



STRATENOTES

A National Newsletter for SIM Trainers

Volume 4, Issue 1- September, 1995

Assignment Completion: There's More Involved Than Meets the Eye

As the instructor's manual for the Assignment Completion Strategy goes to press this week, we have some thoughts to share with you about the strategy and the training associated with the strategy. The Assignment Completion Strategy manual has been 17 years in the making. Work on the strategy began with a Master's project by Kathy Whitaker at KU, continued through some research conducted by Gary Seabaugh at the Plaza Academy in Kansas City, Missouri, and culminated through work conducted by Kathy Ruhl and Charlie Hughes at Penn State. Jean Schumaker and Don Deshler worked throughout the years on all three projects. Additionally, research conducted by Joyce Rademacher and Keith Lenz has played a role in the development of this manual. Thus, the strategy is the compilation of the best of the best ideas derived from 17 years of research and feedback from teachers and SIM Trainers. It involves the use of several organization, time-management, and self-control skills related to completing and turning in high quality assignments on time. It is a complex system of several cognitive strategies that can be used by students to increase their rates of assignment completion and their grades on assignments.

The instructor's manual is accompanied by an assignment notebook, called the *Quality Quest Planner*, that students can use for recording their assignments and creating a plan for completing their work. This planner is different from most other planners on the market today because (a) it is specifically coordinated with the steps of the strategy so that students have something concrete to do in each step of the strategy; (b) it has a separate place for students to record each assignment given; (c) it has tools for students to use to plan the time

they will spend on assignments; (d) it has tools for students to use to help them develop self-control skills; (e) it has tools that will help students self-evaluate and consider their future course.

Since the strategy itself is substantially different from the other strategies and since the *Quality Quest Planner* adds a new "twist" to strategy instruction, we have found that there are several considerations that trainers need to address as they are planning for and presenting workshops about the strategy. Listed below are some of the major considerations that have come to light so far.

First, and foremost, teachers need to understand the mindset they need to adopt as they teach the strategy. As one principal excitedly exclaimed last week, "What we're *really* teaching here is a work ethic!" She was exactly right. What we're *really* teaching as we teach the Assignment Completion Strategy is how to: (a) determine the task one needs to complete; (b) plan to complete the task and schedule one's time in such a way as to get it done on time; (c) motivate oneself to complete the task; (d) ensure that one does a quality job on the task; and (e) evaluate what one needs to do in the future to improve one's performance on similar tasks. These are skills that everyone needs throughout life to get tasks completed, but they are rarely explicitly taught. Thus, teaching the Assignment Completion Strategy involves more than teaching a strategy; it involves teaching a way of thinking about and approaching life's tasks. Students can carry this ethic (and the skills) with them into future educational, community, and work situations. Teachers need to keep in mind this broader context as they teach the strategy. There's more to it than teaching students to complete class assignments. Students need to understand the broader application of the skills they are learning.

Second, the Assignment Completion Strategy spans several situations and settings from the setting where the student gets mentally prepared for a week's worth of assignments, to the regular



classroom where she receives the assignment, to the place where the student plans how the assignment will be completed, to the locker where she plans what materials must be taken home, to the home or other location where the assignment is completed and checked, and finally, back to the regular classroom where the assignment is handed in and a performance evaluation is completed. Thus, unlike most of the other strategies that can be fully used in one sitting in one setting, the use of this strategy can span several settings, several sittings, and several weeks in time. Since parts of the strategy are to be used outside of the classroom and the school and since so many conditions and competing forces come into play in out-of-school settings, providing instruction in this strategy might be considered complex and challenging. For this reason, we recommend that teachers be taught at least one other strategy first. Both students and teachers need to be "hooked" on strategies and have an idea of what a whole strategy is and can do for them before tackling this strategy.

Third, teaching this strategy involves teaching students self-control skills like planning *their own* schedules, setting *their own* goals, motivating *themselves* to do quality work, and thinking about how they might improve *their own work* in the future. This means that teachers really have to adopt the mindset of helping their students become independent and empowered. If they have low expectations for their students and want their students to be dependent on them and not on themselves, they may not be ready to hear about this strategy. Again, this strategy is probably not the one to teach teachers about as their first learning strategy.

Fourth, since the *Quality Quest Planner* (the assignment notebook that students use as they apply the strategy) is different from other planners, teachers need time to understand how it is different, why it is different, and the benefits inherent in using it. They need to be given *permission* by their administrators to try it out to

see how it works. This may require some prior work with administrators before the training session, especially if a school has adopted some other type of planner for all students. Ask administrators whether they would be willing to compare the two planners and how they can be used. Explain the differences and the reasons for the differences. Then ask the administrators whether they would be willing to have teachers try the *Quality Quest Planner* with a few students. Once this permission has been granted and announced, teachers will be more open to new possibilities, and they will be more likely to try an "experiment" to see which type of planner works best. If permission to use the new planner is not granted, take plenty of time during the workshop session to help the teachers consider how they will teach their students to use the planner they are required to use as they apply the Assignment Completion Strategy.

Fifth, because this strategy involves several sittings, several settings, many cognitive strategies and has many issues associated with it, be sure to allow plenty of time for a training session. Give the teachers time to think about expectations and what they want students to be able to do *on their own*. Ask the teachers to identify the skills involved in Assignment Completion from the moment that students go into a classroom, to the moment they put the graded assignment away in their notebooks. Ask them to think about how they get themselves to do some task that they prefer not to do. Have them make a list of all the methods they use to ensure they get a task done, even though they prefer to do something else. Have them generate ideas on activities they can do with their students to teach them to use such methods. Ask them to discuss what "quality" work means to them and to generate some activities for ensuring their students understand the concept of "quality work." Have them create an agenda for a meeting with parents about the strategy. Ask them how they might work with other teachers in their schools regarding student use of the strategy. In other words, spend the whole day focusing on the issues surrounding this strategy as well as on the eight stages of instruction and the strategy itself. Teachers will be much more ready to teach students the strategy if they thoroughly understand the underlying principles and ideas associated with the strategy.



STRATENOTES is published 9 times a year, September through June except December, as part of the Strateworks Trainer's Network by the Center for Research on Learning, 1995-96, cost \$35.00. Permission to reproduce any or all parts of *Stratenotes* to support training activities is hereby given.
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Don Does It Again!

We always knew he was a star researcher, but we're glad others are noticing, too! Don Deshler was recently honored at the University of Kansas Convocation when he received the Higuchi Award, the most prestigious award given to K.U. faculty for excellence in research. Recipients of the award receive a \$10,000 cash prize, and their portraits are hung in the hallway of Strong Hall, the centrally located K.U. administration building. Don had previously been honored by being nominated for this award for the past four years, so we're really glad the committee chose him to actually receive the award this year. Notes of congratulations can be sent to Don at the KU-CRL, 3061 Dole Center, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 66045.

Hard Times at the KU-CRL

They say that bad things happen in threes, and we're hoping they're right. (We couldn't stand to have one more bad thing to happen.) In one ten-day span, we've had one staff member hit by a car, one staff member's spouse die unexpectedly, and one staff member's house burn. On Friday, Sept. 8, Keith Lenz was hit by a car as he was crossing a street. Miraculously, he survived the accident, but, needless to say, he has a number of broken bones, cuts, and bruises, especially on the right side of his body (the side hit by the car). His head and spine are fine, and his sunny spirit is surprisingly intact. His right leg seems to have sustained the most damage. He's had two operations on it already, and a third is planned. Fortunately, he has the use of his left hand and can respond to get-well messages on e-mail or StrateNET. Address get-well cards to him at: 2500 W. 6th Street #133, Lawrence, KS, 66049.

Three days after Keith's accident, Jan Bulgren's husband, Bill Bulgren, went into the hospital, and three days later, he passed away, much to all of our sorrow. Bill, who was a KU faculty member in the Department of Engineering had worked with KU-CRL staff members on several projects, and we all enjoyed his wit and positive outlook on life, as well as his collegueship. He will be greatly missed by all of us. Messages of sympathy can be mailed to Jan at 2810 Trail Rd., Lawrence, KS, 66049.

A few days later, Janet Roth's house burned. Janet and her husband, Stan, heard a crackling noise, and upon checking the source, determined that their roof was on fire. Fortunately, both Janet and Stan escaped unharmed. Their house sustained \$30,000 damage, and Janet and Stan have had to move to other quarters. Messages of concern can be mailed to Janet at the KU-CRL or 532 Oklahoma, Lawrence, KS, 66046.

An Update on IDEA

When this Stratenotes went to press, the news from Washington was as follows. The Senate Appropriations Committee had voted to appropriate 68% of current funding levels for special education research and 92% for teacher preparation. The full Senate is set to vote on these appropriations within the next few days. The Conference Committee will be meeting to negotiate the differences between the House appropriations (which were set at 0% for research and 0% for teacher preparation) and the Senate appropriations. Thus, as a result of the negotiation process, we can expect appropriations for research somewhere between 0% and 68% and appropriations for teacher preparation somewhere between 0% and 92%.

Naturally, we are very concerned about both areas, but we are most concerned about the allocations for research. If you haven't made your phone calls to Washington yet, please do so now. If you called already, please call again. Please tell your Senators and Representatives how important research is in the field of special education, what impact research has had on you and children you know, and how the US government needs to support research in this field. They seem to think that applied research in the education field should be funded by business and medical research and basic research should be funded by the government. Please explain that special education research is not going to be funded by business; it needs to be funded by the US government, because it is a national investment in ensuring appropriate education for *all* students. We want you to know that we appreciate all you have done thus far. The letters and phone calls have made an impact. Please keep up the pressure until the final vote is taken.

Notes & Tips for the StrateNET

1. **The Universal Reply** - When you reply to a message, the program automatically moves the names around and modifies the title slightly. If the message you are replying to was originally sent to "All Users" (or "All CRL"), the "All..." address will be moved to the cc: line and your reply will go to everyone again. You may want that to happen. But if you don't, delete the name from the cc: line before you send the message. You will probably be prompted to push "enter" or "return" to complete the address. Pushing "enter" with a blank in there will finish it off.
2. **The Pre-prepared Message** - To save money on telephone toll charges, prepare your messages in your word processor before you log onto the StrateNET system. This allows you to do all your thinking and editing without the clock ticking. Then just copy the info into a message after you log on. System Administrator Wally says it's possible to copy info to the clipboard, notepad or scrapbook, if your system has those features, so you can do more than one message at a time.
3. **The Downloaded Message** - Along the same lines as preparing your messages in advance to reduce telephone charges, you can copy the text of long and involved messages onto the clipboard, notepad or scrapbook and read them after you log off. It is also possible to just print them out, which will give you the header information, too.
4. **The Personal Resume** - You can find out who people are and what they do by looking up their resumes, assuming they have put one on the system. If you search the "Directory" with no parameters, you get a full list of all users. Double clicking on a name will show you their resume (information they have chosen to share). You can set up your own resume under the Edit menu. See the message under the News section for detailed instructions.
5. **Internet Access** - The StrateNET System allows you access to the Internet. You can send messages to an individual by typing in their Internet address followed by a comma and the word "Internet". Do not space after the comma. There are also messages under the News section giving you more details on this, including your Internet return address and how to set up a personal address book for use with the Internet.
6. **Palette** - The Palette is a really useful way to use StrateNET. It will ride above any other window you have opened and give you easily accessible push buttons for the most common functions. You can find it under the View Menu. Some people leave it opened all of the time on the right side of the screen, even when they disconnect. The next time you connect, it will still be there ready to use.
7. **Message History** - The History button has proven very useful. Highlight a message you have sent and then click the History button on the palette (or find the History command under the Message Menu). You can see if the person you sent it to has read your message yet.
8. **Unsend** - If you find a mistake in a message you sent, you can choose "Unsend" under the Message Menu and the message will be pulled back from anyone who hasn't already read it. You can then correct it and re-send it.

A Fourth Tragedy

As *Stratenotes* was going to press, we heard about a fourth tragedy that we thought we'd pass on to you. Fran Clark's father passed away on Monday, Sept. 25. He was found on the floor of his garage, the victim of a heart attack or stroke. You might send your sympathy messages to Fran at 10011 E. Boston #104, Wichita, KS 67207

If anyone in the Kansas City area wishes to be a part of a study group, please contact Sue Nolan, 5101 West 111th Terrace, Leawood, KS 66211 or at (913) 4915155

1995/96 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- October 5, 6, & 7th 1995 - Glade Springs Resort, Daniels, WV. *Northeast Regional Update Meeting*
- October 12 & 13, 1995 - The Inn at University, Clive, Iowa, *Midwest Regional Update Meeting*
- January 26 & 27, 1996* - Hotel Sofitel, Minneapolis, MN, *North Central Regional Update Meeting*
- February 23 & 24, 1996* - Imperial Palace, Las Vegas, NV, *Farwest Regional Update Meeting*
- March 1 & 2, 1996 - Sheraton-Charleston Hotel, Charleston, SC, *Southeast Regional Update Meeting*
- June 27, 28, & 29, 1996, Lawrence, KS, *National SIM Conference*