

## STUDY ADVICE for ACCA – “Having the Right Frame of Mind”

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*"Histories make men wise; poets, witty; the mathematics, subtle; natural philosophy, deep; moral, grave; logic and rhetoric, able to contend."*

*Francis Bacon - Essay: Of Studies*

Be convinced of the need and value of study. Continuously appraise what it is you're doing. Have in the back of your mind the end objectives - passing exams, gaining a worthwhile future, earning the respect of your contemporaries and proving to yourself that you have above average abilities.

Remember there is nothing easy about studying. The exams you're working towards are difficult and progressive which makes passing them all the more rewarding. No student finds studying easy, at times life can become demanding, tedious and soul destroying. It's a well known fact that as the seas are subject to high and low tides, the human being goes through "bio rhythm" cycles. At the top of the cycle all goes well and we progress smoothly and quickly. As the cycle goes round and reaches for the bottom, what was easy comes difficult and that which was difficult becomes impossible, but as the cycle turns we soon get back on top of everything. This phenomenon is common to *everyone*. The important thing is not to react negatively and getting into a state of depression which leads to doubt, but to press on working hard towards sub-goals within your programme. In fact your real ability does not really alter very much.

Make a point of talking to your family and friends about your studies and the progress you are making. It helps to get people close to you to take an active involvement in your studies - perhaps by inviting their opinion on subjective areas, getting them to 'test' you by asking questions from your study material or by reviewing your work or by inviting them to critically appraise your presentation, use of English or even the arguments you're using to support an opinion or proposition.

### 2. ALLOCATING YOUR TIME

To make a success of private study you'll need to organise your week so that study has the importance it requires and is not just an 'optional' extra.

The amount of time you need to allow will depend upon the speed with which you can read and absorb new information, the level of exam for which you're studying and the length of time between starting the course and taking the exam. Most of all it will depend on your own aptitude.

It's important for you to organise your private study programme before you commence. Your private study programme is going to make inroads into important recreational 'activities', such as keeping up with your domestic responsibilities, shopping, do-it-yourself home maintenance, personal correspondence, reading newspapers, magazines and books, watching television and listening to music and the radio, pursuing your hobbies and interests, taking part in sport, going on holidays, generally having an active social life and doing and being involved in a host of other activities which form the complex family and social life of the average person. Make sure that study time is spent intelligently and efficiently - time allocated to study which exceeds that which you can use efficiently becomes counter-productive and will result in unnecessary stress and strain to the detriment of your study objective - passing your next exam.

Once you've decided on the number of hours you can devote to private study each week you should balance the different subjects within your exam course. It's sensible to alternate between *theory* and *computation* subjects and important to apportion your time to

the different subjects in proportion to the *difficulty* you personally experience in each of them.

The best way of constructing such a programme is to weight the subjects you're studying according to the degree of difficulty which you perceive in each. (An example of this is shown below.)

### EXAMPLE

An example, and it's emphasised that it's **ONLY** an example, might be as follow

1. You're prepared to commit yourself to 60 hours of study.
2. The 'weighting' ratio you consider appropriate could be :

#### SUBJECTS   WEIGHTING

Paper F4	3
Paper F5	3
Paper F6	<u>4</u>
	<u>10</u>

3. On this basis the 60 hours to be spent on learning the subjects will be allocated as follows:

Paper F4	18 hours
Paper F5	18 hours
Paper F6	<u>24</u> hours
	<u>60</u> hours

- NOTES:
1. The subjects used in this example comprise part of the Fundamental Level 2 of the ACCA exams.
  2. For discussion on how to organise and programme revision see Section 7.
  3. The above weighting is an example and should not be considered as a recommendation. You must carefully consider your own weighting for the mixture of subjects you'll be studying. If you were by chance to take a course for the mix of ACCA subjects course mentioned above, your time available and weighting could well be different and would depend upon your own conception of what is involved in each subject.

Once you've worked out your programme in detail, display it on the wall of the place you intend to study and **STICK TO IT**. This document should be treated as one of the most important ancillary documents of your course.

If you fall behind in your programme you should make a determined effort to catch up and bring your studies back into line. The restructuring of your programme should be an act of last resort.

Remember to construct your own detailed timetable strictly in line with the needs of the syllabus. You should design your time table to take into account any "cut off" dates for study blocks, submission of progress tests and revision periods, required by your course.

It's important that you highlight progress tests within your programme. The submission of progress tests (if appropriate) which coincide with the end of each study block will give you important stimulus and allow you to monitor and evaluate your own progress. Each progress test should be seen as a goal which must be scored for you to remain on-line within your overall exam objective. Do, however, accept the fact that despite all your hard work, the progress test may well include questions to which you feel you are unable to do justice. Don't be put off - complete the paper as best you can and submit it for assessment. Bear in mind that what you learn after the progress test is just as important as what you learn before - the end objective of passing the exam can be achieved, provided you achieve exam standard by the exam date.

### 3. WHEN TO STUDY

You must decide when you can study most efficiently. You may be an "early bird" and work at your best when mind and body wake refreshed by sleep, or alternatively you may fall into the "night owl" category and work best in the late evening or early morning "burning the midnight oil". There is no firm and sound rule on this but obviously if you try to study when you're tired your ability to assimilate information and remember facts is reduced. "To burn the midnight oil" is not an axiom for efficient study and therefore break your study routine at regular intervals to measure your progress. If your level of efficiency is not satisfactory, break off study until your mind is capable of absorbing new information and coping with problem situations.

In general terms, if you adapt to a routine of early morning study you'll find that your study time is used more efficiently. Not only are you rested but there are normally fewer distractions early in the morning than late at night and you should find that your studies will cause less disruption. "*Early to bed and early to rise*" is an old fashioned saying which nonetheless holds true for the student who intends to maximise his or her study time.

However, the decision when to study does depend, of course, on circumstances and personal preferences. It's not a bad plan to do some work in the morning and some in the evening. It's important to ensure that you don't put too much effort in and become non-productive due to overwork.

#### 4. THE OPTIMUM STUDY PERIOD

The period of time over which you study at any one session depends on a number of variables - your *personal endurance and vitality*, the *environment* in which you're studying, the *topic* you're studying (difficult or easy, interesting for you or otherwise, discursive or computational), and the *time of day* at which you study. Also, of course, it will depend on other considerations, such as the nature of your other commitments and the amount of study time you can make available.

The main points to remember are :

- (a) study for regular periods;
- (b) study at times you are able to learn most efficiently;
- (c) study for periods of at least two hours but not more than four hours;
- (d) assess your efficiency every 30 minutes; if you're not working at an optimum level realise that your lack of efficiency is holding you back and drive yourself harder;
- (e) don't get overtired; if necessary break off and pick up your programme after a short rest;
- (f) alternate your studies between topics that you find are easy and difficult, interesting and uninteresting, numerate and non-numerate;
- (g) if you find things going well in a particular session, be flexible and maximise your study time by lengthening the period of that particular session; and
- (h) plan each study session before you start it - but be flexible so as to optimise your learning.

#### 5. YOUR STUDY ENVIRONMENT

Arrange your study routine so that you use the same place, the same table or desk and whenever possible plan to work at the same times each day. Remember, when you use Tony SurrIDGE's e-books you must use the same computer you download to, all the time. E-books cannot be transferred from one computer to another. If you want flexibility to take the e-books with you, we suggest downloading to a laptop.

If you do this you will certainly find that you adapt more easily to your study commitments and will be able to overcome the many distractions which make studying so demanding. It's not easy to concentrate one's mind on books to the exclusion of everything else, even for short periods, but a planned routine will help you.

You may not have an ideal home study environment but do the best with whatever you have. The room and physical environment in which you study are important.

A list of points to consider when planning your study environment is given below:

- (a) *The room* needs to be well lit and ventilated. It should have a comfortable working temperature. It does not need to be large.
- (b) *The table* should be large enough to hold your study material, e-book printouts, notebook, reference books, papers and your elbows.
- (c) *Other aids* such as notes and reference books should be close by - perhaps in a bookcase near to your table.
- (d) *Your chair* should be comfortable and of a size which allows you to sit at the table without having to bend your back excessively or strain your eyes.
- (e) *The study area* should be isolated and quiet with as few distractions as possible.

You may decide to do the bulk of your studies in a library or other municipal facility set aside for public study. If so, you should find that your study facilities are good, allowing you to adapt to the environment quickly. If you're an "early bird" you'll find you can use the same table or desk for your studies - this point becomes even more relevant to students who study in an environment over which they have no personal control.

#### 6. KEEPING FIT

It's important to keep physically fit while you're studying. Exercise should be a pleasure and is often curtailed by students who find their time limited and their lives filled with a million-and-one other "important matters". Keeping fit means looking after yourself which to a large extent translates into "don't abuse your body". For instance don't try to do too much in one day and get permanently overtired. Don't go on swotting for long periods without having a break or without eating regularly or without taking regular exercise. Exercise is

essential, not only for reducing flab or looking glamorous as the case may be! It's also necessary for keeping oneself mentally toned up, alert and responsive. The physical stamina required by sustained study and sitting for timed exams is considerable and exercise, like any other form of development, should be planned for and carried out regularly.

Hints :

- (a) If **you're currently under medical supervision don't exercise without consulting your doctor.**
- (b) Plan to do ten minutes exercise for every four hours of study.
- (c) Plan your exercise routine in exactly the same way you plan your studies. Try to exercise at the same time each day or week
- (d) Don't overexert yourself - the aim is to relax your mind and enjoy yourself.
- (e) If possible take part in competitive sport. Competitive sport is one of the most recuperative activities for an over-worked mind as one is normally forced to concentrate on the game.
- (f) If you plan to take solitary exercise (such as walking or jogging) be sure to 'switch off' from your studies during your exercise period – it's too easy to take your study problems with you.
- (g) Stick to a sensible diet - and eat at regular times.
- (h) Make sure you have regular sleep. It's difficult to generalise, but eight hours sleep each night is a sensible target for someone who is studying.

**IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT ANY OF OUR TIPS AND HINTS, CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR BEFOREHAND.**

## **7. DRUGS**

Don't under any circumstances take drugs of any kind unless they have been prescribed by your doctor. Pep pills and tranquillisers/sleeping pills should only be taken in extreme conditions under medical supervision.

## **8. HOW STUDYING AFFECTS YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

This is a very personal and difficult subject but one which can have such a powerful influence on the way your study progresses that it needs to be considered. Sustained study can cause your personal relationships to come under considerable strain. The change of life-style brought about by you allotting time to study will not only affect you but also all those closely connected with you, particularly your family.

Often the aims of study and exams fulfill the desires and ambitions of family groups. For instance, by obtaining a qualification, progressing at work and earning a higher salary, you'll be fulfilling family ambitions. However, it's not always possible for those nearest to us to fully appreciate what we are striving for and to understand why we are working so hard. Neither is it unnatural for people to be very demanding and possessive of the lives of people close to them.

Whenever possible you should encourage your family, partner and friends to help in your studies. They will want to help you and really need to become involved in what you're doing. Value the help of people close to you - their contribution will make your studies pleasant and more rewarding. Don't become isolated or alienated from other people by being too introverted when you're studying. People close to you will need *your forbearance and patience* but harnessing their co-operation and enthusiasm will really motivate you - perhaps more than anything else.

## **9. SPIRITUAL AWARENESS**

Prayer, spiritual exercises, meditation and artistic activity, such as painting, performing music, reading poetry, are not to be condemned as time wasting. Although these activities don't directly improve knowledge, they can help overcome stress and strain and induce confidence and tranquility. Meaningful spiritual activity can be of great help to students when studying for and sitting exams.

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