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About the Author

Ian Waverley was not a good student during his years in school and college. He achieved good marks only in those subjects which interested him.

When he had been working for a few years, he realized that he had little chance of being offered the best jobs and other opportunities unless he improved his knowledge and skills to be able to compete with his colleagues on a more level basis.

Ian said, “I found that studying and producing assignments was not much easier the second time around. But, I had an obvious and important incentive for succeeding – if I didn’t, then my future prospects were very limited.”

He added, “And, that was even before the recent international financial crisis started to reduce job opportunities even more.”

Ian found that many older people were studying for various reasons, to improve their business prospects or gain skills which would help them in some part of their personal lives.

But, like him, many of them were finding it difficult to fit the extra activity into their already crowded schedule.

Ian said, “So, I wrote this ebook mostly to help those who have to adapt to current methods of study without reducing their effectiveness in their current employment or impacting negatively on their personal or professional relationships. I also have some important tips about avoiding the health issues which affect the results many people get because of the extra demands on their time and energy.”

“My book may also be useful to younger students because it focuses on matching the results of study to potential employment in the future.”

Introduction

Every day there are new announcements of businesses under pressure, job numbers reduced and competition increasing in every country.

No-one can be sure that their job is safe into the future like it used to be for earlier generations.



Many people are starting to do formal education or self-paced study which will help them to improve their skills and knowledge for their current job or better ones which they want to apply for in the future.

But, it can be very difficult to fit the demands of their new course into their crowded schedule without impacting on their family, social commitments and the requirements of their current employment.

This can be discouraging, especially if their previous experience in the formal education system was not as successful as they expected.

I know many people that put their desire for further education aside at this point.

Or, they may start their new course but have little or no confidence in their ability to succeed with it. That makes it even harder for them to ever realize their dream of future success with their education or improving their employment prospects.

I believe that these people will be helped a lot by reading and using the tips and strategies which I explain in this book.

I was never a “good” student and no more than average in my ability or intelligence. I struggled more than most of my classmates through my formal education.

So, I started my work-focused learning without any particular advantages. But, I had a strong desire to get out of the rut I was in and provide a better

future for myself and, of course, my family which was and is the center of my life.

The suggestions and strategies I explain here will help you, whether you are starting a formal course of training or learning from books and other resources.

I include a few warnings too. They are not intended to discourage you from seeking information and opportunities. I hope that they will help you to avoid some of the traps and dead-ends which could waste your time and money and take away your confidence.

Your level of self-confidence and feeling of self-worth is probably more important than you may realize when you start your new round of study. Sometimes, it can be the one thing which keeps you on course and willing to take action after one of the inevitable pot-holes we all experience on our road to eventual success.

For that reason, I’ve included some material on building and maintaining your self-confidence. Please read it through and use the information there which fits with your personality. When you have successfully finished your current learning objective, that material will be also useful for keeping you motivated and alert as you progress toward further and bigger personal and professional goals.

Start Here

When you start thinking about taking up the opportunities and responsibility of study on top of your current work and family responsibilities, you need to consider your medium-term goals as well as the short-term considerations which started you to look at this idea.

You should include all the factors which will be affected by your extra activity.

Some people are focused on the potential benefits which could come from successful completion of their new course. A clear understanding of what you are taking on and what you might have to give up while you work to achieve the goal is very important.

Timing: You need to choose the best time for you to take on your study venture.

Do you have the necessary funds and time available to give you the best chance of success?

Think about the time (months or years) which it will take you to reach your goal? Does the potential benefit seem to be worth that investment?

Will this have any serious effect on important business or personal relationships? If so, you need to consider and consult with the people concerned before you move beyond some point of no return.

Will the qualification and the experience you get through your study and practical work be of lasting benefit? Some areas of work are rapidly evolving and you may find that the benefits of some programs have a limited life as new systems and technology devalue them fairly quickly.

Do you have to take on extra financial commitments to pay for the course and/or extra personal expenses during the study period?

Can you fund this from your own resources or will you end your course with a significant extra burden of debt that may affect your quality of life and potential into the future? Be sure to check with your instructors and course advisors whether or not you may qualify for financial or other assistance to

help with your course. Another possibility is that your employer may be willing to help with your costs if you can demonstrate that your value to them will be much greater during and after you learn or improve your current skills and knowledge.

Always check carefully every detail of any financial commitment which you are offered. In North America, for instance, the debt burden which students have accumulated is one of the greatest drags on their future quality of life.

That type of debt is also currently one of the least well-protected under finance and consumer protection legislation.

Travel time: Some people incur a lot of extra travelling time with the associated costs and stress when they take on a new study course. What might be okay as a one-off trip for a seminar could become less attractive when you have to take that trip several times a month.

Your personal security when travelling, even to a local venue at night or in an unfamiliar area, and whether your car is at risk in the parking area also needs to be considered.

Some types of study can be taken part-time at community colleges and other providers by correspondence.

There are also growing opportunities for learning from Internet-based providers world-wide. I will share some of these in the Resources section at the end of my ebook.

These options can help reduce the need for extra travelling time and gasoline or fares.

Getting Ready

This chapter looks at preparing yourself so that you have the best chance of attaining your education and career goals.

These basic steps are not specific to your course of study, they address your preparedness for the work and improving your mind-set which will be so critical to keeping you on-track when you meet obstacles and disappointments during the time ahead.

Two Check-ups

The first check-up which you must arrange is by your doctor or other medical adviser.

He or she will be able to advise of any condition which might need to be addressed so that it does not have a negative effect on the progress you make through your course.

Get your eyes checked, especially if you wear glasses or contact lenses, because they will be of critical importance through your course of study.

When your doctor gives you the results, you will be able to move forward, confident that you are prepared for the battles ahead.

Now, you can start the second check-up.

Checking Your Mindset

This is equally critical. And, it is neglected as often as those regular health check-ups we all know that we should have.

It is understandable that you, or anyone, would have reservations about the outcome of your new study. I did and that doubt held me back a lot until I started to analyze why I was not achieving any results which were close to the expectations which I had built up when I began.

Your Mindset

Please don't skip this chapter, thinking that I just want you to take on board some positive thinking mottos to try to boost your self-esteem.

I want to share some useful, no-fluff suggestions which I and many others have proven can reduce doubt, stress and procrastination over time.

They work – you just have to work at them.

I keep in mind this comment,

"If you constantly believe you are going to do something, beware - it's going to happen." - Billy Connolly, the comedian

It tells me that you need to be as prepared for success as a lot of people are prepared for total failure!

A lot of people have heard that visualization can have benefits. Some people try it and then quickly develop a negative attitude toward it because it doesn't seem to work for them.

But, I was told by a very successful user of visualization that many people focus on mind movies of them being presented with awards and applause or enjoying the results of the work they are still in the early stages of.

My friend said that they would benefit more if they focused like successful athletes and other champions did on mind movies where they performed the tasks which they did every day, but more smoothly and efficiently than they were doing at that stage of their projects.

Everyone has room for improvement in the way that they do routine and specialized tasks. Performing them in our minds better than we are currently doing them physically, can help to make new tracks in our subconscious which will improve our performance in the future.

Use Your Most Powerful Computer

We know that the human brain is one of the most powerful processing units which any of us are likely to use during our whole lifetimes.

But, it’s also clear that we don’t control or even use anything like ten percent of its power. Most of us don’t even make good use of much of that small portion which we are able to influence!

What many people don’t realize is that they are actively reducing the effectiveness of their efforts to advance toward their personal and professional goals!

There are several ways that we may do this.

Regret: Many of us waste time and a lot of emotional energy thinking about past disappointments and the people who we believe caused problems for us. Even if they did, those events and actions are in the past and we are unlikely to help ourselves at all by reliving the negative feelings which we felt at the time. In fact, that will just cause us to feel stressed all over again and that can cause us further problems while keeping us less able to deal effectively with the tasks we need to conquer right now.

Take aboard any lessons which you can get from those old wounds and move on. Some people find comfort in writing out a brief account of the events or their feelings about what occurred and then burning or just tearing up the paper as a signal to their subconscious that you are finished worrying about that matter and don’t want to remember it any longer.

Self-talk: During our early years, many of us were affected by negative comments from some of those around us who gave us only negative feedback or cast doubts on our abilities in some other way. Those early advisors and role-models often continue to have a limiting effect on some people’s self-image even into their adult lives. This can hinder their achievements and even how much effort they will put in to improving their lives, both personally and professionally.

Research has confirmed that we all talk to our subconscious every minute of the time we are awake. People with a negative view of themselves continually feed negativity into their subconscious.

The subconscious is powerful but does not evaluate the material you supply to it. If you say that you are deficient in some area, your subconscious accepts that and the opinion influences the directions which it supplies to the muscles and other parts of your body.

This is easy to start to fix but it will take determination and time before you see some positive changes.

First, you must accept that you have grown physically and mentally since the time when you got those opinions from your adult advisors. And, of course, they may not have been correct anyway.

But, you are now better prepared for the new challenges you take on and you just need to start feeding that positive reinforcement into your subconscious.

It will, in a fairly short time, start to cause positive changes in how your body deals with new and challenging tasks.

Then, you can reinforce those positive changes by recording your progress. When you start to feel doubt or someone throws some negativity your way, review your notes to get you mentally back on the right track.

You can also get good results by avoiding the company or attention of people who are stuck in a negative mode where “everything is someone else’s fault” and “you can’t win unless you cheat”.

You know they are wrong but their statements can wrap you in a warm cocoon of mutual misery.

The only trouble is that you get sick if you stay there.

Squeezing Study in with Your Real Life

When you start a new course of study in addition to your regular employment and social commitments, you will always have to make some hard decisions about what you do, what gets priority and what you give up or put aside for a while.



The demands of your current employment have to be given some importance when you start to plan your new schedule.

But, I suggest that you start by looking for anything which you can reduce or eliminate for a while.

Sometimes, that will involve some friction where you decide to drop out of some regular social commitment or stop doing something for someone else which you cannot find time for now.

I was a secretary of a community group when I started my new course and I quickly found that the time involved was too much. Of course, it was difficult for the group to get another volunteer for secretary. I ruffled some feathers because I would not agree to keep doing the job until they found someone.

That could have become a long-term commitment because they would have had no reason to give the search for my replacement while the extra work would have reduced my effectiveness as their secretary and degraded the results I could get from my coursework.

If I had given some time to checking all my commitments and the new demands on my time and energy for possible conflicts right at the start, it could have been much easier.

Learn from my experience and get any changes you need to make under way as soon as possible. That’s fair to everyone involved and is likely to make any such changes a bit easier to accomplish.

Special care will be needed when you need to make changes to set arrangements which involve the people you are closest to. But, you will usually find that they will be ready to understand the importance of this new task to your future prospects and support you as much as you support them.



The secret (which is not hard to guess) is that these discussions will be easier for everyone involved if you really work on keeping good communication with all members of your family and closest friends at all times, not just when you need something.

Time Management



Time Management is critical. It's an art and no one system will be the best for everyone. I'll explain some of the best approaches I know about and share the experience of myself and other people later in this book.

One thing which many people stumble over is that they try to keep doing more things than they can comfortably fit in.

I believe that you need to trim down where you can see things that are not currently giving you value for the time and other resources which you put into them. Then, you need to drop, or at least defer, those activities and commitments which are border-line in value compared to what they require of you.

Give yourself as much slack as you can at the beginning.

When you have had some time to experience the actual demands of the new system, you might then start slowly to take up some of the old tasks again. Just be sure they will add enough value to your life to be worth more than other commitments which you have left aside.

If you need an extra half hour each day to get through your new workload and still leave you time to do things outside work and study, try getting up a half-hour early. But, go to bed half an hour earlier.

If you just skip half and hour of your regular sleep pattern, it will catch up with you.

Your Study Space

Make a study space for yourself and all the bits and pieces which you need for your course. This is part of being organized. It will not seem like hard

work when you start to see how much time and effort you save by having all the important materials and resources ready when you start each session.

If you have somewhere that you can use only for your study and where you can leave some of your equipment and study materials, it will be ideal.

But, many people make do with part-time use of an area in a room used by all the family and have to remove their gear after each session and put it away. We can adjust and work with almost any conditions when we realize it is a necessary but only temporary inconvenience which is part of the price we pay to achieve our educational and career goals.

Make Time for You!

Always include time for yourself and social time in your schedule.

You need to remain connected with your family and close friends, get regular exercise and some enjoyment from every day so that you avoid health problems, reduce stress and remember why you are putting these extra demands of the course on yourself and your family.

Walking your dog or playing with your kids in the park has many of the same health benefits which people pay significant sums to get from wearing themselves out on machines in gyms.

But, the personal involvement with family or pets has extra benefits which money alone cannot buy.

Make sure that you share time with your partner and exclude all distractions. If necessary, write those times in your diaries but don't let anything get in their way.

Even if it is just a quiet coffee, or a meal, away from your home and kids, it can be the most important thing you do all week.

Why Keep Learning?



Even if you do not feel any need to get more qualifications or improve on your current skill levels for employment reasons, there are still good reasons to continue to add to your knowledge.

As researchers gain greater insights into the structure and function of our brain, they report that we are not using anything like its capacity and cannot wear it out however hard we push ourselves.

It is likely that we do some damage to it because of the junk we push into it and cause some deterioration but leaving it idle.

What a terrible waste!

Current research states that we can improve our use of the almost unlimited power of our brain at almost any age unless there is a physical or other problem.

And, the good news is that keeping our brains actively and gainfully in use is likely to improve our mental processes. We can rewrite old neural pathways and even create new ones much more easily than previously thought.

The reverse is also true. Letting our brain idle is as potentially damaging for it as letting our muscles become slack and weaker from lack of use.

For me, the main reasons for continuing to study through either a formal or self-directed way are:

- ✓ It helps us to be able to take advantage of opportunities which come along.
- ✓ It helps us to be able to connect with people outside of our own age group because we have some knowledge of the current subjects which they are focused on.

- ✓ Continuing to expand our mental horizons creates new neural pathways in our brain.

Our continued enthusiastic commitment to learning not only improves our lives, it makes us more interesting to other people.

Procrastination



Most students would rate procrastination as one of the most challenging problems getting in the way of their completing their assignments and courses successfully.

This chapter will give you some proven tips for defeating procrastination and keeping it at bay in the future.

We start by recognizing that procrastination is not always recognized for what it is.

We think we are:

- Waiting for inspiration
- Putting finishing touches to a project
- Finding important additional facts, or
- Waiting until we have enough time to do the subject justice.

But, all these excuses just mean we are procrastinating.

Waiting for Inspiration: I found that my best ideas usually came to me when I was actively doing something related to the subject. That physical activity got me working. My brain was better focused on the topic, so it was more receptive to related ideas than if I was watching a movie or just “waiting for inspiration” without having any particular focus on my thinking.

Applying the finishing touches: We want our work to be “perfect” but the truth is that we can only take our idea so far by ourselves. We really need to know the reactions of other people. Their input will help us to remove any rough edges and polish the final details. Often, their input can cause us to see some valuable ways to move our idea forward which we might never have gained from our solo development process.

Get additional facts: We run a great risk when we hold back our ideas. We are usually better off putting our work out so that we can make our claim to any original aspects as our work. It’s not unusual for some ideas to be developed separately by several people at around the same time

If someone else releases their version of the same idea we have been working so hard to develop, they might remove any chance of our getting recognition for the originality of our work.

Enough time: If we wait until we have a block of time to work on a particular project, we may find the deadline catching up with us before the time is available. After making that mistake and almost failing a test, I decided to look for small parts of the project which I could do whenever I had a small period of free time.

I found this was a great way to move the project forward.

I did not feel the same pressure because I was only working on it for a small length of time which would have otherwise probably been frittered away.

If you try this tactic of using even small amounts of available time, I expect that you also will be pleasantly surprised at how much more quickly your idea progresses to actual realization.

It’s amazing how much time we fail to make any productive use of in the average week.

A friend of mine kept a “time diary” for a few days where she recorded brief notes about everything she did. She was amazed at how much time was wasted between actual productive tasks.

She said, “I realized that many of the gaps could be used if I had the materials to hand. So, I re-arranged my work area and made great improvements by using many of those gaps.”

“I also stopped checking email as often. That gained for me at least a half hour of useful work-time to every day!”

I like the idea of a “Time Diary”, but it’s important to avoid becoming obsessed about making use of every available minute.

That would be bad for your sense of well-being and make you very dull to be around.

We need to have rest time in our day or we become stressed and worn-down.

The idea of using those small chunks of time is to make it easier for us to have some time for ourselves and our friends as well as to become more efficient in the way we organize our work.

Every Victory Starts from a Plan

Whether your decision to take a course of study is because of your own idea or something which is required to gain advancement in your employment, you will need to invest some time in planning how to fit the extra demands which it brings with it into your current life.

This stage is critical.



Your attention to the details at the beginning will reduce the possibility of problems later on and almost ensure that you will get the best results from your extra effort.

It's very important to involve your partner and family in

this planning stage. That will reassure them that you are treating their interests and needs as very important.

Then, you need to involve the people you work with as well as your employer. Sometimes, friction and other problems develop at work when other staff think they might be disadvantaged. This can be caused by a perception that they were not offered the opportunity of part-time study, especially where it is supported by your employer.

Another worry that should be addressed is that your absences will not mean that they have to do more work to maintain the productivity levels required by the employer.

There are various ways to review your current schedule and commitments and the changes needed for you to successfully add this extra major commitment.

The simplest is to make a chart showing a typical week.

Include your current personal and professional tasks.

Include travel time between activities.

Then, add the new demands which come with your study.

Your work schedule and the time you need to spend at your school or other education facility are probably not very flexible.

So, you will need to make the most of your adjustments in your personal activities. But, you will probably find that you will be able to get back some of that time after you have started your study and find ways to adjust your routine.

Some work may have particular busy periods where you have to modify your study arrangements to ensure that you continue to provide good value as an employee.

But, that may also give you the option to get some leeway when business is less intense.

Some important considerations are to maintain your most important social contacts and show the people involved that you value the time you spend with them.

Sleeping

Many people think that they can skip sleep so that they can pack more activities into their day. This is a trap which can have serious consequences.

You need to ensure that you not only get enough sleep as before, but you need to avoid breaks and distractions which

interrupt your body’s natural sleep cycle. Letting your body go through the four stages of sleep in sequence will ensure that your body’s mental and physical systems are properly repaired and refreshed each night.



Power naps can be of some benefit, but current research strongly indicates that they cannot replace even part of a sustained session of sleep each night.

Keep distractions out of the bedroom. Although many people think that watching TV or some other entertainment will help them relax, the opposite is true.

The unnatural light affects our ability to prepare properly for sleep and a lot of the programming can cause us to lose some of the benefits of a good night’s sleep.

Studying important material while you are getting ready for sleep will also interfere with the quality of your sleep that night. And, because you are not able to focus well when the TV or radio is also competing for your attention, your ability to understand and recall the material you are reviewing will also be downgraded.

I have sometimes reviewed a couple of questions or small topics which I need to write about just before I turn off my light. Sometimes, I have woken

the next day with some ideas that I was not consciously aware of the previous night. But, there have been many more times when I have woke up with my head full of nothing but thoughts about what I would have for breakfast.

I still keep a notebook and pen near the bed, just in case I have a valuable thought that I can capture by writing it down straight away.

But, I believe that a concentrated study session at bedtime is likely to be counterproductive and just interfere with your proper rest.

Eating and drinking in bed is also likely to interfere with the body’s repair and refreshment activities. Taking in food or liquid is likely to cause you to break your sleep pattern to make a trip to the toilet. Then, you will lose some valuable sleep while your mind and body restart your sleep cycle.

Getting and Giving Support

A “study buddy” (I prefer the term, “accountability partner”) is a great way to boost your chances of success with whatever study you undertake.

This can also work even when you are not doing a formal course, but are both interested in the same subject.



You need to find someone that is doing the same course that you are taking and has about your level of knowledge about the subject. The prime considerations are that you feel comfortable discussing your work and theirs in a supportive and non-judgmental way.

You also need to be confident that the person you hook up with will be as supportive and committed as you are to the arrangement.

You probably won't be sure about this until you have been meeting with them for a while. So, I suggest that you put a cooling-off period of, say, a couple of weeks, at the beginning of the arrangement where either of you can withdraw with no hard feelings, hurt feelings or explanations.

Otherwise, you may feel obliged to continue an unsatisfactory arrangement so that you don't get arguments or other unpleasantness if you find the arrangement does not have enough value for you to justify continuing it.

Face-to-face contact is the best way to operate. But, I have found that this sort of arrangement can work over the phone or through computer links as well. That flexibility means you can continue to share your insights and get help with your questions even if you can't physically meet for a while.

You should try to find someone that is at about the same level of understanding as yourself on the study subject. Otherwise, one person could find themselves being an unpaid tutor and not getting anything like an equal return from their contribution to the deal.

When you are discussing the way you will work together, all these points need to be settled to the satisfaction of both people.

You may not realize the potential of this arrangement at first.

Sharing your ideas and helping each other with any points that one person finds difficult are the obvious attractions.

You will also find that having regular discussions will provide a gentle push to each of you that will help you to maintain a steady flow of productive work. Each of you will be able to use the other as a pace-maker and be encouraged to match their progress.

When you have a truly supportive “buddy”, you will benefit from their personal view on the material and be able to practice your presentation and discuss your ideas in more depth than many of us would be able or willing to do as part of a larger group.

Revision is easier and you can share notes with each other when one of you cannot attend a class.

When two people work together, the output of each of them is greater than they would have achieved alone.

One reason for that is the implied expectation that each of you will give an equal contribution to your projects as your “buddy” will.

Sometimes, you may find that you can benefit from your different abilities. One may be able to help the other will improving the way that they express their thoughts, while the other may be able to help their “buddy” become better with the practical aspects of the work they are each doing.

Using the Internet



The Internet is a wonderful tool for anyone that wants more information about any particular subject.

But, you need to keep in mind the problems and risks which are also part of the package you get when you start to browse.

Check the resource section at the end of this book for some options which may be worth using or, at least, will give you some guidance for your own inquiries.

Security

You should not go onto the Internet before you have installed programs which will protect you from viruses, malware, phishing sites and other hazards.

You need to be especially careful about your personal information and your important documents which you have on your computer, or disks and other media.

You need to have back-ups of your important files. Your most important material should be copied and stored at another location, away from your home in case of fire or burglary.

Using other people’s computers or those available in public areas such as libraries and hotels can also be high-risk.

If you have wireless connectivity enabled on your portable computer, you need to take precautions against your data being stolen by a passerby and prevent them from using your account for their surfing at your expense.

Information

The Internet is the ultimate store of information and much of that is freely accessible. But, that access is a two-edged sword.

Overload

You probably have already found that you have to trade time for access and you invest more time than the results you get are worth.

You need to know what you want, and how to find reliable sources and get the information without being side-tracked by the high volume of glittery distractions which are everywhere on the Internet.

Relevance, Currency and Accuracy

Keep these factors in mind when you are looking for new sources of information and ideas.

Checking that the information offered is up to date is important because a lot of theories and “known facts” have been disproved or devalued as better research methods become more widely used.

Use your real-world resources for advice. Your local or school library staff will have recommendations for you that can save time and also give you some idea of how current or reliable different sources are.

Your teachers may also share some of their favorite links with their students.

They may also tell you of any sites which offer information which they believe is not of a suitable standard for you to use.

Use resources provided by your government through various agencies which relate to your area of interest.

Always store the details of the site where you found the information and who wrote it.

Check the “Terms of Use” which are usually provided by the site owner so that you know what you may be allowed to do with the information.

You can also check sites like article directories for information about your topic. Be careful though, because many articles may be low on information

and biased toward the commercial interests of the person who wrote it or a company they are associated with.

Another thing to be aware of is that not all results which you get when you use an Internet search engine will be of equal value. Some will probably be provided as the result of a commercial arrangement between the search engine company and their commercial clients.

Some people use sites like Wikipedia and rely on the information they provide. Be aware that the material in many of these sites can be altered by almost anyone, so you need to get independent and unbiased verification of anything you read there before you use it in your work.

If you are looking for information related to the Internet itself, the Wayback machine can be a useful resource. It has copies of many websites as they were in the past. Some have long disappeared off the Internet while others have gone through radical changes.

Be careful that your computer is as well-protected as you can make it before visiting any sites you have not gone to before.

Websites can change ownership in a matter of days and some are taken over by people that load them with malicious software that can infect or damage the computers of unsuspecting visitors.

Internet Helpers

There are many programs and utilities which are offered to help you with your research and other activities on the Internet.

Some are expensive, but there are also many which are low-cost or even free.

Beware of “Free” Toolbars

There are many toolbars which offer a number of useful functions.

But, many of them are much more useful to their provider than to the innocent users who accept the gift. While you use them to collect information, the program which controls the toolbar may be collecting

information about your use of your computer and even about what is on your computer as well as the sites you visit.

This information may be sent to sites you have never heard of. Most security programs are not designed to detect this information transfer from your machine to the other sites on the Internet. Your Anti-virus program may just focus on preventing other sites sending malicious data and malware to your computer.

One program for Windows computers which can help with this is MalwareBytes which has a limited free version and a more powerful paid version.

Always ask yourself these questions before adding any program to your computer:

What benefit is the provider of the program getting from supplying this program to me?

If you can't see what they get, you may be providing them with material you don't mean to.

Will I really get measurable benefits from using this program? If you can't see benefits in time saved or higher productivity, uninstall the program. Otherwise, its presence is taking valuable space and power from your system. Some people stop using a program but leave it on their computer, unaware or uncaring that it is degrading the performance of the machine just by being there.

Can I get that benefit from a lower-cost program or even some program I already have? Microsoft's Office suite of programs is a classic example of a "standard" package but that power and support comes with a price tag which may put it beyond some people's budget.

The good news is that there are many other providers who offer their own office suites which may have enough functions to be all that you need. Some are lower in cost than Microsoft Office and some are even free.

Fitting in with Younger Students

Many people who are coming back to study have concerns about their interactions with the majority of younger students who have a different life experience and outlook.

The most important factor in successful integration is probably to be accepting of other views.

I keep in mind a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln, “**See that man over there? I don’t like him. I must need to get to know him better.**”

Your experience and achievements may have given you valuable lessons and insights. But, pushing them at the other students is more likely to have them raising barriers than asking for more.

Keep in mind that you are just another student to the instructors and you need to defer to their way of doing things, even if you are closer in age and outlook to many of them than you are to most of the other students.

You should expect to be treated no differently to other students. You will probably find that most instructors appreciate your enthusiasm. Many people have pre-determined views about the likely reactions of the people they will encounter in their new classes.

It’s better to keep an open mind and then you, as well as the other people, will be more likely to develop a sincere and respectful working relationship.

Try to be helpful but don’t push yourself forward.

Keep smiling. It’s the best way to attract and hold someone’s interest or, at least, their cooperation.

Some people might need to practice smiling. Many of us develop a “business smile” which stops before it gets to our eyes and switches off when we are not the center of attention. When you are in front of your bathroom mirror, ask yourself if your smile reflect your genuine feelings or outlook? Or, does it look a bit insincere, a pasted-on version?

Remember that relating to older people in their class can be just as difficult for some students as trying to connect with them may seem initially for you. Many older students are surprised to find the level of acceptance and support which they get from other students. But, the population of most countries is fast becoming more diverse and the younger students probably have more experience of dealing with different views and cultures than we did when we were in school the first time around.

A Proven Learning Aid

The Pomodoro Technique

This is a method of getting the most benefit from your available study time by dividing it into half-hour segments (which the developer labeled “Pomodoros”) and concentrating on one task for most of that time. After the first twenty-five minutes, you stop doing the task. Then, you use the other five minutes to refresh yourself and get ready for the next task.

This simple outline may make the system seem less useful than its adoption by individuals and groups around the world would suggest.

Fortunately, you can get detailed information from the developer’s web site. You can even download a version of the entire course without cost, if you decide to try it.

“Pomodoro” is Italian for tomato and was used because the shape of the kitchen timer which the developer used when he was developing the system in its early days was a red tomato.

Apart from the strongly favorable feedback, I like the system for its simplicity and low cost. It might be even more useful for anyone that finds it hard to focus for a period of time on getting each task done.

Quick Tips



There are many ideas and tactics which are intended to make study time more productive.

Most have real advantages for some people but they cannot be guaranteed to be equally useful for all my

readers.

This overview will just give you some main points about some points I've used or reviewed. I hope that this will help you decide which ones are most likely to be of value for you.

Multi-tasking

Multi-tasking was all the rage a few years ago but the gloss has worn off for many people. They've found that it did not give them the results which they had been told would flow from it.

Two major points which were claimed for multi-tasking was that it would improve productivity for almost everyone and that most women were likely to be better at it than most men.

When the original report was reviewed and more research done, some doubts emerged.

Researchers now say that multi-tasking is not as good for most people as previously claimed.

They have found that our brains work best when focused on one major task at a time.

The most significant problem with the idea of multi-tasking is that (in simple terms – I am not a scientist) our brains need time to pull its focus from the task we are doing, reset itself and then adjust for the demands of the next task we undertake.

If we try to give more than one task equal attention at the same time, we may think we achieve that state.

But, the truth is that our brains do the switch off/reset/switch on routine faster than we consciously realize. We think that we are doing them at the same time while we are actually switching and losing productive time in between them.

This also leads to added pressure which brings stress on us.

The earlier results were probably misinterpreted or the follow-up reports were too optimistic.

Some people may find multi-tasking more comfortable and useful than the rest but that may just mean that their mental systems achieve the switching with less effort and stress than the rest of us.

Power Reading

Speed reading is a technique which can be learned and taught. Some remarkable claims are made.

I can only give you some tips which I got from one of my instructors which have been very useful for me.

I hope they are as effective for you.

Stop saying what you read: Although you’re probably unaware of it, almost everyone sub-vocalizes everything we read. They speak every word. This is a habit which is left-over from the junior school practise of reading aloud.

You may be able to detect your almost inaudible speaking by touching your throat very gently while you read.

Then, it is just a matter of consciously not speaking while you read.

The next tactic is to focus on groups of words instead of each individual word on the page. This is easy to do, but can take a little while to become comfortable.

Another tactic is to hold a ruler or a piece of blank white card below the first line of text which you read.

Try to focus on the whole line in two or even just one chunk.

Then, start moving the card or ruler down the page and continue to focus on each line as a unit rather than each word separately.

After becoming more comfortable with that, try moving the card or ruler a little more quickly than you did before.

Don't try to make a race of it. Your aim should just be to find what rate of moving the card lets you improve your reading speed without dropping your ability to comprehend what you read.

Most people will actually find that their comprehension improves on most types of reading in a fairly short time.

Get Started Sooner: Many people are able to get themselves more productive and focused if they ensure that they do something in the first half hour after they get up instead of dragging themselves through their usual coffee and breakfast before they start their brains.



The Library: I hope you'll continue to use your local library. It's an under-valued resource even with all the bells and whistles on the Internet. The people who work there have learned how to get the best results and you can tap their expertise for free!

Doing What Matters Most: Instead of putting an inspirational quote on your desk, print this on a small card and carry it in your wallet or purse – somewhere that you will see it several times a day.

Is this the Best Use of My Time Right Now?

It helped me – just try it!

Resources

The Pomodoro System

<http://www.pomodorotechnique.com/>

U.S.A.

Student Educational Resources

<http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Education-Training/Student-Resources.shtml>

From the website: “Find government resources for students, including career choices, environmental education, games, libraries, museums, loans, Students Abroad, school locator and more”

U.S.A. Learns

<http://usalearns.org/>

From the website: “U.S.A. Learns is a free Web site funded by the U.S. Department of Education to support immigrants who want to learn or improve their English skills as they become part of American society.

All instructional materials are online; there are no videos or workbooks to purchase.”

United Kingdom

Directgov - Education and learning

www.direct.gov.uk/adultlearning/ Website of the U.K. Government. Assists U.K. citizens with information about courses, financial help for adult learners and related matter.

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