Free University Brighton Study Skills Handbook

Contents

Acknowledgements

The Free University Brighton (FUB) wishes to thank Julia Zweygarth who has kindly provided us with the accompanying diagrams for this Handbook.

Disclaimer

This entire document is designed with the aim of convincing you that learning, studying, and living as a FUB student matters immensely as an experience which doesn't just aim to "educate" us but educates us *for* something. Needless to say, us "FUBers" believe that education is, perhaps above all else, an essential ingredient for active citizenship and social change, but do appreciate that different people choose to study for different reasons. It is therefore important that you ask yourself why you are here and why it matters to you, while at the same time being aware of FUB's distinct principles and values. Participation in our FUB courses is therefore valued by us as important *in its own right* rather than as a means to an end. We therefore aim to cultivate a community of learners with a curiosity, and even love, for the subjects that we offer, a desire to learn new things, and an appreciation of the intellectual challenge(s) of learning.

And while we offer an independently validated degree (we call it "freegree"), our aim is not to dispense qualifications or issue certificates but to create a public space where education can happen and be available to a number of people who can't afford the exorbitant tuition fees of conventional university institutions. Before embarking on any of our courses, it is therefore important to question the reasons why you chose to enrol in the first place and assess them against FUB's principles and values. To make the most of your FUB experience, you would need to see it as *something that you participate in as a member*, rather than as a *service that is offered to you as a user*. Besides, education itself is an *ongoing process* rather than a *finished product* and we often get from it what we put into it in the first place. Given that the educational experience is a two-way process and a balancing act between *what you want* and *what we expect from you*, deciding all this at the outset is absolutely necessary.

Our expectations will of course vary from module to module and tutor to tutor, but they generally involve:

- ✓ Reading everything we send or hand out to you carefully (e.g. e-mails, handbooks, handouts, reading lists), engaging with it seriously and asking questions about it in your communication with us
- ✓ Attending sessions and participating in them
- ✓ Taking your courses as seriously as we do
- ✓ Working independently as well as with others (e.g. fellow students)
- ✓ Being responsible, self-motivated, well-organised, industrious, diligent, and self-reliant

This may sound like a lot and it is (!) which explains why we are willing to help you at every step of this process. In fact, we expect all the above from you not immediately or at the very start of your studies, but *as the end result.* We are here to help you get from where you currently are to where you want to be as a learner. In order to achieve this however, the process of learning needs to be thought of as a contractual arrangement between you and us.

We
Set up courses, modules, workshops and events, deliver learning sessions, organise discussions in seminars, and provide you with feedback and learning/personal support to the best of our ability and with the resources that are publicly available to us (remember: we are *not* a funded institution with our own facilities and resources but a group of volunteers)

You
Are required to demonstrate the necessary level of motivation, responsibility and commitment to facilitate the provision of all the above. Without your willingness and co-operation none of the above can be possible.

Now that the "terms and conditions" of learning within FUB have been explained, this Study Skills guide will turn to and give advice on various aspects of the learning experience from living as a student to acquiring the necessary skills for studying. Happy reading!

How to read this Handbook

This Study Skills Handbook is available in both print and electronic formats. Physical copies will be available during our various Study Skills sessions and can be requested from us via e-mail. An electronic copy of this Handbook, will always be available at our online platform (Ryver), and can be accessed at:

https://fub.ryver.com/index.html#forums/1067433

All clickable links are highlighted in blue, and every effort has been made to shorten webpages for those of you who read the printed copy of this Handbook.

Introduction

The Free University Brighton (FUB) has a unique approach to working with students outside the conventional realm of mainstream university education. We aim to empower students to engage with real-life issues and understand university-level material. Being able to study and develop both intellectual and practical ("transferable") skills while learning is an important part of the process.

This Handbook aims to:

- ✓ Explain how best to learn within the FUB and beyond.
- ✓ Provide you with "key steps" and methods of studying and learning.
- ✓ Point you to different resources you may need (libraries, online resources, and other facilities)

This Handbook therefore, provides a basic introduction and starting point for FUB students, explaining basic skills and approaches to studying and learning. It also covers key information about resources and types of help in and around Brighton, including what is available outside of the Free University. It's very important to know *where* to find information, help and advice as you explore the courses on offer. So *skim reading* this whole handbook at the outset would be very useful to all FUB students**.** Marking *which* resources and information you need now, plan to use later, or follow up, is the best way of using this handbook. It's a "portal" to a journey or learning process.

Section 1: Learning 'how to learn'

Learning something (anything!) involves:

- ✓ Learning about facts, theories, ideas, approaches that try to explain what we are trying to learn
- ✓ Learning about the processes of learning (speaking, listening, reading, writing etc.)
- ✓ Learning about ourselves as learners (evaluating our learning by reflecting on how we do things, and how we might improve)
- ✓ Learning about how others learn (asking questions)
- ✓ Learning how to learn productively from, as well as with others (exchange, sharing, teamwork)
- ✓ Learning how to do something with our learning: Evaluate it, produce new ideas from it, recombine it in new ways, and actualise ourselves or "become our potential" through it

Learning is not just about knowing, gathering knowledge, or understanding things. It's also about being able to present our own ideas, develop a critical sense of the learning material, utilise evidence, solve intellectual and social problems, as well as acquiring the skills to be able to do all the above. Whilst the Free University does not require any outputs from students (other than attendance, and engagement), being able to choose to go further than that, will undoubtedly give you a huge sense of achievement.

Each of us learns in radically different ways! This is because we all come from different backgrounds, and have different needs, as well as different outlooks on and expectations of education. This is important to remember as studying can often be difficult, demanding and confusing, tiring us not only intellectually, but physically and psychologically too. You should therefore try to create a learning style that suits *your* needs, rather than blindly follow anyone's advice uncritically (ours included!). We therefore encourage you to see the teaching programme as a platform, from which you can launch your own personalised journey, and satisfy your own intellectual needs.

It is also important to remember that learning takes time, and requires a lot of patience. In the book *Outliers*, author Malcolm Gladwell argues that it takes roughly 10,000 hours of practice to achieve mastery in a field. To master something however, one has to think laterally/creatively (not a mindless task), and deal with criticism productively (listen to your peers).

W. J. Gordon (1972) illustrated some of the above rather well in the following diagram, taken from his seminal paper, 'On Being Explicit About Creative Process'.
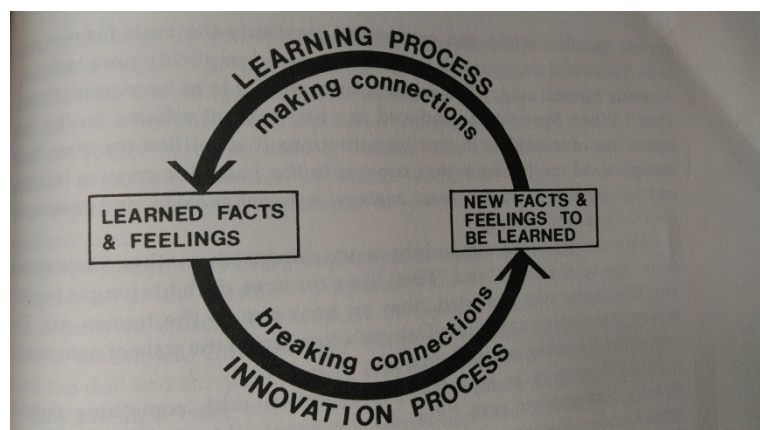
Section 2: Why learn *how to learn*?

Many of the skills that we use in everyday life are similar to those we use for studying. However, the *way* which we use them, and what comes out of that may be different. This is because study skills are the essential ingredient that enables us to develop our intellectual development, complementing what we do and know from as well as in ordinary life.

These are the areas that we aim to cover during our Study Skills Workshops, and this Handbook too:

- ✓ Communication, motivation and learning styles
- ✓ Time management for projects/ essays
- ✓ Active listening and talking: lectures and seminars

- ✓ Using libraries and IT and finding relevant information
- ✓ Recording and using information (e.g. note taking)
- ✓ Critical reading and thinking (e.g. techniques and approaches)
- ✓ Writing essays and projects (essay plans, structure, writing style, academic etiquette)
- ✓ Equipment and resources (what there is, how to use them, where they are)

We will provide you with exercises to help you identify the strengths and areas where you need to develop yourself. This is also something you need to discuss with your personal tutor, your learning support group, other students, and your lecturers. The more you talk about "how you learn" the better. Apart from having a broad understanding of what developing study skills involves and what resources are available to help you, learning is about developing our memory, our understanding of complex issues, the ability to process information, and above all our motivation and confidence.

Self-awareness is paramount in that process. Many students coming into the Free University will feel strong emotions - excitement, enthusiasm, but also fear, and sometimes confusion. This is quite normal and the best way to use these emotions is in a positive way. Carry on, and you will slowly develop your self-confidence and motivation, this is an intrinsic part of any learning process.

Learning how to learn is also about committing yourself to a regular programme of study that inspires you and matters to you. Focusing on topics that we are more interested in will therefore help you along this road.

Useful resources:

Cottrell, S. (2013) *The Study Skills Handbook*. London: Palgrave

Copies of this book can be found in the Jubilee and Hove libraries. See the links below:

 http://tinyurl.com/z244jcw

This book can be used in a number of different ways. It can be a resource for your own personal use, with exercises you can do on your own (or in a group with other students), but it is also a reminder of the different studying techniques and methods! It's worth identifying chapters that you might wish to read depending on your own individual interests and needs.

Section 3: Learning how to attend lectures/sessions

People in general, learn best when they are more 'deeply embedded' in the material they are studying. It will also enhance other areas like memory. So for example, if you *just listen* but don't discuss or express those ideas, then your learning will be only partial. Participating in workshops and seminars, and listening to others debate issues is crucial to deeper and more useful learning. We call this "active learning" and it includes communicating regularly,

as well as linking the issues you learn about with the real world, and/or your own personal beliefs, experiences and observations. We therefore encourage you to develop skills to make your learning active, participatory, and "deep".

- ✓ Make the most of your learning sessions by treating them as a shared learning experience/platform for all present. Learning sessions are not just organised meetings for looking at slides, but create an opportunity to understand what is being learned by engaging with the material, your fellow students, and the teaching staff. Ideally, lectures and seminars establish a dialogue between teachers, learners, and the subject that is being taught

- ✓ Engage, exchange, discuss! Don't be a passive learner, or just a strategic learner! Information as well as study skills cannot be directly "taught". They are (like just about everything else) learned by doing, practice, trial and error, and experience

- ✓ *Make* notes, don't take notes! Don't just write down what the tutor says, make sense of it yourself, and record *your* thoughts

- ✓ Ask questions, even if you feel shy, uncertain, and insecure. As the saying goes, 'it is better to look stupid for a moment, than remain ignorant for a lifetime'. If you feel nervous, you are not alone! Most of your fellow students, and even the most experienced lecturers can feel nervous, especially with a new group they do not know particularly well. Smile! You will notice that most people will smile back- this immediately makes you feel better.

In short, attending, being present, and (inter)active will ensure that you learn from experience. The research of the past two decades (Marton and Saljo, 1976; Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1998; Biggs and Tang, 2007) suggests that *what the learner does*, is as important as what the teacher does. Learning (inter)actively is often called 'deep' learning, while learning passively is defined as 'surface' learning (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

To engage in 'deep' learning is to:

- ✓ Actively seek to understand the material/ the subject
- ✓ Interact vigorously with the content
- ✓ Make use of evidence, inquiry and evaluation
- ✓ Take a broad view and relate ideas to one another
- ✓ Be motivated by interest
- ✓ Relate new ideas to previous knowledge
- ✓ Relate concepts to everyday experience
- ✓ Read and study beyond the course requirements

To engage in 'surface' learning is to:

- ✓ Learn in order to repeat what you have learned
- ✓ Memorise information needed for assessments
- ✓ Make use of rote/mechanical learning
- ✓ Take a narrow view and concentrate on detail
- ✓ Fail to distinguish principles from examples
- ✓ Stick closely to the course requirements
- ✓ Be motivated by fear of failure

As American pragmatist philosopher and educationalist, John Dewey (1916: 140) put it: 'To learn from experience is to make backward and forward connections between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence. Under such conditions, doing becomes a trying, an experiment with the world to find out what it is like'.

Useful online learning resources:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=257
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=260

Section 4: Learning How to Think Critically

Thinking seems "natural" to us, if not entirely automatic too! But it is also a process of making the implicit...explicit. It is therefore important to organise, and shape our thinking into manageable bundles of activities to make it "speak" to us, so we can make sense of it ourselves, and communicate our thoughts to others too. Composing a mental picture of what passes through our minds is an essential part of the process. As a little girl purportedly put it to educationalist Graham Wallas (2014: 58), 'how can I know what I think till I see what I say?' Wallas (2014: 18) himself saw (creative) thinking as a four-stage process, which is described and adapted below.

Thinking involves:

I.   Preparation (Investigating through reading, or simply asking questions)
II.   Incubation (Absorbing information by soaking our minds in what we read, hear, experience, and let it all simmer for a while)
III. Illumination (Coming up with a distinct/original idea, narrative, argument)
IV.   Verification (Justification through evidence: data, theory, literature (readings), empirical accounts)

... and Revision/Inspection: Does it all "stick", make sense, is it supported by evidence?

Thinking, especially within the Social Sciences, also involves being critical, analytical, and descriptive. Piecing bits of information together in a logical manner is not enough. Raising doubts about what things mean, and how they might be understood differently lies at the heart of most Social Science subjects.

Critical thinking involves:

- ✓ Challenging ready-made, prejudicial, dogmatic, or orthodox views
- ✓ Replacing "common sense" with "good sense" as Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote, or 'clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge' as the English empiricist philosopher John Locke put it.
- ✓ Imagination as a process of not simply listing what is already known, but what can be known differently, or what has yet to be discovered

Useful online resource:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=87

Section 5: Learning How to Read Critically

When studying, we read in order to:

- ✓ Find information, explore, and understand concepts, issues, ideas, debates
- ✓ Situate ourselves in the relevant literature by being aware of the existing research
- ✓ Identify what gaps *we* are able to fill in by pointing out shortcomings, while offering new, original, innovative arguments, data, solutions to research/policy considerations/problems

Reading may not be a pleasurable activity for everyone, and we don't all come from households where walls are lined with bookshelves. It is however an essential tool for retrieving information to find out more about a subject or a question. It is therefore important to read in two ways which are described here as 'search and retrieve mode', and 'reading as active learning'.

To read in basic 'search and retrieve' mode:

- ✓ Start reading with questions in mind: Does it relate to the essay question?
- ✓ Look for particular things, note them down as you find them in a clear and systematic way that will help you go back to your notes and find them helpful
- ✓ Don't simply read page after page vainly hoping that the information will somehow "stick"
- ✓ Make good use of contents pages, headings, indexes to get a feel for the reading material, and see what is relevant to your search
- ✓ Read reviews to see what others are saying about what you read

Reading in in 'search and retrieve' mode will not get you very far as a learner. To properly engage with and understand your chosen subject, you will have to read critically-analytically as an active learning process. Most essays require that you can reflect on and react to what you read by articulating your position, offering a new insight/angle, and backing it up with sufficient evidence.

Reading as deep, 'active learning' requires:

- ✓ Reading extensively, broadly and widely, so you know what is being said
- ✓ Digesting information so that it makes sense to you: Can you explain it to yourself and others?
- ✓ Agreeing/disagreeing: If you agree, why do you agree? If you disagree, why do you disagree?
- ✓ Identifying your position/take on the matter
- ✓ Preparing yourself to articulate/state where you stand orally and in writing
- ✓ Looking beyond finding answers to questions (though this is crucial!), but also developing a deep understanding of the topic and being able to discuss, respond to, and have a view on it that you can defend with strong arguments that are based in evidence.

Useful online resources:
Reading and Research
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=24
Questioning as you Read
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=83
Note making
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=16

Section 6: Learning How to Write Critically

I. How to Plan an Essay

Intro (4-5 lines): *Tell us what you'll tell us*

- ✓ Outline what you plan to do in the essay: "In this essay I plan to discuss…"
- ✓ Introduce your argument: "The main argument here espoused is that…"
- ✓ Demonstrate how you plan to answer the question *with your argument* throughout the essay: "The way I propose to answer this question is by…"
- ✓ Make sure to offer a concise statement of the key argument of the essay, its aims and scope

Main body (the rest of the word length, allocate a paragraph per point): *Tell us*

- ✓ This is the space where you need to answer the question *directly* by making your case/discussing your argument at length and using evidence (relevant academic literature, case studies, figures etc.) to back up your argument and any other claims you wish to make

Conclusion (4-5 lines): *Tell us what you've told us*

- ✓ Either sum up what you've said, very briefly, or introduce a different, novel point by means of conclusion (e.g. that the entire discussion/debate/issue is perhaps irrelevant)

How to Plan Your Thinking for an Essay

- ✓ Make sure you read the question carefully and identify what it is that it asks you to do!

- ✓ Decide how you want/plan to answer it: what is your argument (=I think…), where is your evidence (=this can be seen…)

- ✓ Make sure that your argument and evidence help you answer the question directly (beware of deviation!)

In other words…

- ✓ **Thinking involves:** Preparation (Investigating through reading) - Incubation (Absorbing information by soaking our minds in what we have read and playing with it too)- Illumination (Coming up with a distinct/original idea, narrative, argument) - Verification (Justification through evidence: data, theory, literature (readings), empirical accounts)

Source: Wallas, G. (2014) *The Art of Thought*. Solis Press: Tunbridge Wells, p.38

- ✓ **Writing involves:** Description (Picturing) - Narration (Telling) - Exposition (Explaining) - Argument (Convincing)

Source: Crews, F. (1977) *The Random House Handbook*. New York: Random House, p.1

II. Essay writing Advice

Answer the question

This sounds obvious but it's easy to forget to do so! In fact, this is the most frequently recurring mistake in essay writing.

So if the essay title asks you 'What are the links between class, power and alienation', you shouldn't write *everything* you know about class, *everything* you know about power and *everything* you know about alienation.

We are not looking for *how much knowledge you have* (although that is relevant!). We are looking for *an answer to the question* which brings in the specific knowledge you need to do that. Focus your essay on the links between class, power and alienation.

At the end read through the essay, see if you have given an answer to the question and make sure your content is organised around that.

Referencing is confusing!

There are lots of types of referencing and it is important to *avoid plagiarism* (using other peoples' ideas without acknowledgement).

But the key thing is to choose one style of referencing (e.g. Harvard style, APA) and stick to it. And just be as full as you can with your references.

Keep notes of your sources while making notes. Remember to give page numbers, and use quotation marks. Put things in your own words.

More info on referencing can be found in the link below:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=37

Have an argument

It's good to show *understanding* of the material and knowledge of *critical perspectives* on it.

But we are not looking for your knowledge of all the themes and authors in the area, or just understanding. We want to you decide what you think and to be brave in saying it. This may be different to what you are used to before entering Higher Education.

Set out what your argument is at the start and *argue for it* through the essay, *using theories and evidence to back it up*.

No-one expects you to say something completely new (although it's great if you can!). Having an argument can be just deciding which of the perspectives or answers on offer you have come down for and backing up why you think that is the best one.

Keep it focused

If you try to cover too many things, you may skate over them all too superficially without being able to develop your points adequately.

Choose a focus to the essay, explain what this is going to be in the introduction and stick to it. Then you can more full and adequately cover what you want to say.

The thing you have read seems wrong!

If you disagree with articles or books you have read this isn't a problem. This is probably good! You may have come up with a good criticism. Use this as part of your essay.

Say what you think

Don't just reproduce what is said in the sources. Think about what you think about it, and say it!

It's worth checking with the tutor

Check the title, idea or plan with your tutor before writing it. They might have expectations you haven't realised. They may spot a problem with the basic idea.

How much should I read?

Just reading one or two sources probably won't be enough. At the same time it's possible to do too much reading. This can take up time and confuse you!

Read enough to give you a variety of perspectives and information so that you can cover various angles relevant to your essay.

Make connections

It's good to use information from other courses, and contemporary issues. You will be rewarded for drawing in different sources and information and connecting what you have learned on the course with other things you know, as long as this is relevant and done well.

Showing you have gone beyond what you were taught on a topic is good!

Some other small points.

Write a plan for the essay before you write it. You may change the plan as you go along. But it will help you get started and organise your thoughts.

Read your essay through

In fact read through it a few times! If you have time, sleep on it for a day or two before the final proof read. It's amazing how much this final stage can improve an essay, especially if you've given yourself the odd few days off from it before checking it through.

Do not plagiarise!

An expert's six-minute podcast on (avoiding) plagiarism
https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/podcast/wheatley/ep6.html

Tips to avoid plagiarism
http://blog.oxford.co.za/tips-to-avoid-plagiarism/

Additional essay-writing info

How to find information for essays

- ✓ Libraries, Web of Science, Library of Congress Catalog, British Library Catalogue, University of Sussex Library, Jubilee and Hove library (click on each link to be directed to the relevant website)

- ✓ NOT Google! Unless it is used as a first port of call, not a substitute for rigorous academic research
- ✓ Look for: Journal articles, books/book chapters, governmental reports/memos, or whatever is relevant to the aim, purpose, and research question of your studies
- ✓ Organise your search around the key concerns/questions of your study

Useful online resources:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=272
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=273

Online resources/Books

Four things to do before you start writing an essay
http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2015/05/4-things-before-writing-essays/

Turabian, K. (2003) *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*
http://tinyurl.com/oh59eh8

H.S. Becker (2007) *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article* http://tinyurl.com/h7cuubw

Royal Literary Fund's guide to writing essays:
https://www.rlf.org.uk/resources/writing-essays/

[Note: Copies of the aforementioned books are available in PDF form. Contact Lambros (lambros.fatsis@gmail.com) to request a copy]

III. Top Ten Essay Writing Tips

1. A good essay is one that contains analysis, and is not merely descriptive or factual. Essays can be informative but the mark of an excellent one is the *development of an argument*. So *think before you write anything* or choose a title that reflects what you want to say.

2. Try to see the essay as addressing a problem. It is often heplful to see it as answering a question. Ideally, it should be an interesting question, and one that is important or relevant to the field/area of study.

3. It can be a good idea to locate the problem addressed in a debate (for example two or three approaches to a particular issue). The essay then will outline and discuss the merits of the different positions, trying to reach a conclusion on which ones or which elements of these positions are correct, meaningful, relevant.

4. Think about the argument that you will try and develop in answer to the question. A critically-driven essay will be more interesting than one which simply gives information.

5. If you have a clearly developped argument, this will generally lead to a structure whereby the structure reflects the different (logical) steps of the argument pursued. The structure should be clear. It can be a good idea to explain the essay structure briefly, in the Introduction.

6. Design the essay around the Introduction, 3 or 4 sections, and a Conclusion. This helps to signpost the essay for the reader as well as organise the structure of the essay itself for you, the writer! Avoid too many sections or subsections, especially in a short essay of 3-5,000 words or less, unless they are necessary to the argument.

7. You do not need too many references or long quotes, although you need to check that against each assignment's specific requirments. Check the references carefully! Are they in alphabetical order? Have you used your chosen referencing system (e.g. Harvard, APA) consistently throughout the essay?

8. Endnotes, or footnotes can be used. The main reason to use them is for a short digression from the main flow of the text, e.g. to provide some background information related to the point being made, which is not essential to the argument but helpful to the reader.

9. A good essay is a well-written one! When you have produced a draft, it is a good idea to read it several times. It sometimes helps to read it aloud, if possible to another person. If you prefer a more 'silent' way of checking it through, ask a friend to proofread it for you. This usually helps to identify problems of grammar and syntax, as well as problems in expression, style or clarity and coherence.

10. It is advisable to use the Harvard referencing system (author/date/page number) in the text, and the full details of the publications used under References. Normally you cite only the publications you have *referred to* in the text. If you have few references, an option is to have a longer list of relevant texts you have read under Bibliography.

Last but not least, write with interest, if not pleasure even! Choose or create an essay title that strikes a chord, and see it as an opportunity to find out more about it, as well as give your view(s) on it, provided that they are backed-up by the relevant factual evidence, and that you have something original to contribute to the whole debate. See yourself as a writer, not as a 'draught-horse'! Make an emotional connection with your work, create a suitable environment, and a work routine to match.

Useful online resources:

Critical Essay Writing

http://tinyurl.com/je7mycg

Planning Essays

http://tinyurl.com/z6ytfwm

Essay Plan Template

http://tinyurl.com/h3s2cys

Free Writing Workshops

Research Writing Group
Drop-in workshop

- Every Wednesday afternoon, 2-4.30pm.
- A writing workshop based on the Pomodoro™ technique, led by a facilitator.
- Anyone can Join and work on any kind of writing they need to focus on, at their own pace.
- Participants can drop-in any Wednesday: there is no requirement to attend regularly.

Join us!

Bring your own drink – doughnuts provided!*

Autumn term: City Campus
- 5 Oct-14 Dec: Room 204, Edward Street Building

Spring term: Moulsecoomb Campus
- 11-25 Jan Room 308, Watts Building
- 1 Feb-5 Apr: Room 312 or 309, Watts Building

Summer term: Falmer Campus
- 26 Apr-17 May: Room E426, Checkland Building
- 24 May: Room E423, Checkland Building
- 31 May-28 June: Room E422, Checkland Building
- 5 & 12 July: Room 113, Westlain House

Questions?
Email artscrd@brighton.ac.uk / telephone 01273 641781

* Let us know in advance you will be attending

Introducing FUB's own online platform

Ryver is the new software we are now using alongside the old (*Namaste*) because it allows better interaction between people within the Free University Brighton. It is similar to Facebook allowing individuals to interact with each other or groups to develop topics to be posted up, information about courses to be made available, and other additional material. It is very important that you familiarise yourself with the software, since it will be the primary way in which we communicate information to you about courses, timetables, events, venue information etc. We also have a Facebook group, which would suggest you join as well.

You can download Ryver by accessing the following link: http://www.ryver.com/

For instructions on how to set up and use Ryver, see the link below:
http://freeuniversitybrighton.org/fubo/

Other IT equipment and software

IT and other technical equipment can be extremely useful to FUB students. For example, students really like recording lectures for their personal use or to share with other students too. This makes it easier to take notes, particularly people with learning difficulties. So using an electronic digital recorder, or recording on a tablet or phone is extremely useful in that regard. For free online courses on using a computer, see link below:

https://www.learnmyway.com/subjects

Clearly, many people will need access to a computer to access this information and software. The options available are varied, ranging from a desktops, laptops or tablets to smart phones and other such devices. If you have no access to computer technology, there are some sources of free or very low-cost IT equipment, as well as free computer access and/or help with IT in the local community libraries (see Section 8 for more information)

http://www.getonlineathome.org/

http://tinyurl.com/hkecljk

http://www.software4students.co.uk/

The fact that computer technology often replicates "offline" functions means that using a computer isn't absolutely essential. However, we advise people to use basic software, if they can learn it easily without interrupting their core studies. This is because it can strengthen the learning process. There is always a balance to be struck between learning new technology, and learning new ideas. There are places in the city where you can get help on basic software programs, to different levels (see links below)

https://www.ukonlinecentres.com/about-us

http://tinyurl.com/zvelqgt

The principal software that students are expected to use is of course word-processing packages (e.g. Microsoft Word). Being able to use this/these effectively will massively enhance your ability to record information, organising it, and then write essays. Bear in mind that word-processing now has sophisticated functions which include: embedding photographs, sorting information (e.g. alphabetically), colour coding data, enabling cutting and pasting content from the Internet or from PDF files, check your spelling or sentence construction, and so on and so forth.

Other pieces of software that students will use are various types of searching and search engines (e.g. Google). Knowing how to use these, distinguishing "good", solid, reliable information from that which is poor (or not based on evidence) amounts to a whole set of skills. You should aim to become well-versed in terms of using technology so that you can focus more on the issues around what information, you're searching for, and why it's useful to you. Using technology without "thinking too much" about the functions and the technology itself -means more time and energy spent on "how best" to use information, and the nature of the knowledge that you're collecting. We cover some of these areas, in our Study Skills Workshops, and no doubt in some of the lectures, too.

Good searching techniques are covered in Study Skills Workshops, but the basic principle is that the keywords should reflect the issue, question, or academic field or topic. There are of course several different types of search engines, and sources of information, and levels and types of information that would be useful to you. Obviously the library has its own search engine, using its own software. Meta data is a term used to describe "information about information /data" - so search engines use metadata, such as keywords in articles, sets of information in special databases. Top level codes to information etc. There may be several stages to searching for information.

However, there are often similar logical processes underpinning this different software. The main one is Boolean logic. This is where words, phrases and concepts that can be used as "search keywords" can be put together in various ways - to narrow down the field, and the search results. Pay attention to how the search engines you use work, and how best to use them linking terms within the search – e.g. using 'not', 'and', 'or' as instructions in the search. We will explain this more in some of our workshops but it is also briefly covered in our You Tube Study Skills videos below:

http://tinyurl.com/jq4uy47

http://tinyurl.com/how8bn8

http://tinyurl.com/jfxw3yl

Online learning resources/free software for mind maps

https://bubbl.us/examples

https://coggle.it/

http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Software for people with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

Other software that might be useful to you, depending on your circumstances might include voice-activated software. Obviously this is designed for people who have disabilities of various kinds. It's very easy-to-use, and it can make thinking, preparing, planning and writing easier. For a demonstration of the most common speech recognition software (Dragon), ask Kate Bloor. However, there could be some free software available that does voice to text, with some time spent researching that availability and functionality.

In addition to this, there are lots of other types of software such as mind map software technology, spreadsheets, PowerPoint, and numerous other Internet-based tools - that may well be useful to you as you study and produce ideas (see the 'Online learning resources/free software for mind maps' links above)

Section 8: Library Information and Additional Sources of Learning Support

Libraries

Sussex University Library

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/

Members of the public can use the library at the University without borrowing books, just reading them in the building . As a "reference only" member all you need is proof of identity. This only takes a few minutes to set up there. There are "visitor access" computers for the public which gives some online services and information inside the library.

- ✓ Students attending Access courses in Sussex and Surrey colleges may be entitled to join the University of Sussex Library under reciprocal arrangements. People who are registered as a student elsewhere may also get some access.
- ✓ There are a range of membership options available for external users. For a subscription, external users can borrow books up to 5 at a time.
- ✓ People who have been students at the university can get alumni membership that includes access to resources remotely and discount on subscription.

Brighton and Hove Libraries

http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries

For a full list of other local libraries, follow the link below:

http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries/library-opening-times-and-contact-details

Accessible services in libraries

For a full list of Library services for people with disabilities, carers and other access needs, see link below:

https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries/accessible-services-libraries

Most local libraries have a special project called *Libraries Extra*. This provides access to the libraries even when they are unstaffed. Further information can be found on the link below:

http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries/libraries-extra

Using Computers and Computer Help

Info on free help with getting online and using computers with our Council Connect volunteers

https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries/using-computers-libraries

Enquiries

Although the libraries don't have subject specialists, they have an information hub so if the students have a complex enquiry they could speak to a member of staff. They also have a "Ask a librarian" service online, so people can ask a question remotely.

http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/leisure-and-libraries/libraries/ask-a-brighton-hove-librarian

The Keep Library

http://www.thekeep.info/visit_us/

Other resources, support and technology

Disability grants

http://www.disability-grants.org/

Dyslexia

Adult Dyslexia Organisation

http://www.adult-dyslexia.org/

British Dyslexia Association (BDA)

http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about

IT Support for Disabled People

Abilitynet (IT Support at Home - Free for Disabled People)

www.abilitynet.org.uk

https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/at-home/IT-support-for-disabled-people

Assistive Technology grants

http://www.disability-grants.org/assistive-technology-grants.html

The Jonathan Young Trust

https://jonathanyoungtrust.wordpress.com/

The Aidis Trust

http://www.aidis.org/

English Language Skills (Free workshops)
http://tinyurl.com/h3jgn58
http://tinyurl.com/za4zmjw
http://tinyurl.com/joplfns

Section 9: How to get feedback

Getting feedback on our work can often feel harsh, if not entirely disheartening. Yet, you should treat feedback as a *formative process* whose aim is to help us look back positively at our work to identify strengths and weaknesses. It is of course natural to feel somewhat depressed by negative comments, but this often prevents us from seeing the positive aspects of our work. Your tutors are dedicated to opening, not closing doors for you.

If any of our comments sound all too critical, that's often because of the impersonal nature of feedback, as it's difficult to tell *how* the markers say or mean what they write from the comments you read on the page. The best thing to do therefore is go to your tutors, and have an open conversation about your work with them. It is sometimes easy to forget or underestimate the emotional impact feedback has on you, as well as on your relationship with your tutors. Seeing them in person can therefore make all the difference in the world. There might also be areas of oversight on their part, make sure you point that out too!

After receiving your feedback orally and/or in writing, make sure you understand the good qualities of your work, and build on them, while also jotting down suggestions for further

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improvement so you can focus on those aspects of your work next time. Indeed, feedback could and perhaps should be understood as what Higher Education expert [Peter Knight](#) (2006: 1), calls '*feedforward*' to describe a gradual process of developing skills which involves 'improving performance on similar tasks in the future'.

It is equally important to bear in mind that feedback is best seen as an *ongoing process* rather than an isolated event! Feedback doesn't just happen when you receive comments on your oral/written work but during lectures, seminars, and the various meetings you will be having with your tutors. Most FUB tutors are happy to have a face-to-face discussion where the can explain the written feedback on your work in more detail, so do drop them a line to ask for that!

Finally, please make sure to familiarise yourself with the FUB's Learning Outcomes which are used as the main marking criteria for assessments (see 'Learning Outcomes' below, or page 4 of the FUB Guide). Knowing how you are being marked and what you are marked against is especially important and ensures transparency in terms of expectations from both sides.

Learning Outcomes/Marking Criteria

Please note that the following criteria are devised in such a way as to make the FUB's first year is supposed be equivalent to a first year at a conventional university in terms of level/standard.

Understanding, criticism, and argument
- ✓ Knowledge and understanding of a topic from a range of perspectives
- ✓ Ability to explain economic, social, political structures, processes, and power relations using theory to understand them
- ✓ Ability to develop and substantiate an argument on a given topic
- ✓ Ability to critically evaluate an argument or text

Writing and publication
- ✓ Ability to write clearly and critically on a given topic, whether for self-clarification, for other members of the course, or for publication

To conclude

Studying at can often feel like being thrown in at the deep end, or entering a sink or swim scenario. While there are pressures and stresses that are associated with doing something as challenging and demanding as being a student, it should by no means be or feel like a drag. It is a unique experience in our adult life, and should be fully savoured as such! To do so however requires preparing yourself in the various ways suggested above.

This will allow you to *experience* learning in all its splendour not simply as an individual pursuit, but as a partnership between yourself, your fellow students, and your FUB tutors. FUB belongs to us all, and needs us all to survive as a "space" which accommodates the making of a long-lasting relationship between people and ideas. English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth was right to suggest that poetry has the task to 'create the taste by which it is to be enjoyed', and this applies to University life too. The key to enjoying/appreciating your time at FUB is to create the conditions for it to flourish.

A quote

This is a quote from a favourite sociologist (Howard S. Becker), who in (Howard S. Becker) his book, *Writing for Social Scientists* Becker (1986: 176) advised students to:

'Finally, apply sociology's great liberating message to your own scholarly situation. Understand that the troubles you may have may have are not entirely your own doing, not the result of some terrible technical defect, but something built in to the organization of academic life. Then you will not blame yourself for what you haven't done. So the moral, Pollyannaish as it sounds, is Try it!'

A book

In addition to Stella Cottrell's (2013) *The Study Skills Handbook*, we would also recommend the following book as a good companion to Study Skills, especially as it is written in a clear, friendly, and engaging way.

A copy of the book can be found in the Hove library, but you can also contact Lambros Fatsis for PDF version of it.

http://tinyurl.com/jr6x75r

A useful reminder

Even creative geniuses, and famous writers as "fun" as Henry Miller followed a work schedule, why should you hesitate to do the same? Miller is known for his colourful life, and here's what allowed him to both live to the maximum and be a productive writer too! If there's a take-home message from this guide, this is it.

Work Schedule, 1932–1933
—Henry Miller Miscellanea

COMMANDMENTS

1. Work on one thing at a time until finished.
2. Start no more new books, add no more new material to "Black Spring."
3. Don't be nervous. Work calmly, joyously, recklessly on whatever is in hand.
4. Work according to Program and not according to mood. Stop at the appointed time!
5. When you can't *create* you can *work*.
6. Cement a little every day, rather than add new fertilizers.
7. Keep human! See people, go places, drink if you feel like it.
8. Don't be a draught-horse! Work with pleasure only.
9. Discard the Program when you feel like it—but go back to it next day. *Concentrate. Narrow down. Exclude.*
10. Forget the books you want to write. Think only of the book you *are* writing.
11. Write first and always. Painting, music, friends, cinema, all these come afterwards.

Study Skills Contacts

For more information, guidance and/or help with any of the above sections you can contact us and we will do our very best to help according to our area of relative expertise:

General Study Skills and Special Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

 Kate Bloor [kate.bloor1@btopenworld.com]

Essay Writing

Lambros Fatsis [Lambros.fatsis@gmail.com]

IT

Matt Lee [chinkoflight@gmail.com]

Timetable/List of upcoming Study Skills sessions