



ICM

Learner Handbook

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1. What sort of Learner am I?

It's important to recognize and understand your learning style in order to engage successfully with the variety of teaching methods. Once you've identified your learning style, you can adjust the way you study and possibly improve your grades and overall productivity.

- *Visual*
Visual Learners prefer information presented in the form of diagrams, pictures, cartoons, or demonstrations. Information is remembered or assimilated by constructing flow charts, graphs, or other mnemonic devices. So when you work try to draw pictures and diagrams in the margins while reading and write out questions you are working on. Underline and highlight text as you read and make flashcards for studying (use different coloured cards). Copy over your notes to help with recall. Preview a chapter before reading it by first looking at the pictures and section headings.
- *Auditory*
Auditory Learners assimilate knowledge most effectively by listening, and consequently prefer explanations, lectures and discussion work. Auditory Learners characteristically contribute to group discussions, produce high-quality oral presentations, and may think aloud. So when you work try to listen to the words you read and read aloud or talk through the information. Record lectures, tutoring and study group sessions, etc. Make up and repeat rhymes to remember facts, dates, and names. Study in groups and participate in class discussions and debates. Have a friend or classmate quiz you on vocabulary words and recite the word and definition out loud frequently. After you read a section, summarize it out loud.
- *Kinaesthetic*
Kinaesthetic Learners prefer to engage in physical activities, such as role-play, experiments, and model making. It is noteworthy that many Learners may demonstrate strong preferences for one or more of the above styles and learning preferences are not static and can change and develop with age. Whilst ICM appreciate that it is not possible to deliver the same material in a format to suit every learning style we expect that all Learners to be given the opportunity to determine their learning style so that they can take responsibility for asking for material to be delivered in a form they can absorb. So when you work try to walk around as you read and listen to recordings of lectures and notes. Engage your fingers while studying by tracing words and re-writing sentences to learn key facts. If you have a stationary bicycle, try reading while pedalling and studying with music in the background. Try squeezing a Nerf ball or bouncing a foot on the floor.

2. Learners with special needs

2.1 Asperger syndrome

Asperger syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) which alters the way people perceive the world, communicate with others, and learn. Although it tends to be milder than other forms of autism, the symptoms are similar; they usually include finding social situations challenging – due to difficulties reading facial expressions, body language and tone – uniquely specialist interests and sensory issues.

People who have asperger syndrome often have above average intelligence – usually focused in one particular area; such as maths, design or language. For this reason there are

many Learners in higher education with a form of the condition; and because so many go undiagnosed, several struggle in silence. So we've put together some simple study techniques to help make life at college a bit easier for those with the disorder:

Talk to your tutors and anyone else you think might benefit from knowing you have the condition. Making them aware of it will mean they will be able to provide you with more effective support, such as helping you with your time management. People with asperger syndrome often have trouble prioritising tasks, so making both an academic timetable and a social and domestic one will help you keep on top of everything.

"If I get anxious I get in a tizz. I have a timetable; it helps me to see what I have to do next, otherwise I get confused"

Do some research into the resources your university or college has for pupils who are blind, deaf, or who have learning difficulties – like books on tape, or lecture transcripts. Because people who have asperger syndrome often struggle to listen – especially in a busy lecture hall – and take notes simultaneously, gathering handouts and as many support resources as possible can only help. Recording your lectures is also an effective way of combating this.

Find a distraction free study environment, and make sure you set your alarm to schedule in breaks which will lead to more productive studying. ASD Learners are paradoxically either very easily distracted, or tend to become totally absorbed in their work and lose track of time. Prepare well for your exams. Many people with the condition have issues with physical proximity. If this sounds like you, ask for a seat near the aisle, or request to sit apart, well before the exam begins, so that it doesn't distract you.

And finally, if you think you have a form of autism, or asperger syndrome, then talk to a tutor or doctor for support. You can also do a bit of research by visiting the Interactive Autism Network – or your country's relevant body, such as the Autism Community of Africa, Autism Pakistan and Action for Autism.

2.2. Autism

"If, by some magic, autism had been eradicated from the face of the earth, then men would still be socialising in front of a wood fire, at the entrance to a cave" – Temple Gardin, autism activist

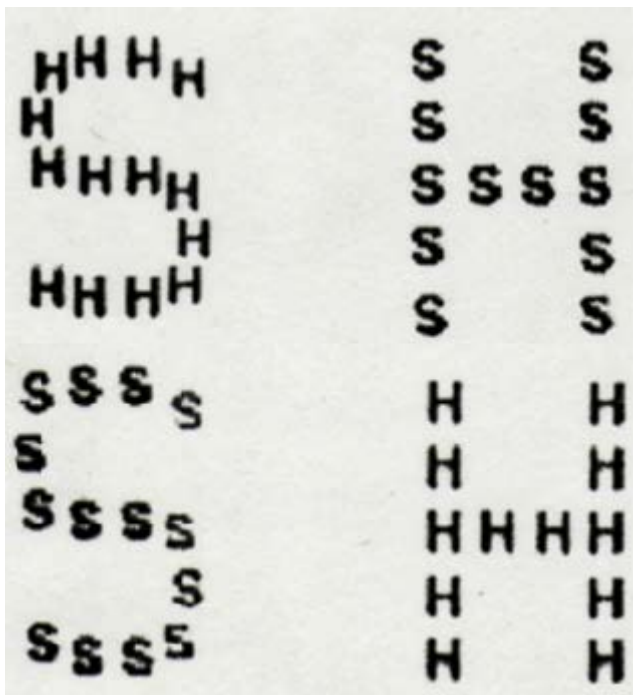
Autism is not a condition that is easily explained; it is a complex spectrum of brain disorders, which affects all of its bearers differently, ranging widely in severity and kind. 1 in 88 children have autism; and every 20 minutes, someone new, somewhere in the world, is diagnosed.

"People with autism learn in a different way; they absorb their surroundings in a different way" explains Wendy Chung, Initiative director of clinical research at Simons Foundation Autism Research.

Very severe cases of autism render the holder non-verbal, and unable to communicate in any way other than through pictures or gestures, while people with mild autism will often just discover they have a strong talent in a particular area, or fixation on a particular subject.

Although autism affects everybody differently, most people with the condition find social situations difficult, to varying degrees; conversation and eye contact is often a struggle, and connections are difficult to make and maintain. People with autism also tend to focus on detail, as opposed to abstract concepts.

Check out this image, and take note of which letters you see first...



... If you saw the small letters before the larger ones, there is a chance you might have a form of autism.

What does this mean?

Autistic thinking can be roughly divided into three different categories; photo realistic visual thinkers whose strengths tend to be artistic, and whose weaknesses numerical; pattern thinkers whose strengths lie in maths and music, but who sometimes have problems reading and writing; and verbal thinkers, who tend to be poor at visualisation and drawing, but who can retain a range of facts and write well.

“The autistic mind tends to be a specialist mind”, expands Temple Grandin, doctor of animal science and autistic activist, “good at one thing, and bad at another”. Pattern thinkers are often talented computer programmers, or engineers; visual thinkers often designers; and verbal thinkers journalists, or stage actors.

Embracing the condition is vitally important. As Faith Jegende – whose two brothers both have severe forms of the condition – put it: “the pursuit of normality is the ultimate sacrifice of potential. The chance for greatness, for progress and for change dies when we try and be like someone else... because [my brothers] could not be seen as ordinary, this could only mean one thing; that they are extraordinary”.

If you think you may have a form of autism, talk to your tutor or doctor for support. You can also do a bit of research, by visiting the Interactive Autism Network – or your country’s relevant body, such as the Autism Community of Africa, Autism Pakistan and Action for Autism.

Also keep your eyes peeled for our blog next week on the best study techniques for people with mild autism, or asperger syndrome.

2.3 ADHD

If you have ADHD, you might recognise some of these symptoms:

- poor organisational skills
- extreme impatience
- irritability and a quick temper
- carelessness and lack of attention to detail
- continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones
- inability to focus or prioritise
- continually losing or misplacing things
- forgetfulness
- restlessness and edginess

The first thing to do, if you believe you might have the condition, is to talk to your tutor, who will put you in touch with professionals who can give you the best advice on how to deal with the condition. There are, however, some basic techniques which people with ADHD can employ...

Keep a study schedule: although we advise all Learners to do this, it is even more important for Learners with attention disorders. Put everything in your diary; from study sessions, to meeting up with friends. Doing this will stop you getting distracted wondering what you’ve got to do next, and help keep you organised. Use alarms to help you stick to your schedule – people with ADHD don’t always have a good sense of passing time.

Begin each day by writing a ‘to-do’ list, and tick off each item when you’ve finished it. This will help keep you focused on your priorities. Take regular breaks: for people who struggle to concentrate, working intensively for short periods of time is more productive than expending all their energy on trying to concentrate. Instead schedule in breaks every 15-20 minutes or so.

Plan for a longer study time than your peers and begin revising early: Because those with ADHD spend a lot of time distracted, it follows that tasks take longer. Make sure you factor

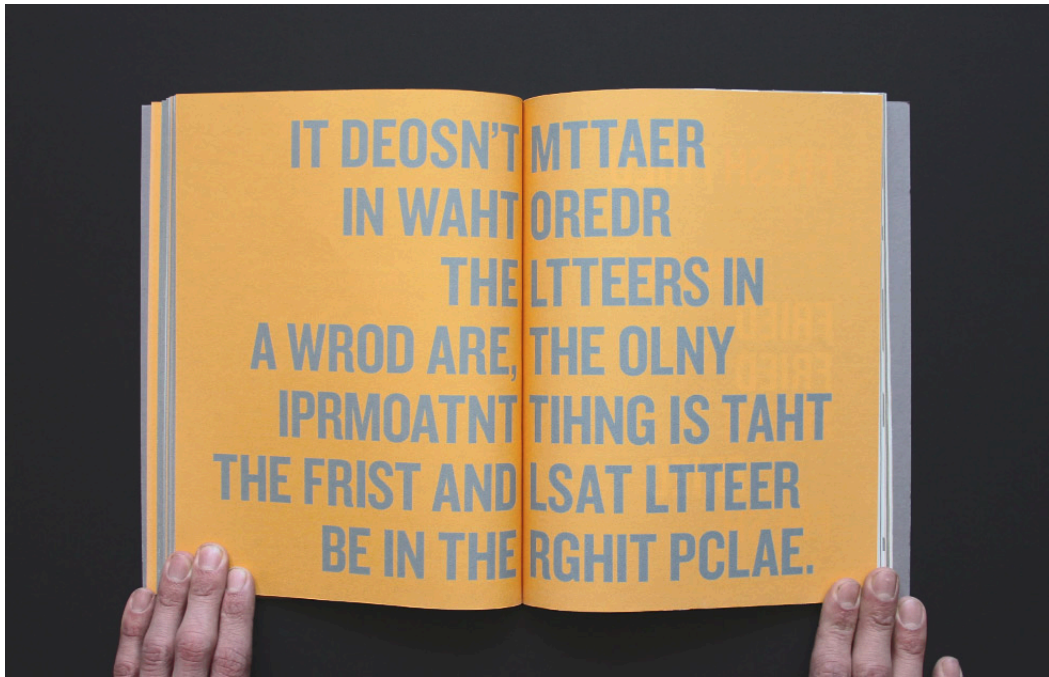
this into your study schedule, and begin revising at the earliest possible time. “Our brains aren’t meant to absorb and retain information [that we] reviewed at the last minute,” Laurie Dietzel, Ph.D, a psychologist specializing in ADHD and developmental disabilities said, “last-minute stress can lead to anxiety that blocks our ability to readily understand and recall information.”

Exercise regularly: People with ADHD often have less dopamine – the hormone released through exercise which helps us concentrate – than those without. Exercising is therefore doubly beneficial for Learners with the condition. Health experts suggest about 30 minutes of exercise per day. Read out-loud and act out while studying; highlight, underline, create diagrams and walk around. Doing so will help you remember the material and also help you focus by keeping the study session varied. Make sure you keep an organised filing system for your material; although doing so will not come naturally to you, it is incredibly important to help save you time and energy. And don’t forget to talk to your tutor about your concerns and symptoms, as they will be able to offer you additional help and support.

2.4 Dyslexia

Dyslexia is the most common learning disorder; estimates suggest it affects around 10% of the world’s population. According to the British Dyslexia Association, “a Learner with dyslexia may mix up letters within words and words within sentences while reading. They may also have difficulty with spelling words correctly while writing; letter reversals are common. However dyslexia is not only about literacy, [it also] affects the way information is processed, stored and retrieved, with problems of memory, speed of processing, time perception, organisation and sequencing”.

Over the years, misunderstanding and ineffective management of the condition has damaged lives; according to UNESCO illiteracy affects around 1 billion people worldwide – a large proportion of whom suffer from a learning difficulty such as dyslexia – while studies show that dyslexic people are over-represented in prisons, and among those with mental health issues. Graphic Design graduate and dyslexic Sam Barclay’s book *I Wonder What It’s Like To Be Dyslexic* illustrates, through typography, a variety of different dyslexic reading experiences.



“Being dyslexic, one thing always stood out,” Sam explains. “The available help was always aimed at making me read better. Very little effort was made to help the people around me understand what it feels like to struggle with reading.”

“People that have difficulty reading are often capable of thinking in ways that others aren’t. Encouraging those with reading difficulties... to excel in ways that make sense to them is not just important, it’s crucial.”

There are strong links between creativity and the condition. In a 1997 study on 360 foundation Learners from Central St Martin’s College of Art and Design, London, psychologist Dr Beverley Steffart found that three quarters of those assessed had a form of dyslexia. “We tend to be very curious, we’re very innovative” said dyslexic fashion designer Paul Smith.

Scientist Albert Einstein, businessman Richard Branson and artist Leonardo da Vinci are just three of a number of highly successful dyslexics. Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disorders, affecting around one in every ten people. When managed properly, the condition should not hold Learners back academically; in fact, it can increase creativity and those with dyslexia often thrive in certain academic areas. When, however, the condition goes undiagnosed and unmanaged – as it does for many – education can be a struggle.

What are the key indicators that a Learner may have dyslexia? Key areas that Learners may experience difficulties include; reading, collating and managing information and academic writing. The areas of writing more likely to cause problems are understanding what to include and how to structure the text to develop a cohesive, logical argument. Grammar, punctuation and certainly spelling are challenging.

Some Learners may find it hard to organise themselves, find their way around and be in the right place at the right time. What should a Learner do if they think they have dyslexia? It is easy to get overwhelmed by the workload; planning study time and creating a balance with social activities is important. Also, knowing how to relax and what helps reduce anxiety levels is essential.

Play to your strengths: Learners with dyslexia can find certain areas of academia easier than other Learners; including being able to think laterally and creatively. They can also bring a high level of determination and persistence to their work. You will also need to get professionally assessed. The processes for this differ from country to country. If you are a UK Learner, you will need a full diagnostic report written after you were 16 from a qualified assessor – the Disability Advisor at your university or college may organise this for you. You will then be given a Needs Assessment to establish the type of support most appropriate for you.

Tips to help dyslexic Learners

- Put study first. It's often better to tackle tasks immediately when they are still fresh. This is a really good habit to establish and makes you feel great.
- Establish good routines.
- Stay organised so you don't waste time looking and checking. This is particularly important for filing paper and IT.
- Clearly label and date files and material.
- Use a diary or note taking system and cross out the things you complete.
- Find someone you trust to help you with things you find difficult and make it a two way relationship.
- Investigate how you learn best and develop a bank of strategies you can draw on.
- Activate your thinking about a topic before a lecture – talk about it to a fellow Learner, read something or see if there are any Research abstracts online, YouTube clips or Ted talks [www.ted.com] connected with it.
- Revisit learning to help embed new information (80% of new learning is lost in 24 hours if it is not revisited). You can buy a 31day concertina file in which you can place dated index cards with key points so that you can place them into the section for the day you want to revisit and revise them.
- Be clear about what you are being asked to write from the outset. Make a plan, either a mind map or a linear plan of your key points and number them in the order you are going to write them. Tick them off as you write. This will help you only include relevant information that answers the question.
- Ensure you read the crucial material first, use post-its to mark key information or to mark information you don't understand and want to ask someone to clarify. Condense it to a format you can use for assignments or revision e.g. Mind Maps.
- Remember everyone is different so this advice will work better for some than others so remain flexible and develop your own strategies.

3. Good Academic Practice

ICM distinguishes between four types of academic malpractice:

- Cheating
- Fabrication
- Facilitating Academic Malpractice
- Plagiarism

3.1 Cheating

Cheating is the use of inappropriate and unacknowledged materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. Assistance from other people is restricted or forbidden unless explicitly authorised by an instructor. Their use in these cases constitutes cheating. Similarly, Learners must not request others to conduct research or prepare any work for them or use work or research prepared by others.

3.2 Fabrication

Fabrication is the falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. "Invented" information may not be used in any academic exercise without authorisation from the instructor. It is improper, for example, to analyse one sample in an experiment and covertly "invent" data based on that single experiment for several more required analyses. The Learner must also acknowledge reliance upon the actual source from which cited information was obtained. A writer should not, for example, reproduce a quotation from a book review and indicate that the quotation was obtained from the book itself.

3.3 Facilitating Academic Malpractice

Learners who knowingly or negligently allow their work to be used by other Learners or who otherwise aid others in academic malpractice are violating academic integrity. Such Learners are as guilty of intellectual malpractice as the Learner who receives the material even though they may not themselves benefit academically from that malpractice. Plagiarism can, in some cases, be a subtle issue as a result of a lack of confidence in academic writing. Any questions or doubts about what constitutes plagiarism should be discussed with a lecturer, a suitably informed member of staff at the Approved Centre.

3.4 Plagiarism¹

Plagiarism is the representation of the words or ideas of another person or source as one's own in any academic exercise such as:

- borrowing material another person or source
- copying exactly word-for-word directly from a text or other source
- copying from a candidate in an exam
- copying from a tutor or a fellow Learner
- copying from your own notes that contain direct quotations
- copying or downloading without acknowledging your sources
- paraphrasing or translating the words from a text or other source too closely
- paying for assignments from other sources and submitting it as your own
- using text downloaded from the internet
- using text obtained from writing sites, organisations or private individuals

¹ Plagiarism here excludes auto plagiarism (the act or process of plagiarising one's own work)

To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or by appropriate indentation and must be properly cited in the text or in a footnote².

Acknowledgment is also required when material from another source stored in print, electronic, or other medium is paraphrased or summarised in whole or in part in one's own words.

There is a distinct difference between referencing, paraphrasing and quoting:

Referencing: The purpose of a reference is to enable the reader to find the original source and/or publication from which you based your form of words. A reference includes an in text citation to the source and following this the full details at the end of a written assignment, e.g., Darwin, C.

(1859) *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or, the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*. London: J. Murray.

Paraphrasing: This forms the most part assignment writing and will often consist of the work of other people and is therefore an important skill in academic writing. Paraphrasing an argument involves restating their findings in your own words and need to make clear that it is someone else's by mentioning the author's name, e.g., Darwin (1859) describes the theory of evolution by natural selection as the process by which organisms change over time as a result of changes in heritable physical or behavioural traits.

Quoting: If you want to quote an author directly then speech marks must be used e.g., Darwin (1978, p.62) states that "I have called this principle, by which each slight of variation, if useful, is preserved, by the term Natural Selection" and conclude with a reference.

Bibliography and reference lists

A reference list refers to works that have been used in the said piece of writing whereas a bibliography usually contains all the works cited in a paper as well as other works that the author consulted, even if they are not mentioned in the text.

What are citations?

Citations tell readers that a certain part of your written assignment comes from another source.

Citations should always include:-

- 1) the author's name
- 2) the title of the work from which you are sourcing
- 3) the details – including name and location – of the publishers
- 4) the date of publication
- 5) and the page numbers of the specific part of the source you are referencing

Citing in the text

In the text of your work you must cite the author or editor's name and date of publication each time you paraphrase or summarise from a source of information.

² <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/library/LibraryPublications/CribSheets/LibrarySeries/Harvard-Referencing-Short-Version.pdf>

When do I have to cite?

You have to cite your sources in a number of circumstances; when you are quoting or paraphrasing someone else, when someone else's ideas are central to your own argument and when you make a specific reference to another piece of work (even when you're not quoting them directly).

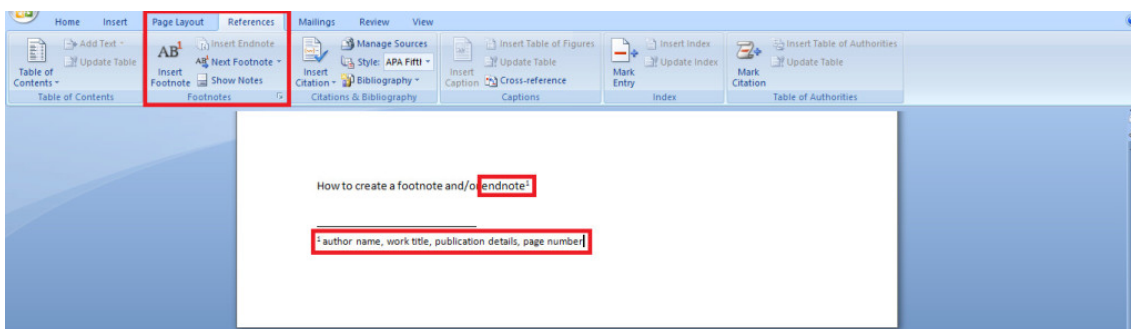
How do I cite?

Developing a clear and efficient citation system is very simple; but different tutors prefer different styles so it's important to double-check their preferred style if you're unsure.

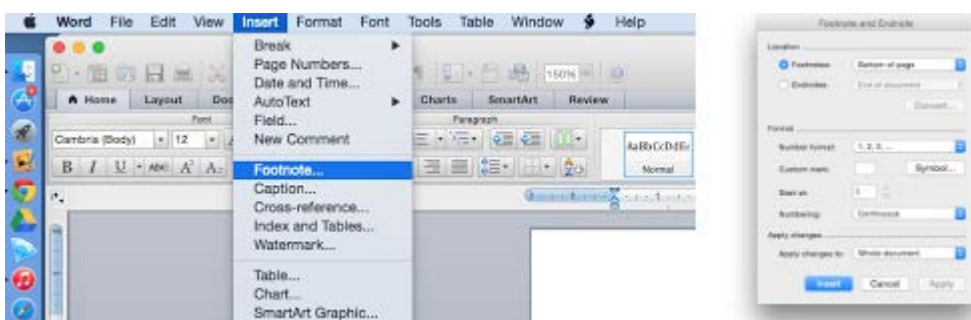
Citations come in three accepted forms:-

- 1) footnotes which come at the end of each page
- 2) endnotes which come at the end of the document
- 3) parenthetical notes which are bracketed at the end of the sentence in which you are referencing your source.

Both footnotes and endnotes can be found in Microsoft Word under 'References' and appear as below:



... and on an Apple device under 'Insert', 'Footnote':



Citing in the reference list or bibliography

Your references should be listed alphabetically by author's name. The following list shows some examples of sources you may use.

Book (Print)

Ten Have, S., Ten Have, W. and Stevens, F. (2003) *Key management models*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Johnson, G. and Scholes, K. (2002) *Exploring corporate strategy*. 6th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Book (Online)

Keenan, D. and Riches, S. (2007) *Business law*. [Online]

Harlow: Pearson Education. Available from: <http://lib.myilibrary.com/>. [Accessed 27 June 2009].

Edited book

Oldroyd, M. (ed.) (2004) *Developing academic library staff for future success*. London: Facet Publishing.

Book section or chapter

Town, J. S. (2003) Information literacy and the information society. In: Hornby, S. and Clarke, Z. (eds.) *Change and challenge: debates on the information society for the 21st Century*. London: Facet Publishing, pp. 83-103.

Journal article (Print)

Kennerley, M. and Neely, A. (2003) Measuring performance in a changing business environment. *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 23 (2), pp. 213-229.

Journal article (Electronic)

Moullin, M. (2004) Eight essentials of performance management. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*. [Online] 17 (3), pp. 110-112. Available from: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/>. [Accessed 2 March 2006].

Newspaper article (Print)

Campbell, D. (2009) Late cancer diagnosis kills 10,000 a year. *The Guardian*, 30 November, p. 1.

Newspaper article (Online)

Campbell, D. (2009) Late cancer diagnosis kills 10,000 a year. *The Guardian*. [Online] 30 November. Available from: <http://find.galegroup.com>. [Accessed 28 January 2010].

Webpage

Leggatt, R. (1992) *A history of photography from its beginnings till the 1920s*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/>. [Accessed 8 August 2003].

Cabinet Office. (2010) *Building Britain's recovery*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/>. [Accessed 8 January 2010].

Video clip online/YouTube

Library La Trobe University. (2010) *Why can't I just Google?* [Online video] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/>. [Accessed 3 December].

In summary How and when to use citations

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to credit your sources; and this is called citing, or referencing.

No matter which style of referencing you decide upon, the first citation of every source has to include the information outlined above (author's name, title, publication details, page number). Subsequent citations of a particular source in the same assignment can then usually – depending on your tutor's preference – be referred to in a reduced format; simply by listing the author's name and reference page number.

Bibliography

As well as referencing you must also include a bibliography. A bibliography is a complete list of all your sources (located on a separate page at the end of your document) that includes all of the same information as your footnotes, endnotes or parenthetical notes.

One more thing...

- When you are quoting a source directly, make sure it's word-for-word. Misquoting someone and then referencing them could land you in just as much trouble as plagiarising their work.
- If you follow these simple steps, then you'll make sure you never plagiarise, as well as increasing the quality of your work. Just remember to double-check with your tutor which style of citation they prefer.

4. The Revision Toolkit

Revision – it's a dirty word and probably one that no Learner wants to hear as the new year barely gets going, but actually, there's no better time to start thinking about what lies ahead and how to improve your revision techniques before the exam season.

We've all done revision badly – starting too late, not working in the best environment, being disorganised, not concentrating properly and, in the end, panicking.

So, how should it be done?

There are three essentials: Being organised, finding support and being imaginative.

4.1 Being Organised

First and foremost, find a good place to work. There's absolutely no point perching in front of the TV and watching your favourite soaps while you try to get to grips with the causes of the economic crash. Turn off your social media devices as well and find somewhere quiet, without distractions – anywhere that works well for you, whether it's your bedroom, the dining table or a library.

Have a plan, a written tick list or even better, a timetable, of what you need to do and by when. Keep to it and it should help you achieve goals and relieve anxiety.

Set targets but make sure they are realistic ones. Starting to revise at the eleventh hour will be counter-productive and come with large doses of anxiety. Ideally, revise throughout the year, making frequent brief notes, and use those notes to help with your revision nearer the exam dates.

4.2 Finding Support

Ask your tutors, family, friends and classmates to help you. Tutors are invaluable as they understand what you need to know and can guide you. Family and friends can also give you their time by testing you and asking questions. Perhaps one of the best ways to get support is to revise with your fellow Learners – testing each other, solving problems and gaining understanding together can be fun and productive.

4.3 Being Imaginative

Of course, you could simply read through your notes and text books again and again until you have learnt what you need to know, but that would be boring, disheartening and laborious. There are much better ways to revise; all you need is a little imagination.

Make question and answer cards.

- Draw mind maps. Sketches and diagrams can also help if you tend to learn visually.
- Look at past papers.
- Make summary notes.
- Use flashcards.
- Use mnemonics to jog your memory.

Get someone who knows nothing about your subject and explain it to them in your own words – a sure way of making certain that you understand what you're talking about. They are bound to ask you some awkward questions and if you can't answer them, you can go back to your notes to find out more.

Take regular breaks. Revising when you are tired is pointless so intervals are important. Watching your favourite TV programme or taking exercise can revitalise your mind and your body. These revision techniques are, of course, vitally important, but the golden rule must be to start revising in plenty of time so you don't end up panicking.

4.4. Memory Training

Maybe you can still recall, verbatim, long Shakespearean speeches learnt at school, but you can't remember where you put your mobile phone. Don't worry, lapses like this are not unusual. According to many experts, there are three types of memory – sensory, short-term and long-term. Sensory memory registers information, like where your mobile phone is, but only very briefly and the memory of it can decay in micro-seconds. If the initial piece of information is encoded by your brain, it will make it into the short-term memory. This has a limited capacity of about seven pieces of information (that's why it's hard to remember long phone numbers instantly or shopping lists). These memories are either dismissed or, if significant enough, moved into the long-term memory where they will be retained and become embedded though not necessarily retrievable.

Neuropsychologist, Dr Joanna Iddon, co-author of *Memory Boosters*, says of absent-mindedness: "In a recent study of healthy adults, the average number of memory slips, like putting the coffee jar in the fridge, was around six per week, irrespective of age, gender and intelligence," says Dr Iddon. "In fact, it was the younger, busier people that were the most absent-minded.

"Remembering is an active process and making the most of your memory involves paying better attention, planning and organising." We all know people who claim to have a

photographic memory, but there's no scientific proof that such memories exist, although there are undoubtedly people with phenomenal memories. However, most of us could improve our memories, so here are some tips and exercises:

Focus – If you want to remember something, it has to get beyond the sensory memory stage, so focus on what you're trying to remember and stop thinking about several other things at the same time. That way, you have a much better chance of remembering where you put your mobile phone because it has become a short-term memory.

Brain Health – Memories are made in our brains so improving brain health should have a positive impact on memory. Brain-stimulation activities – reading, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, for instance, are known to keep the brain sharp.

Use your senses – Touch, smell, sight, hearing and taste, all play a part in memory and can help a memory to be encoded.

Repeat information – As long as you don't try to cram too much into your head, repeating information over and over again can work well.

Bite-size information – Organise large pieces of information into chunks.

Mnemonics – These are useful tools for remembering. Make up a sentence with each word using the initial letters of the information you need to remember, whether it be the periodic table (yes, there's a mnemonic song to help you remember that!), Henry VIII's six wives (A big secret concealing her past – Aragon, Boleyn, Seymour, Cleves, Howard, Parr), or the planets (My very eager mother just served us nine pizzas – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto). You can make up your own.

Learn the way you want – Say it out loud, write it down, record it, sing it; whatever works for you.

Physical exercise – Studies have shown that aerobic exercise improves brain function and is particularly good at enhancing memory. Exercise is thought to encourage the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus – an area of the brain important in memory and learning.

Eat well – A diet low in red meat and dairy and high in omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish and nuts, can help memory. Eating chocolate can improve your memory, say Oxford University scientists, who tested 2,000 volunteers. A separate study at Northumbria University found people given large amounts of flavonols, a compound found in chocolate, found mental arithmetic much easier. Scientists have also found that adults who consumed dairy products at least five or six times a week did far better in memory tests compared with those who rarely ate or drank them. At the very least, drink regularly, preferably water.

Stop smoking – Researchers at Northumbria University found that when 69 Learners aged 18 to 25, were asked to memorise a list of tasks, those who had never smoked did best, remembering to complete 81% of the tasks. The smokers – on an average of 60 cigarettes a week – managed to get through only 59%.

Sleep – A lack of sleep boosts the formation of beta amyloid, the toxic protein that clogs up the brain, according to a study in the journal Science. “Disturbed sleep delays storage of memories and makes us forget sooner,” says Professor Chris Idzikowski, director of The Edinburgh Sleep Centre.

4.5. How to kick-start a successful study day

Starting your day right is vitally important to having a successful study session. Although it’s all too easy to start a day of revision or assignment writing by flicking through Facebook or scrolling down your Twitter feed, the first 10 minutes of your working day plays a big part in setting the tone for the day ahead.

According to Michael Kerr, author and business speaker, “creating consistent habits is largely what makes [people] successful. And a key time for habit-forming practices is at the start of the day.... It’s imperative that you start right, with a clean slate,” he says. Take time for quiet reflection and thoughtful planning. When you first sit down, resist the temptation to switch on your computer or laptop too quickly. Instead, take the time to consider your day ahead. Ask yourself what you want to achieve and how you’re going to achieve it.

“Successful people build in quiet time and solitude to do this first thing. They ask themselves: ‘What did I accomplish toward my goals so far this week — or last week?’,” says workplace expert Lynn Taylor. “Get yourself current on priorities and tasks. Go beyond just making a list, and challenge yourself to create a realistic hierarchy,” she adds. As well as prioritising your tasks, visualise what a successful day would look like. “This helps you to focus on the things that are truly important, and not simply urgent,” Kerr explains. “It can also help you see where potential challenges may lie, so you can make the necessary adjustments,” he adds.

Get comfortable

Although lying in bed with your laptop might seem like the most comfortable option, numerous studies suggest that sitting upright at a desk is the best way to avoid back pain and fidgety legs.

Ensuring your workspace is well-lit and at a comfortable temperature is also vital in maintaining concentration levels. Researchers at Cornell University found that when temperatures dropped from a comfortable 77 degrees to a chillier 68 degrees, typing output dropped by 46% and mistakes increased by a whopping 74%.

And, last but not least, make sure your workspace is a distraction free environment; turn your phone onto silent, switch-off the TV and clear away clutter. “Facing a clean or cleaner

slate on your desk and desktop will better clear your mind for the day's tasks," advises Taylor.

Think positive

"A great way that successful people start their day is to identify something they're grateful for," Taylor explains. "It's motivational and reminds them to put small things in perspective. "Once you've adopted the right mindset and routine for success, the rest of the day flows much more smoothly."

So, there you go. Follow these three simple steps and get your study session off on the right footing.

4.6 Why you should plan your down-time

It's the end of the week; you've been working yourself into the ground juggling class, revision and your life outside college. You just want to put your feet up when you're not studying; we get it. But, unfortunately, completely zoning-out just won't cut the mustard.

If you want to start the week refreshed and with a sense of achievement, then there are five things you need to do this weekend to ensure your time off does you good...

1) See loved ones

Spending time with family and friends is hugely important to emotional well-being; helping relieve stress and feelings of isolation that can accompany self-study. Organise an afternoon out with friends, or invite family over for food. After all, hanging out with those closest to you means you can unwind while still keeping busy.

2) Keep active

Whether it's playing sport, volunteering or learning a new skill, keeping active allows you to start the new week with a sense of achievement. We all know the benefits of exercise for well-being and physical health, but keeping active in other ways can also reap considerable rewards. Learning a new skill – perhaps a musical instrument, a new language, or a craft such as knitting – is great for brain performance; while helping others through charity work or volunteering is well-known to give a huge boost to emotional health – not to mention your CV.

3) Plan your downtime

To make sure you actually manage to see family and friends and get out and about in-between your course work, it's important to plan your time off. As well as organising two or three events and study-time, make sure you schedule in peaceful downtime, too; which leads us on to our next point...

4) Unplug

For at least two hours a day, be sure to switch off your mobile and computer. Doing so will give you a much needed break from the internet and studying, and allow you to unwind properly and enjoy those quiet moments all the more.

5) Get ready for the week ahead

During your time-off, consider what you'd like to achieve over the week ahead and write out your goals and a 'to do' list. As Laura Vanderkam, author of *What the Most Successful People Do on the Weekend*, says: "You need to hit Monday ready to go." "Saturday I take

off. I hike. And then Sunday is reflections, feedback, strategy and getting ready for the rest of the week,” explains Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey.

So, although you need to schedule in time to kick-back and relax, taking control of your downtime by organising a variety of activities and planning for the coming days will boost productivity and help you to start the week on the right footing.

4.7. The dangers of all-night study sessions

Study sessions that go on well into the evening, or through the night, are common fall-back options for Learners feeling the pressure of looming exams or deadlines. But they do much more harm than good. Here’s why...

Decreased productivity

Over the past century, there have been numerous studies that shine a spotlight on the relationship between long working hours and decreased productivity. Here’s a few examples...

During World War I, the Health of Munition Workers Committee discovered that labour output significantly decreased after 50 hours work a week. Similarly a 2013 study conducted by John Pencavel of Stanford University revealed that there was absolutely no productivity increase between a 55 and a 70 hour working week; rendering the extra 15 hours of work entirely pointless.

Although these studies were conducted on manual workers, the principal can also be applied to studying. And especially to Learners who are juggling their studies with family life or a job.

Fatigue and increased stress levels

And it’s not just a drop in productivity you need to consider; overworking can have significantly detrimental effects on other areas of your life...

Experts all agree that getting between seven and nine hours sleep every night is vitally important to mental and physical health; both in the short and long terms. If you regularly work late into the night you’re in danger of damaging your circadian rhythm (or sleeping cycle). Here’s why that’s a problem:

During sleep, memories are consolidated, which is why you’re able to recall information you learnt from the day before more clearly than if you’d only snatched a few hours kip. It’s because during sleep, the brain commits information from a place where memories are temporarily stored (the hippocampus) to the neocortex, where they become more permanent and much harder to overwrite.

Sleep deprivation makes it harder to concentrate. So, on top of finding it harder to recall facts and figures from yesterday’s revision, after pulling a late-night session, you’re less likely to be able to focus on today’s tasks.

The stress hormone cortisol is released in high quantities when the body is lacking in sleep, which can damage your ability to focus, as well as impair decision making and creativity.

“When you’re sleep deprived your ability to process new information drops, your ability to deal with distraction is impaired, and your short-term memory declines,” said Professor Michael Chee, director of the centre for cognitive neuroscience at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School in Singapore. “All the fundamental elements of having to process information rapidly are diminished.”

So, pulling an all-nighter is certainly not a good idea the night before an exam or deadline.

And it’s not just sleep that’s affected... long working hours can also damage social life, leading to increased stress levels and feelings of isolation.

4.8. How to avoid overworking

The most effective way to ensure you don’t overwork yourself – and damage your productivity and mental health in the process – is to create a comprehensive study/life timetable. Although we understand there are many Learners who have to work long hours due to other commitments, making sure you get between seven to nine hours rest per night, and scheduling in time for family, friends, exercise, hobbies and extra-curricular work – as well as study periods – is vital in maintaining healthy productivity levels and emotional wellbeing.

4.9 Maintaining a healthy study-life balance

Maintaining a steady and sustainable work-life balance can be especially hard for Learners, many of whom have to juggle academia with family life and social commitments, extra-curricular activities and a job. But a healthy equilibrium is vitally important not only for study success, but also for mental and physical health, too.

To help our Learners get a handle on their study-life balance, we’ve put together a list of top techniques...

Time management is perhaps the most important method to master in order to achieve a good study-life balance. It’s easy to get bogged down with stress, which can leave you entirely unproductive during working hours and preoccupied during your down-time, unable to relax. To avoid this toxic combination, create – and stick to – a schedule...

Draw-up a study programme that gives you plenty of time to complete assignments and revision; last minute cramming isn’t effective and will disrupt your daily rhythm, leading to soaring stress levels and damaging your sleep. Create a schedule built around regular hours and work towards achievable goals; doing so will give you the best chance of nurturing a successful balance and will give you a motivational boost each time you reach a milestone. It’s hugely important to include down-time in your schedule, too; if you don’t account for

relaxation time the chances are you'll work later into the evening, and miss-out on essential rest.

"Be serious about using these time blocks and seek support from your significant others to follow through," advises Todd Dewett, Management lecturer at Wright State University's Raj Soin College of Business.

As well as accounting for personal time in your schedule, create a dedicated study space to help draw a line between study-time and down-time. If you study in the same space you sleep, the chances are the lines will blur and both rest and work periods will merge, increasing the chance of them becoming ineffective. Reduce caffeine intake, too, to ensure you can unwind properly after your day's work.

Factor-in family time and extra-curricular activities during your off-duty periods, but be honest about your limitations and learn to say no; advises Ben Cober, a recent Indiana University and Bloomington Kelley School of Business MBA graduate. "Explaining why you can't do things... is OK, and appreciated if people understand why and ahead of time," he says.

And, last but not least, stay healthy by eating and sleeping well and exercising regularly. Like diet, sleep is also vitally important for brain-function and emotional well-being; establishing a regular sleep routine of between seven and nine hours per night is recommended by experts. Taking the time to exercise three or four times a week is also a beneficial way of spending your non-study time; as doing so decreases stress-levels and increases energy at the same time as improving your overall physical health.

If you strike the right balance between all of the above, then you'll be on the right track to maintaining a healthy study-life balance. However, if you still feel irritable, anxious or depressed after weaving these techniques into your routine, then seek help from your tutor.

Stress Busting Tips

Mindfulness courses have sprung up everywhere, books have been published, apps created, even the UK's National Health Service prescribes it.

The aim is to help people take better care of themselves and get more out of life by learning to handle stress brought on by challenging emotions, moods, relationships or physical feelings.

Although Mindfulness uses some meditation techniques, it differs from meditation in a number of ways. While similar in the early stages in that both encourage conscious breathing and allow thoughts to drift by, meditation is based on Buddhism, spiritualism, karma, yoga and a withdrawal from your thoughts and the world.

Mindfulness, on the other hand, especially when more advanced, encourages you to be mindful. In other words, to pay attention. Its roots are more related to psychology, it lacks the spirituality of meditation and teaches a focus on the investigation and acknowledgement of your thoughts. It is also much more flexible because meditation takes time and requires people to sit, often cross-legged, to do it, while Mindfulness can be made a part of daily life and relates more to our actions, thoughts and emotions.

So what exactly do the techniques of Mindfulness involve?

Stress tells us to watch out, keep on our guard and activates the part of our brains that can set off a rush of adrenaline and the 'fight or flight' response. The exercises used in Mindfulness aim to counteract these feelings. Focusing on breathing, concentrating on elements of the natural world, focused listening, immersing yourself in activities and appreciating the people and things around you, are all employed to block the over-thinking that we tend to do when we are anxious or stressed about something, in order to make way for more positive thoughts.

While this may all sound as clear as mud and rather nebulous to the sceptical or totally relaxed individual, studies have found that Mindfulness programmes, where participants learn techniques in daily life over the course of several weeks, or more formally in weekly classes, can bring about reductions in stress and improvements in mood. According to the Mental Health Foundation, the techniques used can result in increased activity in the area of the brain associated with positive emotion, the pre-frontal cortex, which is less active in those with depression.

Scores of studies have shown changes in brain wave activity during Mindfulness meditation and researchers have found that areas of the brain linked to emotional regulation are larger in people who have meditated regularly for five years. Evidence also shows that Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy can, on average, reduce the risk of recurrence of depression for people by 43%.

Mark Williams, professor of clinical psychology at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, said that mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment and that the methods used can be an antidote to the "tunnel vision" that can develop in our daily lives, especially when we are busy, stressed or tired. The techniques employed involve becoming more aware of the present moment by using one's senses as well as the thoughts and feelings that occur from one moment to the next.

"It's easy to stop noticing the world around us. It's also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living 'in our heads' – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour," Williams says. "An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment."

Although not miracle cures for anxiety, concentrating on sensations as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs, a door knob as we open a door, the sight of leaves on a tree or the details of a flower, can place people in the moment. “Awareness of this kind doesn’t start by trying to change or fix anything,” says Williams. “It’s about allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives.”

The stress relieving benefits of Mindfulness

If you ever feel unable to cope, your mind hi-jacked by recurring worries to the point where you can’t sleep, feel tired, anxious, irritable or depressed, you might well look for ways to alleviate your feelings, perhaps with social withdrawal, but there’s another way – Mindfulness.

Over the past couple of decades, more and more people have been turning to Mindfulness because of its tried and tested stress relief benefits which offer a way for people to take back control. The technique involves becoming aware of the present moment rather than dwelling in the past or fretting about the future. It generally involves a heightened awareness of sensory stimuli, such as noticing your breathing, feeling the sensations of your body, and being “in the now.”

It was defined in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts, as “paying attention, on purpose, moment by moment, without judging”. His stress-busting programmes were a blend of Buddhist meditation and science, but there was no religious component so it was accessible to anyone.

Decades of scientific research since those early days have demonstrated that Mindfulness-based stress reduction can positively, effectively, and often profoundly, reduce psychological distress and encourage more resilience and productivity. Great for all you busy Learners. Now the technique has moved into the mainstream and today, it is used in schools, hospitals, prisons, in government, by corporations like Google, and even Save the Children’s compound at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya has programmes running.

It differs from orthodox cognitive behaviour therapy by including meditation which, experts say, encourages areas of the brain linked to controlling emotion to become larger in people who have meditated regularly for five years.

During a Mindfulness course, techniques of relaxation, coming back to sensations in the body, to breathing and an awareness of unhelpful habitual thought patterns, are learned, so that instead of using the intellect, you can focus on your own body and listen to your intuition.

Focusing on breathing is key and has been described as a way to switch off the brooding process and treat thoughts and feelings as a temporary weather pattern in the mind.

If you can embrace and work on what Mindfulness has to offer, a more positive approach to life can be developed, where you are able to accept emotions and fears and able to stand back from difficulties rather than be submerged by them.

Some people also feel they have gained the ability to create space and calm in their lives and have learnt wiser ways to respond to challenging experiences. Confidence grows too and you can learn to enjoy fleeting moments of happiness, such as a beautiful view or an act of kindness.

4.10 Avoid Procrastination: the key to successful studying

Procrastination, or the action of delaying something, is a familiar beast to the majority of Learners; in fact, nearly 70% exhibited signs of postponing the hard-graft in a recent study conducted in North America.

We've all been there; a quick email check or glance at Facebook and *then* we'll get our head-down and begin our essay, we promise ourselves. But in reality that's much easier said than done, and 2 hours down the line we can end-up feel dejected and frustrated, and no closer to crossing the finish line.

To help, we've put together our top techniques to help you avoid procrastination.

1) Prioritise your studying

Human nature means we often opt to complete the easiest task first. The problem with this is that the harder or most daunting jobs are left to the last minute. To avoid this last-minute panic, create a to-do list, prioritising the most important or hardest tasks.

Overcoming these sooner rather than later relieves stress as the deadline looms and will give you a good dose of motivation and self-belief before embarking on your exam or essay submission.

2) Use dead-time to 'micro-study'

There are plenty of times throughout an average day when we find ourselves staring into space and whiling away the minutes; waiting for the bus, sitting on the train, waiting for your dinner to cook. Although these moments are brief and sporadic, they add-up; and using them for micro-studying can be positive on two counts. Firstly, these brief moments can be excellent for embedding small concepts or facts which can, in turn, give you a great motivational boost. This sense of achievement (however modest) can help inspire you to avoid procrastination during study time.

3) Make it as fun as possible

Let's face it, research, revision and essay writing will never be as fun as hanging out with your friends. But, it's unavoidable, so it's worth your while to make it as appealing as possible in order to evade procrastination. One of the best ways to jazz-up study time is to create a reward system. For instance, for every hour of uninterrupted work, give yourself a treat – this could be 10 minutes on Twitter, or reading a chapter of your book. Whatever takes your fancy! Creating such a system of self-study can encourage you to get your head down and crack on.

4) Break-down your study into chunks

Considering all of the studying you have to do en-masse can be incredibly daunting, and can create a sense of panic and impending doom that will only feed procrastination. To avoid this crippling situation, break your studying down into manageable chunks. For instance, if you have an enormous essay or dissertation to complete, separate it into different study sections: researching, writing the introduction, exploring the different topics involved, writing the conclusion and finally proof-reading. Create a tick-list with each 'chunk' and tick them off as you go; perhaps rewarding yourself as you go.

5) Remove distractions

Procrastination is fuelled by silly distractions; radio in the background, family buzzing around, friends gaming in the corner. To reduce the risk of getting drawn away from your books, remove yourself from as many distractions as you can. This could be turning-off the TV and shutting yourself away in your room, or perhaps even relocating to the library. Another effective way of reducing the risk of distraction is by downloading a site-blocking tool, such as Google Chrome's StayFocused. With such tools you can block yourself from visiting certain websites for a certain amount of time.

6) Live healthily

During stressful study periods, unhealthy habits can soar; you might find yourself consuming more junk food and energy drinks and sleeping and exercising less. Ironically, such periods are when you need to be at your most healthy to maintain energy and focus. Resist temptation; eat healthily, make sure you sleep 6-8 hours per night and schedule in regular daily exercise.

Dr. Piers Steel, author of *The Procrastination Equation* says that "aside from the cliché that Learners are more impulsive, in your early 20s you're still developing your pre-frontal cortex, home of the will power." It is no wonder, therefore, that Learners struggle with procrastination and reject pen and paper in favour of Facebook. Don't beat yourself up if this sounds familiar. But follow these six simple techniques and you should see your study-times become more successful.

5. Distance or classroom learning: what is best for you?

We know ourselves better than anyone else knows us, so making the decision to distance learn or classroom learn should be easy. Distance learning is education where the Learner learns remotely; it includes online learning, e-learning, home learning, and correspondence learning. Classroom learning is the traditional method of teaching in which Learners learn together in a class, with a teacher. Almost all of us will have experienced that format but before you make a decision for your higher education, do think about the pros and cons of each style of learning.

Distance Learning Advantages:

Cheaper, Convenient, Time efficient: Distance learning is a good option when you live a great distance from an appropriate college or university. Fewer costs, little or no travel, learning where you want to whether it's your bedroom, a library or a café, are all possible if you choose to distance learn.

Learning at your own pace: Learners learn at different speeds and distance learning allows you to spend time on aspects that you find tricky, and less on those you find easy.

Independence: Distance learning can offer more scope to go into more depth or go off at tangents on subjects you are particularly interested in. Choosing when you study instead of having to get to your college, gives you the opportunity to tailor your learning to your lifestyle. Sounds great, doesn't it? But there are what some Learners might see as disadvantages.

Distance Learning Disadvantages:

Solitary Learning: This is the most significant disadvantage of distance learning. With no teacher around, you're on your own – no-one to pose questions to, explain difficult concepts, put you on the right track.

Stunts Social Interaction: Solitary learning also limits who you are meeting on a day-to-day basis. In the classroom, you would interact with Learners from different backgrounds and learn about their cultures. Working on your own can mean that you don't have the opportunity to make new friends or develop your social skills. It can also inhibit a growth in confidence.

No monitoring: Evaluating your own progress is difficult. Without a teacher present giving you feedback or spontaneously testing, it can be tricky to know whether or not you're learning effectively. Still not sure? Then let's look at the upsides of classroom learning.

Classroom Learning Advantages:

You have a teacher: A teacher is a hard-to-beat aspect of classroom learning. A teacher guides Learners, helps them understand difficult concepts and helps them learn how to study efficiently.

Throwing ideas around: Being in a classroom with other Learners is a great way to get heads together in group study. Class discussion and helping each other is one of the best ways to learn and can be particularly appropriate when it comes to preparing for exams. Prepares you for the outside world: Often, class learning involves standing up in class and addressing your fellow Learners. The more you do this, the better and more confident you become and it will help once you start a career.

Mixing with Learners studying other subjects: Classroom education has the edge when it comes to interaction. Getting to know Learners on your particular course and those from different disciplines can help you understand better the direction in which you should go and, in the process, you will make new friends.

Healthy competition: Solitary learning can never provide you with the healthy competition you get in a classroom, with Learners pitting their wits against each other to strive and improve.

Classroom teaching sounds engaging and effective. However, there are some cautionary notes to be sounded...

Structured learning: Because of the group nature of classroom learning, it has a rather rigid study structure. Of course, how rigid depends on the teacher and how he/she works, but it can be a limiting factor.

Negative competition: Peer pressure is a significant and unavoidable aspect of classroom learning. Feeling pressure to be popular, wear the 'right' clothes or have fashionable hobbies, can all affect Learners deeply.

Inhibits imagination: At times the rigid structure of learning of classroom learning may limit the growth and scope of a Learner's creativity, independence of thought and innovation.

Cost: Classroom learning can be a lot more expensive than distance learning which has far fewer, if any, costs for course material, tuition fees, accommodation fees and commuting expenses.

If you're still unsure how to decide your best learning style, think about what kind of person you are. Are you independent, motivated, or with a preference for solitary study? Or do you have a liking for structured and supported education and being with like-minded people with whom you can bounce ideas around?

Maybe also your age is a factor. Young, straight-from-school Learners may be attracted to classroom learning, a tried and tested method for them and one that develops their social lives. Older people, on the other hand, perhaps with full-time jobs and busy lives away from education, may find distance learning enticingly convenient.

6. The pitfalls of skipping class

It's 7am, your alarm clock is buzzing and you know you should get up – now – if you want to make it to class on time. But the temptation of the 'snooze' button and your warm, comfy bed are too much to bare. Sound familiar? If so, you're not alone. Indulging in lie-ins at the expense of lectures and seminars is the scourge of many a Learner. But missing class can have devastating effects on your studies and it's important to nip any bad habits in the bud before they get too ingrained...

According to a recent Harvard study which analysed Tweets about attendance, 87% of Learners admitted to skipping class. And there are a number of reasons why: it could be good, old-fashioned laziness that keeps you behind; or dread at boredom in class; it could even be a sense of complacency (perhaps you think you know all there is to know about a specific topic already), or a confidence that you aren't going to write your assignment on this subject-strand, so don't need to bother going. But for some Learners, the reason behind skipping class is more sinister; for some, social anxiety, and perhaps even depression, can lead to worrying dips in attendance.

Although the reasons behind missing lectures and seminars can vary, the pitfalls remain the same...You could miss out on important information. It might sound obvious, but missing class means that you forego the opportunity to learn about certain things; things that might just crop-up in an exam, or could form an integral part of an assignment. By missing class, you are – in a sense – setting yourself up to fail.

Active learning helps to embed knowledge

One reason you might be keen to skip a specific class could be that you've already read-up on the topic at hand and therefore feel you would get no benefit from attending class. But the interactive nature of class is a great way of cementing your understanding. Seminars provide Learners with the

opportunity to discuss, debate and explore a subject in a way that just isn't possible during self-study. Your fellow Learners or tutor might address a misunderstanding of yours, illuminate knowledge gaps, or provide you with the opportunity of viewing something from a different perspective. All of which could be vital in maximising your success. In addition, the note-taking that forms such a key part of higher education can help embed knowledge as you listen to facts and reframe them in your own words. Lecture notes are also great for revision and could seriously help to improve your grades.

You could harm the relationship with your tutor

Although it might not be on your list of priorities, maintaining a good relationship with your tutors is key to making the most out of your course. Not only will they form a better opinion of you if you have positive attendance rates (which could be key for securing a good reference come graduation time), but you will feel more able to approach them if you ever need their support.

You could miss out on the opportunity of meeting new friends

Attending class is the best way of creating strong bonds with your classmates, who could provide you with excellent support throughout your studies and even beyond if you really click. By skipping class you starve yourself of the opportunity to nurture good relationships; which form a key part of emotional health.

So, next time you feel the urge to skip class, think again. The benefits of regular attendance are manifold and will all contribute to your overall success. If you are really struggling, then seek support from your classmates and tutor and take a look at our blog 'Studying with Depression' for more advice.

7. English: a global language

It is thought that about a quarter of the world's population of 7.4 billion (March 2016) can communicate – to a great or lesser extent – in English. It is now the third most spoken language in the world after Mandarin and Spanish, and in Asia alone, 350 million people speak English – more than the number of native speakers in the USA, Canada and the UK put together. So, how and why has this happened? And what does it mean for young professionals the world over?

In the Middle Ages, language was Latin dominated; in the 18th century, French ruled the roost, but when the British began to explore the world and colonise, they took with them their language to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, to India, Asia and Africa; in fact you could say, right around the world. As Britain's industrial, economic and political power and influence grew, so too did the English-speaking world and today, English is the global language of business, science, air traffic control, computers, international politics and diplomacy, academia and finance – and of the BBC Radio World Service and Hollywood.

Travel anywhere in the world and English is the language you will hear at hotel reception desks, in shops and restaurants and at tourist attractions, being spoken not just to native English speakers but to all foreigners, as a linguistic bridge of communication.

Teaching English as a foreign language is an expanding industry currently worth about £2 billion, while growing awareness of the huge advantage English-speaking countries have and the importance for young career-minded people around the world to gain a strong grasp of English, means that the momentum for it to embed itself as the official global language could well be irresistible.

A report from The British Council published in 2013 says:

“English changes lives. The impact of globalisation and economic development has made English the language of opportunity and a vital means of improving an individual’s prospects for well-paid employment.” Political and economic factors have been the main driving forces in spreading English around the world, but other factors may have been incidental in encouraging its growth.

There are 20 volumes of the revised OED (Oxford English Dictionary) containing 615,000 words, 200,000 of which are in common use. Thanks to this vast vocabulary, English has a richness and depth other languages lack. The grammar is also easier than other languages with no noun genders and no familiar and formal forms. Sentence construction is not totally rigid either and, although there are plenty of examples where logic seems to have been cast aside, still 84% of words conform to general patterns and rules.

Historically, English has also been highly absorbent, embracing words from Old Norse, Norman French, Arabic, Indian, Chinese, among other languages. This gives it a cosmopolitan flavour, while its cultural and class connotations have given it a legitimacy and importance.

With so many people from so many different countries learning and speaking the language, inevitably, there are different ‘Englishes’ emerging: Singlish in Singapore, Taglish in the Philippines, Pidgin English in parts of Asia, Spanglish in Mexico, and Globish, an international incarnation, to name a few, all of which are developing words, syntax, pronunciations and a character of their own.

As Salman Rushdie says in *Imaginary Homelands* (Granta Books 1992): “What seems to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language’s enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.”

As it spreads, that evolution will continue. -More and more, the changes will not be within the control of its native speakers but rather those across the world who speak English as a second language. In fifty years time, the various Englishes now developing could be having an impact on standard native English and it’s possible that, further into the future, the language as we know it will come to sound as unfamiliar as Old English sounds today...

Proper English Grammar – does it matter?

Are you a user of the grocer’s apostrophe, do you write ‘your’ when you mean ‘you’re’, ‘could of’ instead of ‘could have’, and do you construct entire emails without commas, full stops or capital letters?

If so, you may be damaging your career prospects. Criticism of literacy standards comes from educational bodies, literacy experts and business employers, who believe that bad grammar, spelling and punctuation, mean bad business.

Why? They believe that if you can't spell accurately, punctuate correctly or construct a sentence grammatically, if you can't communicate information effectively or produce business-like correspondence, you are not properly equipped with the skills required to be employable, particularly for post-graduate jobs. Bad grammar is either anathema or a matter of disinterest, so faux pas like the ones below may go unnoticed, or, they could make a boss weep:

The most frequently seen punctuation gaffe is the grocer's apostrophe which pops up routinely in bog-standard plurals – orange's, apple's, onion's etc, or 'pine range's, table set's, sofa's, bed's', and even, 'lot's more'. In 2014, Tesco, the supermarket giant, won The Idler Academy Bad Grammar Awards with the double superlative gem, 'most tastiest', when describing its own-brand orange juice, while a council road sign warning 'slow children crossing' left some drivers on the look-out for uncharacteristically slow-moving children and others looking for the much-needed comma.

There are plenty of people who don't mind these howlers; as Charlie Higson, comedian and author, says in *The Guardian* newspaper: "People all round the world, and for thousands upon thousands of years, have been using language to communicate perfectly well without needing to be told how to do it by a bunch of grammar Nazis who think that the way they talk and write is the correct, unchanging way."

Newspaper columnist and sketch writer for the *Daily Mail*, Quentin Letts, disagrees: "Grammar is the coat hanger on which language can hang. Grammar is not just about grammar: it is also about logic and intellectual rigour. We need those skills if our country is to compete with the likes of China, India, Russia and Brazil."

8. The importance of maths skills

It's likely that almost every mathematics teacher has, at some point, been asked by a frustrated Learner, 'what's the point in learning maths?'

More than any other, maths is a subject that baffles and dispirits, a marmite subject either loved or loathed, leaving adults who are marked by a lack of passion, little ability or bad teaching, insisting they don't need maths in their everyday lives anyway.

But does that add up? After all, maths is present in every aspect of our lives. If we look at nature, maths is there in its patterns and structures – the complex hives of bees, spiders' webs, the perfect symmetry of snowflakes. In everyday life, whether we are shopping, planning a holiday, applying for a mortgage or measuring up for new curtains, maths is there, and in our jobs, as mechanics or doctors, musicians or cooks, shopkeepers or architects, maths is there.

The ICM course list is full of courses which include modules on finance or accounting, obvious ones like project management, retail, purchasing and supply, business, and accountancy, but also less obviously maths-orientated careers such as maritime management and sports management.

More advanced maths, largely unseen and unappreciated by the vast majority of us, has many acknowledged, practical applications in areas such as, politics, engineering, computer science, statistics and data analysis, while for purists, maths is an awesome discipline in its own right, lauded by experts as challenging and beautiful – the queen of science.

Its importance in our lives should not, therefore, be underestimated. Try managing your personal finances, understanding health information or making sense of economic news or statistics without numeracy, and it would soon lead to chaos and bad decision-making. Without realising it, our decisions both inside and outside the home are often based on numerical information. Even something as simple as following a cake recipe or understanding your restaurant bill, requires numeracy, and so too does understanding the UK's deficit or global warming statistics. In short, to make the best cakes and the best decisions, we need to be numerate.

Even advanced maths which doesn't appear to have an obvious application is important, says Professor Sir Timothy Gowers, a Royal Society Research Professor at the Department of Pure Mathematics and Mathematical Statistics at Cambridge University. Using such knowledge in research may not yield any practical applications for years, he says, but still there is a value in maths research because advancing the subject has deep implications for human progress. However, says Gowers: "A typical mathematician does not actively try to be useful."

For him or her, the subject is enough as a mental exercise alone, a thing of beauty, interesting, enjoyable, challenging and satisfying. Its principles of pattern and structure, logic, deduction and calculation furnish it with the tools for understanding a whole host of fields and hold the key to developing careers for the future.

The capacity maths has to develop imagination, train in clear and logical thought, enable reasoning and problem solving and, at the same time, be creative and be an international language which transcends cultural boundaries, makes mathematics one of the most crucial disciplines on earth, making difficult things easy, explaining why things are as they are, and challenging research mathematicians to harvest the huge amounts of data that technology now enables them to accumulate and apply it in our technologically advanced world.

"A good way to look at mathematics as a whole, is that it is huge body of knowledge, a bit like an encyclopaedia but with an enormous number of cross-references," says Gowers.

9. Getting a Job

9.1. Employability skills

It's all very well having impressive qualifications but if you don't have employability skills, you will be letting yourself down. In a recent Confederation of British Industry (CBI) skills survey, 44% of employers said they were not satisfied with the levels of business and customer awareness among candidates. The CBI says the vast majority of graduates do have many of the capabilities employers need, but it's not universal and not everyone has enough.

Employability means a set of achievements and skills, understandings and personal attributes that make Learners more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

It goes without saying that young recruits looking for work should be producing sparkling CVs, excellent covering letters and developing a good interview style, but the Department of Education, Science and Training, in partnership with the BBC and Microsoft and reported in the *Financial Times*, points out a number of other areas that should not be neglected. These include written, verbal and communication skills, teamwork, commercial awareness, analytical skills, initiative and drive, time management, planning and organisation and flexibility.

What if you think you may lack some or all of these skills?

There are several ways to increase your attractiveness to potential employers. Here are a few:

Work shadowing: learning from others can be highly instructive.

- Working part-time or in your holidays: learning how to deal with customers, handle money and work under pressure will hold you in good stead for your future career.
- Using your course: analysis, verbal communication, numeracy, teamwork, IT and technical skills can all be honed while at college or university.
- Developing leadership skills: by heading up a club or society, leading a project, captaining a sport's team or being a mentor you will pick up the skills required to lead in your job.
- Improving writing and speaking skills: being at college should help these disciplines – writing dissertations and essays, debating, doing drama, contributing to seminars or giving presentations.
- Get better at working in a team and co-operating: Become involved in group projects, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, an orchestra or band.
- Planning and organisation: by working out a revision schedule, a course project, organising society or Learners' union activities will all help to improve your planning and organisational skills.
- Become commercially aware: this can be done by reading the business sections of newspapers, going on a business course, talking to businessmen etc.

These are just a few ideas. There are other skills it's a good idea to have such as self-motivation, flexibility, effective networking, good decision-making and the art of persuasion.

No-one can be talented at everything though, so concentrate on the key skills or the ones you feel may be most helpful to you in your future career.

9.2. How to make your CV look good

Research shows you've only got a matter of seconds to catch an employer's eye, so you have to make sure your CV looks neat, professional and attractive. Here's how...

According to the results of a study conducted by recruitment site TheLadders.com, your CV has – on average – just six seconds to impress an employer before they make the initial 'suitable/not suitable' decision. Which means it needs to make a positive visual impression; as well as conveying your relevant skills and experience quickly and clearly, of course – *if you haven't yet, take a look at our blog ['CV Advice: The Essentials'](#) for more information on how to do this.*

Layout

Unless you are applying for a design role (in which case a touch of creativity wouldn't go amiss), keeping your CV neat and consistent is vitally important...

- 1) Stick to portrait orientation: if you vary too much from accepted CV formats then it'll delay the recruiter's ability to analyse how suitable you are for the role. And considering you only have a few seconds to impress, this could be valuable time wasted. You want to stand-out, but for the right reasons; namely organisation and professionalism.
- 2) Make sure it's short and sweet: experts all agree that CVs should fit onto two A4 sides, at most. A recruiter's interests will wane if your CV is dauntingly long and the chances are you'll land in the wrong pile.
- 3) Ensure your page margins are all symmetrical: it's simple and easy to double-check your CV's margins, and it can significantly contribute to the document's tidiness.
- 4) Save your CV as a PDF file: formatting can get mixed-up across different platforms, so saving it as a PDF will ensure consistency.
- 5) Use a neat, professional typeface...

Choosing the right typeface

According to letterer and illustrator Jessica Hische "typefaces definitely have personality". And because CVs are all about personal branding, you need to choose one which reflects the person you're trying to convey to an employer; most probably professional, reliable and organised.

And according to a 2013 study conducted by the *New York Times* and film-maker and author Errol Morris, there's one font that takes the biscuit: Baskerville. Gathering 45,000 participants under the pretence that they were being tested to see if they were naturally optimistic or negative, Morris and his team asked readers which statement they found the most trustworthy. All the statements said the same thing, but were written in different fonts; Baskerville came out on top. Other serif typefaces, including Garamond and Cambria, are also recommended by recruitment experts, because, like Baskerville, they're associated with reliability and authority.

"Since a prospective employer is looking at the résumé for only [a few] seconds, you want [a font] that is aesthetically pleasing and grabs the employer's attention at a quick glance,"

said certified professional résumé writer and founder of The Writing Guru, Wendi Weiner. “The résumé should be sophisticated in design with clear headings that stand-out.”

Although the content of your CV is the document’s most important aspect, presenting it well is also vital to grabbing a recruiter’s attention initially.

9.3. Psychometric Testing: The new CV?

You’ve jumped all the hurdles and have a stack of written qualifications to show off to prospective employers, but companies have added another string to their bow in the recruitment process. Along with the traditional requirements of a CV, formal interview and references, they are now increasingly likely to be using psychometric testing to select new employees. Modern psychometric testing has its roots in the work of Sir Francis Galton (a cousin of Charles Darwin), James Cattell – who first coined the term, ‘mental test’ – and Alfred Binet – who introduced the first modern intelligence test.

From those early days and throughout the 20th century, psychological tests have evolved and grown in popularity and today, they are widely used, especially when recruiting graduates. A 2007 survey, reported in The Daily Telegraph, suggested that up to 70% of British organisations were using some form of psychometric assessment in their recruitment processes and it seems that for almost all types of jobs, at all levels, there is now a test that claims to predict who will make the best employee.

Psychometric tests are used to assess candidates’ strengths and to provide insights into their natural abilities. There are many different types aiming to shed light on your personality, aptitudes, reasoning powers and behavioural style – in short, to assess your suitability for the job for which you have applied.

Perhaps the most used test is the personality test. Expect questions such as; are you more inclined to experiment than to follow familiar approaches, are you more gentle than firm or more firm than gentle and do you value justice higher than mercy? Such questions seem nebulous, yet practitioners maintain that the answers can reveal truths about candidates, which traditional interviewing cannot.

Depending on the potential job, you might also have to complete several reasoning tests – maybe verbal, numerical or abstract, perhaps mechanical if you are applying for an engineering or technical post, and often situational judgment tests which can measure your suitability based on your responses to work-related situations.

As well as measuring intelligence, critical reasoning and personality, the tests can also indicate your motivation, values, priorities, opinions and, some claim, unearth hidden traits. It all seems a bit scary but taking psychometric tests is not like taking an exam as they tend to involve multi-choice questions with no right or wrong answers and at the end, you are simply given scores and categorised.

Given the shortcomings of other means of candidate assessment – the subjectivity and possible bias of a formal interview, the hard-to-verify sales patter of a CV, and the common belief that job references aren't worth the paper they're written on because data protection laws make it hard for employers to be honest – fans of psychometric testing point to the scientific credibility and objectivity it lends to the recruitment process, offering a fair and accurate way of assessing a candidate and eliminating those deemed to be unsuitable quickly and efficiently, thus cutting recruitment costs, in some cases, by 30-40%.

The cost benefit is valuable to companies in itself, but supporters of psychometric testing also believe the tests can weed out those candidates who are simply 'good in interviews' and give shy job seekers a chance to shine. Added to that, they say, the opportunity to compare candidates to each other and to an employer's expectations can act as a benchmark while, at the same time, gauging potential in a candidate, rather than other recruitment tools that tend to highlight already-stated skills.

Detractors, however, maintain that psychometric testing cannot guarantee a successful recruitment and that not all candidates are truthful when answering the questions. Worse still, they say that some tests may not be fit for purpose, because correct training has not been given or because they allow gender, age, race or mental health bias.

Whichever camp recruiters fall into, it must be said that psychometric testing is not a magic bullet. However, as one part of the recruitment process, it may have its place even if, at the end of all that testing, interviewing and paperwork, the hunt for the perfect employee still seems elusive.

9.4 The most difficult interview questions and how to answer them

A few years ago, Google became notorious for putting questions of extreme difficulty to job interviewees. After much criticism, these eye-watering posers were eventually abandoned but for the unfortunate people hoping to land a job with the corporation, the experience no doubt left scars.

Here are just a few of Google's little gems presumably crafted to bring out applicants' creativity, ingenuity, mental versatility and articulacy:

- How many piano tuners are there in the world?
- Describe the colour yellow to a blind person.
- How many golf balls fit into a school bus?
- How many times a day does a clock's hands overlap?

Don't worry, you're unlikely to be faced with questions like these at your job interviews, but don't be complacent either. Just because you're in the running, that coveted job isn't in the bag just yet.

Often, it's in the later interview stages when competition is stiffer and the stakes are higher, that the questions get harder, not as hard as Google questions but tricky nonetheless.

Here are ten of the knottiest questions you're likely to be asked:

What is your greatest weakness? This is a common late-stage question and it's not easy to answer well, but a word of advice, don't say, 'I don't have any weaknesses'. Everyone has weaknesses, so focus on turning any weaknesses you have into positives by saying something like you work too hard or you're a perfectionist. On the other hand, you could take a gamble and be honest because some interviewers aren't looking to trip you up, they simply want to find out whether you are self-aware and able to criticise yourself.

Can you tell me a little about yourself? That's an easy question, you think, but think again. You ought to avoid a detailed account of your passion for stamp collecting and you should resist a full no-holes-barred run-down of your education and previous jobs. Instead, try to base your answer on your achievements and the highlights of your life that may qualify you for the job.

Why are there gaps in your employment history? Any gaps, whether caused by unemployment or sabbaticals, are a negative to a potential employer so sound positive. Explain how your time not working allowed you to focus on discovering new skills. Maybe you took classes or volunteered, anything that suggests positive action. Avoid at all costs giving the interviewer the impression that you watched a lot of daytime TV or honed your computer game skills. If you were fired from a job, be honest and say what you learnt from your mistakes.

What salary do you deserve? Tricky, especially if you feel uncomfortable negotiating payment. Do some research online about what salaries similar jobs might command so you're not way off the mark.

Where do you see yourself in five years? Don't say, 'I have no idea'. Try to forge an answer that suggests you have ambition, goals and plans. An interviewer will pay real attention to your answer because he and she will know it's in a company's best interests to nurture these qualities and keep good people.

Why should I hire you? Prepare for this one and single out your past achievements so that you can show a good track record. The interviewer is trying to find out how ready you are for the job so highlight your abilities and accomplishments as they could be applied to the job itself. If you are over-qualified for the job, reassure the hirer that your high-level skills can be used in the job advertised.

What do you know about our company? Do your homework and write down a few key points to show that you're interested and well-informed. Look for newspaper articles which may help you size up the company's strategies, plans and values.

What would your worst enemy say about you? This question has everything to do with how you react to others and the way you feel that people perceive you. The interviewer

isn't interested in your worst enemy so there's no point trying to paint him or her in a bad light. Focus on making a positive from a negative.

What didn't you like about your last job/why are you leaving your current job? This is a tough one, but you need to be honest and positive. Whatever you do, don't knock your past employers. Instead, offer a response that shows you want new opportunities and explain why and how this role and company is a better fit than previous positions. The interviewer may be probing to find a weakness so suggest that you are hungry for more responsibility, didn't feel stretched enough or that you've gone as far as you can go in your current position.

Do you have any questions for us? Don't say, 'No'! Reinforce your interest in the job by asking the interviewer what they like about the company and the company culture. Ask questions about the department you would be working in, the team you'd work with, ask about new projects or products, the company's initiatives, new strategies etc.

Mostly, interviewers ask challenging questions in order to coax out of candidates aspects of their personalities that may be relevant to the job, how they perceive themselves, their communication skills and their potential value to the company, so planning well should mean you won't be stumped by tricky questions.

9.5 Questions to ask at the end of an interview

You've survived to the closing stage of that all-important interview and are feeling pretty good about yourself when the interviewer suddenly asks you if you've got any questions...

You weren't ready for that one and the ball unexpectedly landing in your court stops you in your tracks. The coveted job opportunity slips away from you, beads of cold sweat glisten on your forehead and your brain stops working. Nightmare!

But meltdown doesn't have to happen. Simply think ahead. Prepare a few questions before the interview and you will be ready to end the session with your composure intact.

Asking questions is an opportunity to find out more about the position you've applied for, to show your interest and drive and to demonstrate that you've done your research about the company, its history, aims, ambitions and the field in which it operates.

Avoid questions that only require a yes or no answer. Equally, it's a bad move to ask questions that are too complicated and could faze the interviewer.

Here are a few suggestions of useful questions to ask:

- 1) What's a typical day for someone in this position? This question gives you a chance to hear about the role and gain an insight into the qualities the successful candidate might need.
- 2) What's the biggest challenge/opportunity for the company/department at the moment? This might help you understand what to expect in the first months of your new job.

- 3) Can you tell me about the general culture of the company? This might help you decide whether you will fit in.
- 4) Are there training opportunities available? In other words, will I be able to advance within the company?
- 5) Similarly, are there promotion chances? Another signal that you're thinking about moving up within the company.
- 6) Why did you choose this company and what do you like about working here? This could be quite revealing.
- 7) Am I a good fit for the job? Ask this and you'll have an opportunity to describe your strengths and argue your case should the interviewer point out a couple of your weaknesses.
- 8) Why is the previous person leaving? This is a fair enough question to ask and if answered in a straight way, it could offer you some insight into a whole range of features of the position, and something about the company itself.
- 9) What do you think are the qualities needed to be successful in the role? Another question that should illicit information to help you decide if you're a good fit.
- 10) How do I compare to the perfect candidate? Again, this question will offer insights.
- 11) What is the time frame for making decisions about hiring a new employee?
- 12) What are the company's aims in the next few years? The answer to this could indicate how ambitious and forward-thinking the company is; you don't want to end up working for a deadbeat company.
- 13) Is there anyone else I will have the opportunity to meet before the end of the interview process? If so, you might have an opportunity to see the company and your role from a different angle.
- 14) Can I call you if any other questions occur to me?

Don't ask too many questions. You wouldn't want to irritate or overload the interviewer and most importantly, don't ask questions about the salary, holidays, perks, company cars etc at the interview. Those subjects can be broached later on.

9.6 How to deal with interview nerves

Do you get butterflies every time you think of your first job interview post-graduation? You're certainly not alone if so; according to a recent study by Harris Interactive and Everest College in America, job interviews make 92% of adults feel anxious.

"I think that nervousness prior to a job interview is caused mostly by the fact that there's so much at stake," explains Andy Teach, author of *From Graduation to Corporation*, and host of the YouTube channel FromGradToCorp. "Getting a job, especially one you really want, can certainly impact your self-worth and general happiness. It enables you to pay your bills, save money, have health insurance, and do something every day that you look forward to doing. It makes you feel like you are contributing to the greater good of the company; that you are a part of something bigger than yourself," he adds. In addition to the internal changes nerves can invoke (think racing heart, angsty thoughts and jelly legs), the pressure of an interview scenario can also make us act differently, and can even change our outward appearance. So, in order to ensure you make a winning impression on a

potential employer, it's important you keep a hold on those butterflies. Here are a few tips to help out...

Breathe deeply

Just as your heart rate increases when you feel a dose of anxiety, so too can the speed at which you speak. The problem with super-speedy-speech is two-fold. The first is technical; the faster you speak, the harder your listeners will have to concentrate – particularly if you end up stumbling over your words. The second sends out a clear-cut signal that you are nervous. Now, while everyone understands that all interviewees will feel jittery, it's also important that you project confidence and self-belief. To try and avoid whizzing through your words, pre-interview take a few minutes to breathe deeply and slowly; this should slow down your heart rate, which should – in turn – calm and slow you down generally.

When we're nervous, our bodies also release the hormone adrenalin, which increases our blood circulation and metabolism in a bid to ready our muscles for fight or flight; an evolutionary throw-back that helps us avoid danger. One side effect of increased adrenalin is shaky hands. And just like speedy talking, shaky hands are a tell-tale sign that you're nervous. And just like reducing speedy speech, deep breathing is the best way to calm those shakes. Try breathing in slowly for four seconds, holding for your seconds, and then breathing out for four seconds; a technique dubbed 'tactical breathing' and utilised by the military to preserve adrenalin and manage nerves.

Arrive early

Arriving early for an interview gives you time to prepare; figure out where you need to go, get accustomed to the environment, visit the toilet, and take those vital deep breaths! If you arrive with little time to spare you'll be flustered and more likely to project a nervy demeanour.

Do your homework

"My biggest piece of advice to Learners is always do your research," says Ashley Strausser, associate director of the Center for Career and Professional Development at Otterbein University.

"The best way to stay calm is to be very prepared in every way possible. The more time you spend preparing, the more confident you'll be. Research the company and the industry, write down the questions you have for the interviewer, practice answers to anticipated questions aloud – either by yourself or with a friend or family member who will give you honest feedback, and write down the three to five things you want the interviewer to know about you before the interview ends so you can tailor your answers appropriately."

While anxiety is entirely normal and can give job candidates a much needed energy boost, getting a grip of those jitters is key to projecting a confident and attractive persona. So, try these three simple techniques to help bust those interview nerves!

9.7 From Learner to employee

Going into the real world after graduation can be daunting. After several years of relative freedom, fun and, presumably, some work, you are finally ready to launch yourself into the job market and be a proper grown-up. The prospect can be enticing. Often though, comes a startling reality check as the implications of starting a career dawn on you.

Having lie-ins, being late for lectures or seminars, long summer breaks will all be a thing of the past. You may not even have appreciated those little luxuries at the time, but now, faced with the less forgiving environment of entering the working world – where being late will, in the end, get you fired, and as the new boy or girl, your holiday may be allocated to you in January – you look back on those happy days and mourn them. No, it's not quite as bad as that! But, the transition from Learner to employee can be a tricky one, so here are a few things to bear in mind.

- 1) Do some research well in advance of leaving college. Your institution and professional bodies can help you find a mentor, give you tips on networking, information on internships, or scholarship, research and job opportunities.
- 2) Use what you've learnt at college about managing your time to help you in your new job and to keep a balance between your job and your social life.
- 3) College is a rite of passage, a period in your life that you will always remember, probably with affection, for its freedoms and scope for making mistakes. At work, mistakes may not be viewed as sympathetically and missing deadlines – while you could get away with handing in an essay a few days late at college – will not be well received if done repeatedly.
- 4) You've done well at college and have a sheath of qualifications to prove it, but don't be cocky. In starting a new job, focus on what you can contribute rather than on how impressed your new employer is with you.
- 5) Finding a job isn't easy for most people. The harsh reality is that job-hunting is hard work, time-consuming and it can be disheartening. Many people will be chasing the same jobs as you, so get ahead by networking and learning how to be a good interviewee.
- 6) *"You want me to do what??"* Even if you have to make the coffee or run errands, don't turn up your nose at a lowly job. It's a start. Going in at the bottom gives you a chance to get to know the business. When you've landed your first job, it may have long hours, low pay and require hard work, but look upon it as a chance to prove yourself.
- 7) It's unlikely that you will be totally prepared for your day-to-day working life – working in a team may be a new experience, dealing with people and different personalities too, managing your own money or moving to an area where you know no-one, all these issues can unsettle you.
- 8) If you're lucky enough to be offered more than one job, you need to weigh up which one is for you. What matters to you? Is it the salary, the perks, the clear career path, the good working conditions, the holidays, the lovely boss? Choose wisely!
- 9) Smarten up! You're not a Learner any more so dress professionally, and don't spend the day on social media – many companies have tracking devices on company computers that monitor activity.

These are just some of the considerations when you leave college; there are many more – and there are many people who can help you make it easier than you might think, but at the end of the day, it's only a positive attitude that can make the transition painless and possibly even exciting as well. Good Luck!

9.8 Useful Number and Websites

The Guardian	www.guardian.co.uk/business
The Times	www.business.timesonline.co.uk
The Daily Telegraph	www.telegraph.co.uk/money
Business Week	www.businessweek.com
Bank of England	www.bankofengland.co.uk
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business
Business in the Community	www.bitc.org.uk
Federation of Small Businesses	www.fsb.org.uk
The Business Channel	www.thebusinesschannel.com
Dragons Den	www.bbc.co.uk/dragonden
British Franchise Association	http://www.thebfa.org/
Bized	http://www.bized.co.uk/
BBC Bitesize	www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/business/
Business Link	www.businesslink.gov.uk
Business Plans / Starting-up	http://www.uk250.co.uk/frame/5379/barclays.html
Enterprise and Entrepreneurs	http://www.ft.com/indepth/enterpriseweek
Federation of Small Businesses	http://www.fsb.org.uk/
Statistics	http://www.statistics.gov.uk/
Times 100	http://www.thetimes100.co.uk
Revision	http://rapidrevision.co.uk/business-studies-Learner/
Business studies online	www.businessstudiesonline.co.uk