

Learning Skills for College and Life



with Malia Watson



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Preface

To achieve academic success, students need to acquire, develop, and practice vital learning skills and strategies. *Learning Skills for College and Life* aims to provide the required knowledge and the practice needed for students to reach their full potential as college students as well as life-long learners.

Often students find that their tried and true study strategies fail them when employed to meet the new challenges of their college academic endeavors. As a result of such difficulties, some students experience anxiety and disappointment about their academic performance but do not know how to improve or change their study habits. My career has focused on teaching college students how to accomplish self-change in the area of personal adjustment. Using some concepts from psychology, this book aims to teach students not only what to change, it guides the student through the difficult process and personal challenge of how to change.

Here are a few ways my text guides students to improved learning skills:

- Chapters start with an outline and a set of questions students can answer, my adaptation of the SQ part of Robinson's famous SQ3R procedure, encouraging valuable self-reflection.
- All the material presented for students to learn has been shown by research to actually work to improve study skills.
- Each chapter has built-in opportunities to practice the ideas, with many suggestions on how to slowly and realistically develop them into good academic habits.
- Chapters contain many real-life cases and examples using real students in real situations that students can relate to.

As instructors, we want to avoid the old tradition of "teach and hope" that the students benefit from what we teach. This requires us to do more than simply transmit information. We need to provide practice in the learning skills we teach, and follow students' progress to encourage continued use of the skills. Thus in my book I include many practice exercises, called **Skill Builders**, and many opportunities to be reflective of the process of skill building, called **Think Pieces**.

- Skill Builders, present in every chapter, provide opportunities for planning and gaining practice in developing important skills.
- Think Pieces, also present in every chapter, aim to produce mindful practice of learning skills, accomplished through self-reflection and monitoring of skills development.

Even the best students, research shows, do not know and use all the learning strategies available, and the average student does not know or use many of them. Most instructors know students who do not seem willing to put in the time and effort needed. We need to motivate them to succeed.

There is an explicit motivational theory behind this book, the value x expectancy theory ("value by expectancy"). It is used extensively in modern research and has much research to support it. The basic idea is that humans are motivated to approach goals by two variables: the value the goal has for them, and their estimation of their chances of attaining the goal. In the text I explicitly attempt to show students the value of good grades for them, by tying grades to other goals they have in life, and teach them that, no matter what their previous school experience has been, they can reach their goal.

Acknowledgements

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My dear wife, Abby Brown-Watson, to whom this book is dedicated, helped me think of solutions to many writing problems as the book developed, and was very supportive throughout. Now can we go birding?

Most of all, thanks to the hundreds of undergraduate students who carried out all the real learning skills projects used as cases and examples in the book. Here in Hawaii they were a very diverse group of folks, but they were united by the experience of beginning college and wanting to cope well with the new challenges. They are quoted on many pages, though of course disguised. Thanks to all of you.

David L. Watson Honolulu

About the Author

David L. Watson received his Ph.D. in psychology from Yale University in 1963. His first book (1972), with Roland Tharp, was *Self-Directed Behavior: Self-Modification for Personal Adjustment*, now in its eighth edition. This book is frequently referred to as a "classic" in psychology. In it Watson laid out a set of scientifically tested ideas to enable readers to change important aspects of their own behavior.

In Learning Skills for College and Life Watson continues this tradition of "giving psychology away" by teaching readers what and how to change in their academic and working lives.

Watson is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and Charter Fellow of the American Psychological Society. His other books include Psychology: What It Is and How to Use It, Here's Psychology, Social Psychology: Science and Application, and Psychology: An Introductory Textbook. Watson has two grown children, Dan and Malia, and lives in Hawaii with his wife, Abby, with whom he frequently goes birding around the world.

Brief Table of Contents

	g Started 1
Chapter 1	School's Hidden Agenda: Learning Strategies 3
Part II: Time	Management: How to Control Your Time and Life 19
Chapter 2	Your Goals for Your Life 21
Chapter 3	Planning to Meet Your Goals 33
Chapter 4	Taking Action 49
Part III: Bein	g There: Important Basics 65
Chapter 5	Attitudes about Yourself and Others 67
Chapter 6	Class Attendance, Note Taking, and Participation 85
Chapter 7	Critical Thinking 99
Part IV: Read	ling and Research: Exercise for the Mind 109
Chapter 8	Increasing Reading Skill 111
Chapter 9	Strategies for Reading Well 127
Chapter 10	Using Libraries and Computers for Research
	by Malia G. Watson 147
Part V: Study	ring: Work Smarter, Not Harder 161
Chapter 11	Concentrating on Your Work 163
Chapter 12	Making Material Meaningful 171
Chapter 13	Organizing for Better Memory 187
Chapter 14	Studying in Special Situations: Mnemonics, Math,
	Science, and Literature 201
Part VI: Takin	g Tests: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly 211
Chapter 15	Preparing for Tests 213
Chapter 16	Staying Calm and Focused 225
Chapter 17	During and after the Test 235
Part VII: Impr	oving Verbal Skills: Gaining Control over Words 249
Chapter 18	Gaining Control over Written Words 251
Chapter 19	Gaining Control over Spoken Words 273
Chapter 20	Increasing Your Vocabulary 281
Chapter 21	Spelling: Putting Your Best Foot Forward 291
Part VIII: Life	elong Learning 307
Chapter 22	Lifelong Learning 309
Notes 325	
Indox 330	

vii

Detailed Table of Contents

Preface xv

Part I: Getting Started 1

Chapter 1 School's Hidden Agenda: Learning Strategies 3

School's Hidden Agenda 3

Schooling Is Not Just Subject Matter 4

THINK PIECE 1.1 Do grades in school matter?

Do grades in school matter?

Learning skills 6

Examples of Learning Strategies 6

How Effective Are Learning Strategies? 9

The Need for Planning and Practice 10

Planning with Think Pieces and Skill Builders 11

What kinds of changes should you make? 12

Do You Want to Do This? 12

SKILL BUILDER 1.1 Your skills inventory 13

THINK PIECE 1.2 Life goals and learning strategies 16

Part II: Time Management: How to Control your Time and Life 19

Chapter 2 Your Goals for Your Life 21

Managing Time to Achieve your Life Goals 21

How Do You Spend Your Time Now? 22

THINK PIECE 2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of time management 23

SKILL BUILDER 2.1 Daily time record 24

Keep careful records 25

Make an entry every hour 26

Tell yourself the truth 26

Be sure you keep the records 26

Reactivity 26

What Your Records Tell You 26
Goal Setting: How You Would Like to Spend Your Time 28
Focus your goals on the process you go through to increase your study time,
not on the final goal 28
THINK PIECE 2.2 Opportunities for change 28
Set your first goal only a little bit above where you are now performing 29
SKILL BUILDER 2.2 Goal setting 30
Chapter 3 Planning to Meet Your Goals 33
Strategies for Change 34
Schedule regular study periods with clear starting and stopping times 34
Don't schedule huge study sessions 34
Have a written schedule 34
Make a list of things to do each day and week 35
Use a weekly planner 35
Plan by the week, and prioritize your work 35
SKILL BUILDER 3.1 Daily and weekly time planning sheet 36
THINK PIECE 3.1 Your to-do list 38
Plan over the whole term or semester 39
Supporting Your Time Management 39
Keep records of how well you stick to your schedule 39
SKILL BUILDER 3.2 Long term planner 40
Avoid studying when you are tired or sleepy 41
Be prepared to practice, and expect to make mistakes 41
Don't schedule a dull life; make room for fun 42
Use enjoyable things to reward sticking to your schedule 42
Reward yourself with mental pats on the back 43
Guide your behavior with self-directions 43
THINK PIECE 3.2 Putting the ideas into operation 44
Problem Solving to Improve Plans 44
Examine the details of the problem 45
Think of several solutions to the problem 46
THINK PIECE 3.3 Problem solving 47
Chapter 4 Taking Action 49
Dealing with Procrastination 49
Keeping your goals in your mind 50
Bootstrapping 51
THINK PIECE 4.1 Problems with goals and how to fix them 52
SKILL BUILDER 4.1 Bootstrapping to overcome procrastination 54

Stress Proofing 55
Step One: Controlling the external causes of stress 55
THINK PIECE 4.2 What stresses you? 56
Step Two: Controlling your reaction to the stress 57
THINK PIECE 4.3 An exercise plan 58
THINK PIECE 4.4 Reducing stress 59
THINK PIECE 4.5 What can you control? 60
Can You Gain Greater Control over Time? 60
Your Final Plan 61
Use several strategies, not just one or two 61
SKILL BUILDER 4.2 Your plan for change 63
A self-contract 64
Part III: Being There: Important Basics 65
Chapter 5 Attitudes about Yourself and Others 67
The Skills-Development Attitude 68
Skills development versus performance goals 68
Encouraging a skills-development attitude 69
SKILL BUILDER 5.1 Practicing a skills development attitude 70
Your Beliefs about Learning 72
THINK PIECE 5.1 What do you believe? 73
Learning Styles and Different Kinds of Intelligence 74
Working with Others; How Should You Deal with Diversity? 75
Study groups 75
Best procedures for study groups 77
Diversity on campus 77
SKILL BUILDER 5.2 Setting up a study group 78
Talking to Instructors 80
SKILL BUILDER 5.3 Talking to instructors 82
Chapter 6 Class Attendance, Note Taking,
Chapter 6 Class Attendance, Note Taking, and Participation 85
Being There 85
Going to class 85
SKILL BUILDER 6.1 In class: Being there 87
Focusing in class 88
How to listen in a lecture 89
THINK PIECE 6.1 Lecture prep checklist 90
Taking Notes 91

Making sure notes are usable 91
The outline method 92
The Cornell system 93
The need for review 95
Participating in Class 95
SKILL BUILDER 6.2 Note taking 96
THINK PIECE 6.2 Goals for participating 97
Chapter 7 Critical Thinking 99
Thinking Critically Means Asking Questions 99
How to use the guide 100
Generic questions 101
SKILL BUILDER 7.1 Using generic questions to encourage thinking 103
Problem Solving: A Way of Thinking 104
Step 1: List the details of the problem as concretely as possible 105
Step 2: Think of as many solutions to the problem as you can 105
Step 3: Choose one or more solutions to the problem 106
Step 4: Putting your solution into practice, and then evaluate it
to see if it works 106
THINK PIECE 7.1 Practicing problem solving 107
Part IV: Reading and Researching:
Exercise for the Mind 109
Chapter 8 Increasing Reading Skill 111
Beliefs and Facts about Reading 111
Advantages of reading well 112
The mechanics of reading 112
THINK PIECE 8.1 Bad habits 113
Bad reading habits 114
Increasing Your Reading 114
Taking steps to increase your reading 115
SKILL BUILDER 8.1 Increasing your reading 116
SKILL BUILDER 8.2 Bootstrapping reading 118
Bootstrapping reading 119
Adopting a skills-development attitude and focusing your motivation 120
THINK PIECE 8.2 Self-reminders 120
Reading and TV 121
SKILL BUILDER 8.3 Life goals and TV viewing 122

Chapter 9 Strategies for Reading Well 127
Reading Like an Expert 127
Using Reading Strategies 128
Adjust your speed and the depth of your reading to the material 128
Have your goals in mind 129
Skip around, if that helps 130
Get your mind warmed up for reading 130
As you read, relate what you are reading to what you already know 132
Summary: Strategies for expert reading 133
Getting the Main Ideas 133
Look at the first sentence in a paragraph 133
SKILL BUILDER 9.1 Practicing expert reading strategies 134
Look at the last sentence in a paragraph 137
Check for unfocused paragraphs 137
Keeping Track of Your Understanding 138
SKILL BUILDER 9.2 Finding main ideas 139
Problems with understanding what you are reading 140
Strategies to use when you don't understand what you are reading 140
Evaluating and Thinking about the Material 141
Question One: What are the author's biases, or the point of view? 141
SKILL BUILDER 9.3 Practicing comprehension monitoring 142
Question Two: Is what you are reading fact or opinion? 142
Question Three: What is the evidence to back up what the writer is saying? 143
THINK PIECE 9.1 Thinking while reading 143
SKILL BUILDER 9.4 Practicing what expert readers do 144
Summary: Questions to ask while reading 145
Chapter 10 Using Libraries and Computers
for Research 147
by Malia G. Watson
Know Your Library, Love Your Library 148
Becoming familiar with your library's resources 148
THINK PIECE 10.1 Getting to know your library 148
Defining your need for information 149
THINK PIECE 10.2 Which type of information do you need? 149
The Research Process 150
Step 1: Focus on what you are searching for 150
Step 2: Be prepared for work 150
Step 3: Start with what you don't know 151

Step 4: Expand your search 151
Searching by Computer 154
How to search 154
The Internet 155
Return to the Research Process 156
Step 5: Evaluate your sources 156
SKILL BUILDER 10.1 Searching the web 157
Step 6: When in doubt, consult a librarian. 158
Step 7: Putting it all together with word processing 158
Part V: Studying: Work Smarter,
not Harder 161
Chapter 11 Concentrating on Your Work 163
Dealing with Distractions 164
Identifying distractions 164
Minimizing distractions 165
Examining your ambivalence 166
Focusing your Concentration 167
SKILL BUILDER 11.1 Focusing your concentration while studying 168
Chapter 12 Making Material Meaningful 171
Self-Explanation 172
What are the advantages of self-explanation? 172
How does self-explanation work? 173
How often should you stop to explain material to yourself? 174
How much time does self-explanation take? 174
Do you want to use self-explanation? 174
Keeping track of your understanding 175
SKILL BUILDER 12.1 Using Self-explanations 176
Elaboration: Tying New Material into What You Know 179
1. Think of examples from your own life that fit what you are reading 180
2. Think of examples from daily life of what you are reading 180
3. Restate an idea in your own words 181
4. Relate two ideas together, looking for their similarities and their differences 181
5. As you study, look for connections between ideas 181
SKILL BUILDER 12.2 Studying with elaborations 182
The time it takes to use the elaboration 184
Summary 185

Organizing for Better Memory Organizing the Material 187 Write summaries of what you have read 188 SKILL BUILDER 13.1 Practicing summarizing 190 Make visual representations of what you have read 191

Organizing Your Study Time 192

Preview the material 193

Next, ask *Questions* about the material 194

Next, Read the material 194

As you find main ideas, use Strategies to learn them 195

Review what you have learned 195

SKILL BUILDER 13.2 Making PQRSR a habit 196

Summary 200

Chapter 14 Studying in Special Situations: Mnemonics, Math, Science, and Literature 201

Mnemonics 201

Method of locations 202

Method of first letters 202

THINK PIECE 14.1 Locations, locations 202

THINK PIECE 14.2 Practicing mnemonics 203

Studying Math, Science and Literature 203

Cooking up good grades in math and science 203

Studying Literature 207

THINK PIECE 14.3 Practicing literary skills 207

SKILL BUILDER 14.1 Study strategies for math and science 208

Part VI: Taking Tests: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly 211

Chapter 15 Preparing for Tests 213

Be Well Prepared 213

Time management 213

SKILL BUILDER 15.1 Planning for an upcoming test 214

A two-minute drill for exam time 215

SKILL BUILDER 15.2 Planning to study for a distant test 215

Cramming 216

Predict Test Questions 216

Are there advantages to predicting questions? 217

What types of questions will be on the test? 217
Where do you get your ideas on what questions to predict? 217
When studying, be sure you pay attention to what you don't know 219
Developing test prediction is a skill 219
SKILL BUILDER 15.3 Predicting test questions 220
Take a skills-development attitude toward your ability to predict
test questions 223
Chapter 16 Staying Calm and Focused 225
Getting Calm for Tests 225
Be prepared 225
De-stress yourself 226
THINK PIECE 16.1 Exercise and nerves 226
Meditation 226
Muscle Relaxation 228
Benefits of muscle relaxation 228
THINK PIECE 16.2 Practicing meditation 228
The procedure 229
Staying Mentally Focused 231
THINK PIECE 16.3 Practicing muscle relaxation 231
SKILL BUILDER 16.1 Keeping your mind on the test 232
SKILL BUILDER 16.2 Checklist for getting calm on tests 235
SKILL BUILDER 16.2 Checklist for getting cann on tests 200
Chapter 17 During and after Tests 235
Multiple-Choice Tests 235
P—Prepare to succeed 236
I—Inspect the Instructions 236
R-Read; Remember; Remove 236
A—Answer or Abandon 237
T—Turn back to answer 237
E—Estimate (guess) 237
S—Survey 238
Essay Tests 239
S-S-Study the instructions, and study the questions 239
SKILL BUILDER 17.1 Making PIRATES a habit 240
N-Note important points of each question 241
O-Organize (outline) your answer 242
W-Write your answer 242
After the Test 243
Analyze your errors 243

SKILL BUILDER 17.2 S-SNOW falling on essay tests 244 Use the strategies 246 Take a skills-development attitude about bad grades 246 Talk with your instructor 247 SKILL BUILDER 17.3 Checklist of test-preparation activities 248
Part VII: Improving Verbal Skills: Gaining Control over Words 249
Chapter 18 Gaining Control over Written Words 251
Powerful News about Writing 251
Setting the stage for writing well 252
Mistakes writing novices make 252
SKILL BUILDER 18.1 Setting the stage for writing 253
Writing with PoWeR 254
PoWer Step One: P for Planning 254
Know—What do Know? What do need to Know? 254
A—Audience 255
G—Goals 255
O—Organization: Use TREE 255
Summary: Steps to follow when planning your writing 258
PoWer Step Two: W for Writing 258
Getting started 259
SKILL BUILDER 18.2 Planning a paper with Know-AGO 260
What to say? 262
How to say it? 263
Keep planning 265 PoWer Step Three: R for Revising 265
· chief chief
0
Using SCAN 267 THINK PIECE 18.1 Record of grades on papers 268
1 1
Summary. The sempters to the separate seminary
SKILL BUILDER 18.4 Revising: SCAN your sentences 270
Chapter 19 Gaining Control over Spoken Words 273
Ghalater 19
Deating with the control of the cont
wan braken
Realize that your fear is almost certainly exaggerated 274