

University: Are you prepared?

A primer for new UNBC students

Required materials:

NUGGS Academic Planner (available for free in NUSC building)

A course syllabus for each course

Optional materials:

Reusable UNBC four-month calendar

❖ Motivation

Motivation is the incentive that drives us to do something. In a university setting, our level of motivation intensely affects our level of performance. Our beliefs, commitments, and emotions strongly influence our motivation levels. In addition, motivation is strongly affected by past successes and failures: success increases motivation; failure often reduces motivation.

When motivating yourself to study you may like to try the following:

- Acknowledge any stress, frustration, or fear of failure which hinders your start or progress.
- Avoid “What if...?” type thinking. Worrying is counter-productive and it destroys your confidence in completing manageable tasks.
- Create a comfortable work place where distractions and interruptions can be blocked out, with everything you need easily accessible.
- Divide large jobs into manageable tasks.
- Set a small reward for completing a defined task.
- Write down the specific task you wish to accomplish and the time you plan to finish it. *Be realistic when planning your tasks and time allocations.*
- Plan your tasks for *small periods* of time. Set temporary goals for fifteen or thirty minutes, which allows little opportunity for task avoidance or day-dreaming.
- Try to establish a positive habit of starting your tasks at a specific time each day. Time will then become a stimulus for the start of productive work.
- Challenge any temptation to put the task aside because you cannot complete it perfectly – perfectionism can be a major hindrance! Just get yourself started on the task, then re-shape your efforts as you go along.
- Tell a colleague what you expect to accomplish in your next study period. Your progress report to your colleague will act both as an incentive and a reward.
- **Expect to succeed. Define your goals and then get into action.**



❖ Plan Your Time

"I was always forgetting assignments and exams. It was so stressful. After I started using a day planner and a semester planner, my grades dramatically improved, but it felt like less effort."

How good are you at managing your time? Some of the biggest obstacles to a successful university career involve procrastination and time lost to trivial matters. Knowing what things consume your time and what scheduling methods work best for you not only helps you stay motivated but also gives you more control over a crazy semester.

Exercise: Where Does My Time Go?

Activities	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Total hours used
Daily Tasks: Sleeping Eating Grooming Errands/Chores Grocery Shopping Cooking Laundry								
School: Classes Travel Homework Reading/Studying Day Dreaming Worrying								
Work: Billed Hours Travel Preparation Worrying								
Other:								
Total hours remaining								/168

EXERCISE: Knowing the Due Date

Part 1:

Transcribe each assigned reading, due date, test date, and field trip date from each course syllabus into the NUGSS Academic Planner.

Part 2:

Write a description of assignments and exams onto the Gantt chart template and make a line to indicate the due date. Use the documents on the back of the Gantt chart to estimate the amount of time needed to read, study, or complete an assignment.

Optional: Poster-size dry erase semester calendars are very useful for visually tracking important dates and are available at the UNBC bookstore.



Daily/weekly planning

Where does the time go? Use the log below to plan next weeks schedule including class time, work time, homework time, travel time, etc. Copies of this weekly planner and a semester planner are available at the Learning Skills Centre.

TIME	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
5-6am							
6-7am							
7-8am							
8-9am							
9-10am							
10-11am							
11-12noon							
12-1pm							
1-2pm							
2-3pm							
3-4pm							
4-5pm							
5-6pm							
6-7pm							
7-8pm							
8-9pm							
9-10pm							
10-11pm							
11pm-12am +							

❖ Study Skills & Strategies

“When I first started university, I thought it would be like high school. You know – go to class, do some of the homework, study a little before a test...I was so wrong. I had to evolve and how I approach class, homework and studying had to evolve too.”

In addition to time management, there are several other simple techniques for boosting grades:

- Effectively read and comprehend assigned and supplementary material
- Fully develop thorough methods for clear and useful note-taking
- Actively interact with and absorb important information from lectures
- Properly develop memorization methods and thinking skills that help prepare for and write exams

❖ Reading

Pre-Reading

Always pre-read. Never skip out on reading the assigned material for a class. Pre-reading is a habit that you *need* to develop in order to get the most out of your class lectures. Professors lecture with the full expectation that students have pre-read. Many students do not pre-read and, as a result, are blind-sided by new concepts. Knowing what is to come in class gives you an immediate step ahead!

Planning reading

Before you read, know your time constraints

- Most people read at about 250 words per minute – do you know your average speed?
- Time your reading for one minute – how many words did you read?
- Look at your reading material – how long will it take you to get through one page? One chapter?

Active reading

Be efficient. Read actively to get the most out of the time spent reading. As you read, make sure you become familiar with any:

- Major headings
- Subheadings
- Main concepts
- Difficult concepts
- Key terms
- Diagrams/Illustrations



After you read, ask yourself:

- What is this mainly about?
- What are the implications of this?
- What more do I need to know?

Keep in Mind...

- Set realistic goals for the amount of time spent and number of pages read
- Divide the chapter into smaller ($\frac{1}{2}$ page, or 1 column) sections, instead of trying to read it all in one sitting.
- Give yourself small breaks when you read. Falling asleep trying to get through a full chapter gets you nowhere.
- Try looking through the Chapter Review if the material is too dense. Focus on the key concepts and terms it presents, and always go back into the chapter to look up any parts of the review that you don't understand.
- Don't sell yourself short by not investing in books. Your education is a lengthy investment in yourself, and depriving yourself of materials that help you do the best job possible makes your tuition a waste of money.

Don't worry if you don't understand everything in your first read-through. Your professor will most likely explain the more difficult concepts in class. Just grasping the basic ideas while pre-reading already gives you an advantage over the students who will only hear the difficult concepts for the first time in class!

❖ Listening

Lecture Attendance

Attendance is *very* rarely tracked in university classes – students choose whether or not to attend class. However, classes are a very important part of the learning process. Avoid missing classes except for in the most extreme of circumstances. Skipping classes is a 'slippery slope' leaving most students feeling disconnected and paranoid that they missed something important.



Active Listening

Do not attend your lectures just to doze off or pass notes. In every class you attend, make sure that you:

- look at the speaker;
- judge content, skip over delivery errors;
- don't judge until comprehension is complete;
- listen for central themes and signal words;
- try to predict what is going to come next;
- seek out the total meaning, not a selective part of the message;
- note connections and relationships between ideas;

- respond to the tone, not just the words;
- interpret all accompanying non-verbal cues;
- avoid distractions and concentrate on the speaker

Simple tricks for active listening

- Sit at the front of the class – it is difficult to zone out or fall asleep when the instructor is looking right at you.
- Sit up straight – people usually begin to slump as their attention wanders. The sensation of your back touching the chair will act as a cue to refocus.
- Try and ask at least one question per class – identifying a good question requires focus.
- Avoid sitting beside chatty people. Their whispered comments will disrupt your attention, resulting in you having to spend more time studying.

❖ Note-taking Strategies

Note-taking is very individualised - what works for others may not work for you. Here are some basic strategies:

- Make sure you put the name of the lecture, date and lecturer on the top of the page and number your pages so they are in order later when you review them.
- Leave space around your notes so you can add information later when you revise them.
- Note diagrams, graphs, charts used in the lecture - get the general theme or where to find them.
- Get the important details down on your page by clustering and labeling concepts with key words.
- Use highlighters, coloured pens and other schemes to make the important headings or ideas stand out.
- Eventually organise all your notes (lecture, tutorial, readings) on a particular topic together.
- To recall and aid understanding **read and reframe your notes within 24 hours!**
- **Revise** your weekly notes **over the weekend** to help your long term memory.



Short-Hand

Using a short-hand notation can reduce the amount of time you spend writing and provide more time to ask questions or think about a concept.

Abbreviate terms you use often:		Use symbols:	
also known as	aka	sum/including	Σ
Minister of Parliament	MP	approximately	\sim
for example	e.g.	approximately equal	\approx
especially	esp	resulting in	\rightarrow
with	w/	therefore	\therefore
without	w/o	and	+
		most importantly	*
		less than	<
		more than	>
		same as, equal to	=
		increasing	\uparrow
		decreasing	\downarrow

	<p>Cornell Notes:</p> <p>Note-taking Column</p> <p>Write Notes in this column during class and when reading a text book. When possible, leave room after major concepts to add more information.</p>
<p>Cue Column</p> <p>After wards, record keywords and questions regarding the information in the notes column.</p>	
<p>Summarize the contents of the page at the bottom of the page. Summarizing will help to keep notes organized and help you to remember.</p>	

❖ Midterm & Exam Preparation

By systematically revising your notes within 24 hours, you will retain 80% more. Failure to do this may result in only retaining 20% of the information. To further enhance your memory, weekly revision will ensure that information will be retained in your long term memory. Therefore exam preparation is a continuous process which begins on day one of your course and continues with weekly, monthly revision sessions.



❖ Preparing for Final Exams

At least **five weeks beforehand** (Beginning of November and March)

1. Make summary notes and flashcards - map key ideas to show:
 - Relationships (cause/effect, problems, comparison/contrast)
 - Key words/terms/ideas/concepts/definitions
 - Examples
2. Organise your study timetable to allow for shorter but more frequent periods of concentrated study and memorisation (20 minutes with a 5 minute break).
3. Go over past exams and practise essay writing and short answer questions by doing two to four tasks each week.
4. Make sure you are familiar with the structure of the exam paper in each subject:
 - How many sections are there?
 - How much is each section worth?
 - Time allocations?
 - Topics or skills being examined?
5. Clarify the topics being examined with lecturers and tutors, identifying key concepts, issues, and themes you are expected to know.
6. Find time to relax - do not burn yourself out!

One week before your exam...

1. Memorise summarised notes - visualise concept maps.
2. Practise numerous essay plans, introductions and conclusions.
3. Quiz yourself - get some help from family and friends. Make certain you actually know your subject matter, not just think you know it.
4. Clear up any doubts or uncertainties with instructors or other students.
5. Know the type of materials needed for the exam (e.g. calculator, ruler, blank paper) or prohibited from the exam room (e.g. cell phone)

The day before...

You need to be well rested and alert to complete your exam, so don't overdo it the day before the exam. A tired, tense student is in no position to do as well as a refreshed confident one. Use slow breathing to calm down and avoid the company of tense students.

Do...

- Review your summaries and notes to refresh your memory and build your confidence.
- Organise the equipment and materials you will need for the exam.
- Relax.
- Go to bed early - try to get at least six hours sleep.



Don't...

- Cram late into the evening.
- Join other students in exam hysteria.



❖ In the Exam

Take time to:

1. Read all instructions carefully
2. Work out your time allocations for each question or section.
3. Select the questions which are easiest and carry the most marks to do first.



Writing the exam:

1. Mark your chosen questions and note time allocations for each question or section. Balance your time realistically.
2. Underline key words and phrases; identify task words, content words and limiting words.
3. Make an outline for long questions and essays. Ensure that:
 - all parts of the question are answered;
 - all your points are relevant;
 - your introductions and conclusions are effective.
4. Write legibly; avoid careless spelling and grammatical errors.
5. If you are running out of time on an essay, use point form to get your key ideas across, but try to do a full conclusion.



6. If you have a mental blank, leave what you are doing and come back to it. If you remember some information while you are in the middle of something else, jot down the key words next to the question on the question paper and come back to it later.
7. Avoid leaving out a question because you think it is too difficult. Use your interpretative skills and write down everything you think is relevant to the question.
8. Use *all* your time. If you have spare time, proofread your work, rewrite messy sections, check spelling, correct calculations, etc.



Adapted from: Orr, F. (1988) [*How to succeed at part-time study*](#). Sydney: Unwin Paperbacks.