How to Survive…..
Studying smarter not harder

Studying smarter is about being an active learner. **Active learning:** involving direct participation, initiating action, taking charge. It is about making the shift from being a virtuous student to a successful student.

The more active you are in your study the deeper your understanding of the material will be and the higher your retention rate. The most active way to learn is by doing, applying and showing. The most passive way is reading and listening.

3 types of learning

1. shallow (or surface) learning
   → memorising, accepting information passively. Keep this to a minimum.

2. deep (conceptual) understanding
   → relating new ideas to previous knowledge; integrating and synthesising ideas, critically evaluating content. Stirve for this level of understanding.

3. strategic (goal oriented) learning
   → setting realistic long and short term goals, monitoring priorities, knowing the marking schemes, deadlines and criteria. Let this type of learning inform your efforts.

**Remember:** learning is a process and part of your job as a uni student is to learn how to learn.

Most importantly, for deep learning, use whatever you have learned SOON, OFTEN, WIDELY.

**Active learning** is about:
- reflecting on your own learning style and habits
- evaluating your strengths and weaknesses; and
- assessing how well your study methods serve you in terms of marks, completion rates, stress levels and general enjoyment of being a student.
There is no single or categorically best way of studying. So:

- **personalize** how you study eg: do what works for you, and tailor approaches to suit your learning preferences;

- **translate** the material e.g.: *use your own words* when taking notes, draw diagrams and or pictures;

- **be critical** eg: ask questions, take nothing for granted;

- **organise** your study environment to suit you eg: make your study area comfortable, equip it with the tools you need, minimise outside noise if you find it distracting;

- **be flexible**: eg: if one strategy is not working try another; adapt how you go about your study to fit in with unexpected or unavoidable changes in plan

- use several different approaches eg: try a combination of the active learning strategies.

- **experiment!** Be brave and try new approaches but remember to keep an open mind. Look for better ways of working not just in areas you are struggling with but also in those areas which are working well. Experimenting can be about upgrading your skills from “good’ to ‘fabulous.”

How to tell if you are a virtuous student (and need to change your study habits)? Do you:

- Take neat verbatim notes in lectures
- Copy out or highlight sections of the reading
- Read over your lecture notes in preparation for tutes and exams?

If you answered yes to any of the above you are being virtuous rather than active.

What to do if you are using passive techniques:

Try in future to

- **review the material by asking and answering questions** (in other words by applying the information / theory);

- **teach** what you have learned to another person; and

- **try to find links** between topics and bodies of information.

**Other useful resources:**

Cottrell, S (1999) *The Study Skills Handbook* See chapter on “Learning and Intelligence”


Other Survival guides – ‘Critical thinking’


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