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5th edition

THE STUDY SKILLS HANDBOOK

STELLA COTTRELL

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The Study Skills Handbook

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The Study Skills Handbook

Fifth Edition

Stella Cottrell

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

Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stella Cottrell, 2019

Introducing *The Study Skills Handbook*

Is this book for you?

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

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

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

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

Quick tips or deeper learning?

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

Aims of *The Study Skills Handbook*

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

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

How to use *The Study Skills Handbook*

Decide what you need

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

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

Find what you need

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

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

Select from the resources

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

Use the self-evaluations

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

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

Copiable pages

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



The book's companion site

Visit www.studyskillshandbook.co.uk for interactive self-evaluations, study skills videos, and other useful links and resources.

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

Take on the challenge

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

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

Keeping a journal

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



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

Where to begin?

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

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

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

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

Had a study gap or lack confidence?

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

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

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

Dyslexic students

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

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

International students

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

Pace yourself

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

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

Choose your own route

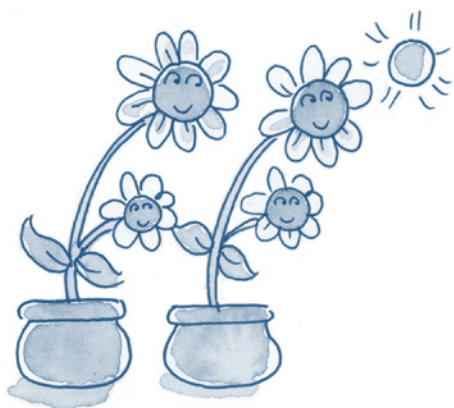
There are many avenues to successful study. [Chapters 1–4](#) encourage you to look at what enhances your individual study, and offer suggestions on how to experiment with your learning to find ways to take it to the next level. Experiment. Explore. Be creative. Find what suits *you* best.

Seven approaches to learning

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

1 Treating learning as an adventure

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



Find a point of attraction

2 Using multiple senses and movement

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

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

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

3 Identifying the attraction

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

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



Visualise your success

4 Using active learning

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

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

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

5 Taking responsibility for your learning

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

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



6 Trusting in your intelligence

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

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

7 Personalising your learning

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

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

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

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

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

Reflection



Seven Approaches to Learning

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

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

A new beginning ...

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

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

Always been good at study?

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

Tend to coast along 'in the middle'?

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

Didn't achieve well in the past?

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

Good strategies matter ...

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

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



**Enjoy
the book**

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

PART A

Self-efficacy: Managing your Success as a Student

You in the driving seat

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

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

Taking on the challenge

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

The importance of 'self-efficacy'

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

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

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

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

Chapter 1

Success as a student

Take charge of your success



Learning outcomes

This chapter offers you opportunities to:

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

A transformational experience

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

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

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

Making your success a reality

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

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



Make the experience work for you

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

Reflection



Taking charge

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

Think through ...

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

Be well informed

Investigate. Read.
Ask. Double check.

Put the hours in

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

Make wise choices that work for you

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

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

Decide what you want ...

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

Take charge

Plan how you will use your time as a student to gain your broader life and career aims.

Don't wait to be told – find out.

Don't wait to be asked – do it.

Don't wait to be inspired – inspire yourself.

Don't wait for opportunities – create them.

Don't rely only on feedback from others; learn to make sound evaluations of your work.

Don't neglect your well-being – include it in your goals.

Develop the right mindset

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

Understand higher level study

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

Use the opportunities

Use resources, support and facilities on campus, online, in the local area, through student organisations.

Use feedback from tutors.

Take extra classes, learn new skills, stretch yourself.

Learn something outside of your subject area – take up a new language or complete an enterprise project.

Use chances of a work placement or year abroad.

Network with others.

Make friends for life.

Your vision of success as a student

A return on your investment

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

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

Reflection



Think forward

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

Reflection



Use your vision to direct your energies

What do your choices opposite indicate about:

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

What would success look like for me?

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

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

Career

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

Transformational experience

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

Subject and qualifications

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

Life and personal

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

Success as a student: what lecturers say

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



Reflection



Student success

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

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



What is expected from you?

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

– Ade, first-year student

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

Independence

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



Self-motivation



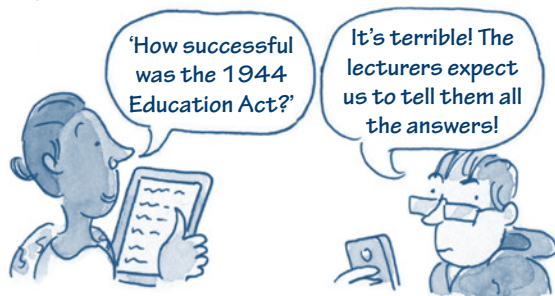
You have to be able to work on your own a lot.

Openness to working with others

You will need to organise study sessions with friends.



Ability to work things out for yourself



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



Ability to organise your time

You need to keep track of time. You must:

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

(See Chapter 6.)

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

Ability to work out when and how you learn best



Success as a student: where am I now?

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

Understanding university-level study

Clear understanding of expectations

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

Clear understanding of educational context

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

Management of independent study

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

Management of assessment

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

Subject knowledge and understanding

Knowledge

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

Understanding

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

Academic Skills

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

Learning savvy

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

Self-awareness and commitment

Clear vision, direction and motivation

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

High levels of personal engagement

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

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

Resilience, self-reliance and self-management

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

Reflection



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

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

How is higher level study different?

Study is different

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

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

The role of the 'teacher' is different

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

Creating knowledge

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

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

Intellectual curiosity; learning community

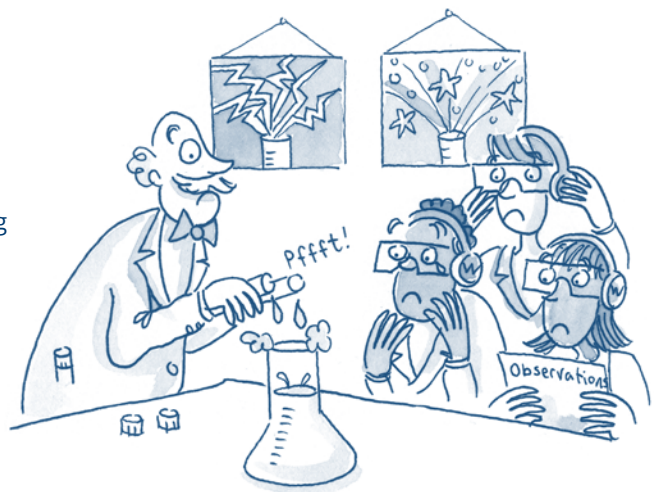
Studying at this level is about being part of an adult learning community in which everyone, students and lecturers, are active in finding out new things for themselves and sharing them with others. It is assumed that you are intellectually curious, keen to find things out for yourself and to contribute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

Universities play an important role in:

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

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

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



Nobody knows what
will happen next ...

Understanding higher level study

Studying at the cutting edge of knowledge

Moving beyond generalisations

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

Journeying into the unknown

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

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

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

Culture, conventions and values

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

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

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

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

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

'Learning the rules of the game ...'

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

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



Professor Smartz works at the cutting edge of knowledge

Teaching: what to expect in Higher Education

The study week

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

Lectures



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

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

Tutorials

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

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

Seminars/workshops/'crits'

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



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

Other typical teaching methods

Independent study

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

Group work and collaborative learning

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

Technology-enhanced learning (TEL)

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

Work-based learning and work placements

Some courses involve job-related learning.

Distance learning

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

Independent study: benefits, challenges, risks

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

Benefits	Challenges	Risks
More control over your study time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To manage time effectively. ★ To meet deadlines. 	Wasting study time. Underestimating how long study tasks take. Forgetting things that must be done.
More control over your 'spare' time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To use time effectively building your CV, gaining skills and experience, to further your employability and career interests. ★ To recognise the difference between 'spare' time and independent study time. ★ To put time aside to relax, rest, socialise and enjoy yourself. 	<p>Missing opportunities to develop a wider range of attributes that will benefit you when applying for jobs or promotions.</p> <p>Spending all your time in study, rather than in a balanced menu of activity.</p>
More choice about when and where to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To create structures for your day. ★ To organise a place to study. ★ To work out the best places and times, for you, for diverse study activities. 	Not getting down to study. Not creating a place that allows you to study without interruption. Making poor choices.
More choice about how you study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To identify what helps you learn best when undertaking different study tasks. ★ To take responsibility for your learning and achieving your goals. 	Not bothering to explore what helps you to learn best. Getting stuck in old habits rather than developing new, more effective ones.
More responsibility for your own successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To identify barriers to your learning and to address these. ★ To identify ways of improving your own performance and grades. ★ 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. Not seeing setbacks as useful guides to future improvement.
More choice about how much energy you devote to topics that interest you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 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. Not finding out what help is available, or not using it. Asking for help before trying to solve problems yourself.
More control over choice of topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ To make choices that contribute to a coherent programme of study that interests you and meets your goals. 	Choosing topics that do not fit together well, or that do not contribute towards your goals.

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



What kind of study skills do you need?

What is a skill?

Skill

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

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

What are study skills?

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

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

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

Why are study skills important?

Study skills help you to:

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

Reflection



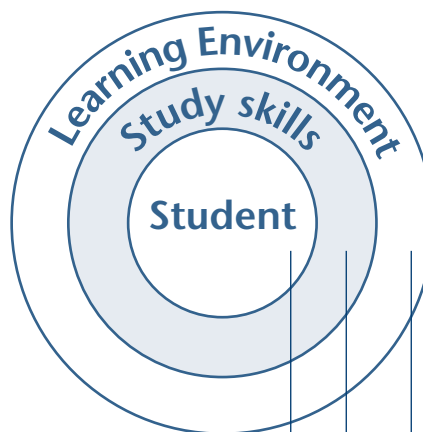
Why study skills matter

Which of the 10 reasons above matter to you?

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

You and your unique starting point

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



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

Self-efficacy skills: managing yourself for study

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

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

Reflection

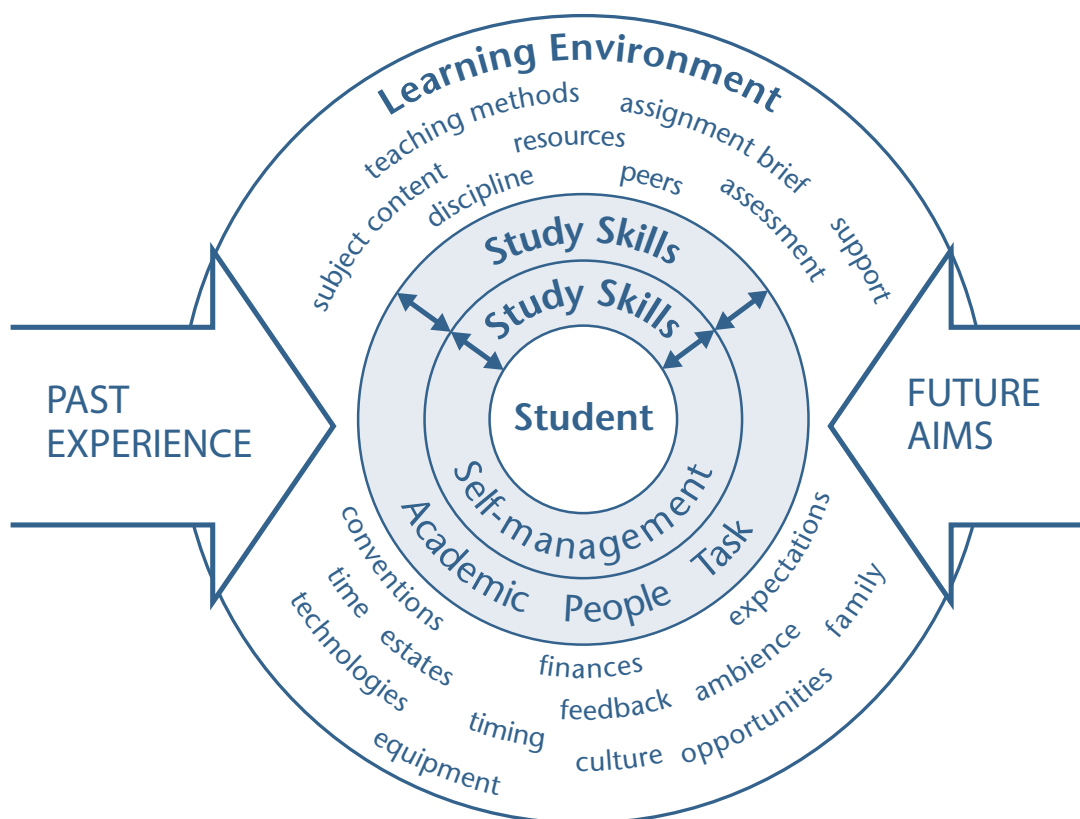


Managing your learning environment

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

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

Who or what could help you in managing these?



Academic Skills

Research skills

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

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



Investigate!
Find out about it!

Thinking skills

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

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

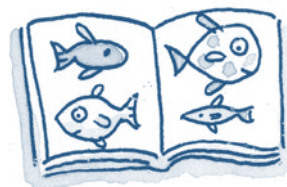


Think about it!

Understanding academic conventions

For students, that means understanding:

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



Develop expertise!
Know your field!

Written and other communication skills

For academic study, this includes:

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



Communicate!
Write it up!

See Chapters 13–16.

People Skills and Task Management Skills

People Skills: studying with others

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

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

See [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#).



Talk it through!

Activity

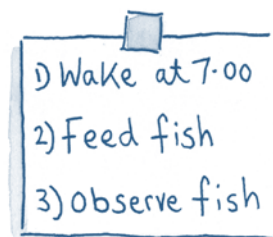
Which skills?

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

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

Task management skills

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



Take charge!

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

Combining skills

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

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