

**TAFE
GIPPSLAND**

Study guide

Tips for effective
study skills

TAFE VICTORIA

Study Tips Guide

Introduction

When you study, you devote your time and attention to gaining knowledge and skills in a subject area. This often requires discipline where you need to do research, reading, identification of important information and note taking for the purpose of increasing your knowledge and skills in the topic.

By carefully examining a subject matter of a published report, online article, book, or journal, you are able to practically apply what you have understood during assessment effectively and perform certain tasks you have learnt.

Committing to study often occurs before employment or during a break from a person's usual work. With the right study tips and process however, you can juggle study loads and normal work and family routine.

Learning how to study effectively is an important skill. When it is difficult to balance commitments, students can feel stressed and worn out from their life, work and course requirements and often end up struggling with learning, begrudging assessments or ultimately dropping out of a course.

The purpose of this guide is to help you organise how you study best and study tips that you can use to be successful in the course you are undertaking. The following sections provide a general understanding on the processes involved in effective studying that you can apply; particularly in a vocational education environment where applying skills and performing tasks is as critical as knowledge of a subject area.



Effective study skills

Studying is a skill that you can acquire through proper discipline. Here are some practical study skills for success.

Time management

- › Schedule a certain time of the week devoted mainly for studying. Make sure that your space for studying is uncluttered and free from any distractions. You may choose a corner of your house or room mainly for this purpose.
- › Make a weekly list over the subject areas that you need to study. A planner or a calendar is helpful.
- › Prioritise subjects that are challenging for you and allocate more time on these.
- › Participate in a study group if this is available – other's viewpoints will give you a fresh perspective when studying. Plus studying with others can be motivating!

Plan ahead of time

- › Make a list of your priorities and when you draft your schedule, make sure not to draft it too tight! Make room for emergencies because you will never know when they might happen. At least you are prepared in case something happens.
- › Socialising is important but make sure to keep it minimal, especially if you have a tight schedule. You can meet your friends or do your not-so-important-activities after you have done your important tasks.

Find your Rhythm

- › It is important to find your rhythm when you study. You will also gain better focus if your body and mind are in unison. It would be hard to concentrate if your body keeps doing other activities (such as checking your mobile phone) as your mind tries to focus on studying.
- › Your body and mind should be doing things that can help you study better.

Practise healthy habits and lifestyle

- › You need to give your body the right sustenance it needs to stay fit and healthy. You need to rest when it is time to rest.
- › Don't stay up late! You need to be asleep at a reasonable time such as 10.30pm. As you sleep, your brain is busy converting all the information you gathered for the day into long term memory.

Reading and comprehension

- › **Skim** - Start by clarifying your purpose when reading material. This will 'set the tone' for your reading and comprehension. Skim the title, summary, and main points of the chapter. The headings and subheadings will highlight the key ideas in the text.
- › **Question** - You might devise questions as you progress through your reading based from the headings and subheadings. This will help you concentrate and test assumptions you might have of the topic.
- › **Read** - Budget your time over how many minutes you will devote for each chapter or section.
- › **Recite or visualise**. For some topics, these approaches are helpful for retention and memorisation. Take time off from reading and recite key points or ideas that you remember. For practical skills, visualise a person performing the task or job correctly – what is the person doing at each point to make sure the task is successfully completed?
- › **Review** - Read summary sections of the material where available or note your own summaries – these will be useful when reviewing the section in future for assessment.

Remember that reading and comprehension are two and different things. So is understanding and memorising. It is important that you comprehend what you have read and what you take as notes as this will be retained in the long run.

Note taking

- › When note taking, write down only the most important points or key words, and elaborate them in your own words. This aids in developing your understanding of the topic. However, be careful to retain technical words, jargon or acronyms as they are given.
- › Date all notes and use proper headings to assist in your review of the notes at a later date.
- › Never crowd your notes. Focus on keywords that are important. Unnecessary information will just confuse you.
- › Using different colours for note taking can help to retain the most important aspects of your notes.
- › Review notes within 24 hours of taking them – this will assist in your recall of the information in future.

Ask for help

If there is something that's bothering you or something is not clear to you, then it is fine to ask for help. You can ask your facilitator, friend, classmate, or family to help you out, especially if you can't find a clear answer from your book or the net.

Instead of wasting too much time trying to find the elusive answer to your questions; it is best to ask!

Preparation for assessments

- › Make sure you know what the requirements of the assessment are in advance, and also any options that might be available to you.
- › Identify areas of weakness in your skills or understanding so that you can devote your time more on subjects you are not familiar with.
- › Make flashcards of key information for every subject area of your notes.
- › It is not ideal to 'cram' before an assessment. The most effective approach is to review topics progressively until you have comprehended or memorised all key information.

The following sections provide further detail on key study strategies that might assist you.



Motivating yourself to study

Motivation is helpful for our daily lives to achieve positive results in any activity. This includes with studying.

A motivated student finds it easier to reach the extra mile and all the necessary steps that are needed to be successful. Greater motivation will assist you to learn and study more with focus and concentration. Procrastination is a number one enemy!

Here are some tips on how to study with motivation and beat procrastination.

Create a goal

Goals and objectives are very powerful motivation setters. These can either be short-term goals or long-term goals. They will keep you on track and stay positive to reach your goals.

Start studying now

This may sound cliché, but difficulty in studying has a lot of causes. These includes watching TV, social networking, being distracted by friends, and more. Stop wasting time!

Therefore, to start studying, is just to start studying itself. Boost yourself to get started, or you might force yourself to study for now and eventually learn the basics. It is all worth it!

A comfortable environment

This is vital. Even if you are well motivated, if you are in a crowded and noisy place, your concentration level will drop. It adds to your motivation when your environment is relaxed, quiet and conducive to study.

Reward yourself!

Celebrate when you achieve a goal or finish a difficult topic. Rewarding yourself for small achievements on an ongoing basis will assist with motivation and support your hard work.

Your enthusiasm will overcome the initial hindrance and obstacles to motivate yourself.



Managing study time

There are a number of different strategies that you can use to manage your time effectively and allocate study time.

It is useful to consider how you spend your time every day. You can jot down your activities and try to eliminate the things that you find unnecessary. You might find it challenging to manage study time at first until a routine is established

Prepare a schedule

Once you have your course schedule, you can prepare your overall weekly schedule to follow. When preparing a schedule, start with all your fixed commitments. From there, it is easier to consider study time and free time.

Your schedule might look like this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	
6am	Breakfast – Get ready							
7am	Exercise	Review	Exercise	Review	Exercise	Breakfast – Get ready		
8am	Review		Review		Review	Review	Work	Sport
9am	Class	Class	Work	Class	Study			
10am								
11am								
12pm	Lunch	Lunch	Class	Class	Class	Study		
1pm	Work							
2pm								
3pm								
4pm								
5pm	Dinner	Study	Study	Work	Free time	Free time		Free time
6pm								
7pm								
8pm								
9pm	Free time	Free time	Free time	Work	Free time	Free time	Free time	
10pm – 6am		Sleep						

While your schedule might look quite different, depending on your family commitments, work commitments, course study mode and personal preferences, the key is to ensure that your schedule is balanced, with study time and free time scheduled around your other key commitments at times that are conducive to successful study whilst also enjoying life!

You need to plot your course schedule first, and you can put your study time and other important things that you need to do in the blank blocks. Make sure you prioritise well when plotting your schedule, and don't forget to plot your breaks, including lunch and dinner!

Look for the ideal study spaces

In each location where you study – such as at home, work or at the course provider, look for the most ideal spot to study. This should be free from distraction. You also need to refrain from using your phone and other gadgets while you are in that area. Your goal is to maximise your concentration. It is also advisable to have a back-up space in case your ideal study space won't be able to serve its purpose at a certain time.

Review your notes and readings

Before the class or event starts, it is best to review your readings and your notes so you can ask your facilitator if something is unclear to you. This will also demonstrate that you are interested to learn more.

You also need to review your notes and materials soon after an event concludes. The first 24 hours of covering fresh information is critical – this is the time where information is held in your short term memory and further review is needed to assist in memorising the information for the longer term.

Do the most difficult task first

When studying, your mind works at its best if you are full of energy. Make it a point to do the most difficult task first when you still have ample amount of energy. You need to determine which

subject or task is most difficult for you and start with that subject first.

Use your free time wisely

You might need to devote your free time searching for other resources that can help you with your study. Don't make room for other activities, which are not important, until your work is done. Keep in mind that it is easier to enjoy fun moments if you don't need to worry about overdue course or study matters.

Conduct weekly reviews

Weekly reviews can help you remember and refresh the things that you have learned so you won't forget them. And it will also assist you monitor your own progress and keep you on track. It is important to determine the best time to do your weekly review, and learn to turn it into a useful habit.

Choose the best study time strategy that works for you. Remember that no two people are exactly alike. A certain study strategy might work for your friend, but not for you and vice versa. You need to find the best study time for yourself and stick to it.



Taking notes

Taking notes is a skill that must be learned by every student who wants to succeed. Writing down the important concepts will assist your learning. Taking your own notes forces you to listen closely during a class or event and also allows you to put the concepts in your own terms, which makes the subject area easier to understand.

There is no such thing as a right or wrong way when it comes to taking notes as you can develop your own style that you find most effective. However, adopting certain techniques will enhance your note taking skills, give you a sense of organisation, and improve your performance.

Here are some tips that will help you take down notes effectively.

Be a good listener

Listening intently throughout a class or event is the first key to taking effective notes. Give your full focus on the facilitator and try not to be distracted by other students or sounds you may hear. Make sure that your mobile phone is either in silent mode or turned off.

Focus on key points

There is no need for you to write down everything that is being said by a facilitator. Taking notes also requires good judgement as you should identify the important and relevant points that need to be written down. When your facilitator stresses a key point, it must be important so jot it down! It is also recommended that you pay close attention to any documents or charts that are presented. Any unfamiliar words or facts should also be jotted down on your notes so you can investigate these in your review.

Note taking methods

You have to develop a method of taking notes that fits your learning style and is most helpful to you. You may colour code your notes, using different coloured pens to identify important terms. Or you may find the use of flash cards more effective in memory recall. As facilitators tend to speak fast and keeping up is hard to do, you may use abbreviations when writing instead of trying to write the entire sentence.

Edit and organise your notes

Review your notes and make any modifications that you find necessary. It is ideal to do this within 24 hours of the event so that it is still fresh in your mind. As you take notes during an event, there can be a tendency for notes to be disorganised, especially when the facilitator changes or inserts a different topic and later goes back to the original discussion. It is helpful to rewrite your notes in a more organised manner.

Placing dates and chapter references on your notes will make it easier for you to look up relevant information later when you study.

And remember – if you take notes on your laptop or device, it is best to keep a backup file!

Thinking techniques

Logical thinking or sometimes called critical thinking is defined as the way in which you think, view, assess, and create a structure in order to deepen the comprehension and analysis of your study. A range of thinking techniques below may assist in your study.

Mnemonics

Mnemonics are used as a memory device that will help you recall the numerous pieces of information, as it requires to memorise lists, names, characteristics, parts of a process, stages and phases. This is used to increase recall. Some of the ways in which you could use mnemonics would be associating information with letters of the alphabet, music or names.

Analysing Skills

Some subjects need deeper analysis. There is a need to know how to analyse concepts and ideas before you can properly explain them.

Take the most important part of the subject and write your ideas on the right hand side of your notes. Next, draw relationships by placing arrows or lines on topics in which you think are related.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique to boost your mind's creativity. If you are using this for problem solving or for group work, all you have to do is to list down as many ideas as possible. There is no such thing as a right or wrong idea so go ahead and list everything.

Once all ideas have been noted, look for the most appropriate idea or common threads. This will assist to achieve the task or solve the problem.

Questioning Skills

Questions are great ways in which you can hone your thinking skills. It will also promote a spirit of questioning. You can prepare questions that you think will be asked, then provide your answers from your readings or notes.

Interpretation Skills

This is your ability to analyse and communicate what you have understood and feedback this to others. You use your readings, observations and inference skills to make a good interpretation of what you have studied, and explain your understandings to others. Ideally the people you select are aware of the topic and can discuss their understanding and views also to provide you with feedback.

Remember your thinking ability will be aided by sleep, exercise, a balanced diet, quiet music, water and most of all giving yourself rest periods so that your brain will be able to function well!

Assessments

Reports and projects

When preparing to complete a report or project, consider the scope and limitation of your work. Plan a working outline of information that will be included. This might include:

- › Title page, which would normally include the title, your name and date.
- › Acknowledgements when it is necessary.
- › Table of Contents, which are in numbered form that states the corresponding pages.
- › Introduction: The overview of your topic.
- › Main content: Where the sections of the report or project are completed.
- › Summary.
- › References would be the list of authors or sources you used.

Remember to write in a simple and clear form.

Questioning, quizzes, interviews or exams

Preparing for questioning assessments involves intellectual, emotional, and physical preparation.

Intellectual Preparation

- › Give yourself ample time for study. Don't resort to cramming at the last minute. Do your reading days ahead of the slated day of assessment. This will give you time to be familiar with the notes you are reading.
- › Ask what type of assessment you will be taking. Short answer questions, essay writing or other activities may require different study techniques.
- › Practise on old assessments if these are available. This is useful, most especially when you are familiar with the techniques used in the assessment and also reinforces the subject matter.
- › Organise your notes. This is when your note-taking papers are put to good use. Because you took down notes in your own words, it is easy to memorise them come examination time.

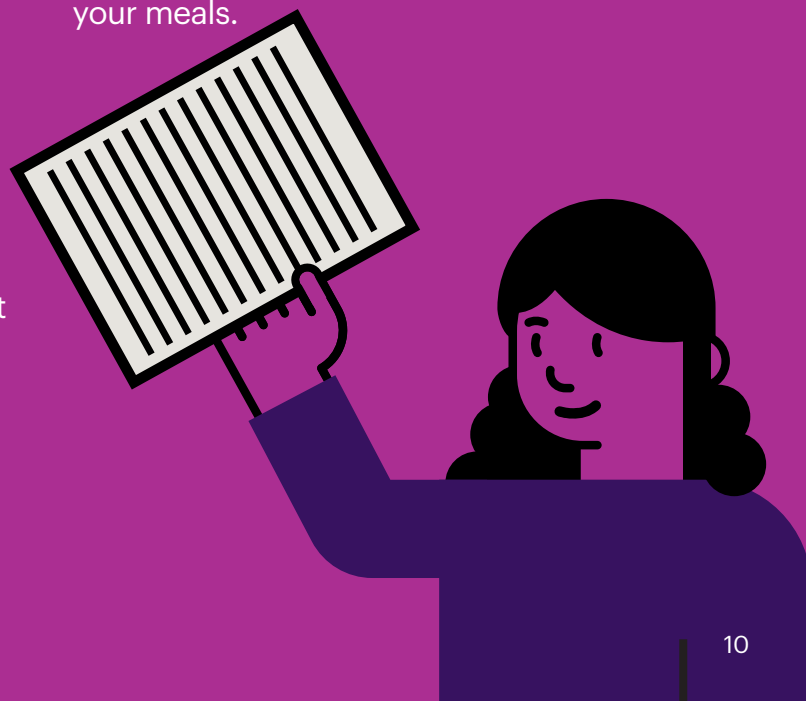
- › Use charts and diagrams. These will assist with your recall – particularly with more complex concepts.

Emotional Preparation

- › Listening to relaxing music will not only boost your mood, but it will encourage the cells of your brain to function well.
- › Plan your assessment day well. Make sure you have everything you need. Forgetting items you need may leave you worried and frazzled, which will not help you in gaining the momentum you need to answer questions.
- › Group reviews are a great way of bonding with your friends, but will also lift up your mood. It will also leave you more motivated to study because you will share the burden of studying with friends.
- › Have a positive attitude! Negativity will cloud your mind and your judgment.

Physical Preparation

- › There is no better preparation than a good night's sleep on the eve of your assessment. This will allow your brain to recover and the rest will assist your memory.
- › You might like to eat so called 'brain foods' such as nuts, fish, berries, yoghurt and choicest fruits.
- › Drink plenty of water and eat nutritious food before and during assessments. Never skip your meals.



Referencing

Referencing is an important part of any written assessment work you complete.

Referencing is a consistent method of acknowledging or citing another person's ideas, which you have used, in your own project or assessment.

Referencing has several important purposes:

- › To uphold intellectual honesty (avoiding plagiarism)
- › To attribute prior or unoriginal work and ideas to the correct persons or sources; and
- › To allow the reader of the assessment to determine independently whether the referenced information supports the position or argument put forward in the assessment.

There are generally two parts to referencing: the note within the text of your assessment where the information appears and within the reference list provided with your assessment.

For example, a common referencing approach is the 'author-date' system as outlined below.

Note in the text of the assignment consists of the author(s) name and year of publication given wholly or partly in round brackets. Generally you should see only the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication. Include page, chapter or section numbers, preceded by a comma, if you need to be specific.

For example: (House and Willis, 2006, 56 – 67).

The full details of the source information should then be provided in a reference list at the end of your assessment. The reference list contains all the information that someone would need to follow up your source.

For example:

House, J., and Willis, P. 2006. Management fundamentals: a practical guide. 3rd edition. Melbourne: Knowles Publishing.

This full referencing provides author names and publication details including year, title, edition, location and name of the publisher.

Plagiarism

Cheating is the act of attempting to circumvent the assessment practices in an unethical or illegal manner.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Plagiarism is the practice of claiming or implying original authorship of (or incorporating material from) someone else's written or creative work, in whole or in part, into one's own without adequate acknowledgement.

The following list outlines some of the activities considered plagiarism:

- › Presenting any work by another individual as one's own intentionally;
- › Handing in assessments markedly similar to or copied from another student;
- › Presenting the work of another individual or group as their own work; and
- › Handing in assessments without the adequate acknowledgement of sources used, including assessments taken totally or in part from the internet.

Cheating and plagiarism are serious acts and may result in a student being excluded from a unit, module or a course overall. Where a student has any doubts about including the work of other authors in their assessments, they should consult with their facilitator or assessor before handing in their assessment.

Success in online learning

There is a difference between online learning and the traditional learning format where students attend classes at an institution. With the virtual format of studying, you have the ability to study at your own time.

This flexibility has many advantages but, unfortunately, too much flexibility and freedom can also be the cause of failing to complete the course requirements on schedule. Taking a course online is not as easy as it sounds, especially if you do not know how to handle responsibilities or you lack self-discipline.

If you are interested in online learning or you are enrolled in an online course, following these tips can help you to be a successful online learner.

Establish a consistent study schedule

The lack of class schedules can always lead to procrastination. You may be tempted to delay your time for learning for another day that can negatively affect your studies. You have to create an effective working schedule for your online course and strictly adhere to it. Establishing a consistent study schedule is very important when you are taking online classes.

Communicate with your facilitator

It is important to communicate regularly with your facilitator and ask questions where certain topics are not clear to you. Usually, you can communicate by email or phone, through the

online learning system such as discussion forums or chat rooms, or through a web conferencing system. When asking a question, make it clear and concise so your facilitator understands your query.

Connect with fellow online students

Having a connection with your fellow online students can have many advantages. You can even form your own study group online. You might use social media such as Facebook or Google Hangouts to communicate with other students, or your provider might have other web based solutions to provide this service.



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