

The Study Skills Handbook

Second Edition

Stella Cottrell

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Related Palgrave Study Guides

Skills for Success: The Personal Development Planning Handbook *Stella Cottrell*

Teaching Study Skills and Supporting Learning
Stella Cottrell

How to Write Better Essays *Bryan Greetham*

The Students' Guide to Writing *John Peck and Martin Coyle*

The Mature Students' Guide to Writing *Jean Rose*

Research Using IT *Hilary Coombes*

Study Skills for Speakers of English as a Second Language *Marilyn Lewis and Hayo Reinders*

Effective Communication for Arts and Humanities Students *Joan van Emden and Lucinda Becker*

Effective Communication for Science and Technology *Joan van Emden*

How to Manage Your Arts, Humanities and Social Science Degree *Lucinda Becker*

How to Manage Your Science and Technology Degree *Lucinda Becker and David Price*

Visit our online Study Skills resource at www.skills4study.com

Introducing

The Study Skills Handbook

The study skills needed for Higher Education are ultimately gained only through studying at that level. Study skills don't hatch fully formed, any more than a grown hen pops from an egg. They evolve and mature through practice, trial and error, feedback from others, and reflection as you move through the different stages of your course. You will be surprised at how your thinking and language skills develop simply through continued study.

However, there are some basic approaches which can start you off on a good footing, help you cut corners, and accelerate the learning process. This *Handbook* developed out of practical work

undertaken with hundreds of students over ten years. The core of the book has now been used by over 50,000 students and hundreds of lecturers, whose varied comments have contributed to this version of the *Handbook*.

Quick tips and deeper learning

A reflective, active, self-evaluating approach to learning develops deeper understanding in the long term. However, quick tips are also invaluable to students, especially in emergencies. This *Handbook* offers both approaches. To meet your immediate and long-term study needs, move flexibly between the two approaches.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Study Skills Handbook aims to help you to manage your own success as a student. It does this by:

- preparing you for what to expect from Higher Education (university or college)
- encouraging you to think about the skills you have already, which you will need both as a student and in your working life
- providing resources to help you evaluate, reflect upon and manage your own learning
- making suggestions on how to develop positive approaches and good study habits
- offering guidance on how to tackle activities that many students find difficult
- helping you to understand more about how learning, intelligence and memory work, and how to develop critical and analytical thinking styles
- encouraging you to understand that success as a student is about more than being 'clever'. Good marks, as well as other kinds of successful outcome, are possibilities for any student.

How to use *The Study Skills Handbook*

This is a guide that you can dip into as you need – or use by working through the chapters related to a particular aspect of study. You can do as little or as much as you find helpful. Of necessity, the *Handbook* focuses on a different aspect of study in each chapter. However, as your study progresses, you will notice that these skills are interconnected. Developing one area of your study will also help with other aspects.

Finding what you need

- Each chapter begins with an outline of the learning outcomes for that chapter. Browsing through this list may help you decide whether or not you need to read the chapter.
- Each chapter deals with several topics, and each topic is introduced by a heading like the one at the top of this page. These headings make it easier to browse through to find what you need quickly.
- The index (at the back) gives page references for specific topics.

Keeping a journal



This symbol reminds you to note down your reflections in your study journal. For details, see page 67.

Photocopiable pages

Pages containing self-evaluations, checklists, planners and record sheets may be photocopied for individual reuse. (You may like to enlarge some of them onto A3 paper.) When you have used the photocopies, keep them with your journal for future reference.



This symbol is used to indicate a page that can be used for self-evaluation or for planning.

Cartoons and page layout

The cartoons and different layouts act primarily as visual memory-joggers. Even if you cannot draw well, you can use visual prompts like these in your own notes. (This will also help you to find things more quickly.) The variety will encourage learning through different senses, too – see Chapter 10 for more details.

The self-evaluation questionnaires

The self-evaluation questionnaires will help you in two ways:

- by breaking down major study skills into their component sub-skills
- by enabling you to pinpoint which components make the study skill difficult for you, and to notice steps or activities that you missed out in the past.

Sometimes just going through the questionnaire will be all you need to do if this helps you identify the missing link. Use the questionnaires to monitor your progress and identify your strengths.

The 'challenging' chapters

Don't be put off by chapters that look difficult, or by words you don't know. You may need to read some chapters several times – but that's typical of advanced learning. When you have lived with them for a few weeks and thought about them, the ideas and vocabulary will become everyday words to you.

Knowledge of specialised terms and of underlying theories empowers you as a student. It sharpens your thinking, allows you to describe things more accurately, and improves your overall performance.

Where to begin

- Read through the 'Seven approaches to learning' used by *The Study Skills Handbook* (page 4). The *Handbook* will then make more sense to you.
- Complete the ***What do I want from university?*** questionnaire (page 6). This will help you to orientate yourself as a student.
- Browse through the *Handbook* so you know roughly what is in it. You may not know what to use until you start assignments.
- Use the ***Study skills: priorities*** planner (page 35) to focus your thinking.
- If you are unsure where to begin with a study skill, do the ***Self-evaluation*** questionnaire in the appropriate chapter to clarify your thinking.
- Chapters 2–4 cover groundwork and approaches basic to the rest of the *Handbook*. You will probably find it helpful to work through these early on.

If you are thinking of applying to university or know little about university life ...

Start with Chapter 1, 'Preparing for university'. This gives you an idea of what to expect from university, helps you decide whether you are ready for university yet, and gives advice on how to prepare yourself for your first term. Chapter 4 is also likely to be useful.

You may also find it helpful if you:

- identify your current skills and qualities (see pages 31–4)
- look at your motivation (***What do I want from university?***, pages 6 and 91)
- develop confidence in your reading (pages 120–6) and writing (pages 144–9).

If you have done BTEC or A-levels ...

You may find that you can browse through the early sections of each chapter quite quickly. Chapters 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11 may be the most useful for you. If you feel uncomfortable about a book that uses images as learning tools, read page 53 and Chapter 11 on 'Memory' and the methods may make more sense.

Dyslexic students

There are now thousands of dyslexic students in Higher Education. Many aspects of this book were designed with dyslexic students in mind, including:

- the contents
- the use of visual images
- the book's layout
- the emphasis on structure
- the use of varied and multi-sensory approaches to learning.

Pace yourself

If you have been away from study for a while, or if you are finding study difficult, be kind to yourself. It takes time and practice to orientate yourself to the Higher Education environment and to develop study habits, especially academic writing skills. Your first-year marks may not count towards the final grade, which means you have time to practise and improve.

Everybody learns in their own way

There are many avenues to successful study. Experiment. Explore. Be creative. Find what suits *you* best.

Chapters 2–4 encourage you to look for your own learning patterns, and make suggestions on how to experiment with your learning.

Seven approaches to learning

The Study Skills Handbook uses seven approaches to learning.

1 Learning can be an adventure

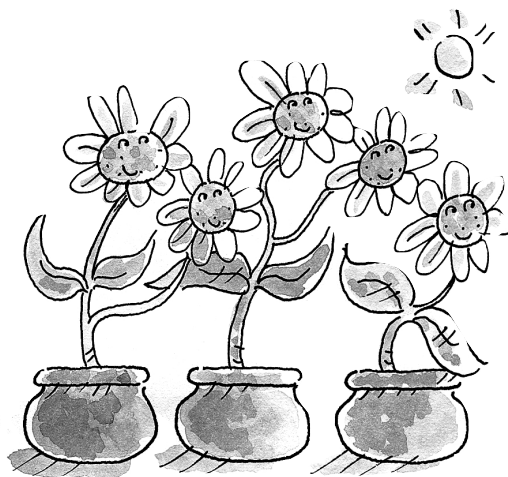
It is difficult to learn if you are stressed or bored. This *Handbook* encourages you to be effective rather than virtuous, and to seek out ways of making your learning more fun. Degree courses take several years, so you need to find ways of making your learning enjoyable.

Small children learn extraordinary amounts without trying particularly hard – simply through being relaxed, observing, playing, role-playing, trying things out, making mistakes, and being interested in what they are doing. They don't regard setbacks as failures; they don't worry about what others think; and they don't tell themselves they might not be able to learn. When a child falls over, she or he just gets up and moves again, and eventually walking becomes easy. Adults can learn in this way too – if they allow themselves.

2 Use many senses

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, or moving the body, the more opportunities we give the brain to take in information using our preferred sense.

The use of several senses also gives the brain more connections and associations, making it easier to find information later, which assists memory and learning. This book encourages you to use your senses to



the full and to incorporate movement into your study. This will make learning easier – and more interesting.

3 Identify what attracts you

It is easier to learn by keeping desirable outcomes in mind than by forcing 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.

It is within your power to find in any aspect of study the 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.

4 Use active learning

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

- juggling information
- struggling to make sense
- playing with different options
- making decisions
- linking information.

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



5 Take responsibility for your own learning

As you will see from Chapter 1, universities generally expect you to be ready to study on your own, with minimum assistance, especially for basics such as spelling or grammar. As a college student, you are expected to be largely responsible for your own learning.

One way in which you can act responsibly towards yourself is to ensure that you *are* ready for the stage of study that you are entering. Many students enter college without adequate preparation. This can make study more stressful and difficult than it need be, and undermine confidence. Make sure *you* are ready.

6 Trust in your own intelligence

Many students worry in case they are not intelligent enough for their course. Some did not do well at school, and worry that being a

good student is 'not in their genes'. Panic about this can, in itself, make it hard to learn. That is why this book considers ideas about intelligence (in Chapter 3) and stress (in Chapter 12). Many students who were not ideal pupils at school do

extremely well at college, following thorough preparation.

7 Recognise your own learning preferences

Each of us learns in an individual way – though we also have a lot in common.

Some theorists divide people into 'types' such as *visual*, *auditory* and *kinaesthetic*, or *introverted* and *extroverted* – there are lots of ways of dividing people up. The important thing, however, is not to discover which 'type' you are but rather to recognise

the many different elements that contribute to how you yourself learn best.

If you regard yourself as a 'type' you may over-identify yourself with that type. You may then get stuck with that image of yourself – and always consider yourself a 'visual introverted' type, or a 'chaotic extrovert'. This may leave you with rigid views about the one way you learn. What you *need* to do is experiment with strategies and skills you currently under-use. The human brain is highly adaptable: able learners move easily between different strategies and learning styles, depending on the task in hand.

The good thing about being aware of how *you* learn best is that you can adapt new learning to fit where you are now. You may also be able to see more clearly why you did well or badly at school, depending on whether the teaching matched your personal learning preferences.



SELF-EVALUATION

What do I want from university?

Our imaginations are extremely powerful. Just try *not* to think about something, such as whether you left the cooker on, and you quickly discover how easy it is for your imagination to see your home burnt to the ground! If you give your imagination any leads, it will act on them.

You can use this capacity of the imagination in many ways to help your study. Try using the following questionnaire to consider what, in five years' time, you would like to be saying to yourself about what you achieved at college. You may then find that your orientation towards your work and to different activities on campus starts to change, as your imagination goes to work.

You may also like to come back to this at different times in the future, to see whether your thinking about what really counts for you has changed.

Imagine yourself five years from now, thinking back on what you achieved at university. From your chair in the future, rate the following desirable outcomes (1, 2, 3, etc.) in their order of importance to you then.

- ☐ I made good friends
- ☐ I got a good degree
- ☐ I made full use of college facilities
- ☐ I developed new interests
- ☐ I developed skills which helped me find a good job
- ☐ I learnt to work better with other people
- ☐ I learnt to express myself better
- ☐ I really enjoyed myself
- ☐ I found out more about who I was as a person
- ☐ I learnt to think and reason better
- ☐ I developed my creativity
- ☐ I took care of my health and well-being
- ☐ I took on positions of responsibility
- ☐ I learnt to manage myself as an effective adult
- ☐ I stretched myself intellectually
- ☐ I learnt to manage stressful situations with calm
- ☐ I learnt how to balance work, friendship and family

What do these priorities suggest to you now about how you could best use your time at university?

Enjoy the book

Enjoy the rest of
The Study Skills Handbook –
and enjoy your time at university!

Chapter 1

Preparing for university

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- evaluate whether you are ready for university yet
- discover what to expect from a Higher Education environment, and what is expected from you as a student
- explore your anxieties and resources
- prepare for university so that you are ready for all it has to offer
- understand the importance of independent learning to higher-level study
- understand how e-learning may be used for higher-level study.

This chapter looks at ways to prepare yourself practically and mentally for your first term at college. If you already know what to expect from Higher Education, you may wish to skip quite quickly over this chapter. If you are a student in Further Education or at school, you may like to leave this chapter until later in your course. On the other hand, you may know little about university. You may wonder what it is like, whether you could cope, and whether you are ready yet. This is especially true if you have been out of education for a few years, or if you are the first member of your family to attend university.

Some aspects of studying at university are very different from school or college. The following pages will give you a general idea of what to expect. On page 9 there is an exercise you can use as a guide, *Am I ready for Higher Education?* If you are almost ready, there are some suggestions of things to do to ease the transition into university study.

Preparation courses

It pays to be well prepared before you start your course. In general, universities do not provide much help at more basic levels to help you 'catch up' – they expect you to be ready. Look at the list on page 9: before you start college, you will be wise to bring yourself to a position where you can say 'yes' to most of these items.

Don't rush into study for which you are not ready – it can be very expensive, in money, stress, health and relationships. Your local Further Education college may offer 'access' and other courses leading to university level, or the university itself might offer a 'foundation year'. The Open University offers foundation courses by correspondence. There are also two-year 'foundation degrees' which incorporate work-based learning. These can lead onto a full degree programme.

In other words, there are now many different routes into university. The admissions staff at the university or college can give you advice about the best routes for you.

Applying to university

Choosing your subject

Find a logical progression

It is advisable to choose a degree course that follows logically from your A-levels, BTEC, HNC or access course. This ensures that you have the appropriate knowledge base, the right specialist language, and other skills needed in managing the course.

You may be offered a place on a course for which you don't have an appropriate foundation. If so, find out from the course admissions tutor exactly what you need to do to catch up, and don't underestimate the extra work involved.

Examine the course content

Read course outlines carefully. Find out exactly what you will be required to do – course titles can be very misleading. Some courses, for example, appear to be creative or practical but are far more theoretical than they sound. Almost all courses involve a great deal of reading and writing.

Form a coherent programme

Some universities allow you to combine very different subjects. This can make study interesting, but will add considerably to the overall workload. Interlinked subjects feed into one another, so the workload is less and you gain a much deeper understanding of the subject.

Consider career opportunities

If you have a particular career in mind, check that the options you choose count towards it. Not all education or psychology modules, for example, are recognised by professional bodies. If you are in any doubt, speak to a careers adviser or the university admissions tutor.

Some universities have advice centres which offer guidance to mature students about which subjects to study, preparatory courses they need to take, and whether previous study can count towards the degree.

Choosing a university

Each university has its own character and ways of doing things, so find out details for the ones that interest you.

Look at the prospectus

Your school library, local library or careers office will have copies and contact addresses.

Attend an open day

Speak to the admissions tutor. Find out what the courses really involve. How many will be in your seminar and tutor groups? What teaching methods are used?

Visit the university campus

Look around the department, and especially the library. Do they seem well organised? Are staff friendly? Would you like to study there?

Some colleges have sites some way from the main campus. Where would you be studying?

Where would you be living?

Check accommodation. Think about transport – how would you get from where you lived to where you studied?

Consider everyday life

Would you feel comfortable there? Would you fit in? Choose a university where you are likely to be happy for the duration of the course.

Application forms (UCAS forms)

To make an application you will need a form from UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. The form needs to be submitted almost a year before the course begins, although late entry is also possible. Forms are available from: UCAS, Fulton House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham GL50 3SH. Telephone: 01242 222444; website: www.ucas.com



SELF-EVALUATION

Am I ready for Higher Education?

The more items in the following list that apply to you, the more likely it is that you are ready for Higher Education. Put a tick ☒ against those that are true of you.

- ☐ Successful course completion at an advanced level (A-level, BTEC National, HNC, access course, or a foundation course) in a subject similar to the one you intend to study
- ☐ *and* if advanced study was not a great struggle for you
- ☐ *or* the course is related to your current profession and level of work (e.g. a BA in Nursing if you are a nurse)
- ☐ *and* you have GCSE English (plus maths for many courses)
- ☐ *and/or* you regularly read advanced text, such as a quality newspaper weekly and several books a year, whether by eye or using taped books
- ☐ *and/or* you have had recent practice at writing essays, reports, projects or a similar level of writing
- ☐ *and* you are reasonably confident about being able to work on your own, without help, for most of the time (though the college may offer specific help for students from overseas or with disabilities, including dyslexia)
- ☐ *and* you feel you are ready to study in the environment described on pages 10–11
- ☐ *and* you can cope with the anxieties explored on page 22
- ☐ *and/or* you can translate your personal skills into academic skills (see page 34)
- ☐ *and* you can type or word-process reasonably well
- ☐ *and* you are comfortable using a library.

If you ticked few items, it may mean that:

- you underestimate yourself, or
- you need more preparation.

Speak to a personal adviser from the Connexions service, or to a teacher at your school or local college, or to a mature-student adviser or admissions officer at the university. Discuss the points from the list above where you feel that you are weak.

However, what is most important is that you feel ready – intellectually, emotionally and financially – before you begin. Don't be rushed into university study.

What to expect in Higher Education

Teaching methods

Teaching methods differ but you can expect at least some of the following.

Lectures



These vary according to course and subject but in general, expect:

- size: 50–300 people
- length: 1–3 hours
- weekly: 5–20 hours
- no individual attention.

See also pages 138–9.

There is usually a set of lectures for each unit or option. You are likely to be with different students for each unit. Lectures are used to give an overview of the topic. Usually, students listen and take notes whilst lecturers speak or read from notes, write on a board, or project information onto an overhead screen. Some lecturers encourage questions and include activities; others do not. Occasionally, lectures are delivered on video or transmitted from another campus.

Tutorials

These are usually used to give feedback on your work and discuss your general progress. It may be the only time that a lecturer is able to help you with study problems, so it is important to prepare your questions in advance.

- size: in small groups or on an individual basis
- length: usually an hour at most
- frequency: possibly one or two per term.

Seminars

These usually involve group discussion of material presented either in a lecture or in set reading.

Often, a student (or a group of students) is asked to begin the discussion by making a presentation. It is important to prepare for seminars by reading through lecture notes and background reading, even if you are not asked to make the presentation yourself.



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

See also Chapter 5.

Other teaching styles used at university

Colleges are becoming more flexible in the ways they teach, so you may experience a wide range of teaching styles, including some or all of the following.

Groupwork

This could be for discussion or mutual support, or to undertake a joint project. Students are often expected to form their own support groups. (See Chapter 5.)

Work placements

Foundation degrees and vocational courses require students to spend time on work placement. While there, they may be supervised by a lecturer from the college or by somebody at the workplace – or a mixture of the two.

Laboratory work, studio work and practicals

Science students may spend most of their time doing practical work in laboratories; fine arts students may work predominantly in studio space they are allocated at the university. The amount of practical work of this kind will depend on the course. (See page 141.)

Distance learning

Students on some courses work mostly at home. Materials are either sent by post or over the Internet. Contact with tutors may be by letter, by e-mail, by video conferencing at a local centre, or in local meetings.

Independent study

This is the most common and possibly most challenging feature of university study. Apart from timetabled elements such as lectures, almost all courses expect students to work on their own for the rest of the week. (See pages 12–14.)

Seeing your lecturers

University lecturers are likely to be much less available than your teachers at school or college. Teaching is only one of their responsibilities. They may undertake research, and examine or lecture at other universities. They may also be consultants outside the university. Some are contracted for only a few hours a week.



A tutor may have a great many students to see. For all of these reasons, you may need to book an appointment well in advance.

Lecturers' varied approaches

University subject areas or departments have their own traditions, and even individual



lecturers may have strong personal tastes in how things should be done. You need to be alert to this and notice your lecturers' preferences. (See page 175.)

The university week

Most full-time college courses are considered to be the equivalent of an average working week in employment. This means that you are expected to study for 35–40 hours a week, in a mixture of independent study, at home or in a library, and scheduled classes on campus.

The way that time is divided up varies greatly. Some courses require students to attend 15 hours of lectures a week, and research around the subject, read, think, and write assignments for the rest of the week. A practical course may involve only 2 hours of lectures a week, with very few written assignments in the year and most of the time spent on placement or in the studio.

Will this suit you?

If you have strong preferences about how you spend your time, investigate how the course breaks up the study week and the kinds of teaching methods used.

Independent study

Types of independent study

Independent study is a feature of *all* university programmes. The amount and the kind varies from one programme to another.

Degrees by independent study

In some cases, programmes are negotiated on an individual basis. These are usually called 'degrees by independent study'. For these, students design their own programmes and study schedules, working mainly from resources. Supervision is offered at intervals, but there are very few taught sessions. These degrees may be multi-disciplinary, crossing over typical subject boundaries, and they are often work-based.

Individually designed degrees are subject to approval or 'validation' by the university, to ensure that the degree is of the same standard and quality as other degrees. Usually, a learning contract of some kind is approved and updated on an agreed basis.

Independent study within a degree programme

In most programmes, 'independent study' means working on your own between taught sessions. Early on you are given more guidance, though probably still less than you received at school or college. As you move through the programme, you are usually given more choices and greater personal management of the study process. The amount of independent study increases until you write your dissertation, which you do almost completely by independent study.

Levels of independence

Different levels of independence are involved for each programme and for each year. Factors include how far you:

Activity

What does 'independent study' suggest to you?

- 1 In pencil, underline all the words you associate with the phrase 'independent study'.



- 2 Using a bright marker pen, draw a ring round all the words that describe how you would *like* independent study to be. Use the bubbles to add words of your own.

- can design your own degree and degree title
- study from resources rather than taught sessions
- have choice over modules or options
- decide the pace of study
- are expected to study on your own each week
- are expected to attend taught sessions
- can choose where and when you study
- can choose your assignment titles
- can choose how you will be assessed.

Independent learning can be all the things you would *like* it to be! University learning allows you a great deal of freedom to shape your learning experience to suit yourself. The better your study skills, the easier you will find managing that freedom so that you can enjoy yourself while undertaking independent study successfully. It is up to you to manage that process well.

Independent learning: taking control

A different approach to learning and teaching

In higher education, it is expected that you have sufficient maturity to work on your own for longer periods, without a tutor in the room to guide you. You are given a great deal more responsibility for your own success than is typical of schools or colleges. This *can* feel as if your study lacks structure. However, it can also feel very liberating – you have more freedom to study in ways that suit you. To take advantage of this, you need a deeper understanding of your own learning, so that you can study effectively (see pages 52–8 and Chapter 4).



Making choices

It is your responsibility to make sensible choices of options within your programme, as well as to plan extracurricular activity. Your choices will affect your programme and your future career. This can feel rather daunting. However, it can also feel exciting to be more in charge of your own life. The literature you are sent usually tells you clearly how to go about making choices and finding help. Guidance will be available, but it is usually up to you to find out where and when

this guidance is delivered – and to read the materials you are sent.

Finding resources and support

You will receive recommendations for books, equipment and sources of support. Usually these will be given in a handbook or similar literature. These recommendations, however, are only part of what you need to know. You will need to find out for yourself what additional reading is needed, what resources are available, what support is available, and when to use each of these.

At school or college you may have received a great deal of guidance on what pages to read in books, how to interpret assignment titles, how to interpret what you read, what information to include in an assignment, and how to structure your answers. At university you will be expected to work out most of this on your own. You will need to set aside time to think through these sorts of issues.

Time management

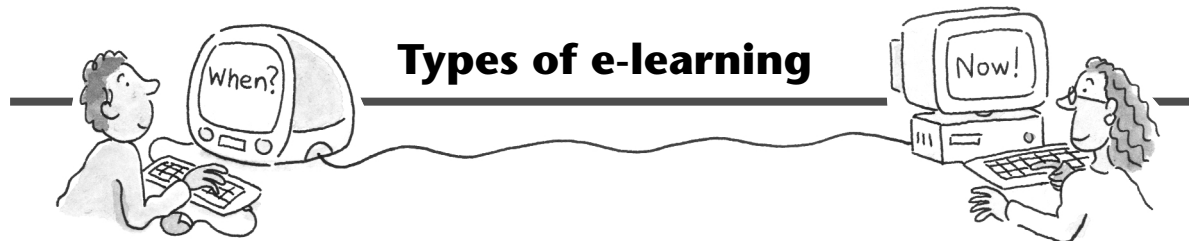
You will spend only a small amount of your time in timetabled activity. You will be responsible for organising your time around taught sessions and meeting assignment deadlines. This may seem hard at first – especially as excuses for missed deadlines are seldom acceptable. If you miss a deadline, you may have to retake part or all of your programme. Good time management skills are therefore essential – see pages 71–83.

Keeping going

When you work on your own, it is important to stay focused and to maintain your motivation. It is quite natural for motivation to change over time. There is no need to worry about this, but it is good to give it some advance thought and planning. Most people find that it is useful to have the support of other people in maintaining their motivation. See *Motivated learning* (page 90) and *Study support networks* (page 109).

Independent learning: benefits, challenges, risks

Benefits	Challenges	Risks
More control over your study time	● To manage time effectively. ● To meet deadlines.	Losing a sense of time. Wasting time. Underestimating how long study tasks take. Forgetting things that must be done. Missing essential deadlines.
More control over your spare time	● To use spare time effectively in building your personal profile. ● To recognise the difference between spare time and independent study time. ● To put time aside to relax, rest and enjoy yourself.	Using all your spare time for study. Mistaking time not spent in taught sessions as 'spare time'. Missing opportunities to develop a wider personal profile that will benefit you later when applying for jobs.
More choice about when and where to study	● To create structures for your day. ● To organise a place to study. ● To work out the best places and times for you for different kinds of study activity.	Not getting down to study. Not creating a place that allows you to study without interruption
More choice about how you study	● To identify your learning style for different types of tasks. ● To take responsibility for your learning and achieving your goals	Not bothering to explore and develop your learning style. Doing what you enjoy most rather than what works best for you, if these are different.
More responsibility for your own successes	● To identify barriers to your learning and to address these. ● To identify ways of improving your own performance. ● To make effective use of feedback and to learn from mistakes.	Failure to understand previous barriers to learning. Not addressing weaknesses in your performance. Giving up too easily. Ignoring feedback. Becoming despondent at early failures rather than using these to guide improvement.
More choice about how much energy you devote to topics that interest you	● 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. ● To broaden your range of interests.	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	● To keep on target with little guidance. ● To keep yourself motivated. ● To take responsibility for pursuing solutions to problems on your own. ● To recognise when you need help and to ask for it.	Letting things slip. Falling behind in your work. Losing motivation. Losing a sense of what you are supposed to do, and not asking for help. Not finding out what help is available, or not using it. Running for help too soon instead of trying to solve the problem yourself.
More control over subject choices	● To create a coherent programme that interests you and meets your goals.	Choosing subjects that do not fit together well, or that do not contribute towards career interests.



Types of e-learning

Many university programmes now incorporate aspects of electronic learning (e-learning) to support study. How much e-learning is used will vary widely from tutor to tutor.

Reading materials provided electronically

This is the most common form of electronic support. Reading material may include:

- a website or web pages for your programme
- copies of lecture notes
- related websites or electronic journals
- revision notes and activities
- a programme newsletter.

Interactive materials

Interactive materials are expensive to produce, and are therefore not suitable for all types of learning. They may include:

- programs for practising technical skills
- interactive videos to enable you to see locations that are expensive or difficult to visit
- learning structured as games
- simulated case studies.

Computer-assisted assessment

Part or all of your programme may be assessed through your answering questions on a computer. Computerised assessment is demanding: you usually need to revise more of your coursework than for essay-based exams.

Computer-based formative assessment

Your course may offer computerised assessment for practice. If so, you can test your knowledge and identify any aspects that need more work.

E-communication

E-communication includes:

- email to and from tutors
- email between students

- email with students on other programmes
- delivery of assignments by e-mail
- electronic noticeboards or bulletins.

Web-cam or video links

You may be given opportunities to learn at a distance using a camera linked to the Internet, or through video links.

E-moderated learning

E-moderated learning can include discussion groups using an electronic forum, conference or chat room. The tutor may 'moderate' interactions in a number of ways, including:

- setting up the forum so that relevant people can get in touch with each other
- stimulating debate by asking key questions or offering material for discussion
- allocating tasks to group members
- monitoring who is taking part in discussions
- contacting and supporting individuals.

Virtual learning environments

Some universities are introducing virtual or managed learning environments (VLE or MLE). These include Web-CT, Blackboard, and specially designed electronic environments. Such learning environments offer a range of possibilities:

- You may be able to log onto a page that is relevant only to you.
- All contacts – such as social events, job opportunities, results, records of achievement – can be managed through a single system.
- Reminders and guidance, such as lectures, events, and assignment deadlines, can be given when you log on.
- Some or all of the other activities mentioned on this page can be built in.
- Lecturers can monitor electronically your level of activity and involvement.

Basics of e-learning

The minimum skills needed

Most programmes expect that you will have some basic IT skills already. For advanced e-learning, however, you will probably be given guidance on how to use specialised software.

Evaluate your basic IT skills

Are you confident about the following (tick):

- ☐ switching on the computer?
- ☐ using the mouse?
- ☐ logging on (with some e-learning software, this may be sufficient to get started)?
- ☐ opening, closing, and naming files?
- ☐ using the 'Start' button to open programs?
- ☐ saving information to floppy disk?
- ☐ opening and closing programs on CD-ROMs?
- ☐ opening to the appropriate page of a file, and moving round a document?
- ☐ the basics of using the keyboard, especially the 'Enter' key, the spacebar, and the 'Page up' and 'Page down' keys?
- ☐ copying, cutting and pasting text?
- ☐ printing a document?
- ☐ connecting with the Internet?
- ☐ moving around the Internet?

If you need training in computer skills, find out where you can get this. It may be available through your tutor, the library, a support unit, or a local college. Do this as soon as you can – you will need these skills.

Time management

When planning to use a computer, leave time for hitches, such as not being able to open large files, files being sent to you in formats that your computer cannot open, or the Internet going down. Tutors expect you to plan for such hitches: delays of this sort are not usually acceptable as excuses for handing in work late.

Dealing with jams

If the computer jams, you could try holding down the three keys 'ALT', 'CTRL' and 'DEL'. A menu may appear to tell you where the problem lies. You may see a message such as 'program not responding', and be invited to end the task. You can then choose to end that task, though you will probably lose any information that has not been saved. Switching the computer off and starting again will clear many problems. However, this takes up your time and you lose any material that you haven't saved. It is vital that you save your files frequently as you work.

Be selective

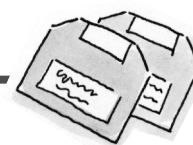
The opportunities offered through electronic media are vast. For example, there are many fascinating Internet forums, chat groups and distribution lists. Unless you choose carefully what is really valuable for you, they can eat up your time. Select just one or two such groups at any one time.



Be precise

Before using electronic catalogues or searching on the Internet, think through exactly what it is that you want to find. Suppose you wanted to find out about fieldmice. If you entered a keyword that is too general, such as 'mice', you would call up many thousands of entries. Entering several keywords, such as 'mice, field, UK', would produce a shorter list of options, more likely to relate to your enquiry. (See also pages 84–6 and 117–19.)

Successful e-learning



E-learning is very varied: the computer is simply a tool which, like pen and paper, can be applied in a wide range of situations. Successful e-learning involves:

- using electronic media confidently
- using electronic media when they provide the best route, rather than simply because they are there
- selecting when it is best for you to use the computer for study, and when you would work more effectively using conventional tools such as books or diaries
- taking an active part in using electronic tools.

Incorporate the computer into study

Make use of the computer as part of your normal study strategy. Here are some examples.

Communicate

- Use e-mail to send messages to other students.
- Send your essay to your tutor electronically.
- Join a relevant chat room or forum.
- Make friends with similar interests on the Internet.

Stay organised

- Maintain an electronic diary for the day, week or year. You can set this to remind you in advance of appointments.
- Keep a bibliography of texts you have read. If you use the same resource for another piece of writing, you can cut and paste from this.
- Keep copies of all your writing on disks.

Find information

- Find out about services at the university and in the local area.
- Check the university catalogues for reading resources.
- Order books from the library electronically, and renew your loans.
- Browse the Internet for research materials.
- Read journals online.

Design materials

- Design questionnaires or surveys for projects using software designed for that purpose.
- Design forms to gather project information.
- Select screen colours, and font styles and sizes that suit you.

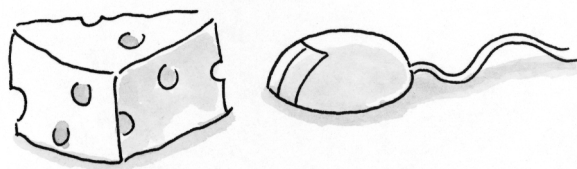
Use other software

- Use software such as 'Powerpoint' to develop your presentations.
- Use the computer calculator, or add up figures using a spreadsheet such as Excel.
- Use statistical packages relevant to your subject. Some of these will do all the mathematical calculations for you.
- Practise assessment tests as often as you like, until you get the answers right.

Take part

E-learning allows great flexibility in when and how you study. To gain the most from it:

- Write out the steps in a way that makes most sense to you, rather than relying on manuals.
- Practise and play with the technology until you become familiar with it.
- Join in! Make use of opportunities that are available, especially any discussion rooms set up for your programme. Many students feel more confident about exchanging ideas electronically.
- Use links built into electronic learning materials. (You usually lose these links if you print out the materials.)
- Avoid sharing written work electronically. Work sent this way can be used very easily by another person. Also avoid copying from any material you receive electronically: this can also be detected electronically!



Basic health and safety for e-learning

Print out materials

Avoid staring at the screen for long spells. Take frequent breaks. If you study primarily by using a computer, be sure to have regular eye tests.

To reduce the time spent staring at the screen, consider printing out materials or using printed versions instead.

Contact lens users

The heat from computer monitors can dry out contact lenses. It may help if you wear glasses, use tear-substitute drops, or take care to blink more often.

Light

Place the computer at right-angles to the light source, so as to avoid glare and reflection on the screen. Avoid bright lights.

Avoid pain to upper limbs

Fast typing and repeated use of the mouse or other controls can lead to pain in the upper limbs, especially if you work under pressurised conditions or in the wrong position. Take frequent breaks. Avoid fast clicking and keying over long periods.

Avoid headaches

Headaches can arise from a number of factors, including small text on the screen, poor posture, working for long periods without a break, stress, glare from the screen, the wrong seating, or poor lighting.

Position

Position yourself 340–600 mm away from the screen, with your eyes looking down at 15–20°, and your head at a comfortable angle (1). The angle at the elbow should be about 90° (2). Your feet should both be flat on the floor or on a foot rest (3).

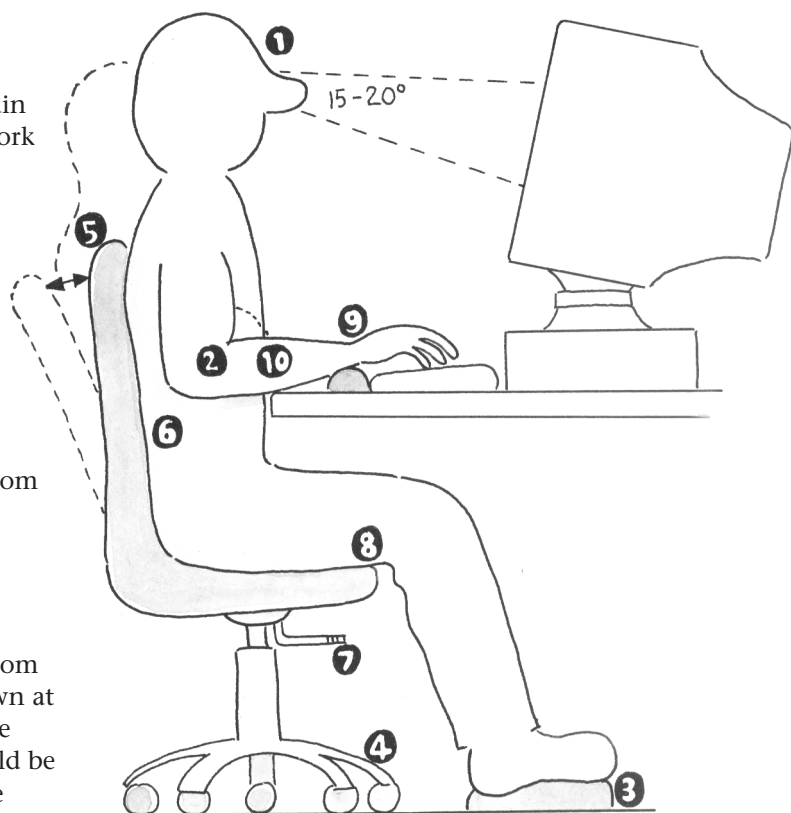
Remove obstacles that prevent you from stretching your legs.

Seating

Invest in a good computer chair with a stable five-legged base (4). You should be able to adjust the backrest (5) so that your back is supported in an upright position (6). The height also should be adjustable (7), so that your forearms are horizontal. Avoid excess pressure on the underside of the thighs and the back of the knees (8).

Using keyboard and mouse

When using the keyboard or mouse, keep your wrists straight (9). Use a light touch. Do not hold the mouse tightly. Keep it near you so that you do not need to stretch your arm to use it, and leave room to rest your wrists on the desk. Consider using a wrist support (10).



Skills and personal development

Key skills and skills development

Most universities provide opportunities to develop a range of skills, but each university takes a different approach. For example, your university may:

- use QCA Key Skills, building on Key Skills developed at school, college or work
- use its own skills set
- offer modules to develop specific skills
- build skills into each programme
- deliver skills sessions through the Careers Service
- assess skills as part of your programme.

Making use of skills opportunities

University offers more opportunities to develop responsibilities and to gain experience and knowledge in a wide range of areas than almost any other setting. It is in your interest to make the most of these opportunities. When you apply for jobs, your employers will know that you have had these opportunities, and will be interested to see how well you used them.

Find out the skills and experience that employers really want – and create opportunities to gain these. In particular, find ways of developing:

- ‘people skills’
- problem-solving skills
- creative thinking skills
- personal management skills.

These skills are in short supply for graduate jobs.

Progress files

At British universities progress files consist of three elements: personal development planning, a transcript, and personal records.

Personal development planning

British universities are required to offer structured opportunities for personal development planning at all levels of study. This planning will be managed differently in each university. Most will offer activities such as:

- work experience
- mentoring in local schools
- volunteer work
- careers advice
- being a ‘student rep.’ for the programme.

Some universities will also structure the curriculum to increase opportunities for personal development. For example, they may offer academic credit for career planning, skills development, or work-based learning. There will also be many opportunities through student clubs, the Student Union, and the local community.

Transcripts

When you leave university, you will be given a transcript which gives details of the aspects of your programme you completed successfully. At some universities, the transcript will also itemise the skills you have developed during the programme.

Personal records

Keep your own records to track your progress and achievements in ways that are meaningful to you and for your future employers. Your personal records could contain:

- a reflective journal
- a record, with evidence, of skills you have developed through life and work
- a record, with evidence, of skills and qualities you have developed through extracurricular activities
- certificates for courses you have taken.

(See also Chapters 2 and 13.)



The student's year

Induction week

The academic year usually begins late in September or early October, with an induction week for first-year students.

During induction week you receive a student number and pass card, you meet lecturers, you are given handouts for the term, you find out essential information about services, and you are told when and how to hand in work. The week includes a 'Freshers' Fair' where you can find out about student clubs and activities. Make sure you are free for this week as it is essential.

Terms and semesters

Traditionally the academic year has three terms, from September to Christmas, New Year to Easter, and Easter to the Summer. Some universities have two longer 'terms', known as 'semesters', the second semester starting in February. There may also be a 'Summer semester'.

Choosing options

When the year begins, you may be asked to select individual units, modules or options at different levels of study, which combine to make your degree.

A 'pathway' is a given set of modules leading to a particular qualification such as a degree in architecture or social work. Even within a pathway you may have 'electives' – modules about which you have some choice.

Teaching staff for the year

You are likely to have the same teaching staff for one term or semester, and sometimes for the whole year. Most academic staff are lecturers, although they are often referred to as tutors.

Personal tutors

You will probably have a year tutor or a personal tutor, who will be concerned with your study overall. Talk to this person if you experience life

or study difficulties that could prevent you from completing your course.

Assessment

Courses vary in how they assess your work. Some assess by coursework only, some by exams, and others by a mixture of coursework and exams. Exams typically take place at the end of each term or semester, although some courses leave exams until the end of the year.

If you are marked by coursework, you could be asked to hand in essays, reports, case studies or project work, or to make an oral presentation to your seminar group.

Deadlines and extensions

It is important that you keep to deadlines, although extensions may be given if you ask in advance and for a good reason. If something unforeseen happens, you may be able to ask for extenuating circumstances to be taken into consideration when your work is being considered by the examination board.

Always speak to your tutors as soon as there is any possibility of a deadline being missed or in special circumstances such as family or health problems. The longer you leave it, the less likely it is that tutors will be able to take your circumstances into consideration.

Tutors have little flexibility in granting additional time for work. Usually the work has to be marked by two lecturers, sent to an external examiner for inspection, and then returned and presented to an exam board by a set date at the end of the term.

The college or course regulations should detail what to expect, and how to apply for extensions.

The summer vacation

Between July and September there is time to catch up on missed study, to resit failed exams, to prepare for the next term, to rest – and, for many students, to earn some money.

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 university 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 with a university environment, 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.

	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

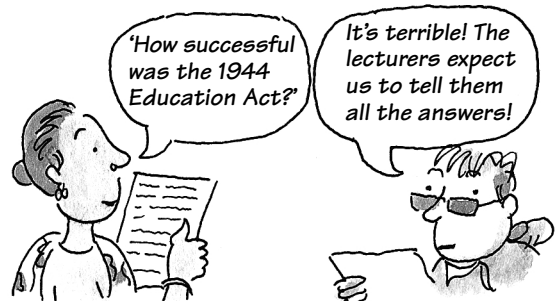
(See Chapter 4.)

Openness to working with others

You will need to organise study sessions with friends.



Ability to work things out for yourself



Ability to work out when, how and where you learn best





SELF-EVALUATION

Anxieties and resources

It is quite natural to feel some anxiety when you start something new, and many students have concerns about starting at university.

It is easier to work out strategies for handling potential challenges and to manage your anxieties if you have:

- sorted out in your own mind what your worries are
- considered how serious they really are
- realised that many other people feel the same way.

On the right are listed some anxieties which are common amongst new students. Tick the box beside any that apply to you, or add in others in the empty spaces.

Study and learning

- ☐ Keeping up with other people
- ☐ Finding the time to do everything
- ☐ Understanding academic language
- ☐ Having the confidence to speak
- ☐ Developing confidence in myself
- ☐ Writing essays
- ☐ Getting used to university life
- ☐ Meeting deadlines
- ☐
- ☐

Personal, family, work commitments

- ☐ Making friends with other students
- ☐ Coping with travel
- ☐ Organising childcare
- ☐ People treating me differently
- ☐ Coping with job requirements
- ☐ Family responsibilities
- ☐
- ☐

Look again at the items you have ticked. Beside each, write the number of the statement below that most closely corresponds with your feeling. Then read the comments on the next page.

- 1 I expect this to be a minor difficulty: I will get round it easily or in time.
- 2 I expect this to be quite a serious difficulty: I will work on a solution.
- 3 I expect this to be a great difficulty: I may need to work hard at finding a solution.
- 4 I expect this to be a major difficulty: I may need to ask for help.



- What initial ideas do you have about how you could manage some of these anxieties?
- What strategies have you used in the past to deal with a new or difficult situation? Which of these strategies could be helpful now?

Managing anxieties

Study and learning anxieties

It is important to give yourself time to settle in and see what is required. Many universities pace the first year more slowly, to give you time to find your feet.

Focus on planning your own activities rather than worrying about how well other students are doing. Some people play psychological games, claiming that they do no work and can write essays overnight. Very few people can really do this; it is certainly not expected of you, and it is not a sensible way to study.

Find support. Many students will be anxious about some aspect of their study and it helps to share concerns. Make time to meet other students in your classes. Once you have formed a bond with other students, you will have more confidence about joining in.

The following chapters make practical suggestions on ways of handling aspects of study such as speaking, essay writing, meeting deadlines, managing stress, and generally setting yourself up to succeed. Focus on your motivation for study, and be determined to enjoy your course. Think of yourself as being on an adventure – not on trial!

Managing other anxieties

There is pressure on students to juggle family and work commitments in ways that were not expected in the past. Students have to be more creative in problem-solving, and very organised in their time management.

In many universities and colleges, Student Services and the Student Union offer advice on managing finance, finding work, grants, childcare, health-care, counselling, disability, and many other issues that arise for students.

Talk to them early on if you experience problems that you find difficult to resolve. Advisers can help more successfully if problems are tackled before they become emergencies.

Make an action plan

Look back to the items you ticked on page 22.

Set priorities

- What needs to be done immediately?
- Which things can wait?
- In which order do you need to deal with these anxieties?
- Use the **Priority organiser** (page 82).

Resources

- What sources of help are available? Contact the university and ask.
- Fill out **What are my personal resources?** (page 25).
- Talk to other students who may have the same worries. See if you can form a study or discussion or support group including other students with whom you feel comfortable.

Reflection

It helps if you write down and explore your anxieties.

- Note down your feelings.
- Write down your options and decide between them (see pages 92–4).
- Record how you dealt with each problem so you that can evaluate your progress later.

How do other students manage?

The short passages on the next page were written by students about their first term. You may notice that their time seemed very pressurised; being organised is an important theme in these writings. However, these students made space for themselves to relax, meet others, and use university facilities such as sports or drama clubs, which are also important to the overall university experience.

Students' experiences

My first term

After the terrible time I had in school, I was very worried about what I might be putting myself through coming back to study as an adult. I was sure I wouldn't be able to keep up. When I got my first few pieces of work back, the marks were not very good, and I felt I ought to leave.

Luckily, I was talked out of leaving. I made an effort to meet other mature students and found many of them were having similar experiences to me. One of them encouraged me to ask my tutors for more detailed feedback on my work. I had not wanted to ask for any help in case the lecturers thought I was not good enough for the course. Bit by bit my marks started to get better, and some were very good. This boosted my confidence.

I had expected study to be difficult. What I had not expected was that other aspects of being a student could be just as hard. It took me ages to build up the confidence to eat in the canteen – it seemed so enormous and bustling. I used to rush away after lectures rather than talking to strangers. My train service is very erratic and I kept arriving late. My sister, who was going to look after my children, moved house. Sorting out all these things has made me very skilled at problem-solving!

I have to say that there are many positive things about being a student. Now that I have got to know other people here, I look forward to coming in to study. I feel like I am escaping into time which is just for me. I like having the library to work in – and not being disturbed while I just get on with it.

I would recommend to new students that they give themselves a chance to settle in, and not panic if anything seems to be going wrong. If they have children, I cannot emphasise how important it has been to me to have plans to cover every eventuality. I wish I had had reserve plans for childcare right from the beginning because that, more than anything else, had an effect on my studies. I also recommend that new students find other people who have similar experiences to themselves – talking to each other you can come up with good ideas about how to tackle problems, and boost each other's morale.

You are bound to find you think differently about many things by the time you finish your course – for me, discussing things with other people has become a very exciting activity. Above all, I think students have to think, 'I might never get this chance again – how am I going to get the most out of it?' There are many facilities available and it is a very good opportunity to try things you might never have imagined yourself doing – starting your own group, karate, or going on an expedition. It is a wonderful opportunity – but you have to make it work for yourself.

Sasha

A typical day

On Tuesdays I have a lecture from 10 a.m. to 12 noon. This lecturer does not just talk at us: she breaks the time up into short tasks, discussions, videos, etc. When all 90 of us are discussing something in groups, it can be rather noisy, but you get used to it. The rest of the day is 'free' but as I am already on the site, I go to the library and prepare for the next day's lectures, or do some reading for the seminars I have on every second Wednesday. Some Tuesday afternoons, I go to the gym, and study in the evening instead.

Krishna

My Thursday as a student

Dash the kids to the nursery. Dash into the labs for 10. Suddenly time changes. I am caught up in what I am doing – the project I am working on with two other people. I can spend hours mixing and measuring, comparing my findings with others'. We talk a lot about what we are doing, and why, and make suggestions on why our results are different. I always ask my lecturers if I am unsure – some are very helpful, but some are not. In the afternoon, I have one lecture. Recently, I have arranged it so I can go to drama club on Thursday nights.

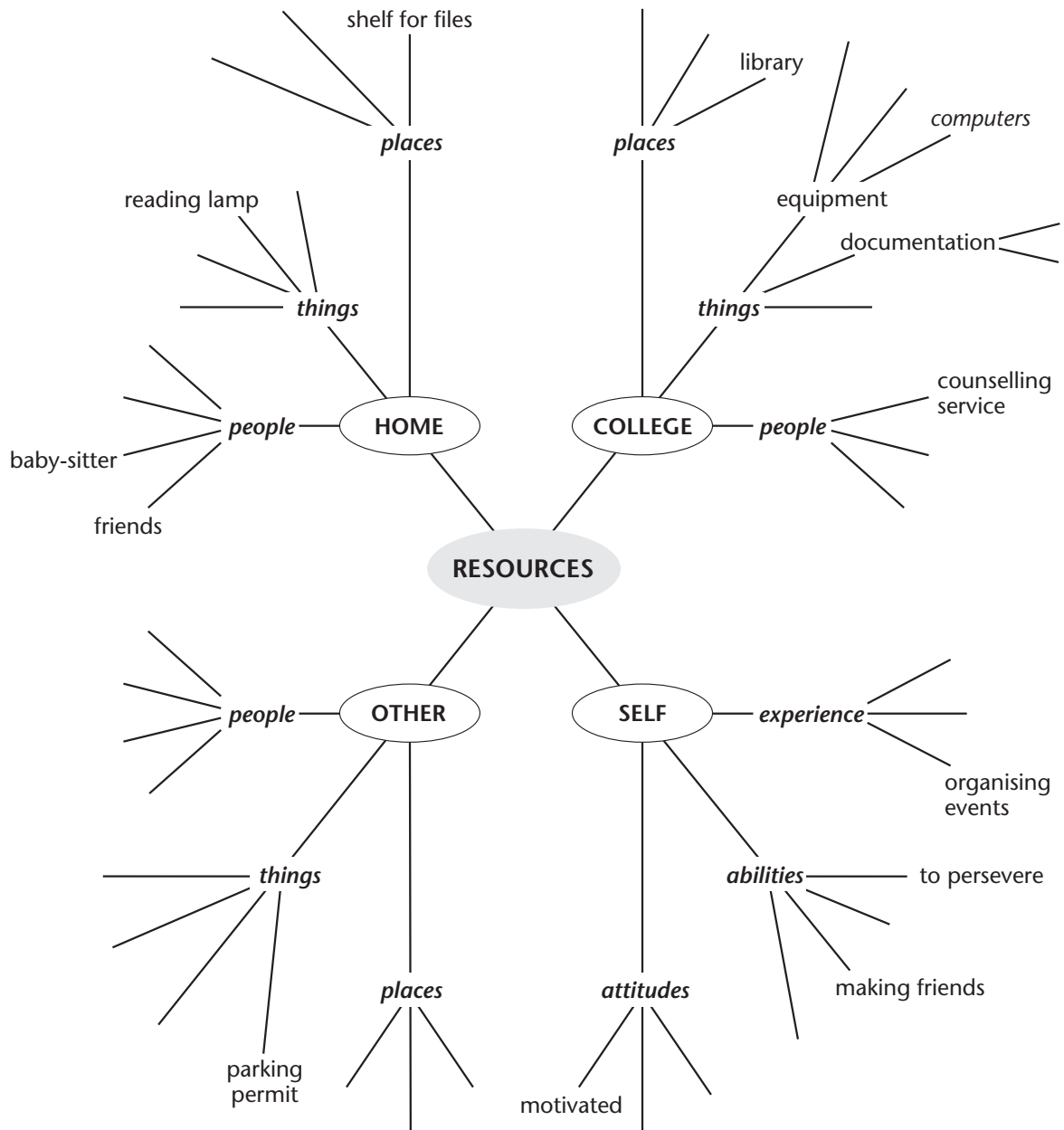
Charlie



SELF-EVALUATION

What are my personal resources?

Have you considered all the resources that might be available to you? Try brainstorming (adding in your own ideas) around key words on the pattern notes below. If you feel you have few resources, it may help to speak to a student counsellor.



Eight things you can do before starting at university

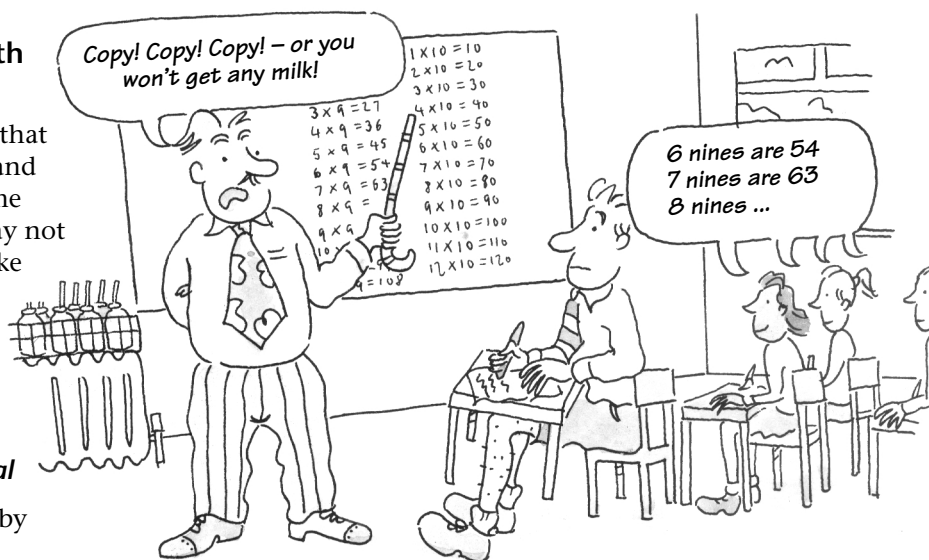
1 Familiarise yourself with this book

Browse through the book so that you know what it contains, and roughly where to find it. Some may be useful now; some may not be needed until you undertake certain aspects of study.

2 Reflect on your past learning

Start a reflective study journal

See pages 65–7. Make a start by doing the activity below.



Activity

How do you learn best?

Think back to a time when you found something very easy or enjoyable to learn. It might have been something at school, or at work, or even putting up shelves. In your journal, jot down any ideas about *why* this was the case. What made it into a good learning experience for you? The teaching? Your interest in the subject? Because it was visual, or used numbers? Or because each step was clear? You may find your notes for the activities in Chapter 2 (pages 31–2) can help with this activity.

Now think of a time when learning something was difficult or unpleasant.

- What happened on that occasion that was different from your first example?
- What could have made the experience more manageable?
- What do these two experiences tell you about the way that you learn best?



Write down your reflections.

3 Read the literature you are sent

Read anything the university sends you, such as handbooks and subject guides. When term begins, you will probably be too busy to read these, but the information they contain might be essential.

Look out especially for:

- details of course texts which you are expected to read for early in the term
- essential dates, such as for enrolment, selecting options, induction week, meeting your tutors, Freshers' Fair, deadlines for assignments, exam dates, and dates when terms begin and end – put these into your diary and don't double-book them: they are unlikely to be negotiable
- information about sources of help.

4 Set up a 'general information' file

Put together in a separate file all the general information you are sent on matters such as college regulations, sources of help, appeals and grievance procedures, and student clubs and facilities. You never know when you might need them.

5 Familiarise yourself with libraries

If you are not a regular library user, spend time in your local library or a local college library. Many students are fearful of appearing foolish in libraries, especially when using library technology such as catalogues on CD-ROM or microfiche, or working out the numbering system.

It is best to get over these fears before term begins. Librarians are used to people not being able to use libraries: if you need help, ask for it.

6 Know your bookshops

Wander round bookshops that stock academic books. Find out where the relevant books for your subject are shelved, and browse the authors and titles for your subject area. Find out where new books are displayed and how long it takes to order books. Check bookshops regularly for new titles: this will give you a rough idea of what is topical in your course subject.

7 Start to develop your study skills

If you have been out of education for a while, use some of the suggestions below to get you into the study habit. There are also ideas listed at the beginning of the relevant chapters in this handbook.

Writing

- Write in your journal (page 67) every day.
- Practise writing short passages from notes you make when reading.
- See Chapter 7.

Keyboard skills

If you don't have keyboard skills and cannot use a word-processor, see if you can enrol on a short

course at a local college or find out if they have an Open Learning Centre computer you can use. Most courses require word-processed work, and it is a great benefit if you can type at a reasonable speed before you start at university.

Reading

- If you don't do so already, start to read the quality newspapers. Jot down the key points for one thing you read. Practise writing only a few key *words*, rather than writing in sentences or copying.
- Read books that are a little more challenging than those you read now. Choose subjects that really interest you.
- Read texts faster than you usually would, even if you feel you are losing some of the meaning. See if you can still grasp the gist of what is written. Being able to find the general meaning at speed is very useful to academic study.
- Do background reading for your course. Find something very general or basic to read for each subject area. This will give you an overview of the subject – leave details for later. (See pages 120–6.)

Get used to sitting and studying

- Set some time aside at least once or twice a week for both reading and writing.
- Keep a pen and paper nearby when you read, and jot down any ideas that come to you.
- Write a few lines about some of the more interesting things you read.
- A few days later, look back over what you wrote. Add further ideas, thoughts or details. Rewrite your notes, so that the text flows better.

8 Be prepared

- See Chapter 4, 'The C-R-E-A-M strategy for learning', on organising time and space.
- Organise childcare before term begins. Have back-up plans for emergencies.
- Contact the university if you are in doubt about enrolment or start dates.
- Make sure you are free for all induction week activities.

Review

In this chapter you have looked at a number of ways in which you can prepare yourself for the start of your first term.

To begin with, you looked at the basics of choosing an appropriate subject and university. You will benefit from researching the different options open to you – talk to as many students, admission tutors and careers staff as you can. A number of very personal considerations will go into your eventual choice, but think carefully about the implications of your choices before you fill in the UCAS form. You might also find it useful to read about ‘Motivation’ (pages 90–4).

Your chances of getting a degree once at university depend crucially on whether you are *ready* for the course before you begin. This is a completely different question from whether you have the *ability*. In some countries almost the whole population studies at a higher level, so it seems that with sufficient preparation most people

have the ability. If you are not ready yet, go to your local College of Further Education or the library to see what preparatory courses you can take.

You now have an idea of what the Higher Education environment is like, and what you can expect in terms of teaching methods, the university week and year, the way time is broken up, and some of the terminology used. A visit to a university campus and talking to students who are already there will give you a clearer picture of what is involved.

As an undergraduate, you will be expected to take a lot more responsibility for your own learning than you may be used to from school or college. This makes the study more exciting, but you do need to develop good study and coping strategies.

Am I ready?

- ☐ If you ticked several items on the ***Am I ready for Higher Education?*** questionnaire (page 9)
- ☐ if you are able to find resources to meet your anxieties
- ☐ if you are able to give yourself reasonable scores for skills that match those needed for academic study (***Turning personal skills into academic skills***, page 34)
- ☐ and if then you feel ready and excited at the thought, you should be able to start university with confidence.

Finally, it can take time to orientate yourself at the beginning of the first term, especially as there are so many new people to meet and so many interesting things to do on a college campus. The better prepared you are for the term, the easier it will be to settle into a study routine, and the more time you will have to enjoy other aspects of undergraduate life.

Chapter 2

Identifying your skills

LEARNING OUTCOMES

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- reflect on what is meant by a 'skill'
- consider the five main study skills components
- develop your awareness of skills and qualities you bring with you to university
- identify areas of strength in your current study skills and areas to be developed
- set priorities for developing your study skills
- consider the wider range of skills you can develop at university
- map out a profile of your own skills and qualities, in preparation for job applications
- monitor and record your own achievements.

Skill

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

A skill is a learned activity – something you can develop through practice and reflection. You can fine-tune skills, just as runners perfect their movement, breathing and pacing.

Fine-tuning a skill involves developing personal qualities as well, such as:

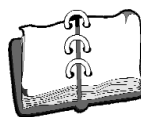
- awareness
- commitment
- determination
- perseverance.
- self-motivation
- time management
- positive thinking

These qualities are also of key importance to successful study: the more obvious study skills, such as knowing how to write essays and use techniques to pass exams, are only part of the story.

Most undergraduates hope that their degree will lead to a good career. Many employers are more interested in your wider range of skills than in which degree you studied or your marks. This chapter looks at how academic study can be an opportunity to develop skills that are 'transferable' to employment.

Sub-skills

Each skill consists of *sub-skills* – the component skills that make up the overall skill. A weakness in one sub-skill can affect what would otherwise be a good performance. For example, you might have the potential to be an excellent essay writer but have weaknesses in structuring your ideas or using paragraphs. This *Handbook* focuses on sub-skills to enable you to develop the wider study skills.



What are your own ideas about what a 'skill' is and how skills are developed?

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 this awareness include self-evaluation questionnaires, reflective journals, group discussion, and using tutor feedback on your work.

2 Awareness of 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.

Essential information on this is usually provided in course handbooks and handouts. 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 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 Methods, organisation, strategies

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 strategies become nearly automatic.

4 Confidence and permission

To succeed well and without undue stress, you need to feel that you are entitled to learn and

achieve. Many students, however, feel that academic success is for other people. 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 – and especially their own intelligence – so Chapter 3 focuses on what we mean by intelligence and learning.

If you are to succeed as a student, it is very important that you believe that success is possible.

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 are:

- adept at finding shortcuts
- aware of sub-skills you need to improve
- able to see patterns in what you do
- able to focus on study for longer
- able to perform sub-skills automatically.

The way to study well and easily becomes a habit. It is important to develop regular study habits in the first year, especially if you have been away from study or are not used to managing so much unscheduled time.

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 *Handbook*.

Skills and qualities you have now

This section offers you the chance to undertake a skills audit. It looks at how your current sub-skills – such as observation, selection, and concern for others – may be transferable to *academic* skills, and how academic skills may later be transferable to *employment* skills. In the process you can identify your current study priorities, and map out your skills and qualities within a personal profile or portfolio so that you can monitor your own progress. This record will also be useful when applying for work.

Skills audits

The most important aspects of making a skills audit are these:

- you can become used to self-evaluation, rather than depending on the estimation of others
- you can become aware of your strengths, so that you can present yourself well to others
- you can develop the confidence and insight to identify areas of potential weakness
- you can learn to set your own priorities for developing new skills.

Identifying your current skills

Think about something you do well, a difficulty you overcame, or a personal achievement, no matter how small. It might be success in your A-levels, skill in a particular sport, learning to drive, or being accepted at college.

What did you do to create the conditions that led to success? Which skills, attitudes and qualities did you exhibit? Did you practise? Did you urge yourself on in a particular way? Did you find people to help? Or did you just believe you could do it? Look at the example below for some ideas.

Example: The beautiful garden

Supposing one year your garden or a window box was absolutely beautiful. How did that happen?

Many small things may have brought about a perfect outcome. For example, maybe you watered the plants very carefully, depending on the weather. If so, you used powers of *observation* and *deduction*. You may have weeded and pruned in the rain, when you wanted to stay indoors. Here you *kept in mind your long-term goal* for the garden, showing *dedication* and *perseverance*.

You may have *selected* some new plants from a wide range of options, to match your garden conditions. You *followed specific instructions* on how to grow them. You probably did *research* by reading gardeners' books and seed packets, talking to other gardeners or watching television programmes. You may have purchased special fertiliser and pots, or prepared the ground in a certain way or pruned at particular times: such care requires *attention to detail*, *time management* and *task management*.

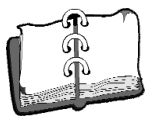
All these skills are relevant to study. Whether your experience is in cooking, riding a bicycle, sport or bringing up children, you are likely to have developed a range of strengths such as those described in the example above. The important thing is to recognise which qualities and abilities you already have so that you can draw on them when you need them.

Activity



Skills from experience

Write down all the elements that go into something you have done well, as in the example of the garden. Note the skills, qualities and attitudes you identify in yourself.



Were you surprised to discover how many skills you have already? Do you tend to under-estimate or over-estimate your skills?

By doing the 'Skills from experience' exercise, you probably discovered you have more skills than you thought. If not, go through the exercise with someone who knows you, or use the list opposite as a prompt. Most people already have qualities and skills which they can adapt to study in Higher Education.

- Students who enter university from school have the benefit of recent study experience and established study habits.
- Mature students often have practice in managing time and responsibility, show perseverance, and can evaluate other people's views. These are valuable assets when studying.

Keep your notes to the 'Skills from experience' exercise near you for use in the following exercise.

Activity

Current skills

- 1 Photocopy the list **Current skills and qualities** on page 33 so that you can use it again.
- 2 On your photocopy, tick all the items at which you are reasonably good.
- 3 Put stars by items at which you excel.
- 4 For each of the skills and qualities you have ticked from the list, starting with the starred items, think of one example of an occasion when you demonstrated that skill or quality. Write down your examples. If you find it hard to remember, the 'prompt box' on the right lists some situations in which you might have developed these skills.
- 5 Hang the list where you can see it. Congratulate yourself!

Where did I develop the skills and qualities that I have now?

School or college	Saturday jobs
Employment	Unemployment
Applying for jobs	Voluntary work
Family life	Making a home
Domestic responsibility	Friendships
Caring for others	Travel/holidays
Interests and hobbies	Clubs/societies
Independent study	Personal setbacks
Emergency events	Ill-health
Personal development	Sport

If you did not tick many items, you may need to search through your past experiences again for examples – or go through the list with a friend. You may be being too modest!

File your answers for use later in the chapter.

Evaluating your skills and setting priorities

The following pages offer resource sheets to:

- help you to evaluate your current profile of strengths and weaknesses
- relate academic skills to life and employment skills
- set priorities for skills development
- monitor your progress.

Update your profile

Awareness of your current skills increases your confidence, which in turn increases your chances of success.

As you progress with the course, your skills profile and self-evaluation will change. Take time to update your skills profile or portfolio, at least once every six months. (See also Chapter 13.)



SELF-EVALUATION

Current skills and qualities

People

- ☐ Ability to get on with people from different backgrounds
- ☐ Ability to see and understand other people's points of view
- ☐ Dealing with the general public
- ☐ Teamwork
- ☐ Managing other people
- ☐ Teaching or training others
- ☐ Negotiating
- ☐ Helping others to arrive at decisions
- ☐ Being sensitive to others' feelings
- ☐ Caring for others
- ☐ Ability to read other people's body language
- ☐ Dealing with others by phone
- ☐ Ability to cope with 'difficult' people
- ☐ Speaking clearly and to the point
- ☐ Being able to take direction from others
- ☐ Courage to speak out against injustice
- ☐ Other:

Activities

- ☐ Creativity, design and layout
- ☐ Ability to see the 'whole picture'
- ☐ Classifying and organising information (e.g. filing)
- ☐ Being good at argument and debate
- ☐ Making decisions
- ☐ Managing change and transition
- ☐ Setting priorities

- ☐ Working out agendas
- ☐ Organising work to meet deadlines
- ☐ Staying calm in a crisis
- ☐ Facilitating meetings
- ☐ Reading complex texts
- ☐ Word-processing
- ☐ Computer literacy
- ☐ Working with numbers
- ☐ Selling
- ☐ Problem-solving
- ☐ Practical things
- ☐ Seeing how things work
- ☐ Writing reports or official letters
- ☐ Other:

Personal qualities

- ☐ Ability to recognise my own needs and ask for help
- ☐ Ability to learn from mistakes
- ☐ Stress management
- ☐ Willingness to take risks and experiment
- ☐ Assertiveness
- ☐ Determination and perseverance
- ☐ Ability to set my own goals
- ☐ Maintaining a high level of motivation
- ☐ Ability to take responsibility for my own actions
- ☐ Trust in my own abilities
- ☐ Other:



SELF-EVALUATION

Turning personal skills into academic skills

The *Current skills and qualities* exercise (page 33) includes specific skills which have more relevance to some courses than in others. For example, 'selling' is more relevant to marketing than to history.

The following exercise is an opportunity to map out your current skills in terms of the general (or 'generic') skills required for most academic courses, and to rate how well you already perform them. This will give you a better idea of how well you may cope with academic study.

Academic skills (skills used in everyday life which relate to academic skills)	Self-rating 5 = good; 1 = very weak	Examples: Where or when you developed this skill
<i>e.g. Managing deadlines</i>	4	<i>Get children to school on time Got UCAS form in despite illness</i>
1 Managing deadlines		
2 Being self-motivated and able to persevere with difficult tasks		
3 Having the confidence to 'have a go' and to express my own ideas		
4 Finding out information from different sources (research)		
5 Reading complicated texts or forms to find the gist of what they are saying		
6 Being able to select what is relevant from what is irrelevant		
7 Comparing different opinions and deciding what are the best grounds for deciding who is right		
8 Being able to weigh up the 'pros' and 'cons', the good points versus the bad		
9 Writing things in my own words		
10 Being able to argue my point of view, giving good reasons		



PLANNER

Study skills: priorities, stage 1

Column A Tick if the statement is generally true of you.

Column B Rate how important it is to acquire this skill: 6 = unimportant; 10 = essential.

Column C Rate how good you are at this skill now: 1 = very weak; 5 = excellent.

Column D Subtract the score in column C from column B (B–C). Items with the highest scores in column D are likely to be priorities. Then turn to page 36.

Later in the term, do this exercise again. Compare your ratings, then and now.

Study-skills statements	A This is true (✓)	B Skill needed? (scale 6–10)	C Current ability? (scale 1–5)	D Priority (B–C)
I am aware of how I learn best, and how to reflect upon and evaluate my own work				
I am well motivated and know how to set myself manageable goals				
I have good time and space management skills, and am able to organise my workload				
I have strategies for getting going with a new task or assignment				
I am confident of my research skills				
I am aware of which strategies suit me best for reading under different conditions				
I am able to make, organise, store, find and use my notes effectively (checklist, page 127)				
I am able to use lecture time effectively and get the best out of lectures				
I know how to prepare for and deliver oral presentations, playing to my strengths (page 113)				
I know how to make the most of groupwork and seminars (sub-skills list, page 108)				
I am able to manage a range of writing tasks appropriately (sub-skills list, page 144)				
I know how to use IT to help in academic study				
I am able to think critically and analytically, and evaluate my own and other people's arguments				
I have good memory strategies				
I have good revision strategies and exam techniques (sub-skills list, pages 260 and 266)				



PLANNER

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.
- Column C* Shows the pages of this *Handbook* related to the given study skill.

Study skill	A Priority for action? Tick, or enter 'can wait' or other options	B	C Pages
I am going to find out how I learn best, and how to reflect upon/evaluate my work			65–70, 95
I am going to be better motivated and learn to set myself manageable goals			90–4
I am going to improve my organisational and time-management skills			71–86, 131, 159
I am going to develop strategies for getting started on a new task or assignment			71–2, 148–9
I am going to improve my research skills			Chs. 6, 9 and 10
I am going to develop my reading skills			120–6
I am going to improve my note-making and organise and use my notes effectively			126–35
I am going to use lecture time effectively to get the best out of lectures			138–9
I am going to improve my oral presentations			111–13
I am going to make the most of working with others (groupwork, seminars, etc.)			Ch. 5
I am going to develop my writing skills			Chs. 7, 8 and 9
I am going to make more use of IT to help my academic study			84–6, 117, 167
I am going to develop my critical and analytical thinking skills			Ch. 10
I am going to improve my memory strategies			Ch. 11
I am going to develop good revision strategies and exam techniques			Ch. 12



PLANNER

Study skills: action plan

Go back over your answers to the different exercises and the self-evaluations you completed for Chapters 1 and 2. Bring together the different ideas about your current strengths, the areas you wish to develop, and your priorities.

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?)



SELF-EVALUATION

Monitoring skills development

Baseline (starting place)

Date: Skill being developed:

My current level of confidence in this skill (circle one):

1 very low 2 low 3 OK 4 high 5 very high

Aspects of this skill I have already demonstrated:

Goal

What I want to be able to do (aspects, sub-skills, qualities I want to develop):

Record of progress

Note down steps in your development of this skill. It is up to you to decide what progress means for you. It could be the achievement of a personal goal (such as getting a particular mark for an assignment), or a small step towards one of your goals (such as asking a question in class for the first time, or developing a successful strategy for arriving on time if you find time management is a challenge).

Date	Achievement	How you know
	<i>(what I can do now that I couldn't before)</i>	<i>(evidence or example)</i>

Personal profiles

What is a profile?

A profile is simply a snapshot of yourself as you are – your skills, qualities, attributes and achievements. It has several uses, of which these are especially important:

- it gives you a sense of where you are now, so that you can work to a personal development plan
- compiling it develops habits of reflection and self-analysis
- experience of evaluating and describing yourself is valuable preparation for job interviews.

In this chapter you have already started to put together your profile of strengths, qualities and priorities. If you photocopied the pages, you can use them again to update your profile as you progress on your course. The profile will help when drawing up a curriculum vitae for job interviews. Add in your achievements and skills from other areas of your life.

‘Soft skills’ are skills such as oral communication

and teamwork, which are less easily quantifiable than academic qualifications. The ‘Soft skills’ evaluation can be used to develop a skills profile (pages 40–1) for employment.

What are employers looking for?

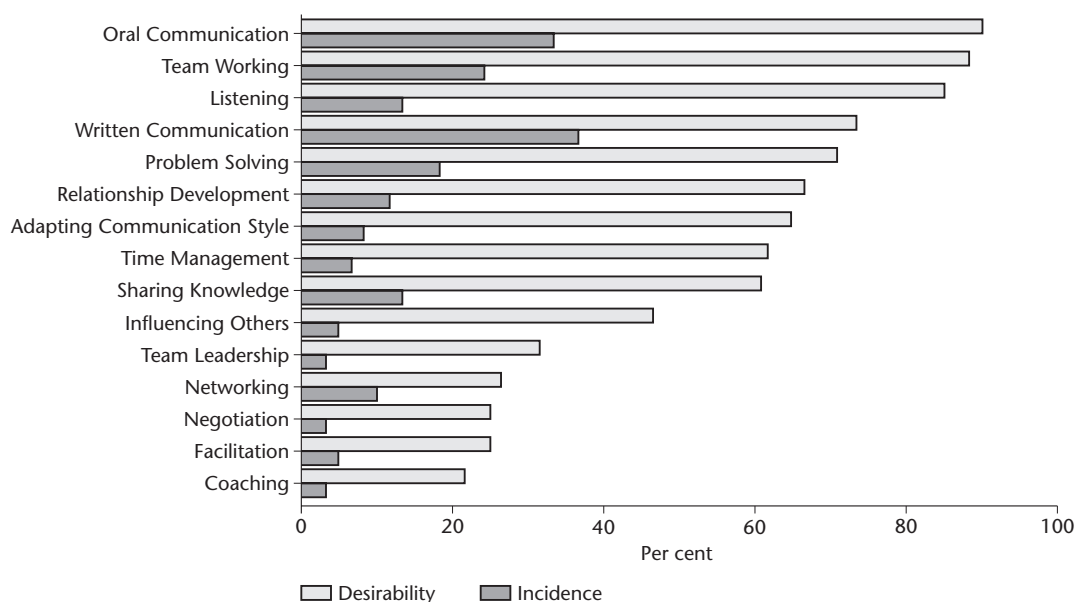
As you can see from the diagram below, employers want graduates to have ‘soft skills’. The lighter bars indicate how desirable each skill is to employers, and the darker bars indicate how few students actually demonstrate those skills.

Activity

What skills would you like to develop?

Read through the list in the diagram below. In which of these skills do you feel most confident? Which could you develop while at university?

Soft skills: as desired by employers and actual incidence



Adapted from TMP Worldwide Research, 1998: *Soft Skills, Hard Facts* (London: TMP Worldwide Research).

Transferable and soft employment skills

Just as you identified how the skills you brought to university could translate into academic skills, so you can see how academic skills translate into the 'transferable' and 'soft' skills required in employment. These skills are needed especially at 'team leader' and other management levels.

On the chart below are some of the soft skills which you could develop as a student – you will be able to think of others. On the next page, map out for yourself the skills you actually develop as a student. This exercise is especially useful in your final year, but if you do it earlier as well you will be better prepared to make use of the various opportunities that college offers.

Area of academic activity	Examples of potential transferable and soft skills which could be developed
Personal development planning	Self-management; forward planning; taking responsibility for improving performance; increasing personal effectiveness; reflective skills; skills development
Attending lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc.	Time-management; working flexibly
Lectures	Listening skills, identifying and selecting relevant points, written communication, information management
Seminars, group work, team projects	Teamwork, negotiating, oral communication, learning to take directions from others and to give directions, taking responsibility, problem-solving, listening, working with people from a variety of backgrounds, dealing with differences in opinion, relationship development, sharing knowledge
Oral presentation	Speaking in public, persuading and influencing others, making a case, time-management, presentation skills, using audiovisual aids, planning, sharing knowledge, adapting communication style
Writing essays and other forms of academic writing	Written communication skills, developing an argument or putting a strong case, working to word limits, working to deadlines, task analysis, sharing knowledge, breaking tasks into component parts, attention to detail
Maths and statistics	Problem-solving, presenting information, interpreting data, sharing knowledge
Observation	Listening skills, working with people from a variety of backgrounds, information management, attention to detail
Research	Time management, managing large amounts of information, working to deadlines
Exams and revision	Working to deadlines, managing stress and crisis, planning



SELF-EVALUATION

Turning academic skills into transferable and soft employment skills

Use the exercises you completed in Chapter 2 to complete the profile below, showing soft and transferable skills developed at university and elsewhere. Look especially at page 33, *Current skills and qualities*.

The first four items from the employer's list are already written in. Add in others at which you are particularly good.

Skills, qualities, attributes and achievements	Specific examples
Oral communication	
Team working	
Listening	
Written communication	
Other transferable skills I can offer	
☐ Current driving licence ☐ Computer literacy ☐ Languages:	

Recording achievement

Celebrate success

When you have achieved a goal, or taken a significant step towards a goal:

- *Acknowledge your achievement* Give yourself credit for what you have done.
- *Celebrate* Give yourself a reward, appropriate to the significance of your achievement.
- *Record it* Note down what happened.
- *Use it* Use your success as an example of what you can achieve when you focus your energies. When applying for jobs, or to build personal motivation, use your records to find examples of different kinds of achievement.



Records of success and personal records

Records of achievement can vary from simple lists of qualifications to detailed reflective journals. Your university will give you a formal transcript that lists your academic achievements, such as courses, modules or units passed. However, only *you* will know:

- how your levels of confidence have changed
- how you have developed as a person
- personal goals you have achieved
- how you did it – the steps you took, and the personal qualities and resources you drew on in order to succeed
- how you kept yourself motivated
- what you learnt about yourself in the process.

It is useful to have records of *how* you achieved your goals, as well as *what* you achieved. These enable you to make use of your experience and to chart change over time. Records of this kind are sometimes referred to as 'portfolios', 'progress files', 'records of achievement' or 'personal records'.

Maintaining a personal portfolio

A portfolio is a file in which you bring together diverse materials on a theme. A personal portfolio, for example, is a collection of key materials related to your own development. To keep the portfolio meaningful and easy to use:

- divide it into sections
- label everything, and use a contents page
- update it regularly, removing old materials
- include an updated personal statement.

Personal statements

A personal statement draws together details of where you are now, where you want to be, and how you will get there. It can be brief. Include such things as:

- long-term and short-term objectives
- what you have done so far towards achieving these (at school, college, university, or work)
- the personal significance of those goals and achievements
- what you learnt about yourself along the way (how to stay motivated, how you learn best, what you need in order to succeed)
- skills and qualities you have achieved, with examples that demonstrate these
- what you need to do next (current targets).

Academic portfolios

Some programmes require you to hand in portfolios for tutors to monitor or mark. These portfolios are different from personal portfolios. When handing in a portfolio:

- Be selective: include only what is required. Choose good examples, rather than dumping everything in the file.
- Indicate exactly where tutors can find each piece of evidence to support points you make in your personal statement or to meet assignment criteria. Annotate or highlight the evidence in the file.
- Remove or edit material that identifies other people by name or gives personal details.
- Number all pages and compile a contents page.

Developing a portfolio

What is the purpose of a portfolio?

A portfolio has several uses:

- it keeps related documents together
- it helps the process of reflection
- it gives the process of self-evaluation and personal development a higher focus in your life
- in some vocations, you can take it to job interviews
- it can hold relevant examples and information for when you need them, such as when applying for work placements, work or other courses.

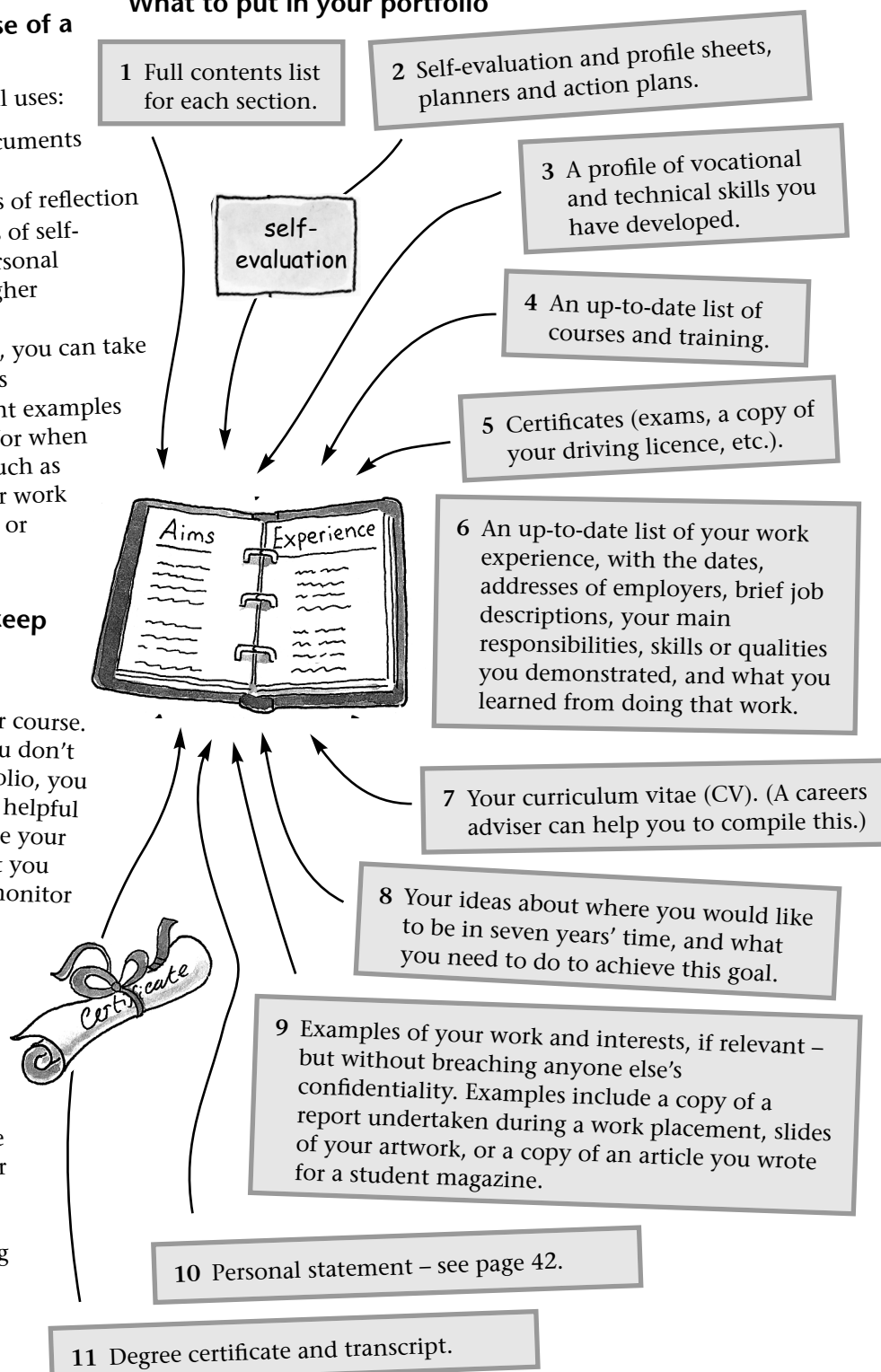
Do you have to keep a portfolio?

A portfolio may be compulsory for your course. However, even if you don't *have* to keep a portfolio, you will probably find it helpful to do so – to organise your thinking about what you need to do, and to monitor your progress.

Checking and updating your portfolio

Update your portfolio regularly – at least once or twice a year, and whenever you achieve something new. Re-reading or rewording what you have written may refocus your energies.

What to put in your portfolio



Review

The term 'study skills' is often used in a loose way. There is a temptation to look at the end product, the finished essay or the good exam mark, and to imagine that knowing a few tips is all that is needed to achieve these. At the other extreme, people may think that high marks are something they can never achieve.

This chapter and Chapters 3 and 4 emphasise that real progress in study skills occurs when skills development is treated as part of a wider, general process of learning. At its best, this is a process in which you learn about yourself and how you perform to your potential under *any* circumstances, not just academically. It involves developing an understanding about how personal opinions, attitudes and states of mind influence your success. Fundamental to that process is self-awareness, based on reflection and self-evaluation, so that you know what you do well and why, and what needs to be improved and how.

This chapter has encouraged you to look at your current qualities and skills in a different way. The process of self-evaluation can begin in quite mechanistic ways, such as filling in questionnaires, rating yourself, setting priorities, and assembling information about yourself. In time, however, this can develop into a deeper process of self-reflection and self-development that benefits any aspect of your life, including your study.

Some students feel as if they have no academic skills. Others, especially those who entered university straight from school, can be anxious about having the right skills to find employment when they leave. For this reason it is important to see the parallels between skills used in academic study, and those used elsewhere. Everybody brings to college experiences and skills which contain sub-skills that are transferable to academic study. In turn,

academic study develops skills and ways of thinking that can be of great benefit in employment. However, skills cannot usually be transferred from one situation to another unless the person concerned can *see* similarities in the two situations. This takes creative reflection, and may require help from others, but it is worth the effort. Graduates who do well in the job market are not necessarily more skilled than others, but they have learnt to *identify* their skills and can therefore talk about them confidently and with examples of their application.

Students may also feel that they do not know where to begin to develop their study skills. The ideas of mapping or profiling skills, identifying weak points for improvement, setting priorities, and drawing up action plans, are themes that run throughout this book. However, the *Handbook* also encourages you to look at opinions, states of mind or belief systems that can affect learning. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on attitudes and approaches which can help or hinder study.

Chapter 3, on 'Intelligence and learning', has been included because so many students consulted during the writing of this book expressed secret doubts about their ability to study or about their intelligence. Most of these students have had their confidence undermined in the past, sometimes by a chance comment. Earlier anxieties about failure can remain for years, eating away at self-esteem and preventing positive outcomes. Looking at underlying myths about intelligence and the realities about learning can enable some students to re-evaluate their learning, and go on to perform extremely well. If you feel this applies to you, you may find it helpful to read Chapter 3 now; if not, you may prefer to come back to the chapter later in the year.