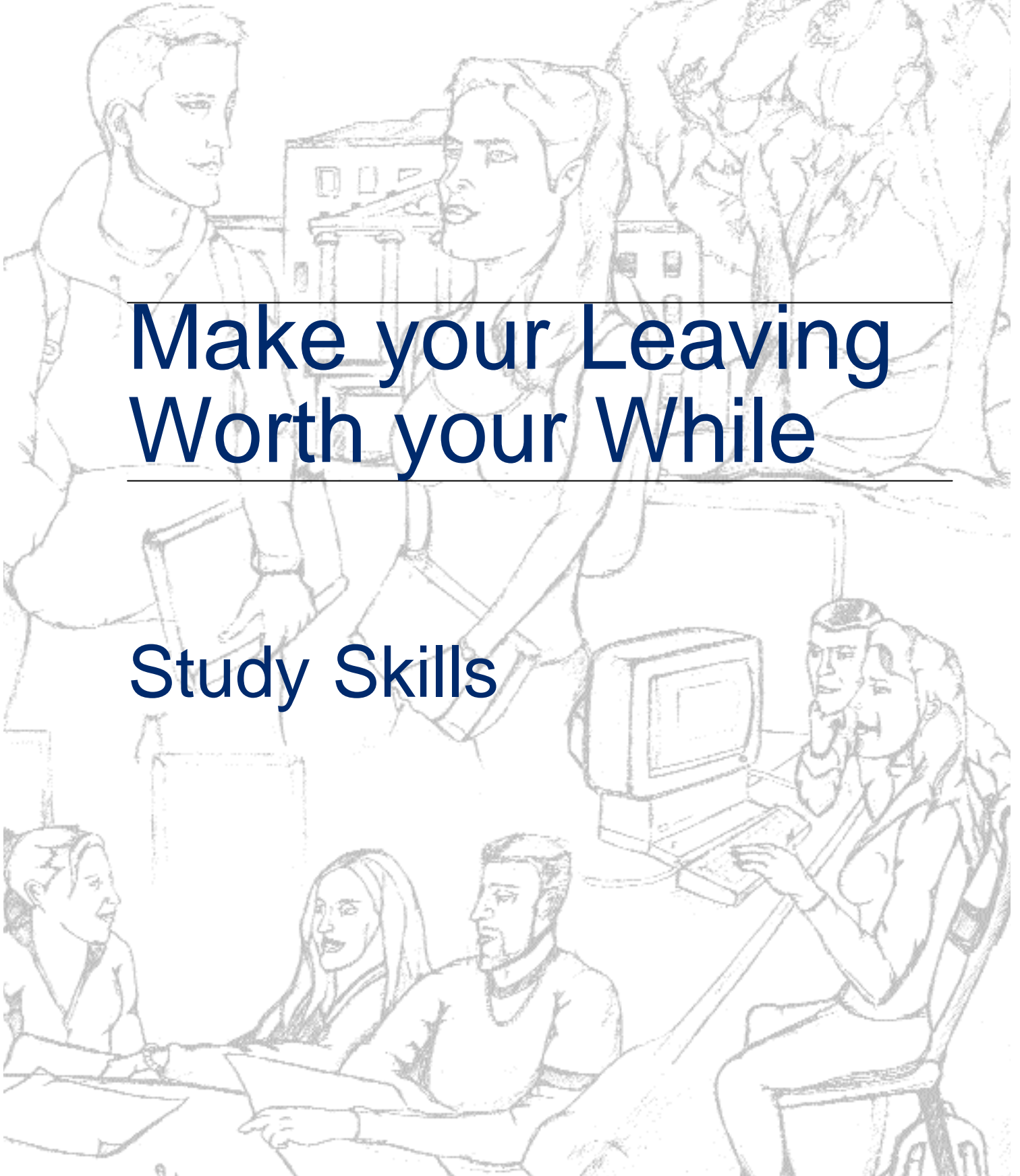




National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

Make your Leaving Worth your While

Study Skills



Using this guide

Although this booklet is written in a particular order, use it in the way that suits you best. You may decide to read it through from start to finish to see where you can make changes in your routines. Or you may use the contents page to go straight to a section which deals with something that you feel you need guidance about, or where you are “slacking off”. Do whatever works for you; but here are some suggestions.

The techniques and methods described in this booklet for improving your study skills are deliberately chosen so that they cover a wide variety of learning styles and preferences. By all means, adapt them to suit yourself: that is real learning!

To start you thinking about how to improve your study skills, it is a good idea to complete the self-rating Habits checklist first. This will highlight for you areas which you need to work on in order to make better use of your time in school. Be as honest as you can. No-one need see the checklist except yourself, and there is no point in fooling yourself!

I have also included a little about learning styles. People learn in different ways. If you know more about your particular learning style, you can choose study techniques that support this preference, which you will find in the various sections. You should also practise learning in a variety of ways and methods: the more versatile your learning capacity is, the better you will do all round.

There is very little, if anything, in this Study Skills booklet that is new or unique. It is a collection of techniques and ideas that have worked for other people. They will work for you too if you apply them. Check them out for yourself. Use those that do work for you, and ignore those that don't.

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Introduction to Study Skills

Why bother with Study Skills?

The run-up to the Leaving Certificate can be a stressful and difficult time, because so much depends on performing well in the examination. The Leaving Certificate is also probably the hardest examination you will ever do. Anything that will improve your ability to study well is worth considering.

Making study worth your while

You need to feel it is worth your while to invest the time, commitment, energy and application required to succeed in your studies. You need a clear purpose to keep your motivation and commitment high. You also need to learn how to use good organisational skills and effective study techniques. These will help you to:

- make more efficient use of your study time,
- make your learning easier and more effective,
- feel the work involved is worth the effort,
- increase your chances of doing well in examinations.

Turning your back on the past

You may think that it is too much of an uphill struggle to succeed. It may be that you have fallen into bad learning habits. Or you may have a negative attitude towards school in general, or towards a specific subject or teacher. Whatever the reason for any negative thinking and acting, put it behind you, and make up your mind to start afresh. **NOW. TODAY.** The past is past. What is not in the past is your ability to do something about your situation **NOW.** Focus on your present and your future, not your past.

Changing your future

You can change things so that you have more choice about your future. This may mean changing some or many of your old habits and attitudes in order to achieve your goals. If this is what it takes, then resolve to do it. Decide now what you want, and then put in place a plan of action that will help you to achieve your goals. It may not be easy all the time, but it is certainly possible. You are the one who is ultimately responsible for your achievements, and it will be your determination and hard work that sees you through.



Time Wasters & Distractions: A Quick Self-Check

Learning Objectives:

To examine your habits and routines to see where you change and/or improve your current learning behaviour.

Often, it is not your ability, but your habits and routines that stop you from achieving your learning goals. The simple remedy is to target those habits that stop you achieving, and replace them with ones that give you a good return.

To find out where your weak spots are, tick each answer that most applies to you from the three categories 'often', 'sometimes', or 'rarely':

- Not knowing where your books, notes, information and so on are. You left them in school/ at home/ your friend has them/ your locker key is lost / the dog ate them, and so on.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Having so much homework or "catching up" to do you don't know where to start so you give up!

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Finding it difficult to start you never seem to be "in the mood."

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Feeling too tired to concentrate, so you say to yourself you'll work better after a snack or after you watch yet another TV programme.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Day-dreaming or thinking of totally irrelevant matters when you should be studying, or regretting that you didn't study more last term /last year.

Often Sometimes Rarely



- Not working to a plan or timetable, and not having a specific goal or question when studying, just pretending to yourself that you are “studying”

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Difficulties finding resources, forgetting important textbooks, and putting things off.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Waiting until the last minute to begin, and depending on the adrenaline rush of the approaching deadline to produce anything.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Being a slave to the ‘telly’, DVD/play stations, mobile phones, chatting with friends.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Wishing you were hanging out with your friends (the ‘hards’) who aren’t studying, while you (the “fool”) are.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Spending hours reading or re-reading the same chapter over and over, yet nothing seems to “go in”.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Rushing your homework because you’ve left it until the last minute, and everything that could go wrong, did...

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Handing in work without checking it for basic errors in grammar, sentence construction, and spelling.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Forever promising yourself that you will start studying “for definite”...soon!

Often Sometimes Rarely



- Feeling you could have done much better in an exam /test if you had more time to study.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Achieving less than you should have because you were badly prepared.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Making notes that, when you read over them, make no sense whatsoever.

Often Sometimes Rarely

- Not following what the teacher said in class, mainly because you can't seem to focus in, or you find it all so boring.

Often Sometimes Rarely

Now add up your scores. If you marked “often” or “sometimes” a lot, you have probably just got into careless study habits. Or you may not have a clear purpose for studying.

The good news is, however, that with a little perseverance and determination you can change these bad habits. To make the change, you need a purpose however, and that purpose or goal is to achieve a particular level of success in the Leaving Certificate exams.

You must make a conscious decision to change the habits that stop you getting what you want, and deliberately change your routine so that you actively make room for your study.

You are the one in control of whether you succeed or not.

My advice to you is to use the booklet in the way that best suits you, not in any particular order. Use it to find information— search the table of contents to find where your questions or problem areas are dealt with— and use the tips and strategies to help you develop new routines and study habits.

Good luck (+ hard work)!



Learning Styles and Personalities

Learning Objectives:

To examine your learning preferences, and to see how you can change your learning methods and styles to improve your learning capabilities.

The traditional and somewhat narrow view of intelligence considered academic ability, or intelligence quotient (IQ), to be the main factor in determining who was “bright” or intelligent. More recently, this view has quite rightly been challenged, and it is now more commonly accepted that intelligence is in fact multi-faceted, and not a simply a matter of academic ability. There are different forms of intelligence e.g., physical, as in a top class football player, or an athlete. Just as top class athletes or footballers work to develop their abilities and skills, so you too can work to develop your learning capacity.

It is important to find out where your strengths and your weaknesses as a learner lie. You assess these, then look at ways of building on your strengths. You do not ignore your weaknesses, just minimise them. For example, if you are better at speaking or listening skills in language learning, then prepare yourself very thoroughly for the oral examination: you can pick up valuable points from this.

Depending on your learning style, you may find some methods of learning more difficult, or indeed deadly boring. It is up to you to change or adapt the material you are trying to learn to a preferred style or method, so that you find it easier to understand it. You can do this during homework, if necessary, and although you might find it time-consuming at first, it will help you in the long run. You will probably find that as your understanding grows, you will get better at understanding material, no matter what way it is presented.

Watch, too, how others learn, and as importantly, how they succeed, and what methods they use. Can you train yourself in any of the techniques that make them successful? Efficient learners use a variety of methods at different times to achieve their goals. Use every technique that makes your learning easier for you to understand and remember.

Never underestimate yourself or your abilities. It’s too limiting.

CHAPTER 1:

Your Passport to Success: The Leaving Certificate

Learning Objectives:

To find out for yourself what you want from the Leaving Certificate so that you can go on to get the job/apprenticeship/college or university course that you want.



What does success mean to you?

The next few months will be very important for you. The decisions you make now will affect what you are able to do later. You need to decide what success means to you. Only you yourself can decide this, not your parents, your teachers, your friends, or anyone else. It's your call.

What do you want to achieve from the Leaving Certificate?

You may want to go straight out to work when you finish school, apply for an apprenticeship, go for a trade or profession, or go on to 3rd level to get a diploma or degree.

Consider some of your options:

- Job (perhaps one with prospects)

- Apprenticeship/ Trade / Profession
- Post-Leaving Certificate Course (PLC)
- Course in an Institute of Technology
- University course
- Course at an Alternative Institute
- Something else?— your own specific choice

Making your own choices

Before you make your decision about what you will do after school, you need to do some self-analysis. You should have a clear idea of what you like to do, and what you do not like to do. To help you decide, you may need to do some research on what you would like, and what suits your talents and interests.

Here are some ideas for getting more information about the various options open to you:

- Get university/ college **prospectuses** (write off for them if necessary)
- Read up on **careers**, and find out about different **jobs**/ courses available
- Talk to your careers guidance teacher/ other teachers/ friends/ parents
- Fill out an online questionnaire which matches a person’s talents to particular jobs. For example, <http://www.careerdirections.ie>. or <http://www.careersworld.com>
- Follow through to choose a trade/career /work that suits you and that is based on your talents and interests.

Once you know what you would like to do, or the general area you are interested in, then work out what qualifications / course you need to obtain in order to get there. Find out what steps you need to take to achieve your goal. This is your strongest motivation. You are not studying because “someone out there” is pushing you. You have made the conscious decision to work for what you want to achieve, and this motivates you to work hard and achieve what you want.

Your Choice: Courses &



The Central Applications Office (CAO)

Learning Objectives:

To make sure you know exactly what course (courses) you want, and know what order you want to rank them in, before filling in the CAO form.

Which course and where?

Choose a course that you feel you would like. Don't choose it because someone said you should, or because it will get you a job. It should be something you feel you really want, and would enjoy doing for the next 2 – 4 years. If you fill in every available degree and certificate/diploma course choice “just in case”, you risk being offered something you (a) do not like, (b) know nothing about.

The consequences of taking a course that you know little about could be that you hate the course, because it doesn't suit you / it's boring/ it's not at all what you thought it would be. You then become unhappy and /or you drop out of college. Apart from feeling bad that you've let yourself and others down, you could also lose your entitlement to free fees and your grant (Higher Education Grant) if applicable.

So, when making your choice, think through all the possibilities:

What course do you really want?

Will you get the points? (be realistic, but do not undersell yourself).

What order will you put your other course choices in?

Do you want to live away from home, especially if the course you want is not offered locally?

How will you (or your parents) finance the cost of the course?

Are you entitled to a grant (the Higher Education Grant, available through the local County Council if your parents' combined income is within a certain limit)

Anything else that you might need to consider?

CAO deadline

Have your decision made before the CAO deadline (February 1st). if you leave it until the last minute, you might have other things on your mind such as exams (written and oral /aural), project work (if applicable) and so on. You may well make mistakes, or be influenced by others, and put down choices you really have no interest in.

Change of Mind form in July

If you do make a mistake on the CAO form, all is not lost. Remember that the CAO has a “change of mind” option towards the end of July, when you can revise your choices.

Score High: Work the Points System

Learning Objectives:

To help you to work out the number of points you will need in order to obtain the course you want.

A pass Leaving Certificate can mean 5 subjects at D3 level = 25 points.

Not so difficult to achieve, is it? A person could get a Pass Leaving Certificate by going to school regularly, paying attention in class, and being actively involved in learning. So if you find school subjects difficult, don't worry. If you make an effort, and pay attention in class, you will succeed. Keep up to date with your homework. Complete all homework as it is set. Include some revision throughout the year, and you can gain your Leaving Certificate with at least a pass in five subjects.

A.Q.A.

This means “All Qualified Applicants.” It may not seem important to you now, but it will be when you apply for a job or apprenticeship. Your prospective employer will more than likely expect that you have reached a Leaving Certificate standard of education, but she or he may not be so interested in the actual grades. Moreover, a Leaving Certificate opens up other possibilities for you, for example Post Leaving Certificate and FETAC 1 and 2 courses. These FETAC courses are now increasingly accepted as an alternative entrance route to 3rd level.

Grades and the points system

Grades, however, do matter if you are aiming for a 3rd level course. Generally, for entry to a 3rd level institution, you will need up to six Leaving Certificate subjects and a specific number of points, from 150 to 600+ (Architecture and some Fine Arts courses for example, give you additional credits for your portfolio). See below the chart of points needed for courses at different 3rd level institutions, (academic year 2003-4, subject to change*).

COURSE	INSTITUTION	POINTS*
Arts	NUI Galway	405
Commerce	NUI Galway	420
Veterinary	University College Dublin	550
Construction Management	GMIT	360
Information Technology	University of Limerick	340
Science	NUI Galway	320
General Nursing	Athlone Inst of Technology	370
Computing with Internet Dev.	Tralee Inst. of Technology	290
Hotel & Catering	GMIT	270

It is important not to aim too low or opt for the minimum points for any one course. The demand for any place can vary from one year to another, and the required points will reflect this variance. In the same way, do not opt for a course because it has low points for entry, but which would not suit or interest you.

Calculate Wisely: Points for the Course of Your Choice

Learning Objectives:

To calculate the minimum and maximum number of points you need to aim for in each subject for entry to the course you want.

- Check out the points required for the course(s) you want.
- Allow for changes next year. Add 20 extra to total points required.
- Divide the new total by 6. This is the minimum score you must aim for in each subject in order to qualify. But as all subjects differ, so will your marks, so aim to get much higher points than you need in your best / easier subjects. These can be offset against your weaker subjects, in case your grades are down.
- Check the points you are aiming for against the marks you achieved in your last in-house/mock examinations.

- Note the differences, and mark clearly where you need to improve your grades.

Table of Points

GRADE	HIGHER	
LOWER		
A1	100	60
A2	90	50
B1	85	45
B2	80	40
B3	75	35
C1	70	30
C2	65	25
C3	60	20
D1	55	15
D2	50	10

Fill in the LC Points Grid below (Using the table of points to calculate grades) to remind

1st Choice and Points Required:				
1st Choice Course	Hons/ ordin.	Points Needed	Mocks or in-house exams	What do you need to do? Any special requirements?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
TOTAL				



Alternatives: Other Course Options

2nd Choice and Points Required:				
1st Choice Course	Hons/ ordin.	Points Needed	Mocks or in-house exams	What do you need to do? Any special requirements?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
TOTAL				

3rd Choice and Points Required:				
1st Choice Course	Hons/ ordin.	Points Needed	Mocks or in-house exams	What do you need to do? Any special requirements?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
TOTAL				

4th Choice and Points Required:				
1st Choice Course	Hons/ ordin.	Points Needed	Mocks or in-house exams	What do you need to do? Any special requirements?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
TOTAL				

Chapter 2:

Achieve Your Goals: the Links between Positive Thinking & Success

Learning Objectives:

To show the links between positive thinking and success. To help you to develop a sense of purpose to keep up your positive attitude in striving for your long-term goals.



Getting Attitude: Studying for a Purpose

Success is not just about hard work. It is also about your attitude to your studies and your belief in your ability to succeed. Of course there is effort involved, but it is easier if you believe you can do it. Believing in yourself is the first step in helping you keep up your commitment and effort to be successful in your studies. Thinking positively will increase your confidence, make studying easier, and increase your chances of success.

This change in your attitude, where you take ownership of your learning, is important. You are not being pushed by anyone, you are studying for a specific purpose: to further your goals. This type of motivation (intrinsic motivation) will be one of the main factors of your continued success. Keep a reminder of your long-term goal where you see it, and especially in your study area:

My goal for the Leaving Cert:

- Believe in yourself, and your ability to achieve your goals.
- No one is forcing you to work. You are working to achieve your goals!
- Develop and sustain a positive attitude.
- Set yourself attainable goals: long-term, medium-term and short-term goals.
- Set yourself tasks that further these goals.
- You will see for yourself your progress, and this will increase your belief in yourself and in your ability to succeed.

Build on what you enjoy. Use rewards for working, particularly on subjects you don't like or which you find difficult.

Reward yourself when you attain your goals. Rewards provide you with regular and powerful feedback that you are being successful.

When you reward your successes, they multiply. Success brings more success. Your confidence and competence increase = increased performance.

The system is based on the principle that behaviour that is rewarded tends to be repeated and, over time, becomes rewarding in itself, and so more likely to be repeated. Today's small efforts will bring in the big prize at the end, and you will begin to enjoy being successful.

Set Yourself Up: Task Achievement Reward System

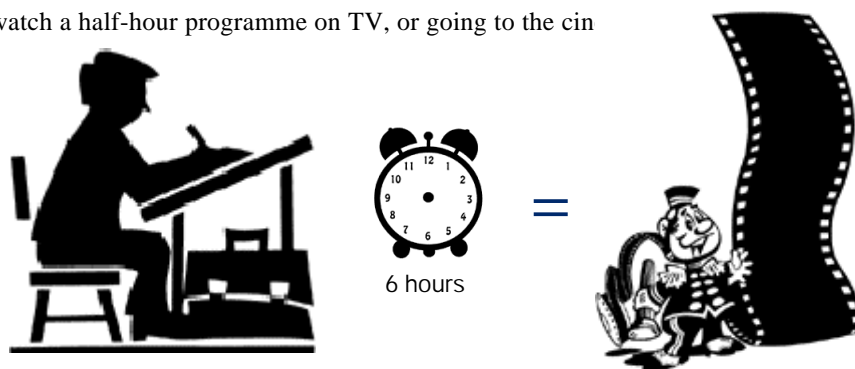
Learning Objectives:

To use task achievement reward system, where you set yourself definite tasks and targets, and reward your successes (achievements). To use this system in your goal-setting strategies.

When behaviour is followed by a reward, the behaviour (in this case, studying) is reinforced and so more likely to be repeated.

The important point is that the reward is something you want or enjoy, and that you get it when you complete an assignment, or a week's homework, and so on. The reward itself does not always have to be big. It can be as simple as having a mini-break, getting to

watch a half-hour programme on TV, or going to the cin



As you succeed in small tasks, you begin to enjoy the feeling of having achieved something. In effect, you train your brain! Practise this system regularly, and you will soon begin to notice the difference it makes— in both your attitude to learning, and your ability to learn and remember. Studying then becomes the norm and not the hated chore, and you begin to enjoy studying itself!

A cautionary tale or two

Beware, however! If you still get to watch your favourite television programme even though you haven't done the work you set yourself, you're only fooling yourself.

Remember the rule: no work - no reward.

If the goals you have set yourself are too difficult ("Learn everything now!") you may become disheartened and feel overwhelmed. If they are too easy, you do very little and fool yourself you are working. If it is too far way (next June is next year) you can leave it all until tomorrow. Set yourself goals that are attainable, that encourage you to keep on studying.

The Leaving Certificate is probably one of the hardest exams you will ever sit. Make it worth your while to get the best you can out of it! The following guidelines might help you, when you focus in on how to use them.

Long-term Goals: Your long-term goal is to achieve the results you want in Leaving Certificate (which is much closer than you think).

Medium-term Goals: Your medium-term goal may be to increase your study time, and improve your focus and concentration. You can set yourself targets round these by (a) increasing your total study time by 30 minutes (or even 15 minutes to start with) each week until Christmas or mid-term; whatever deadline you set for yourself. Or another medium-term goal might be to improve on specific grades in the Christmas examinations or "mocks".

Short-term Goals:

Your daily and weekly timetables keep you working, on target, and help you monitor your progress.

Year Planner: Put Your Long-term & Medium-term Goals into Action

Learning Objectives:

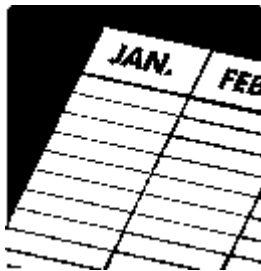
To use a year planner to give you an overview of the year ahead that will clearly show all deadlines, and that will give you focus and determination at different points along the way.

A year planner

Buy one in any stationery shop or bookshop. It is well worth the money. Pin it up in your study area. June might seem a long way off now, but when you break the school year down into terms, then weeks, your available time in real terms is probably less than half what you thought it was. It is a very useful visual reminder of the year ahead, and of how your time will get eaten into along the way.

Mark in important dates and events on the planner:

- Mock exams
- Aural & oral exams
- Deadlines for essays, projects, and assignments
- CAO deadline & other requirements



Block in school breaks:

Mid-terms in 1st and 2nd term
Christmas
Easter
Bank Holidays
In-service days, and so on

You will be surprised at how much time off you will have!

Mark in special days and celebrations— many of your friends (including yourself perhaps) will be 18 years old or thereabouts during the course of the year. Arrange to put in extra

study sessions ahead of time (not afterwards – life happens) and so feel extra good about taking time out to celebrate these important dates and events.

Mark in time you must spend on other commitments.

Medium-term goals

Write in revision topics at regular intervals and check these off as you complete them.

Note the jobs or chores you keep putting off, highlight them (if they have to be done) and make a definite plan to tackle them at a specific time.

Schedule in time off to relax and recoup your energies. Allow yourself this free time, but perhaps use it as a reward for work well done and goals achieved. This will double your fun and enjoyment.

The planner will help you to pace yourself and spur you on to work hard in the first term. It will also show your progress. This will give you a sense of achievement and keep your determination and motivation high.

Timetable: Put Your Short-Term

Learning Objectives:
To use task achievement reward system, where you set yourself definite tasks and targets, and reward your successes (achievements). To use this system in your goal-setting strategies.

Make a practical weekly timetable. Pin one copy on the wall of your study space and one in your notebook. A good timetable allows you to organise your time better, so you fit in more: more quality study time, more quality free time.

To make a realistic but workable timetable, use the following tips:

- **Keep the layout simple.** Make several blank copies so you can alter it weekly or as you need to. Your first effort might be over-ambitious, but you learn from your attempts what actually works. So every subsequent timetable should be more to the point, and help you achieve more.
- **Keep the timetable realistic but flexible.** There will be times when you will not be able to study as you planned. Be able fit in some extra study sessions if you have to.
- **Divide your time into: “Have to” and “Want to”.** You “have to” do certain things.

When they're done, you are free to do the things you "want to." Balance is the key.

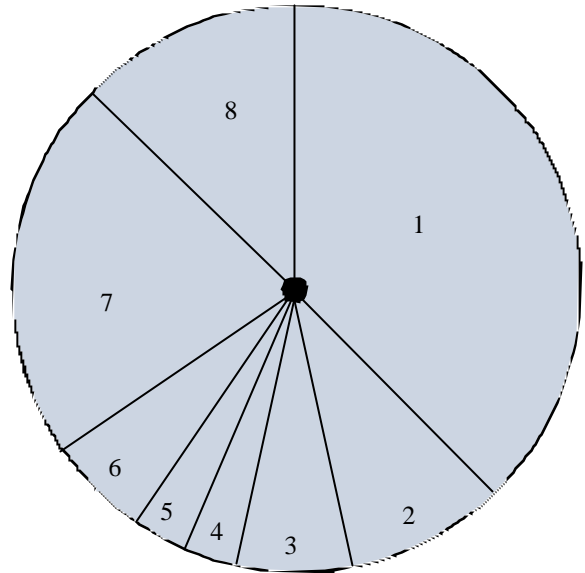
- **Assess how you use your time.** There are 7 days or 168 hours in a week. Average out the time you spend doing different things. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself. You might find you waste a lot of time (see sample diagram).
- **Sleep & rest.** You do need to take care of your mind, body and emotions. Different people have different sleep requirements. Aim for 7-10 hours' sleep every night. Aim to be neither a sleeping beauty nor a raving insomniac.
- **Exercise regularly.** This is not a luxury. Make sure you have adequate exercise without making it your sole purpose in life. The body and mind are inter-connected. Exercise clears the "academic fog", keeps you fit, helps you to relax, and increases your ability to focus and concentrate.
- **Try to eat a balanced diet.** A diet of pizzas, burgers, crisps, coke 'n chips will increase your chances of getting spots and a health problem. Try to vary your diet: good food will feed the brain; junk food will trash it!
- **Monitor your homework.** Work out how many hours you need to spend at homework on a daily or weekly basis. Tick work off as you complete it. Stay ahead of your deadlines, this will give you a real sense of doing well.

A:

	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							
12-1							
1-2							
2-3							
3-4							
4-5							
5-6							
6-7							
7-8							
8-9							
9-10							
10-11							
11-12							

B:

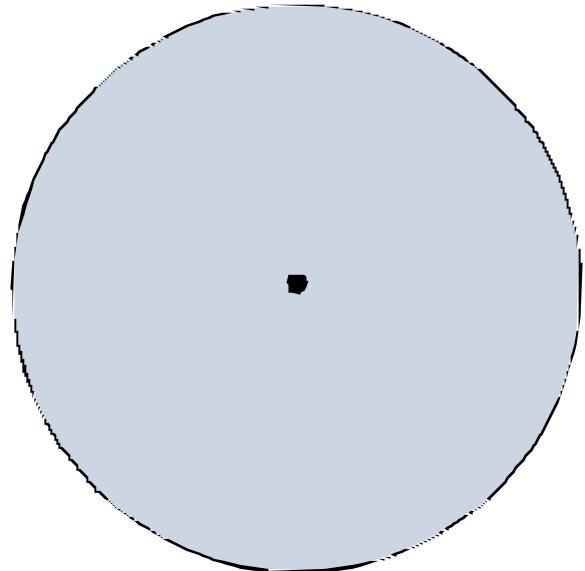
ACTIVITY	%	HOURS
1. Sleep	35.7%	60
2. p/t employment	8.9%	15
3. Socialising	5.9%	10
4. Sport/exercise	2.9%	5
5. Travel	2.9%	5
6. Meals & Maintenance	5.9%	10
7. School	20.8	35
8. Study	11.9%	20
Total: 94.9% = 95% (5% left)		
160 (8 + left)		



Start at 7.00 or 8.00a.m. and finish at 11.00 p.m. (Don't make the mistake of staying up all hours, and depriving your brain of much needed rest)

How to get there: Practice, practice, practice. You remember best by doing, not by watching, listening or reading, so do all you can.

ACTIVITY	%
1. Sleep	
2. p/t employment	
3. Socialising	
4. Sport/exercise	
5. Travel	
6. Meals & Maintenance	
7. School	
8. Study	
Total:	



Chapter 3:

Primal Spot: Find A Study Space

Learning Objectives:

To set up a study/learning space that allows you to concentrate and that also develops and maintains good study habits.

To help you get into the habit of studying, work out routines and strategies that make studying the norm. One way to do this is to have a regular place to study, and to have everything “to hand” so that settling down to study is easier.

Study room/ workspace

Find a workspace/room that you can always associate with study and homework. Keep the room airy but warm, and have good light to avoid eyestrain. Avoid using a family space (like the kitchen table) where you have to set up and clear away when others need it, as this will affect your ability and motivation to study.

Study hall in school

There are advantages to attending study after school. You usually have to turn up, so there is no excuse of sitting and watching the telly while you “get ready” to do your homework. If you organise yourself well, you can make excellent use of the three or so hours of study. But, wherever you choose to study, you have the same goal: to get the best out of each and every study session.

Shelves &

Have shelves if necessary



possibly get

Clutter-free desk

Keep your desk/workspace free of clutter, or you will spend your time tidying up and searching for things instead of actually studying.

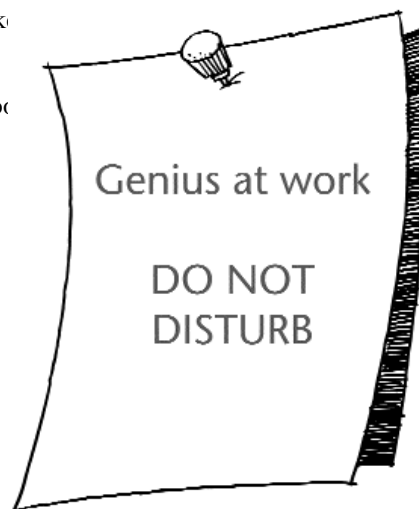
Year planner

Put your year planner up on the wall in front of you so that you can see it at all times. It is a reminder of what you have done, and what still has to be done.

Timetable

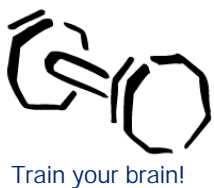
Keep a weekly timetable on the wall of your study space and maybe another one in your homework notebook to keep track of your time.

Put a note up on your door



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Learning Objectives:
To access information and resources that improve your ability to learn and achieve your goals.



You should take stock of all the resources you have available to help you achieve your goals, and then use them carefully for full effect. Here are some of the more obvious, and maybe not so obvious:

Your brain is the best resource you have. Develop it! Train it well, work it well, treat it well (rest and good food) and you will soon have a brain that is more efficient than you imagined. Like a muscle, the more you use it and exercise it, the more powerful it will get, and the easier it will be to achieve better marks.

School after age 16 is no longer compulsory. **You are attending school so that you will increase your chances of better employment**, and certainly to attain an improved lifestyle, not because you are forced to. So use your school resources and your time at school to help you achieve your goals.

Teachers do not get paid to see that you fail. Their job is to help you learn. Make use of their knowledge and experience to improve your understanding and knowledge. Where there is a personality clash (even if it's not your fault!), just keep your head down and aim for success in your exams: it is your future that is important here.

Books /Internet/ CD ROMs/ newspapers are all sources of information. Use them to increase your knowledge and understanding.

Syllabuses give you an overview of the whole course. Use them for revision, to check if you have covered crucial topics and texts, and for focusing on what you have to cover.

Group learning is a very useful and effective way of learning. For example, if each member takes an aspect of the learning task, researches it, makes detailed notes of all the important points, and then presents (“teaches”) it to the rest of the group, everybody gains. Keep the group small, and make sure all members of the group are committed and willing to work.

Past examination papers highlight the kinds of topics and questions that are usually asked in exam questions. The past papers will be very similar to the types of questions you will be set in the exam proper. Be careful if the syllabus changes, however. The best approach is to use the past exam papers in conjunction with teacher hints and advice. Don't take too many chances on leaving out course content, or learning too little— you can get caught out like this!

At the start of each paper it gives the format of the exam. Know the format of every exam before you go in, so there are no surprises.

Marking schemes for each subject (available on Department of Education and Science website) give a very detailed outline of the methods and strategies (criteria) used by the examiners when marking papers. They contain a lot of information, but it would be worthwhile to look at a few at least. They will give you a very good idea of what the examiners are looking for.

Videos, tapes, and films are great where plays, historical events, aural tests and so on are concerned. But again, watch for change of endings (in films), director's slant, and effects

that are definitely not in the original text.

Revision programmes in tape, book and CD form. Choose a revision programme that suits your style of learning. Look at what is available in the bookshops. Skim-read a few pages, to see how the content is organised, and if it makes sense to you and you find it easy to follow, then that is the real test of which one is the best buy. Only buy these programmes if you use them— you won't take in the information by having them on your bookshelf!

Paying for “grinds”, or more accurately, getting your parents to pay for extra tuition, is not always possible, and not always the answer either. Getting grinds is not a substitute for learning: you still have to do that. The main reason for grinds is where you are weak at a subject, or where you missed out on some essential basic knowledge. They are only useful if you put the work into them. They are not a cure-all for the lazy, so beware!

Careers service/ people in employment can be very helpful when you want to find out what your interests / capabilities are, and which career you might aim for. Try to find out what exactly is involved in studying a subject. Just because a television programme presents an occupation as glamorous and exciting does not mean that it is also this way. Most occupations have their share of hard work “behind the scenes”, and boring routine. So beware of false images.

Make it Work —

Learning Objectives:

O To put in place methods of making a study session workable.

Divide your study periods in terms of blocks or units (1 unit = half hour). Start small, especially if you have difficulties concentrating. You can always build up the time you spend studying once you have established the habit, and as your stamina increases.

Study for 25-30 minutes, then take a break, even for a few minutes, and then continue. This gives the brain a chance to rest and to make sense of or consolidate the learning.

Write in exactly which homework you have in each study time slot, not a vague “study”. Do homework on the night it is set (not the morning it is due). This approach helps you to remember, and you retain what you learned that day. Think of the 20/80 theory: you can lose up to 80% of your learning if you don't review it within 24 hours.

There is really no “best time” to study; it depends entirely on the individual. You might be

a morning person, or you might come alive later on at night. Work around what you like, and what is practical. Get up an hour earlier in the morning if it works best for you.

If you opt for evening study (or have to choose that time because it is the only time available) the general rule is to study early in the evening rather than late, because the brain gets sluggish and tired. Tiredness makes learning more difficult, and you retain less information for your time and energy— you are not getting “value for money”.

How many hours of study depends on the points you are aiming for. Your baseline might be to have definite homework/study times (2 – 3 hours minimum) for each day (except maybe Sunday). But the higher the points you aspire to, the more hours you must put in (15 – 25+ hours weekly).

Other commitments: Work your timetable round your other commitments, but make sure you give yourself enough study time for the points you want. (Nearer exam time you may want to include studying on a Sunday morning or afternoon).

Part-time work (for payment): Think carefully about your reasons for working. Obviously, if you need to work for essentials that is one thing, but if it is for style, music and socialising, ask yourself: exactly what are your priorities? It is very tiring trying to study for an important exam while you juggle work, school and study. Maybe you need to focus your energies on your studies.

Your choice. Your future.

Tip:

Include some revision slots during the week. This will keep retention high and give you a real sense of achievement, and you'll be doing revision and exam preparation all year.

Learning Objectives:
To use strategies and ‘warm-up’ techniques which help you to avoid distractions and ease your way into study sessions.

Strategies



Learn to identify your low energy periods!

Noise & other distractions: You may feel background music helps you to focus, and maybe it does. But remember the power of association: if you build up the habit of listening to music or other background noise to help you to concentrate, come exam time

you might not do as well without this “prompt”. So, beware!

Phone a friend: If you are always available to take calls, and you send and receive text messages during your study sessions, you will take longer to finish. Make an agreement with friends that texts /phone calls are for during breaks or at least not during certain times.

Make yourself start a study session when you’re supposed to. Even if you don’t want to, or don’t feel like it, the study routine will eventually become a habit and you will see the positive results of getting work done rather than having great intentions and little else.

Warm up as you would for any exercise. Start with reading over some old learning, then move into the new learning. Get an overview of what you are trying to learn. It will put the new learning in context and make it easier to understand. Question while you are learning. (What does this mean? What are the main points?) This active questioning helps you to remember and, added to good notes, will make your learning more effective.

Try different ways of learning for different subjects. Not all subjects can be or should be studied the same way. Skim or speed-read to get the general ideas first; you will find it easier to learn and remember the facts that support these ideas. When you can, use diagrams, charts, mind-maps, time-lines: anything that helps you understand and retain information more easily.

Learn in small chunks. This keeps the brain more active. If you are learning formulae/foreign verbs etc, learn them bit by bit, and check your knowledge of them often and regularly. This is a better way of learning than trying to remember huge chunks in one go.

Mix n’ match subjects while studying. Mix those you like / dislike / are neutral about with each other. Good practice is to start with a subject you like, follow with a neutral or a subject you dislike, and then one you like etc. You can start this out in small doses and increase the time you spend on a subject you dislike— it will get easier.

When writing up your homework, essay or project, break it down into stages (see writing section) to make it more manageable. This way, you can concentrate on one aspect rather than be overwhelmed by the whole task.

When you are learning formulae or theorems or indeed any information, try applying it rather than just trying to memorise it. Work out the solutions, don’t just read over them. Doing something makes it easier to remember and to retain it. It is also excellent exam preparation.

Summarise (write briefly in your own words) what you have learned in 2 – 3 sentences at the end of every study session. If the chapter or section is very difficult, summarise more often. This also is an excellent technique for helping memory and for later retrieval of information, especially in examinations.

Go back over what you have learned often and regularly. This way you will remember much more, and you won't have to revise as much when tests are due. Review within 24 hours, and thereafter regularly, to ensure learning is transferred into your long-term memory (LTM). This will make it easier to retrieve at examination times.

Use a homework notebook: Record all your homework in your notebook. This keeps you organised and you know what you have to do. Use the notebook to monitor your progress and evaluate how well you are doing.

Reward yourself: Have time off as a reward for Homework Well Done, not for NO Homework Done!

Monitor & evaluate your progress. This is a very important part of any learning. At intervals, you have to take stock and see what you are doing right, and (perhaps more importantly) what you could do better. Look at the ways you learn. Are you using every available resource for your different subjects? Can you improve on your learning techniques? Can you adapt effective techniques for subjects or areas you have difficulties in? With reflection and evaluation, you can keep your learning at high speed without too much effort.

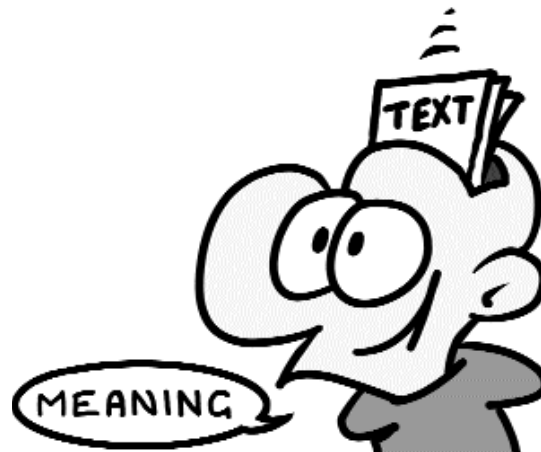


Chapter 4

R

Learning Objectives:

To use techniques to give your reading a specific purpose, and which help you to remember and retain the information more easily.



Reading for information

Reading is an active process in which you make meaning of what you read. All readers do this. Even young children (emergent readers) try to make sense of words they don't actually know. So your brain is already geared towards looking for something. Build on this natural advantage, and when you study a textbook, always have a purpose: to find information.

Reading will involve the amount you have to read, the level of difficulty or otherwise of the reading material or style in which it is written, and your ability to remember what you have read.

Reading that has a specific purpose or intention has a powerful effect on memory.

You remember more easily when you are actively looking for answers to specific questions or topics, and when you are interested in the material. Sounds simple? It is. Use the PQ3R technique (sometimes called the SQ3R) to improve your reading methods.

1. Preview or survey

This is rather like a trailer for a film or video. It gives you an overall sense of what you will be getting. When you approach a chapter or section in a textbook, skim or speed-read

to get a preview of what you will be studying. Look at any headings, diagrams or pictures that accompany the text, and examine the text layout. This prepares your brain for what you will be studying.

2. Question

Always have questions ready before you start. Use the questions set by the teacher. Alternatively, use those given at the end of the chapter or section. Or you can make them up yourself if you need to, and they can be as simple as:

What is the chapter or section about?

What are the main points? (usually 3 – 5)

What evidence is there to support (or oppose) these views?

3. Read

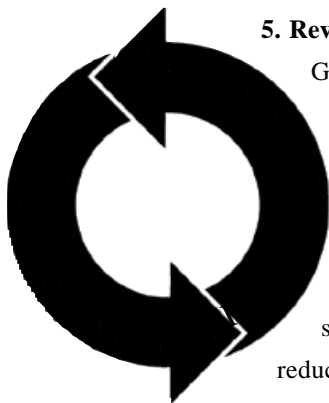
Read the chapter. If it is a new or difficult topic you might like to skim-read it first (read quickly or speed-read) to see how it answers your questions. You then re-read the passage and you focus in on details.

Try to find a “topic sentence” in the passage. This is the sentence that tells you what the main point of the section is. If you cannot find a clear “main point” sentence in the passage, write your own. When you come to a difficult passage, or when you don’t quite understand something, slow down, skip backwards and forwards to see if point becomes clearer or if it is explained at a later stage.

Re-read the material until you are sure you understand it, then write it in your own words, that is, summarise it. Note any difficult technical or obscure words or terminology. Look them up later if you can follow what is being said, or if you can’t, look them up look them up now.

4. Recall

Stop at different times during and at the end of the learning session. Check your understanding of the material by recalling what you have learned: go through the main ideas you have read so far. Do they make sense to you? Jot them down if you can; the effort will pay off. Glance over your notes or summary sheets. Add any ideas or facts you have left out, or any conclusions you can draw from your learning. Summarise again, in your own words, the main points of all you have learned in this session.



5. Review

Go over your notes within 24 hours, and perhaps a week later also, and regularly during the course of the term/year. This might seem excessive, but if you do not review newly-learned material within a certain time you can forget up to 80% of what you learned in the first place. Make up a topic sentence(s) to summarise your summary. This is a sort of “super shorthand”, or like texting somebody. You reduce all you’ve learned to the smallest possible number of sentences without distorting the meaning. These “text” sentences help

you to recall information more speedily, especially under exam conditions.

Skimming (speed-reading) technique

This is where you surface-read very quickly to get the “gist” of a topic or an overview of the chapter/ story/ instructions / experiment /other. This is usually a preliminary read, to be followed by a close reading for detailed information.

Scanning techniques

Where you are looking for specific answers to information, use the technique of scanning. Because you know exactly what questions you want answered, you speed-read and your eyes scan over the words/pages very quickly until they find what they are looking for. Then, rather like in a radar signal, the brain is alerted and focuses in on the details you require.

Problems with highlighting or underlining

It can be very useful to highlight or underline important points in your textbooks, but it is not an alternative to note taking. Also, if you re-read the text, other “new” points stand out, so you underline them, and end up with a section totally underlined, but still no notes! So, if you underline, use it as a reminder of where you want to make notes.

Transcribing or copying chunks of information

Be very careful too about simply copying chunks from textbooks. This wastes time and effort. It won't improve your handwriting, and it won't do much for your learning either. In fact, it has very little learning value.

Shorten Work:

Summarising and Taking Notes

Learning Objectives:
To summarise and make notes of the information you read so that it is easier to process in your brain because you understand it better, and you retain and remember what you learn for longer.

Summarising

Summarising is the technique where you reduce or condense large blocks of information into fewer words and easy –to-read (and learn) chunks, while still keeping the original meaning. It is an excellent learning technique for many reasons.

- You will understand new information better and for much longer when you have to think critically about the meaning.
- It helps you focus, because you pick out key facts, information and ideas that are relevant to your questions.
- You get rid of any information that is not needed or that is irrelevant to the questions you are asking.
- You link new information with what you already know. This helps you to understand the new information and fit it into your existing “store” of knowledge.

Summarising is excellent preparation for examinations, where timing and quick recall of information are very important, as you have a readymade outline plan for exam questions. This makes it easier to bring to mind key points than if you’d tried to memorise the information straight from the book.

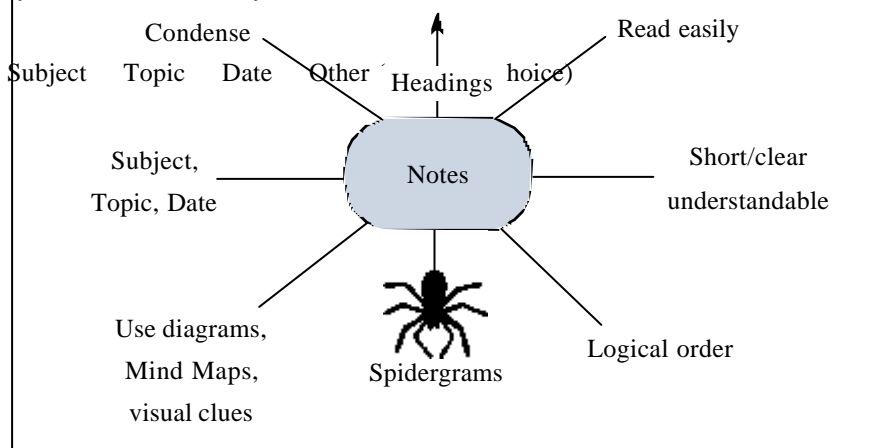
Note-taking strategies

Notes should always be short, clear, understandable, and in logical order.

You are not re-writing the text, you are condensing or reducing the information so that you have the “bones” of the text. The key to good note-taking is to use as few words as possible.

Margins, white space & ease of reading: When taking notes, leave wide margins, and room for added ideas. You should be able to read the information easily and accurately. Use a double page of your copybook, one side for diagrams, mind-maps or visual cues, the other for linear written notes. Use flow-charts, charts, diagrams, spider-grams, abbreviations, or a combination of these - anything that works. Find what style suits you.

Organising and filing (storing) notes: It is pointless having brilliant notes and never being able to find them when you need them. Put the date on each set of notes, and file them in order under headings. This way, you will be able to look them up quickly and revise the knowledge, whether in two weeks’ time or two days before the examination. Use a system like this to file your notes: Flow charts



Different Strokes:

Strategies for Different Learning Styles

Learning Objectives:

To use learning techniques that involve a multi-sensory approach to help make the information easier to understand and remember.

Where possible, use a mixture of learning styles and methods that include oral (speech), aural (listening), visual (seeing), and kinesthetic (doing), techniques to help you take in, understand, and remember information. This will make your learning stand out and will improve your ability to take in information.

MATHEMATICS involves working out examples or working through problems. This is excellent practice, because it requires you to apply the theory to an actual situation. If you don't fully understand the problem, look up an example, check with a friend, or ask your teacher for help.

HISTORY AND SIMILAR TOPICS/SUBJECTS: When presented with facts, dates, events and incidents in History, you might use a time-line across the middle of the page, and fit all the information on either side of this line, to show connections, influences, causes and consequences. This visual map of events and dates can make more sense than blocks of writing.

STUDYING A PLAY OR A NOVEL: Watching a performance is an excellent way of getting to grips with the plot, themes and events as they unfold (allow for director bias). A follow-up activity (or an alternative) could be to listen to the play (or important parts) at the same time as you follow the text when you are studying the play, especially when the language is unfamiliar, as in a Shakespeare play.

LANGUAGE LEARNING. Listening to tapes/ CDs is a very effective way of learning any language if you cannot use it in everyday speech. You listen, take in, grow used to, and copy, the sounds, vocabulary, intonations and speech patterns of the language.

TALK, LEARNING & REMEMBERING: In the classroom, you might feel that although you seem to spend hours listening or reading, you still remember little if anything of what you've heard or read. Become actively involved in your learning, rather than waiting for it to somehow "happen." The key is to listen carefully and actively while trying to follow the teacher's line of reasoning and/ or explanations. Follow up by re-reading the chapter and writing up notes / finding answers to questions as for reading.

Chapter 5

Write for Good Results

Learning Objectives:

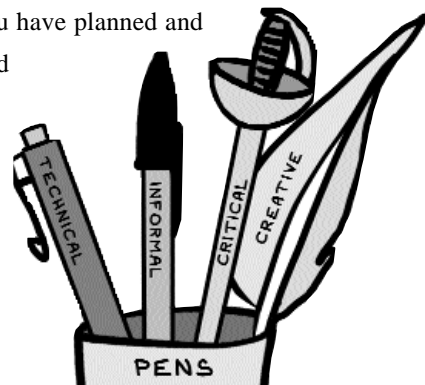
To practise the skills of writing required at Leaving Certificate Level in order to communicate your meaning in an accurate and appropriate style.

The purpose of writing

The purpose of writing is to communicate your ideas or information as clearly and as accurately as you can (in whatever subject). Good writing is about good communication. It shows that you have researched, selected, thought about, and understood the content, ideas and underlying principles. And finally, that you have planned and presented your answers in a well-ordered, logical and informative way, and in an appropriate style.

The three main kinds of writing styles you will use are:

- Informative or functional writing.
- Personal /creative writing/ composition
- Critical / analytical writing.



Informative or functional writing

This type of writing is probably the most commonly used in school. You use it for subjects where you are asked to present facts or information, or when giving instructions. (A good example is in the sciences or in geography.) Use a direct, straightforward and understandable style, and structure your replies in a clear and well-ordered way. Keep the tone formal rather than colloquial (avoid everyday speech/slang). Be objective, and avoid using creative or imaginative responses.

Personal /creative writing/ composition

This is a more creative and subjective style of writing, for example, where you are asked to consider your response to a media image, or to write in diary or journalistic style in response to a visual or written image. You are encouraged to use your imagination, and your style of writing can be individualistic and subjective. However, you are expected to respond in an appropriate manner to any given prompts or cues, and you still have to

structure and order your ideas so they make sense, and convey information or ideas in an appropriate style.

Critical / analytical writing

This type of writing is more often used where you are asked to give a critical response, to analyse, or to make a judgement or evaluation of ideas, themes, events, characters, and so on in any subject matter (English and History are good examples). You will be expected to consider all aspects of a situation or topic, and to present an informed response backed up by references to the text or facts of the matter.

Planning & Writing an Essay

Or Do It!

Learning Objectives:
To practice breaking down writing into defined stages. This will make the task easier and more manageable, with clearly designated stages.

Whatever you write, you need to plan and structure your writing so that it is not simply a collection of unconnected thoughts, ideas or facts. This is true whether you use a functional, personal or analytical style. Regardless of what the writing task is, you have to decide on and include all information you need, keep to the point, and finally present it in an appropriate style or format that it is both easy to read and easy to understand. In effect, you make the essay or project easier and more manageable, both for you, as writer, and for the reader.

Writing an essay or assignment follows a definite pattern. There are several stages you can divide the task down into. This gives you:

- A clear outline of what you should be doing at any one time.
- A clear time-frame in which to do it.

To remind you of these stages, use some form of checklist or plan to structure your thoughts and ideas, and to help you with the writing process. Read through the seven-stage plan below . It lists all the important stages in the writing process.

- 1. Examine the wording of the question.** What exactly you are being asked to do? (To discuss the importance of women in Hamlet? To examine the causes of coastal erosion?) If you can choose the title yourself, do so very carefully, or if given a title, think about what is required of you. Check the working verb, and what it means exactly, for example: “evaluate”, “discuss”, “compare”, and so on.

2. **Search for information.** Brainstorm all possible ideas from many sources. Gather all available information (use the library, CD-ROM, Internet). Mind maps and spidergrams are excellent for giving you a visual overview of the issues. Some ideas you will follow up and use in your essay, others you will throw out.
- 3: **Organise.** Select and arrange points in an ordered, logical pattern. Decide how the points best fit together. Get rid of anything irrelevant which does not answer your question, or that does not develop your ideas. “Select the best. Dump the rest.” Ensure your argument shows development & structure.
- 4: **Attempt a 1st (working) draft:** “Don’t write right, just write.” This first attempt should not be your final essay. It needs working on before it is finished. Ignore technical errors, you can cut and paste or alter what you have written later. If you are unsure how to go about writing an essay, try to obtain a good template— an example of how a good essay is written. Analyse its structure and its treatment of content.
- 5: **Edit, then edit again.** Once you have a first draft essay or project, your next step is to edit it for and language skills, spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, and grammar. This is the final preparation, where you “fine tune” the structure and content until you are happy with the finished result.
- 6: **Submit a well-finished essay or project**— after you have edited it for content, structure, and language technicalities. Re-write it (more than once if necessary) to make sure that the end product does what it is asked to. That is, it answers the question in a clear, logical, structured and interesting fashion.

Putting it together: A template for an essay

An essay has three parts:

Introduction

Main body

Conclusion

Introduction (beginning of the essay) (“Tell 'em what you're going to say”)

In the Introduction, you outline the points (4 – 5 perhaps) that you are going to cover in the main body of the essay. Don’t waffle. Give a straightforward, clear introduction of the points you will cover, in the order in which you intend to deal with them in the body of the essay.



Main body (middle of the essay) (“Say it”)

This discusses in detail the points you wish to consider. Usually it is a good idea to start your essay by writing one of these paragraphs or points, especially one you are fairly confident about. This will give you some confidence and idea of where to progress. You need to order your points in a sequential development. Use a paragraph for each point. Start with a topic sentence (your major point), support with evidence, examples and illustrations if applicable. If there is contradictory evidence, then do not ignore it, use it to show you have taken a wider viewpoint, but be able to argue your line of reasoning. Use a paragraph for each point, and give each paragraph roughly the same treatment; your essay will be more balanced.

Conclusion (“Tell 'em what you've said”)

This draws together your final thoughts. Refer back to the main points you have covered and outline the conclusions in a precise and brief way. It is not the same as the introduction; it serves to “wrap up” your ideas and argument or discussion.

Note: Although the format for writing an essay is mainly for writing up course work or essays, the general principles can be easily adapted and applied to examination situations. The main difference is that in examinations, you do your planning, selecting and writing up under timed conditions (so you probably will not have much time to spend on drafting, except perhaps in skeleton form.)

Use the “Write” Language

Learning Objectives:

To ensure that you edit and check written work for all mechanical errors before handing it in.

One of the main causes of low marks (especially in English, but also in other subjects) is carelessness and poor expression. You might think that because you speak English (or Irish) since birth, you “know” it (all). But you still need to work on the technical aspects of expressing your ideas and thoughts well. This is true whether you are writing a creative response to a media image, or an essay on the poet’s use of imagery, or an account of cell mutation in animals /diseases.

So, before you hand in a piece of work, be it homework or examination, examine every aspect of your answer. Edit it for vocabulary, sentence construction, paragraphs, style and comprehension, spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Vocabulary

Check that your language (vocabulary) is varied. The words you use should be appropriate, not superfluous. However, overusing the same words and verbs can lead to boring reading and a slightly simplistic response.

Sentence construction

Write in a straightforward style, but don't confuse straightforward with simplistic. Check that your sentences are clear and to the point, and that you have said what you intended to say, that is, that your meaning is clear. Vary the length of your sentences to make your writing more interesting, but do not write paragraph-length sentences. Each sentence must make sense and stand on its own, with a clear start and finish. Finally, each sentence should link the previous sentence to the next, and develop the idea or thought that is being expressed.

Paragraphs

The basic rule is: one point per paragraph. You usually start each paragraph with the main or topic sentence, and then follow up with the evidence or ideas to support this point. Each paragraph should follow on logically from the previous one, or your writing will seem disjointed and your overall meaning unclear. The length of each paragraph will vary, depending on the idea you are developing, but again, a good general rule is 5 – 7 sentences per paragraph.

Style

You need to make sure that your style of writing puts forward your points and ideas clearly and accurately, and that it shows you understand the material. You should also make sure you have used an appropriate style. Always beware of inappropriate slang expressions, jargon (technical or specialised language), mixed metaphors and clichés (any over-used common expressions), and so on.

Grammar

The main points to remember here are subject-verb agreement, that is, singular nouns take singular verbs, and plural nouns take plural verbs. Example: "She jumps", not "she jump"; "they agree", not "they agrees". Collective nouns generally take the singular form of the verb, unless you are referring to individual elements of the group. It can be very distracting and confusing to switch number for no apparent reason in an essay, so take care beforehand and decide.

In the same way, you should not change tense. You usually write a report in the past tense. Instructions are written in the imperative mood, but for essays and personal writing you can often decide to use any tense, provided you do not hop from one tense to another pointlessly. When writing an essay, pick one tense and keep to it.

Spelling

Spelling is important, and not just in English class. Poor spelling can sometimes create a wrong impression (that your content is as weak as your spelling, for example). Also, too

many spelling mistakes can distract the reader. This can make it hard for her or him to understand what you are trying to say, and you may lose valuable points in an examination. Use a dictionary or spell check if you can. Learn words that are used regularly so that when you are in an examination you will know how to spell these words— you will not be able to bring the dictionary or spell check into the exam hall.

Punctuation

The sentence, The dog said the man bit him is not quite the same as the sentence, The dog, said the man, bit him. Punctuation can completely change the meaning of a sentence, so you need to use punctuation marks correctly. In speech you use pauses, hand gestures and /or tone of voice to make your meaning clear. In writing, you use punctuation. (You can buy books which outline the basics of punctuation in any bookshop).

Apostrophes and verb contractions

Learn how to use apostrophes in contractions (where you shorten verbs) correctly. There are a few very common mistakes that can easily be avoided:

They're/there/their

They're = shortened version of "they are" (verb contraction)

There = (adverb) It's over there. There it is. There are two of them.

Their = possessive pronoun (belonging to them): Their coats are missing. Their shoes are red.

To/two /too

To: they're going to town (preposition /adverb)

Two: two of them are students (numeral)

Too: I am going too (adverb) (also, as well)

It's/its

The dog wagged its tail (possessive)(this is an exception to the rule of using a possessive apostrophe)

It's a grey day (contraction of the verb "it is")

Possessive apostrophes

The general rule for possession: add 's for singular; add s' for plural

Singular: The dog's owner fed him, (the owner of the dog fed him)

Plural: The dogs' owner fed them, (the owner of the dogs fed them)

Collective nouns

These follow the general rules for apostrophes: before the S for singular, after the S for plural.

Example:

The herd's leader (one herd)

The herds' leaders (several herds)

Be careful when using apostrophes for plural nouns, for example, “countries” is the plural for country. Do not use “country’s” unless there is possession (Example: The country’s boundaries are unclear).

In your essays, avoid using verb contractions or abbreviations, (for example, “They won’t” for “They will not”; “He couldn’t” for “He could not”) in a formal essay or composition.

Again, there are numerous short publications that will show you how to use apostrophes correctly. Go into any bookshop, browse through a few, and buy one that suits you; this will be the best one!

Check or edit your written work and homework

Always, always check any work, whether in class, for homework, or in an examination, before you hand it in. The main things to look for are:

Content: Have you included all the information you should have? Check the question or title to make certain.

Language Skills: Have you started and ended your sentences appropriately? Do they make sense? Are they grammatically correct? Is the spelling correct?

Could you re-write the work (if applicable) to improve your grades (see section on language skills).

Remember, it is your work, and you should feel you have done yourself justice



Chapter 6

Start Smart: Plan your Revision

Learning Objectives:

To plan your approach to your revision as early as possible and to have strategies in place to make it happen.

The examination hall is the final stage of your two years of studying. Good preparation will mean that you are going into the exams well prepared and well equipped to give your best performance on the day. This chapter looks at how you can make good use of your time leading up to the day.

REVISION STIRS UP YOUR BRAIN!



Why start revision early?

Include some element of revision in every homework or study session. Do this right from the beginning, and certainly from October of your examination year onwards. Regular revision helps keep information fresher in your long-term memory.

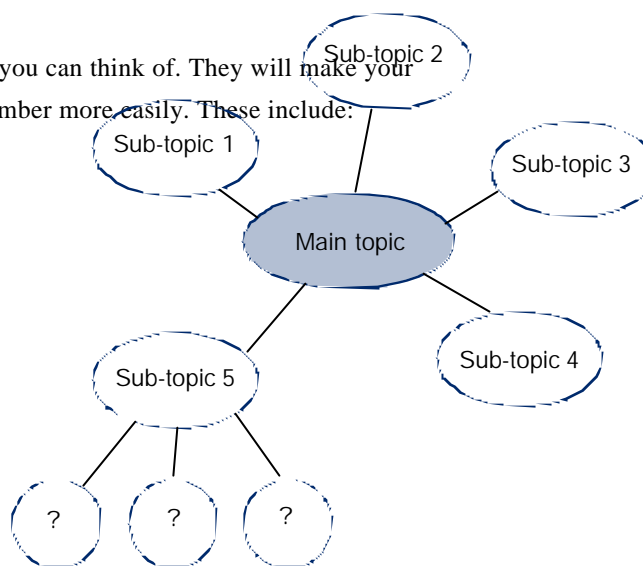
If you revise often, you will be able to retrieve the information you need more easily and faster when you need it. You will be less likely to panic or go blank during an exam, because your confidence level as well as your store of knowledge will be greater. More importantly, nearer exams you will only have to go over existing knowledge rather than having to try to cram everything in at the last minute.

How much of the syllabus do you need to revise?

Although you will have an overall view of the syllabus, the key is to focus in on one area at a time. Aim to cover only as much of your course as you will need for exam purposes. You cannot expect to cover or know every topic and subject of a two-year course, but you do need to feel confident that, with the amount you have covered, you will do yourself justice on the day.

Use every variety and mode of revising that you can think of. They will make your learning more interesting, and you will remember more easily. These include:

- Descriptive Matter
- Diagrams
- Graphs
- Calculations
- Summaries
- Tables
- Cue cards
- Mnemonics
- Visual/ oral/ aural prompts
- Spider diagrams
- Mind maps (see diagram)
- Other



Anything that makes information stand out will be remembered for longer.

Use your performance in the “mocks” to help you to analyse and understand where you did well, and where you could have done better. Be honest with yourself.

- Did you have enough content covered?
- Were you able to apply your knowledge and understanding to the questions set?
- Were your exam techniques helpful?
- How can you improve on your performance?

Get Ready: Exam Preparation

Strategic planning

Approach your revision in an organised, systematic way. You will cover more ground, and you will feel you are making progress. You will feel more in control, especially if you are able to tick off topics that you have covered as you cover them. This in turn increases your confidence and encourages you to keep working, and so helps you to keep your motivation and effort high. Use the system of rewards for revision topics covered to keep your enthusiasm high.

Take care to check that the syllabus or examination structure has not altered before you launch off into revising certain areas and topics.

Past exam papers

Exam papers are excellent preparation because they give you a template (a working example) of what you can expect. Use them to see the kinds of questions that are likely to set, how to approach structuring your answers, and how to time yourself when answering questions.

Course or topic summaries

Write out a summary for each course or topic. Keep it to A4 size if you can. This is time and effort very well spent, as it will show you the main areas you know, and more importantly, those you need to know, and which you need to work on.

Past notes

Use your past notes and summaries to go over main points. Skim texts, always looking to draw information out rather than stuff it into your brain. Exams are about retrieving information quickly and efficiently from your brain. Aim to train yourself to improve at this.

Outline answers

Prepare basic or “skeleton” answers. Use summarising techniques here, and by condensing learning you will be able to access it more easily in a real situation.

Practise writing under exam type conditions, even if you only write out the outline of what you would cover. This will get you used to writing under pressure.

Practise the exam format

Make sure you know, and that you are comfortable with, the layout of the papers. Each subject will have different sections, choices of questions, compulsory questions, and questions that attract different marks. This information is provided at the beginning of the past exam papers/ books which you buy in the bookshop. Use these as a guide for the

exam structure and outline: they're excellent.

Set up a revision timetable, and stick to it!

Tactical Play: Examination Performance

Learning Objectives:

To feel confident that you can harness your stress to achieve optimum performance in the examination. To use your store of knowledge in the best way you can by being well prepared mentally, physically and academically.

It is natural to be afraid of the unknown. **Knowing what is ahead of you in an examination takes away much of the fear.** Have the exam format well thought out beforehand. Know how best to use time during the exam: how to plan your answers, and how to answer the question you have been asked.

Exams are about what you understand more than what you remember. It is your chance to show just how well you can cope with a stressful situation and still give your best performance. It is not just what you know but how you use it that counts on the day.

A certain level of stress is healthy. It gears you up for the "big performance." Ensure you keep your stress levels healthy so that they work for you rather than against you on the day.

Arrive at the examination hall a few minutes early. Do not bring a stock of books. You can bring a few notes / flash cards to glance over as a last-minute measure.

Have bottled water, but avoid chewy (noisy) sweets and chewing gum.

When you are handed your paper, attend to the routine details first. **Fill in all the examination paper details correctly.** Steady yourself.

Read the question carefully. Read it again. Read it thoroughly. Circle the verbs. Check exactly what you are being asked to do, not what you want to do.

Never panic, even if at first the question seems alien. It will be linked with something you have covered in your coursework. It is your job to find the link.

Choose your questions and stick to your choice. The reason for this is that your brain will continue to work on other questions while you plan the first one. Resist temptation to switch to another question, particularly if you have already started one. This is only a

panic response. Ignore it and continue.

Plan your answer before you start. If points or ideas for your other choice question come up, you can write them on a separate page. Never, ever rush into writing—planning is time well spent.

Do your best question first. This will get the “flow” going and give you confidence. Once you have completed your first (best) question, it might be useful to plan your other questions. If you are pressed for time later on, you will not have to rush your thinking: your plan will be there for you.

Check weighting. Spend the time on questions that will bring you higher marks, not on questions that have fewer marks. Managing your time in an exam is crucial to getting you the best advantage.

Pacing and timing (rather than speed) in an exam are very important. Have a clear idea of how you will use your time— even before you start. Good preparation is the key.

Show the starting point and the various stages in any calculation so that the examiner can follow what you are doing. This way, even if you make a small mathematical slip and end up with the wrong answer, you can still score almost full marks (only one mark is deducted for an arithmetical slip). If you do not show the starting point and the various stages, and end up with a wrong answer, you score no points.

Avoid going for what appears to be an easy option, for example, choosing the “B” or more personal /creative option in the comprehension section of the English paper. Any creative or personal response needs to be as well planned and organised as the more formal type questions.

You have 2 – 3 weeks of examinations. Do not burn out half-way through. Preserve your energies. Keep your best for the examination hall.

Write clearly. NO post mortems. They will only fill you with dread or complacency. Neither is useful. Reward yourself afterwards.

Prepare for your next exam. Good luck. You have worked hard to deserve it!

**Believe in yourself, and in
your ability to succeed!**





National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

ACCESS

Programme

MISSION STATEMENT

“To create a supportive learning environment where students who experience socio-economic disadvantage prepare themselves to meet the challenges of the future through degree level studies at NUI, Galway”

