GENERAL STUDY SKILLS

Please read this information carefully in conjunction with the Study Abroad Handbook and the Academic Information booklet which provide information about Assessment Requirements, Add-Drop Period, Transcripts, Grade Transfer, Credit Transfer, Advising and Absence, Examinations, Computing and Internet, and Academic Differences with the USA.

- Pick up a Departmental Handbook from each Department you take modules in.
- Make sure you know exactly what time and date essays need to be handed in.

Use of the Library
You should be using the Library regularly to obtain material that you need to prepare assignments, seminar papers and essays. At the beginning of term organized tours of the Library are arranged, so make sure you go on one. There are also a number of introductory guides available in the Library and on the Library's Web pages http://www.swan.ac.uk/lis/index.asp to explain how to use the catalogues and find your way around the collections. If you need help with finding what you need, ask at the Issue Desk. If you notice gaps in the collections or have any suggestions as to books that the Library ought to hold but does not at present, then mention it to the module tutor.

Taking lecture notes.
It is a mistake to try to write down everything that is said in lectures: if you do this you are probably not listening actively and your notes may be muddled and unclear. Try instead to listen carefully and to distinguish and make a note of the key points and any important information. Listen out also for any points where the lecturer summarizes his or her argument.

You should then consolidate your notes immediately or at least fairly soon after the lecture. This means adding in the details and examples given while they are still fresh in your mind, and fleshing out the information you jotted down in abbreviated form. (If you do not do this, and only take out the notes later when you want to study from them, you may find you cannot remember what your abbreviations meant.) If you consolidate your notes in this way, the information will move from your short-term into your long-term memory and you will have a much better grasp of what the lecture was about.

Taking notes when reading
Through the course of the study abroad period you should read and re-read your primary texts, getting to know them well. You should then make notes on these primary texts and on secondary literature. If you work methodically like this you will have plenty of material to study from. Taking good notes when you are reading is an essential independent study skill, and one that will be useful to you long after you have left university. It is important to develop and stick to good habits. Keep your notes in order, bearing in mind that you may need to refer to them some time in the future. They must be legible, well-organised and fully referenced. Good notes are essential for good presentation of essays and other written work, and for efficient exam revision. Following these guidelines will also forestall any risk of accidental plagiarism. Either use ruled paper with margins or index cards. In order for your notes to be user-friendly when you come back to them, it helps to leave quite a lot of blank space: it will then be easier to take in the contents quickly. Several other reasons for leaving blank space are revealed below.

Note source details.
Whatever you are reading, whether a primary text or secondary literature, take down the full source reference details. Write down the reference details in the standard style used for bibliographies:

- For books - author's full name, Title italicised: Subtitle italicised (Place of Publication: Publishers, Date)
• For journals - author, 'Title of article in single inverted commas,' Name of Journal italicised, Volume number/issue number [if appropriate], page extent.
• For articles in books - author, 'Title of article in single inverted commas,' in Name of book, ed. Name of Editor (Place of publication: Publisher, Date, page extent)

...preferably at the top of a sheet of paper or index card, so you can file the notes conveniently, e.g. in order of author (in separate files for different modules/subjects). Primary texts are typically available in a variety of editions. Your notes must specify which edition you are using, even for a book that you own: you never know, you might lose it. Essay bibliographies must give the full reference. It only takes one minute at most to check all this information and write it down fully and accurately. It will enable you to compile accurate bibliographies for essays, and make it much easier to find sources again later. One important point: NEVER WRITE IN A LIBRARY BOOK, or mark it in any way, even in pencil.

Types of note-taking

Direct transcription
That is, copying down. Everything - even a couple of words - that you copy down directly must be clearly marked as a quotation in your notes: use single quotation marks both before and after each quotation. Note down the relevant page number(s) after every closing quotation mark. Double-check that your transcription is perfectly accurate, down to every detail of punctuation.

Digest/summary
Here you are summarizing the text's contents (an argument, an event, a characterization of a real or fictional person), in your own words. Quotation marks are not necessary except where your digest incorporates direct quotation. You must note the page number(s). If taking lots of notes, try keeping page references running in the left-hand margin as you go along. N.B.: you should take digest/summary notes in general, and only directly transcribe passages which you are likely to want to quote in your own work: arresting turns of phrase, uses of language which are characteristic of the author, or key points which you will quote in order to comment on their implications.

Your own thoughts.
Reflections on the significance, the style, the mood, the implications of what you read; cross-references to other parts of the text, or other texts (recurring images, themes, arguments, etc.); questions you may be asking yourself, ideas for essays and assignments; and so on. These should be distinguished, in your notes, from summary of the text's contents. You can do this for example by using a different pen, or laying your words out differently on the page, or putting your own thoughts in brackets.

Organising notes
Depending on the type of text and subject matter, there are various ways of organising your notes to make them user-friendly.

Headings
Use headings (and sub-headings, where appropriate) as you go along. Make the ranking of headings, sub-headings and sub-sub-headings clear in your notes:

• use, for example, (1) (2) (3), (A) (B) (C), (i) (ii) (iii), etc.;
• use blank lines (above and below major headings; above sub-headings);
• and/or use combinations of capital letters, underlining, margin indent or other layout devices.

If your source is divided into sections itself (chapters, parts of chapters; scenes and/or acts), note down all the headings/numbers (and sub-headings) as you go along. Note the page where each section starts (and ends). If your source is not explicitly divided into sections itself, your notes should still use headings, with page numbers. For example, notes on a work
of history may best be organised by using a sequence of date (1/11/1918) or period (1933-45) headings. Where an article (or a chapter in a book) makes a series of points or arguments, summarise them as appropriate headings. Works of fiction - long or short - can usually be divided into episodes, even if they are not explicitly marked as such. In plays, entrances and exits of characters (for example) are internal reference points, even if there is no scene change. Use headings in your notes on occasions like these.

Another advantage of leaving blank spaces on the page is that you may only realize a section of text had begun at an earlier point when you come to the end, so you may need to go back and insert a heading.

Cross-referencing
What you are reading will sometimes explicitly refer to another part of the text, or to another source. Make a note if this is of interest to you. Take source references down in full. (Notes for further reading may best be kept on a separate sheet/card. But later you may also want to know where a source reference came from.)

If you are struck by an implicit connection (any kind of echo/repetition, variation/similarity, or contrast) between what you are reading and another point in the same text, or between what you are reading and another text you recall, make a note and highlight it in some way. And make the cross-reference work both ways: turn to your earlier notes and add a short reference to the page you are reading now - yet another reason for leaving blank space.

Highlighting
Key words, points and issues should be highlighted (underlining, capitals, highlight pen, or whatever) so that you can spot them at a glance, and immediately have the full reference and any cross-references.

Abbreviations
Only use abbreviations which you will be able to decode later (e.g. does 'int' mean intentional, international, internal, interesting or interminable?). Recurring names of persons and places can be reduced to an initial - but make sure they cannot be mixed up, and note the full name once too, where you can easily find it.

ESSAY WRITING: SOME GUIDELINES

Preparation
Before you start an essay, read the question through very carefully and make quite sure that you understand it. Make sure you answer the question that is set – do not make up your own title! You are expected to provide a clear and concise answer rather than leaving your tutor to extrapolate the necessary information from a discursive narrative. When researching for your essay, constantly bear in mind the question to be answered and as noted above keep a thorough and accurate record of your sources. Finally, make sure that you know the deadline for submission of the essay. You are expected to produce your essay for the deadline, and must therefore plan your work accordingly. Failure to do so may lose you marks.

Style and Presentation
- Essay writing is formal in style.
- Plan the structure of your essay before you actually start writing and be prepared to write more than one draft before submitting the final product for assessment.
- Make sure that the essay follows a valid and logical line of reasoning incorporating an introduction, analysis and argument and a conclusion.
- Be careful to express your argument as precisely and concisely as possible, always ensuring that it relates directly to the question at hand. Omit everything that is irrelevant and avoid padding, waffle, over-generalizations and being banal.
- In general, keep to the designated word limit
- Always distinguish between your own words and those of the critics. PLAGIARISM IS NOT ACCEPTABLE AND WILL BE PENALISED SEVERELY. (See paragraph below on plagiarism)
Remember to adhere to the conventions of punctuation, spelling, sentence and paragraph construction. Failure to do so will obscure the clarity of your argument.

If you are not using a word processor, write legibly. You may be required to re-write illegible work. For word-processed essays, computer/printer failure and/or failure to back-up your work on disk is not sufficient excuse for late submission of essay.

Notes and References
Observe the following conventions when using evidence to justify your arguments or establish your facts.

- Quotations: All quotations must be clearly identified and referenced.
- Paraphrasing: When a line or passage is paraphrased, this should be clearly stated and the original source acknowledged.
- References: References must clearly identify the exact location of your source material (See section on note source details) giving the reader all the necessary information, right down to the page number. The reference should either be placed in brackets at the end of the sentence or listed in notes at the end of the essay but please be consistent.
- Bibliography: At the end of the essay, list all the books and articles you have used in writing the essay, whether you make specific reference to them in your essay or not (See section on note source details for correct form).

If you are in any doubt about how to indicate quotations or sources, or about compiling a bibliography, ask a tutor for help and/or consult the following standard work in the main library: Derek Brown et al. (eds), MHRA Style Book, 5th edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996).

Plagiarism
Plagiarism means “the wrongful act of taking the product of another person’s mind, and presenting it as one’s own” (Alexander Lindey, Plagiarism and Originality (New York: Harper, 1952), p.2). It usually involves copying from a book or an article and passing the text off as your own work. Tutors will spot this easily, and are within their rights to award a mark of 0 and report the student concerned to the Head of Department. Serious plagiarism can be penalised at University level by a range of sanctions from cancellation of marks to disqualification from examinations. **PLAGIARISM IS A SERIOUS OFFENCE THAT MUST BE AVOIDED.** You can avoid it by observing the following guidelines:

- Anything that is copied or quoted from another source must be in quotation marks and attributed to the original author. References taken from Internet sources must be fully cited e.g. www.IMB.com.
- If you paraphrase the work of others (put their ideas into your words), you must acknowledge the source. This can be done by using phrases such as “Ehrhart maintains that …..”, “Ehrhart provides evidence for …..”, “It is argued by Ehrhart that ….” And so on.
- Where you are generally indebted for your ideas to one or two main sources, make this clear in a general statement early on (you can use a footnote or endnote for this). Similarly, where you draw extensively on lecture notes, say so.
- Full citations in timed, unseen examinations are obviously not expected, but you should indicate general indebtedness and credit any quotations you have managed to remember.

**SEMINAR & TUTORIAL PRESENTATIONS: SOME GUIDELINES**

Giving a seminar, or tutorial, presentation can be daunting. Here are a few tips that are designed to help make the experience less of an ordeal. We all -- yes, even lecturers -- get nervous when asked to speak in public. Feeling worried about giving a presentation is only natural. We all know how this feels, so everyone in class will be sympathetic. It is very important to remember that you are not being asked to provide the final word on a particular topic, but to open the topic up to discussion within the rest of the group. Here are some questions you might ask yourself that will help you do this:
• Do you want to be deliberately controversial, to play 'Devil's Advocate'?
• Will you argue for and against particular ways of looking at the topic, or highlight the major arguments?
• What materials and evidence will you use: texts, video clips, music, or other visual aids?
• Do you want to give a joint presentation? (remember this is not an excuse for only one of you doing the work).
• Would you prefer questions and discussion of the points you raise as you raise them or at the end of your presentation?
• Will you read from a script or use notes?

In all of these cases, though, you must be clear about your objectives, and you must make those objectives clear to the rest of the group. Break your argument down into smaller chunks, and tell the rest of the group what you are going to do right at the start of your talk. Remember, also, to tell them where you've got to at various stages throughout your presentation. Phrases such as 'Now that I've dealt with x, I'll move on to y' are very useful in making the structure of your presentation clear to listeners. You could even write the main points of your talk up on a blackboard, OHP, or on a handout, to guide your listeners (and yourself) as you talk. The key to a good presentation is preparation. Don't expect to be able to go to the seminar and talk off the top of your head. This will only cause acute embarrassment for yourself and the other people in the seminar or tutorial, and you will lose marks if your presentation is included in the assessment of the module. To do yourself justice you will need to spend time reading around the subject, thinking about different ways of approaching it and of building a coherent and structured argument. This may sound daunting and over laborious but it is the only real way of overcoming nerves. Even if you don't plan to read your presentation, it's always a good idea to write it out beforehand. If you find yourself tongue-tied once you get in the classroom then you will have a script to work from.

Very often the work you do for a seminar presentation can be used towards essay preparation, so don't think of this as wasted effort. The rest of the group should come prepared as well. A good seminar or tutorial depends on the willingness of everyone to contribute. If you are due to give a presentation you may want to ask the rest of the group to do some reading beforehand. Give them, at least, a rough idea of the general areas you'll be looking at so that they will have had time to think about the wider issues involved in the topic. If you are attending a seminar but not giving a paper make sure that you have prepared the topic for discussion, and are fully prepared to discuss it in depth. This will be expected of you by your tutor or lecturer as a minimum requirement.

When you do get to give your presentation speak clearly and don't rush. Don't talk for too long: your presentation is intended to promote discussion, so short and snappy is much better than exhaustively laboured. Above all try to enjoy the experience: remember that you're not on trial, and that you'll learn a lot both about the topic and about yourself.

EXAM TECHNIQUE

If you are in Swansea for a semester it is possible you will not have examinations to take. However, everyone should read the following in order to gain a better understanding of the academic system. Here are some cardinal rules for exam technique:

Read the rubric
The rubric is the section at the top of the exam question paper which tells you how many questions to answer and from which section, and so on. Read it carefully and follow the instructions exactly. Look out also for any instructions within questions, e.g. the use of EITHER/OR questions.

Read the questions and decide which you are going to answer
Read carefully and select questions that you think you can answer well. Think carefully about the wording of questions: the fact that you have revised (studied) a topic does not mean that
you can answer every question that might be set on it. But also just because a question is phrased in a new or challenging way, this does not mean that you should not attempt it. Take your time to think about the implications of questions and make sure you have something to say of relevance before starting to write. Careful thinking at this stage will help to ensure that your answers are focused and to the point.

Allocate an equal amount of time to each question
Unless otherwise specified, the marks for an exam are divided equally between the questions answered, so it makes sense to spend the same amount of time on each answer. For example, if the exam consists of three questions and lasts one and a half hours, and you have already spent ten minutes deciding which questions to answer, then you should allocate about 25 minutes to each answer, which leaves you with a spare five minutes for checking at the end. If you get to the end of your first 25 minutes and you have not finished your first answer then you should still stop writing and start the next question so that you allow yourself adequate time for the remaining two answers. If you have time at the end you can always come back and finish off the first answer. Remember that if you answer only two out of three questions then you have already thrown away 33% of your possible marks.

Remember what you have learned about essay writing
Answer the specific question asked, write an essay plan, never lose sight of the question, structure your thoughts, and read through what you have written.

Don’t panic (too much)
Keep calm, concentrate, think clearly and positively. Remember: if you have attended lectures regularly and worked consistently, you have nothing to fear. The exam is not intended to catch you out but to give you an opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills you have acquired.

If you are experiencing any academic problems whatsoever, please come to the American Studies Exchange Office or ask your lecturer/tutor for advice.