



Faculty of Dentistry
The University of Hong Kong



mental floss

Tips for life-long learning & knowledge exchange

Spring/Summer 2015



Find time for self-reflection and self-improvement

In our daily hustle and bustle, it's easy to forget to regularly set aside time for self-improvement through continuing professional development and self-reflection of our productivity, how we solve problems, and how we relate to others.

We can make it a habit at the end of every day to briefly reflect on what has been achieved that day and what needs to be done the next day. In addition to academic and specific subject knowledge, we can also take stock of our transferable or "soft" skills such as general problem-solving ability, dealing with unexpected problems, empathy, teamwork, how we present ourselves to others, and effectiveness in communication.

I hope this newsletter will provide some ideas that you can try. Please e-mail (dentke@hku.hk) if you have any comments or if you'd like to share some of your own ideas.

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Market yourself!

Emphasise your positive points and potential value

If you are applying for a job, creating a social media profile such as on LinkedIn, or networking at a function, you have to be your own publicist.

Show what you do

Give a good first impression by saying what you do rather than are. In this way, you focus on results and services, and the audience will want to know more. For example, "I help people find their dream job" is better than "I am a career advisor".

Show your positive side

In your CV, list your education or career history first depending on which is stronger or more relevant. Or list your past jobs first but under each one use subheadings to emphasise achievements thanks to relevant experience, abilities, or expertise. Use subheadings such as *Organisational Skills*, *Management Skills*, or *Interpersonal Skills*. Use brief STAR stories (situation/task/action/result). Use verbs stressing results and benefits such as *achieved*, *managed*, *produced*, *developed*, and *improved*.

Show your value

Explain your potential value to a prospective employer/client with specific past data and accomplishments. Show you can and will perform.

Show your character

Show how you will fit in and help out. Positive traits

to discuss in your CV, cover letter, online profile, or interview include **dependability** (eg, meeting multiple tight deadlines, consistent productivity), **self-awareness** and **empathy** (eg, teamwork, volunteering), **resourcefulness** and **creativity** (eg, problem-solving), **participation** (eg, professional society memberships and meetings), **visibility** (eg, publications, awards), and **leadership** (eg, delegating, planning, budgeting, training).

Sources: Bounds A, *The Jelly Effect: How To Make Your Communication Stick*. Capstone Publishing, 2007; Deluca MJ, Deluca NF, *Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions*. 2nd Ed. McGraw Hill, 2010.

Test yourself



Global awareness

Which of these could help you in collaborating with diverse groups?
 (1) Using good netiquette online, such as writing clear e-mail subjects, not spamming (unwanted bulk messaging) or flaming (rudeness), and not using capitals for everything (online shouting); (2) not showing soles of feet while sitting down in Arab countries; (3) pointing with a thumb instead of a finger in Indonesia; (4) using both hands to present and receive a namecard in China and Japan.

Answer: All of the above. In addition to IQ (intelligence quotient), EQ (emotional quotient), and AQ (adversity quotient), CQ is your cultural or collaborative quotient. It relates to working well across diverse cultures, by knowing appropriate customs, body language, and corporate practices.



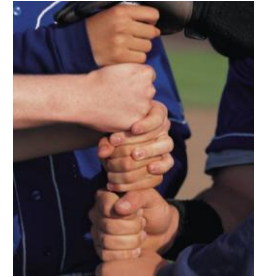
Team talk

Some software development teams hold daily morning update meetings (sometimes called Daily Scrums or Stand-ups), and these could be useful for any team tracking its performance and progress. The meetings have the following features:

- **Stand up:** Development Team members are all standing to keep the meeting quick and focused.
- **Strict timing:** The meeting starts on time, at the same time each day and lasts the same duration (a "time-box"), say, 15 minutes.
- **Status reports:** Team members, in turn, give self-updates with or without a written list for display. They have to report (1) what they did yesterday, (2) what they will do today, and (3) what problems they see that will prevent progress.
- **Park problems:** The meetings are not for problem solving; problems are "parked" in a virtual "car park" for follow-up discussions in relevant groups.
- **Meeting manager:** A meeting manager (sometimes called Scrum Master) acts as a facilitator to ensure the updates are brief and relevant, and the meeting fits in the allotted time-box.
- **Purpose:** The meetings are not intended as progress reports for stakeholders. The purpose is for team members to know what is happening daily and to commit to participating in a synchronised, coordinated way to achieve a product by a certain deadline.

Team time

Promote agile and effective teamwork



If you work in a team, you can learn from how some software development teams use "agility" to manage their projects.

The traditional "waterfall" model involved going linearly from planning to execution, testing, and launch of a product. Teams are now increasingly using cyclical "agile" approaches to deliver products in stages, while continually improving successive versions according to user feedback. One agile method is the Scrum.

Planning: The Product Owner considers stakeholder concerns ("user stories"), proposes product features/functions, and prioritises them in a dynamic, evolving list called the Product Backlog.

Sprint: The Product Owner and the cross-functional Development Team then plan the project in smaller, workable stages called Sprints or iterations, each with a fixed duration ("time-box"), typically a month. The prioritised tasks of a Sprint cycle are listed as a Sprint Backlog. Each day of a Sprint starts with a Stand-up meeting (**see green Box**) to ensure the team keeps to schedule.

Sprint review: When the Sprint product (or "potentially shippable increment") is documented, tested, and refined, it is considered "Done". It is reviewed and demonstrated to the stakeholders before release, and the Product Backlog is modified if needed.

Sprint retrospective: The team discusses what worked and what did not, so as to optimise teamwork and the quality of the next Sprint product in the Product Backlog.

Sources: <http://Scrum.org>; <http://www.ssw.com.au>.

Test yourself

Mind at work

Happy New Year! Look at the following new year's resolutions and then, from memory, reorder them according to your personal, team's, or company's priorities: being time-efficient, being cost-efficient, saving more, investing more, work-life balance, increasing intercultural competence, health and well-being, going "green", improving home/office premises, making use of technology, expanding skills or products/services, volunteering, relocating.

Comment: Be ambitious but know your limits. Our short-term memory can remember only about seven items at a time, so it needs help with pen/paper or memory strategies. As for life- or company-changing goals, one person can efficiently handle only two major projects (and only one task/activity) at a time. So, in addition to a To Do list, it might be a good idea to make Not To Do Yet and Not To Do lists.

Sources: *The Mind Gym*. Time Warner Books, 2005; Goldsmith D, *Paid to Think*. BenBella Books, 2012.





Writing plainly matters

Optimise your text

Write plainly and clearly so that people can understand you quickly:

Sentence construction: Prefer active to passive voice, and check modifying phrases and what pronouns refer to (eg, *Being unclear, it is advised that pronouns and modifiers be checked* ✗). Check the position of focus particles such as *only, exactly, and just* (eg, *I only drink water* ✗). Recast "There is/are" and "It is" if possible. Prefer verbs to nouns for actions (eg, *There should be a preference of verbs over nouns* ✗). Expand chains of nouns to explain how the words relate to each other (eg, *Noun chain expansion means word inter-relation explanation* ✗). Keep items parallel (eg, *She likes reading, writing, and to cook* ✗).

Sentence length: Vary sentence length and remove extra words (eg, *Of course we all know it goes without saying that* ✗).

Connections: Combine related ideas, showing relationships with appropriate connectors (eg, *therefore, because, before, if*).

Word choice: Rewrite jargon, clumsy, or outdated phrases (eg, *Pursuant to my erstwhile facsimile's pedagogical discourse* ✗). Avoid biased language (eg, *cleaners, versus cleaning women* ✗). Prefer short words (eg, *end, versus attenuation* ✗). Rephrase if a word has multiple meanings (eg, *If you don't mean to say what you mean, it means you're mean* ✗).

Tone: Use *I/we* and *you* to be personable. Depending on the audience, use a formal, semi-formal, or informal tone, but not slang (eg, *I would be grateful for any advice / Please could you give me some advice / Do you have any tips?*, versus *Gimme help!* ✗).

Source: Gurak LJ, Lannon JM, *Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace*. Pearson Education, 2010.

Body language

A large proportion of what people say is not in their words and requires good EQ to decipher. For example:

Clenched hands = frustration; **Crossed arms** = negative attitude; **Crossed and held arms** = insecurity; **Foot tapping** = boredom; **Hands behind back** = confidence; **Hands on hips** = dominance; **Leaning forward** = interest/acceptance; **Smile** = welcoming; **Hands in pockets with thumbs outside** = dominance; **Touching face** = negative attitude.

Source: Eggert MA, *Brilliant Personal Development*. Pearson Education, 2013.



QUIZ: E-mail dentke@hku.hk by 31 July 2015 to win a souvenir:

"Insert Symbol"...What are the next three items in this sequence?

à á â ã ä å

[Last issue's answer (fractions that cannot be simplified): 2/5, 3/5, 4/5, 1/6, 5/6]



Comfy computing

When you work at a computer, some good habits can ensure that you remain comfortable and perform at your peak.

Optimise your screen

Position and angle your computer screen so that it does not reflect light from windows or room lights. The screen should be about 2 feet (24 inches; 60 cm) from your eyes, with the top of the screen either at or slightly below eye level. Adjust the screen brightness so that the white background of a page is not too dazzling, while it still allows good contrast with the text for easy reading.

Sit comfortably

Adjust your seat so that your feet lie flat on the floor; use a footrest if needed. Use a seat with good lower-back support; use a cushion if needed.

Position hands well

Keep your arms close to your body, with your forearms at 90 degrees to the desk. Use a rest-pad to support your wrists at the keyboard/mousepad if needed.

Turn down the volume

If you work to music and use earplugs, keep the volume as low as possible to avoid long-term hearing damage.

Take breaks

Every 10 minutes, give your eyes a rest by focusing on something far away; blink to keep your eyes moist. Every half an hour or so, clench your buttocks and leg muscles or get up and walk around your office for a few minutes. Avoid computer work just before sleep.