A Note to the Counselor or Teacher

It has often been said, and wisely so, that the most important thing students can learn in school is how to learn. Knowing how to learn ranks right up there with reading as fundamental to academic and career success. Without learning skills, the riches of math, science, civics and social studies can never be fully tapped.

Studying, Test Taking, and Getting Good Grades falls solidly within the "how to learn" category. Borrowing broadly from a variety of disciplines, it goes beyond basic study skills to address motivation, personal responsibility, diet, exercise, the brain, and numerous other topics. It does not belong to a specific academic "content area," yet applies to all content areas.

This entirely reproducible student activity book is designed to (1) build a base of understanding and skill development in the broad spectrum of learning, studying, and test-taking; (2) provide opportunities for students to apply this knowledge to their own lives; and (3) create a "laboratory" within which students can practice and discuss new information and skills so that they are better prepared to apply these techniques and skills in other subject areas.

The book is comprised of 11 units. Each unit is a separate entity capable of standing alone. Generally, each page is also independently designed, with one concept, quiz, or activity per page. If you have a specific concept you want to address, you may duplicate and distribute individual pages to the students. However, for greatest impact, either present the book in its entirety and encourage students to complete the activities in sequence, or, if you have limited copies, duplicate and assign the units in sequence.

The material in this book can be used in a variety of settings, from school to home, and with a single student or in small to large groups. Because of the nature of the content, and because the students are encouraged to personalize much of the material, the book will benefit low- and high-achievers as well as "mainstream" students.

The lessons in the book are written expressly for the students, so by all means allow them to work independently and at their own pace. You can facilitate this process by reading each chapter in advance and introducing the material to the students in your own words and with some of your own examples and reactions. If a chapter contains words or terms that you think might stymie your students, define and discuss these up front.

Each chapter concludes with an exercise entitled, "What Did You Learn?" Although at first glance these exercises may seem redundant, they comprise a very important repeating element of the book. Students need to learn to ask themselves this question often, not just with regard to study skills, but after every lesson in every subject. In the process of articulating what they've learned (by writing, drawing, symbolizing, mind-mapping, etc.), students are obliged to review, sift, and weigh the information. This helps to strengthen learning pathways in the brain and commit new learning to long-term memory. It also gives them a chance to practice skills such as mind-mapping and experiment with learning-style preferences.

The "What Did You Learn?" pages may also be used to assess student progress relative to the material. If assessment is one of your objectives, let students know that their responses will be used to judge their progress and then collect this page at the conclusion of each unit.

Immediately after the students have completed a unit, lead a follow-up discussion. This is critically important for several reasons. First, discussing the material will help your students to think about the information and "activate" what they have learned (see Six Learning Steps, page 90). Second, they will hear additional ideas and thoughts from each other. Third, they will have a chance to practice their discussion skills (see Strategy #5, page 84). Finally, during the discussion you will have an opportunity to assess how well the students have internalized the material and can begin to plan additional reinforcement activities as needed.

You can lead the discussion before or after the students complete the "What Did You Learn?" page. Having the discussion first will serve as a warm-up and generate ideas for individual students to elaborate. Having it afterwards will reverse the process (and the gains), helping to ensure a lively discussion. Try it both ways.

Studying, Test Taking, and Getting Good Grades provides overviews in a number of fascinating topic areas and is likely to inspire students to conduct further research on topics such as brain science. Please encourage and facilitate this "launching pad" effect.

Anything that teaches students how to learn should, by definition, be just the beginning.