

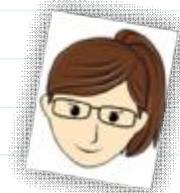
The Thinking Cap

Spring 2010

Volume 2, Issue 2

Alexandra in Tutorland

[alexandra's musings](#)



When practice does make (almost) perfect

There have been plenty of times in my life, especially when I was in school, when I've come to a challenge and thought that it was insurmountable and that I simply *wasn't good* at the given task. I told that myself I just wasn't born with a talent for memorizing lines of Shakespeare as an excuse to give up. After all, if I just wasn't good at something, then I guessed there was nothing to be done. I ignored the sound advice of my parents who would remind that practice makes perfect. Then, I learned about the compelling research of Benjamin Bloom: in his book *Developing Talent in Young People*, Dr. Bloom shows that almost always experts are made, not born. With examples ranging from sports to science, he illustrates that experts become experts through a lot of hard work, practice, and often times, failure. The next time you are up against a challenge and you feel like you're just not good at it, remember that to become good at something you need to:

Practice. To become good at something, you will need to practice, a lot. Don't focus on the easy parts that you understand, instead concentrate specifically on the most challenging material. For example, if there are two topics on your math test and you're having trouble with only one, then spend more time on the harder topic.

Get help. We often talk about the importance of getting help, and here we are again. Dr. Bloom's study explains that, in order to learn, you need someone who really knows that topic well to teach it to you. Working with a teacher or mentor will not only help you understand the topic, but it will also help you understand how to learn similar topics in the future.

Give yourself time. It usually takes a long time to truly master a topic or skill. Depending on the level of expertise you're trying to attain, you will need more or less time. Be realistic about the amount of time you'll need to master your new skill.

Take a step back and breathe. Sometimes we work too hard, and don't stop to realize that we have accomplished and learned new things. If you feel yourself getting frustrated, take a step back and look at the small accomplishments you have made along the way.

Send your questions to:
info@thinkingcapstutoring.com

Sense and Sensibility
 you ask, we answer

Inside this Issue

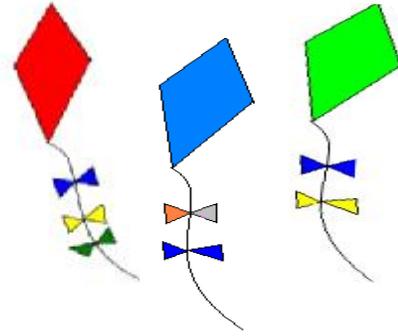
- A Tale of One Tutor
- Great Expectations
- Sense and Sensibility
- The (academic) Odyssey
- Much Ado About Learning
- Cat's Cradle

Great Expectations

- ü ThinkingCaps Summer Registration
May 2010
- ü Check out TCT in the NYT Small Business section
- ü NYS Regents
June 2010
- ü ACT
April 10, 2010
June 12, 2010
- ü SAT
March 13, 2010
May 1, 2010
June 5, 2010

Q: I really messed up the essay on my history midterm. How can I make it so that doesn't happen again?

A: The trick to being a good essay-writer is being a really careful reader. Often times, we get points taken off because we forget to answer parts of a bigger question or forget to include enough evidence. Read the directions carefully, and when checking over your response, make sure that you have answered each part of the essay question.



Much Ado About Learning

our tips and helpful hints

Useful ideas on ways to get stuff done without feeling overwhelmed.

I never forget to relax a little. Even if you only have 15 minutes to spare, take that time to sit down and relax. Read a magazine, listen to some music, or have a little treat. When you have a busy schedule or a lot of work to do, it can be difficult to manage, so even taking a few minutes for yourself is helpful in not becoming overwhelmed.
--Maryann Aita

I work on the most difficult assignments first-- this allows me ample time to finish and will ease the burden in the long run.
—Persis Singh

I stick to my 5 rules to stay on track:

- Prioritize your responsibilities. Figure out what tasks are due earliest and/or will take the most time, and begin working on those.
- Plan out the amount of time you have each day of the week to work and study. Be realistic about what time you have available. You want to feel proud after you have made the most of your time.
- Have a set time that you will stop working for the night.
- Sleep! After a good night's sleep (about 8 hours), you will be amazed at how much more information you will remember and how efficient you are at understanding your studies. It's magical!
- The most important thing to do when you have a lot on your plate is to be in control and use your time efficiently. Every day has the same number of hours; it's what you make of them!

--Elysa Goldberg

A Tale of One Tutor

lessons we learned along the way

Making sense of math

Does math homework give you a splitting headache? Do you have to study extra hard just to do 'okay?' Well, you are not alone. Most people have trouble understanding what math is all about, which is part of why it can be so challenging. Growing up, I was lucky enough to be good at math, but it took me a whole college career to discover that what I was great at was memorizing many problems and procedures down to every variation that could appear on a test. That's when I started thinking: am I really good at math? Or am I just good at memorizing?

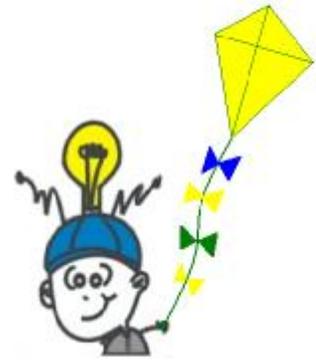
After a couple weeks of reflecting on that issue, I came to the conclusion that, while math doesn't mean much or do much on its own, mathematics is about providing people with the tools they need to think critically about events in everyday life. It all starts with simple problems like "2 + 2" in which we visualize a number of apples in each hand, which are then combined in a single basket to make four apples. Then it gets a bit crazier when we have to solve area problems, calculating the amount of space within a shape or a room. Finally, we have algebraic equations, in which we are almost solving backwards--adding, subtracting, dividing pieces--all to find that particular value of "x" that makes the relation work.

Math seems insignificant on its own, but is a part of our everyday lives, I mean just think about variables: we don't exactly add variables all the time, but it's because of our practice and experiences with a variety of mathematical problems that our brains know how to think critically about, well, everything! If you have to be home by 6 PM, and it is 12 PM now, and you have four errands to run before then, then you're probably going to start planning a route to get the errands done. In planning, you considered route theory, efficiency, and time estimates, which are all mathematical, though you might not have realized it. No one would be able to make that judgment call without having studied area in school.

The point is that math can be hard, and problems can get really tricky, and I know how easy it is to want to give up, but math may become more bearable, and even enjoyable if we understand its purpose. It's not about the math, the formulas, or the theorems but rather, it's about the way we push our brains to use mathematical principles to come to a solution. The more problems we solve, the better we get at thinking critically, and the better you can train your brain to interpret, reflect, and act, the easier things in real life become.

--Joseph Daniele





The (academic) Odyssey

review of education news

Heart pounding, sweaty palms...

Many of us experience these sensations before important events. This is "test anxiety" and it is perfectly normal, as are the unfortunate host of associated effects, including upset stomach, loss of focus, fear, irritability, and even depression. Test anxiety also creates a kind of "noise" or "mental static" in the brain that blocks our ability to retrieve what's stored in our memory and also impairs our ability to comprehend and reason. When you experience test anxiety, your brain downshifts to a lower "gear" and you literally become unable to use the "thinking" part of your brain.

The good news is that there are strategies you can use to help overcome test anxiety. Here are some basic tips:

Get enough sleep and eat something.

Tests require a lot of stamina. Rest and a healthy breakfast will provide your brain with the necessary energy it needs.

Practice the neutral tool. Every time you catch a negative thought about your anticipated performance, stop that self-doubt loop and go into neutral by breathing deeply and finding an attitude of calmness about the situation.

Pace yourself, but don't rush. Review the test and know how many questions there are and allocate time per question.

Don't get distracted. Keep your eyes focused solely on the test, except occasionally to check the time. Ignore surrounding students so you aren't affected by their behavior.

Focus on the stuff you know. If you are absolutely stumped by a

question, immediately move on to the next one. In other words: if you get stuck, don't stay stuck.

Think good thoughts. Research shows that good feelings actually help your brain work better. Think of something positive and hold that thought for 10-20 seconds. Turn what-if questions into positive, "I can" statements. Re-experience that good vibe all over again, especially right before your test.

Expect and accept a little bit of stress. Don't worry if you still are stressed before the test. It's completely normal!

And finally...once the test is over, try not to think about it for a while and instead reward yourself for making it through! --Dr. Amy Schwartz

Dr. Schwartz is a pediatric neuropsychologist. Visit www.dramyschwartz.com or email her at amyschwartz@hotmail.com

Cat's Cradle

tantalizing brain ticklers

Hidden meanings.

Cryptograms are messages that are written in code. The meaning of the communications is hidden or encoded. Try your hand at solving our cryptograms.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
	12	26	25	9	5	19	14	7	17	11	13	3	10
	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
	4	18	15	8	24	2	16	21	6	23	22	20	1
	$\overline{12}$	$\overline{15}$	$\overline{24}$	$\overline{17}$	$\overline{3}$	$\overline{2}$	$\overline{7}$	$\overline{18}$	$\overline{23}$	$\overline{5}$	$\overline{24}$	$\overline{2}$	
	$\overline{26}$	$\overline{24}$	$\overline{17}$	$\overline{4}$	$\overline{14}$	$\overline{10}$	$\overline{12}$	$\overline{20}$					
	$\overline{19}$	$\overline{3}$	$\overline{18}$	$\overline{23}$	$\overline{5}$	$\overline{24}$	$\overline{2}$						



Thinking Caps Tutoring is an innovative, after-school educational company that helps students acquire the skills and confidence needed to succeed in school, college, and beyond. TCT, through an individualized, descriptive screening process, matches students with student tutors best capable of overcoming a child's weak points and emphasizing strengths. Services provided at TCT include subject tutoring, skills coaching, homework support, standardized test prep and more.

For more information about TCT or any of the programs, please call us at 917.779.8183 or send an email to info@thinkingcapstutoring.com.

