This brochure outlines strategies to help you with study, assignments and exam preparation. Effective study requires concentration and preparation! It’s important to study in a place which is free of distraction and to have everything at hand.

Do you have a study area you can use at home? If not, try another quiet place, like a library. Study the most difficult tasks at a time of day when your energy level is highest (is it morning, afternoon or night for you?).

Goal setting can help get you motivated and focussed when studying ...

See Study Skills brochure: Goal Setting and Motivation.

Assignments
If you haven’t studied for a while, your writing skills may be a little rusty. However, with practice, you will improve. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Think about the assignment question and write a rough plan on how you will answer it.
- Use the resources your teacher gives you as a place to start researching the topic.
- Keep focussed on the question or topic, when researching and taking notes for the assignment.
- It’s a good idea to get to know your library – how it’s organised, how to find, reserve and borrow books.

Reading skills
When reading for your study, it will help you to clarify your purpose – do you want to answer a specific question, or get a general overview of the topic?

Pre-reading is used when initially gathering ideas on a topic: Read the introductory paragraphs, first sentences of paragraphs, the summary, conclusion or contents page, to get an understanding about what the article or book is about.

Reading for detail. You may need to read more slowly if encountering concepts for the first time. Go over the passage a couple of times, if you need to more fully understand the ideas presented.
Note taking skills

Note taking is an important skill that helps you to comprehend and later recall information. Here are some ideas on taking notes:

- Organise the way you take down notes by putting topics under headings
- Note down the main relevant points
- Underline or highlight key phrases
- Use abbreviations to save time

Make sure you identify reference details of the reading material (title, author, year of publication, publisher, place published and call number) for later reference.

You can use either a note book or a card system (the cards can be collated in topic order later, when writing the assignment).

Alternatively, you may prefer a ‘mind map’ approach to note taking: a central idea or topic is written on the centre of the page and key points are written in a tree-like branch, outwards from the central topic (see book list at end of this brochure).

Listening

Effective study involves listening and keeping focussed in class:

- Do some pre-reading before class
- Listen for the main ideas and write down key ideas as this will help to keep you focused on the topic
- Review what has been said by considering if it matches with your previous ideas on the topic
- If you don’t understand something, be sure to ask the teacher either during or after class
- Re-read the information after class, to aid in your understanding and recall of the topic

Exams

Knowing the type of exam you are preparing for is important to help with the type of study you do to prepare.

Practical exams require you to practice the task you will undertake in the exam, with someone acting as the ‘examiner’ to give you feedback.

Similarly, problem solving questions would require you to practice lots of problems similar to those you are likely to face in the exam.

Multiple choice question exams require a thorough knowledge of the topic. Take notes of important points and revise until you are very familiar with the material.

Exams with essay questions are best prepared for by practicing questions that may be included in the exam. During the exam, write an essay plan and ensure you are answering the question, including all relevant information.

Some subjects have past exam papers which allow you to practice answering similar questions and also gives you an idea on areas that require further study (answers to past exams are not provided. If available, they are accessed online at the library under ‘e-resources’ on the intranet - a librarian can help you).

Exam anxiety

Some anxiety is normal during exams, and adrenalin can enhance your ability to focus and concentrate. However, if you feel your anxiety is interfering with your thinking, it’s a good idea to practice regular relaxation or breathing strategies prior to your exams. You can then use these tools during exam times to help you cope when anxious.

One calming tool involves slowing down your breathing: count “one-two-three” to yourself, as you breath in. As you breath out, again count to three and try to relax your body.

If you practice this for five minutes or longer, on a regular basis, you will have a tool to use whenever you are feeling anxious.

Further relaxation exercises can be taught through the TAFE Career and Counselling Unit.

Also, see brochure: Stress management tips for students

Where can I get further help?

See brochure: Support Services for Students, which details free TAFE services including; the Adult Basic Education and Individual Learning Centre which provides tutoring, assignment help and classes to improve basic literacy and numeracy.

The library can help you with research skills and has a Study Skills resource guide. Also, here are some study skills books available at the library:

- Study Smart. A Successful Guide to Study at TAFE. By M Aston. [371.30281/ASTO]
- How to pass exams without anxiety. by David Acres [371.302812/ACRE]
- The Mind Map. By T. Buzan. [153.14/BUZA]

For links to study skills websites and online tutorials to develop research skills, go to: www.illawarra.tafensw.edu.au/library/libindex.htm

Counsellors are also available, offering further support and guidance about study, personal issues and career direction.