

REACH FOR THE SKY

Discovering the power
of Working Smart!

Greg Nicholson

Foreword by Dr. Tui McKeown and
Professor Frank Vajda

Illustrated by Prue Sobers



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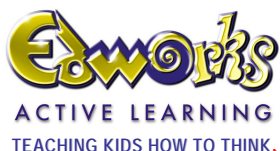
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A word to parents and guardians

Thank you for giving a few minutes of your valuable time. If you are reading this as an adult concerned for your child's education, I applaud you.

Rarely has the quality of student learning in schools demanded greater scrutiny than the present. We have now entered a new century, symbolic of new beginnings, future growth and exciting times ahead – and due to our rapidly evolving high-tech world, such symbolism appears likely to fast become a reality.

Of course, no-one quite knows what the future will hold: what new technologies and industries will emerge, what production demands and workplace expectations will be, what new economic, environmental and social concerns will put us, and our children, to the test. It seems relatively certain, however, that there will be greater complexity and more challenges to overcome, more problems to solve, more issues to face, and more choices and decisions to make, than ever before.

Who will flourish, who will flounder?

It shouldn't be difficult to predict, therefore, the type of person that will flourish and who will flounder in what promises to be a highly competitive, business and social environment. Understandably, most parents believe that there are educational systems in place to prepare the youngsters of today and tomorrow for this rigorous and challenging future. But are there?

As little as a decade ago, rote learning was still at the height of popularity. This acquiring of knowledge through passive memorising and regurgitation had, indeed, embodied traditional learning for centuries. For most of the twentieth century, student success had continued to be measured in quantitative terms: *the more you know, the smarter you are. Don't worry if you don't understand. Just get it right!* Teachers' ticks and crosses and the words, 'well done', and 'more focus, please', generally characterised the feedback response to a student's work. In concert with examination results, these became the yardstick of a student's level of achievement. ...

... The signs of rote learning and content-oriented teaching are plainly evident when new students who join us are initially reluctant to do, or show, their *working out*, for fear of appearing 'dumb'. Of course, this process reveals the steps students have taken to arrive at their answers. To emphasise its importance during problem solving at Edworks, students are encouraged to use good quality paper for their computations. For new students, not having to come up with the fast, memorised answer, but rather, working answers out through analysing the question, deductive reasoning and concrete thinking, is both a welcome relief and something of a novelty.

Driving a desire for greater learning

In fact, for many students, our programs offer a genuine 'awakening'. What excites them is that they suddenly have a sense of control over the learning process. For some, it's like turning on a light! They begin to grasp that learning is meaningful, that it has a purpose – that it is not just an endless series of questions and answers. The program strategies and skill building that lead to greater understanding therefore provide a new appreciation of the relevance of learning. This, in turn, drives the desire for learning and achieving more. The students' parents, who have also been conditioned by the question-answer routine of rote learning, are often surprised by their children's new-found enthusiasm for learning – and in fact, as spectators, rather than participants, cannot initially comprehend where it comes from.

There is one other significant legacy of rote learning that greatly obstructs the learning process. At Edworks we observe it on a regular basis: most students initially fail to understand the *nature* of questions being posed. Here, I would ask, 'How can they therefore perform the tasks expected of them? How can they predict outcomes, for example, if they know nothing of how to look for cues?' *If students do not understand the question, they cannot possibly become involved in the process of constructive thinking.*

How you can help

This book is not only designed for students seeking to change their lives through gaining awareness and a competitive edge. It also offers you the opportunity to actively participate in your child's quest for self-improvement.

The book's format is simple and clear. Aside from in depth essay discussions for senior students, it can be read in a relatively short time. In so doing, it will allow you to better understand the academic challenges that children face today. Hand-in-hand with the book's 'working smart' guidelines, this awareness will enable you to discuss and perhaps assist older students in their study, or to assist and guide younger students in the step-by-step processes necessary for them to realise their potential. It is a book I hope that will be kept safe and revisited by younger students as they progress to their senior school years. ...

A note to students and teachers about this book

This is a book that challenges the very notion that school, even at senior level, means hard work. For students who explore what it has to offer, it will bring greater awareness, meaning and pleasure to the process of learning, and in so doing, greatly facilitate and complement the work of their teachers.

In a friendly, easy-to-read style, psychologist and educator, Greg Nicholson, offers *Reach for the Sky – Discovering the power of Working Smart!* as a powerful, guiding light to equip students from upper primary to senior secondary years, with the skills to meet *and beat* the challenges of an often demanding and stressful, academic pathway. They are skills little known and practised in the classroom.

This is not to reprove teachers or the quality of their teaching. It is more that the skills in question do not fit the paradigm of traditional teaching. That is, classroom practice exists within an educational culture where teaching *methods* place weighty reliance on the passive ‘practice effect’ and a student’s innate ability to store and mechanically retrieve volumes of knowledge.

Former university lecturer and secondary school teacher, Roderick Bruce, observes that current curricula are biased towards ‘knowing’; that students demonstrate their knowledge by rote learning where there is no understanding of the significance of such knowledge. Bruce remarks that school leavers lack the ability to think and learn independently and this forms the basis of much of the criticism from university teachers and employers.¹⁰ In a cross cultural study, US researchers, Professors James Stigler and James Hiebert, report that before assigning a problem solving task to students, American teachers almost always demonstrate the problem solving procedure *first*, so that it can be practiced.¹¹ The impact of the challenge and the opportunity to learn through grappling with, and thinking through the problem, is therefore greatly diminished.

This book is more about acquiring the thinking skills to solve problems and to communicate effectively than it is about getting the answers right through the practice effect. Indeed, the right answers are achieved more consistently through a deeper understanding of the concepts that underpin the learning process. Once these skills are learned, of course, they can be employed both in and out of the classroom across a whole variety of new situations, over and over again.

You may well question the reason content-oriented approaches are still being widely practised. It has much to do with time, tradition and a culture that imbues us all. Classroom teaching methods and processes have evolved over time through a fusion of formal teacher training and practice, and the experiences of a cultural participation by teachers during the 13 years of their own schooling. Here, ideas, beliefs and well-practised rituals have passed through time to coalesce with the disciplines of teacher tertiary training.

As pointed out by Stigler and Hiebert, teaching in their view (and of others in the field) can be likened to cultural events such as participating in family dinners – that it is unconsciously learned over long periods of time through the informal sharing of events with others; that teachers learn more readily what to expect and how to play their roles by having participated within an educational culture, than they do through formal study. Thus, within the context of the dynamic and competitive demands of the modern world, these methods have now become out-of-pace and less than effective.

Ahead, however, the challenges for change, not only for teachers, but governments, education boards, parent councils and administrators alike, are immense and complex. *Reach for the Sky* is therefore offered in the spirit of a contribution towards this change. It is intended as a tribute to students and to the importance of the roles, that as teachers, we must all play. Assisted by best selling author, Prue Sobers, Greg Nicholson now shares some of the skills and strategies he has developed in his role as CEO of Edworks Active Learning. Using his knowledge and professional experience in teaching and psychology, he offers students the awareness and resources to augment their curricula learning; to expand their learning boundaries and to raise their classroom and examination performances through 'working smart'. His refreshing teaching philosophy, focussed on empowering students to think, analyse, evaluate and problem solve, is well supported by national and international research.¹⁰⁻¹⁴

Inspired by his students' continuing successes, Greg has selected what he believes are the most significant aspects of his teachings. He stresses that of these, the skill of *written communication*, is paramount. In fact, in his broad experience involving thousands of students, Greg hails writing skills as the greatest predictor of success in school life and beyond. 'Without such a skill,' he asks, how is one's knowledge or understanding of an issue to be effectively expressed, whatever the subject – be it English, Geography, History, Maths or the Sciences?' ...

Dear Internet reader:

The following excerpts will assist you to assess the comprehensive nature of 'Reach for the Sky' and its value to the student seeking to develop and extend his or her skills level for improved scholastic performance and beyond. The opening chapters are brief and intended as a light warm-up to the more in depth chapters and learning as the book unfolds.

To briefly gauge examples of content in later chapters, **at senior level**, Chapter 30, *Test analysis essays*, discusses aspects of text analysis and cites the useful constructs for students that are to be found in later chapters. These constructs are designed to support and guide students in their issue-based essay writing and in their reading and analysing of texts. The full range of '12 Tools for Working Smart' including checklists and templates, are listed and provided for photocopying, for all student levels, in the Appendix.

For **upper primary students**, Chapter 22, *Exciting changes*, offers insights for younger students into the different approaches to tasks that they are soon to meet, and the skills required for the years ahead. The ensuing two chapters (not shown) *Learning to think* and *Planning your persuasive letter* then take students through a stimulating and friendly, step-by-step process that prompts a thoughtful, exploratory response to issues, in preparation again, for the demands of their secondary education. As indicated in the Contents pages, there is, of course, much, much more to be revealed in the book itself, particularly the useful and varied Plans for writing essays in the essay planning chapter.

It is the author's intention that this book provides a motivating, thought-provoking and easy-to-use learning aid for all students and their families who seek to create positive, life-changing opportunities through a greater awareness and understanding of their potential.

PART 1

Ready ...

Congratulations! You've done it!

You've just opened the book that can change your life. The fact that you are reading this suggests a couple of very encouraging things. Number one: you want to take a look at improving your academic performance *right now*. Two: you're keen to learn the skills that can spell success for you also in the years ahead. Incidentally, that should read, the *complex* years ahead – in case you've had your head in the sand.



But more about that shortly.

Remember! The years ahead belong to you. It is *your* future. It may be hard to imagine at the moment, but believe it or not, what you choose to do now, today, can greatly influence your future choices. This might involve a whole string of significant, future issues including your family, your lifestyle, your level of achievement and your level of wealth.

The odds are fairly predictable. Today's decisions and the path you take will impact on how you shape up to tomorrow's challenges; how quickly and deftly you can solve the problems – big or small – that crop up for you in the future. In turn, this will be a measure of how happy you are likely to be with who you are, and who or what you become. More to the point: today's action can affect the number of doors that are opened to you in your career, in your social and family circles and so on, as your life unfolds.

(More excerpts from PART 1 – 'Ready ...')

Learning the secrets

So, what can we do about it?

How do we go about pursuing our potential so that we can cope with it all? How do we begin to define and shape our goals for this complex future? How can we improve our academic performances to achieve success at school and beyond, so that we can realise our dreams?

You may expect me to say: 'Batten down the hatches and get ready for some solid, hard work *and plenty of it!*' Right?

Wrong! If you've read this far, give yourself a pat on the back! You are on the threshold of learning the secrets to improving your grades without the mammoth effort you thought was necessary. ...

... Only a myth

Clarissa, Jack and Anju are only three of thousands of our students who have learned the easy-to-grasp strategies that put them in the fast lane to study success; to the achievement of scholarships, and selective school entrance and university placements. Like our other students, they also discovered that the widely held belief, *success means hard work*, is no more than a myth.

Incidentally, another important aspect of 'working smart' can also be achieved. If you stick with this book, you will come to understand and appreciate it. Your school years need no longer be a real drag, to be tolerated and endured as best they can. 'Working smart' can transform your outlook. Whether you have years or only months to go, your school time can become a satisfying and enjoyable experience. It can be a period in your life you will look back upon in years to come, with nostalgia and pride.

'Oh, come on now, that's really stretching a point,' I hear all the doubting Thomases cry. Right. Time to find out whether I'm bluffing.

Are you ready?

CHAPTERS 1 - 20

ALL STUDENTS

Understanding yourself and
getting organised

CHAPTERS 21 - 24

UPPER PRIMARY

Learning to think, reason
and write

Dear Student,

In Part 2, whether you're a procrastinator, a perfectionist or both, whether you're stress prone, simply disorganised, or even have good intentions – if you are a student seeking a better understanding of topics and how to improve your skills for higher levels of success, Chapters 1 to 20 are for you.

Older students:

Older students should also note the following: Towards the end of Part 2, Chapters 21 to 24 have been written to mainly assist upper primary students. However, these chapters may offer benefits for you, also, that you have not previously considered. In fact, it's a perfect (undercover) way to swot up on gaps in your knowledge that you're unwilling to admit to. Explore its possibilities.

Younger students:

At the same time, in other chapters younger students may find some references to subjects or issues they have not yet reached in their schooling. Don't worry! You'll find plenty written just for you to read in depth, right through to Chapter 24 and beyond. So scan the few areas you don't need at this stage and move on to find your special areas of interest and enlightenment. Keep the book safe. You will need it again before long.

Let's take a look.

[The next excerpt, following Chapter 1, *Problems, problems ...* (not shown) begins at Chapter 2.

Please continue.]

2

Good intentions aren't enough!

Good intentions to succeed are admirable.

Unfortunately, they aren't enough to get us where we want to be. We all know that. The reality is, like a New Year's resolution, even the best of intentions can wane and slip by the wayside – and that's often followed by a deepening sense of self-doubt and failure. 'What a wimp! Can't keep a promise, even to myself,' sort of thing.

What we need, therefore, is something to keep us going when our good intentions begin to wear a little thin. Now, *wearing thin* can happen all too quickly. So the next chapter or two will help you to put things into perspective – fast!

... Well, what are you waiting for? ...

10

The ultimate reward: Time on your hands

The ultimate reward to overcoming procrastination is free time! Yes!

That is, time to devote to yourself – to indulge yourself; to do what *you* want. Take in a movie. Play tennis. Catch up on the latest sci-fi novel. Visit your beloved grandparents. Go cycling. Dust off your skate board and hit the vert ramp.



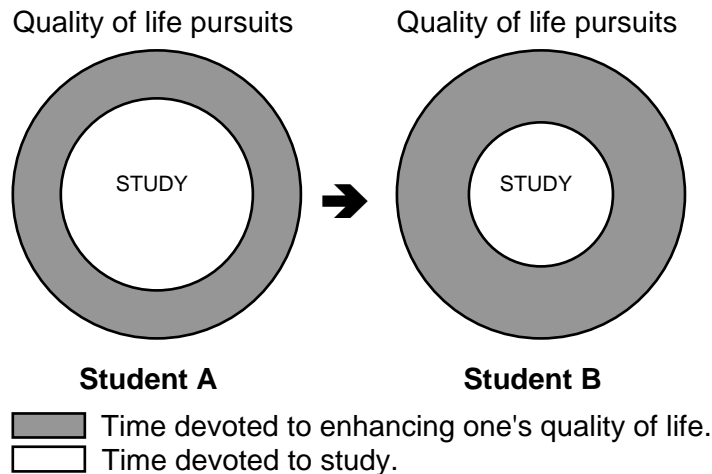
Just think: time away from studies to relax and revitalise your life through family, friends, interests and hobbies.

I guess some mouths have dropped open at such a suggestion. Remarkably, many students see studying as an endless production line: one assignment after another. As soon as one is completed, another waits to be done. Such students believe there's no choice; that completing tasks ahead of schedule only means the next one will be staring them in the face.

Wrong! That is definitely *not* what overcoming procrastination is all about. Remember the old saying: 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'? If that were not written to alert compulsive students of study, then it may well have been. Removing the shackles of procrastination means freeing up time so that your well-deserving self can pursue the interests that will enhance your quality of life. Not only that, it will bring balance into your everyday living to make you a better person.

Showing how time can be used to your advantage, the simple diagram following, spells it out loud and clear. When you move from Student A to Student B, you will spend less time studying and earn more time to use as you please.

ALLOCATION OF TIME



Studying doesn't have to leave you drained and stressed out. However, if you equate study to years spent in agony, then, beware: that is what it will probably be. Life is what you make it. But remember:

You have the power to choose.

21

Upper primary: Transition to secondary school

Your secondary years are not that far away.

In fact, before you can say *Bob's your uncle*, you'll have shed the mantle of senior student at your primary school, and be feeling brand new all over again at your secondary school. Then, a great deal of the information in this book, designed to support you during those challenging years, will become applicable.

It makes sense to do all you can now, to prepare for the time ahead, doesn't it? I recommend to senior students that they put time in on a *routine basis* to gain that all-important edge when it comes to exam time. In a sense, the same advice can apply to you: being one or two steps ahead of your peers as you approach and enter the next phase of your schooling, may not seem much. However, think about this for a moment:

Would you prefer to begin secondary school from a position of ignorance or awareness? That is, do you want to be that ostrich with his head in the sand, or would you feel happier knowing what your academic demands are likely to be during those years? To be so happy will give you that edge I am talking about. This means not only, over time, developing very useful skills for your senior years, but being able to put some of them into practice from the moment you step up to secondary school. In other words, getting a *head start* at 'working smart'.

Your head start to secondary school

At the moment, of course, you are still enjoying your formative years. There are many wonderful childhood experiences left in store before you reach the threshold of adulthood that will place greater demands on your time. However, let's say you are interested in finding out how you might get that head start I was talking about. Beyond these next four chapters, 21 to 24, are some of the chapters which you could explore, to sharpen up your awareness and skills. You may not want to look at them right now.

You could put a marker at this page and come back to it later.

- ▶ Pressing the right buttons (page 105)
- ▶ What you will learn (page 107)
- ▶ Creative essays (page 111)
- ▶ Descriptive and personal essays (page 120)
- ▶ Skill 5: Brainstorming (page 159)
- ▶ Skill 7: Planning your essay (pages 172-6 only)
- ▶ Skill 9: Editing your essay (page 202)
- ▶ Reach for the sky (page 209)

At secondary level, *formal* essay writing will not feature in your curriculum for some time. However, you will certainly be writing a great deal on different subjects: English, history, geography, art history, and so on. To be a smart note-taker, and to be able to efficiently convert your notes into text, will give you an outstanding advantage. You will be able to measure this, simply by your performance and the time you will save compared to your classmates.

Later, as essays become a part of your schedule, you will already have those valuable skills up your sleeve. Once you begin revisiting this book more in depth, perhaps as you progress in your secondary years, your grasp of essay requirements will be well in place. You will already know how to take notes efficiently, how to identify the *whys and wherefores* of an author's intentions, and to produce essays that reflect imagination and your understanding of an issue.

Don't wait!

However, you don't have to wait until secondary school to use your smart note-taking skills. If you are in upper primary, note-taking is an important skill you can acquire and use right now!

Remember Zak's note-taking problem, page 54? His experience is typical of those encountered by secondary students of all ages who come to us. Recently, I spoke to a parent whose son, Kairus, is in Year 10. During class discussions, Kairus always began busily copying notes from the board for fear of running out of time. ...

(Next excerpt begins at Chapter 22. Please continue.)

22

Upper primary: Exciting changes

They say that a change is as good as a holiday!

For many, the change of going to a new school will be just as exciting as a holiday. There will be new people to meet, new friends to make, new sets of rules to follow. Entering the second phase of your school career means there'll be quite a few changes in your new life – and one of them is the way you will be expected to approach tasks.

With this thought, and your future success in mind, see if you can answer this question: what are at least *two* basic skills you will need as you progress in your secondary years? They are two, fundamental stepping stones to achievement – yet, the reality is, many students are not made aware of their importance. They are:

1. Reading and understanding a question.
2. Writing clearly and concisely, while addressing a topic.

This seems logical enough when you know the answer, doesn't it? Yet so many students, from government and private schools alike, are sent into uncharted waters totally unprepared and unskilled in these areas, for the challenges they will meet. As a result, many fail to reach their potential. This is a trifle disturbing when you consider that we are creatures of habit: There's every chance the unskilled student will carry the same poor habits into adulthood.

Whether it be Year 7 English or History, Year 12 Economics or Politics, or Media Studies, Law or Architecture at university – your knowledge of the subject won't matter a hoot – *if you don't know how to communicate!*

The logic of this comes in sharp focus when we confront a major difference between primary and secondary school: *you are expected to think more!* This is so that you can learn how to offer ideas and opinions. What's more important, you have to know how to justify those opinions.

That is, you have to show, by giving examples, that your point of view is valid, or believable. Better than that, the aim is to do this so well that you can win an audience or reader over to your point of view. Actually, it's quite a fun exercise once you learn how. So don't fret, we will offer you some topics and advice in a moment that will help you to get started.

When you were in Grades 2 up to 5, many tasks involved you or your teacher reading and presenting the teacher's and other people's ideas. However, as you move into your secondary years, that will all change: you will be expected to read, research, and weigh up the ideas of others, and *then form your own opinions* about them. So, you will no longer be only writing creative or personal stories. You will be expected to write essays about issues. You will be expected to read and examine novels and plays; to probe and discuss writers' motives (reasons for writing something) behind their works. Your writing will therefore need to have quite a mature level of structure, planning and purpose.

In a recent newspaper article, a 13-year-old, Year 9 student, complained that he could not cope with school. The problem? Things had certainly changed since short pants at primary school. His teachers were now interested in his opinions on a variety of issues, over a variety of topics. Trouble was, he didn't have any opinions! More importantly, nine years at school had not prepared him for this stage of his education.

This media article highlights our findings at our centres. Indeed, one of our major activities is assisting students to regain their confidence and self-esteem by alerting them to skills they were somehow never taught. Then we set about teaching them those skills.

In less time than it takes to peel and eat a juicy orange, we can take students from a state of ignorance to a state of awareness. In less than a term, we sow the seeds of understanding and then watch as their confidence springs up like bean shoots responding to the light. Within a few months, most of our students mature and flourish. With newly learned skills they can take a topic, turn it upside-down, inside out, research it, plan it and present a clear, soundly developed essay, well within the given time-frame.

The art of persuasion

Luckily, you are reading this book. You can at least begin to learn the skills for 'working smart', too, *before* you head off to secondary school. ...



'Essay' is the name given to any short piece of writing about a particular subject, or topic. It is therefore used to describe the many different topics that students are expected to write about during their secondary and tertiary years.

You can learn more about essays, or texts, in 'Pressing the right buttons', page 105, 'What you will learn', page 107, and, if you want to tackle some parts, 'Text analysis essays', page 135.

Excerpts from
CHAPTERS 25 – 40

STUDENTS IN GENERAL SECONDARY AND SENIORS

Understanding essay writing

Dear Student,

Although Part 3 is predominantly directed at secondary, and particularly, senior secondary students, younger students have already been encouraged to read several chapters to enhance their understanding of essay writing. Please refer back to page 67 for the recommended texts for younger readers that occur in the chapters that follow.

Tertiary students:

As has been noted by Dr. McKeown and Professor Vajda in the Foreword, tertiary students may also find certain chapters in Part 3 very useful in preparation of their written assignments.

25

Pressing the right buttons

In my broad experience as a psychologist and educator, the skill of 'written communication' has always been the single greatest predictor of student success.

In a class of say, 25, where many may have a full *grasp* of an issue, it is only the student who can *communicate* the issue in writing, who excels. The significance of this vital skill will become more evident to you as the following chapters unfold. Note them, follow our advice, and you will be well on the way to accomplishment and higher grades.

On the surface, it looks simple enough: to produce an essay means *knowing how to write a short piece about a particular subject*. An obvious statement perhaps. But there is a reason for bringing it into focus: too many secondary students do not know *how* to produce a good essay.

When they come to tackle the job, they flounder. They use no guidelines. They are unfamiliar with brainstorming. They know nothing of essay structure, Main Ideas and Supporting or Substantiating Details; they know little of the concept of developing a personal style; of how to analyse, persuade, inform or entertain. They've never heard of emotional accord, identifying issues and evaluating ideas.

This all flies in the face of logic. How can one achieve a creditable mark for an essay with so few essay writing skills? If you are shrugging silently to yourself, the ensuing chapters are designed with you in mind. Even if you have some bases already covered, you may wish to fine-tune your skills in other areas. So don't worry. We'll soon have you ship-shape and in the know. After all, it's the *knowing how* of essay writing that determines an essay's ultimate worth – the value, or mark, an examiner will place on *how well you are able to communicate your subject*.

Let me put it this way: why would judges at a cake-making contest nibble on the cakes? Because they are hungry? One would hope not. As judges, they are using certain criteria to assess the worthiness of each entry: its presentation, its structure, flavour, aroma, texture, and so on. In short, the cake-nibbling judges are measuring *the skill* of the contestant as a cake maker.

26

What you will learn

Some of you will be poised precariously on new ground. So, to give you the confidence, support and knowledge you will need to become an accomplished essay writer, let's start at the beginning.

An essay can be about any topic under the sun. However, insofar as those you are likely to encounter are concerned, generally, they conform to several, main types. This allows us to label and put them into pigeonholes. We can then more readily define how each essay should be approached and handled.

We need to establish clear terms in discussing essays so that you can readily understand their meaning. Therefore, the term, essay 'type', will be used throughout these chapters to describe the nature of an essay: 'creative', 'argumentative', 'informative', 'descriptive' essays, and so on. While each essay type has different writing requirements, some are linked by a certain common feature or features. We have therefore grouped the nine essay types to be outlined, into four, main 'styles'. They are, as follows:

ESSAY STYLE	ESSAY TYPE
1. CREATIVE	Creative Descriptive Personal
2. ISSUE-BASED	Argumentative Persuasive
3. ANALYTICAL	Text analysis Language analysis
4. INFORMATIVE	Informative Instructional

Note that although *analysis* of an issue is a key requirement for issue-based essays, analysis of *text* and analysis of *language* require different approaches in the planning and writing of the essays. Thus, for our purposes, we have separated issue-based and analytical essays into two styles, as indicated in the preceding table. ...

... Here then, are the main essay writing features that will be covered in this, and the 14 chapters that follow:

- ▶ Reading the essay question
- ▶ Essay styles and types (includes description of type, introductory paragraphs and examples)
- ▶ Brainstorming (includes issue-based checklist and creative methods)
- ▶ Doing your research (includes 'Research Format for Reading Texts')
- ▶ Planning your essay (includes Plan examples and guidelines, exercises and checklists)
- ▶ First draft (includes exercises)
- ▶ Editing your work to final copy
- ▶ Sitting for exams
- ▶ Practice exercises (includes 10-week sample of 15 minute exercises to develop and refine your skills for 'working smart') ...

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Text analysis essays

Sticks and stones: these were our first pens; our paper, the bare earth. The genesis of the written word came about as Homo sapiens scratched symbols of survival in the primeval dirt and etched tribal rites in slabs of stone.

Just think how impoverished we would be, today, if our writing modes had failed to flourish from these primitive beginnings. Where would we all be without books or computers at our disposal? Our self-expression would be repressed, our knowledge exchanged by word of mouth and wild gesticulation.

The written word allows us to enjoy literature and share information on a global scale. We can communicate ideas, raise awareness, expose issues, persuade, dissuade, argue, inform, educate, and tell stories. Writing enables us to reflect on our pasts, to guide the young, comfort the elderly, to entertain, to provoke, shock, woo, censure, praise, and offer thanks and apology. In short, there is virtually nothing in the human experience that the written word cannot express.

Hold this last thought as we begin to talk about the written words, or *texts*, that you are asked to study and respond to in your senior years.

The human experience

Time after time, I chat to students about analysing texts and discover they are in the dark as to what to look for when they are reading. In fact, many don't even realise they should be looking for something. So they read passively, in much the same way they might read the Sunday paper. Scan a bit here, a bit there. No purpose. No structure. Not much read in depth.

When quizzed about classroom instructions prior to reading a text, it becomes clear that part of the reason for a student's inability to read actively, and with purpose, is that they are simply told: read the text, then we'll discuss it. That's a bit like going out on a scavenger hunt without being advised what to bring back.

If you pay attention, now, it will change the way you look at text analysis forever. You will not only 'work smart' by saving time; your new insight will bring greater enjoyment to your reading. In fact, you may even become a bit of a bookworm. What joy that would bring to your English teacher! ...

(More excerpts from Text analysis essays)

Strategies of the author

When we peel back the fictitious layers of a novel and look more deeply at an author's intentions, certain interesting strategies begin to emerge. For example, pitting challenges against a novel's protagonist by placing him or her in difficult or testing conditions allows the author to probe the very same moral, social, political or emotional dilemmas that human beings have grappled with for centuries. In turn, readers are invited on a subconscious level, to explore and identify with, the issues depicted – and perhaps to compare, or better, *question*, their own value systems against those of the characters in the story. ...

... Text analysis

Analysing a text requires you to develop your own objective line of reasoning in very much the same way you would an 'argumentative' or 'persuasive' essay; or, to identify and substantiate the stance of an author whose work you are analysing. (You will see how an author's stance on issues is identified and substantiated when we present a complete 'text analysis' essay example on George Orwell's, 'Animal Farm', page 141 of this chapter.)

Unlike mathematics which incorporates convergent thinking (involving only one answer), text analysis is oriented towards divergent thinking: this leads to no, one answer, but a number of possible answers, verified through substantiation. In an examination or classroom environment, the aim of text analysis, therefore, is to *demonstrate your ability to present a coherent contention*, be it yours or that of an author. The strength of your substantiation provides an insight into your grasp of the text. The format for writing a text response is not difficult: one simply presents a reasonable point of view, or argument, and supports it.

At the end of the last chapter, we mentioned the construct containing 12 perspectives for brainstorming issue-based essays that will assist you to develop a coherent line of reasoning (see page 160 of our 'brainstorming' chapter). Similarly, we have a construct, 'Research Format for Reading Texts', through which you can read and analyse a text. You will find this later in our 'research' chapter on page 169. The great advantage is that by learning how to analyse and reason, you will not only be 'working smart', you will acquire lifelong, independent, analytical skills.

Skill 7: Planning your essay

Winning is intrinsic to the human spirit. It always has been. Since the mists of time, it has meant the scooping of spoils, the reaping of rewards, the hailing of heroes. Winning excites the senses, elates the ego, and opens the doors of opportunity. Winning, in fact, is all about success and feeling good!

The glory and rich prizes that accompany the big win are also the reasons sports coaches earn top salaries: Experience, Success and Wisdom are the coaches' tools of trade. These they use to impart their skills to the athletes who seek to follow their winning example. Motivation aside, an important part of a coach's skill, is having a game plan – or a coaching strategy – that will lead to winning.

Imagine, for example, a soccer or football team in readiness for a big game: a theme tune blares, the cheer squad cheers, the crowd roars like Romans in the Coliseum. And the players stream valiantly on to the field – *without a game plan!*

What a debacle! They all try to hog the ball. They run the wrong way. They despatch goals right through the middle of ... the opposition goal posts! What an unruly bunch. What bitter disappointment. What a perfect recipe for failure! Of course, this is all a bit of fun. No worthy coach would send a team out unprepared in this way, let alone expect it to win.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that planning is important. It's as important for success as being physically fit and able-bodied enough to undertake the challenge. Yet, when it comes to essay writing, time and time again, our staff members encounter the blank looks on the faces of new students who have never considered such a thing. 'An essay *plan*?' they say with open scepticism. 'What's that?' On a scale of importance from one to 10, it's probably worth a good eight, that's what!

This may come as big a surprise to you as it did recently, even to a mature-aged Bachelor of Arts, Literature Major. ...

... Language analysis essays: preparation phase

This requires some concentration. Make a copy of our 'Language Analysis Checklist' from the Appendix, page 242. Become well acquainted with its contents. You will recall we discussed this on pages 132 and 141 in Chapters 29 and 31.

You should also organise two enlarged copies of each of your chosen articles. (Use one; keep one handy as a spare.)

1. Read each article carefully one at a time and highlight passages where you can identify from the 'Language Analysis Checklist' what is occurring in terms of language strategies and intentions to influence the reader.
2. Number each highlighted segment in accordance with your checklist. For example, you may identify where a writer is using emotional blackmail. As that's number 7 strategy on your checklist, mark your highlighted text accordingly. The numbers will then clearly indicate to you the strategies being used by the commentators in each of your chosen pieces, as you write your essay.
3. When choosing article quotes for your essay to illustrate language strategies, keep them short and precise.

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Habit is second nature

Grammar, punctuation, fluency, tone, rhythm, sequential flow, plus all the other components we have discussed at greater length already, make up the package that is to become your completed essay.

However, before you faint with fright, consider this comforting point: Do you play tennis? If so, think of all the components that make up the package that becomes your game. You need to know, have, or understand – court etiquette, dress, equipment, line rules, net rules, how to score, fitness needs, co-ordination, foot work, how to serve, play backhand strokes, forehands, lob shots and volleys. That's 14 different features of the game. But do you need to think of all of these things as you enter a court to play? Of course not! You would certainly be a very distracted player if you did.

The reason you don't mentally contemplate all of these issues all at once, is the very reason that writing a good essay will become second nature to you: preparation. You have studied the tennis rules and learned how to play the game. ...

... Sequential flow

'Fluency' describes sequential flow pretty well: a text that flows, through an association and connection of ideas. However, the word 'sequential' is an important reminder of the need to ensure that paragraph-by-paragraph, each Main Idea builds upon the previous Main Idea in an ordered, sequential manner, to expand the topic. But don't worry! This will be assured, given that you are using your essay Plan.

Creating a symphony

Regard rhythm, fluency and tone as elements in a symphony you are creating. As you read your essay to yourself aloud, listen critically, and modify your work if you detect any *off* notes. Unfortunately, it's the elements that jar, that people will remember. Sure, it may only represent one per cent of your entire essay, but it can have a 110 per cent negative impact!

The good news is that when you fix that one per cent, the reverse is true: it will instantly have a 110 per cent impact on enhancing your writing style.

Sometimes you don't have to do much to achieve a quantum leap in terms of improvement!

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Reach for the sky

Thwack! ... Thwack! Who is the boy on the beach, laughing with friends under a bright West Indian sun, and what is he doing? It is a young Garfield Sobers, practising his cricket with a makeshift ball and bat. Click! ... Click! ... Click! Who is the solitary lad in Shepherd Street, scuffing his feet under a clear Australian sky, and what is he doing? It is a young Don Bradman practising his cricket, striking a golf ball with a cricket stump against a brick tank stand in the yard.

With the passing of the supreme, Australian batsman, Sir Donald Bradman, at age 91, a book he had authorised revealed he had regarded West Indian cricket legend, Sir Garfield Sobers, as 'the best of the best'.

Consider for a moment: what gave these men of might their greatness? Inherent skill? Genius? Gritty determination? Of Bradman, England batsman, Lord Cowdrey, once wrote, 'He had astonishing fleetness of foot, sharpness of eye and timing, but it was his mind that powered his success.' Of Sobers, Professor Henry Fraser of the University of the West Indies has said: 'His desire to do well ... combined with a rare ability to concentrate on the task in hand, to apply himself to the task, and to enjoy every minute of it.'

Beyond the boundary

If inherent skill played a role in the rise to greatness of Sobers and Bradman, why is it such innate ability appears not to be more evenly shared? What makes some people more successful than others? How do some achieve greatness while others do not? The reason is that achievement and success seldom involve mere innate ability. ...

... All you need is *to want it enough!* The motivation will follow – especially when you remember your immediate and long-term goals, and the sweet rewards that ride on their achievement. Who knows, just by concentrating and applying yourself to the task in hand, like the great Garry Sobers, you might even begin to enjoy every minute of it. ...

... In getting the job done, however, we also need Motivation as the driving force behind realising our goals. Thus, as discussed in an earlier chapter, we create a reward system for ourselves, to provide that motivating force: *the force that propels us towards the greater purpose beyond the task!*

As you become better acquainted with the strategies and guidelines within this book, and as your proficiency improves day-by-day, you may sense something curious beginning to emerge. What is it? What are you discovering now? ...

(Excerpt from the Appendix)

THE 12 TOOLS for 'WORKING SMART'

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...

(End of excerpts from 'Reach for the Sky – Discovering
the power of Working Smart!'
Please return to *Shop for Books* to purchase your copy.)