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Put Your Rushmore Studies to Work

By: Alan Guinn,
Rushmore University
Dean of Graduate Studies

I'm often asked by new students, "*What's the most important part of an education at Rushmore?*" That's a great question. Many of you reading this are our students. How would you respond to that question? Should I answer that it is the one-on-one interaction with the Professors? Or is it the fact that you develop your own curriculum, based upon your personalized learning needs? Or is it that we offer an excellent education at a financially affordable price point? Or all of the above? What do you think is most important?

Having had the opportunity to be around since some of the early days of Rushmore, my answer has evolved significantly. Today, I'd have to say that the most important part of an education for most students is **learning how to use what you've selected to study.**

I continually see undergraduate students spending four or five years at University, and successfully graduating with a degree—in many cases, with honors. The unfortunate aspect is that after they have invested thousands of dollars in their studies, they may or may not have a clue what they want to do with the next stage of their lives.

Rushmore students seem to be able to address that challenge successfully. Perhaps it is because Rushmore attracts older students, or perhaps it is because many of our students are mid and upper level management professionals. Whatever the reason, the courses taken by Rushmore students seem to be targeted at personal and professional improvement.

Many of the papers I read for students are focused specifically on management issues faced in real life. I read very few theoretical case studies—most of our case studies represent real-life situations, and students are using them to understand the theories behind their courses.

If you haven't elected to write a paper on a real world topic, it is time to refocus your efforts on practical application of theory. Rushmore Professors will be happy to work with you to make that happen.

Creating Better Study Skills

Rushmore's study program requires study and writing skills which many new Rushmore students find difficult to master. Part of the objective of the Editing Program at Rushmore is to assist students to address unlearned study skills and to improve thinking, reasoning, and writing.

Rushmore's fully virtual program means that a student cannot fall back on study groups, co-study with study partners, or the ever-present "Cliff Notes" versions of study material. Most of Rushmore's Professors and Advisors are practicing professionals in their field of expertise, so it is not enough to simply write a paper and "hope" that the paper will be good enough. As experts, they understand when a paper addresses a learning and functional need.

Let's look at some keys for making sure that your studies "make the grade" at Rushmore:

A. Studying in Graduate School is totally different than studying in any other type of environment. It is not enough to simply understand theories or concepts related to topics under discussion. You must understand and be able to apply those theories to real world discussions and analyses of challenges faced.

B. Rushmore is a reading and writing school. You learn, more than anything else, to **write**. When you send your paper to the Editor, Laurel helps you find a "voice" with which to develop your thoughts and your topics. Without this writing "voice" you may find a school like Rushmore to be difficult. Part of this writing "voice" will be expressed by the organizational skills with which you go about writing your papers. Hone those skills for a lifetime of use.

C. Organizing your studies and your life become golden keys to success. Search out and implement the organizational model which works best for you. For some students, journals hold key ideas and concepts. For other students, electronic organization is the key to success. Others would be lost without their Blackberry or Pocket PC. Find what works for you and stick with it.

D. Seek out ongoing support from your friends and family. You have embarked upon a significant undertaking with your Graduate studies. Make sure that not only your friends, but your family supports your efforts on an ongoing basis.

E. Set aside a specific time for study. Just as a sound financial investment program depends upon both a formal plan and consistent savings so that you have money available to invest, a sound study plan relies upon the discipline of setting aside time to read, write, edit, and post your writings.

F. Don't fear publication. Explore opportunities to publish your papers and create more brand awareness for your personal and professional "brand." Readers will email you, open lines of communication, and offer suggestions and alternatives you may not have considered. Learn from others and they will learn from you.

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Your Editor's Notes

Each month, we offer a column written (and edited!) by Rushmore's Director of Editing, Laurel Barley. Laurel interacts with every Rushmore student—from their very first submissions. She works tirelessly to help each Degree Candidate create perfect Papers prior to submission to the Advisor for grading.

Improving Clarity in Your Writing

By: Laurel Barley, Director of Editing, Rushmore University.



(www.ice-frog.home.insightbb.com)

"I'd like you to address some issues regarding the integration of some areas." I have had sentences very like this all too often – but not from you of course, just most of the other students!

The question is: What does the boss want you to do?

My point is that vague words lead to misunderstanding at best, total confusion at worst. Here are some of the meanings that students seem, from the context, to give to these words.

- **Address:** to identify, find the cause of, offer recommendations on, solve, rectify, improve, innovate.
- **Issues:** points for discussion (which could be anything from a potential merger/acquisition or impending bankruptcy to the provision of an office coffee machine) problems, disputes, misunderstandings, failure of compliance, or brainstorming for innovative ideas.
- **Areas:** Could be sales areas, areas of technology, functions, on-site locations, geographical areas, or areas of expertise.



Misundertanding

(www.englishonline.org.cn)

Other words that cause problems include management and realize. I **realize** that it is common practice to use 'management' to mean 'managers' or 'the management team', but when a student has used it to mean all managers, executive managers, the board of

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The Hong Kong Skyline

directors, the actual management (what managers do) and line managers, then tells me that management needs 'addressing', should I understand that line managers need training? That the management system needs restructuring? That ideas are being sought to improve the way the business is being run? Or...?

'Realize' has many meanings, but the two most common are to understand clearly or to convert into cash. So if the CEO realized the capital gain on the idle plant, did he find out it is worth more than he thought? Or did he sell it and convert the value into cash?

Avoiding vague words will improve the clarity of your message.

Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that
they do not make more clear.

Joseph Joubert
1754-1824

16 Ways to Get Motivated When You're in a Slump (Another great posting from www.zenhabits.com)

1. **One Goal.** Whenever I've been in a slump, I've discovered that it's often because I have too much going on in my life. I'm trying to do too much. And it saps my energy and motivation. It's probably the most common mistake that people make: they try to take on too much, try to accomplish too many goals at once. You cannot maintain energy and focus (the two most important things in accomplishing a goal) if you are trying to do two or more goals at once. It's not possible — I've tried it many times. You have to choose one goal, for now, and focus on it completely. I know, that's hard. Still, I speak from experience. You can always do your other goals when you've accomplished your One Goal.
2. **Find inspiration.** Inspiration, for me, comes from others who have achieved what I want to achieve, or who are currently doing it. I read other blogs, books, magazines. I Google my goal, and read success stories. Zen Habits is just one place for inspiration, not only from me but from many readers who have achieved amazing things.

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3. **Get excited.** This sounds obvious, but most people don't think about it much: if you want to break out of a slump, get yourself excited about a goal. But how can you do that when you don't feel motivated? Well, it starts with inspiration from others (see above), but you have to take that excitement and build on it. For me, I've learned that by talking to my wife about it, and to others, and reading as much about it as possible, and visualizing what it would be like to be successful (seeing the benefits of the goal in my head), I get excited about a goal. Once I've done that, it's just a matter of carrying that energy forward and keeping it going.
4. **Build anticipation.** This will sound hard, and many people will skip this tip. But it really works. It helped me quit smoking after many failed attempts. If you find inspiration and want to do a goal, don't start right away. Many of us will get excited and want to start today. That's a mistake. Set a date in the future — a week or two, or even a month — and make that your Start Date. Mark it on the calendar. Get excited about that date. Make it the most important date in your life. In the meantime, start writing out a plan. And do some of the steps below. Because by delaying your start, you are building anticipation, and increasing your focus and energy for your goal.
5. **Post your goal.** Print out your goal in big words. Make your goal just a few words long, like a mantra ("Exercise 15 mins. Daily"), and post it up on your wall or refrigerator. Post it at home and work. Put it on your computer desktop. You want to have big reminders about your goal, to keep your focus and keep your excitement going. A picture of your goal (like a model with sexy abs, for example) also helps.
6. **Commit publicly.** None of us likes to look bad in front of others. We will go the extra mile to do something we've said publicly. For example, when I wanted to run my first marathon, I started writing a column about it in my local daily newspaper. The entire island of Guam (pop. 160K) knew about my goal. I couldn't back down, and even though my motivation came and went, I stuck with it and completed it. Now, you don't have to commit to your goal in your daily newspaper, but you can do it with friends and family and co-workers, and you can do it on your blog if you have one. And hold yourself accountable — don't just commit once, but commit to giving progress updates to everyone every week or so.
7. **Think about it daily.** If you think about your goal every day, it is much more likely to become true. To this end, posting the goal on your wall or computer desktop (as mentioned above) helps a lot. Sending yourself daily reminders also helps. And if you can commit to doing one small thing to further your goal (even just 5 minutes) every single day, your goal will almost certainly come true.
8. **Get support.** It's hard to accomplish something alone. When I decided to run my marathon, I had the help of friends and family, and I had a great running community on Guam who encouraged me at 5K races and did long

runs with me. When I decided to quit smoking, I joined an online forum and that helped tremendously. And of course, my wife Eva helped every step of the way. I couldn't have done these goals without her, or without the others who supported me. Find your support network, either in the real world or online, or both.

9. **Realize that there's an ebb and flow.** Motivation is not a constant thing that is always there for you. It comes and goes, and comes and goes again, like the tide. But realize that while it may go away, it doesn't do so permanently. It will come back. Just stick it out and wait for that motivation to come back. In the meantime, read about your goal (see below), ask for help (see below), and do some of the other things listed here until your motivation comes back.
10. **Stick with it.** Whatever you do, don't give up. Even if you aren't feeling any motivation today, or this week, don't give up. Again, that motivation will come back. Think of your goal as a long journey, and your slump is just a little bump in the road. You can't give up with every little bump. Stay with it for the long term, ride out the ebbs and surf on the flows, and you'll get there.
11. **Start small. Really small.** If you are having a hard time getting started, it may be because you're thinking too big. If you want to exercise, for example, you may be thinking that you have to do these intense workouts 5 days a week. No — instead, do small, tiny, baby steps. Just do 2 minutes of exercise. I know, that sounds wimpy. But it works. Commit to 2 minutes of exercise for one week. You may want to do more, but just stick to 2 minutes. It's so easy, you can't fail. Do it at the same time, every day. Just some crunches, 2 pushups, and some jogging in place. Once you've done 2 minutes a day for a week, increase it to 5, and stick with that for a week. In a month, you'll be doing 15-20. Want to wake up early? Don't think about waking at 5 a.m. Instead, think about waking 10 minutes earlier for a week. That's all. Once you've done that, wake 10 minutes earlier than that. Baby steps.
12. **Build on small successes.** Again, if you start small for a week, you're going to be successful. You can't fail if you start with something ridiculously easy. Who can't exercise for 2 minutes? (If that's you, I apologize.) And you'll feel successful, and good about yourself. Take that successful feeling and build on it, with another baby step. Add 2-3 minutes to your exercise routine, for example. With each step (and each step should last about a week), you will feel even more successful. Make each step really, really small, and you won't fail. After a couple of months, your tiny steps will add up to a lot of progress and a lot of success.
13. **Read about it daily.** When I lose motivation, I just read a book or blog about my goal. It inspires me and reinvigorates me. For some reason, reading helps motivate and focus you on whatever you're reading about. So read about your goal every day, if you can, especially when you're not feeling motivated.

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14. **Call for help when your motivation ebbs.** Having trouble? Ask for help. Email me. Join an online forum. Get a partner to join you. Call your mom. It doesn't matter who, just tell them your problems, and talking about it will help. Ask them for advice. Ask them to help you overcome your slump. It works.
15. **Think about the benefits, not the difficulties.** One common problem is that we think about how hard something is. Exercise sounds so hard! Just thinking about it makes you tired. But instead of thinking about how hard something is, think about what you will get out of it. For example, instead of thinking about how tiring exercise can be, focus on how good you'll feel when you're done, and how you'll be healthier and slimmer over the long run. The benefits of something will help energize you.
16. **Squash negative thoughts; replace them with positive ones.** Along those lines, it's important to start monitoring your thoughts. Recognize negative self-talk, which is really what's causing your slump. Just spend a few days becoming aware of every negative thought. Then, after a few days, try squashing those negative thoughts like a bug, and then replacing them with a corresponding positive thought. Squash, "This is too hard!" and replace it with, "I can do this! If that wimp Leo can do it, so can I!" It sounds corny, but it works. Really.

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