

**IBN TOFAIL UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF LETTERS AND HUMAN SCIENCES**

**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**



# STUDY SKILLS

**2020/2021**

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# Study skills

## Introduction

The problem with first year was I didn't know what I didn't know, and even when I thought there was something I was supposed to know I didn't know what to do about it'. University can seem confusing; you are expected to learn independently rather than being taught, but there is limited information about how to learn.

University is part of life-long learning; you start to control what and how you learn. There is a departmental teaching agenda to follow, and time to explore other avenues. If, in the process, these equip you for later life, that is a bonus. You have multiple skills already in your L1 (native language) and have decided to study another, L2, (foreign or target language). For a Languages degree, like any other, you need to exploit your current skills and add more. Recognize that a languages degree has two elements:

- The knowledge element, including all the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge necessary to enable you to communicate at or near the level of an educated native speaker over an extensive range of topics and in a wide variety of registers, but also a knowledge and understanding of the culture and people who actually speak the language.

Learning your L2 is a lifelong process, as languages evolve and change over time. The sheer statistics about languages are pretty daunting with perhaps 6000 different languages being spoken around the globe. Yet in the twenty-first century communication is recognized to be the single most vital factor in conducting business and professional activities of all kinds around the world, and an ability to function in the language of your colleagues abroad, or even more importantly, your competitors, is a truly valuable asset. As Willy Brandt allegedly said: 'I sell to you in English but I buy from you in German'. The scope for learning languages is global because, of course, 'linguists do it world-wide'.

- The skills element. Often called transferable skills, these enable linguists to be efficient researchers, which will be of long-term benefit in the workplace. Most language students acquire practical experience of the skills and attributes shown in Figure 1.1. Some are absorbed by osmosis whilst others are taught at varying levels of detail.

In the last years of the twentieth century, UK student numbers expanded and the emphasis switched from lecturers teaching to students learning. Self-motivated learning is vital in life, enabling you to keep abreast of developments and initiatives. Employment is unpredictable. Job market and company requirements change rapidly. An employer needs individuals who are flexible about their careers.

An effective graduate is someone who sees their career as a process of work and learning, mixing them to extend skills and experience. This is the essence of lifelong learning.

In the jargon of career management and personal development, the phrase '**transferable skills**' is readily quoted. To add value to your degree, you need to recognize and reflect on what you do every day in your course, and understand where these skills have market value.

Employers claim to be happy with the academic skills students acquire, such as researching, collating and synthesizing new material, but they also want graduates with skills like listening, negotiating and presenting. Any strengthening of your skills and experience of skill-based activities should add to your self-confidence and improve your performance as a linguist and as a potential employee.

In addition to traditional language skills, your degree will give you the opportunity to experience the latest developments in information technology including surfing the world wide web (www), electronic journals, video-conferencing, e-mail, and digital video. University encourages you to get wired, get trained and build your own electronic resource base. The technology may seem daunting but it is fun too.

The importance of graduates acquiring skills as well as knowledge was reinforced by the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), which defined the key graduate skills,

- Communication skills: written and oral, and the ability to listen to others.
- Interpersonal or social skills: the capacity to establish good, professional working relationships with clients and colleagues.
- Organizational skills: planning ahead, meeting deadlines, managing yourself and coordinating others.
- Problem analysis and solution: the ability to identify key issues, reconcile conflicts, devise workable solutions, be clear and logical in thinking, prioritize and work under pressure.
- Intellect: judged by how effectively you translate your ideas into action.
- Leadership: many graduates eventually reach senior positions managing and leading people.
- Teamwork: working effectively in formal and informal teams.
- Adaptability: being able to initiate and respond to changing circumstances, and to continue to develop one's knowledge, interests and attitudes to adapt to changing demands.
- Technical capability: the capacity to acquire appropriate technical skills including scheduling, IT, statistics, computing, data analysis and to update these as appropriate.
- Achievement: the ability to set and achieve goals for oneself and for others, to keep an organization developing.

By graduation you should feel confident in listing these skills on a curriculum vitae (CV), and be able to explain where in the degree these abilities were practiced and demonstrated

## 1- LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT UNIVERSITY; WHAT TO EXPECT.

Modern Language degrees are usually taught over three years called either Years 1, 2 and 3, or Levels 1, 2 and 3, and most incorporate a fourth year working or studying abroad. The university year is typically divided into 10 or 12 teaching blocks called modules or units, each addressing an aspect of language or some other topic related to the student's particular programme. Language degrees are usually progressive, which means that the standards and difficulty increase each year, and modules in later years build on experience and learning in earlier years.

This section outlines the main activities at university and some of the skills practised during them.

### Lectures

Believing any of the following statements will seriously **damage** your learning from lectures:

- In good lectures the lecturer speaks, the audience takes very rapid notes and silence reigns.
- The success of a lecture is all down to the lecturer.
- A great lecturer speaks slowly so students can take beautifully written, verbatim notes.
- Everything you need to know to get a first class degree will be mentioned in a lecture.
- Lectures are attended by students who work alone.

Lectures are the traditional teaching method, usually about 50 minutes long, with one lecturer and loads of students. If your lectures involve 100+ students they may seem impersonal and asking questions is difficult.

### Top tips for managing lectures include:

- ^ Get there early and find a seat where you can see and hear.
- ^ Get your brain in gear by thinking, 'I know I will enjoy this lecture, it will be good. I really want to know about ...'; 'Last week s/he discussed ....., now I want to find out about../.
- ^ Before the lecture, read the notes from the last session, and maybe some library material too. Even 5-10 minutes will get the brain in gear.
- ^ Think critically about the material presented.
- ^ Revise and summarize notes soon after a lecture; it will help you recall material later. Decide what follow up reading is required.

### Ask questions.

Skills acquired during lectures include understanding language, historical or cultural issues, recognizing research frontiers and subject limitations. They also include, crucially, knowing how to listen, knowing how and when to take notes, and knowing when NOT just to follow the flow of the argument. WITHOUT taking notes.

### **Assessment**

- **Within-module assessment of progress** (sometimes called 'monitoring'), where the marks do not count (**formative**), and usually involve some feedback.
- **Assessments where the marks do count (summative)**. Feedback may or may not happen, depending on the test and system. The results eventually appear on your degree result notification for the edification of your first employer who wants written confirmation of your university prowess.

There is a slight tendency for the average student to pay less attention to formative, within-module assessments, where the marks do not count. Staff design formative tests because they know 99 per cent of students need an opportunity to 'have a go', to get an insight into procedures and expected standards, when marks are not an issue.

### **The Research Process**

By the time you graduate you should have (besides high-level language skills) an enhanced knowledge of, and/or ability to identify and analyse critically, the historical and cultural background of the country in question, its current political, economic and ecological makeup and concerns, and the systems and administrative frameworks (educational, legal, etc.) which underpin its society.

Some exposure to its literature, music and art is also a feature of the educated linguist. You should also have learned to recognize what you as an individual know and do not know; and (perhaps this is paramount for today's society) you should understand how and where to find the information you need. Recognizing the boundaries of one's own expertise is a relevant life skill. University learning is not about recalling a full set of lecture notes. It is about *understanding* issues and being able to relate and apply them in different contexts.

## 2- MAKING EFFECTIVE NOTES

There is a mass of language information whizzing around in radio, video and TV reports, specialist documentaries, lectures, tutorials, discussion groups and all that written material including books, journals and newspapers. BUT, just because an article is in an academic journal, in the library, or on a reading list, does not make it a 'Note-Worthy' event. Making notes is time consuming, and ineffective if done on auto-pilot with the brain half-engaged. Note-making which lets you learn, requires your brain to be fully involved in asking questions and commenting on the ideas. Noting is not just about getting the facts down, it is also about identifying links between different pieces of information, contradictions and examples. Notes should record information in your own words, evaluate different points of view, and encourage the development of your own ideas and opinions.

Many people start reading and making notes without any sort of preview. A BAD IDEA. They make pages of notes from the opening section and few, if any, from later in the document. The first pages of a book usually set the scene. Notes may only be needed from conclusion and discussion sections. Sometimes detailed notes are required, but sometimes keywords, definitions and brief summaries are fine.

### Evaluate Your Present Note-Taking System:

Ask yourself:

1. Do I use complete sentences? They are generally a waste of time.
2. Do I use any form at all? Are my notes clear or confusing?
3. Do I capture main points and all subpoints?
4. Do I streamline using abbreviations and shortcuts?

### Five Important Reasons to Take Notes

1. Notes trigger memories of lecture/reading
2. Your notes are often a source of valuable clues for what information the instructor thinks most important (i.e., what will show up on the next test).
3. Notes inscribe information kinesthetically
4. Taking notes helps you to concentrate in class
5. Notes create a resource for test preparation
6. Your notes often contain information that cannot be found elsewhere (i.e., in your textbook).

### Guidelines for Note-Taking

1. Concentrate on the lecture or on the reading material.
2. Take notes consistently.
3. Take notes selectively. Do NOT try to write down every word. Remember that the average lecturer speaks approximately 125-140 words per minute, and the average note-taker writes at a rate of about 25 words per minute.
4. Translate ideas into your own words.
5. Organize notes into some sort of logical form.
6. Be brief. Write down only the major points and important information.
7. Write legibly. Notes are useless if you cannot read them later!
8. Don't be concerned with spelling and grammar.

**Tips for Finding Major Points in Lectures:**  
**The speaker is usually making an important point if he or she:**

1. Pauses before or after an idea.
2. Uses repetition to emphasize a point.
3. Uses introductory phrases to precede an important idea.
4. Writes an idea on the board.

**Ways to Reduce and Streamline Notes**

- A. Eliminate small connecting words such as: is, are, was, were, a, an, the, would, this, of.
- B. Eliminate pronouns such as: they, these, his, that, them. However, be careful NOT to eliminate these three words: and, in, on.

**1. Common Abbreviations**

Many are derived from Latin.

c.f. (confer) = compare

i.e. (id est) = that is

e.g (exempla grate) = for example

NB (nota benne) =note well

no. (numero) = number

etc. (et cetera)= and so on

**2. Use Concept Maps and Diagrams**

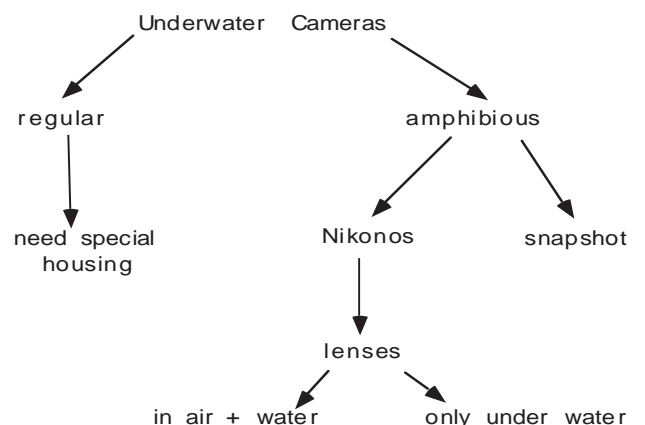
You can set down information in a concept map or diagram. This presents the information in a visual form and is unlike the traditional linear form of note taking. Information can be added to the concept map in any sequence.

Concept maps can easily become cluttered, so we recommend you use both facing pages of an open A4 note book. This will give you an A3 size page to set out your concept map and allow plenty of space for adding ideas and symbols.

- Begin in the middle of the page and add ideas on branches that radiate from the central idea or from previous branches.
- Arrows and words can be used to show links between parts of the concept map.
- Colour and symbols are important parts of concept maps, helping illustrate ideas and triggering your own thoughts.

**Symbols for note-taking are as follows:**

=	equals/is equal to/is the same as
≠	is not equal to/is not the same as
≡	is equivalent to
∴	therefore, thus, so
∵	because
+	and, more, plus
>	more than, greater than
<	less than
—	less, minus
→	gives, causes, leads to, results in, is given by, is produced by, results from
↗	rises, increases by
↘	falls, decreases by
α	proportional to
∅	not proportional to



## 3- RECEPTIVE SKILLS

### 3.1. THE ART OF LISTENING

Can you get addicted to foreign soaps? These may be accessible via satellite or cable, or in your language centre. The same set of characters appear in every episode using bang up-to-the-minute colloquial language, and repetitive and constrained lexis (technical term for the vocabulary of a language) on limited topics; this aids comprehension and helps to reinforce vocabulary (within this limited range). The same is true to a certain extent of news broadcasts – EU refugees, local politics . . . each have their own rhetorical language and structure, and re-appear nightly.

#### To understand or to follow?

In conversations bear in mind that understanding and following are not quite the same thing. When you're listening to someone talking, you need to understand as much as you can of the individual points and follow the thread of the conversation and make your own contribution to it.

Unless you are in a bureaucratic or legal situation (when you would take notes) it is a big mistake to try to remember a conversation verbatim. Your brain processes information by sifting out the significant elements, recasting or filing them alongside connected information, and throwing the rest away. Let your brain do this for you; if you concentrate on remembering everything your brain will overload and you will be left hopelessly behind. Relax, listen for the key words and don't let the detail get you down. If you think you've missed something really crucial in a conversation, you can always ask for it to be repeated. Aim to focus hard on the framework, the theme, or the general thrust of the conversation - you will still be able to follow what is going on even if you miss odd bits.

It should be easier to keep up with a lecture or a themed programme where the topic is announced in advance, and you can prepare for it by looking up some of the relevant vocabulary or reading around the subject. An informal conversation is unstructured and can go off at alarming tangents. Even so, there are plenty of ways in which you can help yourself. Here are just a few:

- Unfamiliar words? Knowing the basic principles of word-formation in your L2 helps you work out their meaning. How are verbs formed from adjectives, for instance? How do particular prefixes or suffixes modify the meaning of the word-stem they are attached to? How can you tell the difference between an adjective and an adverb?
- Little words make a difference. In English, conversations are dosed liberally with expressions like 'you know', 'admittedly', 'actually', 'nevertheless'. Check out the equivalents in your L2. Words like these modify meanings and help the speaker to

persuade, concede, create distance, etc. Get your own list ready - understanding and using them properly is essential for authentic language.

- Grammar matters! The sounder your grammar is, the better you will grasp what is going on.
- Regular phrases and constructions. Everyday spoken language is in large measure rhetorical and repetitive. Unless you are aiming to be witty or otherwise impress, you generally use stock phrases, - 'good morning', 'happy birthday', 'it's been a great day', 'lousy weather for the time of year', and so on. We all recycle phrases, even within a single dialogue, and build up a stock of conversational phrases and responses. Using them will make you sound more authentic and enable you to look ahead in a conversation and anticipate what is coming next.

## Listening (At University)

### Listening In Lectures

Arriving at a lecture with information about last night's activities or juicy scandal is normal, but the brain is not prepared for advanced information on the phonetics of Cantonese or Hegel's dialectics. Some lecturers understand that the average student audience needs 5 minutes background briefing to get the majority of brains engaged and on track. Others leap in with vital information in the first five minutes because 'everyone is fresh!' Whatever the lecture style, but especially with the latter, you will get more from the session having thought 'I know this will be an interesting lecture about ...' and scanned notes from the last session or library. Assuming from the start that a lecture will be dull usually ensures that it will seem dull.

- A lecturer's words, no matter how wise, enter your short-term memory, and unless you play around with them and process the information into ideas, making personal connections, the words will drop out of short-term memory into a black hole. Think about the content and implications as the lecture progresses.
- You may feel a lecturer is wildly off beam, making statements you disagree with, but do not decide he or she is automatically wrong, check it out. There might be dissertation possibilities.
- Keep a record of a speaker's main points.
- Be prepared for the unpredictable. Some speakers indicate what they intend to cover in a lecture, others whiz off in different directions. This unpredictability can keep you alert! But if you get thoroughly lost, then ask a clarifying question (mentally or physically), rather than 'dropping out' for the rest of the session.
- If you feel your brain drifting off ask yourself questions like - 'what is s/he trying to say?' and 'where does this fit with what I know?'

- Treat listening as a challenging mental task.
- Don't imagine you can remember every point of a lecture in your head.

Develop a technique of making notes whilst still following the lecture.

### Listening in discussions and language classes

#### **No one listens until you make a mistake.**

Discussion is the time to harvest the ideas of others, improve your accent and build self-confidence. In most modules there is such a diversity of style, delivery, points of view and interpretation, of literature, that open discussion is vital.

Endeavour to be open-minded in looking for and evaluating statements which may express very different views and beliefs from your own. Because ideas fly around fast, make sure you note the main points and supporting evidence (arguments) where possible. Post-discussion note collation is crucial, mostly involving ordering thoughts and checking arguments that support or confute the points.

#### **Main Tips**

- Come prepared, think about the topic of the class in advance - bear in mind that the subject-matter under discussion is generally secondary to the discussion itself.
- Conversations are messy things, like rugby scrums - be prepared for the unexpected.
- Come prepared to listen.
- Come prepared to talk, and don't worry too much about accuracy - it's important, but less so than actually speaking.
- Build your confidence by planning ahead. Reading around the next topic will help but better still, listen to a radio or TV programme about it. Note the expressions that might come in handy.
- If you are nervous about speaking at length, concentrate on the flow of conversation and ask a question. This gets you into the discussion without having to know the answer.
- Live a little dangerously! Resolve to make at least one off-the-cuff remark in every lesson, regardless of mistakes. Before you know it, you'll be butting in with the best of them. Or as one student said, 'It actually works this language lark, I get a real buzz off it!' Here I am speaking in a language other than my own, being understood!' Stay casual now! The biggest incentive/motivation is success. There's nothing worse than arriving unprepared to a lesson. You feel a fool and will miss out on the buzz.

## 3.2. READING TECHNIQUES

Everyone uses a range of reading techniques - speed reading of novels, skip-reading headlines etc - the style depending on purpose. As you look through this section reflect on where you use each technique already. For effective study adopt the 'deep study' approach.

### Deep study reading

Deep study reading is vital when you want to make connections, understand meanings, consider implications, and evaluate arguments. Reading deeply needs a strategic approach and time to cogitate.

Rowntree (1988) describes an active reading method known as SQ3R, which promotes deeper, more thoughtful reading. SQ3R is an acronym for Survey-Question-Read-Recall-Review. It may seem long-winded at first, but is worth pursuing because it links thinking with reading in a flexible manner. It stops you rushing into unproductive note making. You can use SQ3R with books and articles, and for summarizing notes during revision. You are likely to recall more by using this questioning and 'mental discussion'.

### Scanning

Scan when you want a specific item of information. Scan the contents page or index, letting your eyes rove around to spot key words and phrases. Chase up the references and then, carefully, (deep) read the points that are relevant for

**EQ3R is a template for reading and thinking. Try it on the next book you pick up.**

**Survey:** Look at the whole text before you get into parts in detail. Start with the cover, is this a respected author? When was it written? Is it dated?

Use the Contents and Chapter headings and subheadings to get an idea of the whole book and to locate the sections that are of interest to you. First and last paragraphs should highlight arguments and key points.

**Question:** You will recall more if you know why you are reading, so ask yourself some questions. Review your present knowledge, and then ask what else you want/need to know. Questions like: What is new in this reading? What can I learn from this book? Where does it fit in this course, other modules? Is this a supporting/refuting/contradictory piece of information?

Having previewed the book and developed your reasons for reading, you can also decide whether deep reading and note making is required, or whether scanning and some additions to previous notes, will suffice.

**Read:** This is the stage to start reading, but not necessarily from page 1; read the sections that are relevant for you and your present assignment. Read attentively but also critically. The first time you read you cannot get hold of all points and ideas.

On first reading: locate the main ideas. Get the general structure and subject content in your head. Do not make notes during this first reading, the detail gets in the way.

On second reading: chase up the detailed bits that you need for essays. Highlight or make notes of all essential points.

**Recall:** Do you understand what you have read? Give yourself a break, and then have a think about what you remember, and what you understand. This process makes you an active, learning reader. Ask yourself questions like: Can I explain this idea in my own words? Can I recall the key points without re-reading the original text?

**Review:** Now go back to the text and check the accuracy of your recall.

Reviewing should tell you how much you have really absorbed. Review your steps and check main points: Are the headings and summaries first noted the right ones or do they need revising? Do new questions about the material arise now that you have gone through in detail? Have you missed anything important? Do you need more detail or examples? Fill in gaps and correct errors in your notes. Ask where your views fit with those of the authors. Do you agree/disagree? The last question is 'Am I happy to give this book back to the library?'

## 4- THINKING

For most people the effective stimulus to thinking is conversation and discussion. Being asked: 'What is your position on semiotics?' or 'How do you view Britain's decision to leave the EU?' can stimulate thoughts you didn't know you had.

Language students are expected to apply their already well-developed thinking skills to a series of academic tasks and activities, to make reasoned judgements and arrive at conclusions about language-related issues. It is possible to pursue a languages degree at a rather superficial level, learning and re-presenting information. This is called surface learning.

The aim of a university education is to practise the skills that move beyond this level to deeper learning, to being active in questioning, relating ideas and opinions to other parts of your degree and to other subjects, and developing one's ability to inter-relate evidence and draw valid conclusions. This links to the ideas of deep reading. Your intellectual sophistication should mature during a degree course, but it is sometimes difficult to know what this might mean in practice.

### 4-1- Why Do You Think?

#### **Cogito ergo sum: I think, therefore I am (Descartes)**

Thinking is used to acquire understanding and answers. Adjectives used to describe quality thinking include reasoned, clear, logical, precise, relevant, broad, rational, sound, sensible and creative. Steps in quality thinking involve:

- Deciding on the objective (understanding a concept, recognizing the issues).
- Acquiring information and evidence of a suitable standard to build up a reasoned argument.
- Reasoning or inferring from the available information to draw logical conclusions.
- Considering the consequences of the results.

How good you are at thinking is a matter for personal development and self-assessment. When tackling multi-dimensional language problems, make notes while thinking, plot your thoughts on spider diagrams, and record connections and links as they occur to you. Ideas float away all too easily.

#### **4-1- Critical Thinking:**

Critical thinking involves working through for oneself, afresh, a problem. This means starting by thinking about the nature of the problem, thinking through the issues and striving for a reasoned, logical outcome. During the process you need to be aware of other factors that impinge, where bias may be entering an argument, the evidence for and against the issues involved, and to search for links to other parts of your language

course. Essentially, critically evaluating the material throughout the process. Mind maps can be a helpful way of putting ideas on paper and finding the links between them.

Being critical entails making judgements on the information you have at the time. It is important to remember that being critical does not necessarily imply being negative and derogatory. It also means being positive and supportive, commenting in a thoughtful way. A balanced critique looks at the positive and negative aspects. Some students feel they cannot make such judgements because they are unqualified to do so. Recognize ***that neither you, nor your professors, will ever know everything*** - you are making a judgement based on what you know now. In a year's time, with more information and experience, your views and values may alter, but that will be a subsequent judgement made in the light of different information.

Discussion is a major thinking aid, so talk about language and related issues. It can be provocative and stimulating!

Where does intellectual curiosity fit into this picture? Research in language studies is about being curious about concepts and ideas. You can be curious in a general way, essentially pursuing ideas at random as they grab your imagination.

We all do this. More disciplined thinking aims to give a framework for pursuing ideas in a logical manner and to back up ideas and statements with solid evidence in every case.

**What to avoid.** Uncritical, surface learning involves listening and noting from lectures and documents, committing this information to memory and regurgitating it in essays and examinations. The 'understanding' step is missing, and the rewards will be missing too. Aim to be a deeper learner.

#### **4-2- Questions Worth Asking!**

Being a critical thinker involves asking questions at all stages of every research activity. These questions could run in your head as you consider language issues:

- What are the main ideas here?
- Are the questions being asked the right ones or are there more meaningful or more valid questions?
- What are the supporting ideas?
- What opposing evidence is available?
- Is the evidence strong enough to reach a conclusion?
- How do these ideas fit with those found elsewhere?
- What is assumed?
- Are the assumptions justified?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments?
- Is a particular point of view or social or cultural perspective skewing the interpretation?
- Are these seemingly 'objective' definitions truly objective?
- Is the information of an appropriate quality?

- Are causes and effects clearly distinguished?
- Is this a personal opinion or an example of intuition?
- Have I really understood the evidence?
- Am I making woolly, over-general statements?
- Is the information relevant?

Keep thinking back to the original aims and argument. You can make statements that are clear, accurate and precise but if they are irrelevant they do not help. Off the point arguments or examples distract and confuse the reader, and may lose you marks.

- Is the argument superficial? Have all the complexities of an issue been addressed?
- Is there a broad range of evidence? Does the answer take into account the range of possible perspectives?
- Are the arguments presented in a logical sequence? Check that thoughts and ideas are ordered into a sequence that tells the story in a logical way.
- Which examples will reinforce the idea?
- Can this idea be expressed in another, better way?
- What has been left out? Looking for 'gaps' is an important skill.
- Is this a definitive/true conclusion OR a probable/'on the balance of evidence' conclusion?
- What are the exceptions?

Take a little time to think and reflect before jumping into a task with both feet.

Having completed a task or activity, take a few minutes to reflect on the results or outcomes.

#### **4-3- Can You Improve The Quality Of Your Thinking Alone?**

Yes, but it takes practice. You will probably become more disciplined in your thinking by discussing issues regularly. This is because the act of talking around an idea sparks off other ideas in your own mind. When someone else voices their point of view, you get an insight into other aspects of the problem, whereas thinking of arguments that run against your own position is difficult. A discussion group might:

- Start by summarizing the problem.
- Sort out objectives to follow through.
- Share data and evidence - the knowledge element.
- Share views on the data, 'I think it means ... because .. /
- Work out and discuss the assumptions the data and evidence are making.
- Discuss possible implications; evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.
- Summarize the outcomes.

A good reasoner is like a good footballer; s/he becomes more adept by practising.

## **5- CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT**

At the centre of every quality language essay, report or presentation is a well-structured argument. This is an argument in the sense of a fully supported and referenced explanation or interpretation. In producing an argument you are not looking to provide a mathematical proof, or evidence that is strong enough to support a legal case. You are trying to integrate a series of facts, examples and the connections that link them, so that your deductions and conclusions appear probable.

In different parts of your degree your arguments may follow different styles. In discussions of literature the evidence comes primarily from your close reading of the text, and is an interpretation and appreciation of the material, enhanced by your own ideas and those of other critics. In cultural, historical or linguistic studies you develop evidence from a range of sources and link these with methodological ideas and approaches. Whatever your context the crucial skill is to establish enough appropriate links and evidence or examples, such that your argument cannot be rejected as improbable or unsubstantiated.

### **5.1 Structuring Arguments**

Any argument needs to be structured with reasoned evidence supporting the statements. A stronger, more balanced argument is made when examples for and against the general tenet are quoted.

#### **Cultural Approaches**

It is essential to be aware of the range of ideas and perspectives which surround any political or cultural issue in your studies. You cannot read and consider everything but you need a balanced selection of evidence. You are faced with different points of view, a lack of absolutes, and ideological baggage which colours opinions and investigative approaches. If you research green issues you need some background in politics, economics and sociology. But these are areas where theories are always open to argument, persuasion and debate. Your reading becomes the evidence from which you can draw and discuss, compare and contrast.

#### **Literary Studies**

The text is at the centre of your argument, providing the basis for discussion and examples through quotations, but its place is complemented by your reading of the criticism and analyses which will help inform and develop your ideas and opinions. Breadth and narrow focus are both essential - breadth of reading around other works by the same author, and wider secondary (critical) sources; but above all, close reading of the primary text(s).

### **5-2- Unpacking Arguments**

It is all too easy when speaking and writing to put too much information into a sentence, or to make very general statements. One might say: 'In Reformation Germany a wedding provided a temporary break from everyday social constraints'. This is true but hides much information. A fuller statement like: 'The guilds, so influential in sixteenth-century German urban society, drew clear and sharp distinctions of status between the married master and his as yet unmarried journeymen, and determined how far each group could deviate from the behavioural norm on special occasions'. To further strengthen this assertion, add references or a supporting quotation, such as: 'In Augsburg the eve of the wedding was marked by a drinking party where master and journeymen rubbed shoulders, but at the wedding feast itself the masters sat separately and later only danced with their wives, while the young men processed separately and sat together and danced with as many young women as possible'. (Hufton, 1997).'

### **5-3- Rational And Non-Rational Arguments**

Arguments are categorized as being rational and non-rational. The non-rational are to be avoided. Here are four examples:

1. 'The re-introduction of capital punishment would practically eliminate homicide in Great Britain.' Aside from being arguable, this is hyperbole. It might sell newspapers but it is not an argument unless supported by data.
2. 'People become obese primarily because they overeat. Students overeat when they are stressed, therefore they are more at risk of becoming obese around exam time'. This is a very poor argument and untrue in the majority of cases.

Some students are obese, most are not, some overeat at stressful times, some forget to eat altogether. Everyone's weight fluctuates over time.

3. Going OTT with language or throwing in jargon to impress the reader is a typical journalistic device, involving an emotional rather than factual appeal to the reader. 'Politicians have been documented using styles of language that enable them to avoid giving direct answers to questions', is a more considered academic statement than 'All politicians excel in roundabout linguistic constructions that convey absolutely zero, because they are inherently incapable of giving straight answers to important questions'.

4. 'It is abundantly clear that de Gaulle's profound hatred of all things British set the economic evolution of Europe back by at least a decade'. Words which sound very strong like clearly, manifestly, undoubtedly, all, naturally, and obviously, are intended to influence the reader into thinking the rest of the statement must be true. Overuse of strong words is unprofessional and unhelpful, the written equivalent of browbeating or shouting; they should be used at best sparingly not least because university examiners are programmed to greet them with scepticism.

### **Inductive or deductive? Which approach?**

In presenting an argument, orally or on paper, give some thought to the ordering of ideas. If you write *deductively* you begin with the general idea and then follow on with examples. *Inductive* writing starts with specific evidence and uses it to draw general conclusions and explanations. You must decide what suits your material. In general, use the inductive approach when you want to draw a conclusion. The deductive approach is useful when you want to understand cause and effect, test a hypothesis or solve a problem. The examples given here of an **inductive (A)** and **deductive (B)** approach are in paragraph form, but the same principles apply to essays and dissertations.

**A.** So far we have been discussing the two philosophical traditions which provided the background to Coleridge's interest in the philosophical status of poetry. The first was his native British tradition which had come to regard language in general, and poetry in particular, as being relevant to philosophy. The second was the German tradition. Coleridge's uses of both are far from straightforward. As regards the first, he had scarcely a good word to say about Kames, Reid and Beattie, but he had a lot to say for and against the notion of common sense. More importantly, his statements about common sense betray his habit of treating the phenomenon of language as evidence for a particular kind of philosophy. However, he moves beyond the conservatism of the common-sense philosophers to describe the development of knowledge as being analogous to the growth of a language. He thinks that language grows like an organic body, and that the principle explaining this growth is the progress of the human intellect. And, further, that language exemplifies the identity of the principles of natural growth and intellectual progress, and can be used as the model of this identity (Hamilton, 1983).

**B.** Coleridge's statements about common sense betray his habit of treating the phenomenon of language as evidence for a particular kind of philosophy, according to which: language grows like an organic body; the principle explaining this growth is the progress of the human intellect; language exemplifies the identity of the principles of natural growth and intellectual progress; and it can be used as the model of this identity. He makes use of both his native British philosophical tradition (which had come to regard language in general, and poetry in particular, as being relevant to philosophy) and that of the Germans, but in a far from straightforward manner. Although he had scarcely a good word to say about Kames, Reid and Beattie, he had a lot to say for and against the notion of common sense. But moving beyond the conservatism of the common-sense philosophers, he describes the development of knowledge as being analogous to the growth of a language.

#### 5-4- Potential Minefields

Watch out for bad arguments creeping into your work. The following examples are rather obvious but are there more subtle logic problems? Be critical in reviewing

your own work. It is easy to spot logical errors when sentences are adjacent - they may be less easy to see if there are a thousand words in between.

Circular reasoning: Check that conclusions are not just a restatement of your original premise. The Russian Revolution brought the long rule of imperialism to a bloody end. It was the violent conclusion of an era of autocratic government that had gone unchallenged for centuries.

Cause and effect: Be certain that the cause really is driving the effect. Students are forced to live in crime ridden areas, so crime becomes part of student life.

Leaping to conclusions: The conclusion may be right but steps in the argument are missed. Some arguments are simply wrong: Levels of personal savings are higher in most countries which have adopted the Euro than in the United Kingdom. Britons will never be prosperous until Britain adopts the Euro.

Sons of alcoholic fathers are more likely than sons of non-alcoholic fathers to develop alcoholism. This tells us that alcoholism is hereditary.

Be clear about the difference between arguments where the supporting material provides clear, strong evidence, and those where there is textual or historical evidence supporting the case but uncertainty remains. In projects and dissertations dealing with very complex or ongoing issues, conclusions may have to be conjectural or provisional. Be clear about the limitations. Statements like

“On the basis of the information available at the time of writing, we can suggest that ...” or “The most recent evidence suggests ...” or “However the Hong Kong economy is still in a state of flux following the colony's return to China in 1997, and it would be rash to attempt to draw firm conclusions before 2007 at the earliest” are very acceptable. Qualifying statements of this type have the additional merit of implying that you have thought about the limits and drawbacks inherent in the research results.

### **Is this a good argument?**

Watch out for arguments where the author gives a true premise, but the conclusion is dodgy. Just because you agree with the first part of a sentence does not mean that the second part is also right. Keep thinking right through to the end of the sentence. Having articulated an argument; do you buy it? Why? Why not? What is your view?

Consider the following statements. What questions do they raise? Are they true and logical?

What arguments could be amassed to support or refute them?

1. It Is evident from the fact that most university degrees in Britain take only three years to complete, compared to an average of six years in Italy, that Italian graduates are better educated.'
2. The outbreak of the First World War led to a severe shortage of men to do many essential jobs in the towns and on the land, resulting in greatly increased status and rapid emancipation for women.

## 6- PRODUCTIVE SKILLS

### 6.1. IMPROVING YOUR SPOKEN LANGUAGE:

Equipped with your well-honed listening strategies and skills, and spurred on by your weekly oral language class successes, you are now ready to venture into the uncharted territory of unstructured real-world conversation. Fear not! There are plenty of non-threatening opportunities out there for you to improve your spoken language, and plenty of tricks to help you along.

Probably the easiest way of all to start is - by talking to yourself. And when you get bored with listening to your own voice, rope in some of your friends. Don't worry about correcting one another's grammar or accent, that's what your classes are for, just concentrate on getting your fluency up and improving your comprehension.

Watch and copy the body language used by native speakers, not only to make your own contribution to a conversation appear more authentic, but because certain signs, e.g. nodding or shaking one's head, are aids to comprehension.

#### **Talk as interaction**

Talk as interaction refers to what we normally mean by “conversation” and describes interaction that serves a primarily social function. When people meet, they exchange greetings, engage in small talk, recount recent experiences, and so, on because they wish to be friendly and to establish a comfortable zone of interaction with others. The focus is more on the speakers and how they wish to present themselves to each other than on the message. Such exchanges may be either casual or more formal, depending on the circumstances.

Some of the skills involved in using talk as interaction involve knowing how to do the following things:

- Opening and closing conversations
- Choosing topics
- Making small-talk
- Joking
- Recounting personal incidents and experiences
- Turn-taking
- Interrupting
- Reacting to others
- Using an appropriate style of speaking

Mastering the art of talk as interaction is difficult and may not be a priority for all learners. However, students who do need such skills and find them lacking report that they sometimes feel awkward and at a loss for words when they find themselves in situations that require talk for interaction. They feel difficulty in presenting a good image of themselves and sometimes avoid situations that call for this kind of talk. This

can be a disadvantage for some learners where the ability to use talk for conversation can be important.

### **Talk as transaction**

Talk as transaction refers to situations where the focus is on what is said or done. The message and making oneself understood clearly and accurately is the central focus, rather than the participants and how they interact socially with each other.

#### **Examples of talk as transaction are:**

- Classroom group discussions and problem-solving activities
- A class activity during which students design a poster
- Discussing needed computer repairs with a technician
- Discussing sightseeing plans with a hotel clerk or tour guide
- Making a telephone call to obtain flight information
- Buying something in a shop
- Ordering food from a menu in a restaurant

#### **The main features of talk as transaction are:**

- It has a primarily information focus.
- The main focus is on the message and not the participants.
- Participants employ communication strategies to make themselves understood.
- There may be frequent questions, repetitions, and comprehension checks, as in the example from the preceding classroom lesson.
- There may be negotiation and digression.
- Linguistic accuracy is not always important.

### **Talk as performance**

The third type of talk that can usefully be distinguished has been called talk as performance. This refers to public talk, that is, talk that transmits information before an audience, such as classroom presentations, public announcements, and speeches.

Talk as performance tends to be in the form of monolog rather than dialog, often follows a recognizable format (e.g., a speech of welcome), and is closer to written language than conversational language. Similarly, it is often evaluated according to its effectiveness or impact on the listener, something that is unlikely to happen with talk as interaction or transaction.

#### **Examples of talk as performance are:**

- Giving a class report or presentation
- Conducting a class debate
- Giving a speech of welcome
- Making a sales presentation
- Giving a lecture

## 6.2. WRITTEN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Written assignments come most weeks. They are self, peer or tutor marked and overall you are trying to reduce the red ink on the paper as you progress. The comments should alter in character as your command of the language improves; you will get into more subtle areas of style and idiom where there is room for several alternative 'best options'. You will have crossed the great divide from novice learner to advanced professional, and from here on in your future as a linguist will be concerned more with nuances of meaning and elegance of expression than with genders and endings. (Or so the theory goes.)

### Effective Essay Skills

All essays need good starts and ends, lots of support material and a balance of personal research and lecture-based evidence. This usually requires an initial plan, some rethinking, writing, further research, and re-writing. This should be followed by a heavy editing session where the long sentences are ruthlessly pruned and paragraphs broken up, so that each paragraph makes or develops a separate point. The first version of anything you write is a draft, a rough and ready first attempt, requiring development and polish before it is a quality product. Most marks disappear because the first drafts are submitted as the final product.

### What Kinds Of Essays Are There?

The 'what do you know about ...' style essay should be disappearing from your life. University questions usually require you to think about information that you have researched and to weave it into an argument. You are asked to analyse, criticize, examine, and debate ideas in a structured way, using apt examples to illustrate your arguments.

Essays that get high marks interweave lecture material with personal research findings and ideas. Facts from lectures, by themselves, are not enough - painful but true! Reproducing the facts and arguments as presented in a lecture may get you a mark of 30-50 per cent. To get 50 per cent plus you need to show an examiner that you have thought about the issues. This involves adding other information gleaned through reading, sorting out what it all means for you, and re-stating the argument coherently in your own words. OK, that is our opinion. Ask your language tutors what they think about this - get your own department's view.

You will increasingly be asked for discussion rather than descriptive essays.

Compare these questions:

1. **Descriptive:** Describe the impact of social change on Moroccan daily life, or;

2. **Discussion:** The contradictions, complexity and stresses of modern living impacts on all aspects of Moroccan life.' Discuss.

**The descriptive essay** title may have pointers to the structure, content and type of answer required.

**The discussion essay** needs more thought and planning; you must establish your own structure, and write an introduction to signpost it to the reader. Follow this with linked arguments supported by evidence, leading to a conclusion justified by the points you have made. Including material that veers off at a tangent, or is irrelevant, or presenting evidence in ways that do not really support your case, loses marks.

Many essays in language studies involve a question with no right answer. You may be asked to consider the various dimensions of a problem, evaluate alternative interpretations, provide supporting evidence and reach a balanced conclusion.

### Effective writing skills

#### **Spelling**

Spelling is a potential minefield - use a spell-checker but remember that it will not pick up the errors in the following sentences, caused by homonyms (words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings):

'Shogun warriors had to be skilled in the marshall arts.

'In speech, the tongue and the teeth compliment one another.'

'Most academic books have a forward, but very few books have an epithet.'

#### **Abbreviations and acronyms in text**

Replacing long words or phrases with initials or abbreviations is regarded as lazy by some tutors. However, with well known and established acronyms and phrases like WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get), it is reasonable to adopt this approach.

When using abbreviations the full definition must be given the first time the phrase is used, with the abbreviation immediately afterwards in brackets.

#### **Colloquial usage**

Regional or colloquial terms may not be universally understood so are best omitted. Writing as you speak can also be a trap, as in these examples from student essays:

'He therefore put to greater emphasis on ... .' It should read 'He therefore put too great an emphasis on ...'; The Central Bank will of always considered interest rates', should read "The Central Bank will have always considered ...'.

## **Punctuation and style**

The excessive use of exclamation marks!!!!!!!!!!, of which these authors are generally guilty, is also less than good practice! And never start a sentence with 'And', 'But' or 'BUT'. But having said that, there are plenty of examples of its incorrect usage in this book, where BUT and capitalization are used to emphasize points.

When editing, check that you do not over-use certain words. Find synonyms or restructure the paragraph if repetition is a problem! Keep sentences short and TO THE POINT. Ensure paragraphs address one point only. Be consistent in your use of fonts and font sizes, symbols, heading titles and position, bullet points and referencing. Decide on your style and stick to it.

### **TOP TIPS**

Read and revise everything you write. Make time at the end of an essay to re-read and re-draft, correct spelling, insert missing words, check grammar and insert references.

Check that your arguments are logical.

Read what is written, not what you meant to write.

Work with a friend.

## 7- Discussion

Language students develop their research abilities through discussion in workshops, tutorials and seminars. Talking through the details of a topic leads to a greater degree of understanding and learning. In most jobs being able to discuss topics calmly, fairly and professionally is essential, so discussions are valuable opportunities to practise.

To learn effectively from discussions there needs to be a relaxed atmosphere where you can think about the content, and note what others are saying. Ineffective discussions occur when people worry about what to say next, and run through it mentally, rather than listening to the person speaking. Some of this is nerves, which will calm down with practice, but in the meantime, preparing fully is the best way to lower your stress levels. You have plenty of background and specific information to share.

Be positive about seeking the views of others and value their contributions.

Employ open-ended questions, those which encourage an elaborated, rather than a brief yes or no answer. 'What are the main features of the Animal Farm novel?' is an open ended question and more useful than 'Do you like the Animal Farm novel?'

Keep up the quality of argument in discussion. For example, if discussing the musical properties of the sonnet you might make a general point like "There is evidence that the more complex rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet allows for finer melodic differentiation than other varieties". This is a general argument that would be strengthened, and get more marks, by adding references and examples as you speak. You might say "Appiani and Grimaldi in their 1999 study of rhetorical structures in verse suggest that Petrarch's virtuoso command of rhyme pattern variations produces a markedly wider and more sophisticated range of melodic effects than either Shakespeare or Milton achieved". By adding an example and citing the authors, the argument is stronger and more memorable.

For top marks, take examples from more than one source.

### Types of Discussion

#### Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a great way of collecting a range of ideas and opinions and getting a group talking. The process involves everyone calling out points and ideas. Someone keeps a list, maybe on a flipchart so everyone can see. A typical list has no organization - there is overlap, repetition and a mix of facts and opinions. The art of brainstorming is to assemble ideas, including the wild and wacky, so that many avenues are explored. The points are reordered and arguments developed through discussion, so that by the end of a session they have been pooled, ordered and critically discussed.

## **Role play exercises**

These may involve the simulation of a meeting, as for example, where a committee discusses the progress of a project. You will prepare a role in advance, not necessarily a role you would agree with personally. Procedure depends on the type of topic. It may lead to a decision given by the Chairman, or a vote from observers.

## **Transactional discussion**

This is the term for a dialogue centred around a real-life activity such as buying a rail ticket, ordering a meal, describing an aching tooth to the dentist or making a phone call. It is used regularly in the early stages of language learning, one you can practise with friends or alone.

## **Debate**

The normal format for a debate presupposes that there is a clear issue on which there are polarized opinions. A motion is put forward for discussion. It is traditionally put in the form 'This house believes that .. /'. One side proposes the motion, and the other side opposes it. The proposer gives a speech in favour, followed by the opposer speaking against the motion. These speeches are 'seconded' by two further speeches for and against, although for reasons of time these may be dispensed with in one-hour debates. The motion is then thrown open so everyone can contribute. The proposer and the opposer make closing speeches in which they can answer points made during the debate, followed by a vote. Issues in literature are rarely clear-cut and a vote may be inappropriate, but a formal debate on a current affairs topic is a useful way of exploring positions and opinions, and for eliciting reasoned responses.

## **Oppositional discussion**

Oppositional discussion is a less formal version of debate, in which each side tries to persuade an audience that a particular case is right and the other is wrong. You may work in a small group, assembling information from one point of view, and then argue your case with another group that has tackled the same topic from another angle. Remember that all your arguments need supporting evidence, so keep case examples handy.

## **Consensual discussion**

Consensual discussion involves a group of people with a common purpose, pooling their resources to reach an agreement. Demonstrations of good, co-operative, discussion skills are rare; most of the models of discussion on TV, radio, and in the press are set up as Oppositional rather than consensual. Generally you achieve more through discussing topics in a co-operative spirit, and one of the abilities most sought after by employers of graduates is the ability to solve problems through teamwork.

## **Negotiation**

Negotiation, coming to an agreement by mutual consent, is another useful business and professional skill. One practises and improves negotiation skills in everyday activities like persuading a tutor to extend an essay deadline, getting a landlord to do repairs or persuading someone else to clean the kitchen. In formal negotiations:

- Prepare by considering the issues in their widest context, in advance.
- List the strengths and weaknesses of your position. It reduces the chances of being caught out!
- Get all the options and alternatives outlined at the start. There are different routes to any solution and everyone needs to understand the choices available.
- Check that everyone agrees that no major issue is being overlooked, and that all the information is available to everyone.
- Appreciate that there will be more than one point of view, and let everyone have their say.
- Stick to the issues that are raised and avoid personality-based discussion; s/he may be an idiot BUT saying so will not promote agreement.
- If discussion gets over-heated, break for coffee, or agree to meet again later.
- At the end, ensure everyone understands what has been decided by circulating a summary note.

There are many books on discussion, assertiveness, and negotiation skills; see Drew and Bingham (1997) or Fisher et al. (1997), or do a library keyword search.

## **Top Tips**

- Being asked to start a discussion is not like being asked to represent your country at football. You are simply 'kicking off. Make your points clearly and 'pass the ball' promptly. Focus thoughts by putting the main points on a handout or OHT.
- Don't wait for a 'big moment' before contributing. Ask questions to get a topic going.
- Don't be anxious about the quality of your contributions. Get stuck in. Early in a discussion everyone is nervous and too concerned' about his or her own contribution to be critical of others.
- Keep discussion points short and simple.
- Use examples to illustrate and strengthen your argument.
- Share the responsibility for keeping the group going.
- Have a short discussion before a tutorial to kick ideas about. Meet in the bar, over coffee or supper.

## **Some final points**

Getting better at discussion and argument needs practice, and hearing one's own voice improves one's self-confidence. You can practise in private. Listen to a question on a TV or radio discussion programme. Then turn the sound down, take a deep breath to calm down, and use it as thinking time. What is the first point?

Now say it out loud. Subject matter is not important, get in there and have a go.

Respond with two points and then a question or observation that throws the topic back to the group or audience. That is a good technique because you share the discussion with the rest of the audience, who can contribute their views. You might want to tape a programme and compare your answer with the panellists' - remember to look at the style of the answers and their content.

Where points of view or judgements are needed, you may want to seek the opinions of people with different academic, social and cultural backgrounds and experience. Their views may be radically different from your own.

Seminars, workshops and tutorial discussions in literature and language classes are explicitly designed to allow you to share these kinds of complementary views. To get the most out of a discussion or conversation:

- Be positive.
- Ask yourself questions, like 'How will this help me understand ..?'
- Make eye contact with the group.
- Give the speaker feedback and support.
- Aim to be accurate and on the point.
- Include examples and references as you speak.

## 8. Managing Time

### **Self-Assessment:**

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being “not at all effective,” 3 being “somewhat effective,” and 5 being “very effective,” respond to each of the statements below. This should give you a good idea of your current time-management system.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How effective is your current system for managing time?  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. How effective is your current system for balancing your school, work, and social obligations?                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. How effective is your ability to get things done in an organized way?  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. How effective is your use of short periods of time (such as the time in between classes) to get things done? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

(mostly fives= you are successful in managing your time)

Managing time is the biggest challenge that faces university students. Before university, everything was planned for you by others. Rarely were there occasions when YOU took responsibility of your time. At university, you are in class for few hours, and this leaves with big chunks of time to manage. Your primary task is make sure that you do not fall behind and then have to scramble to make up for the lost time.

The magic word(s): It's high time you learned how to go about managing your time. To be able to do so, you need to be organized. This means that you have to create a balance among all your obligations (classes, friends, home, roommate(s), social life). Four (4) things are essential for creating a balance among all the things you may want to do and those that you have to do:

#### **1. Treat your studies as a full time job.**

As a full time student, you should make sure that you are covering a week's load of studies. Your week load should not be less than 48 hours a week of studies. Of these, you spend some 18 hours in class. You should make sure that you spend the remaining 30 hours on studying for your past and future classes. You spend around 4 hours everyday in class and you must spend a minimum 5 hours on preparing for class, revising lessons, preparing for tests,... The rest of your time (around 70 hours), you are free to devote to sleeping and your other waking-activities. One thing that you should always bear in mind is that you are, as a university student 'free' to study when you want.

#### **2. Plan your review schedule for times when you are most alert.**

The sooner you find what kind of person you are (a morning person/ an afternoon person,...) the better you can approach the task of managing your schedule(s). The latter should always be tailored to your needs as much as possible.

#### **3. Go to class.**

Even in the case where your professors does not take attendance, you should be convinced that they believe that going to classes is part of learning. There is a lot of information that you can only get in class. For example, most professors think of a syllabus as a work-in-progress (a suggestion) that is liable to change without any prior notice.. Your attendance will help you in the sense it will provide you with clues as to what it is that you should focus on.

#### **4. Don't procrastinate.**

The habit of continually putting off work that needs to be done is what the word 'procrastinate' refers to. It is very tempting to put off work until later. This is a very human nature. However, you will completely overwhelmed if you continually procrastinate. Once you start procrastinating, it is very difficult to get back on track.

Procrastination tends to be a bad habit that many students adopt. And then have difficulty getting rid of.. What follows are some strategies that would help you do so.

### **Managing your time:**

Managing your time can help you organize your responsibilities and achieve your goals. You need to determine three (3) pieces of information so as to manage your time effectively:

1. **What do you need to accomplish?**

You should have a clear idea about the things that you want to do during any period of time. One of the things, in this respect, that you should bear in mind is that it is very difficult to say how long an activity X is going to take to be done. The ability to know comes with experience. This is why you are better off if you make this rule, your rule: **Things always take longer than you think they will.** In planning your activities, provide more time than you think you will need. This way you avoid yourself going through the experience of feeling frustrated or rushing to get things done.

2. **What things that you currently do that waste your time?**

Before planning for an effective use of your time, you should find out if and how waste your time. Are you doing things that simply waste large amounts of time? How might you restructure your days so that less time is wasted.?

3. **How can you keep track of what you need to do?**

Get hold of a schedule book and jot down what things you need to do and how time you should be spending on them. However, you should not content yourself with writing the things-to-do list. You must also make sure to check your list every now and then.

### **Scheduling your time:**

The following tips may turn out to be very useful when preparing your schedule. They may help you avoid the trap of time-management pitfalls:

1. **Study when you are most alert.**

Try to find some of blocks of time that are naturally best for you. Test several times of the day to find out when you are the most ready to study.

2. **Spend some time each day on a course you are taking.**

Even in those times when you have nothing to prepare for class (homework, exam/test, reading something,...). It's a good thing to exercise yourself at the task of being up to date.

3. **Be specific.**

By creating a schedule that lists each specific task, one is more likely to remember to get everything done.

4. **Make a reading schedule for each class.**

For every class, make sure that you read an X-number of pages every day by way of preparing for these classes.

5. **prioritize.**

It is very useful if you prioritize what you have to do. You may want to label your assignments as "high", "medium", or "low" priority.

6. **make "to do" lists**

As a student, you may be a victim of what might be called (distracting thoughts). To keep yourself on track, you'd better adopt a 'to do' list.

7. **borrow time- don't steal it!**

If for one reason or another, you decided to skip an activity, make sure that you schedule for the wasted time the following day.

8. **use the time between your classes.**

The time between two activities can be very important so why lose it. Plan to use short periods of time . This time should not be lost.

**9. scheduling studying breaks.**

If you plan to study for more than an hour , schedule a 10-15 mns break for each hour. But be careful that your short breaks don't turn into long breaks.

**10. take some time off**

On a good schedule, you might be able to reward yourself by taking some time off without feeling guilty about it or regretting it later. You should plan some free time when creating your schedule

**11. don't spin your wheels.**

In case you have trouble, seek help. There is nothing that gets in the way of managing your time more than wasting it worrying rather than doing something productive. Don't allow problems / mishaps to let you fall too far behind.

## **PREPARING FOR TESTS**

The following tips might be very useful for effectively managing your time during exam period:

**1. Plan ahead.**

Review and rehearse your notes and the texts, if any, before tests week. Starting early is a must for you as a student who seeks to build up their linguistic competence. This is not something that you can do overnight. It is also a must for you to do so for all your courses have a cumulative nature. You are responsible for all that was covered before the test (= the whole term in the case of end term tests).

**2. Cut down on work or other commitments.**

Make sure that your friends and family understand that you are going to be extremely busy during test preparation (and also during the build up period referred to above). If you have a full-time or part-time job, work less, free yourself as much as possible for your test preparation. Avoid adding any new commitment to your schedule during this period, too.

**3. Get enough sleep.**

It rarely pays off to stay up all-night long preparing for a test. Your test preparation schedule should be so done that it leaves you some adequate sleep time. Falling asleep while taking a test is not a very good prospect.

**4. Study with a partner.**

By this time you should already have figured out the importance of working with a study group. If for nothing, a study group will keep motivated and force you to be on schedule. The notes you have taken in class could be completed, corrected, adjusted,.. by the members of your study group.

**5. Don't panic.**

This is just an exam; it's not the end of the world. If you think that there is too much pressure on you, re-adjust your schedule and allow yourself more break time and try to relax during those breaks. If you feel too much anxiety, don't let it build up, get help before it turns into a stumbling block to doing well in your tests.

## **THINKING Critically?**

1

Noureddine is a 1<sup>st</sup> term student. He loves being at university. Kénitra for him is a new city, his own place, new friends, and a wonderful social life. He has left behind him the time when he had to be home at 10 p.m. Noureddine is having the time of his life. He does not seem to be the person who goes to all his classes and he is falling behind on his class work.

He has 10 courses to attend to this term. He has a quite extensive reading list to see to this term (about 300 pages every week). In addition to in-class short quizzes, he has two tests to prepare for : a mid term and an end of term. He never seems to be able to keep up with his reading or to find time for study. Though he seems to enjoy these, he missed several of his writing and grammar classes.

Another of his problems is his part-time job. His job as a waiter in a local café place gives him the feeling that it is eating up on his study time. He works there for 15 hours every week (3 hours a day). He can't quit or cut back on hours because he needs the money he earns there.

His social commitments are another of his problems. Whenever he tries to start studying / reviewing, somebody knocks at his door. He has a hard time saying no and ends up procrastinating on his work every time. When he was back home, he never had trouble with his studies. He knows that he had to do things differently but he just can't find the time to get everything done.

Using the strategies you learned about time- and self management, what advice would give Noureddine to help him manage his time?

## 2

- a- How do you think your current time management system is affecting your performance at university?
- b- Do you find yourself with a lot of time during which you do not get anything accomplished? If so how can you adjust your current schedule to account for this wasted time?
- c- What kinds of obstacles currently make hard to manage yourself as a university student?
- d- What obstacles did you find to managing yourself and your time in preparing for your midterm tests? What do you plan to do differently for the end term tests?

## 3

Follow the schedule you created for 1 week and then evaluate yourself by asking the following questions:

- a- Did you find that you accomplished more work?
- b- What adjustments would you make to your schedule?
- c- Have you left enough flexibility in your schedule for emergencies?
- d- Are you studying during your most alert time?

## 10- EXAMINATIONS

Relax, you did all that reflection, reviewing and revision, so the examinations will be most agreeable. Check, and double-check, the examination timetable and room locations - they can change. Know where you are going. Plan to be there 20 minutes early to find your seat or block number, visit the loo and relax. Check the student handbook so you know what to do if you are delayed. Make sure you have a pen, spare pens, pencils and highlighters and a watch (even though there ought to be a clock in the room). Take heed of anything the invigilator has to say. If you think there is a problem with the paper tell an invigilator at once, so the Languages staff can be consulted.

Find out well in advance how the paper is structured and use the time in proportion. The usual convention is that if the marks for individual questions are not stipulated, the questions will all be worth equal marks. So, if you have to answer four questions in a two-hour paper, allow equal time for all four, i.e. 25 minutes per question + 10 minutes to read the paper and plan your answers + 10 minutes to check through your answers. Be strict with yourself about running over time, and if you can shave a couple of minutes off one or two of the questions, you gain another 5 minutes for extra checking or emergencies. Do all this arithmetic in advance, and try writing some timed answers to an old exam paper to get yourself tuned in. For language exams, where it is the quality of the language that determines your mark, you will need to adjust the time allocation so as to allow sufficient time for checking what you have written for spelling and grammatical accuracy.

Make sure you read the instructions at the top of the exam paper (the 'rubric') very carefully. Don't rush to answer the first question on the page. Read through all the questions before you put pen to paper, and make a rough plan of every answer (including any quotations or references you intend to use) before you start. Answer the number of questions required, no more and preferably no less.

Leave time to do justice to each question, and don't leave your potentially best answer until the end. Equally, don't spend so much time on it that you have to skimp on the remaining essays.

Should you be seized with anxiety and your brain freezes over, use the brainstorming approach. Write out the question and then look at each word in turn scribbling down the first words that occur to you, anything ... authors' names, examples, and related words. This should generate calm and facts, and you can plan from the spider diagram you have generated.

### 10.1 Examination Essays

Double check exam locations and times

In languages, as in most arts and humanities areas, discursive essays will feature prominently in your exams. The minimalist advice here is: re-read the advice on

argument, revision, and writing essays, and write fast. Essays allow you to develop lines of thought, draw in diverse ideas and demonstrate your skills in argument, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and written communication. Remember to keep the linguistic/cultural/historical/literary content high, use evidence to support your arguments wherever you can and cite supporting references.

### Top Tips

- If all questions look impossible, choose the one where you have the most examples to quote, or the longest question. Long questions usually give more clues to plan the answer.
- Plan your answer even if short of time. Underline or highlight keywords in the question, like Discuss, or Compare and contrast, note the period, areas and issues the answer should cover, and don't stray into irrelevancy. Don't make generalizations if the question asks about specific authors or texts or historical events, but if the answer calls for a wider-ranging treatment, make sure you supply it, along with relevant examples. Do a quick list or spider diagram of the main points, and note ideas for the introduction and conclusion. Then rank the points to get a batting order for the sections.
- On a three question paper, plan all three questions before writing the answer to Question 1. Your brain can run in background mode on ideas for Questions 2 and 3 as you write the first answer.
- Watch the time. Leave a couple of minutes at the end of each answer to check through, amend grammar, spelling, add extra points, references and tidy up diagrams.

Everything needs setting in a language context. If you do not demonstrate your powers of argument and include language-related material and examples, connecting what the examiners are asking with what you know, you are not going to hit the high marks. Organize your points, one per paragraph, in a structure that flows logically. Set the scene in your first paragraph and signpost the layout of the answer. Be precise rather than woolly, for example rather than saying 'Early on .. / give the date; or for the general 'In many parts of Europe we see .. / use examples like 'In Amsterdam, Liege and Strassburg we can see ...'. Try to keep an exciting, interesting point for the final paragraph. If you are going to cross things out, do it tidily.

### 10-2- Short Answer Questions

Short answer questions search for evidence of understanding through factual, knowledge-based answers and the ability to reason and draw inferences. For short answers a reasoned, paragraph answer is required to questions like 'Briefly describe humanism'. Questions like 'Outline four characteristics of the courtly epic' or 'Suggest four reasons for the increased popularity enjoyed by right-wing politicians in central Europe in the early years of the 21st century' require four, fact-rich answers, and can be answered as a set of points. Take care to answer the question that is set -

'Define and demonstrate the importance of the following four aspects of Dadaism: its mocking of traditional European institutions and art forms; its emphasis on odd conjunctions of everyday objects; its left-wing, anti-war thrust; its international dimensions'. This is a really helpful question, provided you answer all eight parts.

### 10.3 MCQs

MCQs (multiple choice questions) test a wide range of topics in a short time. They may be used for revision, in a module test where the marks do not count, or as a part of module assessment where the marks matter. A class test checks what you have understood, and should indicate where more research and revision is required. In a final assessment watch the rules. With on-line assessment, once the answer is typed in and sent, it cannot be changed.

Look carefully at the instructions on MCQ papers. The instructions will remind you of the rules, such as:

There is/is not negative marking. (With negative marking you lose marks for getting it wrong).

One or more answers may be correct, select all the correct answers. (This is how you can get 100 marks on a paper with 60 questions.)

General advice says to shoot through the paper answering all the questions you can do easily, and then go back to tackle the rest (but general advice does not suit everyone). Questions come in a range of types:

### 10.4 Gap-Filling Test

These are peculiar to language learning, especially interactive CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) drills, and used wisely they have a powerful reinforcing effect (because you can learn by your mistakes, go back and try them again). But there is also a sudden-death paper-based form much-beloved of language teachers out to probe (as in 'dentists' instruments') students' knowledge of grammar, where they can be profoundly demoralizing! You are given sentences or a passage containing a series of gaps which represent missing adjectival endings, articles or verbs, and you are required to fill the gaps by adding the correct form. With these tests there is no grey area, only black and white, right and wrong, and the only sensible way to approach them is in the sure and certain knowledge that comes from learning the rules off by heart... and get some past exam papers to practise on.

### 10-5- Oral Examinations

Oral examinations in L2 are an integral part of all language degrees.

In the Oral exam (anything from 10 to 40 minutes) you have a conversation with one or sometimes two examiners (perhaps one of the native-speaker language assistants plus

a lecturer or external examiner), either on a topic you have chosen and prepared in advance, or on a subject determined there and then by the examiner(s). Either way, it is a test of your conversational skills, aural and oral.

You may also be asked to read a passage out loud, to test your pronunciation.

With a topic chosen beforehand, it is up to you to research it and practise the vocabulary connected with it, but many people think that if you don't know the subject until you enter the room, there is nothing you can do to prepare for the exam. Not so. As with writing an essay, there is a lot you can do to help yourself.

### Top Tips

Track down useful conversational gambits and responses and learn them.

Drill yourself until your grammar (especially endings, which always go first under strain) is as rock-solid as possible. If you make a grammatical error and correct it, you will be rewarded for spotting the mistake, too many candidates aren't even aware they have made a mistake.

- Second-guess which topics will come up, and rehearse conversations around them with your friends or kindly language assistants. Even if you guess wrong, all practice is good practice, but realistically, the examiners are quite likely to ask you something vaguely related to your course, your residence abroad, the country itself, your plans for the future, or ...?
- Practise reading aloud (a variety of material, anything will do) to a friend or a tape-recorder until you are satisfied with your accent and intonation and confident about reading a new passage at short notice.

Get a good night's sleep and avoid unusual stimulants (always sound advice).

Examiners tend to appear in suits but are interested in your brain not your wardrobe; but wear something tidy just the same. Celebrate later.

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Donald G. Sydney and Kneale. E. Pauline. *Study Skills for Language Students: A Practical Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001.

Richards C. Jack. *Teaching Listening and Speaking From Theory to Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.