

Of Studies

by Francis Bacon

[Explanation in **blue**, original text is written in **black**]

Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability.

Study as an activity, in whatever form, brings us joy and enhances our thinking, speaking and writing ability adding charm to our personality.

Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament, is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business.

Study is always a private activity which people engage in when they are alone or in the privacy of their homes. It helps them in relaxation after a strenuous routine, when the body and mind need to slow down. It sharpens our intellect helping us to judge things soundly. It helps us to go about our life's business in a more capable way.

For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of affairs, come best from those that are learned.

It enables the learned men, who have studied extensively, to critically examine issues, and arrive at the right conclusion. They can garner data, facts and arguments or against a particular view rationally. Such intelligent analysis of facts improves the soundness and quality of their judgment.

To spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humor of a scholar.

However, over-indulgence in studies leads to undesirable consequences. Setting aside long hours in a day to study will make a man indolent. Overuse of the wisdom to analyze ordinary commonplace issues may make the man appear pretentious and vainglorious. Sticking too much to rules to assess situations and decide on action may invite derision from others.

They perfect nature, and are perfected by experience: for natural abilities are like natural plants, that need pruning, by study; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience.

Studying adds finesse and perfection to human nature. Experiences in life supplements such honing of nature. A person's abilities inherited by birth are raw. Only when they are carefully worked upon and honed, the in-born abilities yield the best benefits to us. Studying is the whetstone that we use to sharpen our abilities. But inferences from study may lead to imprecise and misleading conclusions. In such situations, one's experience in life comes in handy to arrive at the right conclusion. So, experience is very valuable as it supplements studies.

Crafty men condemn studies, simple men admire them, and wise men use them; for they teach not their own use; but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation.

People who are cunning and deceitful have no appreciation for studies as they accomplish their objectives through many crooked ways. Simple folks, however, greatly value the role of studies in human life. Wise people inherently draw upon the ideas obtained from their studies while solving life's myriad problems.

Read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.

The aim of reading and acquiring knowledge must not be to aggressively refute other's views or accept the writer's views as gospel truth. It should also not be to engage in pointless discussion and argumentation. Studying should enable us to weigh facts and analyze them rationally.

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Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention.

Books of varying content and genre are to be made use of differently. Some may be given a cursory reading, some others can be quickly sifted through. Other important books are to be read slowly and minutely so as to truly fathom the meaning and underlying sense.

Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others; but that would be only in the less important arguments, and the meaner sort of books, else distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things.

One can ask an assistant to read a book and prepare a short summary of it. But such practice should be followed for obtaining guidance on matters of lesser importance. There are some books which are, in fact, shortened already.

Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man. Reading adds perfection to a man's personality.

Discussing with others about the contents of a book imparts special practical skills to the reader. Writing removes all the residual weaknesses and ignorance from the person and enables him to remember the contents of a book.

And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit: and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not.

So, writing helps to memorize facts. If a person is bashful so as not to discuss his reading with others, he will not be able to improve his wit. If he does not read, he will remain a somewhat stupid person.

Histories make men wise; poets witty; the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave; logic and rhetoric able to contend.

Studying history makes a man wiser, studying poetry makes a man wittier: mathematics gives sound logical sense, and philosophy imparts valuable lessons on morality.

Abeunt studia in mores [Studies pass into and influence manners]. Nay, there is no stound or impediment in the wit but may be wrought out by fit studies; like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises.

Wit is a god-given gift. It is present in everybody. However, it can be sharpened by selective studying. This is akin to the way certain weaknesses of the human body are cured by appropriate physical exercises.

Bowling is good for the stone and reins; shooting for the lungs and breast; gentle walking for the stomach; riding for the head; and the like. They cure many ailments.

So if a man's wit be wandering, let him study the mathematics; for in demonstrations, if his wit be called away never so little, he must begin again.

If a person is unable to concentrate, he will do well to study mathematics to focus his wavering mind. In mathematics, a slight loss of concentration leads to grave error. This makes the man to start all over again to do it. Thus, studying mathematics restrains the mind from darting off elsewhere.

If his wit be not apt to distinguish or find differences, let him study the Schoolmen; for they are cymini sectores [splitters of hairs].

If a person does not have the ability to discern, he will be benefited by studying Schoolmen as it trains mental ability and develops the art of expression.

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If he be not apt to beat over matters, and to call up one thing to prove and illustrate another, let him study the lawyers' cases. So every defect of the mind may have a special receipt.

If a person is unable to garner facts and manipulate them to put across his views convincingly, studying law will help him. Thus, every deficiency of mind can be addressed by appropriate reading.