

STUDY SKILLS

This section includes the following information-

- Assisting Students in the Development of Organisational and Study Skills
- The SHEIK-ACER (*Study Habits Evaluation and Instruction Kit*)
- A Guide to Study

ASSISTING STUDENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL AND STUDY SKILLS

One of our ultimate aims as educators is to help our students become independent learners with good self-management skills. Students with learning disabilities, however, will require our special understanding and assistance to reach this goal of independence.

Teachers of these students need to:

- 1) Understand the difficulties experienced by the student in the academic, social/emotional, behavioural and organisational areas,
- 2) Be prepared to adapt their teaching and assessment methods accordingly.

The students in their quest for independence need to:

- 1) Understand their strengths and difficulties,
- 2) Develop metacognitive and practical strategies to cope with their difficulties.

Some practical points and ideas to be considered in providing this “scaffolding” follow:

1. General: School and Classroom

- **Provide assistance to students in realistically structuring/organising their**
 - Time
 - plan and record progress (visual representation e.g., time line)
 - monitor progress
 - Environment
 - provide adequate and convenient storage space
 - strategically placed checklists of materials/belongings required
 - Materials
 - colour coding/filing
- **Use record book for**
 - Planning
 - Home/school and student/teacher communication
 - Visual/pictorial record
- **With the student, develop checklists**
 - Practical e.g., items required for lesson
 - Metacognitive questions for student e.g., to get started on assignments/essays

2. Instruction

- Consider classroom arrangement and student placement
- Minimise distractions
 - * in classroom
 - * on board
 - * on worksheets/pages
- presentation of material
 - * minimise possible confusion

e.g., Written instructions

- board most appropriate?
- "frame" work
- photocopy, enlarge, highlight relevant material

Oral instructions

- keep short and sharp
- allow taping
- have student repeat to check understanding

* Variety in presentation and of work required - consider "multiple intelligences" model

- e.g.
- visual (written, pictorial, mind map, "fish bone")
 - spoken (drama, video, tape, guest lecturer; read material or instructions to student)
 - physical

3. Assignments and Homework

- assess and monitor student's homework and research practices; be aware of how student approaches tasks
- vary the amount and type of work required
 - time needed for completion
 - content
 - task
- provide motivation
 - make it meaningful; give it context
 - discussion of relevance (grades/broader)
 - frequent and immediate feedback
 - contracts
- establish and follow consistent and regular homework routines

Teacher

- assigning
- collecting
- correcting
- evaluating
- returning promptly

Student

- time
- place (consider distractions, lighting space etc.)
- plan and pace
- allow time for catch up and review

- provide adequate structure for student
 - framework
 - specific questions
 - estimate of time required
 - aim
 - materials (realistic!)
 - method
 - due date
 - recording references
- provide models/examples of what is required
- provide ongoing guidance and monitor student progress
- communicate with, and involve parents, if necessary
- essay writing: development of metacognitive strategies to assist with
 - general planning
 - estimating time require
 - how to make points
 - how to draw conclusions
 - planning essay
 - getting started
 - visualisation (parts/whole)
 - developing a framework - headings, key words, mindmaps
 - composing essay
 - producing essay
 - checking essay

4. General Study Skills

- planning and organising study time/approach; work together to establish
 - strengths/difficulties e.g., verbal, visual-spatial, and appropriate strategies
 - realistic goal setting (short-, mid- and long-term)
 - time management (charts, time-tables)
 - how to improve concentration

- acquiring information
 - resource location (within community, library, school, computer, book)
 - note-taking - (from oral/written information)
 - use key words, headings, diagrams
 - visual cues (colour)
 - reading texts e.g., - establish purpose of reading
 - SQ3R/SQ5R
 - read summary first
 - read first and last paragraphs
 - read comprehension questions before text for focus
 - identify key words

- using information
 - writing up notes
 - filing system (colour)
 - recording references used

- studying for exams
 - multi-sensory revision (see, hear, say, write)
 - memory techniques (colour, mnemonics; rhyme, lists)

- exam techniques
 - time allocation/planning
 - choice of questions to be answered
 - answering questions
 - checking

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STUDY AND ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS

The SHEIK material provides excellent information on the following components of study skills and independent learning for senior secondary and tertiary students.

- THE PLACE OF STUDY
- STUDY TIMES
- ORGANISATION FOR STUDY
- TEXTBOOK READING SKILLS
- NOTE TAKING
- PROJECT AND ASSIGNMENT PLANNING AND PREPARATION
- STUDYING FOR EXAMS
- EXAM TECHNIQUES

Sources :

Study Habits Evaluation and Instruction Kit (ACER 1990).

SWOT (Study Without Tears) (G. Haisman, NZCER 1997).

A GUIDE TO STUDYING

Many secondary school students, particularly those with a learning disability, report difficulties planning, organising and implementing a study and independent learning schedule. While the field abounds with textbooks, guides and notes, most students find it hard to summarise the recommended techniques and strategies and create their own schedule. Furthermore, many students believe that there is one golden path to study success.

It is wise if students acknowledge, from the outset, the fact that to set up a study routine is a very personal exercise. Not all suggestions are necessarily right for every student. Each student must develop the techniques of study which suit them best. While there is general agreement concerning basics such as place of study, time of study, duration of study, the study environment and specific skills such as reading, note taking, summarizing, revising, studying for exams and exam techniques, details will vary according to personal competencies and preferences.

For the student who is concerned about their study habits, the first step should be a review of current techniques to determine whether the methods are the most efficient and effective. Developing an efficient technique of work and study during student years provides students with a skill which will be very valuable throughout their professional life.

Following the review of existing practices, a framework needs to be established to incorporate the basic components of a study programme. The following components need to be considered.

Place of Study

A personal "comfort zone" needs to be established. While most students prefer to study in their bedroom or in "the study", others feel comfortable working in other locations including the dining room table, the kitchen table or bench or even a stair-case! Comfort and freedom from distractions are usually important requirements.

Study Environment

While a quiet location is frequently stressed as being a "must", many students prefer to listen to music while studying. Again, personal choice is important. If this helps create a "comfort zone", well and good. Some students like company, and hence, welcome the involvement of parents, older siblings, a mentor, etc., when requested.

The aim is to create a place and environment that becomes workable and comfortable.

Time of Study

Establishing a timetable for homework, projects and study is imperative. Ideally, if homework is set, it is best completed as soon as possible after the student arrives home from school. This maximises the possibility that the relevant schoolwork associated with the homework will be remembered. Of course, when there is no set homework, and also at exam times, the period before and after the evening meal can be utilised for study.

Duration of Study

Individual differences determine a student's ability to endure study. A student could begin with a 1 hour session with a break of say 10 minutes after 25/30 minutes. Gradually, as the student reaches the senior stages of their secondary schooling, such sessions could be extended so that 2 hourly sessions, building to perhaps 3 hourly sessions or more, are established. Hence, a maximum of some 3 hours with breaks of 10 minutes every 30 minutes could be maintained. It is wise not to study for more than two hours without a break of about half an hour. Long periods of study without breaks can be detrimental in that they can leave a student feeling tired and usually results in comparatively little being learned. Most people are too tired to concentrate after 10 pm.

Remember that the quality of the time you spend studying is more important than the length of time invested.

It is a well established fact of learning that spaced practice (that is, breaking up study with rest periods) is better than massed practice (that is, not taking breaks). During a break a student should try to relax, get up, walk around, take a breath of fresh air; have a chat, a drink or a snack; to focus on things other than study.

The above schedule attempts to address important factors such as interest, concentration span and fatigue. Remember, study breaks are meant to relieve fatigue, not boredom!

It is imperative that a routine is established and that when sitting down to study, the student is able to focus and sustain attention and to be actively engaged in reading, thinking and/or writing.

What to Study

The timetable should identify set times for each subject with some flexibility to handle necessary/forced changes when needed. The timetable should also show time for fixed commitments and recreation time- social, sporting and relaxation. The timetable should be displayed in prominent places to remind the student of planned activities. Studying during the year requires a long term, "**consolidation**" timetable. Studying for exams requires a short term, "**revision**" timetable.

Ideally, the student should spend an equal amount of time on each subject. However, subjects require different study arrangements. For instance, the Humanities usually require a great deal of reading and note-taking. Mathematics, by contrast, is a subject that probably requires less note-taking than any other subject but requires considerable time doing practice problems.

The use of a diary is important to record school information, provide reminders and to display the study timetable.

If the student finds it difficult to settle and get going, then to help get in “the groove” the follow may help-

- Select a textbook, any textbook and read a chapter or so or read over notes. It is important to read with a soft-lead pencil in hand and mark the margins. This can then be followed by highlighting the text with coloured pens-main points in one colour-minor points in another colour.
- Listen to an audio-tape of a set English text.
- View a video of a set English text.

While obviously far from the ideal, these simple activities are clearly better than the student just sitting at the desk, fiddling, engaged in time wasting things or daydreaming and getting frustrated and discouraged.

Use of a mentor

Many students are now using a mentor or tutor to help them plan and organise their study, to provide positive motivation and to help them focus and sustain attention to the task. In addition, such assistance is being used for essay writing and other project work. While finding the right person is frequently difficult and challenging, such a person can provide the student with excellent encouragement, guidance and support.

KEY COMPONENTS OF STUDY

Having settled on a routine incorporating the above basic factors, the key components of study need to be identified and the relevant skills developed. Following is an outline of components and skills.

READING

Different reading techniques are used for different purposes-

Light reading for pleasure usually has no set time limits and it is not necessary to recall everything that has been read.

Skimming is a process of only looking at selected parts, perhaps chapter headings, initial paragraphs or diagrams.

Scanning is searching through the text looking for particular facts or information.

Critical reading requires full comprehension and analysis of what has been read. Facts, opinions, inferences have to be detected and understood.

Before engaging in critical reading, students should establish the habit of skimming first, and deciding the purpose and direction they are to pursue. Is it to identify a series of events, connected ideas or contradictory opinions? What questions can students formulate in their minds that need answering? If necessary, these can be noted down

even if only in the form of Who? When? Where? What? Why? How? Jotting down the keyword answers to these questions can form the basis for a set of notes. These keywords can be an aid to recalling the main points which can be expanded into an essay.

A first step is to survey the chapter. The student then asks questions about it and tries to answer these questions as they read. In this reading, it is best not to highlight or underline the text, because the student will not really know what is important until they have grasped the whole picture. As the questions are answered and main ideas and important details are spotted, a pencilled check-mark can be placed in the margin.

(A student should always read with a pencil in hand). If these marks do not designate the really important points, the student can erase them, change them or ignore them. The student can then return to underline the points with highlighter pens-using two colours- one for main-points and another for sub-points. The selected colours should be used consistently.

Every student has his or her own approach to studying textbooks. There are, nevertheless, some general principles for the effective study of textbooks. The **SQ5R (Survey, Question, Read, Record, Recite, Review, Reflect) Method** is an extension of a popular strategy. The components are presented below-

Survey

Conducting an overview of what is to be read. Studying the book's content including-preface, table of contents, the chapters, chapter headings, order of headings in a chapter and finally, the chapter summary, is usually very illuminating.

Question

Asking questions for learning while reading. Questions should lead to an emphasis on the what, why, when, who and where of each chapter's content.

Read

The need to read actively not passively; searching for the answers to the questions asked. Reading for main ideas and important details. Noting important terms. Reading graphs, tables and illustrations. Read only to the end of each headed section.

Record

Write in note form up to five main points under each heading. Make key ideas stand out so that they will "flag" points later. Draw vertical lines in the margin next to important content, underline or colour accent selectively.

Recite

Recalling the main ideas of what has been read. Student recalls the main points in their own words. Taking notes is recommended. Reciting is probably the best single way to keep reading active. If you can't answer questions go back and try again.

Review

Review each headed section briefly as you complete it. Make time to revise again, testing yourself by writing and reciting. Surveying what has been read. Re-reading is an important part of the review process.

Reflect

Ask yourself, What does all this mean? How can I apply it? Try to make a picture in your mind or tell yourself a story to consolidate the material.

Some additional reading tips are as follows-

Some students report that reading information aloud enables them to hear their own voice later in an exam.

Having somebody else read aloud selected text for the student can aid learning and retention.

Audio-tapes of set texts are very popular, especially for students with reading difficulties, including slow reading rate. The student can read along with the tapes or simply listen when it best suits them, while walking, resting or in bed.

NOTE TAKING

Notes taken in class/lectures

Some basic steps to be undertaken-

- head each page with topic, subject, teacher/lecturer and date
- number and date sequential pages for each lesson/lecture
- allow a wide margin and space between sections to enable inserts and comments to be included later
- use one side of the paper only
- use abbreviations where possible
- write using phrases rather than whole sentences
- notes should be brief and to the point
- revise notes and underline or highlight key points as soon as possible
- notes for different subjects must be kept apart to avoid confusion

It is advisable to read over lecture notes soon after each lesson/lecture, marking and highlighting important points and making summaries. This is a good way to get started promptly on an evening's work. "Writing up notes" means thinking about them, checking points, annotating and tidying them-not just copying them out neatly.

Use index cards to summarise notes for each topic or section.

Notes from textbooks

Some points to consider-

- taking notes helps a student participate actively in the learning process
- remembering information is strengthened by active reading and note-taking
- skilful underlining and highlighting text is important
- writing a brief summary at the end of each chapter aids understanding
- notes should include main ideas and important details
- using index cards to summarise notes from each chapter.

See other relevant points are detailed under the [Reading](#) Section above.

LEARNING AND REMEMBERING

Some points to consider-

- understanding is the key to learning and remembering
- spaced study/practice (with rest breaks) is better than lengthy, continuous study/practice
- multisensory strategies aid learning-use all “modalities”-reading, writing, listening, talking
- use mnemonics to retain and recall information
- colour coding aids retention and recall
- summary cards reduce the amount of information to be retained and are easy to store and handle

REVISION

Some steps to undertake-

- when revising information in textbooks/folders, following the reading of each page/section, close the book/folder and try to recall the main points
- write keywords (trigger words) and later try to give as much information on each word as possible
- use file cards of concept webs, flow diagrams, diagrams and formulae and key facts
- draw mind maps and concept webs to connect ideas and provide an overview. Using colour and numbering and possibly even pictures, the points can be linked and sorted into a logical order for essay preparation or revision
- have folders colour coded for each subject
- use mnemonics, rhymes and pictures to revise material

- the strategic placement of information for easy access : e.g. beside the student's bed, on the fridge
- make a concept web from a set of "linear" notes for quick revision
- read over summary cards

STUDYING FOR EXAMS

Draw up a short term, "revision" timetable early

- allocate your time so that all topics have been covered separately, in short sessions, before exam week and then again just before the exam

Keep a positive attitude

- remind yourself of all the good consequences of success
- recall past successes

Keep fit and healthy

- for peak performance, keep regular, proper eating, sleeping and exercise patterns
- take regular recreation breaks

Find out exactly what is required for the test/exam

First and foremost, meet with your teachers/lecturers to get advice and confirmation that your plans and arrangements are appropriate.

Details to consider-

- what will be covered and what will be omitted? (refer to course outline); list the things you must know and rank them in importance
- know what types of questions to expect (essay, short answer or multiple-choice, etc)
- find out the specific details of the paper-how many questions, total time and how many marks are distributed over the questions
- check equipment needed, eg., special pencils, pens, calculator, or texts for open book exams
- **get copies of previous papers, answer them and check with any available examiners' remarks, comments and advice**

- talk to friends/students who have done the course before for advice on what to expect
- form a study group to fire questions at each other
- allot study time in proportion to how much the test/exam counts towards the final grade

Some other reminders about revision-

- review notes by active reading
- review notes by active recall (reading sections, closing folder and recalling details)
- review notes by writing
- concentrating on what you do not know
- think of questions that may be asked
- use of rhymes and mnemonics
- question and answer sessions with parents, other students

Students should realise that, unless stated, the questions on an exam paper can be attempted in any order so long as these are clearly labelled. It often helps students to relax and gives them more confidence if they can start the exam with the questions that they know best.

As mentioned above, familiarity with actual sample exam papers is very important. From these, the student will learn to read carefully the rubric telling them how many questions must be answered in any section, what marks are allocated, and how much time they can afford to spend on each question. This familiarity can give the student added confidence before they begin. Noting or underlining keywords on the question paper itself should also keep them on track.

EXAMINATION TECHNIQUES

When given the exam paper

Normally, students will be given time to read the instructions before the exam starts. The student must carefully read the instructions to the exam paper. Information to consider-

- the number of questions on the exam paper and whether they are arranged in sections
- how many questions in total you must answer from each section
- whether there are any compulsory questions
- whether there is any specified order of answering questions
- what type of questions they are-objective (for example, multiple-choice), paragraph, essay or a combination of these
- how many marks each question is worth

- how many answers are to be shown; this is very important if computer-scoring answer sheets are being used
- how the answer sheets and/or answer booklets are to be used
- whether each essay answer should begin on a new leaf or a new page

Be careful that your reading of exam papers from previous years has not led you to expect something that is not there. Exam paper instructions vary from year to year, so although looking at old papers is extremely useful, you cannot be sure of the exact arrangement of the exam paper you are sitting before you see it.

Plan time carefully

This is very important and must be done accurately. Failure to plan your time can lead to questions being omitted or questions which come later in the test being rushed. The best way to divide your time is on the basis of the number of marks each question is allocated. In addition, you should ensure that you plan to have some time at the end of the exam for checking and in case you need longer than you planned to finish a question. Begin with answers you know best-this helps build confidence.

Read the essay questions very carefully

This is essential, especially if there is a choice of questions. Your choice of questions to answer is crucial. It is most important to select questions that you are best able to answer. Make your decision quickly. Tick those questions that you think you can do well and mark with a cross those questions that you think you cannot do at all or only poorly. This will help you to select questions and also help decide the order in which they should be attempted. Next, decide on the order in which you will answer the questions you have chosen. Beginning with the questions you can handle best will give you confidence knowing that you have some marks already. Make sure you number your answers correctly.

Allow 10-15% of essay time for planning. This saves you from wandering off the track and running out of time. It also makes it easier for the examiners to follow your argument or contention. If you are short of time, write an introduction, outline the contention in note form and then write your conclusion.

If the exam or part of the exam is in objective or multiple-choice form, you can leave reading the questions until you are ready to answer them. You should answer these types of questions in the order they appear on the exam paper. Don't choose your answer too quickly. Read all the options before making your selection. Don't spend too long on any one question.

Answering the Questions

Essay or Short Answer Questions

The wording of the questions is critically important. You must consider the key words used in the question which indicates the type of answer that is wanted. Do not just write all that you know about a topic. Your answer must include what is stated in the words of

the question. So read the question carefully and decide what type of answer the examiner wants. Following is a list of these key words-

analyse/examine

look closely and give the essential features of the material and present them clearly in the answer

argue/argument

put forward a case or an argument for a particular point of view

compare

give the main similarities and difference

contrast

stress the qualities or characteristics that are different in the things being discussed

criticise

state what is considered to be a fair and balanced judgement of the events under discussion; give points for and against, not just against

define/definition

give the exact meaning; show the limits of what is defined and the class or category to which it belongs

describe/description

provide a "word picture" of what is being described by including main points, features, characteristics, sensations etc as vividly as possible

discuss

give a complete and detailed answer; examine, analyse and present all points of view regarding topic being discussed

enumerate/list

make a list or outline the main points

evaluate

present a value judgement, stressing advantages and disadvantages of the topic

explain/interpret

give a detailed account of the main features or principles

illustrate

explain by giving examples; if appropriate present a diagram, picture or small drawing; it usually requires more than a drawing

interpret

explain or clarify the meaning of the topic or point of view

justify

prove or show evidence why certain decisions have been taken

narrate/relate

tell a story or give an account of events or experiences

outline/sketch

indicate the main points and important details of the material in a systematic arrangement, but not an extended account

prove/show

give evidence or use logical reasoning to establish how true or genuine a statement is in the topic

review

give a general account of main features or principles; it can also be a critical report of a situation or issue

state

set out the main points in clear, concise expression without minor details or use of examples

summarise

give a brief and full presentation of main points or statements; leave out minor details and explanations

trace

give a step by step account of the development of the issue/situation

There are other key terms that are used in tests and examinations. However, a knowledge and understanding of the above words will be helpful in deciding how to answer a question. It is important to underline or highlight the key word(s) in a question before starting to write an answer. This will assist with the planning, organisation and writing of the answer. It is important to remember that an answer is satisfactory only if it addresses the specific question being asked.

For information about essay writing see the Section on [Written Expression](#).

Objective Questions (for example, multiple-choice)

Read each question carefully. Take note of whether the answer you are to choose is the best one or the only true or correct one.

Take note of any word or words in the question that may give you a clue to the answer

Read all the alternatives even if you think the first one is correct.

If you don't know the answer to a question, guess (unless the instructions tell you that marks will be taken off if you are wrong). Your guessing should be done by eliminating answers which you think are clearly wrong. Guess only between those that you cannot eliminate.

Problems (for example, maths)

Jot down any formulae that you need and which are not provided in the exam paper as soon as possible after entering the exam room.

If you are unable to solve a problem quickly, leave it and return to the question later.

Attempt to answer every problem. Stating part of the correct formulae might gain you some marks.

Write your working steps clearly so that the marker can follow them easily.

Resources

ACER www.acerpress.com.au

Dominie www.dominie.com.au

Edsoft www.edsoft.com.au

Link Educational Supplies www.linkeducational.com.au

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