

THE COLLEGE STUDENT

formerly The Now Student



READING AND
STUDY SKILLS

EDWARD SPARGO



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This text used to be called *The Now Student*. It is essentially unchanged, but has been given a new title and new photographs to maintain its appeal to today's college freshmen.



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THE COLLEGE STUDENT
Reading and Study Skills

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Preface

The College Student functions three ways in developing students' reading and study skills: (1) It is an instructional text. Each of twenty-five lessons deals with a particular reading or study skill and presents specific techniques for developing it. (2) It promotes faster, more efficient reading with increased comprehension. Each lesson is a timed reading selection of 1500 words followed by a comprehension test. Students are encouraged to chart their progress in reading speed as well as in comprehension. (3) It provides opportunities to practice new skills. Each lesson is followed by an appropriate exercise which encourages students to use the skills and techniques discussed.

The text emphasizes sequential procedures which students can use at once to become more proficient in performing daily assignments. The language is concrete and readable; the word choice and structure reflect the author's intent to present useful information in its most understandable form. The design and organization are consistent and regular from one lesson to the next so that students soon become comfortable with an easily recognized format that is stimulating but not threatening.

One of the most useful features of the text is the *cloze* comprehension tests which follow each lesson. These are discussed at length in the Instructor's Guide.

Certain practice exercises contain excerpts from *30 Ways to Get Ahead at College* by Joseph L. Lennon, O.P., Vice President of Providence College, to whom the author is grateful.

The photographs appearing in the text and on the cover were taken at the Bristol campus of Roger Williams College in Rhode Island.

The author is most indebted to Raymond H. Harris for his assistance in rewriting and editing this Revised Edition.

E.S.

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Read the introduction before beginning any work. It explains how the selections are organized and what procedures to use to gain maximum benefit from your program of reading and study improvement.

Introduction to the Student

The further you go in school the more challenges you face, and the higher people's expectations of you become. You are expected to learn independently – to rely more on your reading in the learning process and less on your teachers. You are expected to manage your own time and assume more of the responsibility for your own education. In order to do this, you must have the necessary reading and study skills.

The skills you need for academic success are discussed in the following selections. If you will read each selection carefully and practice the suggested techniques, you will soon find yourself becoming a more efficient student and a faster, more capable learner.

USING THE TEXT

The effectiveness of any textbook depends upon how well it is used. Here are some suggestions for using this text.

1. Preview Each Selection. Before reading, take a minute or two to preview. As a study skill, *previewing* will be discussed fully in the text; but for now, preview by reading the title, the introductory statement in the box preceding the selection, and the headings throughout the selection.

This simple procedure will help you to read each lesson more efficiently. Knowing what is coming helps you to organize as you read and improves your understanding.

2. Time Your Reading. Just before starting to read, glance at the clock and make note of your starting time. If your instructor is timing the class, he will indicate when to begin reading. At the end of the selection, note your reading time in minutes and seconds. Turn to the table on page 254 and convert your time to a words-per-minute rate. Find the time on the table that is closest to your actual reading time. Record these scores in

the box at the end of each selection. We want you to keep a record of your reading rate throughout the text so that you will be able to see your improvement as it occurs.

3. Do the Comprehension Tests.

Two comprehension tests follow each selection. One measures your understanding of material from the beginning of the selection, and the other, material from the end of the selection. Together, they will show you how well you understand the entire selection.

Although the tests resemble familiar fill-in exercises, they are actually a relatively new, highly effective reading test called a *cloze test*. Cloze tests have been found to be ideally suited to check your understanding of the kind of factual material that is presented in this book.

In order to receive credit on the cloze tests, you should fill a blank with the exact word that has been removed. However, in some situations instructors will allow you to take credit for very close synonyms. Be sure to check to find out which procedure your instructor prefers to follow.

Because it is sometimes impossible to determine for sure what the missing word is, the tests are quite demanding and not the simple exercise they first appear to be. Nevertheless, if you read the selection attentively, it is not difficult to achieve a high score. Every blank need not be correctly filled to score 100 percent comprehension.

Correct your tests by referring to

the answer key at the end of the book. Credit yourself with two points for each correctly filled blank and record the scores for both tests in the box at the end of the selection. A conversion table on page 254 lets you convert your total cloze score to a comprehension percentage, which you will also record in the box.

Graphs are provided in the back of the book on which you can plot your reading rate and comprehension percentage for each selection. Trends and improvements can be readily seen when plotted on a graph.

4. Complete Practice Exercises. Following most of the selections there are exercises that provide opportunities to practice using the suggestions you have just read about. Needless to say, if you expect your improvement to last and become part of your study habits, you must practice the new techniques. The exercises have been designed to start you off.

Some of the selections are followed by questions that should be discussed in class or among small groups of students. If this is not possible, however, think each question through by yourself. By seeking answers to these questions, you may become more proficient in finding answers to personal study problems.

The text provides the means for you to improve your reading and study skills; so resolve now to give it the serious attention it deserves, and, in this way, to make the time you spend on schoolwork more satisfying and rewarding.

Every student brings both strengths and weaknesses to the job of learning. Your attitude, reading skills and study habits all contribute to your success or failure as a student. Diagnosing your strengths and weaknesses now and taking advantage of your school's remedial programs and counseling will put you on the right track to academic success.

Diagnosing Strengths and Weaknesses

If you were to begin a new job tomorrow, you would bring with you some basic strengths and weaknesses. Success or failure in your work would depend, to a great extent, on your ability to use your strengths and weaknesses to best advantage.

Of utmost importance is your attitude. A person who begins a job convinced that he isn't going to like it or sure that he is going to fail is exhibiting a weakness which can only hinder his success. On the other hand, a person who is secure in his belief that he is probably as capable of doing the work as anyone else and who is willing to make a cheerful attempt at it possesses a certain strength of purpose. Chances are he will do well.

Having the prerequisite skills for a particular job is a strength. Lacking those skills is obviously a weakness. A bookkeeper who can't add or a carpenter who can't cut a straight line with a saw are hopeless cases.

This book has been designed to help you capitalize on the strengths and overcome the weaknesses that you bring to the job of learning. But in order to measure your development, you must first take stock of where you stand now. As we get further along in the book, we'll be dealing in some detail with specific processes for developing and strengthening learning skills. However, as a beginning, you should pause to examine your present strengths and weaknesses in three areas that are critical to your success or failure in school: your attitude, your reading and communication skills, and your study habits.

ATTITUDE

In his book *Why College Students Fail*, Dr. Robert Pitcher has defined underachieving as *underbelieving* in oneself. If you approach a subject convinced that it's too difficult for you and that you will surely fail,

chances are you will prove yourself right. Low self-concept is one of the most destructive forces in a student's life and the most formidable obstacle to learning. Expectation of success and a willingness to try, on the other hand, are a student's greatest strengths.

Perhaps one of the most useful concepts you can acquire as you set out to improve your academic performance is that you don't have to be a "genius" to succeed in school. You will find it quite safe to assume that you can do as well as anyone else if you will use your strong points and work to improve your weak ones. All schools, both high schools and colleges, are geared to the needs of average people. And usually, a hard-working average student will outperform a lazy "genius" every time. Some students have a habit of rationalizing the success of others and their own lack of success by saying, "I'm just not the academic type. I'm no genius and I'm not a grind like he is."

There are precious few geniuses among successful students. By and large, successful students are very average, ordinary people who make the most of whatever they have to bring to the task of learning.

An old cliché says: *Nothing succeeds like success*. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: *Nothing fails like failure*. Once you have established a negative attitude, it feeds on itself until you become convinced that you can do nothing right and there's no use in trying. If, after taking honest stock of your attitude, you recognize a persistent lack of confidence in your ability to do well in school, you must resolve at once to change your outlook. If you can't do this by yourself, you should seek help from school counselors or from an understanding friend or relative. Many schools have specialists on their staff who deal with just this sort of problem because they recognize that

self-esteem and a healthy self-concept are important assets to learning.

READING AND COMMUNICATING

By now, you probably know in a general way if you are a good reader, a poor reader, or just fair. However, this should be part of the inventory of your strengths and weaknesses. It has been demonstrated time and again that good reading skills, learning and success in school go hand-in-hand.

So it is essential that you find out at once if your reading skills are up to dealing with the material you will be expected to learn from now on. If your reading skills are weak, you must take steps to improve them. If you read well, you should want to read better and to become a more versatile reader than you are now. You can use the reading skills inventory that follows this selection as a first step toward analyzing your reading.

Reading becomes more demanding as you go further in school. Not only do you encounter more difficult material, but you also are expected to read actively. That is, you are expected to evaluate and understand what you read, as well as absorb the information presented. Reading for learning is the sum of reading for information *and* reading for understanding. You should find out which skills you have now that will work for you in that direction, which you must strengthen, and which you must acquire.

If after taking an honest inventory of your reading skills you find you need help, seek it out. Your counselors can direct you. Most high schools and colleges, and many public and private community facilities, offer help in reading. Also, they are prepared to analyze your reading skills and prescribe a suitable remedial program for your needs. Don't shy away from help fearing that you will

be branded stupid or inferior. The reason that reading clinics have been established on every progressive high school and college campus is that there is so much need for them. If you have a reading problem or you feel the need of a program to improve your reading skills, get help. You won't be alone.

On the other side of the coin, you must be able to communicate the knowledge you gain through reading. The saddest and most often heard complaint from students is: "I know it, but I can't explain it."

Sometimes, just improving reading and study habits solves this problem. Building vocabulary increases the number of words you have available to explain what you know. One of the selections later in this book deals with writing effectively, but if you recognize that you have a hard core problem, you should seek help. Again, most schools recognize writing deficiency as a common problem

among students and provide facilities for diagnosis and help.

Faulty vision and substandard hearing are often causes of reading and communication difficulties that should not be overlooked. An eye test and a hearing test are essential parts of your inventory of strengths and weaknesses. Even if you have normal vision and hearing, you should check to make sure that you are using these precious learning receptors properly and not abusing them. A checklist is included at the end of this selection to direct your attention to possible trouble. However, your eyes and ears should be checked by a specialist periodically throughout your school career, and periodically afterward, so that the earliest signs of trouble may be noticed and attended to.

STUDY SKILLS

Some students have an intuitive feeling for doing the right things when they study. Other students stumble



into correct methods through trial and error. Unfortunately, the vast majority of students just don't know how to study efficiently and they suffer needlessly because of it. The problem? Usually no one has bothered to tell them the "tricks of the trade."

Use the study skills inventory following this selection to find out what you know about studying in general and about your own study habits in particular. Many of the selections in this book deal with specific study skills; you're told very explicitly *how to study*, and exercises are provided to help you get on the right track. But after that you are on your own; what you do with the suggestions is up to you.

We spoke earlier of attitudes. As you progress in high school and go from high school to college, you continually find yourself with new freedoms and new responsibilities that you must cope with. Consequently, the sooner that childhood attitudes give way to the demands of adulthood, the better off you will be. You are expected to shift your attitude from short-range to long-range goals and to understand the need for studying. You are suddenly in a serious situation, and your attitude must become more serious accordingly. In short, you are expected to mature.

If you mean to succeed in school, you must begin to consider why you are in school and for whose benefit. If you are in school only because you have to be there, because it's fashionable in your group, or because your parents insist on it, chances are you won't last long and you won't do very well. You won't have the motivation to study or the will to put up with the work it entails. For you to study effectively, your attitude must be that you are in school to learn because you feel that's what you ought to be doing and because it fits your long-range goals. Only then will the effort required to study seem worthwhile.

_____ : Reading Time

_____ : Reading Rate

_____ : Score, Test A

_____ : Score, Test B

_____ : Total Score

_____ %: Comprehension