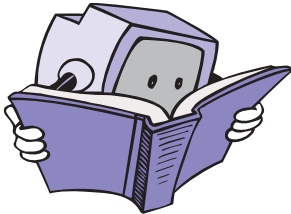


## 2 PREPARATION FOR STUDY: WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW TO GET READY



### READ ACTIVELY

The biggest change in your life on returning to study will probably be the amount of reading that you do. You can prepare yourself immediately by setting aside some time of each day to read – the more reading you do, the more quickly you will be able to read and absorb information. It is like anything else you do, proficiency comes with practise.

Get used to reading material that is a bit more challenging than that which you normally relax with. Read a 'quality' newspaper daily. Read a book a week. Try to read at a faster pace.

When you are reading for academic purposes, you are reading with a particular framework of knowledge – the subject area – and you are reading for a particular purpose. Academic reading is selective reading. You are reading to gain specific ideas or information. For your reading to be effective you must be active and to be active you must be doing something.

Get in the habit of **always** having a notebook and pencil to hand whenever you are reading and practise the following:

- Highlight, or make a note in pencil on the piece you are reading the key points of a page, or article.
- Note down the key points of what you are reading – try to write down a few key words rather than copying out chunks.
- If you are unsure of the meaning of certain words, try to follow the meaning of the sentence as a whole. Keep a dictionary to hand.
- What is the general point of view, or argument of the section you have read? Write a sentence in your notebook which sums this up in your own words. If appropriate, note whether you agree, or not.
- Note down your thoughts on the piece/book you are reading.



Reading in this way ensures that you are actively sifting the information and thinking about what you have read. The more of this you do, the more natural it will become.



- For further advice see section 3: 'THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE' - Notetaking and section 6: 'RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD WIDE WEB'.

# 'Moving On':

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#### ACADEMIC BOOKS

Unlike novels, academic books are not best read by starting at the beginning and continuing to the end. You must take on the role of the detective and seek out the bits and pieces that will serve your own purpose. For example, if you are reading a book from a reading list for an essay you will find that the most useful information can be found by using the following:

##### *The contents page*

This can save you hours of wasted effort. The contents outlines will guide you to the section of the book most relevant to your topic, or alert you to the fact that your topic is not covered.

##### *The index*

The index is at the back of the book and it is very useful indeed. It is an alphabetical listing of the key words used in the book and gives the page numbers where these are located. You can look up the keywords which you have in your assignment title, or the key words for your topic. The index will point you to related ideas but it will certainly save you time by taking you directly to the topic you are studying.

##### *The bibliography and references*

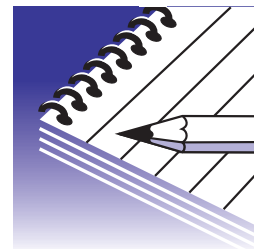
The bibliography and references will allow you to speed up your search for other information on your topic. By starting with a relatively recent book, you can use the author's own research efforts by noting the references that have been cited for information which is particularly relevant to your purposes, and looking up the full publication details in the bibliography. If you are lucky, your library will stock some of these books too. The bibliography is an excellent way to read more widely as it will lead you to other writers whose work may be of interest.

#### WRITING PRACTISE

Just like reading, writing is something that you can practise in order to improve your efficiency. If your writing skills are very rusty, try giving yourself short exercises where you spend just 5 minutes (regularly!) writing on any subject that comes to your mind e.g., something you dreamt, something you overheard. Try and extend the 5 minutes to 10 minutes and gradually increase your limit.

A good way to increase the amount of writing you do in preparation for university is to keep a reflective diary in an A4 book and aim to complete at least a page a day. In your diary you might write on the following:

- A piece summarising a conversation that you have had that day.
- A summary of something you have read.
- A description of a television programme you have watched.



This process will allow you to practise some academic skills: Noting key ideas, reflecting on those ideas, summarising, critically evaluating. At the end of each week, look back on what you have written with a critical eye and think about how fluent you have been, how adventurous have you been with your language use. In each following week, try to consciously 'improve' the standard of your expression.

Writing for academic purposes requires you to follow a pattern of analysing the demands of a particular task, planning and decision making, research and notetaking, argument and evaluation, drafting and editing within a particular structure and formal conventions. You undertake these processes in separate steps.



- For further advice see section 7: 'ACADEMIC WRITING'.

### COMPUTER SKILLS

It is generally the rule in Higher Education that assignments are presented as 'word processed' on a computer. In preparation for university it is clear that word processing skills will be of enormous benefit to you. You should take every opportunity to practise these skills and if you have none, to enrol on a beginners' course at your local college. Word processing will save you an enormous amount of time when you are used to it. It will allow you to edit easily, to delete or add text, and to correct errors without having to rewrite the whole text for each draft. The presentation of your work will be good, and you will find it very helpful to use tools such as spell checking, page numbering and word counting.

### THE INTERNET

In most towns, in internet cafes, colleges, and public libraries, there are facilities for using the internet. In your time preparing for university it would be very advantageous for you to spend some time familiarising yourself with the world wide web. Although your university will provide courses to help you use this technology, time spent in becoming a confident user before moving on will be of very great value to you. You will find introductory courses at local Further Education colleges.

Via the internet you can have access to unlimited quantities of information e.g., newspapers, statistics, film clips, computer programmes, study skills advice, dictionaries, academic journals, shopping! At most universities use of the internet is free and you will be expected to make use of it for researching. The internet is increasingly used as the only method of communicating information to students, such as subject options. The internet also allows you to send e-mail messages to other users and your tutors may use this method as their primary means of communicating with you.

For home use you need a telephone line and a computer with a modem to connect to the internet. There are various internet service providers who provide connections to the net and charge a monthly fee and these are advertised widely. Consider the various cost options carefully – phone bills will grow!

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- For further advice see section 6: 'RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD WIDE WEB'.

#### CREATING A STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Before you begin your course, it is wise to organise a place where you can work at home. You will find you need a place that is yours for at least part of the day and which is understood to be your dedicated study space. You should aim to have the following:

- A space that is quiet and where you can work undisturbed.
- A table or desk that you can keep your work on.
- A chair which is comfortable and the right height.
- Shelves for your books and files.
- Good lighting.

Consider if you need a computer or if the college facilities will do. If you have one at home, you will need to have priority of use and you must **always take back up copies** of your work so that it is not sabotaged by technical faults or other users!

It is important that your space is organised and as uncluttered as possible for this will enable you to think clearly and work efficiently. Your study space will also act as a trigger – when you enter it you will be helped into the right frame of mind for work.

#### Other tips for before you go:



- Organise childcare and back up plans in advance.
- Check enrolment dates.
- Familiarise yourself with local bookshops, libraries.
- Do your Christmas shopping in the summer.
- Fill up the freezer!
- Visit the university, several times if it is near, and familiarise yourself with the locations of loos, phone boxes, cafes, notice boards, classrooms etc.

#### Some final advice:

All students feel apprehensive when they are about to begin university study, mature students probably more so. You will be sent lots of information and may feel it is impossible to remember everything. Don't try to – you will soon get a feel for what is important to you.

#### Before you go:

- Check your dates and registration times carefully.
- Take plenty of photographs with you.
- Sort out domestic arrangements as far as possible, including when and where you are going to study, arrangements for childcare and other people who depend on you.
- Check your finances carefully: grants, benefits, tax, etc.
- Make sure you have sorted out accommodation, if appropriate.

#### In the first few weeks:

- Learn how to use the library.
- Make contact with your personal tutor.
- Look out for any mature student meetings or events.
- Don't rush out and buy all the books recommended but ask about the key texts.
- Find out where you can buy second-hand books.
- Get involved.
- Ask questions.

**WORKSHEET 2****PREPARATION FOR STUDY – WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW TO GET READY**

*There are two workshop suggestions here to encourage your reading and writing skills. You might try either, or both!*

**Task 1 Writing a summary**

*You will need a copy of a newspaper article or a passage from an academic book.*

Writing a summary develops your powers of judgement, concentration and expression. A summary requires you to re-write a passage in fewer words than the original, identifying the main ideas.

A good summary is:

- Fluent and direct.
- Uses language correctly.
- Contains the essential points and arguments from the passage.
- Uses different vocabulary from the original (where appropriate).

It should not:

- Contain your own opinions.
- Include examples of your own.
- Discuss the opinions given.
- Contain additional information.
- Alter the balance of the arguments.

1. **Identify the main points of the passage. Try to sum up each paragraph in a couple of sentences and write each paragraph summary on a separate piece of paper. (The main points are often found at the beginning of each paragraph.)**
2. **Try to replace phrases with a single word where possible.**
3. **Look at your summaries of each paragraph, decide if you would like to change the order to make it more fluent.**
4. **If working with a partner, swop your summary sentences and discuss these.**
5. **Draft your summary. Check it against your original for content.**
6. **Write the final version.**

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### Task 2 Getting over a writing block

*This is a group exercise. The group must decide on a topic for writing.*

1. **Everyone write down an agreed number of key words, (say 6 or 10) on the topic.**
2. **Collect all the key words together, perhaps on the board.**
3. **Collectively, group them according to common characteristics.**
4. **Next, agree an order of importance for each group by numbering the groups of words.**
5. **Allocate each group of key words to a pair of your colleagues.**
6. **Each pair must now compose the opening sentence of a paragraph using these key words.**  
  
(If you would like to make this a discussion, everyone must now pass around the sentences written by others and should make notes on each other's contributions, and these notes can form the basis for the discussion.)
7. **Read out the results in the order of the priority, or, if you prefer, pass around the notes.**

*You should all now be inspired to write a short essay on your topic individually!*