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Teaching Academic Skills to Chinese Undergraduate Students in U.S. Academic Institutions

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University of San Francisco

Teaching Academic Skills to Chinese Undergraduate Students in U.S. Academic Institutions

A Field Project Proposal Presented to the School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by

Ruisi Gui

May 2016

Teaching Academic Skills to Chinese Undergraduate Students in U.S. Academic Institutions

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

by

Ruisi Gui
May 2016

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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Table of Contents

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT..... | iv |
| CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 1 |
| Purpose of the Project..... | 3 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 4 |
| Significance of the Project..... | 8 |
| Limitations of the Project..... | 9 |
| Definition of Terms | 9 |
| CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 11 |
| Introduction | 11 |
| Differences in Teaching and Learning | 12 |
| Ideologies of Education | 12 |
| Learning Paradigms | 14 |
| Teacher - Student Relationship/Classroom Experience | 15 |
| Impact of English proficiency on Academic Performance..... | 17 |
| Impact of Academic Skills on Academic Performance | 19 |
| Listening Skills (note-taking skills) | 20 |
| Speaking Skills (group discussion skills) | 21 |
| Reading Skills (test-preparation skills) | 23 |
| Others (time-management skills) | 24 |
| Summary | 25 |
| CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT | 28 |
| Description of the Project..... | 28 |
| Development of the Project..... | 28 |
| The Project..... | 30 |
| LESSON 1: Welcome to the American Classroom..... | 32 |
| LESSON 2: Note-taking Skills - Section A | 41 |
| LESSON 3: Note-taking Skills - Section B | 51 |
| LESSON 4: Group Discussion Skills..... | 59 |
| LESSON 5: Test Preparation Skills..... | 67 |
| LESSON 6: Time Management Skills | 79 |
| Chapter IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 88 |
| Conclusions..... | 88 |
| Recommendations..... | 89 |
| REFERENCES | 91 |
| APPENDIX | 95 |
| Warm up Questions: | 95 |
| The Benefits of a Bilingual Brain | 96 |
| 5 Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking..... | 99 |
| Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator..... | 101 |

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this field project is to help Chinese undergraduate students succeed in the American classroom through guidance on academic skills. To achieve this goal, a series of situationally-based curriculum modules about different academic skills are developed as the central part of this project. This curriculum is designed not only for Chinese undergraduate students, but also for instructors in U.S. academic institutions to increase their awareness of the academic skills issues among international students.

This project is presented in the form of a teaching manual and a brief syllabus. The teaching manual provides Chinese undergraduate students with practical rules, diagrams, charts, examples, and exercises to practice how to manage their time, how to take notes effectively, how to prepare and take exams, and how to engage in a group discussion. It is a supplement for students to use when they have difficulty in their daily studies. The exercises in the teaching manual will require students to apply these academic skills to their course materials. During the instruction, the teacher should follow the syllabus and adjust it according to the level of students.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

As an international graduate student, I have experienced the stressful transition period during the first semester of graduate school at the University of San Francisco both academically and emotionally. Living and studying abroad alone is an enormous challenge for many international students. Not only do we need to take care of our daily lives by ourselves, but it is also important to improve our English proficiency in a short period to be able to adapt well to an American classroom.

Acculturation, or adaptation to a new culture and community, is already tough, and can be hindered significantly when an immigrant's nation of origin contrasts dramatically with the nation of settlement, as does the United States and China (Berry, 1997). According to my experience and observation of Chinese undergraduate students in the U.S., the classroom experience in the U.S. is completely different from the classroom experience in China. For example, the teaching style in America tends to be discussion-based and student-centered. Activities like group discussion, group assignment, and group projects are quite normal in an American classroom. On the contrary, the teaching style in China is more like "spoon-feeding" (Valdez, 2015, p.193). The typical classroom in China is lecture-based and teacher-centered. The teacher tells students exactly what to do, such as when to take notes. As a result of the differences in the structure of educational systems, teaching strategies, and expectations of students in China and the U.S., Chinese undergraduate students in U.S. academic institutions need greater instruction to guide them on how to be successful in an American classroom.

However, the fact is that this kind of instruction is not largely available in current U.S. educational institutions. Instead, in many U.S. academic institutions, different levels of English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are mandatory for international students especially first-year ESL undergraduate students before they can register for their major courses. This is a widely used policy among most U.S. academic institutions, headmasters or board members of colleges because it is assumed that with sufficient English language proficiency, international students are supposed to have better academic performance in their major courses.

As a matter of fact, English language proficiency is not the only component of success in any major course in college. There are other factors people neglect in the process of learning, namely helping students to develop academic skills. According to my observation during my learning experience and my undergraduate friends, most of them still struggle with assignments or presentations for their major courses even though they have passed their ESL courses. Because of the feeling of empathy, I applied for the Academic English Support tutor position at USF Learning and Writing Center to help Chinese undergraduate students in USF to succeed in the American classroom. During the tutoring sessions, students' problems are usually not related to their reading, listening, speaking, or writing skills in English. Instead, their problems are related to test-taking, time management, note-taking, exam preparation skills that can be concluded as academic skills. For domestic students, using these academic skills are habits because they have had opportunities to learn and practice these skills. Conversely, for Chinese students in U.S. colleges, these academic skills are significant challenges because they

are acculturated to learning in an entirely different way according to the Chinese Educational System.

Since 2004, China has become one of the top countries of origin for international students studying in English-speaking countries such as the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada (Choudaha et al., 2013). The United States attracted 304,040 Chinese international students, an increase of 11% from the previous year according to the most recent Open Doors report (Institute of International Education [IIE] 2015). The increasing number of Chinese undergraduate students, especially majoring in business, computer science, and engineering, has drawn considerable attention from administrators of higher education.

With the growing number of Chinese undergraduate students in U.S. academic institutions and their different learning experiences from the American classroom experience, they lack a sufficient understanding of the academic requirements and lack academic skills including test-taking skills, time-management skills, note taking skills, exam preparation skills, and group discussion skills.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to help Chinese undergraduate students to succeed in the American classroom with guidance on academic skills. To achieve this goal, a series of situationally-based curriculum modules about different academic skills are developed as the central part of this project. Mori (2000) discussed the importance of international efforts to educate international students about the American educational system. She argued that if students understood the educational system better, they would

be better assisted in such areas as time management, test-taking, reading comprehension, and note-taking. Also, this curriculum is designed not only for Chinese undergraduate students but also for instructors in the U.S. academic institution to increase their awareness of the academic skills issue among international students.

This project is presented in the form of a teaching manual, a brief syllabus and, a series of module-based videos. This teaching manual provides Chinese undergraduate students with practical rules, diagrams, charts, examples, and exercises to practice how to manage their time, how to take notes effectively, how to prepare and take exams, and how to involve in a group discussion. This teaching manual is a supplement for students to use when they have difficulty in their daily studies. The exercises in the teaching manual require students to apply these academic skills to their course materials. Each module covers one academic skill. During the instruction, the teacher should follow the syllabus and adjust it according to the level of students.

Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in the Introduction, this field project seeks to help Chinese undergraduate students to be successful in the American classroom with guidance on academic skills. This part will mainly focus on theories related to how to provide proper teaching materials of academic skills as well as how to create a positive and low-anxiety classroom environment for Chinese undergraduate students. This project is based on three theories: The Input Hypothesis, The Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Task-Based Language Teaching.

The first theory that supports this project is the Input Hypothesis developed by Stephen Krashen (1982). He claimed that we acquire by “understanding language that contains structure a little beyond our current level of competence” (p. 21). This kind of input can be described as Comprehensible Input and presented as $i+1$; that is neither too far beyond one’s reach nor too close that it poses no challenge ($i+0$) (Brown, 2014, p. 289). The process of understanding is done with the assistance of context and our extra-linguistic information (Krashen, 1982, p.21).

Usually, we assume that we learn the structures first, then practice in communication, and produce language fluently at last. While the Input Hypothesis says that we acquire by “going for meaning” first, and as a result, we acquire structure (Krashen, 1982, p.21). This statement of Input Hypothesis answers what is perhaps the most important question in the Second Language Acquisition field: How do we acquire language?

The Input Hypothesis theory, especially the comprehensible input is reflected in this project by providing international students with materials to practice academic skills. Unlike the actual classroom with long reading materials or 2-hour long lectures, the teaching materials used in this project are easier than their degree courses and chart-based. The author planned to use organized, direct, and intelligible materials to develop international students’ academic skills. By the comprehensible input, academic skills will be developed for international students to succeed in American classrooms.

Another theory that supports this project is the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), who claimed that the Affective Filter is an impediment to

acquiring language caused by negative emotional responses to one's environment. According to the researches over the last decade, three main categories of affective variables are related to success in second language acquisition which are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982, p.21). Krashen believed that learners with high motivation, high self-confidence, and low-anxiety were conducive to second language acquisition. While low motivation, low self-confidence, and high anxiety can "combine to raise the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition" (Schütz, 2014). The Affective Filter hypothesis implies that our pedagogical goals should not only include providing comprehensible input, but also creating a classroom that encourages a low filter. This hypothesis also defines the language teachers in a new way that an effective language teacher should be able to provide comprehensible input in a low anxiety classroom.

This Affective Filter hypothesis is reflected in this project by creating a low-anxiety classroom with a close distance between teachers and students. Since the project is aimed to build up certain academic skills for international students, group work and practicing is inevitable in the classroom. Different varieties of warm-up activities, in-classroom activities, and other interactive games will be designed to lower the filter of the classroom and ensure the acquisition of comprehensible input.

The third theory that supports this project is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). This term was primarily coined by Long, Prabhu and other SLA researchers and language educators. They support one approach in which teachers give students functional tasks and invite them to focus on using the language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes (Branden, 2006, p.1). In this approach, tasks are educational

activities in which students engage to achieve certain goals, and which necessitates the use of the target language. Besides, there should be a close relation between the educational tasks in the language classroom and in the real world. To facilitate students' language learning and prepare them for the outside world, "what students do with the target language in the classroom should be derived from what the students are supposed to be able to do with the target language in the real world" (Branden, 2006, p.6).

In this project, the curriculum and syllabus were designed based on the TBLT approach. TBLT is used in the design and implementation of language curricula. However, its focus on student-centered tasks provided an appropriate framework for developing real-world academic tasks. In particular, TBLT provides an appropriate framework for the development of academic tasks for international Chinese students to use in and outside of the classroom. English, as the target language used throughout the project, plays a significant role in international students' daily life on campus. With the application of TBLT, Chinese undergraduate students prepared with academic skills for American classrooms and had well academic performance.

Three theories are applied in this field project: The Input Hypothesis, The Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Task-Based Language Teaching. The Input Hypothesis explains how teachers produce teaching materials with an appropriate level of difficulty. The Affective Filter Hypothesis claims that students with low filter have better outcomes in a second language classroom. The Task-Based Language Teaching approach is the basis for the author to design classroom activities throughout the curriculum. In another word, by creating a low-anxiety language classroom and by producing comprehensive language output, the goals that learners have in mode can be achieved.

Significance of the Project

Simply leaving the development of important study skills and general understanding of the U.S. education system to chance may disadvantage international students by limiting their engagement in, and exposure to, developmental course activities (Kovtun, 2011, p.362). After finishing the project, students will have an increased understanding of academic requirements and skills through the exposure to the module-based curriculum. They will recognize the importance of adjusting their learning habits and adapting to the American classroom. Students will understand the reason they struggle to be successful in American classroom even though they got high scores in the ESL courses. Since the root problem has been pointed out, international students can follow the syllabus and teacher's instruction with a clear goal. Based on the modules in this curriculum, Chinese undergraduate students in U.S. academic institutions can learn these academic skills in a systemic and logical way, instead of struggling by themselves in the class or in the library.

Additionally, this academic skills training and curriculum is essential to instructors and teachers in U.S. educational institutions. Generally speaking, language proficiency does affect the academic achievement of international students. Nevertheless, other factors can influence the academic success of international students, including academic skills, age, and years of study. Both instructors and teachers need to recognize that there is a gap between international students' success in ESL courses and major courses.

Limitations of the Project

There are several limitations affiliated with this project. This project is specifically designed for Chinese undergraduate students with the usage of Chinese for videos. Therefore, international students from other countries may not benefit from the curriculum even though they may face the similar difficulties during their transitional period. In addition, not only undergraduate students but graduate students may also encounter this issue when they study in the United States. As the author stated at the beginning of this chapter, she, as a graduate student, also experienced the transitional period during her first semester in the United States.

Another limitation is that the five academic skills in this project may not be exclusive. The author chose these five skills because these skills are representative enough to illustrate the research gap between English proficiency and academic success in international students' degree courses. Besides test-taking skills, time-management skills, note taking skills, exam preparation skills, and group discussion skills, there are other skills can be counted as academic skills such as reading comprehension skills.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to assist readers with precise understanding of meaning in this field project.

Comprehensive Input: This kind of input can be presented as $i+1$, that is neither too far beyond one's reach nor too close that poses no challenge ($i+0$) (Brown, 2014, p. 289).

ESL: It refers to English as a second language. It also indicates the situation where English learners learn English in English-speaking countries.

First Year Transition: Transition in this project, indicates a process of change in how Chinese students feel, and behave in their lives and studies as they adapt from their home social and cultural environment to a new American one during their freshman year.

Grammar-Translation Method: This method of teaching uses grammar as the foundation for language teaching. Some common practices of this method are detailed explanations of grammar, memorizing bilingual vocabulary lists, reading and writing long classical materials (Zimmerman, 1997).

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In recent years, the international experience has become a trend of the 21st-century education. According to Dr. Allan E. Goodman, president of Institute of International Education (IIE), “Studying abroad is one of the best ways undergraduate and graduate students gain the international experience which is necessary to succeed in today's global workforce. Moreover, studying in another country prepares students to be real contributors to working across borders to address key issues in the world we share” (IIE, 2015). In the 2015 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange, the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities increased by 10% to a record high of 974,926 students in the 2014-2015 academic year. It is marked as the highest rate of growth in the past 35 years. Among all the international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, the number of Chinese students increased by 11% to 304,040 (IIE, 2015). With the growing number of Chinese students on American campuses, the discrepancies in teaching and learning experience between these students and domestic students become salient.

It is often said “*we don't know what we don't know.*” This is the case with international students coming to study in the United States. Even though U.S. colleges and universities provide various levels of ESL courses for international students before they can take their degree courses, it does not imply that international students are equipped with enough skills to succeed in American classrooms after finishing these ESL courses. Many international students do not know that they need to know how to

prepare and make a presentation, how to take notes effectively in a two-hour long class, or how to get engaged in a group discussion. As long as these situations occur, most international students and professors may blame the poor academic performance on lacking English proficiency. In this project, a concept of academic skills is introduced as another vital component of academic performance besides English proficiency.

In the literature review for this field project, three parts are covered: the differences in teaching and learning in Chinese and America educational contexts, the impact of English proficiency on international students' academic performance, and the impact of academic skills on international students' academic performance.

Differences in Teaching and Learning

As previous literature stated, “cultural beliefs, values and attitudes, along with personal experience and prior educational background can create a challenge for a student from one culture to another culture” (O’Connor, 2000, p.205). China and the U.S. have different cultural and social contexts. As a result, students from these two countries are educated in different ways. Three aspects of students’ education are compared as follows, including ideologies of higher education, learning paradigms, as well as students’ classroom experience.

Ideologies of Education

“Chinese education and learning traditions have been tremendously influenced by Confucianism” (Wang, 2006, p.1). China is a country with a long and glorious history.

Confucius, as a great thinker and educator, has a significant influence in ideologies on the economy, politics, education and social issues in China. This great influence made Confucianism the keystone of Chinese culture.

In the Chinese educational system, what can be learned, the goals of learning, and the relationship between teachers and students all reflect the values of Confucianism. In the *Analects of Confucius*, *junzi*'s (the ideal, enlightened person) self-cultivation is the main doctrine of Confucius learning (Zhao, 2013). Dating back to the Confucius times, being *junzi* is the purpose of education. Righteousness, loyalty, benevolence, as well as filial piety are also essential characteristics need to be equipped to be a *junzi*. However, these qualities imply the respect and obedience to elder and authority, which are reflected in the educational system. In both ancient and contemporary China, teachers are treated as noble people with knowledge and morality (Wang, 2006). Besides, according to Confucian tradition, students cannot challenge the teacher's authority in the classroom. Due to the lack of communication between teacher and students, knowledge is transmitted directly from the teacher to students in the classroom.

In contrast, independence, equality, and individualism are essential elements reflected in the American educational system (Reese, 2001). In particular, the ideologies of American higher education are profoundly influenced by three major beliefs that shape American public life which are the limited government, equality, and the freedom of expression (Eckel & King, 2004). Reflecting the real classroom, students have an unequal position with teachers. Besides, the communication between students and teacher in class is recommended. Students have the freedom to express their ideas in class, no matter they agree with the teacher or challenge the teacher's authority. Creativity is strongly

encouraged during the discussion in class. Developing critical thinking skills and being creative are valued more in American educational ideology than merely transmitting knowledge from the teacher to students.

In research conducted by Valdez (2015), she explored Chinese international students' classroom experiences in the United States and China. After analyzing the data collected from interviews, she found out that the majority of participants appreciated a "more active" classroom setting, as some of them identified the typical U.S. classroom (Valdez, 2015). In this research, the feature of active reflects the concept of American education. With the differences between the concepts of Chinese and U.S. education, learning paradigms and students' classroom experiences are also different in both countries.

Learning Paradigms

There is no doubt that learning context in the United States is entirely different from Chinese students' previous educational experience. As mentioned above, *junzi's* self-cultivation is treated as the primary doctrine in Confucius educational ideology. The self-cultivation indicates students' individual learning activities in contemporary classrooms. For students growing up in this cultural context, they expect the teachers to provide detailed information in an organized structure for taking notes. They are more used to a teacher-centered classroom setting than a student-centered classroom setting. As a result, Chinese international students in U.S. colleges and universities feel uncomfortable and isolated in the classroom during their freshman year.

The different learning paradigms become one of the biggest difficulties for Chinese international students to adapt to the American college classroom besides the English language barrier. In Zhang and Xu's study (2007) on learning experiences of eleven newly-arrived Chinese international graduate students at a U.S. university, they compared different learning paradigms of Chinese and U.S. higher education in aspects of learner responsibilities, learner engagement during and after class, and learner assessment. Zhang and Xu found out that Chinese students feel uncomfortable in U.S. classrooms when domestic students can interrupt the professor for questions at any time. In addition, the causal atmosphere of the classroom is not what Chinese students are used to in their previous educational experience (Zhang & Xu, 2007). A transitional time is necessary for newly arrived Chinese international students to learn the American learning paradigm in order to adapt to the classroom.

Teacher - Student Relationship/Classroom Experience

Besides the different learning paradigms, prior studies suggest that the relationship between teacher and students are entirely different in China, compared to those in the United States. Turner (2006) claimed that for students in contemporary China, learning is still exam-focused, teacher-centered, and considerably competitive. With the extreme stress from the Chinese National University Entrance Exam, which is commonly viewed as a path to achieve a bright future and social status, both students and parents have high expectations of teachers. It is often said in China that "*there is no such thing as a bad student, only a bad teacher.*" As a result, the missions of being a teacher in China quite differs from being a teacher in the U.S..

In most cases, the classroom setting in China tend to be one-way, which means the teacher speaks and students listen and take notes. The classroom is quieter than the discussion-based classroom in the United States. Nevertheless, this one-way classroom setting does not indicate that Chinese students do not ask questions. In Jin and Cortazzi's study (1998), they interviewed both Chinese students and British teachers about classroom experiences. Those American teachers reflected that Chinese students prefer to ask questions after class. The following comments were made by teachers, "*They ... often keep quiet during the discussion and they raise interesting questions to me as we are leaving the classroom. 'That's a good question', I say. 'Why didn't you bring it up in class?'*" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, p.753). While the Chinese students participated in this study claimed that the reason they do not raise their questions in class immediately is that they do not want to interrupt the class. They want to "prepare mentally before asking the teacher" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). The misunderstanding results from the different expectations for students of Chinese and American teachers. Chinese teachers prefer independent study and profound reflection after class. Whereas teachers in U.S. focus much on students' independent thoughts and encourage students' creative and innovative perspectives (Fang, 2008).

Consequently, the difference of teacher-student relationship results in difficulties for Chinese international students to adapt well to American classrooms. They are familiar to a Chinese classroom and may achieve well academic performance previously. Nevertheless, because of the lack of understanding of American classroom setting, it is quite hard for Chinese international students to perform well in U.S. colleges and universities.

Impact of English proficiency on Academic Performance

In English-medium universities or colleges, English language proficiency is one of the essential factors for both domestic and international students to have better academic achievements. For most international students, vocabulary, delivery speed of lectures, writing academic essays, and reading comprehension have posed great challenges in daily study. Their limited language skills directly influence their academic success.

To ensure students' English proficiency for future academic study, most U.S. colleges and universities require TOEFL or IELTS scores as one of the prerequisites for admission. According to Chalhoub-Deville and Deville, "the TOEFL Test is treated as the threshold that enables international students to approach academic work in English in a meaningful manner" (2006, p.520). A number of studies have been carried out to explore the relationship between TOEFL scores and international students' academic performance. In the research conducted by Stoyhoff (1997), he examined the factors related to the academic achievement of 77 freshmen international students during their first six months in university. The result of this research indicated that there is a significant correlation between TOEFL scores and grade point averages (GPA). In another words, TOEFL scores predict the academic performance of international students as measured by GPA. Similar results were published by Cho and Bridgeman (2012) from the Educational Test Service (ETS) who conducted the research examining the relation between scores on TOEFL Internet-Based Test (TOEFL iBT) and academic performance in higher education, also measured in terms of GPA, among 2594 undergraduate and graduate international students from 10 universities in the U.S.. Even though the

correlation did not appear to be strong, the results still implied that “students with higher TOEFL iBT scores tended to earn higher GPAs” (Cho & Bridgeman, 2012).

Admittedly, language is an essential factor in the learning process. However, it is only one of many factors (Cho & Bridgeman, 2012). Although the positive correlation between English proficiency measured by TOEFL scores and academic performance measured by GPA is implied through a large number of studies, there are studies indicated that English proficiency may not predict international students’ academic success. A research conducted by Krausz et al. (2005) shows that TOEFL scores are not significant positive factor directly related to academic success for international students in Business major. Cho and Bridgeman (2012) acknowledged in their limitations of the study that other indicators of academic performance should be included in the study. Another study conducted by Wongtrirat (2010) investigated 22 studies from 1987-2009 examining the relation between TOEFL score and GPA. According to the meta-analysis of 22 studies, Wongtrirat concluded that “the average correlation between TOEFL scores and GPA of international students was .181” (2010, p.51). This indicates the predictive ability of TOEFL score on GPA is relatively small. Similar results were published in the research conducted by Martirosyan et al. (2015) examining the impact of English proficiency on academic performance of international students in a 4-year university in Louisiana. The study showed that there are other factors related to the academic success of international students like learning strategies and motivation besides English proficiency (Martirosyan et al. 2015). These research reveal that there are still other factors have influence on international students’ academic performance besides language.

While researches reviewed above indicate that language proficiency does affect international students' academic achievements, other factors including academic skills, motivation and educational background can affect the academic success as well. In the next section, literature regarding the categories of academic skills as well as the impacts of academic skills on academic achievement will be reviewed.

Impact of Academic Skills on Academic Performance

With the continuous rising of international students population in U.S. colleges and universities, various obstacles are posed as barriers to academic success. Unlike the academic and social transition issues domestic students face in their first year of university, international students experience greater difficulties in transitioning to American college or university context.

While English language proficiency is crucial to international students' academic performance, it is not the sole factor for academic success. There are a number of factors revealed in existing researches contributing to academic achievement in U.S. higher education. For example, self-efficacy, previous academic grades (e.g., McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), and study habits and skills (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes, & Wyld, 1992) were explored in previous research impacting on college students' academic performance. These research results not only apply for international students but also apply for all students in colleges and universities. Domestic students are facing these academic issues in their first year in the university as well.

The first college year is critical for both domestic and international students. Not only because of the knowledge students gain, but also for "laying the foundation on

which their subsequent academic success”(Crawford, 2007). As the freshmen on campus, everything is new. In most U.S. colleges and universities, orientation is provided for all new students. Usually, useful information about campus resources, academic advice are included to get students prepared for the college life.

Since language proficiency plays a crucial role for students to complete their studies in U.S. colleges and universities, there are still aspects that language proficiency cannot achieve to improve students’ academic performance. Advantages of listening skill, speaking skill, and reading skill will be analyzed as well as disadvantages supporting with previous researches as follows.

Listening Skills (note-taking skills)

For most Chinese international students, their English listening comprehension skills are mostly gained and trained through preparing for TOEFL or IELTS Test. Even though English is a mandatory subject in Chinese educational system, the practice in the typical classroom is not sufficient for students to pass TOEFL or IELTS test. As a result, they memorized vocabulary for certain subjects and practiced dictation to get a higher score in those Standard English language test. Since the listening sections in these tests can reflect the academic lectures in colleges to some extent, American universities and colleges require TOEFL or IELTS scores before admission to predict the student’s academic success. However, there are still differences between listening sections in English language tests and the real academic lectures in college (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). The most significant difference is the length. In language tests, the academic lectures are usually less than 6 minutes. In contrast, the actual lectures in colleges are at least

one-hour long. It may be easy for Chinese students to gain the essential information from a 6-minute lecture after practicing. But it can take considerable efforts for them to understand a one-hour long academic lecture.

According to previous studies, most EFL students have difficulties in processing the information they hear and keep this information in mind for a long time (Peeverly et al., 2007). In those standard language tests, the listening materials are “highly straightforward with short statements and short conversations” (Tsai & Wu, 2010, p. 122). Practicing note-taking skill individually is a possible task for most international students. On the contrary, while the professor is delivering an academic lecture in American colleges, he or she not only contains long statements and unfamiliar terminologies but also requires “a high level of thinking” (Tsai & Wu, 2010, p. 122). Therefore, the note-taking skill is indispensable for newly arrived Chinese students to get the main idea and unfamiliar terms in an American college classroom.

Speaking Skills (group discussion skills)

For Chinese students, they do not have enough opportunities to practice their oral English at school. Because of the exam-driven educational system, English reading and writing skills are treated more significant by teachers, while listening skills, especially speaking skills are usually overlooked (Zhang, 2013, p.52). Preparing for the TOEFL/IELTS Test may be the first opportunity for most Chinese students to practice their oral English since kindergarten. Without an English-speaking environment, it is quite difficult for Chinese students to practice and get a high score in language tests. While preparing for these language tests, some students tend to recite sample answers for

similar topics. Admittedly, this method might lead to a satisfied speaking score. However, it goes against the primary purpose of the speaking section in language tests. For the designer of language tests, they want students to have a certain level of speaking skills to have both daily and academic conversations in an English-speaking environment instead of a good memory (Bridgeman, Powers, Stone & Mollaun, 2012).

Besides, the scenarios in speaking sections of language tests are different from the real academic classroom. Take TOEFL Test as an example. According to the TOEFL Official Guide (2012) created by Educational Testing Service (ETS), there are six tasks in the speaking section of the TOEFL Test, which can be divided into two categories, the independent tasks and integrated tasks. In the independent tasks, students are required to talk about given topics for about one minute. These assigned topics are mostly related to students' daily life. In the integrated tasks, students are required to synthesize the information from a reading material and a daily conversation or a short academic lecture and repeat all the valuable information from these materials. With 30 seconds or less of preparation before speaking during the test, the designer of the test intended to mimic the actual group discussion in an English-speaking classroom. However, group discussion in class contains the exchange of ideas. It requires a high level of thinking and helps students to clarify knowledge. For Chinese students, they are not able to engage in an interactive group discussion in American classrooms immediately after insufficient training of TOEFL Test. According to the Chinese international students in Lu's research, most of the participants expressed that they feel "quite worried and difficult engaging in class discussion, starting a conversation, taking turns and arguing certain issues" (Lu et al., 2015, p. 115). It is a common issue because of the teacher-centered classroom

environment in China. Students who are used to this teaching style do not have the opportunity to learn how to discuss in class. As a result, training in group-discussion skills for Chinese international student is necessary for their academic success.

Reading Skills (test-preparation skills)

Reading comprehension ability is essential for students at all grade level; however, this ability is especially challenging for ESL students. With the continuous increase of international students in American colleges and universities, exploring an efficient way to improve international students' English reading ability for better academic performance is quite critical. After preparing for language tests like TOEFL, most Chinese international students are equipped with academic reading strategies. They can read academic passages for main and detailed information within a limited time. It is the premium goal for test designers to let students use academic reading strategies, instead of test-wiseness tricks, in responding to questions during the test (ETS, 2012).

Even though the long-time preparation of TOEFL Test can build up students' academic reading ability, other strategies such as test-wiseness strategies are used and developed. Besides the language skills gained through the test, students' test-taking ability also improved significantly. It is proved in Cohen and Upton's study upon 32 international college students' reading strategies on the reading section of the New TOEFL iBT Test (Cohen & Upton, 2007). However, the preparations of a real exam in American colleges are different from any language tests or GRE/SAT test. Students can get clues of the reading passages' central idea from the questions provided. With bold words and italic sentences listed in the questions, it is easy for students to target the

crucial detail information in a reading passage. While reading textbooks or handouts for academic courses in college, no clues are provided for reading comprehension. The essential information needs to be highlighted by students themselves. In addition, the reading materials in college are usually 2-3 times longer than TOEFL reading passages. Not only reading comprehension but also categorizing information, synthesis and memorizing need to be finished before the exam. As a result, the preparation of a real academic test in American colleges and universities posed a great challenge to international students.

Others (time-management skills)

Besides the note-taking skill, group-discussion skill and test-preparation skill which can be related to English language proficiency, there are other skills, such as time-management skill, that Chinese international students need to develop during their college life. Time management involves “setting goals and allocating adequate time for activities” (Liu & Tsai, 2015). Good time-management skills allow individuals to plan and monitor themselves, as well as finish their tasks efficiently (Liu & Tsai, 2015). In Liu and Tsai’s study, time-management skills have a positive influence on students’ academic performance. In another word, students who can manage their time efficiently have a better academic performance than those who cannot manage their time well.

For most Chinese high school students, they do not need to consider about their time management because school teachers have done it for them. In a normal Chinese high school, the class usually begins at 8 a.m. and ends around 5 p.m. This 9-10 hour school time is divided into several 45-minute long classes as well as breaks between classes.

With such a tight schedule and large amount of homework, high school students barely have enough time for their interests every day. Which means, they do not have the opportunity to schedule their daily life. However, college life quite differs from high school life. Students have fewer classes and more free time every day. Most college students have difficulty organizing their time for homework and activities in their transitional period. For Chinese international students in American colleges and universities, the change of living environment brings them both excitement and challenge (Lin, 2007). They may experience a longer transitional period than domestic students. Unfortunately, very few researches are conducted about developing international students' time-management skills during the transitional period. In another word, it is crucial and urgent for instructors in American colleges and universities to explore a method to implement the academic skills into academic courses.

Summary

In this literature review, three themes were introduced: 1) the differences between teaching and learning in Chinese and America educational contexts, 2) the impact of English proficiency on international students' academic performance, and 3) the impact of academic skills on international students' academic performance.

The first section of literature review functions as background introduction. The differences Chinese and American educational contexts are discussed in three aspects: ideologies of education, learning paradigms, and the teacher-student relationship. Students from China are used to the individual learning model, teacher-centered classroom. While classrooms in American colleges tend to be student-centered and more

freedom during the lecture. Professors prefer interactive learning and encourage innovative thoughts in class. Because of the lack of understanding of American classroom setting, it is quite hard for Chinese international students to perform well in U.S. colleges and universities.

The second section of literature explored the impact of English proficiency on international students' academic performance. According to previous researches, language proficiency has a positive impact on students' academic success. However, language proficiency is not the only factor for good academic performance. Other factors including academic skills, motivation and educational background can affect the academic success as well.

The third section of literature review, the impact of academic skills on international students' academic performance is examined. In this section, both advantages and disadvantages of each language skill are discussed. The disadvantage of each language skill can be improved by implementing an academic skill. After the preparation of those standard language tests, students may have developed certain listening, speaking, and reading skill. However, these skills may not equipped them for having long lectures, engaging group discussion, and processing large amount of reading materials before tests. Besides these academic skills related to language proficiency, the time-management skill is introduced as a keystone skill for freshmen during their traditional period in American colleges and universities.

The research articles above support the idea that instructions about academic skills are in need for Chinese international students to adapt well to the American classroom. In

the following project, I will develop a series of curricula to address the issue of lacking academic skills and provide practical methods to develop the academic skills for Chinese international students in American colleges and universities.

CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Description of the Project

The purpose of this field project is to help Chinese undergraduate students to succeed in the American classroom with guidance on academic skills. To achieve this goal, a series of situationally-based curriculum models about different academic skills are developed as the central part of this project. This curriculum is designed not only for Chinese undergraduate students but also for instructors in the U.S. academic institution to increase their awareness of the academic skills issue among international students.

This project is presented in the form of a teaching manual and a brief syllabus. The teaching manual provides Chinese undergraduate students with practical rules, diagrams, charts, examples, and exercises to practice how to manage their time, how to take notes effectively, how to prepare and take exams, and how to engage in a group discussion. It is a supplement for students to use when they have difficulty in their daily studies. The exercises in the teaching manual will require students to apply these academic skills to their course materials. During the instruction, the teacher should follow the syllabus and adjust it according to the level of students.

Development of the Project

This project is designed for both Chinese undergraduate students and instructors in U.S. academic institutions to increase their awareness of the academic skills issue among international students. The topic of this field project is largely inspired by my personal experience. As an International graduate student, I have experienced the stressful

transition period during the first semester of graduate school at the University of San Francisco both academically and emotionally. Living and studying abroad alone is a huge challenge for students. Not only do they need to take care of their daily lives by themselves, but also to improve their English proficiency in a short period to be able to adapt well to an American classroom. According to my experience and the observation of Chinese undergraduate students in United States, the classroom experience is completely different from the classroom experience in China. This difference posed great challenge to students. In order to help Chinese undergraduate students in USF to succeed in the American classroom, I applied for the Academic English Support tutor at USF Learning and Writing Center. During the tutor sessions, students' problems are usually barely related to their reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills, in another word, English proficiency, but the problems included test-taking, time management, note-taking, exam preparation skills that can be concluded as academic skills.

However, the fact is that this kind of instruction is not largely available in current U.S. educational institutions. Most U.S. academic institutions, headmasters or board members of colleges assume that with sufficient English language proficiency, international students are supposed to have better academic performance in their major courses. With previous research studies discussed in the literature review chapter, English proficiency is not the only factor influence students' academic performance. Other factors such as academic skills need to be taken into consideration while exploring ways to achieve academic success.

In this project, each academic skill is an individual unit. At the beginning of each unit, exercises are provided to test the level of students. Teachers can adjust their syllabus

according to the test result. In each unit, peer-reviewed materials such as the Cornell Note Taking System are provided to help students to be more effective. Students can apply their reading articles or notes into the materials to practice the skill. At the end of this curriculum, students can be more successful in the American classrooms.

The Project

Teaching Academic Skills to Chinese Undergraduate Students in U.S. Academic
Institutions

To the Teacher:

This curriculum introduces lessons that are based on practical use of academic skills for better American classroom adaption. The curriculum is designed for Chinese international students in America colleges and universities. The materials in this curriculum can be modified for international students with different nationalities.

With the learning gap between ESL courses provided in colleges and students' major courses, Chinese students usually cannot achieve good academic performance. One of the main reasons is the lack of academic skills for American classrooms. The book is designed to include four academic skills: note-taking skills, group discussion skills, test preparation skills, and time-management skills. Each academic skill is an individual unit. At the beginning of each unit, exercises are provided to test the level of students. There is a warm-up activity at the beginning of each unit, peer-reviewed materials to help students to become effective learners. Students can apply their reading articles or notes into the materials to practice these skills. At the end of this curriculum, students can be more successful in the American classrooms.

As a former international student, I understand the difficulties and challenges international students are going through. I hope this curriculum useful for Chinese international students to achieve academic success in American classrooms.

Sincerely,

Ruisi Gui

LESSON 1: Welcome to the American Classroom

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: handouts, laptop, and assignment sign-up sheet

Objectives:

1. Students will become familiar with types of academic skills.
2. Students understand the significance of academic skills in American classrooms.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|------------|---|--|
| 10 minutes | <p>Opening: introduction & ice-breaker</p> <p>Activity: Fun fact</p> <p>Every student state one fun fact about himself or herself at the end of self introduction. Start from the instructor.</p> | <p>Student - Student</p> <p>Teacher - Student</p> |
| 10 minutes | <p>PPT: pictures about classroom experience in China (4 min)</p> <p>Student share their classroom experience in China. (1 min)</p> <p>Handout: a short questionnaire about students' classroom experience in America</p> <p>Discussion: Ask students to finish it and discuss with partner (5 min)</p> | <p>Teacher</p> <p>Student - Student</p> <p>Student - Student</p> |
| 15 minutes | <p>PPT: Introduce American classroom</p> <p>Video clip:</p> <p>Explain: regular procedures and activities in American classrooms (mention the group discussion activity before)</p> <p>Teacher checks if students have the same</p> | <p>Teacher</p> |

| | | |
|------------|--|------------------------------|
| | impression of American classrooms. | |
| 15 minutes | PPT: Introduce 4 types of academic skills Explain: relate each academic skill with certain classroom activities mentioned before. | Teacher |
| 5 minutes | Explain Assignment: Academic Skill Sitcom Finish the sign-up sheet Check if all the students understand the requirements of this assignment Answer students' questions about the assignment. | Teacher Teacher - Student |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Ask students to consider about their Sitcom assignment, settle down the actors, think about the script, etc. Prepare for the next class: note-taking skills. (bring notebook and pen) | Teacher Student - Student |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Welcome to the American Classroom

Ruisi Gui

Self Introduction



1 FUN FACT



Classroom Experience in China V.S. Classroom Experience in United States

Teacher - centered

Student - centered

Individual learning

Interactive learning

...

...

American Classroom Experience

- * Syllabus & class rules
- * Length: 1 hr - 3hrs
- * Reading assignment before each class
- * Professor explained the textbook chapters with examples (students previewed before the class)
- * In the class: pop quiz, group discussion, personal presentation, group presentation
- * Essays, Presentations, Mid-terms, Final

Time to share

Share your experience with your partners.

"Sharing is caring."

Before the Class

- * Do you remember your first class in this university? (if yes, write down the course name, professor, or classmates)
- * Did you talk in that class?
- * Describe one classroom activity you participated in.
- * Describe one classroom activity you feel most comfortable/uncomfortable with.
- * Is there any group discussion in that class?
- * What's your feeling about group discussion?
- * How is your interaction with your classmates during the discussion?

Are you ready ?

Are you equipped enough English language skills from ESL courses?

What else do you need to success in an American classroom?

Academic Skills

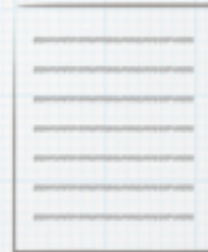
- * Note Taking Skills
- * Group Discussion Skills
- * Test Preparation Skills
- * Time Management Skills

Note Taking Skills

- * Can you take notes for an academic lecture from the TOEFL listening test?
- * How do you usually take notes?
- * Can you follow the professor and take notes in your style? (It is a 3-hour academic lecture.)

Note Taking Skills

- * The Sentence Method:
- * the simplest method
- * doesn't distinguish between major and minor points
- * notes are recorded verbatim



Group Discussion Skills

- * How do you feel about group discussion in your major classes? Do you engage a lot in this activity?
- * One of the most common classroom activities in American colleges and universities.

TIPS

- * Be confident! Speak loud!
- * Active listening. Ask if you can't follow.
- * Make a summary for each discussion.

Test Preparation Skills

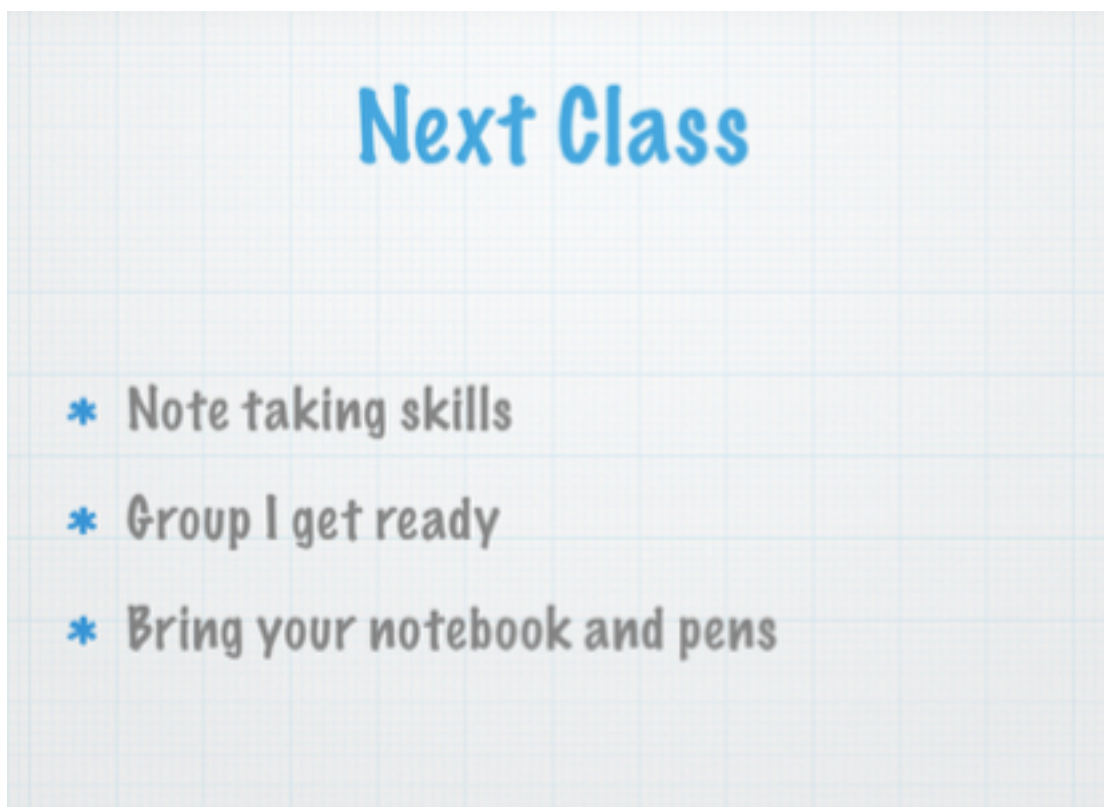
- * Know different types of tests: multiple choice test, T/F test, short answer test, essay test, open-book/note test, etc.
- * Check what materials you need for certain types of test.
- * Follow the process to prepare for the test
- * How to deal with test anxiety?

Time Management Skills

- * Different distractions in your daily life
- * Set priorities
- * Avoid Procrastination
- * Weekly plan & daily to-do list

Assignment

- * Group Sitcom (3-5 min)
- * 5 people per group
- * Each group choose one academic skill
- * In your sitcom, you need to demonstrate your personal experience of this academic skill in an American classroom.
- * Everyone in the group must have the chance to speak in the whole play.
- * Monologue is optional.



LESSON 2: Note-taking Skills - Section A

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: handouts, laptop

Objectives:

1. Students get to know the basic Cornell note-taking skill.
2. Students can understand how to use the note-taking skill.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|------------|---|---|
| 5 minutes | Warm up & Group I Sitcom Presentation (3-5 min) Teacher provides feedback. | Student - Student Teacher - Student |
| 15 minutes | Get prepared: Before the class Discussion: what do you usually do before the class? Tools: notebook v.s. laptop Teacher organizes a small in class debate. | Teacher Student - Student |
| 15 minutes | Warm-up: 5-min TED Talk “The Benefits of a Bilingual Brain” Let students to take notes of important details from the lecture. Students share notes with each other. Answer questions related to the TED Talk. Feedback: Commons of students’ notes (the sentence method) | Student Student - Student Teacher Student - Student Teacher |
| 20 minutes | Cornell Note-taking Skills Handouts: Cornell note-taking template Teacher explains how to use this template with demonstration. | Teacher Teacher - Student |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Assignment: Student use Cornell Note-taking system to take their notes from one of their major courses. Bring the note to the next class. Ask students if they understand the assignment requirements. Reminder: 1. Group II get ready for presentation. 2. Don’t forget to bring the notes. | Teacher Teacher - Student Teacher |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Note Taking Skills

Section A - Basic Skills

Ruisi Gui

Warm up

Ask your classmates all the questions on the handout.



Group 1 Sitcom



Before the Class

- * What do you usually do before class?
- * Preview the chapter, etc.
- * Prepare the stuff you need for the class:
- * textbook, notebook, pens, laptop, etc.

How do you usually take notes?

Notebook v.s. Laptop

Divide into 2 groups: Notebook Group & Laptop Group



Time for Practice

- * please take out your notebook or a piece of paper. Listen to the 5-minute mini lecture about bilingual brains and take notes on important information mentioned by the narrator.



Sharing is caring!

- * Share your note with your partners.
- * Can you answer the following questions according to your note?

- * Language ability is typically measured in what parts?
 - A. Conjugation and expanse of vocabulary
 - B. Talking, writing, listening and reading
 - C. Pronunciation and sentence structure
 - D. Accent, speed and spelling

* A person who learns French and English simultaneously from childhood onward would be considered which type of bilingual?

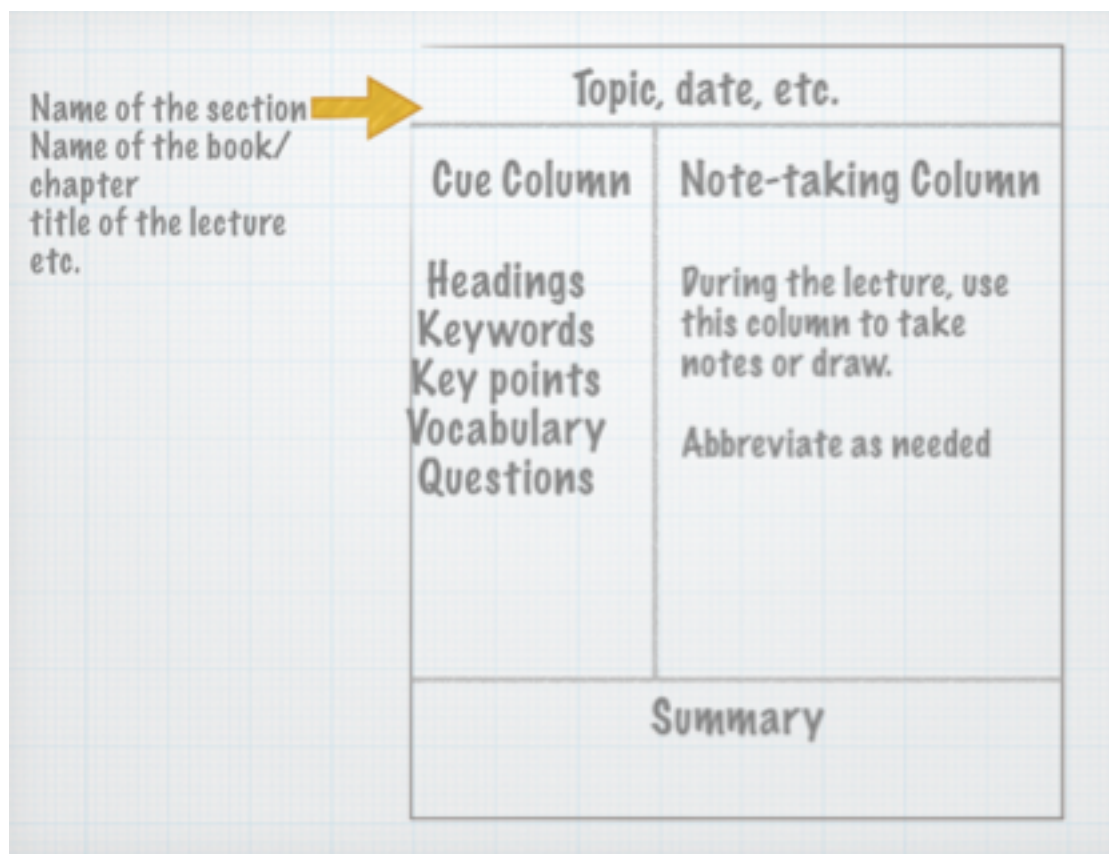
- A. Subordinate bilingual B. Coordinate bilingual
C. Compound bilingual D. All of the above

* The fact that language involves functions both typical of the left and right hemispheres while lateralization develops gradually with age has led to which hypothesis?

- A. The Critical Period Hypothesis
B. The Critical Mass Hypothesis
C. The Compound Bilingual Hypothesis
D. The Early lateralization Hypothesis

How to take notes efficiently

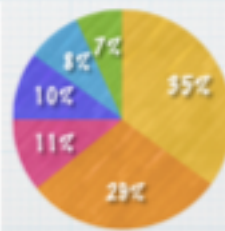
The Cornell Note-taking System



Note-taking Column

- Bullet form**
- * Topic 1
 - * Topic 2
 - * Topic 3
- Outline form**
- * Academic Skills
 - A. Note-taking skill
 - a. Basic note-taking skill

Draw



Note-taking Column

| | Topic, date, etc. | |
|---|--|--------------------|
| <p>After you taking the notes, consider these questions:</p> <p>What you wrote about?</p> <p>What does it mean?</p> | Cue Column | Note-taking Column |
| | <p>Take whatever types of note work for you the best in this area.</p> | |
| | Summary | |

Summary Column

- * A few sentences that sum up the key points of what you have learned.

Ask Yourself:

- * If you are going to explain this lecture/ chapter to someone else, what would you say?
- * How would you explain this lesson to someone who had never learned this before?

Exercise

- * Organize your TED-Talk note with Cornell note-taking system.
- * Share your note with your partners
- * Can you answer the previous 3 questions according to your current note?

Assignment

- * Use Cornell note-taking system to take notes in one of your major course. Bring your note to the next class.
- * Bring your Ted-talk notes to the next class.
- * Questions?
- * Group II get ready for presentation!

LESSON 3: Note-taking Skills - Section B

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: Notes (previous class), handouts, laptop, materials for warm-up activities

Objectives:

1. Students get to know the advanced Cornell note-taking skills.
2. Students can organize their notes in a efficient way with advanced Cornell note-taking skills.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|------------|--|--|
| 5 minutes | Warm up Activity: Draw the picture | Student - Student Teacher - Student |
| 5 minutes | Group II Sitcom Presentation (3-5 min) Teacher provides feedback. | Student - Student Teacher - Student |
| 15 minutes | Teacher checks students' assignment of last class. (the basic Cornell Note-taking) How to organize the note? The advanced Cornell Note-taking skills Teacher demonstrates how to organize a note. Check students' understanding of instruction. | Teacher - Student Teacher Teacher - Student |
| 15 minutes | Exercise: students organize their own notes using the skills developed previously. Feedback: Students share their notes and teacher gives comments. | Student Teacher - Student |
| 15 minutes | Practice: Organize your own notes for FINAL Listen to a 5-min TED-Talk Let students to take notes of important details from the lecture. (review basic Cornell note-taking skills) Student work with their partner to organize their notes with Cornell advanced note-taking skills. (practice advanced note-taking skills) Feedback: Students share their notes with classmates and teacher gives comments. | Student Student - Student Student - Student Student - Teacher |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Assignment: Student use Cornell Note-taking system to create their notes for one of their major courses. Ask students if they understand the assignment requirements. Reminder: 1. Group III get ready for presentation. | Teacher Teacher - Student |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Note Taking Skills

Section B - Advanced Skills

Ruisi Gui

Warm up

- * Divide students into pairs/small groups
- * Pass around the pictures, 1 picture per group
- * One student describe the picture and other students draw on a blank piece of paper
- * Which group have the most similar pictures?



Group II Sitcom



Showtime!

Review

- * What is the format of basic Cornell note-taking system?
- * Share your assignment note with your partners

How to Organize Your Notes

- * Did you work on your notes after the class?
- * Did you still understand your notes after 1 week/month?
- * Did you review your notes when you prepared for midterms/finals?

After the Class

- * Add questions at the cue column

Above the surface question:

who, what when, where

For example:

Language ability is typically measured in what parts?

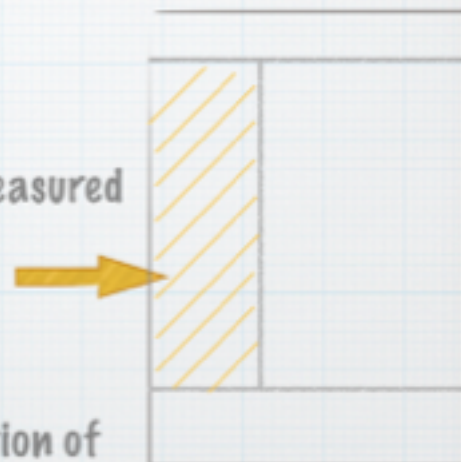
Below the surface question:

how, why

For example:

What was the common perception of bilingualism before the 1960's?

Why did this change?

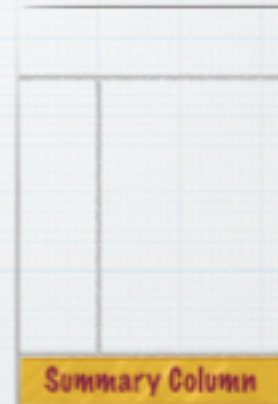


After the Class

- * Write the answer the question in the note column beside the question.
- * If your note can answer the question, highlight it.
- * If you cannot find any space in your note sheet to write your answer or questions, get a new note paper.

After the Class

- * Write 5-7 sentences to summarize this class in the summary column. (important information from your notes)
- * You can fold up the note column to cover your detailed notes. And you review the keywords, headings and questions to check if you really understand the material.



Before the Test

- * Re-read your notes in the right column (highlight or underline important information if needed)
- * Focus on understanding the key points in the left column.
- * You are very likely to see the key points in a test!



Practice Time

- * Take out your Ted-talk notes from previous class. Organize your notes with advanced note-taking skills.
- * Share your note with your partners.
- * Sharing is caring.

Get your Exit Ticket

- * Listen to a mini lecture.
- * Use the basic Cornell note-taking skills to record important information.
- * Use the advanced Cornell note-taking skills to organize your note after the lecture.

5 Tips to Improve your Critical Thinking



Assignment

- * Use the advanced Cornell note-taking skills to organize your notes from your major courses.
- * Group III get ready!

LESSON 4: Group Discussion Skills

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: handouts, laptop, and materials for warm-up activities

Objectives:

1. Students get to know the useful expressions and tips for group discussion.
2. Students can positively engage in a group discussion.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|------------|--|--|
| 5 minutes | Warm up Activity: 20 IF Questions | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 5 minutes | Group III Sitcom Presentation (3-5 min) Teacher provides feedback. | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 15 minutes | Introduce useful expressions in group discussion. | Teacher |
| 15 minutes | In class discussion: Divide students into groups to discuss given topic using expressions provided before. Feedback: Teacher walks around during the discussion to check the usage of expressions. | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 15 minutes | Useful tips for a group discussion? Body language, eye contact, active listening, take notes, speak clearly, participate in regular intervals, relax Role play demonstration with students | Teacher – Student |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Reminder: 1. Group IV gets ready for presentation. | Teacher Teacher – Student |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Group Discussion Skills

Ruisi Gui

Group III Sitcom



Showtime!

Useful Expressions in Group Discussion

1. How to express your opinion?

- * In my opinion, ...
- * I think/feel/believe/suppose/assume ...
- * To my mind, ...
- * As for me, ...
- * I am sure that ...
- * I guess that ...
- * Well, I'd say ...
- * The point I'm trying to make is that ...
- * Let's get this clear. First ...
- * It seems to me that ...
- * I would say that ...
- * The way I see it is ...

Useful Expressions in Group Discussion

2. How to agree with your group members?

- * Quite/ Exactly/ Precisely/ Right/ Definitely.
- * I agree with you ...
- * I really think so.
- * I have come to the same conclusion.
- * I hold the same opinion.
- * I couldn't agree more.
- * That's exactly what I mean/ say.
- * That's exactly how i see it.
- * It is true.
- * You are quite/absolutely right.

Useful Expressions in Group Discussion

3. How to disagree with your group members?

- * I don't agree with you.
- * I disagree.
- * I don't think so.
- * I'm not (quite) so sure if that is true.
- * I take a different view.
- * I am afraid that is not quite true.

Useful Expressions in Group Discussion

4. How to ask for explanation when you don't understand your group member's opinion?

- * Would you explain to me ...?
- * I don't really understand ...
- * What do you mean by that?
- * I didn't quite get that.
- * I just don't see why/how ...?
- * Are you saying that ...?
- * Excuse me, are you saying that ...?

Useful Expressions in Group Discussion

5. How to interrupt during the group discussion? How to deal with interruptions in the group discussion?

- * Excuse me for interrupting, but ...
- * Sorry to interrupt, but...
- * Sorry, do you mind if i say something here?
- * Could I just finish what I am saying?

Discussion Time

Topic: First Impression

- * Do you like to meet new people or do you prefer to hang out with people you already know?
- * When and where did you meet most of your friends for the first time?
- * Have you met someone who you hated right away even though you didn't know them?
- * When are the most important times to make a good first impression?
- * What are the best ways to make a good first impression?
- * Do you make first impressions based on what people wear?
- * Have you ever tried to make a great first impression but completely messed it up?

Top Tips for Group Discussion

1. Always Be Prepared!

- * Preview the chapter/reading materials to get an overview of the whole class.
- * Be familiar with the main issue, argument, and terms related to the class topic.

2. Eye Contact

- * Always have eye contacts with your group members when you are speaking.
- * When your group member is speaking, having eye contact can show your respect to his/her opinion.

3. Active Listening

- * An effective discussion is based on people listen to each other.
- * You need to **listen and respond** to what people have said.

4. Take Notes

- * It is always a good idea to have a notebook and a pen handy.
- * You can take down any useful information (agree/disagree) to back up your point or have an overall summary of the discussion.

5. Enough Supporting Ideas for Your Opinion

- * It is never enough to only express your opinion in a group discussion.
- * No matter what opinion you have, always provide enough examples or facts to support your point of view.
- * People can have a better understanding of your idea with enough supporting facts/examples.

6. Speak Clearly

- * It is always the most vital to let people understand you in a group discussion. So, try your best to express your self clearly.
- * Using simple words or sentence may be helpful.
- * People are happy to forgive a few grammar mistakes when they talk to non-native speakers. However, poor pronunciation/talking too fast may drive people less patient.
- * Practice your pronunciation of key terms (words that shown frequently in textbook/reading materials).

7. Relax!

- * Practice makes perfect. Relax and be confident during the discussion.
- * Group discussion is an opportunity for you to share your ideas with your classmates. Don't take it as a competition.

Assignment

- * Use these group discussion skills in your other classes to check if you feel more comfortable in group discussion.
- * Group IV get ready!

LESSON 5: Test Preparation Skills

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: handouts, laptop, materials for warm-up activities

Objectives:

1. Students get to know the useful tips to prepare for different types of tests.
2. Students can have a good preparation for the test with skills and materials provided.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|-------------|--|---|
| 5 minutes | Warm up Activity: | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 5 minutes | Group IV Sitcom Presentation (3-5 min) Teacher provides feedback. | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 15 minutes | Different types of tests: Teacher explains different types of tests and introduce things need to care about while preparing for different tests. Handout: test preparation check list Teacher demonstrates how to use the checklist. Activity: students finish their checklist according to an upcoming test in their major courses. Share within the group to improve the checklist. | Teacher Teacher - Student Student – Student |
| 20 minutes | Process of Preparation: Teacher explains several stages to fully prepare for a test. How to use your notes during preparation? Tips for memory: Concept map & Acronyms | Student - Student Teacher – Student |
| 10 minutes | Key words: know what your task is Teacher lists words that are frequently seen in test. Make sure students understand the task during the test. | Teacher – Student |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Assignment: 1. Use the checklist and follow the instructions provided to prepare the upcoming test in major courses. Bring feedback to the next class. Reminder: 1. Group V gets ready for presentation. | Teacher Teacher – Student |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Test Preparation Skills

Ruisi Gui

Warm up

- * IF Questions
- * Divide the students into several small groups and sit in the circle.
- * Place the cards with "if" questions in the middle of the circle (question down).
- * The first person takes one card, reads the question, and gives your answer/explanation.
- * After answering, put the card at the bottom of the pile.



Group IV Sitcom



Showtime!

Different Types of Tests

- * True or False Tests
- * Multiple Choice Tests
- * Essay Tests
- * Open Book/Notes Tests

True or False Tests

- * **Every part of a true sentence must be true.**
- * **Pay attention to the following expressions:**
 - Absolute statements:** no, never, always, every, entirely, only, etc.
Usually indicates a "false" answer
 - Qualifier:** words like "sometimes, often, frequently, generally"
They make more modest claims, are more likely to indicate "true" answers.
 - Negatives:** no, none, never, cannot

Exercises

- * A theoretical model attempts to identify every possible determinants of an event. **T/F**
- * The Great Wall is the only man-made structure that can be seen from the Space Shuttle and is used by scientists to study earthquakes. **T/F**
- * Classical Indian civilization emerged without any type of historical foundation. **T/F**

Multiple Choice Tests

- * **Read** the question carefully!!!
- * **Identify** the key words in the question and **underline** it if needed
- * **Block** all the answer choices. Treat it like a fill-in-a-blank question. Try to come up with your answer before looking at the choices.
- * **Eliminate** the incorrect choices until you get the correct answer.
- * **Do not change** your answer unless you are absolutely sure you chose the wrong answer.

Exercises

- After World War II, the Chinese Communists were successful in their revolution mainly because the
- A. United States refused to support the Nationalists
 - B. communists had the support of the peasants
 - C. communists had more technologically advanced weapons
 - D. nationalists had been defeated by Japan

Essay Tests

- * **Time Schedules:** count how many questions there are and give yourself a time limit to answer each one. Try to write something for all the questions.
- * **Read through the questions carefully.** Sometimes you may have choice in answering questions.
- * **Before you write, make an outline for each question.**

Essay Tests

- * **Begin with a strong first sentence that states the main idea of your essay.**
- * **Develop each point in a complete paragraph.**
- * **Back up your points with specific information, examples or quotes.**
- * **Use transitions to connect your points. (in addition, besides, however, ...)**
- * **Pay attention to grammar and sentence structures.**
- * **Never leave any essay item in blank. You might get some credit if you write something.**

Open Book/Notes Tests

- * You are evaluated on the understanding of the class, rather than recall and memorization.
- * You are expected to apply the knowledge on textbook to new situations; synthesize the knowledge; analyze materials critically.
- * Never underestimate the preparation of this type of test!
- * With limited time, you need to organize your materials very well so that you can find the examples, data, or quotes quickly.

How to Get Prepared?

Test Preparation Checklist

Class _____ Instructor _____ Test date & time _____

Type of exam:

___ Multiple Choice ___ True/False ___ Matching
 ___ Completion ___ Identification ___ Essay
 ___ Lab work ___ Problems ___ Other _____

What do I need when I study:

___ Textbook ___ Notes ___ Teacher's study guide
 ___ Worksheets ___ Past exams ___ Supplemental readings
 ___ Calculator ___ Pens, pencils, paper ___ Other _____

Will I study with a study group or alone? ___ Alone ___ Study group
(If you're in a study group, make sure they all have study materials for all topics)

Are there any study sessions the teacher will lead before or after class?
 ___ Yes ___ No If "yes," when? _____

When will I study? Make a plan and stick to it!

Start time _____ End time _____
 Start time _____ End time _____

(PUT THESE DATES ON YOUR CALENDAR)

What do I need for test day?

___ Pens, pencils, paper (lined, unlined, graph, blank)
 ___ Calculator ___ Ruler ___ Watch
 ___ Notes - can I use my notes during the test?
 ___ Textbook - is the test open-book

Material adapted from:
 Purcell, Terry. (2014). Study Skills: Do I really need this stuff? Prentice Hall, New Jersey.
<http://www.studygigs.net>
<http://www.classroomworksheets.com>

It is always not a bad idea to get start with a checklist.

Make your own checklist for the upcoming test of your major course and share with your partner.



The Process of Preparation

- * **Review EARLY:** give yourself enough time to get comfortable with the information.
- * **Daily Review:** conduct short daily review sessions.
- * **Review Notes:** review your notes immediately after lectures. This will help you identify information that you do not understand while the lecture is still fresh in your memory. Make full use of your Cornell notes.
- * **Manageable Chunks:** Break up the study tasks into manageable chunks, especially during major reviews prior to exams. Studying three hours in the morning and three in the evening will be more effective than studying at a six hour stretch.

The Process of Preparation

- * **List according to priorities:** put first things first, you are sure to get the most important things done on time.
- * **Double your time estimates:** Most people tend to underestimate how much time a particular assignment will take. A good rule of thumb is to estimate how much time you realistically think something will take and then double it. More often than not, this doubled estimate is accurate.

Tips for Memory

- * You can always use some techniques associated with letters, images, maps, etc. to help you remember.
- * Each depends on how comfortable you are with, or how useful they are to your way of thinking.
- * **Acronyms** - An acronym is an invented combination of letters. Each letter is a cue to, or suggests, an item you need to remember.

BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
VIP: Very Important Person
BLT: Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato

Tips for Memory

- * **Concept Mapping:**



Tips for Memory

- * **Concept Mapping:**
- * Concept mapping is used to organize related information in a visual manner.
- * It is a way of picturing course content that enhances retrievability of the information on a test. Maps are useful because they reduce large amounts of information.

Key Words: Know What Your Task Is

Analyze: to divide a topic or issue into its parts; to show the relation of one part to another

Apply: to use your knowledge in a new or different situation

Assess: to judge the merits of some issue; to evaluate

Classify: to put things into categories

Compare: to provide similarities, differences, consequences

Contrast: to provide differences

Criticize: to judge critically

Defend: to argue for a particular issue

Define: concise, clear, authoritative meanings

Describe: to explain an event, issue, topic; to explain the main characteristics

Diagram: present a drawing, chart, plan, or graphic representation of your answer

Discuss: to explain in detail; to go beyond mere description

Key Words: Knows What Your Task Is

Enumerate: specifies a list or outline form of reply. Recount one by one the points required

Evaluate: to judge, criticize, establish standards

Explain: clarify & interpret the material you present,

i.e. how or why, reconcile differences in opinion or experimental results, and where possible state causes.

Identify: to show how something is unique or individual

Illustrate: to provide examples

Interpret: to describe the meaning of an issue

Justify: prove or show grounds for decisions, evidence presented in convincing form

List: similar to enumeration, be concise

Motivations: what caused something to happen

Key Words: Knows What Your Task Is

Outline: Organized description, give main points (omit minor details), present information in a systematic arrangement or classification

Prove: demands confirmation or verification, establish certainty by evaluating and citing

Relate: emphasize connection & associations in descriptive form

Relative importance: how two or more factors compare with one another

Review: specifies critical examination, analyze & comment briefly in organized sequence upon major points of problem

State: express high points in brief, clear narrative form; details & usually examples may be omitted summarize: to restate briefly

Trace: to provide an order or sequence of events

Assignments

- * Use the check list and follow the instructions provided to prepare the upcoming test in major courses. Bring feedback to the next class.
- * Group V get ready for the presentation.

LESSON 6: Time Management Skills

PART 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION & OBJECTIVES

Grade Level: undergraduate

Students: first year Chinese international college students (around 18 years old)

Class Size: 20 students

Class Periods: 1-hour classes

Bring to Class: handouts, laptop, and materials for warm-up activities

Objectives:

1. Students create their own to-do list for the next day and follow it.
2. Students get to know the useful tips to management their time.
3. Students can have a good management of their school life and leisure time.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

| Time | Procedures | Interaction |
|------------|---|--|
| 5 minutes | Warm up Activity: | Student - Student Teacher - Student |
| 5 minutes | Group V Sitcom Presentation (3-5 min) Teacher provides feedback. | Student - Student Teacher - Student |
| 10 minutes | Group discussion: distractions in daily school life Teacher lists different distractions while studying/working. | Student - Student Teacher |
| 10 minutes | Before manage your time: Set priorities Determine your PRIME time Activity: students share their prime time | Teacher Student - Student |
| 10 minutes | Procrastination Teacher introduces procrastination Students share what they learned from the TED Talk. Students share their experience of procrastination. Teacher Student - Student Student - Teacher | |
| 15minutes | Handouts: daily to-do list & weekly plan Teacher demonstrates how to use the to-do list and weekly plan. Exercise: Students create their own to-do list for tomorrow | Teacher Teacher - Student |
| 5 minutes | Summary: Teacher concludes the whole class. Assignment: Follow the to-do list created in class Finish a post-questionnaire | Teacher |

PART 3: TEACHING MATERIALS

Time Management Skills

Ruisi Gui

Group V Sitcom



Showtime!

Warm up

- * IF Questions
- * Divide the students into several small groups and sit in the circle.
- * Place the cards with "if" questions in the middle of the circle (question down).
- * The first person takes one card, reads the question, and gives your answer/explanation.
- * After answering, put the card at the bottom of the pile.



What distractions do you have in your daily school life?

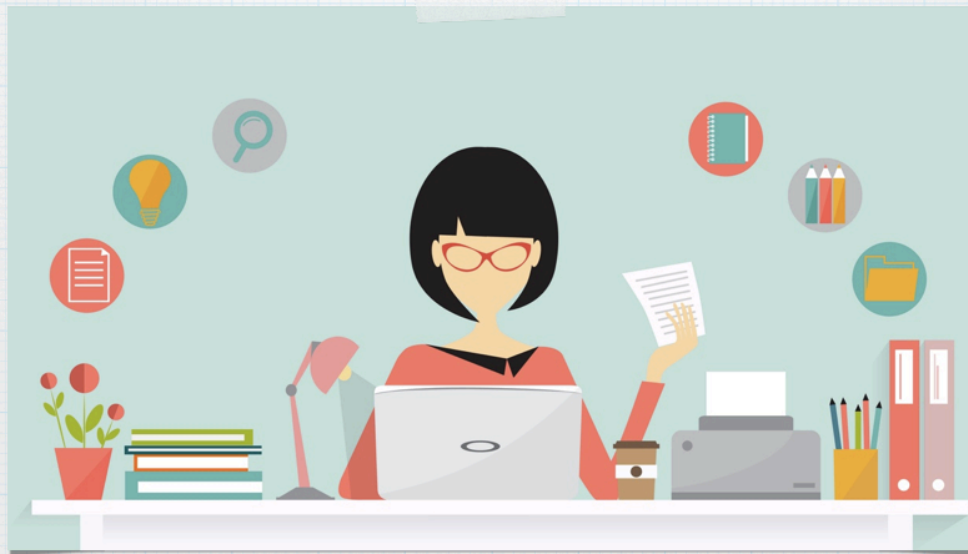


Share your distractions with partners.

Those Black Holes

- * Phone/Email
- * Drop-in visitors - friends/roommates...
- * Text messages
- * Inability to say NO
- * Snack
- * Social media

How to Manage Your Time



Determine your Priorities

- * Rank from most to least important
- * Priorities may change, so check the list often.
- * Look at your goals for this semester or one specific course
- * Be specific in your objectives

Determine Your PRIME Time

- * Prime time: the time of the day when you are the most productive
- * Schedule activities that require the greatest concentration at your prime time.
- * Early in the morning, midnight, or ...
- * When is your prime time? Share with your partners.



PROCRASTINATION

■ NO

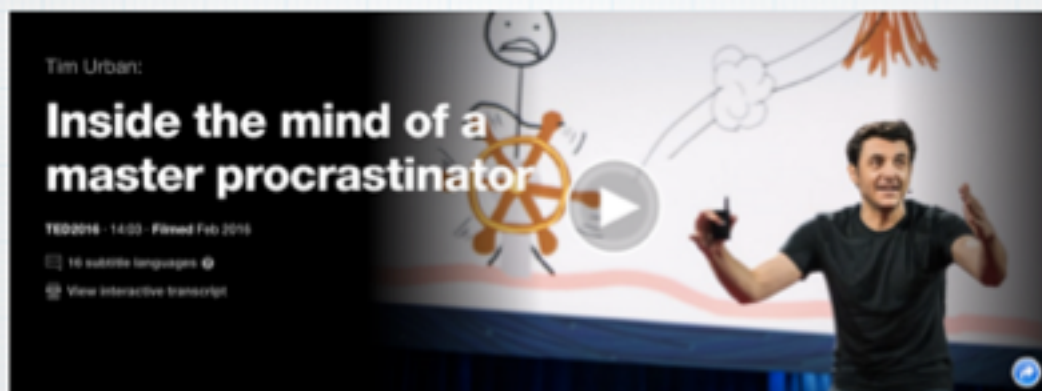
✗ LATE

Tomorrow: a mystical land where 99% of all human productivity, motivation, achievement is stored.

JUST DO IT TOMORROW.

Do you agree?

Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator



What did you learn from this TED Talk?
Discuss with your partners about your experience of procrastination.

Daily To-Do List

My To-Do List

Preview class reading materials

Finish assignment for ESL class

Decide the topic for paper and write an outline

Rehearse the presentation

GYM

Use the calendar on your smart phone and set alarm clock for important things.

Use off-peak period to your advantage.

Create your own to-do list for tomorrow!

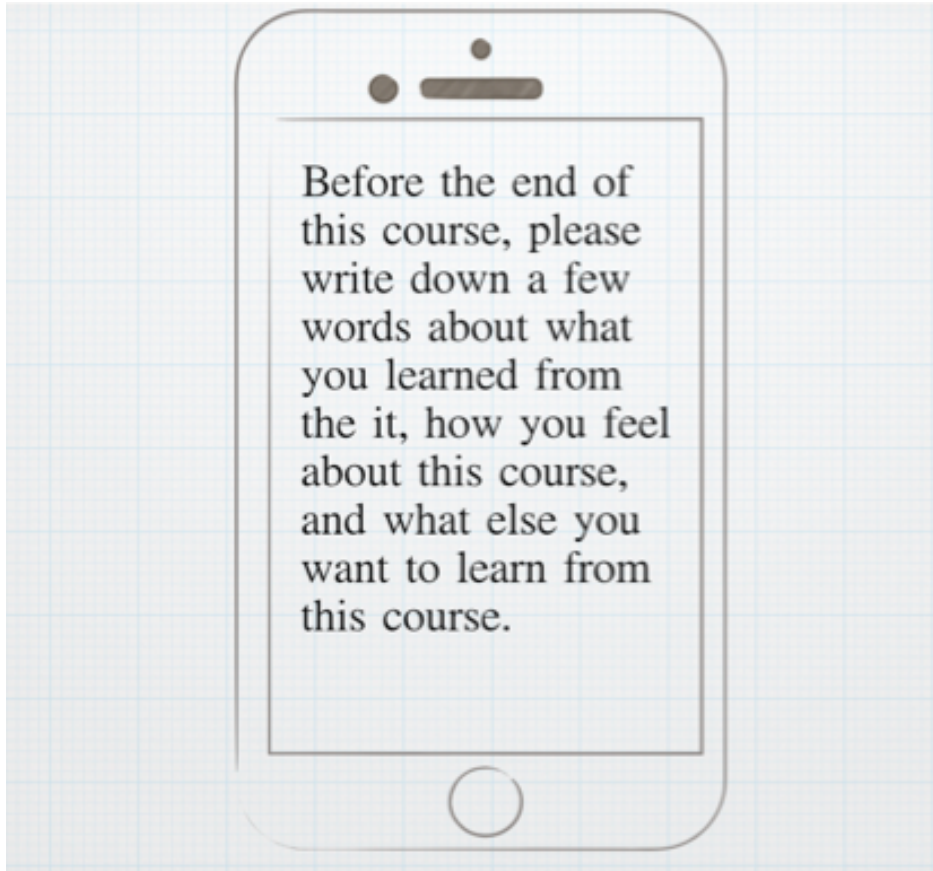
Weekly Plan

Daily Schedule

Spring 2016

| Start Time | Time Blocks |
|------------|-------------|
| 8:00 AM | 1h |

| TIME | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY |
|----------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 8:00 AM | | | | | |
| 9:00 AM | | | | | |
| 10:00 AM | | | | | |
| 11:00 AM | | | | | |
| 12:00 PM | | | | | |
| 1:00 PM | | | | | |
| 2:00 PM | | | | | |
| 3:00 PM | | | | | |
| 4:00 PM | | | | | |
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| 6:00 PM | | | | | |
| 7:00 PM | | | | | |
| 8:00 PM | | | | | |
| 9:00 PM | | | | | |
| 10:00 PM | | | | | |



Chapter IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In recent years, the experience of studying abroad has become a trend in education. With the growing number of Chinese students enrolled in American colleges and universities, their academic performance has drawn a great attention to both instructors and school leaders. However, the discrepancies in teaching and learning experience between Chinese international students and domestic students result into a great challenge to achieve academic success. Besides the English language proficiency, other factors such as academic skills, motivation, and educational background have significant influence on Chinese international students' academic performance.

The purpose of this project is to help Chinese undergraduate students succeed in the American classroom with guidance on academic skills. Six units are created in this project to demonstrate four academic skills: note-taking skills, group discussion skills, test preparation skills, and time-management skills. In class activities and exercises are implemented into each session to make sure every student is involved. Guided by the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the teaching materials' level of difficulty is measured to be suitable for newly arrived Chinese international students.

After finishing the project, Chinese international students will have an increased understanding of academic requirements and skills through the exposure to this curriculum. They will recognize the importance of adjusting their learning habits and adapting to the American classroom. Students will understand the reason they struggle to be successful in American classroom even though they got high scores in the ESL

courses. Since the root problem has been pointed out, Chinese international students can follow the syllabus and teacher's instruction with a clear goal.

Recommendations

This curriculum introduces lessons that are based on practical use of academic skills for better American classroom adaptation. It is designed for Chinese international students in American colleges and universities. The materials in this curriculum can be modified for international students with different nationalities. In order to achieve better teaching and learning effects, this curriculum can be combined with ESL courses.

For student users, they can practice each academic skill with the exercises and materials provided in this curriculum. In addition, learning materials in students' ESL courses can also be used for practicing as the assignments of the curriculum. Since the ultimate goal of this curriculum is to make every Chinese international student acquire these essential academic skills, an implementation of this curriculum into daily ESL courses will provide students more instant opportunities to practice.

For school instructors, the combination of ESL courses and Academic Skills curriculum can achieve teaching effects and can be timesaving. Usually, colleges and universities will open academic success workshops to provide important study skills to students. However, newly arrived international students may not attend the workshops because of their unfamiliarity with the campus. Implementing this curriculum into ESL courses can directly point out students' problem and provide solutions and opportunities to practice instantly. In addition, it can save both students' and instructors' time. Students

and instructors no longer need to spend time figuring out the direct reasons for bad academic performance.

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APPENDIX

Warm up Questions:

1. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
2. If I gave you \$10,000, what would you spend it on?
3. If you could watch your favourite movie now, what would it be?
4. If you could talk to anyone in the world, who would it be?
5. If you could wish one thing to come true this year, what would it be?
6. If you could live in any period of history, when would it be?
7. If you could change anything about yourself, what would you change?
8. If you could be someone else, who would you be?
9. If you could have any question answered, what would it be?
10. If you could watch your favourite TV show now, what would it be?
11. If you could have any kind of pet, what would you have?
12. If you could do your dream job 10 years from now, what would it be?
13. If you had to be allergic to something, what would it be?

14. If you sat down next to Jesus on a bus, what would you talk about?
15. If money and time was no object, what would you be doing right now?
16. If you had one day to live over again, what day would you pick?
17. If you could eat your favourite food now, what would it be?
18. If you could learn any skill, what would it be?
19. If you were sent to live on a space station for three months and only allowed to bring three personal items with you, what would they be?
20. If you could buy a car right now, what would you buy?

The Benefits of a Bilingual Brain

Hablas espanol? Parlez-vous francais? 你会说中文吗?

If you answered, “si”, “oui”, or “是的” and you are watching this in English, chances are you belong to the world’s bilingual and multilingual majority. And besides having an easier time traveling or watching movies without subtitles, knowing two or more languages means that your brain may actually look and work differently than those of your monolingual friends.

So what does it really mean to know a language?

Language ability is typically measured in two active parts, speaking and writing, and two passive parts, listening and reading. While a balanced bilingual has near equal abilities across the board in two languages, most bilinguals around the world know and

use their languages in varying proportions. And depending on their situation and how they acquired their languages, they can be classified into three general types. For example, let's take Gabriella, whose family immigrates to the U.S. from Peru when she was two years old. As a compound bilingual, Gabriella develops two linguistic codes simultaneously, with a single set of concepts, learning both English and Spanish as she begins to process the world around her. Her teenage brother, on the other hand, might be a coordinate bilingual, working with two sets of concepts, learning English in school, while continuing to speak Spanish at home and with friends. Finally, Gabriella's parents are likely to be subordinate bilinguals who learn a secondary language by filtering it through their primary language.

Because all types of bilingual people can become fully proficient in a language regardless of accent or pronunciation, the difference may not be apparent to a casual observer. But recent advances in brain imaging technology have given neurolinguists a glimpse into how specific aspects of language learning affect the bilingual brain. It's well known that the brain's left hemisphere is more dominant and analytical in logical processes, while the right hemisphere is more active in emotional and social ones, though this is a matter of degree, not an absolute split. The fact that language involves both types of functions while lateralization develops gradually with age, has led to the critical period hypothesis. According to this theory, children learn languages more easily because the plasticity of their developing brains lets them use both hemispheres in language acquisition, while in most adults, language is lateralized to one hemisphere, usually the left. If this is true, learning a language in childhood may give you a more holistic grasp of its social and emotional contexts. Conversely, recent research showed that people who

learned a second language in adulthood exhibit less emotional bias and a more rational approach when confronting problems in the second language than in their native one.

But regardless of when you acquire additional languages, being multilingual gives your brain some remarkable advantages. Some of these are even visible, such as higher density of their grey matter that contains most of your brain's neurons and synapses, and more activity in certain regions when engaging a second language. The heightened workout a bilingual brain receives throughout its life can also help delay the onset of diseases like Alzheimer's and dementia by as much as five years.

The idea of major cognitive benefits of bilingualism may seem intuitive now, but it would have surprised earlier experts. Before the 1960s, bilingualism was considered a handicap that slowed a child's development by forcing them to spend too much energy distinguishing between two languages, a view based largely on flawed studies. And while a more recent study did show that reaction times and errors increase for some bilingual students in cross-language tests, it also showed that the effort and attention needed to switch between languages triggered more activity in, and potentially strengthened, in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. This is the part of the brain that plays a large role in executive function, problem solving, switching between tasks, and focusing while filtering out irrelevant information.

So, while bilingualism may not necessarily make you smarter, it does make your brain more healthy, complex and actively engaged, and even if you didn't have the good fortune of learning a second language as a child, it's never too late to do yourself a favor and make the linguistic leap from, "Hello," to "Hola", "Bonjour" or "您好" because when it comes to our brains a little exercise can go a long way.

5 Tips to Improve Your Critical Thinking

Every day, a sea of decisions stretches before us. Some are small and unimportant, but others have a larger impact on our lives. For example, which politician should I vote for? Should I try the latest diet craze? Or will email make me a millionaire? We're bombarded with so many decisions that are impossible to make a perfect choice every time. But there are many ways to improve our chances, and one particularly effective technique is critical thinking. This is a way of approaching a question that allow us to carefully deconstruct a situation, reveal its hidden issues, such as bias and manipulation, and make the best decision. If the critical part sounds negative that's because in a way it is. Rather than choosing an answer because it feels right, a person who uses critical thinking subjects all available options to scrutiny and skepticism. Using the tools at their disposal, they will eliminate everything but the most useful and reliable information.

There are many ways of approaching critical thinking, but here's one five-step process that may help you solve any number of problems. One: formulate your question. In other words, know what you are looking for. This isn't always as straightforward as it sounds. For example, if you are deciding whether to try out the newest diet craze, your reasons for doing so may be obscured by other factors, likes claims that you'll see results in just two weeks. But if you approach the situation with a clear view of what you're actually trying to accomplish by dieting, whether that's weight loss, better nutrition, or having more energy, that'll equip you to sift through this information critically, find what you're looking for, and decide whether the new fad really suits your needs. Two, gather your information. There's lots of it out there, so having a clear idea of your question will help you determine what's relevant. If you're trying to decide on a diet to improve your

nutrition, you may ask an expert for their advice, or seek other people's testimonies. Information gathering helps you weigh different options, moving you closer to a decision that meets your goal. Three: apply the information, something you do by asking critical questions. Facing a decision, ask your self, "What concepts are at work?" "What assumptions exist?" "is my interpretation of the information logically sound?" For example, in an email that promises you millions, you should consider, "What is shaping my approach to this situation?" "Do I assume the sender is telling the truth?" "Based on the evidence, is it logical to assume I'll win any money?" Four: consider the implications. Imagine it's election time, and you've selected a political candidate based on their promise to make it cheaper for drivers to fill up on gas. At first glance, that seems great. But what about the long-term environmental effects? If gasoline use is less restricted by cost, this could also cause a huge surge in air pollution, and unintended consequence that's important to think about. Five: explore other points of view. Ask yourself why many people are drawn to the policies of the opposing political candidate. Even if you disagree with everything that candidate says, exploring the full spectrum of viewpoints might explain why some policies that don't seem valid to you appeal to others. This will allow you to explore alternatives, evaluate your choices, and ultimately help you make more informed decisions. This five-step process is just one tool, and it certainly won't eradicate difficult decisions from our lives. But it can help us increase the number of positive choices we make. Critical thinking can give us the tools to sift through a sea of information and find what we are looking for. And enough of us use it; it has the power to make the world a more reasonable place.

Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator

So in college, I was a government major, which means I had to write a lot of papers. Now, when a normal student writes a paper, they might spread the work out a little like this. So, you know --you get started maybe a little slowly, but you get enough done in the first week that, with some heavier days later on, everything gets done, things stay civil. And I would want to do that like that. That would be the plan. I would have it all ready to go, but then, actually, the paper would come along, and then I would kind of do this. And that would happen every single paper.

But then came my 90-page senior thesis, a paper you're supposed to spend a year on. And I knew for a paper like that, my normal workflow was not an option. It was way too big a project. So I planned things out, and I decided I kind of had to go something like this. This is how the year would go. So I'd start off light, and I'd bump it up in the middle months, and then at the end, I would kick it up into high gear just like a little staircase. How hard could it be to walk up the stairs? No big deal, right? But then, the funniest thing happened. Those first few months? They came and went, and I couldn't quite do stuff. So we had an awesome new revised plan. But then those middle months actually went by, and I didn't really write words, and so we were here. And then two months turned into one month, which turned into two weeks. And one day I woke up with three days until the deadline, still not having written a word, and so I did the only thing I could: I wrote 90 pages over 72 hours, pulling not one but two all-nighters -- humans are not supposed to pull two all-nighters -- sprinted across campus, dove in slow motion, and got it in just at the deadline. I thought that was the end of everything. But a week later I get a call, and it's the school. And they say, "Is this Tim Urban?" And I say, "Yeah." And they

say, "We need to talk about your thesis." And I say, "OK." And they say, "It's the best one we've ever seen."

That did not happen. It was a very, very bad thesis. I just wanted to enjoy that one moment when all of you thought, "This guy is amazing!"

Anyway, today I'm a writer-blogger guy. I write the blog Wait But Why. And a couple of years ago, I decided to write about procrastination. My behavior has always perplexed the non-procrastinators around me, and I wanted to explain to the non-procrastinators of the world what goes on in the heads of procrastinators, and why we are the way we are. Now, I had a hypothesis that the brains of procrastinators were actually different than the brains of other people. And to test this, I found an MRI lab that actually let me scan both my brain and the brain of a proven non-procrastinator, so I could compare them. I actually brought them here to show you today. I want you to take a look carefully to see if you can notice a difference. I know that if you're not a trained brain expert, it's not that obvious, but just take a look, OK? So here's the brain of a non-procrastinator. There is a difference. Both brains have a Rational Decision-Maker in them, but the procrastinator's brain also has an Instant Gratification Monkey. Now, what does this mean for the procrastinator? Well, it means everything's fine until this happens. So the Rational Decision-Maker will make the rational decision to do something productive, but the Monkey doesn't like that plan, so he actually takes the wheel, and he says, "Actually, let's read the entire Wikipedia page of the Nancy Kerrigan/ Tonya Harding scandal, because I just remembered that that happened. Then we're going to go over to the fridge, to see if there's anything new in there since 10 minutes ago. After that, we're going to go on a YouTube spiral that starts with videos of Richard Feynman talking

about magnets and ends much, much later with us watching interviews with Justin Bieber's mom. "All of that's going to take a while, so we're not going to really have room on the schedule for any work today. Sorry!"

Now, what is going on here? The Instant Gratification Monkey does not seem like a guy you want behind the wheel. He lives entirely in the present moment. He has no memory of the past, no knowledge of the future, and he only cares about two things: easy and fun. Now, in the animal world, that works fine. If you're a dog and you spend your whole life doing nothing other than easy and fun things, you're a huge success! And to the Monkey, humans are just another animal species. You have to keep well-slept, well-fed and propagating into the next generation, which in tribal times might have worked OK. But, if you haven't noticed, now we're not in tribal times. We're in an advanced civilization, and the Monkey does not know what that is. Which is why we have another guy in our brain, the Rational Decision-Maker, who gives us the ability to do things no other animal can do. We can visualize the future. We can see the big picture. We can make long-term plans. And he wants to take all of that into account. And he wants to just have us do whatever makes sense to be doing right now. Now, sometimes it makes sense to be doing things that are easy and fun, like when you're having dinner or going to bed or enjoying well-earned leisure time. That's why there's an overlap. Sometimes they agree. But other times, it makes much more sense to be doing things that are harder and less pleasant, for the sake of the big picture. And that's when we have a conflict. And for the procrastinator, that conflict tends to end a certain way every time, leaving him spending a lot of time in this orange zone, an easy and fun place that's entirely out of the Makes Sense circle. I call it the Dark Playground. Now, the Dark

Playground is a place that all of you procrastinators out there know very well. It's where leisure activities happen at times when leisure activities are not supposed to be happening. The fun you have in the Dark Playground isn't actually fun, because it's completely unearned, and the air is filled with guilt, dread, anxiety, self-hatred -- all of those good procrastinator feelings. And the question is, in this situation, with the Monkey behind the wheel, how does the procrastinator ever get himself over here to this blue zone, a less pleasant place, but where really important things happen?

Well, turns out the procrastinator has a guardian angel, someone who's always looking down on him and watching over him in his darkest moments -- someone called the Panic Monster. Now, the Panic Monster is dormant most of the time, but he suddenly wakes up anytime a deadline gets too close or there's danger of public embarrassment, a career disaster or some other scary consequence. And importantly, he's the only thing the Monkey is terrified of. Now, he became very relevant in my life pretty recently, because the people of TED reached out to me about six months ago and invited me to do a TED Talk. Now, of course, I said yes. It's always been a dream of mine to have done a TED Talk in the past. But in the middle of all this excitement, the Rational Decision-Maker seemed to have something else on his mind. He was saying, "Are we clear on what we just accepted? Do we get what's going to be now happening one day in the future? We need to sit down and work on this right now." And the Monkey said, "Totally agree, but let's just open Google Earth and zoom in to the bottom of India, like 200 feet above the ground, and scroll up for two and a half hours til we get to the top of the country, so we can get a better feel for India." So that's what we did that day. As six months turned into four and then two and then one, the people of TED decided to release the speakers. And I

opened up the website, and there was my face staring right back at me. And guess who woke up? So the Panic Monster starts losing his mind, and a few seconds later, the whole system's in mayhem. And the Monkey -- remember, he's terrified of the Panic Monster -- boom, he's up the tree! And finally, finally, the Rational Decision-Maker can take the wheel and I can start working on the talk.

Now, the Panic Monster explains all kinds of pretty insane procrastinator behavior, like how someone like me could spend two weeks unable to start the opening sentence of a paper, and then miraculously find the unbelievable work ethic to stay up all night and write eight pages. And this entire situation, with the three characters -- this is the procrastinator's system. It's not pretty, but in the end, it works. This is what I decided to write about on the blog a couple of years ago. When I did, I was amazed by the response. Literally thousands of emails came in, from all different kinds of people from all over the world, doing all different kinds of things. These are people who were nurses, bankers, painters, engineers and lots and lots of PhD students. And they were all writing, saying the same thing: "I have this problem too." But what struck me was the contrast between the light tone of the post and the heaviness of these emails. These people were writing with intense frustration about what procrastination had done to their lives, about what this Monkey had done to them. And I thought about this, and I said, well, if the procrastinator's system works, then what's going on? Why are all of these people in such a dark place?

Well, it turns out that there's two kinds of procrastination. Everything I've talked about today, the examples I've given, they all have deadlines. And when there are deadlines, the effects of procrastination are contained to the short term because the Panic

Monster gets involved. But there's a second kind of procrastination that happens in situations when there is no deadline. So if you wanted a career where you're a self-starter -- something in the arts, something entrepreneurial -- there's no deadlines on those things at first, because nothing's happening, not until you've gone out and done the hard work to get momentum, get things going. There's also all kinds of important things outside of your career that don't involve any deadlines, like seeing your family or exercising and taking care of your health, working on your relationship or getting out of a relationship that isn't working. Now if the procrastinator's only mechanism of doing these hard things is the Panic Monster, that's a problem, because in all of these non-deadline situations, the Panic Monster doesn't show up. He has nothing to wake up for, so the effects of procrastination, they're not contained; they just extend outward forever. And it's this long-term kind of procrastination that's much less visible and much less talked about than the funnier, short-term deadline-based kind. It's usually suffered quietly and privately. And it can be the source of a huge amount of long-term unhappiness, and regrets. And I thought, that's why those people are emailing, and that's why they're in such a bad place. It's not that they're cramming for some project. It's that long-term procrastination has made them feel like a spectator, at times, in their own lives. The frustration is not that they couldn't achieve their dreams; it's that they weren't even able to start chasing them. So I read these emails and I had a little bit of an epiphany -- which I don't think non-procrastinators exist. That's right -- I think all of you are procrastinators. Now, you might not all be a mess, like some of us, and some of you may have a healthy relationship with deadlines, but remember: the Monkey's sneakiest trick is when the deadlines aren't there.

Now, I want to show you one last thing. I call this a Life Calendar. That's one box for every week of a 90-year life. That's not that many boxes, especially since we've already used a bunch of those. So I think we need to all take a long, hard look at that calendar. We need to think about what we're really procrastinating on, because everyone is procrastinating on something in life. We need to stay aware of the Instant Gratification Monkey. That's a job for all of us. And because there's not that many boxes on there, it's a job that should probably start today. Well, maybe not today, but ... you know. Sometime soon. Thank you.