

# SWOT Lecture Series: LEARNING TO LEARN

## Strategies for Successful Learning

### OUTLINE OF LECTURE

#### A. RECOMMENDED LEARNING STRATEGIES

1. Information-based strategies
2. Revision-based strategies
3. Learning strategies

#### B. USING YOUR TIME EFFICIENTLY

1. Improving your concentration
2. Getting started: dealing with procrastination
3. Using plans
4. Being prepared to make changes

#### C. OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC TASKS AND ASSOCIATED SKILLS

### A. RECOMMENDED LEARNING STRATEGIES

#### 1. Information-based strategies

- be informed about objectives and requirements of course
- be informed about the format, time limit and the number of questions to answer in all exams in all your subjects
- pick up hints given by lecturers about what might be in the exam paper

#### 2. Revision-based strategies

- revise your work regularly - aim for 3-4 revisions  
each night - lectures of the day  
when a topic is complete  
in STUVAC  
night before exam (brief and focussed)
- work to a plan - organise a revision schedule that starts early in the semester
- consult past exam papers and practise answering questions within appropriate time limits - check your answers with the textbook and lecture notes

#### 3. Learning strategies

- to revise **many times** and **in different ways**
- to focus on meaning and understanding

- process information in a variety of ways, i.e. don't reread the same information in same format
- make summaries of lecture notes - but don't use these as your only basis of revision
- draw diagrams (e.g. a concept map) to show relationships between separate pieces of information
- use many senses (e.g. discuss information on tape and listen to it; make a model)
- apply your knowledge to novel situations
- build up chains of information and integrate separate pieces of information so they have meaning
- focus on the connections, similarities and differences between pieces of information
- make it more personal (e.g. think of everyday experiences in your life)
- associate new information with something you already know
- make it concrete (e.g. think of common examples)
- do many practice exercises varying the type of exercise and the level of difficulty
- get an overview first (i.e. start from the general and move to the particular -deductive process)
- work with a partner (discuss, argue, justify, explain ...)

## B. USING YOUR TIME EFFICIENTLY

### 1. Improving your concentration

**Do you sometimes find yourself sitting at your desk and reading/studying your lecture notes/textbook without really concentrating on what you are doing?**

This experience is common.

#### **Causes:**

- short concentration span
- too easily tempted by alternative activities
- poor reading and study skills
- failure to set goals and prioritise tasks
- failure to make a plan for each private study session
- feeling tired or bored
- habitual daydreaming
- feeling anxious and frustrated
- personal and/or familial problems and distractions
- interruptions; e.g. phone calls, household noise, TV, ...

#### **Strategies to improve your concentration**

##### **a) Academic and learning style issues**

- identify areas of difficulty and practise specific skills, e.g. skim text before reading in detail to get overview
- be actively involved in work, e.g. take notes, underline key points, talk aloud
- integrate material, e.g. draw diagrams of information on one page - flow charts, concept maps
- read easier text to bridge gap between more difficult material and current level of understanding
- become familiar with technical language of subject - use subject dictionary, keep own list of common technical and subtechnical terms
- use available resources, clarify task requirements, seek early support if needed, e.g. staff, students, learning centres

**b) Planning and Organisational Issues**

- set and prioritise short-term goals
- plan each study session
- get into a routine, e.g. start at the same time and/or with the same activity each study session
- plan study activities according to your best (and worst) times of concentration
- organise study space and have alternative study area in mind for emergency
- organise your materials - filing systems, folders, notes, written assignments
- know where everything you need is

**c) Lifestyle and Personal Issues**

- anticipate and eliminate possible interruptions, e.g. keep phone calls brief or turn off mobile
- seek cooperation from friends and family to maintain a balance between university/ non-university commitments
- make changes to work patterns and organise your life to get balance between various commitments and interests
- keep a diary for a week to discover how you typically (mis)use your time and cut down on excessive recreational activities
- lead a healthy lifestyle, e.g. get enough sleep, eat healthy foods, get some exercise
- take rest breaks, e.g. 5-10 minutes every hour
- vary your tasks and subjects in each session
- read a more interesting book on the same topic
- give yourself rewards for completing tasks as planned
  - choose a reward you will enjoy and which will motivate you
  - don't give yourself reward if goal not achieved
- learn stress management and relaxation techniques
- talk to a counsellor or health professional if ongoing personal/familial problems require attention

**2. Getting Started: Dealing with Procrastination**

**Do you sometimes find it hard to get started on your work?**

**Causes of procrastination**

- no established study routine or work patterns
- poor self-discipline - an inability to say 'no' to alternative and tempting activities
- low levels of motivation
- poor concentration (see earlier section for strategies)
- a poor understanding of your own work patterns and of task requirements; i.e. underestimating how much time and effort is required for you to satisfactorily complete a task or sub-task

**Strategies for dealing with procrastination**

**a) Strategies to help you establish a study routine or work pattern**

- Associate sitting at your desk with serious work and study (and not with wasting time); i.e. do something straight away.
- Have a plan.
- At the end of each study session prepare for the next one.
- Develop a routine

**b) Strategies to help you increase your motivation and self-discipline**

- Start with some particularly easy or interesting aspect.
- Throw yourself into the project energetically and enthusiastically

- Give yourself rewards.
  - Have a balanced and healthy life.
  - Seek cooperation from friends and family.
  - Stick to your plans and be prepared to say 'no'
- c) **Strategies to help you understand task requirements**
- Estimate and monitor how long tasks and subtasks typically take
  - Clarify task requirements

### 3. Using Plans

- understand your commitments university and non-university (see Appendix 1: Weekly Diary)
- understand yourself as a learner and your lifestyle
- set goals and priorities
- construct flexible and workable plans
  - semester planner: gives overview of semester's workload (see Appendix 2: Planner Semester 1)
  - weekly plan: includes university & non-university commitments
  - sessional plan: sets goals to achieve in one study session
- waste as little time as possible - use small amounts of time; e.g. travelling time, waiting time

### 4. Being Prepared to Make Changes

#### Strategies for making changes

- start with some minor goals
- only attempt one major change at a time
- persist practising the new patterns and don't give up in frustration too early - habits do not change quickly
- order the changes in terms of your needs and goals
- reward yourself with a tick (and more tangible reward) - monitor your progress
- keep your list handy and visible

## C. OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC TASKS AND ASSOCIATED SKILLS

- attending **lectures**
  - listening and notetaking skills
- preparing for and participating in **tutorials**
  - reading and notetaking skills
  - doing practical exercises, calculations
  - listening and notetaking skills
  - speaking skills
  - presentation skills
- preparing for and participating in **lab sessions**
  - observation skills
  - practical skills
  - skills in integrating theory & practice

- gathering information
  - using the **library / internet**
  - research skills
  
- preparing and writing **assignments**, e.g. essays, reports
  - reading and notetaking skills
  - writing skills:
    - clear, coherent expression
    - criticism and analysis
    - structuring/sequencing information
    - developing an argument
    - referencing
    - computer skills
    - scientific writing skills
  
- studying for and performing in **exams**
  - learning skills
  - exam performance skills, e.g. essays, MCQ, short answer, clinical, practical exams
  
- self study
  - time management and organisational skills

## APPENDIX 1 Weekly Diary

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Time%
Formal classes								
Private study								
Relaxing/socialising								
Domestic chores								
Family activities								
Physical exercise								
Travelling								
Sleeping								
Eating								
Paid work								
Other necessary activities								
<b>Time Wasted</b>								

[Adapted from Maddox, H. (1988) *How to Study*, Pan Books Ltd., London.]

### Reflecting on your lifestyle

a) At the end of the week look for patterns and ask yourself the following questions. Tick the appropriate boxes:

- |  | Yes | No  |
|--|-----|-----|
| • Are you distributing your time appropriately?                  | [ ] | [ ] |
| • Are you spending too little time on your universities studies? | [ ] | [ ] |
| • Are you spending too much time on any non-university activity? | [ ] | [ ] |
| • Are you spending too much time on your universities studies?   | [ ] | [ ] |
| • Are you wasting too much time?                                 | [ ] | [ ] |

b) What are your main time wasters? Think of strategies for minimising them.

## APPENDIX 2

### Planner Semester 1, 2009

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Course 1</b>	<b>Course 2</b>	<b>Course 3</b>	<b>Treatise</b>
<b>2 Mar</b>				
<b>9 Mar</b>				
<b>16 Mar</b>				
<b>23 Mar</b>				
<b>30 Mar</b>				
<b>6 Apr</b>				
<b>10 – 17 Apr</b> <b>Easter Break</b>				
<b>20 Apr</b>				
<b>27 Apr</b>				
<b>4 May</b>				
<b>11 May</b>				
<b>18 May</b>				
<b>25 May</b>				
<b>1 June</b>				
<b>8 - 12 June</b> <b>STUVAC</b>				
<b>15 – 25 June</b> <b>Exams</b>				
<b>28 June - 24</b> <b>July</b> <b>Mid-yr Break</b>				
<b>27 July</b> <b>Semester 2</b> <b>begins</b>				

## Planner Semester 2, 2009

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Course 1</b>	<b>Course 2</b>	<b>Course 3</b>	<b>Treatise</b>
<b>28 June - 24 July</b> <b>Mid-yr Break</b>				
<b>27 July</b> <b>Sem 2 begins</b>				
<b>3 Aug</b>				
<b>10 Aug</b>				
<b>17 Aug</b>				
<b>24 Aug</b>				
<b>31 Aug</b>				
<b>7 Sep</b>				
<b>14 Sep</b>				
<b>21 Sep</b>				
<b>28 Sep – 2 Oct</b>  <b>Sem Break</b>				
<b>5 Oct*</b>				
<b>12 Oct</b>				
<b>19 Oct</b>				
<b>26 Oct</b>				
<b>2 - 6 Nov</b>  <b>STUVAC</b>				
<b>9 - 21 Nov</b>  <b>Exams</b>				

\* Public holiday (during lecture programme): Anzac Day Mon 27 April. Labour Day Monday 5 October.

**Yearly Planner 2009**

Dates	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Treatise
2 Mar				
9 Mar				
16 Mar				
23 Mar				
30 Mar				
6 Apr				
10 - 17 Apr (Easter)				
20 Apr*				
27 Apr				
4 May				
11 May				
18 May				
25 May				
1 June				
8 - 12 June STUVAC				
15 - 25 June Exams				
28 June - 24 July Mid-yr Break				
27 July				
3 Aug				
10 Aug				
17 Aug				
24 Aug				
31 Aug				
7 Sep				
14 Sep				
21 Sep				
28 Sep – 2 Oct Sem Break				
5 Oct*				
12 Oct				
19 Oct				
26 Oct				
2 - 6 Nov STUVAC				
9 - 21 Nov Exams				

\* Public holidays (during lecture programme): Monday 27 April, Anzac Day; Mon 5 October, Labour Day