

STUDY MADE EASY: USING SKILLS, INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS AND PREFERENCES

Alfred Afamefuna Ezejiegwu

Abstract

This write up handles one of the greatest gifts a learner can be given – “how to learn.” People are born with different strengths and preferences, sensory, environmental, sociological, good intake time of the day, etc. Preferences frequently indicate strengths and when people are helped to use their preferences (strengths) much better results are achieved. This write up not only deals with easier intake of knowledge but also teaches techniques, processing, storing and refereeing information. It covers areas such as style of studying, notes and summaries, time management, use of essential questions, acrimony and numerous visualization, linking of ideas, etc.

Introduction

“Students are expected to succeed in school but are not taught how” Markes Beale (1994). This write up, therefore, hopes to help students:

Effectively document the information they hear. Read and learn effectively from information materials, master the testing game, think critically and creatively and become more self-directed. Manage their most precious resource time. Recall information fast when needed.

The 6th President of the United States of America, John Quincy Adams remarked that “To furnish the means of acquiring knowledge is ... the greatest benefit that can be conferred upon mankind.”

Learning Preferences

Most students can easily develop one kind of study habit or the other. Students' habits are, therefore, as varied as individual learners. The habit of

studying developed by an individual is usually a function of a number of influences on that learner. The influences could be biological or environmental. Among the things that influence this final outcome seen as study habit are: random Vs sequential learning, left-brain, right-brain preference, sensory and perceptual preferences such as auditory, visual and kinesthetic, sociological preferences, environmental preferences, biological needs, psychological issues such as motivation and persistence, active v's passive learning and the use of essential questions.

One's learning style is a reflection of how one absorbs and processes information from the world. “Everyone has a learning style pattern and every person has learning strengths”. Markes-Beale (1994) observed that “working harder and longer is not the same as working smarter.” Ineffective study skills can make one spend longer hours studying yet not achieving much. Learning can be made a lot easier with proper skills that are efficient and effective. Study skills have been described as the key to success. Effective study can be achieved using individual's learning strengths. It is therefore important that every learner should be

conversant with his learning strengths and preferences. Using learning strengths will help a student absorb information in ways that are easier and most enjoyable for the individual. It will also enable the student process the information with less difficulty and retain the information for a longer time. (Dunn, 1993).

We shall pause here for an exercise.

Exercise

All right-handed persons should write their names with their left hands while left-handed persons do the same with their right hands.

How did you feel doing this?

Which was faster?

Which was easier?

Which one came out better?

Which one took less effort?

When we study without using our strength we are doing something like writing

out names with our left hand while we are right handed and vice versa.

Sensory Preference

There are three types of sensory preferences: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Auditory learners are those who take in and process information best through their sense of hearing. Visuals are best with their sense of sight-their eyes. Kinesthetic/Tactuals do best in motor activities and physical manipulations. Auditory learners are better with information taken in through the ear such as lectures, dialogues, conversations, radio, etc. To tackle a difficult learning task, they read out aloud to themselves. Such a learner may recall information by remembering the voice of a teacher, its pitch, tone etc and

get a 'play back' of the relevant information. These students can read their notes aloud to themselves, engage in discussions with others like in study groups, record materials which they can play and recite. Visual learners recall most easily what they see. To teach them, a variety of cues should be used when they need to recall information, they get photographed representation of the information. They may recall the handwriting, colors of ink used, diagrams, etc. of the required information, the way it appears in their texts or note-books. Some may even remember the sketch, pictures or illustrations used by the teacher when the topic was taught. To prepare for examinations, these learners do better reading and re-reading their notes and texts, making sketches, drawings and visualizing information. (Loomis , 1999).

The Kinesthetic learners love to work with their hands and bodies as information is absorbed best through the feeling of shape, texture, structure, position, spacing, etc. In information processing, these learners combine what they see and hear with what they touch and manipulate. To prepare for examinations, kinesthetic learners may choose to construct structures, do sketches, drawing and diagrams, write down what they remember or act out a scene.

Environmental Preferences

Environmental settings affect study effectiveness and outcome. Individuals differ with regard to their sensitivities to sound, light, heat, design, time, seating arrangement, etc. Some learners operate best in perfectly quiet places while others may find it boring and

fall asleep. Some prefer to play music or have some background noise. Consequently, the quiet school library may be a choice venue for some while others may fare better in a classroom.

Bright or dim light may be comfortable or uncomfortable to individuals. Adequate lighting is important to the learner. Similarly, sensitivity to heat also affects one's ability to study. Some students report that they study better on cold days or in cold places like air-conditioned rooms or cold classrooms while others prefer warm days or warm places.

Students also have preference for sitting arrangement. Some may prefer the traditional classroom arrangement while others thrive better in carrels in the library or bigger spaces on tables. Each student should be encouraged to identify physical factors that enhance his study. (Carruth, 1998).

Food Intake Preferences

Some students do better studying when their stomachs are full. For others, this may send them to sleep. Eating or chewing may act as enhancers or distractors.

Sociological Preferences

Who one studies with may affect how much is absorbed. Individual differences exist in the choice of study partners. Some people prefer to study alone, some in pairs, some in teams, some with adults, others with peers or with different combinations of the above. Having study buddy (ies) can encourage the learner and provide more avenue especially for student-student assistance in learning. Studying and discussing with others is particularly effective for students who are auditory learners as it

affords them more opportunity to hear and use their auditory strengths.

Time of Day Preferences

If students are asked the question, "if your English teacher gives you a take home assignment of reading a very difficult passage and answering very tough comprehension questions on it, at what time of the day would you want to do the assignment?"

Answer to this question will vary from early in the morning, to late morning, early afternoon, evening, early night to late night. There is a biological clock for each person which counters or supports learning at a particular time and counselors can help individual learners discover their own "best times" for studying. (Obidoa, 2008).

Style of Study

Active participating study: What kind of student are you? Active and participating - writing, jotting, drawing, noting, underlining as you read or passive-lying in bed or sitting down and gazing at a text as you would gaze at the landscape. Active participatory learners are marked for success.

Notes and Summaries

Good notes are important. Making notes is an act of doing something. This is very good for kinesthetic and visual learners. It reinforces learning. Notes should be summarized for quicker and faster revision. A two page note on a topic could be summarized in two lines which can be read and re-read easily within short periods.

Time-Tabling and Time Management

Ezekiel 3:1 – 8 says there is time for everything. Time-tabling is allotting time to private study and other activities within the study periods and sharing available study time to all courses. It is budgeting study time. Students who know themselves, their strengths, preferences, priorities, interests and weaknesses can budget their time appropriately giving more time to areas that are more important or difficult.

Using Essential Questions

Each study session will be greatly optimized if students learn to use essential questions. The questions challenge the learner and help to keep his focus. The student should pose the question and attempt to answer it at the end of the study period. It is also a measure of the outcome of the study. They also serve as goals and motivators. Examples of such questions are:

1. What are the key words or names you came across?
2. What are facts about the key words?
3. What diagrams and labels should I know?
4. What are the inter-relationships between the key words/names?

Motivation and Interests

These are two very powerful factors that sustain and propel students. Now your learning will not be controlled by your form master or parent but from within you. Encourage and motivate yourself and keep rekindling your interest. If you lose it, you are then ready to quit school and go home.

Recall Techniques

How do you remember what you have read? A good system of putting

away your clothes, exercise books, makes it easier to find them when you need them. When you organize information well, it is easier to retrieve when needed. Several recall techniques exist. Among them are: acronyms, mnemonic sentences, visualization and graphic organizers. (Preston, 1962).

Acronyms are formed from initial letters of words. The acronym from Enugu Electricity Distribution Company is EEDC. Acronyms are easier to remember and they help the learner remember information. Characteristics of living things, for example, can be remembered with the acronym MRERGFI for movement, respiration, excretion, reproduction, growth, feeding, and initality. The letters in an acronym may yet be rearranged for easier recall. It is easier to remember a cluster of alphabets that can be pronounced as a word than a random unpronounceable cluster of consonants and vowels. MRERGFT above could thus be rearranged to FEIGERM (and pronounced like frying germs to kill them).

Mnemonic Sentences

Mnemonic sentences are memory devices that help the recall of information in an organized manner. A classical example of this is attempting to recall the names of the planets according to their distances from the sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. The acronym for this MVEMJSUNP. This is a difficult cluster to remember. Moses Vamped Every Morning; Joy Sang Uninterrupted Natural Pieces.

Visualization

It is believed that up to 90% of one's memory is stored visually in

pictures. Being able to create and store these pictures enhances recall. This is called visualization. Visual learners in particular do very well if they can recall the picture of the page where the particular piece of information they require is stored. Mental/mind maps that are created during study help to organize information for easier and faster recall. It is advisable for learners to develop mind maps from their notes as they study as this will build up a good visual memory for them. They can make up their own diagrams, sketches, pictures or any form of illustration to help them remember. (Renzulli, 1997).

Linking of Ideas

Linking of ideas help in the recall process. The brains recall work is made easier by association, connections and linking of related ideas.

Graphic Organizers

Sketches can be used to give form/format to ideas, information and facts. These formats known as graphic organizers can help to understand, assimilate, store and recall information. The formats vary to serve different purposes and they come very handy for use in different subject areas and for different kinds of information. (Siberman, 1996).

Taking Tests and Examination

Students are graded in a continuous assessment/examination score of 30/70. Students are, therefore, encouraged to do all assignments and practical and attend all lectures. In some institutions, they are required to make 75% attendance of lectures to qualify to sit for an examination in any course. Preparing well for examinations, choosing of our questions and answering

your questions well are very crucial.

Conclusion

To study effectively, discover and use your strengths and preferences. This makes learning easier, faster, more permanent and more pleasurable. Charge to all students.

1. Pray ceaselessly and work hard. Ask God for wisdom and knowledge.
2. Set your goals.
3. Attend all classes and practical.
4. Make good notes and summaries
5. Manage your time effectively.
6. Manage your time table and keep to it.
7. Know and use your strengths and preferences.
8. Learn to choose examination questions wisely.
9. Learn to answer examination questions well.
10. Know the resources in your environment: the libraries, reading rooms, useable classrooms etc.

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