

SECOND EDITION

Learning Power

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS



Dave Ellis and Peter Lenn

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Table of Contents

1 GETTING STARTED

Meet <i>Learning Power</i>	2
and <i>The Learning Power</i> <i>Workbook</i>	3
Make this Book Your Coach . . .	6
Define Success	8
Improve Your Skills	9
Check Your Mindset	10
Discover Mastery Learning . . .	12
Set the Stage	14
Take Four Steps to Mastery . . .	15
Practice, Practice, Practice . . .	16
Overcome Stage Fright	17
Know Yourself	18
Adopt a Process for Change . . .	19
Take Note of Your Success . . .	21

2 TIME

Set Your Goals	24
Track Your Time	26
Plan Your Time	27
Keep To-Do Lists	29
Ask Some Timely Questions . . .	30
Overcome Procrastination . . .	31
Be Aware	32

3 PREPARE FOR PRACTICE

Think of Homework as Practice	36
Memorize, Perform, and Solve	37
Practice for Tests	39
Choose a Place	40
and Equip Your Space	41
Use a Three-Ring Binder . . .	42
Record Your Assignments . . .	44
Master Your Assignments . . .	45

4 READ, TAKE NOTE, AND REMEMBER

Apply PRQT	50
Experiment with Variations . . .	52
Measure Your Reading Rate . . .	53
Increase Your Reading Skill . . .	54
Use Main Ideas & Supporting Facts	57
Outline It	58
Make a Mind Map	59
Remember	61
Review	62
Use Association	64
Make Flash Cards	66
Picture It	68
Try More Memory Methods . . .	69
Quote Shakespeare	70

TESTS AND GRADES

Prepare for Your Tests	74
Cram at Your Own Risk	77
Ace That Test!	78
Beware of Cheating	82
Take the Feedback	83
Handle the Stress	84
Trade In Those Negative Thoughts	86
Build a Portfolio	88
Play the Grade Game	89

TALK IT OUT

Speak Effectively	92
Listen Actively	96
Create Win-Win Agreements	99
Go for the Big Picture	103
Communicate with Adults	105
Don't Try This at Home	107
Call a Family Meeting	108

MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

Build Your Team	112
Recruit Your Parents	114
Hire a Tutor	116
Think of Teachers as Allies	118
Love Those Mistakes	119
Savor Success	120

RESPECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Take a Look in the Mirror	124
Revisit the Change Process	125
Befriend Your Body	126
Be Truthful	129
Gain Self-Confidence	130
Win Positive Respect	132
Stop Sexual Harassment	133
Manage Tough Emotions	135
Employ the Social Graces	138
Defuse Depression	139
Be Alert to Suicide Talk	142
Be Clear about Alcohol and Other Chemicals	143
For Help Call	147

WRITE

Write for the Joy of It	150
Plan Your Paper	151
Brainstorm Ideas	152
Organize	154
Pick a Topic	156
Draft	157
Use Proofreader's Marks	157
Revise and Edit	158
Revisit the Writing Process	164
Use the Writing Process	
During Tests	165
Engage Both Sides of Your	
Brain	166
Write Legibly	167
Finish a Term Paper in	
Ten Steps	168
Avoid Plagiarism	171
Cook Up Some Instant	
Poetry	172
Write for Personal Reasons	173

MATH MATTERS

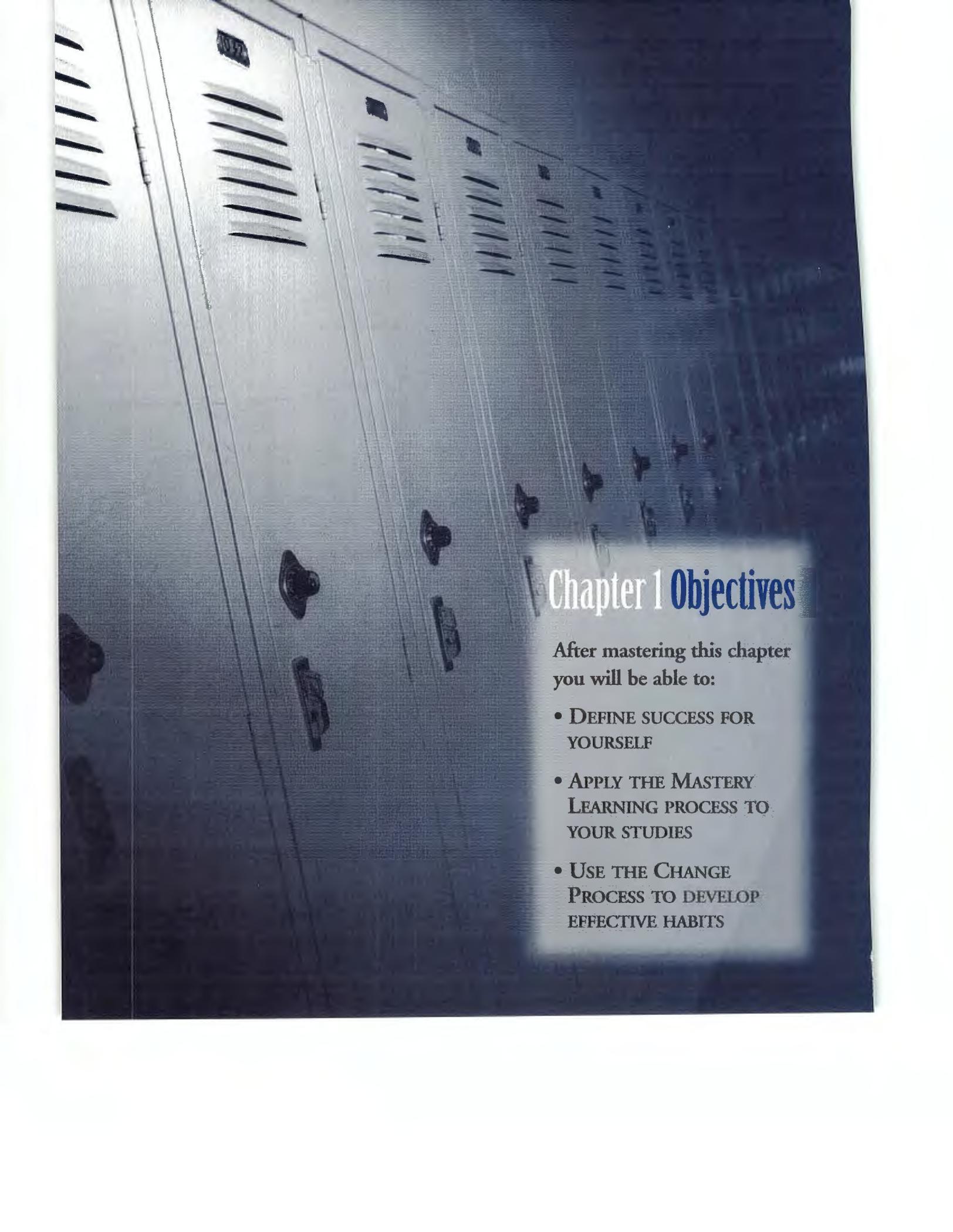
Solve Problems Like	
a Mathematician	176
Do the Logical Calculation	177
Simplify the Problem	178
Try Alternative Methods	180
Expand Your Understanding	182
Compute Your Grades	184

THINK FOR YOURSELF

Think About This	188
Start with the Basics	189
Use Questions	190
Dig Out Assumptions	193
Don't Fall for Fallacies	
in Logic	194
Create!	196
Play with Ideas	198
Contemplate Art	199
Fuel Your Thinking with	
the Three "P's"	200
Make Skillful Decisions	201

LOOK AHEAD

Create Your Future	206
Consider Life After	
Graduation	209
Cross the Finish Line:	211
Contribute	212
Make the End a Beginning	213



Chapter 1 Objectives

After mastering this chapter
you will be able to:

- DEFINE SUCCESS FOR YOURSELF
- APPLY THE MASTERY LEARNING PROCESS TO YOUR STUDIES
- USE THE CHANGE PROCESS TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE HABITS

CHAPTER 1 GETTING STARTED

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Check Your Mindset10
Discover Mastery Learning12
Set the Stage14
Take Four Steps to Mastery15
Practice, Practice, Practice16
Overcome Stage Fright17
Know Yourself18
Adopt a Process for Change19
Take Note of Your Success21

Meet Learning Power...

L *EARNING POWER* and *The Learning Power Workbook* are about thinking, writing, and changing the way you do things. You can use these tools to be more effective at studying, taking tests, doing math, writing, improving your memory, managing your time, speaking in public, getting along with other people, and much more.

Adopt a few of the methods in this book, and you will see immediate results. Get more done in less time and with less effort. Approach tests with more confidence. Set goals to help you reach your dreams through actions you can take today. These are just a few of the benefits waiting for you when you think, write, and practice.

Use this book to make the time you spend on schoolwork pay off. Once you experience success with some of these methods, you'll probably decide to experiment with more. You might even discover that you like school better. At each step of the way, it will be up to you to choose how much of this book to use. The more you use *Learning Power*, the more you will gain.

and The Learning Power Workbook

THE *LEARNING POWER Workbook* invites you to become a co-author of this textbook. That's because *Learning Power* isn't finished. What you see already written is important. But equally important is what you write. That's the value of the workbook.

This course is about taking action. Do whatever it takes to make *The Learning Power Workbook* a record of your thinking and your progress. Underline. Highlight. Mark. Deface. Scribble in the margins. Disagree. Doodle. Fill it up.

Workbook symbols, like the ones that follow, appear throughout *Learning Power*. When these symbols appear, it is your cue to do the indicated activity in the workbook.



JOURNAL

When making Journal Entries, take a few moments to examine what you think or feel about the topic and write down your thoughts. Your writing will not be graded, so don't worry about grammar or spelling for these exercises. There are no right or wrong answers in Journal Entries.



PRACTICE

This is perhaps the most valuable activity of all. Practice leads to excellence. The practice exercises give you hands-on experience with the techniques suggested in *Learning Power*. The cycle of practicing something and then discovering how you did can help you improve in any area you desire.

Throughout *Learning Power* you'll find references to workbook Practices.

Doing the Practices can make the difference between a suggestion or idea that stays with you and one that dies right on the page. Use Practices to stay active, awake, and involved.



KEY WORDS

These **highlighted** words and concepts will expand your vocabulary by focusing on particular words and phrases that have special meaning.



OUTLINE

A great way to learn any material is to re-create it in outline form. You will outline each chapter, and sometimes individual articles, and learn to use several outlining methods.



PROGRESS CHECK

Mastering each assignment before going on to the next is more important than studying a large number of chapters or techniques in a given amount of time. Don't worry about being faster or slower than anyone else. If you put in the time you need to master each assignment, your learning rate will increase and you will build your learning power.

When you complete each chapter, consider whether you have mastered all of the material and skills. When both you and your teacher are convinced that you have mastered the chapter, you are ready to go on to the next step.

Exercise

Please experiment with a new behavior that can become a habit. Look at every page in this book and the workbook.

Get a sense of what the whole thing is about before you zero in on any of the parts.

Reading experts agree that one of the most effective strategies for getting more out of a book is to look it over before you read it. Please take this action now.



Make This Book Your Coach

IN MANY WAYS *Learning Power* looks like an ordinary book. It has titles, subtitles, and paragraphs. It offers ideas and asks you to think. Yet this book is different from most books you'll ever read. *Learning Power* asks for your energy. Use it well, and you'll burn some calories. That happens as you take action, think, write, and practice what you have learned.

A book is a poor substitute for a good friend or a skilled teacher. You will learn things in a well-taught course that aren't in *Learning Power*. On the other hand, this book is available to you twenty-four hours a day, every day. It will never scold, argue, or criticize. It's always ready with words of encouragement. Make friends with this book, and it can become your faithful **coach** for success.



You will get the most out of *Learning Power* by using the following suggestions.

USE IT EVERY DAY

Even if you spend only five minutes, take some time each day to apply at least one idea or hint. Regular practice improves our skills at whatever we do—playing the guitar, playing basketball, dancing, you name it. The same thing is true for using these ideas. Five minutes may not sound like a lot of time, but it adds up to over thirty hours of practice in a year. That's enough time to learn some new habits that will help make you successful.

JUMP AROUND

With your teacher's assistance, choose the chapters that will help you the most. If you want advice about a particular technique, you can skip to that section and learn about it at any time.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

The ideas in this book have been tested by your peers—other people who need to take notes, read books, score well on tests, manage their time, and do all the other things that make one successful in school.

Test these strategies in your other classes. You don't have to believe any of the ideas; just use them. Experiment and see what works. For example, when the book suggests talking out loud to memorize, give it a shot.

INVOLVE OTHERS

You might think that studying is something you do alone while trapped behind a big door marked "*Do Not Disturb.*" Just the opposite is often most effective. You can enlist other students in your efforts to succeed in school. Form **study groups** that meet both in and out of class.

Explain a subject to one of your classmates, and you'll understand it in a new way. One of the best ways to learn something is to teach it. Working with others moves you into action. That makes a big difference in what you remember and what you use.

DEMAND A LOT

Scour this book for ideas about mastering your courses, overcoming procrastination, catching up in subjects in which you are behind, and working out problems with your parents and teachers.

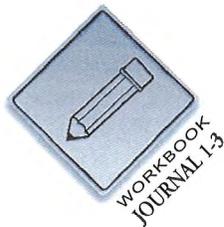
When you don't understand something, ask questions. Use the techniques so you discover what really works for you. The time you spend doing this can change this book from a couple hundred pages of paper into a blueprint for your academic success.



Define Success

SUCCESS IS A MATTER of interpretation. One person's definition includes money or fame. Another's might involve plenty of time for having fun. Someone else's idea of success is feeding the world's hungry or saving the rain forests. Chances are that your family, teachers, and friends, have their ideas about what you should do to be successful. This book is designed to help you reach your own goals, whatever they may be. Your own measure of success will carry the most weight.

Beware of defining your success by the success of others. Comparison can ruin your feelings of success and lead to dissatisfaction. There will always be someone who has more or performs better. Don't worry about how others choose to measure their success or how they measure yours. Go for what you want.



Improve Your Skills

SUCCESS IN SCHOOL usually means mastering three types of skills. First, there are the **basic skills**, often called the “three R’s”—reading, ’riting, and ’rithmetic. Second, there are **study skills**, things like taking notes, handling tests, and memorizing. The third area includes **self-management skills**—things like setting goals, managing time, staying motivated, and communicating with others.

These three categories of skills make a difference in school and in the rest of your life too.

Learning Power coaches you to increase your ability in all three areas. It also suggests ways to practice these skills so you can master them. When you master something, you don’t worry about memorizing the guidelines. Mastery becomes your habitual way to learn.



Basic Skills

Reading: speed, comprehension, and vocabulary

Math: calculations, fractions, decimals, percentages, word problems

Writing: grammar, vocabulary, spelling, penmanship, typing, word processing

Study Skills

Getting information and ideas from a textbook

Memorizing written passages

Memorizing facts

Taking notes

Taking tests

Using the library

Writing essays and term papers

Problem solving

Learning math

Self-Management Skills

Gaining awareness: spotting what’s working and what’s not in your life

Setting goals: writing down your long-term and short-term goals

Managing your time

Mastering homework assignments

Noting your successes

Changing your own behavior or habits

Speaking in public

Learning with a tutor

Communicating with peers, teachers, and parents

Making and keeping agreements

Check Your Mindset

MIND•SET (mind'set')
n. 1. A fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations.
2. An inclination or habit.

The following six statements make up a mindset that will serve you well in achieving your goals.

1. I DESERVE TO BE SUCCESSFUL.
Every day is a new opportunity.
Success is not in short supply. For you to succeed, someone else doesn't have to fail.

2. I AM INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO MASTER MY COURSES.
Intelligence is really a combination of natural ability plus the effects of previous learning and practice.
People who have practiced a lot in a subject appear to be more intelligent.
Your intelligence is very likely more than adequate.

3. I AM AN INDIVIDUAL WITH MY OWN LEARNING RATES.
The rate at which you learn one subject may differ from the rate at which you learn another. Your rate might be faster or slower than that of others who are learning the same subject. This is not a sign that you or they lack intelligence. It means only that you have your own learning rate in each area.

4. I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MY OWN EDUCATION.

Other people, such as your parents, guardians, and teachers have responsibility too. You have the most at stake, and you control the most important factors. If you are dissatisfied with your education, you can change what you are doing. You can also wish for others to change. You may even be able to persuade them to change. But you have far more control over what *you* do. What you do is the most important factor in your learning.

5. I CAN ACHIEVE SUCCESS BY:

- Planning
- Preparing
- Practicing to mastery
- Getting prompt feedback

In this book you will find out how to use these steps in different courses.

6. I CAN MAKE TOMORROW'S ASSIGNMENT EASIER.

Some students seem to get "A's" effortlessly. Look more closely, and you'll find people who invested time in mastering the **prerequisites** and early lessons in the subject. Learning is **cumulative**. Their time investment may be more or less than yours. That's not important. What matters is doing what helps you succeed today.



Discover Mastery Learning

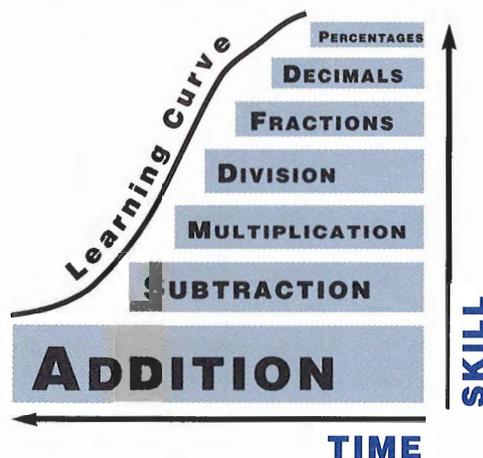
PERHAPS THE MOST powerful approach to learning is mastering one step before going on to the next.

Mastering a skill means that you are competent, that you can definitely perform or demonstrate that skill. Once you have mastered addition, you are ready, willing, and able to pass any reasonable test in adding. You could even show others how to add. That's the idea of mastery. It means you are capable and confident.

Mastery learning has a number of advantages. Learning gets faster and easier as you go along. With **mastery learning** you not only learn more easily and quickly, you also retain the material longer. Mastering the material gives you a sense of progress and success. You may start to enjoy learning subjects that previously were a drag.

For example, in arithmetic you learn addition, then subtraction, multiplication, and so on. Mastering addition reduces the time and effort needed to learn subtraction. If you try to learn subtraction before you've mastered addition, learning subtraction can take longer or even be impossible. That is why, once you fall behind in a course, it is so difficult to catch up.

The graph below indicates that mastering one step decreases the time needed for learning the next step. In other words, it may take some time to master the first few assignments. As your learning rate increases, your learning per hour begins to zoom upward.



Each of us has our own learning rate in each area of life. Our learning curves have the same general shape, but they are not identical. Learning curves vary for many reasons, including difference in age, experience, and attitudes. At any given time, your learning rate may be faster or slower than others'.

Mastering an assignment may at times take longer than expected. That may mean it takes you longer than someone else, or longer than the teacher's estimate, or longer than you would like. Still, the extra time spent now to master any assignment will save time on later assignments. Mastery learning almost always takes less time overall and leads to more learning and higher grades.

In most classes teachers don't stay on each topic until everyone has mastered it. Still, you can use mastery learning to be sure that you have mastered each assignment. That might mean putting in more than the usual amount of time for a while. If you'll make that extra effort, you can expect to see the benefits quickly.

INTELLIGENCE

You may wonder if you are smart enough to master all of your school-work. What if you practiced forever and still couldn't reach the goal? That makes it important to know, up front, whether you can master your assignments.

Consider this. Almost everyone learns to speak and understand their native language, yet they often balk at learning a second language. A "foreign" language is really just one we never learned as infants. We are probably as capable of learning a language as the infants who live where that language is spoken. To be incapable of learning a

particular language, we would have to be less intelligent than everyone who has ever learned it. That's not likely.

Several studies indicate that most students—over 90 percent—have enough intelligence to master all of the high school curriculum. This is more than just passing courses; it means really mastering the subjects. To put it plainly, it is almost certain that you are smart enough to succeed in school.

MOTIVATION

Some students think they have intelligence but lack a mysterious quality called **motivation**. They believe there is something about them that makes it difficult to like school and learning. They might be described as "unmotivated."

Motivation is simply a desire to attain something coupled with a belief that it is possible to attain it. Most people like doing things that they do well. They're motivated to do tasks, even difficult tasks, so long as they believe that succeeding is both possible and worthwhile.

As mastery learning begins to bring the results you want, your motivation jumps. You may never like studying better than you like talking to your friends on the phone. By applying this method, your motivation for studying can grow.

Set the Stage

IF LACK OF INTELLIGENCE and motivation aren't the problems, what can you do to have more success in school? Here are three suggestions:

LEARN TO STUDY EFFECTIVELY

1 Just because they spend years in school, students don't automatically know the best ways to study. Students learn or invent their own methods. Some of those methods work well; others do not. This book includes techniques used by successful students. Many of them can work for you too. You might even find a few that make a big difference in your experience of school.

PRACTICE SUCCEEDING

2 No matter what has happened in the past, you can succeed. Maybe you've gotten behind, or received low grades, or had teachers you didn't like. When these things happen, students may think something is wrong with them. They feel discouraged, and that gets in the way of learning. School seems more and more difficult. If any of this is true for you, this course may help you see that you can succeed. You can watch yourself master assignments and build confidence in your ability to succeed.

OVERCOME YOUR RESISTANCE

3 Most of us resent being told what to do. This is especially true when trying to establish independence—particularly with parents and teachers. Resistance gets confused with independence. In this course you can learn some ways to move through resistance without giving up your independence. You may even gain more freedom by being more successful in school.

Take Four Steps to Mastery

THE HABIT OF GOING for mastery is one of the most useful habits in learning. To get a handle on this method, **plan, prepare, practice, and get feedback.**

1. PLAN FOR MASTERY

Knowing where you want to go greatly increases the odds of getting there. If you don't know what the goal is, you might stop too soon or end up spending your time on the wrong track. Planning involves setting a goal and scheduling actions that will move you toward it.

2. PREPARE TO PRACTICE

Before you practice, it helps to know what is required of you, along with what and how to practice. You can get this by listening, reading, or watching a demonstration. Much of the listening and watching you do in class is preparation for practice you do later at home or during study hall. Reading a textbook or your notes is preparation. The practice comes next.

3. PRACTICE TO MASTERY

Most skills call for more than just reading or gathering information. Meeting our goals usually means taking some action as well. For the pianist it's practicing scales. For the tennis pro it's practicing a backhand stroke. For students it includes many types of practice activities, such as solving problems, doing experiments, writing essays, or speaking another language.

4. GET PROMPT FEEDBACK

Feedback lets you know how well your practice is going. In some situations you can see this for yourself. At other times, crucial feedback comes from teachers, tutors, quizzes, or study partners.



YOU CAN BECOME skillful at almost anything by practicing, from tuning a car engine to tuning a guitar. It's also true of the things you do in school. Becoming skillful at solving math problems or writing essays is a matter of practice. So are learning spelling, vocabulary, grammar, history, and science.



Practice, Practice, Practice

You probably spend most of your time in class listening to others. That includes listening to your teachers and to other students. Even if you participate actively and pay attention, you don't get much time to practice during the school day. Thirty minutes of homework for a course will generally provide much more practice time than a fifty minute class period. This is why homework is so important.

Many of the techniques in this book are intended to help you to do your homework—that is, to practice.

These techniques include powerful ways to practice for different subjects, overcome procrastination, concentrate and be efficient, know when you have practiced enough to master and retain material, and much more. Using the strategies in this book can give you “learning power.”

Overcome Stage Fright

MOST PEOPLE are afraid to speak in public. Getting comfortable speaking to an audience is an amazing experience. When you succeed at this (yes, you can), the benefits will extend to many other parts of your life. That's why your teacher may include getting beyond the fear of public speaking as part of this course.

The overcoming stage fright process of a *Learning Power* student success course has three purposes:

1. To build your self-confidence. Succeeding at something that previously scared us changes the way we think about ourselves. Embarrassment and discomfort need not stop us from practicing a skill to mastery.
2. To demonstrate that mastery learning works on challenging tasks by mastering one small step after another.

3. To assist you to overcome fear of public speaking, to enable you to say what you think, calmly. Examples are speaking in class, to a teacher, to adults, to large groups, or to parents.

Mastery learning makes overcoming stage fright possible by breaking up the public speaking process into many small parts. These are practiced one step at a time, and your comfort and confidence are achieved at each level before moving on.

You can use this same process to overcome fear of almost any activity—climbing to high places, taking tests, handling animals, performing music, or driving a car.

THERE'S AN IDEA that's been held through the ages by spiritual leaders, counselors, business leaders—and successful students. The idea is simple: Success begins with **knowing yourself**



Know Yourself

When looking at ourselves, we have a choice of methods. One is to focus on what should be: “I should be better at reading. I should have studied more last semester. I should be better at taking tests. I should have different friends. I should weigh less.” The list is endless. Soon it seems as if we can never measure up.

Another option is to forget “what I should be” and discover “who I am today.” This means telling the truth about what's happening right now—without shame or blame. Telling the truth frees up energy and sets the stage for changes to occur.

The Personal Profile in *The Learning Power Workbook* is a way to size up how you are doing in five areas: goals and plans, study skills, homework, motivation and attitude, and health and well-being. It is not a test. It is a way to ask yourself important questions and to tell the truth about the kind of student you are today. Use the Personal Profile to help you notice the things you do well, along with the things you want to improve.

When completing the Personal Profile exercise, keep two suggestions in mind. First, think of this exercise as a starting point—the first rung on the ladder of success. Second, don't be too serious. It's OK to laugh at yourself; a sense of humor may help you be more truthful. Don't worry about looking good. When you reach the end of the book, you can repeat this exercise and see how you've changed.



Adopt a **PROCESS** for Change

MOST OF US can list areas in our lives where things aren't working as well as we would like. Often there are many things we would like to change. Some people say, "I can't change. That's just the way I am." Others may say, "I'm not the problem. There's someone else who is messing me up. I want that person to change."

Here are alternative ways of looking at those two situations. Instead of saying, "It's my nature," we might say, "It's just a **habit**, so I can change it." Changing a long-term habit may not be easy, but at least it sounds possible.

Getting someone else to change can be tough. You may have tried polite requests, persuasion, or even threats, and had little success. To get someone else to change, try changing yourself. It may seem unfair that you, not the other person, have to change. It may seem like giving in or selling out. If what you have done in the past hasn't worked, change what you can control—namely, yourself.

When you try to change a habit, it may be embarrassing or feel peculiar for a while. Here's a method you might add to your tool kit for success — the **Change Process**

Like any method, the Change Process doesn't fit every situation. Many people have found it helpful, and you may too. Even if you don't follow the specific steps listed below, you can act on their general ideas.

STEP 1: AWARENESS

Begin by simply noticing what is going on—usually a behavior you don't like. Then tell the truth about that behavior without judging it or putting yourself down. If this seems hard—well, telling the truth takes real courage. When you make it this far, congratulate yourself.

STEP 2: RESPONSIBILITY

Now take responsibility for the current situation. Asking yourself a couple of questions may help: "How could I be helping to create this event? What am I doing before, during, and after this happens?" Sometimes the problem is not what we do but what we fail to do.

It can be hard to stay objective during this process. Imagine how someone else would describe your role in the problem. The only purpose here is to discover what isn't working. Once you have a clear picture of that, go to Step 3.

STEP 3: FORGIVENESS

Forgive yourself for the way things have been up to now. Be as gentle with yourself as you would be with a loved one who did the same thing. Even when you make mistakes, you are OK. The Perfect Human Being Society is a club with no members.

STEP 4: CHANGE

Start doing something differently. It doesn't have to be something big. Often the simplest, smallest changes have the biggest results. Brainstorm some options. To get ideas, talk to a person who has succeeded in a situation like yours.

STEP 5: PRACTICE

Practice the new behavior until you master it. Sometimes this is tough because the new way of acting feels uncomfortable. What's more, it may not be effective for a while. Don't be surprised if you slip into your old behavior. When you notice this, forgive yourself and then continue practicing the new behavior.

STEP 6: FEEDBACK

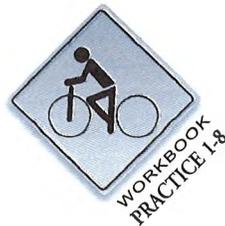
Determine if what you are doing is working and getting you closer to your goal. If not, go to Step 2 and cycle through the process again. Be gentle with yourself, and be honest. Most of the time you've got nothing to lose but an old habit.

HABITS TO START

- Remembering to tell Mom
where I am
- Saving money
- Creating a stronger body
- Remembering to make my bed
and hang up my clothes

HABITS TO STOP

- Biting my nails
- Saying "um" and "you know"
- Twisting the phone cord
- Leaving cans and dishes
on the coffee table





Take Note of Your Success

A SUCCESS LOG is a written record of what you have accomplished—a kind of personal report card. It is important that you write down only your successes, not your failures. As you work toward your goals, you get feedback from others. That's external feedback. In addition, you evaluate yourself—internal feedback.

You will benefit from giving yourself credit for your successes. If you write them down, you make them that much more powerful. A Success Log can be just a piece of paper or a special book or diary. Notice how you are doing. When you have succeeded, give yourself positive, accurate feedback.

Many people write and speak about the importance of self-esteem. Self-esteem can be hard to define. One way to think about this issue is to borrow an idea from psychologist Nathaniel Branden. He defines self-esteem as “the reputation we acquire about ourselves.” In other words, self-esteem refers to how we think of ourselves. Given this definition, our self-esteem could be high or low. Feedback we get—both external and internal—plays a big role here.

A Success Log can change the way you think about yourself. It also keeps your goals in view and boosts your energy level. Success Logs don't call for lying about yourself or overstating your accomplishments. It's simply a matter of taking credit for your progress.

