

Start Slow, Keep Steady

Only do enough to get an 80%.

Think about it. Big projects that require many steps are often overwhelming. It can be hard to produce a good result with so many elements and distractions in play. Instead, begin by doing only enough to get an 80%. Then you can build on that success and knowledge and shoot for 85%, then 90%, etc. Take a new project one step at a time -- don't try to master everything right away.

Take the SATs, for example. Students have to be able to sit for hours, taking multiple subject tests in a relatively short period of time, and yet they also need to exhibit many academic skills, from advanced math to English composition. Plus, these tests can have a huge impact on college choices and future paths, so the pressure is extra high. If students were to try to master each element -- demonstrating skills, reading problems thoroughly, meeting time limits, etc -- all at once, it could be incredibly overwhelming. Instead, students focus on mastering one or two elements first, then build on that success to begin tackling the rest.

Now, Food and Health Communications is not about acing the SAT, but the idea of breaking a project into manageable pieces, combined with the notion that you don't have to be an expert in everything, can make many previously intimidating projects much easier. It's a great strategy for crafting a healthful lifestyle and managing weight, for example. There's a lot of advice out there, and it can get overwhelming.

Take just a few of the steps recommended for a healthy lifestyle, and do them until they are absolutely



second nature. In other words, get 80% right. From there, you can build on your success and slowly get closer to 100%.

Instead of starting a new exercise plan with hour-long walks, begin with 10 minutes of well-paced walking. If you can walk for 10 minutes per day on most days, that is an 80% start. As you get comfortable with the pace and commitment, you can consider how to increase the intensity. You can gradually increase your time without running the risk of starting too hard, injuring yourself, or burning out, which makes it much more likely for you to reach for that next 5% improvement.

The same is true for creating a healthful diet. Instead of worrying about every meal or counting every calorie, eat a healthful breakfast before you leave the house. Pretty soon you can start packing a healthful lunch too. From there, you can learn to plan and shop for healthy meals, begin crafting balanced dinners, reduce empty calorie intake, etc.

Remember to give yourself a pat on the back each day. You're making progress!