



Study Skills Handbook

Get the most from your studies



ACTAC

Australian College of Teacher
Aides and Childcare

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Study skills

What are study skills and why are they important?

Study skills are tools that you can use to help you learn more effectively.

For many people, studying does not come easily and can be time-consuming, boring, and difficult.

When you are learning online or remotely, study can be isolating or demotivating at times. To achieve your study goals, you will need to adopt strategies and learn skills to make studying easier, more manageable, and more achievable.

There are ways to make your study more efficient and more effective. By studying smarter, not harder, you will have more time to spend doing things you enjoy.

What is the difference between studying and learning?

Studying is the time you dedicate to reviewing information and gaining knowledge about a subject. Learning is the knowledge and understanding you retain over time. For your course, think of it like this: studying is the process, while learning is the result.

People learn in different ways, which is known as learning styles. Some people can learn without studying, generally by *doing*; we call this experiential or kinaesthetic learning. Other people learn by watching someone else or by reading about the subject; this is called visual learning. Others still need to hear the information before they can understand it; this is auditory learning.

Understanding your own learning style can help you to choose study strategies that work best for you; this will be discussed in more detail later on.



Time management

Why is time management important?

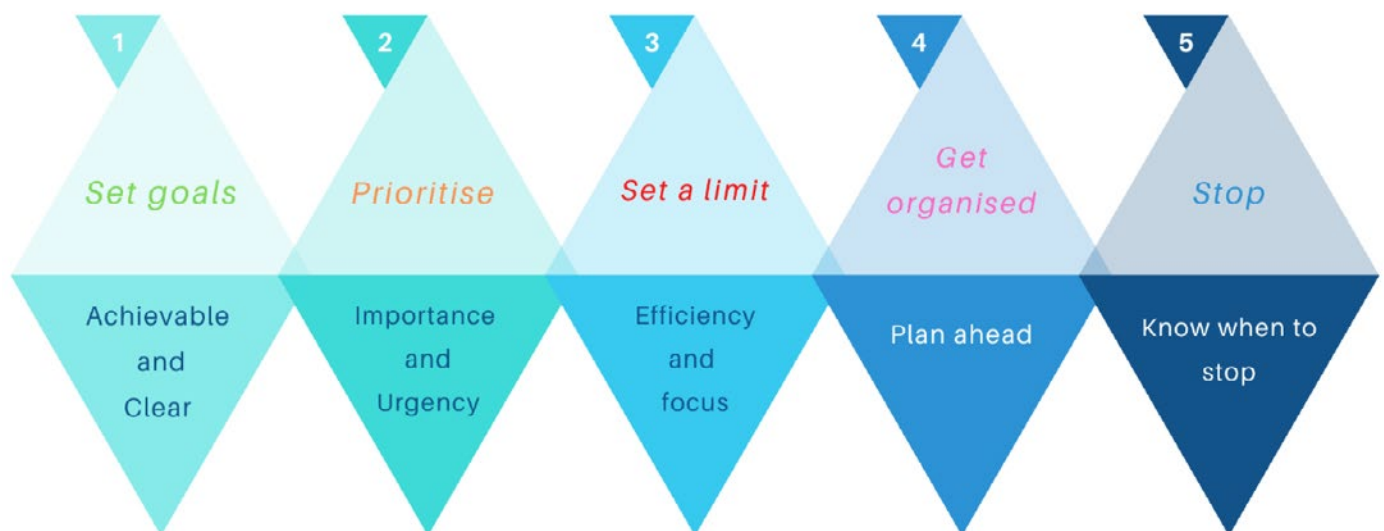
The long-term goal of studying is completing the course. If we do not effectively manage our time when studying, we could waste time, repeat tasks we've already done, lose focus, and lose motivation.

When starting a new course, we need to find time in our day to fit in time to read, research, think about and absorb new concepts, write and respond to assessment questions, and to practice what we are learning.

Do not assume that because you are enthusiastic at the start of your course that you'll be able to read a whole unit in one weekend. During busy times of our lives, studying effectively takes careful planning to make the most of the time we have available.

Time-Management

Tips for study



Set goals

Why are goals important?

Goals give us direction, keep us focused, and provide parameters for tasks to make them more achievable. We often set goals without even realising it. These can be as simple as getting out of bed earlier or more ambitious, such as learning a language.

When we set goals, we need to be **S.M.A.R.T.**

S

Specific

Goals should be clear and well-defined. While you may want to improve your studying habits, it is important that you know exactly what you want to achieve. This will help you to plan the steps you'll take to meet your goal.

Rather than saying "I want to study more often", a specific goal would be "I want to study for at least one hour every Wednesday evening".

Look at the time you have available, then decide how much time you can allocate to study each day. This includes when you will read your course materials, conduct research, review and edit your work, and attempt your assessments. If the time you have available is two hours a day, set specific goals for what you want to achieve in each hour.

M

Measurable

Goals need to be measurable so that you can keep track of your progress and recognise your achievements. Seeing your progress will help you to continue working towards your study goals.

For example, if you know you have an assessment due on a specific date, a measurable goal would be to write 400 words each day so that you will complete it on time.

A

Achievable

Set yourself achievable goals to ensure your success. Everyone has different limitations, and it is essential that you recognise your own. For example, if you plan on running a marathon, it may be unrealistic to expect you'll be able to do so after only one week of training.

Unattainable goals can be demotivating. If we consistently fail at something without seeing any progress or success, it is more likely that we will eventually want to give up. Rather than trying to achieve too much too quickly, set smaller objectives that will help you work towards achieving your overall goals.

Be realistic about what **you** can achieve in your study time. If you realise you won't be able to complete your readings in the hour you've set aside, you may need to reconsider your study plan to give yourself more time.



R

Relevant

Any goal you set will need to clearly relate to successfully achieving your study objectives and align with your personal motivations. Everything in your study plan should get you closer to meeting your goals.

For example, if you are studying the systems of the human body in your course, focus your readings on that specific topic. While you might also be interested in geology, it's best to put that subject aside until you've completed your course work.

T

Time-bound

Giving yourself a specific time limit to complete tasks will help you to stay focused and ensure you don't procrastinate. Many people cannot spend more than twenty minutes doing something that requires intense concentration. If you know you only have an hour to read, take notes, and review, then you are more likely to stay focused.

To improve your productivity, consider setting a timer for twenty minutes and commit to reading during that period of time, then stop when the alarm goes off. Give yourself five minutes away from your study space to refresh and allow your mind process what you have read. You can then come back for another twenty minutes to continue studying.

To help with your planning, you will find a **weekly planner** on the next page. Use this template or create your own to give yourself an idea/goal of what you want to achieve each week.



WEEKLY planner

Goals for week ____

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY



Prioritise tasks

When we prioritise, we need to decide the **urgency** and **importance** of things in our lives.

There are certain tasks we need to get done each day that will have a major impact on our lives now and in the future. These are **important**.

Likewise, there are also things that may come up which need to be done immediately or to meet a deadline. These are **urgent**.

We can use a quadrant for making our priorities clear, like this:



URGENT &
IMPORTANT

DO FIRST

First, decide which tasks are **both urgent and important**. This includes anything that requires immediate attention to meet a deadline, such as submitting an assessment or paying bills by the due date.

Work on the tasks in the **green quadrant first**, so they can be actioned as soon as possible.

IMPORTANT
NOT URGENT

SCHEDULE

Next, decide what is **important, but not urgent**. These activities are meaningful to your life and studies but do not have a specific time limit, such as reading new course materials, completing an assessment, studying for an exam, or spending time with your family.

Schedule the tasks in the **yellow quadrant** and aim to complete them within a set timeframe so that you can get them done before they become urgent.

URGENT
NOT IMPORTANT

DELEGATE

If a task is **urgent, but not important** to your study, consider delegating it to someone else or reschedule it for a later date. For example, is there anyone available who can take over cooking, cleaning, or washing to help you meet your study goals on time?

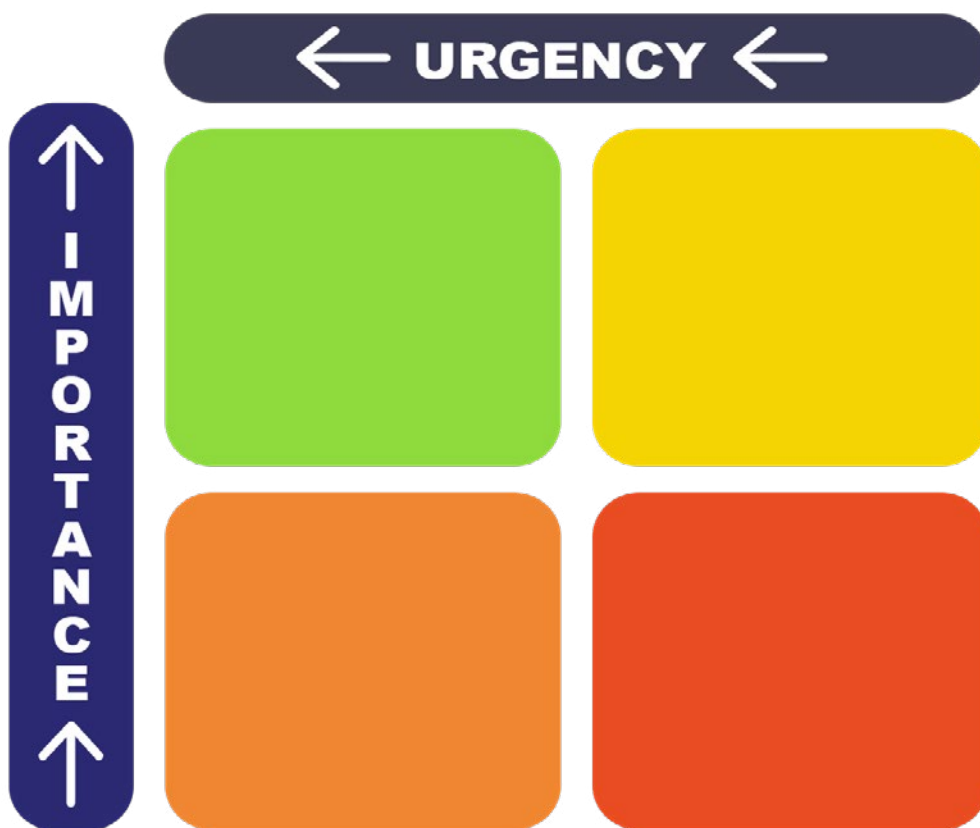
NOT URGENT
NOT IMPORTANT

**IGNORE FOR
NOW**

Anything that does not add value to your life or distracts you from achieving your study goals should be considered **neither important nor urgent**. Try avoiding these things altogether until you've finished your course.

For more information about urgent and important tasks, you can watch this [video](#).

The following page includes blank quadrant planners that you can use to prioritise your weekly tasks. Print and complete one for each week of your course to help you stay on track.



Set a time limit

There are parts of our course we enjoy more than others, and it can be easy to get carried away doing the tasks we love, while putting off those we don't. Setting a time limit on each task can help you to have enough time to do both.

We tend to focus more and ignore distractions when given a certain amount of time to complete a task. Time limits also mean we can see an end in sight for tasks we don't enjoy. If you don't enjoy reading, you can make this task more manageable by setting aside 20 minutes to read through the course materials and highlight any new concepts. If you have enough time left over, you can always go back and do more of the things you enjoy later.

For example:

"I'm enjoying designing this PowerPoint presentation, but I also need to make time to write that essay, which I'm not so keen on. If I limit myself to thirty minutes on my presentation, then set twenty minutes for writing a first draft of the essay, I can go back to working on the PowerPoint presentation if there's enough time left over."



Plan ahead

When we have assessments due to submit, our other workloads do not disappear. If you only schedule time into your week to review learning materials, you'll need to find extra time when assessments and other obligations come along.

When organising a weekly planner, look ahead for when you plan to submit assessments and record these into your planner first. Once this is done, work backwards to determine how much time you'll need to allocate for completing these.

Anything in the **green quadrant** of your priorities diagram needs to be actioned immediately.

We want to start and preferably finish your assessments and tasks while they are still in the **yellow quadrant**. By the time they get to the **green quadrant**, they should be finished and ready to submit. Do not start a large assessment task on the day you plan to submit it, as you'll likely end up rushing and submitting poor quality work.

Know when to stop

We are not machines. Most people are not able to concentrate on an intensive task for more than an hour. If study becomes overwhelming, your goal may start to feel unachievable. Since studying can be physically and mentally tiring, it's important to give yourself a break.

Time management is about being efficient and creating time to do more of the things you love.

You should schedule small breaks into your allocated study time so that you do not become fatigued or demotivated. This will give you time to get a snack, stretch and move your body, refocus your attention, and reflect on what you have been concentrating on.

Be realistic about how much you can do in one sitting, and most importantly, be kind to yourself. Remember, you are important too.



Studying effectively

How do we study?

Many people believe that simply reading course materials is studying. However, this is only a small part of how we study and learn.

Reading and rereading does not mean we will understand what we are reading. For reading to be effective, we need to learn how to actively engage with what we are studying. This helps us to reduce the number of times we need to read the same thing.

Here are a few strategies you can use to make your study time more effective.



Time and place

Once you have set a time to study, you will need a place to study.

This should be somewhere you can be alone and focused for set periods of time. It doesn't have to be the same place every time you sit down to study, as long as it is comfortable and free from distraction.

If you need background noise to concentrate, make sure the noise is unintrusive and does not draw your attention away from studying.

Multi-tasking is not effective or efficient. When you are studying, do **ONLY** that. Leave all other tasks until you have finished or take a scheduled break.

Be realistic about your study space. Are you going to be able to study with people in the next room talking or watching TV? Do you have the ability to create a dedicated study space in your home?

The more distractions there are, the more likely you will end up reading and rereading without being able to engage with the materials. This means more time studying and less time doing things that you love.

Revisit your plan

Before you sit down to study, review your plan so that you know exactly what you will be doing in this study period.

Do you have the materials you need? If you only have 30 minutes to study, you don't want to waste any of them looking for a highlighter.

Is your computer updated? Don't risk a software update starting in the middle of an essay draft.

Do you have your notes? Have you printed materials to actively engage in them? Do you have materials from another unit that will help you understand or engage more effectively with what you are doing?

Make sure there is nothing that you do not need in your study space.

Have a backup plan

Planning is about using your time wisely.

If you are not able to study what you planned to study for whatever reason (e.g., your computer has crashed or you haven't had an opportunity to print out the readings), move to your backup plan. Rather than putting off study in that allocated time, study something else so that you can keep moving towards your goal.

Spaced repetition

As you study, you want to build on your knowledge of the subject. We build up a foundation of knowledge by adding a little bit at a time.

Space out what you study and add to it regularly. After a period of time, come back and review what you know and fill any gaps by adding a little bit more until you thoroughly understand the subject matter.

Don't expect to learn everything about a topic by reading through it once before moving on to a new topic. We need to build on new concepts by actively finding how they relate to our current knowledge. By doing this, we create meaning with our new knowledge and in turn develop our understanding, as we have a context to attach these ideas to.

Teach another person

An effective way to learn something new and to discover what gaps we have in our knowledge is to teach or explain what we are learning to someone who does not know about the subject. By doing this, we not only reinforce what we do know, but highlight what we don't know and need to learn more about.

To learn more about effective study habits, watch this [video](#).



Learning styles

There is a common belief that learning styles affect **how we learn** things. However, learning is not as simple as finding out your preference and only doing that. There is no one better way to learn something than another. For example, if you have an **auditory preference**, you are not disadvantaged by looking at presentations or slides without having any audio with them.

Likewise, you are not at a disadvantage if you prefer **visual learning** and listening to lectures without having notes in front of you.

Most people are **multi-modal learners**, despite having a preference for how they learn. We cannot use one sense in isolation to learn something, particularly if what we are learning is abstract.

Using multiple senses, you are more likely to develop a better understanding of the **content in context** and **make sense** of what you are learning.

Howard Gardner proposed the [theory of multiple intelligences](#), meaning that there are certain areas that some people will excel in over others. However, using these as a way of understanding how we make meaningful connections with the materials of our course is more important than trying to make sure we try to learn by only using our preferred sense.

Learning styles have been broken into various areas, but most people believe in three main types: **visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic**.

These styles aren't necessarily how we learn information but how we **store** information and **recall** it later. Without the ability to recall what we have stored in our memory, input, or learning becomes redundant.

"Remembering" is about three main functions:

- Input
- Recall (requiring effective hooks)
- Output



We store different information and learn different concepts in different ways.

If we are storing the memory of what a tree looks like, we would most likely store this as a visual memory. If we try to recall what our phone sounds like when it's ringing, we would be searching for an auditory memory. Trying to explain to someone, in words, how to tie their shoelaces will make it clear to you that the action of tying your shoelaces is something we store as a kinaesthetic memory.

When we store memories, we are not storing and recalling sound or visual information, but meaning. Likewise, when we learn any new concepts in our courses of study, what we are trying to do is not just recall information, but to make connections with the meaning.

What are some strategies that work?

- Make meaning and connect with the learning materials. The more concrete associations you make with the materials, the better you will be able to remember it
- As you learn a new concept, work out how it fits with your current knowledge
- Test yourself by challenging your recall ability and practice recall often
- Become a super-learner and learn as much as you can about the topic by watching videos and reading—the more you learn about your field, the more interesting it will become
- Find new ways to connect with the content; for example, if you are having difficulties remembering a concept, draw a concept map
- Incorporate multisensory experiences to make your learning more meaningful
- Create conceptual analogies to make better connections to meaning



The following table outlines traditional learning styles and strategies you can use to improve your memory associations. These provide opportunities for spaced repetition when trying to memorise concepts. Doing so will help you make meaningful connections with the materials, until you are able to better understand it.

Learning Style	Strategies
Visual (spatial): You prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding	Create visual aids, such as mind maps, imagery, or graphics; use colour-coded pens or highlighters; visualise concepts as visual stories
Aural (auditory-musical): You prefer using sound and music	Use a recorder to note information instead of writing to playback later; read aloud; say things out loud that you want to remember; study with a friend; use familiar songs and substitute words; recite without notes; discuss your materials with someone else; use mnemonic devices (such as rhymes, alliteration, etc., for example, “i” before “e” except after “c”); watch videos
Verbal (linguistic): You prefer using words, both in speech and writing.	Discuss or present your ideas; use mnemonic devices; role-play; read your writing aloud; if audio is available for any readings online, use audio; watch videos
Physical (kinaesthetic): You prefer using your body, hands, and sense of touch.	Create models and draw diagrams, graphs, and maps; review notes while doing exercise; teach someone else your materials; role-play; get hands-on experience when possible
Logical (mathematical): You prefer using logic, reasoning, and systems.	Problem-solving; do additional research and see how it extends, agrees with, or refutes your materials; find statistical data and facts to support what you have learnt
Social (interpersonal): You prefer to learn in groups or with other people.	Find someone to study with; discuss your ideas; think about how you could help someone who was struggling with their studies to understand it better; create a forum to share ideas with your peers; watch videos about your learning concepts
Solitary (intrapersonal): You prefer to work alone and use self-study.	Use active reading strategies; write reflections or spend time reflecting on the materials; do additional research to see how it extends, agrees with, or refutes your materials; look for the connections to how the content fits with your future career goals

Active reading

What do we mean by active reading?

Active reading means we actively engage with what we are reading, both physically and mentally. This helps us to remember more of what we read and to fit those concepts into our prior knowledge.

Reading and memorising isolated bits of information does not create a solid foundation of knowledge. Instead, we need to discover how the content that we are learning fits with what we already know.

One method of active reading is **SQ3R**:

1. Survey

Read over the text quickly without thinking deeply about what you are reading to get a basic understanding of the concepts and where you find information.

2. Question

- Write down questions that you think you might be able to answer from reading the text
- Write down how you think this information might fit with knowledge you already have about this topic
- Think about any gaps in your knowledge that you think might be filled by reading the text.

3. Read

Read the text thoroughly. While doing so, use your highlighter to highlight sections of the text that answer your questions or that you think are particularly important for you to learn.

It's also important to **annotate** while you read.

Annotating refers to writing notes or questions in the margin of the text (or in a separate document) that summarise or highlight important information. You can use the three strokes method to indicate how important the information is for you to remember.

- I means that it is not important
- II means it is fairly important, you should try to learn it
- III means it is very important, make sure you know this

Most importantly, you will need to find the method that works best for you. The more active you are reading, the fewer times you'll spend rereading the same information to understand it.

4. Recall

When you finish reading, before you finish your study session, write down whatever you can remember from what you've read. Planning is important for this, as this is an important part of reading. Give yourself enough time to skim, read, check what you remember, and make notes about what you will need to review next time. Make sure you fill the gaps.

5. Review

Give yourself a day to process the new information, then teach it or explain it to someone else. This will help you to identify where your gaps in knowledge are. There's no point studying more of what you already understand. Spend that time learning more about what you don't understand.

Summarising

Once you finish reading, write a summary of what you've learned, even if it's just one or two sentences. This will help you in two ways:

1. It will show that you've understood what you've read
2. It will help you later when you need to write an essay, report, or piece of assessment, as it will already be summarised in your own words

Here is a [video](#) that explains summarising a text.

Taking notes

The notes that you take and the notes that you write in separate documents are very important for learning.

These will help you to put the new ideas into your own words, which will later help you to avoid **plagiarism**.

Your notes can be based on a single keyword. Write down everything you know about this keyword as it relates to the topic. You can do this as a concept map or mind map.

To learn more about mind maps, you can watch this [video](#).

Rather than writing full sentences, only write down the **keywords and main ideas** when taking notes. This saves time and makes sure that when you come back to write about the topic, you will have to use more of your own words.

If English is not your main language, use whatever language is easiest for you when you take notes, as long as you cover the keywords and the key concepts in English.



Academic integrity

What do we mean by academic integrity?

When we submit our work, whether it is a small task or an entire assessment, it should all be written **in our own words**.

If we use someone else's ideas, we need to show **where these ideas came from** and whose ideas they were. We can do this by either **directly quoting** or **paraphrasing** the original author and by **referencing** their work.

If we don't do this, it is considered **cheating**, or *plagiarism*.

Using quotes

When using another person's words or ideas, you must clearly indicate who the original author is and where you source the information from. There are two ways to include quotations: **direct quotes** and **indirect quotes**.

Direct quote

A **direct quote** is when we use the original author's exact words we find in a text.

When we do this, we need to:

- Use quotation marks around the text **if it is fewer than 40 words**; *or*
- Indent the text without quotation marks **if it is 40 words or longer**

Examples

Short quotation

The quote is indicated using quotation marks, followed by the **author, year of publication**, and **page number** at the end of the quote (in brackets).

1. *David Copperfield* opens with "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (Dickens, 1869, p. 1).

If the quote is in the middle of the sentence, place the in-text reference directly after the quote. Likewise, if you include the author's name in the sentence, place the year of publication directly after their name.

2. Dickens (1869) opened *David Copperfield* with, "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (p.1) as a way of introducing...

Long quotation

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. (Dickens, 1896, p. 1)

Direct quotes are NOT included in your word count and cannot make up more than 15% of your total word count.

Indirect quote

Indirect quotes are when we use the ideas of another person and either **paraphrase** or **summarise** their words.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing involves using the ideas from your research and rewriting them in your own words without changing their meaning. Doing this shows that you understand what you've read and can apply that knowledge to your work.

Here you can find a [useful video](#) that shows how to paraphrase.

Summarising

Summarising outlines the key points of a passage in your own words. A good summary should contain the main idea, and all the important points.

You can use your mind maps or notes for writing these.

Watch this [video](#) to get a better idea of how to summarise.

References/citations

For the purposes of courses up to Diploma level at the College, referencing is generally not expected for assessment responses unless specifically stated as a requirement.

When referencing, we recommend using the APA standard. You can find more information here: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references>

Take a look at the list of references on the next page to see an example of how to create a basic reference list.



Reference List

- EasyTeaching. (2018, November 4). *Main Idea | Summarising | Reading Strategies* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbO3lRXT0ww>
- How To Do That. (2016, November 9). *How To Paraphrase – 3 Paraphrasing Techniques* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7syE6AMRA7k>
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- The SELL Team. (2019, September 26). *How to Summarise* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqF4-g17uC8>
- Ways To Grow. (2017, Mar 27). *How to Prioritize Tasks Effectively: GET THINGS DONE* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czh4rmk75jc>



Support

If you need support, you are encouraged to reach out to us via email or phone. However, before reaching out, we recommend that you read through your learning materials, resources, and assessment instructions thoroughly and carefully.

