

**THE GOOD
STUDENT
GUIDE**

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My dear Jack, I did promise to do you a letter on how to be a good student. You also wanted to know how I turned out the way I did. Not sure a letter can give you all that information. We don't want to be guilty of something called narrative fallacy. Narrative fallacy is oversimplification of complex realities into soothing cause and effect stories. I'll do my best however to give you some pointers to life. I will be writing with the benefit of age and experience.



Know What School is

It's important for you to know what school is all about. School is not just about academics. University is that phase in life for the development of critical capacities for success. You go to school to learn how to succeed in life, you don't go to school to learn how to fail. You potentiate yourself for the future through school. If you don't understand this simple fact university will just be a rite of passage for you, the next phase of your life after secondary school education, nothing more.

02 Focus

In order to succeed in school you must have focus. Focus concentrates energy. There are too many distractions in school. If you're not careful you'll excel at everything except the reason you're in school.

Parties, babes, booze, social experiments, peer pressure, clubs, wanting to belong, seeking to impress, faking it, posing, religious activities, daydreaming, political activities, fraternities... They have the potential to make you lose focus. Always remember, the primary reason you're in that university is to get your degree. Never forget that. Don't lose focus. If you do every other thing except get that degree what's the point? It's not just a financial loss to your parents, it's a missed opportunity. As you'll soon learn opportunities are few and far between. It's why they're called opportunities.

03

Get Understanding

What education does, what education is **SUPPOSED** to do is give you the capacity to reason at a higher level. Albert Einstein once said, “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” How true!

When you read books don’t just read for knowledge sake. As you read try and figure out **HOW** the author thinks — the structure, the sequence, the progression of logic. When you read a book you’re experiencing someone’s mental processing.

It’s important you develop reasoning capacity. Reasoning capacity is different from mere thinking. Reasoning capacity processes solutions and resolutions. If you don’t develop processing capacity you’ll be limited in life.

Understand what you read. Or you'll just be cramming and regurgitating data for exams. Understanding gives you latitude for creative enunciation. You can take things further.

When I was in university my Law of Contract lecturer gave us an open test. We were allowed to bring in textbooks, open them and copy from them. The point he was making was that he wasn't going to reward regurgitation of text. He was looking for reasoning. It's ultimately about reasoning.

In your search for understanding you may need to read extracurricular materials. A good student resources information and knowledge. A good student respects the syllabus but then goes beyond the syllabus to procure understanding.

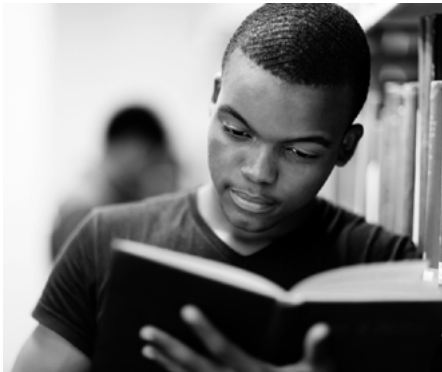
04 Get Discipline

You won't succeed in school without discipline. Discipline is about applying oneself, it's about being consistent, being systematic and methodical. Discipline sets a fixed time for studies for example. Discipline is regimented. You must have discipline. Don't wait till exam is knocking before you start studying. You won't be a good student doing that. An hour of study everyday is better than twenty four hours of study three days to exam. Fix time for reading and abide by it. Discipline makes studying easier. It will get you good grades.

05 Have Drive

You have to have drive. And I'm not talking about Toyota car. If you don't have drive you won't succeed in life. Drive means you push yourself. You have to be self-driven. You must have inner motivation.

Don't depend on external stimuli. Some people won't read unless their friends decide to read. That's not a good trait. You must have your own vision. Without self-motivation you'll be reactionary. That has a huge downside in life.



06 Seek Help

If you're weak in a certain subject seek help from those who know. If you don't understand a topic approach your lecturer, or any student that understands. That topic can be the difference between good and poor performance in exam. It can determine your grade. What if it's a compulsory question in exam?

If you're not top grade yet attach yourself to brilliant students. Align with them. The discipline they exercise, and their methodologies will prove invaluable. It will rub off on you. Iron sharpens iron.

07 Work Hard

You'll need to work hard. Whether in or out of school you won't succeed without hard work. Don't let anyone fool you, there is always rigour involved in success; just that it takes place most times behind the scene.

You've probably heard the phrase "Work smart, not hard." But successful people work hard and smart. Working smart can't replace hard work. The two address different issues. Smartness speaks to efficiencies, hard work speaks to rigour. You need both.

Hard work involves being thorough, being rigorous, perfecting the output, refining it with relentless dedication. It's about getting things done, not resting until it passes muster.

I read about Ronald Erwin McNair. He was the black astronaut and physicist who died in the Challenger mission in 1986. The shuttle exploded seventy-three seconds after take off killing all seven astronauts. Near the end of his doctoral program he lost all the data for his thesis— that was accumulation of two years of specialised laser physics research findings. He never complained. He just started all over again. He produced a second set of data in less than a year. And the second set was better than the first.

That story has always inspired me, especially when I lose a file on my computer. I simply start all over again. I pile right back in to meet the deadline. I don't complain. You have to work hard if you want to succeed.

08 **Set the Bar High**

Aim high, don't aim low. Be determined to excel. It's a mind set. Be determined to be one of the best students if not the best. All that's required is faith, application, rigour and discipline.

09 **Be Rounded**

It will pay you later in life to be a rounded student. That is not always apparent in school but it pays off in the real world. You must read wide. If you're an arts student read science; if you're a science student study the humanities. This makes you balanced. It will affect your approach to work. The difference between a great technology product and a bad one is not always the technical specs. It's many times an understanding of the human. That's something the late Steve Jobs understood. The calligraphy class he took in school inspired the beautiful typography of the Mac. Seems unlikely but Steve himself said it. Computer science inspired by art?! Yes! Study to become rounded so you can create solutions for human needs.

As a law student I studied science on my own. I learnt how scientists think, how

theories are derived. This later proved invaluable, is still invaluable. I still study science, especially cosmology. Studying extra curricular stuff gives you capacity for lateral thinking. Literature from other disciplines inspires thoughts, projects and ideas.

In our first year as law students we were made to study philosophy, sociology, economics, logic, add maths, biology, English, religious studies, etc. Turns out these subjects would power my professional calling as a brand strategist. Who'd have thought!

If you've ever read a book by Carlo Rovelli you'll appreciate the importance of being a rounded scholar. Carlo is a quantum physicist but his books are very accessible to non scientists. He draws on history, philosophy and classical literature to explain arcane topics in science. He uses classical imagery. It's almost like reading the Da Vinci Code. He thinks philosophically, deriving insight to challenges in science through classical reasoning. Who else could have enunciated why we

remember the past and not the future in the way he did in his book, *The Order Of Time*?

You become a maestro when you can crossbreed knowledge. You become an artist. You can borrow templates from other disciplines, model solutions from other disciplines, draw analogies using external frames of reference. How useful is this? Well, at Alder Consulting we once solved a major problem for a financial institution modelling the traffic flow pattern on a particular bridge. And we once used the model of the London Underground rail for the deployment of brand identity materials for a bank.

Read beyond your course. You're preparing for life. Read classical philosophy, sociology, history, literature, economics, art and architecture. Have a hunger for knowledge. Those classical stuff, including classical music were the parapets of human civilisation. They were pillars of human advancement. Study to be a "renaissance man."

And not just books, consume culture — fashion, art, especially modern art, music

and media. They round you up. Without them you'll be mechanistic and literal. Higher nuances will escape you.

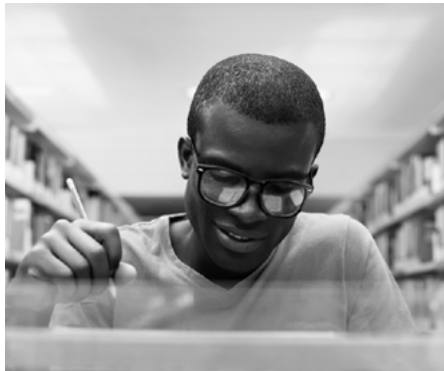
10 Socialise

You've got to socialise. Yes, I didn't forget I said you're in school to learn but as I've sought to demonstrate, school is not just about books. You will need social skills to succeed in life. You will need to network for example.

Make friends, go to parties, take walks with friends, go to picnics, talk to the opposite sex, take your friend out... Up to you whether you want to have a girlfriend or not, though in truth these things happen in the natural course of life.

That said, girls are not the reason you're in school. Don't forget that. But nevertheless socialise. Learn how to dance for example. If you don't you'll become the star of one of those reunion videos later in life.

Learn how to dress as well. It's one of the reasons you consume cultural materials. Read fashion magazines. Acquire taste.



II Be Spiritual

Spirituality is very important. First, it helps you connect at a higher and deeper level. Then it gives you understanding of life, gives you a sense of purpose, or at least makes you hunger for that understanding. It also keeps you from making stupid mistakes — trajectory altering mistakes. Spirituality helps you to keep balance. My faith in Christ is critical to me, has always been.

But religious dogma must not dull your intellect. Spirituality is not anti-intellect. Apostle Paul was an intellectual. He was exposed to the works of Plato.

Don't get so caught up in religious programs that you fail your exams. That's not a good testimony, and it makes mockery of spirituality. If at all you should excel because of it. Spirituality is supposed to give you intelligence leverage.

12 Be Nice to People

Be nice to your classmates. Be kind. Or you'll have regrets later in life. If you're not nice your embarrassment is awaiting you on one of those old students WhatsApp platforms. Someone will remember you. Respect and treat everyone with courtesy. You'll soon learn it's a really small world.

Don't look down on anyone. If you're from a disadvantaged background don't be overly sensitive about it. Don't have the mentality of them versus us. It's a dangerous paradigm that seeks to identify enemies and oppressors even where there are none. And it persists into adulthood. Without a benevolent disposition you'll misuse power. And that can spell your demise. At the end of the day it doesn't really matter where you're coming from, it's what you make of your life that counts.

It's important you behave responsibly towards women. Don't treat women anyhow. Respect womanhood. If you don't you'll struggle to have meaningful relationships as an adult. You'll struggle in marriage.

And if you make a "mistake" take responsibility. Don't run off. Don't deny liability. Be a man.

B **Have Self Esteem**

Believe in yourself. Self confidence is sometimes 50% of the job. Besides, you'll need confidence to talk to girls.

Learn to marshal your viewpoints in an intelligent manner. You don't need to be obnoxious to garner attention. Your classmates will despise you and that despise can last a lifetime. Just be confident.

14 Don't Sweat Tomorrow

Don't sweat about what you're going to become. That's not saying you should be ambitionless or not have a vision. Don't sweat tomorrow, you're going to be okay. And that includes worrying about how you're going to be able to afford to marry your girlfriend in the shortest possible time.

Tomorrow becomes apparent as you apply yourself in life. Doors will open as you demonstrate faithfulness. Opportunities often determine trajectory. Then there are chance meetings. You can meet someone and your life just turns around 180 degrees; sometimes not so dramatic. Tomorrow always sorts itself out. All that's required of you is faithfulness and diligence at whatever you have the opportunity to do.

15

Don't Get into Worthless Pursuits

Don't waste your youth on worthless pursuits. Don't associate with criminals, however glamourized. The Mafia looks good on TV until you visit the Mob Museum in Vegas. Then you realise these are horrible creatures. They're animals. Don't join criminal "fraternities." Don't participate in rituals that violate the sacredness of life. Don't cauterise your conscience. Remember, the sheep that fellowships with wild dogs soon picks up the habits of dogs. Don't associate with criminals.

Don't be treacherous. In the bid to belong don't betray your upbringing. Life will soon show you the people you're seeking to please are nothing actually.



16 **Be Careful with the Envious**

Be careful about the envious. That's something nobody will tell you about school, and yet it's so valid. It stretches into adulthood. Which is why you mind it in school.

I'm assuming of course you will not be the one doing the envying. Envy is a sickness of the soul. It has no expiry date. That's one of the reasons it's dangerous. The envious person can wait for decades for an opportunity to strike.

Envy is unreasonable. You can be envied for being liked by girls, or for being talented, or being confident! Someone can punish you later in life for any of those. That's how sick envy can be. As much as you can avoid the envious guy.

Also be careful about the guy with low self esteem who is nursing a grudge. Pray you don't become his prey later in life. And I'm not saying be afraid of people. That's paranoia. I'm just saying be wise.

17 Earn Your Way

You need to learn financial responsibility in school. Whatever the source or amplitude of your income learn to manage money. It's a scarce commodity.

It's wise to start earning while in school. That small business venture may just turn out to be what you'll do in life. Michael Dell was assembling computers in school. Bill Gates wrote code. I designed greeting cards for students in school, printed and sold thousands of posters, specialised in libel litigation at the Student Council — I represented those who were libelled by campus magazines for a fee. Call it hustle. Not that I needed to. My pocket money was quite adequate. I had a wonderful father. And I was on scholarship. The stipend was substantial. But I needed to develop the discipline.

Part of financial responsibility is doing charity. Don't wait to be rich to embark on charity. Charity ennobles the soul. Support charitable causes with your means. Be sensitive to the needs of your fellow students. Do what you can to help who you can. I helped struggling classmates from my means, shared my pocket money, even bought shoes for a friend. I also learnt about financial responsibility to God. You have to learn to be rich towards God.

18 **Exercise Your Talent**

An unused talent lies in abeyance and over time becomes neglected. Weeds soon choke it. How many times have you heard an adult say, I used to draw! Or sing! There's no better time to exercise your talent than in school. I define talent broadly as any capability or capacity that makes you exceptional, and which comes easy to you, gives you joy, a sense of identity and brings you appreciation or applause. Yes, drawing, singing and dancing are talents, but so also is cooking, or organising events, or writing code. Oratory is a talent. Use whatever talent you have. Deploy it. I pasted cartoon panels on the "democracy wall" of my hostel every Friday. These were political satires. Students looked forward to it. I garnered accolades. I held a major art exhibition with over 2,000 people

in attendance. It was reported in the Guardian. I designed Jesus banners and hung them all over campus. I designed banners for my club as well. And I did posters for events. I expressed my talent.

Find opportunities to use your talent.
Create opportunities to use your talent.
Who knows what you'll become! I became a brand consultant, I hardly practiced law. Use your talent. It may be the key to your future.

19 **Don't Hate Your Lecturer**

You won't like every lecturer. Some will be wonderful, some will be irritating, some annoying. They're drawn from human pool after all. They're representative of us. But the greatest mistake you can make is to hate a lecturer. You will struggle with his course. The dislike will translate. It will affect your grades.

Your goal should be to ace your subjects whether you like a lecturer or not. You have no business hating a lecturer. It's not friendship relationship, it's a contractual relationship. He teaches, you learn. Pass his course and you may never see him again. Don't pass his course and you'll definitely see him again. Have a healthy relationship with your academics.

20 Have Fun!

Have fun! What is youth without fun? Some people take life too seriously. They can't crack a joke, can't take a joke. They're not lively, not fun to be around. Just wet blankets.

Do sports, play games. Make sure you take lots of photographs so you can laugh at yourself and your classmates thirty five years after. By then everyone would have succeeded. Your kids would have been through school as well. One thing you'll notice about those photos is how hungry the guys will look and how innocent the girls will look. The ladies' hairstyle will likely be the same. There's always a reigning style. And of course thirty five years after fashion would have changed. You'll all look so ridiculous. And thirty five years after some would have grown pot bellies. The women won't exactly look like they did in school. That's a euphemism for weight gain.

The guy who was refused a dance at a party can now laugh about it. At the class reunion he'll get his dance. There'll be all sorts of gist, all sorts of reminiscences. And that my friend is what university is about — the accumulation of good memories on the way to success.



What more can I tell you?

Nothing more for now. That's all I have to say... for now. And what I've not told you life will teach you. Though I hope this helps. Your future is waiting for you. Please go for it!

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