

A's Through Self-Testing

The Self-Testing Concept is for you if you fit into one of the following 3 categories:

- You have not done well academically but believe you can do better.
- You earn grades below potential but don't know how to improve.
- You earn excellent grades but would like to re-duce the amount of time spent studying for them.

Using self-testing principles, learners in all 3 categories have discovered and unleashed an enormous potential for learning and earning better grades in less time. Using the Self-testing Concept, learners can study, learn, understand and remember as never before. They have earned grades previously only dreamed of. This welcome success can be yours if you decide to follow the easy steps in the Self-testing Concept. Before explaining the specifics of the Self-testing Concept, a little background information is useful.

Unfortunately, few people have been taught this intentionally and directly, but anyone can learn how to learn better. As a result, many people unnecessarily remain victims of one or more stifiers of academic success:

1. **Memories of past academic failures.**
2. **Recollections of previous unpleasant academic experiences.**
3. **Negative attitudes about education.**
4. **Belief that because learning was difficult in the past that it will so be in the future.**
5. **Have low expectations of your own academic potential.**
6. **There were/are low expectations of your academic potential from significant persons in your life.**
7. **Belief that undue amounts of time are necessary to succeed academically.**

Choose what it is that you will do. Only AFTER that is it possible to find a way to do it.

These stifiers of academic success stem from personal experiences related to learning tasks. It is logical then to assume that different experiences would have produced different results and perceptions of learning. If so, then it is reasonable to say that perceptions about learning come from *past* experiences.

Good experiences = good perceptions about learning

Bad experiences = negative perceptions about learning

This is good news because **YOU** are in control of your experiences. That is, you can intentionally create situations where

Positive experiences with learning are almost guaranteed!

You can create situations that lead to positive learning experiences. The outcomes are **positive perceptions** about yourself and learning. You can create positive experiences by choosing to eliminate whatever stifiers to academic success you have experienced in the past, and leave them there.

You can devise educational experiences that will change every one of the stiflers of academic success into *motivators* for more academic success. These past stiflers can become:

1. **Happy memories of new academic successes.**
2. **Recollections of pleasant academic performance.**
3. **Positive attitudes about education.**
4. **Finding that learning has become easier and more enjoyable.**
5. **Have high and attainable expectations of your own academic potential.**
6. **Have high and attainable expectations for your academic potential from significant persons in your life.**
7. **Learn that time spent on academic pursuits is worthwhile and can be kept to a minimum without sacrificing academic success.**

Many students never discover how to release the hidden hunger to learn, unleash their internal desire to excel or experience the joys of academic success that exist in everyone. But for you, **if you choose**, your life is about to change.

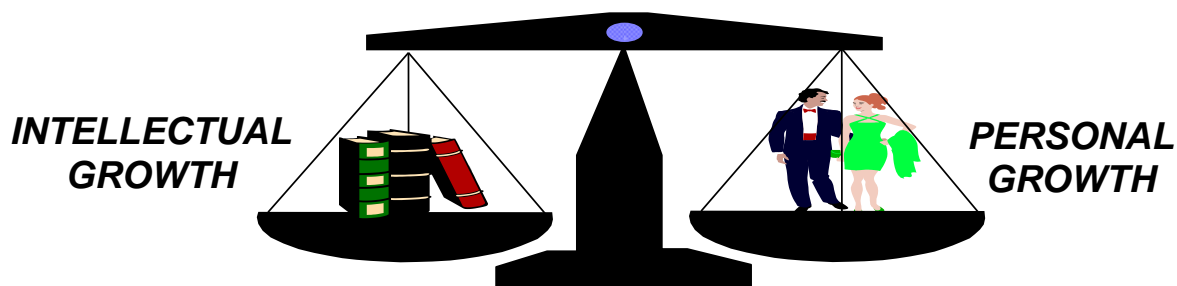
If you can read and follow simple steps, you can release your potential for academic success starting a few moments from now.

As a result of better grades and learning ability, you can consider exciting major fields of study and higher paying careers not available to students with lower grades. You can become more confident in yourself and your ability to learn anything you choose to learn. You can become an independent learner with the ability to earn whatever grades for which you choose to work.

Maintaining Balance

One technique any student can master to maximize the potential to learn, understand, remember important facts and related information is to regularly ***recite aloud*** what it is that must be remembered. This can be done numerous ways; each with its own degree of efficiency. But, many students don't want to spend any more time than is necessary to learn the material well enough to earn an A.

Educational balance is important!



A chief advantage of the Self-Testing Concept is that it **keeps study time to a minimum without sacrificing understanding, learning, and INTELLECTUAL GROWTH**. Another advantage is that because it is so efficient, **more time is freed up to benefit from the equally important other half of college – PERSONAL GROWTH**.

Adapted from: Congos, Dennis H. (2011) *Starting Out in Community College*. Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill

Self Testing

The Self-Testing Concept uses the mighty weapon of **recitation** for combating forgetting and **DOUBLES ITS EFFECTIVENESS** for use in learning.

The Power of Self-Testing Is:

You can discover what you have learned and what you have not learned before you take a test while you can still do some thinking about it!

Using notecards to organize notes is one easy way to self-test, although any organized format for notes will work. Notecards are recommended because they are:

1. **Easy to carry with you.**
2. **Easy to review in the short time periods which are normally wasted such as between classes, at meals, on the bus, walking to class, etc. This reduces study time to the minimum without a sacrifice in grades.**
3. **A very easy way to organize notes.**
4. **A very fast way to recite material to be learned. Reciting material speeds the movement of information toward long-term memory which is where it needs to be for accurate recall on exams and after graduation.**

During a lecture, it's best to format note information into the Cornell System or use outlines, or some other organized format. As soon as possible after lecture, formulate questions and answers out of main ideas and details and put them on notecards for example, while the lecture is still fresh in your mind. This is important because as time passes between lecture and rewriting notes, more and more is forgotten.

Quiz: What is the easiest way to study using a textbook?

Answer: Read it only once, take notes, and then *learn from your notes*.

Many students try to learn test material by reading...re-reading...re-reading...re-reading...

Boring!

One way to use the Self-Testing Concept is to place main ideas in the form of questions on one side of a notecard. Related details are condensed and recorded as answers and placed on the other side of the notecard. Studying and learning is then done from the condensed material on the notecards. There is no need to read a textbook chapter more than once using this note organization format. You can avoid the time-eating **Monster** of re-reading. Rereading and rereading does not reveal for certain if the material is learned or not until after an exam grade is returned. Let's face it, **that's too late**. What can do you about your grade then?

Zilch! Zip! Sorry Charlie! The fat lady is singing! It's over! Sayonara! So long! Sha-na-na-na, hey, hey, good-bye! Too late.

Steps for Self-Testing

Example 1.1

Steps:

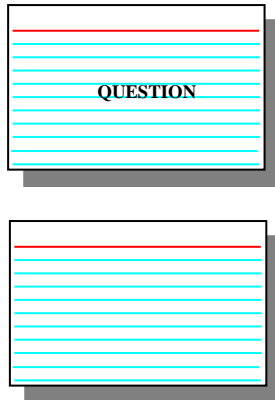
1. Take each main idea and use it as a cue for recollection of related details. The cue may be a word, a phrase, or a heading turned into an exam-like question. Three good formats for organizing CUES and RESPONSES are:
 - i. Notecard Format
 - ii. Cornell System Format
 - iii. Main Ideas and Details Format

All 3 formats are presented in the examples below using questions (made from main ideas) and answers (made from details related to each main idea). See the example below.

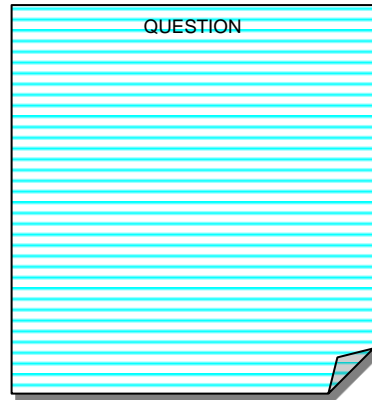
Purpose:

- a. Begins separating main ideas from each other making them harder to confuse during learning and recall.
- b. Begins separating main ideas from the details that explain and clarify each main idea.
- c. Begins the process of mental manipulation of the material to be learned that is vital for learning and recall.
- d. Focuses efforts on learning the information needed for exam answers.
- e. When main ideas are used as questions, they create curiosity for answers, make concentration easier, and make resistance to studying more difficult.

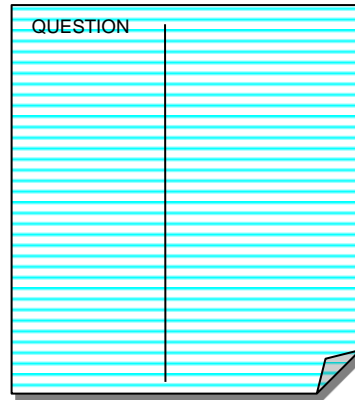
NOTECARD FORMAT



CORNELL SYSTEM FORMAT



MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS FORMAT



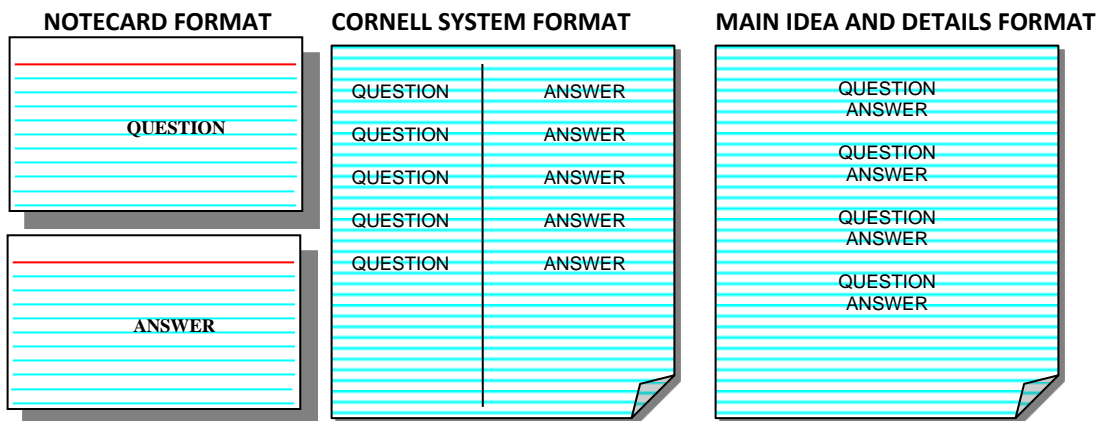
Example 1.2

Steps:

1. Visibly separate answers from questions using space or place questions on one side of a notecard and answers on the other.
2. For notecards, use one question (main idea) and its response (related details) per notecard. See the below example.

Purpose:

- a. Clearly separates main ideas and details, which reduces confusion in learning and improves recall on exams.
- b. Promotes fast but effective recitation and review, which reduces study time.
- c. Separates learned from not-yet-learned ideas, showing where to focus most of the study time.



Example 1.3

Steps:

1. To begin recitation, it is important for learning and remembering to read questions aloud.
2. Recite answers containing related details aloud, from memory, as if lecturing a class. Some students prefer writing answers from memory, as if taking an exam. Doing both only speeds learning.
3. Look at answers only to check for completeness and accuracy.
4. If answers are recited correctly from memory on the first try, put that notecard in the “learned” pile.
5. When answers are inaccurately recited, follow these five steps:
 - i. Read the answer aloud as if lecturing a class and/or write it out.
 - ii. Read the question aloud.
 - iii. Recite the answers aloud and/or write it without looking.
 - iv. Check the accuracy of your answer on the notecard.
 - v. If your answer is correct, place that card in the “not yet learned” pile. If you recited the answer incorrectly, repeat steps 1-4 until it is recited aloud or written correctly from memory. Then, place that notecard in the “not yet learned” pile again and go to the next notecard.
6. As long as the answer is recited incorrectly on the first try each time you review, consider them “not yet learned”
7. Keep “learned” and “unlearned” material separate by using two separate piles of notecards.

Purpose:

- a. This involves using auditory as well as visual skills in learning, which speeds assimilation of material to be learned.
- b. Immediately assesses the completeness and accuracy of answers recited or written from memory.
- c. Provides instant feedback on what has and hasn't yet been learned **before taking an exam** when something can still be done about it.
- d. Reinforces correct answers and increases learning speed and motivation.
- e. Provides immediate corrective feed-back for inaccurate or incomplete answers. This prevents learning incorrect or incomplete information.
- f. Decreases study time by limiting time spent on material already learned. More time can be spent on unlearned material where it is most needed.
- g. Test anxiety fades as you discover that the material is learned. You don't get test anxiety when you know, not just believe, but know that you know the material. For example, how anxious would you be about an exam on the name of 5 of your family members?
- h. Seeing progress as material is learned increases confidence and motivation.
- i. ***This is where learning takes place.*** Without these steps in some form, learning is difficult to impossible.
- j. Fills in missing or incompletely learned information and corrects inaccurately recalled material with complete and accurate information.
- k. Increases concentration and begins the thinking and analyzing processes necessary to learn, understand and recall information when needed.

Example 1.4

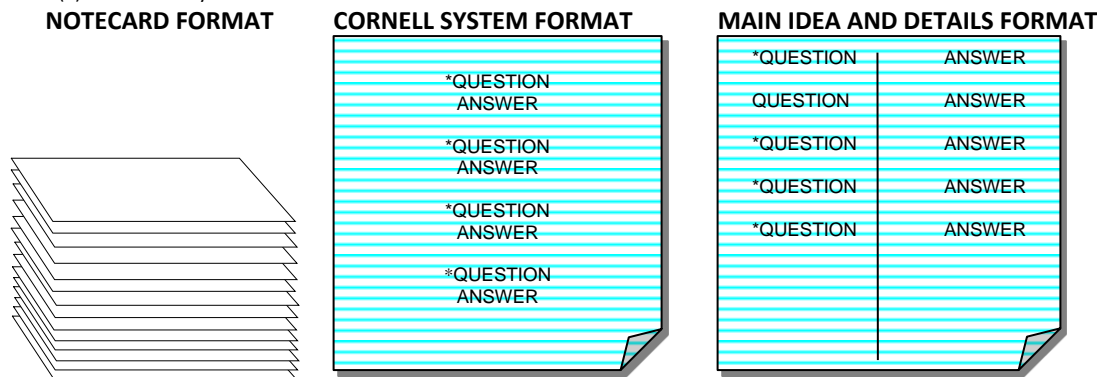
Steps:

1. Review by reciting/writing answers as often as it takes until you can recall ALL ANSWERS correctly, by memory, on the 1st try each time you review. Only this way do you know for sure that material is learned. See the below example. **Go over learned material 2-3 times per week to prevent something that is absolutely normal when material is not reviewed often enough: forgetting.**

Purpose:

- a. As the number of times one reviews increases, the greater are the chances of recall at exam time.
- b. "One becomes better at that which is practiced." If looking at questions and recalling answers from memory is practiced, you become better at the activity for doing well on exams. If you practice not doing these things, you become better at that, too. Nothing reduces test anxiety like knowing you know the material!

The asterisk (*) marks already learned material.



The number of reviews needed to earn "A's" varies. A few students can review 3 times and earn an "A" on a test while others must review 5, 7, or 9 times to earn an "A."

Learning speed is individual and has no correlation with intelligence.

Learning speed varies with each person – this is normal. Learning speed *does* affect how many reviews each person must do to earn an A.

How many reviews you need in order to earn an A is revealed when you identify the number of reviews you did to earn exam/quiz scores or grades. If grades are less than desired, verify that notes are complete and accurate and increase the number of reviews for the next exam.



A Time-Saving Tip

Consider using the memory principle of Distributed Practice. There are 2 kinds of Distributed Practice. One kind is **Long Term Distributed Practice**. This means that you learn more by studying material for 6 hours spread over 3 days in 1 or 2 hour time periods rather than 6 hours all at once.

Another kind of Distributed Practice is **Short Term**. This means you reduce concentration problems if you study for some time period (say 20 minutes), take a 5 minute break, and then study for another 20 minutes, and so on. The result is better recall at test time than when studying in done for long periods of unbroken time.

The length of these time periods to maximize concentration and learning is individual. Some student must break after 20, 30, 45, 60 minutes. To find your breakpoint, study until concentration becomes difficult, then take a 5 minute break before returning to study.

Develop Your Own Style

Feel free to develop your own self-testing style using the above basic fundamentals as a guide. Grades earned on exams and quizzes will provide feedback if further refinements are needed in your self-testing methods.

Don't give up if you don't get the desired results on the first try. Persistence to refine self-testing methods will eventually earn the grades of which you are capable when this powerful technique for learning is mastered.