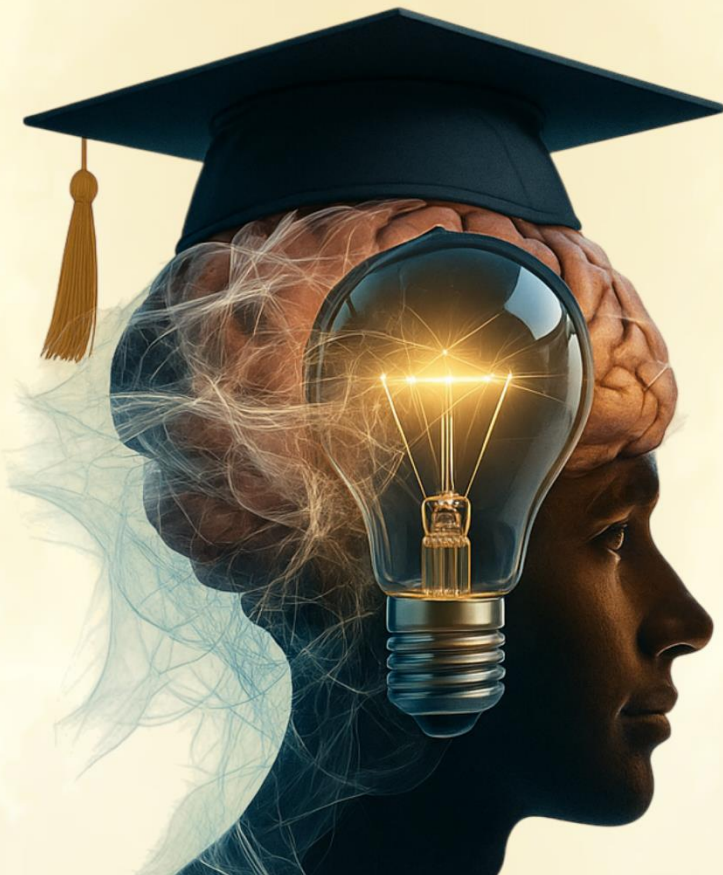


THE

FIRST-CLASS MINDSET

...Mindset Over Result



DEBORAH BAMGBOSE

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This is a work of nonfiction. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

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DEDICATION

To God, who owns my life and does everything in His power to keep me aligned with destiny. Glory!

For my family—you are the shoulders beneath my dreams and the hope which refuels my fire. Thank you!

And to every student who dares to believe that their journey, however uncertain, can lead them to greatness. Read on to take flight!

I didn't see myself as the smartest in class, so I understand what it feels like to doubt yourself in a crowd of brilliance. I once sat where you are, wondering how I would graduate with a top-grade honours. But I aimed, prayed, and studied—curiously, consistently, and courageously. And I made it. Let this be your proof that you can.

Table of Contents

DEDICATION	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
FROM ME TO YOU	VII
INTRODUCTION	VIII
CHAPTER ONE	
FROM KNOW TO KNOW-HOW	1
<i>Bandwagon Learning Is Not for You</i>	3
<i>Find Your Learning Style</i>	4
<i>Take Flight Prompts</i>	6
CHAPTER TWO	
UNDERSTAND YOURSELF	7
<i>Sharpen Your Writing Skill</i>	8
<i>Take Flight Prompts</i>	11
CHAPTER THREE	
WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?	13
<i>You Can't Run Everyone's Race</i>	14
<i>Success Has a Personal Definition. What is Yours?</i>	14
<i>Your Definition is Your Compass</i>	15
<i>Your Goals Will Be Tested</i>	15
<i>Take Flight Prompts</i>	16
CHAPTER FOUR	
TRULY, IRON SHARPENS IRON	17
<i>From Solo to Social</i>	17
<i>Speak Up!</i>	18
<i>Friendships Built on Questions</i>	19
<i>Offer Value</i>	20

<i>Lecturers, Alumni, and Beyond</i> _____	20
<i>Take Flight Prompts</i> _____	21

CHAPTER FIVE

BUILD YOURSELF WHILE YOU LEARN _____ 23

<i>Group Projects, Competitions, and Extracurricular Activities</i> _____	24
<i>Collaborating with Lecturers on Research Projects</i> _____	25
<i>Volunteering and Internships</i> _____	25
<i>Freelancing</i> _____	26
<i>Leadership Roles</i> _____	26
<i>Build a Business</i> _____	27
<i>Personal Branding</i> _____	27
<i>Take Flight Prompts</i> _____	29

CHAPTER SIX

PERSONAL FINANCE _____ 31

<i>Take Flight Prompts</i> _____	34
----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERVE GOD AND MEN _____ 35

<i>Take Flight Prompts</i> _____	37
----------------------------------	----

YOUR ACADEMIC GAME PLAN _____ 39

SUMMARY _____ 40

<i>Study Habits & Academic Performance</i> _____	40
<i>Focus, Productivity & Time Management</i> _____	40
<i>Academic Understanding & Self-Tracking</i> _____	41
<i>Wellness, Mental & Emotional Health</i> _____	41
<i>Faith and Spirituality</i> _____	42
<i>Attitude, Responsibility & Reflection</i> _____	43

ABOUT THE AUTHOR _____ 44

FROM ME TO YOU

If there's one thing I've learned in life, it's that everyone's journey—even through school—is deeply personal. Yes, I earned a first-class honours degree. But this book isn't about celebrating that achievement or urging you to chase the same goal. Earning first-class honours was a personal pursuit for me. It mattered deeply to me, yet I won't define it as a measure of true success. In fact, what I attribute my success outside school to is the first-class mind I built along the way. The kind that kept learning even outside the classroom. The kind that stayed up late reading. The kind that raised her hand to ask questions, not just for grades but for utmost comprehension. The kind that didn't fold under pressure but found peace in God and strength in quiet consistency. So, this book isn't about pressuring you to achieve first-class honours, but most importantly about building a first-class mind while you pursue top-grade honours. No matter what your grades are presently, and what your cumulative results may eventually be, this book is about preparing you to win in exams and develop a mindset that thrives beyond grades. It's about becoming someone you'll be proud of, not just in school but in life. I hope this book feels like a friend beside you, not a stern lecturer in front of you. I hope you pause often, reflect deeply, and act boldly. And I hope that in the end, even if your certificate doesn't say "first class," your mindset, your values, and your results in life will.

With all my heart,
Deborah Bamgbose

INTRODUCTION

I remember how overwhelmed I was on my first day at the almighty Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). I had expectations of what campus life would be like—calm, organized, and all that—but the reality was a far cry from my dreams. There I was, in the middle of what looked like organized chaos: students everywhere, talking, rushing, buying, eating, shouting, reading, even queuing at restrooms. I kept thinking, *So this is what university is?* My heart raced with the common excitement that comes with being a fresh undergraduate, but my head buzzed with questions, more and more than I had before leaving home. The loudest of them all was, *How would I cope?*

One would think that anyone who gained direct entry into the university as a 200-level student, having graduated with distinction from Yaba College of Technology, wouldn't have such worries. Yet, despite my excellent academic background, I did worry. *How I would cope amidst many brilliant minds.* Since I wasn't starting from 100 Level, I was also worried about being the outsider in a class of people who already knew each other. My expectations of my lecturers were also a concern, and my fears worsened at the start of lectures. Honestly, I became afraid of the known and the unknown.

I settled in as quickly as I could, doing the best I could. Then came 300 Level when I had a serious health challenge that lasted the entire session. It affected my strength, my class attendance, and even my results. At some point, I was close to having an extra year. But by God's grace and determination, I still finished strong. Not only did I graduate at the right time, I also finished as the Best Graduating Student in my department, winning six awards that include the Obafemi Awolowo University Excellence Award in two consecutive sessions.

Looking back now, I can say this for sure: the doubts, the fears, the questions, the setbacks, were all necessary parts of the journey. Every challenge, whether major or minor, came with a lesson. Each experience had a purpose: an opportunity to learn at least one thing. And I thank God that I always saw my journey at OAU as a battle between me and the system. I was determined to win. And I did.

I want you to win too. That's why I decided to write about my journey and share the mistakes I made that turned into successes; the mindset shifts that replaced my fears with confidence; the networking that turned my confusion into clarity; the study techniques that helped me ace my courses; and the small, intentional habits that kept my spirit anchored in the pursuit of my goals. I penned this book to teach you how to design a study schedule that works for you; forge purposeful networks with coursemates; show up by speaking up; stay spiritually grounded—even during tests and examinations; join societies that align with your talents, gifts, and passions; build meaningful relationships with your lecturers; and seek mentorship and pursue internships that set the stage for your future career. Overall, you will realize what you're doing that isn't working, and what you need to do to make things work.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find *Take Flight Prompts*—simple, reflective and resetting questions that will help you start applying these ideas immediately. Whether you want to improve your note-absorption method, set academic goals, or even carve out more time to think and rest, these prompts will help you get at them. Read the book at a good pace to understand, reflect, try the tips, and make the journey your own. And then voila! You graduate with a top-grade degree and a first-class mind. **But here's where it starts...**

CHAPTER ONE

FROM KNOW TO KNOW-HOW

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

— Albert Einstein

The first major issue I remember having with my academics when I got into Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was with understanding courses. I would have thought something was really wrong with me, but I got to know early enough that the issue was common to many. Although people, especially my colleagues, found mine confusing. They thought I understood the topics we were to take in our second year before our lecturers even started teaching—since I came in through Direct Entry. But I didn't have prior knowledge of the courses. If I knew anything about what we started doing in class, it was shallow. And I would even later observe that my understanding of what the lecturers in OAU were teaching us was on a surface level, too. I'd think I understood the courses until we wrote tests or exams, where I'd start writing and then... go blank. I could only write a two-line sentence about what was asked before exhausting what I knew.

From Know To Know-How

I tried to push through by memorising my notes. I'd read handouts like my life depended on it, trying to cram every sentence into my brain. But during tests or exams, I'd either forget what I crammed or mix things up. It was exhausting and disappointing. I could cram my notes today and forget them tomorrow. Even though my first GPA in OAU was a 4.50 out of 5.00, I knew there was more to me than that. By the time first semester results were out, I saw the proof that cramming points I barely understood would only help me survive OAU; it wouldn't help me thrive. I'm glad I got frustrated enough about it there and then that I sat myself down to think and ask what was wrong. I realised that I wasn't taking time to understand what was taught as much as I should. Memorising without comprehending was like building on sand—very temporary and risky. How then do I retain what I was memorising when I didn't even comprehend it?

True success, especially in the university, is built on full understanding, not on cramming. I studied Estate Management, and most of our exams were theory-based. No options. No guessing. Just explain this, define that, apply this. If I didn't fully understand the courses, I had little to write. That was my defining semester. I decided I would do no more short-term learning but rather understand knowledge in a way that would stick. So, I made a decision: I would study with the intention of deeply mastering at least 70% of each course content. Believe me, that decision changed everything. Full understanding opened doors: better grades, greater confidence, and deeper conversations. I began to ask questions in class, watch YouTube videos about my courses, and relate ideas to real-life situations. I also started sharing what I'd learned with others. That was when I acknowledged teaching as a top strategy for retaining and remembering what you know.

The First-Class Mindset

Over time, I discovered I'm actually creative at giving answers to questions. I would churn my lecturers' lectures and answer their questions in my own words, such that, even when asked the same question twice, I wouldn't repeat the answer the same way. The key terms would be the same, but I'd beautifully answer each differently.

Bandwagon Learning Is Not for You

I once tutored a group of students whom I asked basic questions like, "Why do we use this method?" The answers I got? "That's how we met it." That statement annoys me to this day. It is the language and excuse of average students. Students who only desire excellence but don't attain it. Imagine someone saying 2×2 is 4 and when you ask why, they reply, "That's how we met it." Maybe that's been your reply too. But 2×2 isn't just 4; it's 4 because multiplication is repeated addition.

It took me a while to realise I was not in school to answer questions my lecturers ask in tests and exams the same way my colleagues or those before me did. I made sure to always understand the principles behind theories, concepts, and formulas, so I could reply to questions in my own way. After all, I went to school to think, to connect the dots my lecturers merely highlighted, and to question them until I fully understood.

One of your major duties as a student who wants to excel is to critique what you learn. Understand that everything you've ever been taught—and will ever be taught—was postulated by men with flesh and blood like you. And there are tricks to those theories and formulas, such that if you don't extend your knowledge base beyond class, you might not know them. Ask any top-grade

From Know To Know-How

graduate; they'll tell you one of the major things they did was to comprehend the principles behind formulas, equations, and theories and make meaningful connections between them. So, embrace the mindset of comprehending your courses instead of just amassing information about them. Understanding your courses will help you relate things to real world occurrences and thereby improve your intellectual development. It requires focus, and it's usually time consuming. But it will help you secure good grades, solve real-world questions right from school, and retain knowledge long-term retention and apply it effectively. Here's how to know you're only gathering information and not understanding:

- ✓ You memorize a lot but forget quickly.
- ✓ You can't explain the topics you were taught in your own words.
- ✓ All you read evaporates from your memory after exams.
- ✓ You don't employ critical thinking while reading your notes or interpreting questions.
- ✓ You can't apply what you learnt in real-life problems.
- ✓ You shy away from questions from lecturers and/or discussions with colleagues.

Find Your Learning Style

Let me tell you about a bulky course I needed to write an exam in at a time when I had very little time to prepare. In my panic, I did what I knew best—cram. I turned my notes into songs I could memorise. It worked. I passed the exam. But guess what I realised about what I crammed when I got to a different level when I needed to remember what I had "sung"? It had vanished. I

The First-Class Mindset

remembered the tune but not the concepts. An average student will feel no pain about that, but the experience made me vow never to cram again. Not everyone learns the same way. Some people love to read, others need to see pictures or watch videos. Some people need to hear it, while others need to read it. Some need to do all of the above—and I'm one of them. Singing my notes alone never works.

My learning style was a mix:

- ✓ I recorded my notes and listened to them.
- ✓ I watched videos that broke down complex topics.
- ✓ I summarised what I learnt in my own words.
- ✓ I drew diagrams of what I learnt.
- ✓ I formed study groups and asked endless questions.
- ✓ I explained things to my friends—even if they didn't ask.
- ✓ I used rewards to keep myself going (Amala and Gbegiri was my go-to!).
- ✓ I built a personal system of learning.

That system helped me stay consistent, and I'll share the full breakdown of it at the end of this book because this book isn't just about me; it's about you. My goal is to help you avoid the mistakes I made by sharing the habits that worked for me. However, here are a few ways you can discover your learning style—if you're honest with yourself:

- ✓ Observe how you best remember information.
- ✓ Try learning something new in different ways (audio, notes, videos).
- ✓ Reflect on the method that keeps you interested.
- ✓ Think of how you study under pressure. What do you default to?
- ✓ Ask friends how they've seen you learn most effectively.

From Know To Know-How

I think the reason only a few people achieve first class, or other top-grade, is because only a few do the diligent, smart work it requires. And comprehension is one of them. No matter your department or level, you can decide to switch from peripheral reading to deep understanding today. Even if your exams are multiple-choiced and not theoretical like mine, full understanding increases your chances of choosing the right answers to tricky questions. It's never too late to reset. If I could do it, you can too.

Take Flight Prompts

These prompts will guide you on knowing your method of absorbing your notes. Be honest with yourself. Write your answers down and take a few minutes to reflect on them.

- ✓ Do I mostly read to cram or to understand? If I read to understand, what's my rank on a scale of 0-10?
- ✓ What's my preferred learning style—visual, auditory, rewriting, or hands-on? What examples can I use to support my claim?
- ✓ Do I find explaining what I learn after each lecture, or period of reading, to colleagues easy? How would I rank myself on a scale of 0-10?
- ✓ Have I ever asked why or how in class? If yes, why? If not, why?
- ✓ What is one thing I'll do differently after reading this chapter?

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTAND YOURSELF

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."

– Carl Rogers

What were your thoughts when you read the title of this chapter? Is this about understanding too? Well, it is. It's not enough to understand your courses—you have to understand yourself too. In fact, it's impossible to fully understand your courses if you don't understand yourself. The concept of knowing yourself includes understanding your social, emotional, and physical behaviours: when you enjoy reading, what your most productive time is, how sociable you are, how fast you assimilate information, your attitude toward academics, what aids your retention, whether you prefer solving calculation problems or writing essays, and much more.

In my second year (300 Level) at OAU, I discovered I wasn't good at theoretical courses, which I refer to as essay-writing courses. These are the kinds of courses where exam questions demand detailed writing and explanation. Those who knew calculations were my strength assumed I was excelling in those

Understand Yourself

courses. You know, there's this common belief that people who are good at calculations are good at everything. But that's not always true—or maybe I was the exception. My concern about those courses grew when I got a C in a 2-unit course I took in the first semester of 300 Level. When I saw the result, I cried myself to sleep, and for days, I was unwell.

The second semester examination for that session was fast approaching, and I was dreading the four essay-writing courses I had to take. I took time to reflect on the cause of the C I had in the first semester and remembered that it wasn't because I didn't understand the course. I had started comprehending all my lectures, but it wasn't reflecting in my results—mainly because I didn't find writing in large volumes interesting. My fingers would get tired during exams. They hurt so much that I could barely keep writing. With the fear of how I'd handle the four upcoming courses, I reached out to one of my trusted lecturers. He advised me to exercise my fingers by flexing the muscles through extensive writing before the exams. I followed his advice—and I aced the four courses.

Sharpen Your Writing Skill

Writing is one of the major ways—if not the only way—to demonstrate your understanding of a course and communicate your ideas. It plays an important role in your academic success because it's through writing that you earn the points which determine your grades. Even for courses that involve presentations and practicals, the essay part of the exams often carries 50-70% of the total score. It often outweighs other forms of assessment.

But it's not enough to know what to write; your writing has to align with the question asked. How you write your answers makes all the difference. You must present substantial information that directly addresses the question—clearly, accurately, and coherently—because that's how you leave a lasting impression on your lecturer. You and your classmates may have similar answers, but you need to present yours in a compelling way to stand out. I remember a time when one of my lecturers said, “If you write two pages of unrelated information in response to the question I asked, I'll give you just one mark—for using your ink!”

In expressive writing, you're not just passing information; you're presenting it with context and structure—an outcome of your critical thinking and engagement with complex ideas. It helps your lecturers connect with what you've written. My lecturers knew my voice through my writing. For example, if the question was, “What is a compact city?” you could expect me to explain the relevance of the concept, define it, describe its features, outline its advantages and disadvantages, mention classic examples, and even identify who proposed the theory. Since the question is direct, I would avoid using bullet points and instead carefully structure my thoughts in prose. This showed that I knew what I was talking about—and that I had done thorough research beyond what was taught in class. Mind you, some lecturers want you to give them answers to their questions just the way they gave you in class. So, you shouldn't only understand your courses and yourself; you should understand how each of your lecturers wants you to present answers to their questions.

Another aspect of understanding yourself is knowing the optimal time when you read and assimilate best. For me, I could read at any time, depending on the course. For essay-writing courses, my brain demands a quiet environment

Understand Yourself

for easy comprehension, whereas I thrived in understanding calculation-based courses anywhere, anytime. I also discovered that I understand essay-writing courses better after a period of rest when I feel more settled. Consequently, I dedicated my midnights and early mornings to reading such courses.

You could be someone who finds extensive writing easy, yet struggle to read at any time of day. We are different, and that's why it's good to find what works for you. We all thrive differently under different environments and conditions, so don't compare yourself to anyone. Even the Bible says, "They that compare themselves with themselves are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12, KJV).

Here are a few tips to help you ace essay-writing courses.

- ✓ Ensure your work is properly spaced out and your handwriting is legible. Lecturers hate to strain their eyes when reading.
- ✓ Structure your sentences well, and use punctuation marks to aid understanding.
- ✓ Use course-specific terminology. It drives the point home differently.
- ✓ Eliminate unnecessary words. Avoid ambiguity and focus on specificity.
- ✓ Read voraciously, especially literature and research works in your field. It helps you articulate your words properly and provides a bank of words for your usage.
- ✓ Do not attempt expressive writing for the first time in the exam hall; rather, ensure you practice it while you read and prepare for tests and exams.

Take Flight Prompts

Be honest with yourself. Write your answers down, and take a few minutes to reflect on them.

- ✓ How well do I perform in courses that require extensive writing in exams?
- ✓ What do I think is the cause for my “bad” grades?
- ✓ On a scale of 0-10, how easy do I find writing answers during exams?
- ✓ Why do I find writing answers strenuous?
- ✓ Do I write notes in class?
- ✓ Would rewriting my notes work?
- ✓ What time of the day do I assimilate more?
- ✓ Should I read at night or during the day?

Understand Yourself

CHAPTER THREE

WHERE ARE YOU HEADED?

"Knowing where you're going is the first step to getting there."

– Kenneth H. Blanchard

I already told you about my first-day experience at OAU. I felt like someone who was thrown into a bustling market. OAU is really busy with students and bats. In fact, some say there are more bats than students. However, movement is always constant, even at midnight and during holidays, with people hurrying, running, scurrying, or walking to their destinations. Everyone who enters the campus is obviously going somewhere, but destinations are quite different and so are the vehicles they board: those going to the market inside the school take buses going to the market; those heading to the school hostels take buses going to Hall; and those going to the academic areas (classes, laboratories, faculties, departments, etc.) take buses heading to Bus-Stop. Similarly, when it comes to results, everyone aims for different grades.

Where are you Headed?

You Can't Run Everyone's Race

I'm always glad that I quickly learnt that university is a race where each person has their lane. You may start out running alongside some people, but don't be shocked when they stop, walk, get distracted, or branch off entirely. Some people even turn around and head back. You must know what you're running for; otherwise, you'll keep looking left and right, checking how fast others are moving or what direction they're facing until you're confused and frustrated. You have to ask yourself: Am I just following the crowd or actually going somewhere? Some people are just on campus. No destination. No urgency. No clarity. Just vibes.

Success Has a Personal Definition. What is Yours?

I already told you: you can't run everyone's race. To some, to succeed is to get through to their final year and graduate—regardless of the grade. To some, success is achieving first-class degrees only. And then, there are those who define success as graduating with a top-grade degree and a first-class mind. Each definition shapes everything about those who defined them: their behaviour to lectures, their social lives, and their level of interest in different campus activities. My pursuit wasn't the same as some, or most, of my colleagues. Although we started in the same lane, our finish lines turned out different. Some were always glad to have B's. Some C's. Some D's. Some had E's, feeling relieved to have escaped F's. But I always aim for A in each of my courses. For me, anything below 70% was a huge failure.

It wasn't pride or *oversabi*. It was the kind of decision I needed to make in order to drive myself to success. It dictated my sleeping time, the events to skip, and when to turn off gists and face my books. It also helped me when I failed—yes, I did fail. But when you know what you're aiming for, you're not easily derailed by failure. So define your version of success. Not your parents' version. Not your roommate's. Yours. What do you aim for? The answer reveals how far you're willing to go. It will sustain you when the journey gets tough.

Your Definition is Your Compass

In a place like OAU—and I'm sure yours too—everything and everyone is always in motion: students, friends, trends, events, crises, and noise. You need a personal compass to navigate it all. That compass includes some WH-questions like the ones listed below. The compass helps you say no when you should, and yes when you must. The truth is, if you don't have a firm internal anchor, external factors will dictate your path. If your goal is just to get through school, that's fine. But if you want school to transform you, equipping you not just with a top-grade degree, but also with knowledge, skills, personal growth, meaningful connections, and a clear sense of direction, then you need to be intentional! Define your purpose. Reflect on it deeply. Write it down and put it somewhere you can see it every day. Revisit it often. Hold onto it tightly. Let it guide you like a compass, because it is!

Your Goals Will Be Tested

There'll be moments when your dream feels like a stubborn generator—plenty of effort, but no light. Times when you'll prepare for a course and still get a bad grade. Nights when you'll look at your notes, plans, and efforts, and they'll look

Where are you Headed?

like premium nonsense. Times when you'll read and not understand a thing. Times when you'll want to give up and say, "Let me just get the degree, sha." I've been there. But those moments are when your "why" matters most. When you remember why you started, you won't let temporary struggles become permanent defeat.

Take Flight Prompts

Here's an expansion of that question, What do you aim for?, to help you arrive at a clear answer:

- ✓ Why am I in University?
- ✓ What did success mean to me in the past?
- ✓ What does success mean to me now?
- ✓ Can I attain this definition of success?
- ✓ What kind of person do I want to become after my convocation?
- ✓ What values do I want to live by while in school?
- ✓ What are the habits that will help me move toward my goal?
- ✓ If I continue at my current pace, what honours will I end up with?
- ✓ What am I doing now that aligns with my future self?
- ✓ What are the things that can easily throw me off balance?
- ✓ Who are my distractors and what are my distractions?

Avoid giving a mental answer. Write your answers down. They'll help you keep your eyes on the finish line while staying on track.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRULY, IRON SHARPENS IRON

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller

In many universities, the Department of Estate Management is housed within the Faculty of Science or Engineering. However, at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), the Department of Estate Management falls under the Faculty of Environmental Design and Management. Within the faculty are sibling departments like Urban and Regional Planning, Quantity Surveying, Architecture, and Building. These departments are considered siblings because of their overlapping career paths, which was why we took certain courses together.

From Solo to Social

When I first got to school, I noticed that students in each department had their cliques, and it was common to see them sit and study together. But I didn't care about having one. I already planned to be a lone ranger throughout school. I felt joining any clique would tie me down and deprive me of my time. But I later

Build Yourself While You Learn

realized that to thrive on campus—academically, socially, and spiritually—I needed meaningful friendships. Still, my social life didn't begin to have life until I was at 300 level. My department and the Urban and Regional Planning department shared a certain course, and there was a group of girls in that class whose contributions always left me speechless. I often felt I had little or nothing to say after they spoke. I started craving conversations with them—not necessarily to join their circle, but just to engage. Thankfully, we had taken a shared course in 200 level, and my contributions back then had made me known. The feeling was mutual—they also wanted to meet me. Eventually, we connected and we've stayed in touch ever since.

My social goals soon expanded. I became intentional about connecting with top-performing students in my faculty and those with remarkable leadership or humanitarian qualities. Maintaining those relationships came naturally; there was always something to talk about—from casual classroom conversations to envisioning our ideal futures. Over time, I learned something important: people often desire connection and collaboration, but many hesitate to make the first move. No one wants to be labeled “the one who approached first.” The real challenge is stepping out of your comfort zone.

Speak Up!

Recently, I spoke with a young student who was torn between making contributions in class or staying quiet. From experience, I told him that speaking up sharpens your thinking, boosts your visibility, and improves your overall performance. Consistently voicing my thoughts helped me grow in communication, confidence, body language, and other soft skills. It has also earned me recognition and opened doors to many opportunities. Conversations

enriched me with ideas. I noticed the synergy between those in my circle and their potential. Some were from other departments—even outside my faculty—but it was easy to see how conversations ignite one's energy to achieve set goals and build friendships that last beyond school. By speaking up, I had opportunities to represent my school in various competitions. My social drive expanded beyond campus walls. What started as simple classroom conversations grew into curriculum comparisons and knowledge exchanges across institutions. Sharing ideas—and receiving just as much in return—gives a great feeling. Speak up! Your voice is a tool for growth and visibility, so speak your mind even if your voice shakes. Just speak.

Friendships Built on Questions

Deep friendships often begin with simple, intentional conversations. I already told you to speak up, but speaking up isn't always about contributing; sometimes, it's about asking. I'll never forget how I met a friend during one of my internships. He was just about to leave the firm, having completed his internship. We met on his last day. Though he was ahead of me in class (and not from my school), we began talking in what felt like a handover session. I asked him a question and we exchanged contacts in case I ever needed guidance. That single question—unrelated to work—became the thread that sustained our friendship to this day. I also remember two senior colleagues from my school who consistently supported me with materials and gave their time generously. They still do so, even now. Don't be afraid to be the first to reach out. Leave the wagon of those waiting for the other person to reach out. Let go of pride. Don't wait for the perfect moment. Take the moments and make them perfect.

Build Yourself While You Learn

Offer Value

Valuable conversations often start by giving value first, and it takes giving and taking values to build lasting relationships. Be prepared at any time to initiate meaningful discussions that are valuable. Don't be shallow. The extent to which you offer value often determines the strength of the connection. When I was in school—even now—I made it a habit to share opportunities that could benefit others—whether academic, professional, or otherwise. We looked out for one another, sharing resources, encouraging ourselves, and striving to be better. And we still do. Of course, there were times I didn't maximize networking opportunities. Sometimes I hesitated or overthought what to say. But if you have that chance now, please make the most of it. Build your social capital.

Lecturers, Alumni, and Beyond

Beyond classmates and peers from other departments, your lecturers, academic groups, and alumni bodies are valuable assets. Lecturers and alumni can be strong allies if approached well. It's surprisingly easy to be known by a lecturer: contribute meaningfully in class, ask insightful questions, show up early, and honor them respectfully. These simple habits create a strong, positive impression. Lecturers also enjoy engaging with standout students. it's a win-win. As for alumni, LinkedIn is a powerful platform. Many are active and willing to support current students. Reach out to them with well-written, intentional messages. You can also attend webinars, seminars, and conferences to learn and network with them. Don't try to meet everyone. Instead, aim to strike a deep connection with one person and leave a lasting impression.

For instance, if you know Prof. X will be attending a conference, read about his field, study his work, and prepare thoughtful questions. Everyone enjoys talking about what excites them. And if you're introverted like me, consider leveraging writing and non-verbal communication. But to grow into a global change agent, you'll need to gradually outgrow the fear of connection. You will need to outgrow being an introvert to being an ambivert, such that you know when to be a loner and when to be social.

I already told you about my plans to be a lone ranger but had to change on that trajectory. Looking back, I believe I now understand that growth isn't just about working hard—it's also about building with others. Relationships helped me expand my knowledge, sharpen my voice, and seize opportunities I never imagined. You don't need to know everyone, but you need to build with someone. The journey becomes richer when you walk with others. Make that move. Start that conversation. Offer that help. Give value first—and watch how your world expands.

Take Flight Prompts

Connection is a powerful catalyst for growth, but it starts with small, intentional steps. Use these prompts to reflect, act, and build meaningful relationships that fuel your journey on campus and beyond.

- ✓ Have I been having valuable conversations with colleagues and lecturers?
- ✓ Have I been intentional about networking beyond my department or friend group?
- ✓ When was the last time I spoke up in class or a group setting? How did it go?

Build Yourself While You Learn

- ✓ What fears or limiting beliefs are holding me back from building new connections? Fear of rejection, fear of being misunderstood, or fear of vulnerability? What can I do to feel more confident and speak up?
- ✓ What's one networking opportunity I missed that I'd handle differently today?
- ✓ Who are the three people around me (classmates, lecturers, alumni) I would love to connect with? What steps can I take this week to start a conversation with at least one of them?
- ✓ What 2–3 conversation openers or questions can I use when meeting someone new?
- ✓ Find a student who's doing something you admire. Reach out and ask to learn from them.

CHAPTER FIVE

BUILD YOURSELF WHILE YOU LEARN

“You don’t have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great.”
- Zig Ziglar

There comes a point in every student’s journey when grades alone begin to feel insufficient. Lectures and textbooks may fill the mind, but deep down, there’s often a quiet void—a sense that something is missing. A feeling that something more is required to truly become who you dream to be. And that feeling isn’t wrong. In a world that rewards initiative, creativity, and courage, grades are no longer enough to fully reflect how capable you are. The classroom gives you knowledge, but real growth comes when you start putting your skills and talents to use. Talent must be nurtured. Skills must be stretched, refined, and released into real-world situations. The knowledge you gather in the classroom is foundational, but real growth comes when you begin to apply the knowledge gained.

Build Yourself While You Learn

Whether it's leading a team, joining a competition, taking on an internship, volunteering, or starting something of your own, university becomes far more meaningful when you go beyond theory and take action. It's important to pursue good grades, yet it's equally vital to put your skills and talents to the test. Opportunities will always exist, but the question is: will you be ready for them? Talent is a natural ability—something you're inherently good at—while skills are developed over time through learning and consistent practice. Both can grow, and both can diminish if ignored or left unpracticed. But the good news is they can always be upgraded. And in today's fast-paced world, those who consistently improve and stay updated are the ones who thrive. The principles and theories learnt in school are foundational, the real world demands application which involves creative use of knowledge and best use of skills. And school time is that time to step out, try new things, and grow from the experience.

These are several ways to put your skills and talent to use:

Group Projects, Competitions, and Extracurricular Activities

Beyond lectures and textbooks, some of the most defining moments in school happen when you roll up your sleeves and get involved in group projects and departmental practicals. They may sometimes feel stressful, but they are golden opportunities to learn how to collaborate, manage pressure, and apply knowledge in real time. They teach you how to work with colleagues with diverse perspectives, navigate conflict, and deliver results. These are skills you'll need for the rest of your life. Competitions and extracurricular activities are platforms that challenge, stretch, and sharpen your abilities. Coding competitions, writing contests, intellectual clubs, community development projects, and business pitch events don't just build your résumé—they reveal hidden potential.

Through these activities, you'll develop communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, problem-solving, and time management skills. These soft skills often open doors and help you keep them open. So don't shy away—step in, show up, and give it your best.

Collaborating with Lecturers on Research Projects

One of the most overlooked but deeply rewarding ways to stretch your academic and professional potential is by collaborating with lecturers on research work. Lecturers are not just teachers, they're researchers, scholars, and often contributors to global conversations in their respective fields. Many of them publish regularly, and their projects often require practical assistance. You can check what they've done by typing their names and your university into ResearchGate, Academia.edu, or Google Scholar. If any lecturer's focus aligns with your own interests or dream specialization, then reach out to him or her politely. Express your willingness to assist, share what you admire about their work and whatever 'new' idea you have about the specialization if you have any, and emphasize your eagerness to learn while contributing in any way they think you can. By this, you begin to shape your academic path and give yourself a head start in fields like academia, policy, innovation, or development.

Volunteering and Internships

Some of the most valuable lessons you'll learn in school won't come from lecture halls—they'll come from showing up, giving your time, and stepping into real-world roles. Volunteering allows you to serve while building soft skills like leadership, communication, and teamwork. Internships, on the other hand, expose you to industry expectations and practical experience in your field.

Build Yourself While You Learn

Together, they give you a head start in life beyond school. A well-chosen internship can open doors, help you have a professional network, and even clarify what you truly enjoy (or don't). Look for opportunities that align with your career goals, challenge you to grow, and reflect your values. The best experiences are those that stretch you and shape you, so don't say yes to just anything or jump at every opportunity just to stay busy or seen. Instead, seek roles that align with your career goals or offer exposure to fields where you dream to be.

Freelancing

Personally, I see freelancing as a means to learn, earn, and grow. As a student, your time is one of your most valuable resources, and you should make judicious use of it. But what if you could use some of that time to generate income, either by using the skills you already have or building the one(s) you don't have? That's what freelancing offers. It's not just about making money; it's a powerful way to develop your skills, discover your strengths, and build a portfolio while still in school. Whether it's design, writing, coding, or marketing, platforms like Upwork and Fiverr offer you space to grow. Although it takes time, start however, and build your portfolio.

Leadership Roles

Every department has an association with various offices, most of which are contested for. However, there are times a few positions are uncontested due to a lack of interest. You could step up and use these roles to build your resume and act of responsibility. Beyond your department, there are often campus events hosted by brands or organizations. Join them. They are great platforms

for growth. You can also carefully seize impromptu opportunities like annual or bi-annual events organized by departments, faculties, corporate bodies, and even brands.

Build a Business

University is one of the best places to experiment with entrepreneurship. You have a supportive environment, access to potential customers (your fellow students), and the freedom to try, fail, learn, and grow. If you have a business idea—no matter how small—don't wait until after graduation. Start now. Whether it's selling products, offering services like hairdressing, photography, fashion styling, tutoring, graphic design, or even launching a tech or content-based business, the key is to start where you are. You may not have everything figured out, but every step you take sharpens your business sense and expands your creativity. Running a business while in school teaches real-life lessons: budgeting, customer service, marketing, time management, and persistence. It builds grit, and that kind of grit will serve you far beyond your campus gates. Don't be discouraged by your initial profits or mistakes. Every successful entrepreneur once had a first customer, a first failed idea, and a first big win. Let your campus be your training ground. Grow as you go, and let your story inspire others who are afraid to begin.

Personal Branding

All of the above contributes to your personal brand. Everything you do (your projects, internships, volunteering, competitions, leadership roles) goes into shaping who you are and you reflect them as your persona. Gone are the days when branding was just for businesses. You, too, are a brand. And in a

Build Yourself While You Learn

competitive world, how you present yourself matters just as much as what you've achieved. To build a personal brand is to build yourself. But the world is now digital such that everyone now needs a media presence to thrive. Don't misinterpret me. There are offline businesses that are thriving, but they'd have been better if they add a media presence to what they do. So be intentional about building it. Let your work speak well of you—online and offline.

As a student, your personal brand can speak for you in rooms you haven't yet entered. It plays a key role in job interviews, scholarships, fellowships, grant applications, and even political or leadership positions. Employers often go online to “meet” you before they ever meet you in person. So, make sure your digital footprint (your blog, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) is authentic and aligned with your values. Use them to showcase your skills, share how you show up in different conferences and other professional spaces, share your growth, and tell your story in a way that inspires confidence and trust. Even when you feel like you're not enough, show up anyway!

That said, as you build your brand and put your talents to the test, remember to prioritize wisely. It's easy to get overwhelmed trying to do everything at once. Evaluate your semester's workload before saying yes to any new project or opportunity. Even good things can become distractions if done at the wrong time. Don't be caught doing the right thing at the wrong time. You must consider your workload per semester/session before considering doing any of the above. Focus. Pace yourself. Choose only what aligns most with your goals per season. Be intentional, be consistent, and above all, be wise.

Take Flight Prompts

Use these reflective questions designed to stir your ambition, align your purpose, and push you to start.

- ✓ When I search my name online, do the results reflect the kind of person or professional I want to be?
- ✓ What are two or three short sentences that describe who I am and what I love? That's the beginning of my personal brand.
- ✓ Have I ever volunteered or done an internship? What skills did I gain from the experience?
- ✓ What is one internship or volunteering role I can apply for?
- ✓ What is one freelance skill I can offer or commit to learning this semester?
- ✓ What leadership role on campus can I go for? What is the first step I need to take?
- ✓ Is there a lecturer whose research interests match my dream career? Have I looked them up?
- ✓ What business idea have I kept aside? What small step can I take to begin testing it now?
- ✓ Which soft skill (e.g., time management, teamwork, communication) will I focus on improving this semester?
- ✓ What digital presence do I have? Did I add my projects, internships, achievements, or volunteering experience?
- ✓ What simple service or product can I offer on campus? What is the smallest step I can take to launch it?
- ✓ Which fellow student do I admire for doing well? What habits or skills can I learn from them?

Build Yourself While You Learn

- ✓ Have I joined any campus club, association, or intellectual group that aligns with my interests? When will I attend a meeting?
- ✓ What personal growth challenge can I commit to this semester—starting a blog, learning a new skill, or organizing a mini event?
- ✓ What three things do I want to be known for by graduation? How can I start building toward them now?

CHAPTER SIX

PERSONAL FINANCE

*Financial freedom is available to those who learn about it
and work for it."*

— Robert Kiyosaki

I remember my early days on campus. I was badly broke. School fees, house rent, and part of my feeding were covered by my parents, but everything else was on me: feeding, transportation, toiletries, books, materials, printing, and all other miscellaneous things that drain students' pockets. Although being stranded wasn't a new experience for me as a student, I quickly learned that financial hardship wasn't just a possibility for many students on campus—it was a lifestyle. A multiple-choice question every student had to answer. I'm glad I chose turning every skill, opportunity, and challenge into a means of survival as my answer.

My first hustle came literally from my feet. I had a small collection of shoes that often got compliments, then I thought, why not sell shoes? Then I started to buy nice, affordable pairs in Lagos and resell them to fellow students and even lecturers. It wasn't long before my customers trusted my taste and quality

Personal Finance

of good shoes. I made use of my smartphone—even though the phone wasn't built for the workload I gave it—to post pictures of those shoes, I made profits and met some of my needs. Thankfully, I was skilled at writing sales copies that converted into purchases. Later, I included groceries in my hustle. With a little capital, I'd buy everyday items in bulk—noodles, sanitary towels, sachet milk, sugar cubes, beverages, hair kits, among others—and retail them at a small profit. It was consistent and met needs directly, so the turnover was regular.

Another of my most memorable ventures was selling roasted groundnuts and kuli kuli—a spicy peanut snack I learned to make during a sister's fellowship program in church. I couldn't do much with the kuli kuli because it was time-consuming, but I roasted groundnuts a lot and sold them in big bottles. I would package them nicely, and through word of mouth, I gained regular customers.

Later on, I delved into agriculture—a hobby I discovered in primary school. Since then, I managed a small farm at home where I planted crops like vegetables, maize, yam, cassava, and plantain. This continued until I left for tertiary education. While in school (I stayed off campus for most of my undergraduate years), I used a small parcel of land beside the house where I planted similar crops. I invested some money from my various businesses to buy a cutlass, hoes, and seeds. The crops yielded well and reduced the financial strain of buying some food items. I also partnered with a friend in the Agricultural Extension department. Together, we secured a portion of the university's land, planted cucumbers, and sold the produce.

At one point, my required expenses were higher than my income, so I returned to a passion I had long nurtured—teaching. I taught primary and secondary school students for a fee after school hours and sometimes during weekends. This also gave me room to fan my passion into flames, as I tutored some of my course mates and junior students for free.

Later, I discovered PiggyVest, a digital savings app with which I set up automated daily savings. The amount felt small, but it added up. On the days my phone buzzed with a PiggyVest reminder, it was a little nudge toward responsibility. I learned to lock funds away, set targets, and treat my savings like a sacred bill I mustn't touch—unless I absolutely had to. And even then, I'd feel the pinch.

Whenever I look back on those days, one of the greatest lessons I remember is the value of financial discipline. I learned how to manage money better than before. I got introduced to thrift-saving early, thanks to a group of final-year students who ran a small cooperative society at the beginning of my undergraduate days. You'd contribute a set amount every week or month and get your payout at the end of the semester. That small lump sum helped me restock inventory or meet major needs like purchasing textbooks or sorting transportation. With my savings, I often felt like someone who had little but lacked nothing.

Personal Finance

Take Flight Prompts

- ✓ What skill, interest, or compliment have I received lately that I could turn into a side hustle on campus?
- ✓ What's one item or service students around me often need that I can provide, even on a small scale?
- ✓ What is one way I can reduce my daily or weekly spending without affecting my wellbeing?
- ✓ Do I track my expenses? Can I start today, just with pen and paper or an app?
- ✓ Do I have separate records for personal money and business money? If not, what system can I put in place today?
- ✓ Who do I know on campus who's doing small business well? Can I have a chat with them this week?
- ✓ What digital savings tool like PiggyVest or Cowrywise can I download and set up with a low amount today?
- ✓ Is there a cooperative or thrift group I can join or start with trusted friends?
- ✓ What is one thing I can delay this month to invest in a need or income source instead?
- ✓ What crops, services, or products are popular in my area or school? Could I partner with someone to try one out?
- ✓ Should I consider teaching as a way to earn money?
- ✓ What small financial decision have I made recently that I'm proud of? How can I do more of that?

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERVE GOD AND MEN

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.”*

—Jesus Christ (Matthew 6:33, The Holy Bible KJV)

Your future isn't just about securing a great job, making money, or achieving personal goals. Those things are good, but they're only parts of a much bigger picture. That bigger picture? It's your purpose—your assignment on earth. So, while you're collecting certificates, winning awards, and growing your CV, don't forget your calling in God. That's the direction of God's calling for your life.

Let me be real with you: There's no way I can talk about my journey as an undergraduate without mentioning God. Honestly, He has been at the centre of everything. By God's grace, I held various offices, named and unnamed, in different locations. From the things I achieved from the places I served, both in public and behind the scenes, God was (and still is) my greatest advantage. I had moments where I struggled to manage school work, leadership roles, church

Serve God and Men

responsibilities, and personal commitments. There were times I made mistakes. But one thing that consistently helped me stay focused was doing God's work first before I did mine.

That included choosing to go for fellowship meetings even after long classes, staying back to serve when others rushed back to read, or showing up for early morning prayers even when my body craved sleep. To some of my colleagues, it didn't make sense. With assignments, deadlines, exams, and looming career plan ahead, I was expected to prioritize differently. But every time I put God first, He gave me strength I still can't fully explain. I found clarity when others were confused. I had peace in the middle of stress. I got help in unexpected ways. I experienced favour I knew had nothing to do with effort.

But "God's work" isn't limited to church activities alone. It's also about using your talents, skills, or education to glorify Him and serve others. When you push for excellence in your studies, you're doing God's work. It doesn't mean you should be careless with your academics or every other area of life. In fact, it's the complete opposite. God's work includes pursuing academic excellence through reading, submitting assignments, growing in your field, pursuing that scholarship or leadership position with a mindset to make an impact. These are part of your obedience to Him. God honours excellence, not laziness or mediocrity. If you're truly walking with Him, you'll understand that giving your best in school is also part of your worship. How you study, show up, and manage your time. All of these can be part of doing God's work if you do it with the right heart. Your success can become a stage God uses to influence others.

Whether you're holding a mic, arranging chairs, helping with media, or leading a prayer session in church, it's all God's work. Don't look down on any

task just because it seems small. Faithfulness in little brings promotion in much. God's work also includes helping a coursemate who's struggling with a topic, encouraging a friend going through a tough situation, volunteering in an outreach organized by a campus fellowship, supporting your leaders, or simply using your skill (music, writing, organizing, content creation, administration—whatever it is) to serve God and serve people. It isn't limited to holding a mic to preach, although evangelizing is a powerful way to work for God. Whether you're doing something huge or something small, if you do it with love, faithfulness, humility, and the fear of God, it counts.

I've noticed that when anyone gives their best to God's work, they naturally grow into the best version of themselves. You grow in character, discipline, love, purpose, and even capacity. You begin to see things differently. You understand timing, patience, and obedience. And over time, you'll see how everything you've sown in secret begins to yield fruit, even in areas you didn't expect. So, as you go through school, make God your priority. Don't just fit Him into your schedule—let Him lead it.

Take Flight Prompts

Faith isn't just what you believe; it's how you live it, even in your busiest seasons. Use these prompts to reflect, take action, and stay aligned with what truly matters.

- ✓ What does doing God's work look like in this season of my life?
- ✓ In what areas have I been serving with the right heart? In what areas can I do better?
- ✓ Have I been faithful with the "small" tasks God has given me?

Serve God and Men

- ✓ Do I allow my relationship with God to shape how I treat people, handle schoolwork, and respond to responsibilities?
- ✓ When was the last time I truly gave my best to something that had no immediate reward? How did it make me feel?
- ✓ How am I using my talents, gifts, or academics to honour God right now?
- ✓ Is my schedule making room for God, or am I only squeezing Him in when it's convenient?
- ✓ How do I define success—and is God part of that definition?
- ✓ Have I spoken to God recently about my course, career, or future plans? What did I sense?
- ✓ Who around me needs support, encouragement, or kindness that I can offer this week?
- ✓ What has God placed in my hands right now that I can be more diligent with?
- ✓ What would it look like to say “yes” to God in a new way this semester?

YOUR ACADEMIC GAME PLAN

1. Before resumption, ensure you get your past questions, notebooks, writing materials, textbooks, and possible handouts ready.
2. With respect to your school's grading system, write your goals for your continuous assessments and examinations.
3. Break your continuous assessments into compositions. Your lecturer would likely inform you of your CA composition which may include term paper, practicals, group projects, etc.
4. If your school releases your CA result before the exam, check your scoreboard and see how you're faring so as to know how hard you are to read to attain your set goals.
5. After the release of your examination results, compute your score against your initial goals and grade yourself. Usually, you might not go above the score written on your goal board. For instance, if you write an 80, you probably won't score above an 80 except you put in concerted efforts.
6. Praise yourself for how far you've done, reward yourself, rest, and prepare for the next semester.

I wish you the very best in your undergraduate journey. Remember to make your output nothing short of excellence—and do so by every legal means.

SUMMARY

Study Habits & Academic Performance

- ✓ Start reading before the semester starts.
- ✓ Attend classes consistently.
- ✓ Ensure your notes are complete and study them thoroughly.
- ✓ Read beyond your notes.
- ✓ Get past questions before a new semester and get familiar with your course content.
- ✓ Avoid reading under pressure. It often leads to poor understanding and quick forgetting.
- ✓ What matters isn't how long you read, but how well you understand.
- ✓ Prepare for your tests as though they were your examinations.
- ✓ Pay attention to instructions and review your work before submitting.
- ✓ Ask questions in class.
- ✓ Record your summarized notes and listen to them while doing daily tasks—it sharpens your understanding.

Focus, Productivity & Time Management

- ✓ Be time conscious—always.
- ✓ Stay focused.
- ✓ Learn to manage your activities and set clear priorities.
- ✓ Use your time wisely; everyone has the same 24 hours.
- ✓ Don't just set goals—take consistent action.

Summary

- ✓ If a strategy isn't working, examine your method and adjust it.
- ✓ If you keep doing things the same way, don't expect different results.

Academic Understanding & Self-Tracking

- ✓ Know your course codes, titles, lecturers, and course descriptions.
- ✓ Learn how to calculate your GPA and CGPA using your school's grading system.
- ✓ Have reflection sessions after every semester—highlight strengths, note weaknesses, and create strategies for improvement. Seek help when necessary.
- ✓ Peer Learning & Collaboration
- ✓ Don't isolate yourself—keep meaningful friendships.
- ✓ Join or form study groups; collaboration helps understanding.
- ✓ Choose study partners based on their strengths—meet A for Economics, B for Statistics.
- ✓ Discover what works best for you: group discussions, solo study, or tutorials?

Wellness, Mental & Emotional Health

- ✓ Sleep and eat well. Your body functions best when it is rested.
- ✓ Sometimes, that headache is because you've not drunk water, eaten or your screen time is long, Rest.
- ✓ Fight for your sanity, by every legal means, ensure your peace and joy is intact.
- ✓ Don't ignore emotional distractions. Face them, heal, and move forward.

The First-Class Mindset

- ✓ Anxiety disrupts the nervous system, it interrupts receptivity and retention, stay calm.
- ✓ Music, strolls, meditations, etc., are therapeutics you can employ when exhausted.
- ✓ Cry when you fail. But don't stop there, aim for the top again.
- ✓ Do not compare yourself with anyone, instead compete against your last performance.
- ✓ The greatest attack on productivity is your mind. Watch it!
- ✓ Your fears are not that important, feed your faith.
- ✓ Your present would soon become your past and will be questioned by you who acted it, make necessary corrections now.
- ✓ Whatever is past is past, leave it in the past. However, strive to make the best use of the present and the future.
- ✓ Feed your mind with so much positivity, let your goals be written on paper or on your mind, you must not lose sight of it.
- ✓ Write positive words on colourful sticky notes and paste them around you. They will keep you in the know.
- ✓ Attend convocation ceremonies. Each one will make your vision brighter and heighten your morale.

Faith and Spirituality

- ✓ Pray over every aspect of your academic life.
- ✓ Leverage your God-given advantage.
- ✓ Serve both God and humanity with your skills and time.

Summary

Attitude, Responsibility & Reflection

- ✓ Seek right solutions to problems.
- ✓ Make the best use of every situation you find yourself in.
- ✓ Stop hating your lecturers, it will do you no good.
- ✓ Stop faulting your lecturers, the school, your parents or others for your failure. How about you?
- ✓ There are different systems governing each phase of our lives. If you can't control it, focus on the solution.
- ✓ Deliver nothing short of excellence.
- ✓ Arguing after writing an exam is baseless, it won't change anything.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Bamgbose is a recent graduate of Estate Management, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, where she finished as the best graduating student of her set. With a keen interest in valuation, investment analysis, and PropTech, she actively explores opportunities to contribute global solutions, especially as an advocate for SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Her passion birthed her final-year research project on Learning Culture Among Real Estate Students in Tertiary Institutions. She mentors undergraduate students in a virtual community, helping them develop the mindset of achievers. Fluent in English and gifted in spoken word poetry, Deborah uses her voice to inspire through performances and speaking engagements. Above all, she is God's FIRELIGHTer—called to liberate many and lead them into their divine destinies.

ABOUT THE BOOK

What if chasing results is what's holding you back? Success isn't just about hard work but the right mindset. In the **First-Class Mindset: Mindset over Result**, Deborah shares the real journey behind graduating with top-grade honours through developing a mindset built for growth and resilience.

This isn't just a study tip book but an honest, practical guide to building study habits that actually work, managing pressure, procrastination and self-doubt as well as staying motivated when things are tough.

Whether you are just starting a degree or at the climax of bagging a degree, this book will challenge you to think differently and act intentionally because once your mindset is First Class, the results will follow.

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