

Towards Success in Tertiary Study Logo with Psychiatric Conditions

such as:

- **Mood-related disorders (depression, bi-polar)**
- **Anxiety-related disorders (phobias, panic, generalised anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive)**
- **Eating disorders (anorexia nervosa, bulimia)**
- **Psychoses (early psychosis, schizophrenia)**
- **Substance-related (alcohol, drug, toxin)**
- **Impulse control (gambling, conduct)**
- **Sleep-related disorders**
- **Personality disorders**

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

Contact your Disability Liaison Officer at your institution for information on alternative formats.

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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 experienced a mental health disorder or impairment. The strategies included here, bring together the experiences of many students and staff and support organisations. This booklet also builds on existing resources, both print and electronic media.

Studying with a psychiatric condition

Almost all students experience stress, motivation problems and concentration lapses at some stage of their secondary or tertiary study career (study is a stressful occupation!). Not all of these students have a psychiatric condition, and conversely, not all of those who have a diagnosed mental disorder find that their condition negatively impacts on their ability to study.

Many students find however, that their mental health, and the effects of any medication they are taking, can affect **thinking** processes (including memory and concentration), **behaviour** (impulsiveness, hyperactivity and fluctuating energy levels), **perception of reality** (hearing voices), **affects** (anxiety, frustration, phobias) and **judgement and insight**.

HOW DOES A PSYCHIATRIC CONDITION IMPACT ON STUDY?

Mental health disorders affect ability to study in many different ways and it's important to note that for some students, there are no (or minimal) negative effects on study and the strategies used prior to diagnosis will still work well. Keep in mind though, university study is an adult learning environment in which you will be expected to be responsible for your own learning. The university year, is also much shorter than the secondary school year, yet there is a greater amount of material to be covered. Many students find too, that universities are large, potentially anonymous institutions. All of these factors can contribute to stress and can work against mental wellbeing.

Here are some of the ways mental health conditions can may impact on successful study:

- poor concentration when studying or during class
- difficulty maintaining motivation
- episodes of low confidence as a student

- poor memory
- anxiety about exams
- lower attendance
- episodes of difficulties with communication
- difficulties structuring and writing essays
- feeling unsafe or uncomfortable on campus
- problems in relating to other students or staff
- difficulties problem solving
- poor organisation skills
- not being able to express needs sufficiently
- feeling stressed out
- difficulties 'keeping it together' and sticking to goals
- difficulty meeting deadlines
- feeling misunderstood

Alongside the problems that may or may not arise, it is worth remembering the positives that come from your own unique contribution to the learning process. For example, the letters which make up the word schizophrenia also stand for: Specially Creative Highly Individual Zanily Outrageous Person (with) Highly Refined Emotions (in) Need (of) Individual Attention.

As you are probably very aware, your mental health may fluctuate over time, and recovery may take time and occur in many ways. You will find some experiences on campus will be positive while others may be a challenge. It is useful to remember the value of the 'educational journey' rather than focussing only on outcomes.

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

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDY

Each of us is an individual, and we all learn and think in different ways. Knowing your preferred learning style, and therefore what works best for you is an excellent start to successful study. Ask your Disability Liaison Officer

(DLO) for the booklet **Discovering your Learning Style** in the **Towards Success in Tertiary Studies** series.

Explore your options

It helps to know why you are going to study; having a clear idea of the objectives you want to achieve is an enormous boost to motivation. It is useful also, to remember that there can be different paths to the same goal and that sometimes alternative goals can be appealing.

"...I had wanted to do medicine since I was a little kid, but I was hospitalised just before my year 12 exams. I spent most of the following year recovering and stressing out about how to get the score I needed to get into the course I wanted. In the end I took Science; now I'm doing my PhD in genetics, loving it, and wondering what the heck I saw in Med..."

- Talk to other students who have completed or are studying courses which interest you.
- Remind yourself of your successes and achievements.

"...I was always top of my class at high school, I found it useful to remember that when things weren't going so well..."

- Consider studying by stages, for example a bridging course or TAFE certificate courses which can lead to a university degree.
- Think laterally; you might have missed out on that prestige course you had your heart set on, but other options (alternative uni courses or TAFE courses) can get you there through lateral entry (transferring part way through a degree). Some TAFEs and uni's have an arrangement whereby the TAFE subjects will be recognised by the university.
- On-line subject delivery modes may suit your needs and this could be something to look for when choosing your course.
- When choosing courses, check assessment methods (do you like continuous essay type assessments or exams?)

"...Do what you really like, otherwise it's a waste of time and energy"...

Ideas for getting started and keeping going

Here are some suggestions that you may find 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.

- Monitor your progress through a diary: write down what you are doing well and what not so well and what things have worked well.
- To avoid responding to events as they occur, and therefore not having time for urgent and important tasks, use prioritised lists and timetables.
- Utilise **SMART** goals (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ssignable, **R**ealistic and use a **T**ime frame). A **SMART** goal may be complete essay introduction, edit the reference list or even organise your study space. It would not be 'do essay on Marx'. If you have planned study time - make sure you always complete some task (even if the task you may have set out to do defeats you - achieve a goal (and tick it off your list). A lot of people who don't like lists and timetables have un-smart goals (and overly long, unrealistic lists!).
- Establish your study routine early; it does wonders for the confidence and means you get to the library books first!
- Prioritise, you can't do **everything**! 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.
- Develop an efficient filing system so that your notes, handouts and other material are well organised and you can find things quickly. Make use of clear labelling 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, texts and so on.
- Be in control of your life and studies instead of being taken by surprise by unmet deadlines and unexpected meetings (buy and use external planning aids like electronic diaries, paper diaries, whiteboards or planners).
- You need some insight into how you feel so you can accept and respect yourself. Be patient in discovering ways to achieve your goals. If you are mentally well, you will be better able to perform and complete your study.

Getting started

Most students will say that the hardest task is to actually get started. Many students develop a string of avoidance techniques (another cup of coffee, tidy the house, eat the last of the icecream in the fridge, ring a friend to see if they've started yet). If you recognise yourself in any of these examples, you might like to try some of the following suggestions:

"...Friends always knew when exams were close because the flat would be so tidy. Once I started it was OK, it's just that I seemed to find a million excuses not to start..."

- Organise a quiet, interruption-free zone (complete with 'Do Not Disturb' sign).
- Let others know your study schedule by keeping a copy on the fridge or on your study door (keeps well meaning naggers at bay!).
- Remember the '**10 minute con job**'. Tell yourself you will work for 10 minutes – getting started is the hardest part and you'll generally find you successfully 'con' yourself to keep going.
- Read through your notes at the end of each day; take no more than 20 minutes per lecture, and avoid the temptation to rewrite - underline, circle, add in some comments. Material you review in this way will stay in your memory more effectively and it ensures you have a regular daily task.
- Always start a task before dinner, even if it's only for a few minutes (otherwise you'll find a variety of excuses not to start after you're nicely relaxed by your evening meal).
- 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 stop an activity at a certain time and commence studying.
- 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.)

Keeping Going

There are always peaks and troughs in a study year - remember the ups when you're in the depths of a down. Here are some strategies other students have found useful to keep up the study momentum.

- **Focus** on what you have achieved, not what you have been unable to do.
- **Reward** yourself for completed goals (a Mars bar, a completely non-educational TV show or a movie with a friend).
- Your concentration span determines how long you can work. Some people find studying for short periods with frequent breaks works best. Try to **extend** the amount of time studied before you take a break.
- Telling someone you intend to study for a particular period of time will help to **reinforce** your good intentions.
- **Develop** a sense of identity and self worth; you are a person with talent and creativity aside from your university marks.

- **Maintain** a balance in your life between body, mind and spirit (go to the footy, watch TV, play squash - and DON'T feel guilty about time spent away from study. Successful students prepare their body as well as their mind.
- **Have** short, medium and long term goals, and don't forget it's OK to daydream occasionally about a long term goal like graduation.
- 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.

Dealing With Stress

Study is stressful! Unexpected situations often seem to happen when you least expect it, and not all of these will be easy to deal with (either because they are new or because of some bad experiences with similar situations earlier in life). Most students experience a range of feelings about campus life; some good, some not so good. You may or may not have enjoyed school, but university is very different so be prepared for some new experiences. It is a good idea to be realistic and prepare yourself to manage your emotions, so that you can get on with tertiary study and life successfully.

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

Some of the things that can contribute to stress include:

- lecturers may not be sufficiently flexible with timelines, or assessment
- assignments or essays may be extremely hard to write to your satisfaction
- feedback or marks from tutors may seem unfair or disappointing
- the campus itself may seem unpleasant, with parking or public transport difficulties, or the classrooms or cafeterias too big or too small
- worries about your safety on campus
- The course may give topics that trigger off reactions in you, or the course might go at a pace that's too fast
- the tutor may be late or absent, leaving times with no apparent structure
- your computer might crash at a critical moment, losing your assignment if you haven't backed it up
- you may miss some classes and fear you are falling behind and can't catch up.

A number of students find relating to others one of the most stressful aspects of studying. You may feel lonely when nobody approaches you. You may feel

judged by people, you may be affected too much by their feelings, or you may take things personally which were not meant that way. It may be hard to trust people, or they may let you down sometimes. You may feel pressured by other people (for example your family or your lecturer) or feel frustrated or even angry when people aren't as responsive or understanding as you expect them to be. You may feel distressed if someone is teasing you or asking lots of questions. You may feel embarrassed when you do something that is not quite right in the situation, or if others belittle you.

Some people feel bad or a nuisance when others don't tolerate them. Stigma, or unfair or discriminative treatment can be humiliating. This is why confidentiality is so important.

"...I wandered round for a week trying to avoid everyone because I hadn't handed in my assignment. When I saw the lecturer walking towards me I hid in the toilets. I felt a bit silly later because he had been trying to contact me to give me an extension..."

Some ways of coping with embarrassment:

- Talk it over with a counsellor or the Disability Liaison Officer (DLO).
- Remind yourself of your positive qualities.
- Remember that we are all free to choose who we like and dislike and that not everyone will like you.
- Work out what caused the feeling and whether the cause can be addressed.
- Ask someone to advocate for you if it is hard to confront the others yourself.
- Practice relaxation and positive self talk every day.
- Keep a journal and reflect on your progress.

"...Sometimes I'd feel uncomfortable because I felt people were staring at me. I found staff at the ...Unit were very friendly and they didn't mind me eating my lunch in their waiting room I felt at ease there and it sort of gave me confidence to face the rest of the day..."

Here are some suggestions for building resilience to stress:

1. **Recognise** what you feel.
2. **Soothe** and calm yourself, with your own resources, or find some supportive people or environment.
3. Try to **pinpoint** what is triggering negative feelings.
4. Work out how to **prevent** or minimise that trigger, and control your reaction. It is a good idea to do this with another person, like the university counsellors or a therapist.
5. **Practise** a positive attitude every day, even if for 5 minutes in the morning. Then use it at the first sign of something potentially stressful.

"...If I couldn't remember something in the exams and I felt the beginnings of a panic attack, I would imagine myself back in my room studying. Not only did it help me relax, I found that I would often be able to retrieve the information..."

Here are some other strategies to avoid stress, talk to the university counsellor for some more ideas :

- Ask for a quiet retreat or safe space .
- Take time off when you are feeling especially vulnerable.
- Know when to turn to others for support.
- Humour is one of the world's best stress relievers, so find opportunities to laugh and enjoy yourself.
- Exercise is good for everyone to reduce stress and will help you to work off energy in a positive way. Choose something you like doing and make it an essential part of your daily routine.

The first year is often the most stressful, and after that many students find they adjust to the study environment. It may be helpful to remember that most students feel stressed by their course at some time. If you are having difficulties, a sensible option may be to study part-time or by distance education. The important thing is to finish - an extra year is not important in the context of your total career plan.

Where to Look for Help and Advice

There are many staff in tertiary institutions who provide support for students with disabilities:

- Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) can act on your behalf and arrange accommodations and equipment to suit your needs.
- Learning/ Study Skills Advisers offer support in skills such as reading, writing and exam preparation.
- Library Staff offer introductory sessions on using the library efficiently and assistance in accessing information and using library adaptive technology.
- University health personnel are familiar with university procedures, and may be able to provide supporting documentation for your condition.
- Counsellors can help you with personal problems and other difficulties such as exam anxiety and motivation.
- Chaplains offer pastoral care and other personal and spiritual support.
- Student Union Welfare/Education Officers can answer questions about a range of academic rights and campus matters.

- 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.
- Peer support groups may exist on your campus (ask the DLO). Meeting with others who have had similar experiences and may be at different stages of their course can be really helpful.

"...It was good talking to someone who REALLY knew what I'd gone through..."

Other suggestions for avoiding isolation

The first year at a campus can be lonely for many students, including those with psychiatric conditions. It takes time to feel comfortable on campus, to get to know other students, to find out which staff are available and understanding. It can be hard for any student to reach out and meet others, but it may be harder for students with psychiatric conditions who may feel unsure of themselves or fearful of contact in case it is painful.

- Surround yourself with positive and supportive people.
- Cultivate friendships - virtual (on discussion lists and in support groups - choose one which will suit your style) and real!
- Join or form a study group - this also helps with maintaining friendships and exploring different study patterns.
- Investigate any faculty, departmental or Student Union Mentor, Buddy or Host schemes that may exist; these can often be great ways to link socially and academically with students or staff.

University campuses reflect broader society attitudes of the general public to mental health issues which can still be negative at times, although most students or staff on campus will be very understanding.

For information about e-mail discussion groups/lists and resources try these website:

<http://www.webcom.com/impulse/list.html>

<http://tile.net/>

Negotiating to Meet Your Needs

Mental illness 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 uncaring, but may lack appropriate information and you might have to explain your particular needs.

"...I want recognition that some of us march to the beat of a different drum; conforming to the beat of the conventional drumbeat can be overwhelmingly distressing..."

Be an active participant in 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 on issues and ask for support. Learn how to be an advocate for yourself; to ask questions and not necessarily accept the first answer.

Don't forget you can also talk to welfare officers at your Student Union.

One of the big differences between secondary school and uni or TAFE is that in an adult learning environment, it is **your** responsibility to follow up on issues or ask for support.

- Learn how to influence your environment to better suit your needs (see below for a list of suggested alternate accommodations).
- Be aware of the side-effects of any medications such as nausea, lack of concentration, dry mouth, drowsiness - then look at ways to overcome them (carry a drink bottle with you, schedule classes for times of the day you're at your best).
- Don't quit just because you're overwhelmed or worn out; talk to the DLO or a course co-ordinator first to discuss your options.
- Don't feel guilty if you decide to go part-time, it may be a sensible option which maximises your chance of eventual success.
- Develop assertiveness skills. Investigate available training programs through the Student Union. Remember **you** are your own best advocate!

"...I wouldn't have made it without the support of my family, best friend ... and of course my cat Finnegan!.."

Managing Gaps in Attendance

Because mental health conditions can flare up at times; some students may need some time off studies to recover. This may range from a few days to several months, or longer. You need to make careful arrangements so that your place in the course is maintained.

The first option is to try to reduce your other activities which are not essential. If you (or others) recognise some early warning signs of extreme stress or another episode of illness, you can plan for some time off study to prevent a breakdown (find out how long you can be away from the course without penalty). Ask the Disability Liaison Officer for help in organising help such as:

- taping or notetaking of lectures
- copies of lecturers' overheads or notes
- assistance with book loans or returns
- additional tutoring
- negotiation of assessment timelines
- arrangements for formal deferral if required.

If you are not well enough to make decisions on what you need or want, ask for a 'Hold' on decision-making until you are able to. It is important to know the timelines for last date for refunds, deferment or incomplete work but sometimes these may be renegotiated or varied.

How long can I be away and still catch up ?

This varies, of course, with the course, your study load, and how well you feel. Some students say it's about four weeks but a few say it could be longer. Often a semester or mid-semester break helps in giving you extra time without falling too far behind, however, it is not easy to catch up fully if you have a full-time study load and have been away for a few weeks. If the course content is non-sequential, you may make up the work at a later time, but if the content is sequential, it will be hard to understand the later content.

What are the options if I can't catch up right now?

- Negotiate indefinite completion time or up to double time (for continuous assessment).
- Convert to self-paced or flexible delivery for missed subjects.
- Deferment.
- Withdraw from missed subjects (but consider Austudy/Youth Allowance workload requirements).
- Change course load to part-time.

If you haven't disclosed your psychiatric condition, this may be the time to do it, to get maximum course flexibility.

"...I wanted to wait until after I had proved myself but I have found the help in exams really useful. I get really stressed by exams but I'm able to sit in a room with only the supervisor and a couple of other students..."

Going on Fieldwork Placement

On Fieldwork placement, you will be trying out your new knowledge and skills in a real work environment. Your employer will be legally responsible for you and your work, including your and others' safety. Again, you need to decide whether to disclose your psychiatric condition, so that you could draw upon extra resources or accommodations if you need to. A good way to introduce your psychiatric condition is by mentioning stress in the past. Your Fieldwork co-ordinator may be able to suggest some accommodations to the employer (with your permission).

Remember that the first day or two are usually for observation or simple tasks.

Some tips:

- Don't be afraid to ask questions or repeat the question to know exactly what you are expected to do.
- Don't do anything you feel is unsafe.
- Find a mentor who can guide you through the tasks, gradually increasing the complexity of the tasks, and give you balanced feedback.
- If stressed, ask for a break or for the task to be broken down into smaller steps.
- Debrief with someone after the working day, even if on the phone.
- Mix with other workers at breaks if possible.
- Identify what you find hard and whether it is necessary to carry it out that way.
- Note what you can do well and put it into words (and on paper).
- Raise any issues or concerns you have with the DLO or someone else you trust so that any potential problems can be cleared up.
- Remember, if you can't carry out all the 'inherent requirements' of the job at this time, it doesn't mean that you won't be able to do so in the future, or that some employers can't redesign the job so as to make those requirements possible in the future.
- Think about what accommodations would make the job easier, and trial them if possible.
- Build support into the placement, for example telephone your support worker daily.
- Consider asking for a substitute activity if you can't stay in a placement comfortably.

Experiment with Different Study Techniques

Lectures and tutorials

Large group lectures can take a bit of getting used to. Many university classes can have 400 students with a different lecturer every week. This is in stark contrast to most year 12 classes which rarely have more than 25 students and are with students and teachers you have come to know very well. Tutorials are smaller and less formal and the tutor will usually try to involve the group in discussing issues.

Some advice 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.
- 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.
- Make sure you sit next to an aisle or an exit door so you can move about or go out for a break.
- Ask lecturers for copies of overhead transparencies or other material if concentration is a problem.
- To maintain concentration during lectures ask yourself questions:
 - ⇒ What is the topic mainly about?
 - ⇒ How does this relate to last week's lecture?
 - ⇒ What are the lecturers' views on this topic?
 - ⇒ What are the main points?
 - ⇒ What further reading has the lecture suggested?
- Spend an hour at the end of the day reading through the day's notes, adding information, circling and underlining important information and looking up unfamiliar vocabulary. In this way you make the notes your own, and material reviewed within 24 hours like this will be more readily remembered.
- 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 further explanation about anything you did not understand and for any missed information.

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Tutorials

While some people may look very confident, almost everyone reports feeling nervous about talking in tutorials for the first time. It may be hard at first to communicate among strangers, but you'll need to find a balance between contributing and listening to others. Some strategies for participation include asking questions such as "Do you mean that ...?" "Why do you think ...?". You can also paraphrase what someone has said or agree or disagree explaining why. If you get to know others in your tutorial you will find participation much easier. Ask a few students from your tutorial to discuss an essay assignment over a coffee.

In some subjects, you will be expected to prepare a tutorial topic, presenting your ideas in a short talk and then facilitating the discussion which arises from your presentation.

If you feel nervous about giving a talk in front of a group, you might find the following suggestions helpful.

- Write your talk out, leaving a column on the left to write key words and phrases. In this way you have the confidence of knowing how long your talk will take and the comfort of having something to fall back on, but you can focus on the key words when you give your talk so you avoid the pitfalls of reading.
- Practise your talk (even in the shower or in the car on the drive to uni).
- Dress for confidence (wear something you know you look good in).
- Have some questions prepared to facilitate discussion.
- Use overheads or powerpoint (apart from looking professional, it will help make sure your talk is well organised). Many students find it comforting to know that the audience is looking at a screen not them.
- Make sure you make eye contact with all your audience, but rest your gaze more often on people you feel comfortable with.
- Use breathing exercises to control anxiety.

Memory and Concentration

Some students find that 'information overload' is a side effect of university study. Additionally, your condition may induce short term memory loss and disassociation. Some medications affect memory and concentration spans too.

Here are some suggestions for dealing with short term memory loss:

- Keep a notepad in your pocket or purse to record useful comments or ideas. It's also handy for those nocturnal or bus-ride brainwaves.

- Take frequent breaks so that you don't overwhelm yourself with information overload.
- Relax! Remember that effective memory is based on understanding material first (studying when you're anxious makes this difficult.)

Here are some suggested memory enhancement techniques:

Word Association will help you 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 **K**itchen with a **pot** in it. To remember that the symbol for lead is **Pb**, imagine a **plumber** with a **lead** pipe.

Mnemonics will help you recall facts and the order of items. Associate the first letter of words to form another word. For example, to remember the five forms of energy transformation, the word **McHales** is useful (**m**echanical, **ch**emical, **h**eat, **a**tomic, **l**ight, **e**lectrical, **s**olar).

To remember when to use **affect** and when to use **effect** - **RAVEN** (**R**emember **A**ffect **V**erb, **E**ffect **N**oun)

Rhymes are also a good way to remember information:

In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue

Thirty days hath September....

Mind Maps can help you link ideas. Start off with the main topic in the centre 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 the ideas with arrows and circles.

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

One of the best ways to improve memory is to **review** material often. Use a small note book or cards you can carry in your pocket or purse (great to pull out when you're waiting for the bus).

Link information to be remembered with locations. For example, every time you enter the bookshop remember the 5 elements of ..., every time you enter the cafeteria remember Piaget's stages of child development

Visit some **memory techniques** websites at:
<http://www.mindtools.com/memory.html>
<http://stad.dsl.nl/~coach/memory.html>

Sitting for exams

The best advice for exams and assessment is to **be prepared** and leave plenty of time for revision or for assignment preparation.

"...When I was in year 12, I used to leave everything to the last minute, often staying up all night before an exam. Last semester I failed a subject because I overslept and missed the exam. This semester I'm a lot more organised..."

- You may be able to arrange for alternative exam formats (check with the DLO at least 5 weeks before the exam).
- Get a good night's sleep.
- If you need alternative seating or frequent breaks, ask to do your exam in an alternative environment.
- Don't rush in - take a slow, deep breath before starting a question.
- 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.
- Highlight important words in questions such as **analyse, discuss, define, and compare** and be sure of the meanings of these direction words.
- Plan your time in exams and stick to it (for example, if you go 5 minutes overtime for each of 4 questions you may run out of time for the 5th).
- Avoid exam post mortems ("you mean there was a question 6?").
- Reward yourself after each exam (VERY important when you have exams coming close together, you need to separate them so any good (or bad) vibes from one exam don't cloud the next).
- If your results are not what you expected, find out from the lecturer where you lost marks.

HOW CAN YOUR UNIVERSITY HELP?

You have a right to ask for **accommodations** or special arrangements which will make it easier for you to study. Some of the accommodations or course adjustments which other students have found useful include:

- waiving attendance requirements
- extended course completion time
- extended examination time
- notetaking or taping of lectures
- additional subject tutoring
- on-going counselling
- a co-ordinator to case manage your needs
- skills training such as study skills, time management, problem solving, memory
- assistance with application and selection processes
- class rules and administrative variations (such as more frequent breaks, priority queuing)
- quiet retreat area
- alternative topics or formats
- alternatives to group task requirements
- bridging programs in study skills.

Experimenting with Adaptive Technology

Your DLO may be able to help with the purchase of some hardware and software. Ask what's available in your library, the Study Skills Unit and Disability Liaison Unit.

- Are you really using all the advantages your computer can give you? A computer course may prove a time-saving investment.
- Think about how you can use files and folders on the computer to help sort or maintain control of ideas for an essay.
- Investigate concept map software (for example, **Inspiration** at <http://www.inspiration.com>) which can facilitate thinking and concentration..
- For postgraduate students, software such as **Endnote** can simplify potentially time consuming tasks like referencing.
- Would voice activated technology make your life easier?
- **Did you know** you can increase the size of the text on screen by using the zoom text facility in **Word** to reduce eye strain and fatigue?
- Investigate voice activated technology to reduce fatigue associated with writing.

Think about how **YOU** are affected by your condition and be creative in the solutions (not all solutions are complex or are expensive).

Do I Have to Disclose my Disability to Receive Help?

Many of the strategies in this booklet can be implemented without disclosing your illness. However your faculty or department will need to understand your illness and how it impacts on your study if they are to provide **special consideration**. You can always **partially disclose** by talking to your DLO. The DLO can then facilitate special consideration or accommodations while maintaining confidentiality about the precise nature of your illness. Some students like to make arrangements themselves while others prefer to have the DLO do this.

Advantages of disclosing a psychiatric condition include:

- obtaining access to services such as accommodations, adjustments to course, facilities and services
- being better understood and accepted
- getting more emotional support
- greater interest, care and follow-up from staff
- appropriate actions in difficult situations from staff
- receiving clear rights of non-discrimination
- not being seen as a **difficult** student
- receiving advice on advocacy.

Students who have chosen to disclose, give reasons such as:

"...I want people understand when I'm not myself..."

"...I'd rather be open..."

"...Sharing the problem relieves my anxiety..."

"...I think it's a way to help people understand mental illness..."

"...I want to pass and I see this as a fallback position..."

"...If anything goes wrong, staff need to know who to contact..."

It is a far from perfect world, however, and colleges are in many ways microcosms of the societies they are part of. Disclosure has not always resulted in increased understanding, however, nor have students always received the support they felt entitled to.

"...Some teachers felt obliged to make decisions for me and treated me differently..."

Despite the potential problems, many students still opt to disclose in order to obtain additional support.

"I could say nothing about my illness, but that doesn't help me, because I need some conditions in the course modified, and asking for that without disclosure is more difficult, otherwise teachers see it as privileges."

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. Use an advocate if you are feeling too weak or vulnerable to assert your rights effectively yourself.

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/>
and you can go straight to the **Disability Rights** section at:
http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/index.html

The **Disability Law Advocacy Service** can assist you as well 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), and information about disability rights can be viewed at the above websites.

RESOURCES

Many students have found online resources useful and easy to access. This list should help you get started at using electronic and print resources to achieve your study goals. Ask your librarian for assistance too.

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/>

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 check out

Some Hot links for Online Research at:

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

Electronic Resources and Support Organisations

PACE (Personal Assessment and Crisis Evaluation) clinic

(for a confidential personal assessment and crisis evaluation)

Centre for Adolescent Health, 2 Gatehouse Street, Parkville, Victoria.

Ph: 03 9625 1226

Alcohol and Drug Information Services

Ph: 131611

Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa Foundation of Victoria (Inc)

Ph: 03- 988 5 0318

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/>

Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC)

Addresses the needs of older adolescents and young adults with emerging psychotic disorders
35 Poplar Rd, Parkville, Melbourne
Tel: 03- 9342 2800
Fax: 03- 9387 3003

Friends Health Connection

(Online one-to-one customised peer support)
<http://www.48friend.org/index.htm>

The Independent Living Centres in Australia

<http://www.iinet.net.au/~ilcwa/ilc.html>

OZADVOCACY

Information dissemination and discussion list for people interested in disability rights in Australia

To subscribe send a message to listserv@maelstrom.stjohns.edu and in the body write:

subscribe OZADVOCAY your name

If you have any problems contact Ria Strong (strong@infoxchange.net.au)

Personal Emergency Services

Ph: 13 16 11

RDLU (Regional Disability Liaison Unit)

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

Ph & TTY: 03-9244 5102

Fax: 03- 9244 5104

SANE Australia

For help with mental illness

<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~sane/>

Ph . 03- 94824 387

Study Skills

- **Resources for Writers**

Owl Handouts: An outline of all the documents

Excellent resource for study and writing issues

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

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

<http://www.macarthur.uws.edu.au/ssd/unilearning/welcome.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.
- Wilson, P. (1995). **Instant calm.** Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin.