

From F to Phi Beta Kappa: Supercharge Your Study Skills

By *Lance O. Ong*

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The focus of Ong's book goes beyond a basic study guide to be used actively by college students. Deeper messages prevail as attention is given to substantive learning versus supporting the mind-set of doing the bare minimum necessary to get by and make the grade. It is crucial that today's student understand that easing through course after course and not truly challenging oneself to learn, grow, and develop is nothing short of a waste of time and resources, especially given the rising costs associated with attending college.

Ong offers many tips to students to incorporate into the successful completion of a college experience. In a very effective manner, the author relays personal accounts of his personal history while giving the reader methods to become organized and attack the academic world armed with skills that might otherwise never develop. This book could be the key to success for many students, as it was created to be an effective resource to assist one with the rigors of academia.

Ong has organized this book into three sections composed of 17 chapters. These chapters are grouped to address one's personal connection to college life and empowerment components, specific techniques and methods students can incorporate for better preparation and performance for coursework, and the need to maintain a healthy perspective during these college years, with additional discussion devoted to available opportunities.

Following a brief introduction, Chapter 1 of Section 1 begins with the acknowledgment that Ong was never really academically challenged until entering college, when he realized more effort was necessary than he had previously given his studies. He addresses the reality that most college course work entails a "heavy, unrelenting homework load" which has "set deadlines and unforgiving consequences" when not properly attended to and managed. A straightforward concept is introduced—that "college is all about becoming the best you can be in life." Yet some students do not accept the challenge of "total development" but seek merely to acquire good grades. In Chapter 2, Ong transitions from personal experiences of failure and success to advice and strategies. Topics shift from concepts such as discipline and stress management to persistence and planning.

In Chapter 4, the author identifies the key elements or core principles necessary to be a successful student. Chapter 5 establishes that the student is responsible for planning to

become a success. It is up to the student to determine what is critically important in each class.

In Chapter 6, Ong emphasizes the importance of attending classes, sitting in the front of the classroom, and keeping a detailed calendar to visually reference when tasks need to be completed. Chapter 8 offers many quick tips about how to succeed in class and an explanation that note taking is a critical method of recording information for later reference, yet is almost a lost art. Ong suggests that students do not focus adequate attention on effective note taking. Chapter 8 also acknowledges the importance of selecting reliable and motivated partners or teammates for group work when possible. Useful tips are provided for working with others whether or not those persons are chosen or assigned.

The next four chapters cover significant areas that should be important to any student. The general ideas discussed focus on preparing and following through on assignments and coursework. These topics are specifically related to class presentations and speeches, papers, exams, and pre- and post-exam activity.

Just as a class shifts from regular semester/quarter assignments, so, too, does Ong. In Chapter 13 he provides assistance in maintaining focus when approaching the end of a course and final examinations. He acknowledges the sense of fatigue and strain which can accompany an exhaustive term. In this chapter, Ong presents in detail several steps in grade calculation. Much less attention is given to stress management and dealing with anxiety.

In Chapter 14, Ong makes excellent points about meeting instructors and getting to know them while not choosing coursework based upon the path of least resistance. He also offers other helpful suggestions about how to appropriately interact with instructors.

As the reader moves into Part 3, Ong shifts attention to staying balanced and maintaining a healthy perspective. Chapter 15 relates mostly to realizing the interconnectedness of various components within one's academic and social life. Specific focus is given to the challenge of continuously improving oneself and addressing efficient study tips. Tips and advice presented in this chapter include applying maximum effort, staying motivated, having a healthy understanding of "tolerant perfection" as defined by Ong, learning from one's errors, and maintaining a healthy mind and body.

Chapter 16 singularly focuses on recognizing the unique opportunities for students to become involved with study abroad travel experiences. Chapter 17 rounds out this book by discussing the importance of staying organized, becoming comfortable with accepting recognition and praise for a job well done, and treating others in the world with kindness as one attempts to make the world a better place. The final words motivate students to accept the challenge and learn during these college years.

These sections and chapters cannot only help a failing or below average student, but also can improve the performance of "good" students who may fall short of learning and earning high grades. This book can quickly be viewed as a how-to manual in constructing study techniques. Too many students come to realize that the process of rote memorization will cause them to fall short of the demand for analysis and synthesis

of information. Ong provides a means for students to become more organized and realize their potential. His personal stories and reflections are appropriate in helping students better understand collegiate challenges and obstacles, be motivated to perform at a higher level, and become better time managers within a less stressful environment.

In conclusion, I wish that this book existed years ago when I was enrolled in high school and subsequently in college. Many critical areas are concisely addressed in Ong's book. It can justifiably be viewed as the first invaluable purchase as one invests in his/her future as a student and as a fulfilled person, making this book well worth the money. Other such books may exist, but Ong has done an excellent job of concisely providing inspiration and motivation while supplying strategies and techniques to succeed.