



★
★
★
★
★
★
★
★
★
★

STAR

STUDY TIPS to ACHIEVE RESULTS



This edition of STAR (2010) has been revised by the Department of Adult Continuing Education (DACE) at Swansea University and funded in collaboration with the Reaching Wider South West Wales Partnership.

The information contained within the STAR Handbook was originally produced by the Community University of the Valleys Partnership (CUIVP) initiative, for which DACE was the lead partner. The Handbook was compiled from a variety of study skills resources and with contributions from a wide range of organisations linked to the CUIVP.

For further information on the Community University of the Valleys, please visit **www.cuv.org.uk**

**A copy of this document is available in Welsh/English on request.
Please contact your school/college who will be able to help you.**

Introduction

Welcome to the STAR (Study Tips to Achieve Results) Handbook. This is a Study Skills Handbook for students who are either about to embark upon or are currently undertaking studies in Year 12 and Year 13.

Studying a subject in depth for a specific qualification/award can broaden your knowledge, and help you achieve new understanding. That is why, in order to attain and maintain good results, as a student, you need to invest time and effort in your studies.

With this in mind the STAR Handbook gives advice on how to become an effective student to help you make the most of your time at school/college.

The STAR Handbook outlines and highlights specific study skills you will need to succeed. These include skills such as essay and report writing, preparing a presentation, revision and exam techniques.

Standards for essay writing and referencing can be confusing for many students so you are certainly not alone if you feel like this. However, your work will develop through practice and it can be surprising just how much your skills will improve over a period of time. The STAR Handbook aims to help you along the way.

Your teachers/tutors will also advise you about the skills you are expected to acquire and demonstrate during your course.

We hope you find the STAR Handbook useful and wish you well with your studies.



Contents

★ Section 1	Learning Styles
★ Section 2	Planning your Learning
★ Section 3	Researching and Managing Information
★ Section 4	Reading Effectively
★ Section 5	Thinking Skills
★ Section 6	Note Taking
★ Section 7	Essay Writing
★ Section 8	Report Writing
★ Section 9	Learning Journals
★ Section 10	Building a Portfolio
★ Section 11	Making Presentations
★ Section 12	Revision and Examination Techniques
★ Section 13	Referencing
★ Section 14	Grammar and Punctuation
★ Section 15	Additional Resources Available to You



Section 1

Learning Styles

If you think about, and are aware of how you learn, you can begin to identify learning approaches that work best for you.

This also means that you can select an approach which is the most appropriate for the essay, report or presentation that you are asked to write.

It is important to reflect on your past learning experiences. An awareness of how you like to work and what areas you think you could improve on, whether this is the way you read or interact with the rest of the group, will enable you to monitor your progression, and adjust your learning approaches where necessary.

What are Learning Styles?

There are several key theories about how people learn and various websites where you can assess your own natural learning style. The theories generally identify three main aspects of how people study:

- Taking in information • Processing information • Organising and presenting information

Learning styles affect every student. People prefer to learn in different ways, some like 'hands on' while some might learn from watching others. You will need to make the most of your strengths as a learner and practice methods that will allow you to build up the weaker areas. You may also have different learning styles for different types of learning. You will need to adopt the learning approaches that are most suitable for a particular task.

The VARK system (Fleming, 2001) assesses how much people rely on:

1. Visual (sight)
2. Auditory (hearing)
3. Reading
4. Kinaesthetic (includes touch and temperature as well as movement).

1. Advice for Visual Learners

- Use visual materials such as pictures, charts and maps
- Use colour to highlight your own copies of texts and notes
- Take notes or use handouts; look carefully at headings and patterns of topics
- Brainstorm using illustrations, mind maps and models
- Use multi-media where possible
- Study in a quiet place away from visual disturbances
- Visualise information you want to remember as a picture

2. Advice for Auditory Learners

- Participate frequently in discussions and debates
- Make speeches and presentations
- Use a Dictaphone or tape recorder if possible as well as making notes
- Read text aloud
- Create mnemonics to aid memory

The following mnemonics are sentences or phrases in which the initial letters of the words spell out a word which many people find rather tricky to spell.

ARITHMETIC - A Rat In The House May Eat The Ice Cream

GEOGRAPHY - General Eisenhower's Oldest Girl Rode A Pony Home Yesterday

RHYTHM - Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move

NECESSARY - Never Eat Cakes Eat Salmon Sandwiches And Remain Young

OCEAN - Only Cats' Eyes Are Narrow

BECAUSE - Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants

List order

Order of colours in the rainbow, or visual spectrum:

(Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet)

Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain

The order of planets in average distance from the Sun:

(Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto)

My Very Easy Method: Just Set Up Nine Planets

Source: www.fun-with-words.com/mnemonics.html

(There are many more fun word games on this site too.)

- Discuss your ideas verbally
- Speak into a Dictaphone or an audio tape and listen to your own ideas played back

3. Advice for Reading Learners

- Rewrite theories and ideas into your own words
- Make lists to help you access information
- Reorganise maps and diagrams into words
- Work with past exam papers

4. Advice for Kinaesthetic Learners

- If you use a physical style, use touch, action, movement and hands-on work in your learning activities
- Work with case studies and applications to help with particular theories
- Use pictures and photographs in your studies
- Participate in discussions

- Write practice papers
- Use bright colours to highlight notes
- Make notes whilst reading

Taking Control of your Learning

The Physical

How you feel physically can have a dramatic influence on your studies. Obviously you will not work as well if you are tired, hungry, thirsty, stressed or anxious. It is important to ensure, especially around an assignment deadline or exam time, that you have a healthy and balanced diet. Too much sugar will give you a quick burst of energy, but will soon leave you feeling sluggish. Alcohol also decreases the ability of your short term memory to function for at least 24 hours. The human concentration span is usually 45 minutes, so after this you will need to take a break otherwise you will not be working efficiently.

The Emotional

Emotions, whether positive or negative, can affect your learning so it is important to try and keep a positive attitude towards your learning. However, sometimes you do have to acknowledge the way you feel, and if you are feeling tired or anxious it is a good idea to take a break and then return with a clear mind. If you still cannot settle, it can help if you reflect and record your feelings and then go back to your studies. It can also help to keep a list of your goals, positive thoughts and actions and review them on a frequent basis. Remember, new challenges promote self esteem and positive thinking.

The Environment

It is always necessary to decide where you actually work best and which place is most conducive to learning. This might be your classroom, in the library, or a quiet room at home. You need to think about what distracts you: are you prone to gazing out of the window? If this is the case then move your table and chair around. Also, try to keep on top of all the rubbish that can accumulate with bits of paper and rough notes that are not relevant any more. An uncluttered space will enable you to work in a far more positive way. Deciding what time you work best is also something else to consider

The Psychological and your Support Network

Personal problems, outside of your school/college life, can impact on you producing work to the best of your ability. Student life can be both challenging and demanding and therefore it is important to acknowledge and seek help with issues such as stress, motivation and concentration. There are ways in which some of the pressures can be dealt with, for example, talking to a family member, a friend, your personal tutor or to a counsellor/adviser. There are many services available to students, and staff at your school/college will be able to put you in contact with student support groups who offer advice and practical help.

Exercise

Assess your Study Skills

Why have you chosen this course?	
What are your main strengths?	
What are your weaknesses?	
Are there any current circumstances that will impact on your studies?	
Are there aspects of the course you will need help with?	
Which parts of the course do you anticipate doing well at?	

Useful website links

www.fun-with-words.com

www.ltscotland.org.uk

www.peterhoney.com

www.vark-learn.com

Reference book

Cottrell, S (2008) *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan

Fleming, N.D, (2001) *Teaching and Learning Styles: VARK Strategies*, Honolulu Community College, New Zealand



Section 2

Planning your Learning

Being an Independent Learner

Independent learners are motivated to learn, can manage their own time and take time to reflect on their learning.

Being motivated to learn means that you:

- Think positively and develop plans to help you achieve
- Take responsibility for your own learning
- Set challenging but attainable goals
- Don't put things off for another day

Reflecting on your learning means that you:

- Regularly reflect on progress
- Record how your skills are developing
- Understand the feedback you receive from teachers/tutors and how to apply it

Time Management

You might feel that there are not enough hours in the day to do everything that needs doing and we all, at some point manage our study time badly. This can lead to deadlines being missed, producing work that is not of your best ability and feelings of frustration and stress. But it is possible to find ways to help you cope better and enable you to be in control of your time and your studies.

Managing your time:

- Identify what is important when planning study
- Balance study and social life
- Use time effectively
- Know the location of key resources
- Understand how you learn best

Overcoming Difficulties

You can benefit from questioning and perhaps reviewing your attitudes and deep-seated habits related to using time. Some habits may be linked to your personality, and can significantly affect your sense of fulfilment. For example some people always find themselves feeling rushed, whilst others feel frustrated because they never seem to be doing what they know they should be doing. The following points can help you to identify issues and help put plans into place.

- Reflect and focus on why you let yourself waste time or become distracted: do you have a tendency to be a little lazy, do you always seem to leave things until the last minute or is there always something better to do? Once you recognise your personal habits, you can then start thinking about how to overcome future stumbling blocks.
- Identify areas of your home /life where you would like to be able to manage your time better
- What are the results of not managing your time as well as you would like?
- In what respects do you think you already have good time management skills?

Using Time Effectively

If you find that you waste time or you are easily distracted then the following techniques should help you:

- Divide a large task up into small manageable chunks and tackle each of these separately. Start with small tasks and work up to the more demanding ones.
- Try making a 'to do' list on which you can add tasks as they arise, and then tick them off.
- Set yourself deadlines. These can be both short term and long term in the form of a daily 'to do' list. It is very important to set achievable goals and to keep reviewing your list to make sure it is realistic.

- Prioritise! Some tasks are more important than others. Avoid spending too much time on things that do not really matter. Write a list of tasks that have to be done at all costs, those that ought to be done and those that you would like to do. Tackle them in that order.
- Write a timetable or keep a diary, setting aside a specific time each day for each task. Note down the external demands on your time as well, for example, part-time work and social engagements. It is important to find an arrangement that suits your needs.
- When planning your studies it is very important that you mark out periods in your timetable for planning your essay, researching, drafting, writing and rewriting it.

Make sure your timetable is realistic or you will end up feeling stressed

- Part of using your time effectively involves working to your own body clock. You might find that you can tackle most demanding tasks at a particular time of day. You need to know the answers to these questions.
- Do you work better early in the morning or late at night?
- What is the maximum amount of time you can work for productively?

Monitor your own Progress

- If you feel you are working too slowly and not really getting anywhere, try changing the way you are studying, for example, work with a friend, because if you are feeling like this, then most probably you are not alone.
- Try tackling something else for a short while to take your mind off the task. If you are still struggling after a long period, it is important that you contact your teacher/tutor and they can provide information or advice.

Getting Started

- If you have trouble getting started, try making a list at the end of every session you spend studying, of what you need to do next time. That way you will be able to get on with your work and work quicker.
- You may find it helps to give yourself a short easy activity to do first, as a warm-up, and the main/most difficult task second.

Example 'To Do' List

Task	Target Date	Completed/Further Development Required

Example Study Planner

JAN	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4
MON				
TUES				
WED				
THURS				
FRI				
SAT				
SUN				

Useful website link

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy



Section 3

Researching and Managing Information

It will be necessary for you to research information to help with your studies for a number of reasons:

- To gain an understanding of the subject
- To find out what experts have written about the subject
- To support your ideas
- To gain more marks for your assignment by providing evidence that you have researched the subject.

Searching the Web

Just because it's on the Web, doesn't mean it's true.

It is necessary to become familiar with using Information Gateways and Subject Directories. These will provide you with good quality web resources for your work, all of which have been evaluated by subject experts. Your school /college librarian will be able to advise you on how to access this resource. It is not a good idea to use 'Wikipedia' as the information has not been checked by experts.

Establishing a Search Method

Before you start searching for information you need to be clear about what you are looking for. You must identify the significant words or phrase that will help you find the relevant information via the search engine, such as Google. These words and phrases are called 'keywords'. For example to research the following essay 'Bella and Edward in the film, *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* lead conflicting lifestyles. Is it possible that their relationship can work if they really love each other?' your key words would first of all be 'Twilight', 'Eclipse', the characters' names and then perhaps 'love' and 'conflict'.

Text Books

Text books contain essential information that will allow you to build on your existing knowledge.

They can provide you with:

- In depth information to fill any gaps in your knowledge and to aid understanding
- Practical hints and tips to help you make decisions
- Expert opinions to quote in your work

Finding Text Books

Your school/college library will hold information regarding all textbooks available for loan. Many library catalogues are now computer-based. In addition to information on books, the catalogue contains details of various other types of resources held by the library, for example journals, e-journals and e-books. It is very important that you familiarise yourself with your library catalogue. For each module that you study, you should be provided with a reading list. The list will contain details of recommended textbooks for your studies.

How to Evaluate Information

Although you will have been given a comprehensive list of reading materials, you will still probably come across books that have not been included but that look useful. There are certain techniques that you need to be aware of which will enable you to decide if the material is appropriate or not.

Techniques

- Is it the latest edition?
- When was it published?
- Has my teacher/ tutor mentioned the author or title in teaching sessions?
- Does the title give me a clue as to what the book is about?
- Is it an introduction or guide to the topic?

When you have found the book it is useful to look at the following to find out if the content is relevant.

- Title page
- Chapter headings
- Contents page
- Index

What is Plagiarism?

If you do not provide a clear indication when you have referred to someone else's work, whether it is from a book, the Internet, a radio programme or a television programme, it is seen as academic theft and is called plagiarism.

Plagiarism occurs when you use the words, thoughts or ideas from someone else and present them as your own. This means that you have not acknowledged the person whose work you are referring to in your assignment.

Here are some examples of plagiarism that must be avoided:

- Copying directly from a text word for word from any source (unless you reference it)
- Copying out odd phrases from books and/or the Internet
- Closely paraphrasing the words of a text or changing several of the words in a passage
- Downloading or copying text images and pictures without acknowledging your source

To avoid being accused of plagiarism you must make sure you are familiar with the reference system you are expected to use in your subject. Your teacher/tutor will advise you of the appropriate system and will spend time showing you how to implement it.

(This has been adapted from Plagiarism and Information Searching
www.glam.ac.uk/blackboard)

For more information see Section 7: Essay Writing

Managing Information

1. Keep a separate file for each subject and file dividers or coloured stickers within it for each topic.
2. Always note down the author, title and publishing details of any book you research in case you want to use the information in an essay. This will also help you to reference it correctly in the bibliography.
3. Keep an A – Z card index to take note of any important information that you might use in the future. Cross reference information to other important relevant information.
4. Keep up to date with your filing. Put handouts and any notes you have made during the teaching session in their correct places straight away.
5. Always date your work and write your name and the name of the teacher/tutor at the top of each page. Also put the title of the teaching session. Getting into this habit will save a lot of time in the long run.
6. Number your pages in case they fall out of your file.
7. If your teacher/tutor moves onto a different topic in the same teaching session make sure you write your new notes onto a clean sheet of paper.

Useful website link

www.open.ac.uk/safari



Section 4

Reading Effectively

The skill of developing efficient reading techniques is necessary to support all of your school/college work. It is important to collect information effectively from what you read. It is essential for students to become organised readers who keep up good reading practices. Use your time constructively to gather and evaluate reading materials.

What reading methods should I employ?

Active Reading

- The reading process involves more than the act of reading; it involves five distinct yet complementary areas of activity.

Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review (SQ3R)

1	Survey	Skim over the text
2	Question	Write down questions you want answered
3	Read	Read through the text
4	Recall	Go over what you have just read
5	Review	Record the information

- **Skimming** involves reading to get a general view of the text. You skim-read by looking at section headings and sub-headings of books and long journal articles to establish whether they are worth reading or not.
- **Scanning** involves looking for particular information. You do this, for example, when you are looking for a name of an author on a page, a date, a topic in an index etc, disregarding the rest of the text.
- **Critical reading** involves thinking and questioning what you are reading, challenging the assumptions made. For more information see Section 5: Thinking Skills.

What should I do before reading textbooks and Internet articles?

- Always know what you are looking for before you search the Internet or library.
- You need to be quite selective when you read because you will not have time, or indeed need to read everything on your reading list. To discover what texts are relevant to your subject or if you need to clarify teaching session notes, start by using the table of contents or index to go straight to the subject. You can also read the introduction and conclusion chapters to decide that the book is worth reading. A good bibliography is also a good indication of the type of information given in the book/article and of its worth.
- Look for questions based on the information you are seeking i.e. say to yourself: “Is this section dealing with such and such a topic? Shall I find the answers to such and such a question?” These will help you to read actively and critically.
- If you are reading to prepare for an essay, you will probably want to read a chapter or section of the book. Start by scanning through the section, looking at headings and sub-headings to get an overall perspective, and then read in more detail.
- Try to select and read only material that is relevant to your needs. This is important as you will never have time to read all the material on your reading list.

What should I do while I am reading?

- If you are satisfied that the text you have identified is the right material for your research, go back and read it more slowly for maximum understanding. Tackle small chunks of information at a time, a paragraph, a page or short chapter, whatever you can manage.
- Keep in mind the questions you are trying to answer and question what you are reading.
- Tackle difficult texts in small bites; paragraphs or a page at a time.
- The actual reading finishes with a review of what you have read. This is the time to compare what you have read with the questions you set out to answer at the start. Did you find answers to these, or was there a mismatch?

Useful website links

www.open.ac.uk/safari

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy

www.bbc.co.uk/learning





Section 5

Thinking Skills

Analysis

Almost every academic activity begins with some form of analysis. This makes clear what you are trying to tackle. Analysis means taking things apart to see what the components are and how they fit. You should question the information, your research findings and theories that you include in your essay. You should not just accept the information or argument of the authors you read; you need to constantly question **why** they say what they say.

Asking **why** requires an answer. This involves comparing alternative views proposed by the authors you read. If you do this, you are doing analysis. The conclusion you come to, the view you take, is your opinion. However, you do all this by using supporting evidence that you gather in the research stage. All well-argued essays are able to support their argument with evidence; this is the difference between biased opinion and informed opinion.

Analysis involves

- Standing back from the information given and examining it in detail from many angles
- Checking closely whether it is completely accurate
- Checking whether a statement follows from what was said before
- Looking for possible faults in the reasoning, the evidence, or the way that conclusions are drawn
- Comparing the same issue from the point of view of others
- Being able to recognise and explain why different people arrived at different conclusions
- Being able to argue why one set of opinions, results or conclusions is preferable to another
- Checking for hidden assumptions
- Checking for attempts to lure the reader into agreement

Critical Analysis

This is one step further than analysis. It is being able to do all of the above with an added element of reflection which involves being critical. This does not necessarily mean being critical in the sense of disapproval, but weighing evidence, looking at the arguments in an evaluative way and making a judgement about them.

Critical Analysis involves:

- Breaking information into different ideas and concepts
- Making careful judgements about and evaluating the quality of ideas
- Drawing from evidence some conclusions which will allow you to answer the question in the essay title, or throw light on an area you are investigating.
- You are acting a little like a judge in a court of law – weighing up the evidence and arriving at a reasonable and fair conclusion.

Critical Analysis is not:

- Making assumptions without checking them out
- Making generalisations which are not supported by evidence
- Accepting information without questioning it

- A straight description
- Giving mistaken or misleading information
- Saying the writer said this, or the writer said that without giving your views on the differences between what is said
- Taking a negative stance

Cottrell (2008) suggests it is helpful to develop a detective like mind when attempting any form of critical analysis, whether this is reading, writing or listening.

Critical thinking when reading should:

- Identify the line of reasoning in the text
- Critically probe the line of reasoning
- Question surface appearances
- Identify evidence
- Evaluate the evidence
- Identify the writer's conclusions
- Check the evidence supports your conclusions

Critical thinking when writing should involve:

- Showing a clear argument
- Providing evidence to support your argument
- Reading your own writing critically as well as your references
- Viewing your subject from a variety of angles
- Writing in a critical style rather than a descriptive one

Critical listening skills should involve:

- Asking questions - Why? How far? How much? How often?
- Checking out the evidence - How do you know this is true? How reliable is the source?

Exercise:

When reading, researching and writing, use the following types of questioning to develop your critical thinking skills

What are the key features of...?

What is the main assumption underlying...?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of ...?

What do I already know about...?

In what ways are x and y similar...?

What do you think would happen if...?

What is the evidence to support...?

What is a good example of ...?

What is the key idea...?

What worked and what did not?

Are there any unsupported arguments?

What has been omitted?

How was the conclusion reached?

Reference book

Cottrell, S (2008, 3rd edn) *The Study Skills Handbook*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Useful website links

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy

www.kcl.ac.uk/teares/nmvc/studyskills/academicwriting/page_28.htm



Section 6

Note Taking

Note taking from a taught session

Most students attempt to write numerous notes in a teaching session, but it is almost impossible to keep up with the speed of a teacher/tutor. It is very easy to lose the thread of the session simply because you are trying to write everything down. This can lead to feelings of frustration and inadequacy. To prevent this from happening it is necessary to put some plans into practice to allow you to get as much as possible out of the session.

Prepare for the teaching session/teaching session

- The more you know about a topic before your teaching session, the easier it will be to take notes. This is simply because there won't be so much new information, and you will know to some extent what to expect. One way to improve your notes is to check the title of the session beforehand, and to do any reading you've been recommended
- Think about the subject matter in advance – how might it relate to what you have already learnt?
- Pose some questions that you would like to answer

Symbols or abbreviations can help

=	equals, the same as
+	and, also
-	not, without < less than > more than
i.e.	that is
e.g.	for example
n.b.	note well
c.	circa, approx, about
esp.	especially
∴	therefore

Or you can invent your own shortened forms such as you might use in text messaging. Any words you use regularly can be shortened to a key letter or symbol. However, it is important not to be too creative or you won't remember what your abbreviations stand for!

Tips for note-taking

- If you are given handouts, it can be easier to make notes on these. You'll need to write less, because some of the information will already be on them. This method can save time as often key information such as the date and the title of the session are already recorded on them
- You'll need to write down the date of the session, its title and what module it belongs to. You will also need to number every sheet to keep them in order. This will help when it comes to writing an assignment or revising for an exam
- Listen for cues, keywords and recurring ideas. The kinds of clues to listen for are ones like:

'I'll give you an example...'

'There are three points supporting this...'

'In conclusion...'

'Because' giving a reason for something.

Also listen for signposts such as

‘Today we are going to look at...’

‘I’m going to discuss four main aspects of...’

‘I must emphasise that...’

If you try to follow these cues in your notes they will be much easier to understand later. Don’t expect to get it right the first time: writing accurate notes takes time and you will get better at doing this with practice.

- Don’t write sentences (these take too long and have lots of unnecessary words) instead write down key words. These are much quicker to write and will enable you to listen. By listening for the most important words and making notes of those points you can remember more of a teaching session afterwards. Keywords are the ones that carry most information. e.g. ‘the main point of his argument is... ‘
- If you have a visual or hearing impairment, you may want to let the teacher/tutor know so they can make sure that they do not block your view or talk with their back to you. They will need to know that you may need notes or copies of the overheads before/after to study. Also that any handouts may need to be produced in alternative formats to ensure you can access them.
- Similarly if you have or think you may have a specific learning difficulty, for example, dyslexia, it is important that the teacher/tutor knows beforehand what additional support or different style resources will be of benefit to your note taking. Most schools and colleges have learning support services and specialist advice workers who can provide help with this.

The following can also help

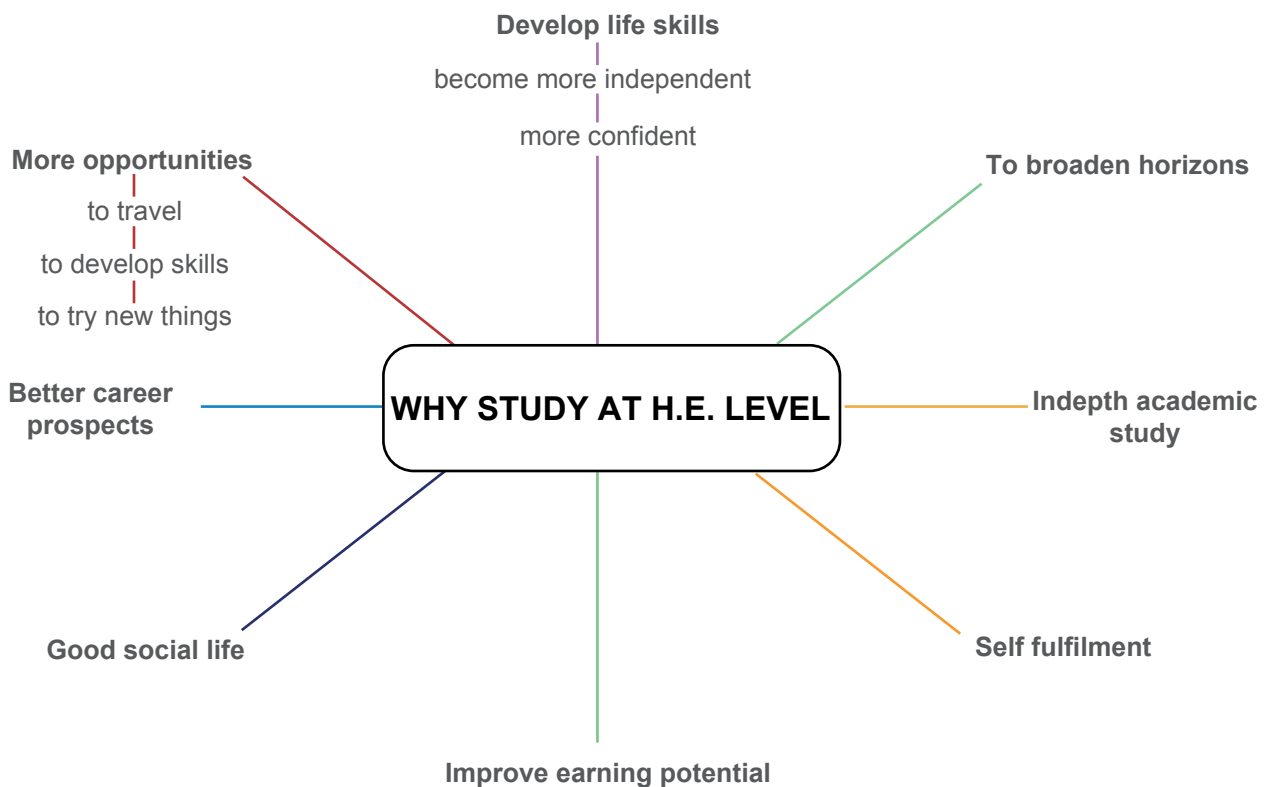
- Go back to your notes within 24 hours to fill in any gaps, rewrite unclear words, or add any thoughts you have about the subject matter.
- While the notes are still fresh in your mind check through for understanding.
- Make sure that the structure is clear: add headings, colours, etc. to help you at a later date.
- Date and file your notes so that you can find them easily.
- Use colour to highlight important points but not too many colours as this can be equally as confusing and time consuming.

Note Taking Styles

Some schools and colleges suggest particular note making styles. Some learners find it helpful to take their notes as spider diagrams, mind maps or flow charts.

Spider Diagram

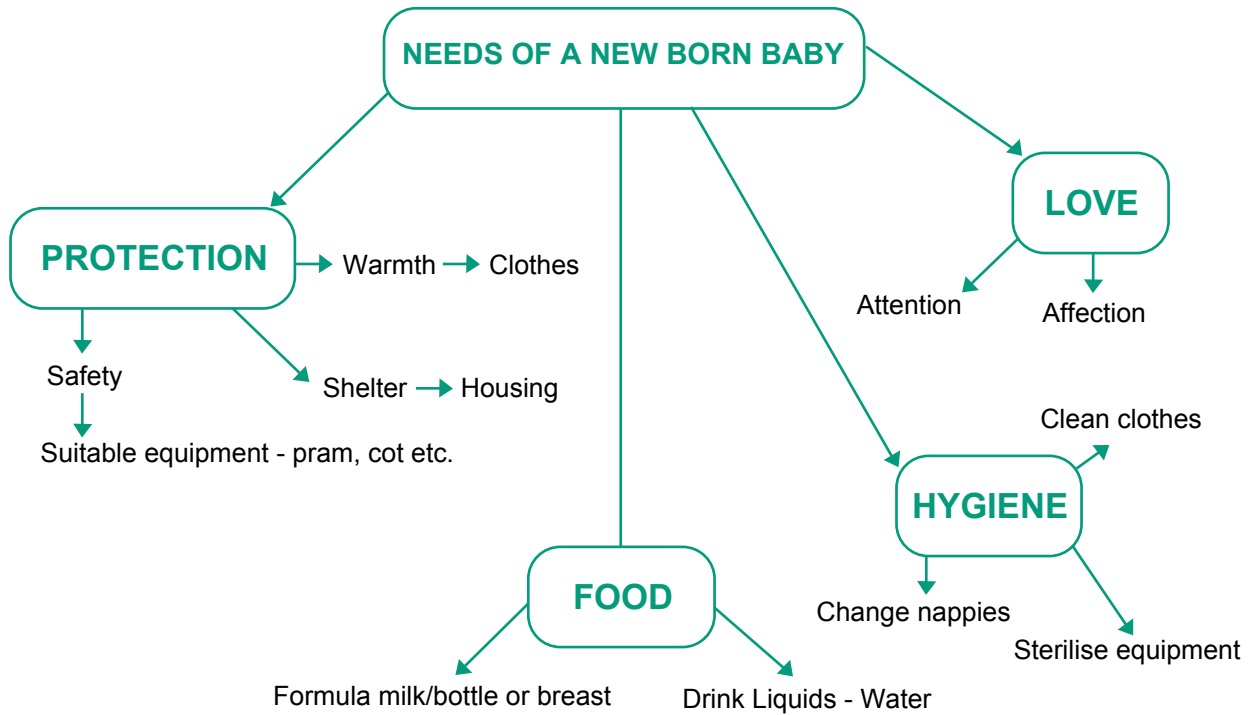
- Write the main theme in the centre of a piece of paper.
- Write down all the ideas and keywords related to your topic starting from the centre and branching out along lines of connecting ideas.
- Each idea can be circled or linked by lines as appropriate.
- When you have finished, highlight any related ideas and then sort topics.
- Some ideas will form main headings, and others will be sub-sections under these headings.
- You should then be able to see a pattern emerging and be able to arrange your main headings in a logical order.



Mind Map

- Write the title of the teaching session or topic in the centre of the paper with all the main points streaming outwards.
- One by one you can then add the ideas and issues linked to these points.
- The mind map will enable you to see things at a glance and you can personalise your own note taking.

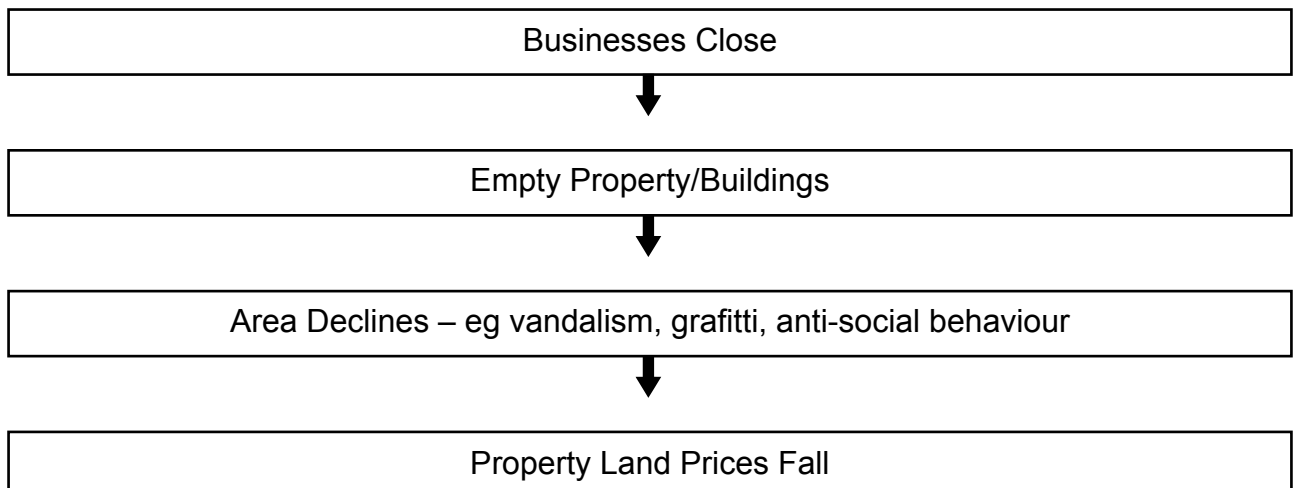
It is important to recognise that you have to be very sure of your subject area before you attempt one, as they can result in a confusing set of words and arrows if not carefully planned.



Flow Chart

- A flow chart is a clear sequence of ideas or events which will enable you to structure your notes in a logical order
- This can help you recall information and therefore will help with your revision

Flow Chart - Inner City Decline



The 6RS Note Taking Model

Stage 1: Ready

Before the teaching session, prepare by dividing up the pages of an A4 loose-leaf book as shown below

Main Ideas	Details
Summary	

Stage 2: Record

During the teaching session, record important points. Use bullet points and abbreviations, not full sentences.

Stage 3: Reduce

As soon as possible, while the teaching session is still fresh in your mind, go through your notes and reduce the information in the Details column to key words and phrases. Finally, summarise the teaching session in your own words in the summary space at the bottom.

Stage 4: Recite

Cover the Details column and go through the cues in the Main Ideas column, to recite the points in the Details column. Repeat until you can recall the information.

Stage 5: Reflect

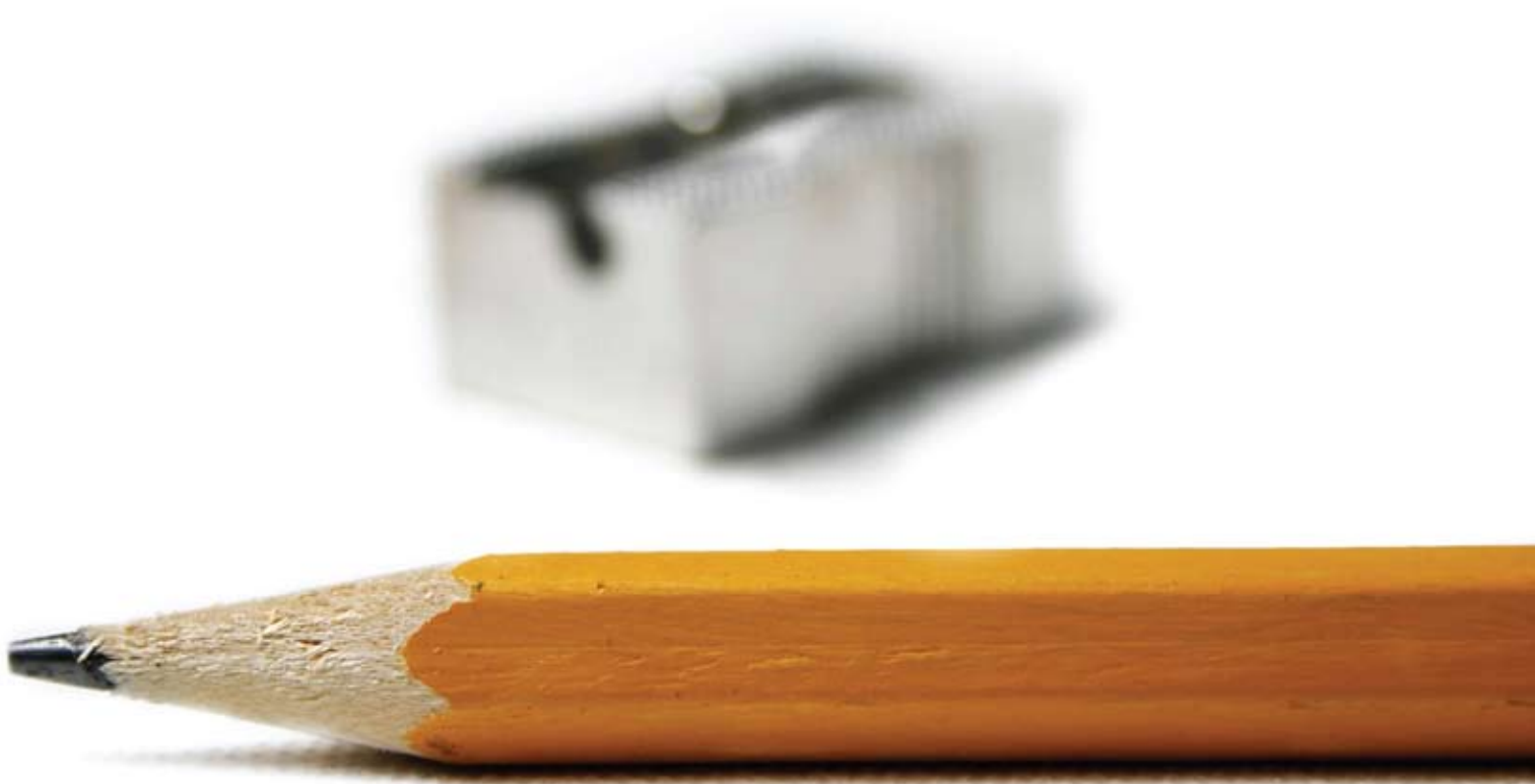
Think about what you have learnt. Ask yourself how it relates to information you already know and how it reinforces or changes your prior understanding and how you can apply it. Try to make the information personally relevant to you.

Stage 6: Review

Spend a few minutes each week looking through your teaching session notes. This will keep the ideas current in your memory, which will be a huge benefit when you need to revise for exams.

Useful website links

www.chompchomp.com
www.visualthesaurus.com
www.SmartDraw.com





Section 7

Essay Writing

It is essential to plan and structure your essay before you start reading vast amounts of material, as the process of planning will be very difficult if there is too much information to organise. There is no one definitive strategy for effective essay writing as each learner's way of planning an essay is different. You have to decide what works best for you. The following good practice tips will help you plan and structure your essay effectively.

A good essay will be one that has a sound structure, equally weighted paragraphs that demonstrate you are in control of the material, relevant content, correct grammar and punctuation and all backed up by referencing.

The Structure of the Essay

As Peck and Coyle (2005) state, it is very unwise to discover the route of your essay as you write it; it is more productive to have the shape of your essay worked out before you begin writing. Divide your essay plan into three stages; the beginning, the middle and the end.

Now divide the middle part (the main part of the essay) into a further three stages; the first stage will prepare the argument; the second stage will push the argument forward; the third stage will draw your argument together. If you think of your plan in these terms, then the essay immediately begins to take shape.

This structure will work for any subject you are taking. If this format is followed, you will create a well-formed and well-structured essay that has a clear direction.

Here are some guidelines for structuring your essay:

1,000 – 1,500 word essay

Think of your essay in terms of three key points that are then slotted into eight paragraphs. Each paragraph, apart from the introduction and conclusion, should have approximately the same number of words. A good guide is to think of your essay in terms of three main points that will have 2 paragraphs each.

A 1,500 word essay structure would look like this:

Introduction	1 paragraph (150 words)
Point One	2 paragraphs
Point Two	2 paragraphs
Point Three	2 paragraphs
Conclusion	1 paragraph (200 words)

2,500 word essay

Think of your essay in terms of three key points again that are then slotted into eleven paragraphs, apart from the introduction and conclusion, each paragraph should have approximately the same number of words.

A 2,500 word essay structure would look like this:

Introduction	1 paragraph
Point One	3 paragraphs
Point Two	3 paragraphs
Point Three	3 paragraphs
Conclusion	1 paragraph (200 words)

5,000 word essay

Think of your essay in terms of three key points again that are then slotted into 20 paragraphs, apart from the introduction and conclusion, each paragraph should have approximately the same number of words.

A 5,000 word essay it would look like this:

Introduction	1 paragraph (150 words)
Point One	6 paragraphs
Point Two	6 paragraphs
Point Three	6 paragraphs
Conclusion	1 paragraph (200 words)

Answering the question:

Your first step in essay writing is to consider the essay title. You need to look at the wording and to work out exactly what you are being asked to do. It might help you to underline what you think are the keywords in the question/title: these are vital phrases or words that will decide the content, the style and the structure of your essay.

For example

Compare	Look for similarities/differences and perhaps reach a conclusion about which is preferable.
Contrast	Set in opposition in order to bring out differences.
Criticise	Give your judgement about the merit of theories and opinions, or about the truth of facts; support your judgement by a discussion of evidence or of the reasoning involved.
Define	Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase; in some cases it may be necessary or desirable to examine different possibilities for often-used definitions.
Describe	Give a detailed or graphic account.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument; sift information and debate; give reasons for and against.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something.
Explain	Make plain; interpret and account for; give reasons.
Illustrate	Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make clear by the use of concrete examples.
Interpret	Explain in detail the meaning of; make clear and explicit, usually giving your judgement also.

Justify	Give a statement of why you think it is so. Give reasons for your statement and conclusion.
Outline	Give a general summary. It should contain a series of main ideas supported by secondary ideas. Leave out minor details and examples.
Prove	Show by argument or logic that it is true.
Relate	Show the connections between things, telling how one causes or is like another.
Review	Provide a summary of the important issues and criticise where needed.
State	Describe the main points in precise terms. Be formal. Use brief, clear sentences. Leave out details and examples.
Summarise	Give a brief condensed account of the main ideas. Leave out details and examples.
Trace	Follow the progress or history of the subject.
Account for	Give reasons for, provide a thorough explanation.
Analyse	Find the main ideas and show how they are related and why they are important.
Comment on	Discuss, criticise or explain its meaning as completely as possible.
Enumerate	Name and list the main ideas one by one. Number them.
Examine	Investigate.

Top Tips for Essay Writing

Writing your Introduction

- Do not over elaborate; one paragraph is sufficient
- Identity the subject/title of the essay
- Start with a paragraph of about 150 words that states what you will explore/discuss within the essay e.g. 'This essay will explore the following three issues', or 'This assignment will specifically identify the following three key themes':
- Do not begin to answer the essay at this stage
- Do not wander around the issue
- Your teacher/tutor is looking for coherence, understanding and insight

Writing the main body of your essay

Presenting effective arguments is at the heart of good essay writing – in almost every essay you should aim to make an overall point in response to some issue or debate. Remember, your teacher/tutor is looking for accuracy, clarity and a tight argument. Below are some pointers that may help. Not all of them apply every time.

- Identify a problem statement: what is the issue or conflict?
- Make an assertion: have something to say and clearly state it
- Only use quotes if they are accurate and appropriate
- Provide evidence to back up your position and explain why it should be believed
- Use examples to illustrate
- Anticipate objections: what are the arguments against
- Modify your argument if the counter arguments are strong
- Order your points to make your argument most believable
- Be precise
- Be consistent in what you say
- Avoid making personal criticisms
- Avoid personal opinions not supported by analysis/evidence
- To conclude, restate your assertion, summarising key points

Writing your Conclusion

- Write one paragraph of approximately 10% of the total words
- Sum up, summarising the key points of your essay
- Do not introduce any new ideas: all your ideas should have been discussed already
- Avoid introducing quotes – these should have been used in the main body of your essay

Developing your arguments in essays

State your point of view early in the essay and present a clear argument to support it. Your point of view should be a consistent one throughout the essay.



Offer reliable evidence or examples to support your argument. Reliable evidence is evidence that you have read in reputable and authoritative texts, articles, newspapers, Internet sites etc.



Show where this evidence has come from by referencing your sources and listing them all in the reference or bibliography section at the end of your essay.



Show that you are aware of, and have considered arguments that are different to your own. You will need to summarise counter arguments in a clear, accurate and undistorted way in your essay.



Show why you have decided that the arguments you have chosen to put forward are more convincing for you than other arguments.

Tips for Essay Presentation

1. Follow the guidelines given for presentation of your essay e.g. produce a typewritten, legible document and use correct paragraph spacing and appropriate font.
2. Always check your spelling. Incorrect spelling may lose you marks. Use a dictionary or the spell check function on your pc and aim to have someone proof read your essay.
3. Check you have gone through all the necessary processes in the preparation of your essay. (See checklist at end of this section).
4. Use linking words to connect the ideas and arguments in your sentences and paragraphs.

Here are some words you might use to:

Add information

Additionally, again, along with, also, and, another, as well as, besides, equally, for example, further, furthermore, likewise, moreover, secondly, together with.

Conclude or summarise

Accordingly, all in all, as a result, consequently, due to, finally, in conclusion, in short, in summary, therefore, to sum up.

Contrast two things or show a difference

Alternatively, as opposed to, but, conversely, however, nevertheless, on the contrary, otherwise, yet.

Emphasise a point

Again, as demonstrated, as highlighted, as shown, clearly, for this reason, in addition, indeed, in fact, specifically, to emphasise.

Show similarities

Again, comparatively, in parallel, in the same way, likewise, in the same manner, similarly.

Clarify

Defined as, differently, in other words, likewise, put another way, to clarify, to restate, viewed as.

Sequence your argument

Before, finally, firstly, immediately, initially, in parallel, later, prior to, in the same manner, secondly, subsequently, to conclude with.

How will the teacher/tutor assess your essay?

Teachers/tutors use a check list or guidelines similar to the following to assess essays and other written work. It will be useful for you to self-assess your essay against this guideline before submitting it, and to review/revise your work in line with your assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of your essay.

Content:

- Background reading
- Understanding of topic
- Understanding of theoretical issues

- Relevance of answer to question
- Strong Introduction
- Clear argument
- Use of appropriate evidence
- Analysis and evaluation
- Appropriate Conclusion

Presentation

- Legible, well presented, neat
- Well structured
- Accurate spelling
- Cohesive (flow, links between stages of argument)
- Paragraph structure (length, organisation)
- Appropriate use of terminology
- Author's names spelt correctly
- References and bibliography
- Strengths of this piece of work
- Weaknesses of this piece of work
- How this essay could be improved

Essay Checklist

- Have I answered the question?
- Have I covered all of the main aspects?
- Have I covered aspects in enough depth?
- Is the content relevant?
- Is the content accurate?
- Have I arranged the material logically?
- Does the essay flow from one section to the next, and paragraph to paragraph?
- Have I used enough sources and references?

- Have I referenced all the sources correctly?
- Does the essay meet the word count?
- Have I written clearly?
- Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling accurate?
- Is the essay presented in line with guidelines?
- Have I read the essay/is it coherent?
- Have I presented a convincing case?

Awkward Spellings

Absence	Anoint	Supersede	Development
Separate	Tyranny	Indispensable	Receive
Pursue	Recommend	Desperate	Seize
Definitely	Occasion	Consensus	Inadvertent
Minuscule	Occurrence	Accommodate	Embarrassment
Repetition	Despair	Liaison	Argument
Acknowledge	Awkward	Environment	Government
Independent	Persuade	Preferred	Appropriate
Rhythm	Severely	Similar	Success
Unnecessary	Usually	Scene	Guarantee

Remember: don't be afraid to use a dictionary or a thesaurus – everyone does.

Reference books

Peck, J and Coyle, M. (2005 2nd edn) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar Punctuation and Spelling*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Redman, P. (2006, 3rd edn) *Good Essay Writing: A Social Sciences Guide*. Milton Keynes, California. SAGE.

Useful website links

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy
www.chompchomp.com



Section 8

Report Writing

A report is a statement of the results of an investigation or of any matter on which definite information is required.

(Oxford English Dictionary)

Reports are a highly structured form of writing often following conventions that have been laid down to produce a common format. Structure and convention in written reports stress the process by which the information was gathered as much as the information itself.

Essay or Report?

The difference between an essay and a report lies mainly in the style and structure. An essay is a reflection of how much you know about a particular aspect of a subject. A report is an account given or opinion formally expressed after an investigation, consideration or collation of information. It is largely fact based i.e. it will have a higher percentage of factual, descriptive text in a highly formalised structure.

Unlike an essay, a report's purpose is not to argue but to present information/facts, although the results of a report may be used to form the basis of an argument. Most reports are used to analyse a situation (usually a problem) to reveal findings and recommend a course of action. Unlike an essay, a report can present some information in the form of bullet points.

During your studies you may be asked to write different types of reports, depending upon the subject area you have chosen. These could include laboratory reports, technical reports, reports of a work placement or industrial visit, reports of a field trip or field work.

Reports vary in their purpose, but all of them will require a formal structure and careful planning, presenting the material in a logical manner using clear and concise language. The following section explores each stage in the development of your report, making recommendations for structure and technique.

Stages in Report Writing

The following stages are involved in writing a report:

- Clarifying your terms of reference
- Planning your work
- Collecting your information
- Organising and structuring your information
- Writing the first draft
- Checking and re-drafting

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of a report are a guiding statement used to define the scope of your investigation. You must be clear from the start what you are being asked to do. You will probably have been given an assignment from your teacher/tutor but you may need to discuss this further to find out the precise subject and purpose of the report. Why have you been asked to write it? Knowing your purpose will help you to communicate your information more clearly and will help you to be more selective when collecting your information.

Planning your Report

Careful planning will help you to write a clear, concise and effective report, giving adequate time to each of the developmental stages prior to submission.

- Consider the report as a whole
- Break down the task of writing the report into various parts
- How much time do you have to write the report?
- How can this be divided up into the various planning stages?
- Set yourself deadlines for the various stages
- Draw up an outline structure for your report
- Set the work within a sensible time scale for completion by the given deadline

Some of the most time-consuming parts of the process are collecting and selecting your information, and checking and revising your report.

Collecting Information

There are a number of questions you need to ask yourself at this stage:

- What information do you need?
- Where do you find it?
- How much do you need?
- How shall you collect it?
- In what order will you arrange it?

You may have much of the information you need already such as results from a laboratory experiment or descriptions of your methods of data collection.

However, you may need other material such as information on other research studies, or literature reviews. You may need to carry out some interviews or make a visit to the school/ college library to collect all the information you need.

- Make a list of what information you need
- Make an action plan stating how you are going to gather this

Organising Information

One helpful way to organise your information into topics is to gather your ideas into a 'spider diagram.' For more information on organising your material see Section 6: Note Taking.

Structuring your Report

It was noted earlier that there are different types of reports such as laboratory reports or reports on a work placement or a special event. Always check with the person requesting the report (your teacher/tutor, your placement supervisor or event organiser) precisely what your report should include and how it should be presented. The following common elements can be found in many different reports:

- Title page
- Acknowledgements
- Contents
- Abstract or Summary
- Introduction
- Method
- Results or Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- Reference books
- Appendices

Title Page

This should include the title of the report (giving an indication of the subject matter), the author's name, module, course and the date.

Acknowledgements

You should acknowledge any help you have received in collecting the information for the report. This may be from librarians, technicians or other staff at your school/college.

Contents

You should list all the main sections of the report in sequence with page numbers. If there are charts, diagrams or tables included in your report, these should be listed separately under a title such as 'List of Illustrations' together with the page numbers on which they appear.

Abstract or Summary

This should be a short paragraph summarising the main contents of the report. It should include a short statement of the main task, the methods used, conclusions reached and any recommendations to be made. The abstract or summary should be concise, informative and independent of the report. Write this section after you have written the report.

Introduction

This should give the context and scope of the report and should include your terms of reference. State your objectives clearly, define the limits of the report, outline the method of enquiry, give a brief general background to the subject of the report and indicate the proposed development.

Method

In this section you should state how you carried out your enquiry. Did you carry out interviews or questionnaires? How did you collect your data? What measurements did you make? How did you choose the subjects for your interviews? Present this information logically and concisely.

Results or Findings

Present your findings in as simple a way as possible. The more complicated the information looks, the more difficult it will be to interpret. There are a number of ways in which results can be presented, including tables, graphs, pie charts, bar charts, diagrams.

Discussion

This is the section where you analyse and interpret your results drawing from the information you have collected, explaining its significance. Identify important issues and suggest explanations for your findings. You should outline any problems encountered and present a balanced view.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the section of the report which draws together the main issues. It should be expressed clearly and should not present any new information. You may wish to list your recommendations in a separate section or include them with the conclusions.

Reference Books

It is important that you give precise details of all the work by other authors to which you have referred within the report. Details should include:

- Author's name and initials
- Date of publication
- Title of the book
- Publisher
- Place of publication
- Page numbers

References should be listed in alphabetical order of the authors' surnames. Make sure that your references are accurate and complete.

Appendices

An appendix contains additional information related to the report but which is not essential to the main findings. This provides additional information for the reader but the report should not depend on this. Here, you can include details of interview questions, statistical data, a glossary of terms, or other information which may be useful.

Report Checklist

- Are all your diagrams / illustrations clearly labelled?
- Do they all have titles?
- Is the link between the text and the diagram clear?
- Are the headings precise?
- Are the axes of graphs clearly labelled?
- Can tables be easily interpreted?
- Have you abided by copyright laws when including illustrations/tables from published documents?

Style of Writing

There are several points that you will need to consider when you are writing your report:

Your teacher/tutor will advise whether the report should be written in the 'active' or 'passive' voice.

The active voice reads as follows: 'I recommend ...'

The passive voice reads as follows: 'It is recommended that ...'

The active voice allows you to write short, punchy sentences. The passive appears more formal and considered. Be aware of these differences and avoid mixing the two voices.

Simplicity

Most written reports should avoid using overly complicated language. If a report is to persuade, brief or justify, its message must be clear. Furthermore, don't swamp the factual presentation of data with sophisticated, lengthy sentences. Avoid using unnecessary jargon. This confuses even the most informed reader. Ensure that your abbreviations are standardised. All too often authors invent their own jargon to ease the pressure on writing things in full. Be cautious of confusing your reader.

Use of Language

Most reports should avoid the use of subjective language. For example, to report on a change in colouration from a "stunning green to a beautiful blue" is to project your own values onto a measurable outcome. What does the term "beautiful" mean to you? What will it mean to your reader? Such subjective or personal language has no place in the more objective field of report writing.

Layout

Most reports have a progressive numbering system. The most common system is the decimal notation system. The main sections are given single Arabic numbers - 1, 2, 3 and so on. An example structure would look like this;

1. Introduction

1.1.....

1.2

2. Method

2.1

Presentation

The following guideline will help you produce an easy to read report:

- Leave wide margins for binding and feedback comments from your teacher/tutor
- Paragraphs should be short and concise
- Headings should be clear - highlighted in bold or underlined
- All diagrams and illustrations should be labelled and numbered
- All standard units, measurements and technical terminology should be listed in a glossary of terms at the back of your report

Redrafting and Checking

Once you have written the first draft of your report you will need to check it through. It is probably sensible to set it aside for a day or so if you have the time. This will make a clear break from the intensive writing period, allowing you to view your work more objectively.

Assess your work in the following areas:

- Structure
- Content
- Style
- Clarity and precision

Use the report writing checklist at the end of this section to check your report. You may like to carry out a more formal evaluation.

Summary

The ability to express yourself clearly is an important skill and is one that can be greatly enhanced by approaching each report in a planned and focused way. The skills involved in writing a report will help you condense and focus information, drawing objective findings from detailed data.

Report Writing Checklist

- Does the title page include: title, your name, module/course details?
- Have you acknowledged all sources of help?
- Have you included a contents page and listed all the main sections in sequence?

- Have you included a list of illustrations?
- Have you included an abstract or summary, describing the main task, methods used, conclusions reached, recommendations made?
- Does your Introduction include terms of reference, limits of the report, an outline of the method, a brief background to the subject matter?
- Have you included a section on methodology showing the form your enquiry took and the way you collected data?
- Are your diagrams clear and simple, clearly labelled and related closely to the text?
- In your main discussion, have you identified key issues, suggested explanations for your findings, outlined any problems encountered?
- Have you presented a balanced view?
- Do your recommendations and conclusion draw together all of your main ideas and avoid any new information?
- Are your references accurate, complete and listed alphabetically?
- In the Appendices, have you only included supporting information?
- Have you used clear and concise language? Are your sentences short and jargon free? Are your paragraphs tightly focused? Have you used the active or the passive voice?
- Layout - have you clearly labelled each section? Is your labelling consistent throughout the report?
- Presentation - have you left sufficient margin space for feedback from your teacher/tutor? Are your headings clear? Have you checked your spelling?

Useful website links

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/information-report-or-description.php
www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/reportwr.pdf
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/library/skills/report.html>



Section 9

Learning Journals

Reflecting and making the most of Learning Journals

A Learning Journal (sometimes known as a Reflective Journal or learning log) is an ongoing document or record (not unlike a diary) based on your experiences, reflections and observations as a student. It is a personal record and as such you may wish to keep the contents private.

In the above sense, a journal is distinct from a log in that the latter acts more as a record of dates, events and activities. The key element of a journal is the reflective nature of the contents as an aid to assist your development as an active and engaged student. The frequent opportunity to think about your feelings and experiences as you write is at least as important as the written record itself.

Reflective Journals can take two forms:

1. A personal record maintained by a learner for his/her own use (i.e. a private account).
2. A documented record of your learning experience submitted as a required part of your course. This form is often assessed.

What kind of material could go into a Reflective Journal?

- Thoughts and notes on issues arising from reading or teaching session discussions; activities that you wish to explore further.
- Questions that came up in your mind because of points made in material you read on a topic.
- As soon as possible after attending a class or teaching session it is often a good idea to reinforce your learning by summarising the key elements. Try to identify a couple of major points with any supporting detail or evidence. Do this from memory to begin with and then compare your ideas with those mentioned in any handouts or notes from your teacher/tutor. How well do they compare? Are there any gaps in your knowledge that you need to follow up?
- Notes and thoughts based on wider reading i.e. not just from books and articles recommended or provided by your teacher/tutor. How does this information enhance (or even deviate from) what you have covered in class or in teaching session discussions?
- Your feelings and impressions on how you are progressing on your course; are things going well or are you having problems in certain areas? What are the problems and how could they be overcome or dealt with? If you do seek help via your teacher/tutor, how useful and effective is it?
- Your reflections on the course itself: the teaching and learning methods used; does it meet your needs? How can you adapt the approach on offer to suit your learning preference to make the most of your learning experience?
- If a Learning Journal is part of your course requirements and you submit it online or as an email attachment, any personal thoughts you do not wish your teacher/tutor to see should be maintained in a separate version.
- A Learning Journal need not consist solely of text and notes but could also include diagrams, drawings, mind maps and anything else that helps you to maintain a useful record.

Always remember that the fundamental purpose of a Reflective Journal is that you, the student, should be the main one to benefit from it. There is no better way of clarifying your thoughts and straightening out areas of confusion than by writing it all down. You may wonder why Learning Journals are now built into so many courses and then assessed.

Essentially it is for two reasons:

1. Students are more likely to remember what they have done if they keep a regular journal.
2. It is a way for your teacher/tutor to see how you feel about the course and to offer help and support if required.



Section 10

Building a Portfolio

You will need somewhere to store your information from all sources. Most students devise a system of storing work and work-related materials whilst studying, usually in a binder or series of files. It is a small step from this to building a portfolio.

What is a Learner Portfolio?

A Learner Portfolio is a varied collection of your work and related material selected to represent activities and achievements in a particular course of study over a specific period of time.

It can function as both a record of activity and a showcase of your achievements. In addition to the work itself, a portfolio could include evidence of learner reflection, self evaluation of the work contained within, and evaluation. For more information see Section 9: Learning Journals. The teacher/tutor and student work together to decide on the contents of a portfolio.

Types of Portfolios

In general, learner portfolios can be divided into two types: a Product Portfolio and a Process Portfolio.

Product Portfolio

This is in essence the total collection of a student's best work completed throughout a course of study. Its aim is to show mastery of certain skills or concepts as well as achievement of learning objectives.

Process Portfolio

A Process Portfolio contains work that shows evidence of the various stages the student experienced on the way to producing the final effort. At any one time it may contain a collection of works-in-progress, illustrating the steps taken in the creation of the final product. A common but very good example of this would be the points of your initial ideas, research, drafting and revision worked through in completing an essay, assignment or written project.

Portfolios have become more popular as student-centred approaches have developed. They are increasingly being included as a tool in the overall assessment scheme for courses. They can provide a telling insight into classroom-based activities, particularly for the purposes of ongoing or continuous assessment.

The Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

- Teachers/tutors and students work together to set learning goals and evaluate progress towards goal achievement
- It provides the student with opportunities to present their work for assessment other than under test or exam conditions. It is important, however, that deadlines for completion of drafts and final tasks are set and adhered to
- Portfolio assessment recognises that learning is a process – a series of stages. The focus is on the process and not just the final product
- It provides students with opportunities for self-evaluation, critical analysis of their work and reflection
- Portfolios can be a very useful part of teaching and learning



Section 11

Making Presentations

Presentation skills can be learnt and continually improved through practice. Before it is possible to become a good presenter you need to understand what is meant by making a presentation. Generally we mean any situation which involves you speaking, either alone or in a group, to a group of people in order to make a point or share information. Many presentations also have some form of supporting visual aid such as a whiteboard, PowerPoint projections or flip charts.

Here are some examples of what your teacher/tutor might be looking for if you are asked to prepare and deliver a presentation:

- Appropriate visual aids
- Evidence of having practiced the talk
- Appropriate timing/length

- A clear argument in the content
- Appropriate breadth and depth in the content
- Understanding of the topic and the audience
- A clear structure: a distinct beginning, middle and end

One way of tackling a presentation is to look at it in three easy stages:

1. Tell them what you are going to tell them
2. Tell them
3. Tell them what you just told them

Planning for your Presentation

Initially you need a plan of some kind in order to understand what your aims are and how you are going to achieve them. Thorough planning provides you with the knowledge that you have done everything you can to ensure a successful presentation, and hence the confidence to stand up in front of a group of people.

You must take **three key aspects** into account when planning any presentation. These are the:

1. Purpose of the presentation
2. Audience for your presentation
3. Location of your presentation

The Purpose of the Presentation

You may be asked to give a presentation for a number of reasons. Your teacher/tutor might want:

- To test your knowledge and understanding – this could count towards an exam or assignment
- To test your skills in a particular way – e.g. how to carry out an experiment
- To share information/your conclusions to your teacher/tutor and the group
- To give you the opportunity to present feedback verbally

The Audience

The type of audience might well influence the layout of your presentation and its content, for example, a technical presentation to a specialist audience might be more formal than one to a discussion group.

Ask yourself the following questions for your intended audience:

- Who are they?
- What are their reasons for attending?
- How many are likely to be present?
- What sort of people – your peer group/your teacher/tutor/examiner?
- What do they already know about the subject?
- What are their likely attitudes/biases?

The answers to these questions will affect both the style and the content of your talk.

The Location of the Presentation

Another important aspect of planning concerns the location of your presentation. This can have significant implications for how you plan your content and organise yourself. If you have access to the venue, it might help to pay an early visit. The aspects you might want to check include:

- Type and size of room
- Seating arrangements – fixed or movable?
- Lighting – artificial or natural?
- Acoustics
- Equipment available, e.g. whiteboard, projector, OHP, flip chart, voice recorder, camera
- Location of power points
- Position of speaker (you)
- Facilities for those with special requirements

Preparing your Presentation

Just like an essay, the content of any presentation needs to have a clear structure. This will allow the audience to understand the main themes and leave the presentation feeling that it has been a worthwhile experience. Break your presentation down into three sections: the introduction, the main body and the conclusion.

1. Introduction

Set the scene and identify up to three themes and give a brief overview

2. **Main Body**
Explain your main findings
3. **The Conclusion**
Clearly summarise each point made. Do not rush it!

The Introduction

It is very important to be very clear and set the scene for the audience. You need to identify up to three objectives. Give a brief overview and suggest that you hope to answer a certain query.

- It should set the aims and the objectives of the presentation and prepare the audience for what is to come
- It should create an immediate impression and gain the attention of the audience

The Main Body

The main body is the key part of your presentation. This is your opportunity to:

- Present your findings
- Discuss your observations
- Provide any comparison
- Highlight additional activities or reading you have taken undertaken
- Provide analysis

The Conclusion

The conclusion is as equally important as the introduction and should not be rushed. A common pitfall is where the speaker has run out of time and rushes the conclusion. In this situation the audience will only remember an incomplete presentation. The conclusion must summarise all your main points and just as you needed to attract the interest of the audience at the beginning, you need to end the presentation on an equally high note. If the ending is weak it will affect the overall presentation.

- Do not wander around the subject
- Do not introduce any new ideas
- Do not keep repeating points over and over again

Visual Aids

Visual aids will help to illustrate your presentation, but effective use of visual aids requires planning and preparation; you need to be selective so as not to overwhelm your audience.

- Do not use overcomplicated visual aids
- Visual aids should help the audience recall an idea
- Visual aids must complement what you say
- Do not have a visual aid that you don't need
- Make sure there are no spelling mistakes
- Spell authors' names correctly
- Avoid using too much material in too little time

PowerPoint Presentations

PowerPoint presentations can create a good impression but only if you follow these guidelines:

- Do not use too many slides
- Avoid text rushing around on the slide
- Avoid too much text
- Use images, charts, video clips instead of lots of text
- Ensure your electronic equipment is working correctly

The Delivery

Most successful presenters will follow the basic points outlined here:

- Do not simply read the text from the slides without any of your own words. Remember the audience can read
- Look at the audience
- Smile
- Consider whether sitting or standing is most appropriate
- Do not fold your arms or put your hands in your pockets
- Use cue cards

- Try to avoid using too many gestures or repetition of certain words or phrases e.g. 'you know', 'and so on and so forth' 'and I really mean this' 'umm' 'err'
- Do not fumble with the equipment or furniture
- Always have a duplicate of your presentation on a memory stick or CD
- Do not get too excited about what you are saying and start going off the subject

Nerves

Remember you are not alone, even the most practiced presenter will suffer from nervousness. The following suggestions can help to relieve feelings of anxiety:

- Try some relaxation exercises. Sit up, breathe in for a count of one and out for a count of four; keep it going for five minutes whilst just concentrating on the counting and rhythm of your breathing
- Practice your presentation a few times before the actual event
- Familiarise yourself with the room and practice, if possible, using the equipment in the room
- Before you get to the presentation do not cram at the last moment. Try to do something enjoyable.

Question and Answer Session

This part of the presentation is as important as the rest of the session.

- Formally introduce the question and answer session
- Clearly state how long this part will be
- Do not rush your answers
- Remember: you know more than they do about your topic



Section 12

Revision and Examination Techniques

There are numerous ways of revising for exams but the most effective ones involve a degree of active engagement with the material. Simply reading notes or chapters from textbooks over and over does not generally do the trick for most students.

An important starting point would be to look carefully at past exam papers and seek advice from your teacher/tutor as to the likely topic areas in exams you are taking.

- What are the core or key subject areas which have questions every year?
- Look at trends or patterns in question types common to recent exams. If regular/persistent – these are likely to continue.
- How broad a choice of questions/ topic areas is given (if any)?

- Consider parts of the course you are strong and confident in (subjects you enjoy studying) and areas you are not so competent in. How likely is it that the areas of strength will be well represented in the exam? This will help you to decide on the amount of attention you need to give to your weaknesses.
- Think about your preferred learning style when you approach exam revision. Consider whether you would benefit from revising with a friend, within a small group or alone.

Revision Plan

A revision plan is essential and needs to be drawn up well in advance. How much time will you need to devote to various subject areas for the exams you are taking? Remember that you need to plan this around your other daily activities for example part-time work, sports training, music practice, dental and other appointments.

It is important to break your revision plan into smaller daily chunks and set yourself realistic targets for each session. As you successfully cover the topic(s) set, you naturally feel good about it.

It will be important to initiate and maintain a degree of self-discipline when preparing and revising for exams:

- Identify a key revision task for a topic area you enjoy (focus on these first and move to deal with your weaker subjects later)
- Decide on a time of day or night when you are regularly free and able to concentrate fully on the task in hand. Remove all possible distractions, for example turn off your mobile telephone
- To begin with at least, the task should not be given more than about 30 minutes, or slightly longer (40-45 minutes) but divided by a short break
- Wait for the exact scheduled time and then begin the task. Focus on the task uninterrupted for the full duration of the period allocated
- In starting to work at the same time for each session, the initial goal is to help you develop a routine
- Maintaining this in the time leading up to your exams is good preparation. Track your own progress. Gradually you can adapt the time given to each subject depending on how effective you are in achieving your goals
- Practise writing timed assignments, aim to complete a specific task in a given time. Practise answering past exam papers or questions in the time allowed
- Gradually begin to allocate more time to your weaker subjects – the ones you really need to work on most. Again, ensure that you tackle them in small chunks, making them feel more manageable

Inevitably, you will not be able to keep a strict timetable going at the exact time every day, so a degree of flexibility is required including free days which can, as the exam approaches, be used for additional work in weaker areas. However, if you identify a likely time for most days when you can work uninterrupted it will be easier to establish and maintain a revision routine.

Revising

Revising is where your active and critical study skills are really needed. When beginning to work:

- **Preview** the text you are about to read. Skim the headings, sub-headings, introduction and conclusion. Does it look likely to serve your needs or is there a more appropriate chapter or book to focus on?
- **Highlight key information** whilst you read; this can be done by marking or underlining important areas of the text (photocopied of course!). Visual learners often devise a colour code using marker pens. This could include using different colours for factual information, the author's opinions or claims, plausible and dubious reasoning, references, etc.
- **Summarise the key points** separately, highlighting patterns and linking main and supporting ideas drawn from different sources.
- **Test yourself** or have a friend test you on those key points listed in your summaries. This is a good opportunity to identify and work on weaknesses at the same time.

The more organised and timely your revision schedule is, the more confident you are going to feel when the time comes to take the exam(s). It will also help in dealing with exam nerves and reduce the likelihood of a panic situation.

Taking the Exam

Once the exam is underway it is important not to panic and launch yourself straight into it without spending some time looking carefully at the questions and any instructions included.

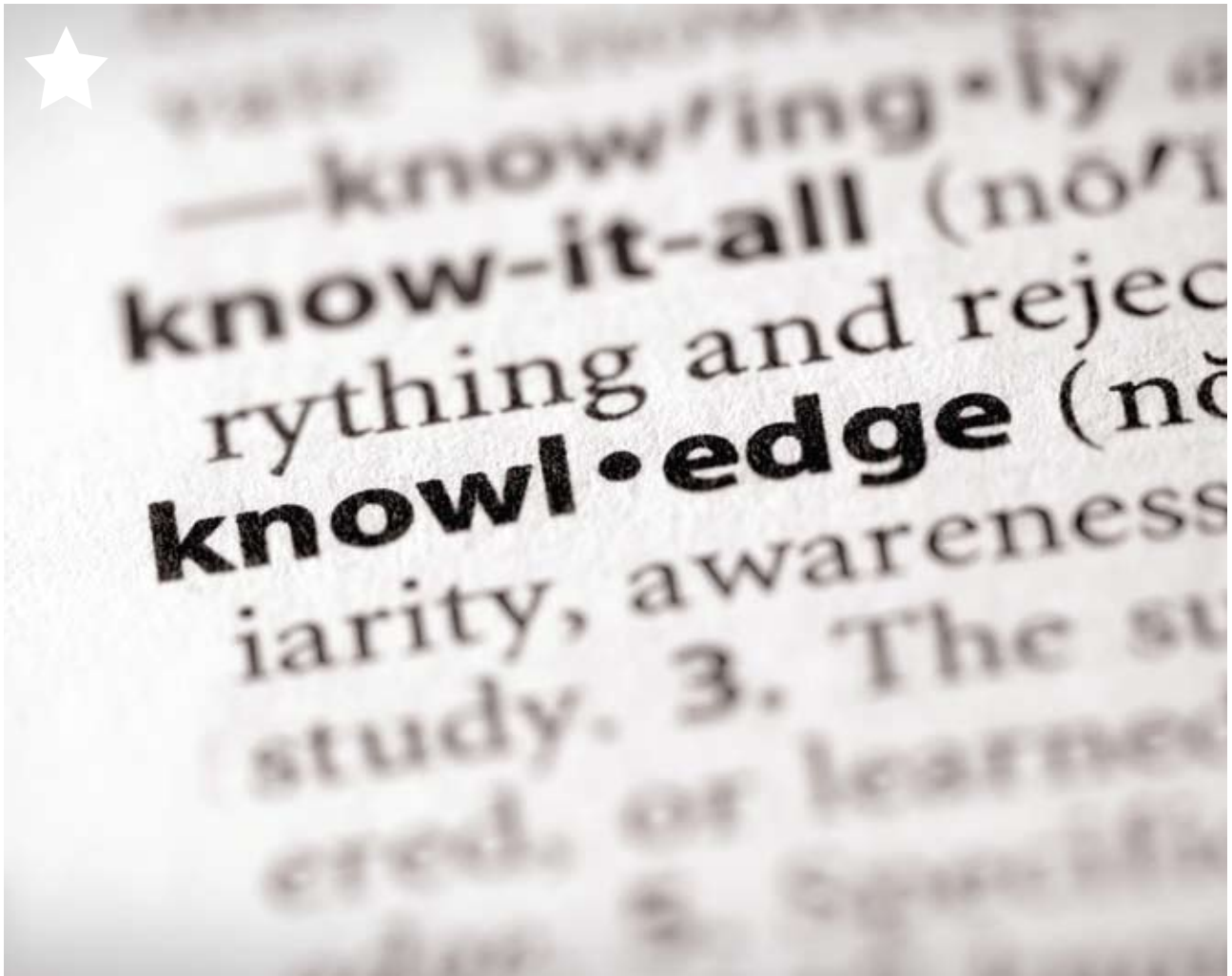
- Read the question paper through carefully, underlining key words and instructions
- If a choice is offered, mark the questions on your stronger topic areas
- Analyse the way in which the question has been broken down. What does it require you to do?
- To ensure that you understand exactly what the question is asking of you, read it carefully and underline key vocabulary items, especially action or task words such as: analyse, compare, contrast, describe, discuss, evaluate, identify
- Making a simple, brief plan for each question you decide to answer is critical if you are to cover all the key aspects expected by the examiner. (In that regard, do not be put off if you are surrounded by other students furiously scribbling away without having thought about or planned their response).

- Trust the knowledge and skills you have acquired during your revision. Avoid getting into conversations with other learners immediately before the exam. This may add to nervousness or uncertainty
- Make sure that you allow enough time to answer all the required questions. Doing a great job on two questions when three or four are required is not going to lead to a good result
- Leave around five minutes at the end of each essay question answered to ensure that you have covered the points outlined in your brief plan. Make any necessary corrections or adjustments
- If required, ensure that you make appropriate references in your text

The most important thing about exam preparation is to start it well before the actual exams. Get your revision plan drawn up and practice self-discipline in carrying it out. There is nothing more stressful or less effective than leaving it all to the last minute and frantically 'cramming' late at night.

Example Revision Timetable

DAY	MORNING			AFTERNOON			EVENING		
	9.00 - 10.00	10.00 - 11.00	11.00 - 12.00	1.30 - 2.30	2.30 - 3.30	3.30 - 4.30	6.00 - 7.00	7.00 - 8.00	8.00 - 9.00
MONDAY	School	School	School	School	School	After School Revision Club	Part-time Work	Part-time Work	Biology Revision
TUESDAY	School	School	School	School	School	After School Revision Club	Tennis Practice	Biology Revision	Biology Revision
WEDNESDAY	Dental Appointment	School	School	English Revision	English Revision	Swimming	English Revision	English Revision	English Revision
THURSDAY	School	School	School	School	School	After School Revision Club	Part-time Work	Part-time Work	Geography Revision
FRIDAY	School	School	School	Geography Revision	Geography Revision	After School Revision Club	Night Off	Night Off	Night Off
SATURDAY	English Revision	Geography Revision	Geography Revision	Part-time Work	Part-time Work	Part-time Work	English Revision	English Revision	English Revision
SUNDAY	Biology Revision	Biology Revision	English Revision	English Revision	Cinema	Cinema	Revision session with friends	Revision session with friends	Night Off



Section 13

Referencing

Referencing is when you acknowledge the work of others in your own writing. This could be when you have used a direct quotation, information, statistics, or summarised someone else's words or ideas in your own words. Referencing is important because it adds credibility to your own work, and is a necessary academic convention. If you read something and you want to put it in your essay, then you must reference it.

It is a good idea to get into the habit of providing full and accurate references. You will find that this helps you to identify, and remember, particular points in your reading. Referencing will be taken into account when marking your assignments and if you want to avoid losing marks, it is essential that you get it right.

Why do I need to reference?

Although providing sources and references is often an uninteresting task, it is a vital one. There are several reasons why you need to do this.

1. It is the means by which you tell your teacher/tutor where the information in your written work came from.
2. To acknowledge the contribution someone else's work has made to what you have written. If you do not, you are implicitly claiming (whether you mean to or not) that the ideas you are writing are entirely your own. This is plagiarism and is extremely serious. There is almost no academic work that is not built on others' work – we are all 'standing on the shoulders' of others in that respect. In your assignments you will draw heavily on the work of others and you need to get into the habit of referencing as soon as possible.
3. Referencing enables your teacher/tutor to see what is your work and what is the work of others. This is fundamental to the whole enterprise of learning, being assessed and receiving tuition. It allows the teacher/tutor to see what you have read, what sources you have used, what aspects of the course materials you have drawn on and which non course materials you have used. These are all things which are rewarded in marking and you should shout about it, not hide it.
4. Being able to identify which are your own ideas also allows the teacher/tutor to see what sense you, personally, have made of this material, how well you have understood it, and what your own analysis and ideas are. In short, teacher/tutors cannot properly comment on your understanding and progress without being able to see what are your own ideas and what are the ideas of others.
5. Citing the work of others can also be used to show that the arguments you are making are supported by other people. Your arguments are stronger if supported by evidence.
6. Proper references also allow the reader to find the sources you have referred to quickly and easily.

If you **do not** reference you are:

- Claiming work is your own when it is not (plagiarism)
- Failing to show the extent of your own studying
- Failing to identify your own work to your teacher/tutor

If you reference **correctly** you are:

- Avoiding possible charges of plagiarism
- Showing what you have studied to your teacher/tutor
- Enabling your teacher/tutor to assess your understanding, analysis and ideas, to award accurate marks and to give you feedback

1. What do I need to reference?

You need to reference any work from any source that is not your own that you use directly in your work.

1. **Instances where the ideas and arguments you are using come from a particular source** (an author of a book chapter for instance). For example, you might want to make a point in your assignment and the argument you use to make and explain this point comes directly from a particular author/book. In this case, then you must reference this source.

2. Where you are using particular bits of data or evidence. Where you wish to use some specific piece of data or evidence, you must say where this comes from. This helps enormously in strengthening your argument – you are not just saying something off the top of your head but are providing evidence to support the claims you are making. You have to show where the evidence came from.

For instance, if your essay title was ‘Discuss the ways in which the idea of the family has altered over the last 30 years’ you will need to show reliable evidence that it has or that it has not changed. For instance you may look at the statistical evidence of the number of families that are single parent and the number of extended families. Then, you will need to discuss, in your opinion, why the idea of the family may have changed.

3. Where you use someone else’s words. It cannot be stressed enough that whenever you use someone else’s words these must be put in quotation marks. You will be accused of plagiarism if you do not. The bulk of your essay should be written in your own words and you need to take care that you don’t accidentally slip into copying sections of the books and other sources you use. However, sometimes an author you are reading puts something in a way that is appropriate and to the point, or provides a definition of a concept or idea which you want to use. Here, using a quotation is appropriate and often adds to the flow of your writing.

Basic Requirements of Referencing

There are a number of different types of referencing, the two major systems are the:

- Harvard System: uses the author’s surname and date
- Numeric System: uses numbers

Every time someone’s work is referred to, one of these systems must point to it in your piece of work. There are other referencing conventions in use; we recommend the Harvard system.

Directly Quoting

If you want to copy what an author has said this is called directly quoting. It can also be called a citation. What you write must be an exact copy of the original and must be supported by references.

Example: Harvard

Jones states that ‘the economy has slowed down over the last two years’ (2007, p6).

Indirectly Quoting

If you want to sum up an author’s point of view, you are effectively taking key points and putting them in your own words. It is still necessary to reference this. This is called an indirect quote.

Example: Harvard

Jones argues that the growth of the economy has decreased since 2005 (Jones, 2007).

Secondary Referencing

This is when you have not read the original work, but it has been referred to in something else you have read. In your text you should refer to the author whose work you have read and inform the reader that the author of that work has cited another's material.

Example: Harvard

George suggests that the problem focused on the issues of the day (2007 cited in Newman 2005, p.326).

Harvard Referencing

At every point in your piece of work when you make a reference to a particular piece of work, the author's surname and the year of publication are inserted. If the author's name occurs naturally in the sentence, the year follows in brackets. Alternatively, the author's name and date can be placed at the end of the sentence, both in brackets.

Presentation of Quotes

- Quote marks should look like this 'or' and be placed directly around the words/figures that have been copied from a text. In most cases they should be in single line spacing.
- If it is a long quote (three lines and over) it should be indented (i.e. with an extra margin of about 1cm at the left) and there must NOT be any quote marks around it.

Bibliography

The bibliography is also on a separate sheet and should include extra material that you have read about the subject, but not included. It should follow the same layout as the reference sheet.

Reference Sheet

The reference page for the Harvard system is on a separate sheet at the end of your work, and must include all the sources you have included in your essay. They are to be written in alphabetical order. The following list will help you order the material. The references must be complete and accurate.

Quick Guide to Referencing – Harvard System

Below is detailed guidance on how to apply the Harvard system to references both within the text of the assignment and in the bibliography at the end. You can use underlining instead of italics if necessary.

Books

Single author

In your essay/report: 'Braverman (1974) argues that ...'

In the list of references at the end of your essay/report:

'Braverman, H. (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital: the degradation of work in the twentieth century*, London, Monthly Review Press.'

Two authors

In your essay/report: 'Bowles and Gintis (1976) found that ...'

In your references: 'Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.'

More than two authors

In your essay report: 'Coffield et al. (1986) suggest that....'

In your references: 'Coffield, F., Borrill, C. and Marshall, S. (1986) *Growing up at the Margins: young adults in the North East*, Milton Keynes, Open School/college Press.'

A single author's chapter in an edited collection

In your essay report: 'Reeder (1979) argued that ...'

In your references: 'Reeder, D. (1979) "A recurring debate: education and industry" in Bernbaum, G. (ed.) *Schooling in Decline*, London, Macmillan.'

(Referencing for joint and multiple authorship of chapters are as above.)

If a book has more than one edition, make clear in the references which edition you have used.

In your essay/report: 'Handy (1981) states ...'

In your references: 'Handy, C. (1981, 2nd edn) *Understanding Organizations*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.'

Internet web site documents

Author's surname, initial(s), year of publication (in brackets), title of document (in italics) [online], publisher. Available from: Name of Service (if any), address of website [Accessed + date].

Gilligan, E. (1998) *Local heroes* [online], Friends of the Earth.

Available from: <http://www.foe.co.uk/local/rest.pdf> [Accessed 24 November 2008]

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (1996) *General national vocational qualifications: a brief guide*. London: DFEE

<http://www.open.gov.uk/dfee/gnvq/gnvq.htm> (updated 20 March 1996, accessed 25 April 2009)

Podcast/Downloads

In your essay/report: 'Fink stated (BBC World News, 2006) that'

In your references: 'Fink, S. (2006) *Aids in Papua New Guinea*. 29 May 2006. BBC World News: health/HIV Aids. Available at <http://www.theworld.org/health/aids/shtml> [Accessed 1 Aug. 2006].

Government Publications

In your essay/report: 'It was stated (DES, 1985) that'

In your references: 'DES (1985) *Better Schools*, London, HMSO.'

Film

In your essay/report: 'It was stated by Bella (*The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*, 2010). that...'

In your references:

Option 1

'SLADE, David. (Director). (2010). *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. [Film]. Canada. Vancouver Film Studios'

Option 2

'*The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. (2010). [Film]. Directed by David Slade. Canada. Vancouver Film Studios'

The order in which you place the director, the author or playwright will depend upon the reason or emphasis you wish to place on them in your essay/report.

The Organisation of References

In your list of references, all materials should be listed alphabetically by author. For each author, single-authored items come first, then joint items, and finally multiple items; within the single-authored section, within the joint-authored section and within the multiple-authored section, items should be listed in date order.

If two or more items have the same date, the items should be listed with a lower-case letter (a, b, c, etc.) after the date. This applies both in the text – e.g. '(Southworth, 1985a)' or '(Southworth, 1985b)' – and in the references:

'Southworth, G. (1985a) *Primary Heads Reflection on Training*, Education, 165 (25), p. 560.'

'Southworth, G. (1985b) *Perspectives on the Primary Curriculum*, Cambridge Journal of Education, 15(1), pp. 41–9.'

If, after reading this section, you are still unsure about referencing:

- Look at how your course books use references
- Ask your teacher/tutor for advice

Useful website link

www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning | www.bournemouth.ac.uk/library

Reference books

Neville, C (2007) *The Complete Guide to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Peck, J and Coyle, M. (2005 2nd edn) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar Punctuation and Spelling*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Redman, P. (2006, 3rd edn) *Good Essay Writing : A Social Sciences Guide*. Milton Keynes, California. SAGE



Section 14

Grammar and Punctuation

Writing Sentences

Writing assignments can place extra demands on your use of grammar and punctuation because sometimes you need to communicate quite difficult meanings clearly. The following sections will help you address frequent problem areas and provide basic examples to help refresh your understanding of basic grammar techniques.

What is a sentence?

A simple sentence is a grammatically complete unit, a group of words that make sense. Sentences may be made up of different components but all sentences must have a **subject** and a **verb**. They often, but not always, have an **object**.

The subject

The subject is the person or thing performing the action.

Example:

The assistant was writing the report.

In this sentence 'The assistant' is the subject of the sentence.

The Verb

Most verbs describe actions. In this sentence 'writing' is the verb.

The Object

The object is the person or thing receiving the action. In this sentence the 'report' is the object.

Example:

She ran fast along the racetrack.

'She' is the **subject**

'Ran' is the **verb**

'Racetrack' is the **object**

Compound Sentences

To make your sentences more interesting, you need to add more information to the basic facts and think about how you can change the structure to make your sentences sound more thoughtful.

One way to do this is by using conjunctions, or words that connect two or more sentences to make one more compound (or complex) sentence, for example 'and', 'or', 'but' and 'so'.

Example:

He went on holiday to France. He bought a house on the coast.

These two sentences can be rewritten as one by using the conjunction 'and': He went on holiday to France and bought a house on the coast.

Complex Sentences

Complex sentences are called that because their structure is more complex than that of simple sentences, not because they contain more complicated ideas. As a result they are a simple way of improving the quality of your writing. A complex sentence contains one independent clause joined to one or more dependent clauses by a subordinating conjunction.

Example:

We had to go inside when it started to rain, however, the picnic was not cancelled

We had to go inside – independent clause

When the rain started, however, the picnic was not cancelled – **two dependent clauses**.

A dependent clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb that cannot stand alone. A dependent clause always starts with a subordinating conjunction. This example has two subordinating conjunctions 'when' and 'however'.

The most commonly used subordinating conjunctions are:

After	soon	if	that	even	though
as before	because	as long as	just as	rather than	provided that
although	as though	whenever	though	as	even if
when	as soon	that	since	what	which

Commas

The comma is one of the most overused punctuation marks and many writers tend to insert commas too freely throughout their work. This can lead to a confused piece of writing. If you can stop yourself inserting too many commas where they are not needed, and learn the six uses of the comma rule, your writing skills will improve and you will convince a reader that you can write confidently, and can present a controlled piece of writing.

1. The introductory part of a sentence

The introductory element is, as the name suggests, the part of the sentence which introduces the rest. It comes first and is separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

Example:

Just before the Christmas holiday, the children came down with a virus.

Before they had breakfast, they went to the market.

2. Parenthetical element of a sentence

Parenthetical elements in a sentence are words such as however, therefore, of course, in fact and nevertheless.

It is important to note that a comma should always be inserted either side of the parenthetical element, unless it starts the sentence in which case just one comma is inserted after it.

Examples:

The course was exceptionally hard, nevertheless, it was worth the struggle.

They decided to go on holiday in February, however, this proved impossible.

3. Comma before ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘or’, ‘so’

Commas are often used before a subordinating conjunction such as ‘and’, ‘but’ ‘or’ ‘so’ to link a dependent clause to an independent clause. (See compound and complex sentences).

Examples:

She wanted to go to the shops, and then go for lunch.

We can go out to dinner, and then to the cinema.

4. Lists

One of the most common uses of the comma is in lists. A comma is used to separate each item in the list, except the last two parts which are normally separated with **and** or **or**.

Examples:

Her shoes were uncomfortable, too tight and impossible to wear.

The film was slow, boring and unrealistic.

5. Additional Clauses

An additional or subordinate clause is a dependent clause which provides additional information about the independent clause and is separated from it by a comma. It might be useful to remind yourself of clauses in the sentence section.

Examples:

He wanted to go to Italy, she refused.

The independent clause is ‘He wanted to go to Italy’ and additional or subordinate clause is ‘she refused’.

She likes sci-fi films, he does not.

6. Incomplete Sentences

An incomplete sentence is when a dependent clause is used on its own. Even though the group of words begins with a capital letter and end with a full stop or exclamation mark, it is grammatically incorrect when used in this way.

Example:

He lives on the outskirts of the village, which is next to the motorway.

The Apostrophe

The apostrophe has two main functions: it indicates if one or more letters have been omitted, and it indicates when something or someone belongs to something or someone else.

When an apostrophe is used to show something has been missed out, this is called a contraction. Some of these include: doesn’t, wouldn’t, shouldn’t, couldn’t, isn’t, haven’t.

Indicating Possession

If you are not sure if you need to use an apostrophe, it is helpful to turn the phrase around and make it '...of the...' phrase. If it still makes sense, then you must use an apostrophe.

Here are some examples to show possession:

- The dog's food = the food of the dog
- The child's toy = the toy of the child
- The car's wheel = the wheel of the car
- The bike's chain = the chain on the bike
- The doll's dress = the dress of the doll

Plural Possession

It is important to remember that apostrophes are **never** used to indicate the plural form of the word for example: the chair's in the room. It should always read: the chairs in the room. They are used to indicate possession by plurals for example something that belongs to more than one person or thing.

Here are some examples to show possession by plurals:

- The girl's books = the books belong to one girl
- The girls' books = the books belong to more than one girl
- The pharmacist's tablets = the tablets belong to only one pharmacist
- The pharmacists' tablets = the tablets belong to more than one pharmacist

It is important to remember that possessive pronouns such as his, hers, ours, yours and theirs do not require an apostrophe.

There are some exceptions to the rule:

Children's, Men's, Women's

It's or Its?

Often 'it's' and 'its' can be confusing. Remember that:

- It's = it is
- Its = belonging to

Examples:

It's going to be a long holiday (It is going to be a long holiday)

The cat wanted its food (The food belongs to the cat)

How to write a paragraph

If you follow a basic layout every time you write a paragraph, this will result in a tightly organised piece of writing. Peck and Coyle (2005) suggest that initially a paragraph should introduce the main point in a simple sentence. The paragraph then needs to explain the point further: this is the main part of the paragraph that elaborates on the first sentence. The final two sentences should sum up what you are saying and then link it to the next paragraph.

An effective way to write a paragraph is to consider it in three sections.

1. **Locate:** the first sentence must clearly state what the paragraph is going to be about
2. **Analyse and develop:** this is where you expand on your first sentence
3. **Conclude:** this will sum up what you have said and link to your next paragraph

Reference books

Burt, A. (1991, 2nd edn) *A Guide to Better Punctuation*, Cheltenham: Stanley Thorne

Peck, J and Coyle, M. (2005 2nd edn) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Useful website link

www.chompchomp.com



Section 15

Additional Resources Available to You

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 25 horizontal dotted lines.

For further information on the Community University of the Valleys, Widening Access and Study Skills, contact the Department of Adult Continuing Education (DACE)

Swansea University

Department of Adult Continuing Education (DACE)
Glyndwr Building, Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP

General Enquiries: **01792 602211**

adult.education@swansea.ac.uk
www.swansea.ac.uk/DACE