



National
College *of*
Ireland

Compiled by Student Support

National College of Ireland, Mayor Street, IFSC, Dublin 1

Learning Development

2010-2011 Guidebook








Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Unit 1: Becoming an effective learner	4
Example journal	6
Unit 2: Note-taking strategies	8
Using Mind maps	10
Creating audio notes	12
Unit 3: Reading and Study Techniques	14
Increasing speed	15
Increasing peripheral vision	16
Unit 4: Academic Writing	17
Your first assignments at third level	18
Essay planning	19
Transitional words	21
Referencing, citing and bibliographies	22
Unit 5: Creating effective presentations	27
The content	28
The delivery	29
Unit 6: Exam revision and anxiety reduction	30
Exam revision	33
Exam anxiety	34
Appendices: Templates	36
Bibliography	37



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the ALSON Group, Stephen Kennedy, Grainne McKenna, Giles Perryer, Neil Fleming, The National Learning Network and the Student Learning and Development Team in Trinity College Dublin for their Support, advice and expertise in developing this resource. I would also like to thank and formally acknowledge the permission to utilise the following projects within this manual;

ALERT information (2009); Eleanor Robinson, 712-8 Software

Examination Tips (2009); Student Learning and Development Dublin, Trinity College

The BodyMind Programme (2009); Declan Aherne, University of Limerick

The Free Online Language translator (2009); Worldlingo

The Kolb Learning Style Test (2009); Giles Perryer, University of Birmingham.

The RoboBraille Consortium (2009); Lars Ballieu Christensen, Synscenter Refsnæs.

The Speed Reading Course (1997); Peter Shepard and Gregory Unsworth-Mitchell

The VARK Questionnaire: Copyright Version 7.0 (2006) held by Neil D. Fleming, Christchurch, New Zealand and Charles C. Bonwell, Green Mountain Falls, Colorado 80819 U.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

The field of learning support has evolved significantly over the last ten years, becoming increasingly concerned with the emotional, cognitive and social aspects of being a student. Indeed many universities are now aiming to develop modules that offer brain workouts, mind-mapping theory and stress management, alongside more traditional concepts such as reading techniques and critical thinking.

In an aim to offer our students a similar experience, this learning support manual represents a collection of both national and international resources that are designed to facilitate self-reflection and increase academic success by fostering a 'whole person' approach to learning.

With this in mind, the content contained within this manual can offer guidance in six areas;

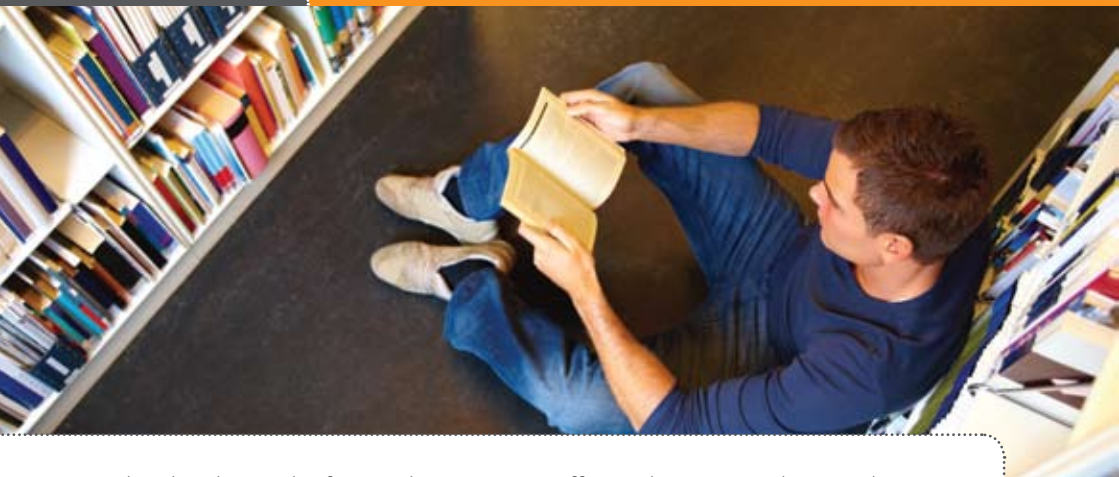
- Becoming an effective learner
- Note-taking strategies
- Reading and study techniques
- Academic writing and referencing
- Effective presentation skills
- Exam revision and anxiety reduction

Through using these resources, it is hoped that each student can develop key skills that will aid them both in their academic life and future career.

Mike Goldrick, National College of Ireland

UNIT 1

Becoming an effective learner



The idea that each of us can become more effective learners can be traced back to 334BC, when Aristotle first proposed that each person learns differently (Reiff, 1992). Following this assumption, modern psychologists and teachers now believe that the more we know about our strengths and weaknesses, the more productive we can become. Essentially, modern ideas of effective learning are related to the tasks of tuning a car engine, or attempting to make a computer run faster.

Our brains, however, are not exactly like a car engine, or indeed a computer. We are much more complex and even harder to analyse. With that said, there are some factors that we can examine in order to learn more about ourselves;

- **Social parameters** (i.e. does a person like working alone or together).
- **Psychological factors** (does a person see tasks as a whole or as a sequence of elements).
- **Stimulus factors** (does a person have a preference for visual learning, aural learning, or learning by doing).

If you would like to learn more about your own learning preferences or identify what your strengths and weaknesses are then you may find the following online tests useful:

The VARK Questionnaire (Fleming, 2001)

<http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>

Using Visual, Aural, Read/write and kinesthetic gauges, this test will highlight which types of learning style you favour so that you can construct your own effective study preferences.

The Kolb Learning Style Test (Kolb, 1984)

<http://www.dentistry.bham.ac.uk/ecourse/pages/page.asp?pid=1518>

This test from Perryer (2009) will help you determine which type of learning style may suit you best for both your academic and professional career.

If you are unsure of how to use these tests, why not download Workshop one: Becoming an effective learner, from the Learning Support Service page, on the Student Portal.

Keeping a record of your self-reflection

It is important for you to keep a record of these test results and to question whether you agree with the results that you received. As a way to do this, why not try writing a short learner journal. This will help you think about the test results and to reflect on what strengths and weaknesses you think you have.

A good learner's journal should have four components;

1. A summary of how you studied in the past, what strategies you used.
2. An example of any lesson you remember particularly well and enjoyed.
3. A brief description of the online tests you have taken.
4. A critical reflection of the results. What can you learn from this experience?
5. Do you have any problems studying, concentrating or sticking to schedules?

Through this reflection you may decide that you are not as organised as you would like to be. For instance, you may feel that you tend to ignore deadlines or leave projects to the last minute. If so, then why not try to make a structured time-table for yourself?

Example Journal:

My memories of the Leaving Cert surround late nights and writing out chapters over and over again. I sometimes underlined parts that I thought were important and tried to pick out key words to remember, but for the most part I found myself re-reading the text books. Looking back on this now, I don't think that this was the best approach.

One particular lesson I remember fondly was when my Biology teacher used real life examples to underpin theories. One moment that stands out was when he threw a piece of wet white bread against the blackboard to illustrate how it sticks to artery walls..

In order to become a more effective learner, I decided to utilise the VARK questionnaire and the Kolb learning style test. Having completed both, here is what I found;

VAR K	Multi-modal learner
Kolb	Diverger

Having firstly taken the VARK test, I discovered that I have a broad sensory approach to learning. What is interesting about this is that in the past I have never used visual techniques such as mind-mapping or spider-diagrams, nor even considered using audio notes. I have begun using these now however, to great success. The results of the Kolb test indicated that I had a slight preference for the Diverger Type. In this case the results offered the following response, which I found interesting;

“People like you tend to develop broad cultural interests, and specialize in the arts, humanities and liberal arts. Careers tend to be in the arts, entertainment, and people-helping fields”.

Working within support and coming from a psychological background, I would have to agree with the results overall.

This page offers you a template for writing up your own journal. If you would like more support in creating your own diary, why not download Workshop one: Becoming an effective learner, from the Learning Support Service page, on the Student Portal.

My Journal:

NAME:

DATE:

VARK	
Kolb	



UNIT 2

Note-taking strategies

Having completed unit 1, you may have discovered that you learn best through audio stimuli, or perhaps visual stimuli, maybe even through discovery learning. This is not to say however that such reflections or results are a definition of you.



We all have the capacity to grow and evolve to meet the conditions of our environment. Whether in college or work or even in a social setting, every individual, regardless of age or academic history, can learn to become a more organised and more effective learner. With this goal in mind, unit two will introduce you to some effective note-taking techniques. In particular, the unit will focus on three particular areas:

- **Taking traditional notes in a lecture**
- **Using Mind maps**
- **Creating audio notes**

The Cornell Two-Column note taking method

Question 1 What is VARK?	The VARK Questionnaire is a learning style tool which allows the learner to explore their own learning preference. Highlighting visual learning, kinesthetic learning, aural learning and reading and writing learning, the tool also offers a list of study strategies that relate to each learners strengths.
Question 2	

Using this two-column method (Pauk, 1962), each student can organize their notes into effective and manageable documents, creating topics within the left column and descriptions in the right.

As a study mechanism, the purpose of reprocessing information from books, handouts, or websites is to make the information more meaningful. The goals of this method then are to not only highlight the most important features of a piece of text, but to create notes that are personal and therefore memorable.

When in class, try to follow these five guidelines:

1. Try to have an organised centre for your notes (i.e. a binder or folder).
2. Have all your equipment ready before the tutor/lecturer begins, (i.e. pens and method of note-taking).
3. Either underline or colour-code any material which the lecturer classifies as being "an important concept".
4. Ask for clarity on a topic that you do not understand
5. Don't try to write everything down.. That's impossible. Try instead to get what you feel are the most important points down and use abbreviations and word economy when needed.

Abbreviation Table

Education	Ed
curriculum	curr
Probably	prob
exercise	exer

Word Economy

Original

"The planet earth is the third closest planet to the sun."

Revised version

"Earth is 3rd closest to the sun."

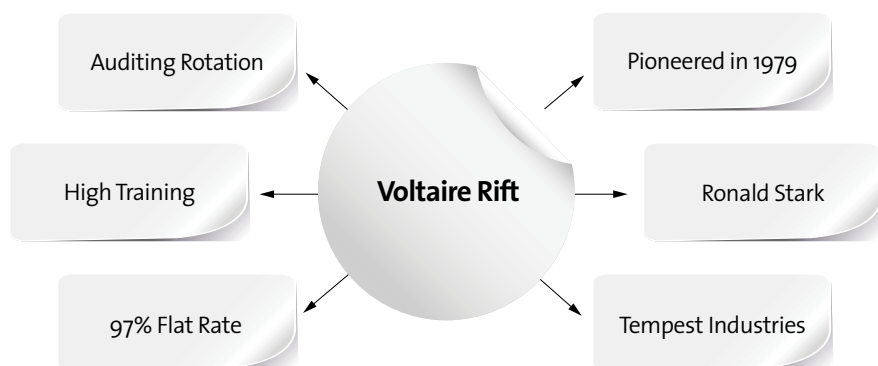
Following these guidelines can help you to become more organized and more alert in class.

Using Mind Maps

If you have discovered that you have strong preferences for visual learning, or perhaps wish to take quicker notes, the following mind mapping section may be of interest.

So what is a mind map?! The concept of mind-mapping (Buzan, 2000) is linked to the theory of connectionism, which states that memories may be triggered through association of colour, smell, word grouping, or sketching. The principles behind the concept relate to hierarchical tree structures, much like grouping similar computer files into the one folder (Woolfolk, 1998).

As you can see in the next figure, the topic of interest is placed in the centre of the Mind map and each relevant piece of information is then placed around this central theme. The mind map is particularly of benefit when studying any theory or model as it can capture the most crucial information such as dates, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the author or creator.



In terms of their effectiveness, recent research has indicated that mind-maps can significantly aid recall and improve exam performance (Farrand, Hussain and Hennessy, 2002). As an alternative to traditional notes then, you should consider using mind-maps when:

- Problem solving
- Creating a project outline
- Collaborating with other students
- Condensing material into a concise and memorable format.

Whilst you can draw a simple mind-map in minutes, some students prefer to create computer mind maps. If you wish to try some of these, here are some links to the most common applications:

Title	Address	Freeware/ Commercial
Question 2	http://www.inspiration.com/Inspiration	Commercial
xmind	http://sourceforge.net/project/platformdownload.php?group_id=246829 or http://www.xmind.net/	Freeware
FreeMind	http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download	Freeware

Creating audio notes

As an added feature to study or even as an alternative to traditional note-taking, the usage of audio notes has many potential benefits;

- Reduces the possibility of eye-strain if using the computer to type notes
- Allows for increased flexibility (study on the train, the bus, on the couch).
- Can be used to rehearse speeches or presentations

When first considering the usage of audio notes for study, the first decision you must make is whether you wish to use your own voice or that of a speech engine.

Option 1: Using your own voice

If you choose to use your own voice then there are several options available. The cheapest option is to utilise a computer-based sound recorder and narrate what notes you wish. This file can then be saved as an Mp3 and put on your computer or portable mp3 player. Whilst both Windows and Macintosh systems have inbuilt features for this process, there are more professional programs that can be downloaded in both the commercial and freeware domain:

Title	Address	Freeware/ Commercial
Inspiration	http://www.inspiration.com/ Inspiration	Commercial
Audacity	http://audacity.sourceforge.net/	Freeware

Remember, in order to create audio notes using your own voice you will need a microphone headset.

Option 2: Using a Speech engine

The second option available to all students is to utilise a speech engine. In order to facilitate this, the student simply needs to have a word document or Pdf created in advance, holding all the text they wish to hear as an audio file.

Having then a saved document, the student can e-mail their file to Robobrain, which in turn will e-mail back a link to an audio version (Note the larger the text, the longer the time it will take to process).

Step 1: Create a word file or pdf

Step 2: E-mail the file to britspeech@robobrain.org

Step 3: Play the mp3 file on your PC or transfer it to an external device.

For more information on this project visit <http://www.robobrain.org/Text-to-Speech>

(When you are playing the mp3 file you can speed up or slow down the narration by using the + and – buttons on your keyboard).

This second unit has presented some guidance on how to begin individualizing your learning in Higher Education by creating effective study notes and lecture notes. If you would like to some guidance on using any of the technologies described in this unit why not download Workshop 2: Note-taking strategies, from the Learning Support portal page.

UNIT 3

Reading and Study Techniques

Some of the most commonly used strategies for reading and revising, focus around scanning, questioning and summarising the text (Robinson, 1970). In a move to incorporate the essence of these techniques, unit three will present two ways that you can improve your reading ability. The first of these will introduce to you how to become a more focussed reader, whilst the second will help you to increase your speed and peripheral vision.



1. Becoming a more focussed reader

Have you ever started to read a chapter of a book, an article or a handout and felt that you could not 'take in' the information? If so, why not try the SQNRN method to actively read and summarise the content.

1. Survey the text

This act of surveying is an initial intake of all the information provided; title, headings, diagrams, conclusions (It is best to use this method chapter-by-chapter).

2. Question

To help you give purpose to your reading, try to formulate questions about each chapter or article (who, what, where, how and why). This will create an investigative nature to your studies (it may be helpful for you to turn sub-headings into questions).

3. Read

Having outlined your questions, read the chapter with intent to answer your questions, using whichever note-making method suits your learning preference.

4. Note-make

Having picked the combination of note-making styles that suits you best, begin writing up your summary of the chapter (possibly use a more visual graph for facts and figures or theories and a two-column method for direct answers).

5. Revise

Having located your answers and generated notes for revision, the last process of this model is a revision-based strategy. When revising, or planning an assignment make sure to follow a self-created study table which is both realistic and specific.

2. Increasing your speed and peripheral vision

Despite popular myths, no person can read an entire book in minutes.

What a person can do however, when trained, is develop some very useful techniques that can increase their reading performance. These techniques generally fall under two areas,

- Increasing speed (word per minutes)
- Increasing peripheral vision

Increasing speed

Many readers tend to simulate the spoken word when reading (the silent use of the tongue and larynx). Whilst this process can be enjoyable when reading poetry or prose, it can limit the maximum reading speed to about 300 w.p.m. In order to reduce this activity, try the following speed exercise adapted from Shepard and Unsworth-Mitchell (1997).

Step 1: Source a book that you can read easily.

Step 2: Read three pages of text (remember to time yourself).

Step 3: Calculate your existing w.p.m:

w.p.m. (speed) = number of pages read multiplied by number of words per average page, divided by the number of minutes spent reading (for example, 3 pages x 400 words per page ÷ 4.5 minutes = 285 w.p.m).

Step 4: Bypass the physical replication of speech:

Count out loud from 1-10 repeatedly, whilst reading the page. This will occupy the motor-vocal system.

Step 5: When you can complete step 4 comfortably, try reading silently whilst counting from 1-10 silently.

Step 6: After completing this exercise for 10 minutes a day, each day for one week, retest your w.p.m. and log your speed improvement.

Original W.P.M.

New W.P.M

Increasing peripheral vision

Generally speaking, most people never waiver from the classic rules of reading (Left-to-right reading, pausing at a punctuation, etc.). In order to become a speed reader however, the classic rules must be broken.

One popular method for increasing reading speed is to develop a vertical approach to reading, sometimes known as a vertical wave (Buzan, 2001). This vertical wave helps a person to identify key words in a page of text without having to fixate on every word individually. Moving then beyond a horizontal saccadic movement, vertical wave reading can be developed using a pacing exercise;

Pacing Exercise

(Adapted from Shepard and Unsworth-Mitchell, 1997, p19)

Step 1: Section off the centre of the page you wish to scan (using a clear plastic ruler or similar device).

Step 2: Work your way down the page, using your finger to read the sections inside the boxed lines.

Step 3: Test yourself and see how many words you can remember from the strip

Step 4: Repeat the exercise with similar pages and see how many key words of each line you can remember.

Step 5: Practice the method without the use of a ruler or similar device and aim to remember as many key words per line as possible.

Eventually, through this technique, the speed reader will begin remembering more than one word per sentence, developing a process known as 'chunking'. This chunking of words transpires when the eyes begin processing more than one word per movement. Some advocates of speed reading claim that as many as six words per line can be 'chunked' together (Buzan, 2001).

If you would like to see examples of the SQNR method why not download Workshop 3: Reading and Study Techniques from the student portal. For a SQNR template please see page 36 of this manual. Also, if you read through JAWS, why not learn how to apply the SQNR method using shortcuts (<http://www.webaim.org/resources/shortcuts/jaws.php>).



UNIT 4

Academic Writing

This fourth unit intends to introduce the basic principles of completing your first academic essays in Higher Education, covering such issues as question analysis, essay structure, transitional words, critical thinking and the usage of references. To begin, let's first consider why essays and projects are so popular amongst lecturers.



Why do we have to do essays?!

Written assignments are a lecturer's primary source of evidence that you as a student, have not only understood your coursework, but have created some of your own ideas about what you have learned.

Therefore when writing any academic assignment, keep in mind that you will be expected to;

- Describe the area of study or phenomena
- Critically evaluate previous thinking around the subject
- Construct an argument about your views about the subject

As a process, academic writing requires clarity and accuracy and is considered in many cases to be objective rather than emotional or rhetorical (Student Support, 2008). It is good practice then, when writing at third level, to become logical in both the structure of your work as well as the content being explored.



Types of academic writing

There are various forms of academic writing. Some you will encounter as a student, some you may not;

- The literature review
- The essay
- The academic proposal
- The abstract
- The Dissertation or Thesis
- The lab report
- The business report
- The Journal

Your first assignments at third level

Your first assignments at Higher Level will most likely be short essays between (1500-2000 words). Rather than be asked to write a descriptive essay you will be asked to write a critical essay which means when planning your essay keep in mind;

- **The Question:** What is the essay asking you to do? Get to know the differences between describe, discuss and evaluate.
- **The Structure:** Each section of your assignment should be distinguishable from the rest. (I.e. the Introduction of the topic, main body of text, to discussion and finally the conclusion).
- **Sources of information:** Try to back up each argument you make with an appropriate reference.

Essay Planning

Below is an example of a sample question and how to approach it.

“Evaluate your organisation’s marketing strategy and suggest some possible improvements”

1500 words

Step 1: What is it asking you to do?

As an evaluation you will be expected to explore the strengths and weaknesses of your organisations marketing strategy. Note whilst this evaluation will most likely include your own self reflection on what you feel works and does not work the majority of the marks will go towards your understanding of effective marketing strategies within the literature.

Step 2: Gather all initial needed material

You will need to examine whatever relevant material you will need, relevant book chapters, websites, research articles and lecture notes.

Step 3: Begin writing preliminary notes and start thinking about your essay's layout, structure and audience

Try to start writing as soon as possible no matter what type of assignment you are tackling (Marshall and Roland, 1993). To get started, try developing ideas about the topic under investigation and try to link up your thinking with published works. Once completing this phase you can begin tackling the essay's structure.

Step 4: Essay Structure

The structure of an essay is pretty universal in so far as it should contain 3 core elements; Introduction, main body and conclusion;

1. Introduction

This section, in general terms, will introduce the topic, highlight the question and illustrate how you intend to address it. In relation to the above question, this particular introduction could focus briefly on the benefits of marketing strategy in general before reiterating the question and highlighting where the essay is going.

2. Body of your essay

Each paragraph should be linked to a specific theme which utilises your critical understanding of the relevant published works or area. In this particular case this section would introduce the context of the essay, organisation background and presentation of current strategy. From here the essay would evaluate the strategy from both from a reflective first person perspective and third person perspective through relevant literature.

3. Conclusion

This should summarise your work, analysis and recommendations. Finally in this section the essay should establish whether the current strategy is effective or ineffective and establish any realistic suggestions for improvement.

To help you create sentences and paragraphs that flow logically and consistently, the next page contains a list of transitional words.

MAIN BODY

INTRO

Transitional Words

Illustration	Thus, for example, for instance, in other words, in particular, such as
Contrast	On the contrary, contrarily, but, however, in spite of, conversely, yet
Addition	And, in addition to, furthermore, besides, also, likewise, Consequently
Time	After, Afterwards, Before, once, next, at last, subsequently, previously
Concession	Although, at least, still, granted that, in spite of, of course, at any rate.
Similarity	Similarly, likewise, in like manner, analogous to
Emphasis	Above all, indeed, truly, of course, certainly, surely, in fact, in truth
Details	Specifically, especially, in particular, to explain, to enumerate, namely
Examples	For example, for instance, to illustrate, in other words,
Summary	Therefore, finally, consequently, thus, in conclusion, Accordingly
Suggestion	For this purpose, with this in mind, therefore,

(Adapted from Student Support 2008, pp20-22)

Critical thinking

As a third level student you are faced with copious amounts of information to take on board on a daily, never mind weekly basis. It is important however, not to passively accept any information from textbooks, articles or online sources (a good example of this is Wikipedia).

With this in mind, always ask yourself the following:

- Has the author an agenda or bias (e.g. propaganda)
- Is this text a reflection of present thinking?
- Is this research author an expert on the subject?
- Is the author trustworthy?
- Is there any other source that might contradict the author's beliefs?

Referencing, Citing and Bibliographies

As many Higher Education institutes now use the Harvard Style Reference system this section will provide an overview of how the system operates.

Having two core elements, the Harvard System begins with a citation within the main body of the work itself. Specifically, citing refers to the use of publicised works in your main body of writing, whereas a bibliography contains the full reference of each source used and is located at the end of your work (sources are presented in an alphabetized list (A-Z) according to surname).

Some questions you might have about this process are;

1. Why do we reference?
2. How do we reference?

Why do we reference?

Essentially, there are three main reasons why academics must reference. The first of these is to give credit to the author or authors of ideas, theories or findings which have been used to construct an argument or explore a topic. Secondly, the usage of previous research and established materials gives a sense of depth, illustrates best practices and demonstrates that the author has considered the wider academic world.

The third and last of these reasons surrounds the consequences of failing to reference or cite properly; *copyright infringement* and *plagiarism*, which at all costs must be avoided.

In order then to help you reference properly, here is a short guide to referencing. Please note however that there are several sources within college Libraries that go into much more detail.

Short quotes

A short quote refers to the usage of quotes which are no more than a sentence long. For example; Stark et al (2002, p11) describes the purpose of essays as

“an exercise in written revision and conceptual exploration”.

Long Quotes

A long quote refers to quotes which are longer than one sentence and are thus set apart from the text by one line spacing and indenting.

“Throughout Irish education there are certain buzz words such as equality and inclusion which are becoming a prelude to social change. This change surrounds the conception of education itself and how we all perceive learning.”

(Goldrick, 2008, p16)

Using a summary of published works

When writing an essay or report, you will not always wish to write a series of direct quotes. As an alternative to this, the usage of a summary can be used to refer to the core ideas or elements of established works.

For example, the above quote by Goldrick (2008) can be partially summarized as;

Recent changes to the Irish education system have been linked to emerging principles of equality and inclusion (Goldrick, 2008).

(Many early infringements of copyright surround this area, where students simply change the structure of a published sentence without placing a citation at the end of a summary.)

Below is an example of a short bibliography. The amount of sources you will use in your essays and reports will vary in relation to the length of the essay and topic. In the below example note the usage of an online source, which includes the address of the website and the date of access.

Example Bibliography

Goldrick, M (2008) *The learning Support Kit*. Dublin. National College of Ireland.

Stark, T, Ryan, R, Banner, B and Kent, K (2002) *How we learn best*. [internet] New York: Shieldman Development INC, retrieved from:

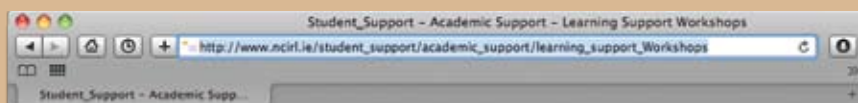
<<http://www.Shieldinc.nyci.com>> [Accessed on 08/09/2008]



Using the internet for references

Whilst lecture notes and set reading lists act as primary references for essays and reports, the usage of the internet as a research tool has become quite standard. With this in mind, here are some precautions for when searching for books, articles or relevant websites:

1. Think before you copy and paste! (always record the address). Many students tend to forget where they found an online article or quote. To avoid this, always record the address and place it in a temporary bibliography.



2. Try to diversify your sources (i.e. don't rely on one book or source for an assignment)
3. Use all the resources you have; the library, the internet, course books, newspapers, TV broadcasts etc.
4. Get a copy of Nolan, A (2006) "HOW TO REFERENCE HARVARD STYLE" from the library or Buckley, M. (2009), 1st Cite @NCI (bibliographies & referencing made easy!), Dublin: National College of Ireland.

Automated Bibliographies

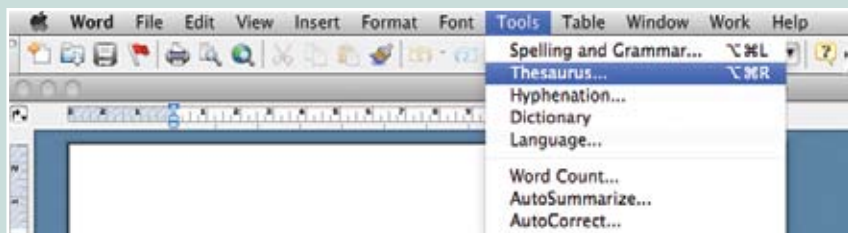
For students who primarily use the internet for research it may be of benefit to utilize one of the many automated bibliography packages available;

Title	Address	Freeware/Commercial
Endnote	http://www.endnoteweb.com/	Commercial
Refworks	http://www.refworks.com/	Commercial
Wikindx	http://sourceforge.net/projects/wikindx/UH	Freeware

Avoiding the squiggly lines: Using Microsoft word for academic writing

Perhaps more than any other stage, the review and re-reading of a draft can be the most unpleasant task. It is ironic then that this stage is perhaps the most crucial. Having then a mind to avoid plagiarism, grammar and spelling errors, use Microsoft Word to perform a spell and grammar check; we all make mistakes...

Beyond finding errors however, Word can help you diversify your word choices. For instance, If through your reading, you have identified a word that you have overly used, use the thesaurus tool to offer suggestions for alternatives words;



(When proofing your own work try reading the essay aloud and watch out for words such as “There” and “Their” as spell checker will not usually highlight any mix up.)

In keeping with the theme of practical suggestions, the last section is aimed towards international students who are studying through a foreign language.

Some tips for international students

Academic writing, as a more formalized and theory driven medium can be quite difficult to understand. If you are an international student who sometimes cannot understand the phrasing or structure of a sentence then try translating it into your first language and see whether it becomes clearer.

http://www.worldlingo.com/en/products_services/worldlingo_translator.html

For any student who would like more information on academic writing, why not download workshop 4: Academic writing and referencing, from the Learning Support portal page.

UNIT 5

Creating effective presentations

Let's think about what a 'presentation' is. For some, presentations are just another word for PowerPoint slides. For others, presentations are about reading notes out to a class. What does it mean for you?

This Unit will help you to become a more organised and effective presenter. In particular, the unit covers the three strands of a presentation; the *audience*, the *content* and the *delivery*.



The Audience

Let's assume that you have a presentation to do, either on your own or as part of a group. What is the very first thing you need to think about?

The greatest presenters will not immediately open up PowerPoint, or begin rummaging through notes. What they will do, however, is think about who they will be presenting to. In most cases, your audience for a presentation will be your classmates and your lecturer. You may think that the most important person to impress will be your lecturer or tutor. This is the wrong approach to take. Any lecturer or tutor examining your delivery will look to see how you interact with the audience, how you deliver your message and how effective your content is.

As a first step, try to put yourself in the position of your audience. How will you capture their attention? Many of the greatest presenters use either of the following:

- A strong opening statement
- A provocative fact or statistic
- A prop
- Humour

In time, you will know which works best for you, but for your first presentations try to focus on creating a clear and confident opening statement, humour and passion will follow. Having done this, the next stage is for you to begin focussing on the content for your presentation.

The Content

Capturing attention is only half the battle. An effective presentation will need to include relevant information, presented in a clear and logical format. To understand this a little better, let's take two examples of presentation slides:



Example A



Example B

Take a look at both slides. Which is easier to read? Whilst Example A is more flashy and creative, it does not come across as being organised. Nor is it easy to read. Overall, example B is a much clearer and effective presentation slide. It presents material in easy to read chunks and does not clutter the screen with unnecessary visuals. With that said, let's review these 'chunks':

- Your content should be easy to read, so don't use overly bright or dark colours in your slides
- Also, try to keep the content on your slides to a minimum. Try to create talking points rather than a script!

- If you want to insert images, do so. But always try to relate the images to the topic and be careful that they do not take away from the overall message.

If you follow these simple guidelines, creating effective slides will become a less complicated process.

The Delivery

Do you shy away from public speaking; perhaps avoid speaking up in class or in group work? You're not alone. In fact, the fear of public speaking ranks as the number one fear among students (Krannich, 2004). Presenting to a crowd or even a few people can be stressful for almost everybody, including lecturers! So how does it become easier?

Like any performing art, public speaking requires practice and some good guidelines. To begin, consider a public figure who you think speaks very well. This could be a President of a country, religious figure, actor, or talk show host. Once you have that person in mind, think about how that person affects you, what makes them an effective communicator?

Generally speaking, a good presenter will use three or more of the following 'tools'; a great presenter may use all six:

Confident voice and stance	A Steady pace of speaking	Varying tone of voice
Passion	Humour	Eye contact

When practicing your own delivery, follow these simple steps:

1. Make short notes about each slide, not a script.
2. Always talk towards your audience (try not to talk to the slides!).
3. Don't be afraid to move around the room.
4. Pace yourself, don't rush your point.
5. Hit the six! A standard lecture hall has six locators (Front left, front middle, front right, back left, back middle, back right), try to direct your head to each location at least once.

If you would like to learn more about effective presentations, why not download workshop 6: Presentation design, from the Learning Support portal page.

UNIT 6

Exam revision and anxiety reduction

The primary goal of revising is to create memories that can be retrieved during an exam. Research indicates that this process is accomplished by creating a loop system in our working memory (Baddeley, 1990) which reprocesses the information so that it is not forgotten or lost to us. Consequently, the more times we repeat the processing, the more chance we have of creating a somewhat more stable memory of a fact, figure, numbers, a song or theorem.



However, as Grainne McKenna points out, it is not only repetition that is important in helping to create long-term memories, but perhaps how the material is presented and how it becomes meaningful to us (Jensen, 1998);

“For knowledge to become embedded, we encourage our students to deliberately engage through an active process of integrating and organising information. The student’s method may be as individual as their thumbprint and make use of their preferred learning styles, be it audio, visual or kinaesthetic. At NCI we endeavour to create a learning environment that engages our students through effective teaching pedagogy and appropriate support services. We believe that this support enables our students to become active in their learning.”

Grainne McKenna, Educational Psychologist, NCI

Knowing then the goals of creating meaningful memories, this unit will offer a range of strategies that are designed to increase attention, memory and overall exam performance;

- Study strategies
- Mnemonics
- Brain training
- Group Study
- Anxiety reduction
- Time management

Mnemonics

A great deal of information may be summed up using this simple technique. The principle of the strategy is to take the first letter of each word you wish to group together and place them within a squished word. Here is an example;

List of critical words to revise	First letter Mnemonic
Coordinate offers and attach critical history	Coach
Perform refunding operations for international transport	Profit

Try creating your own lists and organise them into specific subjects.

Association strategy

Try to think of other ways to remember facts and figures, using imagery or stories (ULogie and Baddeley, 1990). Are there any images you could make to help you remember facts or figures? Perhaps there is a story you could create to make the material more memorable?

In keeping with a focus on using your mind effectively, this next section presents a growing area in Learning Support, that of mind training.

Mind Training

Whilst the practice of mind training has been made popular in recent times through computer games, the principles behind such daily mental workouts has a long history,

dating back to ancient Greece and China (Barnard, 1997). This lineage of puzzling, logic and numeracy can help every learner improve their working memory and processing speed, which is a crucial element during not only exam revision, but exam performance. To begin your own mental workout, try the below links from home:

Product	Description
712-8 Software	http://www.7128.com/alert/alert_where.html
	Many of the games listed in this project are universally designed so that all students, regardless of any disability can use them.

Exam revision

The weeks coming up to an exam can be both very busy and stressful. In order to help you organise your workloads and create a good revision strategy, the following guidelines have been developed in conjunction with the Learning Development Unit in Trinity College.

- Prioritize: Try to get assignments with upcoming deadlines processed early to free things up for exam revision.
- Using “Lost time”: bus and train commutes can be useful for reading or listening to notes.
- Be kind to your body: work regularly in bursts rather than “cramming” all night writing or studying.
- Create a workable timetable: Some students find it helpful to create a weekly planner to outline what they intend to study each week.
- Analyse past exam papers: This can help you become familiar with the exam format and purpose.
- Create your own exam questions: You may end up practicing your future exam.
- Practice writing against the clock: this will give you an idea of how much you can expect to write per question within a certain timeframe.

In keeping with these suggestions, the next section examines how group study can be carried out by both full and part-time students using a virtual classroom.

Group Study

Group study can be a great way of reinforcing your own revision, sharing different strategies and promoting motivation with your peers. A good study group consists of 3-5 members who are committed to meeting up regularly throughout each semester. If however you are a part-time student, or feel that you cannot commit to meeting in college, why not ask your group to meet online using one of the following virtual classrooms that are free to use.

www.wiziq.com

www.getvroom.com

Through these virtual classrooms, each person can upload word documents, PowerPoint files, or even make use of a communal whiteboard to 'brainstorm'. Many virtual classrooms will allow you to record your session. This will be a great resource for revision.

(Remember, if you are planning to use a virtual classroom you will ideally need a high speed/broadband internet connection)

Exam Anxiety

This unit has highlighted some useful strategies that can help each person to improve their academic performance by developing cognitive skills. It is important to realise however that humans are not merely information processing units, where data is inputted, saved and later retrieved. For many of us, the influence of social and emotional factors can have a great deal of influence on our capacity to focus our attention and commit to study (Landow, 2006). Perhaps the most commonly known products of such factors are stress and anxiety, which can in some cases lead to such physical problems as insomnia or muscle tension.

In order to avoid such negative experiences, try following the below guidelines which have been developed by the Learning Development Unit in Trinity College.



Adapted from Learning Development (2009)

- Prepare yourself emotionally by visualising your personal best exam performance and use techniques such as deep breathing and positive self talk to help you to relax.
- Avoid unnecessary stress by starting your revision plan early.
- Develop a regular routine for your study, sleeping, eating and exercise to help you maintain physical, mental and emotional health.
- Manage stress by getting regular exercise, sleeping and eating properly and scheduling in breaks and relaxation time into your study time.
- Allocating a particular task for a particular day can help you to build a routine and feel more in control. This can include doing tasks such as the shopping or washing, or going to the gym on the same day every week and having a set day (e.g. every Wednesday) for studying in the library.
- Try to concentrate on the factors that are in your control rather than those which are not, for example concentrating on the revision and exam process rather than thinking ahead to what result you may get.
- Try to relax and view the exam process positively, it is a chance for you to demonstrate what you have learned.

If you would like to further reduce your stress levels or are feeling particularly anxious in the run up to exams, try using the following programme;

The BodyMind Relaxation Programme

http://www2.ul.ie/web/WWW/Services/Student_Affairs/Student_Supports/Student_Counselling/Relaxation

These set of progressive relaxation downloads from the University of Limerick can help reduce stress levels and anxiety during the academic year.

For more advice on exam revision techniques, why not download workshop 7: Exam strategies from semester one and workshop 6: Overcoming exam anxiety, from semester two. Both workshops are available on the Learning Support portal page.

Authors Note

We hope that you have found this manual to be helpful. If you have any comments, suggestions or queries please contact Mike Goldrick at michael.goldrick@ncirl.ie

Appendices

Templates

Using the SQNR approach to study at home;

Name of Book:

Chapter of Book:

Survey: (Name of book, chapter, headings, images)

Question: Use the above headings to make questions

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

Q5

Q6

Q7

Q8

Read: Begin reading your course work with intent to address the questions.

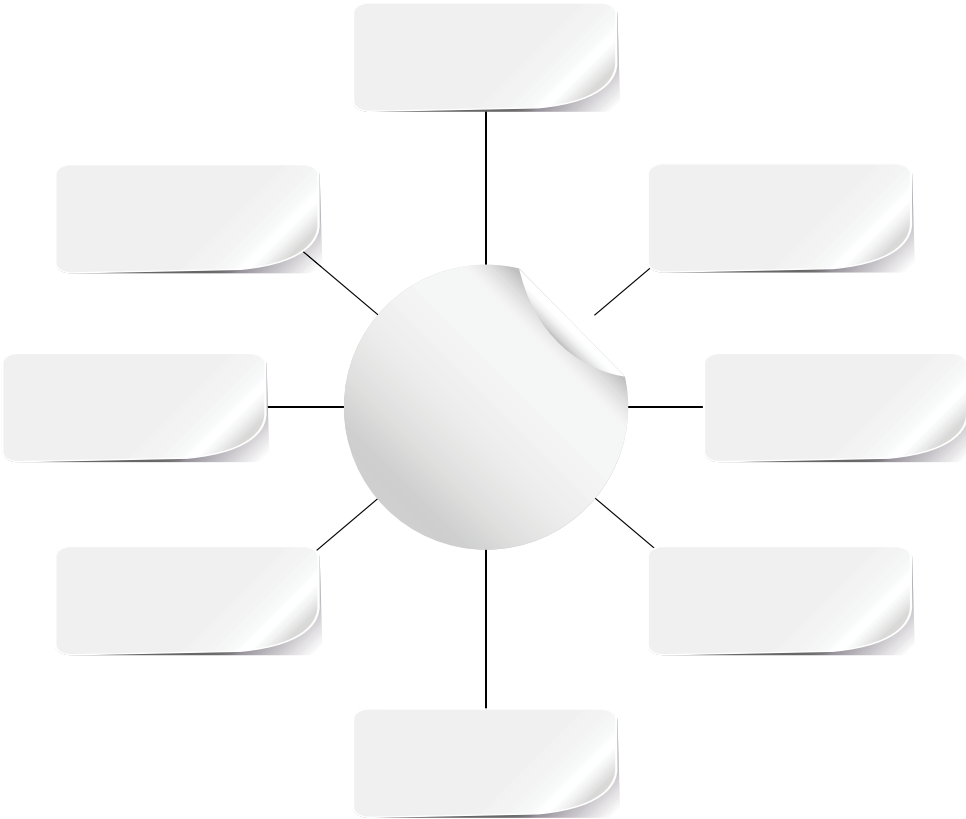
Note-make: Answer your questions through the information you generate by note-making. (In some cases these answers could be adopted to answer set questions from your tutor).

Revise/Research: Use your notes to break down your course into manageable sections (i.e. break your course books into chapters that are manageable for you).

The Cornell Two-Column note taking method

<p>Question 1</p>	<p>(It's a good idea to make note of what pages are relevant to your summary)</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Question 2</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Question 3</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Question 4</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

The Spider-diagram note method



Bibliography

Ausubel, D. P. (1962). *A subsumption theory of meaningful verbal learning and retention*. The Journal of General Psychology, 66, 213-244

Ausubel, D., et. al. (1978). *Educational psychology: A cognitive view* (2nd. ed.) New York: Werbel and Peck.

Baddeley, A. D. (1996). *Exploring the central executive*. Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 49A, 5-28.

Baddeley, A. D. (1990) *The development of the concept of working memory: Implications and contributions of neuropsychology*. In G. Vallar & T. Shallice (Eds.), *Neuropsychological Impairments of Short-term Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 54-73..

Barnard, N.(1997) *Puzzles from the Past: Ancient Brain Strainers*. Macmillan Education.

Businessballs.com (2009) *Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences* [Internet] <http://www.businessballs.com/howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm>UH [Date of access 02/03/2009]

Buzan (2000) *The Speed Reading Book*. BBC Ltd

Curry, L. (1990). One critique of the research on learning styles. *Educational Leadership*, 48, 50-56.

Elluminate, (2009) [Internet] <http://www.illuminate.com/> 07/05/2009

Farrand, P.; Hussain, F.; Hennessy, E. (2002). "The efficacy of the mind map study technique". *Medical Education* 36 (5): 426-431.

Fleming, N.D (2009) The VARK Questionnaire. [Internet] H<http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire>UH [Date of access 02/03/2009]

Fleming, N.D (2001) *Teaching and Learning Styles: VARK Strategies*. Honolulu Community College.

FreeMind (2009) [Internet source] HU<http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download>UH [Date of access 02/03/2009]

Gardner, H (1993) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences 10th edition*. New York: Basic Books

Goldrick, M (2008) *Effective learning Workshops*. National College of Ireland. Dublin. [Internet source] HUhttp://www.ncirl.ie/Student_Support/Academic_SupportUH. [Date of access 23/10/2008]

Honey P, Mumford A (1992) *The Manual of Learning Styles* 3rd Ed. Maidenhead

Jensen, E. (1998) *Teaching with the brain in mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Kolb, D (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Klatzky, R. (1984). *Memory and awareness*. New York: Freeman.

Krannich, C. R. (2004). *101 Secrets of highly effective speakers: controlling fear, commanding attention* [Recorded by B. McDonald]. [CD]. New York: Listen & Live Audio, Inc.

Kuhara-Kojima, K., & Hatano, G. (1991). *Contribution of content knowledge and learning ability to the learning of facts*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 83 (2). 253-263.

Logie, R. H., & Baddeley, A. D. (1990) *Imagery and working memory*. In P. Hampson, D. Marks & J. Richardson (Eds) *Imagery: Current Developments*. London: Routledge, (103-128)

Miles, T.R (2001) *Dyslexia: The Pattern of Difficulties*. Second edn. London. Whurr.

Northedge, A (1990) *The Good Study Guide*; The Open University, Milton Keynes. (371:3)

Pauk, Walter (1962). *How to study in college*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Perryer, G (2009) How do you learn best? [Internet]H<http://www.dentistry.bham.ac.uk/ecourse/pages/page.asp?pid=1518UH> [Date of access 02/03/2009]

Project CRISS (1996) *Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies*. Kalispell, MT. Kendall/Hunt.

Reiff, J. C. (1992). *Learning styles*. Washington, DC: National Education Association of the United States.

Robinson, F.P (1970) *Effective study* (4th ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

Rowntree, D (1993) *Learn How to Study; A realistic approach*, Warner Books, Lancaster, London. (371.3)

Shepard, P and Unsworth-Mitchell, G (1997) The Speed reading Course. [internet] http://web.archive.org/web/20030913231313/www.trans4mind.com/speed_reading/speedread.pdf [Accessed on 05/07/09]

Stahl, S. A. (2002). Different strokes for different folks? In L. Abbeduto (Ed.), *Taking sides: Clashing on controversial issues in educational psychology* (pp. 98-107). Guilford, CT, USA: McGraw-Hill.

Student Learning and Development (2009) *Examination Tips*, Trinity College Dublin.

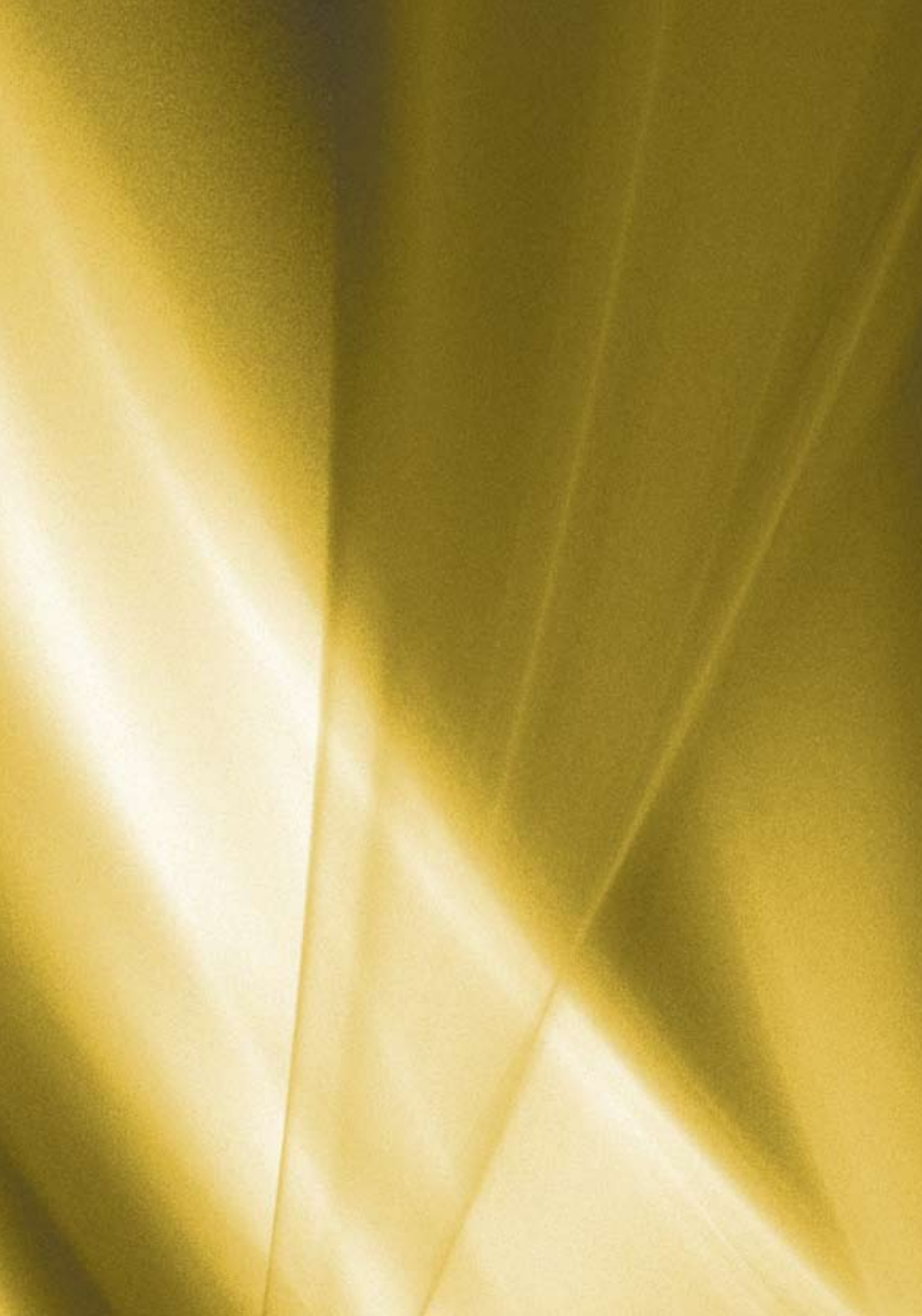
Student Support (2008) *Learning Development Manual*. Dublin. National College of Ireland.

Wiziq (2009) [internet] www.wiziq.com Accessed on 09/06/09

Woolfolk, A. E. (1998). *Educational psychology (7th ed)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





National College of Ireland
Mayor Street, IFSC, Dublin 1
Tel: 01 4498624
Email: studentsupport@ncirl.ie
Web: <https://myncistudent@ncirl.ie>