

Reading comprehension (worksheet)

(adapted from *The Cambridge CAE Course*, CUP 2000)

1 Using lexical and grammatical clues

Texts always contain words, groups of words and grammatical patterns that link up with other words or grammatical patterns in the text. They provide lexical or grammatical clues.

1.1 Below there is a gapped text followed by jumbled paragraphs; decide which paragraph belongs where and write the letter of the paragraph in the correct numbered gap. As you carry out this task, note down the strategies you use to do so and underline anything that gave you a clue to the answer. Later discuss your clues with a partner.

Schedule for passing the test of time

Andrew Northedge on the most vital skill to learn at college – managing your study time.

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I was vaguely committed to endless hours of work. I imagined that at some point I would spend weeks of intensive study.

1

Nevertheless, when I came to look back I realised he had studied more than anyone else I knew. Through sticking assiduously to a modest but well-defined, realistic plan, he had achieved a great deal. He had enjoyed work much more, too.

2

I was too inexperienced at looking after my own affairs to realise I was already failing one of the major tests of studenthood, the organisation of time. I thought that success in studying was to do with how brilliantly clever and original you were: I had yet to discover that one of the central challenges of adult life is time management.

At school the work timetable was defined for us and teachers made sure we fitted all that was required into the school year. At university I was at sea. Time came in great undifferentiated swathes. What to do with it all? With 168 hours in a week – or 105, allowing nine a day for sleeping and eating – how many was it reasonable to spend on study? Individuals vary and different subjects make different demands. Nevertheless with a target you can plan your studies, not just stumble ahead in hope.

Sticking to a modest but well-defined plan, he achieved a great deal

The sketchiest of weekly timetables, setting aside 40 hours to cover all study is an invaluable aid in defining time. Then you can divide it into segments and use it strategically, rather than let it dribble away.

3

I would sit in the library for a whole day, dipping into one book after another, often with glazed-over eyes. What was my purpose / how would I know when I had finished? Although my lecture notes weren't up to much, I could tell myself I had accomplished something, which would bring down my anxiety level.

4

Dividing big jobs into smaller sub-tasks helps to bring work under control, allows you to

set targets and check your progress. There is so much pressure to be ambitious – to go for the long dissertation, to read the huge tomes. Yet achievement arises out of quite modest activities undertaken on a small scale. The trouble with the big tasks is that you keep putting them off, their scope and shape is unclear and we all flee from uncertainty. The more you can define your work as small, discrete, concrete tasks, the more control you have over it.

5

There are few reliable guidelines. Essentially you have to keep circling round a self-monitoring loop; plan an approach to a task, try it out, reflect afterwards on your success in achieving what you intended and then revise your strategy.

6

A Three years later he sailed to his first while other friends struggled to very modest achievements. As I discovered when sharing his lodgings, he worked more or less to the plan he had outlined. He slept late in the mornings, only stirring himself if there was a lecture to attend. He played cards with the rest of us after lunch. Then he moved to his desk and stayed there until around seven. The evenings he spent more wildly than most, hence the late mornings.

B Organising tasks into the time available can itself be divided into strategy and application. It is useful to think of yourself as 'investing' time. Some tasks require intense concentration and need to be done at a prime time of day, when you are at your best and have time to spare. Others can be fitted in when you are tired, or as 'warm-up' activities at the start of a session. Some, such as essay writing, may best be spread over several days. Some need to be done straight away.

C Defining what to do is harder. Take the book lists. How many books are students expected to read? How long should a book take? It took me so long just to read a few pages that I felt defeated when I looked ahead. Should I take notes? How many? What would I need them for?

D Much later I discovered I could learn a great deal from close reading of selected sections; that taking notes could sometimes be very satisfying and at other times was not necessary. The trick was to take control: to decide what I wanted to find out – something specific – and then work at it until I had taken in enough to think about for the time being.

E He argued that it was not possible to work productively at intensive intellectual tasks for more than a few hours at a time. I aimed to do much more. But I was easily distracted. By the time it was apparent that stretches of a day had slipped away, I felt so guilty that I blotted studies out of my mind.

F It is extremely important to always keep to a rigid timetable of study. This is clearly demonstrated by his success and my paltry achievements.

G Once you start to think strategically, you begin to take control of your studies rather than letting them swamp you.

1.2 On the next page you can see the complete text with some of the clues circled (these link back or forward to something else in the text. Can you decide what they link to? If you take example 1, *Three years later*, "later" suggests a link back to a previous point in time – so you have to find this point earlier in the text.

2 Personal reflection on doing gapped text exercises

When you do a gapped text exercise do you think it is a good idea to (add any other tips you find useful):

- a read the text in detail beforehand?
- b work out the meaning of each word in the text?
- c try to understand the general meaning of the text?
- d always work through the text in order?
- e make final decisions on each gap as you do it?
- f underline clues?
- g look for one clue for each gap?
- h look for clues before and after each gap?
- i put arrows on the question paper between the paragraph and its probable gap?
- j read the text again from the beginning before you go on to each new paragraph?
- k
- l

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6.

8.

3 Gapped text 2

For questions 1-4 you must choose which of the paragraphs A-E match the numbered gaps in the newspaper article. There is one extra paragraph, which does not belong in any of the gaps.

THE FIRST few weeks of a university course can seem dangerously elusive and intangible. The initial euphoria of finding that you've got only 12 lectures a week and Fridays are free soon dissipates in the 10-page reading list. Lecturers will toss around conflicting ideas and a bewildering array of interpretations, where school teachers would lead you comfortably through the syllabus. And suddenly it's up to you to decide when, where, how much and even how to study.

1

"The important thing is to find out what's right for you. You should ask yourself am I a morning person or an evening person and for how long can I concentrate? Do I work best in my own room or in the library and what conditions do I need? You may work best with a bit of music or you may need perfect quiet. Working a nine-to-five day – filling in the chunks of time between lectures – suits some people, but others prefer working early in the morning."

2

In lectures it helps to develop an abbreviated style of note-taking. Ms Crookes says: "You need to ask yourself why you are taking notes. They should be a complement to listening to the lecture, recording the most important points, not a substitute for listening." It may also reinforce your understanding and memory of the lecture, if you go through the notes after each lecture, underlining key points and making summaries.

3

Tutorials and seminars provide the opportunity to get to grips with fundamental ideas, question and try out ideas that you could use in essays. But often it is wasted as people sit in embarrassed silence, thinking that their suggestion or idea is too silly to mention. Overcoming such shyness can be liberating not only for you, as you will usually find your idea is taken seriously, but also for other students who may be encouraged to express their views.

4

She says the best policy is to try to strike a balance between the two levels. "Most of the literature points towards deeper level learning being both more satisfying for the student and more successful at internalising the material but bear in mind that there are still games to be played. You've got to be very clear about what's required in exams and coursework and you should get hold of as many past exam papers as you can and talk to your lecturers to get pointers as to what's coming up in exams," she says.

Student poverty and overstretched libraries mean that obtaining books is likely to be one of your most persistent problems. Some libraries are limiting reservations for key texts to 24 hours per student, which makes it even more important to read effectively. It's a good idea to approach second-year students for second-hand textbooks. Some groups of friends pool book budgets and share books.

A Ms Loder has done a study in which she grouped students as surface-level and deeper-level learners according to the approach they took to studying and then compared their success rate in exams and coursework. "Most common was for the mid-line, deeper-level student to do well both in coursework and exams and surface-learners not to do so well. Surface-level learners could do well in exams if they were good at cue spotting and bending the lecturers' ears but in general they tended to get through but not to excel, mainly because they didn't take in broader ideas so well. However, some of the deeper-level students had big psychological problems with exams, because they didn't agree with the whole concept of exams," she says.

B It also helped if people were encouraged to volunteer for things they had a flair for and if they overcame their fear of giving the presentation of what the group had done. "Presentations are a very good way of reinforcing what you have learnt," she says.

C Many universities issue students with booklets on study skills and use of the library and you should ask your course co-ordinator, personal tutor or student counsellor for their advice. Effective reading is the key to success to both essay writing and exam performance and it starts with identifying clearly the question you are trying to answer. You need to find the most relevant books; use the index to find the relevant section and read selectively with the question in mind, picking out key passages, taking down notes and quotations. In essay writing, this needs to be married with a logical structuring of the answer, perhaps by labelling notes that go with each part of the argument.

D As the workload builds up, some students are gripped by a growing sense of panic. But Shirley Crookes, a counsellor at Warwick University, says that by paying careful attention to how you manage your time and realising that studying involves simple skills that can be learnt the situation can be defused. "You need to recognise there are 168 hours in a week and that you can work hard, play hard and relax in that time. It's a question of how to balance your use of time to get the full potential out of it," she says.

E Cari Loder, a lecturer in the Centre for Higher Education Studies at London University, says: "Researchers at Lancaster University have done a lot of work on how students learn and they are pushing the difference between surface-level learning and deeper-level learning." Surface-level learning is absorbing and retaining detail and being able to reproduce it later, deeper-level learning involves engaging with fundamental principles and adjusting your own beliefs accordingly.