



***MANAGING***

***YOUR***

***STUDY & LIFE***

***AT UNIVERSITY***

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# Introduction

Effectiveness as a student is not something that evolves by chance. Nor is it something that you will indirectly develop if you trust in luck, or in an "it'll be OK" approach to getting through the semester.

Effectiveness as a student means recognising that you are in charge - that you are the one responsible for planning and organising a study approach that will work for you. You also need to be clear about what is required of you in terms of the skills you will need to use in order to be an effective learner, and a successful student.

It should be pointed out that this is only an introductory guide whose aim is to introduce time management techniques to help you to be better organised, to develop more productive study habits, and to help you settle into a purposeful study routine. This guide also introduces you to the skills of reading, notetaking, assignment writing, memory enhancement and exam techniques.

The ideas and strategies suggested are for you to **practise** and try out for yourselves. They offer you the opportunity to maximise your study efforts so that the effort you put into study **will be rewarded, not wasted**. These are the skills that, if used effectively, will help you to feel more competent to reflect on and take control of your own learning. The bottom line is that they will also make it easier for you to achieve all your university goals.

Also, to better understand the requirements and processes involved in university study, Student Services offers a range of programmes, workshops, tutorials, and individual assistance designed to maximise your study success. These services build upon the techniques outlined in this booklet and you are strongly encouraged to utilise them.

# Time Management

Time is precious at university. It is also a **basic** commodity which can be invested. Although everybody begins with the same amount of 24 hours a day, each person will invest their time differently because of their different needs. Braint (P3) states "effective time management means being in control of your life: no one can tell you how to use your time; only you know what your priorities are and what you want out of life".

Braint also asks you to tick any of the following statements if you think, or say them, about yourself:

- I waste a lot of time
- I haven't got time to ...
- There aren't enough hours in the day
- I'm not an organised sort of person
- I can't meet deadlines
- I don't have time for socialising
- I can't help being late
- I always work best under pressure
- I can't get motivated

Braint says that if you have ticked five of the above you have chosen a passive role. You have chosen:

- **not** to set yourself goals
- **not** to make choices
- **not** to set priorities in your life
- to be reactive ie. to let things happen to you
- to value spontaneity above planning/organisation (which you may see as a threat to the quality of your life).

If this applies to you, use this guide to focus on the changes you can make to turn around such negative thinking. Self talk is powerful; you can talk yourself into success or failure. Make sure you are positive and constructive, and tell yourself you are in control.

## Plan a Timetable

Drawing up your own study timetable is a first step in becoming a positive, effective learner who is in control. You can use the following steps in drafting your timetable.

### 1 Fill in sleeping and eating times

Be regular about this. The lack of a routine schedule for eating and sleeping is sometimes used as an excuse for **not** studying. For you to be in control you need to

train your body to keep efficient eating and sleeping habits. You can do this by deciding what time you will get up, what time you will eat your meals, and what time you will go to bed (at least on the week days). This also helps to reinforce the idea that study is a "job".

## **2 Build in your regular commitments - work, travel, family, child care, sport, classes?**

Make a list of these first - do you work, travel to university each day? Do you attend meetings, play sport, go to church? Do you need to clean, shop, cook, pick up/care for children? Don't under-estimate the amount of time and effort you spend on these regular commitments. It might even be helpful to make a timetable of how you used your time last week, (putting in everything from when you got up to when you went to bed), to help you work out how much time you spend on these activities.

## **3 Build in family and friends' time**

This way you can ensure minimum disruption to your personal life with maximum time to study. This also allows you to discuss your commitments with your family and friends. Understanding your study needs will be a vital aspect in their support, and remember you **will need** a consistent system of encouragement and support.

## **4 Include relaxation and exercise time**

Make exercise a regular part of your timetable. Some form of exercise/relaxation is necessary to develop good positive attitudes. You will find it easier to stick to your timetable if it includes time for socialising, sport, leisure, exercise or whatever your favourite form of relaxation is. A balanced lifestyle is important. Also a semester is a 'long haul', and you need this time to prevent stress, to avoid 'burn out' and to pace yourself.

## **5 Now, what blocks of time are left for study?**

Which times you put down for study depends on your own habits to a large extent. You should plan to find at least 8-10 hours per week, all up, for each unit you study.

But be realistic and honest with yourself. If you have a favourite music or television programme and know you cannot resist listening to or watching it, include it in your timetable. You are the one who has to keep to your timetable so don't put down study at impossible times. Keeping to your timetable plan will get easier the longer you continue with it. Eventually it should become a habit, part of your everyday routine.

## 6 Do you need to evaluate your priorities?

Check your study hours - if you do not have enough (within the guide of 8-10 hours per unit) you will have to find them somewhere, or change your study commitments. You are the one in charge, the one responsible. You have to arrange the situation so that you maintain your sense of purpose and, your commitment to achieve your university goals.

## 7 Arrange your 'study' to increase the effectiveness of your learning (see page 10 for the theory behind this step)

You can start doing the hard work of preparing for exams right from the first week of semester if you take advantage of the idea that you only need 4 or 5 '**practices**' or **active repetitions** of information to place it in your long term memory. **Organise your study sessions by working around your tutorials and lectures to build in this step.**

**Step 1** Schedule a **preview** session not more than 12 hours prior to each lecture and tutorial (1/2 hour should be fine).

**Step 2** Go to the lectures and tutorials and take notes.

**Step 3** That afternoon or no later than that night, schedule a session where you can **review** your notes (1/2 an hour should be enough).

**Step 4** Schedule a weekly **revision session** for each unit. (You need to spend 1-2 hours per week reviewing all your reading, lecture and tutorial notes for each unit).

Colour code your units (with all the preview, review and revision times) to help balance and organise your study and to make your timetable easy to read.

## 8 Keep in mind the time of day you are most alert - are you a morning or evening person?

A good strategy is to plan your study to fit in with your mental and physical peaks. Experiment to see if you are most alert in the mornings or evenings and try to do your study then. If you are tired and have to study, try starting out with an easier task, for example, writing out a bibliography or putting your files in order. You might find that the sense of achievement gained from completing these tasks can build up your motivation to go on to the harder tasks.

## **9 Work out the demands of assignments**

On your semester calendar list your assignments, colour coded with their weighting and due dates. This will help you plan your weekly timetable to accommodate your assignments, even if two or three are due on the same week.

## **10 Include flexibility**

You will need some time allocated as spare study time to cater for the unforeseen circumstances which will interrupt your usual routine.

## **11 Plan each session and set realistic and achievable study goals**

Plan each session so that specific tasks can be achieved - eg. summarise three pages or code part of a computer programme. Start the planned task as soon as you sit down. Try the 'half-hour goal' (see p 12) which includes that important review time. 'What did I just read? What was the main idea?' Do a quick mind map revision summary. It is **the practise** of material that is important for checking your learning so that you can tell whether or not it has reached your long term memory. This review is important too as a 'reward' for completing work. Remember that 'every long journey starts with a single step'.

## **12 Keep in mind your learning style**

Your personal learning style will affect the way you choose to spend the day. Plan around your strengths, weaknesses and demands placed on you by family, friends, commitments etc.

## **13 Include a weekly planning session**

Spend some scheduled time on Sunday or Monday planning your timetable for the coming week, taking into account the specific demands of that week, both social and academic.

## **14 If your timetable is not working, if you are not following it ... change it!**

If you find you cannot get up, or go to sleep, or study at the times planned, change the timetable so that it will work. It should, in fact, be regularly revised and updated.

## **15 Discuss your timetable with your family and friends**

Let your nearest and dearest know when your study and free times are. When people know that you are studying they might let you get on with it.

## **16 Only study for as long as you are effective**

If you study for three hours but can only remember one hour's worth, you have in fact wasted two hours. You should study **only** for as long as you are fully productive. Take a short break after  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour or whatever fits your concentration span. Two to five minutes should be enough to restore you to full efficiency - do some relaxation exercises, walk around the room, have a drink of water! The 'half-hour goal' helps you to do this too.

## **17 Build 'rewards' into your timetable if you have trouble concentrating or 'getting on' with study**

Rewards are important incentives for increasing motivation, so use them to help you keep to task.

When you decide what tasks you want to complete in each session also decide on the reward for satisfactorily completing the task. For example, an hour's relaxation might be the reward for reading an article, a picnic might be the reward for completing an assignment.

Work it the other way around as well. If the task is not satisfactorily completed then you should not reward yourself. And, if you do not keep to your plan then you should deprive yourself of a reward.

- . Put your time where the marks are;**
- . Students often spend too much time on assignments and not enough where the marks are;**
- . Proportion out your time to the number of marks.**



# Stop Procrastinating

**Source:** Yamauchi KT 1987, *Procrastination: ten ways to “do it now”*. In P.A.Keller and S.R. Heyman (Eds), *Innovations in clinical practice: a source book*, Vol. 6. Professional Resource Exchange, Sarasota.

We’ve all been plagued by procrastination at one time or another. For some, it’s a chronic problem. Others find it hits only some areas of their lives. The net results, though, are usually the same - wasted time, missed opportunities, poor performance, self depreciation or increased stress.

Procrastination is letting the low priority tasks get in the way of high priority ones. It’s socialising with your colleagues when you know that a certain work project is due soon, watching TV instead of doing the things that need to be done, or talking about superficial things with your partner rather than discussing your relationship concerns.

We all seem to do fine with things we want to do or enjoy doing for fun. But, when we perceive tasks as difficult, inconvenient or scary we may shift into our procrastination mode. We have very clever ways of fooling ourselves. How many of the following excuses hit home for you ...

- I’ll wait until I’m in the mood.
- It’s OK to do ??????? now, I’ll do my work later.
- There’s plenty of time to get it done.
- I don’t know where to begin?
- I work better under pressure so I don’t need to do it immediately.
- I’ve got too many things to do first.
- It will get done I can relax now.
- I’ll do it when I get “around to it”.

Once exposed, these self-defeating statements don’t sound so convincing. But, when we privately tell ourselves these excuses, they seem quite believable. Don’t be fooled by how innocent they sound. They get us to postpone important tasks and duties.

## Causes

Procrastination is a bad habit. Like other habits, there are two general causes. The first is the “crooked thinking” we employ to justify our behaviour. The second source is our behaviour patterns.

A closer look at our critical thinking (“crooked thinking”) reveals three major issues in delaying tactics - perfectionism, inadequacy and discomfort. Those who believe they must turn in the most exemplary work may wait until all available resources have been reviewed or endlessly rewrite draft after draft. Worrying over producing the perfect project prevents them from finishing on time. Feelings of inadequacy can also cause delays. Those that “know for a fact” that they are incompetent often believe they will fail and will avoid the unpleasantness of having their skills put to the test. Fear of discomfort is another way of putting a stop to

what needs to be done. Yet the more we delay, the worse the discomforting problem becomes.

Our behavioural patterns are the second cause. Getting started on an unpleasant or difficult task may seem impossible. Procrastination is likened to the physics concept of inertia - a mass at rest tends to stay at rest. Greater forces are required to start change than to sustain change. Another way of viewing it is that avoiding tasks reinforces procrastination which makes it harder to get things going. A person may be stuck too, not by lack of desire, but by not knowing what to do. It is important to use strategies which have been shown to defeat procrastination.

## Remedies

- 1 Rational self talk.** Those old excuses really don't hold up to rational inspection. The "two column" technique will help. Write down all of the excuses on one side of the paper. Then start to challenge the rationale behind each of the excuses. Write down your realistic thoughts on the other side of the paper. Here are some examples.

Excuse	Realistic Thought
I'm not in the mood right now	Mood doesn't do my work, actions do. If I wait for the right mood I may never get it done.
I'm just lazy.	Labelling myself as lazy only brings me down. My work is really separate from who I am as a person. Getting started is the key to finishing.

- 2 Positive self statements.** Incorporate a list of self-motivating statements into your repertoire of thought. Consider ...
  - "There's no time like the present"
  - "The sooner I get it done the sooner I can do what I like"
  - "There is no such thing as perfectionism. It's an illusion that keeps me from doing what I have to do right now"
  - "It's cheaper and less painful to do it right now rather than wait until it gets worse"
- 3 Design clear goals.** Think about what you want and what needs to be done. Be specific. If it's getting that assignment completed by the deadline, figure out a timetable with realistic goals at each step. Keep your sights within reason. Having goals too big can scare you away from starting.
- 4 Don't catastrophise.** Jumping to the conclusion that you will fail or that you are not good at something will only create a wall of fear that will stop you cold. Recognise that your negative predictions are not fact. Focus on the present and what positive steps you can take toward reaching your goals.
- 5 Set priorities.** Write down all of the things that need to be done in order of importance. The greater the importance or urgency, the higher the priority. Put

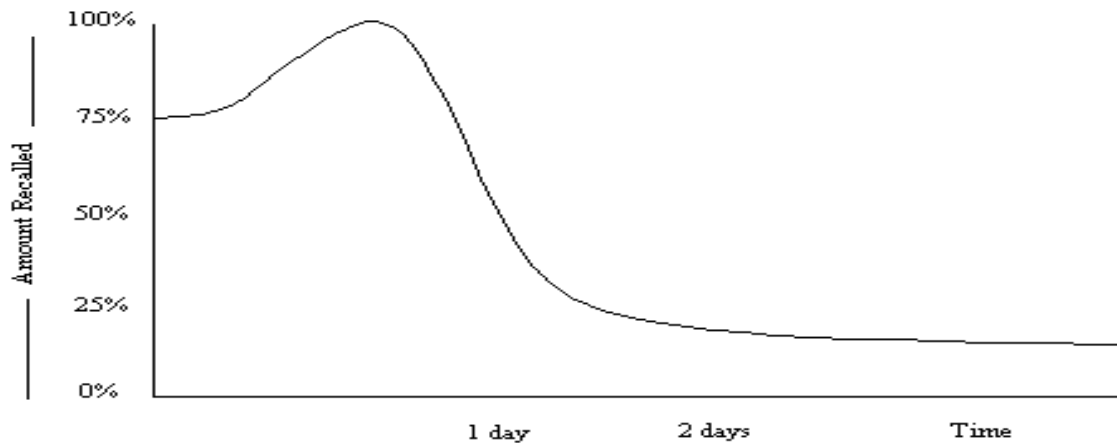
“messing around” distractions in its proper place - LAST. Start at the top of the list and work your way down.

- 6 **Partialise the tasks.** Big projects feel overwhelming. Break them down into the smallest and most manageable sub-parts. You’ll get more done if you do it piece by piece. For example, make an outline of a written report before you start composing. Partialising works particularly well with unpleasant jobs. Most of us can handle unpleasant duties as long as they are for a short time and in small increments. This is sometimes called the salami technique.
- 7 **Worst first.** Linked to the previous remedy, once you have divided the task into small pieces, look at what has to be done and do the worst parts first. In that way you only have more pleasant parts to do.
- 8 **Get organised.** Have all the materials ready before you begin the task. Use a daily schedule and use it all the time. List the tasks of the day or week realistically. Check off the tasks as you have completed them.
- 9 **Take a stand.** Commit yourself to doing the task. Write yourself a contract and sign it. Better still, tell a friend, partner or supervisor about your plans.
- 10 **Use prompts.** Write reminders to yourself and put them in conspicuous places like the TV, fridge, bathroom mirror or car dashboard. The more we remember our plans the more likely we are to follow them through.
- 11 **Round Tuit.** This involves cutting out a round piece of paper and writing on it all the tasks you need to complete today and this week. It is good to use in conjunction with remedy six.
- 12 **Five minute plan.** This involves setting a goal for the next five minutes to work. Often you end up doing more than five minutes work because you get into the task and lose track of time. A great way to start something unpleasant.
- 13 **Switching.** When faced with several tasks that are boring to perform, particularly for long periods of time, switch between tasks on a regular basis and maintain a good work ethic. This way you don’t get bored with any one task. Remember it is essential to go back to the tasks until they are FINISHED. If this is not done this technique becomes a very effective procrastination technique. Not what we want!
- 14 **Reward yourself.** Self reinforcement has a powerful effect on developing a “do it now” attitude. Celebrate, pat yourself on the back, smile and let yourself enjoy the completion of even the smallest of tasks. Don’t minimise your accomplishments. Remember you are already that much closer to finishing things that need to be done. Go ahead, get started. **NOW!**

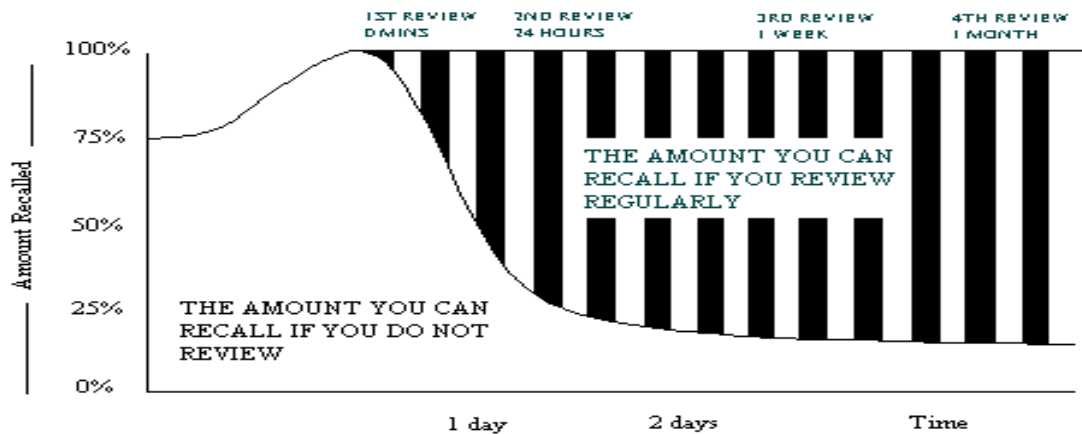
# Organising Your Study Time To Be An Effective Learner

**Source:** Ellis G & Sinclair B 1989, *Learning to Learn English*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Arranging regular times for reviewing your learning can help you understand your work better and make your memory of it much more effective. Look at the two figures below.



This figure shows how it is possible to forget 80% of what you have learnt within 24 hours if you don't review.



This figure shows how regular reviews can help you to keep your recall level high. Note how it is important to start your reviews just at the time when you feel you can remember the most, usually about 10 minutes after learning. Also note how the first three reviews are spaced close together but the latter reviews are spaced quite far apart.

# How Can You Build Review Into Your Timetable?

You can maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of your study by utilising the following four steps:

**Step 1**      **Preview** or **Pre-read** before you go to a lecture. You can do this by skip reading to get an **overview** of the main idea and main points of the topic. Read **a)** The introduction, which tells you what will be in the chapter, **b)** The headings and subheadings and/or the first sentence of each paragraph which tells you the main point of the paragraph or section, and **c)** The conclusion which sums up the chapter. This is best done just before or the night before the lecture.

**Step 2**      **Go** to the lecture and **take notes**.

**Step 3**      **Go over** the day's reading and activities, or lectures and tutorials if you are a full time student, to refresh your mind about the material you have covered. Look at the notes you have made and ask yourself:

- I**
- (a) How can I organise these notes to clearly show main points, headings, etc? Add underlining, highlighting, colour coding and numbering to help here.
  - (b) What were these notes about? Go over the content and check.
  - (c) Where does it fit in with what you've been doing? Place the material in some context or as part of its larger topic.
  - (d) Are there any parts that need special attention? If you did not understand any part of the notes, you may need to work on finding out more about it. Check your text book, ask your lecturer, check with your study group.
  - (e) Is there any follow up work that you need to do? Check your notes for any work that must be done, such as summarising, preparing for tutorials, writing up reports, checking out references, completing any tests or activities.

**To do this review each day is the work of a couple of minutes.**

- II**
- Do a **mind map summary**, (see P 24) from memory of the content of the lecture or reading. This helps your memory as the more visual and more complex a memory tool is and the fact that you do it yourself, means the more effective it will be.

**Step 4** Go over your summary again at the end of the week in your weekly revision session for each unit, and then again at the end of a completed module.

These four steps mean you go over everything at least **five times** - once when you previewed it, again in the lecture, again in the daily review, again in the weekly review and once more at the end of each module. This reviewing process helps you understand and learn your material, and makes your final exam preparation much easier. If you can build these steps into your study routine so that they become habit, you will be well on the way to becoming a successful student.

### **Another idea to try - The Half - Hour Goal**

Hastings (1984) provides a systematic way of organising each study session so that it has maximum effectiveness. She suggests that you try setting very specific half-hour goals. They can be divided into three parts:

- **Two minutes deciding** exactly what you are going to do, why you are doing it now, how it relates to what you did before, what would be a logical place to stop, and why. The trick here is to keep the task very small and precise, so that it can be accomplished within the time limit. This may take practice.
- **Twenty-five minutes doing it.**
- **Three minutes reviewing** what you have done, checking that it was what you had set out to do, making notes on the reading, wondering about the implications of the ideas, or working out for yourself how they connect up.
- Now **take a two minute** break.

### **More hints for goal-setting (adapted from Hastings, 1984)**

- 1 Any half-hour goal achieved is legitimate and complete in itself.
- 2 It's acceptable to select another goal immediately following in the same area, but have a two minute break between, and make sure you decide upon another end point.
- 3 After two goals, take a five minute break.
- 4 Try not to do more than two (or at most three goals) in the same subject one after another - you'll eventually get satiated and bored, as your energy for study will diminish.
- 5 After three goals take a 20 minute break, and get right away from it for the time.
- 6 After four goals take another five minute break.
- 7 After five goals (ie 2 1/2 hours + break = 3 hours) take a real long break, or stop until the next day.

- 8** In all your goal setting give yourself variety in subject and activity. Don't follow French vocabulary with learning Italian vocabulary, you'll only get confused. Similarly, don't follow reading with reading - for the same reasons. Try to do something physically active (writing) after something physically passive (reading); something new (reading) after something old (revision).
- 9** Risk setting goals small enough to achieve - this will take practice until you are used to it.
- 10** Remember to include the three minute review or reflection period at the end of each goal - this reminds you of what you have done, gives you the opportunity to fix errors in spelling etc, and allows you to take brief notes from your own reading. Essentially, the three minute review shifts the material from short to longer term memory, it consolidates your activity, connects it to your other experiences (academic and otherwise) and provides a basis for your next goal decision.
- 11** Always reward yourself when you have completed each goal - tell yourself you did a good job, tick it off the list. Look at what you have achieved, rather than at what is yet to be done. Each step takes you further towards your destination, even when the end of the journey is a long way off, so acknowledge each of your steps.

# Active Ways To Study Effectively

Many people assume that the act of study means reading their textbook or reading their notes. While reading is a necessary part of study, it is important to realise that you need to do something to successfully place information in your mind so that you can use it again later. Think of learning to ride a bike or to skate. You have to practise it before you can do it, not just read about how to do it and hope for the best.

The following are some suggestions on ways of studying actively for you to practise and use as you progress through the unit. It is important that you **start using and practising active study methods right from the start**. This way they will become automatic - a normal part of your study routine.

## 1 Summarising Topics

At the end of each module, topic or chapter you should make a summary. This should become a regular part of your study routine. It has four benefits:

- (a) The very act of summarising helps you to review and remember information.
- (b) Summarising will help you to think clearly about the information and to understand it better.
- (c) Summarising will provide you with a quick overview of information that you can use later on. In fact, you can make summaries of summaries and develop a list of key points that can be placed onto flash cards or formula cards for revision purposes.
- (d) Think about using a mind map or diagram summary. These are particularly effective as they are visual and thus more effective as memory tools.

## 2 Reading Actively

Do not just **read by itself**. Mostly your reading should include some additional action like taking notes, underlining, or highlighting. Ask yourself questions you can answer as you read too. You might like to think about skip reading to get an overview before you read word for word. Also ask yourself, 'Why am I reading?'. The purpose for reading is an important first step in any reading task, as it can help you choose the most efficient method to achieve your purpose.

## 3 Practise Drawing Diagrams

Drawing diagrams, pictures, or mind maps is really another way of summarising your ideas and learning your material. You can also make topics more interesting by thinking of alternate ways of presenting work such as using coloured pens, illustrations, magazine mock-ups, etc. Remember that the more visual something is the more effective a learning tool it will be.



If you have to learn diagrams or graphs, practising drawing them is a vital step.

#### **4 Say Things Aloud**

You can say things aloud to help you understand them if they are difficult. Pretend you are a teacher and explain the material to a class. Also talk to people about what you are studying - your family, friends, classmates, people you live with and your study group. Each time you "practise" or go over material you are helping to place information in your long term memory for exam purposes.

#### **5 Make Definition and Formula Cards**

If you have formal definitions or formulae you need to remember then a good way to start is by making and using flash cards. Put the term on one side of a small card and its definition on another. This process can also be helpful for learning vocabulary.

You can also turn your summaries into flash cards so that you can learn key facts and points as you wait, for example, in a supermarket or for a bus. The act of making the cards helps you learn and you can later use the cards to test yourself.

#### **6 Form a study group or learning circle**

One way to keep your motivation high and your commitment to study strong is to get together with other people studying the same subjects. Group support can help keep you going. Benefits include:

- Reducing feelings of isolation.
- Providing avenues for talking and discussing study material and issues as these are active ways of learning.
- Resource sharing by sharing text books, photocopying, etc.
- Sharing each other's past and present study experiences.
- Meeting to plan revision timetables and the materials you need to review.
- Holding mock or pretend tutorials to give you more confidence in real tutorials.
- Sharing research tasks on a topic to save time and effort.
- Giving one another practice on 'mock' tests or memory tests.
- Helping one another to keep deadlines and follow timetables.
- Helping to develop active exam preparation strategies.
- Discussing problems and difficulties and helping to explain material to each other.
- Researching past exam papers, interviewing lecturers, looking for trends in past papers.
- Combining the benefits of different learning styles.
- Providing different points of view to add to your ability to answer questions and pass exams.

Consider too, that a study group does not mean less work, but more efficient and effective study. It means a commitment to regular participation and preparing for your study group meetings.

# Reading Skills

Because of the time constraints of students, reading at university not only needs to be done in the shortest time possible but also needs to be accomplished so that you retain a good understanding of the text. This section will help you develop a range of reading strategies which can be used to help you be both productive and efficient in your reading tasks.

However, it is important that you recognise that there is no one perfect reading system or strategy. You may naturally read faster or slower than other people you know. This is not as important as recognising your own strengths and weaknesses, and developing your reading skills so that they are as effective as you can make them for the task and the time you have available.

Practise and use the following range of ideas and strategies to see what works most effectively for you and the reading task you have in front of you.

## 1 Be clear about your reading purpose

Ask yourself "**Why am I reading this?**" Am I reading to get an overview of the contents? To take notes for an assignment? To prepare for an exam? To check whether a particular book will be useful?

Then ask yourself which would **be the most efficient strategy or technique for achieving that purpose**. Can I learn what I need by examining the title, contents page and index? How fast can I read to obtain an overview of information?

If you have too much reading to get through you may have to set **priorities**. Of highest priority should be the reading tasks directly focussing on assessment requirements - reading for assignments and exams.

Remember that whatever the purpose, you should never read by itself. Always underline, highlight, take notes, ask questions so that you are actively reading and can concentrate better.

Make efficient use of your reading time by utilising your concentration span. For example:

- **Short term:** Get to know your limit (usually 20-30 minutes), break for a few seconds - walk around the room, draw a diagram, read in short half-hour goals (see p.12).
- **Long term:** Learn to know your total reading span (usually between 1-2 hours). If you are no longer getting meaning out of text, copying chunks of material verbatim or re-reading sentences constantly, you are wasting your time by continuing. When finished give yourself a reward.

## 2 Pre-reading Activities

Pre-reading strategies help develop your understanding, prepare your mind for the reading task, stop you from wasting time and also build in the repetitions of information that are so vital for memory purposes. They include:

- Bringing some knowledge to the study-text by reading encyclopedias, summaries, school text books.
- Having on hand a 'basics' notebook for information you will need (formulae, acronyms, key words, definitions).
- Listing what you already know about the topic.
- Listing the things you need to know about the topic.
- Asking questions: what, when, where, why, how?
- Reading to get an overview of the text before you begin detailed reading and notetaking (see the 'skip reading' strategy below).

## 3 Strategies for Reading

There are many different strategies such as the SQ3R technique and the skimming - by - paragraph technique (see communication texts for these). Different labels are also often attached to the same skills. We will call ours pre-reading/surveying, skip reading, scanning and critical reading.

**Pre-reading/surveying:** This entails a quick preliminary survey to assess the content and relevance to your topic. It helps to clarify your purpose. Check out the title, author, chapter headings, subheadings, preface, introduction, index, and any graphs and diagrams. Also look for study aids such as chapter summaries, guide questions and activities which would be useful.

**Skip Reading:** This helps you get information quickly without reading the entire text. It involves reading for main ideas and skipping everything else so you can get an overview of the topic and an indication of the main points.

To skip read you need to understand and utilise the way most pieces of writing are structured. Usually there is:

- An **introduction** outlining the main idea and an overview of what's in the body... so quickly read this. (Often the main idea is in the last sentence of the introductory paragraph).
- A **body** which is made up of paragraphs that each develops a main point in a summary or topic sentence or under headings and subheadings. The rest of the paragraph or section provides the explanation and/or evidence to support the main point. (Often the main point is contained in the first sentence of the paragraph. If not, try the second sentence or otherwise the last sentence). So read the headings/subheadings and/or the first sentence of every paragraph to get a quick idea of the main points in the body of the text.

- A **conclusion**, which sums up the main points of the text... so read this to get an easy summary. This also acts to reinforce your understanding and is helpful for memory purposes.

**Scanning:** This is a quick research skill where specific items of information are rapidly located (like searching through a dictionary or telephone book where your eyes don't fix until they 'lock' on a key word or a particular fact). Here you scan the entire page rather than read paragraph by paragraph. You can do it by focussing on an imaginary centre column on the page and running your eyes down the text until the information is located.

**Critical reading:** This is where you need to concentrate on trying to understand what the author is getting at.

- As you read, use the skip-reading approach of understanding the text's structure to help you sort out the main ideas and points and significant information.

**or**

- Ask yourself questions .... What's the author's purpose? What evidence is there to support the main ideas? Is the information objective? What are the argument's strengths? What are the argument's weaknesses? Is the argument presented logically? Is it relevant to your purpose?
- Ask evaluating questions..... Do you agree with the author? How do the ideas presented compare with your own? How do they relate to your prior knowledge? How do they extend your understanding?
- Self-talk yourself through the meaning (imagine you are explaining it to a friend).
- Take notes by: labelling notes and noting full bibliographic details; organising your own headings/subheadings; writing down main ideas in your own words; and leaving spaces for additional material.
- Cross reference with lecture notes/further reading.
- Recap what you have read and taken notes on after 20-30 minutes or after each section. If you stop without a quick review, the information may have "gone in one ear and straight out the other."

## **4 Post Reading Activities**

- Condense main points into summaries. Try a mind map summary.
- Talk through problem areas with your study group/class mates.
- Try teaching someone else what you have learnt.
- Translate concepts into charts or diagrams.

## **5 Habits that Slow Down Your Reading**

- Saying the words to yourself as you read.
- Re-reading sentences or back skipping.
- Reading every word (read for ideas not words).
- Not enough background information or insufficient vocabulary (you may need to begin with a simpler text).
- Lack of concentration (check the place, your purpose and your motivation).

## **6 Ways to Improve Your Reading**

- Read in phrases or group of words rather than 'fixing' on every word.
- Concentrate on key words or concepts.
- Improve comprehension by using the most appropriate reading strategy to suit your purposes.
- Widen your vocabulary by reading widely, practising your reading strategies and paying attention to definitions or key terms that are new.
- Start a glossary of new words.
- Focus research skills by understanding and analysing the task and/or assignment question asked.
- Improve your recall or retention by recalling the basic thread of the argument you have just read. This helps identify weaknesses in your understanding and reinforces your memory.
- Use charts, graphs, tables to help further your understanding of the text.

## Simple Definitions of Task Words Or Instructive Key Words

These are words that ask you to do something with the content of a question, like, discuss it or compare and contrast it, or list facts, etc. Task words ask you to approach the content in certain ways and give you a lot of information about the structure of the assignment. Hence, the following is a list of task words and their meanings:

**Compare:** look for the similarities and differences in the content of subject matter.

One task that students often undertake, perhaps because it seems straightforward, is the compare activity. A comparison is a demanding task. It must be organised as a series of steps:

- ◆ the two phenomena to be compared must be analysed
- ◆ points of comparison (likeness) should be identified
- ◆ the degree of likeness should be evaluated
- ◆ evidence supporting the evaluation should be presented

**Contrast:** look for the differences in the content/subject matter.

**Comment:** express an opinion on the issue that forms the basis of the topic or question. Such opinion should draw upon evidence both supporting and opposing the proposition with your preference clearly stated.

**Criticise:** evaluate the merit of theories, opinions and degree of truth observed and back your judgement by the evidence you have from the subject matter.

**Define:** explain precisely the meaning.

**Describe:** give an account of.

**Analyse:** list the components of the whole and explain the relationship between them.

**Critically**

**Analyse:** investigate and explain the nature of the components, definitions or concepts of a question or topic and explain the way they are interrelated. Also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the definitions and concepts.

**Discuss:** present the different aspects of a situation or issue – present the pros and cons. Very like analyse.

**Evaluate:** make an appraisal of the worth of something in the light of its application, usefulness or truth. Again like analyse.

**Enumerate:** list facts or items.

**Explain:** to make plain or clear; to advise the meaning; to interpret.

**Illustrate:** use a figure or diagram, or examples to explain what you mean.

**Examine**

**Critically:** act as a judge, appraise, analyse.

**Interpret:** explain the meaning of, usually giving your own judgement also.

**Justify:** give adequate grounds or examples from the subject matter to support your position or conclusions.

**Outline:** give the important facts of a subject.

**Relate:** tell or show how some facts are related to others.

**Review:** make a survey, examining the subject critically.  
**State:** present a brief, clear form.  
**Summarise:** give a concise account, omitting details or examples.  
**Write**  
**Brief Notes:** write brief explicit notes.



# Notetaking Skills

Efficient notetaking depends on a clear understanding. As well as recording information the purpose of notetaking is to both **a) make information and ideas easy to remember** and **b) easy to retrieve and access.**

The act of taking notes helps you learn!

## Be clear about your purpose for notetaking

The content, style, intensity and format of your notes will vary to suit your purpose. If notes are for an essay, you will need to note main points, examples and bibliographic details. If notes are for exams, you will probably only need headings and brief points set out in a visual format that will aid memory recall.

## Preparing for notetaking

Your notes will be much more meaningful if you have some prior knowledge of the content. You can do this by:

- Scheduling a preview session in your timetable not more than 12 hours prior to lectures or detailed reading session.
- Using the preview to skip read for an overview of lecture content and develop some familiarity with concepts, key words, and time frames so you can hook onto information better.
- Pre-reading and skimming the Study Book and recommended readings which can also introduce you to the main ideas and concepts to be discussed.
- Reviewing your notes from the previous lecture. This might help you anticipate the relationship of the lecture to the rest of the unit.
- Getting a copy of lecture notes from a former student and going through them beforehand to help your understanding.
- Paying attention to the introduction where the lecturer may provide an outline or overview of lecture.
- Anticipating how useful the lecture will be for your study purposes - for exams/assignments etc.
- If you haven't had time to preview, at least take your unit Study Book to the lecture and refer information in the lecture to the relevant module.

## **Listening Effectively**

Efficient notetaking depends on active listening. Although pre-lecture preparation can help develop your awareness of the concepts and main ideas, active listening begins in the lecture itself. This means that you need to:

- Listen for main ideas rather than words or facts.
- Make connections between your prior knowledge and the new information.
- Distinguish between main ideas and points, and supporting information.
- Go to the lecture expecting to learn something and find areas of interest.
- Be mentally alert. Concentrate on the lecturer.
- Try to learn all you can: Remember, the more you learn, the easier it will be to complete your assignment or understand the text.
- Do not be distracted by the speaker's or writer's mannerisms, or method of delivery.
- Capitalise on the fact that thought is faster than speech by weighing the evidence etc.
- Anticipate what is coming.
- Listen with an open mind.
- Listen or look for clues and signals given either by key phrases or words eg. "It is important to realise", or "There are several factors involved. Firstly... Secondly..." These signals could be both verbal and nonverbal.
- Follow the logical progression of the lecture and arrange your notes in a logical sequence.

## **Identifying your notes**

This is important for future referencing of any bibliographic details and for helping you retrieve your notes when you need them later.

For lectures, record the unit, the name of the lecturer, the date and title of the lecture at the top of the first page, and number and date following pages.

For printed material, record the bibliographical details you may need later when you use the notes for your essay. The author, title, place of publication, publisher, editor and year of publication must be clearly recorded at the top of the first page. Next to each key point or direct quote, place the exact page reference.

## **Organising your notes**

In order that notes are easy to understand and easy to retrieve they should be:

- Systematic - use a clear layout with main and subheadings clearly differentiated.
- Flexible ie, use different layouts or systems depending on the purpose, the speaker, the task (see below).

- Well spaced for visual ease and easy recall and set out on decent sized paper.
- On one side of the paper only - use the other side for additional information. This also avoids flipping pages over when studying and allows you to spread them out to get a clear picture of the content.
- In point form, based on key phrases and using abbreviations or your personal shorthand system.
- Organised and structured by using lettering, numbering, highlighting, colour coding, underlining, capitals/brackets, boxes/circles.

## Different Notetaking Systems

### A Linear Notes

Students are usually familiar with the linear format of starting at the top of the page and proceeding downwards. Here are some suggestions for organising notes using this approach:

- Divide the page in half

<b>Summary of main points - additional information</b>	<b>Raw lecture notes</b>
--	--------------------------

- Divide the page into thirds

<b>Summary</b>	<b>Raw notes</b>	<b>Your own comments and ideas</b>
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- Divide the page and organise points

<b>Main ideas</b>	<b>Supporting points</b>  - evidence - evidence
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## **B Mind Maps**

Another approach to organising notes is by using mind maps, also called patterned or network notes. Here the theme or main idea is written in the centre of the page with supporting points and details radiating outwards. Mind maps are useful because their visual characteristics help in recalling the lecture's information, identify and link the main ideas and points, and act as memory prompts for exam purposes (especially if different colours are used). An example is shown next page:

## **After the lecture - Review your notes**

**Immediately after:** Ideally 10 minutes after the lecture, but, if that's not possible, no later than that night, review and check over your notes this way:

- You can make sure they make sense and are easy to understand.
- You can organise them by adding colour coding, underlining, highlighting, numbering etc.
- You can add comments/ideas of your own.
- You can write a summary to further reinforce your learning.
- You can fill in any parts you have missed by conferring with your classmates or lecturers.
- You can follow up on information and/or references mentioned in the lecture while it is still fresh in your mind.

## **Filing your notes**

Well organised notes will save you time and effort in finding information for exam or assignment purposes. So organise your notes into your filing system immediately after reviewing them. Loose leaf binders or systems of manila folders, for example, also allow you to add additional information or ideas easily during your editing process.

# Abbreviations

Use abbreviations whenever you can in your notes; it will help you keep pace with what the lecturer says.

This list offers suggestions for you to select from and modify. Some of these abbreviations are standard, some are examples of individual inventions. Keep a reference (=a ref. list of your abbrev. in your note-book).

## SYMBOLS

↑	= increase	<b>A&gt;B</b>	= A is larger than B
→	= leads to	<b>A&lt;B</b>	= A is smaller than B
↓	= decrease	=	= equal to; defined as
Ψ	= psychology	□	= area
∴	= because	□'s	= areas
Δ	= change, difference	Δ's	= changes
∴	= therefore, it follows that		

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Rxn</b>	= reaction	<b>w</b>	= width
<b>w/o</b>	= without	<b>amt</b>	= amount
<b>dt</b>	= due to	<b>cf</b>	= compare
<b>@</b>	= at	<b>v.s.</b>	= versus; in contrast; as opposed to
<b>Q</b>	= question; e.g. "Main Q in Ψ exper is control".		
<b>Fn or Fx</b>	= function	<b>i.e.</b>	= that is
		<b>&amp;</b>	= and

To abbreviate words, the rule of thumb is to omit and to leave out end syllables. Some people use apostrophes, some don't:

<b>mech</b>	= mechanism	<b>dept</b>	= department
<b>ref</b>	= reference	<b>wt</b>	= weight
<b>cont'd</b>	= continued	<b>am't</b>	= amount
<b>ht</b>	= height	<b>diff</b>	= difference or different

For topics which reoccur in a particular course you might use capital letters for the main topic (but be sure to keep a record of these abbreviations).

e.g.	<b>I</b>	= Intelligence	<b>G</b>	= Gene
	<b>P</b>	= Pressure (This one is standard)	<b>X</b>	= Character (This one Isn't)

**IMPORTANT: USE AND INVENT SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS THAT MAKE SENSE TO YOU. READ LECTURE NOTES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER EACH LECTURE AND REWRITE IN CLEAR ENGLISH.**

# Assignment Writing

## How Can I Complete Good Assignments?

- Make sure you read the assignment questions and each part of every question carefully. Best results come when the question asked is answered exactly. You must **answer the question(s) asked first and foremost**.
- Analyse the question carefully, examining key words including task and limit words, and perhaps rewriting the question in your own words including any relevant definitions. Make sure you understand the task of the assignment thoroughly.
- Use any extra information about the task provided by additional information attached to the question, any criteria or feedback sheets or marking guides.
- Develop a **plan** for your assignment by generating a list of ideas and researching with the question firmly in mind. A mind map is a good way to start planning.
- If you are not sure what is required, think about how you **plan to answer the question** and then discuss your plans with your tutor. Always go back to the relevant part of the Study Book to see how the question is discussed there. There may often be sample answers or examples.
- Plan your time so you can do a rough draft first, then after a break, go back and review it.
- Structure your assignment content so that it follows assignment directions or conventions. Essays, for example, have an introduction, body and conclusion which each have a particular purpose and task. Reports also are set out very specifically and precisely.
- Read it to someone else for extra feedback.
- Prepare a final draft. This should be the best you can do in a reasonable time. It should express your meaning clearly, use effective wording and be free from spelling and grammatical mistakes. It should also be referenced carefully and completely, including text referencing and a bibliography. Remember that good presentation creates a favourable impression in the marker's mind. Always use a 30mm margin on the left.
- Go over your assignments when you get them back. Work out where you lost marks by looking at the comments made and feedback provided. If you can't tell why you got a certain mark contact your tutor for help. This includes times when you get a high mark and you're not really sure how you got it. It's just as important to work out

why you do well as to why you do badly. The objective is to learn and use the feedback so you will be able to do better next time.

## **Essay and Report Writing**

Student Services offer **workshops** on assignment writing as well as **individual consultation** sessions. Please use these opportunities to develop your assignment writing skills to solve any individual problems. Remember that essay and report writing is a process, and you can utilise this process to save you both time and energy when writing assignments.

## **Enquire now at Student Services**

Student Services also has **handouts** that are useful for directing your efforts in each stage of the assignment writing process.

Take advantage of these too.



# Memory Enhancement

To help improve your memory it is important to have some understanding of how memory works. Fortunately, good memory is made, not born, and there are a number of techniques and strategies that you can use to improve your memory. This chapter is designed to introduce some of the theory behind memory, how memory is stored, and some simple strategies that can be used to improve memory.

A popular analogy for the functions of human memory is the workings of a computer. The input of information into a computer can occur through several sources. Computers will accept information from visual scanning devices, keyboards, light pens, and so on. Similarly, humans process information from their five senses. After information is input into the computer it is held temporarily in an information buffer called random access memory (RAM). Humans have a memory process analogous to this that we shall refer to as **working memory**. The computer then must save this information onto hard disk (just like a person's **long-term memory**) until it needs to be accessed again. As with humans, computers require certain processes by which information is transferred from one level to another. Electrical power keeps information in RAM just as **rehearsal** is needed to maintain information in working memory. Computer software must transform information to be saved on hard disk just as people **encode** information to be stored in long-term memory.

## The Information Processing Model

A model of memory that may be used is the Information Processing Model. It describes three systems of memory including sensory information store, working memory and long-term memory.

Sensory memory is the first stage of memory and is of brief duration but has high information capacity. Each of the five senses has a sensory store that briefly retains information selection and processing. During the third of a second that information lasts in sensory store it is mentally scanned and only those characteristics that stand out or are important are retained for further processing.

Working memory is the second stage in memory and again is of brief duration but has limited capacity. Working memory performs the function of processing information for long term storage. Two important processes that occur here are rehearsal and encoding. To maintain information in working memory it is necessary to rehearse it. To make information more memorable and resistant to fading from long-term memory, encoding the information through pictures, mnemonics or labelling is necessary.

Long-term memory is the third stage in memory where information is stored, usually in an inactive form, and is available for retrieval on demand.

A person can best improve their memory by practising skills in rehearsing and encoding information. Without these processes it is more difficult for a person to store and retrieve

information from long-term memory. It is literally impossible to recall anything unless some form of **structure and organisation** has been placed on it. The general process of the strategies to be discussed later is; to remember well, it is necessary to organise new information largely by relating it to something already known.

## Strategies for Enhancing Memory

### Overview

There are a variety of strategies that people use to help improve their memory. The primary purpose of such strategies is to impose structure onto otherwise unstructured information, the choice of which strategies work best is up to the individual.

Any strategies that you can identify in your memory repertoire are important in enhancing memory. You have probably tailored them to suit your specific needs and they are now familiar and well practised. It may be that to improve your memory the use of these strategies has to be maximised and generalised to fit all sorts of learning situations. Pick and choose from the strategies provided below that fit your preference, learning material or learning style.

### 1 Active Learning

Remembering is an active process and one that requires direct attention and sustained concentration. Our brain needs to filter out the distracting, unhelpful information the environment presents to us so that we can learn. Below are some points on how to facilitate this process.

First, to actively learn we must pay attention to our body posture. It has been found that erect (but relaxed) body posture and seating that is not overly plush or harsh facilitate concentration.

Second, we need to examine our study area and look for distractions. Is there background noise, a window to look out, people walking past, or lots of other interesting stimuli in your study environment? If there is then this may detract from your active learning. Find a place that minimises the amount of external stimuli that may distract you and overload your sensory memory. Do you feel sleepy, hungry, cold or hot, tired, sexually aroused, or in pain? These internal distracters often impact more significantly than external distracters. Being aware of these and preparing for the study session are important steps in maintaining concentration.

Third, dismiss any negative thoughts about the information you may be trying to remember. If you have done poorly at a subject before or had problems with a lecturer, sometimes the feelings that result from this impact on how well you are able to learn **now**. However, the fastest learning and best recall comes from how motivated you are to learn and how positively you approach the task.

Fourth, it is important that you understand the material you are trying to learn and memorise. As part of university courses, you are often required to remember both facts and concepts. The strategies that we will discuss later help in memorising facts.

However, to remember concepts it is vital that you also understand them. One way to assist this process is to become familiar with important terms in the material. This way while you are studying, your sensory memory will focus on these terms, helping you to extract the important concepts.

Finally, always try to link new material with material you have previously learned. Approach the subject material from the 'big picture' perspective, becoming aware of how present material relates to the aims and objects of the course as a whole. You are more likely to remember things when they are associated with other facts that are already well established in your mind.

## 2 Review

One of the keys to retention of information in long-term memory is regular review. A timetable that includes one hour of review per week is much more effective than 'cramming' for many hours in the days just before the exam. It is best to carry out these reviews when you are most alert. It is also important to start your reviews at the time when you can remember most - about ten minutes after the first learning session. A person can forget 80% of what they learned within 24 hours if they do not review. Therefore, review 10 minutes, 24 hours, and then weekly after learning.

## 3 Notetaking

Notetaking facilitates the encoding process via multisensory modalities. That is, the person is hearing information through speech, seeing it written down, and using motor functions to write. Writing also provides repetition of information and helps decrease the potential for boredom. It is important to consider notetaking as a compliment to listening rather than a substitute. Do not let notetaking detract from your understanding of the information.

The Cornell method of notetaking is as follows:

- (a) **Record** what is said on the right side of the paper.
- (b) **Reduce** the information into fewer words or headings on the left side of the paper.
- (c) **Recite** the information to be remembered, covering the information on the right side of the paper and using the headings as prompts.
- (d) **Reflect** on the material and incorporate it into previous knowledge.
- (e) **Review** the information periodically to facilitate its permanent storage into memory.

Audiotaping is a form of notetaking that may be useful when large amounts of information are presented. Audiotaping allows you to go back over information in a leisurely manner later and fill in any information missed. It also provides you with repetition and review of information. Finally, it can help to alleviate some anxiety you may feel about having to catch every word said, allowing you to listen in a relaxed

and more effective way. One difficulty with audiotaping is that it does not require much active participation from you. It is important to take written notes while audiotaping information to avoid mind wandering and dependence on the tape.

#### **4 Rehearsal**

Rehearsal and repetition of information helps to ensure encoding and enhanced memory. It is the process whereby material is presented over and over until it is encoded. It can occur in any sensory modality e.g., verbal (repeating information over and over either aloud or silently), motor (drawing or writing information or performing a sequence of actions repeatedly), or visual (looking at information over and over). The more sensory modalities used in the repetition of information, the more likely that information will be remembered.

#### **5 Association**

Association involves joining two items together to form a connection. New pieces of information can be joined, or new information can be joined to what you already know.

One example of association is 'pegging.' This is the process by which you associate a predetermined peg word with a word or phrase you are trying to remember. The peg word becomes a prompt for recalling the new information.

Another example of association is 'loci.' This is the process by which information to be remembered is associated with some well known, visualised location (for example, your room, garden or office). The two basic steps of loci are: determining a familiar location and a series of items within it; and visualising the items to be remembered associated with the loci. An example of how loci may be used is an oral presentation where steps to the talk are remembered through location prompts in a specified sequence.

#### **6 Chunking and Grouping**

Chunking and grouping are terms generally used interchangeably to describe a strategy where large pieces of information are grouped into smaller chunks to remember them. It is based on the premise that the immediate store available for encoding information is 7 plus or minus 2 pieces of information at a time. For example, the number 106614921788 can be learned one number at a time, in which case our working memory would be overloaded. Alternatively, it could be chunked into smaller pieces, which would fill fewer slots (e.g., 1066, 1492 and 1788 for three slots). Thus information is grouped in some organised fashion and stored in that way to facilitate retrieval.

Information can be chunked in a variety of ways. It can be chunked in terms of general **categories** that include specific items, common **properties** of items (colour, shape, size etc.), common **functions** or uses of items, the **origins** of items, or the

**definition** of items. In any given instance, material can be chunked in any manner that the individual finds personally meaningful.

## 7 Mnemonics

Mnemonics is a strategy where if a number of items need to be memorised then the first letter of each item are arranged in a way that is easy to remember. For example, if you are trying to remember the Great Lakes of North America (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior) you could arrange their initials as HOMES to provide a memory prompt. Another example would be trying to remember the planets in order of their distance away from the sun. The planets and their order are Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. To convert the list to a mnemonic take the first letter of each planet and make a word. Join the words up into a sentence. Then we can have something like ‘My Very Eager Mother Just Swam Under the North Pole.’

Mnemonics can also be used by expanding a set of letters that have to be recalled to make a sentence that will be easier to recall than the letters themselves. For example, in music the notes on the treble clef are e, g, b, d, f. This is often expanded to ‘Every Good Boy Deserves Fruit’ and this becomes a lot easier to learn.

## 8 Rhythm and Rhyming

Many people use rhythm to remember information without realising that they do so. When words are added to rhythm, the brain is using both sides, and storage can be more effective. An example of rhythm in memory is:

‘Thirty days has September, April, June and November.  
All the rest have 31,  
except February alone which has 28 days clear,  
and 29 in each leap year.’

Rhyming involves the use of rhythm but adds the factor of similar sound. Poetry for example, is generally much easier to remember than a paragraph of equal length. You can make up your own rhymes and apply them to the different areas of your study. An example of rhyming in memory is:

‘In fourteen hundred and ninety two  
Columbus sailed the ocean blue.’

## 9 Remembering Written Material

When information is conveyed in a written form there are a number of points that must be considered. Some maladaptive habits included **(a)** re-reading information before the initial reading is complete, **(b)** vocalisation and subvocalisation (where lips or other muscles move as if you are speaking, and **(c)** reading with distracters (TV or radio). These maladaptive habits all tend to impair comprehension and interrupt

concentration. Adaptive habits used in remembering written information are listed below:

- (a) **Preview information.** A preview of the information presented will help you gain a sense of the 'big picture' of the material being read. It is often helpful to read a topic sentence, abstract, or summary to obtain an understanding of what the material is about.
- (b) **Skim and scan.** Material previews often involve skimming and scanning the information before actually beginning to read it. This enables you to highlight in your mind themes, structure and main headings of the material.
- (c) **Find the main ideas.** By finding the main ideas you are able to apply other strategies discussed above to place them in memory. It also gives you a structure for remembering the details.
- (d) **Repetition and rehearsal.** As mentioned above repetition and rehearsal is important to facilitate memory. This is particularly true for lengthy and detailed information.
- (e) **Notetaking, outlining, and highlighting.** Taking notes facilitates understanding and assists the individual in organising material into manageable chunks. Similarly, writing an outline is helpful in organising and condensing information, and is an association strategy as well. Finally, highlighting cues you to important information and serves as an associative and organising strategy as well.
- (f) **Varying reading speed.** Be willing to vary your reading speed depending on the nature of the material being read. If you are required to remember details then read the information slowly, if you are reading for a main idea then read it slowly, and if you are reading for pleasure, allow yourself to read at a leisurely pace.
- (g) **Read material three times.** It is generally good to read material three times. The first time is to find out what the information is about. The second is to understand the material in depth. The third is to incorporate the material in knowledge already held, such that the information makes sense and is easier to store.

This chapter has discussed some of the theory behind memory and the strategies that students can use to improve their memory. However, as you may have noticed, the emphasis throughout has been on two main themes - **concentration and organisation**. To commit information to memory effectively, you need to sustain concentration on the task at hand and you need to organise the information you receive so that its structure provides you with the capabilities to retrieve it from long-term memory.

# Examination Skills

The best way to study for exams is to start at **week one**.

- Step 1** Put into practice the four step review plan outlined on P 11. If you can make this the basis of your study routine you will be well on the way to passing your exams.
- Step 2** Most Introductory booklets for your units contain a past exam paper. **Examine these carefully in week one** to make sure you know now what you will be required to do in the exam. Analyse both the format and the content carefully and use this information to prioritise your study endeavours for the semester. (The Library also holds copies of past exam papers so check these out too).
- Step 3** Understand clearly that exams measure **how well you do exams** as well as **how much you know**. Preparation and practice together, therefore, provide the basis for developing good exam skills.
- Step 4** A semester is a long haul so put into place **stress prevention** measures in week one. These include: a timetable that works for you; adequate relaxation time; exercise; a steady study routine; some form of sport, hobby or recreation activity; a healthy diet; the idea that you are responsible for yourself, that you are the one in control; and the belief that you can do it, that you **are** a successful student.

## The Revision Period

### Organising your information

- Always keep focussed on what you know and what you need to know.
- At the beginning of your revision period draw up a chart for each unit of the work you will need to know. Breaking down each unit/module into specific, manageable 'chunks' is very helpful. The unit and module objectives can be used to prioritise information for the chart. Cross reference these with information provided by past exam papers and information gained from attending lectures and or tutorials.

Module Objectives	Sections	Subsections	Work Completed
Objective 1	Section 1	Subsection 1 Subsection 2 Subsection 3	
Objective 2	Section 2		

**Figure 3: An example of a Module Chart**

- Prioritise sections or subsections on the chart by highlighting information that has been emphasised in exam papers, by lecturers etc.
- Cross out the sections you have written assignments on or ones that have not been emphasised during the semester.
- Always test yourself on the objectives and sections **before** you start revising. For example, construct a mind map of what you know and check it. If you study something you already know, you are wasting time.
- Tick off each section on your chart when it has been completed. This will show your progress and act as a reward.

## Organising your Revision Timetable

- Prepare the timetable eight weeks before the exams start.
- Start the timetable six weeks before.
- Use your unit/module charts to slot in chunks or sections of work for each unit in one or two hourly sessions.
- Colour coding will help differentiate units.
- Fill in the timetable for the first two weeks, then fill in the remaining four weeks when you have tested the timetable to see if it was realistic.
- Fill in social time, and plan for treats and rewards. Include relaxation and exercise.
- Vary subject areas each evening.
- Make sure you do not favour more interesting subjects and skimp on those you find difficult or dull.
- Leave the evening before the exam for light revision only.
- Study in short sessions to be most effective. Use half hour goals (see P 13) to pace yourself more productively and use the three minute review to check and reinforce your learning.



# Ways to Actively Study for Exams

- 1 Organise all your material into a form that is conducive to learning and retention. For example, try to develop an understanding of the whole of the unit with its fundamental themes, key issues and principal points and how they interact with each other. Organise your understanding into summaries.
- 2 Get an overview by summarising your notes down to a few pages. Start with all the notes you have prepared through the semester. For review take another set of notes from these notes. For example, you might try to reduce 100 pages of notes to 10 pages. Now reduce this reduced set of notes. The 10 pages might be reduced to, for example, three pages. By reducing your notes like this you are forced to focus on main points. And this way you get an overview of your subject.
- 3 Test your recall by rewriting and condensing your notes - outline the key issues, or topics for the course as a whole and then outline the main parts of each topic or issue. Try to do this without reference to your study materials.
- 4 Use a combination of different methods for summarising:
  - traditional summaries;
  - diagram summaries; and
  - network maps/mind maps.

The more visual your study is, the more effective it will be.
- 5 Practise drawing relevant diagrams or pictures. Visualisation is a very effective method of memorising.
- 6 Make definition or formula cards.
- 7 Use a tape recorder or word processor to help you recall information.
- 8 Do active reading by using the reading strategies and by:
  - taking notes;
  - underlining; and
  - highlighting.
- 9 Pretend you are a lecturer and "explain" the material to the "class".
- 10 Produce written notes on a board or on a overhead projector.
- 11 Use strategies and devices useful for memorising like mnemonic devices, rhyme and rhythm, making stories, flash cards, peg words etc.
- 12 Say things out aloud.

- 13** Talk to your friends, family, class mates about your study.
- 14** Ask yourself questions about your learning.
- 15** Rework your material so that it can be used with flexibility and efficiency in an exam. For example, in the exam you will be called upon to recombine your information and use it in new ways. So try to reorganise your knowledge, form new associations of ideas and look at things from many points of view.
- 16** Test yourself by writing outlines for possible essays, trying variations on already familiar problems, and framing your own exam questions based on the materials you are revising. You could also try writing trial answers without looking at revision notes and within the time limit of the exam. Some lecturers and tutors might be willing to skim over your trial efforts and comment on your performance. Other students could also help by suggesting ways of handling the topic more effectively. Working through past examination papers is also excellent practice.
- 17** Form a study group. The comments, insights and different approaches of other students can help sharpen your ideas, provide you with greater objectivity, give feedback, and enhance your motivation.
- 18** Recheck the examiner's requirements. For example, a maths student should find out if partial credit is given if the answer is incorrect but the error is due to a slip, say, in dividing by two. A history student should know the type of argument expected of him/her, while a statistics student should know whether formulae will be supplied or he/she should memorise them.
- 19** Talk and consult with your lecturers and tutors. This strategy can provide unexpected dividends in increased understanding of the course, and in reinforcing the emphasis which the lecturers consider important, while also providing reasonable guidelines about what will be examined in the course.
- 20** Find out the details of the exam. Ask about:
  - the number of questions;
  - the type of questions to be asked (multiple choice? essay?); and
  - any choice of questions.
- 21** Ascertain what the questions are likely to be. Your Unit/Module Chart will help you here. Anything the lecturer has emphasised or put on the board or overhead projector often crops up in exams.
- 22** Practise by doing mock examinations.
- 23** Talk to past students of the unit; their advice could be most useful.

## Using Previous Examination Papers

Past exam papers are useful, but never reliable guides in identifying the topics which may be set in exams. There may have been, for example, a change of lecturer, or some of the course content, a shift in emphasis in the aims and objectives, or a change in the style and format of the exam itself.

Initially, check the papers to see if you can:

- Identify the main topics which are covered. For example is there a question on listening in the Study Skills paper? Or on meteorology in the Geography paper? Also try to get an impression of the type of questions asked. What type of skills and knowledge, for example, do the questions appear to be testing? Are there special techniques you need to brush up on?
- Become familiar with the format of the exam. How many questions are set and within what time limits? Is the paper divided into sections and is each section compulsory? Are all questions equally weighted, and how long therefore, should you give to each question? Are there any special conditions? Are you allowed, for example, to take in a calculator, reference book, dictionary?

Now utilise the past papers to practise doing what the real examination will require you to do. You can use the papers to:

- Write answers in outline form. Weigh up the question, decide what it is asking for, then jot down the main ideas that you want to develop in your answer. Write down the key steps of your argument as a skeleton outline, just as you would in writing a normal essay. A mind map plan is good here.
- Write out complete model answers, in examination conditions, using the time limits specified. This is an excellent way to test your ability to concentrate and work flat out as well as to break yourself into the demands of the examination. It can also show you how much you can actually get done in the time, and help you plan your allocation of time. It will also reveal to you the extent that you have mastered the course, or whether further practice work is required.
- Check your revision notes again to see which questions relate to the material you have been revising, and what points you would need to cover in order to answer each question.
- Keep all your practice answers, whether outline notes, full essay answers, or a check of your notes. They will be especially valuable for last minute revision of vital topics.

## Exercise

The library keeps copies of past exam papers. Use them to answer the following questions.

- 1 How long is the exam?
- 2 Is there a reading time included?
- 3 How many questions are there?
- 4 Is there a choice of questions?
- 5 Is the paper divided into sections?
- 6 Is the section compulsory?
- 7 What is the weighting for each question?
- 8 How long should you give to each question?
- 9 Are there any special conditions?
- 10 What modules are covered?
- 11 What type of questions are asked?
- 12 What type of skills and knowledge do the questions test?
- 13 Are there any questions that will pose you difficulties? Why?
- 14 Brainstorm ways you can overcome these difficulties.
- 15 Practise the exam by writing answers to the questions without using your notes.
- 16 Check your timing to make sure you are answering within the time limits.
- 17 Review your answers against your notes to see how well you did.

# Stress Management

## What is Stress?

Stressors are events or circumstances which we see as threatening or harmful. Stress is the result of a perceived discrepancy between your abilities to cope and the demands of a situation. That is, if the perceived demands of a situation are greater than your perceived abilities to meet those demands then you are very likely to experience symptoms of stress. Each person will react to situations differently because they view their demands and resources differently to any one else, and they will likely have specific ways of showing or experiencing stress.

A person's response to a stressor is called strain – e.g. someone is showing “the strain.” It can be a psychological or physiological response.

## General Adaptation Syndrome

Three stages occur when a stressor is experienced.

- 1** First, there is an alarm reaction. This is very similar to the fight or flight response. Its function is to mobilise the body's resources to deal with perceived demands of the current or upcoming situation. It increases heart rate, breathing rate, secretes hormones and adrenaline. It is a short-term response to stress.
- 2** Second, there is the stage of resistance. The transfer to this stage occurs when the body tries to adapt to the stressor. During this time there may be few outward signs of the processes occurring or the energy being consumed to maintain resistance. However gradually the body's resources are becoming depleted. If the resistance must be maintained for a sustained period of time, without break or reduction in intensity, the person will become more susceptible to other stressors and diseases (often ones which normally would not produce much stress may be significant because of the body's reduced resources for coping).
- 3** Third, there is the stage of exhaustion. It occurs when the body has used all or nearly all of its resources trying to deal with a stressor. The longer this stage prolongs the greater the likelihood of physical damage, disease or even death.

## Managing Stress

### Physiological

Reducing the physical symptoms of stress can be achieved through a variety of methods – almost all centre around the use of relaxation. Primary methods include Centring and Progressive Muscle Relaxation. Breathing is central to the reduction of stress, through a lowering of the physiological symptoms of stress. It can be a short duration (Centring) or a long duration (Progressive Muscle Relaxation).

## Psychological

Breaking down the perceived demands of the situation and then rationalising each of the components to evaluate their validity is one method. The degree to which your assessment was based on facts, or was based on subjective feelings and expectations, can influence the psychological stress experienced.

## Modifiers of Stress

- 1 **Social Support.** This refers to the perceived comfort, caring, esteem, or help a person receives from other people or groups. There are many sources, the significant ones are personal and variable in different situations and in different times in life. Without social support, our perceived abilities to cope with a stressor may be diminished.
- 2 **Sense of Personal Control.** The degree to which a person believes they have control over events influences their perceived stress. A low level of personal control over a period of time may lead to a sense of helplessness. Control can be exercised in five different ways.
  - Decisional Control, is the opportunity to choose between alternative procedures or courses of action. Exercising decisional control can help facilitate increased faith in the chosen course of action and increased commitment or motivation to completing the chosen action/s.
  - Cognitive Control, is the ability to use thought processes or strategies to modify the impact of a stressor. These strategies may include reframing and looking for positives.
  - Behavioural Control, involves the ability to take concrete action to reduce the impact of the stressor through shortening the duration or the intensity of the stressor.
  - Information Control, involves the opportunity to get information about the stressful event – what will happen, when, why, and how it can be controlled, modified, and dealt with effectively.
  - Retrospective Control, pertains to beliefs about what or who caused the stressful event after it occurred. It does not provide control over the stressful event however, it does allow the impact of the stressor to be modified in hindsight.

## Sitting the Exam

Doing an exam is like driving a car: You can panic and crash, or take control and get where you want to be (Braint, P12).

## **Use reading time to plan your exam carefully**

- Read over the entire exam.
- Read exam instructions carefully and follow them exactly.
- Observe different weights for different questions, and assign time accordingly in a timetable. Follow this timetable!
- Note whether some questions are Optional or Compulsory.
- Plan your approach to the exam in the reading time, for example, which questions you will tackle first. Start with questions you are most confident with, but remember time. Cross out those questions that you are not answering if you have a choice.
- Read and analyse questions carefully - avoids careless mistakes. You must make sure you answer the questions asked. Underline task/limit words to help you do this.
- Always take into consideration how the lecturer will mark each question. Clues here can be gained by the allocation of marks for each question. For example, if a question is worth five marks and you are asked for a list of things, consider listing five things.

## **Types of Questions**

**Short answer questions** - consider providing:

- a) A definition/model/diagram;
- b) Explanation/discussion; and
- c) Examples

But still make sure you keep within the time allowed per mark per question, and make sure you provide the information they want by analysing the questions carefully.

## **Multiple choice questions**

Some useful hints for working through multiple-choice questions:

- Read through each question and answer immediately those that you are sure of. Skip over those that you cannot answer quickly and come back to them later.
- Go back over the harder questions that you left unanswered the first time. (You may have gained some hints from the questions that you have been able to answer).
- Be careful not to dwell too long on any one question at the expense of others, especially if there are more questions that can be answered comfortably in the time.

- Some questions may have several good alternatives and you may be asked to select the 'best' answer. If so, you should read every alternative and choose the most appropriate answer.
- Unless the instructions state otherwise, you have nothing to lose by guessing, and a reasonable chance of gaining some marks on items of which you are not sure.
- When trying to select the correct response, relate each answer to the question to try to eliminate alternatives that do not fit.
- Compare the remaining alternatives to see how they differ; underline the key words.
- If two alternatives are opposites then at least one is wrong and can be eliminated.
- Use common sense and logic to select answers where your knowledge fails. Eliminate and 'Kangaroo' alternatives (ie. alternatives that are so silly or obviously wrong that they just 'hop out of the bush' at you).

## Essay Questions

It is recommended that you use a fifth of the time allowed for each essay question to plan your answer. Utilise this planning time to:

- Read and interpret the essay question very carefully. You will get few, if any, marks if you misinterpret the question and write an essay which has little relevance to the designated topic. In order to help focus your attention, look closely at the wording of the question and then;
- Underline the key words to make sure you have understood the content you must cover and the way in which you are directed to use it.
- Write down (on rough paper, anywhere) your initial ideas, any points, facts, names, dates and other relevant information that springs immediately to mind. Later, these first ideas will need to be reorganised more coherently, but they are helpful in starting your mind working and in focussing your concentration.
- Reorganise your ideas, extracting those specifically related to the topic you are answering. Try to structure them to produce a logical argument. A good way of doing this is to write the actual question in a circle in the middle of a page and then produce a mind map of main points, starting first with ideas stemming from the wording of the question, and then brainstorming other main points but still only in terms of the question asked.



- Now write your essay, keeping one eye on the clock. Try to structure a concise introduction stating how the question will be answered, followed by a clear and well designed argument, supported by facts and examples. Then conclude your answer with an overall summary. Use your mind map plan to achieve this more easily.
- Check your handwriting for legibility. You will find that if you spend the time to plan your answer, and as well, use concise expression, (rather than padding your answer) you will have more time to write neatly.

When you are sitting for an examination containing a number of essay questions consider the following things:

- Attempt the easy questions first. Not only will your confidence be boosted, but this strategy may also leave you with a few extra minutes for the final more difficult questions.
- Start each question on a new page so that you may add to the question already done if you have time available later.
- Never omit a question completely. Although this situation should not arise with the use of time budgeting, should it happen, at least give your answer in the form of an abstract or summary.
- Use the full time allowed. Never walk out before time is up without having checked and re-checked your work.

**and finally.....**

**very best wishes for a successful, fulfilling year  
of productive study.**

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