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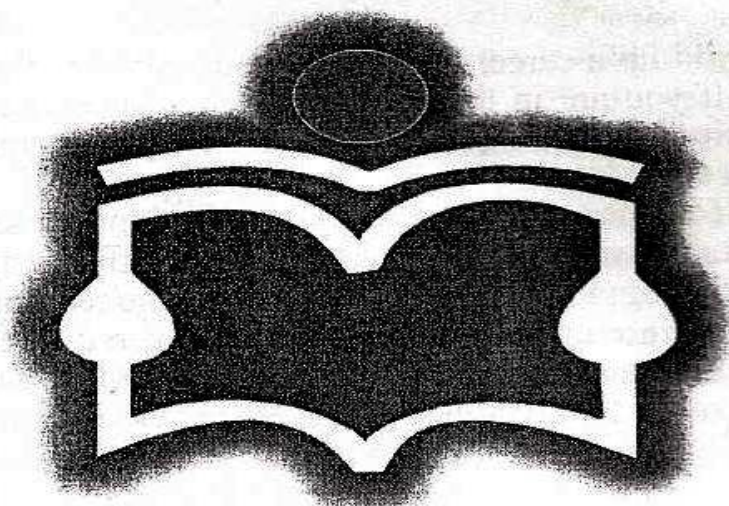
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## Maintaining a Healthy Study Habit in the Secondary School

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper aims to provide a strategy that the student in the secondary school can use to excel in his or her studies. It assumes that such a student has some kind of study habit, which needs to be improved upon for maximal results, such that the student can cope effectively with reading that will improve his or her performance, in the different areas of his or her growth. Different kinds of reading styles are required for different kinds of reading tasks. We present three of these : slow, rapid and skim reading for the purpose of maintaining a good study habit at this level.*

### Introduction

**S**tudying simply means an effort to learn about a subject. It is a skill, and like all skills it must be developed as you need to put some effort into it. The kind of result you get is determined by the kind and amount of effort you put into it.

We define a 'healthy study habit' as a learning routine that is both result oriented and flexible enough to make you interested in reading a wide range of materials that can cater for your intellectual, physical, material, social and spiritual development.

As a student, you need to set up, develop and maintain good study habits to cater for these needs. We assume that you at this stage of your education have a study habit. The aim of this paper is to help you expand and maintain a good study habit, for if you already have a good study habit, then you may need to both develop and maintain it.

First of all, ask yourself why you left the comfort of your parents home to go to school. Even if you are a day student, why do you bother to take the trouble to go to school everyday? This inconvenience is for a purpose. You need to, at this formative years of your life, learn about many subjects, to help you do many things



in future like : build up a career, contribute your quota to the society, raise your own family, etc. If you are in the secondary school to study, then you must go through certain 'rituals', after which you must always ask yourself whether your sacrifice is justified.

The rest of the paper is discussed in six sections. In section 2, we present some preliminaries to studying, section 3 discusses different types of reading that are involved in studying. In section 4, we present some reading faults that hamper studying. Section 5 presents a study method and how to use it. In section 6, we tie up the discussion on maintaining a healthy study habit, and we present at the end some suggestions on further reading.

## **Preliminaries**

There are preliminaries to take care of before we can fully deal with the issue of study itself.

**Where to study :** If study is your main business, then you must take it very seriously. You need a conducive atmosphere to work in as well as suitable tools. For instance, you need some very basic things like : a desk or table and a chair; enough light, a place to store your paper, pencils, books, and other study materials. Try to avoid noise and visual distractions. Remember that you need a lot of concentration. However, because what distracts one person might be needed by another, it is wise to find out what distracts you and avoid it. For instance, some tolerate soft background music while studying, while some cannot. Some even like loud music while studying. But since at the secondary school level, the boarding facilities are communal, you will do well to obey the schools' regulations on the matter of music.

**When to study :** A weekly schedule of study is advised to avoid cramming during examination periods. The best time of the day to study again depends on personal preferences. The sun disturbs some people, while it does not disturb others. If the sun disturbs you, use hot periods for light reading tasks. Arrange your studies to suit your life style. You should be guided by whether you live in the hostel with other students or at home with family.

The length of each study period should depend on your ability as a student, your age and whether you already have a good study habit.

**How to study :** Always ask your self the following questions before any study session :

- Why am I studying this topic?
- What do I want to learn about it?

Such questions will help you create a purpose for studying a particular topic.

## **The memory system and some impediments to studying**

Memory is the ability to remember something that has been learned or experienced (*The World Book Encyclopedia* (1987) Vol. 13:318-320). It is very important to study, and so we will briefly look at what happens to information in the brain. You need to feed the memory as well as service it. We shall therefore discuss very briefly how to do these.

To be able to learn something new, you need to remember something from the past. No knowledge is isolated. The memory is divided into three parts :



- The sensory memory which holds information for about an instant and such information can disappear very fast.
- The short term memory which holds information for as long as you think about it.
- The long term memory which holds information for a long time and this is achieved through both a conscious effort to memorize or constant thought.

You should therefore try to make a conscious effort to get information to get to the long term memory before you conclude any study session. We can do this through certain measures of remembrance like :

- Recall, which involves consciously bringing back to memory information.
- Recognition, which involves sensing, sighting, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching the situation.
- Relearning, which involves memorizing the information after forgetting it.

Forgetfulness hampers learning. You tend to forget more with time. Many reasons have been given for this like :

- Interference, i.e. a situation where some information blocks the memory of some other information
- Retrieval failure, i.e. the inability to recall information stored in the memory.
- The inability to recall information caused by either conscious or unconscious desires.
- Constructive processes, i.e. the use of imagination to create false memories

These tendencies need to be eliminated if you have them, because they can hamper your studies, no matter how well you plan. If you have a tendency to forget things, here are some ways of improving your memory :

- Use of mnemonic devices
- Over-learning i.e. studying the material even when you think you know it.
- Creating surroundings like those in which the information was first learned.

For instance trying to remember a joke that the lecturer cracked in class during a particular lecture.

- Creating a link between the new information and what you already know. For instance if you need to remember something about a date like 1964, you could link it to the Nigeria independence which occurred four years before then.

## **Types of reading in studying**

We refer here to silent reading, which is needed to cover a wide range of subjects with different levels of complexity. Reading proficiency is generally associated with scholastic excellence. It is a prerequisite for studying, as well as an effective means of developing attitudes, quick and sound judgments, sensible inferences among others.

Different types of silent reading are required for different kinds of materials. Sometimes, a combination of them is required in a flexible manner to achieve the best results. We shall look at three types of silent reading which we need to perfect to help us develop and maintain good study habits (Wainwright, 1972).



**Slow Reading :** This kind of reading has a speed of about 150-300 words per minute. It is best used for studying, especially in the R1 step of study reading discussed below. It has a comprehension level of over 80%.

**Rapid Reading :** This kind of reading has a speed of about 300-800 words per minute. It is ideal for easy reading materials like novels, newspapers, etc. It has a comprehension level of between 70-80%, and it can be acquired through controlled practice.

**Skim Reading :** This is a kind of combination in reading styles. It is like rapid reading, and it requires a lot of practice, but when it is achieved, it saves a lot of time. It requires the ability to differentiate between main ideas and unnecessary details. While you skip the unnecessary details, you keep an eye on the text until you can resume reading the main ideas. A number of styles are used. Some move the eyes in a zig zag fashion, others run the eyes diagonally from top left corner to the bottom right, while yet others run their eyes straight down the middle of the page.

### **Some reading faults**

Reading faults retard learning. We will very briefly outline some of the faults found in our students at the secondary school level regarding particularly slow reading which makes study both a boring and fruitless exercise.

- Slow word recognition involving excessive word analysis and lack of skill in recognizing and using context clues. This leads to constant interruptions of reading to refer to the dictionary.
- Vocalization and sub-vocalization largely involving oral reading and inaudible articulation.
- Excessive eye fixation and difficulty with the return sweep.
- Word by word reading, sometimes associated with finger pointing
- Regression and lack of comprehension
- Lack of motivation or interest, leading to lack of concentration and consequently a drop in comprehension and reading rates.
- Inflexibility which involves reading all materials at the same rate irrespective of the purpose of reading and the degree of difficulty of the material.
- Lack of basic linguistic skills.
- Emotional blockade.

### **Using a study method**

Studying involves a lot of planning. Each study session should be planned. Studying is often compared to using a map as a guide in a foreign town. The map shows you the landmarks and directions in a strange town like the major roads, the villages, the markets, etc. and you can get to your destination quicker and easier than one who has no idea of the layout of the town.

Books require different techniques in handling. Non-fiction require a special technique. Many mnemonics are usually used as guides, and they have proved to be quite effective. We shall discuss one of them : the SQ3R study method (Floyd 1984). But before we do that, we will like to draw on divine inspiration. The emotional blockade mentioned in section 4 can be caused by many things which plague adolescent minds. You need to prayerfully settle your minds for any kind of



study. Scripture says in Isaiah (11:2-3, JB) that it is God who gives the spirit of wisdom and insight, counsel and power, knowledge and inspiration, all of which come from fearing Him. This implies therefore that if you call on God to inspire you and you prayerfully surrender yourself to His counsel, He will give you the peace which He also said He will give to you, again in Isaiah (54:13, JB) when He teaches you. This peace, some translations of the Bible say, come with a lot of prosperity.

We now deal with the study method.

**The SQ3R study method :** Study-reading is used mostly on difficult materials like textbooks. Such reading require flexibility in reading with a high level of comprehension. You may sometime need to combine different speeds of reading to achieve maximal results. The SQ3R involves five main steps, each of which is represented in the mnemonic which should really be SQRRR.

**1. S = Survey :** This is the first step and it is the preparatory step which should help you prepare and work up yourself to the correct state of mind for the reading task. You preview or overview the topic to help you focus attention on it. The survey makes for flexibility and shows you from the beginning what sections of the topic you should skim or read slowly, etc. when you begin the actual reading. The survey should:

- Give you an overall impression of the topic
- Help you locate the central idea(s)
- Help you find out the relevance of the topic
- Help you locate the aim, conclusion etc.
- Help you find out the familiar material
- Help you find out the difficult material

Skim through the highlights of either the book or chapter, noting the title, the author, year of publication, preface, table of contents summaries, visual aids, etc. While you are reading through the headings and sub headings, jot down some questions about the subject which you would attempt to answer later. The headings and subheadings are the keywords and give the main ideas. You could turn them into questions, which should motivate you to find out their answers in the next step. As you are doing this, think actively about what you are reading.

**2. Q = Question :** This step focuses attention on the subject matter. You must have a purpose for studying a particular topic. If you had none, you can create one now. Ask questions based on your survey step, like :

- What does the title mean?
- What do I already know about this topic?
- What specifically do I need to find out to pass the test, examinations, etc.?
- Is this author's point of view different from my teacher's?
- Is his example suitable?
- Can I provide a better example?

Jot down such important questions and leave spaces in your notebook for the answers, which you will find after the next step. Try to also jot down from your memory what you already know about the topic. This is important for it helps to set you in the correct frame of mind to concentrate and eliminate mind wandering.



You can take a short break of about five minutes.

When you return, look through what you had jotted down before moving to the next stage.

**3.  $R^1$  = Read :** This step involves the actual reading. It is the main business, it is preceded by two preparatory steps and followed by two more steps.

Read through the topic very fast. Do not break to repeat difficult sections or check up the meaning of words. If you must repeat, read to the end, then reread from the beginning at a slower speed. At this reading stage, try to find answers to the questions you raised in the last section. Reread the passage again if necessary, but this time at a fast rate, rather than a slow one, and then go to the next step.

**4.  $R^2$  = Recall :** This step involves bringing back to memory what you have just read. You can call it recite, record, summarize, test, etc. It is an important step because it helps you to remember about 80% of what you have read according to Floyd (1984).

Shut the book after reading and try to recall what you read. Start with the visual aids (like diagrams). Add more details to what you jotted and jot down more, from your memory. If there are more areas which require more clarification, jot those down as well, to be checked during the review step.

Recall is a good habit to form because as you recall new information, you also reinforce what you already know.

**5.  $R^3$  = Review :** The review step is like the recall step, in that you bring back to memory information that you have just read, but you go further to cross check if what is recalled is correct from the text. It is immediately corrected if any information is wrong.

Regular review consolidates the memory and transfers information from short term memory to long term memory, and it also helps in retrieving information easily when such information is needed. You need a series of reviews, and they should be done systematically.

- The first review (which prevents forgetting) should be done immediately after the learning task.
- The second review (which reinforces information in the memory) should be done the next day.
- The third review (which strengthens your memory) should be done a week later.
- The fourth review (which further strengthens and shows you the progress you are making) should be done a month later.

These reviews will reduce your workload and eliminate cramming and 'crash programs' during examinations

Different techniques have been developed to help you review materials systematically and effectively. One of such techniques is the *keyword pattern*. The keyword pattern is a graphic representation of main ideas, information or facts designed in such a way that all the aspects are revealed sequentially on a page using keywords (Oden, 1991:91). It is brief, interesting, clear and concise. It keeps you really involved in studying as you do many things at the same time while patterning like : thinking, evaluating, judging, reasoning, imagining and solving problems. All these eliminate mind wondering and other poor reading habits, as well as make your studying more creative and enjoyable.



Here are some hints in developing keyword patterns :

- Get a big sheet of paper.
- Print boldly the title or the central idea on the centre of the page.
- Read the passage/chapter/book to be patterned.
- Close the book and recall what you have read on the sheet
- Print the keywords representing the other ideas around the central idea.
- Use arrows, lines and boxes to link up relating ideas, placing the most important near the centre.
- Use different colors of ink (if you like).
- Just let the ideas flow and do not initially mind the arrangements.
- Review the points made on the pattern and correct any mistakes.
- Add more information on subsequent reviews.
- Keep this pattern and use it for your revisions.
- You do not need to go back to read the whole text during revision for examination.
- Reduce all your lecture notes to keyword patterns and continue to add new information on subsequent reviews.

### **Maintaining a healthy study habit**

We have outlined at least three types of reading, a study method and some of the things that hamper effective study. Good grades encourage you to study more, and studying does not have to be a boring exercise. Since you need to apply slightly different techniques to different kinds of reading materials, you need to be flexible in your study methods.

You need to plan your study time to suit you. The kind of material should determine what study method, and what reading style to use. For instance, you need a different style of reading for reading a particular novel for leisure and another style for studying it as a text. Most importantly, if you apply the different techniques we have suggested, you should be able to enjoy reading materials from a wide range of subjects, a novel, your Bible, a newspaper, a magazine, a Mathematics text, a Physics text, etc. That way, you can cope with the challenges you may face for your intellectual, physical, material, social and spiritual development.

There is need for an intensive cultivation of reading habits in our schools, which should translate into a maintenance of good study habits. The secondary school caters for students of the adolescent age, which is the age where children begin to intellectually understand the abstract as well as handle better formal instruction. Independent study and above all the development and maintenance of several habits begin at this stage. Healthy study habits should be among those habits to address at this formative period. You must have developed some level of study habits. Whether yours was healthy or not, we hope that we can help you improve on it with these hints. But above all, remember that God gives peace when He personally teaches you. As a child of God, you have a heritage in that wonderful promise. Tap on it and include reading the Bible as one of your daily reading tasks. God's Word gives you a lot of authority over many things, particularly with regard to developing and maintaining habits.



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