

A Guide to Studying

Helping you on your
learning journey

AMAC

AllActive

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

2 Denne Hill Business Centre
Womenswold
Canterbury
Kent
CT4 6HD
01227 831 840

www.amactraining.co.uk | www.allactive.co.uk

Approaches to Learning

Everyone approaches learning in different ways and it can be likened to a journey. The student maps out her/his own journey through a course with help being paved by the tutor. The journey can feel like you're plodding along, taking one thing at a time, and other times may feel like you're on a steep learning curve. The learning process is not smooth - the amount of time, pace and effort varies along the way.

During a course, you mentally require:

- Practical organisation as you go through the course;
- Mental flexibility to get around obstacles and cope with a wide range of social, psychological and intellectual challenges;
- Stamina to stay on course (physical stamina too).

You have to take responsibility for your own learning through managing the study process. Learning doesn't simply happen because you may or may not have some academic ability. It depends on the context in which you are learning, whether it's an intensive course or full time at college, they all have their own norms and ways of going about things. For example, you may have to write an essay or plan a gym programme, which is not something you have to do in everyday life. You need to find and develop strategies for working and learning in order to get the best results from your efforts.

It is important that you reflect on how you learn and how you manage your studies in order to improve both. As you begin to take responsibility for your own learning, you'll build your confidence at the same time. Remember, only you can do your learning!



Learning to Remember

People generally underestimate their memory. They focus on all the things that they forget and rarely appreciate how amazing the memory is. Our brains take in much more information than is needed. If this information isn't utilized, it becomes lost or overgrown making it hard to retrieve. The way we take in information can affect what we remember. The more you know about how the brain and memory works, the easier it is to remember what you want and when you need it.

We have different strategies for remembering different things. For example, how do you remember your mobile number? And how do you remember what you ate for dinner yesterday? You may have used one of the strategies below:

Fact Strategies:

- Chanting;
- Using your fingers;
- Visualising in your mind;
- Hearing your voice;
- Writing quickly;
- Noting any memorable peculiarity;
- Noting anything that is of personal significance – such as a house number.

Event Strategies:

- Emotions such as anger, horror, ugliness, shock and surprise can have a strong impact on memory;
- Familiar experience;
- Placing yourself in an imaginary context;
- Strong visual memory – like a series of snapshots or film;
- Sound links – such as a film soundtrack.

Other Strategies:

- Movement – such as tying your shoe lace;
- Remembering one thing that reminds you of something else – such as remembering what you wore reminds you of where you were;
- Remembering where something is, you probably use a mixture of visual recall and do a mental check of recent events to see if there was any other reason why they might be somewhere else;
- Remembering a location, you may have visualized the local geography;
- Reminders can be visual or verbal or a combination of both, and allow you to use your imagination.

Whatever strategies you use, your memory needs to be set up like a storage system. This process needs to be done systematically to help you organize your learning.

Managing your Time

Time is an important factor for organizing learning. Most of us complain that there is never enough time to get things done and this is most likely to apply to your studies. Estimating the time it takes to do something and avoiding running out of time are two major study skills.

When you've listed tasks that you need to do for your studies, it is important that you do not waste time, but save time. It's a good idea to prepare for studying to avoid time wasting, such as clearing your desk and have any material that you may need at hand. Try not to get into the habit of sharpening pencils and tidying up instead of getting down to work. Several minutes is all you need to give yourself for getting yourself ready – then you can sit down and start!

Making notes can be a good way of investing your time. Once you have read a chapter or page, notes that have been organised and clear are a good way of integrating your time, study strategy and effective learning. However, copying down sentences exactly as they are written is more likely to be time wasting. Putting in time and effort is always likely to be more productive than something which is time consuming but doesn't really work your brain.



Planning your Time

It's important that you pace yourself through your studies as this will maximise your efforts to learn. It is difficult to take in a lot at once, especially when things are new to you. Dividing your study into stages helps to reinforce things that you have learnt. For example, drafting and redrafting an essay is pacing yourself. Testing yourself after learning for a period of time is a good way of pacing yourself. This allows you to test your existing knowledge and identify any gaps.

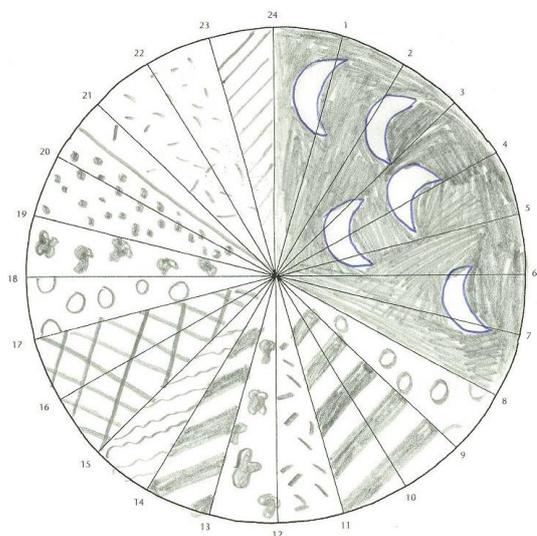
Cramming may be effective in the short term, but it is likely that there is simply too much to remember. Leaving learning to the last minute can be seen as an inefficient use of time.

Try filling in the time circle to work out how much time you would prefer to spend on different activities over a 24 hour day. Activities may include:

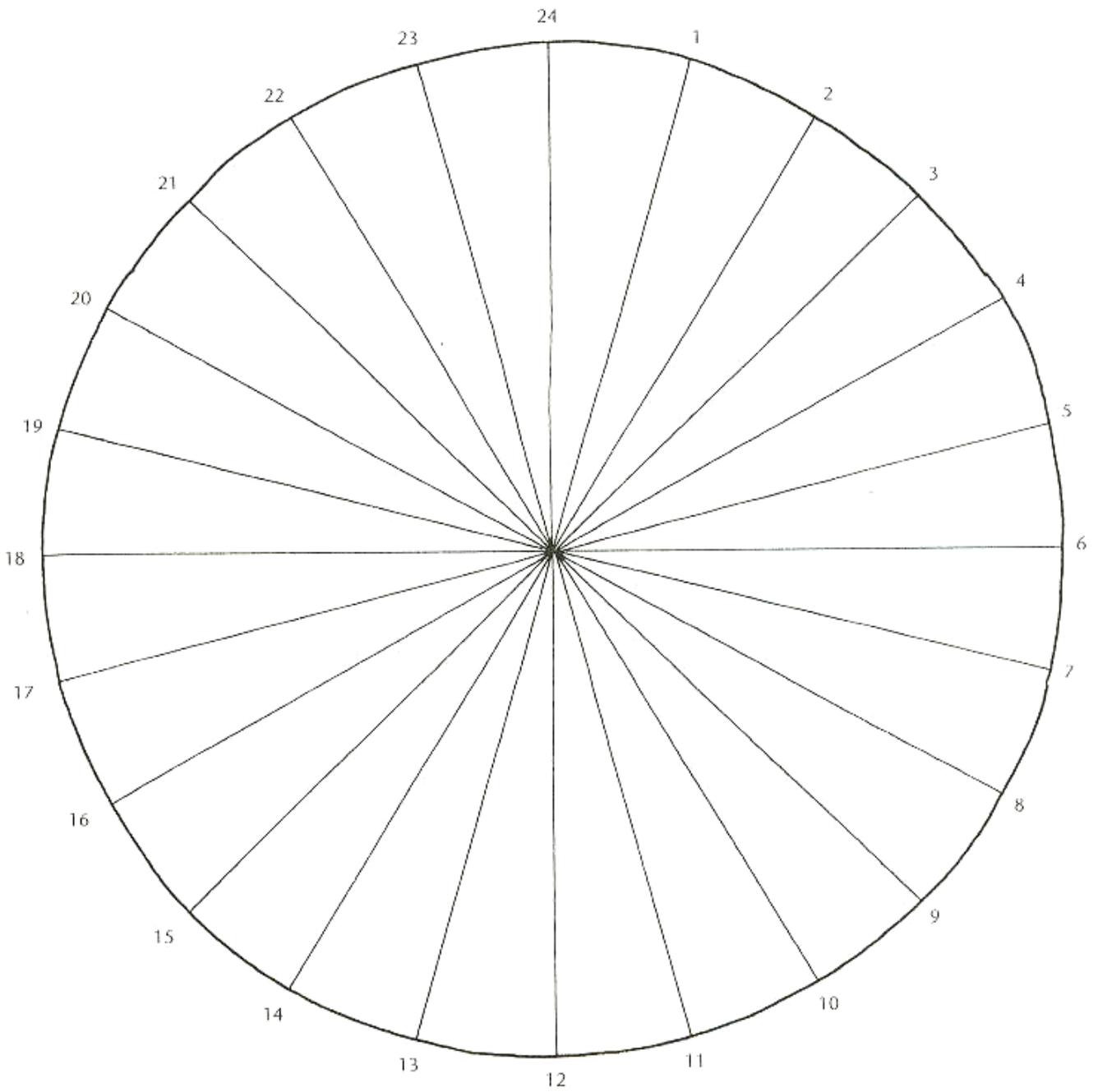
- Sleep
- Eating and socialising
- Personal/home
- Travel
- Lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc
- Reading
- Writing
- Thinking
- Exercise/relaxation

Here is an example of a time circle:

- Sleep – 8 hrs
- Eating and socialising – 2 hrs
- Personal/home- 1 hr
- Travel – 2 hrs
- Lectures, seminars, tutorials etc. - 3 hrs
- Reading – 3 ½ hrs
- Writing – 2 hrs
- Thinking – 1 hr
- Exercise/relaxation – 1 ½ hrs



Time Circle – How I want to use my time



Timetabling your studying allows you to plot clearly the time that you have available for study. You'll be able to note other things that you have to do as well as studying. If you put down 3 hours study time, not all of that will be spent in productive studying. This time will need to be broken up with breaks or 'faffing around' time. You will then be able to tell the difference between quality studying time and 'faffing around' time.

Try completing the timetable below for your current week or next week with hours from 8.00 am to 2.00 am:

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
8.00							
9.00							
10.00							
11.00							
12.00							
13.00							
14.00							
15.00							
16.00							
17.00							
18.00							
19.00							
20.00							
21.00							
22.00							
23.00							
24.00							
01.00							
02.00							

Priority Organiser

When you have a lot of studying to do, it is important that you are able to prioritise tasks. Try using this sheet to set your priorities.

Tasks to be done	A – must be done at once	B – needs to be done	C – it can wait	Order of priority/ when

Making the Most of Reading

There are many strategies for reading which are related to a variety of purposes and reasons you might have for reading. It is not a passive process, nor do you have to read a book from cover to cover.

Skim reading – this involves running through the text quickly to get a general idea of its content. You might glance through a chapter or try to get an overview of a few pages before deciding to reread or move on to another section.

Scanning – if you need to find some specific information, scanning involves checking for key words, or a certain place in the book such as the index or contents. Once the key words have been located, you would read the paragraph/sentences around it rather than reading the whole chapter.

Reading the first sentence of each paragraph – this is a useful way of ascertaining what each paragraph is about in a chapter. The first few sentences are usually *topic sentences* which introduce the new paragraph.

Survey reading – usually this involves gaining an overview of the whole book before in-depth reading commences. This is a good way of determining whether a book is worth using for studying and adding to your reading list. It means surveying the contents by, for example:

- looking at outline of chapters
- looking at when the book was published
- looking at the index
- looking at the layout of chapters

Smart Reading

Think about using the following strategies to help improve your reading skills.

- Know exactly what you're looking for;
- Use reading lists selectively;
- Practice finding information quickly – use the index, note down page numbers;
- Use photocopies – use marker pens to highlight important words/phrases; jot down thoughts in the margin; make notes on sheet;
- Chart the main ideas – map out your ideas using a mind map;
- Think about what you're reading – question yourself; make notes; think of arguments to challenge the author;
- Vary reading speeds;
- Use markers – Post-It notes, bookmarks;
- Concentrate – if you find yourself reading the same sentence more than three times, take a break!

Seminars

Seminars allow you to get a better understanding of a topic that you have been studying. It is a good opportunity to ask questions and listen to other people talking. Try to make a point of saying something during a seminar, the more you comment on a point or ask questions the easier it becomes. Try not to worry if you think other people may sound more articulate than you, remember a seminar is there for you all the get the most out of it.

Preparing a presentation

On some courses, you may be asked to deliver a presentation. This is a way of getting all the students involved in a seminar. Sometimes presentations are assessed, and sometimes they are part of the learning that can be opened up to a general discussion.

Here are some aspects that you will need to think about:

- Background research on the topic;
- Speaking clearly;
- Using overhead projector or PowerPoint slides;
- Allow time to check equipment and furniture arrangement;
- Think about questions that you may be asked afterwards;
- Time your presentation;
- Have water to hand during your presentation;
- Structuring what you have to say;
- Maintain eye contact with your audience;



Revision and Examinations

The purpose of an exam is to find out how much you have understood about the work you have been studying. The idea of sitting an examination can be stressful, whether you have done well or badly in the past. There are some positive benefits in exams such as not giving such detailed answers as you would in coursework. You don't have to write out references or bibliographies and examiners may be more sympathetic about minor grammatical errors, spellings and omissions of some details. Many exams, such as the CYQ exercise and Fitness Knowledge test, are multiple choice. With these types of questions, the correct answer is always written down in front of you. It is therefore, important to understand why the correct answers are correct, and why the wrong answers are incorrect.

Making notes

As the exam approaches it is a good idea to organise your notes by sorting them out and picking out the essential notes. Reduce your notes to key headings, points and names. You could try making cards with key memory triggers for whole topics, or record the key points onto a cassette player.

Use past exam papers

Using past papers puts you in the position of doing the exam before you actually do it! It will give you a chance to get used to the type of questions to expect and which questions recur in papers. Look through some papers and try to work out the minimum number of topics you can revise.

Draw up a revision timetable

Try to work out exactly how much time you have before the exam. If each unit/element of the exam carries equal marks then divide revision time equally between them. Remember to set time aside for practicing past exam papers. Use the timetable in the 'Planning your Time' section to organise your revision time.

Revision Strategies

- Have a revision mentality for the whole length of the course;
- Use time carefully;
- Work with others;
- Ask for help;
- Keep a positive mindset;
- Use memory triggers;
- Revise by ear;
- Stay healthy;
- Use exam papers from former years;

Exam Preparation

It is important that you find out the basic information about the exam. Find out when and where the exams are and how each one will be assessed. If you familiarise yourself with the instructions written on exam papers, as it can add extra pressure during an exam if you're reading them for the first time. Before the exam, plan out how much time you will be able to spend on each section. This will make sure that you are answering the paper at the right pace, not too fast or too slow. Remember to get enough sleep the night before the exam and eat and drink plenty.