

## 7 Tips: How to revise more effectively, stay organised and remain relatively sane

Emilia Sereva [ [e.p.sereva@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:e.p.sereva@sms.ed.ac.uk) ]

## 1) Everybody learns differently. Find out *how* you learn, and play to your strengths

How?

*Think about what sorts of things you remember, and how they map onto the following categories:*

### Auditory

*You seem to remember conversations or song lyrics easily*

### Your plan of attack:

- a) *Attend every lecture*, voice-record them and listen at home as many times as you need until the concepts sink in  
\* ask your teacher whether s/he allows voice-recording beforehand

#### Hints:

1. Voice-recorders start at about £18 on Amazon, and may be a good investment for use in your future research.
  2. Alternatively - Use a smartphone app
  3. Where possible, save lectures as .mp3 files, and make a library on your computer.
  4. Share the wealth – not everyone has a recording device, so please offer to share recordings with your classmates if you can.
- b) *Have debates* with classmates after the lecture: rehash the concepts together over coffee or some lunch
- c) *Read the assigned reading out loud* to yourself or a friend. You may also want to record yourself reading out loud so you can listen later
- d) *Call (or Skype) someone close to you*, and explain a concept from the reading or lectures to them. Don't freak out if the person asks questions you can't answer yet. This will help you figure out what you need to focus on. You can always pick up the conversation later when you can answer them in a way that makes sense.

## Visual

*Images, written words, colours and places are easy to remember*

### Your plan of attack:

- a) *Attend every lecture.* Focus on making some pictures, diagrams or charts to help you remember what was covered.
- b) *Read and re-read* the assigned reading
- c) *Colour code your notes.* Create your own system, or find a helpful way someone else has done it online. Coloured pens, highlighters and even stickers may help you remember what's what. Focus on colour coding by theme, subject or concept: use different colours to remind yourself what you're looking at.
- d) *Focus on taking notes* that will be helpful to you later. This has a learning curve, but you'll get the hang of it with practice. Reread your notes a couple of times a week, and make further notes to clear things up.

### Hint:

1. *Don't simply copy* the PowerPoint slides. You probably won't remember what the lecturer was referring to by re-reading the bullet points in your notes.
  2. Try to copy down the *lecturer's main points*, and you can get a copy of the PowerPoint on Learn later on for reference
  3. When colour coding, use the same colour for the same kind of thing e.g. quotations are always copied in green pen
- e) *Make diagrams, charts, comics or pictures* to explain concepts to yourself and others at home. You can apply your colour coding system here too.

## **Auditory visual mix**

*You can more-or-less easily commit visual and auditory things to memory. However, you may need some of both for memories to really stick.*

### Your plan of attack:

- a) *Mix up the suggestions* for **Auditory** and **Visual** learning
- b) *Listen to recordings* of the lectures while drawing or taking further notes
- c) *Make some pictures, charts or diagrams* and explain them to your friends or classmates. You could also post them on Facebook.

## 2) Build a solid foundation

*This sounds like a huge cliché, but it's also true.*

**There is a reason you start with the basics:** the first concepts you learn may seem super easy, but if you don't focus on learning them inside-and-out, you'll get very lost later and make much more work for yourself. Trust me, I did things backwards and I wish I hadn't.

Ways to build things together:

- a) *Every week*, re-read notes or listen to lecture recordings in sequence
- b) When you learn a new concept, *spend some time thinking* about how it might relate to the other stuff you learned before
- c) *People watch*, and try to apply some concepts you just learned to what you see
- d) *Films, television shows and books* are another good way to synthesise the material: think about the plot, characters and conversations in terms of what you're reading

## 3) Apply what you're learning

*Look for 'real life' examples of what you're currently learning*

**An exercise:**

1. Pick a 'real life example' to illustrate a concept from class. Draw on personal life, fiction, the news, television, film and/or people-watching.
2. Test your example: Use it to help explain the related concept. Pick a classmate or friend, and see if they see what you mean.
3. If your example works, make a note of it. If not, back to the drawing board!

#### 4) “Do something every day”

*My advisor gave me this tip last year, and it helped me not feel so overwhelmed.*

As long as you do something – even if sometimes it’s only a small amount of work – every day, I expect you’ll feel on-top of things by the end of term.

#### 5) Stay organised

You are going to amass a ton of papers and nonsense over the course of this term, and you need to keep it in order.

Or else:

1. You’ll surely go insane from the mess
- OR
2. You won’t be able to find what you need when it’s time for exams and essays

#### Organisational tips:

a) *Create your own filing system:*

- The goal here is efficiency- so focus on devising an easy way to find everything
1. Figure out how you look for the things you need, and where you’d look.  
E.g. You might organise by **author** or by **unit**; you might want your printed articles in one folder or several
  2. Decide whether you want to store things on your computer, the school server, in hard copy, or a few of these.
  3. Get Evernote: <http://evernote.com/> (Mac or PC, Smartphone App)  
Evernote is great for organising typed notes, photos, videos, audio recordings and website links; and it’s **free**.
  4. Colour code by concept, unit or theme.  
E.g. Social networks readings and notes go in the blue folder

a. **On a Mac:** Use the label function

Here's how:

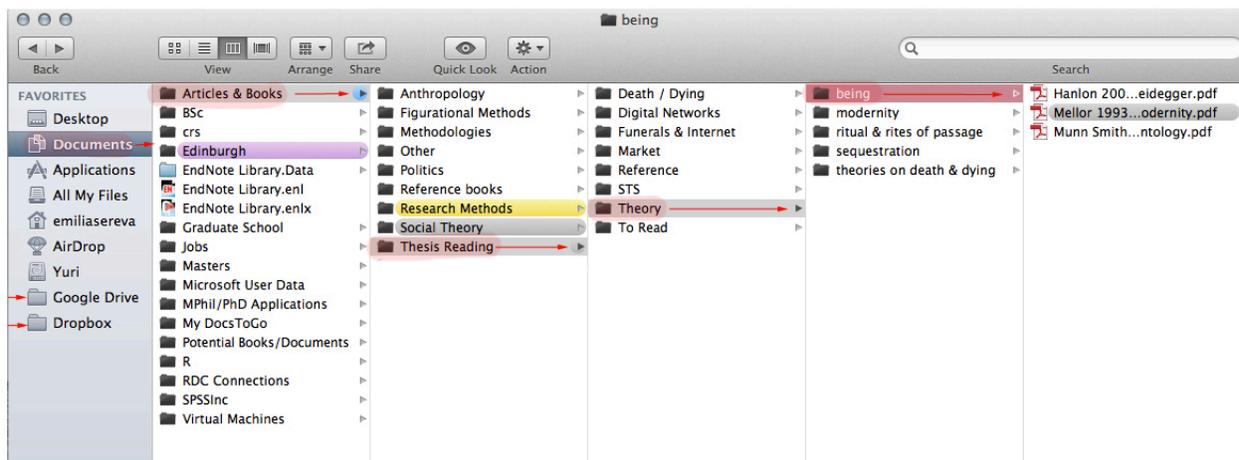
[http://www.maclife.com/article/howtos/how\\_use\\_mac\\_os\\_x%E2%80%99s\\_labels\\_organize\\_your\\_files](http://www.maclife.com/article/howtos/how_use_mac_os_x%E2%80%99s_labels_organize_your_files)

b. **On a PC:** Download some colourful folder icons and apply them manually, or follow the instructions here:

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/be-creative-and-organized-color-code-windows-folders/>

c. **With printed material:** buy some different coloured filing folders

Here's an example of the filing system on my computer (mac):



b) **BACK UP YOUR FILES:** Google drive, Dropbox, university online storage or an external hard drive will all work. Pick two in case one crashes.

- Every week (especially when I finish a new draft), I back up all my files on an external hard drive. I also back up important files to Google Drive and Dropbox (**both free** for download).
- \*\*\*\*In my second year of university, I lost ALL of my final term papers a few days before the submission date... Learn from my mistake!

c) *Rename articles* in a way you can easily find them

e.g. I name articles and books like this: **Author(s) Year Title**

\*Look in the rightmost panel of the screenshot above to see what I mean.

- d) *Get Virus Protection* for your personal computer. The uni provides some **free** software downloads, so there's no excuse:

Download some free anti-virus software here:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/information-services/services/computing/desktop-personal/security/anti-virus>

## 6) Find your special something

Once you understand **what** you need and **where** you get the best work done, studying and writing will become way easier:

- a) **WHAT:** *You may find that ideas come easier* to you when you have that certain tool:

### Some options

- Particular Pen
- Notepad
- Sticky notes
- Note cards
- Paper size
- Brand of coffee

Many students, professors and researchers have these sorts of preferences.

I, for example, prefer writing with a specific pen on specific paper. For lengthy pieces of writing, however, I will always write on my laptop.

- b) **WHERE:** *Find your happy place:* Through trial and error, figure out where you can get the most work done.

### Some options

- In your room
- Café
- Library
- Park bench
- Friend's flat
- CMB lobby

## 7) Ask Questions

To paraphrase Socrates:

*“The wise wo/man understands that s/he knows nothing”*

### What we should take from this:

- a) To not question the material in order to appear smart is probably the silliest thing you could do
- b) Asking questions doesn't mean you're behind the rest of the class. Rather, it means you're smart and rather confident. Remember, the wise wo/man recognises his or her limits, and endeavours to test them.
- c) If you ask a question, you can *always* learn something new
- d) There are no silly or stupid questions
  - If a classmate asks a question that you (think you) know the answer to, LISTEN ANYWAY. You will learn something new.
- e) There is rarely, if ever, *one right answer* where society is concerned

**Tip:** Ask the same question to many different people over time

You will find lots of different answers, and you can then build your knowledge of what opinions exist in society – and WHY these opinions exist.

One of my favourite questions to ask: “What does it mean to *be*?”