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7 More Steps to Independent Learning

An **interactive workbook** that enables students to move from **better study habits** and **learning behaviours** toward being **independent learners**

Full of interactive helpful exercises, tools and checklists
for students ranging from 12 years of age and older

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7 More Steps to Independent Learning ISBN:

978-0-9875141-4-1

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Published by Red Tick Education Pty Ltd



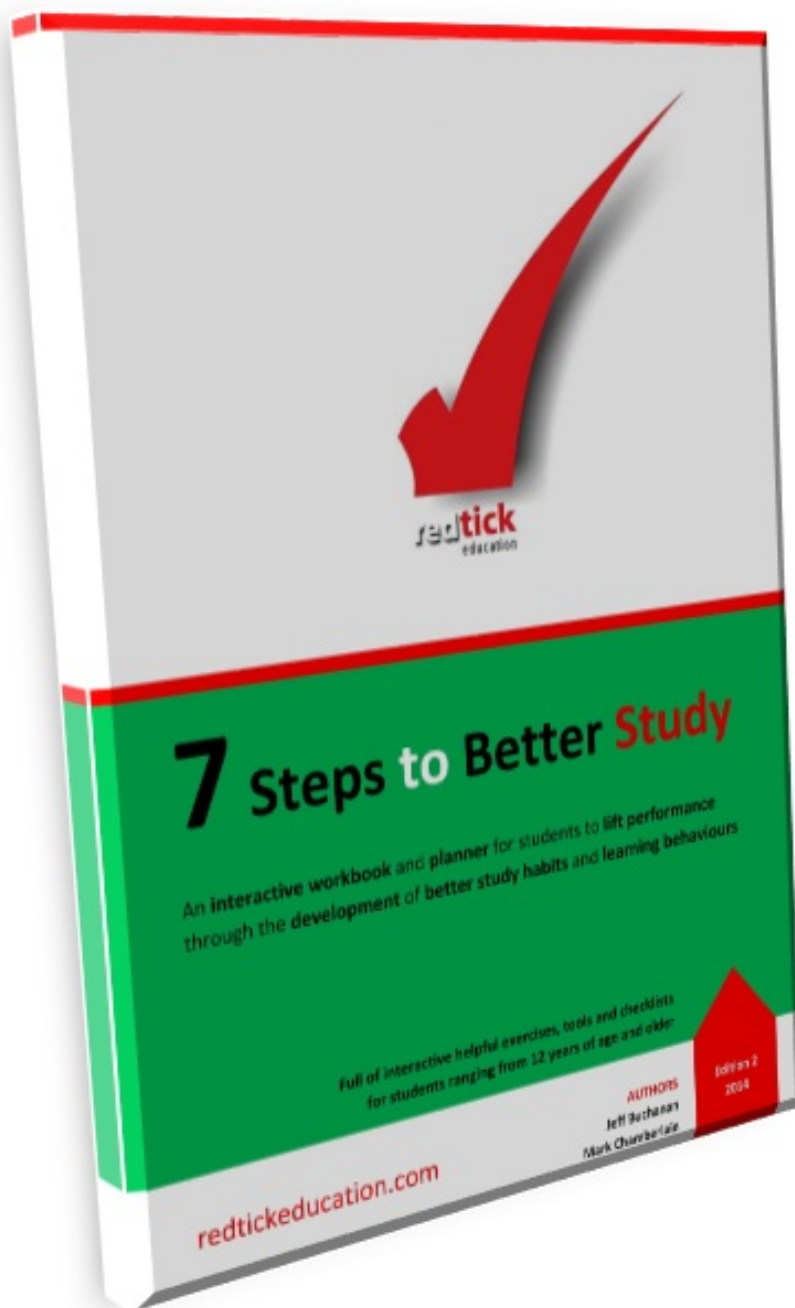
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All enquiries should be addressed to the publisher.

In preparing this publication, two reference resources were used to guide grammatical style and spelling. They were:

- ❖ *Style Manual for authors, editors and printers*, 6th edition (2002) reprinted 2010, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd
- ❖ *Macquarie School Dictionary*, 3rd edition 2010, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd

Also recommended: 7 Steps to Better Study (Edition 2, 2016)



Your School Name here

Contents

STEP 8 - Making more use of your learning style	5
STEP 9 - Mastering Motivation	13
STEP 10 - Improving Memory and Recall	16
STEP 11 - Concept Mapping and Mind Mapping.....	19
STEP 12 - Multitasking.....	22
STEP 13 - Note Taking and Note Making.....	28
STEP 14 - Evolving as an Independent Learner	33

STEP 8 – Making more use of your learning style

Learning styles are not an exact science and there are many theories about learning styles.

One model proposes a straightforward view that there are three styles of learning - visual, auditory and kinaesthetic and that for school students to improve their understanding about themselves as learners it is helpful to understand what their main learning style is.

Which is your dominant learning style?

Visual? Auditory? Or Kinaesthetic?

Have you taken the learning style test in *Seven Steps to Better Study*?

Of these three major learning styles, most individuals are dominant in one. Many people are able to adapt to using two out of three styles and some people can apply themselves using all three.

Why does your dominant learning style matter to your learning?

There are many reasons why. Being aware of your dominant learning style can be helpful for:

- making sure you focus on activities and experiences that will be more engaging and productive for your learning;
- developing study activities at home that suit your style and help you better prepare for assessments;
- sharing your dominant learning style with your teachers so that they can provide a helpful range of learning activities and experiences; and,
- taking more personal responsibility for your learning and becoming a more independent learner.

The table below summarises the different styles, the approximate proportions in which they are found in the population and the types of activities and experiences that are appealing to learners with that style:

Learning Style	Kinaesthetic (about 5% of people)	Visual (about 65% of people)	Auditory (about 30% of people)
Appealing Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gestures • Touching • Body Movements • Object Manipulation • Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pictures • Drawings and Diagrams • Maps • Graphs • Shapes and Colours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Sounds Patterns • Rhythms • Tone • Songs

In this section you will investigate a bit deeper into what your particular learning style means for what you can do at school and also at home to improve your learning and achieve better results from your study effort.

The more that your mind and body are engaged with something, the better you will be at learning it. Your dominant learning style can be a helpful pointer to the best types of activities and experiences to use when you are studying at home and working at school.

As a learner, you are unique. To have the best chance of learning something well, it will be important that new material is presented to you in a way that suits your dominant learning style. However, you do not always have the opportunity to be involved in activities that will suit your dominant learning style. As you become an independent learner it will be helpful to redesign or change such activities to suit your dominant learning style and give yourself a better learning outcome.

The best use of new technology is something else you will need to consider carefully. Advances in technology have made new content and learning activities and experiences more accessible and diverse than ever before. While new technology is not always a guarantee of better learning, it remains an important part of how you acquire, process and learn new information at school and beyond.

Here are some reminders about the differences between the types of learning styles:

Kinaesthetic

Kinaesthetic learners are also called tactile learners – they learn by ‘doing’ so being able to experience things in different ways that use different senses (especially touch, manipulation and movement) is the best way they remember information. They like imitation and practice and enjoy making, creating, acting, doing, physically moving, collecting, building, manipulating, acting, role playing, using tools and varying their activities with suitable breaks. They tend to not have good handwriting, are weaker at spelling and talk fast using their hands to communicate. Kinaesthetic learners prefer multiple choice tests, writing short definitions or answering ‘fill in the blanks’ type questions. They do not like long essay response tests.

Auditory

Auditory learners remember through listened and spoken communication. Hearing things is the most important but also having opportunities to discuss things with others is helpful. Auditory learners will remember a great deal about what everyone said, like to engage in discussion with others and won’t like long silences. Auditory Learners can be talkative in class, tend to memorise well, remember names and often sing, hum or whistle to themselves. They may use their finger as a pointer when reading and they tend to be very good at grammar and foreign languages. They like writing responses of any kind and enjoy oral presentations for assessment. They do not like long reading comprehension exercises or tests.

Visual

Visual learners remember best what they see so reading, writing and drawing are all good engagement tools for studying. They like diagrams, maps, charts, shapes and moving pictures to understand and retain things. Written form is good but any diagrammatic form is even better. Visual Learners like organising things into groups they can visualise. They like to have pen and paper handy, tend to be good at spelling, tend to be detail oriented and are usually organised and tidy. They do not like long lectures, don’t remember names easily and often ask for verbal instructions to be repeated.

Visual Learners need to see the instructor's facial expressions and body language and concentrate better with clear line of sight to blackboard or visual aids. For assessment they prefer essays, drawing or analysing diagrams, maps or demonstrating a process. They don’t do well in test activities that purely involve listening and responding.

Exercise 1 - Learning style identified

Work through the following table and for each type of activity listed in the left hand column, mark off which type of learning style it would be most closely associated with.

Activity/Experience	Kinaesthetic	Auditory	Visual
Answering questions orally			
Building models			
Background music			
Cartoons			
Charades			
Charts and Diagrams			
Collections			
Create a timeline of events			
Dance			
Debates and panel discussions			
Demonstrations			
Illustrations			
Discuss topics with others – have a study friend or group			
Drama games, plays or skits			
Flash cards			
Experiments			
Field trips - museums, factories, offices, nurseries, etc.			
Give an oral presentation (instead of a written essay)			
Highlight text while reading			
Interview others or be interviewed			
Maps			
Music (making songs or tunes for memorisation)			
Oral presentations			
Posters			
Read aloud to someone			
Replace words with symbols or initials			
Record lectures and tutorials and play back			
Recorded books			
Role-play/interviews			
Scrapbooks or 'evidence' walls			
Slideshows			
Talking with others to explain things			
Surveys			
Take notes during lectures or after reading assignments			
Record own notes on tape and listen to them			
Translate concepts to remember into pictures and diagrams			
Use highlighters, underlining			
Writing large on whiteboard or chalkboard			
Writing notes			

(Answers at the end)

Your School Name here

Develop activities that suit your learning style

As you become an independent learner you will experience classroom activities that don't always suit your dominant learning style. When you are studying at home, you should look at the types of activities that occurred in class and decide if it will be helpful for you to redesign or change that activity to suit your dominant learning style and give yourself a better basis for any assessment that will come later.

Exercise 2 is included here to give you some examples to work through that will push you to think about this significant step in becoming an independent learner.

Exercise 2 - Changing the activity to match your learning style

For each activity listed below, write down a way in which you might change that activity when you study.

The first one is done as an example.

Kinaesthetic Learner

Activity that favours a Kinaesthetic Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Visual Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Auditory Learner
Students are provided with plasticine and other materials to build a model of the water cycle	<i>Student draws a flowchart diagram of the water cycle in their notebook</i>	<i>Student speaks on to a recording device to describe the steps of the water cycle and plays it back</i>
Students take a field trip to a Museum to look at marine life display		
Students create a scrapbook about Nelson Mandela's life		
Students make bread from base ingredients		

Visual Learner

Activity that favours a Visual Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Auditory Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Kinaesthetic Learner
Students make a poster about electricity		
Students create a set of flash cards about the different types of clouds		
Students create a timeline for the key battles in World War I		
Students work through an article on safe driving and highlight the key directions and rules		

Auditory Learner

Activity that favours a Auditory Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Kinaesthetic Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Visual Learner
Students make a tape about supermarket price rises of basic items they have observed		
Students have a debate about the voting age		
Students interview a class guest about their career as a firefighter		
Students hear a guest speaker talk about the role of government		

(Answers at the end)

Answers to Exercise 1

Activity/Experience	Kinaesthetic	Auditory	Visual
Answering questions orally		✓	
Building models	✓		
Background music		✓	
Cartoons			✓
Charades	✓		
Charts and Diagrams			✓
Collections	✓		
Create a timeline of events			✓
Dance	✓		
Debates and panel discussions		✓	
Demonstrations	✓		
Illustrations			✓
Discuss topics with others – have a study friend or group		✓	
Drama games, plays or skits	✓		
Flash cards			✓
Experiments	✓		
Field trips - museums, factories, offices, nurseries, etc.	✓		
Give an oral presentation (instead of a written essay)		✓	
Highlight text while reading			✓
Interview others or be interviewed		✓	
Maps			✓
Music (making songs or tunes for memorisation)		✓	
Oral presentations		✓	
Posters	✓		
Read aloud to someone		✓	
Replace words with symbols or initials			✓
Record lectures and tutorials and play back		✓	
Role-play/interviews	✓		
Scrapbooks or 'evidence' walls	✓		
Slideshows			✓
Talking with others to explain things		✓	
Surveys	✓		
Take notes during lectures or after reading assignments			✓
Record own notes on tape and listen to them		✓	
Recorded books		✓	
Translate concepts to remember into pictures and diagrams			✓
Use highlighters, underlining			✓
Writing large on whiteboard or chalkboard	✓		
Writing notes			✓

Your School Name here

Suggested answers to Exercise 2

Note that many other answers would be possible and acceptable as long as the activity aligned with the learning style concerned.

Kinaesthetic Learner

Activity that favours a Kinaesthetic Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Visual Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Auditory Learner
Students are provided with plasticine and other materials to build a model of the water cycle	<i>Students draw a flowchart diagram of the water cycle in their notebook</i>	<i>Students speak on to a recording device to describe the steps of the water cycle and plays it back</i>
Students take a field trip to a Museum to look at marine life display	<i>Students make flashcards of all animals in the marine life display</i>	<i>Students organise a study group to talk about the Museum excursion</i>
Students create a scrapbook about Nelson Mandela's life	<i>Students create a timeline about Nelson Mandela's life</i>	<i>Students have a debate in the next English class about Nelson Mandela's legacy</i>
Students make bread from base ingredients	<i>Students design a kitchen poster for how to make bread</i>	<i>Students find and view an AV presentation on bread making and create a script for a new AV version</i>

Your School Name here

Visual Learner

Activity that favours a Visual Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Auditory Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Kinaesthetic Learner
Students make a poster about electricity	<i>Students find an AV presentation on YouTube about electricity</i>	<i>Students set up a series of steps that they then walk through to model how electricity works</i>
Students create a set of flash cards about the different types of clouds	<i>Students develop a poem about the different types of clouds and read it to friends or their class</i>	<i>Students paint a series of different cloud types</i>
Students create a timeline for the key battles in World War I	<i>Students read out the timeline aloud and record it to play back later again and again</i>	<i>Students create a collage on a world map of key battles in World War I</i>
Students work through an article on safe driving and highlight the key directions and rules	<i>Students organise a panel discussion in the next class about the safe driving article</i>	<i>Students make a 'how to' booklet on safe driving based on content of article</i>

Auditory Learner

Activity that favours a Auditory Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help a Kinaesthetic Learner	Activity CHANGE that could help an Visual Learner
Students make a tape about supermarket price rises of basic items they have observed	<i>Students purchase some basic items, and photographs each with cards in the picture showing previous and current prices beside each</i>	<i>Students create presentations with pictures of basic items and write previous and current prices beside each in large numbers</i>
Students have a debate about the voting age	<i>Students organise copies of old voting ballots to be delivered to class</i>	<i>Students create a poster making young people aware of their right to vote when they turn 18</i>
Students interview a class guest about their career as a firefighter	<i>Students organise a fire truck visit to their school</i>	<i>Students design a flowchart of the process for how firemen respond to a fire call</i>
Students hear a guest speaker talk about the role of government	<i>Students organise a field trip to Parliament House</i>	<i>Students make a set of PowerPoint™ slides about basic structure of government</i>

STEP 9 - Mastering Motivation

At least once you have probably said or thought “I find it hard to get motivated”. Motivation is simply the inner drive you have to behave or act in a certain way.

Independent learners have a good understanding of what motivates them (and what doesn't) and they take steps to organise their study, homework and assignment work accordingly.

Your motivation can change regularly. It can be very high or it can be very low. So what leads to high levels of motivation or low levels? There are many different factors involved.

Most people are highly motivated by:

- Goals
- Rewards
- Achievement
- Enjoyment and excitement
- Praise from others
- Competition
- Being part of something special or historic

Even the fine weather on a sunny day can be a great motivator!

Low motivation is commonly associated with

- Failure
- Difficulty
- Dislike
- Complexity
- Being too busy and overwhelmed
- Personal problems
- Distractions

And ... bad weather too.

Another way in which motivation is frequently described is that it is either intrinsic or extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation essentially comes from within an individual when their motivation is driven by their enjoyment.

Extrinsic motivation essentially comes from outside an individual when their motivation is driven by an external factor such as a reward.

By being more aware of how different factors (listed above) can have an impact on your motivation, you can take steps to structure your study to keep your motivation high.

Exercise 3 - Understanding and planning what drives your motivation

It will be helpful to identify which particular type of motivation will have the biggest influence on your effort in each subject. For the following exercise:

1. List your school subject areas in the table following.
2. For each subject area, firstly decide whether that subject is something that you enjoy (and you can therefore rely more on intrinsic motivation) or whether it is better to focus on being motivated by a reward (extrinsic motivation).

Exercise 3 - Understanding and planning what drives your motivation

Subject	I am motivated by	If you ENJOY the subject, write down what steps you will take to keep your enjoyment strong	If you believe that you will be motivated by REWARDS then write down some examples of the rewards you can plan to have if you do well in the subject
Mathematics	✓ Reward	n/a	Parents will give me \$100 for shopping for an overall grade of B ⁺ or better for the term
Drama	✓ Enjoyment	Make time each weekend for drama rehearsal Participate in more theatre workshops outside school	n/a

Your School Name here

Removing the triggers for low motivation

Exercise 4 - Major distractions that interfere with your study routine and school work

Think through other things you do and consider if any of these could be major distractions that interfere with your study routine and school work?

Distraction	Steps I will take to deal with it
<i>Part time job</i>	<i>Would like to keep the job but will have to be firm about the hours I can work so I allow enough time for studying</i>
<i>Facebook activity</i>	<i>Need to log off Facebook and leave mobile phone out of my room when studying</i>

In summary, if you are struggling with motivation then you need to take time to break down the issue to understand the cause of the problem and plan steps that you will take to fix it.

In a very straightforward way, you can improve your motivation in the following ways:

- Aim to regularly do the things you enjoy
- Get rid of the distractions
- Set up some rewards for things that you don't find easy to enjoy
- Get someone to mentor you
- Team up with others.

You must also appreciate that there will be times when your motivation level is very low and you just need to find the discipline to push through it, or maybe it is just time for a decent holiday break.

At other times the right action will be to make some big changes to your routine and shake things up quite a bit.

TAKE THE 5 MINUTE CHALLENGE!

It's always hardest to get started. Once you are started, the momentum tends to keep you going. In the 5 minute challenge, you study seriously with full concentration and focus for just 5 minutes. In most cases, you will find that after 5 minutes you have actually begun to engage with the material and this will produce the momentum that will keep you going for your allocated study period.

A good analogy is getting into a swimming pool when the water is cold. If you sit and do nothing you will probably give up and not bother to swim. If you jump in you know you will feel the cold for a few minutes, but you also know that as you move your body will acclimatise and you will feel the cold less. Before you know it, you are ready to train.

STEP 10 - Improving Memory and Recall

Remembering and recalling things well is the outcome of a good study routine.

Independent learners tend to work in a disciplined way on their memory and recall skills so they can be used when the need arises.

There are a range of activities you can undertake to improve your memory and recall.

The main activity that produces results is the direct repetition or practice of something. It may be boring at times but when done properly and done over time during a term, it is effective.

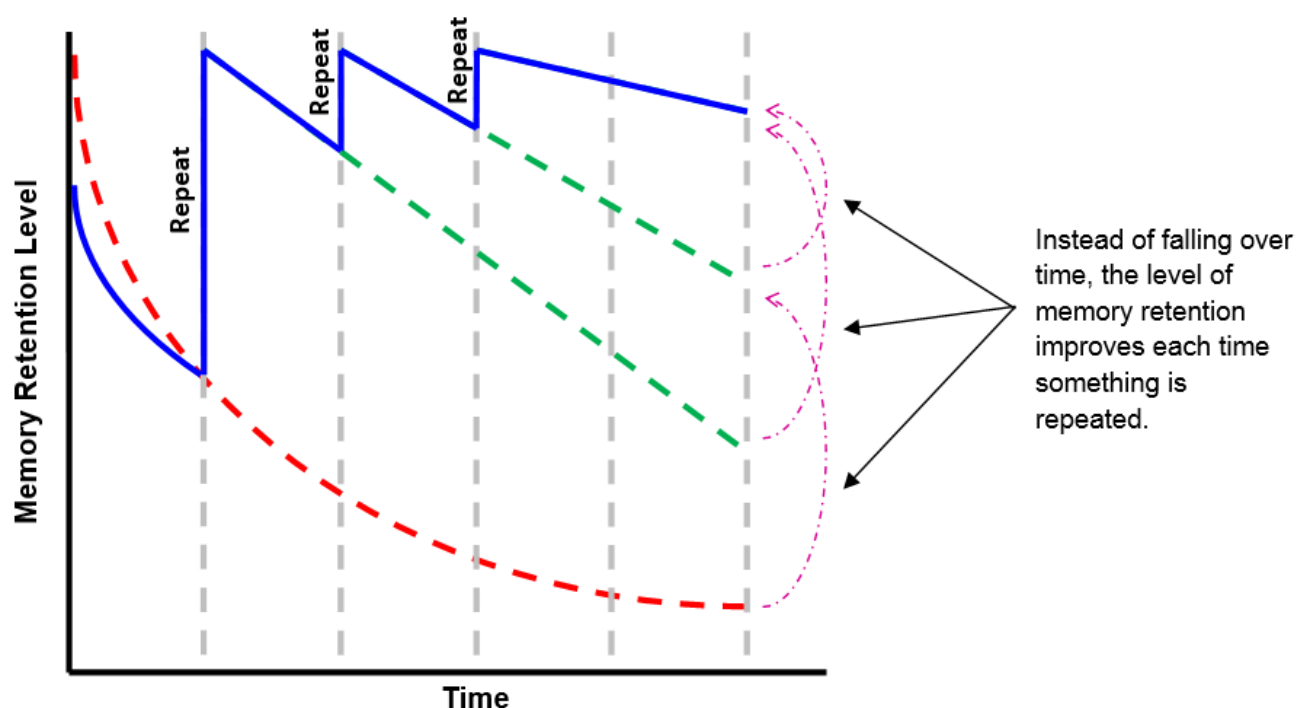
There are other memory tools like mnemonics that provide a way to link information like formulas, lists or rules into smaller pieces of information that are easier to remember. (Mnemonic tools are explained on the next page.)

The rate at which we forget things we have only encountered once is quite staggering! While repetition and practice is the key activity for remembering and recalling it is important to point out that a single short term burst (such as cramming the night before a test) is NOT productive because the short time frame does not make it possible for things to be retained in your long term memory.

To successfully retain information in your long term memory, repetition and practice must occur over an extended period of time, such a term or semester.

The graph below is another way of showing how repetition improves your memory over time.

Graph 1: Change in Memory Retention over Time involving Repetition



Exercise 5 - More positive outcome

Read through each issue linked to cramming and next to each in the right hand column write in the more positive outcome that corresponds when studying across the length of a term or semester.

Issues from Cramming	Practice distributed across a term or semester
Material stays in short-term memory	Material moves from short-term to long-term memory
Material is forgotten rapidly	
Causes fatigue and slow recall, leading to more mistakes	
The student may become stressed	
Does not allow time to test knowledge and get help with any difficulties	

Mnemonics

A mnemonic device is any learning technique that aids information retention. Mnemonics devices are used to translate information into a form that your brain can retain better than the original form of the information. Examples of mnemonic devices are short poems, acronyms, or memorable phrases. Here are some well-known mnemonics:

ROY G. BIV

Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet.

This device helps students remember the order of the colours in a rainbow.

King Philip Cuts Open Five Green Snakes

Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species

This is one of many mnemonics used to remember the order of taxonomy for biology.

Every Good Boy Does Fine/FACE

This mnemonic is used in musical notation to help students remember those treble clef notes on the lines (E, G, B, D, F) and those on the spaces (F, A, C, E).

Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally

Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction.

This mnemonic allows us to remember the Order of Operations in mathematics.

OIL RIG

Oxidation It Loses (electrons)

Reduction It Gains (electrons)

If you are interested in seeing more go to <http://www.mnemonic-device.eu/mnemonics>. You will find hundreds of suggestions for mnemonics in an easily searchable collection.

Other ways to help memory and recall

Taking information and working with it in another way can be helpful in increasing your understanding as well as improving your recall. Here are some other ways you can do that.

Lists

Lists are the simplest and often the most effective organisers. When studying, you will make lots of lists of things you need to remember. Remember that you can turn some lists into mnemonics.

Flash cards

Flash cards are really helpful in achieving concise notes that can be reviewed frequently.

Here are some hints for making flash cards:

- Choose the most important facts or concepts from each section of a subject
- Use your own words to write descriptions on a card unless a specific definition is required
- Label the cards with a subject heading and date, so you'll be able to put them into categories for various types of quizzes and tests
- Use the cards with parents or friends to test out your memory and recall on the facts or concepts
- Use different colour cards for different subjects.

Other activities – groups, categories or alphabet charts

There are lots of ways to group information – chronologically, alphabetically, numerically, hierarchically, and by cause/effect (e.g. most important to least). Reorganising material into different categories makes the recall process much more active and more interesting.

An alphabet chart is one way to break up your routine and systematically organise a recall exercise in your own way. To construct an alphabet chart you simply go through your notes and record all the key words and concepts used in a topic or course under a corresponding letter of the alphabet.

A	B	C	D	E	F
G	H	I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P	Q	R
S	T	U	V	W	X
Y	Z				

Answers to Exercise 5

Issues from Cramming	Practice distributed across a term or semester
Material stays in short-term memory	Material moves from short-term to long-term memory
Material is forgotten rapidly	Material is retained
Causes fatigue and slow recall, leading to more mistakes	Energy level is good and recall is accurate
The student may become stressed	The student becomes more confident, and less anxious
Does not allow time to test knowledge and get help with any difficulties	Allows time to practice and get help if required

STEP 11 - Concept Mapping and Mind Mapping

For an independent learner concept mapping¹ is a useful learning and study activity because as you draw a map your mind is occupied at a high level as you decide on key terms associated with a concept and then how these are linked together. The end result should resemble something akin to a 'map' of that concept.

There are general rules to follow in the development of a concept map:

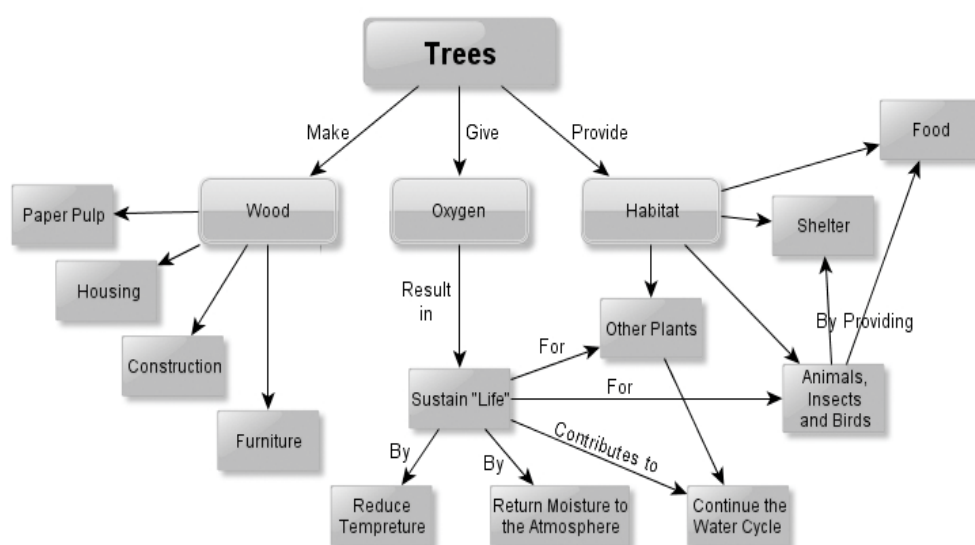
- The key terms must be nouns (only one noun each time)
- The joins must contain verbs (only one verb each time)
- Colour can help with presentation and memory retention
- Small pictures can help with memory retention
- Any key term (noun) that is not readily understood must be broken down further into other terms (nouns) and actions (verbs) until you do have terms you easily understand.

Rigorously following these general rules will ensure that any complex concept is broken down to a level that you can understand. As you draw concept maps, there are a number of processes that are all helpful for learning and study such as:

- Decisions about the key terms involved in the concept
- Decisions about the actions or processes that join the key terms
- The act of drawing (and redrawing) the map.

All of these help to reinforce the concept in your mind. You will gain confidence from taking a complex concept, breaking it down into workable parts that you understand, and organising those parts in a way that you can comprehend and remember. If you are becoming a highly capable independent learner you will be able to take others through your concept maps and you will be able to show others how to create them.

There is plenty of software available online that can help you achieve a professional finish to your map. The concept map below was drawn with a readily available graphics program. Hand drawing can, however, be much faster and is just as effective.



¹ The concept map was developed by Joseph D. Novak and his research team at Cornell University in the 1970s based on the belief that learners actively construct or build upon knowledge they have previously gained. Novak's work is based on the research of an American psychologist, David Ausubel, who viewed a student's prior knowledge as vitally important in learning new concepts by building on their current knowledge base.

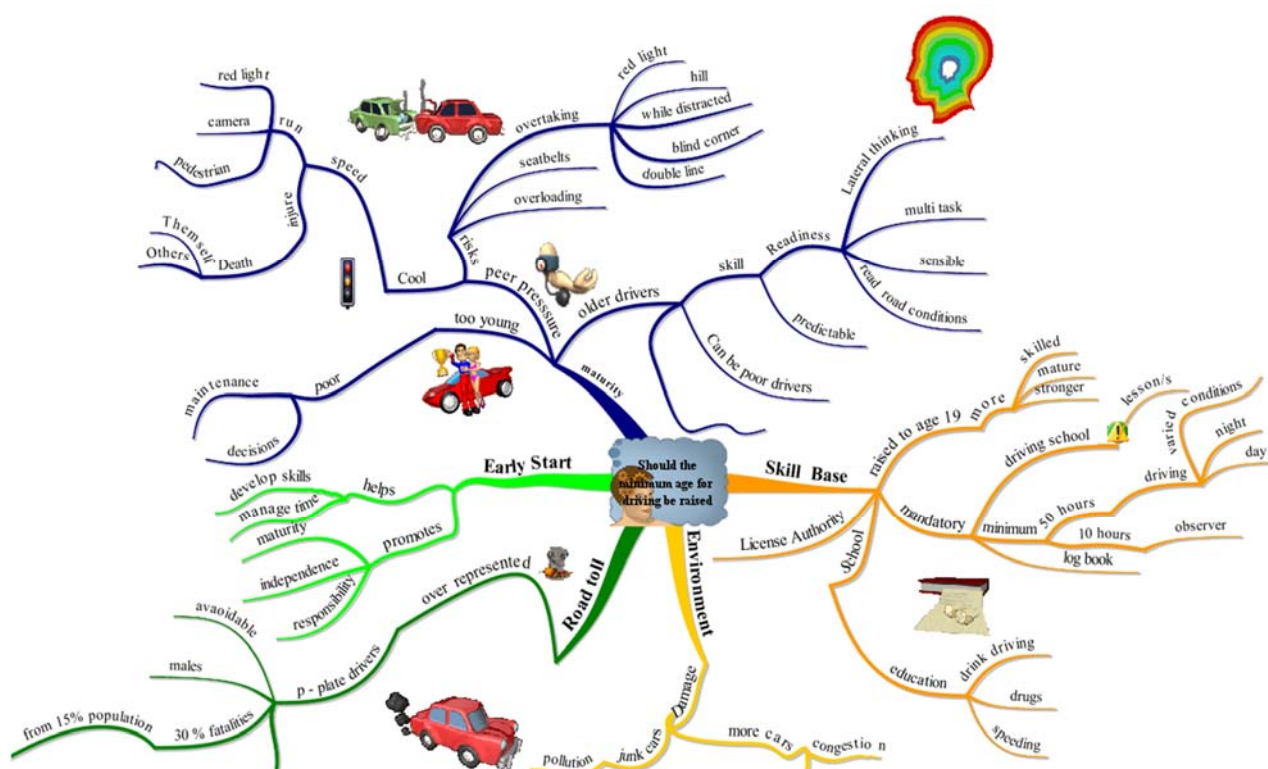
Mind Maps

Mind Maps are another technique used to improve an individual's learning of a particular subject. Mind Mapping® is a technique developed by Tony Buzan in the United Kingdom.

While concept maps are frequently used to break down and link many concepts connected to a complex topic, mind maps fix on a single issue or question that is positioned at the centre with many related issues added to radiate outward like a tree.

Mind Maps are free of firm boundaries and are therefore able to be developed more quickly than concept maps. Mind maps are more unique to the individual and Buzan believes that the mind map format closely mimics the way in which the human brain works to gather, process, link and retain information.

A Mind Map example is provide below on the question: *Should the minimum age for driving be raised?*



Either type of map system (concept map or mind map) has merit.

The choice of map you use will depend on your purpose and what you want to achieve.

Generally, you may use concept maps for science and mathematical (or similar) subjects. Mind maps are generally more suitable for grammatical or creative types of subjects.

Exercise 6 - Draw a concept map

From the subjects you currently study, choose one subject that you think has a complex concept that is difficult to understand and try to draw a concept map of it using the concept map rules.

Test the value of your concept map by 'walking' someone else through it to see if they think it makes sense.

Exercise 7 - Develop a Mind Map®

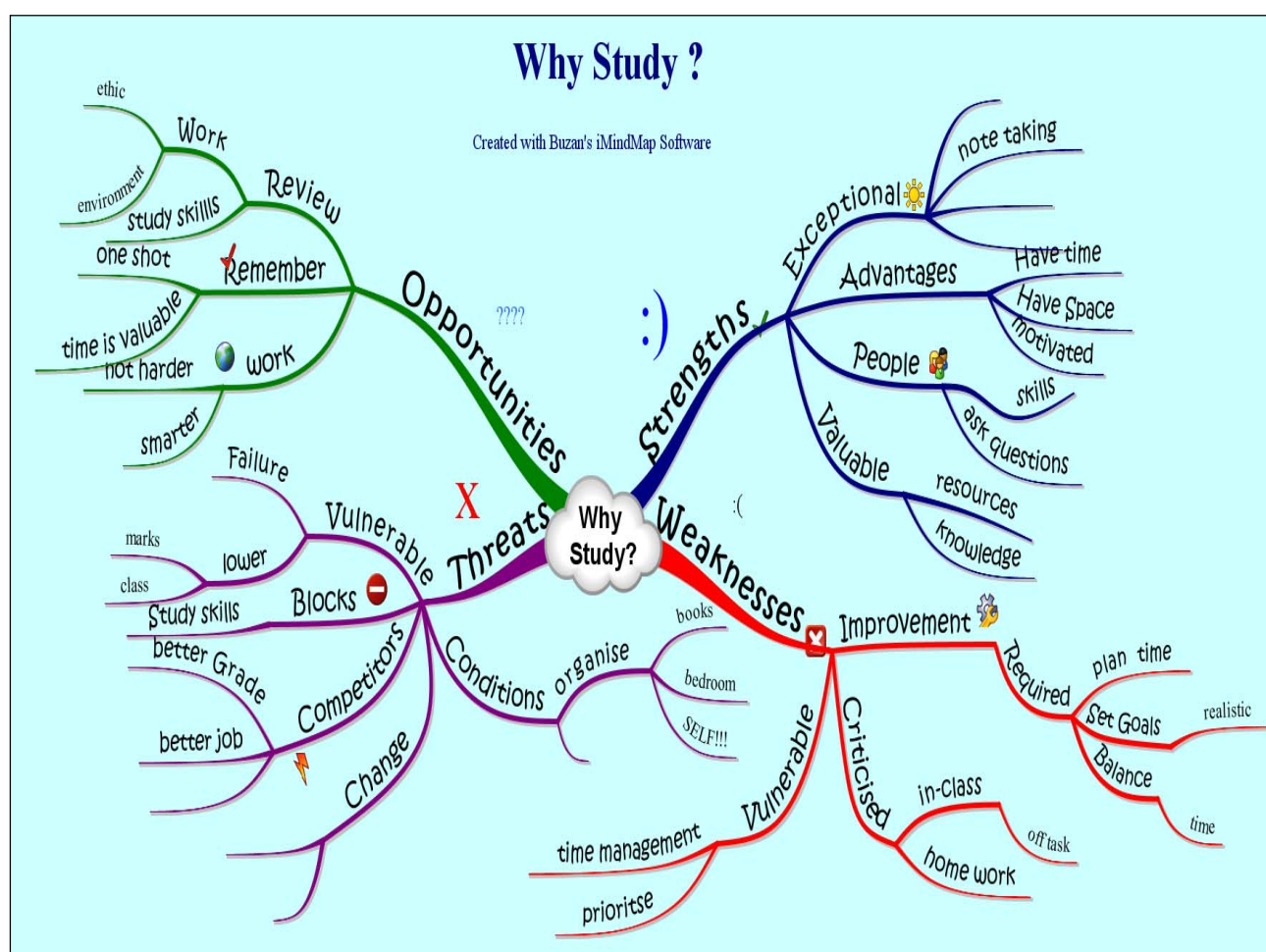
From the subjects you currently study, choose one subject where you have an important question to tackle as part of an assignment and develop a mind map.

Test the value of your mind map by discussing it with another person.

Combining Techniques

If you want to try something quite different, you can combine the Mind Map® technique with the SWOT analysis technique (SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) to break down how you see the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of your own study routine.

It might look a bit like this:



STEP 12 - Multitasking

Multitasking is a natural part of school life and good preparation for work and life beyond school.

Multitasking is not about two tasks at the same time but all about managing a multiple number of tasks over a period of time.

Multitasking is not studying while having your favourite music playing through your headphones - that is called distraction because your full attention is not being given to the study effort. Rather, multitasking is a continuous process where you organise your time so that a number of tasks are all given suitable attention.

Where study is concerned, you can (and should) do one thing at a time but not one thing ALL the time.

The total amount of school work in one term (assignments + study + exams) can be overwhelming and cause anxiety. To fit in so much school work with other things you like to do is also another big challenge.

To be successful at multitasking you will have to organise your time and priorities well to put yourself in a good position to manage multiple tasks during one day or one week or throughout one term.

Students who are successful at multitasking have some things in common to help them take control of the demands of their school work.

1. They have a study timetable and refer to it and review it regularly.
2. They have a term planner and refer to it and review it regularly.
3. They are persistent – sticking to their plan and marking off their progress, and only changing the plan if there is a very good reason. They compose the daily 'to do' list and work to get it all done.
4. They often have someone else (a parent for example) who knows about their activities and deadlines and this helps to keep them accountable.
5. They confront the choices that have to be made sometimes or for short periods of time. (Do you value part-time work more than good school results? Do you value a personal interest more than making more time for study? Can you make a change for one term or for one year to create a better balance between school work and other things you do?)

Students who are successful at multitasking have a plan that they follow, check often and change when there is a good reason to do so. The best thing that you can do is to put yourself in a position where you are highly organised with your time on all your major school work commitments over the term or semester.

To do this, you can use the following exercise to plan and check that you have all your biggest time consuming activities (assignments, examinations, other activities etc.) properly mapped out in a number of distinct sessions over the term or semester.

Exercise 8 - Multitasking planning

The most important thing you need to achieve with this exercise is to make sure that you distribute a sufficient number of sessions across the term (or semester) to manage the multiple tasks that can be due on dates that are very close to each other.

Steps for Exercise 8:

1. Consider the major tasks and time commitments you have for each subject and complete columns 1-6 for each major task.
2. For each one you list, estimate the total amount of time required to achieve a good result (column 7).
3. Break the total amount of time down into a number of sessions that can be distributed across the term/semester (column 8).
4. Write all of those sessions into your term planner and study timetable (confirm with tick in column 9).
5. Where possible and appropriate, list someone who can keep you accountable for your commitment (column 10).

To manage multiple tasks well you need to set your priorities around the tasks that count the most toward your results, whether you are good at the subject, enjoy it, or not.

You can develop the perfect plan but you will also do well to remember that reality during the term will be different.

You should always be prepared to adapt to sudden changes and review your plans if circumstances change.

If you can get ahead of your plan then that can make it a bit easier to deal with those unexpected interruptions that do happen from time to time (illness, car breaks down, computer breaks down etc.).

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Overcoming Inertia – Avoiding Procrastination

Beware of procrastination. To procrastinate means to put off doing something, to postpone or delay it needlessly. It is often regarded as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision.

We try to rationalise our procrastination, or to put it another way, we make excuses for what we are doing or not doing and avoid the real reason. We might rationalise our procrastination by saying, 'There is still plenty of time', 'I'll just watch this movie and then I'll get started'.

There are many reasons why we procrastinate. We often delay starting a task or making a decision because:

- We fear we will not succeed;
- We are self-sabotaging, 'I'm not good at numbers', 'I am just not organised', 'I have never been good with words';
- We lack motivation or lose motivation;
- We feel overwhelmed because there are too many parameters to juggle; or
- We succumb to distraction i.e. to avoid work you do something else.

To beat procrastination you need to keep distractions to a minimum by:

- Keeping your work space conducive to work. This means you need to keep it tidy enough that you can access any materials you need for study and homework. That may not be as tidy as your parents might want but as long as you are productive with your time, and don't waste time trying to locate the necessary materials, then it is good enough.
- Develop a filing system which allows you to quickly locate and retrieve material. Each person's filing system is unique. The hallmark of a good filing system is that you can quickly retrieve material when it is needed. Many schools offer tips in the school dairy.
- Identify the key distractions that affect you - the TV, your phone, Internet, email, social networks, MSN, books, pets, games, toys, sport, and boyfriend/girlfriend. Make an honest estimate on how much time you devote to these things. Plan to limit the amount of time you allow yourself access to these things and use them as a reward instead.
- Simplify your life by eliminating activities which do not contribute to your overall personal and academic goals.
- Develop regular habits of homework, study, relaxation and recreation and work to keep them in balance.

To avoid procrastination with a major task sometimes you just need a starting point or a plan to help you get started. One way is to break down the major task confronting you into smaller segments so you can see each part separately. This where an **Individual Task Planner** can help.

Read through the following case study sample to see one example of how a large task can be broken up into a series of smaller tasks.

Analytical Essay Task

You have about four (4) weeks in which to read a novel for English, complete a set of notes about it, practice essay writing and submit an analytical essay on the novel that shows evidence of research and wider reading. The novel is 385 pages long, divided into 15 chapters. The assessment has dates by which you must show your notes and your essay draft. The assessment is weighted at 20% and you are finding it hard to allocate the task over the 4 week period.

What follows is an example of how it could be done.

INDIVIDUAL TASK PLANNER

Task Details		Book Review	
Subject/Teacher		English / Mr Wilson	
Issued and Due Dates		5 May / 1 June – 4 weeks	
Description		Task: Read and prepare a complete set of notes about the novel. Show evidence of research and wider reading and submit draft essay for comments. The final analytical essay is due on 1 June.	
Weighting		20%	
Week and Day	Date	Time	Action / Steps / Stages
Week 4 Monday	3/5		
Tuesday	4/5		
Wednesday	5/5		Task Issued
Thursday	6/5	15 min	Begin novel read Chapter 1
Friday	7/5	10 min	Read Chapter 2
Saturday	8/5	30 min	Read Chapter 3 to 5
Sunday	9/5	30 min	Read Chapters 6 to 8

(cont)

Week 5 Monday	10/5	10 min	<i>Read Chapter 9</i>
Tuesday	11/5	10 min	<i>Read Chapter 10</i>
Wednesday	12/5	10 min	<i>Read Chapter 11</i>
Thursday	13/5	10 min	<i>Read Chapter 12</i>
Friday	14/5	10 min	<i>Read Chapter 13</i>
Saturday	15/5	25 min	<i>Read Chapters 14 and 15</i>
Sunday	16/5	45 min	<i>Notes on plot/conflict</i>
Week 6 Monday	17/5	30 min	<i>Notes on setting</i>
Tuesday	18/5	60 min	<i>Notes on characters and point of view</i>
Wednesday	19/5	45 min	<i>Notes on style</i>
Thursday	20/5	30 min	<i>Submit notes for checking, choose topic and research</i>
Friday	21/5	25 min	<i>Continue research</i>
Saturday	22/5	20 min	<i>Continue research</i>
Sunday	23/5	30 min	<i>Begin draft – Introduction and 2 body paragraphs</i>
Week 7 Monday	24/5	20 min	<i>Check draft then complete body paragraph and conclusion</i>
Tuesday	25/5	20 min	Submit 1st draft due Show hand written draft and research notes – feedback from teacher – introduction needs work, more research needed
Wednesday	26/5	35 min	<i>Extended research. Email essay to friend for peer comment</i>
Thursday	27/5	--	<i>Ask mum to get more paper for printer and check toner</i>
Friday	28/5	20 min	<i>Type up draft and revise structure, grammar and spelling and save copy to flash stick</i>
Saturday	29/5	35 min	<i>Check friend's essay and give feedback</i>
Sunday	30/5	40 min	<i>Read friend's feedback and revise essay. Check bibliography is up-to-date</i>
Week 8 Monday	31/5	30 min	<i>Print essay and re-read. Proof and edit. Reprint and email to school for safe back up plus to flash stick</i>
Tuesday	1/6		<i>Hand in essay and take a reward!</i>
Wednesday	2/6		

Your School Name here

STEP 13 - Note Taking and Note Making

Note Taking

Notes are an important learning and study tool. Independent learners are good at both taking notes (in the lesson, lecture, demonstration, presentation, speech, reading, reviewing etc.) and then making notes at a later time as part of their revision and study routine.

You will tend to take notes and make notes in your own style (which is fine) but if you want to improve as an independent learner you will need to use a process to make the best use of the notes you take and the notes you make. The process of writing out notes generally keeps you more engaged with what you are learning and studying.

At times, taking notes can be quite passive (for example, straight copying of what is being written on a board) but in some cases, note taking can be a reasonably active process for your mind when you are not creating a verbatim copy. In this case the combined actions of listening, observing and deciding what notes to write down will help to keep you focussed and reasonably well engaged on a topic.

When taking notes, you cannot remember everything. So at a later time (and perhaps at regular intervals in the future) you need to make some notes to improve your understanding and learning for a given topic.

This is why note taking and note making are quite different types of activities.

Making notes is worthwhile, but what you do with those notes is more important for your study and for your development as an independent learner. The work you put into translating your notes into other material for your study and learning is where you can have the biggest impact on your development as an independent learner. When you return to the notes you took, have choices about what to do with them to help your learning and retention of the concepts and content involved.

Developments in technology now have a larger impact on how notes can be taken. Students have access to mobile phones, tablet devices and laptop computers that can record voice, images and/or video. Large quantities of content can now be recorded in various ways (dictation and voice recognition software is also rapidly improving) and while this is mostly a good thing for note taking it also means that your note making will have greater importance as you use your notes to support your learning and study efforts.

Another word sometimes used in relation to note taking and note making is the verb *annotate*. To annotate means to add notes to (a text or diagram) to give explanation or provide some commentary. Articles on a topic, long passages of text or large diagrams may be annotated by a reader as a way of developing a better understanding of the concepts and key points therein. As an independent learner you will begin to annotate various passages of text and other material.

In this section there are two exercises. The first exercise will enable you to consider what your current note taking activities look like and nominate how you could make improvements if appropriate.

Secondly, there is an exercise that will enable you to identify improvements in your note making.

Exercise 9 – Review your note taking

For each subject, select the word (none, some or much) that best describes the amount of time you currently devote to each different note taking type of activity. There is also room to add a couple of your own note taking activities if you wish. After considering what you currently do for taking notes in each subject, type in what you could change (if anything) for that subject to improve the quality, quantity or useability of the notes you take.

Your School Name here

Rate the amount of time you devote to each of the note taking activities do you use at the moment in each subject area? (select the appropriate word in each cell for each subject)												
Subject	Copy from whiteboard	Copy from other sources (handouts)	Record audio	Record pictures or video in class	Draw diagrams	Scan material and highlight parts	Use tablet device (iPad etc.) or laptop to view content	Annotate material provided to me	View video clips in class or on-line			What (if anything) should I think about changing in this subject for the way in which I take notes?

Note Making

Once you have taken notes, you need to use them in a productive way for your study and learning.

You should ensure that you maintain the discipline of referring to your notes and regularly revising and rewriting them to enable the concepts and content to be retained well in your long term memory.

To achieve this you should develop a system where you take your notes from their 'raw' form and develop them into other forms to assist in the process of improving your understanding through your own efforts - therefore developing yourself as an ever improving independent learner.

In their raw form, notes often have abbreviations, short phrases, dot-points and so on. Time and effort will be required on your part to develop the raw notes into more useful material which will also help you to retain it.

Notes can be rewritten into a number of other forms that are helpful, such as:

- Summaries
 - Text
 - Lists
 - Key points
 - Diagrams
 - Graphs
 - Tables
 - Definitions
- Concept maps or mind maps
- Timelines

One method that combines both note making and note taking is known as the Cornell Method².

To set up for this method, divide a page into two columns with a note taking column on the right hand side (12cm wide) and a note making column on the left hand side (6cm wide).

You write the notes you take in a lesson in the right hand column which are likely to have abbreviations, short phrases, dot-points and so on.

At some point soon after the lesson (which is where your discipline to follow up regularly will matter) you go back to the same page with notes in the right hand column and use the left hand column to rewrite the main ideas, definitions, key concepts/diagrams and perhaps any questions you may have.

Depending on the nature of the material involved, it may be worthwhile to write a summary at the bottom of the page in your own words. Even though this method was developed over half a century ago, it's value lies in the process of keeping your mind actively engaged in reviewing lessons and reconstructing the learning material.

A sample of how you can set out a template is provided on the next page. Depending on what software and technology you use you can set up your own template in an appropriate format.

² Devised in the 1950s by Walter Paulk, a professor at Cornell University. The Cornell Method is a simple, systematic method for condensing and organising notes.

Sample:

<p>Note Making Section</p> <p><i>(6 cm wide)</i></p> <p>What:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>main ideas</i> • <i>headings</i> • <i>diagrams</i> • <i>questions</i> • <i>prompts, e.g. acrostics</i> <p>When:</p> <p><i>after lesson/lecture</i> <i>during allocated study time</i></p>	<p>Note Taking Section</p> <p><i>(12 cm wide)</i></p> <p>What:</p> <p><i>Take notes during the lesson/lecture.</i></p> <p>Use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>concise phrases</i> • <i>lists/dot points</i> • <i>abbreviations and personal shorthand</i> <p>When:</p> <p><i>During lesson/lecture</i></p>
<p>Summary Section:</p> <p>What:</p> <p><i>Main ideas expressed in your own words</i></p> <p>When:</p> <p><i>During study time</i></p>	

Your School Name here

Exercise 10 – Review your note making

Beside each subject indicate which note making activities you are using by placing a tick in the cell. There is also room to add a couple of your own note making activities if you wish. After considering what you currently do for making notes in each subject, type in what additional things you could do (if anything) to make more effective notes for that subject.

Your School Name here

Indicate which note making activities you are currently using															What (if anything) could you do to improve your note making for this subject?	
Subject	Summary creation activities							Concept maps or Mind maps	Timelines							
	Text writing	Lists	Key Points	Diagrams	Graphs	Tables	Definitions									

STEP 14 - Evolving as an Independent Learner

In reading this book it is assumed that you have also read and completed the exercises in 7 Steps to Better Study. When combined, these two publications offer a wealth of information and exercises to improve your study routine, learning behaviours, time management and many other aspects for achieving better results at school and beyond.

The 13 STEPS covered were:

- STEP 1 – Identify your learning style
- STEP 2 – Set your goals
- STEP 3 – Improve your time management
- STEP 4 – Measure your effort and progress
- STEP 5 – Find the right balance
- STEP 6 – Set up the best study environment
- STEP 7 – Reward yourself
- STEP 8 – Making more use of your learning style
- STEP 9 – Mastering Motivation
- STEP 10 – Improving Memory and Recall
- STEP 11 – Concept Mapping and Mind Mapping
- STEP 12 – Multitasking
- STEP 13 – Note Taking and Note Making

So what does being an independent learner really mean?

It means that you have completely shifted your behaviour to take full responsibility for yourself and take charge of your own learning and development as much as possible.

It means that you identify your deficiencies and work on them in a disciplined way. It means that you make plans but review them regularly and ask for feedback from others whose opinions you value.

For most students, it will take years to reach a stage where you can view yourself as a highly capable and independent learner.

It is important to get into productive habits around your learning and study as early as possible and build on those each year.

If you consider yourself to be an independent learner you should be seeing the following behaviours and attitudes in yourself:

- Have a high awareness of dominant learning style and use it to choose the most productive types of activities for study sessions
- Able to set goals and develop action plans to achieve those goals by changing behaviour
- Develop study/homework/assignment timetables and term planners
- Values measurement and tracks progress of time invested in various tasks
- Maintains a tidy and organised study environment
- Regularly seeks feedback from teachers and others and genuinely reflects on that feedback
- Keep rewards in proportion to the activity employed
- Breaks down complex tasks into simpler ones using suitable techniques
- Have a mature approach to school work/free time balance
- Always looking to improve memory and recall
- Will make own attempt to tackle problems in different ways before seeking help
- Are very good at managing motivation issues

A long journey where you must take ownership

The transition from junior school through the middle years and into senior years is accompanied by major changes in expectations of you. It is a long journey but ultimately it is up to you take ownership of your progress.

If you can improve to a high level in your development as an independent learner you will put yourself in a very strong position for life beyond school, whether that be further study, work or something else.

The final exercise requires you to identify the current level you think your performance is at for the behaviours and attitudes that really mark an independent learner. Once you have done this you can set target levels for your development in 12 months and two years' time.

You should come back to this exercise every year.

Exercise 11 - Setting targets at a new level

For each behaviour or attitude, rate the current level you think your performance is at, and then set targets for a new level in the next year and in two years' time.

Behaviour/Attitude	Current Level	Target in next 12 months	Target in 2 years
Have a high awareness of dominant learning style and use it to choose the most productive types of activities for study sessions			
Able to set goals and develop action plans to achieve those goals by changing behaviour			
Develop study/homework/assignment timetables and term planners			
Values measurement and tracks progress of time invested in various tasks			
Maintains a tidy and organised study environment			
Regularly seeks feedback from teachers and others and genuinely reflect on that feedback			
Keep rewards in proportion to the activity employed			
Breaks down complex tasks into simpler ones using suitable techniques			
Have a mature approach to school work/free time balance			
Always looking to improve memory and recall			
Will make own attempt to tackle problems in different ways before seeking help			
Are very good at managing motivation issues			

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Also recommended: 7 Steps to Better Study (Edition 2, 2016)

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7 More Steps to Independent Learning

ISBN: 978-0-9875141-4-1

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