



DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

HANDBOOK FOR NEW STUDENTS

**Faculty of Social Sciences
University of the West Indies
Cave Hill Campus**

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The Department of Management Studies

Cave Hill Campus

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WELCOME

The Department of Management Studies is pleased to welcome you, our new students, at the start of your programme. The Department is a dynamic and growing component of the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, and we believe you will find your experience with us valuable. We will do everything we can to make sure that this is the reality you find during your tenure with the Department. The Department's reputation depends on its graduates, so we want you to be the best.

While we strive to make your experience with us pleasant, we also believe that a rigorous academic programme is key to being world-class, and in this era of globalization, it is our objective to produce graduates of the highest caliber. To achieve this, we ask our students to work hard and to aim for the top. We recognize, however, that students entering University for the first time, or after a long absence, often find University a challenge. Classes and life are different from high-school, community college, or the workplace. The demands are different, and students can find the new environment somewhat daunting.

We have prepared this booklet to help students adjust to the University environment and ensure that they are prepared to contribute to their own and the Department's success. We have included advice in this booklet, which we believe will assist you in achieving the best that you can. The topics covered here are intended to provide guidance in vital areas such as developing good study habits, time management, preparing for exams and so on. We hope that you will find this information valuable. Any comments on the material would be welcome.

Justin Robinson, Ph.D.

Head, Department of Management Studies

INTRODUCTION

This booklet was birthed from a concern for the well being of our students and a yearning to do more than simply impart the received wisdom of our various disciplines. The booklet is the child of concern and care about you our students. We do not offer the booklet as having the answer to every problem you may encounter while passing through our department. Rather, it offers practical ways to maximise your potential in every sphere of university life, and offers skills that transfer readily to the work environment.

We offer the booklet as elders who have been where you are currently. Some of the advice in the booklet we would have followed ourselves, some we would love to have known about. The entire content is therefore fully endorsed by us as useful, even invaluable, advice to you our students.

The booklet takes a broad and deep look at topics such as stress management, learning styles and time management. We have also included a document prepared by Dr. David Palmer for students following The Certified General Accountants certification from Canada (with permission). We found that this document contained extremely useful information, and it has been edited by Dr. Nadini Persaud to make it directly relevant to you here in the Department of Management Studies. Dr. Persaud compiled the entire booklet and the Department expresses many thanks to her for an excellent document.

We encourage you to read this booklet in the spirit with which it is being offered; with the expectation that you will maximise your learning experience and to take with you into the future. God bless you with wisdom to access and receive wise counsel.

Emily Dick-Forde, Ph.D.

Former Lecturer, Department of Management Studies

Part 1

**STRESS, GOOD ETIQUETTE, AND
ACADEMIC MALPRACTICE**

1 UNIVERSITY LIFE AND STRESS

Being able to attend university for the first time elicits a variety of emotional responses: those of you who have left home for the first time or are mature students who return to higher education will generally experience great excitement at this new juncture in your lives. However, in addition to the excitement of entering this new world there may also be intense feelings of uncertainty and the experience of being overwhelmed.

Suddenly, the onus and responsibility of learning, consistent attendance and thorough preparation for classes now rests solely with you. Competition, quantity, and quality of work are expected to be of a higher caliber. For regional and international students, the social and family network may be absent or deficient due to geographical location. Thus, loneliness and homesickness can occur. Finances may be an issue since a university education is by no means cheap. Mom is not on campus to provide you with the home-cooked meals and to hustle you out of bed in the morning to attend classes. For those of you who have to work, raise a family and attend classes, the demand on your time can assume monumental proportions. Consequently, initial excitement may become overshadowed by worry which in turn causes **STRESS**.

Stress can trigger poor health, poor grades, feelings of helplessness and lowered self-esteem—all of which in turn can cause more stress. Having to contend with new rules, a new environment, juggle work, classes, family and trying to efficiently and effectively function can all increase the uncertainty and you may think “ **What have I gotten myself into and more importantly, how do I get myself out?**”

Rest assured that you are not alone! Here are a few **suggestions** that can help **to reduce** the amount of **stress** you may encounter:

- After registration, find out exactly where your classes are being held and acquaint yourself with the routes to and from classes. This knowledge helps to reduce initial stress due to unfamiliarity with your surroundings.
-

Ask for and read a copy of the rules that govern your particular faculty. In any country, “Ignorance of the law is no excuse.” This also holds true for the rules of an institution. Seek clarification about anything of which you are uncertain.

- Be punctual and attend all lectures and tutorials barring an emergency. When you miss sessions, you lose a lot of information and you may feel overwhelmed because of the backlog of work. Since you need to catch up in order to understand the present material you may become anxious, or even ill because you begin to panic.
- Begin assignments as soon as you get them. Procrastination can cause stress if you get more assignments due around the same time, or you become ill or have to deal with some emergency. Early planning can decrease the quantity of work, and reduce feelings of being overwhelmed. Also, you can ask for guidance if you encounter obstacles while doing assignments early rather than just before they are due. The former impresses lecturers, the latter does not!
- Edit several drafts of assignments and projects in order to create good, presentable, professional final products. Laziness does not pay. Learn the trade—not the tricks of the trade. Quality work demands quality time. Do extra reading and research. This is vital since a lecturer is a guide and can only do so much. The difference between a “C” student and an “A” student is the amount of relevant work you do independently. Therefore, do your work, get the credit and feel good about yourself and your success. Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it “Autograph your work with excellence”.
- For those of you who are expected to juggle work, raise a family and attend classes, one good rule of thumb is to **be realistic**. This requires that you carefully choose which courses and more importantly, the number of courses that can be taken per semester without the workload causing you and/or your family distress. It will definitely be better to slowly but surely meet your targets than to take up more than you can effectively handle. The former strategy (taking a minimum number of courses) gives you breathing room especially since unexpected circumstances may occur in relation to work and family. Such a strategy allows for you to spend quality time, preferably without undue stress for work, family commitments, and your higher education. Conversely, the latter strategy (taking a maximum number of courses) may cause self-confidence and self-esteem to be minimised if grades begin to slip or deadlines cannot be met due to other obligations.

In addition, you may need to ensure that your employer is up-to-date on your plans to enlist at the university and will give you the necessary support. Communicate also with those that comprise your social/family network to ensure that child-caring responsibilities are met and that your family members do not feel neglected and that you do not feel unduly pressured.

Further, you will need to determine what strategies you will use both on and off campus for reviewing material. Issues to be considered include: access to online material, joining study groups, scheduling appointments with lecturers, attending tutorials. You will also need to take into consideration the amount of time that it will take you to travel to and from classes in order to plan your schedule accordingly.

- If finances are an issue, there are quite a few scholarships that are available. These scholarships are posted on the U.W.I. website.
- Learn how the U.W.I. library is set up and the procedures for finding and accessing information. This helps to increase efficiency in research and reduces stress when you have a short amount of time to accomplish a lot of work. Remember, learning can be likened to a pyramid. You start from the foundation and climb steadily to the top, not the other way around. Good research (**not PLAGIARISM**) provides the foundation for excellent learning.
- Meet with members of the Student Guild. This helps to set up a social network. Many times you can meet and speak with persons from your home country and this helps to minimise homesickness.
- Prepare in advance for examinations, not just the night before. A study time table can help you discipline yourself. Of course you have to follow it. Many students believe that cramming for an exam is an excellent strategy. The issue to be considered here is whether or not you will remember the information after the exam. The holder of a tertiary level degree is expected by the public and of course employers to have both a working theoretical and practical knowledge of the area of study. If you cram material only for the purpose of passing an exam and subsequently forget and be unable to apply the said information, then employers will be of the opinion that you “bought your certificate”. This will reflect poorly on you and the institution of higher learning.

The practice of consistent study and review will prove to be more beneficial in the long term: preparing the topic before class, taking notes during class, asking questions during tutorials, preparing the assignments for tutorials, re-writing class notes and finally placing vital information on flashcards all enhance the learning process since you are constantly dealing with the same material. Therefore, before exams you will find yourself recapping and cementing your understanding rather than just trying to now familiarise yourself with the material by cramming.

- Remember also that a merry heart doeth good like medicine. So laugh to ease tensions.
- “Work hard and play hard.” Physical exercise is as important to university life as are the mental exercises. Run, jog, walk, do relaxation exercises and ‘stop and smell the roses’. These are essential for the maintenance of good health. Take short breaks instead of studying continuously. This gives a better perspective and reduces anxiousness and stress. In addition, eat a healthy, balanced diet, and no, unfortunately this does not refer to junk food.
- If you have a personal problem that persists and makes it difficult for you to study well, seek the help of the campus counsellor. A problem shared is generally a problem halved.

The more prepared you are in dealing with your new environment, the more confident you will become about being able to face the daily challenges. Self confidence and self-esteem promote health and demote stress. Of course, some stress is unavoidable and can even be beneficial as it then motivates you to meet deadlines for example. By following the aforementioned suggestions, you can help to ensure a smoother transition into this new, exciting and challenging world of higher academics. I wish you a wonderful year filled with experiences that positively shape your lives.

Indeira Persaud, M.Sc.

Psychology Lecturer and Counsellor
St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College

2 E-MAIL ETIQUETTE

Nowadays, text messaging has become the norm, especially among the youth. While this may be an acceptable practice for communicating with friends, it is totally unacceptable for communicating with faculty members and for any formal communication (e.g., interviews, business/work related emails etc.). Formal communication should always have proper sentence construction and should be devoid of grammatical mistakes. Most email facilities offer a spell check feature. You should always try to use this feature, with either a British or Caribbean English dictionary switched on. Additionally, communication should be courteous and polite. People respond readily to courteous and polite emails, however, they generally ignore abrupt and discourteous emails.

Today, many public domains offer free email services. Therefore, when communicating formally, you should always use a proper email address with your name clearly identified (e.g., csmith@yahoo.com). A free email address (e.g., starbright@hotmail.com) should be reserved for communicating with your friends. **Note also that all U.W.I. students have a free U.W.I. email account.** This account should be used for all correspondence with U.W.I. personnel.

Guidelines for communicating with U.W.I. faculty:

- Use your U.W.I. email account.
- Insert your course code and title in the subject line.
- Use a proper salutation. Your departmental handbook and course outlines will generally indicate whether a faculty member has a doctoral degree or not. The abbreviation Ph.D. signifies that a person holds a doctorate degree. Therefore, your salutation should read “Dear Dr. Surname”. If the faculty member is a Professor, then your salutation should read “Dear Professor Surname”. If you are unsure, then substitute “Madam” or “Sir” to be on the safe side. Never commence your email without an appropriate salutation since this may be considered by many to be quite rude.
- Keep your message short and to the point. Refer to the lecture, chapter etc., and write in a polite manner. For example, a query can be constructed as follows:

“In the lecture delivered on Monday January 12, you explained the distinction between product and period costs. However, I did not clearly understand this distinction. I reread the chapter on this note, but I am still unclear about the fundamental distinction. I would therefore be grateful if you could provide some additional clarification via email”.

- Always end your email by acknowledging thanks and typing your entire name.

The aforementioned simple rules can indicate to your lecturers that you are a cultured and polite individual, i.e., a professional.

Nadini Persaud, Ph.D., CGA
Lecturer, Department of Management Studies

3 DRESS CODE ETIQUETTE

At The University of the West Indies we are engaged in training the future Caribbean leaders. Thus, not only are you expected to think and write like the future decision-makers, but, you are also expected to demonstrate some level of professionalism in your dress. This is not to say, that lecturers want you to dress formally, but it is expected that when you are attending lectures and tutorials, that your attire reflects some degree of modesty. The classroom is as your “office in training.” While we cannot legislate for the way you dress, we would like to suggest that very mini skirts and shorts, revealing bust-lines, trousers falling off hips, and armless vests (men) can be considered inappropriate dress for the classroom. Remember, that we often have one opportunity to make a first impression and sometimes that is what differentiates the winners from the rest.

Sherma Roberts, Ph.D.

Lecturer, Department of Management Studies

4 ACADEMIC MALPRACTICE

The University of the West Indies has strict policies on Academic Malpractice (including plagiarism) a breach of which will result in disciplinary action. These are highlighted in the University Examinations handbook.

The following definitions of conduct are important and should be read carefully by students. If you are not clear on their meaning, you should discuss the terms with your Tutor:

Collusion occurs when two or more individuals combine their efforts in order to deceive the tutor as to who is responsible for a particular piece of work. Collusion is never permitted.

Cooperation may be permitted by a tutor in certain circumstances, where a joint study effort, class presentation or group project forms an appropriate part of an overall assignment. Cooperation must be cleared with a tutor in advance.

Plagiarism occurs when students use ideas, word sentences, diagrams and other forms of work established prior to the particular student's submission, without acknowledging the source of the work used. This includes work done by other students. To avoid plagiarism, students should be meticulous in referencing all "sources of inspiration" (the accepted referencing system for this course is the Harvard Referencing System, and students should thoroughly familiarize themselves with the required format).

Where staff members detect malpractice, staff will advise the head of Department of the incident in writing. The matter will then be referred to the Office of the registrar for appropriate University action.

Disability

If you have a disability which may make it difficult for you to attend and/or complete the requirements of this course you should discuss your special needs with the Student Affairs Office.

Part 2

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STUDY METHODS

Study Guide prepared by David Palmer, Ph.D. for The Certified General Accountants Association of Canada. Reprinted with permission from author. Copyright © 1982 David Palmer. All rights reserved.

5 KEEPING INTERESTED AND MOTIVATED

A long-term task requiring persistence in learning complex new information and procedures is going to demand a great deal of motivation. That motivation can come from two main sources: your interest in the subject being studied, and the long-term goal which lies at the end of your course of study. Although how well you do in a course will depend to some extent on how interested you are when you start, it is equally true that your level of interest and keenness is greatly affected by what happens in the course. Once you find that you are doing well (completing assignments successfully, mastering new information), your interest tends to increase, even if the subject matter of the course itself never fascinates you. Nevertheless, the real point is that for most people, whatever the subject they're studying, and however interesting they find it, there will be times when there are at least ten other things they'd rather do than the assignment that is due shortly or the preparation they must do for the exam that is fast approaching.

Define Your Objectives

Let's accept that as a fact of life. What you need above all to provide the basic momentum to carry you over the difficult times and the fluctuations in your level of interest is a well thought-out, long-term objective. When life gets difficult and your courses just seem like extra hassles in your life, you may say to yourself: "Why am I doing all this studying?" At that point it's up to you to make sure you have an answer to this question answer that you find convincing (not your husband/wife, friends or boss). You need a goal that is sufficiently

important to you that you will be willing to put up with many short-term frustrations.

What is important to you right now? What is important to you about the kind of person you are becoming, and the kind of job you're going to have in five or ten years' time? What sacrifices are you prepared to make in order to achieve these objectives? These are the kinds of questions you may need to ask in order to establish what your goals are and how realistic they are. Remember that one of the main characteristics of any kind of part-time studying is that a large number of the

people who start a course have not really considered whether they know what they want, or whether they'll be prepared to make time for it when other commitments and opportunities develop.

A related concern, as we mentioned, is *interest*. You cannot expect everything you study to be interesting to you, but even with good overall motivation you will find it difficult to keep going without any interest in the subject at hand. Even with an interest in the overall program, problems often arise when you find a particular course uninspiring.

What often happens is that you start to spend less time on that course than you normally would; consequently, you start finding the course even harder, and feeling that you don't understand it. You may do poorly on assignments, so that you associate the course with negative feelings about your own capabilities. A natural method of self-defense in such a situation is to feel resentment and hostility toward the course, the instructor, the subject-matter, or the people who say you have to take that course. The instructor, the design of the course, or the textbook may indeed be far from perfect, but the tendency is to exaggerate these facts, to use them as complete explanation of your lack of success - in fact, as an "excuse." It is a few short steps from there to ceasing to do much work on the course, developing an aversion to the course material, feeling unable to explain to the instructor the problems that are being encountered and the work that hasn't been done, or withdrawing from the course altogether.

Control Your Negative Responses

What can be done about this? Probably the first thing is to recognize that the responsibility is on *you* to develop and maintain your interest in a course. Instructors in any educational program are not necessarily willing or able to make a special effort to interest you in the subject.

Once you have accepted responsibility for your own interest, you have two main tasks: to put in the necessary hours, and to find ways of developing your interest in the subject. These two things go hand-in-hand to some extent. The more you understand it, then, as a rule, the more interesting you find it - even though you may still have to do some rather dull tasks. An astronomer discovering a new meteor, for example, still has to do hours of routine calculations. But while your interest in a subject is still developing only gradually (if at all), you need to be especially aware of the dangerous temptation to spend less time on that subject. Make a special attempt to put in more time each week on the difficult and dull subject than you would on an interesting one. After all, it makes sense that you will need to spend more time on tasks you find difficult and dull. Things you like doing will get done with little effort.

What's So Great About This Subject

As for developing your interest, try being as active as possible in relation to that subject: read about it, think about it - and talk about it with friends, other students, and the instructor (or another teacher). Be especially ready to *listen*. What is it that people find interesting about the subject? Why do people write books and articles on it? How would life be different (and for whom) if this subject had never been investigated? How does the material in this course relate to what you already know? How does it prepare the way for things you will need to learn or do later on? What abilities in yourself might this course help to develop?

These are the kinds of questions you should be trying to answer. Try to approach them from as many different angles as you can. Discussing the topic

with someone new, or looking at a different book, will often help you to refresh your enthusiasm once you feel jaded. Sometimes, however, the problem is not with the whole subject but only with a particular topic or section which you must master, but which you cannot feel enthusiasm for. A short burst of concentrated work will probably clear the task, and make a great difference to your feelings about the whole course. Once you have convinced yourself that the task is worthwhile, and have got down to it, you are in a much better psychological situation. Starting the task is usually more difficult than continuing it once you have started. Remember that our degree of interest in a task or a subject is not some fixed aspect of our personalities. Our interests are constantly shifting and developing as a result of our experience. Learn to recognize a new enthusiasm; you may discover that it has come from learning how to overcome and control a previous aversion.

6 HOW OTHER PEOPLE CAN HELP

Study Groups

What about the other people who are taking the same course as you? You may find it useful, especially when the exam approaches, to form a study group with some of them. If you are attending lectures you have an easy way to meet other students in the course. When you have the names of other students, you might telephone and ask them if they would be interested in forming a small study group (perhaps two to six people) to meet regularly and go over course material, discuss problems, test each other in preparation for exams, and so on. Alternatively, you might simply arrange a ‘network’ of people in the same course, who can contact each other when they need to discuss a problem they’re encountering in the course.

Study groups can waste time, however, unless some ground rules are laid down. If no specific procedure is followed, study groups can decline into general “chat” sessions, which are pleasant enough but don’t usually get you much nearer your objectives. It may be best to agree in advance on an informal “agenda” for each meeting: specific assignments or sections of the course to be considered, followed by a discussion of any miscellaneous problems that arise. The other main danger is that some members of the group may start to depend on others to do their work for them, using the group session to do what they could and should have done by themselves. This is a common problem, and needs to be dealt with. Don’t expect the group, or the other person, to do your routine work for you. And if someone else is taking advantage of you or the group, gently tell them so individually. If the problem persists, you will need to be firmer. In the case of a group, the problem might be raised in the group, and settled through a group decision.

Anxiety and Perspective

Home study and lecture students alike are liable to experience times when they feel thoroughly despondent about a particular course or about their continuance in the program, times when it all starts to seem too much. Such feelings will possibly involve frustration, anxiety, boredom, resentment and anger - a sense of being overloaded and under pressure, regret for time and money perhaps being wasted, and negative feelings about one's own worth and ability.

In cases where your main concern seems to boil down to anxiety about an approaching exam, have a look at Section 11 "Exam Nerves." In other situations, it usually helps to talk over your situation with a friend or another student. Getting the feelings off your chest is in itself useful, but of course it is only a start. Subsequently, you need to try to identify what real problems you have. Are there specific difficulties with a course, and, if so, how can you get assistance with them? Is the problem one of finding the time for study, in view of your other activities and commitments? Is it a question of being able to concentrate and not being distracted? Do you need to re-think your priorities, or analyse your basic motivation, or examine your degree of interest in the course? There are some ideas in this booklet on each of these concerns, but the basic task of finding answers has to be your own. Any resulting actions you plan to take have to be meaningful and convincing to *you*, because you are the one who will have to put them into practice.

Despite this, remember that in situations where you are confused or tempted to quit, other people can in many cases play an important part in helping you clarify your situation and seeing things in perspective. They can help you assess alternative courses of action, and perhaps help you to remember that success or failure in any course of study is not a reflection on your essential worth as a human being.

7 BUDGETING YOUR TIME

Advice on time management often succeeds only in making us feel inefficient, lazy and despondent. We may admire people who seem to be able to spring with relentless energy from task to task throughout each day, but could most of us enjoy life that way? We are not machines whose only function is to work and study. Nevertheless, there are times when we realize that we need to change something about the way we are using our time. If you get behind you may be able to catch up all right, but you lose the advantage of working methodically from one step in the learning process to the next. Many courses are carefully designed to lead you from mastery of one set of ideas to the next. If you have not learned the previous steps in the sequence it may be difficult or impossible to approach the next one. You may find yourself understanding less and less of your lectures, and not having time to digest properly the information in your lesson notes and textbooks before having to do the assignments. Apart from potentially disastrous effects it may have on your assignment deadlines, getting behind negatively affects your mood and your capacity to enjoy your leisure time. It will mean that you don't achieve your real potential in that course and it may result in your not completing the course at all.

Is there a problem?

Even when you are not in this kind of critical situation, however, you may feel that your present allocation of time to the various activities of your life is unsatisfactory and represents a problem that needs to be looked at. Do you, for instance, need to find more time to study? Or after your studying, do you still have time for relaxation, friends and family? Are you dissatisfied by the amount of time you feel you waste, or by the number of hours that seem to just go by without your being able to account for them? Whether you like it or not, the way you use your time reflects the values and priorities that are at present operating in your life.

You may, however, have values and priorities that you would like to see operating, but which at the moment are having little impact on your actions and

your use of time. One aspect of being a student, in particular, tends to make you think about this. Whereas in jobs and family life your routines may be quite structured - regular hours, meal times, etc., when you are studying you are on your own. You have deadlines for assignments and exams, but how you meet them is up to you. Of course you may be perfectly satisfied with the way you use your time now, but this section is concerned with people who are not. There is one more thing to be said about this matter of time management before we look at a practical way of doing it. The research indicates that very few students use a regular schedule for private study on a continuous basis. Highly successful students do not seem to do so any more than unsuccessful ones. But successful students do use study schedules periodically, at times when special pressures make it vital (and difficult) to ensure that all required tasks get done at the right time, especially when preparing for examinations. So we suggest that you regard time-scheduling as a particular strategy to be used when circumstances warrant, though this does not mean that for some students it will not be an advantage to use it all the time. It is one obvious way of approaching problems that you are aware of in your use of time. It is not necessarily a practice that you will want to engage in unless you are aware of such problems.

Where does it go?

Perhaps the first step is to get a clear idea of where your time at present goes. Basically this is a straightforward procedure. Draw up a grid showing all the hours of the week during which you are normally awake, and fill it for a week (or preferably two), showing *in detail* what you did. In practice this is not as simple as it seems. You need to keep a close watch on your activities hour by hour, or else you will turn to your record of the day and not know where the last few hours went. It is *those* hours, which are hard to account for normally, that especially need to be looked at when you are assessing how you spend your time.

Have a good look at the results of this survey of your time use, especially at those sections of time which you were free to spend more or less as you chose. How much time did you spend on what activities? What didn't get done that should have got done? What did you spend time on that you feel was wasted,

or excessive? How does the way you spent your time differ from the way you would like to have spent it?

Setting Priorities

Perhaps the next step is to list the things in each week that you would like to spend time on a regular basis - not just the things you feel you ought to do, but everything, including the things you enjoy. You probably can write down far more things than you really have time for in any one week. There is not usually enough time for us to do all the things we'd like to. So the next step is to establish priorities for these various activities: number each one as 1 (very important), 2 (important, but only when the higher priority items are done), or 3 (low priority, do only if there is time left over). If, as is likely, you find this hard to do, remember that the way you spent your last week was in itself the result of setting priorities, even if you didn't see it that way at the time. At many points you chose to do one thing rather than another, or someone chose for you. Like it or not, priorities will be established for your week in some way or other, and it is therefore advantageous to you to have as much thoughtful control over these priorities as possible. Otherwise you end up simply responding to immediate pressures and desires as you go along, which is fine unless you are trying to exert some control over your life. Exerting control is not just a question of using willpower at crucial times; it's also a question of having a *strategy* - knowing in advance what you are going to try to achieve.

Strategy

At this point you are able to compare your new priorities with your previous week's record of time use. You can work out what main changes are required, and what your main problems will be. Now you can plan your next week's time use. On a chart of the week's hours, enter those activities which are obligatory (such as work) or which recur at roughly the same time each week and which you do not wish to change (travelling, meals, shopping, household chores, etc.). The objective is to be able to see at a glance what hours are left available each week for the activities of your choice. The blank patches represent time that is unallocated; each week you can decide how you will use that time. One idea

would be to make enough photocopies of your master schedule (which shows activities that recur each week) so that you have one for each week. Then on a weekly basis (perhaps at the weekend) you can plan the week's activities by filling in the blank spaces. (Don't, however, spend too long making up your schedule; working on it doesn't count as studying).

Your Weekly Plan

For this purpose you will need to consult your list of general priorities, and also decide what are the specific tasks for that week. You will need to keep a continuous record of *all* the things you have to do in your studying, so that you can select items from it to put on your schedule for the week. If the weekly schedule gets out of date (i.e., doesn't work) during the week, you may have to switch to deciding *each day* what you are going to do. Make a list each evening of things to do on the next day.

When you are planning the week's study activities bear the following points in mind.

- Make use of *short periods* of time that are scattered about here and there in our lives. We often need these to make a transition from one activity to another, or to relax, but they are often wasted. Your concentration on a certain task may be good over a fairly short span of time but inefficient over a long period, so these short periods can be valuable.
- Try to *schedule regular times* specifically for the day-to-day work that is required in order to keep on top of the material that is being covered in the course. Just getting the assignments done and submitted by your deadlines, though vital, is not enough. Getting the lesson notes and textbook passages read carefully (and understood, and learned), and preparing for lectures, if you attend them, and reviewing your notes - these are tasks that require frequent attention. Most people cannot hope to do them successfully in big splurges at infrequent intervals. The day-to-day tasks should also include going carefully over returned assignments, learning from your mistakes, and looking

back at the relevant text and lesson material when gaps in your knowledge have been revealed. Remember, too, that if you are having to use your text and lesson notes constantly when doing assignment questions you probably are not doing sufficient routine learning of the material.

- Consider setting aside some *special time* each week or two to review the material covered in that period.
- If you are required to undertake a *long-term project* on your own, concurrently with your assignments, remember to plan the stages of this on a long-term basis and allocate time for it in each week.
- *Be realistic* about what you can achieve in the time you have available. Remember that the general tendency is for us to underestimate the time required for a job. This can lead simply to frustration. For some people, making up a schedule for a week or a day is an exercise in wish-fulfillment. They imagine themselves getting done all the things they did not get around to in previous weeks or days.
- Don't expect always to get everything done in an *ideal way*. Occasionally you may have to cut corners, or rush things you would rather do slowly and systematically. Regard this as a regrettable necessity that most people face at times, and don't let it get you down.
- Find out *when you work best*, when you are most fresh, or faced by fewest interruptions and distractions. Plan to do difficult tasks, or those you are reluctant to do, at those times, and leave the jobs you prefer for other times when they can still be done even if your efficiency is not so great. Some people recommend always arranging to do first in any period of study the task you find least inviting.

Achieving Your Time Goals

All well and good so far, but how do you stick to your schedule once it is made up? This is the point at which whether you succeed will depend not so much on a technique or strategy as on what you really want and how much you really want it. You have decided what you want: you have defined your long-term objectives, you have set priorities for your use of time, and you have included those priorities in a plan for the week. Now it's a question of how much effort you are prepared to put into getting results. There are, however, a couple of things to bear in mind. The first is that when people set out to change something about their lives, they usually succeed only gradually. Don't expect to be able to make substantial changes overnight. Be thankful for small gains. If things are going better this week than last week, you are succeeding in your task. Make sure you keep heading in the same direction.

Be Flexible

The other important consideration is that your schedule need not and should not be absolutely rigid. There are unpredictable elements in everyone's lives. Some tasks take vastly longer than you expect them to; others take less time than you anticipated. Unexpected events and opportunities occur which you will need or want to allow extra time for. For both these reasons, therefore, you should not become depressed about departing somewhat from your schedule. Don't give up, telling yourself that you are not the kind of person who can plan his or her life ahead of time - that you have tried several times and failed. A schedule is useful in keeping you on track, or keeping your head above water. It is not a straightjacket, intended to dictate your every move. Even a plan you periodically fail to observe is better than having no plan at all. Think of it as if you were planning a large meeting or party, a festival or a convention. You know from the start that everything will not go smoothly: little emergencies will occur, people will not be there quite when you expect them, and numerous little things will not turn out quite as you had imagined. Yet how many people would say that because of this it was not worth making detailed plans and sticking to them as closely as

possible? Don't abandon all attempts to impose some organisation on your life just because it's a difficult task; but be prepared to make changes and adjustments to your plans as they prove necessary or desirable.

The Benefits

For most people, managing their time will always be a problem. In some study tasks there is always more work that they could be doing, depending on their interests and ambitions. However, if you manage to plan your time to some extent, there should be some significant benefits in addition to the main one of getting more of the things you want to achieve done.

- You don't get behind so easily with work on courses. The importance of this has already been stressed.
- You can lose that "guilty" feeling and the anxiety that makes you feel you are always on the run. During your leisure time you can really relax, without thinking every now and again that you should really be working. In fact you can plan your leisure periods as rewards for work done.
- It helps you to develop habits, so that you will feel ready to work at certain times, rather than having to rely on willpower (a very fatiguing process) to make yourself study.
- It combats the depressing feeling of being overwhelmed. If you have to keep making decisions about whether to study and what to study whenever you have some spare time, you may find - as soon as you start something - that other things start seeming more important or just as urgent. If you have planned ahead, you know that each of your important tasks has had some time allotted to it, and you can therefore concentrate more easily on one thing at a time. When there is no system to study, everything seems to demand immediate attention.
- It helps to prevent the less urgent or less interesting tasks from getting squeezed out. You can plan to spend sufficient time on the tasks you will find difficult, and schedule time for regular reviewing of material

covered so far in the course - an important task, but one which will get left undone if you spend all your study time responding to immediate short-term pressures. Long-term assignments may need to be worked on over a long period of time, rather than being left until the deadline looms close. So break down these large projects into a series of steps, and build them into your weekly schedule well in advance of the deadline. Producing a report, for instance, may involve several distinct stages, and cannot usually be done well in one sustained rush.

- Your schedule can ward off interruptions, if you let your family and friends know that you have particular times set aside for study and other times for other things.

8 ARE YOU CONCENTRATING?

Most people feel less than satisfied with their capacity to concentrate while studying, and they tend to regard this as a problem they can do nothing about. To a limited extent they are right: nearly everyone's capacity for concentration is severely limited, and in certain situations just about everyone has problems concentrating. But despite our natural limitations, we can do a lot to improve our concentration on certain tasks by manipulating the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Understand Your Limits

The fact is that the vast majority of people have great difficulty concentrating efficiently on a demanding task - such as reading lesson notes or textbooks, or learning something for an examination - for more than thirty to forty minutes. They have difficulty concentrating well on what a speaker or lecturer is saying after about twenty-five minutes. So we should not make undue demands on our powers of concentration. That will lead to frustration, dissatisfaction and inefficiency. But at the same time we should realize that this basic capacity can be modified greatly by circumstances. For instance, sometimes a person sits down to study and can't keep his or her mind on it for more than two minutes. But when writing examinations, most people can concentrate well on difficult work for up to four hours, owing to the sense of pressure of time and a realization of the importance of the task. Usually we don't have the sense of pressure, and the extra nervous energy that goes along with it, in our study tasks, and so we have to create for ourselves the conditions that will cause us to approach our work with attitudes that lead to good concentration. Here are the main things to bear in mind:

Develop an Attitude

- *Making study a habit.* If you have become used to regarding certain times as habitual study times you experience less disruption of your

concentration from thoughts of all the other things you might be doing instead. One way to achieve this is to plan your time regularly but you can develop habits without formal time scheduling of course.

- *Having a regular place to study.* This also helps to make studying a habit. Find one or two places where you do nothing but study. You will generally associate that place with studying, and find studying to be the natural activity to do there. If you want to concentrate well, therefore, it is not a good idea to study while lying in bed, since you have been conditioned to regard that as a place where you relax and sleep. Some people find that studying anywhere at home is never very successful because they associate being at home with relaxing, spending time with family, etc. If you go to a library, however, try to get used to studying in one particular place in the library.
- *Keeping clear of distractions.* The ideal conditions are those in which you cannot see or hear other people. Even magazines, letters, etc., can be potent distractions, and even in libraries it is often hard to find places where you cannot see or hear other people. If you find you can study best when listening to music, or with some other continuous sound in the background, it is probably because the music is blotting out other sound (e.g., people's conversation) which would be even more distracting. If you find that something in the place you work is habitually distracting you, such as a TV set, you'd better put it (or yourself) somewhere else.
- *Dealing with mental distractions.* This is a bit more difficult, but most of these are controllable to some extent once you realize what it is that is distracting you. Here are some of the typical ones:

Fatigue makes concentration very difficult. But before you decide to wait until you are fresher, try switching to a different kind of task. A change can be as good as a rest. Are you the kind of person who feels like falling asleep over a textbook but

can then read a magazine for hours? Or try a short break and come back to the work. Don't give up at the first signs of fatigue.

Anxiety can be a major problem, especially at examination time.

Beyond a certain level, anxiety is counter-productive: you focus all your attention on your feelings of dread and so cannot concentrate on the task ahead of you. Try to become aware of your own self-defeating behaviour, focus on the job at hand instead of on your own emotions, and practice relaxation. Concentrate on the *first step* you must take in your study tasks right now, and ignore for the moment the long procession of such tasks you will have to try to get through eventually.

General thoughts and worries about your *personal and social life* may intrude on your studying. This is only to be expected; there is more to being a student than just studying. Some of these thoughts may represent personal problems that have to be faced and worked through. *Externalize* these kinds of *distractions* by jotting them down for future reference - a telephone call you must make, an idea to share with a friend, a plan for spending the weekend. Get them out of your system for the moment, but satisfy yourself that they will be looked after eventually or they will continue to bug you.

Daydreaming can be a great time-waster and can develop into a pretty strong habit. Try to catch yourself at the earliest possible moment and work out a routine for dealing with it - such as saying 'stop', out loud if necessary. If this is a frequent problem, take a look at your daydreams; examine what kinds of desires and wishes they indicate about yourself, and see if there are more productive ways of fulfilling the needs they represent.

For how long should you study? This is a very individual matter. Some people - at certain times, and when working on certain tasks - can concentrate well for hours. At other times people can find it hard to concentrate on a task for more than a few minutes at a time. Some people find they study in cycles, with long periods of intense concentration being followed by long stretches of idleness when they find it hard to do any studying at all. Perhaps the trick is to monitor your concentration and to accept that at times certain kinds of tasks are going to have to be done in short stretches with frequent breaks. Certainly there's little point in ploughing on for hours with very poor concentration. It's better to take a break and come back to it. Try to make sure that when you are studying you really *are* studying. Spending an evening officially studying but in fact half watching TV is usually a rather demoralizing experience.

If concentration is proving very difficult, it might be wise to plan on studying for short periods (30-40 minutes, perhaps) with five or ten minute breaks between each period. Try setting yourself a realistic objective for each period. Reaching a particular objective can give you a sense of satisfaction that provides momentum to carry you on. You say to yourself, "I read (and learned) my five pages, "rather than thinking, "I only did five pages, and there are three hundred more to go!" When you find a good pace you might just set objectives to reach before taking your break, dispensing with set time-periods altogether. But watch that you keep your breaks short. Don't settle down in front of the TV, kidding yourself that you're only there for five minutes. If you are planning a whole evening (or whatever) of studying, you might consider some sort of sequence that would make concentration as easy as possible: a short, pleasant task, followed by a longer, more arduous one, and then - to end with - another comparatively relaxing one.

9 THE EFFECTIVE READER

Reading is the most common of all study activities, and perhaps the one least efficiently performed. There are no magical ways of changing your reading capacities, but in this and the next section there are some important ideas about ways you can increase your efficiency:

What are you reading? Why?

Don't read a book or article just because it's there in front of you. Know specifically *why* you're reading it. To get specific facts? To get an in-depth understanding of a specific subject, or general background for a section of a course? To get just a brief idea of the subject and the author's conclusions? To get the main ideas but not the details? To evaluate the truth of the author's claims or the validity of the evidence presented? Never open the book at the first page and simply plod away, not knowing where you're heading or why. Ask yourself each time you start to read something: "what do I want to get out of this?"

How fast?

A lot of people feel that not reading fast enough is their main problem, and it's easy to see why when you're faced with a lot of reading and not much time to do it. But how fast you can read something will depend primarily on what you need to get out of it. Trying to understand and remember something difficult will always require slow reading, probably done several times. In fact, many people do their study reading *too fast* to get what they need out of it. Other kinds of reading can perhaps be done faster, however, so the key word here is *flexibility*. Different purposes require different approaches. Do you need to read everything? Can you skim some sections quickly and read others closely and slowly? Do you need to remember some or all of it? Do you know some of it already? The general tendency is to read everything in much the same way, at much the same speed. This tendency should be consciously resisted. The

good reader takes short cuts where possible, and slows right down where necessary.

Previewing

Knowing roughly what's coming helps your speed and comprehension. That's why magazine articles usually have a blurb at the beginning. So, preview all your reading. For books, look over the contents page; see how the book is organized, what it covers and what it doesn't. For chapters and articles, flip through the pages to get an idea of what's coming and what the author is setting out to do. Look for summary passages. Previewing also lets you decide further what your purpose is and what the appropriate approach should be.

Comprehension

How do you know whether you are understanding what you are reading? The best test of whether you have understood something is *whether you can summarize it in your own words*. This means being able to say briefly what the main ideas are, and express them as statements in your notes (not just saying what the passage is about). Whenever you're not sure if you've understood something, stop and try to summarize it in this way, then check back to see if your summary fits. If you don't try to summarize what you read, your reading will be like watching someone perform a task: it doesn't necessarily mean you can do it for yourself afterward. This approach requires some time and effort but the result will be worth it.

The main problem with reading comprehension, of course, is not the understanding of individual sentences or the recognition of individual facts, but understanding the overall meaning of larger units - paragraphs, sections, whole chapters, even whole books. You need to make sure you are perceiving what you read not just as a collection of unrelated details, where each sentence is of equal importance to all the others, but as a series of linked 'chunks' of information. Each 'chunk' will usually consist of one or more main points about a certain topic, supported by various kinds of more detailed information:

explanation, evidence, samples, etc. At least, this is the normal pattern we have come to expect in the kind of writing that explains things.

Making Notes

Good reading consists mainly in being efficient at seeing how the information is built up in this way - seeing where main points are, how the detailed evidence and explanations relate to each main point, and where the divisions are between the various 'chunks' of information. Try to show this schematization in any notes you make from your reading: include headings, group related ideas together, put the evidence and explanations as a sub-topics of the main points they go with, leave spaces between the sections, and so on. In other words, arrange the information on the page so that the way the material is built up is immediately apparent when you look back at your notes.

Beware the Highlighter Pen

Many people like to mark up their textbooks and lesson notes as they read, with a pencil, pen or magic marker, Be warned, however, that this does not actually get any information into your head. All you have (if you do it well) is a text that is conveniently marked for reference and review. And you may find that you have marked indiscriminately, or in a way that is only misleading when you have eventually mastered the subject. The practice is so easy that it feels like a relaxing way to study, but it may be doing you very little good.

10 MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MEMORY

Efficient “Forgetter”

Most of the information that we receive - through posters, the media, talking to people, and just looking around us, as well as in our work and our studying - will be forgotten within a short time. This is probably a good thing rather than a cause for regret, since it means that we do not get so overloaded with useless information and sense impressions that we cannot function properly. In fact we probably need to forget, and we should perhaps see ourselves as *efficient forgetters rather than simply poor rememberers*.

Many people, however, feel that they should remember most of what they experience. When they fail to do this they become convinced that they have poor memories, or at least a poor memory for certain things. To expect to remember everything in this way is to make too great a demand on our memories. We don't in fact have 'good' or 'bad' memories at all; we have different degrees of need and motivation to remember the various things we experience, and as a result we process various pieces of information in different ways. Sometimes we remember things because we are exposed to them again; sometimes we get the same effect from deliberate memorizing.

When we really want to remember something, therefore, we must adopt an appropriate method of dealing with the information. We cannot depend on things just 'sticking' in our minds because we have read or heard them a few times. Just reading something is no guarantee that we will remember it, even if we use techniques such as underlining the important passages or highlighting them with a marker. These techniques have an almost negligible effect on retention of information, though they do sometimes provide us with a textbook that is usefully marked for future reference. Even taking notes on a separate sheet as we read does not significantly help remembering. Unless we take deliberate precautions to retard

forgetting we will forget most of what we read and hear within a few days - the actual proportion depending on how meaningful the information is to us, i.e., how many things it connects with that we already know or believe.

Toward Improved Memory

Many people tend to do their reading and studying without being immediately concerned about remembering the information. They put off that aspect of the task until an examination approaches, when they suddenly have to go back over everything they have done and try to learn it. This can be very wasteful: a lot of the learning can be done as they go along, and retained throughout the course. In that way, examinations become no great threat and do not require a dramatic shift in study habits.

To remember consistently most of the material we need to, four things are required:

- we must **UNDERSTAND** what we're trying to remember
- we must **INTEND** to remember it
- we must use appropriate **DEEP PROCESSING** of the information
- we must consistently **REVIEW** it.

The next part of this section will deal with a method of study reading that will make sure that you understand and process thoroughly what you read, for occasions when that is what you need. After that, we'll look at the need for reviewing the material on a regular basis.

Reading to Remember

The following method is the most efficient way of doing your reading of textbooks and lesson notes *when you need to remember most of what you are reading*. To use the method for other purposes, such as when searching for the information you need for a particular case study, would be a waste of time. This method greatly increases the amount of information you retain, and is a modified version of a study reading method that has been extensively and successfully tested. It works and is simple to use once you get used to it. It will

probably take longer than your normal reading method, at least at first, but it's much quicker and more effective in the long run for material that you have to master in detail. It has the following special benefits not necessarily obtained through ordinary reading methods:

- it checks whether you have concentrated on what you read
- it checks whether you are understanding the material
- it motivates you to remember what you need
- it gradually changes the way you read, so that you read with an attitude that maximizes concentration and retention
- it identifies difficulties, so that you can formulate specific questions and difficulties
- it allows you to review easily

HERE IS HOW TO DO IT:

- *Preview the chapter or lesson.* Get a quick overview of what's in it. Look at headings, diagrams, etc.
- *Start reading, and when you come to the end of the first "section" stop reading.* How long each section is will depend on how the book is set up, how difficult the material is, and your own preference; but a third to a half of a page is a rough estimate of what you can probably handle at first.
- *Look over the passage that you have read* and see if you understand all the important things there - what the passage is about, the main points made, the important examples or details, etc. If necessary, and it will often be necessary, read it again.
- Turn the book over, or close it. On your note pad, *write down from memory, in point form, notes in your own words* of the important things in the passage to remember. In the left hand margin write a title for the section.

- *Go back to the book and check* whether you've got the main ideas straight and that you haven't left out anything important. Make corrections and additions where necessary. Then go on to the next section and do the same thing. Once you get used to the method you can perhaps read somewhat longer sections before stopping; but remember, *do* keep stopping. There's a tendency to keep going, to finish the chapter as soon as possible. But what's the use of finishing the chapter in a short time if you haven't understood and remembered half of it?

“In Your Own Words”

This method shows whether you have really absorbed and understood the material. If you cannot explain it in your own words you haven't really grasped it. How often have you read a good magazine article, or heard a talk, but found yourself later on unable to explain the ideas clearly to a friend? Yet this is exactly the task you have to be able to do to answer examination questions. If you find you cannot recall much of what you read at first, do not give up the method in frustration. It should show you how much you need this method. Things will rapidly get better, since knowing that you are going to be constantly “testing yourself” on what you read will change the “mind set” and attitude with which you read. Notice also that with the topic headings placed in the margin of your notes you have an easy review procedure laid out for you once you reach the end of the lesson or chapter. Just cover the notes, except the headings in the margin, and try to recall, without writing anything down, the information in your notes. Try this method now. Make it a regular part of your study technique.

Reviewing

Most of the experiments on memory have been carried out using so-called “meaningless” information (e.g., nonsense syllables). The research shows that we forget such information in a devastatingly short time after we learn it: after two days we have forgotten almost eighty per cent of it! This explains the fact

that if you “cram” for an exam at the last minute by just memorizing things without understanding them you will forget them almost immediately after the exam. Fortunately the situation with regard to “meaningful” information is more encouraging. The better you understand something - the more you see how it fits in with other things you know, the more interconnections you can make between it and other knowledge - the easier it is to remember. It’s therefore very important to concentrate on trying to see the “big picture”: the framework of ideas about a subject into which all the details fit.

However, there will still be a very significant forgetting rate for the best understood material unless it is reviewed; and of course sometimes the material you have to learn can never be made that meaningful: formulas and equations, arbitrary names and procedures, etc. These may simply have to be memorized, and, therefore, frequently reviewed. Learning to do complex operations in some subjects is almost impossible until you have some of this basic information at your fingertips. Much of what you learn in a course gets reviewed continually by being used in later stages of a course, but there’s usually quite a lot that does not get used and so gets forgotten. If you don’t review it until the exam you may easily find that you have to learn it all over again - at a much greater expense of time overall than if you had devoted small, regular amount of time to reviewing. The following tips on the review process will help you:

- Since memory loss is most rapid immediately after the material has been received, you should review the material as soon as possible *after first reading* or hearing it. In the case of study reading this means testing yourself on your reading as you go through it, in the way already described. Similarly, go over lecture notes and “edit” them (adding things
- you didn’t have time to write down, or didn’t immediately grasp the point of) as soon as possible after the class. You are saving yourself a lot of time later on.
- Set aside a *regular time* (e.g., each week) for reviewing all material covered in that period of time, and also some time for reviewing all the

material covered in your course or courses so far. The most efficient kind of review is that in which you read and look over the material, then put it out of sight and try to recite as much as you can from memory in your words. Having to use the material to solve problems is another good way to review; but if you look back at the notes or the textbook in order to find the information needed to solve the problem, you probably don't know it as well as you will eventually need to.

- The more reviews the greater your chance of recalling the material when you need it. Don't worry about getting "stale." Try to "*overlearn*" - so that recall becomes automatic, without effort.
- Cut down on the amount of information that must simply be memorized by *using* the information as often as you can. Interpret it, analyze it, *react to it*. Discuss it with your friends and other students. Apply it to the world around you. Think about it.
- To remember sequences of hard-to-recall facts, devise *mnemonics*, which are words or sentences which give you a cue for recalling each piece of information. If you learned to play the piano you may remember F-A-C-E (the spaces in the treble stave) or "Farmer Charles Goes Down And Ends Battle" (the order of sharps in key signatures: F-C-G-D-A-E-B).

11 LECTURES & LECTURERS

Your Instructor

To start with, one should point out that instructors are human beings and therefore they inevitably vary in the extent to which they suit your particular needs. Up to a point you have to regard your instructor as a fixed quantity, for better or worse, and make the necessary adjustments to the situation yourself. But on the other hand, up to a point, you *can* influence the way your instructor teaches you. You can, for example, give him or her feedback about what you are finding useful and what is not so helpful. Teachers need this kind of information in order to be effective. So you should feel free to establish a personal contact with your instructor, both to give this kind of feedback and to get clarification of points of difficulty or confusion.

In addition, having this personal contact helps you to maintain your interest and motivation in a particular course. Courtesy and frankness are, of course, necessary in initiating and maintaining a satisfactory and productive relationship. Most instructors are by no means unapproachable, and usually welcome feedback from a student, especially when it is clear that the student is interested in learning. So don't be in awe of your instructor just because he may know so much more about the subject than you do; this can make you inhibited, and that's bad for your capacity to be an effective student. The instructor has certain expectations of you, and you in turn have certain expectations of the instructor. If you feel the relationship is not quite satisfactory you should attempt to improve it.

Here are a few of the kinds of matters which you may wish to speak to an instructor about, in addition to those already mentioned:

- Uncertainty about the purpose or nature of the course. Are you still wondering what you are supposed to be learning how to do, or what problems the course is trying to provide answers to?

- Difficulties with individual topics. Is there, for instance, something you could be reading or doing to help you over the difficulty?
- Uncertainty about the best way to prepare for an examination.

Overcoming the Passive Approach

We easily get accustomed to the idea that attending a lecture is just a matter of going along and sitting down while somebody else tells us all about it. This is the passive, “show me” approach, and it doesn’t work very well. The first respect in which it doesn’t work is that it tends to underestimate the importance of preparing for lectures. Any kind of lecture is more easily understandable and more profitable if the students are prepared, and some lectures are a complete waste of time unless certain specific kinds of preparation have been done. Sometimes, for instance, a lecture might consist simply of the instructor offering the students a chance to ask questions about an assignment or a chapter of the textbook. Sometimes a lecturer might go through a chapter working on problems and examples that will make no sense to you unless you have read the chapter or done the problem already.

Even when this kind of situation does not arise, preparation is still important. If you have not looked at your notes on the last lecture since you made them, your ability to understand the material in the new lecture will certainly be significantly affected. Going over your notes after a class, and again before the next class, will mean that you have understood the material in the last lecture, have identified points of difficulty so that you can ask questions, and can see immediately how the new material relates to what came before.

Do you find that there is a ritual half minute of silence when your instructor asks if there are any questions? Do you find that you don’t like to ask your question because you feel it might be seen as a dumb one? If so, your experience is quite normal. This is another situation in which the passive approach doesn’t pay off. You learn by constantly following up the points you are puzzled about, not by putting them out of your mind. Effective learning means participation - in asking questions, joining in class discussions, or

whatever is involved in being a full member of that particular class. So go to class prepared (note down things in your reading that you found confusing, for example), and get set to make your voice heard.

Getting Involved

If you're shy about asking questions, you may be assuming that the instructor and the other students are just waiting for a chance to jump on you for your ignorance or stupidity. Relax! Instructors usually welcome relevant questions (they don't get enough of them most of the time), and students are not as censorious as you think. Most of them are just as reserved as you are. Most of us are insecure about not knowing things we feel we ought to know, but remember; not being ashamed to show ignorance is an essential quality for a student to have. How else are you going to learn? Besides, which is dumber: to ask a question which has already been answered in a previous part of the lecture or course, and which everybody else already knows the answer to, or to sit there for the rest of the course not really understanding the point? The question is worth asking even if you are the only person in the class who does not understand, and this is highly unlikely to be the case.

You should remember, however, that sometimes lecturers prefer to handle questions at certain points when they pause, or at the end of the lecture, rather than whenever you feel like asking a question, especially if the class is a large one. If your class is reasonably small there should be no problem in finding a good moment at which to ask your question. If the lecturer makes regular pauses for questions, jot down your question so you will have it ready when the time comes. And if in doubt about it, ask your instructor after the class how he or she would prefer to receive questions.

Good Listening

Listening is another *active* process, not a passive one. You are processing information, not just receiving it. Try to listen as if you personally had to respond to each thing the lecturer says. Your mind works much faster than

anyone can speak, so you have time both to listen and to consider what the speaker is saying, and to relate it to what you already know.

Be sure that you identify as early as possible the main topic and purpose of the lecture. Then, as the lecture proceeds, try to grasp how it is organized. What are the main steps or divisions in the subject matter? (Some lectures are better organized than others; in a disorganized one you may have to do the best you can to sort it out into manageable sections in your mind.) Identify the main points and the details that go along with each main point. Just as in writing about a certain subject, a person giving a lecture usually makes a series of basic statements, each of which in turn is elaborated upon by such devices as restatement, illustration, explanation, etc. Use the cues given by the lecturer to spot the places where he or she moves from one major section to another. Be alert for things that the lecturer thinks are particularly basic or important to the subject. Often these things will be emphasized, or repeated, or said slowly.

Pay special attention to beginnings and endings of lectures. At the beginning, the lecturer may look back at previous lectures in order to set this one in a context. At the end a brief summary may be given, or important information about reading or assignments. Sit where you can hear everything and where you will not be distracted by other people.

Taking Lecture Notes

This involves summarizing in your own words the things said in the lecture that may be important for you to remember. One useful aspect of this is that taking notes helps you to concentrate on what is being said. But the main purpose of notetaking is to provide you with the ability to recall the information when you need it later on.

Unfortunately, people often spend hours making notes that are almost useless for this purpose, either because the notes are not carefully and clearly set out, or because the lecture was not properly understood, or because the notes are just left for ages before they are looked at again, by which time the lecture is too far in the past. Lecture notes lose most of their usefulness when they cease to trigger some independent recall of the lecture itself. That reinforces what has

been said in the previous section about the importance of reviewing. Don't waste your time: make the kind of notes that are going to be useful to you, and make sure they stay that way. First of all, here are some very practical considerations about notetaking:

- Use a loose-leaf notebook or file folder rather than one with a fixed binding, so that you can add other sheets when necessary.
- Write on one side of the paper only, so that you can spread the sheets out more easily when reviewing or working from them.
- Label your notes according to course, topic, date, etc. to avoid confusion later on.
- Write legibly and neatly in ink, for permanence. Don't scrawl little notes here and there around the place.
- Use plenty of headings and sub-headings, underlinings, capitals, indentations, etc., for clarity.
- Leave clear spaces between sections so that you can see at a glance how the ideas are arranged on the page. Use a fresh page for each new lecture or major topic.
- Use abbreviations for common words and names, but only those you can easily identify later.
- If you miss a point, leave a few lines and get it from someone else or the lecturer afterward. Don't miss other points trying to get it as the lecture continues. If you don't know how to spell a name or a term, write down something that sounds roughly like it, so that you have a clue to what it should be when checking later.
- Record queries in the margin of your notes.

- Copy charts and diagrams that are written on the blackboard or overhead.

- Experiment with different arrangements on the page, until you find one that fits your course, the way you work and the way you use your notes afterwards. Here are some possible formats which might not have occurred to you:
 1. You could leave a wide margin on the right, or a space at the bottom of the page, for adding further ideas, questions or comments that occur to you after the lecture or when reviewing. Or you could use this space for writing brief summaries of the material on the page.

 2. You could leave a wide margin on the left for adding cue words (e.g., topic headings) afterwards. Then all you need to do when reviewing for exams is to cover everything except the cue words and test your ability to reconstruct the information on that page.

 3. If the lectures closely relate to a series of textbook readings, you could divide your page in half and write notes from your readings in one section. Then in the lecture you can add the lecture notes in other half, opposite the textbook notes made on the same topic together.

What to Write Down

Now, what about the actual business of taking notes? What are the important things to know about what you should actually write down? In the first place, don't think of yourself as a court stenographer. You are not trying to make a transcript of what is said. You cannot, and should not, aim to write every piece of information down. The main task is to make sure that you are listening actively and therefore understanding: seeing how the points that are made fit

together. Only then can you successfully summarize them on paper in note form. Time spent on understanding is more important than time spent on notetaking, though it's desirable to have some reasonable notes as well. Good notetaking is merely a branch of the art of good listening; you need to understand what is going on. So you may have to resist the temptation to make notes immediately. Wait for a moment and see how the idea being expressed is developing, and then you'll be able to summarize.

Mental Editing

Once you have this understanding, and have realized that your task in making notes is to select and summarize the important information, and classify and organize it on paper, the common problem of finding that the lecturer is going too fast should not be a problem at all. Besides, when people talk they are not as concise as when they write. They explain examples in detail, they repeat themselves, they stop to think, they try to say the same thing in different words, they write on a blackboard or overhead projector, and so. There are usually plenty of these little bits of "slack" time when you can concentrate momentarily on making notes, while keeping one ear open for what is being said.

There is no mystery about making notes from lecturers. The objectives are the same as when you are making notes from a textbook you are reading. All that is different is the medium. Your task in making summary notes is to separate out the important points and group along with each general point a clear indication of the supporting details that go along with it: examples, definitions, data, etc. Leave spaces between groups of information. Show how pieces of information relate to each other by using lists of points, numbering them if possible (i.e. three reasons for doing such -and-such; two methods for doing something else, etc).

Should you rewrite notes?

Most students do not have time to rewrite their notes, even though they may start off hoping to be able to do so. Don't kid yourself that it doesn't matter if

you don't take good notes first time around because you are going to rewrite them all systematically eventually. You may not get around to it - you probably won't.

Therefore, try to make your notes as clear as possible right from the start. However, you do have time to "edit" them. As soon as possible after the lecture, perhaps in company with a friend who was also at the lecture, look briefly at your notes, fill in the blanks you left, add details that you didn't have time to write down, and generally tidy up the organization. Do this while the lecture is still fresh in your mind, otherwise it will fade fast. Make a note of any point that is still unclear to you, so that you can ask a question about it next time. You should find that at the end of lecture there are several little additions and changes you want to make to your notes on the earlier part of the lecture as a result of hindsight.

Note also that if you are tape recording your lectures, you should not use the tape as a substitute for proper concentration and good notetaking first time around. The best use of a tape recording of a lecture is simply to check over certain problem areas, while following the notes you took.

And last, to get the most out of your lecture notes, don't just let them gather dust until a couple of weeks before the examination. Look over them regularly - it'll save you a lot of time in the end.

12 COMMON SENSE ABOUT WRITING

Many students find writing to be a very off-putting task. They feel that it is very difficult, that they are no good at it, and that any writing task they do is likely to show them at a disadvantage. Feelings like this often go back a long way and may have their roots in bad experiences with writing in high school or even before that. People sometimes drop out of courses at the point when they are asked to put pen to paper and produce a report, a case study, an essay or whatever.

They are right, of course, to think that writing is often a difficult business, though that's usually because the thinking process that leads up to writing is complex rather than because the actual writing in itself is difficult. After all, we have no trouble in expressing ourselves perfectly clearly when what we have to say is very simple. It's when we have a lot of facts and ideas to get straight in our minds that the task becomes difficult. And there are, of course, some people who lack any experience in writing, or for whom English is not a native language, and who as a result find it difficult to produce writing that conforms to the conventions of written English - in grammar, spelling punctuation and so forth.

“Prose and Poetry”

But the main cause of all the anxiety is a mistaken idea that writing is necessarily a matter of style, of “flowery” language and long words, and to do it properly you need to be the kind of person who has a natural flair with words. This notion is perhaps reinforced by the fact that at high school one learns English largely in the context of reading and discussing novels, plays and poems.

It's Only Communication

Forget all that. Writing doesn't need to have anything to do with "literature" or "fancy" language. Instead, think of it simply as a matter of *communication*. Your purpose in doing any kind of writing is to get an idea out of your own head and into the head of your reader with the minimum of fuss. You need to say what you mean clearly and accurately. That is all. Anybody who can do that in the spoken language can do so in the written language if they remember some basic points:

- *Grammar and usage.* When writing, we customarily observe some conventions that do not apply in speech. Some words, for instance, are considered to be appropriate only when we are talking. In writing something like a report, we are expected to use "complete sentences," and to join the parts of our sentences together in specific ways, using appropriate punctuation. If you find that you are breaking some of these "rules" in your writing, it is probably for one of the following reasons:
 1. There may be some rules of written usage that you do not know, either because you have forgotten them or because you never learned them. You need to look at a book which will briefly review the rules and procedures you are having difficulty with. See the list of books at the end of this section, under the heading "Grammar and Usage."
 2. You may be having such a difficult time wrestling with the ideas you want to get down on paper that you have a problem thinking about writing grammatically at the same time. The only answer to this is to revise your work afterwards. You can't do everything at once. Once you have decided that you have said what you want to say you can go back and look carefully at each sentence to see if it conforms to grammatical conventions.

3. You may simply be writing carelessly. Nearly everyone makes frequent mistakes when they write (and when they type), and the only solution is to check *carefully* what you have written (not just glance quickly over it), being prepared to make extensive changes and revisions where necessary.

- *Accuracy and precision.* When speaking to someone, we don't usually need to choose our words and expressions very carefully. If the other person doesn't understand at first, or misunderstands, we can repeat what we said or explain it in a different way. But when writing, we only get one chance. It has to be right the first time. *We must use words and expressions that are accurate and precise*, not loose, vague or ambiguous. When looking at each word and sentence you have written, ask yourself: Is that absolutely clear? Might the reader be unsure what it means? Could it have more than one possible meaning? Be a real nitpicker about your own writing.
- *Careful planning.* Don't start writing until you have decided what you want to say and can see where you are going. This usually means jotting down the topics or ideas that will be covered in each section of what you are writing.
- *Organizing the sequence of parts.* In any piece of writing you cannot say everything at once, so you have to decide which things come in what order. Sometimes you will be working with a very rigid sequence of parts that has already been laid out for you, but at other times you have to decide for yourself. Ask yourself: How does what I want to say break down into a number of component parts? Think first of what the major divisions of your report might be. For instance, a case analysis in which you are asked to report on three alternative decisions is likely to be in three main parts (though not all decisions are that easy). Then look at each of your main parts and see whether each of them is going to require a further division into component parts. You might eventually, for example, come up with a proposed sequence of parts that consists of three major sections, each consisting

of about four sub-sections. Two of those four sub-sections in each of the first two main sections may, for instance, be further divided into two or three parts.

There are usually several alternative ways in which you can organize any report into a sequence of parts. Think of writing a report in which you compare two machines and make a recommendation about which one a company should purchase. Are you going to discuss one machine in your first main section, and discuss the other machine in your second main section? Or are you going to select the important aspects of each machine (purchase price, maintenance cost, productive capacity, length of operating life, depreciation, space required, etc.) and take these aspects one by one, comparing each machine as you go along? In deciding between alternative ways of organizing, use the following criteria.

1. Is one sequence of parts more *natural and logical* than another? One sequence, for instance, might be: statement of problem → causes of problem → important considerations and data → alternative solutions → recommended course of action.
2. Does one arrangement into parts give a more *accurate and thorough* idea than another of how the component parts relate to each other? This would be important, say, if you were trying to describe the various sections or activities of a company. Think of two people trying to decide how to explain and describe the parts of the human body. One person divides the body into arms, legs, head, trunk etc. But the second person, whose knowledge is deeper, divides the body into systems: musculo-skeletal system, nervous system, circulatory system, gastro-intestinal system, cardio-vascular system, respiratory system, and so on.

3. Is one arrangement into parts more *economical* than another? You want to avoid an arrangement which obliges you to keep returning to the same subject in a number of different sections. You may find sometimes that any arrangement still results in overlaps between your various sections. Choose the one that enables you to be most concise.

Once you have produced an efficient sequence of parts and written your report, check back to see that you have made clear to your reader what your sequence of parts is. The test is: as the reader moves from one section to the next, is it made immediately obvious what the new section is about and how it relates to the previous section?

- *Making your purpose clear.* This should be done right at the beginning of the report. Simply explain what the report is attempting to do and how it will go about the task. That gives your reader an overview before he or she has to tackle the detailed information, and makes everything else much easier to follow. Give your reader the opportunity to preview your report.
- *Your reader.* Remember always that your report is a communication. Its purpose is to convey a certain set of ideas to the reader. If it fails to do that it is useless. So consider: what does the reader of a report like the one you are writing need to know? How much detailed explanation does he or she need? How much technical information will he or she understand? Every time you have difficulty in deciding how to proceed in the writing and arrangement of your report, make your decision by thinking about what the reader needs to know. Don't ask yourself, for instance, how a report should begin; ask yourself what is the first thing the reader needs to know.
- *Revision.* Except under examination conditions, when you have little time, revision of your writing is crucial. When you write the first draft you are concentrating on getting your ideas down on paper. Revision is required in order to make sure that your ideas are expressed in such

a way as to be clear to someone else. Most people think of revision as just checking over their work, making small changes and corrections here and there. But in fact it should be a thorough reassessment of all aspects of your report. Look at the judgements you have made, the way you have organized your material (i.e., all the major components of the report), and see if any changes or improvements are needed. Then go over it bit by bit, sentence by sentence, to see if everything is clearly expressed.

One reason why people don't do this task of revision very well is that when they are finished writing they feel fatigued and don't wish to have anything more to do with what they have written. It's very difficult to revise anything immediately after you have written it. So work ahead of your deadline, and give yourself time to take a complete break from the report for a couple of days after you have finished writing the draft. You will then come back to it with renewed energy and be able to make changes and corrections more easily.

You will be more able to read what you have written as if you are the reader of the report, rather than its author. Just after you have written it you are still too close to the material; as you read it you relive the mental processes which led to your writing of the individual sentences, and, therefore, you don't see things that are not clearly expressed. Revision requires that you put yourself in the shoes of the reader and pretend that you are reading your report for the first time.

It sometimes helps to get another person to read your report. But don't ask them what they think of it, or ask them if it's OK unless they are well qualified to give a useful opinion on the subject. In most situations you will find it more helpful just to ask your friend to put a question mark beside anything he or she doesn't fully understand. That will be an additional help in finding out which sentences require revision.

Format and Style

Nothing is said here about the *actual format* to be used when writing up a report, case analysis, or whatever it is you are asked to do. But in the second part of the list of books which follows there are some books that give detailed suggestions on writing reports, case studies, recommendations, letters, memos and so forth.

Books on Writing that may be Useful. Look for them in public or college libraries or in a bookstore.

1. **Books on Grammar and Usage**

Brusaw, C. T., G.J. Alred and W. E. Oliu. *The Business Writer's Handbook*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976. Has alphabetically arranged entries on aspects of grammar, usage and style, as well as brief notes on formats for reports, resumes, etc.

Herman, W. *The Portable English Handbook*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Hodges, J. C. and M. E Whitten. *The Harbrace College Handbook*, Canadian edition, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979. Clearly arranged, and easy to use for reference.

Blumenthal, J. C. *English 2600*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. A review course in basic grammar. Goes step by step in a simple, teach yourself format, but takes quite a longtime to get through.

Casty, A. *Building Writing Skills*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971. Also a self-teaching review course.

Nelson, H. B. *English Essentials*. Totowa, N. J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1956. Concise and cheap.

2. **Books on Specific Kinds of Business and Technical Writing**

Fear, E.D. *Technical Writing*. New York: Random House, 1973. A fairly easy introduction to technical and business writing. Not as long, thorough or dense as the next two entries.

Himstreet, w.c. and W. M. Baty. *Business communications: Principles and Methods*, 5th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1977.

Sherman, T. A. and S. S. Johnson. *Modern Technical Writing*, 3rd edition. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Rosen, L. S. *Introduction to Accounting Case Analysis*. 2nd edition. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1981. This book is not concerned mainly with writing, but contains valuable material and ideas on writing reports presenting the results of case analysis.

13 PREPARING FOR EXAMINATIONS

You don't prepare for an examination just one or two weeks before it actually arrives. Preparation starts right at the beginning of the course, since examinations test how well and consistently you have been learning throughout the course. If you follow the advice given in earlier sections about reading to remember and reviewing regularly, the work required shortly before examinations should not be too onerous.

Suggestions for Reviewing

Nevertheless, reviewing all the course material and making a special effort to remember it is of course highly desirable toward the end of the course, whether or not you have been studying efficiently throughout. Here are some points to remember about this task:

3. *Pace yourself carefully* in your approach to the exams. This is a time when a schedule is especially useful. You want to make sure that everything is covered more or less evenly, with special emphasis on your weak areas (as revealed, for example, by your assignments). At the same time you want to maintain as far as possible your regular way of living, so that you don't "burn out" before you get to the exam.
4. *Make an outline.* Look over your notes and books from the course and make an outline of the major sections. You will be taking each of these major sections in turn, establishing first the important ideas and principles, and then mastering the details.
5. *Plan.* When you have surveyed your total task, plan how you are going to spread the material to be covered over the time you have available. Set yourself a specific time objective for finishing each section.

6. *Stretch out your reviewing* over a lengthy period of time; covering the material in small parts is usually more successful than trying to digest it in huge chunks. Use the short periods of time that are often wasted; you can do some effective intensive studying in half an hour.
7. *Do not cram.* Last-minute “cramming” of material that has *not* already been studied and understood is not effective and should not be tried except in an emergency. It can also increase exam anxiety. But last-minute reviewing of material already studied and understood is useful, and for this you can use all the time right up to the examination. But don’t get over-tired. Schedule your time so that you work steadily but not desperately.
8. *Revise notes.* As you work through the sections, revise your notes where necessary. You cannot rely on unsatisfactory notes. You may need to correct and fill out your notes, and go back to the text or lesson notes and quickly re-read selective passages which you failed to make adequate notes on.
9. *Understand the material before trying to learn it.* Make sure also that you know how each particular piece of knowledge fits in with other things in the course. Make charts and lists of ideas and facts, showing how they are grouped and how they relate to each other. Organize the information to be learned into meaningful sections. Understanding rather than just memorizing makes it easier for you to answer questions on topics regardless of how they are presented, and to apply theory to practice to solve problems. Not all items of information are of equal importance. You must be able to pick out the major ideas and main groups of facts or principles. Periodically recite the main headings or sections of whatever it is you’re working on.
10. *Vary your approaches to the material to be learned.* Read it aloud, make notes, draw charts and diagrams, etc. Try presenting the information in a different form or sequence from that in which you learned it. If learning a list, combat the tendency to forget the items in the middle of the list by sometimes working backwards and forwards

from the middle. In fact, in the battle to retard the forgetting process, use any weapons at your disposal: associations of ideas, sounds of words, recollections of the place on the page where you found the information, etc.

11. *Use mnemonics*

12. *Interference.* What you do between learning and recall can have a powerful effect. Sleep, music or exercise have the least distracting effect. It is important to avoid studying two similar subjects close together, especially if the material is low in meaningfulness, or if one task is learned less well than the other.

13. *Use flash cards.* For points that continually elude your attempts to remember them you might try using “flash” cards. Isolate the crucial pieces of information and write them on small cards. On the backs of the cards write the appropriate questions. You can carry these cards around with you and test yourself regularly. Put aside the cards bearing the questions you succeed in answering and come back to them in a day or two to see if you still remember the answers.

14. *Practice.* Knowing the information is only half of the examination preparation. You must also *practice using* it. While you are learning you must think and reason with what you are learning. Consider its implications and how you might be asked to use it. People do poorly on examinations more often because they cannot *use* their knowledge, rather than because they don’t know the facts they need to know.

15. *Do practice problems.* If you have practice problems in your textbook, do as many of them as possible, noting carefully whether you need to look back to your notes or textbook to do the problems. Turn the problems around, seeing whether there are other ways in which they could be expressed.

16. *Practice answering questions.* Make up questions, and consider how you would answer each question. This can sometimes be done

conveniently in pairs. Two people can make up questions for each other, and ask each other how they would answer them. They can then discuss the best way of tackling each question, and identify further learning that they need to do.

17. *Consider forming a study group, if you haven't already done so.*

14 WRITING EXAMINATIONS

Exam Guidelines

18. *Arrive at the exam room early*, so that you are as relaxed as possible. Don't feel you have to hang around and talk to other people, however, if this makes you nervous. Make sure you have all necessary materials with you, including a watch, spare pencils, pens, erasers, calculator batteries, etc.
19. *Read the general instructions carefully*. How many questions must you do and from which sections? This may seem very obvious, but remember that when people are tense their capacity for careful reading declines dramatically.
20. *Time yourself carefully*. It is amazing how consistently people will not leave themselves quite enough time for their last question or two. Allow yourself time for questions strictly in proportion to the marks allotted for each question. Divide the total time allowed by 100 and multiply by the marks allowed for each question. For example:

3 hour exam: $3 \times 60 = 180$ $180 / 100 = 1.8$ per mark
 1.8×20 marks = 36 minutes for the question

In practice you will probably want to allow less time than this for each question, so that you have time for checking at the end or returning to answers that you didn't feel satisfied with.

It is not advisable to spend any more than the budgeted time on a question until all the others have been attempted. Pace yourself carefully all the way through. If necessary, simply stop writing when your budgeted time on a question is up, and leave a space, so that if you have time you can come back to it. Pacing yourself is especially important for questions which are divided into several sections: the

tendency is for these to take up more than their share of the time you have. If you do run out of time on the last question, make a brief outline of how you would answer the rest of the question or finish the solution of the problem.

21. *Do the questions you can handle best first.* This gives you confidence. But when you have settled on the question you are going to attempt do not give up easily and start flitting from question to question, getting anxious as soon as you hit a difficulty. Remember that exam questions often look more difficult at first than they really are. The correct way to answer them may not be apparent at first glance. They are intended to present you with a problem to work out, and this may take time.
22. *Try to answer each question that you are required to.* A partial answer is better than none. It is sometimes said that the first fifty percent of the marks for a question are easier to obtain than the second, meaning that if you can show that you understand the theory or concept involved you may receive a substantial proportion of the marks, even if you haven't the time to work out all the calculations. However, always make sure you show any steps and calculations you *have* done in a question, so that the marker can see how you have arrived at your answers.
23. *Read each question carefully.* Anxiety can cause carelessness. One useful idea is to underline key words in the question as you read it through. Especially take note of exactly what is required from you, so that you do not prepare a solution or answer that is not quite what is being asked for. Some people just note that a question is about a certain topic or deals with a certain kind of situation, and then they rush ahead and write down all kinds of ideas they have about the subject or about that kind of problem. Don't do that. You're expected to *think*, not just react with an instant answer. Don't pad your answer, and don't add data that you are not being asked for. Note carefully what information is given to you, and remember that not all the information that is given may need to be used directly in preparing your answer.

24. *State assumptions if necessary.* The examiners make every effort to ensure that questions are worded as clearly as possible. If you think, however, that there are alternative answers, and you're not sure which one the question is asking for, state your assumption of what is being asked for and complete your answer accordingly.
25. *Essay-type questions.* There is a common misconception that the normal criteria for judging essay -type writing do not apply on examinations. But good organization is very important, so plan each answer before you start to write. Jot down ideas as they come into your head, and use them to make a brief outline of the main sections of your answer. Use paragraphs to show how your answer is divided into these sections. Try to express yourself as clearly as possible. Be concise: cut out irrelevancy and padding. Don't try to bluff the examiner that you know more than you do. You may use point form but be certain that you elaborate and explain the points.
26. *Review your answers.* Don't be superstitious about changing answers if on reflection you think they need to be changed. Examine your answers for mistaken assumptions and for errors in calculation. Check for carelessness, whether in problem-type or essay-type answers, even if you feel depressed about the way the examination has gone. There are almost always improvements to be made.

15 EXAM NERVES

Is exam anxiety bad?

Situations which involve performing and being evaluated, such as examinations, cause stress for almost everyone. You should not be worried if the thought of an approaching examination causes you to feel somewhat nervous, since stress can be a positive motivating force. In fact a certain amount of stress is necessary for good performance - what we call being “up” for an examination. It takes the bracing effect of anxiety to enable you to concentrate at or near peak efficiency for a three hour stretch. You could not study with that kind of concentration over such a long period of time under normal conditions without several rest periods.

However, many people tend to think that they are the only ones in the exam room feeling very nervous. Far from it. Almost everyone feels anxious, even if they do not appear to be showing it. A small minority of people, nevertheless, experience a kind of anxiety which goes beyond the normal “helpful” type and which may interfere with their capacity to perform as well as they should. They may find themselves unable to recall things they know very well, or fail to pay proper attention to a question, or make frequent minor errors, or be unable to concentrate properly.

Recent research has shown that the physical arousal which is characteristic of states of anxiety is not itself what causes the negative effects of exam anxiety. Large numbers of people who experience the same level of arousal suffer no ill effects. The difference lies in the way they react to the arousal. For some people it gives them extra energy, and the excitement sharpens their concentration. For a small minority, on the other hand, it leads to a situation where they spend their time thinking about a number of worries that do not help them with the task at hand but in fact hinder them. Psychologists call these thoughts “task-irrelevant worries,” and it’s these things buzzing around in your head (when you should be concentrating on the exam questions) that cause anxiety to mar exam performance.

What is going on when you are over-anxious?

You are probably aware of the normal physical feelings of stress, but if anxiety interferes with your exam performance you may be much less aware of these “task-irrelevant” worries preventing you from concentrating. In fact, not only are these worries irrelevant to getting the task at hand done, they also consist largely of negative statements about how well you are likely to do. As you can imagine, this does not help. Can you conceive of a famous golfer, about to try a crucial putt in a championship, saying to himself over and over: “You’re sure to miss. It’s too difficult a shot. You can’t play golf to save your life. Your previous success was just a fluke...?” Here are a few of the kinds of things that people say to themselves in examinations:

27. Just before the examination you try to recall a particular fact and can’t remember it. Immediately you tell yourself that you don’t know the material needed for the exam.
28. On catching sight of a question on the examination paper that you don’t think you can do, you tell yourself that you studied the wrong things that the questions are quite different from what you had expected, and that you’ll never be able to pass. Or you start to flip backwards and forwards from question to question, each time giving up and moving to another as soon as you feel you can’t do it. With growing panic you tell yourself that you can’t do *any* of these questions.
29. On seeing the person next to you working furiously away, you tell yourself that everyone is answering the questions much more quickly than you are, and that you will never have time to finish.
30. You so want to pass this exam that you try to “will” yourself into succeeding, fearful of what the consequences will be if you fail. As you go through the questions you can feel yourself saying all the time: “I’ve got to do well, I’ve got to do well ...”

These are just examples. Once you've started on this kind of train of thought, all sorts of other ideas may come to reinforce your nervousness: "I'm just not smart enough...I never was any good at examinations...I've wasted all that time and money...What will I say to my wife (husband, parents, boss, etc.)...?" The continuous buzzing of these thoughts in your head can prevent you concentrating properly on the questions and doing justice to your real capabilities. Notice that while there may be some justification for some of these negative statements (most people realize that they would, in ideal circumstances have done more thorough preparation of some areas of the course material, for example), most of the statements of this kind are irrational. One little thing gets magnified into an enormous concern, and so on.

What can you do about it?

31. The first thing is to become more aware of what is going on inside your head at these times, identifying the kind of thoughts that are either predictions of disaster or else are simply not relevant to what you have to do (i.e., answer the questions). You can then build a strategy for dealing with the situation when it arises. If you think about this beforehand, and "practice" dealing with an anxiety attack, you should be in good shape when the exam comes. Here are some suggestions:
32. Work out a way of *quickly relaxing physically* as a prelude to dealing with your anxious thought. Sit back and tense each set of muscles in turn as hard as you can (hands/forearms, shoulders, thighs, etc.), allowing each set of muscles to relax after tensing them for a slow count of ten.
33. Decide what you really need to be *concentrating* on at that moment, and eliminate thoughts about anything else. If your immediate task is to study a certain topic for an exam, or solve an exam problem, for instance, you must dismiss any thoughts about the consequences of failing the exam. Remember that it's allowing those kind of thoughts

to fill your mind when you should be applying yourself to the task at hand that could lead to undesirable consequences.

34. If you are besieged with negative thoughts, you might like to *consider the reasonableness* of them. Most people find that when they have these predictions of catastrophe going round in their heads they are not being very reasonable, i.e., they don't have any convincing evidence for what they are predicting. Is it reasonable to assume that because you can't for the moment remember an important fact you won't be able to recall it in a minute or two? Is it reasonable to assume that because you can't immediately see how to do a question you're going to fail the exam? Is it a sensible use of evidence to believe that you are doing badly on an exam because the person next to you is writing down a lot more than you are? Imagine the most calm and reasonable person you know, looking objectively at your situation. What would he or she say about your situation? Would they agree that you have grounds for believing that you are in dire straits?

There's no need to be over-optimistic of course. You won't be fooled by statements like "I don't care if I fail," or "This examination is going to be a breeze." Concentrate on being reasonable - on assessing the evidence that is available for your thoughts. Does it justify the conclusions you are drawing?

16 GLOSSARY

Compare	Examine qualities or characteristics that resemble each other. Emphasize <i>similarities</i> , although differences may be mentioned.
Contrast (Distinguish between)	Compare by observing <i>differences</i> . Stress the dissimilarities of qualities or characteristics.
Criticize	Express your own <i>judgment</i> concerning the topic or view point in question. Discuss <i>both</i> pros and cons.
Define	Clearly state the <i>meaning</i> of the word or term. Relate the meaning <i>specifically</i> to the way it is used in the subject area under discussion. Perhaps also show how the item defined differs from items in other classes.
Describe	Tell the <i>whole</i> story in narrative form.
Diagram	Give a drawing, chart, plan or graphic answer. Usually you should label a diagram. In some cases, add a brief explanation or description.
Discuss	This calls for the most <i>complete</i> and <i>detailed</i> answer. Examine and analyze carefully and present both pros and cons. To discuss briefly requires you to state in a few sentences the critical factors.
Evaluate	This requires making an <i>informed</i> judgement. Your judgement must be shown to be based on <i>knowledge</i> and <i>information</i> about the subject. (Just stating your own ideas is not sufficient.) Cite authorities. Cite advantages and limitations.

Explain	In explanatory answers you must clarify the cause(s), or reason(s). State the “how” and “why” of the subject. Give reasons for differences of opinions or of results.
Illustrate	Make clear by giving an <i>example</i> , e.g., a figure, diagram or concrete example.
Indicate	Provide a short explanation.
Interpret	Translate, give examples of, solve, or comment on, a subject, unusually making a judgment on it.
Justify	Prove or give reasons for decisions or conclusions.
List (Enumerate, Identify)	Present an itemized series or tabulation. Be <i>concise</i> . Point form is often acceptable.
Outline	This is an <i>organized</i> description. Give a general overview, stating main and supporting ideas. Use headings and sub-headings, usually in point form. <i>Omit minor details</i> .
Prove	Establish that something is true by citing evidence or giving clear logical reasons.
Relate	Show how things are connected with each other or how one causes another, correlates with another, or is like another.
Review	Examine a subject critically, analyzing and commenting on the important statements to be made about it.
State	Present the main points in brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details, illustrations, or examples.
Summarize	Give the main points or facts in condensed form, like the summary of a chapter, omitting details and illustrations.

Trace

In narrative form, describe progress, development, or historical events from some point of origin.

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