

How to be a
Successful
Student

Sample Pages

Sample Pages
Second Edition

Copyright 1988, 1991 by Donald Martin

First Edition - 1988

Second Edition - 1991

First printing - May 1991

Second printing - July 1991

Third printing - October 1991

Fourth printing - May 1992

Fifth printing - April 1993

Sixth printing - April 1994

Seventh printing - December 1994

Eighth printing - April 1995

Ninth printing - April 1999

Tenth printing - April 1997

Eleventh printing - May 1998

Twelfth printing - September 1999

Thirteenth printing - June 2001

Fourteenth printing - January 2002

Fifteenth printing - October 2003

Sample Pages

Sample Pages

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review. While every precaution has been taken to produce the finest book possible, the publisher and author assume no responsibility for errors or omissions. Neither is any liability assumed for damages resulting from the use of this book.

Martin Press LLC
PO Box 2109
San Anselmo, CA 94979
www.martintrails.com/Students
email: don@martintrails.com

Clip art

The clip art in this book comes from Clipables, copyright 1989 by C.A.R. of St. Louis, Missouri.

ISBN 0-9617044-2-X

Printed in the United States of America

Sample Pages

Introduction

It is astonishing to think that the most important topics affecting our ability to learn are rarely taught explicitly in the public school system. When did anyone ever attend a class on, Learning How to Learn, or The Power of Positive Thinking, or How to Ask Questions, or How to Get the Most from Lectures?

The purpose of this guide is to provide a condensed summary of the major personal skills required to be an effective, efficient and successful student.

Who Should Use this Handbook

This handbook is written primarily for high school and college students. In this day of information explosion and competition for time, they need to study at peak efficiency.

This handbook is also written for parents, teachers and counselors. They give advice and this book should help them give better advice.

How to Use this Guide

This guide should not be read like a novel or even like a textbook. First, it should be skimmed to see if you are interested or concerned about any of the subjects. If you find a subject, read it carefully and contemplate it for a few days. Ask yourself whether you need to improve. If so, carefully plan out what you will do. Most of these study skills involve personal habits which are not easy to change. Changing habits takes time, practice and commitment.

This book is based on common sense and experience. As you look it over, most subjects will look familiar and you may wonder why you need it. But don't let familiarity fool you. If you are learning at peak efficiency, you will know it. If not, you can use this book to find out why and learn how to improve yourself.

Where to Get Help

Because these one-page condensations are summaries of many ideas or even entire books, they are brief and complete. If you have difficulty understanding their full meaning or in developing a plan of action, try to see a teacher, tutor, or counselor, or sign up for a study skills class.

Good News!

The good news is that self-improvement pays big dividends because even small improvements increase performance, motivation and satisfaction. Success builds more success. So, invest in your future. Create good news. Use this book to start changing. Take the first step and the next one will be easier. Go for it!

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Introduction

- 1 What are your Goals?
- 2 The Power of Positive Thinking
- 3 Learning How to Learn
- 4 Your Rights and Responsibilities
- 5 How to Manage Time and Set Priorities

- 6 How to Use Questions
- 7 How to Improve Reading Comprehension
- 8 How to Study Effectively
- 9 How to Improve your Memory
- 10 ... How to Organize Information

- 11 ... How to Get the Most from Lectures
- 12 ... How to Take Notes in Class
- 13 ... How to Identify your Best Learning Styles
- 14 ... How to Read Textbooks
- 15 ... The Importance of Using Scratch Paper

- 16 ... How to Save Time and Take Shortcuts
- 17 ... How to Succeed in Math
- 18 ... How to Prepare For and Take Examinations
- 19 ... How to Solve Word Problems
- 20 ... How to Sharpen your Critical Thinking Skills

- 21 ... How to Improve Creative Thinking
- 22 ... How to be an Effective Writer
- 23 ... How to Use the 7 Sides of your Brain
- 24 ... How to Improve Visualization
- 25 ... How to Set up a Study Group

- 26 ... Good Health
- 27 ... How to Relax
- 28 ... The 7 Biggest Mistakes Students Make
- 29 ... How to Make Effective Use of Tutoring
- 30 ... Can Learning be Accelerated?

Notes and Bibliography

1 What are your Goals?

Key Point

Goals provide direction and motivation for life.

Why set goals?

Goals are like road maps. They get you where you want to go. Goals focus attention, provide motivation and are a way to measure progress. Goals encourage you in day to day struggles.

Goals create purpose.
Purpose generates plans.
Plans produce action.
Action builds habits.
Good habits create success.

How to set goals and get results.

The best way to get results is to plan for the future, but live one day at a time.

Plan for the future. Think about yourself; how do you define success? What makes you happy? What do you imagine yourself doing? Does happiness mean money, security, helping others, prestige, family, improving the environment, solving problems, a career, a degree?

Strengthen your will. Whatever you decide, the key to success is to strengthen your will to succeed. This sounds circular - to succeed, strengthen your will; to strengthen your will, succeed, and it is. It is a positive feedback loop.

Create a long-term plan. To get this positive feedback loop started, develop a long-term plan. Think about where would you like to be 3-5 years from now? What would you like to be doing? Then plan back in time and outline the major steps that take you there.

Live one day at a time. Once you have the big picture, concentrate on the present. Make a list of specific things you want to

accomplish today, in school, work and your personal life. Make this list realistic so that you have lots of immediate successes. Build the positive feedback loop day-by-day. At the end of each day, reward yourself and strengthen your resolve for tomorrow.

What goals are valuable for everyone?

Although there are many career goals you can choose, here are three self-help goals everyone can use.

Be a lifelong learner.

The only certainty in life is change, an opportunity for some and future shock for others. Education is the door to opportunity. Your most valuable skill in a changing marketplace will be your ability to learn.

Clarify educational plans. If you know what your major is, great. If you don't know what it is, that's okay. Many students do not know what they want to major in until about halfway through college.

If you don't know what you want to do, then research various careers, seek ideas from counselors, teachers, family and friends and take general survey courses to see what interests you. Visit the career counseling center on campus.

It's important during this time to keep your options open.

Determine what prerequisites are required for entry into specific majors. For example, If you're leaning towards science,

computers or engineering, take the required math courses.

Become an efficient, successful student.

No matter what your goals are, work at maximum efficiency. Use this book to help you develop good habits and become a successful student.



Setting goals is like setting the sails.

Sample Pages

San

San

Pages

Pages

2 The Power of Positive Thinking

Key Point

You are what you think. You feel what you want.

Why think positively?

All of our feelings, beliefs and knowledge are based on our internal thoughts, both conscious and subconscious. We are in control, whether we know it or not. We can be positive or negative, enthusiastic or dull, active or passive.

The biggest difference between people is their attitudes. For some, learning is enjoyable and exciting. For other, learning is a drudgery. For many, learning is just okay, something required on the road to a job.

"Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Abraham Lincoln

Our present attitudes are habits, built from the feedback of parents, friends, society and self, that form our self-image and our world-image.

These attitudes are maintained by the inner conversations we constantly have with ourselves, both consciously and subconsciously.

The first step in changing our attitudes is to change our inner conversations.

What should we be saying?

One approach is called the three C's: Commitment, Control and Challenge.

Commitment

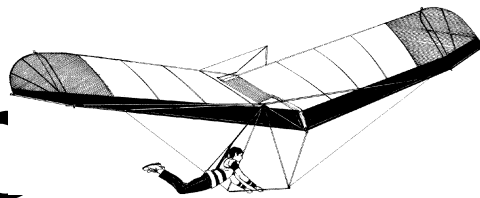
Make a positive commitment to yourself, to learning, work, family, friends, nature, and other worthwhile causes. Praise yourself and others. Dream of success. Be enthusiastic.

Control

Keep your mind focused on important things. Set goals and priorities for what you think and do. Visualize to practice your actions. Develop a strategy for dealing with problems. Learn to relax. Enjoy successes. Be honest with yourself.

Challenge

Be courageous. Change and improve each day. Do your best and don't look back. See learning and change as opportunities. Try new things. Consider several options. Meet new people. Ask lots of questions. Keep track of your mental and physical health. Be optimistic.



Aim high and do your best.

Studies show that people with these characteristics are winners in good times and survivors in hard times.

Research shows that, "... people who begin consciously to modify their

inner conversations and assumptions report an almost immediate improvement in their performance. Their energy increases and things seem to go better...

Commitment, control and challenge help build self-esteem and promote positive thinking. Here are some other suggestions.

7 Suggestions for Building Positive Attitudes

- In every class, look for positive people to associate with.
- In every lecture, look for one more interesting idea.
- In every chapter, find one more concept important to you.
- With every friend, explain a new idea you've just learned.
- With every teacher, ask a question.
- With yourself, keep a list of your goals, positive thoughts and actions.
- Remember, you are what you think, you feel what you want.

3 Learning How to Learn

Key Point

Habits can be the best of friends or the worst of enemies.

Build good habits.

The key to success in any activity is to develop effective skills. Athletes develop athletic skills; musicians develop musical skills; managers develop managing skills; learners need to develop learning skills. Developing skills means building good habits.

Develop the habit of mental self-management.

Mental self-management or metacognition is the art of planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning process. To be good at metacognition means you have to know the options. Here are the major choices.

Identify your best learning styles - visual, verbal, kinesthetic, deductive or inductive.

Monitor and improve your learning skills - reading, writing, listening, time management, note-taking, problem-solving.

Use different learning environments - lecture, lab, discussion, study groups, study partner.

Try to complete the learning cycle - For most courses, the learning cycle goes like this:

- Memorize new information, rules and concepts - often tedious and boring.
- Assimilate and organize this information - often hard, but interesting.
- Use this information to analyze, synthesize and problem-solve - often difficult, but satisfying.
- Incorporate this information into evaluations, judgments and predictions - often powerful and exhilarating.

Many students never get past the first step. They never experience the joy of learning.

Develop the habit of positive thinking.

Use it for increasing confidence and self-esteem. Use

it for setting goals and enjoying learning. Use it for taking charge of your own education.

Develop the habit of hierarchical thinking.

Use it for setting priorities and for time management. Use it for summarizing ideas and for organizing information.

Develop the habit of creative and critical thinking.

Use it for making decisions and solving problems. Use it for synthesizing and creating new associations.

Develop the habit of asking questions.

Use it for identifying main ideas and supporting evidence. Use it for generating interest and motivation. Use it for focusing concentration and improving memory.



Sample Pages

10 Steps for Building New Habits

- Select a new habit or technique you want to develop, like one found in this book.
- Convince yourself it's important.
- Make it fairly easy to do.
- Write out a schedule for working on it.
- Practice using the technique, keep track of progress.
- Reward yourself after each practice period.
- Use your habits as often as possible, both in simple and in new situations.
- Use a coach, teacher, tutor, group or friend.
- Identify internal blocks, e.g., lack of time, poor self-esteem, procrastination, poor techniques, lack of success, lack of confidence, stress, poor organization, poor reading and math skills. Seek help if necessary
- Start small, take one step at a time and enjoy each success.

4 Your Rights and Responsibilities

Key Point

The only real education is self-education.

What is education?

Education is like an apprenticeship between student and teacher. Originally, the teacher provides example, direction, evaluation and help.

However, as time goes on, students become more self-sufficient, more self-directed, more self-critical. Finally, the student becomes teacher, his or her own teacher.

The goal is to become your own teacher.

Sometimes this process becomes confused and blurred. Teachers are too authoritarian or students are too passive. In math and science classes, students are often so uncertain, they become anxious and this anxiety interferes with their learning. The following bill of rights and responsibilities can help clarify roles.

The Learning Bill of Rights

- I have the right to take control of my own learning process.
- I have the right to be treated as a competent adult.
- I have the right to define success in my own terms.
- I have the right to feel good about myself regardless of my abilities.
- I have the right not to feel put down if I am slower than others.
- I have the right to ask questions.
- I have the right to need extra help.
- I have the right to say I don't understand.
- I have the right to evaluate my instructors and course materials.

Adapted from the book "Overcoming Math Anxiety" by S. Tobias

The Learning Set of Responsibilities

- I have the responsibility to take control of my own learning process.
- I have the responsibility to think and act positively.
- I have the responsibility to develop personal strategies for learning, for taking tests, for developing an overview of subject material and for solving problems.
- I have the responsibility to actively attend class.
- I have the responsibility to complete assignments.
- I have the responsibility to ask questions.
- I have the responsibility to participate in classroom activities.
- I have the responsibility to help others when asked.
- I have the responsibility not to influence others negatively about the subject, the class or the teacher.

Responsibility - The Forgotten "R".

Everyone knows that reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic are basic to education. But what about responsibility? How would you like to work for an irresponsible boss, or be known as an irresponsible parent, or take a class from an irresponsible teacher?

Doesn't sound very good, does it? However, in the bustle of modern times and in the crowding of large classrooms, responsibility is sometimes overlooked.

The path to success lies on the road of responsibility.

5 How to Manage Time and Set Priorities

Key Point

Good time management means defining priorities and scheduling activities.

What are the 3 rules for effective time management?

Don't create impossible situations. Define priorities. Avoid distractions and lack of focus.

Don't create impossible situations.

Don't get trapped into doing too much. Don't try to work full time and take a full load. Don't take too many lab classes. Use time to create success, not failure. Be realistic about school. For most classes, plan to study 2 hours for every 1 hour of class.

Make time your friend
not your enemy.

Identify your first priority classes and do whatever it takes to succeed. Drop second priority classes or reduce work hours if necessary.

Define your priorities using the 3-list method.

All time management begins with planning. Use lists to set priorities, plan activities and measure progress. One approach is the 3-list method.

List #1 - The weekly calendar.

Create a weekly calendar. Make it your basic time budgeting guide. List your courses, work, study time, recreation, meals, and relaxation, etc.

Plan to study first priority classes when you work best. Be flexible, adapt your schedule to changing needs. Keep your schedule handy and refer to it often. If it doesn't work, change it.

List #2 - The daily "Things to Do".

Write down all the things that you want to do today. Note homework due or tests or subjects you want to emphasize. Include shopping and personal calls, etc.

This list is a reminder. Use it to set daily priorities

and to reduce decision-making and worry. If time is tight, move items to your long-term list.

Rewrite this list each morning. Use visualization to help you focus on what to do. This list is also a measure of your day-to-day success. Check off items as you finish them and praise yourself for each accomplishment.

List #3 - Goals and other things.

This can be one or two lists, a monthly list and or a long-term list. Put down your goals and things you have to do. What do you want to accomplish over the next month or year? What do you need to buy?

Use this list to keep track of all your commitments. If you're worried about something, put it on this list. The purpose of this list is to develop long-term goals and to free your mind to concentrate on today.

Avoid distractions and lack of focus.

Time is precious. Yet many people waste time by getting stuck in one or more of the following habits.

Procrastination - putting off important jobs.

Crises management - being overwhelmed by the current crisis. No time for routine matters.

Switching and floundering - lack of concentration and focus on one job.

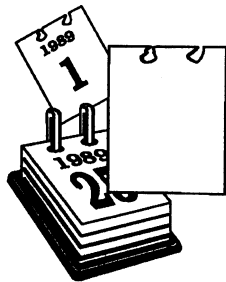
Television, telephones and friends - these are all ways of

avoiding work.

Emotional blocks - boredom, daydreaming, stress, guilt, anger and frustration reduce concentration.

Sickness - getting sick and blowing your schedule.

In all of these cases, the first step is to recognize the problem and resolve to improve. Use priority lists to focus attention. Try positive self-talk. To avoid distractions, find a quiet place to study, the library or a study hall. Get an answering machine.



Plan your work,
then work your plan.

6 How to Use Questions

Key Point

Questions can be used to organize information, stimulate interest and improve test-taking.

Be like children and scientists.

The two best groups of learners are children and scientists. Why? Because both are naturally curious. Both ask lots of questions. Curiosity and questions are the motivation and means of learning.

evidence supports the main point? What are the applications or examples? How is this related to the rest of the chapter, the book, the world, to me?

Use questions to organize information. How does this idea compare or contrast with ...? How important is this concept relative to ...? How general or widespread or useful is this idea?

The paradox of questions.

Educators believe that forming questions is more important than remembering answers. Let teachers test for answers, not questions. Why is that? Questions and answers are two sides of the same coin, the process called learning.

By the time you get to high school or college, it is assumed that you know how to ask good questions, even if you don't verbalize them out loud.

What are the basic questions?

The six basic questions are the familiar, "what, when, where, why, who and how." Variations of these questions can be asked for every topic, whether it's a whole chapter or just one section. What is energy? When is it used? Where do you need it? Why is it important? How do we measure it?

What are the advanced questions?

More advanced questions revolve around words like:
What if ...?
Compare or contrast.
Summarize, trace or list.
Criticize or evaluate.
Explain, state or describe.
Analyze or comment.
Interpret or prove.

When to use questions.

Use questions to read textbooks.
What are new terms? What is the main point? What

Use questions to stimulate interest.

How is this concept used in the everyday world? What are some practical examples? Why is this important?

Use questions to clarify ideas. I don't exactly understand, can you give me an example? I've lost the main point. Can you go over it again?

Use questions to test limits. When does this idea not apply? What happens in extreme cases? What if ...?

Use questions to improve test-taking?

What do you think will be on the test? Can you suggest what to study for this test?

Use questions to improve your listening skills. Ask questions of your friends, relatives and classmates. Show them you care about what they think.

How to protect yourself from embarrassment.

Some students are nervous about asking the teacher questions and get embarrassed if the teacher replies by asking a question in return. Here are two suggestions.

Respond with, "I'm busy writing and haven't considered the implications."

After class, send a note asking if you can ask questions without being embarrassed by trying to



Questions illuminate.

7 How to Improve Reading Comprehension

Key Point

Good reading means building frameworks for connecting words to thoughts.

The purpose of reading.

The purpose of reading is to connect the ideas on the page to what you already know. If you don't know anything about a subject, then pouring words of text into your mind is like pouring water into your hand. You don't retain much. For example, try reading these numbers:

7516324 This is hard to read and remember.

751-6324 This is easier because of chunking.

123-4567 This is very easy to read because of prior knowledge and structure.

Similarly, if you like sports, then reading the sports page is easy. You have a framework in your mind for reading, understanding and storing information.

Improving comprehension.

Reading comprehension requires motivation, mental frameworks for holding ideas, concentration and good study techniques. Here are some suggestions.

Develop a broad background.

Broaden your background knowledge by reading newspapers, magazines and books. Become interested in world events.

Know the structure of paragraphs.

Good writers construct paragraphs that have a beginning, middle and end. Often, the first sentence will give an overview that helps provide a framework for adding details. Also, look for transitional words, phrases or paragraphs that change the topic.

Identify the type of reasoning.

Does the author use cause and effect reasoning, hypothesis, model building, induction or deduction, systems thinking? See section 20 for more examples on critical thinking skills.

Anticipate and predict.

Really smart readers try to anticipate the author and predict future ideas and questions. If you're right, this reinforces your understanding. If you're wrong, you make adjustments quicker.

Look for the method of organization.

Is the material organized chronologically, serially, logically, functionally, spatially or hierarchical? See section 10 for more examples on organization.

Create motivation and interest.

Preview material, ask questions, discuss ideas with classmates. The stronger your interest, the greater your comprehension.

Pay attention to supporting cues.

Study pictures, graphs and headings. Read the first and last paragraph in a chapter, or the first sentence in each section.

Highlight, summarize and review.

Just reading a book once is not enough. To develop a deeper understanding, you have to highlight, summarize and review important ideas.

Build a good vocabulary.

For most educated people, this is a lifetime project. The best way to improve your vocabulary is to use a dictionary regularly. You might carry around a pocket dictionary and use it to look up new words. Or, you can keep a list of words to look up at the end of the day. Concentrate on roots, prefixes and endings.

Use a systematic reading technique like SQR3.

Develop a systematic reading style like the SQR3 method and make adjustments to it, depending on priorities and purpose. The SQR3 steps include Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review. See section 14 for more details.

Monitor effectiveness.

Good readers monitor their attention, concentration and effectiveness. They quickly recognize if they've missed an idea and backup to reread it.

Should you vocalize words?

Yes, although it is faster to form words in your mind rather than on your lips or throat. Eye motion is also important. Frequent backtracking slows you down

8 How to Study Effectively

Key Point

Build good study habits to create success.

Effective studying has three requirements.

Create favorable conditions. Generate a positive attitude. Develop good techniques.

Create favorable conditions.

Create a schedule. Plan to study specific times each week. Break up times as much as possible; an hour here, an hour there. Study harder subjects first when you are fresh. Build good habits.

Choose a location where you can concentrate. Avoid or remove distractions. Loud music or any TV reduces effectiveness.

Generate a positive attitude.

Make the subject meaningful to you in some way. Ask questions to be an active learner and to generate interest. Reward yourself after each study segment, use breaks (good walks, music).

Develop good techniques.

Use the SQR3 method for reading textbooks.

- Survey the section or chapter. Skim questions, key words, figures and summaries.
- Question. Create questions for each major topic.
- Read and answer questions. Make notes in the margin.
- Recite the main points.
- Review. Create a one-page summary sheet. Revise as necessary.

Use repetition to increase remembering. Review summary sheets and chapters weekly. For intensive memorization, create flash cards and practice often.

Use organization to increase understanding. Create associations, analogies, metaphors and summaries to relate new ideas to what you already know.

Dealing with problem areas.

Procrastination, lack of concentration and boredom are the 3 biggest problems that reduce energy and effectiveness. They are often related and

improvement in one can lead to improvement in others.

Procrastination

Procrastination steals time. It saps energy, creates self-doubt and produces anxiety. One trick for beating it is to get started quickly. If necessary, fool yourself. Plan to work for just a few minutes, then get back to procrastination. Take the first step.

Before really studying, try thumbing through the chapter or read the introduction to build interest.

Lack of concentration

Lack of concentration is like a lack of fuel. Without concentration, the mind has little power. Improve concentration by removing distractions and increasing interest.

Remove external distractions by finding a quiet place to study. Remove internal distractions whenever they surface by placing them on a list.

To increase interest, try talking about the subject with yourself. Ask questions. What is most important? Why? Try imagining the author or teacher sitting with you. What would you ask them?

Boredom

If a subject, class, book or teacher is boring, whose fault is it? Who suffers the most? Who has to do something about it? You do.

If you're bored when studying, be more active. Ask questions. Switch subject matter more often. Outline the 3 most important ideas. Vocalize, visualize and symbolize to engage all areas of your brain. Work shorter periods. Discuss ideas with others.

Review short term and long term goals. Relate the subject to your goals and interests.

Have you got 5 minutes?

Effective studying doesn't require an hour or more. Even 5 minutes will do. Find new time while waiting for class or lunch or a bus. Make a habit of using short breaks to review notes and summaries.