Independent learning

Many of you may have experienced a very different learning environment than the one offered at RMIT University.

You have possibly just completed your secondary education where your teachers directed and monitored your studies, or you may have come from overseas where how you learned was mainly by memorizing information and processing this for exams.

At RMIT you may need to develop a different approach to your studies as learning at RMIT is student centred. This means that YOU are responsible for your learning, and therefore may need to acquire some new skills. You need to become 'independent learners'.

To be an independent learner you need to understand, not just memorise information. You need to be able to process information, evaluate what you read, ask questions and form opinions.

These are highly valued skills and need to be reflected in all your assignments and exams. However, these skills take time to acquire... time to read... time to reflect and process... time to understand and ask questions and time to write.

So, one of the key characteristics of being an independent learner is to learn to manage your time effectively. You cannot leave your study to the last minute. Learning is cumulative...that is, it develops over the 13 weeks of the semester.

This means that you must plan your study time and develop good study habits so that you can both keep up with all the work, and understand it.

Remember, the university calendar is different to the school year. There are 2 semesters each of 13 weeks with exams at the half year and the end of the year, so you are expected to learn and study over the whole of each semester, not just at the end before the exams.

As part of being an independent learner you are required to learn outside of the formal classroom. So, for example, a TAFE student will be required to spend about 1 hour per week per course learning independently, for each hour spent in formal class time.

As an undergraduate you are expected to do approximately 6-8 hours of independent learning per week, per course.
And at a Post Graduate level it’s about 14 hours per week, per course. During this time you should be pre-reading for the lectures and tutorials, post reading after the lectures to add to your body of knowledge, researching for your assignments, writing the assignments, doing group work, and revising and preparing for your exams.

Getting ready for the exams should be done each week for the entire semester, not just 2 weeks before the exams. You will not be able to read, summarise and apply an entire semester’s work in the final 2 weeks.

So you have to be disciplined and prepare a little each week, by reading over your notes, writing summaries and this is part of your time management.