

Introduction to Distance-learning with Educatis:

Getting Started

1) PREFACE

This introduction is intended to familiarize students with the special features of distance-learning, thus helping them to get started and to create the necessary prerequisites for a successful completion of their envisaged studies. Students will also gain insights into the organization and workings of Educatis, which will help them to assess their own situation.

Distance-learning is a double-edged sword: On the one hand, it provides many freedoms. Within certain limits, students are free to choose their time and pace of study. On the other hand, students must rely on themselves to a much greater extent when enrolled in a distance-learning program than in a traditional classroom setting, which means that the situation demands a high degree of “auto didactic competence”. Educatis, being an entirely Internet-based University, is a worldwide unprecedented and recently founded institution, which uses the advantages of modern communications technology without sacrificing the values of a traditional university. Certain didactic efforts are required to lead students enrolled in distance-learning programs to success, and Educatis is aware of the dimension of this task and has accepted the challenge this represents.

The didactic framework includes various supporting measures for autonomous learning, a comprehensive adaptation to all study materials, and continuous testing and improvement of the material used. Care was taken to ensure that the latest developments in learning-related psychology were considered in the design of the courses. The different course units are clearly structured and the graphic designs facilitate gaining an overview of course contents. Every unit includes a section on goals and objectives to help students direct their work accordingly.

Typically, graduates of distance-learning programs have completed their studies part-time. This means they have mastered the task of balancing their professional and private lives and their studies, which requires the capability to live an autonomous lifestyle. They possess many abilities that graduates of conventional schools will have to acquire in the course of their ensuing professional lives. Many discussions with business representatives and employers have shown us that these qualifications – high motivation to continue their education, ability to work under pressure, and prior professional experience - are precisely what they look for in future employees and that therefore, these graduates will have better chances of finding a job that fulfills their hopes and expectations.

The courses and programs taught at Educatis have all been authored and are supervised by distinguished professors of renowned universities. This means that in addition to the best possible supervision, a prompt adoption of the latest scientific data and developments into the curricula are ensured.

Educatis has furthermore developed a comprehensive advisory and supervisory system to offer a wide range of support. It consists mainly of tutoring in forums and mail tutoring and also includes scientific communication and fostering social contacts among students. The variety of support mechanisms for forming study groups, attending class sessions and seminars create opportunities to engage in scientific debate, to overcome questions and uncertainties and to get to know one another as well as to interact with professors and lecturers.

Distance-learning is primarily targeted at working professionals who wish to engage in part-time studies and who seek to either gain academic qualifications, who wish to deepen their knowledge in their field of expertise (by taking selected and continuing education classes) or who seek to enhance their knowledge through certificate studies regardless of their prior level of education. Educatis also addresses individuals who have no access to education institutions for a variety of reasons (people with disabilities, prison inmates, etc).

2) PERSONAL SITUATION

Before deciding to enroll in a program or a course of studies, prospective students should ask themselves certain questions to ensure they clearly understand the implications this carries.

There are a variety of decisions to make regarding the goals and intensity of your prospective studies: you must decide on which classes are best suited to meet your plans, and questions pertaining to your new daytime and weekly schedule must be resolved such as which hobbies and current activities you are willing to sacrifice for your studies, etc. Many of these decisions cannot be made on the spot; rather they will be the result of intensive thoughts and discussions with your partner, friends or professionals in your field. A good approach is to make a list of questions, problems, and changes you anticipate in connection with taking up distance-learning classes.

Students will have different reasons and motivations for enrolling in classes. Some may want to advance themselves in their professional field or explore new professional terrain and will therefore carefully select those classes that they perceive instrumental in reaching this goal. Others

may take a more recreational approach and resume studies out of personal interest or desire to learn. Different motivations often carry different levels of commitment and dedication and different styles of study. It is important to note that motivations can change in the course of a program, that certain reasons may become obsolete or, inversely, more important because of new experiences or changing situations in the private or professional lives of students.

Often times, enrolling in a distance-learning program will bring about many changes, some of which may not be positive. There will be a host of practical problems to resolve. The studies will take up much of your spare time you currently share with those around you. While for you, this may be compensated by the wealth of new ideas you are exposed to and the rush of energy that springs from embracing these ideas may be a source of deep satisfaction, those around you may feel left out and abandoned since you no longer spend as much time with them as you did before. Your decision to enroll may therefore negatively affect the people around you more than it does you. You should also consider your strategy towards your workplace: is it better to inform your employer or your colleagues, securing their support and understanding and introducing your new knowledge into your professional surroundings, or is it better to keep your activities private so as to avoid any negative feelings that may ensue (envy, resentment, accusations of “not pulling your weight”)? It is in any case important to discuss the implications and possible consequences with your family or friends, not at least because your personal environment and their support will help you solve many of the practical problems you will encounter in connection with your studies

Many students embark on their distance-learning experience with anxiety and insecurity regarding their learning abilities. This is normal and represents no cause for concern. Venturing into the new and unknown can cause uncertainty and even fear.

Your success in distance-learning courses will also depend highly on your ability to correctly assess your time requirements and study capacities and to use your resources effectively. A realistic self-assessment of your performance will help greatly in achieving your goal. Some may find it necessary to learn how to study all over again.

Once you have gained a clear idea of the aims and objectives of your studies, you are ready to launch your studies and begin looking at the extent of courses you wish to undertake. You may wish to limit yourself to selected classes or begin a full-blown course of studies – this, again, depends on your individual goals, on whether you wish to continue your education or gain an academic degree (diploma or master).

Some Educatis students will opt to take selected classes as a first step and, depending on the quality of experience they gain with this form of study, they will continue as a part-time or full-time student. As a part-time student, you are also free to begin your studies slowly by limiting yourself to a few carefully chosen courses or modules to gain a first impression of the study system at Educatis and of the requirements expected of each student.

2.1) Prerequisites for Your Studies

2.2.1) Prior Education and Choice of Subjects

Students at distance-learning institutions differ significantly from those at conventional universities, in part because of their motives and interests of study, but mainly because of their educational history, their professional and life experience, all of which they bring to their studies and which form the basis of their endeavor.

Many Educatis students hold professional degrees in addition to their secondary education college or university degrees and have completed their education through a variety of programs and courses. The experience they have gathered can facilitate their studies and increase their resolve. There is, however, a danger of underestimating the standards of Educatis and it is useful to reflect on one's individual style of work with regard to distance-learning.

2.1.2) Time Concerns

One of the most important issues for distance-learning is time constraint. Lack of time means it is important to carefully plan how much time can or must be put into a course or program. Many students have full-time jobs and lead rich and fulfilling lives when they decide to enroll. It is very helpful to keep a diary and document how one's time is spent over the course of several weeks to gain an understanding of how much time per day and per week can be made available for studies. Failure to create a reasonable time schedule and to engage in careful planning efforts in the beginning may result in jeopardizing the achievement of your study goals at the end.

Your task is therefore to compile a suitable schedule, in which time is also set aside for recreational and/or sports activities and for unanticipated incidents. This is especially important during examination preparation times.

Every course and module at Educatis lists approximate time requirements to provide students with an orientation of how much time to plan in for their chosen classes. These time require-

ments are estimates and averages and may not represent the amount of time you personally will have to invest. It is very likely that you will need more time at the beginning of your studies to adjust to your new tasks and increase your pace once you have become familiar with the techniques and methods of distance-learning.

3) STUDENTS AT EDUCATIS

When you commence your distance-learning studies, you will need to focus your attention on several important factors:

Style,
Contacts,
Self-assessment,
Organization.

3.1) Style

At the beginning of your studies, you will need to adjust to your new life as a student. You will develop your own personal and unique style of learning and will learn to accept the fact that you will face a number of doubts and uncertainties in the course of your first semester. The flexibility of time, pace, and place of study will require organizational skills and discipline on your part. Your first tasks will be to acquire a rhythm of study, to create a timetable for yourself and to adhere to that timetable. The timetable should not limit your studies to the weekends, but include as many recurring work hours or study periods as possible during your week. While it is not necessary to keep to your schedule at all costs, certain continuity and discipline in this field is without doubt crucial.

3.2) Contacts

When embarking on your studies, find explore the possibilities of building personal **contacts** to fellow students, lecturers, and advisors: Just as students at traditional institutions need a network of support, Educatis students need personal contacts to their fellow students and teaching staff. Seeking and strengthening these contacts is contingent upon your own initiative. Educatis offers a variety of possibilities to enter into scientific debate, to find answers to questions or doubts, to get to know one another, and to foster interaction between students and professors and other teaching staff. This can happen in *forums* and *chat rooms* or by contacting the *tutors* directly. Please remember: if the beginning of your studies is a difficult point in time to navigate,

there are always experienced individuals who are eager to help and give advice – all beginnings are difficult.

One of the features of distance-learning is that you can study at Educatis without meeting any other member of the university – except during examinations, tests, and seminars. You are not required to study with others, to have group discussions, or to plan and implement a project together with fellow students.

As members of a distance-learning university, Educatis students must complete long stretches of their work without contacts to professors or fellow students. Some may find this to be of advantage and beneficial, while others will miss the direct contact with professors and fellow students with all its opportunities for talks and discussions, agreement and disagreement.

Despite the support measures we have discussed above, distance-learning is always accompanied by a certain degree of isolation. Some students voice their difficulties in dealing alone with their study material, relying exclusively on themselves, or not having a person to speak to directly as questions arise. They find it difficult not only to deal with the academic content of their studies, but also consider it a tricky challenge to assess their own capabilities. Some students lament that they have unwittingly become loners.

For others, however, isolation is not an issue. The autonomy of a distance-learning program suits their personal style and does not represent a hardship that must be overcome.

Although you may not want to study in study groups with others as an Educatis student, you should be aware of the fact that you may encounter many situations in the course of your studies where advice, discussion, contact, and debate can be helpful and necessary. Educatis offers a wide range of tools in overcoming isolation in your studies. The Educatis team is ready and willing to assist you and to keep in contact with you – by correspondence or telephone, should you desire this. For every course you take, there is a tutor who is there for your questions and concerns.

3.3) Self-Assessment

Students enrolled in distance-learning programs should have a sound perception of their own capacities in order to plan successfully. After all, they are required to organize their workload themselves, study effectively and efficiently, develop critical thinking skills, show initiative in

dealing with problems and difficulties, demonstrate a high degree of endurance and discipline, and cope successfully with examination pressures.

Your success as a student in distance-learning depends on your ability to examine and assess your learning and study habits accurately. Learning to make a realistic assessment of your interests, time, work capacity, and your performance as well as keeping to your schedule will greatly improve your chances of success.

It is especially advisable to examine yourself closely and practice self-assessment at the beginning of your studies. You should try to compose a study plan to check if your assessment in different activities or assignments is correct. Every course at Educatis has a set of exercises and case studies at the end of each chapter and module to help you assess your level of knowledge. Make sure that you use these opportunities to test yourself and to evaluate your progress

You can increase the control over your performance by subjecting your view of yourself to the forums and chat rooms. Your peers will give you valuable information on where you stand and for the more pessimistic students, this can be a valuable source of reassurance and encouragement.

Discipline and planning and organizing your work are the key factors to success in distance-learning. Analyze your current work habits and strategies. Compose a realistic schedule, especially if you have other commitments. This is a process that will evolve and develop in the course of your studies.

3.4) Examination Anxiety

Each student has his or her own methods of preparing for and coping with the stress and anxiety of examination situations.

If you have had problems with examination situations in the past, you should make sure to talk to a professional (advisor, mentor, lecturer, or tutor) at Educatis well in advance about your concerns.

Sometimes, they can provide helpful tips on how to overcome difficulties and obstacles that seemed insurmountable before suddenly become much less overwhelming.

4) STUDYING AT A DISTANCE-LEARNING UNIVERSITY

4.1) Study Goals

Setting realistic goals is a key factor for success: it is important that you set goals that are at the same time challenging and not impossible to reach. If you set your goals too low, you may take longer to finish your program than we calculated and this may cause impatience and become too taxing on your staying power. Setting your goals too high can result in frustration and demotivation.

4.2) Time Frame

Many students enrolled in distance-learning programs experience difficulties in planning their times of study. The main reasons for this problem lies in the fact that most students underestimate the time needed to complete a course. The course as such may take longer than expected, unexpected problems may occur, or finding a rhythm of work may prove more difficult to find and keep up than anticipated. Time management is therefore an integral aspect of your planning activities.

Most students are professionals or caregivers with a household to maintain. The studies will take away a substantial portion of the time that was formerly devoted to daily or weekly routine. Finding an acceptable balance represents a learning process in most cases. One positive aspect of this is that the necessity to adopt an economic time management has repercussions beyond the duration of the studies. Graduates of distance-learning schools have learned make more efficient use of their time in every aspect of their lives, having learned to work more effectively and efficiently.

Time pressure and the resulting psychological stress can, however, inhibit a student's ability to concentrate and study fully. If your work is causing you to suffer from issues related to time pressure, you may notice that your progress is slower than if you reduce your workload beforehand.

4.3) Study Times

It is therefore important to set up a timetable and to adhere to it strictly while finding a rhythm of work that suits you. You should try to avoid setting time aside for your studies exclusively on weekends, but rather work to incorporate your studies into your life every day.

The following items are important on any agenda you create: planning realistically without succumbing to wishful thinking, scheduling recreation times, and maintaining regular times for your studies. These hallmarks will help you establish healthy work habits, which are your tool to successful distance-learning.

It may not always be practical to adhere slavishly to an established timetable, but the benefits of using planning methods to organize your studies are indisputable: effective use of your precious and limited time, more concentrated work, success in reaching intermediate goals, a higher degree of motivation and reducing stress situations.

4.4) Learning Environment

If you manage to make your learning environment (workplace and surroundings) as pleasant as possible, you will find that this will reflect positively on your concentration and, ultimately, your motivation.

The most important aspect of your learning environment is a suitable workplace. Ideally, this will be a separate room, where you are free to leave your documents. It seems that a steady workplace is a vital prerequisite for regular and serious work. One decisive component is enough space. Your desk should be large enough to hold your computer, monitor, keyboard, books, files, documents, etc.

If you cannot create these conditions, make sure you have a pleasant atmosphere! You should want to spend time at your workplace and you should enjoy your time there!

4.5) Summary

The freedoms of distance-learning program first and foremost demand discipline and organizational talent on the part of the student. The flexibility in time of study requires the student to establish a rough work plan that reflects the individually envisaged intermediate and overall study goals.

The key factor is the creation of a realistic schedule for your activities. Here, the important issue is not to adhere to the schedule mindlessly, but to use the schedule as a tool to achieving your aim. Keep in mind that your current personal circumstances play an important role. Remember to include recreational times in your schedule, and set up a work environment that shields you from external influences as far as possible, enabling you to leave your study material ready for use at the next session and allowing you to study in a pleasant setting.

5) WORKING WITH THE STUDY MATERIALS

5.1)

When you call to mind your experiences at school or at traditional universities, you will realize that in the traditional setting, the learning process is influenced by teachers and instructors to a much higher degree than is the case in distance-learning institutions. In a classroom setting, questions were easily answered, complex matters directly explained, and progress was closely monitored.

In distance-learning programs, these explanatory functions that pedagogues perform in standard learning processes must be carried out by the text – by help of graphic design, repeated listing of indispensable rules that must be observed, and a range of exercises and sample questions for self-assessment.

As an Educatis student enrolled in a distance-learning program, you must therefore be able to devise a personal strategy tailored to your specific study habits and prerequisites suitable to gain knowledge of the material and solve any problems you may encounter as independently as possible by using the instructions provided in the modules and the advisory instrument Educatis offers.

This necessity to gain knowledge independently can be your opportunity to find your own study methods, to develop your unique strategies without having to accept the pace and prior knowledge of your peers.

5.2) Didactic Setup

Distance-learning courses are fundamentally different in their setup from standard textbooks. The absence of a teacher and the different needs of students must be taken into account in the didactic composition of the texts used. Generally, a course (which can consist of one or more units – referred to as ‘modules’ at Educatis) includes the following components:

Every **Module** deals with a certain topic and requires an average of 2 to 3 hours of work. It is subdivided into chapters, which, in turn, are numbered in order of succession.

Each module or chapter begins with an **introduction**, which contains an overview of the contents and **study aims**, which serve as an orientation for students.

Key elements in the text are highlighted and **Links** to interesting sections within the module or to external documents on the Internet exist to enhance the scope of study. Educatis modules therefore exceed the didactic possibilities of traditional study materials by far and make use of the immense information supply of modern communication technology. This advantage, however, carries a certain danger for the student to become sidetracked and stray from the topic at hand and requires a certain amount of discipline from the student

Exercises and sample questions help students assess their level of knowledge and progress. They are designed to help anchor and deepen the information imparted in the module and serve as preparation for future tests and examinations.

The **Case studies** require students to demonstrate that they have understood the contents of a module, sometimes in large parts. In contrast to the exercises and sample questions, students must formulate answers themselves rather than choose from a selection of given answers. It is important that technical terms explained and discussed in the module are used in solving the case studies, because the solutions are assessed partly electronically based on the use of certain catchwords.

Each module or chapter concludes with a **bibliography** containing supplemental or further reading. The **bibliography** includes material recommended for further reading, or material students are advised to purchase.

On the technical side, Educatis has chosen to use the PDF-Format for its modules, since it is best suited to embrace all multimedia possibilities.

Students can work through the modules at their PC using [Acrobat Reader](#), to follow the hyperlinks to the Internet anytime these occur. It will, however, be practical in most cases to print out certain sections or whole modules to annotate the text with various comments, notes, or questions.

Students in possession of the full version of [Adobe Acrobat](#) can add comments or notes to their modules electronically.

5.3) Working Through the Courses

When working through the modules at Educatis, you should proceed exactly the way you would with textbooks: try to gain an overview of the topic by carefully reading the introductory summaries of each module. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the aims and objectives set forth in each module and contemplate these discriminatingly.

The text itself will contain marked passages, images and graphic illustrations to help you differentiate between the central parts of the module contents and the less important ones as you work through the sections, while maintaining a general grasp of the text. Look for similarities or differences: this approach uses the power of association and represents an important step towards understanding and digesting the module contents (cf. 5.4).

It also makes sense to make a note of new terms and rules or unfamiliar mathematical equations you encounter and to summarize their key features briefly. This allows you to have the vital facts on hand when revising and helps the material settle in your mind as you are forced to understand the facts you are summarizing clearly. The manuscripts you have thus created are also very valuable for later examination preparations.

5.4) The Learning Process

We would like to introduce you to some fundamental findings from the field of the psychology of learning, as they can help you positively influence your learning capacities. Your memory, for example, will retain information more readily and reliably if newly acquired knowledge is not stored in isolation, but connected with previously acquired information, that is, if it is associated with existing knowledge.

Our memory functions more easily by power of association which means that if it can link new information to existing information, our learning capacity increases. You can use these findings for your benefit by always looking for connections within the modules. They also show that you can learn how to learn and that the findings of the psychology of learning can be directly applied to your studies.

Just as we can distinguish different learning methods, there are also different memory types. People who belong to the **visual** memory of learning type absorb new information more easily via the eyes. For the **audio-oriented** memory or learning type, the ear is the main receiving

organ and learning aid. The **motoricity**-based memory or learning type uses the locomotor system to learn, an example of which is that new information is written down time and again for better retention. People do not exclusively belong to any of the above categories, of course – but it may be useful for you to try to find which of the three categories you dominantly belong to and to employ your senses accordingly in your learning process.

5.5) Mental Barriers

Most students will reach a point sooner or later in their studies where they are stumped and do not know how to continue with a certain topic or exercise. Nothing seems to work and the student is under the impression that his or her capacities just are not sufficient. In such situations, it is advisable to move to another topic or subject and to let the ‚Pièce de Résistance‘ rest aside for a while. Later, a new approach can be launched and it may take several attempts until the proverbial penny has dropped, but you will feel much more satisfaction and motivation once you have overcome such an obstacle. Should the problem persist despite your greatest efforts, you still have recourse to the tutors, chats and forums to obtain help and support.

5.6) Forgetting

The counterpart to learning is forgetting. The process of forgetting is highly degressive. This means that while much is forgotten at the beginning, less and less is forgotten as you progress. There is only one remedy: Repetition. Repeating periodically firmly anchors knowledge in your long-time memory. In addition, revision serves to keep your knowledge up to date as you can add details or modify certain items you learned previously.

As we have noted earlier and will repeat later when we discuss the reading process, it is useful to make notes and to summarize the material briefly. This procedure is useful in a number of ways: Firstly, it is a direct repetition, secondly it serves to clarify the material, and thirdly, it helps keep up periodic repetition and revision of the material as well as make examination preparations easier.

Frequent repetition helps you to maintain your knowledge up to date. If you discontinue repeating and revising the material, a large part of it will be forgotten, which means it will be pushed into your subconscious mind. You can, however, reactivate the material relatively quickly.

5.7) Comprehension Problems

Experience teaches us that it is useless to puzzle over one text segment we don't understand for hours. We need to put up with the fact that certain steps in the line of reasoning in a complex text may remain obscure, especially in highly condensed and non-redundant text passages.

Our endeavor to understand every unclear portion at once does us a disservice in more than one respect: Firstly, it induces us to reach a negative assessment of our abilities and causes us to believe that the problem lies solely in our incompetence rather than in the fact that too much information to process is being provided. Secondly, our ability to structure a problem and to gain an understanding of parts of the problem is compromised. Often, students must learn to bear to live with 'missing pieces' for a while. It can be helpful to write down problems or questions, and to proceed in the text without addressing them right away. Sometimes, unclear passages or problems can be solved with hindsight.

Another very important learning strategy for distance-learning is finding additional sources of information. One such additional source is above all the scientific literature of your field. The hyperlinks in the PDF modules will reduce your efforts in finding the appropriate literature for your specific problem greatly and offer more depth and wealth of information than ever before at your fingertips. Make use of these opportunities! In addition, talking to specialists within your circle of friends, contacts with your tutor or participation in forums can help and are especially important for solving problems concerning your learning progress. Discussions among fellow students within the forums will greatly help you understand the material.

5.8) Summary

One important task of learning and studying independently is understanding the context and identifying the main message of the material. To achieve this, it is necessary to **structure** the material.

It is necessary to learn by linking new information to existing knowledge or to **learn by heart** to keep facts, rules, and symbols that form the basis for your studies and represent your tools at your ready disposal. Material you have already learned should be kept current through the use of **repetition strategies**. You should therefore plan for the necessary time and appropriate repetition and revision points in time as an integral part of your learning process. The findings

from the field of **learning psychology** can serve to influence your learning strategy positively if included as a tool for your studies.

Try to write down difficulties arising from text segments that contain too much information at once for you and make every attempt to solve them by proceeding and using the context to guide you. Do not keep grimly at the same problem for too long.

Your success in learning must be measured and judged through **self-assessment** of your newly gained knowledge. Allow yourself ample time for completing the exercises and solving the case studies at the end of each chapter and think through the sample solutions provided.

6) WORKING WITH SPECIALIZED LITERATURE

In distance-learning, one general requirement is that you find appropriate strategies to learn and retain the contents of the courses with the help of the instructions provided and that you learn to solve problems independently as they occur.

As your studies progress, you will increasingly be required to work scientifically and independently. The necessity to give reasons for scientific statements and positions within the framework of assignments in the form of reports and papers, and, ultimately, your thesis, will force you to become acquainted with the research of your chosen field. Scientific work is always the product of an intellectual achievement that involves your own thoughts without external help. This does not, however, mean, that only your own ideas and thoughts may be processed. One of the characteristics of scientific work is precisely the act of building upon an existing theory and to name the sources for the existing knowledge that is used (correct quoting).

In addition to your study materials and when compiling your own scientific work, you will need to use scientific literature as further sources of information.

6.1) Reading Techniques

Reading and handling printed information is a part of our lives. It represents an important factor in the context of your studies. Students must read and absorb a wide range of literature during their studies. This applies especially to students at distance-learning institutions whose time is limited and who must therefore economize the time they spend reading as well as possible.

We all learned to read at school as a matter of course. However, as in every discipline, there are substantial differences in the reading behavior of individuals. Someone who picks up a book after a long period without reading might experience some difficulties at the beginning. After a while, it will become easier and faster. Reading is therefore a question of practice. It is important to read a lot of text, to identify and understand the substance of it and then to remember as much as possible of it. Only a very focused approach will lead to thorough, critical and retained reading.

Before embarking on reading a scientific book, you should try to gain an **overview** of the subject matter: what is the topic and contents of the book, what are the aims and main thoughts of the author, what are his or her opinions, have summaries or commentaries been published, etc.

Often, foreword and introduction can serve to answer some of these questions. The table of contents provides you with structure, sequence and weighting of the text contents. Appendices such as an index or glossary can also serve as orientation aids. A thorough orientation phase can sometimes save a lot of time – in some cases, reading certain chapters or sections may suffice (selective reading).

If you try to formulate expectations, you will change from a receptive, passive reader to an **active reader**. The questioning approach to the text will stimulate your desire to learn and increase your motivation. In the beginning, it may be useful to write down questions and expectations and to keep these ready when reading. Over time, you will become increasingly proficient at differentiating between important and unimportant information and to read with a critical and concentrated mind. The more precisely you are aware of your own goals before reading a book, the less time-consuming and the more intensive your studies become.

6.1.1) Reading

Together with the two preparatory steps outlined above, this step is a search for answers that transcends passive reading and encourages concentrated, active and critical reading. The preliminary structuring and subsequent formulation of questions induces us to assume an attitude of expectation, which allows us to read the text actively and with a target orientation. The amount of text read should depend on its level of difficulty. It may be sensible to proceed segment for segment or to allow for frequent short rests – it is especially important for you to keep the questions you formulated at the beginning at hand.

It is also useful to look up any unknown words you may encounter as soon as they appear and to use index cards to catalog them (this applies equally to definitions). In order to avoid losing track of the overall context, you should try to follow the structuring and argumentation of the author and to pause at every headline to answer your catalog of questions.

These three steps – preliminary structuring, writing down questions, and reading – are the basis for efficient reading. They will enable you to tackle any additional literature or informational general reading material.

When preparing for examinations or processing important material in your written assignments, you should include written summaries and repetitions to the three steps outlined above.

6.1.2) Processing Learning Material

After completing a segment or chapter you should always try to formulate the contents or the answers to the questions you noted down in your own words as concisely as possible. You will only be able to do this with the material you have truly understood. It is a common self-deception that leads us to believe we have understood what we have just read and the attempt to summarize the contents in our own words will expose this. Besides making sure you have understood the text, revising the core messages of a text also serves to anchor the contents in your memory and to remember it better.

By summarizing and repeating the material you have read and following the steps as explained above, you 'save' it in your memory. The results of every portion are combined and put into a broader context. Notes can be supplemented and form important tools for examination preparation and revision.

The more thoroughly you execute these steps, the faster you can save the data in your head (saving phase) and the easier it will be for you to repeat and revise the material in preparation to examinations and tests (repetition phase).

Experience and the findings in learning psychology teach us that it is not advisable to revise the material for the first time shortly before an examination. It is much better to repeat and revise directly upon finishing a book, which guarantees a more lasting memory and saves you the frustration of forgetting most of what you have just learned after a short while (see chapter 5.6). At first glance, this method may seem tedious and time-consuming – and it may well take some time in the beginning to tune your reading habits to this method. Once you gain some practice and experience with this method, however, you will witness an increase in the speed of your reading, a deepening of your capacities to retain information and the general systematic approach will positively influence your work and study habits.

6.2) Tools to Help You Work With Scientific Literature

6.2.1) Extracts/ Excerpts

One important tool for writing scientific texts can be gathering relevant text parts (extracts, excerpts). This saves the often time-consuming step looking things up in the original works. Important statements, findings and illustrations, which may be appropriate to use as quotations in a

scientific work, can be at hand quickly and without effort. Here, it is important to ensure that all material taken from existing works be quoted without mistakes (photocopies).

6.2.2) Quotations/Citations

When writing your own scientific work and substantiating your reasoning, you must be sure to indicate the material and author you used. Using an existing text literally or figuratively is called citing or quoting. When using word-for-word citations, you must work diligently to ensure exact rendition of the original. Generally, citations are put in double quotation marks followed by the source you took it from. There are different ways to indicate the sources of quotations you have used (for further detail, please refer to the provisions in the Examination Guidelines).

6.2.3) Organizing and Saving Your Data

We have already discussed the “external” organization of your workplace in the chapter titled “learning environment”. Let us now take a short look at systems that allow you to organize what you have learned – methods for gathering and saving information while keeping it at your constant disposal. One option that is easy to handle and maintain is using index cards containing text segments explaining the key concepts you are working through. Possibly, this slightly antiquated-sounding method may not seem entirely sensible and necessary to you as you begin your studies, especially since it involves more than a little extra work. But once you are asked to write your own scientific work, in which you must process a wide range of primary and secondary literature, you will be grateful for this invaluable tool that becomes more valuable, the more carefully and meticulously you maintain it. Written reports, papers, your thesis – all these assignments will have to be dealt with sooner than you might expect! The earlier on you begin compiling your index cards, the better prepared you will be when you are asked to submit a written piece of work within a set deadline and the more material you will have to rely on.