

ST AUGUSTINE'S
COLLEGE - SYDNEY

Study Skills Booklet

Name : _____

A. Learning Styles

As a student:

Have you ever wondered why you have difficulty learning from a particular teacher, whereas another seems to explain things in just the right way?

Did you ever question why the subject that your friend said was so easy, turned into a struggle for you?

Do you notice that you and your friends have different opinions on whether or not to have the radio on while you're studying?

The reason behind some of these discrepancies may be differences in learning styles!

What is a "Learning Style"?

To put it simply, your learning style (or learning preference) is the way you tend to learn best. It involves your preferred method of taking in, organizing, and making sense of information. Learning styles do not tell us about a person's abilities or intelligence, but they can help us understand why some tasks seem easier for us than others. There are several benefits of thinking about and trying to understand your learning preferences:

- people learn most effectively when the strategies used are closely matched with their preferred learning style
- sometimes we can improve our learning by knowing what our strengths are and then doing more of what we're good at
- often we can improve our learning by knowing what our weakness are and trying to enhance our skills in these areas
- different situations and learning environments require different learning strategies, so it's best to have a large repertoire from which to draw

Expanding Your Learning Preferences

There are 3 learning style preferences outlined here:

1. Auditory (learning by hearing)
2. Visual (learning by seeing)
3. Kinesthetic (learning by doing)

If you're looking to improve your effectiveness as a student, choose the learning preference category that you feel best matches the way you like to learn (e.g. visually), and check to see if you follow the suggested strategies (e.g. enhancing visual learning).

Then, look at the strategies for the other two learning styles and try to implement some of these ideas into your repertoire as well.

Learning Styles

This chart helps you determine your learning style; read the word in the left column and then answer the questions in the successive three columns to see how you respond to each situation.

Highlight or circle your response. Your answers may fall into all three columns, but one column will likely contain the most answers. The dominant column indicates your primary learning style.

When you..	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic & Tactile
Spell	Do you try to see the word?	Do you sound out the word or use a phonetic approach?	Do you write the word down to find if it feels right?
Talk	Do you sparingly but dislike listening for too long? Do you favor words such as <i>see, picture, and imagine</i> ?	Do you enjoy listening but are impatient to talk? Do you use words such as <i>hear, tune, and think</i> ?	Do you gesture and use expressive movements? Do you use words such as <i>feel, touch, and hold</i> ?
Concentrate	Do you become distracted by untidiness or movement?	Do you become distracted by sounds or noises?	Do you become distracted by activity around you?
Meet someone again	Do you forget names but remember faces or remember where you met?	Do you forget faces but remember names or remember what you talked about?	Do you remember best what you did together?
Read	Do you like descriptive scenes or pause to imagine the actions?	Do you enjoy dialogue and conversation or hear the characters talk?	Do you prefer action stories or are not a keen reader?
Do something new at work	Do you like to see demonstrations, diagrams, slides, or posters?	Do you prefer verbal instructions or talking about it with someone else?	Do you prefer to jump right in and try it?
Put something together	Do you look at the directions and the picture?	Do you prefer to hear instructions?	Do you ignore the directions and figure it out as you go along?
Need help with a computer application	Do you seek out pictures or diagrams?	Do you call the help desk, ask a friend, or growl at the computer?	Do you keep trying to do it or try it on another computer?

Enhancing Auditory Learning (Learning By Hearing)

Classroom Learning

- listen to instructions and information given orally
- sit towards the front of the room so you can hear well and so that you won't be distracted by the noises other students make
- sit away from doors, windows, and other sources of noise
- repeat information silently to yourself
- "subvocalize" as you take notes - repeat information to yourself as a quiet "mumble" that's barely audible

Text Learning

- rehearse/repeat information either silently in your head, or out loud
- study with a friend or parent and take turns reading to each other - discuss key concepts
- work in quiet areas to minimize hearing music, television or other distractions
- if you prefer to study with music playing, choose something with no lyrics, and keep the volume low
- use rhymes or jingles to help remember important points
- talk to yourself about textbook diagrams and illustrations
- ensure you understand by creating verbal descriptions
- tape yourself summarizing key points, then play the tape as a memory rehearsal strategy
- try to remember important terms by thinking about how parts of the words sound
- read instructions and questions out loud to yourself (or sub vocalize in test situations)

Enhancing Visual Learning (Learning By Seeing)

Classroom Learning

- watch for key words written on transparencies, PowerPoint slides, or the board to help organise notes
- sit towards the front of the room
- choose a location where you can see the teacher and all visual aids well
- sit away from doors, windows, bulletin boards, and other potential distractions
- choose a seat where you can see the teacher and all visual aids well
- try to listen and write down what you hear; fill in your notes and check for understanding after each class
- if confused about a detail, ask the teacher for clarification, write down what she/he says, then review later to ensure you understand
- use visuals like symbols and colour in notes to help flag new concepts and key ideas
- ask the teacher if other visual information is available (eg. course web site etc)
- complete readings before classes

Text Learning

- minimize visual distractions in your study space (eg. cover your computer screen, do not sit facing a window)
- make an outline of key topics in chart or diagram format
- make pictures in your mind
- use the Cornell note-taking system - include a left margin with key words
- look for sketches, diagrams, or charts to help interpret information - practice re-drawing them to help remember
- write down problems and/or questions and practice writing solutions and/or responses
- use flash cards to help rehearse
- try to remember important terms by looking for parts of the word you already know
- make notes colourful
- highlight notes so all information relating to one topic is in the same colour category
- draw boxes or circles around terms/ concepts and draw lines or arrows to show how they are related to one another
- learn when and how to translate text into charts, graphs, or pictures, such as make a time-line from dates, or draw percentages or statistical information in a pie chart

Enhancing Kinesthetic Learning (Learning By Doing)

Classroom Learning

- ask questions and participate in discussions whenever possible
- question the relevance and applicability to the course, yourself, and life in general...
- take a small object (eg. stress-ball) to class to play with in one hand while the other takes notes
- use class breaks to stand up and stretch

Text Learning

- do something physical before sitting down to read or study
- highlight, underline, or take notes
- use your fingers or a piece of paper to help keep track of where you are
- break reading tasks into small chunks
- stop after each chunk, think about what you learned, and write a brief summary
- personalize the information - think about how the concepts apply to you or other people you know
- think about how you can use the information outside the classroom
- take regular, brief breaks to move around
- use the discussion or practice questions in the textbook or study guide to help rehearse information - if none are available, make up your own questions as you study
- move a body part (eg. swing or tap your foot), or walk around if it helps you concentrate
- write processes, etc. on cards, mix them up, then practice physically arranging them into the correct sequence
- if you typically use your hands when talking to people, try using your hands when studying and explaining concepts to yourself

B. Prepare to Study

Improving Concentration

Are you having trouble concentrating?

Your problem may be one or some or all of the following:

- You're not organized
- You're procrastinating
- Your comprehension is poor
- Your work environment is poor
- You're neglecting your physiology
- Your mind just keeps wandering

You're not organized

It's easier to concentrate on the task at hand when you have set aside specific times for your other tasks. If you're not organized, then you always seem to have too many things to do and you can't get going on any of them.

- Write down all of the school tasks you have to do, breaking them into smaller parts wherever possible.
- Every weekend, make a realistic plan for the upcoming week.
- Every night, make a realistic plan for the next day. Don't make your plans too ambitious, or you will always be failing to get through your list. Success feels better than failure, so plan accordingly.

Your Comprehension is Poor

Your class work material should fall into a pattern that flows and makes sense. If it seems like thousands of disjointed bits of information, then it will be far more difficult to remember and you'll have far more difficulty concentrating.

Could you take a blank piece of paper, right now, and write down the structure of your subjects? If not, then you should spend some time getting the big picture, because you are like a traveller with no map.

- Take your course outline and make a conceptual "map" of the main units in the entire course.
- For each chapter or unit covered, make a smaller map of the topics it contains.
- As you follow the course, keep track of where you are on the map, and anticipate what is coming.
- When you see the pattern of the course, your comprehension and concentration will improve.

You're Procrastinating

So you get organized and you set up a schedule, but you keep avoiding your work and finding other things to do. Now what?

- Re-visit your motivations. Remember, the current task is related to the course, which is related to the program which you chose, which is related to larger issues of what you want in life. You don't have to have everything figured out, but remembering the big picture can help you get going. "I want to do this" is a much healthier attitude than "I should do this".
- Develop a sense of progress. Break your study task down into bite-sized chunks. Each time you sit down to work, set an objective for that study session, enjoy the accomplishment of getting it done, and do something fun to reward yourself for making progress.
- Don't get drawn into perfectionism or fear of failure. Just emphasize what you know, what you want to know, and what you want to express. Do your best, but don't waste energy on impossible ideals.
- Don't get too isolated in your studies. Talk about the material with teachers, family, friends, and other students.

You're neglecting the way your body works

Remember, the mind and the body are not two separate things. To improve your concentration, get to know your own physiology better.

- Nutrition - It's harder to concentrate when you're operating on junk food.
- Sleep - It's said that most people in our society are sleep-deprived to some extent. If this includes you, then your concentration is worse than it could be. 8 hours sleep a night is advised.
- Time of day - People have differing patterns of high and low energy throughout the day. Know your own patterns and plan your work accordingly.
- Exercise - A good workout sharpens the mind. If you skip out on exercise because of time restraints, your concentration will probably suffer.

Your work environment is poor

Take a survey of your work environment.

- Privacy - Find ways to eliminate unwanted interruptions.
- Noise - Too much or too little can both be problems.
- Air Quality - How's the ventilation?
- Temperature - Is it too high or low?
- Comfort - Watch your posture and support. Avoid drowse-inducing positions.
- Clutter - Get everything off your desk except the work that you're doing.

Your mind just keeps wandering

Think of concentration as presence of mind. When your mind is jumping from one topic to another, it is typically a case of ideas and images from the past and the future impinging on the present. When these distracting extra thoughts come to you, what can you do? In some cases, personal issues need to be addressed before you can concentrate properly. If so, you should think them through, talk to a friend or family member. Many times, however, you can improve your concentration with a bit of practice.

When distracting thoughts arise, you can follow them, but this can lead to aimless mental wandering. You can try to shut them out, but they'll probably just keep nagging you. Your best strategy may be to relax and let them fall away by themselves.

1. With practice, you can learn to drop extra ideas before they pull your attention away from the present activity.
2. To ground yourself and achieve presence of mind, it is also helpful to pay attention to your breathing. Regular, deep breathing helps to re-unite your mind and your body, and brings you back to the present.

Both of these tips address what you can do in the moment when concentration is eluding you, but you can also engage in practices which, over the longer term, develop your ability to concentrate. Here are some suggestions:

- Meditation helps bring about a calm but alert mind, which is the basis for concentration.
- Yoga, Tai Chi, and other such practices are, in a sense, meditation with movement.
- Arts, crafts and music are good practices for focusing the mind, and can be helpful in improving concentration.
- Exercise and sports can bring about that same alertness and presence of mind.

C. Study Notes

1. Why do I need to bother making study notes?

Your brain is an amazing organ. You may have heard the brain being compared to a computer but that is actually not a totally apt comparison. The brain does not assemble data from bits and pieces of information. Instead, it relates whole concepts to one another and looks for similarities, differences or relationships between them.

If you organise and structure the material you need to learn, finding ways that concepts are related, it will assist your brain in remembering and recalling the information. Within each subject you have a huge amount of theory to learn and remember. The reality is, you simply do not have the time to keep re-reading every chapter in your textbook, every handout and every note you have ever taken in order to revise. Instead, you need to start sifting through the material, working out what you need to know, what you already know, and what is not relevant. Identifying what is important allows you to reduce the volume of your notes. You need to gather all the related pieces of information together and organise them in a logical manner.

Use your highlighter to underline the key information in the following passages to use as an aid for revision..

The process of making study notes is actually a form of studying. It helps you concentrate on what you are learning and improves your understanding, as putting information in your own words and making links between new knowledge and what you already know helps you distinguish between important points and supporting details. It enables you to find out if you do really understand the content and it forces you to think about the topic in its entirety. As you break the topic down into headings and subheadings, you then focus on different aspects in turn, and through making study notes develop a solid base of knowledge to build upon.

2. When should I make study notes?

Ideally, every time you finish a topic. This is the perfect time to look at the topic as a whole and create a basic set of study notes for this topic. It is also OK to make study notes as the topic progresses, but the end of a topic acts as a reminder to you to get started if you haven't yet done so. The advantage of doing study notes at this time is that you are making your study notes while the topic is fresh in your mind and you can deal with anything you are unsure of in a timely manner rather than months later. In addition to this, you have an enormous time advantage closer to the examinations and can spend time updating and reviewing your study notes rather than creating them from scratch.

In reality, most students do not do this. Some may prepare study notes haphazardly for particular tests or assessments. Others do none at all. Most students are just struggling trying to stay on top of the increased workload as compared to the previous year.

It is never too late. It is, of course, preferable to have as much time as possible, so if you haven't started, start now! Allocate some time to working on study notes during the term. Even if it is just half an hour each afternoon or an hour or so on the weekend. Maybe you could allocate time between now and the examination to make summaries of the topics you have covered so far. Aim to complete a certain number each week.

If it feels like there is just too much to do at least start by doing an overview of each-topic and the main points. You can add in more detail later. Develop the habit that every time you finish a topic, you make a set of study notes for that topic.

3. How do I make study notes?

Making study notes is all about chunking the work down into smaller and smaller pieces. First gather all the material on that topic eg. notes, handouts, textbooks and supplementary material. Usually there is one resource in particular that forms the basis of your study notes. Maybe your textbook covers that topic very clearly or perhaps you have a well set out study guide. Maybe the notes that you made in class are the best resource to use as your basis. Look quickly through all the material for an overview of the topic and to decide if you have a resource that you can use in particular for the core of your study notes.

Next take a piece of paper and write down what the main headings are for the topic. Under each heading, list any subheadings you will need to cover. For example, if your topic is WW1 the headings might be *Causes*, *In the War*, *Effects*. Under the heading *Causes*, you would then list the main causes of the war that you will need to be familiar with.

It is a good idea to take this list of headings and turn it into a one or two page Mind Map. A mind map gives you a visual overview of the topic as a whole and is a useful technique for study notes. It allows you to see at a glance what the topic is all about and you can then follow this with more detailed study notes or mind maps. It also is a way of integrating the left hand side of the brain (that likes details) with the right-hand side (that likes the whole picture) which makes learning more efficient.

Once you have completed the mind map overview, take each heading and subheading and make notes, preferably in point form (either handwritten or on computer). Look through all your additional resources to ensure you haven't left out any information that is related to this 'heading. You may find that including a mind map on a particular heading is also useful as images can be more memorable than words.

4. What should my study notes look like?

It is best to do your study notes on loose A4 paper rather than in a note book. Summaries are never final. You may need to add in good worksheets you are given or you may find when you gain a greater understanding of a topic that you might decide to redo a section of your study notes. The more familiar you become with the material, the less you need to include in your study notes. Keep your A4 pages in a ring binder or display folder.

5. How do I improve my study notes?

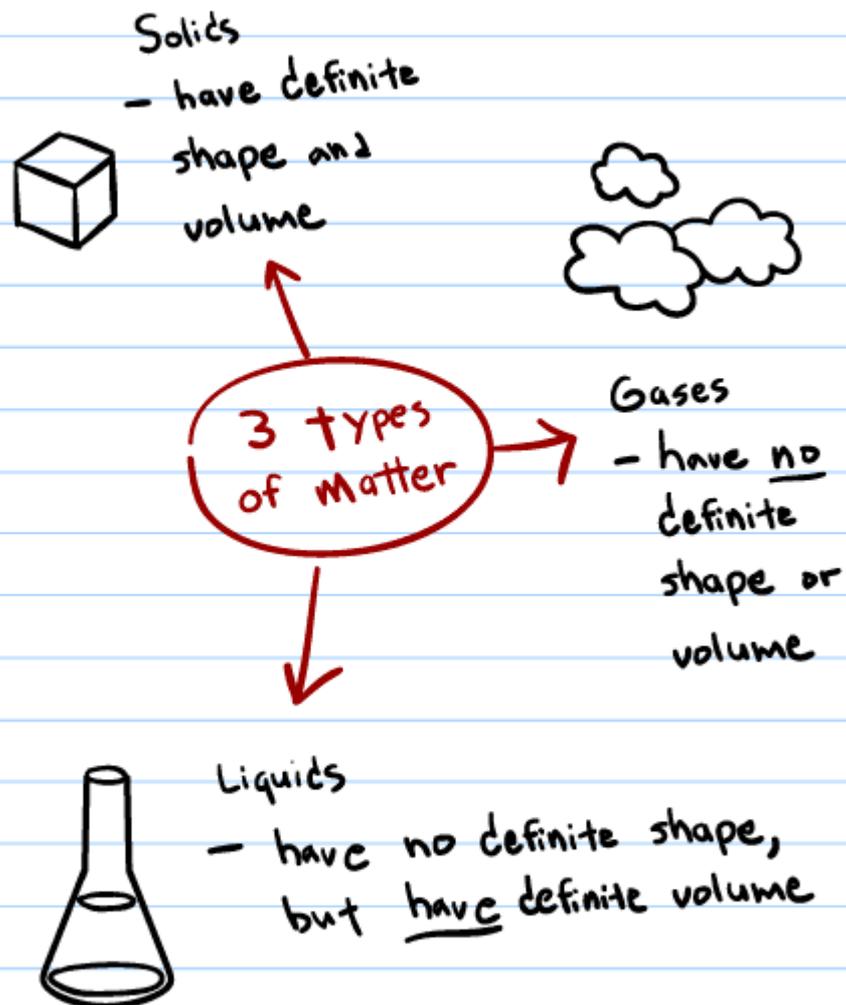
Make them as visual as possible. The more organised they are, the more structured and visual they are, the more your brain will respond and remember. Make it easy for your brain:

- use wide margins so you can add in extra information as your understanding grows
- use bullet points and abbreviations rather than long sentences and paragraphs
- highlight or box important points and formulas
- rewrite any sections that are not clear (but don't rewrite it all just for the sake of it)
- use sub headings, indenting, numbering: the more they are broken down, the easier to learn
- complete sentences should be rare - key phrases are better
- legible, neat handwriting
- use clear and noticeable topic headings

Note Taking

Cornell Two-Column Notes	
Keywords:	Notes:
	Types of Matter
Solids	I. Solids A. Have a definite shape B. Have a definite volume
Liquids	II. Liquids A. Do not have a definite shape B. Have a definite volume
Gases	III. Gases A. Do not have a definite shape B. Do not have a definite volume
Summary: (Insert summary of lecture after class.)	

Extreme Mapping



Landmark College Two-Column Notes

Topics:

Details:

Types of Matter

Three Types :

Solids, liquids, gases

Solids

— Solids have :
Definite shape
Definite volume

Liquids

— Liquids have :
No definite shape
Definite volume

Gases

— Gases have :
No definite shape
No definite volume

Roman Numeral Model

3 Types of Matter

I. Solids

- A. Have a definite shape
- B. Have a definite volume

II. Liquids

- A. Do not have a definite shape
- B. Have a definite volume

III. Gases

- A. Do not have a definite shape
- B. Do not have a definite volume

6. How do I use study notes?

The process of creating the study notes is the first stage of learning the material so you can recall it. It is important that you do not just read your study notes. Of course, reading your notes is useful, but in order to ensure information moves to long-term memory you need to make your study active. Some ways you can do this are to read a section of your notes then put them to one side and see what you can write out from memory. Or you may try and speak out loud what you have read without referring to your notes. You can also try writing out the information in your own words or using your study notes to jot down sample essay plans.

7 How can I do study notes for English?

Many students find it difficult to do study notes for subjects like English as there is such a huge quantity of material studied for each topic or piece of literature. One way to approach study notes for English is to try and do one-page summaries on particular aspects of the novel and organise your thoughts in this way. For example, you may do a page of notes on each particular character, a page on themes, a page on the author's techniques, a page on the plot and so on. Make sure you avoid long wordy paragraphs and stick to point form as much as possible. It is likely you will still need to read many of your notes again but these single pages will help you consolidate your ideas and remember the key points and quotes for essays.

8. Should I include examples in subjects like Mathematics?

This is very much a personal decision. Some students like to keep the examples separate from the formulas they need to memorise. Other students like to include examples of questions they find difficult. One way to do this is to have a separate section of examples of questions you find difficult and you can cover the answer and attempt the question again. Most students find including some examples beneficial. Another way to do it is to place your summaries in a display folder with the rules to memorise on the left-hand side and examples on the right-hand side. You could also create a list of the types of questions you find difficult and so need to review.

9. Why don't I just buy the study guide for the subject?

You can! But don't just use this as your summary. You may use it as a basis for making your summary or check to see if you have included everything you should have, but the process of actually making the summary and understanding the connections and links is probably the most important thing. It is during this process that you discover any holes in your understanding and start the memory process. If you let someone else do this for you, the understanding will still be in their head, not yours. This is why even if your teacher gives you a great summary or you find a fabulous book, you can incorporate it into your summary but you need to add something of your own to it or rewrite part of it in your own words to make it work for you.

10. Should I redo my study notes?

Yes, but not at the expense of other forms of study or practice and not just for the sake of making them look better. There may be sections where, when you look back over your notes, you realise you didn't really understand or left out information or have not clearly and logically collected your ideas. If this is the case, then by all means redo that particular section. Add in any good handouts you are given.

11. Should I type my study notes?

There are arguments for both sides. On one hand, you have to write in the examinations. So you are better off getting used to writing as much as possible, especially as these days students do less and less pen to paper and more and more on the keyboard. It is also argued that by writing the information, you set up pathways of familiarity and recognition in your brain that will kick in when you are in an examination situation. On the other hand, some subjects have so much content that to try and wade through it with handwritten notes would take forever. A good compromise is to start making initial notes on the computer as this allows you to cut and paste, group information and rearrange it with ease. Once you have a core set of notes completed, you may like to further summarise some sections on paper using a more graphical or visual form of note-taking such as mind-mapping.

QUIZ

1. You should rewrite sections of your notes as often as possible in order to make them neater and neater. T / F
2. Commercial study guides are useful to help give you a frame work for your own study notes and to help you ensure you have covered everything you need to know. T / F
3. Doing study notes on loose leaf paper and filing in a display folder is useful as it allows you to rewrite sections when necessary and add in good sheets you are given. T / F
4. There is no point doing study notes until right before the examination — if you start studying too early you won't remember the information. T / F
5. The process of actually making study notes is one of the most effective forms of study you can do. This is why copying someone else's notes is not as valuable as actually creating them yourself. T / F
6. Doing the study notes is enough study. Once you have done these, you only need to read over them in order to be ready for the examination. T / F
7. Just reading through your textbook will be enough to help you retain the information accurately. T / F
8. By summarising at the end of a topic, you can see how the pieces of the topic slot together and create a solid set of notes that will give you a time advantage when examinations approach. T / F
9. Making your notes as visual as possible helps you retain the information more effectively as the brain tends to think in pictures anyway. Colour, highlighting, boxes, layout and neatness are all important in study notes. T / F
10. When starting to memorise information from your study notes, you need to keep actively checking if the information has moved into long term memory. This means doing more than just reading: you need to test yourself to see what you can write or speak (ie. remember) without looking back at your notes. T / F
11. The most effective way to make study notes is to simply start at the first section, and as you read through the paragraphs jot down points as you go. It is not necessary to have an overview of the chapter. T / F
12. Study notes are too important to academic success to be neglected. T / F

D. Activities

The Australian Identity at the Goldfields

Instructions:

1. Using the underlined words draw up a mind-map to help you to make notes. A scaffold is provided for you over the page.
2. Using the topic sentences on the next page, write the rest of the paragraph using the information on this sheet.

When gold was first discovered in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851, Australia's population increased dramatically. People from all over Australia and from overseas rushed to the goldfields hoping to strike it rich. The diggers were almost all men because the conditions were so harsh. At first everyone had to live in tents and cook meals over campfires. It wasn't until later when towns, such as Ballarat, were built near the goldfields that women began arriving in large numbers.

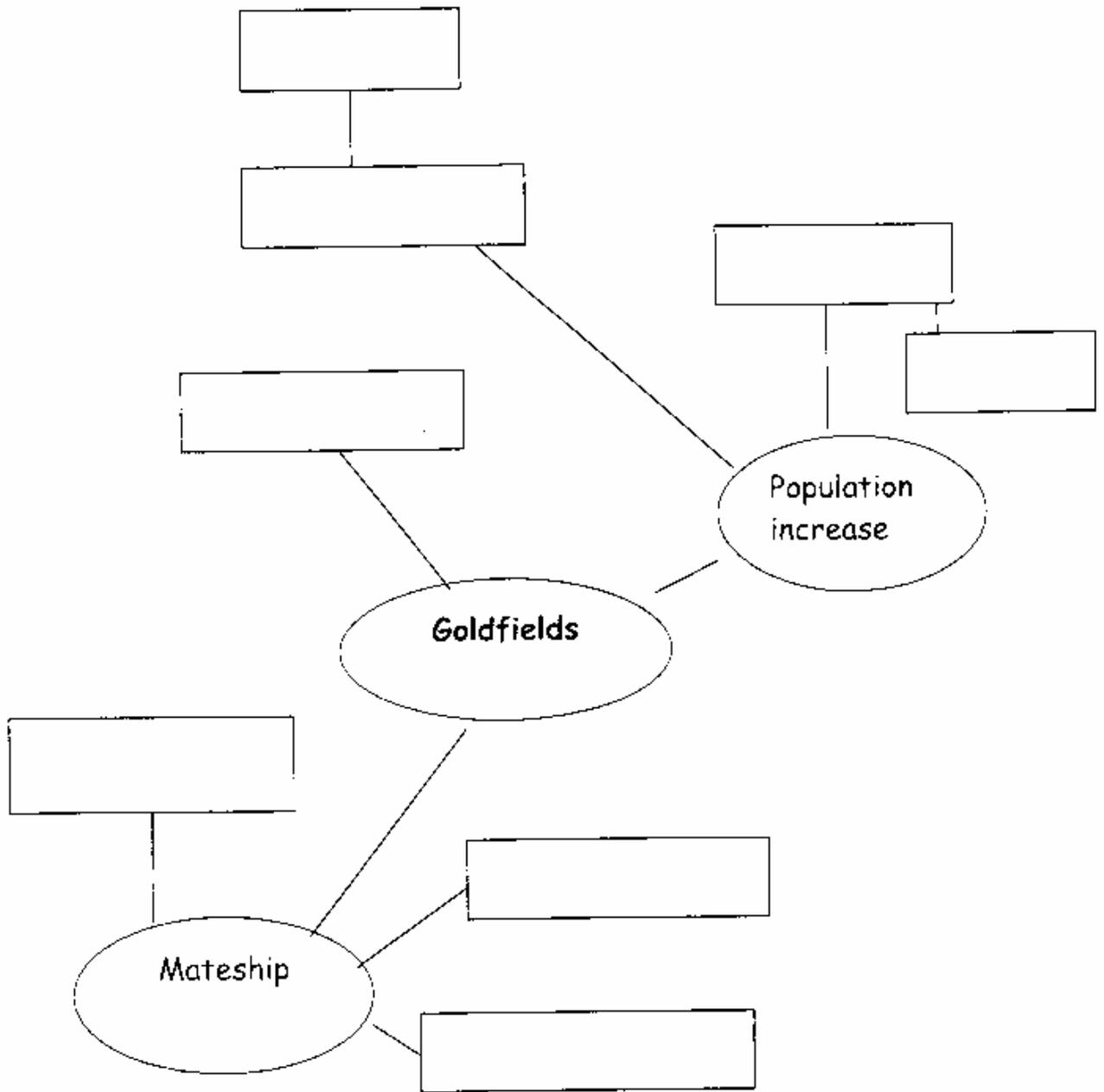
On the goldfields, there was a strong spirit of community and loyalty among the men. Teams of at least two or three men could do mining from the creeks more effectively. The diggers were helpful to each other. One digger might be the tent-keeper and cook while the other members of the group looked for gold.

Group loyalty was made even stronger by the government's demand that each gold digger must have a licence. The police (some of whom had been convicts) would raid the goldfields and check that everyone had a licence. However, many gold-diggers could not afford one because they had not found enough gold, and the police treated these men brutally. Each digger helped his mates escape the police by calling out 'Joe! Joe!'- the nickname for the police-when they saw them coming.

Though behaviour on the goldfields could be wild, the diggers looked after each other. They would not go to the police when there was trouble, preferring to solve their own problems. The diggers were independent-they did not like the police or government inspectors.

The men on the goldfields were bound together by tough living and working conditions. This kind of friendship and loyalty became known as 'mateship'.

MIND MAPPING



Writing Paragraphs

Goldfields

Paragraph: Population increase

Topic Sentence: The population increased in Australia during the time of the Goldfields.

Concluding Sentence:

Paragraph: Mateship

Topic Sentence: The goldfields brought a sense of mateship to the population.

Concluding Sentence:

Paragraph Writing

Basic Things To Remember About Paragraphs

There are a few general 'things' to remember about the structure of a paragraph.

How to write a paragraph

- (i) one paragraph has one main idea
- (ii) this one main idea is usually contained in the opening sentence
- (iii) the opening sentence in the paragraph is sometimes called the **topic sentence**
- (iv) the other sentences making up the paragraph should support the topic sentence
- (v) the final sentence in the paragraph summarizes or restates the main idea (**and**) links the main idea of this paragraph with the next
- (vi) an essay should be a body of organised and linked ideas
- (vii) before writing (a) first think about the topic (b) brainstorm ideas (c) organise and arrange ideas (d) write topic sentences for those ideas (e) follow ideas above
- (viii) all supporting statements should be directly relevant to the topic sentence

Write Topic Sentences

Write topic sentences for the groups of supporting statements.

A. TOPIC SENTENCE: _____

It is a place in which to keep many old things made in the past. Keeping these things helps us to understand the past more clearly. Most museums are owned by governments for the people. Public museums are places where we can learn many things. Most importantly, we can learn about the mistakes of the past, thereby not repeating them.

B. TOPIC SENTENCE: _____

There is not enough space for everyone to be walking comfortably. Shopping centres also put a lot of small family shops out of business. The whole area surrounded by these commercial centres are dominated by automobiles. Many people miss the 'old village street' shopping centres. These large centres are like temples of consumerism. At the front door a sign you be hung, saying "Be silent, consume and die !". Shopping malls are like cultural deserts.

C. TOPIC SENTENCE: _____

Firstly, the air around here smells like heavy oil, especially around sunset when a sea breeze blows in. Furthermore, this house fronts onto one of the busiest roads in Sydney. This makes it a little unsafe to have small children around. While this is a busy road there are no nearby shopping centres. Many heavy trucks use the road in order to get to the big industrial centre just along the road. The smoke and noise from these nearby factories make it unhealthy to live here. Lastly, the recent breakouts from the maximum security prison 200 meters down the road makes it a dangerous and unsuitable place to live.

E. Planning

The first part of your preparation is to work on your study notes and you should be doing this as soon as you can, preferably as you go throughout the year. Then you should use a grid (like the one below) to complete with as much information about the examination as you can find. Much of the information will not be available until closer to the examination period. However, you should be able to discover at least the topics to be tested.

Examination information

Subject		Topics	Date/Time	Length	Format	Timing
Eg.	Maths	Equations Geometry Graphs Surface Area and Volume	Tuesday May 15 th 9am – 11am	2 Hrs	30 multiple choice 6 questions each worth 10 marks 90 marks total	25 mins multiple choice 10 mins each question 5 mins checking

As you start to collect this information, you should also take the time to do a plan for the weeks before the exam, anywhere from three to six weeks before they commence.

Some things you need to think about first:

- On average, how much time can you (or will you plan to) set aside over the next few weeks specifically for study given that you still have to keep up with current school-work? It is realistic to expect that in the lead up to the examinations you will have to increase the amount of work you are doing.

Average time per weeknight you could put aside for study: _____

- Can you find some extra time on the weekends for study? The weekend is a great time to get on top of your study and knock over some big chunks. You can still go out Saturday night with your friends but just don't waste the rest of the weekend. After all, it is only for a few weeks.

Time (hours) available or that you will plan to study for on Saturdays: _____

Time (hours) available or that you will plan to study for on Sundays: _____

- Do you need to spend an equal amount of time on each subject? You may want to consider allocating some extra time to your weakest subject. This can be difficult to do as often your weakest subject is your least favourite and you will be tempted to spend more time on your favourite subjects (which are often also your strongest subjects). Consider carefully and let your mind not your inclinations make the decision.

Strongest subjects: _____

Subjects you are OK in: _____

Weakest subjects: _____

- How long do you like to spend at one time on a subject or a study session? There is a real range among students and again it can often depend on a number of factors such as how much you like the subject, what type of task you are doing, what else you have to do and even what sort of a day you have had and how tired you are! Some students can sit and concentrate for a number of hours (although a short break every half hour is really beneficial to all students) while other students struggle to stay focused for even twenty minutes. If you fall into the latter category, you need to ensure you regularly change which subject you are studying and study very different subjects after each other: eg. Maths followed by History followed by Science. Also have specific tasks to complete in each time slot.

Take a moment to reflect on the approach you will take to your study sessions:

Steps To Planning Your Study Time: “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail”

There is no such thing as a perfect study timetable - it will be different for everyone as everyone has different needs and commitments. Without some sort of plan, your study is likely to be haphazard and ineffectual. Many students are resistant to the idea of making a study timetable - they say it is of no use as they never stick to it. Without a rough plan however, it is much more difficult to make yourself stay on track. The thing to do is to create the sort of study timetable that suits you and that you can work with.

For some students this will be only a very simple outline that says what subject they will study on what day for other students they might just make a list of what they want to get done for each subject as preparation, then just work through the list whenever they are studying that subject. For other students, having a detailed plan with set times for each subject really helps them to complete much more effective study than if they just approached their preparation haphazardly.

It is useful to go through the process below even if you do not end up using as detailed a study timetable, as it helps you to think about how you will approach your study over the next few weeks.

Step 1

On the grid following these instructions, write down approximately how much time you will aim to study each night. Cross off any days that you know you will have activities or will not be able to do any study. For example:

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1 hr	1 hr	basketball	2 hrs	1 hr	3 hrs	2 hrs

It is true that other work may arise, tests and assignments and so on, and that you may need to reschedule this work. But unless you have a goal of what you'd like to do in terms of study, you definitely will not make the time to do it. Set a goal of what you would like to achieve and you are more likely to find a way to make it happen.

Step 2

Allocate subjects to each of these time slots. Try and separate similar subjects and study the subject you find hardest when you are most alert. For example:

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1 hr Maths	1 hr History	Basketball	2 hrs Science	1 hr Geography	2 hrs English	2 hrs Spare time if needed

- This is probably as much detail as most people need in their timetable. At least it has a goal set of the amount of study time to be aimed for, and you won't waste time each afternoon deciding which subject to study. It also ensures that you have thought about how much time you are going to allocate to each subject.

- It can be both frightening and depressing going through this process. You discover how much you have to do and how little time there seems to be to get it all done. The trick is to accept that this is how much time you have, so what is the most effective and productive way you *can* use this time. But without a plan, it is unlikely you will be as productive or efficient as you could be. Instead, you spend time each day deciding what to work on, shuffling papers around and getting more and more stressed. Talk to your teachers and ask for their advice on what you should be doing to prepare in their subject.

Step 3

Come up with some ideas of what sorts of things you should do to study for the examination in each subject. This way you can work through this list when you are studying for that subject.

Step 4

Finally, decide what you are going to do in each block of time for that subject. Be detailed and precise and use the list you created in Step 3 to help you. Do this in pencil, because it will probably change as you go. It is a good idea to just do this a week at a time and to plan out what you want to achieve that week. At the end of the week you can see how far you have got and make a plan for what you want to do in the next week.

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1 hr	1 hr	Basketball	2 hrs	1 hr	3 hrs	2 hrs spare time if needed
Maths Write summaries Ch 22 - 25	History Do practice essay on Medieval Europe		Science Summary Ch 10 + review questions	Geography Study notes on Desert environments	English Organise notes on novel Revise Narrative text type	

In the first few weeks of your preparation you should focus on:

- catching up on any overdue work
- working on study notes
- organising all your material on that subject

In the weeks just prior to your examinations plan to:

- actually start to study and practice the subject
- do past examination papers
- continue to work on your study notes

Timetable

STUDY TIMETABLE

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY

F. Studying

How do you actually study?

When you study do you:

- prepare study notes and summaries? Y / N
- practice examination papers? Y / N
- test yourself to see if you can remember the information? Y / N
- practice lots of different question types? Y / N
- make sure you understand the material before memorising? Y / N
- use a variety of different techniques to learn it? Y / N
- practice the skills of the subject? Y / N

Many students feel they don't really know how to study. They read through their notes and textbooks, they do some questions and revision sheets, maybe even a few essay plans, but they are not really sure if what they are doing is as effective as it could be.

Studying involves the following main aspects:

1. Experiencing and Understanding the course
2. Actively Learning and remembering the content
3. Practicing the skills of the subject

Some students interpret this as read through your notes then do a couple of practice papers. If this is all you are doing, you are right - your study is not as effective as it should be. There is a lot more you could do to save yourself time, to make your memories and recall stronger, and to give yourself a better chance of achieving excellent results in the examination. The complexity and volume of the work has probably increased over time so your study approach should have developed in order to meet these increasing demands. Now might be a good time for a quick makeover, a time to add some new techniques and update your repertoire. It is amazing what a difference a few changes to your approach can make.

Understanding the Subject

Memorising information without really having a clue what it means is simply a waste of time. It is impossible then to apply your knowledge to any slight variation of the question. And of course, it is impossible to predict exactly what the examination question will be! So the first stage of your study should be making sure that you understand the concepts. It is actually a bit difficult to separate this out as really this stage is intertwined with the next two. As you begin to go through the process of learning and practicing for the subject, you will come across sections of work that you do not understand. If this happens you should follow these steps:

Spend a reasonable amount of time trying to understand the information. To do this you might:

- look through any examples or worked examples
- re-read sections of the textbook
- see if you have any other books where the explanation is clearer
- find similar questions
- try and work backwards if it is a numerical problem with an answer
- take a short break then come back fresh
- see if there is anyone in your family who could help
- read through your class notes again
- do a quick search on the Net
- look at earlier or later sections of work and see if they help bring it into perspective

Making Learning Active

In order to move information into long-term memory, you need to study the material in ways that are active and engage your senses. To activate your memory you need to use energy and *effort*. Just reading through your notes is not enough for most people. Sure they will remember some of it, but it will be a long laborious process to get to that stage and their retention of the information will be inadequate

Look through the list below and put a tick next to the learning strategies you use regularly.

- _____ Read textbook and class notes.
- _____ Make and refine summaries.
- _____ Read summaries over and over.
- _____ Write out what you remember in your own words.
- _____ Speak it aloud to see what you remember.
- _____ Test yourself or have someone test you.
- _____ Teach it or explain to someone else.
- _____ Make flashcards.
- _____ Use mnemonics and acronyms (eg SOH CAH TOA in trigonometry).
- _____ Use mind maps to help you gain an overview & see relationships between concepts.
- _____ Use tables and lists of definitions.
- _____ Form study groups to discuss topics and help each other.
- _____ Make posters or signs that you put up around your room or house.
- _____ Make your summaries as visual and memorable as possible.
- _____ Read through your notes then on your computer type what you remember.

Practicing Subject Skills

Practicing the skills of the subject serves a number of purposes:

- It is a test whether you have retained the information you have been learning.
- When you check your answers, you also find out if you have understood the content.
- It ensures you can apply your knowledge under examination conditions
- It ensures you can recognise and interpret what the question is asking.
- It ensures you can apply your knowledge to unfamiliar questions.
- It helps you find out what you do not know or understand yet so you can learn it.

Read through the list below and tick the methods you usually use.

- Practice essay writing / planning by doing typical exam questions.
- Focus on being relevant and answering the question.
- Read examiners' reports/sample answers, note significant points.
- Look at marking criteria.
- Do as many past papers as you can under exam conditions.
- Practice writing essays quickly under time limits.
- Redo old tests, essays, exams.
- Quiz yourself to find out what you really know, not what you think you know.
- Do as many different questions and types of questions as you can find.
- Do sample questions and hand in to your teacher for marking.
- Do chapter reviews or quizzes in your textbook.

A few essential points:

- Keep testing yourself to see what you really remember. Do not rely on what you think you can recall. Often students get a false impression of what they really know only to find when it is too late (i.e. in the exam), that they have not actually retained the information.

- It is vital that you keep a list of common mistakes and things to ask your teachers about and ensure you clear up any doubts or insecurities about your understanding. If you don't understand it before the examination, you certainly won't during.

- Do as much of the practice as you can under examination conditions. This means without referring to your notes, any worked solutions or answers until the very end. Practice under time limits. This is particularly important for essays, as you need to gain practice in planning then writing copious amounts of essays at high speed under examination pressure. The only way to become really good at this is through constant practice.

What are the most effective techniques for studying?

The most effective techniques are the ones that engage your senses that make you feel awake when you are studying and that help you understand the material.

Different techniques will be effective for different people. If you are a strong visual learner, writing summaries and writing it out in your own words will help you the most. Auditory learners will remember best after speaking aloud or listening to tapes. Kinesthetic learners will benefit from walking around while they learn or typing out what they remember.

You need to experiment *with* some of the strategies listed above and earlier in the booklet, and find out what works best for you.

I never seem to be able to remember everything. What can I do?

Change your approach to your studies and use different strategies. If you keep doing the same thing, you will probably keep getting the same results.

Assess how much work you do and how effective it is. Do you need to increase the amount of work you do? Do you need to remove distractions or start studying earlier in the afternoon?

Talk to your teachers about what you currently do. Ask them for suggestions on ways you can change your approach. Find out the sorts of things strong students in your class do and model your study on their approach. Do you fully understand the material? If not, take the time to see your teacher at lunch or before school and ask for help. Find another student who might be willing to help you. Understanding must come before learning and remembering.

Don't try and memorise all of the details at once. Start with the big picture and gradually fill in the blanks. Regularly reviewing what you learn is the secret. The first time you learn something, neural pathways are created in your brain. The more you review this information, the more fixed the pathways become and you halt the forgetting process and stop the pathways dropping away.

How long should you study for at a time?

Different people have different concentration spans but the optimum time for learning is about 20 - 25 minutes, then a short 5 minute break. You could do 3 - 4 of these sessions in a row, then take a decent sized break from work before starting again. You need regular breaks to allow your mind time to form associations between the old and the new knowledge. As new information is assimilated, new pathways in the brain are forged, and it is important to have a short break after learning something new to allow it to consolidate and be sorted out in your brain.

Does listening to music help or hinder?

Research has shown that Baroque music, a form of classical music which has about 60 beats per minute, aids in helping you remember what you learn. Today's music, which has 140 beats per minute, actually lowers your brain's ability to retain information.

That's not to say you should never have music on or listen to the radio when you are doing schoolwork. For many students this helps to relax them, helps them to force themselves to sit there and do the work, and has a positive effect on them. However, if you are trying to memorise something as opposed to doing drill work or work that does not require intense concentration, switch the music off or it will take you longer to learn the information.

Why are exercise and healthy eating important?

Research has shown that exercise juices the brain with more glucose, which may promote and increase the neural connections or pathways along which information flows in your brain. The benefits of exercise and the effect it has on keeping you healthy don't need to be revisited. Just as important to your brain as exercise, is water. You may know your body is 70% water but did you know your brain is 78% water? It is vital that you keep the brain hydrated as dehydration lowers your brain's ability to retain information and causes short-term memory loss. Have a water bottle on your desk and keep sipping as you study. Maybe add some fruit juice to your water for the natural sugars. Avoid overeating as it makes you sleepy (as does overheating) and your body wants to shut down to process the food. Similarly, don't starve yourself as in doing so you are depriving the brain of what it needs to function efficiently. The healthier the fuel or food you eat, the better chance your brain has of operating at its optimum levels of efficiency. Don't take your brain for granted. Sleep is also vital to ensure the information and pathways formed consolidate and the proteins which have been used up in the course of the day's mental activities are replenished.

7. I'm just not smart enough. How can I learn everything?

It is true that some people have a greater natural ability to learn schoolwork than others. Everyone has gifts. Some people shine at school, as their gifts are the sorts that are rewarded in the school system. Others have a much harder time. They get discouraged, feel they are hopeless and are just no good at anything. Many of these students won't discover until they have left school what things are that they are really good at (and everyone is good at something, it just takes some people longer than others to work it out). Meanwhile, school is pretty miserable for them. Unfortunately, everyone has to go through the school system and it is important to do the best you possibly can and to make the process as painless as possible.

While some people do have natural ability, which makes it easier to learn, every single person is capable of learning, of making new pathways in their brain and of mastering things they first thought were impossible. If you struggle at school there are some things you can do to help yourself.

- Reaching Out

Become comfortable asking for help. Most students who struggle just leave out the things they don't understand. This just makes the problem worse. You need to find someone who you can go to with a big long list of questions and feel comfortable sitting down with them and working through them until you understand. Maybe this person is a teacher or another student or an older sibling or a family friend or if there is no other option, a tutor. Don't just show up and say 'I don't understand any of it'. People find it impossible to help students who say this.

Instead, make the effort to spend some time yourself working through the things you don't understand, thinking about it, then see your mentor with your specific questions. At first your questions could be totally basic and simple but that's OK. Once you understand this part, go back again and spend some more time working through the next part. Come up with a new list of questions and get these answered. Move forward again. Keep doing this process and you will find you can understand the material.

Many students who say "I'm too stupid to do this" are really saying 'I am too lazy to do this. If I can't understand it instantly, I can't be bothered putting in the effort that would be required to understand it.'

- Improve Retention

If you find that you thought you knew everything but when you got into the examination you couldn't remember it or it all became muddled, then you did not end up moving the information into long-term memory. The way to do this is through repetition and regular review, using the techniques outlined above and going over and over the material, but most importantly constantly testing yourself to get an accurate picture of what you really do remember. It is easy to jolt a stalled memory with a quick look at your notes. Keep testing yourself over and over until you find that you are able to recall the information.

Sources & Useful Websites

- **Guidelines for Developing Study Skills:**
http://www.ossm.edu/~mzimmerm/study_guide.htm
- **Student Development Services – The University of Western Ontario**
<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/>
- **How to Study**
<http://www.how-to-study.com/>
- **Study Guides & Strategies**
<http://www.studygs.net/>
- **Effective Study Skills**
<http://www.adprima.com/studyout.htm>
- **Education Atlas**
<http://www.educationatlas.com/study-skills.html>
- **Enhanced Learning Educational Services**
- **Elevate Education**
- **Selection of Study Skills Materials – Mark Hall**