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INTRODUCTION

Who can benefit from this Pack ?

- **Anyone** interested in self-development through reading, writing and study.
- **Mature students and sixth-formers** preparing for the independent regime of university study, along with its various and demanding tasks (essays, exams, presentations, vivas, etc).
- **Students already at university** (post-graduates too) motivated to find new stress-reducing study techniques or ways of enhancing grades, confidence and their enjoyment of courses.
- **Teachers/ Tutors**, and their departments, seeking support or fresh ideas in establishing (or augmenting) a rigorous, effective and student-friendly approach to Study Skills.
- **RLF Fellows** in academic/ writing institutions, involved in 1-to-1 or group work where Study Skills are an on-going concern, or dealing with repetitive study-based problems.

What is 'Mission Possible' all about ? Why use this material ?

Many students, at some point in their study, find themselves apparently stuck in the same old problems. Their grades refuse to budge. Coursework becomes a chore. Other students might actually be doing very well, yet seem thwarted in their attempts to hit the very top notes of achievement. *Mission Possible* offers all such students and their tutors, at the very least, a partial remedy. This diverse palette of Study Skills resources has been developed by Mario Petrucci, Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Oxford Brookes University, and with the bogged-down student very much in mind. It is free for anyone to use, either in personal study or as part of a tutored course (though not for publication or resale, see *Conditions of Use*).

The Pack is already tried and tested, and has proved invaluable to students in the preparation of essays, dissertations, talks and presentations, as well as for anyone attempting to survive exams. Many of the techniques, though, go further than that: they also help with 'life skills'. That is, the ideas can be adapted to all kinds of situation – anything from the design of a clear and energetic CV, to giving an impressive job (or radio!) interview. The benefits are lifelong.

What kinds of topic are included ?

Speaking & Presenting in Public	Design & Delivery of Overhead Transparencies / Powerpoint
Voice, Body, Breath; Nerves	Creating a 'Core Statement' (for essay plans, etc)
Essay Plans	Making sure you answer the Question
Building Your Argument: '13 Ways'	Modes of Reading: 'Skim/ Scan/ Spiral'
Memory and Revision	Mnemonics (making memory easier)
Memory's Wheelbarrow	Strands of Study (a strategy for the entire year)
Managing Tasks: the 6-Stage Attack	Building 'Personal Modules' (your knowledge base)
Proofing & Checking	The Five Writers (how do <i>you</i> work?)
Basic Study Skills: a summary	Building English (eg for overseas students)

What the Pack *doesn't* do...

Mission Possible is by no means exhaustive, nor is it a cure-all for every type of difficulty you will encounter in essays, exams or research. There are gaps which, given the space and time, I would have liked to plug (including that fraught issue of how to adjust your work to meet a required word count). Moreover, there are common queries in essay-writing – such as the conventions for bibliographies, quotes, etc – which I keep silence on, partly because they are dealt with so thoroughly elsewhere (for instance, a mere click or two away on this very site, in David Kennedy's excellent guide). I focus instead on a number of key skills in study, planning and presentation, often of deep concern to students but not always dealt with in the 'How-To' books. I also introduce new, unusual or revitalising techniques to cope with some of the perennial problems. As ever, though, one cannot find all the answers in one place – one never does! – but I am confident *Mission Possible* will give you a good start.

Things to watch out for ...

Clearly, no format can meet every eventuality; so, I must leave it to you to adapt, interpret or rewrite each item according to your specific needs. If for any reason you *do* get stuck or confused, the advice or input of a tutor or colleague can, of course, really help. It is also understood that whenever my examples refer to a particular author or book (Byron's *Don Juan*, for instance, or the British Council/ Picador anthology *New Writing 12*) more pertinent texts of your own choice may be substituted.

Students using the Pack.

You can use these handouts and exercises (including the seminars) as part of your independent/ self-directed study, or to bolster your grades. It is a good idea to access the site with friends, particularly where seminar/ group work is suggested. The pages can be viewed on-screen or downloaded. Each exercise has been made as student-friendly as possible, with well-scaffolded guidance notes and many examples to enable you to run with a sheet (or set of sheets) pretty much from scratch.

One important thing to remember: most of the handouts were originally designed for a tutor-led module, so please don't be put off when you encounter notes or instructions directed at tutors. Read those notes, as you may need to take them in. Also, if some handouts seem (at first sight) a little more difficult to do on your own, by all means get the help of a friend or teacher/ tutor. I have included those resources because I want to cater for all levels of aptitude and experience; furthermore, with the Pack thus intact, you have access to all the background material and get a better sense of how the exercises fit together. Of course, you can choose just the pages you want to use. But do bear in mind that, with a little help, the more advanced exercises can be invaluable to core aspects of your study.

Conditions of Use.

I am entirely happy for any of these handouts and exercises (or adaptations of them) to be copied and used for educational purposes, subject to the following conditions:

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‘MISSION POSSIBLE’: THE STUDY SKILLS PACK

[a brief overview]

WHAT KIND OF WRITER ARE YOU? ‘Five Writers’. Seminar: 1 hour.

Handout: Discovering some different styles and approaches to writing and planning. What kind(s) of writer are you? How might you adapt and improve your approach?

Cartoons and instructions. For tutor-led work or self-directed study.

PRESENTATION SKILLS.

Useful for tutors as well as students, whenever you present information via speech or audio-visual means. General help on some key issues behind good talks, lectures, seminar inputs, interviews.

Tutor-led or self-directed study (3 parts). A mixture of handouts, overhead transparencies (OTs) & guidance sheets.

Presentation Skills 1 Some general ideas on making presentations ...

Exercise 1:	Body vs Brain	Is presentation about the body or the brain?
Exercise 2:	Prompting	Techniques for making a passage connect & flow.
Exercise 3:	Breaking Stones	Improving stodgy or woolly passages.
OT:	The Power of Prompts	Simple example, showing how key a ‘prompt’ can be.

Presentation Skills 2 Designing OTs: the dos and don’ts ...

Handout: (a) Overall considerations in making a presentation. Speaker + audience.

Handout: (b) Designing an overhead/ handout. The 4 Ls: *Load, Look, Layout, Learning*.

OTs:	(c) Some examples of OTs:	# 1	Awful !
		# 2	Better ? How much so ?
		# 3	Effect of removing ‘visual cues’
		# 4	Effect of paring things down
		# 5	A good overhead transparency ?

OT: (d) A note on proofing.

Presentation Skills 3 Voice, Body and Breath.

Handout: Preparing to speak. Being still. Habits. Relaxation. Dealing with nerves! Rehearsals.

Seminars on Presentation About 1 hour to do both. Suitable source texts needed (eg via tutor).

Instructions:	Seminar A: Producing OTs	<i>Practise making a good transparency, using suitable course texts (group work).</i>
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Instructions:	Seminar B: ‘Holding the Thought’	<i>Working (in pairs) on your oral delivery.</i>
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ANSWERING THE QUESTION/ QUESTIONING THE ANSWER.

Essays, exams, and all the rest. These handouts, seminars and exercises can form the core of lectures and guided work on the subject; also, they can (mostly) be used by students independently.

Some innovative techniques which help students to make a thorough, coherent response in **essays, reports, exams, dissertations, presentations**, etc. Includes: getting to grips with what you want to say and summarising your ideas effectively (Core Statement); making sure you answer a question suitably and thoroughly (Black-Red-Green); finding a strong and viable structure for your answer (the 13 Ways).

Handout/ OT: **Summary** of the various ideas in this section.

Answering/ Questioning [A] **The Core Statement** (or: what are you trying to say?)

Main handout: What is a ‘Core Statement’ and why is it useful? Building an essay around it.

+ Support handout/ OT: A further example of a good Core Statement.

+ Support handout/ OT: Summary/ recap of issues around the Core Statement.

Instructions:	Seminar: the Core Statement ‘Swap’.	<i>1-1.5 hours</i>
	Take an old (or current) essay and work in pairs to improve it.	

Answering / Questioning [B]

Black-Red-Green + ShadoW-WordS.

- Handout: **Introduction.** An epidemic: why people *don't* answer the question.
- Handout: **Black-Red-Green Method.** How to make sure you *do* answer the question.
- Handout/ OT: Summary version of previous handout on Black-Red-Green.
- Handout/ OT: **ShadoW-WordS.** When it comes to 'Green' (above) see how certain words in the question drop definite hints on how you should answer.
- Handout/ OT: **An example** of how to use Black-Red-Green to generate a full essay plan. This is an advanced example, so do discuss it with peers and tutors.

Answering/ Questioning [C]

Building an Argument: the 13 Ways.

- Handout: Every argument needs a logical structure. This sheet describes 13 types of structure, **the '13 Ways'**. What are the 13 Ways? How can they help you? This section needs a little time & in-depth study. *Read this sheet alongside the 13 Ways chart (next) ...*
- Handout/ OT: **13 Ways Chart.** Visual representation of 13 possible structures (essays, etc).
- Handout/ OT: Performing the same task using different Ways (Example 1: Beckham).
- Handout/ OT: Performing the same task using different Ways (Example 2: Job interview). *There's usually more than one 'Way' of answering a question. The 13 Ways are flexible, and you can choose which approach you prefer. However, some Ways may be more suitable than others for a given task (see seminar later).*
- Handout/ OT: Discussion (optional): where does 'Beginning-Middle-End' fit in to all this?
- Handout/ OT: **Building An Argument: The 3 Types.**
- [OPTIONAL] A simpler (but far more general & less complete) set of essay structures.

Essay Plans and the '13 Ways': a Seminar Advance preparation + 1 hour seminar.

This is a crucial activity if students are to fully grasp the various methods in this section. Aim: to practise the Black-Red-Green Method, create a Core Statement and produce (and improve) an Essay Plan. This is the exercise where all the relevant ideas come together. Group work (tutor-led) or self-directed study (students work alone or in pairs).

- Preparation sheet: This sets up the seminar (see next). You require two questions [A & B] to work with. Typical examples of A & B are given, but you should substitute your own. All students work through this sheet, well ahead of the seminar.
- [in advance]
- Seminar handout: 2 sheets of instructions (with discussion) + another copy of the 13 Ways chart.
- [on day] *Will help you: answer the question, plan your essay, improve its structure.*
- + **Alternative Seminar** Uses the 13 Ways to tackle more varied writing tasks. Needs 13 Ways chart.
- [Instructions] *Helps develop useful structuring skills for all kinds of assignment.*
- (Optional) Handout/ OT: Follow-up for seminar – **Essay Plans/ 4 Steps.** A summary of outcomes from the Essay Plans/ 13 Ways seminar (above). 4 Steps to answering a question.

MEMORY / STUDY / PROCESSING NOTES.

Various tools and strategies: preparing for exams; improving your memory; making better use of notes.

- Handouts: **'Memories'** Memory/ Mnemonics/ Exams:
a practical introduction to memory.
- Handouts/ OTs: **Processing your notes: Personal Modules I** – example (using Jakobson Model).
Personal Modules II – creating '**Blocks**'.
An easy and powerful way to build a reservoir of structured notes over the course of a degree. Develop 'modular' resources you can use effectively in a variety of situations.
- Handout/ OT: **Memory and Study: 'Strands of Study'.**
Understanding the rhythms and structures of study. Memory, lectures, exams. Note-taking, reading, revision. How to time things for best results. Building to a climax.
- Handout/ OT: **Memory and Revision: some reinforcements.** Sleep: Memory's Wheelbarrow.
The importance of sleep and of the quality of revision (not just the quantity). Managing memory: short-term, mid-term, long-term memory.

MANAGING TASKS/ MAKING PRESENTATIONS.

The overall management of assignments, particularly tough ones! Learning from experience. Further thoughts on Presentations.

Handout: **The 6 Stages:** a General Approach to Tasks.

This section brings together most of the earlier ideas, creating a powerful six-stage approach to task-solving. This is an all-purpose, flexible approach you can adapt to most situations or assignments.

Handout: **‘Before & After’:** some final thoughts about Managing Tasks.

The need to check your work, to learn from previous assignments. Recognising your strengths, weaknesses. Rehearsing for presentations. Growing as a writer.

Study Skills: a summary. Handout/ OT: a simple overview of all the ground we’ve covered. Study as an involvement of the Self – much more than just a series of tasks. Enjoying what you do.

MISCELLANEOUS STUDY TOOLS.

Some important odds and ends: Basic Study Skills; Writing Essays (Key Stages); Building Your English; Techniques for Reading (Skim/ Scan/ Spiral); Modes/ Categories of Writing.

1. Handout: **Basic Study Skills.** Assessing tasks; building your response.
Useful when you have a great deal of material to read or research. Saving time.
 2. Handout: **Writing Essays: Key Stages.** Clear, step-by-step approach to producing an essay.
The key concerns – captured on one sheet of A4. Supplements earlier material.
 3. Handout: **Building Your English.** Particularly useful for overseas students.
 4. Handout/ OT: **Techniques for Reading: Skim/ Scan/ Spiral.**
There are different ways of ‘reading’. Save time; cover more ground more effectively.
 5. Handout/ OT: **Modes of Writing** (Categories). Descriptive writing, analysis, evaluation, etc.
A quick guide to 8 modes of writing, what they are and when to use them.
-

FIVE WRITERS. Which one are *you* ...?

LEAPER ?



"I don't know, to begin with, where my ideas are going. I just start to write, to see where it takes me ..."

"I write the sections separately, each dealing with a key idea or topic area... when these are finished, I try to make them all fit together."



CRAZY PAVER ?

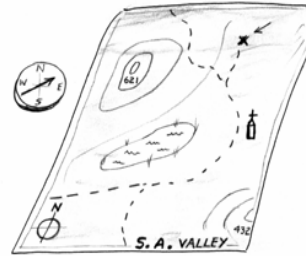
RUMINATOR ?



"I do all the reading and studying first; then, when *finally* it gels in my head, I write it down – sometimes in one go ..."

"I search for known landmarks, get some idea of the landscape – then steer a course through salient points, correcting my bearings as I go..."

MAP-READER / HIKER ?



BLUEPRINTER ?



"I usually 'see' the structure before the detail, maybe sketching a mind-map or diagram. Then I create a design for the whole piece, which I generally stick to."

OR A mixture of these? Something else? Depends on the assignment? It changes as you go?

Seminar : ‘FIVE WRITERS’ (55 mins)

AIMS To explore and understand 5 distinct kinds of thinker/writer. Highlight the differences between them; examine the possible strengths and weaknesses of each kind.

(a) Introduction. *Initial comments.* [2 minutes]

Whether for driving tests or Test Cricket, training is necessary. Why should writing, or study, be exempt? That's not to say it's *all* about practice, or using tools: to write well also means exploring and channelling the self. That's a challenge; but an immense opportunity too. Being more aware of our 'knee-jerk' habits in writing, and learning from other styles, is essential.

(b) ‘Which writer are you ?’ *Work individually.* [8 minutes]

Peruse the cartoons overleaf. Which cartoon comes *closest* to the way you write? After a couple of minutes, take a show of hands. How many of each type in the room?

Important. Perhaps *none* of the types fit you, not even loosely (see ‘OR’ under the cartoons). If so, draw your *own* cartoon for how you work, plus 2-3 lines of description (eg ‘I use different approaches, depending on the situation, with no real favourite...’). Meanwhile, those happy with their type can customise it: ie question it (eg have you *always* been that type?); add personal detail.

(c) Differences; Strengths. *Work in small groups.*

Form into groups of the **SAME TYPE** (2 - 4 per group). If you're the *only* person of a given type (or if, in your opinion, none of the types fit you) simply join any existing group.

- (i) Jot down some key differences between your type and **each** of the others. [5 minutes]
 (ii) Which of the qualities below (or their ‘opposites’, given in []) would you enter in your ‘row’ of the grid (see example for ‘Crazy Paver’)? Add your own ideas too. [10 minutes]

[Lack of] focus	[Lack of] fluency	[No] clear structure	[Lack of] thoroughness
A unified ‘whole’	Scope/ breadth	Missing key ideas	Seizing the ‘ready-made’
[In-] Coherence	Flexibility [Rigidity]	Irrelevant digression	Distorted interpretations
Attention to detail	Coping with bulk	Missed deadlines	Excessive word-count

- (iii) If you have any time left, choose a different row (i.e. not your own type) and repeat (ii).

<u>5 WRITERS: GRID</u>	Potential Strengths (i.e. seems good for...)	Potential Weaknesses (i.e. may lead to...)
LEAPER		
CRAZY PAVER	Thoroughness?	Lack of fluency.
RUMINATOR		
BLUEPRINTER		
MAP-READER		

(d) Conclusions? *Return to the large group. (Tutor-led plenary.)*

- (i) Briefly, share your insights concerning the differences between types. [5-10 min]
 (ii) Pooling your results, create a ‘collective grid’ for strengths & weaknesses [if short of time, just pick a few of the grid’s ‘boxes’ at random, and compare what the different groups put in them]. Negotiate any disagreements. [10 min]
 (iii) * “None of the 5 writers is inherently superior to the others.” [5-10 min]
 * “You don’t *always* have to plan things in advance, or in detail.”
 * “No writer/thinker can, or should, be pigeon-holed as ‘a type’.”
 * “We can’t be pigeon-holed? So, we’ve just been wasting our time...” ... **Discuss.**
 (iv) What insights have you had about the way(s) in which you approach writing?
 In trying to improve, what could you learn from the other types? [5-10 min]

Post-seminar Create a ‘mnemonic’ (a memory aid) for: (i) the Five Writers (eg “a **crazy leap** into the **blue map-room**”); (ii) the possible strengths and weaknesses of your type.

PRESENTATION SKILLS 1

Exercises: Body vs Brain; Prompting; Breaking Stones

Exercise 1: BODY vs BRAIN (SOMA vs CEREBRUM)

QUESTION: How much of your presentation is BRAIN (content, information, ideas) and how much is BODY (posture, breath, gestures, eye contact, body language)? Give each of them a mark out of ten for importance.

Now compare your marks. Discuss them. Here are some ideas to provoke argument...

- Could you argue BODY gets 10/10 because without a body there can't *be* any CONTENT?
- Did you know that an audience takes in more than half of a talk in *purely* visual ways (i.e. through gestures, facial expression, etc. as opposed to what you actually say)? Does this mean you should dash around and make lots of gestures?
- Is it sensible to set up Body and Brain as opposites? Instead of 'Body versus Brain' shouldn't it be 'Body *and* Brain', or 'Brain *through* Body'? Or 'Brain *with* Body'?
- 'Words and text are really "modified breath" '. Discuss. *[Optional.]*

Exercise 2: PROMPTING

In seminars and presentations, various forms of 'prompt' are crucial: they maintain fluency, clarity, vibrancy. They ensure that we engage and inform the audience.

EXAMPLE. Compare the following two versions of the same statement:

"The issue of slavery can be put to one side temporarily in order to deal with the more pertinent factor of colonialism."

*

"So – let's leave the issue of Ethiopian slavery (just for now) to one side: because in this **second** half of the talk, what I **REALLY** want to consider is something of at least equal importance....

..... Colonialism."

- What kinds of 'prompt' can you find in the 2nd version?
[Use the notes overleaf – 'Some Types of Prompt' – to help you.]
- Who are those prompts for (i.e. for audience or speaker)?
- In the 2nd version, are the prompts effective? In what ways?

[HANDOUT: PRESENTATION SKILLS 1: p. 1]

Some types of Prompt

'So' 'because'	'Connection' – Conjunctive Prompts
' – : . '	'Dissection' – Punctuational Prompts
'Let's'	'Register' – Tonal Prompt (eg: to mark a shift in voice)
'Ethiopian'	'Naming' – Informational Prompt (confers authority)
'(just for now)'	'Deferral' – Temporal/ Structural Prompt
'because... want'	'Expectation' – Temporal/ Structural Prompt
'in this second half'	'Ordering' – Temporal/ Structural Prompt
'really' 'want to...'	'Emphasis' – Emotional Prompt
'second' 'least' 'REALLY'	'Emphasis' – Typographic Prompt (use of: font, bold, italics, brackets, etc)
'at least equal...'	'Hierarchy' – Relational Prompt (compares things)
'consider'	'Argument' – Modal Prompt (type of argument proposed)
[syntax of sentence]	'Syntax' – Syntactic Prompts (for drama/ delay/ effect)
[paragraphs, indents, gaps, etc...]	'Space' – Spatial Prompts (for clarity, emphasis, etc)
... and so on!	

In a longer text we would also want '**Logical Prompts**' – i.e. connective words between sentences, paragraphs and sections. These are words or phrases that continue, or carry through, the thread of the argument (eg 'In the light of this...' or 'Moreover...'). Think of the sentences in your presentation as a long line of dominoes. Each sentence needs to 'knock' the next one over...

There are, of course, many other types of Prompt. Come up with your own. But please – don't try to memorise my jargon. What's important is that you stay alert to Prompts in all their variety. Tune in to them. *Use them.* They're an essential form of textual lubrication.

Exercise 3: 'BREAKING STONES'

"Whenever passages (in essays or talks) are feeling 'woolly' or diffuse, it can be useful to sometimes try breaking them down (as far as possible) into simpler sentences of the type we might call subject-verb-object, like breaking a large stone into smaller ones – an exercise I have called (elsewhere) the breaking of stones."

In other words...

"That passage feels woolly. It is diffuse. I will try to break it down. I shall use simple sentences. The sentence type is: subject-verb-object. This is called 'breaking stones'."

Often, the result of this exercise will uncover two types of deficiency:

1. **If it is impossible to complete the exercise – or if the result is hard to follow** – then your original statement may have some logical error in it. Perhaps your original argument is unclear, or misses a step. Perhaps the 'Logical Prompts' are absent, or are misleading (eg using 'Therefore...' instead of 'In addition to this').
2. **If the result is blindingly dull**, then check your original text for inventiveness. Is your wording a bit on the lazy side? Is the text full of padding and irrelevant detail? Could you pare it down? Do you use strong, precise, unusual verbs and nouns?

[HANDOUT: PRESENTATION SKILLS 1: p. 2]

THE POWER OF 'PROMPTS' ...

I'm going to the party...

(insert logical prompt **X** here)

... Sarah is too.

Try X	=	'because'	
	or	'therefore'	
	or	'even though'	<i>etc</i>

... and judge the resulting *effect* !

Conclusion: even the simplest of logical prompts
or 'connectives' can convey *a lot* of information...

PRESENTATION SKILLS 2

Designing OTs

***‘OT’ = an OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY
(or POWERPOINT SLIDE)***

[These principles also apply in many other forms of presentation (eg handouts)...
i.e. ... USE OF SPACE / CLARITY / STRUCTURE / BALANCE / TIME / etc]

(a) OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS ('Macro-text')

(including **SPEAKER** ↔ **AUDIENCE** interactions)

- **AIMS** of Presentation *Type of Audience ?*

- Needs of **SPEAKER**
 vs
Needs of **AUDIENCE** *OTs = thorough ? (for YOU)*
OTs = sparse ? (for THEM) ... CONFLICT ?

- **STRUCTURE** *Talks vs Essays: differences ?*
 How can OTs help define structure ?

- **CONTENT:** % on OTs vs % SAID ? *Audience-dependent ?*
‘Good Cop – Bad Cop’ *OTs = facts ; YOU = interest / anecdotes !*

- **SUPPORT MATERIALS**
Handouts & other Audio-Visuals ? Why use OTs at all ?

*

- **TIME CONSTRAINTS** ... on Preparation as well as Talk itself!
- **Max. no. of OTs per minute** = ? *What’s your guess ?*
- **TIMING** ... Improvisation vs Planning — Balance ?
NOTE: Impro is SLOW ! + Everyone always over-runs. [Why?]

*

- **INSPECT ROOM.** *Space. Where to stand? (Don’t block the view!)*
- **CHECK** machine and image.
On/Off switch + Focus. Legibility. Visibility. Glitches: ‘Plan B’ ?

(b) INDIVIDUAL ‘OTs’ (‘Micro-text’)

Lighten your material. Let it breathe. The 4 Ls ...

the Load

- **CONTENT** vs **EXPOSITION** ?
How much on OTs ? How much said ?
 - **Max. Info.** per OT = ? + *Design of OTs ?*
Good design → more info. per OT (design + load are linked).
Do NOT put huge chunks of text on OTs ... = irritating !
 - **SENTENCES** vs **BULLETS** *Paring down.*
 - **RELEASE:** *Use of a pointer? Sliding sheet? Surprise ‘flaps’?*
-

the Look’...

- **TYPOGRAPHY** *min. font size ? font type ? margins ?*
bold, italics, etc. line spacing ? ... etc
 - Consistent **STYLE** vs **VARIETY** ?
 - Use of **COLOUR** ?
 - Use of **DIAGRAMS, DRAWINGS, IMAGES** ?
-

the Layout ...

- **SPACE = INFORMATION !** *Indents, arrows, alignments.*
Spatial relationship of elements: ‘3D’? Groups/ Mosaics? Zones?
-

Learning ...

- Exercises: **PROMPTING** and ‘**BREAKING STONES**’
 - Try out talk + OTs on a FRIEND [+ Typos/ Proofing]
 - Is THIS a good transparency? *What makes an OT OK or OTT?*
-

5 SAMPLE OTs to follow ...

A key point here is that although most students quickly grasp the sense of 'Explicit' Intertextuality, it is not always so clear to them what is going on at the other end of the spectrum. Indeed, I created the idea of 'Intra-textuality' precisely because the spectrum suggested it, thus opening up an entire new area of discourse and immediately offering a finer structure for the 'Implicit' regions of Intertextuality that some find so confusing. The continuum is discussed more fully elsewhere [Petrucci 2001a, 2001b] but suffice it to say that, in spite of its speculative and provisional nature, this analogy has kick-started detailed debates around Intertext and accommodated all types of theory, from Barthes [1981] to Pope [1995]. It has even been used – albeit at full stretch – to broach the difficult subject of authorship and originality, with (for example) the Explicit extreme stressing text as 'derived object' and the Intra-textual regime suggesting a unique, willed writing-subject. Naturally, the reader may wish to substitute a preferred interpretation; but whatever the slant, it certainly seems to do students no harm to visit, from this new analogic angle, the Intra-textual 'dark matter' of their linguistic universe.

IV. CROSS-TALK, MUTATION, CHAOS

I now present further hybrid analogues (Figures 3, 4 & 5) which qualify – to some degree at least – as Visualizations. That is, they 'store', visually, some recognisable pattern of characteristics, or some parallel set of relationships, which illuminate not only the sourced scientific situation but also the targeted aspect of textual reception. Their 'bubbles' in conceptual space thus overlap, linking those fields. The FIGURE 4, for instance, provides an interesting metaphor for textual reception. Do texts arrive in the reader modulated in a complex way by all manner of inputs and accidents, with the complex 'environment' corresponding to a reader's personality and socio-cultural context, her experiences of other texts, indeed all her involvements with context [7]? In other words: "Is poetry like the ~~MUTATION~~?"



(CROSS-TALK, MUTATION, CHAOS)

FIGURE 4

"Adaptation / Mutation
Analogy"



THESE VISUALIZATIONS 'STORE' CHARACTERISTICS (patterns, parallel sets of relationships). DO TEXTS ARRIVE IN THE READER, FOR EXAMPLE, IN A COMPLEX, MODULATED WAY? HOW DOES THE RECEPTION OF TEXT(S) IN A CULTURE CHANGE WITH TIME?

Like MUTATION?

(effects of complex
Environmental Conditions)

1. CHANGED CODES (DNA)

2. (meanings and associations)
(culture) (social existence)

(c.f. Smooth, gradual change)

= ADAPTATION/
VARIATION

2. "FAMILY LIKENESS"

(c.f. Sudden, radical change)

= MUTATION

- COMPLEX
- FLEXIBLE?
- INCREMENTAL.

• ESSENTIALISM?

- LIMITATIONS OF METHOD AND
ANALOGY VARIES — DISCUSS?

SUMMARY

Sample OT # 3 [sans typographic variation or 'cues']

Text below has been stripped of 'visual cues' & typographic variety. It becomes boring and impenetrable.

(B) INDIVIDUAL OTS (MICRO-TEXT)

THE LOAD

**CONTENT VS EXPOSITION?
HOW MUCH ON OT? HOW MUCH SAID?**

MAX. INFO. PER OT = ? DESIGN OF OTs?

SENTENCES VS BULLETS PARING DOWN.

**RELEASE: USE OF A POINTER? SLIDING
SHEET? SURPRISE FLAPS?**

THE LOOK

**TYPOGRAPHY. MIN. FONT SIZE? FONT TYPE?
MARGINS? BOLD, ITALICS, LINE SPACING? etc**

CONSISTENT STYLE VS VARIETY?

USE OF COLOUR?

USE OF DIAGRAMS, DRAWINGS, IMAGES?

THE LAYOUT

**SPACE = INFORMATION. INDENTS, ARROWS,
ALIGNMENTS. SPATIAL RELATIONSHIP OF
ELEMENTS. 3D? GROUPS/MOSAICS? ZONES?**

LEARNING

EXERCISES. PROMPTING. BREAKING STONES.

TRY OUT TALK + OTS ON A FRIEND.

IS THIS A GOOD TRANSPARENCY?

Sample OT # 4 [Visual effect of 'Paring Down' ...]

COMPARE THIS OT with SAMPLE OT # 3 ...

... still rather bland; but see how much clearer it has become, simply by removing a few unnecessary words.

(B) INDIVIDUAL OTS

THE LOAD

CONTENT VS EXPOSITION?

MAX. INFO. ? DESIGN?

SENTENCES VS BULLETS

RELEASE

THE LOOK

TYPOGRAPHY

CONSISTENT STYLE?

COLOUR?

DIAGRAMS, DRAWINGS, IMAGES?

THE LAYOUT

SPACE = INFORMATION

LEARNING

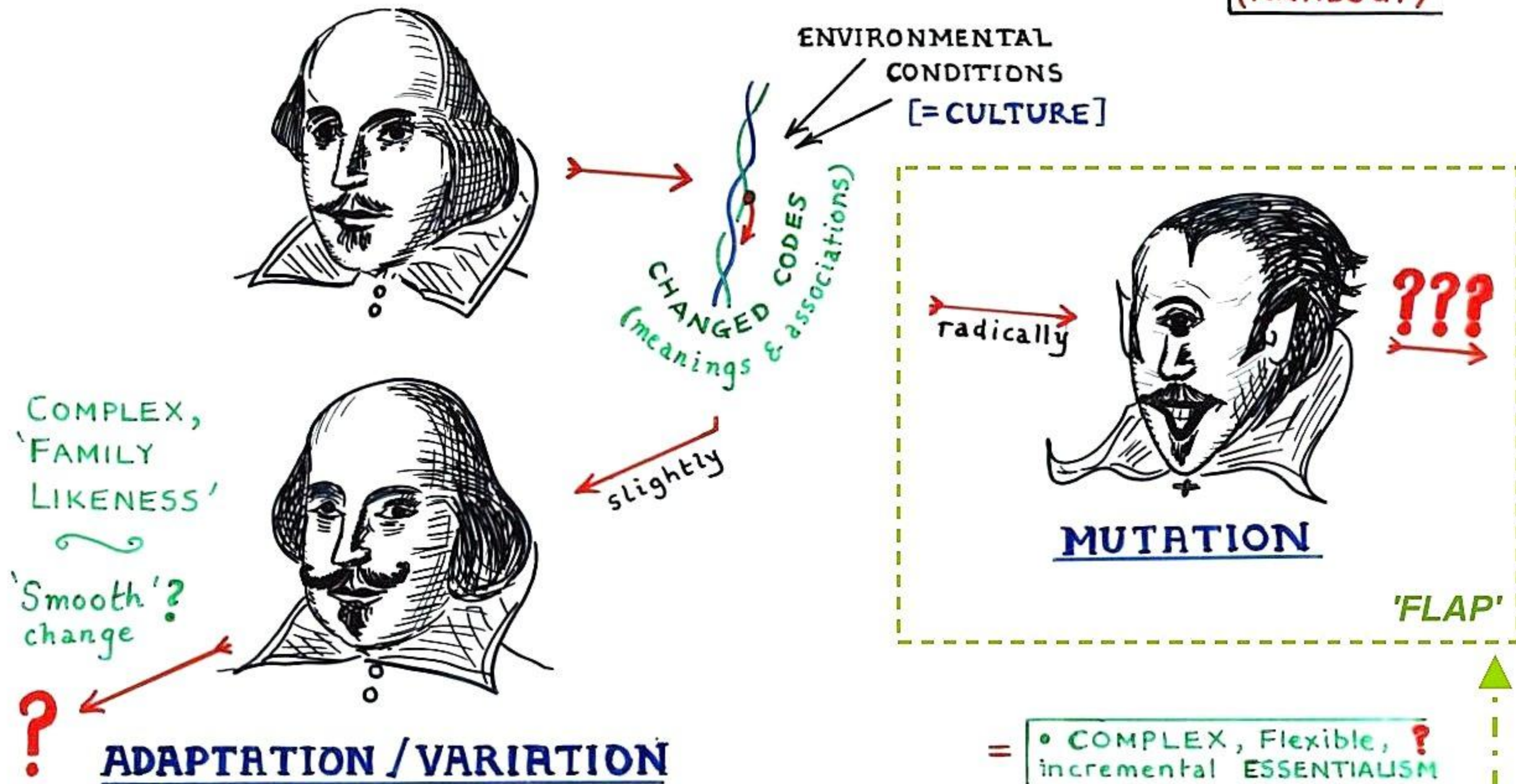
PROMPTING / BREAKING STONES

TRY OUT [FRIEND]

IS THIS A GOOD OT?

Figure 4

ADAPTATION / ^MUTATION^N (ANALOGY)



Use a card 'flap' here, to allow you to reveal this portion of the transparency last

= More dynamic + You can write prompt notes on it.

PROOFING ...

Check spelling

Grammar

Typos

+ Avoidible Errpors

PRESENTATION SKILLS 3 :

‘Voice, Body and Breath’

Exercises like these rarely yield quick results. You have to be patient. They ought to be something you do regularly as ‘serious fun’. They’re self-educating, long-term games that sometimes give insights into your own vocal habits and the ways you speak in public.

Please do them in a controlled, relaxed way. Avoid jerky movements or tension. ***If anything gets painful or begins to strain – STOP!*** Rest and drink some water.

RELAXATION : ***Becoming Still; Being Centred***

- a. **STILLNESS.** Close eyes. Breathe naturally. Relax thoughts. Clear head.
- b. **BREATH.** Easy. Slow. Full. Free. Rhythmic: In through nose, out through mouth. In your head count to 4 breathing in through nose, hold for 2, out for 4 through mouth, hold for 2, REPEAT. Breathe deep into belly. Keep going for a few minutes.

c. **POSTURE: “a state of readiness”...**

Feet	Parallel, beneath hips. Weight slightly forward on the big toe.
Knees	Not locked. Bend and bounce on them slightly.
Unclasp thighs .	
Hips	Not thrust out or sideways. Try revolving pelvis (like Elvis).
Stomach	Avoid pulling it in!
Spine	Straight. <i>“When your spine goes, you age”.</i>
Chest	Try not to collapse chest forwards.
Neck / shoulders (key area)	Slowly flop forwards then shake these loose.
Head	Neither tucked in, nor pushed forward, nor pulled back.
Jaw	Unclench, lift chin slightly.
Alternately clench and unclench Face (yep - you read it right - your <i>face</i> !)	

- d. **NOW PLACE A PALM where you think your voice comes from – your imagined centre.** Continue to breathe as above. NEXT, say “AHhhh” loudly, at length, as you expel breath with your mouth open. Is your palm in the right place? Rediscover the centre of the vibration with your hand. Is it higher/ lower than you thought?
- e. **BE AWARE of TENSIONS, LACK of POSTURE** = Restricted Delivery. How you stand, move, breathe – all these are important to emotion and connection to audiences.

BODY HABITS

Ask a friend or tutor to **watch you** as you read something out, or make a short presentation.

Do they notice any unnecessary movements? Shuffling, ear-scratching, hands in and out of pockets? Swaying, pacing, nods and hand gestures? All such things are distractions. They take attention **away** from what you say and towards you. They make your talk harder work for the listener. The audience might remember more of you, but less of what you said.

Also, think about body language. How do you communicate formality or intimacy through posture? Particularly in interviews and 1-to-1s, should you think about *the way* you will sit?

BREATH and SUPPORT ...

Many voices are faint, or lack range & vitality, or get 'stuck' or damaged, because they lack support. Also, your voice soon loses fitness (within a few days!) Keep it exercised.

To help you detect habits of poor SUPPORT:

- 1/ Breathe in deeply; then begin to speak *before* you're ready. Feel the tightness.
- 2/ Breathe in deeply, hold it, then speak (too late). Note how the abdomen is clenched and your chest is too high. (Common problem.)
- 3/ Breathe out. Try to read a line or two without any air in your lungs. It's a horrible feeling! If you feel panicked or 'locked' during a presentation, just sigh out silently: calmly *wait for the body to ask for breath*. Then breathe, deeply.
- 4/ Say "oh" from deep stomach. Now clench shoulders & repeat. Note the thinness of the sound as it moves up your tensioned body. **Unclench** shoulders & repeat "oh". Better?

THE BIG ONE : NERVES !

Prepare your Body. Develop your own relaxation ritual before readings ...

- *Hydrate fully (do you carry H₂O?) Eat something that day – but not 5 mins before you're on.*
- *Avoid coffee, fags, booze, aspirin, cold or fizzy drinks and (for some) milk. (Sorry!)*
- *Open up the lungs. Push both arms against a wall, keep head level & breathe deeply.*
- *Sigh !! Say a long Doctor's "Ahhh !!" OR: HUM a tune, deeply, changing the notes.*
- *Free up lips, tongue, face. Try to "kiss" the far wall, from where you are.*
- *Shake, loosen up – especially Knees/ Neck/ Shoulders/ Jaw.*
- *Wear comfy clothes, especially shoes.*
- *Gentle stretches. Nothing too vigorous! Relax.*
- *Make a huge smile; drop your jaw by two fingers (keeping smile) & feel your breath.*

You can't engage audiences powerfully if you're not prepared, relaxed, breathing. Become aware of a column of breath moving freely through the body. Even a simple "hummm" or "ahhhh" can free up the lungs beforehand.

If you feel your delivery tends to be a bit 'dead', try varying the **pace**, the **tone** and the **emphasis**, in rehearsals as well as during the talk itself. Also, do the exercises at the end of SEMINAR [B]: **'Holding the Thought'**. Plus: ask yourself, **am I enjoying this?** If the honest answer is no, might that explain the dullness? Find ways of enlivening things!

Keep a sense of perspective. By next week, no one will remember. Don't expect **not** to be nervous. Nerves are natural, even good. Accept them, then focus on something else.

... and DURING the talk/ reading itself :

If you get the shakes, lose your place, or stall – simply pause. **Breathe deeply**. You can tighten up *because you're forgetting to breathe*. Oxygen! Are you snatching breaths, breathing shallowly? This starves the brain of O₂ and can deepen anxiety and confusion. Breathe. Deep and slow, right into the belly. **Slow down**. Speak in a more measured way. Slow down till it feels FAR too slow, and it might be about right. Take breaths between sentences (we often forget). Think one thing at a time. **Trust the words** – they'll carry you through. Breathe. Then take your time and gather your thoughts.

You've done all your preparation, so just go for it! Be enthusiastic. If anything does go wrong, don't fluster. Treat it lightly, with a touch of humour. No one will really mind.

REHEARSE, REHEARSE !

Sounds obvious, but often underdone. Familiarity builds confidence, helps you spot any tricky moments. Build in contingency plans, simplify things. Getting the timing right avoids a LOT of stress. Plan a few dramatic pauses where you can breathe, regroup.

A trick of the trade: don't rehearse ONLY in your head. It's near-impossible to time it accurately and it doesn't signal phrases which turn out to be tongue-twisters! Read everything out loud, at least once, at least to a mirror, and preferably to a colleague.

P.S. Look, I *know* what this can sound like: too much hassle and a little bit silly? But when I started to get lots of readings and felt the collywobbles down both legs, I took it more seriously. It WORKS.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

Seminar [A] : 'Producing OTs'

Materials needed	Copy of Don Juan <i>[or substitute suitable course text here]</i> . Blank transparencies and suitable transparency pens .
Time needed	<u>30 - 35 minutes</u>
AIM	To produce one OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY ('OT') that you could 'talk around' for a couple of minutes, as part of a brief presentation on Don Juan. [You won't be asked to talk ! All we want today is the OT itself.]

TASK SUMMARY

- (a) Working in **small groups** of 2 or 3, **compare and contrast** two short excerpts from Don Juan. Discuss the **differences and similarities** in:
- CONTENT *[What is being said]*
 - STYLE *[How it is said]*
 - TONE *[The mood conveyed, any implied meanings]*
 - LANGUAGE *[Byron's choice of words and form]*
 - OTHER *[Anything else you notice, or want to talk about]*
- (b) **Produce an overhead transparency** ('OT') summarizing your results.
-

GUIDANCE NOTES & TIMING *[make sure you finish your OT within 30 mins]*

- (1) As a group, familiarize yourselves with the excerpts. It's a very good idea to read them out loud first, **before** you begin to discuss them. **[5 mins]**
 - (2) Then discuss the similarities and differences, using at least some of the categories (above) under 'TASK SUMMARY'. **[10 mins]**
IMPORTANT: It's great if you can come up with some interesting points... **BUT** please **DON'T** overdo this part. Remember, today's task is mostly about how you **present** your information, rather than the details of what you've found.
 - (3) Keep an eye on the time! After 15 minutes, decide **what** (and **how much**) you want to say about the texts. Remember, your group has only **one** OT to use and (at most) a couple of minutes to talk about it. **[5 mins]**
 - (4) Now **design** your OT. Don't actually make it, yet! Instead, draw it up first 'in rough' (as a pilot copy, on a sheet of paper). How will you set out your points on the OT? [Assume the audience has a copy of the texts.] **[5 mins]**
 - (5) **Produce your group OT.** **[5 mins]**
 - (6) If you have any time left, rehearse how you'd *each* use your OT in a talk. What kinds of things would worry you? What should you be careful about?
-

At the end: hand your finished OTs to the tutor. She/he may use a few of them (at random) to illustrate strengths and as a spur to discussion.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

Seminar [B]: 'Holding the Thought'

Materials Excerpt of about 15 to 40 lines from any course text. **Time:** 20 minutes.

AIMS **Working in pairs**, explore and enrich your experience of reading aloud.
Engage fellow students **1-to-1** in ways that hone your oral presentation.

1. Introduction. *Ideas to take on board, in your pairs, before starting.* [**< 3 mins**]

There's a tendency, when reading aloud, to deliver the text as a series of disembodied phrases. It helps to think of a reading as a piece of multicoloured string: all the parts different, yet connected. Is the beginning somehow still reverberating in the middle; and does the end, long before you get to it, somehow feel inevitable? [I don't mean, by the way, predictable!]

What I'm really asking is: do the words and ideas flow, move easily, link up? – or does the text hit you like a shopping list, in a disconnected way? [I realise some texts *want* that; but let's put that aside.] Is the reader really 'connected' to the words? Do they convince you that *they* are speaking; that they know where they're heading? 'Holding the Thought' is subtle; but that ability to keep listeners 'tuned in' is crucial to oral delivery. All good storytellers and comedians have it!

2. The Task. *Please read all the notes below, before you begin!* [**< 12 mins**]

- (a) Each person in the pair chooses a **different** excerpt – at random – from the course text. 15 - 40 lines is about right. Don't spend more than 30 secs choosing. Let the text surprise you!
- (b) Face your partner. One person begins to read their text **aloud**. The listener does **not** have the text in front of them – they should be completely attentive to the **voice** of the speaker.
- (c) This is the important bit. If the listener feels, at any point, in any way, that they're 'losing the thread' of what they're hearing, they must stop the speaker. The speaker then has to start to read again, **from the beginning**. It's a bit like Snakes & Ladders. Or 'bio-feedback'!

LISTENERS: It's important to listen **actively**. Don't just 'go with the flow' or switch off. You must feel the text really has you in its grip. It should be working between your ears like a continuous, inevitable length of dental floss! The moment that string breaks, or kinks – even if it's in the first line – stop the speaker. Is the text a mass of words? Is it tough to follow or understand? Are you slightly bored, lost, or unconvinced? If so, gently ask them to start again.

SPEAKERS: The idea is to get further and further, before you're stopped. But don't get anxious if you're constantly pulled up. That's usual. In fact, if you're allowed to just rattle on, be suspicious! The most obvious thing is **not to rush**. Visualise the situation in the text, what the words mean, as you read them. Are you understanding the text, feeling it, yourself? But remember, in this context, **don't** be tempted to 'act' the text out. That misses the point.

- (d) Once you've made some progress, swap roles. Now the listener speaks, and vice versa.

Some ways to 'Hold the Thought' better, to improve your emotional & oral range ... [**> 5 mins**]

- Speak the text in **monotone**. Then with an **exaggerated range** – swinging the tone wildly. Then in monotone again, etc. When you've had enough, just speak it plainly.
- Read a few lines at a time with very **different emotions**. Languor, rage, boredom, anxiety....
- **Mouth the text** in an exaggerated way (all jaw and lips) – but making **no sound**.
- Give **your** text to your partner, and ask **them** to read it out. Note the different qualities and emphasis produced by the other person's voice.

Of course, you don't do any of this at the gig itself! But the wider range of possibilities you experience and explore through such exercises often does 'bleed' into your delivery, enhancing its vitality and coherence.

Think, too, about how you prepare yourself to read. Do you take a good breath, collect your thoughts – or dive in, rattle through? In 2 (b) above, did you (as reader) look through the text first? Why should you?

Finally, try to enjoy or (if the piece is more formal/ serious) to 'feel' what you're doing. That helps to connect you with the text, and the text to the listener. It also makes the whole enterprise more worthwhile.

ANSWERING the *QUESTION* / QUESTIONING the *ANSWER*

**Basic Techniques for organising
a thorough, coherent response**

[MAIN IDEA: having a good strategy = **BAT** *]

A. Core Statement

B. ‘ Black – Red – Green ’

[Interrogating the Question; *ShadoW-WordS*]

C. Building an Argument: the 13 Ways

* = ‘half the battle’

The CORE STATEMENT

ANSWERING the QUESTION / QUESTIONING the ANSWER (A)

MAIN IDEA **Can you encompass the ENTIRE argument of your essay, in a SINGLE SENTENCE? The sentence can get as long as you like!**

Everything in *one* sentence? I know some people just don't work that way. Maybe you find this kind of thing tedious, or your best ideas come to you when you're firing things down (and around) in a far less structured manner. That's fine. But there'll be *some* point in the process when producing a Core Statement can really focus what you're doing.

The Core Statement's primary function is to *encapsulate*, in broad terms, the whole of what you want to say; it also points to all the major links in your argument. It tells us not only *what* you've arrived at, but also *how* and *why*. At this stage, I'm not too worried about the actual/factual content of the sentence you create. We're studying a tool.

Problem: at **what stage** of essay-writing do you compose your Core Statement? Well, you'll need to have got to grips with the subject; but not be so immersed in it that you're bogged down in all the detail. It's probably best to start with (a very few) key texts and write a simple Core Statement early on. Then constantly revisit/ re-write/ develop it as your study progresses.

You probably want an example? Okay, I'll give you something extreme, but only to illustrate my point. Don't feel intimidated! I just want to show how complete and all-encompassing a Core Statement can actually get. Having said that, a much simpler sentence will often do.

EXAMPLE DRAFT CORE STATEMENT: *'There is a clear need for reform in Ward X.'*

At first sight, this seems fine. Even to the point. But, really, does it tell you very much? Isn't it rather vague? Where are the reasons or context? All the 'hows' and 'whys'? Let's try again:

'Because of chronically low post-surgical survival rates in Ward X, we applied four theoretical models to the data, of which the Rothman Model yielded the best insights (plus three recommendations) and Hospital Managers eventually implemented recommendation 3, for which some initial results are now given.'

Pretty good, surely? But wait. Here's the kind of thing you can eventually get to...

'Chronically low post-surgical survival rates in geriatric Ward X (1986 to 1996) led us to apply 4 different theoretical models to the data linking pre-surgical care to survival rates during that time: the Rothman Model yielded not only the most consistent and reliable insights, but also three linked recommendations for improvements in ward procedure, with Hospital Managers in Ward X eventually implementing no. 3 (essentially a special case – Case 'C' – of 'Team Inter-personal Training' as described by Holbein, 1992) and in sufficient time for some of the early effects of that implementation to become apparent.'

ADVANTAGES of a good CORE STATEMENT

Once you've got a really good Core Statement down, you might feel the essay has almost begun to 'write itself'. Moreover, I've found no better way of eliminating woolly thinking. Even if it doesn't appear in the final essay, there are so many advantages in producing a strong and thorough Core Statement. Here are just a few:

- **CLARITY** and **FOCUS** – it should be fairly clear what to do next.
- Defends you against **CONFUSION**, or straying from the point.
- Exposes **WEAKNESSES, GAPS, FAULTS** in your argument.
- Allows you to **ADJUST / CORRECT** early in process, before flaws 'set solid'.
- Hence, can **GUIDE** and **DRIVE** further (focused) reading & research.
- Gives strong **LOGICAL STRUCTURE** before you plunge into distracting detail.
- Can act as basis for essay's **INTRO** or **CONCLUSION** (though not always).
- Helps with **SHORT STUFF**: reports, abstracts, intros to presentations, etc.
- Impresses **TUTORS** when discussing essay plans. Saves time + aids feedback!

['ANSWERING THE QUESTION...' (A): p. 1]

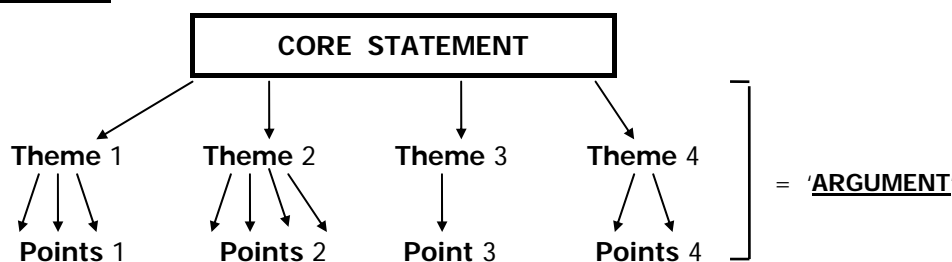
SOME NOTES on the CORE STATEMENT (= 'CS')

- A CS doesn't have to be a SINGLE sentence – though that discipline does help. Very long CSs tend to run into the same problems as the essay itself.
- A good CS paints the whole picture on an eggshell. It's logical, complete (yet concise) and it answers all the main 'because's and 'whys'. It's the logic-skeleton (with no major bones missing!) on which the factual-flesh of the essay can then be put.
- A poor CS may be fuzzy or inconsistent, or slip into over-simplification. Or it can be merely descriptive (i.e. telling us what the author intended, or vaguely what the essay is about, without any insight, reasoning or results). A simple list of facts or ideas is **not** a CS.
- A good CS often helps you to spot spin-off ideas or deeper questions. Eg, in the Ward X example earlier, why was only *one* of the 3 Recommendations implemented (and why *eventually*)? Also, if the recommendations were 'linked', why implement it *on its own*?
- A CS isn't quite the same thing as an introduction or summary. Introductions may, for instance, offer a preamble rather than the essay's whole idea. A summary is much closer to a CS, but it might *describe* what the essay is about without actually giving the full *argument*. In short: a CS can act as a summary; but a summary isn't automatically a CS.

An ESSAY PLAN based on the CORE STATEMENT

This is among the simplest of essay structures. If you're ever stuck, try it. But remember: it's just a model, a means. Don't get obsessed by it: it's only the tool, *not* the finished article.

SAMPLE ESSAY PLAN



- It's important to try to write down your **CORE STATEMENT** in one or two succinct sentences. If you can't, you probably need to do more thinking and/or reading!
- This is fleshed out through various key **THEMES**, each relating in some essential way to the Core Statement. Using the 'Ward X' example (see above) you might have:

Theme 1: The problems of Ward X	Theme 2: 4 Models + Data Analysis
Theme 3: Rothman Model + Insights	Theme 4: Rec. 3 + its results in Ward X
- The themes are, in turn, illustrated and developed through a number of **POINTS**:

eg **Points 2:** * What are the 4 Models? * Advantages/ limitations of each Model

 * Results from each Model * Why is Rothman best? (leads into Theme 3)

Don't overload on points for the sake of it, or to show how much you've read. You won't get marks for sheer quantity! Choose **relevant** points only, ones that most reveal the theme or help to make a convincing and interesting argument. Points that unite or embrace several themes are particularly useful: they can be used to great effect towards the end of your essay, or as part of your conclusions.
- Sort out your 'Argument'**. This is the content, structure and movement of your themes and points. Check you've covered all the important themes. Missing a crucial theme is usually far more serious than missing a crucial point. Devising a good structure of themes should help you to make better sense of the detailed material (the points).

See also (the very useful) *P. Creme & M.R. Lea, 'Writing at University: A Guide for Students', Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997*. Whilst developing my own 'single-sentence' approach to essay plans, I came across their notion of 'Central Idea' & 'Themes'; I adapted and added some of those insights to my own.

['ANSWERING THE QUESTION...' (A): p. 2]

The CORE STATEMENT :

another example ...

VERSION A

“I will give an overview of the voices in *New Writing 12*, looking for differences from real speech, to establish whether or not the editors deployed their preferences in a consistent way.”

VERSION B

“I have assessed all the prose pieces in *New Writing 12* (*not* the poetry, thus eliminating a complicating variable) to see how far they conform to the editors’ preference for an authenticity which is “seemingly tape-recorded” (one of the four categories of voice stated in their Introduction): to do this, I present a chart comparing excerpts from each text with samples of live speech secretly recorded in the Student Union Bar, to prove that none of the authors’ characters is authentic in that sense; the phrase “seemingly tape-recorded” is used merely for effect, I suggest, because all the authors deploy “the skilful use... of voice” (which the editors subsequently acknowledge) in order to create ‘cleaned-up’, literary versions of true speech patterns... in other words, behind that word “seemingly” lies an awful lot of craft.”

- Which Core Statement is better? List some reasons why.
- Could the Core Statement be improved even further?

Core Statement's primary functions ?

- to *encapsulate* the whole of what you want to say
- point to all the major links in your argument
 - be logical, complete, concise
 - answer all the main 'because's' and 'whys'
- provide the skeleton with no major bones missing!

A list of facts or possible ideas is NOT a CS.

Understand the principle behind the CS now.

Worry about (f)actual content later.

Write a simple Core Statement early on...

... then constantly revisit / re-write / develop it
as your reading progresses.

SEMINAR

The Core Statement 'Swap'

1 – 1 ½ hours

Materials

Overhead transparencies & transparency pens. A large workroom.

Preparation

Each student brings in **an essay they wrote/ handed in some time ago**, preferably **on a subject few others would know much about**. If that's difficult, the tutor should supply a range of suitable questions ahead of time for students to choose from, read up on, and produce a short essay plan. This plan should be concise (between 1/2 - 1 side of A4).

IN THE SEMINAR**First, working on your own ...**

If you haven't done so already, prepare a **Core Statement** for your essay, or in response to the essay question of your choice. [*See handout: 'The Core Statement'.*]

Now make a list of **3 or 4 themes** which occur in your essay (or essay plan). For **one** of those themes only, come up with two or three **significant points**. These notes should be clear and concise.

[15 - 20 minutes]

Now, working in pairs ...

Prepare for a presentation of the above notes to the rest of the class: a **2 - 3 minute talk** (no more) summarising them in some way, illustrated with 1 or 2 transparencies.

But wait – there's a twist. **Your partner will be presenting YOUR notes**. So, each pairing generates two presentations; but with each person presenting the *other's* essay!

You supply your partner with your notes (Core Statement + themes and points) and that's all. *They* decide what form the talk takes, and what they'll say about your essay. You don't offer any advice, and don't explain anything unless you are asked to. You certainly make **no input whatsoever to the design or structure of the talk**. Thus:

YOU= Head of **Content**.Provide facts/ concepts **only**.No say in **what is said** or **how**.**Cannot** make suggestions.**YOUR PARTNER**= Head of **Presentation**.Designs & makes the **transparencies**.Prepares and **gives the talk!**

Can ask questions, if they wish.

[30 - 40 minutes]

TUTORS: The talks/ transparencies are revealing, but also time-consuming for large groups (= 6-8 min per pair). If time is short, allow only a selection (or 1 person per pair) to present. You can even skip the talks altogether & concentrate on discussing the process itself (see next).

Finally, some open discussion (plenary)*Pool your insights on ...*

YOU as Head of Content. By being forced to supply **only** the raw facts for your essay, were you drawn into greater clarity – or over-simplification? Did your Core Statement do its job (i.e. make it clear to your partner exactly what your essay is about)? Was it detailed enough? What did your partner's queries (or their talk) reveal to you about your essay or its structure?

YOU as Head of Presentation. By working on someone else's essay (an alien or unfamiliar subject) were you made to consider the audience, and what they need, more deeply? Did the detachment from content help you think more clearly about issues of style, structure, clarity?

What did the above process bring to light in terms of problems or opportunities within your essay? Is a talk (or essay) just about content? How far are content and presentation separable?

[15 - 30 minutes]

Answering the Question ... (B)

‘ BLACK – RED – GREEN ’ / + *SHADOW-WORDS*

[INTRODUCTION]

INTELLIGENCE TEST : ‘Perform the following 20 tasks. You have 10 minutes.’

In the test, this is followed by a list of 20 tasks – mostly quite straightforward but *very* time-consuming. Even the clever and the quick get *nowhere*. Look on ye Mighty, and Despair!

And yet, some participants complete the sheet quite easily. How? Because:

TASK 1 says ‘Read everything on this sheet before you begin.’

and **TASK 20** says ‘Ignore Tasks 2 → 19. Just sign below & hand this in.’

Such ‘tests’ provide an excellent demonstration of ‘NON-READING’ = a tendency to...

- ‘dive in’
- read without actually registering
- read things into the question that aren’t there
- ‘not hear’ what the question is after

Misreading is an epidemic – and not just in exams and assignments. Have you ever ...

- Received feedback: “Not *bad* ... but you didn’t answer the question” ?
 - Got a grade that fails to reflect your (enormous) graft ?
 - Rushed assignments – left them to the last minute ?
 - Neglected to make/ check/ revise an essay plan ?
- More or less hammered out what you were *going* to say anyway ?
- Based your answer on a chunk of textbook or on recycled lecture notes ?
- Imitated a similar answer / stock response from somewhere else ?
 - Just ‘played it safe’ & written what you already knew about ?

The latter is comforting – but only temporarily. Ignoring the question *never* impresses.

So, imagine you’re in the hot-seat with a question in front of you. It’s best to ...

Make sure you answer the ACTUAL question...

... not the one in your HEAD

[use ‘Black – Red – Green’ technique]

Play to your STRENGTHS...

... but cover all the *IMPLIED* areas too

[use ‘*ShadoW-WordS*’ technique]

ANSWERING the QUESTION...(B): The 'Black – Red – Green' Method

Imagine you've got an exam or essay question in front of you. You already have some sense of what the subject's about, or have spent some time reading up on it. What next?

Crazy as it sounds, check you're ANSWERING THE QUESTION! Do you *really* understand what it's looking for? Or have you 'heard what you want to hear', missed some vital clue, gone miles off track? In confusion (or anxiety) it's tempting to regurgitate lecture notes or stock opinions; people can get so stressed (especially in exams) that they'll hammer out an argument they feel secure about, but which actually has (sadly) scant relevance to the question set.

So, here are **two** techniques I've developed for interpreting questions in a thorough way:

WORD by WORD (or PHRASE by PHRASE)	Examine <u>every</u> word in the question, one after the other. 'Unpack' <u>each phrase or word</u> for all its implications.
OVERALL PATTERN	Consider the question's pattern of ideas and expectations as <u>a whole</u> . Cover all the terrain: overtly required <i>and</i> implied.

These are really just ways of making sure you read the question – and take it in – on several levels. Hence they're as much an attitude, or state of attention, as they are techniques. These aren't the only techniques of course, and you should feel free to develop your own approach. Here, though, I focus on the **WORD by WORD** method. It's pretty simple, with 2 main stages ...

STAGE I (Covering the Question; Creating Notes)

- Find pens or pencils in these **three colours**: **BLACK**, **RED**, **GREEN**. Now go through the question, carefully, underlining words or phrases according to this colour code:

BLACK =	BLAtant Instruction	Something you clearly <i>must</i> do; a directive.
RED =	REference Point ; REquired Input	Any definition, term, author, theory, particular text, idea (either referred to <i>or</i> strongly implied).
GREEN =	GREmlin 'GREEN Light'	= Subtle signal, easily missed (to your cost !) = Hint on: how to proceed, desired emphasis, etc.

Don't overdo **BLACK**. Home in on *specific* demands (eg 'Compare all the texts, using 2 or more of the criteria ...')
Broadly, **RED** refers to anything in the 'knowledge base' (facts, authors, theories, etc) that you'll need to draw on.

- Ideally, **most of the words** in the question (including quotes) should get underlined in one (or more) of the colours. Make sure you cover *all* significant phrases. If any large sections remain un-coloured, discuss them with your tutor: have you missed something?
- Now, using a large sheet of paper, list all your **ideas, thoughts & reactions** for each coloured segment. Give attention to each section in turn, remembering what its colour stands for [with **GREEN**, the *Shadow-WordS* handout can be very useful]. Spend time on this process. Brainstorm. Refer to related books and notes. Make links. Be inventive.

STAGE II (Using 'Stage I' notes: Planning & Checking)

Reassess your notes. Are they thorough enough? Suitably to the point? What are the key ideas, links, insights? Importantly, do the notes already suggest a good structure for your answer? When it comes to writing the piece itself (an essay, say) use your notes at least twice :

- Near the **start of the process**: to help you write a **Core Statement** &/or to structure an **Essay Plan** covering all the main expectations of the question. You can either use a structure you know, or else find/ invent one to suit (see the '13 Ways').
- Near the **end**, to ensure you've included all key points, with suitable emphasis. Also to check: (**BLACK**) you didn't miss any specific instructions; (**RED**) all named & implied references have been dealt with; (**GREEN**) you picked up hints on which directions to take/avoid + any *Shadow-Word* subtleties regarding style, depth, approach, etc.

Finally, if you wish, bring in my second technique: i.e. briefly consider the 'OVERALL PATTERN' of the question (see the first box, above) and check your answer is in harmony with it. This activity also helps to compensate for any 'reductionism' that might have slipped into Stage I.

FOOTNOTE: Stage I is something akin to 'Deconstruction' (with deep attention to the detail) while Stage II is a form of 'Reconstruction' (which responds to the 'overall pattern').

Answering the Question...(B): 'BLACK – RED – GREEN' Method (summary)

WORD by WORD (or PHRASE by PHRASE)

- Examine every word in the question, one after the other.
- 'Unpack' each phrase or word for all its implications.

STAGE I Covering the Question; Creating Notes.

Go right through the question, underlining words and phrases using the following **colour code**:

BLACK = **BLA** tant **I**nstruction

Something you *must* do. A clear directive or 'order'.

RED = **RE**ference Point / **RE**quired Input

Any technical term, author, theory, text or idea ...
(*either* specifically referred to *or* implied).

GREEN = **GRE**mlin + '**GREEN** Light'

A subtle signal, easily missed + Any hint on how to proceed
or on desired emphasis, style, etc (see '*ShadoW-WordS*').

BLACK: Try to underline only the *specific* demands ... eg:
'Evaluate four texts, using at least two of the following criteria ...'

RED: Refers to anything in the 'knowledge base' (facts, authors, theories, etc).

Make sure MOST words get underlined with (at least) 1 colour.

For each coloured segment, list **ideas, thoughts & reactions** ...

Give attention to each segment in turn.

Remember what its colour stands for.

*For **GREEN**, use '*ShadoW-WordS*'.*

Brainstorm. Make links.

STAGE II Use 'Stage I' notes twice, to plan & check ...

Near the start of the process ... to help with the **Core Statement**
& structure an **Essay Plan** covering all the question's expectations

Near the end of the process to ensure you have:

done everything you were specifically asked to do (**BLACK**)

dealt with all named & implied references (**RED**)

picked up hints on how to approach the task +
any subtleties regarding style, depth, detail, etc (**GREEN**)

(+ included all your key points, with suitable emphasis)

Optional: is your answer in harmony with the question's 'OVERALL PATTERN' of ideas?

QUESTIONS ... and their **SHADOW-WORDS**

SHADOW-WORDS

Certain words in the question ... cast ... 'Shadows' (= hints on how to answer)

' <u>Consider ...</u> '	=	Weigh up all the possibilities & be attentive to detail
' <u>Discuss ...</u> '	=	Look at several sides to this - then decide what <i>you</i> think
' <u>Outline ...</u> '	=	Be selective, relevant & <u>BRIEF</u>
' <u>What kinds of ...</u> '	=	How many kinds <i>are</i> there ?
' <u>Argue your case ...</u> '	=	Deal with counter-arguments
' <u>In what ways ...</u> '	=	What about the <u>OTHER</u> ways ?
' <u>To what extent ...</u> '	=	Make a judgement – <u>BUT</u> explore your reservations...
' <u>Show that ...</u> '	=	Solid argument / evidence [in 'show', <i>how</i> is the key]
... etc.		

SHADOW-WORDS can help to generate
a ready-made INTRODUCTION ...

- Use **SHADOW-WORDS** to guide your initial thoughts / plans
- Show you've **understood the question** + its **subject area**
- **Outline the terrain**, then **decide on your 'focus'** ...
(by all means lean towards your strengths & expertise)

BUT :

justify that 'focus'...

i.e. Spell out its relevance to question
+ Indicate what you've left out (& why)

‘Black – Red – Green’ : an EXAMPLE

“In particular, we found ourselves responding to voices : imagined voices, authentic (seemingly tape-recorded) voices, voices which come at us from unfamiliar places...”

QUOTE

Introduction to *New Writing 12*, page ix

QUESTION (based on above quote) :

Compare two prose pieces from *New Writing 12* and, with the above quote in mind, consider the ways in which they are constructed. *Plural !*

BLATANT INSTRUCTIONS :

- NOT POETRY !
- TWO PIECES
- = VIGILANCE (refer amply to quote!)

‘in mind’ –

PROSE
1

How each VOICE
is constructed
(several ways)

CONSIDER ...

use

‘GREEN
LIGHTS’

ShadoW-WordS

... & COMPARE

Bring 1 & 2
together

PROSE
2

‘GREMLIN’ : ‘in mind...’ suggests select 1
& 2 cannily (to illustrate quote)

REFERENCE POINT (implied)

= NW12 context

[i.e. voice + British Council?]

‘we found ourselves...’
= Editorial stance?

Put in INTRO / CONCLUSION ?

REFERENCE POINT (overt)

[quote] Analysis of ‘VOICE’

+

REQUIRED DISCUSSION
(implied?)

‘Imagined’ = ? ‘Unfamiliar’ = ?

‘Authentic’ = “LIVE” ?

+ HINTS . ‘seemingly’ (= craft?)

. ‘come at us’ (= forceful texts?)

REQUIRED ANALYSIS (overt)

How is voice constructed?

Any theories or accounts of this?

REQUIRED INPUT (overt?)

Enumerate the (various) means:
origins, style, tone, 1st person, etc?

COMPARATIVE STRUCTURE ?

INTRO: REASONS FOR SELECTING 1 & 2

CONCLUSIONS: What comparison reveals + Editorial view of the terms ‘authenticity’ & ‘familiar’

ANSWERING the QUESTION / QUESTIONING the ANSWER (C)

BUILDING AN ARGUMENT : The '13 WAYS'

Weak essays often lack planning, purpose, or any clear or consistent structure. The 13 WAYS can help.

Core Statement for the '13 Ways'

[See p. 2: The '13 Ways' Chart]

"Looking at past student essays, I've found (so far) 13 distinct types of logical structure, presented overleaf as a series of images to help you visualise what they mean – these store lots of information in a very accessible (visual) form, making the '13 Ways' a powerful ally when planning your work; most of all, they can guide you towards a more suitable structure for your particular argument. So, what are the '13 Ways'; how can they be used; what are their likely strengths, weaknesses?"

EXERCISES

Tutor (or students in pairs). *For each of the 13 Ways, discuss what the image might represent in terms of the logical progression in an essay (i.e. how the essay is structured).*

In pairs. *Choose one of the Ways (at random). What might be the inherent weaknesses or strengths of that particular approach? Then (whole group): tabulate results (as below).*

'WAY' (P.T.O.)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION (or your <u>own</u> interpretation)	SOME POTENTIAL STRENGTHS	SOME POTENTIAL WEAKNESSES
1	Core Statement resolves into 'themes' & ensuing 'points'.	Clear, simple. Easy to create an emphasis (via choice of themes).	May miss key themes. Lacks flair?
2	Points radiate from key idea (out/in) & connect round 'rim'.	Can incorporate a variety of ideas quite easily.	'Spokes' may become arbitrary. 'Rim' breaks.
3a	Subjects/ ideas clash (contrast); arguments + counter-arguments.	Dramatic. Exciting. A stirring (yet familiar) approach.	May miss connections between X and Y.
3b	Subjects/ ideas brought together; connected through comparison?	Great for new insights. Links provide a natural conclusion.	May miss divisions between X and Y.
4	Argument built in stages; finish each stage before moving on.	'Definite'. Moves strongly. Each new stage has firm basis.	Ponderous. Can drift. Destination unclear?
5	Closely argued (point on point) in a linear way; no 'themes' etc.	Easy to follow. Convincing (if all steps correct). Engaging.	Excludes other views. Plods. Wanders. One mistake unravels the lot.
6	Points/ ideas sited along a scale or compared in degree/ extent.	Puts many things into context or can paint a larger picture.	Only applies to narrow frame. Little breadth.
7	Several areas linked freely: focus on linkages or 'cement'.	Freedom to associate widely. Can incorporate vast material.	Gaps left. Crucial items missed. Lacks focus.
8	'Scientific Method' approach to sift/analyse data or test idea.	Rigorous. Carries authority. Leads naturally to conclusions.	MUST apply meaningfully to data/ subject in hand.
9	Areas mapped out to show 'overlaps' and/or difference.	Good for general comparisons between large subjects. Clarity.	Needs a point! How to include specifics/detail?
10	Finding/ suggesting patterns in a highly dispersed subject.	Great for new or outrageous ideas, or little-known territory.	Can become whimsical, arbitrary, self-fulfilling.
11	Probing (establishing?) layers of relevance, etc (up or down).	Can build a strong sense of relative importance, origins, etc.	Not easy to apply where subjects link or overlap.
12	Process of elimination; clearing away the confusion or 'debris'.	Clarifies clouded/ complex issue. Suggests insight. Brings an <i>Ah!</i>	Good or relevant stuff can get swept away too.
13	All ideas/ points in defined area systematically covered: no 'gaps'.	Thorough. Solid. Excellent feel of correctness/ academic rigour.	Inflexible? Stodgy? Can easily get too long.

Notes

Some of the structures might seem familiar (did you get a tang of 'Compare and Contrast' in 3a or 9?) and others not. The key thing here is to see the table as a starting point or guide, not as dogma. It's a quick look; not the last word. So, interpret the images in your *own* way: adapt, customise, mutate them for the task in hand (eg you can redraw 3a/b to include more than 2 areas) or devise a 14th Way and sell it to us! Also bear in mind, when considering which structure to use, how a 'strength' in one context can become a 'weakness' in another.

Important

The 13 WAYS stimulate & focus your thinking/ planning, but they're just a practical aid – not a rigorous (or even complete) model. A convenience, not an exact science. The signpost, not the actual walk. So, don't get hung up on the detail. And if any of the images confuse or block you (even after seeing a tutor) simply move on: there are lots of other techniques for generating essay plans (see web for concept/ 'spider' maps; brain-storming; etc). Core Statements, though, *always* pay dividends: use them. Finally, the 13 WAYS apply to more than essay plans (i.e. reports, exams, talks...) They're sweet sweat-savers in assignment hell.

['ANSWERING the QUESTION...' (C): p. 1]

BUILDING AN ARGUMENT / LOGICAL STRUCTURE :

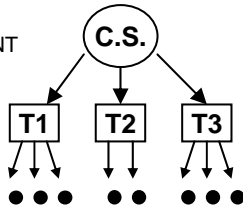
The '13 WAYS'

1.

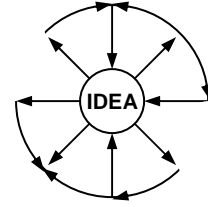
CORE STATEMENT

THEMES

POINTS

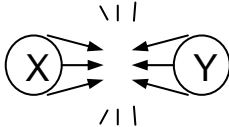
"CORE STATEMENT"

2.

"CARTWHEEL"

[= themeless Core Statement?]

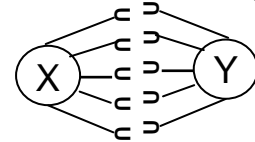
3a.

"DUMB-BELL"

'Opposition'

[Thesis / Anti-thesis → 'Synthesis']

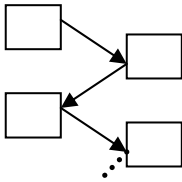
3b.



'Connection'

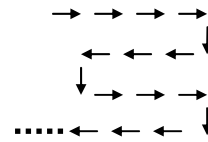
'Synapse Variation'

4.

"STAIRCASE / LANDINGS"

['Stage by Stage' or General Drift]

5.

"LUDO"

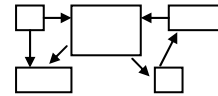
[Closely-argued (linear)]

6.

"SPECTRAL ANALYSIS"

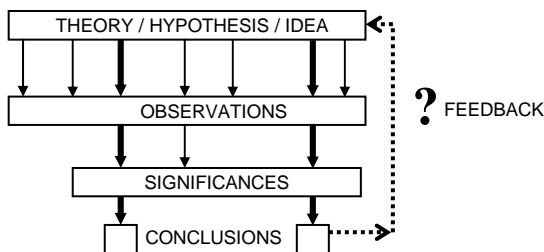
[Degrees / Measures / Extents]

7.

"CEMENTING"

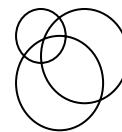
[Relationships]

8.

"SEDIMENTATION"

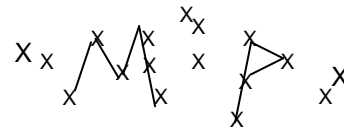
[Sifting / Trickle-Down / Percolation]

9.

"VENN APPROACH"

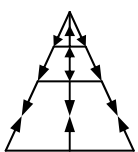
[Similarities / Differences]

10.

"CONSTELLATION-MAKING"

[Patterns / Loose Groups]

11.

"PYRAMID"

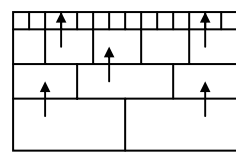
[Hierarchies]

12.

"SWEEPING"

[Make clear by elimination]

13.

"BRICK-WALL"

[All possibilities in a limited range]

... etc. + **ADAPTATIONS & HYBRIDS** of these.**BUT** a CORE STATEMENT is always useful !

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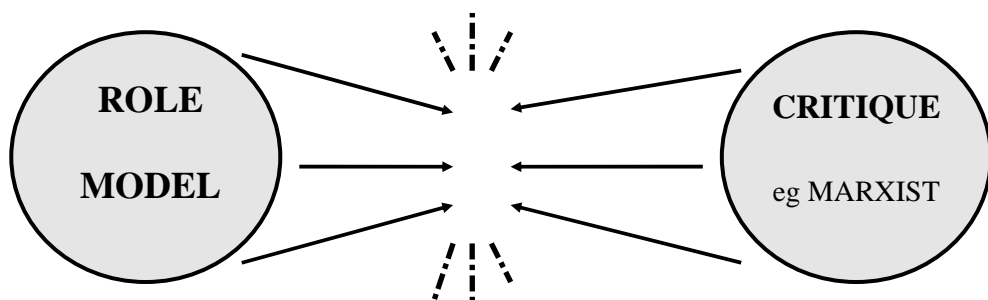
'STUDY SKILLS'

Answering the Question... (C): The '13 WAYS'

A given task can be accomplished in a variety of 'Ways' ...

eg QUESTION: "Beckham: Role Model *or* Model Idiot?"

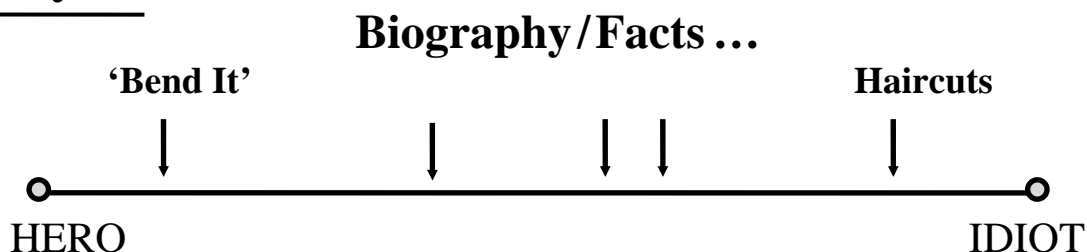
Way 3 a ?



youth aspirations
unifying 'icon'
positive male ...

class aspirations
celebrity cult
person as product...

Way 6 ?



or others ...

Notice how:

- (i) The wording/ structure of the *question* (its duality of 'A or B?') can make some of the 'Ways' more obviously suitable
- (ii) Certain 'Ways' seem to 'match' a given type of approach (is 3a more natural than 6 for 'argument/ counter-argument' style ?)

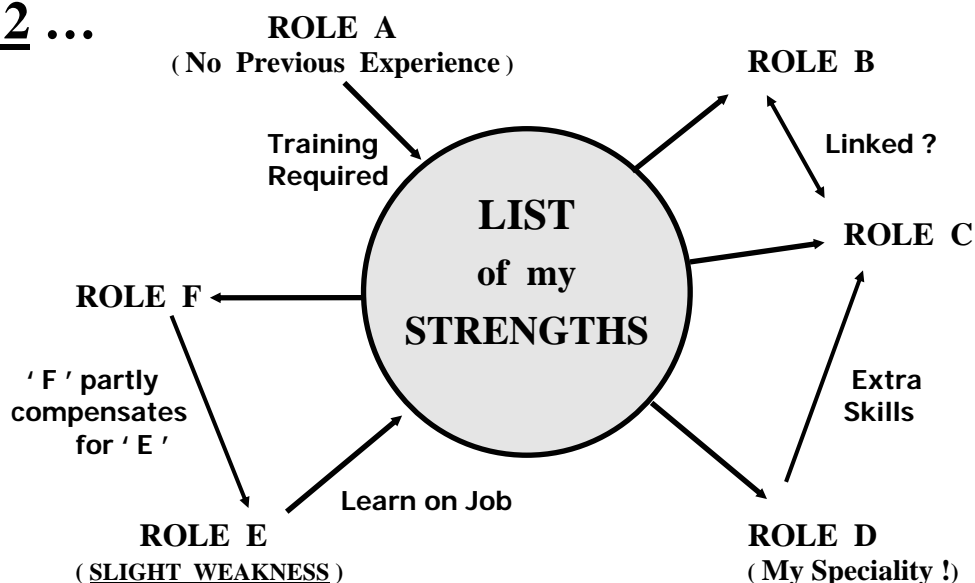
TASK Job Interview: Presentation to Panel.

Using '13 Ways', structure some notes to peruse on the train, for a 10 minute oral presentation on 'who you are'.

Panel will respect the truth – warts and all; but also seeks reassurance that you can fulfil the basic roles of the job.

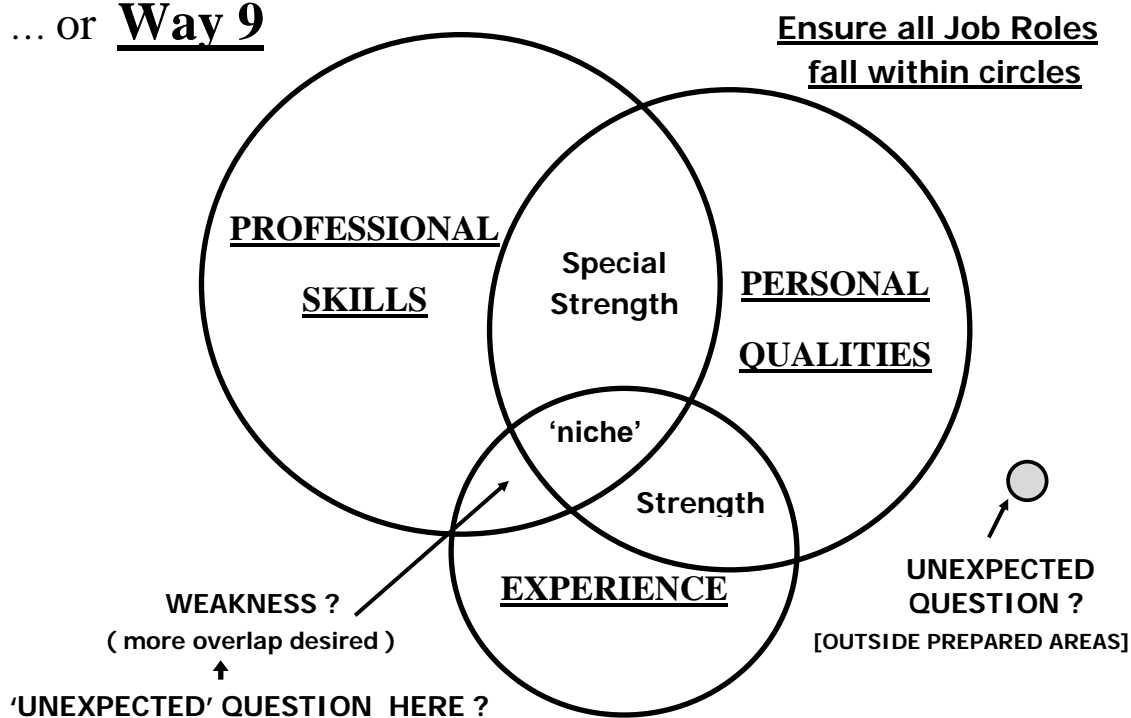
Advert says : 'Expect the unexpected question !'

Way 2 ...



'Unexpected Question' = (eg) some strange combination of Roles ?

... or Way 9



.... and Others ?

Answering the Question...(C)

The '13 Ways' (further discussion)

Common essay approach: **the 'symphonic' form ...**

= INTRO → DEVELOPMENT → CONCLUSION

(i.e. Beginning → Middle → End)

Is this *missing* from the '13 Ways' chart ? OR ...

... is it already there, *in disguise* ?

(e.g. as a special case of 'Way 1', with a Conclusion added ?)

... do the '13 Ways' mostly apply
to the **DEVELOPMENT** stage of an argument :

i.e. to show how ideas relate to one another
in the *body* of the text ?

... is BEGINNING - MIDDLE - END really a logical structure in itself
or just a way of *framing* one ?

(i.e. ALL 13 Ways can be arranged to have an INTRO/ CONCLUSION
or BEGINNING - MIDDLE - END)

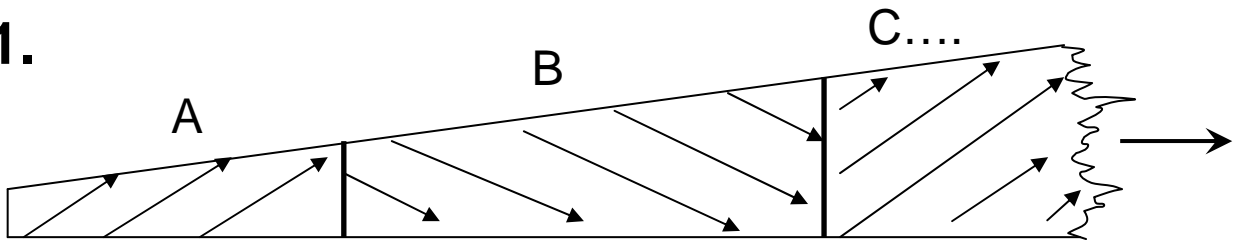
... eg :

INTRO might = preamble; reasons for writing; summary; etc
CONCLUSION could = summary; revisiting of **CORE STATEMENT**; etc

... these may be linked into, but are not equivalent to, an essay's
LOGICAL STRUCTURE

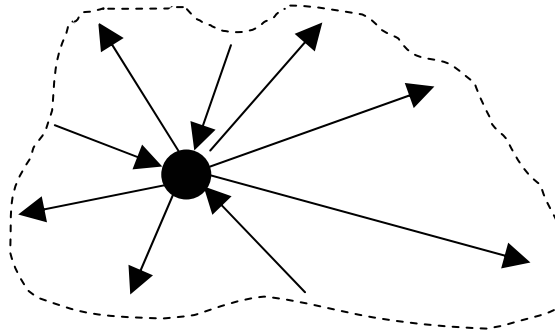
BUILDING AN ARGUMENT: *The '3 TYPES'*

1.



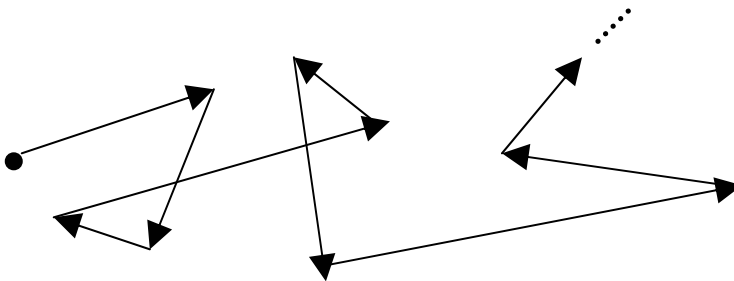
("IN STAGES"
or 'en masse') — to accumulate force
and/ or complexity

2.



("RADIALLY"
or variously) — to 'map out' a complex
or difficult space

3.



("CONSECUTIVELY"
or thread-like) — to shock, surprise, delight;
to maintain or create
drama / interest

or a sign of confusion?

= 3 broad 'families' of approach. Can you think of any others ?

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'STUDY SKILLS'

Preparation sheet for Seminar
(to be handed out at least 1 week in advance)

Essay Plans and the '13 Ways'

- AIMS**
- * To practise the 'Black-Red-Green' Method.
 - * Create a **Core Statement**.
 - * Generate a 'visual' **Essay Plan** using the **13 Ways**.

Materials Suitably coloured pens.
All handouts for 'Answering the Question'.

PREPARATION (to be completed **BEFORE** Seminar)

- Choose **either** QUESTION A **or** QUESTION B (see below).
- Use the **Black-Red-Green** Method [+ *ShadoW-WordS* handout] to interpret your chosen question. Generate a 'side' or so of notes and ideas, making sure you cover all the question's various aspects.
- Using the notes you made, compose a thorough and convincing **Core Statement** for your answer (in one sentence; or *maybe* two).
- Next, generate an **Essay Plan** based on **one of the '13 Ways'**. Choose a 'Way' that seems to fit your approach. Your Plan should take the form of an annotated image on one side of A4. Avoid masses of detail or comment: the *structure* is all-important.
- Bring NOTES, CORE STATEMENT and PLAN **with you** to the Seminar.

[Remember: you're NOT writing the essay itself, just designing its structure.]

VERY IMPORTANT

Please stay focused on how you interpret the question, organise your ideas and structure your response. The detailed points you use to support your argument are of course relevant; but this Seminar isn't really about the essay's content.

In annotating your image, don't go beyond key facts and encapsulating phrases. Rather, spend as much time as you can exploring how best to build a strong and relevant logical structure into your essay.

QUESTION A

[or substitute your own Question A]

"Imagine you were editing *New Writing 12* for a second edition. Identify one prose piece you would definitely keep in, and another you would possibly exclude. Establish your criteria. How consistently can they be applied to different texts?"

QUESTION B

[or substitute your own Question B]

"If you had to advise Byron to remove around a dozen stanzas from one of his Don Juan cantos – mainly for reasons of length – which stanzas would they be, and why? Justify your criteria and (from what you know of Byron and his poetry) suggest what some of his objections might be."

Seminar **'Essay Plans and the 13 Ways'** (55 mins)

AIMS Practise the **Black-Red-Green Method**; create a **Core Statement** and (using the **13 Ways**) a 'visual' **Essay Plan**. Discuss the process; reassess your approach.

NEEDS Pens (Black, Red, Green). *Done in advance:* Core Statements + Visual Essay Plans.

QUESTION A "Imagine you were editing *New Writing 12* for a 2nd edition. Identify one prose piece you would definitely keep in, and another you would possibly exclude. Establish your criteria. How consistently can they be applied to different texts?"

QUESTION B "If you had to advise Byron to remove around a dozen stanzas from one of his *Don Juan* cantos – mainly for reasons of length – which stanzas would they be, and why? Justify your criteria and (from what you know of Byron and his poetry) suggest what some of his objections might be."

(a) Introduction *Tutor-led plenary [2 minutes]*

To begin with, make sure everyone takes on board the following comments:

"Throughout this Seminar, try to stay focused on how you interpreted the question, organised your ideas and structured your response. The detailed points you used in support of your argument are of course relevant; but this seminar isn't really about the essay's content. Don't get distracted by the facts themselves. *You're **NOT** here to write an actual essay, but to design a suitable structure for one.* So, concentrate your energies on how best to use the '13 WAYS' to develop a convincing logical structure for your work."

(b) 'Black-Red-Green' Method *Tutor-led plenary [18 minutes]*

- (i) Get volunteers to read the questions **aloud** and **slowly**, TWICE (to ensure everyone's really heard them, and to refresh your memory of them). [2 mins]
- (ii) Without referring to your Essay Plans, quickly recap the **Black-Red-Green Method** and **Shadow-WordS** [3 mins (max)]. Without going into detail, did you find them useful? Briefly share one or two insights or problems [3 mins (max)].
- (iii) Now run through one of the questions, one colour at a time. Which phrases would you underline **Black, Red, Green**? Do you all agree on this? If time allows, do the other question as well. (Don't 'switch off' during the question you *didn't* do: it's revealing to listen in!) [(at least) 10 mins]

(c) Core Statements *Small groups [10 minutes]*

Split up into small groups (2 or 3 per group) making sure everyone in your group attempted the **same question** ['A' or 'B'].

Taking turns, read out your Core Statement **exactly as it's written down**. Don't introduce or embellish it, or refer to your Essay Plan. Simply read out the Statement slowly, twice, *as it stands*: that's the real test of its effectiveness.

The others in your group should say whether or not they can 'see' what you're up to. Is your Core Statement clear, well-structured, convincing? Has it left out anything crucial? Does it fall into the trap of describing *what* the essay will do, without explaining *how* or *why*? Is it vague? Offer constructive feedback.

(d) Essay Plans & the '13 Ways' *Small groups [15 minutes]*

- (i) Quickly, run your eyes over the '13 Ways' chart. Don't discuss it; just refresh your memory. Now, without revealing Essay Plans, take turns to **explain** [1 min each (max)] which of the '13 Ways' you chose to structure your Plan, and **why**....

(P.T.O for some examples...)

Essay Plans & the '13 Ways' [Seminar Sheet, p.2]

For instance...

"I was in two minds over '3a' and '3b'; but finally went for '3a' because I wanted an exciting, confrontational style; also, I noticed ... etc."

"It was always going to be 'Way 12' for me: after all, there's been so much dross written about ... etc."

Time is very short, so please keep explanations brief and to the point. [3 mins]

- (ii) Once each explanation has been heard, **place all of your group's Essay Plans on the table** in front of you (this is the first time you've seen them properly). Look them over. Ask about anything that's unclear (in the structure). [5 mins]
- (iii) Focus on *one* Essay Plan in your group. Could any of the *other* 'Ways' do the job better? If you're stuck for ideas, simply take a different 'Way' (at random) and discuss whether it might work for that Essay. What would need to change? What might be the benefits (or dangers) of the new structure? Even where the existing structure is strong, could it be **altered** to improve it at all? [6 mins]
- (iv) Have you changed your mind about which structure to use – yes or no? [1 min]

(e) Open Discussion

Tutor-led plenary [10 minutes]

- (i) Without comment, take a vote on these ('yes or no') using a show of hands:
 1. "Without the BLACK-RED-GREEN method, I'd have missed a key issue in that question."
 2. "*ShadoW-WordS* helped me to spot a vital clue in the way the question was worded."
 3. "Core Statements are more trouble - and anxiety - than they're worth."
 4. "You just can't beat an annotated image for producing a well-structured essay plan!"
 5. "Images store lots of information about the essay's structure, true; but I still think you need to produce all the chaotic pages of notes *first*."
 6. "Damn and blast the 13 Ways! You still don't *really* understand something until you've written it all out in sentences and paragraphs..."

At the end, discuss any points arising!

- (ii) Hands up, if you *did* change your mind about which of the '13 Ways' to use for your Essay Plan [in **(d) (iv)**]. Get a volunteer or two to explain why.

We're out of time. If you have any minutes left, have a go at one of the questions below; or use them after the seminar as a 'follow-through' activity, to consolidate and extend your insights.

- How might your Plan change for a different kind of audience or context (eg an oral presentation, or a lecture handout, rather than an essay)?
- Find examples where the wording or structure of the **question** strongly influences the probable structure of its answer (eg questions beginning 'Compare and Contrast...').
- Most essays have a word limit. Are some structures more likely than others to over-run?
- Which do you prefer to write **first**: the Core Statement or the Essay Plan? Why?
- What dangers might there be in the '13 Ways' as a universal approach to Essay Planning? When should they be left behind, or taken with a large pinch of salt?

[NOTE. To do this seminar you need the '13 Ways' Chart, p. S3. You may also use your own **Questions A & B.**]

BUILDING AN ARGUMENT / LOGICAL STRUCTURE :

The '13 WAYS'

<div>1.</div> <div><div><div>CORE STATEMENT</div><div>↓</div><div>THEMES</div><div>↓</div><div>POINTS</div></div><div><div><div>C.S.</div><div>↓</div><div>T1</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div><div><div>T2</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div><div><div>T3</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"CORE STATEMENT"</div></div>	<div>2.</div> <div><div><div><div>IDEA</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"CARTWHEEL"</div><div>[= themeless Core Statement?]</div></div>
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... etc. + **ADAPTATIONS & HYBRIDS** of these.

BUT a CORE STATEMENT is always useful !

© Mario Petrucci, 2002

'STUDY SKILLS'

‘The 13 Ways’

Alternative Seminar (with more varied / general tasks)

When tackling a task, don’t skimp on the planning. Your response will be far more impressive if it shows purpose, and a clear and consistent structure. The 13 WAYS can help with this.

INTRODUCTION (1) Look through *The 13 Ways* [see chart] (*what do they represent?*)
 [Tutor-led] (2) Find 1 Strength/ 1 Weakness in each (*what might these be?*)

MAIN EXERCISE *Split up into small groups. Each group will be allocated one of the writing tasks ‘A’ → ‘F’ (below).*

(3) In your groups, discuss which of the **13 Ways** might be suited to your writing task.

Note: if several Ways seem suitable, choose just one.

(4) As a group, sketch an outline of how you would structure your written piece.

Important: *Keep this to about half a side of A4. Remember, you’re thinking about how to STRUCTURE your ideas, rather than detailed CONTENT. Your outline should simply summarise what the piece will say, according to the Way you chose. You could do this in the form of a diagram (annotated with key-words & phrases) or as a simple map or list of ideas.*

(5) Report back! Which of the 13 Ways did you choose? Why? Did it work?

TASK A **University Essay.** “Consider the pros and cons of a ‘modular’ approach to university teaching, giving particular emphasis to the potential problems of course assessment.” *Note: your lecturer/tutor favours flair, but not at the expense of thoroughness. She hates major omissions.*

TASK B **Article.** “Shakespeare – in twenty minutes?! The Qwik-Fit Shakespeare Company.” *Your editor is trying to get a new popular weekly magazine off the ground, aimed at twenty-somethings. Needs to be punchy.*

TASK C **Film review, the *Independent on Sunday*.** “Slash and Burn – have horror movies had their day?” *Your editor is a ‘junkt-junkie’ who thinks he’s Oscar Wilde. An absolute Psycho for precise word-counts – will cut ruthlessly. So, plan in some flexibility for that...*

TASK D **Article, college newsletter.** “My first week at Brookes University ... some near-misses!” *Editor probably won’t read it, but wants something any hurried student can get through: personal, funny maybe, but of real use too.*

TASK E **Exam Question.** “Jane Eyre – typical Brontë, or best of the bunch? Discuss.” *Tutor is willing to consider all views – however outrageous – but insists on the question being interpreted in depth.*

TASK F **Job Application/ Presentation to Interview Panel.** Notes to take with you on the train, for a ten-minute oral presentation of ‘who you are’. *The panel wants to know the truth, warts and all, but also seeks reassurance that you can be proactive and efficient. Expect the unexpected question!*

Further Discussion. Perhaps the most common essay ‘structure’ is the **symphonic form** :

INTRO → DEVELOPMENT → CONCLUSION (i.e. Beginning → Middle → End)

- Is this present, at all, in the 13 Ways (e.g. a special case of ‘Way 1’, with a Conclusion added)?
 - The 13 Ways show how your ideas relate to one another in the *body* of the text. So, is ‘Beginning - Middle - End’ a logical structure in itself, or just a way of framing one? In other words, could ALL of the 13 Ways be arranged (or adapted) to have an Introduction—Development—Conclusion?
-

Final Points/ Follow-up work.

- * Find cases where the structure (or wording) of the task strongly influences the likely structure of response.
 - * When are *The 13 Ways* most useful? When should they be taken with a big pinch of salt? Why?
-

[NOTE: to do this seminar you need the ‘13 Ways’ Chart.]

BUILDING AN ARGUMENT / LOGICAL STRUCTURE :

The '13 WAYS'

<div>1.</div> <div><div><div>CORE STATEMENT</div><div>↓</div><div>THEMES</div><div>↓</div><div>POINTS</div></div><div><div><div>C.S.</div><div>↓</div><div>T1</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div><div><div>T2</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div><div><div>T3</div><div>↓</div><div>•••</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"CORE STATEMENT"</div></div>	<div>2.</div> <div><div><div><div>IDEA</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div><div>↑</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"CARTWHEEL"</div><div>[= themeless Core Statement?]</div></div>	
<div>3a.</div> <div><div><div><div>X</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div></div><div><div>Y</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div></div></div><div><div>\\ /</div><div>/ \\</div></div><div><div>'Opposition'</div></div></div> <div><div>"DUMB-BELL"</div><div>[Thesis / Anti-thesis → 'Synthesis']</div></div>	<div>3b.</div> <div><div><div><div>X</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div></div><div><div>Y</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div></div></div><div><div>'Connection'</div></div><div><div>'Synapse Variation'</div></div></div>	
<div>4.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"STAIRCASE / LANDINGS"</div><div>['Stage by Stage' or General Drift]</div></div></div>	<div>5.</div> <div><div><div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div><div>→</div></div><div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div></div><div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div><div><div>.....</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div><div>←</div></div></div><div><div>"LUDO"</div><div>[Closely-argued (linear)]</div></div></div>	
<div>6.</div> <div><div><div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"SPECTRAL ANALYSIS"</div><div>[Degrees / Measures / Extents]</div></div>	<div>7.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"CEMENTING"</div><div>[Relationships]</div></div></div>	
<div>8.</div> <div><div><div><div>THEORY / HYPOTHESIS / IDEA</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div><div><div>OBSERVATIONS</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div><div><div>SIGNIFICANCES</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div><div><div>CONCLUSIONS</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div><div>↓</div></div></div><div><div>?</div><div>FEEDBACK</div></div></div> <div><div>"SEDIMENTATION"</div><div>[Sifting / Trickle-Down / Percolation]</div></div>	<div>9.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>→</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"VENN APPROACH"</div><div>[Similarities / Differences]</div></div></div>	
<div>10.</div> <div><div><div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div><div>X X</div></div></div></div> <div><div>"CONSTELLATION-MAKING"</div><div>[Patterns / Loose Groups]</div></div>		
<div>11.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"PYRAMID"</div><div>[Hierarchies]</div></div></div>	<div>12.</div> <div><div><div><div>MY POINT</div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"SWEEPING"</div><div>[Make clear by elimination]</div></div></div>	<div>13.</div> <div><div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div><div><div></div><div>↑</div><div></div></div></div><div><div>"BRICK-WALL"</div><div>[All possibilities in a limited range]</div></div></div>

... etc. + **ADAPTATIONS & HYBRIDS** of these.

BUT a CORE STATEMENT is always useful !

Some possible conclusions from the Seminar ...

... 'Essay Plans and the 13 Ways'

Essay Plans & other Tasks : 4 Steps

- When constructing (say) an Essay Plan, **PAUSE** at several points in the process ...

... check you're actually *Answering the Question*.

Use every technique you can (Black–Red–Green, etc).

- At some stage, start *Questioning your Answer* ...

Have you considered the logical structure of your response ?
Is there any obvious structure *at all* ?

If so, what *kind* of structure is dominant ?

Which of the '13 Ways' best describes it ?

Are you using that structure in a consistent way ?

- Going deeper... what are the likely **strengths** and **weaknesses** of your chosen structure ?

Does it 'fit' the task, or suit the given audience/ context ?

- Finally, have the courage to **change your mind**.

If needed, find a structure better suited to the task at hand.

Does your 'Core Statement' have to change with it ?

Allow the Statement to evolve...

Experiment! Adapt, patch, improvise, shift...

Applies to tasks of many kinds, not just Essay Plans !

OPTIONAL (to raise the issue of Memory...) **MNEMONIC to remember the above:**

Pause, Answer, STrengths/WEAKNESSES, CHANGE YOUr mind

MEMORIES

"Memory, the warder of the brain." *Macbeth*.

Memory is more than an exam tool. It plays a key role in any viva, seminar or interview, and it informs and supports our study generally. It also happens to be a crucial part of what we are.

So, what do you associate with the phrase 'an amazing memory'? Sheer amount remembered? A genetic gift? 'Eye-photography'? Okay. But what about 'preparation' or 'planning'? After all, the very words 're-mind' and 're-member' imply something ordered, already (or previously) arrayed or formed. In preparing this sheet, my 'memory' took the form of last week's carefully indexed notes. That's cheating, of course – but it illustrates my key point: there are many ways we can prepare and arrange things so they'll come easily to mind.

Any memory aid, technique or ploy is called a **mnemonic**, from (ancient Greek) *mnêmôn*. This means 'mindful'. Ah – that's much more pleasant in its associations than 'cramming' or 'mugging up'. *Mindful* wafts a Zen fragrance of awareness. It suggests a (positively) fulsome mind. It reassures me that I can build the habits and structures which will allow me to 'bear in mind' the various weights I'll have to carry there. It seems to me that huge chunks of homogeneous text are less easily carried in that mind than lived experience. The secret, then, is to transform bland or factual material *into* a sensory experience, by associating it with a **Story, Word/ Sound, Image or Place**. In a fluent 'learning-memory' process of encoding → storage → retrieval, mnemonics can help to effectively encode/store new information; by tying that information to existing knowledge (familiar words, etc) they make retrieval easier too.

Mnemonic Type 'A'.

MEMORY AS NARRATIVE.

The memorability of narrative is probably genetic because, long before writing was invented, stories were essential in passing on information. So, to memorise the number sequence

1 3 7 5 3 1

I might spin a yarn like so: "Last night (1am) I was squinting through my 3 bedroom windows at (lucky me!) 7 UFOs. Lifting a hand against the glare, I saw the 5th UFO sprout a tripod of legs. It squatted on my 1 and only dog." I'll remember that story till the sun freezes. I chose colourful words to help it stick. Plus, I *do* hit the sack at about 1am and my room indeed has 3 windows. My lucky number is (usually) 7, and my raised hand reminds me of its 5 digits. But I *don't* have a dog. Then I notice: the sequence is partly symmetrical. That clinches it.

Mnemonic Type 'B'.

MEMORY AS SOUND/ WORDS.

An **acronym** is a word formed from the initial letters of other words, often to condense a definition or simple description (look up CERN, LASER, AIDS). Strictly, 'non-words' like NGO won't do; but this is often relaxed. Acronyms usually need a nudge to get there. Eg, here's (my interpretation of) Italo Calvino's 'recipe' of essentials for literature's next millennium:

Lightness Reference Rapidity Visuality Precision

which yields: **L-R-R-V-P**. Hmm. No vowels; repeated letters. Hence not memorable. But let's be active rather than passive. Change *Reference* to *Intertextuality* (again, my interpretation) and *Precision* to *Exactness*, then juggle the order...

Lightness Intertextuality Visuality Exactness Rapidity

giving: **Italo Calvino's L-I-V-E-R**. Much better; and a real noun. But I tend to forget what that 'E' stands for. Hence: **Italo Calvino's L-I-V-E-R is E-xact**. Yep. To the grave.

There are lots of ways of doing this kind of thing ('acrostics', etc); also, apart from words, memory can thrive on other forms of patterned sound such as music or song. But let's not get bogged down in all that. Just invent your own mnemonic forms and hybrids to suit: extract letters, words, part-words, numbers, names to build memorable phrases. Here's a recent improvisation from my own files. Don't mind the content much; just focus on the process...

JAKOBSON MODEL		
addresser	context message contact code	addressee

This gives: "**Jakob! Dress her messily externally, but tactfully odd – see?**" Okay – so I'm weird. But I hope you get the drift.

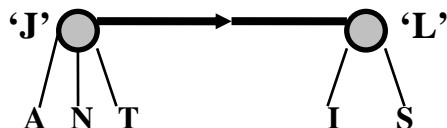
[continued...]

You probably use some simple word-based techniques in revision already (keyword lists, etc.) but what about the rest of the sound tool-bag? In mnemonics, any type of sonic reinforcement is good... nursery rhyme, rhythm, alliteration (indeed, rhyme is one of the most ancient aids to memory: eg '30 days hath September...'). Wackiness helps too. And anything personal.

Mnemonic Type 'C'.

MEMORY AS IMAGES.

We all know the saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' and, for me, visual memory-aids are indeed among the best. In fact, we touched on this earlier when we built visual and spatial structure into overhead transparencies [see '[Presentation Skills 2](#)']. For many people, the memory 'sees' and stores spatial patterns easily. Images and icons are naturally memorable (as advertisers know!) and visual aids, when cannily constructed, can be superb for recalling **relationships, priorities, structure** and **sequence**. Here's a simple example. Don't worry what the letters stand for: rather, note how all the relationships can be understood at a glance.



Each letter stands for a chunk of familiar/ known information.

Why '**ANT IS**' and not (eg) '**TNA SI**'?

Mnemonic Type 'D'.

MEMORY AS 'PLACE'.

'Topic' derives from *topos* (ancient Greek) meaning 'a place'. *Topos* is memorable, I suspect, because proto-humans needed to find their way around (and back again) in order to survive. In Greek oratory, each stage of an argument was associated with a *topos*; its progression was thus symbolised by a visual/ spatial journey of the mind. Later, Roman orators systematised speeches using the places in which they spoke: e.g. this pillar = A; that statue = B... etc., with each feature having its special significance or content. In a sense, they looked around the place to 'read' the sequence of 'topics' on the 'page' of the venue! So, bear *topos* in mind next time you 'lose your place' in a talk, or when an over-used idea is described as 'commonplace'. *Topos* is not easily applied, now, in its Roman sense – unless you use that trick of 'placing' items in a familiar room or location (in your imagination) as a means of memorising them. Perhaps the modern equivalents of *topos* really occur in certain kinds of pictorial diagram, or maybe even in the abstract places we make, from icons, on that screen-sized room of our PCs.

MNEMONICS.

PROs ...

- Composing them can be fun, and *itself* a useful learning process.
- They're yours: funny, rude... you choose. No intimidation. No rules!
- Encodes material according to how *you* think; ties it in to your specialisms.
- Good long-term storage tool for summaries, overviews, etc.
- Great use of short-term memory: excellent 'notes for the bus'.
- Revision: can store 'bones' of a subject in a few diagrams or phrases.
- Before exam: review mnemonics just before you go in; guaranteed result!
- In exam: jot down the essential stuff (in mnemonic form) in first 5-10 mins!
- Emergency: use as an easy start, or prompt, if blocked.
- Can store information on several levels [spatially, associatively, etc].
- Excellent for little 'knots' of easily-forgotten, but crucial, information.

CONs ...

- They're not the *whole* skill of memory. Can't rely entirely on 'memory crutches'.
- Can be overdone. Don't neglect sophisticated, extended means of revision/recall.
- Over-reliance may lead to obviousness, over-simplification, banality.
- Poor mnemonics can confuse, irritate. Good technique needs to be learned.

Take memory seriously. Take time. Take responsibility.

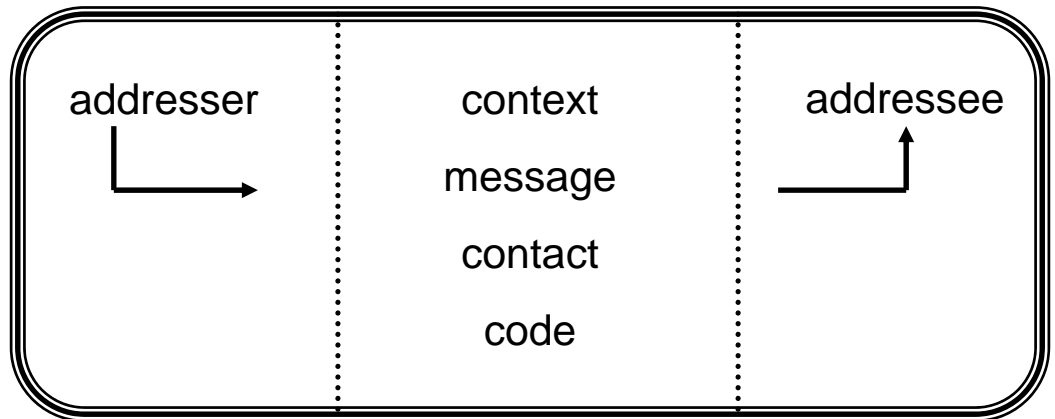
Auditory/verbal and visual memories differ, as do individuals, so experiment! Find out how *you* store/retrieve things best. Also, it seems we most easily lose the middles of long lists (the 'serial position effect') so keep mnemonics relatively short. Having said that, they can go much further than small, individual parcels of information. If you've the frame of mind, and a little patience, several mnemonics can be linked to make a useful '**personal module**' (see next) dealing with (say) a key subject or exam topic. Bite-sized units or related chunks are memory-friendly, and personal modules can be built upon, or even assembled into substantial blocks of material. Not worth the time, you say? In answer, let me misquote (or is it 'mis-member'?) that line from Macbeth:

"Memory, the larder of the brain."

EXAMPLE

The Jakobson Model developed into a “personal module”

JAKOBSON MODEL



CONTENTS OF YOUR 'MODULE' MIGHT INCLUDE :

**B
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↓**

- **Life & works of Roman Jakobson**

- **Details of his model meaning of terms ... examples ... assumptions**

- **Family of larger concepts you want to relate it to :**

**SUPPORT
&
DISSENT**

{ e.g. synchronic vs diachronic ?
structuralism + formalism ?

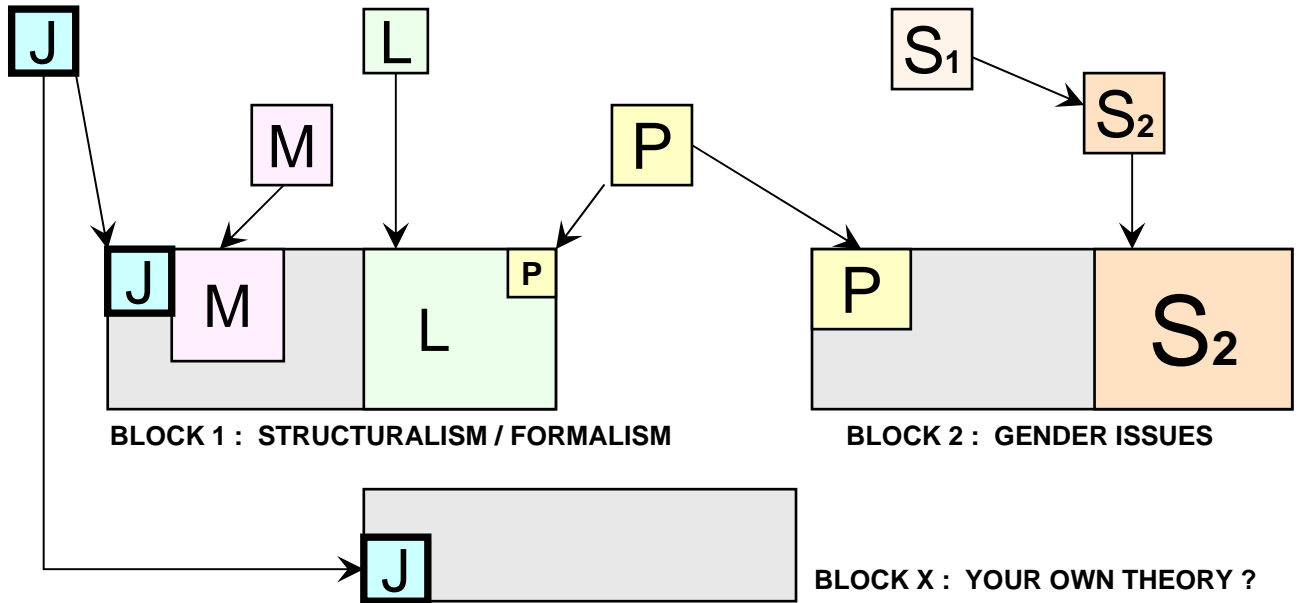
- **Variation(s) on the model (your own?)**
e.g. applied to creative process or criticism itself ?

- **Analysis of stock texts using model + its variations**

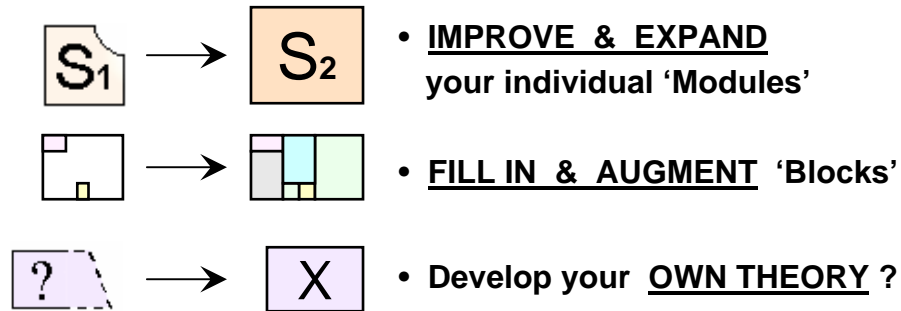
Module ‘J’

etc ... further LAYERS

From PERSONAL MODULES to 'BLOCKS'



Over Degree / Research Period :

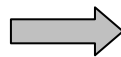


BONUSES

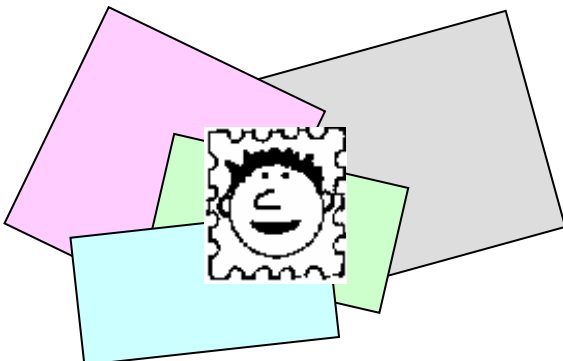
- Helps bring facts / ideas to mind (especially under PRESSURE)
- Modules / Blocks can be used again & again!
- Build exam / viva responses from Modules / Blocks (*play to your strengths*)
- Your revision / exam response will be automatically structured

But ...

BLOCKHEAD alert ...



Danger of reductionism !



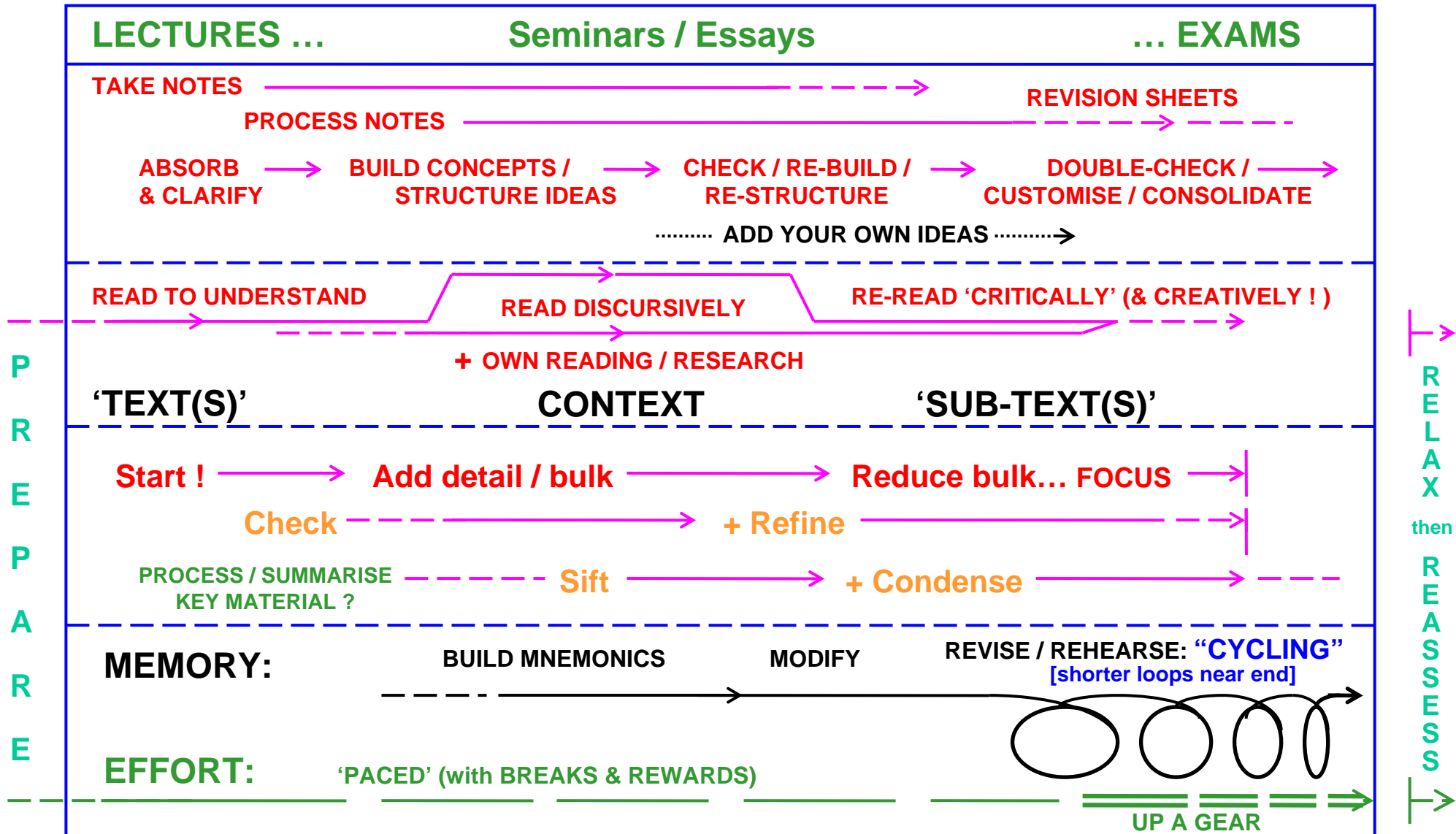
Actually, ideas (Modules & Blocks) overlap & interfere ...

P.S. Leave your personal stamp on it !
Your own research always impresses.

STRANDS OF STUDY

(a simplification)

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Notes. Many students struggle through degrees (even PhDs) without giving much thought to any of this. Study is not only quantity of effort, but also what type of effort and when you apply it. You probably won't (can't) do all of what the chart suggests. But use it to identify areas of neglect, to pick up ideas. Even a basic study plan helps! [The chart does simplify things. In actuality, many of the strands overlap, weave together and spill *outside* the box...]

MANAGING TASKS; MAKING PRESENTATIONS (p.1)

[A general 6-STAGE APPROACH to Task-solving]

Here, many of the techniques we have so far encountered will come together ...

ANALYSIS of TASK:	'Black – Red – Green'	+	'Shadow-WordS'
PLANNING:	'Core Statement'	+	'13 Ways'
HONING:	'Prompting'	+	'Breaking Stones'
MATERIALS:	'Designing OTs'	+	'The Four Ls'
PRESENTING:	'Body vs Brain'	+	Speaker ↔ Audience
	'Voice, Body and Breath'	+	'Holding the Thought'

+ add: *'Brainstorming'*

Important: the notes below will help you with all kinds of task; but they focus on how to present an idea (eg an Essay Plan) to tutors, peers, etc. Note a crucial distinction here: namely, that a presentation *about* a task is itself a separate task, a new piece of planning, another 'argument' in its own right. So, the style and structure (even the content) of a presentation *about* an Essay Plan can easily differ from the style, structure and content of the Essay Plan itself. Be clear about this!

Stage I TASK ANALYSIS (*'Answering the Question'*)

Trying to design a presentation 'cold' (from absolute scratch) can be tough, unless you *really* do work best that way. Look closely at the statement defining your task. Use **Black-Red-Green** and **Shadow-WordS** to understand it fully. Plan, strategize. DON'T leave it all too late.

Stage II BRAINSTORMING (either for Essay Plan itself or how to present it)

Take a large sheet of paper. Explore concepts, themes, contradictions, key phrases... develop your thoughts and insights. Place them around a **Core Statement**, an encapsulating idea (with all its links and threads). Or try making linked lists. Mind-Maps (or 'Spider Diagrams') are good too – they help you to map out a conceptual space, explore associations.

Remember: no censoring or editing at this stage! Get everything down. It's liberating (especially at an early stage of the process) to get away from 'safe' linear reasoning.

After the Brainstorm/ Mind-Map, let the editor in you come back to the table. Fill in any gaps in the ideas. What do you need to check, chase up? Set up an 'internal debate' with yourself (or a friend): "*What is this task really after...? What themes are important... are there any I've missed? Which are the major (and the dissenting) voices in the literature...? How can I firm up this quirky idea...?*" etc. This process can generate astonishing impetus and clarity.

Stage III PLANNING: CONSTRUCTING AN ARGUMENT

An argument is the way you choose to structure your ideas and 'release' them to the listener/ reader; the **Core Statement** serves to encapsulate that argument.

A good argument demonstrates a clarity of purpose in its ideas and in their presented structure. The listener/ reader should feel you know exactly where you're going, and is being led there with you. So, in presenting your case for a particular view, plan how you'll build it up. Will your audience hear the Core Statement first, then see all the reasoning and evidence supporting or challenging it? Or will you work to a climax, hitting them with a clinching finale?

It bears repeating: these comments apply not only to a given assignment, but also to any presentation *about* it. That presentation (unless it's purely descriptive) will have its own 'argument' to make (eg a talk *about* an essay is not the same as reading the essay aloud to the audience). So, whichever of the **13 Ways** you used *within* your essay, you must now decide which 'Way' is best for presenting your talk *about* the essay. These needn't be the same!

[continued...]

PRESENTATIONS. Mix the visuals to maintain interest (eg overheads -> slides -> handout -> overhead...) It's often a good idea to finish by returning in some way to your opening point or statement (eg with a summary) or to leave the audience with a further question your work has raised.

TEXTS/ HANDOUTS/ ESSAYS. Headings and sub-headings (if you're allowed to use them) are easy on the eye, as are paragraph breaks (for each new idea or theme). A note on paragraph length: very short paragraphs create a stuttering, interrupted effect; overlong paragraphs become cluttered or lose focus.

Stage IV

HONING

A good argument needs **GLUE** and **STITCHING**.

GLUE connects words and ideas together within each sentence (its phrases and clauses), from sentence to sentence, and across paragraphs. **Glue** prevents your essay or presentation from becoming ambiguous or a mass of poorly-connected points.

Refer back to **Prompts** (= punctuation, connecting words, spatial and typographic signals, etc). These are a kind of glue. They help to carry the argument along and make it clear. They are little signposts, or arrows, showing where you've come from and where you intend to go.

Prompts can develop into quite complex clauses: eg '*Having thoroughly explored this latter avenue of thought, and given the vast quantity of literature already devoted to Rubin's hegemonic view, it is now important to ...*' More often, though, they are relatively simple:

<i>Despite...</i>	<i>Yet...</i>	<i>Because...</i>	<i>And...</i>
<i>Then...</i>	<i>However....</i>	<i>Consequently....</i>	<i>Since...</i>
<i>Similarly...</i>	<i>First... Second...</i>	<i>Although...</i>	<i>Thus...</i>
<i>Therefore...</i>	<i>Nevertheless...</i>	<i>Notwithstanding...</i>	<i>Clearly...</i>
<i>Moreover...</i>	<i>On the contrary...</i>	<i>Bearing this in mind...</i>	<i>So...</i>
<i>By contrast...</i>	<i>Furthermore...</i>	<i>In contradistinction to...</i>	<i>As a result...</i>
<i>Alternatively...</i>	<i>An instance of...</i>	<i>On the one/ other hand...</i>	<i>But...</i>

Get into a habit of *reading your work aloud* – this helps a lot in seeing where a dab of glue (or a prompt) is needed. Try '**Breaking Stones**' if anything seems woolly or difficult to follow.

STITCHING makes sure your entire argument holds together, that it's intelligible *as a whole*. You might need to unpick your presentation/ text to achieve this: i.e. re-write parts of it, re-order points, or move paragraphs, ideas and themes around. If this gets you nowhere, look again at the **13 Ways**. Have you a good structure for your ideas; have you used it consistently?

It's easier to stitch something together if you break it up into manageable pieces: each fresh idea, or major shift in emphasis, should have a new overhead or slide. Don't interrupt the flow too much; but avoid letting one thread of argument get too convoluted or lose its way.

Often, when you have a really convincing and consistent argument, the stitching doesn't show.

Stage V

CREATING YOUR MATERIALS

Refer back to '**Presentation Skills**' (*Designing OTs*, *The Four Ls*, etc). Think about the balance between visuals and texts. Avoid clutter. Presentations and Overhead Transparencies (OTs) are rarely effective at supplying mass detail: choose fewer points and cover them well. How can you lighten your material, let it breathe? A good presentation usually involves a clear, astute message – delivered with vocal / visual attractiveness and confidence.

Finish 'honing' *before* you make final handouts or OTs. Commit too soon, and you'll only have to do them again. Proof them. Try to simplify (whilst respecting good content). Rehearse 'speaking over' them. Do the audio-visuals clarify and support, or get in the way?

Stage VI

SPEAKING and PRESENTING

Refer back to '**Body vs Brain**' + '**Voice, Body and Breath**'. Have you addressed **Speaker ↔ Audience** interactions in positive ways? When you talk, will you be '**Holding the Thought**'? How can you minimise nerves, prepare your body for standing/speaking? Have you rehearsed?

‘BEFORE and AFTER’ :

some final thoughts about Managing Tasks

BEFORE = Checking

- If you’ve used a **Core Statement** make sure it’s clear, that your themes and points are organised around it in a meaningful way. Are the points gathered under their correct themes? Have you fully used, and extended, your mind-map or brainstorming session to build up the themes/points for your argument? Are there any important gaps in your argument or your understanding of the subject?
- Have you found a good structure for your idea, and an appropriate ‘**register**’ for it (i.e. the type of language you’re using; the tone/ style you deploy)? Does your work have (or need) a clear introduction, and a convincing ending? Do these address the question set, and do you make clear reference to the set task, throughout?
- For presentations, run through them well ahead of time. Rehearse. Actually *giving* the talk to yourself – or, better still, to a patient friend – is the best way to hear which bits aren’t working well (i.e. difficult to enunciate, or not very convincing, or overlong, confused, clogged, etc) and also helps you to see where you might do something with a little more inventiveness or flair. You can (and perhaps should?) improvise and adjust, to some degree, when you’re on stage; but don’t ask too much of yourself: it’s never comfortable to realise you’re running aground, during the talk itself. Also, it’s incredibly difficult to time the presentation, or to make sure all your bits of paper and audio-visuals are in the right place, just by flicking through your notes. So, stand up and *do it*. Rehearsing ‘in your head’ really isn’t the same at all.

... and AFTER = Learning

- Try to recognise your habits. Be aware of how you usually approach a task and how you work best. Did the same things go wrong? Or right? Make (and maintain) a checklist of things to watch out for in your own essays and presentations (use tutors’ previous comments, feedback, etc.). If appropriate, find out from friends and fellow students what they thought of your input (ask them to be honest, but tactful). Devise strategies for playing to your strengths and compensating for any blind-spots. Give that learning process some of your time. Enjoy it.
- There’s no ‘right’ way to write. Writers plan, organise and reflect in various ways and at different stages in the writing process. Find your own approach to task-solving, but do be prepared to adjust your techniques to the task in hand (and to learn new techniques if you don’t yet have them). Make plans; but leave room to change them, depending on how it goes.

Further reading:

P. Creme & M.R. Lea, ‘Writing at University: A Guide for Students’, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997.

STUDY SKILLS : a summary

The kind of ground we've covered ...

- How you approach tasks; your habits
 - Importance of time & planning
 - Answering the Question (not the one in your head)
 - Questioning your Answer: *Structure*
 Honing
 Presentation
 - Voice, Body, Posture
 - The need to ... Rehearse. Proof. Check!
-

'STUDY' is much more than the TASK IN HAND ...

- Memory, Reading, etc. as ACQUIRED SKILLS
- Getting deeper into PROCESS and the SELF
- Greater awareness of AUDIENCE

+ **ENJOY yourself.** Enthusiasm is infectious. It persuades!

+ **TRUST your creativity.** Make space for it. You need it...

... plus a smidgen of luck.

BASIC STUDY SKILLS

Assessing tasks; building your response.

1. EVALUATE reading list/ key texts...

Examine contents pages. 'Skim' though book(s) looking for:

Subject – Themes – Type(s) of text – Level of difficulty.

Assess/ discuss broad territory of the texts (with tutors/ friends).

2. READING TECHNIQUES...

Skim:

[= Quick processing
of bulky material]

- * Titles * Contents pages * Index pages
- * Graphics * Summaries * Section headings

Scan:

[= Overview of
selected texts]

Read it – but not necessarily word by word !
Beginnings/ ends of paragraphs + Note key phrases.
Home in on essential sections.

Spiral:

[= Close study of
important material]

In-depth reading of selected material.
Take notes & check/ adapt them.
Return to text several times ('recursive' reading).

3. IDENTIFY the main ideas...

Annotate (on photocopies!) according to **relative** importance.

Use highlighters – identify **key moments**.

4. MAKE NOTES...

Synopsis Mind-maps Diagrams

5. CHECK...

Revise. Go through it all again.

Review: straight after → a short time after → just before the test.

Test yourself (or your-selves! - i.e. get together...)

6. FOLLOW-UP...

Tutor/ peer feedback.

Use seminars.

Revisit your notes.

Test yourself regularly.

WRITING ESSAYS : KEY STAGES

1. HAVE A PLAN !

- Think about the question. Read it through, aloud, carefully.
*Study the topic. Get the basics first, then scan widely. Play!
Find the roots & branches of your subject. Form an opinion.
Where does it overlap with other subject areas?*
- Brainstorm. *Structure & flesh for your opinion.*
- Gather material. *Inform & expand your opinion.*
- Select + organise material. *Refine & re-structure your opinion.*

2. WRITE IT.

- 'Core Statement'. *[see handout] What are you trying to say?*
- Introduction. *More than just a description of the essay?*
- Main body of essay. *Where it all happens. = Your argument.*
- Conclusion. *Not mere regurgitation. Nor too obvious?*

3. CHECK IT.

- Edit. Proof it. *'Phone a friend' ... Get a fresh eye?*
- Readable? Right tone? *'Ask the audience'... Who is this for?*
- Balance (emphasis, etc) *'50 - 50' ... Anything too one-sided?*
- Do you meet assignment requirements... *especially word count?*
- Order of Paragraphs. *Check these for flow, logic.*
- Style. *Good use of clauses, connectives, structure, variation?*
- Judge importance of content.
Eliminate: Repetition. Tautology. Superfluity. Repetition!
- "GAPS"! = Grammar, Accidents*, Punctuation, Spelling.

* 'Accidents' = gender, number, case, tense. Check these 'agree' – i.e. are consistent within/ across sentences.

4. MARKING ...

Your primary audience, at least initially, is likely to be a tutor or exam marker! But you should think about what any reader (as well as your tutor or examiner) would be seeking:

<i>Clarity.</i>	<i>Succinctness.</i>	<i>Focus.</i>
<i>Detail, accuracy.</i>	<i>References, substantiation.</i>	<i>Flair & insight.</i>

Keep an eye on the following factors in your CONTENT and STYLE:

- **Opening.** With clear references to set question; a strong summary of your piece.
- **Conciseness** versus **Development.** Stick to the point; but with sophistication!
- Avoid **Logical flaws** – in sentences, between paragraphs, across piece as a whole.
- **Effect:** clarity, force. Be confident; but always bother to substantiate your views.
- **Appropriateness** – of your material, deductions, rhetoric, tone, etc.
- **Order** and **Cohesion.** A strong, clear, linked progression of ideas.
- **Ending.** Good answers often lead to 'further questions'. Or a sting in the tail?

BUILDING YOUR ENGLISH :

A STRATEGY FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS

(1) KEEP A JOURNAL

Buy an indexed journal, no smaller than A5. Section it as follows:

WORDS	<i>New words.</i> <i>Phrases and their uses.</i>	<i>.... etc.</i>
GRAMMAR	<i>Sentence constructions.</i> <i>Verbs, adverbs.</i> <i>Nouns, adjectives.</i>	<i>.... etc.</i>
EXERCISES	<i>At the back of the journal, turned upside down (see below).</i>	

Leave plenty of blank pages for each section. As new topics and sub-sections arise, add them in. As you find new things to put in the front of your journal, imitate and **practise them in the back** under 'Exercises'.

(2) DO WEEKLY TASKS

Taking Saturday or Sunday off, spend half an hour each day (preferably first thing in the morning, NOT late at night!) to do the following:

MONDAY and THURSDAY. Read a short article in a paper or magazine and *study* it. Look at the way it uses and constructs language. Keeping a dictionary close by, pick out new words, idiomatic phrases, unfamiliar sentence constructions. Make a note of them in the front of your journal in the appropriate section. Get the hang of using them, at the back of your journal under 'Exercises'.

TUESDAY and FRIDAY. Study a section of a good grammar book – either at random, or linked to a problem you keep having. Make sure the book is pitched at the correct level for you, and try to find one with exercises in it. Again, make notes in the front of your journal in the correct section, then practise what you've learned under the 'Exercises' part of your journal.

WEDNESDAY [and Sat or Sun]. Do this in the back of your journal, under the heading 'Exercises'. Take any new words or ideas from the last two days and imitate them. Then invent your own sentences which incorporate them in your own way. Find a friend (or tutor) who is happy to look at your exercises to confirm they are correct. Reward them with chocolates and coffee!

(3) INVEST

To learn how to use written and spoken English well you must invest TIME, on a regular basis. But you must also invest in some good books... a comprehensive dictionary is essential, one that gives examples of usage. The 'Oxford Concise English' is a fair start. A simple, but thorough, book on English grammar is also important. Eric Partridge's 'Usage and Abusage' (various editions) is a fine manual dealing with common problems, and gives many examples.

TECHNIQUES for READING ...

... and picking up ‘CUES’

Skim * Titles * Section headings * Graphics
 * Summaries * Contents/ Index pages

Scan Read it – but not every word !
 Beginnings/ ends of paragraphs.
 Home in on essential sections.
 Note key words & phrases.

Spiral In-depth reading of *selected* material.
 Take notes & check them
 Return to text several times (‘**recursive**’ reading).
 Adapt notes.

MODES OF WRITING

MODE of WRITING	Clarification of Mode	Some comments
Descriptive. *	<i>Implies no Analysis or Evaluation (yet).</i>	Rarely the whole task! Often leads to analysis and/or explanation somewhere along the line.
Chronological, or 'sequenced'. *	<i>One thing at a time, in some kind of order. An ordered form of description.</i>	Usually insufficient for assignments on its own. Often part of preparation for something else.
Categorisation. *	<i>Linear structure – according to 'types'. An ordered form of description.</i>	Occasionally useful for 'Compare / Contrast' tasks or as an organising model where a CORE STATEMENT does not apply. Usually a tool within a larger job.
Cause—Effect.	<i>Consequences, connections, results.</i>	Often leads into (or generates) explanation and/ or analysis.
Compare / Contrast.	<i>Similarities / Differences.</i>	Common essay/exam mode.
Summarising.	<i>Summing up; drawing out generalities.</i>	Often used to begin or end a piece.
Analysis.	<i>Usually involves information or data being assessed or tested.</i>	Good if it can develop into your own questions and qualifications within (and beyond?) the task allocated.
Evaluation.	<i>Judgements that arise from analysis.</i>	Implies you will weigh up and justify your assertions.

* These modes have to be used with particular care in an essay or thesis – they have a place, but NEVER as a substitute for required analysis, evaluation, etc.

Note: Other writing modes (such as 'Explanation' or 'Discussion') usually translate into some variation or combination of the above.

Which of these modes do you find most 'natural' to you ? Or most troublesome ? Can you say why ?
