

## Reading memos

[Borrowed almost verbatim from Edwin F. Taylor, ‘Guest comment: Only the student knows’, *American Journal of Physics* 60(3):201–202 (March 1992).]

### Students!

I have a problem with which only you can help me. I have been writing this textbook, on and off, for too many years. Over that time I have become accustomed to lying and approximating, and I no longer see what is wrong with the text. Only you, coming fresh to the subject, can recognize where the text fails to help your understanding. In this you are a world-class expert! Will you help?

As you read the text, please have a blank sheet of paper next to you. Note down difficulties as they appear, with text page number. If you cannot figure out what is wrong, tell me that too! If something later clears things up, just add that to the comments. *Do not erase anything or cross it off*; both entries are useful. At the end of each chapter, note down general difficulties that you have and questions that you would like answered. *Do not revise or recopy your notes*; it is very important that they be spontaneous, written down at the very minute you are reading.

Here is the right attitude: If you do not understand something, it is **my** fault. Help me pinpoint where the text falls short.

**Parable of the blind carpenter.** I am like a carpenter who has spent years building a house. During that time the carpenter has gradually gone blind, now cannot see the house at all, and must rely on the occupants of the house to report what is wrong: ‘We need more cupboards in the kitchen’, or ‘Water is leaking into the bedroom.’ Even though blind, the carpenter is still a competent worker and can fix most things, even some things that the occupants do not fully understand, such as exactly where the roof leaks. But the blind carpenter cannot fix things without being alerted by the occupants.

Will you help me finish this house? Thank you.