

EDUCATION

Reynolds C.L. (1992) “Study Techniques”, *Orientation Handbook*, Newcastle University, Australia

Good study method is the key to success at University.

Essentially, study is the discipline of time and skill. Without discipline, study is ad-hoc and ineffective and a sure way to become seemingly over worked.

STUDY

Good study method, or discipline, involves three things; being able to read, being able to write and being able to manage your time. A couple of years ago a friend of mine wanted to immigrate to Australia from United States. He was working at the White House at the time heading up the President’s Commission on Welfare Reform. On the application form there was a question about employment skills and why he should be considered for immigration. His answer was simple but precise.

“Because”, he said, “I can read and write.”

READING

Before reading a book there are two questions the reader needs to answer. “Why am I reading this book?”, and “What do I want to get out of it?” And at the conclusion of the reading, “What was the author’s position on the issues raised?”

In the context of writing essays, the first thing to ask is, “Do I understand the question?” In many cases, the question is not really understood until at least some of the reading has been done, but reading must start with a purpose; to first define the question.

The object in reading for essays is to know the authors position on a subject. The objective is not to accumulate detail; this should be done as a matter of course. There are always a number of books written on a given topic but each author will hold a somewhat different perspective. The reader’s task is to engage the author and seek to identify the author’s position and even their shortcomings.

When commencing a book, never neglect to read the Table of Contents and the Introduction. These should give the necessary overview of what is to follow. When starting a new topic for an essay it is to follow. When starting a new topic for an essay it is a good idea to get 5 or 6 of the prescribed books off the shelves and compare the Table of contents and Introduction. This will enable a quick assessment of differences and similarities to the author’s approach to a topic.

Taking notes is often a problem for students as it is easy to get bogged down with too much detail and miss the essence of the book. Therefore, starting with the right question helps to discipline what notes are taken. Always make reference to page numbers in your notes as you go: This will help with footnoting and for further back referencing when you being to write.

The reading for an essay has concluded when there is a sense that you have an overview of the topic and the contributions that have been made usually no less than 6 to 8 books.

WRITING

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Writing, like reading is a skill. It takes time, practice and coaching.

Writing is done to formula. Grammar, sentence construction, tense, vocabulary and length all add up to good writing. The test to good writing is in the reader for the aim of a writer is to inform as well as interest the reader in the topic.

Writing good papers will be aided by the purchases a writer manual that sets out a method of correct construction. K.L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) is an excellent reference.

Still, a couple of quick tips: write in present tense as much as possible, vary your sentence length, don't be afraid of short sentences, construct each sentences as part of a paragraph and allow paragraphs to be a complete expression of a point or opinion.

Most people beginning University want to write essays to confirm to the introduction – body – conclusion outline method they learnt in high school. This is not high school. At University, you will need to write to present and defend an argument.

Having read the literature and understood the question, the writer must Endeavour to form an opinion. The essay is the presentation and substantiation of that opinion. Writing A paper has to be mapped out to have a plot, just like a good movie. And just like a movie, the writer has to keep up the interest of the audience in the drama of the presentation. The essay is the unfolding of the theme, or more correctly, the thesis of the presentation. The Thesis of a paper is the opinion or position held by the writer. It is a point of view.

A thesis-focused paper is designed to support the thesis.

Model:

- Introduction of Issue
- Thesis
- Substantiation
(3 or 4 arguments)
- Conclusion and Consequences

Start with an introduction of the topic or issue with a minimum, but accurate, detail. Present the thesis, or position opinion you are going to take in discussing the issue. Then move to substantiate your thesis by way of several main arguments. This will include references to various authors used to support your thesis, or, alternatively, criticized. The conclusion is not a summing-up, or a re-statement, it is the conclusion reached by the argument presented. Thus, the paper has had a single focus or theme.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Time management is planning out the tasks that need to be completed against a time line. Time management includes the scheduling of tasks or projects in days, weeks and even months.

Given that a student is provided with most of the detail of their courses at the commencement of a year the appropriate way to manage a student work load is to write out a program for the full year. This will require listing the essays and assignments due for each subject for each semester. Then spacing the work so that essays are done on a continuum and not in a bunch at the end of semester and right up against exams. Exams study time allowance, lectures, and tutorials all have to be planned out.

Daily and weekly programs should be planned to suit the year plan. For example, all day Monday, the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings and Fridays could be set apart for study and

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essay writing. Lectures and tutorials could be planned for the afternoons. This would mean that there would be large blocks of time for study, which for essay writing is absolutely necessary. Some people, however, work better at nights and would therefore be better off keeping their nights, as well as early morning free.

The best time management system for a program that has some variables in it such as University study is called "Work In Progress" (WIP). At the beginning of each week a WIP is drawn up detailing the work by units. Where work is not completed for the day, or more usually, for the week, it is carried over the following week. A WIP contains meetings, lectures, tutes, assignments, carry-overs as well as other personal and administrative tasks to be completed.

If you can organize your time and become effective in keeping to your WIP, along developed reading and writing skills, you will find that a solid 40 hours a week will keep you in line with your work load. However, do not ever forget to take time off and do "something completely different". Sitting around the cafeteria or bar only half heatedly studying or half heatedly relaxing is a waste of time all round.

Some further tips: Don't essays to the last weeks because none of the books you want will be there-everybody else who has not read this article will be cramming. Take lecture notes in point form –it is often more important to listen than it is to sit there with your head down taking notes for the entire lecture. Try to avoid buying all the books that are recommended to you by your lecturers in the first two weeks. While at university it is a good idea to try to build a library and that takes discernment. Therefore only buy the essentials up front – all the recommended books will be in the library anyway.

The other thing to mention is that study is a great opportunity to learn. If you don't learn anything while you are here you have wasted everybody's time, including your own.

Learning is a process of changing one's mind. It is growth in intellect and experience. The books that you will read contain a wealth of both, if you look for them.