



Centre for Excellence in
Teaching and Learning (CETL)

The
FRESHER'S GUIDE
to Learning
at The UWI

July 2014



**CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN
TEACHING AND LEARNING
(CETL)**

The Fresher's Guide to Learning at the UWI

JULY 2014

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FOREWORD

The Fresher's Guide to Learning at The UWI is a handbook that provides you, the student, with a wealth of pertinent information and introduces you to techniques and strategies that will help you to plan and manage your learning. The handbook initially covers a description of the learning context, research on how learning takes place, and discovering your learning style. Methods and techniques to which you will be introduced include the use of graphic organizers, tracking your learning, note-taking and ethical issues relevant to the work that you produce. You are also directed to develop your personal learning plans and take steps to monitor and reflect on your own work.

HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The book is developed around the responses posed by two special characters called Bescy (read BSc) and Hired (short for higher education) who are reflecting on their first year learning engagement and successes at The UWI. The main ideas expressed in each chapter will be summarised at the end of the chapter. Using the handbook should provide you with the tools to become the best learner that you can be and reach your greatest potential. You are your own master in achieving your learning goals.

Embrace the handbook with best wishes!

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Who's in charge here?

Taking ownership: A learning imperative

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores The UWI learning context and provides information that should enable you to better manage your learning in your 'new' environment. Here is what Bescy and Hired think about learning at the UWI.

DEFINING THE LEARNING CONTEXT



Hi Bescy, how you doing? You do look good having gone through a year at university. I can hardly believe that an entire year has gone by and I am now into my second year at UWI.

Yo, Hired, great to see you again, and you do look as though you overcame those challenges that we spoke about last year.



Yeah, I did overcome most of them. Thankfully, I took your advice in most cases and that really contributed to my success. I did not get below a B+ in any of my courses, and for me that was super. I would advise anyone starting off on campus to pay attention to the insights you gave me. I was really scared during the first weeks of the start of my UWI journey last year when I got a lot of information of what life was going to be like for me at university, but I was still at a loss as to how to navigate 'the semester', which was never in my consciousness before. I felt a little intimidated as well because my CAPE and A level grades were not as hot as yours. So, I was also intimidated by you because you seemed so sure of yourself, and of course, you had that Government scholarship, so I knew you were bright. I really have to thank you for being a true friend to me.

There was no need for you to have been intimidated. Just by being here says you have the ability to take on the work at the UWI and be the best you can be, inclusive of getting good grades. I only gave you some perspective and advised you of some tools that you could work with along the way. And, I do believe that it is important to share what I have learnt and know with all UWI freshers.

BescyHired

Perhaps, the first lesson I learnt from you was the context or the 'what' of the university experience. This was important because it allowed me to know what I was responsible for and how to set my learning goals.

Yes, perhaps, that was one of the most important lessons. One really needs to understand that the university's programmes are generally spread over three years. Each year comprises two primary teaching blocks or semesters which are of definite duration of thirteen (13) weeks followed by a period of examination. This is different from our high school years which were split across terms that varied from 12 to 15 weeks. We did not have to be concerned with how long any term was, as our teachers mapped out our subjects (courses) to suit the respective terms. A big difference now is that at the UWI each student is responsible for mapping out his or her own learning and progress over each 13-week period or semester. The UWI teachers or lecturers are principally guides to help us navigate the subject or disciplinary content.

BescyHired

This was very important for me to know and understand. You told me that I was in charge of charting my own course here, and I felt even more intimidated by that...

...until I showed you how it can be done...

Bescy



Of course, what you called 'tools' were critical to my understanding. There are some that immediately come to my mind, one of which is about knowledge of the basics about learning theory. I have come to realise how important it was for me to have some knowledge of learning theory as this helped be to appreciate how learning takes place and helped me to take steps to facilitate my own learning.



Good, perhaps we can review the essentials of learning theory as well as how other tools work, because these will be just as valuable to you in your second year at university as it was in the first year.

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION

Learning is about building knowledge. We are virtually swamped with information, but we, as individuals, have to make sense of the information received or construct (build) our own knowledge. This is why we must read and research information, ask questions and explore our thoughts, and discuss our ideas with others. This is what learning is about, making what we learn personal and meaningful.

There is a process to learning. It is much more than just remembering random information. Let's review some findings about learning that will help us (Box 1.1).

Box 1.1: Ideas About Learning

Learning theories

Current theories about learning support the following views:

Learning is a **process** that involves us interacting with objects and events and other people. This allows which allows us to obtain some kind of understanding of those objects or events.

As we think about and become familiar with information about the objects or events they encounter, they construct their own ideas. Of course, different learners can construct different ideas having perused the same information.

Learning comes about because we keep fitting new information together with what we already know.

The above concepts form the basis of the learning theory called **constructivism**.

Box 1.1: Ideas about Learning (continued)

Note: Constructivism is not the only learning theory. There is also behaviourism and cognitivism. These theories are just as important to understanding how we learn. See explanations of these theories and related theorists at Appendix I.

How People Learn

Research evidence shows the following about learning:

- Learning takes place at the cellular level of our brain (Diamond, 1988).
- Stimulating the brain cells can be achieved in a number of different ways which help information to be stored in either short-term or long-term memory.
- The key to effective learning is to get information into long-term memory
- Getting information into long term memory depends on the type of activity used while learning, the kind of subject matter being studied, and the individual's learning strengths and efforts made.
- Therefore, the learner is more likely to succeed if he/she has some idea of what works for him/her in particular circumstances. The same method might thus not work for the same individual in each learning circumstance.
- Learning does not always take place in a linear fashion. Different people learn at different rates and in different ways in different circumstances. The 'learning curve' is thus not always smooth, but there are times when learning is rapid and times when learning is slow and times when it seems like you are going backwards!. Hence there is the continuing need to review and reflect and clarify what is 'learnt'.
- The reason for the unevenness of the learning process is that every time we attempt to learn something, our brains are trying to fit new information into what is already known. This causes some dissonance with the 'old' information, especially if the old learning is founded on weak structures, that is, if it is not clearly understood.
- Learning cannot really take place in a meaningful way if the new information in the learner's brain does not make sense to him or her.
- One form of learning, rote learning, or repeating information until the information can be recalled, is sometimes the only way to accomplish learning when we either have little or no background knowledge of the topic to help us learn.

Box 1.1: Ideas about Learning (continued)

- Learning first principles and foundational elements of subject matter is usually initially achieved by rote method until repeated use brings understanding and meaning to the learner.
- When a learner has truly learned something he/she can build on it. The learner can use that information for intelligently discussing subject matter, solving problems and creating new perspectives.
- Learning is affected by many factors including what we already know, our ability and efforts, our diet, our beliefs, among other factors.

Reflections

What **you** as a learner can do with these ideas about learning is what is critical.

So in managing your opportunities to learn it is important to note the following:

- You have to make the effort to learn.
- You must interrogate the material by reading/writing, interpreting, explaining, researching and reviewing information to make meaning and clarify issues.
- Your role as the student/learner in the learning process is the most important one to the individual learner.
- Lecturers/teachers can only provide guidance and support and create the circumstances for learning.
- There is a social element to learning, so you can make use of group activities and explanations to help in your own learning.
- For first/foundational principles, you will have to use learning methods that involve repeated interrogation of the material until it is understood.
- Understanding of new material is only achieved when the material can be used by the learner and not just recalled or memorised.

THE LEARNER'S ROLE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS



I think that one thing that became clear to me when you introduced me to what researchers found out about learning and the learning process was that my own role in the process was extremely critical. Since learning is about the learner constructing knowledge, it can only be done by the learner. So even if lecturers work extremely hard and explain the subject matter or a topic over and over and over, they cannot learn for any of their students. Each student is the only one who can make meaning of the material and information with which he/she interact or interrogates. That was really important for me as it told me quite clearly that I had to take up the challenge of being responsible for my own learning. That was both intimidating and exhilarating for me. On the one hand I wanted to be in control, but on the other hand I was thinking “what if I messed up?”

It is inescapable, the reality of one's circumstances on entering the university. For one, some of my peers certainly thought that they were good in high school, and therefore, they would automatically do well here. They did not imagine that university was any different from high school, and guess what? They struggled throughout their first year and some of them even ended up failing at least one of their courses. I am, therefore, more firm in my belief that it is the responsibility of the student to take charge of his/her learning... by reading, making or taking notes, interpreting and verifying ideas and information, and ensuring that the interpretation and understanding arrived at are valid, appropriate and correct or defensible.



LEARNING VS. 'LIMING'



Speaking of friends who failed some of their first semester courses, I have some of those, and they have not only a tough second year ahead, but they may not graduate in three years. I think that they did not realise the importance of some of their courses. One of my friends failed a pre-requisite course in the first semester and he was not allowed to take the relevant, subsequent Semester II course. Well, I now know what is meant by a pre-requisite course and I am duly checking all the courses I am taking this semester to see if I have any pre-requisites. If I do, I will have to ensure that I do the course well and earn

a good grade because I do not want anything to prevent me from successfully completing my degree in the three years I have allocated for my education.

...As your friends found out, it is very easy to become distracted or at least not have clear goals and projections, so things take us by surprise. Before you know it the semester is coming to an end and one may have as many as five courses to juggle at the same time. I have friends like that too. In fact the reason I am so careful in my approach to life at university is because I have a story. I went to work for a year after high school before I took up my scholarship, just for the experience. Some of my high school classmates came directly to the university, and guess what? We are taking some of the same courses this semester. Yes, they failed pre-requisite courses just like your friend and this has set them back a whole year. They are taking a few Year 2 courses and trailing the Year 1 courses that they failed. I planned that I would not find myself in that boat, so my approach to UWI has been quite different....

BetsyHired

...so did your friends think that UWI is hard? Is the work too much? Were they unprepared from high school?

In my view, it seemed that they were not quite prepared for the transition. They used to fete almost every week. I know, because they always invited me and I went along on many occasions. They were away from home for the first time, as we generally all are, but I think they were caught up in the excitement of living in a community of young people, of being able to make their own decisions, of being able to stay out as late as they liked. There is a big social and fun life at UWI and they went with that and treated their courses and classes as just humps to get over. I never really heard them talk about anything involving classes or class work except on one occasion. This was one time near the end of the semester, when one friend said she stayed up all night one Friday night at the St. Augustine Research and Reference Services (STARRS) computer laboratory of the Alma Jordan Library preparing for final examinations.

Betsy



But wasn't that a good thing? At least she was using a facility designed to help students study...



...Yes, but this was just the one time. Personally, I couldn't see how that would help her prepare for a series of final examinations. She had never been to any of the Campus Libraries before, except on about two occasions. Anyway, in my view it was too little too late.



...But are you saying that they should have just come to UWI and only studied, no liming?



I am not saying that at all, I am saying that as we enter university, we have to remember we are learners as well as social beings, and we face a challenge of balancing those two aspects as we are not entering the institution as necessarily prepared for taking on the challenges and opportunities presented, especially as learners.



Well, I had to focus on studies as I told you my CAPE grades were not too good. But, I feel that your friends should not have had to be concerned as much as I had to be. Didn't you say that they had good CAPE grades?



Of course, they were 'A' students. Among the three of them I am talking about, there was barely one B grade. Their grades were mainly As. But seeing their performance especially in the first semester, you could not tell that they had ever been 'A' students.



So you are saying that there is a lesson in their experience.



Very much so. In fact I would say several lessons. (1) You cannot make the assumption that because you performed well at CAPE or A Level, you will automatically perform well at UWI; (2) You have to plan for your learning experience; (3) You also have to balance how you strategise for learning with your social activities...



That makes sense to me. What you are saying is that we have to work out how best to distribute our time between our academic activities and our social or volunteer or other activities including liming and so on.



Yes and you will have to know what really works for you as a learner in order to do a good job selecting activities and pursuing your goals and interests. So we will review some of the tools one can use to find out about oneself as a learner. This will form the topic of our next meeting. I've got to go now, but we can meet next week and review some of the tools that help us find out about ourselves as learners.

SUMMARY

1. When it comes to learning no one else can do it for you. You construct your own knowledge and demonstrate what you have thus learned.
2. You construct your knowledge by interacting with information, and analysing that information so that it makes sense to you. This is the basic premise of current learning theory.
3. The challenge for you is that the information you construct into knowledge can be right or wrong, and it is thus important for you to check your understanding, clarify your conceptions/misconceptions and strive to express what ideas you have formed clearly to others.
4. Discussing your new learning with others is an excellent mechanism for ensuring that your understanding is appropriate.
5. What, and how much you learn is up to you. At this level it is important, an imperative even, for you to take steps to ensure that you are in control of your own learning.
6. You are the primary actor in ensuring that what you indeed learn – the knowledge you construct – is accurate and defensible.
7. You have to plan how you will manage your learning, and balance the time you spend on learning with other activities including social activities.
8. You should decide the activities you can cope with in addition to your studies in planning your semester goals and schedule.

Who I am *is* how I learn

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides examples of tools that you can use to know and understand yourself as a learner and will allow you to take steps that will work for you during your UWI experience. You start the process of reflection that you need to develop as you become more professional. The dialogue between Bescy and Hired illustrate how they came to know themselves as learners and how they started the reflective habit.



Hired

Hi Bescy, the last time we met you reminded me that I had to find out what really works for me as a learner...

Oh, yes, you need to know who you are in terms of what you do to help yourself understand and recall information, what you do to make sense of it...



Bescy



Hired

Yeah, you showed me some cool stuff... and I feel that they were really at the root of my success, as I was able to take charge of my learning. I never heard about a SWOT analysis for learning, and I never heard about a learning style until you introduced me to it.

Oh yes, I told you to reflect on your learning habits and see what helped you and what did not, and then take it a step further by completing a Learning Style Inventory to see how research into the act of learning can support your learning attempts.



Bescy

LEARNING STYLE AND LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY

Let's talk about the Learning Style Inventory (LSI) first as I think this will help you to connect your thoughts about how you learn. The beauty about the LSI you took is the supporting strategies they provide for the different learning preferences.



Bescy



I liked too that everyone can do the LSI as it is available online with all the supporting information. My style is a mixture of Visual, Read/Write and Kinesthetic, so I selected the strategies suggested for these learning preferences, and I must say that they worked.



I am glad you have noted the value of the LSI. I did mine as well and I am multimode – sometimes I am Visual, sometimes I am Aural, sometimes Read/Write and other times Kinesthetic. I got almost equal scores for each area. My learning style or preference seems to be affected by the nature of the subject matter and my familiarity with it and sometimes the mood I am in.

Box 2.1: Learning Style & Learning Style Inventory

This is an activity that should be undertaken by each student. Use the following steps.

1. Using a computer that is connected to the internet, Google VARK (Fleming, 1992)
2. Complete the standard Learning Style Inventory or questionnaire
3. When you obtain your results, go to the Helpsheets link to find out which of the following strategies work for you.
4. Strategies are provided for the four types of learners – Visual, Aural, Read/Write and Kinesthetic. Your style may be a combination of 2 or more of these preferences in which case you are multimodal and should use a combination of strategies commensurate with your particular mode or preferences.
5. **Note:** The Helpsheets indicate the following:
 - i. **Intake** or how you can best take in the information
 - ii. **SWOT** – Study Without Tears - how you make learning packages
 - iii. **Output** – how to perform well in tests and assignments
6. Write down your Learning style in the space below as a constant reminder:

My Learning Style or preferred way of learning is:



Perhaps, we can now consider the SWOT. That was a real eye-opener for me...

LEARNER SWOT ANALYSIS

As I said before, once we discover our learning styles as we think back to various learning situations we are now better placed to work on our strengths and weaknesses as learners and work out what opportunities are there for us to capitalize on and threats that are present for us to avoid.



Yes, I thought that this was a great exercise and it helped me become more in tune with myself. I was also glad for the example you gave me of a learner SWOT analysis (Appendix II), as I really did not know how to answer the questions posed in the SWOT

Complete Boxes 2.2 and 2.3 below to discover some of your characteristics as a learner:

Box 2.2: My Strengths as a Learner

(See Appendix II for examples)

Write FIVE strengths you have as a learner

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Box 2.3: My Weaknesses as a Learner

(See Appendix II for examples)

Write THREE weaknesses you have as a learner

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Reflections

In the spaces provided, give your answers to the following two questions:

How do you think you can use your strengths to help you learn?

What can you do to overcome your learning weaknesses?

Consider threats to your learning as well as the opportunities you have. Note that your strengths and weaknesses are internal to you or describe what you possess. Threats and opportunities are external to you or are features of or in your environment.

Continue your self-discovery journey by completing Boxes 2.4 and 2.5 and related reflections.

Box 2.4: Threats to My Learning

(See Appendix II for examples)

Identify THREE factors you believe will threaten your ability to learn effectively at the UWI

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Box 2.5: Opportunities to Enhance My Learning

(See Appendix II for examples)

Identify THREE opportunities you have to enhance your own learning in the UWI setting.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Reflections

In the spaces provided, give your answers to the following two questions:

Identify THREE steps you can take to avoid the impact of threats to your learning.

Identify THREE opportunities you will make use of to improve your learning at the UWI.

Summary

1. We each have our own peculiar style of learning or preferred approach to making sense of and retaining appropriate information.
2. The better you know yourself as a learner, the easier it is for you to take charge of your learning and your ability to perform academically.
3. A Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and personal SWOT analysis are tools that will allow you to better know who you are as a learner.
4. Do your Learning Style Inventory (LSI).
5. Do a SWOT analysis of yourself as a learner.
6. Use the results of LSI and SWOT analysis to make decisions about how you will help yourself as a learner from the start of your university experience.
7. The less disciplined you are as a learner, the more you will require tools to help you maximise your learning opportunity.

Organising for Learning

INTRODUCTION

With knowledge about your learning characteristics and requirements, and reflections on the use of your learning style(s) to improve your learning, it is important to develop frameworks for putting this new information into use. In this chapter the focus is on tools that you can actually use throughout the semester as you prepare for and attend your classes. The dialogue between Hired and Bescy give insight into how they were able to organise themselves to ensure they mastered learning of course content.

MANAGING YOUR TIME AND TALENT



Oh Bescy, the last time we met you reminded me that I had to find out what really works for me as a learner. I found out very many things worked wonders for me...

Oh, yes, you needed to know who you are in terms of what you like to do to help you understand and recall information, and what you do to make sense of it.... but you also needed to know how to manage your talents and how best to organize for your courses during the semester.



Yeah, you introduced me to some tools and methods for working my way through the semester (I still marvel that I am using the jargon so well... my head is now into 'semester' and what that means)...

Oh yes using the jargon is important... but, you are talking about developing your own learning plan, setting out a schedule for the semester...



...I really want to thank you for that, and to add that there were other strategies that you introduced me to that worked really well for me during the semester. I was able to manage myself better from week-to-week and day-to-day. And I must confess that even though things did not go smoothly all the time..., because I was using a kind of system, I could get back on track when I messed up.

Oh, I didn't know that you slipped up at all during the semester and were able to get back on track. Which of the tools worked for you in this regard?

Bescy

Hired

Both my personal Learning Plan (LP)¹ and the Quick-Look Sheet (QLS)² helped me to manage my progress throughout the semester. The LP² was what I used to become really familiar with the course requirements. Some of the terms in the course outlines floored me at first, but I soon became accustomed with what I had to do for each course. I used the LP for all my courses so I could see what I had to do in each case and collectively. On the other hand I had a Quick-look Sheet for each course and they really helped me to cover the topics for each course.

I am glad they worked for you. So how did you use these tools?

Bescy

Hired

Yes I can go through how I used them. But I would like to say that once anyone knows about these tools they can use them in the way they see fit or as long they work for the individual. I don't think that the way they are to be used is a standard per se. So I used them as they worked for me.

That's great! I am really glad you understand that you have to take control of your learning and even a tool is only that - something to be used to help you do the task..... I am proud of you. That is why you did so well last year even though you were so apprehensive at first.

Bescy

PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN

Hired

Let us talk about the LP³ first. I went through all my courses to get a sense of which ones would seem more challenging or had more readings or which I knew the least about. For most of the courses the complete outlines were available on myeLearning website for the particular course. I thought that if I waited for the first day of class to get the outline I would be too rushed that first week. It takes time to prepare for learning...

²Figure 3.1 Sample Personal Learning Plan Outline

¹Figure 3.2 Quick-Look Sheet: A Tool for Managing Your Classes

³Appendix 3

I mainly used the calendars for each course to work out a plan of study for the semester as they showed which topics were to be done in which week. The Calendars in each course were very important in helping me come up with my plans. Some Calendars even showed where and when assignments were due so I could even plan more time for such course events.

So your approach was more holistic. You looked at all your courses in concert. That was wise. But some persons may not be able to grasp all together...

BescyHired

Yes, I would suggest that a person like that could do a plan for each course... and just stick them up on a wall or in a book side by side. I think that one has to remember that the individual has a number of courses to pursue in each semester and would have to develop strategies to manage all the courses, not just the one...

Well I had plans for two courses as one of my courses looked so much like what I did for CAPE that I decided to spend less time on that one and more time on courses that were completely new to me.

BescyHired

Good strategy! But it all comes around to what works best for you in your particular circumstance, so you are right when you insist that we must all know ourselves as learners.

Agreed...

BescyHired

For me, it was most important to check in weekly and write up my achievements and outstanding work in the Comments column of my LP. That process helped me to keep on track and to get back on track... An important lesson I learnt was that if I skipped a week it was very difficult to keep up, so I would fall further behind.... What I had to do was leave out some topics I had planned to cover and get back on target, then go back when I could make up some time ... I was lucky that what I omitted was not necessary for understanding subsequent topics so that I could move on. But I could see if you skip out some topics you could easily get lost...

Figure 3.1 Sample Personal Learning Plan Outline

Courses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	Semester Week												
	Learning Activities												
Topic/ Activity (Read, research, make notes)													
Core course 1													
Core course 2													
Core course 3													
Foundation course													
Elective													
Weekly comments													

Figure 3.2 Quick-Look Sheet: A Tool for Managing Your Classes

Week	Session	Topic	Major Concepts/Ideas/ Principles	Student Comments/ Reflections
			<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student identifies main ideas/concepts• Notes in point form, concept map, table, brief notes etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students comments on level of understanding• Identifies what he/she has to work on further/what is not clear• Identifies references/sources of information including book chapters etc.

Well, that is the purpose of having a plan... to keep you on track or to get you back on track if you slip up.

Bescy

Hired

I also want to say that I used my learning plan to supplement work done in the courses. So while I allocated two hours each week to working on the topics in my plan, that was the minimum time I spent in really getting to understand the topic. I did not include the assignments in the two hours or else that would not have been sufficient to do research and assignments or other course activities...

Really, you spent more time than I did...

Bescy

Hired

Yes, I told you that my grades coming into UWI were not that great, and I needed to spend time on each course to do the best I could...

Quick-Look Sheet

Very good... so you knew your weakness and took steps to reduce it... Excellent! And how did the QLS help.

Bescy

Hired

That was a god send... I had a sheet (on my laptop) for each course. At the end of each session, as soon as I got a chance, I completed the last two columns. This really allowed me to develop reflective skills that you told me was so important in taking charge of my learning. I used it for the study time I had allocated to each course per week. The sheets really helped me to understand what was going on in each course and how I could shape my readings and research.

But what about the first three columns of the QLS...?

Bescy

Hired

Again, this was an important part of preparing for the semester. I completed the first three columns before classes started. I therefore had a system for dealing with the course content as the courses progressed.

So you are saying that preparation was key...

Bescy

Hired

Yes preparation was key... but I will also add information was also key. I found that the best information came from my Academic Advisor (AA).

Academic advising was a process with which I was not at all familiar, but which I came to realize was critical in providing good guidance.

Bescy

ACADEMIC ADVISING

...I discovered that my friends did not know nearly as much as they pretended, and much of their information was inaccurate. I never regretted working with my Academic Advisor (AA). My AA was a mentor and guide to me, helping me to navigate UWI through my selection of courses, but also providing other important information and support. Sometimes my AA was the one who encouraged me to do better...

Bescy

Hired

You can say that again... My AA helped me to see the relationship between the courses I was taking in Year 1 and the courses I would have to take in Years 2 and 3. She also helped me to understand the importance of credits – how many I would need to graduate, what were pre-requisites and why I had to do well in them, and she motivated me to start right away to balance my courses and those other things I was interested in, and I was interested in many things from sports to volunteer work. So, she provided me with information so that I could make better decisions. All of this helped me to do as well as I did in Year 1.

Because of the advice I got, I had a semester in Canada in my second year. I first got information from my AA who put me on to the Office of Institutional Advancement and Internationalisation and here I am going to Canada for a semester.

Bescy

Hired

That's great! Perhaps I can look at an international placement too, now that my grades look good. I would talk to my AA about that. But my AA was the one who told me that I could get the course information on myeLearning and she set me up to engage in an in-depth preparation process before classes actually started. This was critical for me if I was to do well and take my learning in hand.

So how did you actually find out about academic advising?

Bescy

Hired

I think I read it in the Faculty brochure, first. But, it was mentioned when I went to the Faculty in the very first week of introduction to the campus, and I got an email from my AA. I figured if UWI was making all that effort, perhaps I should at least check in with my AA and see if I could learn something.

Good thinking – if the UWI is making an effort to help you, you should make an effort too...

Bescy

Hired

I also want to talk about another set of tools that worked for me. This is in terms of understanding my work and in taking and making notes. I am referring to concept mapping techniques in particular.

VISUAL TOOLS FOR LEARNING

Oh yes visual tools... you are probably a visual learner...

Bescy

Hired

I am, but I think the graphic organisers (Appendix 4) can be used by all types of learners to help with learning and all that implies – revision and reflection, clarification and making links among concepts.

I agree that all learners can make good use of graphic organisers, concept maps or visual tools – whatever you wish to call them.

Bescy

Hired

There are many ways to use graphic organisers from tables and charts to concept maps. But what was important was how to use these techniques to help my learning.

That is also my thinking... I think that graphic organisers (GOs) helped me to generate ideas as I develop and visually note my thoughts. I used them to put structure to my writing assignments, to problem solve and make decisions....

Bescy



For me they were invaluable for studying and brain storming, especially when I worked with my study group.



I also liked that with graphic organisers, you can draw them up free-hand or sometimes I went to the web and got a template. Actually, I prefer the free hand ones as I could compose what I wanted and how I wanted to display the relationship between or among my ideas.



I learnt some tricks for using GOs. I can tell you a few now:

Star: for study skills – taking notes, reading, memorizing

Spider: investigating attributes associated with a single topic or concept also good for studying and taking notes

Fishbone: for investigating cause and effect factors associated with a complex topic

Flow chart: for a chain of instructions to follow for example, to organize an algorithm



Ok, ok... got it! You are an expert in using GOs... I liked to use the Venn diagram as I often had to examine similarities and differences between different items.



I really liked converting a whole chapter of text into a diagram that I could fit onto one page. I really got to the essence of the course content. I would compile all my GOs for a course and use them to do revision especially when preparing for exams. Now you see why I did so well, huh...

Summary

1. Use the cues and clues of the Academic Calendar to help you organise your learning at the institution.
2. Use the services of the academic advising process that the institution has established to help you navigate your learning situation in the institution.
3. Note that the semester is thirteen weeks long and your actual classes will be scheduled for **one** or **two** sessions **per week** for **each** course that you take.
4. Prepare for the semester by:
 - a. Creating learning plans to allocate time to be spent on **each** of the courses you take in the semester;
 - b. Reflecting and writing down your achievements and outstanding work on a weekly basis;
 - c. Preferably assigning a specific time each week to reflect on your courses and prepare work in advance (project);
 - d. Using your Learning Plan (LP) as a guide;
 - e. Fitting class work into your LP. The goals are the same.
5. Create Quick Look Sheets (QLS) to manage your in-class learning. The less organised you are, the more important these (QLS) become.
6. Contact and work with your Academic Advisor.
7. Academic advising provides you with accurate information for navigating through your university experiences. If the process is well used you have an ally in the form of your Academic Advisor (AA) and a source of information that will allow you to avoid pitfalls of university life.
8. Use graphic organisers to link concepts and ideas, for ready revision options, for note-taking and making and for clarifying your concepts and making meaning of course content.

Reading for Your Degree:

Sourcing and Using Information

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with some of the anticipated behaviours of students who have entered the university. It addresses the concept of 'reading for your degree' and ways of researching and presenting information obtained from different sources. It is important for you to know that there are conventions to be observed in using information other than that which you have created, and you can only lay claim to work of your own creation. The dialogue between Bescy and Hired focuses on some behaviours expected of students, and in particular, show how they come to know about and deal with researching and presenting information which they have sourced as distinct from material they have created.

READING FOR THE DEGREE

Hired, let us pick up from where we left off when we last met. We have covered quite a bit about preparing ourselves for learning and I think the information is most useful, but that is not all. We should also look at some of the other important concepts that float around us and which may impact our lives as learners. In fact it appears that learners are supposed to engage in certain behaviours as responsible students...



Hired

Oh yes... one immediately comes to mind – the idea of 'reading for your degree'... I heard a lecturer say this in one of my courses in circumstances that were not very pleasant. He was 'boofing' a student who had not done the reading he was required to do before the class session. At the time we were all upset and did not quite get the lecturer's meaning or perspective. Since then, however, (seeing that I do a lot of reflecting now) I have come to realise that as a student I had to do a lot of reading and research to take in and understand the range of new information which I faced.

I agree with you ... and would add that many students do not recognise that they do not have to wait to be told what to read before attending classes. This was something that every student has to understand and come to terms with. First of all, you notice that all course outlines have readings and in some cases there are readings for each topic or section of the course, as well as for each session.





Hired

Yes, too many readings, if you ask me...



Bescy

Yes, but important for us who are now learning about the content of the courses that prepare us to become experts (hopefully). I look at the readings as guides directing us to sources of information.



Hired

You are right... the readings are usually indicated in the form of references to books, book chapters or journal articles that help us find the information....



Bescy

Yes, so I think that there are two points to note here. The first is that if the course lecturers have taken the time and effort to have these details for accessing course content, then there must be good reason for this, and the onus is probably on us to make use of what we can perhaps call a facility. These references are our guides to reading in pursuing our degrees.



Hired

Your view makes sense... What is your other point?



Bescy

I think it is a more subtle one, but have you noticed that there is a standard for writing these references? We are expected to note the format and when we cite references... we need to follow the style they use for reference material.



Hired

Oh... I did not realise that ... but now that you have mentioned it, I will go back and check my course outlines.



Bescy

But you do get the point about reading for your degree?



Hired

Yes, but I just did not think that the lecturers expect it.



Bescy

They do, and I think rightly so, because if you don't recognize the work you have to put in you will not be prepared and you will find difficulty keeping up with your courses.



Hired

Tell me about it.... But really, the ideas about reading and making notes and condensing the text into easily reviewed graphics make a lot more sense when you consider the readings that have to be covered. So strategies like using graphic organisers which we discussed before are even more important in helping me 'read for my degree'?

You got it... You must also remember that now with the advent of the Internet, readings have taken on a broader meaning. Searching for information on the web is important and selecting and evaluating information is also an important part of the process. I must say that I was initially overwhelmed, but I discovered my Library and I got a lot of help there.



Bescy



Hired

Yes, I too used library services to boost my grades. Do you know that there are many libraries on Campus? I was so surprised. We have an International Relations Library, and Medical Sciences Library. The School of Education has one too.

But Alma Jordan Library is the biggest one...



Bescy



Hired

Yes I know. I visited it and I have never regretted it. I think everyone should make the library services an integral part of getting to know the campus. I have learnt how to access databases, how to structure a search. How to more effectively use the technology, and before I got my computer, I was able to use the computer laboratory facilities at the Alma Jordan Library.

I think the librarians are very professional and most of all, willing to help. They provide a lot of assistance and guidance in working through the massive amount of information that you have to access and what was important for me also was that they seemed to be in contact with the lecturers and seemed to know what they want. That was my experience. Was yours similar?



Bescy

Hired

Very much so... Actually I missed the orientation that the Libraries organise and I was initially afraid to go to the Library after, but, after I took the bull by the horns and went down there in the first week of classes, I was quite surprised that I got really good help and all the materials the librarians had prepared for new students. I thought that was really good of them... and I realized then that they were really concerned about providing a professional service even when the student slips up.

RESEARCHING AND EVALUATING INFORMATION

One of the things I learnt early in going through my readings is to immediately jot down the referencing information whenever I find something of interest. I don't just write down or copy the information but I write the source in my notes, just in case I have to use the information in anything that I have to submit.

BescyHired

That is a really good idea... because I got caught with incomplete referencing information, as I could not recall where I found certain material that I wanted to use in my assignment. I had to spend a lot of hours and wasted much of my time trying to find the source. I remember the time when I was missing the year of the article I quoted from. Well, I am not going to make that mistake again... Do you know that the Libraries have made software available to help students do their referencing? You must check out your library... that stuff is really easy to use. Saved me a bunch of time and stress!!!

There is a technique you have to develop in researching information. There are several things to be concerned about, for example, if you are going online the trustworthiness of the site is very important. Wikipedia will hardly be a good site for academic quality, given how it evolves...

BescyHired

I google a lot of my stuff.

You can do that, especially if you are using Google scholar, but if you go through the Library, you can access scholarly databases that would make your searches much more relevant and reliable. Further, you can learn from the librarians how to go about doing good searches. My first port of call is the databases accessed through my Library's website.

Bescy



Hired

Again, this is an eye-opener for me. The bottom line is then to fully utilise the Library.



Bescy

That's right... and you don't even have to go there physically all the time. The databases can be accessed using your laptop from home as well as on campus.



Hired

I feel as though I have been missing out on a vital part of my UWI experience.

PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES FOR STUDENTS



Bescy

But if we go back to what we started with – expectations of the lecturers - another of their expectations of us is that of ethical behavior. We are in an environment where people continually create original ideas and concepts and part of an academic enterprise is to be exemplary in acknowledging the source or creator of these original ideas.



Hired

Oh, that is why some lecturers seem obsessive about the source of ideas coming from their students... they have to distinguish ideas that are truly their students' own from those that come from some researcher or author....



Bescy

I think that it is more than that... there is also the issue of honesty. One should not lay claim to work done by others...



Hired

What then is the purpose of reading all that information if it is not going to be a means of forming your own ideas?



Bescy

It is not that you are **not** using the information, but you should not use the information without acknowledging that you have read the works or writings of other people in coming up with your views ... and further, if you use the exact words of someone else you must cite the author and page where you actually found the information, and do a complete bibliographic citation in the reference section of your submission whether it is a paper or any assignment, for that matter...



Hired

So what if I change a few words here and there, would I still have to cite the author?



Bescy

Yes, of course, you would not have to quote the page number where you found the article, but you must state its source...



Hired

Well looking back now, I must say that I have been skating on the edge, because I thought that if I changed up a word here and there I was safe, not infringing anyone's rights.



Bescy

Well no, not really... did you include the source in your Bibliography as far as you could recall?



Hired

In most instances, so I think that I may have stepped over the line sometimes...



Bescy

Well don't worry about what you did ... be concerned about the future... you can't just change a few words and call the material yours, you will have to acknowledge where the idea *originated*.



Hired

So my 'cut and paste' days are over?



Bescy

Not exactly, but you must always remember that if you cut something out from somewhere you have to cite the source, and if you are online there are additional requirements such as citing the date when the material was sourced online. But you can learn all of these details when you talk to your librarian.



Hired

Well, for my sanity, I think my cut and paste days are over...



Bescy

That might not be too bad, because you will now aim to understand what the author is saying so that you can translate or breakdown his or her ideas and reconstruct in a way that makes sense to you. The idea is that you will still have a source that you can put in a Bibliography as compared to a Reference.



Hired

Wait, are you saying that there is a difference between a bibliography and a reference section?



Bescy

Of course there is. A bibliography is a comprehensive record of all the material that was used in your paper or assignment, whether you cited directly from them or not. Sometimes you do background reading to help you understand certain concepts or ideas without quoting directly or citing anything specific. These readings along with your references form the 'biblio'... References would be those you cited whether using direct quotes or not...



Hired

Wow, I have so much to learn... how did you come to know all of this?



Bescy

I am very observant and I ask a lot of questions, and not only of my friends...

REFERENCING RULES AND GUIDELINES



Hired

Perhaps you can clarify an issue for me that relates to referencing... I was told that in my discipline I am to use the APA Reference Guide. Of course I had no idea what they were talking about initially, and as I said, I did miss the Library orientation, so in class I was a little lost. Anyway I was wondering if there were different referencing styles and what were the implications, if any?



Bescy

Oh yes, there are different styles and different disciplines use the style that their professionals agree to, I guess. For example, most of the social science disciplines use APA, which are the guidelines set out by the American Psychological Association. Language disciplines use MLA, that is, the guidelines set by the Modern Languages Association, while most science based disciplines uses one of the styles outlined in the Chicago Style Manual as their guide.



Hired

Oh really, this alone is an education for me...

...and I am not finished yet. I have to caution you that you must follow the guidelines of the particular discipline as they are specific in terms of how the authors' names are written, how the bibliography is sequenced, how and where the dates are written, how reference to a book is done as opposed to a journal article. The guidelines are deep and clear and the sooner you become familiar with the reference style of your discipline the better.

BescyHired

Well you are certainly telling me that I have some good research work to do...

Yes, you can find a lot of info with regard to referencing style online, but in my view the best place to check is with your Library. The librarians are on top of their game and are always willing to facilitate us as students.

BescyHired

I see why you are an A student, yes. You know so much of those things that are important and which speak to the advanced level of the work that must be done at university... great!

Summary

1. Information on almost every subject matter is available at your fingertips through books (purchased from the bookstore or online) or at the Alma Jordan Library or other libraries that exist on the Campus as well as through online searches using your laptop or personal computer.
2. Information is available in large quantities and on a continuous basis using a variety of search engines.
3. All libraries provide training on how to access information using online databases and the Internet.
4. The challenge for you as a learner is to sift through the information to determine what is of value to you and your understanding and thus your learning.
4. Note that some information is of value to your understanding and thus learning, some of it is not. You are best placed to make decisions about what you require to understand and utilise.
5. When selecting information that you have determined is useful to you, always cite or quote (write down) the source of that

information, even if you obtained it online. When citing an online source you must also state the date of retrieval of the information.

6. Avoid the 'cut and paste' trap. Material lifted from an online source and pasted or inserted into your document does not become yours. You must cite the source of the information right next to the cut and pasted material in parentheses or brackets following the referencing guidelines for your discipline.
7. The Referencing Guide is the standard that academic professionals use in citing the origin of ideas, statements or documents that are used in an individual's presentation.
8. Several Reference Guides are in use including:
 - a. APA (American Psychological Association)
 - b. MLA (Modern Languages Association)
 - c. Chicago Manual of Style
 - d. Scientific Reference Style
 - e. Harvard AGPS
 - f. Australian Guide to Legal Citation

You need to use the style that is approved for use by your Faculty or Department. For example, Liberal Arts Department recommends the use of MLA style, the Faculty of Social Sciences recommends the use of APA.

10. The onus is on you to know the style that is recommended for your discipline and become familiar with the guidelines of the particular style.
11. The librarians provide assistance and guidance in the use of referencing styles.
12. All work submitted by you should cite the sources of information, even if you have no direct quotations from the sources.
13. Citations indicate the readings that support your presentation and guide the development of your ideas. Even though you may not have direct quotations, you should have a bibliography section at the end of your document to highlight the readings that influenced the formation of your ideas.
14. Referencing and references, citations, and bibliographies show maturity in the development of your writing and your capability to pursue university level work.

Technology: Friend or fiend!

INTRODUCTION

This chapter speaks to the use and importance of technology to the university student or learner. While the learner population is largely computer savvy, using technology to enhance learning is not an automatic consequence of the skills with which learners enter into the institution. Hired and Bescy try to show how they have used technology to enhance their learning and underscore the investment of time and effort in being able to identify and utilise the technologies that they have found most useful to them.

ONLINE RESOURCES FOR MANAGING YOUR LEARNING



You know, Bescy, perhaps one of the most conflicting experiences I had in the last year was the increasing use of online technology for learning... It is one thing to go online and search for information for a project or paper, but to actually have the online environment as part of my learning experience was something that I was not fully prepared for...

Oh yes, I know what you mean. I had a challenge with online 'learning' especially in my first semester. I was quite competent with the computer and my cell – a real child of the technology age, but I did not conceive of using the online environment as part of my learning ... So I was all for using social networks such as Facebook for social activities, but I had a little problem when some of my lecturers actually used Facebook for learning. At first that did not work for me at all...



Yes, I had the same problem... but what really helped is using the Campus's "online classroom" or learning management system, myLearning and the student portal mySTA. Having to go online using myLearning to do learning activities and to access my course resources on a weekly basis, forced me to use the technology rather than just complain about it...

Actually, being able to go online for our courses turned out to be quite good for me as I could do my activities and access information at almost any time day or night...





Hired

Oh yes, for me though having activities and materials online was a godsend as I could refer to the course time and time again. Having the PowerPoint presentation online was important for me especially when they were put up before the class and I could use them as the basis for my notes. I had this opportunity in one of my courses. It worked well for me. I wished this were so for all the courses.



Bescy

I found too that when I got URLs to access readings that were useful in preparing for my classes. A number of my lecturers guided us to relevant research through the provision of URLs beyond the normal readings.



Hired

But, you know, I must say that when I entered UWI, I did not expect that so much technology would be in use. I thought that they would be using technology for administrative purposes, but not so much for teaching and learning...



Bescy

Yes, that was surprising to me as well. Some of my courses are available on myeLearning...



Hired

Some of mine too...



Bescy

But, there are differences in the kinds of activity and information provided in any different courses. I really preferred the courses in which there were supporting learning activities associated with each topic along with the readings. In one course there were quizzes available, not for marks, but to ensure that we as students gave the right responses for the right reasons and the quizzes were self-paced so as I successfully completed one, I could move on to a more challenging quiz. I loved those because I could keep track of how well I was doing in that course. There were other courses that had us doing things like web quests and group assignments.



Hired

I don't think that I had any courses with quizzes, but we had online discussion groups in two courses that helped us to express our views and clarify the relevant issues. I thought that this worked well and we did not necessarily have to meet physically as a group.

I also thought too that the courses in myeLearning had good communication tools. The lecturers were able to send us messages and I could receive these in my UWI email. By the second semester I realised that I had to log in every day for various notices sent from both the lecturers and members in my online groups.

BescyHired

That's the thing... I did not recognise at first how important this myeLearning system is for the courses. So I did not log on until the lecturers talked about finding the course outlines on the system or else I would have had a head start...

At least you were properly registered and could get online as soon as you were ready. But there were those who up to the second week of the semester could not access their courses. They were at a decided disadvantage for some courses because the readings and assignments were in myeLearning.

BescyHired

I know a couple of students with that experience. So it is really important to register properly. Some students also didn't realize that they should have their laptops configured to access the UWIs wireless network. This was a plus for me so I could have access to myeLearning, use the databases of the libraries and access the web at any hotspot on campus.

KNOWLEDGE OF PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

Hired

I also found that my knowledge of productivity tools in particular, Word, Excel and PowerPoint, was invaluable in helping me navigate my courses. I took a course in Microsoft Office before I came on campus. That was the best \$2000 I ever spent...

I picked up most of my knowledge about productivity tools by the way, so I decided to take the course on Technology Literacy offered by the Microsoft Academy – Campus Information Technology Services (CITS) in my second semester and an added benefit was that I got co-curricular credits that will appear on my transcript... The course was a real eye-opener for me. Both my use of Microsoft Word and PowerPoint improved markedly, and I learnt to use the features in Excel. I only *thought* I knew about these tools before.

Bescy



I bet you were surprised by the conventions and methods involved in using the productivity tools...

For sure, and when the conventions are observed life is made easier or I should say the products – assignments and papers – are much more professional in appearance...



COPING WITH ONLINE DISTRACTIONS



But to go back to the issue of access to online resources and information – one of the challenges I found in being able to visit different sites and download information and interact with others online is that there was the temptation to do everything except what was required for class work. I recall a couple of my friends who would get together to work on an assignment and they spent an inordinate amount of time on it because they go surfing the net for what is interesting to them such as downloading music, and watching movies.

But, it is not only those kinds of websites that are distracting to us as students when we go online... first of all there is the constant gaming and Facebook. Again, I can tell of classmates of mine who spend three hours online, surfing and reading about celebrities and then literally spending half an hour searching for material relevant to their courses.



There is a particular friend I have who spends almost all her time on Facebook... she misses lectures when she is on Facebook sometimes. I find it ridiculous, but I realise that not everyone has self-control. I am concerned about her because she failed one of her courses last semester, and I think that Facebook had a hand in that.

I would advise seeking advice from CAPS, that's The student counselling and psychological service at UWI... But barring that I would advise two options: One is that your friend should try to develop a learning plan as we discussed before and work out how much time she can allocate to all her learning needs and she can then work out how much time per week or per day she could spend online on social matters... Secondly, she would have to decide the times she would go online for social activities, say one hour daily either morning or evening and keep a log... so that she or her friends, me included, can help her monitor her time...





Hired

Your suggestions makes sense – it is not to stop the activities altogether, but to manage them. And as you keep telling me, we as individual learners must know ourselves as learners and as people – we have to know the kind of personalities we are as some types of personalities require more structure and discipline than others. We need to know where we fall so that we can take steps that are appropriate to ensure we become the best we can be and achieve the goals we set ourselves...

Well said...



Bescy



Hired

I think as responsible students we should be able to use the social media to help us manage our learning and communicate about course work. Sometimes I chat with my Facebook friends who are in my courses and we trade information. We even worked on projects together using instant messaging applications on our cell phones or sometimes we used Skype.

While I was apprehensive at first about using social media or my cell as part of my classes or rather for information and learning, I must say that now I understand a little more of the mix of using online technologies as well as hearing from the lecturer in the physical classroom, I can say that I now appreciate the mix.



Bescy



Hired

Me too. This is especially true for classes with large numbers where it is difficult to ask questions in class to clarify my understanding. I really make an effort to prepare for my classes by doing the reading and research. I really try not to be distracted or procrastinate and I try to use my own ideas and words. Unlike some students I know who cut and paste as they see that as an easy option when they have a time constraint.

Well you know they can't get away with that now. There is online software called Turnitin which detects whether you have copied something from a website I know I wouldn't get caught doing cut and paste because I go over the notes and readings several times and prepare my assignments using my own words.



Bescy



Hired

That sounds so neat. You always seem to think through things so well. But you make an important point, going over the work more than once... So you suggest that using the material online including access to readings through URLs - and some lecturers post PDFs of important articles as well - anyway, using the material I can prepare for a class before the lecture session, and after the session, I can make my own notes based on explanations and guidance provided in the session. I would have then gone through the material for each session more than once.



Bescy

Yes, you can use the technology to help you better manage your learning experience, but you have to prepare yourself. Learning to use productivity tools is one level of preparation, going to the libraries and learning how to electronically access relevant databases and conduct searches is another. And when you register at the UWI, you can immediately do the myeLearning tutorial so you learn to deal with your online courses, in fact the majority of your courses.



Hired

Technology can be very important in learning but you must prepare to make the best use of it.

Summary

1. Technology is an integral part of your learning experience at the UWI – from using PowerPoint in class presentation to submitting a Word formatted essay to using a learning management system such as mySTA, for self-directed learning.
2. Importantly, any form of technology is a mere tool to help you work better, learn better and become better. The emphasis here is on **tool** – something to be used towards an end and not an end in itself.
3. Since technology is in use throughout the campus, your challenge is to know how to use the range of technologies effectively and efficiently. Like any other tool it can be used well and as intended or it can be poorly used to disastrous or non-productive effect.

4. Opportunities exist on the campus for you to learn how to effectively use the technology. Some suggestions follow:
 - a. Before starting your classes, you might want to log on to mySTA and go to myeLearning 101 to do the tutorial on how to use the campus' learning management system. This system is used in the majority of classes you will take so invest some time in learning how to use the system. The tutorial is online and is thus accessible 24/7. A caution, you must be financially cleared to access the technology.
 - b. While you may think that you are 'tech-savvy' this may not apply to the use of productivity tools – Word, Excel, PowerPoint software that you will be required to use throughout your university experience and beyond. Note that there are conventions and methods that facilitate the use of these tools. Further, you can learn to use these tools properly and be certified and actually obtain credits for your efforts, as the training programme offered by Campus Information Technology Services (CITS) forms part of the UWI Co-Curricular Credit programme.
5. Preparing yourself for increased use of technology will allow you to know the conventions of their use which will give you the skills to work faster and better.
6. Productivity tools (for example, Word, Excel, PowerPoint) are extremely important for each student to have the best kind of university experience and prepare work that is not only exemplary but of which each student can be justly proud. It must be stressed, though, that there are correct ways and incorrect ways of using these tools that are not always intuitive and hence the need to learn the conventions of use.
7. If you are not well-trained or do not understand the technology and how it ought to be used, you can fall victim to its peculiarities, so that it appears to operate as a 'fiend' and not as the friend it should be.
8. Investing time and effort in learning to use a range of technology is invaluable.
9. The campus provides facilities to help you develop the technological skills you require for your university experience. Contact the Alma Jordan Library and CITS for information in this regard.

Why I am Ready for the Group Experience

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the value of group work. Working collaboratively/cooperatively is not only a teaching/learning strategy that is organized by lecturers, but it is a strategy learners can use to maximize their learning. Working in small groups created by learners themselves, they have the opportunity to engage course material, teach one another, clarify issues and enhance their learning. The research supports this approach. But there are guidelines for selecting persons to work with to be most effective. Bescy and Hired introduce readers to ways in which they utilize cooperative and or collaborative learning to their advantage.

ADVANTAGES OF COOPERATIVE/COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

I wanted to talk to you about whether you have a study group, and if you did, how did you get it to work for you? I ask because working in a group with a good agenda was very useful for me, and...



Hired

I discovered the whole collaborative learning idea somewhat late, so I used the strategy only in the second semester. I, too, was surprised that it worked well for me and I plan to work with the same group next year. Hopefully we will be taking the same courses.

The funny thing for me was that I never worked in a study group of my own making before I got to the UWI. I had worked with groups for some projects in high school, and to tell the truth, they did not all work well for me. I found that I had to carry much of the burden of those groups. I can say now that those groups were dysfunctional.



Hired

I was a part of a dysfunctional group once, but I realised after, that only one member of that group was not pulling her weight and it caused problems for all the other members. But, I felt we were still able to achieve quite a bit in terms of covering and understanding the subject material, so I thought that the strategy had merit.

The good news for me is that there can be many advantages to working in groups, but who the group is made up of is important in putting the group together.



CREATING AND MAINTAINING STUDY GROUPS



I had who I called my “study buddies”... there were four of us in this group. As I said, we formed this group in the second semester, so we had some knowledge of the skills each one of us could bring to the group activities. It was interesting forming the group. We were taking the same four core courses and we wanted to take a little more responsibility for getting through the work of the semester...

Box 6.1: Some Advantages of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning techniques have been found to:

- promote student learning and academic achievement
- increase student retention
- enhance student satisfaction with their learning experience
- help students develop skills in oral communication
- develop students' social skills
- promote student self-esteem
- help to promote positive interpersonal relations

My study group focused on the two most challenging courses in each semester – the courses that we thought would require more thorough interrogation, review and explanation of the material. My group members were not all doing the same courses anyway, so we made other arrangements for the other courses. I worked on my own for the other three courses....



So we used the strategy a bit differently...

Yes, but that is the point... It is important for us as learners to determine what would give us the best advantages and use those tools in the ways that work for us.

BetsyHired

But, I must mention two things about my study buddies. The first is that we were all committed to spend the time and extra effort to work on our courses. We had a specific meeting time every other Saturday for four hours either in the morning or afternoon. (We would decide on the meeting time by the Thursday prior to the meeting to allow for flexibility). We also assigned tasks, we divided up the readings and research work, and we took turns teaching other group members and sharing notes to aid clarification. The other thing about my study buddies was that we did not form the group because we were friends, per se. We formed the groups because we had different talents – from being able to organize information into very interesting graphics, to being articulate, to being really good at sourcing information, to being able to make and see links among constituent concepts. So when we covered a topic, we not only took less time but we could do so thoroughly and with understanding....

My study group was something like that. I had three persons in my group who were committed to bringing their talents to interrogating the two courses and who had different strengths. We were not particular friends, at least not at first, but we became friends because we had common interests and possessed different strengths that could benefit us all. Everyone in the group was important, but do you know that one member of our group was dubbed ‘the questioner’ because she always asked questions until the information was clear to her... boy, oh boy... did her questioning keep us on our toes! You could not prepare material half way....

Betsy

Box 6.2: Some Characteristics of Effective Learning Groups

The most effective learning groups show the following:

- **Size** – groups consist of three or four individuals. Larger groups increase the opportunity for ‘social loafers’.
- **Common purpose** – members are aware of, and committed to, the goals or purpose.
- **Supportive climate** – members operate in a climate of trust and openness. Negative feelings are communicated and resolved.
- **Communication** – members listen and check understanding.
- **Norms and values** – members have a common value system. They understand and share what is acceptable.
- **Roles** – members of the team know their respective roles in the group and adhere to them.
- **Self-awareness** – members know their own strengths and weaknesses and those of other members. They use their strengths to achieve their goals.
- **Balanced approach** – attention paid to needs of the group as well as achievement of the goals (Wooler, 2011).



We had a questioner in our group, as well. We called her “the probe”, she never let anything rest, she would make a good investigative reporter, because her questions were insightful and gave us reason to think through the concepts and ideas and provide sound rationale for our thinking.

I also found that the group worked because we were only three. I felt that if we had more we could not have done as well, everyone would not have had to be so involved...





Hired

We had four, and that worked well for us, especially when we had to do research work.



Bescy

I am glad that number worked for you. I think that it is important to strive for a size that would not be problematic, for example, where you can have social loafers or persons who would not pull their weight.



Hired

One good thing about forming your own study group is that it is really easy to ban or excise from the group anyone who is not pulling his or her weight.



Bescy

That is why it may not be so wise to have your 'friends' as members of these groups as they can take advantage of one's friendship.



Hired

Agreed...



Bescy

One advantage I felt I had in forming my study group was the empowerment I felt. I could choose who I prefer to work with and create our own guidelines for staying in the group and how contributions were to be made. This also helped me to develop other characteristics such as team playing and team leading. I think that should be a goal for all persons who attend university.



Hired

I agree... there are really opportunities to mold yourself into who you would like to become at the end of the university experience. At least there could be more strategic moves on our part as opposed to just following virtually unthinkingly from one course to another. You have given me insight into making the university learning experience more holistic...

Summary

1. Learning at the university is different from learning at any institution which you attended before.
2. You are now considered an adult and you are expected to take responsibility for your learning and therefore live with the consequences of **your** learning activity.
3. The work you undertake at university level is much more in quantity, and must show a decided quality in terms of amount of thinking involved, how it is articulated and presented.
4. Devotion to engagement with and interrogation of the relevant subject matter is expected to occur on a continuous basis which is reflective of learning as a process, and not episodic, coincident only with final examinations.
5. Issues of sharing and helping other students are becoming increasingly important for all students at the tertiary level.
6. Research into learning clearly supports cooperative learning as a universally invaluable strategy to learners, and is used in different formats by several of your lecturers.
7. You can maximise the effectiveness of your learning experience by identifying and working closely with a small group (2 or 3 persons) of carefully selected individuals who can facilitate and enhance your learning.
8. The study groups you create yourself should help you to work as a team **and** facilitate the learning of each group member.
9. **Caution:**
 - a. Your study group ('study buddies') should comprise persons who have strengths relevant to learning that you do not possess – do not select because you like the person or because they are like you **only**.
 - b. Make a distinction between your 'study group' and your 'friends' or 'liming buddies'.
 - c. Your 'study buddies' must be willing to share information, buy into the benefits of collaboration in your circumstances, observe meeting times, group plans and deadlines.

YOUR REFLECTIONS

Outline how you can use ideas in this handbook to prepare for taking charge of your own learning as you pursue your degree.

Glossary

Includes adaptations from the 'How To' Guide & University Regulations Undergraduate Handbook) (UWI, St Augustine, 2011)

ACADEMIC ADVISING: the process whereby you are provided with information on courses for which you must register and assists, where necessary, in the selection of courses. The purpose of academic advising is to help students, particularly new students, in planning, monitoring and successfully managing their chosen field of study, in relation to clear career objectives. Students are guided to accept responsibility for their learning; to be informed of the services provided for them; to access information, and to be managers of their time.

ACADEMIC ADVISOR: the person designated to perform the duties of academic advising for a defined group of students. Usually the HOD is responsible for ensuring that all students have the benefit of an Academic Advisor.

ACADEMIC YEAR: August 1st to July 31st.

ACCEPTANCE PACKAGE: once you've been accepted, you will receive a package from us. It will include your offer letter with your student registration number; information on fees, medical form, travel/passages information.

ADD/DROP: period during which students may add or drop a course without penalty.

ADVISING HOLD: an advising hold may be placed on your record if you are in a faculty that requires academic advising prior to registration. You must attend an advising session before your faculty/faculty advisor will clear you to register.

CRN (course reference number): number assigned to designate a specific class and the specific time/format in which it will be offered.

CO-CURRICULAR COURSE: a course that offered for credits that is taken alongside (that is within the regular semester for the student) disciplinary and traditional elective courses.

CO-REQUISITE: is a course which must be taken along with another specified course, in order to ensure the attainment of complementary and/or interdependent competencies.

CORE/REQUIRED COURSE(S): are courses that you are required to complete in order to be awarded a major or a minor.

COURSE LOAD: the number of credit hours carried each Semester.

COURSE CODE: a numeric number and letter combination used to identify a course e.g. HIST 2004 or ECON 1001. The letter part of the code identifies the subject (e.g. History or Economics), while the first digit of the number part of the Code identifies the level of the course (e.g. 2004-level 2 or 1001 level 1).

COURSE LEVEL: defines the level of a course. For example, HIST 1001 denotes that history 1001 is a level 1 course (at UWI marked by the first digit in a course number).

CREDIT/CREDIT HOUR: a unit which represents the number of hours a student spends in a class each week over the course of the semester. E.g. a student enrolled in MGMT 2003 (3 credits) will spend approximately 3 hours in class for approximately 13 weeks.

DEGREE EVALUATION /AUDIT/OR CURRICULUM ADVISING AND PROGRAMME PLANNING (CAPP) MODULE: an online tool to help students and their advisors compare the student's academic record to the requirements of a specific programme. Prior to a meeting with their academic advisor or any time throughout the year, students with access to degree evaluation can easily review their progress within their current programme. Or, if thinking about a change, they can try a 'what-if' comparison of their record against the requirements of another programme.

DEPARTMENT: a unit of a faculty which has a specific specialisation under the broader area represented by the faculty. (e.g. Food Production is a department within the Faculty of Food & Agriculture; Management Studies is a department in the Faculty of Social Sciences).

ELECTIVE(S): any course not required as part of your major. Course(s) which you may choose from a list provided by your department/faculty which is listed in your respective Faculty Regulations and Syllabuses Booklet.

EVENING: a student who is registered to pursue a course of study in an Evening University Programme for which classes are timetabled in the evenings from Mondays to Fridays from 5.00pm to 10.00pm and on Saturdays from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00pm.

FACULTY: lecturers are known as faculty members. Departments are grouped into divisions called faculties. For example- the Faculty of Social Sciences consists of the Departments of Management Studies, Economics and Behavioural Sciences.

FEE INVOICE: a printout of the courses for which you have registered that lists each specific course. The amount of tuition and fees due for all courses registered and the payment deadline date is also indicated on the printout.

FINANCIAL CLEARANCE: this refers to the approval given by Bursary officials when you have paid all the fees for which you are liable.

FINANCIAL HOLD: your registration will not be processed if you are indebted to the university. If you have any questions regarding your account, you may visit the Student Accounts Office at the Bursary, which located on the ground floor of the Student Administration Building.

FULL-TIME STUDY: a student who is registered for not more than 15/18 and not less than 12 credits per semester in accordance with prescribed faculty regulations.

GPA: grade point average is the average obtained by dividing the total grade points earned by the quality hours for which the student is registered for any stated period of time, excluding hours on the foundation courses, audited courses and courses taken for preliminary credit.

HOLD: a hold is a block placed on a student's record for failure to comply with obligations to the university. If you have a hold on your records, you may not register, or in many cases, obtain transcripts until that hold is cleared with the office imposing the hold. A hold may be imposed for financial indebtedness to the University (i.e. unpaid tuition and fees, unpaid library fines), academic or disciplinary reasons. Examples of holds are: transcript holds, advising holds, immunisation holds, accounts receivable holds etc. If you have not cleared your holds before the start of the academic year, you will be unable to register until the hold is cleared.

LEVEL: a state in a programme for which courses are designed (at UWI marked by the first digit in a course number).

MAJOR/MINOR: a major is the area(s) in which you choose to concentrate most of your studies e.g. French, History, Physics, Management Studies. A minor is a secondary area of concentrated study that relates to the major or is of purely personal interest. Minors are not mandatory, and there are a limited number of minors available at UWI.

my.uwi.edu: the UWI student web portal serving students on all four campuses. The portal provides access to online registration as well as information on student accounts, final grades, degree audits and personal information.

myeLearning: a Learning Management System (LMS) that provides an online interface for a course. It facilitates course administration, communication between course lecturers and students, distribution of materials and active learning.

OPTION: a prescribed combination of courses within a faculty or across faculties leading to a degree.

PART-TIME: a student registering for less than 24 credits of courses in a given academic year. These courses may be scheduled at any time of the day on the timetable.

PLAGIARISM: the unauthorized and/or unacknowledged use of another person's works, efforts or creations. This includes material taken from the internet. Plagiarism is a form of cheating. Lecturers can allow their students can check their work for plagiarism by using the Turnitin software (see entry for Turnitin).

PRE-REQUISITE: a course that needs to be taken before you can register for another course or a more advanced course. Students are responsible for completing all prerequisites prior to enrolling in courses. The student registration system will prevent students from registering if prerequisites have not been completed. Make sure you belong in the class.

PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS: computer applications that allow for the viewing, creating and modifying of general office documents (e.g. spreadsheets, memos, presentations, letters, personal database, form generation, image editing, etc.). Office productivity tools also include applications for managing employee tasks.

PROGRAMME: a selection of courses (designed to achieve pedagogical goals) the taking of which is governed by certain regulations and the satisfactory completion of which (determined by such regulations) makes a candidate eligible for the award of a degree/diploma/certificate.

REQUIRED/CORE COURSE(S): course(s) you must take to fulfill the requirements of your specific degree programme.

REQUIRED TO WITHDRAW (RTW): this applies to a student whose academic performance is deemed unsatisfactory in two consecutive semesters. The student whose semester GPA falls below 2.00 **at the end of a semester** would be placed on **warning** for unsatisfactory academic performance in that semester. If at end of **the following semester**, the semester GPA remains below 2.00, then the student would be required to withdraw (RTW) from the institution. A student who was RTW may be re-admitted to Faculty after a minimum period of one year has elapsed. However, the student must apply for re-entry by the date prescribed by the Campus Registrar.

SEMESTER: half-year term in a school or academic year (normally a 13-week period of instruction at the UWI).

SEMESTER GPA: GPA computed on the basis of all courses done in a semester, without reference to weighting except in terms of credits. (the terms Grade Point, GPA, Quality Hours, Honours GPA, Cumulative GPA and Quality Points are defined by the UWI Grade Point Average Regulations Booklet).

SPECIAL: a prescribed combination of courses offered which leads to a so designated degree.

TRANSCRIPT: official record of a student's academic standing listing coursework and grades for all courses attempted and completed at UWI.

TURNITIN: a software package designed to detect plagiarism in documents submitted by students.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT: a student pursuing a bachelor's degree. Undergraduate students cannot enroll in graduate-level classes. An undergraduate degree (bachelor's) can be a stepping stone to postgraduate programmes, such as Master's, MBA, Ph.D.

UWI STUDENT ID CARD: your university identification card. The UWI card has many functions aside from identification; it serves as a library card and an access card to other buildings on campus.

UWI STUDENT REGISTRATION NUMBER: is a 9-digit or 8-digit identification number. This number which can be found on your offer letter is used to gain access to the St. Augustine on-line system, and to identify you as a UWI student while you are on campus.

WARNING: a student is placed on Warning if the student's academic performance is unsatisfactory as evidenced by a semester GPA that has fallen below the minimum acceptable which is currently 2.00. A student on Warning must obtain a semester GPA of 2.00 or more in the following semester or else he/she would be required to withdraw (RTW) from the university.

New UWI GPA

Grade	% Range	Grade Point	Grade Definition
A+	90 -100	4.3	Exceptional
A	80 – 89	4.0	Outstanding
A-	75 - 79	3.7	Excellent
B+	70 - 74	3.3	Very Good
B	65 - 69	3.0	Good
B-	60 - 64	2.7	Satisfactory
C+	55 - 59	2.3	Fair
C	50 - 54	2.0	Acceptable
F1	45-49	1.70	Unsatisfactory
F2	40-44	1.30	Weak
F3	0-39	0	Poor

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USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES

Experiential Learning Cycles

<http://reviewing.co.uk/research/learning/cycles.htm>

Plagiarism

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/>

Learning Theory/Constructivism

<http://www.stemnet.nf.ca/~elmurphy/emurphy/cle.html>

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Appendix 1

Elements of Learning Theory

*Some of the major theories of learning include **behaviourism**, **cognitivism** and **constructivism**. Here are some brief explanations of these theories and a number of relevant associated theorists.*

Behaviourism is a theory of learning that subscribes to the principle of “stimulus-response.” The essence of the theory posits that all behavior is caused by external stimuli (operant conditioning) and that all behavior can be explained without the need to consider internal mental states or consciousness. Classical conditioning experimentally illustrated by Pavlov (1955) and operant conditioning demonstrated in Skinner’s (1948) work provide evidence for behaviourism. Elements of behaviourist theory is at the heart of the reward/punishment stimulus still used to facilitate learning especially in the young.

Important contributors to behaviourist theory include John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, E. L. Thorndike and Bandura (Social learning Theory).

Cognitivism is a theory that suggests that the mind should be opened and understood. The learner is perceived as a processor of information building schema, mapping information, symbol manipulation and creating mental models.

Important contributors to cognitivism include Reigeluth (Elaboration Theory), Gagne, Briggs, Wager, Bruner (moving toward cognitive constructivism)

Constructivism is a theory that proposes learning as an active, constructive process. The learner actively constructs or creates his/her own subjective views and records of information and interactions with the environment. New information is linked to what is already known, thus learning is subject to the learner’s own interpretation. Therefore, constructivism includes concepts such as

Learning as experience, active learning; Problem Based Learning (PBL); anchored instruction, cognitive apprenticeship (scaffolding); inquiry and discovery learning.

Important contributors to constructivism include Vygotsky (1962), Piaget (1957), Dewey (1916), Bruner (1960).

Appendix 2

Example of a Learner SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facility with words/love reading• Do extra reading• Can multitask• Always completes assignments on time• Self-motivated• Never leaves a concept until I understand it• I ask questions until concepts are clear in my mind• Easily make connections among concepts and learning experiences	WEAKNESSES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be overly persistent• Do not keep good records/a bit untidy• Can be distracted• Cannot easily say “no” to friends
OPPORTUNITIES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To improve approach to learning/take control• To improve discipline and focus• To develop better study habits/time management	THREATS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friends with very different interests/not interested in learning• Inadequate access to technology

Appendix 3

Learning Plan

WEEK	COURSES	TASKS/PLANS	COMMENTS
1	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
2	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		
3			
...			
13			

Appendix 5

Graphic Organisers

The *Star* organiser (Figure A1) can be used for study skills – taking notes, reading, memorizing.

The *Spider* (Figure A2) organizer can be used *for* investigating attributes associated with a single topic or concept also good for studying and taking notes.

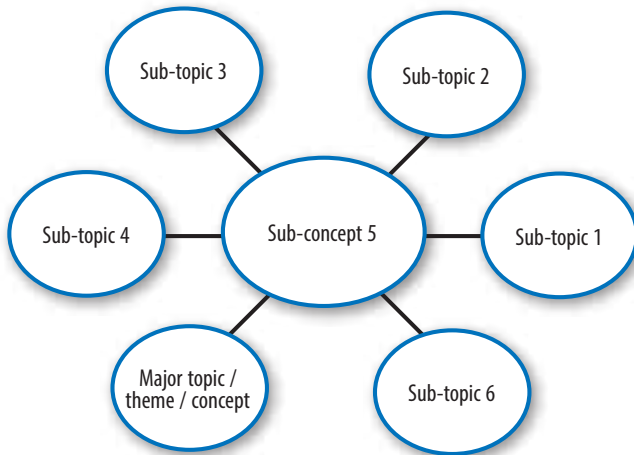


Figure A1: Star Graphic Organiser

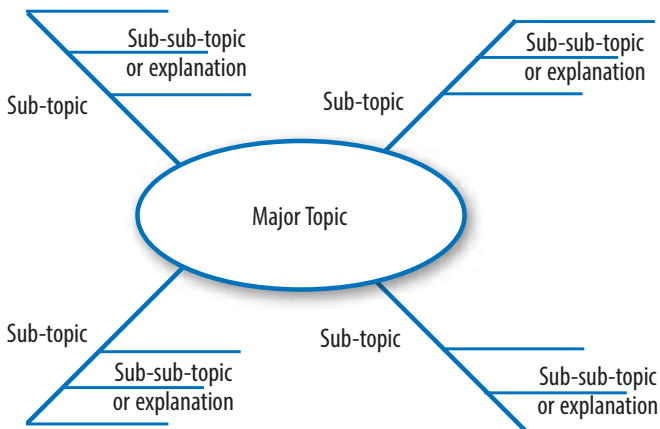


Figure A2: Spider Graphic Organiser

The *Fishbone* organizer (Figure A3) can be used for investigating cause and effect factors associated with a complex topic.

The *Flow chart* (Figure A4) visually displays a chain of instructions used to complete an algorithm or other complicated process. Classical flowcharts have a beginning, multiple possible outcomes at some nodes, rules at some nodes, and possible multiple endings. In flowcharts, different symbols have different meanings. Arrows represent the direction of flow.

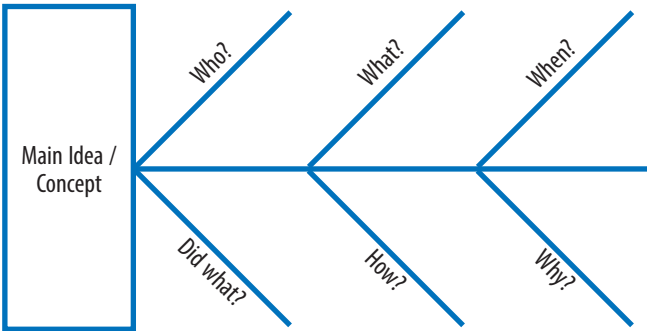


Figure A3: Fishbone Graphic Organiser

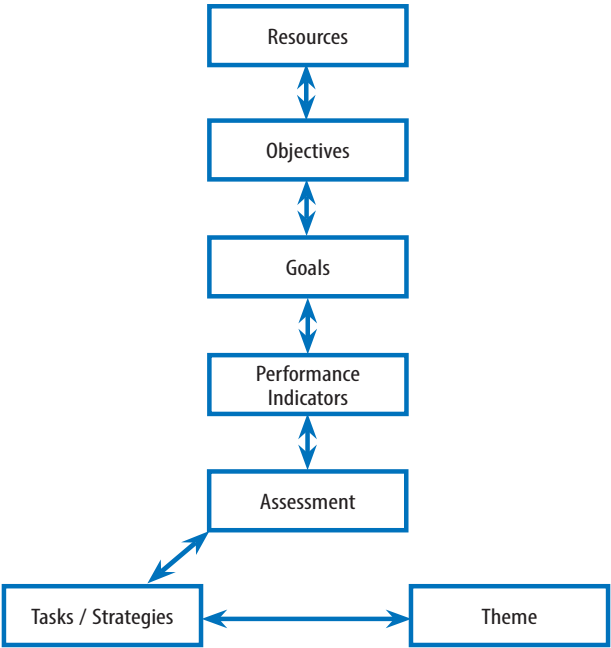


Figure A4: Flow chart

The *Flow chart* (Figure A4) visually displays a chain of instructions used to complete an algorithm or other complicated process. Classical flowcharts have a beginning, multiple possible outcomes at some nodes, rules at some nodes, and possible multiple endings. In flowcharts, different symbols have different meanings. Arrows represent the direction of flow.

- Circles and ovals are starting, stopping, or control points.
- Diamonds are decision points.
- Rectangles and squares are steps at which processing takes place.
- Parallelograms represent input or output.

For example, computer programmers sometimes use a flowchart to organize an algorithm before writing a program and generally use the symbols illustrated in Figure A5.

Beyond the classical there is a variety of flow charts (Figure A4 is an example)

The Venn diagram (Figure A6) is used for tasks involved in examining the similarities and differences between two or three items/concepts.

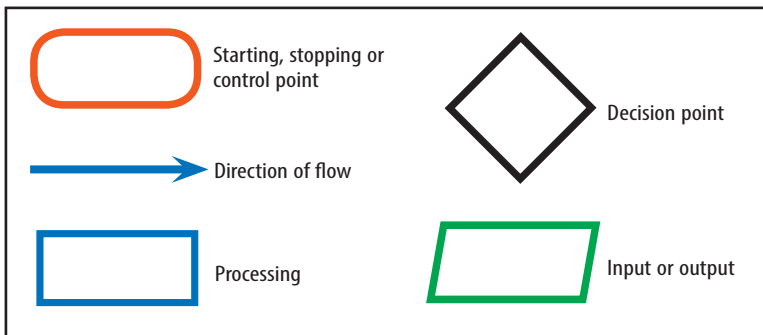


Figure A5: Components of a Classical Flowchart

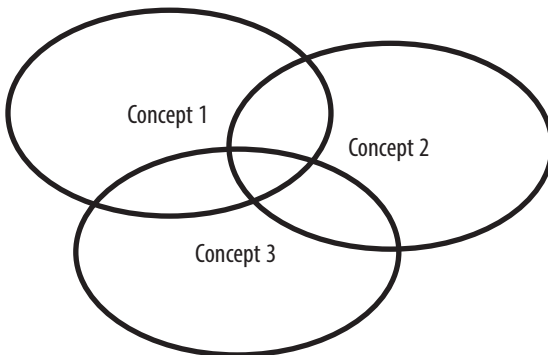


Figure A6: Venn Diagram

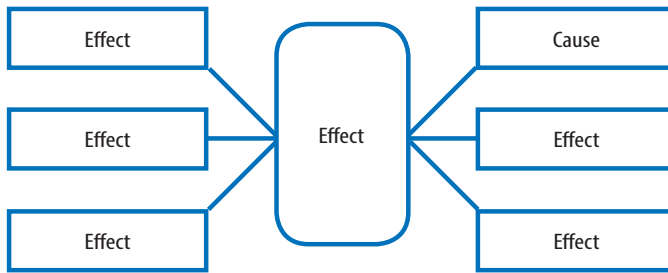


Figure A7: Cause and Effect Graphic Organiser

Cause and effect diagrams: If the objective is to examine possible causes and effects in a process, a cause and effect graphic organizer is recommended.

The graphic organisers illustrated here are by no means exhaustive. You may visit the following websites to learn of the variety of graphic organisers:

<http://www.havefunteaching.com/worksheets/graphic-organizers>

http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/GO/cause_effect.htm

NOTE: It is important to remember that you are free to use graphic organisers in ways that make sense to you and help you. You can modify them or adapt to suit your own needs. The important thing is to make your notes and revision strategies more graphic and memorable.