

Smart Way to Improve Your

MIND & GRADES

*A Revolutionary Plan to Get into University by
Standing Out(Without Burning Out)*

B E N A R D M A K A A

Smart Way

To Improve Your

Mind and Grades

By

BENARD MAKAA

SMART WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR MIND AND GRADES

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PREFACE

This book's writing came about in 2014 after spending some time with my cousins as I shared a few insights about high school studies and my experiences with them. I could not exhaustively tell them everything by word of mouth then. Thus I purposed in my mind to compile in this book all insights and advice I ever received towards my studies and present them as a single book for reference by students.

Chapter two to chapter six majorly deal with the Improvement of our minds through several techniques.

Chapter five and six exhaustively deal with the improvement of grades, especially for high school students. Methods, techniques and insights towards this objective have been suggested.

The book can be read in stages. For those interested in improving their grades, chapter 5& 6 will suffice. For the general improvement of our minds reading the entire book is recommended.

I hope that readers will find this book useful in their academic and life endeavours.

Any suggestions towards the improvement of this book are welcome.

Eng. Benard Mumo Makaa, PE

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FOREWORD

I have known the author for several years. Being familiar with his education and family background, I can honestly confirm that the methods and insights he has suggested in this book work and his life and education story attest to that fact.

He is passionate about education and excellency in the same. I have participated with him in several mentorship sessions for high school students, and his input has been invaluable.

I urge all who will read this to put the suggestions to practice and reap the fruits.

Martin Sila, Geospatial Engineer.

Former student, University of Nairobi.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To God for His guidance, providence and blessings.

To my grandmother, Redemphta, who first taught me how to draw, read and do long divisions.

To my cousins, Boniface and Mwende, who provoked me into writing this book.

To my friends for their encouragement, support and guidance.

To my publisher RealText Publishers and layout designer, Lucas Okoth, for his patience and guidance.

And to all truth seekers and authors who ennoble us by enriching thoughts and wisdom via this medium of writing.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Life is not easy for any of us. We must have perseverance and, above all, confidence in ourselves. We must have perseverance and, above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained."

~ Marie Curie.

For anyone who starts on a journey, a direction to his or her destination is needed. We all need a compass to show us the way. Many are those who get lost in the way because they did not seek to know the direction.

In this compilation, I describe rules and principles upon which a student may follow. I have applied these rules to my studies, and the benefits thereof are self-evident. I consciously and unconsciously applied them even in my primary school studies. As a result, I improve my grades from being a C student (used to score an average of 250/500) in standard 7 to an A student in standard 8. This is amplified by the fact that I scored 407/500 in my K.C.P.E. and the gap to the next best pupil was 118 marks. I won a Jomo Kenyatta Foundation scholarship which saw me through high school education.

Many are those who get lost in the way because they did not seek to know the direction.

I continued with the same streak in high school and ended up being the 2nd best boy student in my K.C.S.E. in the former Eastern Province.

After finishing high school, I had the privilege of teaching three different high-schools before joining the university in May 2010. I also privately tutored several students in the sciences, mathematics

and languages. All the insights I received during this period have been incorporated into this book.

Much of what I have written here is also a reproduction of insights, pieces of advice and directions I wrote down in my notebooks to act as a guide in my studies. I hope other students (especially high school students) shall find them useful.

While motivation and inspiration play a significant role in academic excellence, proper guidelines for approaching a particular subject are also crucial. Several chapters are dedicated to this.

I desire that students find principles they can apply to their studies in their unique manner. I have attempted to enumerate the principles and, where necessary specific solutions are given.

I have endeavoured to use as precise language as possible. The content is divided into several chapters/sections for easier reading and reference.

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act but a habit."

~ Aristotle.

Before we begin, you can go through one of my favourite poems – Desiderata – by Max Ehrmann:

DESIDERATA

Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons. Speak your truth quietly and clearly, and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story. Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexations to the spirit.

If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter, for always, there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism. Be yourself. Especially, do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love, for, in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is perennial as the grass.

Take kindly to the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth. Nurture strength of spirit to shield you from sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be, and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

~ *Max Ehrmann c.1920*

Chapter 2

ON READING AND BOOKS

"Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counsellors and the most patient of teachers."

~Charles W. Eliot

"I find television to be very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go in the other room and read a book."

~Groucho Marx

When you read, your mind must work by taking in letters and connecting them to form words. Words make themselves into thoughts and concepts. We develop our minds by reading, thinking, and figuring out things for ourselves.

*"If we
commit
ourselves to
reading,
thus
increasing
our
knowledge,
only God
limits how
far we can
go in this
world."*

It will be a good habit to start reading good books. Wise friends, mentors and teachers can recommend books for your reading. This will save time for you. Books of importance, especially academic books, can be read in a more general and cursory way. This will give one a glimpse of what to expect from the book before delving deeply into it. One can start by reading the preface and taking a survey of the table of contents.

As you read, mark what is new and unknown to you and develop the habit of reviewing those chapters, pages or paragraphs. At least take a careful review of all the lines or paragraphs you marked and recollect those sections that you thought truly valuable.

For books that do not have an index to them or a good table of contents, you can make one for yourself. Not with exactness as to include the sense of every page and paragraph, but is sufficient in your index to take notice only of those parts of the book which are new to you. Or which you think well written and worthy of your remembrance or review.

Do not have preconceptions regarding books before you read them. Do not have determination beforehand either for or against it or with a settled resolution to believe or disbelieve, confirm, or oppose whatsoever it says. Always read with a design to lay your mind open to truth and embrace whosoever you find it to reject every falsehood.

Life is too short and time too precious to read every new book quite over to find that it is not worthy of reading.

Develop a habit of reading books wherever you are, use that idle time you have to develop your mind. One of my favourite writers, Ellen G White, whom I will quote extensively, counsels us:

"Upon the right improvement of our time depends on our success in acquiring knowledge and mental culture. The cultivation of the intellect need not be prevented by poverty, humble origin, or unfavourable surroundings. Only let the moments be treasured. A few moments here and a few there that might be frittered away in aimless talk; the morning hours so often wasted in aimless talk; the morning hours so often wasted in bed; the time spent in travelling on trams or railway cars, or waiting at the station; the moments of waiting for meals, waiting for those who are tardy in keeping an appointment-**if a book was kept at hand, and these fragments of the time were improved in the study, reading, or careful thought, what might not be accomplished?** A resolute purpose, persistent industry, and careful economy of time will enable men to acquire knowledge

and mental discipline which will qualify them for any position of influence and usefulness."

Reading good books can greatly inspire and motivate a student as they pursue their studies. **Biographies** and **autobiographies** are examples. Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, for example, will show a youth on how 'By cleverness and hard work he (Benjamin Franklin) changed himself from a poorly educated (formal education) son of a candle maker into a world-famous scientist, diplomat, philosopher and writer'. The same can be said of Michael Faraday (father of electricity) and Andrew Carnegie (The great American Industrialist and Philanthropist).

And what shall I more say? For the time and space would fail me to tell of Benjamin Carson, Wangari Maathai, and so many others who pursued and achieved their dreams through reading and hard work.

If we commit ourselves to read, thus increasing our knowledge, only God limits how far we can go in this world.

Through reading and Self-determination, Benjamin Franklin wrote down several virtues which he tried to follow. I will outline them here:

These names of virtues, with their precepts, were:

1. **TEMPERANCE.** Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. **SILENCE.** Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. **ORDER.** Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. **RESOLUTION.** Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.

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5. **FRUGALITY.** Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6. **INDUSTRY.** Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. **SINCERITY.** Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. **JUSTICE.** Wrong none by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. **MODERATION.** Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. **CLEANLINESS.** Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11. **TRANQUILLITY.** Be not disturbed at trifles or accidents common or unavoidable.
12. **CHASTITY.** Rarely use venery, but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. **HUMILITY.** Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

This is what he wrote later, '...on the whole, though I never arrived at the perfection I had been so ambitious of obtaining but fell far short of it, yet I was, by the endeavour a better and a happier man than I otherwise should have been If I had not attempted it. It may be well my posterity should be informed that to this little artifice, with the blessing of God, their ancestor owed the constant felicity of his life...I hope therefore that some of my descendants may follow the example and reap benefits.'

With little modifications of the above virtues, I applied myself to following the Benjamin Franklin example, and I am still reaping the fruits thereof.

Good Reading habits

1. Know what you want to read, why you want to read it, where you will find the reading material, how you will read it and when you want to read it.
2. Be the kind of reader who does not:
 - ✗ Move his or her index finger along the printed lines as this slows down the reading process.
 - ✗ Say the words or letters, either silently or in a low voice (This bad reading habit is called vocalizing)
 - ✗ Point to each word or individual letter.
3. Read when you are motivated, fresh and alert. Forced reading causes tiredness and boredom and results in little or no comprehension.
4. Read a book so that you understand the passage clearly. Do this by trying to understand how words and sentences are used.

To achieve extraordinary results, unconventional methods need to be applied. In my high school studies, I read and made notes ahead of my teachers (even though I could barely understand some of the topics). For tough subjects, I could have several notebooks for different topics.

I read and made notes ahead of my teachers ...

For example, in Form one and Form two, my average grade for English was a C. I knew I had to work hard to get an A in English in my KCSE. I bought four notebooks to cover Literature (Oral and written), English Grammar, Writing (formal and informal). I methodically read and summarized all English textbooks and revision books available in our school. I read

Higher Flyer, Test It and Fix It, Head Start, Integrated English, Golden Tips, Top-Mark series, etc. By the end of form three, I was getting an average of A (plain) in English. I applied this technique to all other subjects, and by the time I was doing my KCSE, I was confident of getting an A in all my subjects, and I was proven right.

The buck stops with you, whether you are going to succeed or not. You will have yourself to blame.

YOURSELF TO BLAME.

If things go bad for you-
And make you a bit ashamed,
Often you will find out that,
You have yourself to blame.

Swiftly we ran to mischief,
And then the bad luck came,
Why do we fault others?
We have ourselves to blame...

Whatever happens to us,
Here are the words we say,
"Had it not been so and so
Things wouldn't have gone that way."

And if you are short of friends,
I'll tell you to do...
Make an examination.
You'll find the faults in you...
You are the captain of your ship,
So agree with the same
If you travel downward,
You have yourself to blame.
<Anon>

Chapter 3

ON CLASS ATTENDANCE AND LISTENING TO TEACHERS

"Value your listening and reading time at roughly ten times your talking time. This will assure you that you are on a course of continuous learning and self-improvement."

*~ Gerald McGinnis,
President and CEO of Respiroics, Inc.*

Teachers' assistance is necessary for most students and especially beginners. Dr Isaac Watts points out, "Books are a sort of dumb teachers, they point out the way to learning: but if we read under any doubt or mistake, they cannot answer sudden questions, or explain present doubts and difficulties."

As a student, you are supposed to attend all classes with constancy and care to listen to. In case you have missed a class due to unavoidable reasons, ensure you compensate for that loss by doubling your study efforts. Follow up with the students to establish what was taught. Collect and review the notes, read extensively

"You should behave yourself so well as to gain the affection and ear of your teacher"

other textbooks related to the subject. This will help cement the points and principles to your brain. Discuss with your teacher and fellow students if you encounter any challenge in the course of your studies. You should never satisfy yourself with mere attendance in your teacher's classes unless you take up the sense and meaning and understand the things he/she teaches.

Be keen with your manners and behave well to gain your teacher and your peers' love and listening ear. This will give you the freedom to ask questions and discuss your sentiments, doubts and difficulties with him/her.

Aim to maintain a respectful opinion of your teacher and heedfully listen to his instructions, as one willing to be led by a more experienced guide.

Tips on how to engage teachers in-case you have wronged them:

- ✘ **Sincerely apologize if you ever wronged the teacher.**

This is one of the most important things to do to get off the trap of enmity. An apology will set you free from guilt and regrets only if you do it genuinely and warmly.

- ✘ **Engage the teacher in your plans to succeed –consult them.**

The best way to strike a rapport with teachers is making them part of your success by consulting them. Consult widely; on social, academic, economic, and any other issue worth their attention.

With such consistency contact, the teacher finds themselves committing to help you all time.

If you fear going alone to consult, get your group members to accompany you.

When teachers notice you are so interested in your academics' success, most will offer to help you, and those who may not give that offer will just give you your way.

- ✘ **Avoid anything that would make you rub shoulders with the teacher.**

Teachers are human beings with feelings and emotions. Some hold grudges; others forgive.

In that line, avoid any activity-done in a group or otherwise that would make you lock horns with the same teacher.

This will ensure there is no reason they would find to disturb your piece. You will, therefore, find it easy to knock on their door and surprise them with questions that you could not answer during your group discussion.

✦ **Dealing with sexual harassment and sexism.**

Sexual harassment of a student is severe and a cause for grievance. See your principal if a teacher makes inappropriate or threatening remarks of a sexual nature to you or others. No teacher should ask to date a student or otherwise pressure students to become involved in a personal relationship. Sexism, which implies that the teacher has a bias for males or females' ability and denigrates the other gender, also deserves to be reported. Such comments as "I don't know why women just can't understand Chemistry" are not only false but may cause students to lose confidence in their abilities and to fail to establish a meaningful relationship with the teacher.

In summary, if you feel you are not being treated fairly, see the teacher first. If you don't get satisfaction or feel the situation is too touchy to discuss with the instructor, see the principal or his/her deputy.

To get more technics and insights on dealing with teachers and people, I would recommend that you read "**How to win friends and influence people**" by **Dale Carnegie**. It is one of the classical masterpieces which completely engages your mind as you read it. It is full of real historical examples which illustrate the principles advocated therein by the Author.