The Arts Good Study Guide

Ellie Chambers and Andrew Northedge
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PREFACE

This second edition of *The Arts Good Study Guide* is much more than an update of the original. The book has not only been rethought and rewritten in many places, but also supplemented. It includes new chapters, and parts of chapters, notably on computer-aided study. We have taken the opportunity not only to bring the book up to date, ten years on, but also to strengthen it and widen its relevance. It is, again, written in the belief that studying is one of the most interesting and satisfying things we can do – and that learning how to study well is among the most challenging.

**Purposes**

*The Arts Good Study Guide* retains its primary purpose as a guide for students of arts and humanities subjects (though not primarily for those studying fine or performance arts); for those who have a serious interest in the long-term development of their learning and study skills. It is not a source of quick fixes and instant remedies. It assumes a willingness to invest time in working on exercises and reflecting on them. It is a thoughtful, theoretically grounded exploration of the nature of studying. At the same time, it is a practical guide to reflective experimentation with study techniques, drawing as it does on many years of exploring these skills with students.

**Changes**

The first edition of *The Arts Good Study Guide* reached an audience far broader than the part-time, adult, distance-learning students for whom it was written. Consequently, this new edition has been recast to address the needs of *all students* aspiring to study beyond school level. It has also been restructured to reflect the sweeping changes in university study over the past decade. Thus it now has *four more chapters* than before, and is organised in *two parts*. However, the basic strategies for studying and the underlying assumptions about the nature of learning remain.

**Part 1: Studying intelligently**

The first part of *The Arts Good Study Guide* addresses the broad strategic aspects of successful study and consists of three chapters. These chapters address one of the key changes of the past decade, the *relocation of study skills* from their former status on the periphery of higher education, as ‘remedial’ activities for beginners, to the *mainstream* under the new label ‘learning skills’. Developing skills as a learner is now recognised as essential preparation for life in the twenty-first century. This is reflected in the title of Chapter 1, ‘Investing in yourself’. These skills are not simply practical but are also *strategic*, requiring a capacity for self-management; hence Chapter 2, ‘Taking control of your studies’. They are also *reflective* skills, which depend on self-knowledge, self-analysis and an understanding of the learning process: thus Chapter 3, ‘Understanding how you learn’. This chapter includes an introduction to the principles of critical-analytical reading and writing,
reflecting growing recognition of the importance of supported entry into academic discourse for an increasingly diverse student body.

The other key change of recent times is the revolution in study practices brought about by computing and the internet. This is addressed right from the start of the book, in Chapter 1 Section 1.8: ‘Investing in Information Technology’. Students are often aware of only a few of the many ways in which a computer can be used to support their studies; this section encourages exploration and experiment. Parts of the rest of the book have also been reworked to reflect changes to basic study activities brought about by word-processing, global access to online information, electronic information storage, and the like.

Part 2: The essential skills
The second part of the book gets down to the practical business of developing skills in the core activities of studying. As in the original edition, readers are asked to undertake genuine study activities, most of them based on a single text, ‘On the Town’: Women in Augustan England’, by Joyce Ellis (1995). So the content of the original chapters generally remains, but ‘Making notes’ has been separated off from ‘Reading’ to give both processes wider relevance and to allow exploration of electronic note making. And the chapter formerly entitled ‘Different ways of studying’ has been recast as ‘Learning through talk’, including extensive new material on online group discussions and making presentations.

The two chapters on writing remain the longest and perhaps the most important, since acquisition of an academic writing voice and the abilities to assemble material and present it in the form of an argument are in many ways the culmination of the transition into competent academic practice. Retitled ‘Writing essays’ and ‘Managing the writing process’, they retain the same broad division into the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of academic writing. However, the first has been reorganised to make the treatment more transparent and accessible.

The chapter ‘Processes of study in the arts and humanities’ is reworked using a poem by Robert Frost as the basis of discussion. There follows a new chapter, ‘Online research and project work’ which introduces the basics of searching for pictures online. The final chapter, ‘Preparing for examinations’, is the least changed, though again there is reworking.

Notes

Level
We have assumed that many readers will be starting studies at post-school level. However, students in the later years of schooling may find the book useful preparation for the switch to higher level studies. Equally, students who have progressed beyond the entry stages of a degree will find much to reflect on.
Assumptions about computing
We have assumed that all readers will have at least some access to a computer and to the internet. Many will already be using a computer for routine study tasks, while others will be looking for advice on ways in which they might profitably switch to computer-based working.

Terms used
Because the original *Arts Good Study Guide* was used in schools, colleges and campus universities, we have dropped the use of specific Open University terminology and adopted more general terms. However, one or two are somewhat awkward. For example, we have largely avoided the term 'lecturer' on account of its narrow connotations, even though it is the typical descriptor of the post in higher education. And we have used 'tutor' mainly in the context of discussion groups because its usage varies between institutions. Instead, we have tended to use 'teacher' throughout.

Personal acknowledgements
The first edition of this book benefited enormously from the comments of Open University colleagues and students, and the same is true of the second edition. So it is important that we include here those who contributed originally as well as those who contributed to the new edition.

First edition
Many people contributed to the writing and production of the original book. As part of our preparation, we asked some students to volunteer their work. We are very grateful to them, and to their tutors. Grateful thanks also to Blanche Gaskell and Vina Quinn-Searle who, as student assessors, gave us their comments on draft chapters. Members of the OU Arts Faculty’s A103 course team offered helpful advice or assistance: especially Cicely Havelvy (Chair), and also Colin Cunningham, Julie Dickens, Lorna Hardwick, Trevor Herbert, Liz Manning, Derek Matravers, Jim Moore, Nora Tomlinson, Linda Walsh, Nigel Warburton and Roberta Wood. So too did colleagues in the School (now Faculty) of Health and Social Care, host to the access course *Living Arts*: Martin Robb (Chair), Margaret Allott and Stella Warriker, with secretarial support from Val O’Connor. Other colleagues in the OU who gave us their time and ideas include: Tim Benton and Hilary Robertson (Arts Faculty); Ann Brechin and Tony Walton (School of Health and Social Care); Nicola Durbridge, Magnus John, Jan Rae, Mary Thorpe and Olwyn Wilson (Institute of Educational Technology); Giles Clark (Book Trade Department); Tony Coulson (Library); Simon Rae (Academic Computing Service). Thank you to Sian Lewis, who designed the book. Thanks also to our friend Gill Parsons, then of North Hertfordshire College, for her help with Chapter 6.

Special thanks to Nora Tomlinson, who read every word and made many insightful, detailed suggestions for improvements; to Margaret Allott for her efficient organisation of the project and friendly support; and to Clive Baldwin for his skill and patience as editor of the book.
Second edition
For this new edition we are indebted to members of the OU Arts Faculty’s AA100 Course Team for their comments on draft chapters, especially Richard Brown, Debbie Brunton, Jessica Davies, Anne Laurence, Charlotte Stevens, Carolyn Price; and to Carol Green and Yvette Purdy (Arts Course Management) for their unfailing helpfulness and support. Grateful thanks go to Gillian Farnen and Clare Spencer, OU Arts Associate Lecturers, for their careful reading and insightful comments on all the draft chapters. Our thanks too to colleagues in the OU Institute of Educational Technology who gave their support: Peter Knight, Wendy Morgan and John Pettit. And we are grateful to the book production team: Emma Wheeler (Media Project Manager), Richard Jones (Editorial Media Developer), Peter Heatherington (Graphics Media Developer), Hannah Parish (Media Assistant), Liam Baldwin (Visual Resources Officer), and Mahruk Bailey (Assistant Project Manager, OU Worldwide). Thanks also to Sheree Kaur, Sharon Monie, David Sheppard and Kristoff VanLeeuwen.

Particular thanks to our colleagues Jessica Davies, Trevor Herbert, Audrey Linkman, Simon Rae and Derek Sheills for their various contributions to the book (acknowledged in footnotes).

We are also grateful to those students who completed a questionnaire asking for their reflections on the learning process or who agreed to allow quotation from their online messages. (Note that the names which appear in the book are fictional). The students who contributed in one way or another are: Billy Anderson, Lorna Archibald, Shirley Bain, Gillian Brewin, Shona Brydson, Jacqui Campbell, Janice Clerk, Jo Chandler, Roseann Cooper, Lesley Dickinson, Ceri Edwards, Ceri Evans, Suzie Eaton, Carol Ferguson, Nicky Gane, Julie Gibbins, Gwyneth Girling, Simon Harris-Dack, Melanie Harvey, Hayley Hill, Gillian Howie, Patricia Jordan, Matthew Lane, Nicola Lloyd, Pauline Knox, Tracy Mogridge, Shirley Moody, Sophie Nichol, Charlotte Northedge, Laura Northedge, Shona Paterson, Tracy Reynolds, Angela Parker, Jan Reis, Janie Richter, Chris Robinson, Kelda Sinclair, Tina Smith, David Shortall, Diane Sloey, Peter Staffell, Ann-Marie Stewart, Deirdre Stewart, Mandy Sutch, Stella Taylor, Matthew Thompson, Jennie Tomlinson, Laura Ward, Ruth Webb, Gail White, Julie Williams, Pepe Wilson and Correne Witchard.

Finally, we are grateful for permission to use Joyce Ellis’s article as a basis for study exercises in this and the original book.

The authors
Ellie Chambers is Professor of Humanities Higher Education in the OU Institute of Educational Technology; Andrew Northedge is Professor of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education in its Faculty of Health and Social Care. The book is based on their long experience of teaching, of researching into study processes and discussing them with students. Andrew Northedge first wrote The Good Study Guide, with students of the Social Sciences in
mind. With his help, Ellie Chambers adapted the book for arts and humanities students; in this second edition, she has written chapters 9 and 10 in their entirety. Although we are joint authors, for convenience we use the singular, 'I', throughout the book.

**Student voices**

You will see quotations from students scattered about the book. These are largely taken from Open University internet chat areas, with the permission of the students. They are intended to offer informal reflection and light relief. They are simply dropped in where relevant and signalled by large quotation marks. The contributors are among those acknowledged above.
CHAPTER 1
Investing in yourself

Welcome to The Arts Good Study Guide. This is a book of advice, practical exercises and tips to help you develop your study skills and get the most you can from your studies: better results, a greater sense of personal achievement and more enjoyment.

1.1 Who this book is for

This book is designed for students of the arts and humanities. If you really enjoy reading novels, looking closely at paintings or listening to music, or if you are fascinated by a particular time and place (such as Classical Greece, Renaissance Italy, Victorian or Modern Britain) and you want to know more about how to study these subjects, then the book is for you.

You may be just starting out on higher level studies, or part way through a degree and looking to boost your performance. The book will be just as helpful whether you are studying:

- full time or part time
- on campus or by distance learning
- having recently left school, or after a long break away from study.

But why should you need a study skills book?

Activity 1.1 Why should you read this book?

Do any of the following thoughts hover in your mind?

Tick any boxes that apply.

1. With so much to study already, I doubt I can spare the time for a book like this.

2. I’m not sure I need to bother with study skills. I have come through years of schooling. Why read about it now?

3. I already have my own ways of studying and I don’t enjoy being told what to do.

4. I think I need a few hints and tips, not a whole book.

5. I find it easier to get advice from people than from books.

I doubt I can spare the time for a book like this ...

A fair point. This is a chunky book and there always seems to be more to study than there is time for. But you will certainly waste a lot of time if you don’t study effectively. Reading this book will actually save time, by helping you make better use of it. You don’t need to drop everything right now and read the book from cover to cover. Skills take time to develop. Just set yourself to read a chapter every three or four weeks, in amongst your other studies.
2. I’m not sure I need to bother with study skills ...

Perhaps you think study skills are for beginners, but studying never becomes easy. There are always new challenges and your skills can always be improved. Successful students recognise the importance of continuing to develop and refine their skills.

3. I already have my own ways of studying ...

A good thought. It is right to feel attached to your ways of doing things. But you don’t need to commit yourself to remaining forever locked into the same practices. Why not try new approaches? This book will not tell you what to do. It will help you to review what you already do and weigh up alternative strategies. You remain in control.

4. I think I need a few hints and tips, not a whole book

Hints and tips are very helpful, and there are plenty in this book, but they are not enough. If you really want to get ahead in your studies, you need insight into the way your mind works together with flexible strategies for getting the most from all kinds of learning opportunities. To achieve this you need to invest small chunks of ‘quality time’ over a fairly long period. You will not understand your own learning overnight. That is where the book will help. It offers exercises and discussion within a coherent overall approach to thinking about study. The exercises will help you work out ways of meeting immediate challenges, but the understandings you develop will help you take control of your learning throughout your life.

5. I find it easier to get advice from people than from books

Advice from teachers and other students is excellent for building up your confidence and giving you new ideas to try out, but studying at a higher level is often a solitary business. Working on your own with a study skills book helps you build up your capacity for this independent learning.

Key points

Why read this book?

- It will help you make better use of your study time.
- It offers much more than handy hints and tips; it will help you to understand how you learn and build up your capacity for independent study.
- Whether you are an experienced student or a beginner, this book will build on your existing skills and insights.

1.2. How this book works

The book is in two parts. Part 1 considers studying as a whole and how to think your way into it. Part 2 focuses on how to develop your skills by engaging you in specific study tasks.
example, a serialist is said to be more likely to start a book on page one and read on to the end, while a holist might read the contents list and the conclusion, skim through some of the illustrations and then dip into selected sections to build up a picture of what it is about. Either strategy can work, but some people are said to have a clear preference for one or the other (Pask, 1988).

**Controlled vs impulsive** Some students work in a steady and systematic way. Others are inclined to put in bursts of intensive study, learning a lot quickly before shifting to something else. Again, both approaches work.

**Deep learning vs surface learning** Some students tend to search for the underlying meaning of a text as they read (deep learning), while others are more inclined to treat a text as information to be remembered (surface learning). Deep learning is seen as a much more appropriate strategy for most university-level study (Marton et al., 1997).

However, there is disagreement about how useful it is to make distinctions between learning styles, and about which distinctions are most meaningful. New classification schemes and new versions of old schemes continue to emerge. If you want to explore the topic of learning styles you can follow it up for yourself by searching the internet. Type ‘learning styles’ in the search box and you will find plenty.

Ultimately, you need to piece together your own picture of yourself as a learner, not rely on questionnaire scores. For this you need to become a practised observer of yourself. In effect you become your own psychologist, tracking how your mind works and comparing your experiences with those of other students and with what you read about learning. Then you can work out what kind of a learner you think you are and develop study strategies accordingly.

### 1.7 Being a reflective learner

But whatever kind of learner you think you are, to become an independent learner you need to be *reflective*. By reflecting on your study experiences you develop real insight into the ways you learn. Then gradually, as your insight grows, you become able to take control of your studies. The process of learning through reflection on experience is illustrated in Figure 1.2 (an adaptation of David Kolb’s diagram of the experiential learning cycle). Whether or not you find diagrams helpful, this one aims to identify what it means to learn well.

#### Planning
You look ahead to the course work you have been set and the deadlines for completing it. You also think about what is going on in your life, the time available for study and any difficulties you have to circumnavigate. Then you think strategically about how to manage the work: Which parts of the work present the toughest challenge? Which parts are most important to complete? In what sequence will you tackle the various tasks? What targets will you set yourself? Will you try out any new ways of doing things?
Having thought about such questions, you then sketch out a plan in the form of a task list.

2 **Doing**
Then you work at your studies, following your plan as best you can.

3 **Reflecting**
At suitable moments, you pause to reflect on how your spell of study has gone. (This could be at the end of the day, the end of the week, or at a point during your studies when things have ground to a halt.) What have you achieved? You tick off items on your task list. What did you not complete? What events intervened? Which parts were hard going, and which parts did you enjoy? Did anything go differently from previous sessions? Perhaps make a few notes of your answers to these questions.

4 **Conceptualising**
Then you try to make sense of what you have observed. What seems to help you learn? – where did your strategy work best? What seems to interfere with your learning? Did you misjudge some of the tasks, or the time required? How does this all fit in with your ideas about the way you learn? What changes in your approach to study might help you to learn better?

5 **Continuing round the cycle**
This brings you back to the planning process, as you look ahead to the next set of tasks. However, now, as a result of the reflective process, you have more insight than last time. You can make better plans, which you then test out further by ‘doing’, ‘reflecting’ and ‘conceptualising’. As you continue your studies, circling round and round the reflective cycle, your understanding steadily deepens and you become more skilful.

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Figure 1.2  Kolb’s reflective learning cycle, adapted for study skills (Source: Kolb, 1984)
The wider value of ICT skills
The skills you develop will be of value far beyond your course, both at work and in your life generally. As we saw in Box 1.1, the UK government has placed IT skills at the heart of its Key Skills strategy, along with communication skills (for more information see the Qualification and Curriculum Authority’s ‘Key Skills’ publications, QCA 2002a–d). The core elements are the abilities to:

- search for and select information
- explore, develop and exchange information
- derive new information
- present information, including text, images and numbers.

You can even acquire an ICT certificate as proof of your achievements: for instance, a European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). This consists of seven modules: Concepts of Information Technology; Using the Computer and Managing Files; Word-processing; Spreadsheets; Databases; Presentation; Information and Communication. (For more information visit the ECDL website at www.ecdl.com/main/index.php.)

Key points

- **Use the Help facilities** When you run into difficulties check the software’s own Help resources first. You will often be able to sort things out for yourself.
- **Ask others** If you are still stuck, ask for help from family, friends, other students or your university advisers.
- **Get a guidebook** Consider borrowing or buying a guidebook for your software package.
- **Keep exploring** Don’t feel you have to learn everything at once. Set time aside occasionally to find out about a new feature of the software.
- **Watch the clock** A computer helps you do many things very efficiently but it also has a tendency to eat up time. Keep an eye on how long you spend on the computer, and maintain a balance with other study activities.
- **Don’t strain yourself** Working long hours at a computer can cause serious strain to your eyes, hands, wrists, neck and back. Position your computer and chair properly (your university should be able to advise you on this) and take regular breaks away from the screen.
- **Learn to touch-type** This is a big investment of your time, but very worthwhile.

1.8.2 eLearning
We have seen that you can use a computer to enhance conventional text-based studies but computers can also be used to deliver the content of
experiences were, nor how quickly the support services could have helped her transform her studies. She didn’t even talk things over with friends, such as Tracy.

In summary, Jenny was unprepared for taking responsibility for her own studies. For a long time she felt adrift, until eventually it dawned on her that she had to seize control.

### Key points

It is vital to take responsibility for your own learning at university because:

- you spend a lot of time in private study
- you are responsible for your own day-to-day work schedule
- the scope of courses tends to be broad, touching on many more topics and texts than you can cover, so you have to decide where to focus your efforts
- you often have distant deadlines and have to work out your own strategy for meeting them
- you are expected to seek out support when you need it, not wait for it to come to you.

### 2.2 Managing your work

Taking responsibility involves managing your own progress through the coursework. You are studying for your own reasons and under your own particular circumstances, you have your own background in the subject, so it is up to you to work out where to make special investments of time and effort. You may have particular difficulties with parts of the subject, or with finding time, or accessing books, and it is for you to develop a strategy that addresses these challenges. That strategy might include seeking advice and support, but you remain the person in charge.

#### 2.2.1 Sketching the big picture

To take control of your work, you need to begin with the big picture. What are the main components of the course? Are there key texts? Is the course divided into topics or themes? What work do you have to hand in – and when? Are there other assessed elements, such as an exam? All this information will be available on printed sheets or on a departmental website. Make sure you have tracked down the relevant sources; then take time to go through them carefully with highlighter pens or write down notes of the most important things you have to do.

**Identify priorities** Use different coloured highlighter pens, or double and treble underlining, or star ratings, to indicate the importance of different course components. What is absolutely essential? What is optional? What looks particularly challenging? What will need to be planned well in advance?
‘Own’ the course  Take ownership of the course information by putting your markings all over it. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by ‘official’ documentation, so assert yourself. You are the one doing the course, so build up your own picture of the course.

Having reviewed the big picture, pick out some of the first tasks and begin to think about how to tackle them.

2.2.2  Breaking big tasks into smaller tasks
A key principle in keeping on top of your studies is to break big tasks into more manageable ones.

I set myself just one or two small, manageable tasks. I find if I can achieve these it’s so much better than setting myself a full working day and then not getting round to much at all. I often feel so virtuous at having achieved the little tasks that I go on and do more. I get a kick out of ticking things off my list.

The trouble with big tasks is that their scope and shape are hard to take in. You can’t see where to start, so, like Jenny, you keep putting things off. And if you do get started, it is very hard to tell how much progress you are making. Smaller tasks give you much more control.

Make tasks specific  It helps to turn vague, abstract tasks, such as ‘make progress with the article’, into specific, concrete tasks, such as ‘read the next eight pages’. You then know where to start and what to do. You can set yourself a time allowance and check your progress as you go. And when you complete the task, you can give yourself a pat on the back.

2.2.3  Making a To Do list
An excellent way to begin to engage with your work is to create a To Do list. This is a simple device, but very effective, particularly if you use a computer, which makes the list easy to update. The example in Figure 2.1 shows the tasks a student, Mel, planned to carry out arranged roughly in the order they would be tackled. Each item has some stars indicating its importance, and an estimate, in brackets, of the number of hours it might take. Notice that tasks 2 and 3 have been broken down into sub-tasks.

Activity 2.3
You may already have a To Do list. If not, make yourself one. List your study tasks for the week or two ahead using pen and paper, your computer or PDA (personal digital assistant). Use coloured paper if you have any, then the list will be easy to find amongst other papers.
2.2 Managing your work

Figure 2.1 Example of a To Do list

If you use a word processor, number the items in your list. Try moving the items around: put the cursor on an item, hold down the Shift and Alt keys and use the arrow keys ↑↓. Try the right arrow for ‘demoting’ a task to a sub-task and the left arrow for ‘promoting’ it back. If these moves don’t work with your word-processor, try the Help menu. When your list is done, save it and print it off.

Using your To Do list

As you complete the tasks, cross them off your list. When other tasks arise, write them in. If you made the list on your computer, go back to the saved list to delete completed tasks and add in the new ones; then rearrange the sequence as appropriate, save the updated version and print it off. In this way the uncompleted tasks will gradually move up your list. Nothing gets forgotten, and you don’t have to keep writing out a new list.

A To Do list is a guide to action. It turns a shapeless mound of work into a sequence of tasks you can tackle. It tells you where to start and enables you to track your progress. You may find yourself working on tasks out of sequence, and that’s fine. Your To Do list is a creative tool, not a straitjacket. With it in front of you, you can think intelligently about modifying your plans when things don’t work out. You remain in control.
2.3 Managing time

Having got the work into perspective, you need to think about how to manage your time.

2.3.1 How much time should you spend on your studies?

The official view

University courses in the UK are measured in credits and each credit is notionally ten hours of study. So a 60 credit course, for example, is seen as involving around 600 hours of work. Spread over a 30-week year, this translates to twenty hours of study per week.

Most full-time students study 120 credits per year, which works out at around 40 hours a week – equivalent to a working week in many jobs. Meanwhile, a part-time student might study 60 credits per year, equating to a twenty-hour week. (This covers everything, including time spent getting things sorted out at the beginning of the course, searching the internet, managing your notes, talking with your teacher, preparing for exams, and so on.)

However, the link between credits and hours is intended only as a rule of thumb. The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education stresses that credit is awarded for achievement not for ‘time served’ (QAA, 2001).

The reality

But what about real life? Are you in a position to set aside the number of study hours implied? If you are not, don’t just give up the idea of studying. A lot depends on the quality of your learning. If you are very focused, like Tracy, you can achieve a lot in fewer than the recommended hours. A part-time student with a full-time job will do very well to find twelve good hours a week for intensive study. But with other tasks squeezed into spare moments, that can be enough.

Be aware of the ‘official’ number of hours your course expects, but be realistic about the number of hours you can actually give to your studies. If you find yourself having to manage with less, be assured that plenty of other students are in the same position. In the end what counts is how well you use your study hours rather than the sheer number of them. As a major review of learning and teaching in North American universities observes:

... many of our students [are] trying to balance significant demands of families, jobs, and careers ... many of today’s students seem unable
2.3 Managing time

to devote sufficient time to their studies. Students need help balancing these demands, and [making] the most of the time that they have available ... There is no magic number of hours that students should study in order to maximise learning ... the amount of time isn’t the issue. It’s how that time is spent.

(Vorkink, 1995, p.70)

### 2.3.2 Creating time

How, then, do you find the hours you need? When studying comes into your life it generally means that something else has to go. However, it is important to strike a balance which allows you to carry on with the important things in your life, including relaxation and entertainment.

Effective studying requires a lot of time in reasonably good-sized chunks. You have to become an expert at creating usable time. One way to set about this is to draw up a study week chart (see Figure 2.2) showing time spent on your ‘typical’ week’s activities and see where there is room for manoeuvre.

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**Figure 2.2 Chart for working out time spent on a ‘typical’ week’s activities**

To find time for study in a busy life, you need to review the way in which your time is normally taken up. You may need to identify opportunities for making extra time – whether first thing in the morning, after putting children to bed, at weekends, during lunch hours or on journeys. Part-time students need to be especially resourceful about this.

**Activity 2.4**

Make yourself a study week chart like the one in Figure 2.2. Either draw it by hand or, better for future updates, use your computer – use a table-creating facility or a spreadsheet template (look in Help if you don’t know how). Then, once you have saved the chart, you can keep making new copies whenever you want to revise the schedule. When you have created your
Taking control of your studies

chart, fill in the hours spent on your main non-study activities each day (work, home or family commitments, travel, leisure etc.).

How many study hours per week will you aim for? Write in a target number of study hours for each day in the ‘Total hours’ row, trying to make them add up to your target number of hours per week. Then start marking in possible study slots, to see if you can achieve your daily totals. What will you cut back on? Where might clashes arise? Can you achieve something close to your target number of study hours per week?

Don’t be alarmed if you found this activity difficult. Life is messy. Indeed, having struggled to draw up a study week chart, life will intervene to make it hard to stick to. But sticking to it is not necessarily the point. Even if you constantly have to change your chart it is still worthwhile making it. Deciding to change it makes you think about your priorities. Planning helps you to think strategically instead of just drifting.

Key points

The first steps in managing study time are to:

- estimate how much time your course requires
- work out how you can release an adequate amount of study time within your ‘typical’ week.

2.3.3 Using time strategically

Having identified the time available for study, it is important to think strategically about how to use this precious time.

High- and low-quality study time

Not all your available time will be of the same quality. It will range between:

- high-quality study time – when you are alert, able to concentrate and can work undisturbed for a decent length of time
- low-quality study time – when you are tired, your concentration is poor, there are distractions around you, and you do not have long enough to get deeply involved.

I’m an early bird. I think and write much better straight after I get up.

My best time to study is in the morning after 11am, when the kids are at school.

I concentrate best after 9 o’clock at night, when I’ve got everything from the day sorted out.

You need to manage your studies so that you use your best quality time for the tasks that most need it. When are your best times for study? When do you
■ **Home support** You talk with family and friends about your study experiences.

### 2.5.3 Managing your morale

Studying makes everyone feel inadequate at times. That is why talking with other students is so helpful, whether in person or online. It puts things in perspective and keeps your spirits up. What matters is not what you have failed to do, but the progress you have made. When your spirits sag remind yourself of your achievements. Focus on the parts of the course you enjoy. Remember, *it is your course*. Make sure you enjoy it and get what you want from it. If you don’t enjoy the course you won’t learn much and you may not even stay with it to the end. Thinking positively is not an indulgence, it is essential.

#### Key points

Here is what you should do when studying gets you down.

- Focus on aspects of study that you enjoy and do well.
- Make a list of what you have achieved. Forget the plans you didn’t fulfil. Ignore the abilities and achievements of other students – it isn’t a race.
- Do some organising to show yourself that you are in charge. Tidy your workspace, set yourself some concrete tasks. Update your To Do list.
- Talk to other students outside class. Talk to your tutor. Remind yourself that you are a normal person, experiencing normal challenges.
- Remember that you are doing this for you.

### 2.6 Being a successful self-manager

To be a successful student you have to become your own manager, guiding yourself through your studies. These are the essentials.

**Be active** As a student, you are not a passenger. You are the driver. You have to take the initiative in finding out what needs to be done, drawing up plans and implementing them. You don’t wait to be told.

**Be strategic** Assess your situation. What needs to be done? What difficulties present themselves? How can you best achieve your goals? Develop plans which take these factors into account, but modify them as appropriate. For example, when you recognise that your powers of concentration have dipped, take the strategic decision to switch to a less demanding task. Don’t flounder around. Weigh things up and work out how to achieve the best you can under the circumstances.

**Be systematic** Take time to gather information and organise it. Maintain your filing system, work out detailed plans. For example, the study plan in Activity 2.6 required you to find out deadlines, create a To Do list and then
map out your week’s study. By developing such a plan systematically you will have a much clearer picture of what has to be achieved and of how to manage your progress flexibly and intelligently.

**Be analytical** Analyse complex issues into more manageable components. For example, in updating your To Do list, you break big tasks into sub-tasks. You then shift items up and down the list, thinking about the consequences of different sequences of tasks.

**Be reflective** Learn from experience (see Figure 1.2 ‘Kolb’s reflective learning cycle’). Review your study activities regularly and consider whether your strategies are working well.

**Give yourself incentives** Remind yourself of your goals, long- and short-term, and keep track of your progress towards them. Set yourself targets and take satisfaction in your achievements.

**Manage your morale** Keep your spirits up by playing to your strengths and focusing on what you enjoy. Set yourself manageable tasks with clear outcomes. Keep your To Do list, your files and your workspace well organised, so that you feel on top of your studies. Keep in touch with other students. And keep reminding yourself that this is all for you.

### Key points

The theme of this chapter is that to enjoy studying and achieve success you have to take control. To do this, you have to:

- take on responsibility for your own learning, no longer relying on being told what to study, when and how
- review the work set by the course and break it into sequences of specific, manageable tasks
- find ways of creating study time, then plan how to use it to best effect
- make efforts to create the best circumstances for study that you can
- work at keeping up your morale
- take an active and intelligent approach to managing yourself.

### References


CHAPTER 3
Understanding how you learn

Most of this book takes a practical approach to studying. It focuses on specific tasks explored through real examples. This chapter, however, is concerned with how you make sense of your experiences of learning so that you can think about the way you approach your studies. In other words, it is concerned with ‘conceptualising’ (see Chapter 1 Figure 1.2).

3.1 Developing ideas about learning

In order to think, you need ideas. You will develop many ideas about learning through your own experiences of studying. As you experiment with different ways of studying, you will form concepts such as ‘studying actively’ and ‘using time effectively’. But you will acquire concepts about learning from other sources too. You will develop them as you talk with other students about their study experiences and as you pick up advice from teachers. Reading this chapter offers further help with conceptualising. It will help you to think about the steps you can take to make sure you learn well.

3.1.1 Different kinds of learning

We learn all the time. Daily experience continually shapes how we think and act. This learning is very visible in young children; however, in adult life we tend not to think of routine everyday adaptation to our surroundings as learning. Rather, we associate learning with those times when we have to make a conscious effort to accumulate new knowledge and skills – such as when starting a new job, finding our way around a strange town or learning to drive.

Practical learning A lot of this learning is achieved by doing – by trying things out, watching others, asking for advice, reflecting on experience, practising, and simply ‘being there’ as part of the action, so that we gradually become familiar with the surroundings and how to act within them.

Abstract learning However, you can’t learn history, for example, simply by ‘doing’ in this sense. You can’t ‘do’ the Middle Ages as direct experience; our knowledge of the past is the product of historians gathering information, interpreting and debating what it means, and writing accounts. It is a product of human enquiry, thought and debate. At bottom, its currency is abstract ideas. Much learning in the arts and humanities is like this.

So, how do we learn ideas? That is the subject of this chapter. My focus will be on the type of learning most associated with the word ‘study’ – the learning of abstract knowledge, achieved through reading, listening, discussing and writing.
A note on ideas and skills in the arts and humanities

But focusing on the learning of ideas, rather than the learning of skills in arts and humanities subjects – for example, the skills of analysing a poem, a painting or a piece of music – gives a false impression, because learning skills such as these goes hand in hand with learning ideas or concepts. For instance, in music, understanding the concept of ‘concordant harmonies’ involves listening to many different pieces of music – the actual objects of your study. To hear these harmonies you need to know how to listen carefully, and be able to pick out and analyse particular sequences of sound. These are some of the skills you learn as you study music.

In arts and humanities subjects you study many different kinds of object – written, aural and visual – such as: poems, novels and plays; musical performances and scores; paintings, sculpture, artefacts, buildings and their plans; philosophical treatises and writings; historical documents and records for particular periods and events. These objects of your study are called primary sources.

You also read a lot about these objects in textbooks, scholarly articles and teaching texts; you watch TV programmes, films and DVDs, and listen to radio talks about them. In such texts and programmes, scholars, critics and teachers analyse and interpret the meanings of the particular objects they choose to study. These academic accounts are called secondary sources.

In this book we are concerned with how to study secondary sources (except for Chapter 9). How to study the objects themselves is what your courses in the arts or humanities teach you.

Using this chapter

Read this chapter when you feel ready to think more about the learning process. It covers a lot of ground, so you may want to read a section at a time rather than tackle the whole thing in one go.

- Section 3.2 ‘What does learning mean?’ explores the way that learning happens in the background while you are busy getting on with your study activities.

- Section 3.3 ‘Why do they write like that?’ is about the very distinctive way academic subjects are discussed and written about. This will help you to follow arguments when you are reading and listening. It will also help you to write better essays. You may want to read this section, or read it again, when you have written an essay or two.

- Section 3.4 ‘Reading, listening, speaking and writing’ looks in detail at the advantages and the challenges of studying in these different modes. It will help you to reflect on your experiences after you have been studying for a while.
3.2 What does learning mean?

As a student you spend hours learning a subject, but what is the nature of the learning you are trying to achieve and how do you make it happen?

**Activity 3.1**

Bring to mind some studying that you have done, and jot down a few thoughts in answer to these questions.

1. How do you know that you have learned something you have studied?
2. What is ‘learning’?
3. What do you have to do to learn something?

These are difficult questions to answer. I put them to some students (two of them arts students) who were part-way through their degree studies to find out what conclusions they had drawn from their experience. In the following sections you can compare some of their answers with your own. It doesn’t matter if your answers are different – just treat any differences as food for thought.

### 3.2.1 How do you know you have learned something?

Have you ever reached the end of a chapter and wondered whether any of it would still be in your head in a few days’ time? Have you been asked about a lecture or talk you attended and found yourself unable to say anything much about it? I am sure most people would answer ‘yes’ to both questions. But do experiences such as these mean that you have learned nothing – that your time was wasted? Ought you to be able to give a detailed summary of what you have read or heard? The answer to both these questions is ‘no’. Your mind does not work like a photocopier, making exact copies of what you read or hear to store as files in your head. The learning of ideas is a much more subtle process than that. Evidence of what you have learned does not emerge as a well-formed replica of what went into your head. It can show up unexpectedly and fragmentarily while you are working on other things. Here is how one student put it:

“When you are in lectures, or talking with mates, and some piece of information enters your head, then you know you’ve learnt it; also when you get interested and start analysing an idea in your head.”

So, ideas and information you have learned begin to appear in your thoughts and words as you are listening and talking. They become part of your mental equipment. Also, when you find yourself interested in a new idea and turn it over in your mind, this too is evidence that the learning process is underway.

Another student had a similar view:

“I can tell I have learned something when I’m able to rephrase an argument in my own terms and link it to other arguments ... I also know when I have learned about a whole topic when I can organise an overall picture in my
head of how all the different points relate to each other. For example, I found it very satisfying to be able to piece together an overall picture of ... post-war European cinema, and the different movements in various countries.

So, being able to turn over new ideas in your head is another sign that you have begun to learn them: being able to put them into your own words and organise them, so that they fit together to create an overall picture.

As you learn new ideas you begin to be able to use them to say things of your own. A student noted that:

"You know something must have begun to sink in when you eventually find the confidence to start thinking about your approach to the next essay – you begin to feel you might have the knowledge to hack it."

Interestingly, another observes that one sign of having learned a new idea is that you are able to carry on and learn more:

"When you find you can understand new aspects of the subject, then you know you learned what you read before."

Knowledge does not sit like a rack of neatly organised CDs in your head which you can take out and play whenever you want. Instead, what you learn becomes embedded in the way that you think. It isn’t easy to say ‘look, this is what I have just learned’, yet evidence of your learning constantly emerges.

**Key points**

**Evidence of learning from study**

Learning through study doesn’t create a detailed record of knowledge in your head; rather, it develops the way you think. Indirect evidence of what you have learned will appear in a number of ways.

- New ideas and information pop up in your thoughts as you are talking to others, reading, listening and thinking.
- You find yourself becoming interested in a new idea and thinking it over.
- You can put an argument into your own words.
- You can create your own summary of a topic.
- You find yourself developing a point of view or coming to your own conclusions about an issue.
- You are able to think your way into an essay.
- You are able to move on and learn something else.

These are signs that learning has happened, but what exactly is ‘learning’?
Essay-assignments offer the most compelling opportunity to learn through writing. For many students this is the most demanding of study activities but, as the students in Section 3.2 of this chapter observed, it also leads to the most profound learning. If you are tempted to think of assignments primarily as a means of achieving grades, don’t. They play a key role in your learning.

Advantages of learning through writing

Putting knowledge to use Writing gives you the incentive to pull together the knowledge and understanding you have gained through studying and to work out how to put it to use. This helps you to make the knowledge your own, so that it becomes part of your thinking.

Taking control Whereas it can be difficult to organise a coherent argument when you speak, you can build arguments carefully in writing. You can sketch out plans and alter what you have written to make your argument more convincing. It is your best opportunity to learn how to argue effectively.

Using your own words You can use the language of the discipline to say things in ways that make sense to you. This is vital to becoming a competent user of the ideas and arguments of your subject.

Expert feedback Assignments provide your best opportunity to receive coaching in how to present arguments using the language of the discipline. Your relationship with your tutor through your writing plays a key part in developing your identity as a member of the academic discipline.

Box 3.4 Developing a discipline identity

Who are you speaking as when you write? What is your relationship to the knowledge you are presenting? Is it in any sense your knowledge, or are you just going through the motions? To argue convincingly you need to develop a sense of identity as a member of the academic community which discusses this knowledge. Though initially you are an apprentice member, you still share ownership of the community’s knowledge. Developing this sense of identity as a student of your subject is part of finding an academic ‘voice’.

In a sense, your student years are a period of apprenticeship to your subject discipline. As you learn the language and culture of your discipline you gradually secure a more established identity, which allows you to participate with increasing effectiveness.

Challenges of writing

Because writing advances your learning significantly it calls on all your resources.

- Deciding what to say Working out the assignment task and making a selection from the many sources and issues you could discuss.
- Presenting an argument Working out an argument, and how to illustrate, support and present it.
Speaking to your reader Writing in a way that makes sense to someone else; creating a flow of meaning and keeping the reader in touch with it.

Keeping up morale Surviving the long slog and the crises of writing.

Here now is a summary of the advantages and the challenges posed by the four modes of discourse we have discussed in this chapter.

### Table 3.2 Advantages and challenges of different modes of discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>You can search, focus, analyse, revisit, make detailed notes and reflect</td>
<td>Getting to grips with the meaning, keeping it flowing, coping with blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Meaning is framed and driven along for you, and you hear the discourse as spoken by an expert</td>
<td>Maintaining concentration, thinking while listening, trying to summarise and recall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>You can ride on the framing and momentum generated by others and develop your verbal skills</td>
<td>Feeling confused and exposed, expressing unfamiliar ideas, competing for ‘air time’, losing the thread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>You can put ideas to use, learn to argue using the language of the discipline, and develop your voice and identity</td>
<td>Deciding what to say, structuring an argument, supporting it, creating a flow, finding a voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Becoming knowledgeable

In this chapter we have seen that learning at higher levels is primarily about understanding ideas. You make these ideas your own by engaging in debates through reading, listening, speaking and writing. You also learn the skills of academic discourse, which enable you to construct powerful arguments backed by scholarship and evidence. The outcome of all this is considerably more valuable than a ‘pile of information’ in your head. You become an actively knowledgeable person – able to follow what experts are talking about, able to question what you read, able to ask probing questions and criticise arguments, and able to find things out and present arguments of your own.

If this sounds rather overwhelming as you embark on studying, remember the people you met in earlier chapters, such as Jan, Nathan, Jenny and Ryan. Everyone struggles to begin with. We all doubt our abilities and determination. Becoming highly educated is a long route with many twists and turns, but it is also a very interesting journey, full of insights and moments of achievement. You don’t have to spend every minute thinking about the big issues discussed in this chapter, just get stuck into next week’s work and enjoy it. What you have read here is for those moments when you...
Box 5.3 Health warning: making very detailed notes can damage your morale

The notes in Figure 5.3 may be more than you need. You don’t want to slow yourself down too much by making notes, or undermine your interest in the subject. If making detailed notes makes you feel more confident in your grasp of the subject, then fine. But don’t let note making become a burden.

On the other hand, you may want to make quite detailed notes when you are:

- studying a key text that is complex and difficult
- preparing set reading for a seminar
- getting ready to make a presentation
- preparing to write an essay
- revising for an exam.

Why make separate notes?

If you have already highlighted or underlined a text, why would you bother making separate notes? First, it helps you to see exactly what the text is about, so that it is then much easier to work the ideas into an essay or a presentation. Second, note making forces you to think as you decide what to write down and how to organise it on the page. Regardless of whether your notes are ‘good’, the act of writing them takes you much further into the meaning of the text. And thirdly, without notes, no matter how good your memory, ideas will gradually drift away from you.

So, although note making is demanding and time consuming, it is an investment which adds much to the value of reading. When a text is thought provoking and full of ideas that you can use in future assignments, the investment pays handsomely.

“I write the next essay topic on a sheet. Then, when I find a point I think is relevant, I write it on to the sheet, and include the reference so I can find it again. Post-it notes can be handy too. And I use index cards for key points. It doesn’t seem a lot of work because it pays off when it comes to the essay. I know I’ve already got enough info to get started.”

There are many ways you might make notes on Ellis’s article, and I expect your notes were different from my examples. It is very useful to experiment with different styles. Your notes on an important and challenging text you have read in depth will be quite different from the single line you might write on an article you happen to dip into. What you need is a range of note-making styles from which you can select according to the circumstances.
Key points

- Making separate notes is an additional investment which can add a lot to the value of reading a text. However, it is not necessary for everything you read.
- There are many ways of making notes, according to the nature of the text and your reasons for studying it.
- Notes should never simply be an abbreviated copy of the original text; they should be an attempt to pick out the bones of the argument.

5.2.2 Lecture notes

When you make notes while reading, the book just sits there – you are in control. But making lecture notes is much more challenging because you have to listen and write at the same time. Lectures can also vary quite a lot, so you have to be able to adjust your strategy according to the context.

Context

The kind of notes you need will depend on several factors.

- Is the lecture your only source of information on the topic? Do you risk losing important ideas and information if you don't write things down? Or are there texts on the topic? In this case your notes can be less detailed and more reflective.
- In your subject do you have to remember a lot of detailed information? Or is it more a matter of understanding theories and analyses; or of following arguments and understanding how ideas work?
- Does your lecturer use a slide presentation to show the structure and main points of the lecture? Are there handouts which provide a framework for your notes? Does your lecturer post an outline on the internet?
- Do you expect to use your notes towards writing an essay, to guide further reading, or in revising for an exam in a few months' time?

You may find out some of these things after a lecture has started, so note making is an unpredictable activity. You need to be well organised in advance, ready to swing into action with a technique to suit the situation.

But sometimes you may be advised not to make notes in a lecture because the lecturer wants you to listen actively or even take part in the session. In any case, you should never let note making replace the job of listening to the lecturer’s argument unfold.

Cornell notes

One widely used approach to note making is the Cornell system developed by Walter Pauk (2001, pp. 236–46). It involves dividing a single sheet of note paper into four sections, as shown in Figure 5.4.
5.2 Capturing knowledge

Figure 5.4 The Cornell note system

To use the Cornell system:
1. Fill in the top part (section 1) before the lecture.
2. Make notes in the main area (section 2) during the lecture.
3. Soon after the lecture, while it is fresh in your mind, read through your notes picking out key concepts and write them in the left margin (section 3). Better still, write down questions to which your notes provide answers. Working out the questions helps you to think about the meaning of your notes.
CHAPTER 8
Managing the writing process

This chapter is the second of a pair concerned with essay writing. While Chapter 7 explores what it is that you are trying to produce when you write an essay, this chapter looks at how to set about the task of writing.

8.1 The challenge of writing

Managing the process of writing assignments is critically important to your progress as a student. It is, potentially, a deeply satisfying activity, but also a very challenging one. Writing is never a simple or straightforward process. You can’t expect to sit down at a keyboard and just type out a good piece of work. Writing essays is a multilayered activity; it interweaves your studies of the course, your emerging understanding of the subject matter and your developing powers of self-expression. You need to approach it with intelligence, insight and a strategic understanding of the writing process. You have to be able to manage setbacks, changes to your plans and sharp mood swings. Good writing emerges out of a resourceful response to constraints and challenges (many of which you impose on yourself). It is an intense experience.

As an essay deadline approaches, many students find it all-consuming.

“I take ages to write an essay. And I can’t get it out of my head until I finally send it off. Do you find it gets easier? I don’t! I keep thinking I’ll get faster but I don’t.”

“It’s funny how each essay is dreadful and the next topic always looks so much more interesting than the current one. That is until you’re on the next topic and the essay is due and then it suddenly becomes really dull and the hardest one yet.”

“I panic because I have read it over so much and I know it off by heart. Then I start thinking I’ve picked the wrong option ... What madness! Then I finally get the courage to send it off – and the whole thing starts again.”

To gain a measure of control over essay writing you need a basic strategy. Section 8.2, ‘Stages in the writing process’, sketches out an approach which breaks writing into stages so that you can tackle it one step at a time. However, writing is a highly individual activity and people succeed in very different ways. So the stages outlined are not meant as a ‘recipe’ to be followed slavishly. Take what suits you and develop a strategy of your own. Then keep developing it. Your approach to writing will evolve as you become more skilled at some aspects and switch your focus to others. If ever the Kolb reflective cycle is relevant to studying, writing has to be the prime instance (see Chapter 1 Figure 1.2). It is essential to plan your approach, write, reflect, and plan again for next time.
I find I’m thinking loads about how I do the writing – what I should do when and what to leave to later – and I get incredibly useful ideas from ... online chatting.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of writing is to turn ideas in your head into eloquent and purposeful sentences, rather than dry aimless ones. Section 8.3, ‘Expressing ideas in writing’, outlines some suggestions for tapping into the flow of your thoughts and trying to reproduce the flow of the spoken word in writing.

You can learn a great deal about writing from other students. But what can you learn from experienced writers? Having looked in Chapter 7 at short essays by students starting out on their studies, we switch to the other end of the spectrum in Section 8.4, ‘Making your essay flow’, by taking a close look at how a published author achieves this. Again we use the article by Joyce Ellis at the back of the book. Then finally we review the experience of writing – exploring why it is so intense, how to survive its challenges and how to focus on its pleasurable and satisfying aspects.

### 8.2 Stages in the writing process

Writing an essay does not simply ‘happen’ on a particular day. Effectively, you begin the process as soon as you begin to study the topic of your next essay. Imagine if you had an essay due in two or three weeks’ time: how would you set about it? Here are my eight stages of the writing process:

1. thinking about the essay title
2. planning the writing process
3. studying the course content
4. taking stock before you start writing
5. getting ideas written down
6. organising your material
7. drafting an answer
8. reviewing, revising and polishing.

#### 8.2.1 Thinking about the essay title

You could study the course first, then turn your attention to the essay. But does this make sense?

"I have the essay in the back of my mind when I’m reading. That gives me time to think what it’s about from all angles. Also I can highlight anything I want to use as I go along."

Reading the essay title (or titles, if there are options) before you study a topic helps to integrate the learning and writing processes.

- **Learning** Knowing the essay title gives an edge to your thinking as you read, listen and make notes. It helps you to learn in a more focused way.
8.4 Making your essay flow

In Chapter 7 we looked at how two students made a very brief essay flow. We saw how they used ‘link words’ and phrases to carry the meaning forward from paragraph to paragraph and sentence to sentence. Now we will look for further tricks of the writing trade by examining how Joyce Ellis, an experienced writer, carries a more complex argument through a longer piece of writing. Again we return to her article, but this time focusing on her writing technique rather than the content.

8.4.1 Link words
The first thing I want to look at is how Ellis makes her argument flow.

**Activity 8.3**

Turn to the Ellis article again for a few minutes (pp. 312–15) and look at the way she makes links between paragraphs 3–8. How does the sense get carried along from one paragraph to the next? Pick out the words that you think are significant in achieving this.

I underlined the following words.

- Paragraph 4: ‘This …’
- Paragraph 5: ‘With’, ‘however’, ‘these tasks’
- Paragraph 6: No link word at the start; ‘Women, however …’ (beginning of second sentence).
- Paragraph 7: ‘Even if …’
- Paragraph 8: ‘Towns, in contrast, …’

Ellis begins paragraph 4 with the word ‘This’, which refers back directly to what she has just said at the end of the previous paragraph (i.e. ‘female behaviour was … dysfunctional in a rural setting’). She goes on to say, ‘This [dysfunction] was perhaps most obvious in the case of women from the higher ranks of society …’. So the meaning flows from paragraph 3 to 4 as Ellis takes up the story of these women’s changing role, which in fact continues up to the end of paragraph 5. (Check this for yourself.) The connections between paragraphs 4 and 5, in the middle of this account, are more complicated. Paragraph 5 begins, ‘With an increasing wealth and sophistication of society, however, many of these tasks were taken over by professionals …’. ‘With …’ suggests a continuing story (or, history, flowing on from paragraph 4), but the ‘however’ that follows this opening phrase signals a significant change in these women’s role. ‘These’ tasks (another reference back to what was explained in paragraph 4) were now carried out by other people. This is a very artful and economical series of links I’d say, which imply processes of both continuity and change.

There is no link word or phrase between paragraphs 5 and 6 at all. However, Ellis doesn’t need one because she simply repeats the last word of paragraph 5 at the start of the next. Notice that a change of topic is indicated part-way
through, though, with ‘Women, however ...’. So in the space of some five lines Ellis has managed to change the subject from women to men and back again without ever leaving us confused.

‘Even if a carriage was available ...' at the start of paragraph 7 suggests a qualification to the claim made at the end of the previous paragraph, about women’s lack of mobility. And it also takes Ellis neatly on to another aspect of the same topic (the dangers involved in travel). She begins a new paragraph at that point precisely because it is a different aspect of the topic.

Finally, at the start of paragraph 8, ‘Towns, in contrast ...’ signals a complete change of subject.

In this way, Ellis manages to introduce and discuss different aspects of her subject while sustaining a thread of meaning throughout, which the reader is able to follow. She uses many words that show how what she is saying follows on from a previous point; whether it adds something, qualifies it, or contrasts with it. She links analysis in paragraph 3 with a developing (explanatory) narrative in paragraphs 4 and 5, to further analysis in paragraph 6 and description and illustration in paragraph 7 – and so on. As a result, reading her article seems fairly effortless (from the second page at least). That's because she is doing the work of ‘steering’ us, her readers, through the meaning of her text.

**Box 8.5 Breaking rules?**

It used to be a ‘rule’ never to start a sentence with ‘and’ or ‘but’. So is Ellis breaking the rules in her second sentence in paragraph 3? The rule can actually be a useful one when you are not very confident about sentence structures. You may be tempted to leave half-formed sentences lying around, hoping that an ‘and’ or a ‘but’ will connect them up to something.

In formal terms these two words are conjunctions, which are placed between equal items within a sentence to link them together. Strictly, they should not be used at the boundaries of a sentence. On the other hand, they are so useful as economical devices for carrying meaning over from one sentence to another that it is often worth breaking the formal rule, provided you know what you are doing. ‘But’ is particularly useful because it is such a quick way of saying ‘I am now going to balance something against what I have just been saying’.

‘Link words’ are the words you use to show the relationship between what you have just said and what you are going on to say. Here are some examples.
Table 8.2  Link words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link words</th>
<th>What they signify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘and’, ‘also’, ‘as well as’</td>
<td>you are adding something of a similar kind to what you have just said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘but’, ‘however’, ‘although’, ‘on the other hand’</td>
<td>you are about to say something different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘because’, ‘since’</td>
<td>you are going to explain what you have just said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘for example’, ‘for instance’</td>
<td>you are about to illustrate the point made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘so’, ‘therefore’</td>
<td>you are going to conclude an argument and draw out its significance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, there are many more words of these kinds (including that ‘of course’, which suggests ‘I don’t think I need to explain any further because no doubt you get the idea’).

Your readers cannot see into your mind. They may not be able to see connections between points that seem perfectly obvious to you. An argument weaves a sequence of points together in an intricate set of relationships. Words like these show how the relationships are meant to work. They show how your readers are meant to understand what you say – they help your readers ‘follow’ your meaning as they read. So you should use them often.

**Key point**

A writer carries a *thread of meaning* through a piece of writing by using link words and phrases that take you on from sentence to sentence and one paragraph to the next. These words show you how to approach each stage of the argument, given what has been said previously.

### 8.4.2 Signposting

Some of the links words we have just looked at serve a signposting function as well. For example, ‘This’ at the start of paragraph 4 connects up with what Ellis has just been talking about (the reason for women’s migration) and at the same time launches the argument off in a different direction (an account of women’s changing role). ‘Town, in contrast ...’ clearly signposts another stage of the argument. At other times, Ellis uses a signposting phrase to pull points together: ‘All the evidence indicates that ...’ in paragraph 1, for instance. And in the last two paragraphs of the article she signals a summary of what she has been saying with ‘Although ..., on the whole ...’. This is followed by the suggestion of a final reckoning in the ‘And yet ...’ of the concluding paragraph.
8.6 Summaries

In this final section, I include two summaries: a comprehensive checklist of the *Criteria for writing a good essay*, which draws mainly on Chapter 7 of the book; a summary of the principles and practices of essay writing drawing on both Chapters 7 and 8. You can come back to these summaries again and again during your years of study. And there is more about the nature of academic writing in Chapter 3, when you want to read it.

**Criteria for writing a good essay**

As your tutors read and mark your essays they will be asking the following questions.

- Have you answered the question in the title?
- Have you drawn on the relevant parts of the course for the main content of your essay?
- Do you show a good grasp of the ideas and texts you have been studying in the course?
- Have you given a reference for each of your sources in the main body of your essay and provided a Reference list or Bibliography at the end?
- Have you written in your own words?
- Have you presented a coherent argument?
- Is the essay written in an objective, analytical way, with appropriate use of illustration and evidence?
- Is the essay well written and well presented?

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**Box 8.7 Some basic principles of essay writing**

Your ability to express yourself is fundamental to being a member of society. Developing that ability is one of the most profoundly worthwhile activities you can undertake.

You won’t become a good writer by learning a set of formal rules. Essentially, you are learning to communicate ideas and your style will develop through practice at explaining things to a reader in your own words.

Think of writing as a craft in which you are an apprentice. You learn by practising a range of different skills. You get this practice by regularly turning out one piece after another and getting feedback from a skilled reader.

Don’t worry about writing well straight away. Just pitch in and write. You have to risk writing badly in order to learn how to write well.

Remember that most of what you read is written by professionals. If you are a beginner, then compare yourself with other beginners.

You cannot judge your own writing until some time after the event.
You have to learn to ‘let go’ and allow others to see your writing, however far it may fall short of your ideals.

Think of your tutor as a ‘coach’ who is working on your technique. You won’t agree with everything your tutor says, but you will make much more progress with the coaching than without.

Read your work aloud to yourself (or to someone else, if you can) so that you can ‘listen’ for sentences or passages that don’t work.

Always read your tutors’ comments on your essays, and try to follow their advice.

Keep practising. Write short pieces regularly (get comments from other students if you can’t get them from a teacher). This will:

– help you to establish a sense of audience and a writing voice
– help you to adapt to the critical-analytical academic style of writing
– extend your repertoire of ways of making your writing flow
– increase your sensitivity to the processes of structuring an argument and signposting its development.

Reference

9.3 Approaching analysis

9.3.1 Why analyse?
Whatever kind of text you study, one of your main tasks is to try to understand it ‘as it is in itself’. That means analysing it. You have to examine it in detail so that you can see what it is made up of and how it ‘works’.

Just as you read, view or listen to different kinds of text in different ways, so you approach your analysis of them differently. In each case, you ask particular types of question using a specialised analytical language. We have just seen the sorts of question you will have in mind when approaching an historical document. Let’s take another example.

Look at Raphael’s Madonna and Child (Figure 9.1)2 To understand how it is ‘put together’ you need to ask the following kinds of question about it, using some of the terms that appear in italics here.

1. How much of the picture space is taken up by the three figures and how much by the background?
2. Where are the figures positioned on the canvas and what are their poses?
3. What is ‘in’ the background and how is this related to the figures in the foreground?
4. Which parts of the painting are in light and which in shade, and where is the source of light – where is the light supposed to be coming from?
5. What is the painting’s tonal range; are there any striking uses of colour in it?
6. How is the two-dimensional (flat) painted surface made to look as if it has a third dimension, of depth, so that the figures appear life-like?
7. What is the relationship of the figures to you, the viewer – at your eye-level, ‘looking’ down, away, or what?

In the process of analysing the painting you study as many aspects of it as you can – not only the picture surface itself (the first four questions), but also your (the viewer’s) relationship to it. All this gives you important clues to how the painting works. When you then combine the results of this analysis with what you have discovered about both the type of painting you are dealing with and the conditions in which it was painted and viewed, you are able to reach some informed and appropriate interpretation of its meanings and values, and to communicate your judgements to other people.

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2 We have only been able to reproduce the painting in black and white, so, among other things, you wouldn’t be able to analyse the artist’s use of colour. This is only one reason why you should always try to examine original paintings when you can. It is also difficult to get a sense of the scale and texture of a painting from a reproduction, however good it is. Of course, you will often have to use reproductions. When you do you should always read the captions, which give you important information about a painting, including its size.
Figure 9.1 Raphael, *The Madonna and Child with the Infant Baptist (The Garvagh Madonna)*, probably C. 1509–10, oil on wood, 39 x 33cm. Bought, 1865. © The National Gallery, London
Key points

When you analyse a text you *break it down* into parts and *examine* each part in detail, so that you can see how the text ‘works’ as a whole. According to the *type* of text you are analysing, you:

- ask particular *kinds* of question
- use the appropriate *language* of analysis.

Let’s see how these processes of analysis–interpretation–evaluation and communication actually work in practice. To do this we will *separate* them out and *illustrate* each one, taking a short poem as a working example. As we discuss the poem, I hope you will be able to see how to *apply* what we are doing to *other kinds of text* you may be particularly interested in. From time to time I will draw out some of these implications.

9.3.2 Carrying out an analysis

Here, then, is a four-stanza poem we will focus on in the next few sections of the chapter. As you will see, I have left out a word at the end of each line in the third and fourth stanzas. So it presents you with a kind of ‘puzzle’. (But I have included the punctuation, and added line numbers for ease of reference.)

1. Whose woods these are I think I know.
2. His house is in the village though;
3. He will not see me stopping here
4. To watch his woods fill up with snow.

1. My little horse must think it queer
2. To stop without a farmhouse near
3. Between the woods and frozen lake
4. The darkest evening of the year.

1. He gives his harness bells a ______
2. To ask if there is some ______.
3. The only other sound’s the ______
4. Of easy wind and downy ______.

1. The woods are lovely, dark, and ______.
2. But I have promises to________.
3. And miles to go before I ________.
4. And miles to go before I ________.

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3 Grateful thanks to Jessica Davies, Associate Lecturer in Literature at The Open University, for analysis of the poem in this section and Sections 9.5 and 9.6 of the chapter.