MANAGING YOUR LEARNING OFFLINE AND ONLINE

STUDY GUIDE FOR THE UWIDEC STUDENT

2006-2007

What this guide is about

This guide is intended to assist you, the UWIDEC student, in managing key areas of your study, with special emphasis on the tasks that you are required to perform in the study of a typical course. While a lot of it focuses on your study online, it also pays attention to your offline activities, since the two are interdependent.

It is a companion to the two manuals *Orientation to Online Learning* and *Improving Your Study Skills*, which new students will have received in order to participate in the Vacation Student Support Programme (VSSP) of May to August, 2006. Returning students may request copies of both these manuals from their site coordinators.

Managing Your Learning Offline and Online offers useful pointers in the following areas:
- Setting up a study area
- Studying the self-instructional materials
- Accessing a computer for online study
- Using e-mail
- Understanding the organisation of the course website
- Keeping to the study schedule for the course
- Posting in the discussion forums
- Doing a self-assessment exercise
- Doing a tutor-marked learning activity
- Getting help

Setting up a study area

Even though, from time to time, you will find yourself studying elsewhere, it is important for you to have that special space that you can call "My study area". Very likely, that space will be in your home.

- Set it up in a way that gives you easy access to all your requirements.
- Ensure that both the lighting and the ventilation are adequate.
- If there is enough space and you can afford it, install a whiteboard. It can be really handy when you have those mental blocks and you need a lot of writing space to brainstorm.
- A notice board is also useful; one important item for that area is your personal study schedule.
- Invest in a good dictionary and a grammar text. Both are useful study companions.
- When it is time to study, go to your study area; do not attempt to study in any other part of your home.
- Get the other members of your household to respect your need to have that space reserved for your study.

Studying the self-instructional materials

The self-instructional materials, also referred to as the self-study course package contains the following:

- The *course material* that contains the essential course content with related learning activities; it is divided into Units and sessions;
- A *compilation of readings*, where appropriate, that is linked to relevant sections of the teaching text in the course material;
- The *course guide* that contains course-related information.

When studying these materials,

- Work through them in a systematic and organized manner.
- Do the activities in the course material to assist you in learning the course content.
- Pay attention to and read related readings where these are included in the course pack.
- Pay attention to the Unit title, overview, objectives and wrap-up; also note the Session title, introduction, objectives and summary. The headings and sub-headings should not be ignored either. All these devices are intended to assist you in organizing your own study of the teaching material.
- Keep a course notebook to make notes as you study each course; the learning activities can also be done here.
- You will also use your course notebook to record any areas of difficulty that you encounter, or alternatively any points of interest. No doubt you will want to bring these to the attention of your online tutor and other members of your group.
- You may find it useful to refer to the relevant Units in the *Improving Your Study Skills* manual on Reading for Meaning, Strategies for Critical Reading, and Taking Notes.

- You also need to organize your study time efficiently. For pointers on Time Management, refer to Unit 1 of *Improving Your Study Skills.*

Accessing a computer for online study

Basically, you must have access to a computer with Internet access. If you do not have this type of access at home, you are free to use the computers at the local site. Alternatively, you may use the resources of an Internet café. In the event that you are planning to acquire a computer for your home, here are the basic hardware and software requirements that the system you choose, must satisfy:

- **Hardware:**
  - Intel Celeron 2.2 GHz processor
  - 384MB of memory
  - 20GB of hard drive space
- **Software:**
  - Open Office 2.0 or Microsoft Office 97
  - Internet Explorer 6 with Flash, Java plugins
  - Adobe Acrobat Reader 6 (this can be downloaded free of cost from the internet)

RBTT computer loan facility

If you live in Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines or Trinidad and Tobago, then you can take advantage of the special loan that RBTT is offering students in these countries to acquire a computer system. Some of the features of the loan are,

- No downpayment
- Special low interest rate
- Low monthly payments
- Up to three years to repay (four for Trinidad and Tobago)

For further information and links to RBTT, just log in to MyUWIDEC at http://dec.uwi.edu/myUWIDEC/login.php .

To refresh your mind about the basics of using your computer, check your *Orientation to Online Learning* manual. Should any problems arise, your first point of contact is the technician at your site.

Using e-mail

You must have an e-mail address. From time to time your tutor may need to make direct contact with you. Other members of your online group may also wish to interact with you on a one-on-one basis. The site staff may need to get an important message to you. E-mail is the most efficient route for all this to happen.

- Ensure that you have an active e-mail address and that it is accurately entered in MyUWIDEC. **The slightest error in your e-mail address means that messages to you will bounce back to the sender**.
- Check your e-mail regularly, preferably every day, but at least once every two days.

- Schedule a particular time of the day to check your e-mail and allow yourself enough time to read new messages, reply as required and send your own messages and do some 'tidying up'.
- Set up special folders to organize your messages.
- Do not allow your 'Inbox' and 'Sent' folder to become cluttered. That may mean that your own brain may be becoming cluttered as well.
- Invest in a good anti-virus software. It is essential.

For guidelines about setting up an e-mail account, see your *Orientation to Online Learning.* If you need any assistance regarding the use of e-mail, please contact your site technician or other member of the site staff.

Understanding the organization of the course website

Your *Orientation to Online Learning* manual has already given you instructions about logging on to the course site. *OOL* also provides you with a step-by-step 'walkthrough' of how the site is laid out and what each of the links refers to.

If you think you need a refresher, consult the manual. If you think you need assistance in understanding the manual, consult the site technician.

The bottom line is that you will always be handicapped in your ability to participate in your online classroom if you are uncertain about the space in which you are operating. So, get all your queries and concerns about logging on and navigating through the site cleared up at the beginning of the semester.

As you review all the sections, note the section entitled 'Learning Forums'. This is the area that you will be working in on a week-by-week basis, or what ever time frame the course coordinator decides on. Pay close attention to the different elements within this area, and how you are expected to use them in the course of your study.

Keeping to the study schedule of the course

The course coordinator has provided a schedule to assist you in pacing yourself in the study of the respective courses. It is important that you keep as close as possible to that schedule top avoid falling behind.

- Check the schedule provided for each of the courses for which you are registered.
- Note all the special dates – handing in assignments etc.
- Create your own personal schedule based on the one provided; your schedule should include all your other responsibilities as well, not just those related to your studies.
- Place your schedule (and possibly copies of it) in a location (or locations) where you can consult it easily.
- **Review the strategies for time management provided in the IYSS manual.**

Posting in the discussion forums

A large proportion of what you do in the online classroom will take place in the discussion forums. The term used for what you do here is 'post' – you post your ideas, questions, queries, responses in the discussion forums. The discussion forum is the space in which you 'talk' with, interact with other members of your group.

- Pay attention to the label identifying each discussion forum. Use it to guide you to select the appropriate discussion forum for the message you want to post.
- For example, do not post a question related to Unit 6, Session 2 in the "Students' general queries and concerns" forum. That belongs to the Unit discussion forum specially set up for questions on Unit 6.
- Post a contribution to all Unit discussion topics started by your tutor. Your tutor will initiate at least one discussion topic for each Unit.
- When contributing to a discussion, ensure that you,
    - Interpret the topic appropriately
    - Reflect on what you want to say before beginning your post
    - Draw on the relevant content from the course materials, readings and other sources to formulate your contribution.
    - Do not simply take a body of content from elsewhere and present it as your contribution to a discussion topic; create your own response.
    - Avoid lengthy postings; your contribution must not be longer than half of a letter-size page.
    - Build on the preceding contribution so that you continue the discussion rather than start a new one.
    - Use the 'reply' button to continue the discussion.
    - Disagree but do not disrespect; everyone has a right to have his/her own view.
    - Always say something; don't just lurk!!
- In general, decide carefully whether your post is starting a new discussion or whether it is continuing a discussion that has already started. If the first, go right ahead and start a new discussion topic; if the second, use the reply button at the end of the preceding post.
- On the whole, aim to build discussions, not simply start a series of disconnected discussion topics.
- **Your participation is compulsory**

Doing a self-assessment exercise (SAE)

Self-assessment exercises may take the form of quizzes, such as multiple-choice questions and true-false questions; or short-answer questions. They are intended to assist you to understand and better learn the content of the course materials. You will be provided with answers either immediately after you have completed the SAE, or after a period of time that the course coordinator will specify. You can expect your tutor to provide your group with some introductory guidelines to begin the SAE and some closing comments when the exercise is completed. The tutor will not grade or provide individual feedback for the SAE.

- When doing the SAE, ensure that you,
  - Study the relevant section of the course material carefully before attempting it.
  - Understand what you are required to do; pay close attention to the guidelines and instructions that accompany the SAE
  - Complete it within the timeframe set
  - Note any difficulties you encounter, any aspects of the exercise that you do not understand.
  - Review the relevant section of the course materials to work out the problem and/or post a question in the appropriate discussion forum to get clarification from your tutor.
- Except otherwise indicated, you are free to attempt an SAE as many times as you need to.
- **It is in your interest to do all SAEs.**

Doing a tutor-marked learning activity
Unlike the SAE, you will receive a grade for the tutor-marked learning activity.
You will also receive a comment (feedback) on your performance in the activity.
- When doing this learning activity, ensure that you
  - Accurately interpret the topic or question that will form the basis for the work you are required to produce.
  - Pay close attention to the guidelines provided for doing the specific activity.
  - In general, follow the rules governing the type of work you are required to produce. For example, if you are writing an essay, pay attention to all the rules governing essay-writing. If it is a mini-research exercise, pay attention to the rules for writing a research report. If it is a quantitative problem-based exercise, follow the procedures for doing that type of work.
  - If you are unsure about how to approach the activity and/or you are unclear about the guidelines provided, post a question in the appropriate discussion forum for the relevant Unit and seek assistance from your tutor and/or fellow students.
- Upload the activity as directed; instructions are provided within the online course site. You may also review the relevant section of the *Orientation to Online Learning* manual.
- Complete the activity within the timeframe set.

Getting help
Here are some guidelines about getting help for some typical problems that may arise.

Type of problem	Who to approach	How
Difficulty in understanding course materials	Tutor	Posting in relevant Unit discussion

		forum.
Unclear about requirements for SAE, learning activity, assignment or mid-semester exam	Tutor	Posting in relevant Unit discussion forum
Query about grade received and/or comment given on learning activity	Tutor	Via e-mail
Difficulty in keeping up with the work and falling behind	Tutor and/or site coordinator	Tutor via e-mail; site coordinator preferably in person
Clarification about dates for submission of learning activity/assignment; mid-semester exam dates	Tutor	Posting in General Queries and Concerns
Clarification about the format for submitting learning activity or assignment	Tutor	Posting in General Queries and Concerns
Clarification of weighting of different forms of assessment	Tutor	Posting in General Queries and Concerns
Non-receipt of grades for activity submitted by pre-determined date and time	Tutor	Posting in General Queries and Concerns
Information about availability of timetable for final examination	Site coordinator	Via e-mail, telephone or in person
Need for general assistance and support to develop confidence to participate fully in online learning	Site coordinator	Via e-mail, telephone, but preferably in person
Issues related to your registration for a particular course	Site coordinator	Via e-mail, telephone, or in person
Technical problems re- logging on, navigating through the online site	Site technician	Via e-mail, telephone or in person
Technical problems re- email	Site technician	Telephone or in person
Inability to organize reliable access to computer services	Site coordinator and/or site technician	Via e-mail, telephone, or in person
Schedule for use of the site's computer facilities	Site technician	Via e-mail, telephone or in person
Advice re- use of specific computer applications (word processing; spreadsheet; graphics; specific symbols etc)	Site technician	Via e-mail, telephone or in person
Guidance re- the purchase of a computer	Site technician	Via e-mail,

		telephone or in person
Advice re- problems with personal computer and/or connectivity	Site technician	Via e-mail, telephone or in person
Assistance in uploading an assignment	Site technician	Via e-mail, telephone or in person

For any problem not listed above, and related to your participation in the online learning environment, please send an e-mail message to helpdesk@dec.uwi.edu .