

5<sup>th</sup> edition

B L O O M S B U R Y   
**studyskills**

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# THE STUDY SKILLS HANDBOOK

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**STELLA COTTRELL**

million copy bestselling author

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# **The Study Skills Handbook**

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# **The Study Skills Handbook**

**Fifth Edition**

**Stella Cottrell**

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Introducing The Study Skills Handbook</i>	1
<b>A. Self-efficacy: Managing your Success as a Student</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Success as a student: Take charge of your success	9
2. Gaining the most from your course: Engage. Enjoy. Excel.	29
3. Employability and preparing for your future	47
4. Successful study: Intelligence, strategy and personalised learning	63
5. The C·R·E·A·M strategy for learning	89
6. Time management as a student	123
7. Managing stress and well-being	151
<b>B. Academic, People and Task Management Skills</b>	<b>169</b>
8. Working with others: Collaborative study	171
9. Developing cultural competence: Learning in diverse and international contexts	197
10. Effective reading and note-making	213
11. Researching and managing information for study	233
12. Critical thinking	253
13. Writing at university level	273
14. Developing your academic writing	301
15. Writing essays	319
16. Managing assignments: Research projects, reports, case studies and dissertations	345
17. Devising your revision and exam strategy	373
18. Memory	389
<i>Appendix: Further resources</i>	405
<i>Answers to activities</i>	407
<i>References and bibliography</i>	413
<i>Index</i>	421
<i>Notes</i>	429

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The hundreds of students who were open to discussing with me what they found difficult about studying and willing to elaborate new and individual ways of approaching their study – to them, and to all future students who may struggle for even a day, this book is dedicated.

# Foreword

Welcome to this fifth edition of *The Study Skills Handbook*. So much has changed in the world of study skills since I wrote the first edition. Back then, there were hardly any study skills books at all. Many assumed that if someone hadn't learnt how to study well by the time they entered Higher Education, they never would.

I have always been interested in what promotes individual success, and what prevents any and every student from achieving at the highest level, with maximum satisfaction and minimum anxiety. I have worked with thousands of students with varied learning histories at different kinds of institution – at Oxford University and inner-city colleges, at both modern and research-intensive universities, with pre-foundation level students through to PhD. I found that whether students were achieving brilliantly or at risk of failing, they brought experiences, attitudes and habits that drained their energy and enthusiasm. If they weren't under-achieving, they were using inefficient strategies that took up too much time or left them stressed, bored or confused.

Although students worried about what seemed to be purely 'study' issues, the key to their success usually involved looking more broadly at their stories, attitudes, self-belief, ambitions and circumstances. No two students were the same so the way forward for each was personal and distinct.

Typically, it was the shifts in self-awareness, self-belief and attitude combined with greater use of study strategy that began to make a difference. I was frequently awe-struck by what students were then able to achieve, not just in raising the standard of their work, but in staying with their courses at all despite the complications and challenges of their lives.

As study skills books used to focus primarily on a narrow range of skills such as reading, writing, note-making and exams, I developed a wider range of materials with students – often just summing up what had emerged during our sessions so they could take it away with them. Over time, the themes that emerged formed the core of *The Study Skills Handbook*. That included matters not usually covered within traditional study skills – on intelligence, self-belief, memory, personal performance, barriers to success, self-sabotage, goal-setting, peer support, stress management, personalising learning, and more. This fifth edition retains these important topics which, happily, have become standard to many study skills courses and materials.

In addition, this edition considers new themes that affect today's students. Changing teaching methods and learning environments call for greater levels of active participation, individual responsibility, social learning and peer support. Universities worldwide tend to be diverse and international environments, bringing opportunities for those who can operate flexibly and sensitively across cultures. Technologies bring new ways of doing things and also add to the pressures of student life. Well-being, stress management, course completion, study satisfaction, grades and graduate employability are of concern world-wide. This edition considers all these aspects.

Finally, whatever your reasons for study, you will gain more from the experience if you find enjoyment in it. I hope that this *Study Skills Handbook* boosts your belief in your own academic potential and encourages you to enjoy your own path to success.

Stella Cottrell, 2019

# Introducing *The Study Skills Handbook*

## Is this book for you?

This book has been designed to help students to achieve the very best that they can, given their individual circumstances, goals and ambitions.

Whether you already excel as a student or feel you are just starting out, it is highly likely that there are approaches, strategies, techniques and ways of thinking or being that could make your study experience more fruitful, effective, efficient and enjoyable.

This *Study Skills Handbook* developed out of practical work with hundreds of staff and students over many years. It has now been used by millions of students and thousands of lecturers worldwide. Students at all levels from school-leaver to PhD have used *The Study Skills Handbook* to fine-tune their skills, understand more about their learning and build their study confidence. I hope that you, too, will find material that is of value to you.

Study skills evolve and mature through understanding, practice, reflection, trial and error, and feedback from others as you move through the different stages of your course. You may be surprised at how your thinking and language skills develop simply through continued study. However, a good study strategy can start you off on a good footing, help you cut corners and accelerate the learning process.

## Quick tips or deeper learning?

A reflective, active, self-evaluating approach to learning develops deeper understanding in the long term. However, quick tips can be invaluable, too, especially in study emergencies. This *Study Skills Handbook* offers both approaches. Move flexibly between the two approaches to meet your immediate needs and improve in your academic studies for the long term.

## Aims of *The Study Skills Handbook*

The key aim of *The Study Skills Handbook* is to help you to manage your own success as a student. It does this by:

- ★ **Promoting understanding** of how good marks and successful outcomes are possibilities for any student
- ★ **Clarifying expectations** of conventions, study tasks and ways of thinking typical of Higher Education
- ★ **Supporting you** in identifying your strengths as well as what else you can do to achieve well
- ★ **Developing effective strategies** – study habits, techniques and thinking that optimise learning
- ★ **Encouraging a personal approach** – one that works best for you
- ★ **Providing step-by-step guidance** in how to undertake academic tasks typical of Higher Education
- ★ **Using structured activities and reflections**, to engage the mind, senses, and motor memory
- ★ **Offering insights** on how to tackle study activities that many students find difficult
- ★ **Providing resources** to help you evaluate, reflect upon and manage your studies more easily.

# How to use *The Study Skills Handbook*

## Decide what you need

Either dip into the book as you need – or work through the chapters to build your academic confidence and abilities in depth. Use as much or little as helps you.

Each chapter focuses on a key aspect of study. In practice, these are interconnected. Developing one area of your study will also help other aspects.

## Find what you need

To help you locate what you need at speed, the following are provided in addition to the Contents and Index.

- ★ An overview of each part (pages 7 and 169)
- ★ Learning outcomes at the start of each chapter
- ★ Individual page headers, for fast browsing
- ★ Visually distinct pages and cartoons, as memory triggers that help you locate and recall material more easily.

## Select from the resources

Select from the wide range of reflections, self-evaluations, planners, checklists, priority-setters, organisers and activities.

## Use the self-evaluations

Most chapters contain a self-evaluation. These can help you in several ways.

- ★ They are a useful starting point for considering what to prioritise next
- ★ They break major study skills into component parts, or tasks into key steps
- ★ They enable you to pinpoint which components or missing steps are undermining your performance so you can address these. Often, once you identify it, it is fairly straightforward to improve a particular skill
- ★ They enable you to monitor your progress and identify your developing strengths.

## Copiable pages

Pages containing self-evaluations, checklists, planners and record sheets may be copied for personal, individual re-use. If you use such copies, keep them with your reflective journal for future reference. Templates for most of these are also available on the companion site.



## The book's companion site

Visit [www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk](http://www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk) for interactive self-evaluations, study skills videos, and other useful links and resources.

This icon indicates that material such as templates of planners and checklists are available on the companion site.

## Take on the challenge

You can improve your academic performance. You can do well. How much and how well depend on you and your circumstances. Good study strategies, habits and understanding of how you learn empower you as a student. Look for the enjoyment in what you do.

There are times when being a student seems tough – for everyone. Those who stick with it and work on their study strategy get through, often doing much better than they expected. Difficult material can become comprehensible if you return to it after a gap. A growing knowledge of specialised terms and underlying theories helps you to make sense of your subject, sharpen your thinking and communicate with precision. Don't let past or present study difficulties stand between you and success.

## Keeping a journal

It is recommended that you maintain a log, personal blog, journal or similar record to help you think about your learning and studies and monitor your development.



This symbol reminds you to note down your reflections in your study journal. For details, see page 99.

## Where to begin?

There are many possible starting places apart from the obvious one of reading straight through. Here are a few suggestions.

- ➔ **Browse** through *The Study Skills Handbook* so you know roughly what is in it. Bookmark any pages you want to come back to early on. You will get a clearer idea of what you need once you start assignments.
- ➔ **Consider** the *Seven approaches to learning* on pages 4–5) – to understand the overall approach of *The Study Skills Handbook*.
- ➔ **Complete** the *What would success look like for me?* questionnaire (page 11) to help orientate yourself as a student.
- ➔ **Start with self-efficacy.** It underpins everything else. See [Chapters 1–7](#) for core aspects of study success, such as time management, stress management, optimising learning and clarifying your purpose.
- ➔ **Prioritise.** Use the *Study skills: priorities* planner (pages 25–6) to focus your thinking.
- ➔ **Evaluate.** If you are unsure where to begin with a study skill, use the *Self-evaluation* questionnaire in the appropriate chapter to clarify your thinking.

### Gained Advanced Level or equivalent (BTEC, Access Diploma, IB, etc.)?

You have already achieved study success. The challenge, then, can be in recognising that there is still more you can do to improve your performance. It can be hard, at times, to stay quietly confident when surrounded by many other smart people. [Chapters 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7](#) might be especially useful for you to ensure you focus your time, attention and emotional energies well. You can also hone all your other academic skills too.

### Had a study gap or lack confidence?

Work through the first few chapters. Understand as much as you can about learning and study in general, about how Higher Education works, and about what has influenced and affected your own

thinking about your studies. You may also find it especially helpful to look at:

- ★ identifying current skills and qualities ([Chapter 3](#))
- ★ understanding ‘intelligence’ ([Chapter 4](#))
- ★ activities for getting back into reading and writing, available on the companion site at [www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk](http://www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk).

### Dyslexic students

Thousands of dyslexic students graduate successfully every year. Many aspects of this book were developed with dyslexic students over many years. That includes:

- ★ the contents
- ★ the use of visual images
- ★ the book’s layout and colours
- ★ the emphasis on structure
- ★ the use of varied and multi-sensory approaches.

### International students

Be prepared for almost any aspect of study to be different from study back home. You might find it especially helpful to read [Chapter 2](#) on getting the most from your course, and [Chapters 12–16](#) on academic thinking and writing. International study is challenging, so use [Chapter 7](#) to take care of your well-being.

### Pace yourself

It takes time and practice to orientate yourself to the Higher Education environment and to develop good study habits. If you have been away from study for a while or are finding study difficult, be kind to yourself.

Your first-year marks may not count towards the final grade, giving you time to practise and improve.

### Choose your own route

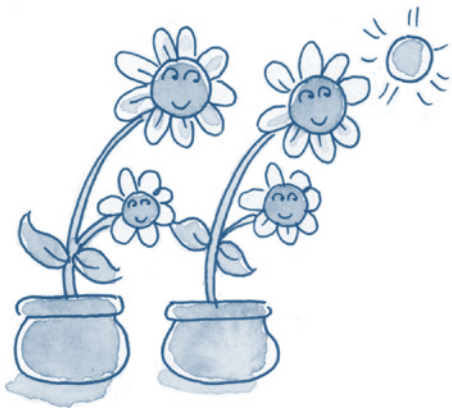
There are many avenues to successful study. [Chapters 1–4](#) encourage you to look at what enhances your individual study, and offer suggestions on how to experiment with your learning to find ways to take it to the next level. Experiment. Explore. Be creative. Find what suits *you* best.

# Seven approaches to learning

*The Study Skills Handbook* is informed by seven approaches to learning.

## 1 Treating learning as an adventure

Small children treat life and learning as a big adventure. They are curious and learn extraordinary amounts without trying particularly hard – simply through being relaxed, observing, playing, questioning, trying things out for themselves, making mistakes, wanting to understand. They don't treat setbacks as failures nor do they worry about what others think or tell themselves they might not be able to learn. If they fall when learning to walk, they have another go, and another, until they succeed. Adults can learn in this way too – if they allow themselves.



Find a point of attraction

## 2 Using multiple senses and movement

The more we use our senses of sight, hearing and touch, and the more we use fine muscle movements in looking, speaking, writing, typing, drawing, checking, deciding, the more we help our brains to help us learn.

Combining the information from multiple senses and movements enables the brain to make more connections and

associations. These help it to make sense of the information, lay down memories and recall it better later. This book encourages you to use your senses to the full and to incorporate movement into your study to make learning easier and more engaging.

## 3 Identifying the attraction

It is easier to learn if we keep desirable outcomes in mind rather than force ourselves to study out of duty. Some aspects of study may be less attractive to you, such as writing essays, meeting deadlines or sitting exams, and yet these also tend to bring the greatest satisfaction and rewards.

You do have it in your power to find in any aspect of study an angle that sparks your curiosity, drives your personal motivation, or makes it meaningful – to find the hidden gold that attracts you. For example, visualise yourself on a large cinema screen enjoying your study – or your later rewards. Hear your own voice telling you what you are achieving now. Your imagination will catch hold of these incentives and find ways of making them happen.



Visualise your success

## 4 Using active learning

We learn with a deeper understanding when we are actively and personally engaged:

- ★ juggling information
- ★ struggling to make sense
- ★ playing with different options
- ★ making decisions
- ★ looking for links, connections, meaning, significance, solutions.

For this reason, most pages of this book require you to *do* something, however small, to help focus attention and increase your active engagement with the topic.

## 5 Taking responsibility for your learning

In Higher Education, it is expected that you will take on increasing responsibility for your learning and that you are ready and able to study under your own direction for much of the week, as a responsible adult. This prepares you to lead and manage, whether in academic life, work or other contexts.

This means developing a range of abilities, not least in being able to evaluate and make judgements about your own work, with a fair but critical eye, prioritising what needs further work, getting on with doing so, and monitoring how well you are doing what you planned to do. This *Study Skills Handbook* helps and encourages you to do that.



## 6 Trusting in your intelligence

Many students worry that they are not intelligent enough to do well, especially at times when the course seems tough. If they didn't do well at school, they can doubt whether academic ability is 'in their genes'. If they excelled at school, they can worry they have 'lost it'. Worry and stress make it harder to learn.

With the right preparation, attitude and strategy, it is likely you will do fine. Trust that you can achieve well – and make it happen. See [Chapter 4](#) to consider this in more detail, and [Chapter 7](#) for managing stress and anxieties.

## 7 Personalising your learning

Each of us learns in an individual way – and our circumstances, experiences and interests vary. We each enjoy particular aspects of the course or methods of assessment more than others. We connect with some material and not others. We might prefer to learn on our own or socially, digitally or with paper and artefacts; to be on campus or at home, and so on.

You can do well without personalising your learning, but you can make study more effective, efficient and enjoyable if you adapt how and when you go about it so that it fits you best. It is worth taking time to understand and consider the many factors that contribute to optimal learning and to work out what really works best for you (see [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)).

It is likely that you will find different things work better for aspects of the course you feel confident about or enjoy, and those you don't, as well as for different tasks, the mood you are in, who you are learning with, how much time you have, or the time of the day.

Experiment with strategies and skills you currently under-use. The human brain is highly adaptable: able learners move easily between different strategies and approaches, depending on the task in hand.

As you are more in charge of your learning at this level, this provides opportunities to adapt the learning experience to suit you. The book provides many suggestions about how you can do this.

### Reflection



#### Seven Approaches to Learning

What is your initial response to these seven approaches to your learning and study?

Which do you feel characterise your own study strategy – and which are worth your considering further?

## A new beginning ...

From this introduction, you will probably have gleaned that an important premise of this book is that academic success is a consequence of many factors. Intellectual ability is one factor, but not necessarily the most important. You have the power to influence many of those contributing factors.

Whatever your experience of academic study in the past, it might not be the same in Higher Education. It is a new beginning. If you don't succeed as well as you wish, at first, there will be further opportunities to do better. Each year, each term or semester, each module or unit of study, gives you a chance to start afresh in the way you approach your study.

### *Always been good at study?*

It is likely that you have laid down some excellent foundations for higher level study. Let that boost your confidence. Nonetheless, even excellent students can find new ways of saving time, fine-tuning their study techniques, and adapting their strategy to meet the demands of higher level study.

### *Tend to coast along 'in the middle'?*

You have the opportunity to test out how well you could do if you aim higher and adapt your strategy. How far do you want to go? What would hold you back from achieving more? Would you get more satisfaction out of your studies if you brought more to them?

### *Didn't achieve well in the past?*

Many people thrive in the different atmosphere of Higher Education, even if they didn't at school. This can be because the teaching and curriculum suit them better or because they adopt new strategies and attitudes. If you under-achieved in the past, this might be welcome news. Your success is not determined by your past. This *Study Skills Handbook* was designed to help you challenge beliefs that have often led to students under-achieving. It provides practical steps forward.

### **Good strategies matter ...**

Students are often pleasantly surprised to find that they can achieve well, and more easily, if they develop study strategies relevant to their own ways of thinking and working, that fit their circumstances, and draw upon their personal interests and preferences. The best strategies tend to be broad-based, taking into consideration all your needs, including health and well-being, goals and enjoyment.

This book enables you to consider your student experience in the round, and to take a holistic approach to your study, life and success.



**Enjoy  
the book**

**I hope you enjoy  
*The Study Skills Handbook* –  
and your time as a student.**

# PART A

## Self-efficacy: Managing your Success as a Student

### You in the driving seat

In Higher Education, the key responsibility for academic success lies with you. You are the manager of your study. You have the prime influence over whether you do well and whether the experience is worthwhile, or not. Although there is usually a range of support and guidance available, ultimately, it comes back to you and to what you are prepared to do to ensure that you achieve the best you can with the least stress and greatest personal satisfaction.

Students who do well tend to be those who appreciate, early on, that higher level study is different from their previous experience, who grasp what this responsibility means, and who have the mindset and strategies to respond well to the challenge.

### Taking on the challenge

Being in control of your own learning brings benefits in terms of increased choices, more control of your time, and for developing a range of skills and personal attributes that will serve you well in your life and career. On the other hand, it isn't always easy. It requires a range of strong personal attributes to direct your learning successfully, to use time well, to interpret sensibly what is going on when study seems more difficult or when your motivation wanes. It can take courage and imagination to adapt your strategy and attitude when your current approach doesn't seem to deliver what you want.

### The importance of 'self-efficacy'

Self-efficacy or being able to 'manage yourself' can make a significant difference to your time as a student and beyond. It is one of the most important attributes to bring to study and to take into life beyond your course. It is worth spending time thinking about this and developing your self-management abilities.

Part A of this *Study Skills Handbook* provides background and approaches that help you to do this. It helps you to understand what characterises Higher Education and what self-efficacy means in that context. It encourages and assists you to think through crucial considerations such as:

- ★ your study purpose and longer-term goals;
- ★ what success would look like for you;
- ★ your strategies for managing time, stress, well-being, employability and career planning;
- ★ organising yourself ready for study and for avoiding common mistakes;
- ★ getting the most from your course and from your time as a student.

It provides you with structured activities and reflections to help you think through the important issues and to plan ahead for maximum success.



# Chapter 1

# Success as a student

## Take charge of your success



### Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- ✓ gain an initial overview of how to achieve success in Higher Education
- ✓ understand what to expect and what characterises study in Higher Education
- ✓ clarify your own vision of success
- ✓ understand the study skills and attributes needed for higher level study
- ✓ consider your starting points and priorities for developing good study skills and habits
- ✓ set priorities for further developing your abilities.

### A transformational experience

The experience of studying in Higher Education can be life-changing. Most graduates look back on this time with great fondness. In part, this is because of the unique opportunities it offers ...

- ★ to study interesting subjects
- ★ to feel stretched intellectually
- ★ to explore new ideas
- ★ to engage in a wide range of new activities, not easily available elsewhere
- ★ to find out about yourself and how you rise to the challenge of academic study
- ★ to consider the kind of person that you want to be in the world
- ★ to make friends that can last for life.

Higher level study is different from that at previous levels. This chapter helps you to identify how and why this is the case, and what this might mean for you as a student.

### Making your success a reality

The more you engage with your course and actively hunt out the enjoyment in study and student life, the greater the likelihood that you will not only survive the experience, but thrive and excel, too.

This chapter helps you to understand what to expect, to consider what 'success' at this level of study means to you, and to decide how you will make the experience work for you.



# Make the experience work for you

Be an active agent on behalf of your own success. Start by considering some ways that your own action can make a difference.

## Reflection



## Taking charge

How will you 'take charge' of your experience as a student?  
What do you need to do first?

### Think through ...

- ★ how your studies contribute to your broader life plan and career ambitions
- ★ how other opportunities at college or university can forward your ambitions.

### Be well informed

Investigate. Read.  
Ask. Double check.

### Put the hours in

Expertise is largely a factor of how many hours you spend on an activity. This applies to study as for other skills. Using that time effectively is, of course, just as important.

### Take charge

Plan how you will use your time as a student to gain your broader life and career aims.  
Don't wait to be told – find out.  
Don't wait to be asked – do it.  
Don't wait to be inspired – inspire yourself.  
Don't wait for opportunities – create them.  
Don't rely only on feedback from others; learn to make sound evaluations of your work.  
Don't neglect your well-being – include it in your goals.

### Develop the right mindset

Intellectually curious and open to new perspectives.  
Strongly motivated and determined to succeed.  
Resilient, persistent and persevering.

### Make wise choices that work for you

To achieve what you want, choose the right ...

- ★ degree subject
- ★ modules or topics
- ★ use of your time in and out of class.

### Understand higher level study

How and why it is different.  
What is expected.  
What you need to know about the conventions and culture.  
What is regarded as important in your subject and what gains the best grades.

### Decide what you want ...

- ★ from your study
- ★ from the broader experience of being in Higher Education.

### Use the opportunities

Use resources, support and facilities on campus, online, in the local area, through student organisations.  
Use feedback from tutors.  
Take extra classes, learn new skills, stretch yourself.  
Learn something outside of your subject area – take up a new language or complete an enterprise project.  
Use chances of a work placement or year abroad.  
Network with others.  
Make friends for life.

# Your vision of success as a student

## A return on your investment

Students invest a great deal of time, energy and money in their education, so success matters. There are many different versions of what that success would look like. Your vision won't be the same as others'.

If you can formulate a clear vision of what success as a student means to you, you are more likely to achieve it. The way you conceive of success will influence how you spend your time and direct energies which, in turn, will affect your achievement and experience.

### Reflection



#### Think forward

Our imaginations are extremely powerful. You can use this to help direct your energies. For example, picture yourself 10 years into the future. Will you be impressed by the choices you are making now, and your use of the time and opportunities available to you? Will you wish that you had done anything differently?

### Reflection



#### Use your vision to direct your energies

What do your choices opposite indicate about:

- ★ what 'success' as a student would look like for you?
- ★ how to direct your energies as a student?

## What would success look like for me?

Use the following questions to help you to plan. Check off ✓ all items that apply to you. Then **highlight** those that are most important to you.

### *I would feel I had made a success of university/ college if:*

#### Career

- I gained a qualification that enabled me to develop my career
- I developed skills which helped me find a good job
- I made full use of the opportunities available
- I took on positions of responsibility that helped my CV
- I made good contacts that helped my career.

#### Transformational experience

- I learnt more about who I am as a person
- I became a different person as a result of my experience
- I developed a range of skills and qualities that improve my life
- I developed in personal confidence
- I developed a broader understanding of the world
- I met and learnt from people I wouldn't have met otherwise.

#### Subject and qualifications

- I learnt a lot about a subject that really interested me
- I got a good class of degree
- I stretched myself intellectually
- I developed academically.

#### Life and personal

- I really enjoyed myself
- I made good friends
- I developed new interests that enrich my life
- I learned to manage myself as an effective adult.

# Success as a student: what lecturers say

Students who do best at university are those who are very determined to succeed, plan how they will do it, and then keep their plans in perspective.



The students who stand out to me are those who don't just read what is on the reading list, but who genuinely want to know all they can about the subject – who surprise you by having read an article just published or have a good grip on the most recent debates in the subject.



Study is important – of course, I would say that. But college life is about much more than that. It can and should be a life-changing experience – a time to have your ideas challenged, to meet people from an incredibly wide range of backgrounds, to think how your education could change your own life and that of others.



I would say that the key factor is time. If students put in the hours, they tend to do well. Of course, you do need to use the time well too.



Students need to keep their eyes on their long-term goals. If they want a good job, it won't hurt to have a good degree but they also need to show they have experience of other things. They need to get out and do things for the community, get a job, have ideas and opinions, show they are their own person.



What helps students to succeed at Uni? Most students do achieve their degree and then go on to get a job, so that suggests there are many different routes to success. Mainly, it's about the basics. Find out what you have to do, do it, and stay the course. Do more, and your marks will be better.



Universities provide the opportunities. It is then up to the students to make those opportunities work for them.



The best students for me are those who really grapple with the issues, who show they have tried to think things through for themselves, even if they haven't got it all right. The worst are those that rely on Wikipedia as their main source of information – and think no-one will notice!



As a lecturer, I like the students who love their subject and want to know as much as they can about it. As the parent of a student myself, I think it important that students use their time at university wisely. If they want an academic career, then they should put the subject first. If they want a career outside of academia, then they need to think more broadly.



## Reflection



### Student success

What can you take away from these lecturers' observations to help you succeed?

It isn't just about how much work you put in. You can actually get away with doing much less work than others and do better than them – but you can't get away without thinking about what you are doing and learning.



# What is expected from you?

It's not like at school where you were stuck in a classroom from 9 till 4 and teachers told you what you needed to do.

– Ade, first-year student

As a student, you are expected to have the following characteristics.

## Independence

You must be able to 'stand on your own two feet'. However, there is help available. The Student Union and Student Services will have details.



To cope at this level, you need to be reasonably good at:

- ★ adapting to new people and environments
- ★ surviving in potentially very large groups
- ★ being flexible in your learning style.

## Ability to set goals to improve your work



## Self-motivation



You have to be able to work on your own a lot.

## Ability to organise your time

You need to keep track of time. You must:

- ★ know when and where you should be for scheduled classes, events and exams
- ★ know when work has to be handed in
- ★ keep to deadlines for handing in work.

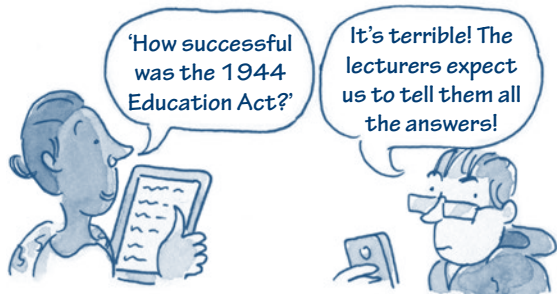
(See Chapter 6.)

## Openness to working with others

You will need to organise study sessions with friends.



## Ability to work things out for yourself



	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
9–10	put notes in order	Ecology lecture Rm G10	prepare for botany seminar
10–11	Lecture Dr Shah Rm X22		
11–12	Do plan (Science Report)		Botany Seminar Rm R21

## Ability to work out when and how you learn best



# Success as a student: where am I now?

Success as a student isn't just about intellectual ability. A wide range of factors contribute, some of which are outlined here. You will probably be able to think of others. For each statement, **circle** or **highlight** the emoticon if you feel confident of that factor. Circle the arrows if you want to investigate it further.

## Understanding university-level study

### *Clear understanding of expectations*

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand what is expected of me. Page 13.
- 😊 ▶▶ I know what to expect from Higher Education. Pages 18–19.

### *Clear understanding of educational context*

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand how higher level study is different from previous levels. Page 16.
- 😊 ▶▶ I have a good grasp of the culture and academic conventions of university level study. Pages 17, 22 and 302–3.
- 😊 ▶▶ I recognise that there is specialist vocabulary I will need to learn to use.

### *Management of independent study*

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand the role of independent study for university level study. Page 19.
- 😊 ▶▶ I manage independent study well. Page 124 and Chapter 6.

### *Management of assessment*

- 😊 ▶▶ I know how to use course information to help me achieve good marks/grades. Page 315.
- 😊 ▶▶ I use the marking criteria to help me evaluate and improve my work. Page 315.
- 😊 ▶▶ I make productive use of feedback from tutors and others. Pages 33 and 316.
- 😊 ▶▶ I understand how to evaluate my own work. Page 317.

## Subject knowledge and understanding

### *Knowledge*

- 😊 ▶▶ There is a good match between my own knowledge and skills and the starting points on my course. Page 69 (Butterworth, 1992).
- 😊 ▶▶ I know how to research my subject in order to develop a good knowledge base. Chapters 10, 11 and 16.

### *Understanding*

- 😊 ▶▶ I appreciate the difference between information and knowledge. Page 75.
- 😊 ▶▶ I recognise the importance of developing a deep understanding of the material. Pages 74–5.
- 😊 ▶▶ I recognise that understanding requires me to spend time reflecting about what I have learnt.
- 😊 ▶▶ I appreciate the importance of strong critical thinking abilities to success in Higher Education. Chapter 12.
- 😊 ▶▶ I enjoy working on new topics and making sense of them for myself.
- 😊 ▶▶ I persist with difficult material until I 'get it'. Pages 42–3.

## Academic Skills

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand what is meant by 'study skills' and the variety of attributes these encompass. Pages 20–8.
- 😊 ▶▶ I am aware of the range of academic skills required in Higher Education. Pages 20–1.
- 😊 ▶▶ I am confident that my academic skills are appropriate to this level of study. Page 22.
- 😊 ▶▶ I am aware of my priorities for further developing my study skills. Pages 25–7.

## Learning savvy

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand the difference between intelligence and academic success. [Chapter 4](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I know how I learn best. [Chapter 4](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I create the optimum learning environment for myself. [Chapter 4](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I think creatively about my study. [Chapter 5](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I use reflection effectively to improve my academic performance. [Chapter 5](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I have effective study strategies. [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I personalise learning so as to build on my strengths and preferences. [Chapter 5](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I make the most of my memory. [Chapter 18](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am confident about participating in class. [Page 36](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am good at studying collaboratively with other students. [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I manage my use of technology to benefit my study. [Pages 41](#) and [143](#).

## Self-awareness and commitment

### *Clear vision, direction and motivation*

- 😊 ▶▶ I have a clear vision about what success as a student would mean to me. [Page 11](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am strongly motivated. See [Chapter 5](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I use the opportunities open to me so as to support my career aims. [Chapter 3](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I take the right steps to enable me to make wise choices related to my studies. [Pages 10](#) and [47–9](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I use my time effectively. See [Chapter 6](#).

### *High levels of personal engagement*

- 😊 ▶▶ I think of myself as an active agent in my own success. [Page 10](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I understand the high level of commitment required. [Pages 18](#) and [113](#).

- 😊 ▶▶ I have a strong sense of purpose.
- 😊 ▶▶ I recognise the importance of being intellectually curious, keen to find out more about my subject. [Pages 12](#) and [16](#); [Chapter 12](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I think about the issues for myself. [Pages 12](#) and [17](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I understand the importance of reading widely in the subject. [Pages 12](#) and [16–17](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am active in finding out what I need to know for my course and as a student. [Pages 29–30](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am able to 'stick with it' in completing tasks and my course. [Page 114](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I go the extra mile to do well at my studies.

## Resilience, self-reliance and self-management

- 😊 ▶▶ I understand what is meant by resilience. [Pages 162–3](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I am able to identify and manage anxieties. [Pages 152–3](#) and [164–7](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I keep goals and problems in perspective. [Page 162](#).
- 😊 ▶▶ I ask for help if I really need it.
- 😊 ▶▶ I recognise the importance of well-being and stress management to my overall success. [Chapter 7](#).

## Reflection



Consider the thoughts that went through your mind as you worked through the list above.

- ★ What kind of message do you pick up about what is needed in order to do well at this level of study?
- ★ How ready do you think you are for engaging with your study in this way?
- ★ Which items stood out for you as important to act upon to help your own study?

# How is higher level study different?

## Study is different

As a student in Higher Education, the most noticeably different features are likely to be:

- ★ the teaching methods, especially the emphasis on independent study
- ★ the assumption that you have the maturity and intelligence to 'get on with it', managing your own study, goals and life
- ★ that academic work is more difficult and complex
- ★ the strong emphasis on 'understanding' rather than 'information'
- ★ learning how knowledge is created
- ★ that time may seem to operate differently: good time management skills are essential.

## The role of the 'teacher' is different

Teachers at this level are usually known as lecturers, tutors or professors. As well as teaching, they are usually expected to engage in research and scholarship, which might feed into their teaching. When they are not involved in teaching-related tasks, they may be preparing research papers for publication and conferences, or applying research or professional skills in industry, government and elsewhere.

## Creating knowledge

Higher Education is about creating knowledge as well as teaching it and learning about it. Depending on the subject, this is through:

- ★ thinking, discussion and writing to develop theoretical understandings
- ★ experimenting to test out theories
- ★ investigating original sources or past knowledge, finding new ways of looking at these and bringing new interpretations
- ★ applying knowledge and understanding to new situations.

## Intellectual curiosity; learning community

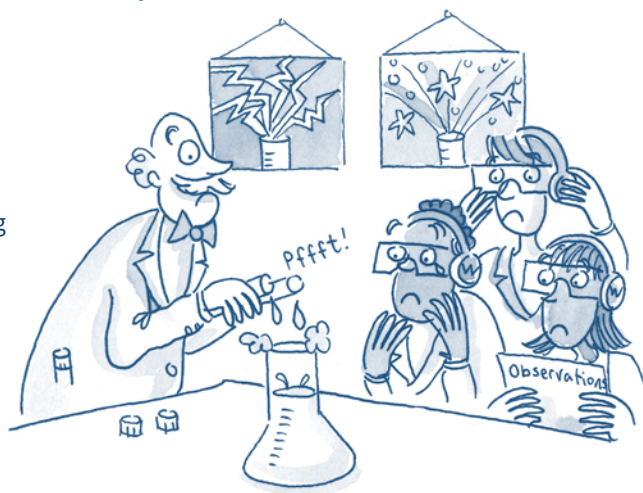
Studying at this level is about being part of an adult learning community in which everyone, students and lecturers, are active in finding out new things for themselves and sharing them with others. It is assumed that you are intellectually curious, keen to find things out for yourself and to contribute to developing new understandings.

Universities play an important role in:

- ★ encouraging research into new areas
- ★ leading debate on contemporary issues
- ★ critiquing existing understandings
- ★ synthesising knowledge
- ★ generating new understandings of the world
- ★ stimulating economic development
- ★ ... as well as teaching students.

Depending on your institution, teaching is likely to be designed in ways that encourage you to do the same. Typically, you are required to:

- ★ engage with debates in your subject
- ★ hunt out answers for yourself
- ★ develop your capacity to think in more creative, systematic and subtle ways
- ★ be open to new perspectives
- ★ undertake projects
- ★ consider the broader significance and relevance of what you find out.



Nobody knows what will happen next ...

# Understanding higher level study

## Studying at the cutting edge of knowledge

### *Moving beyond generalisations*

Study at previous levels often makes learning more manageable by using broader generalisations or 'brush strokes'. These are helpful when you are new to a subject. As you become more expert, you become aware of what lies behind some of the generalisations. As a result, things which had seemed straightforward become more problematic.

### *Journeying into the unknown*

This is especially the case when you come to look at new research. Your tutors' research or scholarship may be at the 'cutting edge' of what is known, as will much of the recommended reading. As a result, course material may take you to that 'edge' too. You may study issues where:

- ★ the answers are not yet known
- ★ there may be no 'easy answers'
- ★ there isn't a clear 'right' or 'wrong'
- ★ research findings are ambiguous or contradictory
- ★ knowledge advances in very small steps – or may seem to be going backwards
- ★ there are conflicting points of view.

You may find this to be frustrating or, alternatively, you may find this to be intellectually exciting and feel driven to think about interesting possibilities.

## Culture, conventions and values

Universities have a strong tradition of upholding values such as free speech, independent thinking and criticality. They strive to create objective truths, as far as this is possible, using rigorous and transparent methodologies. In general, each subject discipline has its own:

- ★ ways of looking at the world
- ★ culture, conventions and methodologies
- ★ specialist terminology, so that it can convey precise and specific meanings.

As a student, you are not simply learning about 'facts'. Rather, you are being trained to think in ways

that will enable you, in time, to conduct your own research using secure methodologies. This means that you need to learn:

- ★ the specialist language of the subject
- ★ what is valued, and why, within the subject discipline
- ★ how knowledge has developed and is developing in the subject – and how to do this for yourself.

## 'Learning the rules of the game ...'

As with many pursuits, success is easier if you are familiar with the system. In this context, that means understanding such things as:

- ★ how you will be taught: pages 16–19
- ★ what gets good grades: page 315
- ★ how language is used and the right style and level of formality: [Chapters 9–11](#)
- ★ academic conventions: pages 22 and 302–4
- ★ making the best use of opportunities to develop skills and experience: [Chapters 2 and 3](#).



Professor Smartz works at the cutting edge of knowledge

# Teaching: what to expect in Higher Education

## The study week

Most full-time courses are the equivalent of a working week in employment (around 35–40 hours). That is spent in a mixture of independent study at home or in a library, scheduled classes and activities and, if relevant, in labs, a studio or the workplace. See page 127.

## Lectures



These vary greatly, but usually involve listening and making notes. Some expect participation or 'flipped' learning. They might be recorded for reviewing later, but it is best to still attend, too. See pages 35–7.

- ★ size: 50–300 people
- ★ length: 1–3 hours
- ★ weekly: 5–20 hours.

## Tutorials

These are used to give feedback on your work and to guide and discuss your progress. Prepare well for them. See page 31.

- ★ size: small groups, pairs or individually
- ★ length: usually 15–60 minutes at most
- ★ frequency: typically 3–6 a year.

## Seminars/workshops/'crits'

These involve group discussions of student presentations, set reading, guest speakers or lectures. Prepare questions and read up, so you are ready to participate. See [Chapters 8](#) and [12](#).



- ★ size: typically 12–30 people
- ★ length: 1–3 hours
- ★ weekly: varies (perhaps 1–3 each week).

## Other typical teaching methods

### *Independent study*

This can take up most of the week. It requires good time management and strong motivation. See page 19 and [Chapter 6](#).

### *Group work and collaborative learning*

This could involve discussion, group tasks, projects or peer support. See [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#).

### *Technology-enhanced learning (TEL)*

Most programmes use TEL to support class-based and independent study. See pages 41 and 83–5.

### *Work-based learning and work placements*

Some courses involve job-related learning.

### *Distance learning*

Materials are provided, usually electronically. Contact with tutors could be by phone, email, conferencing, or in local meetings and classes.

## Independent study: benefits, challenges, risks

As independent study is core to most courses, learning to do this effectively is essential. A good starting place is to consider how you will manage its challenges and risks.

Benefits	Challenges	Risks
More control over your study time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To manage time effectively.</li> <li>★ To meet deadlines.</li> </ul>	Wasting study time. Underestimating how long study tasks take. Forgetting things that must be done.
More control over your 'spare' time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To use time effectively building your CV, gaining skills and experience, to further your employability and career interests.</li> <li>★ To recognise the difference between 'spare' time and independent study time.</li> <li>★ To put time aside to relax, rest, socialise and enjoy yourself.</li> </ul>	<p>Missing opportunities to develop a wider range of attributes that will benefit you when applying for jobs or promotions.</p> <p>Spending all your time in study, rather than in a balanced menu of activity.</p>
More choice about when and where to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To create structures for your day.</li> <li>★ To organise a place to study.</li> <li>★ To work out the best places and times, for you, for diverse study activities.</li> </ul>	Not getting down to study. Not creating a place that allows you to study without interruption. Making poor choices.
More choice about how you study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To identify what helps you learn best when undertaking different study tasks.</li> <li>★ To take responsibility for your learning and achieving your goals.</li> </ul>	Not bothering to explore what helps you to learn best. Getting stuck in old habits rather than developing new, more effective ones.
More responsibility for your own successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To identify barriers to your learning and to address these.</li> <li>★ To identify ways of improving your own performance and grades.</li> <li>★ To make effective use of feedback and to learn from mistakes.</li> </ul>	Failure to understand previous barriers to learning. Not addressing weaknesses in your performance. Giving up too easily. Ignoring feedback. Not seeing setbacks as useful guides to future improvement.
More choice about how much energy you devote to topics that interest you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To find the right balance between a broad set of interests at a superficial level and too much depth in a narrow range of topics.</li> <li>★ To broaden your range of interests.</li> </ul>	Devoting too much time to topics that interest you at the expense of those needed to complete the programme. Becoming specialised in too narrow a range of topics.
There isn't a teacher looking over your shoulder all the time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To keep on target with little guidance.</li> <li>★ To keep yourself motivated.</li> <li>★ To take responsibility for pursuing solutions to problems on your own.</li> <li>★ To recognise when you need help and to ask for it.</li> </ul>	Letting things slip. Falling behind in your work. Losing motivation. Losing a sense of what you are supposed to do. Not finding out what help is available, or not using it. Asking for help before trying to solve problems yourself.
More control over choice of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ To make choices that contribute to a coherent programme of study that interests you and meets your goals.</li> </ul>	Choosing topics that do not fit together well, or that do not contribute towards your goals.

Have a go at the Activity about independent study on the companion site.



# What kind of study skills do you need?

## What is a skill?

### *Skill*

To be skilled is to be able to perform a learned activity well and at will.

A skill is a learned ability rather than an outcome achieved through luck or chance and can, therefore, be relied on reasonably securely when you perform an equivalent task again. You can fine-tune skills through practice, feedback and reflection, just as athletes improve their performance by developing underlying skills in movement, breathing and pacing.

### *What are study skills?*

The term 'study skills' is used here to refer to abilities, habits, understandings and attitudes that enable achievement in your studies. These can be categorised into four easy-to-remember, inter-related areas:

- 1 **Self**
- 2 **Academic**
- 3 **People**
- 4 **Task**

More details of these are provided on pages 89–373.

### *Why are study skills important?*

Study skills help you to:

- 1 know what you are doing
- 2 organise your independent study
- 3 build your confidence
- 4 reduce study stress
- 5 improve the quality of your work
- 6 enjoy study more
- 7 study more efficiently
- 8 save time
- 9 avoid unnecessary errors
- 10 gain better grades.

## Reflection



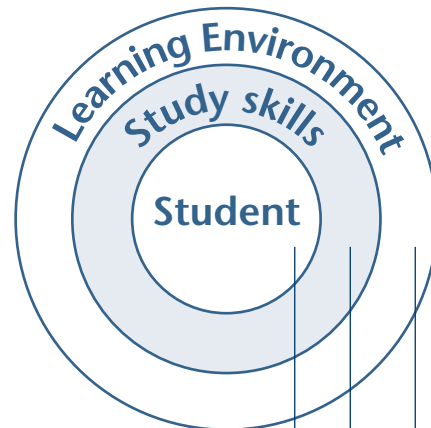
### Why study skills matter

Which of the 10 reasons above matter to you?

Are there other reasons why you want to develop your study skills?

## You and your unique starting point

The skills you will need and develop will be a unique combination, as your experiences, aims, habits, reactions, motivations, personality and many other contributing factors make your learning distinct. That is why a personalised approach is important.



- 1 You, the student, with your particular circumstances, goals, educational history, current abilities and habits
- 2 The course and overall learning environment in their entirety, which create new learning challenges
- 3 The combination of skills you need, personally, to manage those challenges to best effect.

# Self-efficacy skills: managing yourself for study

Good self-management is essential in higher education because of the increased expectations for autonomous learning and personal responsibility, and the level of challenge. Effective management of your time, emotions, attitudes, habits and life matter more as you progress upwards through the course. Self-efficacy is a broad concept; it involves such skills, qualities and attitudes as these 10 below.

- 1 **Engagement:** taking an active part in shaping your learning and success.
- 2 **Autonomy:** being able to think for yourself, and to make good choices to direct your own study.
- 3 **Managing your mindset:** adopting the right attitudes to drive your success and inspire you.
- 4 **Enhancing personal performance:** always looking to improve further, using feedback, data, observation and reflection.
- 5 **Personalising learning:** identifying and applying approaches that work best for you.
- 6 **Applying strategies:** creative, reflective, effective, active, well-motivated (C·R·E·A·M).
- 7 **Time-management:** using time to best effect; ensuring your work is submitted on time.
- 8 **Well-being and self-care:** balancing study, work and life; managing stress.
- 9 **Managing your learning environment:** coping with the broader learning context.
- 10 **Self-reflection:** thinking meaningfully about the consequences of your actions and thought patterns for your study, well-being and future.

## Reflection

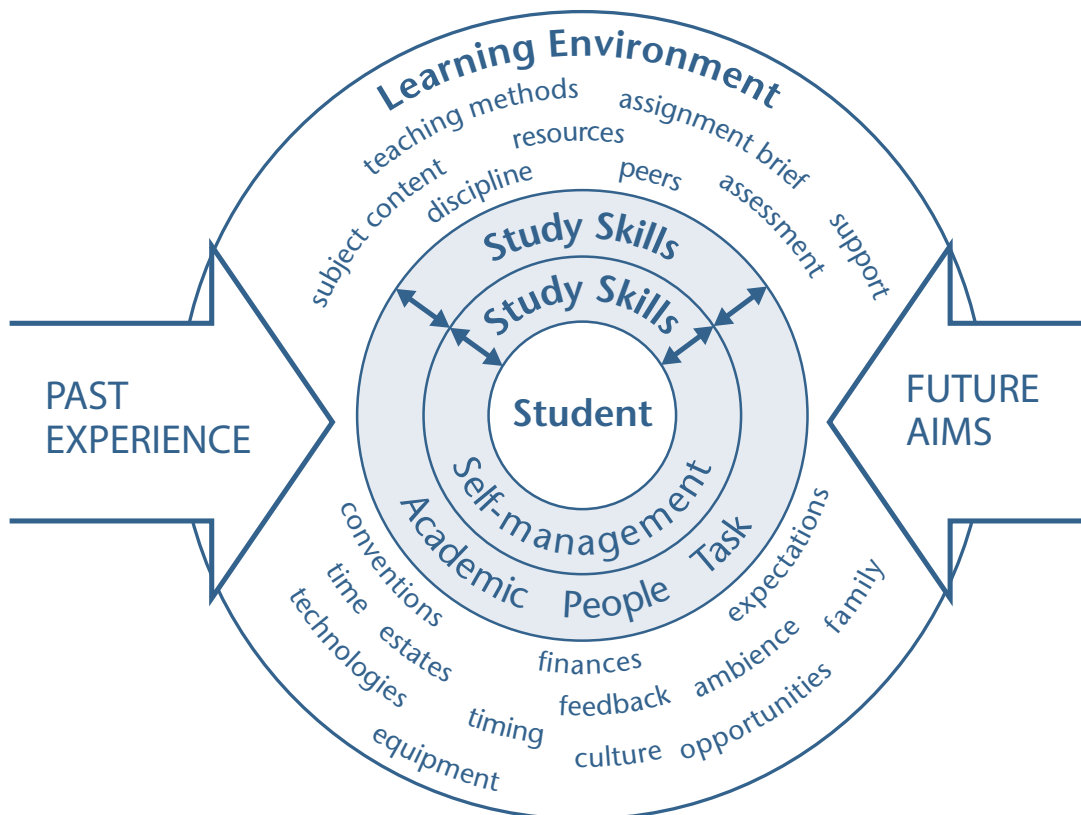


### Managing your learning environment

Which of the environmental factors below might create challenges for you?

What do you need to find out or to do now in order to better manage challenges that could arise?

Who or what could help you in managing these?



# Academic Skills

## Research skills

At each level of study, you will need to use increasingly sophisticated strategies for:

- ★ **Finding information:** searching for information and knowing what is available
- ★ **Reading** large amounts at speed
- ★ **Using multiple sources** of information
- ★ **Making helpful notes** of what you observe, hear, read and think – and using them well
- ★ **Organisational skills:** sorting, storing and retrieving information for re-use; planning out tasks well (Chapter 11)
- ★ **Using numerical data:** collecting, analysing and presenting these (Chapters 12 and 16).



Investigate!  
Find out about it!

## Thinking skills

At this level of study, this means such skills as:

- ★ **Decision making:** using sound decisions about the material to select and draw upon for your work (Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 16)
- ★ **Memory skills,** developing strategies for recalling information easily and accurately when needed (Chapter 18)
- ★ **Critical thinking skills:** evaluating the quality of sources of information; developing a strong line of reasoning based on sound evidence; interpreting material, data and theories (Chapter 12)
- ★ **Creative problem-solving and synthesis:** drawing on diverse knowledge and skills to create new ways of looking at an issue or to find new solutions (Chapters 5 and 12)
- ★ **Understanding:** making sense of increasingly complex and difficult data and concepts, including problems without clear-cut answers
- ★ **Metacognitive skills:** 'thinking about thinking': being able to think meaningfully about the quality and effectiveness of your thinking.



Think about it!

## Understanding academic conventions

For students, that means understanding:

- ★ **Higher Education** as a learning community
- ★ **Your academic discipline:** the specialist branch of learning that underpins your course
- ★ **Foundation concepts** in the discipline – its core theories and ideas
- ★ **Knowledge:** how this is constructed and advanced in your subject
- ★ **Evidence** as the basis of your argument
- ★ **Sound methodologies,** relevant to the subject, used to establish the evidence base
- ★ **Specialist terminology** used in the discipline
- ★ **Academic integrity,** including the use of reputable sources, attributing these correctly, and avoiding plagiarism
- ★ **Ethical awareness,** as relevant to context.



Develop expertise!  
Know your field!

## Written and other communication skills

For academic study, this includes:

- ★ **Precision:** using words and data accurately and succinctly, and keeping to word limits
- ★ **Structure and clarity:** organising your ideas and using a clear line of reasoning
- ★ **Style and format** for essays, reports, case studies, dissertations and other assignments
- ★ **Audience awareness:** for written, spoken and electronic communication
- ★ **Citing and referencing** sources correctly
- ★ **Subject discipline:** using the style, format and conventions used in your subject.



Communicate!  
Write it up!

See Chapters 13–16.

# People Skills and Task Management Skills

## People Skills: studying with others

Many academic tasks are undertaken in social contexts with other students, the public or clients, face to face or using technology. This calls for such skills as:

- ★ **Turn-taking:** taking an active part, without dominating or letting others take over
- ★ **Contributing constructively** in class, seminars, or in online discussions
- ★ **Peer feedback:** giving and receiving constructive criticism
- ★ **Making presentations,** to a group or as part of a group
- ★ **Collaborative team working and small group work,** face to face and/or using video links or social networking
- ★ **Cultural competence:** interacting sensitively and confidently with a diverse range of people; adapting well to new groups
- ★ **Supporting others,** encouraging them and sharing ideas without cheating or collusion.

See **Chapters 8** and **9**.



Talk it through!

### Activity

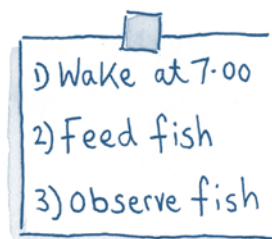
#### Which skills?

The skills you need vary depending on your course. Take a look at the **Skills Clouds** on this book's companion site at [www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk](http://www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk).

- ➔ What kind of course do you think is represented by each cloud?
- ➔ Which skills would stand out most on a skills cloud for your own course?

## Task management skills

You will need to draw together the above skills in order to complete required study tasks such as exams and assignments. Task management, in itself, requires skills in:



Take charge!

- ★ **Producing set items** such as essays, reports, portfolios, presentations, case studies, applying methodologies, conventions and styles relevant to the discipline
- ★ **Managing the process** of taking a task through from start to finish
- ★ **Meeting given requirements** such as the assignment brief, marking criteria, ethical standards, deadlines and word limits
- ★ **Following the appropriate protocols** and guidance for your subject, such as for lab work, clinical practice, field work, studio, performance, practical or technical skills
- ★ **Using specialist equipment and resources** relevant to your course and circumstances, or using apps designed to support study
- ★ **Project management** of larger, more complex tasks such as research projects, dissertations, exams, field work and end of year shows.

### Combining skills

The skills are outlined here, for clarity, as if they were separate categories. In practice, you would combine many skills from each category for most study tasks. For example, you cannot easily separate out basic research tasks, such as searching for information, from the process of thinking through what is relevant for a given assignment or from critical thinking. Similarly, meeting assignment briefs can mean integrating almost all of the skills outlined above.

As you develop through your course, you will integrate a wide range of skills fluidly, without noticing that you are doing so.

# Developing skills: five study skills components

## 1 Self-awareness and self-evaluation

To develop a skill, you need first to know where you are starting from. What are your current strengths and weaknesses? What do you want to achieve? Where do you need to improve? How are you going to improve? What are your resources? What could obstruct your goals? Ways of developing such awareness include:

- ★ using self-evaluation questionnaires
- ★ monitoring your progress
- ★ maintaining a reflective journal or blog
- ★ group discussion and chat
- ★ feedback and criticism from other students
- ★ feedback and comments from tutors.

## 2 Task awareness: knowing what is required

To score a goal you need to know where the goalposts are. In an academic context, this means finding out what is expected of you and what your lecturers are looking for whenever you are set a new assignment.

Essential information is usually provided in course handbooks, webpages, through a virtual learning environment and in assignment briefs. See pages 32–3 and [Chapter 14](#) for key information to find out and use.

In particular, for each subject, find out about:

- ★ the curriculum – the course content
- ★ the outcomes or objectives – what you must know or be able to do by the end of the course
- ★ how marks are allocated – what gets good marks? What loses marks?
- ★ the special preferences of each lecturer – if in doubt, ask.

## 3 Strategy, method and organisation

It is easier to study and saves you time if you have a method for working and are well organised. A skilled student uses strategies, and with practice these become automatic.

## 4 Confidence and sense of 'entitlement'

If you are to succeed as a student, you have to believe that such success is possible for you.

However, many students feel that academic success is for other people rather than for them. This may be because of their experiences at school, or because nobody from their family has a degree. Often, it is because they hold particular ideas about intelligence, especially their own academic abilities, and so do not give themselves 'permission' to do well.

For this reason, [Chapter 4](#) focuses on what we mean by 'intelligence' and 'learning'.

## 5 Familiarity, practice and habit

All skills improve through practice, feedback and monitoring. The more you study and reflect on your learning, the more you become:

- ★ adept at finding shortcuts
- ★ aware of underlying skills, qualities and habits that you can improve
- ★ able to see patterns in what you do
- ★ able to focus on study for longer
- ★ able to perform skills automatically.

The way to study well and easily becomes a habit. If you have been away from study or are not used to managing so much unscheduled time, you may find you need to build good study habits.

### ***You don't have to be 'clever'!***

When you consider these study skills components, it is clear that good study skills have little to do with being 'naturally clever'. They owe much more to awareness, strategies, confidence and practice, leading to an overall development in your learning. Each of these aspects is covered in the various chapters of *The Study Skills Handbook*.

# Study skills: priorities, stage 1

**Column A Already have the skill?** Decide ✓ whether each statement is generally true of you.

**Column B Needed?** How important is it to you? Rate from 6 to 10. (6 = not needed. 10 = essential.)

**Column C Ability?** Rate how good you are at this skill now. (Scale 1 = very weak. 5 = excellent.)

**Column D Priority:** Subtract the score in column C from that in column B (B - C). Items with the highest scores in column D are likely to be priorities. Then turn to page 26. Repeat later in the year.

Study skills statements	A This is true ✓	B Needed? (6–10)	C Ability? (1–5)	D Priority? (B–C)
I have effective strategies for ...				
1 organising myself well for study				
2 using my time effectively (Checklist, page 124)				
3 thinking creatively				
4 solving problems				
5 reading for academic purposes				
6 searching for information for assignments (Chapter 11)				
7 making, and using, good notes (Checklist, page 184)				
8 making best use of taught sessions (Evaluation, page 39)				
9 effective group and seminar work (Checklist, page 186)				
10 working collaboratively with others				
11 making presentations (Checklist, page 195)				
12 managing writing tasks (Checklist, page 274)				
13 writing essays using academic conventions				
14 writing reports and dissertations (Checklist, page 369)				
15 undertaking a research project (Checklist, pages 352–62)				
16 avoiding cheating/plagiarism				
17 citing sources and writing references				
18 improving my concentration				
19 thinking critically and analytically				
20 critiquing my own work and others' work				
21 managing stress, anxiety and well-being				
22 preparing for exams (Checklists, pp. 380, 383 and 387)				
23 evaluating and improving my work (Checklist, page 100)				
24 developing my memory for course material				

## Study skills: priorities, stage 2

**Column A** Using the scoring from stage 1, decide whether each item really is a priority, whether it could wait, who else could do it, or any other options you have.

**Column B** Number your priorities in order. Highlight in yellow the one you are going to work on next. Highlight it in red once you have worked on it.

Study skills statements	<b>A:</b> Priority for action?	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b> pages
I will become more effective at ...			
<b>1</b> organising myself well for study			30–7
<b>2</b> using my time effectively			123–50
<b>3</b> thinking creatively			90–8
<b>4</b> solving problems			93–8
<b>5</b> reading for academic purposes			213–25
<b>6</b> searching for information for assignments			233–44
<b>7</b> making, and using, good notes			226–31
<b>8</b> making best use of taught sessions			31–9
<b>9</b> effective group and seminar work			175–86
<b>10</b> working collaboratively with others			171–85
<b>11</b> making presentations			189–95
<b>12</b> managing writing tasks			273–300
<b>13</b> writing essays using academic conventions			301–343
<b>14</b> writing reports and dissertations			347–69
<b>15</b> undertaking a research project			347–69
<b>16</b> avoiding cheating/plagiarism			247–8
<b>17</b> citing sources and writing references			249–51
<b>18</b> improving my concentration			36; 84; 106; 141
<b>19</b> thinking critically and analytically			253–72
<b>20</b> critiquing my own work and others' work			266–72
<b>21</b> managing stress, anxiety and well-being			151–68
<b>22</b> preparing for exams			373–88
<b>23</b> evaluating and improving my work			100; 315–17
<b>24</b> developing my memory for course material			389–404

## Study skills action plan

Bring together your thoughts about your responses to activities, reflections and self-evaluations. Use these to develop an action plan to collate your thoughts and priorities for action.

An expandable action plan and a chart to help you monitor your progress are available on the companion site at [www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk](http://www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk).



Date:
Summary of my current strengths, skills and qualities: what I have achieved so far
Summary of what I need to work on, develop or improve
My priorities: what I am going to do, when, and how
How will I know that I have improved? (E.g. What changes would I expect in my work, in myself, or in the attitudes of others?)

## Review

1

### **Take charge!**

Do what you need to do to make the experience happy, useful and memorable. Use and create opportunities.

2

### **Develop your vision**

Build your own sense of purpose and motivation for study. Find inspiration. Inspire yourself!

3

### **Understand the context**

Recognise how Higher Education differs from your previous study and why that is so. Use that knowledge to influence how you approach your study.

4

### **Get to grips with independent study**

It is a key aspect of higher level study and a sign of respect for the intelligence and potential of advanced students. It can be challenging, so think and plan carefully about how you will manage it: don't just leave it to chance.

5

### **Don't take study skills for granted**

Keep updating, extending and refining your skills base. You need more sophisticated skills and better study habits as you progress to higher levels and years of study. Good skills can also free up time for other things (or for more study!)

6

### **APT-S**

Give consideration to the range of Academic, People, Task- and Self-management skills that are required – and that you gain through your study.

7

### **Recognise the 5 study skills components**

Use these to help you develop your skills and to feel more confident when skills don't come easily.

8

### **Develop self-efficacy**

This is often overlooked and yet makes a great difference to students' success.

9

### **Set priorities**

The potential skill set is vast. You can't improve in all dimensions at once. Decide which skills and study habits are of most value to you now, for your course and well-being, and for your likely future on graduation.

10

### **Create an Action Plan**

Decide when and how you will take forward your study skills priorities.

11

### **Believe in yourself**

You have chosen to take on the challenge. Rise to it. It won't always be easy. If you do find it easy, find ways to stretch yourself intellectually so you can look back with a sense of satisfaction and achievement. You can do it.

12

### **Take away your own messages**

The points above are key messages from this chapter, but other aspects might be more important for you. Jot down your own list of points to take away from the chapter – ones to put into action.

# Chapter 2

# Gaining the most from your course

Engage. Enjoy. Excel.



## Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- ✓ consider the ten 'golden rules' for passing a course
- ✓ use personal tutorials and class time to best effect
- ✓ become better informed about your course and studies as a whole
- ✓ engage fully with your course, during classes and outside of taught sessions
- ✓ make effective notes of what is covered in lectures and taught sessions
- ✓ manage the more difficult aspects of your course
- ✓ get under the skin of your course, so you better understand what is important
- ✓ to make the subject your own and enjoy it.

## Introduction

Whilst the benefits you gain from your course depend, in part, on the quality of the teaching and resources, much of the real value lies in what you and other students bring to the table.

- ★ If the course is really good, you won't be able to coast along with little effort, and you won't want to.
- ★ If the course is poor or dull, it is all the more important that you take charge so that you gain from the experience.

This chapter looks at some key ways of extracting the maximum value from time scheduled for study, whether in taught sessions or as independent study.

***You invest time, money, energy and your personal reputation in your course, so it makes sense to get the most from every aspect of it.***



## Reflection

### 10 Golden rules

Start by considering the 10 golden rules for passing a course and avoiding study problems later in your course. See page 30.

- ★ Which, if any, are weak points for you?
- ★ What will you do about that?

# Ten golden rules

These 'golden rules' greatly increase your chance of passing your course and avoiding problems along the way. They might seem obvious but many students run into trouble with them. It is wise to:

- ★ Take them seriously
- ★ Commit to following them
- ★ Take action to address your weak or 'risky' areas.

Consider below which you follow already ✓. Highlight any areas that you need to address.

<p><b>1 Turn up! You gain ...</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ A better sense of the course as a whole.</li> <li>★ More of a sense of 'belonging'.</li> <li>★ Less stress and anxiety.</li> <li>★ You don't get on the wrong side of tutors.</li> <li>★ You don't miss learning that you pay for.</li> <li>★ You pick up useful tutor hints and tips.</li> <li>★ You meet attendance requirements.</li> <li>★ You are less likely to fail.</li> </ul>	<p><b>2 Be on time; stay to the end</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>... for every class and event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ It creates the right impression.</li> <li>★ It is a courtesy to others, as it avoids disrupting their learning.</li> <li>★ You gain important information given at the start and end of class.</li> <li>★ Other people take you more seriously.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3 Focus attention during class</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Zone in to what is being taught and tune out everything else. Otherwise, you are wasting time you have paid for. See page 36.</p>	<p><b>4 Don't just turn up – join in!</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ You learn more and develop more skills.</li> <li>★ It helps you to stay focused.</li> <li>★ It helps achieve sessions' study objectives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5 Submit work/sit exams on time</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Handing work in late, or not at all, just makes life harder. You automatically lose marks. You probably have to do the work or sit the exam anyway, but for a capped mark and without the advantage of feedback. The likelihood is that your work is good enough to pass. If not, it is likely you can try again with the benefit of useful practice and feedback. (Your grade might be capped for a re-sit.)</p>	<p><b>6 Keep your tutors onsite</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Remember, they usually want all students to succeed. (It reflects well on them too!)</li> <li>★ You may need them one day as an advocate, for support, or to provide a job reference.</li> <li>★ Don't lose their goodwill through making unreasonable demands, lack of courtesy, seeming not to care about your study, disrupting other students' learning, lateness, absenteeism, cheating, time-wasting, etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7 Avoid any kind of cheating</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Never purchase essays or assignments.</li> <li>★ Don't get anyone else to do your work.</li> <li>★ Don't plagiarise. See pages 247–8.</li> </ul> <p>If in doubt, check with your tutors first.</p>	<p><b>8 Take the right components/credits</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Correct number for the year. At the right level.</p> <p>In the right subjects. In the right order.</p> <p>The right options to enable future choices.</p>
<p><b>9 Spread your workload</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>As far as possible, aim to spread your workload evenly across the term or semester. Avoid carrying incomplete credit if you can, as it adds to next year's workload.</p>	<p><b>10 Use the advice and support</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Read all course handbooks and guidance.</li> <li>★ Use personal tutorials effectively.</li> <li>★ Use the advice and support services.</li> <li>★ Take notice of all feedback – and use it!</li> </ul>

# Effective use of tutorials and personal tutors

Most courses offer personal tutoring or equivalents. As large institutions can feel impersonal, this provides a human face. The better they know you, the better placed they are to advise you, signpost help or write references for prizes, jobs or housing.

## Keep personal tutors on your side

- ★ Don't be afraid to attend tutorial sessions. Let your tutor get to know you – you are not on trial!
- ★ Be realistic in what you ask for and when. Don't leave requests for help until the last minute.
- ★ Always be polite and courteous. Remember they have lives of their own. They are not there to fulfil your every need nor to respond to messages in the middle of the night!
- ★ Keep in touch so they know you are still there.

## Sharing contact details

- ★ Keep your personal tutor's contact details close to hand, for easy access if needed.
- ★ Inform them of any changes to your details.

## Making and keeping appointments

- ★ If you are asked to make appointments, do this straight away before you forget.
- ★ Write the details into your diary.
- ★ Apply common courtesies: turn up on time. Don't miss appointments. Always apologise if something goes wrong. Schedule a new appointment without being asked to do so.

## Prepare well for tutorials

- ★ Don't just turn up – work out what you need from it. Draw up an agenda or list of questions.
- ★ Go over what was agreed at your previous meeting; be ready to provide an update.
- ★ If you have questions about feedback on your work, be prepared to discuss what you think it means or why you received it.
- ★ Bring a copy of a recent assignment with you – it might prove useful for clarifying concerns.

## In tutorials

- ★ Let the tutor know your own agenda.
- ★ Check whether they have matters to raise; finalise the agenda together.
- ★ Work your way through your questions.
- ★ Listen to what your tutor has to say; note it down. Assume they want the best for you.
- ★ Agree actions to follow up before next time.

## After tutorials

- ★ Find a quiet place and go over points raised.
- ★ If relevant, draw up a list of actions.
- ★ Follow up on actions agreed in the tutorial.

## Matters to raise with tutors

- ★ Let them know your ideas for projects, dissertations, study abroad, careers, etc. – they might know of relevant funding or schemes or have other useful tips.
- ★ Let them know if you have a disability or face other difficulties that affect your completing the course or achieving as well as you could.
- ★ If something goes wrong, let them know.

## Enjoy them!

You can enjoy good conversations with your personal tutor – about you, your course and your ambitions. Your tutor will have insights that could be valuable to you.



## Reflection

- ★ How do you feel about personal tutorials in general? Do you look forward to them or try to avoid them?
- ★ What could you do to ensure that your personal tutorials are more productive and constructive?



## Be well informed: find out ...

### Read course material

At this level of study, it is assumed that you will:

- ★ find out what kind of information is available
- ★ read everything that has been provided, thoroughly, and in a timely manner
- ★ work out what it means for you
- ★ ask, if you don't understand its significance.

**Get to know how it all works!**

### Don't wait to be told

Some students are caught out because they think that, at the right moment, a tutor will remind them of what they should know or do, especially if this is what happened at school or college. Although that may happen occasionally, it is not typical. It is usually up to you to make sure you are up to speed with what you need to know.

### Checklist

Find out the following, as relevant to your course. Check ✓ each item once completed.

### Find out what you need to know

- Make a list of all the information you are supposed to receive and when
- Clarify where information is provided
- Check that you receive each item
- Check where to find the regulations and what is in them in case you ever need them.

### Find out programme details

- The exact name and code of your course
- The exact name and code of each module
- The names and contact details of all the tutors and lecturers teaching you this year
- Where to locate handbooks and guidance for the course and study units
- The online facilities provided for your course
- The content of your course (the syllabus).

### Find out about levels and credit

- Your level of study
- The number of modules and credits you must take each year and/or for each level
- The level and credit rating of each module
- The right modules/credit to take for what you want to study next year or for career purposes.

### Find out about attendance requirements

- Start and end dates for terms or semesters
- The minimum attendance requirements
- Times to log on for course-related activity
- Date and times of any trips or events
- When your classes start and end
- Consequences if you don't meet requirements.

### Find out your time requirements

- The number of study hours required (page 130)
- The pattern of study on your course, including the amount of independent study (page 18)
- The weekly time commitments expected for different types of study (pages 131–2).

### Find out about student representation

- The kind of student reps system used
- When and how reps are elected
- The training provided for reps
- How to become a rep
- How to get your voice heard as a student
- What your reps are doing
- How your course has responded to student feedback and ratings.

## Find out about teaching

- The teaching methods
- What kind of participation is required
- How you will be informed about room and time changes.

## Find out about assessment

- The details of how you will be assessed
- How marks/grades are allocated
- The marking criteria and what these mean
- When and how you are expected to hand in your work, such as in person or electronically
- The kind of receipt or acknowledgement provided when you hand in your work
- What is needed to pass?
- What is needed to excel?

## Find out how each level of study differs

- Look at 'level descriptors' and marking criteria for each level or year of study
- Compare assignment briefs for different levels, such as for length, difficulty and complexity, and the amount of personal choice and responsibility involved.

## Find out about feedback

Feedback on your work may be given in many different ways, from written responses through to informally and verbally during a clinical session.

- What kinds of feedback are offered on each module or unit of study?
- When and by whom is this given?
- With whom can you discuss this?

## Find out about resources

- What kinds of learning resources are provided for you electronically or using hard copy?
- How are you informed about updates?
- Where can you find the reading lists?
- Of the items on your reading lists, which can be substituted for those not available?
- What studio/lab/practice space is provided?
- See also page 41.

## Get to know your library

- Who are your library contacts this year?
- Where are course-related items located?
- If you are not a regular library user, become familiar with the space (see page 237).

## Find out about support

- Who is responsible for supporting you this year, such as a personal tutor or year tutor?
- What support is available if you struggle with your coursework?
- What do you have to do to access this? Do you need to email tutors? book appointments?
- Is there a peer-support scheme?

## Find out about social events

- How do course students keep in touch?
- Where do course students meet up?
- What course events are provided?
- Are trips and outings provided?
- Are there networking events?
- Is there a course-related club/society?



## Organise your information

- Store all study-related information in one place.
- Book time into your planner to browse it so you know what information is provided.

# Gaining from scheduled learning: purpose and value



I don't want to miss a moment!

## Find out the purpose

Scheduled sessions, whether labs, lectures, seminars, placements, trips, group projects, discussion or other activity all have a purpose in the course design. Some typical reasons are listed opposite. If you aren't clear of the reason for an activity, ask the tutor.

## What do you gain?

Whatever your tutors' intentions, you can decide for yourself how you will extract the most from classes. That will give you a stronger sense of purpose and help you to remain focused.

### Reflection



Do you use scheduled sessions effectively, to gain all that these can offer, directly and indirectly? If not, what will you change so you benefit from their full value? What could you do to enjoy them more?

### Identify the value for you

Consider which of these benefits of scheduled sessions (such as lectures, group work, etc.) are of value to you ✓.

**1 A 'feel' for the subject**

To gain a broad overview or 'mental map' of the topic; to help me see how new material adds to the picture.

**2 A steer on the essentials**

To find out what lecturers consider important about the topic and issues; to help me when interpreting assignment titles and anticipating potential exam questions; to gain a sense of what I am supposed to know.

**3 To guide and inspire independent study**

For a steer on where to focus my reading, research, practice and thinking; for ideas to inspire my own investigations into the topic.

**4 Clarifying difficult concepts**

To help me clarify complex issues, concepts, problems, etc.

**5 Checking and reinforcing**

To remind me of what I have covered already, to help me understand and recall course material.

**6 Reassurance of being 'up to speed'**

To be confident I am doing what is expected; to avoid the anxiety of feeling I might have missed something essential.

**7 To gain different perspectives**

... from the tutor and, if there is class participation, from the questions and comments of others; these add to my understanding of how the issues can be conceptualised.

**8 To develop insights, skills and behaviours**

... such as through hands-on practical work, working in groups and teams, and communicating through discussion.

**9 Associating with peers before and after class**

To catch up on news, ideas, and generally gain from being part of a learning community.

**10 To demonstrate and reinforce my commitment**

By giving my time and energy, I reinforce my sense of connection to the course, which helps me engage further and enjoy it more.

# 'Flip your learning': advance preparation for class

## 'Flipped classes'

'Flipping' means you don't wait to find out new material in class, you cover it beforehand so that you learn more. Whether you are required by your tutors to 'flip' your learning, or just do so for yourself, advance preparation adds value to your study.

## Why prepare?

### *For more effective listening*

- ★ You gain a general feel for the topic – a sense of what to expect.
- ★ You can then follow more easily.
- ★ You know what to listen out for.
- ★ You can bring questions and spot the answers to these more easily.
- ★ It is easier to take notes in class: you have a better sense of what is relevant and what not to note.
- ★ You have better recall of the most salient material later.

### *For easier participation*

Many courses require active participation in taught sessions based on work prepared in advance. You are set tasks to do or it may just be assumed that you will read around the subject in advance.

- ★ You have greater confidence about joining in.
- ★ You can follow the material more easily in class.
- ★ You can formulate questions to guide and focus learning in class.

## Reflection



### 'Flipping' your learning

How could you prepare better for class so that you engage more, learn more and enjoy learning more, both whilst preparing for classes and during them?

## Prepare, prepare, prepare

**Form an overview.** Check the topics which are scheduled to come up in class over the next 2–3 weeks. Browse the topic online or in one or more key texts – just gain a feel for material that will be covered. Look at the headings within chapters to get a sense of the content, or read opening or closing paragraphs. Look for key themes, issues or debates. Jot down your own outline and any early questions that you have.

**Check for specialist vocabulary.** Look up specialist or technical terms you don't understand. Create a personal 'glossary' or dictionary for easy checks and to learn them.

**Check for concepts and approaches.** Look out for ideas, concepts, theories and approaches that are new to you. Make a note of these. Who developed these, and when and why? Why are they significant? See page 45.

**Check the people.** If names keep re-appearing in the literature, Google them.

**Complete any set work,** if your tutors have provided texts, podcasts, exercises or other activities to do in advance. Make sure you take these and the work you have done to class, or can access them there.

**Consider upcoming assignments.** Make a list of material to watch out for. Jot down questions about this to focus your listening. Leave space to jot down answers under each question either during or after the lecture.

**Jot down your own views on issues or debates.** Check whether your views change – before, during or after class.

**Remind yourself of the last class:** glance through notes; look for potential links with the next class. There is little value in being present in body but absent in mind during class.

# Engagement during class: more than just 'turning up'

## Participate in class activities



The activities are set for a reason. Don't worry about getting things wrong – that may be the point! Participating fully benefits you:

- ★ to focus, understand and remember
- ★ to develop confidence and a wider set of skills and abilities
- ★ to learn from mistakes
- ★ to get to know others better and for others to get to know you, which is useful when choosing or forming groups for classwork and projects.

**50–60% of material heard in class is forgotten ...**

## Listen attentively

Listen out for clues the lecturer gives about the 'arc' of the lecture – its direction of travel. For example: 'I want to look at five main categories of ...' or 'So, why does this happen?' Good teachers provide an outline of key points to be covered, or flag this in their slides. Use their signalling to help structure your notes.

## Maintain your focus in class

Don't miss out on important learning.

**Put all distractions aside** – personal messages, texts, work, thoughts, plans, etc. You may be asked to use devices or phones for class. If so, consider using an app that blocks out internet distractions.

**Mentally challenge what you hear**, to help you focus and to aid recall: e.g. 'Is this always the case?' 'Is it really representative?' 'But why?'

## Make selective notes

**Make your own notes** – even if given class notes. At least 50–60% of what you hear in class is forgotten even if you pay attention. Making your notes by hand helps you remember more.

**But not too many notes** – as you miss points without realising. Note just enough to help you remember what to follow up after class.

**In your own words.** By being selective, you are less likely to end up regurgitating your lecturers' own words back to them in your assignments.

**Avoid drifting off** – by keeping your mind active in listening and making good notes instead.

You can copy or adapt the chart on page 37 to help structure your own lecture notes. A blank template is available on the companion site at [www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk](http://www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk).



See also page 231.