

Study Tricks and Critical thinking

...V Pradeep Kumar

While teaching students a course in communication, I discovered their lack of critical thinking and studying techniques. Being not part of the curriculum in schools and colleges, the only alternative is to learn these techniques through self-learning or under the guidance of a mentor.

The following critical thinking and studying techniques can make your learning comprehensive.

Training the eye: Training the eye to increase the speed of training is a concept most students are unaware. Increasing the number of words at a single glance or the eye span is one fundamental idea to improve reading. One must combine increased eye span with rhythmic and faster reading through correct movement of eyes.

Training the mind: Training the mind is even more important. In the absence of coaching, many students become reluctant and disengaged readers. They practice by heart reading, rarely going beyond the text, focusing on getting grades in examinations rather than actual learning. To practice critical thinking, develop a willingness to learn with an open and curious mind.

Studying techniques: There are various studying techniques to help you become an efficient reader. SQ3R is a popular and recommended studying technique, which increases not only understanding but enhances memory which is of immense help in examinations.

1. **Surveying**: In the context of reading, surveying is like getting an overview before a detailed study.
 - Survey the chapter by reading the first paragraph and then the last.
 - Read the first sentence of paragraphs in between the first and last paragraph.
 - Notice long paragraphs/sub-headings, words in italics; look at diagrams and tables.
 - Notice 'signpost' words like firstly, secondly, in summary,
 - Notice words telling you to speed up, i.e., more of the same thought like also, likewise, further, in addition etc.
 - Notice words asking you to slow down: but, on the other hand, although, despite, however etc.
 - Notice words highlighting the main point like thus, therefore, consequently, accordingly.

The total time spent on surveying can be 10% of total time.

2. **Questioning:** Many students are shy and hesitate to ask questions leading to low interaction between teachers and students making the current learning methods superficial and ineffective. In the absence of questions and interaction, teachers experience the fatigue of a monologue in a classroom and are not at their best.

As a student, practice active listening, concentrating on the meaning of words, being perceptive and questioning to gain an insight into the subject. The ability to ask questions in a classroom or while studying at home to yourself, is therefore important for effective learning. Consider these diverse range of questions and ask them as appropriate in the context.

- Conceptual questions.
 - Exploratory questions.
 - Probing questions.
 - Comparative questions.
 - Hypothetical questions.
 - Connecting questions.
3. **Reading:** This is akin to actual reading. Improve your style further, by reading difficult matter slowly, light matter quickly and provocative, argumentative, conceptual matter cautiously. Also, look for main thoughts and concepts as a single idea could be under a mountain words in a long para. Spend 50% of total studying time on this segment.
 4. **Restating:** After completing reading, restate what you learnt. Restating is a critical step and enhances your memory up to three times. Hence, spend 20% of the total time to practice restating.
 5. **Reviewing:** Simply repeat the earlier four steps to complete your studying which also enhances your self-confidence. Spend 10% of the total time to review.

Critical thinking: Apart from studying techniques, you need other skills to think critically about any subject and to facilitate comprehensive learning. Develop observation, interpretation, understanding, analysis, evaluation, introspection, reflection, problem solving and decision-making skills, through self-learning.

It's a well-known fact that success in life is beyond academic excellence. For true success in professional and personal life, strive to develop skills related to mental, physical intellectual, emotional and social abilities.

While correct studying and critical thinking techniques helps you to achieve academic excellence, together with life skills, you can be the architect of your life.

