

# **Towards Success in Tertiary Study Logo with Learning Disabilities**

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The **Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series web address is at:  
<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/towardssuccess/>

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National Library Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

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**Towards Success in Tertiary Study Series**  
ISBN 0 7340 1401 5 (series)

**Towards Success with Learning Disabilities**  
ISBN 0 7340 1409 0

1. Disabilities    2. Transition to University    3. Study Skills-Tertiary  
4. Learning Disabilities

Cover design by **Gasp of Amazement Pty Ltd**

Illustration cartoons by Michael Leunig (reproduced with permission from **The Age** and Michael Leunig)

Typeset by Gwyn Lindsay

# Acknowledgments

The project team would like to thank all the students, staff, support organisations and people from electronic discussion lists who have provided input and time to the project. We would especially like to thank the students who allowed their experiences to be used in the **Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series.

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## **WHY READ THIS BOOKLET?**

This booklet has been written for students who are studying or intend studying at tertiary level and who have **Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder** or **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**. The strategies included here bring together the experiences of many students, staff and support organisations. This booklet also builds on existing resources, both print and electronic media.

### **Studying with Learning Disabilities**

University students with learning disabilities generally perform very well in some aspect of their work, yet perform poorly in other aspects. The effects of a learning disability (LD) may be mild, moderate or severe and can include difficulties with one or more of the following: listening, speaking, reading (dyslexia), writing, reasoning or maths. LD is due to a central nervous system dysfunction which affects the way information is normally processed. Students with LD are often high achievers at tertiary level because of their areas of intellectual strength, with many contributing in creative and innovative ways.

### **HOW CAN A LEARNING DISABILITY AFFECT STUDY?**

You might find it useful to explain to friends and lecturers that the effects of a learning disability can vary widely and affect study in different ways. Some of the possible effects on study include:

- difficulty setting goals, working out priorities and completing work
- difficulty concentrating
- difficulty organising time; more time needed to complete tasks
- slower rate of information processing
- difficulty memorising material
- difficulty following the sequence and organisation of a lecture
- difficulty following instructions and procedures
- slow reading rate; impaired comprehension
- difficulty incorporating ideas from reading into written work
- poor legibility and speed of writing
- poor spelling
- calculation and numerical difficulties
- reduced ability to grasp social cues or sustain attention - hence may miss point of conversation, go off at a tangent or interrupt

## **HOW DOES ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD) OR ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD) AFFECT STUDY?**

**ADD** and **ADHD** are also due to a dysfunction of the central nervous system and some students may have **ADD** or **ADHD** as well as a learning disability. **ADD** and **ADHD** are included here because learning strategies useful for students with **LD** will also benefit students with **ADD** or **ADHD**.

You might also find it useful to explain to friends and lecturers that the effects of **ADD** and **ADHD** can vary from student to student and that some of the possible effects on study include:

- hyperactive behaviour; the need to be doing many things at once
- difficulty concentrating; easily distracted
- lack of organisational skills
- difficulty following instructions
- difficulty completing work and getting it in on time
- poor reading skills
- possible social difficulties; may seem immature, lacking in sensitivity, demand attention or be aggressive or argumentative
- low stress tolerance
- possible feelings of low self-esteem and depression
- rapid changes of mood
- impulsive; may act without thinking.

You might also find it useful to refer lecturers to **Reasonable Accommodations: Strategies for Teaching University Students with Disabilities** website at:  
<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book4.html>

Though tertiary study with learning disabilities, **ADD** or **ADHD** can be challenging; by developing a range of study strategies and by using the various university services available, students can maximise their chances of success.

**“...Once I discovered that some famous people such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Hans Christian Anderson, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and Auguste Rodin had dyslexia, I finally felt that I was not alone, that I shared something with a group of exceptional individuals. It was a good feeling to be amongst such great company. It was a true turning point in my life...”**

# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY

## Know Your Learning Style

Each of us is an individual and we all learn and think in different ways. Being aware of different learning styles is important for most students, but for students with an LD, it is particularly important. In lots of ways, it is more useful to think about LD as learning difference rather than learning disability. While most students with LD have poor sequencing skills, they often have excellent lateral thinking skills for example. **It's really important to discover the aspects of learning you do well, in order to adequately compensate for the differences.**

**“...I've always had trouble structuring ideas in an essay, but show me a photograph and I can easily explain why some objects need to be in the foreground, and how shading is operating to manipulate the image. Images come to me laterally rather than linearly I guess...”**

Find out as much as you can about your learning personality, preferred modality (for example, visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) and particular learning talents. Knowing your preferred learning style and therefore what works best for you is an excellent start to successful study.

<p>Ask your Disability Liaison Officer for the booklet: <b>Discovering Your Learning Style</b> in the <b>Towards Success in Tertiary Study</b> series to learn more about adapting study techniques to your particular learning style.</p>
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## Ideas for Getting Started and Keeping Going

Here are some suggestions that other students have found useful. There is no one right way - experiment, and decide which strategies work best for **you**.

### Getting organised

Studying at university means developing independent learning skills. This means that you are responsible for learning material, submitting assignments on time and approaching lecturers if you do not understand something. Most students find that what appears at first to be many hours of free time can quickly become insufficient to complete all the tasks required. To make the most effective use of your time, it is essential to develop good organisational skills.

- Since it will probably take you longer than other students to complete tasks, get an early start.
- Draw up a semester timetable; this will enable you to get an overview of the semester's workload. Use course outlines to do this and mark in the due dates for all assessments and exams. You'll also need **complete-by-dates**, a few days before the actual dates - Murphy's Law decrees that three essays will be due on the same day! Attach this timetable to your study wall where you can refer to it often.
- Use a weekly timetable to note all your study and other commitments (such as a part-time job, sporting activities and domestic chores). Use different colours to distinguish these. Look for times adjacent to lectures and tutorials and use these for ongoing reading and preparation. In general, you will need to allow at least two hours of study for each hour of class time, a little more for subjects you find difficult, and more again when assignments and exams are due.
- Stephen Covey, an American writer, notes in his book **First Things First** that we spend our time in one of four ways (see table below). Because people often react to things as they occur, valuable time is spent on relatively unimportant things (see quadrants 3 and 4). He recommends discipline to put **First Things First** to achieve goals.

	<b>Urgent</b>	<b>Not Urgent</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>1</b> assignment due tomorrow your best friend's birthday	<b>2</b> an essay due in 4 weeks long term projects course & career planning
<b>Not Important</b>	<b>3</b> interruptions some phone calls friends dropping in	<b>4</b> junk mail some phone calls watching TV

- As well as a weekly timetable, you will need to spend a few minutes each day organising a daily study plan. You need to balance time for ongoing tasks (such as regular reading for lectures and preparation for tutorials and labs) with time for assessment tasks. For a daily plan to be effective you need:
  1. a precise description of the items
  2. a priority ranking of the items (what is most important to get done today; less important; unnecessary)
  3. an estimate of the amount of time to be spent on each item.

ITEMS	PRIORITY	TIME	PROGRESS
Maths problem p.203	1	1/2 hour	completed
Summarise chap 5 History text	2	1 hour	almost
Revise Sociology lecture notes	3	1/2 hour	tomorrow
Copy Media articles	2	10 minutes	delegated

- Tick off tasks as they are completed for an immediate sense of achievement. Don't worry if you don't do **everything** on the list, but make sure high priority tasks are completed. Other items can be transferred to the next day's list.
- To avoid responding to events as they occur and therefore not completing urgent and important tasks, seriously consider using lists and timetables. If lists have not worked for you in the past, perhaps it was because your goals were unrealistic. Try shorter lists with readily achievable goals. The Learning/Study Skills Advisers on your campus can help you to set appropriate goals and devise a plan to achieve them.
- Once you have a study schedule worked out, monitor how well it is working.
  1. Are you involved in too many extra-curricular activities?
  2. Do you need to study at different times of the day?
  3. Are you keeping up with the work in all your subjects?
  4. Do you need more time to study, or to study certain subjects, or to study in a different place?
- Break larger tasks into smaller mini jobs, then they will appear more manageable and be easier to complete. For example:  
you don't need to read all of chapter two today: read one section  
completing an essay plan is an achievement in itself  
writing a single paragraph tonight is one less paragraph tomorrow.
- Develop an efficient filing system so that your notes, handouts and other material are well organised and you can find things quickly. Label things clearly and have plenty of subject folders and plastic envelopes.
- Use colour to make things more memorable and attention getting. Devise your own colour-code system and use it for files, timetables and highlighting.

**“...I realise that it takes me twice as long as other students to do all the reading and assignments so I have to be really well-organised. I have everything I want to get done for the week in my diary and I mark things off as I do them...”**

## Getting started

- Arrange a study environment that suits how **you** work best. Some people like to work in a quiet environment, others may prefer background noise or music.
- Ask other people to help you achieve your objectives by not disturbing you (a note on the door can be a useful reminder). If there are too many distractions at home, you may need to consider alternative study venues, such as a library.
- For the most effective use of your time, study complicated material when you are most alert. For most people, the morning is the best time to attempt tasks requiring precision and sustained attention.
- Associate sitting at your desk with serious study and start work on the most important task. Ask yourself: what is the best use of my time right now?
- Establish a predictable routine. You could start each session with revision of the last session. Some people find it helpful to begin with something relatively easy - even if it is only opening a new folder on the your computer and giving it a title.
- Getting started is the hardest part. Most people find that once they've started it's much easier to gain some momentum and continue.

## **Keeping going**

- Your concentration span determines how long you can work. Many students find studying for short periods with frequent breaks works best. Try gradually extending the length of your study sessions.
- Many people with ADD like to do several things at once. If this sounds familiar try the following:
  - plan an essay while you're in the shower
  - listen to a taped lecture while doing aerobics
  - put revision notes on tape and listen while driving or exercising.
- Telling someone you intend to study for a specific time will help to reinforce your good intentions.
- Focus on completing the task - get someone to take messages if the phone rings, or use an answering machine. Warn your friends in advance that you will not have as much free time during the semester.
- Alternate interesting with less interesting tasks.
- Make study more interesting by working with a partner or a group.
- **Reward** yourself for studying and for completing tasks. You could watch your favourite TV program, meet a friend for dinner or indulge in a Mars bar or two or three (not if it aggravates your ADD though). Gradually increase the effort required to gain a reward.
- Make sure you allow enough time to recharge your batteries: time for socialising, exercise, relaxation and sleep. Studying can be a bit like preparing for a race: you need to have energy in store for the final sprint.

- A small dose of daydreaming can be beneficial: remember why you took up study in the first place and imagine yourself on graduation day.
- Peaks and troughs in the study year exist for everyone. Try to focus on peaks, such as a lecturer's positive comments on an essay or good marks on a test. If you accept that there will be setbacks, then there is less chance of becoming discouraged if things do go wrong.

## Dealing with Stress

There will be times when you feel overwhelmed by your workload. The challenge of university study may lead to doubts about your ability to succeed. Remember that you are not alone, many students feel this way, particularly as assignment deadlines and exams approach. Study **IS** stressful, particularly the first year when you must learn to adapt to a new environment.

A number of students find relating to others one of the most stressful aspects of studying. You may feel lonely if nobody approaches you, or frustrated or even angry if people are not as responsive as you expect.

Extreme levels of stress will prevent you from studying effectively. If you find yourself in this situation, see the university counsellor who can help you practise stress reduction techniques.

**“...I had to cope with many long hours of painstaking work and at times doubted that I could achieve what I set out to achieve. It was frustrating to see other students in the same course completing tasks in half the time...”**

Here are some suggestions for building resilience to stress.

- Try to **reduce** non-essential activities and ask for help with mundane chores so that you can focus your energy on study.
- Know when to **turn to** others for support. Find someone whom you know will listen - it could be a sympathetic lecturer, a fellow student or the Campus Minister.
- Use **'time out'** when you're upset. Get away from the upsetting event or conversation and calm down.
- Universities allow generous times to complete a degree. If you are having difficulties, a sensible option may be to study part-time or by distance education. The important thing is to finish your course - an extra year is not important in the context of your total career plan.
- Exercise is good for everyone and many people with ADD find it helps to **work off** energy in a positive way. **Choose** something you like doing and make it an essential part of your routine.
- Many students find meditation, yoga or listening to relaxing music helpful in reducing stress.

- Find time to **relax** and have fun. Humour is one of the world's best stress relievers, so find opportunities to laugh and enjoy yourself with friends.

## **Where to Look for Help and Advice**

As well as teaching staff, there are other staff in tertiary institutions who provide support for students with disabilities.

- Disability Liaison Officers can act on your behalf and arrange accommodations and equipment to suit your needs.
- Learning/Study Skills Advisers usually offer workshops at the beginning of each semester. These include: effective reading techniques, how to research and write assignments, time management techniques, understanding your learning styles and exam preparation. Advisers also provide individual help with any aspect of learning that concerns you.
- Library staff offer introductory sessions on using the library efficiently, as well as assistance in accessing information and using adaptive technology.
- University health personnel are familiar with university procedures and may be able to provide supporting documentation for your disability.
- Counsellors can help you with personal problems such as low self-esteem and other difficulties such as exam anxiety and motivation.
- Ministers and Chaplains provide pastoral care and personal and spiritual support.
- Student Union Welfare or Education Officers can answer questions about a range of campus matters, including academic rights.
- Career and Employment Advisers can tell you about the career outcomes of various courses, give information and advice on job seeking and can help link you to part-time jobs. They also assist new graduates find employment.

**“...I was advised to get in touch with the Disability Unit when I started uni and they've been great. The DLO organised extra time for exams and for someone to take notes for me in lectures. She also came with me when I first talked to lecturers about my problems. I was a bit unsure about telling lecturers that I'm dyslexic, but now I'm really glad I did; they've been really supportive and seem to appreciate someone who wants to learn...”**

Here are some other suggestions to increase your links and networks.

- It's important to become involved in the other activities provided by your university. Find out about the various clubs, societies and sporting organisations available. These will link you with other students with similar interests, which should help you feel more comfortable on campus and give you a sense of belonging.

- Join a study group. As well as helping you to make friends, this will enable you to explore different study patterns. If there are no groups, see your lecturer or tutor for suggestions about how to start one.
- Find out if your university has a **Mentor, Buddy, or Host** scheme. This can be an excellent way to link academically and socially with students and staff.
- Cultivate on-line friendships on electronic discussion lists and in support groups. It helps to talk about your feelings and share experiences with others in similar situations. Computer discussion lists can be accessed at all times of the day and night which often appeals to students with ADD and students with spelling problems can relax, since e-mail communication tends to ignore spelling errors.

For information about **e-mail discussion lists, groups and resources** try these websites:  
<http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html>  
 and  
<http://tile.net/>

**“...One thing that helped sustain me during my nursing course has been the support of my mother. She makes sure no one disturbs me when I’m studying and is always happy to discuss what I’m learning. The other thing that helped was joining a Christian group on campus. As well as extra help with study, I always had someone to talk to...”**

## **Negotiating to Meet your Needs**

Learning disabilities, ADD and ADHD are hidden disabilities and may not be well understood by some people at university. People often mean well, but may lack appropriate information and you might have to explain your particular needs.

You need to take charge of how your life and work at university are managed. One of the big differences between secondary school and university is that in an adult-learning environment it is **your** responsibility to follow up issues and ask for support. Learn how to be an advocate for yourself, to ask questions and not necessarily to accept the first answer.

## **Experiment with Different Study Techniques**

## Lectures and Tutorials

Lecture theatres often have large numbers of students (sometimes as many as 400) and may have different lecturers every week. This can take a while to adjust to after small year 12 classes, where you knew the group and teachers well. Here are some suggestions for dealing with lectures:

- Attend all lectures, tutorials and laboratory sessions. If you miss a session, find out what was covered. Always attend the first lecture and tutorial because this is when important course information is discussed.
- Review notes from the previous lecture and read suggested texts before you go in. Note main points and any questions that you hope to have answered in the lecture. You don't have to do all the prescribed reading; even a quick skim read of significant chapters will give you an idea of what to expect and help to familiarise you with the material.
- Get to the lecture early and sit close to the front where you can see and hear more easily and where there are fewer distractions. If lectures are repeated, consider attending the same lecture twice.
- If you find organising material or writing quickly in lectures is a problem, you can arrange to have a note-taker through your Disability Liaison Officer. You should also be able to tape lectures (ask permission first and use the pause button to tape selectively). Do take notes yourself as well, even if very brief, to help maintain concentration.
- Ask lecturers for copies of overhead transparencies and lecture notes if recording information quickly is a problem. Some lecturers keep this material on counter reserve in the library.
- Use lecturers' body language and other signals to gauge the most important information (note vigorous pointing, repeating something several times, speed of delivery, jabbing a finger in the air and saying, "this will be on the exam!"). If the lecturer emphasises a point by writing it on the board - take it down!
- To help maintain concentration during lectures ask yourself questions.
  1. What is the topic mainly about?
  2. How does this relate to last week's lecture?
  3. What is the lecturer's view on this topic?
  4. What are the main points?
  5. What further reading has the lecturer suggested?
- Don't try to take down every word - use words and phrases rather than sentences and leave plenty of space for later additions or comments. Use a multi-colour pen for contrast (red: important; black: main ideas; green: supporting detail and so on).
- Ask tutors to explain any technical language, specific terms or anything else you do not understand in tutorials.
- After the lecture, rework your notes. Highlight the main points; put information into your own words; use diagrams and visual aids if you are a

visual learner. Reviewing your notes within 24 hours is a good memory enhancer.

- Check with other students that you have the key points and fill any gaps if necessary.
- Listen to the tape if the lecture or tutorial was taped to help reinforce new material.
- Revise your notes frequently, not just before exams. Many students find it useful to summarise their notes into a small notebook - this can be used for revision purposes while waiting for the bus or train.

## **Tutorial Presentations**

For most students, participating in tutorials for the first time can be a little scary. Remember that everybody probably feels a bit apprehensive, even those students who appear confident. Try to say something in your first session; this will be easier if you have done some preparatory reading. You can ask questions, or agree or disagree with what someone else has said and give your reasons. Once you get to know the others in your tutorial, you should find participation easier. Here are some tips for giving tutorial presentations:

- You need to know your material well. Rehearse the presentation with a friend and time it. This will help reduce nervousness.
- Try to visit the room beforehand so you are familiar with the layout and can check that the overhead projector and other equipment is operating correctly.
- Use overhead transparencies (OHTs) and other visual aids for variety (and don't forget, if the audience is looking at the screen they're not looking at you). OHTs are an excellent way of organising your talk too.
- Writing your talk out can be a useful way of convincing yourself that you have enough to say, and it can be helpful as a back up in case of mental blocks. If possible, avoid reading your talk because this will prevent eye contact with your audience.
- Many students find index cards useful for noting main points, or you could use a split page technique, where you write your talk in full on the left, but leave a narrower column on the right for main points (block letters and colour are useful here). This way you can aim to use the dot points but revert to the full text in case of emergency.
- Imagine yourself confidently delivering your talk. Practise deep breathing to help calm nerves.
- Have some questions prepared to help stimulate discussion.

## **Reading**

- Ask for course outlines and booklists before the semester begins and get an early start on the reading. Read selectively - ask lecturers to indicate the most important texts and texts written in less complex language. Don't forget to break your reading into manageable sections.
- If you read slowly, or find reading difficult, organise the taping of key texts and articles, or see if they are already available in audio format. You can also arrange to have them read to you. (Did you know that you can become a member of the **Talking Book Library** if you have a disability? Material can be taped using this service.) Plan ahead with the assistance of your Disability Liaison Officer, as these options will take time to organise.
- **Always** have particular questions in mind before you start; this will help ensure you read actively and critically. Some useful questions include:
  1. What do I already know about this topic?
  2. What is the writer's argument or message?
  3. What evidence does the writer provide to support this argument?
  4. From your experience and other reading, would you agree or disagree with this writer?
- Use **SQ3R**, a technique that provides an organised way to approach any text.
 

**Survey** for a general impression. Note the headings and subheadings in the chapter or article. Skim the introductory and concluding sections and note things such as bold print and italics, graphs and diagrams.

**Question** by turning all subheadings into questions or by using those raised by the writer.

**Read** to find the answers to these questions. You may have to read a section more than once. Highlight or underline important material.

**Recite** aloud (or to yourself) the answers to questions posed, in your own words. Make brief notes if you wish.

**Review** by going over the material again and checking to see whether you have covered the main points. See if you can write these from memory in your own words.
- If you are reading for an essay, make a preliminary plan; this will enable you to focus on relevant reading and not make unnecessary notes. Have the question in front of you and refer to it to decide if notes need to be made.
- When making notes, have a system for distinguishing an author's ideas or words from your own. You could use a different colour for your comments or use a split page with your comments on one side.
- Record reference sources accurately as you take notes, including page numbers, to save time looking for these later.
- Avoid the temptation to take too many notes. Use coloured highlighters to mark relevant material in your own texts and photocopies (for example, red for central ideas, green for examples, yellow for important dates and so on). Also, write brief comments or summaries in the margins of your own texts; use **'Post-it'** notes in library books.

- Reading some sections aloud can assist understanding and concentration. Running your finger along the line or using an index card under the line, will help you to keep your place and stop backtracking.
- It's a good idea to expand your understanding of a topic in other ways: you might discuss it with friends, see a film of a book or watch a play.

## Writing

- Read assignment instructions carefully and ask lecturers to clarify any points you are unsure about. Note the number of words required for an idea of the scale of the essay.
- Make sure you are clear about what key words mean. An essay topic which asks you to “**discuss**” an issue requires a different approach from one where you must “**justify**” a point of view or “**summarise**” a body of information.
- It may be useful to brainstorm ideas with other students and tape record these sessions for future reference. Write the main topic in the centre of the page and then brainstorm in the manner of Kipling: “I have six friends that serve me true: **what, when and where, why, how and who.**” Link these ideas with arrows and circles and then decide how you will sequence information. For instance, chronological order might be useful to explain how theories developed over time.

Visit a **concept map** website at:  
<http://classes.aces.uiuc/ACES100/Mind/>

- Many students with LD find conventional essay plans don't work for them. You might find it useful to write **ALL** your ideas as a ‘stream of consciousness’, then go back and look at ways the ideas can be organised to construct a written plan. This will provide a framework on which to build the paragraphs. Your plan can be revised after further research. Software such as **Inspiration** can help you with this too.

Download a free trail software version of **Inspiration** from:  
<http://www.inspiration.com/>

- Divide the assignment into reasonable stages such as the following:  
 Weeks 1 & 2 Analyse question; brainstorm; make preliminary plan; select texts; start reading and making notes; refine plan.  
 Week 3 Read and make notes; write the body, introduction and conclusion.

Week 4 Review draft (focus on logic, structure and coherence). Write second and further drafts (focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar).

Week 5 Type final draft; compile references; take a short break; proofread and hand in completed assignment. (Remember to keep a photocopy.)

- For models of the text type you will be asked to write (such as case studies, laboratory reports, essays, reflective journals and lesson plans) use the books and articles on your reading list as a guide, or ask your lecturer for a copy of a model assignment. Your Learning/Study Skills Adviser will also be able to help you with this.
- Each lecturer has specific requirements for the presentation and referencing of assignments. Check your unit guidelines for these.
- If you don't already have the skills, now is the time to learn how to use a word processor effectively; this will cut time in redrafting and editing since it allows you to move sentences and whole paragraphs to improve the logical sequencing of work and make the meaning clearer. As well, it will make your work look professional and will be much easier to read.
- Written work can often be improved with suitable connective words. These are words like **therefore**, **however**, **firstly**, **secondly** and **in conclusion**, that help combine ideas in sentences and across sentences and paragraphs.
- Use a Thesaurus. This is a good way to enlarge your vocabulary and to find the most relevant words for expressing what you want to say. Think of ways of using new vocabulary appropriately in discussions and written work.
- Many students with LD find it useful to use template structures to establish linear connections and provide structure to their work. A sample template for an essay might include:

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the introduction is to focus your reader's attention on the central theme of your essay. It should clarify how you intend to interpret or limit your question and give a clear, brief overview of the issues to be covered.

Have you included:

- an indication of your interpretation of the question
- the main thrust of your argument
- an indication of the issues you'll cover (and in which order)
- an indication of what your conclusion is
- a definition of key terms (if appropriate)

## **PARAGRAPH 1**

**Statement about issue (1)**

This statement should let the reader know the place this issue has in your overall argument. It should not include evidence but be your own view of the evidence. It is almost always 'quote free' and generally fairly short.

Have you:

- linked the issue to the question (are you SURE you're answering the question)
- described the main aim of the paragraph

### **Evidence substantiated with supporting details and examples**

This is where you back up your statement with the evidence you gain from your reading. The ideas may belong to others but it is your responsibility to analyse and synthesise

Have you:

- acknowledged the ideas of others (whether in your own words or quoted)
- linked each sentence to the preceding one with a connective or associated idea
- are ALL the sentences in the paragraph relevant to the main idea
- is there a logical order to the way in which you've ordered the evidence
- synthesised the evidence so as to avoid the dreaded 'furniture catalogue effect'
- used useful synthesising words: however; clearly; furthermore; accordingly; additionally; nonetheless)

## **PARAGRAPH 2**

### **Statement about issue (2-?)**

This statement should let the reader know the place this issue has in your overall argument. It should not include evidence but be your own view of the evidence. It is almost always 'quote free' and generally fairly short.

Have you:

- linked the issue to the question
- linked the paragraph to the preceding one using either linking words or an association of ideas / words
- described the main aim of the paragraph

### **Evidence substantiated with supporting details and examples**

This where you back up your statement with the evidence you gain from your reading. The ideas may belong to others but it is your responsibility to analyse and synthesise

Have you:

- acknowledged the ideas of others (whether in your own words or quoted)

- linked each sentence to the preceding one with a connective or associated Idea
- ensured ALL the sentences in the paragraph are relevant to the main idea
- ensured there is a logical order to the way in which you've ordered the evidence
- synthesised the evidence so as to avoid the dreaded 'furniture catalogue effect'
- Useful synthesising words: however; clearly; furthermore; accordingly; additionally; nonetheless)

### For paragraphs 1 - ?

Have you:

- ensured the length of the paragraph is consistent with its relative importance
- ensured the paragraphs are in a logical order and flow logically

### CONCLUSION

The conclusion brings together the different sections of the essay, the assertions made in your introductory paragraph are now fully developed and substantiated.

Have you:

- avoided introducing new ideas
- avoided repeating yourself (bringing ideas together is NOT repeating)
- ensured the conclusion is your own (rather than a restatement of someone else's)
- stated your conclusion and the reasons for it clearly and unambiguously

- Try to keep up to date with the assignment requirements. If you do get behind, negotiate with the lecturer for an extension before the due date.
- Ask a Learning/Study Skills Adviser or a fellow student to read your paper critically before you hand it in.
- If you are unsure about lecturers' comments on essays, ask for further feedback.

**“...I found myself spending most of my time rewriting and revising my written work in order for it to make any sense at all. I found completing 2500 word essays a nightmare and spent many long hours, sometimes until dawn, deciphering masses of material, which was exhausting. In retrospect, this has made me extremely organised and methodical...”**

## Spelling

**“...Word meanings and spelling are my greatest problems. Many people have helped to correct and untangle my spelling and make sense of my sentences. I have no doubt that I will be carrying the dictionary around for ever and asking, ‘How do you spell that word again?...”**

Many students with a learning disability have spelling difficulties. It might be reassuring to remember that 85% of English words are phonetically regular, that is each letter corresponds to a sound. (For example, **mat, sand, plastic, novelty.**) many of the more difficult words are international imports, the Turkish **yoghurt** or French **rendezvous** - they follow a different spelling pattern.

- Many words that are difficult to spell contain a smaller word that will help you remember the longer word. For example:
  - **IRON** is part of the env**IRON**ment
  - It was a co**LOSS**al **LOSS**
  - They were **WED** on a **WED**nesday
  - You **GAIN** when you find a bar**GAIN**
  - Use a **BUS** in **BUS**iness

See if you can apply this technique to these words: **peasant, minute, determine, illustrate, villain, permanent and height.**

- A useful spelling pattern to be aware of: when the sound is **ee**, **I** comes before **E** except after **C** (believe, relieve, conceive, receive).
- Another useful spelling pattern is short vowels precede double consonants, for example, ‘TV stations like **stopping slipping sliding ratings**’.
- To remember the difference between **affect** and **effect** use **RAVEN** Remember, **Affect** Verb, **Effect** Noun.
- Many people have trouble spelling **separate** and **relevant**. Can you see a **rat** in **separate** and that **relevant** ends in an **ant**?
- Some words are confusing because they sound the same but are spelt differently. Here are some ways to remember the differences:
  - principal or principle? The school **principal** is your **pal**
  - stationery or stationary? You use **stationery** for a letter
  - their or there? There is the opposite of here
- Highlight in colour the problem areas of words (**aCCoMMoDate, sepArAte**), attach a list to your study wall and refer to it when writing assignments.
- Keep a personal dictionary for words you have trouble reading or spelling and include specialist vocabulary for your subject area. Keep this handy so you can revise and test yourself frequently. Try to find ways of using new vocabulary appropriately in discussions and written work.
- The use of a computer spell check facility will be vital if you have difficulty spelling. Remember though, it may suggest similar but incorrect alternatives and won’t distinguish between words such as **their** and **there**, **stationery** and **stationary**, or **practice** and **practise**. Hence it will also be necessary to get someone to proofread your work. When you check your work, do a separate edit for spelling.

- A good way to remember **practice/practise** is to think of **advice/advise** or **device/devise**. The rule is the same but because they sound different it's easier to pick.
- **TextHELP** offers online support for people with dyslexia and learning difficulties. It can vocalise words that are difficult to read, provide word prediction in sentences (that is, it can complete and make suggestions) and uses a spell checker designed to correct typical dyslexic spelling mistakes.

Find **TextHELP** online at:  
<http://www.loriens.com/>

## Maths

If you have difficulties with numbers or calculation, you may prefer not to enrol in a Maths course, however, you may still need some maths skills. For example, Statistics is a requirement for some Social Science courses.

- Devise a list of steps to follow in problem-solving tasks.
- Put the problem into diagrammatic form if possible.
- Use graph or lined paper for all your calculations.
- Use a calculator for simple operations.
- Use estimation to check the probability of your answers.
- Pay attention to details such as decimal points and the placement of numbers, particularly zeros in operations. Be careful when 'carrying' numbers.
- Remember always to use the common sense test - estimate the likely answer.

## Exam Preparation

**Early and regular revision is the most important factor in exam preparation.**

- A regular review of course material throughout the semester is one of the best ways to remember material. Block out regular times in your weekly timetable to review lecture notes and other reading.
- Draw up a study schedule about 4 weeks before the exams. Allow time for each subject and extra time for subjects you find difficult. You may have to give up some other activities to allow extra time for study.
- Select relevant material for revision: use lecture and tutorial notes, course outlines, material revised in final lectures and past exam papers (if available) to do this.

- Find out about the format of the exam and adjust your revision to suit. Will you be required to answer multiple choice questions, write short answers or longer essays. If essays are required, you should practise planning and writing answers to possible questions. Multiple choice exams will require recognition abilities and therefore close attention to details when studying.
- Test yourself: practise writing answers under timed, simulated exam conditions. Check answers with the help of other students, lecturers or texts.
- It is difficult to remember things you don't understand, so concentrate on understanding first. Ask lecturers or tutors for an explanation of anything you don't understand.
- Find different ways to understand, organise and remember material - use visual prompts such as mind maps, sketches, flow charts and diagrams to help remember the relationship between ideas; use highlighter to emphasise important points. Summarise lecture notes and reduce these to key words. Recite material aloud.
- When your revision is under way, form a study group or work with a partner to discuss course material and help prepare for exams. This will help you anticipate the various ways questions could be asked. Tape these sessions for further revision.
- Reward yourself for completing a set amount of study.
- Athletes psych themselves up for an important race by visualising themselves succeeding. Similarly, you can practise in your mind what you wish to accomplish. Try to think only positive thoughts: you know you are well-prepared and will do your best.
- Preparing for and sitting exams can be very demanding and you need to be physically fit to perform well. Allow time in your daily routine for exercise, relaxation, healthy meals and enough sleep. This will help keep stress to manageable levels as well.

## **Sitting for exams**

- Consider requesting accommodations such as extra time or the use of a reader or scribe. Alternative arrangements will take time to organise, so discuss your needs early with your DLO.
- Don't rush to start - read the paper slowly and carefully and make sure you understand what is required. When you're nervous it is easy to misread instructions.
- Check which questions are compulsory and which are optional and how many must be answered in total.
- Plan the approximate time you need to spend on each question (according to marks allocated) and then stick to this.
- Attempt questions you are best able to answer first to gain confidence.
- Write down any names, dates, formulas and so on, so you don't worry about forgetting these.

- Highlight important words in questions such as **analyse**, **discuss**, **define**, and **compare** and be sure of the meanings of these direction words.
- Write a simple plan: a brief outline of major points, minor points and examples.
- Leave a space between paragraphs in essay questions so you can come back and add in structural cues such as linking words or topic sentences
- Don't spend more than the allocated time on a question. For example, if you only answer **3** out of **4** questions, each worth the same marks, then you automatically lose **25%** of the marks.
- If you run out of time, use point form to indicate to the examiner what you intended to write.
- To relieve anxiety during an exam, take a deep breathe and as you let the air out slowly and quietly, say **RELAX** to yourself and feel the tension flowing out of your body.
- Allow time at the end of the exam to check for problems such as confused or ambiguous sentences, gaps in answers or spelling errors.
- If you have trouble with a question, try translating it in another way. Substitute a theory for a practical example, put a numerical problem into words or put a written question into your own words.
- If your results are not what you expected, find out from the lecturer where marks were lost. This will help you improve your performance next time.

## Memory Enhancement Techniques

In exams you will often need to recall facts and lists of items. According to Tony Buzan, author of **Use Both Sides of Your Brain**, people are more likely to attend to and remember something if it moves, is colourful, imaginative, exaggerated or absurd. Try singing or chanting a list of items you want to remember. Make links between information and other substitute words and visuals (usually the more bizarre the association the better the retention).

- For example, to remember that the symbol for potassium is **K**, imagine a **Kitchen** with a **pot** in it and that the symbol for lead is **Pb**, imagine a **plumber** with a **lead** pipe.

## Mnemonics

Sometimes it is possible to remember things by using special tricks at the time of learning them. Using initial letters will help you recall facts and the order of items. Associate the first letter of words to form another word.

- To remember the five forms of energy transformation, the word **McHales** is useful (mechanical, chemical, heat, atomic, light, electrical, solar).
- **Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally** will help you recall the order of operations in equations (**P**arentheses, **E**xponent, **M**ultiplication, **D**ivision, **A**ddition, **S**ubtraction).

Mnemonic phrases can also help you remember information: Do you know these?

**In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.**

**Thirty days hath September, April, June and November...**

**I before E except after C.**

Visit a **Memory Techniques** website at:  
<http://www.mindtools.com/memory.html>

## **HOW CAN YOUR UNIVERSITY HELP**

### **Accommodations**

**Accommodations** are appropriate adjustments to the learning environment that help to reduce the effects of your disability and make it easier to study. You will need to contact your Disability Liaison Officer as early as possible, preferably before your course starts, to discuss your requirements. Here are some accommodations that you could consider requesting.

#### **For Exams:**

- extra time, a seat close to the front, an alternative quieter venue, the use of a reader or a tape-recorded exam, larger print papers
- alternative methods for **recording exam responses**: orally, on tape, use of a lap top, use of a scribe
- **alternative assessments** such as short answer questions instead of multiple choice, or an additional assignment instead of an exam
- use of **aids** such as dictionaries, spell checks and calculators.

#### **For Lectures:**

- provision of a note-taker, tape recorded lectures.

#### **Other accommodations:**

- assignment extensions
- audio tapes of texts
- use of a reader or scribe
- voice recognition software
- extended library loans
- use of coloured paper for printed material, including exam papers and response booklets.

## **Do I have to Disclose my Disability to Receive Help?**

Many of the strategies in this booklet can be implemented without disclosing your disability. However, lecturers and other support staff will need to understand your disability and how it affects your study if they are to provide additional accommodations. Some students make arrangements for accommodations with the support of the Disability Liaison Officer; others prefer to approach lecturers directly and discuss their needs. You will find that most lecturers and support staff are understanding and will provide what you ask for.

## **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**

If you have a disability, you have rights under the **Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act** and **State Equal Opportunity** legislation. This means you are entitled to ask for **accommodations** so that you can participate in your chosen course.

Make sure that you provide feedback to your lecturers or your DLO if you feel that your needs are not being met. If you are still not satisfied with what is being provided, you should enquire about how you can make a complaint through your institution's internal procedures.

If you have gone through this process and are still not satisfied, you can take the matter to the **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)**. HREOC has a web page at:

**<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/>**

You can access the **Disability Rights** section at:

**[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/index.html)**

The Disability Law Advocacy Service can assist you with this.  
Ph: 03-9602 4877 (in Victoria).

The publication: **A User Guide to the Disability Discrimination Act** can be obtained from Villamanta Publishing Service, Ph: 03-5229 2029 (in Victoria).

**“...Education is very important. To be granted the opportunity to learn is a gift and an ongoing challenge for some of us. I suppose I have never taken it for granted precisely because of my disability. Education has given me the personal power to make something of my life. I may not write like a poet or best-selling author, but I love learning, reading and writing...”**

## RESOURCES

A list of peak bodies and peer support groups can be found in the White Pages under **Disability Services and Support Organisations** or via the Internet at:  
<http://www.whitepages.com.au/>

Many students find online resources very useful and easy to access. This list should help you get started in using electronic and print resources. Ask your librarian for assistance too.

To help you get started using the Internet, you may wish to try out:  
**Surfing the Net Tutorial** at:

<http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/lcd/Nettute.html>  
and

**Some Hot links for Online Research** at:

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/lsu/researchonline.html>

### Electronic Sources and Support Organisations

#### **Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities (ADEC)**

Provides advocacy, education, training and information for people with disabilities from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Ph: 03-9388 1613

#### **Alternative Assessments for Students with Disabilities**

<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book1.html>

#### **Association of Graduates who have a Disability**

Ph: 03-5227 1427

#### **The Directory of Disability Information and Resources for the Education Community - Tertiary (DIRECT)**

<http://direct.deakin.edu.au>

#### **Disability Information Network Australia (DINA)**

<http://avoca.vicnet.net.au/~dina/>

#### **Disability Information Resource Centre (DIRC)**

<http://www.dircsa.org.au/>

#### **Dyslexia - The Gift**

<http://www.dyslexia.com/>

### **A Guide to Students with Learning Disabilities**

<http://www.anu.edu.au/secretary/disabilities/book2.html>

### **Learning Disabilities Links**

Useful resources for learning disabilities software

<http://www.dyslexia.com/links.htm#comp>

### **Print-Alternative Information Service of Australia (PAISA)**

Provides a telephone reference service for people with print disabilities. Information is provided over the phone or in standard print, alternative formats or e-mail.

Ph: 03-9521 3400 or 1800 335588 (toll free)

### **Regional Disability Liaison Unit (RDLU)**

<http://www.deakin.edu.au/extern/rdlu/>

Ph & TTY: 03-9244 5102

### **Specific Learning Difficulties Association of Victoria (SPELD)**

Provides a range of services including referral to psychologists for assessment and trained tutors for individual help.

Ph: 03- 9489 4344

### **Study Skills**

- ***Unilearning: Learning Resources for University Students***

<http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/unilearning/welcome.html>

- ***Resources for Writers***

***Owl Handouts: An Outline of All the Documents***

An excellent resource for study and writing topics

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/writers/by-topic.html>

### **Tertiary Initiatives for People with Disabilities (TIPD)**

<http://www.qut.edu.au/pubs/09other/tipd/tipdhome.html>

### **Voice Recognition Systems**

<http://www.iglou.com/vrsky/index.html>

### **Books**

Arnaudet, M. L. & Barrett, M. E. (1984). **Approaches to academic reading and writing**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Bates, D and Sharpe, P. (1990). **Student writer's handbook: How to write better essays.** Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Birch, N. A., Rothery, M. & Waltrowicz, C. (eds) (1998). **Making it happen: A resource book for people who have a disability and who are considering post-school options.** Melbourne: RDLU.

Buzan, T. (1995). **Use your head.** London: BBC Books.

Clanchy, J. & Ballard, B. (1991). **Essay writing for students: A practical guide.** Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

**Collins Cobuild English Dictionary** (1995). London: HarperCollins

Leech, G. (1989). **An A-Z of English grammar and usage.** Watson-on-Thames, Surrey: Nelson.

Marshall, L. & Rowland, F. (1993). **A guide to learning independently.** Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

McEvedy, M. R. (1996). **Learning grammar in context: A focus on written expression.** Melbourne: Nelson.

McLean, P. , Bruce, G. & Powell, J. (1996). **Learning disabilities in higher education** [kit of pamphlets for students with LD and staff]. Melbourne: DEETYA.

Orr, F. (1997). **How to pass exams.** Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. (1991). **Writing Academic English** (2nd ed.). NY: Addison Wesley.

Turney, C. & Teo, R. (1994). **A guide to successful transition to university: You can make it!.** NSW: Sydmac Academic Press.