

締切でやる気を起こさせる -言語スキル向上のための学習ルーチンの確立

Deadline Driven - Establishing Study Routines to Improve Language Skills

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Abstract: This article discusses the effectiveness of weekly deadlines as a teaching tool to help students establish and maintain study routines while learning English as a foreign language. Results from a 2-year case study are discussed in terms of motivation and study habits while reviewing online forum activity data for 318 freshman university students who were taught by the same native English-speaking teacher at Aichi Institute of Technology.

1. Introduction

To better prepare students for work in an increasingly competitive international business environment, freshmen at Aichi Institute of Technology (AIT) are required to complete two semesters of English conversation classes as part of the university's general education curriculum. This article examines the effectiveness of using weekly deadlines to establish study habits that improve memory and language skills while learning English as a foreign language.

2. Background

At AIT, native English-speaking instructors help students develop language skills and deepen intercultural understanding during fifteen 90-minute classes each semester. In addition to textbook assignments, students must also complete online quizzes and forum homework the English-based website which accompanies the course. Students reading, listening and writing skills are tested every 5 weeks during the semester and completion of textbook homework assignments are checked during these tests. Students must also complete weekly online quiz and forum assignments during their second semester at AIT regardless of class scheduling. Completion of all homework is required to pass the course.

3. Theory and Technology

Having successfully completed secondary education in Japan, freshmen students at AIT are assumed to have a minimal understanding of English and as a result, their

English conversation classes are arranged by student major as opposed to language proficiency level. As a result, individual student skill levels range widely within each class as well as between majors. The curriculum is nonetheless designed as a general education course and all students are encouraged to improve their language skills during the year. If all goes well, students will complete the course feeling more confident toward studying English as a foreign language and are encouraged to continue studying on their own.

These days technology offers many advantages in education and to those who can use English in a more global economy. Therefore, AIT students are taught to use and further develop their English skills using the Internet. Online homework assignments teach students to use an English-based website which motivates them to exchange ideas and information with other students. A detailed discussion and case study of student motivation can be found in an article entitled "Online Forums for Increasing Motivation in English Language Learning" on page 69 in vol.47 of AIT's Kiyō magazine published in March 2012.

Unfortunately, even motivated students have difficulty developing good study habits while learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). And, as if to make matters worse, German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus (1850-1909) discovered during his research into memory psychology, that people usually forget 90% of what they learn within 30 days. These days, this tendency is often known as the "forgetting curve."

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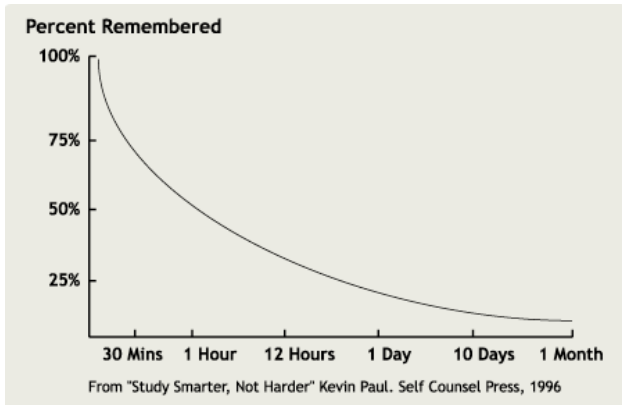


Figure 1. Ebbinghaus Curve aka the “Forgetting Curve”

Despite our inherent tendency to forget, subsequent research into memory psychology has shown that memory can be greatly improved by reviewing the material studied. This is also the basis for many educational software programs using SRS and based on Spaced Repetition learning Systems. The value of review in helping our memory seems invaluable.

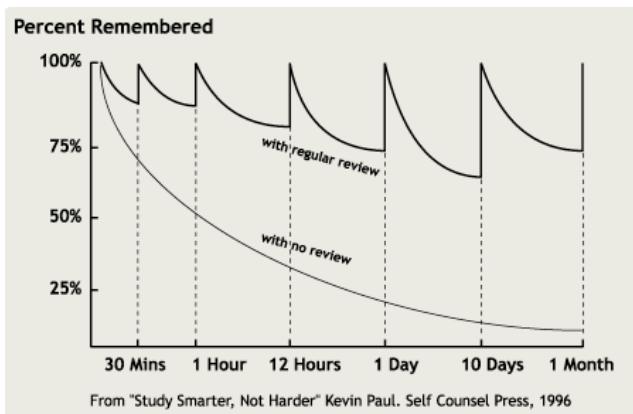


Figure 2. The Impact of Review

4. Case Study – A Change in Policy

As detailed in the previously referenced article, AIT freshman students are introduced to online forums during the second semester of their English conversation course. Minimal forum entry limits are set at 40 words per week and a variety of techniques are used to motivate students to apply their knowledge of English and skills while exchanging information with other students. Completion of all forum homework is required to pass the course and weekly data is collected from the forum website server logs to help teachers monitor student activity.

In keeping with previous studies, dataset parameters were set to include only (1) first year students who had (2) completed the minimal requirements to pass the course. The resulting dataset consisted of forum activity data for 318 students. In this case study however, data was limited to those students who were taught by the same teacher in order to insure consistency in terms of teacher student communication. Data analysis results were once again graphically illustrated for each academic year of study.

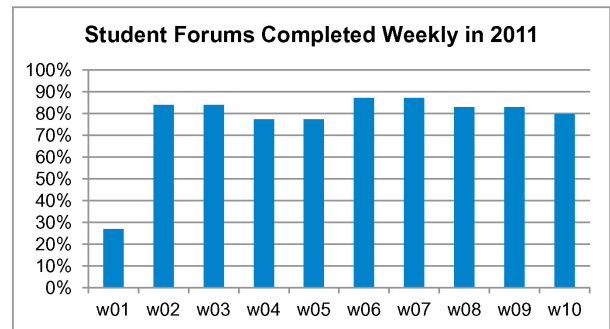


Figure 3. Percentage of forums completed on time during the 2nd semester of 2011

In 2011, 123 students were taught in 5 classes of different academic majors. With a 10-week average of 77% completing their homework on time, the average rises significantly to 82% after the first week when students realize that their homework was being checked.

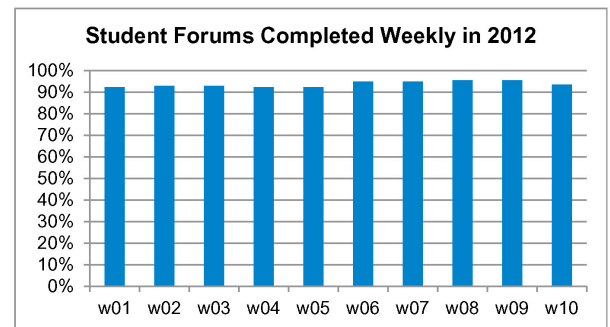


Figure 4. Percentage of forums completed on time during the 2nd semester of 2012

In 2012, 195 students were taught in 8 classes with differing majors. With a 10-week average completion rate of 94%, a noticeable change occurred in student study behavior resulting in an improved study routine.

Although completion of homework was mandatory to pass the course during both years, 2011 students who did not complete their homework on time were still able to do so online after the deadline. As a result, some students chose to wait until the end of the semester to finally complete their homework.

In an effort to encourage students to develop better study behaviors and habits, the decision was made to more strictly enforce deadlines during 2012 by taking forums offline each week after the deadline had passed. Students who did not complete their homework on time were then required to submit the missing forum as handwritten homework. Evidently most students decided that submitting their homework on time was a wiser choice and fewer postpone doing their homework after the deadline had passed.

5. Conclusion

A change in policy to strictly enforce homework deadlines resulted in more students developing routines to allow them to complete their homework on time. By studying more often each week during the semester, students developed better study habits and helped them forget less by reviewing more each week.

Thanks to the use of homework deadlines, students end their course and may continue studying English as a foreign language more confidently having learned what rags-to-riches motivational speaker Jim Rohn is quoted to have once said...

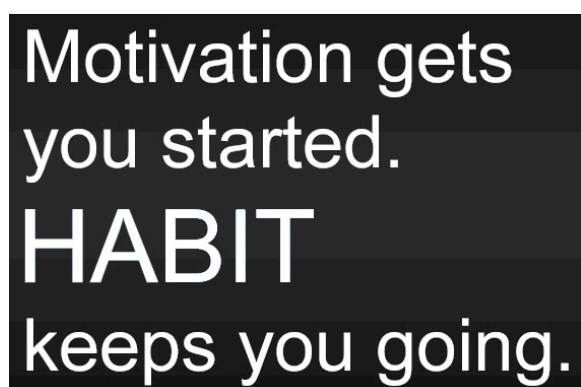


Figure 5. Quote by Jim Rohn (1930 – 2009), American entrepreneur, author and motivational speaker

Footnotes and References

1. Clayton, R & Kelly C (2012). Online Forums for Increasing Motivation in English Language Learning
<http://aitech.ac.jp/lib/electricdoc/files/47/p069-p075.pdf>
2. Kevin Paul, (1996). Study Smarter, Not Harder
3. Wozniak, R. H. (1999). Introduction to memory: Hermann Ebbinghaus (1885/1913). Classics in the history of psychology

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