Paper assignment—Psychology 101—Introduction to Psychology—Fall 2017—Karyn Keane

“Optimizing Learning in College: Tips From Cognitive Psychology”

In transitioning from the relative ease of high school coursework to the demanding nature of postsecondary education, numerous students struggle to maintain high grade point averages. Actual learning and retention of information is often compromised in an effort to simply pass the course amidst the stress of collegiate life. Fortunately, learning deeply and absorbing meaningful information remains possible for dedicated college students. Putnam, Sungkhasettee, and Roediger outline methods for success in the collegiate environment in their article, “Optimizing Learning in College: Tips From Cognitive Psychology.”

The authors first recommend that students utilize time management techniques, such as writing down the requirements and due dates in the syllabus as soon as the class begins. Referring to the course syllabus as a student’s “road map for the semester,” they add that students should “make it a habit to review the upcoming month once a week” (653). I have utilized this strategy in numerous classes (including Psychology 101) by keeping track of all due dates and tests on weekly and monthly calendars. In doing so, I can create my study schedule well in advance and balance my time effectively.

Additionally, the authors of the article contend that “if you are serious about studying and learning, eliminate distractions.” They argue that background noise such as music or television can impair students’ abilities to learn and retain information (653). In my experience, this information has proven true on numerous occasions. I find myself unable to seriously focus on the tasks at hand if I have noise around me. With this knowledge in mind, I frequently make solitary visits to the quiet section of the Greenwood Library so that I am able to focus, absorb information, and produce quality work.

The article also advocates for completing reading assignments prior to the start of class. They contend that by reading about the information covered in the lecture in advance, students “will get much more out of class” (653). In my experience with college courses (especially in Psychology 101), reading helps me familiarize myself with the material at hand so that I can increase my comprehension of it during class. By the time the class period begins, I have a semi-working knowledge of important terminology and concepts from the chapter, making it possible for me to focus on the professor’s helpful explanation of the material. I will continue this practice throughout my college career to reap maximum benefits from my lectures.

Further, the authors recommend that students answer the textbook’s comprehension questions before reading the assigned chapter. They explain:

It may seem counterintuitive to answer questions about topics you have not studied yet, but research suggests that answering questions about a topic before you start reading about it—even if you’re just making educated guesses—may help you to remember more than if you did not answer any questions (654).

This concept applies to all of my collegiate coursework. Regardless of the subject, thinking about questions and key concepts outlined in the textbook before reading the chapter helps me gain a clear picture of what information is relevant. This helps guide my notetaking and studying processes, ensuring a higher chance of success within the class. I will continue to employ this strategy throughout my academic career.

The authors also urge students to attend all lectures and resist the urge to skip classes. In an explanation of the benefits of repetitive study, they explain that “reading about a concept at home and then hearing about it in class after a delay (ideally in a slightly different way) will make it much more likely that you will be able to remember that concept in the future” (654). As I navigate rigorous postsecondary coursework, I have found this concept applicable to my studies. While learning about the course content from my textbook and other easily accessible materials is useful, sitting in an interactive classroom environment and hearing the professor explain the information in a unique way serves as a critical component to my success. I will continue to attend all lectures because doing so enables me to learn more thoroughly and better retain information.

In addition, the authors of the piece suggest that students learn through “spaced practice, in which study of the same content is spaced out over time instead of crammed into one session.” They proceed to explain that this strategy is more effective than cramming in learning and retaining new information and contributes to increased rates of success throughout collegiate coursework (656). I have found this to be especially true for me as I perform poorly under pressure. To combat this issue, I study material in small chunks over the course of several weeks. During this time, I revisit confusing information, ask professors about things I cannot understand on my own, and build confidence in my ability to think about and discuss the information. This technique tends to yield better understanding and higher test scores than if I force myself to learn information in long sessions with a limited time frame before the assessment.

Despite covering some information of which I was already aware, Putnam, Sungkhasettee, and Roediger’s article provided me with useful information which I will carry with me as I progress throughout my college career. I entered college with little preparation regarding how to study from high school. Despite learning how to effectively study prior to this article, the piece solidified some information and enhanced my understanding of other concepts. As someone who plans on attending graduate school and hopes to receive a doctorate, these tips will prove repeatedly beneficial as I face increasingly complex concepts and information.