

Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology. Vol 7, 2007, pp47-48

Book Review

Making the Grade: A guide to successful communication and study

by Ian Hay, Dianne Bochner and Carol Dungey (2006)

Oxford University Press

Paperback \$42.95

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Studying at university is different from studying at school, TAFE or in the workplace. University study involves exposure to a series of new situations, expectations, languages and rituals. "*Making the Grade: A guide to successful communication and study*" is a practical and easy to read guide for novice university students navigating the foreign culture of university study. The primary focus of the book is on the communication skills required for successful university study. Information about what those skills involve and how to apply them form the basis of each chapter. The chapters in the third edition of this book incorporate the new advances in the technological landscape to reflect the changing nature of study methods and communication at university in the past four years.

The content and sequence of the chapters mirror the order in which students are likely to experience them in their studies. The chapters are clearly structured with headings and subheadings, important information is listed in point form and each chapter highlights relevant tips within a box. Chapters 1 and 2 outline the communication skills of listening and reading in an academic context. Chapter 3 outlines the ins and outs of working in a team and the strategies to overcome difficulties that may be encountered in order to have a successful experience. Chapter 4 details the wealth of resources provided by university libraries and the information skills and critical skills to make the most of these resources. For example Chapter 4 has a section on evaluating the reliability of information that is located for use.

Chapters 5, 7, 8, and 12-16 detail the variety of ways in which students may be asked to communicate their ideas as well as ways in which to communicate those ideas clearly. The formats covered are essays, reports, annotated bibliographies, summaries, reviews, oral presentations, posters and exams. Chapter 12 and 13 outline the way in which graphic aids such as figures, tables and maps can help communicate a large amount of information succinctly and effectively. The chapters in this section are structured on a four part common framework: first there is an explanation of the specific communication format, followed by an overview of the key features taken into account by those who are marking it. The third part of the chapter focuses on "*how*" to engage the audience (the assessor) in this form of communication. Part four outlines the assessment criteria applied to each form of communication.

Chapters 6, 9, 10 and 11 deal with aspects of communication in the various formats. Chapter 6 examines ways of presenting an argument on a controversial topic or to prove/disprove a hypothesis in an essay. It is particularly useful to students who may not have experienced writing an essay that required critical thinking. The chapter defines what is meant by "argument" in academic and professional contexts, discusses different kinds of evidence, pitfalls in reasoning and methods of structuring an argumentative essay in a clear and accessible manner. The explicit detailing of each step would be invaluable to a novice university student. Chapter 9, 10 and 11 deal with the conventions of writing: appropriate language, sentence structure, punctuation and acknowledging of sources in academic writing.

“Making the Grade: A guide to successful communication and study” would be a valuable resource for novice university students as they progress through their course because it would help them understand the new culture that they now find themselves in. The book makes explicit the traditions and rituals of university study, particularly the expectations of lecturers who set assignments, as well as the conventions and approaches required for various learning tasks.

The guidelines in the book are based on the combined experience of the authors as well as the contributions made by the students that they have taught. It is therefore an authentic guide. The book is equally useful for academic staff. The authors have “*road-tested*” the guide with their colleagues who found it useful in answering the myriad of questions asked by students when completing assessment tasks. *“Making the Grade: A guide to successful communication and study”* provides a comprehensive coverage of academic skills required for successful university study and would be a prime candidate for inclusion in the reading list of course outlines.