



# STUDY SKILLS FOR FOUNDATION DEGREES

THIRD EDITION

DOROTHY BEDFORD AND ELIZABETH WILSON

A **David Fulton** Book

# Study Skills for *Foundation Degrees*

*Study Skills for Foundation Degrees* offers a step-by-step guide to the skills needed to successfully complete a Foundation Degree. Filled with activities and useful tips, it will help students to move from nervous novice to confident expert and provide them with the necessary tools to accomplish this. By reading this book, students will be able to learn new skills and enhance existing ones.

This third edition has been fully updated and features new chapters on e-learning and dissertations as well as expanded sections on ethics, feedback and referencing. Each chapter includes practical guidance as well as student perspectives that will help students through their course of study. It includes advice on how to support learning, boost motivation and enhance time management, and covers all the essential skills required for successful study, including:

- Effective reading and note-taking strategies
- Developing oral skills in a wide range of presentation settings, including what makes a good presentation and how each stage of the process can be prepared for
- Carrying out well-planned, methodologically sound and well-written research
- Preparing for examinations and other forms of assessment
- Producing a professional development portfolio or winning CV

Highly accessible, this new edition is an essential resource for all Foundation Degree students who want to get the most out of their course, mature students or anyone with limited or no experience of academic study.

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# **Study Skills for** ***Foundation Degrees***

**Third Edition**

**Dorothy Bedford and Elizabeth Wilson**

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# Preface

We are really pleased that you are considering or have already been accepted onto a Foundation Degree. Studying at degree level is quite different from other forms of study, and for those of you who have been away from it for some time this may seem particularly daunting. This book aims to help you move from nervous novice to confident expert and to give you the tools to accomplish this. We recognise that universities and colleges are increasingly composed of students who have a range of entry qualifications and diverse experiences. You may already have gained some of the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for successful academic experience through your education, employment or life's experiences. You will all come to this book with differing expectations and needs. Therefore, the aim of the book is to equip you with the confidence and study skills that you may require.

We have included chapters that focus on the skills of reading effectively, making notes, academic writing, giving presentations, research, examinations and other forms of assessment, all of which are required for your successful study. In addition, we have considered ways you can understand yourself and support your learning, use your workplace, plan your future development, boost your morale and keep motivated, manage your time, use technology and prepare for life beyond your degree.

Although we have written this book in chapters that follow sequentially, our intention is that you will be able to return again to topics as you need them throughout your degree. The information is presented in easy to read sections, interspersed with activities and useful tips under subheadings so that you can easily find what you specifically need at the time. You are welcome to read it straight through like a novel, but it will be most useful if you treat it like a wise friend and turn to it for help when you need it.

We have used the unique experiences of a range of successful students from diverse graduate courses and Higher Education establishments. We are extremely grateful to them for being prepared to share with us their accumulated wisdom. We feel that this has given us an insight into strategies they used to support their learning and we return to their comments throughout the text. We believe that reading about their experiences will give authenticity to what we say, will be encouraging and will help you to understand that it is quite normal to feel anxious, out of your depth and unsure from time to time.

Use the book to learn new skills and enhance existing ones. Learning at a university should be challenging. The more you learn how to manage yourself and your time, get to

know yourself as a learner, practice the skills you need for academic work and reflect on your own achievements, the more your confidence will grow. This is the route to success in your degree and in the future, and we wish you well in your study.

We would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of many colleagues at Roehampton University, The University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Oldham College and the Open University, whose insights have contributed to this book. We thank our families and, in particular, Charles Bedford and the late Peter Davies for their support.

Our best wishes for your study and life beyond the university. Enjoy.

*Dr Dorothy Bedford and Professor Elizabeth Wilson*

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We should also like to thank all the Foundation Degree staff and students who contributed enthusiastically to this project. Particular thanks go to Greta Boldrini, Hilary Budd, Ruth Clements, Marilyn Dooley-Gailis, Adam Fourar-Laidi, Colette Harvey, Jake Hodges, Jane Hudson, Sandra Kendall, Maria Panayi, Teri Rowbotham, Angela Scollan, Julie Scott-Browne, Jon Swinfield, Melissa Unguneanu and Christina Whittingham.

## About the authors

**Dr Dorothy Bedford** has extensive experience as an educator. Formerly a teacher of art from early years through to adult education her career in teaching culminated in nine years as Deputy Head Teacher in an outer London comprehensive school. She moved to Roehampton University in 1995, undertaking research for the Crafts Council and teaching on the PGCE art programme. From there she progressed to the BA Hons School of Education, fulfilling a number of roles, including acting as Programme Convenor for Continuing Professional Development, link tutor for the University of London Student Associate Scheme and Senior Lecturer in Education, contributing to the development and teaching on Foundation Degree courses. She continues to teach a range of modules at both undergraduate and post graduate levels, including research supervision at the doctoral level. She is also External Examiner for Foundation Degrees in Children and Young People and moderates the work of Roehampton's Foundation degree courses.

**Professor Elizabeth Wilson** is a specialist in the field of adult learning and human resource development and was the founder and Head of the Wales Institute for Work-based Learning at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) until December 2016. She continues to work for the University in Wales and overseas, chairing programme validations and international partnership reviews. She was a teacher for the Open University 'Openings' programme and the OU Business School for a number of years. Prior to moving into Higher Education at Roehampton University in 2004, she had 20 years' experience in Further Education as a teacher and staff and curriculum developer. She spent seven years as a member of the senior management team with responsibility for staff and student services for a large FE college where she also chaired the local CIPD branch.

# 1

## Preparing for foundation degree study

### ■ Understanding foundation degrees

Although foundation degrees have been in existence since 2001, some people are still unclear what they are. This section aims to expand your knowledge. Foundation degrees are unique in that they integrate academic and work-based learning to provide an employment-related higher education (HE) qualification. They are validated by universities and by colleges who have their own foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) to ensure that they meet high academic standards. They are designed and delivered in partnership with employers, to equip people with the relevant knowledge and skills for their current or future work. Foundation degrees cover a broad range of vocational areas such as agriculture, art and design, business, computing, education, engineering, health and care, hospitality and tourism, media, music and performing arts.

### How long will it take me?

This depends on the mode of study you choose. A full-time course will usually take two years to complete; part-time courses will take longer, but they offer the opportunity to continue working while you study. Many courses have flexible teaching arrangements involving part-time or evening attendance at college, distance learning or online learning via the internet.

### Which qualifications do I need to start a foundation degree?

You do not necessarily need traditional academic qualifications to gain entry to a course. You can get onto a foundation degree using your work experience and any academic or vocational qualifications you have, like A levels, BTEC Nationals, NVQs and Apprenticeships. It is worth remembering that any commercial and industrial experience you have could be as important as educational qualifications. The institution delivering the foundation degree will decide if you are eligible, and they will decide using a system called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which uses your work experience to judge your ability, and may be used to see if you could be awarded exemption from certain modules. You may also see the terms APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) and APCL (Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning) used in this context.

## What is the status of a foundation degree qualification?

Foundation degrees are valuable qualifications in their own right. You will have the right to use the letters 'FdA', for arts-based subjects, 'FdSc', for science-based subjects or 'FdEng' for engineering subjects after your name. A foundation degree allows you to demonstrate that you are disciplined in your approach to work and can think independently; and employers will know that you are not only academically and theoretically qualified, but that you have got the useful practical experience they need.

A foundation degree is a qualification at the intermediate level in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and is worth 240 credit points, 120 at level 4 and a further 120 at level 5. The qualification frameworks may seem complicated, but you will find a full explanation on page 17 of the Quality Assurance Agency publication *Frameworks for HE Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (QAA, 2018) including compatibility with the Scottish and European qualification systems. It is the equivalent to two-thirds of a BA/BSc(Hons) degree. It is important to note that a foundation degree is not the same as a foundation year, which is designed to give you access to a degree course.

## What progression opportunities exist after I have achieved a foundation degree?

The last chapter of this book covers your options in some detail, including progressing to other professional qualifications and to more senior posts at work. However, in academic terms you can progress to an honours degree through further study. This will require you to study for an additional 120 credit points at level 6. This will usually take around a year if you study full-time and more if you study on a part-time basis; depending on the programme. All foundation degrees are required to have a designated honours degree to which you can progress; this is known as 'articulation'. You may be able to take your 240 credit points to other universities or higher education institutions which offer suitable programmes.

## Identifying your main reasons for wanting to study

Awareness of your motivation and your personal goals can make a real difference in helping you to complete the degree programme. Often students have difficulties with some aspects of the course and looking back at your initial motivation can help you overcome any problems you may be faced with. As an adult, you are studying in addition to many other commitments. It can be difficult to keep going, especially if you are studying part-time over a number of years, and it is not realistic to expect the rest of your life to be put on hold.

### ACTIVITY

What are your own main reasons for wanting to study for a foundation degree? Make a list in your notebook and keep it to remind you of your initial motivation. You might want to add to your list when you look at some of the comments by successful foundation degree students and the *Foundation Degree Task Force Report to Ministers* (DfES, 2004) as follows. Save this list; we will be using it again in Chapter 2.

Peter, a student on a foundation degree in Information Technology, summarises what he has gained from his foundation degree:

*The benefits, professionally, of being able to say that I have a degree are immeasurable. The more I learn, the more self-assured I become. The programme has raised my confidence. I have found my voice and can now speak out. I have new credibility at work, with my input being an intrinsic element of IT decision-making and strategic planning. For example, I am invited to give my input at senior management meetings and my view is seen as an expert opinion rather than “what Peter thinks”. I am looking forward to more doors opening and making further progress in my career.*

The *Foundation Degree Task Force Report to Ministers* (DfES, 2004) identified a number of reasons why students may wish to study for a foundation degree:

- flexible delivery;
- a second chance for mature students;
- to get a specific job;
- career enhancement;
- access to higher education;
- employer recognition;
- the fact that it is shorter and cheaper than an honours degree.

You can also continue to earn, as Kate, an art and design student, explains:

*I couldn't afford to give up work to study full-time, so this foundation degree gives me the opportunity to work and learn at the same time for a qualification that is absolutely relevant to my job.*

The same report suggests that the demand for foundation degrees comes mainly from:

- people in work or their employers seeking to develop and upgrade workforce skills;
- people in work or their employers seeking vocationally oriented progression routes from work-based level 3 programmes;
- people with non-traditional entry qualifications seeking a route to a higher education qualification;



- people wanting a change of occupation;
- employers seeking to fill skill gaps, develop new job roles or meet regulatory requirements (p. 11).

That is the theory; to be successful you need to ask yourself: ‘Am I sufficiently interested in the subject and motivated to attend college regularly, and participate actively in my own learning?’ If so, read on.

## Can I commit the time to study?

The final section of this chapter will look at planning the year ahead; and there is a whole chapter on time management techniques later in the book. However, in our experience, being able to keep up with the workload, particularly if you are working full-time as some foundation degree students do, is what concerns students most. You need to ask yourself if your current situation is flexible enough to take on this major commitment, as you need to commit not only to class time but also to study time and to do the assignments. Remember, everybody works at a different pace.

Jon, a student on the foundation degree in Teaching and Learning, admits that:

*The most difficult thing is motivating myself to study away from the classroom and finding a quiet personal space to get my head down and learn. My tutors have been brilliant helping me out with this, sharing study skills and techniques and helping me to devise a study programme. I have discovered that the best time to study is early in the morning before the kids get up! When people ask me how I manage to fit everything in, working as a teaching assistant, studying and bringing up my family, I have to be honest and say that it can be very challenging. However, I am determined to become a teacher, and this is what I have to do to achieve that.*

## Do I have the academic skills needed to be successful?

This book aims to give you the support to achieve your foundation degree. However, a number of the foundation degree students we teach identified a lack of confidence in being able to reach the academic level required. The good news is that many colleges and universities have excellent support services to help you develop your academic skills; after all, it is in everyone’s interest for you to be successful. Have a look at the website and the prospectus of any institutions you are interested in. You will probably see a range of services from additional learning support for students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyscalculia, as well as screening to identify if additional support is needed for English, numeracy and IT. Many colleges and universities also

offer free seminars on study skills, which are worth attending in addition to working through this book.

## ■ **Creating a support network of family, friends and colleagues**

### Support from family and friends

You will have to sit down and discuss your decision with your family and friends. These people will form part of your informal support team. The more they understand what you are undertaking, the more they will be supportive if difficulties arise. You should not underestimate the impact that your goal will have on those around you. For example, try not to lose contact with your friends. It is hard enough to stay connected to people given our already busy lives, so make the time to speak with them. Also, a number of our students have said that by studying they have acted as a role model for their children.

Maybe others you live with could, for example, do more of the chores, especially during term time. By agreeing some ground rules at the beginning of your course you should be able to share out some of your current responsibilities. Sometimes, spending more money will save you time, like ordering food online and arranging for it to be delivered or employing someone to help in the house or garden. Consider any options that will make your life easier; but, of course, you need to make sure you can afford it.

### Finding a workplace mentor

As you will now be aware, a key characteristic of foundation degrees is the integration of academic studies and work-based learning. In many cases your foundation degree programme will require you to have the support of a workplace mentor. Even if this is not required by your course you should consider approaching a member of staff at your workplace whom you respect, to ask if they would be able to mentor you through your foundation degree. The ideal mentor is usually a more experienced colleague who already holds a qualification at a similar, or more advanced, level and who has practical experience of the job. This may be your line manager, but not necessarily. You need to find a person whom you can be open and honest with about any difficulties you may be having with the course.

Mentors have a key role in facilitating work-based learning; they help you to make the link between the theoretical knowledge you acquire from academic study and your professional practice. Regular meetings with your mentor can focus on making these links and encourage you to reflect on your personal and professional development. Mentors may also carry out observations of you at work and provide feedback on your performance.

In addition to helping you relate academic learning and theoretical knowledge to your job, the right mentor can:

- use their knowledge of the workplace to help you access information that can assist in the completion of your assignments and projects;
- put you in touch with individuals with 'expert' knowledge of the organisation;
- support you by helping to resolve problems and provide encouragement and advice.

Although this is a time-consuming process for both you and your mentor, many students report how useful the relationship has been to both parties. Jane, a student on the Child-care and Early Years degree states that:

*There are a number of factors that have contributed to me successfully embarking on the second year of the programme: I have been fortunate to have an excellent mentor at my school, and the continuing support of my family, workplace and the college. I definitely feel more valued at work, particularly by my head teacher, who is also my workplace mentor. My self-confidence has grown due to my increased knowledge.*

### ACTIVITY

If you are employed, identify a colleague you think would make a good mentor. Check whether your course offers any guidance for mentors. Many universities and colleges offer an induction handbook, and some even offer a mentoring qualification. Arrange a meeting to see your potential mentor and ask if they are prepared to become involved in your learning.

## ■ Preparing a space to study

You will need to make the most of your valuable study time, so finding a place that is conducive to study is important. Marcus advises ‘you should be aware of how much time will be needed to devote to study beyond college attendance’. The ideal solution is a quiet room where you can shut the door and not be disturbed, although not everyone is this fortunate. If you are able to have a designated area at home, consider how your circumstances match up against the following checklist:

- Access to a computer and printer; this is ideal, but you may be able to use a computer at your workplace or college. If you need to share a home computer with others, then access times need to be negotiated.
- A desk or table, large enough to spread out your books and files and to accommodate a laptop or PC if necessary.
- A comfortable chair, which supports your back and is designed for use with a computer, if appropriate.
- Adequate heating and ventilation, you do not want to be so warm that you doze off or so cold that you cannot concentrate.

- Appropriate lighting, preferably natural light and a reading lamp you can turn on at night.
- Storage space, a bookcase or cupboard where you can easily put your work away – and do not forget a waste paper basket.
- A tablet or smartphone for studying away from home or work.
- A good supply of stationery items such as coloured pens, pencils, highlighter pens, ruler, calculator, post-it notes, stapler, hole punch, files, dividers and paper.

Although you may have negotiated with members of your family to have uninterrupted study time, you may need to hang a ‘Do not disturb’ sign on the door or turn your phone off. Research shows that most students study best in a quiet environment. If you find that the radio or TV improves your concentration, keep the volume low. With experience you will be able to decide where and how you study best.

### ■ Some top tips for success

Julie has a list of advice for potential students:

*I would suggest you get the full support of your employer; you need to have a suitable mentor who has the time to help you with your assignments. You will also need a very supportive and understanding family, a computer and lots of spare time. The only thing I would have done differently would be to get it in writing that my employer was going to support me financially throughout the two years.*

## Creating a study schedule

Find out about the proposed study workload for students, term dates and assignment deadlines. This information should all be part of your induction to the course.

### ACTIVITY

Buy a diary or year planner, or learn to use one of the many calendar functions on your computer or smart phone. If you prefer a paper-based system, academic year diaries are usually on sale in the summer. Get all deadlines into your diary and begin to consider how these fit in with your work and other responsibilities. It is also a good idea to pencil in birthdays, holidays, work deadlines and other academic and family commitments.

## Start to think about your time management

We have written a whole chapter on this, but you can make a start now. While many people do the bulk of their studying during the weekends, you should still try to do some of your coursework during the week, so that you do not feel overwhelmed. Maybe you can do some reading during your commute to work or lunch break using a tablet or smartphone. Getting a degree demands a lot of effort and time, but when you graduate we are sure you will agree it was worth it. Some ideas we have been given by students include those listed as follows:

- Stop checking your home and work e-mail so often. Pick times at which you will check your e-mail, possibly three times, morning, afternoon and the evening. Look at apps you can download to restrict your screen time.
- Instead of driving to work, consider taking public transport. This may take a little longer, but you can use that time to study or to relax.
- Always carry with you some work that can be fitted in to unexpected free time, some recommended reading or the latest assignment question.
- Decide on what will be your regular study times. It is easy to delay starting if study is to be fitted in at any time. You will need to think about when you are at your best; are you a lark or an owl?

## And finally . . .

Now you have your place, you may well be wondering if you have made the right decision. We address the issues adults have returning to learn in the next chapter. Thoughts like: 'Am I doing the right thing?', 'Will this really get me somewhere in my career?' and 'Will I be any good at it?' are natural. This is a big step in your life, but we are sure you will find that everyone in your study group will feel anxious, especially in the first couple of weeks. Our advice is not to overthink your decision; just do what you can to prepare in advance then take each day at a time.

The last words in this chapter should go to Jon:

*I am so glad that I made this step; it is one of the biggest steps of my life. I was very fearful of study and not being able to cope with the course, but with the support of my family, classmates and excellent tutors I have now completed my first year. I am further up the career ladder in my new job, but most importantly I am following my vocational calling and I am on my way to becoming a teacher. If you are thinking about embarking on a foundation degree my advice would be to go for it, at least give it a try, it won't be as daunting as you think and the rewards can be fantastic.*