Strategies for effective learning

This guide will provide you with tips to support studying strategically, as well as techniques to check your understanding of the material you've learnt. We've organised this resource around the learning journey to help you decide which tips and strategies might work best for you.

# Prepare to learn

Let’s look at a few ways your learning environment can help you focus and get the most from your studies.

## 🌵 Cultivate a productive space

Whether you're learning on campus or online you should identify and use the spaces that help you to stay focussed. Choose a space that fosters a relaxing learning environment, so you can enjoy the process of revisiting and retaining information. Set up your workspace ergonomically, if you're using screens, be sure to have them the right height for you and be aware of how long you will need before taking e.g. an eye break or time to get up and move. This may mean studying at home or if you're on campus try one of the Library buildings or another space you feel comfortable.

When choosing a space to study think about amount of ambient noise, not everyone works well in silence. For some listening to music may help, if singing can break your focus there are lots of playlists out there that are lyric free.

For further support take a look at the [Strategies for improving motivation, focus and concentration](https://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/taking-care/topic-index/motivation-and-focus/) videos on the student support site and learn more about [Looking after your digital wellbeing](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/looking-after-your-digital-wellbeing-ed996f962de8).

## 📂 Organise your notes and reading

Whenever you're producing a piece of work you will be making lots of notes and reading lots of different texts. Keeping these organised and easy to find will save you time when writing and referencing. If you prefer taking digital notes, take some time to try out different note-taking apps and see which one(s) work best for you. The Resource bank in the [Jisc Discovery Tool](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/none-programme-content/digital-capabilities/) includes a playlist to support developing your 'digital productivity'.

Take a look at the My Learning Essentials online guides [Strategies for effective note making](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/note-making/) and [Preparing to read](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/preparing-to-read-2af579fe3a3d) to learn strategies that can help stay organised.

# Organise your time

Let’s look at a few ways you can use planning and strategy to get the most from your time.

## 🎯 Set goals and study strategically

Know the times of day where you can best focus and study to make the most effective use of your time. Once you know when you study best set goals for those blocks such as revisiting your notes and review materials or taking in a key reading.  
  
Download a copy of this [study schedule template](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/handouts/study-plan.xlsx) and adapt it for your needs.

## 🤼 Organise group study sessions

Arranging group study sessions with course mates can be a great way to support each other to stay motivated. Group study can be particularly useful to help everyone in the group get help with topics they’re finding difficult from others who may be able to explain concepts more effectively. Find out [how to book a space for group or individual study](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/locations-and-opening-hours/bookable-spaces/) at the Library.

## 📑 Plan back from your deadline

When you start an assignment the first thing you need to do is break it down into detailed plan. This will help you see how much time you have for each key task; it will also ensure you don’t forget to leave time at the end for important tasks like editing and proofreading. Review other time commitments such as work or social events to ensure your plan is achievable and realistic. Keep your study sessions to realistic amounts of time and schedule them frequently to avoid last minute cramming.

**🔊** Listen to these [time management tips](https://soundcloud.com/uomlibrary/top-ten-tips-time-management?utm_source=clipboard&utm_campaign=wtshare&utm_medium=widget&utm_content=https%253A%252F%252Fsoundcloud.com%252Fuomlibrary%252Ftop-ten-tips-time-management) from the Library's Student Team

For further help and advice take a look at the My Learning Essentials online guide [Managing Your Time Effectively](https://medium.com/my-learning-essentials/managing-your-time-effectively-36b97c81e7e4) or [book onto a workshop](https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/training/my-learning-essentials/workshops/).

# Check your understanding

Let’s look at a few ways you can review your learning and check your understanding:

## 📝 Review and summarise your notes

To retain information, you need to get it the practice of revisiting it regularly. To help you do this you could try revisiting past notes and condensing them into summaries of your learning. Revisiting your notes is most effective when it is a regular habit.

Set yourself a task to return to your notes before around 5 to 7 days later. When your return to your notes quiz yourself or add some more questions to follow up on.

Download and try this [Cornell notes template](https://www.education.library.manchester.ac.uk/mle/handouts/cornell-notes.pdf) to help get you started.

## ✔ Check your assessment criteria

Use marking rubrics from assignments to work out exactly what you need to know and demonstrate in your assignments and assessments. Often, you will be expected to demonstrate, beyond recalling information, that you can apply your learning to a new context or provide an analysis.

To help you address items within the assessment criteria make use of strategies like 'Know, want to know and learned' and practising past papers, as explained in this guide.

## 👨‍🔬 Test the Feynman technique

To try out this popular technique, choose a concept to learn and teach it to yourself or someone else (or even your stuffed teddy bear). When you get stuck, return to your notes and identify the gaps in your learning. The best way to utilise this method is to pretend to teach it to a child so you can understand complicated topics in simple language. For example, after watching a recording of a lecture, look at topics covered in the next few days and challenge yourself to explain them out loud.