

A Whole New World

The DaVinci Cartooning Course





©Psychotactics Ltd: Sean D'Souza. All rights reserved.

Published by Psychotactics Ltd.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in any database or retrieval system without the prior written permission of Psychotactics Ltd.

If you need permission, you'll have to ask. Ask, because you never know (we may say yes).

The information in this document is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing. As a reader you need to accept full responsibility for your actions and should consult with a professional about your own circumstances before following anything in the book. Results are not guaranteed (Heck, nothing in life is guaranteed).

Further, the author and publisher have used their best efforts to proof and confirm the content of the files, but you should proof and confirm information such as dates, measurements, and any other content for yourself. The author and publisher make no warranties of any kind, express or implied, with regard to that content or its accuracy.

For more information, please write to:

PsychoTactics Ltd., PO Box 36461,
Northcote 0748, Auckland, New Zealand.

E-mail: sean@psychotactics.com

Website: www.psychotactics.com | Facebook & Twitter: [seandsouza](#)

Published in New Zealand (Where else?). Any person flouting the above rules, will be liable for copyright infringement, plus will be sent (at your own cost of course) to pick elephant dung at the Auckland Zoo.

*If you want to go quickly, go alone.
If you want to go far, go with a group.*

—African Proverb

How It All Began

In the year 2008, we had a little discussion in 'the Cave' (which our membership forum at 5000bc). And the discussion was about 'talent'. And most people were firmly of the belief that talent is inborn.

Which kinda bugged me a lot.

That was like a slap to every talented person on the planet

It's like saying we're born with skills. That someone is better at Photoshop, the moment he's being rocked in the cradle. Or that the No.1 tennis star was born with superior tennis genes. And in my case everyone assumed that I was born with the ability to draw. Which to my thinking, wasn't true at all.

But I couldn't prove it

Because people would look at my finished work, and say weird things like: 'I could never draw like that'. Or 'you are so talented at drawing.' But other than getting into heated discussions, there was little I could do. So I shrugged and gave up.

Until Joe came along

Around 2010, one of our members (let's call him Joe, because that's his name) asked me if I'd teach him to draw cartoons. Now I wasn't keen because I had quite a few other courses going at that point in time. And I was also in the midst of writing some books. Besides, I didn't really have any plan to teach cartooning in the near future.

But Joe was persistent

So I asked, 'Why would you want to learn from me?' And he told me how he'd bought dozens of books, attended courses etc., and how he still couldn't draw. He suggested that if I were to teach him to draw, he'd pay me whatever I wanted. As you can guess, payment was the last thing on my mind. So I casually said: 'OK, give me an Amazon voucher for \$150 and let's get started. And oh, you'll have to follow my rules, if you want to succeed.'

And then, just for kicks, I announced it in 5000bc

I wasn't expecting more than a few to show up. But then 30 people signed up. And just like that, I had a course going. A course with no plan, no syllabus and yet we were on our way. Since then this course has seen quite a few participants. And some amazing work in amazing time frames.



It's not like the cartoon course began with any specific plan in mind.

So there you have it...

The course began on a crazy roller coaster ride. And now, you're part of the ride. It's a lot more organised from those early days where the assignment was being created as we moved along. But it's lost none of its madness or joy. Most people who join the course have a blast. Which suggests that there are those that don't. Yes, there are those that go...um...off-course. But we'll deal with that issue in the pages to come. For now, I want to welcome you to the Da Vinci course. And I want you to know that inborn talent doesn't exist.

You don't have to believe me forever.

You just have to suspend your belief for the next six months or so. Six months later you should be well on your way to becoming an outstanding cartoonist. And yes, you'll find that out for yourself, just like others have done so before you.

Jump on board. It's going to be a fun ride.

Tiny, Tiny Increments

There's one thing that differentiates a Psychotactics course from any other course out there. The difference is the concept of 'Tiny Increments'.

So what does this concept of 'Tiny Increments' mean?

It's a factor of 'baby steps'. Every single day you take the tiniest of steps. One tiny step at a time. Then another. Then another. Then a week passes, a month passes, three months pass and suddenly you're a pro at walking.

Heck, you're running.

And admittedly the concept of tiny increments is not an amazingly original idea. You've learned hundreds of things with tiny increments. Yet almost no one uses it when teaching a skill.

Most learning these days, is just an information dump

You have all this wonderful sounding information. Tons of audio, tons of video and hundreds of pages of notes. And no doubt it's wonderful, but there's a huge void between understanding and implementation.

But this void retreats quickly when you enter the world of tiny increments. A world where we don't make big leaps and jumps, but take tiny steps instead. And the reason why we take tiny steps, is because we want to make hundreds of mistakes.

Hundreds of mistakes?

Yes, hundreds. Possibly thousands.

But we only want to make one mistake at a time

So the mistake is made and then fixed. And then made, and then fixed again. And this is how your brain learns best. Your brain has this intense desire to get things right. But getting things right the first time can often be a fluke. To be sure that it's getting things right consistently, it has to learn how to get things wrong as well. It has to goof up. And learn from those mistakes.

When you think of why the airline industry has so few crashes, it's because of their understanding of mistakes. Every pilot learns not only how to fly a plane, but how to pull it out of a crash. They make mistakes as part of their curriculum; part of their learning.

And that's the way we work too

Our goal is to make tons of mistakes, but only one mistake at a time. And this is why almost all our courses at Psychotactics are designed for 'daily practice'. When I say daily, I mean 'six days a week'. You do get one day off every week.

The reason for daily practice is reasonably simple to explain

You learn something, then you make a mistake. And yes, unless you run into that fluke situation, there's a good chance that you're going to make that mistake. You snarl, you groun.



As humans, we're greedy for more, not less. So it's only natural for someone designing a course to give you a ton of stuff. And that mountain of stuff, while exciting at first, soon turns counterproductive. The uniqueness of a Psychotactics course is that we always move ahead in itty-bitty steps at a time. This system of 'tiny increments' relieves stress, and puts you in the safe zone. In some ways, it doesn't feel like hard work at all. And that's when learning not only speeds up, but becomes permanent as well.

and wish you could have gotten it right the first time. But then an amazing thing occurs. Your wonderful brain sleeps on it, and the next day, it takes on the same task in a more efficient manner. Of course, night shows up again, and then the brain does the zzz again. And then, as you'd expect, more efficiency and more speed show up the next time you tackle the very same task.

Which is when some people try to take a short cut

And they try and do six days worth of assignments in one day. And that's not a shortcut at all. That's just you trying to fool your brain, and while it does get fooled, it doesn't help you become better at your skill. The critical part of the learning experience is to work on something, sleep on it, work on it, sleep on it.

Hence the concept of daily practice and tiny increments.

With tiny increments you don't go very far off-course

If you try and shortcut the process and do six things in one day, there's a good chance you may go six steps off-course. Now, not only is it irritating to your team-mates (yes, we work in small groups), but I have to pull you back six steps just to get back to the starting point.

It doesn't work for you

It doesn't work for your group.

And it's mostly a waste of time and energy, for your brain as well.

So stick with the daily practice. It's not hard the benefit of daily progress spills over in other parts of your life too. Many of our clients do two, three, four, even six courses with us. And the reason they do it, is because it not only helps them get a skill like cartooning, or copy writing, or article writing—but also because the concept of tiny, daily steps becomes part of their life.

You'll experience it too. One step at a time.

So we've kinda explored how the brain learns and how we can succeed. Which brings us to an equally important juncture: the concept of failure. What causes us to fail? What has caused others on this course to bail out? How can we avoid similar misery? Let's find out.

Five Ways To Fail

Not everyone completes the cartooning course. And there are reasons why. Let's list the top five reasons why failure is inevitable.

Reason 1: Daily practice

If you don't practice every day, not only does your brain not learn quickly and efficiently, but resistance takes over. If you miss one day, it turns to two. Two turns to four. And you know the rest of the story.

Give yourself the joy and space of sitting down and drawing in one corner of your home. Or go to the cafe. Make a time and space for yourself. My wife, Renuka, goes to the mall, drops her mother off to tai-chi and sits and draws. Others make time early in the morning, late at night etc.

But fix a time. And also a space. Without a specific space, it's often hard to get going. Time is important, but you'll find that it's also the space that's important. The space puts you in a frame of mind to get the job done.

Make this time and space, non-negotiable and you'll come to love these moments of quiet and solitude. And you'll be quite amazed at your progress as the days tick along. But practice you must. Or you will fail, without a doubt.

And yes, while the lack of daily practice is a problem, it's only the first one in the list of problems. The second problem stems from the Western system of education, where everything has to be explained with a WHY.

Reason 2: You want to know WHY

There's a big difference between the Eastern method of teaching and the Western method. The Eastern method is built on the concept of 'when you find the teacher you trust, you have to trust the teacher.' This means that some assignments may seem to defy common sense. And the concept of 'why' will rear its head. 'Why' do you need to do this exercise? Or 'why' that exercise?

And yet, every exercise has been designed to create a certain level of competence, and to strengthen your skill. If there was any time to go with the flow, it's on a Psychotactics course.

If you fight what's being taught, because you want answers, it leads to frustration. You may not realise why you had to do something, until much later down the line. The WHY will be answered later.

But even if you get past the 'why', the biggest failure device clicks into place at this point in time.



If you really, really, really, really, really, really want to learn something quickly and efficiently, you can't fight with your brain. The way the brain works most efficiently is by learning tiny bits at a time. So Tuesday's work is a smidgen better than Monday's. And Wednesday's work is just that tiny bit better than Tuesday's. And so the week unfolds in daily—yet minuscule steps. If you try to do six days of work in one day, your brain doesn't have time to process and sleep on it. And so progress suffers. If you don't want to hamper your progress, you will need to find time—and more importantly a space where you can practice.

Reason 3: The Fear of Not Getting It Right

By the time we were six years old, we learned a ton of stuff. And we didn't care much if it was right or wrong. And then we turned seven. And suddenly our parents, our friends, our teachers put this huge burden of perfection on our shoulders. Well, it's time to get that burden off. We've carried it long enough.

You'll learn to get things right often as you go through the course. But you'll also be working on getting things wrong. And as you've already suspected (or read before), we'll have exercises specially dedicated to making mistakes.

For most of us this is a highly unusual way to learn, because most of our education has been hell-bent on making sure you get things right. Getting things wrong doesn't come into the picture at all.

And yet, like a pilot, you should not only be able to soar, but to deliberately get into a tail-spin and pull out of it. And that helps you get a comprehensive understanding of what not to do. And then what to do.

In the process we have so much fun getting things wrong, that getting things wrong no longer becomes a stigma. It's becomes a liberating way to learn, because it's fun, fun, fun. Pretty much like when you were six years old.

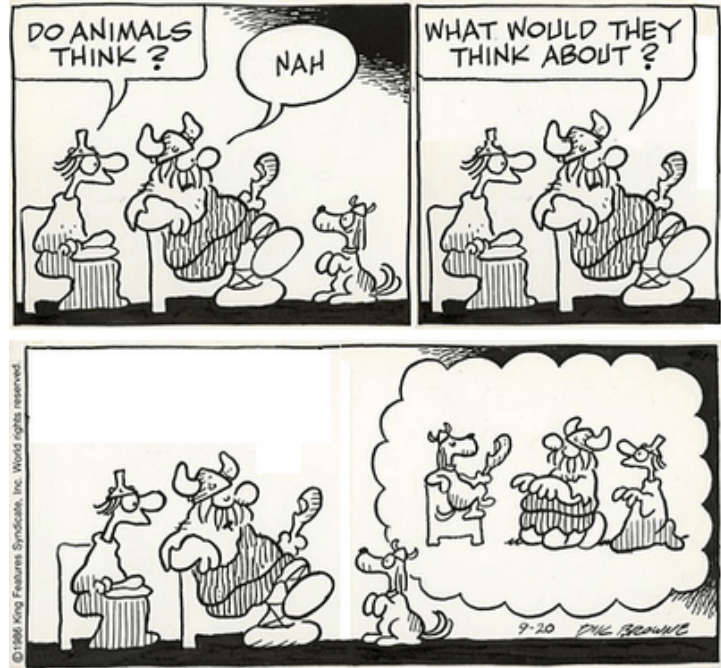
And this takes us to the fourth concept: copying. Interestingly, you did a lot of copying as you were growing up. And then, suddenly the concept of copying became shameful.

Reason 4: The Shame of Copying

There's a difference between copying and plagiarism. Plagiarism is when you copy blatantly and then show it off as your own work.

Plagiarism is to be avoided at all costs. Instead we should do what we do best as humans: we copy. Copying can be defined as 'patterning'. Our brains see and recognise a pattern, and then we 'copy' it. Over time and with a mix of other patterns, make it our own, which is then defined as 'our style'.

So, for instance if some one shows you how to cook a dish better, you copy that method. You practice it a few times, always tweaking, changing and learning. And then, even though it may seem like you're copying that recipe, you've added your own touch. As you get more confident, you add other elements. These elements are again, copies of some other ideas. Soon these ideas merge together and you have a style that you can call your own.



When I was growing up, my parents used to subscribe to a newspaper called 'The Daily'. This newspaper had a variety of cartoons. Hägar the Horrible (an American cartoon strip) mingled quite well with Andy Capp (a British cartoon strip). I grew up reading about 10-12 cartoon strips a day, which is quite common in several Indian newspapers (yes, I grew up in India). By comparison, New Zealand newspapers carry no cartoon strips at all. Makes you wonder, doesn't it? Would I have copied anything? Would I have drawn cartoons at all? Copying is the key to learning quickly from established professionals.

As children, we copied letters of the alphabet, copied accents, copied language. The key to progress (or in some cases, lack of progress) lies in copying or patterning. In fact, it's impossible to go through even a single day of your life, without copying something or the other. But when we do this copying knowingly, we feel shame. Our teacher's voice booms in the recesses of our brain: 'Now, don't you let me catch you copying!'

And so we've learned to reinvent from scratch. And starting from scratch is a very scary place to be in. Because when you're learning any new skill, copying is critical to save time and create efficiency. In order to learn quickly, you need to copy from other cartoon books, other cartoons online and offline. And yes, even copy from your group.

But here's where reinvention firmly steps in. You copy, but copying endlessly means you're not using your brain at all. So you have to put in your style as well. Copy a lot, but put your mark on it. And this is how style develops.

When I was a child, I copied The Phantom, Tarzan and when I moved to cartoons, I copied Hägar the Horrible, Dennis the Menace and many other cartoons. And I created my own situations using the base structure of these cartoons. That helped me learn and improve a lot faster. So yeah, copying is good. But be sure to add your own bit to it too. If you don't you won't feel a sense of achievement. And that lack of achievement soon leads to a skill we've mastered. That skill is the ability to make squillions of excuses.

Reason 5: Excuses

When you wake up every morning, you brush your teeth. And you have a shower. And then put on some clothes before going outdoors. All of these things take time. Not a lot of time, but they all add up. And yet, you get all of it done every single day.

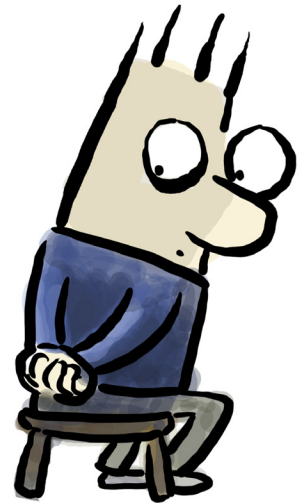
And the reason you do it, is because of certain norms that exist. There's no law that says you have to brush your teeth, or have a shower, though you may get in a spot of trouble if you step out the street without clothes. You do these things because you want to do it. And no matter how crazy your deadline, you brush away the excuses. When excuses are thrown out, success gets a chance to step in.

The key to success can be boiled down to a single line. The line: *Successful people hate doing the same thing that unsuccessful people hate doing—but they do it anyway.*

Resistance loves you to death, and yet we fight resistance when it comes to doing things we want to do. Excuses will pop up at every corner. There's no way to win, except to destroy the excuse every single time. And for this we must carve out a space for ourselves. Find a coffee break, take some time off from lunch, switch off that stupid TV that you watch for at least 8-24 hours a week (no, I'm not kidding, keep a log book and you'll be amazed). And yes, go on Facebook and Twitter a lot less than you need to.

There are just five ways to fail in this booklet. But in reality, there are five million and fifty three ways to fail. And almost all of those ways boil down to your excuses. If you truly want to succeed, no one can stop you.

It's your choice.



No one admits to knowingly tying their hands behind their own back. Yet, that's what we do every day with our excuses. It doesn't matter what the excuse, at the end of the day, it's still an excuse. The sooner you recognise how excuses are holding you back, the sooner you can learn to ignore them, and move ahead.

Method of Teaching

In school you did something weird. Your teacher gave you an assignment. Then you did the assignment all by yourself, handing it back to the teacher when you were done. The teacher would then grade you, based on your work. And then you'd have the option to talk about your grades. Or not. But no one ever saw your work, except you and the teacher.

There's something fundamentally wrong with that method of teaching (and learning)

Because that's not how we learn most things early in life. If we're learning a language as a child, for instance, we don't do the learning in private. Every one in our 'group' (our parents, friends, relatives—even teachers) communicate with us. And we respond in public. There's no devious assignment going back and forth. Any mistakes (yes, that's a typo) are made in public, corrected in public, and therefore everyone around you learns from your mistakes—and your successes.

And the key to this rapid learning is the openness

If you've read 'Outliers' by Malcolm Gladwell, he talks about the concept of 10,000 hours. Based on a research done by K. Anders Ericsson, a psychologist at Florida State University, that it takes about 10,000 hours of practice before any individual can become an expert. Ericsson, found that spending 10,000 hours productively, made a person a bit of an expert on the subject. That's 10 years of reasonable slog to get to expertise. But then again, most of this learning is done alone.

I should know. I worked alone

When learning to draw, I spent thousands of hours shyly sitting in a room and drawing. I would mostly be stuck reading books (or comics) and drawing whenever and wherever I could. To say I was shy was a bit of an understatement. Even two years into university, I spoke to just a few friends and women were totally out of my orbit. I can't remember if I didn't want to speak to people, or whether I was just content drawing away. But the point is that I spent thousands of hours learning to draw.



Working alone has tremendous advantages. The noise of working in a live group can be overwhelming at times. But if properly set up, group learning beats solo learning by miles. That's because you not only learn from the mistakes of others, but also learn from the way they approach the very same assignment.

And I was my own teacher (for the most part)

I'd copy something, and then evaluate it. But the problem with working alone is that you often can't see your mistakes. It's only when someone points out the glitch that you can even begin to fix it. You can, however, see a big difference when you look at your work several months or a year down the line. And this is a tedious, if generally satisfying process of learning^[1] a skill in your own time.

But there's a way to speed up this process

And this is through the group method. Where instead of just you and the teacher viewing the assignments, everyone views your assignment. And something magical happens. For one, they're able to spot your mistakes a lot faster than you. So they learn not to make the mistakes you've made. You in turn, learn not to make the mistakes they've made. Of course this 'learning from mistakes' isn't all instant. Sometimes it takes a bit of to and fro, but even with the to and fro, the learning speeds up exponentially.

¹ It's satisfying if you're not in a hurry to master a skill quickly. If you are in a hurry, it's a horribly frustrating experience.

And this is only one of the goodies of group learning

The other goodies are the way people interpret things. So if 10 people are given the same assignment, with the very same instructions, they all tend to interpret it differently. Sometimes there are big differences in interpretation. Sometimes there are tiny differences. But no two assignments are ever rendered the same way. As a result, you're exposed to a rainbow of methods. Suddenly you see the same assignment executed both correctly and 'wrongly'. And your learning steps firmly on the accelerator.

Fear then feels a little threatened

As you make mistakes, and the rest of the group makes mistakes, the concept of fear seems to disappear (or at least fade away). Hey, 'struggle' still hops along for the ride, but the scariness seems to dissipate, and now the real you comes out. And all of this is only possible with group learning.

What's really cool about the Internet, is that the group learning isn't in your face.

Introverts don't fancy endless amount of stimulation. And to be in a group all the time is a pain in the butt. But you go away, do your assignment all by yourself, then post it. And that's when you get involved and things really rock and roll. Instead of slogging through those thousands of hours, you are able to achieve a lot more in a fraction of the time.

But the group does more than just help you with mistakes and successes

It spurs you on when you're down, disheartened or just plain lazy. It gives you an insight into different cultures and different responses. And it keeps you on your toes. You don't want to let your group down, because they are so helpful.

Yet fear shows up again...

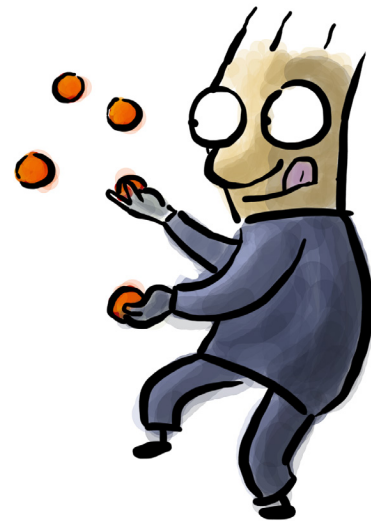
At first, most people are terrified (yes, terrified) of posting their cartoons on Facebook or some public place. This fear largely stems from the realisation that you'll end up looking like an idiot in front your friends, relatives and clients. And it's possible that you've been criticized many times before, so that fear is justified.

And yet, if you look at the public space as a group effort, you'll be amazed by the response of your friends and peers. As your images appear on Facebook, they will begin to encourage you, and your 'group' will include friends, relatives and yes, even the occasional competitor. Yes, you're afraid, but trust the process of the group learning. And you'll find that the quicker you get over this need to keep everything private, the faster you'll learn.

The school method is private. The individual 'slog by yourself' method is private.

And there's a lot to be said about private learning. But it's slow. And tedious. And mostly disadvantageous when it comes to exponential learning capability.

If you want to learn, you can go back to the school method. Or you can depend on the wisdom of the African Proverb: If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go with a group.



The group is an amazing source of inspiration. As you go through the daily juggle called 'life', the group will help you stay focused. The more you respect your group members and work with them, the higher you will soar.

Photos in The Forum

Most courses tend to allow any sort of photos on their forum.

Cats.

Dogs.

Avatars.

Spiderman.

Wonder Woman.

Not on our forums

A critical part of being on a Psychotactics course is a factor of respect. I need to respect you as a participant, and you in turn respect your group and your teacher. And to do this, we need to remove the 'paper bag' from our heads. We can't afford to hide behind pictures of cats, dogs, or any super hero.

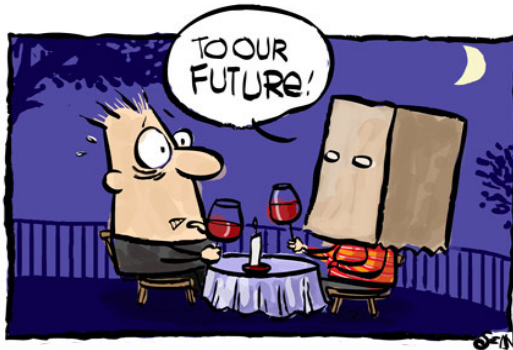
And there's a reason why this is important

As humans we like to see each other. To take that a step further, we need to see each other. And you notice this even if someone is wearing sunglasses. You feel the need to see their eyes. And so, on our courses, all our participants put in their real picture. And preferably without sunglasses.

But a photo isn't just a nice-to-have factor

In previous courses, we've allowed people to get away with not posting their photos. And it's been disastrous for the participant. The group needs to see your face. When they realise you aren't being forthcoming with revealing yourself, it affects their response to you, the participant.

Participants without photos get fewer comments, less interaction and are among the first to drop out—all for want of a real photo. So now there's a rule: You need to have your photo, because the photo helps you relate to others and in turn, they relate to you. And the interaction, learning and quiet camaraderie increases manifold.



The more someone hides themselves from us, the more we mistrust them. As humans, we have this innate need to see each other. Hence, on a Psychotactics course, a photo is critical to the learning process.

Navigating the Forum

Ideally I like to keep the forum as uncluttered as possible when you enter. This is because of two core reasons.

Reason 1: You are dealing with a different forum.

Reason 2: Technology can always be a little intimidating.

Reason 1: A different forum

You may have been in a forum before. And yet the moment you're in a different kind of forum, it's like being in a new city. You not only have to find your way around, but have to understand the culture of the forum. And this gets compounded if you consider yourself not to be tech-savvy. Which takes us to the second point.

Reason 2: Technology can be a pain

It solves a ton of our problems, but things can go wrong, because we're intimidated. So again, keeping the forum as simple as possible is critical to the process.

However...

There are certain items that are needed right at the very start. And for a forum to exist, we need to have those items in place. And even if you streamline things a lot, you still end up with a reasonable amount of clutter.

Therefore there is a recommended pathway (Once we start the course I will explain more).

See you on the course.

