

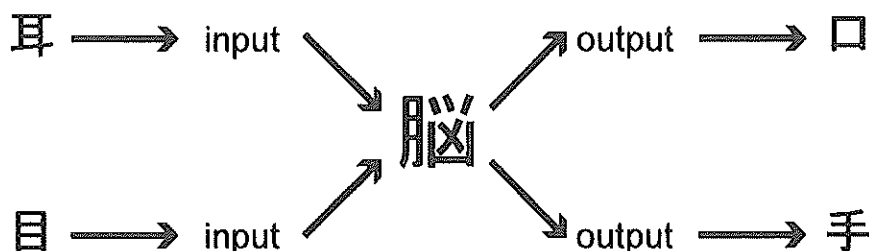
Communication, Technology, and the Force

by R. Jeffrey Blair

What is the secret to learning? Do you know? Do you 脑? The purpose of education, particularly at the university level, is to get students to use their brains. So what are you going to do in class? There are three things that you can do to enhance your ability to learn ... to learn any skill: pay attention, practice, and ask questions.

pay attention

practice



ask questions

Paying attention is what you do when approaching a train crossing: stop, look, and listen. Academic learning is more complicated than watching for a train. You have to use your brain and your imagination. Chatting during class or complaining about how hard the work is won't help at all. You need to concentrate on your subject. **Look** carefully and *try to see*. Keep your head high and your eyes wide open, focused on the speaker, the blackboard, or the screen at the front of the room. **Listen** carefully and *try to hear*. Use your imagination to fill in the gaps, anything you may have missed. Then *think* deeply and *try to understand*. There is a purpose to most lessons. What is it? Focus on the big picture—the purpose of the classwork and homework—as well as the immediate task.

When you think it's hard
Don't freak out
And don't complain
Just pay attention
And use your brain

Next **practice** the skill that you are trying to master, whether it is playing the guitar, dancing, or speaking English. I like the metaphor of a boy that wants to grow

up and play professional baseball. (The same principle applies to girls that want to be world soccer champions.) How does he learn to bat? He has to do two things: watch the ball carefully and keep swinging. In Japan you can see such children outside their houses on small streets late at night, practicing their swings. They practice **with their teammates** at school, but they practice at home **alone, too**.

Finally we all need to **communicate**—students, teachers, and administrators, so that we can work together. **Asking questions** is an **effective** and **polite** way to show that you are **interested** in what the teacher is trying to do and **want to help** achieve that goal, which is helping the entire class learn. If you don't understand the content of a lecture or a procedure the teacher uses in class, ask about it. Discuss it with other students. Ask the teacher directly. That will help the teacher understand your needs and focus on them. Even "complaints" are better handled as **questions**, since teachers (and people in general) often have good reasons for the things they do.

Students these days have an amazing range of **technological resources**—Wikipedia, YouTube, electronic dictionaries on their mobile phones, and computers that point out spelling and grammar mistakes. Quite a few teachers and administrators distrust, or even hate, these reservoirs of instant knowledge. Why? Because, like Darth Vader in Star Wars, some students have been seduced by the Dark Side of this **technology**. They copy and paste from Wikipedia and other websites. They send text messages to their friends or check their mixi accounts under their desks during lectures. They mindlessly use software translations of Japanese into mangled English. These students blindly follow the machines without thinking, **without 脳 ing** what they are doing. At the end of the original Star Wars (Episode 4—A New Hope), the spirit of Obiwan Kenobi tells Luke Skywalker to turn off his computer and "**use the Force**". I say go ahead, use your computers ...

BUT ALSO use the Force, the force between your ears.

Don't cruise with your brain on automatic pilot. Feed it with the wealth of information available online, on computer software, and on your mobile phones. But then put your brain into high gear: (1) **think** deeply, (2) use your **imagination**, and (3) express **your own** ideas and feelings. Technology has a good side, which is valuable and should not be ignored. Let's use it wisely. It is there to augment our brains, not replace them. You're young, have a lot to think about, and a lot of time to do that thinking. While you are here at Aichi Gakuin University, don't waste this opportunity. You are only

大 (a lot) 学 (study) 生 (your life)

for four short years.