



THE LEARNING GUIDE



Foreword /

The Cardiff Centre for Lifelong Learning provides a range of stimulating and useful part-time courses for adult learners of all ages. You may be looking to develop knowledge and skills that you already possess, or you may want to explore a new interest.

Whatever your objective is, this guide offers advice on how you can develop effective ways of studying so that you make the most of your learning experience at Cardiff University.

We want to improve the guide and welcome your comments on it. Send us your thoughts by contacting: Catrin Salter (SalterC@cardiff.ac.uk)

We wish you well with your studies.

Acknowledgement

This resource is based on the STAR (Study Tips to Achieve Results) handbook produced for community learners by the Community University of the Valleys Partnership, with contributions from the following organisations:

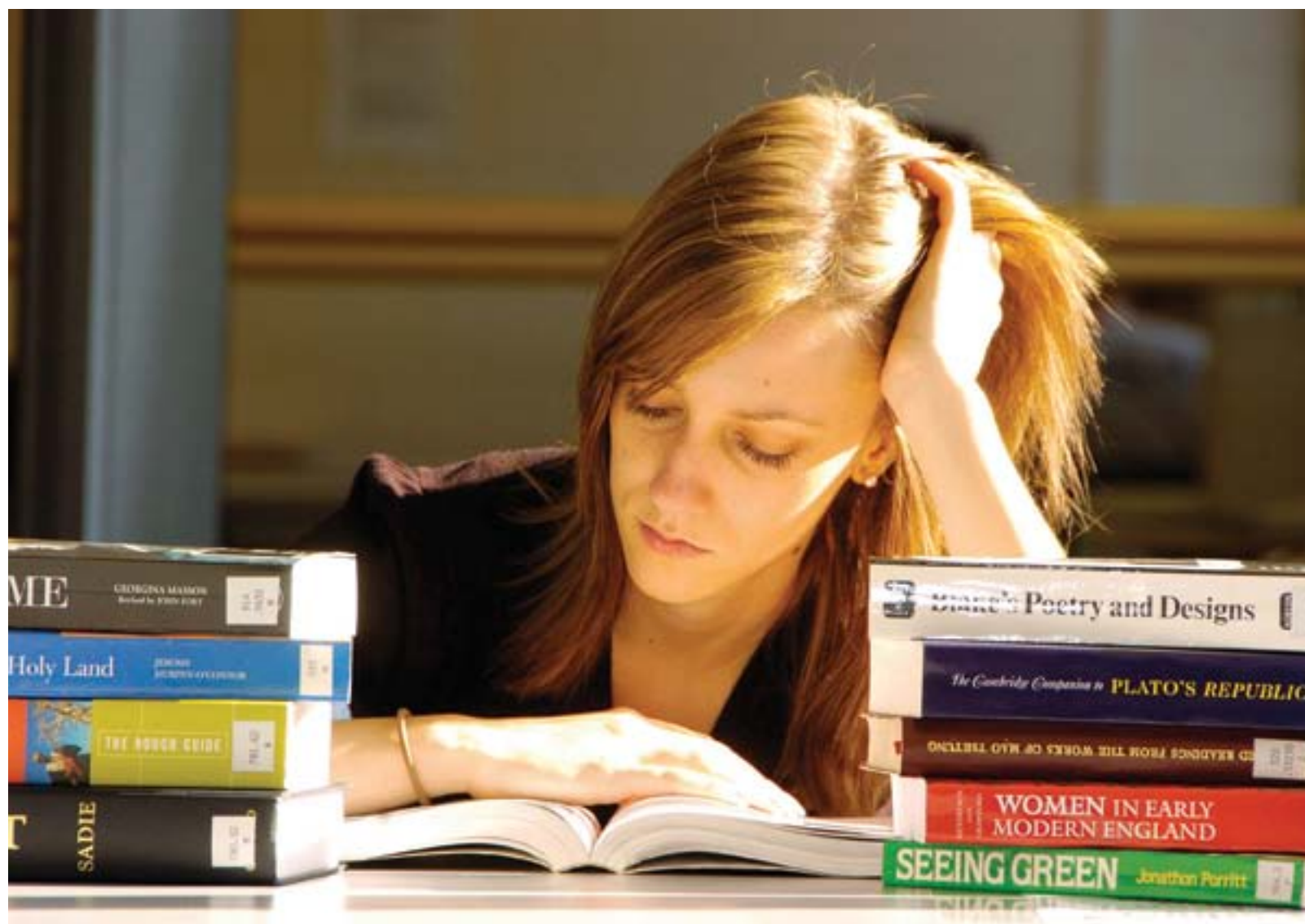
- Amman Valley Enterprise Representing CUVP Community Partners
- Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Swansea University
- Glamorgan Outreach, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Glamorgan
- The Open University In Wales
- RISE
- University of Wales, Newport
- Workers Education Association

We are grateful to the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at Swansea University for allowing us to use and adapt the contents of their version of STAR.



Contents /

Learning Styles /



If you think about, and are aware of, how you learn, you can begin to identify learning approaches or strategies 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. These might not always have been very positive but an awareness of how we like to work and what areas we think we could improve on, whether this is the way we read or interact with the rest of the group, will enable us to monitor our progression, and adjust learning approaches where necessary.

Learning Styles /

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:

- Perceiving information
- Processing information
- Organising and presenting information

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

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

- Visual (sight)
- Auditory (hearing)
- Reading
- Kinaesthetic (includes touch and temperature as well as movement).

Advice for visual learners

- Use visual materials such as pictures, charts and maps
- Use colour to highlight texts and own 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 (computers, mind maps)
- Study in a quiet place away from visual disturbances
- Visualise information as a picture

Advice for auditory learners

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

Learning Styles /

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 Gained Battle In Vain.

The order of planets in average distance from the Sun:
(Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto)
My Very Easy Method: Just Set Up Nine Planets
Source: www.fun-with-words.com/mnemonics.html

- Discuss your ideas verbally
- Speak onto an audio tape and listen to your own ideas played back

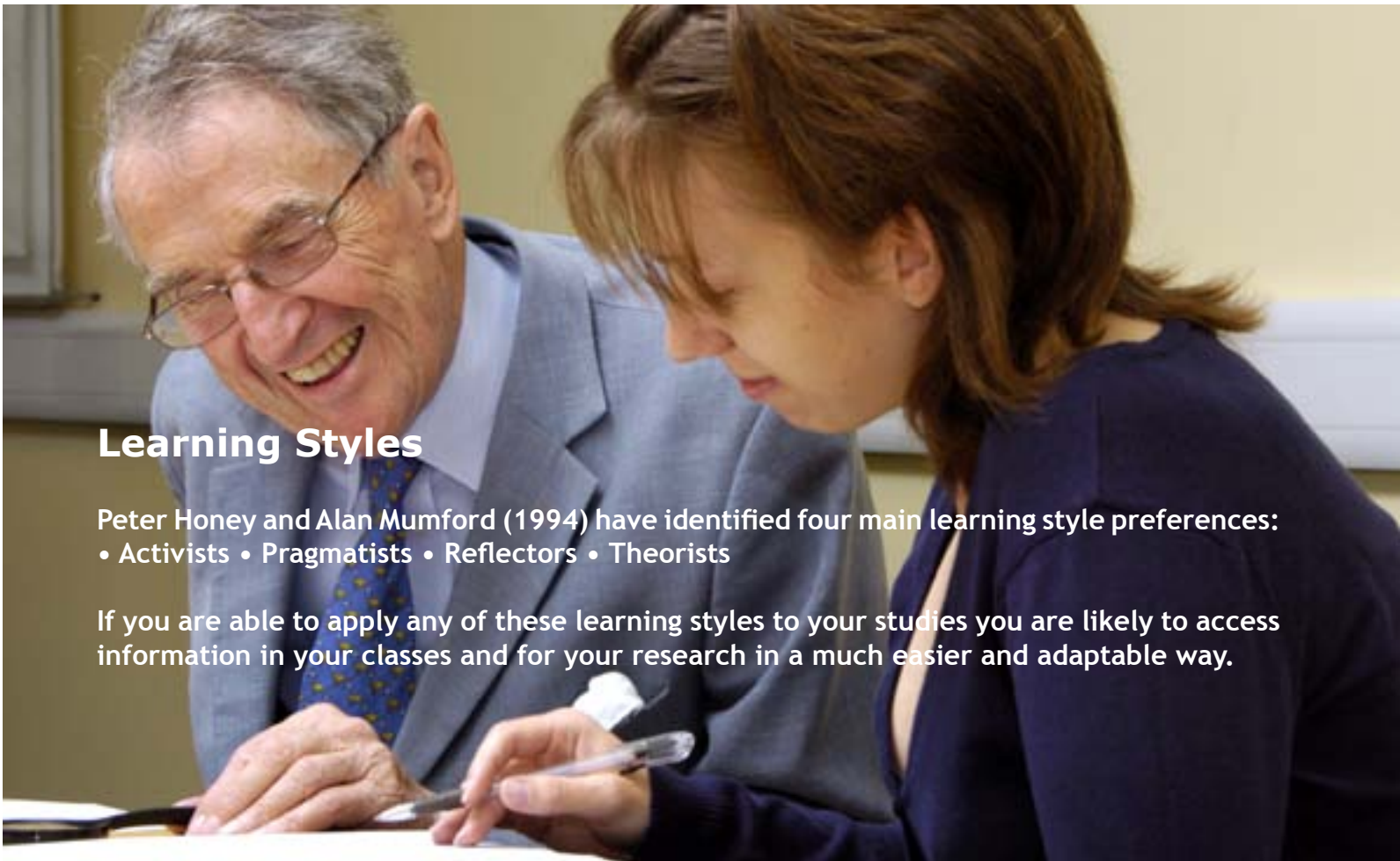
Advice for Reading learners:

- Rewrite theories and principles into your own words
- Make lists to help you access information
- Reorganise maps and diagrams into words
- Work with past exam papers
- Use multiple choice question papers

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

Learning Styles /



Learning Styles

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford (1994) have identified four main learning style preferences:
• Activists • Pragmatists • Reflectors • Theorists

If you are able to apply any of these learning styles to your studies you are likely to access information in your classes and for your research in a much easier and adaptable way.

Activists

Activists like to be involved in new experiences. They are very enthusiastic about new ideas, but get bored with detailed work and routine tasks and tend to act first and consider the implications afterwards.

| Activists learn best when they are: | Activists learn less when they are: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involved in new experiences and problems• Working with others and brainstorming ideas• Being thrown in the deep end with a difficult task• Chairing meetings, leading discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listening to lectures or long explanations• Reading, writing or thinking on their own• Absorbing and understanding data• Following precise instructions to the letter |

Learning Styles /

Reflectors

Reflectors prefer to work to their own timetable and not be rushed into any quick decision making. They carefully analyse theories before applying and are particularly good at gathering materials for research.

| Reflectors learn best when they are: | Reflectors learn less when they are: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observing individuals or groups at work • Able to review activity and think about what they have learned • Not working to deadline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as leader or role playing in front of others • Having to do tasks spontaneously • Working with no time to prepare |

Theorists

They think about problems in a thorough step by step way. They tend to be perfectionists who like to fit things into a rational scheme. They tend to be detached and analytical rather than subjective or emotive in their thinking.

| Theorists learn best when they are: | Theorists learn less when they are: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In complex situations where they are required to use their skills/knowledge • In structured situations with clear purposes • Offered interesting ideas or concepts • Given the chance to question and probe ideas and opinions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In situations which emphasise emotion and feelings • In unstructured situations and briefing is poor • Asked to act without knowing the principle of the concepts involved • Feeling they are out of tune with the other participants |

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are always ready to try new things. They are usually very practical people who prefer doing rather than discussing things.

| Pragmatists learn best when they are: | Pragmatists learn less when they are: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shown a model of something • Shown ways to save time • Given practical tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a situation where learning is all theory with no discussion • Given no guidelines on how to do something • No obvious outcome to the learning |

(Adapted from www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk)

To find out more about your learning styles, see the web links at the end of this section.

Learning Styles /

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 assignment 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 to keep a positive attitude towards your learning. However, sometimes we do have to acknowledge the way we feel, and if you are feeling tired or anxious it is a good idea to take a break and then review with a clear mind. If you still cannot settle, it can help if you reflect and record your feelings and then recommit 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 in your house. You need to think about what distracts you: are you prone to gazing out 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 academic 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, family commitments, motivation and concentration. There are ways in which some of the pressures can be alleviated: for example, talking to a friend, your course tutor or by accessing the many services available to students at Cardiff University (see Section 16).

Learning Styles /

Exercise

Assess your Study Skills

| | |
|---|--|
| Why have you chosen this course? | |
| What are your main strengths? | |
| What are your weaknesses? | |
| What did you find difficult when you last studied? | |
| What did you find enjoyable when you last studied? | |
| 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? | |

To find out more about your Learning Styles visit the following website:
<http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy>

Other useful websites:

www.businessballs.com
www.vark-learn.com
www.learningassistance.com
www.peterhoney.com

Mnemonics
(<http://www.learningassistance.com/2006/january/mnemonics.html>)

References

Cottrell, S (2008) The Study Skills Handbook, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

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

Honey, P & Mumford, A (1994) The Manual of Learning Styles, Maidenhead, Peter Honey

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.

- Motivated to learn:
- Think positive and develop strategies of achievement
 - Take responsibility for own learning
 - Set challenging but attainable goals
 - Deal with procrastination

- Can manage own time:
- Identify what is important when planning study
 - Balance studies and social life
 - Use time effectively
 - Know where resources are
 - Understand how they learn best

Planning your Learning /

Reflect on learning:

- Regularly reflect on progress
- Record how skills are developing
- Understand the feedback needed from tutors and how to use it.

Time Management

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

Diagnosing the Difficulties

All of us can benefit from questioning and perhaps reviewing our attitudes and deep-seated habits related to using time. Some habits are linked to personal traits, and can significantly affect our sense of fulfilment. For example, some people always find themselves feeling rushed and guilty, 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 strategies 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 traits, you can then start thinking about how to put strategies in place, which will help you overcome future stumbling blocks.
- Identify areas of your work/life where you would like to be able to manage your time better.
- Think: 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?



Planning your Learning /

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 'things to do' list to 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 what the external demands are on your time as well, for example, family commitments and social engagements. It is important to find a format that suits your needs.
- When planning your academic work it is very important that you mark out periods of time in your timetable for planning your essay, researching, drafting, writing and rewriting it.



Planning your Learning /

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 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 tutor or access Cardiff University’s advice and support services (see Section 16).

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.



Planning your Learning /

Exercise

Example ‘To Do’ List

| Task | Target Date | Done |
|------|-------------|------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Study Timetable Example 1

| January | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Monday | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | |
| Friday | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | |
| Sunday | | | | |

Useful website:

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy

Researching & Managing Information /



It will be necessary for you to research information to help with your academic 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, it doesn't mean it's true.

Therefore 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.

Establishing a Search Strategy

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

Researching & Managing Information /

information via the search engine. These words and phrases are called 'keywords'. If you had to research an English Literature essay that was titled 'Discuss the influence of Raymond Chandler on 'hardboiled' American crime fiction'. Your key words would be 'hardboiled crime fiction', 'crime fiction', 'American crime fiction' and 'Raymond Chandler'.

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 understanding
- Practical hints and tips to help you make decisions
- Expert opinions to quote in your work

Finding Text Books

Cardiff University's library catalogue holds information regarding all textbooks available for loan. 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 your tutor will have given you 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 to enable you to decide if the book will be appropriate or not.

Techniques

- Is it the latest edition?
- When was it published?
- Has my tutor mentioned the author or title in lectures or tutorials?
- 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:

- Title page
- Contents page
- Index

Researching & Managing Information /

Journal Articles

Journals are an effective source of ideas to develop your arguments or to illustrate points in your assignment. Some journals cover broad subject areas, whilst others target very specific topics, some are scholarly and others cater to a more general audience. Some journal databases also contain details of conference papers and book chapters.

Searching a Journal Database

If you are looking for a relevant journal article it will save time if you search a journal database. A journal database contains details of the articles available within a set of journals. For each article the database will usually provide details of the following:

- Author name
- Article title
- Journal title
- Year of publication
- Volume number
- Part number
- Page numbers
- Sometimes an abstract or summary

If the abstract is available it can be useful to read it to help you decide if the article is relevant or not. Some journal databases also provide links to the full text versions of articles.



Researching & Managing Information /

Plagiarism

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 essay.

Here are some examples of plagiarism that must be avoided:

- Copying directly from a text word for word (unless you reference it)
- Copying out odd phrases from books
- Downloading text from the internet
- Closely paraphrasing the words of a text very closely
- Downloading or copying 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 lecturer will advise you of the appropriate system and will spend time showing you how to implement it.

Adapted from Plagiarism and Information Searching www.glam.ac.uk/blackboard

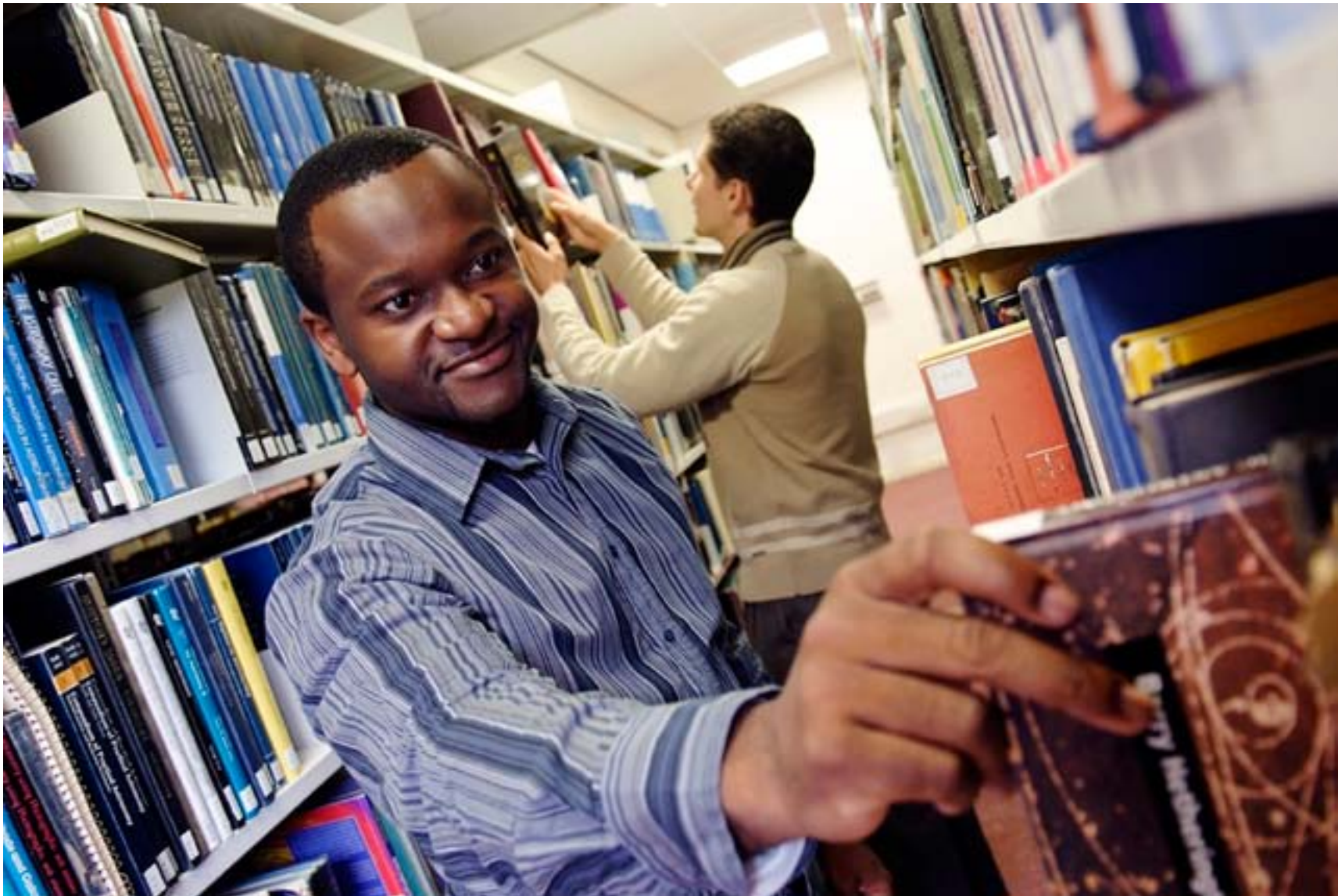
Useful website:

www.open.ac.uk/safari



Reading /

Reading /



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 |

The skill of developing efficient and selective reading techniques is necessary to underpin all types of academic work. It is necessary to glean information efficiently from what you read, but also to learn to interact creatively and critically with it. It is essential for students to become disciplined readers who form and maintain good reading practice, use their time efficiently to gather, evaluate and use reading materials.

- Skimming involves reading to get a general view of what you are reading. You skim-read by looking at section headings and subheadings 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 analysing and questioning what you are reading, challenging the assumptions made. For more information, see Section 5: Analysis and Critical Analysis.

Reading /

What should I do before reading textbooks and journal articles?

- You need to be quite discerning 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 lecture 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 ascertain that the book is worth reading. A good bibliography is also a useful indication of the type of information given in the book/article and of its worth.
- Anticipation 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 to be read, looking at headings and sub-headings to get an overall perspective, then read in more detail.
- Select or discard material based on your skim reading. Make sure you only read material that is relevant to your needs; you will never have time to read all the material on your reading list in its entirety, let alone all material that is freely available to you in your entire academic life.

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 comprehension.
- Keep in mind the questions you are trying to answer and question what you are reading.
- The actual reading finishes with a review of what you have read. This is the time to compare what you have read with the anticipation questions you formulated at the outset. Did you find answers to these, or was there a mismatch?
- You will need to record what is essential.

Having read this section, are you confident with your effective reading skills?

Useful websites:

www.open.ac.uk/safari
www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy
www.bbc.co.uk/learning

ANTICIPATION 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



Critical Thinking /



Analysis and Critical Analysis

Analysis means taking things apart to see what the components are and how they fit. In practice there is not much difference between the terms 'analysis' and 'critical analysis'. Critical is sometimes added to the term 'analysis' because it emphasises that you should question the validity of the information, research findings and theories you include in your essay. In other words you should not just accept the information or argument of the authors you read; you need to constantly question why it is.

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 stance 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.

Critical Thinking /

Analytical thinking involves a range of processes:

- 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 logically from what went before
- Looking for possible flaws in the reasoning, the evidence, or the way that conclusions are drawn
- Comparing the same issue from the point of view of other theorists or writers
- 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

Almost every intellectual activity begins with some form of analysis to make it clear what we are trying to tackle. Unfortunately, it is assumed that everyone knows how to analyse and that there is no need to teach it. This however, is far from the case.

What is Critical Analysis?

- 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 Thinking /

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 be reading, writing or listening.

Critical thinking when reading should involve the following:

- Identify the line of reasoning in 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 the following:

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

Critical listening skills should involve the following:

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

What do we not know about this?

- Assessing the depth of information and what could be going on below the surface.

Critical Thinking /

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 assertions?
- What has been omitted?
- How was the conclusion reached?

References

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

Useful website:

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy



Note Taking /



Note taking from a taught session

Most students, at all levels, attempt to write copious notes in a teaching session, but it is virtually impossible to keep up with the speed of a lecturer. 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. Therefore to prevent this from happening it is necessary to put some strategies into practice to allow you to get as much as possible out of the session.

How to make good notes in lectures and seminars

Prepare for the lecture

- The more you know about a topic before your seminar or lecture, 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 a greater 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.

Note Taking /

Abbreviate

Think of good abbreviations to use. These can be symbols or standard abbreviations.

- = 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

Or you can invent your own shortened forms. 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 during the lecture

- 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 essay or if you are taking an exam.
- Listen for cues, keywords and recurring ideas from the lecturer. The kind of clues to listen for are ones like: 'I'll give you an example...' 'There are three points supporting this...' 'In conclusion...' Also listen for signposts such as 'Today we are going to look at...' 'I'm going to discuss four main aspects of...' or '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 first time: writing accurate notes takes time and you will get better at doing this with practice.



Note Taking /

After the lecture the following can help

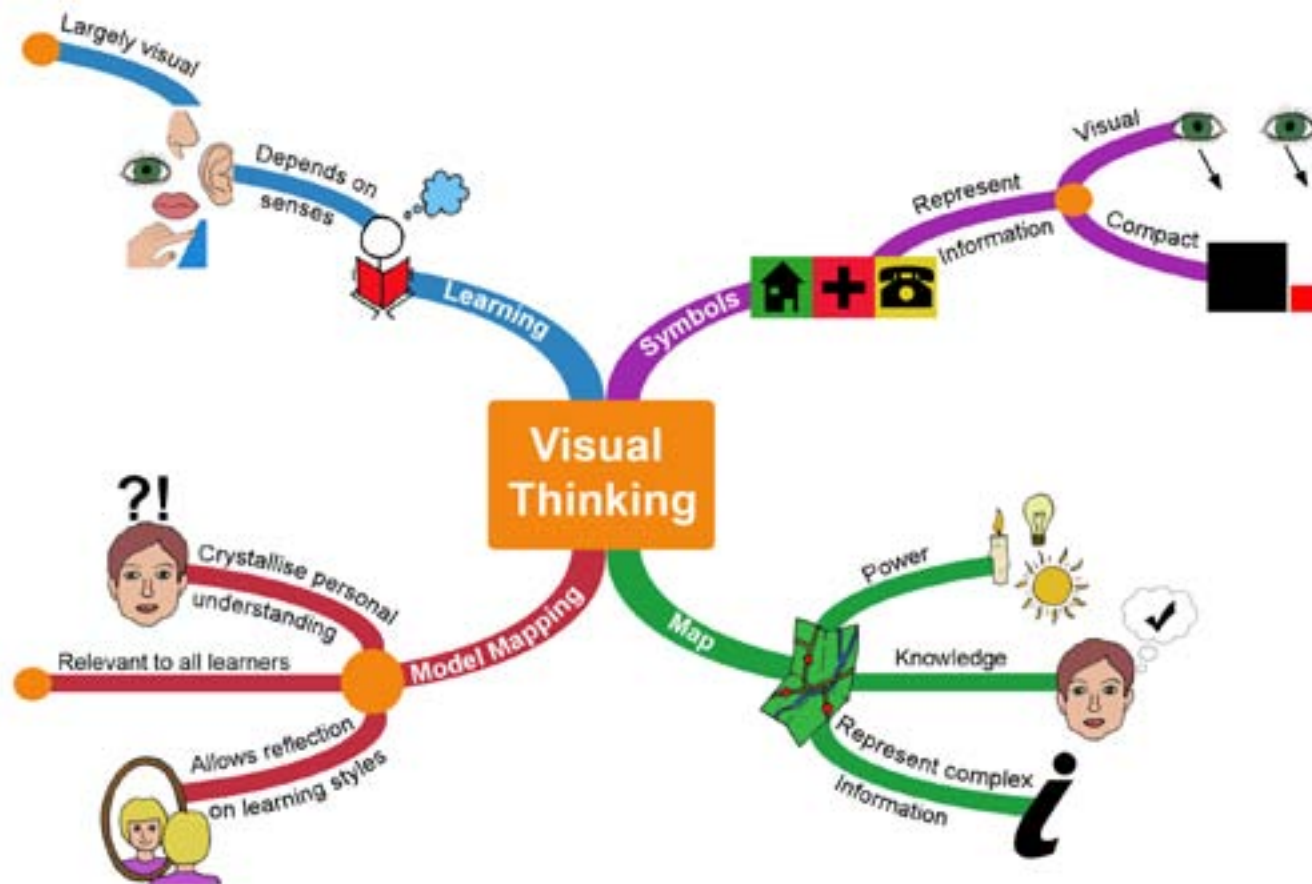
- Go back to your notes within 24 hours to fill in any gaps, rewrite unclear words, or add any thoughts you have about the subject matter.
- While the notes are still fresh in your mind check through for understanding.
- Make sure that the structure is clear: add headings, colours, etc. to help you at 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 universities suggest particular note making styles. Some students find it helpful to take their notes as mind maps, concept maps or spider diagrams.

Mind Maps

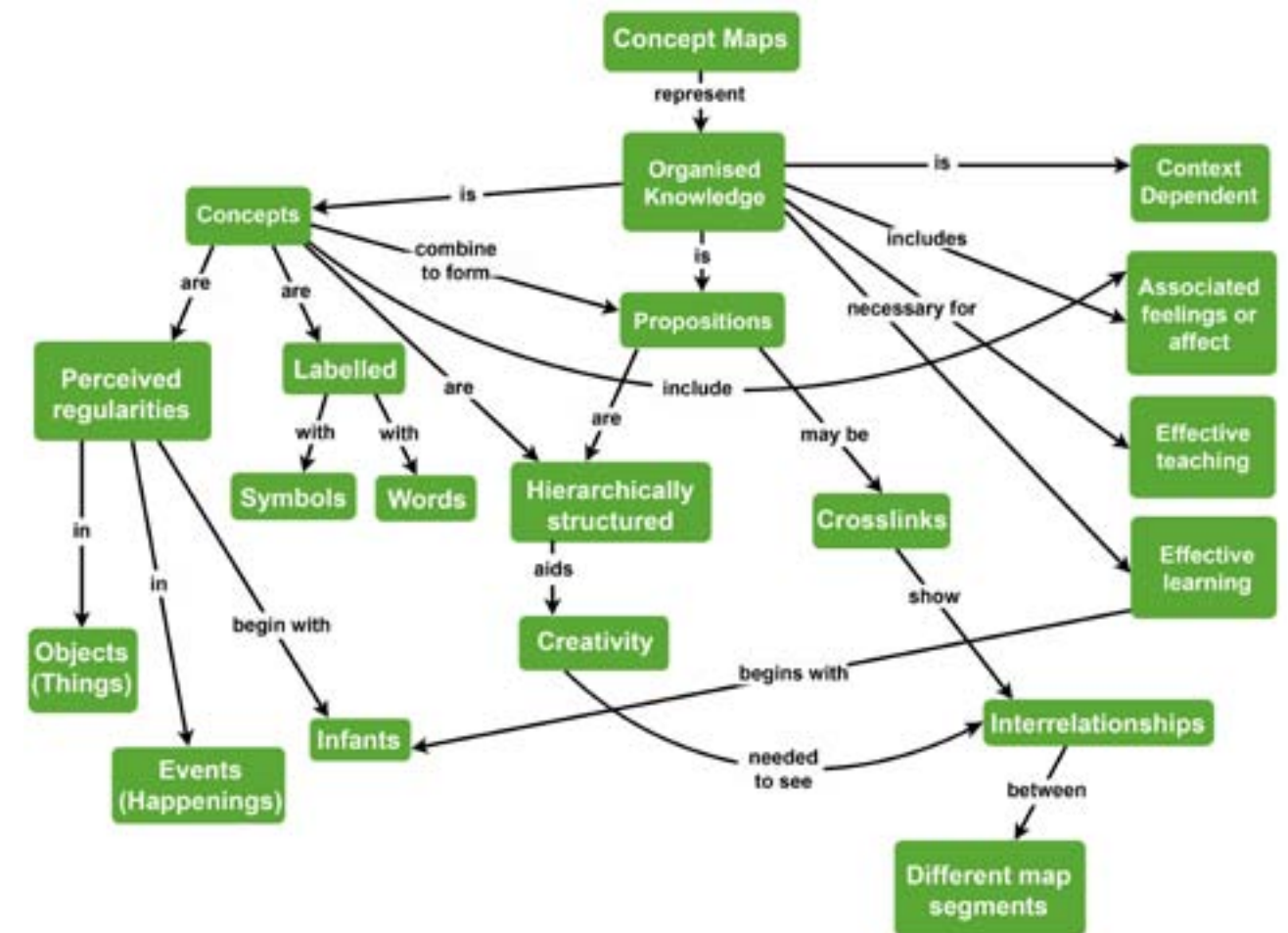
The title of the lecture is in the centre of the paper with all the ideas radiating outwards and subsidiary sections radiating off them.



Note Taking /

Concept Maps

Concept maps do enable you to see things at a glance and you can personalise your own note taking, but 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.



Note Taking /

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.

The 6Rs Note Taking Model

Stage 1: Ready

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

| Main Ideas | Details |
|------------|---------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Summary | |

Stage 2: Record

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

Note Taking /

Stage 3: Reduce

As soon as possible, while the lecture 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 lecture 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 lecture notes. This will keep the ideas current in your memory, which will be a huge benefit when you need to revise for exams.

Useful websites:

www.chompchomp.com
www.visualthesaurus.com
www.open2.net



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 student’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.

The criteria for a good essay is sound structure, equally weighted paragraphs that demonstrate you are in control of the material, good content, good 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. 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) |

Essay Writing /

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 1 | 3 paragraphs | |
| Point 2 | 3 paragraphs | |
| Point 3 | 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 1 | 6 paragraphs | |
| Point 2 | 6 paragraphs | |
| Point 3 | 6 paragraphs | |
| Conclusion | 1 paragraph | (200 words) |



Essay Writing /

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 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 | Expound 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. Omit minor details and examples. |
| Prove | Show by argument or logic that it is true. |

Essay Writing /

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 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. Omit details and examples. |
| Summarise | Give a brief condensed account of the main ideas. Omit 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 tutor is looking for coherence, understanding, insight

Essay Writing /

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, a lecturer 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.
- Give quotes, opinions/theories to back up your argument.
- Provide evidence and explain why it should be believed.
- Use examples to illustrate.
- Use logic.
- 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.

Essay Writing /

Developing your arguments in essays

State your point of view early in the essay and present a clear rationale 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 reputable and authoritative texts, articles, newspapers, internet sites, etc.



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



Show that you are aware of, and have considered arguments that are counter 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.



Essay Writing /



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 to see if you have gone through all the necessary processes in the preparation of your essay. (see checklist at end of this section).
4. Use transitional and linking words to connect the ideas and arguments in your sentences and paragraphs.

Essay Writing /

To add information:

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

To conclude or summarise:

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

To contrast two things or show a difference:

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

To emphasise a point:

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

To show similarities:

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

To clarify:

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

To sequence your argument:

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

Essay Writing /

How will the tutor assess your essay?

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, 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 Writing /

Exercise 1

Essay Checklist

- Have I answered the question?
- Have I covered all the main aspects?
- Have I covered aspects in enough depth?
- Is the content relevant?
- Is the content accurate?
- Have I arranged the materials 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?



Essay Writing /

Exercise 2

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 | Recommend |
| Rhythm | Severely | Similar | Success |
| Unnecessary | Usually | Scene | Guarantee |

Remember: don't be afraid to use a dictionary or a Thesaurus - everyone does.

Useful websites:

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy
www.chompchomp.com/
<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>
www.open2.net

References

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.

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.



Report Writing /

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) 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 time of study 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 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.

Report Writing /

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 one of Cardiff University's libraries 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 of organising your information into topics is to brainstorm your ideas into a 'spider diagram.' Further advice concerning the organising of material can be found in Section 6 on Note Taking.

Report Writing /

Structuring your Report

We discussed earlier that there are different types of reports such as laboratory reports or reports on an industrial placement. Always check with the person commissioning the report (your tutor, your placement supervisor) 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
- Methodology
- Results or Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- References
- Appendices

We shall now look at each of these in turn.

Title Page

This should include the title of the report (giving a precise 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 computer centre staff.

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.



Report Writing /

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.

Methodology

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.

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 any copyright laws when including illustrations/tables from published documents?

Report Writing /

Discussion

This is the section where you analyse and interpret your results drawing from the information which 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.

References

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

- author's name and initials
- date of publication
- title of the book, paper or journal
- publisher
- place of publication
- page numbers
- details of the journal volume of any article

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

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. You could include details of interview questions, statistical data, a glossary of terms, or other information which may be useful.

Style of writing

There are several points that you will need to consider when you are writing your report:
Active or passive?

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

Report Writing /

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

The passive voice reads: '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 commonly 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. Sub-sections are given a decimal number - 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and so on. Sub-sections can be further divided into - 1.11, 1.12, 1.13 and so on.

An example structure would look as follows:

1. Introduction
 - 1.1.....
 - 1.11
 - 1.2
 - 1.21
2. Methodology
 - 2.1
 - 2.11
 - 2.12

Report Writing /

Presentation

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

- Leave wide margins for binding and feedback comments from your 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 leave it on your desk 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 of your work.

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 oneself clearly and succinctly 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 /

Exercise

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 content 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, 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 binding and tutor feedback? Are your headings clear? Have you checked your spelling?

Useful website:

www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/information-report-or-description.php

References

www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/reportwr.pdf

The Information Technology Skills Guide

Learning Journals /

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.



Reflecting and making the most of Learning Journals

A Learning Journal (sometimes known as a reflective journal or learning log) is an accumulative document or record (not unlike a diary) based on your experiences, reflections and observations as a learner. It is a personal record and as such you may wish to keep the contents private, though maintaining a computer 'blog' (weblog) is an increasingly popular (and sometimes very public) means of developing a journal.

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 learner. The frequent opportunity to think about your feelings and experiences as you write is at least as important as the written record itself.

Learning Journals /

Reflective journals can take two forms:

1. A personal record maintained by a student for his or 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 and can take the form of a blog or weblog).

What kind of material could go into a reflective journal?

- Thoughts and notes on issues arising from reading or seminar discussion; 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 lecture it's 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 recollections and ideas with those mentioned in any handouts or notes from the tutor. How well do they compare? Are there any gaps in knowledge that you need to follow up on?
- Notes and thoughts based on wider reading undertaken i.e. not just from books and articles recommended or provided by your tutors. How does this information enhance (or even deviate from) what you have covered in class or in seminar 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 tutor or student counsellor, 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 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 assists in maintaining a useful record.

Learning Journals /

Always remember that the fundamental purpose of a reflective journal is that you, the learner, 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 it is now built into so many courses and then assessed. Essentially it is for two reasons:

1. Students are more likely to keep up a regular journal if they feel they have to.
2. It is a way for your tutor(s) to see how you feel about the course and how help can be given, if required.

Setting up your blog

Here are two easy ways of setting up a basic bloggers account.

1. Go directly to www.blogger.com where there are 3 easy steps for creating a blog. Just follow the instructions on the homepage.
 - You will need to create a google account using an email address you already have.
 - Give your blog an initial title (this can be changed later so don't worry).
 - Try logging in and then out again to ensure that it works. Then you are ready to start blogging.
2. Alternatively you can go to www.gmail.com and set up a new email account there. It is important to verify your new gmail account by accessing a message delivered to your existing email that contains a link you will need to click on.

Once verified you can go to www.blogger.com and set up the account with your new gmail username and password.

Your reflective blog journal need not be simply confined to text but can include pictures, links to other blogs or web pages, animations.

Assessment of Learning Journals

As mentioned above, the purpose of having reflective journals forms part of your overall course assessment and is mainly to ensure that you start one and keep it up. The emphasis is on the extent to which students show evidence of wide reading, identifying issues and reflection on solutions to those issues raised.

Building a Portfolio /

WHAT KIND OF MATERIAL COULD GO INTO A Reflective Journal?

Thoughts and notes on issues from reading
or seminar discussion activities that you
wish to explore further



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 Student Portfolio?

A student portfolio is a varied collection of student work and related material systematically selected to represent activities and achievements in a particular course of study or over a specific period of time. It can function as both a record of activity and a showcase of accomplishment. In addition to the work itself, a portfolio could include evidence of student reflection, self evaluation of the work contained within, and tutor evaluation. The student and tutor work together to decide on the contents of a portfolio.

Building a Portfolio /

Types of Portfolios

In general, student portfolios can be divided into two types: a product portfolio and a process portfolio.

Product Portfolio

This is in essence a summative collection of a student's best work completed throughout a course of study. It aims to highlight mastery of certain skills or concepts as well as achievement of learning objectives.

Process Portfolio

A Process Portfolio contains work that demonstrates evidence of the various stages the learner 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 conception, 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 strategy for courses. They can provide a telling insight into classroom-based activities, particularly for the purposes of formative or continuous assessment.

Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

- Tutors and students collaborate to set learning goals and evaluate progress towards goal achievement.
- Provides students 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 component of an overall teaching and learning strategy.

Making Presentations /



Presentation skills can be learnt and continually improved through practice.

Before it is possible to become a good presenter we 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, projections or flip charts.

Here are some examples of what your lecturer 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

Making Presentations /

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

- Tell them what you are going to tell them
- Tell them
- 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 objectives 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:

- purpose of the presentation
- audience for your presentation
- location of your presentation

Purpose of the Presentation

Your Audience

The type of audience might well influence the format 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 - age, education, status?
- 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.

Making Presentations /

Location of your 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, tape recorder
- location of power points
- position of speaker (you)
- facilities for special needs

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 objectives and give a brief overview

2. Main Body

Explain your main findings

3. The Conclusion

Clearly summarise each point made. Do not rush it!



Making Presentations /



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.

Making Presentations /

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 a concept
- 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
- Too much material in too little time
- If you are using overhead transparencies know how to position them on the projector

Powerpoint Presentations

Powerpoint presentations can look very professional 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

Making Presentations /

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
- Don't fold your arms or put your hands in your pocket
- 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 spare disk with you just in case your disc does not work
- 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:

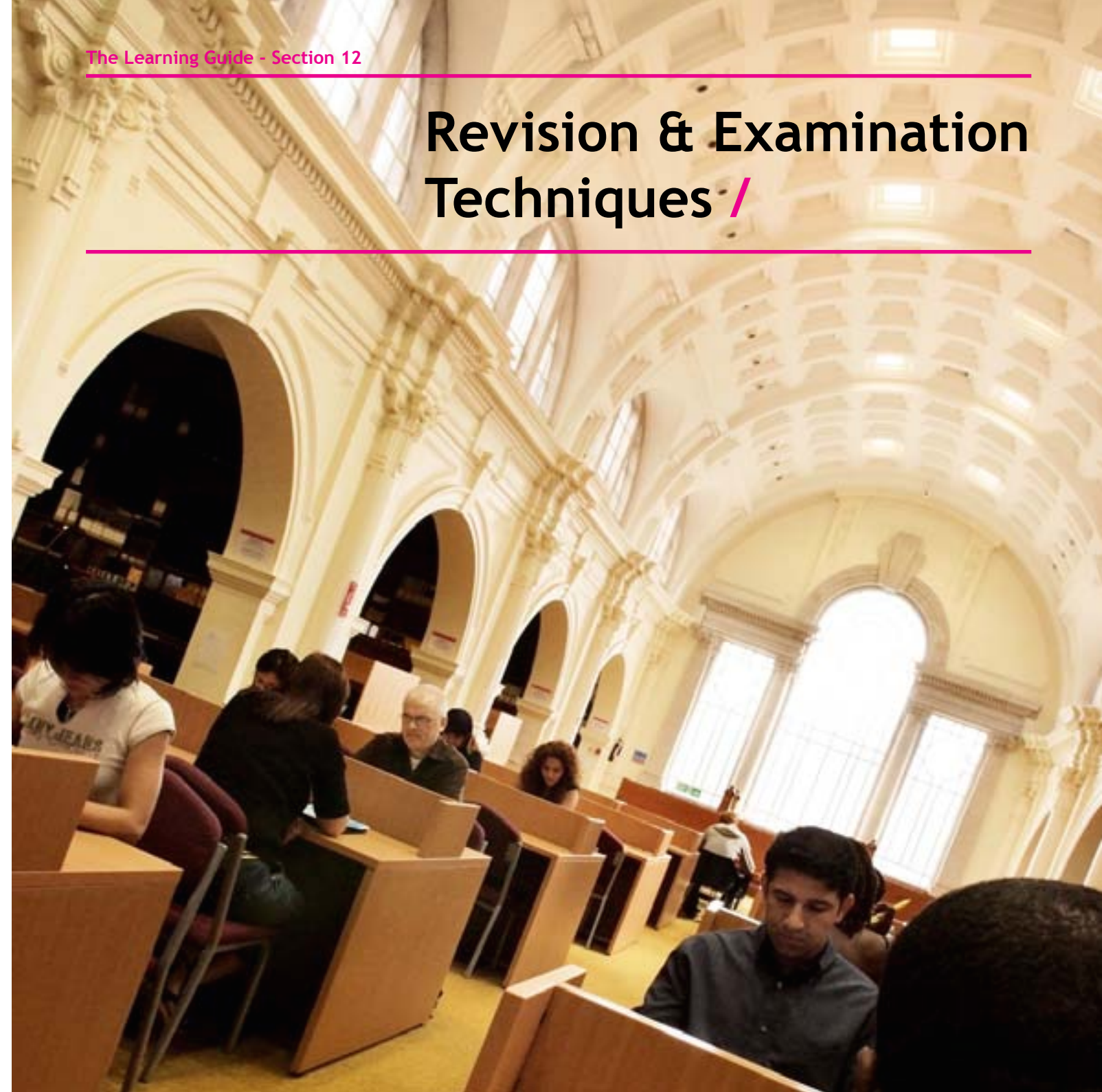
- Try some relaxation exercises. Sit up, breathe in for a count of one and out for a count of four; keep it going for five minutes whilst just concentrating on the counting and rhythm of your breathing
- Practice your presentation a few times before the actual event
- Familiarise yourself with the room 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 answer
- Remember: you know more than they do

Revision & 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 experienced tutors 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.

Revision & Examination Techniques /

- How broad a choice of questions/ topic areas is given (if any)?
- Consider elements 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.

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?

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, enhancing **positive reinforcement** of your efforts.

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.
- 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.



Revision & Examination Techniques /

- In starting to work at the same time for each session, the initial goal is to focus on time allocation rather than completing a specific task. In other words, you are developing a habit and establishing a routine.
- Try to keep this up over the number of weeks you have decided is adequate to prepare for the exams you are taking. Track/ record your own progress. Gradually you can adapt the time allocated depending on how effective it is proving to be in getting specific tasks completed.
- 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 regime 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 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.

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 the readings. 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.

Referencing /

Plagiarism

Why do I need to reference?

Although citing sources and references is often a tedious task, it is a vital one. It is the means by which you communicate the origin of the material you use in our written work. There are several reasons why you need to do this.

1. So that you can **tell others where the ideas you are using have come from**, that is to acknowledge the intellectual 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 referencing is a practice you need to get into the habit of.
2. Referencing **enables your 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 tutor/script-marker 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 sources you have used. These are all things which are rewarded in marking and you should shout about it, not hide it.

Being able to identify which are your own ideas also allows the 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, 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.

3. 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.
4. Proper references also allow the reader to **find the sources you have referred to** quickly and easily.



Referencing /

So if you **do not** reference you are:

- Implicitly claiming work is your own when it is not (plagiarism)
- Failing to demonstrate the extent of your own studying
- Failing to identify your own work to your tutor

If you **do** reference you are:

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

What do I need to reference?

You need to reference any work 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, let us say that you 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 then you must cite this as a reference.
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 asserting something off the top of your head but are providing verifiable evidence to support the claims you are making. But to be verifiable you have to say where the evidence came from. An example of this might be, say, that you wanted to make the point that India's economic growth was higher after liberalisation than before. You could support this point by stating that real annual GDP growth rose from 3.7 per cent from 1950-1980 to 6.2 per cent 1990-2000. You must cite the source of this data. Please note that commonly known facts, such as the date of Indian independence, say, do not need to have sources cited.
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 inadvertently slip into copying sections of the books and other sources you use. However, sometimes an author you are reading puts something in a succinct or insightful way, 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.

Referencing /

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 summarise 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) suggests...

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.

Referencing /

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 format 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 report and in the bibliography at the end. (Note: You can use underlining instead of italics if necessary.)



Referencing /

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 University 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.’

Referencing /

Articles in Journals

Single author

In your essay/report: 'Pollert (1988) states that ...'

In your references: 'Pollert, A. (1988) "The flexible firm: fixation or fact", *Work, Employment and Society*, 2(3) pp. 281-316' (Note that you should provide the volume number, in this case 2, the part number where available and page numbers.)

Referencing for joint and multiple authorship of articles are as above.

Electronic journal articles

Author's surname, initial(s), year of publication (in brackets), title of article (in quotation marks), title of journal (in italics) [online], volume number, issue number. Available from: Name of service (if any), address of website [Accessed + date]

Sommers, R.C. (1997) 'The quilting bee: a research metaphor', *The Qualitative Report*, vol. 3, no. 4 [online].

Available from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-4/sommers.html> [Accessed 9 February 2012]

World Wide 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 2012]

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 2012)

Government Publications

In your essay/report: 'It was stated (DES, 1985) that ...' In your references: 'DES (1985) *Better Schools*, London, HMSO.'

Referencing /

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 (they follow the method outlined here).
- Ask your tutor for advice.

Useful website:

www.open.ac.uk/openlearn

References

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.

Also see self-help guides:

www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/educationandtraining/guides/index.html
(see How to & Study Skills Sections)



Grammar & Punctuation /

IF YOU DO NOT REFERENCE YOU ARE:

- Implicitly claiming work is your own when it is not (plagiarism)
- Failing to demonstrate the extent of your own studying
- Failing to identify your own work to your tutor



Writing Sentences

Academic writing can place extra demands on your use of grammar and punctuation because you need to communicate complex and subtle 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**.

Grammar & Punctuation /

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.

The subject is **She**
The verb is **ran**
The object is **racetrack**.

Compound Sentences

To make our sentences more interesting, we need to add more information to the basic facts and think about how we can change the structure to make our 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**.

Grammar & Punctuation /

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. Appositives

An **appositive** is the renaming or expanding on a phrase at the beginning of a sentence.

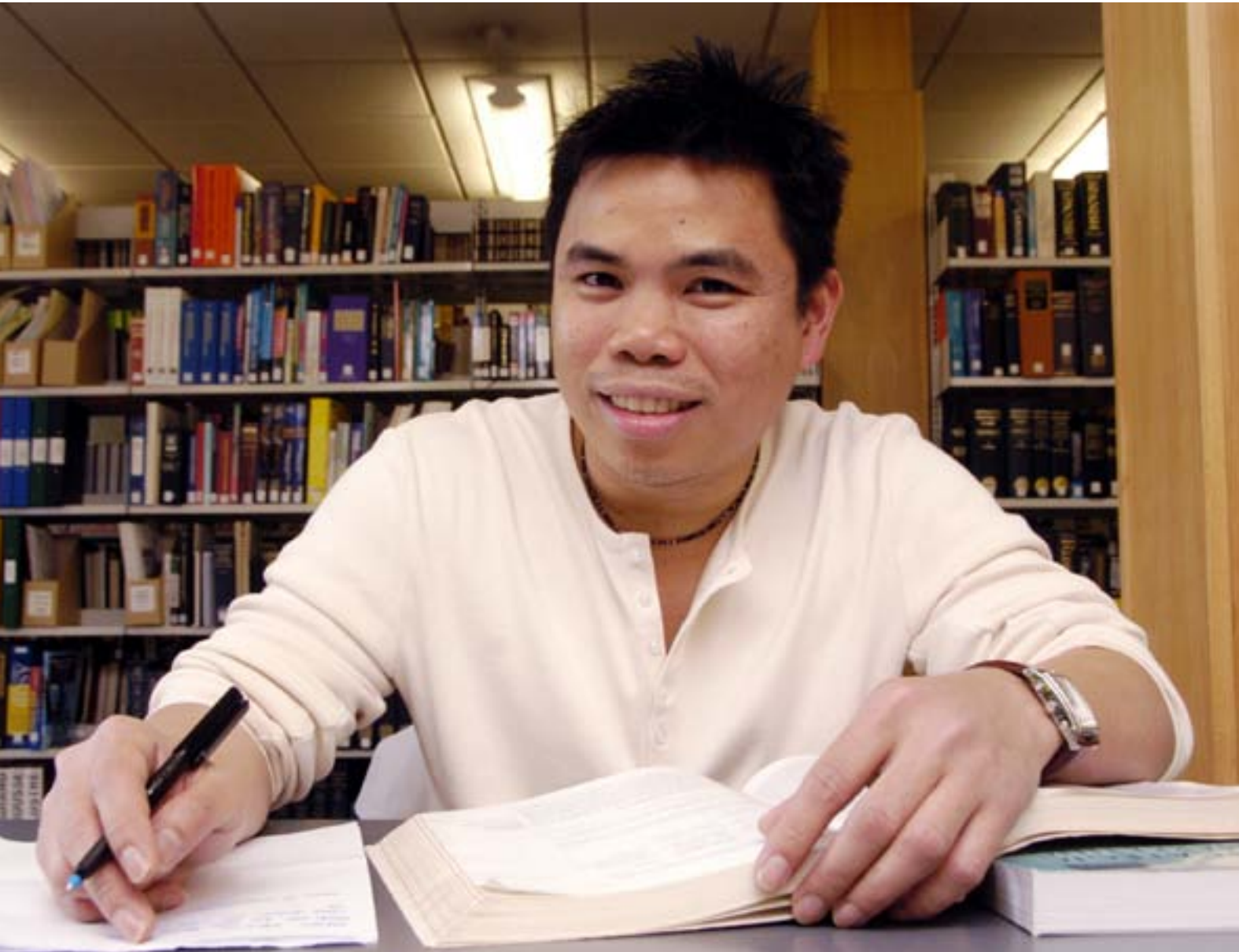
Example:
Val D’isere, a popular ski resort, has not had any snow this winter.

2. 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.

Grammar & Punctuation /



3. 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.

Example:

The course was exceptionally hard; nevertheless, it was worth the struggle. They decided to go on holiday in February, however, this proved impossible.

Grammar & Punctuation /

4. 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).

Example:

She wanted to go to the shops and then go for lunch. We can go out to dinner, and then to the cinema.

5. 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**.

Example:

Her shoes were uncomfortable, too tight and impossible to wear. The film was slow, boring and unrealistic.

6. 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.

Example: 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.

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.

Grammar & Punctuation /

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 is confused. Remember that:

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

Grammar & Punctuation /

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 format 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 'advance itself': this is the main part or the 'meat' of the paragraph that elaborates on the first sentence. The final two sentences should sum up what you are saying and then link to the next paragraph.

An effective way of reminding yourself is to think about it in terms of the 'rule of three' (Peck & Coyle, 2005).

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

Useful website:

www.chompchomp.com

Reference

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



IT Skills for Online Study (E-Learning) /



In addition to the necessity of developing competence in the use of standard IT applications such as MS Office and email, it is increasingly likely that any course of study you undertake will have an online or internet-based component (e-learning). This may be a certain percentage of course time in what is known as a 'blended' programme (e.g. 50% face to face classroom contact with tutors, 50% online study) or possibly even fully online (useful, of course, if you are working full-time and need to organise study time around a busy work/family/social life).

IT Skills for Online Study (E-Learning) /

Web 2.0 – Social Software

What is Web 2.0?

It is about **harnessing collective intelligence**. Don't worry, this is not as ominous as it sounds! Google and the online bookstore Amazon began with this. For instance, Google ranks search results partly based on how many other sites link to a specific page - the fact that other people have linked to a page means that there is a strong likelihood that it has value. Similarly, Amazon uses the patterns of other shoppers to help you find things you may like. Web 2.0 took this idea further. For example, take a look at **Wikipedia** (<http://www.wikipedia.org>). This is an online encyclopaedia based on entries from anyone and everyone. You begin writing about something, then another person can read what you've written and change or add to it, etc, etc. Eventually, you end up with a collective piece of information which is surprisingly accurate in many cases, without the need for the traditional 'expert' creator.

Del.icio.us (<http://delicious.com>) is a **shared** and **tagged** bookmark system. You bookmark a site, and tag it with a keyword to remind you of what the site is about. Other people can see your bookmarks, and you can also see other people's bookmarks: Very useful for research purposes.

The third radical difference is the concept of **everyone as publisher**. If you wish to post content on the web now it couldn't be easier. You can put your photos online with **Flickr** (www.flickr.com), videos with **YouTube** (www.youtube.com) and of course write online in your blog (www.blogger.com). You can create your social networking site through **myspace** (www.myspace.com) or **facebook** (www.facebook.com).

IT Skills for Online Study (E-Learning) /

Tagging

Information overload can be a big problem in the world of web 2.0; you can organise it through the use of tagging. So you can tag your **blog**, **wiki** and **del.icio.us** bookmarks.

If you do take a course with an online element then the concepts and 'buzzwords' mentioned briefly above will be explored in greater detail. For students who are working full-time and have too many commitments to engage in traditional face to face learning, web 2.0 can be a great motivator. It puts you in touch with fellow students as well as your tutors and can greatly reduce those feelings of isolation that sometimes afflict distance learners.

To sum up, the most important elements of web 2.0 are it's all free, shareable, searchable and we can all be creating and publishing online.



IT Skills for Online Study (E-Learning) /

Using and navigating a VLE (e.g. Learning Central)

What is a VLE?

Continuing the theme of online or blended learning we will briefly look at VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments).

"A Virtual learning environment (VLE) is a software system designed to facilitate teachers in the management of educational courses for their students, especially by helping teachers and learners with course administration. The system can often track the learners' progress, which can be monitored by both teachers and learners. While often thought of as primarily tools for distance education, they are most often used to supplement the face-to-face classroom." (From 'Wikipedia')

A VLE therefore provides an overall framework through which online or web-based learning material can be organised by tutors and accessed by students and tutors. Importantly, VLEs have the tools for tutors and students to track learning progress at any time. A VLE also has in-built communication software with its own email, discussion forums and chat facilities so that students can communicate with fellow learners and tutors in a 'closed' environment.

Most universities, like Cardiff University, currently use Learning Central as its VLE. For more information, visit:

www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/educationandtraining/elearning/blackboard/index.html

If you are about to take a course which includes an e-learning component you will explore the above in greater detail with your tutor(s).



Resources & Support Services at Cardiff University /

Cardiff University Centre for Lifelong Learning

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Fax: +44(0)29 2066 8935
E-mail: learn@cardiff.ac.uk / dysgu@caerdydd.ac.uk
Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/learn/

Student Support Centre

Cardiff University offers a full range of confidential help, advice and support from trained professional staff on a range of subjects, such as money, housing, counselling, disability and dyslexia, and academic matters.

Visit in person at 50 Park Place (029 2087 4844) or Cardigan House on the Heath Park site (029 2074 2070), 9.30 - 4.30 weekdays.

You can find out more by visiting: www.cardiff.ac.uk/studentsupport/

Or e-mail: studentsupportcentre@cardiff.ac.uk

Library Resources/ Facilities

Cardiff University's 16 library sites are conveniently located close to the academic schools. They support and offer a wide range of information resources, as well as access to photocopying and IT facilities.

Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/libraries/index.html

The Senghennydd Library (the Centre for Lifelong Learning's dedicated library) is situated on the ground floor of the Centre's building.

Senghennydd Library

Information Services
Cardiff University
PO Box 430
Cardiff
CF24 0DE
Tel: 029 2087 4158
E-mail: sengliby@cardiff.ac.uk
Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/libraries/senghennydd/index.html

Resources & Support Services at Cardiff University /

Student Union

Cardiff University Students' Union
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3QN
Tel: 029 2078 1400
E-mail: studentsunion@cardiff.ac.uk

Careers Guidance

The Careers & Employability Centre
5-7 Corbett Road
Cardiff
Tel: 029 2087 4828
E-mail: careers@cardiff.ac.uk
Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/carsv/

IT Services

40-41 Park Place
Monday to Friday 9.00 to 17.00
Tel: 029 2087 4487, Monday to Friday 8.00 to 22.00
Email: insrvConnect@cardiff.ac.uk
Website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/insrv/it/help/index.html



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