

科学实验室的那张长桌

上周三的科学课，老师宣布做电路实验。她走到讲台边那张长桌前，手没有停过：左手掀开盒盖，右手取出电池盒、灯座、三根导线，全部摆到桌面左上角，前后不到三十秒。她说，器材提前分好类，实验时间才够你们试错。

我盯着那张长桌看了很久。每个零件有自己的小格，导线按长短排开，备用电池竖在一边。我脑子里想的却是自己的文具盒：昨天美术课要水彩笔，我在里面摸到的是圆规的针尖，扎了手指；前天数学课要量角器，我翻出来的是一张揉皱的草稿纸，量角器压在盒子最底下，和半块橡皮、三节电池、一沓贴纸搅在一起。我的文具盒里，所有东西都平等地挤着，谁也不认识谁。

那天放学路上，我把科学课那张长桌在脑子里放大，决定照着它重整我的文具盒。回家我找了个带格的首饰盒当内胆，塞进文具盒里。格子按上课的顺序排：第一格放当天第一节课要用的笔和本子标签，第二格放数学工具，第三格放语文英语要用的红笔和订书钉，最后一格放备用电池和备用笔芯。每样东西只许有一个格子，多出来的东西要么扔掉，要么留在书桌上不进盒子。整理用了一个多小时，可是从那以后，我闭着眼睛都能摸到量角器。

变化是从科学课第二次实验开始的。老师要求按步骤记录数据，别的小组边做边找导线，我们组的时间全花在接电路上，老师说的数据一个没记全。我们组四个人商量，把步骤单贴在实验册封面，先照单子把器材摆齐，再动手。那次我们记全了数据，还多试了一个串联的接法。

我把这个办法搬回了自己的学习计划。以前我的计划写在便利贴上，贴满书桌前的墙，十几张纸条互相盖着，哪张在最上面就做哪件事。现在我在笔记本首页画一张流程单：放学后完成的事排最前，晚饭后必须完成的排中间，弹性任务排最后，每张单子不超过五项。做计划的那个晚上，我把墙上十几张便利贴全撕下来，合并到流程单上，撕完发现墙上空了，桌子前也空了。

这个月我晚自习回家，坐下就翻开流程单，从第一项开始做，笔从第一格拿，尺子从第二格拿。我妈说我最近像换了个人。其实没有换人，只是我的文具盒终于像科学实验室那张长桌，而我的计划终于像那张步骤单。东西排顺了，思路跟着排顺了，这是我上科学课之外，从那张长桌上学到的最大一课。

The Long Table in the Science Lab

Last Wednesday in science class, our teacher announced a circuit experiment. She walked to the long table by the podium and her hands never stopped: her left hand lifted a lid, her right hand took out the battery holder, the lamp socket, and three wires, arranging them at the top-left corner of the table in under thirty seconds. She said that if the equipment is sorted in advance, there will be enough time for trial and error.

I stared at that long table for a long time. Every part had its own compartment, the wires lay arranged by length, and spare batteries stood to one side. What I kept thinking about, though, was my own pencil case. The day before, in art class, I had

reached in for watercolor pens and touched the point of a compass instead, pricking my finger. The day before that, in math class, I had pulled out a crumpled draft sheet while my protractor sat crushed at the bottom, tangled with half an eraser, three batteries, and a stack of stickers. In my pencil case everything crowded together as equals, and nothing knew anything.

On the way home that day, I enlarged the image of the lab table in my mind and decided to rebuild my pencil case after it. I found a compartmented jewelry box to serve as an insert inside the case. The compartments followed the order of my school day: the first held the pen and notebook tags for the first class, the second held math tools, the third held the red pen and staples for Chinese and English, and the last held spare batteries and pen refills. Every item was allowed exactly one compartment; anything extra was either thrown away or left on the desk, never in the box. The reorganization took over an hour, but ever since, I can find my protractor with my eyes closed.

The change showed up in our second lab. The teacher asked us to record data step by step. Other groups hunted for wires as they went and missed half the numbers, while our group spent all our time connecting the circuit. The four of us agreed to tape the procedure sheet to the front of our lab book, lay out all the equipment according to it, and only then start. That time we recorded every number and even tried one extra series connection.

I carried the method back to my study plans. My plans used to live on sticky notes covering the wall by my desk, a dozen notes overlapping, and I did whatever happened to be on top. Now I draw a flow list on the first page of my notebook: tasks due before the end of school come first, must-finish-after-dinner tasks in the middle, flexible ones last, never more than five items per day. That evening I peeled all the sticky notes off the wall and merged them into the list. When I finished, the wall was bare, and so was the space in front of me.

This month, when I get home from evening study hall, I sit down, open the flow list, and start from item one, taking my pen from the first compartment and my ruler from the second. My mother says I seem like a different person lately. I am not. It is just that my pencil case finally resembles that long table in the science lab, and my plans finally resemble the procedure sheet. Once the things fell into order, my thinking followed. That was the biggest lesson I ever took away from that table, bigger than anything in the textbook.