



Study Skills

for the **certificate in christian discipleship**

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What is your learning style? Do you know? Why should you?

Knowing your learning style can be very helpful – it can tell you what ways you learn most easily, and where you might need to apply a bit more effort.

The easiest (and possibly least scientific) way of determining your learning style is to imagine the situation in which you are about to begin putting together a piece of flat packed furniture.

What do you do first?

- Find the instructions, and go make a cup of tea while you read them thoroughly
- Find the instructions, count all the bits and pieces, make sure you have all that you need in the way of tools, then read the instructions while looking at all the parts
- Begin putting the furniture together, referring to the instructions when/if you need to



The interesting thing is that in almost any group of people, you will find a mix of the above styles, yet they are all solutions *to the same problem*: getting a group of disparate parts to become a bed or bookcase. The important point is that here, as with learning styles, there is no one “right way” to do things.

The fact is that different people learn differently: some are happiest learning from books, others need to get their hands dirty and try things out. In the course we try to cater for all learning styles, but inevitably, you will have to “come out of your comfort zone” at times and learn in a style that is not the one you prefer. This does not mean that you will not learn: it does mean that you might have to spend a bit more time or energy learning in a different style. However, learning in a range of styles is a very useful skill to acquire.

Assess your Learning Style

The chart on the next page helps you determine your learning style; read the word in the left column and then answer the questions in the successive three columns to see how you respond to each situation. Your answers may fall into all three columns, but one column will likely contain the most answers. The dominant column indicates your primary learning style.

When you..	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic & Tactile
Spell	Do you try to see the word?	Do you sound out the word or use a phonetic approach?	Do you write the word down to find if it feels right?
Talk	Do you sparingly but dislike listening for too long? Do you favour words such as <i>see, picture, and imagine</i> ?	Do you enjoy listening but are impatient to talk? Do you use words such as <i>hear, tune, and think</i> ?	Do you gesture and use expressive movements? Do you use words such as <i>feel, touch, and hold</i> ?
Concentrate	Do you become distracted by untidiness or movement?	Do you become distracted by sounds or noises?	Do you become distracted by activity around you?
Meet someone again	Do you forget names but remember faces or remember where you met?	Do you forget faces but remember names or remember what you talked about?	Do you remember best what you did together?
Contact people on business	Do you prefer direct, face-to-face, personal meetings?	Do you prefer the telephone?	Do you talk with them while walking or participating in an activity?
Read	Do you like descriptive scenes or pause to imagine the actions?	Do you enjoy dialog and conversation or hear the characters talk?	Do you prefer action stories or are not a keen reader?
Do something new at work	Do you like to see demonstrations, diagrams, slides, or posters?	Do you prefer verbal instructions or talking about it with someone else?	Do you prefer to jump right in and try it?
Put something together	Do you look at the directions and the picture?		Do you ignore the directions and figure it out as you go along?
Need help with a computer application	Do you seek out pictures or diagrams?	Do you call the help desk, ask a neighbour, or growl at the computer?	Do you keep trying to do it or try it on another computer?

Adapted from Colin Rose(1987). Accelerated Learning.

<http://www.chaminade.org/inspire/learnstl.htm>

Taking and making time



It must be said that there is no way you can undertake this level of study without readjusting some parts of your life. It may be that you forgo TV one night a week, or turn off the computer games early... Your study will be much better, and much less stressful if you get into a routine early on and keep to it.

There will be times you need to devote more time to study – usually in the days/weeks before an assignment is due. However, if you are in the routine of study already, this won't pose too much of an issue for you.

Don't leave preparation for your essays till the week before they are due.

Enlisting support

If you can, enlist the support of family members and friends. Make it known, for instance, that on Tuesday evenings you will be out at class and on Thursday evenings you will be studying – ask people not to phone or visit on those evenings unless it's really necessary. (You may also find that friends, colleagues, etc. are useful sources of information or even books!).

Reading academic texts is a specialised art form: it obviously has some things in common with ordinary reading, but it is not the same as, say, reading a novel or reading a newspaper. In fact, it has more to do, in some ways, with reading a magazine in the dentist's office (though without the prospect of drilling to come...).

When faced with a book list, or even a single book, it is not necessary to read the whole thing. Some books you may wish to do so later, but most you will not need to do so.

Survey the book

- read the contents list – this is especially helpful if it's an annotated one
- flick through the pages and assess how the author/publisher has laid it out e.g. are there section headings within chapters? If so, what are they?
- Decide which chapters/sections look most relevant and make a note of the page numbers
- If you are reading more than one book – move on at this point. You may find the next one you open is far more useful

Question the Book

- What's the author's apparent standpoint – e.g. does s/he have an axe to grind? Do I have an axe to grind? Am I looking for support for an opinion I already hold?
- What's the author's standpoint in terms of approach to the topic and do I find this helpful
- Is it a recent book – is the scholarship up to date? Or it a classic?
- N.b. you are allowed to disagree with a book/author! Try to get a little objective distance from any book.

Read the relevant book(s)/passage(s) more carefully

Take Fuller Notes

- having decided which are the best book(s) for the assignment topic go back and take fuller notes (see below) before deciding how to use this material in your assignment

Review how this will fit in with the argument you are developing.

- Does it support your argument?
- Does it disagree with your argument? (This doesn't mean you have to ditch it – if they make a good point well you could say e.g. "However, Joe Bloggs makes the challenging point that... (précis his argument)" Then you will need to succinctly rebut this and thereby strengthen your own position (see below)
- Decided if you are going to refer to it.
- Avoid plagiarism (see Participants' Manual) – if the book is more than a general influence then reference it.

TYPES OF NOTES

The three most commonly used types of notes are:

1. Summary notes These are a mini version of the material itself. Written in proper sentences, they have the appearance of a hand-written narrative. Most students tend to adopt this style when making notes and, if not careful, end up re-writing whole chapters!



2. Skeleton notes Many people make these rough, brief notes when trying to take down their tutor's words in the class. They use abbreviations, numbering, underlining, indentation of phrases and other such devices to speed up their notation and make the notes easier to re-read. These students are therefore beginning to select what is essential and to ignore what is mere flesh on the bones of an argument. They are also aware that the layout of the notes is important.

3. Diagrammatic notes Fewer students have heard about diagrammatic methods of note-making. These are variously described as spray diagrams, concept-tree systems, patterned notes and, most famously by Tony Buzan, as Mind Maps. These are the kinds of notes which force you to engage with your material, to think about it and to put into your own words the most important ideas which the writer/speaker is trying to convey.

This typology applies to all note taking, but here we will concentrate on notes taken from written sources.

One thing you must decide on from the outset, in terms of taking notes from books, journals, etc., is whether or not you will take notes verbatim (word for word) or make a précis of them. There will be times you wish to do both but you need to have some way of distinguishing for yourself which is which. If you usually make a précis of material, then simply putting anything verbatim in quotes will be enough.

This is important because in the course of your work you may wish to cite an author's own words, or you may end up looking at your notes wondering whether that good turn of phrase was yours, or in the original source!

Everyone is different and therefore few people take notes in the same way.

The important thing, however, is to ensure that your notes are useful to you, in a month, three months, a year or a decade!

Ways of keeping Information

There are a number of ways of keeping data about and from your sources; they may well be more than those listed below. There is no one, right way to keep this information. What is important is that you can find what you need quickly and easily, and that you can update the information easily. There is no point in setting up a beautiful system which is so elaborate that you can not use it easily (and therefore, don't use it at all).

Paper based systems



One of the easiest ways to keep information is simply on index cards. These have the advantage over notebooks, etc., due to their ability to be shuffled around - you can keep them in whatever order (alphabetical by author, by subject, etc.) suits you. You might use different coloured cards for journal articles, books, etc. You can also

keep a few with you most of the time – it's amazing where you find information you want to record..

Electronic systems

There are a number of ways to keep information on a computer.

Perhaps the easiest is just in a table, in a Word document. Set up a table that contains the headings you need, and enter information as it comes to you. You can then sort the table according to your need at any one time.

You can also keep the same sort of information in Excel, (but beware of Excel's habit of trying to add up numbers or do other things with them - ensure that your dates remain dates and do not become sums!)

Access, or other database programmes, offer more leeway in what you can do with the information after it is stored on computer.

There are also specialist bibliographic programmes (most of them proprietary, that is, you have to pay for them) available. Some of these (such as EndNote) will allow you to put information directly from the programme into essays, etc., saving you the time and effort of creating bibliographies. It may be possible to purchase EndNote or other programs more cheaply through the university CHEST system, than would otherwise be the case. Contact the Information Services Department for more information.

What to keep and how to find it

No matter how you choose to keep your notes, there is some information which will always need to be recorded.

This will obviously include as much information as possible about the source (author, date, title, place of publication, publisher, editor, etc – see the section on references). However, if you are going to find a specific bit of information, you will need to have some means of doing so... you need some sort of index. Otherwise,



you may spend more time searching through your notes than you did in taking them in the first place – which means they are more of a hindrance to you than a help.

This could be something as simple as writing a word or two at the top of the index card on which you record the information – just, “Trinity” or “Bible” or whatever general subject you are reading about. (I would suggest then filing these by subject rather than author, but that’s because my mind works that way – yours may not).

If you are using a notebook to keep your notes, this becomes a bit more difficult – it would be rare for a source to only have information about one subject.

You could keep notes about different subjects in different notebooks, but you might find this more cumbersome than helpful after a while! It is easier to write the general subjects covered at the top of the notebook pages (or down the side or at the bottom...).

Electronic systems are in many ways easier – you can simply add a column to a table in a word processing document, or a field to one in a database, and enter subjects there. This has the ability of allowing you to get the computer to search for information for you, rather than having to do it yourself!

References

It is very important that you begin as you mean to go on: keep *all* information about the things you read, the sources you use, and the ideas you have. You may well wish to return to books or ideas at a later date: the easier it is to find them, the easier your life will be! I've included this under the title of "referencing" on the grounds that you'll need to tell your tutors what books you've read to support your writing, and doing it the same way every time saves time and effort for everyone. But it's a very good idea to keep this information about everything you read, whether you intend to cite it as a source or not.

Each section has a simple list of information which should be kept about each kind of source material.

Not every field will be filled in for each source you come across - not all books are parts of series, for instance. However, the more you can fill in, the better.

You may wish to set up some system for keeping this information - suggestions for this are made later on.

Items are separated into those which you should keep (for writing purposes) and those which you might wish to keep, for your own convenience (*these are in italics*).

Books

- Author(s)
- Title (Keep ALL the information about the title; this includes any subtitles)
- Date of publication (first date of publication, and the date of the publication of the edition of the book you are using, if they differ)
- City
- Publisher
- Edition
- Reprint number (There is rarely any need to have this information, but it's not a bad idea to keep it!)
- Volume number
- Series
- Series Editor
- Translator
- *ISBN number (useful if you wish to buy the book)*
- *Where you obtained it (library, borrowed, you own it - you might be surprised how often people buy books they already own!)*
- *Keywords (this allows you to search for all the books in which you have found information about, for instance, Biblical Theology)*
- *Notes (any notes you might like to make about the book, other than the above - including whom you have loaned it to!)*
- *Uses (used in a particular piece of work, for example)*

Example of the text when citing a book:

Author, (date of publication) Title (or *Title in Italics – it doesn't matter which, just be consistent!*), Place of publication, Publisher

Cf: Armstrong, K. (2000). The battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hammersmith, London, HarperCollins Publishers.

Journal/Magazine/Newspaper Articles

- Author(s)
- Year
- Title
- Journal
- Volume
- Date
- Number (Issue)
- Pages
- Original publication (if this article has been published before)
- *Where you obtained it*
- *Keywords*
- *Notes*
- *Uses*
- *URL (remember to include date of access)*

Example of the usual text:

Author, (date), "Article title in quotes", Journal, etc. Title Or, again, in italics, volume number, issue number, page(s)

Cf: Burack, E. (1999). "Spirituality in the workplace." Journal of Organizational Change Management **12:04**: 280 - 291.

Book Section (chapter)

Everything as for Books, with the addition of:

- Chapter author
- Chapter title
- Chapter pages

Example of the usual text:

Author of article, (date), Title of article (or in quotes) Title of book or again in italics, Book author(s), Place of publication, Publisher, pages of article (what pages it's on in the book).

Cf: Astley, J. (1992). Growing into Christ: The psychology and politics of Christian maturity. The contours of Christian education. J. Astley and D. Day. Great Wakering, McCrimmon Publishing Co. Ltd.: 307 - 322.

Electronic source (website)



It almost goes without saying that you won't be able to find all of this information for every web site; but the more of it you can find, the better. The more information there is, the more likely you will be to find it again, and the more likely anyone reading your work will be to be able to find it. Often URLs change as people reorganise their sites, so knowing the title, etc. will help find it should that happen. Including the date you accessed the page is helpful, in case the page is no longer there when your work is read! (If you think information on a page is very important/interesting, it's a good idea to save it, as pages **do** disappear).

- Author
- Year
- Title
- Producer
- Access date (day, month, year)
- Last update (this can sometimes be found on the page)
- URL

Example of usual text:

Author, date, Title of webpage, date you accessed the page, URL
Leo XIII, 1879, Aeterni Patris, access date 14 August, 2000, URL
www.listserv.aremican.edu/catholic.church/papal.html

Resources

As you go through your studies, you will do a great deal of reading and thinking.

Valuable as this is in itself, it will be of even greater value if you are able to retrieve the information you glean/create in this process; the following pages suggest ways in which you might begin to do this.



Other people

Try and keep a list, mental or otherwise, of who you could call on in different situations. It may be that all you need from a particular person is a pointer toward other resources. Most people are more than flattered to be asked to help!

As a step toward this, try and think of three areas where *you* could be a resource for others:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Can you think of three other people you might call on, for different things?

1. (name, for what?)
2. (name, for what?)
3. (name, for what?)

Books, etc.

The world seems to be full of books, with more written seemingly every minute. In any course of study, you may well find that books attach themselves to you, every time you walk into a bookstore. You have been warned....

However, not all books are created equal, and there are a number of things to consider when selecting sources.

- ♦ Do you have time to read it? Many of us have bookshelves full of things “waiting to be read”.
- ♦ Do you need to read it all? Almost certainly not – be selective in your reading, as we looked at last time.
- ♦ Is this the right book, journal, magazine? Does it actually have the information you need?
- ♦ Is it a reputable source? This is a very difficult and grey area: one person’s reputable source is another person’s trash. However, there are some general pointers which might help:
 - ♦ Who is the author? Do they have any qualifications for writing about this subject? That information should be available in the book or on the back cover
 - ♦ Have you or someone you trust read things by this author before and found them useful?
 - ♦ If it is giving information, does it tell you where the information comes from? (Citations, footnotes, etc.).

Electronic sources

Again, the same issue arises: what do you do with all this information? One suggestion is to treat electronic sources exactly as you treat print resources: however you file information from books, make it a point to do the same with information from the internet or other resources. Also, make good use of your “favourites” folder in your web browser; don’t just save names of sites, give the sites names which will remind you of why you saved them in the first place!

Planning the Assignment

Writing

This is perhaps the most difficult, and the most personal, part of the entire process.

There is no one, right way to go about producing written work. What is given below is a series of suggestions which might make things easier: as always, the watchwords are adapt, adapt, adapt!

Beginning the process

For a lot of people, this is the most difficult bit of the entire process. The suggestions below are in no particular order: use those that seem to work for you!

- ♦ **READ THE QUESTION.** When you have done that, read the question again. Make sure you know what the question is asking *before* you begin to think about how to answer it.
- ♦ Don't stare at a blank piece of paper or computer screen. Write SOMETHING, even if it is only the date and the title
- ♦ It is far better to do *something*, even if you are not entirely happy with the result, than to do nothing. Once you have something on paper, you will feel more confident about your work, and you will have something to go back and work on.

Dealing with research information

Having done all the research for your essay, how do you make sense of it?

- ♦ Divide the writing to be done into sections – label the sections – put these down on your paper. Fill in anything you know or might want to say about the sections under the heading. Don't worry about any particular order, you can do that later. Include any sources that might be helpful (including people!).
- ♦ Once you have done that, you can start putting the things you have found out or planned to say, under different headings. You can do this in a number of different ways.
 - ♦ Make a mind-map of what you know/want to say about the subject or the individual areas, and add information on the branches
 - ♦ Don't be afraid to play with your research information – make notes that are **not** your originals (which you will want to keep), and cut them up, move them around, till you have them in an order which pleases you. Use different colours of paper or pens or highlighters, if it helps you decide what you want to do.
- ♦ Remember this process, as you write – it will give you your “narrative thread” that runs through the essay. Even if you are not using section headings, you

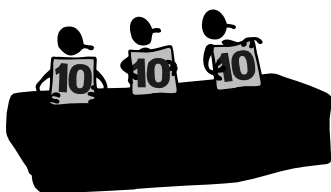


can still guide the reader by “signposting” – that is, saying things such as, “So we can see that we’ve arrived at the conclusion that...”.



During the writing

- ♦ **READ THE QUESTION AGAIN.** Make sure what you are writing actually answers the question, rather than something else that has taken your interest.
- ♦ If possible, set aside a specific time and place to do your work. It may be the kitchen table while everyone else is watching Coronation Street: the point is that you know that *this* is the time and place.
- ♦ Never throw anything away. If you have an idea, a paragraph, a page, that doesn't fit in with what you are doing now, file it somewhere. You may well want it later!
- ♦ Be ruthless about what belongs in your work. Reread what the work is supposed to be about. Does what you are writing actually fit in with the instructions/title given? If not, take it out (but save it, see above).
- ♦ SAVE YOUR WORK. If you are handwriting it, put it away carefully. (That sounds obvious but accidents happen). If you are using a computer, back it up on a disk or cd. Email it to yourself at work. As with anything related to computers: if you don't back it up, you don't care about it. If you care about it, take the time to back it up.
- ♦ If you are using a computer, set it to automatically save every five minutes: that way, you never lose more than that amount of work. Hit Control+S every time you hit the return key to form a new paragraph: that will save your work.
- ♦ Ensure your software is set to save your work every so often – every five or ten minutes.
- ♦ Reread what you have written as you go along. While you do need to be critical of it, see what should and should not be there, etc., you *also* need to be able to see where you have done well. Be pleased with what you have done!
- ♦ Make sure you keep copies of *all* work submitted for the Certificate



Backing up your arguments

Theology is the study of/knowledge of/thinking about God.

So the work that you do IS theology – it contributes to the body of knowledge that is theology.

No one else will ever have the insights that you have – no one else will ever bring exactly the same set of experiences to the work that you do. Your work is unique and valuable.

But it also needs to be reasonable, in the sense that it follows reason. It needs to make its arguments clearly so that they can be understood by anyone who reads the work.

In other words, you need to back up your arguments, to say *why* you are saying what you are saying. It also means that your arguments have to be able to stand up to scrutiny. Taking the time to do this means that your work will be much stronger.

There are some common problems with this kind of writing:

1. Universal statements.

A universal statement is one that takes in all of a particular category. “All Christians believe”, “every writer knows” and so on.

All it takes is one example to the contrary, and your argument falls. It is very difficult to find any issue on which all Christians agree, for instance, other than perhaps the reality of Christ. It would be far better, and make your argument far stronger, to say, “Most Christians believe...” or better still, “Within the Anglican Communion, is it commonly believed that...”.

If you make universal statements, expect to see them queried by the marking tutor.



2. Common sense arguments – or arguments from the crowd (vox populi)

This is the kind of argument which relies on agreement in a society – “everyone knows that stealing is wrong” “everyone knows that school is good for children” and so on. The argument suffers from the same problems as the one above (because it is calling on the entire population for support) and it is weak in another way – it assumes that something which “everyone” agrees on, must be right.

3. Assumptions

Often when writing within a community (such as those involved with the Certificate) people fall into the trap of making assumptions about those who will read their work. Unfortunately, we do not all share the same set of assumptions.

Moreover, assuming knowledge or understanding on the part of the reader may mean that you leave important points out of your own work, and thus that your arguments are not as well supported as they could be.

One of the best ways around this is to assume from the time you begin to write that your work will be read by a trained orang-utan, who has no knowledge of the Certificate whatsoever. This is not, of course the case! But if you write as though

the reader were someone who had no previous knowledge of your subject, you will avoid making assumptions, and thus will make your arguments clear.

4. Arguments which are not backed up

If you make a statement as to fact, “The Gospel of John was written in the year X”, it is helpful to say how you know. An example would be, “The gardening metaphor for the parish educator is a well known one, (Astley 2000)” (with the full information about the book at the end of the work).

5. Error of voice

What this means is that the wrong “voice” is used to say something. In the work for the Certificate, it is not only permissible to say, “I think” or “I believe”, there’s no way you could write the work required without doing so.

You need to let your tutors know when you are making a statement of personal belief, “I believe that all Christians should...” and when you are making a statement of fact, “All Christians should...”. The first is a very different thing to the second. *They are both valid statements.* However, they need to be set apart so that whoever is reading your work can tell the difference between them. And the second, “All Christians should...” needs to be backed up quite clearly – a simple statement that all Christians should do a particular thing is simply asking for the question, “Why?”

Back up your work

However you work, whether in long hand in notebooks, on index cards, or using electronic means, back up your work.

That means - have a copy.

This is most easily done for things on a computer.

The importance of backing up your work can not be overestimated.... yet people still don't do it often enough.



Assuming you are using a computer to store your work, including the information about what you have read, etc., these are some things you might consider.

1. Back your work up onto CDs. (Be aware though that these do not last forever – re-do them every few years or so. A home burnt CD lasts at most 5 years). Do NOT keep these next to the computer – if it fries, so will your CDs.
2. Have an up to date virus protection programme and update it regularly. Not doing this on a computer that is ever connected to the internet is asking for trouble.
3. Back your work up onto another computer on your home network. (This is better than no back up but if a virus gets one computer the chances are it will get them all). These days it is possible to buy an external Hard Drive of eg 120 Gb for well under £100. If you lose all your
4. Back your work up onto a server somewhere else.
5. Email your work to yourself (or someone else) using a service that has a large cache – Gmail or Hotmail, etc. That way you can recover the work from the cache.
6. Download and run SpyBot and AdAware *every day* if you use the internet regularly. Use online virus scanning software such as HouseCall.

Appendix1 : Grammar and Spelling

This table gives information about some of the most common errors or places of confusion in writing essays for the Certificate in Intercultural Theology. Many words are confusing: its and it's, for example, and alter and altar. Please refer to the list below when writing.

Word	Meaning
Advice	What you give someone
Advise	To advise someone is to give them advice – advise is the verb, advice, the noun; “I advise you to seek advice”
Affect	To influence or cause to change: “That is affecting me”.
Altar	A table used for worship – “let us go up to the altar of the Lord”
Alter	To change – I would like you to alter the wording here. Or, if you would like to change the Table of the Lord, you might alter the altar.
Choose	To pick, to select
Chose	The past tense of choose – “I chose that yesterday.”
Effect	A result – “Tiredness is an effect of writing essays late at night”.
It's	Contraction – the apostrophe replaces the missing letter(s). Thus, it's means – it is, it has.
Its	Possessive – belonging to it. “The dragon is upset – it's lost its place in the queue”.
Loose	Not tight
Lose	To not be in possession of, to not know where something is, to come second in a sporting event
Potato's	Belonging to the potato. Potatoes is the plural (more than one potato). While you may not find yourself writing about potatoes in many theology essays, you will find yourself using plurals (such as essays) and possessives (such as the essay's wording) and contractions (see above, also I'm (I am) and so on). Please be aware that in general in English plurals are <i>not</i> formed by using an apostrophe.
Separate	To take apart. Please note the spelling...
Their	Belonging to them. “It's their car”.
There	Over there – a place. “Their car is over there”.
They're	They are – contraction. “They're going there in their car”.
Threw	Pitched, tossed – “I threw the ball through the branches of the tree.”
Through	In one side and out the other – “We're going through the tunnel.”
Weather	General topic of conversation in England – “What's the weather like? Do you know whether it will rain or not?”
Whether	A choice – “I don't know whether to go or not, because I don't know what the weather will be like”
Which	As in, “which one?”
Witch	Magic user – “Which one is the wicked witch of the west?”

References

Astley, J., Ed. (2000). *Learning in the Way: Research and reflection on adult Christian education*. Leomister, Gracewing.

Brains, P. *Common Errors in English*. Accessed.1.9.05
<http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html>