

## **Fundamentals of Learning**

### *The Whole is More than the Sum of the Parts*

As we pursue Consciousness-Based<sup>SM</sup> education we will be thinking in a new way about our own learning. This section provides practical advice aimed at keeping us focused and productive as we learn, and will bring out many of the unique aspects of Consciousness-Based education.

Let's take a minute to review our own learning habits, seeing how each one of the questions below relates to our personal learning experience.

1. Is it easy to relate what I learn in school to my personal life?
2. Do I use different strategies for different learning tasks?
3. Do I take time to think about what I have learned each day?
4. Do I maintain a healthy schedule?
5. Do I periodically self-test to monitor my progress?
6. Do I understand the teacher's goals in each assignment?
7. Do I view myself as a thinker?
8. Am I open to listening to opinions that differ from my own?
9. Can I relate the purpose of an assignment to my personal learning goals?
10. Do I view exams as an opportunity to express what I have learned?
11. Do I enjoy sharing knowledge with others?

The text below outlines five fundamentals of Consciousness-Based education and then relates the actions and attitudes reflected in the survey above to these elements of the process of learning. In this way we gain a comprehensive vision of ourselves as learners and see what areas we are strong in and what areas we may wish to strengthen.

Throughout the text, references are provided to related M.U.M. Academic Support study skill pages.

The five fundamentals are:

1. Receptivity
2. Intelligence
3. Knowledge
4. Experience
5. Expression

### **Am I Receptive?**

Receptive learners are happy to be in school. They have chosen higher education as the next step in their personal development, and are ready to meet the challenges of that step.

Receptive learners:

- ❖ come on time to class
- ❖ keep regular hours so it is easy to stay alert while listening to lectures and doing assignments
- ❖ listen to lectures and to the ideas of others in class with an open mind
- ❖ read with an open mind
- ❖ treat each assignment as an opportunity to learn

### **Coming on time**

This we do for ourselves as well as for others. When we are on time or maybe even a little bit early for class, we give ourselves breathing room, time to get settled before class begins. When every student does this, it creates a coherent air in the room, which all can appreciate, including the teacher.

When the atmosphere in the room is settled and coherent, teachers can focus fully on their presentations. Their teaching will be more fluid when the room is settled and coherent. And they might find themselves saying something even more interesting than they have planned. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management and Active Listening and Note Taking.

### **Keeping regular hours**

This is not something every college student thinks about, but it is a very important point. If we look around us, we see that nature is very efficient. One of its secrets is regularity. When it is time to set the sun, nature sets the sun; it doesn't ask for five more minutes. When it is time for the sun to rise, it simply rises, and the air and the birds wake up. The birds are right in tune with nature. When it is time to go to sleep, they go right off, and no one has to shake them in the morning or implore them to start singing. Regular cycles of rest and activity are natural to life. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management.

### **Listening with an open mind**

We have a particular view of the world, and this structures our opinions. It's important to have opinions, but when we decided to continue our education, we knew that we had even more to learn—that there was room for expansion.

The people in charge of teaching us have more experience in their field of knowledge than we do. They speak from a more expanded perspective. The efficient way of taking advantage of what they have to offer is to listen with an open mind.

Also, the other students in our classes come from a variety of backgrounds. Listening to their point of view with an open mind provides many opportunities to expand our thinking. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Active Listening and Note Taking.

### **Reading with an open mind**

The authors of the reading materials we use for class assignments obviously know more than we do. They knew enough to write a book or an article. We have our opinions, but it is important to take time to understand what an author is saying before we respond with our own thoughts. In this way, we leave room for expansion. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Efficient Study Reading.

### **Treating each assignment as an opportunity to learn**

In our college career, we are enjoying a new level of autonomy. But now, here's someone at the front of the room telling us what to do. Who **is** in charge here?

It's a cooperative effort, isn't it? The professors have already received a higher education. They are familiar with the styles of thinking required in their field. Their job is to guide us toward familiarity with these styles of thinking, and their assignments are vehicles to do so. Our job is to understand the professors' goals in giving the assignments and also to establish our own goals for each assignment so we gain knowledge that is relevant and personally useful. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management.

### **Am I an Intelligent Learner?**

This is a time of discovery, an opportunity to become aware of ourselves as thinkers. Intelligent learners enjoy thinking. They:

- ❖ relate new knowledge to prior knowledge
- ❖ relate knowledge gained to their personal lives

- ❖ think with discrimination
- ❖ are aware of the purpose(s) of each learning activity
- ❖ choose learning strategies appropriate to the task
- ❖ take time each day to think about what they have learned

Notice that being an intelligent learner also involves the integration of two other fundamentals—knowledge and experience.

### **Relating new knowledge to prior knowledge**

By the time we get to college we know a little something about most of the subjects we will be studying. This we can classify as prior knowledge, knowledge that came before. Prior knowledge provides a frame of reference. It helps us relate to and integrate new knowledge.

### **Try This**

The following excerpt is from material that might be presented in a physics class. Divide a piece of paper into two columns. Title the first column “Prior Knowledge.” Title the second column “New Knowledge.” Read the excerpt and make notes in the first column of your paper on what was familiar to you and make notes in the second column on brand new knowledge.

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The study of physics uncovers the full range of natural law. The laws of nature are orderly principles governing the functioning of nature everywhere. If there were no laws of nature, there would be no order, no predictability, and no intelligibility. Deep within physics are the secrets of life.

Early physicists developed theories of classical mechanics, which describes the macroscopic world of objects and the forces that make them move. Classical mechanics deals with the world of everyday sense experiences.

Physicists of the 20th century have searched more deeply. They have probed the molecular, atomic, and subatomic levels of creation and discovered elementary particles and forces. Because these finer levels are more abstract, they cannot be understood in classical, concrete terms.

The new language of 20th century physics was quantum mechanics. It brought out a new flavor of natural law at finer strata—it brought out new levels of dynamism,

intelligence, and abstraction. We will study the principles of quantum mechanics in this course and explore the finer levels of life.

At the foundation of the finer levels of life lies a unified field. As the course progresses, we will study this unified field of all the laws of nature, a perfectly symmetrical field, a field of perfect orderliness, infinite organizing power, and infinite dynamism. We will examine the mechanism by which the perfect symmetry of the unified field is spontaneously broken, giving rise to all the diversity in creation.

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Now read over what you have written, and in a few sentences state how the new information extended your understanding of physics.

Relating new knowledge to prior knowledge grounds us in the familiar and helps us comfortably expand to a new level of understanding.

### **Relating knowledge gained to our personal life**

Knowledge should always have practical value. Are any of the ideas in the material presented in the excerpt from a physics lecture practically relevant to life?

At first glance, we might say no. But let's think for a minute. What general trend in modern scientific thought does the study of quantum mechanics illustrate? Doesn't it exemplify a tendency to probe deeply into the mechanics of life? What other fields of study seem to be concerned with this? How does that affect us personally?

Taking time to reflect on the practical relevance of knowledge helps to make seemingly abstract concepts more clear and concrete. This deepens our comprehension and helps us express ourselves more accurately in a paper or on a test. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management, Efficient Study Reading, and Preparing for and Taking Exams.

### **Thinking with discrimination**

Establishing relevance is an important part of learning. A deeper aspect of relevance is validity. In order for knowledge to be useful, it must also be true. Learning to establish criteria for validity is an important part of thinking. Once we establish these criteria, we have a frame of reference for evaluation. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Establishing Validity.

### **Being aware of the purpose(s) of each learning activity**

Being aware of the purpose(s) of each activity establishes a wholeness that allows us to see how all the parts fit together. Whenever we get an assignment, it's good to reflect on why we are doing it, based on the professor's goals and our own personal learning goals. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management, Active Listening and Note Taking, and Efficient Study Reading.

### **Choosing learning strategies appropriate to the task**

Once we are aware of the purpose of an assignment or a particular learning task, we can choose a strategy that will allow us to complete the task efficiently and effectively. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management, Active Listening and Note Taking, Efficient Study Reading, and Preparing for and Taking Exams.

### **Taking time each day to think about what we have learned**

Learning is an active process that requires periodic self-monitoring. It is a good idea to pause at specific intervals and reflect upon our progress. The end of the day is a good time because that is a transition period for the next day.

We see how many bricks we have placed on the foundation and evaluate the stability of the structure. Then we are ready to continue building, the following day. For suggestions on ways to self-test please refer to Active Listening and Note Taking, Efficient Study Reading, and Preparing for and Taking Exams.

### **Am I an Expressive Learner?**

Expressive learners enjoy speaking and writing. They view all testing situations as an opportunity to show what they have gained. They also are comfortable asking questions.

Expressive learners:

- ❖ Participate in group discussions
- ❖ Ask intelligent, coherent questions
- ❖ Self-test periodically
- ❖ Think creatively
- ❖ Use good test preparation strategies
- ❖ Use good test taking strategies

### **Participating in group discussions**

Active learning is a cooperative effort between teachers and students. It is also a cooperative effort among students. Class discussions are vehicles for bringing out ideas for reflection and comparison. When we bring out a point in class, it gives us a chance to see what we have learned. It also helps us to see how the idea stands up in relation to the thoughts and opinions of others. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Active Listening and Note Taking.

### **Asking intelligent, coherent questions**

Class discussions also provide opportunities to ask questions to clear up any gaps in our understanding. In order to do this we must be clear on where gaps are in our comprehension so we can phrase our questions clearly. This will help the teacher take the correct angle in answering. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Active Listening and Note Taking.

### **Self-testing periodically**

Self-testing creates more channels for the expression of knowledge. We can set goals at different levels of learning appropriate to the information (e.g., listing, explaining, relating, comparing and contrasting, designing new systems, solving problems, evaluating) and test ourselves on the achievement of these goals.

We can review our notes in the evening, make up questions, and answer them. We can summarize a textbook section after reading it. We can make up possible exam questions when studying for the exam and write out the answers. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management, Active Listening and Note Taking, Efficient Study Reading, and Preparing for and Taking Exams.

### **Thinking creatively**

Many students shy away from creative thinking. They are afraid of extending too wide of the mark and losing the train of the lesson. Other students may find themselves attempting to be too creative, losing the train and producing answers on tests or handing in assignments that miss the point.

There is a happy, productive medium between these two extremes. And it is basically achieved by continuing to expand consciousness by easily following the Maharishi University of Management routine. It is very interesting that such a seemingly strict routine promotes more and more unbounded thinking that still hits the mark in relevance

and validity. For more information, the following is an excellent reference:  
[http://mum.edu/tm\\_research/tm\\_biblio/psych\\_a.html](http://mum.edu/tm_research/tm_biblio/psych_a.html).

### **Using good test preparation strategies**

The key is to self-test throughout the course, keeping track of main ideas and supporting details all the way through. Also being aware of the professor's goals and correlating them with our own learning goals during the course are active strategies for assimilating knowledge and preparing to express it accurately. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Goal Setting and Time Management, and Preparing for and Taking Exams.

### **Using good test taking strategies**

Careful preparation will result in a fairly settled mind, but we all seem to have some nervous energy when we are being tested, no matter how well prepared we are. We can turn that vacillating energy into a steadier more productive stream by using a few techniques that allow us to think more clearly and express what we know most coherently. For related suggestions on this topic please refer to: Preparing for and Taking Exams.

At this point you are saying to yourself, the author is probably a nice lady; she means well. But she expects a great deal. It takes a lot of energy and intelligence to be able to do all of these things. It also takes an expanded social awareness to be that open to gaining and sharing knowledge. Well, you are right; it does take all of these things, but it is also possible to have them. Consciousness-Based education is the key.

### **Some Practice**

1. List the habits you already have that make you a receptive learner. Then list the habits you would like to culture to extend your receptivity.
2. Do the same for the habits that make you an intelligent learner, and an expressive learner.
3. Think about an experience in learning that you have had in the past that was satisfying. What contributed to your success and satisfaction? What are some things you can do to continue having this experience?

Comments or questions on this section? Please e-mail [talazrak@mum.edu](mailto:talazrak@mum.edu)

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