Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Nina’s Note for students in online learning environments

Online learning is very different from classroom learning, mainly because you must proactively choose to engage and go after the information you need to learn. In the classroom, it is possible just to participate by listening passively, and some information will stick. However, online learning can be very rewarding, because it combines parts of formal and informal (or visible and invisible) learning. Online learning certainly allows more freedom and flexibility – but increased freedom demands increased responsibility.

Learning interactions always are about our individual goals and choices. A major goal of formal education is to create lifelong learners (Nilson, 2013). Successful learners aim to master their own learning process (Zimmerman, 2008), and with SRL learning can become an extremely rewarding experience of personal and professional growth. Learning process is a cycle we start repeatedly. Here is how to help yourself!

A Cyclic Phase Model of Self-Regulated Learning

To start the planning (Forethought Phase) look into the degree or term as an entity. Then spend time exploring individual courses, tasks, course tips and available resources, so that you know what lies ahead and can make a plan. Thinking about your completion goals is important, but process goals are the short-term achievements that often keep us going. Please remember to think how the courses and tasks relate to your own work (outcome and value expectations), and what are your self-efficacy beliefs in getting through all your readings and tasks.

While being in the trenches of your studies (Performance Phase) it is very important to observe and monitor how well you are following your own plan. This phase is where the time management is essential! Can you finish your readings and tasks in the way you planned? If not, then reassessing your goals and looping back into the Forethought Phase is a good idea. Creating a new plan that is more manageable helps you to move forward. There is no need to punish yourself, or get into the feelings of failure, because that doesn’t help you at all! Instead, current research recognizes the benefits of forgiving your own procrastination. So, create a new goal and a new plan to achieve it. A plan doesn’t have to be overly formal, personal preferences matter here!

Self-reflection Phase is the most ignored one, unfortunately! It is where SRL either triumphs or flops. This is the time to celebrate achievements and think about the learning strategies. It IS important to have realistic self-judgment, and assess & evaluate your own performance. However, all too often I talk with students who are mentally punishing themselves about not meeting the timeline, or tasks not being good enough. Please stop doing that. It significantly harms the learning process (Dweck & Master, 2008, p. 44).

Learning process cannot be linear and straightforward, it is tangled and messy by nature. The transfer of learning must happen in the last phase: think about ways you can benefit professionally and personally from your learning experience. Write the reflection down! This is also the time to think about the next Forethought Phase – is there something you want to do differently in the next task or course? This is how we begin the next learning cycle. How wonderful! 😊