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**COMMUNICATIONSKILLS**

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**TeachingNotes/Handbook**

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## INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION

In this section, we shall examine the field of communication to serve as a foundation to what follows in the course. Principally, we shall define communication; outline its elements, principles and its importance in academic and life in general. We shall also briefly examine the various types of communication.

### Objectives of the topic

At the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- a) Define communication
- b) Discuss the elements that constitute communication
- c) Explain the importance of communication in academics and in life in general
- d) Outline the important principles of communication
- e) Discuss the various types of communication

### What is Communication?

The term communication comes from a Latin word '*communicare*' which means to make common or share. Therefore, communication is **a process** by which **meaning is exchanged** between individuals or an individual and a group through **a common system of symbols, signs and behavior**.

- The definition of communication is shared in the Webster's Dictionary as "sending, giving, or exchanging information and ideas," which is often expressed nonverbally and verbally.
- A plethora of authors have defined communication including Gamble and Gamble, who define communication as a desirable or accidental transfer of meaning.
- Communication is also a process of sharing or exchanging ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feelings through certain signs, symbols and behavior.
- Communication is more than transfer of ideas and thoughts; it is a dynamic process of action and interaction towards desired goals.

#### 1.2.1 Key phrases of definition

- a) **Communication is a process:** it is an activity which is an exchange of meaning that is dynamic. Communication is therefore not static. Communication as a process is a concept whose critical element is the changing nature of its occurrence.
- b) **Communication involves meaning:** meaning is shared understanding of message. The understanding of the meaning of another person's message only occurs when you elicit common meanings for words, phrases, and non-verbal messages.
- c) **Communication is a system of symbols, signs and behavior:** the system may be in form of language, gesture, demeanor, facial expressions e.t.c.

### Importance of Studying Communication

Communication is central to human life. You cannot avoid communication and you will engage in communication nearly every minute of every day in your life. In addition, communication plays a major role in every aspect of your life. Effective communication therefore both enhances your daily life and at the same time solves problems in your professional and personal life. Communication experts believe that poor communication is at the root of many of our problems.

Therefore there are various reasons why studying communication is important:

- a) **Studying communication helps in understanding and insight of oneself and others.**
  - Self awareness is the way we see ourselves. Most of our self knowledge comes from communication with ourselves (intrapersonal communication) and communication with other people (interpersonal communication). The message and feedback we receive from others helps improve our self concept.
- b) Studying communication and using it effectively can lead to more positive feelings of ourselves. **Effective communication can improve our self worth** by enabling us to positively project ourselves in what is called **image management**.
- c) Studying communication can **increase our knowledge about human relationships** because studying communication includes learning about how people relate with one another and about what communication is appropriate for a given situation.
- d) Studying communication can **teach us important life skills**. For instance it can help us **acquire**

**problem solving skills.** Studying communication is also instrumental in helping us acquire important life skills such as **decision making skills, public speaking** e.t.c. All these skills are important in academic and career development.

- e) Studying communication **can help us succeed professionally.** Employers regard highly written, oral and other communication competencies. The ability to listen and analyze messages is usually considered an essential professional skill. Entrepreneurs too regard communication skills as top priority skills for success.
- f) Poor communication may lead to misunderstanding, frustration, being ignored by others, unsuccessful careers, among many other negative consequences.

### Elements of Communication

Elements of communication are the components that constitute the communication process. These are:

a) **People**

These are the **participants** in the communication process. People are involved in communication in two roles. They are **sources** and **receivers** of messages. Sources initiate/compose the intended message. S/he encodes the message, while receivers are the intended target of messages, i.e. a receiver is the person who receives, decodes, comprehends and attaches meaning to the message sent. The participants' knowledge, interest and emotional state will affect how the message is sent or received. In the communication process, people are sources and receivers of a message simultaneously and continually.

b) **Message**

This is the verbal or non-verbal form of idea, thought or feeling that one person (source) wishes to communicate to a group of people (receivers). The message, therefore, is the **content** of interaction. A message may be easy to understand or long and complex, it may also be intentional or unintentional.

c) **Channel**

This is the means by which a message moves from a source to a receiver. It is also called the **medium of transmission**. The medium may be in form of sound waves (in oral-auditory messages) or as light waves (in visual communication such as written communication).

d) **Feedback**

This is the receiver's verbal, non verbal or written **response** to the message from the source. Feedback is part of any communication situation such that even non-response is feedback.

e) **Code**

This is the **systematic arrangement of symbols** used by the source or receiver to create meaning in the mind of another person(s) or receiver(s). The code may be in form of

- i) Language you choose to communicate in e.g. English, Kiswahili or *Sheng*.
- ii) Grammatical structure, for instance, a statement, question etc.
- iii) Words and phrases you choose to use.
- iv) Non-verbal codes you may choose.

f) **Encoding and decoding**

Encoding is the act of putting ideas and thoughts into a code, while decoding is interpreting/making sense those ideas or thoughts.

g) **Noise**

Noise is any interference in encoding or decoding process that reduces the clarity of a message. Noise can be in the form of:

- i) **Physical noise**, which can be in form of distracting sounds or sights. Such noise is usually easier to prevent in a speaking or listening situation. For example, closing doors to a noisy room, wearing ear plugs etc.
- ii) **Psychological/noise**, mental and emotional interferences that distract communication, such as day dreaming, pain, hunger and the like.
- iii) **Semantic noise**, which is the use of expressions that are unknown to the receiver or are too complex in grammatical structure. They include language differences, inattention and misunderstanding caused by different interpretations of a word or an expression. Cultural diversity can also lead to semantic noise.

### Principles of communication

There are important properties of communication that we need to keep in mind as we study and employ communication. The properties constitute the invaluable attributes of communication:

- a) **Communication is inescapable:** communication is always occurring in human life at various levels, for instance, at the intra-personal level when you are thinking, planning, meditating, as well as when you are observing, gathering information and making conclusions. It also occurs at the interpersonal level as you interact with one another.
- b) **Communication is irreversible:** you cannot take back something once it is communicated. Even if you can, what has been communicated cannot entirely be erased. Traces of the effect of the communication will always remain.
- c) **Communication is dynamic:** all elements in communication (i.e. setting, participants, their knowledge, their roles etc) affect each other as communication progresses.
- d) **Every communication interaction has a content dimension and relationship dimension:** Content dimension is the information or message that a source desires to communicate, which has to be packaged in a strategic manner to elicit a desired reaction. The relationship dimension of communication constitutes the elements in the communication that seek to signal and acknowledge the state of the social relation between the communicating parties. The relationship dimension 'oils' the attainment of communication goals. For instance if you lecturer entered into the lecturer room with an unzipped trousers and you wanted to alert him to this fact, you will not just blurt out to him the content of what you want to say to him! You will need to do a lot of damage control about the awkward situation, while at the same time recognizing his superior position in relation to you as a student. Just think of the exact kind of language you would use and point out the content and relationship dimension of what you will say.
- e) **Communication is contextual:** communication does not occur in a vacuum. It involves various aspects of context of communication. The context of communication is the environment in which communication takes place. The context of communication involves:
  - i) **Psychological context:** that is the needs, desires, values, personality, and so on that people communicate and bring to the communication activity.
  - ii) **Situational context:** this involves the place and time of communication, which affects what and how we communicate.
  - iii) **Environmental context:** this involves the physical features of the communication setting, such as, noise level, cultural context, objects available in setting e.t.c.
- f) **Communication is complicated:** Communication is complicated in several respects. For instance:
  - i) It involves choice about multiple aspects of message i.e. we have to make verbal and code choices, as well as non-verbal behavioral aspects to be used in communication. We also have to make choices of channel, and all these aspects must be combined strategically in order to pass across a unified message.
  - ii) Communication is also complicated because of our differing perception of the same object that we may wish to communicate about.

### Types of Communication

Communication can be categorized in two ways.

- a) By the number of people involved in the communication process.
- b) By the channel or medium used in the communication process.
  - a) **Communication categorized by number of people involved:**
    - i) **Intrapersonal communication:** this is the process of sharing meaning within oneself in the mind, which involves such activities as reflection, problem solving, planning, and solving internal conflict among others. This is a continuous process we always engage in but rarely realize we are involved in it.
    - ii) **Inter-personal communication:** this involves exchanging meaning between at least two people in a situation that allows mutual opportunities for both speaking and listening. Interpersonal communication can be of two types:
      - **Dyadic communication:** involves two people in communication such as a doctor and a patient, a lecturer and a student.
      - **Small group communication:** involves three to ten people such communication includes that which takes place in families and work groups.
    - iii) **Public communication:** it involves one person communicating to a large group of people.

- iv) **Mass communication:** this is communication mediated via a technological transmission system involving a source (professional communicator often representing an organization), and a large number of unseen receivers spread over a wide geographical area. The transmission system might be in the form of electronic, audio, audio-visual signal or visual technologies such as publication in form of books or newspapers.

**b) Communication Categorized by Channel or Medium**

- i) **Verbal communication:** this type of communication relies on the oral-auditory signal for communication.
- ii) **Graphic communication:** this communication is also known as visual communication. It involves visual representation of ideas facts and objects other than written communication e.g. cartoons, graphs, charts, models, objects etc.
- iii) **Written communication:** this is the use of visual symbols, representing language, on a surface which is read by receivers.
- iv) **Non-verbal communication:** this is the use of visual or oral auditory signals that do not primarily rely on language or verbalized message for communication to take place. This form of communication is also known as paralinguistic communication and would include forms such as gestures, posture, distance, facial expression, rate of speech, pause, voice quality, and so on.

**Categories of non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication can be divided into 5 categories:

**1. Paralanguage**

This includes non-verbal communication such as tone, pitch, quality, rate of speech, laughing, crying, belching or even hesitating or sighing. Paralanguage can help reinforce a verbal message, for example, a father says, “awwww” to his daughter who has just fallen.

**2. Kinesics/body language**

Body language is the gestures, movements and mannerisms by which a person communicates with others. Physical attributes such as appearance, facial expressions, eye contact and posture all contribute to kinesics or body language. For example:

- Physical appearance includes clothes, jewelry and grooming. Wearing the appropriate clothing to specific events demonstrates taste and style.
- Facial expressions indicate our emotions: happy, sad, confused, angry etc. Eye contact may convey confidence, honesty and interest in the conversation.
- Gestures can express many things: a friendly wave to say hello etc.
- Posture sends a message. Standing or sitting erect denotes that you are paying attention to the matter at hand, leaning forward conveys increased interest.

**3. Environment**

Our environment communicates many different messages. For example:

A large desk in a corner office with windows communicates high status within an organization

Fast food restaurants are designed to move customers through quickly by using plastic seats that is comfortable for about 10 minutes

**4. Touch**

Touch, or haptic communication, is a primary method for achieving connection with people, indicating intention, or expressing emotion. The use of touch can be culturally bound. For example:

In a business setting, the most appropriate form of communication is the handshake

Haptic communication is status-driven. That is, a manager may give an employee an encouraging pat on the back, but not vice versa

People in business must avoid touch that could be considered condescending or sexual harassment

## 5. Space

Space, as it relates to non-verbal communication, is the physical distance maintained with others. How you use space to communicate depends on:

- Cultural norms
- Your relationship with the receivers of your communication
- The activities involved

Space generally falls into 4 categories:

- a) Intimate distance: this distance is reserved for personal expression with those we know well
- b) Personal distance: this distance is used for casual and friendly conversations
- c) Social distance: this distance is used in the workplace for business-related conversations, small meetings and social functions. It is also used for other conversations that are not personal in nature
- d) Public distance: this distance is usually for public speaking. In a personal conversation, this distance would constitute a huge communication barrier

### Pointers for using non-verbal communication

- ✓ Avoid conflicting signals: messages are made stronger when both the verbal and non-verbal communications convey the same thing.
- ✓ Care should be taken not to intimidate people by encroaching on their personal space.
- ✓ Interpretation of the non-verbal cues and messages we receive is an essential responsibility of any communicator.
- ✓ Perception is the cornerstone for interpreting non-verbal signals.

### c) Other types of communication categorized by direction of flow

Communications creates links between people for different functions or purposes. If several links are missing, broken or not aligned properly, the communication becomes wobbly and may eventually break. The following are communication situations that represent a different flow of communication depending on the purpose:

#### i) Upward communication

This is communicating with people who rank above you, such as your boss or instructor.

#### ii) Lateral or horizontal communication

This is communicating with people who are at the same rank or level as you – your co-workers or classmates.

#### iii) Downward communication

This is communicating with people who rank below you, such as the people you might manage at work.

#### iv) Internal communication

This is a communication situation that takes place in a company or an organization. Internal communication is the transmittal of information between and among persons within a business or organization. It is used to accomplish company goals and objectives. For example, managers communicating deadline on assignments or employees seeking promotions.

#### v) External communication

This is the transfer of information to and from people outside the company or organization. The goal is to persuade the recipients to respond favorably to company needs. For example, a job advert tries to attract qualified personnel to fill a certain position.

#### vi) Cross-cultural communication

This refers to communicating, either in writing, verbally or non-verbally, with people who are from a culture different from your own. This calls for an understanding and respect of cultural differences and

being adaptable.

**vii) Grapevine communication**

This refers to informal communication within a company/organization, where information spread bypasses the formal communication structure. It spreads in random ways, irrespective of the authority levels.

**NOTE:** The direction your communication flows at any given time will influence how you communicate – the words you use and the method you choose.

**The objectives of communication**

Whether we are speaking, writing, persuading, informing, entertaining, explaining, convincing, educating or any other objective behind the particular communication, we always have four general objectives:

- To be received (heard or read)
- To be understood
- To be accepted
- To get action (change behavior or attitude)

**Specific barriers to communication**

Human communication is fraught with problems and difficulties such as:

1. Differences in opinion

Our worldviews are largely determined by our past experiences. As vast as these experiences are, so are the perceptions and interpretations of the world that people have. Age, nationality, culture, education, occupation, sex, status, personality etc, all bring to bear the difference in perception.

2. Jumping to conclusions

We often see what we expect to see, thus hear what we expect to hear, rather than what is actually intended. This may lead us to unnecessary conclusions.

3. Stereotyping

Our experiences could run us the risk of treating different people as if they were the same.

4. Lack of knowledge

Communication is adversely affected if it is exchanged between persons whose knowledge of the particular subject is varied or whose backgrounds regarding the subject are too different.

It requires skill on the part of the communicator to be aware of the discrepancy between the levels of knowledge, thus communicate accordingly.

5. Lack of interest

This is lacking alertness to the message being sent. As an effective communicator, you should avoid assuming that your interest in the specific subject is everyone's interest, thus angle your message to appeal to the interests and needs of the receiver.

6. Difficulties with expression

This refers to difficulty expressing or conveying your message as clearly as possible. It includes lack of vocabulary as well as lack of confidence, both of which can be overcome by improving your vocabulary and preparing carefully respectively.



## 7. Emotions

Both the receiver and communicator could harbor strongly felt emotions that could prevent almost anything from being communicated. Such emotions could entirely distort the communication and should be avoided. However, any audience knows that a speaker without emotion and enthusiasm is likely to be a dull speaker. Emotion just needs a clear balance.

## 8. Personality

Our personality traits/behaviors can affect the behavior of others in a communication situation. We may not be able to change the personalities of others, but at least we should be prepared to consider our own personality to see if change in behavior may result in more satisfactory relationships, thus better communication.

### **The 7cs of effective communication**

Effective communication must apply the following 7 essentials, whether you are speaking or writing. Using these 7Cs will ensure that your communication is coherent and easy to follow.

#### **1. Clarity**

This refers to being specific rather than vague while communicating.

You must communicate so clearly that you are not misunderstood, i.e. it is not enough to communicate so you need to be understood.

Ask the following key questions to test how clear your communication is:

- Have you used familiar words, short sentences?
- Have you presented only one idea in each sentence?
- Have you avoided "business" and technical terms?
- Have you used the reader's language?

#### **2. Completeness**

Complete communication includes enough details so that the recipient will not need to ask for more information. For example – if you receive a message from your lecturer asking you to pick your graded papers on Wednesday, how do you know which Wednesday it should be?

To be complete, a communication should answer the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? or How much?

Ask the following key questions to test how complete your communication is:

- Have you given all the facts?
- Have you covered the essentials?
- Have you answered all his/her questions?
- Did you PLAN what you said?

#### **3. Conciseness**

Concise communication avoids unnecessary words that could hamper the same communication. Such extra words may clutter the message and distort it all together. Conciseness makes the message more understandable and comprehensible.

For conciseness:

- Eliminate wordy expressions
- Include only relevant material
- Avoid unnecessary repetition

Look at the following examples:

<b>WORDY</b>	<b>CONCISE</b>
Due to the fact that	Because
In due course	Soon
At this time	Now
Few in number	few
On a weekly basis	Weekly
In spite of the fact that	Although
Until such time as	Until
Meet together	Meet

### **In-class exercise:**

Revise the following statement, which is too wordy and eliminate seven unnecessary words ('fillers').

"I am writing this letter to inform you that your airline tickets will be mailed ten days before your scheduled departure".

### **4. Consistency**

All communication should be consistent in FACT, TREATMENT and SEQUENCE.

Consistency in fact refers to agreement with a source document or an established fact. For example, an exam scheduled for 31<sup>st</sup> April should be questioned since April has only 30 days.

Consistency in treatment means treating similar items the same way. For example using the courtesy title (Mr., Mrs., Miss., or Ms.) with names of all recipients of a letter or indenting all paragraphs in a report.

Consistency in sequence refers to the arrangement of listings such as alphabetical, chronological or numerical order. For example, if an exam is scheduled for 3 days, the dates should be given in chronological order: June 14, June 15 and June 16.

### **5. Correctness**

This refers to all the information in the message being accurate – the content, the spelling, the capitalization and the punctuation. The following guidelines can ensure your communication achieves correctness:

- Use the correct level of language
- Check accuracy of figures, facts and words
- Maintain acceptable writing mechanics
- There should be proper grammar, punctuation, spelling and paragraphing

Ask the following questions to test for correctness:

- Have you checked all facts for correctness?
- Have you spelled the reader's name correctly?
- Have you verified all numbers and amounts?
- Is the appearance of the letter effective? Is it clean, well-spaced?
- Have you checked your spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.?

### **6. Consideration**

This refers to the use of the 'You-attitude' instead of the 'I' or 'We-attitude'. Consideration applies sympathy, the human touch and understanding of human nature. It means the message is sent with the receiver in mind.

You should try to visualize your readers; their desires, problems, emotions, circumstances and possible reaction to your communication.

The following actions can ensure that your communication is considerate:

- Focus on 'You-attitude' instead of 'I' or 'We'
- Show audience benefit or interest in the receiver
- Emphasize positive pleasant facts

Look at the following examples:

<b>NEGATIVE EMOTION/EXPRESSION</b>	<b>TRANSFORMS INTO</b>
Anxious	A little concerned, expectant
Confused	Curious
Destroyed	Set back
Disgusted	Surprised
Failure	Learning
I hate	I prefer
Insulted	Misunderstood
Lost	Searching
Painful	Uncomfortable
Stressed	Busy
<b>GOOD WORD</b>	<b>GREAT WORD</b>
Attractive	Gorgeous
Confident	Unstoppable
Curious	Fascinated
Fast	Ballistic
Fortunate	Blessed
Interesting	Captivating
Like	Relish
Nice	Fantastic
Quick	Explosive
Smart	Gifted

Ask the following questions to test your communication for consideration:

- Have you put the client first?
- Have you floodlighted his/her interests?
- Have you walked in his/her moccasins?
- Have you talked his/her language?

## 7. Courtesy

This refers to the building of goodwill at all times.

- Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful and appreciative
- Use expressions that show respect
- Choose non-discriminatory expressions

Ask the following questions to test your communication for courtesy:

- Will it win good will?
- Have you used positive, "pleasant-toned" words?
- Have you used "I appreciate," "please", and "thank you" somewhere in your message?
- Would you enjoy reading what you have said?

NOTE: Concreteness: (sometimes used in the place of consistency – either one of them is ok.)

This refers to when communication is specific definite unambiguous and vivid rather than vague and general. The following guidelines lead to concreteness.

1. Use specific facts and figures
2. Put action in your verb
3. Choose vivid image building words.

Ask the following questions to test your communication for concreteness:

- Have you given the crisp details the client needs?
- Have you made the details razor and needle-sharp?
- Have you flashed word pictures, made facts vivid?

The chief art in communication is to know:

1. How much to put in.
2. What to leave out.
3. When to quit.

## LISTENING

### Introduction

In this section, we are interested in discussing listening as an invaluable skill in the communication process. We shall also endeavor to show how listening is connected to critical thinking.

### Objectives of the topic

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- a) Distinguish between hearing and listening
- b) Outline the importance of listening in our lives
- c) Explain the essential aspects in the listening process
- d) Discuss the various types of listening
- e) Demonstrate knowledge of effective listening strategies

### Definition of Listening

**Hearing** is the act of receiving sound. **Listening** is the act of receiving sound, constructing meaning and responding to the spoken message. Listening also involves the ability to retain information as well as react emphatically to the spoken message.

### Importance of Listening in our lives

- a) Listening is an essential task for effective communicators. We actually do spend the largest part of our time listening, for instance it has been observed that college students spend up to 50% of their time listening.
- b) Listening helps us build and maintain relationship. Part of our ability to build and retain relationships involves our ability to understand and respond empathetically to messages from others.
- c) Listening can help us determine whether people we are communicating with are honest or deceitful.
- d) Listening is an essential skill for success in academics and business world.
- e) Listening is directly linked to our ability to remember information.

### The Listening Process

The listening process involves receiving oral stimuli (music, words or sounds) in the ear (*Hearing*). The ear translates the vibration from oral stimuli into sensation that is registered by the brain (*Listening*). The brain, using attention and working memory, interprets the sensation and gives it meaning (*Interpretation*). The interpreted message is then stored in short term memory for immediate use (*Retaining*) or long term memory for future recall (*Recalling*).

### Important aspects of the Listening Process

- a) **Attention** – At any one time there are many oral-auditory stimuli such that our mind has to focus on specific stimuli and block others. This process is called **attention**. Attention is selective or automatic.
  - i) **Selective attention** – This is sustained focus we give to information we deem important. Selective attention can be obstructed by our mind's instinct to pay automatic attention to certain stimuli.
  - ii) **Automatic attention** – this is instinctive focus we give to stimuli signaling a change in our surrounding. We give automatic attention to stimuli that we deem important or that which we perceive to signal danger. Automatic attention, therefore, competes with selective attention.
- b) **Working memory** – This is the part of our consciousness that interprets and assigns meaning to stimuli we pay attention to. We may use it without 'thinking' about it. It looks for shortcuts when

processing information e.g. patterns of letters or words in assigning meanings. The working memory works in conjunction with the long term memory.

- c) **Short term memory** – Once information is interpreted in working memory it is either sent to the short term or the long term memory. The short term memory is part of the memory that acts as a temporary storage place for information. The information stored in short term memory is that which we want to use immediately but not necessarily in future. It is the least efficient of our memory resources because information stored here is easily forgotten unless some strategy like rehearsal is used. Unfortunately most people, students included, rely on short term memory for information that deserves to be recalled in the long term.
- d) **Long term memory** – This is the permanent storage place for information including past experiences, language, values, knowledge, images of people, memories of sights, sounds, smells and even fantasies. Unlike short term memory, long term memory has no known limitation on the quantity or duration of stored information. Long term memory is organized in schema, which are organizational filing systems for thoughts held in long term memory. We access such information through stimulus cues that constitute words, images, sights, smells or tastes that serve as triggers, which signal the mind to activate information held in schema. If we encounter information for first time, which is not in the long term memory, a new schema will be created and this information stored. The long term memory plays a key role in the listening process because it is instrumental in recalling stored information and helps in creating meaning between what we hear and our background knowledge.

### Types of Listening

There are various types of listening, which can be used for various purposes either independently or in combination. These are:

- a) **Active listening** – It involves listening with a purpose and comprises:
  - i) Listening carefully using all our available senses.
  - ii) Paraphrasing what we hear both mentally and verbally.
  - iii) Checking our understanding to ensure accuracy.
  - iv) Providing feedback positively or negatively.
- b) **Empathetic listening** – It is a form of active listening where we attempt to understand the other person by perceiving their world view as if it is our own. It is putting ourselves in the shoes of another person in order to feel and understand what the person is going through. This kind is very useful in sustaining relationships, counseling process, resolving disputes, as well as dealing with traumatic situations.
- c) **Critical listening** – This is listening that analyses, evaluates, critiques or challenges a speaker's message by evaluating its accuracy, meaningfulness and utility. This goes hand in hand with critical thinking and it involves asking question such as:
  - i) Is the speaker's message possible? Is it realistic?
  - ii) Does the speaker back up his or her claims? Are these claims reliable?
  - iii) Is the speaker credible or an authority?
  - iv) Is the message free of contradiction and inconsistencies?

Critical listening is very useful when we are confronted with persuasive messages such as advertisements, political communications, propaganda and the like.
- d) **Listening for enjoyment** – This type of listening helps us to relax like when we enjoy listening to, for instance, music.
- e) **Reflective listening**

This refers to attentively listening to the speaker's actual words, as well as tone of voice, and observing the body language and emotions displayed. Reflective listening is particularly an important tool in one-on-one situations. It is not practical in a speaker-audience situation.

- f) **Passive listening**

This means concentrating at a low level and absorbing just enough of the speaker's words to stay involved in a conversation or speech. Such listening is characterized by:

- Listeners remembering little of what is said

- Listeners let the speaker's inflection or tone of voice signal when they should react by nodding, smiling or saying, "I see"
- Listeners may suggest that the speaker has the listener's attention, even though that may not be the case
- It is appropriate when you listen for pleasure and when it doesn't matter whether or not you retain what you hear

### Effective Listening Strategies

Effective listening is a life-long skill that is of paramount importance in academic life. There are various ways of improving listening skills that can make your life in academics and beyond very fruitful. Strategies that improve your listening skills include:

- Listen and think critically** – This involves analyzing the speaker, the situation and the message in order to make critical judgment about messages being presented.
- Identifying and understanding barriers to the listening process and genuinely working towards eliminating them.** Such barriers may include noise of various types, which should be eliminated in the listening process.
- Identifying patterns in what we are listening to** – Understanding the overall message, its main points and the supporting points is essential in having a graphical impression of messages and is an important aid in the recall process.
- Applying memory retention skills** such as:
  - Rehearsing and rephrasing what we listen to.
  - Using mnemonic devices (using a series of letters forming a meaningful or pronounceable word where each letter stands for a particular concept, idea or point for easy recall).

### Improving Listening skills

Listening behavior also varies from culture to culture. For instance, African listeners may look away from you instead of maintaining eye contact, while Japanese listeners often close their eyes when they are concentrating.

However, even such cultural orientations are not an excuse to effective listening.

You can use these five strategies to enhance, reinforce and develop your listening skills:

- *Read* to gain background information
- *Repeat* a person's name when you are introduced to someone
- *Ask* questions to clarify information
- *Take* good notes
- *Use* a tape recorder, when permitted, to record a lecture or a meeting

Good listening skills enable you:

- To absorb an instructor's lectures, explanations and directions for assignments
- Understand what the speaker is saying
- Combined with note-taking, listening skills enable you to record information and review it at a later time

### Overcoming listening barriers

Becoming an effective listener requires conscious effort and practice.

Listening barriers are any distractions that interfere with listening, for example:

- Not concentrating on what is being said
- Being distracted by noise
- Talking instead of listening
- Having preconceived thoughts and opinions
- Not being interested in what is being said

These can be overcome through:

- Concentrate on the speaker's message – it is your responsibility to stay focused.
- Use filters to manage and control noise – control the two basic kinds of noise; 1) external noise, which includes sounds from conversations, radio, television, CD players, machinery etc and 2) internal noise, which includes distractions such as pain, fatigue, preoccupation with other thoughts, hunger, worry or a personality conflict with the speaker. To this end, you can turn down the volume of unnecessary sounds, take a pain reliever or get enough sleep.
- Resist talking instead of listening – it is impossible to be both sender and receiver of information at the same time. You can even become your own distraction.
- Focus on the message – make sure that your own ideas do not interfere with listening to the ideas of another.
- Listen with a positive attitude – you do not have to agree with the speaker, but good listening requires you to keep an open mind and believe that the speaker might have something useful to offer.

### **Improving listening skills**

1. Paraphrasing: this is summarizing the speaker's message in your own words and allowing the speaker to correct any discrepancies from the intended message. That is, the listener crystallizes his/her own understanding of the content presented.
2. Evaluate your skills: everyone has listening weakness; you must therefore identify your weaknesses.
3. Prepare yourself physically and mentally: listening is a combination of physical and mental activities.
4. Set listening priorities: because you are bombarded with several messages at once, decide which ones deserve your focus.
5. Make efficient use of available time: do not rush through your conversation as you may lack full understanding of the message.
6. Listen attentively: be attentive and show interest in the speaker's message.
7. Listen for ideas and feelings: look out for factual information as well as the speaker's tone of voice.
8. Establish eye contact: do not stare at the speaker, instead, glance away periodically to reflect on the topic.
9. Use body language to show you are listening: body language can convey your level of interest. Employ appropriate non-verbal cues.
10. Overlook personal characteristics of the speaker: do not prejudge a speaker on the basis of distracting personal characteristics such as mannerisms, voice, speech patterns or appearance.
11. Choose strategic seating: posture can affect listening; therefore choose a physical location that is conducive, comfortable and practical.
12. Ask questions if permitted: this helps clarify the speaker's information.
13. Take notes: jot down key ideas or concepts for further referencing.

One method to help you retain the content of a speaker's message is to think of the strategies represented by the letters in the sentence "IS A FACT":

**Identify** – identify the speaker's ideas and connections among the ideas

**Summarize** – summarize the main points of the message

**Assess** – assess the correctness or validity of the message

**Formulate** – formulate appropriate questions

**Associate** – associate the speaker's ideas with other known concepts

**Consider** – consider specific ways the information might be used **Take notes** – take notes to assist in better recall (to bring to mind)

For you to succeed in higher education study, there are basic study guidelines, which you can think about and practice in order to achieve your personal academic objectives. Before you proceed, engage yourself in the activity below:



## **STUDY SKILLS**

### **Activity**

1. Explain the words, effective, study, and methods in your own words. You will refer to your answer at the end of this sub-topic.
2. Do you really need to know how to study? Don't you already know?

We can succeed in anything that we do if we can develop certain skills. In studying, we are expected to develop various techniques which will enable us create a good environment for ourselves in order to succeed. We notice that the words used above will mean that we should be able to see results of the efforts, which we put in our work as we study.

### **Setting Goals**

We believe that you know what you are doing and that you know what you want in life. For this reason, it is expected you have set a purpose for your self and that your aim is to fulfill that purpose as you undertake this degree course at Kabarak University. If you do not know what you want to do in life, then you cannot succeed, because you will not have something, which you can look up to. All of us have more energy when what we do leads us to what we want in our lives. Those who do not have a central goal fall prey of petty worries, fears, troubles and self-pity. All these lead to low moral. Therefore if your studies are part of that overall aim, then the chances of your studies succeeding will be very high. So you must set goals and a purpose for your study if you have to achieve the desired success.

However, we want to caution you here that when you are setting goals for yourself do not set targets that are unrealistic. If the targets are too unrealistic, they become an obstacle to achieving your success. For example if you say 'I must complete this module in one week'. That may be difficult to achieve and you will end up frustrated because you may come to believe that you are not able to meet your goals, and yet they may not be achievable.

The goals that you set should be those that you can measure. Can you see the results of what you have set out to achieve? For example, when you set a goal like 'I want to work harder in my studies'. How can you measure when you have worked harder than before? So you can improve on the goal may be perhaps by saying that 'I want to create two free hours per day for my assignments'.

If your goals are set clearly and in measurable terms, you will be able to think about each of the study tasks that you will have and pay specific attention to them. So what you feel about a study task is very important. You will be able to know what goal to set if the study assignment is hard or easy. If the material you are working with is hard, you will need to set different goals from those that you set when the task seems very easy.

### **Positive Thinking**

It does not matter how many purposes you set for yourself. They may not be fulfilled if you do not have positive thoughts about yourself. You should be kind to yourself such that you can judge yourself by what you deserve and your capabilities. If you think of yourself as stupid or bad then you will actually be discouraged and end up giving up. All of us make wrong decisions or mistakes at one stage in our lives.

The attitudes about yourself should be positive in order for you to realize your full potential through your abilities. You must develop self-confidence to enable you complete all the tasks successfully. If you have a tendency of

negative thoughts about any of the study modules that you will be reading, that will make it hard for you to complete the courses on schedule. As you encounter the various modules, you might begin to develop negative attitudes by perhaps looking at the material as difficult, boring, or too simple, that is negative thinking and should be avoided. A positive attitude towards your abilities will strengthen your self-confidence, which is an essential ingredient of success.

## **Networking**

You may find that there are some colleagues in your geographical setting whom you should always get in touch with. You can form study groups with these colleagues in order to make your study tasks easier than they would be if you were alone. Besides colleagues, the teaching staff at the university will be a useful source of Information especially when you are in doubt or have no idea completely. Do not struggle on your own if you are not sure of what you are supposed to do, especially if you have trouble understanding how to use any of the materials provided to you for the modules that you have registered for. Summarily, you can:

1. Establish contacts with instructors and colleagues.
2. Identify your areas of strength, which you can build on as you relate to others.

## **Stay Healthy**

If you are not healthy, there is no need to even undertake a university course. So it is important that after you have made the decision to study at university level, ensure that you stay healthy psychologically and physically. You need to make sure that you are strong and happy within yourself and that all the things, which bring about unhappiness, are avoided. But avail time to interact with whatever makes you happy. For example, if you like listening to music, do not sell your music set just because you are undertaking university study. Take time to listen to the music and you will be tension free and your study will be enjoyable.

Staying healthy can also mean that you take a break whenever you feel tired. Do not sit up for long hours that may not be productive. So ensure that you get sufficient sleep so that what you study can be transferred successfully into the long-term memory bank of the brain. All people do not have same concentration span. You should also eat nutritious and sufficient food. Being tired and hungry all the time means that you are neglecting yourself. This will then affect the success of your studies.

## **Bad Habits**

All of us have habits that may not be good in all situations. In achieving successful study, there are some habits that will drag you behind if they are not controlled. Do you know some of your bad habits? It is important for you to identify your bad habits, which might in fact interfere with your study programme, so as to consciously try to get rid of them. One of the worst bad habits, which you should get rid of from the start of your programme, is postponing tasks: that you find yourself postponing tasks and therefore end up working under pressure when you could have completed the tasks at ease and slowly. Once one task is postponed, it looks enlarged and seems more difficult.

Forgetting your appointments is another habit that might make you not to complete your studies within the time you have set for yourself. Keep all your appointments with your peers and your tutors. If you fail to keep them they will all perceive you as not being interested in your own studies and they could stop caring about you.

You should also make sure that you keep to your schedule and be disciplined. Study material that is related to the subjects that you have registered for so that you do not waste time. In so doing, you ensure that you have all the materials that you need before settling down to study. This will help you avoid that bad habit of interrupting yourself while you are studying by continuously getting up and doing other things in between. Do not day- dream

either. Ensure that all those things that might interfere with your thought processes are attended to before you settle down to study.

After identifying your bad habits, which continually interfere with your study process, you should plan to deal with them one by one. This is through practice. Habits do not go away overnight.

### Activity

**Write down genuine answers to the following questions. Be as honest as possible because these will form the beginning of your effective study methods.**

- 3. Why did you decide to register as a student of Kabarak University to study the course you are undertaking now? (Write all the reasons).**
- 4. What do you want to do with the qualification you will obtain at the end of your study?**
- 5. How long have you planned to take in completing the qualification?**
- 6. What do you expect your whole study to provide you with?**

The answers you provide to the questions in activity 2 above will be leading you to set your actual purpose and achievable goals for undertaking a degree course at University in the area of study that you have chosen. The questions are relevant at this stage because you need to provide practical answers to them. The better you understand why you are studying, the better the chances that you will continue with your studies and succeed.

So whatever your expectations may be, it is important to think about them and write them down so that you can refer to them later. This will motivate you to complete your studies with ease.

### Study Space

Majority of us will be undertaking our studies under demanding conditions. However you must think about the place you plan to study from. The environment you live in will determine this. Despite all the variations that may exist, an ideal study place must have the following things: A chair, a table or desk and a lamp with good light. If all these things are not available, you should ensure that your study place:

- Has good lighting,
- Is comfortable to sit and study in,
- Is quiet so that you will be able to concentrate

### TIME MANAGEMENT

A student's time is very precious; you are a student now, so you must know that your time is valuable. For this reason you must know how to utilize valuable assets, like time in order to rip the desired fruits from the trees of higher education! Time is a unique resource, which cannot be saved but can only be spent wisely. All of us have equal time and once that period passes, we cannot replace it with another set of time.

To be efficient you must plan your time every day, every week, every month and every year of your study. You need to budget time and allocate it to each of the goals that you have set for yourself in order to achieve them.

The most crucial point to remember is that you are a distant student; with various other responsibilities perhaps work, family and social. So you do not have unlimited time for study. Your study time is even more limited than that

which the regular students have. This gives you greater reason to plan your available time keenly and carefully. Prepare a timetable that caters for all your activities and responsibilities. You should therefore plan your time so that you have sufficient time for every thing that you might be doing.

There are various modes of planning your time. You could plan weekly, monthly, for two months or even yearly, depending on the nature of the activities that you are engaged in. So you need to determine how much time you have, for effective planning.

### **How much Time do you Have?**

Before you budget your study time, the first step is to find out how much time you have in seven days of the week. We are going to calculate these hours here as you practically prepare your time budget for your actual study. Complete **table 1** by responding to the instructions provided.

After completing this schedule, you will have prepared for yourself an actual initial time plan for your study.

### **Activity**

**Table 1: Weekly Time table**

Hours	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
5-6am							
6-7am							
7-8am							
8-9am							
9-10am							
10-11am							
11-12pm							
12-1pm							
1-2pm							
2-3pm							
3-4pm							
4-5pm							
5-6pm							
6-7pm							
7-8pm							
8-9pm							
9-10pm							
10-11pm							
11-12am							
12-1am							
1-2am							

2-3am							
3-4am							
4-5am							
<b>Total number of study hours per day</b>							

(Adopted from: UNISA, *Learning skills for Theology*, Access Module)

### **Instructions**

1. What hours do you think you will not use for study purposes? (These must include such hours as those you use for traveling to and from work, hours spent at work, doing household duties, eating sleeping e.tc.) Use **X** to cross out these hours in table 1.
2. What hours do you think that you have other commitments? (These may include, church meetings, sports, your family and friends, leisure like watching television, listening to music or reading). Indicate these hours by **0** and you may also write the type of commitment.
3. Now place **S** in the remaining hours as the hours available for your study.
4. Now, add up your study hours per day and fill in the last space of each column in **table 1**.

### **Activity**

**Table 2: Calculation of Study hours per week per module or course**

<b>Total number of study hours per week</b>	
<b>Number of courses or modules</b>	
<b>Number of study hours per module or course per week</b>	

5. How many modules or courses are you studying? Write the answer in the second row of table 2.
6. How many hours do you have per module or course per week? Find the answer by dividing the total amount of study hours by the number of modules or courses you have registered for i.e.  

$$\text{Total number of study hours} \div \text{Number of modules/courses} = \text{Number of hours per module per week}$$

Once you know how many hours you have available for your study, and how many hours are available in one university semester, then you will be able to plan your time more practically than if you only imagined. On average you need to have about seven study hours per week.

If you find that you do not have those hours, then you will begin to negotiate with yourself in order to cut down on the hours, which you marked with **0** in table 2. If you still do not have sufficient study time after negotiating, then you need to look at the hours marked with **X** but with lot of care because this means that you will have to make lots of sacrifices. This is because you will have to change your routine, and that is not a simple matter especially if it will

be affecting your work and even your household.

### **Important aspects of time management**

1. We have realized that there is a lot of time, which we do not usually put to effective use. However, we cannot control time but only plan to use it effectively.
2. Planning your time is a useful activity, as a student you must think and carefully plan your daily routine.
3. You will have to be self-disciplined and work hard. It takes a committed student to come home after a day's work, and sit down to study.
4. When you work hard and succeed (study and pass examinations), you will be motivated to continue and complete the course, which you have started.
5. You will need to be flexible in your schedule, because there will be unforeseen problems and unavoidable happenings. However when you fail to do what you plan at the time you have planned, then you must plan to catch up with what you have missed.

Most of all, you must organize your study environment and ensure that there is little distraction so that you create study mood every time you embark on your study.

If you do not have a space of your own to study at home, you will have to negotiate with the family members on how to share the facilities that are available. Some of us might be residing near public libraries, or have space at your work place. You negotiate with your self to find suitable time when you can study in that available space outside your home. You can also find that opportunities exist at the university for the use of the study facilities there, so you need to plan when you can use those facilities once in a while.

Besides identifying and planning for the study space, you should also identify and plan the best period to study. Human beings are programmed in a way that there are certain learning periods. This is the period when a person is ready to learn and understand more effectively. To some people it is early in the morning when there is little disturbance, to others; late into the night is preferred, when the environment is quiet. These periods are believed to produce major learning effect. So you need to identify your own critical learning period and put it to effective use.

### **GROUP/PEER WORK**

#### **Face-to-face**

After you have established the members of your course who live around you or colleagues who are willing to work with you, you will now need to plan for the meetings with them. You must draw a programme and establish objectives for your meetings, so that you are not meeting to review your frustrations and end up not accomplishing any work.

When you consult with your peers and colleagues, you have a chance to ask questions and even express your opinions and also an opportunity to discuss pressing issues or those that you are not sure. When you discuss questions among your peers you will be more informed and can distinguish various concepts with ease. You will also feel responsible for your own learning and in that case you will definitely be motivated.

Do not however engage in unplanned for group or peer work. It will not be productive. You ensure that you have an identifiable aim of the group whenever you sit down. Allocate time to that activity that you wish to carry out to ensure effectiveness.

### **Correspondence**

Group or peer work can be undertaken through correspondence. You need to identify colleagues and friends whom you could share your work with by correspondence. Here you will be talking to one another by post, e-mail, telephone, and even short messages. This will be very practical and useful especially as you work on your assignments. You may want to seek clarification of a task facing you, share your findings, or seek approval from the

colleagues. This can make your entire study enjoyable. Do not hide your work and keep it to yourself, you could be hiding incorrectly completed work.

## **READING SKILLS**

### **Introduction**

In this section, we shall examine reading as an important communication skill that you as a university student will be constantly engaged in as you research, conduct routine study as well as during revision for examinations. We shall therefore be concerned with how you can develop effective reading skills that you can use in your university studies and life after college.

### **Objectives of the topic**

By the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- a) Define reading
- b) Outline how you develop a purpose for your reading
- c) Explain what the various types of reading entail
- d) Expound on the effective reading and comprehension techniques
- e) Discuss the skill of note taking

### **What is Reading?**

Reading is the process of interpreting, analyzing and understanding written messages. Reading for study at university level is an active integration of the text involving interpretation and thinking as you read. Reading is, therefore, a dynamic process involving the following properties:

- a) Decoding or interpreting written symbols
- b) It is a physical and mental activity
- c) It requires attention and thought
- d) It is an interaction of the language of the text and background knowledge of the reader, such that, the written message focuses the reader on what background knowledge (in long term memory), the reader should bring to the interpretation of written message being read.

### **Developing a Purpose for Reading**

Before we engage in reading we need to establish the purpose for which we seek to read. Generally speaking, we engage in reading for the following purposes:

- a) We read to entertainment or leisure
- b) To acquire information and knowledge
- c) As a means of preparing for successful life i.e. as means of acquiring useful life skill.
- d) To improve quality of life.

At the university level reading is particularly more focused and rigorous and would normally entail the following purposes:

- a) To gain an overall understanding of main ideas presented in some reading.
- b) To find specific information such as a name, date or a definition of a concept.
- c) To gain understanding of material so as to recall it as presented in the text.
- d) To evaluate, critique or analyze some material.

The purpose of our reading will, to a large extent, determine the type of reading of style we adopt as the discussion below will indicate.

### **Types of Reading**

Types of reading refer to styles we may adopt in our reading as determined by the purpose for which we are reading. Types of reading include:

- e) **Scanning** – This style or technique is used when you are looking for a name, definition or any other specific piece of information in a text like a house in classified ads, addresses or phone in a directory, an important concept, information for a research essay in a library catalogue, table of

content, index page etc. In using the technique you move your eye quickly over the page to find particular words or phrases that are relevant to specific information you are looking for.

While scanning, a good reader should first:

- ✓ Ensure that the text he/she is scanning is the correct text and that he/she knows precisely what he is looking for.
  - ✓ Try to determine the text structure or its style of arrangement, i.e. clues or signals which can assist in understanding the text pattern.
  - ✓ Scan with speed without reading extraneous or irrelevant material.
- f) **Skimming** – In this technique you read quickly through a text in order to get a grip of the main ideas or general information about the text. In using this technique you intend to get a general grasp of ideas presented by the author. This technique is useful when:
- i) Trying to decide if a book in library is useful or right for your studies.
  - ii) Previewing books or texts before detailed reading.
  - iii) Refreshing your understanding of a text after you have read it in detail.

You can skim:

- ✓ Introductory paragraphs – to give the general theme
- ✓ Concluding paragraph
- ✓ Transitional paragraphs
- ✓ Subheadings
- ✓ Italicized, underlined and boldfaced items

As an efficient reading strategy, skimming is a very useful skill both for recreational and study reading. In study reading, it is useful for the following reasons:

- ✓ It can be used at the preliminary stages of selecting texts for research or selecting reserved and supplementary literature. It helps determine which texts merit more careful and thorough reading and which specific parts of those texts are worth spending time on.
- ✓ It can be used as an exercise for improving speed and therefore performance and for coping with high quantity work. It can enable a reader cover a lot of material in a short time, therefore saving time.
- ✓ It is one of those skills used in the reading for the main idea only when the supporting details or other extraneous materials are not important.

- g) **Active/detailed reading** – This technique is used in serious study. It calls for an active involvement in the reading process. In this type of reading you need to interrogate or think over what you read so as to both evaluate what you have read and facilitate recall of read material. This is the kind of reading that is most extensively used at university during study. As you use this type of reading the following tips are important.
- i) Always make notes
  - ii) Pick out what you think are the important points of what you are reading by highlighting these points.
  - iii) Record main headings as you read, this helps you to see the flow of your reading and notes.
  - iv) As you prepare for active reading note down questions you want the material to answer.
  - v) After you have read a section of text and have made a summary of what you have read in your notes, skim through the text and check how accurate your summary is. As you do this, fill in gaps that you may notice in your notes.
- h) **Extensive reading** is purposeful, organized, wide reading of long texts such as journals, novels, magazines, and periodicals etc, especially those that relate to one's area of study, to enrich one's vocabulary, which is basic to all good reading.
- i) **Intensive reading** is a concentrated, thorough and comprehensive reading style. It is applied when one wants to understand the contents of the reading deeply. It is an intellectually involving affair in that the reader will be trying to evaluate how the ideas involved could be applied or adapted to different situations. It is also analytical, critical and interpretive. It could involve a paragraph, a whole passage or even a whole book, like in the case of a literature book.



- j) **Light reading** – this is the type of reading that we apply when reading papers and novels for leisure. This does not involve any critical assessment or appraisal of the material one is reading. It is fast and superficial.
- k) **Word by word reading** – this is the style used by beginners when they are reading for the first time and in an attempt to understand each word or phrase at a time. It is also applicable when one is reading scientific or mathematics process or formula.

### **EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT READING STRATEGIES**

To read **effectively** means to be able to comprehend, evaluate and utilize that which one has read, while reading **efficiently** means reading effectively with the least amount of physical (psycho-motor) effort and time. To attain efficiency, one has to:

1. Reduce certain poor reading habits
2. Utilize better psycho-motor reading strategies

#### **3.6.1 Common poor reading habits**

##### **a) Vocalization (sounding out)**

This is reading aloud (the tendency to register the sound of the words as you read), which wastes time and creates a sub-process as follows:

According to Pearson (1981), the reading process involves a) visual perception, b) response to visual stimuli, c) transmission to brain, d) decoding (giving meaning), e) vocalizing, f) response to mental stimuli (understanding or not). As a result, vocalization slows down this reading process. Henry Pearson (1981) observed that reading aloud takes at least twice as long as reading silently and yet it is not any more effective.

##### **b) Sub-vocalization**

This is where the reader makes a conscious effort not to move his/her lips when reading but his/her internal speech organs, larynx or vocal cords are mechanically working. That is, the tendency to internally acknowledge or pronounce the sound of the words in your head.

##### **c) Finger reading, pointing at words and head movement**

These habits not only affect the rate of reading but also affect the comprehension, since they prevent the reader from grasping full phrases and clauses, therefore hindering him/her from understanding the ideas expressed fully.

##### **d) Narrow recognition span and poor rhythmic eye movement**

Recognition span is the number of words a reader can recognize while eyes are fixed at one point. Fixations are the stops a reader takes to take in a word or phrase and then move on to the next.

A narrow recognition span wastes time and energy and therefore affects one's rate and comprehension. Efficient readers take in several words per fixation, which should be at least a phrase. Thus, rhythmically, eyes should move systematically from the middle of one phrase to another.

##### **e) Regression (backtracking while reading)**

This is glancing back and re-reading words, phrases and sentences that have already been read. It is a characteristic of lacking concentration and poor reading. It affects comprehension because it interrupts the reading process (though process). An efficient reader should move forward at all times.

NB: Regression is different from review, which is done after, for clarification.

### **Effective Reading and Comprehension Skills**

One important technique that has been developed for effective reading and comprehension is summed up as **SQ3R**, which stand for:

**S** – Survey  
**Q** – Question  
**R** – Read  
**R** – Recall  
**R** – Review

- a) **Survey** – stands for a rapid preview of material in order to get an overview a topic, chapter, or book. The idea here is to look for main points of the text, its content and approach. In doing this:
- Read the title to help give you an idea of the subject.
  - Read the introduction or summary to see what the author thinks are the key points.
  - Notice boldface headings to see what the structure of the text is.
  - Notice any maps, charts or graphs which give a summation of ideas in the text.
  - Notice reading aids and any questions at the end of chapter because they are meant to help you understand and remember.
- b) **Question** – When reading you should develop a questioning attitude. Questions help your mind to engage and concentrate. This is because your mind is actively engaged when it is looking for answers to questions. In using questions as you read, keep in mind the following:
- Try to turn bold face headings into questions you think the section should answer.
  - Ask yourself:
    - What is the main point being made here?
    - What is author trying to explain here?
    - Have I understood the argument and conclusion?
- c) **Read** – After formulating questions you can start reading the material carefully in detail. The approach you take in reading may depend on subject. If the subject is complex your reading may be slower and if the subject is familiar, you might adopt a faster pace. How you read may also be determined by your personal approach. As you read:
- Remember to take notes.
  - Engage actively with your material.
  - Look for answers to questions you have set for yourself and make up new questions if necessary.
- d) **Recall** – After each section, stop and think back to your questions. See if you can answer them from memory. If not take a look back at the text. Do this as often as you need to. As you do this you may highlight important points of your notes.
- e) **Review** – Once you have finished reading, for instance, a whole chapter or section, go back over all questions in all headings to see if you can still answer them. If not, look back and refresh your memory. Do this as an important part of your revision for exams.

### **The importance of SQ3R:**

- ✓ It makes reading a conscious active effort.
- ✓ It enables a reader think constructively along similar lines as the writer.
- ✓ The prediction or question formulation stage is both a sign and an aid to understanding.
- ✓ The stages improve one's concentration and retention ability.
- ✓ Reading is organized into stages, therefore it takes less time and effort and it is more effective.

### **Other important tips to effective reading and comprehension**

- Do not treat all books in same way, skim before you read a book to establish the type, for instance, whether it is complex or elementary.
- Do not start reading a book unless you have decided it is suitable.
- Determine the purpose for reading a book.
- You can switch from one way of reading to another, this is suitable particularly so when selecting books or doing research.
- Extract important reference information during your reading. This includes:
  - Name of Author
  - Title and sub-title

- iii) Date of publication
- iv) Publisher and city of publication

### **Note taking**

Notes are a shortened version of information. Note taking is an integral part of reading, listening as well as during revision or study.

### **Advantages of Notes**

1. **Taking notes helps you to learn and understand** by translating what you are studying into your own words and thereby helping you to understand and remember what you are studying.
2. **Taking notes helps you concentrate while you are studying** because the note taking process helps you process and digest the information.
3. **Making notes helps you assess information** because you are selecting the most important parts of what you are reading or hearing. Through making notes, you are also spotting the key issues and ideas of the materials.
4. **Note taking also helps you think about the subject.** Writing down ideas often produces ideas about other ideas you already know. This makes you think and connect what you are noting down with what you already know. This process, therefore, makes remembering of information more likely.

### **How to Take Notes**

1. You should only choose the main points of what you are reading or listening to. Do not record all the materials from your source.
2. Show the difference between main points, supporting points and examples. This can be done by use of highlighting through the use of colours, underlining, or using various types of font or bolding for the different aspects of your notes.
3. Listen, read or watch closely the source of notes while carefully thinking about the subject and decide which part of source material are most useful, then put them down in your own words as your notes.
4. Brevity is important in taking notes. Use abbreviations wherever possible. You could also achieve brevity by adopting mathematical or scientific symbols or device your own personal code of symbols and signs.
5. Use note cards and list each new idea on a new line
6. Use phrases, not complete sentences to save time
7. Use abbreviations when possible
8. Never take verbatim notes, unless you need a direct quote
9. Use pen rather than pencil
10. Use underlining and asterisks to indicate important points
11. Number items, put information in bulleted lists, or use an outline to make it easier to review notes
12. Leave space in the margins for additional notes
13. Write on only one side of the paper or note card
14. Watch for clues: repetition of words or topics, handouts with key phrases or terms
15. Create networks, just in case you miss out important points during a lecture
16. Use a second note page for listing questions and their answers
17. Begin each day's notes with a heading that includes the name or number of the course, instructor's/speaker's name, date and topic of the day

## **LIBRARY USER SKILLS**

### **Introduction**

This section is concerned with guiding you to become an effective library user. Effective library usage is important because it is an essential part of life in education, particularly at university level, where you are required to find and acquire materials on your own, either for research or for study.

### Objectives of the topic

At the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- a) Discuss the characteristics of the various types of libraries.
- b) Discuss the various information sources
- c) Discuss the organization of information sources in the library
- d) Explain the criteria for evaluating reading materials in the library.

### Types of libraries

Libraries can be divided into five main categories:

- a) National libraries
  - b) Public libraries
  - c) Special libraries
  - d) Private libraries
  - e) Academic libraries.
- a) National Libraries** are also referred to as **reference libraries** because they are used for references. Their main function is to collect and preserve for posterity the books, periodicals and newspapers published in the country. They are formed through a law and these laws require publishers to deposit copies of all publications they produce. National libraries also purchase books published in other countries.
- b) Public libraries** are types of libraries that are funded by the public through local authorities or government and the use of these libraries is open to all members of public. The function of these libraries is to promote a reading culture in a country's citizens. They provide a wide range of loan services, where you can borrow reading material. They endeavor to provide reading material to the entire country, communities and they do this by providing travelling and mobile libraries even in remote areas. They also provide special facilities for the old and disabled and also organize provision of library services for hospital, jails e.t.c.
- Public libraries therefore build up their collection to relate to local community interests. The ideal public library should provide access to knowledge for all people in the country besides providing books. Many public libraries also provide meeting rooms for use by community groups. They should also sponsor lecturers as well as participate in adult education programmes.
- c) Special libraries** contain a collection of books and other materials dealing with a limited field of knowledge for a particular society, research organization, government department, or educational institution department. A special library may also be a special branch of a public library serving certain interest or occupation groups. A special library is intended to serve needs of specific users requiring detailed materials in a limited area. A library may be special in a variety of ways.
- i) By nature of subject it deals with. This type of library store resources on particular subject e.g. Central Bank library, Kenya Agriculture research Institute (KARI) library.

- ii) In terms of type of user. This type of library serves a special category of people i.e. prisoners, children, pastoral communities e.t.c.
  - iii) By nature of material or resource found there. These libraries have special format of resources for instance video libraries, Braille, internet library, KBC, KTN, and NTV as broadcast libraries.
- d) Private libraries** are libraries owned by individuals, clubs, and societies to which members of the public have no right of access. They may contain a variety of materials or specialized materials depending on the interests of the individuals or group.
- e) Academic libraries** are libraries associated with educational institutions and are established to serve the needs of those in the institutions. Such libraries include university, college, polytechnics and so on. University libraries, for instance, are meant to serve academic needs of students and members of the academic staff.

### Information sources

Information sources are materials used as resources of information in the library, which are selected to meet the needs of users of specific libraries.

### Types of Information Sources

Information sources can be grouped into **print** or **non-print** information sources.

A. **Print information sources** are print information sources are devised into four categories.

- a) Reference sources
- b) Periodicals
- c) Textbooks
- d) Recreational books

1. **Reference sources** are designed to be consulted for definite information and are meant to be referred to rather than being read as texts. Usually they are not allowed to be taken away from the library building. Reference sources include: encyclopedias, dictionaries, bibliographies, indexes, and atlases. Reference sources are divided into two, that is, **general reference books** and **quick references**.
2. **General reference books** include research reports, including theses and dissertations; official publications such as government publications including Kenya Gazette, parliamentary reports, statistics reports, development plans and government budget estimates; bibliographies; indexes and abstracts.
3. **Quick references** are books that will provide you with material or direct and factual information. They provide basic and background information to a topic and are designed for consultation when you are in urgent need of a piece of information or fact. The information provided is usually in shortened form for quick reference. They are written by specialists in specified fields. Some quick reference books include:
  - i) **Dictionaries**, which may be general language dictionaries that give meaning, pronunciation, spelling, usage of meaning, trace history of words, synonyms and antonyms. They may also be **subject dictionaries**, which provide meanings of words as used in that particular field.
  - ii) **Encyclopedias**, which are like dictionaries. Most are in a number of volumes covering all types of subjects and cover a wide range of knowledge. Others are specialized and cover specific fields of knowledge.
  - iii) Other quick reference books include **yearbooks**, covering major events that occurred in the year of publication; and **atlases**, providing varied geographical information.

### 4. Periodicals

These are publications that have a distinct title and published at stated intervals. They contain articles or

other writings by several contributors. The intervals in which they are published could be fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, or once a year. Periodicals include:

- i) **Journals**, which are publications by a society, institution or professional body containing news, proceedings, transactions and reports of work contained in a particular field of study e.g. communication, linguistics, philosophy, political science e.t.c.
- ii) **Magazines**, which contain varied information written by various writers. They deal with general topics, and are non-professional and non-technical. Examples include *Parents*, *Adams*, *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.
- iii) **Newspaper**, which contain recent news and may be published daily or weekly. The news items generally include politics, sports, business and advertisements among others.

## 6. Textbooks

A textbook is book written specifically for use by those studying for examination in a particular system. Textbooks discuss subject areas in details and are the main material found in academic libraries. They include most of course texts used in the university.

## 7. Recreational books

These are books read for leisure or entertainment and may not be meant for serious study. This includes mainly fictional works.

## B. Non-printed information sources

These sources of information are those that are not books or periodicals or journals. These information sources are audio-visual or visual and they include materials such as films, video tapes, slides and internet material which is in soft form. Most of these materials require special handling and are an important source of varied information.

### Organization of information sources in the library

Libraries do have a wide and enormous variety of information, which must be organized to make it easy to access by library users. As a library user you need to understand how the sources are organized in order to benefit from information they contain. Library information sources are organized in two ways: **classification** and **cataloguing**.

### a) Classification

Classification is arrangement of documents in a logical order according to their degree of likeness by either subject or form. Classification enables librarians to place documents in a particular order and the user to be able to locate these documents in particular places in the library. There are various classification schemes used in libraries. The common ones in Kenyan libraries are:

- i) **Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)**, which was invented by Melvi Dewey. This classification uses numbers to create division between subject areas and the topics. In this system, the main subject area is indicated numerals from number 1-999. The sub-division within the subject areas are further denoted by numerals 1-999 and those are separated from main subject area by a decimal i.e. 1.35, 685.7, 23.867.
- ii) **Library of Congress Classification (LCC)** was created by library of congress in America. Most libraries in Kenya use this system. The system uses alphabetical letters from A to Z which are used to classify the main subject areas. For instance:

**A** – General works.

**B** – Philosophy and psychology

**BL – BX – Religion**

**H – Sociology**

**L – Education**

**P – Languages**

All subject areas are covered by alphabetical letters. Numerals are used to show sub-division in subjects and other details. The symbol assigned to every book during classification make up a call number. The call number enables librarians to store books in particular specified pattern for you to locate the books in the library. For instance, in the following call number the details are as follows:

**P**  
**106**  
**.Y8**  
**1996**  
**C3**

**P** is the main subject (Language text)

**106** is the sub-division of subject

**Y** is the first letter of the author and **8** is the eighth book by the author.

**1996** is the year of publication of that book.

**C3** Represents copy number 3 of the same book in the library.

### **b) Cataloguing**

Cataloguing is process in which all materials in the library are listed. These materials are listed in a particular order. A catalogue list of information about materials will include the author, subject, title of the material, as well as year of publication, number of copies. In computerized catalogue, it may also indicate whether the material is borrowed.

#### **Types of catalogues**

There are different types of catalogues and different libraries choose to use different types of catalogues depending on convenience and personnel they have in libraries. The common types of catalogue are:

- a) **Author catalogue**, where a library lists material in library alphabetically according to the surname of the author.
- b) **Title catalogue**, where a library lists materials arranged alphabetically according to the title of the materials. Articles that precedes titles e.g. *a*, *an* and *the* are, not included in the title. They are ignored.
- c) **Subject catalogue**, which lists materials in the library in alphabetical order according to subject heading.

#### **6.4.3.1 Catalogue format**

There are two types of catalogue formats:

- i) **Card catalogue**, in which catalogues are done on cards where each card contains only one entry and the card entries are arranged alphabetically either using author system, subject system or title system. The cards are placed in drawers where they can be accessed by library user. Most libraries are phasing out this system in favour of computer catalogue.
- ii) **Computer catalogue** format uses computers which have catalogue information of various entries of materials found in a library. The system is very efficient and can be used to store more varied information than card catalogue. It can also be accessed very fast, at the click of a button.

### Evaluating information sources

In a library there are numerous information sources and you need to be able to select information sources that would be most helpful for study or research. In the case of a book its various parts may guide you into evaluating this information source. The various parts of a book that might be relevant include:

- i) **Book cover**, which contain the author's name and the title of the book. At the back cover, it contains a brief history of author and may indicate his/her credibility and also a brief summary of the contents of the book.
- ii) **Title page**, which shows the title of the book, full name or all names of authors, edition, volume, publisher, place of publication, the translator e.t.c.
- iii) **Preface/forward**, which is the section that reveals the purpose of materials contained in the book as well as its relevance. The forward is usually written by someone else other than author who is an authority or has a great understanding of materials contained in the book.
- iv) **Table of content**, which shows the title of topics, chapters and pages the information is found.
- v) The **introduction** usually provides general survey of material contained in the book. It also offers advice on how the book is arranged and should be read e.g. whether it should be read progressively or whether each section may be read independently.
- vi) The **glossary** is a list of technical or special terms used in the text and their definitions.
- vii) **Appendix** comes towards the end of the book and it may contain notes about things that might not have been fully explained in the text. It also includes tables, statistics and so on, for which there is no room to be included in text.
- viii) The **Index** is a systematically arranged list of items which show information for each item and how it can be traced by means of page number.

### Choosing the right book

Using the parts of book described above you can now assess the quality of books in the library before reading them.

In addition to the information given above, there are other criteria which you can use in selecting the right book as illustrated below:

- i) **Relevance of the book**, which is determined by the purpose you have established for your reading which can be achieved by looking at various sections of books described above.
- ii) **Up-to-datedness**, which is the publication date of the book and the edition. This is important because information keeps changing over time or new developments emerge in a field of study. Therefore more current books contain new developments that old books may not have.
- iii) **The credibility of author and publisher**. You need to select materials that are written by credible authors and well known publishing firms. In so doing you will be reading material that is reliable and reputable. This is more so because a lot of materials circulating which may pass off as facts may actually be coming from unreliable sources.
- iv) **Book's popularity**. A popular book will have certain characteristics: It is in high demand as reflected in sales and it has several reprints.
- v) **Presentation of material**. This refers to how the author presents material, which is very important in assessing the suitability of the material. Presentation involves how the material is produced, how it is organized, the usefulness of illustration used and the level of language used.



## **ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS**

### **PREPARING FOR ASSESSMENT**

In this section we shall highlight the general requirements for your assessment during your study at the university. You will be required to write assignments as part of your assessment and also undertake examinations as specified by the university regulations. Let's clarify what each of two forms of assessment involves.

#### **Assignments**

During your study at the university, you will be expected to read through the modules from your specific areas of discipline and complete the writing tasks that will be accompanying the different modules. These written assignments are very important to your final grading for your degree. You will therefore need to follow the instructions in each of the modules you will be studying and fulfill the requirements therein.

#### **Examinations**

In this section, we shall highlight the salient points on how you can always remain ready for the university examinations to enable you complete your studies successfully.

#### **The Purpose of Examinations**

Examinations have been designed to fulfill certain purposes. There are specific purposes for different types of examinations. However the purposes of examination in academic undertakings are meant to serve the following purposes:

- (a) To measure to what extent you have gained a certain body of knowledge.
- (b) To measure how much or how effectively you have learned or studied a particular subject.
- (c) To find out the degree to which you can apply or relate the basic knowledge and skills you have learned to new circumstances or situations.
- (d) To predict your future level of success in your chosen field of study or profession.
- (e) To measure your general level of ability, endurance and hard work to manage examinations at your level of education.
- (f) To select and arrange individuals for assigning duties and positions in society.
- (g) To motivate you to work hard throughout your study at the university.
- (h) To train you to have a disciplined approach to life.

We can see that the objectives for having examinations are all very important. It requires that we strive to pass our examinations regardless of the conditions we study in. This is why you need to be aware and practice the techniques required for preparation for your examinations.

Assess your responses by comparing them with the following general important points to consider the activities that surround examination preparation.

#### **Content**

You should ensure that you are familiar with all the material that will be covered in the examination. Study some of the past question papers in the area of your study (if the course you are studying has been offered for several years). This will in fact enable you to recognize the types of questions that are likely to be set after assessing the content.

#### **Time Allocation**

It might seem obvious, but you need to establish how many examination papers you will be expected to sit for. In so

doing, you will be able to know how much time is allocated to each paper. Find out in advance how many questions each examination paper contains and how many you will be expected to answer. This helps in preparing by allocating revision time and becoming psychologically prepared. At the same time, you will be able to know and understand the conditions of the examination you will sit for as well as the material. This can help you score the desired marks when the examination comes.

You need to allocate sufficient time to the revision period. The best revision is the one, which is done over a long time as the course progresses. However intensive revision seems to be done as the examinations approach and as they progress. Revision should be a routine, allocate some time in your schedule, for revising what you have already covered. This helps you build your revision gradually and not leave everything for concentrated revision as you approach your examination.

### **Practice Examination Questions**

You may not always get access to past examinations in your area of study. But if you do, ensure that you take time to answer the questions in an actual timed examination situation to get the test of timing without referring to the notes. We want to advise you that you must ensure that you attempt and complete all the assignments and activities in your study guides. This is because the activities you are given could be pointers to the examination questions.

### **Get Sufficient Rest**

You should always build the attitude of determination. This will help you avoid unnecessary fatigue but instead build the required energy. Get adequate sleep during the examination period. You should remain mentally and physically healthy. Eat well and also seek medical attention if you do not feel well. The materials required for your examination should be ready and available to you whenever you need them during the examination.

You can ensure that you remain mentally and physically healthy if you also avoid anxiety and stressful situations during the examination period. Build confidence in yourself so as to reduce the anxiety that might come about during the examination period. This can be achieved through physical exercises if you are able. You can also make a point of discussing with colleagues in your peer group as we discussed in section 1.6 about peer or group discussions.

### **In the examination Room**

You have prepared yourself for the examination and finally, the day of examination comes. What do you do with the examination paper and questions that are before you?

Once well prepared, confident and relaxed, you will be ready for your examination. Read the instructions and all the questions slowly and thoroughly. This will help you to understand what is expected of each question. If there are instructions, which you do not understand, ask the instructor or invigilator immediately. Once you know what each question is asking then your thinking will be focused. Think about the questions that are before you and allot time to each question according to what it demands. Always begin with the question that you feel you can answer fully and sufficiently.

### **Interpreting the Questions**

Questions usually contain key words that can help you organize the answer. Some words will be commanding you to act in a certain way; others will be key thus giving you direction. Command words usually tell you what exactly the examiner wants you to do. These words include those that could ask you to compare; define; demonstrate; evaluate; isolate; identify; discuss; list; point out; analyse; relate; So you must pay attention to such words, which we can also refer to as **action** words. Examinations always ask for specific things.

If for example you are asked the following question: '*Demonstrate the process of human communication*' what will be the key words in the question?

The keywords would be process, human and communication the command word would be demonstrate. In an examination situation, you must pay attention to those words, understand what they require you to do before beginning to answer the questions. All this should be processed very fast within the time available to you during the examination. Make sure that you familiarize yourself with the language and expressions in your specific subject areas in order to interpret the questions accurately.

### **The Answer booklet**

At the university, you will be provided with special examination answer booklet printed specially for university

examinations. We want to remind you that you are expected to read the instructions on the answer booklet so that you use it correctly. Familiarize yourself with the university's answer booklet and what it requires before you write in it. Ensure that the information, which you write in, is correct.

Even when students have studied a course thoroughly, they can fail to do themselves justice in the examination through:

- inadequate / inefficient revision
- poor exam technique

Remember that revision and examination techniques are skills that can be learned about and practised.

The subject of revision technique is dealt with in another handout. Those notes focus on coping in the examination itself. (Of course the two topics are closely related!)

### **The Format of the Examination**

It's important to familiarise yourself with this by studying specimen papers / past papers.

### **Some Common Mistakes in Examinations**

It can also be very helpful to think about *things that students do wrong* in examinations, which adversely affect their performance. Knowing the pitfalls can help you to avoid them!

The following are based on Examiner's Reports:

- failure to follow basic examination instructions eg. about the number of questions to answer from each section of the paper
- misallocation of time – at worst resulting in insufficient questions being answered eg. 3 instead of 4, throwing away 25% of marks
- failure to answer the question set, misreading or misinterpreting the question; writing 'All I know about ...'. Cases have been noted of students coming in with prepared answers or quoting TMAs word for word without any attempt to adapt them to the specific question set
- basing answers largely on 'common sense' rather than on the course material
- failure to illustrate and support arguments sufficiently eg. with reference to specific theories, authorities, case studies etc.
- writing illegibly.

Awareness of problems like these suggests things that you can do to make the most of your examination:

### **Examination Strategies**

#### **Read Examination instructions carefully**

How many questions are to be answered? How many from each section? How long does this allow per question? etc. (eg. 3 hour paper, 4 questions to be answered, each carrying equal weight; 3 questions from Part 1 and one from Part II; approx 45 mins. per question).

#### **Read through the paper and choose questions carefully**

Allow 5–10 min. for this. Focus on questions relating to blocks / themes which you concentrated on in revision.

#### **Order of questions**

It does not usually matter what order you take the questions in – just number them carefully. Do them in the order that you feel happiest with (for example, some students like to start with their 'second best' – this can build up confidence, without so much danger or over- running on time).

### Spend time thinking about and planning each question

Do this before you start writing it up (eg. 5–10 minutes per question, leaving 30–35 mins for writing up). Don't be panicked by the 'scribblers'.

- **Read questions carefully**, underline key words etc. Notice if there are different parts to cover. Don't be sidetracked by similar questions you have tackled in the past eg. in TMAs. Remember the aim is to answer the specific question set, not just to air knowledge.
- **'Brainstorm'** – jot down relevant ideas as they come to you, in the answer book. Thinking about the questions should already have started to 'home you in' on relevant course material eg. particular unit or part of unit. Note down main themes and arguments, ideas and concepts plus authorities, illustrations and examples; often just a word or phrase is enough to capture a point – pattern / spray notes can be useful here. Do not censor ideas or the flow may dry up, you can strike out anything irrelevant afterwards, if the flow gets stuck write something silly like 'fish and chips'. Sometimes thinking about the TV programmes can jog your memory. If you're aware of any material that should be included but you just can't call it to mind, then 'send a message to your brain' and leave it (remember how many names etc. often come back to you when you stop trying to remember them).  
***NB** Where a question is block related, material from that block should be to the fore but you can still cross refer to other parts of the course or to summer school material where relevant. Indeed examiners praise those who recognise interconnections in the course and can use material across the course to illustrate themes and issues.*
- **Sort out** the jotted points into a sensible sequence. Just put a number by each point to indicate the order you decide on. Cross out anything that doesn't look relevant; remember that exam answers should have an introduction, main body and conclusion just like TMAs.

### Some final points on planning

- Examiners' reports praise evidence of planning – it leads to better structured answers.
- Jot plans in the answer book and mark them off neatly afterwards to indicate rough work, but make sure examiner can still see them – examiners warm to signs of planning!
- Some students like to plan all the answers first, while really fresh. Others prefer to take each in turn – do what suits you best.

### Writing up answers – some points

- There's no need to write out questions (unless it *helps* you to focus) as it can waste valuable time, but keep referring back to the question in your answer to keep you on course and show that you are addressing it.
- Do not forget introductions and conclusions. Use introductions to indicate clearly how you intend to tackle the question. If the question is at all ambiguous, state how you have interpreted it. Do not let your argument 'peter out', but draw it together clearly in a conclusion.
- Remember, the examiner does not know you, so cannot assume you know something that is not there. So do not be afraid to 'state the obvious'. Express yourself as clearly as you can.
- If you suddenly remember an important point, write it in a box with an arrow or asterisk to show where it *should* have gone – so you don't spoil the flow.
- Try to write legibly.

**NB** By adopting a stage-by-stage approach like this, you are not asking your mind to do too much at once. This makes for better answers. With piles of scripts to mark the examiner will warm to **your** relevant, well organised, clearly presented and legible answers!

### Timing – remember to stick to timing as rigidly as you can:

- Remember how much time you have per question. Keep a careful eye on the time. When you are coming towards the end of the time allotted to a question, try to round it off and then move on to the next. Resist the temptation to over-run.
- If the worst comes to the worst and you do run short of time for the last question, put something down. A plan in note form is unlikely to scrape a pass. Probably better is to start the answer and finish with an

indication of where it was leading ie. '*Had I had time I would have ...*' **Best of all is not to get into this situation, so learn to budget your time carefully.**

**A few practical hints** – the following will help to avoid unnecessary worry or problems:

- Get well organised beforehand eg. check carefully when and where you have to go; make sure you have a spare pen; wear suitable clothes, you don't want to be too hot or cold in an exam.
- Take along anything (within reason) that will comfort you – sweets, a flask of coffee, a good luck charm, a photo, for instance of your family or your tutor, to calm or inspire you.
- Get to the exam in good time – you don't want anything to fluster you.
- If you are early avoid talking to others – it can be depressing.
- Once in the exam room, find your place, settle in, get your equipment organised, unwrap sweets etc. Do not let others disturb you.
- If you feel upset then write down on the paper how you feel – it can release tension.
- Afterwards avoid post mortems. Let a decent interval elapse and only then think back and try to learn from the experience.

**One Last Comment** – the strategies outlined in this handout are not intended as hard and fast rules but simply as initial guidelines that you may find useful. Examination technique, like revision technique, is a very personal thing, and what works for one person can be unhelpful for another. It is important to learn through experience what works for *you*, but some initial advice can form a starting point.