

How to be a
Successful
Sample Student

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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!

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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.

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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

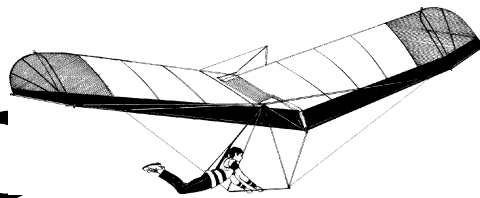
Make a positive commitment to yourself, to learning, work, family, friends, nature, and other worthwhile causes. Praise yourself and others. Dream of success. Be enthusiastic.

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.



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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, writing and arithmetic 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.
