FACULTY OF SCIENCE

A Guide to Study Skills

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Faculty of Science, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus. We are delighted you have chosen to join us and we hope that you will enjoy your next few years here and find them immensely rewarding.

We have produced this document to help you get the best out of your university education. May we suggest that you take some time to look through it now, before you come to University?

The pack is divided into thematic sections. Each section has an overview which explains its purpose and suggests how to use it and when it is most likely to be useful to you. We use square bullet points ■ when asking you to think about an issue and round bullet ● point when summarizing key points.

The value of some sections will become more apparent after term has started. You should aim to bring this folder with you and refer to it regularly.

HEALTH WARNING

You can have too much of a good thing. If all the advice in this pack seems rather daunting, do not despair. You will soon get the hang of things at university and succeed like thousands of students before you. No matter what happens, **don't panic!**

Also, this pack gives **general guidance** only. You may well find you are required to do things in a slightly different way for different modules. Whenever this is the case the module tutors should tell you, **but if in doubt, ask them!**

THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM MALAYSIA CAMPUS

THE FACULTY OF SCIENCE

The Faculty of Science is set at our Semenyih Campus at Jalan Broga, 43500 Semenyih, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

One of the first people you will meet in your faculty is your personal tutor. This will be an individual with whom you will have a regular tutorial as part of a group. Your tutor is there to help you with both academic and/or personal problems. Although they may not be able to help you directly, they should know somebody who can.

In October 1992 The University of Nottingham adopted a modular system for its teaching. It was one of the first in United Kingdom to do so. For many of you this system will be different to that which you are used to, however it has proved very popular with students since it was introduced.

Essentially, the academic year has been divided into two separate semesters. The first semester starts in September and finishes in mid-December, the second semester follows after a short break and finished in early June. The big difference is that each of the semesters is entirely self-contained. Thus the first semester contains 12 weeks of teaching followed by 2 or 3 weeks of exams with a revision week in between the two. The process is repeated in the second semester. The net effect is that you will be examined twice a year, in January and May. Although this sounds fairly gruesome, you should remember that you will only have a few exams on each occasion.

Within each semester you are expected to study a series of subjects in 'bite sized chunks' called modules. Each module is worth 5, 10, 15 or 20 credits, although 10 credits is the norm. You are expected to accumulate 120 credits each year. Normally this involves a 60/60 credit split over the two semesters, although 70/50 or 50/70 splits are acceptable.

Within each module you can expect to attend lectures and may also have some laboratory and example classes. The final mark you obtain will be some ratio of the exam and coursework elements. 80% exam and 20% coursework is typical, although there are modules which are 100% exam or indeed 100% coursework. All this may seem a little confusing to you right now, but it will soon become clearer once you start in September.

Here are a few pieces of free advice; they come from fellow undergraduate students and from academic staff who helped us prepare this document for you.

- Most lecturers will teach at a faster pace than you are used to from school or college. It is important that you develop good note-taking skills early in your university career.

- Lectures are progressive, i.e. each lecture builds on the last. Missing lectures is therefore dangerous as is ignoring things that you did not fully understand at the time.

- Don't miss examples classes – they are potentially the most useful periods on the timetable!

- Most departments issue a book list. Check with academic staff and 2nd and 3rd year students which are the most valuable to buy. You may not be able to afford them all.

- You should expect to work outside of class time. This may include reading, rewriting your notes, doing coursework, writing reports, etc.

- Remember that activities continue after the exams and that you are required to remain at the university until the end of each semester.

- Never hesitate to see the lecturer if you are having real difficulty with his/her module or don't understand why you were given a poor mark.

- Handing in coursework late means losing marks. Most faculties knock off at least 5% per day late. Ouch!

- Most faculties have a staff-student committee with student representatives from each year. Use this system to make constructive comments about your course.

- If you become ill and have to miss more than a couple of days or a coursework deadline, or if your performance in an exam is affected, go and see a doctor immediately and get a note. You should also contact your faculty and complete an Extenuating Circumstances Form.

- Missing an exam for any reason is extremely serious and should be avoided if at all possible. You MUST discuss the situation with your faculty IMMEDIATLEY.

- Remember to read notice boards and check your e-mail daily; otherwise you can miss vital information.

ORGANISING YOUR TIME

Overview

Organising your own time for study is one of the key skills you can learn at University. The difference between school or a relatively structured job is that the staff here are unlikely to chase up your work. Most students have a full timetable of lectures, labs and classes. You will need to organize enough time to complete assignments on time and prepare for exams twice a year. Remember, you lose a least 5% per day if coursework is handed in late.

This section suggests some simple techniques for planning your time. Some students seem to work best under pressure and thrive on handing in assignments that were done at 2.00 am the night before. On the other hand you may have found yourself in this position and really hated it. The best way of organizing your time is the way that works for you.

The section is divided into long term goals, planning the week and effective study sessions. We recommend reviewing the section when you have been here a few weeks.

Setting Long Term Goals

You might find it useful to think about the following points and write some answers down.

- What do I want to achieve by the end of the year?
- How much time per week will be spent in classes?
- When do I have to take exams?
- How often do I have to hand in assignments?
- Are there any other major course requirements (e.g. projects, work placements)

Planning The Week

You may find some of the ideas on this page helpful, especially if you are struggling to fit everything in. For example you might find the 'Action Sheet' helpful even if you don't want to do the whole timetable.

- Set aside some time (e.g. Sunday evening) to plan your week ahead.
- Use the master timetable grid on the next page to fill in your regular commitments, e.g. lectures, labs, meals. Photocopy the page a few times
- Make a copy of the following action sheet. In the left hand column write in tasks that you complete during the week. In the right hand column write in things that you would like to do. Write an estimate of how long each task will take.
- Using one of the timetable sheets, allocate some slots for the **must do** tasks and write them in.
- Now pencil in time for the **would like to do** tasks.

- Be realistic! Don't forget to allow time for relaxation, exercise and your friends.
- If a particular day doesn't work out accordingly to plan, you should be able to adjust the timetable to compensate.
- At the end of the week (when you get to planning for the next week) review your timetable. Don't worry if you didn't keep to it precisely – you probably made too many demands on yourself.
- Most things take longer than planned. Try to understand what happened to your time and learn the lessons for future planning.

	WEDNESDAY	**THURSDAY**	**FRIDAY**	**SATURDAY**	
	Lecture	Lab	Write up lecture notes from Weds	Global Warming Essay	
	Library – Refs on Global Warming		Example Class	Global Warming Essay	
	Lecture				
	Lecture				
	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
	Sport	Lab	Write Lab Report	Go to Town!	
	Sport		Write Lab Report		

Timetable for week commencing……

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

Action for week commencing ……

Must do this week	Would like to do this week

Effective Study Sessions

Sometimes you may find that you get stuck. Some of these ideas may help you to get going again.

- **Define** your tasks specifically (see the sample timetable). Don't just write 'study' or 'read textbook' but 'read and summarise Ch.3 of *Computers Tools for an Information Age by Capron.'*
- Make sure you are **equipped** for study. You will need your notes, any relevant books and other equipment.
- **Start!** The best way to get going is to do something. If you find starting difficult, review what you last did on this topic.
- If you still can't **concentrate**, work out what is worrying you. Try to fix it.
- **Analyse** the way you use your study time. What is the best length of session? This may well vary according to the activity.
- Research suggests our attention wanders after **30 minutes or so.** Try splitting hour-long sessions with a short break.
- **Vary** the study tasks if you have a long session – it will keep the material fresh.
- **Review** each session. Did you accomplish what you planned? If not, what can you do about it?
- Make sure you get some time to **relax** after working.

A PLACE TO STUDY

- It may be difficult to get some peace in hall. Try a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door.
- A firm chair and a desk can help concentration.
- You need good lighting directed at the page (e.g. an angle-poised lamp).
- It needs to be warm but not hot.
- If you feel sleepy try opening a window.

What are your ideal conditions for working? It could be loud music or very quiet. It could vary depending on what you are doing. When you find a good place or way of working it is useful to stick to it and associate it with work.

MAKING NOTES

Overview

During your time at University there are many occasions when you will have to make notes. The most obvious of these is during lectures, but you may also need to make notes during tutorials or seminars, in laboratory classes or when reading textbooks. Each of these activities is different and each will require a different approach.

Whatever the source of your notes, it is essential that they are as clear as possible and arranged so that you can find the relevant points quickly.

This section suggests some general guidelines for taking lecture notes. Some of which may seem obvious, but it is amazing how many of them are neglected. We suggest you read this section in full now.

Taking Lecture Notes

Taking lecture notes is a skill which is new to many people who come to you. You are required to listen to the lecturer, look at diagrams, follow handouts, read what is written on the board and make your own notes. To become successful at note-taking requires concentration and the determination to develop your own style and skills.

Another problem is that lecturers' techniques vary considerably. Some write on the board for you to copy, most do not. Some make use of overhead projectors and/or slides. Others give handouts for you to follow, so some do not. It is unlikely that you will be able to use the same approach with every lecturer.

- Arrive for lectures in good time; missing the start can mean that the rest of the lecture does not make sense.

- Sit nearer the front than the back of the lecture theatre. It will help you to see better and reduce the chances of being distracted.

- Ensure you bring pens, pencil, ruler, paper and calculator with you. It is useful to standardize on A4 size paper for all your work. One other colour pen (or a highlighter pen) will help to mark the most important points. Because lectures are progressive it is helpful to bring your current lecture notes with you – topics can be spread between lectures.

- Number the pages of your notes and mark the place where each lecture starts with the date.

- Leave plenty of space around your notes so that you can easily annotate them or add extra information after the lecture.

- Use headings and sub-headings to distinguish between topics.

- Make sure your notes are accurate. You can waste a lot of time over a trivial error such as writing x^2 instead of x^3. This is particularly important in mathematics lectures.

- Do not expect to understand immediately everything that is said or written during a lecture. Some concepts are more difficult than others and require thinking about carefully before they can be understood.

- Aim to make a thorough record of each lecture which you can use for further study. This does not mean trying to write down everything but rather obtaining a **good summary** of the lecture.

- For mathematics lectures you should write down exactly everything that is written on the board and annotate it with the key points made by the lecturer .

- Make sure you understand any abbreviations used by the lecturers. Mathematics involves a number of special symbols including the Greek alphabet. Below are some of the abbreviations that may be used. You will learn many more in the next few years

[ ]	-	concentration	$accl^n$	-	acceleration
↑	-	increase	$conc^n$	-	concentration
↓	-	decrease	def^n	-	definition
∴	-	therefore	sol^n	-	solution
w	-	with	cf	-	compared with
□wrt	-	with respect to			

- As soon as possible after the lecture, work through your notes, tidying up and expanding where possible. Check the accuracy whenever you have any doubt. Leaving this until just before the exams is a recipe for disaster since you will have forgotten much of the detail you might otherwise have found useful.

- If you have miss a lecture try to borrow two sets of notes and write up your own version.

- Remember note taking is not a substitute for thinking, but a good set of notes will be a valuable aid to thinking.

EFFICIENT READING

Overview

You probably learned to read when you were very young but you can still learn new skills to apply to reading for different purposes. This section gives some ideas about how to organize your reading efficiently. You will probably find it useful to work through the whole section now.

You will be required to do some reading for every module. This could include the following:

- If your tutors give you a long booklist ask them which books are the most relevant (and why). ☐
- Ask more experienced students which books they have found helpful and which were least useful. ☐
- Skim very quickly through recommended books (see next page) to decide whether to read them (or which parts to read). ☐
- Look for visual signposts to get to find your way around a text (e.g. sub-headings, shatter summaries, text in **bold**, CAPITALS or *italics*). ☐
- Share out reading with two or three other students and report to each other regularly on what is worthwhile. ☐
- Use the index and contents to find specific information. ☐
- Note which books and papers are regularly mentioned in other books as being important. ☐

SQ3R – A Flexible Strategy

SQ3R is SURVEY, QUESTION, READ, RECALL, REVIEW. It is designed to make reading more efficiently by breaking it down into definite stages. With a little practice, some of these different skills become automatic and you can apply them selectively to all types of task.

Survey

A quick preview to tell you what the book, or chapter or section is about. It can be applied to sorting out a long booklist where you spend ten minutes looking at each book and deciding which is most suitable for your needs (i.e. how up-to-date is the book? Does it look easy to read? Does it cover the exact topic?). It is certainly worth doing this before buying. It is also useful to preview a section of text before reading it in detail to gain some idea of what the author's main ideas are.

Question

There are two types of questions to ask. First, is the book relevant to your needs? Second, read with 'research' questions in mind: for example if the section is about

pavement surfaces, set yourself the question: 'what are the advantages of different types of surfacing material?'

Read

When you have decided to read part of a text, divide it into small chunks and read in detail for, say, no more the 20 minutes. Pay particular attention to the evidence the author uses to justify his or her point and look for important information that you might need to remember later. Do not make any notes at this stage.

Recall

After you have read a short section, stop. Close the book and now write down important points, the main ideas and the evidence offered. See the section on note-making for ideas about how to do this.

Review

Remind yourself of the questions you wanted to answer by reading the book – were you able answer them all? Read over the section again, very quickly – have you got all the important points noted down and have you got the details correct? Complete your recall by filling in any gaps in your notes or highlighting key parts of the text (if it is your copy!).

What counts in the end is the quality of the reading you do, not the amount.

REPORT OR ESSAY WRITING

Overview

A report is a written statement of the facts of a situation, project, process or test; how the facts were ascertained; their significance; the conclusions drawn; and the recommendations being made.

As a University student, you will be asked to write a number of these reports. In subsequent years you will be asked to write dissertations and/or project reports; specific information on these will be provided on a future occasion.

This section outlines how to produce a good report. It is arranged in a typical format which uses numbered sections and could be followed when writing your reports (*but see the Health Warning on page 3).* We suggest you skim read it now and then use it when you are set written assignments.

1. Producing A Report

The production of a successful report requires ALL the following stages:

i) clear objectives
ii) information gathering (e.g. doing the laboratory)
iii) careful preparation, planning and layout
iv) writing
v) review

There is often a temptation to leap straight to the fourth stage with the vague hope that the report will somehow sort itself out as it goes along. Seldom, if ever, is this approach successful. Usually one of two things happens: i) the report is badly written and does not achieve its objective, or ii) the author stops writing half way through to go back and do all the preparations that should have been done earlier – with the result that considerable time is wasted. You do not need to be a literary genius to write a good report – but you do need to present your material simply, clearly and logically. A simple step by step approach makes clear presentation easier and saves time for you and the reader.

1.1 Instructions/Objectives

A successful report cannot be written without the objectives being clearly understood by both the person asking for it and the individual or group writing it. A clear set of instructions is needed – these are often known as the Terms of Reference. They specify what is, and is not, to be included and the depth required.

For you as an undergraduate student, Terms of Reference should be clearly provided. Nevertheless, there will probably be occasions when you feel unsure about exactly what is wanted. At this point you can do one of three things:

- *press on anyway taking a 'best guess'* – not recommended, you could waste a lot of time producing a report which is not wanted
- *ask your tutor/lecturer for more information* – an excellent idea, but an even better one is to

- *prepare a brief outline and ask if this is what is wanted* – this shows that you have thought about the problem and does not waste too much of your time if wrong.

1.2 The Reader

A critical part of writing a report is a knowledge of the reader.

The important questions are:

a) who will need my report?

b) what do they want in the report?

c) how can I best satisfy them? (e.g. what 'level' do I pitch it at?)

As an undergraduate your work will be read by members of the teaching staff and/or postgraduate students. But who exactly will read each different report that you write? Take time to find out and to discover what their Terms of Reference are for marking your work. A little time invested at this stage can pay dividends later.

The secret of successful report writing is a systematic approach.

1.3 Planning and Layout

Reports vary considerably in their requirements; but they have commonly recognised parts. These can include:

Title page
Abstract (also called a Summary or Executive Summary)
Contents list
Introduction
Body of report (which may have any number of parts)
Conclusions
Recommendations
References
Illustrations & tables (can be included in the body of the report)
Glossary (can be put after contents list)
Appendices
Index

2. Writing

2.1 Introduction

Writing demands some of the hardest mental work that most of us have to do; however, much of it is self-inflicted. Good report writer build up the report in stages. Before they begin to write they ensure they already have:

- accurate terms of reference
- all the relevant facts, evaluated and organized
- an outline of all the sections in an appropriate order
- notes on the points to be included.

The major part of the work involved has therefore been accomplished without any strain on their ability. After all, there is no advantage in doing a brilliant piece of practical work if you cannot subsequently communicate it to others. A guide to grammar, spelling and punctuation can be in found in Section 4 of this document.

2.2 Principles

Clear technical writing can be improved with experience and by following certain basic principles.

- Always bear the reader in mind.

- Keep reports as short as is practical. Long reports do NOT impress a reader more than short ones! For example, use appropriate diagrams and illustrations to shorten the length of your report.

- Ensure your report draws conclusions and makes recommendations (as appropriate). There is no such thing as a 'safe' report which simply states the facts and leaves the reader to sort them out!

- Observe the three – FYs

    - SimpliFY - keep to essentials
    - JustiFY - never make a statement without supporting it either in the text with evidence or by a reference.
    - QuantiFY - avoid generalizations of size or quantity such as using big, large, small, etc – they mean different things to different people.

- Use simple, plain English and keep sentences short. With experience you can build up their complexity but even so they should not exceed about 30 words or the reader will have difficulty following them. (The last sentence had 26 words).

- Paragraphs should deal only with one topic and should be no more than about one half of a page long. Avoid one sentence paragraphs.

- Use adjectives and adverbs sparingly – you are not a novelist or poet.

3. Referencing

The list of references at the end of your report has two functions:

a) it tells the reader the sources of the information in the report so that is he/she wishes to investigate further or check a fact they can do so easily.

b) the references as a whole show the extent to which you have 'cast your net' in gathering information.

There are two principle formats for including references in a report, these are known as the *Harvard system* and the *Numeric system.* In both cases the basic concept is to link ideas in the text with their source. Check with your department which of the above two formats (or indeed any other) which they prefer you to use.

The important aspect of referencing is that it must include ALL relevant information.

Examples are given below for references elating to books and to journals:

a) From books
Author (surname followed by initials); title; edition (if not the first); publisher; place of publication; date of publication; volume (if applicable); page number(s); date.

Lee S.W., Hsu S.M. and Shen M.C., Ceramic wear maps:
zirconia, J.Amer.Ceram.Soc., 76 [81]. 1937-1947, 1993

At the collection stage all sources of information should be recorded in case there is a need to check back or to explore further. There is nothing more irritating than not being able to find a reference you used! At the time of writing the report however, some sources may be omitted because you did not use all the information you gathered.

4. Punctuation, Grammar And Spelling

There is a great temptation to regard these matters as being of little importance. However in science clarity of expression is essential and if poor punctuation, grammar or spelling prevents us from communicating effectively then they become a problem which must be overcome. Spelling can be checked with a dictionary or a spell-checker if using a word-processor. Punctuation and grammar are more difficult. Some very simple guidelines are therefore set out below.

Full stop completes sentences.

Comma can be used to

i) separate items, e.g. *We packed clips, tubes, nuts and bolts.* (NB no comma before *and)*

ii) mark off phrases that interrupt the flow of the sentence, e.g. *The company, which won the Queen's award, put on a fine exhibition.* If used correctly then the phrase within the commas should be removable without loss of meaning to the sentence, e.g. *The company put on a fine exhibition.* Hence *The scheme, did not and still does not, apply to salary earners* is incorrect.

Semi-colon a device whose function lies between that of the comma and the full stop.

i) It can be used to mark off phrases in which the comma already occurs, e.g. *The soldiers were transported by road; the specialists, by helicopter.*

ii) It can be used to extend sentences without breaking continuity, e.g. *The new scheme will have little effect upon John; by then he will be used to it.*

Colon is primarily used to introduce a series of items, e.g. *The camper's needs are: tent, groundsheet, etc.*

Question marks are used at the end of a direct question.

Apostrophes have two main uses:

i) To indicate possession. e.g. *the boy's hat or the foot-ballers' changing room.* Note that where the word is singular the apostrophe comes before the *s*, whilst when the word is plural it comes after. The exception to the latter is when the word is already plural, e.g. *the children's games.*

ii) To indicate that a letter has been omitted, e.g. *don't (do not).*

iii) Its is a special case that has an apostrophe only when it is an abbreviation of it is. Thus *It's a good computer* BUT *The machine had its own software.* There is no apostrophe here since its is not a contraction of *it is.*

5. The Review

An indispensable part of the production of a report is the review. Unless hard pressed for time, you should not review the report too soon. It is often better to wait for a few days so that you can read your work more dispassionately. Remember to allow yourself enough time for this.

If the report must be typed, note that facilities exist at the University for typing your own reports. The standard software is Microsoft Word and computer terminals, linked to a central network, are located in all Faculties and in a separate Computing Centre. Most Faculties run modules to familiarize you with the facilities available and teach you the necessary skills.

As with the preparation, reviewing is best done in a systematic way. The report should be read OUT LOUD marking the script where you think there may be problems. This is NOT the same as just saying the words in your head. You need to check each of the following aspects:

- logic
- clarity of expression
- punctuation, grammar and spelling
- layout

A full check-list is provided overleaf.

If it does not sound right, it is not written right.

Review Check List

You may find it helpful to photocopy this page and use it every time you complete a piece of written work.

1. Does my written work have a clear sense of purpose?

   - I know and understand the main issues involved ☐
   - I have planned my report and followed the plan ☐
   - I feel that I have written the report required of me ☐

2. Is the content of my work satisfactory?

   - My facts are complete and up to date ☐
   - All the material included is relevant ☐
   - I have not left out anything that is relevant ☐
   - All my points are supported by evidence or reference ☐

3. Is the structure and style of my work satisfactory?

   - I have written the expected number of words ☐
   - I have made the structure of my argument clear ☐
   - I have used headings where appropriate ☐
   - Every important idea has been given a separate paragraph ☐
   - the paragraphs follow a logical order ☐
   - The conclusions are justified by the evidence presented ☐
   - I have avoided long-winded or jargon words ☐
   - I have kept my sentences reasonably short ☐
   - I have followed the required house style ☐
   - The spelling, punctuation and grammar are as good as I can make them ☐

WORKING IN GROUPS

Overview

At University, and beyond, you will often find yourself working in groups. This is because groups can bring together a wider range of skills and talents than a single individual could possess. Groups can be particularly effective at solving complex problems, making difficult decisions or collecting ideas.

It is a common assumption that everyone knows how to work well within a group and how to get the most out of participating in a group. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. This section is intended to help you work in a group with less than 8 members assigned a specific task, such as solving a problem or doing a project. The advice that follows may be useful to take to your first group meeting.

Starting Off

Select a Group Leader
This is particularly useful in larger groups. His or her role is to arrange meetings, chair meetings and ensure that the group is able to carry out its task effectively. Try and select someone who is interested in getting the project done and willing to do their share of the work as well as lead the group.

Identify the Overall Task
- Clarify exactly what has to be done.
- Getting the question right is an essential part of getting the solution right.
- Make sure all of the group understand and agree with the overall task.

Do the Ground Work
- Generate ideas about the best way of doing the task.
- Brainstorm – write all the ideas the group comes up with on a sheet of paper.
- Decide what further information needs to be gathered before a solution can be identified.
- Determine what other tasks need to be carried out.

Allocate Tasks
- Divide the tasks to either individuals within the group or smaller subgroups.
- Remember, people are happy to do things they like doing.
- Usually there are some tasks that no one wants to do – it is important that unwanted tasks are shared equally among group members.

Creating The Solution

The initial tasks are completed by group members before coming back to the rest of the group.

The group then assimilates this information.

Brainstorm Solutions
- Use the initial research generated to create a solution or strategy to achieve the goal.
- Write all the potential solutions on paper.
- Discuss and evaluate each solution.
- Allow enough time for this.

Turn Ideas into Action

- Make sure all group members understand and agree with the solution chosen.
- Break the solution down into manageable tasks.
- Allocate the tasks to team members.

Individuals carry out their tasks.

Do not forget project deadlines. Set time limits for each task and stick to them.

Making Sure The Job Gets Done

At this point the role of the group changes:

- Monitoring
- Meeting to receive progress reports from individuals
- Reallocating tasks when necessary
- Solving problems if they occur.

The group draws together its final report.

Meetings

Working in groups will normally require several meetings, particularly in the early stages.

- Make sure everyone exchanges telephone numbers, e-mail and/or postal addresses – so you can keep in touch.

- When meeting use a room with tables – try to avoid the pub, a coffee bar or somebody's front room! There are lots of suitable rooms across campus. Talk to members of academic staff or 2nd and 3rd year students to help you locate them.

- Regular meetings are easier to remember and will get better attendance than meetings held at irregular times. Avoid unpopular times of the day (e.g. 9.00am Monday or 5.00pm Friday).

- Make sure you turn up on time. There is nothing worse than waiting for one person when everyone else was there on time.

- Have an agenda to work through. This does not have to be formal – just a simple list of the things the group needs to discuss at the meeting.

- If there is some information you want everyone to read, ensure there are enough copies for each member of the group and try to distribute it **before** the meeting.

- Keep your meetings short and to the point – do not digress.

Trouble Shooting

Working in groups is not something that everyone knows how to do. Effective and successful groups need commitment from each member of that group.

There will be times when situations occur that cause problems within the groups. The most common are:

- **Members of the group not carrying out their allocated work**
  One person not carrying their weight will create ill-feeling amongst the group and may lead to the late completion of the work required. Try and identify the reason for this. For example, check that the person concerned understands exactly what is required and is not having problems with the task. If problems persist, then the group leader could have a quiet word with the person concerned and emphasize importance of completing the project. If all else fails consult the member of staff who set the project.

- **Poor time planning**
  Remember your final deadline and set time limits of each of the smaller tasks. It is very difficult to make up time lost at the beginning of a project so make a prompt start – don't wait a week before doing the initial stages of the task. Use the section on ORGANISING YOUR TIME for yourself and the group.

- **Unclear definitions of problems**
  Make sure everyone understands and agrees with the objectives of the project. You cannot reach a solution to a problem if you do not completely understand the problem.

Some Hints

- Be prepared to listen to other members of the group and value their contributions.

- Remember groups take time to 'settle down' and that progress is generally slower than for an individual.

- Don't let your fellow group members down – turn up on time and complete the tasks that you have been allocated.

GIVING EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

Overview

Oral presentations are an effective means of communicating information to more than one person simultaneously. More and more employers are expecting graduates to have mastered presentations. As a result it has become increasingly common to find this skill developed and assessed at University.

Nearly everyone feels nervous when doing a presentation and so this section has been included to help you overcome your anxiety. It is in no way definite, nor is it meant to be. It has been designed to provide a sensible basis for developing your own style. This section should be read before you plan your presentation. More detailed information and instruction will be provided during your course.

Preparing Your Presentation

Ensure you have answers to the following questions before you begin:

- What is the aim of your presentation? Is it to inform, to persuade or to amuse?
- What are the key points you want to get across to your audience?
- How long have you got to make your presentation?
- Who are your audience and how many of them will there be?
- What do you know about your subject?

Structure

All presentations should have a beginning, a middle and an end. At the beginning you should say what you are about to say, in the middle you should say it, and at the end you should tell the audience what you have just said.

This may be old advice but it makes for effective presentations.

- Does your **opening** contain an outline of the presentation, set the context and state your objectives?
- What are the **main points** you want to make? Do they follow each other logically, linking together well?
- Are they well 'signposted', covering the material you want to cover?
- Do they support from visual aids?
- When **closing,** do you sum up the main points and make a strong conclusion?

DELIVERY

No matter how well your presentation is structured, the way you put it across to your audience will determine what kind of impression you create.

Preparation is very important.

- You should know your presentation. You could talk using prompt cards. Avoid simply reading, it does not make for an effective presentation.
- The language should match the abilities of your audience.
- Good speakers make eye contact with all their audience, try and achieve this.
- Make sure your timing is right – this means rehearsing extensively.

Visual Aids

Visual aids are used to help convey ideas and information in a way that is more easily understood.

- Are your visual aids simple, interesting and easy to read?
- Do they fit well with your talk and add to your presentation?
- Is the size of the text large enough to read?
- Do you remove visual aids when they are not needed to avoid distracting your audience?

Summary

Rehearsal of your presentation is the only way to check that you have managed to get everything right. You could rehearse in front of a group of friends and ask for constructive comments. You will be pleasantly surprised at how much better you will feel actually doing the presentation when you have done it several times before.

REVISION AND EXAMS

Overview

Twice a year you will face a set of exams at the end of each semester. This is very different from facing one set of exams at the end of two years as in A Levels, for example. You should therefore treat preparation for exams as a continuous process and part of your normal work. This section is about fine-tuning your 'last-minute' revision and managing the exam itself.

You may already have passed a number of exams to get to University and know that you work best with last-minute cramming or with a long period of revision. The method we recommend encourages you to plan ahead. We suggest you review this section a few weeks after the beginning of term.

Planning Ahead

You should have definite answers to the following points. If you find it helpful, you could write answers down and attach them to this file.

- A personal provisional exam timetable is issued during each semester. You will need to ensure that you are entered for the correct papers and that there are no time-table clashes. It is your responsibility to confirm it. You will then receive a final personal timetable.

- What types of questions are set (short written answers, mathematical problems, multiple choice or essays)? You can get copies of past exam papers from the University library.

- Are there compulsory sections in the exam papers?

- Can you use tables, set books or calculators in the exam?

Early on in the course you should have a very clear picture about the combination and spread of topics that you will be examined on and the form the exams take.

Revision Strategy

Teaching should stop after week 12th of the semester but it will be useful to balance your timetable by putting some work in during the vacations.

Draw up a realistic timetable (you could photocopy page 7).

- Divide your time between topics making sure you cover your strongest as well as weakest subjects.

- Write in which topic you will cover in each slot.

- You may want to tackle easier or more familiar subjects first, but don't put off the difficult topics for too long.

- Most people work more productively in (short) timed bursts and when they are not tired or hungry.

There are probably few activities more tedious than reading your own notes or coursework over and over again. Here are some ideas for making revision active.

- Try combining lecture notes, coursework, laboratory practicals, material from textbooks into condensed summaries of particular topics.

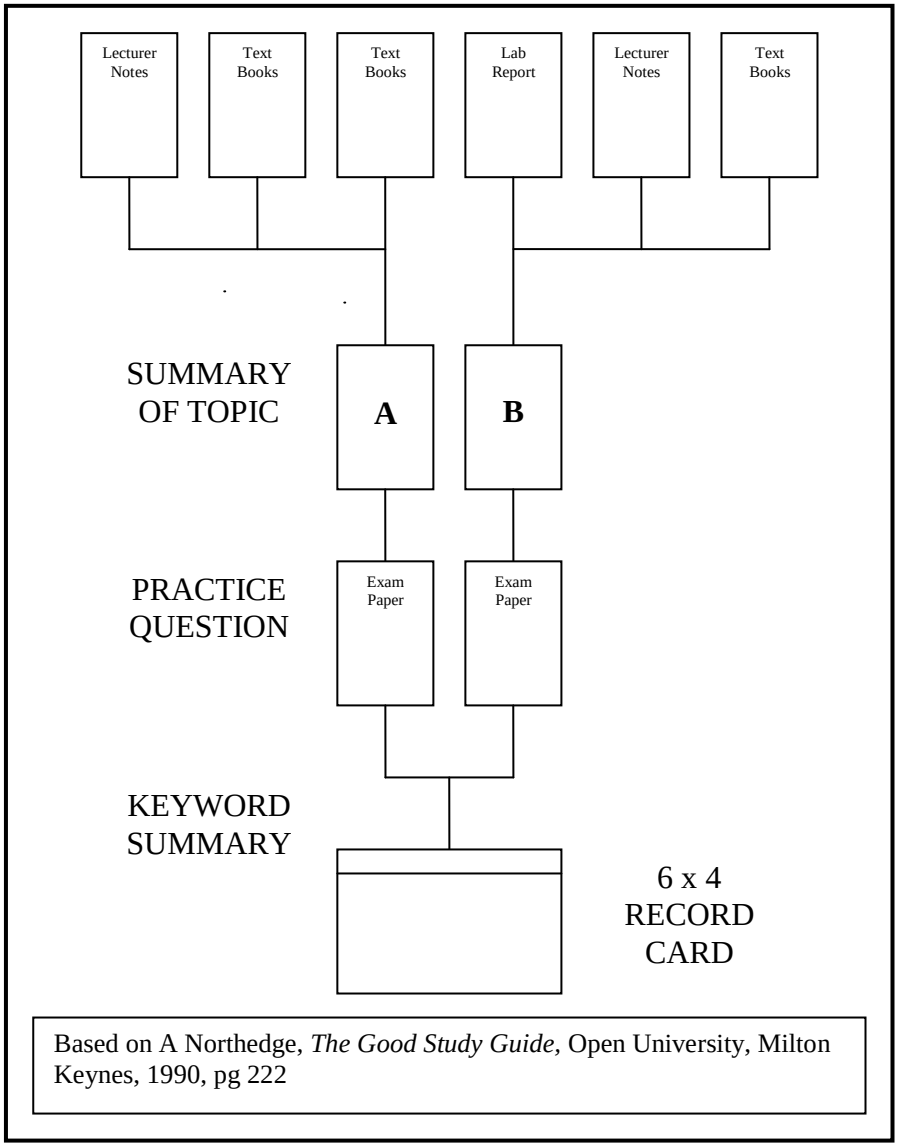
- Combine several summaries to get an overview of a whole chunk of the course (see diagram)

- Try working in pairs.

- Always ask questions:
  - What are the key ideas in a particular topic?
  - Are there key formulae
  - You can note down on a summary card?
  - Are you working in material which improves your understanding of a topic?

- Practise answering real questions from the outset, using past exam papers or questions in textbooks.

- If you have not had much experience of exams, begin by writing outline answers, progress to timed questions and finally test yourself under exam conditions



Based on A Northedge, *The Good Study Guide*, Open University, Milton Keynes, 1990, pg 222

Stick to the timetable. If you let it drift, you may find whole sections of the course are left uncovered. Before the big day arrives, run through the following checklist.

- Make sure you know when and where your exams take place. It might be helpful to check the location of an unfamiliar venue.

- Ensure you have got all your equipment sorted out. It is a good idea to have spares but do not overload yourself with equipment.

- Most people find last minute cramming very stressful. Do not tackle new material immediately before an exam. You are unlikely; to absorb it and you may undo your earlier good work.

- To soothe any last minute nerves, try something 'light' like reviewing your condensed summaries.

Strategy For The Exam Day

- Collect all the equipment you will need. Arrive at the exam room in good time. It may be helpful to agree with friends not to talk before the exam and make each other nervous. Avoid the prophets of doom!

- Ensure all formalities (e.g. registration form, candidates number) are completed accurately before the time starts.

- Read the instructions (sometimes called *rubric*) on the paper carefully. There may have been some changes compared with past exam papers that you have studied.

- Read through the paper twice. Mark the questions you will definitely do and those you might do. On a three hour paper you may need to allow 10 minutes for this stage – don't put off by the sight of others beginning to write.

- Assign your time so that minutes equate to marks. Make sure you allow enough time to cover all the sections of the paper. It can be helpful to write a schedule for the exam.

- Read the questions carefully. Answer the question asked, not the one you wish had been set.

- For questions requiring long written or complex answers you will need to plan your answer. There are at least four stages:

    - Remembering what you know about the topic
    - Selecting what is relevant to the question
    - Organising the information into a written plan
    - Writing the response (in legible English)

- For long questions (both written and problem solving) the first 50% of the marks are fairly easy to get. The next 25% require more effort and the final 25% can be much harder. This has several consequences:

    - Answer all the questions required. It will be easier to gain 25% on a topic you are weak on than to gain an additional 25% by improving the answer on your strongest topic.

    - Sheer quantity of material will not gain marks and will not help the examiner to find good incisive points to reward.

    - A strong opening to a written answer will gain marks quickly.

    - Whilst it may boost your confidence to tackle your best question first you should not overrun your time budget. Leave space after your answer and return to it if you have the time.

- Don’t leave early. Use any time left to reach each finished answer through and check for errors, omissions, badly written passages and so forth.

- If you realize you have made a mistake and you don’t have time to redo the question, then own up. This sometimes impresses examiners!

- Have a strategy for after the exam. It is wise to avoid post mortems, especially if there are more exams coming up.

FURTHER HELP

OVERVIEW

We have aimed to provide comprehensive general guidance in this pack. We hope you will have found it a good introduction to your studies at the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus. Whilst it should be clear that you must take main responsibility for your studies here, there are plenty of people who can help you and resources that you can use. This section provides a brief introduction to some of the key sources of help.

PERSONAL TUTOR

At the start of term a member of academic staff in your faculty will be assigned to you. You should feel free to discuss any issues of an academic or personal nature that may be affecting you.

UNIVERSITY COUNSELLING SERVICE

The University provides a confidential, free counseling service with a staff of trained counselors. They are available to talk over any problem with a student and work on an appointment system. Details on this counseling service can be found in the Student Handbook.