

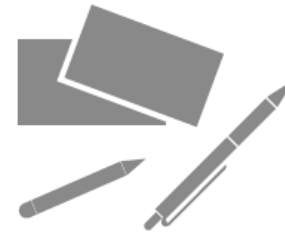
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SECTION 1:

LEARNING HOW TO LEARN



ARE YOU LEARNING, OR JUST STUDYING?

Typical studying strategies are useless if you don't know how to think and how to learn.

Schools spend a lot of time and energy teaching information to students, but often without instruction on *how* to learn the information.¹ That's like giving you an unassembled car with no instructions on how to build it. You can know the names of all the parts and understand what they all do. You can know all the ways the car will be useful when it is built. But without knowing how to put it all together, the parts are useless.

In my experience, teachers give students a lot of advice about how to study. You know what I'm talking about, right? They tell you about studying skills such as re-reading, highlighting things you read, making flashcards, memorizing, summarizing, and doing practice questions. However, if you want to maximize your learning and success, you need quality *thinking skills, learning skills, and psychological skills* far more than you need studying tips.

Have you ever studied for a test, passed it (or better), and then two weeks later, realized you have forgotten most of it? I certainly

had experiences like that when I was in school. That is a great example of how we can study but not learn very much. So, are you learning, or just studying?

In a perfect world, studying leads to learning. But as you can see, studying and learning are not necessarily the same thing. To learn, you must know *how to think*. Thinking skills are *not* the same as studying skills. Thinking skills will make your studying skills more effective.

Please consider this quotation: “Learning how to learn cannot be left to students. It must be taught.”² Most students think about learning information in school. If you are doing well in high school, or if you are attending college, you probably don’t think you need to learn how to learn. Some of you may be right.

Before you jump to that conclusion, consider this: A study in 1995 showed that 79 percent of students starting at a community college felt prepared for college-level work, but more than half left school with no degree two years later.³ Data from a 2011 study showed that only 20 percent of students who enrolled in a two-year public college had graduated three years later.⁴ Do you want to become part of these statistics? I’m confident your answer is, “No!”

Do not be discouraged by statistics like that. This book will help you develop thinking skills and psychological skills to succeed in high school, college, and your career. For example, having strong academic goals, motivation, confidence in your own abilities, and self-control will help you stay in school (i.e., persist) and graduate.^{5,6,7} Those aren’t studying skills. They are thinking and psychological skills that help you succeed.

I would be lying if I told you that hard work and good thinking skills will get all of you through to graduation and career success. There are many factors related to academic achievement. For example, many of my students have children and work part- or full-time. Others face significant hardships such as poverty and even homelessness.

Scholars and researchers have also looked at how intelligence is related to academic achievement (that is a huge topic and is not the focus of this book).⁸ Many students get worried when they see the word intelligence. Some worry that they aren’t smart enough to do well in school. If you are one of those students, there is a nice metaphor⁹ that might set your mind at ease. Each of us is like a rubber band when it comes to intelligence. We come in different sizes. There is nothing we can do to change the size of the rubber band we happen to be. However, we are all capable of stretching a lot. This book will help you develop the skills and strategies that will allow you to...

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Being “smart” is helpful, but hard work, practice, persistence, and developing specific skills really matter. For example, one study found that report card grades were predicted more by self-control and homework completion than by IQ scores.¹⁰ You need “skill, will, and self-regulation”¹¹ for learning and success. As for success in life, there is much research showing that emotional intelligence (i.e., recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions) can take you much further than IQ smarts.¹² You’ll read about that in the psychological skills section of this book.

So, what are your thoughts about being a successful student? Is academic success about intelligence? Studying hard? Getting good grades? Just passing? Memorizing stuff? Getting a degree? What exactly does a successful student look like? Would you know a successful student if you saw one? Is that student staring back at you in the mirror?

If you want the student in the mirror to be successful, keep reading and I will help you develop thinking skills, learning skills, and psychological skills that will help you *stretch!*