

# **Towards Success in Tertiary Study Logo**

## **with Acquired Brain Injury**

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The **Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series web address is at:  
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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 Acquired Brain Injury. 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 Acquired Brain Injury**

Because people who have a brain injury often appear healthy and fully recovered, others are not always aware of the difficulties which arise from permanent damage to brain function. Acquired brain injury (ABI) may have resulted from an accident, poisoning, stroke, brain tumour, infection or lack of oxygen. A brain injury can affect a person's short-term memory and their ability to concentrate and solve problems. It can also lead to fatigue, a lack of motivation and a tendency to become self-centred. Most improvements in functioning take place in the first six months after injury; progress after this can often be quite slow. Some people with ABI have been students prior to their injury and many re-enrol after a period of recovery. Others will be taking up tertiary study for the first time.

Though tertiary study with ABI 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.

## **HOW DOES ACQUIRED BRAIN INJURY IMPACT ON STUDY?**

You might find it useful to explain to friends and lecturers that the effects of a brain injury can be serious (particularly in the early weeks and months) and can affect the ability to study in different ways. Some of the possible effects on study include:

- difficulty remembering things and learning new information
- difficulty reasoning and problem solving
- difficulty organising time; more time required to complete tasks
- difficulty setting goals, working out priorities and completing work
- easily distracted
- slower rate of information processing
- difficulty managing many tasks simultaneously

- tendency for linear or rigid thinking
- main points of lectures, articles, discussions may be missed
- speech problems; difficulty finding the right words
- physical problems: dizziness, headaches, fatigue, pain, or epilepsy
- visual perception problems
- fine motor control and other co-ordination problems
- possible social difficulties: may misread situations and respond inappropriately
- possible impulsive or disruptive behaviour
- possible feelings of low self-esteem, depression or anxiety.

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>

**“...I was in year 10 when I had my accident. I fell off my horse and my injuries were a sustained closed head injury, collapsed lung and my right side was paralysed. I was in a coma for two and a half weeks, hospital for five weeks and rehabilitation for three months. They said I’d never be able to write again along with other negative feedback. But I’m at uni now and the only major problems I still have are memory problems. I also get headaches and I get tired easily...”**

## **STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY**

University is an adult learning environment where you will be expected to be responsible for your own progress as an independent learner. To do this you need to understand how you learn, organise and remember information. Knowing your preferred learning style and therefore what works best for you is an excellent start to successful study.

Ask your Disability Liaison Officer for the booklet: **Discovering Your Learning Style in the Towards Success in Tertiary Study** series to learn more about adapting study techniques to your particular learning style.

**Explore your Options**

Before you commence study:

- Talk to other students who are studying courses that interest you.
- Investigate courses that require less memorisation of material and less need for abstract reasoning.
- Explore options such as bridging or TAFE certificate courses that can lead or be credited towards university degrees.
- Consider part-time study; this would give you a chance to become used to university life without the pressure of a full-time load.
- Talk to a Careers Adviser or Course Co-ordinator so that you choose a course that capitalises on your strengths.

**“...When I began studying again after my accident, I began in the off-campus mode - that is by correspondence. This meant I didn't have to rush around and be at a certain place at a certain time. Being tired is a big problem for me, so this was a good choice...”**

## **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**

At university, it is up to you how you organise your time. 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.

- It will probably take you longer than other students to complete tasks, so begin early: last minute cramming is a luxury you probably can't afford.
- Draw up a semester timetable; this will give you 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 diagram). Because people often react to things as they occur, valuable time is spent on relatively unimportant things (see quadrant 3 and 4). To avoid procrastinating, he recommends discipline and the need 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 and 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. 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.

<b>ITEMS</b>	<b>PRIORITY</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>PROGRESS</b>
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. Your Learning/Study Skills Adviser 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?
- Completing a large task can sometimes seem overwhelming and the tendency is to want to put it off. If you break the task into smaller mini jobs and attach deadlines, then it will appear more manageable and 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 and handouts 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. Devise your own colour-code system and use it for files, timetables, highlighting texts and so on.

## Getting started

- It is usually best to work in a quiet study environment free from distractions. It needs to be a place where you can leave your books out so you can return to them later.
- 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, you may need to consider alternative study venues, such as a library.
- Use prompts to get yourself started: ask someone to remind you, write yourself a note about when you intend to study, or use an alarm to remind you to start studying.

- Study demanding material when you are most alert. For most people, the best time to attempt tasks requiring precision and sustained attention is in the morning.
- Associate sitting at your desk with serious study and start work immediately. Lying on your bed to study, or sitting on the floor next to the heater may well put you to sleep.
- Establish a predictable routine. This will help reduce the load on your memory. You could start each session by revising your lecture notes. 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.
- Work on the most important task first. Ask yourself: what is the best use of my time right now?
- Before leaving your desk, briefly note what you intend to start on in the next session.
- 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 with ABI find studying for short periods with frequent breaks works best. Try to gradually extend the amount of time between breaks.
- 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.
- Introduce one idea at a time and don't try to work on several things or to take in too much at once.
- Try to keep your attention on the task. If your attention wanders, remind yourself to concentrate or ask someone to help you do this.
- **Reward** yourself for studying and for completing tasks - large rewards for significant goals, small for smaller ones. You could watch your favourite TV program, or meet a friend for dinner or indulge in a Mars bar or two. Gradually increase the effort required to gain a reward.
- Play gentle, rhythmic music quietly in the background while you're studying (try Baroque composers such as Bach, Vivaldi and Corelli). This produces a state of calm relaxed alertness ideal for concentration and comprehension.
- 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.

**“...If I planned my time properly and took a break when I needed one, I was able to overcome headaches and tiredness. But if I tried to study for too long I paid for it with increasing pain and then the self-doubt would start to surface again...”**

- 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.
- A small dose of daydreaming can be beneficial: remember why you took up study in the first place and imagine yourself on graduation day.

**“...Although going to uni may be thought of as daunting by some, I have found it an excellent environment in which to further my brain’s rehab. This is due to you being surrounded by people who are learning, people who are teaching, books, libraries and computers, the Internet and so on. One skill I did need to learn again was that of time management. Imagine telling a head-injured person that they have to have a 2000 word essay done by the weekend!...”**

## **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. You may feel embarrassed if you do or say something that is not quite right and someone laughs or criticises you.

Extreme levels of stress will prevent you from studying effectively. If you find yourself in this situation, consider options such as seeing your university counsellor or doing a stress reduction course.

Suggestions for dealing with stress:

- Try to reduce other activities that are not essential 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.
- 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.
- Stay healthy by getting enough sleep, eating nutritious food and getting some daily exercise.
- Many students find meditation, yoga or listening to relaxing music helpful in reducing stress.
- Find some 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 many other staff in tertiary institutions who provide support for students with disabilities:

- The Disability Liaison Officers can act on your behalf and arrange accommodations and equipment to suit your needs.
- The 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 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.
- The Counsellors can help you to understand the effects of your injury and to cope with problems such as low self-esteem, depression, anger or anxiety.
- The Ministers provide pastoral care and personal and spiritual support.
- The Student Union Welfare or Education Officers can answer questions about a range of campus matters, including academic rights.
- The 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.

**“...When I started I registered at the Disability Resource Centre on my campus. They have been excellent. They helped me negotiate extra time for my assignments, a longer time for examinations, and for me to be able to do my exams off-campus and use a computer...”**

## Other Suggestions

- It's important to become involved in 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 feelings and share experiences with others in a similar situation. Computer discussion lists can be accessed at all times of the day and night.

Check out **e-mail discussion lists/groups resources** websites at:  
<http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html>  
and  
<http://tile.net/>

## Negotiating to Meet your Needs

Acquired brain injury is a hidden disability and many people at university may have little idea of what the problems for a student might be. They are not necessarily ill-willed, but may lack appropriate information and you might have to explain your particular needs.

**“...It took me until my third year of university to seek help. That was one of the biggest mistakes of my life! Help is there and you need to make the most of it. Different forms of assessment can be arranged and people are really understanding when you explain your problem...”**

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.

**“...After a while, the fact that you have a head injury becomes irrelevant and unnoticed. Everyone is far too busy with his or her studies to be concerned about your performance. So fellow students do not pay that much attention to you. However, that is not to say that you cannot get help if you need it...”**

## **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.

Suggestions for dealing with lectures:

- It is important to 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.
- Before a lecture, review the notes from the previous lecture. Also read suggested texts and 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.  
What is the topic mainly about?

How does this relate to last week's lecture?

What is the lecturer's view on this topic?

What are the main points?

What further reading has the lecturer suggested?

- Leave plenty of space for later additions or comments and don't try to take down every word - use words and phrases rather than sentences.
- As soon as possible 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. Ask to photocopy other students' notes (and share yours). Two people listening to the same lecture always glean different information.
- Listen to the tape if the lecture or tutorial was taped to help reinforce new material.
- Ask in tutorials for an explanation of anything you don't understand.
- 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 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.

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 the 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; they may also be able to suggest less complex texts. Don't forget to break reading into manageable sections.

**“...Because of memory problems, I needed to be far more organised so that I had plenty of time to read and then re-read...”**

- If you read slowly, or find reading difficult, organise for 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 help 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 all bibliographic information, including page numbers, as you take notes to save time looking for this later.
- Avoid the temptation to take too many notes. Use coloured highlighters to mark relevant material in your own texts and photocopies. (For example, use 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 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; watch a play or documentary.

## Writing

- Read assignment instructions carefully and ask lecturers to clarify any points you are unsure about. Note the number of words required; this will give you an idea of the scale of the essay. Are you sure about what key words mean? An essay topic which asks you **discuss** an issue requires a different approach from one where you must **justify** a point of view or **summarise** a body of information.

**“...One of my problems was my failure to fully comprehend the essay questions I was asked to do. So I called in at Student Services and spoke to one of their Advisers. From that visit I found out exactly what the term ‘critically analyse’ meant - and how to answer it too!...”**

- 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.edu/ACES100/Mind/>

- Construct a written plan. This will provide a framework for paragraphs and give you some direction. Your plan can be revised after further research.
- 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 first draft.
  - 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 types 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 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.
- Build up a specialist vocabulary for your subject area by keeping a personal dictionary in which you enter words you have trouble reading or spelling. Revise these words frequently. The use of a computer spell check facility will be vital if you have difficulty spelling. Remember though, it may suggest a similar but incorrect alternative and won't distinguish between

words such as **their** and **there**, **stationery** and **stationary**, or **practice** and **practise**.

- Use a Thesaurus 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.
- 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.

## **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. Summarise lecture notes and reduce these to key words or diagrams for easier recall of material.
- Find out about the format of the exam and gear your revision to suit. Will you be required to answer multiple choice questions, write short answers or longer essays? For example, if essays are required, you should practise planning and writing answers to possible questions 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. Ask lecturers or tutors for an explanation of anything you don't understand.
- Space your revision and don't try to take in too much in one session.
- Find different ways to understand, organise and remember material - use visual prompts such as mind maps, sketches, flow charts and diagrams to help you remember the relationship between ideas; use highlighter to emphasise important points; listen to information you have taped; 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.

**“...I used a voice-activated dictaphone to help me study. I could speak into it while I was studying and have a record of the session for listening to again later. It was far better than carrying paper and pen everywhere...”**

- 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 the marks allocated) and then stick to this.
- Answer questions you are best able to first to gain confidence.
- Write down any names, dates, formulas and so on, so you don't have to 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 consisting of a brief outline of major points, minor points and examples.
- 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.

- Allow time at the end of the exam to check for problems such as confused or ambiguous sentences, gaps in answers or spelling errors.
- To help relieve anxiety during an exam, take a deep breathe and let the air out slowly and quietly. As you breathe out, say **RELAX** to yourself and feel the tension flowing out through your finger tips.
- If your results are not what you expected, find out from the lecturer where you lost marks. 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. To remember 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 (**Parentheses, Exponent, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction**).

Mnemonic phrases can also be helpful. 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.**

<p>Visit a website on <b>Memory Techniques</b> at:  <a href="http://www.mindtools.com/memory.html">http://www.mindtools.com/memory.html</a></p>
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## HOW CAN YOUR UNIVERSITY HELP

### Accommodations

**Accommodations** are appropriate adjustments to the learning environment that help to reduce the impact 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.

Accommodations that you could consider requesting include:

**For Exams:**

- extra time; a seat close to the front; an alternative quieter venue; the use of a reader or a tape-recorded exam
- 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 and spell checks.

**For Lectures:**

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

**Other accommodations:**

- assignment extensions
- audio tapes of texts
- use of a reader or scribe
- extended library loans.

## **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 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.

**“...I let all the teaching staff know of my condition. I showed them my Headway card and was consequently given all the help I required. People with a brain injury are usually reticent about telling others of their condition. I used to be like this but have come to realise, if you don't ask, you don't get. Anyway, what are they going to do? Sack me? All my lecturers were pleased I was making the effort and were more than willing to help...”**

## **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)

**“...In summary, I have found on campus study a great aid to the brain's rehabilitation and have had all the help I have needed or requested. There are many people with disabilities on my campus, so don't regard going to uni as a big issue. You simply become another face and are unnoticed. ...If you look at the workings of the brain; it is so complex and we don't understand it. Therefore, we all have capabilities we are unaware of. Going back to study uses some of them. We can literally do anything. When I said I was going to university people looked at me in disbelief. Imagine my satisfaction when in one year's time I invite them to my graduation and then show off my degree!..”**

## **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. Ask your librarian for help to use electronic resources.

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/ldc/Nettute.html>

and

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

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

## **Electronic resources 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/>

### **Epilepsy Foundation of Victoria**

The foundation acts as an information, education and referral point.

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

Ph: 03-9813 2866 or 1800 134 087 (toll free)

**Headway Victoria** is an advocacy and information service for people with ABI and their families and carers. It has a network of support groups throughout Victoria and a comprehensive library of books, articles and videos on ABI.

<http://yarranet.net.au/organisations/headway.htm#About>  
Ph: 03-9429 7044

**The Independent Living Centres in Australia in your state**  
<http://www.iinet.net.au/~ilcwa/ilc.html>

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

Provide 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

## 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***  
Excellent resource for study and writing  
<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>

## Books

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.

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

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

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

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

