

# Unit 2: Study Skills



*“We are what we repeatedly do.”*

Aristotle.



## 2. Unit 2: Study Skills

### 2.1 Introduction

In this unit you will learn about the importance of knowing how to study effectively in order to achieve your goal of succeeding at University. The success of these strategies depends on how consistently you apply them. That is why we began this section by sharing the following quote with you: "*We are what we repeatedly do*" by Aristotle. For you to improve on your study methods, you need to be consistent and persistent. Nothing ever worthwhile was achieved overnight. You may already be making use of some good study habits – of course you are – or you would not have come this far. We hope you will add some of the methods discussed here to your repertoire of study methods so that you can increase your chances of succeeding in what is often described as the hardest year at university, your first year. This section will cover the following areas: *timetabling, note-taking, overcoming procrastination, learning styles and study groups*.

### 2.2 Learning outcomes

*After working through this unit, you should be able to:*

- utilise effective study techniques that will help you to succeed at university.

### 2.3 Assessment criteria

1. A comprehensive study timetable is created.
2. General note-taking methods are applied.
3. Strategies to overcome procrastination are identified.
4. Study methods related to one's learning style are reflected on.
5. Study groups are discussed.

## 2.4 Learner activities

*For this unit, students are expected to:*

Before Class	During Class	After Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access the prescribed reading / audio-visual materials for this unit.</li><li>• Come to class with a general understanding of the content and be prepared to participate.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in a Life Skills workshop on <i>Study skills</i>.</li></ul>	Complete the following activities and tests that will form part of your final assessment for this module: <b>1. Activity 2: My timetable</b> <b>2. Quiz 2</b> <b>3. Unit Test 2</b>

The following information was adapted from a chapter on study skills from the textbook, *Communication Skills*, developed by the Language Communication for Development Department at the Bunda College of Agriculture, University of Malawi by Sitima, J, Maulidi, F, Mkandawire, M, Chisoni, E, Samu, S, Gulule, M, and Salanje, G (2009).

## 2.5 Timetabling

A very important part of studying effectively at university is to have a constant visual reminder of what you need to do. You should have been given a departmental class timetable at the beginning of the year. This is a good place to start, but it is not enough. Your class timetable will only give you information about when and where you have classes. What it will NOT show you is your study sessions, meetings with your mentors, tutors, consulting with your lecturers, and your relaxation time.

Get into the habit of being visual with how you spend your time. What is out of sight is very often out of mind. In other words, if you don't write it down, you can very easily forget it. Adopting new behaviours is not easy and will take a considerable amount of willpower and self-discipline. Psychology suggests that some behaviours take around 21 days to become habit. This might be true for small behaviours like drinking a glass of water every day, but for more difficult behaviours, it can take much longer. A recent study found that among participants who were asked to adopt a new behaviour, it took on average around 66 days for that behaviour to become a habit. Most of the behaviours were health-related such as running for 15 minutes after dinner or eating a fruit with lunch (Popova, 2014).

With this in mind, think about the new study behaviours that you would like to adopt. Be realistic with yourself about how soon these behaviours will become a habit and remember that most of these behaviours will require your willpower, determination and effort!

Timetabling also requires the investment of your time. You need to invest time into preparing your timetables right at the beginning of each semester and sometimes even revising them weekly or monthly if you want to be serious about your studies. You will have to develop your own study timetable to ensure you give your various subjects enough time for self-study.

### **2.5.1 Class timetable**

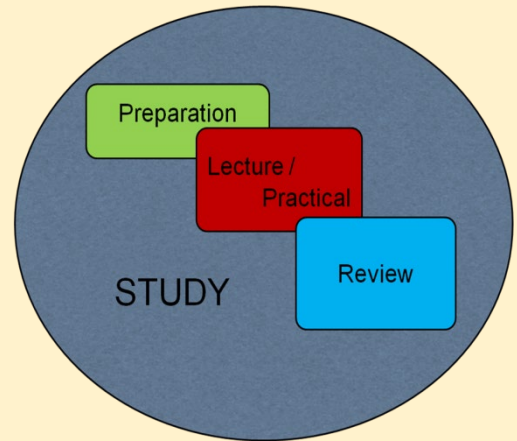
Populate the following weekly grid template with all your classes from Monday to Friday/Saturday. We have shaded out the grid from 11pm onwards as there should be no lectures happening at that time. We hope! We have provided an example of a completed class timetable on the next page.

<b>Times</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
<b>05:00</b>							
<b>06:00</b>							
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<b>Times</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>	<b>Sunday</b>
<b>05:00</b>	Wake up – gym!	Wake up – gym!	Wake up – gym!	Wake up – gym!	Wake up – gym!	Sleep	Sleep
<b>06:00</b>	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Sleep	Sleep
<b>07:00</b>	Travel to campus	Travel to campus	Travel to campus	Travel to campus	Travel to campus	Sleep	Sleep
<b>08:00</b>	Psych101	Study group	Consult with mentor	Psych101	Design107	Sleep	Sleep
<b>09:00</b>	Psych101	Study group	Consult with lecturer	Psych101	Design107	Breakfast	Sleep
<b>10:00</b>	Psych101	Study group	Library - research	Psych101	Computers108	Bath	Sleep
<b>11:00</b>	Chemistry101	Geography104	ERC	Chemistry101	Computers108	Out with friends	Clean house
<b>12:00</b>	Chemistry101	Geography104	ERC	Chemistry101	Computers108	Out with friends	Relax
<b>13:00</b>	LUNCH	Maths105	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	Out with friends	Relax
<b>14:00</b>	Business103	Maths105	To town - shops	Chill with friends	Study group	Clean house	Relax
<b>15:00</b>	Business103	Late lunch	Travel home	Business103	Study group	Netflix	Cook
<b>16:00</b>	Business103	Library - research	Clean room	Business103	Study group	Netflix	Cook
<b>17:00</b>	Travel home / Rest	English106	Cook	Business103	Sociology109	Netflix	Plan week
<b>18:00</b>	Shower & cook	Travel home / Rest	Rest - Netflix	Travel home / Rest	Sociology109	Netflix	Plan week
<b>19:00</b>	Make notes - Psyc	Shower & cook	Study – test 1	Study – test 1	Travel home	Netflix	Plan week
<b>20:00</b>	Revise Geography	Summarise Psych	Revise mind maps	Revise Geography	Social media	Cook dinner	Rest & Eat
<b>21:00</b>	Memorise Chem	Practice tests	Read	Memorise Chem	Social media	Cook dinner	Sleep
<b>22:00</b>	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
<b>23:00</b>	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep
<b>00:00</b>	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep

## 2.5.2 Study timetable

Study is really composed of three components at the most basic level: Preparation / The Lecture / and then Review. If you complete this routine, you are then doing quite a big part of "studying". A rule of thumb is for every hour of class you need to work an additional 2 hours. In the diagram those 2 hours are made up of preparation (1 hour) and review (1 hour).



For every lecture/practical, plan to do preparation before the lecture/practical, then a review session after the lecture or practical. Also schedule additional study time around tests and examinations.

Plot your study sessions in the same timetable template you completed above by now adding the following sessions that should be a consistent part of your study routine:

- Meetings with mentors/tutors;
- Consultation with your lecturers;
- Research – can be online, in the library etc.;
- Study group sessions – which should include opportunities to test yourself;
- Making your summaries;
- Memorising;
- Self-testing – completing past papers, quizzing yourself.

Time on the weekends and free periods can be incorporated into your study programme. But relaxation time is just as important as study time. Also note that not all slots have to be filled! Your timetable should also include some flexibility or free time for events that are unforeseen, and for when you just can't help but procrastinate (although don't make this a habit!).

**The following "non-study" activities should also form part of your study routine:**

- Sleep – aim for 7 – 8 hours every night;
- Relaxation time – choose activities that engage your body, mind and soul;
- Self-reflection – time to reflect on your week and plan ahead.

Can you think of other important non-academic activities that you enjoy?

### **2.5.3 Where to study**

You should have a specific place where you study regularly. It could be in the library, your room, outdoors or in one of the lecture halls. It should be a place where you are safe, comfortable (but not too comfortable that you fall asleep), and able to concentrate on your studies. A good study place is also linked to your learning preferences. Visual learners might prefer studying in places that offer a nice view or that are not too visually distracting. Auditory learners may prefer studying in places where there is no noise or in places that allow them to talk out loud, play music etc. Studying in an environment that is not conducive to your preferences can be very challenging. You might find yourself constantly fidgeting and restless and this can impact on your ability to concentrate and retain information. We discuss studying according to your learning style a bit later in this unit.

## **2.6 Overcoming procrastination**

In this section we discuss what is often the biggest reason many students study at the last minute and feel overwhelmed by the workload at university. Procrastination is a problem to us all, and as a student, it can often mean the difference between passing and failing. Read on to learn more about what it entails, why students procrastinate and how you can reduce it. Not procrastinating at all is probably not possible, but we will give you tips for making sure that it is not excessive and controlling your life.

### **2.6.1 What is procrastination?**

Procrastination is the practice of carrying out less urgent tasks in preference to more urgent ones or doing more pleasurable things in place of less pleasurable ones, and thus putting off things that need to be done to later, sometimes to the last minute. It is natural to procrastinate occasionally. However, excessive procrastination can result in guilty feelings about not doing a task when it should be done. It can also cause anxiety since the task still needs to be done. Further, excessive procrastination can cause poor performance if the task is completed without sufficient time to do it well. In short, excessive procrastination can interfere with school and personal success.



## 2.6.2 Why do students procrastinate?

There are many reasons why students procrastinate. Here are the most common reasons:

- **Perfectionism.** Students who aim for perfectionism can sometimes end up never getting started on a task because they are preoccupied with completing it perfectly.
- **Fear of failure.** A student may lack confidence and fear that he/she will be unable to accomplish a task successfully.
- **Confusion.** A student may be unsure about how to start a task or how it should be completed.
- **Task difficulty.** A student may lack the skills and abilities needed to accomplish a task.
- **Poor motivation.** A student may have little or no interest in completing a task because he/she finds the task boring, difficult or lacking in relevance.
- **Difficulty concentrating.** A student may have too many things around that distract him/her from doing a task.
- **Task unpleasantness.** A student may dislike doing what a task requires.
- **Lack of priorities.** A student may have little or no sense about which tasks are most important to do.

## 2.6.3 How do you know if you procrastinate excessively?

You procrastinate excessively if you agree with five or more of the following statements. Tick the ones you most identify with:

	I often put off starting a task I find difficult.
	I often give up on a task as soon as I start to find it difficult.
	I often wonder why I should be doing a task.
	I often have difficulty getting started on a task.
	I often try to do so many tasks at once that I cannot complete any of them.
	I often put off a task in which I have little or no interest.
	I often try to come up with reasons to do something other than a task I have to do.
	I often ignore a task when I am not certain about how to start it or complete it.
	I often start a task but stop before completing it.
	I often find myself thinking that if I ignore a task, it will go away.
	I often cannot decide which of a number of tasks I should complete first.

	I often find my mind wandering to things other than the task on which I am trying to work.
	I often put off starting a task I find difficult.
	I often give up on a task as soon as I start to find it difficult.
	I often wonder why I should be doing a task.

## 2.6.4 What can you do about excessive procrastination?

Here are some things you can do to control excessive procrastination.

- Motivate yourself to work on a task with thoughts such as "There is no time like the present," or "Nobody's perfect".
- Prioritize the tasks you have to do. Use a priority grid like this [one](#).
- Commit yourself to completing a task once started.
- Reward yourself whenever you complete a task.
- Work on tasks at the times you work best (e.g. early morning).
- Break large tasks into smaller manageable parts. How do you eat an elephant? Piece by piece.
- Work on tasks as part of a study group.
- Get help from lecturers and other students when you find a task difficult.
- Make a schedule of the tasks you have to do and stick to it.
- Eliminate distractions that interfere with working on tasks.
- Set reasonable standards that you can meet for a task.
- Take breaks when working on a task so that you do not wear down.
- Work on difficult and/or unpleasant tasks first.
- Work on a task you find easier after you complete a difficult task.
- Find a good, motivating place to work on tasks.

Above all, think positively and get going. Once you are into a task, you will probably find that it is more interesting than you thought it would be and not as difficult as you feared. You will feel increasingly relieved as you work toward its accomplishment and will come to look forward to the feeling of satisfaction you will experience when you have completed the task.

## 2.7 Learning styles

A learning style is a way of learning. Your preferred learning style is the way in which you learn well. Three learning styles that are often identified in literature are the auditory, visual, and tactile / kinaesthetic learning styles. Literature also suggests that there are more styles,

with some sources describing up to 10 or more different learning styles. We won't overwhelm you with that much information. As an introduction, we will only discuss the following three styles: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.

It must also be mentioned that some sources suggest that learning styles do not actually exist. We don't want to get too deep into the detail. We do feel that students can benefit a lot from knowing their learning preferences. Having said that, we also want to encourage you to adopt learning methods across all styles. A student who stays stuck in their own preference can sometimes miss out on learning opportunities that make use of other styles. The whole point of knowing a little bit about learning styles is not to box you into one way of being. It is merely to create awareness about what you prefer and to shape your learning experiences around that. We strongly encourage you to know about all styles of learning so that you can adopt a well-rounded or holistic study regimen.

Let's take a look at the three basic learning styles.

### **2.7.1 Auditory learners**

Auditory learners learn best when information is presented in an auditory format. Do you seem to learn best in classes that emphasise lectures and class discussions? Does listening to audio tapes help you learn better? Do you find yourself reading aloud or talking things out to gain better understanding? If yes, you may have a preference for auditory learning.

#### **Some study advice for auditory learners:**

- Ask questions in class or during your discussion sessions.
- Use mnemonics, rhymes, jingles, and auditory repetition through tape recording to improve memory.
- Read your notes aloud.
- Ask someone to read information to you if it is long and complicated.
- Participate in group discussions.
- Figure out what your auditory distractions are and avoid them. Some people like noise in the background, others don't. Being an auditory learner does not necessarily mean you have to study in silence. Silence itself can be distracting!
- Choose a place to study that supports your learning style. It is not considerate to study in the library if you prefer reading out loud. And if silence disturbs you, the library is probably not the best place to study.

## **2.7.2 Visual learners**

Visual learners learn best when information is presented in a written format or in another visual format such as pictures, diagrams or videos. Do you do best in classes in which lecturers do a lot of writing on the chalkboard, provide clear handouts, and make use of PowerPoint slides? Do you try to remember information by creating pictures in your mind? Do you take detailed written notes from your textbooks and in class? If yes, you may have a preference for learning information visually.

### **Some study advice for visual learners:**

- Use colour in your notes (e.g. highlighters, sticky notes etc.).
- Make sure your information is organised.
- Translate some of the written text into pictures or diagrams.
- Use mind-maps.
- Watch videos.
- Put your summaries and learning schedule somewhere you can see it regularly. Make sure it is visually appealing (use colour and pictures).
- When in class, try to sit in front.

## **2.7.3 Tactile / kinaesthetic learners**

Tactile / kinaesthetic learners learn best in hands-on learning settings in which they can physically manipulate something in order to learn about it. Do you learn best when you can move about and handle things? Do you do well in classes in which there is a lab or practical component? Do you learn better when you have an actual object in your hands rather than a picture of the object or a verbal or written description of it? Do you find it difficult to sit still for extended periods of time and feel the need to move around? If yes, you may have a preference for tactile or kinaesthetic learning.

### **Some study advice for tactile / kinaesthetic learners:**

- Take frequent study breaks to stretch your body and rest your mind.
- Try some brain gym exercises.
- Take long walks and talk out loud to yourself about what you have studied.
- Role-play some concepts or topics.
- If you are studying practical subjects, practice as much as possible.
- Volunteer in class to write concepts or formulas on the board.

You might find you are a combination of all three styles. That's even better. As we noted before, we strongly encourage you to use a variety of study methods from all three styles.

## **2.8 Note-taking**

In classes your lecturers will talk with authority on topics that you are studying. Besides improving your knowledgebase, the details of each lecture will be important for you to know when you take tests and examinations. Consequently, you will need to take down accurate notes. Taking good notes is a three-stage process. There are things you should do before class, during class, and after class. Here are the three stages of note-taking.

### **2.8.1 Get Ready to Take Notes (Activities Before Class)**

Prepare for the lecture so that you will be more likely to predict the organisation of the lecture. Check the course outline in your study guide to see if the lecturer has listed the topic or key ideas in the upcoming lecture. If so, convert this information into questions. If there are readings assigned to the lecture, try to skim through these the night before to get a basic idea of the topic. If you can go through the content in more detail beforehand, underline or highlight topics, new vocabulary, and main ideas. Jot down any questions that you have or highlight concepts that were not clear. These will become the things you need to listen out for during the lecture or even ask about in class. Lecturers really like it when students engage in class and participate.

Sit as near to the front of the room as possible to eliminate distractions and in order to see and hear clearly. Come to class with the right attitude. You are at university to learn. Instead of seeing every lecture as a disruption to your free time, see it as a important opportunity to learn from your lecturers and peers. You are fortunate to be studying at a contact university. Make the most of it by appreciating every single class you have.

Listening well is a matter of paying close attention. Be prepared to be open-minded about what the lecturer may be saying, even though you may not understand it fully yet. Sometimes how we feel about the lecturer can also influence our willingness to listen in class or even attend class or not. Try to work out any issues you may have with your lecturer by either respectfully addressing them with him/her or by trying to set them aside so that you can get the best from the great opportunity you have to attend lectures. Remember, your lecturers

are on your side. They actually WANT you to pass. Take their feedback constructively and use it to improve.

Make sure you always have your note-taking materials (pens, pencils, highlighters etc.) ready before you go to class. There is nothing more frustrating than needing to write something down and you don't have anything to write with.

## **2.8.2 Take Notes (Activities During Class)**

Arrive on time for class. This is very important so that you can choose a comfortable and convenient place to sit, and so that you do not miss out on the lecturer's introduction. Often the introduction contains the richest information. You need to be able to listen carefully to the introduction so that you will be better prepared to anticipate what notes you will need to take.

The moment you sit down, take out your notepad and write down the name of the lecturer, the title of the lecture/the subject, and the date. This information is so important for the effective organisation of your notes after class.

Note-taking is not just about copying what is written on the whiteboard or on the slides. Get into the habit of looking for the main ideas. Try to always skip words like "the" and "a" and make use of shorthand and abbreviations when you take notes. **Summarise your notes in your own words, not the lecturer's.** Remember: your goal is to understand what the lecturer is saying, not to try to record everything he or she says verbatim (word for word).

Recognise main ideas by signal words that indicate something important is to follow. An example of a signal word is "Take note of the following..." or "A major development..." Jot down details or examples that support the main ideas. Take down examples and sketches which the lecturer presents. Indicate examples with 'e.g.' Give special attention to details not covered in the textbook.

If there is a summary at the end of the lecture, pay close attention to it. You can use it to check the organisation of your notes. If your notes seem disorganised, copy down the main points that are covered in the summary. It will help in revising your notes later.

Towards the end of the lecture, ask questions about points that you did not understand or schedule an appointment with your lecturer to address these questions.

## **Interactive classroom methods and the use of technology**

We would like to take a moment here and discuss two important developments that are now a part of many classrooms or learning spaces at university.

Many lecturers see the value in engaging students in classroom activities as opposed to standing in the front of the class and “lecturing” in the traditional sense. You will know from your life skills classes that classroom activities and participation from every student is paramount.

Some students might be frustrated by the high level of engagement and may be used to/expect lectures to be facilitated in a traditional way – where they sit passively and listen and the lecturer talks (and talks, and talks). Research has shown that this is not the most effective way of promoting student learning. So you might be asking, “then if I am expected to participate in group discussions all the time, what’s the point of taking notes?”

Your lecturers carefully design or plan their lessons, and all activities in class are specifically chosen to help measure the outcomes for the unit/topic/chapter. You might find that when the lecturer summarises the activity at the end of the class, you realise how much of what was discussed or shared is directly relevant to the content. It is in these moments of reflection where most of the learning takes place. So, you will have to spare some time (either in class or directly afterwards) in noting your reflections about what was discussed or shared in class.

The use of technology has reformed how classrooms look and how students receive information. You might be fortunate enough to have your own devices – a smartphone, a laptop, a tablet etc. In the past these devices were generally banned from classrooms and lecture halls. Today, they form an integral part of the lesson. Your lecturer might encourage you to bring your devices to class so that you can engage with others, research information or take tests/quizzes. Students sometimes use their phones to take pictures of slides or to record the lecture. These all have their benefits and it is necessary that we adapt to the times. However, we still strongly encourage students to prepare themselves to take written notes in a lecture as these have so many important benefits, including the following:

- Lecturers *sometimes* share information that they consider important but that is not available in textbooks. Taking photos of slides won’t help you recollect that information.

- Taking notes helps you become an "active listener" and a "critical thinker".
- Taking notes helps you concentrate and keeps you alert. It essentially gives you something to do instead of just sitting still and "listening".
- Taking notes allows you to organise information in a way that works for you: your lecturers slides (or even your classmates notes) might not be presented in a style that suits you.

Watch for signal words. Watch for body language. Your lecturer is not going to send up a rocket when he states an important new idea or gives an example, but he will use signals to telegraph what he is doing. Every good speaker does it, and you should expect to receive these signals.

For example, they may signal with body language (raised eyebrows, change of tone of voice, raising their hand etc.) when stating the following:

"Now this is important...."

"Remember that...."

"The important idea is that...."

"The basic concept here is...."

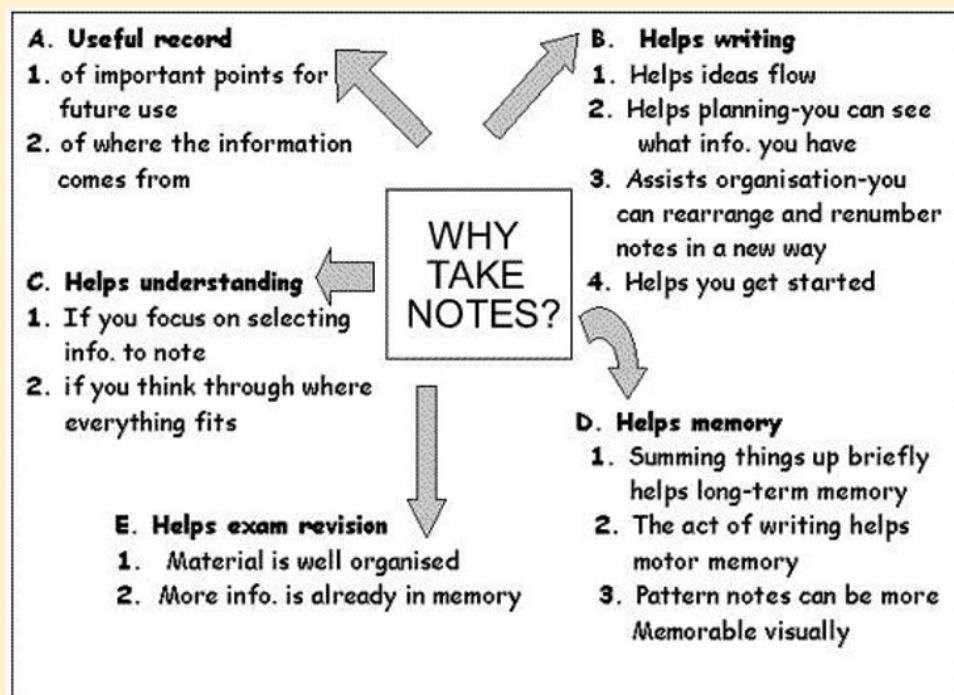


Figure 1: Why Take Notes (Anonymous 2014)



### 2.8.3 Rewrite Your Notes (Activities After Class)

Revise your notes as quickly as possible, preferably immediately after the lecture, since at that time you will still remember a good deal of the lecture. Also, it is a good idea to reread your notes within 24 hours of the lecture. It may be a good idea to rewrite or type your notes to make them clearer and more organised. Review the lecture notes before the next lecture. Incorporate different colours of ink, diagrams, drawings of your own. Make your notes *your* notes. Take advantage of how you learn (visually, orally, or actively) and write/draw your notes according to that style.

Have a look at the following two images and try to interpret what they are saying in your own words.

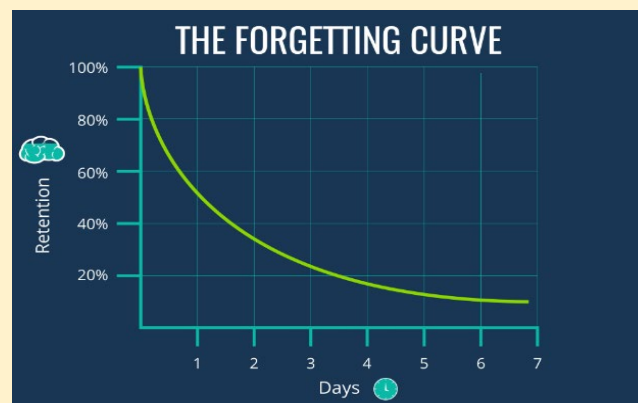


Figure 2: The Forgetting Curve (Growth Engineering 2016)

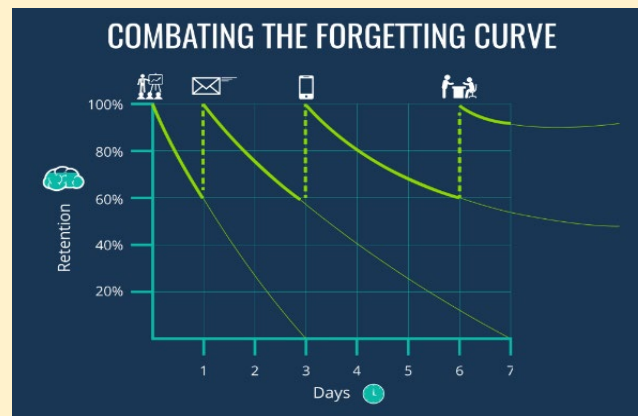


Figure 3: Combatting the Forgetting Curve (Growth Engineering 2016)

The images above are based on findings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by a German psychologist, Hermann Ebbinghaus about the nature of memory loss over time. The first image above shows that when we first learn something or receive information, over time the information starts to disappear or is forgotten at a very quick rate over days. In order to retain this information,

we need to adopt certain strategies. This is called information retention. In the second image, it is the ongoing application and use of the information that allows it to be retained.

## **2.8.4 Note-taking methods**

Access the following website to learn about the various note-taking methods available for students: <https://medium.goodnotes.com/the-best-note-taking-methods-for-college-students-451f412e264e>. Here you can also read about the pros and cons of each strategy and use that to decide on a method that will work best for you.

For your own benefit, try to apply one or all of the methods outlined in the article.

## **2.9 Study groups**

Forming study groups is a very effective and popular learning strategy at university. Working with others offers the opportunity to get clarity on aspects of the work that are confusing and to take turns teaching and learning from others. Opportunities to talk to others about what you are studying is to your advantage, and something that every student should incorporate in their study methods, regardless of your preferred learning style.

In this section we will discuss the benefits of forming a study group and give you clear steps for how to form one. There are some common pitfalls that you must be aware of when working in a study group – these are often the things that deter a lot of people from joining/forming a study group. We will make you aware of those pitfalls so that you can form a group that is effective and helpful.

### **2.9.1 Benefits of study groups**

A study group can be beneficial in many ways. Here are the most important benefits:

- A support group can “pick you up” when you find that your motivation to study is slipping. The other group members can be a source of encouragement.
- You may be reluctant to ask a question in class. You will find it easier to do so in a small study group.
- You may become more committed to study because the group members are depending on your presentation and participation. You will not want to let them down.
- Group members will listen and discuss information and concepts during the study sessions. These activities add a strong auditory dimension to your learning experience.

- One or more group members are likely to understand something you do not. They may bring up ideas you never considered.
- You can learn valuable new study habits from the other group members.
- You can compare your class notes with those of the other group members to clarify your notes and fill in any gaps.
- Teaching/explaining information and concepts to the other group members will help you reinforce your mastery of the information and concepts.

Let's face it – studying can sometimes be boring. Interacting with the other group members can make studying more enjoyable.

## **2.9.2 Getting a study group started**

Study groups don't just happen. Someone needs to take the initiative to start one. Many students are reluctant to form study groups because of the perception that they do not work, or they don't want to be the first to ask others. Taking the initiative to start a group is great, but here are some important things that you should be do ensure you get your study group started on the right foot.

Firstly, you should get to know your classmates by talking with them before class, during breaks, and after class. When selecting a classmate to join your study group, you should be able to answer YES to each of the following questions:

- Is this classmate motivated to do well?
- Does this classmate understand the subject matter? Or are they willing to try?
- Is this classmate dependable? Will they do the work and arrive on time?
- Does this classmate attend his/her lectures regularly?
- Would this classmate be tolerant of the ideas of others?
- Would you like to work with this classmate?

Notice how we said *classmates* and not friends. Whilst you may have friends in some of your classes, and it might make sense to include them in your study group, it is not a requirement. A more necessary requirement is to include people in your group who you can actually learn from and who can also learn from you. If the idea of you and your best friend being in the same study group is too distracting, don't do it! You will have more than enough opportunities to socialise with your friends. A study group is not one of them.

Invite enough of your classmates, that meet those criteria above, to work with you in a study group until you have formed a group of about three to five members. A group that is too large may allow some members to avoid responsibility, may lead to conflict, and may make group management more of an issue than learning.

Decide how often and for how long you will meet. Meeting one to two times a week is probably best. If you plan a long study session, make sure you include time for breaks. A study session of about 60 to 90 minutes is usually best. It is also really important that you meet at the same agreed upon time every week. A group that only meets before a big test is not going to be effective. Put your weekly study group sessions into your study timetable.

Decide where you will meet. Select a meeting place that is available and free from distractions. An empty classroom or a group study room in the library are possibilities. Meeting outdoors is also fine, if this accommodates everyone's learning styles AND if it is not too distracting. Meeting in a campus cafeteria is not effective. There are too many distractions.

Decide on the goals of the study group. This is very important. Have a session with your group in which you discuss these goals and other important rules for how you will work together. Goals can include how each session will be structured, what each member of the group needs to do, prepare and share during the sessions and what the *agenda* will be for each session. Setting ground rules are also important – especially around arriving late, missing two or more sessions in a row, disrupting the other members, interruptions (e.g. phone calls, messages etc.).

Decide who the leader will be for the first study session. Also decide whether it will be the same person each session or whether there will be a rotating leader. The leader of a study session should be responsible for ensuring that the goals of a study session are met. A leader is not a boss. A leader is a facilitator and a moderator.

Develop a list of all group members that includes their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Make sure each group member has this list and update the list as needed. Forming a WhatsApp group is also a practical way to keep in touch.

### **2.9.3 Characteristics of a successful study group**

Once started, a study group should possess the following characteristics to be successful:

- Each group member contributes to discussions.
- Group members actively listen to each other without interrupting.
- Only one group member speaks at a time.
- Group members work collaboratively to resolve any concern raised.
- Group members are punctual and come prepared to work.
- The group stays on task with respect to its agenda.
- Group members show respect for each other.
- Group members feel free to criticize each other but keep their criticisms constructive.
- Group members feel comfortable to reveal their weaknesses so that they can strengthen them.
- Group members feel free to ask questions of each other.

At the end of each study session, an agenda including specific group member responsibilities is prepared for the next session. Here is an example of how you can structure your study group agenda for each session:

*Example of a study group agenda*

<b>Date:</b>		
<b>Members present:</b>	<b>1.</b>	<b>4.</b>
	<b>2.</b>	<b>5.</b>
	<b>3.</b>	<b>6.</b>
<b>Topic for today:</b>		
<b>1. Introduction: Approx. 10 minutes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start the session with a light icebreaker or warm-up to get everyone feeling comfortable.</li> <li>Members can take turns coming up with the icebreaker.</li> <li>This should be light-hearted – allowing for laughter and bonding.</li> <li>The icebreaker should take no longer than 10 minutes.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Review of lecture from the week: Approx. 30 minutes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group can go through the lecture/slides/readings from the week.</li> <li>Everyone should take turns rephrasing the content in their own words and preparing their own written summaries.</li> <li>Discussions can be in pairs or as a full group.</li> <li>Members should give constructive and corrective feedback.</li> <li>There should be time for questions and answers.</li> </ul>		
<b>3. Working through problems / possible test questions: Approx. 30 minutes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can work through questions individually and share feedback in the group.</li> <li>Members should source questions from the textbook, past papers or make up their own.</li> <li>Emphasis should be on the “how” and “why” in addition to getting the right answer.</li> </ul>		
<b>4. Create overview of material for coming week’s session: Approx. 10 minutes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members look ahead &amp; prepare for next session – what will be discussed, responsibilities etc.</li> <li>Discuss any upcoming assignments, tests etc.</li> <li>Time and venue for meeting should be agreed upon.</li> </ul>		
<b>5. Summary and things to follow up:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group leader should take note of any issues that need to be followed up with lecturer, tutor or by group members themselves.</li> </ul>		

Content adapted from Northwestern Academic Support and Learning Advancement, Sample study group agendas.

## 2.9.4 Possible pitfalls of a study group

A study group can be a very positive learning experience. However, there are pitfalls to be avoided. Here are some cautions:

- Do not let the study group get distracted from its agenda and goals.
- Do not let the study group become a social group. You can always socialise at other times.
- Do not allow group members to attend unprepared. To stay in the group, members should be required to do their fair share.
- Do not let the session become a negative forum for complaining about lecturers and courses.
- Do not allow one or two group members to dominate the group. It is important that **all members** have an equal opportunity to participate, teach, ask and share.

The information you just read will help you decide when a study group is appropriate for you and will help ensure its success.

Now that you have come to the end of this unit, complete the following activity to assist in managing your time. Also reflect on the other topics that were discussed in this unit and try to apply the skills you have learnt, for example, try to take notes according to the strategies discussed or create a study group with a specific agenda for each week. The sooner you try to practice the skills, the sooner they will become habit, and great tools to carry with you for the rest of your journey at university.

Access Activity 2 on myTUTor and follow the instructions. Once you have completed the activity, proceed to Quiz 2. **NOTE:** You must successfully complete the quiz to be able to access Test 2 for this unit. You may complete the quiz as many times as you wish.