

Structured Independent Learning

I have spent over two decades teaching high school science and math courses in a variety of ways from traditional teacher-centered classes, to computer-based instruction, to approaches where students were completely independent. I have, to the best of my ability, provided the appropriate materials, instruction and structure to help students succeed. However, the success of these approaches has, in my experience, been largely dependent on the student. Some students learn well on their own, some want a teacher to provide notes and lectures, while others enjoy a combination of independence and teacher direction. Some students have been willing to ask questions, even at the risk of sounding stupid, while others have not spoken a single word to me throughout the course. Some students do every problem, read every line, and take down every note, while others have done as little as humanly possible. Some can see a concept and know it forever after, while others never quite get the idea. In short, *every learner is different and unique*.

Having made this discovery I have endeavored to provide courses that allow every student, as far as possible, to choose the manner in which he or she wishes to learn. My courses are structured so that every student can learn in a manner that best suits the individual. In addition, my courses are designed to teach students to become self-motivated, self-responsible, independent and self-aware learners. In a larger context, beyond school, once an individual knows how to learn for him or her self all things become possible. This course format provides you with an opportunity to become a self-motivated, self-responsible, independent and self-aware learner. As in all things, one learns by doing.

At the heart of each course are a set of well prepared and edited lessons. The lessons contain the relevant information, examples, lab activities, and problems from which you can learn the course material. Your task is to:

- ⇒ Read each section of the lessons to understand the key concepts involved.
- ⇒ Read, work through, study and understand each example problem.
- ⇒ Make notes of key ideas and do the practice problems.
- ⇒ Do the assigned problems to learn the concepts.
- ⇒ If you do not understand something in the lesson, **ask** and I will provide you with a brief explanation, mini-lesson, lecture for the entire lesson – whatever is required.
- ⇒ **Ask questions** if you do not understand something. I will always answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Learn to use me as a resource.**
- ⇒ Enjoy the learning experience.

I will also occasionally provide demos, video materials and direct you to particular websites that will help to clarify the principles and concepts under discussion. The majority of the instruction is done within the lessons and by **asking me questions** when you do not understand something.

Generating, asking and answering questions is, in my experience, a crucial part of any learning experience. Therefore, the fundamental idea that I follow in my teaching is – **genuine learning becomes possible when a student has a genuine question in mind**. In other words, a student may go through the motions of what looks like learning, but if there are no questions being developed within the student's mind there is little or no actual learning going on. If you have a question, please ask. I will do my best to (a) hear the question you are asking and (b) answer the question. (Incidentally, if you are very lucky you may stumble upon a truly profound and inspiring question that haunts you for the rest of your life. Those are the questions you really want.)

You will also receive a general **calendar** outlining when lessons ought to be worked on, assignment and activity due dates, quiz dates, and “doomsday” exam days. Given the nature of the students at the National Sport School, it is expected that people will not always be “on time” in following the general calendar. Nevertheless, the calendar provides a structure that students ought to follow in order to successfully complete the course. Barring other factors like training, competitions, etc., the calendar indicates when work on a lesson should be underway and when it should be completed. Since you are given a calendar of everything that will be covered in class on a daily basis, you will know when quizzes and tests are to be written. It is your responsibility to read the calendar. If you know in advance that you will be missing any school days, you should **talk to me**. It is your responsibility to **talk to me** about missed work. In fact, I expect that everyone will have his or her own unique issues which we shall discuss to find viable solutions. I suggest that you endeavor to work with or ahead of the calendar schedule.

Another key principle that I follow is that ***you are responsible for your own learning***. Learning to be responsible for your own learning can be one of life’s most difficult lessons. If you demonstrate through your actions that you can handle the responsibility of working independently, I will be pleased to give you as much freedom as you require. However, if by your actions you demonstrate that you cannot handle the responsibility, I will work with you to help you learn how to be responsible. But, if you decide not to work, I will, with kindness and non-interference, let you sink or swim on your own. Of course, personal situations do arise. If there are extenuating circumstances, **talk to me**. The main objectives are to learn the course material, develop self-responsibility for learning, and to enjoy the entire experience. Further, while it is your choice whether you work or not, I will not tolerate your interference with other students’ efforts to learn. A mature and responsible attitude is expected at all times.

The lessons, answer keys, and review materials may all be found on the D2L website. You may also help yourself to copies of the lessons and review materials that are in the file drawer. Each assignment is accompanied by an answer key and you should feel free to check your solutions at any time. If you do not complete an assignment, activity, quiz or test, a zero will be assessed until you complete the assignment, activity, quiz or test.

I believe it is my job as a teacher to provide the best environment in which learning can take place. If you have any questions or concerns, **talk to me** and bring them to my attention. If you are not learning things effectively, **let me know**. We can work something out. Do not hesitate to **talk to me** about any problems or concerns you may have.

Let us endeavor to make your learning experience in this course the best you have ever experienced.

Dr. Ron Licht