

Study Skills **(Writing Notes, Preparing for Exams, etc)**

Ways of Managing Academic Material During the School Term

Accumulate class material -- the information, and your thoughts about the information -- layer after layer, over time.

A recommended way to do this is:

- 1) If possible, have a separate ruled blank notebook for each class subject (Math, History, Literature, etc).
- 2) Number the pages of each blank notebook.
- 3) Create a "Contents" page.
- 4) When taking notes during a class -- write the date on the top of the first page of notes one is writing during that class.
- 5) Keep your notebook open to a blank page during every minute of every class period (except for when you are writing exams, of course). Write notes, and your thoughts about what is happening in class.
- 6) After a class, write in the Contents page the date and any other small amount of important identifying info next to the page number. This way, you would record the material and store it in an organised way -- and you would also be able to locate and access the wanted material easily.

What to do When One Does Not Understand a Lesson

At times, one may be baffled by an aspect of what one is supposed to be learning -- for example, a math procedure. Even if one has listened to and watched the teacher, one may not understand a new lesson.

Every once in a while, go over your notes, and identify where your understanding is unclear. That is: don't run away from, and try to ignore, your weak areas. Instead, identify these areas, go after them, and try to improve yourself in these areas.

Becoming aware of *what you do not know* is a big first step in catching up, and in clarifying that which was unclear.

Once you have identified a difficulty you are having: Go to your teacher before or after class, and -- as privately as possible -- tell her about your difficulty. Ask her what she might suggest you do to gain clarity regarding the matter.

Many times what is needed is more and clearer examples and illustrations of a procedure or idea. The teacher may be able to give this. If you are baffled about something, it is likely that other students in the class may also be baffled about the same matter. In many cases, if you are polite and sincere as you ask for additional examples and illustrations, you can help a teacher improve her teaching.

Possible additional steps:

You might form study groups with classmates. See if a classmate can explain the unclear matter to you. In a good study group, some students will be able to explain some things, and other students will be able to explain other things, to each other.

One option may be to engage a tutor, at least for a limited time period, at least regarding one aspect of the subject, so one can catch up. It is better to spend some time with a tutor than to 1) have a lot of anxiety leading up to a test, and/or 2) possibly fail the test and have to take it again. If one does fail a test, keep the tutor option in mind.

Preparing for Exams

- 1) Gather the material --
 - a) the notes you have from class,
 - b) the notes you have from readings, and
 - c) your written thoughts about these notes.
- 2) Divide the material into sections.
- 3) Create a list of topics you need to know about. Organise the topics -- and for each topic, highlights and summaries of your notes -- into an order. You might now have three to six pages of material to study (before a mid-term or final exam).
- 4) Go into "active mode": practice "outputting." For examples:
 - a) In writing -- define terms, and ask and answer sample questions.
 - b) Explain the material to people.