

Study strategies to help you learn the language and concepts of your discipline



Academic Skills Quick Guide

An important part of practising academic integrity is being able to engage with the **concepts** and **theories** of your discipline. And it also **demonstrates your understanding to your marker**. This guide explains two study strategies for learning the concepts and theories of your field: glossary of terms and concept journals.

Use this guide alongside the Quick Guide '[Defining and using concepts in your assignments](#)'.

Why is it important to learn and use unit concepts?

Your units don't just teach you skills and information. They teach you to **understand** events, problems, contexts, issues, topics or problems in your field of study, and **respond** in informed and innovative ways.

1. Units teach you concepts (abstract ideas) that are part of theoretical approaches to help you **understand** and **respond** to phenomena. This means learning and using unit concepts is essential to study success.
2. Learning and knowing how to use unit concepts is part of learning **how to think in new ways**, relevant to your future professional role, such as teacher, engineer, journalist and so on.

Keeping a glossary of terms

A glossary of terms is often kept by students studying in the Sciences. It grows over the study session and contains:

- referenced definitions of unit concepts
- explanations of concepts in your own words
- diagrams and/or tables to condense information.

The idea is to keep the glossary of terms in a digital file (e.g. Word document) so that you can keep adding to the list of concepts each week, and easily copy and paste from the file into your draft assignments.

Keeping a concept journal

Usually, students from the School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Law and Justice, and Ginibi keep concept journals rather than a glossary of terms. Often a digital document (e.g. Word, or Microsoft Word file), a concept journal is a place to **'think by writing'**. The idea is maintain a concept journal for each unit as part of your weekly study routine of reading and note making.

Create your concept journal at the start of each study session for each unit you are studying. Every time you come across a new concept or principle make an entry in the journal.

Each entry into the concept journal needs to include:

- a heading in bold using the concept or principle
- a referenced definition from a disciplinary expert (likely a direct quote)
- an explanation of the quote in your own words (notes will do)
- an example (e.g. use the concept to explain a concrete example you are familiar with)
- your response (e.g. your questions, comments, and/or judgements).

The benefits of keeping a glossary of terms or concept journal

As study strategies, glossaries of terms and concept journals are ways to **use writing to create a space to think and engage** deeply with the ideas, arguments and theories you are being taught in your unit. Both of these strategies can help you become 'fluent' in the disciplinary language taught in your course, and demonstrate your understanding in assignments and exams.

1. Focuses your study efforts and drives deep learning

It is easy to become overwhelmed by new ideas and information at university. Making entries as part of note making each week will help you **focus on the key ideas**.

Treat each entry as **thinking time** where you get to really think through what concepts mean. If you are keeping a concept journal, each entry is a chance to think critically about the concepts you are being taught by recording your questions, judgements and comments.

2. Assists preparation for exams and writing assignments

Most assignments and exams at university involve defining and using concepts or principles taught in the unit. Students in the Sciences use their glossary of terms as a key revision tool when preparing for exams and quizzes. Students keeping a concept journal usually copy and paste concept definitions into their draft assignments.

3. Helps you to use sources more effectively in your writing

Keeping a glossary of terms or concept journal will help you understand unit concepts better. As a result of using 'writing to think' it will be easier to **demonstrate your understanding** in assignments.

Concept definitions are an important way to include sources in your writing, and an easy way to earn marks. It is important to **use disciplinary experts to define concepts** (abstract ideas) used in assignments and exams. Unit materials are the first place to look when defining specialist terms of concepts. Never use English Dictionaries or generic online dictionaries. The **same word** will have a **different meaning** when used in your area of study.