Guidelines for Writing Study Guides

These guidelines provide suggestions on how to formulate a study guide. This does not cover the administrative details that you will include in your Administration Guide. The Administration Guide template covers this area.

The Study Guide is a guide, a road map, to the content/materials of the paper. Your guide will motivate students, provide navigation and encourage/facilitate interaction with the content and reflection on learning.

The amount of detailed guidance you provide will depend on the level your students are learning at. More detailed guidance for first year students (100 level papers) and less for advanced learners (700 level papers). The level of guidance may also depend on your discipline area and on the knowledge and skills your learners bring to the subject.

Designing and writing a study guide takes some considerable time. Get started as early as possible before the deadline date, find mentors and support staff who can provide assistance (colleagues, departmental administrative staff, teaching consultants from TDU).

Consider the following points

1. Begin by considering who your audience/students are.
   - background/prior learning issues
   - demographic factors
   - motivation – is your paper a requirement? Is it a core requirement of the work environment?
   - resource factors – where, when and how will your students learn? How much time will they have available? What access will they have to support facilities, internet?
   - Knowing about your students (as best you can) will help you pitch your commentary, your guidance.

2. Select content available from other sources – textbook/s students are required to purchase, and articles and chapters from texts for inclusion as essential reading, tapes and video etc. Check copyright allowances for readings and other media when making your selections. (This will make it easier when you come to put the material together. See [http://copyright.massey.ac.nz](http://copyright.massey.ac.nz) for allowances.)
3. You will then need to write:
   • A guide/introduction/commentary to the textbook, readings and any other media,
   • All or some of the content of the paper

4. When writing for distance students you are essentially writing for one person working alone, often at night after work, with little or no support or access to support. You are having a conversation with your student/s. In doing this try to anticipate the queries/questions they will have and provide answers in your commentary or direct them to where they can get the answers for themselves. Use the first person when writing your commentary as this will engage the learners, humour is useful too, as is expressing an appreciation of their situation from time to time.

5. Divide the learning (content) into manageable and logical chunks (e.g. modules, units, sections, parts, topics)
   • Provide an introduction to each chunk with links to previous chunk/s
   • Provide learning outcomes for each chunk as a guide to student learning
   • Be consistent with terminology throughout

6. Provide an introduction to the whole paper to begin (you may have done some or all of this in the admin guide, if so recap important information)
   • Outline how the paper is structured
   • Suggest order for the learning, eg. “Read the commentary first, followed by the text, then the included articles, and the activity…”, outline your expectations

7. Guidance/commentary will highlight the main points and guide students through the material
   • Write a commentary/briefing notes about each chunk highlighting the main points/concepts to be mastered
   • Refer to the readings, text and or other media and indicate when to use these components
   • Ask questions for the learners to consider while they read
   • Provide a glossary of jargon as applicable, suggest students make their own
   • A brief summary can be useful, to reiterate the main points (this can be done as a recap or feedback after students have completed an activity. Keep this short.)
   • Provide additional reading list/and your references

8. Provide opportunities for active learning (learning-by-doing) within each chunk so students can test themselves on the effectiveness of their learning. (too many can be off putting.)
Suggestions:

- Start with an activity to help activate prior learning. (This could be incorporated with the link to the previous chunk, a previous paper)
- Compare and contrast type activities help clarify ideas
- Study questions within your commentary and or at the end of each chunk (these are helpful if used to ‘prime’ the students before reading)
- Others activities to consider may ask students to:
  - explain concepts/theories in own words
  - write a summary of the chunk
  - locate evidence to prove ...
  - solve problems
  - predict how something might work in a different setting
  - apply concepts to their own environment
  - reflect on their own experiences/learning

9. Technical issues
   (consider the following if your paper is camera ready)
   - Provide a detailed contents page with page numbers (sometimes it’s useful to have a contents page for each chunk depending on size of the guide) and a contents for the readings with full references (include the pages number used)
   - Page numbering – start numbering each chunk from one (this makes it easier to make changes in the future, especially when adding new readings)
   - Reference consistently with expected student assignment style
   - Place readings either directly after the topic/unit/module they relate to or all together at the end
   - Provide the full reference at the top of the first page of each included reading or in the contents, or both.
   - Each new reading should start on an odd numbered page (a right hand side page)

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