

Guidance for **Students**

Spiritualists' National Union



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Introduction

This booklet is designed to help students to improve their study skills whether you are tackling a course after leaving education for a long time or you are a more experienced student and getting along well but have certain areas that you would like to improve. The skills we develop through study have an incredible impact on how we view everyday life. Many skills are 'transferable' and this simply means that we can utilise skills in writing or research to help us in other areas of our lives such as the workplace or studying further education outside of the Spiritualist community. For those who are nervous of tackling an essay it is hoped that this booklet will give you the confidence, and for those who are more experienced the encouragement, to study further and gain qualifications with the Spiritualists' National Union.

The Spiritualists' National Union recognises that there is a need to encourage students to gain the best possible educational experience and in order to help to raise standards it is important that students understand what is required of them. In order to raise the standards the Education Committee has devised a tutor marking process, which in turn will help tutors and students.

The Union would like students to become analytical thinkers so that they can achieve a solid foundation of the Spiritualists' religion and philosophy. It is hoped that this booklet will assist those students who need support in tackling the required criteria on courses at basic, intermediate and advanced levels.

Getting Started

We all have our own reasons for taking on a course designed to extend our knowledge of Spiritualism. Some pursue courses because they wish to gain a qualification such as PAS (Platform Accreditation Scheme), CAAS (Chairing & Administration Accreditation Scheme), CSNU (Certificate of the Spiritualists' National Union), DSNU (Diploma of the Spiritualists' National Union), and OSNU [Officiant of the Spiritualists' National Union]. Others choose a course simply for enjoyment and to challenge their own perceptions of religious thought and experience. Whichever pathway you choose it is important that you get the best from your studies.

There will be some students who have studied extensively over a period of time and have the experience and confidence to tackle essay-writing. This will include a combination of research skills and understanding the basic format for successful essays and gaining higher grades. However, for those students who struggle to get the first paragraph off the ground or lack the confidence to explore and expand their own ideas on paper this booklet is designed for you. The Spiritualists' National Union wants students to 'think outside of the box' and not regurgitate the course notes or delve into plagiaristic practice, which will leave you either resubmitting your work or, at worst, gaining a plagiarism fail. Learning should be enjoyable and not become a chore but as with all things, it is how we utilise the skills we already have that will help us to overcome barriers to learning.

The Education Committee has devised a flexible format for tutors who mark students' essays. The following pages are structured so as to assist the students who require additional support and this includes students with disabilities. This booklet is not designed to degrade or to humiliate anyone: it is written purely to encourage and to show students that essay-writing and research is not as difficult as they imagine.

The First Steps

For those students who have negative experiences within the boundaries of education or just lack the confidence to take on board a course of study this can be nerve-racking the first steps to studying may not be easy. Some students enjoy studying and want to push the boundaries and have endless confidence; however, there are students who do not have this confidence and they wonder why they have chosen to study in the first place.

Look at the first step as a positive move. In order to help students we need to look at some important details such as presentation, essay-writing, study tips and planning an essay.

Important Details

It is important that your details are at the top of every page and this is for a good reason. It shows discipline and that you care about your presentation: it also helps the tutor to keep your work together. Number your pages: if you are computer-literate this is easy but for those who are not sure where to find this look at the top of your document page for INSERT then click on it. A Page numbers format box will appear and the rest is self-explanatory: it is entirely up to the student as to where they position the page number. You only need to write or type the question on the first page and leave a small space or lines so that it is clear.

For those students who choose to handwrite their essays this rule also applies. Please remember that your tutor has to read what you have written: therefore, make your writing legible. If you have a friend who can type your work up for you, don't forget to mention this to your tutor, as this will cover you when a request is made to confirm that the work is yours. For students who are dyslexic or have problems with dexterity it is important that you identify your problems when enrolling on the course. Redwoods will notify the course organiser who will ensure that your tutor is used to working with your particular disability. The Education Committee takes its responsibilities seriously and will help and support those who require additional support and this information is kept confidential. More information with regard to students with disabilities will be given further on.

If you have problems during your studies and need time out, discuss it with your tutor, as they will keep your record and they need to discuss it with the course organiser.

1. If problems arise with your tutor it would be beneficial if you contacted them first. Often problems can be sorted out in the initial stages.
2. If you are still not satisfied, then approach your course organiser. They will contact your tutor and endeavour to sort out the problem.
3. If the situation does not reach a satisfactory conclusion a student can write to the Education Committee Secretary. Contact details are available on the SNU website.

Study Tips

Some students have deep concerns about how to tackle an essay and wonder how to research and catalogue information properly. There will be those who are fearful of not being able to write coherently and putting the information together. After starting a course they feel that confidence is waning or the tutor/student relationship has not got off to a good start. Some students have not studied for any length of time and/or have complex family situations and those with disabilities may feel intimidated at the prospect of writing.

Courses are designed to encourage students to think and analyse Spiritualism in greater detail. The Spiritualists' National Union encourages, as part of its Mission Statement, the following: 'To promote the Religion and Religious Philosophy of Spiritualism as based upon the Seven Principles.' Therefore, the courses that students undertake will cover various aspects of the religious, philosophical and scientific aspects of Spiritualism.

Planning your Essay

It is beneficial that you plan your essay and this will help you to develop discipline and confidence. Find a comfortable spot in which to read and take notes. If possible, don't have the telephone near your chosen area, otherwise you will be interrupted and lose momentum. This is your domain and it would help if your family are made aware of the times when you will be studying and need peace and quiet. Some students like to have noise in the background to help them think whilst others prefer silence.

Time and task management work together and you need to balance one against the other. It is easy to become obsessed with time and worry about the amount of time that has been put in rather than what you have achieved. Most people can concentrate for roughly twenty minutes on a particular subject and we all have our own style of learning.

What is studying all about?

The purpose of study is to learn and this consists of three particular areas:-

1. Taking in new ideas and making sense of them and not just memorising
2. Thinking through concepts or ideas alongside your own, which will help you to understand the subject you are studying.
3. Being able to express your own ideas by talking or writing about them.

Many students assume that taking in new ideas actually means cramming in as much information as possible. The fun part is making sense of new ideas and opening our minds in order to challenge our own perceptions. We don't necessarily sit and think about a particular subject at a set time: our thinking can happen when we tackle the most mundane jobs. Giving our thoughts expression is usually done through two main avenues: speaking and writing. However, how we give expression through speech is entirely different from how we share our thoughts through writing.

Writing up your notes and planning your essay help you to expand upon your own ideas. There are various methods used and in order to help students we are using three of the most common methods.

Note taking

Taking notes is a personal experience and there is no hard and fast way, as each student is unique. Highlighting and/or underlining an article helps students to focus upon key words or issues. Writing comments in the margin also gives some indication that ideas have been activated. Some may feel uncomfortable about vandalising the course notes and consider this inappropriate but there are other methods of note-taking.

Using a card to summarise key pointers can be a useful tool.

Here is an example:-

Spiritualism [threefold premise]

- Science, philosophy and religion
- Science based upon communication from the spirit world
- Spiritualism accepts no dogma and only accepted facts and testimony
- Phenomena of Spiritualism [God's natural laws]
- Philosophy helps mankind to grasp spiritual identity/nature
- Concept of a Being from which all things are created
- Spiritualism rejects the heaven and hell concept
- Spiritualism rejects vicarious atonement and accepts Personal Responsibility
- Religion [proof of man's immortality]
- Part of the Divine essence and no personal devil
- The spirit world is able to communicate with those people still on earth plane
- Bringing comfort to those who are bereaved

By writing up key words this also helps to grasp the themes and their relationship to each other. It's about getting to grips or down to basics and working through your ideas so that a greater understanding is achieved.

Understanding comes when the student has prised out every bit of information and examined it under a microscope.

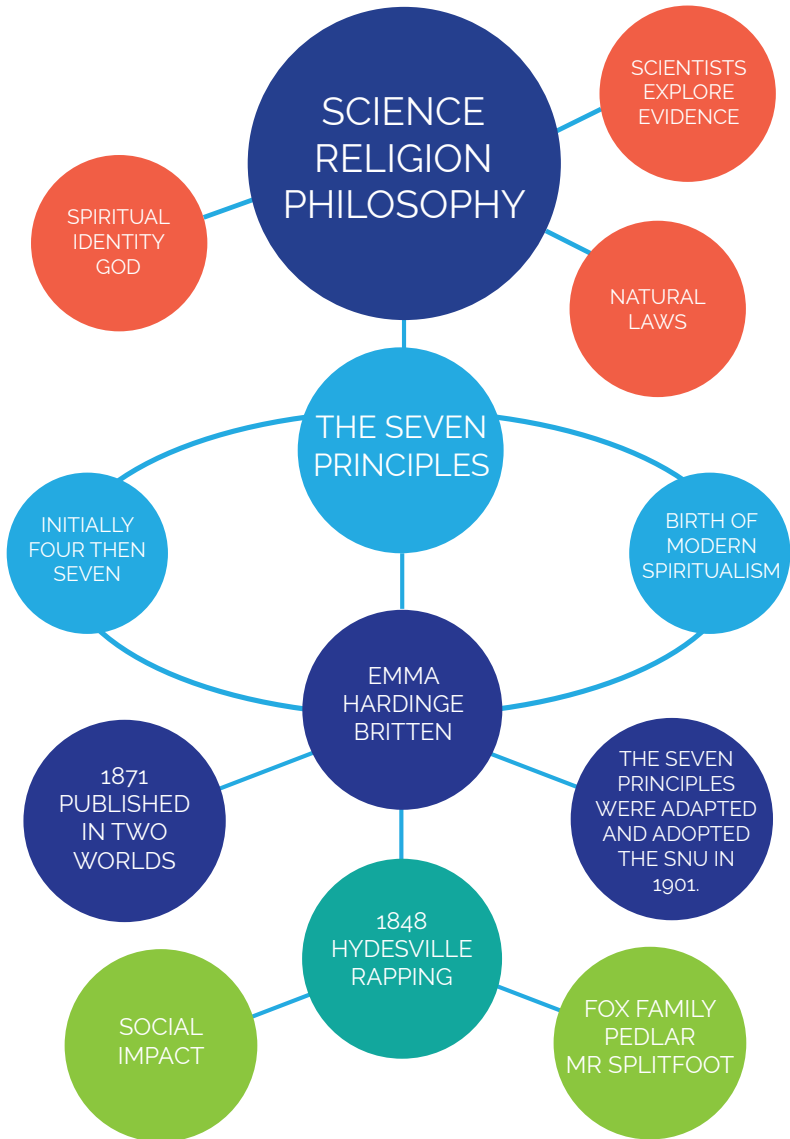
Using Diagrams

Some students may prefer something a little more in detail such as a mindmap or brain storming diagram. This requires extra time but it helps to clarify in more detail and by experimenting students can find the diagram that suits them best.

It may prove beneficial if colour is utilised: for example, a bold colour stipulates a theme that is important and a lighter colour represents branches from a particular area. This sort of diagram can be time-consuming; however, if this is practised on a regular basis it can prove very useful not just for gathering information for essays but it can help to prioritise thoughts for class or group work.

Warning: Reading in depth and taking detailed notes can damage your morale and give you a headache: therefore, use common sense. Studying is about enjoyment and gaining knowledge in small doses and not trying to cram so much information into your brain that you become overwhelmed.

Example Diagram



Citing and cataloguing information

With regard to citing and cataloguing information that has been taken from works other than the course notes, such as television programmes, websites or any literature, it is important that students are aware of the procedure and how they must show this in all essays. It is so easy to forget but if students follow these simple guidelines, then they will not fall into the trap of Plagiarism. In the modern world plagiarism is rife: educational establishments are catching on to this problem and the Spiritualists' National Union is keen to stamp this out.

There are several ways in which you can make your reader aware that you have taken quotations or arguments from other reading material than your course notes. We have a few examples for you: The following quotation is taken from 'Making of Man' by Sir Oliver Lodge: 'The conception of evolution necessarily involves the idea of Time, of Progress and in some sort of Effort' [p.42, 'Making of Man']

In your Bibliography you must put the full details as to where this citation came from, including the publisher and dates. For books dating after the 1970s there will be an ISBN code or International Standard Book Number. ISBN 0-226-64205-4

The Making of Man – Sir Oliver Lodge [Hodder & Stoughton] 1938

'Therefore I tried to develop in myself the passive-writing power, and after some weeks of daily, short, solitary séances, unintelligible strokes gave way to letters'. [Page 171, The Darkened Room]

The Bibliography shows it as:-

The Darkened Room
[Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England]
– Alex Owen [The University Of Chicago Press]
ISBN 0-226-64205-4

As the Bibliography can gain a student up to 10% of the marks it is important that all references and quotations taken from text other than the course notes must be catalogued and in alphabetical order. If websites are utilised, then include the date of research because in today's climate information changes very quickly and it would be useful if students put websites they have visited in full. This procedure will stop students falling into the trap of plagiarism and helps students to maintain good presentation skills.

Essay-Writing Skills

There are some basic rules to essay-writing that will help you and if you follow them carefully this will act as building-blocks or pieces of a jigsaw and you will see a clearer picture. Marking procedures will be in place and students are advised to read the following procedures in order to make sure that they understand what is expected of them.

Firstly, you have read the course notes and spent time digesting the information and kept notes or underlined words and paragraphs that will help you to remember. Everyone is different and some people read more quickly than others. Don't just read the course notes; look to other avenues that will help you to learn and expand your knowledge of Spiritualism. Some courses will give you a list of interesting literature that will help a student to research more and for those who are computer-literate there is a wealth of information on the internet. But, words of warning, some websites are not suitable and tend to give a negative impression of Spiritualism: therefore, research carefully and use common sense. The Spiritualists' National Union has its own website, which has up-to-date information that will help you. Go to your local library or talk to other Spiritualists, especially those who are experienced.

Most Spiritualist churches have a library and if you are a member, then go and search on the shelves; you will be amazed at the information stored there. You may be able to purchase Spiritualist literature in your church and they try to keep the cost low, or simply ask your tutor for advice.

Presentation

Presentation is important and often neglected by some students: therefore, students will be expected to put their details such as name and student number, along with the section details at the top of the page. This also applies to subsequent pages and each page must be numbered. This helps to keep hand written work or printed work in order. The student should also write the question out at the top of page one before the introduction. This is to ensure that both student and tutor are working with the same updated course notes. When you start a course the tutor requires you to answer the first question of the first Section only. You should not submit the whole of the first section to your tutor, as they have the right to refuse it. The reason why a tutor requires only the first question is so that they can get some indication as to how a student will fare and if they require support, then guidance can be given. Once the tutor has marked the first question a student can then submit the rest of the section.

Introduction

The initial introduction covers the first paragraph and the student must clearly introduce the subject or topic and aims of the essay. The first paragraph tells the reader what the student is discussing within the essay. Some students tend to write only a few lines and this is not acceptable, as students should be encouraged to introduce their essay properly. No proper introduction loses marks. The introduction constitutes 10% of the marks.

Body of the Essay

We come to the main body of your essay and it is important that you have researched thoroughly and that the content is relevant to the subject and question. Keep your writing objective and do not just give just one side of the argument. A tutor will look for originality and the student 'thinking outside of the box' and not just regurgitating the course notes. Importantly, tutors will be looking for plagiarism and this basically means that the student has copied from sources such as websites or books and taking the credit for the work. This is not acceptable behaviour and plagiarism can be seen as cheating. Some students will deliberately plagiarise for a number of reasons: it could be due to a lack of confidence or lack of understanding. Whatever the reason, a student must not simply regurgitate the course notes or appear to be taking information from a website and utilising it as their own work. The essay should show that the student has read the notes and gained an understanding to their meaning.

Plagiarism

If a tutor finds evidence of plagiarism, they will contact the student and request that the essay is rewritten and resubmitted. However, if the student fails to do this, the course organiser will be informed and the matter taken to the Education Committee. Proven plagiarism constitutes a FAIL.

Structure

Paragraphs must follow in order and not be scattered, and sentences should follow a common theme so that the tutor can get an understanding of the students thought process. The body of the essay should be interesting, creative and literally 'thinking outside of the box'. Again, students will lose marks if they have not attempted to structure the essay properly or become too reliant upon the course notes. Remember, your experiences are important and can add marks to your essay. The main body of the essay constitutes 60% and a tutor can give a further 15% if they feel that the essay is of exceptional standard.

Conclusion

The conclusion is a summary of the findings and the essay must come to a good conclusion: it is important that students do not attempt to bring in new ideas. The conclusion constitutes 5% of the mark.

Bibliography

Finally, the Bibliography should be written up at the end of the section and it is important that all information, whether through books, websites or television programmes, must be catalogued as explained earlier.

The Bibliography constitute 10% of the marks.

Policy

The Spiritualists' National Union has a policy covering abusive language, behaviour or any forms of bullying. If evidence is found of bullying or harassment, then the Education Committee will deal with the matter appropriately.

Finally

Enjoy your studies and we hope that students will gain a greater insight into Spiritualism and how it has developed over the years. Course organisers, students and tutors all play an invaluable role in the progression of Spiritualism.

Good luck with your studies!

Bibliography

A Transparent and Flexible Approach to Tutor Marking
[Spiritualists' National Union Education Committee]

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[Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England]

Alex Owen
[The University Of Chicago Press] ISBN 0-226-64205-4

The Good Study Guide [Open University]

Andrew Northedge ISBN 0 7492 0044 8

The Making of Man – Sir Oliver Lodge
[Hodder & Stoughton] 1938

Notes

If you require further reading to support your studies
please visit our online shop via: www.snu.org.uk
Here you can purchase a wide range of Spiritualist books,
publications, educational documents, and much more.



Find us and follow us!

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