

*Becoming A Better Distance Education Student*

*Education Without Walls*



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## **Worse Case Scenario**

Kate was so excited; her package from St. Lawrence College finally arrived. She didn't have time to look at it for a week, and then opened it to find the course manual and schedule. The schedule told her that she had an assignment due in two weeks. She put the materials and the textbook aside to look at when she had more time.

The next day when she awoke she had a headache that soon developed into a case of the flu. Poor Kate ended up in bed for a week. Just when she was getting back to her old self her sister called to say that her husband had left her for an itinerant circus worker. The sister needed support and a shoulder to cry on. Kate rushed to her side. After the crisis abated Kate realized that she was three weeks behind in her assignment. She vowed to get at it the next Monday.

On Sunday evening her younger child came down with the chicken pox. That week there was also a dentist appointment for her older child and a hair appointment for her. She was anxious and stressed out over not starting her course and worried that her hard earned money was wasted.

Embarrassed, she refused to phone her instructor and felt that there was no way to be successful in the course. Finally, she decided to just forget it, take the failing grade and give up trying to reach her goal and complete her diploma. Life just seemed to be one failure after another.

Does any of this sound familiar?

What could Kate have done differently to avoid the outcome?

## **Self Assessment Form**

*Try to complete this statement in point form. Be as objective as possible.*

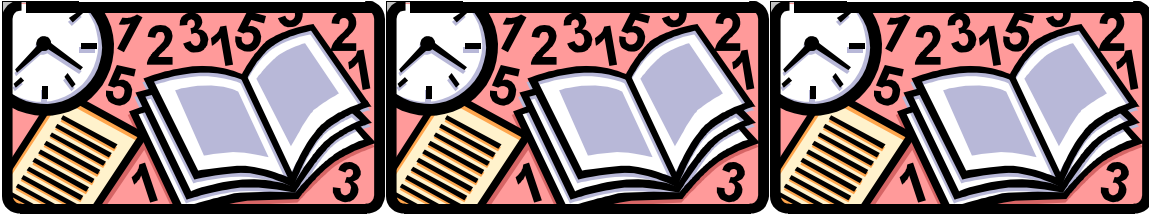
*When it comes to being a distance education student I have the following **strengths** as well as **areas to improve**;*

*+ Strengths*

*- Areas to Improve*

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## How To Study



*Some students believe that distance education is easier than classroom education. Distance education requires more self-discipline and time management to be successful. The #1 downfall of distance students is **procrastination**. There is always something more pressing or more interesting just when you have work to be done. Waiting until “you are in the mood” sometimes results in no action.*

*The best strategy is to devote a particular time each day or week to your studies. Whether you are taking one course or seven courses, **consistency** and **no distractions** are the keys to success. Think of it in terms of “Tuesday night at 7 p.m. is my course time”.*

*A good rule of thumb for the **ideal total time for homework** for a course in a week is as follows:*

***A 30 hour course**=number of hours per week in classroom (2) over 15 week semester x 2 = **4 hours per week***

***A 45 hour course**=number of hours per week in classroom (3) over 15 week semester x 2 = **6 hours per week***

*These are recommended study or homework times required to be successful. They are minimum estimates.*

*Always do the reading **before** you complete the assignment. It is assumed that you have done this. Find a quiet place with little or no distractions. Make sure that you have everything you need to avoid having to interrupt your concentration. Begin each session with a quick review of the previous one. This will serve as a means to get your brain in gear for the study session.*

*If an assignment seems overwhelming break it down into smaller units and complete these separately. When you are reviewing material, whether for research or an exam, it is a good idea to share the new information with a friend or family member. If you can articulate what you have learned then you are processing the information and will be better able to recall it at a later date.*

## **Studying Textbooks**

*You need to become familiar with the textbook. Look at the table of contents, glossaries, appendices, chapter headings, chapter introductions, summaries and indexes. By doing this you will have a feeling for the text and the subject matter that you will be studying.*

*As you read each chapter, ask yourself questions about what you are reading. Look up unfamiliar words in the glossary or dictionary. Relate the material to that which is in the manual notes. In other words -be an active learner! At the end of each chapter, make a point summary with the book closed to see what you can recall. Make a note of the areas that you feel unsure about. Review the chapter*

*summaries for the exam. If the text does not have summaries make your own.*

### **Answering Short Answer Questions**

*Read the question thoroughly underlining the key words or phrases. Refer to the text and manual for help in formulating your answer. Do not copy directly from the text, as this is plagiarism. Answer the question in your own words using examples to illustrate your point. Your answer should cover all the main points. Do not repeat the same point over and over!*

### **Writing Essays**

*Take the time to plan your essay. Gather the notes and references. Make an outline in which to structure your ideas. Write a first draft and get your ideas down on paper. Clean up the draft check grammar and organization. Insert any tables, graphs etc. Word process, type or print very neatly (double spaced) your final copy.*

### **Workshops/Observations**

*Make a time line for yourself. Workshops can be intimidating if you let them. Allow enough time for getting materials together, inviting people or meeting them at a specific time or place and for making the final report.*

## Studying for Exams

*You will receive information for each course regarding what material to study for the examination. In general terms, always review the assignments and the readings, both in the text and in the manual. Most assignment questions come from these sources. You will be told whether the format is short essay, multiple choice or some other. Again, it is good to articulate what you have learned. Be the teacher and share the information with someone else as a review for the exam. Information on each course exam is sent out with the last graded assignment. Don't wait until the exam date is set to cram. If you understand the concepts as they are presented then studying for the exam becomes a **review**, not a “**crash course**”.*

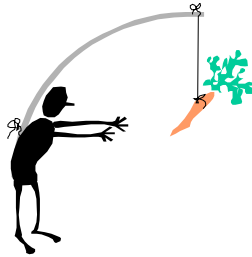
### What Does My Teacher Want?

*One of the most asked (or at least thought questions) when it comes to the completion of an assignment or answering a question on an exam is, “**What does my teacher want?**”*

*The answer to this question is as follows:*

**Our expectation is for a high level of work and good detail. Your assignment answers need to be well written, organized and show evidence of critical thinking and assimilation of the material from the manual, the text, and from your own observations.**

# Motivation



Motivation is a very personal thing depending upon our personalities. We are motivated by different incentives. Decide **why** you are taking courses and let that be your goal.

Are you taking courses to:

- better yourself?
- earn more income?
- become more professional?
- get that raise/promotion?
- keep the job you have?
- other?

When you become frustrated consider your goal. Imagine yourself having attained it. This will serve as a motivating factor. Remember, we all have moments of doubt but it is very important to maintain a **positive attitude**.

Another motivator is **pride**. Pride in our own accomplishments as well as others being proud of us. Take credit for what you have accomplished. A job well done is worth a lapse in humility! It's amazing how one success can turn into another.

Once you see how the theories you have learned apply to practical situations the courses start to overlap. For example: the thread of child development runs through all the courses.

***The importance of a good understanding of child development*** when actually working with children acts as a motivator to take more courses.

# *Improved Memory*



Memory has two aspects, ***retention*** and ***recall***. Retention is the taking in and storing of information. Recall is the ability to select what information is needed when it's needed.

Imagination and association are important factors.

Our memory is like other things in life, the more we use it the better it becomes. Many of us were taught to memorize information using the rote system, repeating something over and over again. This is one way to memorize but not necessarily the best way.

Two important ingredients for a better memory are ***concentration*** and ***repetition***.

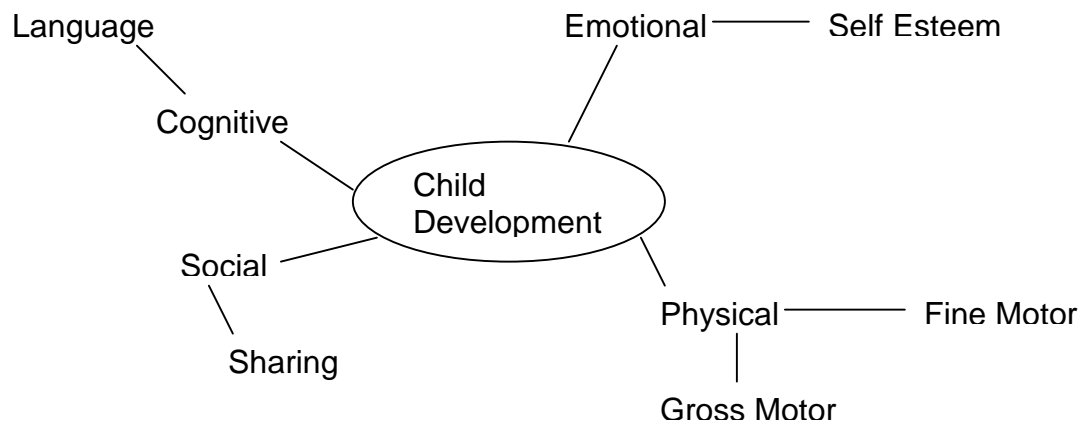
- Concentration involves paying particular attention to detail while focusing on the information without distractions.
  
- Repetition involves going over the information at intervals. Reviewing over a spaced out interval helps information enter our “long term memory”.

## ***Some Strategies to Improve Memory***

### *Mind Maps*

Mind maps involve note taking using a pictorial representation

Example:



### ***Association***

Association involves associating something you want to remember with something you already know.

Example: HOME = Names of the Great Lakes = Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie

### ***Mnemonics***

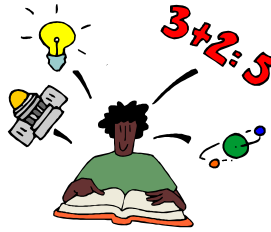
Mnemonics can be learned phrases (often rhymes) or the linking of a series of items (sometimes using numbers or shapes)

Example: "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."

## Note Taking

*Note taking, whether it is in the classroom or by distance, helps the student to process information. **After** you have read the text or manual, take notes to consolidate and memorize the information. Use the mind map picture and/or key words to do this. Complete sentences are not a requirement in the note taking process. Effective recall of the notes involves a mind picture and key words only. Information can be recalled and then expressed in sentences. When reviewing for assignment or exam purposes review the notes that you have taken. Teach someone else what you have learned. This is another way to use repetition. Remember to review at **intervals** to maximize memory and retention.*

# ***Exams and Test Anxiety***



*Many students suffer from test anxiety. Most courses are a combination of assignments and tests. The value of the test can vary from course to course. Assignments are important but tests are another way to assure that the student understands the concepts and has met the learning outcomes.*

*If you are not good at writing exams or suffer from test anxiety you will be able to excel more in the assignments and this should balance out your grade. Having said this, keep in mind that ALL components of the course must be successfully completed including the exam. They are also safeguards to insure that the student has indeed been the one completing the course. Exams and tests are one way of measuring knowledge.*

*Following are some tips on reducing test anxiety and best preparing for a test or exam.*

- Use the full time allotted.
- Its better to write “too much than too little”.
- Relax and think about one question at a time.
- Make notes on the back sheet if need be.

- Ask yourself.... What is the question really asking? If it says to describe something have you done that?
- Read the instructions carefully. Does it say to answer in complete sentences? Have you done that?
- Never leave a question unanswered.
- Use examples to illustrate the answer.
- Write legibly.
- With multiple choice questions, eliminate the incorrect answers first when you are not sure of the correct one.
- Only circle one answer.
- Be logical in your answer. Give information in sequence when necessary.
- Don't waste words repeating the question throughout your answer.
- Be specific; generalities don't demonstrate understanding...."It was a great theory...".
- The marks assigned to each question don't necessarily mean that there are that many points. 20 marks don't mean 20 different points.
- There is usually a correlation between the weight of the marks. An answer to a question worth 20 marks should be more in depth than one worth 5 marks.

- If you don't know the answer move on to the next one. Often the answer will come to you when you stop thinking about it and you can go back to it.
- If you feel stressed during a test, take deep breathes and try to relax and clear your head. Most tests require less time than is given.

# ***Time Management***



Organization of your time is crucial in distance education. You do not have a teacher standing over you reminding you of assignments and due dates. We all have busy lives between work, family and school. Even if you are not the best manager of time you can become better by following some of the following suggestions.

- Use a calendar for all assignment due dates.
- Plan your reading and completion of the assignments around these dates.
- Check off items as they are completed.

It is important to prioritize the work that you have to complete. What is most important? You can label the “things to do” as A, B and C items. Or you can colour code as you choose. This way you can complete the most important items before moving onto the next.

*Do the assignments early. Do not leave anything to the last minute. If you do, one of the following may occur:*

- The computer will crash
- You will become ill
- The dog will eat your assignment
- Life will intervene

Be sure to complete one scheduled assignment at a time. If one assignment is “off base” your teacher will need to guide you in the right direction. Once you have completed and sent off the assignment you can begin to read and work on the next assignment. Be sure to wait for feedback before submitting the next assignment.

**Stick to the schedule that you have been given unless you have permission from the teacher to make changes in it. Changes can only be made due to medical or family emergencies. If you need an extension contact your teacher immediately so accommodations can be made.**

The assignments and the exam (if there is one) must be completed before the official end of the semester or an automatic “F” grade will be submitted and the student will need to reregister for the course.

If you are taking more than one course it is your responsibility to balance the time necessary for each course.

Completing one course before you begin the next does not work. Try to work on each course at the same time each week much as you would do in a classroom situation.

*Always keep a back up or copy of your work. This can eliminate much stress if your assignment is lost or destroyed and will be a time saver.*

*Homework must be a priority. Make that known to family and friends. Your commitment as a student is to devote a certain amount of effort and energy into your course. Be clear about what you require in regards to time, space and privacy and then see that you get it.*

# **Methodology**



Some of the distance education courses have specific requirements when it comes to methodology. Methodology includes how the assignment should be presented or the **method** by which it should be presented. Some courses may require typed pages with a bibliography. If the course requires specific methodology then follow the required elements. If a course does not state the methodology then use the following guidelines.

- Paper should be white and approximately 8"x11".
- Assignments should be typed whenever possible.
- If assignments can't be typed, then write in a neat legible manner.
- Presentation and organization are often a part of the grading criteria, so be sure your work is neat and presented in an orderly fashion. Teacher Quote: ***"There's nothing worse than marking an assignment that reeks of cigarette smoke and is covered in coffee stains"***.
- Avoid using "white out" or correction fluid.
- Be sure you are using proper bibliography format. APA is recommended. This is covered in the Communications Course COMM61.
- Use a black or blue pen for writing (other colours are hard to read) and never use crayon. Teacher Quote: ***"I***

***have received an entire assignment written in crayon and not only once”.***

- Cover sheets should be used for essays and projects with your name, instructor’s name and course name.
- Avoid sending in large folders for assignments. i.e. (Duo tang). They are more expensive to mail and the instructor must remove and replace to grade.
- Be sure to include your name on the assignment sheets in case these separate from the Data Sheet.
- If you are emailing assignments, be sure to include name and address so a graded hard copy can be mailed back.
- Staple assignment pages together

## Goal Setting

*On the next page you will be asked to make a contract with yourself to achieve specific goals. Consider your self-assessment and what you have learned from reading this booklet. What goals can you set to become a better distance education student? No one is perfect but we can all improve our skills. Being a successful student involves a particular set of skills. You should have identified your strong skills. Now, which ones would you like to work on? Set goals based on the answer to this question. Then you need to follow through until you have met the goals. It is important to set a few goals at a time to insure success and positive reinforcement.*

Goal setting is useless without evaluation. Be sure to evaluate your situation every now and then to see if:

- you are in the process of meeting the goal
- you have met the goal
- the goal has changed



# Goals

As a result of reading the material on “becoming a better distance education student” I have identified my **strengths** as well as **areas in which I can improve**. Based on those areas in which I can improve my skills I am setting personal goals to become even more successful. These will include the following:

Goal #1

Goal #2

Goal #3

Goal #4