

Book Review

How to Study: Practical Tips for Students

By Phil Race

pp248, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003, £9.99, ISBN 1-4051-0693-X

Every Students' Union bookshop has a pile of books entitled 'How to Study', 'How to Write Essays', 'How to get a PhD', etc., I wonder what evidence there is that students actually read such books. From high school onwards they are given "tips" on how to study, how to take notes, how to pass exams, and many university courses or parts of modules offer similar advice on how to do things, how to write winning exam essays, and so on. Those of us who mark their work sometimes wonder whether any of this has any effect whatsoever. Should we recommend such books to students? They are mostly full of common sense and would surely repay an hour or two's study. Most importantly they help students understand how to manage their learning, to see learning as something that can be organized and controlled, and how good techniques and habits can be consciously developed. But is there any evidence that they read books rather than going onto the Internet?

This present book, the first edition of which appeared in 1992, although written by a former Physical Chemist, is not about *laboratory* practical work, but offers general tips about how to succeed at university. It is divided into eight sections and each section contains half a dozen short chapters of 3–4 pages, listing the tips in bold, each followed by a few sentences of explanation. The style is friendly and avuncular. For any student faced with a task – writing an essay, writing a practical report, preparing a presentation – a glance at the *Contents* will in most cases identify a chapter (they are not actually called chapters) that in three pages can help. Worth five minutes study surely!

The sections are entitled: Managing your Learning; Lectures, Labs, Computers, Portfolios and so on; Essays; Presentations; Ups and Downs; Revision – Getting your Act Together; Exams – Before, During and After!; and, Job Hunting. In the Exams section (as an example) there are 'chapters' on preparing for exams, on calculations and problems, on open-book exams, multiple-choice exams and on 'preparing for your re-sit' (presumably for those who have not followed the advice carefully in the first place). Mostly the advice, of course, is for undergraduates, but the sections on presentations, job hunting and 'Giving Due Credit' (about styles used for referencing) will also be of interest to graduates.

All books of this type are in my opinion valuable (and teaching staff should read them too), but this is one of the better (and more comprehensive) of them.

Reviewed by E J Wood

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