Learning on Steroids:

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

by Scott Young

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

First, I'd like to thank you for signing up for the *Learning on Steroids* program. Most people don't even bother searching out tactics for learning better. Just by downloading, you've separated yourself from the majority of mediocre students.

Of course, searching out tactics isn't what this program is about. This program is aimed at **implementing** rapid learning strategies in your life.

Implementation requires not just reading, but sweat and hard work.

I know, I know, nobody wants to work hard (and I'll give you tips to make integration as easy as possible). But even if you had the best jiu jitsu master as an instructor, you'd still need to practice kicks and chops.

So let's make a deal: I'll work tirelessly to make sure you get the **best rapid-learning-jiu-jitsu instruction**, so long as you provide the **kicks and chops**.

What is Rapid Learning?

My first full book on holistic learning was entitled [Learn More, Study Less](). To me, those four words describe my philosophy of rapid learning.

First, notice that *Learn More* comes before *Study Less*. To me, this philosophy isn't simply about cutting time from your studies so you can watch mindless television and let your brain rot. Ultimately it's about learning more, and **wanting** to learn more.

Second, the title in my opinion points out a problem many

students face: they feel **learning** and **studying** are the same thing. They aren't, and often they pay the price from wasteful study sessions when exam time comes around.

Finally, I want the emphasis to be on **learning, not just getting good grades**.

I dislike most academic institutions as a source of education. Frankly, they suck at it. Most schools are lazy, boring and ineffective at teaching. Not always true, but it certainly can be.

Getting good grades sometimes involves learning. Other times it involves adopting "cramming" techniques and various short-cuts to pass tests. Unfortunately, many students leave university still employing these short-cuts and find they don't work in real life situations.

Rapid learning isn't about school short-cuts. It's about learning faster in every aspect of life. Learning faster, because you're learning better.

A Quick Introduction to Holistic Learning

So what is this strategy to "learn better"?

For the people who have already read *Learn More, Study Less*, feel free to skip ahead to the next chapter. This section will recap what holistic learning is and why it works.

Holistic learning is the opposite of rote memorization.

Rote memorization, if you've ever tried to memorize for a test, involves repeating facts or data to yourself multiple times in the hopes you'll cough it up later during a test.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

Rote memorization works on the **"hard-drive" model** of human memory. The idea here being that human brains work like a hard-drive, and that you can save data in one place and recall it later with perfect accuracy.

Obviously, there are serious holes in the hard-drive theory of human memory. Most notably, that this isn't how brains learn things.

If you had to save a file on your hard drive 5-10 times, and only have a 50% certainty you could find it when you needed it, you would take the computer back to the store and ask for a refund. Yet many people are perfectly happy using this approach when trying to learn new material.

The reason the hard-drive theory fails is because humans don't learn that way. Human brains are interwoven neural

networks. Memories aren't stored serially along a hard drive, but interwoven with every other idea, linked together in complex webs.

Holistic learning works on the **"web" theory** of human memory. That ideas aren't saved like a hard-drive, but woven together.

With holistic learning, you don't even bother trying the memorization approach. Instead of repeating information to yourself 5-10 times, you look for 5-10 connections to remember.

For example, if I need to remember a fact, say that human eyes have 3 different types of cone cells for detecting color, I could do this the hard-drive way, and just read the information over numerous times.

OR, I could do it the holistic way. I could think about how televisions have three different pixel colors also. I could remind myself that there are three primary colors. I could even learn more about the subject and discover that most mammals only have two color cones and birds often have four.

The more interconnected an idea is, the easier it will be to retrieve for a test. The more interconnected an idea is, that easier it is to actually USE the idea in your life (isn't that the point of learning?).

The Wikipedia Theory of Learning

I'm going to give another metaphor for holistic learning. Why? Because I like metaphors, and people "get" ideas by metaphor (more on that later).

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

For this example, think of Wikipedia. Now, I want you to imagine that the online encyclopedia is exactly the same as it is now, except that there is no search feature. (And no, you can't hop onto Google to search Wikipedia either).

This means the only way to find the information you want is through the links in-between pages. In order to retrieve information on "Steve Jobs" I might have to go from a page on Microsoft to Apple Inc. to Steve Jobs biographical page.

Obviously, the easiest information to retrieve has the most hyperlinks to it. Finding a page on *dwarf lanternsharks* will be more difficult than say, a page on the *United States*.

Now imagine that the number of hyperlinks in Wikipedia were reduced to one tenth. Nine out of every ten inter-page links were destroyed. Now, how difficult would it be to find different pages?

I'd like to argue that **your brain is like a search-disabled Wikipedia**. Tons of information, for sure, but not always the clearest route to link it together. However, if you have more links between pages in your mind, it is far easier to find the information you're looking for.

Rapid Learning Principles

I'd like to quickly summarize some of the main principles (beyond linking ideas) featured in *Learn More, Study Less*. This isn't a replacement for the book, but just to bring non-readers up to speed:

Learn Things Once

I'll come at this idea again, but the main way you'll learn

faster is by not having to learn things 2, 3 or 15 times before they stick. Learning things once is the ideal, but when you start, even cutting the number of learning repetitions you normally take in half is a huge improvement.

Interest = Connections

The more interested you are in a course, the easier it will be to make connections. The more connections you make in a course to your actual life, the more interesting it will seem. This means two things:

1. Boring classes can be made less boring by learning holistically.
2. Holistic learning is easier on topics you enjoy.

Not all Information Was Created Equal

In Learn More, Study Less, I identify 5 main types of information:

- **Arbitrary** - dates, facts, names with no logical relationship

- **Opinion** - non-factual information (according to so-and-so, author of such-and-such...)

- **Process** - information as a skill (coding, designing, etc.)

- **Concrete** - tangible information

- **Abstract** - intangible information (although often with deep logical relationships)

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

Of course, in addition to information-based learning tasks, there is also skill acquisition. So learning karate or other non-info learning tasks could create even more learning categories.

Simply put, **holistic learning works best on concrete and abstract information**. Holistic learning is easiest when there is a high potential for deeper logical structure. Physics may be complicated, but the ideas are all interwoven and connected to the phenomenon of the world.

Holistic learning is at its worst on arbitrary information (which is difficult to connect) and process information (which requires a minimum level of practice). This doesn't mean holistic learning can't work, just that you often need to supplement your learning diet to get the best results.

Think of abstract (like calculus) and concrete (like kineseology) as the whole-grain information. Lots of vitamins, minerals and complete nutrition. Arbitrary information is more like the white-bread variety, it will still fill you up, but every now and again you need to eat a carrot.

Holistic Learning in Five Stages

Once again, in *Learn More, Study Less*, I identify 5 major phases of learning holistically. Ideally, in order to master a subject, you should be able to progress any idea through all 5 stages:

1. **Acquire** - Read, listen or see the information.
2. **Understand** - You understand what was written or said, even if it seems hard or complex.

3. **Explore** - You connect the idea to other things you already know in the subject.
4. **Debug** - You make distinctions for where your connections might not apply.
5. **Apply** - You find real-life situations where the information applies and interest you personally.

Most non-holistic learners usually tackle phases 1 and 2 pretty well.

However, it's the last 3 stages that really separate holistic learning from slow learners. When slow learners explore, they make few connections. When they debug, they make few distinctions. And rarely, if ever, do they work to deliberately apply the ideas to their interests.

Most of the techniques I'll discuss are aimed at getting you to push beyond the first two stages and go through all five.

15

Holistic Learning Methods

It's one thing to say "learn by connections", and a completely different thing to actually do it in practice. Once again, I'm going to compare holistic learning to martial arts. Just reading about the principles of jiu jitsu isn't going to help you kick ass.

The real meat of holistic learning comes not just from changing your philosophy, although that is an important first step, but from **changing your habits**.

If you believe connections are important, but when classes come, you still take the same boring notes and when tests come you still cram, then it doesn't matter. Unfortunately, as with jiu jitsu, the difficult part (the sweat-requiring part) isn't principles, it's practice.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

Holistic learning tactics are the ways I've applied the broader holistic learning philosophy to my education. In addition to the summary of techniques I'm going to list below (and the dozen or so featured in *Learn More, Study Less*), I'll be sending you out brief reports on implementing new techniques or mastering old ones every month.

However, I'm not the all-knowing guru of holistic learning, just another student like yourself. I encourage you to invent your own techniques. These techniques aren't commandments, just suggestions.

Many readers have found success adapting and modifying the techniques for their needs. As the challenges of learning are diverse, it helps to create your own style.

Flow-Based Notetaking

Flow-based notetaking is a radical departure from most notetaking styles I've seen. The main idea here is that notetaking is a **tool for learning, not just recording lectures**.

When you take flow-based notes, instead of just writing down the materials, you are organizing ideas and connecting them with one another. Don't worry about mess, focus on connecting ideas and really learning them as they are being presented.

Under most conventional standards, my notes are horrible. They're disorganized, poorly transcribed and lack the nice hierarchical bullet point structure we've all been taught to adhere to.

However, the point of my notes isn't transcription but learning. I use notes to facilitate the learning process, jotting down ideas that occur to me, drawing diagrams to relate the information. Notetaking, for me, is a creative process not a passive one.

Metaphors

The ability to use metaphors is a core holistic learning skill. A metaphor is a literary term where you compare two otherwise dissimilar things.

This book is full of metaphors, so I really practice what I suggest.

You can use metaphors for a wide range of holistic learning tasks:

- **Better understanding an idea**. Taking something abstract and making it concrete.
- **Connecting two different fields**. Linking science to literature or art to history.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

- **Linking within a field**. Connecting a complex physics formula to a simpler formula.
- **Applying ideas**. Using metaphors from your life to connect to the subject material.

Metaphor is a skill that is easy to describe, but requires practice to use effectively. I have a lot to say about metaphors and implementing this skill, much of which is in *Learn More, Study Less*, but even more will be included in upcoming implementation PDFs.

For right now, all I'll suggest for people wanting to pick up this skill:

- **Forget quality, focus on quantity**. People get too self-conscious about their metaphors. Don't worry if it's silly or stupid, just make sure it's creative and interesting.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

- **Tell stories**. Storytelling is rooted in metaphor. If you can make a story out of a subject or information, that will create many workable metaphors.
- **Start small, first**. Metaphors can be simple too. You can liken a differential formula to an integration formula.

But all the tips in the world can't make up for practice. The more metaphors you make, the easier it will be to make them in the future.

Visceralization

Visualization is a popular learning tool which I highly recommend. However, I've found it often helps to go one step further.

Visceralization is a portmanteau of visceral and visualization. The goal isn't just to create mental images, but to create mental sensations. Mix sound, smell, touch and body movements to an idea.

Okay, for the less-creative types, this may sound vague and New Agey, so I'll give a non-vague example:

I've used this technique for learning how to do the determinant of a 2x2 matrix. The process involves multiplying the

top left and bottom right corners and subtracting the top right and bottom left corners.

To visceralize this, I imagined moving my hands through the matrix, with one hand I felt weight being added as I moved it from top left to bottom right. With the other hand I felt it being drained as I moved it from top right to bottom left.
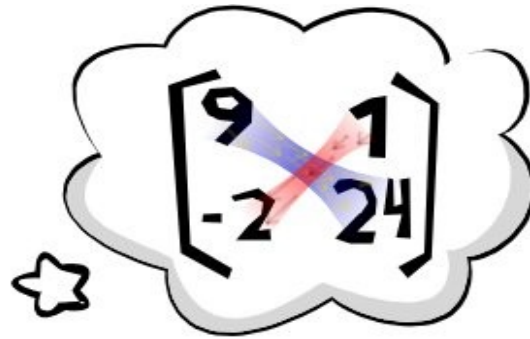
Simple visualization is a good starting point. You don't always need to add sound and motion, but it can help, especially if you have a different learning preference.

Diagramming

Even easier than visualization is diagramming. This is a core component of my flow-based notetaking routines and it can be a good intermediate step to visualization.

The simplest diagrams simply connect ideas together with arrows. Making flow charts (or mind maps) is a good way to associate concepts and link ideas together. I feel this is Holistic Learning Lite, as it is fairly easy to do and helps you associate ideas.

Even better diagrams make richer cohesion of ideas in an easier format to remember. While linking ideas with arrows is helpful, creating a single image or model to organize a large variety of ideas is even better.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

A recent example of this was for an exam I recently took on International Labor Law. A large component of the class was involved with understanding the inner workings of the International Labor Organization.

Why the curriculum was designed around such minute details baffles me, but we don't always have a choice in our learning tasks, unfortunately.

In order to cohere many of these ideas in one diagram, I decided to draw a creature to represent the ILO. It had two heads, a governing body and an office, it's stomach was the general conference. The general conference had four mouths, each representing the two governmental delegates, employer and labor delegates.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

I'll spare you the details of my drawing, but in about 10 minutes, I had associated roughly 15-20 different ideas into one visual graph that didn't just use arrows but metaphors to create connections (the office was leashed to the governing body "head", to symbolize its role).

I'm not saying that your diagrams need to be post-modern art assembling hundreds of ideas to start. Simple arrow diagrams that connect one or two ideas is a great starting place. I'm simply pointing out that diagrams can go far beyond traditional mind maps.

Non-Holistic Learning Techniques

Holistic learning is just one tool in any rapid learner's tool-kit. In addition to holistic learning, I think there are many non-holistic skills that can make learning faster.

I won't dive into these with too much detail in this introduction book. Simply because I'd rather you focus on one or two of the aforementioned holistic techniques and getting started. It's easy to get overwhelmed and do nothing. Start small and finish further is my motto.

Here are some of the techniques I'll be covering in later implementation guides:

- **Speed reading**. Not always about speed, but a great skill to have for any book learning.

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

- **Project-based learning**. This is great for learning new skills, I've used it for business, programming, design and many others with great success.
- **Link method**. Not technically a holistic method (although it relies on some holistic principles) this is a technique used by mentalists to remember huge numbers and perform complex calculations in their head.
- **Peg method**. An advanced version of the link method, it works well for remembering dates and numbers that otherwise have no logical relationship.
- **Learning curve mastery**. A good meta-skill to have is being aware of the learning curve of new pursuits and knowing how to handle each phase of the skill-acquiring process.

Productivity and Getting Organized

I'm not going to write too much about beating procrastination or creating to-do lists. Frankly, I've already written tons of free material and in-depth ebooks online about the topic. In addition, productivity advice is plentiful on the net, so there are many resources to get started.

This doesn't mean that I think productivity is less important than learning strategy. Being the best holistic learner in the world isn't going to make sure your assignments get done on time or your reading is up-to-date. Productivity and organization is invaluable for any learner.

I would guess that at least 50%, but possibly more, of my ability to manage running a business, extracurriculars and a social

life with full-time classes is due to productivity, not just holistic learning.

   While I might not write a whole lot of advice for productivity within this service, that doesn't mean you can't make use of the ass-kicking emails, community support or personal contact with me as a means to get organized.

   Feel free to start 30 Day Trials around keeping to-do lists or organizing your study time. In fact, I encourage it, since productivity gains will make it easier to master the previously mentioned rapid learning skills.

Getting Started: Implementing Rapid Learning in Your Life

The goal of this program isn't ideas: it's to get you to implement those ideas. I don't want you to just feel good after reading this book–I actually want you to learn better.

There are three main tools I'm going to mention repeatedly in the ass-kicking emails and in the implementation guides. Although you're free to modify these tools to fit your life, these are, in my opinion, the absolute best way to go from reading to taking action.

1. Set clear **goals**.
2. Change your **habits**.
3. **Practice** the skills.

First, Set Clear Goals

Why did you sign into this program? Do you want to improve your grades? Do you want to read more books? Do you want to become an expert in your field? Do you simply want to manage the stress associated with heavy coursework?

Without clear goals, it's going to be very difficult to implement these ideas. Simply because whenever you set aside time to practice, your brain is going to scream back at you, ***"Why?"***

If you don't have a good answer for that question, I guarantee the program will not work.

Notice I said "clear" goals. Most learners (and I'm guessing almost all of the subscribers here) have at least a vague notion in their head of why they are starting.

However, if I asked them to write down, in one sentence, exactly what they want to achieve, most people couldn't do it. They would write several sentences, using lots of fuzzy words with nothing specific.

Clarity is important because without being clear, it is too easy to get distracted and give up. Unless you can write down a major learning goal in one sentence, with precise language, you don't have a clear goal yet.

Take a piece of paper (or open Notepad) and try writing, in one sentence, what your goal for learning is.

What are Realistic Expectations?

I imagine some of you may have written, "ace finals without studying," or "get straight A's in a triple-degree program". Honestly, I don't think these goals are realistic starting points. You may achieve them, but that's like a first-time jiu jitsu student signing up to compete in the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

I think it's better to start with smaller goals and work up. Maybe your first goal could simply be to become effective with one of the holistic learning methods. Or you could decide to create a studying schedule so you don't need to cram before exams.

I can't tell you what goals to set, because the goals are uniquely yours. However, I do have a few suggestions that might make them more successful:

Your Introduction to Rapid Learning

Make the goal learning, not saving time. Time saving is a byproduct of successful learning, not the goal. When you learn effectively, you naturally need less time to study. Going at it from the other route (study less -> learn more) usually fails.

Master techniques first. Setting a goal to work on a specific technique will be easier to follow than general improvements. For your first month, you may want to spend all your time focusing on integrating metaphors, or diagrams or visualization into your existing studying routine.

Start small. Focus on one technique to start, and try to focus on one course. This doesn't mean you can't use the methods everywhere, just that if you narrow your focus it will be easier to stay disciplined when you don't feel like doing anything.

Next, Change Your Habits

Once you have an idea of what you want to accomplish, you now need to start changing your habits. As I'll mention in the ass-kicking email you will receive, this is the time to start a new 30 Day Trial.

A **30 Day Trial** is a commitment to performing a habit or practice, every day, for at least 30 days consecutively. This is by far the best method I've uncovered to change behavior.

Use your 30 Day Trial to put your goal into practice. If your goal was to master the metaphor technique in your Biology class, this could be a suitable 30 Day Trial:

"I commit to practicing, for 20 minutes every day, the metaphor technique on my biology notes."

37

These are the chops and kicks I was talking about. Is spending 20 minutes, every day, hard work? You bet. Then again, you're probably already wasting far more time than that because of lousy studying habits, so why not make the investment that will pay you back in learning time?

As I mentioned previously, your 30 Day Trials do not need to be directly associated with the learning methods. Setting trials to organize your studying schedule, setting daily to-do lists or becoming productive are also useful and can help you facilitate later practice on rapid learning techniques.

So what are you waiting for? If you haven't set clear goals, go back up a few pages, get out a piece of paper and do that now.

If you haven't started a 30 Day Trial, what are you *waiting for*?

Finally, Practice the Skills

A problem many would-be rapid learners encounter is falling back on old studying habits. They understand, intellectually, that cramming, rote memorizing and endlessly rereading their notes is inefficient. But, when push comes to shove, they fall back on those past strategies.

This is because they didn't adequately practice the skills. Driving a car is faster than walking. But if you don't know how to drive, you're going to walk everywhere out of necessity.

If you want to use metaphor, flow-based notetaking, visceralization or some other technique, read through the implementation guide and start practicing it in your actual learning.

I recommend setting aside time each day specifically to practice these techniques. The nice thing about practicing is that you'll be learning your subjects better at the same time, so mastering a holistic learning method can also count as time towards studying.

Lets say you wanted to master flow-based notetaking. This is an example of a skill that can be difficult to implement for new learners because it has drawbacks as well as benefits.

The first step wouldn't be to completely change your notetaking style. You might start simply by recopying your existing notes into a flow-based format. This is easier because you don't have to keep up with the lecturer in order to create diagrams, associations and mind maps of the course content.

You may want to practice that step on your notes, every day,

after class. Later, as you improve, you may want to continue your existing notetaking style, but leave a margin for creating your own flow-based connections.

As your comfort level improves (I would practice for at least one month or more) you may want to switch to doing all of your notes in a flow-based style.

Stop Reading, Start Practicing

Let's return to the deal we made earlier: I'll do my best to provide jiu jitsu learning tactics. But you need to practice the chops and kicks.

So what are your first steps?

1. If you haven't already, set clear goals.
2. Set an introductory 30-Day Trial.
3. Start practicing!

If you're stuck on a specific skill, here are my suggestions:

Focus on the easy subjects first. If there is a course you really struggle to understand, trying to use new techniques will be tricky. It's better to start on courses you are a little more comfortable with until you have a grasp of the technique.

Start slowly with skills. Follow the implementation guides and don't try to rush progress. Practice the simple kicks before you work on a roundhouse.

Email me your plan for the 30 Day Trial. I won't be able to give detailed feedback every time, but sending me your plan for

the 30 Day Trial forces you to write it down, organize it, get clarity and commit to it.

If you're really stuck, send me an email. Once again, I recommend going through the above steps first. If you haven't set clear goals, a 30 Day Trial and at least put some effort to follow the implementation guide on a skill, I can't really offer advice.

Thanks for reading the introduction guide. Hopefully you've already taken some steps to implement rapid learning strategies in your life.

Best of luck in life and learning,
Scott Young