent and maintain a positive attitude. View failures as temporary setbacks and problems as opportunities in disguise.

Recognize that step 2, the action plan, usually involves the development of new skills and may take several years. Be patient, yet relentless in your pursuit of success.

If you make a move, make sure it is your decision to do so. Your goals should represent what *you* want, not what other people may want for you. For example, well-meaning family members' ideas of success often force people into decisions they don't really want to make.

Take the initiative. Whether you are launching an entirely new career or building on your existing one, self-development is a key ingredient of success.

2 PLAN YOUR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

2.1 AIM FOR QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY

Each day we have an opportunity to become better than we were the day before. Let's not pass up that opportunity. Set some goals in the area of self-development. Are there some areas where you feel there's room for improvement? Writing skills? Memory? Public speaking? Select one area this year and concentrate on improving it.

Some people seem to be professional course takers. They sign up for every interesting course that appears in their email inbox regardless of how relevant it is to their current position or planned career. Take fewer courses and devote more time to developing those particular skills. And evaluate other people based on their personal improvement, not on the number of certificates they have managed to accumulate.



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If one of your weaknesses is speaking on your feet, it is better to take four courses in public speaking than one course in each of your weak areas. Devote six months or more to developing that skill. Join Toastmasters. Volunteer to introduce and thank speakers at your associations' meetings. Say a few words at weddings and birthday parties. Talk in front of a mirror. Recite to your family. Work continually on improving that *one* skill. You will be able to measure the results because you will see the results. Then concentrate on another skill area, and so on.

Don't be deceived into believing that the degree of self-development is proportional to the number of courses you take. It is proportional to the amount of time you devote to practicing that skill *after* you have taken the course. Have you ever heard of people taking a speed-reading course and shortly afterward dropping back to their original speed? Or taking a time management seminar, only to drift back into their original time-wasting habits? It's not only common, it's usually the norm.

Don't let seemingly overwhelming goals force you to procrastinate. This was brought home to me when I was a high school graduate working in a supermarket. My older brother urged me to continue my education by getting a university degree in the evenings. When I protested that I didn't have the time or the money for such an undertaking, he suggested I take only one course per year.

"But that's impossible!" I exclaimed. "At that rate it would take me 15 years. I'd be 33 years old before I got my degree!" He was unimpressed.

"Well, you'll be 33 years old anyway, won't you?" he asked. "Would you rather be 33 with or without a degree?" How right he was. I didn't take his advice and 15 years later found myself 33 years old, but *without* a degree – being passed over for promotions because I didn't have that piece of paper that said I was qualified. Time passes regardless, so why not be working on your goals while it does.

Nothing in life is that easy. If you want something, you have to work for it. So be patient, and be thorough. Select *one* area of weakness, and focus on that one area for six months or the entire year. There will be plenty more years for those other skills that need developing. Set your goal for this year. Work on it daily. And each day you will become better than you were the day before.

2.2 YOUR PERSONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS

Successful companies plow back most of their profits into the development of their organizations. They invest in their people, their equipment and their methods in order to build strength, durability and the capacity to expand.

As an individual, you also should plow back a portion of your earnings into the development of yourself. Through self-development you build strength in order to perform at your peak. You build durability so that you can weather temporary setbacks, including unemployment, health problems and financial loss. You build the capacity to expand, through promotion or self-employment, into more challenging and lucrative careers.

Everyone should have a personal budget, just as an organization has a budget. When you draw up your budget for next year, allocate a specific amount of money to self-development. Then determine how that money should be spent. In order to do this, you should conduct a self-analysis or needs analysis to determine, as objectively as possible, your strengths and weaknesses. List all the management, social and technical skills you need in order to perform superbly in your present job and in that higher job you have set your sights on. Then rate yourself high, medium or low according to the extent that you already possess that skill.

One way of doing this is to list the various skills on the left hand side of a page and rate yourself high, medium or low to the right of each skill. After brainstorming alone to come up with the various skills, you could seek the input of your boss and other individuals to ensure the list is as complete as possible. A portion of your list may look something like this:

- How effectively do I manage my time?
- Am I able to delegate well?
- Am I a good listener?
- Do I have good memory for names and faces, facts and figures?
- Do I express myself well in writing?
- Am I able to speak in public with confidence?
- Am I able to cope with stress and manage my emotions?
- Am I able to be assertive and say no when a request does not relate to my goals?
- Am I comfortable in making decisions?
- Am I creative and effective at problem solving?
- Do I have a good command of the English language or other languages in which business is conducted?
- Have I developed the art of relaxation?
- Have I developed good health habits, and do I have an understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle?
- Do I possess effective leadership skills and the ability to motivate others?

- Am I skilled at promoting myself through dress, manner, networking, etc.?
- Am I able to “read” other people’s body language and build rapport?
- Am I skilled at interviewing people and assessing their performance?
- Do I have a good understanding of financial controls?
- Am I able to set goals and plan at least five years in advance?

This list can be extended to encompass all the skills you must possess in order to become a top performer. When you have completed the rating process, list all those skills that you have rated “low” on a separate sheet and prioritize them. Mark the skill you feel is most important to your current job as number one, the next most important as number two, etc. Don’t hesitate to ask your boss to help in this prioritizing process.

You now have a list of those skills in which you are weak, prioritized in order of their importance. Now you must select a means of developing that first skill. This could be accomplished by taking a course at a college or university, attending a training program or series of seminars, reading books on the topic, listening to CDs, signing up for an online course, obtaining personal coaching or any combination of these.

2.3 DISTANCE EDUCATION IS ON THE INCREASE

There are hundreds of educational courses available – from online credit courses or certificate programs to full-time degree programs at colleges and universities.

Online learning is increasing in popularity since it allows you to fit your education around your current work and family situations and not the reverse. And with laptops, iPads and other hand held devices, students can continue their learning regardless of their location. Online training organizations such as *Udemy.com* offer a wide selection of inexpensive courses that make lifelong learning available to almost everyone.

The flexibility of online courses allows you to register at any time, proceed at your own speed, and choose courses that meet both your requirements and your budget. On the other hand, they require more self-discipline and motivation, lack the energy and synergy of interacting with other students, and less face-to-face contact with the instructor.

Regardless of the format of your self-development programs, you will have to balance family life, business commitments and learning so that all three will prosper. And if you are a mature student, you may have to re-learn how to learn. This book should help.

If you have clear, realistic goals and a strong desire to reach them, a commitment to succeed, and the encouragement of your family and business associates, you can succeed regardless of the route you choose.

2.4 DEVELOP SKILLS OVER YOUR LIFETIME

In addition to studying the skill, you must practice it. Skills are obtained through a combination of knowledge and practice. Skills are lost quickly if they are not used. You can develop almost any skill if you have enough interest and put forth enough effort.

As you are developing that first skill, you must plan the development of those other needed skills. Don't try to do everything at once; the workload will overwhelm you and you will probably become discouraged and quit. Don't be impatient. Time passes quickly, and a three-year or even a five-year plan is probably realistic.

Remember that these skills will be with you for the rest of your life; you don't have to become an instant success at everything. On a one-year, five-year or ten-year planning calendar (depending on the number of skills that need development), mark the time period allocated for each skill. On your current year's planning calendar, block off the specific times on a daily or weekly basis that you will be devoting to that particular skill development. Treat that time as though it were a meeting with your major client or your boss. Don't allow it to be preempted by less important activities. Few things are more important than time invested in yourself. Be sure to record time for reading and other activities that are more easily put off, in addition to the more rigid times such as class times and seminar dates.

Your skills are cumulative; while you are developing your second skill you are still practicing your first acquired skill, and so on. As the years pass, you will not only become a more valuable asset to your organization, you will feel better about yourself. As you acquire new skills, you will gain in self-confidence and self-esteem. As you become more self-confident you will be more eager to accept greater challenges and take greater risks. As you take greater risks and become more creative, you become even more valuable to your organization. Success is self-perpetuating.

The secret of self-development, like most other activities, is planning. Don't sign up for courses or seminars indiscriminately simply because they are available at a convenient time and seem intriguing. Self-development does not occur every time you take a course, read a book or attend a seminar. Self-development only occurs when you assess your needs, plan the training, study the particular skills area in depth, practice what you learn and evaluate the results.

The results will be evident as you observe your accomplishments and experience your success.

2.5 SELECTING YOUR COURSES

Learning does not stop when you graduate; it is a continuing activity. As times change, so do methods, techniques and information. Technology continues to advance. New products and services flood the market. Innovations produce not only new competition, but whole new fields of study. Many of the children born today will be in jobs and professions that don't even exist yet.

Many of us may be overwhelmed by the multitude of courses and seminars that are available. The previous needs analysis will help in the selection. We must assess our needs first, prioritize them, and include the most important self-development programs in our weekly schedule.

But there's another problem. Dozens of courses on identical topics are offered by a plethora of educational institutions, seminar companies, online organizations and independent professionals. Many are excellent, others a waste of time. How do we select the best ones? Our time is too valuable and too scarce to squander on courses and seminars that offer little substance.

The answer is to investigate what's out there and gather information on the ones that seem to meet your needs. We conduct market research before we modify a product, start a new business or invest money in a new invention. And in selecting a course you have more at stake than money; you are risking that nonrenewable resource called time. Invest a little of that resource in evaluating a seminar or course *before* you take the plunge. It's good business sense to do so.

If you need to improve your speaking skills, selling skills or understanding of computer technology, don't sign up for the first course that bears that label. Investigate first. After reviewing a detailed outline of the course and confirming that the stated objectives match your own, contact the institution or online training company. Find out who is the author of the materials being used and who will be facilitating the program, and their credentials and background.

In live sessions, talk to the instructor if you are doubtful whether the course will satisfy your needs. Will there be take-home notes or a seminar manual? How many are registered? Will you be one among 100 or is registration limited? Is there a test or examination? Is a certificate or proof of attendance offered for your career file?

Ask for names of people who have attended the course or seminar previously, and call a few of them to get their reaction. This may seem like a lot of trouble to go through for a simple two-day seminar or eight-week course, but it's not when you consider it's your career you're developing. Even a few days is still a sizable chunk of your working life, so don't part with it before confirming that you will receive value in its place. Don't choose a course on the basis of cost. If it is a course that will help satisfy your career objectives, it's worth the price. But don't assume the course is good just because it's expensive. Check it out.

2.6 SELECTING THE TRAINING ORGANIZATION

There are hundreds of seminar companies, associations, colleges, universities and private companies offering courses and seminars. Many of them will search *you* out through email or social media such as Facebook or Twitter. But their information has usually disappeared by the time you're ready to take the course. To prevent this, make up a series of electronic folders titled with those skills you are interested in developing (as determined by your needs analysis). Whenever you receive information describing courses in that particular area, file it in the appropriate folder. When it's time to select the course, you will have several options.

It might be a good idea to have both an electronic and a hard copy folder to house, not only the information on training, but also interesting magazine articles, blogs, newsletters etc. containing information on those areas you have selected to study.

Check out the organization as well as the course itself. There are many seminar companies and entrepreneurs whose prime motive appears to be to maximize profits – with the quality of the programs offered a very distant second. Check out the reputation of the organization in the marketplace. Obtain a list of its clients. Ask how long it has been in business. Is a money-back guarantee offered? Will the organization supply references? Is there a certificate of completion, designation or accreditation provided upon successful completion of the program?

If the company has been in business for several years, has its own educational facilities and receives raves from past attendees, you are probably on safe ground. If an organization provides in-house training programs for industry in addition to its public seminars, it is probably okay, as well – and it's easy to check a few references. Large organizations such as IBM are usually more discerning than individuals. Don't be afraid to call one of its corporate clients for a reference.

If you are taking a course at a recognized university or college, you usually won't have to worry about its reputation. The quality of the course is probably good. But don't fail to investigate whether it's the right program or course for *you*.

3 OPTIMIZE THE LEARNING PROCESS

3.1 HAVE A GROWTH MINDSET

Research indicates that intelligence is not the greatest factor in succeeding at school or in life; it's a combination of personal effort and effective strategies. Successful students view initial failure, not as a result of a lack of ability, but as mistakes that can be corrected or solved.

Carol Dweck, author of the book *Mindset: the new psychology of success*, refers to those who believe intelligence is a fixed trait as having a “fixed mindset.” Since they attribute errors to a lack of ability, they feel powerless to improve. But if you believe intelligence can be developed through education, effort, and help from instructors and others, you are motivated to do just that. You have a “growth mindset.”

In 2007, Dweck and associates monitored 373 students for two years during transition to junior high school. The students with the growth mindset – those believing that the harder you work at something, the more adept you will become at doing it – had better grades than those with a fixed mindset. Managers with a fixed mindset were also less likely to seek feedback or accept constructive criticism and advice.

Recognize that intelligence at both school and work is a process, not a gift. Don't be discouraged if the subject appears difficult or confusing or if you initially do poorly. Adopt a growth mindset, focus on improving, and as your brain's neurons grow more connections, you will be developing more than just your skills.

3.2 DEVELOP A STRATEGY

Don't fall into the trap of thinking you are just “taking a course.” You are developing yourself in a particular area that was identified by your personal needs analysis. Your objective is not simply to complete a course and pass an exam; it is to master that area of expertise. To do this you must complement your educational course with research in your particular field of study. You must keep current with new developments, become familiar with resources available, talk to experts in the field, keep a file on relevant data and, above all, read, read, read.

If you read a book every week you will still only be reading less than one-tenth of one percent of the paper and electronic books being published. Speed-reading courses alone are not enough to allow you to cope with the information explosion. Zero in on those subjects of greatest interest and benefit. Review best-seller lists, search topics online at amazon.com and indigo.com for relevant titles. Visit bookstores and check the new releases. Subscribe to online blogs and newsletters that simplify recent research in your field of interest. You might also advise friends and business associates of your areas of interest.

One site that is gaining a reputation for complete coverage in the field of business is *bookboon.com*. With thousands of electronic books, including text books, *Bookboon* has a corporate online library containing, brief, readable e-books covering all of the important soft-skill topics that are central to success. Their e-Library has one of the highest usage rates in the digital learning industry.

In a survey that I conducted among my time management workshops over a decade ago, managers were spending more than thirteen hours a week reading business-related material alone. Every year the amount of information we are required to read seems to increase. Yet our reading speed remains the same. This produces a time bind. We have to either absorb more in the same time or be more selective in what we read – perhaps both.

To maintain our effectiveness we must keep current. We can't ignore the multitude of books, magazines and technical papers being published every year. But we can't read indiscriminately, either.

3.3 COPING WITH THE INFORMATION EXPLOSION

More information is being created than ever before. As much information was created every 48 hours in 2010 as was created between the dawn of time and 2003. By 2020, that much data will be generated in 60 minutes. And yet, according to the American Booksellers Association, in 2013, 80 percent of Americans did not buy or read a book last year. If this is the case, Allyson Lewis, author of the book "The seven minute difference," is right in recommending that we read at least 10 pages of a non-fiction book each day. That would be one 300-page book each month. Imagine the impact on our management skills and relevant knowledge! We would be well ahead of the majority of the population.

If you feel you don't have enough time to read, take a look at your social media habits and see if you can take time away from that. The average social media user consumes 285 pieces of content a day, which equates to about 54,000 words – the length of an average novel. (Source: *10-minute digital de-clutter* by S.J. Scott and Barrie Davenport)

Here are a few suggestions to reduce the time spent reading.

Be selective. You certainly can't read everything. James T. McKay in his book *The Management of Time* suggests you can read 50,000 words a minute. All you have to do is recognize within one minute that a 50,000-word book is not going to help you and then don't read it.

How much time do you spend reading newspapers? Some people subscribe to as many as three or four daily or weekly newspapers, and actually spend time with all of them – even though they carry the same news. Some of the news is worth reading. But there's so much other material that "catches the eye" the cost in time is phenomenal.

Since the important news is also carried on the radio, TV and in weekly newsmagazines, all that exposure may not really be necessary. It's important to be kept up to date on what's happening in the world, but don't spend more time than is necessary. Take a hard look at the newspapers and magazines you receive with a view to eliminating most of them. If you currently receive magazines that offer no value, cancel your subscription. Get off the mailing list of unwanted controlled circulation magazines. Resist the temptation to accept them simply because they're free. Read only those magazines and books that will help you attain your self-development goals. A good guideline is to review only those publications that consistently publish relevant articles. One or two useful articles a year is not sufficient payback for your time invested.

Handle magazines quickly. If you review magazines yourself, don't retain the magazines. Tear out articles of interest, staple the pages together and toss them into a folder marked READ. If the magazine must be circulated to others in the organization, photocopy the articles instead. Don't actually read the articles until later. Carry the READ folder in your computer bag and refer to it during idle times while waiting for classes to commence, buses to arrive or lineups to dwindle.

Skim. Walter Pauk, in his book *How to Study in College*, described a method of skimming that he used, and that was frequently being used by students. He would spend a few minutes trying to get the full meaning of the chapter from the chapter title, and then read the first couple of paragraphs in the regular way to make sure he knew where the author was heading. He would then let his eyes drift to the big-type headings and subheadings and read them as though they were items in a newspaper. They are brief summaries. Then he would read a sentence or two underneath these headings. His eyes would float over the rest of the material looking for other islands of information. They might be marked by clues such as italicized words, underlined words, and changes in the type.

He was always careful to read the last paragraph or last section marked “summary.” That’s where the author gathers together all the main ideas of the chapter. Finally, he would bring all these pieces and fragments together before reading and taking notes on the chapter. By then he would know the important parts and what was of most interest to him.

Read actively. The average reading speed is only 230 to 250 words a minute. But you can scan literature at 1,000 to 5,000 words a minute. Don’t simply absorb whatever information hits your eye. Search out the information you require. For example, the title of an article should tell you what the article is about. Turn it into a question and actively search for the answers. For example, if the article is entitled “How to save time at meetings,” change it to read “How can I save time at meetings?” and search for those sentences that provide the information you’re looking for. By reading with a purpose, your mind will not wander and you’ll cover the material more quickly. Even the process of holding the highlighter in your hand as you read will make it easier to concentrate. It makes you a more active participant in the reading and improves recall later.



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3.4 KEEP UP WITH THE TIMES

Times have changed. But in many cases, the learning environment hasn't. Many instructors still dole out the notes during class time, deliver long lectures, and keep the students' eyes and brains occupied with endless PowerPoint slides.

Research tell us that learning is enhanced when students are actively involved in offering their own explanations and interpretations of the workshop materials rather than just passively absorbing what course leaders have to say. To quote Nobel laureate Herbert Simon, "Learning results from what the student does and thinks, and not from what the instructor does and thinks."

So come prepared to question, discuss and request more information on specific areas. Good instructors focus on the students' interests and needs. They spend less time disseminating information and more time helping the students see how they can adapt and apply the information to their own situations.

Where lectures are necessary, many of them take the form of brief videos, articles or news items that prompt discussion. Take-away materials could be included on USB flash-drives. Additional information could be uploaded to a website for post-course reading. And an online discussion forum might be included for those students motivated enough to continue learning more in those areas discussed.

One technique for getting information to move into your long-term memory is to visualize using it later. People participating in a German study who were told to think about how something they learned that day may come in handy in the future were able to access that information far faster than people who learned the same information, but didn't try this trick. So just imagining that you will need a phone number or a person's name can help you recall it later. When you are taking classes of any kind, make sure you know the relevance of the material being taught, and how it could be used in your career or life.

Richard Mayer, an educational psychologist at the *University of California*, Santa Barbara has shown that optimal learning takes place when visuals and verbal materials are presented together simultaneously. It generates more accurate and enduring recall as well as improves problem solving. Other senses such as sound and touch increase it even more. The sum of the senses is greater than their parts.

Learning is improved when more senses are involved. Neural connections are formed when we learn, and here's a list of what builds neural connections found in a series on education appearing in the November 1, 2009 issue of the *Toronto Star*: learning by doing; physical involvement; using more than one sense during the learning process; being emotionally calm & open to learning; building on information already there; having a positive connection with the instructor and knowing *why* you're learning. All these should be considered when selecting and attending training programs.

3.5 TECHNOLOGY IS HAVING AN IMPACT ON LEARNING

Technology is advancing all the time, and it has revolutionized the learning process. You can access distant learning courses online. You have instant access to information, including synonyms, meaning of words, writing aids, e-books, and virtually any help you need with the click of your mouse or the tap of your finger. Research has been simplified. Bibliographies are assembled for you at bibme.org. You can dictate to your computer and handheld devices using voice activated software. Note-taking has been simplified. Sharing information with fellow students is easy and instantaneous. But technology also comes with problems and challenges that you have to overcome.

A 2008 study of 6,000 kids who had grown up with the web revealed that the Internet has affected the way they read and learn. They don't necessarily read from left to right or from top to bottom, but rather skip around searching for pertinent information. (This study by Genera was discussed in the book, *Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains*, by Nicholas Carr.)

The digital age has affected more than just the younger students. More and more adults are reporting that they have difficulty concentrating, are more easily distracted, and have real problems trying to read a text book for any length of time. The rewiring of our brains will have an impact on how we plan our self-development and study sessions, which include a trend towards shorter chunks of information, more visual methods and frequent breaks. These are discussed in the chapter on study.

At 2013 study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science USA* showed that frequent interactions keep attention from wandering. But attention spans in the digital age have been reduced drastically. So it is imperative that you take an active part in the learning process. Spoon feeding is a thing of the past.

3.6 MAXIMIZE YOUR PERSONAL ENERGY.

We hear a lot of suggestions for using energy wisely in order to protect the Earth – everything from reversible ceiling fans and low-flow shower heads to energy-saving light bulbs and microwave ovens. But there are a lot fewer suggestions on how to use our personal energy wisely in order to protect our own bodies and brains. It is just as important to make ourselves energy-efficient as it is to make our homes and environment energy-efficient.

It may be true that the average car uses 500 gallons of gasoline a year and adds 20 pounds of carbon dioxide to the air with every gallon burned. But it is also true that the brain uses up to 25% of the oxygenated glucose and other nutrients that the body gets -and if deprived, it will make inferior decisions, poor choices and reduced creativity.

Just as the single most important thing you can do to save energy in the home is to make sure your furnace is running efficiently, the single most important thing to save energy in your body is to make sure your brain is working efficiently.

This requires both physical and mental exercise, adequate sleep, proper nutrition, and exposure to natural sunlight. It also pays to avoid energy drainers such as stress, disorganization, multitasking, frenetic living and the excessive use of digital technology.

In addition, there are many energy boosters including such things as social relationships, work habits, lifestyle, and working environment.

All of these factors and others are discussed in my new e-book, *Manage your personal energy*, published by Bookboon.com. Do what you can to conserve and maximize your energy; because thinking and learning consume a lot of energy.

4 ENHANCE YOUR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

4.1 PLAN AHEAD

If you are attending classes at a school or attending live workshops, get directions to the location if needed, confirm the room and physical layout, and whether laptops and hand-held devices are allowed. Bring any necessary supplies with you, such as highlighter, writing materials and the course outline.

Arrive early, take a front seat where you can hear and see everything, and meet the instructor before the course starts. If you're not sure of the format, breaks, location of library, study areas, washrooms, etc., ask. Meet as many of the other participants as possible before the class starts and talk to them during breaks. There's a wealth of business contacts and potential study partners at every live course or seminar.

Don't sit in the back row with your arms crossed, soaking up the instructor's wisdom. It won't work. Like anything else, you will receive value based on the effort you put into it.

Resist the urge to fall asleep if the leader is not dynamic. Regardless of the quality of instruction, challenge yourself to get something of value out of the session. Pay attention. Be alert. Participate. Ask questions. Sometimes a seminar leader or instructor will forge ahead with nary a pause for breath, let alone time to ask questions. Don't try to retain a question in your head until the break; a dozen others thoughts will push it from your memory in the meantime. Quickly jot down the question and ask it at the first opportunity.

Don't waste everyone's time with questions that might have a more personal application. Ask these during the breaks. And ask the instructor if he or she would mind if you raise questions about material that has already been covered, since questions are certain to occur to you when you're reviewing your notes.

Schedule a block of time in your planning calendar to review the notes later. Make it as soon after the seminar as possible. There is no course in existence (including seminars) that does not require homework. Read, highlight, review and even put into action many of the ideas that you have written down.

Be prepared. Bring a three-ring binder with lined paper that has been ruled with a vertical line one-third of the way from the left margin. Make your notes to the right of this line and later you can summarize these notes into a few key headings at the left side of the page. If the room is set theater style with no tables to write on, you might want to use a clipboard to hold any sheets in place. They can be transferred to the binder later. It's a good idea to number the sheets as you progress. Always number at least ten pages in advance. You have the option of using a laptop or handheld device; but physically writing things down seems to improve recall later – and tends to allow more effective listening. The younger generation, not having been born into the cursive writing era, may find little difference.

4.2 BE A GOOD LISTENER

The onus is on the learner to avoid prejudging, daydreaming, interrupting, criticizing the speaker's delivery, reacting to emotional words and being distracted by the environment. Effective listening can be learned. It requires greater mental application because it is an active skill.

If you find yourself tapping your pencil impatiently while the instructor replies to a question or explains an assignment, and if you have trouble keeping your mind on the conversation, relax for a moment. Half-listening can waste time and cause stress when you lose track of where the instructor is headed, strain the speaker-listener relationship, and result in costly misunderstandings.

There's more to effective listening than meets the ear. It's hard work. It requires an active participation in the communication process. It takes effort and practice. And it requires that we break habits that have been forming since childhood.

Don't be a passive listener. Be an active listener. Lean forward to demonstrate your interest in the instructor and what he or she is saying. Establish eye contact. Resist the temptation to glance at your watch or the door. Devote full attention to the speaker. Don't let yourself have judgmental or negative thoughts.

During the question period speak up. The lack of any response suggests you aren't listening. Ask for clarification. Summarize key points and ask if you've interpreted them correctly. Listen for ideas, not details. But hear the person out. Most people are flattered when you listen to them and teachers are no different. They respond positively and appreciate you more. And who know, at exam time they might even pay more attention to what you are writing.

During discussion periods or in study groups always consider carefully what the other students say before responding. Active listening involves paraphrasing what you think the other person said. This gives the person an opportunity to clarify or modify or confirm that your interpretation of what was said is entirely accurate.

In some educational situations you may not have an opportunity to discuss, question or interact in any way. This is the case with most online courses. There may be an almost irresistible urge to let your mind wander as the “talking head” drones on. This is reinforced by the fact that people talk at roughly 125 words a minute, while we listen at speeds over four times that fast. Since our minds must be busy doing something, we go on little mental excursions and soon find ourselves thinking about other things.

To prevent this from happening, let your “extracurricular thinking” revolve around the speaker’s comments. Think about the conclusions that he or she will probably arrive at, the evidence that supports claims made, how the opinions stack up against those of other people you’ve listened to. Mentally review the points covered to date. Check out the nonverbal communications. In other words, apply yourself totally to the lesson being taught. It’s a small sacrifice to make. You’re part of a captive audience, so make the most of your captivity. And with online courses you can always put the instructor “on pause” while you enjoy a stand-up break or a coffee.

4.3 TAKE GOOD NOTES

Copying feverishly while the lecturer drones on is not the most effective method of note taking. It is difficult to listen for understanding while writing, and all you succeed in doing is producing more text material. Tony Buzan in his book, *Make the Most of Your Mind*, claimed that repeated studies indicate the fewer notes, the better. He stated that in reverse order of merit, note taking techniques rank as follows:

1. No notes at all (the worst technique).
2. Complete transcript notes given by the lecturer or teacher.
3. Complete transcript notes made by the learner.
4. Summary sentence notes given by the lecturer or teacher.
5. Summary sentence notes made by the learner.
6. Key word notes given by the lecturer or teacher.
7. Key word notes made by the learner.

Key word notes should be more than a simple word or two jotted down periodically. The purpose of note taking is to capture the teacher's ideas for later expansion and learning, so you must be able to make sense of the key words. But more than note taking takes place in a classroom. Discussions, role playing, case studies, questioning, visuals all assist in the learning process. There is simply too little time to write down everything that happens.

Everything the instructor says may indeed be in the text book or the notes provided; but not the ideas that those notes may generate. You should be searching for ways to *apply* what is being taught. Whenever you think of an application, jot it down. Don't laboriously copy down everything the instructor says – just be prepared to take brief notes. Writing things down improves memory and later recall.

It might help if you used a form of shorthand that could be easily understood afterward. Your own homemade version is sufficient. Some people drop vowels to shorten words; for instance, “drppng vls mk wrds shrtr” is probably understandable to other people as well as to the person making the abbreviation. But even if it isn't, it's unlikely that anyone but you will have to read your notes, anyway. Spend the time on legibility and save it by writing less and abbreviating what you write.

4.4 ORGANIZE YOUR NOTE-TAKING

The important thing is to view your classroom note taking as permanent. Don't scribble notes on a scratch pad or envelope with the intention of copying them over later – the tendency is to procrastinate until the notes are indecipherable and memory has faded. A good idea might be to dictate the notes to your computer using voice activated software once you get home. If you are adept at typing on an iPad or other electronic device, either with or without a Bluetooth keyboard, go to it. Teachers and other students alike no longer see it as distracting. But research seems to indicate that writing them down improves recall.

When taking notes, leave plenty of space for inserting additional information later. You may want to add to your notes after reviewing the corresponding chapter in your textbook. The instructor may also provide more information on that topic at a later class or during exam review. Also, you may want to arrange with another student to review each other's notes after class in order to pick up anything you missed. It's amazing how two people pick up different information while listening to the same lecture.

Write on one side of the page only. It speeds up note taking, makes the material more legible and allows pages to be spread out later when you're studying them. Be sure to mark the class date and page number on your note paper before the class begins.

4.5 REVIEWING YOUR NOTES

The best time to review your notes, add additional information and insert the marginal headings is immediately following the lecture. Walter Pauk in his book, *How to Study in College*, describes the results of an experiment where two groups were tested six weeks after a lecture. The group that reviewed immediately after a lecture recalled one-and-a-half times more than a group that had no review. If your class is early in the evening, go to a library or some quiet spot that same night. Recall is always better in the morning after a good night's sleep.

Don't rely on an audio recorder to take notes for you. It can easily become an excuse to let your mind wander. It also captures everything that is not relevant, leaving you with the formidable chore of listening to it and taking notes later. Simply listening is an inefficient method of study.

4.6 DON'T AVOID THE COFFEE BREAK

A jolt of caffeine, equivalent to about 12 ounces of coffee, made study subjects at John Hopkins University more likely to recall information they had just learned. But the effect may work only on people who do not drink caffeine regularly. (Source: Victoria Stein, writing in *Scientific American Mind*, May/June, 2014.)

Although drinking too much coffee has been associated with stress, in moderation it seems to give memory a boost. A brief article in the spring, 2014 issue of *Health* magazine describes a link between caffeine and memory. Michael Yassa of John Hopkins University asked 60 people to view a series of images of different objects. Then, five minutes later, after receiving either a placebo or 200 milligrams of caffeine, were tested the next day on their ability to recognize images from the day before. More people from the caffeine group recognized that an image was similar to rather than identical with one they had viewed earlier.

Separate research published in the *Journal of Public Health Nutrition* also showed that one or two cups of tea a day can boost brain power and athletic performance. And researcher Rodney W. Johnson, PhD, claims that chamomile tea, rich in luteolin, is not only relaxing, but also guards you against forgetfulness. He says it works by preventing brain inflammation that contributes to age-related memory lapses.

Drinking water may also sharpen your recall skills according to research conducted at University of East London. The UK researchers believe that bringing water into an exam room can raise students' marks. Studies indicated that those who drank water while writing exams outperformed those who didn't. In one study the scores averaged 4.8% better. One explanation is that students are in a mild state of dehydration when taking exams and it is corrected by drinking water.

4.7 DON'T STIFLE THOSE YAWNS

If you think yawning on is a sign of boredom, be encouraged. It is one of the best ways to bring students into a state of alertness, according to the book *How God changes your brain*, by Newberg and Waldman. It might even be wise to intentionally yawn throughout the training session, since studies reveal that it is an important way to improve the functioning of the brain.

In the above-mentioned book, it is explained that yawning is one of the best ways of exercising the brain and it increases activity in one of the areas hardest hit by attention deficit problems. It not only relaxes you but improves your cognitive awareness as well.

One of the authors goes as far as to say he has encouraged his students to pause and yawn 10 times. We all have experienced that yawning seems to be contagious so it should be easy to apply this idea.

5 DEVELOP GOOD STUDY HABITS

5.1 USE YOUR BRAIN'S ASSOCIATIVE POWERS

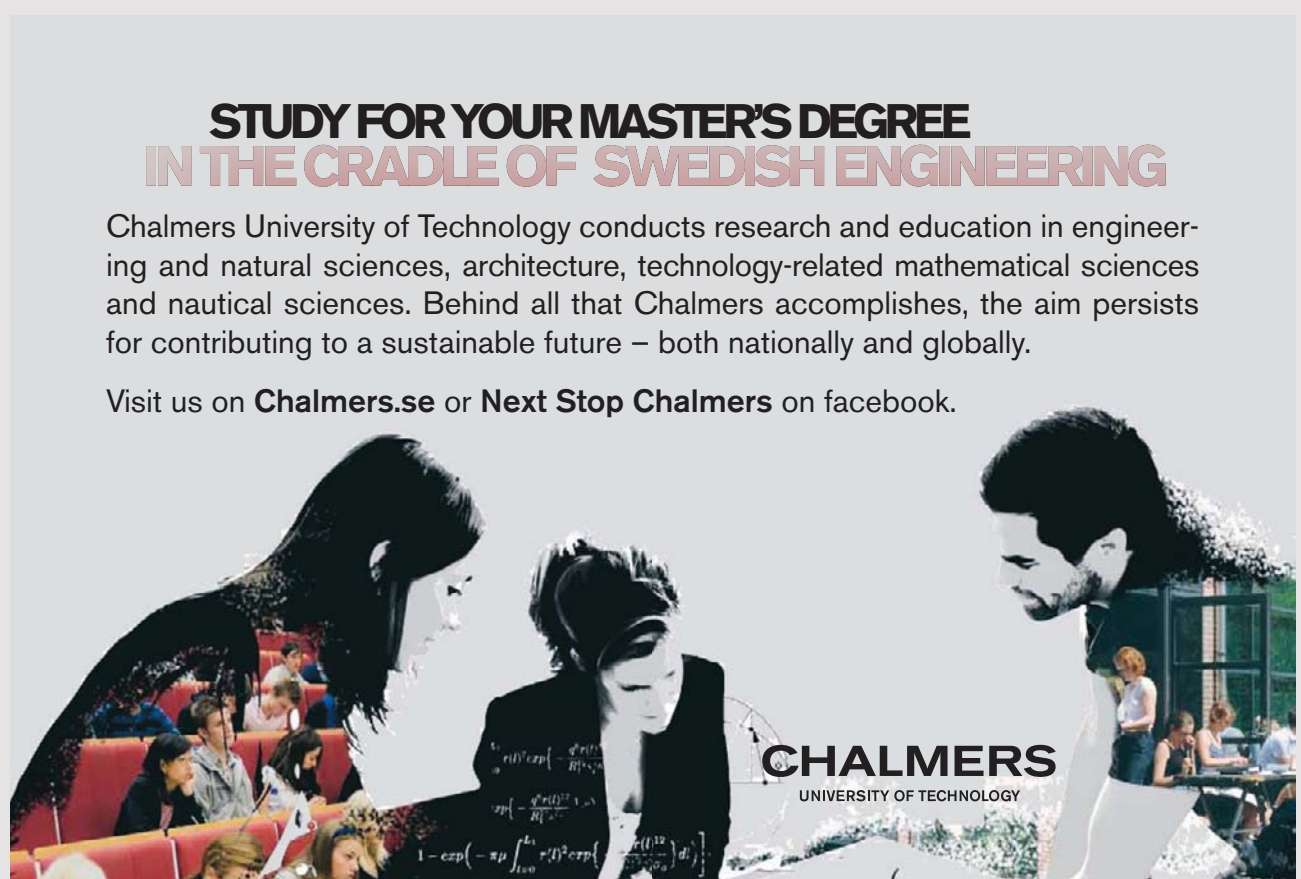
Regardless of the course you take, study is involved. And studying is difficult for most of us. It's something we did a lot of during school years without actually knowing how. And since then we have had ample time to develop bad habits. But we can no longer afford to sit for hours every night, drilling the material into our memory banks through the sheer force of repetition. This is not a good method of studying, even though it may be the most commonly used one. As professional people and managers we must use the most effective method. We must absorb the maximum amount of information in the least time possible and still be able to recall it afterward.

When studying for an exam for instance, cramming a few nights before the exam is the least effective way. Instead, start several weeks ahead and wait two or three days between study sessions. And during the study sessions, it has been shown that working in 25 to 30 minute segments with five-minute breaks in between is more effective, and usually decreases interruptions.

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The advertisement features three large silhouettes of students in the foreground. The left silhouette is a woman looking down, the middle is a woman looking to the side, and the right is a man looking down. They are filled with various mathematical formulas, including $\frac{d^2 r(t)}{dt^2} \exp\left(-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{2l^2}\right)$, $\exp\left(-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{2l^2}\right)$, and $1 - \exp\left(-\pi \mu \int_{t=0}^{L_1} r(t)^2 \exp\left(-\frac{q^2 r(t)^2}{2l^2}\right) dt\right)$. The background shows a collage of students in a lecture hall and working at computers. The Chalmers logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the ad.

The ability to recall learned information is critical, and to accomplish this we must take advantage of our brain's associative powers. Everything we store in memory is associated with other things stored there. And recalling one item from memory conjures images of other facts, figures, places and events that have been committed to memory, as well.

Experiments have shown that students tested in the same room at the same desk as the learning took place scored higher than those tested in another room. By always studying a specific subject in the same physical environment each time, your brain makes associations with the surroundings. If you pretend you're in the same room when you later write the test, more information can be recalled.

Cicero, back in 55 B.C., took advantage of this fact to memorize speeches. He would memorize one part of his talk while standing in his study, another part while sitting in his bedroom, changing the setting many times. Later he would visualize these various places and the information he memorized there would be recalled. Evidently this is how we arrived at the expressions "in the first place...and in the second place..."

You can further capitalize on your brain's associative powers by linking specific information with known facts, so that when you think of the fact, the information studied will be recalled. This will be covered in the following chapter on memory.

5.2 BEST STUDY METHODS

The winter, 2015 special issue of *Scientific American Mind* published an article whose authors reviewed more than 700 scientific articles on commonly used learning techniques. Based on ease of use and effectiveness, here are the two best methods identified.

Self-testing: By using either flash cards (physical or digital) to test recall or answering sample questions – such as those found at the back of the text book chapters. In one study, students memorized word pairs. One group was tested afterwards and another group was not. Then, one week later, the tested group recalled 35% of the word pairs compared to only 4% by those who had not been tested immediately after learning the information.

Distributed practice: Distributing learning over a period of time versus "cramming." Three groups of students studied the English equivalent of Spanish words and reviewed the material in six sessions. One group did the review sessions back to back, a second group had the review sessions one day apart, and a third group had the reviews 30 days apart. The students in the 30-day group did the best.

For a full description of the top five study methods, refer to the article, *What works, what doesn't* in the special Winter, 2015 issue of *Scientific American Mind*. This collector's edition is titled *Your Inner Genius*.

One of the best ways to learn something new is to teach it to someone else. Putting information into your own words helps it take root. Similarly, when making notes from books, the Internet, or other sources, translate the material into your own words. Then explaining it to a friend or family member will improve your understanding even more and make recall easier.

Another effective way to learn material thoroughly is to make up a quiz after reading a chapter of a book or listening to a lecture. Testing yourself every so often strengthens the neural pathways and make subsequent recall easier.

If you can't recall something, it's best to guess, and then look it up. Correcting yourself and then reminding yourself of the correct answer will help get the information into long-term memory.

Many students make the mistake of overloading themselves with too much information. It's akin to continuously watering a plant before the water has a chance to sink in. Information simply overflows with little benefit. Try breaking your study sessions into 20-minute modules. Where practicable, in each study module leave the most important point until the last and start off with the second most important point. There's good reason for this other than avoiding information overload. Studies show that you have better recall for things that happen at the beginning of an event or situation (*Primacy Effect*) and also at the end (*Recency Effect*). So it makes sense to have more beginnings and endings for the course material – with the most important information studied at the start and end of each module.

5.3 THE BEST TIME TO STUDY

As far as reviewing your notes and studying is concerned, if you don't have to go directly home after your last class, you might want to slip into a spare classroom or back to the library to review your notes. Otherwise you will forget about 80 percent of the information within twenty-four hours. Leaving it until you get home is risky.

Retention and understanding are aided by an immediate review. Be sure to utilize any spares or canceled classes. Also, have an organized study area at home. Don't waste time searching for pencils, books, paper, stapler, etc. Have everything at your fingertips. When it's time to study, start right in without procrastinating. Limit yourself to a ten-minute break after each module of study time.

Although a growing problem seems to be lack of sufficient sleep, if you can form a habit of getting to bed earlier and getting up earlier the following morning, you will be ahead of the game. Research shows that each hour used for study during the day is equal to one-and-one-half hours at night. And you'll avoid that frantic, early morning rush.

Most people report that their prime time is early in the morning. They feel at their peak, full of energy and enthusiasm, ready to take on the world. Then their enthusiasm and energy wanes as they experience the day's crises, problems and setbacks. If you have more energy in the mornings it is even more important that you utilize this "prime time" for activities that require mental energy such as studying, reading or writing.

A study by the *Rotman Research Institute* at *Baycrest Health Sciences* in Toronto found that people aged between 60 and 82 were better able to focus and ignore distractions, and did better on memory tests in the morning – specifically between 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. – than in the afternoon between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. Functional MRI scans showed that in the afternoon, these people's brains were idling. Younger adults, however, were still attentive well into the afternoon.

Since we are an aging population, it makes sense to attend training programs in the mornings if possible, preferably starting no later than 9 a.m..

If you are a teenager, however, it might be wiser to start later. Generally, teenagers are night owls and do not operate on all cylinders early in the day. Studies were done in schools to adapt hours to match the biological clocks of adolescents. In the U.S., school starting times were changed from 8 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. and in some cases to 9:40 a.m. Student achievement improved by an average of one letter grade. In some studies, absenteeism went down as well as student depression and dropouts.

Eastern Commerce Collegiate Institute in Toronto changed the hours to a 10 a.m. to 3:50 p.m. school day, with extracurricular activities starting at 8 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. instead of the usual 7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. According to principle Jennifer Chan, who was interviewed by the *Toronto Star* in 2014, students are arriving more alert, energetic and on time with higher scholastic achievement overall. Also, a 2011 study involving 19 year olds from the U.S. air force found that those who started classes at 8:50 a.m. instead of 7 a.m. achieved better results in their exams.

5.4 THE BEST PLACE TO STUDY

The ability to recall learned information is critical, and to accomplish this we must take advantage of our brain's associative powers. Everything we store in memory is associated with other things stored there. And recalling one item from memory conjures images of other facts, figures, places and events that have been committed to memory, as well.

As mentioned earlier, experiments have shown that students tested in the same room at the same desk as the learning took place scored higher than those tested in another room since your brain makes associations with the surroundings. If you pretend you're in the same room when you later write the test, more information can be recalled. It's called the *Law of Contiguity*. Two things experienced together will become associated with each other in the mind. You can take advantage of this fact by studying each subject in a different setting.

It is difficult to study effectively in front of a TV set, slouched on a couch or in bed. Entrepreneurs would never consider operating their home business from any of these locations. Choose a time of the day when you're alert, a location that is quiet and a length of time that coincides with your concentration span.

Make sure you're not breathing stale air. The brain constitutes 2% of the body weight, but it uses 20% to 25% of the oxygen you take in. Lighting is important as well. Natural light is better than artificial light and incandescent light is better than fluorescent.

Your surroundings not only impact your energy level and effectiveness as you study; they can also affect your health, mental attitude and general well-being. For example, studies have shown that the presence of potted plants improves productivity, creativity, performance and learning ability. And researchers have also found that plants act as vacuum cleaners, removing pollution from the air. Exposure to indoor and outdoor pollutants in both home and offices has been linked to anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue and short and long-term cognitive decline among other afflictions.

Loud noises can not only disrupt a person's concentration, it could also increase stress levels and conditions such as high blood pressure, coronary disease, peptic ulcers and migraine headaches.

But according to a peer-reviewed study out of the *University of Chicago*, “a moderate level of ambient noise is conducive to creative cognition.” Research carried out at the *University of Illinois* on the effects of background noise on creativity found that the level of noise experienced in a bustling coffee shop enhanced performance and even helped people concentrate.

There's a website called *Coffitivity* at <https://coffitivity.com/> that lets you bring the sound of a coffee shop to your computer while you work. *Coffitivity* recreates the ambient sounds of a cafe to boost your creativity and help you work better.

Background music, especially classical, has been shown to reduce stress, lower blood pressure and even help focus attention – so sound itself is not necessarily a distraction. I sometimes listen to *AccuRadio* on my laptop as I work. *AccuRadio.com* has over 50 genres including classical, blues, contemporary, Christian, country, and dance.

Natural light from the sun is another environmental factor that can affect your health as well as your personal performance. It improves cognitive performance, alertness and mood. A *University of Michigan* study showed that people with windows facing the outside world are more productive, healthier, and are able to maintain higher levels of concentration. People in windowless offices – such as the common cubicle layout – daydream more.

If you have a home office, working at a kitchen table may not be maximizing your personal productivity. Give more thought to where you locate your principal working area. Is there natural lighting? Ambient noise or music that encourages, rather than blocks, creativity? Adequate air circulation? Relatively free from interruptions? Pleasant, cheerful surroundings that include plants? How about a comfortable office chair and a stand-up desk as well so you are able to move around?

Have a principal place of study that is conducive to learning. And remember that dull, boring rooms could encourage dull boring ideas and lower creativity.

5.5 AVOID FATIGUE

Don't overdo the studying. It's more effective to study for thirty minutes over eight periods than to study for four hours at one sitting. Fatigue and boredom tend to set in when you stick at it too long. Switching subjects might also help; frequently when you think you are tired, you are simply tired of that subject. Don't study late at night. If you aren't sleepy, use the time for recreational reading or spending time with the other night owls in the family. If you find a topic particularly boring or difficult, study that one first, while you're at your mental peak; resist the urge to procrastinate. When reading, set yourself a goal of so many pages within the allocated time period.

You should review your material frequently, but space out the sessions. Tests have indicated that people remember three times as much when they review material once a day for five days as opposed to five times in one day. Make sure the last review is at night before you get too sleepy; don't try to cram it all in the morning of the exam. Studies show that only 9 percent of material studied before noon could be recalled eight hours later. Yet 56 percent could be recalled after eight hours of sleep.

Shorter periods of review also improve our power of recall. To illustrate, place fifteen objects in a row on a table and ask people to observe them for one minute. Then, after covering them up, see how many they can recall. Chances are, they won't remember them all. Chances are, as well, that they will remember the first ones in the row and the last ones – but not many of the ones in between.

Our memories work that way. We tend to recall the beginning events and the more recent ones, but forget those in between. Similarly, in life itself we tend to remember our childhood years and our senior years, but those in-between years are often fuzzy.

When studying, take advantage of this phenomenon by breaking your study times into periods of half an hour or an hour with five-minute or ten-minute rest periods in between. That way you will have more beginnings and endings with less material in between to become fuzzy.

As I noted at the beginning of this section, marathon study sessions are not effective. Studying for four hours at one sitting is not as productive as studying one-half hour eight times.

This isn't necessarily due to mental fatigue. Research indicates that it's impossible to develop mental fatigue by studying. We simply get bored or tired of studying. Yet we can watch TV or pick up a magazine or read email or text messages. If you persist in spite of your boredom, you may be able to get your second wind. But a better idea might be to switch subjects every so often to provide the diversion you need. Don't forget to switch your environment to match the subjects. And try standing up to study if you get restless in a sitting position.

Be sure to exercise regularly. It helps promote a keen appetite, improves circulation of the blood and produces alert studying and thinking. Learn to relax, as well. Take a full, leisurely lunch hour, relax before dinner and never sacrifice needed sleep to gain time for study. And don't become so obsessed with your studies that you deprive yourself and your family of the joys of living. Never set your goals too high. It may be more reasonable to take longer to complete your course requirements. Discuss your workload with your family. Do they feel you have become a hermit? With proper utilization of time and good study habits you should be able to handle the increased workload without disrupting your personal and family life.

5.6 DOING RESEARCH ONLINE

We used to have just the library for researching material for our school assignments. Now there's the Internet, with its world wide web, social media, blogs and websites as well as the opportunity to correspond with experts all over the world using text messages and email. We have access to unlimited information. The problem is there's too much information, and you can waste a lot of time trying to boil it down to a reasonable amount of relevant information.

When you are using your web browser to search for information on a topic, be as specific as possible. Google, for example looks for all the words you type into the Search box. And the biggest problem for most people is the overwhelming amount of information they receive as a result. You don't want to be wasting time scrolling through tons of information. Don't search for time management if you're really looking for tips on prioritizing.

Assume you are searching for information on multitasking for a report that you are writing. If you were to type the word multitasking into the search box you may get over 17 million results. At least that's what I got in June of 2016. It varies from day to day. To narrow it down you may want to put the exact information you are looking for in quotation marks. For example, if you were working on a report on "using cell phones while driving," you will receive only those articles, reports etc. containing those exact words. That might take it down to about 275,000. You could cut it down even further by just requesting the most recent information. Putting 2016 in brackets after the "using cell phones while driving" will knock it down to about 35,000 results. If it were only young drivers, you were interested in, typing "Teens using cell phones while driving" (2016) will reduce the results to fewer than 150. Be sure to include the quotation marks or you'll receive a lot of useless information on driving.

A frequently used source of information is Wikipedia at <http://wikipedia.org/>. But it is wise to double check the information that you are receiving before you actually use it. Wikipedia, for instance, may be one of the most popular sources of information; but it is neither approved, evaluated or edited by experts in the topics being discussed. Anyone can post and edit information, whether they are a neurologist or an educated 10-year-old. As Daniel J Levitin says in his book, *The Organized Mind: Thinking straight in the age of information overload*, no rational person would choose the high school dropout as their brain surgeon. Information should be checked with expert sources before being used or disseminated further. The same thing applies to many websites, blogs and social media posts. Only quote sources that you trust.

5.7 DON'T PUT OFF THOSE TERM ASSIGNMENTS

When it comes to procrastination, it seems like our brain has a mind of its own. According to Esther Laandhuis, writing in the January/February, 2015 issue of *Scientific American Mind*, you can trick your brain into meeting any due date by thinking differently about deadlines. When we think of a deadline as something occurring in the present, we are more likely to begin the task.

For example, something due this week would be perceived by the brain as something more urgent than something due this month; something due this month would be perceived as being more urgent than something due next month, and so on – *even though the actual number of days to the deadline are identical.*

So a project due date of March 31st set on March 21st would prompt action faster than a due date of April 1st set on March 20th even though you had the same number of days to complete the task.

Research confirms this. One experiment, published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, involved asking 100 students when they would start a data-entry task if they had 5 days to complete it. The ones who were assigned the task late enough in April so the deadline fell in early May were less likely to start the task right away compared to those whose deadline fell in March – even though they had the same number of days to work on the task.

Since the brain seems to divide time into segments, we could use this fact by scheduling the work on your assignments early enough so the deadlines fall in the same week, month or year. This might necessitate breaking the longer tasks or projects into shorter sub-tasks with shorter deadlines.

If you find yourself staring at the computer screen with no idea how to start, start writing anyway. As you write nothing of consequence, something of consequence will start spilling out of your brain. In a similar way, if you have ideas or notes scribbled on a napkin or piece of paper, type them. Your brain is activated once the task is started.

5.8 DON'T ALWAYS STUDY SITTING DOWN

Sitting for more than half the day doubles the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular problems, according to James Levine of the *Mayo Clinic* in Scottsdale, Arizona. And Tom Rath, in his book, *Eat Move Sleep*, called sitting “the most underrated health threat of modern times. He claims that after sitting for two hours your good cholesterol drops by 20 percent.

Standing up and moving around, on the other hand, is mentally stimulating and keeps the brain sharp. It also feels better when you get a chance to change your position and stretch every so often.

Integrate stretch breaks into your study sessions. Stand up, move around, and realize that the more active you are, the more creative and alert you become.

6 WRITE YOUR EXAMS WITH CONFIDENCE

6.1 ATTEND THE CLASSES

Exam preparation starts the day you sign up for a course. A little studying every day will beat last-minute cramming anytime. Success requires more than intelligence; it requires commitment to effort and effective study methods. Start with a commitment to attend every class. Make it a priority and block off those evenings in your planning calendar. It's so easy to skip – especially after a hard day at work. It's easy to rationalize not going: the weather's bad; it's all in the textbook; the instructor is terrible; a familiar topic is being covered; old information. And one skip makes the next one easier, until skipping classes becomes a habit.

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It's a costly habit. You will probably spend twice as much time catching up, copying someone's notes, doing the reading on your own and trying to figure out what's important. Courses do not necessarily follow the outline or text very closely, and if there's a test involved, material may have been covered in class that does not appear elsewhere. Attendance also allows you to question the material, discover what the instructor feels is important, and learn from the other students in the class. If attendance is taken, skipping classes may affect your term mark, and at least make a poor impression on the instructor. One university professor I know takes every absence as a personal insult to himself and to his teaching ability.

You cannot even *have* a learning experience, let alone maximize it, if you're not there. Make sure you can free up the time in your schedule to attend *before* you register. And take into consideration that you will need at least an equal amount of time for study and review. This will vary with the course and the student, but count on a minimum of four-and-one-half hours for every three hours in the classroom. Add an extra half hour for preparation before each class session.

6.2 GET A HEAD START

One of your objectives should be to get a good grade. This may not indicate a mastery of the subject area, but it goes a long way toward furthering your career. It's a fact of life that you are evaluated on what you have actually accomplished, not on what you had intended to accomplish. So think about the exams at the start of the course, not only when exam deadlines approach.

Obtain copies of past exams from the instructor, library, college bookstore or past students. The same questions may not appear, but you will see a pattern of frequently tested areas and will have a good idea of the type of question that will be asked.

If in doubt about anything concerning the course content or exams, ask. Make yourself known to the instructor. Ask if there are any really important areas that you should study; inquire about the type of exam to be set, any additional reference books that would assist you. Do this early in the school year, when exams are usually the last thing students are thinking about. Don't have it look like last-minute exam panic.

Make good notes throughout the year, comparing them with the course outline to ensure that you have all areas covered. When making notes from a textbook, do so in your own words; it will increase your understanding and subsequent recall.

Don't skip over areas you don't understand; get help from the instructor or other students. Students frequently make the mistake of devoting too much time to those areas they feel most comfortable with, and ignoring other areas in the hope that they won't be on the exam.

Utilize short periods of time, such as that wait at the hair salon, on the subway, in lineups, in an airport, etc. You might make up flash cards using 3 x 5-inch index cards with the question or topic on one side and the answer or significant information to be memorized on the other. They can be carried in your pocket, briefcase or purse for use during those idle moments.

As I've said previously, if you drive a lot you might record information on a CD and play it in the car. If committing material to memory, ask a question, leave a few minutes of silence to allow for the recitation of the answer, then record the answer. You can then test yourself continually when you're on the road.

Get a good night's sleep before the exam. Go for a long walk or get some other form of exercise the day of the exam. It relaxes you, increases blood circulation for a better supply of oxygen to the brain and allows you to think more clearly. Eat lightly; don't stuff yourself before the exam. And walk into that exam room with a positive attitude.

6.3 LEARNING REQUIRES REPETITION, REST AND REVIEW

Students frequently sacrifice sleep to get more done when the reverse is true. They get more done when they get more sleep. Yet in my lifetime, the average amount of sleep people get has been reduced from over 8 hours a night to only 6.7 hours a night.

Studies show that only 9 percent of material studied before noon could be recalled eight hours later. Yet 56 percent could be recalled after eight hours of sleep. It's believed now that information is transferred to long-term memory during sleep.

Our brain has an accurate biological clock. And during sleep there is a replenishment of cells needed for a healthy immune system. Also long-term memories are formed at this time as well as brain cells replaced. So don't sacrifice sleep in order to get up earlier – unless of course, you get to bed earlier as well.

Normally you should aim for a good 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night, although women seem to need more sleep than men. A recent study by the *Loughborough University Sleep Research Centre* found that women need about 20 minutes more sleep than men. Restorative of sleep is to learning as Stephen Covey's "sharpening the saw" is to productivity. It's during sleep that we process new information. If you don't get adequate sleep, you're not going to remember things well.

One study showed that people are far more likely to learn a new skill if they were taught the night before as opposed to being taught in the morning and tested that night. Dr. Marie Pasinsky, a neurologist from *Harvard Medical School* and author of *Beautiful brain, beautiful you*, suggests that we actually learn while we sleep.

I'm not suggesting you only attend classes in the evening, although a combined evening session and morning review might be effective. But we know that repetition is important in learning since it reinforces what was just taught, and it's always better to review a chapter in a book before you continue reading. So applied to training, it might be wise to summarize the material just before a break and again immediately after the break before continuing with new information.

6.4 YOUR APPROACH TO THE EXAM IS IMPORTANT

Plan your time by allocating the number of minutes to be spent on each question based on its value. For example, if the exam is three hours and all ten questions have equal value, you might allow fifteen minutes for each question. But if one question is worth 20 percent of the marks, assign 20 percent of the time to that question.

Before answering questions, read them aloud to yourself (not too loud or other people will hear you) and rephrase them if the wording is confusing. It sometimes helps clarify the questions if you reword them. Clark McKowen in his book *Get Your A out of College* uses the following example:

I bought a car for \$400 and sold it for \$500. Then I bought it back again for \$600 and sold it for \$700. How much did I make in the used-car business? a. broke even, b. made \$100, c. made \$200, d. made \$300.

By rewording, McKowen shows how simple this becomes: I bought a Chevy for \$400 and sold it for \$500. Then I bought a Ford for \$600 and sold it for \$700. How much did I make in the used-car business?

Answer the questions starting with the easiest ones, and stick to your assigned time limit. If you find yourself struggling with a question and spending more than the allotted time, leave it and go on to the next question. You can return to it if you complete other questions in less than the allotted time. The Pareto Principle or 80–20 Rule applies to exams, as well. People tend to spend 80 percent of their time on questions that bring only 20 percent of the marks. Don't spend too much time on those nice, familiar questions that you know so much about. Just write enough to get you the grade; don't provide an essay when one isn't required.

Be neat. Legible writing can do no harm and may influence the marker. Don't panic if you meet a tough question or experience a temporary mental block. Remain calm. Experiments show that emotions such as anxiety and frustration, and feeling ill at ease, lower the ability to remember. Pretend you're in the same environment where the learning took place.

If you have trouble recalling material, think back to when you originally did the memorizing. Where were you? Describe your environment at that time. What were you wearing? What time of the day or night was it? You may be surprised how trivial information can trigger the memory you're looking for. That's the brain's associative power at work.

Sometimes the physical activity of writing will release the information from your memory. On a separate piece of paper, start writing down some information that you do know – information that is somehow related to the material asked for in the question. The associative powers of the brain will frequently get you on track. As the correct information starts to flow, move to the exam page and continue your writing there. Always leave plenty of space at the end of your answer so more information can be added during the review phase.

When you have used up the allocated writing time, spend the review time by reading the questions and your answers, making corrections where necessary and adding additional material if you think of it. Never leave a question unanswered. If you have left a blank, fill it in at this stage, even if you feel your answer is off base.

An article in an old issue of the *Toronto Star* indicated that test anxiety is brought on by a fear of evaluation. It described a study conducted by Dr. Monroe Bruch, associate professor of counseling psychology at the *State University of New York*, in Albany. People who were asked to carry out a specific task but were assured that they weren't being rated in any way performed without any noticeable tension. But people given the same task and told they *would* be scored showed definite signs of anxiety. Evidently the awareness that a grade will be attached to performance produces a concern about competence. We need the approval of others.

Although a little stress is good and will help you perform at your best, too much is debilitating. A thorough knowledge of the material through effective study, a good night's rest prior to the exam and a positive attitude during the exam should prevent a little stress from blossoming into out-and-out panic.

Test taking is a skill like anything else, so again, approach it calmly. There is probably little relationship between test results and mastery of the subject. A high grade is more a measure of your test-taking ability than a measure of your future success in working with the information covered in the course. So work on your test-taking skills, and don't feel you have wasted the entire semester if you receive a low mark.

Don't let the fact that others are finished early throw you off. Squeeze out every mark you can. And avoid looking at other students or their feverish writing may make you self-conscious. Fast answers are not always the best; think before you write, and don't be afraid to change your answers later.

Don't discuss the answers with other students when you leave the exam room. Who needs the additional anxiety? But as soon as you get your exam back, analyze what happened. Determine how you can improve your test-taking skills. Review the answers with your instructor. It may not be so much what you wrote as how you expressed it. Anything you discover now will help you excel in your next exam.

6.5 KNOW YOUR TERMS

It's difficult to write a good exam if you don't understand the questions. Make sure you are familiar with the terms that usually appear on exam papers. Reviewing exam papers from previous years will help in this regard. Inquire about any term or expression that is not 100 percent clear.

Here are some frequently used terms from exam papers. Make sure you understand the difference between comparing and contrasting, describing and defining and so on. It might make a difference on how you word your answer – and the resulting mark.

Compare: Look for similarities and differences between things.

Contrast: Set in opposition in order to bring out the differences in things.

Criticize: Give your judgment about the merit of theories or opinions or about the truth of facts, and back your judgment by a discussion of the evidence.

Define: Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase. Show that the distinctions implied in the definition are necessary.

Describe: Give a detailed or graphic account of something.

Discuss: Investigate or examine by argument, sift and debate, giving reasons pro and con.

Evaluate: Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in the light of its truth or utility; include to a lesser degree your personal opinion.

Explain: To make plain, to interpret and to account for.

Illustrate: Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make clear by the use of concrete examples.

Interpret: Expound the meaning of; make clear and explicit; usually giving your own judgment, also.

Justify: Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions.

Outline: Give the main features or general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasizing structure and arrangement.

Relate: Show how things are connected to each other and to what extent they are alike or affect each other.

Review: To make a survey of, examining the subject critically.

State: Present in brief, clear, form.

Summarize: Give a concise account of the chief points or substance of a matter, omitting details and examples.

Trace: Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.

7 **MANAGE YOUR TIME FOR RESULTS**

7.1 **PLAN AND SCHEDULE**

No person can juggle a career, home and school without adequate planning. Planning translates intention into action. Planning forces us to fill our calendars with the activities that reflect our goals in life. It protects us from all those trivial tasks that tend to obscure the important ones. And it prevents crises by foreseeing problem areas and providing a course of action that will avoid them.

Next to your textbook, notes and class materials, a planning calendar is your most important educational tool. Choose a week-at-a-glance planner that breaks the day into increments of time from morning through evening. If you can't find one that suits you, draw up your own week-at-a-glance form, print it and keep the individual weeks in a three-ring binder. The one I developed is shown at the end of this section and includes evenings and weekends to facilitate blocking off time for school and other personal activities. You can read about the details at taylorintime.com.

This planner should be used not only for school activities, but for personal and work activities, as well. Don't have more than one planner and don't keep separate lists of things to do. If someone asks you to do something, jot it down under the "things to do" column in your planner so you don't lose track of it. And remember, a list of things to do provides little commitment to get them done. People tend to put off doing things on lists, but most people keep appointments. So schedule those "must do" items directly into the planner at a specific time as an appointment with yourself.

For instance, a class assignment should never remain on a "to do list." Block out the time needed in your planner, let's say between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m., and treat it as though it were a meeting with your doctor, lawyer or client. Allow a little extra time for those unavoidable interruptions that are bound to occur. If you schedule several of these meetings with yourself during the week, you will accomplish those priority tasks and increase your effectiveness.

Most people use their planning calendar for meetings and appointments – everything involving *people* – but fail to schedule time for tasks into it as well. Consequently, those important tasks (usually relegated to “to do lists”) never seem to get done. “To do lists” are fine for shopping, but if you want to succeed in life, scheduled commitments are a must. Be sure to set deadlines on all assignments. You work more effectively if you have deadlines to work toward. Realistic deadlines are not stressful. Having no deadline creates stress because you tend to delay everything until the last minute, and panic sets in. Schedule blocks of time in your planner to work on your assignments as soon as they are received. You will have to estimate the total time required and add up to 50% more time to allow for unforeseen interruptions or crises that may occur.

Let’s assume you are employed full time from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. and have enrolled in a university course Tuesday nights from 7 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. It’s assumed that the Tuesday evening was checked out and did not conflict with any other ongoing commitment such as a son’s or daughter’s sporting activity or theater night with your spouse. The first thing to do is to block off Tuesday evenings from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. in your planner, including the exam date. Once you have scheduled that time, nothing should interfere with it unless an urgent family matter or similar crisis arises. You will have committed yourself to attend every class.

Since study time, assignment time, research time and other school-related demands are usually more flexible, leave those until you have scheduled time for those personal life priorities such as vacation time, church attendance and other family activities. Don’t forget to include a free evening in which to simply do nothing or to engage in some spontaneous activity.

Next, schedule in those school-related activities. Finally, don’t neglect to leave blank spaces in your planner; don’t block off every hour of every day. You will need additional time to accommodate items on your “to do list” and time for scheduled activities that are displaced by a more important and urgent item that might occur.

THIS WEEK'S PRIORITY

Week 17

THINGS TO DO:

JANUARY		FEBRUARY		MARCH		APRIL		MAY		JUNE		JULY		AUGUST		SEPTEMBER		OCTOBER		NOVEMBER		DECEMBER			
MONDAY	20	TUESDAY	21	WEDNESDAY	22	THURSDAY	23	FRIDAY	24	SATURDAY	25	SUNDAY	26												
Follow ups:																									
110														111		112		113		114		115		116	

7.2 LIFE INVOLVES A SERIES OF CHOICES

Time management involves choices. Effective time management can be defined as making good choices. Making good choices is important because we can't do everything. There are simply more things to do than we can possibly get done – so doing one thing means **not** doing something else. For a student, the choices might be to study for an exam or go to a ball game, or spend an hour reading or start a project and so on. We all have to make our own choices that collectively determine how successful we will be.

There's actually a *Law of Excluded Alternative* that says that doing one thing means not doing something else. Some people say they can't say no – but they are saying no every time they say yes. They are saying no to other things that they could do instead, such as spend time with their family or study for a term test.

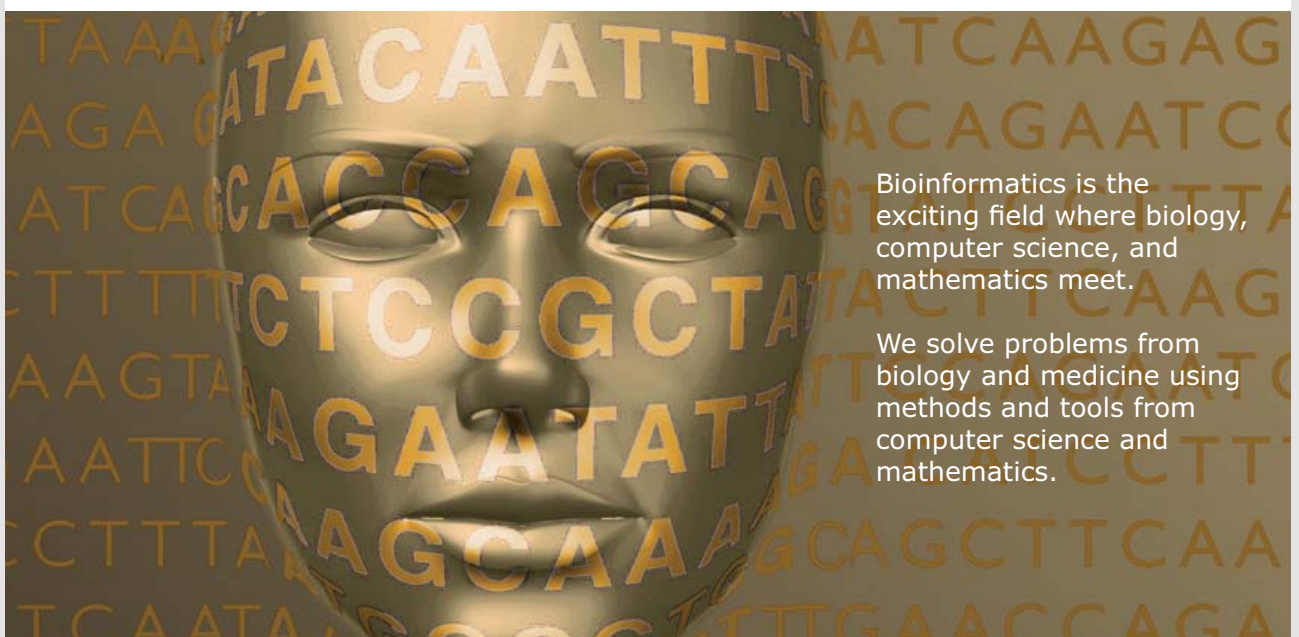
Planning, which is an important time management strategy, is simply making choices in advance. Planning is great because it allows you to change your mind before the event is upon you. It provides flexibility in your life, reduces stress, and leaves you some breathing room.

Time management for students is no different than time management for anyone else – except it involves different projects, tasks and activities. Efficiency still means doing something in the best possible way and effectiveness still means doing the best possible thing. Organizing the work area is good for business people, and it is also good for students – as is scheduling time for tasks, putting deadlines on activities, writing things down, having focus hours, utilizing commute time, prioritizing work, reducing procrastination and perfectionism and so on.

This hit home many years ago when a parent asked if her 12 year old son could accompany her at one of my “time management for managers” workshops. She said he was having problems at school and thought he needed a course in time management. I explained that the course was directed at executives but she persisted. I relented, explained to the group that a student would be sitting in on the class and gave my normal workshop, tailored to executives. About 4 weeks after the program I received a call from the mother thanking me profusely for the workshop and saying she had just talked to her son’s teacher and she was mentioning the change in her child. He was now organized, submitted assignments on time, and his grades had improved.

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7.3 TIME MANAGEMENT LAWS AND PRINCIPLES

There are some time management laws that apply to everyone. I have recorded them below, along with the definition, and an explanation of how they apply to you as a student.

7.3.1 PARKINSON'S LAW

Work expands to fill the time available for its completion.

This explains why deadlines make us more effective. For example, if you have all morning to complete an assignment, it usually takes all morning. But if you allocate two hours to the task, you will probably be able to complete it within that time frame. All tasks, projects, and assignments should have realistic deadlines. The deadline becomes a goal to work towards. If the deadline is unrealistic, it will put you under needless stress so always allow more time than you think you require.

If you were to write a thesis, report, essay, or even a book, you would have to work at it in chunks of time. So as soon as you get the assignment, you would enter the deadline date in your planner. Then you would work backwards. You estimate how much time it will take you, see how much time you have left, and calculate that you would have to spend, let's say 14 hours in order to complete it. If you have 14 weeks to complete it, then you would have to work on it for one hour each week. If you have only 7 weeks, you would have to work on it for two hours each week, and so on. Those blocks of time would then be scheduled in your planner so you know those times are not available for anything else. What you are doing is budgeting your time.

The problem with "To Do" lists is that they are one-dimensional; they tell us what has to be done, but they don't tell us how long those things will take or when we will be able to do them. So use "To Do" lists for unimportant items, but schedule appointments with yourself in your planner to work on the important ones.

7.3.2 THE PARETO PRINCIPLE

The significant items in a given group normally constitute a relatively small portion of the total items in the group.

Later, the figures 20% and 80% were added. About 80% of your results are achieved from 20% of the things you do. 80% of the value is obtained by doing 80% of the things on your To Do list. 80% of your term mark might be from 20% of your assignments. Or 80% of the marks on your exam might be for 20% of the questions.

The amazing thing about this “principle” is that it seems to hold true for *most* things. 80% of the interruptions are caused by 20% of your friends. Twenty percent of your callers consume 80 percent of your smartphone time. 80% of the relevant information in a lecture might be from 20% of the class time. And so on. The figures, 80 percent and 20 percent, may not be accurate, but the principle certainly holds true in practice.

The point is to be on the lookout for the priorities – those 20% that will give you the biggest payoff, and don’t neglect them. Those are the things you schedule in your planner. The 80% could be listed on your “To Do” list to work on if you have time. If they never get done, no big deal. Similarly at exam time, know what each question is worth in terms of marks and proportion your time accordingly.

7.3.3 LAW OF DIMINISHING RETURNS

The amount of time required to approach perfection increases exponentially the nearer the job is to completion.

This is why it seldom pays to delay decision-making until you get all the facts or spend an inappropriate amount of time on a task. The extra value received by doing a near perfect job rarely justifies the cost of the additional time spent. This relates to *Parkinson’s Law* inasmuch as you should always let the amount of time spent on a task be proportionate to the importance of the task. In other words, don’t be a perfectionist.

As an example, if you have ten exam questions on a test, each worth ten marks, and you have one hour to complete the exam, it stands to reason that you should spend about 6 minutes on each question. But if someone really knows a lot about one question, the tendency is to put down all they know, even if it takes fifteen minutes or more. But the most they could possibly get for that question is ten marks, regardless of how much time they spend or how perfect their answer. As a result, they don’t have enough time left to spend an adequate job on the remaining questions and do poorly overall.

According to Jeff Olson, author of the book *The Agile Manager’s Guide to Getting Organized*, it often takes 50% more of the total effort to squeeze out the last 10% or so of quality or whatever it is that perfectionists want out of a situation. You could always do a better job of writing a report or answering an exam question; but the amount of additional benefit or the extra bit of quality or marks would be way out of proportion to the amount of extra time you would have to spend.

Do the best job you can in the time allocated and leave it at that.

7.3.4 PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

A psychoanalytic concept suggesting that an organism avoids pain and seeks immediate gratification.

That simply means we tend to avoid unpleasant things and gravitate towards the pleasant things. That makes sense. This explains why we tend to procrastinate on distasteful or overwhelming tasks and work instead on those brief and pleasant tasks, even though they may be less important. When we procrastinate, we are frequently putting off what we want most in order to receive what we want at the moment.

The *Pleasure Principle* indicates that it is natural to want to avoid unpleasantness, such as working on that essay or research project. So we watch TV or attend a concert or just hang out instead. Unfortunately in doing so we sacrifice long-term benefits in favor of those less-important, short-term rewards.

So first of all, you should not be too hard on yourself if you procrastinate, because in a way, you are just doing what comes naturally. But just because it's natural, doesn't mean it's effective. There are many ways to build up a resistance to procrastination, including breaking large jobs into chunks, utilizing high-energy time for distasteful tasks and developing a "do it now" habit.

We tend to postpone jobs that are unpleasant. If we have to deny a request, cancel an order, work on that boring statistical report, we drag our feet. Don't tell yourself, "It's unpleasant, so I'll delay action." Say instead, "It's unpleasant, so I'll do it now and get it over with." Your effectiveness will increase because an unpleasant task isn't hanging over your head. This is really delayed gratification – scheduling the unpleasant activities first so that you can more fully enjoy the pleasant activities.

It's usually the most important tasks that take longer periods of time. So they are the ones that encourage procrastination. In order to ensure their completion, we should break the jobs into chunks, as mentioned already, providing interim *finish times* so the *ends* are always in sight and we maintain our motivation to complete each segment. If you have to write a 20-page report for instance, write 2 pages per day for ten days. The achievable and more palatable goal of two pages replaces the overwhelming goal of 20 pages.

The “marshmallow experiment” is an example of this concept. It was conducted at [Stanford University](#) back in the '60s. A group of four-year olds were given a marshmallow and promised another, only if they could wait 20 minutes before eating the first one. Some children could wait and others could not. The researchers then followed the progress of each child into adolescence, and demonstrated that those with the ability to wait were better adjusted and more dependable (determined via surveys of their parents and teachers), and scored an average of 210 points higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

7.4 GET AN EARLY START

Surgeons take advantage of peak energy levels during early morning hours and schedule operations accordingly. If you are a “morning person,” don’t waste one minute of this valuable period of the day. Do your priority jobs first and leave the newspaper, coupon clipping and vacuuming until later.

Early risers get a head start on life. They have the opportunity to get more accomplished during that relatively quiet time than they would if they arose in the midst of humanity’s “rush hour.” If you dawdle in the mornings and roll over for an extra ten minutes shut-eye, try changing your habits. But if you get up earlier, be sure to go to bed earlier to insure a minimum of 7 hours sleep a night. Anything less than six hours and you are sleep-deprived, which hampers your thinking and learning ability.

If you have more energy in the mornings, reserve some time before work for your priority tasks, whether they be preparation of class presentations, writing, studying or reading. Never leave important items until later in the day simply because you feel there may be more time later. Time always seems to dissipate faster as the day goes on. It’s better to start a job and not complete it that day than never to start it at all. Most people agree that exercise is more important than making beds, but we all know which activity gets the priority treatment.

Build up some early morning momentum and you’ll be able to coast through the day with less difficulty. Physics tells us that an object in motion tends to stay in motion and an object at rest tends to stay at rest. The same law applies to human endeavor. Overcome your daily inertia with a burst of early morning enthusiasm. Once you get rolling, you can plow through those daily tasks and achieve your daily objectives.

Spending a half hour in study after breakfast does not mean you should gulp down your food or spoon cereal into your mouth with one hand while you write a report with the other. Get up early enough so you can enjoy your breakfast without rushing.

7.5 UTILIZE ANY IDLE TIME

Reviewing notes while commuting to work may seem to be characteristic of a workaholic, but it is simply a wise utilization of time. It is claimed by experts in the field that each hour of study during the day is equivalent to one and a half hours at night. So it is important to utilize fully the daylight hours. If you drive to and from work there is limited opportunity to take advantage of commute time except to relax and concentrate on the drive. However highway driving, where there is little traffic, might allow you to listen to audio books or mentally rehearse material that you have committed to memory. You might build a library of condensations of best-selling books or purchase recordings dealing with specific skills you wish to improve, such as effective listening, memory training, public speaking or creative thinking.

Do you have limited time to read? Then listen to those books you never had time to read. Download them to your smartphone and listen to them while you go for your morning walk or while doing those mindless housekeeping tasks. There are also what I call mini-books; brief eBooks from 30 to 50 pages that can be read in an hour or two. Check out the hundreds of choices you have at bookboon.com. There is also an enormous selection of regular non-fiction eBooks at amazon.com that you can download to your e-Reader or iPad and read in chunks of time while commuting by public transportation to work or school. This same device can be used at home while you dress, prepare breakfast, work in the garden. A real time-redeemer!

Don't try to read notes, review cue cards or perform complicated mental tasks while driving. Keep your eyes on the road. The utilization of CDs or MP3 players should require no more concentration than listening to the news or weather forecast on the car radio. But it could still detract from your driving – and the shallow listening is not conducive to recalling the material later.

If you take the subway, bus or train, treat this travel time as a great opportunity to read, review, write, memorize – whatever conditions permit. Always have school-related material with you to fill those otherwise idle moments waiting for the bus, in line-ups, at the doctor's office or even walking from one building to the next. You can copy key ideas, facts, and formulas on index cards. These can be kept in a pocket or purse ready for use. But if you find yourself stressed out, don't hesitate to use idle time simply to relax.

8 MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MEMORY

8.1 GET THE INFORMATION INTO LONG-TERM MEMORY

How much you learn and can utilize afterwards depends on how much you remember, so it's important to understand how memory works. Otherwise you can invest countless hours studying and still recall very little when the time comes to write exams or put the material to practical use.

You might say we possess both a short-term memory system and long-term memory system. Assuming we pay attention and see or hear the information properly, it is immediately sent into short-term storage. Thus we have no trouble repeating information immediately after having heard it or read it. But unless we made a conscious effort to memorize the information – to transfer it to long-term storage – the memory of it soon disappears. When this happens we have to look up the information again.

Once we get the information into long-term storage, we still may have a problem recalling the information at a later date. Just how much of a problem we have depends on how effectively we memorized the information and whether we provided enough of a “handle” with which to drag this information out of our “memory bank” at will.

You cannot remember something that you never really heard in the first place. It just won't make it into your short-term memory. When you attend classes, pay attention. Listen carefully. Ask the instructor to repeat something if you fail to hear it clearly. Write the information down and review it as soon afterward as possible.

Your short-term memory is a temporary storage device that accepts indiscriminately any information that has commanded your attention. So get in the habit of being an active listener, observer and reader.

Information you're not really interested in retaining will soon disappear from temporary storage. But in the meantime, capture it while you have the chance. Review notes as soon as possible while you still remember information the instructor gave verbally.

It is difficult to transfer to long-term memory information that you don't understand so it's very important you get help the moment something is unclear. As an example of this fact, memorize the following three lists, then try to reproduce them the next day. Just about everyone is able to recite list 3 without difficulty because it not only makes sense, but each word is a "handle" that helps pull out the next word. Fewer people can recall the words in List 2 since there is no link. But at least the words make sense and can be visualized. Practically no one is able to recall all ten words from List 1 because they just don't make sense – and it's difficult to visualize these words in our mind.

List 1	List 2	List 3
Gul	Dog	Do
Win	Horse	You
Bof	House	Want
Seb	Street	To
Zim	Boy	Improve
Yog	Coat	Your
Tob	Tree	Power
Jik	Hill	Of
Aig	Lake	Recall

Information is transferred to our long-term memories by active effort on our part. Repeating the information to ourselves, reciting it aloud, writing it down and reviewing it periodically all help to get it into permanent storage.

8.2 BOOST YOUR POWER OF RECALL

If you make a conscious effort to remember names, faces or information, they will move into that permanent filing system called long-term memory. However, there is sometimes a problem in retrieving the information when you need it. This can be overcome by providing clues so your mind can recall it later. You do this with names when you learn as much as possible about people when you meet them. The more you know about a person, the more associations you can make and the more clues you will have in your mind to remind you of the person's name later.

So if you want to recall the name of an individual you met last week, concentrate on everything you learned about him: everything that happened on the occasion you met him; his appearance and personality; events connected with him. Eventually one of these events or characteristics will stimulate recall of his name from long-term memory. Recall from permanent memory involves a process of association whereby one memory evokes another. This is evident when you hear a familiar song that brings back memories of events that were associated with it or you pass a familiar landmark that reminds you of something that happened there in the past. Two things experienced together will become associated with each other in the mind.

Most of the things you remembered in the past were associated sub-consciously with something else that you already knew or remembered. So learn to consciously associate things you want to remember with things you already know.

Think back to your early school days. What clues did the teacher suggest in order to make it easier for you to recall information? Some of the memory aids or “gimmicks” are probably still with you today. For instance, do you know the names of the Great Lakes bordering Canada and the U.S.A.? Easy, they’re H.O.M.E.S., which translated means Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior. A flimsy clue when you think about it, for the letter “H” could stand for thousands of names. But once we have learned that the name of the lake is Huron, all we need is the first letter “H” to remind us of it. To recall it from long-term storage we associate the letter “H” with the full name, Huron.

What other recall clues have you learned? How about “spring for ward and fall back” when changing to and from standard and daylight saving time? Or the little rhyme “Thirty days has September, April, June and November...” or “Every Good Boy Deserves Favor” as the lines of the treble clef of the musical staff.

If you associated clues such as these to remember information ten or twenty years ago, chances are you will still be able to recall the information today. For the brain is an amazing thing. It remembers everything you consciously put there. All you need is a way of extracting it at will.

You might use the acronym method to memorize information to make recall easier. Acronyms are words formed from the initial letters of other words. For instance, if you want to memorize the characteristics of effective goals:

Attainable
Expressed in terms of results
Specific
Measurable
Established time frame

Juggle them a little until you can spell out a word with the first letter from each characteristic. You may end up with

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Results-worded
Time frame

Taking the first letter of each word and you end up with SMART. It's easy to think of SMART goals, and your natural memory will provide you with the word the various letters stand for. You can then expand on each one, *assuming you understood the meaning at the time that goal setting was discussed in class.*

Here's another acronym for you: AIR. It stands for Attention, Interest and *Repetition*. That's how you get information into long-term storage in the first place. Give information your undivided attention. Be *interested* in remembering it. Repeat it to yourself. Even *write it down* at the time if possible. Remember to observe and listen. This will ensure that the facts get into your brain's long-term storage system. And the association technique will help you recall them at will.

8.3 THE STORY-TELLING TECHNIQUE OF REMEMBERING

As mentioned, words and facts that you can visualize – actually see in your mind – are easier to memorize and recall later. Combine this fact with the association or story-telling technique and you have a powerful way of memorizing facts and information so they can be recalled later.

For example, assume you want to memorize the items in List 2 in section 8.1 above – Dog, Horse, House, Street, Boy, Coat, Tree, Hill, and Lake. Simply make up a brief story using the nine words in the order they are listed. (If you don't need to list the items in order, you can juggle them around if it makes the story easier to make up.) As you make up the story, it is important to see it happening in your mind. The more action, color, noise, smell etc. in your story, the easier it is to visualize and to remember. What you are actually doing is linking the words together so that one leads you to the next. Here's one story as an example. Visualize it in your mind as you read it, and add your own details. When making up your own story you can put yourself into the story, and use familiar locations, people etc. The items you are to remember below are in bold type. When you have reviewed the story a few times, do it by memory, jotting down each item as they appear in the story. Count them to make sure you haven't missed any.

*As the story opens, a dog is running around the backyard of the farmhouse. The **dog** starts chasing a **horse** and the horse runs right through the **house**, in the back door and out the front door, and onto the **street**. As it races down the street a **boy** jumps on top of the horse riding at the rest of the way. He takes off his **coat** and throws it over the horse's head. The horse can't see so he runs into a **tree** beside the street, rolls down a **hill**, and ends up in a **lake**.*

As you visualize the story, be sure to add the details, the color of the horse, the features of the boy, etc. make it as colorful and dramatic as possible and you won't forget it. Rehearse it a few times in your mind, jotting down the items as they appear in your story, and then check them against the list. Don't worry if you miss one or two items initially. It has been proven that if you get a wrong answer and then correct it, it will be locked even more permanently in your memory. When you make up the story using the same items, you will find it even easier to remember. You won't forget a story that you made up yourself.

You can use this technique for more than just lists of items, places or people. You can remember facts, concepts, theories or even descriptions of various strategies. All you need to do is select key words to represent those facts or whatever chunk of information are attempting to memorize, and link those words in a story.

For a complete discussion of memory, and ways of memorizing information for later recall, including names and faces, numbers and statistics, refer to my e-book, *Boost your memory and sharpen your mind*, published by *Bookboon.com*.

9 DON'T BUCKLE UNDER PRESSURE

9.1 STRESS MAKES LEARNING DIFFICULT

Stress can induce the release of cortisol, and excess cortisol impairs function in the prefrontal cortex – a learning center that helps regulate “executive” functions such as planning, reasoning and impulse control. Recent evidence indicates that the prefrontal cortex also stores short-term memories. So for effective learning, it is imperative that you are able to manage the stress that you will invariably encounter while juggling school, home and career.

There is a direct link between stress and an impaired ability to solve problems. Experiments at *Ohio State University* indicated that even something minor, like watching 20 minutes of a suspenseful or violent movie before studying can seriously block access to your learning and problem solving ability.

We're living in a stressful world, and balancing a job, family and studies tends to add even more pressure. Although in many cases we can do little to control our environment, we can do much to control our reaction to stressful situations. And therein lies the secret of coping with stress.



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Stress is best described as the “fight or flight response” – an involuntary body response that increases our blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, blood flow to the muscles and metabolism – preparing us to face some conflict or flee some danger. The body is prepared for some physical activity, but the activity never comes because most of today’s situations, particularly in a business or school environment, call for behavioral adjustments, not physical activity.

Consequently our body’s systems are thrown out of balance. The fight or flight response could be elicited when you are suddenly put down by a sarcastic comment from an instructor. Or we walk into an exam room unprepared. The body’s responses prepare you for “fight or flight,” but instead you sit there and stew – your hands clenching the arms of your chair, face flushed, stomach muscles tight. The appropriate response might be to jump up and get out of there. This would invariably relieve the tension, but it is only appropriate from the viewpoint of our body’s system and not from the viewpoint of acceptable behavior. Consequently, we remain under stress long after the cause of it has disappeared. The thoughtless teacher does not put us under stress, nor does the irate parent, the exam, the careless friend or the misplaced textbook. It is our *reaction* to these daily incidents that causes the grief. Instead of saying “His words upset me,” we would be more accurate in saying “I upset myself by my reaction to his words.”

You can seldom control what other people say or do; but you can control yourself and how you react to what other people say and do. It’s not easy. The first step is to admit that you are, in fact, upsetting yourself. Talk yourself into relaxing. Say to yourself, “Hey, calm down. You’re starting to upset yourself again.” Getting upset – putting yourself under stress – will not help solve the problem.

Hans Selye, endocrinologist and researcher and author of several books on stress, once told us to talk to ourselves if we find we’re becoming stressful. In time, you will find it actually works. But it requires a commitment on your part to take control of your own life and not to let yourself be controlled by others. Although the enemy appears to be a person, an unrealistic deadline or a heavy workload, it is actually *you*. You must be able to recognize the symptoms of stress, identify the stressor you are reacting to, eliminate it where possible and modify your *reaction* to it when it is not.

9.2 RECOGNIZING STRESS

There are both physical and emotional danger signals. And although they could be the result of other physical or emotional ailments, when they appear frequently or in situations that don’t call for them, they are probably a warning to take things easy.

Physical danger signals include cold, clammy hands, pounding heart, tense muscles, trembling hands, trouble sleeping, and inability to sit still, frequently upset stomach and increase or decrease in appetite.

Emotional danger signals include trouble making decisions, problems concentrating, temper outbursts, too much daydreaming, arguments with friends or family, drinking alcohol or taking drugs, long periods of feeling “down,” feelings of failure, withdrawing from people and/or activities.

Different people cope with stress in different ways. Among the most popular methods are relaxation, conversation and exercise. Soothing music, a hot bath or reading will work for some people. Others prefer talking out their problems with a friend (select a good listener, not a good *talker*, if this is your choice). Still others find exercise eases the tension as well as increases circulation and tones the muscles.

The important thing is to learn to recognize stress and take action to alleviate it. Stress is your body's reaction to fear, anger or anxiety. You can control your reaction by deciding not to take life so seriously. An insult, a missed class, a failed test, a low mark on an assignment do not herald the end of the world.

9.3 AVOID BURNOUT

Tanis Halliwell, who conducts workshops in stress, burnout and time management, claims that burnout strikes those goal-oriented people who have high expectations. People who set unrealistic standards for themselves and relentlessly strive to attain them, at the expense of their health and family, eventually experience mental, physical and emotional exhaustion.

Keep your career and your life in perspective. With so much emphasis on success and achievement, it sometimes becomes difficult to relax and enjoy life. Don't set your sights too high. Do the best you can, but don't kill yourself. Job burnout is a result of too much stress, and most jobs are stressful enough without adding your own unrealistic goals and expectations.

Set realistic goals. And realize you can't do everything. Don't sign up for two courses and six seminars if you only have the time for one. And always have some way of working off mental and emotional stress. Engage in a regular exercise program. Have interests other than your job. Make it a habit to talk over your problems with a close friend.

Above all, remember that what you *are* is more important than what you *do*. It's possible that you work harder and *faster* under the pressure of unrealistic deadlines, but it's doubtful that you work *better*. Excellence does not come from tired, harried people. Mediocrity does. You would hate to have your plane piloted by someone who had been flying steadily for twelve hours. And you probably wouldn't feel too comfortable in a taxi if the driver had been driving all night. It's a fact that tired workers cause accidents. For the same reason, most skiing mishaps take place during that "one last run." Don't talk yourself into believing that working steadily with your nose to the grindstone will lead to success. It will only lead to a flat nose. Work smarter, not harder. Concentrate on the career goals you set for yourself. Every day do something to bring yourself closer to them. But recognize that you will have to ignore some of those unimportant activities that produce minimal results. You can't do everything and still keep your life in balance.

Many managers, particularly entrepreneurs, keep putting off their vacations, and in some cases skip them altogether. This is a mistake. Vacations should be blocked off in your planning calendar ahead of most other things. Relaxation is necessary in order to keep your mind alert, your body healthy and your family together.

Some managers take better care of their office equipment and plant machinery than they do their own bodies. The human body is a lot more valuable than a hunk of machinery. And with a little care it may have a longer life. But one thing it doesn't have is a warranty or money-back guarantee. There are no returns or allowances. So spend all the time and money necessary for preventive maintenance.

To prevent yourself from filling your planning calendar with only career-related activities, schedule blocks of leisure time. Those outings with the children, that movie with your spouse, that tennis game or shopping trip – schedule them in ink, not pencil; make them definite, not tentative. Most people schedule them with the idea that they will go through with them "if something more important doesn't come up." And the "something more important" is usually job-related, and usually involves value in terms of dollars and cents.

Recognize that leisure time has value, too. Not in terms of measurable dollars and cents, but in terms of long-term effectiveness; in terms of family accord and happiness; in terms of physical health and mental alertness. And in terms of success.

9.4 RELIEVING STRESS

Even though you have set realistic career goals, scheduled time in your planner for recreation, rest and family as well as for job and school, and made up your mind not to get upset over unpredictable stressors, you may still encounter periods of distress. Experiment with ways of relieving that stress before it takes its toll.

Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist specializing in hypertension, researched the effects of Transcendental Meditation (TM). While performing this research he also examined the literature on meditation research in general – a variety of meditative practices. He found a technique common to all practices. This technique involved repetition of a sound, word or phrase – sometimes it is said silently, sometimes aloud.

He devised a simple, nonreligious meditative technique for eliciting “the relaxation response.” Dr. Benson seriously suggested that companies do their employees a good turn by offering an alternative to the coffee break – the relaxation-response break.

Briefly here are his instructions for eliciting the “relaxation response”:

1. In a quiet environment, sit in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face: feet, calves, thighs, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and neck. Allow them to remain deeply relaxed.
4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word “one” silently to yourself. Thus breathe in...breathe out, with “one”...
5. Continue this practice for twenty minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes open.

One of the most common ways of relieving stress is through exercise. Dr. Perry W. Buffington, in an article in an old issue of SKY magazine, maintains that exercise not only improves your body physically, but increases psychological and emotional stamina, as well. He reported a study that compared individuals taking exercise classes to those participating in a sedentary hobby activity. The “exercisers” had more energy, were less fatigued, less serious in their outlook, less tense and experienced less depression and anger.

Exercise frees the mind from the problems of work, builds a positive mental attitude and improves physical condition. Unfortunately the easiest thing is to decide to exercise; the hardest part is to stick with it. Dr. Buffington has some suggestions:

1. Start slowly. Don't overdo it the first day out or the discomfort will discourage you from continuing.
2. Don't be intimidated by those sports buffs who whiz past you with little effort. They didn't start that way. And remember, you can burn off just as many calories walking as running – you just have to walk longer.
3. When doing routine exercises, count backward. "Only five more to go" is more encouraging when you're tired.
4. Engage in proper exercise even if it tires you faster than sloppy exercise.
5. Exercise with a friend. It's more fun and you reinforce each other's motivation to continue.
6. Don't forget to breathe. Many people have trouble exercising – because they forget to take breaths. The body needs oxygen to perform.

Don't let your career become an obsession. You can develop yourself without risking your life if you manage yourself and your time effectively.

10 SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

10.1 MANAGE YOUR TIME

1. Put your career goals in writing, complete with deadline dates, and keep them in your planner so they are with you and visible at all times.
2. Don't take on too much. Register only for those courses you are able to handle without sacrificing the other areas of your life. Recognize that you might have to give up a few volunteer activities in order to succeed.
3. Set a goal to attend all the classes. Skipping classes will make the material more difficult, affect your grades, and make a poor impression on the instructor.
4. Obtain a week-at-a-glance planner that displays all seven days from morning until night and has space for follow-up, assignments, and things to do. Budget your time on this planner, and stick to it as closely as possible. Here are a few suggestions that will help you excel in your schoolwork while maintaining a balanced life:
5. Never leave a project or assignment on a *To Do* list. Block off time in your planner to actually work on those tasks. Schedule the work so that it is completed ahead of the deadline dates.
6. Mark all deadlines, such as exam dates and assignments, in your planner the moment they become available. When you get your timetable, be sure to block off the hours you will be spending in classes throughout the whole term period.
7. Once you have blocked off family time, special events, vacation, sporting events, and class times, block off those times that you plan to study or visit the library. Do this at least week in advance.
8. If you are taking evening classes, block off the entire evening. Review notes and text before the class, and go to a library or quiet spot after the class for a quick review.
9. Plan to utilize idle time for review, study, reading, writing reports, research. Always have material with you that you can work on. Use flash cards.
10. Organize your study area to increase focus, According to neuroscientist Torkel Klingberg, author of *The overflowing brain*, the more items on your desk, the greater the demand on your attention. So keep your work area clear.
11. Learn to say "no" more often. Have as much respect for your own time as you have for the time of others.

12. Turn off cell phones and other distracting devices when you are in the classroom or studying.
13. Don't be a perfectionist. Write legibly answer questions fully, and study effectively; but don't make your notes a work of art, don't spend more time on test answers than the marks you can get warrant, and don't burn yourself out trying to get a perfect score when it's the certificate, designation or degree that is recognized.

10.2 MAXIMIZE YOUR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

1. Arrive early enough to get a front seat, meet your instructor, and arrange your materials. Don't sit next to buddies or other potential distractions.
2. Be an active listener. Take notes. Ask questions (jot them down and ask at a convenient time). Challenge yourself to get something new out of every session. Do something with the information afterwards. Review it. Recite it. Paraphrase it. Create & answer questions about it.
3. Don't let your mind wander while listening to the instructor. If you pull it back on track immediately, it will eventually lead to a habit. If necessary, take a brief "effective listening" workshop.
4. Make notes legible, leaving space to fill in additional information later. Have a wide margin for inserting key headings.
5. Review your notes and insert missing information immediately following the class. Delaying will cause memory loss.
6. Mark on index cards those formulas, key ideas, facts that you must memorize. Carry them with you for quick review during breaks, while commuting or while having lunch.
7. Lack of concentration can result from boredom. Know the objective of each class or chapter. Question what you don't understand; challenge yourself to learn.
8. Yawning is not a sign of boredom. It is one of the best ways to bring students into a state of alertness. You may want to yawn frequently, but it might be wise to cover your mouth because it may be misinterpreted as well as contagious.
9. Don't multitask in the classroom. You can't listen effectively while texting or checking email.
10. You are more alert and creative if you periodically stand up, so if the lectures are long, explain to the instructor in advance that you may have to stand periodically for health reasons. It is true; because sitting too long could be unhealthy.

10.3 HOW TO STUDY

1. Use your *prime time* when you're at your peak of mental alertness. This is usually in the morning (but not before 6 a.m.) and again early in the evening. Follow your own unique cycle of personal energy.
2. Schedule study periods in your time planner as you would appointments with a doctor or hairdresser. Don't cancel those appointments with yourself unless a crisis necessitates it.
3. Have a place to study free from distraction, with your materials (laptop with Internet access, paper, pens, reference texts etc.) within reach.
4. Study with a friend. It can help fill in the gaps in each other's knowledge, offer two perspectives, allow testing of each other's recall, and break the loneliness of studying alone.
5. Learn to use both the library and the Internet for research before your course starts. Find out what is available; learn how to use the services. Don't hesitate to get help from the librarian.
6. Don't study past your attention span. If you find your mind wandering, take a few minutes to stretch, change your position. You may find fifty-minute study periods with ten-minute breaks in between gives best results. Avoid distractions when studying.
7. If one subject is particularly boring or difficult, tackle that one first. If a subject is difficult, search out a book covering the same topic at a lower grade level. The authors are great at making a complicated subject appear easy.
8. When reading, don't look up every other word; read for understanding. When you have to look up a word, jot the definition in the margin of the textbook.
9. The best way of learning something is to teach it; try explaining your notes, your textbook chapter etc., to someone else. It forces you to express it in your own words.
10. When reading a textbook, grasp the main ideas by reading through the assigned chapter quickly. Then reread, highlighting key areas to facilitate review. Make notes by putting it into your own words.
11. Don't throw away old assignments once they have been marked; you may be able to re-hash some of the material for a later assignment – or even for a book or article you may get published later on.
12. Always study the same subject in the same place (at the same time, if possible). It will aid in recall later.
13. Ask for help if some of the material does not make sense. Understanding is important when you want to remember something.

14. Studies have shown that even the presence of potted plants improves creativity, performance and learning ability. In schools, the presence of plants improved scores in mathematics spelling and science between 10% and 14%. Consider this for your study area.
15. Natural lighting from the sun is another environmental factor that can affect our health and personal performance as well as cognitive performance, alertness and mood – so choose a study environment with plenty of windows if possible.
16. Drink lots of water. In one study the scores averaged 4.8% better when students drank water as they took exams.
17. Although drinking too much coffee has been associated with stress, in moderation it is thought to give memory a boost – so one or two cups a day should not harm you.
18. Never plan your studies after a pleasurable experience. Study first and take that trip to the ice cream shop or watch that movie afterwards.
19. Be an active reader. Search for definite information as opposed to reading passively. A highlighter or pen in your hand will increase your concentration.
20. Experiment with different study times to determine when your mind is most alert. Avoid late nights and very early mornings if possible.
21. Recognize that success at studying requires a little skill and a lot of hard work. Make it a priority, and continue to practice self-discipline.

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22. Exercise regularly; it relaxes you, increases blood circulation for a better supply of oxygen to the brain and allows you to think more clearly. Don't eat a heavy meal before you study.
23. Aim for 7 to 8 hours sleep a night to be at your maximum energy level. A study by the Loughborough University Sleep Research Centre found that women need about 20 more minutes sleep than men.

10.4 IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY AND RECALL

1. You can't recall what you don't hear, see or read. Make up your mind to use a searching attitude and intend to remember.
2. Provide clues or links when memorizing material to make recall easier. For example, acronyms such as H.O.M.E.S. to represent the Great Lakes or R.O.Y.G.B.I.V. to represent the colors of the rainbow.
3. Reading material five times in one day is not as effective as reading it once per day for five days. Space out the repetition.
4. Get plenty of sleep. Avoid marathon study sessions. We memorize material more easily when we are mentally alert. And sleep consolidates memories.
5. People forget about 70 percent of what they learn within one hour and 84 percent within 48 hours. Review material immediately after having learned it.
6. Studying the same subject at the same location every time aids recall later. Learn the "link" or "stacking" method of memorization for easy recall (Explained in detail in the ebook, *Boost your memory & sharpen your mind* published by Bookboon).
7. Exercise regularly. Older people who walked 40 minutes a day, three times a week, did better on memory tests. Exercising regularly has been shown to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease by more than 60 percent.
8. Manage stress. Stress can induce the release of cortisol, and excess cortisol impairs function in the prefrontal cortex – an emotional learning center that helps regulate the "executive" skills, including working memory.
9. Although drinking too much coffee has been associated with stress, in moderation it seems to give memory a boost.
10. Laughter reduces stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, aids immunity and improves both mood and memory. Sandra Kornblatt, in her book, *A better brain at any age*, also gave an account of how humor during instruction led to increased test scores.
11. Drinking water may also sharpen your recall skills according to research conducted at University of East London.
12. Putting information in the form of jingles, rhymes, and catchy tunes makes it memorable and easy to memorize.

10.5 WRITING EXAMS

1. If you are anxious or worried about the test, spend 10 minutes writing about your anxieties so they won't pop into your mind while writing the test. The January 11, 2011 *Toronto Star* reported on a study that showed students who wrote about their anxieties did 2½ times better on their exam than those who didn't.
2. Get enough sleep (7–8 hours) the night before taking a training program or writing an exam or thesis. That's when memories are transferred to long-term storage.
3. Obtain copies of past exams to determine any pattern of frequently tested areas and the types of questions asked. If past exams aren't available, make up your own practice exams.
4. Make good notes during the year, making sure they fulfill the requirements of the course outline. Express them in your own words to improve memory and recall.
5. Get a good night's sleep before the exam. Stay away from caffeine, video games & TV. Keep technology out of the bedroom. Go for a walk on the morning of the exam. Eat lightly.
6. Walk into the exam room relaxed and refreshed; telling yourself you're going to do great. Don't allow negative thoughts to invade your mind.
7. Don't discuss information or compare notes with other students before walking into the room; it will generally confuse you.
8. Sit at the front where you can't be distracted by other students' antics. If you feel nervous try deep breathing.
9. When you receive your exam paper, quickly jot down any memory cues, acronyms, etc., that you committed to memory.
10. Read over the paper, checking the easiest questions. Pay particular attention to the instructions and marking scheme.
11. Question the instructor or facilitator if anything is unclear.
12. Plan your time by allocating a specific number of minutes for each question based on its value. If a question is worth 20 percent of the marks, assign 20 percent of the time to it (but leave at least 10 or 15 minutes available to review the entire exam at the end).
13. Answer all questions, starting with the easiest one and sticking to your time budget.
14. If you find yourself struggling with an answer and going beyond your time allowance, leave it and proceed to the next question. (Add to it during the review at the end.)
15. Don't spend more time on those easy familiar questions. Just write enough to get full marks and go on to the next one.
16. Be neat, clear and legible; it can do no harm and might influence the marker.
17. Drinking water may also sharpen your recall skills according to research conducted at University of East London. The UK researchers believe that bringing water into an exam room can raise students' marks. Studies indicated that those who drank water while writing exams outperformed those who didn't.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harold Taylor, CEO of *TaylorinTime*, has been speaking, writing and conducting training programs on the topic of effective time management for over 40 years. He has written more than 20 books, including a Canadian bestseller, *Making Time Work for You*. He has developed over 50 time management products that have sold in 38 countries around the world. His monthly Time Report has been published for twenty-five years and he has had over 250 articles accepted for publication.

A past director of the National Association of Professional Organizers, Harold received their Founder's Award in 1999 for outstanding contributions to the organizing profession. He received the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) designation in 1987 from the National Speakers Association. In 1998 the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers inducted him into the Canadian Speaking Hall of Fame. And in 2001, he received the Founder's Award from the Professional Organizers in Canada. The award has been named in his honor.

Prior to his speaking and writing career, Harold held management positions in industry for twelve years and was a teaching master in the business division of Humber College in Toronto for eight years. He has been an entrepreneur for forty years, incorporating four companies during that time. Since 1981, when he incorporated the time management company, *Harold Taylor Time Consultants Inc.*, he has presented over 2000 workshops, speeches and keynotes on the topic of time and life management.