

STUDY by CHOICE

IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

A core theme of this book is that **deliberate study is preferable to enforced study**. The person who actually wants to learn will do so much more effectively than the person who is resisting all attempts to do so. Somewhere in the middle is the individual who finds study quite a drag.

So, a first step towards better study skills is to check on a person's motivation and to do some work around this with a view to enhancing it. If we look at the things we have learned most about in our lives, very often the word "study" doesn't even get a mention. We need to harness the power of that type of learning.

We cannot assume that everybody knows how to study. "Study by Choice" will help people improve their learning skills but corresponding support from the teachers in their lives can have a very powerful effect. As a teacher you can flesh out the ideas in each chapter of the book and elaborate on them in the context of your own subject.

This document offers you some ideas you could use to reinforce the learning in each chapter of "Study by Choice". Some chapters deal with a lot more material than others and this will reflect in the amount of class time needed to process that material. As far as possible encourage the students to think for themselves and to discuss or research many of the issues presented here. Enable them to discover the excitement of learning, an excitement that stretches far beyond the boundaries of any subject.

01 - Don't even think about studying

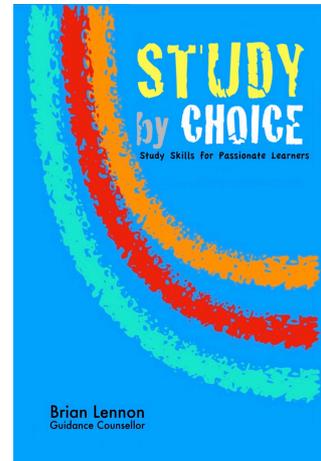
Theme: Motivation

Ask your students the core questions. It is very important that all individuals answer these questions for themselves.

1. Do you like study?
2. Do you like examinations?
3. Do you want to pass your examinations?
4. Why?
5. Do you need to study to pass your examinations?

There are two vital things you as teacher can do with regard to motivation.

1. Find out and share with your students (1) the general life relevance of your subject and (2) your subject's specific value for further education and jobs.
2. Share with your students your own story about how you got interested in your subject, what you find fascinating about it and the impact it has had on your life.



Guidance counsellors could display copies of the subject chart from this chapter on the guidance counsellor, build class-room quizzes around it, create a poster for each subject showing life and career linkages.

02 - Your learning for life story

Theme: learning from previous successful learning experiences

Brainstorm: what are all the things you have learned that were not part of the school curriculum?

Fun exercise: divide the class into small groups. Each has 5 minutes to prepare to sing an advertising jingle they have heard on television. (The “hidden agenda” here is to help them realise they have learned a lot of things with minimal effort.) After the performance, ask, “how did you learn that?” “How could you apply this type of learning to your present subjects?”

03 - The Five-Second Study Skills Course

Theme: The role of repetition in learning. This is not to say that the repetition should be boring nor that understanding is not important.

This is how people learn advertising jingles (whether they want to or not), popular songs and, of course, their first language.

Challenge students: You all speak English. If you were asked to teach a foreign friend English, how would you do it? After some discussion ask, “How did you learn English yourself?” In the ensuing discussion, draw out the three factors mentioned in the book: need, enjoyment and repetition.

04 - If you haven't got the ball, you can't score a goal

Theme: If you haven't picked up the ideas clearly and accurately in the first place, you cannot learn them properly. Students need to realise that this assimilation of new material can be hard work but is essential.

This chapter and the following five chapters introduce components of my “LAST” approach to learning. (**Link, Absorb, Summarise and Test.**)

Absorbing means getting an overview of the context of the topic and then working to understand the topic.

Give the students a page of text about your subject and take them through the absorption stage in small steps. Remember that here you are not teaching your subject but teaching how to study your subject.

- Without reading it in detail, what do you think this page is all about?
- What helps you find out what it's about? (headings, illustrations)
- Why would anybody want to learn about this?
- Have you seen anything on television in recent times that relates to this?
- What do you already know about this topic?
- Have you any questions in your own head about this topic?
- Can you see any words or phrases you don't understand?

Allow some time for the students to read through the page and signal when they think they fully grasp it.

05 - Instant Coffee

Theme: The importance of summarising

Only when a topic is fully grasped can the student move on to packaging its contents for “take away”. How will they carry this topic around in their heads for life or for examinations? The secret is to compress it in some way just as in the example of instant coffee granules.

Invite the students to identify key words and phrases in the page you chose in the previous chapter. Ideally they should be able to underline these (with a pencil). Ask if they find any existing headers helpful or would they like to add some of their own.

Point out that different students choose different keywords because each is assimilating the material into their own pre-existing set of knowledge.

06 - Spinning your web

Theme: Ways to summarise a topic

Spider diagrams are useful in a multiplicity of contexts and so they get pride of place in this chapter.

Demonstrate on the board how you might build up a spider diagram for the sample page you have been using up to now. Alternatively collect keywords/phrases from the students, write each on a card, then invite them to suggest how these cards might best be arranged (on a table, felt-board, magnetic board). Be sure to show how spider diagrams are enhanced by the use of colour and drawings.

How can you best summarise topics from your own subject? Work that out and share the ideas with your students. Don't supply them with ready-made summaries. Making a summary for themselves is an important part of the assimilation process.

You might have summary diagrams in your head that go back to your own childhood (that's where I found my Pythagoras diagram). Share these impressive feats of memory with your students.

07 - How do you know you know?

Theme: Checking that you really have grasped and learned a topic

Ask the students to close their eyes. Then ask them how many things they remember from the room (still with their eyes closed). After getting a reasonable number of answers, tell them to open their eyes again. This time they have 30 seconds to look around the room. Then ask them to close their eyes again and repeat the exercise. Ask, "What was the difference between the two exercises?"

Testing what you know has an interesting effect over time since it helps you become more observant. If I say I am going to explain the French Revolution to you now because you have an examination tomorrow, the prospect of the examination increases attention.

Invite the students to close all their books and draw their summary diagram from memory. Be sure to tell them that they can look back at their original diagram or the topic itself if they need to.

Ask them, is there anything they could have done differently, that would have helped their memory more.

08 - Remembering not to forget

Theme: Consolidating learning by contextualising and constantly topping-up.

Ask your students: "Did you ever start to watch a television series in the middle?" "What was it like?" "What problems did you have?" "Could this happen to some of your subjects?"

Draw something like this sketch on the board and ask them do they know what it is? (Some will know.) Of course, it's a giraffe! But you need to see the whole animal or get information about the whole animal to know what it is. The same with study. Looking at one page or topic on its own is not normally enough.

Another line of questioning: "Do you ever forget all the English you have learned?" "How come you don't?" "Why do we never forget some things we have learned such as how to tie laces, how to make tea, how to ride a bicycle?"

Yet another: "What is your favourite song?" "Approximately how many times have you actually listened to this song?"

09 - LAST but not least

Theme: The LAST study method.

Each of the components has been dealt with in chapters four to eight. Now it's time to bring all four components together.

Offer a page of information to the students and then help them process this through each of the four LAST components: Link, Absorb, Summarise and Test. Since assimilation of knowledge is a personal thing, it is important that all students work through each of the four steps for themselves. The teacher's role is to mention each step, remind them what it is and then encourage them to implement it. If they find better ways to do any of the steps, encourage them to share these ideas.

10 - The Secret Power of Your Memory

Theme: The power of memory and aids for rote memory

Ask students, "What is the earliest thing you can remember?" Take a few volunteer replies and invite them to give as much detail as possible. Ask how much detail all those images, sounds and other memories would require on their smart phones. Use this to show just how massive human memory is.

Ask what memory aids they already use. For example, "Thirty days hath September ..."

Demonstrate the use of zany associations by inviting the class to remember a random list of words. For example:

dog, bell, tractor, computer, Dublin, ice-cream, mobile phone, flying

Here are suggestions for the associations. Try this yourself beforehand if you're not convinced. Guide the students through this visualisation and then invite each of them to write down the list of words on a page.

dog - imagine a dog with a very big head, barking but it's mouth like a giant bell making very loud noises

bell - in your mind's eye see a farmer steering a massive church bell across a ploughed field making crazy bell and tractor noises "ding dong whirr whirr ding dong whirr whirr"

tractor - visualise a tractor propped up on your desk with a computer-like screen at one end

computer - think of a computer "doubling" itself and looking very surprised as each new clone appears alongside

Dublin - imagine the River Liffey overflowing with fluffy ice-cream that is moving along making lots of rushing water noises

ice-cream - think of a big ice-cream cone making phone noises and you holding it up to your ear

mobile phone - visualise you and your whole family sitting on a massive mobile phone as it skims over the airport

flying

11 - Your Study Den

Theme: The study location and environment

Ask the students about their study arrangements, the room, desk, seat, lighting. Enquire about distractions and discuss what they could do to reduce these. This may involve disruptive siblings, shared bedrooms, loud television.

Discuss: Studying with and without music in the background

12 - Homework and Study

Theme: The link between homework and study

This is probably a good moment for you, the teacher, to get serious feedback from students about the homework you give. How could it be improved so that the students learn more from it?

Work through a plan for this evening. Help the student plan their mix of homework and study. What time will they start? What will they do first? What could they study before doing the homework? Are they ready for the homework or do they need some clarifications?

It is helpful if each student is encouraged to write down a question to ask after they complete their homework.

13 - Holy Notes

Theme: Storage of notes.

Discuss the type of note books or other storage formats that suit your subject. If possible, display a four-ring binder.

Although it is not included in this chapter in the book, a discussion of note-taking in general could be incorporated here. Ask the class, "If you were attending a talk or presentation and you wanted to learn from the speaker, which of these would you do?"

- write down everything the speaker says
- write down important sentences
- write down key words or phrases
- photograph the presentation screen
- make a spider diagram of what the speaker says
- don't write anything to focus on what is being said

14 - Learning with Style

Theme: Learning Styles

Rather than engage in the different theories about learning styles, this chapter offers a range of approaches and asks students for their preferences.

Show the list of approaches to students. Ask them to choose two approaches. Then do a quick survey of the class to see who would choose each.

In the context of your own subject, go through the list of approaches and suggest how students could learn more about your subject with each of the approaches.

Ask students what was their best learning experience ever and then elicit more details to find out what learning styles were involved.

15 - Study Time Management

Theme: Time management

This is an important topic, a whole course in itself.

Work through a time planning session with the students.

- What are the really important things you want to do in the coming week? Make a list.
- When do you intend to do each of these? Choose a day, start and finish time for each.
- Slot these into your diary (journal) now.

Demonstrate the use of the card system for managing time on a particular day.

Ask the students about breaks (rest periods).

How long should a person study before taking a break?

How long should a break be?

What do you do during a break?

There will be considerable variation in the answers to the above. Each person needs to do what suits them BUT breaks are essential both for physical and mental recuperation.

16 - Revision

Theme: Revision

Check on how each student keeps his or her summary diagrams. Keeping these safe is a key aspect of repetition in the learning process. They see the same presentation of the information over and over again as in the six occasions listed in this chapter.

Repetition is so powerful that skilled writers and presenters use it to emphasise ideas and this usage even has a name, “anaphora”. (See <https://literarydevices.net/anaphora/>)

Spaced repetition: This idea, first proposed by Professor C.A. Mace in “Psychology of Study” in 1932, suggests that revision of any topic should be spaced in gradually increasing intervals, e.g., one day, two days, four days, eight days etc. This is an important concept for a teacher delivering lessons. If I present Pythagoras Theory today, I will return to it tomorrow, then again on day 7, day 15 and so on. If I am teaching French and I introduce the word “chez” today, I will use it again on day 2 (tomorrow), day 7, 15 and so on.

Students can apply the idea of spaced repetition using their summary diagrams and by building a revision slot into their daily study period at the time of linking to previous material. They can make a habit of revisiting the summary diagram of the previous topic with a quick look at the diagram of, say, four topics back and ten topics back. Even a quick visit to these earlier topics can be enough to top up the memory.

17 - Examination Expertise

Theme: Changing focus from learning to examination performance

Examinations receive special attention just before examination times e.g., term examinations or final state examinations. It is helpful to communicate to students that we are now entering examination mode as distinct from learning mode. A constant reference to examinations during the learning period is not advisable since it can devalue the subject matter and the associated stress of constant examination reminders is not good for learning.

Teachers often process previous examination papers, a good way of helping students learn about the format and language of their examinations. They also need practice in examination strategy.

Give the students a past examination paper they have not seen before.
Give them ten minutes to do the following:

- read the instructions
- note how many questions they are required to complete
- identify questions they will do
- calculate how much time to give to each question

Then process each of the above points with the class.

Why did each student choose particular questions? You might point out that liking a particular topic and knowing enough to answer a question about it could be very different things.

Go over each of the many points listed in this chapter. You may be able to give advice that is specific to this class and this subject. For example, give details about the “kit” they will need for examinations in your subject.

18 - Studies Cross-Examination

Theme: A checklist to help identify study weak points.

Invite the class to look through the first section “Overview”, then take questions about this. Do the same with each of the other headings.

19 - Teaching Yourself

Theme: The learner as teacher.

This has been a theme throughout the book but is now brought into sharp focus.

If someone brings you a beautiful present and leaves it at your door, it is no good to you unless you open the door.

Invite the class to tell you (or write an essay) about something they have learned outside of formal education. How did they learn to use their mobile phones? Where and how did they learn how to relate to others? Have they learned the rules of any game or sport?

Challenge them to learn something new for next week. You might choose a topic that is not in your subject curriculum but is related to it. The students may learn about the topic in any way they choose and, as proof of learning, should supply at least one page about the topic.

Later, process the results in class. How did each person approach the topic? What means did they use to find out more? What have they discovered about their own learning styles? Is there any need for caution in their approach to learning (e.g., unreliable sources).

STUDY by CHOICE
the book
is available, both
as a paperback
and as a Kindle book,
from Amazon

Paperback

www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B086LD8PXG

Kindle

www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B086JWDRKF

A set of presentations is available to accompany these teacher notes. These are available in *Apple Keynote format* and in *Microsoft Powerpoint*. The presentations incorporate the above notes and comments more specific to each slide.

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