

Associate Certificate course in Environmental Management Study Guide

Introduction

This guide aims to equip you with the skills you need to effectively study our course. The first section contains some key tips, which you will find useful to ensure you get the best out of your study time. The remainder of this guidance document contains more detailed information on specific areas of study technique.

Remember, there is an exam at the end of the course. If you think you will be able to simply read the course material and then pass the exam at the end, you will be disappointed. The exam is technically open-book, but with 10 questions (12 marks each) in 2.5 hours, you will need to revise if you are to be successful. Also remember that the exam is designed to test your *understanding* as well as your knowledge. You will need to apply your knowledge to a given situation in the exam question. Memorising facts verbatim will not be that useful. You should try to test your understanding as you progress through the course.

You should be able to apply the basic principles of learning that this guide suggests to each of your course modules. In this study guide we will help you to make the best use of your e-learning materials. The e-learning course on which you are enrolled has been developed to enable you to continue your training without the constraints of fixed times and places. You are in control of your learning and will have already made your first decision, what to study.

General Hints and Tips

To become an effective learner you will need to:

- Develop a habit of study.
 - Spread your studies in nice, manageable chunks. (e.g. 1-2 hours).
 - Make sure that you take regular breaks.
- Have a place to work.
 - Somewhere quiet and without distractions.
- Set aside times when you will not be interrupted.
- Make notes.
 - Good notes are critical to your success.
 - Read the course material.
 - Make notes.
 - Read your notes.
 - If you need to, read the course material again.
 - As your understanding grows, go back and add to your notes.
- File and store your notes in a way in which you will be able to retrieve the information you need.

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What is meant by learning?

Learning how to study is about learning how to think and how to learn. Below are some responses from undergraduates at a London University when they were asked the question “what is learning?”:

Learning as memorising

- *I learn by absorbing the information taught into my head. Learning is remembering things and avoiding repetitious mistakes.*

Learning as understanding

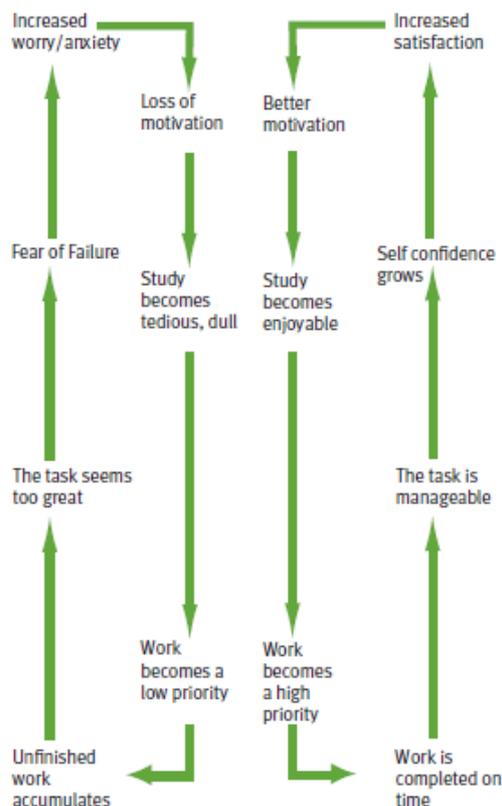
- *Learning is understanding the concept and knowing how to apply the knowledge that you understand.*
- *Learning is a process of self-development through which you can grow. When you've learnt something you gain confidence and wish to pass it on.*

Learning for personal development

- *Learning is the ability to obtain new scientific information and theories to connect subjects and acquire some skills of scientific thinking.*
- *Learning is increasing one's knowledge and understanding of the world. Learning enables us to progress further in life.*

Many factors can influence your ability to learn and it is important to understand those that affect you personally. The choices you make about how you study will affect how well you study.

What Influences Learning?



Source: *The Imperial Study Guide, Imperial College London.*

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Getting Organised

If you want to study successfully, you have to avoid distractions. While it's hard to escape the modern world, it is only for few hours or so at a time... so switch off your phone and concentrate on studying.

Whilst e-learning enables you to study at your own pace, many people find it difficult to develop a 'habit of study' because of the self-discipline that is needed. To help you overcome this problem and achieve your long-term aim of completing the course within a realistic period of time.

When will you study?

This will depend on your commitments. You must plan your time but be realistic. Part of being realistic is being flexible.

Some people prefer to study in the morning; others prefer the end of the day. You'll need to experiment a little and see what works best for you. Not matter what time it is make sure you are organised, alert and ready to learn.

It's very difficult to say how long it will take you to complete one lesson or section because so much depends on the subject matter and your previous experience. Work through each unit carefully and do not try to do it in long study sessions. A rough average would be 1½ to 2 hours for one session. This may serve as a guide when you are initially planning your time.

Try to get into a regular study routine but be prepared to give and take a bit. Remember that it is difficult for the average person to *really* concentrate for more than 20 minutes at a time, so break up your study sessions with short breaks.

Where will you study?

Some people can study anywhere, whilst will need a specific study space. Wherever you decide to study, try to minimise the distractions.

You will probably find it helpful if you do your studying in a place to which you have easy access on a regular basis. You will then associate that place with studying and be in the right frame of mind when you start.

Find somewhere that is:

- Convenient for you – it could be at work, at home or in a neutral place such as a library.
- Away from distractions – such as noisy children, TVs and noisy music.
- Comfortable – but not too comfortable! An upright chair and a table are ideal. Lying on the bed is not suitable.
- An ergonomic computer work station is needed for online study.

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It may be that changing where you study will bring better results. What area works best for you for effective studying? There is no right or wrong answer, as everyone is so different.

- You may have a study (or a spare bedroom that you can turn into a temporary study). If you are too remote from the rest of your household, you may feel isolated.
- A coffee shop can provide a stimulating community, background noise, relaxed atmosphere, wifi, and coffee! You can be unknown and unbothered, and easily turn off your mobile phone to avoid that distraction! However, you may be limited to opening times and there may be extra travel time required.
- Your bedroom/personal space can be convenient to fit your schedule, as well as have all your study materials at hand. Its comfort can be a mixed blessing if you take too many naps!
- Kitchens are conducive to studying, with good lighting and open space for all your materials. You also have nourishment at hand, but snack with fruit and vegetables to avoid heavy foods.
- Your living room can be great place to study with comfortable seating and enough space, but avoid the distractions or projects around the house. If you love watching the television, it may not be the best option for a study space.
- A library may offer a quiet environment, Wi-Fi, and even windows with a view! However, you may be limited to opening times and there may be extra travel time required.

How to study:

Time is precious and so it is important that you study effectively. To be an effective learner you need to use study skills, which include:

1. Efficient Reading
2. Concentration
3. Taking notes
4. Time Management
5. Memorising and Understanding
6. Revision
7. Examination Techniques

1. Efficient Reading

You will spend a great deal of your study time reading, memorising and we hope, understanding. You can improve your efficiency by adopting a strategic approach to reading a course unit.

A strategic approach involves reading in different ways for different purposes. These different ways are:

- Receptive Reading
- Search Reading
- Scanning
- Skimming

Receptive reading enables you to obtain a general understanding of what is being said. Your speed can be improved by practising reading against the clock but the reading will only become faster, not more meaningful.

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Search reading is the method used when you are searching for certain key words or phrases which help you locate specific information. Any words that are not closely related to what you are looking for need only a cursory glance.

Scanning is relevant when you know exactly what you are looking for. You are looking for a 'visual match', such as looking for the boiling point of water, 100°C.

Skimming can be used:

- To decide how to read a text, i.e. whether to read carefully, making detailed notes, or use it for search reading for information on a certain topic.
- To get a rough idea of what the lesson is about.
- To review something already read as revision for an exam or to refresh your memory.

Skimming is a useful skill which involves going through a text whilst making certain judgements and remembering only certain points. It is much faster than speed, at which you would carry out receptive reading.

You will find that the course is structured to help your reading strategy since they state at the beginning of each unit what you are aiming to achieve by the end of the lesson.

Academic Reading

Reading for academic work is not the same as reading a newspaper, magazine or fiction. You should be selective and focused, know what you're looking for, and be able to pick it out.

You do not want to waste your time reading lots of books or reports that aren't relevant. Keep the following questions in mind when you are reading:

1. **What** am I reading: what is the purpose of it? Am I looking for a specific fact, or instructions, or an overview of a topic?
2. Does the writer of the material tell me **why** I need to read it, or give me any 'signposts' about **how** to approach it? What are the author's important points? For example, looking at the contents list of a book should help you to decide which, if any, of the chapters will be helpful to you.
3. **When** was it written? If you want to read about developments in recent technology, and you read a book or article written in 2005, it won't be a good start.
4. **How** should I read? Quickly, slowly, to find some key pieces of information, or to be critical? How thoroughly do you want to understand this material, and why? Evaluate the text – don't believe all you read without argument or evidence.
5. **How much** do I need to remember? **How** can I remind myself later of the most important points?

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2. Concentration

Concentrating is easy when you are so absorbed in what you are doing that you are unaware of time passing, but it is difficult to sustain that level of concentration. The length of time for which you can concentrate depends on your enthusiasm, your skill, your emotional and physical state, and your surroundings. When you are reading, you need to actively question. Some ideas to help with concentration are given below:

- **Mental warming up** Decide on time limits, decide what to study first, get yourself comfortable.
- **Sustaining concentration** Physically loosen up: stand up, walk around, and mentally recharge.
- **Time for ideas** Why not let your ideas sort themselves out while you watch the sunset?
- **Losing concentration?** Try to recognise when you cannot go any further. Stop and relax.

3. Taking Notes

You can develop your own note taking system and study strategy with the five "R's" of note-taking:

1. Record
2. Reduce
3. Recite
4. Reflect
5. Review

1. Record:

- Identify the main points.
- Capture the main ideas.
- Use outlines or concept maps.
- Use words and pictures and graphs or whatever it takes to get the information down quickly. Avoid quoting unless it is very necessary.

2. Reduce:

- Summarize: key/cue words, phrases, questions.
- Link to information from your course material or other sources that helps you understand or study the material

3. Recite:

- Talk out loud!
- Review from memory what you have learned.
- Using the left hand margin's key words and questions, talk through, or illustrate definitions, concepts, etc.
- Create your own examples.

4. Reflect: Think over!

- How does this relate to what you knew before?

5. Review the notes you took

- At your next study session
- Before reading new material
- When studying for tests
- Make notes on your "notes page"

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Good note-taking is essential for managing the information in the course. There are a number of different note-taking techniques, and you may find it's effective to use different techniques depending on the information you need to record.

To make effective notes, it's worth thinking about why you need to make them. Most people would say you make notes to remember things. That's true, but there are many other reasons:

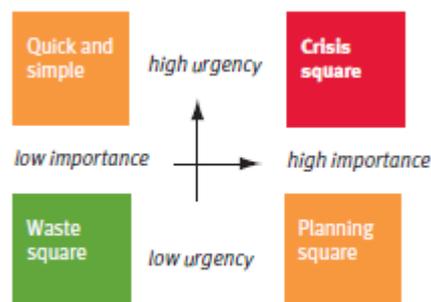
- To be able to review topics
- To understand what you've read/heard/learnt
- To make sense of difficult theories, concepts, methodologies, techniques, skills etc.
- To help you to focus on the topic you are reading/ hearing about
- To link between readings
- To record questions, further investigation, thoughts and opinions on what you've read/heard/learnt
- To keep control of information
- To reinforce what you've learnt.

Good practice:

- Write legible notes; give yourself space; underline.
- Use abbreviations.
- Write quotations in a different colour from your own words.
- Use your own words to write about what you read – this is good paraphrasing practice, and will help you to explain difficult ideas more easily. Saying them yourself helps understanding.

4. Time Management

Planning how to spend your time will help you to enjoy learning, and to cope better when it is difficult to study. Learning how to manage and allocate your time is an important skill to develop and will enable you to make the best of your experience here. Do allocate some time every week to monitor your workload and plan ahead. Sticking to a sensible study/time plan will enable you to keep track of coursework deadlines, prioritise your work and find the time to support your course material by revision and extended reading. It will also enable you to find a good balance between work and play. There are several common methods of doing this: some students choose to keep wall charts, others keep diaries; some students use lists and others personal organisers. Experiment to find out which method suits you – there is no best system.



This diagram is a guide for you to assess how important and/or urgent your tasks are in order to start to plan your time effectively. A job in the top right hand corner obviously requires more attention than one in the bottom left. Note that the mere passage of time moves items to the crisis square!

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How should I organise my time?

- **Find out what you have to do for the course** and find out how to perform well in your exams, not just pass (this invariably means reading beyond your course notes).
- **Experiment** and think about your study habits.
- **Relax** – when you have some free time, allow yourself to relax and forget about work, knowing that you have timetabled this period and you don't have to feel guilty.
- **Take planned breaks** – experiment to find the best way to do this.
- **Look at course objectives** to see how they fit in with your own personal objectives – work out what you want to achieve from your course.
- **Plan your week**, taking into account your own preferred study habits.
- **Try to plan ahead for the term or even the year**, allowing leeway for colds, illnesses etc.

5. Memorising and Understanding

Efficient study involves some memory work. You may need to memorise, for example, the names of pieces of legislation or the stages in a process.

Memory work can be easier if you:

- Have a good clear purpose for any memory work you undertake.
- Make sure you understand what a section means before you memorise.
- Only memorise what is relevant.
- Split up a task into manageable chunks.
- Relate what you are learning to something you know - 'associate'.
- Look for a pattern in what you are going to memorise. Rhymes and mnemonics will help.
- Distinguish between what you need to remember in the long term and short term.
- Keep repeating the points you are memorising.

To understand you need to:

- Remember things.
- Go back frequently over what you have learned.
- Learn new information with the old.
- Look for underlying principles and ideas.
- Be actively involved in learning (asking questions and thinking).

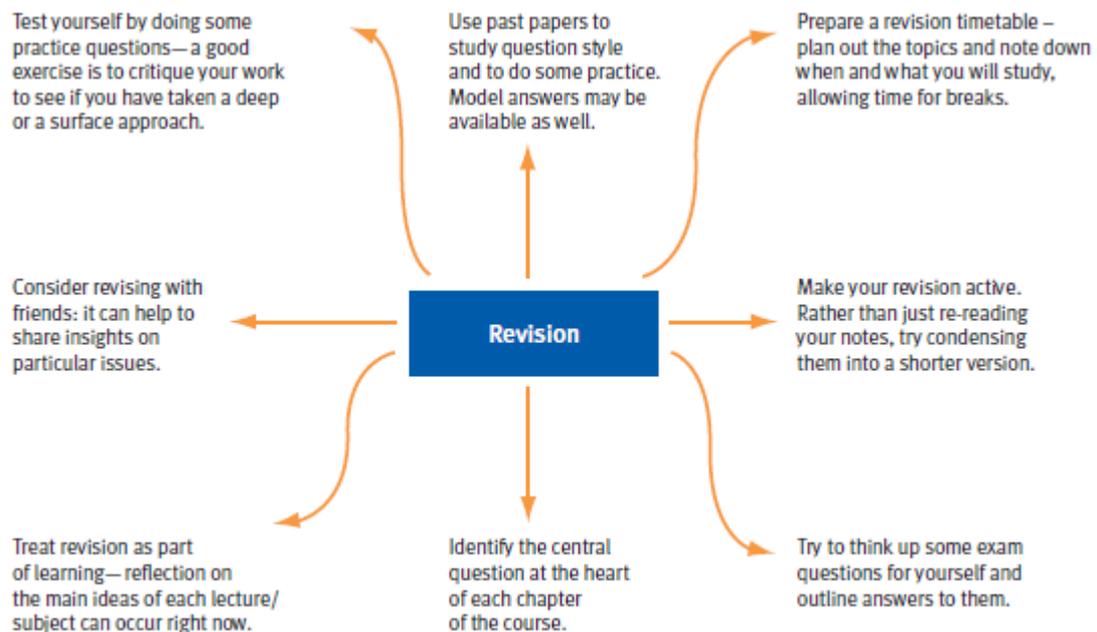
You are likely to do much of your studying alone, but if you need the opportunity to discuss your work with someone else, then do so. You have an allocated tutor. You can often clarify your own understanding by trying to articulate questions and explanations to a sympathetic listener and by participating in the forums we have produced.

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6. Revision

Do not forget that at the end of your course there is an exam!

The word that immediately follows on from 'exams' is 'revision'. This is what exams mean to most students. Long nights of cramming in as much of the course as possible, writing crib notes and taking them everywhere with you. All manner of creative solutions are used by students during the last few days of preparation for exams. The methods used by students to survive times of stress are many and varied. However, it is best to avoid leaving the majority of work until the last minute; the following chart provides useful hints and tips which aim to help you to prepare for your examinations.



Source: *The Imperial Study Guide, Imperial College London.*

7. Exam Technique

Please refer to our additional guidance document, specifically on exam technique.

To all our delegates ... Good luck with your studies!