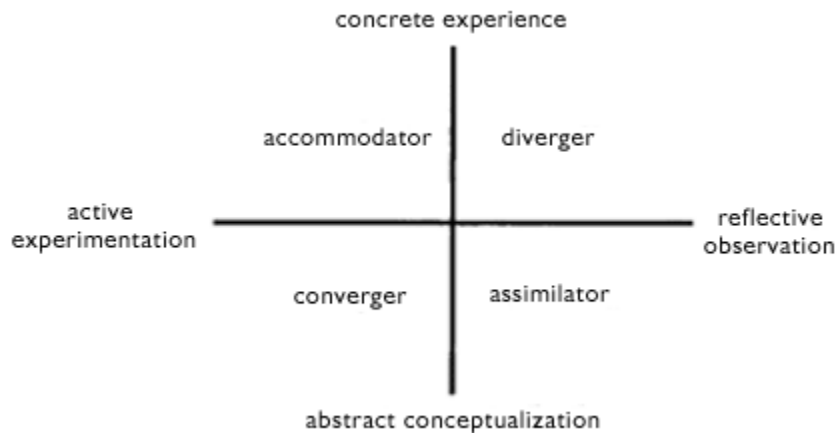


## Guidelines for Writing an Experiential Learning Essay

### The Kolb Model: The relationship between learning and experience

David Kolb presents a model of experiential learning containing four components: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. (See Figure 1.1) They are described more fully below.

*Figure 1.1*



### Section 1: Concrete Experience

The first stage of Kolb's Model starts with the individual's *concrete experience*: an event that triggers the learning cycle. While this is usually a specific experience, it can also include reading, consulting with others or personal research.

When writing about concrete experiences that led to learning, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- What did I do? Where? When? For how long? Why?
- What was my role (as opposed to the others involved) ?
- How deeply was I involved?
- What techniques, methods, procedures did I employ? Why did I choose the ones I used?
- What were my goals and objectives? How did they influence my choices?
- What resources did I use?
- Can I get documentation to verify my experience?

*Summarize* what occurred rather than giving a narrative account of what happened.

## Section 2: Reflective Observation

In the second stage of writing about experiential learning, you step back from the experience to observe and reflect upon it. This might involve noticing similarities or differences, patterns or results of certain actions.

Ask yourself:

- What were the reasons behind my behavior? What was I thinking at the time?
- What trends and patterns are evident?
- What were the significant and unique components of the experience?
- What worked for me and what didn't?
- How has my behavior changed as the result of what I learned from the experience?
- What conclusions can I reach as the result of my reflection?

## Section 3: Abstract Conceptualization

Based on your observations and reflections about your experience, begin to generalize and form abstract concepts about it. Ask:

- What are the underlying principles for each of my 3 key concepts?
- What *existing* rules, laws, theories, and/or concepts from other sources support my understanding of my 3 key concepts?
- Can I articulate depth and breadth of understanding around each of my 3 key concepts?
- What examples from my concrete experience demonstrate this understanding?

## Section 4: Active Experimentation

In the fourth stage of the model, you will apply your newly discovered principles, testing the implications of the concepts in new situations.

Ask yourself:

- How does my knowledge apply to other situations?
- How will I implement (have I implemented) my new knowledge?
- Have I tested my ideas or those of others? If not, what might I predict will happen? Why?
- Can I give specific examples of how I am using or would use the learning around each of my 3 key concepts in a new setting?

The testing or experimentation in the fourth stage leads to another concrete experience. You then make new observations and reflections and, based on them, formulate or refine the principle and apply it to see if it holds true. Therefore, Kolb's

Model might be better pictured as a spiral: the cycle repeats itself, becoming more refined and sophisticated with each “turn.”

## Sample Subjects/Topics For Experiential Learning Essays

**Note:** All essays are based upon your adult, personal experience (aged 18+). You cannot write an essay to fulfill General Education or Elective requirements, if you do not have significant experience in the area you are writing about. All essays written for academic credit must be written in the Kolb, experiential learning format. No essay is guaranteed a 3-unit credit award. Faculty in the subject matter area evaluating the essay determine the final credit award. (Not all of the following subject areas qualify to meet General Studies. Please contact the Director of Assessment at [priorlearning@uc.apu.edu](mailto:priorlearning@uc.apu.edu) regarding essay topics that qualify for assessment in the area of General Studies)

### Business

Advertising	Retail Sales	Direct Sales
Inventory Control	Labor Relations	Quality Control
Job Analysis	Personnel	Marketing
Insurance		Unemployment
Small Business Ownership		
Data Processing (Lower Level)		

### Business/Government

Strategic Planning

### Business/Psychology

Business Programming (unless strong math application. Must include two programs.  
Accepted languages: COBOL, FORTRAN, C<sup>(++)</sup>, etc.)

### Consumer economics

Must cover a minimum of five (5) economic areas which may include:

Shelter	Budgeting	Food
Transportation	Insurance	Consumer Fraud
Savings	Establishing Credit	Laws & Regulations

### Mathematics

Engineering

### Psychology/Sociology/Human sciences

Alcoholism	Pregnancy & Childbirth	Behavior Disorders
Therapy (Personal)	Death and Dying	Divorce
Mental Health	Behavior Modification	Stress Management
Cultural Comparison	Career Analysis	Single Lifestyle
Volunteerism	Gerontology	Social Service Agencies
Community Work		Small Group Supervision
Rehabilitation Programs		
Developing & Implementing Program		
Re-Entry Students (Adult Learners)		
Working with Children/Adults with Special Needs		
Unemployment Counseling Techniques		

Coping with:

Disease	Illness	Problems
Trauma		

Maturation:

Since college	Through military life
---------------	-----------------------

Parenting (you may choose only 1 of the following)  
Foster Parenting      Step Parenting      Working Mother  
Adoptive Parenting      Cross Cultural Parenting      Parenting/ Single Parenting

### **Government/Social Science**

Paralegal      Consumer Fraud      Laws & Regulations  
Strategic Planning      Genealogy (strong historical perspective)  
Metropolitics: Election Judge

### **Biology**

Outdoor Education      Immunology      Disease/Illness  
Pregnancy & Childbirth (e.g. Lamaze, LeBoyer, etc., from a medical standpoint)  
Botany:  
    Plants  
    Organic Gardening

### **Biology/Psychology/Sociology**

Health Problems

### **Physical Education**

Coaching      Physical Fitness

***NOTE: This subject area is generally awarded less than 3 Semester Units of credit.***

### **Biology / Physical Education /Health**

Job Evaluation      Health Curriculum Development  
Allied Health Management

### **Education special topics**

Teaching      Early Childhood      Educational Strategies/Methods  
    Lesson Planning      Course Development  
Classroom Management  
Systems in Contrast (other countries vs. US)  
Adult Education (medical military)

### **Art special topics**

***NOTE: To petition for upper level college credit in the following subjects, creative talent must be clearly demonstrated.***

Fiber Arts      Graphic Arts      Teaching Art  
Drawing/Cartooning      Ceramics (original/no molds)  
Photography (A minimum of 10-12 good photographs)  
Painting (examples of 6-8 pieces of original work and 15-20 preliminary sketches)

### **Speech/Theater**

Acting      Directing      Modeling  
Dance  
Effective Speaking (minimum 5-6 speaking experiences...*SEE APPENDIX 5.8*)

### **Communication**

Argumentation      Persuasion      Conflict Management

### **Physical science special topics**

Basic/Advanced Electricity

**Philosophy and religion special topics (these topics do not qualify for General Education credit)**

Death & Dying                      Ethics                      Scriptural Understanding  
Church Involvement:  
    Teaching  
    Volunteering

**English special topics**

Creative Writing                      Poetic Expression                      Publications  
Writing Training Manuals  
How Literature Has Changed My Life...SEE APPENDIX E.

**Music special topics**

Choir Direction  
Creative Expression (include tape/cassette with experience): Vocal or Instrumental

## Guidelines for Writing Essays for Credit in General Education

The following are *strict* guidelines for writing essays to meet general education requirements in the areas of *Literature, Speech, Psychology, Fine Arts, Bible Survey* and *Bible Literature*. If you have further questions, contact the Director of Prior Learning Assessment at [priorlearning@uc.apu.edu](mailto:priorlearning@uc.apu.edu).

### Requirements for *Literature* Credit

In order to receive literature credit, you should write an essay that follows the KOLB Model and demonstrate:

- an acceptable *variety* of reading experiences in various genres. Not all the reading should be in one area, for instance, all science fiction novels, etc. You would be expected to have reading experience in two areas of literature including fiction, non-fiction, historical/biographical, drama or poetry (at least one of these genres must be fiction, drama or poetry), with reading in classical American or international literature
- an ability to think critically about literature, that is, an ability to probe its meaning, fit one work into the context of others, make persuasive arguments about the relative worth of various works of literature
- an understanding of fundamental literacy concepts, such as theme, character, plot, setting, symbol, and metaphor
- the ability to articulate what the literature has meant to you, personally, including how it has challenged your thinking or broadened your insight into the lives, thoughts, and perceptions of others

Development of each section:

- **Section I (Concrete Experience)** should demonstrate *breadth of reading* by mentioning at least 6 to 8 books that you have read as an adult.
- **Section II (Reflective Observation)** should demonstrate your knowledge of the *application of concepts* such as theme, character, plot, setting, symbol and metaphor by comparing the styles of at least four of the writers introduced in Section I.
- **Section III (Abstract conceptualization)** should demonstrate *depth of knowledge* of literary concepts such as theme, character, plot, setting, symbol and metaphor by showing in-depth knowledge of these concepts.
- **Section IV (Active Experimentation)** allows you to share how your *reading has*

*enhanced* your on-going lifestyle.

## Requirements for *Speech* Credit

The following information is designed to give you a better understanding of how to meet the minimum standards for speech proficiency, including what an evaluator will be looking for in your video presentation and the written component.

### The Videotaped Speech

The 7 minute video speech should demonstrate proficiency in both *content* and *delivery*. From a technical standpoint, the video should be clear, in-focus, have an adequate sound level and a good variety of camera shots. Make sure that there are several minutes of close-ups as well as longer range shots so that the observer can adequately evaluate nonverbal as well as verbal communication.

Make sure the content addresses a significant social, political, or moral issue.

The thesis should be absolutely clear to the evaluator and should be limited to a short declarative sentence. “How to do it” speeches will be rejected. That is, how to bake a cake, how to throw a baseball, how to mop a floor, etc., will fail to meet the requirement. Once you have established your thesis, make sure that the organizational pattern is clear. You should have between two and four major points and each of these points should be adequately supported with a good variety of quality evidence. Make sure your transitions are stated clearly and support the thesis.

The introduction should gain the attention of the audience as well as orient the audience to your thesis. The body of the speech should contain proof for the major points with clear transitions between the points. The conclusion should not end abruptly but should restate the thesis and major points. Refer to a basic speech text to better understand the options available in constructing an introduction and conclusion, as well as other aspects such as sign-posting, methods of amplification, and the modes of persuasion.

The speech, itself, should be delivered in an extemporaneous manner, with minimum notes

☞ **DO NOT READ DIRECTLY FROM A MANUSCRIPT**

Be sure that you establish good eye-contact with the audience.

### The Written Component: Experiential Learning Essay

In addition to identifying an example or examples of involvement, the learning outcomes should demonstrate a clear understanding of basic communication theory and major principles of oral communication as they relate to Public Address. Include



discussion on theories like the modes of persuasion, identification, forms of support differentiating persuasive speeches from informative speeches, ethical considerations, factors of attention, sign-posting, analysis of human behavior, rhetorical strategies, the use of ethos, pathos, and logic as modes of persuasion, etc.

Some recommended sources are:

- Verderber, Ralph—*The Challenge of Effective Speaking*;
- Gronbeck, Mckerrow, Ehninger, and Monroe—*Principles and Types of Speech Communication*;
- Griffin, Em—*A First Look At Communication Theory*.

The written presentation should meet the minimum standards of any college level essay in terms of syntax and grammar.

### Requirements for Credit in *Bible Survey* and *Bible Literature*

In order to receive credit in Bible Survey or Bible Literature, you should write an essay that follows the KOLB Model and demonstrates:

#### I. Survey

- an historical awareness of the cultural context of a particular Old or New Testament book or books
- the hermeneutical principles of interpretation which result in your understanding the intended meaning of the original author
- a critical evaluation and synthesis of your learning so as to make a valid contemporary application for church life or your personal life today

#### II. Literature

- familiarity with at least six different genres of literature that can be found in the Bible
- in-depth knowledge of two areas of Bible literature including history, parables, narratives, poetry, myths, theology or prophecy (at least one of these genres must be poetry, history, theology or prophecy)
- an understanding of the original message the biblical author(s) attempted to communicate in those areas; select and articulate what that understanding has meant to you, personally, including how it has challenged your thinking or broadened your insight into the lives, thoughts, and perceptions of others

## Requirements for *Music (Fine Arts)*

Your focus of learning for an Experiential Learning Essay in Music must be on the principles of music theory, music history, or music literature. Focusing on participation is not acceptable.

## Requirements for *Sociology/Psychology* Credit

To write an experiential essay that fulfills your sociology/psychology general studies requirement, *you must use at least three of the following five sources* to support your experiential learning topic. Choose 3 key concepts that relate to your learning experience. Your Section III Abstract Conceptualization should be a minimum of 4 pages. Otherwise, use the same parameters for the Kolb format that you would with an essay for elective credit. ([See essay guidelines.](#))

### **Required:**

**Myers, D. (2004) *Psychology* (7th edition). Holland, MI: Worth Publishers.**

#### Brief Contents

Thinking Critically with Psychological Science  
Neuroscience and Behavior  
The Nature and Nature of Behavior  
The Developing Person  
Sensation  
Perception  
States of Consciousness  
Learning  
Memory  
Thinking and Language  
Intelligence  
Motivation and Work  
Emotion  
Stress and Health  
Personality  
Psychological Disorders  
Therapy  
Social Psychology

**Aronson E., Wilson, T. & Akert. R. (2003) *Social Psychology*. New York: Longman**

#### Brief Contents

Introduction to Social Psychology  
Methodology: The Process of Doing Research  
Social Cognition: How We Think About the Social World  
Social Perception: How We Come to Understand Other People  
Self-Understanding: How We Come to Understand Ourselves

Self-Justification and the Need to Maintain Self-Esteem  
Attitudes and Attitude Change: Influencing Thoughts and Feelings  
Conformity: Influencing Behavior  
Group Processes: Influence in Social Groups  
Interpersonal Attraction: From First Impressions to Close Relationships  
Prosocial Behavior: Why Do People Help?  
Aggression: Why We Hurt Other People  
Prejudice: Causes and Cures  
Social Psychology and Health  
Social Psychology and the Environment  
Social Psychology and the Law

**Comer, R.J. (2000) *Abnormal Psychology* (4th edition). New York: Worth**  
Brief Contents

Abnormal Psychology: Past and Present  
Research in Abnormal Psychology  
Models of Abnormality  
Clinical Assessment, Diagnosis, and Treatment  
Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Phobias  
Panic, Obsessive-Compulsive, and Stress Disorders  
Mood Disorders (i.e. depression & bipolar)  
Treatments for Mood Disorders  
Suicide  
Psychosocial Factors in Physical Disorders  
Eating Disorders  
Substance-Related Disorders (i.e. tobacco, alcohol & drugs)  
Sexual Disorders and Gender Identity Disorder  
Schizophrenia  
Treatments for Schizophrenia  
Disorders of Memory and Other Cognitive Functions  
Personality Disorders  
Disorders of Childhood and Old Age (i.e. autism, dementia, Alzheimer's)  
Law, Society, and the Mental Health Profession

**Santrock, J. W. (2004) *Life-Span Development* (9th edition). Boston: McGraw Hill**  
Brief Contents

Life-Span Development Perspective  
Biological Beginnings  
Prenatal Development and Birth  
Infancy: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Early Childhood: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Middle & Late Childhood: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Adolescence: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Early Adulthood: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Middle Adulthood: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development  
Late Adulthood: Physical, Cognitive & Socioemotional Development

## Death and Grieving

### **Recommended:**

- Balswick, J. O. & Balswick, J. K. (1999) *The Family* (2nd edition). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
- Gottman, J. M. & Silver, N. (2002). *The Relationship Cure: A 5 Step Guide to Strengthening Your Marriage, Family, and Friendships*. Three Rivers Press.
- Gottman, J. M. & Declaire, J. (1998). *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Nelsen, J. (Ed). (2006). *Positive Discipline*. Ballantine Books.
- Kubler-Ross, E. (1997). *On Death and Dying*. New York: Scribner

## Experiential Essay Outline

- ◆ Student Name
- ◆ Student I.D. #
- ◆ Date

### **THIS IS THE TITLE OF YOUR ESSAY**

Your entire paper should be doubled-spaced, numbered, using 1" margins all around. You should use regular 10 pt. or 12 pt. Times New Roman font. The first line of each paragraph should be indented. Do not put extra spacing between headings, sections, etc.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In one brief paragraph, introduce the reader to your topic and integrate your three key concepts into this opening narrative. This is a short paragraph that clearly tells the reader what you will be discussing and sets the stage for you to continue on to your Section I experience. It should be between 3-6 sentences long.

### **I. CONCRETE EXPERIENCE**

Discuss your experience here in terms of the concepts you learned. *This section is a minimum of 2 pages and a maximum of 2 ½ pages.* Frame it clearly around your three key concepts.

### **II. REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION**

Discuss your Section I learning in terms of reflective statements; show the reader how you came to understand the concepts. Don't continue talking about new experiences. *This section is a minimum of 2 pages and a maximum of 2 1/2 pages.* Frame it clearly around your three key concepts.

### **III. ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION**

Discuss your learning in terms of defining the concepts and showing the underlying principles and relationships between the principles. *This section is a minimum of 2 1/2 pages and a maximum of 3 pages.* Frame it clearly around your three key concepts. In addition, this is the only section in which you use academic references and in-text citations (using APA style referencing) to support your stated learning outcomes. (See Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* for additional assistance.)

### **IV. ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION**

Discuss your learning in terms of how you have used it, or may use it, in a new situation. Give specific examples that show how you have transferred the learning.

*This section is a minimum of 2 pages and a maximum of 2 1/2 pages* and is NOT a summary. Frame it clearly around your three key concepts.

### **Resources/References/Bibliography**

This is a separate page at the end of your essay (but still part of the essay document itself) using APA style format. (See Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* for additional assistance.)

## Integrating Concepts and Experiences

The ideal Experiential Learning Essay should provide a balance between breadth of theory (general concepts) and depth of practical application (specific experiences) as shown below in Illustration B. You must cover two major areas in your essay:

1. General concepts of the field
2. Specific experiences of the individual

The faculty evaluators award credit for your grasp of general concepts, not for your specific experiences. Your experiences serve to illustrate how you originally learned and have since applied the general concepts. (Practical applications of general concepts are crucial in demonstrating a thorough understanding of how concepts apply to new situations.)

When constructing an Experiential Learning Essay, it is helpful to begin by identifying the general concepts of the field with which you are familiar. Here are two approaches:

1. You could start by listing the key concepts or learning outcomes in outline form.
2. You might develop a “cluster” of concepts. Write the topic in the center of a sheet of paper, circle it, and list the general concepts in circles around the topic. Thus, a cluster of concepts is formed.<sup>1</sup> These general concepts form the elements of the essay’s thesis statement, providing the skeleton for the body of the essay.

After the concepts have been identified, reflect upon what specific experiences aided you in learning these concepts. This could include personal and professional experiences as well as the more traditional reading and research. If you can describe the original experience in which the concept was learned and a new application of that concept in a new situation, you demonstrate a balance between breadth of theory and depth of practical application.

### **Coleman’s Concepts: Differences between experiential and classroom learning<sup>2</sup>**

James S. Coleman has outlined several differences between experiential and classroom learning. His distinctions are shown below:

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<sup>1</sup> See Gabriel Lusser Rico’s *Writing the Natural Way* for a more detailed discussion of “clustering” in writing.

<sup>2</sup> adapted from Coleman, J. S. (1976). Differences between experiential and classroom learning. In M. T. Keeton and Associates. *Experiential learning: Rationale, characteristics, and assessment*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

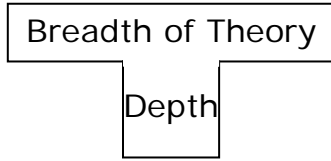
Coleman's differences between classroom and experiential learning

Traditional Classroom Learning	Experiential Learning
<p style="text-align: center;">Information Assimilation</p> <p>Steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. receiving information</li> <li>2. understanding the general principles</li> <li>3. identifying potential applications of the general principles</li> <li>4. taking action in specific experiences</li> </ol> <p>Approach :</p> <p><i>Deductive</i>—arriving at a practical application from the general principle</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Learning by doing</p> <p>Steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. taking action in specific experiences</li> <li>2. analyzing the consequences of actions</li> <li>3. understanding the general principle</li> <li>4. applying the general principle in new situations</li> </ol> <p>Approach :</p> <p><i>Inductive</i>—developing a general concept from specific experiences</p>

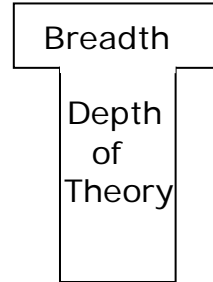
There are significant differences in how people learn in the traditional, information assimilation mode and how they learn via experiences. One of the differences concerns the individual's grasp of the knowledge base of the field. The traditionally educated have a greater breadth of the knowledge base and are familiar with many concepts/theories of the area; however, their depth of application of these concepts in "real life" is relatively shallow. The experientially educated, on the other hand, have a deep understanding of how a particular concept is applied, but rarely do they have a grasp on the other concepts of the field (see illustration A).

### Illustration A

Traditionally Educated:

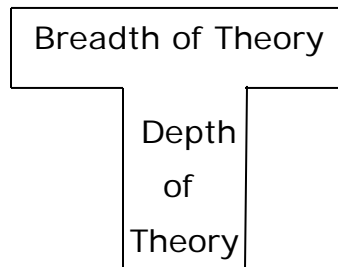


Experientially Educated:



Ideally, an individual should have a balance between breadth of theory (general concepts) and depth of application of that theory in specific experiences (see Illustration B).

### Illustration B





## **Tips For Writing A Kolb Essay\*<sup>3</sup>** **Step - by - Step Phrases**

1. **Concrete Experience.** Tell the story of what you did (what behaviors and actions you took) using terms such as the following

I met	I said	I tried
I attended	I taught	I traced
I saw	I listed	I recorded
I drafted	I reacted to	I calculated
I designed	I coordinated	I promoted
I purchased	I modified	I programmed
I forecasted	I convinced	I reviewed
I collected	I avoided	I studied

### **When that happened I saw – sensed - reacted**

- ◆ Five years ago I developed – started – mistook a problem with...
- ◆ I created – investigated – experienced – encountered – confronted...
- ◆ After that I traveled – studied – criticized...

2. **Observations Reflections/ What you learned from what you did**

I learned that	I discerned	I distinguished
I detected	I perceived	I wondered about
I noticed	I viewed	I spotted
I found that	I discovered	I grasped
I imagined	I heeded	I neglected to see
I observed	I acknowledge	I recognized
I came to believe		

### **Looking back, I realize – now remember watching/detecting...**

- ◆ In retrospect, I observe that I...
- ◆ Reflecting back on this experience I acknowledge that I
- ◆ I now see that my reaction was based on....
- ◆ I have come to believe that....

3. **Generalizations and Principles.** What you understand from what you learned including theories, principles, general concepts, models, systems, insights.

Research indicates	Another metaphor is	It is logical that
It is apparent that	It is similar to	An analysis explains that
The concept of	Experts agree that	This idea means that
The principle of	Authorities speculate	A synthesis of this data

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<sup>3</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Vickie Becker for designing this tip sheet and to Dr. Jerry Houser for his added input.

