



## Middle School Guidance Officer

### How to Use a School Closure or Disruption to Learning to Surge Ahead Academically

The probability of school closures to slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) is a major challenge for senior secondary students. It is tempting to view this as an extended holiday with time for crashing out on the couch, watching squillions of episodes of Games of Thrones (again), spending endless hours messaging friends and consuming as many great snacks as you can get your hands on. Of course while all of this, your parents are most likely going crazy but you have the perfect excuse- you didn't ask for the school year to be disrupted. Now I don't wish to throw a dampener on your party plans but if you decide to veg out and do no work, you might regret it later. At the risk of being a major spoilsport, here are a few ideas to consider.

#### Develop and keep to a system

Goals are good but systems are better. Decide on your study program system for the next few weeks and stick to it. Consider when you learn and think best and don't fritter those hours away. If you don't develop a system you are relying on waking up in the morning and saying to yourself, "Great, I can't wait to get some study done today!" I don't know you but I wouldn't like to place a bet on that happening very often. Developing a system that works for you also sets you up for being a self-reliant learner after you have left school.

#### This is a chance to catch up not drop back

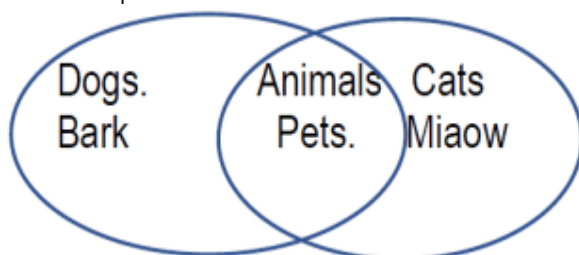
The first part of the year has been busy with ideas and papers flying in all directions. Use this time firstly to get some order into your life. Make sure your notes are coded and in the correct folders.

#### Elaborate what you've already got

Once you have got your stuff together and everything is in the right place, you can start to plan to surge. List all of the topics that have already been covered this year. For each topic develop a concept map that links main related ideas and outlines their relationships. Developing a visual outline of a topic area deepens your understanding, improves your memory and improves your marks. That's a win-win-win situation for you.

#### Why Venn Diagrams win hands down

Take the key concepts from each topic covered so far this year and draw at least two overlapping circles describing how the two ideas are related. In the overlap area write some points about the similarities between the ideas. In the separate circles write some differences. For example:



Research shows that identifying how ideas are similar and also how they differ powerfully increases results.



### **Build your Learning Strengths**

Analyse your learning strengths at [www.mylearningstrengths.com](http://www.mylearningstrengths.com) and use the information to build on what you are already good at. Obtain a copy of the full Learning Strengths report to learn how to use your strengths to develop in other areas. By using your brain correctly you can get better outcomes.

### **Extend your thinking**

Ask teachers to provide you with a list of forthcoming topics. Read related texts. Research future topics. Use Google Scholar to find related articles. If there are concepts that seem difficult to understand search for students explaining these ideas for the benefit of other students. Email or phone your teachers. They will have resources that can help you.

### **Conversations deepen ideas**

Universities usually conduct tutorials where Ideas are discussed and considered with other students. Many schools will be offering on-line versions of these. Become involved in these discussions and be prepared to test out your thoughts and ideas. Being a listener to other people's discussion is never as powerful as being involved. Learning is not a spectator sport.

### **Test Yourself**

Plan to test yourself about your level of knowledge, once a week. Develop questions on cards with an answer or description on the other side. Shuffle cards and answer them out loud. Place those that you answer clearly, to the right of you and those that you don't answer well or don't know on you left side. Those that you can't answer clearly require more learning. Over time, aim to get them all correct. Self-testing increases memory by 50%.

### **Decide not to turn into a Learning Zombie**

You've seen them – sleep deprived, screen obsessed, brains clouded by sugars, fats and carbs bouncing between energy drinks and exhaustion. Keep yourself learning and life ready by looking after yourself.

- Sleep is when your learning and memories are consolidated. It also boosts your immune system. Don't miss out on this.
- Your brain uses at least 20% of your energy so give it good 'fuels' to run on. Eat a healthy breakfast to get yourself ready for learning.
- Sip water regularly. Not only does it hydrate your brain and body, it also lowers stress.
- Even if you are house-bound give yourself a good physical exercise regime a few times a week.
- Keep in touch. If you are isolated from your friends, it is easy to fantasise that they are having a wonderful time. Sometimes you can ever start thinking they have forgotten about you. Even if you are not the most confident person, reach out to others. Invite them to have conversations with you. Share ideas or jokes.
- This won't last forever. The world has had viruses in the past and will have some more in the future. We all need to be more careful to regularly wash our hands and keep our hygiene and health levels up. While I don't want you to take unnecessary risks, the chances that you or someone in your family becomes seriously sick is very low.
- We'll be back to more usual times soon.
- Good sources to further your learning include: YouTube clips, TED talks, podcasts, iTunes U, and Khan academy explaining concepts.

Author: Andrew Fuller is a clinical psychologist and author.