

How To Succeed In Your Blackford Centre Course



The
Blackford
Centre

HOW TO SUCCEED IN YOUR DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE

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HOW TO SUCCEED IN YOUR DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE

Welcome! We want you to succeed, so we've produced this guide to advise you how you can complete the course as smoothly as possible.

If you're returning to study after several years, you're already partway to accomplishing your goals - because you've enrolled on the course.

If you use this guide as you work through the course, and refer back to it after every few modules, you should achieve your qualification in no time!

WHERE TO STUDY

- **Have a comfortable area to study in.** You need good light, ventilation, a comfortable temperature and an uncluttered area. If this isn't possible at home consider going to your local library to study.
- **Study in a quiet place, not in front of the television or where other people are doing things.**
- If you have room, set up a dedicated study area in your home.

WHEN TO STUDY

- **Plan your study time in advance.** Set aside a specific amount of time each day or week for your studies when you know you won't be interrupted. Mark these times on a calendar (electronic or paper – whichever you feel most comfortable with).

Working to a timetable will ensure you keep your motivation going and complete the course.

Keep studying through to the end of the course. It's easy to start your course with good intentions, and slowly drift away from your studies. If you plan your studies over the 4-9 months that the course will take, you're more likely to complete it. Timings are up to you, but starting with a focussed study plan means you're more likely to succeed.

- **Set suitable targets.** When planning your studies, you will need blocks of time of at least one hour to study. Five minutes here and there isn't enough time to absorb information. Equally, don't over-commit your time. If you study the course at a comfortable pace rather than try and hurry things you're more likely to achieve a much better result.

- **Don't try and rush through the course just to achieve your qualification quickly.** You are likely to make mistakes and not get such a good final grade as if you pace yourself.
- **What times are best for you?** This depends on your free time and whether you have a full-time job. You may be able to study in the mornings, when you're at your best. You may find it easier to work in the mornings and have the afternoons to study. Or perhaps you can only study in the evenings? Whatever time you study at, it should be a quiet time when you can concentrate and aren't tired.
- **Take plenty of breaks.** We can only concentrate for a short amount of time before our thoughts wander. After each chunk of study go for a short walk, have a drink or just move away from your study environment. This will help – we promise!
- **Don't procrastinate.** It's easy to say 'I'll do it tomorrow', and then never achieve your goals. If you find yourself procrastinating, make an action list of 4-5 jobs. Don't make it any longer or it will seem unmanageable. Give each action point an amount of time, from 5-20 minutes, depending on the task. Work through the list and tick off the points as you achieve them.
- **Give yourself a reward at intervals.** For example allow yourself a drink or snack at the end of an hour.
- **Set a timer to ring after 40 or 50 minutes.** This will help you study for a suitable amount of time - neither too little nor too much.
- **Make sure you get enough sleep and don't work into the early hours just to finish a module.** You'll absorb much more information if you leave your studies, get a good night's sleep and return to them refreshed.
- **Don't study if you're hungry or thirsty.** This will affect your concentration. Likewise, studying after a big meal isn't advisable as you're likely to feel uncomfortable.

STORING AND USING YOUR COURSE MATERIALS

- **Store your study materials carefully.** Keep all your study materials in one place. This might be a corner of your desk or if space is limited, a box file. Keeping everything organised and together means you won't waste valuable time searching for your study materials.
- **Decide what additional materials you might need.** Make a list of things you might need to help you study. For example, you may need stationery, a notebook, files, dividers, computer, pens, pencils, highlighter pens and paper.

WRITE NOTES

- **Take notes and organise them.** As you work through each module, make notes on what is important. Keep referring back to the title of the module and its objectives.

Write your notes using the different main headings of the module. Once you have completed the module, go back over your notes and re-read anything you are unclear on.

You may be the kind of person that likes neat notes organised by section and split into different subjects. Or you may be able to scan read your rough notes and absorb the information you are learning.

Use the method you are most comfortable with and that helps you remember information.

- **Write on your modules.** This is your course material and these are your notes. As you read through the modules you may find writing on the pages is easier for you than making separate notes. This means all your information is in one place, rather than being on separate pages.
- **The simple highlighter pen is a powerful tool.** Use several different colours and code important points on pages of the modules. You may be referring to these for many years to come!

TRY MIND MAPS

While some students like to make notes; others prefer visual aids such as mind maps.

Mind mapping involves simply writing the main points on a diagram and linking them with lines to the subject of the module. Once you've done this you can make additional notes under each point (just three or four words). One example of a free mind mapping software is *Canva*, which you can download here: <https://www.canva.com/graphs/mind-maps/>.

BETTER READING

- **Learn to speed read.** Reading fast (speed reading) is an art that can be learned easily. Follow these steps to learn how to read faster:
 1. Read in a quiet environment.
 2. Scan the text first to get the general meaning (gist) of the text.
 3. Take note of the headings in the text to give you an idea of what you will be reading.

4. Read the text in more detail to give you a more detailed comprehension (this is when you should take your notes).

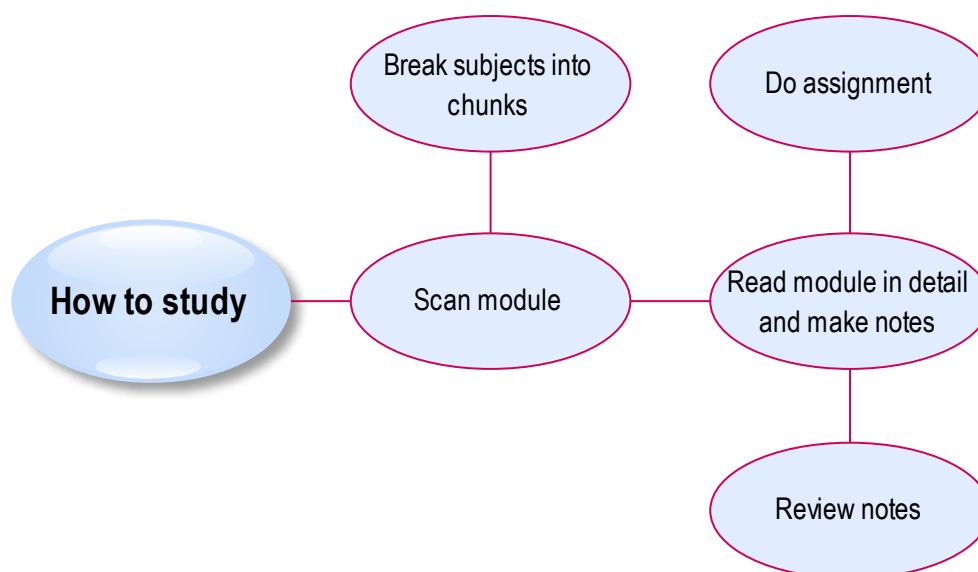


Figure 1: Example of a mind map

5. When reading the course modules take a short 10 minute break at least every half hour. This will help you absorb what you have just read.
- **Background reading is also an essential part of your course.** As you study the modules you will be given web links and books that we feel you will benefit from. To broaden your knowledge we strongly advise that you engage in background reading.

MULTI-TASKING AND STRESS

- **Be aware of stress, and manage it.** Managing the stress of this extra commitment might not be easy. You are likely to already have a busy life, with work, children, family commitments, and household chores.

However, it's important to remember you have chosen to study this course to improve your life. You may be intending to change career, improve your current career prospects, set up your own business or just be doing the course to improve your knowledge of a particular subject. Whatever the reason, the overall objective is to improve your knowledge of the subject you're studying.

If you feel stressed and unable to continue your studies take a break. You may only need an hour, a few days or a week. **Don't give up.**

Once you've had time to relax away from your studies, go back to the course material and review the time scales you have set yourself to study. You might find by adjusting your plans slightly and giving yourself a little more time, you can cope better.

You'll also find that making a list helps. This will show you exactly what you need to do. As you accomplish 'chunks' of your studies, you can tick them off the list, which is immensely satisfying.

If you find you are still struggling and feeling stressed by your studies contact your course advisor and explain the situation. They will help you to re-focus.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET STUCK

- **Take action if you get stuck.** Sometimes you might get stuck on a certain part of the course or have a general query. You might find you don't understand part of a module or you are not clear on what is required for an assignment. In this situation, first of all don't worry – we're here to help.

Simply contact your course advisor, and they will offer support and guidance.

REVISION?

- **Don't worry about revising.** You don't need to revise, because there are no exams. This is a continually assessed course, meaning each of your assignment marks contributes towards your overall grade. This method of learning is much less stressful than set exams, as you can study at your own pace.

It also means you won't go through the stress and worry of pre-exam nerves.

YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- **Tell others about the course:** it'll help you succeed. Tell your friends and family that you're studying. This will be an interesting talking point, but will also help people to understand why you may have a little less time for them than before. And research shows that those who publicly commit to a project are more likely to succeed.
- **Get support from your family.** Explain to them why you are studying and how important it is to you. Ask them to help you by allowing you time to study in peace and to do some household chores for you to ease the burden.
- **Study when your family doesn't need you.** Dealing with children, spouse or other dependents ('me' time) isn't always easy. It's often better to study when children are at school or in bed. Even grown ups can interrupt your train of thought when you're studying. Make it clear to everyone that you are studying for an important reason, and ask them not to interrupt you. This is your time and you will be working hard to achieve your goal.

DOING AN ASSIGNMENT

See our how to 'Write Assignments' Guide for this.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED AN ASSIGNMENT

- **Learn from your mistakes.** When you receive your feedback for a marked assignment, take time to review it and look at where you could have made improvements.

For many self assessed assignment, guidance is given. Review this to determine if your work could be improved.

AND FINALLY...

- Believe in yourself! You can do it!

EXERCISE

Go through this booklet, and choose the **three** most useful pieces of advice.
