

Study skills (for humanities and nursing)

When to complete: November-June

Recommended time for completion: 10 hours

Date completed:

Contents

1. Introduction
2. How do you study?
3. Developing reading skills
4. Developing listening skills
5. Listening skills
6. Research for assignments
7. Academic writing
8. Feedback and evaluation
9. Exams
10. Remembering things
11. Top tips

1. Introduction

This section focuses on study skills. It has been written to provide you with some knowledge of the academic work that is expected of university students and contains some information and exercises to help you to do this. There is also a section which includes Top 10 tips on various areas of academic challenges; this was devised by previous university students for new students. It would be useful if you could keep this document and use it as a guide during your first year at university. For now though, it would be useful for you to work through the exercises and to try using the writing guides to help you with your coursework towards the end of your access programme.

You will be given help to develop these skills from your tutors at college and you may also be able to participate in one of the events run by the universities to help you develop the skills you'll need at university. Make the most of all these opportunities; you'll always pick up something useful. Like other skills, study skills can always be developed and refined.

2. How do you study?

Exercise 1

The first step in becoming better at using the time available for studying is to recognise how and when you study best. Many students delay written assignments in the hope that nearer to the deadline they will suddenly be inspired. This only happens to a lucky few! Fill in the chart below.

		Yes	No
1	I like to get up early and get started on my academic work.		
2	I have too much to do before I leave the house in the morning.		
3	I plan my work carefully to fit in with the other things I have to do.		
4	I sometimes give up on a task when I find it difficult.		
5	I am good at making a list and sticking to it.		

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 6 | I try to do so many things that I don't get many of them done. |
| 7 | If I find a task difficult, I try to find an easy place to start. |
| 8 | I often find reasons to put off tasks. |
| 9 | If I have a number of tasks I cannot decide which I should start with. |
| 10 | I get satisfaction from getting a task done in good time. |

Questions 1, 3, 5, 7 and 10: give yourself 2 points for each yes.

Questions 2, 4, 6, 8 and 9: deduct 1 point for each yes.

The maximum score is 10. If you scored, you are already a very well organised person; if you scored less than 6, you have some work to do.

Some ideas about your answers to the previous exercise

It is natural to put off unpleasant tasks. Everyone does this occasionally, even the most diligent student. The problem is that if you make a habit of putting things off until the last minute, you are likely to eventually suffer from stress. And this can cause problems with your ability to cope with your University course. The secret is understanding why you put off doing tasks until the last minute, and then taking steps to improve the situation.

Are you a perfectionist?

Sometimes students are so overwhelmed by achieving their immediate goal of reaching university that they cannot believe they will ever meet the standard required.

Are you afraid of failure?

This lack of confidence often comes from being poorly prepared both in time management skills and study skills. You can work on both these skills, with help from university staff and with your own practice.

Are you confused about the task?

If you have any questions about anything, an assignment, for example, ask! It is far better to do this at the beginning than to spend time fruitlessly on a task.

Do you lack motivation?

There may be a serious reason for this, such as having chosen a course for which you are not suited. If this is the case, seek help as soon as possible – there are ways of helping you change direction. Or it may be that you are suffering from illness or you just don't like what you are doing. Identify the cause, then take action.

Do you have difficulty in prioritising?

Perhaps you do make a list of what you have to do, but can't decide which is most important. Practice is the key. Spend some time developing time management skills. You can learn to do this effectively.

For all the above difficulties, there is a solution. There are short courses available at your University or you can seek the help of your tutor or work with other students in a small group. The worst option is to do nothing.

3. Developing reading skills

Exercise 2

Read the passage below. Do not write anything, read it only once and then move on page 4.

China

As it emerges on to the world stage there is increasing interest in China and the Chinese. No longer seen as an impossible destination for foreign travellers, China is becoming more and more accessible to the general public.

Yet it is often difficult to grasp the scale and the variety of this great country.

China is a country of some estimated 1.3 billion people which is about 22% of the total population of the world.

It is regarded as one of the oldest of all civilizations. Many people believe the Chinese invented paper-making, the compass, gunpowder and printing. Among its most important ancient projects are the Great Wall of China, the Grand Canal and the Karez irrigation system.

The ruling party in China is the Communist party and the President is Hu Jintao.

The Chinese celebrated the Lunar New Year on the 26th January this year and 2009 is the Year of the Ox.

The official language is Putonghua or Mandarin: China has had a written language for over 6000 years.

China is a multi-national country of 56 different nationalities. 91% are Han and the rest are made up of the other 55 minorities including Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Korean, Russian and Gelo.

China's currency is the Renminbi (RMB): the popular unit of currency is the Yuan. One US dollar is worth about 8.30 Yuan.

学 术

How did you do?

If you managed to remember at least ten points then you are doing very well; you may even be one of the lucky people with a photographic memory. But for most of us, it is important to make notes as we go along. For academic work you must develop the habit of making notes.

Exercise 3

Read the original text about China again. This time, pick out five important points.

1

2

3

4

5

Notice that you are asked to pick out the important points. One of the skills of learning to study effectively is learning to separate the important from the non-important. The passage contains a lot of information and what you select depends on the question you are asked. For example, if you are asked to provide information for travellers to China what four points would you pick out?

1

2

3

4

And if you were asked about the importance of modern China, which four points would you pick out?

1

2

3

4

Your note-taking and understanding must be focussed, not just a random series of notes.

How did you do?

Look at your notes and then compare them with the original text.

There are three points you should be looking for:

- ❖ Where you picked up correct information.
- ❖ Where you picked up important information.
- ❖ Where you misheard something.

You can, if you wish, award yourself points for this exercise:

Add 1 point where you picked up correct information.

Add 2 points where you picked up important information.

Deduct 1 point where you misheard something.

Then add up your score. Of course there is nothing scientific about this, but it illustrates the importance of developing the skill of listening. For example, if you look back at the information on China, how much easier would it have been to remember if you had managed to do some preliminary work on the country? And if that is true for written work, it is even more so for the spoken word. Most lecturers provide handouts or use PowerPoint presentations. However, the same point applies as in the previous section – you are seeking to focus on what is relevant to the question you will be asked.

5. Listening skills

Getting the most out of lectures

There is some preliminary work you can do to make sure you get the most out of lectures.

Are you prepared?

If you are asked to do any reading beforehand, make sure you do it. These tasks are set because they will help you get the most out of your University course. Try not to switch off during the lecture. Keep your concentration levels up. It helps to choose your seat carefully. Don't skulk at the back. In some subjects this means you have to arrive in good time, so be warned.

Do you know what you want to get out of this lecture?

Think beforehand how this lecture will fit into your overall subject. This means doing some prior reading as suggested above.

Are you ready to participate?

Write down what you think is important. For some people this means writing down almost everything, but with practice you should be able to develop a personal shorthand. Whatever method you choose, make sure you remember what it is.

Can you ignore the environment?

The lecture room may be noisy or too hot or too cold. Try to ignore any of these inconveniences and concentrate on what is being said.

Do you have everything you need?

This means more than one pen or pencil – just in case.

Have you switched off your mobile phone?

Make sure you are not the guilty party!

Taking Lecture Notes

Lectures are an important part of your university course. Below are some suggestions for getting the most out of your lectures.

Before the lecture

Look back over your notes from the previous lecture to remind yourself of the main themes. If you have been given a task to do prior to this lecture, make sure you have completed it. The lecturer will assume that you have. Decide what materials you need for taking notes. Using scraps of paper is unlikely to be of use. Arrive in good time.

During the lecture

Most lecturers now make use of technology when giving a lecture. This does not mean you should just sit back. If you are given a handout, for example, make sure you annotate it with additional information that will help you understand the topic better. Practice writing quickly and, as previously advised, develop your own shorthand. Underline anything of major importance and put a question mark or cross next to anything you are unsure of.

After the lecture

Although it takes time, you may find it useful to re-write your lecture notes afterwards. If you have used a lot of shorthand you can fill it out again to make sure you understand it. Find out the answers to any queries you may have had. If you do this immediately it will take no time at all – if you leave it you will have a major task to do.

Later

Once you have completed a series of lectures, take some time to look over them all and make one summary note. This will help you remember the major points.

6. Research for assignments

With the availability of information on the internet, research has actually become more difficult for students. With so much information there is a real danger of becoming totally swamped and not getting the piece of work completed on time.

Added to this is the problem of plagiarism. If you have not had practice over a period of time in reading, making notes and then using these to answer the question set, you may stray into 'cutting and pasting' which is not only illegal (unless you have copyright permission or the piece is copyright free) but makes for a poor quality assignment. Remember also that your tutor will have read hundreds of essays and is well able to spot anything which has been put together in this way!

A university education isn't about rehashing facts; it's about challenging assumptions and putting forward your point of view, supported by appropriate evidence.

Question

Make sure you understand the question. Break it down into key words and concentrate on those.

Instructions

Read through all the instructions carefully, including those relating to submission dates, number of words and submission format. It is much easier to write a long piece but the word limit is there to make sure you can condense and select. If there is anything in the instructions you don't understand, ask before you begin your research.

Keep focused

Write the key words of the assignment in large letters and put them in a prominent place on your desk or table. Every time you come across what you think is an important point, 'test' it against the keywords. If it isn't relevant, don't waste time on it.

Keep to the point

It is far better to argue a few points well (and support them with proper evidence) than write a long series of unstructured ideas. Remember to check all facts (some internet sources are notoriously unreliable!) and acknowledge where you have made use of other peoples' ideas or work.

Plan ahead

Assignments are often given out early in the term. This allows you to schedule in adequate time to complete the work to the best of your ability. Organise your time so that you allow time to finish the assignment, leave it for a few days and then return to it to finalise it.

7. Academic writing

Academic writing starts with understanding the question that you have been asked to answer. Even if you think you know the answer to a question, never rush in – you may be missing something!! First deconstruct the question. Deconstructing the question should be done before starting on detailed background reading and note-taking.

Lecturers, when posing assignments/examinations generally adhere to a set formula containing these three key elements:

1. Subject.
2. Focus.
3. Command Words.

Deconstructing a question means identifying the subject, focus and command words.

1. Subject/Topic

This relates to the general topic or theme of the course. Start off by asking yourself 'What's the question about?' and 'From which topic in the course does it come?' Often the subject is not explicit in the wording of the question.

2. Focus/Angle

This is the crucial part. The focus must be identified or you could be in danger of not answering the question. Ask yourself 'In what part of the topic/subject are they particularly interested?' Often the focus is not explicit either! It may be implicit and therefore you need to look more deeply before you feel confident you have understood what the question is really asking.

3. Command Words

It is important that you understand exactly what the command words mean.

These are some of the typical command words you will encounter:

- ❖ Compare.
- ❖ Contrast.
- ❖ Describe.
- ❖ Examine.

The meaning of command words

Account (for)	see “explain”
Analyse	is the ability to break a problem down into manageable parts and select relevant/valid information
Appraise	See “evaluate”
Assess	To weigh-up or judge to what extent conditions are fulfilled
Categorise	Group phenomena together using some standard
Comment	Brief expression of opinion
Compare	Examine the similarities and differences between two or more objects, ideas or processes
Consider	Think over; ponder on; reflect on, perhaps by drawing upon theory to help the process
Contrast	Point out differences between
Criticise/Critically Analyse	Point out defects; pass judgements; show errors
Define	Show clearly the outlines of; give the precise meaning of (in many places the word ‘list’ could be used in place of ‘define’)
Describe	A detailed account
Differentiate	Recognise differences between
Discuss	Argue the case for and against. Detailed writing required
Distinguish (between)	Make clear the differences between one ‘thing’ and another
Evaluate	Make a judgement based on evidence and criteria
Examine	Scrutinise; investigate; or inspect carefully
Explain	Make clear or intelligible; illustrate the meaning of; account for
Illustrate	Make clear; explain by means of examples
Indicate	Show; point out; make known; reveal
Interpret	Using your own expertise, explain the meaning of; or assign significance to
Judge	Give an opinion or decision based on evidence
Justify	Show to be true, right or reasonable; give reason to
Outline	Brief general description or summary without detail
Present	Declare plainly or in detail
Prove	To confirm or verify; establish something with certainty by evaluating and citing experimental evidence
Reflect	Think over; ponder on; consider; perhaps by drawing upon theory to help the process;
Relate	Tell a story, describe
Show	Reveal; disclose; reveal by logical sequence
State	Declare plainly or in detail
Suggest	Propose ideas, or solutions, or reasons
Summarise	Make a brief statement of the main points

Trace	Explain stage by stage
Verify	Show to be true

Essay writing

An essay contains three main parts: the introduction; main body (which is divided into a number of paragraphs); and conclusion.

The introduction to an essay is very important. An introduction acts as a guide to your reader. It is like a map. After having read your introduction, the reader should have a fair idea of what is coming up.

Important guidelines for an introduction

The introduction to an essay is very important. An introduction acts as a guide to your reader. It is like a map. After having read your introduction, the reader should have a fair idea of what is coming up. In your own words tell the reader what the question requires. This helps the reader adjust to the topic being discussed. Try to avoid posing a number of questions related to the essay question. Whereas it is important to identify these underlying questions in the planning phase of your essay, it can be frustrating to the reader to be posed questions without any obvious point to it.

- ❖ Never promise in the introduction to cover an issue, then fail to fulfil your promise. Too many essays start with grand introductions claiming to address a whole range of issues, but often fail to deliver!
- ❖ Write the introduction after you have written the essay. In this way you will have some idea of what you are introducing! Some students start with a 'working' introduction that gets ditched once the essay has been written and a better introduction can be substituted.
- ❖ Don't be timid. Introductions which state, 'This essay will attempt to explain', give the impression you don't know what you are writing about. Immediately the reader is sceptical of your work.
- ❖ Two tips to get you started writing an introduction: i) summarise each paragraph of your essay into one sentence. String the sentences together and you have a start. Or, ii) take your essay plan and string it together with words. However, beware: introductions which read 'This essay will first. . . Then it will . . . Finally it will show that . . .' may lack subtlety and flair.
- ❖ Look at introductions to research papers in your subject area to gain an impression of the style used.

Paragraphs

A simple paragraph is made up of three parts:

- ❖ Idea or concept is presented.
- ❖ Idea or concept is developed with evidence presented to support idea.
- ❖ Summing up and link to next paragraph or section.

Paragraphs should not be stand-alone bits of information. To check whether your paragraphs are working, ask yourself at the end of the paragraph:

- ❖ So what?
- ❖ How does this information help me answer the question?
- ❖ Have I made it clear how this information relates to the question?

Conclusions

The conclusion is a summing up of the essay. Never be tempted to add a new idea in the conclusion. It is more than a one-sentence summing up. It may well be a quarter or third of your essay. Exactly what is in your conclusion depends on the nature of the question.

Referencing

When writing your essay, report or dissertation, you will refer to books, various types of articles and journal papers for the information used within your work. In academia, this is usually carried out by summarising and rewording (paraphrasing).

When you cite information from external sources, you should refer to the source in your text and provide a references section (bibliography) at the end of your work.

Learning to use referencing in your academic writing is important for a number of reasons:

- ❖ To support your arguments and add credibility to them.
- ❖ To acknowledge the source of the ideas or information.
- ❖ To allow the reader to trace your sources.
- ❖ To avoid accusations of plagiarism.
- ❖ To gain better marks in essays, reports and exams.

There are two main systems used for the citation of references, so check with your department for their preference. The two main systems are Harvard (alphabetical author and date system) and Vancouver (a numerical system).

Harvard

Sources are listed alphabetically by author and date in the references section and in the body of the text when using the Harvard section. All sources should be listed alphabetically in your references section at the end of your essay or report.

Within text

Holland stated that “[a]ll animals are intelligent and need to be loved in order to bring out their intelligence. Lack of intelligence usually means lack of love” (1998, p.100).

It was proposed that teenagers were influenced by teen film and television (Kaveney 2006).

Reference section

Journal:

Holland, A. (2008). “Anthropological assessment of animal interactions leading to intelligence” in *Journal of Anthropology*, **23**, pp 11-20.

Book:

Kaveney, R. (2006). *Teen dreams: reading teen film and television*. London: Tauris Publishing.

Vancouver

In the Vancouver system, a number is given to each reference as it is used (even if the author is named in your text). The number of the reference is used each time the reference is cited in the text. The first reference you cite will be numbered [1] and the second reference you cite will be [2] and so on. If you refer to 1 again, you will cite it [1] throughout the text. List all sources in numerical order in your references section.

Within text

Holland (1) stated that “[a]ll animals are intelligent and need to be loved in order to bring out their intelligence. Lack of intelligence usually means lack of love”.

It was proposed that teenagers were influenced by teen film and television (2).

Reference section

Journal:

1. Holland, Anthropological Assessment of Animal Interactions, Journal of Anthropology, 2008, Volume 23, pp11-20.

Book:

2. Kaveney, R. Teen dreams: reading teen film and television, Tauris Publishing, ISBN 01295987, 2006.

Using the internet

Other than books and paper copies of journals, you may also use the internet as a resource for finding the information you might need for your university work. However, you must bear in mind the reliability of these sources. For example, references using Wikipedia are discouraged, although you may use this type of website as a starting point for your research. You should use websites of reputable agencies, government organisations or publications online instead.

Journals online

If you use a journal paper online as a source, you should site the reference like this:

Masci I, Kenya: Population Growth in the Light of Its Adopted Policies, International Journal of Anthropology, Volume 21 (3), 2006, pp 165-180. <http://www.springerlink.com/content/mascil>, Accessed 1/1/09.

Articles on websites

If you use an article on a (reliable) website you should cite the reference like this:

“What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder” National Autistic Society, <http://www.autism.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1009&a=2227>, Accessed 1/1/09.

More information on referencing can be found on your University website and you can also contact your Effective Learning Service or Centre for Academic Practice for more information and workshops.

Plagiarism

The work submitted by yourself towards your degree is taken to be of your own work. Plagiarism is taken very seriously at university and carries harsh penalties (before and after you graduate). Some universities even use software to check for plagiarism (e.g. Turnitin) when assessing your work, so it is worth familiarising yourself with your chosen university’s plagiarism statement.

Plagiarism is the submission of work, which is not your own, without acknowledging the sources of the material. Plagiarism can also mean one student copying another student's work or improper collaboration.

Plagiarism could be:

- ❖ Copying or exact transcription.
- ❖ Unacknowledged quotations.
- ❖ Too similar paraphrasing.

- ❖ Summary of a source with no reference.

When you are writing an essay, report or dissertation, always remember to make reference to your sources in the text and in your references section. In exams, if you have learned a passage word for word, you should also acknowledge the source.

Other tips

Here are some additional tips to help you produce well written work:

- ❖ You should remind yourself that practice makes perfect and that if you understand something in your head; it can take a few attempts before you communicate this in writing effectively in the appropriate academic style.
- ❖ Make good use of a thesaurus or scientific dictionary. You do not have to buy them; you can use the thesaurus on Word or find one online. Your library will also have some that you can borrow.
- ❖ Sometimes, it may be useful to write your work in the way that you might say it and then go over each passage you write replacing informal language with academic words. For example, you can replace “I noticed that” with “it was observed that”.
- ❖ You should avoid the use of “I” in your academic work. Instead of writing, “In this report I will discuss” try “this report discusses” and so on.
- ❖ Conceptual categories are useful for organising the content of your work. Conceptual categories are found in many places where things have to be organised; e.g. in a music shop music is arranged into genres and in your video shop, films are arranged into drama, horror sci-fi etc. so that you can find what you’re looking for quickly. Your written work can also be arranged into categories, paragraph by paragraph, and presented in a logical order so that a reader can understand your work easily.
- ❖ Always consider the reader! Think of how you would understand your writing if you were reading it for the first time, or even if you knew nothing about the subject. One way communication can be more difficult than you think: just think about a favourite food recipe that you make without thinking about it, and then try to describe it to someone who has never cooked it before. If you make your work clear, concise and easy to understand, this may also help towards better grades!

With perseverance, you will become a confident academic communicator and will take these skills with you from university to the workplace. Remember, help is always at hand, and your university has learning support for academic skills.

Effective Learning Advisers are in place at your university to help you develop your skills. You can attend workshops, one to one sessions and lectures on a range of areas, for example, note taking, essay and report writing, presentations and effective reading.

Effective Learning Websites

Have a look at the following university student learning service web pages for more information:

- ❖ [University of Edinburgh](#)
- ❖ [Edinburgh Napier University](#)
- ❖ [Heriot-Watt University](#)
- ❖ [Queen Margaret University](#)

- ❖ [University of Dundee](#)
- ❖ [Abertay University](#)
- ❖ [University of St Andrews](#)
- ❖ [University of Stirling](#)

It's also worth remembering that there are many study skills resources on the internet and alternatively you can buy or borrow books on study skills.

8. Feedback and evaluation

Sometimes students pay little heed to the critical comments the tutor makes on a piece of work. Yet in many ways this is even more important than the mark or grade you receive. If there are a lot of very negative comments, coupled with a poor mark or grade, you must take some action and make an appointment to see your tutor immediately unless there is a good reason for your poor performance. Remember that your tutor makes these comments as a way of helping you. Read them over carefully, make a note of any you do not understand and action those you do understand.

9. Exams

Are you terrified of examinations? This is a common worry, especially among mature students, so you are not alone. The secret of success is to confront any fears you have and to devise ways of overcoming them.

Exercise 5

Take the test below, but don't rely too much on the answers!

	Yes	No
1 When I start to study for an exam, I find lots of things to distract me.		
2 No matter how much work I do, I am sure to do badly in an exam.		
3 I do much better in essays and assignments than in examinations.		
4 I find it difficult to sleep the night before an exam.		
5 When I start an exam I find my mind goes blank		
6 When I am in the exam room I experience symptoms such as an upset stomach, a fast heart rate, a headache or other bad feelings		
7 Although I know the information, I find it difficult to organise the material once I am in the exam room.		
8 I find it difficult to get all the questions finished within the time allocated for the exam.		
9 When the exam is over, I suddenly realise all the things I should have written.		

Give yourself 2 points for each no and deduct 1 for each yes.

If you have a low score in this exercise, don't worry. Many people lack confidence in their ability to cope with examinations, especially if their school experience of examinations has left them unhappy. Have a look at the suggestions on the next page.

Points to consider from the previous exercise

Think of examinations in three stages: before, during and after. You can rid yourself of some of your fears but remember that, as with acting a part on stage, some adrenaline is needed for a good performance.

Before you start:

- ❖ Have you a suitable place for study? While not every home can offer a separate study, try to find a quiet corner that is yours for the duration of your course. If that is impossible, schedule in time at the local library. University facilities can often be oversubscribed, especially at exam time.
- ❖ Think about what you know, not about what you don't know. The trick in examinations is to maximise the information you have.
- ❖ Get a good night's sleep if you can or at least a good rest. Eat well. Don't depend on coffee to keep you alert.

The exam:

- ❖ Arrive in good time, but not too early. If you arrive too early you will be involved in the mass hysteria that seems to prevail when students gather before an exam.
- ❖ Before you enter the exam room and as soon as you sit down, take a few deep breaths.
- ❖ If you feel yourself panicking during the exam, sit back for a moment or two, close your eyes and breathe deeply.
- ❖ Don't worry about what others around you are doing. Just concentrate on doing your best.

After the exam:

- ❖ As soon as you leave the exam hall, try to forget all about it. Though this is easier said than done, realise that almost everyone feels there is additional information they could have offered.
- ❖ When you get your results, congratulate yourself on any successes and learn from any failures.

Keywords in exam questions

It is important to understand the keywords in any examination. These point you directly to the way in which you should structure your answer to the question.

Exercise 6

Look at the examples below and try to say what each one means. Then look at the suggestions on the next page.

1. If you are asked to **analyse**.

2. If you are asked to **compare**.

3. If you are asked to **contrast**.

4. If you are asked to **describe**.

5. If you are asked to **evaluate**.

If you are asked to **explain**.

Some suggestions for the keywords exercise.

Analyse

To answer a question asking you to analyse, you must break the topic down into parts and show how all the parts relate to each other (e.g. *Analyse the components which make a healthy meal*).

Compare

To answer a question asking you to compare, you must show how two (minimum) parts/items/themes have both similarities and differences (e.g. *Compare the climates of North and South America*).

Contrast

To answer a question asking you to contrast, you must demonstrate how two or more items/themes are different (e.g. *Contrast methods of farming in France and Britain*).

Describe

To answer a question asking you to describe, you must give very detailed information on the topic/theme (e.g. *Describe the features of an Egyptian tomb*).

Evaluate

To answer the question asking you to evaluate, you must present arguments both for and against the topic/theme (e.g. *Evaluate the impact of climate change on Africa*).

Explain

To answer a question asking you to explain, you must give all the necessary facts to make the topic/theme easy to understand (e.g. *Explain the reasons for the First World War*).

Trace

To answer the question asking you to trace, you must present the facts of the topic/theme in the sequence in which they happened (e.g. *Trace the development of aeroplane design 1920-1960*).

10. Remembering things

Using mnemonics and acronyms

It is important that you devise ways to help you remember information easily and effectively. Here is an example of a mnemonic rhyme:

Columbus sailed the ocean blue
in fourteen hundred and ninety two.

Mnemonics or acronyms are ways in which you can help your memory to perform more effectively. While you may not be able to aspire to remembering everything in rhyme form, you should be able to devise some memory tricks of your own.

Exercise 7

Healthy Food

We are all encouraged to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Among the healthiest fruits are the following: apples, raspberries, pears, grapefruit, apricots, plums.

My acronym is: _____

There is a suggested answer on page 19.



Exercise 7

Suggested acronym: **GRAPPA** (Grapefruit, raspberries, apples, pears, plums, apricots).

It's also a very strong, and very good, Italian spirit.

11. Top tips

Lectures

1. Be prepared

- ❖ Before the lecture – be prepared. These points will help you to familiarise yourself with the topic, terminology, and language of the lecture enabling easier note-making.
- ❖ Read the lecture synopsis.
- ❖ Read the appropriate reading materials, making notes.
- ❖ At a suitable time before the lecture, read your notes.
- ❖ Read the notes from the previous lecture.

2. Listen

- ❖ During the lecture – listen. Listening is an important activity for making notes; having done step 1 above; you will be more in tune with the lecture, therefore listening and note-making are easier.
- ❖ Make sure that you have a seat where you can see and hear the lecturer.
- ❖ Avoid distractions: sitting at the front of the room often helps with this.
- ❖ Pay attention – you only have this opportunity to hear/see this lecture.
- ❖ Listen and look for signals e.g. “This may be useful for your assignment”, “There are 4 main points in this . . .”
- ❖ If a point is repeated it usually means that it is very important.
- ❖ Make sure that you copy anything that is put on the board/overhead projector – this may not be in handouts.
- ❖ Make sure that any points you are confused with, or didn’t understand, are clarified. Ask questions.

3. Do not doodle

This is a distracter and breaks concentration.

4. Organise

- ❖ Organise your notes.
- ❖ Separate folders for each course.
- ❖ Label, number and date all pages.

5. Highlight

Highlight important information

6. Use abbreviations

Use abbreviations – be consistent.

7. Use symbols

- ❖ To indicate if you don’t understand something: ?
- ❖ To indicate something you want to find out more about: !!!
- ❖ To indicate something that you want to incorporate into an assignment, or something that you agree with: v

8. Review your notes

- ❖ After the lecture, review your notes.
- ❖ Combine the notes from the previous reading materials with the notes you have made during the lecture.
- ❖ Keep one set of good notes.
- ❖ File other notes away.

Combining your notes is not copying your notes; by having a set of complete notes, you will have notes that make sense when you retrieve them later. Reviewing your notes also helps to move information from your short-term memory into your long-term memory. You are also starting to revise for assignments, essays and exams.

9. Share notes

Share notes with others in your class. You may have something important in your notes that others may not have and vice versa.

10. Listening and note-making are skills

The more you practise, the more skilled you will become.

Tutorials

1. Be prepared

You will find the topics for tutorials usually listed in the course handbook while example sheets may be given out in lectures or may be found on your course area on your university's virtual learning environment. This means that you are expected to do preparatory reading or complete some example sheets before the tutorial.

2. Make links

The tutorial system relates to the content of the lecture programme but sometimes they do not necessarily tie in sequentially with each other. This means that it is important that you identify the links between tutorials, additional reading and assignments.

3. Think ahead

What issues might arise on the chosen topic and what is your view on these? If you have examples to do, don't just do the easy ones, but aim to do the more difficult ones so that you can discuss any difficulties with your tutor or demonstrator.

4. Participate

Some people are not hesitant about voicing their views or about asking questions. Others are often reluctant to do so. If you are one of the former, remember that participating in a tutorial can often mean listening as well as speaking. If you are more reluctant to speak, recognise that your ideas are just as valid as the next person's and that you are just as entitled to voice them as anyone else. The more diffident student may often be the one with the best ideas, so speak out!

5. Stick to the tutorial topic

Sometimes students have queries about the lecture programme and want to discuss these in the tutorial. If you have such a query, then make an appointment to discuss it with the appropriate lecturer or send your query as an email. Most lecturers welcome this demonstration of interest in the course and will give you some guidance or refer you to a printed source in the course.

6. Involve others

Sometimes you may feel that you're doing all the work – or talking – and others may be more than willing to let you take on that burden. Involve peers by asking someone else for their opinion or asking a question of the tutorial leader. Think about how you might phrase this – “Maybe someone else has a different/similar view?” or “What do you think about this, so and so?”

7. Take notes

The tutorial is an opportunity to explore topics in greater detail than covered in the lecture. Therefore, your tutorial notes can feed into your assignments or later exam revision. If you ensure that you title and date them, you will have a ready resource to file alongside the lecture notes.

8. Contributing to the discussion

Tutorial discussion can become heated. However, it is important to remember that you are learning how to discuss issues objectively and should not take contradiction from either a college or the tutorial leader as a personal slight. The purpose of debate is to train students to present their viewpoints with a sound argument supported by evidence – and someone who is critical of your viewpoint may simply be exploring the issue from other directions as a kind of devil's advocate.

9. Assessment

If you are asked a direct question on the topic, would you be able to answer it? Your participation in tutorials, or the worked examples you need to complete in them – may contribute to your assessment. This means that it is important to contribute to the discussion as this will be monitored – just being there is not enough.

10. Developing skills

Recognise that the skills you need for tutorials translate into employment skills. For example, participating in case conferences, meetings with clients and planning meetings within an organisation. This is your chance to hone your skills for the future.

Research

1. Ask questions all the time

What do you know? What do you need to know more about? What do you not know? Never stop asking questions. Treat your research like explorers treat their journeys – always looking around them, picking up new information, thinking about where next to head. So you can use your questions to ask yourself how much you are understanding and what you need to research next to help you complete your coursework tasks.

2. Is what you're reading relevant? Will it help you answer your questions?

There might be times when you can read about the subjects you are studying for personal pleasure and take your time over it – enjoy those moments. More familiar might be the times when you have a deadline pressing and you can't afford to read anything that won't be directly useful. Think as you research whether or not what you are reading is helping you. Have you answered your questions about that aspect of the topic? Do you know enough about it for now to move on? What new questions do you have as a result of what you have read?

3. Who is the author? Can you trust him/her?

Another question to ask about your research sources is whether or not you can trust them. You need to be sure that the author is trustworthy. Information on sites such as Wikipedia, for example, is not to be relied upon as it may not be objective. One way of testing this is to check the other things you are reading to find out whether or not other authors you have been reading reference them.

4. Why was it written? Who was the intended audience? What's the author's agenda?

Another test for whether you can trust an author is to ask whether they had hidden motives for what they were writing. That's less likely with academic sources that have been reviewed by other academics before publication, but still not impossible.

5. When was it written? And is it still up to date?

Some of the subjects you will study develop fast so how recently the source was published is important to know. Is it still relevant? Are there new angles on the subject that you should also be finding out about?

6. Is every argument backed up by facts or are they just assertions?

It can be easy to trust every author you read simply because they write convincingly. Don't let yourself take that easy route. Be bold and challenge what you are reading. Why do you agree/disagree with it? What reasons do you have? How can you defend those reasons?

7. Have you understood everything?

If not, what can you do to fill in the gaps?

8. Has it answered all your questions?

What were you hoping to achieve when you started your research? How much of that have you managed? For the questions you started out with, how many are still to be answered? Are they worth continuing with?

9. What new questions do you have?

The questions you started with were just that – starting points. Now your research has told you much more about the subject you are exploring, what new questions do you have? How can you try to answer them?

10. Think for yourself. Don't just repeat other people's ideas.

Having the chance to think for yourself and present your own ideas can be one of the great things about higher education. Enjoy that opportunity and make the most of it. Sadly that can also be one of the hardest things. It takes a lot of hard work before you can know enough to come up with some good ideas that require more time and effort through research to test. Work hard.

Presentations**1. Be prepared**

Think about what you have been asked to do in terms of time. Research the topic and then brainstorm the points that you feel apply to the focus of your presentation. Construct a running order for these and then begin to flesh out what you would like to say on each point.

2. Make links

You need to think about how you will map the presentation for your listeners. You need to think about how you will frame the introduction and create links throughout your talk so that it flows naturally and logically from point to point. Work on a strong ending that summarises your points to ensure that you don't end with a weak "That's all I have to say!"

3. Stick to the topic

It is tempting to provide background information and sometimes this can be at the expense of the time you can devote to the key points you wish to make. It is better to make a conscious decision to

assume some foundation knowledge on the part of your listeners and concentrate on the key points of your argument or appraisal of the topic.

4. Write/print out script

Speaking without notes is an approach that is loaded with risk. It is better to have put your ideas on paper and then practised how you might deliver this text, thinking about pauses, phrasing, intonation and expression.

5. Practise

It is important that you are aware of how long your presentation takes to deliver and so you should practise this against the clock. Bearing in mind that most people speak faster when under stress, edit or expand your written notes.

6. Create cue cards or short notes

Simply reading out a script does not make for an interesting or enlivened delivery. Try condensing what you say to notes on cue cards that allow you to sound more natural in your delivery.

7. Practise again

With a friend, practise again using the cue cards and timing yourself as you do so.

It is not generally a good idea to try to memorise your written script because it is too easy to lose the place if you are nervous, but if you practise thoroughly you should become so familiar with your material that the cue cards will be enough to act as prompts for your presentation.

8. Read your audience

If you smile at the audience as you introduce yourself and your topic, they will warm to you and you to them. Establishing this rapport at the outset is a critical element of successful presentations. You can do this also by asking the audience a question, by relating your topic to an earlier presentation or by narrating a personal experience.

9. Speak clearly

Not everyone in your audience may have perfect hearing; some may be speakers of other languages. Sometimes external noise or poor acoustics can inhibit people's ability to hear the speaker, so it is particularly important that you speak clearly and precisely in standard English so that your message is received by all.

10. Assessment and developing skills

Making presentations is a skill that develops with practice and experience. Take every opportunity to gain that experience and you will find that, as your confidence grows, your competence will increase and this will be reflected in your assessment marks.

Revision

1. Get yourself organised

The key to successful revision is to be fully aware of what your course is about – this means that you need to have a full set of lecture notes, handouts and notes from your own supplementary reading. Once you have all that in place, then you are ready to begin.

2. Make links

Go to the past exam papers (possibly available in your library or online) and identify the style of questions, the topics that frequently come up and match these against the learning objectives (or outcomes) of your course and the time devoted to these topics in the lecture programme. Make a

list of these topics and identify which you have covered in tutorials or assignments. From this list select the topics that you intend to revise, making sure that you have some topics 'in reserve' so that, should your favourite topics not come up, you still have options open to you.

3. Think ahead

Create a blank timetable of the time you have before your exam. Working backwards from the date of your exam, plot in other commitments and then block in the time that you have available to cover your chosen topics. Be sure to leave some time for daily things such as eating, shopping and relaxing.

4. Revising

For some people, revision is a chore that quickly becomes boring and unproductive. To ensure that you are engaged with what you are trying to learn, you might think about reducing your lecture notes, handouts and other materials to short notes. Alternatively, you might think of taping your notes and listening to these as you travel or do other things when you are not studying. Much of this will depend on your favoured natural learning style.

5. Think about 'double' questions

Sometimes exam questions draw on more than one topic from the lecture course, so it is important to think about logical connections, comparisons or contrasts that just might ask you to cover two topics in a single question. For example a question such as "Consider whether Napoleon's contribution to the French legal system outweighed his contribution to France's international power" requires an understanding of both the legal code and international policies.

6. Involve others

Some people find that discussing the topics with friends doing the same course by quizzing each other can be a useful way of imprinting the ideas in their minds. Family members act as oral examiners. Voicing your answers can provide a rehearsal for the exam and this kind of activity also makes those around you feel less distanced from your activities.

7. Practise planning answers

Working out plans for potential questions is a good revision tactic. It not only helps you to work out logical connections between the points of an argument or the sequence of operations you might need to perform in the exam, but it also helps you to do this quickly and efficiently in the exam. Sometimes you will receive a mark or two for the plan if you have been unable to finish an answer but seem to have been writing on the right lines.

8. Work out the timings

Before the exam, work out exactly how much time that you will have to answer each question, ensuring that you take into account time needed for reading the question, doing a brief plan, writing your answer and checking it afterwards.

9. Practise writing answers

Many students find that they have difficulty writing to a time limit so it is worthwhile trying to write your answer against the clock. You need to discipline yourself not to write beyond the allotted span of time as you won't be able to overrun beyond the end of the allocated time on the day.

10. Specialist terms

While marks may not be deducted for misspelling of general vocabulary, you may find that penalties are imposed if you misspell subject-specific words. For example, a politics student would be

expected to know how to spell “government” or a biology student would be expected to know how to spell “mitochondrion.”

Exams

1. Be prepared

Check out the date, time and location of the exam. Make sure that you know how long it will take to travel to the exam hall, where you can park (if necessary) and that you have all the necessary equipment such as pens, calculators, highlighters and watch.

2. Think ahead

Rehearse the time that you can allocate to each question on the paper and have prepared plans for potential questions (See Tips for Revision). Be sure that you know what format the exam takes – essay answers, worked examples, multiple choice questions, short answer questions or open book.

3. Think positively

If you have worked at your revision and have practised well, then you should be confident in your ability to handle whatever the exam paper contains. If you have not prepared as well as you might, then this is the time to put your brain in gear and attempt to answer as fully as you can. Blank paper gains no marks and if you apply yourself, you may well be able to squeeze some marks even out of the most unlikely questions.

4. Confront your nerves

Even the best prepared student can be overcome by nerves. But nerves can also be a good thing; they can sharpen your senses and provide you with a focused frame of mind. Often the nerves diminish once the paper is turned over and you can see what you have to work on. If your favourite topics have not turned up, then take a deep breath and focus on the strongest alternatives on the paper. You may surprise yourself about what you know.

5. Making choices

Sometimes students are ‘spoiled for choice’ in that they are faced with many ‘good’ questions, all of which they feel they could answer well. A good way to make that choice is to give each question a score out of 5 (high) as a reflection of how strong they feel their answer would be on that question. Clearly, those that score highest are the ones to tackle.

6. Stick to the time plan

There is evidence that suggests that the marks you gain from spending extra time on one question are less than the marks you could gain from stopping that one on time and moving on to a new question.

7. Checking over your work

In the rush to get your thoughts on paper and to keep to the time limit, it is all too easy to make slips. Make an allowance of time in your time-plan for the exam to go over your answers and to check for spelling and grammar mistakes, as well as factual and logical errors. Be sure that you have included all work and that you remember basics such as entering the units in your answer.

8. Being methodical

Do not be put off by others around you who have ripped straight into an answer. Take time to consider the question and to plan your answer so that it responds to that question and not the one you would have liked to have been asked.

9. Developing skills

Taking exams at university will eventually become routine and you may even begin to enjoy that feeling of being on top of your subject – that is, engaging in deep learning. However, it takes time to develop exam skills and you should welcome the chance to develop these skills as you work through your courses. While exemptions from exams are often welcome (and some students specifically adopt this as a strategy to avoid exams) in the long term, this means a missed opportunity at becoming a good examinee and this may have an impact on your performance in final year exams.

10. Assessment

Examination assessment should reflect the stated aims and objectives of the course. In some subjects, it may be possible to gain “full marks” that reflect the classification of degrees. You should be informed of how your exams will be marked and what the repercussions are if you do not perform satisfactorily and this may involve undertaking a re-sit examination.