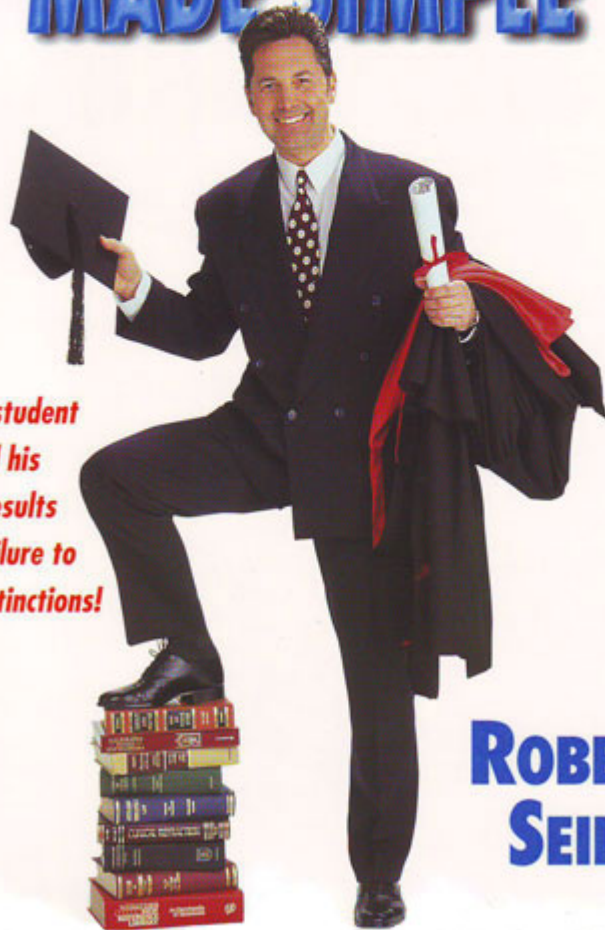


STUDYING FOR EXAMS MADE SIMPLE

*How a student
changed his
exam results
from failure to
high distinctions!*



**ROBERT
SEILER**

A Simple Six-Step Study System Designed By A Student

For Getting A's In Exams

INTRODUCTION

It is the essence of genius to make use of the simplest ideas.

Charles Peguy

One of the most important decisions you'll ever make in your life is the choice of a career. Your decision will affect the rest of your life in a very significant way. Making this choice, however, is only the first step. You then have to break through the numerous barriers that are in your way between you and your chosen future. These barriers are called **EXAMS**, and your likely success in reaching your career goals depends on how well you do in them.

In the education system of today, even doing well in exams is not a guarantee of entering your chosen profession. Education today is extremely competitive. Many students who qualify to attend universities are denied a place, and straight A's are almost a pre-requisite. In other words, you have to achieve outstanding exam results if you're going to have any hope of taking the first step towards your career.

The study system I developed, and which I call "***Studying For Exams Made Simple***", was designed for those students interested in being competitive and serious about achieving excellent exam results. It was also written for the rapidly increasing number of adults who by choice or necessity find that they've returned to the education system but have forgotten how to study for exams. Many corporations have also found that there's a need for continuing education of their employees who may suddenly be placed in a situation where they're once again being assessed by exams, and they've lost their study skills.

I've devised this system of study for all those students because not so long ago, I too, was a student and I've experienced both the disappointment of failure and the elation of achieving high distinctions in exams. I found out how to transform my results from one to the other in a very simple and logical way. I proved to myself that it works, and many students have also found that they've gone from being a below average student to an 'A' student once they've incorporated this system into their method of study.

I discovered that many students had absolutely no idea of how to study, many relying on old habits developed over the years, which weren't methodical or efficient. Some had no identifiable method at all! After reading all the 'How to Study' books that I could lay my hands on, I also realized that they didn't actually provide a **SYSTEM** of study, but were

mostly a collection of unrelated suggestions on how to improve your memory, along with a multitude of observations of what makes a good student. In the main, whilst the intent is honorable, these books fail to provide a **SYSTEM** of study incorporating these tips and observations, which can be followed step-by-step.

They're also usually written by teachers, academics or psychologists, who approach study from their point of view rather than from the student's perspective. Their many suggestions for better study techniques can often confuse rather than assist the student, a fact I realized after resorting to the many books available on this subject.

So, here is a system that in a simple, logical, and efficient way, will allow you to approach your study systematically, using methods of learning that are so natural and obvious that you'll probably say to yourself... *'I could've thought of that!'* I hope you do say that because it's usually a remark reserved for simple ideas that work. This system will show you how to utilize the various ways that we all learn naturally, compare these learning techniques with other pursuits such as your favourite sport, and provide you with a simple to follow method of incorporating them into a six step system which identifies and practices the many skills necessary to be able to study effectively.

It will allow you to go into the exams feeling confident and relaxed rather than fearful and anxious, emotions, which normally inhibit your performance in answering exam questions,

The last ingredient in the formula is of course **MOTIVATION**. This is something you must summon for yourself. No one can make you want something if you're not motivated to achieve it, and if you're not motivated then advice on how to study won't be effective. Exams are a barrier only if the education system is the direction you want to go, and what you want is on the other side.

I hope this system helps you to achieve your full potential and to find happiness in your chosen profession.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER OF THE SYSTEM

Not only must you know what you want, but you must really want what you want, if you are to get what you want.

My earliest memories of studying for exams go back to early high school when most of us start to take exams a little more seriously. I can't remember what study methods I had then but I do remember what my motivation was. My father used to say to me *"If you don't pass your exams then I'll put you to work in a factory"*. I guess you could say that one of the first things to motivate me was fear, and this seemed enough to keep me in the top classes through high school.

I remember in each year at high school that there were always a handful of students who seemed to do extremely well in their exams but didn't appear to do much study. They always seemed to have lots of time for sport and recreation and were at the beach during summer. They approached exams almost casually yet usually did very well. This puzzled me until much later in life when I realized it wasn't how hard you study but how smart you study. When I look back on my old study techniques, I wish I'd known this at the time!

Even though my study techniques were questionable, I did manage to get results good enough to gain entry into university, although, as I mentioned, fear and hard work was probably the main reason for my success. I'd just turned seventeen and was at an age where, like most students, I felt that I was now able to decide on my own future and wasn't going to be pressured or pushed into a career by my father. He wanted me to do dentistry, but although I didn't have a definite choice in mind, I wanted to make that choice my own. I wanted the motivation to be positive, not negative.

It's very difficult at seventeen to know that your choice of career is in fact your own. It may be strongly influenced by your parents' hopes and dreams, and perhaps their own unfulfilled ambitions. It may also be influenced by the choices made by your friends and peers. Some students make decisions based on income and prestige. I didn't have a strong focus, but at that age, not having had travel and work experience, I decided that the career I chose should be enjoyable and fulfilling.

For many years I'd watched a documentary series on TV made by a man named Jacques Cousteau. You may have heard of him, or his son who is still making programs about the sea. I'd always loved the sea and in fact to this day, I live on the seashore where I can go to sleep listening to the waves. I felt I should rely on my instincts and feelings, and after a lot of

thought, decided to become a marine biologist. This involved doing a Bachelor of Science for three years, with the prospect of further study in Queensland Australia, or the USA. I remember being very excited that I'd at last made a decision about my future, and that it was my own decision.

Unfortunately, fate had other ideas. One day while I was skin-diving on a shipwreck about 500 meters offshore, I found myself being stalked by a large shark who seemed very hungry because it kept circling me in smaller and smaller circles. While it was doing that, I was slowly swimming closer to shore until it was too shallow for the shark and it swam away. The whole episode felt like a dream but unfortunately it instilled in me a fear of being in water deeper than waist high! I guess I should have gone back into the ocean straight away, but I left it too long before I realized that it I wouldn't be a very good marine biologist if I couldn't go into the water past my waist!



I decided that I wasn't as motivated to become a marine biologist as I first thought.

Added to this close encounter, as part of the course, I found myself counting mosquito eggs in the local swamp and ended up scratching more than my head about whether I'd made the right career choice. So much for life as a marine biologist

Well, having lost direction, I decided that if I couldn't make up my own mind about what I wanted to be with any commitment, then I should at least listen to the voice of experience and do what my father had

suggested which was dentistry. I remember thinking that after nearly becoming dental plaque for a shark, it was probably a sign, although the thought of causing pain all day didn't appeal to me. I wasn't accepted for the course anyway and was told to apply again when I'd finished my Science degree.

As you can imagine, I'd lost motivation by this stage because there were no goals associated with completing my degree except getting into another one, a direction I wasn't keen to pursue anyway. I didn't have an effective study method to supplement my lack of motivation, and as a result I scraped through each year. Then in my final year I experienced the fear of all students - I failed one of my subjects! I knew I wouldn't get into dentistry now, not that I wanted to in my heart, and I had the choice of dropping out of university as a failure or at least completing what I'd started.

I chose the second option.

Another year went by and I completed my degree with average results and a failure recorded in my third year. One of my final year subjects was microbiology and I decided to at least try to make use of the four years I'd spent studying, although a career as a microbiologist wasn't what I had in mind. This was just as well because microbiology didn't have me in mind either and I wasn't successful getting employment in this profession.

I spent most of the year following my graduation working in retail positions, wine bars, and picking grapes. I'd reached the depths of depression knowing that my friends were pursuing careers as doctors, architects and lawyers, my parents were disappointed in me, and I'd wasted four years of my life. I felt like an absolute failure, reaching a point in my life where I felt completely lost and without direction. Even if I had direction, I didn't know how I would have the means to follow it. At that point in my life I felt that I'd truly reached a crossroad.

I was either destined to be what I considered a failure or I could pick myself up, dust myself off, and start again.

This is exactly what I did. Often out of the depths of depression, one obtains renewed motivation. I decided to be practical and choose a career with a reasonable guarantee of employment, and with a good income. I came up with the idea of becoming an optometrist after a chance meeting with an old school friend who was practicing as one. It certainly didn't appear to be as stressful as dentistry, and it was only a four-year university course, which was very appealing as I had only enough money to survive one year of university anyway!

I applied and was accepted, and as a bonus I was exempted from first year, as it was similar to the first year of my science degree. Here was my opportunity to have another try for success. I had to move to another state

and decided to live on the campus in order to reduce distractions. I knew that if I failed one year, it would all be over and I could go home in disgrace. So, I had motivation but very little money, and, I lacked an effective study method. These last two things could still cause me to fail.

Remembering students who were motivated but who studied hard instead of smart, I decided to examine my study methods. All that motivation would go to waste if it wasn't harnessed effectively. I decided to worry about my finances when I'd finished the first year.

The system of study I devised was the result of asking myself some basic, logical questions, and learning from my previous mistakes. It also involved researching the available information on how to study. I found very few suggestions, which were practical. In other words, it's one thing to make an observation and another to be able to put that observation into practice. I took what I could and integrated it into the framework of information, which eventually became my system of studying for exams, which I eventually called Studying For Exams Made Simple.

When I put this system into practice during my first year of my second degree, the results I obtained exceeded my wildest expectations. I achieved nearly straight distinctions (also called A's), 100% in three out of four psychology papers, and I was given a scholarship for three years of study from one the largest private optometry companies in Australia. My

financial worries were over because after having only just put my study system into practice, someone was going to pay me to finish my degree, and not only that, guarantee me a highly paid position when I graduated. All this because I'd spent some time seriously thinking about the most logical way to study and had stuck to the plan.

This was probably the most significant turning point in my life and I attribute all my current success to that period of time in my life.

Exams no longer appeared to be an obstacle causing fear and anxiety. They became more of a challenge, something I'd convinced myself that I was good at and with which I felt comfortable. One of my lecturers even remarked on one of my psychology papers: *"It is really gratifying to find out that at least one person can understand what they were asked to do - I was beginning to think that it was an impossible task"*.

A similar course of success continued through the remainder of the degree until in my final year, I received the greatest thrill of all, an academic prize for the best performance in one of my final year subjects. The feeling was unforgettable, made even more memorable when compared with the results of my first degree. I'd turned my academic results around, from failure and disgrace, to incredible success, just by using the system of study that I'm about to describe to you.

After working for the company, which provided me with a scholarship allowing me to complete my degree, I decided to travel the world. I spent a year and a half in Africa, practicing optometry in black townships. Following this I traveled through Europe and, for six months, lived and worked in Germany, the country of my ancestors. After returning to Australia for a brief period, I headed for Hong Kong and decided to establish an education consultancy, which would operate through Asia. I represented private colleges in Australia and toured through China and nearby countries, lecturing on the benefits of studying in Australia.

China was particularly exciting because giving a lecture there was like performing in a pop concert. I expected a handful of students to respond to the advertisement I'd placed in a newspaper in Guangzhou, informing them that I'd be lecturing on study in Australia, and was quite shocked when a large crowd turned up. They were so keen to hear about education in another country!

Through this extensive contact with students, I found myself discussing how I'd studied for my exams, and this inspired me to document the system. I was further inspired when I realized that many students could achieve so much more if they learnt to study systematically and logically. The motivation that many students have is wasted because it's applied to inefficient study techniques.

If you're motivated and you apply the system of studying for exams, which I'll describe to you, I see no reason why you can't experience the success that I managed to achieve. It's in your hands! So let's get on with describing the system so you can put it into practice straight away.

THE SYSTEM

When you hear something, you will forget it. When you see something you will remember it. But only when you do something, will you understand it.

Old Chinese proverb

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THIS SYSTEM?

When I started my second degree, I knew that unless I passed each year, I wouldn't have enough money to allow me to complete the course. I was working part-time during the year and also had a regular full-time job in the mid-year and end-of-year holidays, but because I was living away from home on the university campus, my expenses were only just covered by my income. As it was I only had enough money to get me through one year of university. I decided to worry about where the money would come from for the remaining two years of the course after I'd completed the first year.

I'd made up my mind to devote 100% effort to this second chance that I had for a future, and I'd addressed the barrier that my finances presented to achieving this future. There was only one barrier left - EXAMS! If I could

manage to break through that then I'd have what I was working so hard to achieve. I thought about my old study methods and how I'd read all the "How to Study" books. Since they hadn't helped me in my first degree, it was obvious that I'd need to come up with my own system of study, which worked. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result!

I needed something that would break down that barrier that exams represented. Exams were stopping me from becoming what I wanted to be.

I knew that motivation alone wouldn't be enough. It wasn't in the first degree so why would it be now? If two people are equally motivated to chop down a tree, surely the one with the sharp axe will do it more efficiently than the one with the blunt axe. I needed to study smart not hard. I'd observed students who studied incredibly hard, thinking that the time spent re-writing the text book would somehow give them a better exam result. Usually they achieved only average results in exams. On the other hand I'd seen students who studied very little yet achieved excellent exam results.

There had to be something more to studying for exams than blood, sweat and tears!

I decided to spend some time conscientiously planning how I'd study. I felt any plan would be better than no plan at all. As they say *"fail to plan and you plan to fail"*. I also believed that studying for exams should be simple and logical. It should rely on the ways that we learn instinctively, as we would outside the education system.

As children, we learn at an incredible rate. This learning occurs naturally without direction from adults, just as it would occur, say, if a child were left to grow up alone. The child wouldn't necessarily learn the things that our education system requires but it would no doubt learn and develop in other ways.

The first question I asked myself was:

"How do we learn naturally as children?"

If I could identify a number of ways that young children learn, i.e., go back to the simple basics, and then I could incorporate these learning methods into my new study system. I came up with five basic ways. They are:

ASKING QUESTIONS

MAKING MISTAKES

FEEDBACK

COPYING

REPETITION

After analyzing how children learn naturally, I decided to take this train of thought a little further and consider other circumstances where learning is involved. The most obvious situation where learning plays an important part is sport. This came to me while I was watching a boxing match on TV.

The second question I asked myself was:

"If exams were like sport, how would I train myself?"

If I studied for my exams in the same way a tennis player would train for Wimbledon, then I would become what I called a mental athlete!

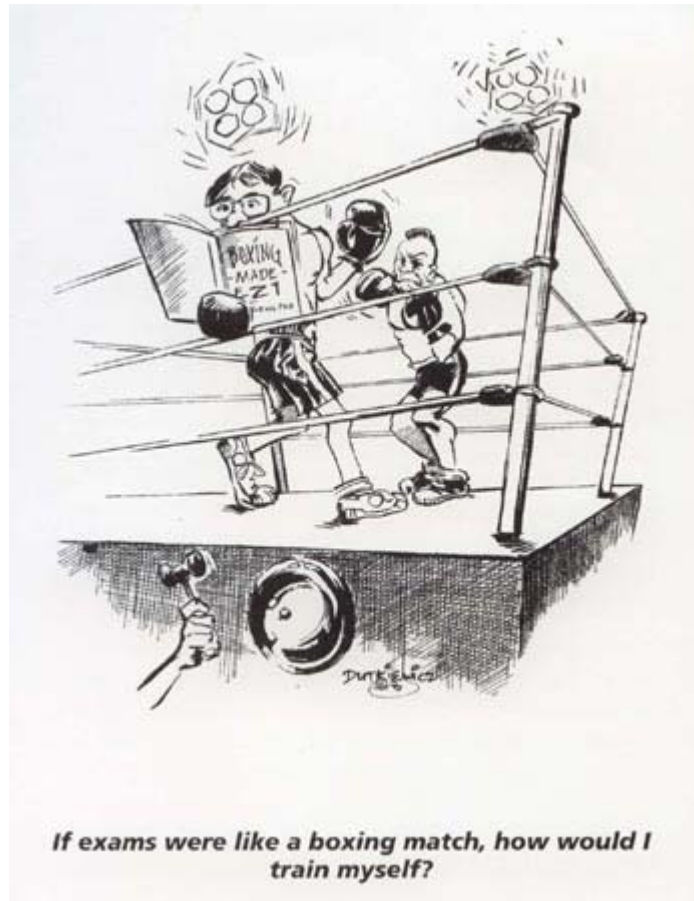
I decided that the answer to this second question was to train myself under the same conditions that I'd experience in the exam, i.e.:

TRAIN WITH EXAM QUESTIONS

PRACTICE ANSWERING THEM UNDER EXAM CONDITIONS

DEVELOP EXAM SKILLS

IMPROVE MY MENTAL FITNESS



The aim was then to combine the answers to the two simple questions I asked myself, into a system of studying for exams. I wanted to incorporate the five instinctive ways of learning into a system of studying or training for exams in the same way an athlete trains. To simplify the analogy, let's consider each of the different ways of learning for tennis and for exams as I've done in the following table:

	PHYSICAL (e.g. tennis)	MENTAL (e.g. exams)
QUESTIONS	stimulus / response	question / answer
MISTAKES	hitting a tennis ball out of the court	incorrect exam answers
FEEDBACK	the scoreboard or advice from your coach	exam results
COPYING	tennis skills e.g. volleying or serving	exam skills e.g. key words or proportioning time in exams etc
REPETITION	physical conditioning	mental conditioning

Let's now go through each of these different ways of learning in more detail.

1. ASKING QUESTIONS

How do you ask a question in a game of tennis? Obviously you hit the ball to your opponent and wait for an answer when the ball is returned. Hitting the ball is the stimulus and the return is the response. This in turn becomes the stimulus for your response. In other words, a game of tennis is really a few hours of questions and answers! A situation very similar to an exam wouldn't you say? Admittedly the answers are short but are usually multiple choice, and if the answer is wrong then you get marked down on the scoreboard.

What do we normally call the combination of a stimulus and a response? It's called a **reflex**, and reflexes have to be trained, and in sport also have to be automatic if they are to be of any use. If you touch something hot (a stimulus) and you pull your hand away (a response) too slowly, then the reflex is too slow to be of any benefit. You'll suffer a nasty burn, but perhaps the reflex will be better next time. It's been trained.

If in tennis you're served a stimulus and you're undecided about whether to answer it with a forehand or a backhand response, you'll probably lose the point. The reflex was too slow and you need to train more.

In exams, the same situation exists. The mental analogy is to consider the question as the stimulus and the answer as the response. I call this the **"question / answer reflex"**. If in the exam a question is asked and the answer or response is too slow because you're trying to search your knowledge for the appropriate information and then suitably organize it, you'll either produce the wrong answer or run out of time.

Doesn't it make more sense to have the "question / answer reflex" already trained so that you have an answer already prepared for every possible exam question? As soon as a question is fired at you, your mental reflexes are so well trained that your answer responds immediately. You hardly even have to think, just like in a game of tennis. All the thinking has already been done in your pre-exam training and your answer is virtually automatic!

As a result of this thinking, I decided that I should train myself for exams in the same way. If information is expected to **"come out"** in a question / answer format, then it should **"go in"** in much the same way. In other words, if I were being tested with questions and answers, then I should train for exams in the same way. There's no point in hitting a cricket ball against the wall to train for a tennis match, just as there's no point in highlighting and underlining notes to train for exams!

I modified my study method appropriately and as a result I changed into questions all the titles and headings in my notes and textbooks. These headings would now stimulate an active thinking response rather than only being observed passively as they'd always been in the past.

Isn't it interesting to observe that from an early age when we begin to communicate verbally, we ask questions. Young children are famous for it. All you often hear is "why", "how", "when", "where", etc. They're thirsty for information and asking questions is one of the most natural ways of acquiring knowledge. The "question / answer reflex" is established at an early age. Why then is it suppressed? How often have you heard mothers in supermarkets say *"stop asking so many questions"* to their young inquisitive children, or *"ask your father"*?

How many of us are embarrassed to stand up in class and ask a question in case we're made fun of? By the time we're young adults, thinking in terms of questions has been progressively conditioned out of us.

The teaching process, as it stands today, tends to take away our learning drive. Initially, as young children, we actively seek knowledge by asking questions. We've discussed how this appears to be innate or instinctive behavior. As we get older and become a part of the traditional education process, we change from active seekers of knowledge to passive containers being filled with information. Our minds, which instinctively began, thinking

for themselves by asking questions of everything, are suppressed by an overload of information.

If we no longer ask questions and just accept everything as fact, the thinking instinct is eventually diminished to such an extent that when we leave the academic arena, we don't know how to think creatively or actively any more. We've stopped asking questions. If we're told to do something in a particular way, we accept it instead of questioning it.

This study system will reinforce the instinct of thinking in terms of questions.

2. MAKING MISTAKES

The second way of learning naturally is by making mistakes. I'm sure we've all heard it said that we learn by making mistakes. Yet it's one thing to say and another to live by. How many times have you also heard "*don't make mistakes*"? Many times I'm sure.

In tennis, and any sport, mistakes and the resultant correction are called practice. You know immediately whether you've made a mistake in tennis when the ball goes out of court, and you try to correct that mistake the next time. This is called learning how to play tennis. In other words, learning is simply a process of making mistakes, finding out what you don't know, and correcting. By the time you get to Wimbledon you would have

made more mistakes than you care to remember, but you'll be a very good tennis player.

So, we agree that the process of learning involves making mistakes. In the sport of studying for exams, when do we get the opportunity to make mistakes? Yes! In the exam when it's too late. What's more, we're punished for those mistakes by having marks deducted. It's also arguable if we do in fact learn from mistakes made in the exam because we rarely have our exam papers returned so that we can see what mistakes were made!

This quote by Robert Kiyosaki, well known author, sums it up very nicely: *"Our education system teaches riding a bicycle by lecturing on the subject for fifty hours, giving a written test, and then punishing the student for falling off"*. In other words we aren't being given the opportunity to make mistakes, and learn from them.

I decided that my study system should allow me to make as many mistakes as necessary and not be punished. If we consider making mistakes as learning experiences, then I'd have a study system, which practices the art of learning from mistakes. Mistakes tell you that you don't know something that you need to find out.

Once again we have a system of learning, which extends even to the animal kingdom, which apart from not being encouraged, is punished and suppressed. The alternative to making mistakes is of course memorizing, which is boring, is not a measure of your competence, and doesn't result in knowledge. Memorizing also makes you feel stupid if you aren't very good at it, and ultimately makes you forget how to think!

3. FEEDBACK

Feedback is defined as the return of a portion of the output, of any process or system, to the input. In other words, it tells you how you're going and is extremely important in learning.

In a sport such as tennis for example, this return of output comes from a number of sources, some of which are: your tennis coach, the scoreboard, the spectators, and your own observations of how you're playing the game. In music, e.g. playing the piano, you get instant feedback when you hear a wrong note. The importance of feedback in learning is obvious if you try to learn the piano with earplugs in your ears!

In the sport of study, when do we get a chance to obtain feedback? Once again, in the exam when it's too late. I must admit that some feedback is given in tutorials and assignments, but this only goes to show how

important it is and that there should be more of it. We need feedback for a number of reasons:

- it gives us a way of measuring our progress
- it tells us whether we're studying enough
- it convinces us of what we know which gives us confidence that we're studying effectively
- it tells us what we don't know, thus identifying areas which need more time spent on them and those which have already been learned and don't need more time wasted on them
- it helps us improve
- it gives us encouragement, satisfaction and motivation by allowing us to see the results of our efforts



Feedback is extremely important when it comes to fear and anxiety, which occur often before and during exams. They usually arise from the unknown, in this case not knowing what's in the exam and also not knowing whether you have in fact learnt and remembered all the information necessary for the exam. Obviously it's impossible to know what questions will be in the exam, although you'll see with this system, even this type of unknown will be reduced.

As for not knowing whether you've actually learnt and understood all your study material, this method will continuously provide you with feedback on the effectiveness of your study. By reducing the unknown in this way, the fear and anxiety, which accompany exams, will be reduced, thus increasing confidence and performance.

There's nothing more reinforcing when you study than knowing that you've learnt all the material that you've spent so much time trying to absorb. Feedback has been described as the breakfast of champions. This study system will drown you in feedback.

4. COPYING

I regard copying as identifying skills and reproducing them. Even animals will imitate older animals or adults in order to learn skills of survival such as hunting for food and obtaining shelter. If these skills are not identified by the more experienced members of the species and reproduced by the young, then they won't survive. We've all heard of animals kept in captivity where they're deprived of learning survival skills. In most cases when such animals are returned to the wild, they have little chance of survival.

In the same way, to survive exams, you must be shown the skills necessary to do so and also be able to reproduce those skills when required. Consider the analogy of tennis once again. In this sport your

coach or instructor will show you how to play a certain shot and you must try to reproduce it using the skills that have been identified. Your likely success as a tennis player is dependent on the number of skills you have and your ability to reproduce them.

Your progress in tennis, or any other art, is measured by how well you've mastered the skills involved. These skills must first be identified. How can you master them if you don't even know what they are? My point is that in the sport of studying for exams, the skills required are very rarely identified, and even if they are, how many of them have been mastered? How many of you could immediately list more than a few skills that are required when studying for exams?

In this system of study, I'll show you twenty four skills that I feel are necessary for you to study for, and be successful in, exams. This system will also provide you with the means of mastering those skills, to allow you to become a mental athlete or a survivor in the exam jungle! Interested?

5. REPETITION

The final technique of learning is through repetition and it's really what we call practice or conditioning. It provides us with a way of mastering those skills which are necessary, and conditioning us to become either physically or mentally fit.

Would you expect to learn how to play tennis without practice? Would you expect to be a competitive gymnast without practice? Would you expect to be able to learn an instrument without practice? Then why do the majority of students expect to do well in exams without practice? Exams really test how well you've practiced doing exams!

Please be aware that there's a huge difference between studying for exams and doing exams. By doing exams or practicing exams you'll actually be studying for exams. However, by studying for exams, you won't necessarily be practicing exams.

The bottom line is - your knowledge will be assessed in the exam and although you may have the knowledge, if you aren't able to reproduce what is required of you in the exam, then the assessment will reflect your exam abilities and not your knowledge. Einstein was a good example of this as he was in fact considered a poor student because he couldn't express his knowledge in the required manner.

I know of no other way to be good at something other than **PRACTICE!**
PRACTICE! PRACTICE! Just make sure you're practicing the right things!

Practice in sport is also called physical conditioning, a process in which you:

- build up your physical strength

- develop your physical reflexes
- increase your cardiovascular fitness

All these factors will have a direct affect on your ability and success as a tennis player.

In the same way you must condition yourself mentally for the sport of exams. After the skills needed to study for exams have been identified, you must practice and develop them until they're mastered. This mental conditioning process will:

- build up your mental strength by reducing fear and anxiety and increasing confidence
- develop your mental reflexes i.e. the "question / answer" reflex
- increase your mental fitness hence improving your ability to perform in exams

The majority of "How to Study" books currently available, identify many skills involved but don't show you how to practice those skills. On the other hand, the system of study I've developed will provide you with a way to practice all those skills so that you can master them and become a mental athlete.

Now that I've explained the simple principles behind my system of studying for exams, are you ready to go through the six steps, which will allow you to put everything we've learned so far into practice? Let's start!

STEP 1: PREPARATION

Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.

Edmund Burke

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

The aim of this step is to prepare you for effective participation in the study system, by organizing the appropriate fundamentals or pre-requisites into a useful form. It's a little like preparing all the ingredients in a recipe into a form, which is easily digestible. In the same way, you have to prepare your study material in such a way that it's more easily mentally digestible or 'learnable'.

This involves giving all your study material structure to make it more easily learned and retrieved. The alternative is to have a salad bowl of endless, isolated and unrelated facts.

WHEN SHOULD YOU START YOUR PREPARATION?

This first step should be commenced at the beginning of the course by obtaining a copy of the syllabus if this is available. The syllabus is

important because it'll define what has to be covered in your study program. Your lecturers usually give an outline of their courses, sometimes with references.

You should also try to find out what form the examination will take, i.e. short answer, multiple choice, short, or long essay type answers. If there's assessment during the year, find out how much weight the exam carries. You should also try to obtain past exam papers for each subject as far back as possible. The reason for this will become more obvious later.

If you delay for too long in finding out what additional information (other than lecture notes) is required for you to cover each topic effectively, then a great deal of your later revision period will be involved in a last minute chase for books and references. You'll find that in the period leading up to the exams. When everyone else is in need of the necessary literature, it's much more difficult to get hold of that resource material.

Furthermore, the photocopy machine will probably be crowded, and the library full of students doing their last minute research. It'll be more difficult to borrow materials from your friends as the revision period approaches, because then they'll be harder to contact, and more reluctant to loan you anything in case it's not returned.

WHY ORGANISE A STRUCTURE?

The answer to this lies in how we remember. If information is stored away poorly or untidily, then it'll be retrieved, if at all, in much the same way. In other words, the form in which material is learned, determines to a large extent, the form in which it'll be recalled. Recall is much better when materials are committed to memory in an orderly and structured fashion.

If you've filed away your facts carelessly, you may not be able to retrieve them when and how you want them.

An example of this occurs when, after an examination, some students realize that they knew the answer to a question but didn't connect with their store of information because it was disorganized. As a result, their answer was wrong, disorganized, or no answer was given at all. It usually means that they've failed to organize their learning material, have tried to memories isolated facts, failed to think, or failed to achieve the right grasp of information at the outset.

SKILL #1:

**THE ABILITY TO CONNECT WITH YOUR STORE OF
INFORMATION AS REQUIRED BY THE EXAM QUESTION.**

It's obviously easier to remember general rules and principles, which link facts together rather than isolated facts. Therefore, when approaching the topic you're about to study, after taking an overall view of it, divide it up into sections or parts with appropriate headings.

Create a framework that can easily be remembered. This refers mainly to your lecture notes, which should be written out again as soon as possible after the lecture, in this way.

Material is not easily learned unless it has structure and sequence, and, because we can absorb and retain only a few groups at a time, it helps to group together facts and procedures into meaningful units, each group containing a further complex of information.

SKILL #2:

**THE ABILITY TO ORGANISE A STRUCTURE FOR YOUR
STUDY MATERIAL, THUS GIVING IT A USEFUL FORM
WHICH CAN EASILY BE LEARNED.**

At this stage you should be making questions out of all your headings for the reasons discussed earlier, i.e. to begin your training of the "question / answer reflex".

SKILL #3:

THE ABILITY TO THINK IN TERMS OF QUESTIONS, AND ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS, RATHER THAN GENERAL THEMES, VAGUE TITLES OR ISOLATED FACTS.

WHAT IF A STRUCTURE IS NOT OBVIOUS?

The most obvious structure or framework to use is that supplied by the lecturer in lecture notes. If the structure is not already inherent in the material or pointed out by the lecturer, then you must develop your own. The point is that you must decide on the appropriate structure when re-writing out your lecture notes, either the structure supplied by the lecturer or from the prescribed textbook.

Most textbook writers break down their treatment of chapters into main headings and sub-headings that follow a sequential pattern. Your thought processes work in much the same way. If your lecture notes follow a given

textbook closely, then your work will be less in terms of organizing your study material.

If, however, the framework of the textbook is different from that being used by the lecturer, then confusion can occur. But take heart, the fundamentals of most academic subjects are now well established and set out in standard textbooks.

Initially, to decide on a basic framework, it's probably best to restrict your reliance to a single primary source. If possible, use the framework supplied by your lecturer. This is because, in the early stages of learning, even minor differences in presentation can be confusing, and organization in memory is best achieved by relying on a single primary source for your basic framework.

If two or more textbooks are referred to, and even additional sources of information such as journals and reference books, then even greater confusion can arise when deciding which treatment to use. You will, however, have an opportunity to compare points of view. Once again, if in doubt, it's usually best to keep to the framework of your lecture notes.



WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER THE FRAMEWORK HAS BEEN DEVELOPED?

Once the basic framework has been decided, filling in the rest of the body of information is best done by using multiple sources. The significance of facts is better grasped when they're presented in new contexts, with new examples and applications. In most subjects there's room for different approaches, assumptions and points of view. Once a subject is understood and anchored to a framework of knowledge, extensive reading should

enlighten, rather than confuse, and should broaden that knowledge of the subject.

All your study material is now organized into a form, which is suitable for digestion (as food must be prepared for eating). The actual digestive process refers to the method of remembering this now easily digestible information.

SKILL #4:

**THE ABILITY TO THINK IN AN ORGANISED WAY ABOUT
THE TOPIC, ONE OF THE FIRST STEPS IN LEARNING.**

SUMMARY

- Start at the beginning of the course by getting a copy of the syllabus.
- Find out as early as possible what form the exam will take and how much weight it carries.
- Find out what additional information is required as early as possible, and make a record of it for future reference.
- Recall of information is much better when it's committed to memory in an orderly and structured fashion.

- Re-write your lecture notes as soon as possible after the lecture by dividing them into sections or parts with headings and sub-headings to form an organized structure or framework.
- If a framework isn't obvious in the lecture notes, make up your own or use the textbook.
- If the structure of the lecture notes conflicts with that of the textbook, it's best to rely on a single primary source, most often that of the lecture.
- Once a basic framework has been established, multiple sources will further broaden knowledge of the subject.

STEP 2: MODEL QUESTIONS

If life seems to have more questions than answers, try to be the one who asks the questions.

Peanuts

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

The aim of this step is to produce a list of model questions, which you either must think of yourself, or obtain from past exam papers or from any other sources available such as tutorials or textbooks, which are relevant to the topic being studied. Questions have probably even suggested themselves during lectures and possibly even whilst you were carrying out step number one (preparation).

The goal is to end up with a list of questions, the answers to which cover all the material, which is required to be studied, and which may be included in the exam. As a result of this step you'll find that there's only a limited number of questions, which can be asked about a particular topic before they become repetitive.



As mentioned, model questions may even present themselves in lectures as a result of suggestion by the lecturer or because you've been actively participating in the lecture by trying to think of them yourself by maintaining a questioning state of mind during this period. See how many model questions you can write down by the end of the lecture and keep these to add to your collection.

SKILL #5:

THE ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE LECTURE.

WHAT TYPE OF QUESTIONS SHOULD YOU ASK YOURSELF?

The model questions you come up with should have as close as possible the following characteristics:

- They should be as similar as possible to the usual format of questions asked in the exam for the subject.
- If possible, they should be in essay form of a length that would require 45 minutes to answer comprehensively in a concise and organized manner. Each question should be long enough for you to include relevant information, to describe chains of events or ideas, and to express your arguments properly. It should not be so long that you're writing a mini textbook.

Above all, it shouldn't be so long that you couldn't conceivably adapt the answer for use under exam conditions. You have to judge what material to put in and leave out. Facing up to this difficulty gives you practice knowing where to start and what to include and leave out in the exam itself.

SKILL #6:

THE ABILITY TO KNOW WHERE TO START, WHAT TO INCLUDE, AND WHAT TO LEAVE OUT IN AN EXAM ANSWER.

- These questions should cover all of your study material, not as individual questions, but the list as a whole. It's not important if the required answers overlap. In fact, this will serve to reinforce what is being learned. You'll find that there are only a limited number of questions, which can be formulated without becoming too repetitive.

If you've made sure that all areas of the topic are encompassed by your model questions, and that no section of the topic has been left out, you'll find that it's extremely difficult for a question to be asked in the exam which isn't on your list in some form or another.

This would be similar to having a list of possible exam questions, knowing that the questions in the exam would come from that list.

In tennis it would be like knowing what your opponent's game plan is and being prepared for it. In fact this happens in professional tennis

where videos of the opponent are studied prior to a game in order to assess the method of play usually adopted.

SKILL #7:

**THE ABILITY TO MAINTAIN A QUESTIONING STATE OF MIND
WHILE COVERING ALL OF YOUR STUDY MATERIAL.**

- Your questions should approach the topic from as many different perspectives as possible. If a particular part of the topic lends itself to comparison with another, or can be evaluated as to its validity, then phrase the model question in this way.

SKILL #8:

**THE ABILITY TO APPROACH YOUR STUDY MATERIAL FROM
MANY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.**

HOW SHOULD THESE QUESTIONS BE WORDED?

You'll notice from past exam papers that there are certain 'key' words in each question. These key words are extremely important because they'll enable you to open the correct door to all the information required by the question.

I've listed some of the most commonly used key words and defined them for you, and it's important that you're not only familiar with as many of these as possible, but also that you know their precise meaning. If you don't, you may find that during the exam, you're not answering the question appropriately. The ability to understand and decipher these key words in questions is another skill, which must be learned if you're to become a mental athlete in exams.

The following are some commonly used key words. You may be able to find even more!

COMPARE: to examine in order to note the differences and similarities

CONTRAST: to set in opposition and show differences when compared

CRITICISE: to judge the merits and faults; analyze and evaluate; to find faults

DEFINE: to state the precise meaning; to describe the basic qualities

DESCRIBE: to tell about in detail; picture verbally

DISCUSS: to investigate by argument giving reasons for and against

EVALUATE: to ascertain or judge the value or worth of something

EXPLAIN: to make plain or comprehensible; to offer reasons for; account for

ILLUSTRATE: to clarify by use of example or comparison; to provide a text with explanatory or decorative pictures, photos or diagrams

INTERPRET: to clarify or elucidate; to expound the significance of; to translate; to offer an explanation; your own judgment may be required

JUSTIFY: to show adequate grounds for decisions; to demonstrate to be just, right or valid; to show to be well founded

OUTLINE: to give a general description, plan or summary; to give the main points of; to summarize

RELATE: to show how things are connected to each other, and to show to what extent they are alike or affect each other

REVIEW: to write or give a critical report on; to examine with an eye to criticism or correction

STATE: to present in brief, clear form

SUMMARISE: to present in condensed form; concise

TRACE: to ascertain the successive stages in the development of; to locate or discover as a cause

The importance of these key words (and their precise meanings) can't be over-emphasized. They should be used in your model questions so that you have practice in using them. Deciphering these key words is another of the skills which you'll develop using this system.

SKILL #9:

THE ABILITY TO RECOGNISE AND UNDERSTAND KEY WORDS

IN QUESTIONS SO THAT YOU'RE ABLE TO ANSWER

QUESTIONS APPROPRIATELY.

WHEN SHOULD YOU START FORMULATING YOUR LIST OF MODEL QUESTIONS?

You should start creating your own list of model questions as soon as possible after the topic has been covered in the lecture, while the material is still fresh in your mind. I used to start doing this even during the lecture itself. Every time I thought of a question during lectures, I'd write it on a separate page to add to my collection. I'd try to see how many questions I could collect before the end of the lecture.

This makes your participation in the lecture much more active, and it can be quite a challenge. Your interest in the lecture will be maintained a lot longer.

You'll probably find that the lecturer will even suggest questions, and there's a good chance that these may even be hints of a favourite question to be included in the exam. Also, be aware of questions that are asked by other students because if they're having difficulty with a particular part of the subject then there's a chance that you may have trouble with it as well!

Taking the step of writing down a list of model questions as early as possible will stop the usual steep decline in retention which usually occurs after you first encounter the material. When it's fresh in your mind, you should be able to understand it with much less effort than if you leave it

until it's half forgotten. Also, if you understand the material thoroughly already, then revision just before the exams serves to revive and strengthen these memories when they're needed.

So, begin your list as soon as possible. In fact you can add to the list at any time during the year as questions suggest themselves. Drown yourself in them!

SUMMARY

- The aim of this step is to create a list of model questions.
- Model questions should:
 1. be similar in format to exam
 2. unless otherwise indicated, require an answer of approximately forty-five minutes duration.
 3. cover all your study material
 4. approach the topic from various perspectives
- You should ask yourself questions because:
 1. it forces you to think actively
 2. it helps you to think in the same way as the examiner
 3. it teaches you very important skills relevant to the exam situation

4. it's more helpful to write in response to a question rather than a title

- Most questions have a key word, which dictates the way in which the question is answered. You should use and understand as many key words as possible when formulating your model questions.
- You should begin formulating your own model questions as soon as possible, even as early as during the lecture itself.

STEP 3: MODEL ANSWERS

He must be ignorant for he answers every question he is asked.

Voltaire

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

The third step of the system is called "***model answers***", and its aim is to produce answers to model questions, which are concise, organized, thorough and comprehensive, and in fact answer the question appropriately. You should begin by writing, at the top of a page, a model question from your list.

WHAT SOURCES SHOULD YOU USE?

Because this model answer forms the basis of how you'd answer the question in the exam, it must cover all the information from which you're expected to have knowledge. Make mistakes answering the model questions at this stage, and that same mistake will be carried into the exam. Therefore, you should use all the sources of information, which have relevance to the topic concerned.

This would include:

LECTURE NOTES

TEXTBOOKS

REFERENCES

JOURNALS

TUTORIALS

PROJECTS

ASSIGNMENTS

An answer to a question in the exam, which shows that you've included information from many different sources, will show the examiner that you've read extensively on the subject. This will look extremely impressive when all the other students have given at most a textbook answer.

SKILL #10:

**THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE AN ANSWER IN THE EXAM
WHICH SHOWS THAT YOU'VE READ EXTENSIVELY.**

Your model answers should be produced using all the sources of information, which have relevance to the topic concerned.

HOW SHOULD THE MODEL ANSWER BE WRITTEN?

Your answer in the exam will only be as good as what you've prepared. It'll reflect your understanding, memory and organization of information covered in the topic. There are three main steps in producing your model answers.

The first step in writing your answer is to **analyze the question**. This will give you invaluable practice in quickly dissecting exam questions so that they can be understood and answered appropriately. It'll also help you decide on the appropriate framework for the answer. To analyze the question, you must identify and interpret the key instruction words in the model question. These have already been mentioned and defined earlier.

Sometimes it helps to rewrite the question in your own words if it happens to be one from a past exam paper. It's not a bad idea to do this in the exam itself if it helps you to analyze the question. You may also need to use your dictionary to find out the exact meaning of other important words in the question.

SKILL #11:
THE ABILITY TO QUICKLY DISSECT AN EXAM QUESTION
AND ANALYSE WHAT'S REQUIRED IN THE ANSWER.

After you've worked out what you should be writing about, and how you should be answering the question, the second step in producing your model answers is to **organize and define the answer** by writing down an overall plan of major headings and groups of ideas, and try to put them in a logical sequence.

Refine this plan by checking that you have a logically structured flowing answer. Getting the plan right is very important because if you don't, the whole exercise is a waste of time.

SKILL #12:
THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE AN ORGANISED ANSWER TO A
QUESTION BECAUSE YOU'VE BEEN LEARNING
INFORMATION IN THE SAME WAY - INFORMATION IS
RETRIEVED IN THE SAME WAY IT'S STORED.

Using this plan or framework, you can then proceed to the third step, namely, to **fill in the body of the answer**. Obviously, to produce a model answer, which has interpreted your model question correctly, you'll need to understand the information you're using from various sources. If there's something you don't understand, make sure at this stage that you clarify it, by seeking advice from lecturers, tutors, or fellow students.

It's sure to panic you if you leave this until just prior to the exam!

HOW LONG SHOULD THE MODEL ANSWER BE?

As already mentioned, you should try to keep your model answers to an approximate 45-minute time limit, similar to that which you'd experience in an exam. This format covers most of the possible types of answers usually required, namely, essay, short answer, and single sentence answer or multiple choice.

You could conceivably produce a list of model questions and answers, which require a shorter format response, but I've found that the 45-minute answers require you to have a better understanding of how information is related, and how to structure an answer more comprehensively, should the longer answer be required.

This develops another important skill useful in mastering exam questions, i.e. it'll help you learn how much you can write within a given period, giving you practice in proportioning your available time in the exam.

SKILL #13:

**THE ABILITY TO PROPORTION YOUR TIME IN THE EXAM
FOR EACH QUESTION BY LEARNING HOW MUCH YOU
CAN WRITE WITHIN A GIVEN PERIOD.**

WHY IS ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS SO IMPORTANT?

This is active as opposed to passive study.

Passive study involves reading and memorizing information without questioning the relevance or assumptions. It's usually difficult, inefficient, and time consuming. Active study, on the other hand, requires you to think about a subject as a whole, i.e. to reason, examine and question.

Because actively answered questions require you to think about a subject as part of a whole, and not in isolation, you're able to see facts in context and not in isolation. This forces you to understand the subject better.

Active study, by producing model questions and answers, forces you to think in an organized way about the topic.

It's this organization process, which is the key to retaining all the knowledge, that you're expected to have.

SKILL #14:

THE ABILITY TO STUDY ACTIVELY

This method is much more efficient than cramming or memorizing.

Writing and sorting out your own ideas by producing model answers, is much more efficient than passive study methods. It may sound like a lot more work when it's described in a step-by-step system, but on the other hand, you'll probably find that you spend most of your study time daydreaming when you study passively.

Asking and answering questions helps you think in the same way as the examiner.

In other words, you'll begin to understand how questions are put together to make you think. The examiner is your opponent and, just as in tennis,

knowing how your opponent thinks puts you on the winning side. That's why professional sports people watch videos of their prospective opponents before they compete, e.g. in tennis and boxing.

SKILL #15:

THE ABILITY TO THINK HOW THE EXAMINER THINKS, WHAT HE OR SHE IS EXPECTING IN AN ANSWER, AND HOW QUESTIONS ARE PUT TOGETHER TO MAKE YOU THINK.

Asking and answering questions teaches important skills relevant to the exam situation.

Because answering exam questions is an art, there are skills involved. By conditioning yourself to answering questions in the exam format, you're actually learning and developing skills, which will be extremely useful in the actual exam. These skills will need to be mastered before you become an expert in the sport of exams.

Asking and answering questions gives you practice in maintaining a relevant response.

It's more helpful in your study to write in response to a question rather than a title. By providing answers to questions, you'll gain practice in maintaining a relevant response, rather than writing around a general theme or vague title.

Asking and answering questions is a natural way to learn.

By asking and answering questions, we're reinforcing the "question / answer reflex" which will promote an automatic response to questions when they're asked in the exam. When a question is asked in the exam on a familiar subject, our knowledge is already prepared to respond with the appropriate answer.

In the same way that we ask a question as a child so that when that situation arises once again we'll already have the answer, so we have to prepare ourselves for what would otherwise be unfamiliar questions in the exam, by encountering them as much as possible before the exam.

WHAT DOES THE EXAMINER LOOK FOR IN AN ANSWER?

The ultimate purpose of studying for exams is to satisfy the examiner. Therefore it helps to keep in mind what the examiner is looking for, or

expects of your answers. You shouldn't, unless pressed for time, supply only the basics of an answer. Give as much as you can, keeping in mind that your answer must be relevant to the question and not padded.

Expanding on the first point, don't get sidetracked and lose focus from what's required, because this is an immediate signal to the examiner that you're having trouble handling the question. If the question requires a contrast or argument, or your point of view, try to produce a balanced answer and not just your own view.

The examiner will look for signs of extensive reading so, if possible, draw on as many sources as you can to give an answer with a broad perspective. This is something you've been doing in preparing your model answers. If the examiner finds difficulty in reading your answer or following your train of thought, you may be marked down accordingly. Be legible and work out an overall approach to your answer before you start writing.

Avoid making vague, general comments without confirming their validity.

SUMMARY

- The aim of this step is to produce concise, thorough, organized, and comprehensive answers to your model questions.

- You should use all sources of information to produce your answers, which are relevant to the model question.
- Each question should be analyzed by identifying the key instruction words.
- You should, having completed this stage, at least understand all the information you're expected to know.
- Your model answers should be similar in length to those from past exam papers, usually around 45 minutes duration.
- This is an active study system, forcing you to think in an organized manner about a topic, and to understand a subject in context.
- This system allows you to think in the same way as the examiner, teaches important exam skills, and gives you practice in maintaining a relevant response.

STEP 4: TRIAL RUN

When I was young, I observed that nine out of ten things I did were failures, so I did ten times more work.

Bernard Shaw

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

So far, the system has covered the *"question / answer reflex"* or the *"asking questions"* part of the learning techniques discussed earlier. To some extent we've also covered *"identifying skills"* or *"copying"*. The remainder of the system concerns itself with *"making mistakes"*, *"feedback"*, *"repetition"*, and more *"copying"* of skills.

The aim of this particular step is to test yourself in order to identify what you know already, and what still needs to be learned and thus requires further attention - in other words, **FEEDBACK**. By making mistakes you'll also be having learning experiences. Further studying and exam skills will also be identified and practiced.

This is not a mock exam and you shouldn't worry about a time limit, however, you shouldn't refer to your model answers until you've finished.

It's not a practice exam! The important part of this step is the enormous feedback and opportunity to make mistakes that it gives you, hence amplifying the learning experience. It's only when you find out something that you don't know, that you gain knowledge. Otherwise you're just standing still.

Feedback tells you what you don't know!

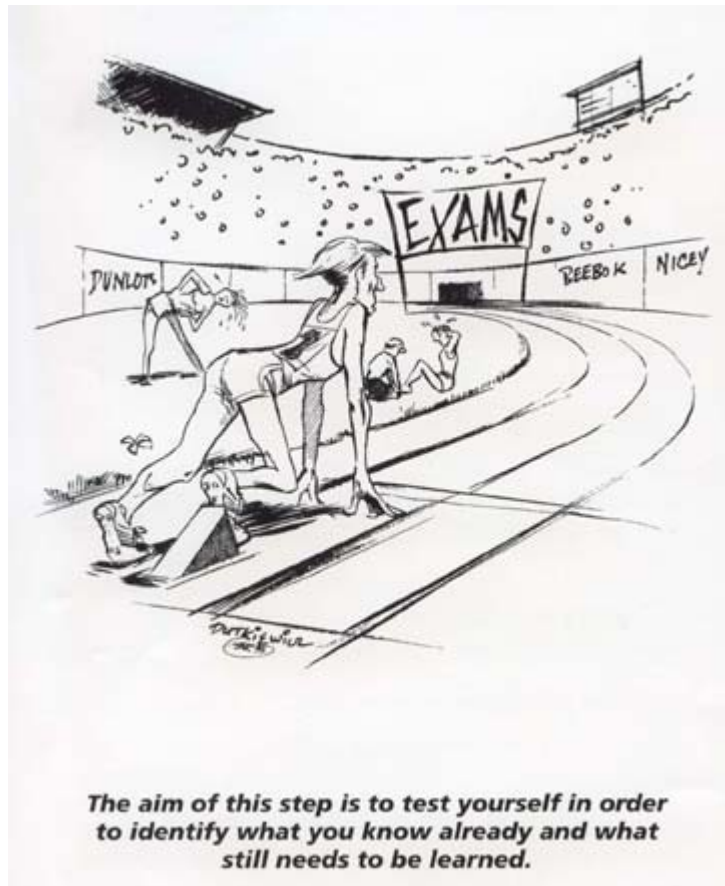
SKILL #16:

THE ABILITY TO LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES.

I know of no other way of generating your own feedback than with this system of study. Once you're convinced that you know everything you're expected to know for the exam, and that a question can't be asked in the exam that you haven't already asked yourself, you'll be bursting with confidence.

SKILL #17:

**THE ABILITY TO IMPROVE YOUR CONFIDENCE BY CONVINCING
YOURSELF VIA FEEDBACK THAT YOU KNOW ENOUGH
FOR THE EXAM.**



HOW DO YOU PERFORM A TRIAL RUN?

Choose a particular model question for which you've already prepared a model answer. To begin this step, you don't have to wait until you know the answer perfectly. The purpose is to identify areas which you don't know and which require further learning, and to give you an idea of how much you know already. Some students waste time going over and over information, which they already know.

You may get a welcome surprise when you realize that you've already understood and retained a great deal of information from the first three steps.

In your trial run, it's advisable to approach the question in the same way that you prepared your model answers, i.e.:

Interpret the question.

Interpret exactly what the question is asking. This involves once again, identifying key words and breaking down the question until it's fully comprehended. During the course of any part of your answer, if you're reminded of something, which is relevant, jot it down on a piece of paper so that you can use it where necessary. If you don't write it down, there's a good chance you'll forget it later.

Organize and define your answer.

Don't rush in and start writing the first thing that comes into your head. If you do this then a lot of the early part of your answer is taken up with valuable time trying to get orientated. To avoid this in your trial run and in future practice answers (and of course in the exam itself), put down on paper a broad structure, which will define your answer appropriate to the question.

Practice in doing this will help you to become an expert at adapting your knowledge to answer any variety of questions appropriately.

This planning and organizational period prior to writing your answer, gives an answer, which demonstrates evidence of well-organized thought. This is particularly important in the exam, as this is a big part of what the examiner is looking for. It also helps to avoid irrelevant material in your answer.

To develop a structure for your answer, recall how you've organized your material in the preparation step and also in your model answer. If you've organized this correctly, you'll be aware of major headings and sub-headings, which will assist you.

Fill in the body of the answer.

Do this once you've completed your skeleton answer. You should use your own words and not try to remember the same words used in your model answer. The important thing is to convey the same meaning and your understanding of the topic and question.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED THE TRIAL RUN?

When you've finished your trial run, refer to your model answer and write down in red all the areas that you've missed or answered incorrectly. This is your feedback and the mistakes are your learning experiences. You should then make sure that you understand why you've made mistakes and why certain information wasn't in your framework of knowledge and left out of your answer.

This is your chance to make sure that you know and understand everything on the topic and that it's organized logically within your total comprehension of the subject.

The next time you come across the same or similar questions, you'll remember the mistakes you made and the parts you left out, and as a result, your future answer will be so much better. When you eventually confront this material in the exam, you won't have to make the same mistakes that you made in your trial run and future steps of this system.

That's provided you've learnt from your mistakes. Those who forget their mistakes are doomed to repeat them!

SUMMARY

- The aim of this step is to identify, via feedback, what you know and what you don't know, in order to give you confidence.
- The aim is also to create a way for you to make mistakes in your own time without being penalized, and, having made those mistakes before the exam, benefiting from the enormous learning experiences they offer. Prior to this system, we all tried to avoid mistakes but this system encourages you to make as many as are necessary for you to learn.
- The three stages of this step are:
 1. Interpret the question
 2. Organize and define the answer
 3. Fill in the body of the answer
- Highlighting certain information by omission or error will help to impress it in your memory.

STEP 5: MOCK EXAM

Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety nine percent perspiration.

Thomas A. Edison

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

The aim of this step is to really test your knowledge by imposing exam conditions upon yourself, as close as possible to "the real thing". It's the conditioning aspect of learning. It's the practice aspect of sport in order to prepare yourself for the goal you're trying to achieve.

For example, to prepare yourself for Wimbledon if you're serious about tennis, you'd have to condition yourself to large audiences, the media, and two weeks of continuous tennis, circumstances that you may not encounter during the normal course of playing tennis. Many professional players enter other tournaments in the lead up to Wimbledon for this very reason.

You could conceivably be the best tennis player in the world and still get eliminated in the first round if you're not conditioned to all these other factors. In the same way, you must condition yourself to all the skills required, and situations present, in the exam. Things such as writing

continuously for three hours, maintaining concentration for the whole exam, and feeling confident under pressure, and many more.

You may know everything about your subject but still fail the exam because you find it difficult to perform under time restrictions. The purpose of this step is to make sure that doesn't happen due to any factors other than not having learnt all your study material.



HOW DO YOU PERFORM A MOCK EXAM?

Lock yourself in your room for three hours, put a "do not disturb" sign on the door, and tell all members of your family or roommates not to interrupt you. Set yourself four, forty-five minute questions or six, thirty-minute questions etc from your list of model questions that you've been collecting. Set your alarm clock for three hours, and try to answer your model questions within the time set. Stop writing as soon as the alarm goes off.

SKILL #18:

THE ABILITY TO WRITE CONTINUOUSLY AND MAINTAIN CONCENTRATION FOR THREE HOURS.

Begin your answers in the same way as you began your trial answers, i.e. interpret, organize, and fill in the body of the answer. Try to use all of the skills we've discussed so far. When you're finished, mark your mock exams in red ink to make a feature of your mistakes, and then correct them using your model answers as a guide.

This is an important part of learning, which we normally experience in the real exam situation, i.e. to be able to see what mistakes we made. In this

step we have the same opportunity but we can correct them and learn from them before we lose marks. Once again we're utilizing basic learning principles such as, learning from mistakes, obtaining feedback, practicing skills, and asking questions, all in the one-step.

SKILL #19:
THE ABILITY TO INTERPRET, ORGANISE YOUR
KNOWLEDGE, AND ANSWER A QUESTION
WITHIN, SAY, FORTY FIVE MINUTES.

WHY IS THIS STEP IMPORTANT?

One of the most important advantages of studying according to this system is that it results in a dramatic reduction of fear and anxiety, which most students experience before and during exams.

The enormous amount of feedback, which you're able to generate for yourself, gives you extreme confidence in your ability to handle any exam. Fear in exams is usually due to various unknowns such as, not knowing what will be in the exams, and not knowing if you can answer all the

questions. Removing these unknowns is the key to confidence, and that's exactly what this system achieves.

By knowing that the exam questions will come from your list of model questions in some form or another, and knowing that you can answer them because you've done your own mock exams to prove it, you can't help but feel confident.

Try it ... it works!

HOW MANY TIMES DO YOU PERFORM THIS STEP?

Obviously, the more you practice something the better you become. Just ask any athlete. Therefore, you should do mock exams as often as possible and become an expert test-taker.

Whenever you've collected enough model questions to put together a three-hour exam, perform this step. Set aside three hours on the weekend and give yourself a mock exam. Get into the habit of doing this every weekend. If you're really serious about your study, do one subject on Saturday and another on Sunday. It may be another couple of weeks before you have enough model questions to be able to put together another three-hour exam for a particular subject.

You must make sure, of course, that you do enough mock exams to cover all of your model questions at least once. Keep your mock exams after you've marked them for yourself in red ink, so that when you go over them later, perhaps during revision, you'll be reminded of your past mistakes (learning experiences).

Remember that forgetting your mistakes will increase your chances of repeating them! The more mistakes you make at this stage when you're not being assessed, the more you'll learn without risking marks.

By identifying difficult to remember areas, you can concentrate valuable time familiarizing yourself with them rather than going over the whole topic again. In this way, your study becomes more time efficient because you're not wasting time on information you already know and remember.

As mentioned, the more you test yourself in this way, the further you'll boost your confidence and the further you'll reduce your fear and anxiety about the exam. This is because you know you can perform under exam conditions, having proven it to yourself over and over. You've also proven to yourself that you have the knowledge.

If you feel that you can answer your mock exams verbally rather than writing everything, then you can save yourself a lot of time by doing so and cover even more of your study material in this format.

Eventually, you'll reach a stage where, having performed this step a number of times, and demonstrating to yourself an ability to answer all your model questions within a set time, you'll be bursting with confidence.

SKILL #20:

**THE ABILITY TO REDUCE FEAR AND ANXIETY DURING
EXAMS BY CONDITIONING YOURSELF TO THE EXAM
SITUATION AND CONVINCING YOURSELF THAT YOU HAVE
A SUFFICIENT LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE TO GET STRAIGHT A's.**

In order to keep yourself organized, use a large folder divided into sections for your model questions and answers, and also your trial run and mock exam answers. You should refer to them occasionally to confirm to yourself that you still know everything and to revisit your past mistakes.

Finally, you may say that studying in this way, i.e. actively, will take a lot of time. Remember though, you can't become the world's number one tennis player if you practice only when you feel like it and don't put in the effort. More importantly, however, is the time you waste if you don't study to a plan.

I can remember in my first degree, sitting in the library for hours trying to study passively with no definable or written study system. I used to wake up sometimes, having fallen asleep in the library not knowing where or how to start. I wasted so much time with very little reward.

When I did my second degree and worked out an active study system that suited me, I could set aside a few hours and put in some quality study time, actually learn and digest something, and then go out and play some sport.

The point is that you have to be organized and stick to an effective study plan. You can't build a house, sail around the world, paint a picture or become an Olympic athlete without a plan. Try these things without one and see where you end up. I know where because at one stage I ended up there!

SKILL #21:

**THE ABILITY TO STUDY TO A PLAN AND
END UP WHERE YOU WANT TO BE.**

SUMMARY

- The aim of this step is to condition the student to exam conditions and to provide further feedback.
- Highlighting certain information by its omission and by making mistakes, will make it easier to remember in the future.
- The conditioning process in this step will:
 1. Improve your ability to maintain concentration for three hours.
 2. Dramatically reduce fear and anxiety and improve confidence.
 3. Increase your ability to interpret, organize your knowledge, and answer a question within 45 minutes.
- Studying to a definite plan and sticking to it will enable you to get where you want to be.

STEP 6: REVISION

Well begun is half done?

John Ray

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS STEP?

RE-vision obviously means to look at something again. In the context of studying for exams it would mean looking again at all the information that you're expected to have knowledge of for the exams. The purpose of this is to RE-fresh your memory, a process called RE-membering. It doesn't mean RE-learning!

This learning should already have been done during the year if you follow this technique, so you shouldn't have to RE-learn it.

SHOULD YOU HAVE A REVISION TIMETABLE?

As there's so much information, which must be revised before the exam, you have to spend some time working out a reasonable and achievable timetable. If you've followed this study technique throughout the year, most of the hard work will already have been

done, and the subject understood. Therefore, this revision step should consist of working out a timetable for making your way through your model questions for a particular subject, in the exam format as described in step 5.

Because you've been answering questions to a time limit, one of the skills you've been practicing, it's very simple to calculate your timetable almost to the day, before the exams. You should plan on doing a mock exam every night as a lead up to the exam, and perhaps three a day during your time off from lectures leading up to the exam. Perhaps one in each of the morning, afternoon and night.

The aim is also to RE-look at your previous trial runs and mock exams so that you can RE-visit your past mistakes and confirm to yourself that you won't make them again.

Let's say you've got six weeks of available time before the exams. If you've prepared 40 model questions and answers for a particular subject, and you schedule a mock exam every night requiring four, forty-five minute answers, then you have ten days to revise your subject (i.e. ten mock exams). If you have four subjects then it'll take you 40 days (approximately 6 weeks) to complete your revision. Even less if you have a study vacation.

All you have to do in the above example, to cover all your study material actively, is to spend three hours a night for six weeks prior to the exam. This is a very achievable timetable, which won't cause a hectic, fatiguing rush to try and handle a large amount of information at the last minute.

You'll also finish your revision feeling extremely confident and *"exam ready"*. It also provides you with a way to jump straight into your revision each day without thinking *"what am I going to do today?"*.

According to this timetable you'll have revised all your study material by doing forty mock exams. Imagine how good you'll feel in the real exam knowing once again that you can answer any question under exam conditions because you've proven it to yourself over and over. You'll have more confidence than you imagined possible.

I can remember walking into exams feeling calm and relaxed, and sitting down to an exam paper with all the questions the same as, or variations of, those in my list of model questions. I mean there's only so many questions you can ask about something isn't there? Even if the odd question is totally different, you will have covered the information necessary to answer it in a different context.

Remember, nothing has been left out of your field of study material.

SKILL #22:

**THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE A REASONABLE
AND ACHIEVABLE REVISION TIMETABLE.**

It may not be necessary to cover all your model questions if time is short. Perhaps choose the ones that are the most difficult. You may even be able to answer them verbally to save time. The important thing is that you're revising by asking yourself questions, which are forcing you to think.

SKILL #23:

**THE ABILITY TO MAINTAIN A QUESTIONING STATE
OF MIND THROUGHOUT YOUR REVISION.**

WHEN SHOULD YOU START REVISION?

You shouldn't start your revision too early. If you do then you'll lose the RE-fresh part of the purpose of revision, and probably feel a little stressed from doing a mock exam every night. As in the example given, it's probably best to start about six weeks prior to the exams. Any less and you may not fit in all your preparation. This period will of course vary depending on your workload.

Work out your timetable as in the example, and if it looks like you won't be able to fit all your model answers into your schedule, then rank them in order of difficulty and do the difficult ones first. The easier ones can be done either verbally, read a few times, or by writing out the framework only.

The important thing to remember is that you've already learned and understood all your study material and proven to yourself that you know it. You won't be walking around saying *"I really don't know anything for this exam!"* A lot of students aren't revising for exams but are still trying to comprehend and learn. When you hear them complain with the above comment, you can probably believe them.

If you've already learned and comprehended your study material, then very little revision is required to restore 100% retention.

Theoretically you don't forget what's been understood and organized in terms of general principles. Often though, it's only by constant repetition that insights are gained.

Conscientious students continuously go back over their work, think about it, and integrate it into their framework of knowledge.

IS CRAMMING OK?

Usually, when the original learning is imperfect or not even done, and is never consolidated by subsequent revision, the result is a hectic period of cramming before exams. The practice of cramming on the night before exams may generate some memory traces, which are fresh, the next day, but it usually means a last desperate attempt to tackle the work, which should have been done long before.

It really means RE-minding yourself of what you don't know before the exam. This is guaranteed to induce fear and anxiety and a strong urge to go to the toilet! In other words, it's too late. You can't expect to play well in a tennis match when the only practice you've had is on the day before the match.

Even if cramming enables you to pass the exam, much of what's been remembered is quickly forgotten and unlikely to be retained in

the long run. Since what you learn in one year forms the foundation of future learning in successive years, you'll be disadvantaged later on.

SKILL #24:

THE ABILITY TO PREPARE FOR THE EXAM WITHOUT A HECTIC PERIOD OF CRAMMING.

SHOULD YOU REVISE THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM?

Revision on the night before an exam, in my opinion, is a good idea, but should be quite a different story to cramming. If you've worked systematically through the year, your final revision shouldn't need to be more than one or two hours in order to strengthen and RE-vive your impressions. You should maintain the questioning state of mind that you've been developing throughout this system.

This limited amount of last minute revision shouldn't be omitted. Sometimes students are advised to relax completely before exams, and do no work at all. However, even a student who's already well prepared benefits from an hour's revision before the exam. The

mistake is when you try to digest large amounts of information at this stage, guaranteed to give you mental indigestion.

I used to repeat the following confirmation to myself before the exam to give me confidence and relax me:

I KNOW I CAN ANSWER ALL MY MODEL QUESTIONS

BECAUSE I'VE TESTED MYSELF

I KNOW ALL MY SUBJECT MATERIAL IS

COVERED IN MY MODEL ANSWERS

I KNOW THEY CAN'T ASK A QUESTION THAT I

HAVEN'T ASKED MYSELF IN SOME FORM

I KNOW WHAT I KNOW AND WHAT I DON'T KNOW

If fear is born of the unknown, then, because there is very little unknown after using this system, there will be little or no fear and consequently, little or no anxiety. There is no reason why you shouldn't go into the exam bursting with confidence like I did.

SUMMARY

- The aim of this step is to practice and develop certain skills relevant to the exam situation and to refresh your memory of all your study material.
- This step involves devising a timetable which is reasonable and achievable, and which involves practicing your skills using your model questions and answers.
- Revision should ideally be started about six weeks prior to exams, but depends on your workload. It shouldn't involve trying to understand information; something that should have been done soon after you first encountered it.
- Cramming the night before exams should be avoided because it's an act of desperation and doesn't produce any long-term understanding of the subject. It rarely allows you to pass the exam.
- Relaxed revision the night before the exam shouldn't be omitted, and should be an inquisitive read-through of your model questions and answers, and a confirmation of your ability to remember certain things, which must be committed to memory such as formulae and equations etc.

THE EXAM

*The greatest mistake you can make is to be continually fearing that
you might make one.*

Elbert Hubbard

WHAT ARE EXAMS?

I've already mentioned that exams test mainly how well we've practiced doing exams. They actually test a variety of skills, which have little to do with education in a broader sense. Skills such as the ability to remember large amounts of information and the ability to reproduce this information within a certain period of time, really have nothing to do with assessing intelligence.

Practicing doing exams is in fact what we've been doing as part of this system, however, in doing so we've also been acquiring knowledge. As I have mentioned, studying for exams and doing exams are in fact two completely different things. Most students study for exams without paying any attention to actually doing exams, and practicing exam skills.

This system encompasses both aspects. You're using the information that you need to know for the exams as raw material for practicing your exam skills. In doing so you're learning all this information by utilizing all the techniques by which we learn naturally as discussed at the beginning of the system. What could be simpler?

HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE YOURSELF MENTALLY FOR THE EXAM?

When you go into the exam, there's an ideal state of mind, which should be present. To achieve this state of mind, you should feel confident and not be anxious or nervous. It's very easy to say this but another matter to achieve it.

As already mentioned throughout this system, the reason why the majority of students are not relaxed and calm when they take an exam is because they've talked themselves into a state of anxiety and lack of self-confidence. When I've asked groups of students about how they feel prior to an exam, I hear comments such as those shown below:

FEAR AND ANXIETY

STRESS AND NERVOUSNESS

BUTTERFLIES

DON'T KNOW ENOUGH

DON'T KNOW WHAT I KNOW

I'M GOING TO FAIL

MY MIND WILL GO BLANK

All these symptoms seem to stem from one cause, the **UNKNOWN**. The two unknowns are firstly, what's in the exam and secondly, what do you actually know? Not knowing what's in the exam causes fear, which produces stress, anxiety and nervousness, which all gives you butterflies.

Not knowing what you know produces thoughts that your mind will go blank, you're going to fail, and you don't know enough, all of which make you worry. No wonder we go into exams with the wrong attitude.

It seems obvious that all we simply have to do is remove the "unknown" from the equation. This study system does exactly that. I have to emphasize this once again ...

Since all your questions have covered all the information required for the exam, it's impossible for a question to be asked in the exam that requires information that hasn't been covered by your questions. Since you've been testing yourself throughout this system, you'll be convinced of what you know.

Therefore, since there is very little "unknown" any more, then there should be very little of those negative feelings and emotions that exist prior to the exam. As a result, you should walk into the exam feeling confident, relaxed, calm and capable, the state of mind that should exist prior to, and during, the exam.

HOW SHOULD YOU APPROACH THE EXAM PAPER?

- Read very carefully all the instructions on the exam paper, i.e. how many questions are required to be answered, whether you have any choices, or must answer all the questions, and whether some questions are worth more than others etc.
- If you have a choice of questions, read through the whole exam paper to identify those questions which you feel you can best answer. You'll probably recognize a lot of questions, which are similar to those in your list of model questions. Others may

require answers similar to your model answers but have been asked from a slightly different perspective.

- Proportion your time for each question depending on the marks each may be worth. If all questions are of equal value, allocate your time equally between the required number of answers.
- Before answering the question, read it through very carefully, noting key words.
- Make sure that you don't spend too much time on your first question only to find that you have no time for the last question.
- Choose an easy question to start with to allow yourself to warm up your thinking processes.
- Make sure that you include only material relevant to the question and avoid padding answers.
- Answer the questions in the sequence described in step four, i.e. analyze and define, form a structure, and fill in the body of the answer, so that it develops in an organized manner.
- Make sure that your answers are legible, grammatical, punctuated, and spelt correctly. Answers produced in this way

will unconsciously appeal to the examiner and may influence the final mark.

- Take the trouble to have a quick look over your answers before handing in your paper. It'll give you an opportunity to pick up any errors and to make last minute changes. You can often pick up a few extra marks in this way.
- If you find that you've missed out a question or run out of time, don't panic. Write outline notes showing how you planned to write your answer if you had the time. You'll also pick up a few extra marks by doing this.

THE LAST STEP

You should know that a man of knowledge lives by acting, not by thinking about acting, nor by thinking about what he will think when he has finished acting. A man of knowledge chooses a path with heart and follows it.

Carlos Casteneda

A SHORT STORY

I guess all of us, when we're going through school or university, have a favourite teacher or lecturer, probably for a variety of reasons. I'll always remember one of my lecturers at university, mainly because of the way in which he made learning easier.

In his class, as in most classes, there was a small minority of students who got bored very easily and tended to be disruptive. We often label these students as troublemakers because they're the ones who throw things around the classroom when the teacher's back is turned. I've noticed over the years that these students usually lose

interest to such an extent that they often become losers, not only in education but also in life.

Well, in this particular lecturer's class, even these students achieved excellent results and some of them even went on to take up top research positions when they graduated. He had a unique method of getting students to learn.

Usually, students sit through hours and hours of lectures, taking pages and pages of notes, writing furiously, and walking out of the lecture with nothing but an armful of paper with a lot of writing on it, and a vague collection of what the lecture was all about. He was able to teach in such a way that even the small disruptive element in the class maintained interest in the topic of the lecture, no matter how boring it would normally be.

Rather than stand in front of the class and regurgitate volumes of information, and virtually become a medium for transferring information from the textbook to the lecture notes, he'd point to one of the students at random and ask a question. Often it was the first thing he'd do when he walked into the room.

The question, of course, was related to the subject of the lecture, and it didn't matter that we hadn't covered the topic previously. The

answer to the question only required some active, logical thinking. We had no choice whether to make fools of ourselves or not. Suddenly, standing up amongst our fellow students and perhaps making ridiculous mistakes, wasn't avoidable. We all had to do it, and we all made mistakes, plenty of them.

What we were in fact doing was having learning experiences and learning from the mistakes of others. We were able to make mistakes in an environment of understanding and tolerance and weren't punished for them. No mark was given at the end of the lecture. We all eventually became comfortable with standing up in class and perhaps asking a question that might indicate a lack of understanding of a part of the topic, and which, under other circumstances, would make us appear stupid.

The whole lecture became an active thinking and learning experience. We'd hardly take any notes, or perhaps only skeleton notes, because most of the information was already integrated into our framework of knowledge. We'd leave the lecture with most of the information in our minds instead of on paper.

The random questioning during the lecture kept us attentive, paying particular attention to what the lecturer was talking about in case we were the next to be asked a question. Some of us even started

reading and preparing ahead of the lecture so we'd be able to show off our knowledge if asked a question. No one went to sleep in these lectures and we'd never have to study as much for the exams on his subject.

We can't expect all our lecturers to be like this, but I'm telling you this story to demonstrate the importance of asking questions and making mistakes in the learning process. It even helped those students who would normally fail a subject. Don't be afraid to ask questions in class, even if you think it could be a stupid question. You might even find the same question in the exam and there's a greater chance you'll know the answer if you already asked it in class.

In most lectures, we look and listen without understanding. We forget some things, remember others, but unless we ask and answer questions we can't expect to understand.

DOES IT WORK?

The principles of learning I've described to you aren't new but it sometimes takes a system such as this to bring them to your attention and put them all together in a way that enables you to use them. I haven't come across any other system such as this which shows you, in a logical sequence of steps, how to process all your

study material from start to finish, and be prepared like a professional athlete, for your exams.

The five basic learning techniques I've described to you are just as important in other aspects of your life, such as your future job for example. Many people are in low paying or dead end jobs because they're afraid of making mistakes and leaving their comfort zones. They stay in these jobs for a lifetime with little growth or satisfaction because they've never known that it's OK to make mistakes as part of the learning experience.

Does this system work? Will this system of study work for you? The answer is a definite **"yes!"** All you have to do is take the final step in this system, which is to take action. Take action by choosing a direction and following it with all your heart. Always keep your goals in mind and stay focused.

I've given you my own personal technique of studying for exams, which transformed my results from failure to prize winning. What you do with this information is in your hands.

I wish you every success.

P.S. I would love to hear about your success after using this technique so please drop me an e-mail and tell me all about it.

P.P.S. Also feel free to contact me if you have any suggestions or questions about studying for your exams. I would love to be able to help you: [email: robert@college-study-skills.com](mailto:robert@college-study-skills.com)

P.P.P.S. If you're interested in lots more great information about how to dramatically improve your chances for getting straight A's, [go to www.college-study-skills.com](http://www.college-study-skills.com) where you can also subscribe to my newsletter.

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