



Study Skills Guide



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Date of production: March 18, 2021

Update: January 8, 2025

This guide will be updated at NCIU's discretion from time to time and without student consent.

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1 The Benefits of Distance Learning

Distance Learning, while not new, is one of the most innovative and exciting concepts for the 21st century. The advent of the Internet and social media and their use as a medium for the delivery of courses makes for a flexible and convenient way for people to achieve their academic goals and develop themselves to be more effective in their chosen fields and careers.

Studying by distance learning means that you can:

- Remain among your family and friends whilst achieving your academic goals.
- Maintain involvement in your ministry, job or work whilst studying.
- Remain involved in your local church and support networks.
- Enhance your education by applying what you are learning to real life situations along the way.
- Work to your own pace and capacity and balance the mix of work, family, study and recreation along the way.

As a distance learning student, you will find the benefits of studying in this fashion highly beneficial and rewarding. We encourage you to consider the points and advice in this manual and refer to it often along your journey for advice and reassurance.

At NCIU, we endeavor to design and deliver quality distance education curriculum that is not only of a high academic standard, but also intensely practical. We believe that as you study NCIU courses you will be inspired and equipped to better fulfil your calling and ministry.

2 The Challenges of Distance Learning

Even with all the benefits of distance learning, you will do well to take note of some of the potential challenges that you will invariably face as a distance education student.

- It requires discipline and consistency to make progress.
- Courses are generally completed in a longer period of time.
- There is strong temptation to drop out, especially when other priorities (such as work, friends or too many Church activities) become pressing and studies can fall by the wayside.

We aim to help you become a successful distance learner and complete your chosen course. We have student mentors and faculty that can answer your questions and help to encourage and motivate you to finish your course – and finish well.

3 How to Maximize Your Distance Learning Experience

3.1 Two Mentor Types

There are two kinds of mentors. The first is an academic mentor, who is always appointed by NCIU and has proven expertise in the field of study. The second is a personal mentor, i.e., an encourager or personal ‘coach’, who may or may not know about your area of study, but who can help you and motivate you to perform with excellence along the way.

3.2 How to Find a Personal Mentor

- Look for somebody you admire who has a good track record in the area of your study interest and in personal growth and development.
- Look for somebody who will listen to you talk about your goals and reasons for studying.
- Look for somebody who will not let you “off the hook” when you try to make an excuse for missing a deadline.
- Look for somebody who has an interest, or even better, understanding in your area of study.
- Look for somebody who will be committed to you for the length of the course. Remember that a mentor must be accessible and focused on the learning

outcomes, i.e., the encouragement of the application of all that you are learning.

3.3 Then What?

Having found someone here are some practical considerations to help you.

1. Establish some basic expectations such as how often you would like to meet to discuss your progress, and for how long, and where etc. Meet to discuss your personal progress and goals. Remember, a lack of motivation to set and achieve goals is a major reason that distance learning students drop out.
2. Establish some written study goals and a timetable and give your mentor a copy.
3. Be honest about your progress and ask for advice regarding problems, distractions or difficulties you are facing. Most importantly listen to advice and constantly seek to improve yourself and be faithful to your goals.
4. Talk about ways that you can apply what it is that you are learning, so that your learning experience provides benefit to both yourself and those around you. This is a great motivator and reason to keep going.

Next to your personal discipline, finding and developing a relationship with a mentor can be the single biggest reason that you succeed in your distance learning endeavor.

3.4 Implement a Study Timetable

Establishing a timetable and written goals for your study program is a great motivator, reminder and friend as your progress through your course. We suggest that you:

- *Write it down.* Remember writing crystallizes thought. It is only wishful thinking until it is written down. Then the challenge is to make it happen.
- *Keep it in front of you.* Pin your plan in front of your study desk, or where you will see it often.
- *Monitor your progress.* Mark off your progress and set some encouraging rewards along the way.

3.5 Have Realistic Expectations

Unfulfilled expectations are a great reason for frustration.

Set realistic expectation about what you can achieve and by when. Although your initial attack on the study program may yield some quick and impressive results, look at the finish line, and pace yourself along the way so that you finish, and finish well.

Allow some margins in your schedule for that unexpected cold, or work project. Success in Distance Learning is not based on cramming, but a gradual and consistent approach to your study each week. If your survival at High School, like so many, was based on cramming, you will need to make a fresh approach to your study discipline so you can maximize your time and make the most of your learning opportunity.

3.6 Live a Balanced Life

Whilst studying it is both beneficial and necessary to lead a balanced life between the areas of your work, family, social/recreation, rest and studies, among other things.

Everyone has 168 hours in the week, so make sure you do not treat yourself like a machine. Give yourself permission to be balanced along the learning pathway. The key is not so much the time spent in study, as the focus whilst you are studying.

3.7 You Can Do It

Thousands of people each year graduate from learning institutions with Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Postgraduate degrees achieved via distance learning. The time effort and discipline will reward you, not just in the end but also along the way.

4 Studying More Effectively

Many of the following points have a sound basis in research findings on student learning. However, study is a very personal matter and you must develop the methods most effective for yourself. You should remember, though, that there is no method for instant and easy success. Good organization and thorough working habits, demanding as they are, are the only answer.

4.1 Why Do You study?

Before any course, ask yourself what you wish to learn from the experience. What knowledge, skills and attitudes do you wish to develop? Effective study is very dependent on your knowing why you want to know and what you want to know. You will gain a great deal more from being actively involved in your education rather than being a passive processor of information.

For each course, make certain that you know what you are expected to cover. The module descriptors should provide this knowledge as will interaction with students, who have already done that course! However, courses change.

4.2 Where Do You study?

Here are some thoughts about establishing a place to study.

- Work in the same place as far as possible, though an occasional change can be invigorating.
- Banish distractions during your allocated study times such as boyfriends, girlfriends, TV, radio, magazines, kittens, babies and other appealing stimuli. See that you have a good light, plenty of fresh air, and a comfortable temperature in your room. Try to keep your study time focused.
- Organize a large table or desk, suitable chair, and a bookcase (if you use printed materials). Have all sources for your subject at hand or make sure that you can access them digitally and can charge your electronic device.
- Keep a supply of pens, pencils, paper clips and scribbling papers readily available.
- Avoid too much physical relaxation as you study.

4.3 How Do You Study?

However much you dislike it, a large timetable showing your set commitments of study time, free time, and revision etc. will help you work out the best use of your remaining time. This responsibility is yours alone. Before you start planning recognize your 'biological clock': if you work best in the early part of the day, plan to finish work early enough for a good rest. Do not be tricked into working only when you are in the mood. Most of us never are!

4.4 Planning Your Study

An ounce of planning can save a ton of frustrated effort!

- Plan ahead when and what you will study, dividing your day into, for example, 40-minute blocks of time. Although there will be wide variations between courses and subjects, plan to spend a good two or three hours a couple of times a week, if at all possible. You may have only one study day per week.
- Give each subject more or less equal time. Do not concentrate on one at the expense of others.
- Allot difficult tasks to those times when you are most efficient and discipline yourself to confront them.
- Plan to study a particular subject as soon as possible after listening to the lecture or reading the text. Material is remembered better if some attempt is made to recall it soon after its original presentation.
- As far as possible, plan for each period of learning to reinforce the next. For example, do not learn Greek immediately after learning Hebrew!
- Decide if you prefer to finish one task at a time or spend shorter periods on each task. Make certain that you allow sufficient time for each subject. On the whole, 'spaced learning' is more effective than 'massed' learning. Keep your timetable flexible enough to cope with any emergencies, or a need for new organization.
- At the end of a section of work (between 40-60 minutes) have a break. Go for a short walk, do some exercises, relax, have a drink. But time yourself. A morning can disappear during a coffee break.
- Make certain that you have proper breaks for meals and at least an hour's physical recreation a day. You cannot work if you are physically tired or mentally stale.

- Allow for 'warming up' when you first begin a study period, and do not expect to achieve a high level of efficiency immediately you sit down. If you are not 'interested' when you start, work usually produces its own interest. At the beginning and end of each period of work, review what you have done and will do in the next study period on this subject. Your study should be a springboard for your own research and thinking.
- Do not forget that some of your most valuable work may be done in consultation or conversation with your mentor or fellow students. Talking is one of the most important ways of making knowledge our own and of extending our range.

5 Getting the Most Out of Reading

Reading, like listening, is a very active process and demands all our concentration. A good aim is to maintain approximately 80% comprehension while reading at faster speeds, and to be aware of what speeds are appropriate for particular pieces of reading.

5.1 Concentration and Relaxation

It is essential to bring your full attention to the task. Discipline any tendency to think of something else.

5.2 Regression

Slow readers tend to go over material several times. The mind does not make the effort to assimilate material the first time. Work taken in very slowly is often hard to understand or remember. Cover your work so your eyes cannot move back.

5.3 Eye Movements

Eye movements should:

- Be steady and rhythmic, without any accompanying head movements or subvocalization (i.e., lip or tongue movements).
- Focus two or three times only in one line, choosing key words or key phrases.
- Cover as wide a span as possible, at least two or three words on either side of the main words.
- Eliminate unnecessary words and anticipate what is coming.

5.4 Comprehension

The purpose of reading includes the ability to:

- Retain information and recall it when required.
- Select important points.
- Interpret information and ideas.
- Make deductions from what has been read to arrive at general conclusions and judgements.
- Relate knowledge to experience.

5.5 Factors Affecting Comprehension

Comprehension can be enhanced by understanding the following:

- Speed of perception. This helps us group our ideas meaningfully.
- Accuracy of perception. Do not read what is not on the page.
- Memory and ability to recall information. This depends on organization.
- Motivation or purpose. Invent a purpose if you have none.
- Concentration.
- Level of difficulty of the material. Be realistic about what you tackle.
- Ability to anticipate.
- Vocabulary. Remember part of good preaching/teaching is the ability to use the right words.
- General background of knowledge and experience. Learning is not an isolated experience.
- Ability to read critically.

5.6 Reading

Reading is an active process, during which evaluation of the material should be carried out.

You must become a critic and take a slightly skeptical attitude:

1. Who is writing and for what purpose?
2. What audience has he/she in mind?
3. What is the writer saying, how and why?
4. What value is there, for the reader, for anyone, in what the writer says?

5.7 Vocabulary

An important part of your education is the extension of your vocabulary.

- Make yourself conscious and curious about new words. Use new ones when you are speaking.
- When you study a new subject, be particularly careful about defining new terms.
- Use 3" x 4" cards or a cheap notebook to write out each new word together with its meaning, derivation and possibly the sentence in which you found it. Often it is a good idea to add synonyms (a word having the same or nearly the same meaning) and antonyms (a word of opposite meaning). Practice reading and writing the word until it is part of your personal vocabulary.

5.8 Types of Reading

Recognize that there are different kinds of reading to suit different objectives:

- *Studying* involves rereading, making notes, and giving careful consideration to the full meaning and implications of the material. Speeds will range from a few words to 200 words per minute (wpm).
- *Slow reading* ranges between 150-300 wpm and is used normally by inefficient readers and by efficient readers where material is difficult, unfamiliar, and/or a higher quality of comprehension is required.
- *Rapid reading* is adequate for most purposes. On easy material a comprehension level of 70-80% should be maintained. Speeds range from 300-800 wpm.
- *Skimming* involves moving the eye quickly across and down the page, not reading every group of words or even every line. This is aided by a clear sense of purpose: paying attention to headings and subheadings, identifying the principal sentences of paragraphs, and looking for key words and phrases. It is most used in previewing material and speeds of 800-1000 wpm can be achieved with practice.
- *Scanning* is a refinement of skimming, to be used when looking for a precise piece of information, date, number, etc., and speeds of up to 2000 wpm have been achieved after considerable practice.

5.9 Reading Efficiency

An efficient read is flexible and will:

- Be aware of these different types of reading and will apply the appropriate one to the task in hand (students find great advantage in varying their speeds as the material requires).
- Organize an approach to the material so that reading skills will enhance general study skills.
- Judge when adequate time has been spent reading the material. This means that, after you organized your previewing and skimming, you should know what needs more attention, what you already know, and what can be ignored. Of course, this does not apply to reading poetry and fiction where the position of each word may be important to the overall pattern.

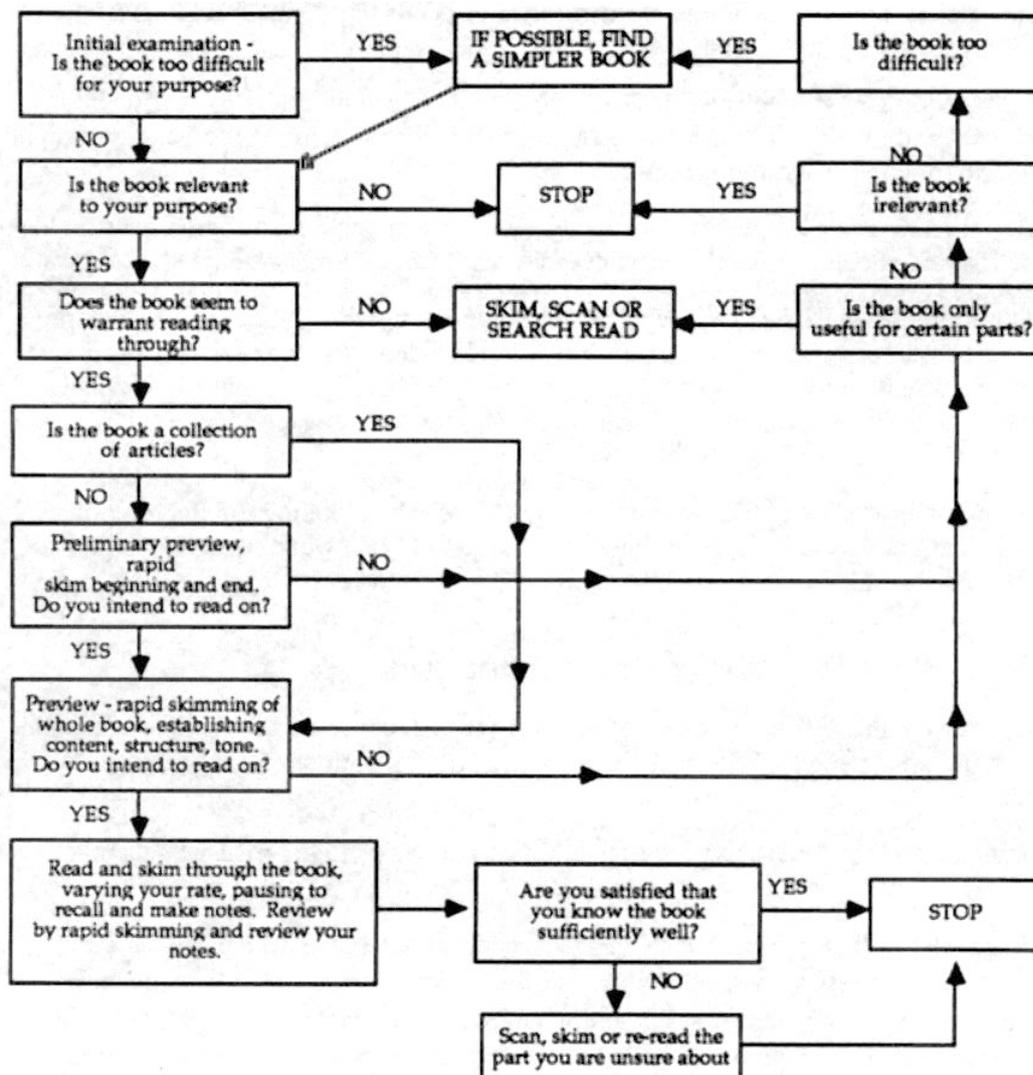


Figure 1: Reading Summary Flowchart

6 Note Taking in Lectures and from Recordings

At high school we learn from many different sources: textbooks, lectures, papers, handouts, formal and informal discussions. Integrating the information from all these sources is a big problem. Acquiring skill in bringing it all together is probably one of the most important things you can do in order to study successfully.

Taking good notes during lectures is particularly important. With other information sources you can usually go back to the original material to check, but at the end of a lecture only your memory and your notes remain.

There is no one 'best' style of taking notes in a lecture. The best method will vary with student preferences, lecture topic, the nature of handouts or visual aid material presented, and with the tutor's style of presentation.

In general, the tutor aims to get across three main types of information:

FACTS: All lectures contain factual material to be written down or copied from a board or screen.

CONCEPTS: Most lectures contain an element of conceptual integration of the material which may in fact be the most important part of the lecture. Many tutors concentrate on concepts, knowing that the bare facts can be found in texts.

REFERENCES: Sources of further relevant material may be given.

The second category, concepts, usually presents the most problems. Facts can be written down as they are presented, often in the same form, as can further references. Concepts require the student to contribute something by actively interpreting and displaying relationships in a way that will aid recall. It is possible, but usually difficult, to record concepts in narrative form. Very often, diagrammatic presentation is a better approach, being quicker and more amenable to correction and alteration if later developments in the lecture prompt a better concept.

In many lectures, a good set of notes should contain all the factual and reference material and set out in such a way that the links and relationships between them are clearly obvious. If the resulting notes also facilitate 'inserting' other material at a later date, so much the better. There are a number of ways of achieving this sort of result, the two most common of which are discussed here.

6.1 Patterned Note Taking

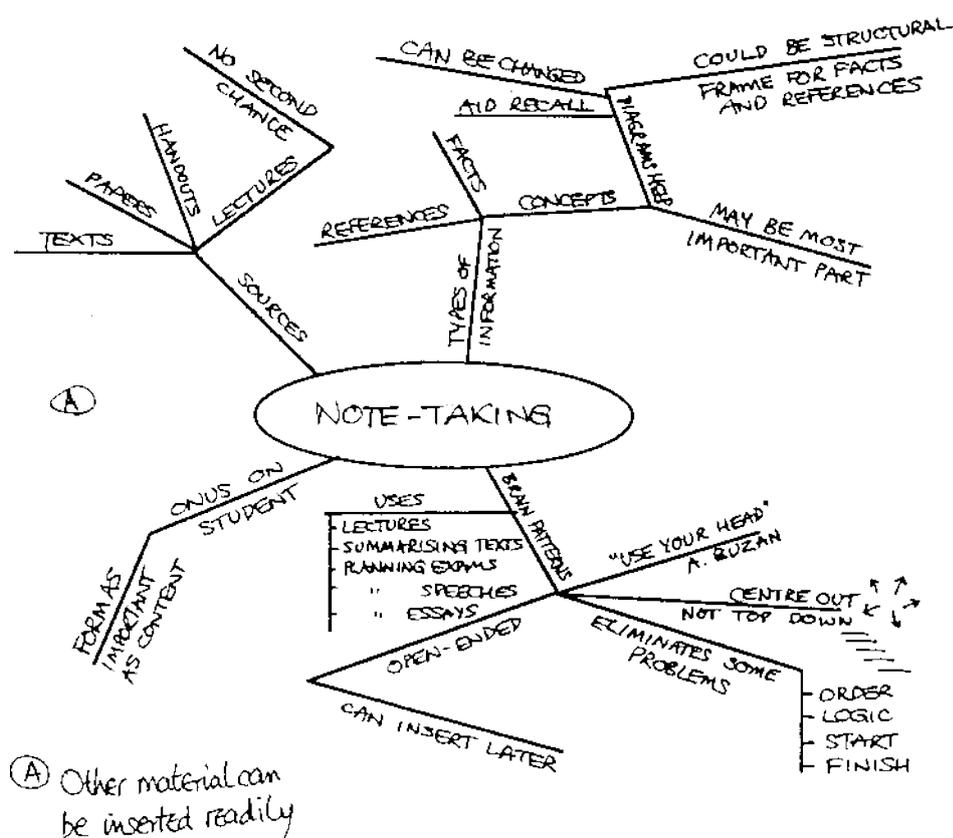


Figure 2: A sample of patterned note taking

Buzan (*Use Your Head*, 1974) describes an approach known as 'brain-patterning', which almost amounts to an evolutionary approach for a student familiar only with conventional or 'linear' notes.

Patterned notes begin at the center of the page and radiate out rather than begin at the top and work down. The logic of the lecture is developed as a two-dimensional network, with factual and reference material displayed in their appropriate relationships to each other.

This approach eliminates problems of order and logic, starting and ending sections, and organization of data, all of which are taken care of within the pattern itself. Patterned notes are open ended, allowing for insertion of extra material without destroying the logic. They aid recall in revision periods, sometimes to the extent that simply looking at the page brings back the essential features of the topic.

Patterned notes can be used in note taking from lectures or literature, and also for planning essays, speeches or exam answers. Their most useful property in such applications is their open-ended nature, which permits an argument to be structured, altered and elaborated upon without at any stage having to be scrapped in favor of a fresh start.

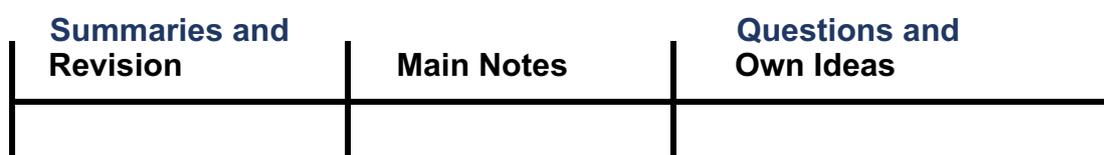
If necessary, long lists or large sections of new material can be drawn elsewhere and indexed to the main pattern with a reference number, or even via a long line from the opposite page to show where the new material 'fits in'.

The following example illustrates a pattern. Start by writing the topic in the middle of the page and build up the logic from here. You may need to practice a few times before it comes easily. Buzan's approach to patterning is by no means the only such approach and does not necessarily suit all students. It is a good example of a different method with substantial advantages, suited to many lectures.

The responsibility for note taking rest solely with the student. Notes are frequently the key to success and as such their form is as important as the content.

6.2 Conventional or Linear Notes

It is best to have loose-leaf notebooks so that you can incorporate notes from your own research on the subject. Label lectures accurately so that they do not get out of order. Layout can help. A possible approach is to divide the page into columns, in this way.



If you use linear notes, develop a consistent method of indicating important points, underlining, starring, etc. Use a pattern of abbreviations consistently so that it becomes a personal shorthand.

For example:

v. imp.	=	veryimportant
govt.	=	government
w.	=	with
▲	=	therefore
=>	=	implies
E	=	there exists
≠	=	is not
II	=	is approximately
X	=	Christ
Xn	=	Christian

Make use of the planned structure of most lectures to help you set out notes in an organized fashion. Use headings, subheadings, indentation, letters and numbers. Do not confuse substance with illustration, many lecturers use anecdotal material liberally to illustrate their material, without intending it to be taken down in notes.

Regardless of your preferred style of actually taking notes, there are some general principles which will stand you in good stead in taking notes from lectures. All notes should include:

- Speaker's (author's) main ideas and any important details.
- The logical structure of his/her ideas (in a diagram if possible, even if you do not use patterns).
- Space for adding relevant examples, quotations or additional material you may come across later.
- The lecture method requires active listening, thus making for more effective recall and evaluation of material.
- Prepare yourself for lectures by looking over previous lectures, recalling what you already know on the subject (sketch a pattern). Make use of any course

handouts in this preview. It will make a considerable difference to your reception of the lecture material.

- These activities will help you to listen for main points, for steps in an argument, and for summaries. These are essential note material. Ignore the other material as far as your notes are concerned; listen to it as amplification, which is what it is intended to be.
- When in doubt, leave blanks and check later with other students. If necessary, use phonetic spelling of unusual words and find out later what the words were.
- As soon as possible after a lecture, review your notes to see that you can read and understand them. Rewriting is only valuable if it is necessary for this purpose. Do not hesitate to follow up queries with other students or with the tutor.

7 Establishing the Sources

The Module Descriptor contains the core and further reading materials for any given course. In addition, and in particular at Master level, students are expected to find complementary texts through (online) libraries and Internet research.

Note that Wikipedia is not an academically approved source and should **never** be used in any essay or dissertation. This will lead to a deduction of points.

8 Writing an Essay

This following section outlines a set of strategies for approaching the task of writing essays at college or university level. This skill usually takes some time to acquire, but by following the advice below we hope you will gain a better appreciation of what is required.

8.1 Plan

Plan your research and start your reading and writing weeks, not days, before the essay is due.

8.2 Identify Key Words

Essay questions usually contain one or more of the following KEY WORDS, which are your main guide as to what is required:

ANALYZE: Consider the various parts of the whole and describe the interrelationship between them.

COMPARE: Examine the objects in question with a view to demonstrating their similarities.

CONTRAST: Examine the objects in question for the purpose of demonstrating differences.

DEFINE: Give a definition or state terms of reference.

DISCUSS: Present the different aspects of a problem or question and draw a reasoned conclusion.

EVALUATE: Examine the various sides of a question and try to reach a judgement.

SUMMARISE: Outline the main points briefly.

8.3 Analyze the Question

Question the question itself. Consider the possibilities, scope and limitations. Define each term used in it and use these definitions as tentative headings for your research. Essay questions at University level are usually more testing, more subtle and more controversially worded than those confronted by you in high school. If you are unclear about what is wanted, ask your lecturer or tutor for clarification.

8.4 Plan Your Reading

Plan your initial research around questions relevant to the topic.

- Use small cards on which to build up a file of material. Question headings can go on to these.
- See that your reading is not too general and that you do not amass material haphazardly and to no purpose. Prune steadily as you read, and actively assess the value of your material.
- Continually check your reading against your questions and the questions asked. Your subject may redefine itself as you become more familiar with the material.

- It is helpful to note ideas, facts and quotes on separate cards. This makes later organization of material much easier, especially if you have to rewrite a draft.

8.5 Discern a Line of Attack

Review all your material and decide what your line of approach (argument, plan) will be. Sort your ideas into a pattern that will best support the development of your ideas. This is a very important part of your work. It is rarely sufficient to summarize material.

You will be required to use techniques such as ANALYSING (detecting unstated assumptions, seeing interrelationships between ideas, distinguishing facts from hypotheses), SYNTHESISING (arranging ideas or information in such a way as to build a pattern or structure not clearly there before), and EVALUATING (making judgments about the value of material and methods for given purposes). This is especially true at Master level where critical thinking is required.

8.6 Sketch an Outline Answer

It is your responsibility, not your reader's, to see that you make sense of your material. An INTRODUCTION outlining the question and the organization of your answer is necessary. In the same way, a CONCLUSION that sums up and clinches your argument is necessary. Remember that subheadings may be helpful in some subjects. This may be achieved by a carefully planned OUTLINE. Here is a basic framework for an outline:

Introduction

- Comment on the subject of the essay. (What do you understand by it? How is it important?)
- Introduce the points you are going to discuss, first stating your case in general terms and then the opinions you are going to support in the rest of the essay.
- Very briefly summarize the overall theme of your essay, indicating the main points to be made, and perhaps the order in which they are to be presented. This gives the reader an idea of what to expect and greatly increases his/her comprehension. Do not waste your own and your reader's time with padding.

The Main Body

- Develop your line of argument through several main ideas.
- Support each idea with examples and illustrations drawn from the books, articles and any other sources you have used.
- As you develop your essay, make it clear how your arguments in one place relate to others you have used or will use.

Conclusion

- Summarize the main ideas.
- Form a tentative answer by way of final comment to the question.
- Be prepared to write more than one draft, in the first you will concentrate on content rather than style.

8.7 Presentation Style

Headings often help divide your text into logical units for your reader and yourself. Employ a conventional format in your setting out of headings. If you use headings, however, the text should still make sense as it stands. In other words, headings are additional to the essay.

Quotations that exceed three lines should be acknowledged (e.g., Jones, 1977). The full reference can be given in a footnote.

Paragraphs that rely heavily on the ideas of one of the authors you have read should be acknowledged in your text, e.g., "Smith ably demonstrates ", or via a footnote. Footnotes are also a useful place to relegate supporting details that are of worthy of inclusion somewhere, but they tend to clutter the main text.

Extensive supporting details, like tables, lists and excursions into related but nonessential matters can be relegated to one or more appendices.

The work should conclude with a bibliography in conventional academic style (see the Assignment Style Guide).

8.8 Logical Style

Have your notes arranged in such a fashion that it is easy to write coherent paragraphs leading from subject to subject. 'Flow' or continuity of argument is a very important quality in essays.

Check each paragraph for a key sentence that links it to the preceding one, a key sentence that defines the topic in hand, and a final one that sets up a link to the next paragraph. This whole issue is so important that the article following this one is devoted entirely to the issue.

It is important to imagine the person marking your essay drinking black coffee, with another ten essays to mark before lunch wishing they were somewhere else. If the introduction is fuzzy, the flow of ideas muddled, and the conclusions limp, you will have lost him/her and they will get to the end still not sure what on earth you have really said. They will not have another go tomorrow. It will get a boring lowish mark and go onto the pile, unloved and unremembered!

8.9 Academic Style

Support your points with appropriate references, and on no account copy material without acknowledgement and use quotations sparingly. Paraphrase where possible.

Beware of:

- Oversimplifying issues and using jargon or cliches as a substitute for careful explanation.
- Making generalizations without giving specific examples.
- Using inappropriate analogies.
- Quoting material that is irrelevant or out of context.
- Adopting an emotive tone.
- Using inconsistent approaches.
- Making assertions without supporting evidence or argument.

8.10 English Style

- Use simple and grammatically accurate English.
- Use complete, straightforward sentences. Do not just write points or jumbled notes.
- Follow accepted English rules for spelling, not your imagination.
- Avoid slang and colloquialisms (and undue flourish and affectation). An essay is formal work in which precision of language is very important.
- Make your punctuation accurate, economic and meaningful.
- Use a good dictionary (such as the Webster's Concise Oxford) and thesaurus (such as Roget's).
- Use a spell-checker and search for double spaces where there should be only one space. (It is easy to tap the spacebar inadvertently twice.)

The issue of academic English is treated at greater length in the next section "Writing Academic English".

8.11 Drafts and Rewrites

Get the first draft done according to the above guidelines, but relatively rapidly, and in good time before the deadline. After a day or two, when the pride of authorship has subsided a bit, reread your draft, preferably aloud, and to a critical listener. Be ruthless in your pruning, redrafting, or even complete rewriting. Good work requires a great deal of effort. Very, very few people can rely on writing an essay without at least one preliminary draft.

8.12 Time Management

Some theology students get so overwhelmed by the quest of life, the universe and everything that every essay becomes a trauma. Others get very bogged down in the reading, chasing up every lead and every idea; some in the quest for the line of attack, some in the drafting and redrafting. Yet others spend weeks wrestling with the dreaded computer. Beware of all this! Try to devise a work schedule and stick to it.

8.13 Improve

If this is your first year of university study, it may take several essays for you to develop an efficient strategy. Do not get discouraged. If one or two of your early efforts fail, ask the tutor for proper feedback and try again!

9 Writing Academic English

9.1 Thinking of the Reader

When you write reports or essays, and even examination answers, do you ever think about the person who is going to read them?

Except for a personal diary, the purpose of everything we write is to put a message across to a reader. This person should be uppermost in our minds, whenever, whatever, we write. For example, when you write a university assignment your reader (i.e., your tutor) knows more about the subject than you. So, you are writing not to provide him/her with new knowledge, but to show him/her you have researched and understood the issues. The way in which you structure and write the assignment should reflect this purpose.

If you are in doubt about whether to include or exclude information, your question should be:

"DOES THE READER NEED THIS?"

not

"SHOULD I PUT THIS IN?"

There are many components to good writing. We have selected a few which have the greatest effect on readability. The references listed at the end will expand on these and provide further reading.

9.2 Paragraph Structure

Each paragraph should contain one central idea. This main idea can be well expressed in one main sentence (a topic sentence), preferably placed at the beginning of a paragraph and followed by sentences giving supporting details. The paragraph should only contain information relevant to the main idea. For example:

Some accidents are caused by a combination of laziness and ignorance.

An operator may lack the energy and personal drive to find out the governing circumstances and he may not have the technical knowledge to appreciate some special requirement. Many of the accidents that occurred last year could have been prevented if the operators had enforced their overall responsibility.

(NB: The topic sentence is in bold type).

Look at the paragraphs you have written. Is each one a self-contained unit with one central idea? If not, try to rewrite them. How long are the paragraphs? You should try to keep them short, with a maximum of about 150 words. Pages of continuous prose are off-putting.

Paragraphs with a common theme should be given a short, informative heading. Headings such as 'Problems' and 'Discussion' are not very informative.

9.3 Sentence Links

In good writing, one sentence leads clearly to the next. The reader is always aware of where the text is going and can predict what will probably come next. Two ways in which this is achieved are "signaling in advance" and "chaining".

9.3.1 Signaling in Advance

One way of signaling is by using the meaning of certain words and phrases to enable us to predict the type of information that will follow.

An example of signaling in advance:

Helicopters are very convenient for dropping freight by parachute, but this system has its problems.

The writer should now proceed to elaborate on these problems, otherwise our expectations, as a reader, will not be fulfilled.

Other examples of such words are:

cause, advantage, reason, result, conclusion, by this means.

In the first paragraph under the heading "Sentence Links" above, *two ways* is a signal. As a reader you would be disconcerted if after that phrase only one of the ways was given.

Another way of signaling is by conjunctions and sentence connectors:

moreover, although, because, hence, as a result, nevertheless, whereas.

These all show in what way two pieces of information are being linked together.

9.3.2 Chaining

This is a way of linking ideas so that a flow is obtained. An idea brought up at the end of the sentence is developed at the beginning of the next.

An example of chaining:

For every legal recording sold, probably as many as thirty are sold illegally. Pirate tape sales produce vastly more revenue than legitimate ones. This situation has caused the government to introduce new legislation.

This example also illustrates another effective technique. Instead of repeating the same words or phrases, others which imply the same idea are employed.

In the example above:

sold illegally = pirate sales

this situation = pirate sales producing more revenue than legitimate ones

9.4 Sentence Construction

Sentences should be reasonably short and not too complex. The storage capacity of the reader's brain is limited; if a sentence is very long we usually forget the beginning by the time we get to the end. In addition, as the most important part of the sentence normally comes first, it is better to put the main verb as early as possible in the sentence, and as close as possible to the subject.

Which of these is easier or quicker to grasp?

- A. An excellent example of social and commercial value derived from sustained applied research aimed at product improvement is provided by the electric light industry.
- B. The electric light industry is an excellent example of social and commercial value which has derived from sustained applied research that is aimed at product improvement.

9.5 Personal Pronouns

In academic writing it is common practice for a writer to distance himself/herself from the action being reported. The personal pronoun "I" is therefore avoided. However, where a completely individual action or opinion is discussed then it is legitimate to use "I". We suggest that you do not use "we" unless there are at least two authors.

9.6 Use of the Passive

As mentioned above, it is not common to use personal pronouns when reporting actions, for example laboratory methods. It is therefore frequently necessary to use a passive construction.

Example:

The equipment was calibrated before use.

You may also choose a passive construction so as to order the information in the sentence correctly. In other situations, try to select vocabulary that means you can use an active construction.

Example:

In all the experiments it was found that the distributions were time- dependent.

- or -

All the experiments showed that the distributions were time-dependent.

Any personal experience should be put into a footnote, unless it is part of a case study.

9.7 Words

Try to think clearly what you want to say before you start writing. Edit your work by asking yourself if you are using any unnecessary words leading to indirect or cumbersome phrasing.

Example:

arrive at the conclusion that	=	conclude
have been subjected to examination by	=	have been examined by
has a remarkable degree of stability	=	is remarkably stable
achieve an improvement	=	improve
at the present time	=	now
on the grounds that	=	because / since

When there is a choice, try to use the more familiar form of a word. This will enable a reader to process the material more effectively.

Example:

utilize	=	use
translocation	=	movement
elucidate	=	explain

Think carefully about the full meanings of words so that you do not repeat ideas; your aim is to put across a concise but easily interpretable message. REMEMBER THE READER!

9.8 Punctuation

Lack of punctuation, particularly in longer sentences, makes comprehension difficult. Too much punctuation, however, can be equally confusing. Use punctuation to help you convey the sense of your meaning and to prevent ambiguity. The reader should not need to work out the correct relations between words. Good punctuation should not be particularly noticed or missed. If you are unsure as to how certain punctuation marks are used, consult a style guide or English grammar guide.

10 PQRST – A 5 Step Recipe for Everything

This section outlines PQRST, a mnemonic for a useful 5 step method that can be applied to various tasks that you will need to perform over the coming years.

Previewing – **Q**uestioning – **R**eadng – **S**ummarizing – **T**esting

This pattern may be applied to lectures and reading, summarizing course material, and preparing for essays. Adapt the pattern as it suits your purpose. Here it is set out as for reading a book.

10.1 Previewing

Provides a general picture of the work to be studied.

- First decide on the amount of work to be done and the time to be spent on it.
- Preview the whole book.
- Read the preface, introductions, foreword and other material addressed to the reader.
- Study the table of contents, and index if necessary.
- Leaf through the book, reading the summaries and glancing at headings and topic sentences.
- Check diagrams, maps, illustrations, etc.
- Before reading each section, preview it quickly.

10.2 Questioning

Questions help reading, by giving it a purpose. As you preview (or afterwards), keep asking questions.

- Ask your own questions. What do you already know about the subject? What would you like to know? What do you think the writer might say? Use the questions asked by the author. Turn titles, headings and topic sentences into questions.
- At first write your questions down, but let this questioning become an ingrained mental habit.

10.3 Reading

To read most effectively:

- Read actively, not passively, asking yourself periodically what you have learned.
- Note especially important terms. Write down new definitions.
- Read everything, including tables, graphs, and other illustrative materials.
- Use the speed appropriate for the material you are reading.
- Compare your new work with what you already know.

10.4 Summarizing

Summarize your work at these times.

As you read:

- By underlining.
- By noting main points.
- By brief paraphrases.

As you finish each section:

- By listing the main points.
- By reviewing the work and checking the points by checking the answers to the questions you asked.
- Occasionally, by writing extended paraphrases, especially when you are trying to understand new ideas.

Before you go to your final tests:

- Make master summaries of your notes from various sources.
- Reduce these into major points for testing your recall of facts.
- Arrange your notes in as many new patterns as possible.

10.5 Testing

Test your work frequently.

By recitation:

- As you read your work, section by section.
- In general, immediately after first learning your work.
- Say aloud what you want to remember or discuss material with other students.

By review:

- As you finish reading, survey the main headings.
- Reread, or skim read to check your summaries.

These activities of review and reciting should occur:

- Immediately after studying something.
- Once or twice between the first and final review.
- Intensively before your final examination, leaving ample time for your final review.

Complete the master sheets for the topic:

- Set yourself questions to answer, use old papers as a guide.
- Reorganize your notes from books, lectures, tutorials, etc., into different patterns to test your memory as well as your material.
- Check your definitions and basic principles.
- Make use of KEY WORDS for recalling information.

Remember that cramming may confuse you, so that you cannot think clearly, or use your available knowledge to the best advantage in an examination.

11 Writing a Dissertation

Each thesis/dissertation submitted must meet the specifications for minimum length as prescribed in the general catalog. Refer to the appropriate section, which describes the requirements for the degree you are working toward, and your letter of assessment.

All thesis/dissertations shall be submitted using the standard formats as stipulated by the University.

Refer to the earlier chapters on essay writing for further help in developing and preparing your dissertation.

11.1 Procedure for Producing the Thesis/Dissertation

The following pattern of procedure has been designed to assist you in completing your thesis/dissertation with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Be sure to adhere to it in each of its steps.

1. Submit a written proposal to the faculty outlining the thesis/dissertation project.
2. The Faculty will respond with a written approval, including a deadline for completion. He/ she may make suggestions for changes in the subject/project and specify additional bibliography. A suitable mentor will be appointed at this time.
3. The Mentor will confirm with the candidate the allowable time period for research and draft submission. The usual time allowed is 24 months. Exceptions or extensions may be granted at NCIU's discretion.
4. The candidate will be responsible to make frequent contact with his/her mentor for consideration, guidance and approval during the research and draft submission phase. The student should submit his/her work chapter by chapter to the allocated tutor to avoid as much re-writing as possible.
5. Following completion of the research and draft submission phase, the mentor will approve and grade the draft thesis/dissertation. It will be finalized and submitted to the University as a Word and PDF file.
6. The draft thesis/dissertation will be assessed and graded by a second reviewer. If there is more than 10% difference between the grades accorded by the mentor and second reviewer, the Chief Academic Officer will appoint a third

reviewer.

7. Any changes to be implemented are communicated to the student.
8. For doctoral students, an examination committee of three people will be appointed. The student will have to attend a viva (either in person or virtually), which focusses on the subject matter of the dissertation. The student will have to detail the major findings in a 20-minute presentation and answer questions from those taking part in the viva. The examination committee will recommend changes and agree on a grade.

11.2 Thesis/Dissertation Criteria

11.2.1 Selection of the Topic

When selecting the topic, the following points should be considered:

- The topic should develop appropriately from the candidate's previous and current studies in the course.
- The topic should relate to a specific area of Christian ministry. Its application must be of benefit to both the candidate's future service and the mission of the church.
- The topic should be in an area of study in which there is a reasonable amount of resource material available.
- The nature of the topic must be that it provides an opportunity for rigorous inquiry by the candidate. The University will expect such rigor to be exhibited in the work presented by the candidate.

11.2.2 Title

The candidate will give careful and deliberate consideration to the title, as it reflects and informs the exact focus of the work. Be aware that many title submissions are far too general or broad in scope. The thesis/dissertation is intended to reflect very specific study.

Observe the following in choosing your title:

- Your words must identify a precise focus of inquiry.
- The title must clearly indicate the subject context.
- The title must be relevant to the specific degree you have chosen.

Restrict your key title to approximately twelve words.

Example of an appropriate title:

BAPTIST CHURCHES AND LOCAL POLITICS

An Examination of the Role of the Baptist Church in Local Politics in America

Titles such as “Church and State” will not suffice because they will not meet the criteria outlined above.

The title is considered a working title and will be finalized before submission.

11.2.3 Standard Organizational Format of the Thesis/Dissertation

You are required to adhere to the following Standard Organizational Format. If you have questions or concerns, please contact your mentor. Significant deviations require the approval of the University.

1. Title page
2. Abstract page (no more than two)
3. Table of contents (with page references)
4. List of tables (with titles and page references)
5. List of illustrations (with titles and page references)
6. List of appendices (with titles and page references)
7. Chapter 1 – Proposal
8. Chapter 2 – Review of literature and reports
9. Chapter 3 – Presentation of analysis
10. Chapter 4 – Conclusions, recommendations and implications
11. Appendix and notes
12. Bibliography
13. Index

11.2.4 Abstract

All doctoral students must submit a brief 2-page summary of their work in the thesis/dissertation. All students, who have been approved to write in a language other than English, have to supply an abstract in English. Its format is as follows:

- a) Title
- b) Name of Author
- c) A brief description of the problem or issue addressed (one paragraph only)
- d) A brief description of the following:
 - Research method and design
 - Major findings
 - Significance and value of the findings
 - Conclusions

The Abstract is the pivotal document of your thesis/dissertation submission, encapsulating for its readers, the essence of your work. Take extreme care with it.

11.2.5 Bibliography

In addition to the various titles and publications included in your chapter footnotes, be sure to provide a full bibliography at the position indicated in the Standard Organizational Format (see 11.2.3).

11.2.6 Indices

Include the following at the position indicated in the Standard Organizational Format (see 11.2.3).

- a) Subject Index
- b) Scripture Index (references of biblical passages and the page numbers that they appear on)

Modern word processors and computers facilitate this task. If you do not have access to such equipment, it is expected that a reasonable effort to provide an index will appear in your work.

11.2.7 Plagiarism/Originality

It is deemed a very important issue by all institutes of higher learning that students present original work and are not guilty of plagiarism, the using of other's intellectual property without due acknowledgement. NCIU will use commonly available tools to cross-check submitted work against plagiarism.

In order to assist students understand the requirement for a statement of originality, we put forward 15 acceptable definitions of originality, as proposed by Estelle M. Phillips & D.S. Pugh in *How To get A PhD*, which substantiate the unaided work of a student in their research papers and dissertations.

1. Continuing a previously original piece of work
2. Setting down a major piece of information in writing for the first time
3. Carrying out original work designed by the supervisor/mentor
4. Providing a single original technique, by observation, or result in an otherwise unoriginal but competent piece of research
5. Having many original ideas, methods and interpretations all performed by others under the direction of a postgraduate
6. Showing originality in testing somebody else's idea(s)
7. Carrying out empirical work that has not been done before
8. Making a synthesis that has not been made before
9. Using already known material but with a new interpretation
10. Trying out something in this country previously only done in other countries
11. Taking a particular technique and applying it to a new idea
12. Brining new evidence to bear on an old issue
13. Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies
14. Looking at areas that people in the discipline have not looked at before
15. Adding to knowledge in a way that has not previously been done

With their signature in the Acceptance Letter, students declare that all future submitted work will be their own research and written presentation and that it constitutes original work in accordance with the standards required by NCIU. They further state that they will not knowingly plagiarize any other person's work and give due recognition and acknowledgement to all quoted or borrowed work. Students have to familiarize themselves with NCIU's Unfair Practice Policy.

12 Study Bibliography

Here is list of resources to aid your distance education experience:

Bell, Judith

Doing Your Research Project (second edition)

Open University Press, UK

Blaxter, Lorraine & Hughes, Christina & Malcolm

How to Research

Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996

Brause, Rita S.

Writing Your Doctoral Dissertation: Invisible Rules for Success

London: Falmer Press, 2000

Meredeen, Sander

Study for Survival and Success: Guidenotes for College Students

London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd., 1988

Neuman, W. Lawrence

Social Research Methods

Allyn & Bacon Publishers (Simon & Schuster), MA, USA

Nortledge, Andrew

The Good Study Guide

Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1990

Phillips, Estelle M. & Pugh, D.S.

How To Get A Ph.D.

Open University Press, UK

Swetnam, Derek

Writing Your Dissertation

Oxford: How To Books, 1999

Turabian, Kate

A Manual for Writers (fifth edition)

The University of Chicago Press

Tutor A & Tutor B

Trix of the Grade: Everything Tutors Don't Tell You About Grades

Hampshire: Gower Publishing Limited, 1996

van den Brink-Budgen, Roy

Critical Thinking for Students: How to Assess Arguments and Effectively Present Your Own
(second edition)

Oxford: How To Books, 1999