Questions and Answers

Online Learning – Study Guide

Academic Learning Strategies

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1. How best to organize the learning environment?

The space where we spend many hours of learning influences our ability to absorb information and our motivation to study. In normal times we have very little impact on the design of this space, we use spaces designed for the "average" learner. Learning via Zoom provides an excellent opportunity to organize for ourselves an ideal space for learning at home.

What is the purpose of a home learning space?

To create a calm, inviting and even fun learning atmosphere.

How do we do this?

First, we have to decide where at home we can study: Is the living room the only option or is there somewhere else we can set up? In the first case, we will delineate a specific part of the room and define it as a space to be used only for learning. Such a decision excludes the bed for example, making it out of bounds – it is an iron-clad rule that we do not study in bed and do not sleep on our desk. The desk and the area around it are now defined as a designated space for learning: for listening to lectures, writing papers, reading articles, organizing the school week – all academic activities will take place only here. Sounds tough? Perhaps, but think again about what it means to go to the IDC for a school day. Think about the natural separation between the IDC and home. This is exactly what we're trying to create in our personal living room, just without the traffic, parking problems or dependency on public transportation. Sounds like fun, no?

If necessary, you can use a portable or makeshift partition that will be a visible border between the different functions and make it easier for you to not be tempted to blur the separation.

If you can choose some other space, please define it as such in a manner that all the roommates agree to. Once you have defined the space – you should have free access to it.

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How will we design the space?

Make sure to have a comfortable desk – not too big (so it doesn't become a storage space or a shelf for anything we can't find a place for…), and not too small (that won't be comfortable for spreading out the learning materials: a computer or two? Exam booklet? Summary pages? A bowl of lentils or beans to play with while you listen to a lecture?). Pay attention to the desk's height: It should be such that it creates a 90° angle between your elbows and the work surface.

Make sure you have suitable lighting – if you can take advantage of the sunlight during the day do so; an open window might also provide ventilation and reduce the burden. If the learning space is somewhat dark, organize suitable lighting – place the lamp behind you so the light will shine from behind your shoulder. High intensity light that is reflected on the screen is tough on the eyes and could tire you and harm concentration. Be sure to set the lighting to the required intensity.

If you have a desk lamp please note – if you are right-handed, place the lamp on your left and vice versa.

Make sure to have a comfortable chair – supposedly, an innocuous item, but it plays an important role in the ability to sit for long. Make sure that the entire time you are seated your feet are flat on the floor, your thighs are parallel to the floor and your arms are at the right height in relation to the desk.

Wherever your personal learning space is, organize it so that when you choose to sit there – pleasure is guaranteed!

2. <u>**How best to watch a lecture or recording (if participation isn't mandatory)?**</u>

One of the advantages of online learning is the possibility of building a much more flexible schedule than possible when learning on campus.

Now that all the lectures are recorded and you can watch them anywhere and at any time you can explore what time of day is most convenient for you to study? Are you a morning, evening or night person? In which lessons is your online presence of added value? (you participate in the discussions, the material is of interest you, you are easily motivated to sit in front of the screen). These lessons will be the basis of your schedule.

You can decide when you prefer to watch the other classes.

Please note! This is a decision you can make once, at the beginning of the semester, allowing you to build an alternative but permanent schedule of recorded lectures. This schedule cannot be changed just as the online lectures cannot be changed. Once the schedule is set, it is binding.

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3. Should you study alone or in a group?

One of the disadvantages of online studies is the lack of social relationships in the learning process. Social aspects of learning have a significant role and in their absence the issue of studying in a group becomes all the more important. In these new conditions a study group becomes the significant alternative to company/socializing. The group is a social space of learning whose advantages are: the calm atmosphere and the sense of belonging that enables all members of the group to actively participate. In the group we can ask questions or provide answers, we can participate in the discussion and clarify – for yourself or for others – issues related to the studies through dialogue. Learning together creates higher levels of engagement with the materials and of motivation.

4. How to summarize a lecture

We have compiled several points for consideration to help you choose the method for summarizing lectures that is best for you:

What is the purpose of the summary? In other words – why bother or "what's in it for us"? Before we decide to summarize, we should clarify the purpose. We can distinguish between two goals: The first is focused on the process itself – the actual writing of the summary during the lecture, and the second is focused on the outcome – facilitating memory for future learning. The method of summary we choose will be different in each case.

What is more suitable for us – writing by hand or typing? Each of the options has advantages and disadvantages, and research on the topic doesn't offer an unequivocal conclusion as to which is preferable in terms of its contribution to enhancing knowledge (memory and comprehension). Writing by hand allows you to sketch and draw during the lecture, scribble and doodle, but it will be harder to file, conduct searches or use images and videos. Typing the summary on the computer makes all these possible, but it exposes us to social media and "disturbances" during the lecture. In addition, research shows that students who type tend to transcribe the lessons. Transcription is a passive form of learning and is therefore not recommended as a summarizing strategy.

What type of information do I need to summarize? There are roughly two types of information we summarize in lectures: Facts (for example, in history) and ideas and theories (for example, in psychology or philosophy). Of course, this is an artificial distinction and every subject has a different mix of the types of information. However, the choice of a method of summarizing will take into account the nature of the material we are summarizing.

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So, what should we pay attention to?

1. Whatever allows maximum concentration and the fewest disturbances.

2. Whatever prevents "auto pilot" transcription.

3. Whatever makes it possible to take advantage of images, tables or drawing and sketching.

And what are the methods of summarization?

1. **An outline or sequenced main points** – In this type of summary we will emphasize the main topics of the lecture and the sub topics related to each topic. Its advantage is that it requires thinking about the hierarchical relationship between the various issues the lesson deals with: What are the main topics? What do they comprise? What examples were used to illustrate each of them?

2. **The Cornell Method** – In the Cornell note-taking system we divide the page into four: At the top of the page we will note the topic of the lecture. In the center of the page we will write the lecture's main ideas, at the bottom of the page we will summarize these ideas (at home) and in the left-hand column we will write key sentences or questions – cues and clues to help us remember.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX-xshA_0m8

3. **Concept Mapping** – This is a graphic rendition of the material delivered in the lecture. It presents a visual network of ideas and concepts and the connections between them.

4. **Flow Method** – This method is the exact opposite of the methods based on hierarchical organization of the information presented in the lesson. In this method the information is organized as perceived by the learner. If this cannot be done simultaneously, that is while listening, you can make a regular summary and at the end of the lesson add a summary in the proposed method.

https://www.scotthyoung.com/learnonsteroids/KJdf342RK-09898JKBDSTDFnkquikPP3-Jan/FlowBasedNotetaking.pdf

5. **The Lazy Method** – In this method we will use the lesson's presentations to add information to. This way we maintain the sequence and the main points and the additions are a matter of choice. In this method too, presentations you can review before the lesson—and certainly after—are preferable.

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Recommended note-taking software: Evernote, OneNote, Notion

Recommended Software to organize materials for memorization:

Anki, Quizlet, RemNote

Recommended software to organize materials for in-depth understanding:

Roam and the Zettelkasten method:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOSZOCoqOo8

These help form deeper connections between the ideas presented in the lesson and the other lessons in the course, and between the various ideas in a specific course and other courses and articles.

5. Getting organized to write papers

There are two stages: preparations before writing, and the actual writing. Even though we cannot make a clear-cut separation, as interestingly enough, you prepare to write by writing… you should maintain the separation as a mental visualization of the entire process.

The preparation stage: Mark the due dates in advance on a monthly/weekly calendar – papers do not suddenly materialize. You can find the information on the syllabus of any and all courses that require a paper. Even if there isn't a specific due date, the assignment should still be on your ongoing to-do list and make sure to include it in your monthly/weekly work plan, even if it isn't due – just so you don't forget it and to make sure you aren't surprised.

Have you received the instructions for writing and the due date?

Organize a real or virtual space on the desk. Save all the information about the paper in one place: writing guidelines, ideas, articles, lesson summaries. Everything you need in one place only.

Choose a method to keep track of drafts and summaries of articles: in separate documents? Using the same format throughout? Using a highlighting marker? How do you save an important article you read for the paper?

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Please note the "PDF Alibi Syndrome" that is characterized by indiscriminately downloading of PDF files to a computer folder in the (usually unfulfilled) hope that we will read them. It is very easy to click on the keyboard and add another article to the folder. So easy and convenient and the abundance is tempting – every word in the title that seems relevant beckons us to download and there you have it – another article in the folder. The range of topics is broad and it's hard to withstand temptation. We simply want to have the article. But remember – downloading doesn't mean reading! Skimming also isn't reading that promotes writing. Before you click on the keyboard ask yourself: If obtaining the article was a bit more difficult – let's say it required going to the library and making a photocopy – would you still do it? If the answer is still "yes," then go ahead and click. If you're not sure, leave the article in cyberspace. You can always return to it.

Choose reference management software – Of course, if the scope of the paper is small you don't need such software. However, you should make sure to keep organized notes about the title of the article, the names of the authors, year and place of publication and write down the page numbers of ideas/summaries you wrote to make it easier to get back to them if needed. For papers of a large scope you should choose the software (free options – Zotero or Mendeley, or software for purchase – Paper or EndNote), learn how to use it and its advantages.

The writing stage:

Organizing your thoughts: You've finished reading, and your head is filled to the brim with information that will soon find its way to paper. Pause for a moment to organize your thoughts. Answer the following questions in clear and simple language:

- What do I actually want to say to the reader?

- What is the paper's main argument?

- What are my conclusions?

These are the outline of the paper, your roadmap, helping you focus on the objectives while you write.

Be clear: The clearer you are about what you're writing – the clearer it will be for your readers.

Clearly define the system of concepts and the theoretical framework of the paper. Simply put, what are you talking about and how?

Language and words are your tools, so make sure your sentence structure is clear and direct. Keep your sentences as simple as possible. Also explain the professional and complex concepts in simple language

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Be precise in conveying the information – keep the relevant and cut the immediate. If you want to say what you think – provide convincing reasons to explain why. The more you explain, the clearer you make things. However, please note – avoid unnecessary repetitions. Ask yourself: Could I have said the same in fewer words? Did I say something that I could have omitted?

Use the help of acquaintances / friends / colleagues – let them read and tell you what they think. If there is something they didn't understand, figure out how to improve the wording.

Don't be afraid to delete – using the 'delete' key will do wonders for the quality of your paper.

Proofread your papers before submitting them, and make sure there are no typos, language errors or other errors.

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