

Mastering the INFORMATION AGE



• Get control of
your information overload
• Learn to read faster and plow
through books, reports, and memos • Find
the information you need quickly • Remember more
facts and data • Think more sharply • Present information
to others • Achieve your peak intelligence



MICHAEL J. McCARTHY



MASTERING THE INFORMATION AGE

A Course in
Working Smarter,
Thinking Better,
and Learning Faster

MICHAEL J. MCCARTHY



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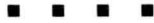
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First Edition

MASTERING THE INFORMATION AGE



I dedicate this book to two women: To my mother Mary Louise McCarthy, who started me off with a lively curiosity about life and an insatiable hunger for learning. And to my beloved wife and best friend, Kathryn McCarthy, whose encouragement, inspiration, love, and support have made me who I have become.





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In a general sense, my heartfelt gratitude goes to the many friends and teachers who have stimulated my thinking and contributed to my personal growth throughout the years. Thank you for being there.

In more specific terms, I wish to acknowledge my father Don McCarthy, a journalist and author, who taught me the power of words; my publisher Jeremy P. Tarcher for recognizing the gap that this book fills; my unrelenting editor, Rick Benzel, who contributed greatly to this book in many ways, and Paul Murphy, managing editor, for his expertise in putting the book together. In addition, I would like to thank Don Hawkins of AT&T, author Alfred Glossbrenner and Kathy Mulvey of DIALOG Information Services for their suggestions on Chapter 8; Dr. Jeffery Thompson for his guidance on neurophysiology; Mary Snyder for her help and support; Jim Golden of Strade (Denver), the artist whose creative genius produced the illustrations for this book; all of the students from my seminars who have taught me so much; and my friend Chester Stern for his incessant prodding and encouragement. The publisher also wishes to thank Richard Greene for his suggestions and time spent on Chapter 8.

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ceived certifications in whole-brain learning, speed reading, and neurolinguistic programming.

Little by little, I began to implement these new skills and strategies in dealing with my own information load, and I found the results dramatic and impressive. Within a short time a system emerged that allowed me to manage information rather than letting it manage me.

In 1987 I founded a consulting company called McCarthy Learning Institute and developed Champion Speed Learning Systems and Active Reading techniques, which subsequently have been taught to thousands of people across the United States. My clients included working professionals, executives, business and salespeople, students, and ordinary individuals interested in learning how to improve their productivity, reading speed, and effectiveness. As the demand for workshops in this area mushroomed, it dawned on me that practically everyone in today's society could benefit from a concise course that would combine the diverse skills I have read about, learned, or personally developed to deal with information overload.

Mastering the Information Age is that course. In this book, I have distilled the most important and useful principles and techniques from hundreds in the fields of learning, reading, thinking, and memory.

Some of the ideas and techniques in this book may be familiar to you, or you may recognize them as plain common sense. Others will be new to you and perhaps difficult to believe until you try them. But the beauty of this book is how powerful the sum total of the ideas can be in helping to transform you into a smarter, more productive, efficient, organized, and *successful* person. Once implemented these ideas can become a new lifestyle that will promote your ability to become a faster worker, better learner, and more intelligent person. My experience has shown me that, with practice, anyone can become a Master of the Information Age, regardless of age or educational background.

THE OBJECTIVES

Mastering the Information Age incorporates three objectives, each as vital and necessary as the next. These include developing:

1. broad-based personal skills in learning, working, and thinking better;
2. specific information management skills; and
3. effective communication and presentation skills.

Following is a brief overview of how this book addresses these goals.

Goal Number One:

Developing Broad-Based Personal Skills

The first part of this book, chapters 1 through 6, explores the first aspect of becoming a Master: developing your personal skills to handle any work or study situation that involves information. Becoming a Master requires a broad-based foundation that allows you to function effectively regardless of the task at hand.

In Chapter 1, we will start by examining more precisely what the Information Age means and why it challenges us. We will then define what a Master is and why most people have not learned to be one. Being aware of these issues and basic definitions will allow you to see what becoming a Master entails and why it is important for your future to make every effort to become one.

Chapter 2 examines an essential element of this process: learning how to identify and transform negative beliefs about your abilities and intelligence into positive beliefs that support your learning and thinking. Many people are not Masters, and perhaps may never be, simply because they limit their own abilities with self-defeating attitudes.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the fascinating concept of peak performance as it relates to learning and intelligence. You will see how using relaxation, nutrition, exercise, and even setting up the right external environment all contribute to putting you into a special “learning state” in which you can work or study with maximum effectiveness. You will also learn about the value of sharpening your senses and using your intuition in dealing with information. Included in these chapters are dozens of practical tips on improving your work or study habits.

Chapter 5 focuses on how you can enhance your memory

through a four-step program. You will also learn a variety of simple devices that can alleviate memory overload when it is more useful, as it often is, to record information rather than commit it to memory.

Chapter 6 teaches you how to think better and analyze information for accuracy and logic, both crucial skills in today's complex information world.

Goal Number Two:

Developing Specific Information-Management Skills

Much information comes to us in printed form. Chapters 7 through 10 focus on how you can learn to improve your ability to manage this flood of information, whether it comes to you unsought, or you go looking for it in your professional or personal research projects.

Chapter 7 presents the concept of defining your "information target zone" so that you will not waste time sorting through useless or irrelevant material. You will learn the steps for previewing reading materials to help you understand better and identify more precisely what information in a book, article, memo, or other source truly meets your needs.

Chapters 8 and 9 will teach you several powerful reading techniques that can enable you to increase your speed of information gathering. By practicing the exercises in these chapters, you will *at least double or triple your reading speed*.

Chapter 10 is aimed at familiarizing you with the many new information sources at your disposal when you need to find information not readily available. Many people experience "research anxiety," and are consequently nervous, if not terrified, about using libraries, online databases, CD-ROM, and other valuable sources of information that can simplify life.

Goal Number Three:

Developing Effective Communication Skills

A vital aspect of being a Master is knowing how to transmit information to others. The last chapter of this book is therefore aimed at helping you communicate information with clarity and power, in both writing and speaking.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Mastering the Information Age is organized into a carefully planned sequence of explanations and exercises, just as a course might be. If you follow it step by step you will find yourself growing steadily in your skills, and you will gain new confidence in the value of applying them to your daily life.

As you go through each section and chapter, you will also be able to implement immediately what you are learning. For example, after you read about the importance of establishing a learning environment, you may wish to improve your office or workspace at home following the suggestions in that section.

Here are a few other suggestions on how to gain the most from the time you spend with this book.

Participate

Most importantly, this book requires your *active participation*. As I said, it is really a course book. It differs from most books in that you will be asked to do more than passively take in the words. Really *using* this book assumes your active involvement. It is filled with quotes, techniques, and tools to allow you to change old habits and develop new skills, but the degree of your success depends in large part upon your willingness to become involved in the mastery process.

You may have heard of or even used “interactive” computer programs. These are programs for learning a new skill such as a language or a computer program itself. The computer presents you with some information and gives you an instruction or asks you a question. You respond, and then the computer responds to you. By interacting with the computer—answering questions, performing operations, *doing* something—the learner learns much more than by simply absorbing and trying to memorize information.

This book is designed as an interactive experience. To get the most out of it you must put yourself into it!

The book contains many exercises called Learning Activators. These are included to teach you in a direct way by involving you in a personal learning experience. In order to

get full benefit from the Learning Activators, you will need to pause in your progress through the book and spend some time thinking and writing. This is absolutely vital if you are to derive maximum results from this book.

A physical exercise routine written down on paper will not get you in shape, no matter how many times you read it over. A diet plan won't take off any weight unless you follow it. Likewise, understanding the principles of peak intelligence and Active Reading must be accompanied by action on your part, or nothing will change.

Make a commitment to yourself: Complete all the Learning Activators with full and honest participation.

Give Up Your Self-Limiting Beliefs and Habits

No matter how successful you are, unless you are a very unusual person you have some bad habits that hold you back from greater success. These may be habits of negative thinking, notions such as "I don't learn new things easily," "I read slowly," or "I have a terrible memory." You may have a habit of procrastination, of inefficient reading, or of being easily distracted.

These and other self-defeating, self-sabotaging habits of thought and action can be replaced by more productive behavior. In Chapter 2 you will find a number of exercises to help you transform such limiting behaviors into more positive and productive ones. But you have to be willing to change, and you have to translate your desire into concrete action.

A frequent barrier to taking action is our reluctance to leave our established "comfort zone," that familiar place where there are no challenges. Challenges often create tension and the discomfort of something new. There is safety in the status quo, where the comfort zone surrounds us like the warm atmosphere of home.

The trouble with this approach to life is that nothing new ever happens in the comfort zone; it is "business as usual" and does not stimulate our brain or free us from the boundaries of our present level of experience. If you are to grow, you need to step outside the boundaries of your comfort zone, into the region of new experience where learning takes place.

Please Write in Your Book

Since this is a workbook to be used and not just read, you will need to write in it. If you are one of those people who can't bear to mess up a book with underlining and other writing, here is your chance to take a first step beyond your comfort zone.

Please approach this book with pens, pencils, colored markers, paper clips, sticky notes, and any other methods of marking you might devise. Underline, write notes in the margins, put a paper clip on a page that's important to you. These simple techniques personalize the book for you and allow you to pick it up any time in the future and quickly find the places that were most useful or important to you.

Of course, these instructions do not apply if you are borrowing this book from the library. If this is a library book, please be considerate of others and do not write in it. Copy the exercise pages on a duplicating machine, or use a separate writing journal of your own.

Decide What You Want from This Book

It is useful for you to take a few minutes to define your purpose and write down what you want to accomplish from reading this book.

If this is *your* book, you can write in the blank spaces provided below. Or you can start a journal and write your goals there. Either way, you will derive much more from the book if you set objectives for yourself.

1. What is your purpose in reading this book? Write down brief points, or elaborate as much as you like. You might take the following questions into consideration. A few examples are given to get you going.

- What do you want to learn?
(Examples: Learn to locate information faster;
overcome limiting beliefs about my ability to learn)
- What new skills would you like to acquire?
(Examples: Read faster; enhance my memory;
visualize success)

- What changes do you want to make in your relationship to the Information Age?
(Example: Feel more in control)
- How much faster would you like to be able to read?
(Go for it! What would you really like?)

YOUR RESPONSES:

2. What questions do you have about the process of becoming an Information Age Master? For example:

- How can I improve my thinking skills?
- What are the possibilities and limits of my intelligence?
- What are the mechanics of memory?
- How much time will I have to spend in order to double my reading speed?

YOUR QUESTIONS:

3. What do you anticipate will be the answers to the questions you just posed? Based on what you know, try answering them now. Then as you read this book, come back to this page and compare what you are learning to what you wrote. Write your answers in the space below. Don't be afraid to be wrong. This is not a test, it is a way for you to engage your brain in the active process of getting what you want from this book.

YOUR ANSWERS:

Mastering the Information Age can transform your life. If you implement most of the ideas in this book, you will find that your performance at work or study will substantially improve and your personal day-to-day satisfaction will increase. Even if you incorporate only 50 percent of the suggestions, the benefits you will gain will place you many steps ahead of most people in your personal quest for excellence. At the very least, this book will give you a new confidence in yourself and in your ability to meet the challenges of the future, whether you are a working professional or a student.

We cannot build a dam to stop the flood of changes around us. In a world in which, according to economist and management expert Peter Drucker, "knowledge has already become the primary industry," a world in which brain power has replaced muscle power as the essential passport to success, only those people will survive and flourish who have the tools to

convert the flood of information and raw data into useful, coherent knowledge.

As I see it, you have only two choices: You can stay as you are and be overwhelmed by the tidal wave of change. Or you can begin to make the improvements suggested in this book to help you stay ahead and succeed. *Mastering the Information Age* invites you to be on the leading edge of progress.

Michael J. McCarthy
September 1990
Hotchkiss, Colorado



CHAPTER 1

BECOME A MASTER

You can't escape from the Information Age. Ready or not, you are right in the thick of it. Futurists such as Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock*, and John Naisbitt, author of *Megatrends*, have long predicted that information would soon overwhelm us. They were right. For most of us, information overload is now a reality.

If you are a working professional, you undoubtedly face a daily barrage of letters, memos, soft and hard computer copy, electronic mail, newsletters, articles in trade and professional publications, and entire books you need to read just to keep up with your job. If you are a student, you have stacks of required reading—textbooks, articles, journals, and so on—to wade through just to pass your courses. Whatever your situation, the amount of information you have to sort through and assimilate increases exponentially if you want to excel. Clearly, staying current with information has become one of the essential ingredients of professional or academic success.

Even on a purely personal level, you probably have a similar problem with information overload. If you are like most people,