

6 Improving Your Notes

Name: _____

Hopefully you have started work on your study notes, completing them as you go throughout the year.

Self-Evaluation:

For each of the following mark a cross on the scale.

	No	sort of	Yes
1. Your study notes are very visual - lots of colour, diagrams and tables. You photocopy and include good diagrams from textbooks.	_____	_____	_____
2. Your headings are clear and easily identified in your notes. At a glance, you are able to see the main sections of each topic.	_____	_____	_____
3. You redo sections of your notes that are hard to understand or not organised logically.	_____	_____	_____
4. You incorporate good handouts into your study notes and check your textbook to ensure you have included everything you need to know.	_____	_____	_____
5. Your study notes are neat and legible even if you are normally a messy writer - you make the effort to have clear, well-written study notes.	_____	_____	_____
6. Key points or formulas are highlighted or boxed so that they stand out and are memorable.	_____	_____	_____
7. After tests or examinations, you add to your study notes based on what you got wrong or what you learnt in the exam.	_____	_____	_____
8. You are confident that your study notes are comprehensive, memorable and effective.	_____	_____	_____

Based on your self-evaluation, what are the main areas you need to work on improving?

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Read and highlight key points:

There are a number of techniques you can use to improve your study notes:

- always use a margin and space out work adequately (leave blank lines between sections) so it is clear and you can add in key points or extra notes
- it helps if you use loose leaf paper as you can then add notes into relevant sections or rewrite parts if they are unclear
- ensure topic headings are very clear and very noticeable (use another colour or make them larger or highlight them)
- underline or highlight key words or important points - use colour for emphasis
- keep your work neat by writing legibly, using the same style of handwriting and consistent pen colours for particular types of headings or notes
- develop a system of abbreviations for regular use and use point form and key phrases

QUALITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN QUANTITY

Types of Notes

- *Linear Notes:* Linear note taking is where you write the notes straight down the page using headings, sub-headings and where possible, lists and categories. This is how most students take notes. It is effective as it has the material logically organised where each section flows onto the next.
- *Thought Cluster:* In a box in the centre you put a topic or focus and you have lines going out to all the ideas or thoughts related to this particular topic. It gives you a visual image of the topic as a whole.
- *Mind Map:* A mind map is a more advanced version of a thought cluster. The topic need not be in the centre of the page, it could also start at the top and have branches coming down to the main heading and further branches leading to the sub-headings.
- *PMI Plan:* Draw up three columns and list the pluses, minuses and interesting points for a particular topic, argument or issue.
- *Comparison Chart:* List the similarities and differences between two concepts or aspects of a course.

Write down the most relevant point for you and describe how it relates to you or your situation:

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Your To Do List: What changes do you need to make to your study notes?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

8 Improving Writing Skills

Name:

Good writing skills are important not only for the subjects you are now studying, but also for many aspects of your future life.

Self-Evaluation:

For each of the following characteristics of your writing, CROSS those which represent difficulties and TICK those you are OK with.

1. Correctly interpreting the question.	
2. Remaining focused on answering the question and not side-tracking.	
3. Thinking of relevant ideas and content to include.	
4. Organising your content into a logical plan.	
5. Creating an initial draft of your work.	
6. Being able to express your ideas clearly and cohesively.	
7. Writing opening paragraphs or introductions.	
8. Writing closing paragraphs or conclusions.	
9. Writing with a varied and powerful vocabulary.	
10. Writing grammatically correct sentences.	
11. Writing using varied sentence types and lengths.	
12. Writing with flair.	
13. Writing sufficient length.	
14. Knowing how to improve a draft piece of work.	
15. Being open to suggestions, criticism and feedback.	

Based on your self-evaluation, what are the main areas you need to work on improving?

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Read and highlight key points:

Everyone has the potential to improve his or her writing skills. The hardest part is deciding to actually make the effort to do something about it. Improving your writing skills will benefit you across all subjects so it is definitely worth the effort.

The first thing to do is to find, develop or locate a list of the important words in essay questions. Words like: analyse, assess, compare, contrast, critically, demonstrate, explain, extrapolate, justify, propose, recount... the list goes on. Different humanities subjects will have different lists of key words that you need to be conscious of and look for when you are in the process of interpreting a question. Developing such a list and being clear on exactly what each word is asking you to do can certainly help you unpack the language of the question.

Then move onto targeting particular areas of your writing. Practise interpreting questions if this is your weakness. Spend time highlighting and analysing a question, do a rough plan of your ideas and how you would organise them, and take them to your teacher for feedback. Imagine how much you would improve if you sat down for an hour and did 5 plans and got some feedback on these.

Pinpoint what you need to practise then do it! Write 10 introductory paragraphs if this is where you need improvement. Speak with your teacher if you are unsure about what you need to focus on. In the end, it comes down to practise and feedback. A running loop of these two elements will definitely help you on the path to success.

Form a study group with other students. After an essay is returned, give each other copies so each can benefit from other people's styles, content and feedback. Having the opportunity to examine a number of pieces of work on a subject is a great way to look for tips to improve your own style.

Practise, practise and more practise. It is a commitment to improving your communication skills.

Write down the most relevant point for you and describe how it relates to you or your situation:

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Your To Do List: What do you need to do to improve your writing?



13 Overcoming Procrastination

Name:

Procrastination: avoiding or putting off till tomorrow what could and should be done today.

Self-Evaluation:

For each of the following tick either YES, SOMETIMES, or NO.

	Yes	Some	No
I find it difficult to prioritise my work.			
My time management skills are quite poor.			
I can only get work done at the last minute.			
I do everything else except the thing I should be doing.			
I am very good at finding alternative things that need to be done.			
I spend more time worrying and thinking about things than doing them.			
If I find the task boring, I find it really hard to do it.			
If something is difficult or I dislike it then I will put it off.			
It just seems impossible to get started sometimes.			
I don't even bother trying to find an excuse - I just don't do it.			
I watch TV, or use the computer or eat instead of doing the task.			
I procrastinate in other areas of my life as well, not just schoolwork.			
Procrastination has become a habit for me.			
Sometimes I can't start as I am worried about my work being perfect.			
I have a history of unfinished projects, piles of paper and messy rooms.			

Based on your self-evaluation, what are the main areas you need to work on improving?

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Read and highlight key points:

Most people are very good at finding reasons why they don't really need to do something or why something else should be done instead. This busyness on secondary tasks disguises the fact that we are not doing the things we should be doing. The fact that we have to do it automatically makes it a task we are unhappy about. For many people it is only at the last hour that they understand that the pain of not doing it is greater than the pain of actually doing it.

The Salami Technique

If you think of a task as one big job, it will seem insurmountable. Instead, start thinking of attacking one small piece of the task instead of trying to mentally grapple with the whole thing. Rather than saying to yourself 'How can I ever finish this?' say 'What step could I take right now?'. If you start a task enough times, eventually you will finish it. Slice the job into pieces and eat one piece today and one piece tomorrow...

The 30-Minute Method

Select a small piece of the task to work on for 30 minutes and plan to give yourself a reward at the end of 30 minutes of work. Watching a bit of TV, ringing a friend, something you can look forward to as long as you have stuck to your task for the full 30 minutes. Keep scheduling another set of 30 minutes and a reward at the end of it. If you are really stuck, you may need to use a 15 minute method where you force yourself to sit at your desk and really concentrate for 15 minutes before you claim your reward. Often this method helps you as you start to get involved in the task and you actually end up doing more than the allocated time.

Going Public

Verbalising what you need to do or stating your intentions to a friend or family member can also help. Making a commitment to someone else can be quite motivating. Find a friend who is also having difficulties and make pacts together to do certain tasks.

Don't let perfectionism stand in your way. It doesn't have to be perfect - at times like this it is better to produce something rather than nothing.

Write down the most relevant point for you and describe how it relates to you or your situation:

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Your To Do List:



16 But How Should I Study?

Name:

*Studying is a very personal experience. What works for some may not work for others.
The essential ingredient to all successful study is to make it as active as possible.*

Self-Evaluation:

For each of the following rank how effective you have found these methods using the following scale: 1 (excellent) 2 (good) 3 (OK) 4 (doesn't work for me) 5 (never tried it).

	Rank
Making study notes and reading over and reviewing them.	
Doing past papers under examination conditions.	
Making a tape of the information or a question and answer tape.	
Testing yourself to see what you know by writing down all you know about a topic.	
Doing practise essays or essay plans and submitting these to your teachers.	
Creating a study group with friends to help motivate you and get yourself working.	
Making up practise questions and swapping with a friend.	
Using study guides and other materials for extra practise.	
Creating mind maps or diagrams of the topic information and how it is linked.	
Making flashcards or executive summaries of key points / formulas.	
Using songs, rhymes, mnemonics, acronyms to jog your memory.	
Teaching or explaining to someone else or even out loud to yourself.	

Based on your self-evaluation, what works best for you and what new techniques could you try:

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Read and highlight key points:

When you study, you should be following a cycle of learning then practising, learning then practising; over and over and over. You spend some time actively engaging with the material to become familiar with the content, then you practise to ensure you can apply this content using the skills of the subject.

❖ **STEP 1 : MAKE YOUR MEMORISING ACTIVE! DON'T JUST SIT THERE READING**

Review your study notes. Read them through, then see what you can write down or say out loud without looking. Test yourself on sections. You want to move the information into long-term memory and the way to do that is through regularly reviewing the material and testing yourself. Repetition and active strategies are the key to information retention.

❖ **STEP 2: CONCENTRATE ON QUESTIONS/PAST PAPERS UNDER EXAMINATION CONDITIONS**

Do past papers or questions for the subject. Try and simulate the examination conditions as much as possible. Set your room up so you won't be interrupted, take all your notes away, set up a clock and sit the exam fully under examination conditions. Do not give yourself even a peek at your notes and do not let yourself have any extra time. It is only by adhering strictly to examination conditions that you can really find out if you understand the subject and get an accurate picture of how much you know.

❖ **STEP 3: WORK ON FILLING IN THE HOLES IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

Once you have corrected the paper, mark it carefully and try and work out any mistakes you made. Perhaps ask your teacher to look through essay questions for you. Make a list of what you need to go back and review. Go back and redo these sections by redoing questions or sheets on each of these topics. The study guides you can buy on subjects are also useful for this type of topic-by-topic revision. For essay subjects, go back through your notes and see if you have covered everything or if there was a better way to structure the essay. Focus on filling in the holes in your knowledge. See your teachers for help on particular areas. Keep repeating this process over and over. The aim is to keep going until you have no holes left in your knowledge.

Write down the most relevant point for you and describe how it relates to you or your situation:

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Your To Do List: List below the changes you need to make to the way you study.

