

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



Disability Rights Unit



TIPS FOR STUDYING ONLINE



Tips for Successfully Studying Online

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO TO GET THE MOST OUT OF LECTURES AND TUTORIALS?

Learning in an online education context is different from the face-to-face classroom to which most of you are accustomed. The following suggestions provide you with an idea of how you can approach the study material in order to be successful in this unit.

1. Develop a Routine

- You will need to make time to work and time to relax. It might be worth sitting together with your family and creating a plan that considers everyone's needs. As you may not usually study at home, they may not be aware of what your needs are. You may also have to make some compromises as your environment is probably not what you are used to when studying. Keeping a routine not only helps with sleep but will keep you motivated,
- Build studying into your routine. Giving yourself deadlines will help reach goals. Setting yourself a goal of finishing a chapter of a project by the weekend, for example, will "keep you focused without guidance from supervisors."
- "If you start thinking that you're stuck in your room, that can be quite demoralizing. Rephrase it to 'I'm safe in my room, I've got opportunities to do things that I can concentrate on,'"

2. Compile a Personal Study Timetable

Decide on strategies for planning ahead and compile your personal study timetable. Be disciplined in keeping to your schedule. The amount of information presented on Sakai and the number of assignments to be completed may seem overwhelming at first, but don't be disheartened! We are on this journey together.

3. Approach your Studies Systematically

- Work in 2-hour blocks of 4x 30 minutes with 5 minutes short breaks between and then an hour long break. Alternatively, try to work for 30 min or 2 x 30 minutes. You should

alternate the subjects between a study block to ensure that you get coverage of all the different disciplines. You could choose to only alternate 2 subjects per day or more. Work out what works best for you. Breaking the day up into smaller periods with the other responsibilities that you need to do in between, also works.

- Work your way systematically through the various learning activities, reflective questions and assignments. Make sure that you meet all the requirements for the learning activities.

4. Studying the Content

You will come across different types of activities in the different units:

- self-reflection on work covered
- completing formative assessment questions and activities
- doing self-evaluation
- reading response questions

5. Browsing through Ulwazi

Take time to browse through Ulwazi to familiarise yourself with the demands of the subject. This will enable you to see the “big picture” of the whole subject. Evaluate the demands, opportunities and challenges of your personal circumstances and determine how you can fit them in with the assignment due dates and the other relevant learning activities to which you have to attend. Please make use of the forums on Wits-e. The questions posed by other students might be similar to yours and will save you time.

6. Contact your tutor

Please contact your tutor/course co-ordinator* if you experience any difficulties with any aspect of the subject.

7. Contact your peers

Please make regular contact with your peers. Engage with your fellow learners to clarify and broaden your understanding of challenging concepts and themes. You will find that participating in discussions and interacting with your peers is also useful when preparing your formative and summative assessment tasks

UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT OR TEST QUESTIONS:

Every question you are expected to answer has three kinds of words:

1. **Content words:** These tell you on which idea or concept to use in your answer
2. **Task words:** These verbs tell you what to do with that idea or concept.
3. **Limiting words:** A question will never ask you to write everything you know about a concept. Limiting words establish boundaries for your response by telling you on which part of the concept to focus.

Explanation of Task words

Words	What they (might) mean...
Account for	Explain, clarify, or give reasons for. (Quite different from "Give an account of which is more like 'describe in detail' or state the facts in sequence).
Analyse	Break an issue down into its component parts, discuss them and show how they interrelate.
Assess	Consider the value or importance of something, paying due attention to positive, negative and disputable aspects, and citing the judgements of any known authorities as well as your own.
Argue	Make a case, based on appropriate evidence for and/or against some given point of view.
Compare	Identify the characteristics or qualities two or more things have in common (but probably pointing out their differences as well).

Contrast	Point out the difference between two things (but probably point out their similarities as well).
Criticise	Spell out your judgement as to the value or truth of something, indicating the criteria on which you base your judgement and citing specific instances of how the criteria apply in this case.
Define	Make a statement as to the meaning or interpretation of something, giving sufficient detail as to allow it to be distinguished from similar things.
Describe	Spell out the main aspects of an idea or topic or the sequence in which a series of things happened.
Discuss	Investigate or examine by argument. Examine key points and possible interpretations, sift and debate, giving reasons for and against. Draw a conclusion.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal or the worth of something, in the light of its apparent truth; include your personal opinion. Like 'assess'.
Examine	Present in depth and investigate the implications.
Explain	Tell how things work or how they came to be the way they are, including perhaps some need to 'describe' and to 'analyse' (see above).
To what extent...?	Explore the case for a stated proposition or explanation, much in the manner of 'assess' and 'criticise' (see above), probably arguing for a less than total acceptance of the proposition.
Identify	Pick out what you regard as the key features of something, perhaps making clear the criteria you use.
Illustrate	Similar to 'explain' (see above), but the question is asking for the quoting of specific examples or case studies; can be the drawing of maps, graphs, or sketches

Interpret	Clarify something or 'explain' (see above), perhaps indicating how the thing relates to some other thing or perspective.
Justify	Express valid reasons for accepting a particular interpretation or conclusion, probably including the need to 'argue' (see above) a case.
Outline	Indicate the main features of a topic or sequence of events, possibly setting them within a clear structure or framework to show how they interrelate.
Prove	Demonstrate the truth of something by offering irrefutable evidence and/or logical sequence of statements leading from evidence to conclusion.
Reconcile	Show how two apparently opposed or mutually exclusive ideas or propositions can be seen to be similar in important respects, if not identical. Involves need to 'analyse' and 'justify' (see above).
Summarise	'State' (see above) the main features of an argument, omitting all superfluous detail and side-issues.
Trace	Identify the connection between one thing and another either in a developmental sense over a period of time, or else in a cause and effect sense.

(Taken from Learning Centre, University of New South Wales <https://student.unsw.edu.au/>)

A SUGGESTED PROCESS FOR READING AN ACADEMIC TEXT

Step 1: **Find out** what the article is about, and **the context** in which it was written. You do this by looking at the heading, who wrote it, where and when it was written. The context helps clarify what you can expect from an article or not.

Step 2: **Read the abstract and** page through the whole article reading the **sub-headings**. This gives you a general sense of how long the article is and what it is about. Then reflect a bit: say in your own words what the article is about. Think what you expect the article will say.

Step 3: **'Photo read' the article**. You do this by breathing calmly and paging through the whole article slowly, looking at the whole of each page without reading anything. In this process, you are getting the 'whole' picture. Your brain unconsciously absorbs the information and creates a framework into which you can later fit more detailed understanding.

Step 4: **Get an overview** of what the article is about. You can do this by reading the first and last sentences (or paragraphs, if they are short) in each section. In this way you get a general idea of what the main argument of the article is, even if you don't fully understand everything yet. It is important not to get stuck and read something carefully at this stage, (unless you find a short piece really interesting and easy to read). Rather focus on getting a sense of the whole article by reading the first and last sentences in each section.

Step 5: **Reflect** on (or even better, write down) what you have understood to far. Maybe you write a little summary of what you think the article is about. Maybe you have a sense of the argument that the article is presenting, and you already know whether you agree or disagree. Maybe you have some questions that you want the article to answer for you. Just spend some time thinking about what you know already and what you want to learn from reading the article in detail.

It may be that at this point you decide that the article does not interest you, or you already know the main points that it is making, or you don't have time for further investigation – so then you stop reading at this point.

Step 6: Now you **read the article in detail** so as to understand exactly what it is saying. This is where most people start, but actually, it should be step 6. All the “reading” you have done above helps to give you a general sense and framework, so that when you start the “slow” reading, you already have an overview, and you won't get lost in detail.

While you are reading, underline the ideas that you think are important. Write comments in the margin. Put question marks where you do not understand what is being said. Note places where you disagree. Try to formulate for yourself what is the main point in each section. Keep your own questions in mind as you are reading, so that it feels like you are having a dialogue with the author. You are reading so as to gain an understanding of the ideas presented and the author's argument.

Step 7: **Relate the article to your own experience and understanding.** You can do this in two ways:

- Reflect on the article in relation to your own experience: where do you agree with the points made and examples given, and where do you disagree? Which ideas were new to you? Which ideas confirmed what you were already thinking?
- Evaluate the argument: What is the author arguing against and what is s/he arguing for? Do you find the argument convincing? Is there enough evidence to back up the argument? How does it relate to other articles you have read?