

Module 00: Self-organisation During Studies

A Guide for Distance Learners

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1. Introduction

Distance learning should be well planned and organised. The framework conditions should be planned and taken into account, especially the family and the double burden of studying and working. If you want to successfully complete your training, you need to balance work and career. You will learn methods for planning your studies. You must be able to concentrate during your studies. It is important to optimise and organise your work and study space to take the pressure off. You will constantly have to obtain and evaluate information. In order to optimise your learning style, it makes sense to analyse your learning type and apply the best learning path for you.

2. General Conditions of the Distance Learning Training

Personal Framework Conditions and Motivation

Definitions: "The motives that determine a person's actions." (Drosdowski, Müller, Scholze-Stubenrecht & Wermke 1996, p. 505)

What are the things that motivate you to complete your training? This chapter is about your general conditions and motivation to study.

Your family, partner, parents, children and friends will be happy when you successfully complete your studies. But the bottom line is that studying is relevant to your life.

Keep your goal in mind as often as possible! This will help if you find yourself finding an excuse to skip working on a study session today. Realise that you are not accountable to anyone. If you skip this unit, YOU are the one who has to bear the consequences.

Studying poses many challenges for your self-discipline and stamina. The most important question our motivation always asks is WHY? The answer to the question "why" is your perspective, is the benefit that exceeds your effort. And if the ratio of effort to benefit is right and you know why you are doing all this, then you have a source of motivation that you can use again and again.

Exercise: This worksheet can help you to become aware of your motivation to study. First, analyse the expectations that other people have of you and your studies. Make a note of what you think they expect from you in your role as a learner. What do they expect from you after your studies? What role do they think you should fulfil? What position should you aspire to? Write down what spontaneously comes to mind for each person.

[Klick here to find the Worksheets](#)

With this analysis, you have developed a motivational panorama for your distance learning Training. It can form the basis for lasting motivation and overcoming low points in your studies

Professional Activity

Distance learning Trainings are generally completed by working people. This is obviously the best way to combine work and study. You can work on the study materials at your own pace, as well as the asynchronous learning units on the Internet. Any preparatory phases usually take place at the weekend. Nevertheless, you must take into account an additional time commitment. Depending on the training, module and personal requirements, this can amount to 12 to 20 or more hours per week.

Employer support can be very positive. In terms of competence and personnel development, you are not the only one to benefit; studying can also be in the interests of your employer. Your employer may even encourage or recommend you to study.

Some employers contribute to the burden of studying. This can be in the form of time off (afternoons for learning purposes, a whole Friday for attendance phases, special leave for exam preparation), flexible working hours or the monetary contribution or total assumption of tuition fees or additional costs (for books, travel costs, etc.).

Some learners deliberately do not involve their employer in their study plans in order to strengthen their own independence. This can be to increase their own employability and attractiveness on the labour market, but also to create a better position for the next salary negotiation. Sometimes an employer not only does not want to support such a study Training, but would prefer to prevent it in order to avoid higher salary demands or even a possible departure from the company. It is also conceivable that colleagues or superiors fear that the training will make them more competent.

In this respect, you should think carefully about whether, how and to whom you communicate your studies within the company.

Family

You should involve your family and partner at an early stage in your considerations about distance learning, as they must actively support your decision to complete a training programme. There will be considerably less time for family and friends, who may have to cover your back and share your burden (which will not always help to improve your mood).

Create a plan with your free time and workload (preferably a weekly plan) and coordinate it with your family. What free time does your family have? Do you have evenings as study time? How many? Do you have the weekends available? All of them? Does your family go on holiday alone if necessary? What compromises do you make? What leeway do you have, for example for important family events or, conversely, during important learning times?

Exercise: Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which interested parties (stakeholders) are there in connection with your distance learning Training?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of employer support for studying?

3. Basics of Self-Management in Studies

Organisation of the Distance Learning Course

One of the characteristics of distance learning is the self-organisation of learning times, places and workload. You can largely decide for yourself when, where and how much you want to learn.

Another difference to full-time, face-to-face trainings is the physical separation of lecturers and learners and the learners from each other. You therefore learn largely on the basis of the study material provided or synchronous or asynchronous e-learning. On the one hand, this gives you the opportunity to increasingly control and organise your learning process yourself. On the other hand, however, this can entail the risk of learning isolation. Take advantage of the possibilities and opportunities offered by the course, e.g. in the form of forums, (virtual live events) or other online offerings. By communicating with other learners, you will learn that many learners are confronted with similar problems. You can also benefit from the experiences of learners who already have more experience.

The idea of self-determined or self-organised learning, of learning without external constraints such as prescribed timetables or compulsory attendance in attendance studies are certainly advantages of distance learning.

However, self-determined learning makes great demands, especially on your discipline, stamina and organisational skills. You have to plan and organise your learning process independently. This applies to your learning rhythm as well as to the processing of the learning content and the review of your learning success.

In order to manage your studies in the best possible way and to avoid dropping out, the following section provides information on studying, organisation, learning and working techniques during your studies, workplace organisation, etc.

Learning and working techniques here refer to the methods that relate to absorbing, processing and passing on knowledge and that serve to plan learning time sensibly. This methodology can be used to formulate specific instructions for distance learning that you can apply to your individual situation. However, knowing how to learn does not mean that you can successfully acquire or apply this knowledge. The presentation of mere "techniques" does not take into account the fact that factors such as demotivation, questions about the meaning of the learning material, the (still) unclear practical relevance of the content or simply excessive demands due to the multiple workload, but also a lack of practice or learning unaccustomedness can lead to major work and learning disorders. Personal contacts, an exchange of experiences, a learning group or technical discussions are helpful here, increase motivation and lead to a deepening of the learning process.

For many distance learning learners, organising their study time is a major hurdle. In most cases, they are unable to find an effective working and learning rhythm. Many have to spend more time overall than expected, especially because they were unable to master the subject matter in the time they had planned. Planning and organising their learning time is therefore a particularly important aspect of distance learning.

Most distance learning trainings alongside their professional work and have to coordinate their studies and work with their household and family activities. Studying therefore mainly takes place in the "work-free" time that is otherwise available for recreation, family, friends or leisure.

Learning Planning in the Training

Learning is a natural part of our lives. Learning means gaining experience.

Realise that this attitude of learning does not end with your studies or training. Learn to appreciate the variety of information options and integrate them into your life.

Learning, like thinking and remembering, is a self-organised, structurally determined process of attributing meaning. Teachers can explain why a topic is important to them, but each learner must determine the meaning of this topic for themselves. (cf. Siebert 1999, p.19)

"Learning is an active-constructive process that always takes place in a specific context and is therefore situational, multidimensional and systemic. The results of learning cannot be predicted due to individual and situation-specific construction processes." (Mandl 1997, p. 366)

Learning can be described as a self-directed process of constructing reality, whereby this activity takes place recursively on the basis of existing structures and networks. (Siebert 1999, p.21)

The overall planning of your training is important because you can see what is coming up during your studies. You should therefore do this as early as possible in the course of your training, before you have simply been studying for some time. Planning gives you an overview of the possibilities and connections between the individual modules of your training, but also makes the dependencies between the individual courses visible. Comprehensive planning means less stress for you overall and therefore more concentration and energy for studying. This is particularly important when you are studying part-time. To get an overview of your entire training, you can assign the individual modules and examinations to the trimester in which you want to complete them. You will find a suggested schedule for your training in your study documents. You can find out what you need to achieve in your training in the study regulations.

Exercise: Create a table for each trimester in which you can enter the various academic achievements.

[Klick here to find the template for your table.](#)

What do you expect from your training? Do you want to complete your training with a very good grade to prove how successful you can be? Or do you want to complete your training in as little time as possible? Focus on your needs and goals. You will be more motivated if you do things that you really want to do.

In order to develop a regular learning and study rhythm, you should be familiar with the study system and the study materials and their supplementary teaching units. You need to know where to find the information relevant to your studies, how to keep track of it and how to plan it. For this reason, you should continuously use the sources of information relevant to you.

Exercise: For one week, document how much time you have left for your studies in addition to your other commitments. Use the following weekly schedule for this.

[Klick here to find the template for your schedule.](#)

If your learning plan does not match the learning time to be realised, you should consider

How important is your distance learning Training compared to other activities and interests? You should determine your study workload based on this. Achieving a degree in a relatively short period of time and time-consuming (leisure) activities in your free time can hardly be reconciled. Can you do without certain activities or give them less time?

Think about whether you can reduce your course load. Although this will affect the duration of your studies, it will help you to avoid dropping out. If you feel overwhelmed by the workload, you will therefore potentially make less progress. Time pressure and the resulting mental stress often lead to a reduced ability to concentrate and learn.

Find your own rhythm, some learners divide "their study time" into fixed periods, others favour a more flexible schedule.

Individual time planning is important for distance learning, and you can differentiate between three perspectives:

Long-term schedules cover the entire training-Training and focus on the graduation date.

Medium-term schedules include the performance records and module completions;

Short-term schedules, i.e. weekly and daily schedules, include the processing of study materials and the deadlines for submission of assignments.

Prioritise your studies and create a list. Which module needs to be completed first because the deadline for the assignments is approaching? Which module do you still have time for? Divide the final goal into intermediate goals. Do you need to tackle the assignments or the exam preparation first? You should consider the following points:

- Plan realistically and do not make any wishful thinking plans. Take into account your other activities and obligations.
- Plan rest breaks, sleeping times, meals and household chores.
- Even if it seems tedious, stick to your planned study times as much as possible and don't wait for the right working time!
- Stick to your plan as far as possible.
- Think about time reserves (for unforeseen interruptions, for unexpected difficulties when working on a module, for repetitions, for follow-up questions, etc.).
- If you proceed according to plan, you have the following advantages:
- You use your limited time more effectively
- You learn more intensively in the planned learning phases
- The sense of achievement when you have reached intermediate goals gives you new motivation
- You reduce your stress situations, e.g. before exams, which are not avoided but alleviated
- You can procure important work materials, such as literature, in good time.
- You can start research at an early stage and are better able to overcome unforeseen hurdles.

Your stamina is put to the test time and again. The following points can help you to strengthen your stamina:

Create variety in your learning material. Always working on the same content can reduce your concentration. Alternate between exciting and rather boring or strenuous topics. This will keep you more motivated and make learning easier.

Keep your goal in mind. Answer the question of why you are taking on this burden. This answer is your basic motivation, which will always give you strength in times of demotivation.

Create satisfaction in your other areas of life. See your studies as a (sporting) challenge. Don't forget that there is also a life outside of work and studies. You can only concentrate on your studies with sufficient energy if you are also satisfied in other areas of your life. If you have personal problems to deal with, you will not be able to concentrate properly on your studies. If you try to distract yourself with work or study, this problem will affect you. Especially in the areas of personal relationships, self-realisation, physical fitness and health, finances, etc. can ensure that avoidable problems are also avoided. Think about the areas in which you are most likely to be dissatisfied and work on them before the problems become too big.

Make sure you get enough restful sleep. An important factor that you should not underestimate is getting enough sleep. In the long term, the human body needs at least seven hours of sleep per night to feel rested. Of course, this is only the average value, which can vary from person to person. It is possible that you are rested and refreshed after six hours of sleep, but it is also possible that you need eight hours of sleep per night. Find out what your individual sleep quota is that you feel comfortable with in the long term. You should make sure you get enough rest, especially if you have a double work and study load.

Try to find the right balance between under- and overstretching yourself. If you constantly feel overwhelmed, e.g. because you are working on too many modules at the same time, you will lose track in the medium term and probably give up. If, on the other hand, you are underchallenged, you will feel bored.

Take on small units regularly, but do so continuously. This will help you avoid the danger of facing a huge mountain of work (especially before assignments or exams) that is almost impossible to manage. Even if you are travelling for a few days (for business or pleasure), take the train, for example, so you can still work during the train journey and stay in the flow.

However, if you do have a "slump", you can quickly motivate yourself with the following exercise. You can quickly increase your motivation with this exercise: However, you should not lose sight of your long-term goal, as this is the more permanent basic motivation.

Exercise: Create a list within four minutes:

When I (study, exam, homework, etc.), then...

... I feel...

... I have more again...

... may I finally...

... I am proud because I...

... I will.....

Concentration

Concentration is strongly linked to your own motivation. If you have your goal in mind and your motivation is correspondingly high, the importance of the learning content will be greater in your eyes than the importance of aspects that distract you from learning.

Definition: Concentration is the deliberate narrowing of the field of attention to a specific area.

They can therefore concentrate better when they are highly motivated, because the narrowing of the field of attention remains despite influencing factors.

If you follow a few design rules, you can positively influence your motivation to learn and your ability to concentrate.

Design Rules

1. Switch off all distracting factors that do not belong in the learning environment. The study room should be in a quiet location. If this is not possible, go to the university library or the local library, for example. Move the telephone to another room or switch on the answering machine.
2. Plan the disruptions in your learning environment that you cannot change into your learning plan. When drawing up your learning plan, take into account, for example, traffic noise peaks or your children's play times. Schedule breaks accordingly or switch to other (also external) rooms.
3. Individual perceptions of noise vary greatly. Do you need absolute silence or are you stimulated by quiet background noises? In addition to your own noises, a quiet background noise (street noises, radio music) can be conducive to learning.
4. Inner restlessness distracts you from learning. Take a break and get to the bottom of the distraction. Take some time to deal with the restlessness and then concentrate on your learning. A relaxation exercise can be helpful here.
5. The combination and variety of learning content prevents fatigue. Fatigue leads to a higher error rate, which in turn causes a drop in motivation to learn - a vicious circle that you are heading towards.

Your learning environment naturally and above all includes a fixed workplace. If you have your own study room, this is already a good condition for your distance learning course, as a spatial separation of working and living has a favourable effect on the learning atmosphere. If you don't have a study, you should at least set up a fixed workstation where you can leave your documents.

Organisation of the Workplace

Your learning environment should include a fixed workstation, as a spatial separation of working and living has a positive effect on the learning atmosphere. Ideally, you should have your own quiet study, but you should at least set up a fixed workstation where you can leave your documents.

The design of the workplace and the learning environment is particularly important, as the ability to concentrate depends on this to a large extent.

In addition to a sufficient amount of paper and writing utensils, the following should be on the desk: PC / notebook, telephone, writing pad, pen, pencil, pencil sharpener, eraser, hole punch, stapler, paper clips, possibly scissors and glue, calendar (if you do not keep it electronically in the calculator), documents for the current task, if necessary something personal. Folders and a pin board, notepads, small sticky notes are helpful.

Check whether you need a so-called "reference work" as basic equipment: encyclopaedias, reference works, subject-specific basic literature and a spelling dictionary. You may also be able to use some of these online.

Work with a shelf. Set up a dynamic area and a static area. The dynamic area is also located on the desk and includes areas that you still need to access. The static area includes the shelf in the study (the documents that you need to access from time to time and are still relatively up-to-date). Documents that you do not necessarily need for your work and that may have been lying around for a long time without you having accessed them belong in the old filing cabinet. Important documents that must remain documented belong in the archive (possibly in the basement)

Your desk should have a sufficiently large work surface (e.g. 120x80 cm) so that you have enough space for writing and for materials and books. A mobile pedestal or base unit with drawers has proven to be advantageous. If you work with a hanging filing system, this is the place for it.

A good office swivel chair makes sense as you will be spending a large part of your study time here. Also make sure you have good lighting conditions, support the daylight with a desk lamp or good room lighting. The entire workplace must be well lit and glare-free. If you are right-handed, daylight should enter your workstation from the left or from the front.

Even if you can't create the ideal conditions for yourself, you should ensure a pleasant learning environment! You should enjoy being at your workplace, this will increase your motivation to learn.

Summary

In this chapter, you have gained an overview of the options for organising your distance learning course. Only if you know when you will complete which module with which performance record can you draw up a corresponding plan (which you may have to modify). You know your options for organising your learning rhythm.

4. Learning and Working in the Training-Training

Our introductory video by Prof. Brüggemann has already given you an overview of how this training is structured. Here we would like to give you a few more tips.

Obtain Information and Evaluate

Below you will find some initial tips on obtaining and evaluating information.

If you want to delve deeper into a topic, start by writing down what you already know about the topic. This is usually a good starting point for further research. Approach the topic with open eyes; magazines, newspapers, books, TV reports, etc. can also be helpful to give your considerations a current relevance. It is important that you record the information and also document the sources. In scientific papers, well-founded references are essential. It is often just as difficult to filter out the relevant information from the flood of information as it is to find well-founded information.

The first port of call is the Internet and the library.

As a learner or resident of the city, you should if available additionally apply for a library card from your local (technical) university, if available. This will give you access to the excellent knowledge pool at any time. University libraries are equipped with electronic research systems (OPAC = Online Puplic Access Catalogue). This means that you can basically find everything if you use the correct search strategies. You can also search for important information in other library catalogues via the Internet.

You can use search engines on the Internet to get an initial overview. You will find a lot of information, but it is ranked by search engines such as Google. Providers/customers can use optimisation strategies to change the ranking. In this respect, the first hits are not necessarily the most relevant for you. You may be able to find a better, or in any case a more scientifically sound selection via scientific search engines or science portals. The Internet is unbeatable in terms of topicality. A note on Wikipedia: The site is possibly a first orientation, but since the information can be changed at any time, it is unscientific and therefore in no way suitable or worth citing as a source.

You should document the sources and citations, e.g. on index cards on which all the necessary data is noted (follow the instructions for academic work at your university). Specialised literature management software can be much more convenient than index cards.

Organise and structure the topic and the literature. You can use mind maps to visualise your thoughts and knowledge in an understandable way. Do not write your notes behind or under each other as usual. Instead, write your core topic in the centre of the sheet and group your thoughts as keywords on lines that run from the centre (from the core topic) of the mind map. In this way, you create a visual representation of your thoughts and depict your knowledge map of the topic.

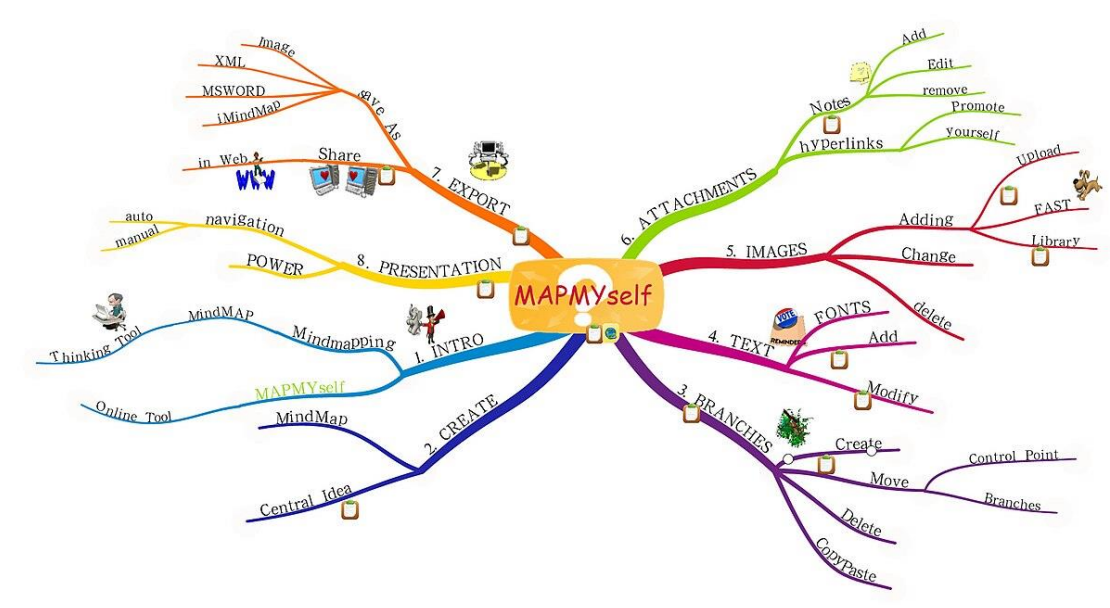


Figure 1: Mindmap ("This photo" by Unknown author is licenced under CC BY-ND. Downloaded at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mindmap.jpg>, 15.06.2024)

The branched illustration makes it possible to visualise even complicated relationships in an understandable way. It also helps you to condense the knowledge because you have to concentrate on the essentials, i.e. the key words, when creating the mind map. Thoughts, ideas or information of any kind can be easily incorporated. Connections become visible. The method is similar to the way the human brain works. Both halves of the brain work in constant alternation with each other. This increases performance. Each map looks different and is therefore easier to memorise. You can simply write the mind map on paper or create it on the computer using a mind map Training.

Exercise: Set up your mind map in four simple steps:

1. Write down the central theme. You always start your mind map with the central topic, which you write in the centre of a blank sheet of paper.
2. Collect the keywords and then as many terms as you can think of for a topic. Use this to create your first mind map.
3. Find generic terms and categorise the keywords. To organise your thoughts, use headings and sort your keywords under them.
4. Finally, tweak your mind map a little and refine it. You can add notes, explanations or connections.

Learning Type Analysis

Learning styles are the link between the general learning ability and the actualised situation-dependent learning behaviour. In the learning styles, the competence or ability interlocks with the performance, i.e. the actual achievement. At the same time, learning styles take into account the content of learning. The differentiation between learning styles and learning types is not clear-cut. Learning types are seen as more stable and independent of subject matter than learning styles. The term learning type refers to basic personality traits such as diligence, self-confidence, extraversion and optimism.

Here is an overview (according to Siebert 1996, p. 29):

- imitative, additive-casuistic learning vs. anticipatory, structuring learning
- clarifier (interested in clarification and differentiation) vs. simplifier (hasty, simplifying)
- elaborated thinking and speaking vs. restricted codes
- Success-motivated learning vs. failure-avoiding learning
- Field/situation-dependent learning vs. field/situation-independent learning
- Dualising thinking vs. networked thinking
- exclusive thinking (excluding, separating, alternative, e.g. "us against the others") vs. inclusive thinking (including, connecting, synthesising, e.g. "us with the others")
- Intrinsic motivation vs. extrinsic motivation

It is certainly worth taking a closer look at which learning type you belong to. Although it is assumed that all learning types are present in every person, there are nevertheless focal points in the way you learn best.

If you know and understand all aspects of your personal learning style, you can improve your performance. You will be able to absorb information more quickly and easily. This will automatically improve your communication. Last but not least, you can also utilise this knowledge of your preferred way of absorbing information when learning by applying appropriate methods. Train your other sensory channels and use them when learning. Learning with all your senses is often the most successful method. You can also consciously try out and strengthen your "weakest" learning type.

You can use the following test to analyse whether you are more of a

- Active learner
- Acoustic learning type
- Reading learner or
- Are a visual learner

Exercise: Set up your mind map in four simple steps: Exercise: The following test was adapted by Wulfert and Müller (2010) on the basis of the HALB test by W. Stangl. Please answer the following questions.

[Klick here to find the template for your learning type analysis.](#)

Learning Schedule

The didactic concept of this course has already been explained to you in a previous lesson. You will work through the course module by module, following the recurring principle of learning (text work), application (tests, exercises) and consolidation (further literature research and work). In order to progress regularly with the online study materials according to this concept, a schedule is helpful.

Create a schedule with the help of a calendar. The end point is your performance record. Leave the two to three days beforehand as a buffer, and plan a day to relax and recharge your batteries shortly before the exam. This will give you the time The period between today and the end of the module is set. You divide the learning material into the respective weeks (e.g. 15 weeks for a trimester) and

then into the individual days. In the next step, you plan the learning phases of the individual days (position and duration of the learning phases per day).

The most important reason for constant, regular processing of the study materials is the danger that you can quickly lose the thread if you do not process the learning material consistently and stringently. Small gaps in your knowledge will accumulate and grow, and you will lose the overview.

If you still have questions that cannot be clarified by the in-depth processing, you should take the opportunity to speak to the counsellor and ask for clarification.

Learning Tips

How do you learn? Put yourself as accurately as possible in a situation in which you had a positive feeling during and after learning. What was the situation like, what was special about it? Did the subject suit you? Were you well rested? Did you study alone or in a group? You can control a lot about the external variables of learning if you are aware of them. Create pleasant learning conditions.

Learning can also be fun! Make sure that you feel comfortable while you are learning and that the conditions are ideal. Allow yourself enough time to study (plan a little more generously, the prouder you will be if you finish a little earlier), make sure you are quiet (even small distractions will take you out of the learning flow). Try to study in a relaxing environment. This includes an organised and tidy desk. Sometimes soft background music can also help you study.

Summary

After working through this text, ...

- you now know how to obtain and evaluate information.
- you can use a mind map to structure and organise your information.
- You will have determined your learning type so that you know your learning style and can optimise your learning.

5. Conclusion

The general conditions of your distance learning Training should be planned and taken into account, especially your family and the double burden of studying and working. The integration of study and work is necessary to achieve your goals, and you have learnt about various methods of learning planning. It is important to design and organise your work and learning space in the best possible way to relieve your workload. You can obtain and analyse information. In order to optimise your learning style, you can analyse your learning type and apply the best learning path for you.

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