

Review of the Book *The Psychology of Effective Studying: How to Succeed in Your Degree* by P. Penn

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Contents and Chapter Breakdown

- Chapter 1. Introduction: Metacognition: The foundation of successful studying (or at least how to avoid being “that person” on the TV talent show)
- Chapter 2. Conquering Procrastination: Why it’s so hard to DO IT. JUST DO IT!
- Chapter 3. Academic reading and note-taking: what we can all learn from *50 Shades of Grey*
- Chapter 4. Academic Integrity, citation, quotation and referencing: Credit where credit is due
- Chapter 5. Producing written assessments at degree level: Producing quality written work shouldn’t be rocket science, even if you’re studying rocket science
- Chapter 6. Working collaboratively: There is no “I” in team, but there is an “I” in “I really hate teamwork”
- Chapter 7. How to deliver an effective presentation: It’s not about you
- Chapter 8. Revision: Cleaning up a dirty word

There is no shortage of study skills books on the market for students to choose from, but there are very few that provide advice on studying informed by evidence from psychological research. In his book, Dr Paul Penn provides a synthesis of what psychology has to say on how students can learn, communicate and collaborate more effectively. It is aimed at undergraduates from all disciplines and written in a non-technical, accessible and conversational style. I don’t just like this book — I love it! I have been a HE teacher for over 30 years and have supported many students through their educational journey, often providing copies of “how to study” texts to help them grasp the essentials. This book kicks all others into the long grass. Why? Firstly, the book is written as though Paul is having a personal tutorial with you. A good example of this is in chapters 4 and 5, where

he guides you through the intricacies of referencing and academic writing, respectively. The second thing that elevates this book is that Paul is happy to share aspects of his own journey with the reader. This makes the book “real” — we have all been there and struggled with things like procrastination and group work. For example, in chapter 5, Paul confesses to his dismay at receiving a lower grade than expected for an essay and the way that feedback helped shape his future submissions. In Chapter 7, Paul admits that his first attempt at giving a presentation was far from an illustrious start to his lecturing career and reflects insightfully on what went wrong. There are other examples scattered throughout the book, and this makes reading it an enjoyable experience — there is a natural flow to his writing style, as though you were in conversation with the author. The third thing I found really appealing about this book is that the examples are drawn from psychology and are evidence based but don’t make the book impenetrable to students from other disciplines. For example, I enjoyed being reminded of the lessons we can learn from Bartlett’s “War of the Ghosts” study, i.e., that memory is reconstructive, not reproductive and that approaches to learning must take account of this basic principle. Finally, the book covers the main challenges which students, in my experience, face — topics not already mentioned include metacognition, note-taking and revision. All topics covered are key challenges for students brought together in this wonderful book written by someone with a passion for teaching and helping students navigate their journey.

References

- Penn, P. (2020). *The psychology of effective studying: How to succeed in your degree*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.