

The Study Skills Handbook

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Palgrave Study Skills

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The Study Skills Handbook

Fourth Edition

Stella Cottrell

palgrave
macmillan



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First edition 1999
Second edition 2003
Third edition 2008
Fourth edition 2013

First published 1999 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN: 978-1-137-28925-4

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

Printed in China

Self-evaluations, checklists, planners and record sheets may be photocopied by individual students for their personal use only.

Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Introducing <i>The Study Skills Handbook</i>	1
A Managing yourself for study	7
1 Success as a student	9
2 Developing your skills	35
3 Successful study: Intelligence, strategy and personalised learning	59
4 The C·R·E·A·M strategy for learning	87
5 Time management as a student	121
B Academic skills	151
6 Core research skills: Reading, note-making and managing information	153
7 Critical analytical thinking	187
8 Memory	203
9 Confidence with numbers	219
C People skills	243
10 Working with others: Collaborative study	245
D Task management skills	271
11 Writing at university level	273
12 Developing academic writing	307
13 Research projects, case studies and dissertations	339
14 Revision and exams	367
E Drawing it together	383
15 Planning your next move	385
Appendices	
1 Quick multiplier	399
2 Online research tools	400
3 Further resources on managing and studying as a student	402
Glossary: Terms useful to know in Higher Education	404
Answers to activities	407
References	415
Index	418

Page vi is not included in this book preview.

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, reflection, trial and error, and feedback from others as you move through the different stages of your course. You may be surprised at how your thinking and language skills develop simply through continued study.

However, 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 twenty years. The core of the book has now been used by hundreds of thousands of students and lecturers worldwide, whose varied comments have contributed to this edition 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.

Aims of *The Study Skills Handbook*

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

- encouraging an understanding that success is not simply about being 'bright' or 'clever' – good marks, and other kinds of successful outcome, are possibilities for any student
- supporting you to take individual, or personalised, approaches to study – that work best for you
- preparing you for what to expect from Higher Education at university or college
- offering guidance on how to develop effective study habits and a positive approach to study
- providing strategies and techniques for addressing core academic tasks at this level of study
- offering insights on how to tackle study activities that many students find difficult
- developing understanding of how learning, intelligence and memory work – so you can apply that understanding to your own studies
- developing core methodologies and thinking skills needed in Higher Education
- supporting you in identifying skills you have already, which you need as a student and for working life
- providing the resources to help you evaluate, reflect upon and manage your studies.

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, in practice, these are interconnected: developing one area of your study will also help with other aspects.

Finding what you need

- Each section provides an overview of the cluster of study skills it covers.
- 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.

Copiable pages

Pages containing self-evaluations, checklists, planners and record sheets may be copied for individual re-use. (You may like to enlarge some of them onto A3 paper.) If you use such copies, keep them with your reflective journal for future reference.

Using the website

Additional free material can be found on the Palgrave website at www.palgravestudyskills.com. You can download some of the resource materials, rather than copying these from the book.

Cartoons and page layout

The cartoons and the variety of page layouts act primarily as visual memory-joggers. Even if you cannot draw well, you can use visual prompts such as these in your own notes. The visual distinctiveness of the pages along with the page headers will also help you to find things more quickly within the book. This encourages learning

through different senses, too – see page 4 below and Chapter 8 for more details.

The self-evaluation questionnaires

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

- they break down major study skills into their component sub-skills
- they enable you to pinpoint which components make a study skill difficult for you, and to identify steps that you missed out in the past. Often, once you identify that missing step, it is fairly straightforward to address it
- they enable you to monitor your progress and identify your strengths.

Challenging material

If you are returning to study after a few years' absence, or if there are aspects of study that are new to you or that proved difficult in the past, don't let these put you off now.

It is very common for students to find that material which was difficult the first time around becomes comprehensible when they return to it after a gap. Even students who find academic language and methods unexpected or difficult usually adapt to these quite quickly.

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.

Keeping a journal



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

Where to begin

- Browse through the *Handbook* so you know roughly what is in it. You may not know what to use until you start assignments.
- 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 would success look like for me?* questionnaire (page 33). This will help you to orientate yourself as a student.
- Use the *Study skills: priorities* planner (page 48) to focus your thinking.
- If you are unsure where to begin with a study skill, use the *Self-evaluation* questionnaire in the appropriate chapter to clarify your thinking.
- Chapters 1–5 cover groundwork and study management approaches basic to the rest of the *Handbook*. It is generally helpful to gain a grasp of the material in these first.

If you are new to Higher Education ...

Start with Chapter 1. This gives you an idea of what to expect as well as guidance on what to find out and do in order to make sense of Higher Education and take control of your experience as a student.

You may also find it helpful, early on, to look at:

- identifying your current skills and qualities (Chapter 2)
- building your confidence in your learning abilities (Chapter 3)
- what will keep you motivated, focused, and help performance (Chapter 4)
- time management (Chapter 5)
- brushing up on reading skills (Chapter 6) and writing skills (Chapter 11).

If you have studied for A-levels, BTEC, Access to HE diplomas or the International Baccalaureate ...

You may find that you can browse through the early sections of each chapter quite quickly. Chapters 1, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12 and 13 may be the most useful for you. If you feel uncomfortable about a book that uses images as learning tools, read page 68 and Chapter 8 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 are 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 learning

As you will see from Chapter 1, it is generally understood in Higher Education that:

- at this level, it is a good thing for students to take on increased amounts of responsibility for their learning
- *and* you will arrive with sufficient preparation to be able to study in an independent way for much of the week.

It is generally your responsibility to catch up if you are not fully prepared in a certain area, especially for more basic skills such as spelling or grammar.

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 14). Many students who were not ideal pupils at school do extremely well at college, following thorough preparation.



7 Personalise your learning

Recognise your 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 your learning environment and your approaches to 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.

As you are more in charge of your learning at this level, this gives you opportunities to personalise the learning experience to suit yourself. The various chapters of this book provide ideas about how you can do this.

A new beginning ...

From this introduction, you will probably have gleaned that an important premise of this book is that academic success comes about as the result of many factors. Intellectual ability is one, but not necessarily the most important of these. Whatever your experience of academic study in the past, this may not be the same in Higher Education.

Didn't achieve well in the past?

Many people who didn't do well at school find that they thrive in the very different atmosphere of Higher Education. For some, this is because the approaches taken in Higher Education suit them better; for others, it is because they take a different approach themselves to their work. If you under-achieved in the past, this may come as welcome news. This *Handbook* was designed to help you challenge beliefs that have often led to students under-achieving in the past, and offers practical steps for managing your current studies.

Have always been good at study?

If you did well in the past, you have the benefit of excellent building blocks for study that should boost your confidence. Those who gain the highest marks are generally keen to find ways of studying more effectively. Even excellent students can find ways of saving time, fine-tuning their study techniques, and adapting their approaches to meet the demands of higher level study.

Good strategies count ...

Putting in place the right study skills and strategies can make a significant difference to academic performance. Students are surprised and pleased to find that they can achieve well if they develop study strategies that are relevant to their ways of thinking and working and that draw upon their personal interests and preferences.

Developing study skills in context

Even study skills strategies and techniques are not much use in a vacuum. These are more likely to be effective if they are fine-tuned to the level of study and the study context. For Higher Education, this means considering such factors as:

- understanding what is different about studying in Higher Education
- knowing what is required at your level of study
- understanding the learning process and how you can manage that process to best effect
- being aware of what you want to gain from your time in Higher Education in relation to your longer-term life and career aims.

Before looking at study skills in depth, the following three chapters encourage you to stand back and consider these broader contextual issues. These provide many of the tools you need for applying the specific skills and techniques covered in later chapters.



Enjoy the book

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

Part A

Managing yourself for study

- 1 Success as a student
- 2 Developing your skills
- 3 Successful study: intelligence, strategy and personalised learning
- 4 The C·R·E·A·M strategy for learning
- 5 Time management as a student

In Higher Education, the key responsibility for academic success lies with you. That responsibility increases with each level of study. This change in emphasis can come as a surprise to many students, and can catch many out.

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

Being in control of your own learning isn't easy. It requires a range of personal skills and attributes to manage independent learning successfully, to use time well, to interpret sensibly what is going on when study seems more difficult or your motivation wanes, and to adapt your strategies when your current ones don't seem to deliver what you want. 'Managing yourself' is, then, a key aspect of managing study.

This section, *Managing yourself for study*, provides background and approaches that help you to build a solid foundation in managing your studies. It helps you to understand the context of Higher Education – and why you are expected to take on such responsibility. As you are expected to take charge of your own learning, it is useful to understand what 'learning' is about so that you gain insights into how to do this well. It looks at the range of skills and understandings typically expected of students at this level, so that you can check for yourself whether you are on the right track.

Page 8 is not included in this book preview.

Chapter 1

Success as a student

Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

- identify what is expected from you as a student
- appreciate how Higher Education differs from previous levels of education
- understand the teaching methods used at this level, and the pivotal role of independent study
- clarify what success at this level would look like for you
- consider how to make best use of the experience
- explore your anxieties and identify resources
- build your resilience as a student so as to maximise your chance of success.

Higher Education involves study at university level, although this may be completed in institutions that are not, themselves, universities. The experience of being a student in Higher Education can be life-changing. Most graduates look back on this time with great fondness. That is because of the unique opportunities to:

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

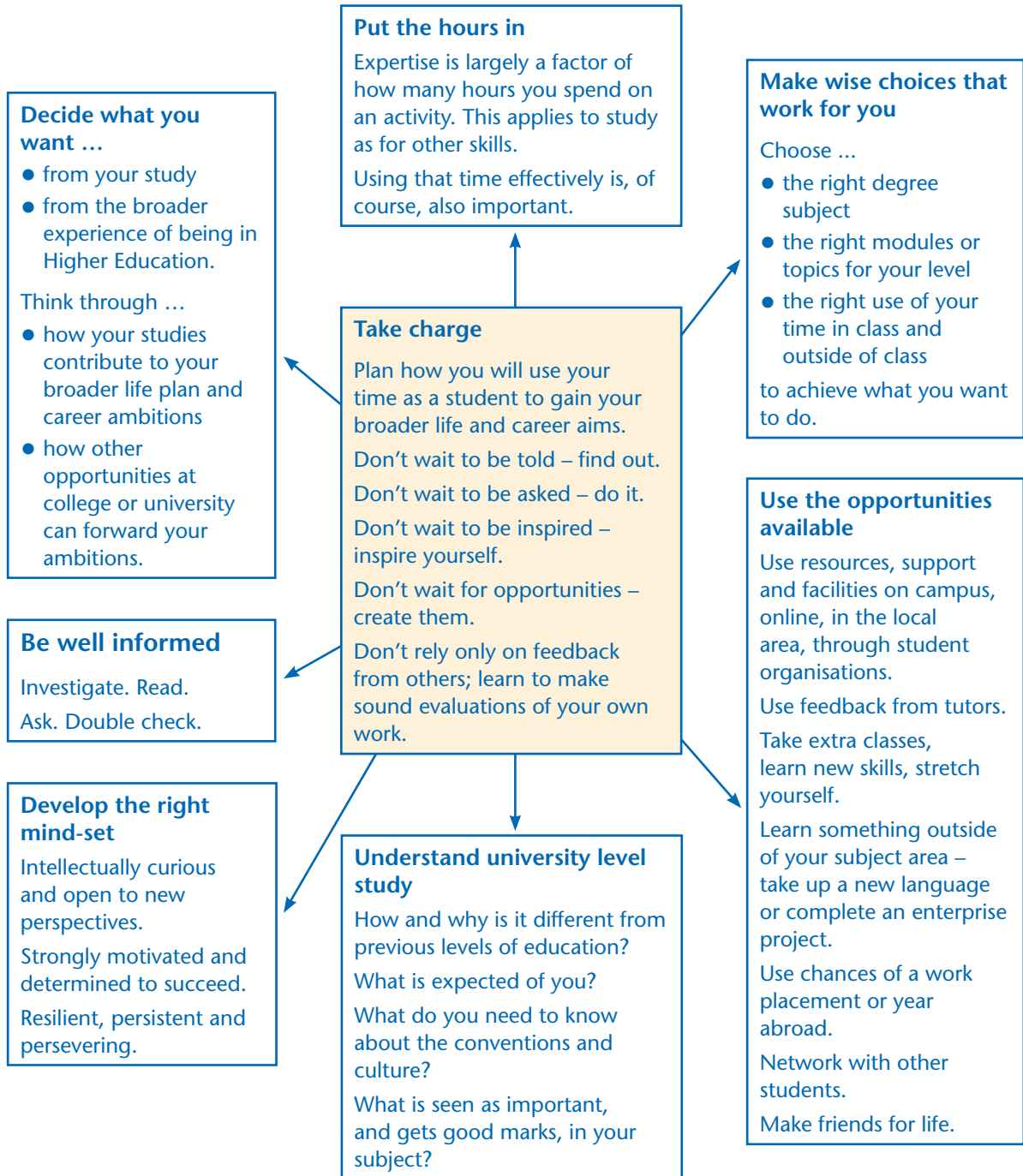
Whilst starting out as a student is exciting, it is also natural to feel some anxieties about what you might be taking on, whether you are up to it, and whether you are doing the right things to achieve well.

Higher level study is different from study at previous levels. This chapter helps you to identify how and why this is the case, and what that means for you as a student. It encourages you to think through what you want from the experience of being a student and to identify things you can do to succeed.



Make the experience work for you

In Higher Education, success lies largely in your own hands. Although help and guidance is provided, it is up to you to take the initiative. This means being active on your own behalf.



What is expected from you?

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

– Ade, first-year student

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

Independence

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



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

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

Ability to set goals to improve your work



Self-motivation



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

Ability to organise your time

You need to keep track of time. You must:

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

	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

Openness to working with others

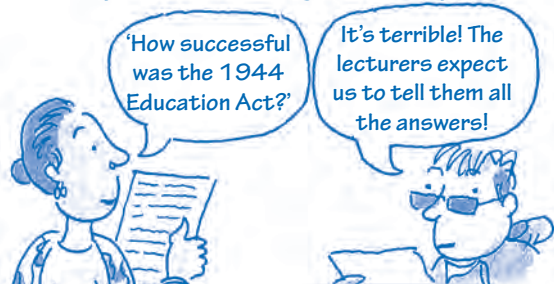
You will need to organise study sessions with friends.



(See Chapter 5.)

Ability to work out when and how you learn best

Ability to work things out for yourself



On second thoughts maybe I do work better indoors, in the daytime.



Current skills and qualities

Pages 12–45 are not included in this book preview.

People

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to get on with people from different backgrounds | <input type="checkbox"/> Consideration of others' feelings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding other people's points of view | <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitivity to cultural differences | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting and motivating others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the general public | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding others' body language |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork and collaboration | <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with 'difficult' people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Networking | <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking clearly and to the point |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing or supervising others' work | <input type="checkbox"/> Audience awareness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching, training or mentoring others | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking direction from others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiating and persuading | <input type="checkbox"/> Giving constructive feedback |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Helping others to arrive at decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership skills |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

Activities and tasks

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity, design and layout | <input type="checkbox"/> Technological skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Innovation and inventiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Using social networking tools |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to see the 'whole picture' | <input type="checkbox"/> Working with numbers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Argument and debate | <input type="checkbox"/> Selling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing patterns and connections | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to detail | <input type="checkbox"/> Quick thinking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Searching for information | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classifying and organising information | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding quickly how things work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Making decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing practical applications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing change and transition | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing reports or official letters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting priorities | <input type="checkbox"/> Languages |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working out agendas | <input type="checkbox"/> Enterprise and entrepreneurship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organising work to meet deadlines | <input type="checkbox"/> Business and financial skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing difficult situations, emergencies and crises |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading complex texts | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer literacy | |

Personal

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Setting my own goals | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-reliance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working independently | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognising my own needs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining a high level of motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking care of my health and well-being |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Taking responsibility for my own actions | <input type="checkbox"/> Staying calm in a crisis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learning from my mistakes | <input type="checkbox"/> Coping skills and managing stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness to take risks and experiment | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assertiveness | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Determination and perseverance | |

Index

- abbreviations 174, 184
abstracts
 in journal articles 163
 published 158
 for reports 344, 361
academic conventions 39, 289, 314
 features of academic writing 281, 287, 308–9, 315
 the scientific model 311–12, 314
 skills 36, 37, 39; *see* APT-S study skills model
 writing styles 287, 315–22
academic skills 151, 281; *see* APT-S study skills model; study skills
academic sources online 154, 158, 159, 162–4
Access to Higher Education Diploma 3
achievement 55; *see* study skills; monitoring
action learning groups 257
action plans 118–19, 135, 292, 324, 373, 397
 for managing anxieties 26
 study skills 50
active learning 5, 87, 108–10, 205–6
 active reading 166, 167, 168
analysis, qualitative and quantitative 312, 313, 314
analytical thinking 187–202
analytical writing 194, 197–200, 317, 319
anxieties 9, 25–6, 27–8, 60, 113, 276
 and exams 370, 376
 and memory 209
 see stress management
apps 21, 80, 81, 181
APT-S study skills model 35, 36–40, 58
argument 310
 see also reasoning, line of
assessment 3, 12, 31, 80, 274
assignments *see* writing
 assignment brief 340
assistive technologies 21
Athens 158
attention 68, 108, 167
attitude 43, 114–15
audience 39, 253, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269
auditory learning strategies 90, 167, 170, 204, 205, 209, 213, 279, 371
averages 231–4, 235
 calculating averages 231–4
 comparing mean, median and mode 234
 mean 232
 median 233
 mode 234
 representative function 231
 understanding averages 224, 231
 see also five-number summaries
bar charts 240, 356
bibliographic databases 158
bibliographies 181
blended learning *see* technology-enhanced learning
 see also personalised learning
blogs 21, 43, 81
Bower, G. H. 215
Bowlby, J. 325–30
brain 203
 hemispheres 85, 207–8
 and learning 203, 207–9
 plasticity 65
 triune 85, 208–9
brainstorming 143, 173, 279
Butterworth, G. 65
Buzan, T. 173, 201
career planning 6, 10, 13, 32, 33, 52–5, 57, 387, 389–92, 392
 see personal development planning
case studies 364–5
causality 190–1
categorising 293, 294, 295
charts 237, 240
 bar charts 240, 356
 pie charts 240, 356
cheating 258
 see also plagiarism
choices
 wise choices as a student 10, 18, 19, 57
citations *see* referencing
collaborative learning 16, 20, 40, 78, 82, 182, 245, 246–8, 256, 257
 without cheating 258
 using Delicious 182
colour-coding
 diaries 136
 memory 205, 208, 213
 notes 110, 143, 166, 168, 172
 to organise writing 300
 planning paragraphs 300
 when reading 166, 167
communications
 e-communications for study 20
 group projects 259, 260, 261
 computer-assisted assessment 20
 computers *see* information and communications technology
 concepts 293
 concept pyramids 215–16, 293–6, 376
 conclusions 197
 see also writing
 confidentiality 304
 CREAM strategy 87–120, 88–96, 119, 120
 critical thinking 14, 187–202, 319–20
 bias 192, 193, 319
 evaluating evidence 191–4
 false premises 189, 190
 questioning 188, 191, 296
 analysis of statistics 192–3
 when listening 188, 201
 when reading 164, 168, 188
 when writing 188, 197–200
 criticism, giving and receiving 255
 CV 52, 392
data 223–4
 analysing 192–3, 356
 collecting 351–5
 interpreting raw data 223, 356
 presenting 356
 see also number skills; statistics
deadlines, meeting deadlines 121, 139
denominator 226, 241
descriptive writing 198–9, 315, 316
diary-keeping 136–8
digital repositories 158
discussion groups 251–4, 259
dissertation 340, 342
 checklist 363
 drafts 302–3
 supervisors 346
 see research project
distance learning 17
Donaldson, M. 65
dyslexia 3
 developing writing 275
 jumping and glaring texts 170
 reading strategies 164–6, 168
 starting a piece of writing 278–9
 see also concept pyramids; memory
editing 300, 302, 303, 304
effective learning 87, 100–7
Einstein, A. 66, 89
employers *see* work-based learning
 what employers want 52–4, 57, 245, 340, 389
employment *see* careers planning;
 work experience

- e-portfolios 12, 55, 56
- e-projects *see* projects
- essays 108–9, 281–306
 - examples of 325–37
 - in exams 369, 376
 - 'going blank' 376
 - procedure for writing 282–3
 - structure 288–90, 295, 297
 - titles 284–6
 - what is an essay? 281, 342, 350
 - see also* writing
- ethical considerations 346, 347
- evaluation of achievement 51, 52–4, 94, 97
- evaluation of study skills 386
 - see also* monitoring progress
- evidence *see* critical thinking; research projects
- exams 367, 371, 372, 374–8
 - exam checklists 372
 - pitfalls 377
 - strategy 378
 - use of exam time 375, 376, 377
 - see* memory; revision; dealing with stress
- expectations 12
 - what is expected of you 11, 102
 - what to expect 10, 16–21, 30–1
 - see* university level study; independent study
- experience, learning from 36, 44, 45–7, 68–9, 322
- feedback, using tutor feedback 31, 324
- five-number summaries 235–6
- Flanagan, K. 218
- fractions 225–7
 - adding, subtracting and multiplying fractions 226, 227
 - calculating percentages from fractions 229
 - comparing fractions 226
 - improper fractions 225
- Gardner, H. 61, 62, 63, 64
- Glaser, E. 187
- goal-setting 11, 47, 49, 114, 115–18
- goals for university study 114
- Google Docs 182
- Google Scholar 158
- graduates 9, 52, 57, 58, 245
- graphs 237, 238
- groupwork 11, 16, 46, 53, 182, 249–59
 - blog 20
 - communications 259, 261, 262
 - group projects 258, 259, 260
 - group roles 250, 259, 260, 261
 - groundrules 249, 256, 261
 - making groups work effectively 249–53, 254, 256, 260
 - wikis 260
- see* working with others, collaborative learning, presentations, study groups
- Harris, J. E. and Sunderland, A. 203
- Higher Education 3, 9, 10
 - higher level study 151; *see* university level study
 - see* expectations; university level study
- hypothesis, for research projects 311, 349
- improper fractions 225
- independent learning 11, 17
- independent study 18–19
 - benefits, challenges, risks 19
 - managing independent study 19, 10, 12
 - responsibility for own learning 5, 7, 105
- indexes, book 164
 - published indices 158
- information and communications technology 104, 154–5
 - management of 79, 80, 176, 182
 - storage 155, 182
 - see* technology enhanced learning; search strategies
- intellectual curiosity 10, 13, 14–15, 32, 71, 89
- intelligence 5, 13, 43, 59–66
 - IQ 61, 62, 65
- interview techniques 355
- intranets 21
- introductions *see* writing
- IT *see* information and communications technology
- journals 2, 159
 - learning journals 99
- Karmiloff-Smith, A. 62
- Keane, M., Kahney, H. and Brayshaw, M. 66
- kinaesthetic learning strategies 166, 204, 205, 212
- knowledge 14–15, 39, 71
- laboratory work 17, 185
- learning 3, 59, 67–71, 205
 - approaches 4
 - community 14, 20, 245
 - deep processing 1, 70, 153, 168
 - environment 37, 38, 64, 144, 167
 - from experience 69, 74
 - optimal learning 84
 - process 67–71
 - savvy 13
 - styles and preferences 72–83, 207–8
 - unconscious 76
- see also* active learning; brain; CREAM strategy; independent study; journals; multi-sensory learning; personalised approaches to learning
- lectures 16–17, 101
 - using effectively 183
 - lecture notes 183, 184
- lecturers 14, 15, 17, 305
- levels of study 30, 31, 35
- libraries 31, 79, 157
- life balance 147
- lifelong learning 393
- listening 53, 183, 188, 201
 - critically 206
 - skills 252
- literature review 343, 347, 350, 358, 359
- literature search 343
- M-learning 20
- Mackintosh, N. J. and Mascie-Taylor, C. G. N. 62
- managing yourself *see* self-management
- marks, getting good marks 156, 316, 323–4, 327–8, 330, 334, 337
- mature students 3, 4, 6, 9, 18, 19, 26, 29, 44, 45, 46
- memory 39, 203–18, 371
 - and age 203
 - and concept pyramids 215–16
 - encoding information 210–15
 - individual styles 204, 205, 210
 - organisation 215–17
 - over-learning 214
 - process 210–11
 - stages 210–11
 - strategies 108–10, 204, 205, 203–18
- mentors (for work-based learning) 106
- metacognitive skills 38, 39, 91–3
- mnemonics 206
- money 24
- monitoring progress 51, 97, 386, 388
- motivation 1, 3, 4, 6, 11, 13, 18, 87, 108, 111–18, 144, 370, 371
- multiplication 222, 399
 - of fractions 227
 - quick multiplier (table) 399
 - understanding multiplication 222
- multi-sensory learning 2, 4, 68, 75, 78, 205, 208
- netiquette 21
- neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) 115
- notes, using provided notes 184
- note-making 100, 101, 171–6, 184, 185, 284
 - abbreviating 174, 184
 - how to make notes 171, 172
 - organising 143, 171, 174, 176
 - pattern notes 166, 173
 - and plagiarism 177

- as posters and charts 166
- when reading 171, 172, 175
- for revision 172, 368, 369
- strategy 172, 175
- number skills 219–42
 - building your confidence 219, 221–2
 - critically questioning numbers and statistics 192–3, 224
 - extreme values 235
 - five-number summaries 235–6
 - required for academic study 219, 220
 - technical terms for number work 241
 - trusting numbers and statistics 220, 222, 223
 - understanding numbers 221–2
 - see also averages; charts; graphs; percentages; rounding; statistics; tables; quartiles
- numerator 226, 241
- objectivity 311, 313
- online searches 159; see searches
- opinion 310, 315
- organisation 43, 100, 101, 103, 141
 - of ideas in concept pyramids 215–16
 - of information 31, 154–5, 156, 182, 214, 217
 - of study space 103
 - using information technology 79–80, 104, 142
 - see writing
- over-learning 214, 373
- paragraphing see writing
- part-time study 127
- pattern notes 173, 216, 292
- PDP see personal development planning
- peer review 162, 163
- people skills 40, 46, 243–70
 - self-evaluation of 248
 - see working with others
- percentages 228, 230
 - calculating from fractions 229
- personal development planning (PDP) 33, 57, 114, 386, 394–7
 - action plan for PDP 397
 - already undertaken 388
 - opportunities, making use of 10, 13, 24, 32, 33, 57, 63, 79, 388, 389, 393
 - planning your future 387, 389–91
 - qualities 38, 45
 - targets for PDP 46, 396–7
- personal profiles 52
- personal statements 55
- personalised approaches to learning 3, 5, 59, 74–83, 84–5, 102, 110, 245
 - see multi-sensory approaches
- pie charts 240, 356
- plagiarism 177–9
- planning 136–7, 138
- podcasts 20, 81, 163, 183, 201
- portal 20
- portfolios 55, 56, 97, 389
- posters 265
- practicals 17, 185
- presentations 40, 264, 265–8
 - group 265
- priority-setting 26, 48–9, 125, 134–5
- problem-solving 64, 65, 66, 91–6, 101
- profiling 45–6, 52, 78
- progress files 55–6
- projects 258, 260–4, 341
 - checklist 262–4
 - management of 40, 106
 - managing a project 261–4
 - see also collaborative learning; dissertations; groupwork; presentations; report-writing; research projects
- proof-reading 301, 302, 303
- proper fractions 225
- pyramids see concept pyramids
- qualitative and quantitative analysis 241, 311–12, 352, 353, 364
- quartiles 235, 236
- questionnaires, designing 352–4
- quotations, using 177–81
- Raven's Progressive Matrices 61–2
- reading
 - critically 164, 168, 188, 189–96, 350
 - difficulty 170
 - to improve comprehension 166, 167, 168, 170
 - and note-taking 166, 171, 175, 176, 177
 - using questions 164, 168, 169
 - reading lists 21, 158, 164, 165
 - selectively 164, 165, 350
 - speed 165, 166, 168–9, 170
 - strategies 110, 165–7, 168, 169
- reasoning, line of 187, 189–91, 197
 - flawed reasoning 187, 189, 190–1
- recording achievement 55–7, 117, 386
- recording information 176 (see notes), 182, 185
- Reed, S. K., Dempster, A. and Ettinger, M. 64
- referencing 143, 177, 179–81, 344, 358
 - citing sources 179, 180
 - Harvard system 180
 - introducing quotations 180–1
 - reference management tools 181
 - storing 182
 - what to include 179
 - writing out 179
- reflection 1, 2, 26, 55, 56, 58, 87, 97–9, 307
- reflective learning journal 97, 99, 110
- report-writing 342, 357, 359–62, 363
 - characteristics of 342, 357
 - layout 350, 362
 - structure of 357, 358
- research projects 14–15, 153–86
 - checklist 363
 - choosing a topic 347–8
 - defining the research task 154, 156, 286, 340–1, 342
 - design 344, 351
 - information management 154–5
 - hypothesis 349
 - methods 351, 352–5, 358, 360
 - pilots 351
 - process 342–3, 345
 - proposal 343, 346, 347
 - projects 339, 341–2
 - recommendations 31
 - research strategy 343, 346, 351
 - results, analysing data 356, 360, 362
 - thesis 348
 - tools 154, 400–1
 - see case studies; dissertations; literature review; reports; writing
- resilience 13, 22–3
 - mind-set 10
 - taking charge 10
 - see managing stress; motivation
- Resnick, L., Levine, J. and Teasley, S. D. 63
- resources, personal 25, 26, 29
- revision 80, 367, 369–73
 - action plan 373
 - choosing what to revise 368, 373
 - notes and charts 166, 172
 - past papers 368, 371, 374
 - pitfalls 369–70
 - strategies 371
 - timetables 368
- rounding numbers 230
- sabotage of own study 116
 - sabotaging groups 250
- samples 193, 223, 224
- scientific model 311–12, 314
- search methods 154, 158
- search tools 154–5, 158
- searching online 154–5, 154–63
 - advanced searches 160, 161
 - automated 159
 - narrowing a search 159, 160
 - for good quality materials 162, 163, 164
 - search tools 154, 158
 - strategies 155
 - widening a search 160, 161
 - wildcards 160
- self-awareness 3, 12–13, 43, 59, 387
- self-evaluation 2, 43, 44, 97–9, 267, 269
- self-management 7, 9, 13, 22–3, 24, 37, 38

- seminars 16, 53, 245–54, 268–9
- SHAPE 74
- Simon, H. 307, 217
- skills 35–58
 - audit 35, 44, 45, 46
 - brought to university 44–6
 - clouds 41–2
 - components 43
 - developed at university 36–41, 53–4, 55, 57, 388, 393
 - identifying your skills 44–9
 - priorities 48–9
 - 'soft' skills 52–4
 - transferable skills 44–7, 53–4
- sleep 24, 25–6
- social networking 81
- speaking skills 251, 252, 253, 265–9
- Spearman, C. 61
- spider diagrams 110
- statistics 191–3, 222, 223, 224
 - samples 223, 224
- Sternberg, R. 64
- stress 22, 147, 379–81
- strategies
 - see* active learning; CREAM strategy; exams
 - study strategies 6, 43, 59
- student experiences 16, 19, 27–8, 32, 33, 63, 124, 126, 170, 174
- student life 22–3, 24, 32
- study groups 78, 256, 257, 258, 259
- study support groups 23, 25, 26, 31, 345
- study options 8, 15
- study skills 1, 3, 6, 13, 36, 37
 - achievement 326–31, 385–6
 - evaluating 332, 386
 - priorities 48–9
 - recording 38, 326–31
 - see also* APT-S study skills model; monitoring progress
- subject knowledge 12, 14, 15, 39, 340
- subjectivity 313
- success as a student 9–34
 - making Higher Education work for you 10, 12–13, 27–8, 32
 - marks 156, 316, 323–4, 327–8, 330, 334, 337
 - personal vision of success 33
 - see also* resilience; career planning
- supervisors 345, 346
- Suzuki Violin Talent Education Programme 63
- synthesis 14, 94, 155, 197, 287, 319, 323
- tables 237, 239
 - presenting data in tables 239, 356
 - raw data in tables 356
 - understanding tables 237
- talks, giving talks 265–7, 268
- target-setting *see* goals; personal development planning
- task management skills 36, 40, 43, 271; *see* APT-S study skills model
- teaching methods 16–17, 19, 20
 - see* independent study
- technology enhanced learning 17, 21, 79–81
- terminology 241, 404–6
- Terman, L. M. 43, 61
- thinking skills 14–15, 39, 351; *see* critical thinking
- Thurstone, L. L. 43, 61
- time 100, 123
 - blocks and breaks 140
 - deadlines 139, 141
 - and independent study 19
 - organising 10, 11
 - managing distractions and procrastination 142, 144, 145
 - management of time 18, 121–52, 345, 380
 - monitoring use of time 131–3, 129–30, 149
 - requirements 31, 125–8
 - student experiences of 27, 124
 - time circles 131–3
 - time-saving techniques and strategies 140–3, 148
- titles
 - analysing assignment titles 284, 285
 - devising your own for assignments 286, 343
- 'To do' lists 137
- transcripts 55, 56, 57
- truncated symbols 160
- tutorials 16, 99, 345, 346
- understanding and learning 69–71
- university *see* expectations; Higher Education
 - culture of 14, 15
 - research 14, 15
 - university level study 10, 12, 14–15, 71
- variables 312
- virtual learning environments 20, 21
- visual perceptual difficulties with text 179
- visual learning strategies 2, 4, 5, 115, 166, 168, 173, 204, 205, 213–14, 216; *see* multi-sensory learning
- vulgar fractions 241
 - see also* fractions
- Vygotsky, L. 63
- web addresses, saving 182
- websites, Palgrave 2
- wheel diagrams 279
- wikis 21, 81, 163
 - group wiki 260, 261
 - Wikipedia 163
 - Wiktionary 163
- wildcard symbols 160
- word limits (in study tasks) 143, 290, 291, 296
 - using efficiently 164
- work-based learning 16, 19
 - benefits of work-based learning 105
 - combining work and study 105, 106, 107
 - managing study-release time 107
 - managing work-based projects 106
 - workplace mentors 106
 - work placements 16, 107, 389, 392
 - working with others 10, 11, 23, 82
 - see* collaborative learning; groupwork; people skills; study groups
 - writing 273
 - academic writing 273, 307, 338
 - analysis 187, 188, 197–8, 284, 285, 287, 312–13, 317, 319
 - anxieties 275, 276
 - argument 317–18; *see* reasoning, line of
 - assignments 282–3
 - blocks 275, 276, 278, 280
 - checklists 363
 - compare and contrast 319–21
 - critical thinking and writing 188, 197–200
 - conclusions 197, 290, 361
 - drafts 276, 278, 283, 297, 344
 - editing 300, 302, 303, 304
 - evaluation of writing skills 268, 274
 - evaluative 319
 - focus 284
 - from experience 275, 322
 - generating ideas 275, 276, 278, 279
 - getting started 275, 276, 278–80, 290
 - introductions 290, 315, 359
 - linking ideas 301
 - managing writing tasks 273, 274
 - organising 276, 277, 282–3, 304
 - paragraphs 288, 289, 290, 291, 298–301
 - plans 282, 283, 289, 291, 292
 - precision 310
 - presenting 304, 362
 - procedure for writing assignments 282–3
 - proof-reading 302
 - sentences 298, 300
 - speed 368
 - structure 283, 284, 288–90, 296, 297, 303
 - style 175, 287, 290, 302, 308–9, 315–22, 360, 362, 365
 - skills 39, 274
 - see also* case studies; description; critical analysis; dissertations; essays; reasoning, line of; referencing; report-writing; word limits