



## **Welcome to distance learning at Milpark Business School!**

Distance learning can be challenging because students do not necessarily have face to face interactions with a teacher or because there are no easily accessible classmates. In order to assist you with your studies at Milpark Business School, this document gives you some background into distance learning and also provides some guidelines on how to be a successful distance learner.

### **What is distance learning?**

Simply described, distance learning (DL) is when the student is separated from the teacher by either time or physical distance. In DL there is limited contact with an instructor or other students primarily because learning occurs in a different place from the teaching. Perhaps the most common model of DL is when students receive a learning pack which contains various study materials and are required to submit a formative assessment/s for which they receive usually written feedback. Having submitted the required work the student is eligible to sit for the summative assessment, usually an examination, which takes place at a pre-determined time and place. The learning experience may be supported by tutoring or other forms of communication including email, telephone and online services (we have established online forums for certain qualifications). Distance learning requires special organisational and administrative arrangements in order to ensure a successful learning experience.

### **Why distance learning?**

- Working adults may not be able to attend classes.
- Family responsibilities may prevent people from leaving their place of residence.

- Some travelling professionals cannot be in one place long enough to attend classes.
- Some people may not be close enough to an institution that offers their qualification of choice.
- Distance learning is often more affordable as enrolment fees and student travel and other expenses either cost less or are not needed.
- Some people prefer to study independently as they do not feel comfortable with classroom interaction (at a particular stage in life).
- People may prefer to pace their studies according to their needs.
- There are people with certain types of physical challenges who may find distance learning more convenient and accommodating.

### **The distance learning experience**

Distance learning does not have the rhythm and the pace that is associated with contact learning. In contact learning, class timetables, lecture outlines and planned interactions guide the unfolding of the learning experience. A distance learning provider can anticipate many of the challenges associated with distance learning by including additional information and self-assessment tasks as part of the course materials. Ultimately though, DL requires an independent learner and it can be a lonely journey. The successful distance learner takes control of his/her learning experience and manages it so as to achieve maximum benefit.

### Lifestyle and career commitments

- Discuss the challenges inherent to your studies with family members and friends to determine how best they can support your efforts.
- Discuss your studies and career aspirations with your employer to generate understanding and support in the workplace.
- Plan your time at home in such a way that you allocate sufficient time to your studies as well as to other activities.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle by balancing your studies with other relaxing activities, including exercise.

## Approaching your studies

Research into study techniques shows that very few people study in exactly the same manner. However, certain general techniques have been shown to produce good results. Whilst these techniques are not a magic formula, by practising them and applying them you will gain valuable insight into the knowledge and outcomes expected from you. Effective study techniques are central to being thoroughly prepared for assessment.

### Preparation

- Obtain all the prescribed books and required materials as early as possible.
- Plan your studies according to the requirements of each module by compiling a detailed study schedule. In this way you will be able to allocate your precious time realistically to the tasks at hand. Revise this schedule as needed. This activity is **highly recommended**.
- Your schedule should be sufficiently detailed and broken down into weekly blocks indicating time for study, social activities as well as work time. It is important that sufficient time is also allocated for sleep!
- Decide on the best time of the day for you to study. Recognize your “biological clock” and set your study timetable accordingly and adhere to it.
- Planning should take into account assignment submission dates with sufficient time being allocated to cover all the material to be assessed for the assignment and the examination adequately. Remember to allow sufficient time for revision purposes as this is critical to enhance your chances of success in the examination.
- Factor “guilt-free” rest days into your schedule allowing your brain time to be refreshed.
- The question of **when** to study is critical. You should only study when you are rested, alert and have planned for it. Last minute studying is the result of bad planning and is generally a waste of time.
- Once your study schedule is completed, share it with family members / housemates to obtain their buy-in and co-operation during these study times.
- Make sure that you have all the contact details for tutors and know how to submit queries and how to access the forums (where applicable) under

“*Support*” on the student website. The forums (where applicable) have been established to support your studies.

- You can contact us if you want to identify other DL students in your area in order to form a study group or to enjoy the benefit of peer support. Some guidelines around study groups follow:
  - Choose 2 or 3 other students who share your learning goals.
  - Set a specific time, place and topic of study.
  - Ensure that everyone does the initial studying of the material and brings questions to the group.
  - Compare notes and focus on unanswered questions and predicted questions for the examination.
  - Debate issues or quiz each other.
  - Assign topics where one learner is designated to “teach” the others.
- Make sure that you have all the important dates: assignment due dates, examination briefing sessions and examination dates.
- Eliminate thinking that results in procrastination. For example, “I have plenty of time to do my assignment” often results in putting the assignment off until the last minute which is counter-productive.
- Lastly, don’t be afraid to revise your schedule – if it doesn’t work, redo it.

### Study venue

- Choice of a study venue is important. Obviously, some places are better than others and your chosen spot should work for you and not be distracting.
- Students are different and some need a completely quiet room whilst others study better listening to quiet music in the background. Determine what works best for you.
- Let your chosen place of study become your regular place of study – this disciplines your mind that you mean business once you are seated there.
- Sit in a quiet ventilated room and ban all distractions like TV, radio, pets, etc.
- Organize a large table / desk and a suitable chair wherever possible.
- Ensure that you are comfortable but don’t attempt to study lying down because you are more likely to fall asleep than to study!

- Prepare your study environment by ensuring that all your stationery and study materials are readily available. Nothing is more distracting than having to break your study routine once you have settled into it.

### The process of study

- Time is one of the most valuable resources – don't waste it. Make use of the allocated time in the most effective manner possible and avoid procrastination.
- Study in short, frequent sessions as this has been proven to be more effective. To sit and study for hours on end without a break is not only boring but leads to fatigue and stress. Concentrated study sessions should not be longer than 45 minutes as the brain cannot concentrate at the required level for longer than a 30-45 minute period.
- Take study breaks (10-15 minutes) away from your desk / study area and ensure that during the break you think about other things and not the material that you are studying.
- Do not study if you are tired, angry, distracted, or in a hurry. Our emotional state is important and if we are emotionally stressed our brain repels data.
- Do not study straight after eating a meal and allow sufficient time for your body to digest the meal or else valuable energy is directed into digestion as opposed to concentration and study.
- Do the most difficult tasks at a time when you are most efficient. Tackling these after an arduous day at the office can be extremely frustrating and not the best use of limited study time.
- Create a study routine. This way the "habit" of studying will be created and your brain will respond in an appropriate fashion.
- Start as early as possible in the semester by reading through all the instructions and study guides so that you have a good idea of what is required. This reading should guide the preparation of your study schedule.
- Set reasonable goals that are achievable. Nothing motivates more than achieving your goals which will ultimately lead to you being able to set higher goals for yourself. Break goals down into daily, weekly and monthly goals to ensure that achieving them is possible.

- Respect “brain fade” and ensure that adequate review of the study material is carried out. Frequent review of material is essential to avoid “brain drain.”
- The SQ3R method of study is a proven way to sharpen study skills:
  - **S – survey**  
The idea here is to get an **overall picture** of what you are going to study prior to studying it in any great detail. Use chapter / unit headings and outcomes to guide your skim-reading.
  - **Q – question**  
Ask yourself questions as you read or study. These questions should emphasise the what, how, why, when, who and where of the study content. Write questions in the margins of your study material or wherever else makes sense to you.
  - **R – read**  
Reading is not running your eyes over the study material but involves “active reading”. Read to answer questions you have asked yourself or use the self-study questions set in the material. Be alert to *italicized* print and graphs and tables, ensuring that you work thoroughly through these.
  - **R – recite**  
Stop reading periodically, to recall what you have read. Try to recall main headings, important ideas and concepts whilst trying to develop an overall concept of what you have read.
  - **R – review**  
This is a survey of what you have just covered. Re-reading is an important part of the review process and should not be left until just before the examination. It should take place shortly after you have finished studying a particular topic. The final review of your material should be a “fine-tuning” of your knowledge of the material.
- Highlighting study material is an important consideration with experience showing that highlighted text passages are more easily remembered than underlined text. Use of different colour highlighters is also recommended (headings, sub-headings and text for example) as it exercises both the left and right hemispheres of the brain and prolongs concentration levels.

## Mind mapping

- Mind mapping was developed in the 1960's by Tony Buzan as a method of making notes using only key words and images.
- It involves writing down the main idea to be studied and jotting down the various key points related to that main idea.
- These are depicted as branches flowing out of the main idea. By focusing on these aspects, and writing them down in your own words and then grouping them and depicting them as branching out from the main idea, you are making a map of your knowledge in a way that will help you understand and remember the information.

We trust that these tips and guidelines will be of assistance to you as you embark on this exciting journey.

## Important

**Do not struggle on your own while there is help available!** Contact us as soon as you feel that you are experiencing problems with your studies.

### **Important email addresses:**

Any queries: [info@milpark.ac.za](mailto:info@milpark.ac.za)

Tutor contact: [tutor@milpark.ac.za](mailto:tutor@milpark.ac.za)

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1. Extracts from article by Howard Richman of Sound Feelings Publishing – *11 Free Tips to Improve Study Results*, Tarzana, California. – <http://www.soundfellings.com/free/studying.htm>
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3. Extracts from SABC Education – Youth Zone, "*Tips for Effective Study*" – <http://www.sabceducation.co.za>