

Do I *Really* Need THIS STUFF?

Simply put, discipline is doing what you really don't want to do so you can do what you really want to do.

—John C. Maxwell, leadership expert and author

CHAPTER LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the time you finish reading this chapter and completing its activities, you will be able to do the following:

- Identify at least two study skill challenges that you have.
- Identify at least two study skill strengths that you have.
- Explain how you can use your study skill strengths to minimize one of your study skill challenges.
- List at least five study skill topics covered in this book that you can use immediately.

The First Day of CLASS



It is the first day of the college term. Your instructor asks you to take out a piece of paper and respond to the following statements:

1. You have been placed in a study skills course this term. Explain why you do NOT really need this stuff! There must be some mistake. After all, you have spent many years in

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Key Terms

Challenge
Critical thinking
Discipline
Locus of control
Strength
Study skills

Chapter INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you hear the term study skills?

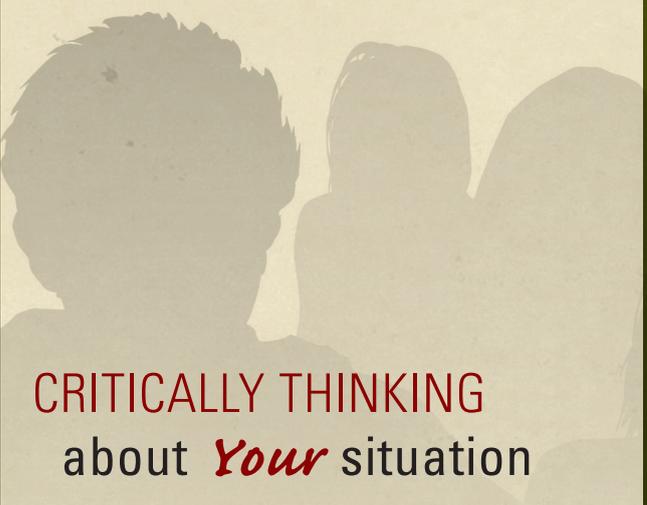
Most students approach a study skills course (or book) with little or no enthusiasm. It's not one of the most popular topics in the course catalog.

For many students, college is a means to an end: a career and the ability to earn money. They want to get in, get out, and get on with their lives.

Others come to campus excited about the activities, clubs, and social experiences that await them. They want to encounter more than just the classroom.

classrooms. You know what to do and how to do it.

2. You have been placed in a study skills course this term. Explain why you *DO really need this stuff!* Even though you have spent many years in classrooms, you need to improve in some areas as you begin the term.



CRITICALLY THINKING about *Your* situation

Take a quiet moment to reflect on the statements just presented:

1. What reasons come to mind that explain why you feel you do *not* need to be in a study skills course?
2. What reasons explain why a study skills course is the *correct* placement for you this term?

And most students come to postsecondary education believing they have the tools needed to succeed in college. They finished high school without much difficulty and with fairly good grades—and so they don't see any problems with jumping right into their college classes. Other nontraditional students may have postponed college for a number of years. They are here now after years of real-life experiences. Whether they spent time working, raising a family, or serving in the military, they stand ready for this next adventure in their lives. While some might be a bit apprehensive about handling the course work, they are excited to be back in school.

MyStudentSuccessLab

MyStudentSuccessLab (www.mystudentsuccesslab.com) is an online solution designed to help you 'Start strong, Finish stronger' by building skills for ongoing personal and professional development.

With all of these life experiences and college expectations, it is not unusual for students to be a bit put off when an adviser tells them they have to enroll in a study skills course. You might even hear students say things like the following:

- “Why do I need that? That’s a course for students with problems—not me!”
- “I am too smart for this course!”
- “Why do I need this course? I do my homework every night. Isn’t that studying?”
- “My adviser made me take this course. What a waste of time!”
- “Sounds like an easy A!”

Perhaps you had a similar reaction. Or at least, maybe you thought taking this course was just another “hoop” you had to jump through. You did not like it, but you rolled your eyes, gritted your teeth, and enrolled. “I do not really need this stuff, but I don’t have much choice. Anyway, how difficult can this be? I’m sure I don’t have to be Bill Gates to figure this stuff out.”

So, for whatever reason you ended up in this course, recognize that it is not designed for problem students, slow learners, or struggling students. It remains a course for students who wish to discover the best ways to learn and excel on campus—and beyond.

As you work through the activities in this book, identify obstacles to your learning as well as the strengths that help you learn. What stands in your way of being as successful as you would like to be? Are these obstacles related to attitude or ability? In the past, what strengths have helped you to achieve in the classroom? How can you build on those strengths to help minimize your challenges?

Activity 1.1, Assessment of Strengths and Challenges, will help you focus on some of your academic challenges—as well as your strengths. All students—including you—bring academic experiences, skills, and strategies that will help them be successful in the college classroom.

Activity 1.1

Assessment of Strengths and Challenges

Before you can work on your **challenges**, you need to know what they are. That may seem obvious, but sometimes we miss the obvious. This activity will help you focus on your challenges while reminding you of your **strengths**—those things you do well. You may be able to use your strengths to minimize or eliminate your challenges. For instance, your ability to think critically may help you determine the best way to address a test-taking challenge.

The challenges you want to be concerned with at this point are process challenges, not content challenges. For this activity focus on what you do, rather than what you learn. Concentrate, for instance, on what you can do (steps you can take) to become a more capable student in math (or English, or history, or science, or Spanish, or some other class).

First, check your strengths when it comes to academic success. What do you do well? Check as many or as few of the following qualities as apply. Take your time, and think about each choice carefully.

Setting goals

Completing goals

Supporting an opinion with facts

Organizing an essay

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking study breaks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing and completing a strong essay | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping an organized notebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing work on time | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing relationships and connections with class notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly reviewing and organizing class notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminating distractions | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying with friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes from class lectures | <input type="checkbox"/> Coming to class prepared |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remembering important information for exams | <input type="checkbox"/> Locating information for research projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling test anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding and using my learning style |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes from the textbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating information for research projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allowing plenty of time to prepare for exams | <input type="checkbox"/> Using critical-thinking skills to solve problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking organized notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Using social media for academic and career purposes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing exams in the time allotted | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting the main point from a reading assignment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting to class on time | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing respectful relationships with faculty and classmates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning from previous exam mistakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participating in class | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Now, check your challenges when it comes to academic success. In what areas do you need to improve? Check as many or as few as apply. Take your time, and think about each choice carefully.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning from previous exam mistakes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting an opinion with facts | <input type="checkbox"/> Participating in class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking study breaks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing an essay | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping an organized notebook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing and completing a strong essay | <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly reviewing and organizing class notes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing work on time | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying with friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Establishing relationships and connections with class notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Coming to class prepared |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eliminating distractions | <input type="checkbox"/> Locating information for research projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes from class lectures | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding and using my learning style |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remembering important information for exams | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluating information for research projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling test anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Using critical-thinking skills to solve problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking notes from the textbook | <input type="checkbox"/> Using social media for academic and career purposes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allowing plenty of time to prepare for exams | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting the main point from a reading assignment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking organized notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Developing respectful relationships with faculty and classmates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing exams in the time allotted | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting to class on time | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

Review the items you checked in each previous section. List below the five strengths you consider your biggest assets, ranking them from 1 to 5 (high to low). Do the same for your challenges.

Strengths

1.

6 DO I REALLY NEED THIS STUFF?

2.
3.
4.
5.

Challenges

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Look at the strengths you listed. In what ways might you be able to use them to help you minimize or eliminate your challenges? For instance, if one of your challenges is “Getting the main point from a reading assignment” and one of your strengths is “Taking organized notes,” how can you use that strength to help with the challenge? That is, how can one of your strengths be used to minimize one of your challenges?

Write your response here:

.....

.....

.....

HOW CAN STUDY SKILLS HELP YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT?

Action expresses priorities.
—Mohandas Gandhi, Indian independence leader

Obvious similarities exist between college and high school experiences. For instance, your instructors organize class activities and assign textbook readings. There are tests and projects to complete. You will have classmates you like and some that may irritate you. You will have a deep passion for some classes but find others difficult and tiring.

Overall, the outward structure of college will appear very similar to what you have experienced in your past schooling.

You will quickly discover, however, that there is also a great deal of difference between college and high school. For example, you will be given a syllabus on the first

day of class. More than likely, all of your assignments for the entire term will be on that handout. You will not be reminded daily about your assignments and due dates. You will have to keep track of them on your own. It is possible that you will not even get a hard copy (that is, a printed version) of the syllabus. Your instructor may post it online and expect you to find and use it from there.

In college, you may find yourself in very large lecture halls with more students than you ever had in a class before. Your instructors may not even know your name—and you may only see them when they walk into your classes. If you want to talk with them about your grades, you may have to search and find their campus offices.

In high school, your teachers may have given you many opportunities to earn grades. But in college, you may find that in some of your classes, you will receive only two, three, or four grades for the entire term. A lot rides on your performance on each exam or assignment.

You will also learn that if you miss your 8:00 a.m. history class, there is a better than average chance that no one will come looking for you. College life offers a great deal of freedom of choice and unstructured time. You will need to master how to use your unstructured time for positive results. Assignments, exams, group projects, social engagements, and personal responsibilities will all compete for your time (Piscitelli, 2011, p. 8). Having good study skills will help you complete assignments and still have time for a full social life, as well.

In short, you will need to develop **discipline** to effectively structure and carry out your day. When you act with discipline, you develop habits that move you closer to your goals. You focus on what needs to be done, and you do it when it needs to be done.

That is what having effective study skills will help you do: Develop discipline. Primarily, the focus will be on academic success, but you will see—as you read through these chapters—that the skills you develop in this course will carry over to your life outside class. These are life skills that are transferable to your career and your relationships.

Having disciplined study skills is necessary for students to master their academic work. Applying these skills helps develop strategies and techniques to focus energies on efficient and effective studying. And having sound study skills contributes to developing positive self-esteem. A student who can achieve in the classroom will feel better about his or her capabilities. Competence will foster confidence. In short, study skills are important for all students.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT

Break the concept of study skills into its two parts:

- **Study:** This is your personal effort to learn something. It could be academic (learning how to speak a foreign language), athletic (learning how to play tennis), occupational (learning how to do a particular job), or emotional (learning how to control anxiety or anger). You have “studied” your entire life—even before you ever set foot in a school. That is, you have learned how to do certain things. This book will concentrate on learning within the school setting. Synonyms include *think deeply*, *inspect*, *reflect*, *contemplate*, *review*, *analyze*, and *concentrate*.
- **Skill:** When someone has a skill, he or she can do something with a degree of expertise. A skill is sharpened through practice and experience. Even someone with a natural talent—say, in music—practices to become expert or skilled in his or her area. When you have a skill, you are able to do something well. Typically, when someone develops a skill it involves a certain amount of studying. Synonyms include *ability*, *mastery*, *competence*, *command*, *aptitude*, and *expertise*.

For our purposes, the term **study skills** will refer to your abilities to learn how to do academic things well and in a disciplined manner. Look at the table of contents of this book, and you will find typical study skill topics listed. Some, you will have no problem with, but others may cause you some concern.

Activity 1.2

Let's Get Personal (Part I)

It's time to make this very personal. Flip to the table of contents. Read the chapter titles and section headings listed there. Pick the one chapter that you believe will have the biggest impact on your academic success when you read it.

Look at the boldface headings, tables, and figures of that chapter. Choose three items (information, tips, strategies) you can use right now.

List and then briefly explain your interest in each item.

1.
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2.
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3.
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Each new term in college presents its own set of challenges. New courses, new instructors, and new demands all require students to reevaluate their study and relationship skills in and out of the classroom. Having study skills can help you successfully navigate various courses and instructor personalities.

Reading this chapter will also give you the opportunity to identify what will help you get what you want from your school term.

A QUICK PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

*Continuous effort—
not strength or
intelligence—is the
key to unlocking
our potential.
—Winston Churchill,
prime minister of the
United Kingdom*

Movie “trailers”—those quick advertisements that appear on TV—give previews of coming attractions. After watching a couple of clips from a movie, viewers have an idea of what a movie has to offer. Effective trailers draw people to movies.

Consider, if you would, this book to be the “movie” and the following chapters to be the “scenes.” Together, they all make up the “main feature.” This section of the chapter will help you preview some

of the “coming attractions”—the coming topics—and how they relate to you. It will warm you up and prepare you for what is to come. It will also help you locate information that is of immediate interest.

Activity 1.2, which you just completed, allowed you the opportunity to review the chapter you believe could have the biggest impact on your academic success. In Activities 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5, you will be able to dig a little deeper into this book. You will not only see what this book has to offer, but you will also be able to locate the topics that will be most helpful to you at this point in your college term.

Following one simple guideline will help you make the most of your time with this activity—and not see it as overwhelming: Spend no more than 10 minutes on each activity. If you desire, you can spend more time, but remember that you will have plenty of time to spend on each chapter later in the term. For the time being, invest no more than one-half hour on the following three activities combined. That’s it—just 30 minutes!

You have only two purposes:

1. Familiarize yourself with the content of this textbook.
2. Concentrate on which study skills can help you right now.

By the time you are done with the activities, you will have identified topics of immediate interest to you. And you will have done this in less time than it would take you to watch a television news program or have a cup of coffee with friends at a café. What a valuable investment in a short period of time! Wouldn’t you say you and your academic success are worth 30 minutes? (And you will have practiced a reading strategy known as SQ4R: survey, question, read, recite, record, and review.)

Activity 1.3

Let’s Get Personal (Part 2)

This activity builds on Activity 1.2. Once again, flip to the table of contents. Read the chapter titles and section headings. Pick another chapter that you believe will have an impact on your academic success when you read it.

Look at the boldface headings, tables, and figures of that chapter. Choose three items (information, tips, strategies) you can use right now.

List and then briefly explain your interest in each item.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

Activity 1.4

Let's Get Personal (Part 3)

This activity builds on Activities 1.2 and 1.3. Turn to the table of contents. Read the chapter titles and section headings. Pick another chapter that you believe will have an impact on your academic success.

Look at the boldface headings, tables, and figures of that chapter. Choose three items (information, tips, strategies) you can use right now.

List and then briefly explain your interest in each item.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

Activity 1.5

Let's Get Personal (Part 4)

This activity builds on Activities 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. Flip to the table of contents. Read the chapter titles and section headings. Pick one more chapter that you believe will have an impact on your academic success.

Look at the boldface headings, tables, and figures of that chapter. Choose three items (information, tips, strategies) you can use right now.

List and then briefly explain your interest in each item.

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

CORE PRINCIPLES

All the so-called 'secrets of success' will not work unless you do.
—Unknown

You will find three core life-skill principles running throughout this book: critical thinking, the power of practice, and locus of control.

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking requires gathering information, weighing it for accuracy and appropriateness, and then making a rational decision based on it. Critical thinkers are active learners who seem to never stop asking questions about whatever is before them.

As you read each chapter, apply your critical-thinking skills to determine how you can best use the strategies to help you become more successful as a student. To make both the book and your course more meaningful, try constantly to make connections that go beyond the classroom. That is, critically examine each skill for its connection to your life in general. For instance, studying how to most effectively use your time will develop a life skill that will help you in your personal relationships and career development.

THE POWER OF PRACTICE

The study skill strategies covered in the following chapters will be virtually useless unless you take the time to study them, practice them, and apply them. It won't help simply to think about using them or to think about the success you will have with them. You need to actually use the strategies again and again. Practice until you make using the strategies a habit—a good habit.

When you find a reflective self-assessment activity in a chapter, set aside some quiet time and complete it carefully. After all, the time you invest is time you are investing in yourself. What a wonderful investment!

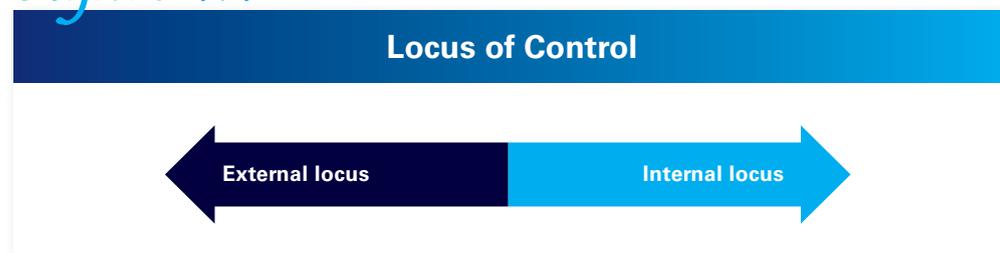
LOCUS OF CONTROL

Generally speaking, **locus of control** describes how people explain events in their lives. Do you accept responsibility for your life and make things happen, or do you look for reasons (excuses) that things happen to you?

An individual with an internal locus of control may explain poor test grades by looking into the mirror, pointing at himself, and saying, “I should have studied more.” This student accepts the responsibility for what happens to him. On the other hand, a student who is more apt to blame the teacher exhibits an external locus of control. A comment such as “That teacher is not fair and does not know how to write a test” reflects a student looking to assign responsibility elsewhere.

Refer to Figure 1.1. As with all continuums, few people are found at the extremes. Most of us fall somewhere in between. But upon reflection, we notice that we tend to lean to one end or the other.

As you progress through the semester, think of this continuum. Listen to your words. Pay attention to your actions. Are you a person who generally takes responsibility for your actions (leaning toward the “internal” end)? Or are you someone who tends to blame others (leaning toward the “external” end)? Use this information to heighten your awareness.

Figure 1.1

IT'S CALLED *WORK*

THERE IS NO "QUICK FIX"

This book does not offer a way to “beat the system” to earn the highest possible grades. It provides no gimmicks, no tricks. To offer a “quick fix” would be like going on a trendy diet to lose weight but never changing the behaviors that resulted in the extra pounds. Unfortunately, becoming a better student is not as easy as reading a book or watching an Internet video. So, if you want a quick-fix approach, reading the following chapters will not help much.

The material in this book will help you identify and change those behaviors that are keeping you from being the best student you can be. It will also help you strengthen and maintain the habits that have worked for you in the past.

The following chapters concentrate on practical skills to build academic success and a positive self-image. Having these skills will help you make the transition from being a student who simply gets by to being a successful student who is aware, insightful, and confident.

NO "QUICK FIX" DOES NOT MEAN TEDIOUS WORK

Interestingly enough, academic success does not have to be accompanied by tedious hours of tortuous work. Yes, there will be hours of work, but the work will be productive. Consider the following example.

Have you ever studied a long time for an exam only to be baffled by receiving a lower-than-expected grade? How frustrating. Many students complain, “I sat at that desk for hours last night—and I still bombed!”

In situations like this, the problem may be your study strategy, not the number of hours you have studied. There is a way to be more effective and reduce the number of hours you spend reviewing your material. The key is to know when to study so that you will maximize what you remember.

Memory—a study skill topic—will improve if you organize your study time into a number of sessions, rather than one big “cram” session. Research suggests this is one way to retain and recall more of what you study. It is not so much how long you study as it is how often you study (Medina, 2008, p. 133).

Study skill strategies will provide you with tools to do this.



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A COVENANT WITH MYSELF

Because this academic journey is about you—your desires, your needs, and your successes—take a moment and complete the covenant in Figure 1.2. Consider two things about this document:

- This is a covenant, not a contract. The term contract too often has connotations of distrust: “I’m not sure you will do what you say. Therefore, I want you to sign this contract.” For our purposes, let’s use a much more positive approach. A covenant implies respect and trust. It is a public proclamation of that respect.
- This covenant is strictly personal. It is an agreement you make with yourself. If you don’t follow through on it, you don’t follow through with yourself. Your signature indicates your desire to improve, your respect for yourself and those around you, and the trust you place in your intention to do the best you can.

Figure 1.2

Covenant with Myself

A COVENANT WITH MYSELF

I realize that my choices and actions
reflect my priorities.

I further recognize that my choices and actions
affect my dreams and personal well-being.

I pledge to make choices during this term that reflect respect,
responsibility, and honesty toward myself and others.

Today’s date _____

My signature _____

Chapter SUMMARY

Before leaving this chapter, keep the following points in mind:

- Developing effective study skills will help you discover the best ways to learn and excel in college.
- You have strengths. Use them. You have challenges. Recognize them and work to minimize them.

- Use your critical-thinking skills to examine your strengths and challenges. Practice strategies that will help you.
- Develop disciplined habits that will take you to the highest levels you can reach as a student.

CRITICALLY THINKING

What Have You Learned in This Chapter?

Return to the situation that was described (and that you wrote about) at the beginning of the chapter. Specifically, look at the second part of that scenario, which stated the following:

You have been placed in a study skills course this term. Explain why you DO really need this stuff! Even though you have spent many years in classrooms, you need to improve in some areas as you begin the term.

Reflect on the answer you wrote in response to this statement. After you complete that, review your notes from this chapter, the key terms, the boldface chapter headings, and the figures. Also reacquaint yourself with the Chapter Learning Outcomes:

- Identify at least two study skill challenges that you have.
- Identify at least two study skill strengths that you have.
- Explain how you can use your study skill strengths to minimize one of your study skill challenges.
- List at least five study skill topics covered in this book that you can use immediately.

Based on what you have read in this chapter, write a revised response to the statement from the beginning. Also explain what has caused you to adjust (or maintain) your evaluation. How do you see study skills differently now than when you started the chapter? How will you use your strengths to minimize your challenges?

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