Module 1: The Psychology of Reflective Studying

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Lecture 1.1: What’s in It for You?–More Than You Might Think

***Topic: Introduction Concept: Psychology***

**Summary 1.1: How can studying psychology help me in my personal and professional life?**

**1.1.1:** Two broad categories of learning are learning content and learning skills.

**1.1.2:** Psychology students learn a variety of study skills, research skills, critical thinking skills, cultural awareness skills, and personal skills during their studies.

**1.1.3:** The study of psychology will prepare you for many potentially rewarding careers. Some of those exist within the field of psychology, but the skills learned in a psychology degree can also be applied to a wide range of other paths.

**1.1.4:** Reflective learning is deliberately reflective and active self-guided study.

This course will help students build their skill set for a future psychology career by covering a range of skills in psychology, such as study skills, research skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness skills.

* **Study skills**: This section will discuss a range of study skills, including reflective reading, active listening, test taking, and avoiding procrastination. It also defines reflective processing, which will be emphasized throughout the textbook. These skills can be applied in various jobs.
* **Research skills**: The text provides an introduction to research in psychology, including research methods and statistics. These skills allow students to better decipher true science from pseudoscience and can be invaluable for multiple careers.
* **Critical thinking skills**: Critical thinking skills are emphasized throughout the textbook and overlap with multiple other skills, such as conceptualizing problems, identifying solutions, synthesizing content, and applying concepts. These skills are highly valued by employers.
* **Cultural awareness skills**: The textbook encourages students to learn and assess cultural differences across a number of demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, race, sexual orientation). This skill is critical in positions where one is working with people from diverse backgrounds.

As you can see, this course covers many valuable skills that are relevant for a wide range of careers. Of course, many skills can be gained outside of the classroom as well. Most of your students will be involved in university clubs or have part-time jobs and volunteer experiences. They may also participate in unique learning experiences such as study abroad. These experiences can nicely supplement students’ work in the classroom; many of them help build verbal communication skills while coursework mostly builds reading and writing skills. Students should be advised to highlight their communication skill set in applications and interviews, as it is often a valuable asset in the workplace.

Students must engage in reflective learning to acquire these classroom skills and be successful in the course. To dissect the idea of reflective learning, you can start by describing a time in which students might be on autopilot, such as when they are passively watching television or listening to the radio. These are times when they are not thinking deeply about what they are seeing/hearing and do not remember much from it later. This is called **experiential processing**. In contrast, **reflective processing** is mindfully engaging with content, like one might do in a job interview. It requires one to be more present, actively listening and thoughtfully responding. Accordingly, **active learning** occurs when the student actively processes and engages with the material. The curriculum is designed to promote reflective learning. Students can facilitate reflective learning using the following strategies:

1. **Set specific, objective learning goals.** Have a clear plan as you begin each study session. Keep in mind what goals you have for the session and what specific skills and competencies you are aiming to sharpen.
2. **Plan a learning strategy.** Make detailed plans and timelines for learning and implementing those plans.
3. **Be your own teacher.** Instruct and quiz yourself. Ask yourself questions as if you are the teacher.
4. **Monitor your progress and correct when necessary.** Record your progress on each of your learning goals. Check your progress by testing your knowledge and then revisit the areas that need improvement. Revise short and long term goals as needed.
5. **Reward yourself.** Treat yourself to a fun activity or give self-praise when you meet goals.

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Lecture 1.2: Reflective Reading–How to Tame a Textbook

***Topic: Introduction Concept: Psychology***

**Summary 1.2: How can I get the most out of this textbook?**

**1.2.1:** Reflective reading, which involves actively thinking about what is being read, is better than passive reading.

**1.2.2:** One way to be a more active reader is to follow the six steps of the reflective SQ4R method: survey, question, read, recite, reflect, and review.

**1.2.3:** Digital media offer another way to be more reflective.

Students may wonder how to read more reflectively. One strategy is **self-reference**. They can find ways to relate to new information they learn by connecting it with information they already know from their own experiences. **Critical thinking** is another strategy. Critical thinking means stopping to assess what one is reading in multiple ways.

You may want to teach the **reflective SQ4R method**, which combines all of these learning strategies. It stands for *survey, question, read, recite, reflect,* and *review*. These strategies have been associated with gains in grades and lasting understanding of concepts.

S = *Survey*. Before starting to read, first skim through to get acclimated to what you are about to read. Pay attention to the heading titles, images, figures, and captions.

Q = *Question*. Look at the topic headings and reword them as questions that ask what specific information that section is offering. For example, for “Sleep Stages” you can ask, “What is each stage of sleep?”

R1 = *Read*. Read sections in chunks and search as you read for the responses to the questions you asked yourself earlier.

R2 = *Recite*. Once you’ve read one section, go over it again. Make notes about it and try to answer the questions you asked about it. Ensure you understand what you’ve read before reading more. Repeat the main ideas to yourself.

R3 = *Reflect*. Use self-reference, critical thinking, and other strategies that work for you to reflect on what you’ve read.

R4 = *Review*. Read over your notes or skim the section again when you finish reading. Continue to quiz yourself and recite main ideas.

The textbook is designed to foster reflective learning through the reflective SQ4R method. There are quick *survey* introductions and questions for each section. There are clear headings that can be used to create *questions*. As students *read*,there is **boldface type** for key words and major concepts as well as corresponding figures and tables further illustrating certain concepts. There is also a *running glossary* on each page in addition to the *Subject/Index Glossary* at the end of the book. There are *recite* questions in each *Knowledge Builder*, a study guide at the conclusion of each section. Knowledge Builders also allow students to *reflect* on what they just read. They include *Think Critically* questions and *Self-Reflect* questions to help evaluate the information just read and relate it to past knowledge and personal experiences. Lastly, for *review,* each section concludes with a *Summary*, which provides an overview of the major concepts and important takeaways from that section.

#### Digital media can be used throughout the course to enhance understanding and reflective learning of course content. Psychology websites and other media can be referenced to supplement lectures and textbook reading assignments. MindTap is an online learning forum that can be customized to include all of the content and assignments from the textbook. You can also include more practice materials (e.g., practice tests) online beyond the few the textbook offers due to limited space. MindTap will help you present the whole course in the reflective SQ4R method, including videos and online interactive activities. All course activities and feedback can be accomplished through this program. MindTap also includes MindApps, which allows students to sync course material with other programs, among other helpful functionalities.

Additionally, you can encourage students to use their digital resources for the course by directing them to look up some of the references in the text through academic search engines such as PsycINFO. Remind them that some of the material they find might be more advanced than where they are, but that doesn’t preclude them from looking over the articles and soaking in what they can understand. This will help them grow as a student and learn interesting information. They can also refer to APA and APS’s websites, as well as websites linked to other relevant organizations and topics.

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Lecture 1.3: Reflective Note Taking–LISAN UP!

***Topic: Introduction Concept: Psychology***

**Summary 1.3: How can I get the most out of class time?**

**1.3.1:** Reflective learning in class involves active listening.

**1.3.2:** One way to be a more active listener in class is to follow the five steps of the LISAN method: lead, don’t follow; ideas; signal words; actively listen; note taking.

Students should learn to be **reflective listeners** in order to succeed in this course. Active listening is key to reflective learning and involves avoiding distractions and skillfully gathering ideas. Encourage your students to use the listening/note-taking method called LISAN. The acronym LISAN stands for:

L = *Lead. Don’t follow.* Read the assigned materials and survey any lecture notes or PowerPoints your instructor provides you with before coming to class. Most importantly, engage in reflective questioning while reviewing materials. Reflective questions can come the assignments, study guides, or your own curiousity.

I = *Ideas.* Every lecture is based on a core of ideas. While reading the class materials and listening in class, ask yourself, “What is the main idea now? What ideas support it?”

S = *Signal words.* Pay special attention to words that tell you what direction the instructor is taking. Here are a few examples of signal words/phrases to look out for:

*There are three reasons…*

*Most important is…*

*On the contrary…*

*As an example…*

*Therefore…*

A = *Actively listen.* When you arrive at class, make sure to sit where you can get involved and ask questions. Also, bring questions that you want answered from the last lecture of from your text, and approach your instructor about these questions before class or right at the start of class. What is most important is to stay active, alert, and engaged throughout the course.

N = *Note taking.* Listen to everything during lectures, but be selective while taking notes. Write down the key points so you can also spend time absorbing what the instructor is saying. It helps to think of yourself as a reporter who is trying to get a good story.

While taking notes is important, it’s more important for students to then use those notes. Encourage students to review their notes right after the lectures so they can fill in any gaps, complete their thoughts and look for connections between ideas. It is also beneficial for them to summarize their notes and write down any major ideas, definitions, or details that they think might come on tests.

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Lecture 1.4: Reflective Study Strategies–Making a Habit of Success

***Topic: Introduction Concept: Psychology***

**Summary 1.4: How can I best prepare for tests?**

**1.4.1:** More reflective studying involves studying in a specific place, using spaced study sessions, trying mnemonics, testing yourself, and overlearning.

**1.4.2:** A variety of guidelines are available for improving general test taking skills.

**1.4.3:** More specialized strategies are available for objective tests, essay tests, and short-answer tests.

**1.4.4:** Procrastination can be overcome through time management, setting goals, and making learning an adventure.

Students will benefit from understanding how to study, prepare for tests, and effectively complete assignments for this course. Strategies for studying include testing oneself, using spaced study sessions, and creating a study environment that helps the student stay focused. **Self-testing** involves asking oneself questions and providing answers. This can be done through flashcards or using some of the self-testing tools available in the textbook such as the Knowledge Builder Recite, the Think Critically questions, and the Self-Reflect questions offered after each section.

Another helpful strategy is spacing out study sessions rather than only studying the night before an exam. **Spaced practice** includes frequent, short study sessions. **Massed practice** includes long, focused study sessions without breaks. This approach is not recommended, as it is associated with lapses in memory for the studied content. It’s best not to try to learn new concepts the night before a test. Small chunks of studying and frequent reviewing lead to greater success in learning and testing. Other suggestions include studying in a quiet area with few opportunities for interruption or distraction, studying in the same place each time, and reserving that space for studying alone (e.g., not sleeping, hanging out with friends, browsing social media, etc.).

Students tend to *underprepare* for exams and *overestimate* their performance. A good way for students to avoid these pitfalls is to **overlearn** material—this process involves continuing to study beyond the point at which one feels they have mastered the studied concepts. Students should prepare for tests as if they are all essay tests, in which they must demonstrate their expertise in a topic area in thorough and specific detail.

So the student has now made it to the test. Great! What next? How do they also be successful in test-taking, not just studying for tests? Strategies for taking tests vary in some ways based on test type (e.g., objective tests, essay tests, or short answer tests). Here are some overarching strategies for successful test-taking:

1. Read directions thoroughly and thoughtfully. They may contain clues about how to appropriately and fully answer the question.
2. Take a minute to survey or look over the test before beginning.
3. Respond to easier questions first, and then spend time tackling the more challenging ones.
4. Double-check to ensure you have answered ALL questions.
5. Be mindful of the time and use it wisely.
6. Ask for clarification on questions if you’re feeling unsure.

Strategies for **objective tests** (i.e., multiple choice or T/F):

1. Connect the question to what you know about the concept. Read through the options. Which matches the response you thought would be the answer? If none, is there at least a partial match?
2. Read all answer choices before you choose one or you might choose a *good* response over the BEST response.
3. Read quickly. Skip over questions that you don’t feel as confident or knowledgeable about and come back to them later. There may be information from later questions that helps you identify the answer for these ones.
4. Use process of elimination to improve your odds of choosing the correct answer.
5. Make sure you go back to all initially skipped items (unless you are penalized for wrong answers and not for blank ones). You might guess correctly. Just do your best.
6. Don’t make the mistake of adamantly fighting against second-guessing yourself. Changing your answer after more reflection often improves scores.
7. Look for the best answer. Many choices will be somewhat true but contain a flaw. You may try rating each answer to see which one rises above the rest.
8. Answer choices that take an extreme stance (e.g., claiming something ALWAYS or NEVER happens) are often false.

Strategies for **Essay Tests**:

1. Read carefully and identify key words that describe what the essay is asking you to do (e.g., compare, contrast, critique, describe).
2. Make sure to answer everything the question asks for. If it says compare and contrast, don’t just compare or contrast. Do both.
3. Take a minute to think about your answer and the main points you want to address in your response before composing the essay. Write them all down as they come to mind and then organize the points into a logical order before beginning the essay. There is no need to form a detailed outline.
4. Make answers clear and concrete. Directly communicate your main points and don’t make the grader have to search for or infer what you mean.
5. Proofread your essay when it’s done. Correct any spelling or grammatical errors. Don’t spend too much time worrying about this as you write. Get your ideas down on the page and save proofreading for last.

Strategies for **Short-Answer Tests** (i.e., fill in the blank, define terms, etc.) can be tricky. The questions often offer little information and clues. Overlearning material, paying attention to detail, and studying related concepts can help prepare you for short-answer tests. These may be questions that you should skip first and tackle after responding to more obvious questions.

**Procrastination**, the habit of waiting until the last minute to complete difficult or unpleasant tasks, can become a serious problem for some students. It can lead to negative outcomes both for their quality of work as well as their psychological wellbeing. Students procrastinate often because they have mentally built up the task to be daunting (even when it is not) or because they want to be able to attribute their subpar work to lack of time rather than poor ability. Time management strategies, realistic goal setting, and shifting one’s attitude can be used to address and overcome the tendency to procrastinate. A **weekly time schedule** is a detailed written plan that allots specific blocks of time for studying, working, and social activities. The schedule is meant to be used daily, checking off tasks/activities as you go through the day. A **term schedule** can also be useful. A term schedule is a planner comprised of dates for quizzes, tests, and other projects for a course. Schedules create a sense of accountability when taken seriously. The budgeted time for self-care is also vital for success. Students who set **specific goals** also tend to perform better. Specific goals are clear, measurable, and well-distributed across timeframes. Setting more goals for the beginning of the course can prevent students from feeling overwhelmed at the end. Big assignments can be completed in smaller chunks. Lastly, students should remember to maintain a positive attitude. Procrastination primarily happens when students believe an assignment will be extremely difficult or unpleasant. Students can be more successful in avoiding procrastination when they approach schoolwork as an interesting or fun challenge.

Students can be inspired toward active engagement in the course by learning how psychology connects with them and getting inspired to challenge themselves through active and reflective learning. The concept of Zen distinguishes between *live* and *dead* words. Live words refer to personal experiences whereas dead words refer to topics. The textbook is just dead words unless students make it their own journey. In order to experience the exciting, interesting, and challenging ideas the course has to offer, students must commit to active and reflective learning throughout.