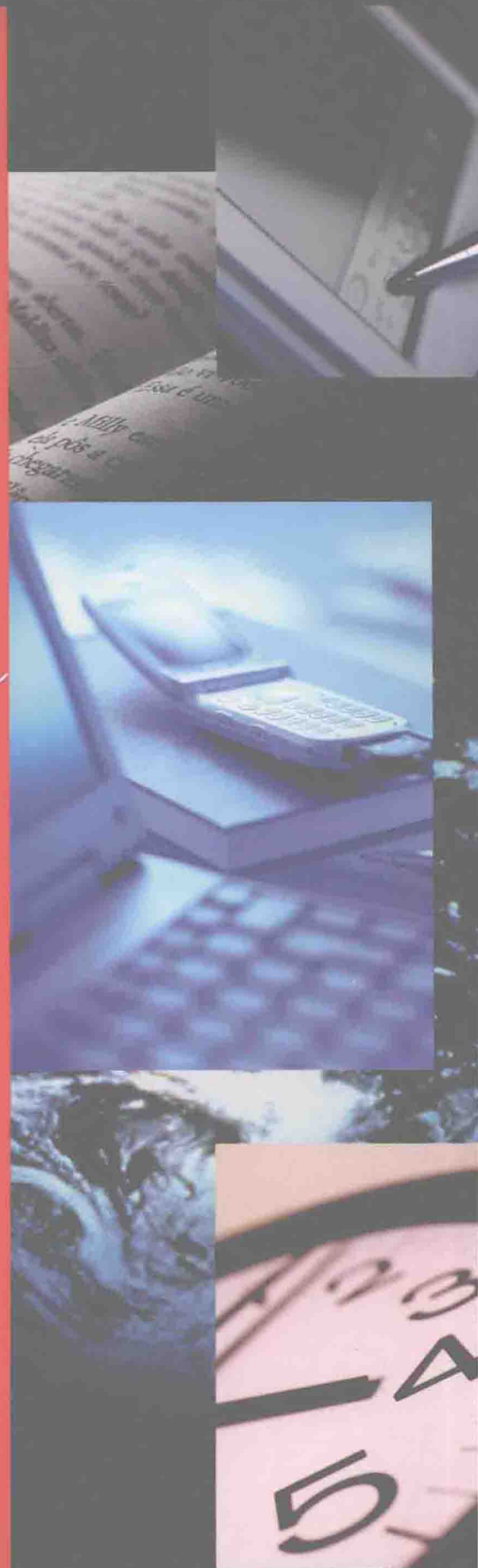


Tenth Edition

# Becoming a **MASTER STUDENT**

Tools, techniques, hints, ideas,  
illustrations, examples, methods,  
procedures, processes, skills, resources,  
and suggestions for success.

Dave Ellis



# Becoming a MASTER STUDENT

**Dave Ellis**

**Doug Toft**

*Contributing Editor*

**Dean Mancina**

*Faculty Advisor*

Tools, techniques, hints, ideas,  
illustrations, examples, methods,  
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and suggestions for success.

Houghton Mifflin Company Boston New York

**Tenth Edition**

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# For the most part, students have created this book.

The First Edition of *Becoming a Master Student* came from notes that I collected while teaching a course to students. These students ended up teaching me more than I ever imagined there was to learn about student success while I was supposed to be teaching them. Since that first edition, millions of students have used this book, and their continuing input has dramatically changed it. To all of those students of different ages and from a variety of cultures and ethnic groups, I send my heartfelt thanks.

In previous editions of this book, I listed many of the educators who have contributed significantly to the strategies and insights offered to students. Unfortunately, this list has gotten so long that I cannot list, by name, the hundreds of significant contributors. Some educators have offered an idea or two as part of an article. Others have provided the inspiration and much of the content for entire articles. Still others have offered suggestions that have totally rearranged the structure and outline of this text. Thank you all.

During the last twenty years, I have worked day to day with dozens of people who have contributed dramatically to the creation of this text. They have lent ideas, logistical support, project management, consultation, and design. To all of those people, I want you to know that this book would never have been produced without you. There are a few people out of the dozens I have worked with who have made such a difference in this book that to leave them unnamed would border on unethical. Therefore, I deeply thank and acknowledge the work of Doug Toft, Stan Lankowitz, Larry David, Jeff Swaim, Mary Maisey-Ireland, Bill Rentz, Robbie Murchison, Bill Harlan, Judith Maisey, James Anderson, Wayne Zako, Richard Kiefer, JoAnne Bangs, Leonard Running, Shirley Wileman-Conrad and Karen Marie Erickson.

In this book, the design and artwork are critical components of the message. For that work I appreciate the mastery of Bill Fleming, Henry Rachlin, and Walter Kopec, along with the other people who have contributed so much to the artistry of this book, including Susan Turnbull, Amy Davis, Neil Zetah, Roger Slott, Lee Christiansen, and Mike Speiser.

Along with thanking the Advisory Board members listed on the title page of this book, I also want to sincerely thank the consultants of College Survival.

Many people at Houghton Mifflin Company have provided thousands of hours of excellent and dedicated work in the creation of this book. Specifically I thank June Smith, Patricia Coryell, Shani Fisher, Janet Edmonds, Andrew Sylvester, Barbara LeBuhn, Terry Wilton, Nancy Doherty Schmitt, Rachel D'Angelo Wimberly, Sarah Ambrose, May Jawdat, Florence Cadran, Tony Saizon, Diana Coe, Shawn Kendrick, Elaine Gray, and Keith Fredericks.

For their contribution to my life, and to my becoming a master student, I thank my wife, Trisha Waldron, and my best friend, Stan Lankowitz. I also treasure what I have learned from my children, Sara, Elizabeth, Snow, and Berry, and I honor the constant encouragement of my parents, Maryellen and Ken.

I know that no book and no set of ideas come from a single person, and my intention is to continue to give to others what all of the people I have mentioned here have given to me.

Dave Ellis





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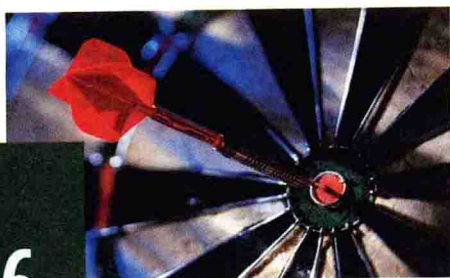
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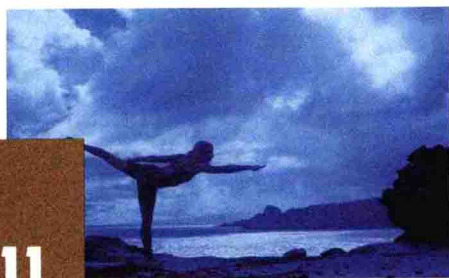


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# This book is worthless...

The first edition of this book began with the sentence: *This book is worthless*. Many students thought this was a trick to get their attention. It wasn't. Others thought it was reverse psychology. It wasn't that, either. Still others thought it meant that the book was worthless if they didn't read it. It's more than that.

The book is worthless even if you read it, if reading is all you do. What was true of that first edition is true of this one. Until you take action and use the ideas in it, *Becoming a Master Student* really is worthless.

You probably won't take action and use the ideas until you are convinced that you have something to gain. The main purpose of this introduction is to persuade you to commit to spending the energy to use this book actively. Before you stiffen up and resist, the purpose of this sales pitch is not to separate you from your money. You already bought the book. Now you can get something for your money by committing yourself to take action—in other words, commit yourself to become a master student. Here's what's in it for you.

**Pitch #1: You can save money now and make more later.** Start with money. Your college education is one of the most expensive things you will ever buy. Typically, it costs students \$30 to \$70 an hour to sit in class. Unfortunately, many students think their classes aren't even worth 50 cents an hour.

As a master student, you control the value you get out of your education, and that value

## EXERCISE



### Textbook reconnaissance

Start becoming a master student this moment. Do a 15-minute "textbook reconnaissance" of this book. Here's how:

First, read the table of contents. Do it in three minutes or less. Next, look at every page in the book. Move quickly. Scan headlines. Look at pictures. Notice forms, charts, and diagrams.

A textbook reconnaissance shows you where a course is going. It gives you the big picture. That's useful because brains work best when going from the general to the specific. Getting the big picture before you start makes details easier to recall and understand later on.

Your textbook reconnaissance will work even better if, as you scan, you look for ideas you can use. When you find one, write the page number and a short description of it in the space below. The idea behind this technique is simple: It's easier to learn when you're excited, and it's easier to get excited about a course if you know it's going to be useful, interesting, or fun.

When you have found five interesting ideas, stop writing and continue your survey. Remember, look at every page, and do it quickly. And here's another useful tip for the master student: Do it now.

Page number	Description
1.	
2.	
3.	
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## This book is worth \$1000

Houghton Mifflin College Survival is proud to present three students each year with a \$1,000 scholarship. Any post-secondary school in the United States and Canada can nominate one student for the scholarship. In order to be considered, you must first write an essay that answers the question "What is a Master Student?"



For more details, check the web site for Houghton Mifflin College Survival  
Scholarship: [college.hmco.com/collegesurvival/resources/students/contests/scholarship.html](http://college.hmco.com/collegesurvival/resources/students/contests/scholarship.html)



can be considerable. The joy of learning aside, college graduates make an average of over \$1 million more during their lifetimes than their nondegreed peers. It pays to be a master student.

**Pitch #2: You can rediscover the natural learner in you.** Joy is important too. As you become a master student, you will learn ways to learn in the most effective way possible by discovering the joyful, natural learner within you.

Children are great natural students. They quickly learn complex skills, such as language, and they have fun doing it. For them, learning is a high-energy process involving experimentation, discovery, and sometimes, broken dishes. Then comes school. For some students, drill and drudgery replace discovery and dish breaking. Learning can become a drag. You can use this book to reverse that process and rediscover what you knew as a child—that laughter and learning go hand in hand.

Sometimes learning does take effort, especially in college. As you become a master student, you will learn many ways to get the most out of that effort.

**Pitch #3: You can choose from hundreds of techniques.** *Becoming a Master Student* is packed with hundreds of practical, nuts-and-bolts techniques. And you can begin using them immediately. For example, during your textbook reconnaissance on page 1, you practiced three powerful learning techniques in one 15-minute exercise. (If you didn't do the textbook reconnaissance, it's not too late to get your money's worth. Do it now.) If you doze in lectures, drift during tests, or dawdle on term papers, you can use the ideas in this book to become a more effective student.

Not all these ideas will work for you. That's why there are so many of them in *Becoming a Master Student*. You can experiment with the techniques. As you discover what works, you will develop a unique style of learning that you can use for the rest of your life.

**Pitch #4: You get the best suggestions from thousands of students.** The concepts and techniques in this book are not here because learning

theorists, educators, and psychologists say they work. They are here because tens of thousands of students from all kinds of backgrounds tried them and say they work. These are people who dreaded giving speeches, couldn't read their own notes, and couldn't remember where their ileocecal valve was. Then they figured out how to solve these problems, which was the hard part. Now you can use their ideas.

**Pitch #5: You can learn about you.**

The process of self-discovery is an important theme in *Becoming a Master Student*.

Throughout the book you can use Discovery Statements and Intention Statements for everything from organizing your desk to choosing long-term goals. Studying for an organic chemistry quiz is a lot easier with a clean desk and a clear idea of the course's importance to you.

**Pitch #6: You can use a proven product.** The first nine editions of this book were successful for hundreds of thousands of students. In schools where it was widely used, the dropout rate decreased as much as 25 percent and in some cases, 50 percent. Student feedback has been positive. In particular, students with successful histories have praised the techniques in this book.

**Pitch #7: You can learn the secret of student success.** If this sales pitch still hasn't persuaded you to actively use this book, maybe it's time to reveal the secret of student success. (Provide your own drum roll here.) The secret is, there are no secrets. Perhaps the ultimate formula is to give up formulas and keep inventing.

The strategies and tactics that successful students use are well known. You have hundreds of them at your fingertips right now, in this book. Use them. Modify them. Invent new ones. You're the authority on what works for you.

However, what makes any technique work is commitment—and action. Without them, the pages of *Becoming a Master Student* are just 2.1 pounds of expensive mulch. Add your participation to the mulch, and these pages are priceless.



## JOURNAL ENTRY



### Discovery Statement

Success is a choice. Your choice. To *get* what you want, it helps to *know* what you want. That is the purpose of this Journal Entry.

Select a time and place when you know you will not be disturbed for at least 20 minutes. (The library is a good place to do this.) Relax for two or three minutes, clearing your mind. Then complete the following sentences . . . and then keep writing. Write down everything you want to get out of school. Write down everything you want your education to enable you to do after you finish school.

When you run out of things to write, stick with it just a bit longer. Be willing to experience a little discomfort. Keep writing. What you discover might be well worth the extra effort. You can begin choosing success right now by choosing a date, time, and place to complete this Journal Entry. Write your choice here and block out the time on your calendar.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

What I want from my education is . . .

---

---

---

When I complete my education, I want to be able to . . .

---

---

---

I also want . . .

---

---

---

## JOURNAL ENTRY



### Discovery Statement

On a separate piece of paper, write a description of a time in your life when you learned or did something well. This situation need not be related to school. Describe the details of the situation, including the place, time, and people involved. Describe how you felt about it, how it looked to you, how it sounded. Describe the physical sensations you associate with the event. Describe your emotions also.



# Get the most out of this book



**1 Rip 'em out.** The pages of *Becoming a Master Student* are perforated because some of the information here is too important to leave in the book and some your instructor may want to see. For example, Journal Entry #1 asks you to write some important things you want to get out of your education. To keep yourself focused, you could rip that page out and post it on your bathroom mirror or some other place where you'll see it several times a day.

You can re-insert the page by just sticking it into the spine of the book; it will hold. A piece of tape will fix it in place.

**2 Skip around.** You can use this book in several different ways. Read it straight through. Or pick it up, turn to any page, and find an idea you can use. Look for ideas you can use right now. For example, if you are about to choose a major or you are considering changing schools, skip directly to the articles on these topics in Chapter Twelve.

**3 If it works, use it. If it doesn't, lose it.** If there are sections of the book that don't apply to you at all, skip them—unless, of course, they are assigned. Then, see if you can gain value from these sections anyway. When you are committed to getting value from this book, even an idea that seems irrelevant or ineffective at first can turn out to be a powerful tool.

**4 Rewrite this book.** Here's an alternative strategy to the one above. If an idea doesn't work for you, rewrite it. Change the exercises to fit your needs. Create a new technique by combining several others. Create a technique out of thin air!

**5 Put yourself into the book.** As you read about techniques in this book, invent your own examples, starring yourself in the title role. For example, as you were reading the explanation of Exercise #1: "Textbook reconnaissance," you might have pictured yourself using this technique on your world history textbook.

Also look throughout the book for short features labeled **Student Voices**. These are quotations from students who used this book to promote their success. As you dig into the following chapters, think about what you would say if you could add your voice to this book. Look for tools and techniques that can make a huge difference in your life.

**6 Yuk it up.** Going to school is a big investment. The stakes are high. It's OK to be serious about that, but you don't have to go to school on the deferred-fun program. A master student celebrates learning, and one of the best ways to do that is to have a laugh now and then.

**7 Own this book.** Write your name and address on the first page of this book now, and don't stop there. Create a record of what you want to get out of school and how you intend to get it by completing the Journal Entries and exercises. Every time your pen touches a page, you move closer to mastery of learning.

**8 Do the exercises.** Action makes this book work. To get the most out of an exercise, read the instructions carefully before you begin. To get the most out of this book, do most of the exercises. More important, avoid feeling guilty if you skip some. And by the way, it's never too late to go back and do those.



These exercises invite you to write, touch, feel, move, see, search, ponder, speak, listen, recall, choose, commit, and create. You might even sing and dance. Learning often works best when it involves action.

**9 Get used to a new look and tone.** This book looks different from traditional textbooks. *Becoming a Master Student* presents major ideas in magazine-style articles. You will discover lots of lists, blurbs, one-liners, pictures, charts, graphs, illustrations, and even a joke or two.

The icons and key visuals in this book carry special meanings. For example, Journal Entries are introduced by



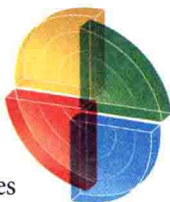
a drawing of a twisted pencil, a sign of infinity, symbolizing the idea that journaling is a process that never ends. The picture of the running shoe that accompanies the exercises in this book indicates the action that makes for effective learning.

One more note: As a strategy for avoiding sexist language, this book alternates the use of feminine and masculine pronouns.

**10 Practice critical thinking.** Throughout this book are activities labeled “Practicing Critical Thinking.” Look for them next to the icon of the “thinker” inside a light bulb, who’s there to encourage contemplation and constant problem solving. Also note that other elements of this text promote critical thinking, including exercises and Journal Entries.



**11 Learn about learning styles.** Check out the Learning Styles Applications at the end of each chapter. These are included to increase your awareness of your preferred learning styles and to help you explore new styles. Each exercise will guide you through experiencing four specific modes of learning as applied to the content of the chapter.



**12 Enter cyberspace.** You’ll see an Internet logo next to articles, exercises, and Journal Entries throughout this book. This logo indicates opportunities for you to explore the Internet as a tool for promoting your success. Many of these logos will direct you to Houghton Mifflin’s College Survival/Becoming a Master Student web site: <http://collegesurvival.college.hmco.com/students>. Visit this site regularly for articles, online exercises, and links to useful web sites.



**13 Sweat the small stuff.** Look for sidebars throughout this book—short bursts of words and pictures that are placed between longer articles. These short pieces also might offer an insight that leads you to transform your experience of higher education. Related point: Shorter chapters in this book are just as important as longer chapters.

**14 Take this book to work.** With a little tweaking in some cases, you can apply nearly all the techniques in this book to your career. **Workplace Applications** in each chapter will remind you of this fact. Use them to make seamless transition from success in school to success on the job.

## EXERCISE



### Commitment

This book is worthless without your action. One powerful way to begin taking action is to make a commitment. Conversely, without commitment, sustained action is unlikely, and the result is a worthless book. Therefore, in the interest of saving your valuable time and energy, this exercise gives you a chance to declare your level of involvement up front. From the choices below, choose the sentence that best reflects your commitment to using this book. Write the number in the space provided at the end of the list.

1. “Well, I’m reading this book right now, aren’t I?”
2. “I will skim the book and read the interesting parts.”
3. “I will read the book and think about how some of the techniques might apply to me.”
4. “I will read the book, think about it, and do the exercises that look interesting.”
5. “I will read the book, do exercises, and complete some of the Journal Entries.”
6. “I will read the book, do exercises and Journal Entries, and use some of the techniques.”
7. “I will read the book, do most of the exercises and Journal Entries, and use some of the techniques.”
8. “I will study this book, do most of the exercises and Journal Entries, and use some of the techniques.”
9. “I will study this book, do most of the exercises and Journal Entries, and experiment vigorously with most of the suggestions in order to discover what works best for me.”
10. “I promise to get value from this book, beginning with Exercise #1: ‘Textbook reconnaissance,’ even if I have to rewrite the sections I don’t like and even if I have to invent new techniques of my own.”

Enter your commitment level and today’s date here:

Commitment level \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you selected commitment level 1 or 2, you might consider passing this book on to a friend. If your commitment level is a 9 or 10, you are on your way to terrific success in school. If you are somewhere in between, experiment with the techniques; if you find they work, consider returning to this exercise and raising your level of commitment.