

# **Strategic Support of INFORMATION PROCESSING AND ORGANISATION**

# Information processing and organisation

- At a fundamental level, effective information processing and efficient organisation of what we perceive and experience is crucial for our survival - telling a threat from a benefit, monitoring to keep ourselves safe etc. involve the swift and accurate categorisation of the things that we experience.
- It is useful to consider study skills and academic learning as a particularly evolved form of information processing and organisation, where the types of filtering of information and the types of organisation feed into specialised tasks (drawing key information from text, organising ideas for an essay, revising key information as part of an examination process etc.).

# Learners with literacy-related difficulties...

- .... often struggle with filtering information – think why this is... think about the way attention is split between holding ‘the message’ (the essential topic of a piece of text) in memory, whilst reading the words on the page and retaining them as important to the message, or discarding them... without this control of attention/memory effective study/revision notes cannot be made.
- .... can still face challenges even if effective notes are made: how are those notes further sorted and ordered? Think how like a jigsaw puzzle this is, but the overall picture is lacking. Usually a response to a report or an essay evolves as the data is sorted through – it is a complex and dynamic process.

# Filtering and re-organising information

- Both the effective filtering of information (selecting key information, being aware of secondary information and dropping irrelevant information) and the effective organisation of information into pre-set structures (essays, blogs, reports, presentations etc.) are essential to effective study skills and some workplace tasks too.
- Many learners face difficulties in achieving the effective extraction of information from reading matter and educational experiences.
- A key part of our role in study-skills support is to strategically support the learner to effectively filter information and then bring order to the facts retained.
- The learner must (through structured support) develop his/her own self-monitoring habits.

# Extracting key facts

Supporting learners with literacy-related difficulties to become adept at extracting key information from spoken input and written text is essential. Aside from general note-taking skills practice, consider providing practice in listening/reading for specific categories of information or to extract key information. It may be easier to do this with simpler material (rather than course materials, initially):

Example 1: *Listen for words that tell the position of something.*

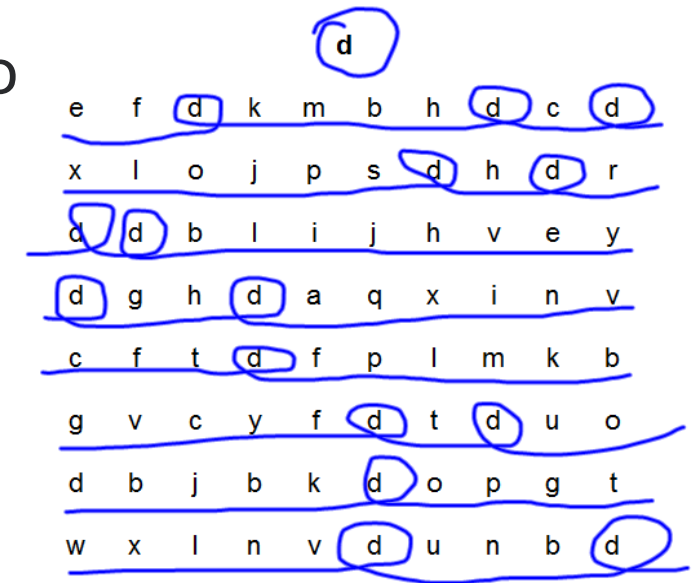
Dad said that he had put his shoes under the table. I looked and could not find them. Later on in the day, I found them on top of the fridge.

Example 2: *Find two key facts in the following:*

Funghi are a very varied life-form. In the United Kingdom many species fruit during the Autumn months: September, October and November. If you are expert you can go and pick them. If you are not sure, then it's best not to pick them as some species are poisonous. In fact, some species of mushroom can kill you if you eat them in sufficient quantity.

# Extracting key facts

- Work on word class and the importance of 'not' can also help focus on key information within text.
- Work on skimming and scanning skills ...
- Think how often this involves categorisation skills...
- Tracking activities can also be used to help reading at speed and searching within text. The simplest of examples on screen shows a single letter to be tracked in lines of single letters. But the target (shown as **d** in the example) can be a key word, a category (e.g. enzymes, verbs) or the key point searched for in a paragraph of text. 'Synonyms' and 'words associated with e.g. 'erosion', would be other examples of profitable search and categorisation tasks that can be linked to both vocabulary enrichment and terminology reinforcement.



# Integrating information to form a new whole

- Adult learners with literacy-related difficulties often need support in organising information into coherent structures, ready for essay or report writing, revision, etc. The three most common options are (each have their pros and cons, and it is often a matter of personal preference which work best):
  - Mind/concept maps
  - Linear notes
  - Tables/flow-charts/diagrams/Venn diagrams
- Some learners can also benefit from having key facts on post-it notes/cards so that the facts can be grouped and moved around – to allow different sequences and combinations to be tried out – this can work as an initial stage of sorting before transferring the sorted material to mindmaps etc. Think how it allows facts to be physically sorted, rather than held in memory and ‘juggled’ in the head....
- It’s worth reflecting whether a learner requires more support in extracting facts or in integrating them – both clearly feed into the quality of the final product.