

Helping Students Choose Courses

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"Oh, I just can't decide which additional course to take this term" is a familiar student lament, even after the merits of available and feasible courses have been examined. Many factors enter into a decision, but a choice must be made.

Here is a quick and easy, five-step, self-help method for selecting the course—the Course Selection Matrix Chart. To illustrate: Chris is trying to choose one course from among the following. (Assume that courses are available, class time will fit, Chris is eligible to enroll, and some rationale exists for each.)

- Weaving or Knitting (WOK 388)
- Calf Roping for Beginners (COW 107)
- Floppy Disks and Magnets (ZAP 224)
- Ghost Writing (BOO 151)
- Home Cooking Techniques (MOM 239)

At issue here is action—making a choice, getting out of the indecision-delay trap. The Course Selection Matrix Chart produces a choice-ranking and does not address the whats or the whys that go into the choosing (those factors were weighed before). It works this way (refer to Figure 1).

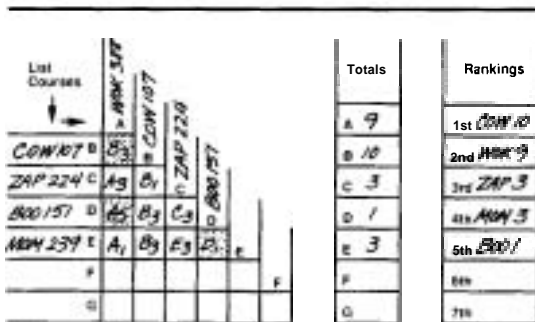


Figure 1. Course Selection Matrix Chart

List courses vertically (omitting the FIRST) and horizontally (omitting the LAST).

Enter in each cell the LETTER of the course Preferred and a NUMBER (5=high; 3=medium; 1=low) for weighting the degree of preference.

Sum the numbers for each letter and complete the "Totals" column.

Arrange the courses and their corresponding number weightings in the "Rankings" column.

Inspect the results.

Chris first lists the courses in the vertical column (omitting the first one) B through E and in the horizontal headings (omitting the last one) A through D. Next, Chris compares each course with every other course and arbitrarily chooses one over the other for each comparison-pair. Then the letter of the preferred course is entered in respective course-intersection cells. The next step requires that a degree-of-preference number or weight (5 or 3 or 1) be assigned to the letter (course).

A few examples will clarify the procedure. Chris has entered "B-3" in the B-A intersection cell. This means that Chris prefers COW 107—Calf Roping for Beginners (Course B) over WOK 388—Weaving or Knitting (Course A) and has indicated a medium (3) degree of preference. The "A-5" entry in the D-A cell means that A (WOK 388) is preferred over D (BOO 151—Ghost Writing) with a strong (5) degree of preference. The "D-1" in cell E-D means BOO (D) over MOM (E) by a slight (1) preference.

For the final steps Chris sums all the numbers for each letter and enters these data in the Totals column. The entries are then arranged for the Rankings column, and the results are inspected. Ghost Writing is definitely out and Floppy Disks and Home Cooking, although tied, didn't rank very high. Calf Roping just edged out Weaving or Knitting. So Chris chooses COW 107 for the additional course.

The Matrix is designed to accommodate the comparison of up to seven courses, which is about its limit for efficiency. The Course Selection Matrix Chart may be modified to compare items other than courses. It is a simple, convenient, versatile tool.

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