

## **GETTING STARTED WITH ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING**

One of the most exciting things about studying is the wide range of students who are studying throughout the world at the same time as you. The CILT (UK) reaches people across continents and the materials have been updated to incorporate the latest thinking in the various disciplines. Some of you may have left school without any qualifications, whilst others may have formal qualifications. What follows may be completely new to you, or some of it may already be well-known.

So we will start with something really practical – a place to study.

### **Space, place and equipment**

Identify a place or places where you can study comfortably and in peace and quiet. Remember that you will be studying via the internet, but may also be reading other materials, and you will need to take notes. In an ideal world you would have your own private place and a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door. In reality, this may be more difficult. Whatever the case, you should be planning to work out a practical solution.

At a minimum, make sure you have somewhere to keep your work safe, secure and backed up – this includes your notes. Set up a separate folder on your system and ensure it is backed up regularly.

### **Planning your time and tasks**

You have made a major commitment of time to work on this qualification, on top of your military studies. You have committed yourself to putting time aside for the duration of the course, although we realise that some students read more quickly than others and some have more opportunity for intensive study than others. You may well have to juggle your time to provide you with a study slot in which your other daily commitments do not become overwhelming. Here are some suggestions to help you organise your time and tasks:

Plan your work well, and ensure that you make a note of agreed deadlines with your tutor. Whatever method you use, planning will always help you achieve these deadlines!

### **Planning your life**

Discuss the course with your family and friends so that they know what to expect (and not what to expect) from you. Let them know how important the course of study is to you and get their support. In practice, there may be some challenges, but it is only fair to others and yourself to be up front in expressing your needs.

## **Set a specific task**

As a CILT (UK) student you will have to manage yourself and learn how long it takes you to do a given task or work through a particular length of text. Some typical study tasks that you can define for yourself and then allocate to your work time include the following:

- Read one or more sections of a chapter and take notes
- Read one section of this study guide
- Sort out your files and notes from the week's study
- Plan your assignment

Note that, if you have planned a particular task in advance, even a very short half-hour slot can be very effective.

## **Work out when you work best**

Test out the time of day that you can most effectively study. This needs to take account of your own aptitude as well as the needs of others and the presence of distractions. Many of us are most effective early in the morning, while convenience might push us into working last thing at night. All we can advise is that you try out alternatives and see which works best for you.

## **You are not alone: using your support network**

As a student of the CILT (UK), a lot of your time may be spent alone reading or working on your computer. However, no matter how much support you are getting from family at home or from interested friends and colleagues, there comes a point when they don't want to talk to you, or can't talk to you, about that issue in one of the units that is really bugging you. Give them a break and think about the other people who really do want to talk to you about that particular issue – there are people in the CILT (UK) to help you.

## **Your Tutor**

Your tutor is there to help you on issues surrounding your distance learning. They are your main link with the CILT (UK) as well as the person who marks your tasks. If there are any queries that they cannot answer they will contact the CILT (UK) on your behalf and provide an answer. Tutors expect to have students contacting them and are well aware of the sorts of challenges they will face from time to time. You contact your tutor through the learning system, and can expect an answer within agreed times.

The Operations Director is there to help you on an administrative basis.

## **Other students**

You may not meet the other students face to face, though you could well meet them on-line. This will give you the opportunity to interact with your peers and provide focus and support for on-line discussions.

#### **4.1. Active reading.**

As with any other study, you will spend a lot of time reading. This section suggests ways in which you might get the most out of this essential reading experience. The sort of material that you are being asked to read on this module may be quite different from what you are used to reading. In addition, reading from a computer screen is different from reading paper-based materials. You will be asked to:

- Read material that is in an academic style
- Read material that may be more difficult than you are used to

You may find this challenging at times, but as you work through this section of the guide, reading and remembering what you have read will become less difficult.

You might be asking why we have included a section on active reading. The answer is that *active* reading is very different from ordinary reading. Perhaps you already read for example - newspapers, novels, travel guides. But *active* reading requires that you engage with what you are reading, and this is essential for supplementary reading.

Active reading requires you to inter-act with the material that you are reading. Basically this means that you are doing something yourself in addition to reading it in the ordinary sense of the word; you might be asking questions about the material, or thinking through the implications of what you are reading, or picking out what is really important for the argument, or identifying the different stages of the argument.

This active engagement with what you read will help you to understand and remember what you are reading. If you are reading 'passively' you will understand less and remember little of what you have read. How many times have you felt that way about a newspaper article or book that you have read? As you develop the skill of active reading, you will start to read and learn effectively.

#### **4.2 Stages of active reading**

Bates, (2000) suggests a staged approach to active reading that she calls SQ3R. This stands for 'scan & skim, question, read, remember, review'.

SQ3R: five steps to better reading

##### *Step 1: Scan and skim*

Scan and skim a piece of text (paragraph, page or longer) – look at it quickly, notice headings, pictures, images, key words – try to get an overall impression.

### *Step 2: Question*

Make up some questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why? Read any questions provided.

### *Step 3: Read*

Read the text carefully. Try to read in a relaxed, focused and fairly speedy way. Don't agonise over difficult words or ideas. Do not make any notes.

### *Step 4: Remember*

Test your memory – but don't worry if you can't remember much. Jot down some points without looking at the text.

### *Step 5: Review*

Read the passage again, making notes where necessary.

Use your own words as much as possible – look away from the text and imagine that you are trying to explain it to a friend, but don't be too informal.

## **4.3 Written notes**

Written notes are particularly helpful for when you read the module notes and come to do an assessment. This is because taking notes forces you to think about what you are reading and, for essays, what you are going to write down. It seems like hard work at the time, but it pays off in the end because it forces you to delve further into the meaning of the text and this adds to your knowledge and understanding.

In summary note taking helps you to:

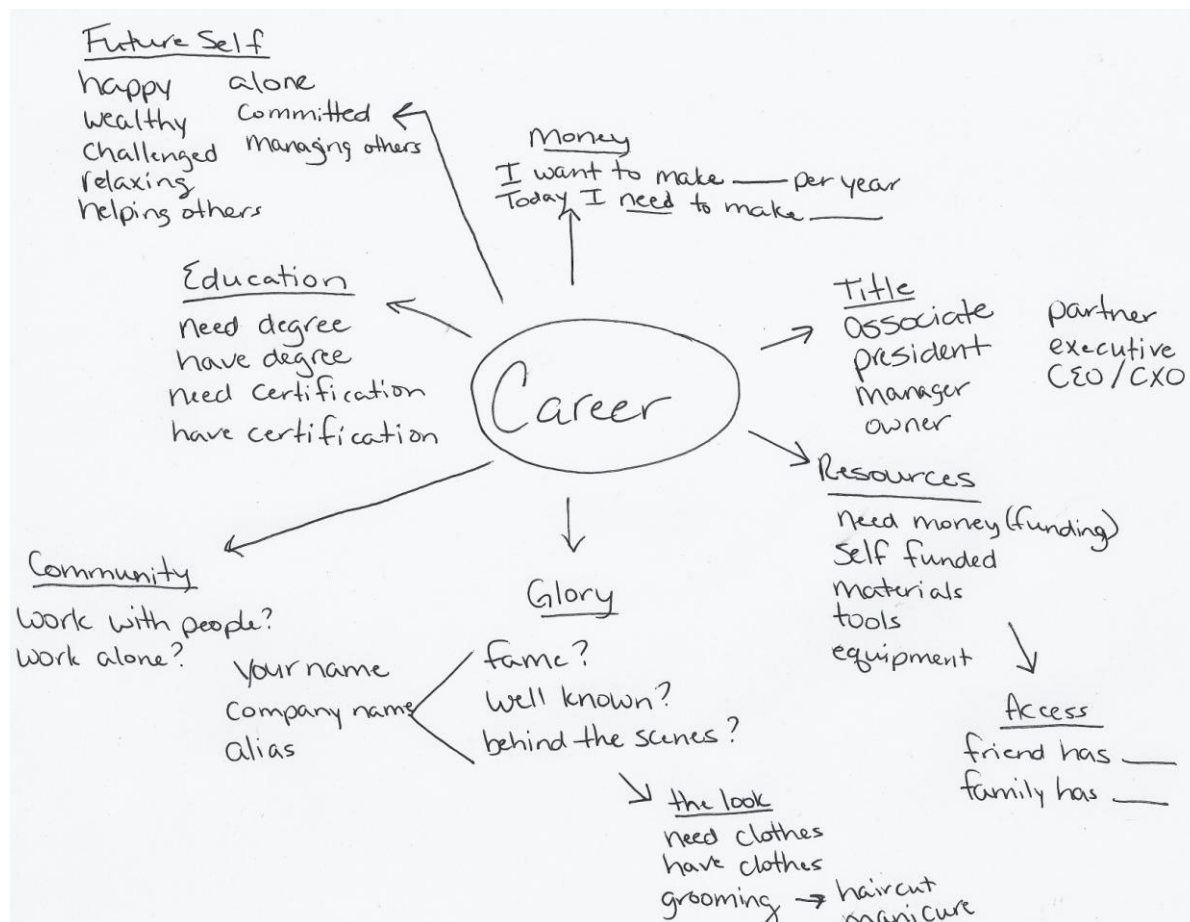
1. understand a topic by going back over it and writing it in your own words
2. remember facts, key concepts, important dates, and formulae
3. record any questions or further thoughts about a topic
4. arranging a lot of information into manageable chunks
5. see how much progress you have made by showing how much work you have done
6. bring together ideas to do an assignment
7. summarise a section of the module.

Although you may think that the points above are useful for a printed book, they are just as applicable for on-line and reading on-screen.

## **4.4 Mind maps**

Another way of thinking about the different steps involved in active reading is to construct a mind map. This is a form of note taking, but a much more visual and flexible form which allows you to extract and highlight particular ideas and to make links between such ideas. You can see an example of a mind map regarding career development below.

Once this is down on a piece of paper – or on the screen, it's then possible to use arrows to link related issues. Many people find such forms of visual note taking more creative as they can spark off inter-relationships between different issues.



In taking notes you are identifying key points or issues. A further step you may wish to take is to develop your notes into a summary. This would involve rewriting the notes in your own words using complete sentences, perhaps using direct quotes from the text. Importantly, if you are directly quoting someone, it is necessary to note down their name, the year of publication you are drawing on, and the page of the actual reference. Acknowledging the source of the quotation in this way is an important part of report writing.

I wish you every success in your studies, and remember there are people to help you – your tutor, the office, the Knowledge Centre of CILT (UK) and other forums and faculties.

References:

Bates, D. (2000) *Reading and Note Taking*, Student Toolkit 4, Milton Keynes, The Open University.