

Special Issue for Students

SELF-LEARNING FOR STUDENTS AT HOME

Preamble

First of all, I wish all of you the best of health. This is a challenging time for us all, all over the world. The significance of living in a flat, globalized world has never been so clear to all of us.

There have been plagues and pandemics in the past even in Malta. The last five that are historically documented are those of 1592, 1623, 1655, 1676 and 1813. Unfortunately, many were those who fell victims to these pestilences, the worst being the black death of 1676. Mostly, promiscuity and ignoring directions from the authorities considerably increased the number of lives lost.

Needless to say, we are in a better position than our past ancestors to combat such scourges. Advances in medicine are much more pronounced today. Moreover, the power of technology - the Internet is an optimal resource in this respect - can give us an immense helping hand to spend profitably the days we need to be away from College mostly spent mostly in isolation but not away from our study duties.

This is where self-learning comes in. Indeed, self-learning is a valuable means to help us make the best use of our time and acquire other skills and competences which perhaps we were not aware of. Self-learning can be very effective if we approach it with the right attitude and frame of mind it deserves.

Self-learning and Self-study at Home

Self-learning, which involves learning and studying without direct supervision or attendance in a classroom, is also a valuable way to learn. It has been rendered much easier today thanks to the profitable use of technology. In the circumstances we are experiencing today, self-learning at home is a sine qua non to continue with our educational journey.



First of all, get Well-Organised



A study area is crucial for effective self-learning. This might be a home office, or a desk in a quiet room. Preferably one should not work in bed or in one's bedroom. No matter where it is, it should include a tidy workspace – free of clutter and distractions – with good lighting. By setting aside a desk or table that is a designated environment for self-learning, you will know to be mentally prepared to learn when you enter that space. If possible, separate the area you intend to use for study from that in which you relax.

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Obviously enough, a computer is necessary for many methods of self-learning especially where reading, watching or listening to online resources are concerned. This is basic. Put to good use any other form of technology which can help you.

In addition, traditional note-taking tools such as highlighters, coloured pens and sticky notes are useful tools when studying at home. Keeping written notes while learning will help you retain the information longer and give your notes a personal touch while enhancing ownership. Also, try to keep your 'entertainment gadgets out of sight when you are studying.

**Use the following methods to study at home**

The importance of **REVISION** cannot be overemphasised. Now is the time to catch up with revising, learning, overlearning and consolidating material covered. According to the Collins English dictionary, revision means 'to read things again'. This implies that you have read and understood your study material at least once prior to starting revision. So, if you have not, you need to do so. The importance of revision is, at least, twofold:

- Firstly, it helps you to remember facts, figures, topics and methodologies that you have covered some time ago;
- Secondly, if done correctly it will help increase your confidence and reduce anxiety because you feel well-prepared for your assignments and examinations.

Once you have organized your work space and your study material, work carefully on a **REVISION PLAN**:

- Include all the subjects and areas covered;
- Make sure that your plan is realistic and not too ambitious;
- Give yourself enough time to revise properly as well as breaks for relaxation;
- The revision plan needs to be flexible enough to allow for some things taking longer than expected.

Revise subjects and topics that make you feel anxious earlier on in the revision plan. This will help reduce anxiety because you will feel that you have more time to deal with them. You do not need to tackle the difficult areas first. Revising subjects you know well will boost your confidence and put you in a better position to tackle the more difficult areas.



We are speaking here of **ACTIVE** and *not* **PASSIVE** revision. So,

- Jot down notes as you revise;
- Make further summaries of the notes: they act as very useful prompts for your memory;
- Review these notes and summaries regularly;
- Read them out loud and test yourself on each area you cover.

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Where possible, make use of past assignments and exam papers if available. Get used to the type and style of questions asked and practice answering the questions previously set.

Revision can be hard work. Make sure that you get enough sleep and take time to relax and exercise a little. Rest, relaxation and making sure you stay fit and well are also very important.

Study in Short Frequent Sessions

Instead of treating your study sessions like a marathon, break up your material by topic into a series of short sessions, separated by short breaks. That way, you won't be staring at your books or computer for too long while wearing on your focus, and your brain can absorb the material more easily. While cramming may seem like a great way to cover a lot of material in a condensed amount of time, studying in short, frequent sessions is a more effective way to learn subject matter and to self-learn.

**Add Variety to Your Ways of Learning**

Avoid staring at the same textbooks for hours on end, day after day: this can get monotonous and obstruct your productivity levels. Research studies show that different media can stimulate different areas of the brain, and heightened brain activity is related to enhanced learning abilities. In this technology-powered age, there is no lack of easily-available sources to learn from. You could improve your productivity by planning a good mix.

Besides reading your textbooks and class notes –which is very important- refer to video tutorial, online sources and '**digital books**' to receive the same information from an array of sources. This will not only help keep your mind fresh and attentive and alert but also improve your power of retention.

**Dealing with Different Subjects**

- Instead of taking a subject and studying it for a whole week, it is usually much better to work on two or different subjects at the same time;
- Plan also how to best combine the subjects you are studying. For instance, it is better to combine a science subject with a language rather than with mathematics. This usually aids better retention.

Avoid Multi-tasking

- A great deal of research has been done into the effects of multitasking. It was found that trying to juggle too many balls in the air only makes your more distracted and less productive.



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- The secret to making self-learning sessions more productive is to focus on just one task at a time. It is, therefore, imperative to resist the urge to study while watching television, eating, texting your friends or checking your social media feeds.

**Handwritten Notes**

It may sound old-fashioned but I still believe that handwritten notes are the best way to allow your brain to absorb and process the information you are gathering as you study. Yes, you already have your 'textbook' lessons and lecture notes to help you but the process of taking in bits of information and then reproducing them in your own words helps in improving concept clarity and understanding. This way you are not just mindlessly cramming information but actually processing it as you go along.

Reading for Pleasure and Beyond the Syllabus

Whether it is fiction or the news, a science blog or a poetry review, a little or a lot, doing extra reading has some interesting benefits of which a few are listed below:

- **Reading stimulates your mind:** Studies have shown that keeping your brain active and engaged prevents it from losing power. Just like any other muscle in the body, the brain requires exercise to keep it strong and healthy;
- **Reading helps you increase your knowledge:** The more knowledge you have, the better-equipped you are to tackle any challenge you will have to face in life. Moreover, to read beyond the syllabus will help you evaluate arguments and express yourself better in your examinations and assignments. In fact, the more knowledge you acquire through reading, the more you can fine-tune your analytical skills.
- **Reading expands your vocabulary:** the more you read the more words you have to express yourself. Being well-spoken and articulate is of immense help in any profession or any walk of life. Needless to say, vocabulary improves your writing skills, as well.
- **Reading improves your memory:** Without realizing, when you read a book, even for pleasure, there are many things you have to recall, and this, exercises and enhances your memory power.
- **Reading improves focus and concentration:** in our internet-crazed world, when you read a book, all of your attention is focused on the story, the rest of the world just falls away, and you can immerse yourself in every fine detail you are absorbing.
- **Reading reduces stress:** No matter how much stress you have, it all just slips away when you learn how to lose yourself in a great story, a well-written novel or an engaging article. Reading a good book relaxes you and gives you peace of mind and tranquillity.

Last Important Tip

Take Regular
Breaks

Taking regular breaks is not a waste of time. In fact, this will help you enhance productivity and focus. Instead of aiming for a single six-hour sitting, divide your study time in smaller spells of 40 to 60 minutes each with 5 to 10 breaks. At the end of each day, reward yourself for a job well done, by indulging in a fun, relaxing activity of your choice. This will motivate you to keep going and set you up for a fresh start the next day.

These few tips are meant to be of assistance to you during this challenging period; they are meant to help you in your studies by furthering your study skills. The words of the College Principal, Prof. Joachim James Calleja send a clear message: *"I urge students to continue studying and consider each day as if it is a regular College day that is, looking into notes, preparing assignments and going over other material that lecturers have given you as part of the units being covered"* (**Appendix 1 attached**).

Admittedly, self-learning does take a lot of discipline and can be difficult at first, but like any endeavour, with time, it becomes easier. I am sure that like the phoenix, we will be reborn and come out of this experience with more energy, vigour and a healthier outlook on life.

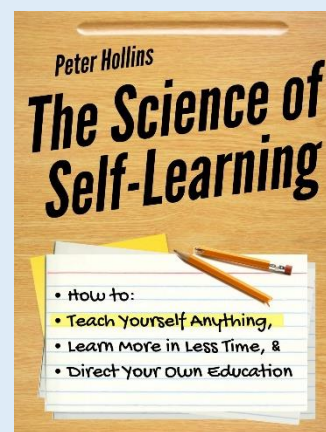
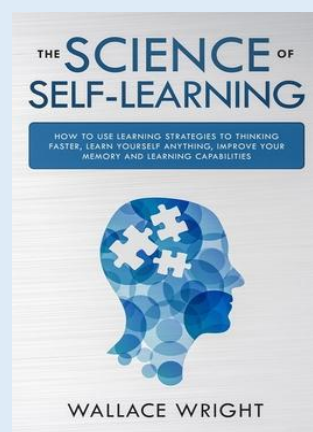
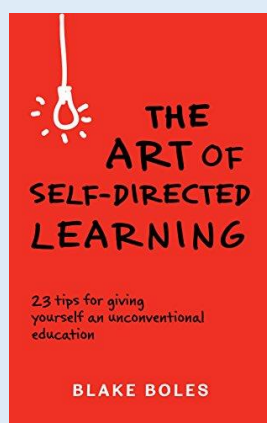
Our educational journey goes on thanks to self-learning at home.

The best of luck. Please take care!

Chev. Frank Gatt, Quality Assurance Department

REFERENCES and FURTHER READING

- *Benefits and Advantages of Self-Learning for Students, Professionals and Everyone:* <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/benefits-of-self-learning.htm>
- Boles B., *The Art of Self-Directed learning*, Tells Peak Press, 2014.
- Hollins P., *The Science of Self-Learning: How to Teach Yourself Anything*, Kindle Edition, 2019 Amazon.com, 2019.
- Wright W., *The Science of Self-Learning: How to Use Learning Strategies to Thinking Faster, Learn Yourself Anything, Improve Your Memory and Learning Capabilities* Kindle Edition, Amazon.com, 2019





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APPENDIX 1: CIRCULAR 78/2020 - Message from the Principal to all MCAST Community

Dear Members of Staff, Dear Students,

I hope you are keeping well and safe.

These are challenging times for all of us especially now that we are still half way through the academic year. Although most of us are working from home, we miss the physical interaction that makes the College so vibrant and alive every day.

Over the weekend, thanks to an agreement with the MUT, MCAST has launched a number of IT platforms through which interaction, on a voluntary basis, can be ongoing between students and lecturers. You are all free to make use of these tools. The aim is to freely give lecturers and students the opportunity to facilitate interaction through the use of technology.

What is important to keep in mind is that this period is not a holiday break and that if the situation does not improve, we could be facing tougher times ahead and new ways of working from a distance. Therefore, please avail yourself of every opportunity offered to keep in touch either if you are working or learning at MCAST.

I urge students to continue studying and consider each day as if it is a regular College day that is, looking into notes, preparing assignments and going over other material that lecturers have given you as part of the units being covered.

To all employees, I kindly encourage you to contribute in any way possible, as you deem fit, to keep the spirit of our MCAST community alive. Let's keep in mind that our main mission is the learning and welfare of our key clients: the students.


Management staff is aiming to be available online and on campus as much as possible. It is not easy to work from a distance and the experience is showing that it could be very stressful and frustrating. But our common good comes first and at this particular time we need to ensure that we are all keeping well and safe.

Much will depend on our will power, discipline as well as our professionalism. Management staff will do its very best to keep the momentum of an academic year alive and to support you in every way possible. I invite you to regularly access our web portal www.mcast.edu.mt and social media for updates through circulars and messages.

I would like to thank very warmly indeed all those who are supporting the College. As Principal, I am committing myself to do my utmost to lead the College through this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to contact me or the management team if you need support.

Keep safe and away from gatherings and unnecessary interaction with others. Hopefully, if we all work as a team, we will get through this together.

The Principal/CEO.



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Principal and CEO
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APPENDIX 2: MCAST Library goes ONLINE: E-Resources and Guidelines

MCAST Library and Learning Resource Centre

Accessing library electronic resources from outside MCAST



Types of electronic resources

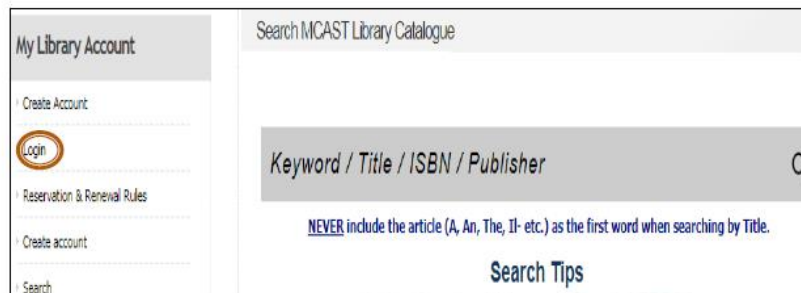
The electronic resources to which the library subscribes to are the following:

1. **EBSCO Academic Search Ultimate** database – **e-journals** in disciplines ranging from astronomy, anthropology, biomedicine, engineering, health, law and literacy to mathematics, pharmacology, women's studies, zoology and more.
1. **Emerald** database – **e-journals** in disciplines ranging from management, engineering, computing, technology, behavioral strategy, business strategy and more.
1. **Skillsoft (SkillPort)** database - **e-books** covering areas such as, business skills, compliance, desktop skills, engineering, government, IT skills, well-being, and certification.
2. **Weblinks** database - thousands of teacher-reviewed, approved and annotated **websites** useful for students and lecturers.
1. **IEEE** database – **e-journals**- a 30-day free trial until 3rd April of e-articles on all subjects ranging from engineering (automotive, electrical, biomedical, etc.) to information technology and sustainable technology, business, arts, sports, health and many more.



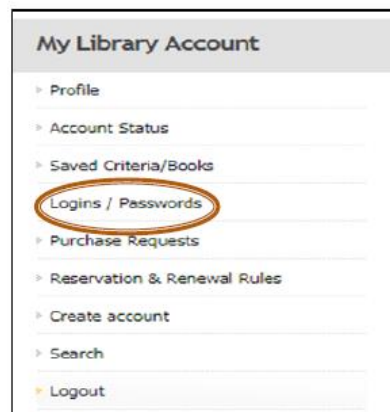
Accessing EBSCO Academic Search Ultimate, Emerald, Skillport and Weblinks

1. Go to <https://www.mcast.edu.mt/mcast-library/>
1. Log into the online **My Library Account** after registering with the library, and after having created this account. If you haven't, then click on the **Create Account** button to do so, following the instructions given.



Accessing EBSCO Academic Search Ultimate, Emerald, Skillport and Weblinks

1. Then click on the **Logins/Password** button on the left-hand menu to obtain the respective database URLs and passwords, where necessary.



Should you have any difficulty in accessing the library electronic resources, please do not hesitate to send an email to

llrc@mcast.edu.mt

or on 'MCAST Libraries' Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/MCAST.Libraries/>