Sixth Form

Independent Study Skills
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Appendix 1 : The Harvard referencing system.

Appendix 2 : The Time Management Plan.
Introduction

Independent study skills have become increasingly important as a level specifications have changed. Students will not achieve their potential if they do not put in the work outside of the lesson.

Assessment frequently asks students to apply their subject knowledge to unfamiliar contexts and it is difficult, if not impossible, to do this if you have not taken the time to extend your understanding independently.

Our students spend only a limited amount of time in lessons …

- 38/52 weeks in the year
  - 5/7 days in every week
  - 4/24 hours in every day

- This adds up to approximately 8% of their time...
  Which leaves 92% outside teacher contact time.

- How do they use this time to learn?
  It makes a BIG difference.

This booklet aims to explain how to make the most of this time to achieve success.
Preparing for university

A Levels are intended to prepare students for undergraduate study and it is clear that if you can develop these independent study skills during your time in the Sixth Form, you will begin university with a head start. However, more than that, acquiring these skills will actually improve your chances of gaining a place at that university in the first place.

There are more students than ever competing for fewer places with better grades. So what does this mean for sixth formers? Basically, for all university courses, students need to be developing the independent study skills described in this booklet, and for the more competitive courses they must be reading and pursuing activities beyond the A Level syllabus; the universities call these ‘Supercurricular Activities’ and they are more highly prized than extracurricular activities.

Oxford talks about the 3 Rs – reading, reading and reading! The Head of Student Recruitment describes it as ‘Sunday Afternoon Syndrome’. When you have finished all your school commitments, done your part time job etc, what do you do? Students who receive offers from the most competitive courses will be pursuing their academic interest. They are intrinsically motivated and engaged. In addition, the majority of these resources are available for free – they are online or on ‘freeview’. They are your local libraries, museums; or even your local river or mountain. It is not an extensive home library or a trip to the Galapagos Islands.

However, this work must be outside the A Level syllabus – otherwise it just tells admissions tutors that you are good at doing what you are told! It is also important that you read critically. Many students are critical of a copy of Heat magazine or an episode of Big Brother but accept a broadsheet opinion piece at face value. So, in conclusion, if you are aiming for one of these courses, this kind of studying should be a pleasure not a chore!
Essential study skills

What follows is an introduction to the essential study skills you will need in the Sixth Form. The exact study skills you will need to develop will be dependent on the subjects you are studying and your own strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult to generalise about study skills, and you will need to work with your tutor and teachers to find your most effective approach to study. However, the section begins with ten top tips that everyone can follow!

1. **Get yourself organised** – keep your planner up to date, listing work set, work completed and work outstanding.

2. **Try and stick to a regular work rota**: do a little bit of study often, rather than leaving huge amounts of work to the eleventh hour before a deadline. Late work is invariably rushed, often incomplete, and of inferior quality, and by starting an assignment well in advance of a deadline you will get the chance to ask staff for help if you need it. Most ‘A’ level students need to work for between 14 and 16 hours per week OUTSIDE of lessons.

3. **Work in a studious environment**, not somewhere where you will be distracted. At home, work somewhere where you will not be disturbed (and where you can leave books and folders safely). If you do need to work on a computer, make sure you are not signed into any social networking sites (MSN, Facebook) to avoid distractions.

4. **Define your work tasks**. Make sure you understand what is expected of you. Seek clarification if you are uncertain about essay titles, the parameters of note taking, etc.

5. **Don’t be afraid to ask for help** when you need it! Don’t suffer in silence and don’t pretend you understand something when you DO NOT.

6. **Use all the available resources**: teachers; textbooks; libraries; periodicals; the Internet; newspapers; television and radio; fellow students.

7. **Motivate yourself**. Have a goal to aim for … on a micro scale a favourite TV programme in half an hour after some revision; on a longer scale a university grade offer.

8. **Work in attention span units**. Few students can work effectively for more than one hour before their concentration starts to ebb (this is particularly so with revision). Divide your working time up into attention span units (40-60 minutes) punctuated by short breaks.

9. **Get a dictionary**! Many exam boards now penalise poor spelling and grammar at ‘A’ level.

10. **The more you put in, the more you get out**, both in terms of results and enjoyment.
Reading and Note taking

Reading is one of the core activities of studying. At A level you are faced with three particular challenges:

• The volume of reading
• The complexity of the material you will read
• Trying to remember what you have read.

1. A Reading Style
Skilled readers vary their reading speed and method to suit both the material they are reading and their purpose in reading it. You ‘read’ a telephone directory rather differently than a novel. There are several different approaches to reading. Here are some of the main techniques you can use:

• **Skimming**: this involves looking quickly through the book and reading only things like contents, headings, introductions and conclusions. It is a quick and efficient way of familiarising yourself with a publication and is useful if you wish to check whether a book is relevant, or for finding particular information or ideas quickly. Skimming is particularly useful for finding your way around a publication. You may skim the newspaper to find the articles you want to read, or a textbook to identify a relevant chapter.

• **Scanning**: this is a very rapid search for important points. It may be a diagram, a title or a key word. The essential thing is that you deliberately ignore everything except the one item for which you are scanning. Scanning is useful when you want to identify a particular piece of information – for example some specific chemical formulae.

• **Reading to understand**: this involves detailed study of a chapter, passage or article in order to absorb all the major facts and ideas. You may read it more than once, and take notes to summarise what you have read. Reading to understand is useful when you want to study something thoroughly.

• **Word-by-word reading**: very occasionally you actually need to read every word extremely carefully – for example, when reading an English Literature text or an exam question.

To study efficiently you must learn to vary your reading style and become proficient at each type of reading. By developing the ability to switch from one method of reading to another you will vastly increase your studying efficiency.

Language Difficulties
Reading is more difficult when the author uses technical terms or complex language. In this situation you should never guess meanings, but instead use dictionaries and subject glossaries to help you with definitions.

Responding to the Material
Reading is not a passive activity! You should be thinking about what you read …

• Do you agree with the author?
• What is the quality of the author’s argument?
• Do you have a different point of view?
• What counter arguments could you use?
Taking Notes
Clear accurate and comprehensive notes are vital to ‘A’ level success (Sod’s Law of Examination states that the topics you failed to note properly are the ones you will be examined on!)

The Process of Note Taking
Highlight and underline texts IF THEY ARE YOUR OWN. Highlighting and underlining focuses your attention on the text and makes you think about what the key concepts and issues are.
Taking notes forces you to THINK: to grapple with the ideas in the text as you read them, because you have to decide what to write down and how to say it. What is more, if you read without taking notes, no matter how good your memory, you will find that ideas gradually drift away from you.

Notes should:
• **Summarise** the main theme of an article/chapter
• **Highlight** the key ideas and arguments used
• **List** out any important statistics/facts.

Notes are best presented in point form or under subheadings with key ideas/points underlined and highlighted. They may contain quotes, BUT BEWARE OF COPYING TOO MUCH NARRATIVE STRAIGHT FROM THE TEXT.

Notes should be detailed enough to cover all the relevant material in a depth necessary for ‘A’ level study, but not too detailed to make revision arduous and overly time consuming. Notes can be made more concise by the use of abbreviations.

Good notes are invaluable and they act as:
• **A form of ‘external’ memory**, a kind of extension to the memory capacity of your mind – enabling you to have ready access to a far wider range of knowledge.
• **A symbol of progress**: notes provide you with evidence of the work you have done and so make an important contribution to your morale.
• **A means of pulling the course together**.

Making notes on notes is an effective form of revision. The action of noting concentrates your mind in revision, and allows you to further order ideas sharpen understanding.

Filing notes in an ordered fashion is a vital skill. Too many students lose notes or are unable to access material when they need it because of chaotic or non-existent filing systems. Treat yourself to some ring binders and box files!

Absence: As with any subject it is vitally important that you have a comprehensive, clear set of notes. Make sure if you are absent from school that you ask someone in your class for a copy of anything you have missed. This is your responsibility, not the teacher’s although of course your teacher will be more than willing to go through any problems once you have copied up missed work.
Computers
Increasingly the ability to use computers is expected in both academic and everyday life. There is no doubt that you are at a disadvantage if you are not computer literate to at least some degree of competency. There is a wealth of information out there and the internet offers huge scope for research for projects and for general interest. However, you should consider the source of information on the web – there is little censorship or vetting of material so how reliable is the source?

Finally, despite their significant advantages, computers present two distinct pitfalls to today’s student:

Plagiarism: Copying information from the internet without acknowledging it is plagiarism. You must cite your sources or reference them in a footnote, bibliography or appendix. Failure to do this may result in disqualification from individual modules or entire subjects. By all means, get information from the net but you must digest it and produce your own conclusions in your own words as well as citing your sources.

Distraction: Social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram etc are a central part of teenagers’ lives. Inevitably, they are also a distraction. It is impossible to concentrate on academic work if you have MSN ‘conversations’ and Facebook status updates popping up continuously. To avoid distraction, do not log in to these sites whilst you are studying; use them as a reward after a study session. They are enormous drains on your time!

Textbooks
Again the use of a textbook depends on the subject. In most subjects, the main use of your textbook is as a source of information and questions on specific topics. You may be asked to take notes directly from the textbook.
Homework

There is one huge misconception about homework which a surprising number of people still cling to. The misconception is this: the reason for completing my homework is so that the relevant teacher will not moan/contact my tutor/contact my parents/generally make my life unpleasant.

That is not the reason for doing homework.

There are two main points to homework: firstly for the teacher to check that you understand the work and have grasped the relevant concepts and secondly and equally importantly for you to practise required techniques, check you understand the work and have grasped the relevant techniques.

Copying homework from someone else and passing work off as your own serves no purpose. Apart from the dishonesty of it, how can a teacher help when they are not seeing your own effort? Don't fool yourself into thinking, 'Oh yes I could probably have done that myself – I think I understand what I’m copying.' If you understand it, then do it yourself. If you don't understand, ask.

Be aware that what goes around comes around. Teachers will always be willing to help you as much as they can but bear in mind they are much more likely to go that extra mile with you if you have shown your commitment.

In the same vein, don't be afraid to ask for help with homework – before it is due in. There is no point on the day homework is due saying 'Oh, I couldn't do these three questions.' You should have contacted the teacher long before then. Similarly, writing the question number and no working does not constitute a reasonable attempt at a homework question.

Do not be under the misapprehension that the homework process finishes with the handing in of the piece of work. A crucially important part of the process is sorting out mistakes you have made and learning from them.
Group discussion

In the Sixth Form you will probably find there is more opportunity for group discussion than was the case at GCSE.

Group discussion is important in:

• Helping you articulate ideas and arguments in a clear coherent fashion
• Building self confidence
• Aiding group learning, as you may have novel ideas or a new approach which add a different perspective to a topic
• Learning to appreciate the views of others and the dangers of dogma.

How to make group discussions work

1. Contribute … throw caution to the wind and join in! Everyone has something valid to contribute and you have just as much right to take part in discussions as anyone else.

2. Contributions can be simple … they don’t have to be complex and brilliant.

3. In any discussion you may occasionally grow confused – and unsure of what exactly the discussion is about. Don’t sit quietly by, but instead ask for clarification.

4. If a discussion is pre-planned, then prepare for it! Argument backed up with logic and factual content will always prevail over “hot air”.

5. Show tolerance towards the views of others even if you disagree with them. Many issues are so complex that there is never just one right answer.
Essay writing

There are six key steps:

1. Think about the essay title
   In particular look out for command verbs such as explain and evaluate which will set the parameters of your answer. Underline key words and ensure that all aspects of the question are being addressed. Before you begin to prepare for an essay you must have a clear idea of what the question wants, and if necessary seek clarification from your teacher.

2. Gather together material for the essay
   Look back through your class notes to find out what is relevant to the question set. Find out from your teacher what extra reading you should do.

   Look out for other sources (eg newspapers, Internet,), which may be relevant. Using relevant material taken from sources beyond basic textbooks impresses examiners. Without thorough research, you will not be familiar with the range of arguments and depth of supporting detail necessary to score highly.

3. Get some ideas down on paper
   By writing notes for your essay, you have already begun the process of getting ideas on to paper. However, up to this point your main emphasis has been on getting hold of what other writers have to say. Once you have completed the gathering together of material, you have to switch to thinking in terms of what you are going to say. A good way to approach this is by BRAINSTORMING, jotting down a whole series of thoughts relating to the title. Brainstorming allows you to trap some of the ideas floating around in your mind.

4. Organise material and draw up an essay plan
   You need to start dividing up your brainstorming ideas from (3) into some sort of order from which a logical and structured argument can be formed. This could take the form of dividing points up into for or against a particular viewpoint, or by listing points out under certain subheadings which will form the text of individual paragraphs in your answer. How you actually construct an essay does vary from one subject to another, and detailed advice is best left to subject teachers. Suffice to say most essays should:
   • Have an introduction, outlining the topic to be discussed. Good introductions often impose a structure on the subsequent essay.
   • Be relevant to the question set. Cut out any irrelevancy or background narrative not directly related to the essay title.
   • Have a logical and developed argument.
   • Have a conclusion which summarises the main points (arguments in your essay) and directly answers the question set.

5. Write the essay
   This is best done in one go, as this will help the flow of your argument. Do not spend too long worrying about the detail of sentences, for while you are writing you are too close to the words to make reliable judgments about them. It is easy to waste time
fiddling about with small changes when a fresh run at the piece might show a useful way of recasting a whole sentence or paragraph.

6. Review your essay

In doing so, check the following:

i) Are your spelling, punctuation and use of English accurate?

ii) Do the sentences work; that is, do they make sense? Even at Advanced level, many candidates produce awkward sentences which have too many sub-clauses or lack a verb!

iii) Do the divisions into paragraphs work? Do the breaks feel as though they come at the right place when the focus of the discussion shifts, for example, as you move from one factor to another?

iv) Have you given sufficient explanation and illustration such that your argument has credibility?

v) Does the argument follow? Does it make sense as you move from point to point?

vi) And the most important check of all, have you answered the question in the title? Your answer should be relevant and structured rather than “a tell me everything you know about…. ” narrative.
Essential revision and examination skills

A Summary
There is no miracle approach to Advanced level success or academic panacea for intellectual woes. However, it is possible to “work smarter not harder!”. Here are a few ways of getting the most out of your revision and study.

1. Get yourself organised
• Make sufficient time for academic study outside of the classroom. You should be spending approximately four hours per subject each week.
• Don’t let study periods in school drift away without getting anything done.
• Meet all your deadlines and do not fall behind (especially for coursework and projects)
• Set up a quiet place to study (at home; the library) and avoid distractions.
• Address extra curricular dilemmas, eg part-time job versus study. As exams approach you must give academic work increased priority but occasional relaxation is vital!

2. Reading
• Read around the subject (daily newspaper; Economist; New Scientist; Internet).
• Read other people’s work … (after you’ve done your own!).
• Ask for help if you do not understand what you read.
• Use reading as a source of technical words and jargon for your own work.
• Summarise what you read in your notes.
• Do not copy other students’ work or plagiarise.

3. Note Taking
• Clear and concise notes are best remembered.
• Highlight key ideas and terms.
• Summarise your own notes into a series of key points as part of your revision programme.
• Make sure you have a complete set of notes (Sod’s Law … says the examination will always focus on your weak spots!).
• Keep your notes safe and well organised.

4. Preparing for Exams
• Pull the whole course together (get a syllabus and do not compartmentalize information).
• Start revising early enough (ie months before the exam!)
• Try to keep a revision timetable.
• Change revision topics regularly to avoid boredom (but ensure thorough revision of all areas!)
• Revise actively by summarising notes onto cards or into diagrams; (don’t stare blankly at your notes or copy out repetitively!).
• Revise in approximately 45 minute sessions (…your attention span!).
• Practise past questions and papers.
• Try to think up likely exam questions for yourself (but beware of question spotting!).
• Talk about the material you are revising (bore parents, friends, relatives, etc).

5. As Exam Day Approaches
• Ease off your revision (you need to be mentally alert for the exam, not a walking zombie!).
• Revise during the day so that your mind is used to working in examination hours. You must be at your most alert at 9am not 11.30pm!
• If anxiety sets in talk to parents/tutors. (Breathing exercises, meditation or a GP may help.)
• Check examination arrangements (twice!) – time, place, etc.
• On the day:
  i) Don’t attempt any last minute revision, it will only disturb your carefully stored ideas.
  ii) Arrive in good time.
  iii) Don’t let other candidates disturb you. Remain aloof if you need to.
  iv) Make sure you have the necessary equipment for the exam (black pen, pencil, ruler, rubber, calculator, books!)

6. In the Exam Itself
• Keep calm at all times
• Read the instructions on the front page.
• Read the questions.
• Read the instructions (again) and find the questions you have prepared for.
• As you tackle a question:
  - Examine the wording carefully
  - Take the time to plan your answer before you start writing - Everything you write should be relevant to the specific question asked.
  - Write legibly and in a clear style using relevant terminology.
  - Express complex ideas in short sentences.
  - Structure essays with an introduction, a logically developed argument and a conclusion which all answer the question set.
To conclude, there are three general golden rules. They are obvious and yet surprisingly rarely adhered to:

1) Slow and steady wins the race – every time. By that I mean study little and often – from day one. There is nothing worse than playing catch up and, believe me, although it might have worked at GCSE the ‘I'll do no work throughout the year and then make a huge revision effort just before the exams’ technique simply will not work at A-level. Ask the current Year 13 if you don’t believe me.

2) Divide your time fairly between subjects. It is easy to become bogged down in a particular subject if there is a test/exam/project looming in that particular area. You must endeavour however to keep the other subjects going at the same time. No doubt there will be some weekly variations in the division of your time between subjects but it is vitally important to keep your head above water in all of them at the same time. All too often students get themselves into a ‘Catch-22’ situation of leaving some subjects, trying to catch up and in the process neglecting the original subject and so on. It is a thankless situation and one to be avoided at all cost. A little forward planning can go a long way.

3) Seek advice and assistance before things get out of control. We are here to help. Whether it be subject teacher, tutor, Miss Buckle, Mrs Wyatt, Mr Jones, or Mrs Devismes – see someone. Let us know you are having difficulties and we will endeavour to help you form a strategy for sorting them out. There are very rarely problems that are insurmountable provided you are willing to work through them.
Conclusion

Everyone teaching you hopes that you will not only succeed academically but also enjoy your next two years in the Sixth Form, developing in every aspect of school life. Remember that, in the end, what you get out of the Sixth Form will depend on what you put into it. Our aim is to see Sixth Form students leave as well-rounded young adults, who will make outstanding citizens in society.
Appendix 1

Different systems for citing references are in use by different institutions.

**citations in the text of your essay**

In the text of your essay, references can be made in a number of ways. In this guide we are focusing on the Harvard system and the Number system.

- **Harvard system** - the name(s) of the author(s) is/are followed by the year of publication in brackets in the text. The references are then listed in the bibliography at the end of the essay in alphabetical order of the first author's surname.
- **Number system** - a number is allocated to each reference and this is inserted in the text as a superscript number or in parentheses eg (3). In the bibliography at the end, the references are listed in the order in which they are cited in the text.

The following examples show the difference between the two systems.

**Harvard system**

**Text**

In the text of the paper the name(s) of the author(s) is/are followed by the year of publication in brackets. For example:

"Recently, **Li and Raichlen (1999)** have found a nonlinear correction to Synolakis's formula. For the three-dimensional case, **Carrier and Noiseux (1983)** have analysed the reduction of a tsunami wave theory."

If the name(s) of the author(s) is/are not part of the sentence, both the author's/authors' name(s) and the year of publication are enclosed in brackets. For example:

"Recently, a nonlinear correction to Synolaki's formula has been found (**Li and Raichlin, 1999**). The reduction of a tsunami wave theory has been analysed for the three-dimensional case (**Carrier and Noiseux, 1983**)."

**References**

In the bibliography or list of references the authors are listed in alphabetical order by the first author's surname. For example:


Ways of referring to one or more authors in the text

The ways in which you may refer to one or more authors in your text is shown in the examples below:

One author: Carrier (1983) or (Carrier, 1983)
Two authors: Carrier and Noiseux (1983) or (Carrier and Noiseux, 1983)
Three or more: Carrier et al. (1998) or (Carrier et al., 1998)

Ways of referring to multiple references by the same author

If there is more than one reference in your essay by the same author then these should be listed chronologically in the bibliography or reference list, eg:
Carrier (1966)
Carrier (1970)

Number system

Text

In the text - a number is allocated to each reference and this is inserted in the text as a superscript number or in parentheses. For example:

"Double flowers are being sought by one breeder (10), but others consider the single flower more beautiful. The hybrid clone 'Annie J. Hemming' (11) frequently produces six or seven petals rather than the five typical of the genus Hibiscus."

If a reference is cited more than once, the same number is used.

References

In the bibliography or list of references the references are usually listed in number order. For example:


See the section above for help with references written by more than one author.
## Appendix 2

### The Time Management Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANCE</th>
<th>URGENCY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Urgent and important</td>
<td>2. Important but not urgent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Firefighter]</td>
<td>Important but doesn’t need to be dealt with now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things to deal with now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Urgent but not important</td>
<td>4. Neither urgent nor important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Things to deal with now but not important</td>
<td>Ignore – just time wasting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>