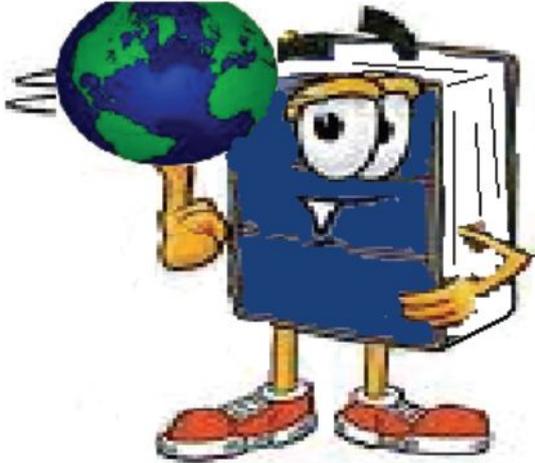


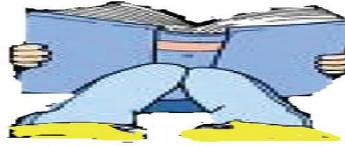
Chapter 5

Being an Active Learner



Being an active learner involves:

- Becoming active in your learning experience. It is not just up to the teacher to teach you, the student must want and be motivated to learn.
- Learning note taking skills or organisational skills that can help improve your educational experience.
- Time and motivation, as both are needed to figure out what strategies help you study and pay attention in lectures and class.
- Noting that not every strategy will be effective for you. It's a game of trial and error to figure out what helps make studying easier for you.
- Finding out what type of learner you are (Visual, Auditory or Kinaesthetic) as it is a good place to start with your investigation. From there you can tailor your study strategies.
- Putting simple strategies in place that can help you to be an active learner.



Strategies for Reading

The main aim when reading a text is to identify the central message the text is trying to convey. At times this can be difficult. If you get overwhelmed by large amounts of text, break the reading into short achievable time frames.

Often when reading a large chapter or paper we scan through the piece very quickly and lose the main subject of the text. A simple way to rectify this is to read the text paragraph by paragraph. After each paragraph write in the margin the key words or the key meaning and important details such as dates or statistics given. This will help break down the text into a simpler form and understand its key meaning.

Keep an eye out for diagrams or charts as often these are another method by which the author is trying to clarify key ideas. Re-writing or drawing diagrams is a great way of learning the information given.

It is also a good break from reading text.

Quick Tip

The meaning of the paragraph is often in the first or last sentence !

Critically evaluate the text. Ask questions about the author's information, evidence and opinions. Ask yourself if the author's opinion could be biased and if so why?

When you have finished each paragraph write a brief summary of the paragraph's content in your own words. This will help you remember what you have previously read when you have reached the end of the text.

It is normal to be more engaged in reading when we are interested in the topic of the text. When the subject is of less interest to us it often becomes a tedious task. When this happens it becomes more difficult to keep our concentration levels up. Be aware of this and lift your concentration by using highlighters, colour tags and an index card to block out text and keep you focused on the current sentence.

Chapter II
ORIGIN OF THE ANGLO-AMERICANS, AND IMPORTANCE OF THIS ORIGIN IN RELATION TO

The index card is placed ABOVE the line currently being read.

words which awaken the sleeping powers of thought, and stand by his earliest efforts if we would understand the process, the habits, and the character of the child. The child will rule his life. The father is to speak, to be seen in the child.

If nations presents allegiance to this, they all see of their origin. The spirit that accompanied their entrance to their affected the whole term of the child.

He to go back to the rates and to examine the

This line is being read.

the full read.

short, the national character. We should there find the explanation of certain customs which may seem at variance with the prevailing manners; of such laws as conflict with established principles; and of such inconherent opinions as are here and there to be met with in society. Like those fragments of broken chairs which we sometimes see hanging from the vaults of an old edifice, supporting nothing. This might explain the destinies of certain nations which seem borne on by an unknown force, so much of which they themselves are ignorant. But hitherto facts have been lacking for such a study, the spirit of analysis has come upon nations only as they matured; and when they at last conceived of contemplating their origin, time had already obscured it, or ignorance and pride had surrounded it with files behind which the truth was hidden.

Original character of the first inhabitants of New England—Their arrival—Their first laws—their social compact—Fatal errors borrowed from the Indians—Political union of the spirit of religion with the spirit of liberty.

A MAN has come into the world, his only years are spent without notice in the pleasures and activities of childhood. As he grows up, the world receives him when his manhood begins, and he enters into contact with his fellows. He is then studied for the first time, and it is imagined that the terms of the races and the virtues of his maturer years is then formed.

This, if I am not mistaken, is a great error. We must begin higher up; we must watch the infant in his mother's arms; we must see the first images which the external world casts upon the dark mirror of his mind, the first occurrences that he witnesses, we must hear the first

By simply placing an index card above the line you are reading it can help you concentrate.

Before beginning to read the text ask yourself a few simple questions.

1. What do I want to learn from reading this passage?
2. What are the key ideas explored in this text?
3. Do they relate to my course material?
4. Is the subject matter discussed in the text new to me?

The most efficient way of reading is to re-read. Unfortunately it is very unlikely that we will understand the meaning of a text by reading it once. For most of us the more we read a passage the more we understand it. As the saying goes, read, read and read again. The PQRR technique devised by Moran, 1997 is based on the strategies laid out by a researcher named Francis Robinson (1961) and is an excellent technique to follow when reading.

The PQRR technique

The PQRR technique stands for **p**reviewing, **q**uestioning, **r**eading and **r**eviewing.

Previewing

When you begin a chapter in one of your text books have a quick scan (2-3 minutes) over the whole chapter before you begin your in-depth reading. This gives you the basic idea of the chapter and its layout. As you move through the chapter highlight the paragraphs that you think are of particular relevance to you. This will help capture your attention when you go back to read the chapter properly. Previewing the chapter also helps establish a retrieval cue for the information (Moran, 1997).

Question

To get the full benefit of reading the chapter you must first ask the question as to why you are reading the chapter. Are you reading it to gain information about a new topic? Or are you reading a novel in order to write an essay on it? Establishing these questions before you go into in-depth reading can help you bias your reading towards the information that is of particular interest to you. For example you might have a particular character to focus your essay on; therefore you would pay more attention to that particular character when you are reading the novel. This is a great way of being an active learner. Identify the information that you need and then source the answer to that information.

Read

Read the chapter very slowly, absorbing as much of the information as possible. Use highlighters, index cards and colour tags to highlight the important information. Have a pen at the ready to write down any important information. If you are finding the material overwhelming, take it extra slow and try to summarize each paragraph in your own words as you go along. Keep in sight the study questions that you laid out in the previous step. This will help you keep on track with your reading goal. Anything that you don't understand, write it down and source its meaning and then continue. There is no point in continuing your reading if you don't understand a key term.

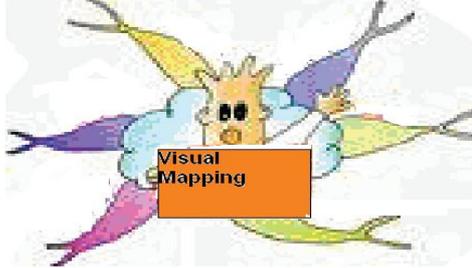
Reviewing

After you have finished the chapter review what you have learned. If you have broken down each paragraph into your own words read over your own explanation and assess if you have understood the central idea in the chapter. Ask yourself "Am I able to answer my original study questions?" The more you review the information the more you are likely to absorb. If the material is particularly difficult then reviewing after each page can often help you understand the subject more easily. Break everything down into small digestible chunks.

Quick Summary

- Identify your reading goal
- Read in short achievable time frames
- Highlight the important information as you go along
- Using a ruler or index card can help keep your concentration.

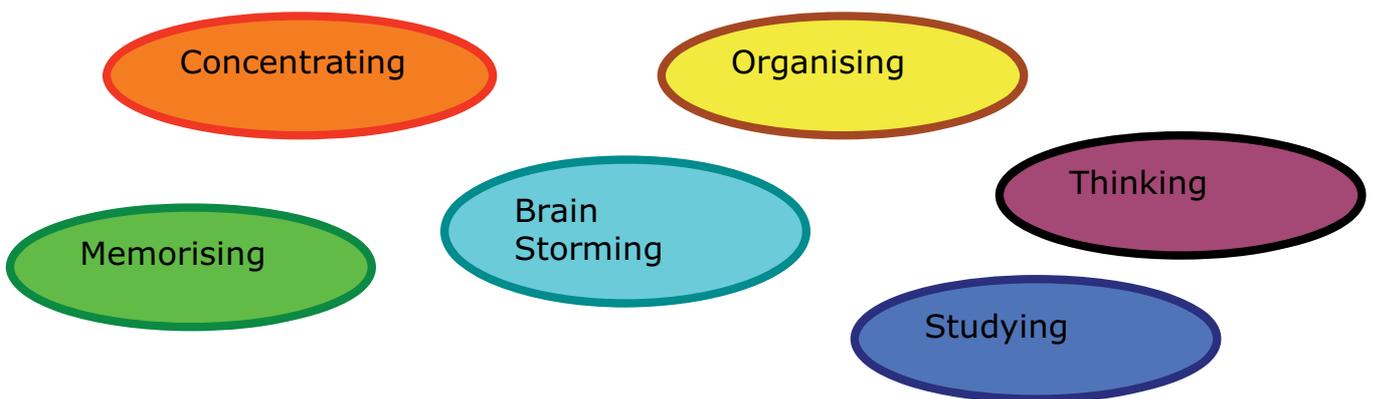
Strategies for Visual Mapping



Visual maps work so well because they work with the two main aspects of your memory: **Imagination** and **Association**

Visual mapping is a great way of breaking down information into a fun, easy way to study. A visual map is used to represent tasks, words or ideas linked to a central idea. By presenting your study information in this manner you are encouraging brainstorming and organization of thoughts.

Some of the **practical uses** for Visual Maps are:



Some of the **benefits** of Visual Mapping are:

- Encourages Brainstorming which helps build up information about the topic
- They can gather and hold large amounts of data
- Encourages critical thinking
- Helps you be efficient and organised
- Helps you memorise large amounts of information
- Can help give an overview of a large subject area
- Can be applied to all disciplines
- Aids easy recall

Making a Visual Map is very simple. The key to a Visual Map is to work with one key idea at a time. Use this idea to guide your map. Write down on a blank piece of paper all the ideas etc. that spring to mind and that are related to your key idea. Then begin to filter through the information you have gathered and pick out the points that are most relevant to you and the subject.

The next 5 steps take you through how to make your Visual Map.



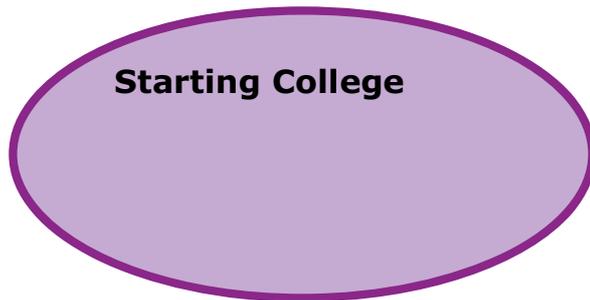
How to make a Visual Map (1)

→ Take a blank piece of paper

→ Start in the centre

→ Make a central image that represents the topic about which you are thinking/writing

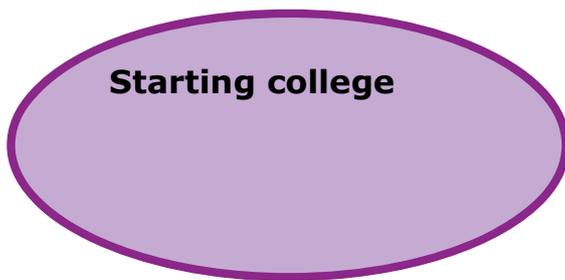
Example:



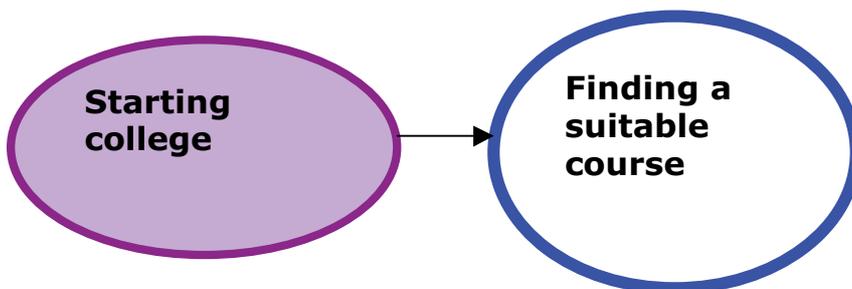


How to make a Visual Map (2)

- Begin adding Branches from your central idea
- Use a different Colour for each new branch
- Your visual map will create its own shape. You do not need to use a frame
- Keep the map simple



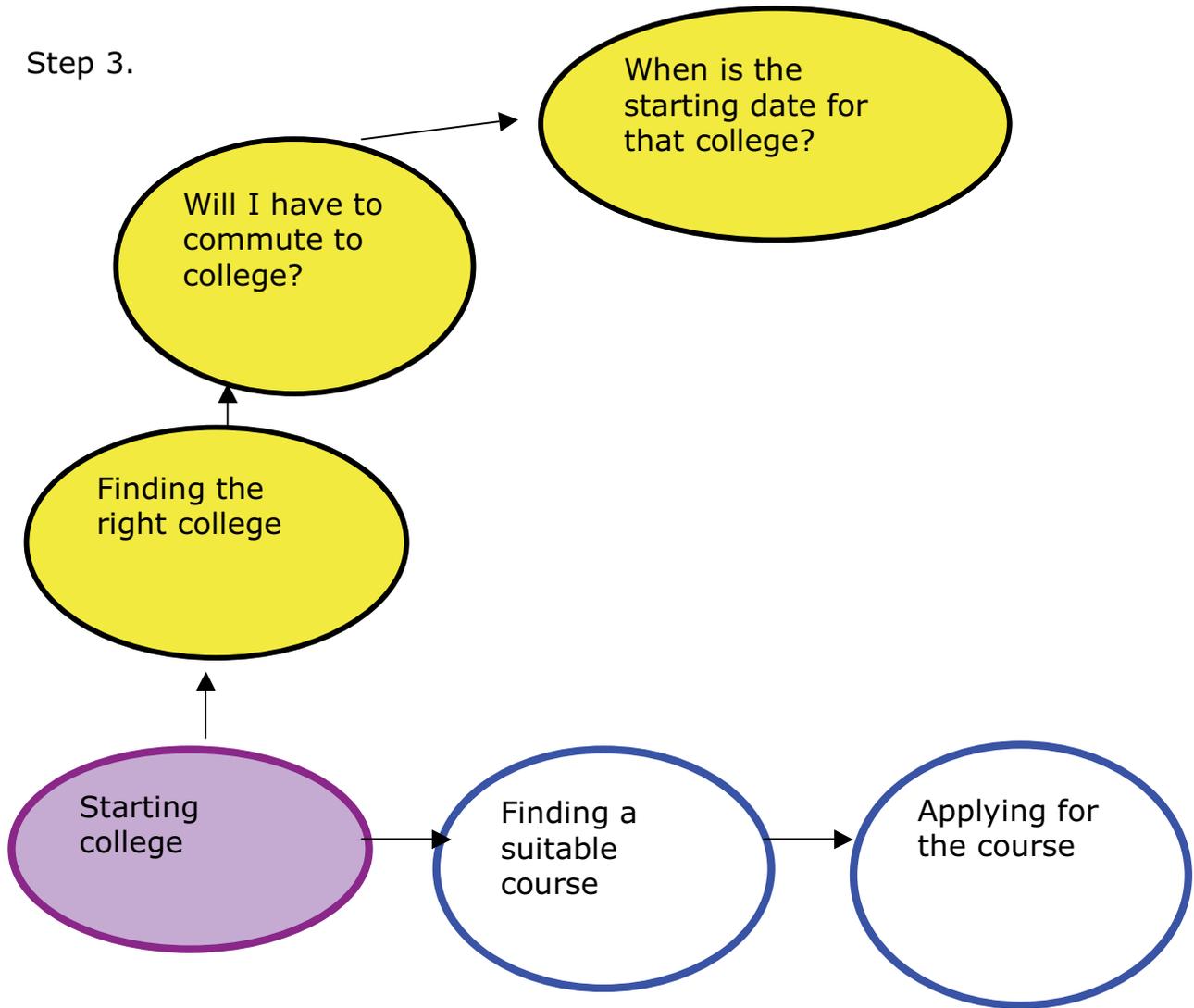
Step 1.



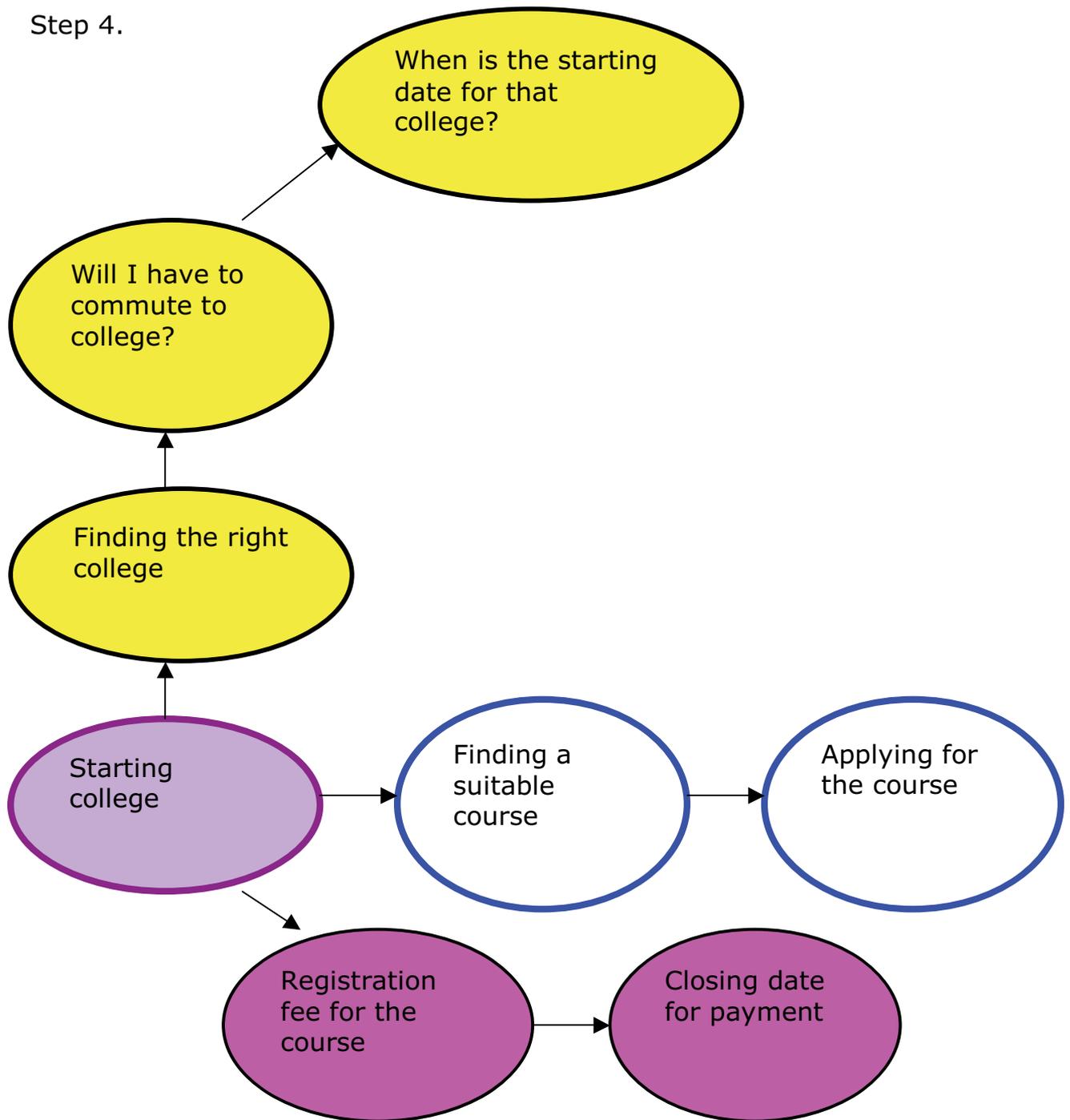
Step 2.



Step 3.

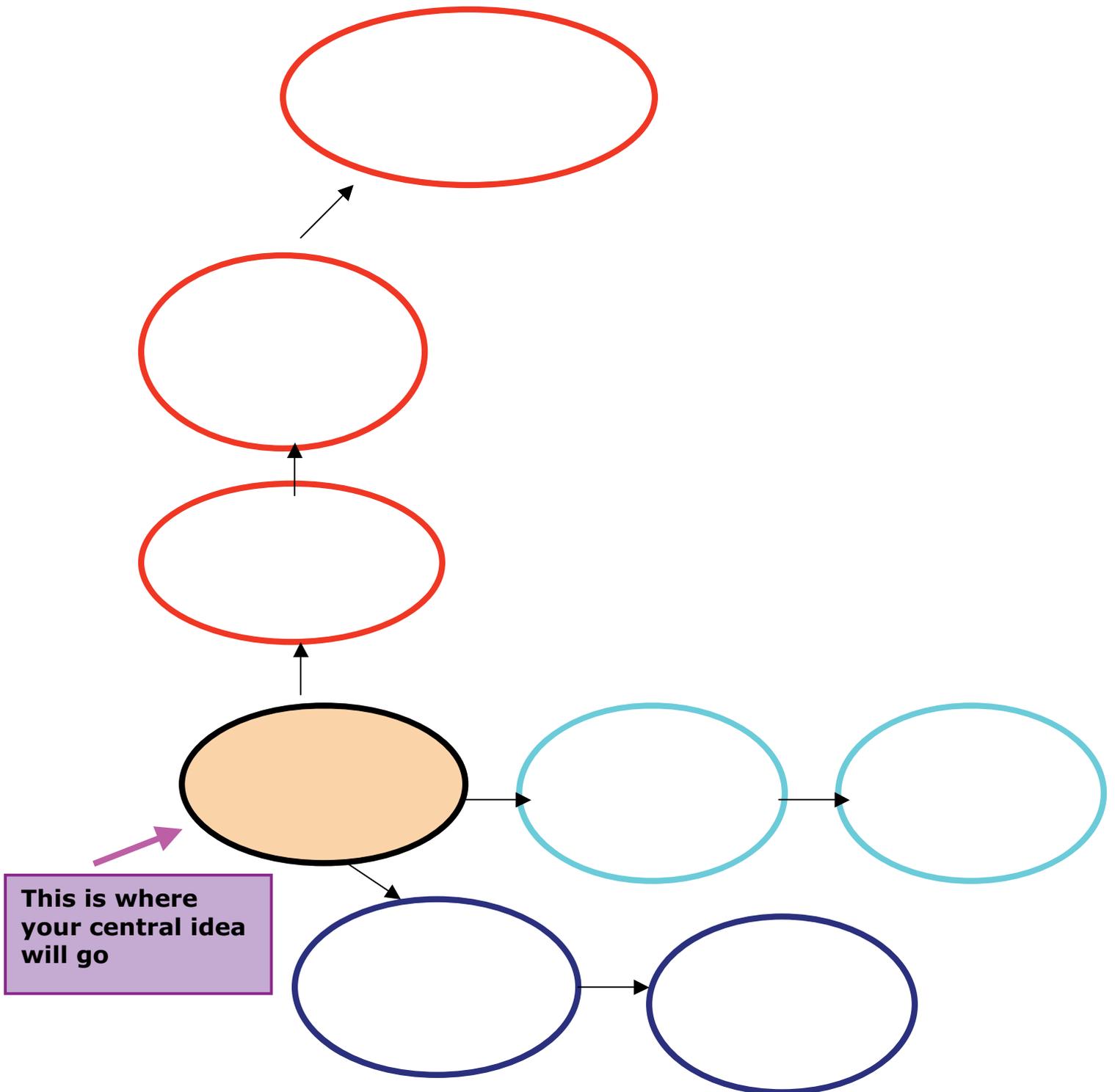


Step 4.



Step 5.

Produce a basic Visual Map yourself using the layout provided below.

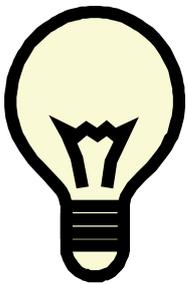




Lectures

Pre-Lecture Routine

- Read what is recommended off your reading list for that lecture. Knowing background information before going into the lecture can help you follow the lecturer more easily.
- Look over the notes from the previous lecture. This will enable you to pick up where the lecturer is starting from straight away.
- Remember to put the date and lecturer's name at the top of all your lecture notes. This will help you keep organised and make revision for exams less stressful.
- Always come organised. Have your pen, pencils and notebook, as well as any course material you may need with you when you go to lectures.



Having a pre-lecture routine will encourage you to be organised and will help keep you focused.



The Lecture

Being an active learner in lectures will increase your performance in essays and exams. You can do this by listening and participating in the lecture. Here are some handy tips to improve your active participation in lectures.

- Try and have full attendance to your lectures. If you do happen to miss a lecture make sure you get the notes from a reliable source and go through them before the next lecture. It is essential you attend lectures as they are the building blocks of your learning experience.
- Sitting at the very front of the lecture hall or class can help you concentrate better. In general there are fewer distractions at the front of the class than at the back.
- Be prepared for taking notes in the lecture. If you come across something you don't understand either ask the question straight away or write it down and approach the lecturer after class. Always ask as it may be a vital bit of information for an essay or an exam.
- Keep your attention as much as possible in class.
- Don't be afraid to participate in class. Engaging in a debate or acting out something can be great ways to learn and help others around you learn.
- Sometimes the best ideas for essays etc. will come to you during the lecture. Jot down your ideas as they come to mind.
- If the lecturer uses power-point ask the lecturer for a copy of the lecture before class. This is a great way of making sure you don't miss anything. It also puts less pressure on you to keep writing which leaves room for critical thinking

Writing Notes

- Do not try to write every word down as you will more than likely end up getting lost. Write down the key points. It is a good idea to swap or compare notes with a friend after the lecture. Often you might have missed a point they got and vice versa.

- Write as clearly and as neatly as possible. If you find it difficult to understand your own writing after a lecture, try using a computer to type the notes instead. Even asking the lecturer for a copy of the lecture slides prior to the lecture can cut down the amount of information you have to write.
- If you find it difficult to listen and take notes try taping the lecture on a Dictaphone with the lecturer's permission.
- Listen carefully when a lecturer elaborates on an important topic.
- Using the Visual Mapping technique mentioned earlier is a great way of taking notes in a lecture.
- If you are a very visual learner, using different colour pens, highlighters and 'Post-its' can help you absorb the material as you go along.



Example of bullet point notes

Starting College

- ◆ Finding a college
- ◆ Finding a suitable course
- ◆ Applying for the course
- ◆ Starting date for college

Example of Highlighting

When I find a suitable course I will need to find out more information about it. For example, what is the **starting date**? Can I afford the **fees** and will I need to **commute** a great distance every day?



After the Lecture

After the lecture take a quick break to rest your mind. Before the **next day's lectures try the following strategies.**

- Review your notes. Highlight the important information and fill in the blanks.
Make sure you have taken down the lecture information properly.
- **If there is something you come across that you don't understand follow it up straight away.**
- Break down your notes into key words or key information. You can use the Visual Mapping technique or the Break it up technique to do this.
- Before you put the notes away look over the key information you have taken out. This will help you remember the information later on.
- Check up any reference to extra reading material made in class. This will save you time around exam time or during an essay.

Set some time aside every week to review all your notes. The more times that you review your lecture notes the more likely you are to remember the information.

Tips for when the lecturer talks fast

- Come prepared to the lecture by reading background information on the topic before the lecture starts
- Forming a study group is a great way of sharing information and catching information that you may have missed
- Leave enough space in your notes to put in information that you may have missed.
- Develop a signal to write in your notes to show where you got lost, this way you know where to go back over after the lecture.