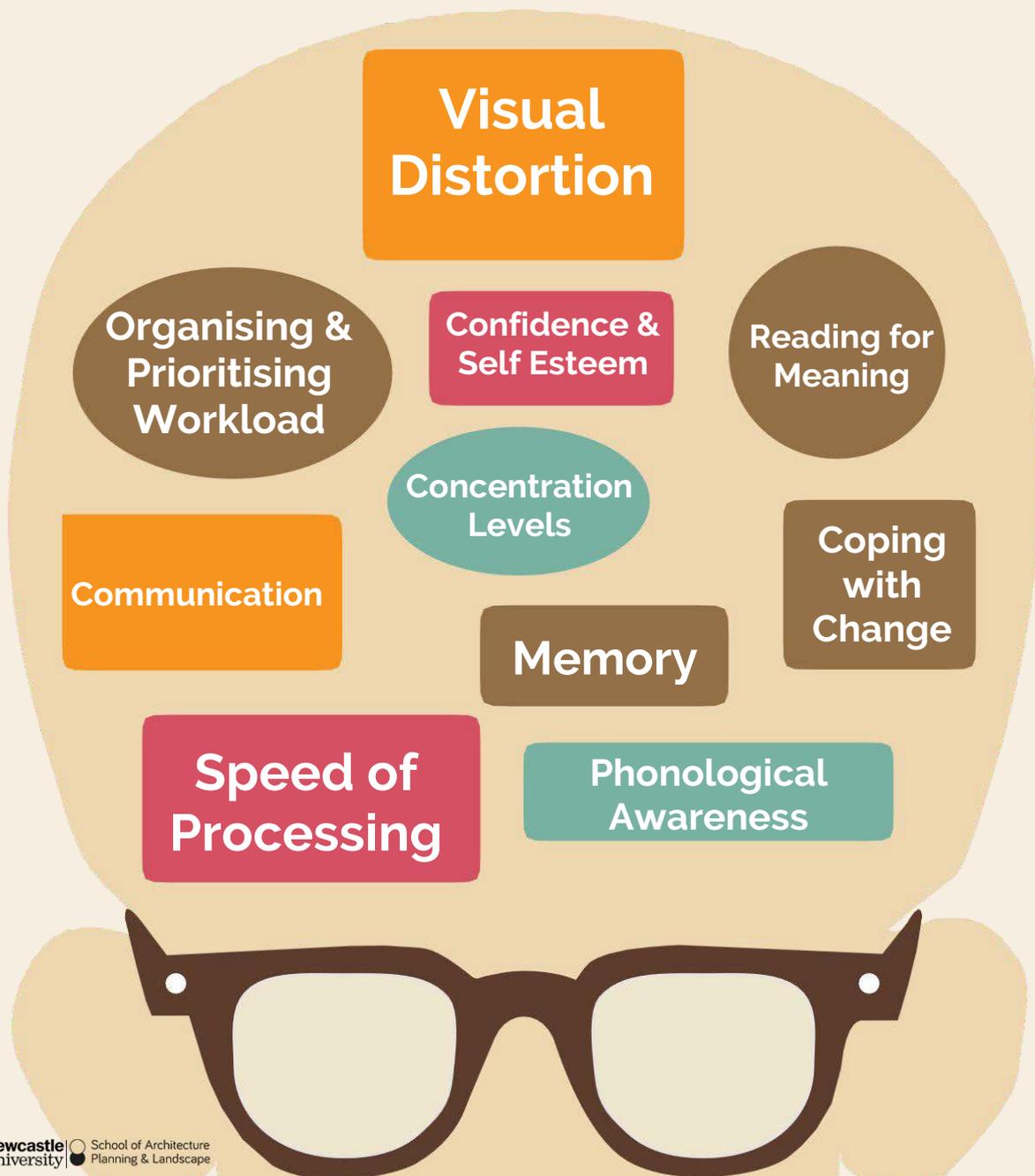# Learning Support Guide for Students

This guide provides you with some useful tips to help you combat the challenges many students may face.

You may find that you struggle with some or all of the following:

Visual Distortion

Organising & Prioritising Workload

Confidence & Self Esteem

Reading for Meaning

Concentration Levels

Communication

Coping with Change

Memory

Speed of Processing

Phonological Awareness

If any of the following seriously impacts your ability to make progress on your programme, you may want to consider contacting the [Student Health and Wellbeing Service](#) to discuss a Student Support Plan:

Visual Distortion

You may see rivers or spirals within text or experience double vision. Coloured layovers, reading rulers or text on cream/pastel coloured paper can help.

Organising & Prioritising Workload

You will be expected to organise and prioritise your workload independently, but there is help available if this is very difficult for you.

Confidence & Self Esteem

You may find it difficult to engage with peers and staff, to the point where you isolate yourself.

Reading for Meaning

You may find it difficult to discuss and understand what you are reading, beyond just pronouncing words correctly.

Communication

You may struggle with keeping track of conversation with friends, or don't feel able to put forward your opinion in tutorials or seminars.

Concentration Levels

You may find it difficult to concentrate on tasks for lengthy periods of time.

Coping with Change

Change is a big part of coming to university, but some people struggle more than others. You may find yourself more anxious than normal, which can lead to stress.

Speed of Processing

You may find that you are slow at processing information, i.e. listening to a lecture or the speed of your reading and writing.

Memory

You may have difficulty retaining information that you see or hear.

Phonological Awareness

You may find it difficult to break down words into their sound structure, or phonetics. This can cause you to misinterpret information.

Contents Page

1. **Tips for Studio Design** (for Design students only)

Time Management

- Don't underestimate how much time your design projects will take and make sure you do plenty of work in the early stages rather than leaving everything to the end.

- At the beginning of the project break down the requirements into sections and plan your time. Review your plan each week to ensure you stick to your schedule.

- Try to get into a 9am-5pm Monday to Friday routine and avoid the tendency to spend long unproductive hours in the studios.

- Take breaks - it is unproductive to work for hours on end without a break. You need to get plenty of rest, eat regularly and stay hydrated.

Research

- Spend time looking at design options early in the project.

- Create a mind map and/or storyboard to plan out your ideas.

- Don't leave presentation work until the last minute - it will take longer than you think.

Peer/Tutorial Support

- Make sure you have understood the project brief and don't be afraid to seek extra support from your tutor when you need it.

- Make sure you go to each tutorial offered, even if you feel like you haven't developed your ideas.

- As well as support from your tutor, your peers can be a great source of inspiration and help. Don't be shy!

- Have the confidence to make your own decisions.

2.   Tips for Written Assignments

Essay Writing

- Break down assignments into small sections. Imagine you are describing the task to someone else and talk through what you aim to do for each section.

- Make notes of what you already know about the subject area.

- Give yourself a reward scheme i.e. break times at key points or treats when you reach certain milestones.

- Create a checklist. This should help you plan your time and allows you to tick things off as you achieve them, a checklist should also help you not to miss anything.

- Create a mind map with post-it notes, then place your post-it notes in order, giving you your structure. You can then remove each post-it as you complete that task, giving you a sense of achievement as you reach each goal.

    Check out [Mind View](#) (University specialist software) that converts mind maps into word templates which can form your essay structure. The University also holds a license for other assistive technology, see here for more info:
    [Assistive Technology | IT Service (NUIT) | Newcastle University (ncl.ac.uk)](#)

- Create a storyboard of your ideas (this will help you if you're a visual person).

- Plan out your structure: What is each paragraph going to achieve? What is the purpose of writing it? It can help to know the answer to these questions before you begin.

- You don't have to begin writing with the introduction; sometimes it's easier to write the introduction at the end.

- Break your word count into sections:
  10% = Your Introduction
  70% = Your Content
  20% = Your Conclusion

    You can use this for the essay but also for each paragraph within the essay.

- Create a bank of opening sentences to help you begin your paragraphs.

- Break each section down into boxes so you can see your essay structure in a grid-like format on one page.

- Make sure you know how to spell the key words within your essay.

- If you struggle with spelling and grammar, ensure that you use a Spellcheck tool – much like the one that is built into Microsoft Word or other similar word processors.

- Make sure that your word processing program is set to use English (UK) as the default language, not English (USA). This will ensure that certain words are spelt correctly – colour (UK) vs color (USA), analyse (UK) vs analyze (USA), etc.

   To do this in Microsoft Word: Review > Language > Set Proofing Language > English (United Kingdom)

- What – When – Why – Who – How – Establish the questions you need to address around these words. These questions can help you get started if you have a mental block.

- Colour code the text within each paragraph to show the main point, evidence, examples and concluding parts. For example, green could be the concluding parts, if you then group together all of your green text you can develop the final concluding paragraph (you will need to edit it to make it flow but it will be a good starting point.

Proof Reading

- Always take a break before you begin to proofread an essay.

- Read your essay out loud to yourself.

- A good way to spell check a document is to read the text from back to front so you're just viewing each word alone and not focusing on the content of the text.

- Create a personalised checklist of your common mistakes and double check if you have made any of these errors.

- Work with a peer - ask them to proofread your work and you can offer to proofread theirs. Working with a peer can also be useful when carrying out research.

Referencing

- Refer to the referencing notes in your student handbook for information on the School's preferred referencing style. If you are unsure what this is, the University expects Harvard Referencing as default.

- Use coloured post-it notes for books and keep online journals/articles bookmarked – add the quotes, authors, publication and page numbers into a separate document. This will give you your reference list ready to type up.

- The Newcastle University Library has online guides and resources that can support you in referencing correctly. These guides and resources cover:

    - Using EndNote, used for storing and managing references, available on all University computers.
    - Using Cite Them Right, resource to understand how to correctly reference, online.

Reading and Making Notes from Text

- Make a note of your initial thoughts when you read the information; often putting text into your own words can help your understanding and ability to retain the information.

- Create a personal dictionary which contains words that are unfamiliar or important to you.

- Use a highlighter pen when reading text or making notes and highlight the key information you want to remember. Use different colours to highlight different topics – but be careful not to over highlight.

- When you read a text, try to summarise the main point in no more than 10 words.

- Convert the text you have read into bullet points.

- Control your environment – make sure you study in a quiet area with no distracting noises.

- Study at your optimum time when your concentration levels are at their peak –not when you are tired or hungry.

- Dictionary.com can be a good web resource to look up unfamiliar words.

Note Taking in Lectures

- Try to do some background reading on the subject area in advance of the lecture.

- Use a Dictaphone or other recording device, such as a smartphone, where permitted.

- Try to highlight the key points or terms on your handout.

- Write a summary of what you have learnt.

- Make note of any words you don't understand and look them up afterwards.

3. Tips for Exams

Exam Preparation

- Make a revision timetable and break this down into subjects and topics. Build in time for contingency and allow time for review, reflection and breaks! Give your brain a rest from thinking about the same topic for too long.

- Give yourself strict goals, for example:

    - "I will do X on Mondays and Y on Wednesdays."
    - "I will read 1 chapter per day."
    - "I will take a 15-minute break at 10.30am and have lunch at 12.30pm."

- Make a list of the subjects you need to revise and tick these off as you complete them so you can see the progress you are making.

- Break down your time into weeks so you can plan well in advance. Work backwards from the exam date and allow yourself plenty of time. Decide how long you need to revise and allow for some contingency in case it takes you longer than you think.

- Set yourself questions to check your understanding of the topic – it can be helpful to work with a study partner or group.

- Set yourself diary reminders so you can remind yourself where your progress should be and by which weeks.

- Find out the best way that you remember information. If you respond better to visual things, then try making a mind-map or place words within pictures. You can also try creating a story, a rhyme or a song. Check out [MindTools](#) for other tips on remembering information.

- When starting to revise, reflect on what you already know. It will build your confidence and help you by providing hooks for your revision.

- Stick post-it notes of key words on frequently used objects or places such as the kettle or kitchen cupboard.

- Create index cards with technology terms.

- Try to review past exam papers where possible.

- Decide how long you will spend on each question, that way you can be sure you will reach the end of the exam paper without running out of time.

- Use past exam questions to write essay plans using the information you have learnt. This can help you organise material quickly into a structured essay and helps you to see how you can use the material you have learnt to answer the question.

- If there are a number of questions on the same topic then write essay plans for these too. This can help you develop the skill of utilising what you know to answer the question you are given. This will give you confidence that you can use the material in a number of different ways and answer whatever question may come up.

- When you revise try writing full answers under time constraints by using one of your essay plans. This will build up your ability to write quickly, think at speed and will help you work out how much you can get written in the time allocated.

During the Exam

- Spend some time jotting down key points in the notes tab before you even read the exam paper. After reading the paper, use this same tab to plan your answer(s).

- Read the whole paper before you start writing – read through the paper more than once if you can spare the time.

- Before you start, know what is expected of you in the exam:

  - How many questions must you answer?
  - How long do you have to answer each question?

- Organise responses to the questions based on what you already know, and, in the notes tab, piece together essay plans for the questions you will answer. This will enable you to design your answers in advance.

- Keep your introduction brief and to the point – explain your main argument, how your argument answers the question and how it is organised.

- Make sure that your conclusion comes out of the discussion had in the main body of the text and not only in response to the exam question(s), but also reinforces your introduction.

- Note how many marks each question is worth. Prioritise the amount of time spent answering questions by using this information – more marks = more time.

- You don't have to answer the questions in order.

- If a question has 7 marks, the examiners are likely to be looking for 7 key points in your answer.

- Should you not have enough time to fully answer all of the questions, by using the notes tab to plan your answers, there will be evidence of your intentions in the exam paper – and you could get some marks for that.

4.   Sources of Help

School Support

- Each student is assigned a Personal Tutor. You can go to your Personal Tutor for advice and support when you need it, both academically and personally. In addition to your personal tutor, we also have subject specific Senior Tutors:

  - [Dr Ed Wainwright](#) for Architecture Programmes
  - [Dr Dave Webb](#) - Semester 1 for Planning Programmes
  - [Dr Raymond Abdulai](#) - Semester 2 for Planning Programmes

- Each programme also has a Degree Programme Director and a Director of Discipline who you may also contact for help, support and guidance.

- As well as Personal Tutors, Senior Tutors and Degree/Discipline Directors, you can also contact Kelly Weightman, Learning & Teaching Coordinator (Student Support) at saplpecforms@newcastle.ac.uk. Kelly is available to meet with students for one-to-one advice and wellbeing support. Whether you need someone to talk to, or whether you have questions relating to the Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) process, Kelly can offer help and guidance and point you in the right direction for further support.

- Another useful source of information is your Student Programme Handbooks which are provided for each programme of study and contain important information relating to your degree programme. This includes what you can expect from us and what we expect from you.

Student Health and Wellbeing Service

- The Student Health and Wellbeing Service provides information, advice and guidance on a wide range of student support issues to enable all students to maximise their potential whilst at university. Detailed information about the support available and how to make an appointment is outlined on this website and includes the following areas:

  - [Financial Support](#)
  - [Disability Support](#)
  - [International Students](#)
  - [Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care](#)
  - [Physical Health and Wellbeing](#)
  - [Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

Other Helpful Resources

- ASK (Academic Skills Kit):
  https://internal.ncl.ac.uk/ask/

- Newcastle University Library Resource and Study Support:
  https://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/resources-and-study-support/