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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTITUDES TO KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>conserving</th>
<th>extending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING APPROACHES</td>
<td>reproductive</td>
<td>analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING STRATEGIES</td>
<td>memorisation &amp; imitation</td>
<td>critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>summarising, describing,</td>
<td>questioning, judging,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifying &amp; applying</td>
<td>recombining ideas &amp; information into an argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>what?</td>
<td>why? how? how valid? how important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>‘correctness’</td>
<td>‘simple’ originality - reshaping material into a different pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘creative’ originality - totally new approach/new knowledge</td>
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</table>

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• to revise <strong>many times</strong> and in <strong>different ways</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to focus on meaning and understanding</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- 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 ...)

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**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
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• 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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thur</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Time%</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Formal classes</td>
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<td>Private study</td>
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<td>Relaxing/socialising</td>
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<td>Domestic chores</td>
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<td>Family activities</td>
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<td>Eating</td>
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<td>Other necessary activities</td>
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<td>Time Wasted</td>
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Reflecting on your lifestyle

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

- 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.