

1 Cramming for success: study and academic work

A Study and exams

Before an exam, some students **cram**¹ for it. Even if you're a **genius**², you'll have to **do some revision**. If the exam happens every year, you can **revise** by looking at **past papers**³. Some things can be **memorised** or **learnt (off) by heart**. But **rote-learning**⁴ is not sufficient for most subjects. It is also possible to use **mnemonics**⁵. However, all things considered, the best idea is to **bury yourself in your books**⁶ and to study **intensively**⁷ until you **know the subject inside out**⁸.



¹ study in a very concentrated way for a short time ² an exceptionally clever person ³ exam papers from previous years ⁴ learning purely by repetition ⁵ /ni'mɒnɪks/ tricks that help you remember something, for example: 'i' after 'e' except after 'c' is a mnemonic for English spelling (e.g. friend, but receive) ⁶ spend the maximum time studying ⁷ in a very focused way ⁸ know it completely

B Academic writing

composition could be just 50–100 words, often used for school work
essay longer than a composition, more serious, hundreds or thousands of words
assignment a long essay, often part of a course, usually thousands of words
project like an assignment, but emphasis on student's own material and topic
portfolio a collection of individual pieces of work, may include drawings and other examples of creative work as well as writing
dissertation a long, research-based work, perhaps 10–15,000 words, for a degree or diploma
thesis a very long, original, research-based work, perhaps 80–100,000 words, for a higher degree (e.g. PhD)

It's a good idea to start with a **mind map**¹ when preparing an essay. Always write a **first draft**² before **writing up** the final version. Your essay should be all your own work; **plagiarism**³ is a very serious offence in colleges and universities. It is an increasing problem because it is so easy to cut and paste from materials available on the internet, and students have to sign a **plagiarism form** to say that the work they are handing in is all their own and that they **acknowledge**⁴ any sources they have used. There is usually a **deadline**⁵. After the essay is **submitted**⁶, it will be **assessed**⁷ and usually you can get **feedback**⁸.

¹ diagram that lays out ideas for a topic and how they are connected to one another ² first, rough version ³ /'pleɪdʒərɪzəm/ using other people's work as if it was yours ⁴ give details of ⁵ date by which you must hand in the work ⁶ handed in; *formal* ⁷ evaluated and given a grade ⁸ comments from the teacher/tutor

C Aspects of higher academic study

University academics **carry out**¹ **research** and are expected to read **academic journals**², which publish **papers/articles** on specialised subjects. If a library does not have a copy of a book or journal, you may be able to **access it online**³ or you can usually get it through an **inter-library loan**⁴. **Open educational resources**⁵ are particularly convenient for many students. Academic study can be very demanding, and some students **drop out**⁶, but the majority survive till **finals**⁷ and become **well-qualified**⁸ members of their future professions.

¹ less formal is **do research** ² magazines with academic articles (we do not use the word *magazine* to talk about this kind of academic publication) ³ get hold of (it) on the internet ⁴ system where libraries exchange books/journals with one another ⁵ online materials that can be freely used by teachers and students anywhere ⁶ leave the course before the end because they cannot cope ⁷ last exams before the end of a college or university course ⁸ with the right formal qualifications

Exercises

1.1 Correct the wrong usage of words to do with written work in these sentences.

- 1 His PhD assignment was 90,000 words long and was on the history of US place names.
- 2 Little Martha did her first dissertation in school today. It was called 'My family'.
- 3 We have to hand in an essay at the end of the course. It can consist of up to five different pieces of work.
- 4 The teacher gave us the title of this week's project today. We have to write 1,000 words on the topic of 'If I ruled the world' and hand it in next Monday.
- 5 At the end of this course, you have to do a 5,000-word thesis which will be assessed, and the grade will contribute to your final degree.
- 6 I think I'll do a study of people's personal banking habits for my MSc composition. It has to be about 12,000 words.
- 7 I've chosen to do the portfolio instead of the two exams, because I like to do one single piece of work where I can research something that interests me personally.

1.2 Rewrite this text using words and phrases from the opposite page instead of the underlined words.

When I'm studying in a very focused way because I'm preparing hard for an exam, I don't see any point in looking up exam papers from previous years, nor is there any point in just learning things by memory. I know some people develop very clever memory tricks to help them remember the material, but there's no real substitute for rereading and going over the term's work. It's a good idea to have some sort of diagram to organise your ideas, and memory-learning is useful, but in a limited way. At the end of the day, you just have to read a huge amount until you feel you know the subject 100%.

1.3 Answer these questions.

- 1 What do we call the first attempt at writing something, e.g. an essay?
- 2 What word means 'the date by which you must do something'?
- 3 What word means 'using someone else's ideas as if they were yours'?
- 4 What are more formal words for 'to hand in' and for 'to mark'?
- 5 What phrasal verb do we use when someone doesn't complete their course?
- 6 What is another word for an academic article? Where can you read them?
- 7 What is the name of the system for getting books from other libraries?
- 8 What word means 'the comments you get back from the teacher about your work'?
- 9 What word can you use for a person who is extraordinarily intelligent?
- 10 What is a more formal way of saying 'do research'?

1.4 Choose the best word from the opposite page to complete these sentences.

- 1 If you quote an article in an essay, you must your source, giving details of author and title.
- 2 Open educational can be particularly useful for students who do not have easy access to a university library.
- 3 How much have you done for tomorrow's maths exam?
- 4 Don't forget to sign the form and hand it in with your dissertation.
- 5 Some people take a long time to find suitable work even though they are very
- 6 Orla has had a published in the *British Medical Journal*.
- 7 All students need a username and password to be able to journals online.
- 8 Caspar is bound to do well in his mechanics exam – he knows the subject out.