WHAT IS THE LEARNING CYCLE?

In its simplest form the learning cycle makes up the steps you go through to learn material in your college courses. The focus here is learning, not memorization. There are times for memorization, but at the college level the big picture becomes important. Understanding the connections among a variety of terms and theories provides you with a better working knowledge of the big picture. Simply put, learning is moving beyond words and definitions into understanding and application.

THE STEPS IN THE LEARNING CYCLE

In brief, the learning cycle moves through understanding who you are as a learner, to the final step of the exam, and then cycles through again, making adjustments to improve your learning.

REFLECTION – To reflect you’ll use metacognition, a term with which you may not be familiar. Metacognition is thinking about your thinking, or in this case your learning. Here at Saint Mary’s you’ll experience a liberal arts education, which means you learn just about everything. In a given semester you may have a math class, a history course, a biology course, a philosophy course, and a speech class. A single learning style or study method will not allow you to be successful in the wide range of courses to which you’ll be exposed. You’ll need to find out what works best for math, and how that’s different from what works best for history.

Reflect on how you learn. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Begin to consider how you’ll overcome those weaknesses. Will you start by using tutoring? Will you form a study group with someone in class? Will you work with the professor outside of class?

GOAL SETTING – You’ll need to set specific goals for each course. This is more than just a grade on an exam. You will need to identify the information that will be important for the exam and determine how much time and effort you’ll need to apply to be successful.

PREPARE & BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE – This begins with reading and becoming familiar with the information that will be presented in class. The importance of reading before your lecture class is two-fold. By reading or pre-reading before class you activate your background knowledge, what you already know about the subject. If you have very little background knowledge, reading provides you exposure to the key information that will be discussed in lecture and an understanding of how that information is tied together. Reading before lecture, however brief, provides your brain with a working model of how the information in lecture should be stored. In short, your brain is activated before your walk into the lecture hall.

EXPOSURE – This is class lecture. Here’s where the instructor presents not only what they want you to know but often times how they want you to know it. Through listening and note-taking you identify what you’ll be tested on later in the semester. You can see how missing a lecture can be detrimental to your grade.

SPACED PRACTICE – Constant, repetitive exposure to the material is what assists your brain in learning the material.
**LEARNING CYCLE**

**HOW IT WORKS**

**REVIEW** – Much more than just rereading your notes, review is creating study tools that help you to focus your learning in the method that your instructor expects. Creating summary sheets, maps, diagrams, or flashcards focus your learning and often times the creation of these tools assists with the learning process.

**ELABORATIVE REHEARSAL** – This is where the deep thinking and understanding comes in.

**PRACTICE** – Practice includes working problems or giving speeches, but also includes teaching. For example, teaching the material to a classmate or roommate ensures your level of understanding. Learning is most effective when you experience it with someone else.

**SELF-MANAGEMENT** – This is your health and well being during the learning process. Are you getting enough sleep? Lack of sleep inhibits learning. Are you eating well? Poor nutrition negatively affects the learning process. Self-management is continuous through the learning process.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES** – If you look on your course syllabus you’ll find this heading. It refers to the goals and outcomes the instructor has listed for the course. The exam is often what decides if you achieved the learning outcomes outlined in your syllabus.

This leads us full circle back to reflection. Once you receive a graded exam, you can look back at what worked and what needs to change for the next exam. An external resource such as an advisor or staff member in the Student Success Center can help you accurately reflect on your learning process.

Each of your courses have a learning cycle. Each course may be at a different point in the cycle, and present different requirements. For a math class you may need to practice problems every night, while for your philosophy course, the reading may consume a good portion of your time. As you are making the final preparations for an exam in history, you may be beginning a new section in biology. Now you can begin to see the complexity of the learning cycle.