

## Study Skills

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# Assignment 1

1. Discuss the importance of good time management
2. Give 3 examples of strategies you could implement to help avoid procrastination
3. Produce a study schedule for a typical week – you should include other activities (e.g. work, hobbies etc.)

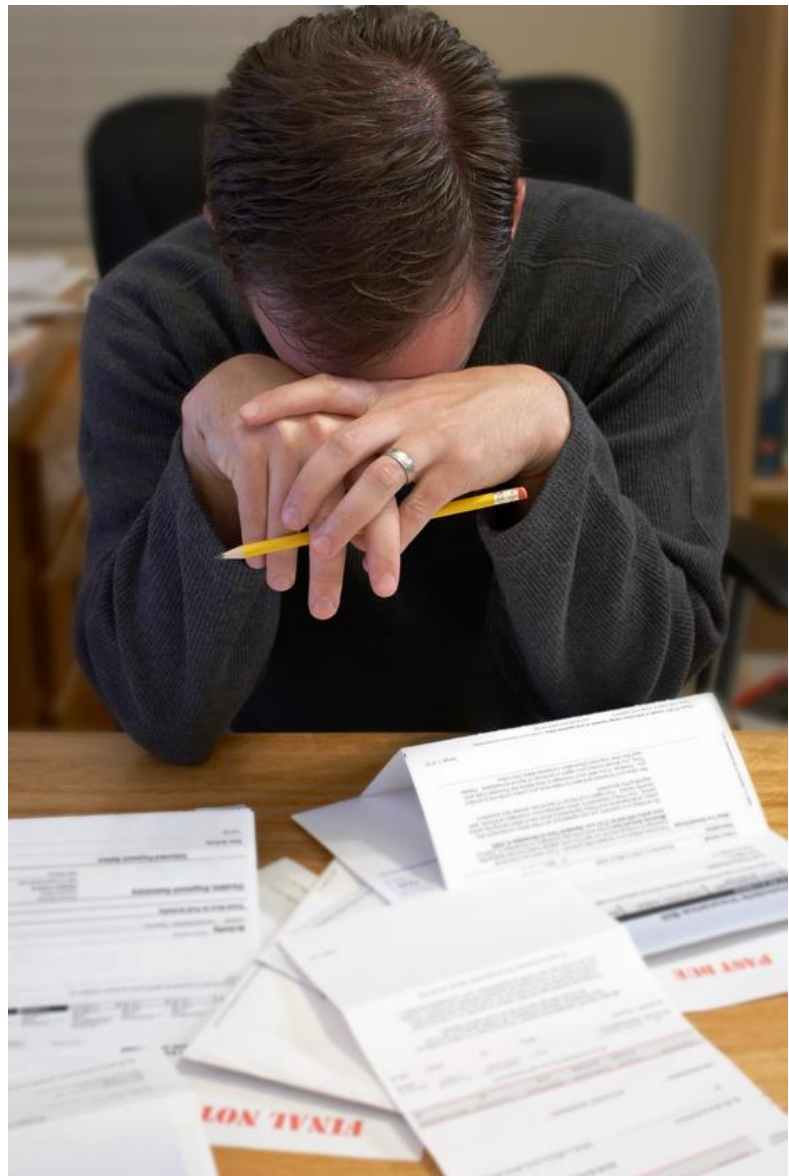
# Study Skills

When you begin distance learning, there are many additional challenges faced when compared to traditional university settings. While it is challenging in a standard school setting to find time to study, live with roommates, and balance your school work with a social life, these things are exacerbated by trying to finish school from home. Without a standard classroom setting you must be more disciplined in your learning. Without the convenience of physical study groups you must adapt to online chats and email communication with professors or tutors. You must study and take notes in preparation for exams without the disciplined schedules enforced by physical university settings and teachers. Instead you are forced to create your own schedule and ensure that there is plenty of time to finish everything you need on time.

There are many important components to studying. Whether you are new to school or advanced and beginning with online courses now, there are many great resources available to help you use referencing styles, take notes, plan your time, read, and write at the appropriate level.

# Procrastination

When you are taking online education courses or transferring to a university there are many distractions around you, each of which can lead to procrastination. If you are at home trying to study, you might procrastinate by cleaning, cooking, or watching television. If you are in the university setting the distractions can include things such as: sports, group projects, study groups, or conferences. No matter the source of your procrastination, it will keep you one step behind where you need to be.



Procrastination happens when you avoid completing a task at hand which needs to be finished. If you do not pay attention, your procrastination can leave you with feelings of inadequacy, depression, or guilt. If you let procrastination get the best of you then you might begin to doubt yourself and your academic abilities. If you do not catch it early, procrastination can severely inhibit your academic success with distance education or at a university.

You can look for signs of procrastination to stop this before it happens. You might say "I work better with a tight deadline" or "It can wait until tomorrow". If you have either one of these then you have faced procrastination.

Procrastination is the result of poor time management. If you have priorities, goals, and objectives you want to meet during a busy school and work week but if you allow deadlines to overwhelm you then you may miss them completely. When you stress about something it can quickly consume you and therefore you attempt to alleviate your stress through other means such as social activities in lieu of finishing your academic priorities. However you should avoid putting off your work as it leads to an unhealthy time management schedule which exacerbates any existing stress.

Procrastination may occur if you are unable to focus. This is especially true of distance learning. If you are sitting at your computer with a social network page open you may begin to work or think to yourself that you are "multi-tasking" but in reality you end up spending an hour or two before you know it looking at photos, daydreaming, or chatting with friends. If your environment is very noisy you can easily become distracted. You might be living with flat mates and find that when you try to sit down and work you get distracted by talking with them or watching a television show they put on. You can also get easily distracted if you are working in a messy environment.

If you let your fear get the most of you it could interfere with your ability to work. Instead of sitting down to work you may find yourself sitting down and worrying over and over about getting a failing grade or just not completing the project on time, both of which ultimately lead to more procrastination and distractions. You might begin working on your project after which you begin to worry about whether or not you have the skills to do it. This worry can cause you to stop midway through a project without completing it. Other distractions might include family problems, the phone ringing, personal

problems, or social issues, especially for those who complete their education online.

Whatever the type of procrastination you face or reason for it, you can overcome it with enough effort. The first step is to admit that procrastination is a problem. Like many things, the first step is admitting there is an issue which is holding you back. In order to overcome the procrastination you have to recognise why you are procrastinating. Are you doing it because of family issues? Because of stress? Because of a lack of concentration? Or are you doing it because of boredom? Personal issues? Overall bad time management?

Once you admit you are procrastinating and find out why, you can review your goals. You can determine the strengths you have in your possession and your weaknesses. If you often get distracted and procrastinate, you can remind yourself that if you want to reach your goals you have to find a quiet place where you will not be as distracted.

Once you get your assignment lists you should write out the due dates for each by hand. It is not enough to put the due dates in a computer. You recall information more if you write it by hand. You should continually remind yourself of the goals you have set and the schedule to which you must adhere in order to meet the goals.

It can help to take a ten minute break in between your assignments or alternating between them in order to help alleviate boredom or a lack of motivation. If you surround yourself with other people who are also studying, you are less likely to get distracted by social things or television shows. If you study in a public location where you must be quiet, you cannot be distracted by online streaming or YouTube videos. Instead you can maintain the motivation you need to meet your goals.



Whichever method you employ in order to alleviate your procrastination, you should be realistic about your goals. If you try and still find that you do not meet the goals you set for the first few days, you should try breaking up your goals into smaller and more manageable items. It does you no good to set unreachable goals and then continually miss them. This will only continue to fuel the desire to procrastinate. It is better to be honest with yourself so that you enjoy a sense of accomplishment at the end of each day.

## Tips

Be sure to concentrate on one activity at a time, giving your mind a more conducive working environment and guaranteeing that you work effectively. Allocate the most draining tasks first to work on them while your mind is still fresh. If you push these forward to a time when you are tired, you will likely be overwhelmed and give up, choosing instead to sleep or watch TV. Identify whether your peak study time is during the day or at night and organise your time accordingly.

As a way to ensure that you utilise even the small bits of free time in your day, carry note cards or an audio recorder with things like



definitions, formulas or recorded lectures that are easily accessible during small breaks.

To train your body to settle and concentrate faster during your study time, study in a regular location. Use this place only to study so that your body naturally relates this location to the activity. Consider places that are serene and have the items that you would need to study e.g. computers. Avoid places that make you too comfortable to do any constructive work- a bed or comfortable couch is probably not a good idea. It is better to find a location where you can sit straight at a desk.

Do not let your mind wander to things that would disrupt your studying. To keep focus, have a notepad close by where you can write down thoughts for later reference and get back to your studying. This subconsciously assures you that as you return your attention to your studying, the random thought that you had will not be left pending as an unfinished task.

Liaise with anyone that you live with and ensure that they understand your study timetable and then you can establish a convenient means of communication when you are studying that will not interrupt or disrupt the process. A notice at the door for instance, can inform your housemates that you are studying and should not be interrupted unless it is for it an urgent situation. Correspondingly, if your phone rings during your study time, find out if it is an urgent situation; if not, notify the caller that you are busy and they can complete the phone call quickly, or you can call them back after your study time. It is however best to leave your phone off or in another room to rule out the distraction of text messages and chat notifications.

The aptitude to say 'no' is another important skill in the effective management of time. Even with the desire to appease people, it is better to simply say 'no' to activities and projects that would force you to work under

duress. This ensures that you always work to your optimum and produce your best work, and people will appreciate that you need to keep to your schedule. Those that have a problem with this are most likely not very valuable inclusions in your life.

It is a beneficial practice to plan the time management of your day on the night before, making sure that all the materials and information that you need are in place for the day. Pack your bag at night to minimise the chance of forgetting important things that would stall your schedule during the day. In addition, look for ways to eliminate and cross out unimportant tasks and activities; do as much as possible before you sleep so that the next day, you will have reduced the number of things you need to do. If you realise that somebody keeps you from making good use of your time to complete your set objectives, keep away from that person. Remember to remunerate yourself for the successful completion of tasks by taking a break or going out with a friend.

The highest priority in the scheduling of your time should be class attendance. For some courses, if you take notes and listen to the lecturer, the time required to study for them is significantly reduced. Setting goals that are attainable and realistic keep your morale high, as opposed to setting unrealistic milestones that you will most likely fail to achieve. Steer clear of procrastination, which is fatal to the practice of effective time management.

# How to Write at a University Level



During the first few weeks of your university life, it will probably be challenging to plan your time and accurately determine the number of hours that you will need to complete assignments. Writing for university assignments must incorporate critical thinking, consistent thought and legitimate substantiation for the information presented. Appropriate formatting and methods of referencing are also demanded at the college level e.g. APA, Harvard and MLA. Citations and reference pages are an integral part of writing assignments that draw from external sources of information, as are bibliographies.

Points presented must be explained and described, based on valid sources of information that must be well referenced. University level assignments often extend much longer than 3 pages and include critical examination of issue stemming from an inquisitive attitude.

There are different types of writing assignments in university, including short and long essays, scientific reports, case studies and reviews of literature. It is imperative that information written be researched and studied so that you are able to provide more than simply an opinion or point of view.

While the general principles of writing are consistent across the board some subjects and specialisations have special requirements for writing. For instance, writing for business incorporates more technical aspects than writing for English literature. Pay attention to these specifications, while keeping in mind that all college-level writing assignments are expected to have some basic characteristics: they must be free from plagiarism and adhere to your institution's policies. As you grow in your field of study, you will be better placed to estimate and allocate the amount of time that is required to complete projects and papers, and managing your time will become more natural as you settle into the course of study.

# Reading



In dealing with a large amount of reading assignments, first of all plan to maximise the amount of time that you have. Before you embark on a reading assignment, determine the purpose of the reading so that you approach the assignment with a specific intention. Focus your time on discovering the answers to questions that may come up from the material you are reading.

It is important to determine the content that is relevant to you so that you can save time that would be spent focusing on irrelevant information. Know the difference between required and suggested reading texts, prioritising the former first and leaving the latter for any extra time that you have left over.

Some reading assignments demand that you know the details of a specific segment of chapter. In these cases, you can get by with reading only these sections; read with a definite intention and take note of key words, descriptions and any other relevant material that will help you to limit the amount of reading that you will do.

If you are already knowledgeable in the material that you are reading, you will be able to understand the content better and remember it faster. Establish if you have prior exposure to a subject through experience, lectures or previous reading so that you can determine a basis for your reading. Go through questions related to the content that you are going to read, prepping yourself for an active approach to your reading assignment.

Divide large texts into smaller segments to ease your task, and spread the work over different days. Allocate 4 pages for the first night for example, and divide the text over a convenient number of days to ensure that you can complete it within the required timeframe. Incorporate reading strategies like scanning and skimming to complete your assignment in the most efficient way.

First, outline a general summary of the content that you intend to read. This gives you a broad idea of the text material before you take a more detailed approach, and gives an indication of what information is relevant and what parts of the text can be overlooked. To prepare a summary or overview, go through the text and note down striking information, headings and subheadings, images and highlighted information. Pay attention to segments written in upper case, italics or bold text, as these are used to draw attention to important points. Do not ignore images (maps, graphs, pictures etc.). An overview should give you an idea of the main points explored in the text and guide you to read with these in mind.

Skimming refers to moving your eyes quickly across sections of text to get an idea of the main points without delving into the smaller details.

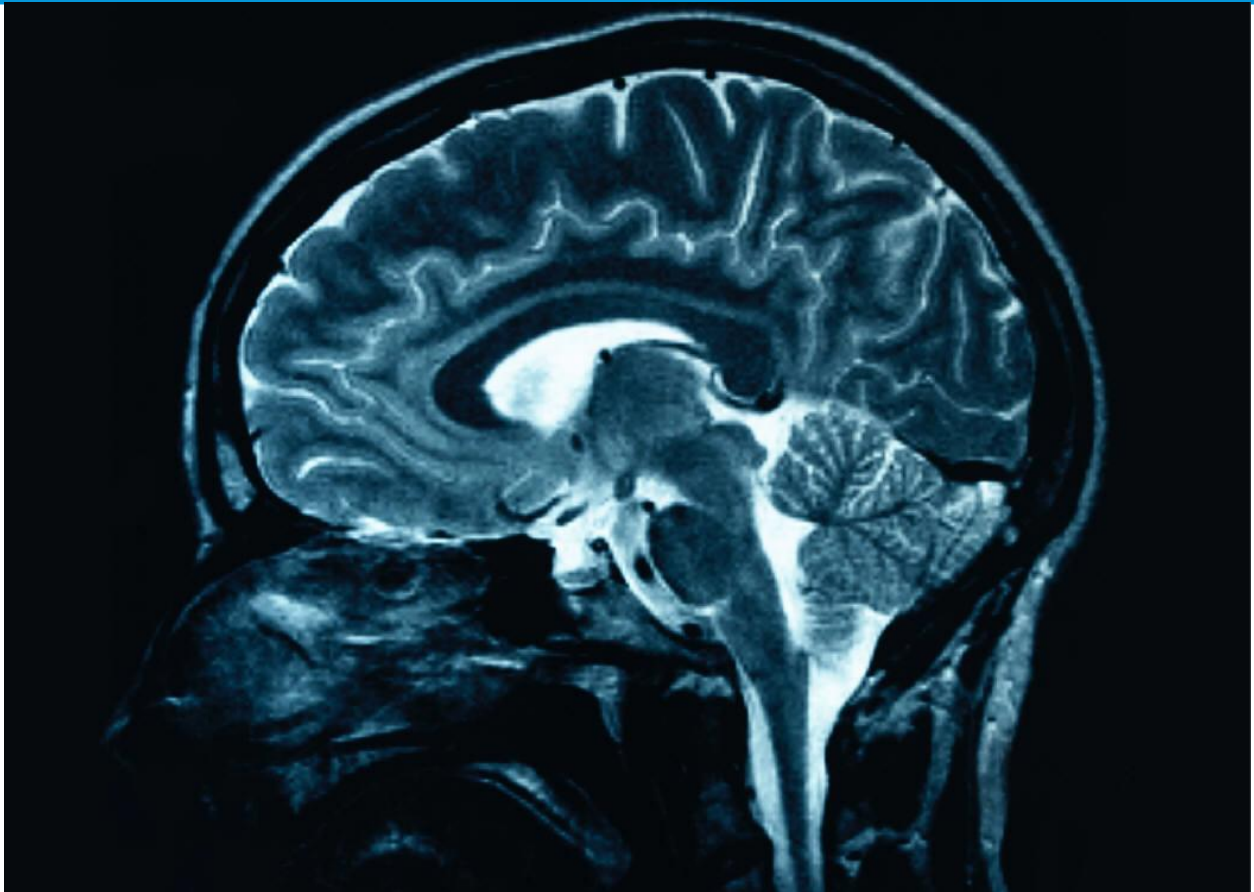
Be attentive to text that is presented in a different way (colour, font etc.) and read phrases and sentences in each paragraph.

Scanning refers to the identification of a specific point of interest within the reading passage without going through the entire passage. Brush over the text until you are attracted to the words and information that you need so that you can read the related section.

Once you have established the important and relevant sections of text, you may engage yourself in intensive reading. Concentrate on the sections of text that you identified in your overview, skimming and scanning and take note of the information that you need for any referencing that you may need to do. Note the page number, author, book title, and publication information for any bibliographical requirements. Rephrase text from the book, only maintaining original wording where you will provide a citation.

## How to Remember





The ability to recollect is one of the most important aspects of time management. It enables you to remember the work that you need to do, as well as to study faster and lower your work load. There are two main forms of memorisation that are vital in university:

The first form of memorisation relates to the ability to recall a general idea or account without copying the exact words and phrases of an interview, book, article or lecturer.

The second form of memorisation related to the recollection of specific words, phrases or items. This is especially valuable when learning a foreign language, or technical subjects like sciences and law.

Memorisation most commonly results from the understanding of a concept as opposed to the active memorisation of complex items. As you read and

comprehend material, your interpretation and reasoning enhances the natural memorisation of this information.

Emphasising and underlining specific information that requires memorisation aides the recollection of material and the utilisation of bits of free time to reinforce the memorisation of material enhances this process. It is easier to remember information that you genuinely find striking and interesting; identify the material that you find hardest to recall and review it first. Keep reviewing information- there is no such thing as 'too much reviewing', and you should go over the material until you can picture the page and underlined material, with images and graphical representations accurately stored in your mind.

It is also helpful to create an ellipsis or image to represent information, especially when learning a foreign language. For example, 'peaceful' in the South African Afrikaans language is 'vreedsam'. This is related to the English word 'freedom', which links to mind to the idea of peacefulness. Be sure to remember the meanings of the images and ellipses which you have formed to aide your memorisation.

Create a list with the words and phrases which are common, recurrent or allusive to the information that you need to commit to memory. Articulating this list from memory enhances your memorisation of the information related to the list. It is also helpful to take assessment tests, even if you created them yourself. The ability to teach information to a friend ascertains that you have successfully committed it to your memory.

# How to Control Your Studying Environment



Time-management and a private place of study are both essential in order to study effectively.

Study space should be used solely for studying and uniquely yours. Silence is not required in order to study effectively; in fact, it all depends on the person

and their environment. Many people feel that it is easier to stay focused with soft music playing while others prefer a place that offers periodic distractions, like a library.

Many people decide to study in the comfort of their own home for many reasons. Some people feel there are too many distractions in the home, none of which are conducive to a studying environment. A campus may offer designated areas that will allow you the privacy that you need. After all, if you cannot focus, you certainly cannot anticipate understanding very well.

Once you find your study space, create the environment that best suits your personality. In order to study effectively, you may need to eliminate things that may prevent you from getting your studies done. A person's attention span and attitude will become an important part of studying attentively.

Time-management is essential and will keep you on track with your assignments. Make goals for yourself and set rules regarding your study space. Allow a set amount of time per assignment, this will help you keep track of your time and progress. This may put some pressure on you but it will not be enough to fog your focus or take you away from studying. If you set goals, this will allow you to start small and work towards achieving bigger goals.

“Put your thinking cap on” is a child-hood phrase that you may or may not be familiar with. Concentrating is a big part of studying effectively and this phrase is basically telling a person to “think about, find the solution, and reflect on”.

A person's bad habit could affect the way they study. Physical activity will help you unwind before your studies and your mind will be renewed. This can help improve the quality of your work and may improve your grades. The

ritualistic aspect of this method will allow more structure involving your studies, getting your mind into a routine and feeling comfortable with the notion of studying habitually.

Sometimes daydreaming happens and if you find your mind is wandering, take a break. Get up and stretch your legs, walk around, and get something to snack on. The physical break and movement will refresh your mind and you will not feel so guilty about wasting time during a mental block. Once you are done with your assignment, give yourself a refresher course. This will remind you of what you just read, wrote, and learned.

If you keep a study planner, you will be able to manage your time more effectively.

Did you know studying can become a habit just like smoking and overeating?

Once studying becomes routine, it will be easier for you to “step outside your study space”. Studying will become routine and your mind will get used to studying anywhere.

Check your stress and concerns and do not fret over unfinished tasks or projects. This will not only waste your time but can lead to stress and break your concentration.

Think of short-term goals involving your studies and write them down. If the goals are smaller, this can make them easier to achieve. This will give you a nice sense of accomplishment and will motivate you to keep the focus. Taking notes can be very helpful and keep your head clear and your concentration moving forward.