

Orientation Lecture Series: LEARNING TO LEARN Strategies for Successful Learning

OUTLINE OF LECTURE

- A. Learning**
 - 1. Learning styles and critical thinking
 - 2. Recommended learning strategies
- B. Using Your Time Efficiently**
 - 1. Improve your concentration
 - 2. Get started: dealing with procrastination
 - 3. Use plans
 - 4. Be prepared to make changes
- C. Overview of Academic Tasks and Associated Skills**

A. LEARNING

1. Learning Styles and Critical Thinking

ATTITUDES
TO
KNOWLEDGE

conserving

extending

LEARNING
APPROACHES

reproductive

analytical

speculative

LEARNING
STRATEGIES

Type	memorisation & imitation	critical thinking	deliberate search for new possibilities & explanations
Activities	summarising, describing, identifying & applying information	questioning, judging, recombining ideas & information into an argument	speculating & hypothesising
Questions	what?	why? how? how valid? how important?	what if?
Aim	'correctness'	'simple' originality - reshaping material into a different pattern	'creative' originality - totally new approach/new knowledge

Learning Styles

2. Recommended Learning Strategies

a) information-based strategies

- be informed about objectives and requirements of course
- be informed about the format, time limit and the number of questions to answer in all exams in all your subjects
- pick up hints given by lecturers about what might be in the exam paper

b) revision-based strategies

- revise your work regularly - aim for 3-4 revisions
 each night - lectures of the day
 when a topic is complete
 in STUVAC
 night before exam (brief and focussed)
- work to a plan - organise a revision schedule that starts early in the semester
- consult past exam papers and practise answering questions within appropriate time limits - check your answers with the textbook and lecture notes

c) learning strategies

Aims

- to revise **many times** and **in different ways**
 - to focus on meaning and understanding
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- process information in a variety of ways, i.e. don't reread the same information in same format
 - make summaries of lecture notes - but don't use these as your only basis of revision
 - draw diagrams (e.g. a concept map) to show relationships between separate pieces of information
 - use many senses (e.g. discuss information on tape and listen to it; make a model)
 - apply your knowledge to novel situations
 - build up chains of information and integrate separate pieces of information so they have meaning
 - focus on the connections, similarities and differences between pieces of information
 - make it more personal (e.g. think of everyday experiences in your life)
 - associate new information with something you already know
 - make it concrete (e.g. think of common examples)
 - do many practice exercises varying the type of exercise and the level of difficulty
 - get an overview first (i.e. start from the general and move to the particular -deductive process)
 - work with a partner (discuss, argue, justify, explain ...)

B. USING YOUR TIME EFFICIENTLY

1. Improve your concentration

Do you sometimes find yourself sitting at your desk and reading/studying your lecture notes/textbook without having the slightest idea of what it is about?

This experience is common.

Causes:

- short concentration span;
- too easily tempted by alternative activities
- poor reading and study skills
- failure to set goals and prioritise tasks
- failure to make a plan for each private study session
- feeling tired or bored
- habitual daydreaming
- feeling anxious and frustrated
- personal and/or familial problems and distractions
- interruptions; e.g. phone calls, household noise, TV...

Strategies to Improve your Concentration

a) Academic and Learning Style Issues

- identify areas of difficulty and practise specific skills, e.g. skim text before reading in detail to get overview
- be actively involved in work, e.g. take notes, underline key points, talk aloud
- integrate material, e.g. draw diagrams of information on one page - flow charts, concept maps
- read easier text to bridge gap between more difficult material and current level of understanding
- become familiar with technical language of subject - use subject dictionary, keep own list of common technical and subtechnical terms
- use available resources, clarify task requirements, seek early support if needed, e.g. staff, students, learning centres

b) Planning and Organisational Issues

- set and prioritise short-term goals
- plan each study session
- get into a routine e.g. start at the same time and/or with the same activity each study session
- plan study activities according to your best (and worst) times of concentration;
- organise study space and have alternative study area in mind for emergency
- organise your materials - filing systems, folders, notes, written assignments
- know where everything you need is

c) Lifestyle and Personal Issues

- anticipate and eliminate possible interruptions: e.g. keep phone calls brief or take it off the hook
- seek cooperation from friends and family to maintain a balance between university/ non-university commitments
- make changes to work patterns and organise your life to get balance between various commitments and interests
- keep a diary for a week to discover how you typically (mis)use your time and cut down on excessive recreational activities
- lead a healthy lifestyle; e.g. get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, get some exercise
- take rest breaks; e.g. 5-10 minutes every hour
- vary your tasks and subjects in each session

- read a more interesting book on the same topic
- give yourself rewards for completing tasks as planned
 - * choose a reward you will enjoy and motivate you
 - * don't give yourself reward if goal not achieved
- learn stress management and relaxation techniques
- talk to a counsellor or health professional if ongoing personal/familial problems require attention

2. Get Started: Dealing with Procrastination

Do you sometimes find it hard to get started on your work?

Causes of Procrastination

- no established study routine or work patterns
- poor self-discipline - an inability to say 'no' to alternative and tempting activities
- low levels of motivation
- poor concentration (see earlier section for strategies)
- a poor understanding of your own work patterns and of task requirements; i.e. underestimating how much time and effort is required for you to satisfactorily complete a task or sub-task

Strategies for Dealing with Procrastination

a) Strategies to help you establish a study routine or work pattern

- Associate sitting at your desk with serious work and study (and not with wasting time); i.e. do something straight away.
- Have a plan.
- At the end of each study session prepare for the next one.
- Develop a routine

b) Strategies to help you increase your motivation and self-discipline

- Start with some particularly easy or interesting aspect.
- Throw yourself into the project energetically and enthusiastically
- Give yourself rewards.
- Have a balanced and healthy life.
- Seek cooperation from friends and family.
- Stick to your plans and be prepared to say 'no'

c) Strategies to help you understand task requirements

- Estimate and monitor how long tasks and subtasks typically take
- Clarify task requirements

3. Use Plans

- understand your commitments university and non-university (see Appendix 1: Weekly Diary)
- understand yourself as a learner and your lifestyle
- set goals and priorities
- construct flexible and workable plans
 - semester planner: gives overview of semester's workload (see Appendix 2: Planner Semester 1, Appendix 3: Planner Semester 2, and both semesters in Yearly Planner)
 - weekly plan: includes university & non-university commitments
 - sessional plan: sets goals to achieve in one study session

- waste as little time as possible - use small amounts of time; e.g. travelling time, waiting time

4. Be prepared to make changes

Strategies for Making Changes

- start with some minor goals
- only attempt one major change at a time
- persist practising the new patterns and don't give up in frustration too early - habits do not change quickly
- order the changes in terms of your needs and goals
- reward yourself with a tick (and more tangible reward) - monitor your progress
- keep your list handy and visible

C. OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC TASKS AND ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- attending **lectures**
 - listening and notetaking skills
- preparing for and participating in **tutorials**
 - reading and notetaking skills
 - doing practical exercises, calculations
 - listening and notetaking skills
 - speaking skills
 - presentation skills
- preparing for and participating in **lab sessions**
 - observation skills
 - practical skills
 - skills in integrating theory & practice
- gathering information
 - using the **library / internet**
 - research skills
- preparing and writing **assignments**, e.g. essays, reports
 - reading and notetaking skills
 - writing skills
 - clear, coherent expression
 - criticism and analysis
 - structuring/sequencing information
 - developing an argument
 - referencing
 - computer skills
 - scientific writing skills
- studying for and performing in **exams**
 - learning skills
 - exam performance skills, e.g. essays, MCQ, short answer, clinical, practical exams

- self study
time management and organisational skills

APPENDIX 1 Weekly Diary

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Time%
Formal classes								
Private study								
Relaxing/socialising								
Domestic chores								
Family activities								
Physical exercise								
Travelling								
Sleeping								
Eating								
Paid work								
Other necessary activities								
Time Wasted								

[Adapted from Maddox, H. (1988) *How to Study*, Pan Books Ltd., London.]

Reflecting on your lifestyle

a) At the end of the week look for patterns and ask yourself the following questions. Tick the appropriate boxes:

- | | Yes | No |
|--|-----|-----|
| • Are you distributing your time appropriately? | [] | [] |
| • Are you spending too little time on your universities studies? | [] | [] |
| • Are you spending too much time on any non-university activity? | [] | [] |
| • Are you spending too much time on your universities studies? | [] | [] |
| • Are you wasting too much time? | [] | [] |

b) What are your main time wasters? Think of strategies for minimising them.