

A Quick Start Guide to Academic Study Skills

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ECEY 4008/C
1077

To introduce and develop an understanding of three key academic study skills, to use in your academic writing.

Time Management

Cottrell (2013) suggests that effective time management is an essential academic skill, one which allows students to prioritise, plan and execute academic tasks successfully. There is an emphasis on clarifying your study time requirements and being systematic in how you use your time to avoid distraction and procrastination. Colour coded checklists and 'to do' lists may also provide a helpful way forward. In addition, a more visual time circle may be helpful in providing an 'at a glance' picture of how time is being spent and how that time may be used more effectively to achieve the assignment goals.

University of Aberdeen (2023) identify the Pomodoro technique, first identified by Francesco Cirillo in the 1980's. This approach breaks study time into twenty-five-minute blocks. Step one is to decide on the task to be completed. Step two setting a timer for the twenty-five minutes. Step three working on the task, with step four ending work when the timer rings. Coursera (2023) emphasises efficiently and effectively planning your time to be the most productive. They stress learning how to prioritise and goal set, to sort out the immediate from the still important and lower priority tasks. With goals as helpful to measure sustained progress.

Note Taking

Research conducted by Imperial College London (2023) promotes a variety of note-taking techniques. From writing the date and name of the lecture, to using abbreviations and highlighting important points and direct quotations. The study highlights the importance of referencing and bibliographic details. Also stressing to only record the most important points and questions to prompt memory retention.

Mills (2019) presents the interesting concept of visual note taking, using the term Sketchnoting or visual communication. The learner makes a sketch of the information they are taking notes on, these can be as simple or complex as desired to aid visual learning for student who is more predisposed to better process visual information. Mills asserts that 65% of the population identify as visual learners. She also conveys that the visual and kinaesthetic engage more parts of the brain, so the information retention rate rises by up to six times.

McMillan and Weyers (2021) highlight the impossibility of writing down every word in a lecture or text and give suggestions as to how to structure notes. They suggest noting the introduction/title, the main points, with the supporting evidence/arguments, and also any counter arguments, with a logical conclusion drawing all the themes together.

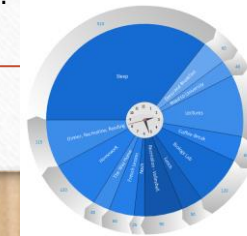
Critical Thinking Skills

Burns & Sinfield (2016) define critical thinking as follows:

"Critical thinking is the art of making clear, reasoned judgements based on interpreting, understanding, applying and synthesising evidence gathered from observation, reading and experimentation."

Similarly, Cohen (2015) identifies critical thinking as the development of a range of skills and understanding necessary to play with language and ideas in a sensitive and open-minded context, leading to creativity and insight, in addition to following a line of reasoning to a logical conclusion. Also encompassing skills, such as logical argument, reasoning by analogy and both puzzle and problem solving.

One element of critical thinking is purposeful thinking, drilling down to the purpose or *telos* (Greek for end or purpose) of a piece of writing. It asks the questions: what, where, when, who, why and how (in what style, with what bias) did they write it and what is the main point of the article. Hermida (2009) purports asking these questions can assist in furthering understanding of a text and help to clearly summarise its main argument. The difference between deep and surface reading is also discussed and concluded to be an essential critical thinking skill.



A time circle/pie chart, giving a visual snapshot, helpful in time management. (Source: Concept draw 2023)

In conclusion both time management and note taking are immensely helpful in your studies, however critical thinking is essential to academic success.

References

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