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## Attention Advisors and Mentors: A Suggested Study Technique for Deaf College Students

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## **ATTENTION ADVISORS AND MENTORS: A SUGGESTED STUDY TECHNIQUE FOR DEAF COLLEGE STUDENTS**

**B. Robert Gonzales<sup>1</sup>**

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Deaf college students can develop a programmed study method that has been used successfully with college students for over twenty-five years. This study method will improve students grades if they will dedicate themselves to this technique rather than waiting until the last minute to cram. Deaf students can continually review the knowledge base of lecture and textbook information by studying independently and especially by using an instructor or peer mentor. Students need to establish appropriate time management for studying and writing term papers. Deaf students must develop assertiveness in the college classroom when the lecture presentations are not clear. Successful deaf college students realize that it is not the personality of the professor that is relevant when information is presented but rather maintaining a positive attitude that will determine how much they learn.

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As a professor in higher education for more than twenty-five years, I have observed and worked with many beginning college students who enter school with very poor study habits. These students were either not taught appropriate study skills in their high schools or they managed to skip the class. Many of these students have the cognitive abilities for succeeding in higher education but are not organized and have not learned the nuances of the system. Deaf students in the regular mainstreamed high schools across the United States can easily fall victim to social promotion or isolation as well as poor instruction and/or interpreters. Many of the deaf students beginning college have not had the luxury of college preparatory classes offered in state residential high schools nor a full year of preparatory classes as offered at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York, or at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.

Especially for college students, there probably is not a more boring subject in the world to discuss than studying or learning how to study. Students would naturally rather talk about the opposite sex, when and where the next party will be, or about the last game between the Yankees and the Red Sox. Consequently, for college professionals, teaching

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healthy study habits and keeping classroom courses interesting or rewarding is definitely a challenge.

Through the years college professionals will have the opportunity to mentor deaf students who are flunking out of college at all grade levels and are desperately needing help. Beginning freshman who are overwhelmed with the fast pace of college classes also quite often need some kind of academic structure and assistance. By the time an advisor contacts these students their self image is often very low and their advisors or mentors are probably their last chance for some positive direction leading to a successful college career.

Even if deaf students are receiving tutor, interpreter, and notetaker assistance from the services for the disabled center, professors and/or advisors should want to develop a one-to-one mentoring relationship with students. A strong professor-advisee relationship would attempt to assure that everything possible has been done to keep students in school. Successful hearing-impaired students, especially deaf students in a college setting, are a positive influence for all professionals working with this population, and particularly for all deaf children attending schools at all grade levels. Ideally, every professor in all colleges and universities in the United States should mentor deaf students. On the other hand, the mentor could also be an advisor, a counselor, a parent or just a friend. What is important to all students and a major reason for their success is that somebody really cares about their accomplishments in higher education.

Developing rapport with deaf college students is generally not that difficult, especially if the mentor can use some form of sign language in order to communicate. Such a skill demonstrates that he/she is seriously concerned about them. The first thing the mentor should establish with deaf students is for the student to realize how smart they are and how great an accomplishment it is for them to have reached the college level. In other words, the mentor must not let deaf students underestimate themselves regarding their intelligence and their ability to make appropriate grades.

The mentor and the deaf student should establish a contingency contract indicating that if the student will agree to put out a one-hundred percent effort to study using several suggested study techniques, the mentor will work with the student for a full semester and even longer if necessary. Students must understand that they will get good grades only if they work for them.

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As part of the counseling and rapport process, the mentor may reveal some of his/her own problems encountered as a beginning student or perhaps some favorite case studies of other deaf students who made it through school after a poor start. Deaf students need to know that hearing students, especially minority students who are also bilingual (and bicultural) have problems succeeding in college. Similar to many minorities, deaf students need to develop coping skills such as learning to ignore people criticizing their speech and low English vocabulary skills. In many cases, deaf students accept the challenge that they often must work twice as hard as hearing students in order to complete classroom assignments.

After rapport is established, the mentor must assist deaf students in developing a healthy general attitude about why they are attending college in the first place. All college students, both hearing and deaf, should accept the reality that college is a very serious period in their lives and can, in fact, be considered a full-time job. Deaf students can easily commit forty-eight hours a week to classroom attendance and studying time. These students that put in a lot of overtime are the very students who will get ahead and probably make "A's" and "B's." The less committed deaf student will barely get by with "C's" and "D's."

Another area of concern the mentor must convey to deaf students is the relationship between the classroom professor's popularity and the quality of information he/she is presenting on any given subject. Too often deaf students become more interested in the professor's ability to entertain, assuming they do this to keep the students' attention, than they are in the information they should be acquiring. The mentor must make it very clear to deaf students that all instructors can not be as funny as Lucille Ball or as handsome as Tom Cruise. Deaf students should make every attempt to respect the professor's intelligence and the information he/she is presenting to the class. Deaf students also should make an assertive effort to meet the professor and ask for extra information and assistance if necessary. Most professors, if approached appropriately, will share information and/or help students to succeed in their class.

Assertiveness also must be demonstrated by deaf students in relation to support services for the disabled provided by the college. Deaf students must demand the best interpreters, notetakers, and tutors. In addition, they should be encouraged to evaluate these services as soon as possible and change them if they are not acceptable. Deaf students cannot afford to fall behind, especially because of inadequate assistance. Students should

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also demonstrate assertive classroom behaviors by not missing classes or tutoring sessions, doing homework assignments, arriving at class as early as possible in order to obtain appropriate seating, not walking out of class early, and by getting involved in classroom discussions. These behaviors will help deaf students establish rapport with the instructor and respect from other students, but more importantly, they will help them learn and make better grades.

Once the mentor and students have established rapport, discussed attitude changes and worked out a mutual time commitment agreement, they must continue the process by developing some programmed study techniques that can be used by students. The mentor can present these techniques in the following order: programming study cards, using study groups, other suggested mentor-student activities, using appropriate time management, working on term papers, strategies on test taking, and lastly, learning the system.

### **Programming Study Cards**

The most important and disciplined study technique to be used by deaf students is the development of study cards made from the instructor's lecture notes and outside reading assignments. Students must develop a list of questions related to all the information from their lecture notes. Students then place the question on one side of the card and the answer on the other (see Figure 1). The mentor should recommend the use of five by eight inch cards in order to have more space for long answers. For a one day or fifty-minute lecture students might end up with ten cards or only two cards, depending on the type of lecture. After students have programmed all of first day's lecture they should then study the cards until all of the information is mastered. Deaf students will obviously remember some of the information presented in class so the information should not be that extensive or time consuming. On the second day of class, students will follow the same routine except that after they are finished programming and studying the second day's lecture they will review the cards from the first day. On the third day, students will write out and study today's lecture and review the past two days, etc. It takes a great deal of discipline for deaf students to use this study technique faithfully everyday after every lecture and for every course during the semester. By mid-term, or approximately the twenty-first lecture, students will have a stack of cards, with the size depending on the type of class.

Although students may feel that using study cards is a little "corny," they will soon discover several advantages to this technique. First of all, students will realize that very

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little studying will be required for mid-term or general quizzes since they have been studying all along. They can study independently, flipping cards on the bus, walking down the street or actually anyplace because they are easy to carry. They can routinely make an "I know" and "I don't know" stack so they can concentrate only on the information not known or not completely understood. For more in-depth questions and longer answers, students may want to practice signing to themselves or writing the answers on paper before turning the card over and checking for corrections. They can also use the now-organized questions and answers to quiz a study partner or an entire study group. Students can place extra information acquired from supplementary reading assignments on the appropriate cards from the lecture or make additional cards. Students also will realize that by studying every day they are keeping up with the professor's presentations and not falling behind. As a result, learning becomes more enjoyable and less frustrating.

Students soon realize that with a little creativity study cards can be used with any class (see figures 1 through 7). In English class deaf students can place a poem or part of a poem on one side with the author's name on the other side. Students can then drill themselves on either recognizing the author from reading the poem or by reciting the poem after recognizing the author. In algebra class, deaf students can place sample problems on one side of the card and the solved problem on the other. Student will soon realize that question-answer cards are a natural for any course, and that they can even be used extensively for upper level statistics courses.

### Using Study Groups

One of the first things students should establish in every class is a dependable study group consisting of deaf peers and hearing students who are skilled in sign language. As time goes on, deaf students will develop many friends, making study group activities easier to establish. Deaf students will find that typical study groups often get off track or begin "chewing the fat" and wasting time. Students can keep everyone on track with the set of study cards. As an example, each study group participant can draw a card and become the group leader by reading off the question and the correct answer after it has been discussed sufficiently. Another very helpful activity students can establish with the study group is the outlining or summarizing of the chapters in the assigned textbook. Each student, or team of two or three students depending on the size of the group, can outline and/or make study cards on important areas in one or two assigned chapters. Another assignment the

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study group can undertake is the development of a vocabulary list with definitions (study cards), because every discipline has its own terminology, vocabulary or jargon.

### **Other Suggested Mentor-Student Activities**

Deaf students will probably feel more confident and secure when regular mentoring sessions are established. The most beneficial activity the mentor can establish is to have students regularly demonstrate their knowledge of course content by quizzing the students by randomly selecting a card from any of the stacks. The mentor and students should discuss term paper assignments, general scheduling, or any problems relevant to studying. The mentor should continually reinforce one of the most important principles presented in basic psychology of learning that students will retain more information if they will study a little every day, rather than a lot right before the examination. Deaf students might feel that they are good at memorizing, but must fully understand that they will generally forget all the information as soon as they walk out of the classroom. The mentor should also periodically contact the student's classroom professors in order to check on his/her performance and to answer any questions about deafness or deaf culture. Lastly, the mentor should assure deaf students that they should feel free to contact their mentor anytime necessary, especially during a crisis.

### **Using Appropriate Time Management**

Deaf students must be able to demonstrate appropriate time management for daily, weekly, monthly, and semester study activities. Deaf students should be able to prioritize hours during the day for studying, class attendance, or leisure time. Eventually mentees will be able to outline weekly and monthly activities without any problems. Students would probably benefit by outlining the entire semester's activities on a calendar, which could be placed over their desk. In addition, discussion centered around the fact that "all work and no play" is not healthy, would make it wise to program one day off a week to play or visit family.

### **Working on Term Papers**

Young deaf students will soon discover that term papers are the "killer sharks" in the sea of college academia and the victims are the procrastinators who wait until the night before the paper is due to begin the assignment. The mentor should demonstrate to

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students, while using the semester calendar, how to space their term paper assignments with other assigned activities, making certain that overlap does not occur.

The mentor should encourage students to have a friend (peer mentor) read and edit the term paper once the paper is completed. They should also read and edit friend's papers whenever possible in order to return the favor. Deaf students must be aware that even professional writers, including their professors, generally have someone else read their papers for content and context. Students should never turn in a rough non-edited paper to the professor unless this is part of the assignment. If the mentor is able to keep a long term relationship with students it would be helpful to read their papers periodically in order to help improve the student's writing ability, as well as monitor their level of expository writing in preparation for essay examinations or written comprehensives at the Master's level.

### Planning for the English Exit Examination

Another thorn in the deaf student's side is having to pass a sophomore English proficiency examination and/or some kind of senior English exit examination. Many deaf students must also take some required tests such as the California Achievement Test or the National Teacher's Examination. The mentor should encourage deaf students to take this examination as soon as possible after they enter school, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level, in order to begin remediation in the weak areas, if necessary, immediately.

### Strategies on Test Taking

When deaf students become extremely nervous at the beginning of any kind of written examination, an effective calming down technique is to go up and down the list of questions to find a question they really know and begin with that question. If students are still nervous, they can repeat the procedure until they calm down sufficiently to gain composure and return to the first question.

When students have difficulty with an objective test question such as true or false or multiple choice and are not certain which answer to pick, it is usually best to stay with their first choice and not keep changing their answer. On essay questions students should assume that the reader knows nothing about the subject and write answers that are as complete as possible. Otherwise, the professor will remove points for being too vague since they cannot read the student's mind.

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Deaf students can set up practice tests by using randomly selected study cards and a timer, forcing themselves to practice writing answers quickly while under stress. They will soon discover that it takes discipline and self control to remain calm and not have anxiety attacks. Probably the best reliever of text anxiety is "over-learning" the material.

Students also can set up practice oral/manual examinations with their student group by again using the study cards. When students are participating in an official oral examination with an interpreter and do not know an answer, it would probably be best to simply admit to having a mental block or just state that they do not know the answer than to attempt to impress the examiners with a wrong answer.

### **Learning the System**

Many deaf and hearing students attend college not realizing how many support services are available. Deaf students may receive assistance from the services for the disabled and not be aware that most colleges have other tutoring centers and testing centers for career evaluation and counseling. Many students could very likely use some assistance in choosing a major, receive information on career direction or in personal counseling. Some mentees will avoid any services for the disabled, because they have often not needed any assistance since childhood. The mentor should inform deaf students that everyone's taxes are paying for these services and if they change their mind the services are available.

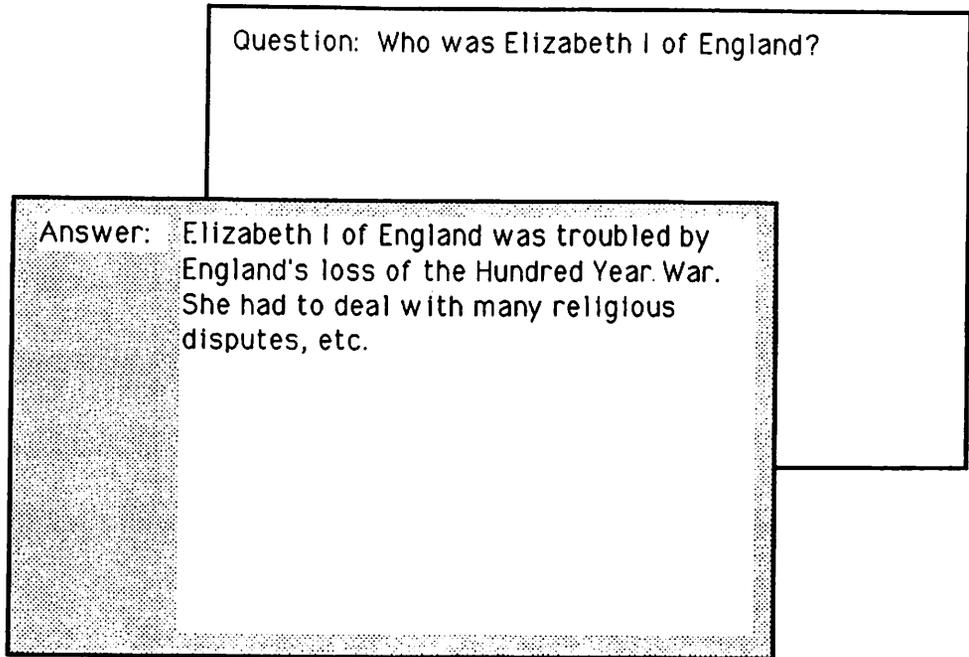
### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, for many deaf students to succeed in the college environment, especially in the classroom, dedicated and professional mentors and/or advisors must help deaf students develop an appropriate positive attitude about higher education and a structured and organized study system. Deaf students must also develop acceptable assertive behaviors which will assist them to become more disciplined and dedicated to the learning process required in higher education.

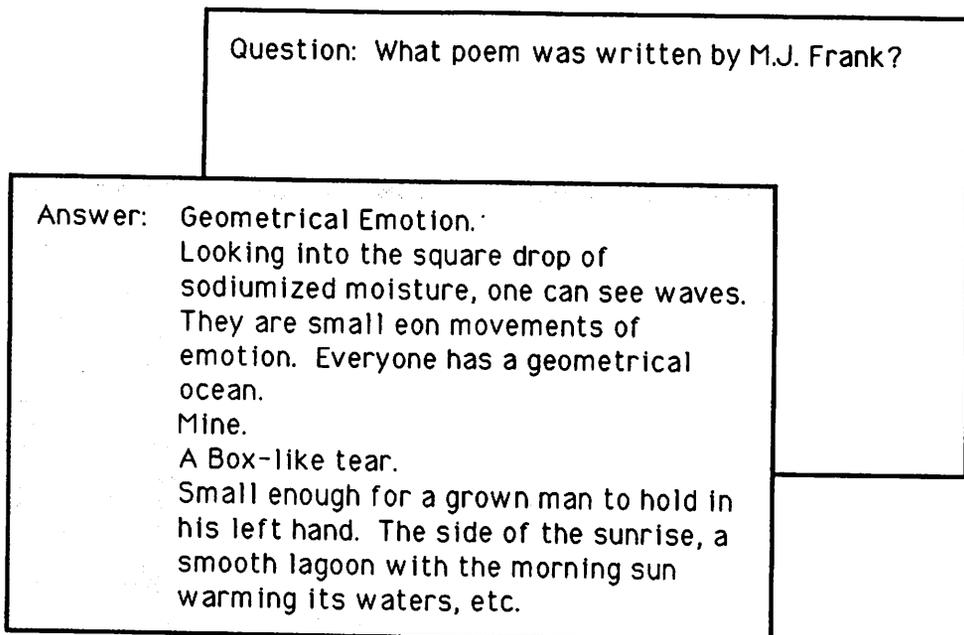
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**Figure 1: History**



**Figure 2: English**



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**Figure 3: Algebra**

Question: Solve problem  $2x = -8$

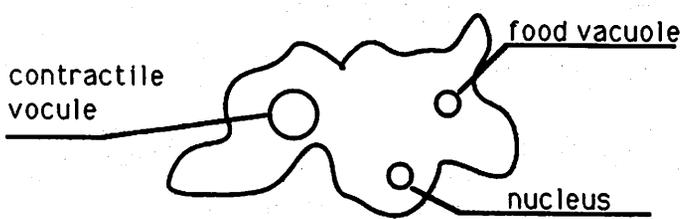
Answer:

$$\begin{aligned} -2x &= -8 \\ \frac{-2x}{-2} &= \frac{-8}{-2} \\ -2x \div -2 &= +4 \end{aligned}$$

**Figure 4: Biology**

Question: Diagram and describe an amoeba

Answer: An amoeba is a rhizopod protozoan with pseudopodia and without organelles, etc.....



The diagram shows an amoeba with an irregular, wavy outline. Three internal organelles are labeled with lines pointing to them: a 'contractile vacuule' on the left, a 'food vacuole' on the right, and a 'nucleus' at the bottom center.

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**Figure 5: Statistics**

Question: What is the standard deviation?

Answer:

It is measure or spread from the center where you square to get rid of the minus signs, add results and divide by the number. You then find the square root of the mean of the deviation squared.

or  $Sd$  or  $\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum X^2}{n}}$

**Figure 6: Question -- Short Answers**

Question:

1. The standard error of estimate is called.
2. Low correlation would produce what size of band?
3. High correlation would produce what size of band?
4. What is another verbalization of  $r$ ?
5. What is the range of validity coefficient?
6. What is the range of reliability coefficient?

Etc.

Answer:

1. Band of confidence or confidence range
2. Large or thick band.
3. Thin band.
4. It equals the amount of variance of  $y$  explained  
 $r = \frac{1 - \text{total error}}{\text{total } \sigma^2}$
5. .00 to .80 (Minimum validity at .45)
6. .70 to .98, etc.

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**Figure 7: Vocabulary -- Definitions**

