The information in this booklet is the result of the Academic Skills and Learning Centre’s years of experience working with ANU Honours students, supervisors, convenors and coordinators, many of whom have been kind enough to share their thoughts, concerns and experiences with us. Thank you to Michael Leunig for permission to reprint his cartoons from *Everyday Devils and Angels* © Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 1992. Thanks also to Cris Clucas and Salud Villegas (DRSS) for designing and formatting this booklet.

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The Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC) provides free courses, online and print materials and individual consultations to all ANU students with the aim of developing students’ academic skills and strategies. The ASLC is located on the lower ground floor of the Pauline Griffin Building. To enrol in courses or access materials visit our website: academicskills.anu.edu.au Appointments can be made in person or by telephoning 02 6125 2972.

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1. CONTEMPLATING HONOURS

What is Honours?

Honours is a uniquely rewarding but diverse aspect of an Australian undergraduate degree. ‘Doing Honours’ can occur in a number of ways depending on your academic discipline. It can be an add-on year in which you undertake your own research project and perhaps some additional coursework (this is common in the Humanities and Social Sciences), or an optional part of your undergraduate degree in which you conduct a research project for credit (for example in Law and Engineering). If you are undertaking a double-degree you may choose to do Honours in either or both of your disciplines, and this may entail up to two years of additional study, depending on the degree structure.

There is no such thing as the typical Honours experience. In addition to the discipline-based differences you may find yourself juggling a variety of commitments such as work and family in conjunction with your Honours study. You may also face a variety of challenges such as returning to study after an absence, studying part-time, starting mid-year, doing Honours at a new institution, or doing Honours in another language.

However within this rich diversity, the Honours experience has some key features.

Honours is a major transition year for most students, where you are asked to:

- shift to being a generator of knowledge,
- begin to establish your claim to join the academic community,
- decide whether or not you will proceed to graduate study, and
- perform at a standard which determines whether you will be eligible for a PhD scholarship.

In practical terms, this transition means significant changes to undergraduate patterns of study, most notably in terms of:

- independent and extended research for and writing of a thesis, research essay or report,
- working with a supervisor, and
- managing your time, energy and sanity during a year of pressure.

Why do Honours?

- research training, and a chance to try out research for yourself (a taste of postgraduate life),
- an intellectual challenge,
- a chance to work on a project that particularly interests you,
- an edge in the employment market – shows employers that you can work in a professional relationship – sharing ideas, maintaining your own point of view, co-operating, balancing respect with integrity and independent thought,
- scholarship opportunities,
- accelerated entry to postgraduate courses,
- coursework that can be more interesting, in depth, in smaller classes,
- a chance to refine your skills (analysis, project and data management, writing, original thinking, using initiative) for research or for use in the field/on the job, and
- an opportunity for combined Honours so you can get the most out of both your majors and combine your interests.
Getting ready to do Honours

Regardless of your current degree stage (first year, later year, about to do Honours) it is never too early to start thinking about Honours. Some areas stipulate specific courses that you must do as part of your degree to be eligible to enrol in Honours, so it is a good idea to check these requirements early. Here are a few things you can do at any time to begin your Honours preparation:

Consider possible projects & supervisors

Ask yourself some questions:

- What aspects of your degree have you found most interesting?
- What career options would you like to pursue once you graduate?
- What topics/issues have you studied that you would like more time to explore?
- What topics/issues have you not had a chance to explore in your degree so far?
- Which academic staff have you enjoyed studying courses with?
- Which academic staff have similar interests to you?
Talk to past Honours students

The ANU Colleges and individual areas hold information sessions for prospective Honours students and often invite past students along to share their experiences. These are very useful sessions as they can give you a much better idea of what is involved in doing Honours in your particular area. Take the time to meet with some past students and ask them about the Honours experience and what tips they have for new Honours students.

The ASLC has a number of podcasts of previous Honours students from a variety of disciplines sharing their experiences. You can listen to or download these from the ASLC website: academicskills.anu.edu.au, or browse through a variety of resources under Resources: Managing Transitions: Transitioning to Honours.

Look at past Honours projects

Past Honours theses and project reports are kept in your areas. You may be allowed to borrow them to read for a short time, or browse through them in a specific area in the College. Ask the College or School administrator for more information about protocols in your particular area.

When looking at past Honours work consider:

- the types of projects students have undertaken,
- the amount of work involved (research, writing, practical activities), and
- how they present their work (thesis, report, creative production, accompanying materials, a variety of these).

Think about scholarships

ANU offers a number of Honours scholarships. Information about the University-wide ANU Honours Scholarship can be found at:


In addition, each ANU College offers Honours scholarships specific to their area. Details for each College can be found at:

www.anu.edu.au/sas/scholarships/draft/ug_index1.php

Remember that applications for scholarships usually close in October for First Semester the following year, so you need to prepare early.
Choosing & working with a supervisor

The supervisor and the topic you choose are usually connected.

If you are doing an experimental lab or fieldwork-based topic, it is likely that you will be incorporated into an existing research project in your area, joining a team of research staff and students. Your research will focus on one aspect of the larger project, so you will need to consider which of the available research projects most interests you.

If your thesis is based on library research or surveys, you will typically have wider choices of topic and supervisor. In most cases, you can either decide what you want to undertake research into, then find out which member of staff is best suited to work with you on that topic, or alternatively, first select your preferred supervisor, then in consultation work out a suitable topic for research.

Choosing your supervisor

It is important to have a supervisor you find easy to work with, so it is wise to start talking to potential supervisors a semester in advance. Otherwise you may be allocated to a staff member who happens to have a relatively low supervisory load, rather than to the person you think would best supervise your work. If you are unsure of your options, check the area or School’s website and search for information on the academic staff and their research interests. It can be difficult (although not impossible) to change supervisors during Honours.
When choosing a supervisor you should consider a variety of aspects:

**Academic**

- What is their previous experience in dealing with Honours students, either as supervisor, or convenor/coordinator?
- How available are they going to be throughout your Honours studies? Check if the person will be away for part of the year.
- What is their style as a teacher?
- What is their expertise in the general field of study?
- Do you respect their work? Read some of their published work before deciding.

**Personal**

Is your potential supervisor someone you can:

- work with week-by-week?
- expect to provide useful feedback which you respect and trust?
- depend on for their availability and support?
- approach for guidance and direction in your research?
- show unfinished drafts to, if stuck?

Generally speaking, the primary responsibility of the supervisor is the oversight of your work, that is, to offer advice in the planning and execution of the various aspects of the Honours project, and to offer help in the solving of difficulties.

For the supervisor, a delicate balance exists between the different roles required over time as encourager, helpful critic, and tough critic (looking at your work through the eyes of the examiner). The particular way these aspects take shape on a day-to-day basis varies greatly within different academic areas. Some areas, for example, do not allow supervisors to read the entire draft thesis before submission, or to only read each section a certain number of times.

**Exercise:** Make a list of potential supervisors. You might also like to list their research areas and/or publications, and what you perceive to be their strengths and skills.
Negotiate how you will work together

The supervisory relationship is such a critical one that establishing the ground rules for a sound and effective relationship should be among your earlier priorities. Expectations will exist on both sides of the supervisory relationship, so it is important that you negotiate and clarify these early in your Honours year.

Right from the outset discuss:

➢ how often to meet (weekly? monthly? fortnightly?),
➢ the level of comment you would like on an early draft of a chapter (only on content and argument, or also on language and style?),
➢ whether you should revise each chapter as you go, or complete a draft of the whole thesis and then revise it as a whole,
➢ how long you should allow for the supervisor to return a chapter,
➢ whether your supervisor will read the final thesis as a whole, as well as draft chapters along the way, and
➢ whether your supervisor will assist with editing the language and format of the final version.

When things go wrong, or threaten to go wrong, keep your supervisor informed. Share your anxieties before you become overwhelmed by them. Don’t isolate yourself. Your supervisor is on your side.

Supervisors vary in the amount of time that they have available, and how much advice and guidance they are prepared to give. They have many other duties and may not be able to see you as often or as immediately as you might like. Solve smaller problems yourself, but see your supervisor as soon as important problems arise. Meanwhile, don’t forget the role of others in your support network, such as your Honours convenor/coordinator (sometimes they are one and the same person, sometimes not), in assisting the course of your studies. Find out the scope of their roles. If serious problems arise between you and your supervisor, this might be the person to turn to for advice.

Supervisors also have expectations. They want to see commitment and initiative on the part of their students. If you are in the Sciences, your supervisor may be investing scarce grant money on your project; there may be expectations of co-authorship of articles. In all cases, your supervisor is investing valuable time and effort in your project.

Be considerate. Remember:

➢ Notify your supervisor in plenty of time if you need to cancel an appointment.
➢ It may take some time to get feedback, so keep working on something else in the interim.
➢ Maintain communication. Supervisors like to hear from you regularly.
➢ Discuss your plan of work with your supervisor.
➢ Ask questions and clarify so you understand more fully.
➢ Number the pages of your draft for easier referencing.
➢ Encourage written feedback by using wide margins and double spacing.
➢ Respond to criticism constructively. Sometimes your supervisor will be critical of your work – remember that it is your work, not you, that they are being critical of.

There may be other matters to discuss, and not all will be apparent to you at the outset of your Honours studies. Across the span, moods and pressures of your Honours studies, your relationship with your supervisor should remain one of mutual respect and trust. Avoid communication breakdown at all costs. If serious problems of communication arise with your supervisor, seek guidance from your Honours convenor/coordinator sooner rather than later.
Choosing a topic

Consider these general criteria when choosing an Honours topic:

- word, time, space and cost limitations of your Honours project
- available supervision
- available resources such as equipment, sources, methodology, sites, experimental material
- your academic strengths (e.g., in handling theory, primary sources, etc)
- familiarity with the area
- intellectual and/or emotional appeal
- professional advancement

Time is a critical element in choosing a suitable topic. So before making your final decision, scope the project and avoid those which cannot realistically be completed, analysed and written up well within the given timeframe. Then allow a comfortable margin for the unexpected.

Some issues to consider:

- If your project requires fieldwork, what will it involve and how can you best fit it around coursework? Where do you need to go, when is the best time, how long will it take, how much will it cost, what facilities do you need?
- If your project has an interview component, you will need to plan ahead: who do you need to talk to, are they available to you, will you have to travel to talk to them, have you got ethics clearance?
- If your work is mainly with library and/or archival sources, think about the availability and accessibility of the material you will require. Do you need access to archives (which, where, will you be allowed access, how do you request this)? Is the material available now or only sometime in the future? Does the material require translation?
Changing your topic later may not be possible. If working as part of a team, for example, it simply may not be feasible. Much may depend on your particular area and supervisor, the timing of your proposed change, and other factors. So think carefully before committing yourself to a particular project. Do some background reading on the topic and see what resources are available.

Exercise: List a few potential topics. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these topics in terms of the issues discussed above?

Developing a research question

Eventually you will need to move from considering your Honours ‘topic’ to developing a ‘research question’. This involves intensive reading about the topic, considering what is already known, and what the gaps in knowledge about this issue are. While you will not be expected to develop a specific research question right away (doing this is part of the project journey) it is important to keep this in mind when choosing a topic and doing the preliminary reading around the topic. You want to choose something that gives you some scope to develop your own argument and contribution, not something that has been ‘done-to-death’.

Ethics clearance

If your research involves either humans or animals you will need to apply for ethics clearance before you can begin to conduct your research. This includes not only the more obvious areas of biological and psychological research, but also very common research practices such as conducting interviews, surveys and questionnaires. This is something you should discuss with your supervisor as early as possible.

The ANU Office of Research Integrity offers information and training to ANU staff and students regarding ethical research practices. For more information, or to apply for ethics clearance through the ANU Research Information Enterprise System (ARIES) portal: www.anu.edu.au/ro/ORI/Office/ORI_index.php
Exercise: Of the potential topics you listed above, do any of them require ethics clearance? What are some of the ethical issues that your research in these areas may raise?

Developing a research proposal

Some areas require their Honours students to produce a research proposal. It may be prior to enrolment, prior to beginning the research component of a degree that combines coursework and research, or soon after enrolment. Your research proposal may or may not form part of the formal assessment, but is an opportunity to get timely feedback on your planned approach.

Different areas have different requirements, but typically a research proposal includes:

> a brief outline of the topic,
> an indication of why this topic is important/interesting/topical for the discipline,
> what you propose to do (this might be a detailed methodology in the sciences or an indication of how information will be gathered (interviews, archives, fieldwork) in the humanities and social sciences), and
> a proposed timeline for the project.

Some areas may also ask for a bibliography of sources you have found so far, a more detailed literature review or a thesis plan, depending on the stage of your research.

Even if your area does not require you to produce a formal research proposal, preparing a draft proposal covering these major aspects of your project is an excellent way to get started, and a valuable document with which to start discussing a more detailed plan of work with your supervisor.

Planning the coursework

Most Honours programmes across ANU involve two major components: a research project and coursework. Both are vital parts of doing Honours and serve different and complementary purposes.

Within broad ANU guidelines, individual areas decide on the particular details (what courses, how and when undertaken, and how much assessment weighting applies) for these two parts. In some cases, your coursework precedes the thesis; in others, the opposite applies. In some areas your two components – coursework and thesis – run concurrently through the Honours year.

Whatever the case, make sure to keep all components of your Honours programme in perspective. Don’t let the research project overshadow the coursework in terms of time or commitment. In neglecting their coursework, students are missing out on a key element of their Honours studies, one intended to complement and broaden the perspective gained from their thesis work. In more practical terms, Honours students who stress thesis over coursework are often disappointed to find their final Honours mark lowered by their performance in coursework.

Coursework is usually the most familiar aspect of the Honours assessment, and may sometimes seem like ‘more of the same’: just another 3000–5000 word assignment. But beware. Coursework can sometimes carry as much – if not more – assessment weight than the thesis. So keep an eye on the proportion of your final assessment given to each component of
Honours (how much for coursework? how much for the thesis?), and keep the amount of time and effort you devote to each in a realistic balance.

Coursework requirements vary widely:

- some areas offer courses particularly designed for Honours students
- some run workshops/seminar series
- some give their students the choice of enrolling in on-going later-year undergraduate courses
- some have compulsory courses
- some have both compulsory and elective courses
- some offer other choices

Before selecting your coursework, acquaint yourself with basic information such as:

- are there compulsory courses?
- will there be electives?
- who is teaching this course?
- how much does it count towards my final Honours mark?
- what are its assessment components?
- how much theory, reading, and research does it involve?

Consider also:

- the particular timing of the coursework within the broad timeframe of your Honours studies: does it precede, follow or run concurrently with your Honours project?
- useful connections between this and other components of your Honours studies: do they complement each other in relevant ways?

This booklet will acquaint you with some of the skills of thesis writing but you might also like to brush-up on some of your essay writing skills for the kinds of longer, more conceptually complex essays you may be required to produce as part of your Honours coursework. Additionally students are often invited to develop their own questions for Honours essays. For more information on these skills see the ASLC website for Courses and Resources: academicskills.anu.edu.au

Getting to know the system

At the start of your Honours year, a priority is to familiarise yourself with basic housekeeping matters relating to your area. This is especially important if you are new to ANU. These might include:

- telephone, mail and email facilities
- stationery facilities
- word processing and other computing facilities
- Honours room facilities
- library borrowing rights
- access to photocopier, printer
- coffee and tea facilities
- regular working hours
- any special arrangements and timetable for access to laboratories, equipment, university vehicles, buildings and grounds.
It is also important to get to know ‘who’s who’ in your area. Important academic contacts will include your Honours supervisor, Honours convenor/coordinator and the Head of School. Other academic staff might include lecturers, and research, postdoctoral and visiting fellows working in areas relevant to your Honours project. Key support staff might include the College administrator, the librarian, the head technician and others. Devise your own directory of the names and necessary contact details of relevant staff, including telephone and email addresses.

**Exercise:** make a list of ‘who’s who’ and useful contacts for your Honours study.

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**Checklist for getting started on Honours:**

Have you:

- Chosen a supervisor?
- Negotiated a plan of work with your supervisor?
- Chosen a topic that is achievable within the parameters of Honours?
- Considered whether you will need to apply for ethics clearance?
- Developed a draft research proposal?
- Planned your coursework (which courses, when)?
- Familiarised yourself with the facilities your area offers Honours students?
- Made a directory of important contacts?
3. SKILLING UP FOR HONOURS

Time & project management

Honours can be a very demanding period in terms of time management. To manage Honours you will need to consider time and project management at a number of levels: the year or semester level, the weekly level and the daily level. You also need to consider the best places for you to work, as well as strategies for overcoming procrastination.

Year & semester plans

Depending on whether your Honours is a year-long or semester-long project you will need develop a map for the overall timeframe. This long-range plan should include all your assessment commitments for the semester (eg coursework assignment deadlines, internship reports), as well as key milestones in the research project.

One of the challenging things about the Honours research project is that often there is just one due date: the final one. But in order to meet this deadline you need to meet smaller project milestones and it’s up to you (in negotiation with your supervisor) to determine what and when these will be. The more you break the bigger project up into smaller pieces, the more manageable it will be, and the easier it is to keep yourself on track and avoid procrastination. The milestones will differ for each individual project, and occur in different orders, but some you may like to consider are:

- Writing a research proposal
- General reading on the topic
- Narrowing to a research question
- Gathering data/more detailed research
- Organising materials and equipment
- Conducting experiments
- Analysing/compiling data
- Writing a literature review
- Developing a thesis/report/exegesis plan
- Writing an introduction
- Writing individual sections (method, results, discussion, conclusion) or individual chapters
- Revising each section
- Editing and proofreading
- Printing, binding and submission

Working backwards from your due date work out a timeframe for each of these activities, and any others that relate to your specific project (you may have to revise them, but it is a useful starting point).

Then, along with the due dates for your coursework, map all of these key dates on to a large wall planner (ANU produces one with all the important university dates an holidays already marked). This allows you to see them all at a glance and plan ahead for busy periods when many things are due at once. You may find it useful to use different colours for different activities. Remember to always work backwards from your deadlines. Schedule to finish written tasks at least a week before they are due.
**Weekly schedules**

The weekly schedule should be a whole-of-life plan rather than just a study plan. Include your regular university commitments (lectures, tutorials, lab times, supervisor meetings), as well as any other commitments you may have (paid work, clubs, sport, fitness classes, language classes). Allow times for housekeeping, shopping, socialising and leisure. Everyone has unique commitments that may be influenced by family obligations and health issues. Your weekly schedule should reflect your particular life needs and circumstances, not what you wish they were.

1. Mark in all of your set contact times for uni.
2. Mark in anything else that you have to do at a particular time.
3. Assess where the gaps are in your schedule and decide on the best activity for that space.

To do number 3 effectively you need to have a list of all the things you need to fit into your week, and a good sense of all the individual activities that go into doing Honours. Remember that as different milestones become priorities, the type of work you are doing may change.
**Exercise:** List the activities you need time for in your weekly schedule.

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You will need to make a new weekly-schedule each week. Try not to make them more than a week in advance or they will begin to lose touch with your actual life and priorities.

When allocating activities to spaces in your weekly schedule, remember to:

- **Consider at what times you work and think best.** Plan your time so that you do the more difficult tasks when you are most alert (eg reading and note-taking), and do less demanding tasks when you are tired (eg compiling notes, making graphs). Take a short break every hour to refresh your mind and body.

- **Leave time for food and exercise.** Regular physical activity – a walk, a visit to the gym, whatever you enjoy – helps you clear ‘the cobwebs’ and to think and work better. Similarly, eating a good balanced breakfast, lunch and dinner – rather than skipping meals for lack of time – helps your body and mind work more efficiently. Honours is a marathon, not a sprint; make sure you are in it for the long haul.

- **Be realistic.** Manage your time not for the ideal you, but the real you. Consider travel and relaxation time. How long will certain activities (reading, finding sources, writing a section of text) actually take? Your first few weekly plans may be unrealistic. Don’t be disheartened – learn from them to make a more realistic schedule for the following week: it can take time to get the balance right. Also be realistic about your goals and your ability to meet them. Setting goals that are either unlikely or impossible for you to meet will undermine your confidence in your ability to manage your studies.

- **Allow room for the unexpected.** (Illness, sudden visitors, friends in need, homesickness). You are not programming a machine, but are setting out a realistic, as well as flexible, plan of work for the coming week. The best timetable is one that gives you sufficient room to maneuver when the unexpected happens. So don’t schedule every minute of every day.

- **Be as specific as possible.** Don’t just write ‘research’ or ‘write thesis’ because there are many different activities that make up these bigger tasks. You don’t want to waste time working out what to do once you sit down at your desk. It’s better to be specific; for example, ‘read 3 articles on X’, ‘write section on Y’.

- **Keep track of activities you don’t finish.** You will need to come back to them in your spare time.

- **Prioritise.** If coursework assignments are due, you may have to allocate more time to completing them than your research project for a while. Your schedule should not be the same every week – it should reflect the changing priorities of the year and your project.
Daily 'to-do' lists

A daily ‘to-do’ list outlines what you need to accomplish during the course of the day. Follow these steps:

1. Write a list of activities that you want or need to accomplish during the day.
2. Break down larger tasks into smaller ones.
3. Prioritise and list the most important tasks first.
4. Check to see if there are any activities that you can accomplish at the same time.

People often find they have a ‘wish-list’ of things to do – more things than can realistically be done in a day. Because it's impossible to achieve all of them in a day you can start to feel like you’re not getting anywhere. Keep a list of all the things you wish to do if you like, but this is not the purpose of the daily ‘to do’ list. The purpose is to keep track of the most important things you need to get done today. Consider limiting your list to only five items so you are forced to prioritise! Just like your weekly schedule, this should take a whole-of-life approach, so if the most important thing to do today is go food shopping so you can eat tomorrow, this goes at the top of the list.

Manage your place along with your time

Where you plan to do your work is as important as when and how.

Some discipline areas have dedicated Honours spaces. These (if available) or designated campus study spaces such as libraries, are the obvious choice. However some students prefer to work from home, or their residential rooms, and some have to work from home because of work and family commitments. Choosing a favourite study corner in your favourite library as your study space and aiming for it by 9am might prove a useful incentive to getting you into ‘study mode’ each weekday morning.

Match your study place with your study task. Libraries are great for looking for resources or reading, but may not be best for writing assignments as you need to carry all your resources with you, and you may not have good access to a computer.

Overcoming procrastination

Procrastination is the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished. This can lead to feelings of guilt, inadequacy, depression and self-doubt. Procrastination interferes with academic and personal success.

Why do students procrastinate?

- **Poor time management.** You may be uncertain of your priorities, goals and objectives. You may also be overwhelmed by the task. As a result, you keep putting off your academic assignments for a later date, or spending a great deal of time with your friends socialising, or worrying about essays and your thesis, rather than completing them.

- **Difficulty concentrating.** This is when you sit at your desk and find yourself daydreaming, staring into space, or doing things other than the task. Your environment may be distracting or poorly organised: you keep running back and forth for books, paper, pens, or you are surrounded by things that call for your attention, such as email.

- **Fear and anxiety.** You may be overwhelmed with the task and afraid of getting a bad mark. As a result, you spend more time worrying about things than completing the task.

- **Negative beliefs.** Thinking ‘I’m not a good writer’ or ‘I don’t know what the point of this is’ may stop you from getting work done.

- **Personal, family and relationship stress.** These can cause distraction, anxiety and low mood, which in turn can affect your ability to concentrate and motivation levels.

- **Finding the task boring.** Not all aspects of study are as engaging as others, so you put off the parts you don’t enjoy as much.

- **Unrealistic expectations and perfectionism.** You may believe that you MUST read everything ever written before you can begin to write. You may think that you haven’t done the best you possibly could do, so it’s not good enough to hand in.

How to overcome procrastination:

- Identify the cause of your procrastination: anxiety, difficulty concentrating, poor time management, indecisiveness, perfectionism, or lack of task clarity?

- Identify your own goals, strengths and weaknesses, values and set priorities. Motivate yourself to study: think about what you want to get out of the course or activity. Action – even if it is small – improves motivation.

- Ask questions to clarify tasks and assignment questions so you can get started. Break the task down into smaller, manageable parts.
Discuss your work with your supervisor, the ASLC, or a colleague. This can help clarify ‘the next step’.

Study in small blocks instead of long time periods. For example, you will accomplish more if you study/work in 60-minute blocks and take frequent 10-minute breaks in between, than if you study/work for 2–3 hours straight, with no breaks.

Reward yourself after you complete a task.

Keep a checklist and mark off tasks as you complete them.

Set realistic goals.

Modify your environment: eliminate or minimise distraction. Ensure adequate lighting. Have necessary equipment at hand. Don’t get too comfortable (e.g., reading on the bed). A desk and straight-backed chair is usually best. Take a few minutes to straighten your desk so it, and your mind, are uncluttered.

**Exercise:** Analyse your procrastination practices and behaviour. What situations lead you to procrastinate? Why do you procrastinate? Having analysed why you procrastinate, develop some strategies to help you overcome procrastination.

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Managing the reading

Reading strategically

Reading strategically means taking control of the reading you need to do, rather than letting it control you. Be realistic: you cannot read all day, for hours at a time. You need to break your reading up into manageable segments, intersperse reading with writing (eg note-taking and summarising), take breaks, and reflect on, interpret, and analyse what you have read.

When doing reading for your independent project, ask yourself:

> Why am I reading this? (what do I want to get out of it?)
> Does this article/chapter/report look like it will provide me with the information I need?
> Do I need to read all of it or only parts of it?
> How reliable is the source? (eg peer-reviewed, not out of date)
> Some key strategies for reading strategically include:

1. **Seek out background knowledge if you don't have it:**
   > Do some web-searching.
   > Discuss with your supervisor, lecturers, fellow students.
   > Consult specialist encyclopaedias or dictionaries.
   > Read general current texts that summarise research.
   > Identify and research key terms, concepts and theories of your specific topic.
2. Set purposes for reading:
   > Why are you reading this text?
   > What do you want to know?

3. Question yourself as you read to maintain focus and concentration:
   > Does the text make sense? (slow down and re-read the parts that you are unsure of and see if the meaning becomes clearer).
   > What is the author's argument?
   > What evidence is provided for the argument?
   > Write down any questions to which the text does not provide answers.

4. Annotate the text with your questions and comments:
   > Use a structured summary sheet to record critically and systematically as you read.
   > Position the texts in relation to each other.
   > Continually think about where you stand in relationship to what you are reading. What are the implications for your project?

To make your reading effective, focused and critical, consider the following steps:

Step 1
   > Quickly glance at the structure of the text. If it's a book or journal:
   > Examine the contents page. Do any of the chapter headings or article titles look relevant to your topic or issue?
   > Check the index at the back of the book for more specific information.
   > Turn to the relevant page(s) and take note of how the chapter/article is set out. Does it contain an abstract, introduction, conclusion, summary of the main findings? Is it divided into different sections with subheadings? What do the headings and subheadings tell you about the focus of the source? What questions does the author ask?

Step 2

Skim read the abstract, introduction, conclusion, subheadings, and the first sentence of every paragraph (ie the topic sentences) to gain an overview of the author's main ideas and arguments, method, theoretical approach, or case studies used. It will help you to decide what is relevant/irrelevant information. Focus on locating specific material to read more carefully.

Your major purpose in skimming is to find out whether the author is actually discussing matters relevant to your topic and to identify what will be truly useful for you to read intensively. Ask yourself: What **precisely** is the author talking about?

   > Then:
   > Read the introduction **intensively** to determine the author's purposes – precisely what he/she sets out to do and why. Perhaps the argument to be developed will be mentioned and/or the conclusions reached will be stated. It can also be useful to read the conclusion intensively at this stage.
   > Read quickly through the sub-division headings trying to work out what might be more or less relevant for your topic.
   > You can now begin to **skim read first and/or last sentences in the paragraphs**. These are **topic sentences** that carry the main ideas or generalisations that the author wants to develop. These main ideas are brought forward to support his/her position – the overall thesis being developed.
Step 3
Once you’ve identified what is relevant, read the text closely and more than once for the purposes of critically:

> analysing the logic of the author's argument, and
> assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the argument/evidence in relation to other readings.

These are useful strategies for managing the reading, but reading strategically goes hand-in-hand with good note-taking strategies.

Note-taking
Note-taking is closely linked with reading and helps you to: concentrate on what you’re reading; gather and evaluate information; form links between the different texts that you’ve read; draw conclusions; remember things; and summarise ideas and arguments.

How to take notes:

> Have a flexible system: use a note-book or computer file for each course/topic/chapter; develop a note-taking template; store notes on the computer or in Endnote, Zotero or NVivo.
> Record bibliographic information: author, date, title, place of publication, publisher, edition, page numbers.
> Leave space for comments and reactions to the text.
> If you copy a quotation, copy it exactly (words and punctuation) and record the page number.
> Clearly identify the author’s ideas, arguments, theories, and distinguish them from your own.

Note-taking templates
Consider using a template for your note-taking. You will need to tailor it to your needs by considering what types of information you need to record and what factors you want to be able to compare across different sources.
A sample note-taking template is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bibliographical details</th>
<th>Page numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence for argument</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct quotations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions arising from reading</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Organising notes by theme

Alternatively you might consider organising your notes by theme. This involves you having multiple note-taking places available at once (different pages of a notebook, multiple wordprocessing or spreadsheet documents).

Make a list of topics, areas or research questions, and set up a ‘page’ for each. As you read something you can take the relevant notes in the appropriate area (making sure to remember to record the bibliographic details).

This has the advantage of grouping your notes on specific topics together, making it easier when it comes to writing about that topic.

Annotation texts & note-taking

The process of annotating text as you read is preferrable to highlighting, which is a rather passive activity. Indeed, you end up losing focus and highlighting most of the text and so it is not a particularly effective strategy for comprehending and critically analysing text. To ‘annotate’ simply means making notes on the text. It is an active process as you ask questions, look for the answers to these questions and record your thoughts as you read. Annotating text has the benefit of helping you to stay focused, allowing you to monitor and improve your comprehension.

Techniques that you could employ to annotate text include:

> underlining or circling key terms, concepts, definitions, case studies, evidence used to support line of argument,
> indicating where important information can be found, including answers to your question by writing key words in the margin,
> putting a question mark next to something you don’t understand or find questionable,
> writing numbers in the margin to indicate steps in a process or argument,
> writing your responses and comments in the margin, and
> summarising key arguments in your own words at the end of each major section.

Information Management

To manage your Honours project successfully you also need to consider how to manage the large quantities of information you will be accessing. Having an organised note-taking system is part of this, but there are some other factors to consider:

> Your filing system. How will you organise and store both paper and electronic documents for easy retrieval and cross-referencing? You might choose to use data management software like Zotero or NVivo, but you will still need to consider how to integrate this with your paper filing.

> Your backup system. How will you back up your notes, reading material, data and writing? A good backup system should be off-site (meaning it is held at a different location to your main data: for example one copy at home and one at the office or a friend’s place), or online (you can email yourself copies of files or upload them using a system like Google docs).
Checklist for skilling up for Honours

Have you:

✔ Broken your Honours project up into smaller milestones and discussed these with your supervisor?
✔ Mapped your project milestones along with your coursework due dates onto your semester/yearly planner?
✔ Started making weekly plans to manage your time?
✔ Started making ‘To-Do’ lists to prioritise your tasks each day?
✔ Considered your reading strategies for the types of material you are working with?
✔ Thought about the best way to take notes for different tasks, and developed an organised system for your note-taking?
✔ Considered the best filing and backup systems for your data?
4. WRITING THE THESIS

The University has no ‘set’ guidelines on what a thesis must look like or how it is to be structured; these issues are dependent on your discipline. For example, an Honours thesis in Chemistry is very different from one in Engineering, which is quite different from a thesis in Law or Philosophy.

You should spend some time finding out what requirements and guidelines exist in your area, and examining past theses to get a sense of conventions, and how other students have dealt with specific issues (formatting, structure, language, referencing).

Broadly speaking, Honours theses can be divided into two main groups: theses in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and theses in the Sciences.

Please note: individual projects in the Creative Arts can be quite different to either of these main groups, so you should consult the guidelines in your area for more information on these.

Thesis writing in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences

Examiners agree that good Honours theses in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have a number of things in common. Good theses:

- have a clearly defined argument,
- are contextualised within the discipline,
- are filling a gap,
- have a clear flow between and within chapters,
- demonstrate wide and critical reading,
- provide evidence to support points, and
- have a catchy but clear title that indicates not only the topic, but also the approach to it/the argument.

Thesis introductions

Introductions tend to move from the general to the more specific. Typically you will need to provide a number of key points of information that orient the reader to your research project:

1. What is the topic? (you may have to start a bit broader then move in to specifics so the exact nature of the topic is contextualised)
2. Why is it interesting/topical/important/significant in your discipline?
3. What do we know about it? (literature review)
4. What don’t we know about it? (what are the gaps, absences or silences in the literature?)
5. How will your work seek to address this gap? (your research questions, an overview of your methodology)
6. What is your argument? (what will your thesis prove/demonstrate?)
7. How will your thesis proceed? (outline of chapters, sections, process)

Note: you don’t have to provide information in exactly this order – some topics will necessitate the merging or re-ordering of information, but the answers to these broad questions should be clear from reading your introduction. In addition, introductions may also need to introduce any assumptions and limitations that apply to your topic.
**Exercise:** See if you can write a sentence that answers each of the questions above for your project (remember that in your thesis each of these may take a few sentences or paragraphs to deal with fully, or be combined, but it is useful to get the idea clear in your mind by stating it succinctly).

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**Literature reviews**

Regardless of your topic you will need to demonstrate that you have critically engaged with what other writers /thinkers/ practitioners and theorists have to say about the issues you are investigating.

You will make reference to ‘the literature’ throughout your thesis, but often you will spend some time at the start of the thesis (in your introduction or in an early chapter) summarising the field of research in order to demonstrate what is currently known about the issues, and to identify key points of contention, gaps, absences or silences that you wish to engage with in your thesis.

The exact placement of a ‘literature review’ section differs according to your discipline. Sometimes it is embedded in your introduction (see questions 3 and 4 above), sometimes it is briefly introduced in your introduction and then dealt with at length in a ‘literature review chapter’, and at other times it is provided a little bit at a time, distributed throughout the thesis. You should talk to your supervisor and read some past theses to determine the approach taken by your discipline.

Regardless of the exact placement of the literature review material, there are a number of goals that need to be achieved:

1. Show the current state of research on your topic.
2. Identify where there is a gap/contention/silence/absence in this research to which your project will make a contribution.
3. Identify particular studies/methodologies/research upon which you are basing your own project.
A good literature review should not be merely a list of all the things you have read but a summary of the current state of research on the topic. It should not read like a textbook. You will need to critically engage with the research: what are its strengths and weaknesses, what are the different positions/debates, and where does your work fit within them? You may like to draw a mind-map, or diagram to keep track of the different groups of ideas, approaches and thinkers involved, and see where your work is located on the ‘map’.

**Thesis outlines**

In the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences students must usually decide on a structure that best suits the topic they are investigating and the argument they wish to advance.

Honours theses typically have an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. You may have more chapters with fewer words in each, but be careful not to spread your topic too thinly to really analyse it in depth. You will need to decide how to divide your thesis and what each chapter will cover.

As you progress it is useful to develop and maintain a thesis outline as a kind of roadmap for your writing. This will help you develop a logical sequence of ideas, help you see the bigger picture of the thesis as a whole and where everything fits within that picture, and keep you on track for meeting word limits. The more specific the outline, the more useful it is.
Sample thesis outline (for a 15,000 word thesis):

**Introduction (3,000 words)**

**Chapter 1 - Topic (3,500 words)**

- Heading 1 (1,500 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)
- Heading 2 (2,000 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)

**Chapter 2 - Topic (3,500 words)**

- Heading 1 (1,000 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)
- Heading 2 (1,000 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)
- Heading 3 (1,500 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)

**Chapter 3 - Topic (4,000 words)**

- Heading 1 (2,000 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)
- Heading 2 (2,000 words)
  - Para 1 – topic
  - Para 2 – topic
  - Para 3 – topic (and so on)

**Conclusion (1,000 words)**

Some topics just fall neatly into sections but it’s worth thinking about what you are trying to communicate. Your chapter structure should support your argument – which means it should be analytical rather than descriptive. Some structures assist with this (arranged thematically, based on series of questions). This doesn’t mean you can’t organise your material chronologically, but you do need to be conscious that this can lead to a descriptive rather than analytical thesis.
**Exercise:** Sketch out a rough thesis outline. It would be helpful to write a sentence for each chapter that starts: “The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate….”
Paragraphing

Paragraphs have a clear structure. They have:

1. a topic sentence that states your point,
2. developing sentences to explain and give evidence for your point, and
3. a concluding sentence that links to the next idea (or back to the argument).

In order to follow this 3-part structure, paragraphs are usually 100–200 words. This is a rough average only – but if your paragraph is significantly shorter or longer ask yourself how well you have structured it, and whether you have made only one point or branched off into other ideas.

Use transition and linking words in your paragraphs to give your writing flow: however, conversely, in contrast, additionally, another aspect…

Spend some time examining past theses and good writing in the field to determine how others use paragraphs to develop a line of reasoning, the vocabulary and tone they use, and the ways in which they incorporate evidence and other people’s ideas (the literature) into their own writing.

Structuring chapters: A checklist

✓ Does the introduction clearly state the aim/argument of the chapter and how this relates to the argument of the thesis as a whole?
✓ If subheadings are used, are they consistent in format, clear and specific?
✓ Are you writing in academic paragraphs (topic sentence, development and evidence, summary and link)?
✓ At the end of each ‘section’ or ‘chunk’ of information, is there a clear summary of the overall point being made, and a clear link to the next section?
✓ Does the conclusion to the chapter summarise the argument of the chapter, relate this to the overall thesis argument, and link to the next chapter?
✓ Are you within the word limit you established for the chapter?
✓ Is your writing clear, concise, academic in tone and grammatically correct?

Thesis writing in the Sciences

While there is no ‘standard’ type of Science thesis (it depends on your discipline), broadly speaking good Honours theses in the Sciences:

➤ have a clearly defined purpose /goal/aim/argument/hypothesis,
➤ are contextualised within the discipline,
➤ are filling a gap/testing a contention/addressing something that is currently unknown,
➤ clearly explain the method/methodology in such a way that others can follow the process exactly,
➤ use language that is appropriate to the discipline, but that is also simple, easy to understand and not full of unnecessary jargon,
➤ report results clearly, and
➤ discuss in detail the significance of the results, relating this back to the bigger picture of the issue under investigation.

Typically theses in the Sciences tend to be divided up into: an Introduction (sometimes containing a literature review, sometimes this is a separate section), a Methods section, a Results section, a Discussion section and a Conclusion.
Introductions
Introductions tend to move from the general to the more specific, establishing the context for your research and the specifics of what you are investigating in four broad moves:

1. What is the topic? (you may have to start a bit broader and move in to specifics so the exact nature of the topic is contextualised)

2. What is the specific issue within this topic that you are researching? (note you need to establish the contribution your research is making here – consider your literature review – what do we know, what don’t we know, where does your research fit?)

3. Why is this worth doing? What interest is it to others in your field? (note sometimes this can be part of move 1)

4. What is/are your aim(s)/hypotheses/argument (if this is relevant to your topic)?

Exercise: Write a sentence that answers each of the questions above for your project (remember that in your thesis each of these may take a few sentences or paragraphs to deal with fully, or be combined, but it is useful to get the idea clear in your mind by stating it succinctly).
Literature reviews

All of the information in the section on Literature Reviews for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences above also relates to Science theses so you should also read that section in detail.

The purpose of reviewing literature is the same:

1. To show the current state of research on your topic.
2. To identify where there is a gap/contention/absence in this research to which your project will make a contribution.
3. To identify particular studies/methodologies/research that you are basing your own project upon.

Often the literature review is distributed throughout your Introduction. For example: a review of the existing methods of solar panel production (background to the topic); a review of the problems of these methods (establishing the particular issue you are investigating and the importance of your research into a new method); a review of similar projects (establishing your research gap).

The methods (& materials) section

You need to be able to explain your methods and the equipment and materials you are using as clearly and succinctly as possible. You may also need to justify your choices of particular materials and processes, or explain why you are deviating from established practices. There may be an element of literature review in this section as you contextualise your method in relation to other studies.

Some things to think about when writing about method:

► Is your method a set of logical steps (did this, then this) or an approach to research (a methodology) that has a more theoretical dimension?

► Methods may need to be justified (did it this way, not that way because…)

► Is your method based on a particular procedure developed by other researchers? (explained by a literature review) Are you modifying it? Why?

► Could somebody replicate your experiment after reading your methods and materials section?

Looking at past Honours theses and journal articles in your field will help you decide how to best set out any lists of materials or sequential steps.

Exercise: Considering the questions above, write a few sentences outlining your method. If appropriate, also list the materials you will be using (it can help to think through the experiment/process step by step and say what you are doing and what you need in order to do it).
The results section

How you present your results is partially determined by conventions in your discipline, and partly dependant on the results you have for the research you are doing. Consider:

➢ How are results are usually presented in your discipline? (tables, graphs, images, diagrams, words). Look at past theses and journal articles.
➢ Results alone are not enough. Results need to be introduced, clarified, explained, and summarised.
➢ Labels and legends for tables, graphs etc are very important. Readers need to know at a glance exactly what they are looking at. There are sometimes conventions for writing these – find out.
➢ How are you going to deal with unexpected or conflicting results?

The discussion section & conclusion

Results are all well and good but they need to be interpreted to create meaning. This is where you really demonstrate the strength of your project. Don’t make the mistake of assuming your results speak for themselves. They don’t. The Discussion section should:

➢ match up with the aims/goals/argument you established in your introduction.
➢ bring together the major outcomes of your project – both on the small-project scale and on the real-world scale of your discipline.
➢ highlight the implications of your findings – what does this mean for your discipline, others working in this field, or industry?
➢ suggest future directions the work may follow.

Markers pay particular attention to this section. In some ways it is the inverse of your introduction. There you moved from the general to the specific – here you must move from the specific nature of your project back to the wider meanings/implications for your broader field/the real world.

In some disciplines the Discussion section and Conclusion are separate, in others this final section is combined. Find out what is typical in your area.

The thesis writing process

Some general thesis writing tips:

➢ Thesis writing should be a constant process. Start now – don’t wait until you have read everything or have your results to start writing.
➢ Try writing your Introduction, Literature Review and Methods sections as soon as possible. They will have to be revised as the project progresses, but the process of writing will help clarify your project, purpose, design and identify possible problems before they become critical.
➢ Read and revise sections frequently to keep them up-to-date
➢ Keep a current reference list that you update as you write – DO NOT leave this until the end. Similarly, as you write, reference the text correctly as you go to stop this becoming a big job or accidentally committing plagiarism through poor information management.
Editing & proofreading

Make sure you leave plenty of time to proofread and edit your thesis. Carelessness with spelling, grammar, consistency and formatting may raise questions about your attention to detail in other areas of your work, and leaves an unfavourable impression on markers.

In addition to editing to improve your work, and proofreading to find any errors, you should also double-check to make sure you are conforming to any Honours guidelines in your area. Make sure that you follow the style conventions appropriate to the discipline, and that your referencing follows exactly a recognised and appropriate system.
5. SUBMISSION & EXAMINATION

How is Honours examined?

Each area is responsible for designing and implementing its own assessment practices. Your final Honours mark may be an aggregate of marks for the thesis and assessment from coursework. What percentages attach to which aspects differs significantly between areas and you should find this out as early as possible by reading your course guides, checking the College websites, or talking to your Honours convenor.

Similarly, who marks the thesis component of Honours, and how many markers there are, also differs between areas. Discuss this with your supervisor so you can tailor your work to the appropriate audience. This is especially important if your work is interdisciplinary. It is helpful to consider what markers from different disciplines might be expected to know about the varying fields you are writing about.

The final rankings and grades for Honours are as follows: Honours Class 1 (80 per cent and above), 2A (70–79 per cent), 2B (60–69 per cent) and 3 (50–59 per cent).

Penalties for late submissions & criteria for extensions

Late submission of your thesis may result in a lower grade. An extension to a deadline may be granted due to circumstances beyond your control, but you should apply in writing to the Honours convenor as soon as a problem arises. In some cases, even if an extension is approved, submission after that revised date is penalised. It is usual that all extension requests be accompanied by a doctor's certificate or other appropriate documentary evidence. If a crisis strikes during your Honours studies, notify your supervisor immediately. In case of illness, keep medical certificates. You will need them to support your application for extensions to deadlines for submission. Note that a crisis may involve trauma – not necessarily an illness per se.

Every ANU student has the right to appeal an assessment. While there are few ANU-wide guidelines on the appeal process, some areas have their own guidelines as to a student's right to appeal and the appeal process. If you are considering an appeal, your supervisor should be able to advise you on the appropriate course of action. The Dean of Students is also available for you to consult on this matter.
6. SEEKING HELP

What’s available?

There is a vast range of resources for ANU students, details of which are accessible at the ‘Current Students’ homepage: www.anu.edu.au/students including information on:

➢ The Academic Skills and Learning Centre (ASLC)
➢ The Counselling Centre
➢ The Information Literacy Program (ILP)
➢ The ANU Library
➢ Campus life and facilities.

Make sure you are completely familiar with what is available to you, and make efficient and strategic use of the services.

In trouble? All too hard?

➢ Talk to someone: a friend, an Honours colleague, your supervisor, an Academic Skills and Learning Centre adviser, a counsellor at the Counselling Centre.

➢ No problem is too big or too small.

➢ Identifying the problem is a huge step forward in terms of solving it.