

STUDY GUIDE

Learning to Learn

“The first and most important ability you can develop in a flat world is the ability to “learn how to learn”- to constantly absorb and teach yourself new ways of doing old things or new ways of doing new things.” *The World is Flat by Thomas L. Friedman*

HOW TO STUDY

As a student you will be required to make time for your studies, in a routine already crowded with other responsibilities like work, family commitments and other activities. For the most part you will also be studying alone. This brief study guide provides a number of suggestions to help you make the best use of your time. It should be noted that all of the suggested techniques may not work for everyone and it is important for you to discover which are most relevant to you.

PREPARING YOURSELF

Are you fit to study?

To study successfully, you will need to take care of your physical and emotional well-being.

- Good eating habits, as well as, regular exercise, complemented with rest periods go a long way in promoting a sense of well-being
- Assess how much sleep you need and ensure that you have the right amount
- Take time to learn stress relief and relaxation techniques
- Determine the time of day you work best and arrange study sessions accordingly

STUDY PARTNERS

If you are studying as part of a group (no matter how frequently) maximise on each session. Study partners can provide mutual support and a range of experience which can help increase your knowledge and understand difficult topics.

Make sure to also get the support from family members and friends. Their active participation will ensure that you get the time that you need, to study. Also, socialisation should not be completely neglected, since it can offer relaxation during periods of intense study.

YOUR PLACE OF STUDY

Choosing a place to study which will not hinder your studying is extremely important. Some factors to be taken into consideration are:

- Amount of space
- Furniture (and equipment if needed)
- Temperature
- Ventilation
- Lighting
- Noise and other distractions

Bear in mind that your surroundings can affect your ability to concentrate!

STUDY PLAN

You will need to plan your studies in order to ensure that you successfully complete this course, including time for background reading and revision, before the examination.

Factors to consider when preparing your study plan:

- The amount of time you have before your exams
- Other factors that compete for your time e.g. work, social events and family
- How confident you are about your knowledge on the topic

Remember that the recommended hours to be devoted to each subject when preparing your study plan is, **fourteen hours** per week.

STUDY SKILLS

Understanding and Learning

It is easiest to understand and learn:

- when you are interested in what you are learning
- when you relate what you are learning to your own experience
- if you put into practise what you learn e.g. in your professional life
- by learning those things which are relevant to you
- by studying at a time and in a way that suits you and your needs

Students are given a great deal of information and it will be impossible to remember everything. It is important to read the **objectives** and **learning outcomes** provided at the start of each syllabus. Use these to decide what is important and relevant and what you should learn and remember. You will need to know the main concepts, facts and theories outlined. You should also memorise good examples that illustrate particular points.

To help you remember:

- Learn the selected information as thoroughly as you can by absorbing the same information in as many different ways as possible, e.g.
 - Reading
 - Discussion
 - Flow charts or diagrams
- Adapt your study sessions to suit the material, e.g. if you are learning complex information do not attempt to take it in at a single session

Reading

You will be expected to read extensively as part of these Programmes. Candidates are provided with lists of texts as recommended reading, which are in addition to the books listed in the syllabi or study manuals. All modules carry a strong theoretical base and require conceptual and analytical thinking on the part of the candidate. It is in the candidates' best interest to read as wide a selection of the further reading as possible.

It is worthwhile developing good reading techniques, which may be different to those you may use when reading for entertainment.

- It is easy to read something and later realise that you have retained very little of it. A solution to this is to read actively and put meaning to the content that you are reading e.g. by making notes referring to your own experience or in a format that you can relate to
- To get an overview of the contents of a book, learn to scan or skim read by looking for key points and reading the first and last paragraphs
- Take notes or underline passages to help you to comprehend important material
- Use a book's content and index pages to help you to locate relevant information
- *Do not neglect periodical articles. They often contain specialised information, often times not found in books and are usually up-to-date. Regular reading of newspapers and relevant periodicals is critical and should be a part of your study schedule.*

Making Notes

For those of you who attend tuition centres, making notes when you listen to a lecture or read a book is an invaluable way to ensure that you comprehend what you are being told. Notes help you to remember key points later on.

- Decide for yourself what to note. Taking too many notes can mean that you are not attending fully to what you are being told or reading. Do not simply copy everything written on a board or in a book- put things into your own words
- Write questions in your notes if there is something that you do not understand. Follow these questions up later, to ensure that you understand
- Make important points stand out (underlining or highlighting) so that they can be easily seen
- Experiment with the layout of your notes e.g. you could try dividing the page into two columns and writing the main points in one column and the subsidiary points in the other

Revision

Ideally, revision should be a continuous process throughout the Programme. Realistically though, most revision should be done in the weeks leading up to the exam. Relying on frantic last minute revision is seldom effective and the following suggestions may help to focus your efforts:

- Make a revision plan and stick to it. Most students try to spot which questions are likely to appear in the exam paper but, to have a realistic chance of doing well, your revision will need to cover the whole syllabus
- Covering the same information at different times will reinforce your knowledge and help you to remember it
- Revise actively - passive reading of a textbook is not sufficient to make you remember it. Make notes or charts to help you to understand the material better and commit it to memory. They will be easier to visualise in the exam room too
- Accept that you cannot remember everything. Concentrate on the important facts and if you understand them properly, you will find that they lead you to remember supplementary information as well
- Use well-known mnemonics to remember important phrases or series of actions
- Short but frequent periods of intense revision are more effective than long tiring sessions
- Make use of spare time wisely
- Practise answering exam papers, under exam conditions

Memorising Information

- Write summaries of important information. Use key words and phrases to highlight different points within the summary which can be used as a 'memory joggers' to develop these points
- Pictorial information can be visualised and is easier to remember. Use patterned notes, diagrams or flow charts to summarise information and show links between topics
- Use what you have learned as often as possible, e.g. discussing a topic with other people will deepen your knowledge, help you to remember and build confidence.

The Examination

Approaching the Examination

Examinations are a source of stress for most people but this can be minimised by proper planning and preparation. If you are well prepared, then you will be less susceptible to last minute panicking that could have an impact on your performance.

With proper planning and revision, it is hardly likely that you would have to do any last minute cramming. Examination performance is most likely improved by a good night's sleep rather than by burning the midnight oil.

The following points may seem obvious, but as calls to IBAF near to exam dates reveal, they are often neglected by candidates:

- Be certain that you are aware of:
 - The exam date(s)
 - The time of the exam
 - The exam venue
- Check traffic conditions to allow sufficient time to reach the exam centre
- Make sure that you are familiar with the format of the exam paper i.e. the time allowed, the number of questions and marks to be allocated and whether calculators etc. are permitted
- Make sure you have all of your stationery e.g. pens, pencils, eraser etc.
- Remember to take your examination letter and picture identification to the exam centre

Essay Examinations

No matter how much you have learnt it is easy to throw away the chance of a great pass mark for a marginal one or even to fail, because of poor examination technique.

At first glance the exam paper may seem like it is written in a foreign language and may lead you to believe that you cannot answer a single question. On the reverse side the paper may look simple and you may be tempted to plunge right into it without properly assessing the questions. However, the smartest course of action is to first plan how to make the best use of the time available:

- Read the instructions given on the question paper and make sure that you follow them
- Read all of the questions twice to ensure that you fully understand what is being asked
- Select the questions that you are going to answer. If you are not sure which questions to choose, make quick notes of the main points you would include in the answer to each and then choose the ones that you are able to answer effectively
- Plan the time available. It is important that you do not spend all of your time on only one or two questions. To pass the examination you must answer all of the required questions

In a 3 hour examination, the time would probably allow for:

- 10-15 minutes spent reading the paper and choosing questions
 - 150-160 minutes answering the required questions. The time spent on each question should be in proportion to the marks allocated to it;
 - 10 -15 minutes reading through your answers and making any changes at the end
- When answering each question, spend five to ten minutes making notes first. This allows you to write logically and also prevents you from forgetting important points
 - Make sure that your answers are relevant. Many times candidates write everything they know on a subject without applying it to the question asked. This approach can lead to losing marks and possibly failure
 - Write in the format required. Many questions require essays, sometimes however other formats e.g. reports are also requested
 - Support your answer with appropriate material. An adequate answer can be converted into a good pass by:
 - Defining terms to show that you understand the technicalities of the subject
 - Making use of data given in the question, proving that you can interpret data
 - Including neatly drawn and labelled diagrams, graphs or charts where appropriate
 - Using relevant examples e.g. legal cases, quotations from accepted authorities

- Showing knowledge of current developments. If you have been reading periodicals and newspapers you have the opportunity to apply what you have read
- Paying attention to good presentation. Your answer should be neat, legible and your points made clearly avoiding vagueness and repetition. Use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation

If you suffer any mitigating circumstance in the examination, e.g. illness, you must notify the invigilators immediately.

How to Approach the Writing of an Essay

Essay writing is a skill. Some of you may not have much experience writing essays, especially if you were previously assessed by multiple choice or some other form of academic training or knowledge testing. We therefore make some general points on essay writing.

An essay is a well reasoned, written argument, answering a particular question and should be well structured. It not only helps the examiner assess how much you understand about a particular topic, but it also acts as a piece of creative work which enables you to explain your point of view about a subject area. It also helps you to explore or develop you widening knowledge base.

When you are asked to write an essay, the first step is to read the question carefully and identify exactly what is being asked. You should identify key words in the question which provides a guide to how you should answer the question. The definitions of common words used in essay questions are listed below;

Compare

Look for and explain similarities and differences between

Contrast

Set different ideas or concepts in opposition, in order to highlight or discuss the differences

Criticise

Give your reasoned and well informed judgement or opinion about the merit of theories, concepts or the truth about facts, discussing the evidence

Define

Write the precise meaning of a word or phrase, concept or idea. Explain how the distinctions and assumptions implied in the definition are necessary

Describe

Give a detailed account

Discuss

Explore an issue by reasoned argument, debate and give reasons for and against

Enumerate

Write in a list or outline form, giving points consistently one by one

Evaluate

Make an appraisal of the worth of something, which can include your own well informed opinion

Explain

To clarify, make plain, to interpret or to account for. Give reasons for differences of opinion or for results and try to analyse causes

Illustrate

Use a figure, diagram or examples to explain or clarify an issue

Interpret

Translate, give example of, solve or comment on a subject, usually giving your own judgement

Justify

Show and explain adequate grounds or evidence for decisions or examples

List

As in 'enumerate' write an itemised series of concise statements

Outline

Organise a description under main points and subordinate points, omitting minor details and stressing the arrangement or classification of things

Relate

Show how things are related to, or connected with each other or how one causes another, correlates with another or is like another

Review

Make a survey of a point or an idea, examining the subject critically

State

Present the main points in brief, clear sequence, usually omitting details, illustrations or examples

Summarise

Give a brief account of the chief points or substance of a matter

Trace

In narrative form, describe progress, development or historical events from some point of origin

Multiple Choice Examinations

Studying for a multiple choice exam requires a special method of preparation distinctly different from an essay exam. Multiple choice exams ask a student to recognise a correct answer among a set of options that include 3 or 4 wrong answers (called distractors), rather than asking the student to produce a correct answer entirely from his/her own mind.

For many reasons, students commonly consider multiple choice exams easier than essay exams. Perhaps the most obvious reasons are that:

- The correct answer is guaranteed to be among the possible responses. A student can score points with a lucky guess.
- Many multiple choice exams tend to emphasise basic definitions or simple comparisons, rather than asking students to analyse new information or apply theories to new situations.
- Because multiple choice exams usually contain many more questions than essay exams, each question has a lower point value and thus offers less risk.

Despite these factors, however, multiple choice exams can actually be very difficult. Consider that:

- Because multiple choice exams contain many questions, they force students to be familiar with a much broader range of material than essay exams do.
- Multiple choice exams also usually expect students to have a greater familiarity with details such as specific dates, names, or vocabulary than most essay exams do. Students cannot easily "bluff" on a multiple choice exam.
- Finally, because it is much more difficult for a teacher to write good multiple choice questions than to design essay questions, students often face higher risks due to unintended ambiguity. [This is NOT the case with IBAF's tests!]

To prepare for a multiple choice exam, consider the following steps:

- Begin studying early
- Multiple choice exams tend to focus on details and you cannot retain many details effectively in short-term memory. If you learn a little bit each day and allow plenty of time for repeated reviews, you will build a much more reliable long-term memory.
- Make sure that you identify and understand thoroughly everything that you are studying
- Pay particular attention to fundamental terms and concepts that describe important events or features, or that tie related ideas and observations together. These are the items that most commonly appear on multiple choice exams.
- As you study your notes and your assigned readings, make lists and tables.
- Concentrate on understanding multi-step processes and on ideas, events, or objects that form natural sequences or groupings. Look for similarities and

differences that might be used to distinguish correct choices from distractors on an exam.

- If your manual highlights new vocabulary or key definitions, be sure that you understand them. Sometimes new words and concepts are collected at the end of a chapter. Check to be sure that you have not left any out by mistake.
- Do not simply memorise the book's definitions. Most instructors will rephrase things in their own words as they write exam questions, so you must be sure that you really know what the definitions mean.
- Brainstorm possible questions with several other students who are also taking the course.
- Practice sample questions

Answering Multiple Choice Questions

There are many strategies for maximising your success on multiple choice exams. The best way to improve your chances, of course, is to study carefully before the exam. There is no good substitute for knowing the right answer. Even a well-prepared student can make silly mistakes on a multiple choice exam, however, or can fall prey to distractors that look very similar to the correct answer.

Here are a few tips to help reduce these perils:

- Before you begin taking the exam, enter all pieces of required information on your answer sheet
- If you are so eager to start that you forget to enter your name and ID number, your results may never be scored.
- Always cover up the possible responses with a piece of paper or with your hand while you read the stem, or body of the question. Try to anticipate the correct response before you are distracted by seeing the options that the examiner has provided. Then, uncover the responses. If you see the response that you anticipated, circle it and then check to be sure that none of the other responses is better.

If you do not see a response that you expected, then consider some of the following strategies to eliminate responses that are probably wrong. None of these strategies is infallible.

- Responses that use absolute words, such as "always" or "never" are less likely to be correct than ones that use conditional words like "usually" or "probably."
- "Funny" responses are usually wrong.
- "All of the above" is often a correct response. If you can verify that more than one of the other responses is probably correct, then choose "all of the above."
- "None of the above" is usually an incorrect response, but this is less reliable than the "all of the above" rule. Be very careful not to be trapped by double negatives.
- Look for grammatical clues
- Look for verbal associations

- If you cannot answer a question within a minute or less, skip it and plan to come back later.
- Transfer all responses to the answer sheet at the same time, once you have marked all questions on your exam. (If you try to do several things at once, you increase the probability of making a mistake. Saving the relatively mindless job of filling in bubbles until the last step reduces the probability of making errors.)
- Be sure that you have filled the appropriate bubbles carefully IN PENCIL.
- Take the time to check your work before you hand in the answer sheet.
- Unlike an essay exam, on which you may later appeal a grade on the grounds that the instructor misunderstood your response, a multiple choice exam offers you no opportunity for "partial credit." If you filled the wrong bubble, your answer is 100% wrong

Disappointing Results

If you receive your results and they are disappointing, do not become disheartened. A copy of the examiners' reports will be published on the website to assist students in improving weak areas.

You should make good use of this feedback as this would enable you to gauge where you went wrong and so improve your performance in the next exam.