

The Thinking Cap

Winter 2012

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Alexandra in Tutorland

alexandra's musings



Plugged in.

We have had an exciting school year thus far at Thinking Caps. Not only have we been fortunate to work with many wonderful families in New York and Austin, but we have gotten the opportunity to get to know the Houston area, too. Seeing schools and services for students in different parts of the country has inspired us to think about our work and how we can continue to build on our strong curricula and processes.

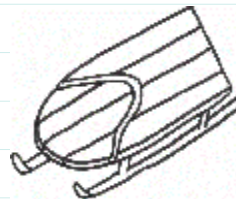
This year we have expanded not just our geographic borders, but we have pushed ourselves to think innovatively. We are always trying to improve our processes, and in 2011/2012, we are working to bring our extensive library of resources online. We have long-prided ourselves on our curricula and materials, and we look forward to updating our database and working to make it accessible to our entire community.

In thinking about enhancing our own resources, we also realize how the world of education is changing. Technology plays an ever-increasing role in the learning process in the classroom and beyond. Students reap the benefits and also suffer some disadvantages with constantly-evolving technologies.

In this issue we are talking tech: the good, the bad, and the how-to handle it all.

The (academic) Odyssey

review of education news



The computer can be used for homework too! Helpful programs to help students stay focused.

Most kids these days are bombarded with emails, Facebook updates, instant messages, and YouTube videos at home on the computer. How can you help them stay focused when it's time to do their homework? These computer applications can help.

1. Show your kids how they're currently spending their time on the computer

The TrackTime application for Mac (\$25; free 30-day trial) or the ManicTime application for Windows (free) automatically tracks your kids' every move, so you and they can see what they're actually doing. It can track time in various applications, as well as time on specific websites--so your kids can see how much time they're doing research on Wikipedia for a paper.

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Great Expectations

ü Congratulations to all of our ISEE/SSAT and SAT takers!

ü Pick up your copy of Alexandra's [Tutor in a Book](#)

ü [Follow us](#) on Twitter

ü Become a Thinking Caps [Facebook fan](#) and get weekly study tips

ü Join our book club: [PageTurners](#)

ü Interested in guitar lessons? TCT's first student ever is now a teacher herself. Check her out: www.laurenstockner.com

Have questions?

www.thinkingcapstutoring.com

New York: 917.779.8183

Austin: 512.351.3612

Houston 713.570.6391

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Much Ado About Learning

our tips and helpful hints

We're sharing our favorite websites for study and review.

I find Study Guides and Strategies (www.studygs.net) a useful website when studying for an upcoming test. It has inventive tools like a drawing-vocabulary application and tips for test-taking for a wide range of subjects. If you're trying to get a grasp of French verbs, the University of Alberta has a great website allowing you to choose which tense you'd like to conjugate a verb with. (www.fsj.ualberta.ca/griff98/conj.htm).

—Marie-Helene Rousseau

My favorite study-skills site is www.quizlet.com. They have pre-made flashcards to help you study, or you can even make your own! The most helpful option for me as a high schooler was their "100 Most Common SAT Words" flashcard set. It made studying easy, fast, and well-organized!"

—Laura Jakli

PurpleMath (www.purplemath.com) is an awesome website that has tutorials on most topics you'll cover in your math class. The tutorials start with a mini-lesson, then guided examples, and finish with practice problems, or links to more practice.

—Joseph Daniele

A great way to practice grammar is with online quizzes. I think these websites are a fun, interactive way to practice.

1. www.Quia.com
2. www.A4esl.org
3. www.softschools.com

—Tim Stauffer

www.khanacademy.org/ is an awesome website that is mostly about math, but expanding the topics it covers all the time. Recently they've added a lot of stuff about art history. Pretty cool stuff!

—Michael Lau

Sometimes I get stuck on a problem and I have to refer to the internet to help me because my notes or book can't help me. So here are some websites that I visit!

For Physics www.physicsclassroom.com/morehelp/

For Algebra: www.mathsisfun.com/algebra/index.html

For Biology: www.sparknotes.com/biology/

For Chemistry: www.chemistrylecturenotes.com/

—Amanda Harris

A Tale of One Tutor

lessons we learned along the way

Seeing things a different way .

I studied music for many years and trained as a classical Indian singer in New Delhi, India, where I grew up. While I wasn't the next Adele, I really enjoyed music and had a decent voice (which made it just bearable for all the neighbors who had to hear me practice). When I got to college in the US, I joined a West African music group that played traditional folk music, primarily from Ghana. It was the best experience of my life (it's where I met my future husband and many of my closest friends) in the college ensemble. The group had drummers, flutists, and xylophone players, but all I wanted to do was sing. Ghanaian music is very melodic, with beautiful harmonies, complex rhythms and enchanting call-and-response phrasing. I thought I had a good handle on singing, and learning the words came easily to me – even though they were in completely foreign languages. Our music director, Sowah Mensah, was an accomplished composer and ethnomusicologist, and I was really excited to learn from him. I signed up for vocal lessons to become a lead singer in the group.

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**The computer can be used for homework too!
Helpful programs to help students stay focused.**

From page 1

Just seeing the hard facts on how they're spending time while on the computer is a good way for you and your kids to begin discussing study habits.

2. Get rid of distracting windows

If your kid is writing a paper on the computer, she can eliminate all other windows from her view, so she doesn't get distracted by an IM or an email alert. There are a few ways to do this:

FocusWriter for Mac and Windows (free) WriteRoom for Mac (\$25), and DarkRoom for Windows (free) are all pared-down word processing applications that block out the applications that block out the desktop, all open windows, all menus, everything except the text you're typing.

Other applications blur out or minimize all inactive windows. For Mac, these programs include Think (free), Isolator (free), Quiet (\$2), and HazeOver (\$2). For Windows, try Swept Away (free), which automatically minimizes inactive windows after a period of time you set.

3. Take regular breaks

The ideal way most people work is to focus

Cat's Cradle

tantalizing brain ticklers

A good laugh to warm you up...



**OK, Show of hands...
Who's tired of snow?**

themselves intently for a short period of time (less than an hour) and then take a break, away from the computer, for a few minutes. For many kids this may be a good way to organize their studies.

Time Out for Mac (free), Break Reminder for Windows (free), and Kill RSI for Windows (free) are very simple applications that allow you to set how often you want to take a break, and how long you want that break to be. When break time comes around, the application lets you know.

Pomodoro is a time management technique that is based on the idea of working for 25 minutes and then taking a 5-minute break; this 30-minute block of time is called one "pomodoro." There are quite a number of applications that use the Pomodoro technique for staying focused, including Pomodairo for Mac and Windows (free), FocusBooster for Mac and Windows (free), and Pomodoro for Mac (\$5).



4. Block websites

Often the most distracting things for your kids on the computer are internet-related--YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace are all accessed through the web. Use software that blocks access to specific websites, so your kids can't be tempted.

Self Control for Mac (free) and Freedom for Mac and Windows (\$10, free to try) both take you off the internet completely, for a period of time that you set. So that means no email, no web, no IM. Easy to set up; not so useful if your child needs to be on the web to do homework.

AntiSocial for Mac (\$15, free to try), Do Not Disturb for Windows (\$40), and Internet Access Controller for Windows (\$15) are more complicated to set up but they offer a lot of flexibility. For example, you can create a blacklist of social websites, so your child can go to Wikipedia but not Facebook.

—Ivan Drucker and Caroline Green


Ivan Drucker and Caroline Green are the principals of IvanExpert, Inc., a Mac-focused technology consulting firm. IvanExpert provides on-site Mac, iPhone, and iPad support to families in the New York City area, and helps them be more efficient and productive with their technology. Visit them at <http://www.ivanexpert.com>



Seeing things a different way .

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The day came for my first lesson and I eagerly sang the lead call to one particularly beautiful piece. Sowah, my teacher, looked a bit puzzled and asked me to try again. I did, and it sounded pretty good to me. He said "I am not sure what you are doing, but something is wrong." We worked through a few other songs, and all of them sounded right when I sang them, but each time Sowah repeated them asking me if I could hear the difference when he sang them. I couldn't. I had no idea what I was doing wrong and I left my lesson frustrated and confused.



The following week, Sowah asked me what style of Indian music I had learned before coming to college. "Hindustani Classical," I said. "Ah!" he said. "That explains it." He proceeded to explain to me that Indian music scales are ever so slightly different from Ghanaian and western music scales. That is, an Indian "C" vibrates at a different frequency than a Ghanaian "C". I could not hear the difference, but my vocal chords were trained to repeat the Indian notes. Sowah told me that what I was doing was not wrong, just different. He assured me that we could work past it and with the right training I would be able to sing on different scales. He was absolutely right – it took a long time, but I was eventually able to train my voice and my ears to hear subtleties in Ghanaian music, and I play both Indian and Ghanaian music to this day.

This experience taught me several things. First, if there is a problem in any aspect of life and learning, all you have to do is pinpoint the cause and work at it. After that, it stops being a problem! Second, a good teacher is invaluable. Even though there were much better singers in the group than I, Sowah took the time to identify my weak spots and work patiently to encourage me to become a better musician. Third, there will be a time where you have to look at something you think you know well from a completely different point of view. It might blow your mind, or even make you very uncomfortable, but if you are open to learning it will make you a more enriched and accomplished person.

—Rhea Datta




Happy Holidays!



Thinking Caps Tutoring is an innovative, after-school educational company that helps students acquire the skills and confidence needed to succeed in school, college, and beyond. TCT, through an individualized, descriptive screening process, matches students with student tutors best capable of overcoming a child's weak points and emphasizing strengths. Services provided at TCT include subject tutoring, skills coaching, homework support, standardized test prep and more.

For more information about TCT or any of the programs, please call us at 917.779.8183/512.351.3612 or send an email to info@thinkingcapstutoring.com.



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