

# SECTION ON EDUCATION AND LEGISLATION, AMERICAN PHARMACEUTICAL ASSOCIATION

## HOW TO STUDY.\*

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Mental control is the underlying basis of concentration and concentration is the ability to pay sustained attention to what one hears or reads or studies. We all possess the faculty of concentration, but in only few persons is it well developed. Its development should be begun early in childhood. Many high-school graduates and others of equal or greater maturity have come to my notice who lack to a deplorable degree the capacity of attention. They lack the power to focus attention, to permit their minds to become impressed with what is said to them. No curriculum is adequate that does not necessitate the development of the power of concentration by the enforcement of sustained and intensive attention. I say "enforcement" because experience has taught me that some sort of compulsion is necessary with the average child and older students.

Patanjali is quoted as giving four main stages in the development of the mind: "First, the butterfly mind, constantly flitting from one thing to another; second, the confused mind full of hasty impulses, illy considered thought and immature ideas; third, the mind dominated by a fixed idea, concentrated; fourth, the fixed idea dominated by the man, or the mind under perfect control of the Ego."

This classification, made many centuries ago, holds good to-day; I know of no better modern one. Most students, indeed most men and women, are in the first and second stages; a few are in the third and only occasionally does one find any member of the fourth. Many influences of to-day tend to keep in or put people back into the first and second stages. Witness the schedule in most of the public schools in which subjects are changed every fifteen, thirty, or at best forty minutes; the bulky newspapers of which most of us can read only the headlines; the tremendous increase in the short story literature at the expense of the old and new classics; the movies; etc. While none of these are wholly bad in themselves, in their combined and increasing totality they tend most disastrously away from that concentration of mind which is so essential for individual and national success and growth. Add to this the abstractions, interruptions and diversions of a great part of our average daily life and you have the conditions that create and maintain the butterfly mind, the superficial, shallow, unconstructive, uncreative, leaning, confused mind that is a detriment to the possessor and a distinct liability to the community because it is so numerous and keeps down the average of intelligence and in that measure retards national and universal, to say nothing of the respective individual, development.

In the two higher stages probably only very few, if any, can control and direct all their thoughts, but happily some by persistent effort and will-power have trained their minds to create and control their thought and to direct or focus it

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according to the wisdom they have. By this power they also, naturally, restrain or regulate, in short, govern their actions and their emotions. They have a *dominating, persistent, constructive will-power*. This brings me to the point of my remarks, namely, that the concentration of the mind upon a given purpose, which is so necessary in the prosecution of study, is based upon a determined, resolute, relentless will-power and sticktoitiveness. I would despair, if I were not convinced that every normal individual can with more or less success develop will-power. This conviction grows out of the fact that I have often had the privilege of helping individuals develop this power. There are those, first, who recognize the existence of will-power: latent in some, sluggish in others and fairly well developed in still others; second, those who do not, or who are hopelessly and helplessly indifferent as to its existence. Because I must make my time and energy bear the greatest fruit possible I have never devoted any of them to the latter class. They constitute a field for the most helpful kind of home missionary work for which unfortunately I have no time. Of the former class nearly everyone who came under my direction succeeded at least to a point enabling him or her to graduate and later to pass the board.

You ask what method do I employ? Mostly heart to heart talks with the individuals in which I call attention to the latent abilities in all of us and how their development is dependent upon personal, individual effort and persistent work backed up by the will to do and to accomplish. It is a regrettable fact that most young people nowadays are more anxious to succeed financially than mentally or spiritually, so I dwell on the concentration of mind and will-power as indispensable to the success of the business as well as the professional activity of pharmacists. This I do in the hope that when they have developed some will-power they will also have gained some wisdom to direct their will-power to other or additional ends. I emphasize the fact that the ability to concentrate can easily be developed by giving close attention and the best in us to every little task or activity as well as to the larger, for the little tasks make up the bulk of our lives and by doing them well we more easily create the permanent habit of doing all things well. I also speak of the fact that nature takes care of our physical development, but that it is our individual task and duty and privilege to stimulate our mental growth and that our mental development determines largely our success in life and normally our moral and spiritual evolution, for it is true that with mental increase comes wisdom which prompts a more universal augmentation of our concepts. I mention also the necessity of conserving our energies to get affirmative results from them rather than fritter them away on unimportant and frivolous activities. One of my arguments that usually brings an awakening to the mind of an indifferent student is the statement that the difference between the person who concentrates his whole energy and attention upon his task, be it little or great, and the one who does things indifferently and carelessly is the difference between a systematic, conscious development and heedless, easy drifting with the current; the difference between controlling and being controlled; the difference between the master and the servant.

I also make it clear to the student that if he has the idea that his teachers and others have done all the thinking that is necessary and that he need, therefore, merely memorize statements or quotations, he must abandon it forthwith and

instead decide and learn to think for himself. The concentration upon his work must include sequential, related thinking and reasoning. The student must learn that his mind is an instrument given him to use and develop under the dominance of his wisely directed will. I point out that thinking is sequential and should be based upon reasoning; that each step in thinking a problem out is based upon and made easier by the preceding one and that once this power of building up original thought in his own mind and of feeding consistently his imagination is developed, he will have acquired the power of concentrated attention and application that will make the solution of each subsequent problem progressively easier. I try to be convincing and to obtain the person's good-will and his promise to let me help him and continue my interest in him. I soon learn whether the person in question has the ability to carry out my suggestions or advice. Quite frequently I find a student who is self-willed and obstinate but who qualifies under compulsion. I am an advocate of judicious and wise compulsion and believe it was a serious mistake to eliminate corporal punishment from the schools. While I was an advocate of the elimination at the time, I would now restore it and regulate and control it. I see continually the result of a lack of sufficient compulsion in our public schools in some of the students who come to us and to other colleges. Indeed, many admit that they did not work at school because they did not have to. Some, realizing their deficiencies and handicaps, are incensed at their teachers and parents for not having made them study harder. The compulsion I use consists in assigning certain appropriate home study to be done within a specified time or within a time that requires close application to the work. This work is made a requirement. It is graded and made to fit individual cases, always with the end in view of increasing the student's capacity for concentration and continuity of application and work. To do this and make this requirement is, I believe, a legitimate function of a dean. Of course, this sort of thing ought not to be necessary and would not be if the common and high schools, and parents had done their full duties but the necessity exists and I administer upon it as best I can. It must be recognized that many, probably the majority of students, are mentally and physically indolent if not actually lazy; some are merely slow. But it must also be recognized that they are not wholly the product of their own volition; their environment and especially their lack of training are responsible. The great majority are under insufficient discipline or under none at all and the blame rests upon the parents or those in *loco parentis* and secondarily upon those responsible for our school systems.

In addition to this individual work with those who need it I do some work with the classes along similar lines, including several lectures on psychology, ethics, logic, philosophy, etc., but of this I will speak separately some other time.

Now you may have gained the impression that I am a hard taskmaster, but the fact is nevertheless that I know of none of my students whose good-will and more I have not.

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