

Campion College Study Skills Handbook



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Introduction

The purpose of this Study Guide is to assist you to identify and develop effective study skills. This document is aimed at suggesting ways for you to improve your study skills in order to enable you to use your time at this college in a way that is most beneficial.

The meaning of the words ‘learning’ and ‘studying’ will be defined in the first chapter of this guide which will then consider the questions ‘Why am I studying?’ and ‘What am I studying?’ The majority of the guide’s material focuses on the question ‘How do I study?’ and provides strategies, checklists and activities to assist you in working this out for yourself.

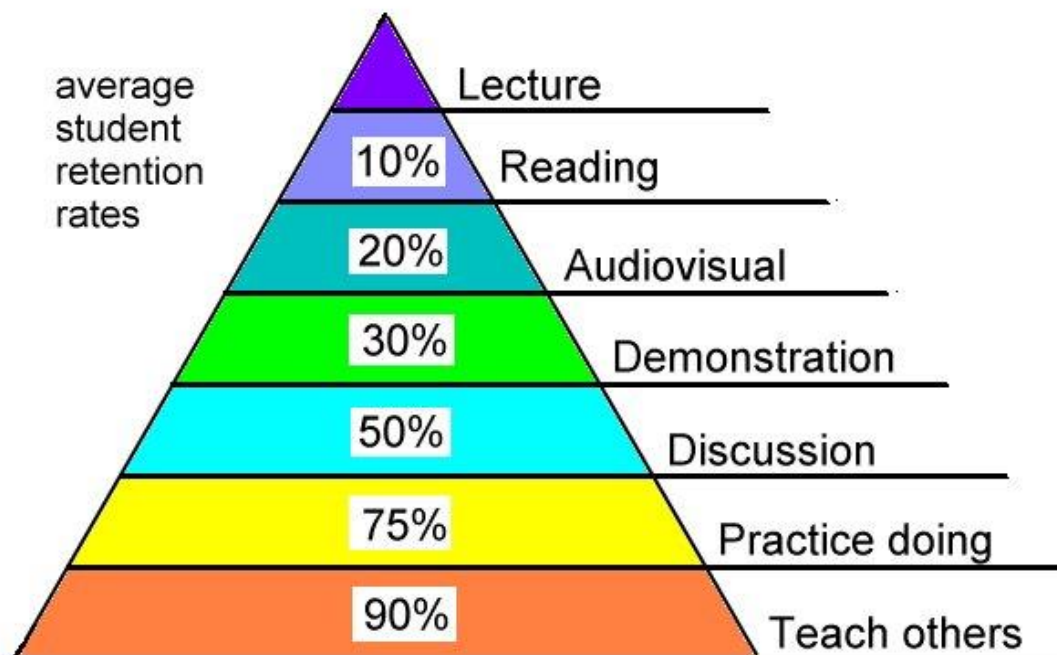
Learning and Studying

All of us are learning throughout our lives. Each new experience is a potential learning experience. Studying, on the other hand, is a deliberate action to learn something.

Studying is an active process. It demands effort from both the learner and the teacher. Some people think that learning is simply the process of transferring knowledge from the teacher’s head to the learner’s mind – the so-called “jug-to-mug” method of learning and teaching. To some this means that all the learner needs to do is sit back and let the knowledge be ‘poured in.’ This is the approach of the passive learner.

Different theories have presented more beneficial approaches to learning including the cognitive view, which is described as an active mental process involving acquiring, remembering and using knowledge. Constructivist theories of learning develop this process to highlight the fact that learners are active participants in constructing their knowledge and that social interaction is an important part of this (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013). Learning is an active process. The diagram of the learning pyramid illustrates that the more active the mode of study, the higher the retention rate of the studied material.

Learning Pyramid



Source: National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine

Another important aspect of studying is the process of linking new knowledge into an existing knowledge structure. Finding relationships between learned material and known material, and connecting new ideas or facts with ones that have been previously understood, assists students in understanding and retaining the information.

Learning at University

When at high school, your teachers would have guided your learning and studying very closely in order to minimize your chances of making mistakes. In tertiary studies, you need to become a highly motivated, independent learner. You need to learn how to learn, that is, understand the meta-cognitive principles in order to guide your own learning. At a tertiary level, your lecturers and tutors are very happy to give you instructions and advice regarding your assignments but it is up to you to initiate and take ownership of your studies. Students are encouraged to make use of the support services available including the Learning Centre, workshops and Study Skills 101 unit.

Reasons for Studying

It is a well-known fact that the higher your motivation for studying the more successful you will be. It is therefore important to closely analyse your reasons for studying.

Why am I studying?

This question draws attention to your attitudes or self-motivation. You might have decided to study for a tertiary qualification for several different reasons. Try jotting down your reasons. Can you classify your reasons under any of the following?

- interest in the subjects
- following a family tradition
- to get a job
- to gain promotion
- to pass examinations
- to earn money
- enjoyment

Perhaps you are now in a better position to sort out in your own mind *why* you are studying in the course you have enrolled in. Having clarified the *why*, we shall go on to try to answer the *what*.

What am I studying?

This question draws attention to your goals in terms of what has to be learned in order to earn the qualification you are seeking. This applies to the broad decisions including which elective subject to choose or which topic to research for an assignment, as well as to the planning of individual study sessions.

For each session of study try to be clear about what stage you are at and what you wish to achieve at the end of the session. It is a good idea to write down your goals – it helps to keep you intellectually honest! Your list of tasks should include action words such as:

- read a chapter in a book
- read an article
- write and outline
- write a summary.

At the end of each study session, review what you have achieved in relation to your objectives. What exactly did you learn? Where does it fit into the subject, or the whole course? When should I go over it again?

Summary

- Learning is an active process that involves your participation.
- Studying at a tertiary level requires you to be motivated and independent.
- It is important to know your own personal motivations for studying and be clear about what you want to achieve.

Efficient Study

So far this guide has covered the questions **why** and **what** am I studying? Here we look in more detail at the topic of **how** to study efficiently. Efficient study is purposeful and directed towards specific goals:

- understanding a particular piece of knowledge, or
- acquiring a definite skill.

It is important to apply some of the learning principles explained in the previous chapter when aiming to establish efficient study habits.

Making Linkages

New concepts and ideas are acquired, learned and remembered when they are connected or integrated into an already existing system of concepts, knowledge and ideas. Without making these linkages it will be hard or next to impossible to commit new material to the long term memory.

In order to make these linkages you will need to acquire the skill of posing questions to yourself along the lines of:

- What do I know about this already?
- How is it similar to what I already know?
- How is it different from what I already know?
- Why am I being asked to learn this theory or acquire these skills?
- Where is it all leading?

Regular Repetition

We learn best through regular repetition. This means that short, concentrated bursts of study with full attention are most effective. Cramming a vast amount of knowledge in last minute study sessions before an exam only means that, at best, the material stays in your memory during the exam and is forgotten soon after. It is important to treat the course work and the revision before an exam as an integral unit rather than two separate things. This means that you regard your study sessions, lectures or tutorials during the semester as exam or assessment preparation. It means actively revising as you go along by creating good study notes and going over them regularly. These strategies will be outlined further in the chapters on note-taking and time management.

Spaced Learning

Spaced learning is more effective than massed learning. This means that if you are studying four subjects, it is generally better to work at each subject every day, rather than devote one day to one subject, the next day to another one, and so on.

Recall

Memory and retention of knowledge is much better tested by recall than by recognition, so when studying, use frequent tests of recall about what you have just tried to learn. The goal of recall is to test whether the information you have read or listened to has transferred from your working and short-term memory (what you are thinking of at the present and will think of in the immediate future), to your long-term memory. Methods of helping you do this include elaboration (connecting new information to existing knowledge), organisation (chunking information or using a coherent mental structure) and context (putting new information into context to trigger your memory) (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2013).

Learning Styles

There are no hard and fast rules about the best way to study since this varies from person to person. Some students are content to study alone with books; alternatively, there are those who learn better by discussing concepts and ideas with others.

Individually, we must develop a method and pattern which suits our needs and temperament. The following table will help you to identify broadly what type of learner you are. Most people are a mixture of these styles rather than being of one particular type.

ACTIVE	REFLECTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> likes variety and frequent changes of activities, likes the company of other like-minded people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> likes adequate time to consider, prepare and assimilate, likes opportunities to gather relevant information, likes to listen to other points of view across a wide spectrum.
THEORIST	PRACTICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> likes opportunities to question, likes structure and purposeful situations, likes challenging ideas and concepts, likes mixing with intellectually capable people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> likes opportunities to practice and experiment, likes lots of practical tips and techniques, likes to tackle real problems, likes to hear from practising experts.

Howard Gardner proposed a theory of multiple intelligences to explain variabilities between individuals' abilities and learning styles. Have a look at the chart below and identify which ones may apply more to you. How could this information help you approach your studies?

You might also like to reflect on your 'cognitive style'. Do you prefer to:

- take copious notes?
- use visual materials, pictures, diagrams?
- use 'hands on' methods of learning: equipment or an instrument?
- work amidst ambiguous demands?
- extract details out of a mass of information?

- work amidst distraction?
- study alone?
- study with a friend?
- study with a group of other people?

It is important that you find out what your personal study style is and then choose ways of studying that you are most comfortable with.

Studying with Other People

Talking about the studied material in a small group will allow you to test out ideas in a non-threatening environment; this will help you to gain confidence. The challenge of bouncing ideas off each other can be beneficial to learning since shared experiences generally broaden perspectives on a problem. You can discuss key points, share ideas and clarify questions. The act of trying to articulate and to discuss the issues will help you to integrate new learning with what you already know, which as illustrated before, is important for successful study.

It is, however, important to be disciplined and organised when studying in a group in order to avoid the study time turning into mere socializing. You can achieve this by:

- Setting a fixed time during which you will study and a fixed time for socializing with the group,
- Set a time for meeting and make sure you are punctual,
- Set an agenda, for instance a set of questions that will be discussed,
- Make sure that each group member comes prepared, has read about the topic beforehand and is able to contribute something to the session.

Dealing with Stress

Stress is something that you may be familiar with, it is the experience when you feel that the demands on you (real or perceived) exceed your ability to cope with them. There are many factors that can contribute to your levels of stress including examinations, assignment deadlines, relationship problems, financial constraints, study/work/life balance and your own personality traits such as perfectionism or over-sensitivity.

There are many symptoms of stress so it is a good idea to identify the ones that may be relevant to your situation and be aware when they occur. These include physical symptoms (such as headaches, low energy, stomach problems, muscle tension, increased heart and breathing rate); emotional symptoms (such as irritation, frustration, nervousness, difficulty relaxing your mind); and behavioural symptoms (including insomnia, avoiding other people, dependence on alcohol, drugs, nicotine).

While some level of stress is good because it motivates people and helps them to achieve and do well, too much stress is not conducive and makes study ineffective. It is therefore important to look at the 'stresses' of having to complete assignments and sit exams as an opportunity to do well. It is also important to avoid the unnecessary stresses of preparing for an exam or finishing an essay in a last minute rush by establishing a good study routine and using good time management strategies from the start.

Summary

- Effective learning involves connecting new knowledge to existing knowledge.
- There are a variety of learning styles; consider your personal preferences and choose ways of studying that are compatible with this.
- Regular repetition is more effective than last minute study sessions.
- Study for concentrated bursts with full attention.
- Don't allow stress to hinder the effectiveness of how you study.

Acquiring and Processing Information

Now that you have prepared the conditions under which you can study, let us concentrate on the skills you will need. Essentially, learning in the liberal arts consists of extracting relevant information from what you have read, as well as heard about in lectures, processing this information and then producing your own piece of work that shows how you have understood the concepts that were presented to you. This piece of work could be in the form of an essay, an oral presentation, discussion paper or report. The following chapter aims at enabling you to become more efficient at acquiring and processing the information through reading, listening in lectures and tutorials and taking notes, while later chapters are devoted to essay writing.

The skills of listening and reading are paramount when considering the methods in which we acquire and process information.

Listening

Effective listening skills are vital in human relationships as well as in developing and articulating knowledge. Before listening to a lecture or participating in a tutorial consider the key ideas or concepts that the class may cover. As you listen, identify words, phrases, themes or issues that are important. Listening well allows you to ask intelligent questions that will extend your understanding of the knowledge, attitudes or skills that your teachers are trying to impart to the class.

While hearing is accidental and effortless, listening requires focusing intentionally. There are different levels of active listening which include:

Repetition – using exactly the same words or sounds

Paraphrasing – using similar words

Reflecting – using your own words.

Each of these methods is useful for studying and assisting you to recall information and use it wisely.

Reading Strategies

In the subjects studied at this college you will have to take in large amounts of reading materials from a variety of formats including books, journals and electronic sources. You will therefore have to become an efficient reader. Efficient reading is not the same as speed reading, but your speed will increase if you become more efficient in the way you read.

In order to cope with a large quantity of reading it is important to develop different reading strategies and to be flexible with the use of these strategies depending on the purpose for which you are reading at any given point in time. While it is desirable to become faster at

reading, developing a range of reading strategies and using these strategies flexibly and appropriately is just as important.

If you are reading poetry, you will probably want to read aloud with the rhythm of the verse and with the sounds rolling around. If you are reading a philosophy paper on the other hand, you will need to summarize each paragraph after reading it and take notes as you go along.

We have all had the experience of reading a page of a book and wondering afterwards what it was all about. Adopting the following strategies will help avoid this experience. Firstly, it is important to assign a set amount of reading material for each reading / study session. Secondly, it helps to be clear about the purpose of reading before beginning to read. Thirdly, a questioning attitude is important. An awareness of questions or key points you are looking for will speed up the search and make the reading process more effective. This can be achieved through the techniques of previewing and questioning described below.

The skills and strategies which should be practiced and developed are:

- Previewing / Getting the Overall Picture
- Questioning
- In Depth Reading
- Recall and Review
- Skimming
- Scanning

Previewing

This skill aims at getting an overview of the information before the actual reading by looking at

- the title
- the author
- the chapter (or section) headings
- summaries or conclusions
- the contents page
- the index pages

Questioning

Before you begin to read, ask yourself questions about what you are going to read, such as:

- Why am I looking at this particular material?
- What information am I looking for?
- What are the key words or ideas?
- Has this information any relevance to my current work and studies?

In Depth Reading and Note-taking

After previewing and questioning, sit down with paper and pen in order to read in depth.

Ask yourself the questions that you have generated while previewing and try to find the answers to them. Select main points and highlight them. Alternatively, note down important words and phrases. Following this, write in your own words a short summary of the main

points of all or most paragraphs that you read. Another suggestion is to draw a vertical line through the middle of the paper and to write the summaries of the key points on the left side of the line and to use the right side for your own questions, comments, opinions or for referencing the key points to the opinions of other authors.

Recall and Review

At the end of the session recall and review what you have read by looking over your notes and checking your understanding by trying to re-word some of the key points in your head. Better still try to explain it to a classmate. By doing this, you will help to integrate what you have just learned with what you already know.

Skimming

Skimming is the process of looking at a text in order to find out the main ideas of the text. In this technique you let your eyes pass down and across the page to find important information. You might choose to read the first sentence of each paragraph or you might look for:

- headings
- diagrams
- pictures
- graphs and charts
- tables

Scanning

Scanning is a technique that you use when you already know what you are looking for and you are looking at the text in order to locate this particular information. You use this technique when you have already read a text before and want to look more closely at a particular point. In this technique let your eyes pass down and across the page quickly looking for specific information such as:

- headings and sub-headings
- key words and ideas
- key phrases
- relevant diagrams and pictures.

Summary

- Listening is a discipline, learning to do it well will help you process information efficiently.
- You will have to do a large amount of reading for your studies. Learn the skills of previewing, questioning, in-depth reading, recall, review, skimming and scanning to help you.

Note-taking and Note Making

Taking notes effectively allows you to create permanent records of relevant information that you can draw on for your own essay writing or exam revision. Accuracy in this process helps you avoid plagiarism and identify the origin of your own ideas.

An important skill when taking notes is to record only essential information and to record it very briefly in point form, possibly using only a few words. This causes difficulties for many people. Many students, especially when they first start studying at a tertiary level, have a tendency to try to take down everything a lecturer says or everything they read in a text. The skill of discriminating between the more important points and the not so important ones is acquired gradually.

There are three aspects to the process of taking notes:

- identifying the key elements,
- establishing the relationships between these parts,
- identifying the organizing principle (that is, the plan behind the structure).

Note-taking in Lectures

- Before the lecture, revise previous notes, pre-read about the topic and prepare your note paper (rule margins, etc.)
- During the lecture, focus on the main points by identifying structural, visual and non-verbal cues.
- Use bullet points, indentation, linear structures, mind-mapping, wide margins or another strategy that makes sense for you.

Note Making After the Lecture

- After the lecture, revise your notes, tidy them up, add any missing information, and attach any handouts.
- Expand the notes with examples, explanations, references or anything that makes them more meaningful.
- Analyse key points or write a brief one paragraph summary of the lecture.

Taking Notes from Reading Materials

Some suggestions for taking notes from reading materials include:

- Identify the purpose and function of the text – will it provide the information you require?
- Be selective and systematic – Why are you reading? What are the main points? How will you organise these points?
- Read a chapter or a section of a chapter and then jot down the main points.

- Note personal insights into the material and ideas that occur to you as you read, but when you do this, make sure you record them separately or in a different colour to your other notes.
- Include clear and accurate reference information including page numbers.

Note Taking Checklist

- ✓ Folders or notes are well organised as a whole
- ✓ Notes include the date, subject and title of the lecture /tutorial
- ✓ Notes are in a clear format
- ✓ There is space to make notes after the class
- ✓ Logical abbreviations are used
- ✓ Notes record important ideas
- ✓ Notes are a useful guide for studying

Being organised and prepared with study materials makes essay writing and exam preparation less stressful! It is therefore a good idea to organise all study materials in a folder or to have them in any other preferred organised way, all in one place.

Summary

- Notes are to assist you in assignments and exam preparation, how useful they will be depends on your own effort.
- Be diligent in keeping your notes organised.
- Have a system that works for you.
- Recognise primary ideas and concepts.
- Always record the source of the information.

Essay Writing

Developing good essay writing skills is essential in any academic course but it is of special importance in a liberal arts course because essays are one of the main assessment strategies that are used. The process of writing an essay involves a number of steps. These are often done in a linear order; however it is usual to include a number of iterations (repetitions of a process) before completing the essay.

1. Analyse and define the topic or question.

A good essay must answer the question. It is therefore important to put careful thought and time into analysing the question before writing the essay.

Each essay question usually has three fundamental parts:

- *The instruction words*
 - The instructional words describe what you are actually supposed to do such as: analyse, explain, identify, compare, evaluate, discuss.
- *The content words*
 - The content words indicate what the topic is about.
- *The limiting part*
 - The limiting part of the question more specifically defines or narrows down the content of the essay to one particular area or focus. This means that the content that has to be covered is less general.

Example:

“Discuss the role of white women in power relations in Australian colonial frontiers during the second half of the nineteenth century.”

The instruction word in this topic is **‘discuss’**. Keywords that indicate the content are **‘white women in power relations’**. The limiting part of the question is that you are only required to write about **‘Australian colonial frontiers’** and **‘the second half of the nineteenth century’**.

2. Identify key ideas and/or topics to research

Drawing from your analysis in the first stage, identify relating areas within your topic. To do this you may:

- Look at lecture and tutorial notes and slides.
- Review course outline requirements and topics.
- Brainstorm or mind map to expand and focus ideas.

3. Literature search

The next stage involves locating relevant evidence, quotations or other material relevant to your topic. You could look at:

- Library catalogue
- Lecture notes and slides
- Course Reserve shelves
- Bibliographies
- Online databases

Remember to take notes as you read!

4. Develop a thesis statement and formulate your argument

Your thesis or argument should express your response to the question and requires supporting evidence which you have gathered from the previous step. Consider:

- Does the thesis statement answer the question?
- What is needed to persuade the reader of your opinion?
- Is the argument logical and can you explain yourself?
- What evidence or structures will you use? E.g. examples, definitions of key terms, compare/contrast, give context, evaluate, look at case studies etc.

5. Write an essay plan

This is a visual organisation of ideas for your essay and helps you to develop a structure that will assist you in further research and writing.

- Divide the word count up and divide the body of the essay into sections.
- Match each section with a topic and evidence to support your argument.
- Begin with a provisional plan which can be updated and revised as you progress.

6. Write a draft

The purpose of the initial essay draft is to work out for yourself what you know or understand about the topic and how you want to argue your thesis statement. It should help you identify areas that need strengthening, aspects to leave out or develop further. Aim for:

- Clear introduction with your thesis statement.
- Body paragraphs that build on each other and flow together.
- Conclusion that sums up the evidence, re-states the thesis and draws everything together.
- Make sure you are clear about what you are writing and which direction you want to take your argument.

7. More focused reading and research

This is important to provide more depth to your essay. In this process you should:

- Go over your draft and identify information 'gaps.'
- Find sources and examples to supplement specific arguments.
- Widen, extend or narrow your search for material.

8. Take a break

Try to allow enough time to have a break from writing and get some fresh air, then re-read your draft with new eyes to make note of errors and areas to strengthen and adjust.

9. Rewrite and revise

Rewrite your first draft and revise your structure taking note to ensure paragraphs flow together, your thesis is clear, supported and summarized, and your arguments are logical. At this stage you can:

- Delete extraneous information.
- Work on clean transitions between paragraphs.
- Polish vocabulary and language.
- Ask a friend to read your work and give you some feedback.

10. Proofread

It is a good idea to take another break before finally proofreading your work. At this point you are focusing on the finer details and can:

- Refine vocabulary.
- Confirm referencing is accurate and thorough.
- Check spelling and grammar.
- Look at punctuation.
- Check formatting.

11. Submit Essay

- Record word count.
- Ensure pages are numbered.
- Ensure bibliography is attached and correct.
- Save and back-up a soft copy.

12. Evaluate

- Tidy up your notes and consolidate soft files.
- Evaluate your study process: what could you have done better? Did you allow enough time? Did you spend enough (or too much) time researching? How helpful was your plan? What do you want to improve on for next time?

Summary

- Invest time in understanding the question.
- Search broadly for information to support your thesis statement.
- Writing, rewriting and editing will help you develop a coherent, logical argument.
- Ensure you have enough time to take a break before proofreading and finalizing for submission.

Essay Structure, Plans and Editing

An essay should have the following main parts:

- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

The introduction should provide a ‘definite opening’; the body a ‘considered development’ of the argument and the essay should end with an ‘emphatic conclusion’ (Shiach, 2009).

Introduction

In the introduction you should map out clearly how the question will be answered. It is important to be specific enough, but not to put too much detail into the introduction. Generally introductions take up approximately 10% of the overall word count. Introductions have three primary functions:

- To catch your reader’s interest and encourage them to continue reading,
- To establish your topic and provide the background information needed to understand it,
- To present your thesis statement and explain how you are going to argue it.

Elements of a good introduction are:

- *An Opening Sentence*

The opening sentence introduces the topic by using words from the essay question. It should grab the reader’s attention in order to create a motivation in the reader to read on. It should also be relevant and specific and indicate what the main argument is.

- *Background Information on the Topic*

The introduction should include information that is important to your argument and which needs to be presented to the reader in the opening paragraph. This serves as a basis for your thesis statements and objectives.

- *A Thesis Statement*

The thesis statement states and defines the main point the author is making in the essay. It is important that the thesis statement is clear and concise because the line of argument in the body of the essay is developed from the thesis statement.

Body

The body of the essay is the main part where the question is answered and the argument is developed through using evidence. It may consist of few or many paragraphs depending on your task.

Paragraphs

The body of the essay is divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph should be devoted to one general idea or argument. Just as the whole essay is divided into introduction, body and conclusion, each paragraph itself mirrors this structure with a topic sentence, an explanation and a concluding sentence (or sentences).

- *Topic Sentence*

The topic sentence states the main argument which is the key point of the paragraph. It includes the specific topic of the paragraph and is usually placed at the start of the paragraph but may be included later on.

- *Explanation and Evidence*

This part illustrates and justifies the key point by elaborating and giving specific examples. It supports the argument through evidence such as facts, logic, research, relevant examples and authoritative quotations from the literature. The body of the paragraph should also analyse the evidence and comment on its significance, implications and impact.

- *Concluding Sentences*

The concluding sentences of each paragraph summarises the evidence given and can indicate how the material will be covered in the following paragraph. They state why the evidence provided supports the main thesis statement which was outlined in the introduction of the essay. This ensures that the topic runs like a thread through the whole essay and that each paragraph does in fact answer the essay question (Shiach, 2009).

Linking Paragraphs

The introduction, body and conclusion have to be linked together in order to create an integral whole (Shiach, 2009). It is important to create a logical flow of ideas throughout the essay. One way of achieving this is to link one paragraph to the next one by, at the end of each paragraph, pointing towards the ideas that will be presented in the following paragraph.

Conclusion

The conclusion of an essay is as important as the introduction as it leaves a final impression on the reader. The purpose of the conclusion is to round off the essay appropriately and to indicate that the topic has been dealt with adequately (Shiach, 2009). Like an introduction, a conclusion should contain approximately 10% of the word count. The conclusion should not introduce new information or ideas. It should summarise without restating and be a synthesis of the evidence that was presented in the body of the essay. A conclusion should clearly answer the essay question and reaffirm the thesis.

Essay Plan

Writing an essay plan is important. Skipping the step of writing an essay plan will not save you time! On the contrary, putting careful thought into how to structure your essay before you start writing, saves time later on. If you analyse the question and develop an essay plan from this analysis you are more likely to stay on track, answer the question and achieve a good result in the form of a well-structured essay. Writing an essay plan helps to produce an essay that is cohesive and makes sense overall.

Many students have one of the following types of approaches to essay plans. If you fall into one (or more) of these categories, be mindful of your habits and identify steps to improve your approach to essay writing.

1. *"I don't plan"* – This usually results in a confused essay, lacking structure and cohesion. Plans help maximise your time and the information you use. Try starting with a very basic plan and adapt it as necessary.
2. *"I do lots of planning, but no work"* – Over-planning wastes time; planning should move you closer towards your goal. If this is an issue for you, try a task-line that details each step of the process and what time/days you want to complete them by.
3. *"I don't stick to a plan"* - This usually results in not answering the question. Analyse the question, marking criteria and outcomes. Adapt your plan, but ensure it sticks to the criteria.
4. *"I change my mind so I can't plan"* - This is often due to a lack of confidence. Focus only on the information you have at hand, decide on a question or topic, make a plan and try to stick to it as much as possible.

How to write an essay plan

An essay plan is a way to visually organise your ideas for the essay. After analysing the topic and after researching the topic you have to:

- decide on information that you want to include in your answer,
- choose examples and evidence which will support your argument,
- decide on an order of points which creates a logic line of argument,
- jot these ideas down in point form.

This is your essay plan and is followed by writing up a first draft.

Drafting

In writing the first draft, concentrate on getting your ideas onto the paper in a structured way according to your essay plan. Work on the quality of the writing when you are editing.

Editing and Proof Reading

Editing is a necessary component of academic writing. It increases the consistency and clarity of your work which assists the reader in understanding your argument. Editing should be done systematically and cover a number of different levels of writing.

- **Argument:** is your argument clear, well-supported with evidence, convincing and developed logically throughout the essay? Does your introduction contain a concise thesis statement? Does this answer the question? Do your body paragraphs support the thesis? Does the conclusion restate the argument clearly?
- **Structure:** Is the structure of the essay logical, flowing between points and well signposted? Are your key points obvious? Are your transitions between paragraphs clear? Do the paragraphs demonstrate the development stated in the introduction?
- **Paragraphing:** Does each paragraph have a topic sentence? Do these convey the argument effectively? Are you using accurate quotations and evidence? Are your paragraphs of a reasonable length? Does all the information relate back to the original question? Do you paraphrase more often than you use direct quotations? Do linking sentences express the development of the argument?
- **Expression:** Do the sentences flow together logically? Are the sentences a reasonable length? Have you used punctuation correctly?

Proofreading

Proofreading occurs towards the final stages of essay writing. It is the process of studying your work for grammatical and spelling errors, missing or repeated words, anomalies in font or size, accurate and consistent referencing, and punctuation. Strategies to use when proofreading include:

- Read the essay out loud,
- Read for one aspect at a time (e.g. spelling),
- Use spell and grammar check but don't rely on them,
- Try to eliminate unnecessary words, consider "is this needed?"
- Allow time between editing and proofreading,
- Consider feedback from previous assignments and apply suggestions.

Editing and Proofreading Checklist

- ✓ Written work fits assignment question, format and length.
- ✓ Thesis statement is clearly articulated in introduction.
- ✓ Necessary background information is provided.
- ✓ The argument is sustained throughout each paragraph.
- ✓ Each paragraph has a topic sentence and sufficient evidence.
- ✓ Scholarly, academic sources are used and are paraphrased more than quoted directly.
- ✓ Referencing style is consistent and accurate.
- ✓ Sentences flow logically and provide clear transitions between ideas.
- ✓ The work is grammatically correct with no spelling errors and has clear expression.

Summary

- An essay should have a clear introduction, body paragraphs containing evidence and a succinct conclusion.
- Essay plans will save time and help you develop a strong structure.
- Editing involves reviewing the argument, structure, paragraphing and expression.
- Proofreading focuses on grammar, spelling, punctuation and consistent referencing.

Sample Assessment Criteria

Try to find out from your lecturer or tutor what the detailed marking criteria for your subject are. The following is a guide to the grading criteria.

Grade	Notation	Mark Range	Descriptor
Pass	P	50-64	The essay covers a reasonable number of relevant points raised by the question; An adequate number of sources have been consulted. The essay demonstrates knowledge of the basic concepts raised by the question; It is well structured; It presents a reasonable and consistent argument; It observes the essay writing conventions; It is clearly expressed.
Credit	C	65-74	The essay shows some originality in judgement; It shows a capacity to identify, evaluate and use relevant scholarship; The essay clearly defines terms and concepts where required; The bibliography and footnotes demonstrate that the student has consulted a wider range of sources (books, scholarly articles & electronic sources); Primary source material was used.
Distinction	D	75-84	The essay demonstrates a marked degree of originality in thought and organisation; It demonstrates a high degree of precision and rigour in argument; It demonstrates a capacity to evaluate conflicting interpretations and to draw conclusions; It reflects wide reading and uses primary source material as part of its argument.
High Distinction	HD	85-100	An essay that earns a High Distinction demonstrates all the hallmarks of academic scholarship in its use of evidence, especially primary resource material, and in the breadth and scope of its reading. Of course these criteria are commensurate to the level of studies of the student.
Fail	F	0-49	The essay does not meet the minimum requirements for various reasons: the essay may not answer the question; It relies on a narrow range of sources or simply uses general texts; it is poorly structured and does not argue a case; It contradicts itself; It is marred by poor expression and grammar; It does not observe the essay writing conventions; It shows evidence of plagiarism; It is superficial in its treatment of the question; It contains factual errors.

Oral Presentations

Speaking in public is an important skill to acquire. Oral presentations can vary and could take many forms, from a seminar presentation to the delivery of a major lecture at a conference, a speech at a wedding or a reading in church. This chapter is intended to help you in planning, organising and delivering speeches in a tertiary context.

There are several things that you have to learn when speaking in public. These include:

- managing anxiety,
- projecting confidence,
- gaining the attention of the audience,
- retaining the attention of the audience,
- delivering your planned speech,
- handling and answering questions.

Preparation

Proper preparation prevents poor performance. Firstly, consider what the purpose of your speech is. It could be:

- to entertain,
- to provide information,
- to motivate,
- to persuade,
- to give a vote of thanks.

Define the main idea. Find a one-sentence generalisation to link the topic and purpose of the presentation to the frame of reference your audience is likely to have.

Audience

Know your audience and tailor your presentation to meet the criteria you need to address and the audience you are speaking to. Consider:

- What is the likely size of the audience?
- Why would the audience be there to hear you?
- What is it likely that the audience already knows about your topic?
- What do those in the audience have in common in terms of attitudes and interests?
- How might the members of the audience differ:
 - gender?
 - age?
 - ethnicity?
 - socio-economically?
 - professionally?

Your answers to these questions will provide ideas about:

- How to adapt your message,
- How to win over your audience,
- What supporting material, such as technical data, will be needed and how should it be provided,
- What communication techniques (including audio-visual aids) will be best suited for your message and your audience.

In organizing your presentation or speech, you will need to clarify carefully what message you want members of the audience to have in their minds at the conclusion of the presentation. Be careful about trying to say or to do too much in the time available. The old adage still applies: it is better to err on the side of brevity and have the audience wanting more, than to be long-winded and have the audience wishing that you would stop! On average, when speaking in public, talk more slowly than usual (about 125-150 words per minute or 7500-9000 words per hour).

As you prepare your presentation, use the following steps:

1. Define the main idea.
2. Limit the scope of the main idea.
3. Choose your approach.
4. Prepare an outline of your talk which balances
 - general concepts,
 - specific details, and
 - apt illustrative examples.
5. Decide on the style which suits
 - the topic,
 - your personality, and
 - the nature of the audience.

General Organization

Your presentation should have a beginning, middle and an end.

- Move from simple to complex ideas.
- The beginning should address the why, what and how questions.
- The middle should contain clear, simple, direct analogies, comparisons and examples.
- The end should consist of a succinct summary.
- If required, finish off with inviting questions.

If you use small briefing cards these need to include:

- key points,
- points to accompany visual aids,

- transitional sentences to connect main points,
- Don't read your whole speech word for word,
- Your goal is to appear prepared but spontaneous.

Delivery

Speaking from note cards is generally the easiest and most effective way of delivering a message. In this mode of delivery you do not have every word written down in front of you, but you have key points that you can use as prompts. Reading the entire speech word for word from your notes is not a good idea since it does not allow you to have enough eye contact with the audience.

Above all, don't ramble. Digressions should be stories that relate your topic to ideas familiar to this particular audience.

- Vary your speech and tone.
- Even with a mic you need to raise your voice.
- Slow down and enunciate clearly.
- Pauses can be effective for gaining attention and emphasizing important points.
- Body language is vital: stand up straight, shoulders back, smile if appropriate.
- Facial expressions should support the content of the speech.
- Vary eye contact with the audience members.

Conquering Anxiety

The following strategies will help you to keep anxiety to a minimum

- Check out the location before the actual day of the delivery and confirm the time.
- Practice the delivery if possible to a friend or family member.
- Think positively.
- Don't panic at any stage. If you start feeling anxious, take some deep breaths and just keep going. Concentrate on your message and the audience.

There are several ways to make you look more confident to your audience, no matter how you might feel inside! Follow these processes to help you stay calm.

- Don't rush.
- Be aware of your non-verbal signals.
- Walk slowly to the lectern, breathe deeply and stand up straight.
- Stand tall with your weight on both feet and shoulders back.
- Don't put your hands in your pockets.
- Face the audience, adjust the microphone, pause (count to 3), then survey the room.
- Find a friendly face, make eye contact and smile.
- Count to 3 again (it will seem like a long time) and then start your presentation. Don't begin speaking until you have silence.

- Pick out a few people in different parts of the audience and shift your eye contact from one to the other during your presentation.
- Use your hands to emphasise remarks with appropriate gestures.
- Vary your facial expressions from time to time to make the message more dynamic.
- Speak slowly and enunciate carefully so that everyone can hear you and understand you.
- Pause for effect. The pause in public speaking is like the 'glide' when you swim: kick, glide, pull. Some people just kick and pull when they swim and they look like drowning rats.
- Use silence instead of meaningless filler words such as "um", "you know", "like".
- Sound enthusiastic, even if you would much rather be somewhere else!

Responding to Questions

The following section contains techniques that can be helpful for making the question time after the presentation more effective.

- Try to anticipate some of the questions so that you can emphasize your most important points.
- Give as many in the audience as possible a chance to participate.
- Focus on the questioner and indicate with your use of body language that you are listening.
- Repeat the question to confirm your understanding of it and to ensure that the audience has also heard the question.
- Respond appropriately by:
 - keeping your answers short and to the point,
 - breaking up long questions into smaller more manageable chunks,
 - offering an individual discussion later with the questioner if the answer would take too long,
 - offering to provide the answer as soon as possible, if you can not answer it on the spot,
 - maintaining a business-like tone in your voice, accompanied by a pleasant expression on your face,
 - responding unemotionally to tough questions,
 - avoiding the use of put downs or sarcasm.

Conclusion

Finish up on time, even if some people are eager to continue. Others may have arranged for transport, eating and so on. In any case, most people seem to have an in-built clock for concentration! Thank people for their attendance and their attention.

Exercises

Exercise 1 - Self-assessment on oral presentation.

How good are you at planning, writing and delivering oral presentations?

- Rate yourself on each of the following elements.
- Examine your ratings to identify where you are strongest and where you can improve, using the tips learnt in this lesson.

Element of Presentation Process	Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
I start by defining my purpose.				
I analyse my audience before writing a presentation.				
I match my presentation length to the allotted time.				
I begin my oral presentations with an attention-getting introduction.				
I look for ways to build credibility as a speaker.				
I cover only a few main points in the body of my presentation.				
I use transitions to help listeners follow my ideas.				
I practise my presentation beforehand.				
I prepare in advance for questions and objections.				
I conclude oral presentations by summarising my main ideas.				

Exercise 2

Watch and observe the delivery of a speaker at college, work, on the news or in another setting. Consider:

- What non-verbal signals did the speaker use to emphasise key points?
- Were these signals effective?

Exercise 3

Choose any topic and talk about it for one minute. Identify any 'filler' words you use repeatedly and any physical gestures or expressions you tend towards. How can these add or detract from your speech? What words do you need to be careful of not over-using? Ask a friend to give you feedback on their impression of your speech.

Summary

- Know the purpose of the presentation, your audience and the length of time you have.
- Oral presentations or speeches follow the same structure as essays, containing an introduction, body and conclusion.
- Be prepared and practice your presentation to minimize nerves.
- Delivery is paramount: Clear speech, eye contact with the audience and confident physical posture will improve your delivery.

Referencing and Plagiarism

The word ‘plagiarism’ derives from the Latin word ‘platiarius’, which means ‘kidnapper’. It refers to the practice of using other people’s thoughts and giving the impression that they are your own thoughts by not providing the reference information about the ‘source’ i.e. the book or article in which you found the information. If you do this, you will fail the essay in which you plagiarised (some universities will not only fail you but they will also prevent you from ever continuing your course). It is therefore important to make absolutely sure that it is very clear to the reader which thoughts are yours and which are from another source.

Using citations strengthens your writing; it gives your writing authority because the information from the source backs up your argument. It also means that the reader can read more about the topic in the source you cite. Careful citing makes you look trustworthy because it means that you give credit to the hard work of others and you will receive the credit for having studied the sources (Harvey, 2008).

There are a few ways to use quotations. One is quoting verbatim where you copy exactly word for word what the author has written. Summarising and paraphrasing are other ways to incorporate another person’s work into your writing without using their exact words. Correct referencing is needed in all of these cases.

Verbatim Quotations

A majority of the words in an essay must your own, however sometimes it is useful to quote verbatim. Only quote what you really need, what can’t be expressed any better, or material that is subject to further analysis. All quotations require referencing and need to be fitted smoothly into your writing. For example:

Fiedler contends that *Slaughterhouse Five* is “less about Dresden than about [...] failure to come to terms with it” (p.11).

Only quote verbatim if:

- If it cannot be expressed any better,
- If it represents a phenomenon that is discussed very strikingly,
- If it is so important that it is subject to further analysis,
- If it is an important claim and the reader will need to know what exactly the source has said (Harvey, 2008).

Summary

A summary is a shorter version of the original source. Only the important points of the source are included, which means that details and supporting examples are left out. A good summary should usually be about a third as long as the original source, have the same meaning as the original, and include a complete bibliographical reference to the original source. In order to summarize:

- Read the passage carefully.
- Underline the main ideas and delete most details and examples.
- Rewrite the main ideas in complete sentences.

- Substitute synonyms for words in the original.
- Identify and correctly cite the original source.

Paraphrase

A paraphrase contains all the information in the original source written in your own words. Details and supporting examples must be included. The paraphrase has the same meaning as the original. However, it must be different enough from the original to be considered your own writing, and should include a complete bibliographical reference to the original source.

To paraphrase:

- Read the passage carefully.
- Substitute synonyms and rearrange words and sentences to make the writing your own.
- Break up long sentences.
- Make sure that the resulting paraphrase is worded very differently from the original, yet means the same thing as the original sentence.
- No more than three consecutive words in the paraphrase can be identical to the original.
- Identify the source in the introduction of the paraphrase.

For example:

It has been argued that *Slaughterhouse Five* is about the inability of society to accept what happened to Dresden (Fielder, p. 11).

When to Cite

When writing essays you have to make sure that most of the words are your own and that the citing of sources is used strategically to back up your argument or to stress important points. You must cite:

- When you use factual materials, data or information found in a source.
- When you use others' ideas, claims, interpretations, lines of argument, terms, concepts, and theories.
- When you quote verbatim (Harvey, 2008).

Guideline for Using Sources

- Quote only what is really important and be concise by summarising rather than paraphrasing.
- When you rewrite something into your own words, it must really be in your own words, it is not enough simply to change one or two words in a sentence.
- Some citations are short and imbedded in the text of the essay, others may be longer. If it is more than three lines, then the quote has to be indented.
- Don't reproduce long stretches, select a few key points and link them with a short summary.
- Make clear where the quotation begins and ends by announcing it before and commenting on it afterwards.
- Explain how the source relates to the argument and what your opinion towards it is.
- Read widely and appropriately: Don't pad your list of references: they should be the fruit of your genuine reading.

Get into the habit of writing down your sources as you read and take notes. Having to find this information at a later date, when you may have forgotten exactly where you got some of your information from, might mean that you cannot use the citation.

Each unit outline has information regarding the technicalities of referencing in that unit. Please ensure you read this information thoroughly and refer to it when writing your assignments.

Summary

- Plagiarism is intellectual theft and results in an automatic fail.
- You must cite all factual material, data, information, other people's ideas, claims, interpretations, theories and anytime you quote verbatim.
- Always check your unit outline for information regarding referencing.

Time Management

Learning at a tertiary level means that you are expected to organise your own time schedule. You have to acquire the skill of breaking big tasks down into more manageable chunks and setting up time frames in which you need to achieve each part of the task. Good time management skills are the key to successful study at college or university.

Time management is not a matter of being so task-oriented that you cease to be people-focused. It is about balancing your personal and professional lives. With good time management people can be efficient and use their time purposefully as well as being people focused.

Time management defies 'rules' because it is dependent on one's circumstances, character and personality. Nevertheless, there are useful strategies that can help you manage your time more carefully, enable you to complete work on time and be successful with your studies. Firstly, this chapter shall consider the problem of procrastination.

Procrastination

Not meeting deadlines for assignments due to procrastination is a very common problem amongst students. Often students underestimate the time it takes to complete a task. They might just have developed the habit of leaving their essay writing to the last night before the due date because only extreme time pressure motivates them. Others might just feel overwhelmed at the task and lack confidence; therefore, they put off the task out of fear of failure. Others are perfectionists and fail to meet deadlines because they are never satisfied with what they have done so far. Of course they never will be, only the mediocre think that they have done a great job. Perfection takes infinite time – and you do not have infinite time!

Whatever the reason, procrastination is a debilitating habit that must be overcome, because otherwise it can seriously affect one's ability to succeed in an educational course, in a working environment, in relationships, or in life generally.

Steps to Overcome Procrastination:

Ask yourself:

- Where are you wasting time?
- Do you let yourself be interrupted unnecessarily?
- Do you control time or does time control you?
- Do you put off tasks out of fear of failure?

Take positive steps:

- By setting goals
 - Long-term goals: Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?



- Medium-term goals: What are your major goals for this year? Are they realistic?
- Short-term: What are your goals for this month/week/day?
- Postpone unnecessary activities until the main tasks are completed.
- Break down assignments into manageable chunks so big jobs are done little by little.

Do your best in the time available and then accept that you are human!

Creating a Weekly Schedule

Step One

Print the weekly time schedule, which can be downloaded from the Library Moodle page or Campion website. For the duration of one week, record each day how much time you spend on your various activities. This step creates awareness about what it is that you spend your time on. Having this awareness will be the first step towards changing your time management habits.

Step Two

The next step is to develop a realistic weekly study schedule. Use the weekly time table again. First write in your lecture times and any regular weekly activities. Then ask yourself the question, “How long can I reasonably study without a break?” Once you have an answer to this, you can write as many study blocks of that particular length of time into the schedule as realistically possible. If possible, you can gradually increase these periods of intense concentration in any future time schedules that you plan.

This process is important because it is counterproductive to write an unrealistic time plan. Having written such a plan and then not being able to stick with it will only dishearten and discourage you.

It is important to schedule the study blocks for a time of the day when your mental capacity is at its best and when you can be most productive. This time varies from person to person.

Step three

The next step is trying out the study time table by following it for a week. The purpose of this step is to assess whether or not the schedule that you set for yourself is realistic. It is important not to study for too short a period, because it is ineffective. Likewise studying for extensive periods and pushing on although you are having difficulties in concentrating, is also counterproductive. It is better to take a break and continue later otherwise the “Law of diminishing returns” sets in when you are no longer learning successfully.

Again, it is a good idea to record each day how you spend your time and whether you are able to follow the schedule. If you don’t follow it, record your reason. Also record for each study period how effective it was and if the goal of the study session was achieved.

Step four

Use the trial schedule from step three to create your final study schedule which you intend to follow for a while. This process should result in a schedule that allows sufficient time for study in order to enable you to achieve the best possible results.

Using the Semester Planner

- Write the due dates of all assignments as well as other important events in the semester planner.
- Try to estimate how long the assignment will take to complete and ‘planning backwards,’ write in your semester planner when you intend to start working on that assignment.
- If you keep a diary, write these dates on the respective page in the diary.

Use the Semester planner and the diary to plan each day by prioritizing your activities. Each morning or the night before write down the day’s goals and set goals for what you want to achieve in your next study session.

Work Spaces

- Do you have a dedicated work space at home that is enabling?
- Is it free from distractions?
- Is it comfortable, well-lit and well organised?
- Are your study schedule and your semester planner visible in your workplace?
- Can you turn off your mobile while you are studying?

Productivity

- Some jobs have to be done little by little so that ideas can crystallize gradually.
- Use those odd ten minutes during the day constructively by reading or doing chores.
- Use travel time for reading.
- Do it now! Tomorrow is always tomorrow: it never comes!
- Start with the least palatable of the day’s tasks.
- Break big tasks down into smaller ones.
- Nothing succeeds like success: the achievement of completing tasks well is a great intrinsic motivator.

Summary

- Have a weekly study schedule.
- Use a semester planner.
- Allow time for leisure.
- Plan your workload for each day in the morning or the night before.
- Single out the small jobs that absolutely must be done and do them first, then go directly to the big tasks.
- Make time for getting big tasks done every day and try to pursue them to completion.
- Avoid the temptation to “perfectionism” and “procrastination”.

Exams

During your course of studies, you will encounter various forms of assessment:

- written, open book and oral examinations,
- essays and reports,
- oral presentations,
- take-home examinations,
- class participation (especially in tutorials, seminars, studio workshops, laboratory performances).

Although this chapter deals with written examinations in mind, the principles apply generally (with more or less emphasis on different parts) to all forms of exam assessment.

Finding Out About the Exam

The first thing about exam preparation is to ensure that you know as much as possible about the assessment procedure:

- what is to be assessed,
- how is it to be assessed,
- where is it to be assessed,
- what is the duration of the assessment process,
- what can you take into the examination room.

Study Notes

It is important to have well organised study notes to use in your exam preparation. Re-written lecture notes, notes from readings, marked essays, completed past exam papers and textbooks should all be well organised and readily available for you study. You should use these materials to go over main points and to memorise the key ideas and concepts.

Active Revision

Revising does not mean just reading through notes and hoping that the material will stay in your memory. It means testing your understanding of key points and arguments as well as the various viewpoints associated with the topics. The preparation should enable you to develop a reasoned response that provides a clear and focussed answer to the exam question (Evans, 2009).

Rehearsing / Writing Practice Essays under Exam Conditions

Thorough preparation also involves rehearsal so that you know how to pace yourself. For example, if you have a 2 hour written examination containing mainly essay questions, then it makes sense to write practice essays under exam conditions on topics that are potential exam questions. That is, you should try to complete the essay questions by writing for 2 hours in order to be best prepared for the exam.

The Exam – On the Day

You have prepared thoroughly and have arrived at the examination location in good time. From here on you will need to listen to, or read carefully, any instructions from the invigilators.

When you are permitted to look at the paper, make sure that you read the cover page of the exam paper carefully because it contains vital information about the following:

- What information about you is required on the cover of each booklet (name, ID number, etc)?
- What length of time is available for writing your answers?
- Are all the questions compulsory?
- If there is a choice, what questions must you answer?
- How are the marks distributed?

When reading the question carefully check:

- What exactly do the questions / instructions require you to do?
- How much time do you have to allocate to answer each of the questions so that you will have time at the end to revise your answers?
- Plan your answers, so that each one has:
 - **A beginning:** What is this question about and how do you intend to approach it? Assumptions, background knowledge, introductory information etc.
 - **A middle:** logical development of the main ideas with evidence that supports your argument.
 - **An end:** summary and conclusion.

Sometimes it is a good idea to put ideas for answers down in point form on scrap paper before you start writing. This will let the examiner know how you were planning to answer the question in case you run out of time.

Make sure that you answer the question that is asked. Be wary about saying more than the answer to the question actually requires. Not infrequently, students like to add a bit at the end of an essay. Any such additions do not add value to an essay, they might not be relevant to the question and they might make the marker think that the student did not really understand the question.

Remember, just answer the question as clearly and concisely to the point as possible.

Finishing the Exam

Check your work at the end of the exam. If there are some questions that you have not been able to complete because of time constraints, then indicate in two or three sentences how you would complete the answer if you had had sufficient time.

When the invigilator tells you to cease writing, make sure that you obey promptly, partly out of courtesy, but also because penalties can accrue if you keep writing.

Summary

- Find out as much as you can about the exam and the examiner's expectations.
- Revise by going through your notes, lecture slides, research and by doing 'practice' exams.
- Ensure you read the exam question(s) carefully and construct logical responses.
- Proofread your work at the end if you have time.

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