MODULE 1

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Introduction

Module 1 Introduction

Imagine a person who walks up to a counter at the airport to buy a plane ticket for his next vacation. “Just give me a ticket,” he says to the reservation agent. “Anywhere will do.”

The agent stares back at him in disbelief. “I’m sorry, sir,” she replies. “I’ll need some more details. Just minor things—such as the name of your destination city and your arrival and departure dates.”

“Oh, I’m not fussy,” says the would-be traveler. “I just want to get away. You choose for me.”

Compare this person to another traveler who walks up to the counter and says, “I’d like a ticket to Ixtapa, Mexico, departing on Saturday, March 23, and returning Sunday, April 7. Please give me a window seat, first class, with vegetarian meals.”

Now, ask yourself which traveler is more likely to end up with a vacation that he’ll enjoy.

The same principle applies in any area of life, including school. Suppose that you asked someone what she wanted from her education and you got this answer: “I plan to get a degree in journalism, with double minors in earth science and Portuguese, so that I can work as a reporter covering the environment in Brazil.” The details of a person’s vision offer clues to her skills and sense of purpose.

Discovering what you want and having a plan to get there helps you succeed in higher education. Many students quit school simply because they are unsure about what they want from it. With well-defined goals in mind, you can look for connections between what you want and what you study. The more connections, the more likely you’ll stay in school—and get what you want in every area of life.

By design, you are a learning machine. As an infant, you learned to walk. As a toddler, you learned to talk. By the time you reached age 5, you had mastered many skills needed to thrive in the world. And you learned all these things without formal instruction, without lectures, without books, without conscious effort, and without fear.

Shortly after we start school, however, something happens to us. Somehow, we start forgetting about the successful student inside us. Even under the best teachers, we experience the discomfort that sometimes accompanies learning. We start avoiding situations that might lead to embarrassment. We turn away from experiences that could lead to mistakes. We accumulate a growing list of ideas to defend, a catalog of familiar experiences that discourage us from learning anything new. Slowly, we restrict our possibilities and potentials.

However, don’t let this become your journey. You can take a new path in your life, starting today. You can rediscover the natural learner within you. Each module in this course is about a step you can take on your journey to becoming a successful student.

Lesson 1.1: What Is a Successful Student?

Lesson 1.1 Introduction

Becoming a successful student means mastering learning for you, based on your skills and personal characteristics.

Mastery means attaining a level of skill that goes beyond technique. For a master, work is effortless and struggle evaporates. The master carpenter, for example, is so familiar with her tools that they are part of her. To a master chef, utensils are old friends. Because these masters don't have to think about the details of the process, they bring more of themselves to their work.

Likewise, the successful student is one who masters her learning and makes learning look easy. She works hard without seeming to make any effort. She's relaxed *and* alert, disciplined *and* spontaneous, focused *and* fun-loving.

You might say that those statements don't make sense. Actually, mastery does *not* make sense. It cannot be captured in words. It defies analysis. It cannot be taught. It can only be learned and experienced.

Do you possess the skills and characteristics of a successful student?

Characteristics of a Successful Student

Successful students share certain qualities. These are attitudes and core values. Although they imply various strategies for learning, they ultimately go beyond what you do. These qualities are ways of *being* exceptional.

As you read the following list of qualities common to successful students, look to yourself. Make a list of each quality that you already demonstrate. Make another list of each quality that you want to possess. This is not a test. It is simply a chance to celebrate what qualities you possess so far—and to start thinking about what's possible for your future.

Inquisitive. A successful student is curious about everything. By posing questions, she can generate interest in the most mundane, humdrum situations. When she is bored during a biology lecture, she thinks to herself, "I always get bored when I listen to this instructor. Why is that? Then she asks herself, "What can I do to get value out of this lecture, even though it seems boring?" And she finds an answer.

Competent. Mastery of skills is important to a successful student. When he learns mathematical formulas, he studies them until they become second nature. He practices until he knows them cold and then puts in a few extra minutes of practice. He also is able to apply what he learns to new and different situations.

Joyful. More often than not, a successful student is seen with a smile on her face—sometimes a smile at nothing in particular other than amazement at the world and her experience of it.

Energetic. Notice the student with a spring in his step, the one who is enthusiastic and involved in class. When he reads, he often sits on the very edge of his chair, and he plays with the same intensity. He is determined and persistent. He is a successful student.

Self-aware. A successful student is willing to evaluate herself and her behavior. She regularly tells the truth about her strengths and those aspects that could be improved.

Responsible. There is a difference between responsibility and blame, and successful students know it well. A successful student is willing to take responsibility for everything in his life. He remembers that by choosing his thoughts and behaviors, he can create interesting classes, enjoyable relationships, fulfilling work experiences, and just about anything else he wants.

Courageous. A successful student admits her fear and fully experiences it. For example, she will approach a tough exam as an opportunity to explore feelings of anxiety and tension related to the pressure to perform. She does not deny fear but embraces it. If she doesn't understand something or makes a mistake, she admits it. When she faces a challenge and bumps into her limits, she asks for help. And she's just as willing to give help as to receive it.

Self-directed. Rewards or punishments provided by others do not motivate a successful student. His desire to learn comes from within, and his goals come from himself. He competes like a star athlete—not to defeat other people but to push himself to the next level of excellence.

Spontaneous. A successful student is truly in the here and now. She is able to respond to the moment in fresh, surprising, and unplanned ways.

Tech savvy. A successful student defines *technology* as any tool that is used to achieve a human purpose. From this point of view, computers become tools for deeper learning, higher productivity, and greater success in the workplace. He searches for information efficiently, thinks critically about data, and uses technology to create online communities. If he isn't familiar with a type of technology, he doesn't get overwhelmed. Instead, he embraces learning about the new technology and finding ways to use it to help him succeed at a given task.

Intuitive. A successful student has an inner sense that cannot be explained by logic alone. She trusts her gut instincts as well as her mind.

Creative. Where others see dull details and trivia, a successful student sees opportunities to create. He can gather pieces of knowledge from a wide range of subjects and can put them together in new ways. A successful student is creative in every aspect of his life.

Optimistic. A successful student sees setbacks as temporary and isolated, knowing that she can choose her response to any circumstance.

Hungry. Human beings begin life with a natural appetite for knowledge. In some people, it soon gets dulled. A successful student has tapped that hunger, and it gives him a desire to learn for the sake of learning.

Caring. A successful student cares about knowledge and has a passion for ideas. She also cares about other people and appreciates learning from them. She collaborates on projects and thrives on teams. She flourishes in a community that values win-win outcomes, cooperation, and love.

Reading: Actions and Behaviors of a Successful Student

In addition to improving personal characteristics, successful students must be willing to take actions that would contribute to her success. Which of the following are you willing to do?

Willing to change. The unknown does not frighten a successful student. In fact, she welcomes it—even the unknown in herself. We all have pictures of who we think we are, and these pictures can be useful. But they also can prevent learning and growth. A successful student is open to changes in her environment and in herself.

Willing to take risks. A successful student often takes on projects with no guarantee of success. He participates in class discussions at the risk of looking foolish. He tackles difficult subjects in term papers. He welcomes the risk of a challenging course.

Willing to participate. Don't look for a successful student on the sidelines. She is in the game. She is a team player who can be counted on. She is engaged at school, at work, and with friends and family. She is willing to make a commitment and to follow through on it.

Willing to accept paradox. The word *paradox* comes from two Greek words: *para* (meaning *beyond*) and *doxen* (meaning *opinion*). A paradox is something that is beyond opinion or, more accurately, that seems contradictory or absurd yet might actually have meaning. For example, a successful student can be committed to managing money and reaching his financial goals. At the same time, he can be totally detached from money, knowing that his real worth is independent of how much money he has. A successful student recognizes the limitations of the mind and is at home with paradox. He can accept that ambiguity.

Willing to be uncomfortable. A successful student does not place comfort first. When discomfort is necessary to reach a goal, she is willing to experience it. She can endure personal hardships and can look at unpleasant things with detachment.

Willing to laugh. A successful student might laugh at any moment, and his sense of humor includes the ability to laugh at himself. Going to school is a big investment with high stakes, but you don't have to enroll in the deferred-fun program. A successful student celebrates learning, and one of the best ways to do so is to laugh every now and then.

Willing to work. Once inspired, a successful student is willing to follow through with sweat. She knows that genius and creativity are the result of persistence and work. When in high gear, a successful student works with the intensity of a child at play.

Willing to make choices to be well. Health is important to a successful student, although not necessarily in the sense of being free of illness. Rather, he values his body and treats it with respect. He tends to his emotional and spiritual health as well as his physical health.

Reading: Personal Abilities of a Successful Student

In addition to possessing personal characteristics and qualities, a successful student also has specific abilities that contribute to his success. Which of the following abilities do you possess?

Able to focus attention. Watch a 2-year-old at play. Pay attention to his eyes. The wide-eyed look reveals an energy and a capacity for amazement that keep him absolutely focused on the here and now. The world, to a child, is always new. Because a successful student can focus attention, to him the world is always new, too.

Able to organize and sort. A successful student can take a large body of information and sift through it to discover relationships. She can organize data by size, color, function, time lines, and hundreds of other categories. She has the guts to set big goals and has the precision to plan carefully so that those goals can be achieved.

Able to suspend judgment. A successful student has opinions and positions, but he is able to let go of them when appropriate. He realizes he is more than his thoughts. He can quiet his internal dialogue and listen to an opposing viewpoint. He doesn't let judgment get in the way of learning. Rather than approach discussions with a "Prove it to me, and then I'll believe it" attitude, he asks himself, "What if this is true?" and then explores the possibilities.

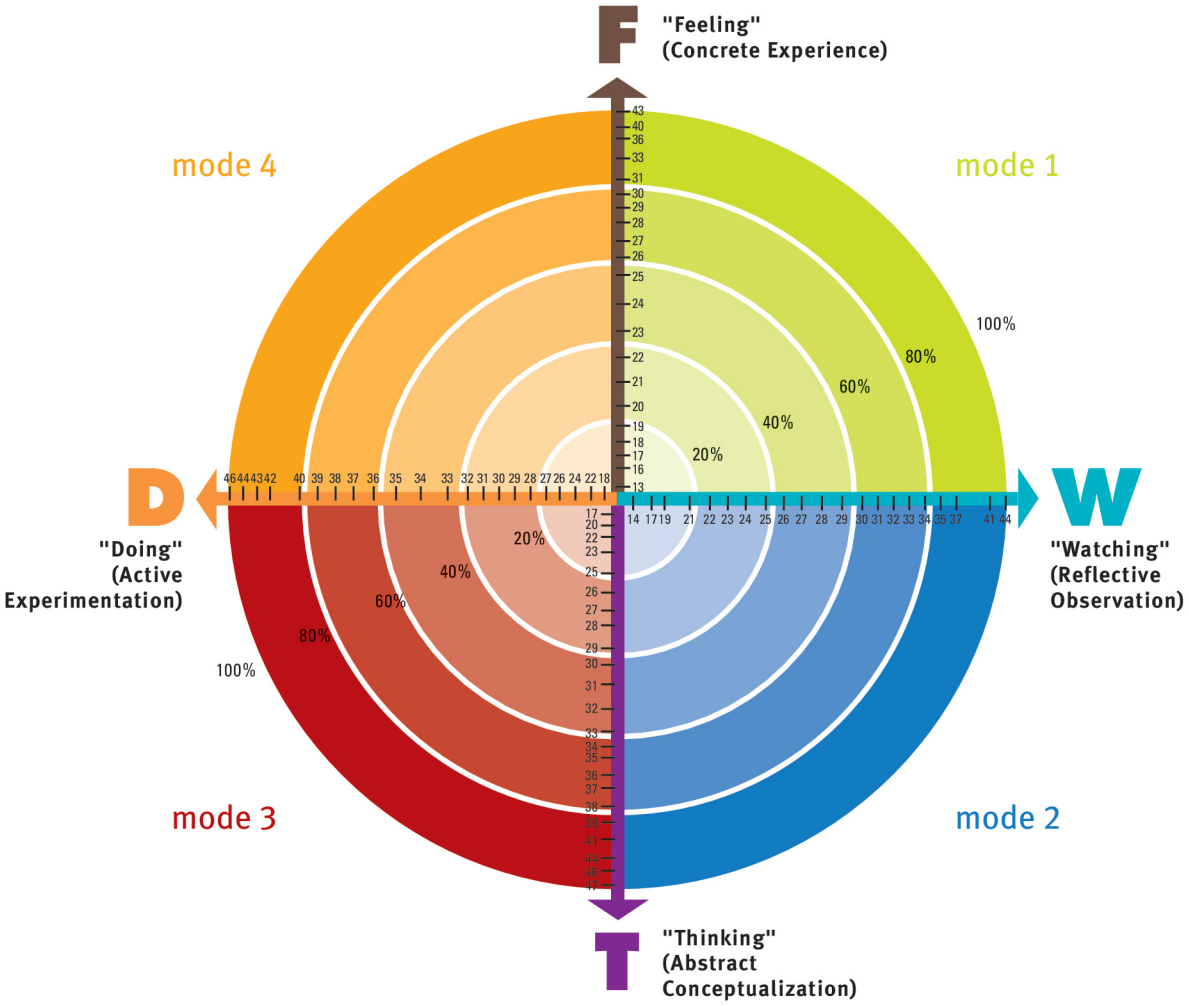
Able to be relaxed about grades. Grades make a successful student neither depressed nor euphoric. She recognizes that sometimes grades are important. At the same time, grades are not the only reason she studies. She does not measure her worth as a human being by the grades she receives.

Able to be a generalist. A successful student is interested in everything around him. In the classroom, he is fully present. Outside the classroom, he actively seeks out ways to deepen his learning—through study groups, campus events, student organizations, and team-based projects. Through such experiences, he develops a broad base of knowledge in many fields that he can apply to his specialties.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Which of these characteristics of a successful student do you have?
- Which actions are you willing to take?
- Which abilities do you possess?
- Which characteristics, actions, and abilities do you need to work on?

Focus on strengthening those characteristics that you already possess, and continue to build on those you don't yet have. You are well on your way to success.



Lesson 1.2: The Learning Process

Lesson 1.2 Introduction

Right now, you are investing substantial amounts of time, money, and energy in your education. What you get in return for this investment depends on how well you understand the process of learning and use it to your advantage.

If you don't understand learning, you might feel bored or confused in class. After getting a low grade, you might have no idea how to respond. Over time, frustration can mount to the point that you question the value of being in school.

Some students answer that question by dropping out of school. These students lose a chance to create the life they want, and society loses the contributions of educated workers.

You can prevent that outcome. Gain strategies for going beyond boredom and confusion. Discover new options for achieving goals, solving problems, listening more fully, speaking more persuasively, and resolving conflicts between people.

Start by understanding the different ways that people create meaning from their experience and change their behavior. In other words, it is important to learn about *how* we learn.

The Learning Process: Perceiving and Processing

When we learn well, says psychologist David Kolb, two things happen.

First, we perceive. That is, we notice events and "take in" new experiences.

Second, *we process*. We "deal with" experiences in a way that helps us make sense of them. According to Kolb (1984), each mode of learning represents a unique way of perceiving and processing our experiences. The following image illustrates the four modes of learning:

Mode 1: Concrete experience (feeling)

Mode 2: Reflective observation (watching)

Mode 3: Abstract conceptualization (thinking)

Mode 4: Active experimentation (doing)

Concrete experience. Some people prefer to perceive by *feeling* (also called *concrete experience*). They like to absorb information through their five senses. They learn by getting directly involved in new experiences. When solving problems, they rely on intuition as much as intellect. These people typically function well in unstructured classes that allow them to take initiative.

Reflective observation. Some people prefer to process by *watching* (also called *reflective observation*). They prefer to stand back, watch what is going on, and think about it. They consider several points of view as they attempt to make sense of things and generate many ideas about how something happens. They value patience, good judgment, and a thorough approach to learning.

Abstract conceptualization. Other people like to perceive by *thinking* (also called *abstract conceptualization*). They take in information best when they can think about it as a subject separate from themselves. They analyze, intellectualize, and create theories. Often, these people take a scientific approach to problem solving and excel in traditional classrooms.

Active experimentation. Other people like to process by *doing* (also called *active experimentation*). They prefer to jump in and start doing things immediately. These people do not mind taking risks as they attempt to make sense of things; this helps them learn. They are results oriented and look for practical ways to apply what they have learned.

Perceiving and Processing—An Example

Suppose that you're considering a new smartphone. It has more features than any phone you've used before. You have many options for learning how to use it. If you were to get the phone, which of the following would you tend to do to learn how to use it?

- Get your hands on the phone right away, press some buttons, and see whether you can browse online and access apps. This is an example of learning through concrete experience.
- Recall experiences you've had with phones in the past and what you've learned by watching other people use their phones. This is an example of learning through reflective observation.
- Read the instruction manual and view help screens on the phone before you try to make a call. This is an example of learning through abstract conceptualization.
- Ask a friend who owns the same type of phone to coach you as you experiment with making calls and sending messages. This is an example of learning through active experimentation.

In summary, your learning style is the unique way that you blend feeling, thinking, watching, and doing. You tend to use this approach in learning anything—from cell phones to English composition to calculus.

Reference

Kolb, David A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.

The Learning Process: Multiple Intelligences

People often think that being smart means the same thing as having a high IQ, and that having a high IQ automatically leads to success. However, psychologists are finding that IQ scores do not always foretell which students will do well in academic settings—or after they graduate (Bernstein et al. 2006, 368–69).

Howard Gardner of Harvard University believes that no single measure of intelligence can tell us how smart we are. Instead, he defines intelligence in a flexible way as "the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within one or more cultural settings" (Gardner 1993). He also identifies several types of intelligences.

Multiple Intelligences

People using **verbal/linguistic intelligence** are adept at language skills and learn best by speaking, writing, reading, and listening. They are likely to enjoy activities such as telling stories and doing crossword puzzles.

People who use **mathematical/logical intelligence** are good with numbers, logic, problem solving, patterns, relationships, and categories. They are generally precise and methodical, and they are likely to enjoy science.

When people learn visually and by organizing things spatially, they display **visual/spatial intelligence**. They think in images and pictures and understand best by seeing the subject. They enjoy charts, graphs, maps, mazes, tables, illustrations, art, models, puzzles, and costumes.

People using **bodily/kinesthetic intelligence** prefer physical activity. They enjoy activities such as building things, woodworking, dancing, skiing, sewing, and crafts. They generally are coordinated and athletic, and they would rather participate in games than just watch.

Individuals using **musical/rhythmic intelligence** enjoy musical expression through songs, rhythms, and musical instruments. They are responsive to various kinds of sounds; remember melodies easily; and might enjoy drumming, humming, and whistling.

People using **intrapersonal intelligence** are exceptionally aware of their own feelings and values. They are generally reserved, self-motivated, and intuitive.

Outgoing people show evidence of **interpersonal intelligence**. They do well with cooperative learning and are sensitive to the feelings, intentions, and motivations of others. They often make good leaders.

People using **naturalist intelligence** love the outdoors and recognize details in plants, animals, rocks, clouds, and other natural formations. These people excel in observing fine distinctions among similar items.

Each of us has all of these intelligences to some degree. And each of us can learn to enhance them. Experiment with learning in ways that draw on a variety of intelligences—including those that might be less familiar. When we acknowledge all of our intelligences, we can constantly explore new ways of being strategic in our learning.

Reference

Bernstein, Douglas A., Louis A. Penner, Alison Clarke-Stewart, and Edward J. Roy. *Psychology.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* New York: Basic Books, 1993.

The Learning Process: Learning Through Your Senses—VAK

You can approach the topic of learning styles with a simple and powerful system—one that focuses on just three ways of perceiving through your senses:

1. Seeing, or visual learning
2. Hearing, or auditory learning
3. Movement, or kinesthetic learning

To recall this system of learning, remember the letters **VAK**, which stand for **visual**, **auditory**, and **kinesthetic**. The theory is that each of us prefers to learn through one of these senses. We can enrich our learning with activities that draw on the other channels.

To illustrate how each type of learners perceives and processes information, use the following questions to reflect on your VAK preferences. Each question has three possible answers. Write down the answer that best describes how you would respond in the stated situation. This is not a formal inventory—just a way to prompt some self-discovery.

When you have problems spelling a word, you prefer to

1. look it up in the dictionary.
2. say the word out loud several times before you write it down.
3. write out the word with several different spellings and then choose one.

You enjoy courses the most when you get to

1. view slides, overhead displays, videos, and readings with plenty of charts, tables, and illustrations.
2. ask questions, engage in small-group discussions, and listen to guest speakers.
3. take field trips, participate in lab sessions, or apply the course content while working as a volunteer or intern.

When giving someone directions on how to drive to a destination, you prefer to

1. pull out a piece of paper and sketch a map.
2. give verbal instructions.
3. say, “I’m driving to a place near there, so just follow me.”

When planning an extended vacation to a new destination, you prefer to

1. read colorful, illustrated brochures or articles about that place.
2. talk directly to someone who’s been there.
3. spend a day or two at that destination on a work-related trip before taking a vacation there.

You’ve made a commitment to learn to play the guitar. The first thing you do is

1. go to a library or music store and find an instruction book with plenty of diagrams and chord charts.
2. pull out your favorite CDs, listen closely to the guitar solos, and see whether you can play along with them.
3. buy or borrow a guitar, pluck the strings, and ask someone to show you how to play a few chords.

You’ve saved up enough money to lease a car. When choosing from among several new models, the most important factor in your decision is

1. the information you read from sources like *Consumer Reports*.
2. the information you get by talking to people who own the cars you're considering.
3. the overall impression you get by taking each car on a test drive.

You've just bought a new computer system. When setting up the system, the first thing you do is

1. skim through the printed instructions that come with the equipment.
2. call someone with a similar system and ask her for directions.
3. assemble the components as best as you can, see whether everything works, and consult the instructions only as a last resort.

You get a scholarship to study abroad next semester, which starts in just three months. You will travel to a country where French is the most widely spoken language. To learn as much French as you can before you depart, you

1. buy a video-based language course that's recorded on a DVD.
2. set up tutoring sessions with a friend who's fluent in French.
3. sign up for a short immersion course in an environment in which you speak only French, starting with the first class.

Now, take a few minutes to reflect on the meaning of your responses.

- All of the answers numbered "1" are examples of visual learning.
- Those numbered "2" refer to auditory learning.
- Those numbered "3" illustrate kinesthetic learning.

A consistent pattern in your answers indicates that you prefer learning through one sense channel more than others. Or you might find that your preferences are fairly balanced.

Lesson 1.3: Planning for Success

Lesson 1.3 Introduction

Now that you know more about how people learn, you want to think about how to apply it to your own learning. How do you learn best? How can you use that information to be a more successful student?

To learn more about your strengths and weaknesses as a learner, you can complete various inventories related to learning styles, attitudes, and motivations. For some of us, it's even harder to recognize our strengths than to recognize our weaknesses. Maybe we don't want to brag. Maybe we're attached to a poor self-image. The reasons don't matter. Part of becoming a successful student means telling the truth about our positive qualities, too.

Remember that weaknesses are often strengths taken to an extreme. The student who carefully revises her writing can make significant improvements in a term paper. If she revises too much and hands in the paper late, though, her grade might suffer. Any success strategy carried too far can backfire.

Figuring out how you learn and how to use that information is an important step in becoming a master student. You explored the various learning theories, and during this module, you will learn more about how to develop strategies to enhance your learning.

Planning for Success: Taking the First Steps

To succeed in school, tell the truth about what kind of student you are and what kind of student you want to become. Success starts with telling the truth about what is working—and what is not working—in our lives right now. When we acknowledge our strengths, we gain an accurate

picture of what we can accomplish. When we admit that we have a problem, we are free to find a solution. Ignoring the truth, on the other hand, can lead to problems that stick around for decades.

Let's be truthful: It's not fun to admit our weaknesses. Many of us would approach a frank evaluation of ourselves about as enthusiastically as we would greet a phone call from the bank about an overdrawn account.
There is another way to think about self-evaluations. If we could see them as opportunities to solve problems and take charge of our lives, we might welcome them. Believe it or not, we can begin working with our list of weaknesses by celebrating them.

Whether written or verbal, the ways that we express our self-analysis are more powerful when they are specific. For example, if you want to improve your note-taking skills, you might write, "I am an awful note taker," but it would be more effective to write, "I can't read 80 percent of the notes I took in Introduction to Psychology last week, and I have no idea what was important in that class."

Be just as specific about what you plan to achieve. You might declare, "I want to take legible notes that help me predict what questions will be on the final exam."

As you use the results of your self-analysis, you might feel surprised at what you discover. Just tell the truth about it. The truth has power.

It is important for you to discover and acknowledge your own strengths as well as your areas for improvement. For many students, this is difficult to do. Some people suggest that looking at areas for improvement means focusing on personal weaknesses. They view it as a negative approach that runs counter to positive thinking. Positive thinking is a great technique. So is telling the truth, especially when we see the whole picture—the negative aspects as well as the positive ones.

To start your self-analysis, use the following suggestions as a guideline.

Be specific. It is not effective to write, "I can improve my communication skills." Of course you can. Instead, write down precisely what you can do to improve your communication skills. For example, "I can spend more time really listening while the other person is talking, instead of thinking about what I'm going to say next."

Be self-aware. Look beyond the classroom. What goes on outside school often has the greatest impact on your ability to be an effective student. Consider your strengths and weaknesses that you may think have nothing to do with school.

Be courageous. Self-analysis calls for an important master student quality—courage. It is a waste of time to do this if this is done half-heartedly. Be willing to take risks. You might open a door that reveals a part of yourself that you didn't want to admit was there.

Strengths

Examine your strengths by thinking about the following:

- One area where I show strong skills is …
- Another area of strength is …

Goals

Think about the areas you need to improve and make them your goals:

- The area in which I most want to improve is …
- It is also important for me to get better at …
- I want to concentrate on improving these areas because …
- To meet my goals for improvement, I intend to …

Planning for Success: Self-Analysis Using Discovery Statements

One way of thinking about success or failure is to focus on habits. Behaviors such as ignoring reading assignments or skipping class might be habits that lead to outcomes that *could not* be avoided—including dropping out of school. In the same way, behaviors such as completing assignments and attending class might lead to the outcome of getting an A.

When you confront a behavior that undermines your goals or creates a circumstance that you don't want, consider a new attitude: That behavior is just a habit. And it can be changed.

Thinking about ourselves as creatures of habit actually gives us power. In that way, we are not faced with the monumental task of changing our very nature. Rather, we can take on the doable job of changing our habits. One consistent change in behavior that seems insignificant at first can have effects that ripple throughout your life. Following are ways to test this idea for yourself.

One way to put your self-analysis into action is by journaling about your behaviors and habits and then creating discovery and intention statements.

Discovery Statements

Through **discovery statements**, you gain *awareness* of "where you are." These statements are a record of what you are learning about yourself as a student—both your strengths and your weaknesses. Discovery statements can also be declarations of your goals, descriptions of your attitudes, statements of your feelings, transcripts of your thoughts, and chronicles of your behaviors.

Sometimes, discovery statements chronicle an a-ha! moment—a flash of insight that results when you connect a new idea with your previous experiences, preferred styles of learning, or both. Perhaps a solution to a long-standing problem suddenly occurs to you. Or a life-changing insight wells up from the deepest recesses of your mind. Don't let such moments disappear. Capture them in discovery statements.

Record the specifics about your thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Notice your thoughts, observe your actions, and record them accurately. Get the facts. If you spent 90 minutes to checking your social media feed instead of reading your anatomy text, write about it. Include details.

Use discomfort as a signal. When you approach a daunting task, such as a difficult math problem, notice your physical sensations. Feeling uncomfortable, bored, or tired might be a signal that you're about to do valuable work. Stick with it. Write about it. Tell yourself you can handle the discomfort just a little bit longer. You will be rewarded with a new insight.

Suspend judgment. When you are discovering yourself, be gentle. Suspend self-judgment. If you continually judge your behaviors as "bad" or "stupid," your mind will quit making discoveries. For your own benefit, be kind to yourself.

Tell the truth. Suspending judgment helps you tell the truth about yourself. "The truth will set you free" is a saying that endures for a reason. The closer you get to the truth, the more powerful your discovery statements. If you notice that you are avoiding the truth, don't blame yourself. Just tell the truth about it.

Planning for Success: Taking Actions Using Intention Statements

Intention statements can be used to alter your course. These statements are about your *commitment* to take action based on increased awareness. An intention arises out of your choice to direct your energy toward a specific task and to aim at a particular goal. The processes of discovery and intention reinforce each other.

Even simple changes in behavior can produce results. If you feel like procrastinating, then tackle just one small, specific task related to your intention. Find something you can complete in minutes or less, and do it *now*. For example, access just one website related to the topic of your next assigned paper. Spend just 3 minutes previewing a reading assignment. Taking baby steps like these can move you into action with grace and ease.

Make intentions positive. The purpose of writing intention statements is to focus on what you want rather than what you don't want. Instead of writing, "I will not fall asleep while studying chemistry," write, "I intend to stay awake when studying chemistry." Also, avoid the word *try*. Trying is not doing. When we hedge our bets with try, we can always tell ourselves, "Well, I *tried* to stay awake."

Make intentions observable. Rather than writing, "I intend to work harder on my history assignments," write, "I intend to review my class notes, and I intend to make summary sheets of my reading."

Make intentions small and achievable. Break large goals into small, specific tasks that can be accomplished quickly. Small and simple changes in behavior—when practiced consistently over time—can have large and lasting effects.

When setting your goals, anticipate self-sabotage. Be aware of what you might do, consciously or unconsciously, to undermine your best intentions. Also, be careful with intentions that depend on other people. If you intend for your study group to complete an assignment by Monday, then your success depends on the students in the group. Likewise, you can support your group's success by following through on your stated intentions.

Set time lines. For example, if you are assigned a paper to write, break the assignment into small tasks and set a precise due date for each one: "I intend to select a topic for my paper by 9:00 A.M. Wednesday."

Move from intention to action. Intention statements are of little use until you act on them. If you want new results in your life, then take action. Life responds to what you *do*.

Planning for Success: Identifying and Changing Habits

Discovery leads to awareness. Intention leads to commitment, which naturally leads to focused action.

The processes of discovery, intention, and action create a dynamic and efficient cycle. First, you write discovery statements about where you are now. Second, you write intention statements about where you want to be and the specific steps you will take to get there. Finally, follow up with action—the sooner, the better. Then, start the cycle again. Write discovery statements about whether or how you act on your intention statements—and what you learn in the process. Follow up with more intention statements about what you will do differently in the future. Then, move into action and describe what happens next.

This process never ends. Each time you repeat the cycle, you get new results. It's all about getting what you want and becoming more effective in everything you do. This is the path of mastery—a path that you can travel for the rest of your life.

Don't panic when you fail to complete an intended task. Straying off course is normal. Simply make the necessary corrections. Consider the first word in the title of the textbook—*becoming*. This word implies that mastery is not an end state or final goal. Rather, mastery is a process that never ends.

Miraculous progress might not come immediately. Do not be concerned. Stay with the cycle. Give it time. Use discovery statements to get a clear view of your world. Then, use intention statements to direct your actions. Whenever you notice progress, record it.

It can take the same amount of energy to get what you don't want in school as it takes to get what you do want. Sometimes getting what you *don't* want takes even more effort.

Planning for Success: Thinking About Motivation

Motivation is an important part of being a successful student. There are at least two ways to think about motivation. One is that the terms *self-discipline*, *willpower*, and *motivation* describe something missing in ourselves. We use these words to explain another person's success—or our own shortcomings: "If I were more motivated, I'd be more successful in school."

The other approach to thinking about motivation is to stop assuming that motivation is mysterious, determined at birth, or hard to come by. Motivation could be something that you already possess—the ability to do a task even when you don't feel like it. This is a habit that you can develop with practice.

Promise it. Motivation can come simply from being clear about your goals and acting on them. Say that you want to start a study group. You can commit yourself to inviting people and setting a time and place to meet. Promise your classmates that you'll do this, and ask them to hold you accountable. Self-discipline, willpower, and motivation—none of these mysterious characteristics has to get in your way. Just make a promise and keep your word.

Befriend your discomfort. Once you're aware of your discomfort, stay with it a few minutes longer. Don't judge it as good or bad. Accepting discomfort robs it of power. It might still be there, but in time it can stop being a barrier for you. Discomfort can be a gift—an opportunity to do valuable work on yourself. On the other side of discomfort lies mastery.

Change your mind—and your body. You can also get past discomfort by planting new thoughts in your mind or changing your physical stance. For example, instead of slumping in a chair, sit up straight or stand up. Get physically active by taking a short walk. Notice what happens to your discomfort.

Work with your thoughts. Replace "I can't stand this" with "I'll feel great when this is done" or "Doing this will help me get something I want."

Sweeten the task. Sometimes it's just one aspect of a task that holds you back. You can stop procrastinating merely by changing that aspect. If distaste for your physical environment keeps you from studying, for example, then change that environment. Reading about social psychology might seem like a yawner when you're alone in a dark corner of the house. Moving to a cheery, well-lit library can sweeten the task.

Turn up the pressure. Sometimes motivation is a luxury. Pretend that the due date for your project has been moved up 1 month, 1 week, or 1 day. Raising the stress level slightly can spur you into action. In that way, the issue of motivation seems beside the point, and meeting the due date moves to the forefront.

Turn down the pressure. The mere thought of starting a huge task can induce anxiety. To get past this feeling, turn down the pressure by taking baby steps. Divide a large project into small tasks. In 30 minutes or less, you could preview a book, create a rough outline for a paper, or solve two or three math problems. Careful planning can help you discover many such steps to make a big job doable.

Ask for support. Other people can become your allies in overcoming procrastination. For example, form a support group and declare what you intend to accomplish before each meeting. Then, ask members to hold you accountable. If you want to begin exercising regularly, ask another person to walk with you three times per week. People in support groups, ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to Weight Watchers, know the power of this strategy.

Compare the payoffs with the costs. Skipping a reading assignment can give you time to go to the movies. However, you might be unprepared for class and have twice as much to read the following week. Maybe there is another way to get the payoff (going to the movies) without paying the cost (skipping the reading assignment). With some thoughtful weekly planning, you might choose to give up a few hours of television and end up with enough time to read the assignment and go to the movies.

Heed the message. Sometimes lack of motivation carries a message that's worth heeding. An example is the student who majors in accounting but seizes every chance to be with children. His

chronic reluctance to read accounting textbooks might not be a problem. Instead, it might reveal his desire to major in elementary education. His original career choice might have come from the belief that "real men don't teach kindergarten." In such cases, an apparent lack of motivation signals a deeper wisdom trying to get through.

Planning for Success: Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Visible measures of success—such as top grades and résumés filled with accomplishments—start with invisible assets called *attitudes*. Some attitudes will help you benefit from all the money and time you invest in higher education. Consider these examples: "Every course is worthwhile." "I learn something from any instructor." "The most important factors in the quality of my education are my own choices."

Other attitudes will render your investment worthless: "This required class is a total waste of time." "You can't learn anything from some instructors." "Success depends on luck more than anything else." "I've never been good at school."

You can change your attitudes through regular practice with affirmations and visualizations.

Affirm It

An affirmation is a statement describing what you want. The most effective affirmations are personal, positive, and written in the present tense.
To use affirmations, first determine what you want, and then describe yourself as if you already have it. To get what you want from your education, you could write, "I, Malika Jones, am a master student. I take full responsibility for my education. I learn with joy, and I use my experiences in each course to create the life that I want."

If you decide that you want a wonderful job, you might write, "I, Peter Webster, have a wonderful job. I respect and love my colleagues, and they feel the same way about me. I look forward to going to work each day."

Effective affirmations include detail. Use brand names, people's names, and your own name. Involve all of your senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Take a positive approach. Instead of saying, "I am not fat," say, "I am slender."

Once you have written an affirmation, repeat it. Practice saying it out loud several times a day.

Visualize It

Here's one way to begin. Choose what you want to improve. Then, describe in writing what it would look like, sound like, and feel like to have that improvement in your life. If you are learning to play the piano, write down briefly what you would see, hear, and feel if you were playing skillfully. If you want to improve your relationships with your children, write down what you would see, hear, and feel if you were communicating with them successfully.

Once you have a sketch of what it would be like to be successful, practice seeing it in your mind's eye. Whenever you toss the basketball, it swishes through the net. Every time you invite someone out on a date, the person says "yes." Each test the teacher hands back to you is graded an A. Practice at least once a day. Then, wait for the results to unfold in your life.
Be clear about what you want, and then practice it.

Developing the Modes of Learning

As you have learned, one of the ways to think about your own learning process is to examine how you perceive and process information—your preferred learning mode. Each mode of learning represents a unique way of perceiving and processing:

- Concrete experience (feeling)
- Reflective observation (watching)

- Abstract conceptualization (thinking)
- Active experimentation (doing)

Although you may tend to favor one of the modes, developing all four modes offers many potential benefits. For example, you can excel in many types of courses and find more opportunities to learn outside the classroom. You can expand your options for declaring a major and choosing a career. You can also work more effectively with people who learn differently from you.

In addition, you'll be able to learn from instructors no matter how they teach. Let go of statements such as "My teachers don't get me" and "The instructor doesn't teach to my learning style." Replace those negative statements with more positive attitudes: "I am responsible for what I learn" and "I will master this subject by using several modes of learning."

No matter which of these you've tended to prefer, you can develop the ability to use all four modes. You can explore new learning styles simply by adopting new habits related to each of these activities. Consider the following suggestions as places to start.

To Gain Concrete Experience (Feeling)

- See a live demonstration or performance related to your course content.
- Engage your emotions by reading a novel or seeing a video related to your course.
- Interview an expert in the subject you're learning or a master practitioner of a skill you want to gain.
- Conduct role-plays, exercises, or games based on your courses.
- Conduct an informational interview with someone in your chosen career or "shadow" that person for a day on the job.
- Look for a part-time job, internship, or volunteer experience that complements what you do in class.
- Deepen your understanding of another culture and extend your foreign language skills by studying abroad.

To Gain More Reflective Observation (Watching)

- Keep a personal journal, and write about connections among your courses.
- Form a study group to discuss and debate topics related to your courses.
- Set up a website, blog, email listserv, or online chat room related to your major.
- Create analogies to make sense of concepts; for instance, see if you can find similarities between career planning and putting together a puzzle.
- Visit your course instructor during office hours to ask questions.
- During social gatherings with friends and relatives, briefly explain to them what your courses are about.

To Develop Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking)

- Take notes on your reading in outline form; consider using word-processing software with an outlining feature.
- Supplement assigned texts with other books, magazine and newspaper articles, and related websites.
- Attend lectures given by your current instructors and others who teach the same subjects.
- Take the ideas presented in text or lectures and translate them into visual form—tables, charts, diagrams, and maps.
- Create visuals and use computer software to recreate them with more complex graphics and animation.

To Gain More Active Experimentation (Doing)

- Conduct laboratory experiments or field observations.
- Go to settings where theories are being applied or tested.
- Make predictions based on theories you learn, and then see if events in your daily life confirm your predictions.
- Try out a new behavior described in a lecture or reading, and observe its consequences in your life.

The following chart identifies some of the natural talents people have, as well as challenges for people who have a strong preference for any one mode of learning. For example, if Mode 2 (Reflective Observation) is most like you, then look at the lower right-hand corner of the following chart to see whether it gives an accurate description of you.

Employing your Multiple Intelligences, Part 1

Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences complements the discussion of different learning styles. The main point is that there are many ways to gain knowledge and acquire new behaviors. You can use Gardner's concepts to explore a range of options for achieving success in school, work, and relationships.

The following list identifies each of the intelligences and describes the strategies you can use to develop more effective learning strategies. As you review each of the first three intelligences

below, write down any of the characteristics that describe you. Also, identify learning strategies that you intend to use. Finally, note any of the possible careers that spark your interest.

Verbal/Linguistic

- Characteristics
  - You enjoy writing letters, stories, and papers.
  - You prefer to write directions rather than draw maps.
  - You take excellent notes from textbooks and lectures.
  - You enjoy reading, telling stories, and listening to them.
- Learning Strategies
  - Highlight, underline, and write notes in your textbooks.
  - Recite new ideas in your own words.
  - Rewrite and edit your class notes.
  - Talk to other people often about what you're studying.
- Careers
  - Librarian, lawyer, editor, journalist, English teacher, radio or television announcer

Mathematical/Logical

- Characteristics
  - You enjoy solving puzzles.
  - You prefer math or science class to English class.
  - You want to know how and why things work.
  - You make careful, step-by-step plans.
- Learning Strategies
  - Analyze tasks so that you can order them in a sequence of steps.
  - Group concepts into categories, and look for underlying patterns.
  - Convert text into tables, charts, and graphs.
  - Look for ways to quantify ideas—express them in numerical terms.
- Careers
  - Accountant, auditor, tax preparer, mathematician, computer programmer, actuary, economist, math or science teacher

Visual/Spatial

- Characteristics
  - You draw pictures to give an example or clarify an explanation.
  - You understand maps and illustrations more readily than text.
  - You assemble things from illustrated instructions.
  - You especially enjoy books that have a lot of illustrations.
- Learning Strategies
  - When taking notes, create concept maps, mind maps, and other visuals.
  - Code your notes by using different colors to highlight main topics, major points, and key details.
  - When your attention wanders, focus it by sketching or drawing.
  - Before you try a new task, visualize yourself doing it well.
- Careers
  - Architect, commercial artist, fine artist, graphic designer, photographer, interior decorator, engineer, cartographer

Reference

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.* New York: Basic Books, 1993.

Employing your Multiple Intelligences, Part 2

Continue to review the next five multiple intelligences. Which intelligences seem to fit your learning preferences?

Bodily/Kinesthetic

- Characteristics
  - You use a lot of gestures when talking.
- Learning Strategies
  - Be active in ways that support concentration; for example, pace as you recite, read while standing up, and create flash cards.
  - Carry materials with you, and practice studying in several different locations.
  - Create hands-on activities related to key concepts; for example, create a game based on course content.
  - Notice the sensations involved with learning something well.
- Careers
  - Physical education teacher, athlete, athletic coach, physical therapist, chiropractor, massage therapist, yoga teacher, dancer, choreographer, actor

Musical/Rhythmic

- Characteristics
  - You often sing in the car or shower.
  - You easily tap your foot to the beat of a song.
  - You play a musical instrument.
  - You feel most engaged and productive when music is playing.
- Learning Strategies
  - During a study break, play music or dance to restore energy.
  - Put on background music that enhances your concentration while studying.
  - Relate key concepts to songs you know.
  - Write your own songs based on course content.
- Careers
  - Professional musician, music teacher, music therapist, choral director, musical instrument sales representative, musical instrument maker, piano tuner

Intrapersonal

- Characteristics
  - You enjoy writing in a journal and being alone with your thoughts.
  - You think a lot about what you want in the future.
  - You prefer to work on individual projects over group projects.
  - You take time to think things through before talking or taking action.
- Learning Strategies
  - Connect course content to your personal values and goals.
  - Study a topic alone before attending a study group.
  - Connect readings and lectures to a strong feeling or significant past experience.
  - Keep a journal that relates your course work to events in your daily life.
- Careers
  - Minister, priest, rabbi, professor of philosophy or religion, counseling psychologist, creator of a home-based or small business

Interpersonal

- Characteristics
  - You enjoy group work over working alone.
  - You have plenty of friends and regularly spend time with them.
  - You prefer talking and listening over reading or writing.
  - You thrive in positions of leadership.
- Learning Strategies
  - Form and conduct study groups early in the term.

    - Create flash cards, and use them to quiz study partners.
    - Volunteer to give a speech or lead group presentations on course topics.
    - Teach the topic you're studying to someone else.
- Careers
    - Manager, school administrator, salesperson, teacher, counseling psychologist, arbitrator, police officer, nurse, travel agent, public relations specialist, creator of a midsize to large business

Naturalistic

- Characteristics
    - As a child, you enjoyed collecting insects, leaves, or other natural objects.
    - You enjoy being outdoors.
    - You find that important insights occur during times you spend in nature.
    - You read books and magazines on nature-related topics.
- Learning Strategies
    - During study breaks, take walks outside.
    - Post pictures of outdoor scenes where you study, and play recordings of outdoor sounds while you read.
    - Invite classmates to discuss course work while taking a hike or going on a camping trip.
    - Focus on careers that hold the potential for working outdoors.
- Careers
    - Environmental activist, park ranger, recreation supervisor, historian, museum curator, biologist, criminologist, mechanic, woodworker, construction worker, construction contractor or estimator

Remember this is not an exhaustive list or a formal inventory. Take what you find merely as a starting point to developing your learning strategies. You can invent strategies of your own to cultivate different intelligences.

Developing Your Learning Through Your Senses

Whether you are a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner, you can adjust your study methods to fit your individual learning preference. As you review the following suggestions, think about which study methods you already use. You might consider trying one of these suggestions to support your individual learning preference or try a new method to enhance another learning style.

Enhancing Visual Learning

- Preview reading assignments by looking for elements that are highlighted visually—bold headlines, charts, graphs, illustrations, and photographs.
- When taking notes in class, leave plenty of room to later add your own charts, diagrams, tables, and other visuals.
- Whenever an instructor writes information on a blackboard or overhead display, copy it exactly in your notes.
- Transfer your handwritten notes to your computer. Use word-processing software that allows you to format your notes in lists, add headings in different fonts, and create visuals in color.
- Before you begin an exam, quickly sketch a diagram on scratch paper. Use this diagram to summarize the key formulas or facts you want to remember.
- During tests, see whether you can visualize pages from your handwritten notes or images from your computer-based notes.

Enhancing Auditory Learning

- Reinforce memory of your notes and readings by talking about them. When studying, stop often to recite key points and examples in your own words.

- After reciting several summaries of key points and examples, record your favorite version or write it out.
- Read difficult passages in your textbooks slowly and out loud.
- Join study groups, and create short presentations about course topics.
- Visit your instructors during office hours to ask questions.

Enhancing Kinesthetic Learning

- Look for ways to translate course content into 3D models that you can build. While studying biology, for example, create a model of a human cell using different colors of clay.
- Supplement lectures with trips to museums, field observations, lab sessions, tutorials, and other hands-on activities.
- Recite key concepts from your courses while you walk or exercise.
- Intentionally set up situations in which you can learn by trial and error.
- Create a practice test, and write out the answers in the room where you will actually take the exam.

One variation of the VAK system has been called VARK (Fleming 2012). The *R* describes a preference for learning by reading and writing. People with this preference might benefit from translating charts and diagrams into statements, taking notes in lists, and converting those lists into possible items on a multiple-choice test.

Reference

Fleming, Neil. 2012. “VARK: A Guide to Learning Styles.” Accessed November 8, 2012. www.vark-learn.com/.

MODULE 2

CHOOSING A CAREER PATH

Introduction

Module 2 Introduction

There's an old saying, "If you enjoy what you do, you'll never work another day in your life."

If you clearly define your career goals and your strategy for reaching them, you can plan your education effectively and create a seamless transition from school to the workplace.

When people learn study skills and life skills, they usually start with finding out things they don't know. That means discovering new strategies for taking notes, reading, writing, managing time, and the other subjects covered in the textbook.

Career planning is different. You can begin your career planning education by realizing how much you know right now. You've already made many decisions about your career. This is true for young people who say, "I don't have any idea what I want to be when I grow up." It's also true for midlife career changers.

Consider the student who can't decide whether she wants to be a cost accountant or a tax accountant and then jumps to the conclusion that she is totally lost when it comes to career planning. It's the same with the student who doesn't know whether he wants to be a veterinary assistant or a nurse.

These people forget that they already know a lot about their career choices. The person who couldn't decide between veterinary assistance and nursing had already ruled out becoming a lawyer, computer programmer, or teacher. He just didn't know yet whether he had the right bedside manner for horses or for people. The person who was debating tax accounting versus cost accounting already knew she didn't want to be a doctor, playwright, or taxicab driver. She did know she liked working with numbers and balancing books.

In each case, these people have already narrowed their list of career choices to a number of jobs in the same field—jobs that draw on the same core skills. In general, they already know what they want to be when they grow up.

Many people approach career planning as if they were panning for gold. They keep sifting through the dirt, clearing the dust, and throwing out the rocks. They are hoping to strike it rich and discover the perfect career.

Other people believe that they'll wake up one morning, see the heavens part, and suddenly know what they're supposed to do. Many of them are still waiting for that magical day to dawn.

You can approach career planning in a different way. Instead of seeing a career as something you discover, you can see it as something you choose. You don't find the right career. You create it.

There's a big difference between these two approaches. Thinking that there's only one "correct" choice for your career can lead to a lot of anxiety: "Did I choose the right one?" "What if I made a mistake?"

Viewing your career as your creation helps you relax. Instead of anguishing over finding the right career, you can stay open to possibilities. You can choose one career today, knowing that you can choose again later.

Lesson 2.1: Exploring Career Options

Lesson 2.1 Introduction

Start the process of career planning, even if you're not sure where to begin. The final format of your plan is up to you. You might include many details, such as the next job title you'd like to have, the courses required for your major, and other training that you want to complete. You might list companies to research and people that could hire you. You might also include target dates to complete each of these tasks.

One option is to represent your plan visually through flowcharts, time lines, mind maps, or drawings. You can generate these by hand or using computer software.

The goal is to begin the process of discovery. You can always change direction after some investigation.

- The career I choose for now is …
- The major steps that will guide me to this career are …
- The immediate steps I will take to pursue this career are …

This lesson will guide you through ways to explore your career options, including choosing a career path, building a career network, and identifying your transferrable skills.

Exploring a Career Choice

You have many options for integrating work into the context of your life. You can work full-time. You can work part-time. You can commute to a cubicle in a major corporation. Or you can work at home and take the 30-second commute from your bedroom to your desk. Close your eyes. Visualize an ideal day in your life after graduation. Vividly imagine the following:

- Your work setting
- Your coworkers
- Your calendar and to-do list for that day
- Other sights and sounds in your work environment

This visualization emphasizes the importance of finding a match between your career and your lifestyle preferences—the amount of flexibility in your schedule, the number of people you see each day, the variety in your tasks, and the ways that you balance work with other activities.

Career-planning materials and counselors can help you test your choice and change it if you decide to do so. Read books about careers. Search for career-planning websites. Ask career counselors about skills assessments that can help you discover more about your skills and identify jobs that call for those skills. Take career planning courses and workshops sponsored by your school. Visit the career-planning and job placement offices on campus.

Once you have a career choice, translate it into workplace experience. Here are some examples:

- Contact people who are actually doing the job you're researching, and ask them a lot of questions about what it's like (an *information interview*).
- Choose an internship or volunteer position in a field that interests you.
- Get a part-time or summer job in your career field.

If you find that you enjoy such experiences, you've probably made a wise career choice. And the people you meet are possible sources of recommendations, referrals, and employment in the

future. If you did *not* enjoy your experiences, celebrate what you learned about yourself. Now, you're free to refine your initial career choice or go in a new direction.

Career planning is not a once-and-for-all proposition. Rather, career plans are made to be changed and refined as you gain new information about yourself and the world. You might not walk straight into your dream job right after graduation. And you can approach *any* position in a way that takes you one step closer to your career goal. Do your best at every job, and stay flexible. Career planning never ends, and the process is the same whether you're choosing your first career or your fifth.

Supporting Your Career Plan

Now that you've thought more about your career plan, you can make choices such as choosing a major and creating an academic plan.

Choosing a Major

One of the ways to help you choose a major is by completing the following steps:

Step 1: Discover options. Look at your school's catalog or website for a list of majors. Make a photocopy of that list or print it out. Spend at least 5 minutes reading through all the majors that your school offers.

Step 2: Make a trial choice. Cross out all of the majors that you already know are *not* right for you. You will probably eliminate well over half the list. Scan the remaining majors. Next to the ones that definitely interest you, write "yes." Next to majors that you're willing to consider and are still unsure about, write "maybe."

Now, focus on your "yes" choices. See whether you can narrow them down to three majors.

Finally, write an asterisk next to the major that interests you most right now. *This is your trial choice of major*.

Step 3: Evaluate your trial choice. Congratulations on making your choice! Now, take a few minutes to reflect on it. Does it align with your interests, skills, and career plans? Set a goal to test your choice of major with an out-of-classroom experience. Examples are internships, field experiences, study abroad programs, and work-study assignments. Note that these experiences might confirm your trial choice—or lead to a new choice of major.

Creating Your Academic Plan

An academic plan is a road map for getting the most out of your education. It is a document listing all of the courses you plan to take and *when* you plan to take each one. (At some schools, it is called a *degree plan*.)

Step 1: You probably started an academic plan when you registered for school. If you have any notes or materials from that experience, then review them. Also review your school's course catalog and website.

Step 2: Using all of the information you've gathered so far, create your list of planned courses on a separate sheet of paper. Another option is to use your computer and create your list with word-processing, outlining, or spreadsheet software.

- Consider formatting your plan as a chart:
    - In the first column, list the name of each course.
    - In the second column, write the number of credits for each course.
    - In the third column, note the term you plan to take each course (for example, *Spring 2018*). Be sure to check your college catalog for course prerequisites or corequisites.

Step 3: Now, evaluate your academic plan. Make sure that it

- gives you the total number of credits you need to graduate.
- meets your school's requirements for general education.
- meets the requirements for your major, your minor, or both.

Reach out to instructors and advisors for help. Use available resources to create an academic plan that fuels your success.

Building a Career Network

One key to making your career plan real and ensuring that you can act on it is *naming*. Include specific names whenever they're called for. Here are some examples:

- **Name your job.** List the skills you enjoy using, and find out which jobs use them (you can begin by going to the O*NET OnLine website). What are those jobs' titles? List them. Note that the same job might have different names.
- **Name your company—the agency or organization you want to work for.** If you want to be self-employed or start your own business, name the product or service you'd sell. Also, list some possible names for your business. If you plan to work for others, name the organizations or agencies that are high on your list.
- **Name your contacts.** Take the list of organizations you just compiled. Find out which people in these organizations are responsible for hiring. List those people, and contact them directly. If you choose self-employment, list the names of possible customers or clients. All of these people are job contacts.
- **Name your location.** Ask whether your career choices are consistent with your preferences about where to live and work. For example, someone who wants to make a living as a studio musician might consider living in a large city such as New York or Toronto. This contrasts with the freelance graphic artist who conducts his business mainly by phone, fax, and email. He might be able to live anywhere and still pursue his career.

Now, expand your list of contacts by brainstorming with your family and friends. Come up with a list of names—anyone who can help you with career planning and job hunting. Write each of these names on a 3 × 5 card; you can also use a spiral-bound notebook, computer, or smartphone.

Next, contact the people on your list to conduct an information interview to get to know people in your career field.

- **Call the key people on your list.** Ask them about their career experiences, tell them about the career path you're considering, and probe their knowledge of the industry you're interested in. After you speak with them, make brief notes about what you discussed. Also jot down any actions you agreed to take, such as a follow-up call.
- **Send a short email to a person on your list.** This is someone who's doing the kind of work that you'd love to do. Invite that person to coffee or lunch. If that's not feasible, then ask for a time to talk on the phone or to videoconference. Explain that you'd like to have a 20-minute conversation to learn more about what people in your career field do and about how they get hired. Again, you're asking for an information interview rather than a job interview. Whenever possible, make this contact after getting an introduction from someone that both of you know.

Consider everyone you meet as a potential member of your job network. Be prepared to talk about what you do. Develop a **pitch**—a short statement of your career goal that you can easily share with your contacts. For example: "After I graduate, I plan to work in the travel business. I'm looking for an internship in a travel agency for next summer. Do you know of any agencies that take interns?"

Everyone has a network. The key is to discover it and develop it.

Reference

O*NET OnLine. https://www.onetonline.org (accessed November 20, 2017).

Defining Transferrable Skills

Few words are as widely misunderstood as **skill**. Defining this word carefully can have an immediate and positive impact on your career planning.

One dictionary defines *skill* as "the ability to do something well, usually gained by training or experience." Some skills—such as the ability to repair fiber-optic cables or do brain surgery—are acquired through formal schooling, on-the-job training, or both. These abilities are called **work-content skills**. People with such skills have mastered a specialized body of knowledge needed to do a specific kind of work.

However, there is another category of skills that we develop through experiences both inside and outside the classroom. These are **transferable skills**. Transferable skills are abilities that help people thrive in any job—no matter what work-content skills they have. You start developing these skills even before you take your first job.

Perhaps you've heard someone described this way: "She's really smart and knows what she's doing, but she's got lousy people skills." People skills—such as *listening* and *negotiating*—are prime examples of transferable skills.

Transferable skills are often invisible to us. The problem begins when we assume that a given skill can be used in only one context, such as being in school or working at a particular job. Thinking in this way places an artificial limit on our possibilities.

Exploring Transferrable Skills

As an alternative, think about the things you routinely do to succeed in school. Analyze your activities to isolate specific skills. Then, brainstorm a list of jobs where you could use the same skills.

Consider the task of writing a research paper. This calls for the following skills:

- *Planning*, including setting goals for completing your outline, first draft, second draft, and final draft
- *Managing time* to meet your writing goals
- *Interviewing* people who know a lot about the topic of your paper
- *Researching* using the Internet and campus library to discover key facts and ideas to include in your paper
- *Writing* to present those facts and ideas in an original way
- *Editing* your drafts for clarity and correctness

Now, consider the kinds of jobs that draw on these skills.

For example, you could transfer your skill at writing papers to a possible career in journalism, technical writing, or advertising copywriting. You could use your editing skills to work in the field of publishing as a magazine or book editor.

When meeting with an academic advisor, you may be tempted to say, "I've just been taking general education and liberal arts courses. I don't have any marketable skills." Think again. Interviewing and researching skills could help you enter the field of market research. The abilities to plan, manage time, and meet deadlines will help you succeed in all of the jobs mentioned so far.

Use the same kind of analysis to think about transferring skills from one job to another. Say that you work part-time as an administrative assistant at a computer dealer that sells a variety of hardware and software. You take phone calls from potential customers, help current customers solve problems using their computers, and attend meetings where your coworkers plan ways to

market new products. You are developing skills at *selling*, *serving customers*, and *working on teams*. These skills could help you land a job as a sales representative for a computer manufacturer or software developer.

The basic idea is to take a cue from the word *transferable*. Almost any skill you use to succeed in one situation can transfer to success in another situation.

The concept of transferable skills creates a powerful link between higher education and the work world. Skills are the core elements of any job. While taking any course, list the specific skills you are developing and how you can transfer them to the work world. Almost everything you do in school can be applied to your career—if you consistently pursue this line of thought.

You might want to do some additional research on the types of skills important as you develop your career path, and ask yourself:

- What skills are important in my specific career path?
- Which skills do I already possess?
- Which skills do I need to continue to develop?

Asking the Right Questions

To experiment further with this concept of transferable skills, ask and answer four questions.

***Why* identify my transferable skills?** Getting past the "I-don't-have-any-skills" syndrome means that you can approach job hunting with more confidence. As you uncover these hidden assets, your list of qualifications will grow as if by magic. You won't be padding your résumé. You'll simply be using action words to tell the full truth about what you can do.

Identifying your transferable skills takes a little time. But the payoffs are numerous. A complete and accurate list of transferable skills can help you land jobs that involve more responsibility, more variety, more freedom to structure your time, and more money. Careers can be made—or broken—by the skills that allow you to define your job, manage your workload, and get along with people.

Transferable skills help you thrive in the midst of constant change. Technology will continue to develop. Ongoing discoveries in many fields could render current knowledge obsolete. Jobs that exist today may disappear in a few years, only to be replaced by entirely new ones.

In the economy of the twenty-first century, you might not be able to count on job security. What you *can* count on is *skills security*—abilities that you can carry from one career to another or acquire as needed.

***What* are my transferable skills?** Discover your transferable skills by reflecting on key experiences. Recall a time when you performed at the peak of your ability, overcame obstacles, won an award, gained a high grade, or met a significant goal. List the skills you used to create those successes.

For a more complete picture of your transferable skills, describe the object of your action. Say that one of the skills on your list is organizing. This could refer to organizing ideas, organizing people, or organizing objects in a room. Specify the kind of organizing that you like to do.

***How* do I perform these skills?** You can bring your transferable skills into even sharper focus by adding adverbs—words that describe *how* you take action. You might say that you edit *accurately* or learn *quickly*.

You can use a three-column chart to summarize your transferable skills; see the following for an example. Create a three-column chart. Label the first column Verb. Label the second column Object. Label the third column Adverb.

VERB	OBJECT	ADVERB
Organizing	Records	Effectively
Serving	Customers	Courteously
Coordinating	Special events	Efficiently

Add a specific example of each transferable skill to your skills list, and you're well on the way to an engaging résumé and a winning job interview.

***What if* I could expand my transferable skills?** In addition to thinking about the skills you already have, consider the skills you'd like to acquire. Describe them in detail. List experiences that can help you develop them. Let your list of transferable skills grow and develop as you do.

Identifying Your Transferrable Skills

Discovering your skills includes three steps. Before you begin, gather at least a hundred 3 × 5 cards and a pen or pencil. Or open up a computer file and use any software that allows you to create lists. Allow about 1 hour to complete the exercise.

These areas of knowledge indicate your work-content skills. For example, tutoring a French class requires a working knowledge of that language.

List all of your skills that fall into this category, labeling each one as *work content*.

Step 1: List recent activities. Recall your activities during the past week or month. Jot down as many of these activities as you can. (If you're using 3 × 5 cards, list each item on a separate card.) Include work-related activities, school activities, and hobbies. Spend 10 minutes on this step.

Step 2: List rewards and recognitions. Next, list any rewards you've received, or other recognition of your achievements, during the past year. Examples include scholarship awards, athletic awards, or recognitions for volunteer work. Allow 10 minutes for this step as well.

Step 3: List work-content skills. Now, review the two lists you just created. Take another 10 minutes to list any specialized areas of knowledge needed to do those activities, win those awards, and receive those recognitions.

Step 4: List transferable skills. Go over your list of activities one more time. Spend 10 minutes looking for examples of transferable skills—those that can be applied to a variety of situations. For instance, giving a speech or working as a salesperson in a computer store requires the ability to persuade people. Tuning a car means that you can attend to details and troubleshoot. List all of your skills that fall into this category, labeling each one as *transferable*.

Step 5: Review and plan. You now have a detailed picture of your skills. Review all the lists you've created in the previous steps. See whether you can add any items that occur to you. Save your lists in a place where you can easily find them again. Plan to update all of them at least once each year. Your lists will come in handy for writing your résumé, preparing for job interviews, and doing other career-planning tasks.

Lesson 2.2: Creating a Cover Letter and Résumé

Lesson 2.2 Introduction

Part of an effective career plan is knowing how to prepare an effective cover letter and résumé.

The purpose of a cover letter is two-fold: it announces specifically what job you are applying for, and it provides you the opportunity to make a good first impression. In fact, your cover letter may quite possibly determine whether your résumé is considered or not. Therefore, it is clearly in your best interest to spend time composing and polishing a good cover letter to accompany your résumé.

Once you have hooked a prospective employer with an effective cover letter, you want your résumé to make such a strong positive impression that it cinches an interview. A résumé is much more than a list of your qualifications. This document says a lot about who you are, what you love to do, and how you contribute to the world by using your skills. You can gain a lot from thinking about those things now, even if you don't plan to apply for a job in the near future.
Start building your résumé now, even if you don't plan to use one for a while.

You should always have a good electronic version of your cover letter and résumé handy because many companies prefer to receive all materials electronically. Also, many companies are now conducting webcam and video interviews, so it is a good idea to be familiar with that technology as well.

Guidelines for Effective Cover Letters

Use the following guidelines in composing your cover letter:

- Include both a return address (your address) and an inside address (the address of the company to which you are applying) in your document. These should come before your greeting.
- State specifically the position you are applying for and how you learned about that position. For example, was it advertised on the company's website or in a professional journal?
- In your first sentence, address the person who can hire you and grab that person's attention. Make a statement that appeals directly to her self-interest. Write something that moves a potential employer to say, "We can't afford to pass this person up. Call him right away to set up an appointment."
    - To come up with ideas for your opening, complete the following sentence: "The main benefits that I can bring to your organization are …" Another option: "My work experience ties directly to several points mentioned in your job description. First, …"
- If someone whom the employer knows told you about this job opening, mention this person in your opening paragraph, especially if he has a positive reputation in the organization.
- Explain briefly why you are an ideal candidate for the job. A good rule of thumb is to hit the highlights of your résumé without going into too much detail.
- Indicate how you can be reached and what your availability is for an interview.
- End on a positive note. Include your handwritten signature above your typed name.

Guidelines for Creating a Résumé

The purpose of a résumé is to educate potential employers about your background, education, and professional experiences.

There is no one right way to write a résumé. When you go to your school's career planning office, ask to see sample résumés, especially from alumni who got hired. Go online to find even more. You'll notice many differences in style and format.

The main purpose of a résumé is to get you to the next step in the hiring process. This is usually a job interview. See your résumé as a piece of persuasive writing, not a dry recitation of facts or a laundry list of previous jobs. Neatness, organization, and correct grammar and punctuation are

essential. And, they are paths to meeting a larger goal—making a strong impression on someone who has the power to hire you. If your résumé does that, then it works.

People who read your résumé are pressed for time. Assume that they're reviewing hundreds of them and that they only have 10 seconds to scan yours. With this in mind, make your résumé easy to read. Keep it short—one page. Use every line to document a specific accomplishment. Avoid paragraphs, and go for lists instead.

A résumé should be grammatically correct and well organized; it should include headings so that a potential employer can see at a glance if you are a suitable candidate for the job.

As a general rule, your résumé should contain all or most of the following:

- Your contact information, including your name, home address, telephone number, and email address
- An employment objective stating your career objective
- Your work experience, starting with the most current and working backward
- Your education, including areas of study as well as degrees and certificates
- Examples of your service to your community, including volunteer work and service on governing boards
- Examples of awards and honors you have earned, such as memberships in college honor societies and placement at state and national conferences
- Professional and personal references, including contact information (names, phone numbers, and email addresses)
    - If you are in college, getting ready to graduate, or right out of college, consider asking two or three professors if you can list them as references.
    - Always ask permission before listing anyone as a reference.
    - If you have had a negative experience with a professor or a previous employer, do not ask them to serve as a reference.

During a Job Interview

Plan to arrive early for your interview. While you're waiting, observe the workplace. Notice what people are saying and doing. See whether you can "read" the company culture by making informal observations.

When you meet the interviewer, do three things right away: smile, make eye contact, and give a firm handshake. Nonverbal communication creates a lasting impression.

After making small talk, the interviewer will start asking questions. Draw on the answers you've prepared. At the same time, respond to the *exact* questions that you're asked. Speak naturally and avoid the impression that you're making a speech or avoiding a question.

Stay aware of how much you talk. Avoid answers that are too brief or too long. Respond to each question for a minute or two. If you have more to say, end your answer by saying, "Those are the basics. I can add more if you want."

A skilled interviewer will allow time for *you* to ask questions about the company. Use this time to your full advantage.

Some good questions to ask are as follows:

- When does the job begin?
- What is a typical day like?
- What would I work on if I were to get the job?
- What training is offered for this job?
- Are there opportunities to advance?
- Who will supervise me in this job?
- Could I take a tour of the workplace?

Save questions about benefits, salary, and vacation days for the second interview. When you get to that point, you know that the employer is interested in you. You might have leverage to negotiate.

Be sure to find out the next step in the hiring process and when it will take place. Also, ask interviewers for their business cards and how they want you to follow up. Some people are fine with a phone call, , email, or other form of online communication. Others prefer a good, old-fashioned letter.

If you're truly interested in the job and feel comfortable with the interviewer, ask one more question: "Do you have any concerns about hiring me?" Listen carefully to the reply, and then respond to each concern in a polite way.

After a Job Interview

Congratulate yourself for getting as far in the hiring process as an interview. Write a discovery statement that describes your strengths, along with what you learned about your potential employer. Write an intention statement also about ways to be more effective during your next interview.

Now comes the follow-up. This step can give you the edge that leads to a job offer.

Pull out the business cards from the people who interviewed you. Write them thank-you notes, following each person's preference for paper-based or online contact. Do this within 2 business days after the interview. If you talked to several people at the same company, then write a different note to each one.

If you get turned down for the job after your interview, don't take it personally. Every interview is a source of feedback about what works—and what doesn't work—in contacting employers. Use that feedback to interview more effectively next time.

Also, remember that each person you talked to is now a member of your network. This is true even if you do not get a job offer. Follow up by asking interviewers to keep you in mind for future job openings. Using this approach, you gain from every interview, no matter what the outcome.

MODULE 3

SETTING AND ATTAINING GOALS

Introduction

Many people have no goals or have only vague, idealized notions of what they want. These notions float among the clouds in their heads. They are wonderful, fuzzy, safe thoughts such as “I want to be a good person,” “I want to be financially secure,” or “I want to be happy.”

Generalized outcomes have great potential as achievable goals. When we keep these goals in a nonspecific form, however, we may become confused about ways to actually achieve them.

Make your goal as real as a finely tuned engine. There is nothing vague or fuzzy about engines. You can see them, feel them, and hear them. You can take them apart and inspect the moving parts.

Goals can be every bit as real and useful. If you really want to meet a goal, then take it apart. Inspect the moving parts—the physical actions that you will take to make the goal happen and fine-tune your life.

There are many useful methods for setting goals. Experiment and modify as you see fit.

Lesson 3.1: Defining Goals

Lesson 3.1 Introduction

An important part of being a successful student is defining your goals and developing a plan to meet those goals. Your goals are the overarching principles that help guide your decisions and help you make your plan for success. Goals are broad, general ideas about what you want to accomplish.

Objectives then, are the smaller, more defined steps you take to meet your goals. Objectives are more specific than goals. They must be measurable. For example, the objective “to learn more about project management” is not measurable. How would you determine if you met that objective?

Objectives should be realistic as well. For example, let’s say you set the objective of taking five classes per term for the next two years to meet your goal of graduating with a bachelor’s degree in project management. However, you also have a full-time job, which requires you to travel, and three children under the age of five to care for. Would this be a realistic objective? Likely not.

The first step of setting and attaining appropriate goals is to define the areas in which you want to create goals.

Identifying Goals

An important part of setting goals is to figure out the areas of your life where you can set goals. You should write goals in several areas of life. People who set goals in only one area of life—such as their career—may find that their personal growth becomes one-sided. They might experience success at work while neglecting their health or relationships with family members and friends.

To avoid this outcome, set goals in a variety of categories. Consider what you want to experience in these areas:

- Education
- Career
- Finances
- Family life or relationships
- Social life
- Spirituality
- Health

Add goals in other areas as they occur to you.

Lesson 3.2: Setting a Time Frame for Your Goals

Lesson 3.2 Introduction

Once you have defined the areas in your life for which you want to set goals, then you want to think about the time frame in which you want to accomplish those goals.

Let's say your goal is to complete your degree in project management in four years. That is a measurable goal and certainly attainable. However, the end time is four years away. What happens during those four years? How do you know if you are meeting the necessary smaller steps along the way? Should all goals have the same timeline?

It is important to feel a sense of accomplishment when you set and attain goals. Part of a comprehensive plan is to set goals that have different time frames: long-term, mid-term, and short-term goals.

Setting a Time Frame for Your Goals

Not all goals can or should be accomplished in the same time frame. As you create your plan of setting and attaining goals and to get a comprehensive vision of your future, include the following time frames:

- **Long-term goals.** Long-term goals represent major targets in your life. These goals can take 5 to 20 years to achieve. In some cases, they will take a lifetime. They can include goals in education, careers, personal relationships, travel, or financial security—whatever is most important to you.
- **Mid-term goals.** Mid-term goals are objectives you can accomplish in 1 to 5 years. They include goals such as completing a course of education, paying off a car loan, or achieving a specific career level. These goals usually support your long-term goals.
- **Short-term goals.** Short-term goals are the ones you can accomplish in a year or less. These goals are specific achievements, such as completing a particular course or group of courses, hiking down the Appalachian Trail, or organizing a family reunion.

Setting your goals to include long-term, mid-term, and short-term time frames will not only help you create a more comprehensive plan but also allow you to more easily identify your accomplishments along the way.

Lesson 3.3: Writing Specific Goals

Lesson 3.3 Introduction

Once you have defined your goals and set the time frame for each of your goals, you are ready to create your plan. Your plan should have goals in several areas of your life and include short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. To create a plan that is achievable, make sure you write it down.

Having goals you talk about or that only exist in your mind may not give you the motivation you need to attain them.

In addition, once you create your plan, you want to take immediate action to increase your odds of success. Decrease the gap between stating a goal and starting to achieve it. If you slip and forget about the goal, you can get back on track at any time by *doing* something about it.

Writing Specific Goals

One of the most important things to do when creating your goals is to write down your goals. Writing down your goals greatly increases your chances of meeting them. Writing exposes undefined terms, unrealistic time frames, and other symptoms of fuzzy thinking.

One idea to keep track of your goals is to write each one on a separate 3 × 5 card or type them all into a file on your computer. Update this file as your goals change.

In addition to writing down your goals, make sure your goals are specific. Make clear what actions are needed or what results are expected. Consider these examples of vague goals and specific goals. Which goals are written in a way that is measurable and realistic?

Vague Goal	Specific Goal
Get a good education.	Graduate with a B.S. in engineering, with honors, by 2012.
Get good grades.	Earn a 3.5 GPA next semester.
Enhance my spiritual life.	Meditate for 15 minutes daily.
Improve my appearance.	Lose 6 pounds during the next 6 months.
Get control of my money.	Transfer $100 to my savings account each month.

When stated specifically, a goal might look different to you. If you examine it closely, a goal you once thought you wanted might not be something you want after all. Or you might discover that you want to choose a new path to achieve a goal that you are sure you want.

MODULE 4

UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Education is one of the few things you can buy that will last a lifetime. It can't rust, corrode, break down, or wear out. It can't be stolen, repossessed, or destroyed. Once you have a degree, no one can take it away. That makes your education a safer investment than real estate, gold, oil, diamonds, or stocks.

Higher levels of education are associated with the following (Alzheimer's Association 2012):

- Greater likelihood of being employed
- Greater likelihood of having health insurance
- Higher income
- Greater job satisfaction
- Higher tax revenues for governments, which fund libraries, schools, parks, and other public goods
- Less dependence on income support services, such as food stamps
- Greater involvement in volunteer activities

In short, education is a good deal for you and for society. It's worth investing in it periodically to update your skills, reach your goals, and get more of what you want in life. In this module, you will learn about the guidelines important to creating your own financial plan so that you are able to confidently invest in your future.

Lesson 4.1: Income and Expenses

Lesson 4.1 Introduction

Most money problems result from spending more than is available. It's that simple, even though we often do everything we can to make the problem much more complicated. The solution also is simple: Don't spend more than you have. If you are spending more than you have, then increase your income, decrease your spending, or do both. This idea has never won a Nobel Prize in Economics, but you won't go broke applying it.

If the economy tanks, we can benefit by telling the truth about it. We can also tell the truth about ourselves. It's one thing to condemn the dishonesty of mortgage bankers and hedge-fund managers. It's another thing to have an unpaid balance on a credit card or wipe out a savings account and still believe that we are in charge of our money.

The first step to changing such behaviors is simply to admit that they don't work. Then, make a plan and stick to it.

Identifying Income and Expenses

Keep financial news in perspective. Yes, times aren't always good, and recessions are hard on people. At the same time, reporters tend to center the conversation on gloom and doom. Turn it around. If the official unemployment rate is 8 percent, for example, this means that 92 percent of people in the work force *are* employed. Our economy will continue to reward people who apply their skills to create valuable new products and services.

When times get tough, some people are tempted to reduce stress with unhealthy behaviors like smoking, drinking, and overeating. Find better ways to cope. Exercise, meditation, sound sleep, and social support can do wonders.

Another way to manage stress is to limit how much attention you pay to fear-based articles and programs. Avoid conversations that focus on problems. Instead, talk about solutions. Focus on what you can control, and forget about the rest. Even if the economy takes a nosedive, there is always at least one more thing you can do to manage stress and get on a firmer financial footing.

The first step is to determine exactly what it costs you to go to school.

Fill in the blanks in the following chart, using totals for a semester, quarter, or whatever term system your school uses.

Note: Include only the costs directly related to going to school. For example, under "Transportation," list only the amount that you pay for gas to drive back and forth to school—not the total amount you spend on gas for a semester.

Identifying the Costs of Taking One Class

Category	**Cost**
Tuition	$_____
Books	$_____
Fees	$_____
Transportation	$_____
Clothing	$_____
Food	$_____
Housing	$_____
Entertainment	$_____
Other expenses (such as insurance, medical, and child care costs)	$_____
Subtotal	$_____
Salary you could earn per term if you weren't in school	$_____
Total (A)	$_____

Now figure out how many classes you attend in one term. This is the number of your scheduled class periods per week multiplied by the number of weeks in your school term. Put that figure below:

Total (B)	$_____
Divide the **Total (B)** into the **Total (A)**, and put that amount here:	$_____

This amount is what it costs you to go to one class at one time.

What is your response to discovering this figure? What might you do differently as a result of knowing the hourly cost of your education?

Tracking Income and Expenses

Many of us find it easy to lose track of money. It likes to escape when no one is looking. And usually, no one is looking. That's why the simple act of noticing the details about money can be so useful.

One goal you should have when you are creating a financial plan is to discover how money flows into and out of your life. You record all the money you receive and spend over the course of one month. This sounds like a big task, but it's simpler than you might think. Besides, there's a big payoff for this action. With increased awareness of income and expenses, you can make choices about money that will change your life. Here's how to begin.

Track your income and expenses. Use your creativity to figure out how you want to carry out this step. The goal is to create a record of exactly how much you earn and spend each month.

Use any method that works for you. And keep it simple. Following are some options:

- **Carry 3 × 5 cards in your pocket, purse, backpack, or briefcase.** Every time you buy something or get paid, record a few details on a card. List the date. Add a description of what you bought or what you got paid. Note whether the item is a source of income (money coming in) or an expense (money going out). Be sure to use a separate card for each item. This makes it easier to sort your cards into categories at the end of the month and fill out your Money Monitor or Money Plan.
- **Save all receipts and file them.** This method does not require you to carry any 3 × 5 cards, but it does require that you faithfully hang on to every receipt and record of payment. Every time you buy something, ask for a receipt and then stick it in your wallet, purse, or pocket. When you get home, make notes about the purchase on the receipt. File the receipts in a folder labeled with the current month and year (for example, January 2018). Every time you get a paycheck during that month, save the stub and add it to the folder. If you do not get a receipt or record of payment, whip out a 3 × 5 card and create one of your own. Detailed receipts will help you later on when you file taxes, categorize expenses (such as food and entertainment), and check your purchases against credit card statements.
- **Use personal finance software.** Learn to use personal finance software (Quicken, for example) that allows you to record income and expenses on your computer and to sort them into categories. Also check out money management apps for your smart phone.
- **Use online banking services.** If you have a checking account that offers online services, take advantage of the records that the bank is already keeping for you. Every time you write a check, use a debit card, or make a deposit, the transaction will show up online. You can use a computer to log in to your account and view these transactions at any time. If you're unclear about how to use online banking, go in to your bank and ask for help.

Experiment with several of the options mentioned. Settle into one method that feels most comfortable to you, or create a method of your own. Anything will work, as long as you end each month with an *exact and accurate* record of your income and expenses.

Increasing Income

Increasing your income is definitely a way to build wealth and improve your financial situation. The following are some suggestions for increasing your income:

- **Focus on your education.** Your most important assets are not your bank accounts, your car, or your house but your skills. Once you graduate and land a job in your chosen field, continue your education. Look for ways to gain additional skills or certifications that lead to higher earnings and more fulfilling work assignments.
- **Consider financial aid.** Student grants and loans can play a major role in your college success by freeing you up from having to work full-time or even part-time. Visit the financial aid office at your school to discover your options.

- **Work while you're in school.** You can use any job to gain experience, establish references, interact with a variety of people, and make contact with people who might hire you in the future.
- **Do your best at every job.** Excel as an employee. Suggest and implement ways to help your employer increase its income and decrease its expenses. A positive work experience can pay off for years by leading to other jobs, recommendations, and contacts.

For many people, finding a way to increase income is the most appealing way to fix a money problem. This approach has a potential problem: When their income increases, many people continue to spend more than they make. This means that money problems persist even at higher incomes. To avoid this problem, manage your expenses—no matter how much money you make.

Keep monitoring your income and expenses to discover the main drains on your finances. Then focus on one or two areas where you can reduce spending, increase income, or both.

Lesson 4.2: Financial Planning Resources

Lesson 4.2 Introduction

The cost of college is something you definitely have to plan for. You might already have a good understanding of your individual income and expenses, and that is a great first step. Your individual income and expenses are things that are, for the most part, in your control. You know exactly how much income is coming in, and you know exactly how much you spend. Given this information, you can make adjustments accordingly.

During this lesson, you will learn more about the resources available to help you create your own financial plan. Good financial planning means understanding how to find information to protect your income, manage your expenses, and know the available resources to deal with unexpected challenges.

Financial Planning Resources

As you are identifying your financial goals and priorities, it is important to consider the resources available to you to help you come up with a realistic financial plan. You might consider the following resources as you are planning:

Savings. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) backs individual saving accounts. The National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) offers similar protection for credit union members. If these programs protect your savings, then every penny you deposit is safe. Check your statements or ask your bank or credit union to find out if your savings is protected by the FDIC or NCUA.

Current job. The threat of layoffs increases during a recession. However, companies hesitate to shed their star employees—those who do stellar work. If you're working right now, then think about ways to become indispensable. Gain skills and experience that will make you more valuable to your employer.

Next job. Create a career plan that describes the next job you want, the skills that you'll develop to get it, and the next steps you'll take to gain those skills. Stay informed about the latest developments in your field. Find people who are already working in this area, and contact them for information interviews.

Unemployment benefits. Unemployment benefits have limits and may not replace your lost wages. However, they can cushion the blow of losing a job while you put other strategies in place. You may want to research more about the benefits offered in your state.

Health insurance. A sudden illness or lengthy hospital stay can drain your savings. Health insurance can pick up all or most of the costs instead. If possible, get health insurance through your school or employer. Another option is private health insurance. This can be cheaper than extending an employer's policy if you lose your job.

Financial advice. Avoid debt consolidators that offer schemes to wipe out your debt. What they don't tell you is that their fees are high and that using them can lower your credit rating. Turn instead to organizations such as the National Foundation for Credit Counseling to find an accredited credit counselor. Work with someone who is open about fees and willing to work with all your creditors. Don't pay any fees up front, before you actually get help.

Credit report. A credit report is a record of your payment history and other credit-related items. You are entitled to get a free copy each year. You can request a copy of your credit report online.

Student Loans

It is also important to understand the various options you have regarding student loans. Determining how you will pay for school is an important part of financial planning.

Find financial aid. Millions of dollars are waiting for people who take part in higher education. The funds flow to students who know how to find them. There are many ways to pay for school. The kind of help you get depends on your financial need. In general, *financial need* equals how much your schooling costs minus what you can reasonably be expected to pay. A financial aid package includes three major types of assistance:

1. Money you *do not* pay back (grants and scholarships)
2. Money you *do* pay back (loans)
3. Work-study programs

Go to your school's financial aid office and ask whether you can get a Stafford loan. These are fixed-rate, low-interest loans from the federal government. If you qualify for a subsidized Stafford loan, the government pays the interest due while you're in school. Unsubsidized Stafford loan does not offer this benefit, but it is still one of the cheapest student loans you can get. Remember that *anyone* can apply for a Stafford loan. Take full advantage of this program before you look into other loans.

Many students who get financial aid receive a package that includes all of the three types of assistance.

To find out more, visit your school's financial aid office or research student financial aid online.

Choose schools with costs in mind. If you decide to transfer to another school, you can save thousands of dollars the moment you sign your application for admission. In addition to choosing schools on the basis of reputation, consider how much they cost and the financial aid packages they offer.

Repay your loans. If you take out student loans, find out exactly when the first payment is due on each of them. Don't assume that you can wait to start repayment until you find a job.

Consolidate your loans. Ask your financial aid office whether you can consolidate your loans—lump them all together and make just one payment every month. This can make it easier to stay on top of your payments and protect your credit score.

Lesson 4.3: Creating a Financial Management Plan

Lesson 4.3 Introduction

Everything written about time and money management can be reduced to three main ideas:

1. **Know exactly *what* you want.** State your wants as clear, specific goals. Put them in writing.
2. **Know *how* to get what you want.** Take action to meet your goals, including financial goals. Determine what you'll do *today* to get what you want in the future. Put those actions in writing as well.
3. **Take action to *get* what you want.** When our lives lack this quality, we spend most of our time responding to interruptions, last-minute projects, and emergencies. Life feels like a scramble to just survive. We're so busy achieving someone else's goals that we forget about getting what we want.

Whether it is balancing your income and expenses, taking charge of your credit, or managing student loans, identifying your financial goals and priorities will help you create a financial plan with confidence.

Guidelines for Financial Planning

As you identify your financial goals and priorities, you might consider the following guidelines:

Balance your income and expenses. List specific ways that you will reduce spending and increase income. If you have a family, consider posting this list for everyone to see.

Take charge of your credit. A good credit rating will serve you for a lifetime. With this asset, you'll be able to borrow money any time you need it. A poor credit rating, however, can keep you from getting a car or a house in the future. You might also have to pay higher insurance rates, and you could even be turned down for a job.

To take charge of your credit, borrow money only when truly necessary. If you do borrow, make all of your payments, and make them on time. This is especially important for managing credit cards and student loans.

Use credit cards with caution.

- **Pay off the balance each month.** An unpaid credit card balance is a sure sign that you are spending more money than you have. To avoid this outcome, keep track of how much you spend with credit cards each month. Pay off the card balance each month and on time, and avoid finance or late charges.
- **Scrutinize credit card offers.** Look carefully at credit card offers. Low rates might be temporary. After a few months, they could double or even triple. Also look for annual fees, late fees, and other charges buried in the fine print.
- **Be especially wary of credit card offers made to students.** Remember that the companies who willingly dispense cards on campus are not there to offer an educational service. They are in business to make money by charging you interest.
- **Avoid cash advances.** Due to their high interest rates and fees, credit cards are not a great source of spare cash. Even when you get cash advances on these cards from an ATM, it's still borrowed money. As an alternative, get a debit card tied to a checking account, and use that card when you need cash on the go.
- **Use just one credit card.** To simplify your financial life and take charge of your credit, consider using only one card. Choose one with no annual fee and the lowest interest rate. Consider the bottom line, and be selective. If you do have more than one credit card, pay off the one with the highest interest rate first. Then consider cancelling that card.

Avoid debt when possible. The surest way to manage debt is to avoid it altogether. If you do take out loans, borrow only the amount that you cannot get from other sources—scholarships, grants, employment, gifts from relatives, and personal savings. Predict what your income will be when the first loan payments are due and whether you'll make enough money to manage continuing payments.

Set a target date for graduation, and stick to it. The fewer years you go to school, the lower your debt.

MODULE 5

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Introduction

It is impossible to live a life that's free of problems. Besides, problems serve a purpose. They provide opportunities to participate in life. Problems stimulate us and pull us forward.

Seen from this perspective, our goal becomes not to eliminate problems but to find problems that are worthy of us. Worthy problems are those that challenge us to think, consider our values, and define our goals. Solving the biggest problems offers the greatest potential benefits for others and ourselves. Engaging with big problems changes us for the better. Bigger problems give more meaning to our lives.

Problems expand to fill whatever space is available. Suppose that your only problem for today is to write a thank-you letter to a job interviewer. You could spend the entire day thinking about what you're going to say, writing the letter, finding a stamp, going to the post office—and then thinking about all of the things you forgot to say.

Now suppose that you get a phone call with an urgent message: A close friend has been admitted to the hospital and wants you to come right away. It's amazing how quickly and easily that letter can get finished when there's a bigger problem on your plate.

True, the smaller problems that enter our lives still need to be solved. The goal is simply to solve them in less time and with less energy.

Bigger problems are easy to find—world hunger, child abuse, environmental pollution, terrorism, human rights violations, drug abuse, street crime, energy shortages, poverty, and wars. These problems await your attention and involvement.

Tackling a bigger problem does not have to be depressing. In fact, it can be energizing—a reason for getting up in the morning. A huge project can channel your passion and purpose.

When we take on a bigger problem, we play full out. We do justice to our potentials. We start to love what we do and do what we love. We're awake, alert, and engaged. Playing full out means living our lives as if our lives depended on it.

Perhaps a little voice in your mind is saying, "That's crazy. I can't do anything about global problems." In the spirit of critical thinking, put that idea to the test. Get involved in solving a bigger problem. Then notice the difference that you can make. And just as important, notice how your other problems dwindle—or even vanish.

In this module, you will learn about ways to develop your critical and creative thinking skills, which will help you take on life's problems with confidence.

Lesson 5.1: Understanding Critical Thinking

Lesson 5.1 Introduction

Society depends on persuasion. We are flooded with content from TV, radio, magazines, books, billboards, and the Internet. This leaves us with hundreds of choices about what to buy, where to go, and who to be. It's easy to lose our heads in the cross-current of competing ideas—unless we develop skills in critical thinking. When we think critically, we can make choices with open eyes.

It has been said that human beings are rational creatures.

Yet no one is born as an effective thinker. Critical thinking is a learned skill. This is one reason that you study so many subjects in higher education—math, science, history, psychology, literature, and more. A broad base of courses helps you develop as a thinker. You see how people with different viewpoints arrive at conclusions, make decisions, and solve problems. This gives you a foundation for dealing with complex challenges in your career, your relationships, and your community.

Creative thinking often involves analyzing an idea into parts and then combining those parts in a new way. Another source of creativity is taking several ideas and finding an unexpected connection among them. In either case, you are thinking at a very high level. You are going beyond agreement and disagreement to offer something unique—an original contribution of your own.

Critical and creative thinking are exciting. The potential rewards are many, and the stakes are high. Your major decisions in life—from choosing a major to choosing a career—depend on your skills at critical and creative thinking.

Use the suggestions in this module to claim the thinking powers that are your birthright. The critical thinker is one aspect of the successful student who lives inside you.

The Benefits of Critical Thinking

Successful students are critical thinkers. But why does that matter? Seeing yourself as a critical thinker offers many benefits.

Critical thinking frees us from nonsense. Novelist Ernest Hemingway once said that anyone who wants to be a great writer must have a built-in, shockproof "crap" detector (Rees Cheney 1990). That inelegant comment points to a basic truth: As critical thinkers, we are constantly on the lookout for thinking that's inaccurate, sloppy, or misleading.

Critical thinking is a skill that will never go out of style. At various times in human history, nonsense has been taken for the truth. For example, people have believed the following:

- Illness results from an imbalance in the four vital fluids: blood, phlegm, water, and bile.
- Racial integration of the armed forces will lead to the destruction of soldiers' morale.
- Women are incapable of voting intelligently.
- People will never invent anything smaller than a transistor. (This was before the computer chip.)

Critical thinkers in history arose to challenge short-sighted ideas such as these listed. These courageous men and women held their peers to higher standards of critical thinking.

Critical thinking frees us from self-deception. Critical thinking is a path to freedom from half-truths and deception. You have the right to question everything that you see, hear, and read. Acquiring this ability is a major goal of a college education.

One of the reasons that critical thinking is so challenging—and so rewarding—is that we have a remarkable capacity to fool ourselves. Some of our ill-formed thoughts and half-truths have a source that hits a little close to home. That source is ourselves.

Successful students are willing to admit the truth when they discover that their thinking is fuzzy, lazy, based on a false assumption, or dishonest. These students value facts. When a solid fact contradicts a cherished belief, they are willing to change the belief.

Critical thinking is thorough thinking. For some people, the term *critical thinking* has negative connotations. If you prefer, use *thorough thinking* instead. Both terms point to the same activities: sorting out conflicting claims, weighing the evidence, letting go of personal biases, and arriving at reasonable conclusions. These activities add up to an ongoing conversation—a constant process, not a final product.

We live in a culture that values quick answers and certainty. These concepts are often at odds with effective thinking. Thorough thinking is the ability to examine and reexamine ideas that might seem obvious. This kind of thinking takes time and the willingness to say three subversive words: *I don't know*.

Thorough thinking is the basis for much of what you do in school—reading, writing, speaking, listening, note taking, test taking, problem solving, and other forms of decision making. Skilled students have strategies for accomplishing all these tasks. They distinguish between opinion and fact. They ask probing questions and make detailed observations. They uncover assumptions and define their terms. They make assertions carefully, basing them on sound logic and solid evidence. Almost everything that we call *knowledge* is a result of these activities. This means that critical thinking and learning are intimately linked.

Characteristics and Behaviors of Critical Thinkers, Part 1

The highest levels of critical thinking call for the highest investments of time and energy. Also, moving from a lower level of thinking to a higher level often requires courage and an ability to tolerate discomfort. Give yourself permission to experiment, practice, and learn from mistakes.

The following suggestions identify things to look for to deepen your critical thinking skills:

Look for different perspectives. Imagine Donald Trump, Cesar Chavez, and Barack Obama assembled in one room to debate the most desirable way to reshape our government. Picture Beyoncé, Oprah Winfrey, and Mark Zuckerberg leading a workshop on how to plan your career.

When seeking out alternative points of view, let scenes like these unfold in your mind.

Dozens of viewpoints exist on every important issue—reducing crime, ending world hunger, preventing war, and educating children, to name a few. But few problems have any single, permanent solution. Each generation produces its own answers to critical questions on the basis of current conditions. Our search for answers is a conversation that spans centuries. On each question, many voices are waiting to be heard.

You can take advantage of this diversity by seeking out alternative views with an open mind. When talking to another person, be willing to walk away with a new point of view—even if it's the one you brought to the table—when faced or presented with new evidence.

Look for assertions. Speakers and writers present their key terms in a larger context called an *assertion*. An assertion is a complete sentence that directly answers a key question. For example, consider this sentence from an earlier lesson: "Mastery means attaining a level of skill that goes beyond technique." This sentence is an assertion that answers an important question, How do we recognize mastery?

Look for multiple solutions. When asking questions, let go of the temptation to settle for just a single answer. Once you have come up with an answer, say to yourself, "Yes, that is one answer. Now what's another?" Using this approach can sustain honest inquiry, fuel creativity, and lead to conceptual breakthroughs. Be prepared. The world is complicated, and critical thinking is a complex business. Some of your answers might contradict others. Resist the temptation to have all of your ideas in a neat, orderly bundle.

Look for logic and evidence. Uncritical thinkers shield themselves from new information and ideas. As an alternative, you can follow the example of scientists, who constantly search for evidence that contradicts their theories. The following suggestions can help you do so.

The aim of using logic is to make statements that are clear, consistent, and coherent. As you examine a speaker's or writer's assertions, you might find errors in logic—assertions that contradict each other or assumptions that are unfounded.

Also assess the evidence used to support points of view. Evidence comes in several forms, including facts, expert testimony, and examples. To think critically about evidence, ask questions such as the following:

- Are all or most of the relevant facts presented?
- Are the facts consistent with one another?
- Are facts presented accurately or in a misleading way?
- Are opinions mistakenly being presented as facts?
- Are enough examples included to make a solid case for the viewpoint?
- Do the examples truly support the viewpoint?
- Are the examples typical? Could the author or speaker support the assertion with other similar examples?
- Is the expert credible—truly knowledgeable about the topic?
- Does this evidence affirm or contradict something that I already know?

Characteristics and Behaviors of Critical Thinkers, Part 2

In addition to knowing what to look for, critical thinkers understand that there are many different perspectives and they have to consider all points of view.

Consider controversial topics. Many people have mental *hot spots*—topics that provoke strong opinions and feelings. Examples are abortion, homosexuality, gun control, and the death penalty. To become more skilled at examining various points of view, notice your own particular hot spots. Make a clear intention to accept your feelings about these topics and to continue using critical thinking techniques in relation to them.

One way to cool down our hot spots is to remember that we can change or even give up our current opinions without giving up ourselves. That's a key message behind the power processes: "Ideas are tools" and "Detach." These articles remind us that human beings are much more than the sum of their current opinions.

Consider alternatives. One path to critical thinking is tolerance for a wide range of opinions. Taking a position on important issues is natural. When we stop having an opinion on things, we've probably stopped breathing.

Problems occur when we become so attached to our current viewpoints that we refuse to consider alternatives. Likewise, it can be disastrous when we blindly follow everything any person or group believes without questioning its validity. Many ideas that are widely accepted in Western cultures—for example, civil liberties for people of color and the right of women to vote—were once considered dangerous. Viewpoints that seem outlandish today might become widely accepted a century, a decade, or even a year from now. Remembering this idea can help us practice tolerance for differing beliefs and, in doing so, make room for new ideas that might alter our lives.

Consider the source. A critical thinker takes into consideration the source of the information being reviewed. For example, you may have an article on the problems of manufacturing cars powered by natural gas. It might have been written by an executive from an oil company. Check out the expert who disputes the connection between smoking and lung cancer. That "expert" might be the president of a tobacco company.

This is not to say that we should dismiss the ideas of people who have a vested interest in stating their opinions. Rather, we should take their self-interest into account as we consider their ideas.

Characteristics and Behaviors of Critical Thinkers, Part 3

Critical thinkers take specific actions to continue to build their critical thinking skills, as described in the following suggestions:

Define terms. Imagine two people arguing about whether an employer should limit health care benefits to members of a family. To one person, the word *family* means a mother, father, and children; to the other person, the word *family* applies to any individuals who live together in a long-term, supportive relationship. Chances are the debate will go nowhere until these two people realize that they're defining the same word in different ways.

Conflicts of opinion can often be resolved—or at least clarified—when we define our key terms up front. This is especially true with abstract, emotion-laden terms such as *freedom, peace, progress*, or *justice*. Blood has been shed over the meaning of those words. Define terms with care.

Understand before criticizing. Polished debaters are good at summing up their opponents' viewpoints—often better than the people who support those viewpoints themselves. Likewise, critical thinkers take the time to understand a statement of opinion before agreeing or disagreeing with it.

Effective understanding calls for listening without judgment. Enter another person's world by expressing her viewpoint in your own words. If you're conversing with that person, keep revising your summary until she agrees that you've stated her position accurately. If you're reading an article, write a short summary of it. Then scan the article again, checking to see whether your synopsis is on target.

Be willing to be uncertain. Some of the most profound thinkers have practiced the art of thinking by using a magic sentence: "I'm not sure yet."

Those are words that many people do not like to hear. Our society rewards quick answers and quotable sound bites. We're under considerable pressure to utter the truth in 10 seconds or less.

In such a society, it is courageous and unusual to take the time to pause, look, examine, be thoughtful, consider many points of view, and be unsure. When a society adopts half-truths in a blind rush for certainty, a willingness to embrace uncertainty can move us forward.

Write about it. Thoughts can move at blinding speed. Writing slows down that process. Gaps in logic that slip by us in thought or speech are often exposed when we commit the same ideas to paper. Writing down our thoughts allows us to compare, contrast, and combine points of view more clearly—and therefore to think more thoroughly.

Notice your changing perspectives. Researcher William Perry found that students in higher education move through stages of intellectual development (Rees Cheney 1990). In earlier stages, students tend to think there is only one correct viewpoint on each issue, and they look to their instructors to reveal that truth. Later, students acknowledge a variety of opinions on issues and construct their own viewpoints.

Remember that the process of becoming a critical thinker will take you through a variety of stages. Give yourself time, and celebrate your growing mastery of critical thinking.

Lesson 5.2: Becoming a Critical Thinker

Lesson 5.2 Introduction

Now that you have learned the characteristics and behaviors of critical thinkers, you can think about how you might start developing your critical thinking skills.

Successful students have the ability to ask questions that lead to deeper learning. Your mind is an obedient servant. It will deliver answers at the same level as your questions. Becoming a critical thinker means being flexible and asking a wide range of questions.

In addition, successful students can think logically. Whether presenting or hearing arguments, successful students are able to examine the arguments and determine if they are based on sound logic or flawed logic.

Finally, successful students know how to find, evaluate, and use the information they find. An important part of critical thinking is examining information and determining when it is appropriate or not appropriate to use.

In this module, you will learn about asking the right questions, thinking logically, and practicing information literacy. These skills will not only help you develop your critical thinking skills but also lead you on the path to becoming a more successful student.

Asking Lower-Level Critical Thinking Question

Thinking is a path to intellectual adventure. Although there are dozens of possible approaches to thinking well, the process boils down to asking and answering questions.

A psychologist named Benjamin Bloom named six levels of thinking. (He called them *educational objectives*, or goals for learning). Each level of thinking calls for asking and answering different kinds of questions.

Level 1: Remembering—recalling an idea. At this level of thinking, the key question is, *Can I recall the key terms, facts, or events?* To prompt level 1 thinking, an instructor might ask you to do the following:

- List the ways to become a more critical thinker.
- State the primary features of a *mind map*.
- Name Bloom's six levels of thinking.

To study for a test with level 1 questions, you could create flash cards to review ideas from your readings and class notes. You could also read a book with a set of questions in mind and underline the answers to those questions in the text. Or, you could memorize a list of definitions so that you can recite them exactly. These are just a few examples.

Although remembering is important, it is a relatively low level kind of learning. No critical or creative thinking is involved. You simply recognize or recall something that you've observed in the past.

Level 2: Understanding—explaining an idea in your own words and giving examples from your own experience. At this level, the main question is, *Can I explain this idea in my own words?* Often, this means giving examples of an idea on the basis of your own experience.

Suppose that your instructor asks you to do the following:

- Explain the main point of Lesson 1.
- Summarize the steps involved in creating a *concept map*.
- Compare mind mapping with concept mapping, stating how they're alike and how they're different.

Other key words in level 2 questions are *discuss*, *estimate*, and *restate*. All of these are cues to go one step beyond remembering and to show that you truly *comprehend* an idea.

Level 3: Applying—using an idea to produce a desired result. Learning at level 3 means asking, *Can I use this idea to produce a desired result?* That result might include completing a task, meeting a goal, making a decision, or solving a problem.

Some examples of level 3 thinking are as follows:

- Write an affirmation about succeeding in school on the basis of the guidelines in this course.
- Write an effective goal statement.

- Choose a mnemonic to remember the names of the Great Lakes.

Some key words in level 3 questions include *apply, solve, construct, plan, predict*, and *produce*.

Asking Higher-Level Critical Thinking Questions

Lower levels of thinking are sometimes about finding the "right" answer to a question. At levels 4, 5, and 6, you might discover several valid answers or create several workable solutions. As you review the following higher-level thinking questions, notice that the lower levels of thinking (1 to 3) give you fewer options than the higher levels (4 to 6) do.

Level 4: Analyzing—dividing an idea into parts or steps. Questions at this level boil down to this, *Can I divide this idea into parts or steps?*

For example, you could do the following:

- Divide the levels of thinking into two major levels.
- Take a list of key events in the Vietnam War, for example, and arrange them in chronological order.
- Organize the memory techniques from this course into different categories.

Other key words in level 4 questions are *classify, separate, distinguish*, and *outline*.

Level 5: Evaluating—rating the truth, usefulness, or quality of an idea—and giving reasons for your rating. Learning at level 5 means asking, *Can I rate the truth, usefulness, or quality of this idea—and give reasons for my rating?*

This is the level of thinking you would use to do the following:

- Judge the effectiveness of an intention statement.
- Recommend a method for taking lecture notes when an instructor talks fast.
- Rank your financial priorities from most important to least important to you.

Level 5 involves genuine critical thinking. At this level, you agree with an idea, disagree with it, or suspend judgment about it until you get more information. In addition, you give reasons for your opinion and offer supporting evidence.

Some key words in level 5 questions are *critique, defend*, and *comment*.

Level 6: Creating—inventing something new on the basis of an idea. To think at this level, ask, *Can I invent something new based on this idea?*

For instance, you might do the following:

- Invent your own format for taking lecture notes.
- Prepare a list of topics that you would cover if you were teaching a student success course.
- Imagine that you now have enough money to retire and then write goals you would like to accomplish with your extra time.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation on the basis of ideas found in this lesson. Put the material in your own words, and use visual elements to enhance your points.

Questions for creative thinking often start with words such as *adapt, change, collaborate, compose, construct, create, design*, and *develop*. You might also notice phrases such as the following:

- *What changes would you make…?*
- *How could you improve…?*
- *Can you think of another way to…?*
- *What would happen if…?*

Notice that the six levels in Bloom's taxonomy build on each other. Before you agree or disagree with an idea, make sure that you *remember* it accurately and truly *understand* it. Your understanding will go deeper if you can *apply* and *analyze* the idea as well. Successful students stay aware of their current level of thinking. They can also move to other levels with a clear intention.

Thinking Logically, Part 1

In addition to asking the right questions, to become a more successful student, you want to develop your logical thinking skills. Logic is a branch of philosophy that seeks to distinguish between effective and ineffective reasoning. This is not just an idle pastime for unemployed philosophers. Learning to think logically offers many benefits (Seligman 2002):

- You take your reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to a higher level.
- You avoid costly mistakes in decision making.
- You can join discussions and debates with more confidence, cast your election votes with a clear head, and become a better-informed citizen.
- You can improve your mental health by learning to dispute illogical beliefs.

Over the last 2,500 years, specialists have listed some classic land mines in the field of logic—common mistakes in thinking that are called *fallacies*. The study of fallacies could fill a yearlong course.

Following are some examples to get you started. Knowing about them before you string together a bunch of assertions can help you avoid getting fooled.

Jumping to conclusions. Jumping to conclusions is the only exercise that some lazy thinkers get. This fallacy involves drawing conclusions without sufficient evidence. Take the bank officer who hears about one student failing to pay back a student loan. After that, the officer turns down all loan applications from all students. This person has formed a rigid opinion on the basis of hearsay. Jumping to conclusions—also called *hasty generalization*—is at work here.

Attacking the person. The mistake of attacking the person is common at election time. An example is the candidate who claims that her opponent has failed to attend church regularly during the campaign. People who indulge in personal attacks are attempting an intellectual sleight of hand to divert attention away from the truly relevant issues.

Pointing to a false cause. The fact that one event follows another does not necessarily mean that the two events have a cause-and-effect relationship. All we can actually say is that the events might be correlated. For example, as children's vocabularies improve, they can get more cavities. This does not mean that cavities are the result of an improved vocabulary. Instead, the increase in cavities is due to other factors, such as physical maturation and changes in diet or personal care.

Thinking Logically, Part 2

The following are additional fallacies to avoid as you are working to improve your logical thinking skills.

Thinking in all-or-nothing terms. Consider these statements: *Doctors are greedy. You can't trust politicians. Students these days are in school just to get high-paying jobs; they lack idealism. Homeless people don't want to work.*

These opinions imply the word *all*. They gloss over individual differences, claiming that all members of a group are exactly alike. They also ignore key facts—for instance, that some doctors volunteer their time at free medical clinics and that many homeless people are children who are too young to work.

All-or-nothing thinking is one of the most common errors in logic. To avoid this fallacy, watch out for words such as *all, everyone, no one, none, always,* and *never*. Statements that include these words often make sweeping claims that require a lot of evidence. See whether words such as *usually, some, many, few*, and *sometimes* lead to more accurate statements. Sometimes, the words are implied. For example, the implication in the claim "Doctors are greedy" is that *all* doctors are greedy.

Basing arguments on emotion. The politician who ends every campaign speech with flag waving and slides of his mother eating apple pie is staking his future on appeals to emotion. So is the candidate who paints a grim scenario of the disaster and ruination that will transpire unless she is elected. Get past the fluff to see whether you can uncover any worthwhile ideas.

The bottom line—finding fallacies before they bite you. Consider this statement: "My mother and father have a happy marriage. After all, they're still together after 35 years." Behind this statement is this big assumption: *Happy marriages are those that last a long time.* And there's a possible fallacy here: You might know of married couples who've stayed together for decades even though they confess to be unhappy in the relationship.

Uncovering assumptions and looking for exceptions can help you detect many errors in logic. This is a tool you can pull out any time you want to experience the benefits of critical thinking.

Thinking Critically About Information on the Internet, Part 1

Sources of information on the Internet range from the reputable (such as the Library of Congress) to the flamboyant (such as the *National Enquirer*). People are free to post *anything* on the Internet, including outdated facts as well as intentional misinformation.

Newspaper, magazine, and book publishers often employ fact-checkers, editors, and lawyers to screen out errors and scrutinize questionable material before publication. Creators of independent, user-generated, or low-traffic websites might not have these resources or choose to use them.

Taking a few simple precautions when you surf the Internet can keep you from crashing onto the rocky shore of misinformation.

Distinguish between *ideas* and *information*. To think more powerfully about what you find on the Internet, remember the difference between information and ideas.

For example, consider the following sentence: *Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994.* That statement provides information about South Africa. In contrast, the following sentence states an idea: *Nelson Mandela's presidency means that Apartheid has no future in South Africa.*

Information refers to facts that can be verified by independent observers. *Ideas* are interpretations or opinions based on facts. These include statements of opinion and value judgments. Several people with the same information might adopt different ideas on the basis of that information.

Don't assume that an idea is more current, reasonable, or accurate just because you find it on the Internet. Apply your critical thinking skills to all published material—print and online.

Look for overall quality. Examine the features of a website in general. Notice the effectiveness of the text, layout, and visuals as a whole. Also note how well the site is organized and whether you can navigate its features with ease. Look for the date that crucial information was posted, and determine how often the site is updated.

Next, get an overview of the site's content. Examine several of its webpages for consistency of facts, quality of information, and grammar and spelling errors.

Are the links easy to find? Do they take you to the intended pages or sites? Click on a few links to the sites of reputable organizations. If the links lead you to dead-ends, it might indicate that the site is not updated often—a clue that it's not a reliable source for late-breaking information.

Thinking Critically About Information on the Internet, Part 2

In addition to distinguishing between ideas and information and looking for overall quality, to think more critically about information on the Internet, you should also consider the following:

Look at the source. Find a clear description of the person or organization responsible for the website. Many sites include this information in the About webpage.

The domain in the uniform resource locator (URL or the web address) for a site gives you clues about sources of information and possible bias. For example, distinguish among information from a for-profit commercial enterprise (URL ending in .com); a nonprofit organization (.org); a government agency (.gov); and a school, college, or university (.edu).

If the site asks you to subscribe or become a member, then find out what it does with the personal information that you provide. Look for a way to contact the site's publisher with questions and comments.

Look for documentation. When you encounter an assertion on a website, note the types and quality of the evidence offered. Look for credible examples, quotations from authorities in the field, documented statistics, or summaries of scientific studies.

Remember that wikis (peer-edited or user-generated sites) such as Wikipedia do not employ editors to screen out errors or scrutinize questionable material before publication. Do not rely on these sites when researching a paper or presentation. Also, be cautious about citing blogs, which often are not reviewed for accuracy. Such sources may, however, provide you with key words and concepts that help lead you to scholarly research on your topic.

Set an example. In the midst of the Internet's chaotic growth, you can light a path of rationality. Whether you're sending a short e-mail message or building a massive website, bring your own critical thinking skills into play. Every word and image that you send down the wires and on to the Internet can display the hallmarks of critical thinking—sound logic, credible evidence, and respect for your audience.

Developing Information Literacy: Gathering Your Thoughts

An important quality of successful students is curiosity. And to satisfy their curiosity, successful students ask questions. To answer questions, these students find information from appropriate sources, evaluate the information, organize it, and use it to achieve a purpose.

The ability to do this in a world where data are literally at your fingertips is called *information literacy*.

You should begin by discovering the questions you want to answer. Start with a *main question*. This is the thing that sparked your curiosity in the first place. Answering it is your purpose for doing research.

Your main question will raise a number of smaller, related questions. These are *supporting questions*. They also call for answers.

Suppose that your main question is this: "During the mortgage credit crisis of 2007 to 2010, what led banks to lend money to people with poor credit history?" Your list of supporting questions might include the following:

- What banks were involved in the mortgage credit crisis?
- How do banks discover a person's credit history?
- What are the signs of a poor credit history?

Once you have a solid set of main questions and supporting questions, you can now think about gathering your information.

Developing Information Literacy: Gathering Information—Primary and Secondary Sources

Consider the variety of information sources available to you: billions of websites, books, magazines, newspapers, and audio and video recordings. You can reduce this vast range of materials to a few manageable categories. Start with the distinction between primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources. These can lead to information treasures. Primary sources are firsthand materials—personal journals, letters, speeches, government documents, scientific experiments, field observations, interviews with recognized experts, archeological digs, artifacts, and original works of art.

Making direct contact with people can offer a welcome relief from hours of solitary research time and give you valuable hands-on involvement. Your initial research will uncover the names of experts on your chosen topic. Consider doing an interview with one of these people—in person, over the phone, or via e-mail.

Primary sources can also include scholarly publications such as the *New England Journal of Medicine, Contemporary Literary Criticism*, and similar publications. One clue that you're dealing with a primary source is the title. If it includes the word *journal*, then you're probably reading a primary source.

Following are some signs of scholarly articles:

- Names of authors with their credentials and academic affiliations
- A brief abstract (summary) of the article, along with a section on research methods (how the authors tested their ideas and reached their conclusions)
- Lengthy articles with detailed treatment of the main topic and definitions of key terms
- Conclusions based on an extensive review of relevant publications, survey research, data collected in a laboratory experiment, or a combination of these
- Extensive bibliographies and references to the work of other scholars in the form of footnotes (at the bottom of each page) or endnotes (at the end of the article)

If you pick up a magazine with pages of full-color advertisements and photos of celebrities, you're not reading a scholarly journal. Some scholarly articles run just a few pages, but many run to 10, 20, or even more pages. Although that's a lot to read, you get more information to use for your assignment or to answer your questions.

Secondary sources. These sources summarize, explain, and comment on primary sources:

- Popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*
- Magazines—such as *The Atlantic* and *Scientific American*—with wide circulation and long articles
- Nationally circulated newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*
- General reference works such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*

Secondary sources are useful places to start your research. Use them to get an overview of your topic. Depending on the assignment, these may be all you need for informal research.

Developing Information Literacy: Gathering Information—The Library and Search Engines

Remember that many published materials are available in print as well as online. For a full range of sources, head to your campus or local community library.

One reason for a trip to the library is to find a reference librarian. Tell this person about the questions you want answered, and ask for good sources of information. Remember that a

librarian can help you apply the suggestions in this lesson, including those that relate to using technology.

One crucial skill for information literacy is using key words. Key words are the main terms in your main and supporting questions. These are the words that you enter into a search box. Your choice of key words determines the quality of results that you get from Internet search engines, such as Google or Bing, and from library catalogs. For better search results, you may do the following:

- ***Use specific key words.*** Entering *Firefox* or *Safari* will give you more focused results than entering *web browser. Reading strategies* or *note-taking strategies* will get more specific results than just *study strategies*. Do not type in your whole research question as a sentence. The search engine will look for each word and give you a lot of useless results.
- ***Use unique key words.*** Whenever possible, use proper names. Enter *Beatles* or *Radiohead* rather than *British rock bands*. If you're looking for nearby restaurants, enter *restaurant* and your zip code rather than the name of your city.
- ***Use quotation marks if you're looking for specific words in a certain order.*** *"Audacity of hope"* will return a list of pages with that exact phrase.
- ***Search within a site.*** If you're looking only for articles about college tuition from the *New York Times*, then add *New York Times* to the search box.
- ***Think of synonyms.*** For example, *hypertension* is often called *high blood pressure*.
- ***Add a wild card character when you're not sure of a key word.*** In most search engines, that character is the asterisk (*). If you're looking for the title of a film directed by Clint Eastwood and just can't remember the name, enter *Clint Eastwood directed**.
- ***Look for more search options.*** Many search engines also offer advanced search features and explain how to use them. Click on the word *advanced* or *more* on the site's home page.

Developing Information Literacy: Evaluating Information

Once you have finished gathering your information, you want to evaluate it. Some students assume that anything that's published in print or online is true.

Unfortunately, that's not the case. Some sources of information are more reliable than others, and some published information is misleading or mistaken.

Before evaluating any source of information, make sure that you understand what it says. Think critically about the information. Here are some essential things to look for:

- ***Currency.*** Notice the published date of your source material. If your topic is time sensitive, then set some guidelines about how current you want your sources to be—for example, published during the past five years.
- ***Credibility.*** Scan the source for biographical information about the author. Look for educational degrees, training, and work experience that qualify this person to publish on the topic of your research.
- ***Bias.*** Determine what the website or other source is "selling"—the product, service, or point of view it promotes. Political affiliations or funding sources might color the author's point of view. For instance, you can predict that a pamphlet on gun-control policies that's printed through funding from the National Rifle Association will promote certain points of view. Round out your research with other sources on the topic.

Developing Information Literacy: Using Information

Once you have gathered and evaluated your information, you are ready to figure out how to use it. Many students use information to write a paper or create a presentation. Remember to keep a

list of all your sources of information, and avoid plagiarism. Be prepared to cite your sources in footnotes or endnotes and include a bibliography.

Make time to digest all of the information you gather. Return to the important step of asking questions:

- Do I have answers to my main question?
- Do I have answers to my supporting questions?
- What are the main ideas from my sources?
- Do I have personal experiences that can help me answer these questions?
- If a TV talk show host asked me these questions, how would I answer?
- On what points do my sources agree?
- On what points do my sources disagree?
- Do I have statistics and other facts that I can use to support my ideas?
- What new questions do I have?

The beauty of these questions is that they stimulate your thinking. Discover the pleasures of emerging insights and sudden inspiration. You just might get hooked on the adventure of information literacy.

Lesson 5.3: Using Critical Thinking Skills: Decision Making and Problem Solving

Lesson 5.3 Introduction

In previous lessons, you learned about characteristics of critical thinkers and information literacy. In this module, you will learn how to put those skills into action through the important processes of decision making and problem solving.

As with the process of developing information literacy, asking questions is an important part of decision making and problem solving. Thinking is born of questions. Questions wake us up. Questions alert us to hidden assumptions. Questions promote curiosity and create new distinctions. Questions open up options that otherwise go unexplored. Besides, teachers love questions.

We make decisions all the time, whether we realize it or not. Even avoiding decisions is a form of decision making. The student who puts off studying for a test until the last minute, for example, might really be saying, “I’ve decided this course is not important” or “I’ve decided not to give this course much time.”

Decisions are specific and lead to focused action. When we decide, we narrow down. We give up actions that are inconsistent with our decision.

In addition to decision making, critical thinking skills are important to solving problems. We encounter problems every single day, and having a solid process in place is important to solving them.

At the end of the lesson, you will learn how to put your critical thinking skills to use by reviewing an example of how critical thinking skills can help with making those everyday decisions.

Using Critical Thinking Skills: Asking Questions

Questions have practical power. Asking for directions can shave hours off a trip. Asking a librarian for help can save hours of research time. Asking how to address an instructor—by first name or formal title—can change your relationship with that person. Asking your academic advisor a question can alter your entire education. Asking people about their career plans can alter *your* career plans.

You can use the following strategies to develop questions for problem solving and decision making:

Ask questions that create possibilities. At any moment, you can ask a question that opens up a new possibility for someone.

- Suppose a friend walks up to you and says, "People just never listen to me." You listen carefully. Then you say, "Let me make sure I understand. Who, specifically, doesn't listen to you? And how do you know they're not listening?"
- Another friend tells you, "I just lost my job to someone who has less experience. That should never happen." You respond, "Wow, that's hard. I'm sorry you lost your job. Who can help you find another job?"
- A relative seeks your advice. "My mother-in-law makes me mad," she says. "You're having a hard time with this person," you say. "What does she say and do when you feel mad at her? And are there times when you *don't* get mad at her?"

These kinds of questions—asked with compassion and a sense of timing—can help people move from complaining about problems to solving them.

Discover new questions. Students sometimes say, "I don't know what questions to ask."

Consider the following ways to create questions about any subject you want to study or about any area of your life that you want to change:

- ***Let your pen start moving.*** Sometimes you can access a deeper level of knowledge by taking out your pen, putting it on a piece of paper, and writing down questions—even before you know what to write. Don't think. Just watch the pen move across the paper. Notice what appears. The results might be surprising.
- ***Ask about what's missing*.** Another way to invent useful questions is to notice what's missing from your life and then ask how to supply it. For example, if you want to take better notes, you can write, "What's missing is skill in note taking. How can I gain more skill in taking notes?" If you always feel rushed, you can write, "What's missing is time. How do I create enough time in my day to actually do the things that I say I want to do?"
- ***Pretend to be someone else.*** Another way to invent questions is first to think of someone you greatly respect. Then pretend you're that person. Ask the questions you think she would ask.
- ***Begin with a general question, and then brainstorm the endings.*** By starting with a general question and then brainstorming a long list of endings, you can invent a question that you've never asked before. For example:
    - ***What can I do when*** … an instructor calls on me in class and I have no idea what to say? When a teacher doesn't show up for class on time? When I feel overwhelmed with assignments?
    - ***How can I …*** take the kind of courses that I want? Expand my career options? Become much more effective as a student, starting today?
    - ***When do I …*** decide on a major? Transfer to another school? Meet with an instructor to discuss an upcoming term paper?
    - ***What else do I want to know about …*** my academic plan? My career plan? My options for job hunting? My friends? My relatives? My spouse?
    - ***Who can I ask about …*** my career options? My major? My love life? My values and purpose in life?

Many times you can quickly generate questions by simply asking yourself, "What else do I want to know?" Ask this question immediately after you read a paragraph in a book or listen to someone speak.

Start from the assumption that you are brilliant. Then ask questions to unlock your brilliance.

Using Critical Thinking Skills in Decision Making

As you develop your critical thinking skills, you can apply them as you make decisions. The following suggestions can help in your decision-making process:

Recognize decisions. Decisions are more than wishes or desires. There's a world of difference between "I wish I could be a better student" and "I will take more powerful notes, read with greater retention, and review my class notes daily." Deciding to eat fruit for dessert instead of ice cream rules out the next trip to the ice cream store.

Establish priorities. Some decisions are trivial. No matter what the outcome, your life is not affected much. Other decisions can shape your circumstances for years. Devote more time and energy to the decisions with big outcomes.

Base decisions on a life plan. The benefit of having long-term goals for our lives is that they provide a basis for many of our daily decisions. Being certain about what we want to accomplish this year and this month makes today's choices more clear.

Balance learning styles in decision making. To make decisions more effectively, use all four modes of learning explained in a previous lesson. The key is to balance reflection with action, and thinking with experience. First, take the time to think creatively, and generate many options. Then think critically about the possible consequences of each option before choosing one. Remember, however, that thinking is no substitute for experience. Act on your chosen option, and notice what happens. If you're not getting the results you want, then quickly return to creative thinking to invent new options.

Choose an overall strategy. Every time you make a decision, you choose a strategy—even when you're not aware of it. Effective decision makers can articulate and choose from among several strategies. For example:

- ***Find all of the available options, and choose one deliberately.*** Save this strategy for times when you have a relatively small number of options, each of which leads to noticeably different results.
- ***Find all of the available options, and choose one randomly.*** This strategy can be risky. Save it for times when your options are basically similar and fairness is the main issue.
- ***Limit the options, and then choose.*** When deciding which search engine to use, visit many search sites and then narrow the list down to two or three from which to choose.

Use time as an ally. Sometimes we face dilemmas—situations in which any course of action leads to undesirable consequences. In such cases, consider putting a decision on hold. Wait it out. Do nothing until the circumstances change, making one alternative clearly preferable to another.

Use intuition. Some decisions seem to make themselves. A solution pops into your mind, and you gain newfound clarity. Using intuition is not the same as forgetting about the decision or refusing to make it. Intuitive decisions usually arrive after we've gathered the relevant facts and faced a problem for some time.

Evaluate your decision. Hindsight is a source of insight. After you act on a decision, observe the consequences over time. Reflect on how well your decision worked and what you might have done differently.

Think of choices. This final suggestion involves some creative thinking. Consider that the word *decide* derives from the same roots as *suicide* and *homicide*. In the spirit of those words, a decision forever "kills" all other options. That's kind of heavy. Instead, use the word *choice*, and see whether it frees up your thinking. When you *choose*, you express a preference for one option over others. However, those options remain live possibilities for the future. Choose for today, knowing that as you gain more wisdom and experience, you can choose again.

Using Critical Thinking Skills in Problem Solving

Think of problem solving as a process with *four Ps*: Define the *problem*, generate *possibilities*, create a *plan*, and *perform* your plan.

Step 1: Define the problem. To define a problem effectively, understand what a problem is—a mismatch between what you want and what you have. Problem solving is all about reducing the gap between these two factors.

Tell the truth about what's present in your life right now, without shame or blame. For example: "I often get sleepy while reading my physics assignments, and after closing the book I cannot remember what I just read."

Next, describe in detail what you want. Go for specifics: "I want to remain alert as I read about physics. I also want to accurately summarize each chapter I read."

Remember that when we define a problem in limiting ways, our solutions merely generate new problems. As Albert Einstein said, "The world we have made is a result of the level of thinking we have done thus far. We cannot solve problems at the same level at which we created them" (Calaprice 2000).

This idea has many applications for success in school. An example is the student who struggles with note taking. The problem, she thinks, is that her notes are too sketchy. The logical solution, she decides, is to take more notes; her new goal is to write down almost everything her instructors say. No matter how fast and furiously she writes, she cannot capture all of the instructors' comments.

Consider what happens when this student defines the problem in a new way. After more thought, she decides that her dilemma is not the *quantity* of her notes but their *quality*. She adopts a new format for taking notes, dividing her notepaper into two columns. In the right-hand column, she writes down only the main points of each lecture. In the left-hand column, she notes two or three supporting details for each point.

Over time, this student makes the joyous discovery that there are usually just three or four core ideas to remember from each lecture. She originally thought the solution was to take more notes. What really worked was taking notes in a new way.

Step 2: Generate possibilities. Now put on your creative thinking hat. Open up. Brainstorm as many possible solutions to the problem as you can. At this stage, quantity counts. As you generate possibilities, gather relevant facts. For example, when you're faced with a dilemma about what courses to take next semester, get information on class times, locations, and instructors. If you haven't decided which summer job offer to accept, gather information on salary, benefits, and working conditions.

Step 3: Create a plan. After rereading your problem definition and list of possible solutions, choose the solution that seems most workable. Think about specific actions that will reduce the gap between what you have and what you want. Visualize the steps you will take to make this solution a reality, and arrange them in chronological order. To make your plan even more powerful, put it in writing.

Step 4: Perform your plan. This step gets you off your chair and out into the world. Now you actually *do* what you have planned.

Ultimately, your skill in solving problems lies in how well you perform your plan. Through the quality of your actions, you become the architect of your own success.

When facing problems, experiment with these four Ps, and remember that the order of steps is not absolute. Also remember that any solution has the potential to create new problems. If that happens, cycle through the four Ps of problem solving again.

Critical Thinking Skills in Action: Thinking About Your Major, Part 1

One decision that troubles many students in higher education is the choice of a major. Weighing the benefits, costs, and outcomes of a possible major is an intellectual challenge. This choice is an opportunity to apply your critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. The following suggestions will guide you through this seemingly overwhelming process.

The first step is to discover options. You can use the following suggestions to discover options for choosing your major:

Follow the fun. Perhaps you look forward to attending one of your classes and even like completing the assignments. This is a clue to your choice of major.

See whether you can find lasting patterns in the subjects and extracurricular activities that you've enjoyed over the years. Look for a major that allows you to continue and expand on these experiences.

Also, sit down with a stack of 3 × 5 cards and brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- What do you enjoy doing most with your unscheduled time?
- Imagine that you're at a party and having a fascinating conversation. What is this conversation about?
- What kind of problems do you enjoy solving—those that involve people? Products? Ideas?
- What interests are revealed by your choices of reading material, television shows, and other entertainment?
- What would an ideal day look like for you? Describe where you would live, who would be with you, and what you would do throughout the day. Do any of these visions suggest a possible major?

Questions like these can uncover a "fun factor" that energizes you to finish the work of completing a major.

Consider your abilities. In choosing a major, ability counts as much as interest. In addition to considering what you enjoy, think about times and places when you excelled. List the courses that you aced, the work assignments that you mastered, and the hobbies that led to rewards or recognition. Let your choice of a major reflect a discovery of your passions *and* potentials.

Use formal techniques for self-discovery. Explore questionnaires and inventories that are designed to correlate your interests with specific majors. Examples include the Strong Interest Inventory and the Self-Directed Search. Your academic advisor or someone in your school's career planning office can give you more details about these and related assessments. For some fun, take several of them and meet with an advisor to interpret the results. Remember inventories can help you gain self-knowledge, and other people can offer valuable perspectives. However, what you *do* with all this input is entirely up to you.

Critical Thinking Skills in Action: Thinking About Your Major, Part 2

As you review the following additional suggestions of discovering options, think about what strategies you already use in your own decision-making process. Also think about what new strategies you might try in the future.

Link to long-term goals. Your choice of a major can fall into place once you determine what you want in life. Before you choose a major, back up to a bigger picture. List your core values, such as contributing to society, achieving financial security and professional recognition, enjoying good health, or making time for fun. Also write down specific goals that you want to accomplish 5 years, 10 years, or even 50 years from today.

Many students find that the prospect of getting what they want in life justifies all of the time, money, and day-to-day effort invested in going to school. Having a major gives you a powerful incentive for attending classes, taking part in discussions, reading textbooks, writing papers, and completing other assignments. When you see a clear connection between finishing school and

creating the life of your dreams, the daily tasks of higher education become charged with meaning.

Ask other people. Key people in your life might have valuable suggestions about your choice of major. Ask for their ideas, and listen with an open mind. At the same time, distance yourself from any pressure to choose a major or career that fails to interest you. If you make a choice solely on the basis of the expectations of other people, you could end up with a major or even a career you don't enjoy.

Gather information. Check your school's catalog or website for a list of available majors. Here is a gold mine of information. Take a quick glance, and highlight all the majors that interest you. Then talk to students who have declared these majors. Also read the descriptions of courses required for these majors. Do you get excited about the chance to enroll in them? Pay attention to your gut feelings.

Also chat with instructors who teach courses in a specific major. Ask for copies of their class syllabi. Go to the bookstore and browse the required texts. Based on all of this information, write a list of prospective majors. Discuss them with an academic advisor and someone at your school's career-planning center.

Invent a major. When choosing a major, you might not need to limit yourself to those listed in your school catalog. Many schools now have flexible programs that allow for independent study. Through such programs, you might be able to combine two existing majors or invent an entirely new one of your own.

Consider a complementary minor. You can add flexibility to your academic program by choosing a minor to complement or contrast with your major. The student who wants to be a minister could opt for a minor in English; all of those courses in composition can help in writing sermons. Or the student with a major in psychology might choose a minor in business administration, with the idea of managing a counseling service some day. An effective choice of a minor can expand your skills and career options.

Think critically about the link between your major and your career. Your career goals might have a significant impact on your choice of major.

You could pursue a rewarding career by choosing among *several* different majors. Even students planning to apply for law school or medical school have flexibility in their choice of majors. In addition, after graduation, many people tend to be employed in jobs that have little relationship to their major. And you might choose a career in the future that is unrelated to any currently available major.

Critical Thinking Skills in Action: Thinking About Your Major, Part 3

Once you have discovered all of your options, you can move on to the next step in the process—making a trial choice.

Make a Trial Choice

Pretend that you have to choose a major today. Based on the options for a major that you've already discovered, write down the first three ideas that come to mind. Review the list for a few minutes, and then choose one.

Evaluate Your Trial Choice

When you've made a trial choice of major, take on the role of a scientist. Treat your choice as a hypothesis, and then design a series of experiments to evaluate and test it. For example:

- Schedule office meetings with instructors who teach courses in the major. Ask about required course work and career options in the field.
- Discuss your trial choice with an academic advisor or career counselor.

- Enroll in a course related to your possible major. Remember that introductory courses might not give you a realistic picture of the workload involved in advanced courses. Also, you might not be able to register for certain courses until you've actually declared a related major.
- Find a volunteer experience, internship, part-time job, or service-learning experience related to the major.
- Interview students who have declared the same major. Ask them in detail about their experiences and suggestions for success.
- Interview people who work in a field related to the major and "shadow" them—that is, spend time with those people during their workday.
- Think about whether you can complete your major given the amount of time and money that you plan to invest in higher education.
- Consider whether declaring this major would require a transfer to another program or even another school.

If your "experiments" confirm your choice of major, celebrate that fact. If they result in choosing a new major, celebrate that outcome as well.

Also remember that higher education represents a safe place to test your choice of major—and to change your mind. As you sort through your options, help is always available from administrators, instructors, advisors, and peers.

Choose Again

Keep your choice of a major in perspective. There is probably no single "correct" choice. Your unique collection of skills is likely to provide the basis for majoring in several fields.

Odds are that you'll change your major at least once—and that you'll change careers several times during your life. One benefit of higher education is mobility. You gain the general skills and knowledge that can help you move into a new major or career field at any time.

Viewing a major as a one-time choice that determines your entire future can raise your stress levels. Instead, look at choosing a major as the start of a continuing path that involves discovery, choice, and passionate action.

As you review this example of how you can use critical thinking to make a decision about choosing your major, think about how you will use your critical thinking to make decisions and solve problems in the future.

MODULE 6

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

Introduction

Succeeding in the college environment involves more than just one singular trait or skill set. Preparing for academic success is about more than attending class or writing papers. How we care for our bodies and minds can also influence achievement, or lack thereof, in school and work pursuits.

In this module, we explore a variety of factors every individual should consider pertaining to personal health and well-being. We begin by taking a look at ways to promote physical health and well-being, including how to make positive choices regarding food and substances. Next, we present a variety of tools and strategies to protect yourself while on campus or while you're out and about, through methods of maintaining personal safety. Your learning investigation also includes taking a look at ways to ask for help—something many people struggle with in today's society.

Through exploring perspectives and skills related to health, safety, and overall well-being, you will gain valuable insight as you prepare for success in your academic path.

Lesson 6.1: Making Healthy Choices: Eating, Exercise, and Drug Use

Lesson 6.1 Introduction

Before we explore ways to keep your body healthy, let's do a little bit of investigation. Ask yourself the following questions, answering as honestly as you can:

- Do you sometimes find yourself feeling sluggish during the day, unable to finish writing that essay or start studying?
- Do you wish you had more energy to keep up with school, work, and family commitments?
- Does drug or alcohol use interfere with your ability to balance daily responsibilities?

Just like proper maintenance and quality fuel keeps your car running smoothly along the highway, our bodies also require care and effort to support all of the demands of today's fast-paced lifestyle. Scientific data tell us that good nutrition and hydration improve cognitive health, including memory. Fueling our bodies is more than simply eating when hungry; proper nutrients—or lack thereof—affect how our brains function.

Whether you dream of running a marathon or would rather watch a movie marathon on the couch, you should know that exercise is a vital part of keeping both your body and mind vibrant. Regular physical activity boasts a variety of benefits, from disease prevention to improved mental focus.

Drug and alcohol consumption also affects both our physical and mental state of wellness. While occasional imbibing may reduce stress, prolonged overindulgence in any substance creates negative patterns and often leads to unhealthy consequences.

How do we find the balance between recreation and getting wrecked? What tools can we use to create positive physical behaviors for a healthy body? In this module, we explore ways to make good decisions about health choices that can positively affect your academic journey.

What is Good Health?

Some people see health as just a matter of common sense. These people might see little value in reading a health chapter. After all, they already know how to take care of themselves. Yet *knowing* and *doing* are two different things. Health information does not always translate into healthy habits.

We expect to experience health challenges as we age, although even youth is no guarantee of good health. Over the past three decades, obesity among young adults has tripled. Twenty-nine percent of young men smoke, and 70 percent of deaths among adults aged 18 to 29 years result from unintentional injuries, accidents, homicide, and suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009).

As a student, your success in school is directly tied to your health. Lack of sleep and exercise have been associated with lower GPAs among undergraduate students. So have alcohol use, tobacco use, gambling, and chronic health conditions (University of Minnesota 2007).

Any health habit that undermines your success in school can also undermine your success in later life. On the other hand, you can adopt habits that sustain your well-being. One study found that people lengthened their lives an average of 14 years by adopting just four habits (Khaw and colleagues 2008):

1. staying tobacco-free;
2. eating more fruits and vegetables;
3. exercising regularly; and
4. drinking alcohol in moderation, if at all.

Health also hinges on a habit of exercising some tissue that lies between your ears—the organ called your brain. One path to greater health starts not with new food or a new form of exercise but with new ideas.

Consider the power of beliefs, some of which create barriers to higher levels of health: “Your health is programmed by your heredity,” “Some people are just low on energy,” “Healthy food doesn’t taste very good,” and “Over the long run, people just don’t change their habits.” Be willing to test these ideas and change them when it serves you.

People often misunderstand what the word *health* means. Remember that this word is similar in origin to *whole, hale, hardy*, and even *holy*. Implied in these words are qualities that most of us associate with healthy people: alertness, vitality, and vigor. Healthy people meet the demands of daily life with energy to spare. Illness or stress might slow them down for a while, but they bounce back. They know how to relax, create loving relationships, and find satisfaction in their work.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Health habits of adults aged 18–29 highlighted in report on nation’s health.” CDC.gov. www.cdc.gov/media/pressrel/2009/r090218.htm (published February 18, 2009; accessed March 15, 2011).

Khaw, Kay-Tee, Nicholas Wareham, Sheila Bingham, Ailsa Welch, Robert Luben, and Nicholas Day. “Combined impact of health behaviours and mortality in men and women: The EPIC-Norfolk prospective population study.” *PLoS Medicine* 5 (2008): e70. www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.0050012 (accessed November 8, 2012).

University of Minnesota. “Health and academic performance: Minnesota undergraduate students.” University of Minnesota, Boynton Health Service.

https://boynton.umn.edu/sites/boynton.umn.edu/files/2017-09/HealthAcademicPerformanceReport_2007.pdf (accessed April 10, 2009).

Opening Your Mind to Good Health

When you think about health, what ideas come to mind? Perhaps you think about a loved one who has faced an illness, or a friend who is into fitness. Health involves many different things and can be looked at in a variety of ways. To open up your inquiry into health—and to open up new possibilities for your life—consider these three ideas:

1. **Health is a continuum.** On one end of that continuum is a death that comes too early. On the other end is a long life filled with satisfying work and fulfilling relationships. Many of us exist between those extremes at a point we might call average. Most of the time we're not sick. And most of the time we're not truly thriving, either.
2. **Health changes.** Health is not a fixed state. In fact, health fluctuates from year to year, day to day, and moment to moment. Those changes can occur largely by chance. Or they can occur more often by choice, as we take conscious control of our thinking and behavior.
3. **Even when faced with health challenges, we have choices.** We can choose attitudes and habits that promote a higher quality of life. For example, people with diabetes can often manage the disease by exercising more and changing their diet.

Health is one of those rich, multilayered concepts that we can never define completely. In the end, your definition of *health* comes from your own experience. The proof lies not on these pages but in your life—in the level of health that you create, starting now.

You have choices. You can remain unaware of habits that have major consequences for your health. Or you can become aware of current habits (discovery), choose new habits (intention), and take appropriate action.

Health is a choice you make every moment, with each thought and behavior. Wake up to this possibility by experimenting with the suggestions in this lesson.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders affect many students. These disorders involve serious disturbances in eating behavior. Examples are overeating or extreme reduction of food intake as well as irrational concern about body shape or weight. Women are much more likely to develop these disorders than are men, although cases are on the rise among men.

Bulimia involves cycles of excessive eating and forced purges. A person with this disorder might gorge on a pizza, doughnuts, and ice cream and then force herself to vomit. Or she might compensate for overeating with excessive use of laxatives, enemas, or diuretics.

Anorexia nervosa is a potentially fatal illness marked by self-starvation. People with anorexia may practice extended fasting or eat only one kind of food for weeks at a time.

These disorders are not due to a failure of willpower. They are real illnesses in which harmful patterns of eating take on a life of their own.

Eating disorders can lead to many complications, including life-threatening heart conditions and kidney failure. Many people with eating disorders also struggle with depression, substance abuse, and anxiety. They need immediate treatment to stabilize their health. This is usually followed by continuing medical care, counseling, and medication to promote a full recovery.

If you're worried you might have an eating disorder, visit a doctor, campus health service, or local public health clinic. For more information, contact the National Eating Disorders Association at 1-800-931-2237 or online at www.nationaleatingdisorders.org.

Choose to Exercise

Our bodies need to be exercised. The world ran on muscle power back in the era when we had to hunt down a woolly mammoth every few weeks and drag it back to the cave. Today, we can grab a burger at a drive-up window, so we need to make a special effort to exercise.

Exercise promotes weight control and reduces the symptoms of depression. It also helps to prevent heart attack, diabetes, and several forms of cancer (Harvard Medical School 2008).

Exercise also refreshes your body and your mind. If you're stuck on a math problem or blocked on writing a paper, take an exercise break. Chances are that you'll come back with a fresh perspective and some new ideas.

If you get moving, you'll create lean muscles, a strong heart, and an alert brain. If the word *exercise* turns you off, think *physical activity* instead. Here are some things you can do:

- **Stay active throughout the day.** Park a little farther from work or school. Do your heart a favor by walking some extra blocks. Take the stairs instead of riding elevators. For an extra workout, climb two stairs at a time. An hour of daily activity is ideal, but do whatever you can. Some activity is better than none.
- **No matter what you do, ease into it.** For example, start by walking briskly for at least 15 minutes every day. Increase that time gradually, and add a little jogging.
- **Adapt to your campus environment.** Look for exercise facilities on campus. Search for classes in aerobics, swimming, volleyball, basketball, golf, tennis, and other sports. Intramural sports are another option. School can be a great place to get in shape.
- **Do what you enjoy.** Stay active with aerobic activities that you enjoy. You might like martial arts, kickboxing, yoga, ballroom dancing, stage combat classes, or mountain climbing. Check your school catalog for such courses.
- **Vary your routine.** Find several activities that you like to do, and rotate them throughout the year. Your main form of activity during winter might be ballroom dancing, riding an exercise bike, or skiing. In summer, you could switch to outdoor sports. Whenever possible, choose weight-bearing activities such as walking, running, or stair climbing.
- **Get active early.** Work out first thing in the morning. Then it's done for the day. Make it part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth.
- **Exercise with other people.** Making exercise a social affair can add a fun factor and raise your level of commitment.
- **Join a gym without fear**. Many health clubs welcome people who are just starting to get in shape.

Look for gradual results. If your goal is to lose weight, be patient. Because 1 pound equals 3,500 calories, you might feel tempted to reduce weight loss to a simple formula: *Let's see… if I burn away just 100 calories each day through exercise, I should lose 1 pound every 35 days.*

Actually, the relationship between exercise and weight loss is complex. Many factors—including individual differences in metabolism and the type of exercise you do—affect the amount of weight you actually lose (Brody 2006). When you step on the bathroom scale, look for small changes over time rather than sudden, dramatic losses. Gradual weight loss is more healthy anyway—and easier to sustain over the long term.

Weight loss is just one potential benefit of exercise. Choosing to exercise can lift your mood, increase your stamina, strengthen your bones, stabilize your joints, and help prevent heart disease. It can also reduce your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and several forms of cancer. If you do resistance training—such as weight machines or elastic-band workouts—you'll strengthen your muscles as well. For a complete fitness program, add stretching exercises to enjoy increased flexibility (Harvard Medical School 2009).

Before beginning any vigorous exercise program, consult a healthcare professional. This is critical if you are overweight, older than 60 years, in poor condition, or a heavy smoker, or if you have a history of health problems.

References

Brody, Jane. “Exercise = weight loss, except when it doesn’t.” *New York Times,* September 12, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/12/health/nutrition/12brody.html (accessed November 8, 2012).

Harvard Medical School. *HEALTHbeat: 20 No-Sweat Ways to Get More Exercise.* Boston: Harvard Health Publications, 2008.

Harvard Medical School. *HEALTHbeat Extra: The Secret to Better Health—Exercise.* Boston: Harvard Health Publications, 2009.

Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drugs: The Truth

The truth is that getting high can be fun. In our culture, and especially in our media, getting high has become synonymous with having a good time. Even if you don’t smoke, drink, or use other drugs, you are certain to come in contact with people who do.

For centuries, human beings have devised ways to change their feelings and thoughts by altering their body chemistry. The Chinese were using marijuana 5,000 years ago. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, wrote about a group of people in Eastern Europe who threw marijuana on hot stones and inhaled the vapors. More recently, during the American Civil War, customers could buy opium and morphine at neighborhood stores (Weil and Rosen 1993, 45).

Today, we are still a drug-using society. Of course, some of those uses are therapeutic and lawful, including taking drugs as prescribed by a doctor or psychiatrist. The problem comes when we turn to drugs as the solution to any problem. Often, the first response to the question, “Are you uncomfortable?” is, “Take something.”

We live in times when reaching for instant comfort via chemicals is not only condoned but encouraged. If you’re bored, tense, or anxious, you can drink a can of beer, down a glass of wine, or light up a cigarette. If you want to enhance your memory, take a *smart drug*, which includes prescription stimulants and caffeine. And these are only the legal options. If you’re willing to take risks, you can pick from a large selection of illegal drugs on the street. And if that seems too risky, you can abuse prescription drugs.

There is a big payoff in using alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, cocaine, heroin, or other drugs—or people wouldn’t do it. The payoff can be direct, such as relaxation, self-confidence, comfort, excitement, or the ability to pull an all-nighter. At times, the payoff is avoiding rejection or defying authority.

In addition to the payoffs, there are costs. For some people, the cost is much greater than the payoff. Even if drug use doesn’t make you broke, it can make you crazy. This is not necessarily the kind of crazy where you dress up like Napoleon. Rather, it is the kind where you care about little else except finding more drugs—friends, school, work, and family be damned.

Substance abuse is only part of the picture. People can also relate to food, gambling, money, sex, and even work in compulsive ways.

Some people will stop abusing a substance or activity when the consequences get serious enough. Other people don’t stop. They continue their self-defeating behaviors, no matter the consequences for themselves, their friends, or their families. At that point, the problem goes beyond abuse. It’s addiction.

With addiction, the costs can include overdose, infection, and lowered immunity to disease. These can be fatal. Long-term heavy drinking, for example, damages every organ system in the human body. And about 440,000 Americans die annually from the effects of cigarette smoking, including secondhand smoke (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011).

Lectures about the reasons for avoiding alcohol as well as drug abuse and addiction can be pointless. We don't take care of our bodies because someone says we should. We might take care of ourselves when we see that the costs of using a substance outweigh the benefits.

Acknowledging that alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs can be fun infuriates a lot of people. Remember that this acknowledgment is *not* the same as condoning drug use. The point is this: People are more likely to abstain when they're convinced that using these substances leads to more pain than pleasure over the long run. You choose. It's your body.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Tobacco-related mortality." CDC.gov. http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality/ (published March 21, 2011; accessed November 8, 2012).

Weil, Andrew, and Winifred Rosen. *From Chocolate to Morphine: Everything You Need to Know About Mind-Altering Drugs.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Lesson 6.2: Emotional Well-Being and Personal Safety

Lesson 6.2 Introduction

In our previous lesson, we explored some of the reasons that taking a proactive approach to physical health is important. But what about our emotional health?

The mind–body connection must be acknowledged and valued if we want to truly lead a balanced lifestyle—one that sets up the conditions for fulfillment and happiness in an increasingly hectic world. Learning ways to quiet the mind and improve mental focus can promote a sense of health and well-being. In addition to our emotional health, physical safety should also be a concern in today's world. Having fun and enjoying life's experiences are important, but we must also be mindful of our safety while doing so. Being aware of our surroundings, making good decisions, and learning to trust our instincts in dangerous situations can help reduce our risk of harm.

In this lesson, we explore strategies you can use to promote health and relieve stress in positive, proactive ways. You will also encounter useful strategies for keeping yourself safe in a variety of real-world situations.

Promoting Emotional Health

The number of students in higher education who have emotional health problems is steadily increasing (Duenwald 2004). According to the American College Health Association (2008), 31 percent of college students report that they have felt so depressed that it was difficult to function. Almost half of students say that they've felt overwhelming anxiety, and 60 percent report that they've felt very lonely.

Emotional health includes many factors. Your skill at managing stress and ability to build loving relationships are key. And so are your capacity to meet the demands of school and work and your beliefs about your ability to succeed. People with mental illness have thoughts, emotions, or behaviors that consistently interfere with these skills.

You can take simple and immediate steps to prevent emotional health problems—and cope with them if they do occur. Here are some other suggestions to promote your emotional health:

- **Take care of your body.** Your thoughts and emotions can get scrambled if you go too long feeling hungry or tired. Follow the suggestions in this lesson for eating, exercise, and sleep.
- **Solve problems.** Although you can't fix a bad feeling in the same way that you can fix a machine, you can choose to change a situation associated with that feeling. There might

be a problem that needs a solution. You can use feelings as your motivation to solve that problem.
If you feel intense sadness, anger, or fear, think about whether it is related to a specific situation in your life. Describe the problem in a Discovery Statement. Then brainstorm solutions, choose one to implement, and write an Intention Statement to describe the next action you'll take. Reducing your course load, cutting back on hours at work, getting more financial aid, delegating a task, or taking some other concrete action might solve the problem—and help you feel better.

- **Stay active.** A related strategy is to do something—*anything* that's constructive, even if it's not a solution to a specific problem. For example, mop the kitchen floor. Clean out your dresser drawers. Iron your shirts. This sounds silly, but it works.

The basic principle is that you can separate emotions from actions. It is appropriate to feel miserable when you do. It's normal to cry and express your feelings. It is also possible to go to class, study, work, eat, and feel miserable at the same time. Unless you have a diagnosable problem with anxiety or depression, you can continue your normal activities until the misery passes.

References

American College Health Association. "American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group, Executive Summary Fall 2008." www.acha-ncha.org/docs/ACHA-NCHA_Reference_Group_ExecutiveSummary_Fall2008.pdf (accessed March 15, 2011).

Duenwald, Mary. "The dorms may be great, but how's the counseling?" *New York Times,* October 26, 2004. https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/26/health/psychology/26cons.html (accessed November 8, 2012).

Dealing with Stress

Japanese psychiatrist Morita Masatake, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud, based his whole approach to treatment on this insight: We can face our emotional pain directly and still take constructive action. One of Masatake's favorite suggestions for people who felt depressed was that they tend a garden (Reynolds 1995, 98).

It's easy to feel stressed if you dwell on how much you have to accomplish this year, this term, this month, or even this week. Focus on one task at a time.

Remember that an effective plan for the day does two things. First, it clarifies what you're choosing *not* to do today. (Tasks that you plan to do in the future are listed on your calendar or to-do list.) Second, it reduces your day to a series of concrete tasks—such as making phone calls, going to classes, running errands, or reading chapters—that you can do one at a time.

If you feel overwhelmed, just find the highest-priority task on your to-do list. Do it with total attention until it's done. Then go back to your list for the next high-priority task. Do *it* with total attention. Savor the feeling of mastery and control that comes with crossing each task off your list.

Don't believe everything you think. According to Albert Ellis and other cognitive psychologists, stress results not from events in our lives but from the way we *think* about those events. If we believe that people should always behave in exactly the way we expect them to, for instance, we set ourselves up for misery. The same happens if we believe that events should always turn out exactly as we want. There are two main ways to deal with such thoughts:

1. **Don't believe them.** Dispute such thoughts and replace them with more realistic ones: *I can control my own behavior but not the behavior of others*, and *Some events are beyond my control*. Changing our beliefs can reduce our stress significantly.
2. **Release stress-producing thoughts without disputing them.** Mindfulness meditation is a way to do this. While meditating, you simply notice your thoughts as they arise and

pass. Instead of reacting to them, you observe them. Eventually, your stream of thinking slows down. You might enter a state of deep relaxation that also yields life-changing insights.

Many religious organizations offer meditation classes. You can also find meditation instruction through health maintenance organizations, YMCAs or YWCAs, and community education programs.

Reference

Reynolds, David. *A Handbook for Constructive Living.* New York: Morrow, 1995.

Dealing with Emotional Pain

Remember that emotional pain is not a sickness. Emotional pain has gotten a bad name. This reputation is undeserved. There is nothing wrong with feeling bad. It's okay to feel miserable, depressed, sad, upset, angry, dejected, gloomy, or unhappy.

It might not be pleasant to feel bad, but it can be good for you. Often, bad is an appropriate way to feel. When you leave a place you love, sadness is natural. When you lose a friend or lover, misery might be in order. When someone treats you badly, it is probably appropriate to feel angry. When a loved one dies, it is necessary to grieve. The grief might appear in the form of depression, sadness, or anger.

There is nothing wrong with extreme emotional pain. If depression, sadness, or anger persists, then get help. Otherwise, allow yourself to experience these emotions. They're often appropriate.

Sometimes, we allow ourselves to feel bad only if we have a good reason. For example: "Well, I feel very sad, but that is because I just found out my best friend is moving to Europe." It's all right to know the reason why you are sad. It's also fine not to know. You can feel bad for no apparent reason. The reason doesn't matter. Because you cannot directly control any feeling, simply accept it.

There's no way to predict how long emotional pain will last. The main point is that it does not last forever. There's no need to let a broken heart stop your life. Although you can find abundant advice on the subject, just remember a simple and powerful idea: This too shall pass.

Choosing to Rest

A lack of rest can decrease your immunity to illness and impair your performance in school. You still might be tempted to cut back drastically on your sleep once in awhile for an all-night study session, but depriving yourself of sleep is a choice you can avoid.

If you have trouble falling asleep, experiment with the following suggestions:

- Exercise daily. For many people, regular exercise promotes sounder sleep. However, finish exercising several hours before you want to go to sleep.
- Avoid naps during the daytime.
- Monitor your caffeine intake, especially in the afternoon and evening.
- Avoid using alcohol to feel sleepy. Drinking alcohol late in the evening can disrupt your sleep during the night.
- Develop a sleep ritual—a regular sequence of calming activities that end your day. You might take a warm bath and do some light reading. Turn off the TV and computer at least 1 hour before you go to bed.
- Keep your sleeping room cool.
- Keep a regular schedule for going to sleep and waking up.
- Sleep in the same place each night. When you're there, your body gets the message that it's time to go to sleep.

- Practice relaxation techniques while lying in bed. A simple one is to count your breaths and release distracting thoughts as they arise.
- Make tomorrow's to-do list before you go to sleep so that you won't lie there worrying that tomorrow you'll forget about something you need to do.
- Get up and study or do something else until you're tired.
- See a doctor if sleeplessness persists.

Share What You Are Feeling

Sometimes, other people—friends or family members, for example—have a hard time letting you feel bad. They might be worried that they did something wrong and want to make it better. They want you to quit feeling bad. Tell them you will—eventually. Assure them that you will feel good again, but that for right now you just want to feel bad.

Share what you're thinking and feeling. Revealing your inner world with a family member or friend is a powerful way to gain perspective. The simple act of describing a problem can sometimes reveal a solution or give you a fresh perspective.

Get help. Remember a basic guideline about *when* to seek help: whenever problems with your thinking, moods, or behavior consistently interfere with your ability to sleep, eat, go to class, work, or create positive relationships.

You can get help at the student health center on campus. This is not just a service for treating colds, allergies, and flu symptoms. Counselors expect to help students deal with adjustment to campus, changes in mood, academic problems, and drug abuse and dependence.

Students with anxiety disorders, clinical depression, bipolar disorder, and other diagnoses might get referred to a professional outside the student health center. The referral process can take time, so seek help right away. Your tuition helps to pay for these services. It's smart to use them now.

Finding Resources

You can find resources to promote emotional health even if your campus doesn't offer counseling services. Start with a personal physician—one person who can coordinate all of your health care. (For suggestions, go to your school's health center.) A personal physician can refer you to another health professional if it seems appropriate. These two suggestions can also work after you graduate. Promoting emotional health is a skill to use for the rest of your life.

Remember that suicide is no solution. While entering higher education, people typically go through major change. For some people, this involves depression and anxiety. Both are risk factors for suicide—the second leading cause of death on college campuses (Schaffer, Jeglic, and Stanley 2008).

Most often, suicide can be prevented. If you suspect that someone you know is considering suicide, do the following:

- **Take it seriously.** Taking suicidal comments seriously is especially important when you hear them from young adults.
- **Listen fully.** Encourage the person at risk to express thoughts and feelings appropriately. If he claims that he doesn't want to talk, be inviting, be assertive, and be persistent. Be totally committed to listening.
- **Speak powerfully.** Let the person at risk know that you care. Trying to talk someone out of suicide or minimizing problems is generally useless. Acknowledge that problems are serious, but they can be solved. Point out that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.
- **Get professional help**. Suggest that the person see a mental health professional. If she resists help, offer to schedule the appointment for her and to take her to it.

- **Remove access to firearms.** Most suicides are attempted with guns. Get rid of any guns that might be around. Also remove all drugs and razors.
- **Handle the event as an emergency.** If a situation becomes a crisis, do not leave the person alone. Call a crisis hotline, 911, or a social service agency. If necessary, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room, clinic, or police station.

If you ever begin to think about committing suicide, seek out someone you trust. Tell this person how you feel. If necessary, make an appointment to see a counselor, and ask someone to accompany you. When you're at risk, you deserve the same compassion that you'd willingly extend to another person.

Find out more from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention at 1-800-273-8255 or www.afsp.org. Another excellent resource is the It Gets Better Project at www.itgetsbetter.org.

Reference

Schaffer, M., E. L. Jeglic, and B. Stanley. "The relationship between suicidal behavior, ideation, and binge drinking among college students." *Archives of Suicide Research* 12 (2008): 124–132.

Choose to Stay Safe

Staying safe in our everyday lives, whether on campus, at home, or around town, is not always within our control. However, there are many proactive steps you can take to protect yourself in a variety of situations. Remaining alert and being aware of your surroundings is important in any situation. In addition, following these simple actions can significantly increase your personal safety:

1. Always lock doors when you're leaving home. If you live in a dorm, follow the policies for keeping the front doors secure. Don't let an unauthorized person walk in behind you. If you commute to school or have a car on campus, keep your car doors locked.
2. Avoid walking alone, especially at night. Many schools offer shuttle buses to central campus locations. Use them. As a backup, carry enough spare cash for a taxi ride.
3. Be prepared for a crisis. Ask your instructors about what to do in classroom emergencies. Look for emergency phones along the campus routes that you normally walk. You can always use your cell phone to call 911 for help.
4. Be willing to make that call when you see other people in unsafe situations. For example, you might be at a party with a friend who drinks too much and collapses. In this situation, some underage students might hesitate to call for help. They fear getting charged with illegal alcohol possession. Don't make this mistake. Every minute that you delay calling 911 puts your friend at further risk.

In addition to basic personal safety, you need to know how to prevent sexual assault while you're on campus. This problem could be more common at your school than you think. People often hesitate to report rape for many reasons, such as fear, embarrassment, and concerns that others won't believe them.

Both women and men can take steps to prevent rape from occurring in the first place:

- **Get together with a group of people for a tour of the campus.** Make a special note of danger spots, such as unlighted paths and unguarded buildings. Keep in mind that rape can occur during daylight and in well-lit places.
- **Ask whether your school has escort services for people taking evening classes.** These might include personal escorts, car escorts, or both. If you do take an evening class, ask whether there are security officers on duty before and after the class.
- **Take a course or seminar on self-defense and rape prevention.** To find these courses, check with your student counseling service, community education center, or local library.

If you are raped, get medical care right away. Go to the nearest rape crisis center, hospital, student health service, or police station. Also arrange for follow-up counseling. It's your decision whether to report the crime. Filing a report does not mean that you have to press charges. And if you do choose to press charges later, having a report on file can help your case.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Another important part of personal safety is protecting yourself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). People with an STD might feel no symptoms for years and not even discover that they are infected. Know how to protect yourself.

STDs can result from vaginal sex; oral sex; anal sex; or any other way that people contact semen, vaginal secretions, and blood. Without treatment, some of these diseases can lead to blindness, infertility, cancer, heart disease, or even death (Minnesota Department of Health 2010).

There are at least 25 kinds of STDs. Common examples are chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis. Sexual contact can also spread the human papillomavirus or HPV, the most common cause of cervical cancer, and the human immunodeficiency virus or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Most STDs can be cured if treated early. (Herpes and AIDS are important exceptions, however.) Prevention is better. Some guidelines for prevention are as follows.

Abstain from sex. Abstain from sex or have sex exclusively with one person who is free of disease and has no other sex partners. These are the only ways to be absolutely safe from STDs.

Use condoms. Male condoms are thin membranes stretched over the penis prior to intercourse. Condoms prevent semen from entering the vagina. For the most protection, use latex condoms—not ones made of lambskin or polyurethane. Use a condom every time you have sex and for any type of sex.

Condoms are not guaranteed to work all of the time. They can break, leak, or slip off. In addition, condoms cannot protect you from STDs that are spread by contact with herpes sores or warts. Avoid condoms, lubricants, spermicides, and other products that contain nonoxynol-9, which can actually increase the risk of STDs.

Stay sober. People are more likely to have unsafe sex when drunk or high.

Do not share needles. Sharing needles or other paraphernalia with other drug users can spread STDs.

Take action soon after you have sex. Urinate soon after you have sex. Wash your genitals with soap and water.

Get vaccinated. Vaccines are available to prevent hepatitis B and HPV infection. See your doctor.

Get screened for STDs. The only way to find out whether you're infected is to be tested by a healthcare professional. If you have sex with more than one person, get screened for STDs at least once each year. Do this even if you have no symptoms. Remember that many schools offer free STD screening.

The more people you have sex with, the greater your risk of STDs. You are at risk even if you have sex only once with one person who is infected. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends chlamydia screening for all sexually active women under age 26 years. Women aged 25 or older should be screened if they have a new sex partner or multiple sex partners (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009).

Recognize the symptoms of STDs. Symptoms include swollen glands with fever and aching; itching around the vagina; vaginal discharge; pain during sex or when urinating; sore throat following oral sex; anal pain after anal sex; sores, blisters, scabs, or warts on the genitals, anus,

tongue, or throat; rashes on the palms of your hands or soles of your feet; dark urine; loose and light-colored stools; and unexplained fatigue, weight loss, and night sweats.

Get treated right away. If you think you have an STD, go to your doctor, campus health service, or local public health clinic. Early treatment might prevent serious health problems.

Talk to your partner. Before you have sex with someone, talk about the risk of STDs. If you are infected, tell your partner.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Trends in reportable sexually transmitted diseases in the United States, 2007.” CDC.gov. http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats07/trends.htm (published January 13, 2009; accessed March 15, 2011).

Minnesota Department of Health. “Sexually transmitted disease facts.” http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/stds/stdfactssummary.html (published November 16, 2010; accessed November 8, 2012).

Lesson 6.3: Asking for Help

Lesson 6.3 Introduction

In today’s quickly changing world, it’s easy to lose ourselves. Trying to be the very best in our jobs, working to excel in school, and managing the needs of friends and family can all become difficult to balance. Each day it seems, we are inundated with crisis and worry in the news, and our increasingly connected technological world doesn’t seem to have a shut-off switch.

At a time when cell or smart phones, the Internet, and social media let people instantly connect, many of us are becoming more isolated than ever. Where can we turn when we are stressed, overwhelmed, and anxious?

The world responds to people who ask. If you’re not consistently getting what you want in life, then consider the power of asking for help. *Ask and you shall receive* is a gem of wisdom from many spiritual traditions. Yet acting on this simple idea can be challenging.

Some people see asking for help as a sign of weakness. Actually, it’s a sign of strength. Focus on the potential rewards. When you’re willing to receive and others are willing to give, resources become available. Circumstances fall into place. Dreams that once seemed too big become goals that you can actually achieve. You benefit, and so do other people.

Remember that asking for help pays someone a compliment. It means that you value what people have to offer. Many will be happy to respond. The key is asking with skill.

In this lesson, we explore some of the ways you can reach out when life becomes unmanageable. Taking care of your mind is just as important as caring for your physical needs, yet we often ignore mental health until a crisis emerges. Whether we find resources and support through technology, or a more old-school approach, we never truly need to feel alone.

How to Ask for Help

It may be difficult to ask for help. You us use the following guidelines to ask for help with skill:

Ask with clarity. Before asking for help, think about your request. Take time to prepare, and consider putting it in writing before you ask in person.

The way you ask has a great influence on the answers you get. For example, “I need help with money” is a big statement. People might not know how to respond. Be more specific: “Do you know any sources of financial aid that I might have missed?” or “My expenses exceed my income by $200 each month. I don’t want to work more hours while I’m in school. How can I fill the gap?”

Ask with sincerity. People can tell when a request comes straight from your heart. Although clarity is important, remember that you're asking for help—not making a speech. Keep it simple and direct. Just tell the truth about your current situation, what you want, and the gap between the two. It's okay to be less than perfect.

Ask widely. Consider the variety of people who can offer help. They include parents, friends, classmates, coworkers, mentors, and sponsors. People such as counselors, advisors, and librarians are *paid* to help you.

Also, be willing to ask for help with tough issues in any area of life—sex, health, money, career decisions, and more. If you consistently ask for help only in one area, you limit your potential.

To get the most value from this suggestion, direct your request to an appropriate person. For example, you wouldn't ask your instructors for advice about sex. However, you can share any concern with a professional counselor.

Ask with an open mind. When you ask for help, see whether you can truly open up. If an idea seems strange or unworkable, put your objections on hold for the moment. If you feel threatened or defensive, just notice the feeling. Then return to listening. Discomfort can be a sign that you're about to make a valuable discovery. If people only confirm what you already think and feel, you miss the chance to learn.

Ask with responsibility. If you want people to offer help, then avoid statements such as, "You know that suggestion you gave me last time? Wow, that really bombed!"

When you act on an idea and it doesn't work, the reason may have nothing to do with the other person. Perhaps you misunderstood or forgot a key point. Ask again—for clarity. In any case, the choice about what to do—and the responsibility for the consequences—is still yours.

Ask with an opening for more ideas. Approaching people with a specific, limited request can work wonders. So can asking in a way that takes the conversation to a new place. You can do this with creative questions: "Do you have any other ideas for me?" "Would it help if I approached this problem from a different angle?" "Could I be asking a better question?"

Ask again. People who make a living by selling things know the power of a repeated request. Some people habitually respond to a first request with "no." They might not get to "yes" until the second or third request.

Some cultures place a value on competition, success, and "making it on your own." In this environment, asking for help is not always valued. Sometimes, people say "no" because they're surprised or not sure how to respond. Give them more time and another chance to come around.

MODULE 7

USING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Introduction

In our daily contact with other people and the mass media, we are exposed to hundreds of messages. Yet there are numerous obstacles to receiving those messages accurately.

For one thing, only a small percentage of communication is verbal. We also send messages with our bodies and with the tone of our voices. Throw in a few other factors, such as a hot room or background noise, and it's a wonder we can communicate at all.

We often send and receive messages using emotions. Your emotional intelligence skills will serve you in school and in the workplace, especially when you collaborate on project teams. In his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* , Daniel Goleman (1995) defines emotional intelligence as a cluster of traits: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and skill in relationships.

Written communication adds a whole other set of variables. When you speak, you supplement the meaning of your words with the power of body language and voice inflection. When you write, those nonverbal elements are absent. Instead, you depend on your skills at word choice, sentence construction, and punctuation to get your message across.

When you are engaged in a conversation or delivering a presentation, how you listen and how you choose your words will make the difference in the effectiveness of that communication.

The choices that you make in these areas can aid—or hinder—communication.

Reference

Goleman, Daniel. *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam, 1995.

Lesson 7.1: Communication Skills

Lesson 7.1 Introduction

In communication theory, the term *noise* refers to any factor that distorts meaning. When noise is present, the channels of communication start to close. Noise can be external (a lawn mower outside a classroom) or internal (the emotions of the sender or receiver, such as speech anxiety). To a large extent, skillful communication means reducing noise and keeping channels open.

Communication works best when each of us has plenty of time to receive what others send *and* the opportunity to send a complete message when it's our turn. Communication is a two-way street. When someone else talks, just listen. Then, switch roles so that you can be the sender for a while. Keep this up until you do a reasonably complete job of creating shared meaning.

In this lesson, you will learn strategies important to listening and speaking. Think about how you might find opportunities to practice these strategies.

Nonverbal Listening Skills

Effective listening calls for concentration and energy, but it's worth the trouble. People love a good listener. The best salespeople, managers, coworkers, teachers, parents, and friends are the best listeners.

To listen well, begin from a clear intention. *Choose* to listen well. Once you've made this choice, practice your nonverbal listening skills to be even more effective.

Nonverbal Listening Skills

Be quiet. Allowing several seconds to pass before you begin to respond gives the speaker time to catch her breath and gather her thoughts. Someone who talks nonstop might fear she will lose the floor if she pauses.

If the message being sent is complete, this short break gives you time to form your response. If you make up a response before the speaker is finished, you might miss the end of her message, which is often the main point.

In some circumstances, pausing for several seconds might be inappropriate. Ignore this suggestion completely in situations where immediate action is usually necessary.

Maintain eye contact. Maintaining eye contact demonstrates your attentiveness and keeps your mind from wandering. However, this idea is not an absolute. Maintaining eye contact is valued more in some cultures than in others.

Display openness. You can display openness through your facial expression and body position. Uncross your arms and legs. Sit up straight. Face the other person, and remove any physical barriers between you.

Send acknowledgments. Words and nonverbal gestures of acknowledgment convey to the speaker that you are receiving his message. These words and gestures include "okay," "yes," and head nods.

Release distractions. Even when your intention is to listen, you might find your mind wandering. There's a simple solution: Notice your wandering mind without judgment. Then, bring your attention back to the act of listening. Set up your immediate environment to release distractions. Turn off or silence your cell phone and other digital devices. Send the message that your intention is to listen.

Suspend judgments. As listeners, our goal is to fully receive another person's message. This does not mean that we must agree with the message. Once you're confident that you accurately understand a speaker's point of view, you are free to agree or disagree with it. The key to effective listening is understanding *before* evaluating.

Verbal Listening Skills

In addition to your nonverbal listening skills, your verbal listening skills are important to consider as well. Imagine telling someone about a problem you are having and, in the middle of telling your story, he interrupts you and tells you his story or gives you advice. That is not what you needed from him at that moment. Part of effective communication is being an effective listener and knowing how to respond when someone else is speaking.

The following suggestions will help you improve your verbal listening skills:

Choose when to speak. When we listen to another person, we often interrupt with our own stories, opinions, suggestions, and comments. To avoid this kind of one-sided conversation, delay your verbal responses and wait for an *appropriate* moment to respond.

Feed back meaning. Sometimes, you can help a speaker clarify her message by paraphrasing it. This does not mean parroting what she says. Instead, briefly summarize. There will be no doubt when you get it right. The sender will say, "Yeah, that's it."

Notice verbal *and* nonverbal messages. Sometimes, a speaker's body language seems to convey the opposite of his words. Keep in mind that the same nonverbal behavior can have various meanings across cultures. Someone who looks bored might simply be listening in a different way.

Listen for requests and intentions. An effective way to listen to complaints is to pay attention to the request hidden in them. *The instructor talks too fast* might be asking, *What strategies can I use to take notes when the instructor covers material rapidly?*

Viewing complaints as requests gives us more choices. We can decide whether to grant the request or help the person translate her own complaint into an action plan.

Allow emotion. In the presence of full listening, some people will share things that they feel deeply about. If you feel uncomfortable when this happens, try to accept the discomfort for a little while longer. Emotional release can bring relief and trigger unexpected insights.

Be careful with questions and advice. Questions can take conversations in a new direction, which may not be where the speaker wants to go. Ask questions only to clarify the speaker's message. When it's your turn to speak, you can introduce any topic that you want.

Also be cautious about giving advice. Unsolicited advice can be taken as condescending or even insulting. Skilled listeners do not assume that they know what's best for someone else.

Take care of yourself. Be honest. Don't pretend to listen. You can say, "What you're telling me is important, but I'm pressed for time right now. Can we set aside another time to talk about this?"

Stay open to the adventure of listening. Listening fully, and opening yourself to how others see the world, means taking risks and challenging your own opinions.

Listening in an unguarded way can take your relationships to a new depth and level of honesty. This kind of listening can open up new possibilities for thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Choosing to Speak

Another important element to effective communication is using the right words when we choose to speak. We want to be clear in the message we are sending. Emotions, though, can get in the way of the message. Sometimes, we feel wonderful or rotten or sad or scared, and we want to express it. You can send almost any message through tears, laughter, fist pounding, or hugging, but sometimes words are better. Begin with a sincere intention to reach common ground with your listener and practice effective speaking skills.

Replace *you* messages with *I* messages. It can be difficult to disagree without the persons involved becoming angry or upset. When conflict occurs, we often make statements about the other person with *you* messages:

- "*You* are rude."
- "*You* make me mad."
- "*You* must be crazy."
- "*You* don't love me anymore."

This kind of communication results in defensiveness. The responses to you messages might be similar to these:

- "I am not rude."
- "I don't care."
- "No, *you* are crazy."
- "No, *you* don't love *me*!"

You messages are hard to listen to. They label, judge, blame, and assume things that may or may not be true. They demand rebuttal. Even praises can sometimes be considered ineffective you messages. They don't work.

Psychologist Thomas Gordon (1975) suggests that, when communication is emotionally charged, you should limit your statements to descriptions about yourself. Replace you messages with *I* messages:

- "You are rude" might become "*I* feel upset."
- "You make me mad" could be "*I* feel angry."
- "You must be crazy" might be "*I* don't understand."
- "You don't love me anymore" could become "*I'm* afraid we're drifting apart."

Suppose a friend asks you to pick him up at the airport. You drive 20 miles to the airport and wait for his plane to land. No friend. You guess he missed his flight, so you decide to wait 3 more hours for the next flight to arrive. Still no friend. Perplexed and worried, you drive home. The next day, you see your friend downtown.

- "What happened?" you ask.
- "Oh, I caught an earlier flight," he says.
- "*You* are a rude person," you reply.

Look for and talk about the facts—the observable behavior. Everyone will agree to the facts: your friend asked you to pick him up at the airport, he took an earlier flight, and you did not receive a call from him while you waited. But his being rude is not a fact—it's your judgment.

He might explain, "I called your home, but no one answered. My mom had a stroke and was rushed to the hospital, so I caught the earliest flight I could get." Your judgment no longer fits then.

When you saw your friend, you might have said, "*I* waited and waited at the airport. *I* was worried about you. *I* didn't get a call. *I* feel angry and hurt. *I* don't want to waste my time. Next time, *I'll* be happy to pick you up, but call me on my cell phone when your flight arrives."

I messages don't judge, blame, criticize, or insult. They don't invite the other person to counterattack with more of the same. They are more accurate. They report our own thoughts and feelings.

Remember that questions are not always questions. You've heard these "questions" before. A parent asks, "Don't you want to look nice?" Translation: *I wish you'd cut your hair, lose the blue jeans, and put on a tie.* Or how about this question from a spouse: "Honey, wouldn't you love to go to an exciting hockey game tonight?" Translation: *I've already bought tickets.*

We use questions that aren't questions to sneak our opinions and requests into conversations. For example,

- "Doesn't it upset you?" means *It upsets me*.
- "Shouldn't we hang the picture on this wall?" means *I want to hang the picture on this wall*.

Communication improves when we say directly, "I'm upset" or "Let's hang the picture on this wall."

Reference

Gordon, Thomas. *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Tested New Way to Raise Responsible Children.* New York: New American Library, 1975.

Lesson 7.2: Emotional Intelligence

Lesson 7.2 Introduction (2 min.)

Imagine that you suddenly perceive a threat—from a supervisor who's screaming at you, for example. Physical sensations begin immediately, such as your heart beating in double-time or your stomach muscles clenching. Next, thoughts race through your head: *This is a disaster. She hates me. And everyone's watching*. Then, you think about what action you should take. You may feel like doing something, such as yelling back at her, running away from her, or quitting your job. Or you may do nothing, such as staring at her or crying.

What would you do?

Everyone has encountered these types of tense situations, and we all react differently. Recognizing these emotions is the first step in deciding how you will consciously act rather than allowing your emotions to react for you.

Part of effective communication is understanding how to use your emotional intelligence to make those communication decisions.

Using Emotional Intelligence

One concept important to communication is emotional intelligence, which is "the capacity to reason about emotions and emotional information, and of emotions to enhance thought" (Mayer 2009). In other words, it is the ability to recognize the emotional aspect of communication and the know-how to handle that aspect.

Following are some actions you can take to develop your emotional intelligence:

Recognize three elements of emotion. Even the strongest emotion consists of just three elements: physical sensations, thoughts, and urges to take action. Usually, these elements happen so fast that you can barely distinguish them. Separating them out is a first step toward emotional intelligence.

Name your emotions. Naming your emotions is a first step to going beyond the fight-or-flight reaction to any emotion. Naming gives you power. The second you attach a word to an emotion, you start to gain perspective. People with emotional intelligence have a rich vocabulary to describe a wide range of emotions. For example, do an Internet search with the key words *feelings list*. Read through the lists you find for examples of how to name your feelings in the future.

Accept your emotions. Another step toward emotional intelligence is accepting your emotions—*all* of them. This can be challenging if you've been taught that some emotions are "good" and some are "bad." Experiment with another viewpoint: You do not choose your emotional reactions; however, you can choose what you *do* in response to any emotion.

Express your emotions. One possible response to an emotion is expressing it. The key is to speak without blaming others for the way you feel. The basic tool for doing so is I messages, as described in the previous lesson.

Respond rather than react. The heart of emotional intelligence is moving from mindless reaction to mindful action. See whether you can introduce an intentional gap between sensations and thoughts on the one hand and your next action on the other hand.

To do this more often, use Discovery Statements. In your journal, write about situations in daily life that trigger strong emotions. Describe these events—and your usual responses to them—in detail. Follow up with Intention Statements. After seeing patterns in your emotions, you can consciously choose to behave in new ways. Instead of yelling back at the angry supervisor, for example, make it your intention to simply remain silent and breathe deeply until she finishes. Then say, "I'll wait to respond until we've both had a chance to cool down."

Make decisions with emotional intelligence. When considering a possible choice, ask yourself, *How am I likely to feel if I do this? And how will other people feel?* You can use your *gut feeling* to tell when an action might violate your values or hurt someone.

Translate decisions into effective action. Emotional intelligence will help you succeed on project teams in the workplace. Two questions recommended by consultant David Allen (2011) can lead to team meetings that actually produce results:

1. **What's the successful outcome?** If no one on your team can visualize a successful outcome for a meeting, then save everybody some frustration. Ask that the meeting be postponed until your team can create a clear agenda.

2. **What's the next action to make it happen?** Too many meetings end with no clear agreement about what action will be taken, who will take action, and by what date. To get clarity and accountability, ask each team member to state what he or she will do before the next meeting.

Think of emotions as energy. Anger, sadness, and fear send currents of sensation through your whole body. Ask yourself how you can channel that energy into constructive action.

References

Allen, David. "The GTD questions you can use every day." *Productive Living*, e-mail newsletter, January 12, 2011.

Lesson 7.3: Managing Conflict

Lesson 7.3 Introduction

We may encounter conflict in many areas of our lives: personal, professional, and academic. Imagine one of the following scenarios:

- Stephanie is an employee at a retail clothing shop and has recently been promoted. She has been with the company for five years, and many of her friends are now reporting to her. Since her promotion, she has noticed that several of her friends show up late to work and are not doing as much as they used to. She is worried that they are taking advantage of their friendship and not taking her seriously as a manager.
- Steve has been working on a group project for his history class. Another student, Jeff, told Steve that he used his brother's old history paper for his part of the project.

What would you do in each of these situations?

Managing conflict is an important part of communication. The key to managing conflict is *not* to avoid it.

Conflict Management Strategies, Part 1

Conflict management is one of the most practical skills you'll ever learn. Here are strategies that can help:

Start with common ground. As a first step in managing conflict, start with common ground. List all of the points on which you are *not* in conflict: *I know that we disagree about how much to spend on a new car, but we do agree that the old one needs to be replaced.* Often, such comments put the problem in perspective and pave the way for a solution.

State the problem. Using I messages, state the problem. Tell people what you observe, feel, think, want, and intend to do. Allow the other people involved in a particular conflict to do the same. Each person might have a different perception of the problem. That's fine. Let the conflict come into clear focus. It's hard to fix something unless people agree on what's broken.

Remember that the way you state the problem largely determines the solution. Defining the problem in a new way can open up a world of possibilities. For example, *I need a new roommate* is a problem statement that dictates only one solution. But the statement, *We could come to an agreement about who cleans the apartment* opens up more options, such as resolving a problem about who will wash the dishes tonight.

State all points of view. If you want to defuse tension or defensiveness, set aside your opinions for a moment. Take the time to understand the other points of view. Sum up those view points in words that the other parties can accept. When people feel that they've been heard, they're often more willing to listen.

Ask for complete communication. In times of conflict, we often say one thing and mean another. Before responding to what the other person says, use active listening. Check whether you have correctly received that person's message by saying, *What I'm hearing you say is … Did I get it correctly?*

Focus on solutions. After stating the problem, dream up as many solutions as you can. Be outrageous. Don't hold back. Quantity—not quality—is the key. If you get stuck, restate the problem and continue brainstorming.

Next, evaluate the solutions you brainstormed. Discard the unacceptable ones. Talk about which solutions will work and how difficult they will be to implement. You might hit on a totally new solution.

Focus on the future. Instead of rehashing the past, talk about new possibilities. Think about what you can do to prevent problems in the future. State how you intend to change, and ask others for their contributions to the solution.

Commit to the relationship. The thorniest conflicts usually arise between people who genuinely care for each other. Begin by affirming your commitment to the other person: *I care about you, and I want this relationship to last. So I'm willing to do whatever it takes to resolve this problem.* Also ask the other person for a similar commitment.

Allow strong feelings. Permitting conflict can also mean permitting emotions. Being upset is all right. Feeling angry is often appropriate. Crying is okay.

Allowing other people to see the strength of our feelings can help resolve the conflict. This suggestion can be especially useful when differences are so extreme that reaching common ground seems impossible.

Expressing the full range of your feelings can transform the conflict. Often, love is what's on the far side of anger. When we express and release resentment, we might discover genuine compassion in its place.

Conflict Management Strategies, Part 2

Dealing with conflict can sometimes be difficult. Once you recognize the problem, you can take specific actions to help manage the situation. Following are some additional strategies to help you manage conflict.

Notice your need to be "right." Some people approach conflict as a situation where only one person wins. That person has the "right" point of view. Everyone else loses. When this happens, step back. See whether you can approach the situation in a neutral way.

Define the conflict as a problem to be solved, not as a contest to be won. Explore the possibility that you might be mistaken. There might be more than one acceptable solution. The other person might simply have a different learning style than yours. Let go of being "right," and instead aim for being effective at resolving conflict.

Sometimes, this strategy means apologizing. Conflict sometimes arises from our own errors. Others might move quickly to end the conflict when we acknowledge our mistake and ask for forgiveness.

Slow down the communication. In times of great conflict, people often talk all at once. Words fly like speeding bullets, and no one listens. Chances for resolving the conflict take a nosedive.

When everyone is talking at once, choose either to listen or to talk—not both at the same time. Just send your message. Or just receive the other person's message. Usually, this technique slows down the pace and allows everyone to become more levelheaded.

To slow down the communication even more, take a break. Depending on the level of conflict, this might mean anything from a few minutes to a few days.

A related suggestion is to do something nonthreatening together. Share an activity with the others involved that's not a source of conflict.

Allow for cultural differences. People respond to conflict in different ways, depending on their cultural background. Some stand close, speak loudly, and make direct eye contact. Other people avert their eyes, mute their voices, and increase their physical distance.

When it seems to you that other people are sidestepping or escalating a conflict, consider whether your reaction is based on cultural bias.

Agree to disagree. Sometimes, we say all we have to say on an issue. We do all of the problem solving we can do. We get all points of view across. But the conflict remains, staring us right in the face.

What's left is to recognize that honest disagreement is a fact of life. We can peacefully coexist with other people—and respect them—even though we don't agree on fundamental issues. Conflict can be accepted even when it is not resolved.

Take on leadership roles. A useful motto for leaders is this: "Be the change you want to see." If you want the people around you to demonstrate their skills in speaking, listening, and resolving conflict, then begin by modeling these qualities yourself.

No one is born knowing how to lead. We acquire the skills over time. Begin now, while you are in higher education. Campuses offer continual opportunities to gain leadership skills. Volunteer for clubs, organizations, and/or student government. Look for opportunities to tutor or to become a peer advisor or mentor. No matter what you do, take on big projects—those that are worthy of your time and talents. These projects will put you in direct contact with human diversity.

Your next boss or coworker could be a person whose life experiences and views of the world differ radically from yours. Use this fact as an opportunity to take the ideas in this lesson and put them into practice.

Lesson 7.4: Strategies for Effective Writing and Public Speaking

Lesson 7.4 Introduction

In addition to interacting with others, writing and public speaking are two other forms of communication important in academic and professional contexts.

Effective writing is essential to your success. Papers, presentations, essay tests, e-mails, social networking, and even occasional text messages call for your ability to communicate ideas with force and clarity.

Knowing how to deliver a presentation is also a skill essential to your success. Some people tune out during a speech. Just think of all the times you have listened to instructors, lecturers, and politicians. Remember all of the wonderful daydreams you had during their speeches. The way you plan and present your speech can determine the number of audience members who will stay with you until the end.

In this lesson, you will learn some strategies for being a more effective writer and public speaker.

Getting Started with Writing

Sometimes, the most difficult part of writing is getting started. Following are some suggestions to help you get started with your writing:

Schedule and list writing tasks. You can divide the ultimate goal—a finished paper—into smaller steps that you can tackle right away. Estimate how long it will take to complete each step. Start with the date your paper is due and work backward to the present. Say that the due date is December 1, and you have about three months to write the paper. To give yourself a cushion, schedule November 20 as your targeted completion date. Plan what you want to get done by November 1, and then list what you want to get done by October 1.

Narrow your topic. The most common pitfall is selecting a topic that's too broad. *Harriet Tubman* is not a useful topic for your American history paper because it's too broad. Covering that topic would take hundreds of pages. Instead, be more specific: *Harriet Tubman's activities as a spy for the Union Army during the American Civil War.* Your topic statement can function as a working title.

Write a thesis statement. Clarify what you want to say by summarizing it in one concise sentence. This sentence, called a *thesis statement*, refines your working title. It also helps in making a preliminary outline.

You might write a thesis statement, such as *Harriet Tubman's activities with the Underground Railroad led to a relationship with the Union Army during the American Civil War.* A thesis statement that's clear and to the point can make your paper easier to write. Remember, you can always rewrite your thesis statement as you learn more about your topic.

A thesis statement is different from a topic. Like a newspaper headline, a thesis statement makes an assertion or describes an action. It is expressed in a complete sentence, including a verb. *Diversity* is a topic. *Cultural diversity is valuable* is a thesis statement.

Consider your purpose. Effective writing flows from a purpose. Discuss the purpose of your assignment with your instructor. Also think about how you'd like your reader or listener to respond after considering your ideas. Do you want your audience to think differently, feel differently, or take a certain action?

How you answer these questions greatly affects your writing strategy. If you want someone to think differently, make your writing clear and logical. Support your assertions with evidence. If you want someone to feel differently, consider crafting a story. Write about a character your audience can empathize with, and tell how that character resolves a problem that the audience can relate to. If your purpose is to move the reader into action, explain exactly the steps to take and the benefits for doing so.

To clarify your purpose, state it in one sentence. For example, *I will define the term* success *in such a clear and convincing way that I win a scholarship from the publisher of this textbook.*

Strategies for Effective Writing

You have identified your topic and considered your purpose and audience. That is a huge accomplishment. Next, develop and follow a plan for writing the paper. Breaking it down into smaller steps will make the writing process that much easier.

Use the following strategies to help you be a more effective and confident writer:

Do research. Research happens in two phases. In the first phase, you gain an overview of the subject. Discover the structure of your topic—its major divisions and branches. Say that you want to persuade the reader to vote for a certain political candidate. You must first learn enough about this person to summarize his background and state his stance on key issues. During the second phase, you uncover specific facts about your topic and take detailed notes.

Create an outline. An outline is a kind of map. When you follow a map, you avoid getting lost. Likewise, an outline keeps you from wandering off your topic.

To start an outline, gather a stack of 3 × 5 cards. Brainstorm ideas you want to include in your paper. Write one phrase or sentence per card. Next, experiment with the cards. Group them into separate stacks, with each stack representing one major category. After that, arrange the stacks and the cards within each stack in a logical order. Rearrange them until you discover an organization that you like. If you write on a computer, use the outlining feature of your word-processing software.

Gather your notes and outline. If you've planned your writing project and completed your research, you've already done much of the hard work. Now you can begin writing your first draft. To create your draft, gather your notes and arrange them according to your outline. Write about the ideas in your notes. Write in paragraphs, discussing one idea per paragraph. If you've organized your notes logically, related facts and concepts will appear close to one another.

Plan to revise a paper two or three times. Make a clean copy of each revision, and then let the last revised draft sit for at least 3 or 4 days.

During each revision, look for the following:

- A clear thesis statement
- Helpful sentences that introduce your topic, guide the reader through the major sections of your paper, and summarize your conclusions
- Sufficient details—such as quotations, examples, and statistics—that support your conclusions
- Lean sentences that have been purged of needless words
- Plenty of action verbs and concrete, specific nouns

Finally, look over your paper with an eye for spelling and grammar mistakes. If you're using a word-processing software, take advantage of the feature that checks for such errors. Also keep in mind that even the best software will miss some mistakes. Computers still cannot replace a skilled human proofreader.

When you're finished proofreading, take a minute to savor the result. You've just witnessed something of a miracle—the mind attaining clarity and resolution. That's the *aha*! in writing.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Using another person's words, images, or other original creations without giving proper credit is called *plagiarism*. Plagiarism amounts to taking someone else's work and presenting it as your own—the equivalent of cheating on a test.

To avoid plagiarism, ask an instructor where you can find your school's written policy on plagiarism. Also review the following suggestions whenever you write:

Know the perils of "paper mills." A quick Internet search will uncover hundreds of online business that sell term papers, essays, and book reports. Some of them offer to customize their products for an additional fee. These businesses are often called *paper mills*. Even so, these services are based on plagiarism.

Don't recycle papers. Plagiarism includes turning in a paper—or portions of a paper—that you have already written for another class. If you want to draw on previous research you did, talk to your instructor first.

Identify direct quotes. If you use a direct quote from another writer or speaker, put that person's words in quotation marks. If you do research online, you might find yourself copying words or images from a website and pasting them directly into your notes. *This is the same as taking direct quotes from your source*. To avoid plagiarism, identify such passages in an obvious way. Besides enclosing them in quotation marks, you could format them in a different font or color.

Paraphrase carefully. Instead of using a direct quote, you might choose to paraphrase an author's words. Paraphrasing means restating the original passage in your own words, usually making it shorter and simpler. Students who copy a passage word for word and then just rearrange or delete a few phrases are running a serious risk of plagiarism.

Summarize carefully. For some of your notes, you may simply want to summarize your source in a few sentences or paragraphs. Be sure to write the summary in your own words.

List your sources. Remember to list a source for any material that you quote, paraphrase, or summarize. Your list of sources will appear as footnotes or endnotes in your paper. Ask your instructor about which format to use.

Identify distinctive terms and phrases. Some ideas are closely identified with their individual creators. Students who present such ideas without mentioning the individual are plagiarizing. This is true even if they do not copy words, sentence structure, or overall organization of ideas.

Submit only your own work. Turning in materials that have been written or revised by someone else puts your education at risk.

Creating a Presentation: Getting Started

In addition to writing, you may be asked at school or work to create and deliver a presentation. Many people are not comfortable with creating presentations or with public speaking.

The following strategies will help you get started with creating a presentation:

Start from your passions. If your instructor allows you to choose the topic of presentation, then choose one that you find interesting. Imagine that the first words in your presentation are, *I'm here to talk to you because I feel passionately about ….* How would you complete the sentence? Turn your answer into your main topic.

Analyze your audience. Remember that audience members want to know that your presentation relates to their needs and desires. To convince people that you have something worthwhile to say, think of your main topic or point. Then, see whether you can complete this sentence: *I'm telling you this because* ….

Organize your presentation. List three to five questions that your audience members are likely to ask about your topic. Put those questions in logical order. Organize your presentation so that it directly answers those questions.

Aim for a lean presentation—enough words to make your point but not so many as to make your audience restless. Leave your listeners wanting more. When you speak, be brief and then be seated.

Speeches are usually organized in three main parts: the introduction, the main body, and the conclusion.

Write the introduction. Rambling speeches with no clear point or organization put audiences to sleep. Solve this problem with your introduction. The following introduction, for example, reveals the thesis and exactly what's coming. It reveals that the speech will have three distinct parts, each in logical order:

> *Dog fighting is a cruel sport. I intend to describe exactly what happens to the animals, tell you who is doing this, and show you how you can stop this inhumane practice.*

Whenever possible, talk about things that hold your interest. Include your personal experiences and start with a bang. Consider this introduction to a speech on the subject of world hunger:

> *I'm very honored to be here with you today. I intend to talk about malnutrition and starvation. First, I want to outline the extent of these problems, then I will discuss some basic assumptions concerning world hunger, and finally I will propose some solutions.*

You can almost hear the snores from the audience. Following is a rewrite:

> *More people have died from hunger in the past 5 years than have been killed in all of the wars, revolutions, and murders in the past 150 years. Yet there is enough food to go around. I'm honored to be here with you today to discuss solutions to this problem.*

Creating a Presentation: Developing your Presentation

Once you have ideas for your presentation, you can start adding details that will enhance your presentation.

Write the main body. The main body of your speech is the content, which accounts for 70 to 90 percent of most speeches. In the main body, you develop your ideas in much the same way that you develop a written paper. If you raised questions in your introduction, be sure to directly answer them in the body.

Transitions are especially important. Give your audience a signal when you change points. Do so by using meaningful pauses and verbal emphasis as well as transitional phrases such as, *On the other hand, until the public realizes what is happening to children in these countries …* or *The second reason hunger persists is ….*

In long speeches, recap from time to time. Also preview what's to come. Hold your audience's attention by using facts, descriptions, expert opinions, and statistics.

Write the conclusion. At the end of the speech, summarize your points and draw your conclusion. You started with a bang; now finish with drama. The first and last parts of a speech are the most important. Make it clear to your audience when you've reached the end. Avoid endings such as *This is the end of my speech.* A simple standby is, *In conclusion, I want to reiterate three points: First, ….* When you are finished, stop talking.

Create speaking notes. Some professional speakers recommend writing out your speech in full and then putting key words or main points on a few 3 × 5 cards. Number the cards so that if you drop them, you can quickly put them in order again. As you finish the information on each card, move it to the back of the pile. Write information clearly and in letters large enough to be seen from a distance.

The disadvantage of the 3 × 5 card system is that it involves card shuffling. Some speakers prefer to use standard outlined notes. Another option is mind mapping. Even an hour-long speech can be mapped on one sheet of paper. You can also use memory techniques to memorize the outline of your speech.

Create supporting visuals. Presentations often include visuals such as PowerPoint slides and posters. With PowerPoint, you can add video clips from your computer or cell phone. These

visuals can reinforce your main points and help your audience understand how your presentation is organized.

Use visuals to *complement* rather than *replace* your speaking. If you use too many visuals—or visuals that are too complex—your audience might focus on them and forget about you.

Delivering Your Presentation

Once you have developed your presentation, you are ready to deliver it. Many people have a fear of speaking in public.

The following strategies can help you deliver the most effective presentation possible:

Overcome fear of public speaking. You may not be able to eliminate fear of public speaking entirely, but you can take steps to reduce and manage it.

First, prepare thoroughly. Research your topic thoroughly. Knowing your topic inside and out can create a baseline of confidence. To make a strong start, memorize the first four sentences that you plan to deliver, and practice them many times. Delivering them flawlessly when you're in front of an audience can build your confidence for the rest of your speech.

Second, accept any physical sensations associated with stage fright: dry mouth, pounding heart, sweaty hands, muscle jitters, shortness of breath, and shaky voice. When you fully accept sensations, they start to lose power.

Practice your presentation. The key to successful public speaking is practice. Do this with your *speaker's voice.* Your voice sounds different when you talk loudly, and this fact can be unnerving. Get used to it early on. If possible, practice in the room in which you will deliver your speech. Keep an eye on the time to make sure that you stay within the limit.

Keep practicing. Avoid speaking word for word, as if you were reading a script. When you know your material well, you can deliver it in a natural way. Practice your presentation until you could deliver it in your sleep. Then, run through it a few more times.

Deliver your presentation. Before you begin, get the audience's attention. If people are still filing into the room or adjusting their seats, they're not ready to listen. When all eyes are on you, then begin.

Project your voice. When you speak, talk loudly enough to be heard. Avoid leaning over your notes or the podium.

Maintain eye contact. When you look at people, they become less frightening. Also, remember that it is easier for the audience to listen to someone when that person is looking at them.

Notice your nonverbal communication. Be aware of what your body is telling your audience. Contrived or staged gestures will look dishonest. Be natural. If you don't know what to do with your hands, notice that and then don't do anything with them.

Pause when appropriate. Beginners sometimes feel that they have to fill every moment with the sound of their voice. Release that expectation. Give your listeners a chance to make notes and absorb what you say.

Have fun. Chances are that if you lighten up and enjoy your presentation, so will your listeners.

Make the grade in group presentations. When preparing group presentations, you can use three strategies for making a memorable impression:

1. Get organized. As soon as you get the assignment, select a group leader and exchange contact information. Find out how your presentation will be graded. Write a to-do list that includes all of the tasks involved in completing the assignment. Distribute tasks fairly, paying attention to the strengths of individuals in your group.

2. Practice your presentation before giving it in class. Develop smooth, short transitions between individual speakers. Keep track of the time so that you stay within the guidelines for the assignment.

3. Communicate with group members in an open and sensitive way. Contribute your ideas, and be responsive to the viewpoints of other members. When you cooperate, your group is on the way to an effective presentation.

Lesson 7.5: Improving Communication Skills

Lesson 7.5 Introduction

Think of a situation where you felt you could have done better with your communication. Ask yourself what went well and what you could have done better.

Whether you are having a conversation, writing a paper, or delivering a presentation, effective communication is essential to your success. The key to developing and improving your communication skills is to find as many opportunities as possible to practice them.

In this lesson, you will learn different strategies for improving your communication skills. What you say and how you say it has an effect on you and everyone around you. Through an understanding of how to choose your words more effectively, you can build stronger relationships and be more successful in speaking and writing.

Employing Your Words

The person you are, for the most part, is a result of the agreements you make. Others know who you are by your words and your commitments. And you can learn who you are by observing which commitments you choose to keep and which ones you choose to avoid.

Relationships are built on agreements. When we break a promise to be faithful to a spouse, to help a friend move to a new apartment, or to pay a bill on time, relationships are strained.

The words we use to make agreements can be placed into six different levels. We can think of each level as one rung on a ladder—the ladder of powerful speaking. As we move up the ladder, our speaking becomes more effective.

The first and lowest rung is *obligation*. Words used at this level include *I should*, *he ought to*, *someone had better*, *they need to*, *I must*, and *I had to*. Speaking this way implies that something other than ourselves is in control of our lives. When we live at the level of obligation, we speak as if we are victims.

The second rung is *possibility*. At this level, we examine new options. We play with new ideas, possible solutions, and alternative courses of action. As we do, we learn that we can make choices that dramatically affect the quality of our lives. We are not the victims of circumstance. Words that signal this level include *I might*, *I could*, *I'll consider*, *I hope to*, and *maybe*.

The third rung is *preference*. Here, we begin the process of choice. The phrase *I prefer* signals that we're moving toward one set of possibilities over another, perhaps setting the stage for eventual action.

The fourth rung is *passion*. Certain words signal this level: *I want to*, *I'm really excited to do that*, and *I can't wait*.

The fifth rung is *plan*. When people use phrases such as *I intend to*, *my goal is to*, *I plan to*, and *I'll try like mad to*, they're at the level of plan. The Intention Statements you write for this module are examples of plans.

The sixth and highest rung is *promise*. This is where the power of your word really comes into play. At this level, it's common to use phrases such as *I will*, *I promise to*, *I am committed*, and *you can count on it*. A promise is where we bridge possibility and plan to action. It brings with it all of the rewards of employing your word.

Using *I* Messages

In an earlier lesson, you learned the difference between *I* and *You* messages. At first, I messages might feel uncomfortable or seem forced. That's okay. With practice, you will gain confidence in using them.

An I message can include any or all of the following five elements. Be careful when including the last two elements, though, because they can contain hidden judgments or threats.

Observations. Describe the facts—the indisputable, observable realities. Talk about what you—or anyone else—can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. Avoid judgments, interpretations, or opinions. Instead of saying, *You're a slob*, try, *Last night's lasagna pan was still on the stove this morning.*

Feelings. Describe your own feelings. It is easier to listen to *I feel frustrated* than to *You never help me.* Stating how you feel about another's actions can be valuable feedback for that person.

Wants. You are far more likely to get what you want if you say what you want. If someone doesn't know what you want, she doesn't have a chance to help you get it. Ask clearly. Avoid demanding or using the word *need*. Most people like to feel helpful, not obligated. Instead of saying, *Do the dishes when it's your turn, or else!* state, *I want to divide the housework fairly.*

Thoughts. Communicate your thoughts, and use caution. Beginning your statement with the word "I" doesn't automatically make it an I message. *I think you're a slob* is a you message judgment in disguise. Instead, say, *I'd have more time to study if I didn't have to clean up so often.*

Intentions. The last part of an I message is a statement about what you intend to do. Have a plan that doesn't depend on the other person. For example, instead of *From now on, we're going to split the dishwashing evenly*, you could say, *I intend to do my share of the housework and leave the rest.*

Practice Writing *I* Messages

The following is one way you can practice writing I messages:

- Pick something about school that irritates you. Then, pretend that you are talking to a person who is associated with this irritation. In the space below, write down what you would say to this person as a you message.
- Write the same complaint as an I message. Include at least the first three elements of I messages.

Think of other ways you can write I messages. They will help you be more confident in your communication.

Choosing Your Words Wisely

Three Ways to Say No—Respectfully

Students in higher education tend to have many commitments. Saying no helps you prevent an overloaded schedule that compromises your health and GPA. You can use three strategies to say no in a respectful, graceful way:

1. Think critically about your assumptions. The inability to say no can spring from the assumption that you'll lose friends if you state what you really want. But consider this: If you cannot say no, then you are not in charge of your time. You've given that right to whoever wants to interrupt you. This is not a friendship based on equality. True friends will respect your wishes.

2. Plan your refusal. You might find it easier to say no when you don't have to grasp for words. Choose some key words and phrases in advance—for example, *Thanks for asking. I have a huge test tomorrow and want to study rather than party.*

3. Avoid apologies or qualifiers. People give away their power when they couch their no in phrases such as *I'm sorry, but I just don't know whether I want to* or *Would you get upset if I said no?* You don't have to apologize for being in charge of your life. It's okay to say no.

Strategies for Nonsexist Communication

Following are tools you can use to speak and write in ways that are gender-fair without twisting yourself into verbal knots:

- **Use gender-neutral terms.** Instead of writing *policeman* or *chairman*, for example, use *police officer* or *chairperson*. In many cases, there's no need to identify the gender or marital status of a person. This allows us to dispose of expressions such as *female driver* and *lady doctor*.
- **Use examples that include both women and men.** Good writing thrives on examples and illustrations. As you search for details to support the main points in your paper, include the stories and accomplishments of both women and men.
- **Alternate pronoun gender.** In an attempt to be gender-fair, some writers make a point of mentioning both sexes whenever they refer to gender. Another method is to alternate the gender of pronouns throughout your writing. Still another option is to alternate male and female pronouns—the strategy used in this book. This allows you to avoid using awkward wording such as *He/she should open his/her book.*
- **Switch to plural.** Because plural pronouns in English are not gender specific, a sentence such as *The writer has many tools at her disposal* becomes *Writers have many tools at their disposal*.

Sending and Receiving Messages

One powerful technique for improving communication is to separate the roles of sending and receiving. Communication channels get blocked when we try to send and receive messages at the same time. Instead, be aware of when you are the receiver and when you are the sender.

If you are receiving (listening or reading), just receive; avoid switching to the sending (speaking or writing) mode. When you are sending, stick with it until you are finished.

Practice Sending or Receiving

The purpose of this sample exercise is to help you slow down the pace of communication and clearly separate the roles of sending and receiving. Begin by applying the following steps to conversations on neutral topics. With some practice, you'll be ready to use this technique in situations that could escalate into an argument.

Find a partner, and then choose a topic for a conversation. Set a time limit for doing this exercise.

Complete the following steps:

- Get two 3 × 5 cards. Label one of them *sender*. Label the other *receiver*. Choose one card, and give the other one to your partner.
- If you chose the *sender* card, then start speaking. If you chose the *receiver* card, then listen to your partner without saying a word.
- When the sender is done speaking, exchange cards and switch roles. The person who listened (receiver) in Step 2 now gets to speak. However, do not exchange cards until the speaker (sender) in Step 2 declares that she has expressed everything she wants to say.
- Keep switching cards and roles until your time is up.

After completing these steps, reflect on the experience.

- What can this type of exercise teach you about your current skills as a speaker and listener?
- In what ways do you feel you are effective as a sender or receiver of messages?
- In what ways do you feel you need to improve when sending or receiving messages?

Using Critical Thinking With Communication

As you may recall from Module 5, psychologist Benjamin Bloom described six levels of learning and thinking. Each level calls for asking and answering different types of questions as part of critical thinking:

- Level 1: Remembering
- Level 2: Understanding
- Level 3: Applying
- Level 4: Analyzing
- Level 5: Evaluating
- Level 6: Creating

These critical thinking levels are also important to effective communication. Understanding what a test question is asking or how an essay prompt is worded will help in how you respond. When you pay attention to these elements of critical thinking, you comprehend information and ideas well enough to explain them in your own words.

For example, test questions that call for understanding begin with terms such as the following:

- Compare
- Contrast
- Discuss
- Estimate
- Explain
- Give an example
- Illustrate
- Infer
- Interpret
- Paraphrase
- Predict
- Summarize
- Translate

In a science class, for example, an instructor might ask you to name the various types of clouds and then *explain* the factors that cause each kind of cloud to form. In a literature class, the instructor might ask you to *summarize* the plot of a short story. You can do this examination and thinking in any of your courses.

The six levels of thinking can also be useful when you want to clarify your intentions or ask questions. For example, think of one of your personal values or goals. Then, demonstrate how well you understand it. *Give an example* of how you put a value into action. Or *explain* how you will know when you've reached a goal.

MODULE 8

MANAGING YOUR TIME

Introduction

The term *time management* may call forth images of restriction and control. You might visualize a prune-faced Scrooge hunched over your shoulder, stopwatch in hand, telling you what to do every minute. Bad news.

Good news: You do have enough time for the things you want to do. All it takes is thinking about the possibilities and making conscious choices.

Time is an unusual commodity. There are several reasons for this. For one, it cannot really be saved. You can't stockpile time like wood for the fireplace or like canned food for a storm. Time also can't be seen, heard, touched, tasted, or smelled. Even scientists and philosophers find it hard to describe. And because time is so elusive, it is easy to ignore. That doesn't bother time at all. Time is perfectly content to remain hidden until you are nearly out of it. And when you are out of it, you are out of it.

In addition, time is a nonrenewable resource. If you're out of wood, you can chop some more. If you're out of money, you can earn a little extra. If you're out of love, there is still hope. If you're out of health, it can often be restored. But when you're out of time, that's it. When this minute is gone, it's gone.

Another challenge is that time seems hard to control. Sometimes, it seems that your friends control your time; your boss controls your time; your teachers or your parents or your kids control your time.

This module invites you to test this idea: Approach time as if you are in control of it. When you say you don't have enough time, you might really be saying that you are not spending the time you have in the way you want. In this module, we'll explore strategies you can use in daily life to help improve your time management skills, maximizing each day's potential for success and balance.

Lesson 8.1: Time Management Strategies

Lesson 8.1 Introduction

Do you ever wonder where the hours in the day go? Do some days seem to just fly by—leaving you feeling like there just isn't enough time to do everything you need to do?

People in modern society often struggle to balance the time-consuming needs of going to school, working, and taking care of families. Even doing the things we love can consume so much time that it becomes stressful or anxiety-producing.

Is there a way to accomplish the things we *need* to do, along with the things we *want* to do, each day?

There are many strategies out there for organizing our daily activities. Using skills to arrange our time can help relieve our stress and allow us to take care of a variety of things in our lives. There is nothing quite like sitting down after a long day and feeling like you were productive. Smiling

with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, you can cross off the items on your to-do list, knowing that you made the most out of the day.

In this lesson, we'll explore useful ways to organize your days—and even your weeks—to get the most mileage out of your time.

How to Make a Daily To-Do List

We often have many tasks and activities to take care of during the day or throughout the week. When keeping track of responsibilities for work, school, or home, you can make a to-do list to help you stay organized; it can also be an effective way of prioritizing what needs to be done first—or last.

Here are useful ways you can organize the day's activities:

Step 1: Brainstorm tasks. List all of the tasks you want to get done tomorrow. Each task will become an item on a to-do list. Don't worry about putting the entries in order or scheduling them yet. List everything you want to accomplish on a sheet of paper or in a notebook. You can also use 3 × 5 cards, writing one task on each card. Cards work well because you can slip them into your pocket or rearrange them, and you never have to copy to-do items from one list to another.

Step 2: Estimate time. For each task you wrote down in Step 1, estimate how long it will take you to complete it. This can be tricky. If you allow too little time, you end up feeling rushed. If you allow too much time, you become less productive. For now, give it your best guess. If you are unsure, overestimate rather than underestimate how long it will take for each task.

Now, pull out your calendar or Time Monitor/Time Plan. A Time Monitor or Time Plan is a structured document where you can plan your day, week, or month—but you can write your activities on your calendar as well. You've probably scheduled some hours for events such as classes or work. This leaves the unscheduled hours for tackling your to-do list.

Add up the time needed to complete all of your to-do items. Also add up the number of unscheduled hours in your day. Then compare the two totals. The power of this step is that you can spot time overload in advance. If you have eight hours' worth of to-do items but only four unscheduled hours, that's a potential problem. To solve it, proceed to Step 3.

Step 3: Rate each task by priority. To prevent overscheduling, decide which to-do items are the most important, given your available time. One suggestion for making this decision comes from the book *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*, by Alan Lakein (1973): Simply label each item as A, B, or C.

The A items on your list are tasks that are the most critical. They include assignments that are coming due or jobs that need to be done immediately. Also included are activities that lead directly to your short-term goals.

The B items on your list are important, but less so than the A items. The B items can be postponed, if necessary, for another day.

The C items are often small, easy tasks with no set timeline. They, too, can be postponed.

Once you've labeled the items on your to-do list, schedule time for all of the A tasks. The B and C items can be done randomly during the day—when you are in between tasks and are not yet ready to start the next A task. Even if you get only one or two of your A items done, you'll still be moving toward your goals.

Reference

Lakein, Alan. *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life.* New York: New American Library, 1973.

Make Choices About Focus

When we get busy, we get tempted to do several things at the same time. It seems like such a natural solution: Watch TV and read a textbook. Talk on the phone and outline a paper. Write an e-mail and listen to a lecture. These are examples of multitasking.

There's a problem with this strategy: Multitasking is much harder than it looks.

Despite the awe-inspiring complexity of the human brain, research reveals that we are basically wired to do one thing at a time (Lien, Ruthruff, and Johnston 2005). One study found that people who interrupted work to check e-mail or surf the Internet took up to 25 minutes to get back to their original task (Thompson 2005). In addition, people who use their cell phones while driving get into more traffic accidents than other drivers do, except for drunk drivers (Medina 2009, 87).

The solution is an old-fashioned one: Whenever possible, take life one task at a time. Develop a key quality of master students—focused attention. Start by reviewing and using the Power Process: *Be here now.* Then, add the following strategies to your toolbox:

Unplug from technology. To reduce the temptation of multitasking, turn off distracting devices. Shut off your TV, cell phone, computer, and/or tablet. Disconnect from the Internet, unless it's required for your task. Later, you can take a break to make calls, send texts, check e-mails, or browse the web or social media.

Capture fast-breaking ideas with minimal interruption. Your brain is an expert nagger. After you choose to focus on one task, it might issue urgent reminders about 10 more things you need to do. Keep 3 × 5 cards or paper and a pen handy to write down those reminders. You can take a break later and add them to your to-do list. Your mind can quiet down once it knows that a task has been captured in writing.

Monitor the moment-to-moment shifts in your attention. Whenever you're studying and notice that you're distracted by thoughts of doing something else, make a tally mark on a sheet of paper. Simply being aware of your tendency to multitask can help you reclaim your attention.

References

Lien, Mei-Ching, Eric Ruthruff, and James C. Johnston. "Attentional limitations in doing two tasks at once: The search for exceptions." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, 2 (2005): 89–93.

Medina, John. *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School.* Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2009.

Thompson, Clive. "Meet the lifehackers." *New York Times*, October 16, 2005.

Make Choices About Multitasking

Learning how to improve your focus and overall attention can help you be more effective in your academic pursuits. Sometimes, though, we simply may not be able to devote our entire time to the same activity. In that case, it becomes necessary to multitask. Can multitasking be productive or even beneficial? It depends on the situation. Some activities require total focus, while others can be more easily juggled.

Here are some strategies for refining your ability to multitask:

Handle interruptions with care. Some breaking events are so urgent that they call for your immediate attention. When this happens, note what you were doing when you were interrupted. For example, write down the number of the page you were reading or the name of the computer file you were working on. When you return to the task, your notes can help you get up to speed again.

Multitask by conscious choice. If multitasking seems inevitable, then do it with skill. Pair one activity that requires concentration with another activity that you can do almost automatically. For

example, studying for your psychology exam while downloading music is a way to reduce the disadvantages of multitasking. Pretending to listen to your children while watching TV is not.

Align your activities with your passions. Our attention naturally wanders when we find a task to be trivial, pointless, or irritating. At those times, switching attention to another activity becomes a way to reduce discomfort.

Handling routine tasks is a necessary part of daily life. But if you find that your attention frequently wanders throughout the day, ask yourself: Am I really doing what I want to do? Do my work and my classes connect to my interests?

If the answer is no, then the path beyond multitasking might call for a change in your academic and career plans. Determine what you want most in life. Then, use the techniques in this lesson to set goals that inspire you. Whenever an activity aligns with your passion, the temptation to multitask loses power.

Break It Down, Get It Done: Using a Long-Term Planner

With a long-term planner, you can eliminate a lot of unpleasant surprises. Long-term planning allows you to avoid scheduling conflicts—the kind that obligate you to be in two places at the same time three weeks from now. You can also anticipate busy periods, such as finals week, and start preparing for them now. Goodbye, all-night cram sessions. Hello, serenity.

Find a long-term planner, or make your own. Many office supply stores sell academic planners that cover an entire school year. You can also create your own planner. A big roll of newsprint pinned to a bulletin board or taped to a wall will do nicely. Also search online stores for free or cheap software or smartphone apps designed for long-term planning.

Enter scheduled dates that extend into the future. Use your long-term planner to list commitments that extend beyond the current month. Enter test dates, lab and study sessions, no-classes days or holidays, and planned and other events for the current and next terms.

Create a master assignment list. Find the syllabus for each course you're currently taking. Then, in your long-term planner, enter the due dates for all of the assignments in all of your courses. This step can be a powerful reality check.

The purpose of using a planner is *not* to make you feel overwhelmed by all of the things you have to do. Rather, its aim is to help you take a first step toward recognizing the demands on your time. Armed with the truth about how you use your time, you can make more accurate plans.

Include nonacademic events. In addition to tracking academic commitments, you can use your long-term planner to mark significant events in your life outside of school. Include birthdays, doctors' appointments, concert dates, credit card payment due dates, and car maintenance schedules.

Week of	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9 / 5							
9 / 12		English quiz					
9 / 19			English paper due		Speech #1		
9 / 26	Chemistry test					Skiing at the lake	
10 / 3		English quiz			Speech #2		
10 / 10				Geography project due			
10 / 17				--- No classes ---			

Planning a day, a week, or a month ahead is a powerful practice. Using a long-term planner—one that displays an entire quarter, semester, or year at a glance—can yield even more benefits.

Use your long-term planner to divide and conquer. For some people, academic life is a series of last-minute crises punctuated by periods of exhaustion. You can avoid that fate. The key is to break down big assignments and projects into smaller assignments and subprojects, each with its own due date.

When planning to write a paper, for example, enter the final due date in your long-term planner. Then, set individual deadlines for each milestone in the writing process—creating an outline, completing the research, finishing the first draft, editing the draft, and preparing the final copy. By meeting these interim due dates, you make steady progress toward completing the assignment throughout the term. That sure beats trying to crank out all those pages at the last minute.

Lesson 8.2: Avoiding Procrastination

Lesson 8.2 Introduction

Procrastination is a common problem that many of us struggle with. It can negatively affect work, school, and even relationships. Putting something off until later can often lead to never quite completing the task or activity, creating a variety of problems as a result.

“I’ll do it tomorrow.”

“I’ll take care of that later.”

“Oh, that can wait just a bit.”

Have you ever made excuses for why a task didn’t get completed? Do you ever find yourself putting something off until a later time, only to forget about it indefinitely?

In college, procrastination can have real negative effects on your academic success. Waiting to write that essay until the night before it’s due will likely mean you can’t put in your best effort—and it will show! Cramming the morning of the final exam can have disastrous results as well. But how do you avoid these behaviors when they are part of your daily life?

In this lesson, you’ll dive deeper into the common issue of procrastination and explore some ways you can break this destructive pattern.

Stop Procrastination Now

When it comes to putting things off, the remedy is to avoid delaying tasks and activities altogether. Consider that bold idea: The way to stop procrastinating is to stop procrastinating. Giving up procrastination is actually a simple choice. People just make it complicated.

Sound crazy? Well, test this idea for yourself.

Think of something that you’ve been putting off. Choose a small, specific task—one that you can complete in five minutes or less. Then do that task today.

Tomorrow, choose another task and do it. Repeat this strategy each day for one week. Notice what happens to your habit of procrastination after just one week.

If that suggestion just doesn’t work for you, then experiment with any of the strategies that follow.

Discover the costs. Think about whether procrastination keeps you from getting what you want. Clearly seeing the side effects of procrastination can help you kick the habit.

Trick yourself into getting started. If you have a 50-page chapter to read, then grab the book and say to yourself, “I’m not really going to read this chapter right now. I’m just going to flip

through the pages and scan the headings for 10 minutes." Tricks like these can get you started on a task you've been dreading.

Let feelings follow action. If you put off exercising until you feel energetic, you might wait for months. Instead, get moving now. Then, watch your feelings change. After five minutes of brisk walking, you might be in the mood for a 20-minute run. This principle—*action generates motivation*—can apply to any task that you've put on the back burner.

Choose to work under pressure. Sometimes, people thrive under pressure. As one writer puts it, "I don't do my best work under deadline. I do my only work under deadline." Used selectively, this strategy might also work for you.

Create goals that draw you forward. A goal that grabs you by the heartstrings is an inspiration to act now. If you're procrastinating, then set some goals that excite you. You might wake up one day and discover that procrastination is part of your past.

The 7-Day Anti-Procrastination Plan

Listed here are seven strategies you can use to reduce or eliminate many sources of procrastination. The suggestions are tied to the days of the week to help you remember them. Use this list to remind yourself that each day of your life presents an opportunity to stop the cycle of procrastination.

Monday

Make it meaningful. What is important about the task you've been putting off? List all the benefits of completing that task. To remember this strategy, keep in mind that it starts with the letter M, as does Monday.

Tuesday

Take it apart. Break big jobs into a series of small ones you can do in 15 minutes or less. Even the biggest projects can be broken down into a series of small tasks. This strategy starts with the letter T, so mentally tie it to Tuesday.

Wednesday

Write an intention statement. If you can't get started on a term paper, you might write, "I intend to write a list of at least 10 possible topics by 9 p.m. I will reward myself with an hour of guilt-free recreational reading." File in your memory the first word of this strategy—write—under Wednesday.

Thursday

Tell everyone. Publicly announce your intention to get a task done. Make the world your support group. Associate *tell* with Thursday.

Friday

Find a reward. Construct rewards for yourself carefully. Be willing to withhold them if you do not complete the task. Remember that Friday is a fine day to find a reward.

Saturday

Settle it now. Do it now. The minute you notice yourself procrastinating, plunge into the task. Link *settle* with Saturday.

Sunday

Say no. When you keep pushing a task into a low-priority category, reexamine your purpose for doing that task at all. If you realize that you really don't intend to do something, quit telling yourself that you will. Sunday—the last day of this seven-day anti-procrastination plan—is a great day to finally let go and say no.

Lesson 8.3: Time Management and Study Time

Lesson 8.3 Introduction

All studying is not the same.

Sometimes, simply reading a chapter in a book may not be the most effective way to retain the information. Learning is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, and it helps to have multiple tools in your bag so that you can find the learning methods that work best for you specifically.

Often, *how* we study is related to *what* we study. What works well for a math class might not be the best method for a literature class. Understanding life hacks to studying can help you be strategic, and intentional, in how you prepare for class.

Technology also affects how we study. In today's ever-connected society, we can't overlook how screen time influences our daily lives. Do you find yourself distracted by social media or streaming media? We'll explore ways to determine when technology is becoming a hindrance and how to tune it out.

Through this lesson, you'll become better equipped to study even when life distracts you. Whether those distractions come from your surroundings or your loved ones, you'll learn tips on how to make the most out of study time to maximize your opportunities to succeed.

Getting the Most Out of Now

The following strategies are designed to help you get the most from study time. Don't feel pressured to use all of these or to tackle them in order. As you read, note the suggestions you think will be helpful, but pick one to use now. When that strategy becomes a habit, select another one to practice. Repeat this cycle, and enjoy the results as they unfold in your life.

Study difficult (or boring) subjects first. If your chemistry problems put you to sleep, then get to them first—while you are fresh. We tend to give top priority to what we enjoy studying, yet the courses that we find most difficult often require the most creative energy. Save your favorite subjects for later. If you find yourself avoiding a particular subject, get up an hour earlier to study it before breakfast. With that chore out of the way, the rest of the day can be a breeze.

Be aware of your best time of day. Many people learn best in daylight hours. If this is true for you, then schedule study time for your most difficult subjects (or face time for the most difficult people) before nightfall.

Use waiting time. Five minutes waiting for a subway, 20 minutes waiting for the dentist, 10 minutes in between classes. Waiting times add up fast. Have short study tasks ready to do during these periods, and keep your study materials handy. For example, carry 3 × 5 cards with facts, formulas, or definitions and pull them out anywhere. A cell phone with an audiorecorder can help you use commuting time to your advantage. Make a recording of yourself reading your notes. Play it back during your drive or bus or subway ride.

Study two hours for every hour you're in class. Students in higher education are regularly advised to allow two hours of study time for every hour spent in class. If you are taking 15 credit hours, then plan to spend 30 hours a week studying. That adds up to 45 hours each week for school—more than a full-time job. The benefits of thinking in these terms will be apparent at exam time.

Keep in mind that the 2-hours-for-1 rule doesn't distinguish between focused time and unfocused time. In one 4-hour block of study time, it's possible to use up two of those hours with texting, breaks, daydreaming, or doodling. With study time, quality counts as much as quantity.

Setting Limits on Screen Time

Discover how much time you spend online. To get an accurate picture of your involvement in social networking and other online activities, monitor the time you spend online for a short period (for example, a week or two). Then, make conscious choices about how much time you want to spend online and on your phone or tablet. Don't let screen-time activities distract you from meeting personal and academic goals.

Go offline to send the message that other people matter. It's hard to pay attention to the person in front of you when you're hammering out text messages or updating your Twitter or Snapchat. You can also tell when someone else is doing these things and only half-listening to you. How engaged in your conversation do you think that person is?

An alternative is to ignore your devices and *be here now*. When you're eating, ignore your phone. Notice how the food tastes. When you're with a friend, close your laptop. Hear every word he says. Rediscover where life actually takes place—in the present moment.

When it counts, your presence is your greatest present.

Get off the phone. The cell phone is the ultimate interrupter. People who wouldn't think of distracting you in person might call or text you at the worst times because they can't see that you are studying. You don't have to be a victim of your phone. If a simple *I can't talk; I'm studying* doesn't work, use dead silence. It's a conversation killer. Or short-circuit the whole problem by turning off your phone.

Use a regular study area. Your body and your mind know where you are. Using the same place to study, day after day, helps train your responses. When you arrive at that particular place, you can focus your attention more quickly.

Easy chairs and sofas are dangerous places to study. Learning requires energy. Give your body a message that energy is needed. Put yourself in a posture that supports this message.

Reach an agreement with people around you about your study time. These people include roommates, spouses or partners, parents, siblings, or children. Make the rules about study time clear, and be sure to follow them yourself. Explicit agreements—even written contracts—work well. One student always wears a colorful hat when he wants to study. When his wife and children see the hat, they respect his wish to be left alone.

Learn to say no. Saying no is a time-saver and a valuable life skill for everyone. Some people feel it is rude to refuse a request. But you can say no effectively and courteously. Others want you to succeed as a student. When you tell them that you can't do what they ask because you are busy educating yourself, most people will understand.

Get ready the night before. Completing a few simple tasks just before you go to bed can help you get in gear the next day. If you need to make some calls first thing in the morning, then look up those numbers and write them down or note them on your cell phone. If you need to drive to a new location, find the address, map it online, or enter the location into your GPS. If you plan to spend the next afternoon writing a paper, get your materials together: notes, outline, textbook, paper and pen, or laptop—whatever you need. Pack your lunch or put gas in the car. Organize the baby's diaper bag and your briefcase or backpack.

Ask yourself, *Could I find the time if I really wanted to?* The next time you're tempted to say, *I just don't have time*, pause for a minute. Question the truth of this statement. Could you find four more hours this week for studying?

Suppose that someone offered to pay you $10,000 to find those four hours. Suppose, too, that you will get paid only if you don't lose sleep, call in sick for work, or sacrifice anything important to you. Could you find the time if vast sums of money were involved? When it comes to school, vast sums of money are indeed involved.

Ask yourself, *Am I willing to promise it?* This time-management idea might be the most powerful of all: If you want to find time for a task, promise yourself—and others—that you'll get it done. Unleash one of the key qualities of master students and take responsibility for producing an outcome.

Finding Time for Reading

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your workload, making a plan for how (and when) to tackle the job can help to put your mind at ease. Planning dispels panic (I've got 300 pages to read before tomorrow morning!) and helps you finish off your entire reading load for a term.

Creating a reading plan is relatively simple if you use the following steps:

Step 1: Estimate the total number of pages you'll read. To arrive at this figure, check the course syllabus for each class you're taking. Look for lists of reading assignments. Based on what you find, estimate the total number of pages you'll read for all your classes.

Step 2: Estimate how many pages you can read in one hour. Remember that your reading speed will be different for various materials. It depends on everything from the layout of the pages to the difficulty of the text. To give your estimate some credibility, base it on actual experience. During your first reading assignment in each course, keep track of how many pages you read per hour.

Step 3: Estimate your total number of reading hours. Divide the total number of pages from Step 1 by your pages-per-hour from Step 2. For example, look at this calculation:

600 (total number of pages for all courses this term) ÷ 10 (pages read per hour)

= 60 (total reading hours needed for the term

The result is the total number of hours you'll need to complete your reading assignments this term. Remember to give yourself some wiggle room. Allow extra hours for rereading and unplanned events. Consider taking your initial number of projected hours and doubling it. You can always back off from there to an estimate that seems more reasonable.

Step 4: Schedule reading time. Take the total number of hours from Step 3 and divide it by the number of weeks in your current term. That will give you the number of hours to schedule for reading each week.

60 (total reading hours needed for the term) ÷ 16 (weeks in the term)

= 3.75 (hours per week to schedule for reading

Now, go to your calendar or long-term planner and reflect on it for a few minutes. Look for ways to block out those hours next week.

Step 5: Refine your reading plan. Scheduling your reading takes time. The potential benefits are beyond calculation. With a plan, you can be more confident that you'll actually get your reading done. Even if your estimates are off, you'll still go beyond blind guessing or leaving the whole thing to chance. Your reading matters too much for that.

Dealing with Interruptions

Sometimes, the people you live with and care about the most—friend, roommate, parent, spouse or partner, or child—can become a temporary roadblock to reading or studying. This happens when our time is spent taking care of the needs of others—even at the expense of our own priorities.

The following strategies can help you stay focused on your reading or studying:

Attend to people first. When you first come home from school, keep your books out of sight. Spend some time with your roommates or family members before you settle in to study. Make small talk and ask them about their day. Give the important people in your life a short period of full, focused attention rather than a long period of partial attention. Then, explain that you have some work to do. Set some ground rules for the amount of time you need to focus on studying. You could be rewarded with extra minutes or hours of quiet time.

Plan for interruptions. It's possible that you'll be interrupted even if you set up guidelines for your study time in advance. If so, schedule the kind of studying that can be interrupted. For example, you could write out or review flash cards with key terms and definitions. Save the tasks that require sustained attention for more quiet times.

Use "pockets" of time. See whether you can arrange a study time in a quiet place at school before you come home. If you arrive at school 15 minutes earlier and stay 15 minutes later, you can squeeze in an extra half hour of reading that day. Also look for opportunities to study on campus between classes.

Read with children underfoot. It is possible to have both effective reading time and quality time with your children. The following suggestions come mostly from students who are also parents. The specific strategies you use will depend on your schedule and the ages of your children.

Find a regular playmate for your child. Some children can pair off with close friends and safely retreat to their rooms for hours of private play. You can check on them occasionally and still get a lot of reading done.

Create a special space for your child. Set aside one room or area of your home as a play space. Childproof this space. The goal is to create a place where children can roam freely and play with minimal supervision. Consider allowing your child in this area only when you study. Your homework time then becomes your child's reward. If you're cramped for space, just set aside some special toys for your child to play with during your study time.

Use TV responsibly. Whenever possible, select educational programs that keep your child's mind active and engaged. Also see whether your child can use headphones while watching TV. That way, the house stays quiet while you read or study.

Schedule time to be with your children when you've finished studying. Let your children in on the plan: *I'll be done reading at 7:30. That gives us a whole hour to play before you go to bed*.

Ask other adults for help. Getting help can be as simple as asking your spouse, partner, neighbor, or a fellow student to take care of the children while you study. Offer to trade child care with a neighbor: You will take her kids and yours for two hours on Thursday night, for example, if she'll take them for two hours on Saturday morning.

Find community activities and services. Ask whether your school provides a day care service. In some cases, these services are available to students at a reduced cost.

MODULE 9

DEVELOPING LEARNING STRATEGIES

Introduction

We all have problems and barriers that block our progress or prevent us from moving into new areas. Often, the way we respond to our problems places limitations on what we can be, do, and have.

Problems often work like barriers. When we bump up against one of our problems, we usually turn away and start walking along a different path. All of a sudden—bump!—we've struck another barrier. And then we turn away again.

As we continue to bump into problems and turn away from them, our lives stay inside the same old boundaries. Inside these boundaries, we are unlikely to have new adventures. We are unlikely to keep learning.

If we respond to problems by loving them instead of resisting them, we can expand the boundaries in which we live our lives.

The word *love* might sound like an overstatement. In the context of this module, the word means to unconditionally accept the fact that your problems exist. The more we deny or resist a problem, the stronger it seems to become. When we accept the fact that we have a problem, we can find effective ways to deal with it.

So, think about what that means to you. Ask yourself what problems you might *love*:

Do you feel comfortable reading a large amount of information in a short period?

Are you confident in your ability to take tests?

Are you able to remember what you read and hear and then apply it to different situations?

Are you able to effectively take notes from what you read and hear?

Loving a problem does not mean *liking* it. Instead, loving a problem means admitting the truth about it. This helps us take effective action, which can free us from the problem once and for all.

In this module, you learn effective strategies for reading, test-taking, remembering (memory), and note-taking so that you can take action on the problems you *love*.

Lesson 9.1: Reading Strategies

Lesson 9.1 Introduction

Picture yourself sitting at a desk, a book in your hands. Your eyes are open, and it looks as if you're reading. Suddenly your head jerks up. You blink. You realize your eyes have been scanning the page for 10 minutes, and you can't remember a single thing you have read.

Or picture this: You've had a hard day. You are up at 6:00 a.m. to get the kids ready for school. A coworker calls in sick, and you miss your lunch trying to do his job as well as your own. You pick up the kids and then shop for dinner. Dinner is late, of course, and the kids are grumpy.

Finally, you get to your books at 8:00 p.m. You begin a reading assignment on something called *the equity method of accounting for common stock investments*. "I am preparing for the future," you tell yourself as you plod through two paragraphs and begin the third. Suddenly, everything in the room looks different. Your head is resting on your elbow, which is resting on the equity method of accounting. The clock reads 11:00 p.m. Say goodbye to three hours.

Contrast this scenario with the image of an active reader, who exhibits the following behaviors:

- Stays alert, poses questions about what he reads, and searches for the answers
- Recognizes levels of information within the text, separating the main points and general principles from supporting details
- Quizzes himself about the material, makes written notes, and lists unanswered questions
- Instantly spots key terms and takes the time to find the definitions of unfamiliar words
- Thinks critically about the ideas in the text and looks for ways to apply them

That sounds like a lot to do. Yet skilled readers routinely accomplish all these things and more—while enjoying the process. Successful students engage actively with reading material. They're willing to grapple with even the most challenging texts. They wrestle meaning from each page. They fill the margins with handwritten questions. They underline, highlight, annotate, and nearly rewrite some books to make them their own.

Successful students also commit to change their lives on the basis of what they read. Of every chapter, they ask, *What's the point? And what's the payoff? How can I use this to live my purpose and achieve my goals?* These students are just as likely to create to-do lists as to take notes on their reading. And when they're done with a useful book, successful students share its points with others for continuing conversation. Reading becomes a creative act and a tool for building a community.

One way to experience this kind of success is to approach reading with a system in mind. You can use active reading to avoid mental minivacations and reduce the number of unscheduled naps during study time, even after a hard day. Active reading is a way to decrease difficulty and struggle by increasing energy and skill. Once you learn these strategies, you might actually spend less time on your reading but get more out of it.

Active Reading Phase 1—Before You Read

Active reading is a three-phase technique you can use to extract the ideas and information you want. They include strategies to use before, while, and after you read. Using these strategies will help you engage with the material more effectively and therefore remember more of what you read.

Phase 1 happens *before* you read and includes the following steps:

Step 1: Preview. Before you start reading, preview the entire assignment. You don't have to memorize what you preview to get value from this step.

- Look over the table of contents and flip through the text page by page, if you are starting a new book. If you're going to read one chapter, flip through the pages of that chapter.
- Read all chapter headings and subheadings. Like the headlines in a newspaper, these are usually printed in large, bold type. Often, headings are brief summaries themselves.
- Keep an eye out for summary statements. If the assignment is long or complex, read the summary first. Many textbooks have summaries in the introduction or at the end of each chapter.
- Seek out familiar concepts, facts, or ideas when previewing. These items can help increase comprehension by linking new information to previously learned material. Take a few moments to reflect on what you already know about the subject—even if you think you know nothing. This technique prepares your brain to accept new information.
- Look for ideas that spark your imagination or curiosity. Inspect drawings, diagrams, charts, tables, graphs, and photographs.

- Imagine what kinds of questions will show up on a test. Previewing helps to clarify your purpose for reading. Ask yourself what you will do with this material and how it can relate to your long-term goals. Keep your preview short. If the entire reading assignment will take less than an hour, your preview might take five minutes. Previewing is also a way to get yourself started when an assignment looks too big to handle. It is an easy way to step into the material.

Step 2: Outline. With complex material, you should take the time to understand the structure of what you are about to read. Outlining actively organizes your thoughts about the assignment and can help make complex information easier to understand.

- Spend some time studying the chapter outline in your textbook, if an outline is provided.
- Sketch a brief outline in the margin of the book or at the beginning of your notes on a separate sheet of paper, if an outline is not provided. Later, as you read and take notes, you can add to your outline. Headings in the text can serve as major and minor entries in your outline.

The amount of time you spend on this outlining step will vary. For some assignments, a 10-second mental outline is all you might need. For other assignments (fiction and poetry, for example), you can skip this step altogether.

Step 3: Question. Before you begin a careful reading, determine what you want from the assignment.

- Write down a list of questions, including any questions that resulted from your preview of the materials.
- Turn chapter headings and subheadings into questions. For example, if a heading is "Transference and Suggestion," you can ask yourself, *What are transference* and *suggestion? How does transference* relate to *suggestion?*
- Make up a quiz as if you were teaching this subject to your classmates.
- Write specific questions about a concept if you do not understand it. The more detailed your questions, the more powerful this technique becomes. You don't need to answer every question that you ask. The purpose of making up questions is to get your brain involved in the assignment. Take your unanswered questions to class, where they can serve as springboards for class discussion.

Active Reading Phase 2—While You Read, Part 1

Phase 1 of active reading is done before reading, but Phase 2 happens *while* you read, helping you figure out what you are looking for and setting up some context. This phase includes the following steps:

Step 4: Focus. You have previewed the reading assignment, organized it in your mind or on paper, and formulated questions. Now you are ready to begin reading.

It's easy to fool yourself about reading. Having an open book in your hand and moving your eyes across a page don't mean that you are reading effectively. Reading takes mental focus. As you read, be conscious of where you are and what you are doing.

To begin, get in a position to stay focused. If you observe chief executive officers, you'll find that some of them wear out the front of their chair first. They're literally on the edge of their seat. Approach your reading assignment in the same way. Sit up. Keep your spine straight. Avoid reading in bed, except for fun.

Avoid marathon reading sessions. Schedule breaks, and set a reasonable goal for the entire session. Then, reward yourself with an enjoyable activity for 10 or 15 minutes every hour or two.

For difficult reading, set more limited goals. Read for a half-hour and then take a break. Most students find that shorter periods of reading distributed throughout the day and week can be more effective than long sessions.

Visualize the material. Form mental pictures of the concepts as they are presented. If you read that a voucher system can help control cash disbursements, picture a voucher handing out dollar bills. Using visual imagery in this way can help deepen your understanding of the text while allowing information to be transferred into your long-term memory.

Read the material out loud, especially if it is complicated. Some of us remember better and understand more quickly when we hear an idea.

Get a feel for the subject. For example, let's say you are reading about a microorganism—a paramecium—in your biology text. Imagine what it would feel like to run your finger around the long, cigar-shaped body of the organism. Imagine feeling the large fold of its gullet on one side and the tickle of the hairy little cilia as they wiggle in your hand.

In addition, predict how the author will answer your key questions. Then read to find out if your predictions were accurate.

Active Reading Phase 2—While You Read, Part 2

Once you have taken the important step of creating your focus and are aware of what you are looking for while reading, you are ready to use Step 5. During this step in Phase 2 of active reading, you use strategies for marking your text to identify the important elements.

Step 5: Flag answers. As you read, seek out the answers to your questions. You are a detective, watching for every clue. When you do find an answer, flag it so that it stands out on the page.

Deface your books. Flag answers by highlighting, underlining, writing comments, filling in your outline, or marking up pages in any other way that helps you. Indulge yourself as you never could with your grade school books.

Marking up your books offers other benefits. When you read with a highlighter, pen, or pencil in your hand, you involve your kinesthetic senses of touch and motion. Being physical with your books can help build strong neural pathways in your memory. You can mark up a text in many ways. For example:

- Place an asterisk (*) or an exclamation point (!) in the margin next to an especially important sentence or term.
- Circle key terms and words to look up later in a dictionary.
- Write short definitions of key terms in the margin.
- Write a Q in the margin to highlight possible test questions, passages you don't understand, and questions to ask in class.
- Write personal comments in the margin—points of agreement or disagreement with the author.
- Write mini-indexes in the margin—that is, the numbers of other pages in the book where the same topic is discussed.
- Write summaries in your own words.
- Rewrite chapter titles, headings, and subheadings so that they're more meaningful to you.
- Draw diagrams, pictures, tables, or maps that translate text into visual terms.
- Number each step in a list or series of related points.
- In the margins, write notes about the relationships between elements in your reading. For example, note connections between an idea and examples of that idea.
- If you infer an answer to a question or come up with another idea of your own, write that down as well.

Avoid marking up a textbook too soon. Wait until you complete a chapter or section to make sure you know the key points and then mark it up. Sometimes, flagging answers after you read each paragraph works best.

Also remember that the purpose of making marks in a text is to call out important concepts or information that you will review later. Flagging key information can save lots of time when you are studying for tests. With this in mind, highlight or underline sparingly—usually less than 10 percent of the text. If you mark up too much on a page, you defeat the purpose: to flag the most important material for review.

Finally, jot down new questions, and note when you don't find the answers you are looking for. Ask these questions in class, or see your instructor personally. Demand that your textbooks give you what you want—answers.

Active Reading Phase 3—After You Read

At the end of Phase 2, your reading is complete, but to get the most out of what you just read, it's important to complete the final phase of active reading—Phase 3. This phase happens *after* you read and includes the following steps:

Step 6: Recite. Talk to yourself about what you've read. Or talk to someone else. When you finish a reading assignment, make a speech about it. When you recite, you practice an important aspect of metacognition—*synthesis*, or combining individual ideas and facts into a meaningful whole.

One way to recite is to look at each underlined point. Note what you marked; then, put the book down and start talking out loud. Explain as much as you can about that particular point. To make this technique more effective, do it in front of a mirror. It might seem silly, but the benefits can be enormous. Reap them at exam time.

A related technique is to stop reading periodically and write a short, free-form summary of what you just read. In one study, this informal "retrieval practice" helped students recall information better than other study techniques did (Karpicke and Blunt 2011).

Classmates are even better than mirrors. Form a group to practice teaching one another what you have read. One of the best ways to learn anything is to teach it to someone else. In addition, talk about your reading whenever you can. Tell friends and family members what you're learning.

Talking about your reading reinforces a valuable skill—the ability to summarize. To practice this skill, pick one chapter (or one section of one chapter) from any of your textbooks. State the main topic covered in the chapter. Then, state the main points that the author makes about the topic.

Step 7: Review. Plan to do your first complete review within 24 hours of reading the material. Sound the trumpets! This point is critical: A review within 24 hours moves information from your short-term memory to your long-term memory.

Review within one day. If you read it on Wednesday, review it on Thursday. During this review, look over your notes and clear up anything you don't understand. Recite some of the main points.

This review can be short. You might spend as little as 15 minutes reviewing a difficult two-hour reading assignment. Investing that time now can save you hours later when studying for exams.

Step 8: Review again. This final step can be very short—perhaps only four or five minutes per assignment. Simply go over your notes. Read the highlighted parts of your text. Recite one or two of the more complicated points.

The purpose of these reviews is to keep the neural pathways to the information open and to make them more distinct. That way, the information can be easier to recall. You can accomplish these short reviews anytime, anywhere, if you are prepared.

Sometimes, longer review periods are appropriate. For example, if you found an assignment difficult, consider rereading it. Start over, as if you had never seen the material before. Sometimes, a second reading will provide you with surprising insights.

Decades ago, psychologists identified the *primacy-recency effect*, which suggests that we most easily remember the first and last items in any presentation (Pineño and Miller 2005). Previewing and reviewing your reading can put this theory to work for you.

Dealing With Challenging Texts

Successful readers monitor their understanding of reading material. They do not see confusion as a mistake or a personal shortcoming. Instead, they take it as a cue to change reading strategies and process ideas at a deeper level.

Read it again. Somehow, students get the idea that reading means opening a book and dutifully slogging through the text—line by line, page by page—moving in a straight line from the first word to the last. Feel free to shake up your routine. Make several passes through tough reading material. During a preview, for example, just scan the text to look for key words and highlighted material. Next, skim the entire chapter or article again, spending a little more time and taking in more than you did during your preview. Finally, read in more depth.

Read it out loud. Make noise. Read a passage out loud several times, each time using a different inflection and emphasizing a different part of the sentence. Be creative. Imagine that you are the author talking.

Use another text. Find a similar text in the library. Sometimes a concept is easier to understand if it is expressed another way. Children's books—especially children's encyclopedias—can provide useful overviews of baffling subjects.

Talk to someone who can help. Admit when you are stuck. Then, bring questions about reading assignments to classmates and members of your study group. Also, make an appointment with your instructor. Most teachers welcome the opportunity to work individually with students. Be specific about your confusion. Point out the paragraph that you found toughest to understand.

Reading Faster

One way to read faster is to read faster. This idea might sound like double-talk, but it is a serious suggestion. The fact is, you can probably read faster—without any loss in comprehension—simply by making a conscious effort to do so. Your comprehension might even improve. You might try the following suggestions.

Move your eyes faster. When we read, our eyes leap across the page in short bursts called *saccades* (pronounced "să-käds"). A saccade is also a sharp jerk on the reins of a horse—a violent pull to stop the animal quickly. Our eyes stop like that, too, in pauses called *fixations*.

Although we experience the illusion of continuously scanning each line, we actually take in groups of words—usually about three at a time. For more than 90 percent of reading time, our eyes are at a dead stop, in those fixations.

One way to decrease saccades is to follow your finger as you read. The faster your finger moves, the faster your eyes move. You can also use a pen, pencil, or 3 × 5 card as a guide.

Your eyes can move faster if they take in more words with each burst—for example, six instead of three. To practice taking in more words between fixations, find a newspaper with narrow columns. Read down one column at a time, and fixate only once per line.

In addition to using the above techniques, simply make a conscious effort to fixate less. You might feel a little uncomfortable at first. That's normal. Just practice often, for short periods.

Notice and release ineffective habits. Our eyes make regressions; that is, they back up and reread words. You can reduce regressions by paying attention to them. Use the handy 3 × 5 card to cover words and lines that you have just read. You can then note how often you stop and move the card back to reread the text. Don't be discouraged if you stop often at first. Being aware of it helps you regress less frequently.

Also notice vocalizing. You are more likely to read faster if you don't read out loud or move your lips. You can also increase your speed if you don't subvocalize—that is, if you don't mentally "hear" the words as you read them. To stop doing it, just be aware of it.

When you first attempt to release these habits, choose simpler reading material. That way, you can pay closer attention to your reading technique. Gradually work your way up to more complex material.

Stay flexible. Remember that speed isn't everything. Skillful readers vary their reading rate according to their purpose and the nature of the material. An advanced text in analytic geometry usually calls for a different reading rate than the Sunday comics.

You also can use different reading rates on the same material. For example, you might first sprint through an assignment for the key words and ideas, and then return to the difficult parts for a slower and more thorough reading.

Another option is to divide a large reading assignment into smaller sections and use different reading strategies for each one. You might choose to read the first and last sections in detail, for example, and skim the middle sections.

As a general guideline, slow down your reading pace for material that's technical and unfamiliar to you. Speed up for material that's familiar, staying alert for anything that seems new or significant.

Also remember that reading faster *without comprehension* can actually increase the amount of time that you study. Balance the desire for speed with the need for understanding what you read.

Finally, remember the first rule of reading fast: Just do it!

Building Your Vocabulary

Having a large vocabulary makes reading more enjoyable and increases the range of materials you can explore. In addition, building your vocabulary gives you more options for self-expression when speaking or writing. With a larger vocabulary, you can think more precisely by making finer distinctions between ideas. And you won't have to stop to search for words at crucial times, such as a job interview.

Strengthen your vocabulary by looking up unfamiliar terms. A desk dictionary is an easy-to-handle abridged dictionary that you can use many times in the course of a day. In contrast, an unabridged dictionary is large and not made for you to carry around. It provides more complete information about words and definitions not included in your desk dictionary as well as synonyms, usage notes, and word histories. Look for unabridged dictionaries in libraries and bookstores.

You might prefer using one of several online dictionaries, such as Dictionary.com. Another common option is to use a search engine such as Google.com. If you do this, inspect the results carefully. They can vary in quality and be less useful than the definitions you'd find in a good dictionary or thesaurus.

Construct a word stack. When you come across an unfamiliar word, write it down on a 3 × 5 card. Below the word, copy the sentence in which it was used, along with the page number. You can look up each word immediately, or you can accumulate a stack of these cards and look up the words later. Write the definition of each word on the back of the 3 × 5 card, adding the diacritics—marks that tell you how to pronounce it.

To expand your vocabulary and learn the history behind the words, take your stack of cards to an unabridged dictionary. As you find related words in the dictionary, add them to your stack. These cards become a portable study aid that you can review in your spare moments.

Learn—even when your dictionary is across town. When you are listening to a lecture and hear an unusual word or when you are reading on the bus and encounter a word you don't know, you can still build your word stack. Pull out a 3 × 5 card and write down the word and its

sentence. Or make a note of the word on your cell phone. Later, you can look up the definition and write it on the back of the card.

Divide words into parts. Another suggestion for building your vocabulary is to divide an unfamiliar word into syllables and look for familiar parts. This strategy works well if you make it a point to learn common prefixes (beginning syllables) and suffixes (ending syllables).

For example, the suffix *-tude* usually refers to a condition or state of being. Knowing this makes it easier to conclude that *habitude* refers to a usual way of doing something and that *similitude* means being similar or having a quality of resemblance.

Infer the meaning of words from their context. You can often deduce the meaning of an unfamiliar word simply by paying attention to its context—the surrounding words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or images. Practice looking for context clues such as these:

- **Definitions.** A key word might be defined right in the text. Look for phrases such as *defined as* or *in other words*.
- **Examples.** Authors often provide examples to clarify a word meaning. If the word is not explicitly defined, then study the examples. They're often preceded by the phrases *for example, for instance, or such as*.
- **Lists.** When a word is listed in a series, pay attention to the other items in the series. They might define the unfamiliar word through association.
- **Comparisons.** You might find a new word surrounded by synonyms—words with a similar meaning. Look for synonyms after words such as *like* and *as*.
- **Contrasts.** A writer might juxtapose a word with its antonym. Look for phrases such as *on the contrary* and *on the other hand*.

References

Karpicke, Jeffrey D., and Janell R. Blunt. "Retrieval practice produces more learning than elaborative studying with concept mapping." *Science.* www.sciencemag.org/content/early/2011/01/19/science.1199327.abstract (accessed January 21, 2011).

Pineño, Oskar and Ralph R. Miller. "Primacy and recency effects in extinction and latent inhibition: A selective review with implications for models of learning." *Behavioural Processes* 69, 2 (2005): 223–235.

Lesson 9.2: Test-Taking Strategies

Lesson 9.2 Introduction

On the surface, tests don't look dangerous. Maybe that's why we sometimes treat them as if they were land mines. Suppose a stranger walks up to you on the street and asks, "Does a finite abelian P-group have a basis?" Would you break out in a cold sweat? Would your muscles tense up? Would your breathing become shallow?

Probably not. Even if you had never heard of a finite abelian P-group, you probably would remain calm. However, if you find the same question on a test and you have never heard of a finite abelian P-group, your hands might get clammy.

Grades (A to F) are what we use to give power to tests. And there are lots of misconceptions about what grades are. Grades are not a measure of intelligence or creativity. They are not an indication of our ability to contribute to society. Grades are simply a measure of how well we do on tests.

Some people think that a test score measures what a student has accomplished in a course. This idea is false. A test score is a measure of what a student scored on a test. If you are anxious about a test and blank out, the grade cannot measure what you've learned. The reverse is also

true: If you are good at taking tests and you are a lucky guesser, the score won't be an accurate reflection of what you know.

Grades are not a measure of self-worth. Yet we tend to give test scores the power to determine how we feel about ourselves. Common thoughts include *If I fail a test, I am a failure* or *If I do badly on a test, I am a bad person*. The truth is that if you do badly on a test, you are a person who did badly on a test. That's all.

It is easier to do well on exams if you don't put too much pressure on yourself. Don't give the test some magical power over your own worth as a human being. Academic tests are not a matter of life and death. Scoring low on important tests—medical school exams, bar exams, CPA exams, and the like—usually means only a delay.

You might want to explore your feelings about tests before you begin this lesson. Complete the following sentences:

As exam time gets closer, one thing I notice that I do is…

When it comes to taking tests, I have trouble…

The night before a test, I usually feel…

The morning of a test, I usually feel…

During a test, I usually feel…

After a test, I usually feel…

When I learn a test score, I usually feel…

Once you have a better understanding of how you feel about tests, you can do something about it. You might ask yourself, *What can* I *do to experience my next test differently? How can I prepare more effectively? How can I manage stress before, during, and after the test?* When you answer such questions, you take back your power.

This lesson includes strategies for improving your test-taking skills, including dealing with test anxiety, preparing for tests, and understanding how to take different types of tests.

Dealing with Test Anxiety

Whether the chance of doing poorly is real or exaggerated, worrying about it can become paralyzing. Test anxiety is a common problem among students, and it can surface in many ways. Here are some examples:

- Anger: The teacher never wanted me to pass this stupid course anyway.
- Blame: If only the class were not so boring.
- Fear: I'll never have enough time to study.

Believing in any of these statements leaves us powerless. We become victims of things that we don't control—the teacher, the textbook, or the wording of the test questions.
A little tension before a test is fine. You can enjoy the benefits of a little tension while you stay confident and relaxed by trying some of the following strategies:

Yell "stop!" If you notice that your mind is consumed with worries and fears or your thoughts are spinning out of control, mentally yell, "Stop!" If you're in a situation that allows it, yell it out loud. This action can allow you to redirect your thoughts.

Describe your thoughts in writing. Certain thoughts tend to increase test anxiety. One way to defuse them is to simply acknowledge them. To get the full benefit of this technique, take the time to make a list. Write down what you think and feel about an upcoming test. Capture everything that's on your mind, and don't stop to edit.

Dispute your thoughts. You can take the above technique one step further. Do some critical thinking. Remember that anxiety-creating thoughts about tests often boil down to this statement: *Getting a low grade on a test is a disaster*. Do the math, however: A four-year degree often involves taking about 32 courses (eight courses per year over four years for a full-time student). This means that your final grade on any one course amounts to about only 3 percent of your total GPA. This is *not* an excuse to avoid studying. It is simply a reason to keep tests in perspective.

Praise yourself. Many of us take the first opportunity to belittle ourselves*: "Way to go, dummy! You don't even know the answer to the first question on the test.* We wouldn't dream of treating a friend this way, yet we do it to ourselves. An alternative is to give yourself some encouragement. Treat yourself as if you were your own best friend. Prepare carefully for each test, and then remind yourself, *I am ready. I can do a great job on this test.*

Consider the worst. Rather than trying to put a stop to your worrying, consider the very worst thing that could happen. Take your fear to the limit of absurdity. Imagine the catastrophic problems that might occur if you were to fail the test. You might say to yourself, *Well, if I fail this test, I might fail the course, lose my financial aid, and get kicked out of school. Then I won't be able to get a job, so the bank will repossess my car, and I'll start drinking.* Keep going until you see the absurdity of your predictions. After you stop chuckling, you can backtrack to discover a reasonable level of concern.

Breathe. You can calm physical sensations within your body by focusing your attention on your breathing. Concentrate on the air going in and out of your lungs. Experience it as it passes through your nose and mouth. Do this exercise for two to five minutes. If you notice that you are taking short, shallow breaths, begin to take longer and deeper breaths. Imagine your lungs to be a pair of bagpipes. Expand your chest to bring in as much air as possible. Then, listen to the plaintive chords as you slowly release the air.

Dealing with Math Anxiety

Test anxiety can occur for any subject, but many students seem to have more anxiety when it comes to taking math tests. This can be attributed to a lack of confidence about doing math, even beyond taking tests.

The following are strategies to help you deal with math anxiety:

Connect math to life. Think of the benefits of mastering math courses. You'll have more options for choosing a major and a career. Math skills can also put you at ease in everyday situations—calculating the tip for a waiter, balancing your checkbook, figuring out the discounted price while shopping, or working with a spreadsheet. If you follow baseball statistics, cook or bake, do construction work, or snap pictures with a camera, you'll use math. And speaking the language of math can help you feel at home in a world driven by technology.

Pause occasionally to get an overview of the branch of math that you're studying. What's it all about? What basic problems is it designed to solve? How do people apply this knowledge in daily life? For example, many architects, engineers, and scientists use calculus daily.

Take a first step. To ensure that you have an adequate base of knowledge, tell the truth about your current level of knowledge and skill. Before you register for a math course, locate assigned texts for the prerequisite courses. If the material in those books seems new or difficult for you, see the instructor. Ask for suggestions on ways to prepare for the course.

Notice your pictures about math. Succeeding in math won't turn you into a nerd. Actually, you'll be able to enjoy school more, and your friends will still like you.

Mental pictures about math can be funny, but they can have serious effects. If math is seen as a field for white males, then women and people of color are likely to get excluded. Promoting math success for all students helps to overcome racism and sexism.

Change your conversation about math. When students fear math, they often say negative things to themselves about their abilities in this subject. Many times this self-talk includes these statements:

- *I'll never be fast enough at solving math problems.*
- *I'm good with words, so I can't be good with numbers.*

Get such statements out in the open, and apply some emergency critical thinking. You'll find two self-defeating assumptions lurking there:

- *Everybody else is better at math and science than I am.*
- *Because I don't understand a math concept right now, I'll never understand it*.

Both of these statements are illogical. Replace negative beliefs with logical, realistic statements that affirm your ability to succeed in math:

- *Any confusion I feel now can be resolved.*
- *I learn math without comparing myself to others.*
- *I ask whatever questions are needed to aid my understanding*.

Choose your response to stress. Math anxiety is seldom just in your head. It can also register as sweaty palms, shallow breathing, tightness in the chest, or a mild headache. Instead of trying to ignore these sensations, just notice them without judgment. Over time, simple awareness decreases their power.

Preparing for Tests

One of the best ways to improve your test-taking skills is to have a solid plan in place as to how you are going to prepare for the test. Having a solid plan in place for studying will help you be more confident and successful when taking a test.

Try some of the following strategies:

Create study checklists. You can use study checklists the way a pilot uses a preflight checklist. Pilots go through a standard routine before they take off. They physically mark off each item: test flaps, check magnetos, check fuel tanks, adjust instruments, check rudder. A written list helps them to be sure they don't miss anything. Once they are in the air, it's too late.

Taking an exam is like flying a plane. Once the test begins, it's too late to memorize that one equation you forgot to include in your review.

Make a checklist for each subject.

- List reading assignments by chapters or page numbers.
- List dates of lecture notes.
- Write down various types of problems you will need to solve.
- Write down other skills to master. Include major ideas, definitions, theories, formulas, and equations.
- For math and science tests, choose some problems and do them over again as a way to review for the test.

Remember that a study checklist is not a review sheet; it is a to-do list. Checklists contain the briefest possible description of each item to study.

Instead of a checklist, you may want to use a *test prep plan*. This written plan goes beyond a study checklist to include the following:

- Date and time of each test, along with the name of the course and instructor
- Type of items—such as essay or multiple choice—likely to appear on each test
- Specific dates and times you intend to study for each test (which you then enter on your calendar)

- Specific strategies you intend to use while studying for each test

Create mind map summary sheets. There are several ways to make a mind map as you study for tests. Start by creating a map totally from memory. You might be surprised by how much you already know. After you have gone as far as you can using recall alone, go over your notes and text, and fill in the rest of the map. Another option is to go through your notes and write down key words as you pick them out. Then, without looking at your notes, create a mind map of everything you can recall about each key word. Finally, go back to your notes, and fill in material you left out.

Create flash cards. Flash cards are like portable test questions. On one side of some 3 × 5 cards, write questions. On the other side, write the answers. Carry a pack of flash cards with you, and review them whenever you have a minute to spare. Use flash cards for formulas, definitions, theories, key words from your notes, axioms, dates, foreign language phrases, hypotheses, and sample problems. Create flash cards regularly as the term progresses. Buy an inexpensive card file to keep your flash cards arranged by subject.

Preparing for Tests—Practice and Review

In addition to having a plan in place for studying for tests, it is important to have a plan for practicing and reviewing the material. Practicing and reviewing will help keep the material fresh in your mind and will deepen your understanding of it.

Try some of the following strategies:

Take a practice test. Write up your own questions based on course material—a good activity for study groups. Take your practice test several times before the actual exam. You might type this "test" so that it looks like the real thing. If possible, take your practice test in the same room where you will take the actual test.

Meet with your instructor to go over your practice test. Ask whether your questions focus on appropriate topics and represent the kind of items you can expect to see. The instructor might decline to give you any of this information. More often, though, instructors will answer some or all of your questions about an upcoming test.

Do daily reviews. Daily reviews include short preclass and postclass reviews of lecture notes. Conduct brief daily reviews with textbooks: Before reading a new assignment, scan your notes and the sections you underlined or highlighted in the previous assignment. In addition, use the time you spend waiting for the bus or doing the laundry to conduct short reviews.

Concentrate daily reviews on two kinds of material: (1) material you have just learned, either in class or in your reading, and (2) material that involves simple memorization—equations, formulas, dates, and definitions.

Begin to review on the first day of class. Most instructors outline the whole course at that time. You can even start reviewing within seconds after learning. During a lull in class, go over the notes you just took. Immediately after class, review your notes again.

Do weekly reviews. Review each subject at least once a week, allowing about one hour per subject. Include reviews of assigned reading and lecture notes. Look over any mind map summaries or flash cards you have created. Also practice working on sample problems.

Do major reviews. Major reviews are usually most helpful when conducted the week before finals or other critical exams. They help you integrate concepts and deepen your understanding of the material presented throughout the term. These are longer review periods—two to five hours at a stretch, with sufficient breaks. Remember that the effectiveness of your review begins to drop after an hour or so unless you give yourself a short rest.

After a certain point, short breaks every hour might not be enough to refresh you. That's when it's time to quit. Learn your limits by being conscious of the quality of your concentration. During long

sessions, study the most difficult subjects when you are the most alert—at the beginning of the session.

Schedule reviews. Schedule specific times in your calendar for reviews. Start reviewing key topics at least five days before you'll be tested on them. This allows plenty of time to find the answers to questions and close any gaps in your understanding.

Monitor your reviews. Each day that you prepare for a test, assess what you have learned and what you still want to learn. See how many items you've covered from your study checklist. Look at the tables of contents in your textbooks, and mark an X next to the sections you've summarized. This helps you gauge the thoroughness of your reviews and alerts you to areas that still need attention.

Predicting Test Questions

Predicting test questions can do more than get you a better grade. It can also keep you focused on the purpose of a course and help you design your learning strategies. Making predictions can be fun too, especially when they turn out to be accurate.

Ask about the nature of the test. Eliminate as much guesswork as possible. Ask your instructor to describe upcoming tests. Do this early in the term so that you can be alert for possible test questions throughout the course. Here are some questions to ask:

What course material will the test cover—readings, lectures, lab sessions, or a combination?

Will the test be cumulative, or will it cover just the most recent material covered?

Will the test focus on facts and details or major themes and relationships?

Will the test call on you to solve problems or apply concepts?

Will you have choices about which questions to answer?

What types of questions will be on the test—true/false, multiple choice, short answer, essay?

Put yourself in your instructor's shoes. If you were teaching the course, what kinds of questions would you put on an exam? You can also brainstorm test questions with other students—a great activity for study groups.

Look for possible test questions in your notes and readings. Have a separate section in your notebook labeled *Test Questions*. Add several questions to this section after every lecture and assignment. You can also create your own code or graphic signal—such as a *T!* in a circle—to flag possible test questions in your notes. Use the same symbol to flag review questions and problems in your textbooks that could appear on a test.

Remember that textbook authors have many ways of pointing you to potential test items. Look for clues in chapter overviews and summaries, headings, lists of key words, and review questions. Some textbooks have related websites where you can take practice tests.

Look for clues to possible questions during class. During lectures, you can predict test questions by observing what an instructor says and how he says it. Instructors often give clues. They might repeat important points several times, write them on the board, or return to them in later classes.

Gestures can indicate critical points. For example, your instructor might pause, look at notes, or read passages word for word.

Notice whether your teacher has any strong points of view on certain issues. Questions on those issues are likely to appear on a test. Also pay attention to questions the instructor poses to students, and note questions that other students ask.

When material from reading assignments is covered extensively in class, it is likely to be on a test. For science courses and other courses involving problem solving, work on sample problems using different variables.

Save all quizzes, papers, lab sheets, and graded materials of any kind. Quiz questions have a way of reappearing, in slightly altered form, on final exams. If copies of previous exams and other graded materials are available, use them to predict test questions.

Apply your predictions. To get the most value from your predictions, use them to guide your review sessions.

Remember the obvious. Be on the lookout for these words: *This material will be on the test*.

Preparing for Tests—Studying in Groups

Study groups can lift your mood on days when you just don't feel like working. If you skip a solo study session, no one else will know. If you declare your intention to study with others who are depending on you, your intention gains strength.

Study groups are especially important if going to school has thrown you into a new culture. Joining a study group with people you already know can help ease the transition. To multiply the benefits of working with study groups, seek out people of other backgrounds, cultures, races, and ethnic groups. You can get a whole new perspective on the world, along with some new friends.

Joining a study group also helps you to develop a number of skills for working on teams in the workplace. Effective teams consist of people who know how to resolve conflict, give each other constructive feedback, collaborate to reach a common goal, and build consensus based on creative and critical thinking. You can start learning these skills now, and use them to advance your career in the future.

Ask your instructor for guidelines on study group activity. Many instructors welcome and encourage study groups. However, they have different ideas about what kinds of collaboration are acceptable. Some activities—such as sharing test items or writing papers from a shared outline—are considered cheating. Let your instructor know that you're forming a group, and ask for clear guidelines.

Set an agenda for each meeting. At the beginning of each meeting, reach an agreement on what you intend to do. Set a time limit for each agenda item, and determine a quitting time. End each meeting with assignments for all members to complete before the next meeting.

Assign roles. To make the most of your time, ask one member to lead each group meeting. The leader's role is to keep the discussion focused on the agenda and ask for contributions from all members. Assign another person to act as the recorder. This person will take notes on the meeting, recording possible test questions, answers, and main points from group discussions. Rotate both of these roles so that every group member takes a turn.

Teach each other. Teaching is a great way to learn something. Turn the material you're studying into a list of topics and then assign a specific topic to each group member, who will then teach it to the group.

Test one another. During your meeting, take a practice test created from questions contributed by group members. When you're finished, compare your answers. Or turn testing into a game by pretending you're on a television game show. Use sample test questions to quiz one another.

Compare notes. Make sure that all the group's members heard the same thing in class and that you all recorded the important information. Ask others to help explain material in your notes that is confusing to you.

Create wall-sized mind maps or concept maps to summarize a textbook or series of lectures. Work on large sheets of butcher paper, or tape together pieces of construction paper. When creating a mind map, assign one branch to each member of the study group. Use a different colored pen or marker for each branch of the mind map.

Use technology to collaborate. Web-based applications allow you to create virtual study groups and collaborate online. For example, create and revise documents with sites such as Google Docs (www.docs.google.com) and Zoho Writer (https://www.zoho.com/writer/). For more options, do an Internet search with the key words *collaborate online*.

During the Test

It is important to arrive for the test early. Being early often leaves time to do a relaxation exercise. While you're waiting for the test to begin and talking with classmates, avoid asking the question, *How much did you study for the test?* This question might fuel anxious thoughts that you didn't study enough.

Use the following guidelines to feel confident during the test:

Ask the teacher or test administrator if you can use scratch paper during the test. If you use a separate sheet of paper without permission, you might appear to be cheating. If you *do* get permission, use this paper to jot down memory aids, formulas, equations, definitions, facts, or other material you know you'll need and might forget. An alternative is to make quick notes in the margins of the test sheet.

Pay attention to verbal directions given as a test is distributed. Scan the whole test immediately. Evaluate the importance of each section. Notice how many points each part of the test is worth, and then estimate how much time you'll need for each section, using its point value as your guide. For example, don't budget 20 percent of your time for a section that is worth only 10 percent of the points.

Read the directions slowly. Then reread them. It can be agonizing to discover that you lost points on a test merely because you failed to follow the directions. When the directions are confusing, ask to have them clarified.

Now you are ready to begin the test. If necessary, allow yourself a minute or two of panic time.

Answer the easiest, shortest questions first. This gives you the experience of success. It also stimulates associations and prepares you for more difficult questions. Pace yourself, and watch the time. If you can't think of an answer, move on. Follow your time plan.

If you are unable to determine the answer to a test question, keep an eye out throughout the test for context clues that may remind you of the correct answer or provide you with evidence to eliminate wrong answers.

Taking Different Types of Tests

To help you improve your test-taking skills, understand the types of questions and tests you might encounter. Understanding the format of questions in different types of tests will help you decide how to answer questions and demonstrate what you know. The following information will help you take any type of test with confidence.

Multiple Choice

- **Answer each question in your head first.** Do this step before you look at the possible answers. If you come up with an answer that you're confident is right, look for that answer in the list of choices.
- **Read all possible answers before selecting one.** Sometimes, two answers will be similar and only one will be correct.
- **Test each possible answer.** Remember that multiple choice questions consist of two parts: the stem (an incomplete statement or question at the beginning) and a list of possible answers. Each answer, when combined with the stem, makes a complete statement or question-and-answer pair that is either true or false. When you combine the

stem with each possible answer, you are turning each multiple choice question into a small series of true/false questions. Choose the answer that makes a true statement.
- **Eliminate incorrect answers.** Cross off the answers that are clearly not correct. The answer you cannot eliminate is probably the best choice.

True/False

- **Read the entire question.** Separate the statement into its grammatical parts—individual clauses and phrases—and then test each part. If any part is false, the entire statement is false.
- **Look for qualifiers.** Qualifiers include words such as *all, most, sometimes,* or *rarely*. Absolute qualifiers such as *always* or *never* generally indicate a false statement.
- **Find the devil in the details.** Double-check each number, fact, and date in a true/false statement. Look for numbers that have been transposed or facts that have been slightly altered. These are signals of a false statement.
- **Watch for negatives.** Look for words such as *not* and *cannot*. Read the sentence without these words and see whether you come up with a true/false statement. Then, reinsert the negative words and see whether the statement makes more sense. Watch especially for sentences with two negative words. As in math operations, two negatives cancel each other out: *We cannot say that Chekhov never succeeded at short-story writing* means the same as *Chekhov succeeded at short-story writing*.

Computer Graded

- Make sure that the answer you mark corresponds to the question you are answering.
- Check the test booklet against the answer sheet whenever you switch sections and whenever you come to the top of a column.
- Watch for stray marks on the answer sheet; they can look like answers.
- If you change an answer, erase the wrong answer thoroughly, removing all pencil marks.

Open Book

- Organize your notes, readings, and any other materials you plan to consult when writing answers.
- Write down any formulas you will need on a separate sheet of paper.
- Bookmark the table of contents and index in each of your textbooks. Place sticky notes and stick-on tabs or paper clips on other important pages of books (pages with tables, for example).
- Create an informal table of contents or index for the notes you took in class.
- Predict which material will be covered on the test, and highlight relevant sections in your readings and notes.

Short Answer/Fill in the Blank

- Concentrate on key words and facts. Be brief.
- Overlearn or overstudy the material. When you know a subject backward and forward, you can answer this type of question almost as fast as you can write.

Matching

- Read through each column, starting with the one with fewer items. Check the number of items in each column to see whether they're equal. If they're not, look for an item in one column that you can match with two or more items in the other column.
- Look for any items with similar wording, and make special note of the differences between these items.
- Match words that are similar grammatically. For example, match verbs with verbs and nouns with nouns.
- When matching individual words with phrases, first read a phrase. Then, look for the word that logically completes the phrase.

- Cross out items in each column when you are through with them.

Tests with Essay Questions

Managing your time is crucial in answering essay questions. Note how many questions you have to answer, and monitor your progress during the test period. Writing shorter answers and completing all of the questions on an essay test will probably yield a better score than leaving some questions blank.

Find out what an essay question is asking—precisely. If a question asks you to *compare* the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, no matter how eloquently you *explain* them, you are on a one-way trip to No Credit City.

Before you write, make a quick outline. An outline can help speed up the writing of your detailed answer; you're less likely to leave out important facts; and if you don't have time to finish your answer, your outline could win you some points. To use test time efficiently, keep your outline brief. Focus on key words to use in your answer.

Introduce your answer by getting to the point. General statements such as, *There are many interesting facets to this difficult question* can cause irritation to teachers grading dozens of tests.

One way to get to the point is to begin your answer with part of the question. Suppose the question is, *Discuss how increasing the city police budget might or might not contribute to a decrease in street crime*. Your first sentence might be this: *An increase in police expenditures will not have a significant effect on street crime for the following reasons.* Your position is clear. You are on your way to an answer.

Next, expand your answer with supporting ideas and facts. Start out with the most solid points. Be brief, and avoid filler sentences.

Write legibly. Grading essay questions is in large part a subjective process. Sloppy, difficult-to-read handwriting might actually lower your grade.

Write on one side of the paper only. If you write on both sides of the paper, writing may show through and obscure the words on the other side. If necessary, use the blank side to add points you missed. Leave a generous left-side margin and plenty of space between your answers, in case you want to add points that you missed later on.

Finally, if you have time, review your answers for grammar and spelling errors, clarity, and legibility.

After the Test

Many students believe that a test is over as soon as they turn in the answer sheet. Consider another point of view: You're not done with a test until you know the answer to any question that you missed—and why you missed it.

This point of view offers major benefits. Tests in many courses are cumulative. In other words, the content included on the first test is assumed to be working knowledge for the second test, midterm, or final exam. When you discover what questions you missed and understand the reasons for lost points, you learn something—and you greatly increase your odds of achieving better scores later in the course.

To get the most value from any test, take control of what you do at two critical points: the time immediately following the test and the time when the test is returned to you.

Immediately following the test. After finishing a test, your first thought might be to nap, snack, or go out with friends to celebrate. Restrain those impulses for a short while so that you can reflect on the test. The time you invest now carries the potential to raise your grades in the future.

When the test is returned. When a returned test includes a teacher's comments, view this document as a treasure trove of intellectual gold.

- First, make sure that the point totals add up correctly, and double-check for any other errors in grading. Even the best teachers make an occasional mistake.
- Next, look at the test items that you missed. Ask these questions:
  - On what material did the teacher base test questions—readings, lectures, discussions, or other class activities?
  - What types of questions appeared in the test—objective (such as matching items, true/false questions, or multiple choice), short answer, or essay?
  - What types of questions did I miss?
  - Can I learn anything from the instructor's comments that will help me prepare for the next test?
  - What strategies did I use to prepare for this test? What would I do differently to prepare for the next test?
- See whether you can correct any answers that lost points. To do this, carefully analyze the source of your errors, and find a solution.

Getting Feedback. Getting prompt and meaningful feedback on your performance is a powerful strategy for learning *anything*. Tests are not the only source of feedback. Make a habit of asking for feedback from your instructors, advisors, classmates, coworkers, friends, family members, and anyone else who knows you. Just determine what you want to improve and ask, *How am I doing?*

Lesson 9.3: Memory Strategies

Lesson 9.3 Introduction

Think of your memory as a vast, overgrown jungle. This memory jungle is thick with wild plants, exotic shrubs, twisted trees, and creeping vines. It spreads over thousands of square miles—dense, tangled, forbidding.

Imagine that the jungle is encompassed on all sides by towering mountains. There is only one entrance to the jungle, a small meadow that is reached by a narrow pass through the mountains.

In the jungle, there are animals—millions of them. The animals represent all of the information in your memory. Imagine that every thought, mental picture, or perception you ever had is represented by an animal in this jungle. Every single event ever perceived by any of your five senses—sight, touch, hearing, smell, or taste—is a thought animal that has also passed through the meadow and entered the jungle. Some of the thought animals, such as the color of your seventh-grade teacher's favorite sweater, are well hidden. Other thoughts, such as your cell phone number or the position of the reverse gear in your car, are easier to find.

The memory jungle has two rules: Each thought animal must pass through the meadow at the entrance to the jungle. And once an animal enters the jungle, it never leaves.

The meadow represents short-term memory. You use this kind of memory when you look up a telephone number and hold it in your memory long enough to make a call. Short-term memory appears to have a limited capacity (the meadow is small) and disappears fast (animals pass through the meadow quickly).

The jungle itself represents long-term memory. This kind of memory allows you to recall information from day to day, week to week, and year to year. Remember that thought animals never leave the long-term memory jungle.

Memory Techniques: Organize It

Experiment with these techniques to develop a flexible, custom-made memory system that fits your style of learning. The techniques discussed here are divided into four categories, each of which represents a general principle for improving memory:

1. Organize it. Organized information is easier to find.

2. Use your body. Learning is an active process; get all of your senses involved.

3. Use your brain. Work *with* your memory, not *against* it.

4. Recall it. Regularly retrieve and apply key information.

Organize It

Be selective. There's a difference between gaining understanding and drowning in information. During your stay in higher education, you will be exposed to thousands of facts and ideas. As you dig into your textbooks and notes, make choices about what is most important to learn. Imagine that you are going to create a test on the material. Next, consider the questions you would ask.

When reading, look for chapter previews, summaries, and review questions. Pay attention to anything printed in bold type. Also notice visual elements—tables, charts, graphs, and illustrations. They are all clues pointing to what's important. During lectures, notice what the instructor emphasizes. Anything that's presented visually—on the board, in overheads, or with slides—is probably key.

Make it meaningful. You remember things better if they have meaning for you. One way to create meaning is to learn from the general to the specific. Before you begin your next reading assignment, skim the passage to locate the main ideas. If you're ever lost, step back and look at the big picture. The details then might make more sense.

Also, organize any list of items—even random items—in a meaningful way to make them easier to remember. Although there are probably an infinite number of facts, there are only a finite number of ways to organize them.

- **By category.** Organize any group of items by category. You can apply this suggestion to long to-do lists. For example, write each item on a separate index card. Create a pile of cards for calls to make, errands to run, and household chores to complete. These will become your working categories. The same concept applies to the content of your courses. In chemistry, a common example of organizing by category is the periodic table of chemical elements. When reading a novel for a literature course, you can organize your notes in categories such as theme, setting, and plot. Then, take any of these categories and divide them into subcategories such as major events and minor events in the story. Use index cards to describe each event.
- **By chronological order.** Any time you create a numbered list of ideas, events, or steps, you are organizing by chronological order. To remember the events that led up to the US stock market crash of 1929, for instance, create a timeline. List the key events on index cards. Then, arrange the cards by the date of each event.
- **By spatial order.** In plain English, this means making a map. When studying for a history exam, for example, you can create a rough map of the major locations where events take place.
- **By alphabetical order.** This old standby for organizing lists is simple, and it works.

Create associations. The data already encoded in your neural networks are arranged according to a scheme that makes sense to you. When you introduce new data, you can remember them more effectively if you associate them with similar or related data.

Think about your favorite courses. They probably relate to subjects that you already know something about. If you have been interested in politics over the last few years, you'll find it easier to remember the facts in a modern history course. Even when you're tackling a new subject, you

can build a mental store of basic background information—the raw material for creating associations. Preview reading assignments, and complete those readings before you attend lectures. Before taking upper-level courses, master the prerequisites.

Memory Techniques—Use Your Body

Because learning is an active process, you should get all of your senses involved. When you use your senses, you process the information at a deeper level and you are more likely to remember it. For example, imagine you are trying to learn the scientific method, you might see a visual of the steps in the process, listen to a video explaining it, and maybe even conduct your own experiment to try it out. You can use some of the following memory techniques that focus on using all of your senses.

Learn actively. Action is a great memory enhancer. Test this theory by studying your assignments with the same energy that you bring to the dance floor or the basketball court.

You can use simple, direct methods to infuse your learning with action. When you sit at your desk, sit up straight. Sit on the edge of your chair as if you were about to spring out of it and sprint across the room.

Experiment with standing up when you study. It's harder to fall asleep in this position. Some people insist that their brains work better when they stand. Pace back and forth and gesture as you recite material out loud. Get your body moving.

Relax. When you're relaxed, you absorb new information quickly and recall it with greater ease and accuracy. Students who can't recall information under the stress of a final exam can often recite the same facts later when they are relaxed.

Relaxing might seem to contradict the idea of active learning, but it doesn't. Being relaxed is not the same as being drowsy, zoned out, or asleep. Relaxation is a state of alertness, free of tension, during which your mind can play with new information, roll it around, create associations with it, and apply many of the other memory techniques. You can be active *and* relaxed.

Recite and repeat. When you repeat something out loud, you anchor the concept in two different senses. First, you get the physical sensation in your throat, tongue, and lips when voicing the concept. Second, you hear it. The combined result is synergistic, just as it is when you create pictures. That is, the effect of using two different senses is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

The *out loud* part is important. Reciting silently in your head can be useful—in the library, for example—but it is not as effective as making noise. Your mind can trick itself into thinking it knows something when it doesn't. Your ears are harder to fool.

The repetition part is important, too. Repetition is a common memory device because it works. Also remember that recitation works best when you recite concepts in your own words.

Write it down. The technique of writing things down is obvious, yet easy to forget. Writing a note to yourself helps you remember an idea, even if you never look at the note again. Writing notes in the margins of your textbooks can help you remember what you read.

You can extend this technique by writing down an idea not just once, but many times. When you choose to remember something, repetitive writing is a powerful tool.

Create pictures. Draw diagrams. Make cartoons. Use these images to connect facts and illustrate relationships. You can see and recall associations within and among abstract concepts more easily when you visualize both the concepts and the associations. The key is to use your imagination. Creating pictures reinforces visual and kinesthetic learning styles.

For example, Boyle's law states that, at a constant temperature, the volume of a confined ideal gas varies inversely with its pressure. Simply put, cutting the volume in half doubles the pressure. To remember this concept, you might picture someone doubled over, using a bicycle pump. As

she increases the pressure in the pump by decreasing the volume in the pump cylinder, she seems to be getting angrier. By the time she has doubled the pressure (and halved the volume), she is boiling (Boyle-*ing*) mad.

Memory Techniques—Using Graphic Organizers

You can also create pictures as you study by using graphic organizers. These preformatted charts prompt you to visualize relationships among facts and ideas.

One example is a *topic-point-details chart*. At the top of this chart, write the main topic of a lecture or reading assignment. In the left column, list the main points you want to remember. In the right column, list key details related to each point.

Topic-Point-Details Chart

Memory Techniques	
Point	**Details**
1. Be selective	Choose what *not* to remember.
2. Make it	Organize by time, location, category,
3. Create	Link new facts with facts you already know.
4. Learn actively	Sit straight.
5. Relax	Release tension.

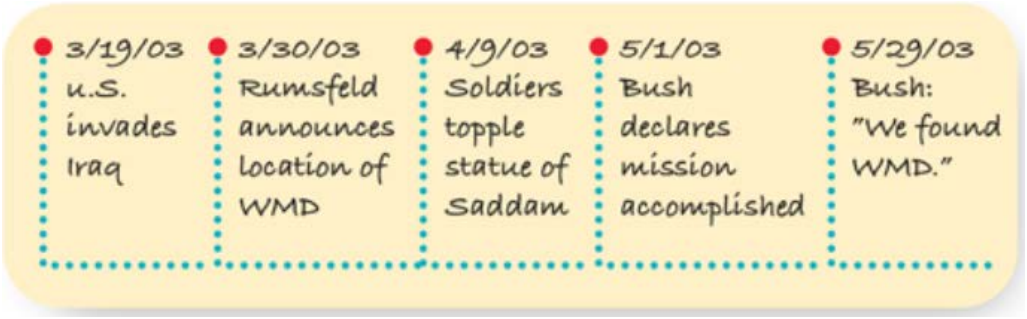
You could use a similar chart to prompt critical thinking about an issue. Express that issue as a question, and write it at the top. In the left column, note the opinion about the issue. In the right column, list notable facts, expert opinions, reasons, and examples that support each opinion. The example *question-opinion-support chart* is about tax cuts as a strategy for stimulating the economy.

Question-Opinion-Support Chart

Stimulate the Economy with Tax Cuts?	
Opinion	**Support**
Yes	Savings from tax cuts allow businesses to invest
No	Years of tax cuts under the Bush administration failed
Maybe	Tax cuts might work in some economic conditions.

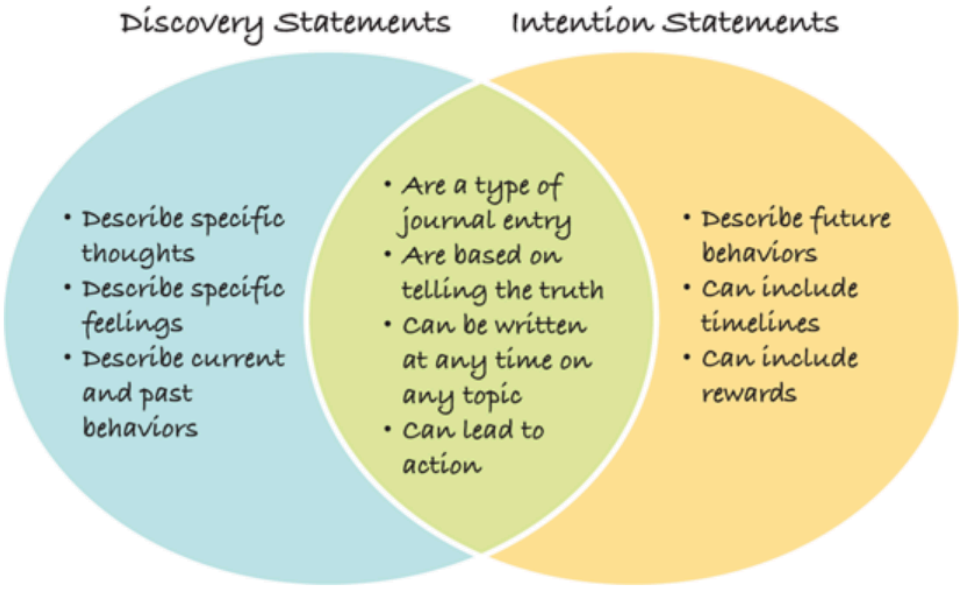
Sometimes, you'll want to remember the main actions in a story or historical event. Create a *timeline* by drawing a straight line. Place points in order on that line to represent key events. Place earlier events toward the left end of the line and later events toward the right. The example timeline shows the start of time line of events relating the US war with Iraq.

Timeline



When you want to compare or contrast two things, play with a *Venn diagram*. Represent each thing as a circle. Draw the circles so that they overlap. In the overlapping area, list characteristics that the two things share. In the outer parts of each circle, list the unique characteristics of each thing. The example Venn Diagram compares the two types of journal entries included in this course—Discovery Statements and Intention Statements.

Venn Diagram



The graphic organizers described here are just a few of the many kinds available. To find more examples, do an Internet search. Have fun, and invent graphic organizers of your own.

Memory Techniques—Use Your Brain, Part 1

In addition to organizing your information and using your body, using your brain is a memory technique. Using your brain effectively involves understanding how your brain works so that you can optimize your study time and strategies to learn more efficiently.

Try some of the following strategies to engage your memory by using your brain:

Engage your emotions. One powerful way to enhance your memory is to make friends with your amygdala. This area of your brain lights up with extra neural activity each time you feel a strong emotion. When a topic excites love, laughter, or fear, the amygdala sends a flurry of chemical messages that say, in effect, *This information is important and useful. Don't forget it*.

You're more likely to remember course material when you relate it to a goal—whether academic, personal, or career—that you feel strongly about. This is one reason why it pays to be specific about what you want. The more goals you have and the more clearly they are defined, the more channels you create for incoming information.

Overlearn. One way to fight mental fuzziness is to learn more than you need to know about a subject simply to pass a test. You can pick a subject apart, examine it, add to it, and go over it until it becomes second nature.

This technique is especially effective for problem solving. Do the assigned problems and then do more problems. Find another textbook and work similar problems. Make up your own problems and solve them. When you pretest yourself in this way, the potential rewards are speed, accuracy, and greater confidence at exam time. Being well prepared can help you prevent test anxiety.

Escape the short-term memory trap. Short-term memory is different from the kind of memory you'll need during exam week. For example, most of us can look at an unfamiliar seven-digit

phone number once and remember it long enough to dial it. See whether you can recall that number the next day.

Short-term memory can fade after a few minutes, and it rarely lasts more than several hours. A short review within minutes or hours of a study session can move material from short-term memory into long-term memory. That quick mini-review can save you hours of study time when exams roll around.

Use your times of peak energy. Study your most difficult subjects during the times when your energy peaks. Some people can concentrate more effectively during daylight hours. Observe the peaks and valleys in your energy flow during the day, and adjust study times accordingly.

Memory Techniques—Use Your Brain, Part 2

Using your brain effectively also involves planning your study time and being aware of your attitudes and intentions toward learning. Following are some additional strategies for engaging your memory to help you more effectively learn the task at hand.

Try each of these strategies, and see which method works best or you:

Distribute learning. As an alternative to marathon study sessions, experiment with several shorter sessions spaced out over time. You might find that you can get far more done in three 2-hour sessions than in one 6-hour session.

This suggestion does have an exception. When you are so engrossed in a textbook that you cannot put it down or when you are consumed by an idea for a term paper and cannot think of anything else, keep going. The successful student within you has taken over. Enjoy the ride.

Be aware of attitudes. People who think history is boring tend to have trouble remembering dates and historical events. People who believe math is difficult often have a hard time recalling mathematical equations and formulas. All of us can forget information that contradicts our opinions.

If you think a subject is boring, remind yourself that everything is related to everything else. Look for connections that relate to your own interests.

Being aware of your attitudes is not the same as fighting them or struggling to give them up. Just notice your attitudes, and be willing to put them on hold. For more ideas, see the power process: *Notice your pictures and let them go.*

Elaborate. According to Harvard psychologist Daniel Schacter, all courses in memory improvement are based on a single technique—elaboration. *Elaboration* means consciously encoding new information. Repetition is one basic way to elaborate. However, current brain research indicates that other types of elaboration are more effective for long-term memory (Schacter 2002, 35-36).

One way to elaborate is to ask yourself questions about incoming information: *Does this remind me of something or someone I already know?, Is this similar to a technique that I already use?,* and *Where and when can I use this information?*

The same idea applies to more complex material. When you meet someone new, for example, ask yourself, *Does she remind me of someone else?*

Intend to remember. To instantly enhance your memory, form the simple intention to *learn it now* rather than later. The intention to remember can be more powerful than any single memory technique.

You can build on your intention with simple tricks. During a lecture, for example, pretend that you'll be quizzed on the key points at the end of the period. Imagine that you'll get a $5 reward for every correct answer.

Memory Techniques—Recall It

Sometimes, recalling information can be difficult, especially if you are processing a lot of information or are studying multiple subjects at once. You might need to recall information when you are taking a test or learning a new concept that relates to something you already learned. You can use some of the following recall techniques to help you recall information when you need it.

Remember something else. When you are stuck and can't remember something that you're sure you know, remember something else that is related to it.

If you can't remember your great-aunt's name, remember your great-uncle's name. During an economics exam, if you can't remember anything about the aggregate demand curve, recall what you do know about the aggregate supply curve. If you cannot recall specific facts, remember the example that the instructor used during his lecture. Any piece of information is encoded in the same area of the brain as a similar piece of information. You can unblock your recall by stimulating that area of your memory.

A brainstorm is a good memory jog. If you are stumped when taking a test, start writing down lots of answers to related questions, and—pop!—the answer you need may appear.

Notice when you do remember. Everyone has a different memory style. Some people are best at recalling information they've read. Others have an easier time remembering what they've heard, seen, or done.

To develop your memory, notice when you recall information easily, and ask yourself what memory techniques you're using naturally. Also notice when you find it difficult to recall information. Be a reporter. Get the facts and then adjust your learning techniques. And congratulate yourself when you remember.

Use it before you lose it. Even information encoded in long-term memory becomes difficult to recall when we don't use it regularly. The pathways to the information become faint with disuse. For example, you can probably remember your current phone number. What was your phone number 10 years ago?

This example points to a powerful memory technique. To remember something, access it a lot. Read it, write it, speak it, listen to it, apply it. Find some way to make contact with the material regularly. Each time you do so, you widen the neural pathway to the material and make it easier to recall the next time.

Another way to make contact with the material is to teach it. Teaching demands mastery. When you explain the function of the pancreas to a fellow student, you discover quickly whether you really understand it yourself. Study groups are especially effective because they put you on stage. The friendly pressure of knowing that you'll teach the group helps focus your attention.

Adopt the attitude that you never forget. Instead of saying, *I don't remember*, say, *It will come to me*. The latter statement implies that the information you want is encoded in your brain and that you can retrieve it—just not right now. You might be surprised to find that the information obediently pops into mind.

Understanding the Brain

When asked about brain-based learning, skeptics might say, *Well, obviously—how could learning be based anywhere other than the brain?*

That's a fair question. One answer is this: All learning does involve the brain, but some learning strategies use more of the brain's unique capacities.

Brains Thrive on Meaningful Patterns

Your brain is a pattern-making machine. It excels at taking random bits of information and translating them into meaningful wholes. Build on this capacity with *elaborative rehearsal*. For example:

- **Use your journal.** Write Discovery Statements and Intention Statements like the ones discussed in this course. Journal entries prompt you to elaborate on what you hear in class and read in your textbooks. You can create your own writing prompts. For example: *In class today, I discovered that….* and *To overcome my confusion about this topic, I intend to….*
- **Send yourself a message.** Imagine that an absent classmate has asked you to send her an e-mail about what happened in class today. Write a reply and send it to yourself. You'll actively process your recent learning—and create a summary that you can use to review for tests.
- **Play with ideas.** Copy your notes onto 3 × 5 cards—one fact or idea per card. Then, see whether you can arrange these into new patterns—by chronological order, order of importance, or main ideas and supporting details.

Brains Thrive on Rich Sensory Experience

Your brain's contact with the world comes through your five senses, so anchor your learning in as many senses as possible. Beyond sight and sound, this can include touch, movement, smell, and taste:

- **Create images.** Draw mind map summaries of your readings and lecture notes. Include visual images. Put the main ideas in larger letters and brighter colors.
- **Translate ideas into physical objects.** If one of your career goals is to work from a home office, for example, then create a model of your ideal workspace. Visit an art supplies store to find appropriate materials.
- **Immerse yourself in concrete experiences.** Say you're in a music appreciation class and learning about jazz. Go to a local jazz club or concert to see and hear a live performance.

Brains Thrive on Long-Term Care

Starting now, adopt habits to keep your brain lean and fit for life. Consider these research-based suggestions from the Alzheimer's Association (2012):

- **Stay mentally active.** If you sit at a desk most of the workday, take a hiking class or start a garden. If you seldom travel, start reading maps of new locations and plan a cross-country trip. Play challenging games and work crossword puzzles. Seek out museums, theaters, concerts, and other cultural events. Even after you graduate, consider learning another language or a musical instrument. Learning gives your brain a workout, much like sit-ups condition your abs.
- **Stay socially active.** Having a network of supportive friends can reduce stress levels. In turn, stress management helps to maintain connections between brain cells. Stay socially active by working, volunteering, and joining clubs.
- **Stay physically active.** Physical activity promotes blood flow to the brain. It also reduces the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other diseases that can impair brain function. Exercise that includes mental activity—such as planning a jogging route and watching for traffic signals—offers added benefits.
- **Adopt a brain-healthy diet.** A diet rich in dark-skinned fruits and vegetables boosts your supply of antioxidants—natural chemicals that nourish your brain. Examples of these foods are raisins, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, kale, spinach, brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, and broccoli. Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat and cholesterol, which may increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease.
- **Protect your heart.** In general, what's good for your heart is good for your brain. Protect both organs by eating well, exercising regularly, managing your weight, staying tobacco-free, and getting plenty of sleep. These habits reduce your risk of heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular conditions that interfere with blood flow to the brain.

Mnemonic Devices, Part 1

Mnemonic is pronounced “ne-MON-ik.” The word refers to tricks that can increase your ability to recall everything from grocery lists to speeches.

Some entertainers use mnemonic devices to perform seemingly impossible feats of memory, such as recalling the names of everyone in a large audience after hearing them just once. Using mnemonic devices, speakers can go for hours without looking at their notes. The possibilities for students are endless.

There is a catch, though. Mnemonic devices have three serious limitations:

1. They don’t always help you understand or digest material. Mnemonics rely only on rote memorization.

2. The mnemonic device itself is sometimes complicated to learn and time consuming to develop.

3. Mnemonic devices can be forgotten.

In spite of their limitations, mnemonic devices can be powerful. There are five general categories: new words, creative sentences, rhymes and songs, the loci system, and the peg system.

New words. Acronyms are words created from the initial letters of a series of words. Examples include

- NASA (**N**ational **A**eronautics and **S**pace **A**dministration)
- laser (**l**ight **a**mplification by **s**timulated **e**mission of **r**adiation).

You can make up your own acronyms to recall a series of facts. A common mnemonic acronym is Roy G. Biv, which has helped millions of students remember the colors of the visible spectrum (**r**ed, **o**range, **y**ellow, **g**reen, **b**lue, **i**ndigo, and **v**iolet). The mnemonic IPMAT helps biology students remember the stages of cell division (**i**nterphase, **p**rophase, **m**etaphase, **a**naphase, and **t**elophase). The mnemonic OCEAN helps psychology students recall the five major personality factors: **o**pen-mindedness, **c**onscientiousness, **e**xtraversion, **a**greeableness, and **n**euroticism.

Creative sentences. Acrostics are sentences that help you remember a series of letters that stand for something. For example, the first letters of the words in the sentence *Every good boy does fine* (E, G, B, D, and F) are the music notes of the lines of the treble clef staff.

Rhymes and songs. Madison Avenue (in New York City) advertising executives spend billions of dollars a year on advertisements designed to burn their messages into your memory. The song “It’s the Real Thing” was used to market Coca-Cola, despite the soda’s artificial ingredients.

Rhymes have been used for centuries to teach basic facts. I *before* e*, except after* c has helped many students on spelling tests.

Mnemonic Devices, Part 2

In addition to making up new words or creating rhymes and songs, you might try the loci system and peg system to learn new information. Try them to see which one works best for you.

Loci system. The word *loci* is the plural of *locus*, a synonym for *place* or *location*. Use the loci system to create visual associations with familiar locations. Unusual associations are the easiest to remember.

The loci system is an old one. Ancient Greek orators used it to remember long speeches, and politicians use it today. For example, if a politician’s position were that road taxes must be raised to pay for school equipment, his loci visualizations before a speech might look like the following.

First, as he walks in the door of his house, he imagines a large *porpoise* jumping through a hoop. This reminds him to begin by telling the audience the *purpose* of his speech.

Next, he visualizes his living room floor covered with paving stones, forming a road leading into the kitchen. In the kitchen, he pictures dozens of schoolchildren sitting on the floor because they have no desks.

Now it's the day of the big speech. The politician is nervous. He's perspiring so much that his clothes stick to his body. He stands up to give his speech and his mind goes blank. Then, he starts thinking to himself:

> *I can remember the rooms in my house. Let's see, I'm walking in the front door and—wow!—I see a porpoise. That reminds me to talk about the purpose of my speech. And then there's that road leading to the kitchen. Say, what are all those kids doing there on the floor? Oh, yeah, now I remember—they have no desks! We need to raise taxes on roads to pay for their desks and the other stuff they need in classrooms.*

Peg system. The peg system is a device that employs key words paired with numbers. Each word forms a "peg" on which you can "hang" mental associations. To use this system effectively, learn the following peg words and their associated numbers:

- **bun** goes with 1
- **shoe** goes with 2
- **tree** goes with 3
- **door** goes with 4
- **hive** goes with 5
- **sticks** goes with 6
- **heaven** goes with 7
- **gate** goes with 8
- **wine** goes with 9
- **hen** goes with 10

You can use the peg system to remember the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the US Constitution). For example, amendment number *four* is about protection from unlawful search and seizure. Imagine people knocking at your *door* who are demanding to search your home. This amendment means that you do not have to open your door unless those people have a proper search warrant.

References

Alzheimer's Association. "Brain health." www.alz.org/brainhealth/overview.asp (accessed November 8, 2012).

Schacter, Daniel. *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers.* Wilmington, MA: Mariner Books, 2002.

Lesson 9.4: Note-Taking Strategies

Lesson 9.4 Introduction

One way to understand note taking is to realize that taking notes is just one part of the process. Effective note taking consists of three parts: observing, recording, and reviewing.

1. Observe an event. This part can be a statement by an instructor, a lab experiment, a slide show of an artist's works, or a chapter of required reading.

2. Record your observations of that event. This part means *take notes*.

3. Review what you have recorded. Memorize, reflect, apply, and rehearse what you're learning. This part lifts ideas off the page and turns them into a working part of your mind.

Each part of the note-taking process is essential, and each depends on the other. Your observations determine what you record. What you record determines what you review. And the quality of your review can determine how effective your next observations will be. If you review your notes on the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, for example, the next day's lecture on the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 will make more sense.

Legible and speedy handwriting is also useful in taking notes. Knowledge of outlining is handy too. A nifty pen, a new notebook, and a laptop computer are all great note-taking devices.

But they're all worthless—unless you participate as an energetic observer *in* class and regularly review your notes *after* class. If you take those two steps, you can turn even the most disorganized chicken scratches into a powerful tool.

This is a well-researched aspect of student success in higher education. Study after study points to the benefits of taking notes. The value is added in two ways. First, you gather a set of materials that refreshes your memory and helps you prepare for tests. Second, you are prompted to listen effectively during class.

You translate new ideas into your own words and images. You impose a personal and meaningful structure on what you see, read, and hear. You move from passive observer to active participant (Brazeau 2006). It's not that you take notes so that you can learn from them later. Instead, you learn *while* taking notes.

Computer technology takes traditional note taking to a whole new level. You can capture key notes with word processing, outlining, database, and publishing software. Your notes become living documents that you can search, bookmark, tag, and archive like other digital files.

Sometimes, note-taking looks like a passive affair, especially in large lecture classes. One person at the front of the room does most of the talking. Everyone else is seated and silent, taking notes. The lecturer seems to be doing all of the work.

Don't be deceived. Look more closely. You'll see some students taking notes in a way that radiates energy. They're awake and alert, poised on the edge of their seats. They're writing—a physical activity that expresses mental engagement. These students listen for levels of ideas and information, make choices about what to record, and compile materials to review.

In higher education, you might spend hundreds of hours taking notes. Making them more effective is a direct investment in your success.

Think of your notes as a textbook that you create—one that's more current and more in tune with your learning preferences than any textbook you could buy.

Note-Taking—Observe

Sherlock Holmes, a fictional master detective and student of the obvious, could track down a villain by observing the fold of his scarf and the mud on his shoes. In real life, a doctor can save a life by observing a mole—one a patient has always had—that undergoes a rapid change.

Keen observers see facts and relationships. They know ways to focus their attention on the details and then tap their creative energy to discover patterns.

To sharpen your classroom observation skills, experiment with the following techniques:

Complete outside assignments. The more familiar you are with a subject, the more easily you can absorb important information during class lectures. Instructors usually assume that students complete assignments, and they construct their lectures accordingly.

Sit front and center. Students who get as close as possible to the front and center of the classroom often do better on tests for several reasons. The closer you sit to the lecturer, the harder it is to fall asleep. The closer you sit to the front, the fewer interesting or distracting

classmates are situated between you and the instructor. Material on the board is easier to read from up front. Also, the instructor can see you more easily when you have a question.

Sitting close to the front is a way to commit yourself to getting what you want out of school. One reason students gravitate to the back of the classroom is that they think the instructor is less likely to call on them. Sitting in back can signal a lack of commitment. When you sit up front, you are declaring your willingness to take a risk and participate.

Conduct a short preclass review. Arrive early, and then put your brain in gear by reviewing your notes from the previous class. Scan your reading assignment. Look at the sections you have underlined or highlighted. Review assigned problems and exercises. Note questions you intend to ask.

Observe—Be Attentive in Class

Part of preparing to take notes is being observant about your own responses and reactions to what is going on in class. For example, sometimes your mind may wander, you might hear the instructor say something you disagree with, or you may feel sleepy during a lecture. These can be huge distractions to you while you listen. However, how you react when these situations happen will make all the difference in your ability to remain attentive in class.

Accept your wandering mind. Don't fight daydreaming. When you notice your mind wandering during class, look at it as an opportunity to refocus your attention. If thermodynamics is losing out to beach parties, let go of the beach.

Be with the instructor. In your mind, put yourself right up front with the instructor. Imagine that you and the instructor are the only ones in the room and that the lecture is a personal conversation between the two of you. Pay attention to the instructor's body language and facial expressions. Look the instructor in the eye.

Remember that the power of this suggestion is immediately reduced by digital distractions—Internet surfing, e-mail checking, text messaging, or reading social media feeds. Taking notes is a way to stay focused. The physical act of taking notes signals your mind to stay in the same room as the instructor.

Postpone debate. When you hear something you disagree with, note your disagreement and let it go. Don't allow your internal dialogue to drown out subsequent material. If your disagreement is persistent and strong, make note of it and then move on. Internal debate can prevent you from absorbing new information. It's okay to absorb information you don't agree with. Just absorb it with the mental tag *My instructor says … and I don't agree with it.*

Let go of judgments about lecture styles. Human beings are judgment machines. We evaluate everything, especially other people. If another person's eyebrows are too close together (or too far apart), if she walks a certain way or speaks with an unusual accent, we instantly make up a story about her. We do this so quickly that the process is usually not a conscious one.

Don't let your attitude about an instructor's lecture style, habits, or appearance get in the way of your education. You can decrease the power of your judgments if you pay attention to them and let them go.

You can even let go of judgments about rambling, unorganized lectures. Turn them to your advantage. Take the initiative and organize the material yourself. While taking notes, separate the key points from the examples and supporting evidence. Note the places where you got confused, and make a list of questions to ask.

Participate in class activities. Ask questions. Volunteer for demonstrations. Join in-class discussions. Be willing to take a risk or look foolish, if that's what it takes for you to learn. Chances are, the question you think is dumb is also on the minds of several of your classmates.

Relate the class to your goals. If you have trouble staying awake in a particular class, write at the top of your notes how that class relates to a specific goal. Identify the reward or payoff for reaching that goal.

Think critically about what you hear. This suggestion might seem contrary to the postpone debate technique. It's not. You might choose not to think critically about the instructor's ideas during the lecture. That's fine. Do it later, as you review and edit your notes. This is the time to list questions or write down your agreements and disagreements.

Observe—What to Watch for in Class

Another important element to taking notes is knowing what to observe in class. During class, you want to listen and look for the instructor cues that help you recognize the important information to know.

The following suggestions will help you look for clues as to the important material to know.

Be alert to repetition. When an instructor repeats a phrase or an idea, make a note of it. Repetition is a signal that the instructor thinks the information is important.

Listen for introductory, concluding, and transition words and phrases. Examples include phrases such as *the following three factors, in conclusion, the most important consideration, in addition to*, and *on the other hand*. These phrases and others signal relationships, definitions, new subjects, conclusions, cause and effect, and examples. They reveal the structure of the lecture. You can use these phrases to organize your notes.

Watch the board or PowerPoint presentation. If an instructor takes the time to write something on the board or show a PowerPoint presentation, consider the material to be important. Copy all diagrams and drawings, equations, names, places, dates, statistics, and definitions.

Watch the instructor's eyes. If an instructor glances at her notes and then makes a point, it is probably a signal that the information is especially important. Anything she reads from her notes is a potential test question.

Highlight the obvious clues. Instructors often hint strongly or tell students point-blank that certain information is likely to appear on an exam. Use stars or other special marks in your notes next to this information. Instructors are not trying to hide what's important.

Notice the instructor's interest level. If the instructor is excited about a topic, it is more likely to appear on an exam. Pay attention when he seems more animated than usual.

Attend class. For most courses, you'll benefit by attending every class session. This allows you to observe and actively participate. If you miss a class, then catch up as quickly as possible. Find additional ways to observe class content.

Clarify policies on missed classes. On the first day of classes, find out about your instructors' policies on absences. See whether you will be allowed to make up assignments, quizzes, and tests. Also inquire about doing extra-credit assignments.

Contact a classmate. Early in the semester, identify a student in each class who seems responsible and dependable. Exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers. If you know you won't be in class, contact this student ahead of time. When you notice that your classmate is absent, pick up extra copies of handouts, make assignments lists, and offer copies of your notes.

Contact your instructor. If you miss a class, e-mail or call your instructor, or put a note in his mailbox. Ask whether he has another section of the same course that you can attend so that you won't miss the lecture information. Also ask about getting handouts you might need before the next class meeting.

Use technology. If there is a website for your class, check it for assignments and the availability of handouts you missed. Free online services allow students to share notes with one another.

These services use wiki software, which allows you to create and edit webpages using any browser. Before using such tools, however, check with instructors for their policies on notes sharing.

Record—Techniques for Effective Note-Taking, Part 1

The format and structure of your notes are more important than how fast you write or how elegant your handwriting is. You want to use the method that works best for you so that they make sense when you go back and review them. One method you can try is to use key words to help you take effective and meaningful notes.

Use key words. An easy way to sort the extraneous material from the important points is to take notes using key words. Key words or phrases contain the essence of communication. They include the following:

- Concepts, technical terms, names, and numbers
- Linking words, including words that describe action, relationship, and degree (for example, *most*, *least*, and *faster*)

Key words evoke images and associations with other words and ideas. They trigger your memory. That characteristic makes them powerful review tools. One key word can initiate the recall of a whole cluster of ideas. A few key words can form a chain from which you can reconstruct an entire lecture.

To see how key words work, take yourself to an imaginary classroom. You are now in the middle of an anatomy lecture. Picture what the room looks like, what it feels like, how it smells. You hear the instructor say:

- *Okay, what happens when we look directly over our heads and see a piano falling out of the sky? How do we take that signal and translate it into the action of getting out of the way? The first thing that happens is that a stimulus is generated in the neurons—receptor neurons—of the eye. Light reflected from the piano reaches our eyes. In other words, we see the piano.*
- *The receptor neurons in the eye transmit that sensory signal—the sight of the piano—to the body's nervous system. That's all they can do—pass on information. So we've got a sensory signal coming into the nervous system. But the neurons that initiate movement in our legs are effector neurons. The information from the sensory neurons must be transmitted to effector neurons, or we will get squashed by the piano. There must be some kind of interconnection between receptor and effector neurons. What happens between the two? What is the connection?*

Key words, as you might note in this example, include *stimulus, generated, receptor neurons, transmit, sensory signals, nervous system, effector neurons*, and *connection*. You can reduce the instructor's 163 words to these 12 key words. With a few transitional words, your notes might look like this:

- *Note the last key word of the lecture:* connection. *This word is part of the instructor's question and leads to the next point in the lecture. Be on the lookout for questions like this. They can help you organize your notes and are often clues for test questions.*

Record—Techniques for Effective Note-Taking, Part 2

If key words do not work for you as a method of note-taking, you might try one of the following strategies:

Use pictures and diagrams. Make relationships visual. Copy all diagrams from the board, and invent your own. A drawing of a piano falling on someone who is looking up, for example, might be used to demonstrate the relationship of receptor neurons to effector neurons. Label the eyes

receptor and the feet *effector*. This picture implies that the sight of the piano must be translated into a motor response. By connecting the explanation of the process with the unusual picture of the piano falling, you can link the elements of the process together.

Write notes in paragraphs. When it is difficult to follow the organization of a lecture or put information into outline form, create a series of informal paragraphs. These paragraphs should contain few complete sentences. Reserve complete sentences for precise definitions, direct quotations, and important points that the instructor emphasizes by repetition or other signals—such as the phrase *This is an important point*.

Copy material from the board or PowerPoint presentation. Record key formulas, diagrams, and problems that the teacher presents on the board or in a PowerPoint presentation. Copy dates, numbers, names, places, and other facts. You can even use your own signal or code to flag important material.

Use a three-ring binder. Three-ring binders have several advantages over other kinds of notebooks. First, pages can be removed and spread out when you review. This way, you can get the whole picture of a lecture. Second, the three-ring binder allows you to insert handouts right into your notes. Third, you can insert your own out-of-class notes in the correct order.

Use only one side of a piece of paper. When you use one side of a page, you can review and organize all of your notes by spreading them out side by side. Most students find the benefit well worth the cost of the paper. Perhaps you're concerned about the environmental impact of consuming more paper. If so, you can use the blank side of old notes and use recycled paper.

Use 3 × 5 cards. As an alternative to using notebook paper, use 3 × 5 cards to take lecture notes. Copy each new concept onto a separate 3 × 5 card.

Keep your own thoughts separate. For the most part, avoid making editorial comments in your lecture notes. The danger is that when you return to your notes, you might mistake your own ideas for those of the instructor. If you want to make a comment, clearly label it as your own.

Use an *I'm lost* signal. No matter how attentive and alert you are, you might get lost and confused in a lecture. If it is inappropriate to ask a question, record in your notes that you were lost. Invent your own signal—for example, a circled question mark. When you write down your code for I'm lost, leave space for the explanation or clarification that you will get later. The space will also be a signal that you missed something. Later, you can speak to your instructor or ask to see a fellow student's notes.

Record—Techniques for Effective Note-Taking, Part 3

When choosing an effective note-taking strategy, you might find that one method works best in your math class and another works best in your history class. Experiment with them and use what works best for you.

Here are a few more strategies to choose from that you may find helpful:

Label, number, and date all notes. Develop the habit of labeling and dating your notes at the beginning of each class. Number the page, too. Sometimes, the sequence of material in a lecture is important. Write your name and phone number in each notebook in case you lose it.

Use standard abbreviations. Be consistent with your abbreviations. If you make up your own abbreviations or symbols, write a key explaining them in your notes. Avoid vague abbreviations. When you use an abbreviation such as *comm.* for *committee*, you run the risk of not being able to remember whether you meant *committee*, *commission*, *common*, or *commit*. One way to abbreviate is to leave out vowels. For example, talk becomes tlk, said becomes sd, American becomes Amrcn.

Leave blank space. Notes tightly crammed into every corner of the page are hard to read and difficult to use for review. Give your eyes a break by leaving plenty of space.

Later, when you review, you can use the blank spaces in your notes to clarify points, write questions, or add other material.

Take notes in different colors. You can use colors as highly visible organizers. For example, you can signal important points with red. Or use one color of ink for notes about the text and another color for lecture notes.

Use graphic signals. The following ideas can be used with any note-taking format:

- Use brackets, parentheses, circles, and squares to group information that belongs together.
- Use stars, arrows, and underlining to indicate important points. Flag the most important points with double stars, double arrows, or double underlines.
- Use arrows and connecting lines to link related groups.
- Use equal signs and greater-than and less-than signs to indicate compared quantities.
- To avoid creating confusion with graphic symbols, write a "dictionary" of your symbols in the front of your notebooks.

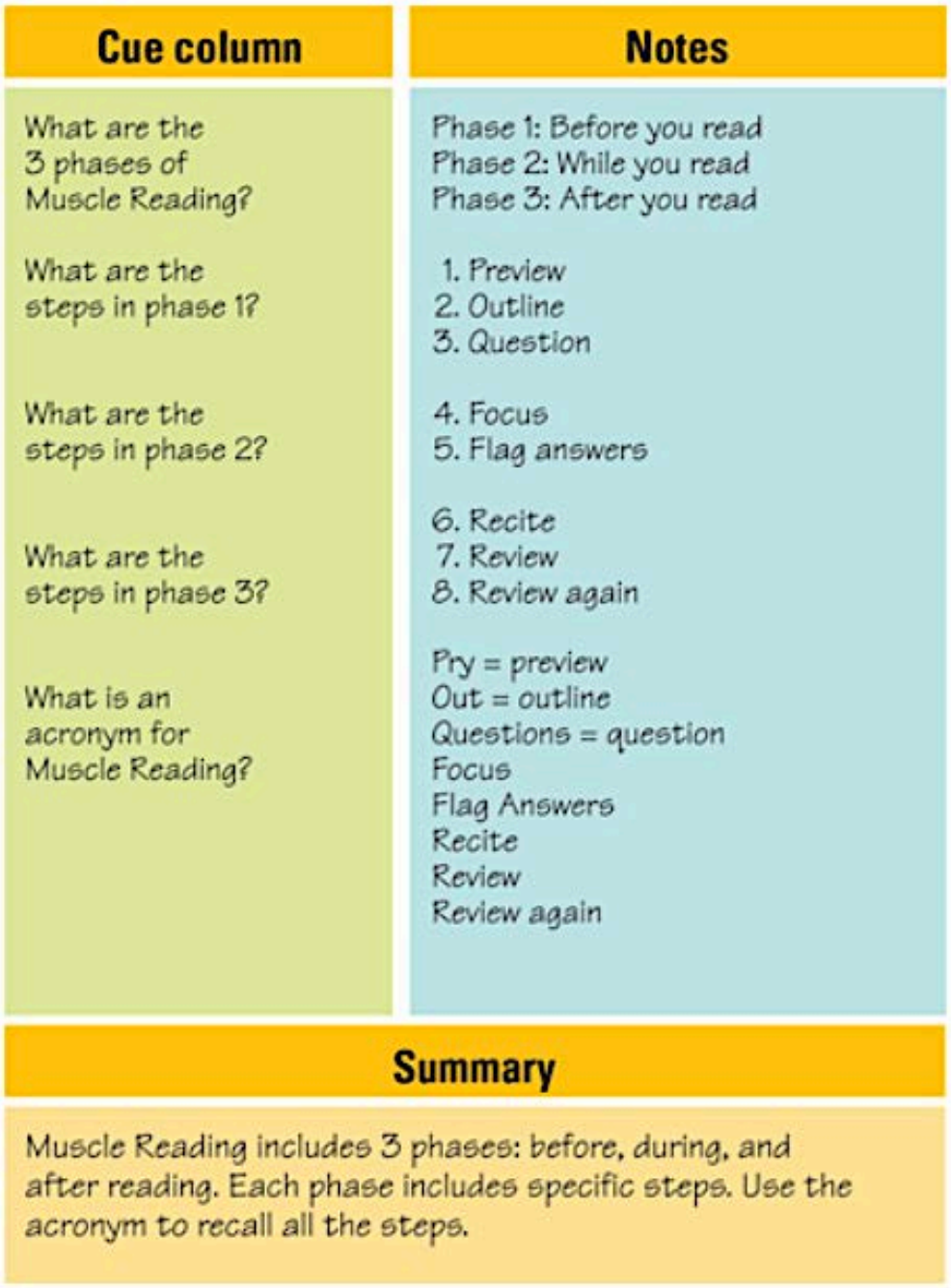
Use recorders effectively. Some students record lectures with audio or digital recorders, but there are persuasive arguments against doing so. When you record a lecture, there is a strong temptation to daydream. After all, you can always listen to the lecture again later on. Unfortunately, if you let the recorder do all of the work, you are skipping a valuable part of the learning process.

There are other potential problems as well. Listening to recorded lectures can take a lot of time—more time than reviewing written notes. Recorders can't answer the questions you didn't ask in class. Also, recording devices malfunction. In fact, the unscientific Hypothesis of Recording Glitches states that the tendency of recorders to malfunction is directly proportional to the importance of the material. With those warnings in mind, you can use a recorder effectively if you choose. For example, you can use recordings as backups to written notes. (Check with your instructor first. Some prefer not to be recorded.) Turn the recorder on, and then take notes as if it weren't there. Recordings can be especially useful if an instructor speaks fast.

Record—The Cornell Method

A note-taking system that has worked for students around the world is the *Cornell method* (Pauk and Owens 2011). Originally developed by Walter Pauk at Cornell University during the 1950s, this approach continues to be taught across the United States and in other countries as well.

The cornerstone of this method is what Pauk calls the *cue column*—a wide margin on the left side of the paper. The cue column is the key to the Cornell method's many benefits. Here's how to use it.



Cue column	Notes
What are the 3 phases of Muscle Reading?	Phase 1: Before you read Phase 2: While you read Phase 3: After you read
What are the steps in phase 1?	1. Preview 2. Outline 3. Question
What are the steps in phase 2?	4. Focus 5. Flag answers
What are the steps in phase 3?	6. Recite 7. Review 8. Review again
What is an acronym for Muscle Reading?	Pry = preview Out = outline Questions = question Focus Flag Answers Recite Review Review again

Summary

Muscle Reading includes 3 phases: before, during, and after reading. Each phase includes specific steps. Use the acronym to recall all the steps.

Example Notes Using the Cornell Method

Format your paper. On each sheet, draw a vertical line from top to bottom about 2 inches from the left edge of the paper. This line creates the cue column—the space to the left of the line. You can also find websites that allow you to print out pages in this format. Just do an Internet search using the key words *cornell method pdf*.

Take notes, leaving the cue column blank. As you read an assignment or listen to a lecture, take notes on the right side of the paper. Fill up this column with sentences, paragraphs, outlines, charts, or drawings. Do not write in the cue column. You'll use this space later, as you do the next steps.

Condense your notes in the cue column. Think of the notes you took on the right side of the paper as a set of answers. In the cue column, list potential test questions that correspond to your notes. Write one question for each major term or point.

As an alternative to questions, you can list key words from your notes. Another option is to pretend that your notes are a series of articles on different topics. In the cue column, write a newspaper-style headline for each "article." In any case, be brief. Cramming the cue column full of words defeats its purpose—to reduce the number and length of your notes.

Write a summary. Pauk recommends reducing your notes even more by writing a brief summary at the bottom of each page. This step offers you another way to engage actively with the material.

Use the cue column to recite. Cover the right side of your notes with a blank sheet of paper. Leave only the cue column showing. Then, look at each item you wrote in the cue column and talk about it. If you wrote questions, answer each question. If you wrote key words, define each word and talk about why it's important. If you wrote headlines in the cue column, explain what each one means and offer supporting details. After reciting, uncover your notes and look for any important points you missed.

Record—Mind Map

Mind mapping, a system developed by Tony Buzan (1991), can be used in conjunction with the Cornell method to take notes. In some circumstances, you might want to use mind maps exclusively.

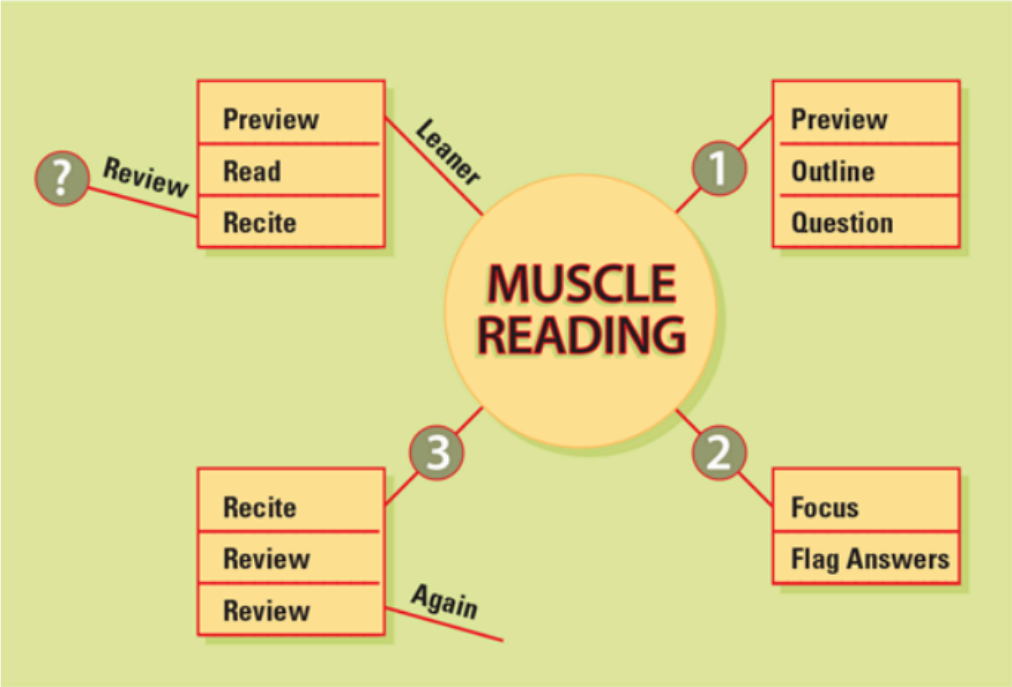
To understand mind maps, first review the features of traditional note-taking. Outlines (explained in the next section) divide major topics into minor topics, which are subdivided further. They organize information in a sequential, linear way.

The traditional outline reflects only a limited range of brain function—a point that is often made in discussions about left-brain and right-brain activities. People often use the term *right brain* when referring to creative, pattern-making, visual, intuitive brain activity. They use the term *left brain* when talking about orderly, logical, step-by-step characteristics of thought. Writing teacher Gabrielle Rico (2000) uses another metaphor. She refers to the left-brain mode as our *sign mind* (concerned with words) and the right-brain mode as our *design mind* (concerned with visuals).

A mind map uses both kinds of brain functions. Mind maps can contain lists and sequences and show relationships. They can also provide a picture of a subject. They work on both verbal and nonverbal levels.

One benefit of mind maps is that they quickly, vividly, and accurately show the relationships between ideas. Also, mind mapping helps you think from general to specific. By choosing a main topic, you focus first on the big picture, then zero-in on subordinate details. By using only key words, you can condense a large subject into a small area on a mind map. You can review more quickly by looking at the key words on a mind map than by reading notes word for word.

Example Notes Using Mind Mapping



Give yourself plenty of room. To create a mind map, use blank paper that measures at least 11 by 17 inches. If that's not available, turn regular notebook paper on its side so that you can take notes in a horizontal (instead of vertical) format. If you use a computer in class to take notes, consider software that allows you to create digital mind maps that can include graphics, photos, and URLs.

Determine the main concept of the lecture, article, or chapter. As you listen to a lecture or read, figure out the main concept. Write it in the center of the paper and circle it, underline it, or highlight it with color. You can also write the concept in large letters. Record concepts related to the main concept on lines that radiate outward from the center. An alternative is to circle or box in these concepts.

Use key words only. Whenever possible, reduce each concept to a single word per line or circle or box in your mind map. Although this reduction might seem awkward at first, it prompts you to summarize and to condense ideas to their essence. That means fewer words for you to write now and fewer to review when it's time to prepare for tests. (Using shorthand symbols and abbreviations can help.) Key words are usually nouns and verbs that communicate the bulk of the speaker's ideas. Choose words that are rich in associations and that can help you recreate the lecture.

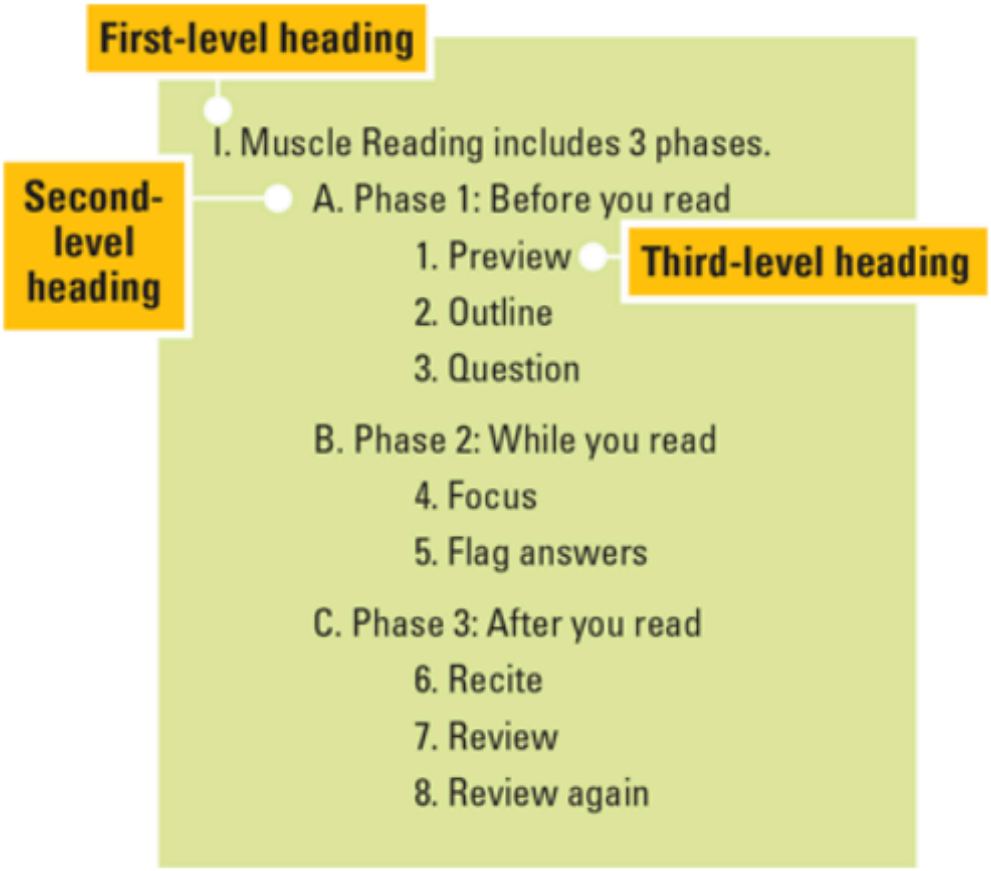
Create links. A single mind map doesn't have to include all of the ideas in a lecture, book, or article. Instead, you can link mind maps. For example, draw a mind map that sums up the five key points in a chapter, and then make a separate, more detailed mind map for each of those key points. Within each mind map, include references to the other mind maps. This technique helps explain and reinforce the relationships among many ideas. Some students pin several mind maps next to one another on a bulletin board or tape them to a wall. This allows for a dramatic—and effective—look at the big picture.

Record—Outline

A traditional outline shows the relationships among major points and supporting ideas. One benefit of taking notes in the outline format is that doing so can totally occupy your attention. You are recording ideas and also organizing them. This process can be an advantage if the material has been presented in a disorganized way. By playing with variations, you can discover the power of outlining to reveal relationships among ideas. Technically, each word, phrase, or sentence that appears in an outline is called a *heading*. Headings are arranged in different levels:

- In the first, or top, level of headings, note the major topics presented in a lecture or reading assignment.
- In the second level of headings, record the key points that relate to each topic in the first level of headings.
- In the third level of headings, record specific facts and details that support or explain each of your second level of headings. Each additional level of subordinate heading supports the ideas in the previous level of heading.
- Roman numerals offer one way to illustrate the difference between levels of headings.

Example Notes Using Outlining



Feel free to use different note-taking systems for different subjects and to combine formats. Do what works for you.

For example, combine mind maps along with the Cornell method. You can modify the Cornell format by dividing your paper in half. Reserve one-half for mind maps and the other half for linear information such as lists, graphs, and outlines as well as equations, long explanations, and word-for-word definitions. You can incorporate a mind map into your paragraph-style notes whenever

you feel one is appropriate. Mind maps are also useful for summarizing notes taken in the Cornell format.

John Sperry, a teacher at Utah Valley State College, developed a note-taking system that can include all of the formats discussed in this lesson:

- Fill up a three-ring binder with fresh paper. Open your notebook so that you see two blank pages—one on the left and one on the right. Plan to take notes across this entire two-page spread.
- During class or while reading, write your notes only on the left-side page. Place a large dash next to each main topic or point. If your instructor skips a step or switches topics unexpectedly, just keep writing.
- Later, use the right-side page to review and elaborate on the notes that you took earlier. This page is for anything you want. For example, add visuals such as mind maps. Write review questions, headlines, possible test questions, summaries, outlines, mnemonics, or analogies that link new concepts to your current knowledge.
- To keep ideas in sequence, place appropriate numbers on top of the dashes in your notes on the left-side page. Even if concepts are presented out of order during class, they'll still be numbered correctly in your notes.

Review—Techniques for Reviewing Your Notes

Think of reviewing as an integral part of note-taking rather than an added task. To make new information useful, encode it in a way that connects it to your long-term memory. The key is reviewing.

Review within 24 hours. The sooner you review your notes, the better, especially if the content is difficult. In fact, you can start reviewing during class. When your instructor pauses to set up the overhead display or erase the board, scan your notes. Dot the *i*'s, cross the *t*'s, and write out unclear abbreviations. Another way to use this technique is to get to your next class as quickly as you can. Then use the four or five minutes before the lecture begins to review the notes you just took in the previous class. If you do not get to your notes immediately after class, you can still benefit by reviewing them later in the day. A review right before you go to sleep can also be valuable.

Think of the day's unreviewed notes as leaky faucets, constantly dripping and losing precious information until you shut them off with a quick review. Remember, it's possible to forget most of the material within 24 hours—unless you review.

Edit your notes. During your first review, fix words that are illegible. Write out abbreviated words that might be unclear to you later. Make sure you can read everything. If you can't read something or don't understand something you *can* read, mark it and make a note to ask your instructor or another student about it. Check to see that your notes are labeled with the date and class and that the pages are numbered.

Fill in key words. As you review your notes, focus on extracting important concepts. Using the key word principles described earlier in this module, go through your notes and make a list of key words or phrases. These key words will speed up the review process later. Also experiment with the Cornell method for taking notes, which centers on organizing your notes on the basis of key words.

Use your key words as cues to recite. Cover your notes with a blank sheet of paper so that you can see only the key words in the left-side margin. Take each key word in order, and recite as much as you can about the point. Then, uncover your notes and look for any important points you missed.

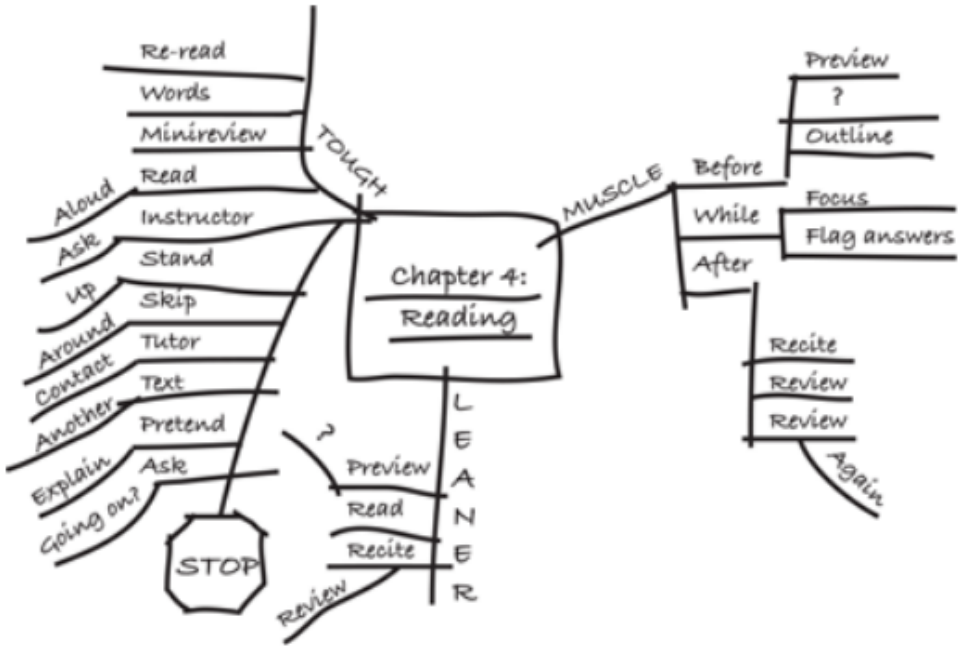
Conduct short weekly review periods. Once a week, review all of your notes again. These review sessions don't need to take a lot of time. Even a 20-minute weekly review period is valuable. Some students find that a weekend review—say, on Sunday afternoon—helps them

stay in continuous touch with the material. Scheduling regular review sessions on your calendar helps develop the habit.

Consider typing your notes. Some students type up their handwritten notes on the computer. The argument for doing so is threefold. First, typed notes are easier to read. Second, they take up less space. Third, the process of typing them forces you to review the material.

Create summaries. Mind mapping is an excellent way to summarize large sections of your course notes or reading assignments. Create one map that shows all the main topics you want to remember. Then create another map about each main topic. After drawing your maps, look at your original notes, and fill in anything you missed. This system is fun and quick.

Example Mind Map Summary



Another option is to create a cheat sheet. There's only one guideline: Fit all your review notes on a single sheet of paper. Use any note-taking format that you want—mind map, outline, Cornell method, or a combination of all of them. The beauty of this technique is that it forces you to pick out main ideas and key details. There's not enough room for anything else!

Some instructors might let you use a summary sheet during an exam. But even if you can't use it, you'll benefit from creating one while you study for the test. Summarizing is a powerful way to review.

Turning PowerPoints Into Notes

PowerPoint presentations are common. They can also be lethal for students who want to master course content or those who simply want to stay awake.

Some students stop taking notes during a PowerPoint presentation. This choice can be hazardous to your academic health for several reasons. For one thing, PowerPoint presentations don't always include all of the key material. Depending on them can leave large gaps in your notes. When you stop taking notes, you might also stop being an active participant in class.

To create value from PowerPoint presentations, take notes on them. Continue to observe, record, and review. See PowerPoint as a way to *guide* rather than to *replace* your own note-taking. Even the slickest, smartest presentation is no substitute for your own thinking.

Experiment with the following suggestions. They include ideas about what to do before, during, and after a PowerPoint presentation.

Before the presentation. Sometimes, instructors make PowerPoint slides available before a lecture. If you have computer access, download these files. Scan the slides, just as you would preview a reading assignment.

Consider printing out the slides and bringing them along to class. (If you own a copy of PowerPoint, then choose the Handouts option when printing. This will save paper and ink.) You can take notes directly on the pages that you print out. Be sure to add the slide numbers if they are missing.

If you use a laptop computer for taking notes during class, then you might not want to bother with printing. Just open up the PowerPoint file and type your notes in the window that appears at the bottom of each slide. After class, you can print out the slides in note view. This will show the original slides plus any text that you added.

During the presentation. In many cases, PowerPoint slides are presented visually by the instructor *only during class*. The slides are not provided as handouts, and they are not available online for students to print out.

This makes it even more important to take effective notes in class. Capture the main points and key details as you normally would. Use your preferred note-taking strategies.

Be selective in what you write down. Determine what kind of material is on each slide. Stay alert for new topics, main points, and important details. Taking too many notes makes it hard to keep up with a speaker and separate main points from minor details.

In any case, go *beyond* the slides. Record valuable questions and answers that come up during a discussion, even if they are not a planned part of the presentation.

After the presentation. If you printed out slides before class and took notes on those pages, then find a way to integrate them with the rest of your notes. For example, add references in your notebook to specific slides. Or create summary notes that include the major topics and points from readings, class meetings, and PowerPoint presentations.

Printouts of slides can make review tools. Use them as cues to recite. Cover up your notes so that only the main image or words on each slide are visible. See whether you can remember what else appears on the slide, along with the key points from any notes you added.

Also consider “editing” the presentation. If you have the PowerPoint file on your computer, make another copy of it. Open up this copy, and see whether you can condense the presentation. Cut slides that don’t include anything you want to remember. Also, rearrange slides so that the order makes more sense to you. Remember that you can open up the original file later if you want to see exactly what your instructor presented.

Taking Notes When Your Instructor Talks Quickly

Instructors are different in their communication style. Sometimes, instructors talk very quickly, and it may seem difficult to take notes.

The following strategies can help you take notes when your instructor talks quickly:

Take more time to prepare for class. Familiarity with a subject increases your ability to pick up on key points. If an instructor lectures quickly or is difficult to understand, conduct a thorough preview of the material to be covered.

Be willing to make choices. Focus your attention on key points. Instead of trying to write everything down, choose what you think is important. Occasionally, you will make a less-than-perfect choice or even neglect an important point. Worse things could happen. Stay with the lecture, write down key words, and revise your notes immediately after class.

Exchange photocopies of notes with classmates. Your classmates might write down something you missed. At the same time, your notes might help them. Exchanging photocopies can fill in the gaps.

Leave large empty spaces in your notes. Leave plenty of room for filling in information you missed. Use a symbol that signals you've missed something so that you can remember to come back to it.

See the instructor after class. Take your class notes with you, and show the instructor what you missed.

Use an audio recorder. Recording a lecture gives you a chance to hear it again whenever you choose. Some audio-recording software allows you to vary the speed of the recording. With this feature, you can perform magic and actually slow down the instructor's speech.

Before class, take notes on your reading assignment. You can take detailed notes on the text before class. Leave plenty of blank space. Take these notes with you to class, and simply add your lecture notes to them.

Go to the lecture again. Many classes are taught in multiple sections. That gives you the chance to hear a lecture at least twice—once in your regular class and again in another section of the class.

Learn shorthand. Some note-taking systems, known as *shorthand*, are specifically designed for getting ideas down fast. Books and courses are available to help you learn these systems. You can also devise your own shorthand method by inventing one- or two-letter symbols for common words and phrases.

Ask questions—even if you're totally lost. Many instructors allow a question session. This is the time to ask about the points you missed.

At times, you might feel so lost that you can't even formulate a question. That's okay. One option is to report this fact to the instructor. She can often guide you to a clear question. Another option is to ask a related question. Doing so might lead you to the question you really want to ask.

Ask the instructor to slow down. This solution is the most obvious. If asking the instructor to slow down doesn't work, ask her to repeat what you missed.

Taking Notes While Reading

Taking notes while reading requires the same skills that apply to taking class notes: observing, recording, and reviewing. Use these skills to take notes for review and for research.

Review notes will look like the notes you take in class. Take review notes when you want more detailed notes than writing in the margin of your text allows. You might want to single out a particularly difficult section of a text and make separate notes. Or make summaries of overlapping lecture and text material. Because you can't underline or make notes in library books, these sources will require separate notes, too.

To take more effective review notes, use the following suggestions:

Set priorities. Single out a particularly difficult section of a text and make separate notes. Or make summaries of overlapping lecture and text material.

Use a variety of formats. Translate text into Cornell notes, mind maps, or outlines. Combine these formats to create your own. Translate diagrams, charts, and other visual elements into words. Then, reverse the process by translating straight text into visual elements.

However, don't let the creation of formats get in your way. Even a simple list of key points and examples can become a powerful review tool. Another option is to close your book and just start writing. Write quickly about what you intend to remember from the text, and don't worry about following any format.

Condense a passage to key quotes. Authors embed their essential ideas in key sentences. As you read, continually ask yourself, *What's the point*? See whether you can point to a specific sentence on the page to answer your question. Look especially at headings, subheadings, and topic sentences of paragraphs. Write these key sentences word for word in your notes, and put them within quotation marks. Copy as few sentences as you can and still retain the core meaning of the passage.

Condense by paraphrasing. Pretend that you have to summarize a chapter, article, or book on a postcard. Limit yourself to a single paragraph—or a single sentence—and use your own words. This is a great way to test your understanding of the material.

Take a cue from the table of contents. Look at the table of contents in your book. Write each major heading on a piece of paper, or key those headings into a file on your computer. Include page numbers. Next, see whether you can improve on the table of contents. Substitute your own headings for those that appear in the book. Turn single words or phrases into complete sentences, and use words that are meaningful to you.

Adapt to special cases. The style of your notes can vary according to the nature of the reading material. If you are assigned a short story or poem, for example, then read the entire work once without taking any notes. On your first reading, simply enjoy the piece. When you finish, write down your immediate impressions. Then, go over the piece again. Make brief notes on characters, images, symbols, settings, plot, point of view, or other aspects of the work.

Note key concepts in math and science. When you read mathematical, scientific, or other technical materials, copy important formulas or equations. Recreate important diagrams, and draw your own visual representations of concepts. Also write down data that might appear on an exam.

Taking Research Notes

Take research notes when preparing to write a paper or deliver a speech. One traditional method of research is to take notes on 3 × 5 cards. You write *one* idea, fact, or quotation per card, along with a note about the source (where you found it). The advantage of limiting each card to one item is that you can easily arrange cards according to the sequence of ideas in your outline.

Taking notes on a computer offers the same flexibility as index cards. Just include one idea, fact, or quotation per paragraph along with the source. Think of each paragraph as a separate card. When you're ready to create the first draft of your paper or presentation, just move paragraphs around so that they fit your outline.

Include your sources. Whether you use cards or a computer, be sure to include a source for each note that you take.

Say, for example, that you find a useful quotation from a book. You want to include that quotation in your paper. Copy the quotation word for word onto a card, or key the quotation into a computer file. Along with the quotation, note the book's author, title, date and place of publication, and publisher. You'll need such information later when you create a formal list of your sources—a bibliography, or a list of endnotes or footnotes.

Whenever possible, print out or make photocopies of each source. For books, include a copy of the title page and copyright page, both of which are found in the front matter. For magazines and scholarly journals, copy the table of contents.

For each *book* you consult, record the following:

- Author
- Editor (if listed)
- Translator (if listed)
- Edition number (if listed)
- Full title, including the subtitle
- Name and location of the publisher
- Copyright date
- Page numbers for passages that you quote, summarize, or paraphrase

For each *article* you consult, record the following:

- Author
- Editor (if listed)
- Translator (if listed)
- Full title, including the subtitle
- Name of the periodical
- Volume number
- Issue number
- Issue date
- Page numbers for passages that you quote, summarize, or paraphrase

For other types of sources, ask your instructor for guidelines about what information to record.

Avoid plagiarism. When people take material from a source and fail to acknowledge that source, they are committing plagiarism. Even when plagiarism is accidental, the consequences can be harsh.

Many cases of plagiarism occur during the process of taking research notes. To prevent this problem, remember that a major goal of taking research notes is to *clearly separate your own words and images from words and images created by someone else*. To meet this goal, develop the following habits:

- If you take a direct quote from one of your sources, enclose those words in quotation marks and note the information about that source.
- If you take an image (photo, illustration, chart, or diagram) from one of your sources, note the information about that source.
- If you summarize or paraphrase a *specific passage* from one of your sources, use your own words and note the information about that source.
- If your notes include any idea that is closely identified with a particular person, note the information about the source.
- If you include one of your own ideas in your notes, simply note the source as “me.”
- If you’re taking notes on a computer and using Internet sources, be especially careful to avoid plagiarism. When you copy text or images from a website, separate those notes from your own ideas. Use a different font for copied material, or enclose it in quotation marks.

You do *not* need to note a source for these:

- Facts that are considered common knowledge (The history of the twentieth century includes two world wars.)
- Facts that can be easily verified (The US Constitution includes a group of amendments known as the Bill of Rights.)
- Your own opinion (Hip-hop artists are the most important poets of our age.)

The bottom line: Always present your own work—not materials that have been created or revised by someone else. If you’re ever in doubt about what to do, then take the safest course: Cite the source. Give credit where credit is due.

Taking Notes in Online Courses

You may not always take classes in a formal classroom setting. Many classes are now offered online. The following suggestions will help with taking notes and keeping track of information in online courses.

Do a trial run with technology. Verify your access to course web sites, including online tutorials, PowerPoint presentations, readings, quizzes, tests, assignments, bulletin boards, and chatrooms. Ask your instructors for the website addresses (URLs), e-mail addresses, and passwords. Work out any bugs when you start the course and well before that first assignment is due.

Develop a contingency plan. Murphy's Law of computer crashes states that technology tends to break down at the moment of greatest inconvenience. You might not believe this piece of folklore, but it's still wise to prepare for it:

- Find a "technology buddy" in each of your classes—someone who can contact the instructor if you lose Internet access or experience other computer problems.
- Every day, back up the files created for your courses.
- Keep extra printer supplies—paper, toner, and ink—on hand at all times. Don't run out of necessary supplies on the day a paper is due.

Take notes on course material. You can print out anything that appears on a computer screen. This includes online course materials—articles, books, manuscripts, e-mail messages, chatroom sessions, and more.

The potential problem is that you might skip the note-taking process altogether. (*I can just print out everything!*) You would then miss the chance to internalize a new idea by restating it in your own words—a principal benefit of note-taking. Result: Material passes from computer to printer without ever intersecting with your brain. To prevent this problem, take notes on your online course material.

Ask for help. If you feel confused about anything you're learning online, ask for help right away. This is especially important when you don't see the instructor face-to-face in class. Some students simply drop online courses rather than seek help. E-mail or call the instructor before you make that choice. If the instructor is on campus, you might be able to arrange for a meeting during office hours.

Manage time and tasks carefully. Courses that take place mostly or totally online can become invisible in your weekly academic schedule. This reinforces the temptation to put off dealing with these courses until late in the term.

Avoid this mistake! Consider the real possibility that an online course can take *more* time than a traditional, face-to-face lecture class.

One key to keeping up with the course is frequent contact and careful time management:

- Early in the term, create a detailed schedule for online courses. In your calendar, list a due date for each assignment. Break big assignments into smaller steps, and schedule a due date for each step.
- Schedule times in your calendar to complete online course work. Give these scheduled sessions the same priority as regular classroom meetings. At these times, check for online announcements relating to assignments, tests, and other course events. Check for course-related e-mails daily.
- If the class includes discussion forums, check those daily as well. Look for new posts and add your replies. The point of these tools is to create a lively conversation that starts early and continues throughout the term.
- When you receive an online assignment, e-mail any questions immediately. If you want to meet with an instructor in person, request an appointment several days in advance.
- Give online instructors plenty of time to respond. They are not always online. Many online instructors have traditional courses to teach, along with administration and research duties.

- Download or print out online course materials as soon as they're posted on the class website. These materials might not be available later in the term.

Focus your attention. Some students are used to visiting websites while watching TV, listening to music, or browsing their social media feed. When applied to online learning, these habits can reduce your learning and imperil your grades. To succeed with online learning technology, turn off the distractions. Whenever you go online, stay in charge of your attention.

References

Brazeau, Gayle A. "Handouts in the classroom: Is note taking a lost skill?" *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 70, 2 (2006): 38.

Buzan, Tony. *Use Both Sides of Your Brain*. New York: Dutton, 1991.

Pauk, Walter and Ross J. Q. Owens. *How to Study in College*, 10th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2011.

Rico, Gabrielle. *Writing the Natural Way.* New York: Penguin, 2000.

MODULE 10

DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

What images fill your mind when you hear the word *relationship?*

Perhaps you think of a romantic partner or a spouse—or even an ex. Or maybe the term conjures up thoughts of parents, siblings, or children.

These are some of the most common relationships that fill your life, but many other types affect your academic journey.

How you interact with other people—both in and out of the classroom—can influence your college success. Learning positive ways to handle challenges, understanding personal boundaries, and navigating social cues will help you to become more engaged in classroom experiences. You can also use these skills as tools to get involved beyond the classroom walls.

Throughout this course, you've explored ways to be successful in college—managing time, studying effectively, and communicating well, to name a few lessons. In this module, you'll learn more about the types of relationships you'll need to develop during your academic career and the appropriate ways to use the skills you've gained to make sure these relationships are healthy, balanced, and successful.

Lesson 10.1: Interacting in the Classroom

Lesson 10.1 Introduction

When it comes to college, success is about more than memorizing formulas or recalling important dates and information. To do well, you need to employ a holistic approach—using all of your skills and making good decisions each day.

Throughout your college journey, you'll have the opportunity to interact with many different people in and out of the classroom. Although you may have many positive experiences in class, you will also be in situations that may be challenging. For example,

What happens if you disagree with another student during a discussion?

Are there ways to feel comfortable in a course if you don't like the instructor?

Should you turn off your cell phone during class?

Knowing the protocol is not necessarily intuitive, and this module will help you better understand the behavioral expectations of the college environment. You'll also learn strategies for working with diverse peers and for using the challenges you face as opportunities for growth. Throughout this module, we'll investigate how you can become more confident, engaged, and connected throughout your college career.

Making the Transition to Higher Education: What You Encounter

Whether you've just graduated from high school or have been out of the classroom for decades, you'll discover many differences between secondary and postsecondary education. The sooner you understand such differences, the sooner you can deal with them.

Some examples of what you might face include the following:

New academic standards. Once you enter college, you'll probably find yourself working harder in school than ever before. Compared with high school, instructors often present more material and at a faster pace. There may be fewer tests, but the grading might be tougher. You'll have more to read, more to write, more problems to solve, and more to remember.

New level of independence. College instructors typically give less guidance about how or when to study. You may not get reminders about when assignments are due or when quizzes and tests will take place. You probably won't get study sheets before a test. Overall, you might receive less consistent feedback about how well you are doing in each of your courses.

Don't let any of this hands-off environment tempt you into putting off work until the last minute. You will still be held accountable for all coursework. And anything that's said in class or included in assigned readings might appear on an exam.

Differences in teaching styles. Instructors at colleges, universities, and vocational schools are often steeped in their subject matter. Many did not take courses on how to teach and might not be as interesting as some of your high school teachers. Some professors also might seem more focused on research than on teaching.

Larger playing field. The institution you've just joined might seem immense, impersonal, and even frightening. The sheer size of the campus, the variety of courses offered, and the large number of departments can all add up to a confusing array of academic options.

More students and more diversity. Your college might enroll hundreds or even thousands more students than your high school does. So the range of diversity among these students might surprise you.

You are now responsible for structuring your time and creating new relationships. Perhaps more than ever before, you'll find that your life is your own creation. You are free to set different goals, explore alternative ways of thinking, change habits, and expand your circle of friends. All of these opportunities can add up to a new identity or a new way of being in the world.

Making the Transition to Higher Education: How to Cope

Entering college is filled with many different decisions and options for you to choose. At first, this world of choices might seem overwhelming or even frightening. You might feel that you're just going through the motions of being a student or playing a role that you've never rehearsed.

That feeling is understandable. Use it to your advantage. After all, you are assuming a new role in life—a student in higher education. And just as actors enter the minds of the characters they portray, you can take on the character of a master student.

When you're willing to take responsibility for the quality of your education, you can create the future of your dreams. Keep the following strategies in mind:

Decrease the unknowns. To reduce surprises, anticipate changes. Before classes begin, get a map of the campus and walk through the buildings and other areas—perhaps with a classmate or friend. Visit your instructors in their offices and introduce yourself. Anything you can do to get familiar with the new place will help. In addition, consider buying your textbooks before class begins. Scan them to get a preview of your courses.

Admit your feelings—whatever they are. School can be an intimidating experience for new students. People of diverse cultures, adult learners, commuters, and people with disabilities may feel excluded. Anyone can feel anxious, isolated, homesick, or worried.

Those emotions are common among new students, and there's nothing wrong with them. Simply admitting the truth about how you feel—to yourself and to someone else—can help you cope. And you can almost always do something constructive in the present moment, no matter how you feel.

If your feelings about this transition to higher education make it hard for you to carry out the activities of daily life—going to class, working, studying, and relating to other people—then get professional help. Start with a counselor at the student health service on your campus. The mere act of seeking help can make a difference.

Allow time for transition. You don't have to master the transition to higher education right away. Give it some time. Also, plan your academic schedule with your needs for transition in mind. Balance time-intensive courses with other classes that are not as demanding.

Find resources. Of all resources, people are the most important. You can isolate yourself, study hard, and get a good education. However, doing just that is not the most powerful use of your tuition money. When you establish relationships with teachers, staff members, fellow students, and employers, you can get a great education. Build a network of people who will personally support your success in school.

Make peace with new technology. Turn back the clock to 2001. Google was just a few years old. There was no Facebook, no Twitter, no iPad, and no iPhone. Compare that to today's world, when these services and products are used by millions of people.

If you don't feel comfortable with the latest technology, welcome to the club. Students in higher education are asked to engage with technology at a level that has no precedent in our history.

To make the transition to this technological world, remember that it's okay to admit the truth whenever you're outside of your comfort zone. It's also okay to get help.

Unless your college orientation does not cover this, go to your academic advisor to ask about help desks, workshops or classes, and other campus resources for getting up to speed with the latest technology. Find out how to access your school's computer network, wireless network, website, e-mail system, and computers and printers available to students.

One way to overcome fear of change is to get hands-on experience with digital tools as soon as possible.

Succeeding in School at Any Age

If you're an adult learner, you're on a strong footing. With a rich store of life experiences, you can ask meaningful questions and make connections between course work and daily life. Any abilities that you've developed to work on teams, manage projects, meet deadlines, and solve problems are assets. Many instructors will especially enjoy working with you.

First, acknowledge your concerns. Adult learners might express any of the following fears:

- I'll be the oldest person in all my classes.
- I've been out of the classroom too long.
- I'm concerned about my math, reading, and writing skills.
- I'm worried about making tuition payments.
- How will I ever make the time to study, on top of everything else I'm doing?
- I won't be able to keep up with all the new technology.

Those concerns are understandable. However, college classrooms are more diverse than ever before. Adult learners can take advantage of evening classes, weekend classes, summer classes, distance learning, and online courses.

Here are some steps you can take as you prepare to become a college student:

Ease into it. If you're new to higher education, ease into it. You can choose to attend school part-time before making a full-time commitment. If you've taken college-level classes in the past, find out if any of those credits will transfer into your current program.

Plan ahead. By planning a week or month at a time, you get a bigger picture of your multiple roles as a student, an employee, and a family member. With that awareness, you can make conscious adjustments in the number of hours you devote to each domain of activity in your life.

Delegate tasks. If you have children, delegate some of the household chores to them. Or start a meal co-op in your neighborhood. Cook dinner for yourself and someone else one night each week. In return, ask that person to furnish you with a meal on another night. A similar strategy can apply to child care and other household tasks.

Get to know other returning students. Introduce yourself to other adult learners. Being in the same classroom gives you an immediate bond. You can exchange work, home, or cell phone numbers and build a network of mutual support. Some students adopt a buddy system, pairing up with another student in each class to complete assignments and prepare for tests.

Find common ground with traditional students. Traditional and nontraditional students have many things in common. They seek to gain knowledge and skills for their chosen careers. They desire financial stability and personal fulfillment. And, like their older peers, many younger students are concerned about whether they have the skills to succeed in higher education.

Consider pooling resources with younger students. Share notes, edit one another's papers, and form study groups. Look for ways to build on one another's strengths. If you want help with using a computer for assignments, you might ask a younger student for help. In group projects and case studies, you can expand the discussion by sharing insights from your experiences.

Enlist your employer's support. Let your employer in on your educational plans. Point out how the skills you gain in the classroom will help you meet work objectives. Offer informal seminars at work to share what you're learning in school. You might find that your company reimburses its employees for some tuition costs or even grants time off to attend classes.

Get extra mileage out of your current tasks. Look for ways to relate your schoolwork to your job. For example, when you're assigned a research paper, choose a topic that relates to your current job tasks. Some schools even offer academic credit for work and life experience.

Review your subjects before you start classes. Say that you've registered for trigonometry and you haven't taken a math class since high school. Consider brushing up on the subject before classes begin. Also, talk with future instructors about ways to prepare for their classes.

"Publish" your schedule. After you plan your study and class sessions for the week, write up your schedule and post it in a place where others who live with you will see it. If you use an online calendar, print out copies to put in your school binder or on your refrigerator door, bathroom mirror, or kitchen cupboard.

Engage family and friends in your success. Ask the key people in your life for help. Share your reason for getting a degree, and talk about what your whole family has to gain from this change in your life. Ask them to think of ways that they can support your success in school and to commit to those actions. Make your own education a joint mission that benefits everyone.

Enroll Your Instructor in Your Success

It's important to view instructors as partners in your education. You have the power to influence whether that relationship is positive or negative, and you get to decide what types of experiences you glean from each class. Here are some tips on how to build a positive connection with your instructor and how to handle the situation if things go awry:

Research the instructor. When deciding what classes to take, look for formal and informal sources of information about instructors. At some schools, students post informal evaluations of

instructors on websites. Also talk to students who have taken courses from the instructor you're researching.

Show interest in class. Students give teachers moment-by-moment feedback in class. That feedback comes through posture, eye contact, responses to questions, and participation in class discussions.

Release judgments. Maybe your instructor reminds you of someone you don't like—your annoying aunt, a rude store clerk, or the fifth-grade teacher who kept you after school. Your attitudes are in your own head and beyond the instructor's control. Likewise, an instructor's political, religious, and societal beliefs are not related to teaching ability. Being aware of such things can help you let go of negative judgments.

Get to know the instructor. Meet with your instructor during office hours. Teachers who seem boring in class can be fascinating in person.

If you are meeting with your instructor, come to the meeting prepared with a list of questions and any materials you'll need. During the meeting, relax. Avoid questions that might offend your instructor, such as *I missed class on Monday. Did we do anything important?*

Open up to diversity. A Latino can teach English literature. A white teacher can have something valid to say about African music. A teacher in a wheelchair can command the attention of a hundred people in a lecture hall. Don't let assumptions about race and ethicity, gender, sexuality, and disability hinder your learning.

Form your own opinion about each instructor. You might hear conflicting reports about teachers from other students. The same instructor could be described by two different students as a riveting speaker and as completely lacking in charisma. Decide for yourself.

Seek alternatives. You might feel more comfortable with another teacher's style or method of organizing course materials. Consider changing teachers, asking another teacher for help outside class, or attending an additional section taught by a different instructor.

Avoid excuses. Instructors know them all. Most teachers can see a snow job coming before the first flake hits the ground.

Submit professional work. Prepare papers and projects as if you were submitting them to an employer.

Accept criticism. Learn from your teachers' comments about your work. It is a teacher's job to give feedback. Don't take it personally.

Use course evaluations. In many classes, you'll have an opportunity to evaluate the instructor. Write about the aspects of the class that did not work well for you. Offer specific ideas for improvement. Also note what did work well.

Communicate effectively by phone and e-mail. Find out how your instructors prefer to be contacted outside of class. Most have specific preferences about what they want you to include in a voice mail or e-mail.

Take further steps, if appropriate. Sometimes, severe conflict develops between students and instructors. In such cases, you might decide to file a complaint or ask for help from a school administrator or program director. Be prepared to document your case in writing. Describe specific actions that created problems. Stick to the facts—events that other class members can verify. Your school has grievance procedures that apply in these cases. Use them. You are a consumer of education and have a right to fair treatment.

Classroom Civility—What's in it For You

How you act in a situation conveys messages about what you may think or feel, even if you are not communicating with words. Consider an example: A student arrives 15 minutes late to a

lecture and lets the door slam behind her. She pulls a fast-food burger out of a crackling paper bag. Then, her cell phone rings at full volume—and she answers it. Behaviors like these send a message to everyone in the room: *I'm ignoring you*.

Without civility, you lose. Even a small problem with classroom civility can create a barrier for everyone. Learning gets interrupted. Trust breaks down. Your tuition dollars go down the drain. You deserve to enter classrooms that are free of discipline problems and bullies. Many schools have formal policies about classroom civility. Find out what policies apply to you. The consequences for violating them can be serious and may include dismissal or legal action.

With civility, you win. When you treat instructors with respect, you're more likely to be treated that way in return. A respectful relationship with an instructor could turn into a favorable reference letter, a mentorship, a job referral, or a friendship that lasts for years after you graduate. Politeness pays.

Classroom civility does not mean that you have to be passive or insincere. You can present your opinions with passion and even disagree with an instructor in a way that leaves everyone enriched rather than threatened.

Lack of civility boils down to a group of habits. Like any other habits, these can be changed. The following suggestions reflect common sense, and they make an uncommon difference:

Attend classes regularly and on time. If you know that you're going to miss a class or be late, let your instructor know. Take the initiative to ask your instructor or another student about what you missed.

Do not disrupt class. If you arrive late, close the door quietly and take a seat. When you know that you will have to leave class early, tell your instructor before class begins, and sit near an exit. If you leave class to use the restroom or handle an emergency, do so quietly.

Participate fully during class. Take notes and join the discussions. Turn off your cell phone or any other electronic device that you don't need for class. Remember that sleeping, texting, or doing work for another class is a waste of your time and money. Instructors notice distracting activities and take them as a sign of your lack of interest and commitment. So do employers.

Wait until class has been dismissed before packing up your things. Instructors often give assignments or make a key point at the end of a class period. Be there when it happens.

Communicate respect. When you speak in class, begin by addressing your instructor as Ms., Mrs., Mr., Dr., Professor, or whatever the teacher prefers.

Discussions gain value when everyone gets a chance to speak. Show respect for others by not monopolizing class discussions. Refrain from side conversations and profanity. When presenting viewpoints that conflict with those of classmates or your instructor, combine the passion for your opinion with respect for the opinions of others. Similarly, if you disagree with a class requirement or a grade you received, then talk to your instructor about it *after* class in a respectful way. In a private setting, your ideas will get more attention.

Respect gets communicated in small details. Don't make distracting noises. Cover your mouth if you yawn or cough. Avoid wearing inappropriate clothing. And even if you meet your future spouse in class, refrain from public displays of affection.

Embrace diversity. Successful students—and teachers—come in endless variety. They are old and young, male and female. They come from every culture, race, and ethnic group. Part of civility is staying open to the value that other people have to offer.

See civility as a contribution. Every class you enter has the potential to become a community of people who talk openly, listen fully, share laughter, and arrive at life-changing insights. These are master student qualities. Every time you demonstrate them, you make a contribution to your community.

Lesson 10.2: Getting Involved

Lesson 10.2 Introduction

"What did you do this weekend?" Britt asks as you walk into Professor Schmidt's 8 a.m. class. Smiling, you grab a seat in the third row and shuffle papers from your bag.

"Oh, you know," you stammer, "nothing much."

Nothing much. Nothing much?

Do you ever feel as though life is just passing you by? Are you caught in the daily grind of work and school, wondering at the end of the weekend where the time has gone and what you have to show for it?

A successful college experience is about more than academic achievement. Your college years—whether you are young or old—can be a time of immense personal enrichment.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time? Do you have any hobbies? Many colleges and universities offer clubs and student organizations to fit a variety of interests. Whether you are interested in team activities or solo ventures, school is a great place to find out about opportunities to network and connect with people who enjoy similar things.

Your academic journey can also provide opportunities for volunteering in your local community and even the chance to turn those hours into course credits through Service Learning. By using your time as a student to participate in activities outside of the classroom, you'll explore new possibilities and make valuable connections in the process.

In this lesson, you'll learn about some of the many opportunities for extracurricular involvement—both on and off campus—as a college student. Let's examine ways you can use the resources and connections of your campus to find new ways to connect and engage with your community.

Extracurricular Activities: Reap the Benefits

As you enter higher education, you may find that you are busier than you've ever been before. Often, that's due to the variety of extracurricular activities available to you: athletics, fraternities and sororities, student newspapers and literary journals, debate teams, study groups, service learning or volunteer projects, internships, mentorships, student government, and political action groups, to name just a few. Your school might also offer free admissions or discounted tickets to conferences, films, plays, concerts, comedy shows, museums, games or sporting events, art galleries, and speaking engagements. Student organizations help to make these activities possible, and you can join any of them.

People who participate in extracurricular activities gain many benefits. They bridge the worlds inside and outside the classroom. They expand their learning styles by testing theories in action and gaining concrete experiences. Through student organizations, they explore possible careers, make contacts for jobs, and build a lifelong habit of giving back to their communities. They make new friends among both students and faculty and work on teams composed of people from different cultures.

Getting involved in such organizations also comes with some risks. When students don't balance extracurricular activities with class work, their success in school can suffer. They can also compromise their health by losing sleep, neglecting exercise, skipping meals, or relying on fast food. These costs are easier to avoid if you keep a few suggestions in mind:

Make conscious choices about how to divide your time between schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Decide up front how many hours each week or month you can devote to a student organization. Leave room in your schedule for relaxing and for unplanned events.

Look to the future when making commitments. Write down three or four of the most important goals you'd like to achieve in your lifetime. Then, choose extracurricular activities that directly support those goals.

Create a career plan that includes a list of skills needed for your next job. Choose extracurricular activities that will help you develop those necessary skills. If you're unsure of your career choice, then get involved in campus organizations to explore your options.

Whenever possible, develop leadership experience by holding an office in an organization. If that's too much of a commitment, then volunteer to lead a committee or plan a special event.

Get involved in a variety of extracurricular activities. Varying your activities demonstrates to future employers that you can work with a diverse group of people in a range of settings.

Recognize your own reluctance to follow through on a commitment. You might agree to attend meetings and find yourself forgetting them or consistently showing up late. If that happens, write a Discovery Statement about the way you're using time. Follow that with an Intention Statement about ways to keep your agreements—or consider renegotiating those agreements.

Say no to activities that fail to create value for you. Avoid joining groups only because you feel obligated to do so or feel guilty for not doing so.

Check out the rules before joining any student organization. Ask about dues and attendance requirements.

What Is Service Learning?

As part of a service learning project for a sociology course, students volunteer at a community center for older adults. For another service learning project, history students interview people in veterans' hospitals about their war experiences. These students share their interview results with a psychiatrist on the hospital staff.

Meanwhile, business students provide free tax-preparation help at a center for low-income people. Students in graphic arts classes create free promotional materials for charities. Other students staff a food cooperative and a community credit union.

These examples of actual projects from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse demonstrate the basic premise of service learning: Volunteer work and other forms of service can be a vehicle for higher education.

Think of service learning as a way to find new tools and new ideas. In fact, see service learning as a tool based on one of the core values behind this course—making a positive contribution to the lives of other people.

Many of the resources in this course are about filling yourself up, taking care of yourself, being "selfish," and meeting your needs. The strategies and tips suggested here focus on how to get what you want out of school, work, and the rest of your life. One result of these lessons in successful selfishness is your immense capacity to contribute. This means giving back to your community in ways that enhance the lives of other people.

Many schools offer service learning programs. Look up *service learning* in the index of your school catalog or search your school's website using those key words. There might be a service learning office on your campus.

When you design a service learning project, consider the following suggestions:

Follow your interests. Think of the persistent problems in the world—illiteracy, hunger, poverty, racial and gender inequality, addiction, climate change, corruption and abuse of power, to name just a few. Which of them generate the strongest feelings in you? Which of them link to your possible career plans and choice of major? The place where passion intersects with plan (see the six levels of powerful speaking discussed in an earlier module) often creates an opportunity for service learning.

Choose your community partner carefully. Work with a community organization that has experience with students. Make sure that the organization has liability insurance to cover volunteers.

Learn about your community partner. Once you connect with a community organization, learn everything you can about it. Find its mission statement and explore its history. Find out what makes this organization unique. If the organization partners with other entities in the community, learn about them as well.

Handle logistics. Integrating service learning into your schedule calls for detailed planning. If your volunteer work takes place off campus, arrange for transportation and allow for travel time.

Build long-term support for the project. One potential pitfall of service learning is that the programs are often short-lived. After students pack up and return to campus, the programs can deteriorate and die because of lack of staffing and support. To prevent this outcome, recruit other students or community members willing to step in and take over for you when the semester ends.

Connect service learning to critical thinking. To think critically and creatively about your service learning project, ask questions such as these:

- What service did you perform?
- What roles did your service project include, and who filled those roles?
- What knowledge and skills did you bring to this project?
- After being involved in this project, what new knowledge and skills did you gain?
- What did you learn from this experience that can help another service learning project succeed?
- Will this project affect your choice of a major? If so, how?
- Will this project affect your career plans? If so, how?

Service learning provides an opportunity to combine theory and practice, reflection and action, book learning and real-world experience. Education takes place as we reflect on our experiences and turn them into new insights and intentions. Use service learning as a way to elevate your thinking skills to the critical level.

Lesson 10.3: Interacting with Others

Lesson 10.3 Introduction

In today's global, interconnected world, communication is more vital than ever. Technology has played an important role in this globalization. With just a simple online search, we can learn about other cultures and traditions.

But how does this changing landscape affect the classroom?

College has not always been a welcoming realm of diversity. In the Middle Ages of Europe, for example, only the wealthiest of young men were likely to have a chance at higher education. Thankfully, times have changed in much of the world and education is more accessible now.

If you grew up in a small town and lived there for most of your life so far, you may not be used to interacting with people who have different beliefs, perspectives, languages, or cultures from your own. But in a college environment, people come from many different states, or even countries, to pursue their studies. Your classroom will likely be made up of individuals of varying ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Each class is unique, and you will have the opportunity to work with many types of people in the college environment.

In this lesson, we'll explore ways you can build your cultural communication skills to truly benefit from the experiences within the classroom and throughout the campus.

Communicating Across Cultures

The ability to communicate across cultures is valuable. What gives it power is your sincere desire and commitment to create understanding. If you truly value cultural diversity, then you can discover ways to build bridges between people.

Use the following strategies to do so, and invent more of your own:

Start with self-discovery. The first step to developing diversity skills is to learn about yourself and the lenses through which you see the world. One way to do this is to intentionally switch lenses—that is, to consciously perceive familiar events in a new way.

For example, think of a situation in your life that involved an emotionally charged conflict among several people. Now, mentally put yourself inside the skin of another person in that conflict. Ask yourself, *How would I view this situation if I were that person?*

You can also learn by asking, *What if I were a person of the opposite gender or sexual orientation? Or if I were a member of a different racial or ethnic group and didn't speak English? Or if I were older or younger or differently abled?* Do this exercise consistently, and you'll discover that we live in a world of multiple realities. There are many different ways to interpret any event—and just as many ways to respond, given our individual differences.

Look for differences between *individualist* and *collectivist* cultures. *Individualist* cultures flourish in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. If your family has deep roots in one of these areas, you were probably raised to value personal fulfillment and personal success. You received recognition or rewards when you stood out from your peers by, for example, earning the highest grades throughout the semester, scoring the most points during a basketball game, or demonstrating excellence in art or science projects.

In contrast, *collectivist* cultures value cooperation over competition. Group progress is more important than individual success. Credit for an achievement is widely shared. If you were raised in such a culture, you probably place a high value on your family and were taught to respect your elders. Collectivist cultures dominate Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In short, individualist cultures often emphasize the I. Collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the we. Forgetting about the differences between them can strain a friendship or wreck an international business deal.

If you were raised in an individualist culture, we suggest the following:

- **Remember that someone from a collectivist culture may place a high value on saving face.** This idea involves more than simply avoiding embarrassment. This person may not want to be singled out from other members of a group, even for a positive achievement. If you have a direct request for this person or want to share something that could be taken as a personal criticism, save it for a private conversation.
- **Respect titles and last names.** Americans often like to use first names immediately after meeting someone, but in some cultures this practice is acceptable only among family members. Especially in work settings, use last names and job titles during your first meetings. Allow time for informal relationships to develop.
- **Put messages in context.** For members of collectivist cultures, words convey only part of an intended message. Notice gestures and other nonverbal communication as well.

If you were raised in a collectivist culture, you can creatively "reverse" the preceding list. Keep in mind that direct questions from a Western student or coworker are meant *not* to offend but to clarify an idea. Don't be surprised if you are called by a nickname, if no one asks about your family, or if you are rewarded for a personal achievement. In social situations, remember that indirect cues might not get another person's attention. Practice asking clearly and directly for what you want.

Look for common ground. Students in higher education often find that they worry about many of the same things, including tuition bills, the quality of cafeteria food, and the shortage of on-campus parking spaces. More important, our fundamental goals as human beings—such as good health, physical safety, and economic security—cross cultural lines.

Communicating with Openness

When communicating with someone whose background may be different than your own, speak and listen with cultural sensitivity. After first speaking with someone from another culture, don't assume that you've been understood or that you fully understand the other person. The same action can have different meanings at different times, even for members of the same culture. Check it out. Verify what you think you have heard. Listen to see whether what you sent (said) is what the other person received (heard).

If you're speaking with someone who doesn't understand English well, keep the following ideas in mind:

- Speak slowly, distinctly, and patiently.
- Don't repeat individual words over and over to clarify your statement. Restate your entire message with simple, direct language and short sentences.
- Avoid slang and figures of speech.
- Use gestures to accompany your words.
- Write down what you're saying; English classes for nonnative speakers often emphasize written English. Print your message in capital letters.
- Stay calm, and avoid sending nonverbal messages that you're frustrated.

If you're unsure about how well you're communicating, ask questions: *I don't know how to make this idea clear to you. How might I communicate better?, When you look away from me during our conversation, I feel uneasy. Is there something else we need to talk about?,* or *When you don't ask questions, I wonder whether I am being clear. Do you want any more explanation?* Questions such as these can get cultural differences out in the open in a constructive way.

Look for individuals, not group representatives. Sometimes, the way we speak glosses over differences among individuals and reinforces stereotypes. For example, a student worried about her grade in math expresses concern over "all those Asian students who are skewing the class curve." Or a white music major assumes that his black classmate knows a lot about jazz or hip-hop music. We can avoid such errors by seeing people as individuals—not spokespersons for an entire group.

Develop support systems. Many students find that their social adjustment affects their academic performance. Students with a strong support system—such as family, friends, members of the same church, members of a self-help group, and a mentor—are using a powerful strategy for success in school. As an exercise, list the support system that you rely on right now. Also list new support systems you could develop.

Support systems can help you bridge culture gaps. With a strong base of support in your own group, you can feel more confident in meeting people outside that group.

Be willing to accept feedback. Members of another culture might let you know that some of your words or actions had a meaning other than what you intended. For example, perhaps a comment that seems harmless to you is offensive to them. And they may tell you directly about it.

Avoid responding to such feedback with phrases such as *Don't get me wrong*, *You're taking this way too seriously*, or *You're too sensitive*. Instead, listen without resistance. Open yourself to what others have to say. Remember to distinguish between the intention of your behavior and its actual effect on other people. Then, take the feedback you receive and ask yourself how you can use it to communicate more effectively in the future.

You can also interpret such feedback positively—a sign that others believe you can change and that they see the possibility of a better relationship with you.

If you are new at responding to diversity, expect to make some mistakes along the way. As long as you approach people in a spirit of acceptance, your words and actions can always be changed.

In social situations, remember that indirect cues might not get another person's attention. Practice asking clearly and directly for what you want.

Speak up against discrimination. You might find yourself in the presence of someone who tells a racist joke, makes a homophobic comment, or utters an ethnic slur. When this happens, you have a right to state what you observe, share what you think, and communicate how you feel. Depending on the circumstance, you might say any of the following:

- "That's a stereotype, and we don't have to fall for it."
- "Other people are going to take offense at that. Let's tell jokes that don't put people down."
- "I realize that you don't mean to offend anybody, but I feel hurt and angry by what you just said."
- "I know that an African-American person told you that story, but I still think it's racist and creates an atmosphere that I don't want to be in."

Speaking up in this instance may be the most difficult type of communication you will ever do. However, if you don't do it, you give the impression that you agree with biased speech.

In response to your candid comments, many people will apologize and express their willingness to change. Even if they don't, you still know that you showed integrity by aligning your words with your values.

When it comes to helping minimize discrimination, you are in an environment where you can make a difference. Express your viewpoint. This is training for citizenship in a multicultural world.