

TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

University education is usually different from secondary school. University offers you much greater freedom, but at the same time, it places more responsibility on you to plan your own life, particularly your own study program.

Your first year is a year of adjustment, so remember that many of your student friends are experiencing the same newness, the same strangeness, the same challenge to their good sense and judgement. You will need a little time to clarify your objectives and to frame a properly balanced program for yourself.

In addition, giving you a chance to qualify for a degree or a diploma, the University also offers you opportunities for social and cultural activities. There are societies and clubs, discussions and debates, music recitals, film and dramatic performances, sporting facilities, dances and parties, excursions and camps, and so on. Here again you are not directed, but are free to make your own choice.

To be successful you need to make certain choices and to balance this side of University life with the demands of study. This is your responsibility. No one will do it for you.

Get Your Objectives Clear

Make sure that you have a general idea of the course that lies ahead of you in the succeeding years. You will find this in your Faculty Handbook. If you are uncertain of the choice of your course, see the Faculty Registrar, the University Counselling Service, or the Monash Student Employment & Careers Service.

Make a Balanced Plan for Your University Life

Don't forget that the University year is a relatively short period of only about 30 lecturing weeks.

Remember, you have lecture and/or laboratory time, library reading time, and study time to arrange in effective proportions. Some students try to do too many things at the University; others turn themselves into anxious bookworms and fail to get value from the social life and the recreation that the University offers. You can't study as well if you don't have some sport or participate in some social activities. Such activities can keep you fresh and alert, and provide opportunities to make friends.

Make your plans flexible enough to be modified during the week. Try your first plan for three or four weeks. If your plan is not effective, scrap it and make another. Don't forget that you may need to do some work during vacations.

Carrying Out Your Study Plan

Make use of your own concentration patterns to work more effectively. Identify an

appropriate time span (say 15 minutes, half hour or an hour) and work hard for this period. Then take a break, even if it's just a 5 minute stretch, then get back into study.

Work out your best time of day and work on your hardest subjects at that time. If your brain is fuzzy do some routine work like organising your notes or tidying diagrams.

Recognise the needs of your own body. Don't flog yourself to work when you really are too tired to keep going.

Finally

You can't study if you are worried. If you have any problems -- personal, financial, domestic -- or if you want advice on study methods, the **University Counselling Service** will be able to help you.



TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

1. Adjustment

University education is different from secondary school. University offers you much greater freedom, but at the same time, it places more responsibility on you to plan your own lives, particularly your own study programs.

Your first year is a year of adjustment, so remember that many of your student friends are experiencing the same newness, the same strangeness, the same challenge to their good sense and judgement. You will need a little time to clarify your objectives and to frame a properly balanced program for yourself.

Listen and assess, keep an open mind on new matters, avoid making premature generalisations, think before rushing in to argue, and remember, don't be upset by new problems. Through your work, your contacts in halls or college, your friendship in lecture or laboratory groups, you will sort things out. Many problems can be taken in your stride.

It is a good idea to have a friend with whom you can discuss study matters, compare notes and revise material, with whom you can share minor problems.

In addition to a chance to qualify for a degree or a diploma, the University offers you opportunities for social and cultural life. There are societies and clubs, discussions and debates, music recitals, film and dramatic performances, sporting facilities, dances and parties, excursions and camps, and so on. Here again you are not directed, but are free to make your own choice.

To be successful you need to make certain choices and to balance this side of University life with the demands of study. This is your responsibility. No one will do it for you.

2. Get Your Objectives Clear

Good standards of scholarship, and success in your examination are clearly important in getting a degree.

Equally important are such things as gleaning general knowledge, sharpening your thinking against that of staff and students in discussion, improving your techniques of learning, and enriching social relationships through contacts with your fellow students and your lecturers.

Make sure that you have a general idea of the course that lies ahead of you in the succeeding years. You will find this in your Faculty Handbook. If you are uncertain of the choice of your course, see the Faculty Registrar, the University Counselling Service, or the Monash Student Employment & Careers Service (MONSEACS).

If, within reasonable limits, you are satisfied with your choice of course, then "give it a go" with all the ability and application you possibly can. You can change your course. Our records show that 13% of students do change courses, and 60% of these qualify for a degree.

3. Make a Balanced Plan for Your University Life

A University atmosphere almost invites you to waste time, and to confuse “doing a lot” with working hard - that is, confusing going to lectures and moving from place to place with the real, hard grind of studying.

Don't forget that a University year is a relatively short period - only 30 lecturing weeks.

Remember you have lecture and/or laboratory time, library reading time and study time to arrange in effective proportions. Some students try to do too many things at the University; others turn themselves into anxious bookworms and fail to get value from the social life and the recreation that the University offers. You can't study as well if you don't have some sport, or participate in social activities. Such activities keep you fresh and alert. They enable you to make friends.

Make your plans flexible enough to be modified during the week. Try your first plan for three or four weeks. If your plan is not effective scrap it and make another.

Don't forget that you may need to do some work during vacations.

Study doesn't come easy to anyone - it requires persistence and adherence to a plan. Study is hard work. It's so easy to procrastinate.

Amongst your fellow students there will be three groups of possible distracters who may cause you to neglect or even to abandon your plan.

The really very able dilettantes who after appearing to do very little work most of the year, can pull the chestnuts out of the fire at the very last moment. Amongst these are the 1% of extremely able students, who often don't take notes, but who never-the-less are thinking about the lectures. They are the students who finish up with Second Class Honours when they could quite easily get First.

The students who don't really intend to work. These students are not concerned about getting a degree, but about having a good time.

The poseurs who say that they never do a scrap of work, when in point of fact they work like fury - they work flat out each night and every night, but you don't see them.

Carrying Out Your Study Plan

Make use of your own concentration patterns to work more effectively. Identify an appropriate time span (15 mins., ½ hour, 1 hour) and work hard for this period. Then take a break. Then get back into study.

Work out your best time of day and work on your hardest subjects at that time. If your brain is fuzzy do some routine work like organising your notes or tidying diagrams.

Recognise the needs of your own body. Don't flog yourself to work when you really are too tired to keep going.

Common Causes of Failure to Carry Out a Study Plan or to Study Effectively

- a) The first is failure to begin work right at the beginning of the year. Some students are inclined to keep postponing the commencement of really serious study. They fail to grapple with the difficult job of understanding and committing to memory the harder facts of the course. As a result gaps in their knowledge increase; there is no continuity and they pile up areas of partly understood knowledge. There is no conclusion. They then get to a point at which they are so far behind that they “give up the ghost”.
- b) Some student s fail to develop the habit of thinking. They either read notes or books half-heartedly, or they try to memorise things before they have really thought about them and understood them. The only way to prevent this is by following up each lecture or section by some hard thinking. Thinking means understanding. Sort out the facts, unravel the theory, follow the argument, pin-point the main principles. Put down the main points under headings, build up a sequence, consolidate by diagrams if necessary, and go over the material until you understand it completely. Ask someone else if you don't understand it. It is quite useless to memorise material that you don't understand thoroughly.

4. LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY

At the University you will learn by listening to lectures, by studying books and journals, by doing assignments, writing essays, or giving papers, by taking part in discussions, and by doing practical work. It is very important that you should know:

- (a) How to listen
- (b) How to read books
- (c) How to take notes effectively
- (d) How to learn and remember
- (e) How to revise

But it should be borne in mind quite strongly that learning is an active process on the part of the learner, and it is what he himself does with the material of the courses that produces understanding and retention.

A. How to Listen

What does active listening depend on?

- a) Good attention. You can't listen and learn unless you attend strongly and continuously.
- b) Following the lecturer's points and so understanding the argument or the presentation of the case.
- c) Avoiding diversionary trains of thought. You can help yourself to concentrate by adopting an active attitude.
- d) Watching for the lecturer's key words. “Next”, “Firstly”, “Fourthly”, “On the one hand”, “On the other hand”.
- e) Checking out points in text books.

B. How Can I Read and Study Books to Best Advantage?

You should be capable of two kinds of reading.

Reading methodically, at depth when you are seeking to understand rather difficult material. (This intense form of reading is necessarily slower than your usual rate.)

Reading quickly when you are covering a page, a section, or a chapter to select the main points, or to understand the general idea or theme of the material.

You need to decide which type of reading to use. Most students use both, that is, skim reading to get an overview or to find particular information and slow, detailed reading when trying to understand new material. You seldom need to know everything in a book so it is useful to develop your skim reading skills.

Some students find these techniques useful

Making a diagram to illustrate a different theory - it is one way of seeing whether you've understood what you've read and it helps you to remember.

Making your own personal lists of words or scientific expressions and glossary of terms. You should keep a small notebook with alphabetic divisions - in this enter new words. Make full use of your Concise Oxford Dictionary and Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases.

Picking out the author's own key words, headings, sub-headings, etc.

Using coloured pencils to mark important facts, or to indicate points in the margins.

C. What is a Good Way to Make Effective Notes?

Taking down lectures.

Get the most important points, but put them down fully enough, with logical sequence and correctness, so that you can understand them later. Develop a form of shorthand for speed, eg. / for "the", & for "and", w for "with", X for "that". It is doubtful whether you should try to copy down verbatim all the lecturer says. Try to understand what he says and put it down in shortened form (except for theoretical proofs, etc.).

Put topics down under headings, letters and/or numbers. Use a consistent scheme of letters or numbers. A scheme or pattern helps us in remembering.

Distinguish between the lecturer's analogies or illustrations and the real material of the lecture.

Sometimes list main headings as questions (see above). These challenge you to remember and to understand.

Take advantage of the lecturer's own blackboard notes or summary.

Notes on Making Summaries

You may have to work from three or four sources:

- Your own lecture notes
- Duplicated sheets of notes provided by your lecturers
- Sections in reference books
- Textbooks

Some students like to learn by underlining and going over their own notes, supplemented by similar treatment of material in duplicated notes and textbooks.

If you have a good collection of these summarised, composite sheets of notes, you will, in the first place, have been over your work thoroughly and, in the second place, you will have the material in brief, logical form from which you can make effective revision at the end.

D. How to Learn and Remember

In the full and effective learning of the problem there must be analysis and understanding. Train yourself to analyse a problem or other material into its basic constituents.

The characteristics of any proof or argument or set of facts are determined not only by their parts, but by their relationship to the other. The function of any part is likewise determined by the whole of which it is a part.

Therefore:

- Understand the whole
- Select the principal points or facts
- Know their separate significance
- Compare, contrast, and relate the parts to the whole

Remember:

Active learning, not passive reading, understanding, not mere learning by rote.

You must also be able to apply your knowledge and see its full significance. Particularly in the Sciences you must know your basic material, but you must also work out problems, more problems, and then more problems.

Just as the working of problems and examples is important, so too are working in the laboratory and doing written assignments. Here, you should continually strive to apply to the material in hand, the principles you have been learning. Form habits of observing carefully and thinking critically. The creative work you do yourself is meaningful to you, and more easily remembered than something which stems from the experience of a lecturer or the writer of a textbook.

Testing Your Memory

When you have thoroughly understood and learnt a particular section of your work you should make a trial recall. Turn over your book or your notes and see if you can recount the points, ideas, events, arguments, in the correct sequence. This may be done orally or in writing. Research shows that learning with trial recall every now and then is far superior to any other method. You should go back over the material and fix any points, or consolidate any explanations or sequence of points only partially mastered.

Spacing Your Study Periods

In the main (but there are exceptions in the case of subjects and students) it is better to devote 1 ½ - 2 hours, 4 times a week, to a certain subject than 3 hours twice a week. Much, however, depends on the degree of pre-learning, on the amount you already know, and on the intrinsic difficulty of the material. Use your own judgement in the matter, but remember the above rule. Remember also that when you start your study it takes some time to warm up so to speak.

Rest Pauses

It is important to have rest pauses during study - five or ten minutes after, say, an hour, or 1½ hours. You might listen to a record, go for a short stroll, read the daily paper or something light that will rest the mind. Try to relax during the rest period; the idea is to do something that will refresh the mind.

And remember to stop studying at night 10 or 15 minutes before you go to bed. Relax before you go to sleep.

Appropriate Study Conditions

So far as it is possible you should try to have conditions conducive to study. You may study efficiently with distracting noises, etc. or you may find that you cannot think deeply or concentrate continuously. See that you have really good lighting. Adjust the table to your height. Ventilation, or warmth, according to the temperature, is important. Move if people talk continuously.

Concentration

Even the best student experiences natural fluctuations in concentration. Arrange your work so that you face the most difficult tasks first, when concentration is at its height. Do the routine work much later in your study period.

Most students can study best if they have some physical recreation and social relaxation from time to time. You should be able to enjoy them throughout the complete academic year with benefit to your studies. You should not find it necessary to reduce your hours of sleep to such an extent that you are perpetually tired. No-one can concentrate well under such conditions. If you feel that poor health is affecting your efficiency as a student, consult the University Health Service.

E. How To Revise

Start early. Have a timetable.

The main fault of students is that they leave too much to revise, and start too late. Avoid this by periodic revision, and by systematic work according to a timetable of revision.

For example, you might take the last ten weeks before the examination, and compile a daily timetable of the topics in your subjects for revision. As you complete them you mark them off, adding to a further list for final revision topics which you feel still need attention. Some students like to pin selected groups of notes or summaries on boards, or on sheets of hardboard, and then to go over them at odd times. The notes are replaced by different ones from time to time.

It is useful to copy on to a card the main points of a topic difficult to master, and to revise these at odd times in buses or trams.

To sum up the preceding sections there are **four guiding principles**:

- (1) **BE YOURSELF**
- (2) **KNOW YOURSELF**
- (3) **MAKE A PLAN**
- (4) **DO IT**

5. Essays

You will be given advice on the writing of essays from particular Departments, but one point I would stress is that you should give some thought to the topic of the essay as soon as it is given, and not just before the time of actually writing it. Some previous thinking about the possible structure of the essay gives direction to current reading of books or journals and what is heard in lectures, and often produces worthwhile ideas before the systematic writing is commenced.

6. Examinations

In examinations questions you are often required to marshal relevant sections of your knowledge, to discard the irrelevant items and from the relevant ones to construct an answer to the question. This process is aided if you learn your work in significant wholes and perceive the inter-relations between the various parts.

Remember, trial recall is not only a good way of learning but produces excellent preparation for examinations.

If you have studied seriously throughout the year, you can “taper off” your work somewhat during the last day or so before examinations. Go to your examinations well-rested and physically fit, rather than worn out and confused.

Avoid plunging into new and detailed learning immediately prior to the examinations. You may become so obsessed with the new detail you have been learning, that you may find it difficult to recall the remainder of your work.

If you are ill just prior to or during the examination try, if possible, to consult the University Health Service. For your own protection lodge a special consideration form which is available from your faculty.

In the last term it is useful to work old examination papers. You can adopt either of two procedures:

See how much you know of a question - simply write down the points; then check up by reading it in your textbook or notes.

Read the topic in your textbook or notes, then write out the main points.

Don't spend too much time on old questions. It is only a form of revision, but a very valuable one to indicate sources of weakness in your learning. Don't place too much reliance on the form and content of old examination papers. All examiners are at liberty to change the pattern. The best safeguard is to know all your work.

When in the examination room, don't rush blindly into answering questions. Make sure you understand what the question means. Sit back and think for a moment. Plan out your answer, mentally or else in very brief note form.

Budget your time in the examination room. Unless you are informed that certain questions carry more weight than others, allow about the same time for each.

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