

## Chapter 2

# Attendance, Class sessions, note-taking, using textbooks/resources and study methods

In this chapter, you will learn about the importance of regular and punctual attendance, what takes place during class sessions, why, when, how and where to keep study notes. You will also learn about the lecturer's role and the important part lecturers play in your studies. We will look at how you can make the most of your textbooks as a learning tool. Much of your studies and preparation takes place out of the classroom. We will look at how, when and where to study.

## 1. Attendance

### Visa requirements

For international students, there may be strict attendance requirements as a condition of enrolment. In other words, if absences are unexplained and, more importantly, unacceptable, then your visa may be cancelled which effectively means that you can no longer study in Australia.

Rules regarding attendance are set by the Department of Immigration. Be aware that colleges and universities generally have to follow such rules because otherwise, there may be consequences for them. \*These may vary.

Your educational institution will provide you with information regarding attendance and you may also receive additional information from the Immigration Department. You need to read this carefully and ask questions if any information is unclear to you.

It is not the purpose of this book to go into detail regarding attendance requirements for students for the reasons given in the previous paragraph. However, here are some points to help you:

- Take careful note of your study timetable including semester breaks and public holidays. Note that some public holidays may **NOT** be a holiday for your institution. Check your diary and/or ask about these.
- If you return to your home country during a break, you will be expected to return when classes resume. It is advisable not to return home during short breaks, unless there is an emergency. You may find that you actually get very tired and even suffer jet lag which is not the purpose of having a holiday

- Staying longer in your home country is not usually accepted as an excuse if there is a special occasion e.g. wedding, birthday. An emergency e.g. death or severe illness of a close family member **MAY** be acceptable, but you should not assume this. You may be required to provide adequate proof of the 'emergency.'
- Proof of illness must be supported by a medical certificate, but such proof is not an automatic guarantee that absences will be accepted due to illness
- Sadly, some students don't always tell the truth regarding their absences. It's very likely that if you lie, you will be found out and there are likely to be serious consequences for you. It is usually best to tell the truth. Lying and cheating are generally taken seriously in Australia

### **Regular and punctual attendance**

Unfortunately, some students don't understand that regular attendance is important for other reasons directly related to their studies. One student when asked why he was not attending regularly replied that a local student had told him 'don't worry too much about being in class. Just make sure you get the notes.' Local as well as overseas students often learn, sometimes too late, that going to a tertiary institution actually means being physically and mentally present, rather than just copying study material.

Regular and punctual attendance is important for the following reasons:

- 1) Being late is considered disrespectful and discourteous in Australia and this applies to study, work and social situations. Punctuality is taken seriously by most people and being late to work on a regular basis would be grounds for dismissing an employee
- 2) Being late to class shows a lack of respect towards the lecturer as well as other students. When you enter a class late, you distract others and this may interfere with the flow of information
- 3) When you miss a class, you miss valuable and possibly, irretrievable information. The more classes you miss, the less you understand and the more confused you become. This, in turn, leads to greater stress and panic, particularly (but not exclusively) during tests and exams. Missed information is also one of the principle causes of misunderstandings which can directly or indirectly lead to poor marks

## 2. Class sessions

You can make the most of your class sessions by doing the following:

- Come on time or even early
- Sit near the front of the class where you can see and hear better
- Take out all necessary material e.g. textbook, writing paper, and pens
- Switch off your mobile and put it in your bag where it won't be a distraction. Ringing mobiles are an unnecessary distraction. If you are waiting for an urgent call, tell your lecturer, set the phone on silent and when your call comes, go outside. This is an exception and not the rule. You should also check this with your institution as many of them have very strict rules about mobiles
- Focus on the lecturer. Learn to study their cues and clues
- Ask questions
- Take notes

Students often complain about fatigue and/ or restlessness in class. It's certainly not easy to sit for long periods. The steps mentioned above can help you. In addition, don't put your head on the desk. Sit upright but relaxed and change position from time to time. Keep alert by listening, asking questions and taking notes. Breathe deeply as this can reduce tiredness. Try to avoid late nights before class sessions, particularly early classes.

Use your class breaks to clear your head. Take a short walk, have a drink and/or food. Have a chat with a fellow student.

## 3. Using textbooks

You need to buy the correct edition of the prescribed textbook. If you use an older one, you may find it difficult to find the correct page numbers and/ or chapters. Older editions may not have all the topics covered in your curriculum.

Some students don't make full use of their textbook. When you consider that books can cost from \$50.00 upwards, this should be at least one good reason for making the best use of it. The points below can help you:

- the pages/chapters set are the **minimum** required reading. Although it's not advisable nor often practical to read all the chapters, you may find it helpful to read beyond those chapters.
- read the introduction to each chapter. This may contain a summary of the contents and/ or the objectives, giving you a clearer idea of what you can expect to read in a particular chapter
- some textbooks contain activities, questions and/ or case studies. Sometimes, these are part of the actual chapter, but otherwise, they are often found at the chapter's end. Don't forget these. They can help to further your understanding

- some books also have a **glossary**. A glossary is a dictionary of words and terms used throughout the book. You can use these together with or instead of your dictionary
- textbooks often have a **bibliography** which is a list of resource material used or consulted by the author/s. Some authors also have a companion website containing additional material specially designed to help students

Although it may sound somewhat juvenile (childish), it's a good idea to label your textbooks as well as all your study material in case of loss. We all hope that we won't lose anything, but the reality is that it can be very easy to leave a book or folder behind. If you have your name, educational institution and a contact telephone number, in case of such a loss, perhaps a kind person will let you know. Otherwise, you will have to spend more time and money replacing your lost items.

If you intend re-selling your book, it's not a good idea to underline key words/ideas and/ or write notes in it. Doing this may lower the re-sale value. Also, when you are reviewing your study material, you may find it very hard to understand what you have written. If underlining still appeals to you, at least use a pencil which can be removed more easily.

#### **4. Unit Outlines and Study Guides**

Many courses use Unit Outlines. A 'Unit' is a subject. Lecturers usually write the Unit Outline (UO) for their subject and these are given out to students. You need to read the UO carefully. It may contain the following information:

- 1) Subject name and subject code
- 2) Duration – i.e. number of weeks, days and times
- 3) Topics covered
- 4) Prescribed textbook (if one is used) including the edition Learning outcomes.
- 5) Learning outcomes are the knowledge and understanding students are expected to demonstrate in relation to each topic. This is assessed using a variety of methods
- 6) Recommended reading list. Some lecturers may recommend books, magazines and other study materials
- 7) Assessment tasks including number, type, marks/grades and submission dates. Such tasks also include tests/exams \* You should read this section carefully so that you can start planning your work
- 8) Grading/marketing system
- 9) Lecturer/s' details

A Study Guide may be used instead of a Unit Outline or it may be used as a supplement. When both are used, the Study Guide usually goes into more detail about the topics and learning outcomes.

In either or both cases, these study materials are prepared and updated by lecturers. As always, ask questions if you have any doubts or concerns.

## **5. Handouts**

Some lecturers give handouts fairly regularly, some periodically and some rarely. There are no actual 'guidelines' regarding handouts which can depend on institutional requirements, the subject and the lecturer. Although lecturers teaching the same subject will cover the same topics and learning outcomes, use the same textbook and the same assessment methods, they may vary in their choice of teaching material. This is not unusual nor is this any cause for concern. After all, there is more than one way to reach a destination.

Handouts may be used:

- to summarise material
- for assessment tasks
- for revision purposes

You should **NOT** write on handouts. Writing along the side (in the margins) and/or on the top or bottom of written work can be very confusing. Remember that you will be reading and re-reading your study materials, particularly close to exam periods. By that time, you may find it difficult if not impossible to make sense of what you have written. Also, the notes you write may not always be directly or even indirectly linked to the handout.

## **6. Lecture notes on websites**

It's becoming more common for lecturers and students to use the Internet. Your lecturers may have their own websites and/ or use the university's website and email addresses. The College may have a particular Internet system whereby lecturers write and place their lecture notes on the system, thus enabling students to read these in their own time. If this is the case, make sure that you:

- check the website at least 2-3 times weekly
- download and print out the notes so that you can review and file them
- read them carefully
- underline key words/ideas

You may need to check your institution's website for other information e.g. fees, activities, holidays, exam dates and accessing your results. If you find it difficult to access the website, get help from a lecturer and/ or other students. If you do experience an ongoing problem, then you should contact your college immediately to report this. Most faults are usually remedied quickly.

## 7. Taking notes

Imagine that at the end of the day you are reviewing what took place. You are likely to remember significant events such as meeting a friend you haven't seen for a long time, but it's unlikely that you will remember every single detail. It's even more difficult if you are trying to recall everything that happened to you in the course of one week.

Even if you have an exceptional memory (and few people do), it's not enough to remember. You'll be asked to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding by way of assessment. You won't be able to do this without taking notes in class.

### Purpose

The reasons for taking class notes include:

- helping you to recall what was discussed during the session
- helping you to ask questions to clarify information
- helping to revise and review material, particularly before exams
- clarifying and/ or elaborating on textbook and other study materials

### When to take notes

Lecturers will not always tell you when to take notes. As an adult, tertiary student, it's expected that you will understand **WHY** this is necessary.

It's best to write more than less. It is not up to the student to decide what is and is not important. You can usually assume that everything the lecturer says (apart from the occasional joke and/or anecdote) is **important**. If it turns out that some notes are not required for the purpose of your test/exam, then you can decide whether to discard or keep them, but it's much harder and in some cases, impossible, to get back what you've missed.

When lecturers use **audiovisual** resources e.g. the whiteboard and/or overheads, this is usually a clear signal to write down information. Get into the habit of taking out all your materials e.g. pens/writing paper as soon as you come to class and be ready to write even before the lecturer arrives.

### How

Taking **good** notes is a skill and one that with a little practice and using the guidelines below, can be a very effective study strategy:

- a) use a separate sheet for each subject
- b) use a separate sheet for each topic
- c) as soon as you are in a class, write down the subject, topic and the date. Underline these
- d) Use a black or blue pen
- e) Use **headings** to highlight important key words/terms
- f) Leave white space between paragraphs

A common mistake made by some international students is looking up the meaning of a new word during note taking. Whilst you are doing this, your lecturer has moved forward and you may miss out on new information.

If you come across a new word, you can quickly:

- underline it in red/highlighter pen and/ or
- use a bullet/asterisk

You can look up the meaning later and this will help you to keep up with your lecturer.

## **Reading and reviewing notes**

There is little point in taking notes if you don't read them. Although it's often tempting to throw down your books and notes soon after a class session finishes, you will find that if you do this, by the time that you re-read them, you may have forgotten what took place in class. This is particularly obvious when you only have one session per subject per week.

Try to read your notes soon after the class took place and again, just before the next session. Although you may find it hard to believe, by doing this, information is actually easier to remember, understand and retain. Reading notes more than once often ends up saving time. If you only read them once, you may find them hard to understand. The second and third time, they should become clearer and your reading time may actually be reduced. Don't worry if reading does take time and don't compare yourself with other students. Being a fast or slow reader is rarely an indicator of intelligence.

## **Borrowing and/or lending notes**

It's not a good idea to lend notes or, in fact, any study material. If a student takes your materials home, there is a risk that they may lose them or they may be away which can affect your own study and will not be accepted as an excuse for incomplete tasks. Helping other students is important, so the best way is to arrange to meet one another at the college where notes can be photocopied and/or handwritten without the need to take anything home.

If you are the one who has missed a session or part of it, be careful when you are copying notes. Some students do not take clear and/or detailed notes. How can you tell if a student takes good notes? There is no certainty, but you can tell by observation. If a student attends regularly and punctually, if they seem organised and ready to work, if they do not get easily distracted but work methodically and lastly, if their notes look clear and detailed, then you should ask that student for help. If you are still not sure, show the notes you've copied to your lecturer. Although they won't remember every word they said, usually, they will be able to tell you if the notes look incomplete.

## **8. Organisational skills**

In the previous chapter, you were advised what study resources you will need.

One of those resources is your **folder/s**. All materials relating to a particular subject should be put in your folder (binder) in chronological (date) order. This is referred to as 'filing.' If you use the one folder for all your subjects, then use colored and labeled dividers to separate subjects and make sure information is easy to find. It's probably better to use a separate folder

for each subject as one folder is likely to get very heavy and difficult to carry around. Also, it's preferable to use a 2 ring folder so that you can punch holes in all the resource materials and they will be secure.

Your folder should contain:

- The Unit Outline and/or Study Guide
- Handouts and/or other lecturer's materials
- Your own notes. If you use loose-leaf paper, make sure the pages are stapled together for each topic
- Assessment task instructions
- Feedback on any assessment tasks
- Other material not already covered above

Personal materials should **not** be kept in this/these folder/s. Make sure that your folder/s are kept updated regularly. Once you get started, you will find that filing should only take you a few minutes, but it can save you hours. If you are well organised, you will be able to access material quickly. If not, you'll find that you are wasting time looking for missing and/or misplaced material when you really need that time to study.

## 9. When and where to study

Thus far, we've discussed class sessions, but the reality is that much of your study will take place **outside** of the classroom. In class, even at a tertiary level, the lecturer can maintain control, to encourage, motivate and try to reduce distractions, but at home, you're often on your own.

Students often remark that they find it difficult to study at home. A few alternatives to home study include staying at the college (including the library), studying at your local library and/or studying with friends. Each of these methods has its advantages and disadvantages.

### College/Library

At the college, you may still be in 'study' mode so you may find it easier to concentrate. There are likely to be fewer distractions, but there is a risk that you may become over-tired and also, you may not always have all your study materials with you. The library is useful particularly when you need to use library resources. It's also quiet, but both libraries and colleges eventually close and may not be open during certain times and days when you still need to study.

### Studying in groups

Studying with friends can be fun. If one person does not know the answer, then another may. Students can support and help one another, but there is also the potential for distraction and time wasting, particularly if one or two students use this time to socialise. It's best to form a group with motivated, hard-working students. Make a pact (agreement) to have fun **after** you have finished studying so that this will be a form of reward.

## Studying at home

There will be times when, for a variety of reasons, you'll need to study at home alone. It's best to choose a calm environment. Make sure your chair is comfortable, but avoid studying in bed or even sitting on it as you may get drowsy. Make sure you have all the materials you need nearby to save time.

Switch off your mobile completely as well as the television. If you must have music on, it should be in the background and turned down low. Although some students say they can study with music on, some types of music can be a distraction.

If you live with other people, you may need to ask them to turn down any noise they are making. Sometimes, people are not aware that they may be disturbing your studies.

There are no right or wrong times to study which also depend on your other commitments e.g. part-time work. However, some people study better in the morning and others in the evening. Whilst you can't always choose when to study, it may be useful to leave complex study for your 'peak periods'.

As far as hours of study are concerned, **1-1<sup>1/2</sup> hours per subject per day** is recommended for tertiary students. Even more hours may be required if you are finding a subject difficult and/or during test/exam periods. Although it's unlikely that you will study the same number of hours on a daily basis, **regular** study is generally preferable. Spending long periods on study every now and then is likely to be more difficult and less productive. The average brain does not cope well trying to digest large parcels of information. Tiredness tends to set in more quickly and this can reduce concentration.

It's best to take a break every 1-1<sup>1/2</sup> hours. A break of 10-15 minutes can be helpful. Any longer and there's a tendency to get distracted. Take a longer break in between subjects. There's no point continuing when you feel that you can no longer concentrate. Some people work best in bursts. Again, don't compare yourself with other students. Everyone is different.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed attendance as a (possible) legal requirement for international students, but we also looked at the practical necessity for regular and punctual attendance in class sessions. We discussed using various study materials used such as Unit Outlines, Study Guides, Textbooks and handouts. Reasons and strategies for taking, reviewing and filing class notes were explained. Time can be saved by keeping study materials for each subject filed in date order in folders.

Since a great deal of study takes place outside of the classroom, we looked at the advantages and disadvantages of studying at the college and in groups.

Students often find it more practical to study at home. The environment should be comfortable and free of distractions such as mobiles/television. All materials should be readily available.

Although how much time is used for study purposes may vary, regular time spent on each subject is generally thought to be more useful than erratic long periods of study because it is

difficult for most people to concentrate for long periods. More time is required when a subject is more 'challenging' for a student and/or during exam periods.

Taking regular breaks are important as long as they are neither too frequent nor too long. Breaks can be used to clear the mind, have a snack or drink and feel refreshed, ready to start again. When fatigue (tiredness) sets in, it may be better to postpone study (if possible) because nothing is probably gained by continuing. Use peak periods, i.e. periods when you feel you are able to concentrate more fully, to focus on more difficult tasks.

## Key words and terms

Attendance  
Tool  
Enrolment  
Tertiary  
Irretrievable  
Panic  
Principles  
Organisational

Irretrievable  
Anecdote  
Retain  
Certainty  
Complex  
Outcome  
Accessing  
Remedied

Observation  
Edition  
Prescribed  
Exceptional  
Supplement  
Destination  
Methodically  
Exceptional

Sample pages