

Metadata

Title	Study Skills
Description	
Keywords	
Objectives	
Author	Student Support and Development Service
Organisation	University of Leicester
Version	V1.0
Date	21 May 2010
Copyright	

Avoiding plagiarism

This guide aims to help you to understand what plagiarism is in the context of academic work and offers guidance on how to avoid it.

What is plagiarism?

In all aspects of academic study and research, thoughts and ideas inevitably build on those of other writers or researchers - this is a legitimate and indeed essential part of the academic process. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines plagiarism as the taking and using as one's own ... the thoughts, writings, or inventions of another. In an academic context, plagiarism implies a deliberate act on the part of the writer or researcher to use the work, ideas or expressions of others as if they were his or her own.

Deliberate plagiarism, therefore, is academic cheating, and the university has a very firm view on this: anyone found to have deliberately copied or plagiarised the work of others is severely penalised. The University regulation concerning academic dishonesty is included in the Undergraduate (p.11) and Postgraduate (section A:14) Regulations; most departmental handbooks also include a statement of the University's policy in respect of academic dishonesty.

Deliberate plagiarism with a clear intention to cheat is, however, far less common than plagiarism committed through misunderstanding or even carelessness. These latter types of plagiarism may occur if:

- you fail to acknowledge fully the sources of knowledge and ideas that you use in your work;
- you incorporate the words of others into your writing as if they were your own;
- you 'string together' ideas or facts taken from others without presenting your own viewpoint.

Many students, particularly those at the beginning of their courses, are unclear about how to use the work of others in a way that does not constitute plagiarism. This leaflet has been written to give guidance on how to avoid plagiarism and at the same time produce work of better quality.

Fully reference and acknowledge the work of others

Understanding how to use and appropriately acknowledge your debt to the work of others is an essential step in learning how to avoid plagiarism.

Make sure that when you are reading or researching for any written work or presentation, you include in your notes, or on any photocopies, the full reference details (see the Student Learning Centre guide: [Referencing & Bibliographies](#)) of each source that you use. This will ensure that you have all the information you need to acknowledge your sources fully when you come to use this material in your own work.

When you write down the precise words of a writer, or even of a lecturer, make sure that you mark clearly in your notes that you have included an exact quotation, and add the relevant page number to the other reference details (this includes the citation of sources on the Web, and online discussion lists/mail bases/databases). This will ensure that when you go back to your notes at a later date you will be able to distinguish your own words from those of your sources. An appropriate sentence or phrase quoted from an expert in the field can be used with great effect within an essay or dissertation, but it needs to be fully referenced and clearly distinguished from your own words.

The paragraph below is taken word for word, fully referenced, from an article by Peter Scott in a book on the future of higher education and is used here as a source for a hypothetical essay on the topic of Higher Education in the 1990s.

Widening access to higher education is no longer conceived... as a crusade to help the educationally and socially deprived, to reach out into the depths of Britain's democracy (and, incidentally, to save departments and institutions from threatened closure!). Instead it is seen in much less heroic terms, as the careful management of burgeoning demand mainly, but not exclusively, from standard school leavers and other conventional sources (Scott 1991 p.57).

Scott, P. 1991: Access: an overview. In T. Schuller (ed.) *The Future of Higher Education*. Buckingham: SRHE & Open University Press, pp. 55-60.

The paragraph below, from the essay returned by student A, has clearly been plagiarised. Although the wording has been changed slightly, the words are essentially those of Scott and not of the student writer; there is no reference to the original source.

A

The driving force behind Britain's move towards a mass higher education system is no longer conceived as a crusade to help the educationally and socially deprived. It has become a way of meeting the demand from standard level student leavers and other conventional sources.

Student A's plagiarism may not have been deliberate but the result of poor note taking which did not distinguish between the student's own words and ideas and those of other writers. Such plagiarism would nonetheless be taken very seriously. The paragraph below from student B's essay is not plagiarised.

B

The early 1990s saw considerable changes in the organisation of Higher Education in Britain, as it moved from an elite to a mass education system. At this time, the Editor of the Times

Higher Education Supplement was Peter Scott, whose job placed him in a unique position to take a broad, and well informed, overview of these changes. He viewed the move to mass education as 'the careful management of burgeoning demand mainly, but not exclusively, from standard school leavers and other conventional sources' and not, as others might have seen it ' as a crusade to help the educationally and socially deprived, and to reach out into the depths of British democracy' (Scott 1991 p.57).

Student B chose to include quotations to make a particular point, but these have been fully referenced. The quotations are included within a paragraph, which clearly shows the personal stamp and contribution of the student writer. This is seen in, for example, the comment on the background to Scott's viewpoint (as editor of the Times Higher) and the suggestion that his view is not universally held ('and not as others might have characterised it'). Student B might then go on to discuss, and give his opinion of, these other views, making sure that appropriate references were included.

For more information on note taking and on referencing your sources in written work, read the Student Learning Centre guides: [Effective Note Making](#) and [Referencing & Bibliographies](#).

Use your own words and develop your own writing style

Many students, particularly when they first start writing, find it difficult to develop their own writing style. When you are reading and researching for a piece of written work, try to use your own words in your notes to summarise your reading, and include your own ideas and comments on each text that you read. As you practise and establish your writing style, you will become more confident about expressing your thoughts and ideas in your own way.

If your first language is not English, and you are not yet completely fluent, it can be very tempting to borrow a well expressed sentence or even a paragraph from another writer. However, this is plagiarism, and lecturers would much prefer to receive a piece of work in your own, if imperfect, style than to read chunks of text in perfect English that are clearly taken from another writer.

Organise and structure your work in your own way

Taking notes that paraphrase the views and opinions of the authors that you read is often the first stage of the research undertaken for any piece of written work. However, if your own writing consists largely of a string of paraphrases from a number of different writers, or an almost exact copy of the sequence of another writer's ideas and the logic of his/her argument, you may be seen to be plagiarising, even if you acknowledge the sources of your information. This type of plagiarism is probably the most common that is found in undergraduate work.

Examples

Two further 'extracts' from hypothetical essays illustrate this point. In this example the essay topic is about the value of different types of assessment procedures. Student C has read a number of books on his topic, and in the paragraphs below he has quoted some of them in his discussion of examinations. In these examples the sources quoted have been invented for illustrative purposes, and so reference details have not been included.

C

An experiment carried out by Smith (1997) showed that students do better in exams that contribute to their final grade than in those that are merely 'pass and proceed'; this showed that motivation is an important factor in improving students' examination performance. Patel (1995) believes that students should be given past papers to increase their confidence, but Jones (1998) thinks that this can lead to students revising only those topics that come up regularly. Essay-type questions are better than short-answer questions because they test creative thinking and not just memory (McPherson, 1997)

Student C's writing is essentially a string of facts, ideas and opinions from others and there is very little evidence of his own contribution to the topic. He seems only to be passing on the views of others without any critical analysis of the arguments or evidence presented by his sources. Although he has referenced his sources, he has effectively plagiarised their ideas. This type of plagiarism though not at all desirable, is not deliberate academic cheating, as there is no attempt here to claim the ideas as his own. However, Student C would not get a very good grade for his essay. Now consider the extract from Student D's essay:

D

Recent published research on the effectiveness of examinations as an assessment technique has highlighted the importance of motivation as a driving force (for example, Patel, 1995; Smith, 1997; Jones 1998). Patel and Jones disagree about whether or not past papers can be useful in helping students, but I would agree with Patel that without some clear examples of at least the types of questions that are likely to be asked, students are not able to plan an effective revision strategy. What is important, though, is not just the context in which examinations are used, but the format of the examinations themselves. McPherson (1997) argued against short-answer questions, which he saw as only capable of testing memory and not creative thinking. In his criticism of this type of examination, he has failed to acknowledge the importance of providing opportunities for students to develop a wider range of written communication skills than those developed by essay writing. The ability to write briefly and effectively is a very valuable skill for future employment; discursive essays are a form of writing that is very rarely used in the world of work.

Student D has used the same sources, but has provided a much more sophisticated analysis, and, while building on the work of her sources, has taken the ideas and discussion forward. Her own contribution to the topic is very clear in this piece. Student D will undoubtedly have gained a much higher grade for her work than Student C.

Don't be afraid to express your own views

Many students are hesitant about expressing their own opinion, particularly if it contradicts the views of 'experts'. Work that is published and printed in books and learned journals is not necessarily always right nor the very last word on a topic. In the humanities and social sciences in particular, much academic writing is based on informed opinion rather than indisputable fact. Do not be afraid to have your own views on a subject. What is important is that your views should be informed, clearly expressed and based on careful consideration and knowledge of both the relevant facts and of the views of those who are acknowledged to have expertise on the topic.

It may be much more difficult for science students to have new ideas or make original contributions to their subject in the early stages of their scientific education. What you can show in your writing is that you are aware of all the relevant information, and have a full knowledge and understanding of the scientific principles that underpin the experiments that you write up or the reports that you complete. When you carry out an experiment, the method you use is perhaps unlikely to be your own, and you may well need to acknowledge the source of the particular methodology you employ. However, the results that you obtain when you carry out the experiment are your own, and in their analysis and interpretation you can make your own contribution.

Other forms of plagiarism

Don't forget that plagiarism can occur not only in your use of text but also in accompanying illustrations, maps and tables. Make sure that in the captions to these you fully reference and acknowledge any material or ideas taken from a source that is not your own. Minor changes, rewording or redrawing may be enough to avoid infringing copyright, but not to avoid the charge of plagiarism. Remember that you also need to take steps to avoid plagiarism in an oral presentation by making appropriate acknowledgements to the authors you quote, either in your talk or in the OHPs that you use.

Further information

If you are still unclear about what is and isn't plagiarism, you can talk to your lecturer or personal tutor, or visit the Student Learning Centre in the Student Development Zone in the David Wilson Library. Your departmental student handbook may also give you further guidance.

Contributing to seminars and tutorials

This study guide offers practical strategies for participating in seminars and tutorials encouraging you to make the most of the opportunities for discussion and debate.

Introduction

Seminars and tutorials are a vital part of most academic courses and give you an opportunity to discuss topics and issues with other students, teaching assistants and members of academic staff. This sort of critical debate and argument is very useful in developing your grasp and understanding of your subject. Benefits associated with seminars and tutorials include opportunities to:

- apply knowledge from your lectures and background reading;
- solve problems in a team to maximise your creativity;
- test your understanding and develop new insights;
- learn from other people's approaches and ideas;
- clarify any concepts that you might not have understood.

The success of a good seminar is not only based on its content (the subject knowledge explored) but also upon the way in which the seminar group works together. Students are often invited to take a lead role in the preparation of the seminar, chairing the discussion,

solving problems or making a presentation to start the session. Learning through small group discussion will thus help you develop essential skills for later life, including opportunities to:

- practise expressing yourself;
- practise and develop your group skills (e.g. listening to and supporting others);
- prepare and deliver oral presentations.

This guide offers many practical strategies for successful group discussions, helping you to improve your own performance and play a full role within the group. For information about preparing a seminar paper or presentation, refer to another guide in this series: Planning a Powerful Presentation.

1. Preparation

It is important to come to each seminar or tutorial group prepared to take a full part in discussion. If you have a basic understanding of the topic you will be better able to participate in discussion and understand the material being explored.

- Begin by identifying the main issues to be discussed. This information should be in your module handbook(s) or be available from your course tutor.
- Carry out background reading/research to develop your understanding and interest.
- Make notes as you read, focusing your thoughts on the forthcoming topic.
- Keep track of useful examples or quotations as these will provide important evidence for discussion.
- Develop both a broad understanding of the subject matter as well as a list of things that you're having difficulty with. These latter can form the basis for questions or contributions to the discussion.
- Make a list of points that you'd like to make or problems you'd like to find solutions to. Keep open minded though, as they might not all be relevant.

Remember, the key to successful discussion is for everyone to be fully engaged not for everyone to have fully developed ideas. A questioning approach to your preparation opens your mind and creates fertile ground for discussion and debate.

2. Engaging in discussion

It isn't always easy to contribute to discussions, even if you have prepared thoroughly. Many students worry that they may have got something 'wrong' in their preparatory work and that everyone else has the 'right' answer. This is rarely the case. To help overcome nerves and anxiety, it is worth remembering the following points:

- don't wait until you arrive at the 'big idea': say something simple and often to help build discussion;
- share responsibility with the group: don't dominate or leave others to do all of the talking;
- be positive and respectful of other people's ideas.

With these principles in mind, try using the following strategies to help build your contributions to group discussions. They start with low stress approaches and build to full involvement.

a. Verbal/non-verbal acknowledgements

Show that you're a good listener by paying close attention to what is being said. Acknowledge other people's contributions by saying "yes" or nodding your head. Speakers find such signals reassuring as they show their ideas are being listened to and valued. These listening strategies will also keep you active and involved, giving a good starting point for more substantial contributions.

b. Agreements

Agreeing with a point someone has made can take your contributions to the next stage. Statements like "That's a good idea" or "I'd not thought of that" offer non-threatening speaking strategies. You can then build this to more complex levels of agreement, stating where and why you agree, for example: "Yes, it's important to realise that Kushner has been read out of context."

c. Observation

Try commenting on the discussion, showing other group members that you're aware of what's going on and are playing an active role in listening and shaping the argument. This can be particularly useful when trying to avoid distractions and keeping the discussion on course: "Haven't we moved away from the point that Manjit was making about ...?"

d. Presenting alternative views

Offering alternative points of view indicates a high level of involvement and can be a very effective way of helping to develop your own ideas and the ideas of others. Don't be afraid to disagree with someone, simply make sure that you do so in a constructive way. First express your disagreement by showing you understand the point that was being made and then explain why you disagree. If you are unsure as to why you disagree, try doing so with a question: "But doesn't that contradict with...?"

e. Involvement

This level shows very strong levels of engagement. In addition to all of the above strategies, the involved student will also try to make new points, leading the discussion into new ground: "I think we need to look more closely at the impact of...". The involved student will also try to bring other people into the discussion, inviting comment or drawing upon someone with relevant experience.

Using Openers

It can be difficult to begin making a contribution to the discussion, particularly when other group members are already contributing fully. Using a simple opening statement will get you

started and draw people's attention to the fact that you want to speak. Examples include: "I think...", "I disagree,...", "That's a good point...", "Can I say that...?"

If the discussion is going really well, you might need to repeat your opening statement, even drawing attention to the fact that a particular point is being overlooked: "Hold on; haven't we ignored...."

Coping with Conflict

In some instances, discussions can become so lively that they lead to strong disagreement between group members. It is important to remember that discussion in an academic environment should remain objective and impersonal: ideas should be challenged, never people. If you feel your own anger levels rising, take a deep breath and stop talking for a while. If you see other people getting angry try to play an active role in the group, intervening with some of the above strategies. Observation or agreement (as described on page 2) can be very effective ways of drawing attention to disagreement before it gets out of hand, for example: "We appear to be saying the same thing here".

3. Taking notes in discussion groups

It can be challenging to take notes and remain involved in the discussion at the same time. Some times you might not take any notes at all, relying on your follow-up work (see Step Four below) to capture any important ideas and references. If you do want to take notes, try to limit the amount that you write. Focus on significant points, questions or references so that these can be followed up at a later date. Successful note making strategies include:

- using a diagrammatical form of notes to map out the discussion with arrows linking ideas to show progression and relationships;
- keeping a record of who said what so that you can follow up any queries later in more detail;
- using key words and notation such as question marks (?) and exclamation marks (!) to prioritise information quickly for later follow-up work;
- dividing your page into two columns, using the left hand column to record actual comments from the discussion and using the right hand column to record your own ideas and responses (see Figure One over the page).

As you are only making brief notes, you will need to make sure that you follow these up whilst the session is still fresh in your mind. For more information about note making techniques in general, see the companion Study Guide Effective Note Making.

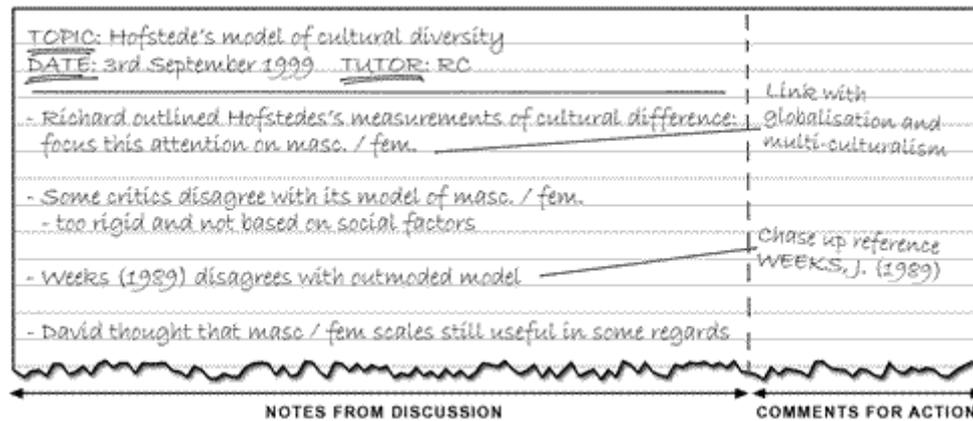


Figure One: Illustration of note making technique using two columns

4. Follow-up work

One of the key things you will need to do after a seminar or tutorial is to go back to your notes and flesh them out in more detail. Remember that this shouldn't take the form of a lengthy transcript. Instead, try sketching out the ideas that you found most interesting and/or challenging, taking them further by developing your own thoughts and responses. If you have found the discussion to be particularly stimulating you might even wish to amend notes from other parts of your course (e.g. lectures or private study), including any new ideas and concepts accordingly.

At this stage, it will be important to make sure that you have clearly differentiated between your own ideas and those of others (authors, your tutor, fellow students). This will help you avoid plagiarism by acknowledging other people's work appropriately. For further information on this topic, see the companion Study Guide, AVOIDING PLAGIARISM.

The follow-up stage is also a good time to set priority areas for further reading and investigation. Choose a reference to follow up in the library or highlight an argument that you'd like to validate by checking back through your lecture notes. Develop your understanding of the topic further by tackling questions from a course text or past exam papers. You may want to identify individuals from the discussion group whose ideas you would like to discuss in more detail. Make the most of the discussion by using the session as a starting point for your own investigations and interests.

Conclusion

Seminars and tutorials provide important opportunities to stimulate your thinking and deepen your understanding. By engaging in debate and critical argument with others, or by working together to solve problems, you are developing your intellectual and critical skills as well as your group work skills. Such opportunities encourage you to apply, test and consolidate your own learning, helping you to become more familiar and confident with a particular subject area. Preparation beforehand, active participation during the session and effective follow-up work will help make the most of these learning opportunities.

Effective note making

Effective note making skills enable you to select the information you need from written sources, quickly and efficiently. This guide shows you how to make clear and well organised notes that are useful for every aspect of study.

Making effective notes

In order to make the maximum use of your time and effort you must be clear as to why you are taking notes. Having a clear focus cuts out unnecessary note taking time and enables you to produce well organised notes. The three main reasons for note taking are:

- to select;
- to understand;
- to remember.

This guide introduces the different note taking skills that can be used for each of these three purposes.

Taking notes to select

When you are making notes for an essay, report or seminar paper, you will need to understand and select information. Use your essay title or question to provide the focus for your note taking. You can then select your information according to its direct relevance to this title or question.

Always make sure that a text is relevant to your needs. Do this by checking:

- the year of publication - how up to date is the information?
- the contents page and index - are there specific areas devoted to your topic?
- the introduction or preface - do they give an overview of the text?
- the beginnings and endings of promising chapters - are the chapters worth reading closely?

When you know the text has the information you need you can begin to make notes.

- Begin by recording the details you will need for your bibliography i.e. *author, date, place of publication, and publisher*. (Refer to the guide [Referencing and bibliographies](#).)
- Use your own words to check you understand each point.
- Check that each point you record is relevant to the task in hand.
- Record the chapter and page number for use in referencing and so that you can easily retrace your steps should you need to check a point in your notes later on.
- Take down all quotations in inverted commas with full reference details. This will allow you to identify and acknowledge other writers' words in your essay or report.

Organising your information

Organising your notes as you write will help you to digest the information quickly. You can also reorganise the notes later to make the information more meaningful to your task.

- Use main and sub headings and numerical lists to organise your notes.

- Use keywords to summarise each point in the margin. A quick keyword reference is good for taking an overview of your notes.
- Use colour to categorise points, make headings stand out and show links between points and ideas.

Taking notes to understand

Taking notes whenever you read is a useful aid to understanding the material. Use the following techniques to improve your understanding.

Underlining and highlighting

Underlining or highlighting encourages you to identify the most important aspects of the text. This helps to keep you focused and prevents the loss of concentration.

- Use underlining or highlighting in your own copy of texts or on photocopies, never on borrowed books.
- As you read, select what seem to you to be central words and phrases that convey the key meaning of the text.

One of the first things you will find out about studying for your degree is that the focus is on you the learner rather than the member of staff who teaches you. You will be expected to work far more on your own than you may have done in the past. This gives you an opportunity to make the most of the University environment, which includes staff, students and academic services such as the Library and the Student Learning Centre, to extend your knowledge and skills.

Sample paragraph with key points underlined

Using your own words

Putting the information into your own words actively engages you with the text and gives you a chance to check that you understand the material.

- Summarise a point in your own words.
- Use abbreviations when you can but be sure to still use your own words.
- Copy technical terms and data for accuracy.
- Add your own comments to any quotations you record to show their meaning and significance.

Taking notes to remember

When preparing for exams, you will need to select, understand and remember information. In addition to the techniques described above you can use the following techniques to help you recall the content of your notes. Condensing information will help you commit it to memory.

Using keywords to aid recall

The natural functions of the memory are hampered when we try to memorise information in the form of whole phrases or sentences. Use keywords in your notes to make the revision process more efficient and time effective.

- Select keywords to represent central concepts or crucial facts and commit these to memory.
- Work with your own personal associations to choose a keyword that will trigger your memory.
- Begin by using keywords with a few pages of text, choosing a keyword for each heading and then a keyword for each point under the headings.
- Test your recall of the information using the trigger of memorised keywords.
- Practise the method and build up the confidence to use keywords throughout your revision.

Using colour and image

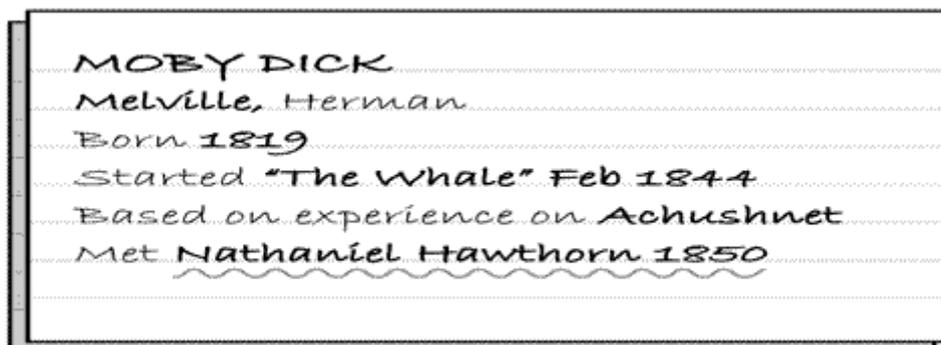
Use colour and image to create a strong visual trigger to help you recall information.

- Categorise and highlight information with colour. This will help you to visualise a page of notes in your mind.
- Use diagrams and pictures to represent information. Chose an image that is humorous or has personal associations as this will be even easier to remember.

Using index cards

Notes are usually recorded on A4 paper and then stored in a ring binder where they can be easily removed and the pages reorganised. When making notes for revision you can also use index cards to organise key concepts and ideas.

- Use the cards to physically divide information into easy to handle bites, for example one key point to each card.
- Use keywords and colour to make the information as visually clear as possible.
- Use the cards to test your recall, putting to the back of the pile the cards you can easily remember. Repeat the cards that need more concentration.

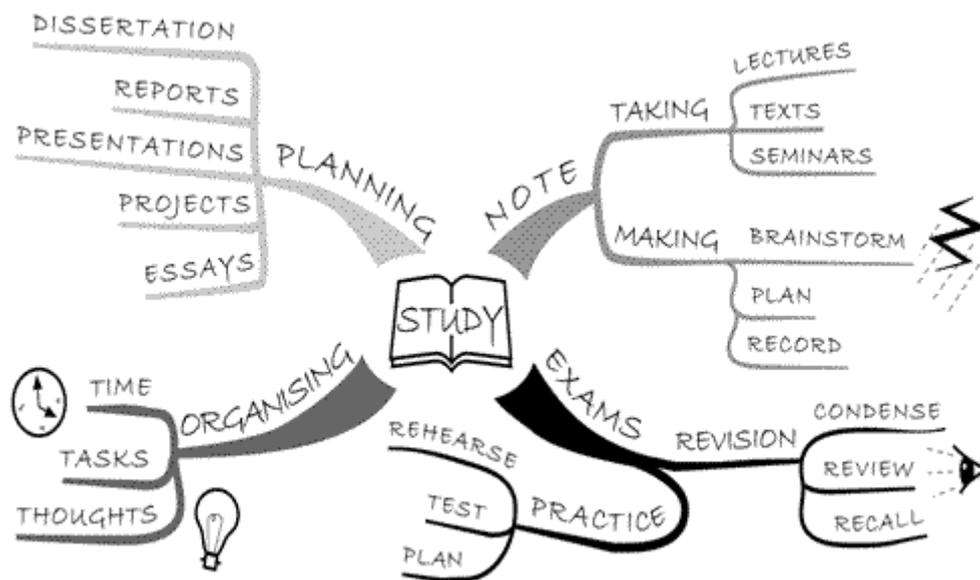


Sample index card showing key points

Using diagrams

Using diagrams in your notes can:

- help you gather and hold large amounts of information on one page;
- enable you to create an overview of a large topic or subject area;
- help you see links and connections in your notes;
- provide a powerful aid to memory by using the association of word, image, number, colour and spatial awareness;
- attract and hold the interest of the eye/brain.



Sample diagrammatical note showing structure and interrelationships.

This method of note taking is also useful for planning essays and presentations. For details on how to use this technique look at the guide *Thought Mapping*.

Summary

- Be clear as to why you are making notes.
- Adapt your note taking style to the task in hand.
- Be selective in your note taking and only include the information that is relevant to the current task.
- Use a simple form of note taking to aid your understanding when you read.
- Use your own words throughout your notes and comment on any quotations you record.
- Use a variety of methods to organise your notes as clearly as possible.
- Use a variety of association techniques throughout your notes for effective recall.
- Try different ways of presenting your notes such as index cards, diagrams or maps.
- Rework your notes in different formats, reordering or condensing the material.

Exam stress

This guide aims to help you understand and recognise exam stress and offers strategies to help you minimise any harmful effects. The leaflet also provides contact details for a number of further sources of help and advice.

What is stress?

Stress is one of the body's natural responses to something that is threatening or frightening. It is something that we all experience from time to time. Many aspects of university life have the potential to cause stress, including adjusting to a new living environment, fulfilling academic requirements, developing friendships and preparing for and sitting exams.

Stress is not necessarily harmful: mild forms of stress can motivate and energise you. Slightly increased stress levels may make you more alert and motivated to do your work. However, if your stress level is too high then it can cause difficulties, including impairing your ability to prepare for and perform during exams.

What causes stress?

To understand what produces the responses associated with anxiety and stress, think about how your body responded at times when you felt threatened or frightened. It is likely that you will have experienced the following physical responses:

- increased muscle tension to prepare your muscles for use;
- increased heart rate to boost blood flow and energy levels;
- increased breathing rate to supply oxygen required for energy;
- extra alert senses to produce a reaction from the slightest touch or sound.

All these reactions happen automatically when we are under stress; they are driven by the production of hormones, including adrenaline. This is called the flight or fight response because it equips you to fight or escape from situations which are dangerous or threatening; your body is alert and ready for action. Once the danger has gone, your body will gradually return to normal.

People also respond similarly to situations that feel threatening but which cannot be resolved by fighting or running away. Imagine that it is a few weeks until the start of your exams, your revision is not going well and you are starting to feel "stressed out". In this instance there may be some time between when you start to feel stressed and the end of the "danger" (which may be the completion of the exams). During this time your body may remain mentally overactive and physically tense. It is when you are in this uncomfortable state that you are stressed or in a state of anxiety; the flight or fight response is switched on and remains on, causing additional difficulties for some individuals. It is only when you perceive that the danger has passed that your body returns to normal. This may be as soon as you have sat the exam, but it could be when the results come out, or even later.

What are the signs that I am stressed?

There is a whole range of different signs which may indicate that someone is feeling stressed. The signs could include: strong feelings such as feeling scared or irritable; changes in your thinking such as being unable to concentrate and remember things; behavioural changes such as changes in your appetite, increased use of drugs or alcohol and sleeping difficulties;

physical changes such as headaches or other pains from muscles that have become tense. People vary greatly in the way that they react to stress, and you should therefore try to become aware of how your body and behaviour change and take action to minimise any negative effects.

What can I do to help a friend who is feeling stressed?

Friends can often take on an important supportive role during the exam periods and at other times of stress; often very simple things can help.

- Accept that your friend is anxious, whatever the cause of the anxiety and whether or not you feel they have a good reason to be anxious.
- Encourage them to talk about their concerns and listen carefully.
- Help them to build up a group of people, including friends and family who can support them.
- Encourage them to relax and to try and follow the strategies outlined below.
- Encourage them to seek further guidance and help from the resources detailed at the end of this guide if the strategies outlined do not help.

Six strategies for dealing with stress

Unfortunately there is no magic wand that will remove the impact of stress on your life. Controlling stress is an active process which means that you will have to take steps to limit its impact. However, there are some very simple steps that you can take to do this which may help your stress levels work for you instead of against you.

Step One: Be careful about what you eat and drink

Try to eat a well balanced diet, eating at least three regular meals a day. Eat foods which will release energy slowly and are likely to have a calming effect. Food or drink high in sugar may give you instant energy, but in the long term may wind you up leaving you feeling more nervy and edgy than you did before.

Limit your consumption of caffeine particularly found in tea, coffee, fizzy soft drinks and "Proplus" tablets. Excess caffeine tends to heighten arousal and increases "jittery" feelings; it can also impair your concentration and may keep you awake at night.

Try to also limit your use of alcohol and to avoid all use of non-prescribed drugs. These may make you feel better in the short term, but can prevent you from sleeping properly; they can also impair your ability to remember the work that you are trying to revise. Some people drink alcohol and / or smoke more to control their stress levels, but it would be a good decision to try to develop more healthy ways of controlling your stress.

Step Two: Get enough sleep

Make sure that you get plenty of rest; six to eight hours a night are recommended. If getting to sleep is a problem, ensure that you have at least a half an hour break from your revision before going to bed. Use this break to do anything relaxing which will take your mind off your work such as:

- having a soak in the bath;

- chatting to your friends;
- writing a letter;
- listening to some music.

(image)

Step Three: Take regular exercise

Exercising regularly will not only help to keep you physically healthy, but also uses up the hormones and nervous energy produced when you are stressed. Exercise will also help to relax the muscles which become tense when you are stressed, and, as exercise increases the blood flow around the body, it can help you to think more clearly.

You do not have to take up a strenuous sport: try swimming, walking, cycling or dancing. Anything that gets you moving around and is enjoyable is beneficial, especially if it involves spending at least half an hour in the fresh air every day.

Step Four: Control your breathing

If you notice that you are starting to feel very stressed, for example as you wait for the examination to start, try to regulate your breathing by concentrating on breathing out to a slow count of four; the breathing in will take care of itself. It will be helpful if you practise this exercise when you are not stressed so that you are very familiar with the technique when you need actually need it.

Step Five: Make time for fun

Build leisure time into your revision days and the days that you sit your exams. Get involved in a non-academic activity, such as sports, crafts, hobbies or music. Anything that you find relaxing or enjoyable which will give you a break from thinking or worrying about your exams will be beneficial.

Step Six: Improve your study skills

Effective study skills can reduce stress by making you feel more in control of your work and more confident that you will succeed. Check out the Student Learning Centre's guide to Revision & Exam Skills; attend one of the Centre's exam skills workshops or review your approach in an individual consultation with the Centre's adviser. (Details of how to contact the Centre are provided in the resources section at the end of this guide.) It may also be useful to talk to your course tutor to get subject specific advice to help make your revision more focused.

Remember that most of your fellow students will be feeling the same way as you do. Tell your friends and family how you feel and find ways of relaxing with them which will help to support you.

On the day of the exams and during the exam:

- Have a good but moderate breakfast and lunch, remembering not to drink too much caffeine.
- Try to do something relaxing for the last hour before the exam. Last minute cramming could cloud your ability to remember the overall concepts.
- Try to avoid fellow students who may increase your anxiety levels by asking what you have or have not revised etc.
- Use the breathing exercise that you have practised to regulate your breathing; exhale slowly.
- If you find even getting into the examinations hall a problem, talk to a trusted friend and ask them to walk to the exam hall with you.
- Have a plan for how you will use your time in the exam hall (see the [Revision and exam skills study guide](#) for guidance).

Resources for more help and advice

The following information outlines sources of further help which provide assistance to students who want to improve their exam preparations/performance and/or stress levels. These services are all very experienced in supporting students during the examination period (and at other stressful times).

Resources within the university

Departmental Staff

Your personal tutor can offer academic guidance and support during examination periods. Discuss your exam preparations with them and talk to them if you are feeling under stress. Similarly, your course tutors may also be able to allay some pre-examination fears by discussing your exam preparations with you.

Student Development

The [Learning Development team](#) within Student Development offers a range of services to develop your revision and exam skills.

AccessAbility Centre

If you have a disability or special need, the [AccessAbility Centre](#) can assist you with devising the most appropriate revision strategies, time management and exam techniques, taking into consideration any additional needs that you have. The Centre also offers a quiet place where you can work or rest. For more information call in or email the Centre.

Counselling Service

Talking to a counsellor from the [Student Counselling Service](#) about stress can help you develop a better understanding about why you are feeling stressed. Counsellors can help you to explore possible options that may help to reduce your stress levels, including making the choices or changes which are right for you. The University counsellors are all very experienced in helping students cope with stress, particularly around the examination times, and hope that by attending for some counselling you will start to feel more positive about the

situation. If you feel it may be useful for you to see a counsellor, try to arrange an appointment as soon as you can, as this may prevent any problems or difficulties from escalating.

Welfare Service

The [Welfare Service](#) offers practical support to students during the build up to the exams and if necessary immediately before the exams. For further information, call at the Welfare Service in the Percy Gee Building, or contact the Service by phone or email.

The Freeman's Common Health Centre

For those students who have registered with the surgery, doctors are available to assist with any physical or psychological concerns. Nursing staff also operate a stress management clinic on an appointment basis which is held on Wednesday evenings. If you feel it would be useful to attend the clinic try to make an appointment as soon as you can as there is a limited number of appointments. For more details contact the Centre's reception.

Special Exam Arrangements

Under certain circumstances students may be able to negotiate special exam arrangements such as sitting examinations in a different venue. If you feel that you require alternative arrangements talk to your personal tutor, another member of academic staff or a GP at the Student Health Centre (if you are registered with the practice) as soon as possible prior to the exams. The AccessAbility Centre will also support students' requests for special exam arrangements where appropriate. Requests need to be backed up by official confirmation of the difficulties that you are experiencing.

In the event of a crisis situation you should bring it to the attention of one of the following as soon as possible: a member of academic staff in your department, the Examinations Office in the Fielding Johnson Building or the Welfare Service.

National Organisations

The Relaxation for Living Trust

168-170 Oatlands Drive,

Weybridge,

Surrey

KT13 9ET

This organisation produces relaxation cassette tapes which may help you to relax. They also have leaflets and a list of people who teach relaxation classes.

New World Cassettes

Paradise Farm,

Weshall, Halesworth,

Suffolk

IP19 8RH

This organisation provides spoken and musical cassettes to help you relax.

Mind (National Association for Mental Health)

Granta House,

15-19 Broadway,

London

E15 4BQ

Mindinfo: 0345 660163

This organisation publishes books and leaflets covering a whole range of mental health difficulties including stress, anxiety and panic attacks. Send a large stamped addressed envelope to the above address to receive a publications list, or telephone the information line.

Improving your reading skills

Improving your reading skills will reduce unnecessary reading time and enable you to read in a more focused and selective manner. You will also be able to increase your levels of understanding and concentration. This guide shows you how to read with greater efficiency and effectiveness by using a range of different reading skills.

Reading for study

You already use a range of reading styles in everyday situations. The normal reading style that you might use for reading a novel is to read in detail, focusing on every word in sequence from start to finish. If it is a magazine you are reading, you might flick through the pages to see which articles are of interest. When you look in a telephone directory for a particular name, you purposefully ignore all other entries and focus your attention on spotting the name you want. These everyday reading skills can be applied to your studies.

To improve your reading skills you need to:

- have clear reading goals;
- choose the right texts;
- use the right reading style;

- use note taking techniques.

Reading goals

Clear reading goals can significantly increase your reading efficiency. Not everything in print will be of use to you. Use reading goals to select and prioritise information according to the task in hand.

Reading goals can be:

- an essay or seminar subject;
- a report brief;
- a selected subject area;
- a series of questions about a specific topic.

Use your reading goals to help you identify the information that is relevant to your current task.

Choosing a text

You will need to assess the text to see if it contains information that is relevant to your reading goals.

- Check the date of publication. Is the information up-to-date?
- Read the publisher's blurb at the back or inside sleeve for an overview of the content.
- Check the contents page for relevant chapters.
- Look up references for your topic in the index.

If the text does not seem relevant, discard it.

Once you have selected a text you can use the following techniques of scanning and skimming to help you identify areas for detailed reading.

Scanning

Scanning is the technique you might use when reading a telephone directory. You pass your vision speedily over a section of text in order to find particular words or phrases that are relevant to your current task. You can scan:

- the introduction or preface of a text;
- the first or last paragraphs of chapters;
- the concluding or summarising chapter of a text;
- the book index.

Skimming

Skimming is the process of speedy reading for general meaning. Let your eyes skip over sentences or phrases which contain detail. Concentrate on identifying the central or main points. Use this technique to:

- pre-view a selection of text prior to detailed reading;
- refresh your understanding of a selection of text following detailed reading.

Detailed reading and note taking

Once you have selected useful information, you can begin to read in detail. Note taking techniques provide a useful aid to reading. Use:

- **underlining and highlighting** to pick out what seem to you the most central or important words and phrases. Do this in your own copy of texts or on photocopies - never on borrowed texts;
- **keywords** to record the main headings as you read. Use one or two keywords for each main point. Keywords can be used when you don't want to mark the text;
- **questions** to encourage you to take an active approach to your reading. Record your questions as you read. They can also be used as prompts for follow up work;
- **summaries** to check you have understood what you have read. Pause after a section of text and put what you have read in your own words. Skim over the text to check the accuracy of your summary, filling in any significant gaps.

These techniques encourage an active engagement with the text as well as providing you with a useful record of your reading. Avoid passively reading large amounts of text, it does not make effective use of your time. Always use a note taking technique to increase your levels of concentration and understanding.

For more detailed guidance on note taking techniques see the guide [Effective Note Making](#).

Increasing your reading speed

It is more important to improve your reading skills than your reading speed. Being focused and selective in your reading habits will reduce the time you spend reading. If, in addition to using a range of reading skills you want to increase your reading speed, then the following technique will be of use.

The average reading speed is about 240-300 words per minute. For the average reader, the eye fixes on each word individually.

It is easy for your eye to recognise 4 or 5 words in a single fixation without a loss of understanding.

The key to increasing your reading speed is not to increase the speed at which your eyes move across the page, but to increase the word span for a single fixation. A simple way of developing the habit of taking in more than one word per fixation is to take a page of text and divide it length ways into three with two lines drawn down the page. Using a pen or pencil as a pointer, read each line of text by allowing your eye to fall only in the middle of each of the three sections, as indicated by your pointer.

Developing your reading speed

- Don't worry about how quickly you are reading but instead, concentrate on reading the line in only three fixations.

- As this becomes more natural, practise without drawing lines.
- Later, reduce the number of fixations to two per line.
- Once this increased word span becomes a comfortable habit, an increase in your reading speed will occur.

Summary

- Have a clear focus for your reading. Set your reading goals.
- Survey the text before you spend the time and effort involved in detailed reading.
- Scan and skim to select the text for detailed reading.
- Scan and skim after detailed reading to reinforce your understanding.
- Use a form of note taking whilst reading in detail, to keep you concentrating, aid understanding and provide you with a record of your reading.
- Using clear reading goals and a variety of reading skills is more important than increasing your reading speed.
- To improve your reading speed, don't increase the speed of the eye across the page, but increase the number of words the eye recognises in a single fixation.

Inclusive writing

People do not want to feel excluded, or to be labelled inferior, either as individuals, or as members of a group. However, it is possible to exclude or imply inferiority without realising it, if insufficient care is taken with your writing. This Study Guide reviews the main ways in which inappropriate assumptions can be made within academic writing, and gives ideas about how to avoid this within your own writing.

There are many words that have been widely used traditionally, but which are based on outdated assumptions. A familiar example is words containing the word man e.g.: chairman, manpower, and man-made, the use of which can be taken to imply that women do not participate in these activities.

We also have a tradition of referring to people with disabilities, by their disability e.g.: calling a person with epilepsy 'an epileptic'; and of using stereotypes with unhelpful presumptions of 'normality' and by implication 'abnormality'. These problems are most commonly found within the fields of: **gender; disability; race; and sexual orientation**. Language with regard to these characteristics will be examined in turn within this Study Guide.

The challenge

The appropriateness of language is a contested area that changes in the light of social debates and political agendas. It is not possible to prescribe appropriate language in all cases. The challenge is:

'to communicate in a manner that does not exclude particular individuals or groups. At the same time ... try to avoid getting trapped in euphemisms and the ever-changing preferences of various "politically correct" factions — both liberal and conservative. It's a balancing act, the basic premise of which is to treat people as individuals who are equal.'

www.colorado.edu/Publications/styleguide/inclusive.html

Examples and references

This Study Guide uses examples taken from the following websites and book, which are all recommended references on this issue:

- American Psychological Association at www.apastyle.org/styletips.html
- British Sociological Association at www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/60.htm
- The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/gender.html
- Brookes, I. & Marshall, D. (2004) Good writing guide. Edinburgh: Chambers.

Examples of writing that is not inclusive

“If we get an engineering student on the committee we’ll need to make sure that he can fit the meetings in around his project work”

This assumes that all engineering students are male.

“We need to cater for the wives as well as the managers”

This implies firstly that all managers must be male; and secondly that they will have female partners.

“The professors may need a little extra time in case they forget where they’ve parked”

This implies all professors are absent-minded and forgetful.

Such writing can make people feel:

- less important than others
- defective
- irritated that they have fewer rights
- inappropriately stereotyped
- excluded
- offended
- unvalued
- abnormal
- biased against

Particular challenges within academic writing

If you are writing about, or conducting, research involving human participants, it may be essential that you report certain demographic details such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age. These details may be needed to inform the interpretation of the findings, and to support judgements about their generalisability. Such details may need to appear in any section of a piece of writing, from the literature review, through the method and findings sections, to the conclusions. The key questions to address are:

- **when** should we report these details?
- **how** should we refer to special interest groups?

Guiding principles are that:

- you need to record and describe the demographic details that are **relevant** to the conduct, findings, and generalisability of the research, but not the demographic details that are not;

- you need to take care that the descriptions you use would not offend people in the groups you are describing. Ideally you would use terms that people in those groups might use to describe themselves.

It is important to appreciate that what may sometimes seem to be a very minor difference in the label chosen can make a huge difference to the impact that label has on members of that group.

General principles you can use to guide your writing

In addition to the guidance and examples given later, about specific areas where care needs to be taken, the following are some general principles that are useful to work to in all writing.

1. Avoid implying that people in a certain group are abnormal compared with the normal population e.g.: when comparing people with a disability with people who do not have that particular disability, use the term 'non-disabled' or 'people without a disability' rather than the word 'normal'.
2. Take care not to appear to use your own group as the reference group, thus implying both normality and superiority e.g.: describing a culture as 'culturally deprived' implies that it fails in comparison with, usually, western culture.
3. Keep in mind that differences arising from race or ethnic comparisons do not imply deficits.
4. Try to become routinely aware of any assumptions you are making regarding gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, or any other pattern or grouping.
5. Become familiar with websites, books, or articles, that give good guidance on this issue, such as those listed on the first page.

Gender

An ever-present problem is how to avoid the potentially distracting over-use of 'he or she' or 's/he' scattered throughout a piece of writing, yet retain an essence of neutrality. Table 1 shows some ideas to help with this.

Principle	Example	Suggested alternative
Use 'they' instead of 'he' or 'she' (only when the use of plurals would be acceptable)	"Each respondent was asked whether he wished to participate."	"Respondents were asked whether they wished to participate."
Use 'you' to speak direct to the reader	"The student should make sure she checks her references carefully."	"You should make sure you check your references carefully."
Changing the sentence to avoid the need to state a gender	"The child should be given ample time to familiarise himself with the test material."	"Ample time should be allowed for the child to become familiar with the test material."

Table 1: Gendered language

Another possibility is to alternate genders throughout a list, or by chapter. As well as being explicit in pronouns such as he, she, him, and her, gender is implicit in many nouns themselves. Table 2 lists examples of the kind of word to look out for, and offers some corresponding gender-neutral options.

Gendered noun	Gender-neutral noun
man in the street	people in general, people
manpower	workforce, labour force, employees
cameraman	camera operator
policeman	police officer
forefathers	ancestors
founding fathers	founders
old masters	classic art/artists
master copy	top copy/original
steward, stewardess	flight attendant
man-made	artificial, synthetic

Table 2: Gendered nouns

Disability

People with a disability usually prefer to be thought of first as individual people. They prefer not to be labelled primarily as victims; passively disabled; or labelled constantly with the name of their disability. The aim is to maintain the integrity of individuals e.g.:

- The term 'disabled person' implies that a person as a whole is disabled. It could be replaced with 'person with (who has) a disability'.
- The term 'epileptic' equates the person with their condition. Instead you could write 'person with epilepsy'.
- The term 'stroke victim' has superfluous, negative overtones of passivity and victim-hood. It would be preferable to write 'individual who had had a stroke'.
- Similarly, the term 'confined to a wheelchair' could more respectfully be replaced by 'person who uses a wheelchair', changing from passive to active voice.

All of these suggestions put the individual person first, and refer to their disability second.

Race

It is important to report details of race and ethnicity where they are necessary to describe or explain an aspect of method, analysis, or interpretation. Where this is essential, it is important to use acceptable labels. You need to be guided in acceptability by members of the groups you are describing, rather than by any standard practice you might be used to. Names and preferences change over time so it is important to check what is currently acceptable.

General guidance can be given, but this is, along with the rest of the guidance in this Study Guide, best practice only at the time of writing (2007), and will need to be checked for current validity at the time of use. Current advice is to:

- use positive descriptions/definitions such as *Asian*, which give people a name in their own right, rather than negative ones like *Non-White*, that define people relative to a supposed norm of 'whiteness';
- avoid saying English if you mean *British*: this could alienate some people you are including who are Scottish or Welsh rather than English;
- avoid hyphens in multiword labels e.g.: *Mexican Americans* is preferable to *Mexican-Americans*. The first is a description of some Americans, with the additional information in the adjective 'Mexican', while the second is a label or name;
- be aware of assumptions implicit in commonly used words and phrases such as: *illegal asylum seekers*, when to seek asylum is not in itself illegal; and the term *assimilation*, if you are really talking about *integration*;
- be aware that *ethnic minorities* is not necessarily the same as *Non-White* e.g.: the ethnic minority might be Irish or Welsh;
- When possible, authors should use the more specific rather than the less specific term (e.g., *Choctaws* is more specific than *American Indian*; *Cubans* is more specific than *Hispanic*).

Sexual orientation

You need to acknowledge the existence of a range of sexual orientations. Careless wording can easily make people feel excluded, or abnormal. The table below gives some examples of careless writing, explains what the problem is, and suggests more acceptable wording.

Problematic	Preferred	Comment
Sexual preference	Sexual orientation	Using 'orientation' avoids the connotation of voluntary choice, and thereby potential blame, implicit in the word 'preference'.
Women's sexual partners should use condoms.	Women's male sexual partners should use condoms.	Avoids assumption of heterosexuality.
AIDS education must extend beyond the gay male population to the general population.	AIDS education must not focus only on selected groups.	Does not imply that gay men are set apart from the general population.

Table 3: Language associated with sexual orientation

Conclusion

Because of the ingrained nature of cultural bias, it is possible to offend without having any intention to do so, and without noticing. It is therefore worth incorporating a specific scan for sensitive language within your usual revision or editing process. You can use the guidance in this Study Guide to devise your own check list. The references listed on the front page provide more examples and guidance on these and other areas of sensitivity.

Making the most of lectures

This guide shows you how to make the most of lectures through the use of active listening skills and effective note taking techniques. These skills will help you produce clear, helpful notes that will be of use to you in all your study activities.

The purpose of lectures

Lectures are commonly used:

- to offer an overview of a subject - you will need to fill in the detail;
- to deliver detailed information on a subject - you will need to fill in the background.

Lectures provide you with a valuable resource. They can synthesise the views of several researchers and text books or provide new and unpublished information.

This guide shows you how to make the most of your lectures by following four main steps:

- preparing for lectures;
- listening in lectures;
- taking notes;
- following up lectures.

Preparing for lectures

Know your course

Find out how your lectures relate to the course as a whole.

- Do the seminars or tutorials prepare you for the lecture or do they follow up the content of the lectures?
- Are there opportunities to discuss the lecture content in your seminars?

Look in your module handbook for more information or ask your tutor.

Reading before the lecture

Find out if there is any recommended reading you can do in preparation for the lecture. Preparatory reading will make it easier for you to engage with the lecture content and provide you with a framework for making opinions and comparisons. When the lectures are linked in a series, you should also review your notes from the previous lecture.

Listening in lectures

Listening to the lecture should take priority over note taking. If you listen effectively you will have a better understanding of the lecture content which will enable you to write clear, helpful notes that will make sense to you after the lecture.

Listen for structure

As you listen to a lecture, try to focus on the structure of the lecture content. Sometimes the structure is laid out for you at the beginning of a lecture, either as a list of headings or as a potted summary of the content. Make a note of this structure straight away, it will give you a sense of direction, enabling you to anticipate points or take up the thread of information again should you get lost.

During a lecture, a speaker may structure their material by using verbal signposts such as:

"I shall now discuss..."; "My next point is....."; "Finally...".

These signposts identify a new point and you can show this in your notes accordingly. Other sign posts include:

- pausing to indicate a new point or heading;
- summarising what has been said prior to moving on.

There are other, less obvious linguistic signposts which can help you structure your notes; you will need to listen for these. Examples include:

"On the other hand...."; "Others have argued..." ; "Turning now to...".

Certain words and phrases will indicate that an illustration is being given:

"an example of this is..."; "this can be seen when..."; "evidence for this can be found in...".

Your ability to listen will improve with experience. You will be better able to spot digressions or additional examples and highlight these in your notes.

Taking notes

Avoid taking too many detailed notes. A dense transcript will be difficult to work with at a later stage. The following techniques will help you make structured, useful notes.

Using structure in your notes

- Use headings to order information.
- Give each point a new line or number it.
- Highlight examples and illustrations.
- Separate digressions from the main points.

Using your own words

Putting each point in your own words will help you understand and recall the lecture content.

Remember to:

- copy down important quotations or examples word for word;
- separate quotations and examples from your own words;
- record points you don't understand in the lecturer's words adding a question mark as a reminder to follow the point up later.

Using fewer words

- Reduce the number of words you use in taking notes: detailed notes are of little use in remembering facts and ideas.
- Use keywords to represent points or ideas briefly.
- Add brief details of any examples or evidence that support a point.

Using abbreviations

- Use standard abbreviations and subject specific abbreviations.
- Make up your own abbreviations for common words, but be sure to be consistent.
- Don't use so many abbreviations that your notes become a shorthand transcript; continue to use your own words.

Using space

- Show structure in your notes e.g. putting each point on a new line.
- Leave gaps for additions or corrections at a later date.
- Make notes easier to read and review by using space to separate the points.

Using colour and image

- Categorise points under colour coded headings.
- Highlight in colour any points you want to remember.
- Use images or diagrams as a quick way of describing a concept or idea.

You may want to consider using a diagrammatic style of note taking for lectures.

Refer to the guide: Thought Mapping for details.

Using handouts

Lecturers use handouts to help you follow the lecture and to highlight important information. You can maximise the benefits of handouts by adding your own comments.

- Highlight keywords.
- Add colour to categorise information.
- Add notes in the margin.

Organising your notes

- A4 paper stored in a ring binder with dividers is the most practical system for organising notes.
- Begin each lecture with a clear heading of the lecture title, date and name of the lecturer.
- Number the pages clearly so they can be easily kept in order later on.

Following up lectures

Don't be afraid to ask a lecturer for clarification either in the lecture or afterwards. Use seminars and tutorials to clarify or discuss material from the lectures. Review your notes as soon as possible after a lecture. Make the most of your review by:

- highlighting points which seem particularly important or central;
- adding any details which you can remember from the lecture;
- showing links between points;
- correcting any mistakes;
- adding questions to highlight areas you don't understand or need further information on.

Overcoming problems

Failing concentration

You are much less likely to find your concentration straying when you use an active approach to note taking. Putting points into your own words, using space, colour and image, will make note taking a busy but interesting activity. If you do miss some points because your attention strays then just leave a space in your notes and check it out with the lecturer or another student later.

Being left behind

You may find that the information is being delivered too fast for you to write down. If points pass you by, then leave a space and compare your notes with another student's. Doing some background reading for the lecture will help you to keep up as the information will not be entirely unfamiliar to you.

Sometimes you can get lost because you don't understand the material that is being delivered. This may be the case for the occasional point or even for a large section of the lecture. Rather than giving up on the lecture, write a series of questions that you can try to follow up later.

Summary

- **Be prepared** - get to know the course structure and do pre-lecture reading.
- **Be organised** - have a system for storing notes and take a selection of pens and pencils to the lecture.
- **Listen for structure** - watch out for signposts that help you follow the lecture.
- **Be brief** - try using key words and phrases as much as possible so the emphasis is on listening and understanding.

- **Make note taking an active process** - summarise in your own words, make good use of space, colour, symbols and images.
- **Leave gaps** - if you miss a point, don't get further behind by panicking about it, just leave a space and check it out with another student.
- **Actively review** your notes after the lecture, making additions and corrections as you read.

Organising your time

This guide offers you strategies to help you plan your time effectively, encouraging you to maximise your productivity and maintain optimum control over your activities. Effective time management creates, divides and allocates time - it is an active process.

Part one: planning time

Planning is an essential part of being organised. It involves predicting your future commitments and setting aside enough time to meet them. Successful planning gives you confidence and purpose.

Five steps to successful planning

1. Looking ahead

An important first step is to establish:

- what you need to do (e.g. coursework/taught sessions/private study);
- when things need to be done by (e.g. deadlines for assessed work);
- how long they are likely to take (e.g. time spent in taught sessions/time required to write a lab. report).

Read through your course handbooks and other information related to your modules to establish the demands that will be placed upon your time. Think of the broad range of study activities and develop a picture of how they relate to each other. This forward picture will be an invaluable tool in helping you organise your time.

2. Making plans

Once you have established your commitments, it might be useful to enter these on a plan or calendar. Plan each semester at a time.

There are several advantages to using a wall chart for this activity.

- You can see the whole semester ahead of you.
- You can see where deadlines fall in relationship to each other.
- You can quickly scan the whole plan to remind yourself of the full range of your activities.

If you already have plans in a calendar or diary, use these in the same way. Construct a visual image of the term ahead, one that you can scan quickly to refresh and review.

Make filling in your plan an active process. Use colour and image to distinguish between different sorts of activities. For example, fill in deadlines in red, starting points in green. Use exclamation marks as warning signs or question marks to highlight vague commitments.

Continually review your long term plan, assessing your achievements or adding further information as it arises.

3. Breaking up time

To begin taking control of your time you will need to break it up into manageable chunks. Try the following strategies for planning each day a week at a time.

Planning the week

Your study time over a week will be divided into two broad areas:

- your contact time or taught sessions (lectures, tutorials, laboratory classes);
- your private study activities (working on projects, reading for an essay).

Draw up a timetable for the week showing each day and each hour within that day. Fill in your taught sessions for the week ahead. This will give you a clear idea of the time you can allocate to other activities, showing you when you have time and how much time is available.

Now begin to allocate time to your other activities. Don't try to fulfil your study obligations in a few long sessions. Make the best use of all the time available to you by being creative in your use of time. For example:

- use an evening to plan your essay;
- use an hour between lectures to visit the library;
- use a ten minute bus journey to review your lecture notes.

Try to fit the right tasks to the right time slots. Don't try to write a presentation in half an hour at the end of the day if you know you will be tired. Move this activity to a more suitable time when you will have the energy to complete the task to your best abilities. Instead, attempt more mundane tasks such as organising notes.

When planning your week, remember to balance your long-term commitments with your short term ones. Effective time management involves doing the right thing at the right time.

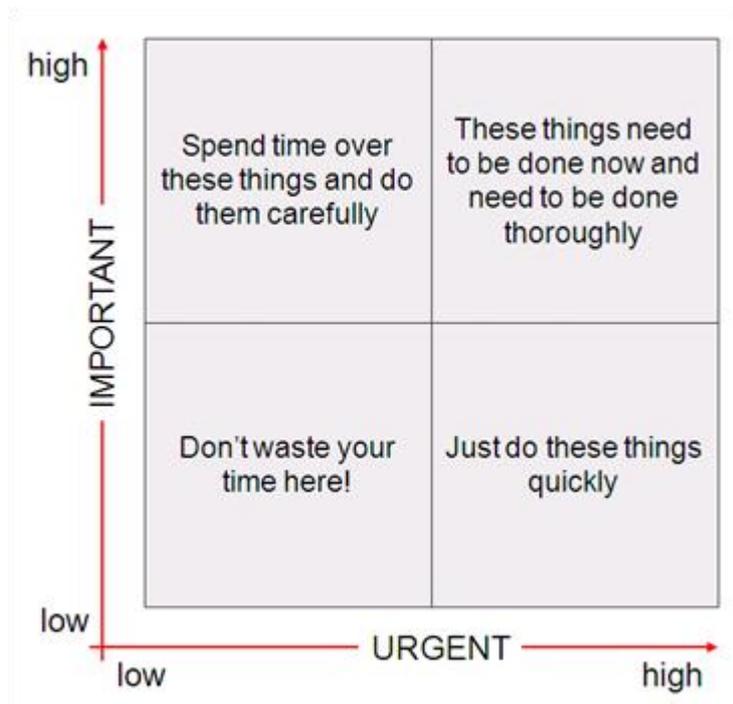
Planning a day

As each new day approaches, review your week plan to make sure that it is up to date. Make a 'to do' list for each day if this will help focus your activities.

- Use your day plan to add discipline to your working day.
- Be active with your plan. Tick off completed tasks and keep a check on uncompleted activity.
- Avoid overburdening your day plan - only set out to complete realistic tasks.

4. Setting priorities

You may find that within a week you will need to tackle more than one task at a time. Find a way of putting multiple tasks in order, establishing a list of priorities. A priority graph (shown below) can be used to judge whether something is a priority or not. Put a cross on the graph for each task you need to complete. If it goes in the top right corner (Important/Urgent) it is an immediate priority. If it goes in the bottom left corner (Not Urgent/Unimportant), you should question why you were thinking about doing it in the first place!



5. Reviewing progress

It is important to continually review your planning strategy to make sure that it is up to date (an ineffective time manager allows all of their priority points to slide towards the top right hand corner of their graph when everything is urgent and everything needs to be done yesterday!). Try to avoid this by forward planning, predicting any possible glitches and pitfalls.

Part two: using time

It is important to find ways of motivating your mind and stimulating your thoughts when working for an extended period. The following tips look at ways of keeping your mind fresh and active whilst studying. Always remember to avoid passive behaviour. Work actively, pursuing goals, achieving targets and reaping rewards.

Getting started

Begin a work session by making sure that the task is achievable in the time set. Split a task that's too big into smaller tasks. Also, make sure that you are clear about the task itself. Setting clear, attainable goals will improve your motivation considerably.

- Set a definite end point - "I know I will have finished when...".
- Set clear rewards - "When I have finished I will ..."

If you have a few study tasks that you don't enjoy doing, try forcing yourself to do these at the beginning of a work session. Get them over and done with so that you can reward yourself with more interesting work. Above all, avoid putting them to the end of your 'to do' list - they will stay there forever!

Keeping going

Make sure that you introduce variety into your work. Avoid doing the same thing for hours on end; your brain will soon tire and you will cease to be productive. Break up long periods of activity by checking what you have achieved or reviewing your objectives. Make the most of natural breaks; pause when you come to the end of a chapter or complete an exercise. Take these opportunities to reward yourself and rekindle enthusiasm.

If you are really struggling to maintain concentration, stop and review your activities. You might not have set clear goals or engaged your mind in an active way. Avoid pushing on regardless of your ability to concentrate; you will rarely be productive and will be wasting your energies.

Taking breaks

Take breaks when and if you need to. This may be when your concentration is slipping, or when you have been staring at the computer screen for too long. However, try to avoid distractions such as an interesting television programme or a conversation with friends. Keep your mind focused on your work; this is important if you are to resume work in a productive and focused way.

Knowing when to stop

Once you have achieved your tasks, stop working. Maintain a sense of achievement and carry this through to your next work session. Avoid starting things you know you won't be able to finish or might be too tired to devote proper time to. If you have spare time, reward yourself with something interesting but unessential.

Know your own obstacles

There are many reasons why we avoid using time effectively. Some of these include:

- lack of motivation;
- poor concentration;
- noisy working environment.

Try to be active in overcoming your personal obstacles. If you know you try and ignore less interesting or difficult tasks then tackle them straight away before rewarding yourself with more stimulating work.

Summary

Organising your time is a personal process. You will need to find a way of monitoring and planning your activities that suits you. If you prefer written lists then use them. If you prefer to work from plans and diagrams then use those instead. Continually reflect upon your approach to planning. Make it work for you.

- Be clear about what you have got to do and when it has got to be done by.
- Use a term planner to help gauge your productivity over time.
- Use a week planner to set a clear agenda for the week ahead.
- Use a 'to do' list as a prompt to remind you of the tasks you have dedicated to that day.
- Use time effectively by setting and sticking to clear realistic objectives.

Referencing and bibliographies

This brief study guide aims to help you to understand why you should include references to the information sources that you use to underpin your writing. It explains the main principles of accurately referencing such sources in your work.

Why reference?

When you are writing an essay, report, dissertation or any other form of academic writing, your own thoughts and ideas inevitably build on those of other writers, researchers or teachers. It is essential that you acknowledge your debt to the sources of data, research and ideas on which you have drawn by including references to, and full details of, these sources in your work. Referencing your work allows the reader:

- to distinguish your own ideas and findings from those you have drawn from the work of others;
- to follow up in more detail the ideas or facts that you have referred to.

Before you write

Whenever you read or research material for your writing, make sure that you include in your notes, or on any photocopied material, the full publication details of each relevant text that you read. These details should include:

- surname(s) and initial(s) of the author(s);
- the date of publication;
- the title of the text;
- if it is a paper, the title of the journal and volume number;
- if it is a chapter of an edited book, the book's title and editor(s)
the publisher and place of publication*;
- the first and last page numbers if it is a journal article or a chapter in an edited book.

For particularly important points, or for parts of texts that you might wish to quote word for word, also include in your notes the specific page reference.

* Please note that the publisher of a book should not be confused with the printer. The publisher's name is normally on a book's main title page, and often on the book's spine too.

When to use references

Your source should be acknowledged every time the point that you make, or the data or other information that you use, is substantially that of another writer and not your own. As a very rough guide, while the introduction and the conclusions to your writing might be largely based on your own ideas, within the main body of your report, essay or dissertation, you would expect to be drawing on, and thus referencing your debt to, the work of others in each main section or paragraph. Look at the ways in which your sources use references in their own work, and for further guidance consult the companion guide [Avoiding Plagiarism](#).

Referencing styles

There are many different referencing conventions in common use. Each department will have its own preferred format, and every journal or book editor has a set of 'house rules'. This guide aims to explain the general principles by giving details of the two most commonly used formats, the '**author, date**' system and **footnotes** or **endnotes**. Once you have understood the principles common to all referencing systems you should be able to apply the specific rules set by your own department.

How to reference using the 'author, date' system

In the 'author, date' system (often referred to as the 'Harvard' system) very brief details of the source from which a discussion point or piece of factual information is drawn are included in the text. Full details of the source are then given in a reference list or bibliography at the end of the text. This allows the writer to fully acknowledge her/his sources, without significantly interrupting the flow of the writing.

1. Citing your source within the text

As the name suggests, the citation in the text normally includes the name(s) (surname only) of the author(s) and the date of the publication. This information is usually included in brackets at the most appropriate point in the text.

The seminars that are often a part of humanities courses can provide opportunities for students to develop the communication and interpersonal skills that are valued by employers (Lyon, 1992).

The text reference above indicates to the reader that the point being made draws on a work by Lyon, published in 1992. An alternative format is shown in the example below.

Knapper and Cropley (1991: p. 44) believe that the willingness of adults to learn is affected by their attitudes, values and self-image and that their capacity to learn depends greatly on their study skills.

Note that in this example reference has been made to a specific point within a very long text (in this instance a book) and so a page number has been added. This gives the reader the opportunity to find the particular place in the text where the point referred to is made. You should **always** include the page number when you include a passage of direct quotation from another writer's work.

When a publication has several authors, it is usual to give the surname of the first author followed by et al. (an abbreviation of the Latin for 'and the others') although for works with just two authors both names may be given, as in the example above.

Do not forget that you should also include reference to the source of any **tables of data**, **diagrams** or **maps** that you include in your work. If you have included a straight copy of a table or figure, then it is usual to add a reference to the table or figure caption thus:

Figure 1: The continuum of influences on learning (from Knapper and Cropley, 1991: p. 43).

Even if you have reorganised a table of data, or redrawn a figure, you should still acknowledge its source:

Table 1: Type of work entered by humanities graduates (data from Lyon, 1992: Table 8.5).

You may need to cite an **unpublished** idea or discussion point from an oral presentation, such as a **lecture**. The format for the text citation is normally exactly the same as for a published work and should give the speaker's name and the date of the presentation.

Recent research on the origins of early man has challenged the views expressed in many of the standard textbooks (Barker, 1996).

If the idea or information that you wish to cite has been told to you personally, perhaps in a discussion with a lecturer or a tutor, it is normal to reference the point as shown in the example below.

The experience of the Student Learning Centre at Leicester is that many students are anxious to improve their writing skills, and are keen to seek help and guidance (Maria Lorenzini, pers. comm.).

'Pers. comm.' stands for personal communication; no further information is usually required.

2. Reference lists/ bibliographies

When using the 'author, date' system, the brief references included in the text must be followed up with full publication details, usually as an **alphabetical** reference list or bibliography at the end of your piece of work. The examples given below are used to indicate the main principles.

Book references

The simplest format, for a book reference, is given first; it is the full reference for one of the works quoted in the examples above.

Knapper, C.K. and Cropley, A. 1991: Lifelong Learning and Higher Education. London: Croom Helm.

The reference above includes:

- the surnames and forenames or initials of both the authors;

- the date of publication;
- the book title;
- the place of publication;
- the name of the publisher.

The title of the book should be formatted to distinguish it from the other details; in the example above it is italicised, but it could be in bold, underlined or in inverted commas. When multi-authored works have been quoted, it is important to include the names of all the authors, even when the text reference used was *et al.*

Papers or articles within an edited book

A reference to a paper or article within an edited book should in addition include:

- the editor and the title of the book;
- the first and last page numbers of the article or paper.

Lyon, E.S. 1992: Humanities graduates in the labour market. In H. Eggins (ed.), *Arts Graduates, their Skills and their Employment*. London: The Falmer Press, pp. 123-143.

Journal articles

Journal articles must also include:

- the name and volume number of the journal;
- the first and last page numbers of the article.

The publisher and place of publication are not normally required for journals.

Pask, G. 1979: Styles and strategies of learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46, pp. 128-148.

Note that in the last two references above, it is the book title and the journal name that are italicised, **not** the title of the paper or article. The name highlighted should always be the name under which the work will have been filed on the library shelves or referenced in any indexing system. It is often the name which is written on the spine of the volume, and if you remember this it may be easier for you to remember which is the appropriate title to highlight.

Other types of publications

The three examples above cover the most common publication types. You may also wish to refer to other types of publications, including PhD dissertations, translated works, newspaper articles, dictionary or encyclopaedia entries or legal or historical texts. The same general principles apply to the referencing of all published sources, but for specific conventions

consult your departmental handbook or your tutor, or look at the more detailed reference books listed in the Further reading section of this guide.

Referencing web pages

The internet is increasingly used as a source of information and it is just as important to reference internet sources as it is to reference printed sources. Information on the internet changes rapidly and web pages move or are sometimes inaccessible meaning it can often be difficult to validate or even find information cited from the internet. When referencing web pages it is helpful to include details that will help other people check or follow up the information. A suggested format is to include the author of the information (this may be an individual, group or organisation), the date the page was put on the internet (most web pages have a date at the bottom of the page), the title, the http:// address, and the date you accessed the web page (in case the information has been subsequently modified). A format for referencing web pages is given below.

University of Leicester Standing Committee of Deans (6/8/2002) Internet code of practice and guide to legislation. Accessed 8/8/02

<http://www.le.ac.uk/committees/deans/codecode.html>

Referencing lectures

Full references to unpublished oral presentations, such as lectures, usually include the speaker's name, the date of the lecture, the name of the lecture or of the lecture series, and the location:

Barker, G. 1996 (7 October): The Archaeology of Europe, Lecture 1. University of Leicester.

Please note that in contrast to the format used for the published sources given in the first three examples above, the formatting of references for unpublished sources does not include italics, as there is no publication title to highlight.

Formatting references

If you look carefully at all the examples of full references given above, you will see that there is a consistency in the ways in which punctuation and capitalisation have been used. There are many other ways in which references can be formatted - look at the books and articles you read for other examples and at any guidelines in your course handbooks. The only rule governing formatting is the rule of **consistency**.

How to reference using footnotes or endnotes

Some academic disciplines prefer to use footnotes (notes at the foot of the page) or endnotes (notes at the end of the work) to reference their writing. Although this method differs in style from the 'author, date' system, its purpose - to acknowledge the source of ideas, data or quotations without undue interruption to the flow of the writing - is the same.

Footnote or endnote markers, usually a sequential series of numbers either in brackets or slightly above the line of writing or printing (superscript), are placed at the appropriate point

in the text. This is normally where you would insert the author and date if you were using the 'author, date' system described above.

Employers are not just looking for high academic achievement and have identified competencies that distinguish the high performers from the average graduate.¹ This view has been supported by an early study that demonstrated that graduates employed in the industrial and commercial sectors were as likely to have lower second and third class degrees as firsts and upper seconds.²

Full details of the reference are then given at the bottom of the relevant page or, if endnotes are preferred, in numerical order at the end of the writing. Rules for the formatting of the detailed references follow the same principles as for the reference lists for the 'author, date' system.

1. Moore, K. 1992: National Westminster Bank plc. In H. Eggins (ed.), *Arts Graduates, their Skills and their Employment*. London: The Falmer Press, pp. 24-26.

2. Kelsall, R.K., Poole, A. and Kuhn, A. 1970: *Six Years After*. Sheffield: Higher Education Research Unit, Sheffield University, p. 40.

NB. The reference to 'p.40' at the end of note 2 above implies that the specific point referred to is to be found on page 40 of the book referenced.

If the same source needs to be referred to several times, on second or subsequent occasions, a shortened reference may be used.

Studies of women's employment patterns have demonstrated the relationship between marital status and employment sector.³

3. Kelsall et al. 1970 (as n.2 above).

In this example, the footnote refers the reader to the full reference to be found in footnote 2.

In some academic disciplines, footnotes and endnotes are not only used for references, but also to contain elaborations or explanations of points made in the main text. If you are unsure about how to use footnotes or endnotes in your work, consult your departmental guidelines or personal tutor.

Finally

Whichever referencing system you use, you should check carefully to make sure that:

- you have included in your reference list/bibliography, footnotes or endnotes full details of all the sources referred to in your text;
- you have used punctuation and text formatting, such as italics, capitals, and bold text, in a consistent manner in your reference lists or footnotes.

Further reading

More detailed discussion of referencing conventions is to be found in the following publications:

- Berry, R. 2004: *The Research Project: How to Write It*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Gash, S. 1999: *Effective Literature Searching for Students* (second edition). Aldershot: Gower.
- Gibaldi, J. 2004: *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (sixth edition). New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Watson, G. 1987: *Writing a Thesis: a Guide to Long Essays and Dissertations*. London: Longman.

There are also software programs, for example, [Endnote](#) and [Refworks](#) that are designed to manage references. They include the facility to incorporate 'author, date' insertions within your text, and to format reference lists automatically.

Revision and exam skills

This Study Guide tackles the topic of revision for exams. Many of the ideas it contains are from discussions with students who have come for study consultations provided by Student Development.

Revision is a personal, individual process

Revision must be one of the most individualised processes within academic life. Students begin it with:

- different sets of knowledge and understandings;
- different responses to the stress of the revision and exam period;
- different preferred revision techniques; and
- different psychological and life contexts into which to fit the revision.

While it is possible to get ideas from others and from books, about how to revise, you also need to get to know what your own personal strengths and weaknesses are. How much do you already know? How do you revise? What are the factors that usually cause problems for you in managing your revision?

The following list may be useful in identifying combinations of contexts in which you prefer to revise.

- Early-mid morning
- Mid-late morning
- Early-mid afternoon
- Mid-late afternoon
- Early-mid evening
- Mid-late evening
- In the library
- In a cafe
- On a bus/train journey
- At home
- Outside

- In your own department
- On your own in silence
- On your own with background music
- With someone else but working independently
- With someone else and working interactively
- In a revision tutorial

Different stages of revision can fit with different contexts. Early on you may prefer to work individually; mid-morning, in silence, at home. Later, you may prefer to work mid-afternoon, interactively, in a café. The important thing is that you match the type of revision you are doing with the context in which you, personally, are able to do that best.

Taking control

It is easy to feel overwhelmed. You may feel that the task is too big, and that whatever you do you will not succeed. It is important to appreciate the size of the task, but it is also important to be realistic about what you can do in the time available. The revision and exam period will inevitably involve stress. You need to monitor this and, ideally, make it work *for* you not against you.

The key is to be realistic. Yes, you will have less free time temporarily. No, you will not have to go without free time completely.

If you find yourself feeling generally worried, give yourself 10 minutes to write down exactly what it is that you are worrying about. You are then in a better position to devise some strategies for addressing those specific concerns. You can compare the concept of ‘revision’ with that of athletic ‘training’. First read the following list as it stands. Then try reading it again but substituting: ‘students’ for ‘athletes’; ‘revision’ for ‘training’; and ‘exams’ for ‘competition’.

Athletes in training

- Athletes need to consider both the quantity and the quality of their training.
- Training volume is essential, but so is planned recovery time, otherwise athletes will experience ‘burn-out’, and performance in competition will drop.
- Training needs to be tailored closely to what will be required in competition, rather than just being random, unstructured effort that will fill in time but not bring the rewards in competition.
- Athletes have stronger aspects of their performance, which they need to maintain and capitalise on. But they also need to work on their weaknesses to achieve a successful overall performance.
- Athletes need a high degree of self-awareness to know how they personally respond to training and to recovery, so they can optimise their performance on the day.
- By planning training sensibly, it will be possible to schedule in high quality sessions close to competition, but also to schedule in appropriate rest to support top performance on the day.

Quality above quantity

It is important to focus on the quality rather than just the quantity of your revision. This means that, whatever time you do spend revising, you try to make sure that it:

- is quality time;
- with full concentration; and
- with the most appropriate revision method.

Just as recovery has to be built into physical training sessions to optimise the training effect of the effort, so breaks need to be built into the revision schedule to give the brain time to consolidate the learning.

Set a realistic, definite time to stop each revision session. This should help to maintain the quality of each session. **The session should be short enough to guarantee your full attention throughout.** You could:

- agree with yourself that you will exclude other distractions for that period of revision;
- decide your specific revision goals for that session;
- allow yourself to be totally focussed for that period, knowing that, when it ends, you can walk away.

Another way to use short specific time slots to do quality revision sessions is to look for opportunities to **mix revision productively with other activities**. For example:

- a bus or train journey could give you a defined and limited block of time during which you could rehearse in your mind an explanation of a topic;
- you could take an exam question or two on a walk or a run with you.

You could find that being outside and getting exercise will have a dual benefit of keeping fit and freeing your brain to think laterally around the topic in question.

Scoping the task

The earlier you can scope the size and characteristics of the revision task the better. Make a systematic list of exactly what you need to cover, and in what depth. This allows you to collect further information or resources to support your revision before you start the serious work. Make sure you have any information that is available on what is expected of you and, importantly, what you are not expected to revise.

Active versus passive revision

Active revision is much more effective than *passive* revision. Passive revision is associated with such activities as reading notes, and copying material. Active revision is concerned with **using** and **organising** material.

Unfortunately, the basic revision technique, on which most other ideas are built, of:

reading and understanding the material; ‘**reducing**’ it to a smaller amount of material in note form; reviewing this again; reducing it again perhaps to a list of bullet points

...can become a passive, time consuming exercise if you aren’t careful.

While this kind of activity may legitimately form the foundation of your revision, you need to make sure you do not spend huge amounts of time copying material in a passive way.

Active and passive learning can be compared with the concepts of *recognition* and *recall*. It is much easier to *recognise* someone's name when you are told it, than it is to *recall* their name without any clues. Similarly it is much easier to read through a page of notes and think, "Yes, I know this", than it is to cover up the page and to give a talk on the topic.

Words associated with an active approach to revision

- organise
- select
- interpret
- link
- explore
- use
- calculate
- explain
- recall
- categorise
- teach
- reorganise
- develop
- argue
- diagnose

The University of Edinburgh has a useful section on revision on its website. It gives some suggestions for ways of making your revision active:

“Revising actively implies making a real effort to understand what you are learning, rather than simply memorising by rote. Even if your exams require you to remember a lot of facts, you are much more likely to retain detailed information if it is related to an underlying understanding. There are many ways to achieve this; here are some suggestions you might like to try:

- Looking for underlying themes or principles.
- Thinking about inter-relationships.
- Relating what you are learning to 'real-life' situations.
- Thinking how the solution to one problem may help you solve others.
- Organising material into a hierarchical structure.
- Creating a diagram or chart to represent a topic.
- Looking for similarities or differences.
- Looking for points for and against an argument.
- Trying to really understand how formulae work.
- Critically evaluating what you are learning.
- Discussing topics with a friend.”

([Source](#))

Timetabling

There are several different stages in revision, and it is likely that you will want to cover some elements of your syllabus several times in slightly different ways. When you are preparing your revision timetable you need to build in repeat sessions where possible. Here are three timetable designs you might find useful.

Planner A: Possible design of a planner to cover the whole revision period

M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	Sun
M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	Sun
M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	Sun

Planner B: Possible design of a planner to cover the forthcoming week

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sat	Sun
Early-mid am							
Mid-late am							
Early-mid pm							
Late pm							

Planner C: Possible design of a planner to cover the next day

9-10	
10-11	
11-12	

On Planner A you can:

1. mark when the exams are;
2. block out time that you already know will be unavailable e.g.: sporting event, concert etc.
3. work back from each exam and schedule in repeat and last minute revision sessions for each topic, close to the relevant exam.
4. within the exam period itself you will probably be able to schedule in revision sessions for the later exams, once earlier exams are out of the way: this should free up time earlier on.

Use Planners B and C to take more specific control on a weekly and daily basis. Again be sure to be **realistic** about how much quality revision you can do at a time before you need a break.

You could start by revising a couple of topics that you feel quite confident about. This could remind you of the level you need to aim for with the rest of the topics. It could also let you feel you've made a solid start.

Monitor how things are going

It is vital to monitor regularly how your revision is going, and to modify your plans accordingly. If you find that it is taking longer than you anticipated, there are several options:

- add in more revision sessions;
- change your revision style to become more efficient;
- if you really have to, then be more selective and reduce the amount you plan to do.

By monitoring your experiences in the early days of revision, it should be possible to modify your revision timetable for the remaining time so that it works most effectively for you.

Be ready to step up your revision techniques

You may find that revision techniques you have used very successfully in the past now need to be modified, extended, or changed in some way to cope with new challenges. Take a critical and honest look at your revision habits. If you find they are not up to the task ahead, find new ways of working. You may find you can make significant improvements. It may even feel as if you have created more time.

Memory techniques

In addition to reading, understanding, and making revision notes, you may feel that you need to use some specific memory techniques to remember collections of facts, or processes. Discover the potential of mnemonics. A mnemonic is a device by which you think of something quite easy to remember, which then prompts you to remember material that is more difficult to remember. A famous mnemonic based on the initial letters of words is 'Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain' for the order of the colours of the rainbow. Two musical examples are: 'Every Good Boy Deserves Food' for the names of the lines on the treble clef; and 'Father Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle' for the order in which sharps appear in a key signature.

Some disciplines have their own favourites. You can also make up your own mnemonics to help you remember list of ideas, questions, stages, dimensions etc. You could also use a mnemonic to **make sure you don't miss out a crucial stage in a process, or a dimension of a problem.**

Similar to a mnemonic is the amazingly useful **list of simple questions** that you can use to practise lateral thinking around a topic: what? how? where? when? who? why? so what? This list can be useful within the exam to help you think around possible answers to a question, or possible essay plans to use.

When memorising a lot of material you will need to find a range of methods that suit you. Typical advice is to use **associations, diagrams, mind maps, narratives, colours, places** and so on, to link course content to memorable images or experiences.

Testing yourself

As you revise you could **create a list of questions relating to what you've just revised.** When you come back to that topic you could start by seeing how you do with those questions. This will highlight where you need to pay particular attention.

It's always a good idea to see how much you can remember about a topic **before** you look at your notes again. You could try allowing yourself time to think through as much as you can before returning to your notes. Thinking hard through a topic like this means that, when you finally check out your notes, you can quickly identify which elements you had forgotten about, and be ready to slot them firmly into your memory.

'**Mind maps**' or '**thought maps**' are useful if you want to find out how much you can remember on a topic. After you have written down everything you can remember, try to extend the map by adding more to each branch e.g.: a link, an idea, a query, extra description, references, a debate point, or a conclusion.

Explaining

A particularly effective way of engaging actively with what you are revising is to learn about a topic then to try to **explain it in your own words**. You don't necessarily need any audience except yourself. By trying to explain a topic you quickly discover which aspects you understand and remember well, and which you need to investigate and revise further. Be prepared to have a good go at the explanation before reaching for the answers.

Group work

Although revision is very much an individual process, it is surprising how much you can gain by working with others for some revision sessions, either in pairs or in larger groups. Some of the work is best done face to face, but some can be done using electronic communication.

Ideas include:

- revising different but closely related topics in advance, then each giving a short talk on their topic, with the others asking questions;
- revising the same topic and coming together to talk about what you've learnt and what you can't understand/remember;
- creating practice exam questions as you revise and putting these into a collective pool of questions that you can all dip into;
- swapping mnemonics you've made up. When you ask someone else to explain something that you don't understand you will gain from their help.
- When someone else asks for your help, you gain by having to provide a comprehensive, clear and informed explanation.

Working with exam questions

If your exam will involve **tackling a problem, or doing calculations**, active revision is crucial. Passive revision would be to read through a completed calculation, or the solution to a problem, and to say to yourself, 'Yes, I can follow that'. Active revision involves working through a new question or problem on your own. For example:

- in mathematics, it is not enough to follow through calculations: you need to practise doing them on your own;
- in medicine, it is not enough to learn material by rote within each topic: you need to practise making links across topics;
- in law, it is not enough to read through cases: you may need to find or create case studies to practise on;

- in psychology it is not enough to read through examples of how statistical tests can be used, you need to try to work through them for yourself.

If essays are required, however, it is not best use of your time to practise writing full essay responses to exam questions. It may be useful to do this once or twice if you want to, to get an idea of the timing, but this is probably not the most efficient or effective way of using your revision time.

Skeleton essays

More useful than practising writing full essays is to practise creating **essay plans**, or ‘**skeleton essays**’. These are a bit like a site map for a website: they will include the main headings relating to the planned structure of your essay, and the associated sub-headings of examples, arguments, and references, etc, but the full content would not appear unless you wrote the full essay.

Allow yourself ten minutes to prepare a detailed plan for your essay, so that writing it would then be straightforward. You will thus have practised the hard part of remembering and selecting information, and creating the best structure for its presentation, but will have taken only ten minutes.

Remember that there may be several ways to answer to a question, and you need to identify the most effective approach to take. Practise identifying the biggest turning point / the information of most consequence / the best examples / the most powerful evidence.

When you practise creating essay plans for exam questions, a four-stage approach can be useful:

- Squeeze everything you can out of the essay title to make sure that you fully understand it and that you are addressing each element of it.
- Brainstorm all relevant ideas onto paper, including references, examples, arguments, queries, links...
- Match up ideas to aspects of the title and organise them into the most powerful order.
- Squeeze out more ideas using a systematic approach of, for example, adding dimensions or asking why, where, who, what, where, when etc, or whatever questions are appropriate to your subject.

Timings in the exam

It is useful to plan how you will allocate your time within the exam. This is not necessarily relevant for exams where short answers are required. Where you will need to write essays, however, it is important to know how much time you can allocate to each individual essay.

Here is an example of a timings plan for a 2 hour exam: 13.00-15.00; where you need to write 3 essays.

13.00-13.05 = settling in; reading instructions; noting down your timings plan; making initial essay choices.

- 13.05-13.45 = essay 1: 5 minutes planning; 35 minutes writing

- 13.45-14.25 = essay 2: 5 minutes planning; 35 minutes writing
- 14.25-15.00 = essay 3: 5 minutes planning; 30 minutes writing

Make sure that you make as good an attempt as you can for ALL of your responses. In general it is considerably **easier to get the first 50% of marks for each question than it is to get the second 50%**. So, for example, make sure that you make a significant effort for each essay rather than using too much extra time on your favourite ones. With an essay-based exam it can be useful to begin with the question for which you can think of the most material. This can boost your confidence and get your thoughts flowing. In a paper with no choice of questions, it can be most productive to go through the paper answering all of the questions that you are sure of. This will stimulate your thoughts and help you recall information, putting you in a more active frame of mind for when you go back to the start and give more thought to the remaining questions.

On the start line

When you are waiting to go into the exam room there is no point looking backwards over what you haven't covered; what you never understood; or what you thought you'd learnt but can't seem to remember. All you can influence now is the future. You are where you are: now you have to make the best of what you've got.

Athletes at the start of a race can't do anything about the training they missed. There is no point in worrying about whether they are less well-prepared than they had hoped. All they can influence now is what happens after the starting gun goes off. They need to concentrate fully on the race ahead, and use their training as best they can.

Go!

Here are some ideas to help you in the exam:

- Begin by checking *very carefully* the instructions of the exam paper. Highlight or underline the key instructions.
- Note down (and check) any timings plan you have prepared, so you have it to refer to, and to stop you spending too much or too little time on one question.
- Where there is a choice of tasks or essays, check out the potential of all of the options before making your decision.
- For an essay-based paper, it can be helpful to begin with the title for which you have the most to write. This can boost your confidence, and get you into the swing of planning and writing exam essays.
- Do not be rushed into starting to write your first essay. Remember to take adequate time to prepare a strong essay plan first.
- Even if you have already written a similar essay before, try to bring fresh energy on this occasion.
- Don't waste energy judging a question. You may think it's irrelevant, or boring, or badly phrased, but put those feelings to one side. Re-read the question to check if there was anything you missed.
- Respect the question. Take time to 'listen' to the question before thinking of the answer, rather than assuming that you know what the question will be. It may be slightly different from what you expect.

- Read all parts of a question before beginning to answer. In that way you can see how the examiner has divided the knowledge between the different parts of the question, so you can be sure to focus on the specific response needed for each part.
- If there is a question you cannot answer, leave it and continue with the rest of the paper. Come back later to make your best effort with the question(s) you left out.

Successful group projects

This study guide has been written for students undertaking group projects as part of their course. It will help you to manage your group activities effectively, increase group performance and maximise the benefits of group assessment.

Group work at university

There are many occasions when you will be asked to work with other students on your course: tutorials and seminars rely on group discussion whilst group projects involve students working together to complete a piece of assessed work. This guide focuses in particular on group projects that involve such activities as:

- researching and writing a report;
- devising and writing up an experiment;
- working to a design brief to design a new product or service.

Group projects often involve a substantial task that is undertaken over an extended period. You may be required to manage your own work independently of your teaching staff and the outcomes of your group's work (a report, poster or presentation) may be assessed in a variety of different ways. Advice on assessment methods can be found later on in this guide.

The benefits of group work

Whatever form the group work takes on your course, the opportunity to work with others, rather than on your own, can provide distinct benefits.

- **Increased productivity and performance:** groups that work well together can achieve much more than individuals working on their own. A broader range of skills can be applied to practical activities and sharing and discussing ideas can play a pivotal role in deepening your understanding of a particular subject area.
- **Skills development:** being part of a team will help you develop your interpersonal skills such as speaking and listening as well as team working skills such as leadership, and working with and motivating others. Some of these skills will be useful throughout your academic career and all are valued by employers.
- **Knowing more about yourself:** collaborating with [others](#) will help identify your own strengths and weaknesses (for example, you may be a better leader than listener, or you might be good at coming up with the 'big ideas' but not so good at putting them into action). Enhanced self-awareness will both [help](#) your approach to learning and will be invaluable when you come to write your CV or complete job application forms.

In order to maximise these benefits, you will need to manage your group work effectively.

Stages in group work

To ensure a successful group outcome, [you](#) will find it helpful to divide your activities into a series of stages:

- familiarisation;
- planning and preparation;
- implementation;
- completion.

Managing each of these stages effectively will greatly enhance your group performance.

Stage One - Familiarisation

This is the stage when the individual members of the group get to know each other and begin to understand the task they need to undertake. Time spent at this stage discussing your individual areas of interest and skills will be invaluable in helping your group [develop](#) a sense of its own identity (including its strengths and weaknesses).

Make sure everyone understands what it is they will need to achieve. Think about:

- the product: i.e. a report, oral presentation or poster
what guidelines have been set by your department to govern this work?
- the time scale: i.e. date of final presentation or submission
what things need to be done before you hand in your work?
how much time should you spend on the group project in relation to your other commitments?
- the assessment: i.e. the way your activity or output will be marked
do you know the assessment criteria?
will you be assessed as a group or as individuals?

If your group needs clarification of any of these issues then consult your course tutor.

Stage Two - Planning and preparation

This is the stage when your group should plan exactly what needs to be done, how it needs to be done, and who should do what. Pay attention to the following:

- agree the different elements of the task (e.g. a poster might involve background research, written text, an overall design, graphs and images, final assembly and so on);
- agree the best way of achieving these tasks by dividing areas of responsibility amongst the group, making sure that roles and time commitments are as evenly balanced as possible;
- make the most of your different areas of expertise by dividing tasks up according to the skills of different group members;
- make an action plan of what needs to be done by when, working towards the final deadline.

Stage Three - Implementation

Whilst your group carries out its tasks you will need to preserve your group's sense of purpose. Effective communication is vital, particularly when your group activity extends over time. Here are some tips to promote good communication.

- Share addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses at an early stage to facilitate contact between members of the group.
- If possible, set up an email distribution list for rapid communication so that issues or problems can be flagged up as and when they arise.
- Establish regular meetings of the whole group to check on progress and review action plans. Take notes at these meetings to help record complex discussions.

Stage Four - Completion

The final stage of your project is often the most difficult and may require a different management approach. It will be vital to ensure that you pay close attention to detail, tie up loose ends and review the whole product rather than your discrete part of it. It is important to regroup at this stage to agree a new action plan for the final burst of activity.

Trouble shooting

Occasionally, groups can run into trouble, and it is useful to be aware of some of the problems (and the appropriate solutions) right from the start. The following list highlights some of the most common difficulties.

- **Unfair division or take-up of labour between different group members:** this can lead to resentment if someone feels they are doing all the hard work or if the group thinks that one or more members aren't doing their fair share. Use your meetings to check that people are happy with their workloads and discuss problems openly, making sure that issues are addressed as a group concern rather than putting pressure on individuals.
- **Conflict between different group members:** this might arise for many different reasons including two people competing for leadership or simple disagreement about ways forward. Don't be afraid to rotate leadership responsibilities or find ways of accommodating differing opinions. Your group practices should be flexible and democratic rather than rigid and leader-led.
- **Tackling inappropriate tasks as a whole group:** groups are notoriously bad environments for carrying out such activities as writing first drafts of documents or carrying out detailed searches. Be aware of the limitations of group activity and don't be afraid to delegate responsibility for particular tasks to individuals.

Always consult your course tutor if there are overwhelming problems in your group. An independent voice can often help diffuse tension and help your group get back on the right track.

Making the most of assessment

Group work may be assessed in a number of ways. Most commonly, groups are asked to produce a single piece of assessed work (this could be an oral presentation or written report) whilst the individual members might be asked to provide a personal account of their work (this could be another report or a work diary). Group assessment can also take place through the use of a viva with small groups being interviewed together to discuss their work or individual group members interviewed in turn to talk about their contribution.

Planning effective oral presentations

If you are making a group presentation, make sure that this is written and rehearsed as a group. Share opportunities for speaking rather than making one person do all the work (unless there are too many people in your group or there just isn't enough time). Change speakers in strategic places, using the different voices to structure your presentation (e.g. one person could take the introduction, another the main discussion, a third the conclusions). Finally, use effective linking statements to announce the handover from one speaker to another, e.g.:

So far we've looked at the methods used in the design process. I would now like to hand over to Melissa to talk about the features of the final product.

Writing a group report

Writing a group report can be challenging. If you divide responsibility for drafting chapters or sections between the different members of your group, you will need to nominate someone to take overall responsibility for pulling the final piece together. Careful copyediting at this stage is essential to make sure that the document is logical and consistent. Key things to watch out for here include:

- have the authors used the same writing style (tense/voice/person)?
- do the individual sections lead on from each other logically?
- is the use of references, units, abbreviations and notation consistent?

You will need to make sure that you have left plenty of time for this final stage.

Preparing for your viva

If you have been asked to discuss your group's performance in a viva make sure that you meet to plan for this activity in the same way you planned your other work. This will give you an opportunity to address issues such as allocation of roles, time management and task completion. Use the notes from your group meetings to evaluate your group's performance, identifying negative as well as positive aspects (no group performs flawlessly all of the time). Remember to talk about your group's performance as a group rather than discussing the performance of individual group members.

Summary

The skills acquired from successfully managed group work will be of great use to your academic and future careers. It is essential to manage your group work effectively, planning for the different stages of group activity. Time spent discussing how your group will work together will be invaluable in helping to create a constructive working team. The effective organisation, communication and trouble shooting strategies described in this guide will help your group work productively to complete its task.

This guide has been produced with the assistance of the Centre for Learning and Professional Development at the University of Aberdeen.

Thought mapping

This guide gives you a step by step introduction to a note making technique called thought mapping. This non-linear technique provides you with a note making tool that encourages active thinking and creativity. It can help you to create plans, increase recall and save time in a wide range of study tasks.

What is a non-linear technique?

Written information is most commonly presented to us in a linear format, i.e. sentences and phrases going left to right down a page. A non-linear format breaks away from this norm, making freer use of space and symbols. Varieties of this format include flow charts, spider diagrams and thought maps.

Why use a non-linear technique?

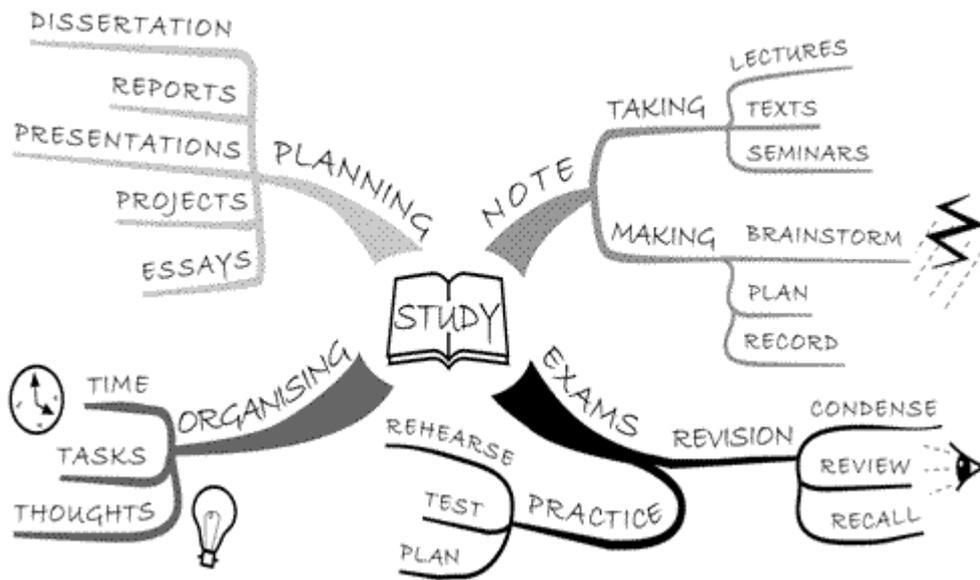
Non-linear techniques can provide a powerful graphic tool which uses word, image, number, logic, colour and spatial awareness.

- It can give you an overview of a large subject or topic area.
- It can gather and hold large amounts of data.
- It encourages active planning techniques by allowing you to see links and make connections.
- It is a useful memory aid.
- It is visually stimulating and aids concentration.

Introducing thought maps

This guide will show you a style of non-linear note taking called thought mapping. This particular technique uses keywords grouped around a central topic in a hierarchical structure. You will be shown how to:

- read a thought map
- make a thought map
- apply thought mapping to your own studies



Reading a thought map

The diagram on the previous page shows the different applications of thought mapping in study. A thought map uses keywords to represent points. This enables you to make the best use of space and to record a lot of information on just one page. To read this thought map:

- start in the centre where the subject is shown, in this case "STUDY";
- read the keywords that connect to the centre. These are the topic headings or main themes of the subject, in this case "PLANNING", "NOTES", "EXAMS", "ORGANISE";
- read each branch from the centre outwards. Each branch lists the points under each heading or theme. "ORGANISE" for example applies to "TIME", "TASKS" and "THOUGHTS";
- notice that some main headings divide into subheadings, for example: "EXAMS" divides into "REVISION" and "PRACTICE", with three different points under each subheading.

The same information is presented below in a linear format. The keywords used in the thought map have been highlighted for easy comparison.

Thought mapping can be applied to a variety of **study** tasks including **planning**, **note making**, **organising** and **exams**. Plans for **dissertations**, **reports**, **presentations**, **projects** and **essays** can be made with a thought map. It can be applied to **note taking** tasks in **lectures**, **seminars** and with **texts**, as well as with **note making** tasks such as **brainstorming** ideas, making initial **plans** for work or **recording** your own thoughts and ideas. When tackling **exams** this technique can be made use of in **revision** for **condensing**, **reviewing** and **recalling** material. It provides a quick way of **practising** exam answers, allowing you to **rehearse** ideas, try out **plans** and **test** your recall. Finally thought mapping can help with **organisation** skills, enabling you to overview your **thoughts**, manage your **time** and order everyday **tasks**.

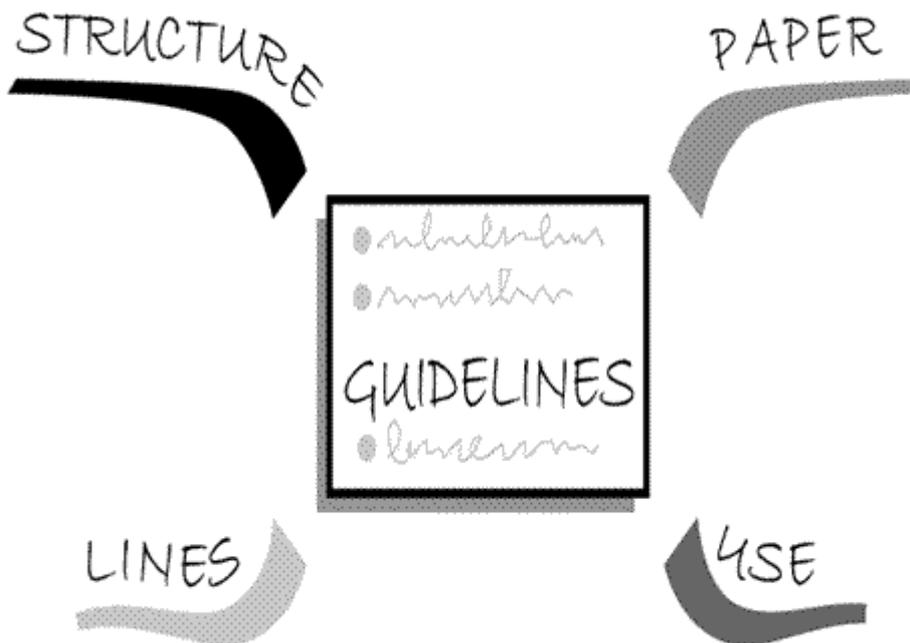
By comparing this paragraph with the thought map, you can see that a thought map presents the key aspects of information in an ordered format that provides a clear overview of the material.

Making a thought map

The following guidelines show you the three steps to making a thought map that is well organised and easy to read.

Step 1

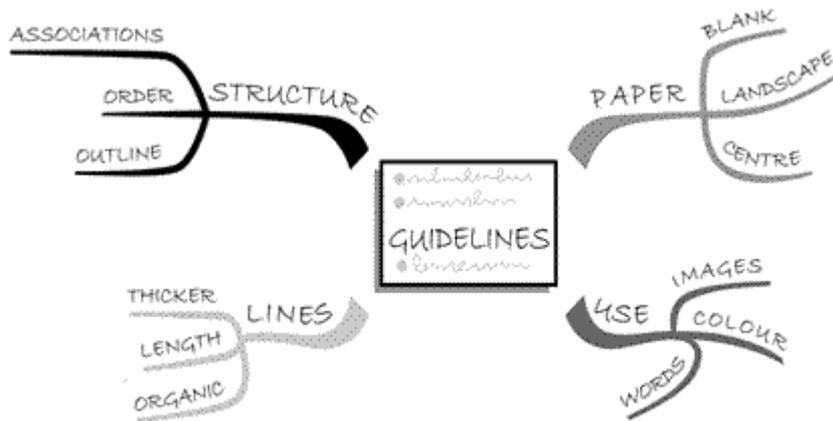
- Use blank paper, turned sideways (landscape).
- Start in the centre with an image and/or word that represents the topic of your thought map.
- Choose the keywords or images that will represent your main themes and put each one on a line that is connected to your topic in the centre.
- The best keywords are the ones that use your own personal associations to link the keyword to the point it represents.



Step 2

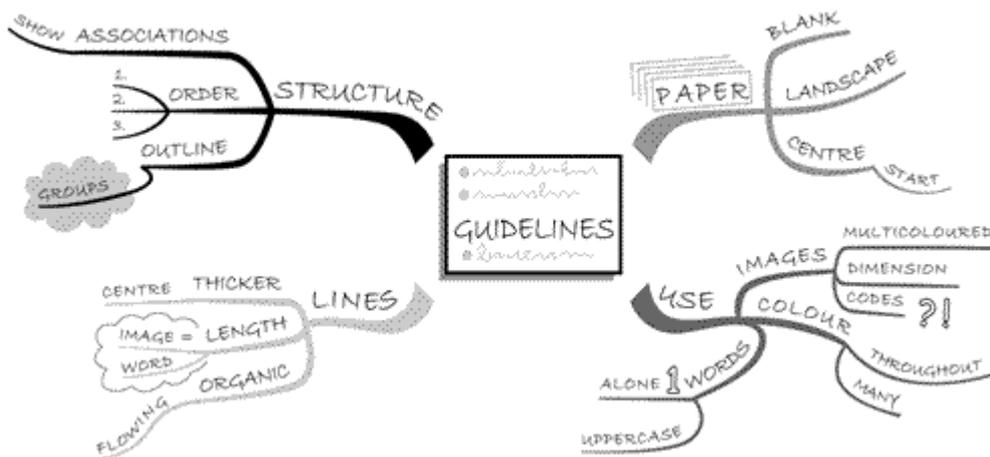
- Branch off from the main themes with points represented by keywords or images.
- Put each word or image on its own line.
- Make each line the same length as the word or image.
- Words and images are larger in the centre and smaller further out.

- Keep the lines thicker in the centre, thinning out towards the edges of your thought map. This helps to show the order of your material.



Step 3

- Add more levels of thought as necessary.
- Use colour to categorise your information and make the thought map visually stimulating. Use three or more colours for the central image and then use a different colour for each branch.
- Use symbols and images in place of keywords to represent a point concisely, or in addition to keywords to reinforce a point and aid recall.
- Keep your thought map clear and add levels of order by enclosing grouped branches, using numbers and showing links with arrows.



Once you are familiar with these guidelines, you can adapt the technique to your own particular needs. Develop your own personal style of thought mapping to make the best use of your own personal associations and thought processes.

Using thought maps

Use thought maps to plan essays, reports and presentations:

- label points in your linear notes with a keyword for each point in the margin;
- try out structures for your essay or report by using the keywords to create thought maps;
- try out a variety of structures in thought map form until you find the plan which shows the best order for your material.

Use a thought map in all note making tasks:

- it can be used to brainstorm your initial ideas on a topic, essay or presentation;
- it is a quick and efficient technique for making notes from texts and other written sources;
- it can be incorporated into your lecture notes to make your note taking an active process and to help you remember information;
- it can be used in seminars and tutorials to quickly record ideas and points that may arise.

Use thought maps in revision:

- create an overview of a topic or subject area using a thought map;
- condense notes into a form that is easier to remember;
- test your recall by recreating from memory a thought map of your notes. The visual image of the thought map will help you remember the information;
- practise planning exam answers by using a thought map. It will help you to order your ideas and make links and connections.

Use thought maps to organise your time:

- thought maps make effective 'to do' lists. They provide an overview which enables you to see what is a priority. Use colour to highlight or numbers to order important tasks;
- before beginning a task use a thought map to make an action plan of what needs to be done;
- organise your thoughts or ideas by making a thought map on a particular topic or issue. The structure of a thought map enables you to add new thoughts and ideas as they occur whilst the connecting nature of the map encourages active thinking processes.