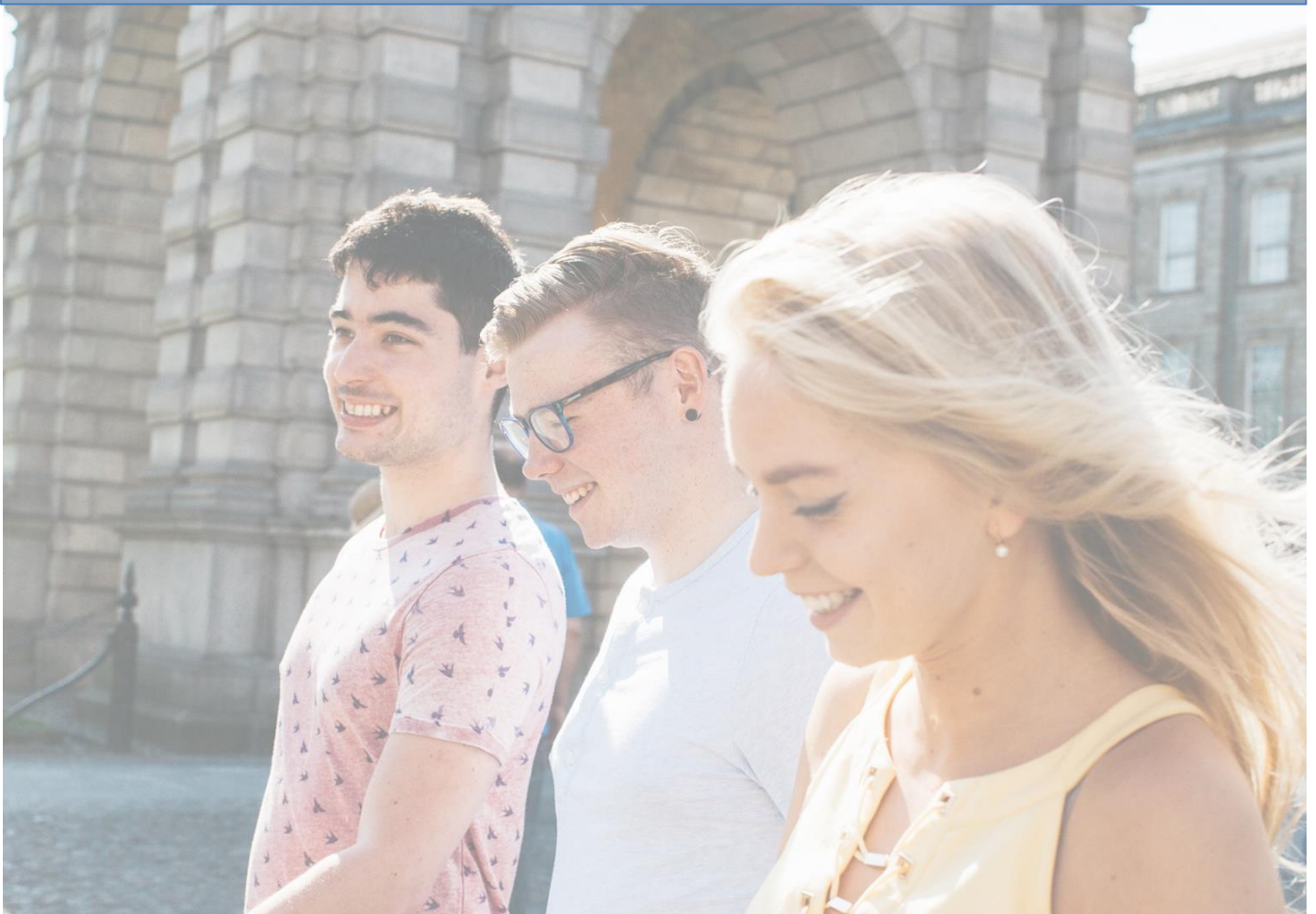**Trinity College Dublin**
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Academic Practice, Trinity Teaching & Learning

Hybrid Learning & Digital Assessment:
A Handbook for Students (by Students)

Ben Ryan

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www.tcd.ie/capsl

Purpose of this handbook:

This handbook has been designed to support students in getting to grips with college in an online/hybrid environment. The handbook is split into two sections:

Section 1: Hybrid Learning at Trinity.
Section 2: Digital & Open-book Assessment.

At Trinity, we use the term "Digital Assessment" to mean **assessment approaches enabled by digital technologies**. So, while you might think that digital assessment refers to assessments which are completed online, digital assessment is much broader than this.

Students may find Section 1 most useful **near the start of an academic year**, as it deals with establishing a routine and the key skills needed for learning in a hybrid environment. Students may wish to consult Section 2 when **approaching an assessment period or assignment deadline**.

The principles and guidance outlined in this document are for guidance alone and are not exhaustive. Students should use this resource in conjunction with the handbooks/materials provided by their School/Department.

*Note: this document is intended as guidance only. It is not a statement of formal University policy and is not intended to be prescriptive.

Acknowledgements:

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This publication is one of a series of handbooks for students.

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Section 1: Hybrid learning at Trinity—what you need to know

Hybrid learning is when students have a **mix of online and 'in-person' sessions** as part of their learning experience. The mix of online and in-person sessions can vary depending on programme requirements. This section has been designed to support students in adapting to a hybrid learning environment.

If you are looking for information on digital assessments, please see Section 2.

What to expect from hybrid learning at Trinity

Things to look forward to

Increased level of independence:	Learning online requires you to stay on top of your work and be able to find the information you need (attachments on Blackboard, journal articles etc.). While this can be daunting, online learning can be an amazing opportunity to learn independently and take control of your learning!
Meeting new people:	Randomly being assigned to groups allows you to chat with new people, hear new perspectives and get to know those on your course better!
Group discussions:	Hybrid learning gives you the opportunity to engage with other students through breakrooms and group discussions.

Things to watch out for

Technical glitches:	You are bound to face some technical difficulties when learning online. Be patient, everyone is still adjusting to this new form of teaching & learning. If you face difficulties: - Check everything is plugged in. - Check your input and output settings. - Restart the application & check for any updates.
Lack of Motivation:	It can sometimes be quite difficult to remain motivated when studying online. If you find yourself distracted or disinterested in studying, try some of the following tips: - Take a 5/10 minute break to clear your head and then come back to the work you are doing. - Work on different modules or assignments to keep things interesting and engaging. Spending hours on one module can negatively impact your level of motivation. - Try having a group call/study session to help focus your attention on the work at hand. When working in groups you can try to motivate each other.

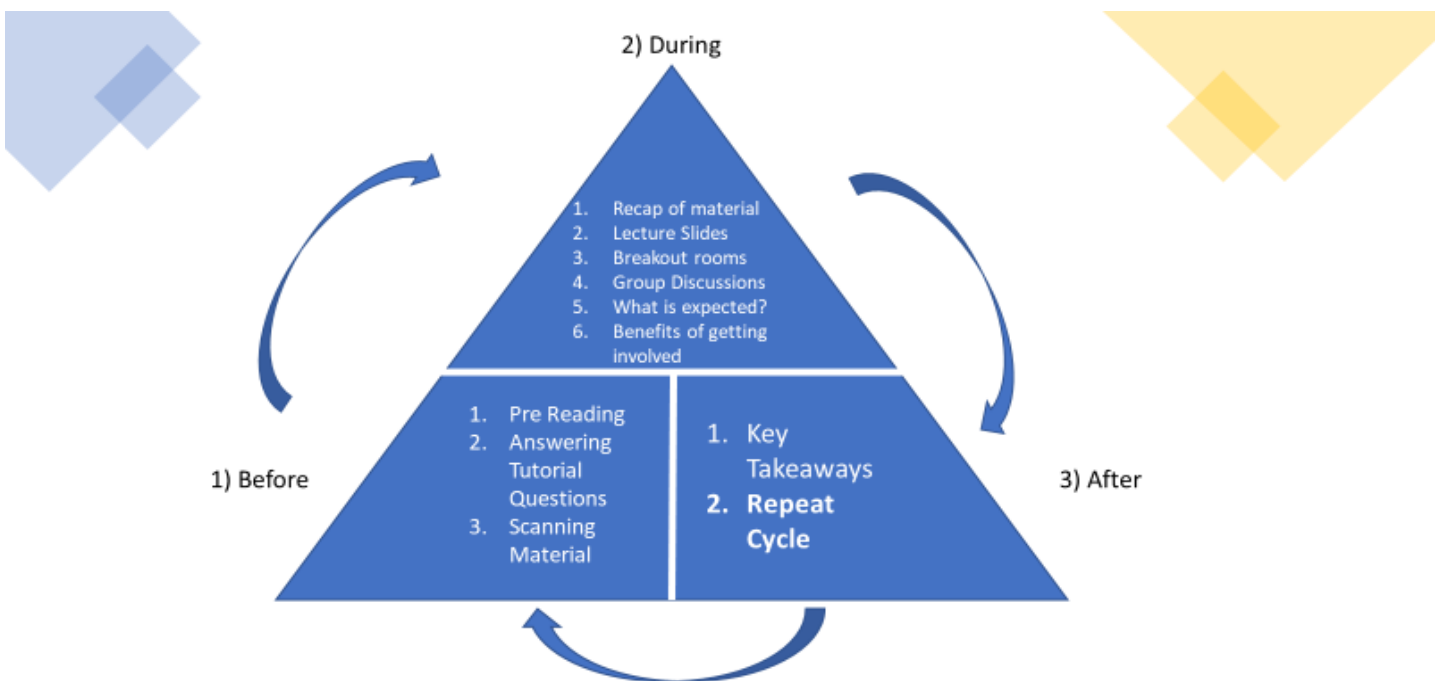| Disorganisation:	It can be challenging to find a system that works for you and remain organised when learning online. Try to establish a study routine that is manageable and realistic. Here are some tips to help: • Have a system for saving and filing your documents. Place them in folders with accurate and detailed names so you don't lose them! • Use an online calendar to mark out your week, including online sessions, study periods and social events. Be specific about the work you want to get done in a certain study period.

Getting involved in online sessions

Things EVERYONE can do to become more involved:	Join an online session early or stay a few minutes after to chat with other students or the session leader.	If you unsure about something, asking a question in a live session is often the quickest way to get an answer. Here the session leader can explain the answer and ensure you fully understand. If your module has a discussion forum, these are also great ways to get answers to questions or queries.	Leave your phone in another room or switch it off during online sessions.
Using your mic:	The quality of answers you can give are much higher when you use your mic. You can elaborate on a point and have a much more in-depth discussion when speaking rather than typing.	Try using the 'raise hand' feature on Blackboard Collaborate if you are concerned about interrupting someone else. If you are somewhere you cannot speak out loud (e.g. the library), make this known by typing into the chat. This is especially important in a breakout room so other group members can read your written contributions.	Saying hello and goodbye instead of typing it really 'humanises' the online experience and makes us feel like we are interacting with people, not just screens! If you are uncomfortable with speaking on mic, saying hello or goodbye can help you get used to speaking aloud, as you are one of many voices speaking at the same time.

Using your camera:	If you are comfortable doing so, switching on your camera is a great way to become more involved in an online session.	You are less likely to go on your phone or get distracted when you have your camera on.	Lecturers prefer to see faces of their students rather than teach to a blank screen—if you don't want to put your camera on, can you put up an 'avatar'/picture of yourself on the software?

Getting the most from online sessions

2) During

1. Recap of material
2. Lecture Slides
3. Breakout rooms
4. Group Discussions
5. What is expected?
6. Benefits of getting involved

1) Before

1. Pre Reading
2. Answering Tutorial Questions
3. Scanning Material

1. Key Takeaways
2. **Repeat Cycle**

3) After

It can be very difficult to know how best to prepare for online sessions, but it is important to remember the three key stages. For each lecture tutorial or lab, there will be things you must do before, things to bare in mind when the session is taking place and things to do once it is over. This process is repeated for each session in each of your modules. Try to develop a system for learning online that suits you. Find some hints & tips below about online sessions at Trinity.

Preparing for an online session

Preparation:
 	
(Also known as: 'pre-work', 'pre-reading', 'pre-task')
	1. There will likely be preparation to be done before each session. This usually involves reading a certain piece or attempting questions/exercises. Try your best to finish this work before the session takes place.
	2. Even if you have not done the work required, STILL GO TO THE SESSION. You will still benefit from attending, listening to others and contributing if you have a thought/comment.
	3. Take notes when doing pre-reading:
	   a. What are the key ideas in this reading?
	   b. Why are they important?
	   c. Are there any examples that support/refute these ideas?
	4. If you don't fully understand something, don't worry, the session will likely give more context to the readings/topic and hopefully answer any questions you have.
	5. If you still have a question, be sure to ask!

Tutorial Questions/Exercises:	1. Often tutorial time will be used to go through a question to show how it is done.
	2. Try to attempt the question before the tutorial. You won't get as much out of the session if you don't have an attempt of the work done to compare with the solution.
	3. If you didn't get time to do the question beforehand, don't panic:
	   a. Attempt the question after the tutorial & check your work.
	   b. If there is a recording of the tutorial it may be useful to re-watch it.

Scanning Material:	If there are any slides or notes uploaded before the session, it can be very useful to scan through these in advance. Start thinking about the topic being discussed. What do you know about the topic and what would you like to know more about?

During an online session

Online sessions (lectures & tutorials) will include some or all of the following:

Short recap of previous material:	• Session leaders might briefly recap the material from the previous session. • This is a great opportunity to ask questions if you are still unsure of anything.
Lecture Slides:	• Lecturers may talk through some premade slides. • These may be made available to students either before or just after the lecture.
Breakout Rooms:	• Students are split into smaller groups to discuss a question/topic. • If you haven't already got your camera on, consider turning it on here. These groups are much smaller and less formal than the whole group setting. • Introduce yourself to the other members of the group, try to get to know one another. • Take notes of what is being said as different perspectives & comments can be very useful for your learning.
Group discussions:	• Don't be afraid to contribute! Everyone's comments are equally welcome. • Even if you aren't sure about your answer, don't be afraid to try.
Watching Videos/Clips:	• It can be very easy to sit back and watch a video, but it is really important to take notes to retain the key message. • Session leaders have shown this clip for a reason, it is likely important to the topic being discussed. There may also be questions on the clip afterwards, so be prepared to discuss your views on what you have watched!
What is expected of you in lectures/ tutorials?	• Students are expected to come to a session prepared and willing to contribute. • This doesn't mean you need some amazing insights or comments, just to state your opinion and be willing to ask questions when you don't understand.
The benefits of getting involved:	• Online sessions are one of the best ways to develop your understanding of a certain topic or idea. • You have access to the seminar leader as well as other students to hear new ideas, ask questions and to develop your opinion. • You are also able to meet new people and get to know the other members of your module or course!

N.b. Have your pre-work available to you (e.g. your notes on a reading) in a format you can cross-check during and/or after the session!

After an online session

Key Takeaways:	• Write down 3/4 key points your learned in that session. • They could be things you thought of, something another person said, or questions you wish to explore further
Repeat the Cycle:	• Once you have finished an online session, it is time to repeat the process! • Look at what you must do to prepare for the next session.

Making the most of available tools

Here are some hints and tips about the tools you might be using while learning in a hybrid environment.

Blackboard Collaborate:	Double clicking on the screen when someone is sharing their screen will allow you to zoom in. Very useful if the text of the document is too small!	In the settings you can control notifications. Consider turning off notifications for when someone enters/leaves the room. These notifications are unnecessary and can often be quite distracting!	If you have been **assigned to a group within a Blackboard module** you should **see a new set of options** on the bottom of the left column. From here you can: 1. **Email** your group members. 2. **Share files** between members. 3. Create your **own Collaborate session.** This is a really great alternative to Zoom or Microsoft Teams as you don't require a premium account and it is easily accessible.
Microsoft Office 365:	Microsoft Word: 1. Use the **'Sort' button to order a list** alphabetically or numerically. 2. If you have a bibliography created, use the	PowerPoint: 1. The **'Design' feature** can save lots of time and effort when designing a presentation. 2. Input the text and images you need	For more info on using Office 365 follow this link: https://www.tcd.ie/itservices/students/software/

	'Sort' button and then 'text' to create a list from A-Z based on the first letter of each line. 3. If you have a list of years/dates, use the same feature but click 'number' or 'date'.	and then **select a pre-made design from the list given!**	
Google Calendar/ Other Calendar Apps:	Select a different colour for each type of event in your calendar. That could include a different colour for: • Each module you are studying. • Any work commitments. • Clubs and Society events. • Social calls.		

Section 2. Digital & open-book assessment

At Trinity, we use the term "Digital Assessment" to mean **assessment approaches enabled by digital technologies**. So, while you might think of digital assessments as those which are completed online, at Trinity we think of digital assessment as much broader than this.

Take, for example essays. Essays might be considered as non-digital, or a more traditional type of assessment. However, it is rare to research for, write and submit an essay without the use of digital technologies at some point in the process. (For example, many essay assessments are now distributed and collected within Blackboard. They are often written using word-processing software. And they are typically informed by research undertaken online!)

Most assessments at Trinity will have at least some digital element as part of the process, so it's important to be aware of the different types that you might encounter and how to approach each one. Here are some hints, tips and strategies to help you with digital assessment, written by students who have gone through the process of doing assessments in a digital context.

Download/Print this section of the guide and keep it close by when doing your assessments. Refer to it if you are ever unsure what to do next or who to ask for help with an assessment.

Getting started with digital assessments

While the move online has been quite challenging, don't forget you know much more than you think when it comes to digital assessment. One advantage that digital exams have is that you can have some notes beside you. Having the main points or topics beside you on a page can help give you a starting off point for your assignment!

Try to **stick to the routine you had when preparing for 'physical' exams** as much as possible.

The standard expected of you in a digital assessment is, for the most part, very similar to what was expected of you in in-person proctored/invigilated exams.

This table is likely to help you think through the types of assessment you'll encounter online:

Realtime online exams ('live' essays or exams)	These are very similar to the exams you have taken in the past.	You are still expected to write essays or answer questions using material from the module.	You will likely be unable to search for all the information you need during the exam, so prepare as if you were sitting the exam in person.
Offline assessments ('take home' essays, reports or questions)	These assessments are very similar to what you may have done throughout previous years.	What strategies can you apply from previous essays, reports, or	The main difference now is that these assessments may be over a period of days instead of weeks, so be sure to plan your time effectively!

		continuous assessments?	
Online MCQs	MCQs are quite different to those you may have sat in previous years.	While you may have your notes with you for online MCQs this doesn't necessarily make them any easier!	Lecturers may give more questions in less time to account for the MCQ being online, so prepare as you would for a traditional MCQ!

Sorting your study space

While everyone's study space is slightly different, there are some key things everyone needs to consider when preparing for online assessments. Look at the image below and see if there are any changes you can make to set up your study space before the assessment period begins.

Sorting your Study Space:

Make sure you have some water and a snack.

Keep you screen clear from anything not related to the assessment. Make sure to practice how to upload your assessment before the time starts, don't leave it untill the last minute!

In most cases, you will have to balance several exams and assessments. Try having a calendar/ list of key dates on a wall near your study space.

Consider making an A4 spider diagram for each main topic you have covered. The diagram should include key points, terms and quotes and should act as a memory aid to get you started!

A blank page for notes/ calculations is always useful to have beside you.

Put your phone away! If you need to use it during the assessment, consider installing apps which limit distractions (Offtime, Cold Turkey).

The 4 W's of open-book assessment for students

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The 4 W's of Open-Book Assessment for Students

WHEN IS THE ASSESSMENT?

- Does the exam take place over a window of time (24/48hrs)?
- Is the exam 'live'?
- When will the questions be released?
- When will you need to submit?

WHAT FORMAT IS THE ASSESSMENT?

- Is the exam an essay, report etc?
- What is the wordcount?
- Do you need to show any roughwork/ calculations? If so, how will you upload these?
- Are you clear about the referencing requirements?

WHO CAN I GO TO FOR HELP?

For questions on deadlines/exams etc (not content related):

- Always check the module handbook first.
- Check the VLE module. Look through the different categories, folders and announcements.
- If there is a module discussion forum check it for the information you need. Chances are someone has the same question! Ask for support if you can't find the information yourself.

For questions on content/topics in a module:

- Check the lecture material, including slides, recordings and notes. You may find a fresh pair of eyes can help answer your question/solve an issue.
- Friends/ classmates are great to ask for a refresher on a topic/ to show you have to carry out a calculation
- If you are completely stuck, ask your tutorial leader for support.

What to do while waiting for answers:

- Keep going with your own work while waiting for a response!
- If you cannot access a book from the library, use library services to look elsewhere online – is there an e-copy in e.g. JSTOR, PubMed, ScienceDirect?
- If you are confused by a topic, can you find tutorials, mini lectures or guide videos online?

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WHERE ARE THE RESOURCES I NEED FOR MY ASSESSMENT:

Readings, journal articles and lecture notes :
- Has my lecturer included a reading list for the module/ assignment?
- Can I access the readings online?
- Do I need to visit the library in person?

Notes I should make myself:
- How do I know what the key topics are and what the key information I need to include is? (See 'Identifying Key Information')
- What kind of resources should I make to prepare for this assessment? (See 'Preparing Notes for an Online Assessment')

What if I need physical books but can't get to the library?
- Try not to get too worried or concerned, this won't help and there is usually a very straightforward solution.
- Be proactive: look for a digital copy of materials.
- Ask the library for assistance.
- Use a book on a similar topic/from a similar author Look to see if there is any information from lecturer to help
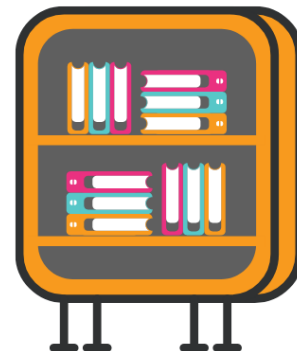
This table may help you think through how to use this information to prepare for your upcoming assessment:

When is the assessment? (Add details here)	
What is the format of the assessment? (Add details here)	
What sort of resources do I need and where are they? (Add details here)	
If I need help, who do I have to go to? (Add details here)	

Preparing for online assessments

There are some things that are mandatory for certain assessments. These are vital to include so be sure you know exactly what is expected in the assessment.

1. Am I expected/required to **include a set number of sources?** If so, how many?

2. Do I need to use real world examples?
    a. Can I prepare examples in advance?
    b. Do I have the time to research examples during the assessment period?
        i. Realtime Exams: you likely won't have time to do in-depth research on the question in real time, so think about some examples in advance.
        ii. Offline/Take-home Assessments: you will probably have more time to research question-specific examples.

3. Where do I get all this information?
    a. Check the assessment question.
    b. Are there any grading criteria/rubrics available for this assessment?
    c. Has the module leader said anything about the assessment in lectures/tutorials?

4. What must I do to **prepare my study space** for the assessment?
    a. Do I need strong WIFI or a quiet space for a set time at any stage while doing this assessment?
    b. Clear away any tabs on my computer not related to the assessment. This will save valuable time.
    c. Will I need a page/document for roughwork? Having a physical page beside you can save on screen space and won't distract you by having to switch between tabs.

There are also lots of things you can do to help you achieve your best in an assessment. Here are some things to consider before and during online assessments. Ask yourself:
- How do I **show I have applied my learning** in the module to this assessment?
- Does this assessment require me to **use examples** instead of 'just' theory alone?
- Will the assessment/ parts of the assignment have one right answer, or **will it require personal opinion/judgement?**

Identifying key information

How to identify the key topics of a module

Each module will cover several key topics or themes. Any assessment will examine one or more of these topics so it is important to identify them.

1. Each week/theme in the module is generally considered a major topic.
2. Check past paper questions for likely topics. The questions asked are usually on the most important topics of that module. You can access many past paper questions [here.](here)
3. When you receive the assessment question, highlight the key words that relate to one or more topics to identify the area of the module you need to focus on.

How to find the key information within a given topic

1. Headings in lecture slides often indicate the key points or ideas in a topic.
2. Make sure you can write down and explain the key terms and definitions in your own words.
3. There are very often key authors associated with a given topic - make sure you know their work and why it is important.
4. It is also beneficial to be aware of the critiques and alternative opinions from other authors.

Preparing notes for an online assessment

Are there any notes/resources I can create to help me during the assessment?

Any resources/notes you can create to act as a one-stop shop for all the key information you need are really helpful. This summary document doesn't need to have everything in it, but just enough to kickstart your memory and get you thinking. Here are some ideas for summary documents:

1. 1-page spider diagram of key ideas for each topic.
2. 1-page list of key authors.
3. Examples relating to lecture content.
4. List of common formulae.

Understanding formulas, calculations and equations

1. Divide up the formula into each part.
   a. Make sure you know what every symbol means.
   b. Make sure that you can explain each part of the formula in your own words.
2. Look at the overall explanation of the formula/equation (which is usually included in lecture slides).
   a. Can you identify what each word(s) of the explanation is referring to in the equation. Link the equation to the written description given.
3. Practice, practice, practice.
   a. Find or ask your session leader for sample questions and solutions! Practice with your friends/with a study group, think about how you can 'peer review' calculations – how can you test yourself in advance?

Digital assessment in a nutshell

Timing

Make sure you know when your assessment is released and when it is due!

Submitting assessments

- Practice submission of your assignment in advance of the deadline, don't leave it till the last minute to figure out the submission process.
- If you have any extra work to be submitted along with the assignment (calculations etc.) make sure you upload them as instructed (in the same document vs as a separate one, take a picture of your roughwork, etc.).

Working with friends and classmates

- Don't be afraid to ask for help and advice from fellow students in your module or course. They are likely feeling the same way.
- Try creating virtual study groups to discuss key points or ideas when preparing for an assignment. Send a message to the group chat/ email etc. Take the initiative to organise a group for yourself!
- Talk to your family/housemates about when you need them to be quiet or not be on the WIFI. Make sure you do this in advance.

MCQ preparation

Have a document/page open and number it with the amount of questions you are required to answer. Write notes/ rough work for each question beside the corresponding number. Often it is helpful to write 'a b c d e...' and rule out the wrong options as you think about the question, leaving only one left. It also helps to ensure you don't click the wrong option when answering online.

Where to go for more resources

- Try Trinity's Student Gateway to Digital Assessment: it contains lots of resources, student perspectives and useful links on a huge range of digital assessment types.
- There are many great resources available from SLD about assignments, note taking, critical thinking and essay advice.
- Have you looked at the Library's 'HITS' programme?