

How to Succeed as an Independent Learner

Acknowledgements

How to Succeed as an Independent Learner

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Introduction

1 Introduction

How to succeed as an independent learner is a step-by-step guide to planning your learning and studying effectively.

There is a good chance that you haven't studied recently. You may feel unsure or nervous about starting a course. And you probably have other commitments and demands on your time. You may have a job, a family to look after, or other responsibilities.

This guide will help you to become a more confident and efficient learner, so that when you are studying you are also learning. It will help you to:

- ▶ organise and plan your study time effectively
- ▶ get support and stay motivated
- ▶ develop study techniques such as taking notes
- ▶ select and organise resources
- ▶ use libraries and the Internet to do research
- ▶ develop concentration and memory skills
- ▶ read faster and more effectively
- ▶ plan, draft and edit your writing
- ▶ improve your spelling and punctuation
- ▶ prepare for exams and assignments.

Using this guide

The guide is divided into six sections, each with on average eight topics. You should be able to complete a topic in approximately 30 minutes, although you might want to spend more or less time than this on some topics. The sections and topics are listed on the next page.

Topic number	Topic title
1	Introduction
Preparing to learn	
2	How do you feel about learning?
3	How do you learn?
4	Why are you learning?
5	Getting support
6	Making the most of your tutor
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Preparing for assessment	
39	Planning for assessment
40	Revising
41	Tackling examinations
42	Tackling assignments

You may find it helpful to work through the topics in the order in which they appear, but you can dip into the topics in any order, depending on your own needs and interests.

Features of the topics

Each topic contains the following features to help you learn.

Introduction and objectives

Each topic begins with a short introduction and objectives. These describe what you will get out of the topic. The objectives give you a clear idea of what you will learn, and you can check with them at the end of the topic to make sure you have understood everything.

Case studies

At the start of some topics there is a case study showing how one learner approached this aspect of studying. We hope you will find the case studies interesting and sometimes inspiring.

Activities

All the topics are based around a series of activities. Research into learning shows that people learn better when they are doing something. It is much harder to learn just from reading or listening. So, the activities suggest what you should do to achieve the objectives. Activities may ask you to think about something, to write something down, or to find something out.

Feedback

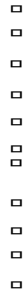
After every activity there is some feedback. This provides a comment on what you may have done, plus extra ideas and suggestions.

Personal learning plan

At the end of each topic you are asked to make a note of any ideas or documents for your personal learning plan. At the end of the guide you should have built up your own personal learning plan providing you with a helpful summary of what you have learned, any documents you have produced, and a list of any actions you plan to take to improve your learning skills or study more effectively.

Preparing to learn

2



How do you feel about learning?

Introduction

In this topic you will be thinking about how you feel about learning so that you can start to identify your strengths as a learner.

You may feel that you are not very good at learning at the moment. You may think you are out of practice, or rusty. Most people feel like this sometimes. This workbook will show you that learning is a skill – in fact a number of skills – that you can improve and develop. This topic will show you that in fact you are learning all the time. It will also help you to get to know yourself as a learner, so that you can start to find out which style of learning suits you best.

Your work on the rest of this workbook will then be devoted to maximising your own strengths and abilities and developing the skills you need to succeed as an independent learner.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ consider how you feel about learning
- ▶ identify some positive learning experiences you have had.

How do you feel about learning?

You may feel that learning is something you only did at school or college, in a classroom, with a teacher. In fact, you learn all the time. You have learned how to do some or all of these things:

- ▶ jobs around the house, such as changing a plug or switching off the water
- ▶ looking after children
- ▶ your job
- ▶ driving

- ▶ managing your household expenses
- ▶ carrying out a particular hobby or interest.

In any of these examples you will have used special skills. In driving or housework these may be practical – using the steering wheel or working the vacuum cleaner. In managing your expenses they will be mental – for example, doing arithmetic. Often, as with looking after children, you use both practical and mental skills, and your emotions as well. You have probably learned these skills on your own, or with the help of someone who is not a school or college teacher.

Case study

Mena is 38. Here she talks about how she felt about learning before she embarked on an introductory course for childminders.

‘I got married when I was 19 and had my first child when I was 21 so I have never done anything much with the exams I got at school. It seems a long time ago!

My children are growing up now so I was looking around for something that I could combine with looking after the family. One of my friends is a childminder and she said why didn’t I have a go so I applied. You have to do an introductory course before you can be registered so I am about to start that.

At first, I was terrified at the thought of it. I thought everyone else would be more clever than me and I wouldn’t be able to keep up. But my friend said it isn’t like that – the tutors are really friendly, and they know you might not have studied for ages. And there’s a student group on the website so you can chat to other people in the same situation and compare notes.

Although I still feel anxious about doing the course, I think once I start I’ll enjoy it and find it interesting. Hopefully, it will help me if I decide to go for registration as a childminder.’

Formal learning, or study, is just another kind of learning. It has its own particular skills, such as reading or writing, which we will look at in detail later in this workbook. But it is still only learning. And one thing is sure: you will have learning strengths that you can build on. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Think of some things you have learned. You could include examples both of:

- ▶ formal learning – things you learnt at school or college
- ▶ informal learning – things you learned at home or work.

Select three things that you have enjoyed learning or which you feel have been successful (positive), and three things you have not enjoyed learning or where you have felt unsuccessful (negative).

Fill in the boxes in the table below to show why you feel each learning experience was positive or negative. Was it because of:

- ▶ how easy or difficult you found the learning?
- ▶ whether you were interested in what you were learning or not?
- ▶ whether you liked what you were learning?
- ▶ the kind of help you had or did not have?

What you learnt	Why was this?
<i>Enjoyable/successful/positive</i>	
Example 1	
Example 2	
Example 3	
<i>Unenjoyable/unsuccessful/negative</i>	
Example 4	
Example 5	
Example 6	

Feedback

Many learners find that the following factors affect how well they learn.

Positive factors	Negative factors
<i>You want to learn</i>	<i>Other people tell you to learn</i>
<i>You are interested in the subject</i>	<i>You find the subject boring</i>
<i>You have good support from other people</i>	<i>You have poor support – or none at all</i>
<i>You learn effectively</i>	<i>You learn ineffectively</i>
<i>You have enough time</i>	<i>You are short of time</i>
<i>It makes sense to build on the things you enjoy and do well</i>	<i>You are trying to do something that you aren't suited for</i>

We hope this activity has helped you to identify and explain for yourself some positive learning experiences, and that this will help you to think about how you feel about learning now.

.....

Key points

- ▶ Every learner has different strengths and weaknesses.
- ▶ Knowing what your strengths are and making the most of them can help you learn more effectively.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 2, in your personal learning plan, make a note of how you now feel about learning. Try to use a few key words to describe your feelings, e.g. confident, nervous, excited, optimistic, scared.

In Topic 3: *How do you learn?* you will be looking at how you learn best and identifying your strengths as a learner.

3

How do you learn?

Introduction

Everyone has their own learning style – while one style is ideal for one person, another person will learn the same thing in a different way. In this topic you will think about how you prefer to learn so that you can make the most of your own learning style when you are studying.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ identify your own learning style
- ▶ think about how you can make the most of your learning style.

What is your learning style?

It is important to work out how you learn best so that you can make the most of this when you are studying. For example, if you are someone who likes to learn by doing, a course with lots of coursework may suit you better than a course with lots of reading. If you prefer to work on a computer, online learning will suit you better than a course based on workbooks and textbooks. Some people like a combination of paper-based and online learning – this is called ‘blended learning’.

Case study

Sara is 45. She talks here about how she realised that the way in which she was taught at school didn't suit her and how she has worked out her preferred learning style.

'I did fine at school until I was about 15. Then I started to find the lessons really boring. It was usually just a teacher standing at the front spouting great quantities of information and us furiously taking notes and then churning out the information in essays and exams. It really turned me off school altogether and I started to mess around. In the end I got two GCSEs and left school.

Now I want to start again on A levels. I talked to the Course Advice Team at NEC and they asked me about how I felt about learning. When I told them how I felt at school they suggested that I start with a more practical subject such as Geography rather than a subject like English Literature or History where there is lots of reading and writing.

They also recommended that I learn in short bursts rather than for hours on end so that I don't get bored and jaded. I've talked about this with my tutor and we have agreed a timetable which allows me to do 'chunks' of learning and still meet deadlines.

So far, so good. I wish my school had thought a bit more about how different people like to learn in different ways.'

Sara found that she learned best if she

- ▶ learned by doing
- ▶ didn't try to absorb too much information at once.

Here is what some other students have said about how they learn:

'I need to talk things over with someone or I just come to a halt. That was the worst problem when I started this course. It's easy to feel isolated. But now I've found a friend who is very good at listening and I meet with her regularly to talk things through.'

'I always used to work in a muddle, and I honestly felt this suited me best. However, when I tried keeping my desk tidy, I found it actually helped me work more effectively. I wouldn't say I have become fanatical about tidying things up, but I make more of an effort now.'

'As I am self-employed I have got very used to taking my own decisions, and I was nervous that I would always have to do what my tutor told me. In fact, I have been able to discuss and agree my study with her and I find this works well.'

‘I travel a lot for my work, so I have time on trains and planes when I can learn. I always go for an online course. I’m so used to working on screen that I would find it difficult to work on a paper-based course.’

Think about your own learning style in the next activity.

Activity 1

Which learning style suits you best?

- 1 Look through each of these pairs of statements.
- 2 For each pair, decide whether Statement A or Statement B is closest to your own feelings. Tick the box nearest that statement.
- 3 If you are really not sure, tick the middle box.

Statement A

I like detailed instructions

☐ ☐ ☐

I enjoy reading around a subject

☐ ☐ ☐

I prefer my tutor to tell me what to do

☐ ☐ ☐

I like to work on my own

☐ ☐ ☐

I like to do one thing at a time

☐ ☐ ☐

I prefer everything to be tidy and organised

☐ ☐ ☐

I need the discipline of a set timetable

☐ ☐ ☐

I think exams reflect my abilities well

☐ ☐ ☐

I need to be prodded into action regularly

☐ ☐ ☐

I like to work steadily

☐ ☐ ☐

I need a good reason for taking a course

☐ ☐ ☐

I like to work on a computer

☐ ☐ ☐

Statement B

I like to try things on my own

I enjoy learning by doing

I prefer to negotiate what I will do with my tutor

I like to work with others

I like to have several things on the go at once

I can cope with things being untidy

I can motivate myself to do things

I like my progress to be checked as I go along

I am good at keeping myself going

I need a challenge

I find out about the course as I go along

I like to work on paper

Feedback

None of these statements is good or bad – they are all strategies for learning that some people find effective. Some people must keep everything tidy and organised, while others thrive on what looks like chaos. However, you can draw three lessons from what you ticked.

- 1. In some cases, you will have a tried and tested way of learning that you know works for you – you need to make the most of this.*
 - 2. In other cases, you may like to try using a different approach – you may be surprised at how well it suits you.*
 - 3. Finally, in some cases you will have to adopt an approach that doesn't suit you – for example, you may have to take exams even if you find them stressful. If this happens, try to be flexible and think about ways in which you can overcome any problems. You may need to discuss them with your tutor or with a friend or colleague who is doing a similar course. There is more on getting support in Topic 5: Getting support and Topic 6: Making the most of your tutor, and more on learning effectively in Topic 7: Setting goals, Topic 8: Being realistic and Topic 21: Concentrating.*
-

Key points

- ▶ Different people have different learning styles.
- ▶ Making the most of your preferred learning style can help you learn more effectively.

Personal learning plan

Note down on your personal learning plan under Topic 3:

- ▶ the ways you like to learn
- ▶ the ways you don't like to learn
- ▶ what you plan to do if you have to learn in a style that is not ideally suited to you.

4 Why are you learning?

Introduction

At some point in your learning you may find yourself beginning to flag. This is quite common when you are working independently, without any face-to-face teaching. If this happens to you, you need to be able to remind yourself why you started learning in the first place! This topic looks at why you are learning and how this will help you succeed.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ identify your reasons for learning
- ▶ consider how knowing your reasons will help you succeed.

Why are you learning?

There are many different reasons for wanting to learn. Some will be your own – to get a better job, to go to university. Others will be other people's reasons – because your manager asks you, for example. It is very important to make the most of your own reasons, as these will keep you motivated for longer.

Your own reasons may be:

- ▶ vocational – related to your work, for example, to gain a qualification needed for promotion
- ▶ academic – for example, to prepare to study with the Open University
- ▶ personal – for example, to raise your self-esteem or to make better use of your time.

Case study

Joe is 51. Here he talks about why he decided to do an introductory course in management.

‘I have worked for the local bus company since I was 15 when I was taken on as an apprentice mechanic. Over the years, I’ve worked my way up through the company until now I run the service and maintenance workshop. We’ve expanded over the years and I now manage 5 mechanics and 2 apprentices.

The company is still expanding so I was asked if I would do an introductory management course with a view to going on the management committee as one of the deputy directors. I’m really pleased about it and I’m happy to do the course if it will help my chances of promotion and higher earnings.

So far I’ve just used my common sense when managing the workshop and it seems to have gone OK, but I think it will give me confidence on the management committee if I’ve done some studying.’

To stay motivated, you need to have some positive reasons for learning. For example, in Joe’s case, he was keen to do the management course because it would give him not only a better chance of promotion and higher earnings but also more confidence when joining the management committee. Negative reasons for doing the course such as ‘otherwise I’ll be stuck in the workshop for ever’ or ‘my boss told me to do it’, will not be as motivating for him. Negative reasons may act like a stick but, generally speaking, tempting yourself with a carrot will be more likely to motivate you when you’re finding it hard going.

Think about your own reasons for learning in the next activity.

Activity 1

Think about what you are studying or planning to study. What are your reasons for doing this? Tick any of the reasons below, and add any other factors that may motivate you:

- ▶ getting a more fulfilling job ☐
- ▶ getting more pay ☐
- ▶ getting a chance to move to a better town ☐
- ▶ feeling more self-confident ☐
- ▶ playing a greater part in the community ☐
- ▶ learning something you enjoy ☐
- ▶ doing something you have always wanted to do ☐

- ▶ going on to further study ☐
- ▶ impressing your family ☐
- ▶ having more choice in your career ☐
- ▶ getting another qualification ☐
- ▶ trying yourself out after not studying for a long time ☐
- ▶ other reasons: ☐

Feedback

Try to find ways of making these reasons work for you. For example, you could write them down on a poster above the place where you study. Tell other people about them, so that they can back you up.

If you found it difficult to list your reasons for studying, what you can do about this? Good motivation is always tied up with interest in the subject. There are many ways of livening up an area of study:

- ▶ *Look out for films, and television and radio programmes associated with the subject.*
- ▶ *Use the Internet to do some extra research around the subject.*
- ▶ *Find out how the subject comes into everyday life.*
- ▶ *Try reading a book on its history.*
- ▶ *Try to find out how the subject relates to other subjects.*

All these approaches can stimulate your interest and increase your motivation.

If you still find it hard to convince yourself that you have good reasons for studying, talk this over with your tutor, a colleague or a friend. It may be that now is not the best time for you to study, or that you have chosen the wrong course. It may be better to reconsider what you are doing now rather than later on.

.....

Key points

- You need to have positive reasons for studying, as these will keep you motivated.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 4 make a list of your reasons for learning. Remember to refer back to these if you start to find your studying hard going.

5 Getting support

Introduction

Getting the support of other people, and making the most of it, may be the key to your success as a learner. The kinds of support you will need – and how much – will depend on your style of learning and the subject you have chosen to learn about. For example, some people are very good at sticking to their plans and timetables, while others need regular support to help them keep going to their schedule.

There is more on getting support from your tutor in Topic 6: *Making the most of your tutor*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ identify the support you will need
- ▶ decide where you can get it.

What support will you need?

It is important to work out the kind of support you will need in your learning. Don't be hesitant about getting help – it's a sensible thing to do and can make all the difference to your success as a learner.

Case study

Jonny is 19. He talks about the support he needed to work from home on his A levels in Accountancy and Business Studies.

‘My Mum died suddenly when I was 16 and although I got good GCSEs, I went to pieces during my A levels. With a lot of support from my Dad and friends, I managed to get back on track last year and I enrolled with NEC to do A levels in Accountancy and Business Studies.

I had never worked on my own from home before and I was really worried about whether I’d be able to pull it off. My Dad is out at work all day so I look after my younger brother and sister when they get home from school.

Dad has been fantastic. He keeps me going, helping me to keep on schedule and get my assignments off to my tutor on time. He takes over with my brother and sister as soon as he gets home from work and makes sure I have some peace and quiet if I need to meet a deadline or revise for an exam.

I have also got on really well with my NEC tutor. I thought she might be scary but she has been very supportive about my home situation. She always replies to my emails within a day or two at the most and she’s given me loads of advice on how to structure my assignments and plan my time.

The other person who has made all the difference has been my year tutor from my old school. Although I’m not a student there any more, he has kept in touch and always wants to know how I’m getting on. He is so confident that I can do it, I’ve started believing him!’

Here are some examples of support you might want to think about:

- ▶ help with childcare
- ▶ space at home or work to study
- ▶ facilities, tools or equipment
- ▶ someone to boost your confidence
- ▶ someone to cheer you up
- ▶ contact with other learners
- ▶ websites and helplines
- ▶ books and other resources
- ▶ feedback on your work

- ▶ help in planning your learning
- ▶ financial help
- ▶ suggestions of books to read.

Activity 1

Make a quick list below of the kinds of support you think you will need in your learning. Try to list at least three. Don't worry yet about who will provide the support – just try to get a general idea of what you might need.

Feedback

Here are some ideas you might have included:

- ▶ **Practical** support could include childcare, money, software, time to study or a place to study.
- ▶ **Emotional** support could be informal, such as being able to talk about your learning to your family or friends or to other students, or formal, such as support from your tutor, a mentor at work, a counsellor, or a face-to-face or website support group where you can link up with other students.
- ▶ **Specialist subject** support could include testing out ideas on your tutor, getting feedback on your work, getting comments on your style or presentation, asking for an explanation for something you haven't understood, or getting help in planning a piece of work.

Who can support you?

Once you have identified the kinds of support you will need, you can start to work out where you will get it. You will be able to get some kinds of support from people, and other kinds of support from organisations, websites or helplines.

Activity 2

Think about the kinds of support you will need, make a note below of the people or organisations that might be able to help you, and how they might help.

Support I will need	Who can help	How

Feedback

What you wrote will depend on what you are planning to learn and who can support you. Here is what one learner wrote.

Support I need	Who can help	How
<i>Childcare</i>	<i>My sister</i> <i>Playgroup</i>	<i>Having the children at weekends</i> <i>Children go weekday mornings termtime</i>
<i>Money</i>	<i>My stepfather</i>	<i>Loan to buy computer</i>
<i>Keeping me going</i>	<i>Mentor at work</i> <i>My tutor</i> <i>Online student groups and forums</i>	<i>Weekly meetings to go through any problems</i> <i>Feedback on work, help in scheduling</i> <i>Mutual support, sharing information</i>
<i>Cheering me up</i>	<i>Family and friends</i>	<i>Phone calls, occasional night out</i>
<i>Academic</i>	<i>My tutor</i> <i>Library and Internet</i>	<i>To read what I write, give me comments and explain things to me</i> <i>Help with finding information – books, websites</i>
<i>Equipment</i>	<i>My workplace</i>	<i>I can take my laptop from work home in the evenings and at the weekend</i>

Setting up support

To make sure you get the support you need from individual people, talk with them about the kind of help you need and how they might be able to provide it. You will need to:

- ▶ arrange a time to discuss it with them - or contact them by email or messaging services
- ▶ prepare what you want to say
- ▶ agree how you will work together.

If you are an NEC-enrolled student, you will be supported by your tutor. There is more on this in Topic 6: *Making the most of your tutor*.

Activity 3

It is particularly important to prepare what you will say when you are setting up support. Make a note below of the names of individual people who you hope will support you in your learning. For each one write down any points you want to cover when you talk to them or email/message them. For example, if you want someone to be your mentor at work, you might want to check that their own background is relevant to your learning and discuss with them how much time they can give you each week.

Person	Points I want to cover

Feedback

What you wrote will depend on what you are learning and who can support you. But points you may want to cover could include:

- ▶ *describing briefly what you are learning*
- ▶ *explaining your reasons for learning*
- ▶ *checking in principle if they would be prepared to help*
- ▶ *explaining what kind of support you want from them*
- ▶ *discussing practical issues such as how much time might be involved, whether you would need to meet and if so, how often.*

Key points

- ▶ It is important to identify the support you will need and where you will get it.
- ▶ Different people can offer different kinds of support.

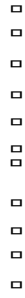
Personal learning plan

Note down on your personal learning plan under Topic 5.

- ▶ what support you need
- ▶ where you can get it.

Topic 6: *Making the most of your tutor* looks at getting support from your tutor and Topic 7: *Setting goals* looks in more detail at getting and staying motivated.

6



Making the most of your tutor

Introduction

Your tutor will be the person most closely involved with your work on your course, guiding your studies and giving you feedback. Tutors are experienced teachers who know your course and subject extremely well and who have helped many other students succeed. This topic looks at how you can make the most of the support your tutor can offer you. Topic 5: *Getting support* looks at other kinds of support you might need.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- make the most of your tutor.

What support can your tutor give you?

It is important to be clear about the kind of support your tutor can give you. Read the next case study for some ideas before you do the activity which follows.

Case study

Kevin is 19. He talks about the support he received from his tutor when he was working on his A levels in Geography and Economics.

‘Working on my own has meant that I’ve really relied on my tutor for support and motivation. When I first enrolled for my A levels she contacted me by email to introduce herself and she sent me a few background details about herself, just so I could picture her better.

She has actually written an economics textbook and I was a bit daunted at first about sending her anything. But she is really good at giving me helpful comments without talking down to me. She’s not afraid to point out something that I have got wrong but she does it in a constructive way, showing me how I can get it right next time. When I do something well, she always says so and also explains to me why she thought it was good so that I can try that again. It’s no good getting a good mark if you don’t understand why.’

Think about the kinds of support you might want from your tutor in the next activity.

Activity 1

What support do you think you might need from your tutor? Tick the boxes in the list below to help you decide on the types of support you need.

1. Encourage you to get going ☐
2. Help motivate you to keep going ☐
3. Comment on your assignments and other coursework ☐
4. Help you organise your time ☐
5. Help you make the most of your strengths ☐
6. Recommend useful books and guide your choice of reading ☐
7. Recommend useful websites ☐
8. Suggest ways in which you can improve your work ☐
9. Advise you on how to tackle your next assignment ☐
10. Provide references for university or college applications ☐

Feedback

Tutors can provide all these different kinds of support. Identifying the kinds of support you will need from your tutor will help you develop a more useful relationship with him or her, because you will know what you want and your tutor will be able to focus on your needs.

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Making the most of your tutor

Don't be afraid to ask your tutor for help. Tutors want to help you make the most of your studies, so feel free to:

- ▶ keep notes while you are working so that you have a list of queries for the next time you contact them – you can ask them questions about any aspects of your study
- ▶ contact them if you don't understand their feedback or comments on your work
- ▶ contact them if you have a query, even if you haven't completed an assignment or piece of coursework.

However, you need to be realistic about how much support you can expect. Tutors are paid to support you but not 24 hours a day! If you are contacting them too much they will let you know politely. When you enrol for your course you will be told how much support you can expect from your tutor.

When you receive feedback or comments from your tutor, you can make the most of it by:

- ▶ reading back over your work alongside the comments
- ▶ reading the comments again before you start your next assignment or piece of coursework
- ▶ making notes of common mistakes in a separate notebook so that you can avoid repeating the same mistakes.

If it doesn't work out

Most students find working with their tutor a very positive and helpful experience. In a very few cases, tutors and students are not ideally matched. If this happens to you, contact the student advisors at the organisation running your course, giving as much detail as possible, so that they can find a more suitable tutor for you.

Key points

- ▶ Your tutor is there to help you make the most of your studies.
- ▶ It is important to identify the support you need from your tutor.

Personal learning plan

Note down on your personal learning plan under Topic 6:

- ▶ the support you want from your tutor.

7 Setting goals

Introduction

Once you are clear about why you are learning, you will have a clear motivation for studying. You know that as long as these reasons don't change, your learning will be worth the effort. However, your reasons are likely to be quite distant and long-term, such as 'I want a better choice of job' or 'I want to write better job applications'. It may take you several months or even years to achieve these long-term aims, and it's easy to get dispirited along the way. So, you need to set yourself some goals – or targets – to help keep you going on a day-to-day basis. This topic looks at how to do this.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ set yourself some realistic short-term goals.

Why do you need goals?

When you are studying, goals are like milestones during a long walk – they give you:

- ▶ something to aim at soon
- ▶ a regular sense of achievement
- ▶ motivation to start a study session.

Most courses are divided up into several modules or units, because most learners like a regular sense of getting somewhere. For example, for this workbook, you could set yourself a goal of completing four topics each week. This will help you to:

- ▶ see your studying as short episodes of learning rather than a big programme that you can't really imagine completing

- plan your time (there are 42 topics in total, so at four topics per week you would need to allow 11 weeks if you didn't have any breaks)
- keep yourself motivated as you make progress through the topics.

Case study

Kieran is 31. He is serving a prison sentence for fraud. Here he talks about how why he finds it helpful to set himself some short-term goals.

'I decided to do the course to pass the time and give myself another qualification for when I came out of prison. Although there is a routine to the day here and I have to do certain chores, I do have a lot of time and it's easy to waste it. So I decided to plan out my time giving myself a target for the end of each week. This week I am planning to work through one unit of the course and complete an assignment that I started last week. I usually manage to meet my target one way or another, and it gives me a good feeling on Friday if I have. I take Saturday off because it's visiting day and then I start again on Sunday. If something comes up and I don't manage to achieve my target, I try to let it go, as the targets are only for me, and it's not the end of the world if I don't meet them. But it has really helped to have a bit of a structure and the time is certainly passing faster than it was before I started the course.'

Kieran found he could structure his learning by breaking it down into small chunks that he could achieve fairly easily. Think about how you will do this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Begin with this workbook. When, ideally, would you like to complete it? Many learners take between three and six months, though some go more quickly and others like to spread it over a longer period. Note your target date in the box on the next page.

In the light of this, can you set yourself some shorter-term goals? For example, how quickly will you aim to complete each topic? There are 42 topics so if you said you wanted to complete the workbook in four months, you would need to do 10 or 11 topics each month, or two or three each week. Note your target dates in the box.

You could use a calendar, wall chart, spreadsheet or project management software to keep track of your progress.

Target date for completing workbook	
Target date for completing Topic 1	
Target date for completing Topic 2	
Target date for completing Topic 3	
Target date for completing Topic 4	
Target date for completing Topic 5	

Feedback

Don't feel that you have to get this exactly right now. You can always revise your goals later.

Check that your goals take account of times when you will be unable to study, such as holidays, weekends away, times when you are likely to be very busy at work and will have to stay late or bring work home, or school holidays if you have children.

A typical month on your study calendar might look like this:

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7 weekend away
8	9 start topic 9	10	11 swimming gala	12	13 finish topic 9	14
15 start unit 10	16 birthday	17	18	19	20	21
22 check assignment 2	23	24	25	26 post assignment 2	27	28

Some people give themselves a reward everytime they achieve a short-term goal or a set of goals. This could be something very simple and inexpensive like going for a long walk or having a glass of beer or wine, or something more elaborate such as buying something to wear or going out for a meal.

.....

Planning your work in this way has a number of advantages:

- ▶ You ensure that you put in work regularly.
- ▶ You don't have to panic because you have left your work until the last minute.
- ▶ Once you have completed the work that you planned for a particular number of days, the rest of the days are free from the worry of not getting the work done.
- ▶ By allowing a span of days rather than one day to do your work, you can then cope with unexpected interruptions.
- ▶ If you are being assessed, splitting an assignment or coursework into three parts (writing it, checking it and posting it), gives you time to think about what you've written before you go on to the next stage. That way you won't rush it to meet a deadline and then wish you'd changed something after you'd posted it.

Your goals will only help you if they are realistic. In particular, they need to reflect your learning style. For example:

- ▶ If you are someone who needs a deadline to get you going, make sure you give yourself regular deadlines.
- ▶ If you are someone who likes a challenge, make sure your goals will stretch you enough.
- ▶ If you are someone who likes plenty of time to reflect on things, make sure your goals are well spaced out.
- ▶ If you are someone who likes being prodded, agree your goals with your tutor or a colleague or friend.

There is more on learning styles in Topic 2: *How do you feel about learning?* and more on being realistic in Topic 8: *Being realistic*.

Keypoints

- ▶ You need realistic short-term goals as well as a long-term goal to keep you motivated.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 7 list your targets for completing this workbook. Put a copy of these somewhere where you will see them so that you can check your progress and keep yourself on track.

8

Being realistic

Introduction

We have seen how important it is to set short-term goals for your learning to keep you motivated and on track, but these will only help you if they are realistic. This topic looks at how you can make sure your learning plans are realistic and achievable. If your plans are unrealistic or too distant, you will lose your motivation to learn.

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ be realistic about your learning.

Why is it important to be realistic?

Look at the two targets below.

‘By this time next year I’ll have completed all twelve modules on ‘Welding’.’

‘By this time next month I’ll have worked through the first module on ‘Welding’.’

You can probably see that the second target is more realistic than the first. The first target, ‘This time next year’, seems a long way off, and makes it all too easy not to get started now. ‘By this time next month’ is much more manageable and the timeframe is shorter so you are more likely to get started.

Realistic targets are:

- ▶ achievable – you know you will be capable of meeting them
- ▶ reasonable – if you set goals that you cannot meet, they will reduce rather than increase your motivation
- ▶ sufficient – your goals must ensure that you achieve what you want to do

- flexible – it is always worth building in some contingency time in case something unpredictable happens, such as an illness.

Case study

Jasmine is 22. She is working on an NVQ in Playwork. She talks about how she developed a realistic plan for working on her portfolio.

‘When you do an NVQ you have to build up a portfolio to show that you can do the work you are being assessed in. This means keeping records and observations, noting down activities you have led with the children, making notes on health and safety checks, etc., and then filing these in your portfolio. The portfolio is assessed and if it is OK you get your NVQ.

At first I felt overwhelmed by the thought of producing a portfolio – there was so much evidence to sort out and file. But I talked to my NVQ assessor and she helped me plan my work. I now spend one hour at the end of each week going through the evidence I have collected and filing it in my portfolio. That way I can stay on top of it.’

Jasmine found that it was realistic to work in one-hour sessions on her portfolio at the end of each week. This was better than working on it every day, which she wouldn’t have been able to keep up, or leaving it until the end of a longer period, when she would have too much evidence to sort through. In the same way, you will need to work out what is realistic for your own study sessions.

Activity 1

Ask yourself whether each of these questions is true for you and tick one of the boxes.

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
Do you achieve what you want to achieve in each study session?			
Can you cope if something unexpected happens, e.g. illness?			
Are you allowing yourself enough time to do something useful each time you study?			
Are you sure you can make the most of the times you set aside for study?			
Is the time of day when you study a good time of day for you?			

Feedback

Many people motivate themselves to study by deciding on a target for a particular day (or evening) and promising themselves a reward when they have finished. This really helps you to get started and not to become easily distracted.

Most people find it very hard to study, so do not worry if it is difficult for you. The great Italian dramatist, Alfieri, even made his servant tie him to the study table!

There is more on ways of keeping going in Topics 9, 10 and 11, and more on getting support in Topic 5.

Using timetables

Timetables are great aids to efficiency. They enable you to analyse the use you are making of your time. Are you being realistic? Are the hours allocated to study the best ones?

A timetable also takes a load off your mind; without a timetable you will have to make a hundred decisions each week as you try to fit everything in. Timetabling the day's or week's routine ensures that you take all the decisions in advance.

One student found it helpful to produce the following weekly study plan.

Tasks – week beginning 7 March	Time and place
Preview Unit 3	On the train Monday
Do Unit 3 activities	7–9pm at home Tuesday
Background reading	Lunch hour Wednesday
Do Assignment C	7–8am at home Thursday
Extra times if needed	Thursday evening Friday lunch hour

Activity 2

Note down below your study plan for next week, making sure your targets and study times are realistic.

Feedback

We hope this has helped you see how easy it is to plan your time in advance. Even if you go on to change what you had decided to do, your timetable will give you a realistic structure to work to. Try to make it a habit at the end of each week to plan your study timetable for the following week. Although it might seem like something else to fit into a busy day, you will find that good timetabling will save you lots of time in the long run.

Key points

- Make sure your learning plans are realistic or you will not stay motivated.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 8, make a note of what you will do to make sure your learning plans are realistic.

9 Deciding when to study

Introduction

If you are going to study effectively you need to organise yourself so that you have enough time and can make best use of it. You might feel it's not worth studying for less than 30 minutes at a time, but in this topic you will see how you can make good use of even five minutes if you are well organised.

There is more on studying effectively in Topic 7: *Setting goals*, Topic 8: *Being realistic* and Topic 11: *Using action plans*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ decide how much time you will spend on studying
- ▶ make the most of the time you have.

How much time do you have for studying?

To start with, you need to decide how much time you have for studying. There is no point in making ambitious plans to study for 30 hours a week if you have a full-time job, a family to look after in the evenings and weekends and you only have five hours free each week. Read about how one learner worked this out in the case study which follows.

Case study

Maureen is 53. She is a foster carer and usually has two or three foster children to look after as well as her own 14-year-old daughter. She is working on an A level in Psychology. Here she talks about how she made a realistic assessment of how much study time she had.

‘I knew I would have to be careful about planning study time because the needs of the children have to come first. Often the children I foster have been traumatised and I have to be there for them whenever they want me – it’s part of my job to help them cope with the unhappinesses they have had in their lives. Also, every week there are meetings with their social workers, contact with their parents, and other meetings with teachers or educational psychologists.

However, I only foster school age children so I worked out that I have six hours a day or 30 hours a week in term time when the children are at school. I allowed one day a week for meetings and other appointments, and another day a week for domestic things like food shopping and cleaning. Every week I also try to set aside a bit of time to spend on my own with Catherine, my own daughter, while my husband is looking after the other children, so I aim for about three to five hours a week working on my A level. I don’t try to study in the school holidays at all.’

With her busy lifestyle and commitments to the children, Maureen made a realistic assessment of how much time she could study.

When can you find time for studying?

There are three sorts of time in any day:

- ▶ essential work time (if you work)
- ▶ essential living time (eating, sleeping, travelling, shopping and so on)
- ▶ flexible time (when you can choose what you do).

Like Maureen, you need to work out exactly how much flexible time you have when you can study, and whether there are any other times when you could study. For example, if your course is work-based you may be able to do some studying at work. Try thinking about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Use the 24-hour diary below to analyse how you spend a fairly typical 24 hours.

1. Using a coloured pen, note down your essential time – the time you spend on working and other essential living activities such as eating, sleeping, travelling, shopping.
2. Using a different coloured pen, make a note of your flexible time – time when you can choose what you do.
3. Now look critically at your completed diary. When can you fit in some studying? For example, could you:
 - ▶ study for 30 minutes before you go to work?
 - ▶ go to bed later and fit in some studying then?
 - ▶ do some studying while you are travelling?
 - ▶ do an extra 30 minutes after dinner before watching a favourite television programme or going out?

24-hour diary

Time	Activity	Time	Activity
midnight–1 am		midday–1pm	
1am–2am		1pm–2pm	
2am–3am		2pm–3pm	
3am–4am		3pm–4pm	
4am–5am		4pm–5pm	
5am–6am		5pm–6pm	
6am–7am		6pm–7pm	
7am–8am		7pm–8pm	
8am–9am		8pm–9pm	
9am–10am		9pm–10pm	
10am–11am		10pm–11pm	
11am–midday		11pm–midnight	

Feedback

You might be surprised to discover how much flexible time you have. You probably found at least one 30-minute slot which you hadn't realised you could use for studying.

Of course, you only looked at a typical day in a week – you may have more or less time on other days. Like many people you may need to fit in most of your studying into busy weekends rather than busy weekdays.

We hope this activity has at least given you a snapshot of how much time you have for studying, and perhaps how much time you might be wasting.

If it helps you plan your time, you can copy the diary on page 39 and use it to produce a timetable for your studies. There is more on timetabling in Topic 11: Using action plans.

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When can you get the most out of studying?

Some people work well early in the morning, feel drowsy by about 4pm and are recharged in the evening. Other people work best late at night but are slow in the morning. Some people don't have a particularly productive time – they work fairly evenly throughout the day. Think about when you work best in the next activity.

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Activity 2

Think about when you feel most productive and least productive and make a note of the times below.

Most productive

Least productive

Feedback

It makes sense to plan your studying so that you work when you are most productive. You should leave less demanding jobs, such as background reading, to the times when you are least productive.

Are you more productive if you work for a fairly long and intensive period such as two hours? Some people find they work up a head of steam and become increasingly productive the longer they work. Or are you someone who prefers to work in short bursts such as 30 minutes every two hours? Some people find they get more done if they have frequent breaks.

Even a five-minute slot can be useful for things like:

- ▶ *taking stock – perhaps jotting down things that you already know about a subject you are about to study*
- ▶ *writing questions – making a list of questions you want to ask*
- ▶ *making a summary – perhaps of something complex that you have studied*
- ▶ *testing yourself – perhaps on something you have studied recently*
- ▶ *revisiting – having another quick look at something you have studied.*

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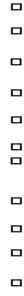
Key points

- ▶ Decide how much time per week you have for studying.
- ▶ Make the most of the time you have for studying.
- ▶ Try to study when you are most productive.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 9, make a note of when you plan to study or copy out your weekly diary showing your planned study times.

10



Deciding where to study

Introduction

It's amazing the difference that finding the right place to study can make to your learning. If you feel comfortable and can concentrate you are obviously going to take in a lot more than if you are distracted by an uncomfortable chair or by background noise. This topic looks at how you can identify where you will study best and will encourage you to consider options you may not previously have considered.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- decide where you will study.

Where can you study?

There are no rules about what makes for the best studying environment – some people find they work better against background noise, while for others utter silence is essential. Read about how one learner worked this out in the case study which follows.

Case study

James is 35. He is a single parent caring for his three-year-old twins. He lives in a two-bedroom flat and studies while the twins are at pre-school. He is working on an introductory course, Essential Book-keeping, with a view to developing a career in book-keeping when the children go to school.

‘With three of us in a small flat I knew I would have to be disciplined about the space I used to study. I can’t leave my books and papers in the kitchen or living room as the kids mess them up, so I had to have a separate space where they knew I worked and which they would learn to respect as they got older.

I came up with an ingenious solution of a desk in a cupboard in my bedroom! I’ve built myself a large wardrobe sized space and inside I have my desk and chair, computer, printer, bookshelves, etc. When the twins are at pre-school I work there. When they come home I shut the doors on it.

It’s worked for me and for them as I am not tempted to do a quick bit of study while I should be giving them attention and they leave my work space alone.’

Even with his limited space and busy life with the children, James came up with a clever solution to the problem of where to study. Think about where you can study best next.

Activity 1

Think about the sort of places where you can study. Do you already have a place for studying in mind or do you need to find somewhere? Tick one or more of the options below.

1. I'll need to sort out a suitable area for studying at home. ☐
2. I've no problem, I already have a good place for studying at home. ☐
3. I'll have to go out to do my studying, maybe to a library or somewhere like that. ☐
4. I'll be doing a lot of my studying at work, where I have a suitable place. ☐
5. I really don't know where I'm going to study. ☐
6. I'll do some of my studying at the local college. ☐

Feedback

1. *You're in good company. You may want to set yourself a time limit for sorting out a study place: it's easy to delay getting down to studying by spending lots of time organising a space at home.*
2. *Congratulations! Bear in mind that it is useful to have other places where you can study as well. We'll explore this later on in this topic.*
3. *A library or somewhere like that may be suitable for studying, but you may find it difficult or inconvenient to get there sometimes. Can you think of anywhere else you could study as well?*
4. *It is useful to be able to do some studying at work. However, you may be distracted there so you may want to find other places where you can study as well.*
5. *If you read the other responses, you'll notice that even the best places have problems associated with them. In fact, it's more useful if you can do some studying in less than ideal circumstances, than to search endlessly for the ideal place.*
6. *If you are studying at college most days, this should be convenient, and you'll have plenty of resources to refer to if you need them. But it may be useful to think of somewhere else where you can study if you need to work outside college hours.*

.....

In fact, there are pitfalls in setting aside one place for studying. What happens when you're not there? Will you feel that you can't do any studying until you get back to your 'ideal' place? If you study in a number of different places, studying can become part of your normal lifestyle. This is much more productive than if studying is something 'special' that you do only in one ideal place. You may well find studying easier if you can make it part of your everyday life. We'll look at this next.

Locating different places for different kinds of study

Some kinds of studying can be done in the most unlikely places. For example, you can read a textbook while travelling, in a doctor's waiting room, or in a lunch break. If you have a laptop, tablet or smartphone you can do research on the Internet or write assignments wherever you are.

Other kinds of studying will obviously require particular environments or conditions. For example, you may need:

- peace and quiet when you're doing calculations

- ▶ space to spread out when you're comparing a number of different reports
- ▶ access to a particular tool, machine or piece of equipment if you are studying a practical subject.

So, it's essential to plan how to make the best use of the various places that are available to you and to decide what to do where. You might be able to read, write or use a laptop or tablet on the train, but if you need to spread out you're probably better off in a library or at home.

Activity 2

Think about the different places where you can study and make a note below of what studying you can do in each place.

Places I can use	Studying I can do there

Feedback

We hope this activity has helped you to consider different options that are open to you. Try to make the most of all the locations available to you. A big 'plus' about having more than one place to work in is that studying doesn't become routine. However, if you are someone who likes routine, you might prefer to find somewhere where you can do most of your work and which you will come to associate with studying.

Key points

- ▶ It is important to find somewhere suitable for your studying.
- ▶ You may find you locate a number of different types of places for different kinds of studying.
- ▶ Try to choose places that will make your study more productive.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 10, make a note of where you plan to study.

11

Using action plans

Introduction

In this topic you will be looking at using action plans to help you produce your assignments. An action plan shows your tutor – and any external assessor – that you can think carefully about how to do an assignment and that you can ‘plan your actions’.

For most of the activities in this topic we will be using an imaginary assignment to illustrate how to use an action plan.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ use action plans to produce assignments.

What is an action plan?

An action plan is a written statement of how you intend to do something. The personal learning plan that you are completing as you work through this workbook is a kind of action plan.

Action plans are becoming more and more common in training and study. They can take various forms:

- ▶ some course or training materials provide an action plan form for you to fill in
- ▶ your tutor may produce one for you to use
- ▶ you may produce one yourself.

Case study

Yusif is 24. He is doing an accounting course by distance learning. He explains how he has used action plans to improve his results.

‘When I started working on the course I wasn’t very organised. I used to do the work at the last minute and was often late sending off my assignments to my tutor. She suggested that action plans would help me organise what I had to do and keep me on schedule. Now I write an action plan first, send it to my tutor, and she comments on anything she thinks will be unrealistic or difficult to achieve. Once I start working on the assignment, she will prod me by email if it looks like I am not keeping to schedule.’

The different stages of producing an action plan

An action plan should be broken down into a number of stages:

1. Make sure you understand the task/assignment you have been set.
2. Work out what tasks you need to do.
3. Work out what information you need.
4. Work out where you can get the information from.
5. Work out the order in which you plan to do the tasks.
6. Set dates for doing different parts of the task/assignment.
7. Find information, make visits, carry out surveys or interviews, and so on.
8. Check that your action plan is on course and change if necessary.
9. Write up your task/assignment.
10. Evaluate how well you carried out the task/assignment.

Work through some of these stages in the next activity.

Activity 1

You have been asked to write a report on the facilities available at a local leisure centre. Your report should include facilities for disabled people and adults with babies and toddlers. What would you do first? Make a note below.

Feedback

We hope you found it helpful to go through some of the stages of writing an action plan.

Before you started on your action plan you would need to check with your tutor how long your report should be and when you should aim to complete it. You would also need to decide which leisure centre you were going to focus on.

Think about the tasks you need to carry out to complete the report and make a note of them below.

For this stage, you might have thought of the following:

- ▶ *visiting the leisure centre*
- ▶ *using the facilities yourself*
- ▶ *asking another student to try the facilities*
- ▶ *looking at the centre's website*
- ▶ *interviewing the manager and other staff*
- ▶ *carrying out a survey among some of the users, including some disabled people and some adults with young children, and analysing the results*

- *finding out what people have said about the facilities in the past – maybe looking through the archives of the local newspaper in the library or on the Internet.*

Activity 2

Now think about the information you will need to complete the report and where you can get it. Make a note of this below.

Feedback

For this stage, you might have included:

- *finding out the name of the manager of the centre*
- *getting hold of leaflets detailing facilities at the centre, or looking at its website*
- *finding articles or letters in the local newspaper about the centre.*

Writing your action plan

Now you can start to write your action plan.

Activity 3

Using your notes from the previous activity, write down what you plan to do in an action plan. If you already have an action plan template, use that. If not, you can create one on a separate piece of paper using these headings:

- things to do
- planned date
- actual date
- changes to plan.

1. Fill in the first column – things to do.
2. Now think about a realistic date by which you can complete these tasks and write this for each task in the second column – planned date. Remember that you will have to meet the final deadline for the assignment so work back from that.
3. When you have completed each task, fill in the third column – actual date.
4. As you work through the things to do, make a note of any changes you have made to your original plan and say why you had to make this change.

Feedback

Here is a sample action plan with some of the stages completed.

<i>Things to do</i>	<i>Planned date</i>	<i>Actual date</i>	<i>Changes to plan</i>
<i>Visit leisure centre website, find out name of manager.</i>	<i>2 June</i>	<i>2 June</i>	
<i>Write to manager and ask to interview him or her.</i>	<i>3 June</i>	<i>3 June</i>	
<i>If yes, make a list of questions to ask.</i>	<i>6 June</i>	<i>6 June</i>	
<i>Go to library to look at newspaper archive for letters or articles about centre.</i>	<i>By 9 June</i>	<i>12 June</i>	<i>Library was closed for refurbishment 8–11 June</i>
<i>Visit centre, interview manager, pick up leaflets.</i>	<i>14 June</i>	<i>14 June</i>	
<i>Produce survey questionnaire for users.</i>	<i>16 June</i>	<i>16 June</i>	
<i>Go to centre, use facilities, do survey.</i>	<i>18 June</i>	<i>18 June and 19 June</i>	<i>Not enough users to survey on 18 June, had to return on 19 June</i>

.....

Evaluating your action plan

Once you have written your report, you need to write an evaluation of your assignment. You may have an evaluation form that you use for all your assignments. It might look something like this.

Evaluation form
Assignment:
What went well:
What went wrong:
How I could do it differently:

Activity 4

Under which heading on the evaluation form would you put the following comments for the imaginary assignment that you have been working on in this topic? Make a note of the heading beside each statement.

Evaluation comment	Evaluation heading
I interviewed the manager of the leisure centre when he was very busy and he didn't have much time to spend with me.	
I got a lot of information about the leisure centre's facilities	
The library had no record of local opinion on the centre.	
I would interview the manager at a quiet time of day for him.	
I didn't spend enough time preparing my survey for users and some questions were difficult for people to answer.	
I used the centre several times and found out a number of things about different facilities.	
I would pilot my questionnaire to users.	

Feedback

<i>Evaluation comment</i>	<i>Evaluation heading</i>
<i>I interviewed the manager of the leisure centre when he was very busy and he didn't have much time to spend with me.</i>	<i>What went wrong</i>
<i>I got a lot of information about the leisure centre's facilities</i>	<i>What went well</i>
<i>The library had no record of local opinion on the centre.</i>	<i>What went wrong</i>
<i>I would interview the manager at a quiet time of day for him.</i>	<i>How I could do it differently</i>
<i>I didn't spend enough time preparing my survey for users and some questions were difficult for people to answer.</i>	<i>What went wrong</i>
<i>I used the centre several times and found out a number of things about different facilities.</i>	<i>What went well</i>
<i>I would pilot my questionnaire to users.</i>	<i>How I could do it differently</i>

Your action plan is now complete. If you follow all these stages and think carefully about your evaluation, you could achieve a high grade for your assignments. Evaluating your assignments in this way is also an important part of reflective learning. Topic 26: Reflecting on what you learn looks at this in more detail and there is more on preparing for assignments in Topic 42: Tackling assignments.

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Key points

- ▶ Action planning is an essential part of preparing for an assignment.
- ▶ Remember to use your action plans to evaluate your assignment as part of your reflective learning.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 11, make a note of:

- ▶ anything you think you will find difficult about writing action plans
- ▶ how you plan to overcome these difficulties.

Note-taking and using resources

12 Why take notes?

Introduction

Your own notes can be some of the most useful aids to your study. They can help you to understand what you are learning and to remember it later. In this topic you will look at why you might need to make notes, and how useful your current note-making is. Topic 13: *Making notes on paper* and Topic 14: *Making notes online* look in more detail at different methods of making notes. You might also want to work through Topic 15: *Organising your notes*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ decide why you need notes
- ▶ assess how useful your current note-making is.

Why take notes?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains why she takes notes.

Case study

Rhiannon is 15. She is studying for her GCSEs at home because she suffers from a rare kidney disease. She has developed a system of note-taking with her tutor to help her organise her studies and prepare for her examinations.

‘Because I have to spend a lot of time on dialysis, I work on a laptop computer. I find that the best way of working for me is to read textbooks when I am on dialysis and then immediately afterwards I write up notes on my computer, trying to summarise the key points. Doing this as I go helps me to remember what I have read and it also means I have a summary of my reading to refer to when it comes to revising. If my tutor makes any comments I want to remember I add those in too so that I have them in mind when it comes to doing coursework.’

Like Rhiannon, you may need to take notes for a number of reasons:

- ▶ to help you **remember** something – you can’t hope to retain a whole lecture, book, website or discussion permanently in your memory, so instead you make notes of the most important points and use your notes for revision and reference
- ▶ to keep a **permanent record** of something – if you attend a lecture or visit somewhere as part of your course, your notes may be your only record of what took place
- ▶ to help in your **planning** – notes can be a good way of starting off a project or a piece of writing; you can note down the main things you need to do, the books you will read, and so on (this is also helpful when you are writing action plans – see Topic 11: *Using action plans*)
- ▶ to **re-order material** – making notes is one of the most useful opportunities for rearranging material before you use it to write an assignment or produce your coursework
- ▶ to help you **understand** what you are learning – writing things down yourself forces you to think them through properly
- ▶ to help you to **concentrate** – if you are reading or listening to someone talking, your mind may wander – making notes helps to keep you active and involved
- ▶ to provide **evidence** – for example, if you are doing a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) or a similar award, you may need to provide notes to prove that you have done something
- ▶ to **show other people** – you may want other learners to benefit from the notes you have made.

Think about why you make notes in the next activity.

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Activity 1

Look through three examples of notes you have made for your study. Note down here what they were about, and why you made them.

Notes	Why I made them

Feedback

Your reasons for taking notes are very important. For example, if other people will read your notes – and especially if they will assess them as evidence or for coursework – they may need to be more detailed or tidy than if you are the only person who will read them. If they will be your only permanent record, they will need to be self-contained, whereas if they are based on a book you own, you can cross-refer to particular sections of the book.

Your reasons will also affect the way you make notes. You may well wish to concentrate on written notes. Written notes are easy to produce, and you can easily access them later.

- ▶ *You could handwrite your notes, or you could type them up on your laptop or tablet. Typing them has the advantage that you can easily access them, print them out, and change them if you want to.*

- *Alternatively, you could record your notes. Some people prefer to say their ideas out loud and record them to play back later. Bear in mind that if you record what someone else says, you may need their permission.*

You might also like to look at different ways of making notes in Topic 13: Making notes on paper and Topic 14: Making notes online.

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How useful are your notes?

Notes are usually a personal learning aid, so the most important thing about them is that they suit your learning style and your reasons for taking them.

Above all, notes should be:

- **brief and clear:** if they are too long, you will find it tedious to wade through them, either to look for a specific point, or to refresh your memory
- **easy to read and understand:** if you cannot quickly read through them to check on something or to refresh your memory, they will not help you in your study
- **organised** to suit the way you learn and your reasons for learning: if they are not relevant to you, you will never look at them again.

In the next activity, think about how useful your notes are.

.....

Activity 2

Have a good look at the sets of notes you used in the previous activity. Tick the words that describe them below. Try to be honest!

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Difficult to read | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Too long | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Unclear | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Difficult to understand | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Organised in some other way | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Not relevant to your needs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Easy to read | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Brief | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Clear | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Easily understood | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Organised the way you learn | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Relevant to your needs | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Feedback

If you ticked mostly numbers 7 to 12 your note-taking system is already excellent. If you ticked mostly numbers 1 to 6, then you need a new approach to note-taking. There is more on methods and techniques of making notes in Topic 13: Making notes on paper and Topic 14: Making notes online.

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Key points

- ▶ You need to know why you are making notes.
- ▶ Your purpose for making notes will affect the kind of notes you make.
- ▶ Notes must be easy to read, brief, clear, easy to understand, organised the way you learn, and relevant to your needs.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 12, write down:

- ▶ why you need to make notes
- ▶ how you plan to make notes.

13 Making notes on paper

Introduction

As you saw in Topic 12, your own notes can be some of the most useful aids to your study. They can help you to understand what you are learning and to remember it later. In this topic you will look in detail at different methods and techniques of making notes on paper. You may also want to work through Topic 14: *Making notes online* and Topic 15: *Organising your notes*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ make notes from written sources or from speech
- ▶ identify two different types of notes – ‘listed’ and ‘spray’ notes.

Making notes from written sources or from speech

How you make your notes will depend on whether you are making notes from written sources, such as books and articles, or from speech, for example, lectures or television or radio programmes. Start by reading the case study below where Janette describes how she makes notes from television programmes.

Case study

Janette is 45 and she is working on an Open University degree in History. Part of her learning is from the OU television programmes which she video records and then watches later on. Here she describes how she adapted her note-making for the television programmes.

‘I have always been quite quick at making notes from textbooks and this has really helped me in my studying. When it came to watching the television programmes though I found it much more difficult. They were very well made and organised but I had trouble getting down the key points from everything that was said. I talked to my tutor about it and she suggested I try to divide my notes into sections and under each section heading I just write the key words that I hear. Then I can go back over the video recording and for each section fill in some more detail under each key words, pausing the video as I go.’

Making notes from written sources

When you are taking notes from books and other written sources, there are a number of important points to remember. These are summarised in the checklist below.

Making notes from written sources: checklist

1. Before you start, check that the book or article will help answer your questions or provide the information you need.
2. Label your notes clearly. Write down the source. For a book, record the:
 - ▶ title
 - ▶ author
 - ▶ publisher and place of publication
 - ▶ ISBN number and date.

If a book is from the library, also write down the classification number (printed at the base of the spine) for future reference.

If you are using information from the Internet, make a note of the website and date of the information. There is more on working online in Topic 14: *Making notes online*.

3. Get an overall sense of what the book is about, skimming it to see find out the main points in each chapter and to work out which parts of the book are most relevant. (There is more on skimming in Topic 31: *Skimming and scanning*.)
4. Make notes in your own words. Putting the ideas into your own language will make sure that you have understood what you have read. You may want to rearrange the information, perhaps adding your own comments or cross-referencing.
5. Record the main topic or chapter headings and then briefly note the important points under each one. If the material contains an argument or sequence of reasoning, try to note down the main steps but don't leave out so much that you can't restate the missing processes. Finally, note the result or conclusions of the material. So, the framework for your notes might be something like this:
 - ▶ topic or chapter heading
 - ▶ important points
 - ▶ illustrations and arguments to support points
 - ▶ result/conclusions.If you are copying directly from a book, always put quotation marks around the material you have copied out – then you know to acknowledge the author if you use the quotation later.
6. Record the page numbers of the sections you are noting. For example, 'Brown p27' means that your notes came from page 27 of the book by Brown. This will help if you need to double-check your notes later on.

Activity 1

Try making some notes from a book using the checklist above. As you do this, jot down in the space below anything you found difficult or want to discuss with your tutor.

Feedback

Did using the checklist make your note-taking easier? Of course, you do not have to stick rigidly to this way of making notes – it is only provided as a suggestion – but it does show you the type and level of organisation you should be aiming for in your notes.

If you had any problems or questions, talk these over with your tutor the next time you have contact with him or her.

Note that in some modern examinations – called ‘open book’ exams – you are allowed to take books into the exam room with you. This can have important implications for how you make notes. For example, you might like to use a blank page in the book to note where key passages or sections of the book are to be found.

.....

Taking notes from speech

You might also need to record what someone else has said, perhaps in a lecture, television or radio programme or a talk. These notes will be different from the notes you take from a book or article because you are likely to have just one opportunity to make them, whereas you can read a book at your own pace. So, you may have to make hasty notes that you revise afterwards – unless you can tape-record what is said (and you will need the speaker’s permission to do this). We will be looking in more detail at two note-making techniques later.

Making notes from speech: checklist

1. Prepare yourself beforehand by finding out about the topic. This will make it easier to understand and help you to recognise the main points. Note down questions that you want answers to. Make sure you can see and hear the speaker(s) easily.
2. Label your notes clearly. Write down:
 - ▶ the subject
 - ▶ the speaker’s name
 - ▶ the date.
3. Try to get an overall picture of what is being said. Concentrate on understanding first – don’t let taking notes get in the way of grasping what is being said. If in doubt, concentrate on listening rather than writing.

4. People do not always stick to a logical order when they talk. You may have to keep order in your notes by using headings that you can go back to if need be.
5. If you are listening to a talk or lecture, be prepared to ask questions if you do not understand every point, or if you need further information. There is usually an opportunity to do this when the speaker has finished.
6. Go over your notes as soon as possible afterwards, before you forget what your notes mean. If your notes are still confused, talk about them to another student. This may help to clarify them.

Activity 2

Try making some notes from a lecture or television or radio programme using the checklist above. As you do this, jot down in the space below anything you found difficult or want to discuss with your tutor.

Feedback

Did using the checklist make your note-taking easier? If you had any problems or questions, talk these over with your tutor the next time you have contact with him or her.

If you are attending a course of lectures, and you find that two or three of you are confused, go to see the lecturer concerned. You may be embarrassed about doing this, but your study is too important to be ignored. The lecturer may be prepared to provide the key points on the screen or whiteboard.

Note-making techniques

Whether you are taking notes from a book, article, lecture or radio programmes, there are two techniques that you might find helpful:

- ▶ making ‘**listed**’ notes
- ▶ making ‘**spray**’ notes.

We will look at each of these next.

Listed notes

Listed notes involve listing the key points under a series of headings and sub-headings. With this method you can:

- ▶ number the points
- ▶ emphasise material by underlining, using different colours or capital letters, although this slows some people down
- ▶ use abbreviations, although be careful that you are consistent and can remember what the abbreviation means.

Here is an example of some listed notes.

Example 1: Listed notes

Why make notes?

1 Notes help:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| a remember | d reorganise |
| b summarise | e highlight |
| c plan | f concentrate |

2 Use when:

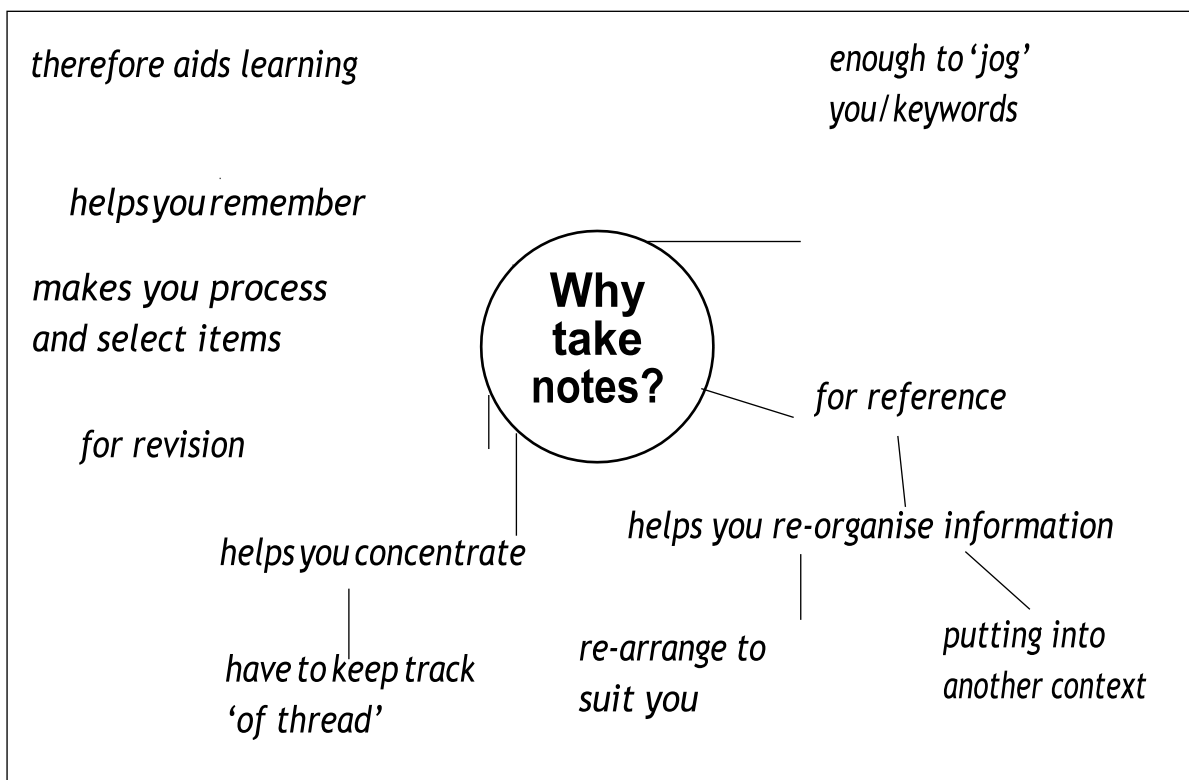
- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a watching demonstrations | d listening to radio |
| b listening to talk | e watching TV programme |
| reading book, newspaper, etc. | f discussing with others |

Spray notes

Spray notes are more visual than listed notes and they look more like a diagram. Some people call them ‘mind maps’. With this method you:

- ▶ write the main topic in the centre of the page
- ▶ write related ideas around it and link them up to show their relationship to the main idea
- ▶ add links around the edges to show relationships.

Here are some example spray notes.



Both methods of making notes have their advantages. In the next activity you will have an opportunity to try them out.

Activity 3

Choose a section from a book that you have been reading, ideally as part of your course.

1. Make one set of listed notes, making a list of the main points and including headings and sub-headings.
2. Make another set of spray notes on the same section, writing a key word in the middle of a blank sheet of paper and then writing the other points around it.
3. Think about which method you found most useful and why. Make a note of your thoughts below.

Feedback

Listed notes are useful when a topic is easily sub-divided under a number of headings, or when a book or talk is ordered in a way that is easy to follow. They can be very clear. Some people find them more boring to write and use than spray notes and if there is too much information they can be difficult to remember.

Spray notes can be very useful if you want to generate ideas – perhaps for an essay. Spray notes can be more fun to write and use than listed notes and for some people they are much easier to remember. They also allow you to show links between ideas and this can help you to understand and remember them well.

You may find that one method suits you best, but many students make use of both, depending on what they are doing.

.....

Key points

- ▶ How you make notes will depend on whether your notes are from written sources or speech.
- ▶ You can take listed or spray notes.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 13, write down:

- ▶ note-making methods you find useful.

14



Making notes online

Introduction

In Topic 13: *Making notes on paper* you looked at making notes on paper. In this topic you will consider making notes online. Many of the principles of note-making are the same wherever you make your notes, but there are some important differences which this topic will look at.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- make notes online.

Making notes online

Start by reading the case study on page 70 where one learner explains how he makes notes online.

Case study

Antonio is 38. He is doing a Diploma in Health Services Management by distance learning. He describes how he uses his computer for all his note-taking.

‘Although the course material is all on paper, it is so well written I don’t have to make notes on it – I can just work through the activities and information provided. But as part of the course I need to do some of my own research, looking up articles on the Internet. I need to be very organised about how I organise these notes. Every time I refer to an online article, I make notes on my computer and then in the course material on the relevant page I make a note of what the document with the notes is called, what the article is called, and which website I found it on. If I think I will want to refer to the article again, not just to my notes, I download it, save it with a file name including the date, and put it in a folder on my computer with other articles.’

There are a number of ways in which you can make notes online. Antonio either made notes on his computer on articles he had found or downloaded the articles in full for future reference, but you can also use the copy and paste facility in Word to speed up your note-taking. We will look at this next.

Copying and pasting

One way of speeding up online note-taking is to cut and paste information from a website or an online article. To do this you can either:

- ▶ highlight the information you wish to copy, paste it into a Word document and then save it as a labelled file, or
- ▶ save the whole file as a Word document and then delete the information you don’t need to keep.

Then you can change the text to suit your own note-taking purposes, perhaps by:

- ▶ changing the font or typesize to make it easier to read
- ▶ increasing the spacing between lines or paragraphs
- ▶ using colours to highlight sections
- ▶ adding your own summaries at the end of each section, perhaps in a different colour

- ▶ highlighting specific concepts or words, using the Find function to locate them
- ▶ inserting comments – in Word, it is possible to add your own notes to specific words and paragraphs using the Comment function on the Insert menu. This allows you to add anything you want to remember about a specific section of text. Your comments are tagged to the text so you can find them easily as you read through your notes.

Try doing this in the next activity.

Activity 1

1. Choose an article or piece of text that you want to use for your study.
2. Copy the sections that you want and paste them into a new Word file.
3. Save the file with a name that makes sense to you.
4. Change the format of the document to suit your note-taking purposes.
5. If you want to, insert your own comments using the Comment function.

Make a note in the space below of how you have chosen to present your notes – which font, typesize, size, colour, spacing, etc.

Feedback

Once you have found a format that suits you, you can use it as the basis for all your online notes.

Remember that if you are copying and pasting information from other sources you will have to respect the author's copyright. It is OK to use the information for your own purposes but not for wider circulation. To be on the safe side, always indicate the source of any material in a note. If you are expected to present your own original work, perhaps for an assignment or an examination, you should always make it clear when you are quoting someone else.

Other ideas that you might find helpful when taking notes online include:

- ▶ cutting and pasting a variety of extracts from documents and then editing them into a continuous summary
- ▶ pasting useful web addresses into your notes and then clicking on the links if you need to
- ▶ using a web search to locate a summary of your subject compiled by someone else, e.g. you could search for “Great War” + summary and then expand the summary yourself
- ▶ using a web search to locate a diagram of your topic, e.g. you could search for “Lymph system” + diagram and then copy and paste it into your notes
- ▶ using the Notepad facility to temporarily paste any copied text or to make notes while you are working online; you can then transfer anything you want to keep from the Notepad to the Word file you plan to save.

What matters is that you find a method that works for you.

Key points

- ▶ Find a method of online note-taking that works for you.
- ▶ Establish a format for your online notes that makes it as easy as possible for you to use them.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 14, write down:

- ▶ how you plan to make notes online.

15 Organising your notes

Introduction

As you saw in Topic 12: *Why take notes?*, Topic 13: *Making notes on paper* and Topic 14: *Making notes online*, your own notes can be some of the most useful aids to your study. To make effective use of them you will need to be able to access them easily. This means having a good system of storing and classifying them.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- organise your notes.

Organising your notes

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how he organises his notes.

Case study

Morris is 73. He is retired and has done a number of distance learning courses over the last 10 years. He is currently working on an Open University degree in Philosophy.

‘When I first retired I didn’t have a computer and so I had quite complicated systems of keeping my notes in ringbinders with alphabetical index cards listing where everything was. Although it was a very efficient system, it took a lot of time to maintain it and I would have preferred to spend that time studying.

A couple of years ago I bought my first PC and it has made storing my notes much easier. Although I still have a few wallets with press cuttings and other bits and pieces, nearly all my notes are done on the computer and I’ve got a system for naming the documents and folders so that I can easily find them. Because I don’t have paper copies of any of my notes I make a back-up of everything I have done.’

Like Morris, you will want to store your notes so that you do not lose them, and can find them again easily, perhaps when you do some coursework or revision. So, you will need to decide:

- ▶ what you will use to store the notes in
- ▶ how you will classify, or sort, the notes.

Ways of storing notes

This table compares some of the more common ways of storing notes and their advantages.

Method	Advantages
Loose-leaf folders	Easy to sub-divide and add to later. Easy to transport.
Laptop, tablet or virtual storage space	Easy to organise documents. Easy to edit material and reuse. Can make back-up copies. Easy to transport.
Ringbinder	Easy to add to. Sheets unlikely to fall out. Possible to organise notes in plastic pockets. Easy to transport.
Filing cards	Easy to re-organise. Good for project, essay or report plans. Easy to transport.
Notebook	Pages cannot fall out. Easy to transport.
Concertina files	Easy to see what is stored in which section. Ready-made sub-divisions. May be difficult to transport.
Recorded information	Record to your laptop, tablet or smartphone. Good if you find it easier to say things than write them down. Useful for recording speech. Easy to transport. Remember to back up to a virtual storage space.

If you are working online, you will need to decide whether you will draft your notes on paper or whether you will try to complete all your work on screen. The advantage of making notes on paper is that the change of activity might be good in itself, and you can take your paper notes with you if you need to study in different places. However, the advantage of working online is that your notes are captured in digital form and can then be transferred or manipulated. If you have a laptop, tablet or smartphone you will also be able to transport your notes easily.

Ways of classifying notes

Whatever method of storing notes you use, you will need to organise your notes so you can find them again. This is called **classifying**. Here are some of the most common methods of classifying and their advantages.

Method	Advantages
Chronological – by the date on which you make the notes, e.g. notes from February 12 go before notes from March 12.	May be useful for a series of lectures or you are doing a course where the order in which you study material is important.
Alphabetical – by first letter of topic A–Z.	A simple system to use if you don't have too many notes.
Numerical – by number using a system of referencing, e.g. you might number your main topics 1–6 and number your notes within each topic 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc.	May be useful if you have lots of notes and no other way of obviously ordering them.
By topic or subject.	Often the best system as it is easy to add to as you go along, providing it is obvious how your topics are categorised.
A mixture.	This is good if you have lots of topics and notes, e.g. alphabetically within topics.

Activity 1

Think about the notes you need to keep for your course. How will you classify and store them? Write your plans in the space below.

Feedback

You may have found it easy to decide on a system of classification and storage for your notes. Or you may have felt you needed a variety of different methods for different aspects of your course. Whichever system you decide to adopt, make sure that:

- ▶ *it is easy to decide where you will put new notes – if you can't decide where to put something, this may mean that your categories are not working*
 - ▶ *it is easy to find your notes later – consider creating an index if this helps*
 - ▶ *it is easy to identify individual notes – they should all have clear headings*
 - ▶ *it is easy to update your system if you need to.*
-

Key points

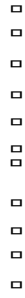
- ▶ Your methods of storing and classifying notes should make it easy for you to file your notes and to find them again later.
- ▶ You can store your notes online or on paper.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 15, write down:

- ▶ how you plan to store and classify your notes.

16



Selecting and organising resources

Introduction

Whatever you are learning, there are likely to be resources that can help you. Choosing the right resources can save you a lot of study time and help you work more efficiently. This topic looks at selecting resources.

You may also want to work through Topic 17: *Using a library* and Topic 18: *Using the Internet*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ select the resources you need for your study.

Preparing for the task

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how she prepares for a unit by thinking about the resources she will need.

Case study

Chantelle is 21 and she is working on her A level Biology.

‘Doing a practical subject like Biology by distance learning does raise some problems but I have been able to overcome most of these with the help of my tutor. I obviously don’t have a full science lab at home but I have an agreement to do some of the practical exercises at my local college. Other things like the dissection I can arrange to do at home providing I have some warning, and a friendly butcher to supply the pig’s eye! All the materials list the resources required at the start of a unit so you can look at that and get ready before you start working on the unit.’

Before you start a task it's always a good idea to spend a little time in preparation, thinking about the resources you will need and making sure they are available. Think about how good you are at doing this in the next activity.

Activity 1

When you are going to undertake a piece of work, do you normally:

1. begin, and then think about any resources you need once you have started? ☐
2. check first to see what resources you need and whether these are available? ☐
3. feel unable to start until you are surrounded by absolutely everything you may need? ☐

Feedback

If you ticked 1, you need to think about whether you are planning ahead enough in your study. If you start on a task without first getting yourself organised, you may feel that you are doing something positive and productive immediately, rather than delaying the moment when you begin. If the task is short and requires few resources and no specialised equipment or material, this policy may possibly work. However, when tasks are longer or more complex, this policy is likely to cause you many delays and setbacks later on.

If you ticked 2, you probably work in a sensible but practical way. By checking all your needs in advance, you will be able to identify:

- ▶ *whether some or all of the task must be done in a particular place, e.g. in a library, in a workshop, in a laboratory, or on a computer*
- ▶ *whether you need to order or book any particular resources or equipment*
- ▶ *the resources that you yourself must provide.*

If you ticked 3, you are probably very well prepared, but you may create other problems for yourself. Knowing you have everything you need before you start is good, but on the other hand this approach may:

- ▶ *not always be feasible if the task is lengthy or complex*
- ▶ *prevent you from getting started with one part of a task which does require particular resources or equipment*
- ▶ *become an inflexible routine which interferes with the completion of the task, or even becomes more important than the task itself!*

Choosing the right resources

Choosing resources is usually much easier if you have given time to thinking about what resources you really need. For example, for an assignment you might be able to choose from:

- ▶ books, magazines, newspapers, etc.
- ▶ people you can talk to
- ▶ television, radio, video or audio material and equipment
- ▶ electronic databases
- ▶ word processing, spreadsheet or graphics software
- ▶ websites.

In fact, the most effective learning often results from using a ‘blend’ of different media, including printed, electronic, audio and visual resources.

Activity 2

1. Think of a writing task you have to tackle next in your work or for your course.
2. Now think about the kinds of resources you will need and complete the first column in the table below. For example, do you need:
 - ▶ facts and figures
 - ▶ ideas and theories
 - ▶ opinions/interviews
 - ▶ examples
 - ▶ results of experiments
 - ▶ publications
 - ▶ information from the Internet
 - ▶ practical equipment?
3. Now think about where you can locate the resources and complete the second column.
4. For each item, think about when you need the resources by and write this in the third column.
5. Finally, think of any other factors that will affect the resources you use such as whether you will have to use them in a particular place, whether you will have to reserve them, etc. Fill in the last column if appropriate.

Resources I need	Where I can find them	When I need them by	Any other factors

Feedback

What you wrote will depend on the writing task you selected. For example, if your writing involved you in preparing an action plan for a change you might carry out at work, you might have included:

- ▶ *the relevant facts, and possibly technical specifications*
- ▶ *the opinions of those affected*
- ▶ *information about costs*
- ▶ *information about timings*
- ▶ *examples of product if appropriate.*

If you were writing an essay for your course, you might have included

- ▶ *the relevant facts and figures*
- ▶ *the more important theories and ideas you have come across*
- ▶ *examples to bear out your views*
- ▶ *quotations from key books or specialist journals you have read*
- ▶ *information you have downloaded from the Internet*
- ▶ *newspaper articles you have cut out.*

You should have found at least one source for everything you need and been able to make a note of timing and any other factors.

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Key points

- ▶ Select the resources you will need before you start your study.
- ▶ The most effective learning often results from a ‘blend’ of different media, including printed, electronic, audio and visual resources.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 16, write down:

- ▶ the resources you will need for your next piece of learning.

17

Using a library

Introduction

This topic takes a close look at how to access information that is held in a library. Your public or local college library may be one of your main sources of information, so it is worth knowing how to make the most of it. For this topic you will need to make a visit to a library.

You may also want to work through Topic 16: *Selecting and organising resources* and Topic 18: *Using the Internet*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- use a library effectively.

What's in a library?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how he uses his local library.

Case study

Laurie is a 48-year-old self-employed editor who is working on a creative writing course in his spare time. His favourite kind of writing is historical fiction and for this he likes to do background research.

‘At first I was very sceptical about using my local library. I thought it would be full of people with nowhere else to go. But when I was writing my novel about slavery I couldn’t find a historical account of the slave trade in Bristol and decided to ask in the library. They were incredibly helpful and located a book at another library in the area. They requested for me, it arrived three days later and I had all the information I needed for that part of my book.

I would certainly recommend using your local library whatever you are studying. The librarians are very knowledgeable and even if they don’t have the book you want, they usually know where you can get it, or they can find out for you.’

Most libraries have a **lending section**, a **reference section**, **online** and **computer facilities**.

Lending section

The **lending section** contains books, audio cassettes, CDs, videos and DVDs which you can borrow if you are a member of the library. The books are either:

- ▶ fiction – novels in English and some foreign languages
- ▶ non-fiction – factual books on a wide range of subjects.

Fiction is usually arranged in alphabetical order, according to the author’s surname and initials.

Non-fiction is usually arranged according to a system called the Dewey Decimal System. Under this system, books are arranged on the shelves in ten main categories. Each book is marked with its Dewey classification number on its spine.

000 Computer science, information and general works	500 Science
100 Philosophy and psychology	600 Technology
200 Religion	700 Arts and recreation
300 Social sciences	800 Literature
400 Language	900 History and geography

Each of these categories is then broken down into further sub-sections.

Reference section

This section usually has a more varied collection of books and resources, but you are not allowed to take them out of the library. This section is likely to include:

- ▶ reference books such as dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias
- ▶ non-fiction books (some of these will also be in the lending section)
- ▶ telephone directories
- ▶ trade directories
- ▶ statistical reference books
- ▶ maps and atlases
- ▶ British or ISO standards
- ▶ videos for reference only
- ▶ government publications
- ▶ careers and education guides
- ▶ newspapers, magazines and journals.

The Dewey classification system is used in the reference section as well.

Online services

Your library is likely to provide all or some of these online facilities:

- ▶ e-books and eAudiobooks which you can download to your laptop, e-book reader, tablet or smartphone; provided your device is compatible
- ▶ eNewspapers and eMagazines so that you can read current or back issues using your Internet browser
- ▶ searchable library catalogue listing all of the books available from your library
- ▶ online reference database.

You will also be able to renew the loan of any books you have borrowed from the library using their online services.

If you need access to a computer and/or the Internet to help with your studies, your library may provide these. Check with the library as you may need to book in advance, and there may be a charge.

Activity 1

Visit a local library and find out where the following types of information can be found. You may be able to find them just by looking around the library for them or you may need to ask the librarian to help you. Write your answers in the spaces below.

Directories of local businesses

Back copies of *The Times* newspaper

Websites on child development

College and university prospectuses

Journals or magazines relating to healthcare

A Yellow Pages directory for your area

Reference books relating to electronic engineering

Videos available for reference only

Feedback

We hope this activity has helped you to become familiar with exactly what your local library can offer. If you found that the library didn't keep some of the information on this list, then at least you know now and you won't waste time looking for it.

If you found it difficult to locate any of the information, you should have asked the librarian. They will know what is available in their library but will also be able to give you advice on obtaining information from elsewhere, e.g. websites or other libraries. They may be able to order books and other resources from another library for you.

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Key points

- ▶ A library is an important source of information.
- ▶ You can borrow books and other resources from the lending section but not from the reference section.
- ▶ Your library is likely to offer a range of online and computer facilities.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 17, write down:

- ▶ the name of the local library or libraries you plan to use
- ▶ the kinds of information you will be able to get there.

18 Using the Internet

Introduction

This topic looks at using the Internet for your study. The Internet is a really valuable source of information and it is worth learning how to make use of it.

This topic is not intended as a guide to the Internet. There are plenty of these available, and because technology and software change so quickly, any specific information would soon be out of date. Instead the activities in this topic focus on ways of making the most of the Internet as a learning tool.

For this topic you will need to have access to the Internet.

You may also want to work through Topic 16: *Selecting and organising resources* and Topic 17: *Using a library*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ search the worldwide web for information
- ▶ assess information you find on the worldwide web.

Using the worldwide web

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how she uses the Internet for her studying.

Case study

Margaret is 60 and has recently retired. She has just started a distance learning course in Interior Design. She has been using the Internet for a while but up until now she has only used it for online shopping and booking holidays and travel.

‘I had never really explored using the Internet until I started this course. I had used it for the things I needed, such as food shopping, buying Christmas presents, and booking holidays, but hadn’t really had time to do any more when I was working. As part of my course I have to design the interior for a new extension in a house including an ensuite bathroom. The Internet has been invaluable for sourcing products such as bathroom furniture and bedroom fabrics. You can look at them online and price them really easily.’

Like Margaret, one of the main ways in which you will use the Internet is to search for information. There are two basic ways of finding information:

- ▶ If you have a website address you can go straight to the site by typing the address in your browser’s address bar and clicking on the ‘Return’ button.
- ▶ If you don’t have an address, you can use a **search engine** to search for information for you. Google is by far the most widely used search engine, but there are others available.

Using a search engine

Search engines keep a huge database of websites and keywords so that you can match what you’re looking for with web pages containing the right words. You can use a search engine in two ways:

- ▶ you can look through categories and links that the search engine has built up to see if you can find what you want
- ▶ you can type in a word or phrase you want to look for and ask it to search for you.

When you do a search, the search engine displays a list of pages that match the word you have typed. These are called hits. This is the result of a search for ‘learning online UK’ using the search engine Google.

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query 'learning online UK'. The search bar at the top contains the text 'learning online UK' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'All', 'Shopping', 'Images', 'News', 'Videos', 'More', 'Settings', and 'Tools'. The search results are displayed below the tabs, starting with 'About 9,170,000 results (0.42 seconds)'. The first result is an advertisement for 'The Open University | Dream, Believe, Succeed | open.ac.uk', which includes a star rating and a list of degree programs. The second result is an advertisement for 'Online University Learning | Apply By Tues 13th March | arden.ac.uk'. The third result is for 'FutureLearn: Free Online Courses'. The fourth result is for 'Online Learning College'. The fifth result is for 'Distance Learning Courses, Home Study & Home Learning, Online ...'. The sixth result is for 'Distance and Online Courses | Open University'.

In the next activity you will have an opportunity to do a search on the Web yourself.

Activity 1

1. Use your browser to go to <https://www.bing.com>. Enter 'learning online UK' in the search box, then click on the Search' button. The results of your search will be listed. They will probably look similar to the example we showed you above, although you probably won't see exactly the same references as the Web changes so quickly. The listing of categories gives you some idea of the sort of content of the pages as you can see how they have been grouped.
2. Somewhere on the page – maybe at the top and bottom – you will see buttons to get to the news stories and web pages your search has found. Click on each of the buttons in turn to see the pages you've found in the different categories.
3. Follow some of the links that your search has found, remembering that you can get back to the results of your search using the 'Back' button of your browser. Each search engine has its own way of working, and you won't always get the same results from the same search with different engines. This means that if you can't find what you want with one search engine it's always worth trying again with another.

4. Repeat your search using Google <https://www.google.com> and see what other pages you can find.
5. Make a note below of any problems you had in using either search engine, so that you can discuss them with your tutor or a friend or colleague who regularly uses the Internet.

Feedback

We hope that your search resulted in some useful hits. Each entry should include the title of the page that has been found, some information about it, and the address of the page. The information about the page is taken from the page itself – it may be a useful description, or it may just be the first few lines of text on the page. The address of the page is what you would need to pass on to someone wanting to look at the web page. You don't need to do this, as you can go to the page by clicking on the link.

You will probably see 10 or more results from your search on the first page. This is fine if the information you want is likely to be on one of the pages offered to you. If there are more hits than this, there will be a Next or More button at the bottom of the list for you to look at the next set.

When you find a site or page that you would like to return to it's a good idea to save it as a 'favourite' or 'bookmark' (what this is called depends on your browser). Beware though of bookmarking everything because your list will become so long it will no longer be helpful. Aim to include only the sites you are likely to return to and organise your list using your system's instructions to create folders containing all the bookmarks for a particular subject.

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Doing a more detailed search

Sometimes a search for one word or phrase will be enough to find what you want, but more often you will need to do a more detailed search. You can search for a combination of words, or exclude words from your search, like this:

+ or **AND** to include words, e.g. UK + learning online

NOT to exclude words, e.g. learning online NOT US

"" around two or more words to search for a phrase, or the name of a person, e.g. "history of learning online"

To do a search like this you need to work out the words you want to include and any you want to exclude. It may not be obvious until you have done the search that there are words you need to exclude. For example, if you search for mercury, you will find pages about:

- ▶ the metal mercury
- ▶ the god Mercury
- ▶ the defunct telecommunications company Mercury
- ▶ and probably several other things as well!

Try to work out a combination that will narrow down your search to just the type of thing you want to find. If you make your search clever enough, you can use fairly common words, as they will only be found if all the other criteria are met.

Activity 2

1. Carry out a search for 'holidays'. You will find there are lots of hits.
2. If you wanted to book a holiday, you wouldn't want to look through a million pages, or the thousands of sites dedicated to holidays. You would probably pick the categories that looked most promising and have a look through them. But if you wanted something very specific, it might take you a long time to get where you wanted doing this. Instead, you could use a more advanced search. Suppose you wanted to go on a camping holiday in the Kalahari Desert. There shouldn't be too many options. So now try:

holidays+camping+kalahari

Feedback

We hope this activity has shown you how it is possible to narrow down a search to just the relevant pages. Some search engines have a button to allow you to refine your search—for example, by picking more words to include or exclude. The new search is carried out on the results of your first search to narrow it down. Others let you choose other options, like only pages with pictures, or only pages originating in a certain area (the UK, Europe, Asia), or in a particular language. If you are using Google, you can click on Advanced Search (you will find this under 'Settings') to take advantage of more advanced search options. Google also offers you the option to filter results – e.g. by country or date.

Assessing information on the Internet

The Internet contains a vast amount of information. That is its strength and also its weakness. Although you can find something of interest on almost every subject, you often do not know how reliable or factually correct the information is. Anyone can put web pages on the Internet, and there is no one to screen them for accuracy.

As an online learner you need to develop your skills in evaluating the information you find. This means:

- ▶ considering why it was placed on the Internet in the first place
- ▶ checking its origin, as far as possible.

Here are some questions to help you assess how reliable information is:

- ▶ does the web page provide the name and qualifications or credentials of the author and/or organisation?
- ▶ are contact details provided?
- ▶ does the author take a balanced approach – avoiding informal or colourful language?
- ▶ does the author declare any vested interest?
- ▶ is the information based on fact not personal anecdote or opinion?
- ▶ are other authorities cited?
- ▶ is a full listing of sources provided?
- ▶ are there are links to other web pages or sources that are reliable?

Activity 3

Suppose you found a web page that made a significant claim – for example, an argument that all the earth’s water derived originally from ice on comets. You would want to see how well this is supported before citing it. What could you do? Make a note of your ideas below.

Feedback

The most effective approach would be to use the Internet to find at least two other unrelated sources that make a similar claim. In this case, you might conduct a further search, using terms such as:

ice+comet+water+source

Copyright

Much of the information you find on the Internet will be for your own personal use. However, ‘personal use’ has a very narrow meaning when it comes to copyright. Using words and images you find on the Internet is fine if the material is only available on your own computer. But if you incorporate those words or images into a website without acknowledging the original source, you are infringing copyright and could be prosecuted. The offence becomes more serious if you charge for the use of others’ material.

The person who owns copyright is not obliged to attach their name or contact details to the material, or to put the copyright symbol on it. To be on the safe side, assume that all material is protected by copyright unless you have a specific reason to be certain that this is not the case.

Key points

- ▶ The Internet can be a very valuable tool to help learning.
- ▶ You need to be able to do a detailed search to find exactly the information you are looking for.
- ▶ It is important to assess the reliability of any information you find on the Internet.
- ▶ Be careful not to breach copyright when using information from the Internet.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 18, write down:

- ▶ why you might use the Internet for your course
- ▶ the name of the search engine you plan to use to find information on the Internet
- ▶ how you plan to assess the reliability of information you find.

19

Using a dictionary

Introduction

This topic will help you make good use of a dictionary. It explains exactly how most dictionaries are presented and how to find the information you need. If you don't have a dictionary, or you feel your current dictionary is difficult to use, you may need to buy one. The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* is an inexpensive one that many students use.

You may also want to work through Topic 34: *Improving your spelling* and Topic 20: *Using an index*.

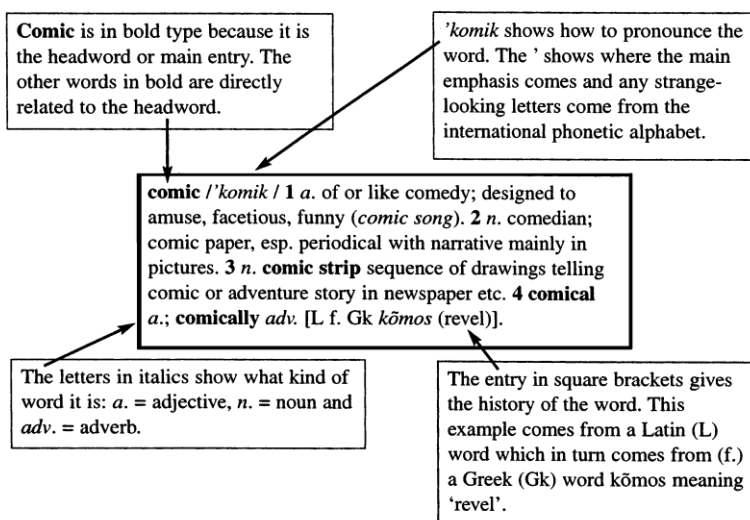
Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ follow the layout of a dictionary
- ▶ select the right definition for your needs.

How are dictionaries laid out?

A dictionary entry will look something like the central box below. This one is for the word 'comic'. The other boxes explain how the entry has been set out.



Every dictionary has a key explaining the symbols and abbreviations it uses. The key for your dictionary may be slightly different from this one.

Activity 1

Somewhere at the front of your dictionary you will find a key which explains the particular system of symbols or abbreviations it uses.

Check through the first pages of your dictionary. What information does it contain?

List three or four words below and then look them up in your dictionary. Check with your dictionary's key to make sure you understand everything in the entries.

Feedback

It's tempting to skip the information in the front of a dictionary because it's often presented fairly densely and in quite small print. However, it is important that you do read this at some point because this part of the dictionary is its 'instruction manual'. If you don't read it you may end up misunderstanding what you're looking at under a particular entry.

Selecting the right meaning

Many words have more than one meaning, and it is always important to check that you have selected the correct definition. For example, in the following sentences, the word 'easy' means two different things.

- ▶ He is an easy person to persuade.
- ▶ He has a very easy manner.

This is a fairly straightforward example, but other words may require more care, so:

- ▶ Don't assume that the first definition you find under its dictionary entry will be the one you want.
- ▶ Read through the complete entry before deciding which is the correct sense of the word you are checking.

Problems can also arise because dictionaries do not always make it clear in which situation you should use a word. For example, the word ‘astute’ means shrewd or crafty. So, you might choose to use it in the sentence: ‘The astute hare escaped from the hounds.’ But this is not a very appropriate use of the word astute because it is almost always used to describe people rather than animals. The dictionary does not make this clear.

There is no easy solution to this problem, but you may find it helpful to:

- ▶ observe when and where words are used as you encounter them
- ▶ make a careful note of new words you come across and how they are used.

Reading as much as possible will obviously help develop your sense of when words can and can’t be used. Try to look at magazines, newspapers and books as well as any other printed material as often as you can. This will develop your feel for language. Doing crosswords – especially learning how to solve cryptic ones – is another very good way to get to know a wide range of words and their meanings.

Try practising using a dictionary in the next activity.

Activity 2

Use a dictionary to look up each of the highlighted words below and write the definitions in the spaces provided. Make sure you select the correct meaning for the context of the sentence.

He had very **liberal** parents and found the discipline at school difficult.

He was no **match** for his tennis opponent.

Her teacher needed to **prime** her for her piano exam.

Feedback

We hope you found this activity helpful. Did you select the right meaning for the words you looked up? In these contexts:

- ▶ *liberal means free and unstructured*
- ▶ *match means an equal*

- ▶ *prime means prepare.*

It may take some time to develop your own judgement when you are selecting the best meaning or the right word from a dictionary.

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Key points

- ▶ Using a dictionary is an essential skill when reading and writing.
- ▶ Entries are presented in a dictionary in different ways although some aspects are standard.
- ▶ You need to get used to using your own dictionary, developing your own judgement when selecting the best meaning or the right word.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 19, write down:

- ▶ what you plan to do to practise using a dictionary.

20 Using an index

Introduction

This topic will show you how an index works and to make best use of indexes in your studying. You may find it easier to work through this unit in a library so that you can immediately carry out the activity that asks you to look at a variety of library books with indexes.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- use an index effectively.

How are indexes laid out?

The simplest type of index provides an alphabetical listing of the main subjects dealt with in the text, and the pages on which these appear. For example, in a book which deals with heavy vehicle technology the entries for V and W are:

variable load valve, 209
vee engine, 31
viscosity index, 64
viscous fan drives, 81
volumetric efficiency, 26

wax pellet thermostat, 85
wedge-type brake adjuster, 186
weight transfer, 184
wet-type air cleaner, 51
wet-type cylinder liners, 35

Other indexes use a number of **key headings**, which appear in alphabetical order, followed by a series of related references grouped under this main entry:

Note 1:
in this case
topics grouped under
a main heading are
noted in the order
they appear
first in the book, not
alphabetically.

Teachers (tutors):
role of, in study group, 4–5
time required for preparation, 7–9, 93
experience of exercises, 8 *passim*
design their own exercises, 9, 10, 45–55
quality of, 11
advice given by, 16, 68–9
feedback to students, 36–73
poor communications with students, 99–100
threat-free study groups, 5, 24, 89–90, 96–7
Time for study:
organization of, 5, 15–16
commitment to, 80

Note 2:
passim
means that
there are
occasional
references
to the topic
throughout
the section.

If you are trying to trace a very specific subject which is not listed under an entry of its own, it is always worth checking to see if it has been grouped under another heading. For example, if you can't find 'screen-savers' under the first word you might find it as a subheading under the general topic of 'screens' or even 'savers'.

When there is a major entry on a specific subject, this is often indicated by the **numbers being in bold type**, e.g.:

sports in schools, 3, 4, 5, **5–6**, 10, 11

Sometimes italics are used in the numbering to indicate that the reference to the subject is part of a diagram or illustration, e.g.:

sports in schools 5, *10*, 11
swimming pools 3, 8, 9 *10*, 14, *19*

There is usually an explanation of the style adopted in an index.

Activity 1

Now practise using an index. Read through the instructions below and then write your answer in the space provided. You need to use a library for this activity so that you have access to a variety of books with indexes.

1. Select a topic which you are learning about at present.
2. Check to see what library books are available which might be useful.
3. Consult the indexes to identify appropriate material on the topic.
4. For each library book you have used, list below the title, authors, subjects you found mentioned in the index, page references and the classification numbers of the books so that you can find them again easily.

Feedback

We hope you found this opportunity to use indexes helpful. If you found it difficult to find any material related to your learning, talk to the librarian or your tutor. You might need to consult another type of index.

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Specialist reference indexes

Specialist reference indexes are helpful when you are doing a project or some detailed work on a particular subject. Reference indexes are usually kept in the reference section of libraries. Books such as the *British Humanities Index* are published annually, and they list material published during the previous year for a wide range of topics. They do this by:

- ▶ cataloguing articles published in numerous periodicals, magazines, journals and newspapers, giving full details of the author's name, the title of the article and the source
- ▶ listing the articles according to subject, but they also include an alphabetical index of authors and their writings.

Online versions of these reference indexes may also be available.

Activity 2

Think of any ways in which you could use specialist reference indexes for your own learning. Make a note of your ideas below.

Feedback

Your ideas will of course be related to the subject of your course. A useful exercise might be to use the British Humanities Index to compile a list of articles published in the last three years on a subject which you are learning about.

Key points

- ▶ Indexes can save you valuable time when you are researching a subject.
- ▶ Specialist reference indexes can help you do detailed research on a specialist subject.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 20, write down:

- ▶ how you plan to make use of indexes in your learning.

Skills for learning

21 Concentrating

Introduction

Being able to concentrate is a vital first step in learning. If you are constantly distracted, or if your attention waivers, you will find it hard to get going. This topic looks at a number of ways in which you can increase the level of concentration you are able to give to your study sessions.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ concentrate on your learning.

Improving your concentration

Concentration involves a number of things:

- ▶ reducing interruptions to a minimum
- ▶ clearing your own mind of distractions
- ▶ being able to focus your attention clearly on what you are learning.

Reducing interruptions to a minimum

Interruptions come from other people and could include:

- the television or radio being on in the same room
- your family asking you questions
- the telephone ringing
- visitors calling.

Not many people can concentrate effectively under pressures like these!

Clearing your own mind of distractions

Distractions can come from yourself and could include other things you have to do, or other activities that you would enjoy doing. For example, if you are doing some Internet research for your study, you might get distracted by other websites and be tempted to look at these rather than the websites relevant to your study.

Being able to focus your attention clearly on what you are learning

This means knowing why you are learning something and what you want to get out of it – Topic 4: *Why are you learning?* looks at this.

Read the case study below to see how one learner managed to overcome her initial problems with concentration.

Case study

Sandra is 41. She has been caring for her disabled father since she was 15. She was unable to get any qualifications at school because she had to stay at home a lot of the time to look after her father. A few years ago she decided to study by distance learning. Last year she got an A* in English Literature and Mathematics at GCSE and this year she is starting A level Maths. She says:

‘Once I had decided to do the GCSEs I was determined to see it through and my tutors were really supportive.

One of my big problems was learning how to concentrate because I hadn’t been at school for so long. Although I have always been an avid reader, I was always expecting to be interrupted by something my father needed, so I learnt to read in snatches when I had a few moments. This meant I developed a bit of a ‘butterfly’ mind.

When I started the GCSEs I quickly realised I was going to have to learn to concentrate more if I was going to get anywhere with them. My tutor made some suggestions and I talked to Dad about it. Together we worked out a system where I would get him settled first and then work in 30 minute slots. He only calls for me if he really needs me as he knows the most he will have to wait is 30 minutes.

I have got it down to a fine art now, and find I can really concentrate for those 30 minutes and get somewhere.’

Sandra worked out a way of concentrating that suited her situation. In the same way, you will need to think about what stops you concentrating and how you can overcome it. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

What may be stopping you concentrating effectively on your learning?

Note down in the following table:

- ▶ any regular interruptions to your studying
- ▶ any distractions that make it hard for you to keep going
- ▶ anything else that stops you focusing fully on your learning.

Now think about each item you have listed and try to suggest a solution. For example, could you:

- ▶ find somewhere else to study?
- ▶ make a list of tasks to do each day?

What stops you concentrating	What you might be able to do
Interruptions – from others	
Distractions – from yourself	
Anything else	

Feedback

Here are some ways of tackling interruptions and distractions. Think about each question and try to decide whether this idea will help you concentrate.

- ▶ *Can you negotiate study times with other members of the household?*
- ▶ *Is there somewhere quieter at home where you can study?*
- ▶ *Could you study somewhere else altogether – in a library, on the train to work, or at a friend's house?*
- ▶ *Can you timetable the tasks that get in your way, so that you know you will do them and when, instead of being distracted by them?*
- ▶ *Can you promise yourself time off to do the things you really enjoy?*
- ▶ *Can you use a desk or table where you can leave your books undisturbed, so that it's easy to get started again?*

.....

One of the keys to focusing your attention is to make sure you are interested in your learning. Your reasons for study and your targets (see Topic 4: *Why are you learning?* and Topic 7: *Setting goals*) should help you do this. And there is more on ways of keeping going in Topic 5: *Getting support* and Topic 8: *Being realistic*.

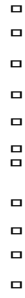
Key points

- ▶ Being able to concentrate is essential when you are studying.
- ▶ You need to work out how you can minimise interruptions and distractions.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 21, make a note of what you will do to make sure you are not interrupted or distracted when you are learning.

22



Developing your memory

Introduction

When you are studying you want your memory to be working as efficiently and predictably as possible. In this topic you will be looking at a variety of activities that you can use to make your memory work more effectively for you. You may be using some of these already, but we hope you will find at least one that will be a useful study technique.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- develop your memory.

Developing memory skills

Research suggests that you reach a peak when you are able both to recall and to understand what you are learning. Before this you are still getting into the swing of learning – after it you tend to remember less. So, when you are studying, it's a good idea warm your brain up first. For example, if you want to learn something in chapter 4 of a textbook, remind yourself of the contents of chapter 3 first. This will start your mind working along the right lines and could make your study of chapter 4 more effective.

There are many different techniques for remembering things. Read about one learner's ideas on this in the next case study.

Case study

Trevor is 51. He talks about how he worked out his own way of remembering things.

‘When I was at school and then when I was training to be a police officer, I found exams really difficult because I had such a poor memory. I would spend hours revising my notes and then just not be able to recall them when I got into the exam room.

Now I’m studying for a degree with the Open University. My tutor suggested that I might have a more visual memory and it might be better for me to make my notes in a diagram form, rather than just pages of writing. This has really made a difference to me. In the exams I can picture my diagrams in my mind’s eye and then I can usually recall what they say.’

Trevor discovered that the most effective memory technique for him was to present his notes in a diagram form. In the same way, you will need to work out which memory technique is best for you. Think about this in the next activities.

Memorising a list

You may not have to look at a list of words and then try recalling it later on, but doing so can be a useful way to discover how to memorise other kinds of information.

Activity 1

Read through the words in the following table once. Then cover the table up and write down all the words you can remember from it.

sea	age	cat	string	mat	rat
yard	pin	pear	steak	man	foot
cottage	arm	Blair	duck	field	share
pink	hill	table	India	paper	curtain
ring	sand	bottle	floor	book	hamster

Feedback

However difficult you found this activity, you probably managed to remember the words: sea, age, book and hamster. You might well also have remembered cat, string, mat, rat, Blair, pink and India.

Research that has been carried out to see what people can remember agrees on a number of principles:

- ▶ first and last things
- ▶ linked things
- ▶ pictures of things
- ▶ outstanding things
- ▶ familiar (recognisable) things.

Let's look at these principles in more detail to find out how they work.

First and last

Most people agree that we remember first and last things – in the last activity these were the words sea, age, book and hamster. Whatever you might be learning, you are most likely to remember the **beginning** and **end** of it. This also goes for whatever you are listening to. For example, it has been found that in lectures students remember the early part best, then their memory tails off, but it picks up again just before the end.

Try to make the most of this 'first and last' principle when you are learning – aim to focus on the really important parts of a study session at the beginning and end.

Making connections

If you remembered the words cat, mat, rat in our list, it might be because these words rhyme. If you remembered cat and string it might be because you made a connection – cats play with string. You may also have remembered other words on the list because of mental links between them, e.g. sea and sand.

Remembering things can be made easier if we can find links between them. The next activity shows how effectively this can work.

Activity 2

Read through the following list once, cover it up, and then write down as many words as you can remember.

cat	secretary	sleeve	scientist
steam	coat	gerbil	diesel
milkman	poodle	canary	hat
writer	carriage	fleece	piston

Now read the next list, cover it up, and write down the words you can remember.

Pets	Trains	Jobs	Clothes
cat	steam	milkman	sleeve
gerbil	carriage	writer	coat
canary	diesel	secretary	fleece
poodle	piston	scientist	hat

Feedback

Did you notice that both lists contained the same words? The first was given in no particular order, whereas the second was grouped into four 'chunks'. Did you find the second list easier to remember than the first? If you classify information like this, memorising it should become much simpler.

.....

Picture this

When you looked at the lists of words in the last two activities, you may have found some items easy to remember because you could visualise them, such as the words pink or cat. This is how Trevor, in the case study, discovered he could remember things best. Try your visual memory out in the next activity.

.....

Activity 3

Look at the list of words in the first activity again and try to picture each word. Cover up the list and then try to write it out again below.

Feedback

The list should have been easier to remember this time – not just because this was the second-time round, but also because you had a method for remembering the words. The most difficult words may have been age and share since it may be harder to picture them.

Memorable designs

There will always be things you have to remember that are not easy to picture – things that are abstract, such as figures or dates, or are perhaps in such a long list that you can't recall all of them by visualising. Another way to remember something is to lay it on a page in a memorable design. The next activity will help you to see how this can be done.

Activity 4

Choose a page from a textbook you have been reading. Find one where the text is in paragraphs only and there are few or no headings or illustrations – just a lot of words on a page. Now on a separate piece of paper rewrite the page in note form using headings, arrows, lists with bullet points, and anything else you can add to make it visually more interesting.

The two styles should look something like this:

Constructivism.

Constructivism is the name given to an artistic movement which had many antecedents in other artistic movements in different parts of Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. Firstly, Kandinsky was an artist who worked in many of the capitals of Europe including Moscow. Kasimir Malevich had been instrumental in founding a new movement here called Suprematism which was also an influence on Kandinsky's work. Part of their manifesto reads as follows. The representation of an object, in itself (the objectivity as the aim of the representation) is something that has nothing to do with art, although the use of representation is a mode of art does not rule out the rationality of the being of things artistic work.

Other artists in Russia whose work is important in the development of the Constructivist movement are Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko. There were many differences (and Kandinsky) in all their different approaches amongst them attitudes towards rationality and functionalism. These differences were much affected by developments in the Russian Revolution taking place at the same time. Two other people who were very important in the development of the Constructivist movement were Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner. Naum Gabo (who had changed his name to distinguish himself from his brother) met Kandinsky and had his brother called concerning the spiritual art.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

3/2/81
H. Read: A Concise History of Mod. Art.

European context – early 20th C.
many antecedents and movements
many: Impressionism, Symbolism, Cubism, etc.

Kandinsky
Bauhaus 1927

Suprematism Kasimir Malevich
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."

Russia
Malevich died early with new ideas
Vladimir Tatlin: new humanism
Alexander Rodchenko: new art, new life.

main differences:
of effects of
Russ. Rev.
later notes (p. 28)

Naum Gabo – broken – Antoine Pevsner
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."
"I am not an artist, I am a painter."

Kandinsky
"Concerning the spiritual in art" was written
Stroemlin. Should this
make the effects any.

Archipenko
Second of Paris
being in the middle of
of his intellectual life.

Feedback

Do you think rewriting this page has made the material more memorable for you or not?

Even if you don't have a photographic memory, remembering something that is visually more interesting can be easier than trying to recall a long chunk of text with few or no breaks, and no pattern or layout design.

If you did feel this exercise was useful, you could try in future to take your notes in this style. Although it may produce more pages of notes, in the end it will pay off as you shouldn't have to read through your notes as often. There is more on taking notes in Topic 13: Making notes on paper and Topic 14: Making notes online.

.....

Using mnemonics

Another way of remembering things is to invent 'mnemonics'. The word 'mnemonic' comes from the Greek word meaning 'to remember' and it can be applied to any device you use to help yourself remember things. The most common mnemonics are rhymes such as 'i before e except after c' or phrases such as 'Richard of York gained battles in vain' for the colours of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet). You can make up mnemonics like this for yourself.

Another kind of mnemonic is one where you make a connection. For example, in the Italian language the word for sad is mesto. To remember this, you could think that someone who is sad is in a bit of a mess – maybe not very kind but a good way of remembering the Italian word!

Activity 5

.....

List some mnemonics that you already use.

Now think of other things that you find difficult to remember and don't yet have a mnemonic for. Make up mnemonics that may help you remember them.

Feedback

Some people don't use mnemonics much because they feel they are just one more thing to remember in addition to the actual facts. But if a mnemonic is easily memorable, such as a rhyme, it can be a very effective memory aid.

.....

Key points

- ▶ Being able to remember information is essential when you are studying.
- ▶ There are different ways of remembering information including making connections, picturing things, and using mnemonics.
- ▶ Warm your brain up first when you are studying.
- ▶ Don't work for long periods – the ability to remember information peaks about 20–40 minutes after starting a study session and then tails off.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 22, make a note of the techniques you will use to help you memorise information when you are learning.

23



Asking questions

Introduction

To learn effectively you need to be able to ask questions to help you develop your understanding and knowledge. In this topic you will be looking at how you can ask questions most effectively.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ask questions.

Asking questions

All effective learning is active learning. Even if you're reading a book, listening to a talk, doing some Internet research, or chatting about work to fellow students face-to-face or online, you need to be active to make the most of your learning. And you can learn more actively by asking questions.

Kim talks next about how it took him some time to get the hang of asking questions.

Case study

Kim is 25 and he is studying for the CACHE Certificate of Professional Development in work with Children and Young People (CPD).

'After a few weeks of studying the course materials I realised that the activities in the pack mean you have to think it out for yourself and apply it to your own experience and situation. So I got into the habit of asking myself the questions 'What do I do?' or 'What would I do?' or even 'Why do I do it like that?'. This has really helped me to produce my assignments where you have to reflect on the way you work, and explain how and why you work the way you do.'

You can use questions to help your learning in all kinds of ways. For example:

- ▶ to focus your approach to a topic
- ▶ to help you plan a piece of work
- ▶ to help you reflect on your practice
- ▶ as headings for notes
- ▶ as the basis for an interview with another person such as your tutor
- ▶ as the structure of a report or essay plan.

Some of the most useful question words you can use are:

- ▶ what
- ▶ why
- ▶ how
- ▶ who
- ▶ where
- ▶ when.

Listed below are the questions one History student wrote as she prepared to study Chamberlain's policy of appeasement before World War 2.

Case study

What was appeasement?

What was the background to appeasement?

What other points of view were there at the time?

Why did Chamberlain adopt this policy?

How did he carry out the policy?

How did the policy change?

Who supported Chamberlain's policy? Who opposed him?

When did appeasement start?

When did it become clear that it was not working?

It can be very useful to map out questions like these before you start learning about something. It can also be encouraging because you will already know the answers to some of the questions.

You might find this way of mapping out questions works for you.

1. Draw a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper, with a word or two in the middle to describe what you are going to learn about.

2. Then draw in spokes (like those on a bicycle wheel) and write on them questions you can answer.
3. You can then make short notes alongside the questions you already know the answers to.

Mapping in this way means the questions you don't know the answers to get planted in your mind and help to guide you when you're learning more about the subject. It's like opening an empty folder up in your mind in which you will store all you know on the subject. Simply creating that folder will help your mind to sort out what you already know on a subject and make it ready to take in more information. If you use a 'Windows' program on a computer you will find this easy to imagine, but even if you don't, you can imagine a filing cabinet full of folders with pieces of paper inside them.

Activity 1

Choose a topic that you are studying or planning to study. Draw up your own circle and spoke diagram. When you have completed it, spend five minutes thinking of any additional questions you need to answer in the light of information you already know.

Feedback

How easy it was to find questions may depend on the topic. In the History example we looked at it was harder to find 'where' questions than 'what' questions. So, don't worry if you found it easier to think of some questions than others.

Once you have thought of the questions, the next stage is of course to answer them. Some you will already know the answer to, or have some ideas about. In other cases you will need to do more research, perhaps by asking someone else or by reading about it.

You may like to go back to the questions you weren't sure about and write in the name of someone you could ask, a place or website to visit, or a book to consult.

Key points

- Asking questions is essential when you are studying.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 23, make a note of how you plan to ask yourself questions when you are learning.

24 Solving problems

Introduction

It's normal to run into problems from time to time during your study. Some of them will have been specifically created or set up for you by the course material or your tutor, while others will be unexpected and possibly unwelcome. This topic will help you to develop a good problem-solving approach so that you can resolve any problems quickly and make sure they don't develop into something worse.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- develop a practical approach to problem-solving.

How do you react to difficult problems?

Some problems will be easily overcome either because you have the techniques, skills or knowledge required or because you have faced something similar before and can handle the new problems in the same way. But there will be other problems for which you don't have an immediate answer or where you lack a choice of techniques or tools to solve them.

Read the next case study in which Mohammed talks about how he developed a creative approach to problem-solving.

Case study

Mohammed is 43 and he is working on Understanding Loss and Grief, with a view to becoming a counsellor for the charity CRUSE Bereavement.

‘I have always been someone who likes to get on with things – I like meeting a challenge and overcoming it. That’s one of the reasons why I decided to do this course. But working on Understanding Loss and Grief has shown me that not all problems can be solved immediately. Sometimes you have to put a problem to one side for a while and let your mind just run free – distance yourself. Often a solution comes to you in a flash or series of flashes later on, when you are no longer focusing on the problem.

If I have a problem – at work, in my course, or in my personal life – I try to take a bit of time out and go for a run or walk. Usually, by the time I get back my mind has worked through the problem and I’m able to tackle it.’

How do you react to difficult problems? Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Think about any tricky problems you have encountered in your learning or training. Tick the statements below that apply to you. Be honest!

1. I’m not always clear about what I’m supposed to be doing. ☐
2. I sometimes misinterpret the question or the problem. ☐
3. My approach to solving problems is sometimes a bit confused. ☐
4. I use the knowledge or skills that I already have to solve the problem. ☐
5. I consider the problem from different angles. ☐
6. I often give up if I can’t find the answer immediately. ☐
7. I get distracted by other things going on in my life. ☐

Feedback

You probably found that you experience at least one of these issues when trying to tackle problems.

1. *Working out exactly what problem you have to solve is obviously a good starting point, so ask your tutor or fellow students if you’re not sure.*

2. *Again, make sure you understand what you're supposed to be doing and check if you're in any doubt.*
 3. *Go for a more focused approach where you approach the problem from different angles knowing each time what you need to achieve.*
 4. *This is a good tactic, but one we don't always remember to use. When you're faced with a complex problem it is all too easy to get bogged down with it and forget the knowledge and skills that you already have which would help you.*
 5. *A good way to solve a problem is often to 'reformulate' it – break it down into smaller parts and piece it together again so that you look at it from new angles.*
 6. *Carrying your reasoning through to a conclusion is important if you are going to successfully crack problems. Don't give up when it starts to look too tricky – do go away and do something else and then come back to it later on with renewed enthusiasm and patience.*
 7. *If you are going to solve a problem, you need to be able to stay focused on it. If you find other worries keep getting in the way, take a break and then return to it later.*
-

Stages of problem-solving

Now you have established what you tend to do when faced with problems, you can look at how to change and improve your responses. There are four key stages to problem-solving.

Firstly, analyse the problem – spend time thinking the problem through.

Ask yourself:

- ▶ What exactly is it that you have to solve?
- ▶ Is it your problem?
- ▶ What do you want to achieve?

Secondly, obtain information – get the information you need in order to solve it. The next stage is to make sure that you have the relevant details. Just obtaining information can sometimes solve the problem. Ask yourself:

- ▶ Which books might help?
- ▶ Which other resources, such as the library or the Internet, might you try?
- ▶ Who can you ask for advice?

Thirdly, consider alternative solutions – and evaluate each one. When you're faced with a problem, the choices often seem stark. But there may be other possible ways of looking at it, and one way is likely to be more appropriate than the others. Ask yourself:

- ▶ What will be the advantages of each?
- ▶ What would be the drawbacks?
- ▶ Which will be most appropriate?

Fourthly, implement the best solution – once you have decided what to do, do it as soon as you can, before the problem gets worse.

Activity 2

Think of any problem you have at the moment, in your study, your work or elsewhere in your life, and practise solving it now.

In the spaces below:

- ▶ describe the problem
- ▶ note down what information would help you to solve it
- ▶ list some possible solutions
- ▶ decide which you feel is the best solution.

Statement of problem:

Information required:

Resources:

People:

Alternative solutions	Advantages	Drawbacks
1		
2		
3		

Chosen solution:

Action:

Feedback

We hope you felt this activity helped you work through the key stages of problem-solving. Here is what one student wrote.

Statement of problem:

I am concerned that I will not complete the course in time and will therefore perform poorly in the exam.

Information required:

Resources:

Obtain copies of syllabus and past exam papers

People:

Talk with tutor

Alternative solutions	Advantages	Drawbacks
<i>1 Defer exam to next year</i>	<i>Time to prepare Reduced stress</i>	<i>Time lost Extra cost</i>
<i>2 Concentrate on key topics</i>	<i>Stay on schedule Meet other commitments</i>	<i>Fewer questions to choose from Likely lower grade</i>
<i>3 Increase time devoted to study</i>	<i>Full range of questions to answer Stay on schedule</i>	<i>Increased stress Less time for family</i>

Chosen solution:

Concentrate on key topics

Action:

Discuss further with tutor

.....

Asking questions is an essential part of problem-solving – there is more on this in Topic 23: *Asking questions*. You may also want to work through Topic 25: *Managing stress*.

Key points

- A problem-solving approach can increase your ability to learn.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 24, make a note of how you plan to solve problems when you are learning.

25 Managing stress

Introduction

Stress is a word that we often use without really understanding its true meaning. You might say, ‘He really stresses me out’, when all you mean is that someone is difficult to get on with or hard to please. You might say ‘I’ve had a really stressful day’ when your computer kept crashing.

So, we often use the word ‘stress’ when we’re just talking about something that isn’t terribly important and that doesn’t bother us for long. However, if we are continually bombarded by problems we feel unable to resolve then we really start to experience stress. Unless we can find ways of tackling these feelings, stress can begin to affect our health and make us even less able to deal with problems.

This topic will help you identify what causes you stress and suggests several ways of coping with stress.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ recognise when you are stressed
- ▶ find ways to manage or reduce your stress.

Identifying stress

We all begin to suffer from stress when we no longer feel able to cope with the pressures on us. We all have to face pressure some of the time – perhaps you have to complete an assignment and you have a tight deadline, or you have to go for a job interview. You feel under pressure and unable to cope with the situation – and then you suffer stress.

There are also other pressures which are quite the opposite of these. These are pressures where you don’t feel you’re being tested enough and you end up feeling bored or dissatisfied. This too can cause stress because you feel you’re not achieving your full potential.

In the next case study Jeanne talks about what has caused her stress and how she has learned to manage her stress.

Case study

Jeanne is 30. She came to Europe from Rwanda as a refugee eight years ago and has worked hard to rebuild a life in the UK for herself and her children. Now her children are at school she is starting an Open University degree with a view to retraining as a teacher.

‘Before I started the degree course I found the fact that I didn’t have any career prospects very frustrating. Although I was very busy with the children when they were small, I had always planned to be a teacher and I had just started my teacher training in Rwanda when we had to escape. It was stressful not knowing whether I would ever catch up and get qualified here.

Now I have finally realised my dream of doing a degree course here and I am finding that stressful too! It’s hard to make sure the children have enough attention but at the same time find time to study and do my assignments.

Friends have been really helpful though and I find that as long as I am really organised with my time when the children are at school, I can manage the studying without feeling under so much pressure I can’t cope. I make sure I take time off during the school holidays otherwise I do get really stressed.’

Think about how you know you are stressed in the next activity.

Activity 1

Tick any of the following statements that apply to you.

- I feel frightened and nervous about meeting certain people. ☐
- I have no enthusiasm to do things which I normally like doing. ☐
- I can’t concentrate on things and often daydream. ☐
- I feel I’m not as good as other people are at doing a number of things. ☐
- I’ve been suffering from lots of minor illnesses like colds and flu. ☐
- I feel tired a lot of the time. ☐
- I seem to be accident prone. ☐
- I’m not sleeping and often wake up early. ☐
- I eat too much or I’ve lost my appetite. ☐
- I worry all the time about my assignments. ☐

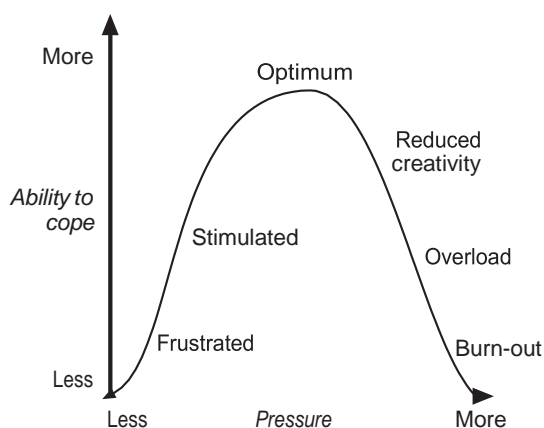
Feedback

If you ticked three or more of these statements you could be suffering from stress. Read on and find out how you may be able to relieve it.

If you didn't tick any statements it looks as though you're not suffering from stress at the moment – but you need to know what the warning signs are and what to do about stress if you start to suffer from it. Read on anyway.

.....

The graph below illustrates the relationship between pressure and the ability to cope. If you start at the 'frustrated' point on the curve, you're not under much pressure but you still find it difficult to cope. Higher up at the 'stimulated' point, you're under more pressure but are still able to cope well. At the top of the curve you are receiving the right amount of pressure and working at your very best. After that it's downhill. Too much pressure and you are less creative. More pressure still and you face overload – you can't cope very well. Down at the bottom at 'burn-out' you're under far too much pressure and are basically unable to do anything at all.



We all need the right amount of pressure to be at our peak – the optimum – and this will vary from one person to the next. The important thing is to be able to see the warning signs when we are getting too stressed and to be able to do something about it.

Ways of managing stress

There are a number of things you can do to manage stress or reduce it, and everyone has their own way, but you might find these techniques especially helpful:

- ▶ managing your time
- ▶ sharing a problem
- ▶ relaxing.

We will look at each of these next.

Good time management

A common cause of stress is feeling that you have too much to do in too short a time. So, managing your time more effectively is a good way to reduce stress. Here are some simple things you can do to organise yourself so that you don't feel as if you're always racing against time:

- ▶ Make a list of what you have to do at the beginning of each day and as you do them tick them off. Be realistic.
- ▶ Allow time to deal with any unexpected things.
- ▶ Prioritise what you have to do so that you do the most important things first.
- ▶ Do one task at a time rather than interrupt one task to start something else.
- ▶ If you have a meeting or interview, write down in advance what you want to say or discuss.
- ▶ If you have an important telephone call to make, make a list in advance of what you need to say or ask.
- ▶ If you receive lots of emails, prioritise them rather than trying to answer them as soon as and in the order in which they arrive.
- ▶ Don't put off things that are difficult or that you don't like doing – either deal with them or at least make a plan of how you will tackle them.
- ▶ Make sure you understand instructions straight away so, for example, you don't have to go back to your tutor or a colleague to ask them what you are meant to be doing.

Sharing a problem

Often when people are under stress, they stop talking about themselves and their problems with other people. Unfortunately, some of us find it easier to talk about ourselves when we are happy and confident.

When we are suffering from stress one way to manage or reduce it is to talk to others. This is another way to put things into perspective and it might result in a solution to your problem. Knowing that other people have similar problems may also make you feel more positive about yourself and your ability to cope. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 2

Who could you talk to when you feel stressed about the amount of work you have to do?

Who could you talk to when you're lacking in the confidence you need to do a certain task?

Feedback

If you have found this difficult to do, you probably need to work on your relationship with your tutor, family, friends or colleagues. Most people are happy to help others with their problems and to make suggestions, particularly if they know that they can expect to receive some support in return.

A good idea is to have a 'study buddy' – someone like a fellow student or a colleague who you can talk to about your progress, your difficulties, your worries, etc. You might be able to find someone on a website support group. Choosing someone who is going through the same thing as you can help to put matters in perspective and to find solutions to problems.

How do you like to relax?

Knowing how to relax can really help when you are getting stressed. Everyone has their own way of relaxing. Think about yours in the next activity.

Activity 3

Think about how you like to relax. Do you read a magazine or newspaper, take the dog for a walk, go for a swim, chat to a friend on the phone? Make a list below of five or more ways that you like to relax.

Feedback

It can be very useful to know how you relax when you are stressed. Even if you feel you are too busy to find the time to relax you should stop, even if only for 10 minutes. Having a short break will put you in a better position to complete the job in hand. If you are just feeling low, doing something you enjoy for a short while can help to raise your spirits and keep you going. There is more on staying motivated in Topic 7: Setting goals and Topic 8: Being realistic.

Key points

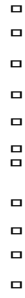
- ▶ Knowing when you are too stressed is essential.
- ▶ Being able to manage or reduce stress is important.
- ▶ Everyone has their own way of managing or reducing stress but good time management, sharing a problem, and relaxing are all important methods.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 25, make a note of:

- ▶ what makes you stressed
- ▶ how you know you are stressed
- ▶ how you plan to manage or reduce your stress.

26



Reflecting on what you learn

Introduction

Taking a little time to reflect on what you learn is one of the most important ways of making sure you benefit from your learning. It can help you in several ways.

- ▶ It gives you a chance to think about how you learned – this means you can weigh up what worked well and use this in the future.
- ▶ It helps you to remember what you learned.
- ▶ It gives you time to plan your next steps.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ take time to reflect on what you have learned.

Developing reflection skills

Reflective learning means thinking about:

- ▶ what you have experienced and why it was significant
- ▶ what you did or didn't do
- ▶ what you learned as a result of that experience
- ▶ what actions you plan to take as a result.

Research suggests that people develop reflection skills all the time. In the early stages, most people need to make time when they consciously reflect on what they have just achieved – this is called 'reflection on action'. As they become more experienced at it, they are able to reflect on things while they are happening – this is called 'reflection in action'.

In the case study below Andrew talks about how he became a more reflective learner.

Case study

Andrew is 35. He has been working for a small engineering firm for 15 years and has recently started a course in Communication Skills, with a view to promotion to management.

‘At first I found distance learning really difficult because I was expecting someone to tell me what to do. It’s a while since I’ve done any studying and then it was at school where you had to do what you were told. When it came to studying on my own, I found I didn’t have the confidence in myself and I was constantly checking back with my tutor to see whether I was on the right track.

My tutor gave me lots of feedback and this helped me see how I could develop my own thoughts and views. He got me into the habit of reading through an assignment before I sent it off to him and really thinking about what I had learned and whether this was coming through in the assignment. It wasn’t easy at first but after a few months I realised it was becoming second nature.

Now I feel I am more reflective at work too. Whereas before I would just deal with each situation or problem in isolation, often reacting to situations without really thinking, now I try to think more carefully about what is happening and what has worked before, so that I can make more effective decisions. It has really changed the way I work with my team and my colleagues say they have noticed the difference.’

A good way to develop your reflective skills is to use a diary or learning log. This involves recording what you learn in terms of:

- ▶ the experience – a brief summary of what you did
- ▶ your reflection – what you feel you have learned from this
- ▶ actions – what you might do as a result.

Try this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Think about a recent experience that you feel you may have learned from. It could be something to do with your study, or something else in your work or home life.

Your experience – Begin by writing a short description of the experience. In the space below say what happened and what you did or didn't do. Then reflect on the experience and write down why you felt it was significant.

What you learned – Now explain what you think you learned from the experience and how you felt about it.

Actions you could take – Now note down any actions you could take as a result of your learning.

Feedback

You can use this approach to record and reflect on what you learn:

- ▶ *in your study*
- ▶ *at work*
- ▶ *in your home and family life.*

You may prefer to write your entries in a diary – or just to note down your reflections on sheets of paper as a ‘learning log’. This is an excellent way of becoming more reflective in your studies. The personal learning plan you are keeping as you work through this workbook is an example of this.

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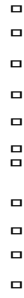
Key points

- ▶ Reflective learning means thinking about how you learned, remembering what you have learned, and planning your next steps.
- ▶ Reflective learning skills are essential for your studying.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 26, make a note of how you plan to be more reflective about your learning.

27



Checking your own learning

Introduction

Even if other people will be checking how you are getting on in your learning through some kind of formal assessment, it is very useful for you to keep in charge of your learning by checking your own progress.

In this topic you will look at who can help you check how you are doing in your learning by assessing your own work before it is more formally assessed.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ identify people who can comment on your work
- ▶ assess your own work.

Why check your work?

You may think that as long as your tutor or trainer is assessing your work, there is no need for you to check your progress as you go along. But there are lots of reasons why it's a good idea to assess your own work. Checking your own progress will:

- ▶ boost your learning by showing you where you are making progress
- ▶ highlight areas where you need more help or you need to do more learning
- ▶ help you make your learning more efficient
- ▶ help you to keep going if you feel overwhelmed by what you are learning
- ▶ show you how well you are likely to do in a formal assessment.

In the case study below Sofia talks about how checking her own progress helped her improve her grades.

Case study

Sofia is 23. She is doing two A levels in Psychology and Human Biology.

‘During my AS level year I found the feedback from my tutor really helpful. After working with the tutor for a year I began to be able to predict what my tutor would say about a piece of work and discovered that I could improve it myself before I sent it off.

This gave me lots of confidence because I realised that I was able to assess my own work, I didn’t have to rely on someone else to tell me what to do. Now I am in my A level year, my tutor still makes helpful comments on my work but there is much less reworking to do than there was in the first year. I feel I am able to work out for myself what I need to do to get a good grade in my coursework and assignments.’

Who can comment on your work?

Even if you are good at checking your own progress, it’s still useful to have other people’s insights into your work, and it’s a good idea to try to identify a few people you could ask to give this kind of help. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Tick any of the people below who could make helpful comments on your work.

- ▶ tutor or trainer ☐
- ▶ other learners ☐
- ▶ family ☐
- ▶ friends ☐
- ▶ colleagues ☐

Feedback

Your tutor or trainer will help and guide you in your work by making specific comments and suggestions and give you more general feedback on how you are doing. There is more on getting feedback in Topic 6: Making the most of your tutor.

Other learners, especially successful learners, might be able to give you comments on your learning techniques and methods or on the way in which you present your work. You might be able to contact other learners through your tutor or trainer or through a student website area.

Friends, family and colleagues may also be able to give you comments and guidance on your studies, but they may not have the background or understanding you need, depending on the subject you have chosen.

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How can you assess your own work?

Before your work is assessed by a tutor or trainer, it's a good idea to assess it for yourself first. Try to judge what your tutor will be looking for, and assess it using those criteria. For example, if you know your tutor will be looking for practical examples to illustrate the points you have made, make sure you have included examples for each point.

It's not always easy to be objective about your own work. Try imagining that you have never seen it before and that it is someone else's work.

Make a note of your own assessment. When you get the assessment from your tutor or trainer, compare what you said with their comments. If there are significant differences between your assessment and theirs, try to work out why this is. What did you do well and why? Where and how could you improve?

Activity 2

Take a piece of written work that has not yet been assessed, for example, a report or an essay. Use the checklist below to assess it yourself (some questions may not apply to your piece of work).

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Does it look attractive? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is it well laid out, with enough space for margins and for paragraphs? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you done what you were asked to do? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you covered all the relevant points? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you developed your ideas and presented a good argument? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you divided it up logically? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is there a good framework with an introduction, development and conclusion? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is it easy to read and follow? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Is any 'jargon' or difficult terminology explained? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| If you have done some research or background reading, have you referred to this? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do you back up your arguments with supporting evidence? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have you checked the spelling, grammar and punctuation? | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If there is a word count, have you kept within it?

☐

Write a short summary below of your assessment.

Feedback

When your piece of work has been assessed by your tutor or trainer, compare your assessment with theirs.

If their comments are similar to yours, you should be able to anticipate how your next written work will be assessed. Use this to help you change the way you tackle your next piece of work.

If their comments are different from yours, can you see why? If you need something to be explained further, ask your tutor or trainer for help. Use your tutor's or trainer's comments to influence your next piece of written work.

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Key points

- ▶ It is important to identify people who can comment on your work.
- ▶ Assessing your own work can help you to improve your learning by showing you where you are making progress, highlighting areas where you need more help, or you need to do more learning, and showing you how well you are likely to do in a formal assessment.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 27, make a note of:

- ▶ who you can ask to comment on your work as you progress
- ▶ how you plan to change the way you tackle your next piece of work as a result of your self-assessment.

Reading

28 Reasons for reading

Introduction

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ list the kinds of reading you do
- ▶ identify the purpose of your reading.

Why read?

During your study you may draw on various publications, including:

- ▶ textbooks
- ▶ reference books such as directories, dictionaries and manuals
- ▶ newspapers, magazines and journals
- ▶ literature, including novels, plays and poems
- ▶ information on the Internet
- ▶ other sources such as maps or historical information.

You are likely to consult different publications for different reasons. For example, you might want to look up a piece of information in a reference book, or you might use a textbook to find the answer to a question that is raised during your course. Your reasons for reading will make a big difference to how you read.

So, before you begin reading for your learning, ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Why am I reading this?
- ▶ What do I want to find out?

Your answers to these questions will:

- ▶ give you a clear purpose for your reading

- ▶ help you decide how to read
- ▶ help to make reading easier
- ▶ allow you to check whether your reading has been worthwhile.

Consider this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Note down below six things that you have read recently. If possible, include some items connected with your study. Beside each item, note down why you were reading it.

Item of reading	Your reason for reading it
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

Feedback

It's likely that you had a variety of reasons, which could have included:

- ▶ *obtaining a particular piece of information – for example, the price of an item in a catalogue, a list of hotels from the Internet, the meaning of a word in a dictionary, or the date of a historical event*
- ▶ *finding the answer to a question – for example, how to highlight a word on your computer, or which character gave a particular speech in a play you are studying*
- ▶ *gaining more detailed information – for example, the day's news on teletext, or a list of factors affecting bacterial growth*
- ▶ *trying to understand something – for example, a scientific theory or the reasons why the world went to war in 1914*
- ▶ *pleasure – for example, a novel, poem or autobiography.*

Your reason for reading will affect the way you read. For example, you might read a novel from cover to cover, you might look for particular articles in a newspaper, or you might just look for one word in a dictionary.

You may also want to work through Topic 30: Different types of reading.

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Key points

- ▶ Your reasons for reading will affect the way in which you read.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 28, write down:

- ▶ the reading tasks you need to do over the next few weeks
- ▶ how you plan to approach the reading tasks – what kind of reading you will be doing.

29

Reading faster

Introduction

This topic looks at how to improve your reading speed. Improving your reading in this way can make a big difference to your learning and to your confidence in tackling large amounts of printed material.

In fact, many people who feel they read slowly are actually reading ineffectively. For example, they may read right through a book without concentrating on the parts that matter.

You may also want to work through Topic 30: *Different kinds of reading* and Topic 31: *Skimming and scanning*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ find out how fast you read
- ▶ identify things which slow your reading down
- ▶ improve your reading speed without losing understanding.

Working out your reading speed

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how his reading speed is holding him back.

Case study

Leonard is 58 and recently took early retirement. He has started doing an A Level in English Literature but is finding the amount of reading hard going.

‘Until I started this A Level I hadn’t realised how slowly I read. I know it takes me a long time to read a novel and my wife gets through about four to my one, but I am surprised how much time it is taking me to get through the set texts. I will have to find ways of speeding up if I am to get through the course.’

Like Leonard, if you want to improve your reading speed, you need to know first how quickly you read. It can be difficult to get a reliable indication of the speed at which you read. For example, if the material is familiar, the vocabulary is simple, and/or if you are interested in what you are reading, you tend to read faster. However, the next activity will give you a rough guide to how fast you read.

Activity 1

1. Find a passage of familiar material to read.
2. Read from the start at your normal speed (not aloud) for one minute. Mark where you finish.
3. Count the number of words you have read. This is the number of words per minute (wpm) that you have read.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3, starting at different points.

Feedback

If your reading speed is above 200 words per minute, you may not need to improve your reading speed. However, you may want to read through Topic 31: Skimming and scanning to find ways to improve your reading generally.

If your reading speed is below 200 words per minute, you may be able to increase it by:

- ▶ *deciding on your purpose before you start and concentrating on this*
- ▶ *always skimming new material and scanning for key words and ideas*
- ▶ *training your eyes to see more in each eye movement – instead of moving them along each line of print, concentrate on the centre of each line*
- ▶ *not looking back after you have read a difficult sentence – keep going and see if the meaning becomes clearer and only go back when you have finished the section (see below)*

- *avoiding mouthing the words – the way to overcome this is to read faster than you can speak (see below).*
-

It can help to look closely at how you read so that you can identify ways to improve your speed and your reading generally. Try this in the next activity.

.....

Activity 2

Look through the characteristics listed below and put a tick in a box for each one.

Characteristic	I DO THIS,	I SOMETIMES DO THIS	I NEVER DO THIS
1. Mouthing words silently as you read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Reading word-by-word rather than taking in groups of words	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Going back over words, even though you haven't read them accurately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Regularly losing your place in the text	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Struggling to read something that is too difficult because you feel you have to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Stopping at unfamiliar words and terms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feedback

If you ticked 'I do this' or 'I sometimes do this', here are some ideas on how to improve your reading.

- When you mouth words you can read only as fast as you speak, and this will slow you down a lot. Try to stop mouthing words and you may find that your reading speed will increase. Use a pointer or pen to train your eyes to follow the line and increase your speed.*
- Words fit together in groups, so you may find that taking in groups of words will increase your ability to understand, as well as increasing your speed. Practise taking in more words with each eye movement and, instead of moving your eyes along each line of print, try concentrating on the centre of each line. Even if you don't understand every word, you will probably be able to get the gist of the meaning with the words you have taken in.*

3. *When you come across a difficult word or sentence, it is often tempting to go back immediately and puzzle over it. But if you keep going, you often get more information later on which makes things clearer and helps you work out what you had difficulty with.*
 4. *Losing your place tends to happen when you lose the sense of what you are reading. Slow readers tend to do this more often and so find understanding even more difficult. If this is a problem, you could try putting a ruler or some sort of guide under each line to help you keep your place. However, this will make it more difficult for you to increase your speed by taking in groups of words and reading on quickly. Try to do without the ruler when you feel you are getting over the problem of losing your place.*
 5. *If something is too difficult for you, stop and get advice from your tutor. There may be something easier you can read instead or some background reading you need to do to help you understand. There will almost certainly be a solution to the problem so make sure you ask your tutor.*
-

Key points

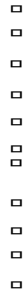
- ▶ Although reading effectively is more important than reading quickly, increasing your reading speed can help you learn more effectively.
- ▶ Identify the things that are slowing your reading down and work on those.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 29, write down:

- ▶ your current reading speed
- ▶ any problems you have identified that are slowing down your reading
- ▶ if your reading speed is too slow, how you plan to improve it.

30



Different types of reading

Introduction

This topic looks at different types of reading:

- ▶ reading to understand and remember
- ▶ reading instructions
- ▶ reading online.

You may also want to work through Topic 29: *Reading faster* and Topic 31: *Skimming and scanning*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ read to understand and remember
- ▶ read instructions
- ▶ read online.

Reading to understand and remember

Start by reading about how one learner developed different ways of reading for different types of text.

Case study

Becky is 21 and has just started two A levels – Human Biology and Geography. Although they are both practical subjects she describes here how she has developed different ways of reading for different purposes.

‘It’s only since I’ve started doing the A levels from home that I’ve realised that there are different ways of reading. I think that when I was at school I tried to read everything I was given in depth and of course I couldn’t cope with the amount of information I was taking in.

Before I started my A levels my tutor talked to me about this and she said that I would have to be more selective, reading some textbooks in detail but just skimming through other information or extracting what I needed in order to do an experiment or complete an assignment. I wish someone had told me about this when I was at school. I might have done better at my A levels first time round.’

You will sometimes need to understand and appreciate each and every point being made and this will involve you in a ‘detailed’ or ‘close’ read. To do this, you can use a technique called **SQ3R**. Don’t be put off by the title – it is simply short for:

- ▶ **S**urvey
- ▶ **Q**uestion
- ▶ **R**ead
- ▶ **R**ecite
- ▶ **R**ewind.

This is a simple and useful method of approaching a passage, such as a chapter of a book, which you want to study and master. The idea is that your reading of the material is broken down into five stages, as explained below.

Survey

This is a bit like skimming (Topic 31: *Skimming and scanning*). You look at:

- ▶ the title, author, date of first publication and date of this edition, to check that it is relevant to you and up to date
- ▶ the contents and chapter headings to identify which parts to concentrate on

- ▶ the introduction, to understand the author's intention in writing the publication
- ▶ the index and bibliography.

Question

Before you start a detailed read of all or part of the publication, you need to ask yourself what you expect to gain from it. Why are you reading it? What points are you particularly interested in? These sorts of questions ensure that you read with purpose. You might even ask 'Is it worth reading?' To answer this, you could read its first and last paragraphs, then its first and last chapters or sections. This should help you decide whether it is worth studying.

Read

Begin by getting a clear picture of what the material is about. You may wish to read a section at least twice at a fair speed. First ask yourself:

- ▶ What is the basic idea in each paragraph?
- ▶ Do you understand everything the author is saying?

Then look at the detail:

- ▶ Which parts are factual? Are all the facts you need provided?
- ▶ Which parts give the author's ideas? What evidence does the author give to back up his or her ideas?
- ▶ What points do any diagrams or figures illustrate?

Then make an overall judgement about the material.

- ▶ Is it convincing?
- ▶ Are there alternative ideas which you think are better than this author's ideas?

You will notice that at the beginning of the read stage, you are simply trying to grasp what the author says, to understand the arguments. Only when you have understood the author's ideas can you start to assess them and read more critically. If you criticise the ideas too soon, you may not take in everything the author has to say.

Recite

This stage may follow the read stage for the whole material, or if the material is rather lengthy or complex, it may follow the read stage for different sections of the material.

The recite stage involves trying to recall all the main ideas in the section you've just read. You may like to write them down in note form. See Topic 13: *Making notes on paper* and Topic 14: *Making notes online* for more on making notes.

Review

This stage follows the recall stage and involves looking back over the material to check that your recall was correct. Make a note of any important points which you failed to recall, or which you wrongly recalled.

Activity 1

Try practising the SQ3R technique on a passage from something you are studying. It could be a chapter from a book, an article from a magazine, or information from a website. Alternatively, you could use the magazine article from the next page.

Survey the passage.

Question – write down below the questions you hope to be able to answer by reading the passage.

Read the passage.

Recite (recall) – jot down below the answers to your questions.

Review what you have jotted down by referring back to your questions. Have you understood the passage correctly? Have you missed out any important points?

Feedback

We hope you have found the SQ3R technique made your reading quicker and more effective. Although this kind of approach can seem time-consuming, it does pay off in the end by ensuring that you understand what you read and

by helping you to remember it. If you found this technique helpful, try using it next time you are reading information for your course. Talk to your tutor if you had any problems in using this technique.

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Reading instructions

When you are sitting an examination or doing an assessment, it is particularly important that you read the instructions you are given. Many people do not do themselves justice when they are being assessed simply because they misread the question or instructions. They may write a good answer, but if it isn't the answer to the question being asked, it won't count towards their marks.

Instructions must be read with care. To do this, you need to be able to pick out the 'key words' in them. Key words are usually verbs, that is, words that instruct you to 'do' something.

.....

Activity 2

Underline the key words in the following sentences which give you directions or tell you what to do.

- ▶ Push to open.
- ▶ Describe the events leading to the accident.
- ▶ Justify your application for this grant.
- ▶ With reference to this article, explain what the author means by the phrase 'only connect'.

Feedback

'Push', 'describe', 'justify' and 'explain' are all key words—they tell you what to do and how to do it. In the last sentence, you are asked not only to explain but also to refer to the article that has been provided. In that situation, it wouldn't be enough to simply explain what you thought the author meant—you would also need to relate your answer to the article.

When you are reading instructions or questions you have to follow, you may find it helpful to underline the key words so that you are clear about what you have to do. It is particularly important to note the key words in an essay-type question so that you are clear about what you are being asked to do.

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It is amazing how easy it is to misread, ignore or misunderstand quite simple instructions. You therefore need to train yourself to read them very carefully. Try this in the next activity.

Activity 3

Try reading and following the directions below. Read them all through before you start.

1. Write your full name in the space below.
2. Write your address, including the postcode if you know it, in the space below.
3. State your date of birth.
4. Explain what you did in your most recent placement.
5. Make sure you write everything in block capitals and write your date of birth in full without using numbers for the month.

Feedback

How many directions did you follow before you came to number 5? Many people will have started to actually carry out some of the directions – probably for one of the following reasons:

- ▶ *they chose to ignore the instruction to read all the directions first because they didn't think it was important*
- ▶ *they wanted to save time*
- ▶ *they weren't reading carefully enough to see it.*

We hope this activity has highlighted how not reading and following instructions carefully can result in wasted time and effort.

Reading online

Many online courses also involve a certain amount of off-screen reading. Some, in fact, have very little learning material online, and rely instead on conventional resources for learning while using the PC as a tool for course

communication. But even a mixed media course is likely to involve a certain amount of reading text on screen. Many learners find this a challenge.

Activity 4

How far does reading text on screen present a challenge to you?

Read the following statements and tick one of the boxes beside it to show how far you agree or disagree.

	strongly agree	agree	disagree	strongly disagree
Reading text on screen gives me a headache.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often can't read text on screen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'd rather print text off than read it on screen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading text on screen tends to strain my eyes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I find it hard to concentrate when looking at text on screen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feedback

If you ticked 'strongly agree' one or more times, or 'agree' two or more times, you probably feel very sceptical about reading text on screen for any significant period. But sometimes it really is more convenient not to have to print material out. And online learning really can be a richer, more satisfying and more effective learning experience than a print alternative.

Here are some tips for making your reading on screen as pleasurable as possible.

- ▶ Work in short bursts – Breaking up your learning into short periods interspersed with breaks is even more important if you are reading on screen.
- ▶ Change your browser settings – Most internet browsers allow you to adjust the size of the text you see on screen. If one of your problems is that the text is too small to read, check your browser's Help or Instructions. In Internet Explorer you'll find a Text Zoom function under View, which enables you to adjust the size of text on your screen.

Note:

If you have a sight impairment, your PC or laptop may have a built-in screen-reader.

Key points

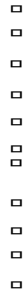
- ▶ Reading to understand involves a ‘detailed’ or ‘close’ read.
- ▶ Read instructions with care, especially key words.
- ▶ Reading on screen can be valuable and satisfying but requires certain techniques.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 30, write down:

- ▶ any reading tasks over the next few weeks where you will have to do some detailed reading, read instructions or read on screen
- ▶ how you will approach these tasks differently as a result of working through this topic.

31



Skimming and scanning

Introduction

This topic looks at two important reading techniques – skimming and scanning. Both these techniques will be invaluable to your study as they allow you to quickly assess material and extract information without having to do a detailed read, if this is not needed. To study efficiently you need to be able to switch from one method of reading to another, so for example, you can search for a specific item in a book by scanning, and then assess a section quickly by skimming.

Topic 30: *Different types of reading* looks at other reading techniques.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ learn to skim read
- ▶ learn to scan.

Skimming

Skimming involves looking quickly through some text and reading only things like contents, headings, introductions and conclusions. It is a quick and efficient way of familiarising yourself with a publication. It is particularly useful if you want to check whether material is relevant or for finding certain information or ideas quickly. For example, you might skim a newspaper to find an article you want to read, or a textbook to locate a chapter.

Start by reading the next case study which shows how helpful it is to be able to skim read.

Case study

Lorraine works full time in a pre-school and is doing an A level in Psychology. She talks here about how skim reading helped her make the most of her limited study time.

‘Because I work full time and I also have my elderly parents to care for, I can’t afford to waste any valuable study time in the evenings and at weekends. If I need to do any background reading in a textbook or on the Internet I quickly skim read it first to see if it has what I need for my assignment and then I can decide whether to use it or not. I think this will have saved me hours of study time by the end of my course.’

The next activity will help you to practise skimming.

Activity 1

Choose a book that you need to use for your course. Spend up to 10 minutes skimming it, looking at:

- ▶ details of the author
- ▶ contents list
- ▶ introduction and summary
- ▶ headings and sub-headings
- ▶ first and last paragraphs of each section or chapter
- ▶ charts, diagrams and illustrations.

Make a note below of what you have found out about the book. Will it be helpful for your course? If so, which sections of it will be particularly useful?

Feedback

You may have been surprised by how much you can find out from a book in 10 minutes. Your skim should have given you a good idea of what each section or chapter is about. The author details will have given you information about

the author's background and approach. The contents, introductions and summaries will have highlighted what you are likely to get out of each section or chapter, and the headings will have shown you what each section or chapter covers.

After skimming material in this way you have three choices:

- ▶ *decide that the book is not suitable and you will not read it*
 - ▶ *decide that some sections or chapters are suitable*
 - ▶ *decide that you need to read all of it.*
-

Scanning

Another way of reading is to scan material. This means looking through material for a particular piece of information. For example, you may have to scan textbooks or periodicals for information for your course.

Effective scanning involves:

- ▶ using references – the contents page, and the index, if the book has one, will help you find something quickly
- ▶ moving round the book quickly – just flicking through the book, looking at headings and sub-headings, may help you locate the information you need
- ▶ using your experience – you probably know that the index of a book is usually at the back and that the contents list is at the front.

Try practising your scanning in the next activity.

Activity 2

Read through the passage below and then answer the questions.

Op-ting to go abroad

With one in ten people in British hospitals contracting some form of MRSA 'superbug', it is perhaps unsurprising that many people are now opting to go abroad for routine operations – particularly when treatment costs can be much lower, writes Miles Brignall.

Opinions are divided on which countries offer the cheapest operations but most agree the quality of care – especially on the continent – is excellent.

Germany, France and Belgium all offer cheaper rates than the UK, although it depends on what you are having done. Helen McGrevy, private patients co-ordinator at Medibroker, which finds treatment abroad for UK patients, says German hospitals offer very good value for those looking for hip and knee replacements.

'We reckon that our customers having a hip replacement can save between £1,000 and £2,000 by going abroad, but there are also other benefits. Not only are the chances of picking up an infection much lower, but the after care is so much better.

Patients can spend up to 14 days in the hospital during which they are given intensive physiotherapy. The care is excellent and we've had no problems reported from people once they have returned home,' she says.

Those going abroad need to have seen a consultant and procedure prescribed. There is no need to translate notes into the local language, she says, but it should be noted that transport costs have to be added to all quoted prices.

How many people in British hospitals contract some form of MRSA?

Which European countries offer cheaper rates for operations than the UK?

How long do patients need to spend in hospital abroad?

Feedback

You shouldn't have needed to read the whole article to find out the answers to the questions.

When you are scanning, it's a good idea to read through any questions you are going to be asked about the reading before you start – even if the questions are at the end of the passage. Doing this prepares your mind to take only relevant information from the passage. In this activity, the questions gave you a specific purpose for your reading. Knowing your purpose for reading also makes it easier to choose the type of reading you need to do.

Key points

- ▶ Skimming and scanning are two helpful reading techniques that can speed up your reading and help you read more effectively.

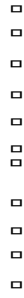
Personal learning plan

Under Topic 31, write down:

- ▶ any reading tasks over the next few weeks where you plan to use the skimming or scanning techniques.

Writing

32



Deciding what you want to write

Introduction

Most of us have to write things as part of our work or learning. This topic looks at deciding what you need to write. Some kinds of writing have particular requirements and conventions, so it is very important to be clear about exactly what you will be asked to do. Deciding what you are going to write is the first step in the writing process. Other topics look at the rest of the writing process.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- decide what you need to write.

What will you write?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how he works out what he is going to write.

Case study

Jason is 25 and is doing a distance learning course in assertiveness. He has to write three assignments for the course.

‘You have a choice of essay title for each of the assignments. For the first one, I rushed into it and just chose the one I thought I’d be able to do most easily and in the least time. But it was actually much more difficult to write than I thought because it covered aspects of the course I was least interested in. So for the second one I really thought about which title to choose, and chose one I was interested in. I enjoyed doing the research for it and got a top mark.’

Traditionally, most student writing involved essays. You may have written some essays for your own learning. But it is also possible that you will need to do other kinds of writing. These could include:

- ▶ emails or letters
- ▶ reports – of experiments, talks or visits
- ▶ projects
- ▶ assignments or coursework.

You will probably be writing for more than one person. For example, your notes may just be for yourself, or for other learners. An essay or assignment may be for your tutor or an examiner. A report might be for someone at work. It is very important to be clear about who the reader or readers will be and to know that they will be able to read, understand and, if necessary, act on what you write.

Sometimes there may be more than one type of reader and you will need to bear that in mind – different people will look for different things. For example, examiners will have clear guidelines about what they must look for in written work and your tutor should be able to brief you about these. Other people will look for more general points. For example, your manager may be looking to see how clearly you are able to summarise something in writing.

The next activity asks you to think about what you may have to write in your learning. If you are not sure about what your writing may involve, ask your tutor for guidance. If necessary, just look through the activity, comment quickly now and come back to it later.

Activity 1

First, look through the following list and tick the kinds of writing you may have to do in your learning.

Type of writing		Type of writing	
notes	<input type="checkbox"/>	emails	<input type="checkbox"/>
letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	projects	<input type="checkbox"/>
reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>
essays	<input type="checkbox"/>	summaries	<input type="checkbox"/>
exams	<input type="checkbox"/>	coursework	<input type="checkbox"/>
projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	other:	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feedback

It is important to identify what type of writing you are going to do.

.....

Activity 2

Note down each kind of writing you ticked in the previous activity and decide who will read it.

Then, note down any special features of each kind of writing – for example, whether you should use certain headings, whether you should write in sentences and paragraphs or whether notes will be acceptable. If you are not sure, check with your tutor. Continue on a separate piece of paper if necessary.

Type of writing	Who will read it?	Any special features

Feedback

We hope this activity has helped you to get clear in your mind what you are going to write and who it is for.

To complete the special features column, you may have had to think about these style and presentation points:

- ▶ *Should you write in note form or sentences and paragraphs?*
- ▶ *Should you use an informal style (e.g. 'don't', 'I'm') or a formal style (e.g. 'do not', 'I am')?*
- ▶ *Should you use an impersonal style (e.g. 'It could be argued that') or a personal style ('I feel that')?*
- ▶ *Should you use a computer or do you need to write by hand?*
- ▶ *Should you write or print on one or both sides of the paper?*
- ▶ *Should you use single or double spacing? (Double spacing is helpful if someone else is going to write comments on your piece of writing.)*
- ▶ *Where should you put details like your name and the title?*

If you are writing something for your course, you can check these details by looking at your syllabus or past papers, or by asking your tutor.

.....

Key points

- ▶ It is important to know what you need to write and who it is for.
- ▶ You may need to write in a certain format or style if there are special requirements or conventions.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 32, write down:

- ▶ what you plan to write next for your course
- ▶ who it is for
- ▶ any special features you need to include.

33 Planning your writing

Introduction

Topic 32: *Deciding what you want to write* looked at considering what to write, who it is for and any special features required. In this topic you will look at preparing a plan for your writing, the next stage in the writing process. For formal writing such as essays and assignments and coursework, it is essential to have a plan so that your work is organised, clear and easy to follow.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- plan your writing.

Preparing a plan

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how she plans her essays.

Case study

Maria is 51 and she works in the human resources department of a large multinational corporation. Her company is paying for her to do an A level in Law by distance learning.

‘For my job I have to write a lot of reports and I am used to having to plan those. I start by making a list of the key points I want to cover, then I turn those into the main headings. Then I list the key points under each heading and turn those into a sentence or paragraph each. Then I write the introduction and conclusion. I have found this planning process works really well when it comes to planning my essays for my A level, and also for the exams. My tutor has commented on how well thought out and structured my work is, so it must be OK.’

A plan is a series of headings with an idea or two under each heading. The headings should do no more than cover the points you intend to write about.

The main point of producing a plan is to establish a logical order for what you want to write. There will probably be more than one order which you can consider when you are planning but the order you choose must make sense and be clear to the reader.

One way of preparing a plan is to look at the information and material you have collected in preparation for your essay and to decide on the main points you want to cover. For example, a plan for an essay on looking after babies and toddlers could look like this.

Introduction

Main points to cover

Section 1: Physical care

Skin and hair care

Sleep and rest

Exercise and fresh air

Section 2: Toilet training

Developmental stages

Methods of toilet training

Personal hygiene

Section 3: Mealtimes

Eating behaviour

Healthy eating

Social side of mealtimes

Summary

Key points covered

Conclusion

References

Activity 1

Think about a piece of writing you are going to have to do in the near future. It could be for your work, your course or something else. In the space below write a plan for your writing.

Try using your plan to complete your piece of writing and see how well it worked. If part of the plan didn't work when you came to do the actual writing, adjust the plan now.

Feedback

You can use your plan as a template for future planning. If planning seems laborious and time-consuming at first, don't worry. You will find it saves you lots of time in the long run and as you become familiar with it, it will become second nature.

Key points

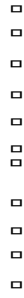
- ▶ It is important to plan what you are going to write before you start.
- ▶ Planning what you write helps you to organise your thoughts and write clearly.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 33, write down:

- ▶ the headings you will use for a plan for your next piece of writing.

34



Improving your spelling

Introduction

This topic is for anyone who has difficulties in spelling. The activities will help you analyse why you make certain spelling mistakes and give you practice at using different methods designed to help you overcome spelling problems. Spelling correctly may be important for your coursework, assignments and exam answers. If you make lots of spelling mistakes the tutor or examiner may not be able to understand what you have written, and your work may look badly presented.

You may be thinking that nowadays you don't actually need to know how to spell because computers have spell-checkers. However, these do have some disadvantages – we will look at these later in the topic.

You may also want to work through Topic 35: *Improving your punctuation*, Topic 37: *Drafting*, and Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ understand why you make spelling mistakes
- ▶ use different methods to improve your spelling.

What do you think about spelling?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how he identified his spelling weaknesses and worked on overcoming them.

Case study

Jason is 24 and is serving a prison sentence for armed robbery.

‘I never did well at school because I just couldn’t keep up.

The teachers wrote me off as trouble early on and no one ever gave me the help I needed. I drifted into drugs and then into crime to pay for the drugs. That’s how I ended up here.

They have a basic skills tutor here and she gave me the confidence to start doing some basic courses. She was the one who organised the test for dyslexia and now they say I am mildly dyslexic, that’s why I could never spell. I wish they’d known that when I was at school – I might have got some help and done better. Anyway, the tutor is helping me get over this by showing me some simple strategies for spelling and it’s really helping. I’m going to try to do a GCSE in English in the Autumn.’

It is useful to start by thinking about how you feel about spelling. Your beliefs about spelling may well be mistaken and may actually be making things harder for you. Consider this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Think about how you feel about spelling. Tick true or false for each of the following statements.

	TRUE / FALSE	
1. Clever people spell well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. If you pronounce words properly you’ll be able to spell.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Using a dictionary is cheating.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The more you read the better your spelling gets.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Just teach me all the rules and I’ll be fine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Spelling doesn’t matter as long as your writing can be understood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. As I can’t spell how can I use a dictionary anyway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I’ll never make a good speller.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. If you’re stuck on a word all you need to do is to say it aloud.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. People who make spelling mistakes are careless and lazy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feedback

1. *False – Being clever has very little to do with spelling well. Many people who you would consider to be clever have problems with their spelling.*
 2. *False – This might be the case with some English words, but unfortunately there are a great many words where pronouncing them doesn't help to spell them because certain letters are not heard at all. As we all speak with some kind of accent we all pronounce words differently.*
 3. *False – Using a dictionary is a very good idea. We all have doubts about how a word is spelt and need to check up.*
 4. *True – This is definitely the case as long as the spelling in what you're reading is correct! If you read a lot you'll see words over and over again, and eventually you'll be able to write them yourself correctly without thinking.*
 5. *False – There are certain rules for spelling English words, but many words don't follow a particular rule. So, you just have to learn them or familiarise yourself with them.*
 6. *False – Spelling does matter as wrong spellings make reading much slower and more difficult to understand. People get frustrated reading wrongly spelt words and may give up altogether. Bad spelling also gives a poor impression of your work and may prejudice your chances in, for example, job applications.*
 7. *False – You can use a dictionary even if you can't spell. It just might take you a bit longer to find the word. If you can't find the word straight away, think carefully of other ways that it could be spelt – or find a bigger dictionary.*
 8. *False – There are many ways that you can improve your spelling – you'll find out about them later in this topic. As we said above, reading more will also help you to improve.*
 9. *False – This does apply to some words but not all of them. Consider a word like 'through'. Saying it aloud would result in spelling it 'thru'. So, don't rely on this method! One commonly misspelt word is 'necessary' because we pronounce it 'nessessary' – and even if you know that it takes a 'c' you may forget how many 'c's and 's's there are in it and where they go.*
 10. *False – Not necessarily. Many people make mistakes because they're in a hurry and don't have time to check through what they've written. Others may spell a word wrong over and over again without realising because no one has ever pointed it out to them.*
-

What do you get wrong?

There are a number of reasons why we spell words incorrectly. You may discover that when you come to look closely at those words you find difficult, you frequently make the same kind of mistake. If you can become aware of why you are making mistakes, you should find it easier to correct them.

Activity 2

Here is a list of words that have been spelt wrongly. Find the correct spelling for each word and write it in the second column. The reason for the mistake is given in the final column – this may help you to find the correct spelling.

Misspelt word	Correct spelling	Reason for incorrect spelling
misshun		spelt like it sounds
bakeing		rule not known
corse		letter missed out
Arpil		letters out of order
somefing		sounds mixed up

Feedback

Here are the words spelt correctly.

<i>Misspelt word</i>	<i>Correct spelling</i>	<i>Reason for incorrect spelling</i>
<i>misshun</i>	<i>mission</i>	<i>spelt like it sounds</i>
<i>bakeing</i>	<i>baking</i>	<i>rule not known</i>
<i>corse</i>	<i>course</i>	<i>letter missed out</i>
<i>Arpil</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>letters out of order</i>
<i>somefing</i>	<i>something</i>	<i>sounds mixed up</i>

You may find that when you make spelling mistakes it is for these same reasons. Or you may just have problems with one group. For example, you often miss letters out, but you don't make the other kinds of mistakes.

The next activity will help you to analyse the spelling mistakes you make most often.

.....

Activity 3

On a separate piece of paper, make a list of the words that you often (or always) spell wrongly – give the incorrect and correct version of each. Come up with about 10 to 20 words. Then put these words into one of the six columns below. The first column is for words that you don't think fit into any of the other five – think carefully before you put words in this column as there is usually a reason for a spelling mistake.

No rule applies	Rule not known	Spelt like it sounds	Sounds mixed up	Letters mixed up	Letters out of order

Feedback

This activity should have helped you to see where you are most often making spelling mistakes and why. Some of the columns might be empty because you don't make that type of error. Now you have worked out where you are going wrong with your spelling, you can begin to work out how you can correct these mistakes. The rest of this topic contains some ideas.

.....

Methods for improving spelling

There are a number of methods of improving your spelling. In the rest of this topic we will look at some of them:

- ▶ group patterns
- ▶ pronouncing the letters
- ▶ highlighting the letters.

Group patterns

Many people find it easier to learn how to spell difficult words if they put them into groups. This helps to break down a long list of words and make it more manageable.

The sort of groups you need to use are words that are spelt similarly and follow the same pattern of spelling. For example, these words follow the same pattern and can be put into a group together because they start with a silent 'k':

- ▶ knee
- ▶ knock
- ▶ knife.

Try doing this in the next activity.

.....

Activity 4

Here is a list of words that one student found difficult. Look for spelling patterns and in the space provided on the next page, divide them up into groups.

catch	admission	examination	enough
hard	nation	daughter	ignorant
rough	introduction	explosion	constant
instant	thought	television	though
taught	station	mission	infection
resistant	exploration	abundant	caught
discussion	match	tough	watch
naughty	yard	card	indication

Feedback

You should have sorted the words into these groups:

- ▶ words ending 'sion' – admission, television, mission, discussion
- ▶ words ending 'tion' – examination, nation, introduction, station, infection, exploration, indication
- ▶ words with 'ough' or 'augh' in them – enough, rough, though, thought, taught, caught, tough, naughty, daughter (note that these words are pronounced in different ways)
- ▶ words ending 'ant' – ignorant, constant, instant, resistant, abundant
- ▶ words ending 'atch' – catch, match, watch (again, note the different pronunciations)
- ▶ words ending 'ard' – hard, card, yard.

You might like to use this method to group and learn the list of spellings you drew up in the last activity.

.....

Pronouncing the letters

As we have said, some words are not spelt how they are pronounced, such as 'through', which would be spelt 'thru' if it was spelt as it is pronounced. (Sometimes it is, but this is only an abbreviation of the full spelling.) Other words which are spelt differently from how we say them include 'separate' (which we pronounce 'seperate') and secretary (which people often say as 'secetary').

However, there are some words where it does help to say them aloud and exaggerate the pronunciation to help you with the spelling. Take the word 'Wednesday'. If you pronounce each syllable carefully as in 'Wed nes day' you would spell it correctly.

Activity 5

Look back at your list of words that you often spell incorrectly. Are there any where exaggerating their pronunciation would help you to spell them correctly? If so, make a note of them below. If not, can you think of other words where this method would help you? Make a note of any below.

Feedback

This method will be helpful for words where the spelling isn't obvious, but you will need to concentrate on the full pronunciation, and make sure you are pronouncing the word correctly.

Highlighting the letters

Another method that you might find useful is highlighting the letters you find difficult with a highlighter pen. For example, if you get letters out of order in 'Arpil' instead of 'April', you could highlight the letters 'ri' in your spelling list. Likewise, if you spell 'corse' without the letter 'u' you could highlight the 'or'.

Activity 6

Think about your list of words that you often spell incorrectly. Are there any where you think this method of highlighting incorrect letters would help you? If so, make a note of them below and highlight the letters you often get wrong.

Feedback

If you find this method helpful, you might like to make a copy of your list to keep near your study area so that you can refer to it when you are writing essays, assignments or coursework for your course. You can add to your list as you come across other words where you often get a few letters wrong.

General spelling tips

Here are some more general tips on how you can improve your spelling.

- ▶ When you are writing something, keep a piece of rough paper at your side for trying out words until you find a spelling that looks right. This will stop you crossing out words and making a mess of your work.
- ▶ Write a draft copy of anything important and read it through looking out for spelling mistakes. This is a skill that you may have trouble with. If so, read through your copy more than once and look carefully for mistakes that you know you often make. Then copy it out neatly. This is covered in more detail in Topic 37: *Drafting* and Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting*.
- ▶ Use a dictionary if you're in any doubt. Get used to using one and searching for words.
- ▶ Practise writing as often as you can – write notes, letters, postcards and emails as well as coursework.
- ▶ Read a lot – not just books and magazines but also food packets, posters, advertisements on television and hoardings.

Spell checking

As we have mentioned, the spell-checking function on a computer is very useful but you cannot rely on it for your spelling. You may have spelt a word correctly but used it in the wrong context and the spell checker won't notice this for you. For example, a spell checker would not correct 'This from is fro him' as all the words are spelt correctly. Only you would be able to see that it should read 'This form is for him'. Or you may have written 'I don't need to reed much in my job' when you should have put 'I don't need to read much in my job'. The spell checker wouldn't be able to tell you that the spelling of 'reed' is wrong because 'reed' is also a word.

There are many other words that you might spell correctly but use wrongly, including:

- ▶ hear/here
- ▶ their/there
- ▶ plaice/place
- ▶ sight/site/cite
- ▶ where/ware
- ▶ know/no
- ▶ wrote/rote

- ▶ right/rite
- ▶ course/coarse
- ▶ band/banned.

Even if you are quite strong on spelling, it's easy to make mistakes in using these words:

- ▶ practice (noun)/practise (verb)
- ▶ effect (noun or verb)/affect (usually a verb)
- ▶ compliment/complement
- ▶ principle/principal.

Use a dictionary to look up the last two pairs of words if you are not sure what they mean.

Key points

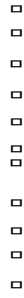
- ▶ Knowing why you make spelling mistakes can help you.
- ▶ There are different methods which can help you spell correctly.
- ▶ Spell checkers are useful, but you shouldn't rely on them for all your spelling.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 34, write down:

- ▶ the spellings you most often have difficulty with
- ▶ the methods you plan to use to improve your spelling.

35



Improving your punctuation

Introduction

This topic is for anyone who has problems with punctuation. The activities will help you analyse why you make certain punctuation mistakes and help you overcome your problems. Good punctuation may be important for your coursework, assignments and exam answers. If you make lots of punctuation mistakes the tutor or examiner may not be able to understand what you have written, and your work may look badly presented.

You may also want to work through Topic 34: *Improving your spelling*, Topic 37: *Drafting* and Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ understand the importance of correct punctuation
- ▶ identify why you make punctuation mistakes
- ▶ practise using correct punctuation.

Why bother with punctuation?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how her tutor helped her overcome her mental block about punctuation.

Case study

Louise is 25 and the mother of two small children. She hasn't worked since she left school but has recently started childminding and is now doing a distance learning course in childminding.

'When I was at school they never really explained about punctuation and it was always a bit hit and miss for me. I never quite knew what apostrophes were or where to put them and didn't have any confidence.

So when I decided to do this course I was nervous about writing the assignments. My tutor made contact with me at the beginning and asked me if I had any concerns or worries and I told her that I was worried about the writing I would have to do. She told me not to worry that she would have a check through my assignments and give me feedback on how they were written including things like spelling and punctuation. She said to try to keep it simple so that I was just using basic punctuation like full stops and commas, and to work up from there. She also recommended a couple of good books on punctuation that I can refer to if I need to.'

There are two main reasons why we punctuate what we write:

- ▶ to make what we've written easier to read
- ▶ to prevent the reader misunderstanding what we've written.

Consider this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Read the following text from a postcard. It hasn't been punctuated at all. How easy to understand is it? Go through it again and insert any punctuation that you think makes it easier to follow.

dear amina and leroy

we are having an enjoyable holiday doing as little as possible the hotel is beautiful although our room looks on to the kitchens but it doesn't matter as we are spending most of our time on the beach or in the pool the weather has been marvellous temperatures of over 30 degrees weve been swimming for an hour or more every morning and are getting very fit see you soon

love sally and winston

Feedback

Although you would probably have been able to understand the postcard eventually, it would have been much easier if there had been some punctuation.

This is how you could punctuate it. Read it through and see where we have inserted punctuation and how much easier it is to read. You may have punctuated it slightly differently – perhaps adding an exclamation mark in place of a full stop, or adding more commas – but your punctuation should be correct and should also make it easier to read.

Dear Amina and Leroy

We are having an enjoyable holiday doing as little as possible. The hotel is beautiful although our room looks on to the kitchens – but it doesn't matter as we are spending most of our time on the beach or in the bar. The weather has been marvellous – temperatures of over 30 degrees. We've been swimming for an hour or more every day and are getting very fit.

See you soon.

Love Sally and Winston

What do you find difficult?

You may find that when you make punctuation mistakes it is for certain reasons which keep cropping up. For example, you may not have understood or been taught how to use apostrophes properly.

The next activity will help you to analyse the punctuation mistakes you make most often.

Activity 2

Read the following sentences and decide whether the punctuation is correct or incorrect. If you are not sure, put a question mark.

	CORRECT / INCORRECT	
1. We arrived home late, from town.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. We bought apples, oranges, grapefruit, and bananas for a fruit salad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. 'I intend to take my holiday in August,' said Tom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Why are you leaving he asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. She said she was going to stay for a few days we knew it would be much longer at the cottage by the sea.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6. We all decided to write a short letter to him – just to thank him for his generosity. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Aisha wontbecomingtoSams party as shes already going out somewhere else. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Theanimals' food is over there inside the warden's hut. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The car failed it's MOT test. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Its a pity that its likely to rain for the barbecue. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. She raised some money for the save the children fund | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. He'sthe publishing manager of the National Extension College. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I said I would go however I wasn't looking forward to it. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. She found the cheque that she thought she'd lost. And then the next day her dog ate it. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Thegirl'swere late for college every day last week. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Now make a list below of areas of punctuation where you have had some difficulty.

Feedback

- Incorrect – The comma in this sentence isn't necessary. It could be taken out and the meaning would still be clear. If you use a lot of commas check to make sure that they are all necessary.*
- Correct – The commas separate the items in the list, but you don't need one after 'grapefruit' because the word 'and' serves this purpose.*
- Correct – The speech marks used here are in the right place. The comma is used to separate the words spoken from the reference to the speaker.*
- Incorrect – The speech marks and question mark have been left out. It should be: 'Why are you leaving?' he asked.*

5. *Incorrect—Some punctuation is needed to make the sentence clearer. You need to add two dashes: She said she was going to stay for a few days—we knew it would turn out to be much longer—at the cottage by the sea. The dashes are used to indicate an aside or a separate idea within the main sentence.*
6. *Correct—A dash has been used here to link the first part of the sentence to the additional explanation. The dash could have been left out altogether and the sentence would still have been correct. The dash has been used here to give a sort of breathing space in it. It also slightly alters the emphasis of the sentence.*
7. *Incorrect—We hope you spotted that all the apostrophes have been left out in this sentence. They should have been inserted to indicate a shortened version of a word ('won't' instead of 'will not') and the possessive ('Sam's'). The correct version is: Aisha won't be coming to Sam's party as she's already going out somewhere else.*
8. *Correct—In this sentence two apostrophes are used correctly. They are both possessive apostrophes—used to indicate possession. The first one (animals') refers to more than one animal and so the apostrophe goes at the end of the word 'animals' after the plural 's'. The second one refers to a single warden and so the apostrophe goes at the end of the word 'warden' before the 's'.*
9. *Incorrect—This should be 'The car failed its MOT test'. There is no possessive apostrophe in 'its'. People often get confused about the use of apostrophes with it, so here's a reminder.*

Its or it's?

- ▶ *it's stands for 'it is' as in 'it's my cat'—this is the only time you have an apostrophe with 'it'*
- ▶ *there is no apostrophe in 'its' when it means 'of it' as in 'my cat has hurt its paw'*

So a correct sentence would be:

'It's my cat and it has hurt its paw.'

10. *Incorrect—The apostrophes have been left out in this sentence. It should read 'It's a pity that it's likely to rain'. Both times 'it is' has been shortened to sound a little less formal.*
11. *Incorrect—Capital letters are needed for Save the Children as it is the name of an organisation.*
12. *Incorrect—Capital letters are needed for the Publishing Manager as it is a proper job title. If the description was of a publishing manager rather than the publishing manager, capital letters would not have been needed, as in 'He's a publishing manager for the National Extension College—and he works for the Publishing Director'. However, nowadays, some*

people tend not to follow this punctuation rule so strictly. As long as the sentence makes sense you wouldn't need to worry too much about using capital letters or not.

13. *Incorrect – These should be two sentences with a full stop after 'go' and a capital H for However. 'However' also needs a comma after it when used like this. It should read 'I said I would go. However, I wasn't looking forward to it.'*

14. *Correct – This full stop is correct, although you could have left it out and made this one sentence.*

15. *Incorrect – The apostrophe should not be inserted into a word that is plural. An apostrophe should only have been used here for a possessive (as in 'The girls' college was shut').*

This activity should have highlighted the areas of punctuation where you have some difficulty. You may have found, for example, that you are quite happy about commas and full stops but need some practice with speech marks and apostrophes.

It should also now be clear that there are occasions when you can choose yourself how to punctuate a sentence, and more than one way would be correct. Often this is simply a question of style.

Getting some practice

The next two activities give you some practice at working at your punctuation.

Activity 3

This passage is taken from the novel *Sacred Country* by Rose Tremain. Some of the punctuation has been removed or altered. Writing on the text below, change it back to how you think it should be.

Hed continued to treat Walters gum disease. he told Walter that he wished to see him regularly until every manifestation of decay had been eradicated. He said that 'if his teeth were 'nt saved now, he would have none left by the time he was thirtyfive. He said: It was profoundly important, Walter, that you came to see me when you did. By january Walters mouth was pink and clean again his breath sweet. He said so is that Mr Blakey for now

No said Gilbert monthly checkup's must continue until the spring.

Feedback

This is how the text is actually written in the novel.

He'd continued to treat Walter's gum disease. He told Walter that he wished to see him regularly until every manifestation of decay had been eradicated. He said that if his teeth weren't saved now, he would have none left by the time he was thirty-five. He said: 'It was profoundly important, Walter, that you came to see me when you did.' By January, Walter's mouth was pink and clean again, his breath sweet. He said: 'So is that it, Mr Blakey, for now?'

'No,' said Gilbert. 'Monthly check-ups must continue until the spring.'

Mark a circle around any mistakes you made as these are areas of difficulty that you still need to practise.

You may have noticed these style points while you were doing this activity:

- ▶ *The author has used a colon to separate the words from the reference to the speaker rather than a comma. This isn't always done and is just the style she uses throughout the novel.*
- ▶ *The author has used commas in places where you could have left them out. For example, after 'By January,'.*
- ▶ *The author has spelt the word 'spring' without an initial capital letter. This is also a style choice and it is used throughout the book.*

Don't worry if your punctuation for these wasn't exactly the same – this is just the author's chosen style. If you decide to adopt a particular style of punctuation though, you should use it consistently throughout the piece of writing.

When you read other people's writing – in a novel, magazine, newspaper or coursebook – note how they have used punctuation. Note how they have used standard forms of punctuation as well as the occasions when they have applied their own style.

.....

Try the next activity which gives you another chance to practise using punctuation.

Activity 4

Here is another passage from the same novel. This time all the punctuation has been removed. Following the same style as in the previous corrected passage, now put the punctuation back.

he told walter hed bought a new car an mgb he didn't say that it made him afraid walter said im envious mr blakey if theres one thing certain about my life its that ill never own a sports car gilbert replied that nothing was certain in any life and they laughed and walter noticed for the first time gilberts resemblance to anthony eden and felt flattered by it peculiarly flattered to have seen it from this moment they told each other details of their lives because walter couldn't speak for most of the time he spent in gilberts adjustable chair and because gilbert preferred not to talk while he was drilling or scaling small details were all they had time for

Feedback

This is how it is actually punctuated in the novel.

He told Walter he'd bought a new car, an MGB. He didn't say that it made him afraid. Walter said: 'I'm envious, Mr Blakey. If there's one thing certain about my life, it's that I'll never own a sports car.' Gilbert replied that nothing was certain in any life and they laughed and Walter noticed for the first time Gilbert's resemblance to Anthony Eden and felt flattered by it, peculiarly flattered to have seen it.

From this moment they told each other odd details of their lives. Because Walter couldn't speak for most of the time he spent in Gilbert's adjustable chair and because Gilbert preferred not to talk while he was drilling or scaling, small details were all they had time for.

As well as giving you a chance to practise your punctuation, these two activities have shown that people use punctuation in different ways. There are certain rules that everyone has to follow to make their writing clear, but there are many instances when you can choose yourself how to punctuate your work. Use standard punctuation where necessary to make your writing clear and free of possible misunderstandings—and reserve your own style for other more minor points of punctuation.

When you are writing check your punctuation carefully afterwards and think back to the punctuation you observed in your reading.

Key points

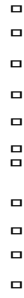
- ▶ Correct punctuation is important for ensuring that what you have written makes sense and flows easily.
- ▶ It is important to identify where you have difficulties in punctuating correctly and to practise these until you get them right.
- ▶ You can use your own style for some minor punctuation points.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 35, write down:

- ▶ the areas of punctuation you most often have difficulty with
- ▶ how you plan to improve your punctuation.

36



Using and acknowledging sources

Introduction

It is unusual to write something in which all your arguments and ideas come directly from you. Normally, some of the ideas and information come from other sources such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines, websites, CD-ROMs, television programmes, interviews, posters or brochures.

When you are writing for your course, these sources all need to be acknowledged to show other people, such as your tutor or an examiner, where you have found your information. It is also important to acknowledge your sources for copyright reasons. In this topic you will look at using sources correctly and acknowledging them appropriately.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ cite material found in other books and publications
- ▶ create a list of references
- ▶ create a bibliography.

‘Lifting’ text

Here is part of an essay, written by Roseanne, a student on a History of Art course. She has written some of it herself but has copied part of it straight from a textbook.

Case study

‘At the beginning of the twentieth century many artists from all over Europe were attracted to Paris, including Picasso. His earliest truly individual paintings, such as those of the Blue Period, are still symbolist in style: they owe much to Redon, for example, as well as to Degas and to Lautrec. In subject matter, they are close to the paintings which Rouault was producing at the same time, though technically they are much suaver. He then became very interested in the primitive style of the work of Cézanne, which was on view at an exhibition in Paris in 1900.’

You may have spotted that the second sentence starting ‘His earliest ...’ to the end of the paragraph is written in a formal style that might not be Roseanne’s own writing.

When you read text in a book it can be tempting to just ‘lift’ it out and repeat it word for word in your own writing, hoping no one will notice. It is important not to do this because you could be breaching copyright and also you are misleading your tutor or examiner into thinking that this is your own work when it isn’t. It is acceptable, however, to rewrite what you have read in your own words. Try this in the next activity.

Activity 1

In the space below, rewrite the borrowed text in the case study in your own words. Keep to a maximum word count for the whole passage of about 100 words.

A very effective way of doing this is to make notes of what you read, taking down the key points. Then put the original text away and write your own work from your notes.

Feedback

Here is what we have written. Your text may be slightly different.

'At the beginning of the twentieth century, many artists from all over Europe were attracted to Paris, including Picasso. At that time his style of painting was known as the 'Blue Period'. The subject matter of the paintings was quite similar to what Rouault was producing at the same time, but Picasso's were more sophisticated technically. The paintings were symbolist in style and here Picasso was influenced by other artists such as Redon, Degas and Lautrec. He then became very interested in the primitive style of the work of Cézanne, which was on view at an exhibition in Paris in 1900.'

The text now flows much better. The language is consistent throughout and the ideas in the second paragraph follow on naturally. Note also that the order of the original text has been changed slightly.

.....

Using several different sources is another way to make sure that you don't just lift text from other authors. If you take notes from more than one source, and then merge them, your language should be your own.

If you have any difficulty with expressing something in your own words, try talking about it with a friend or family member. You are more likely to express it in your own way.

Citing text from books

Sometimes you will want to cite (quote) the actual words that you have found in a book, journal, magazine or newspaper. There are two ways of doing this, depending on the length of the material:

If the text you want to cite is very short – just one short sentence or less – the same rules apply but you don't need to display it in the same way. Instead, you can keep the quote within the text like this:

Their subject matter was similar to the paintings which Rouault was producing at the same time, but 'technically they are much suaver' (Lucie-Smith, 1971, p. 250).

To display such a short passage in quotes and indented would waste space and the author's details would take up more space than the quote!

If the text runs to two or more lines you would display it like this:

‘His earliest truly individual paintings, those of the Blue Period, are still symbolist in style: they owe much to Redon, for example, as well as to Degas and to Lautrec. In subject matter, they are close to the paintings which Rouault was producing at the same time, though technically they are much suaver.’

(Lucie-Smith, 1971, p. 250)

This is how it has been done:

- ▶ the margin is further in on the page so that the text stands out more – it has been indented
- ▶ the text is single-spaced, whereas the rest of the text should be double-spaced
- ▶ the text is enclosed within speech marks
- ▶ at the end, the author’s surname is stated in brackets together with the date of the publication and the page number. This is just a short way of referring to the text – the full reference comes later at the end of the coursework or essay. We will look at that next.

References and footnotes

If you cite a piece of text, you need to give the full details for the book either in a references section at the end of your writing or in a footnote at the bottom of the page.

The information you need to give is in the book itself, usually at the front within the first few pages.

There are several ways of giving a reference or writing a footnote. Here is one way.

References

Lucie-Smith, Edward (1971) *A Concise History of French Painting*, Thames and Hudson, London

Note carefully how this is set out: Author’s last name, author’s first name or initials (date of publication in brackets) *name of publication in italics*, publisher, place of publication.

Footnotes

If you are producing footnotes you just need to display them at the bottom of the same page on which the quote appears. If you are working on a computer, display the footnotes in a smaller typeface.

One very important thing to remember when you take notes from another source is to note down the information you need for your reference list – otherwise you will have to waste a lot of time retracing

your steps. Also, when you are writing out your references list, keep to the order in which the quotes appear within the text. This makes it easier for anyone reading your work to find the full reference.

Activity 2

Use the method described above or another recognised method that you already use to write out these book references correctly below.

1. Book written by Ray Josephs called *How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day*. Published in 1994 by Thorsons, London.
2. Dr Peter Hanson's *Stress for Success*. Published by Pan Books, London in 1990.
3. *How to Write Essays* by Roger Lewis, Published in 1993 by Collins Educational of London.
4. CRAC Student Guide: *Study Skills for Success*, written by Patricia McBride in 1994.
5. *Directing on Camera* by Harris Watts. Published in 1992 by Aavo Media.

Feedback

The correct answers using the method described above are as follows.

1. Josephs, Ray (1994) *How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day*, Thorsons, London
2. Hanson, Peter (1990) *Stress for Success*, Pan Books, London
3. Lewis, Roger (1993) *How to Write Essays*, Collins Educational, London
4. McBride, Patricia (1994) *Study Skills for Success*, CRAC Student Guide
5. Watts, Harris (1992) *Directing on Camera*, Aavo Media

Note that the last two don't indicate where they are published. This is usually not that important and can be left out if you can't find this information in the book. However, it is more important if the book comes from another country such as the US because someone wanting to trace it would need to know if it was published in the UK or not. If you are in doubt about details like this, the reference section of your local library may be able to check the

details on their database – so it's worth giving them a ring. You can also check on the website of an online bookseller such as Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk).

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Citing text from magazines, journals or newspapers

If you want to quote something from a magazine, journal or newspaper, the principles are very similar to those for books, but you need to add more details in the reference section:

- ▶ If the article comes from a magazine or journal, you need to give the title of the article and its page numbers, as well as the name of the magazine or journal – together with the issue. For a magazine, the issue will be a month or a week, and for a journal this could be a volume and a number.
- ▶ If the article comes from a newspaper you need to give the name of the newspaper, the date of issue, the article's title (or headline), the page number where it starts and also the column where it starts. If it is in a particular section of the paper this also needs to be stated.

Here are some examples:

Rooksby, R T (1995) 'Citing Material', *Psychology Review*, Vol 2, No 1, pp 32–33, Philip Allan Publishers

Boston, Richard (7 June 1997), 'Rosbif rules OK' *The Guardian*, The Week p5 col 1

.....

Activity 3

Use the method described above or another recognised method that you already use to write out these journal, magazine or newspaper references correctly below.

1. Article in the Guardian on Saturday 7 June 1997, written by Kamal Ahmed. Appears on page 1 of The Week and is called Mystery of the Master. Starts in column one.
2. Article in The Vegetarian, July 1997. Every Drop Counts by Sarah Edghill. Pages 70–71.
3. An Excellent Start by Hans Stockl in World Aerospace Development, Volume 3, 1997. Pages 22 to 24.
4. Article by T Boren and D Liver in Science and Medicine, Sept/Oct 1994, pp 38–39, 'Growth conditions of Helicobacter pylori'.
5. Article in Chemical Processing Technology International on pages 11 to 21. Article entitled: The new and the Old. Published in 1995 vol 8. Written by Alan Hammond and Linda Pirtle.

Feedback

The correct answers using the method described above are as follows.

1. Ahmed, Kamal (7 June 1997) 'Mystery of the Master', *The Guardian*, The Week p 1, col 1
2. Edghill, Sarah (1997) 'Every Drop Counts', *The Vegetarian*, July, pp 70–71
3. Stockl, Hans (1997) 'An Excellent Start', *World Aerospace Development*, Volume 3, pp 22–24
4. Boren, T and Liver, D (1994) 'Growth conditions of *Helicobacter pylori*', *Science and Medicine*, Sept/Oct, pp 38–37
5. Hammond, Alan and Pirtle, Linda (1995) 'The new and the Old', *Chemical Processing Technology International*, Vol 8, pp 11–21

It might take you some time to get used to this system of writing out references but the more practice you have, the easier it will become.

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Citing text from the Internet

If you want to quote something from a website, you need to give the website address, the author's name, and ideally the title of the piece. If you use words or images from a website without acknowledging the original source, you are infringing copyright. To be on the safe side, assume that all material on the Internet is protected by copyright unless you have a specific reason to be certain that this is not the case.

When you are citing text from the Internet, be aware that you often do not know how reliable or factually correct the information is. Anyone can put web pages on the Internet, and there is no one to screen them for accuracy. As an online learner you need to develop your skills in evaluating the information you find.

You may also want to work through Topic 18: *Using the Internet*.

Writing a bibliography

A bibliography is a list of books, magazines, websites, videos, television programmes and other sources that you have read or seen but did not actually quote from in your writing.

In a bibliography you need to write out the details of your sources of information:

- ▶ the title of the book, name of the author, and name of the publisher
- ▶ the title of the video
- ▶ the names and dates of any television programmes
- ▶ the website address with the author's name and the title of the piece
- ▶ the names and dates of issue of magazines and newspapers
- ▶ the names of people you have interviewed and the date of the interview
- ▶ the title of posters and leaflets and the name of the publisher, plus a date of publication if there is one
- ▶ the names of organisations you have visited and the people you have spoken to.

This information needs to be set out at the end of your writing. This is one way of doing it:

Title/name	Description	Author/company	Date
Panorama	Television	BBC	9.6.2004
The Times	Newspaper		15.5.97
Henry Matthews, director of planning	Interview	Bursett City Council	23.2.97

For the Internet, you could make a separate list of sources of information like this:

Internet

Spertus, Ellen Why are there so few female computer scientists?
ftp://ftp.ai.mit.edu/ellens/womes.txt

Activity 4

Take a piece of work you are currently working on. Consider all the sources of information you have used so far and on a separate sheet of paper make a bibliography. You can use the style set out above or you can use your own style and layout. Try to fill in all the details for each source of information as listed above.

Feedback

We hope you found this a helpful exercise. Try to remember to make a note of what you have read and watched and on what day, as this will make writing up your bibliography much easier.

Key points

- ▶ It is important to acknowledge any material quoted from other sources.
- ▶ There are standard ways of writing references and footnotes.
- ▶ A bibliography is a list of anything you have read or seen but did not actually quote from in your writing.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 36, write down:

- ▶ ways of quoting text word for word within a piece of writing
- ▶ details needed for a reference list
- ▶ details needed for a bibliography.

37 Drafting

Introduction

Once you have collected the information you need and prepared a plan, you are ready to start writing. Very few writers get it right first time, and most good writers begin with a first draft – or first attempt – which they can then revise and improve. A draft is a working document which can be jotted down quickly to help you organise your thoughts and plan what you will write. This topic looks at why drafting is important and how to go about developing drafts. You may also want to work through Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- prepare drafts for your writing.

Why is drafting important?

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how he realised the importance of drafting what he writes.

Case study

Kyle is 23 and he is doing an A level in History.

‘When I started the A level I was so nervous and so worried about missing the deadlines that I bashed my first essay out really quickly. I had done all the reading and everything but I didn’t spend time drafting at all.

It came back from my tutor covered in red comments, all of which were helpful, but not always positive. When I read through the comments I realised that I would have made those changes myself if I had read through a draft before I sent it off.

For my next essay, I did a rough draft on the computer, printed it off, read through it and made my own comments in red. Then I went through it again, improving it, until I was happy with it. I got a much better mark and my tutor commented on how much better it was than the first one.’

Drafting a piece of work is part of the process of learning about a subject – the more you understand your material and the subject you are writing about, the better your learning will be. Drafting is particularly valuable when you are doing:

- ▶ projects and assignments
- ▶ reports
- ▶ coursework
- ▶ essays.

Advantages of drafting include:

- ▶ you don’t have to get it right first time, and this sometimes makes it easier to start writing
- ▶ you don’t have to start at the beginning – an introduction can be difficult to write, so it sometimes makes sense to start in the middle
- ▶ you can change the order of things if they don’t work
- ▶ you don’t have to worry about getting your style and spelling correct at first – you can come back and correct them later
- ▶ you can spot any inconsistencies, irrelevancies or points which do not contribute to the overall piece of writing
- ▶ you can experiment with different approaches to the topic
- ▶ you can show your drafts to other people and get their comments before you start the actual writing.

Drafting is much easier if you use a computer – you can try out pieces of writing and then edit or reorder them without having to write everything out again.

Drafting

Here are some basic guidelines on producing a draft. Read them through and then try the activity which follows.

Drafting guidelines

1. Whether you are writing your draft by hand or using a computer, leave plenty of space on the page for your own comments, changes and notes. Use double line spacing on a computer.
2. You can either start by drafting the introduction or leave this until the end and start with a section that you find easier to write.
3. If you can't get going, just write something – anything – to get you started. You can change and improve it later.
4. Aim to write at least one paragraph for each of the headings you have planned. Each paragraph should contain one main idea and ideally the first sentence should introduce this idea. Other sentences in the paragraph should support the main idea by explaining it more, giving examples, or linking it to other paragraphs. If a paragraph contains more than one main idea it should be divided into further paragraphs.
5. If you have any illustrations work out where these will go and make a note or include them in your draft.
6. Write a summary or conclusion once you have completed the draft. Make sure it covers all the main points.
7. Read the draft through, editing and improving it as necessary. There is more on editing and redrafting in Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting*.

Activity 1

1. Think of a piece of writing you have to do for your work or your course, and write a draft for at least part of it, either by hand in the box below or on a computer.
2. Read through your draft, making notes or changes as you go. Ask yourself:
 - ▶ Is it:
 - well organised?
 - clear?
 - easy to follow?

- well written?
 - ▶ Does it cover all the main points you wanted to cover, in a logical order?
 - ▶ Does it have a good introduction and summary?
 - ▶ Are any illustrations included or annotated?
3. You might want to show it to someone else for their comments too.
 4. Make any changes to the draft as necessary.

Feedback

We hope that you found this exercise helpful. Did you find that your first draft needed improving? If so, did your improvements help the flow, organisation or clarity of your writing?

Make sure you draft any writing for your course before you send it off to your tutor. Drafting work is especially encouraged for coursework for GCSE and other courses.

.....

Key points

- ▶ It is important to produce a draft of what you are going to write.
- ▶ Drafting helps you to organise your thoughts and write clearly.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 37, write down:

- ▶ how you will organise your next piece of writing when you draft it
- ▶ what you plan to look for when you are checking your own drafts.

38

Editing and redrafting

Introduction

Topic 37: *Drafting* looked at completing a first draft. When your first draft is complete, you can edit and redraft it. Editing means reading through and checking what you have written; redrafting means revising what you have written. Editing and redrafting are essential stages in the writing process.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- edit and redraft your writing.

Editing

Start by reading the case study below where one learner explains how she edits and redrafts all her coursework.

Case study

Joanna is 43 and she is doing a management course by distance learning. Here she describes how she edits her own work.

‘When I’ve finished an assignment, I print it off and leave it for a couple of days. Then I read through it again, trying to read it through the eyes of my tutor, thinking to myself ‘What would she say about that bit?’ or ‘How well will she think I’ve done that bit?’ I find this really helps me to see areas where I can improve what I have written.’

Editing normally means checking, cutting, rewriting and reorganising a piece of writing after it has been drafted. Editing a draft means you can:

- improve the presentation
- make sure it says what you want to say

- ▶ check it for accuracy.

These are the checks you need to make when you are editing.

Coverage

- ▶ Have you answered the question/followed the instructions?
- ▶ Have you included all the points from your plan?
- ▶ Is everything relevant to the question or topic?
- ▶ Is there anything you need to add?
- ▶ Is there anything you can delete?
- ▶ Is the order right?

Approach

- ▶ Have you backed up all your ideas with evidence?
- ▶ Is the balance between points right?
- ▶ Does the introduction give a clear idea of what is to come?
- ▶ Is the conclusion strong enough?

Style

- ▶ Is each paragraph limited to one main idea?
- ▶ Is it easy to read and understand?
- ▶ Could you say anything just as well in fewer words?
- ▶ Does the spelling, punctuation or grammar need to be corrected?

You may also want to work through Topic 33: *Planning your writing*, Topic 34: *Improving your spelling* and Topic 35: *Improving your punctuation*.

As you read through what you have written, you can make small changes, such as spelling, on the spot, especially if you are working on a computer. For more significant changes, you may wish to write a comment in the margin and think about how to improve that part of the draft later.

You can also ask someone else to help you with the editing process. They can read through your draft and may spot things that you miss, as well as tell you things they like about what you have written.

Activity 1

Find a piece of writing you have drafted and use the questions above to edit it for coverage, approach and style. Make notes on any major changes you plan to make in the spaces below.

Coverage

Approach

Style

Feedback

How do you think the changes you plan to make will improve your writing? Did you notice that you had missed any key points, or included points that weren't really relevant? Have you got a logical order and structure? Does each paragraph introduce one main idea? Are all your ideas backed up with evidence? Are your introduction and conclusion clear? Is your writing easy to read and understand? Have you kept your writing as concise and to the point as possible? Are there any spelling, grammar or punctuation errors?

.....

Now you have edited your writing, you can redraft it.

Redrafting

How you make the changes in your draft will depend on how you are working:

- ▶ If you are using a computer, you can make all your changes, save your document and then print it out again to check.
- ▶ If you are writing by hand, you will have to decide whether whole pages need to be rewritten, or whether you could make changes to the draft without it looking too messy.

Always bear in mind who will read it. If you are submitting a piece of work for someone you don't know, such as an examiner, you will want to aim for a high level of presentation. But if you are drafting something such as coursework that you will revise in the light of your tutor's comments, all that really matters is that is easy for your tutor to read. And

if the draft is just for you to read – perhaps because you plan to edit it again – you only need to present it in a way that enables you to follow it and make comments on it.

Activity 2

Produce a new draft of the piece of writing you edited in the last activity, incorporating the comments you have made. When you have finished, ask your tutor, a colleague, a fellow student or a friend to read it through and comment on it. If you choose a friend, pick someone who you can trust to make constructive comments. Explain to them that you have written the essay as part of a project to develop your study skills.

Feedback

You have now done the hard work. You should have an edited and redrafted piece of writing which you feel conveys well what you wanted to say.

It is wise to check it one last time, making sure in particular that:

- ▶ *spelling and punctuation are accurate*
- ▶ *presentation and appearance are good enough*
- ▶ *your name and any other essential information are included.*

You can then send or give it to the reader. You can also include a covering note, to explain what it is and to mention any points you would like the reader to comment on, if this is appropriate.

Key points

- ▶ Editing means reading through and checking what you have written.
- ▶ Redrafting means revising what you have written.
- ▶ Editing and redrafting are essential stages in the writing process.

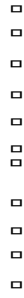
Personal learning plan

Under Topic 38, write down:

- ▶ your next writing task
- ▶ at what stages you will edit and redraft it
- ▶ the points you will look for when you are editing it.

Preparing for assessment

39



Planning for assessment

Introduction

This topic looks at how you can prepare for assessment. It starts by considering the kinds of assessment you might need to prepare for, and then goes on show you how to draw up an assessment plan and timetable. You may also want to work through Topic 40: *Revising*, Topic 41: *Tackling examinations* and Topic 42: *Tackling assignments*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ identify how you will be assessed
- ▶ prepare for assessment.

How will you be assessed?

Assessment has changed rapidly in recent years. Exams are no longer seen as necessarily the best way of testing students. Although exams are still important, particularly on A level courses, other forms of assessment are also used, with or without exams.

Before you go on, read about how one learner prepared for assessment.

Case study

Sean is 25 and is studying for a GCSE in Biology. He describes how his tutor helped him plan his coursework so that he didn't miss any deadlines.

'For my GCSE I had to produce four coursework assignments by March 15th and sit one exam at the end of my studies. I knew that the coursework carried 20% of the marks and my tutor suggested I buy a wall planner to plan out what I am going to do and when by, so that I don't miss any important dates or leave all the work till the last minute when I should be revising for the exams.'

What kind of assessment do you need to prepare for? Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

1. Think about how you will be assessed for your course and then tick one or more of the boxes below.

formal exams	<input type="checkbox"/>
tutor-marked assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>
interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>
real-life practical assessment – putting what you've learned into practice	<input type="checkbox"/>
assessment of projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>

List the methods of assessment in the left-hand column in the table below.

2. Find out what you will be asked to do for each type of assessment. For example, you may be given a choice of four essay questions out of 20, a paper of 50 compulsory multiple-choice questions, or a project of 2,000 words with the headings Introduction, Method and Conclusions, illustrated with diagrams or photographs.

List what you have to do in the middle column in the table above.

3. Find out what the 'assessment criteria' for the course are – in other words, what you will be assessed on. These are usually provided in the syllabus or course handbook. Ask your tutor if you are not sure about this.

List the criteria in the right-hand column in the table above.

Assessment	What you have to do	Assessment criteria

Feedback

Here are some example assessment methods for four typical courses. The way in which you will be assessed may be similar to one or more of these.

An A level syllabus

Two exam papers, each three hours long and each contributing 50% of the total marks:

- ▶ *Paper 1: four essay questions out of a possible choice of 16 titles, each receiving a maximum of 25 marks.*
- ▶ *Paper 2: four questions – two compulsory questions (combining to a maximum of 50 marks) and two other questions out of a choice of seven (each with a maximum of 25 marks).*

The assessment criteria in the syllabus are very general and described as assessment objectives. For example, 'to evaluate and interpret source material as historical evidence' or 'to present a clear, concise, logical and relevant argument'. You would need to ask your tutor for more specific guidance on what this means.

A GCSE syllabus

Coursework (40% of the marks) and two two-hour exam papers (each 30% of the marks).

- ▶ *Coursework: two to four short assignments of 1,250–2,000 words each, plus two or three longer assignments of 2,000–3,000 words each.*
- ▶ *Paper 1: 15 source-based questions, all of which must be answered.*
- ▶ *Paper 2: four questions from a choice of ten.*

The assessment criteria are more detailed than in the A level example.

A Certificate of Management Studies course

There are two main components:

- ▶ *Using a learning contract and a personal development journal to record progress and evidence of competence.*
- ▶ *A project based on two assignments which can demonstrate the learner's knowledge and application.*

Detailed assessment criteria are provided.

A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Marketing

A report exploring demand for a product, including explanations of:

- ▶ *how consumer characteristics affect demand for a product*
- ▶ *how economic factors affect demand for a product*
- ▶ *the factors which determine product life cycles.*

A forecast of demand for a given product presented in textual and graphic form.

If you are still not sure how you will be assessed, look at the syllabus or course handbook, or contact your tutor. Past exam papers and assignments are another helpful way of finding out the kinds of things you might be asked to do.

.....

Planning for assessment

Planning is important for all assessment. It is particularly important for exams – if you leave all your exam revision to the last minute you are unlikely to be able to do it well. There is more on preparing for exams in Topic 40: *Revising* and Topic 41: *Tackling examinations*.

Ideally, you should plan for assessment as part of your overall plan for study. You are likely to need to start actively working on assessment six to eight weeks before the assessment takes place. Practise planning for assessment in the next activity.

Activity 2

Using the table below, draw up an assessment plan and timetable.

- ▶ In the first column, list all the pieces of assessment you must do.
- ▶ In the next column, note how you will prepare for each piece of assessment.
- ▶ In the next column, note the date when you will start preparing for each one.

- In the last column, note the date of the exam or the date the coursework, project or assignment is due.

Assessment	How I will prepare	Date I will start to prepare	Date of assessment

Feedback

We hope this has helped you see how easy and effective assessment planning can be. As you approach the time for being assessed for your course, make sure you:

- *know exactly what you must do – check with the syllabus, course handbook or your tutor if you’re not sure*
- *have all the resources you need, including your notes plus any reading.*

.....

Key points

- It is important to prepare and plan for assessment.
- You need to know the assessment criteria and due date for each piece of assessment.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 39, make a copy of:

- ▶ your assessment timetable.

40 Revising

Introduction

When the dreaded word ‘revision’ is mentioned, it often conjures up a picture of someone poring over a pile of books and papers, usually late into the night, looking extremely stressed. Of course, the most efficient way of revising is to avoid this stressful type of situation, where very little will go into your head and even less will stay there.

This topic will help you take a fresh look at revising so that you can view revision more positively.

You may also want to work through Topic 39: *Planning for assessment*, Topic 41: *Tackling examinations* and Topic 42: *Tackling assignments*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ organise and plan your revision
- ▶ revise effectively.

Getting started

You need to start revising between six and eight weeks before your exam. Before you start, check that you have:

- ▶ the examination dates
- ▶ a copy of the syllabus or course handbook
- ▶ a list of topics you need to cover
- ▶ copies of past papers.

Read what the learner in the next case study is doing to prepare for his exams.

Case study

Mike is 42 and is doing three A levels by distance learning.

‘When I was at school, I always left revision too late and ended up going into the exams under-prepared and over-anxious. Consequently, I felt I didn’t do myself justice and I got poor grades at GCSE.

This time round, my tutor has helped me work out a timetable for my revision for my A levels. I’ve spread the topics I have to revise over the six weeks before the exams, so that I have so much to do each week. I allow at least one free day each week to relax, and I plan to stop revising two days before each exam itself.’

To plan your revision, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

► **How much time have I left?**

Work out how much time you have until the exam date and then work back from that to plan your revision.

► **Do I have any coursework still to complete?**

Check that you have finished all your coursework on schedule before you start revising.

► **What other commitments do I have?**

Make a list of all your other commitments, such as domestic tasks, time you need to spend with your family, holidays, work commitments, etc. Can you manage to fit these in with your revision? If not, are there any that you can put off until after the exam? Are there any that someone else could do? Make sure you also allow time for any unexpected things that may crop up.

► **Where will I work?**

If you don’t have a place set aside for learning, try to find one before you start revising. You will find it easier to revise if you can keep everything you need in one place so that even if you have only a short time to spare, you can sit down and do something worthwhile. If you can’t set aside a particular place, try to find ways of making what you do have as convenient as possible. For example, if you can only revise at the dining table and have to clear it for meals, you may be able to keep everything you need in a box, so that it’s easy to get out and start work. Topic 10: *Deciding where to study* looks at this in more detail.

► **When will I work?**

You will know when you work best. Plan your revision so that you work when you are most alert and receptive. Don't work flat out for hours on end – build in time for rests and breaks. Topic 9: *Deciding when to study* looks at this in more detail.

► **What are my priorities?**

Use a copy of your syllabus to work out which topics you feel reasonably confident about and which topics you are less confident about. You will obviously need to allocate more revision time to topics you feel less confident about.

When you have answered all these questions, you should be ready to plan out your programme of revision. Try this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Fill in the revision timetable below.

Date of exam:

Time:

Place:

Materials/equipment needed:

Revision plan

Topic	Total time allocated(hrs)	Revision begins (date)	Revision ends(date)
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Feedback

If you found this helpful, you can use this timetable for all your revision planning. Refer to the plan frequently during your revision and make any adjustments if necessary.

If you find you are struggling with planning your revision, contact your tutor. He or she will have lots of tips and strategies that will help you.

Revising actively

In the past, you may have revised by reading material over and over again, hoping that some of it will stick. This approach is not always effective, and it is certainly time-consuming. You need to take a more ‘active’ approach to your revision, so that you learn, understand and remember. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 2

Think for a few minutes of revision you have done or you are planning to do. Try to think of how you revise and make a note of your methods below.

Feedback

There are many different revision techniques. The most ‘active’ ones include:

- ▶ *making notes*
- ▶ *reading actively*
- ▶ *testing yourself*
- ▶ *making lists*
- ▶ *making outlines*
- ▶ *working with someone else*
- ▶ *making a recording*
- ▶ *using a memory aid.*

Whatever methods you use, the important thing is to make sure you are doing something while you revise so that you stay involved and active. This will make your revision much more effective. We will look at each of these methods briefly next.

'Active' revision techniques

Making notes

Making notes can help you revise, partly because you are doing something and so staying involved, but also because to make notes you need to read and understand the information. If you make notes when you are revising, make sure your notes:

- ▶ are brief and concise
- ▶ contain all the key facts, arguments or ideas
- ▶ are easy to file so that you can find them again.

There is more on making notes in Topic 13: *Making notes on paper* and Topic 14: *Making notes online*.

Reading

When you are reading for revision, decide what you want to get out of the reading and make sure you do. Reading has to be active to be effective. One way of ensuring that you stay involved is to write yourself some questions which you then answer as you read. There is more on active reading in Topic 30: *Different types of reading*.

Testing yourself

Testing yourself is a useful way to practise answering the type of question you will meet in the assessment. You can get questions from past exam papers or from your tutor. Spend some time thinking, reading, checking and preparing your answers. You could mark your answers yourself, or your tutor may be willing to go through them with you.

Lists

Lists can be a quick and easy way of helping you think, plan your answers, and find information.

Outlines

You could make outlines of how you plan to answer specific essay questions, or of procedures, arguments, etc. This can save you time and you can add to them as you find out more information.

Other people

If you can, get together with other students so that you can help each other revise. You could try out test questions and share your answers, or prepare an answer together, or set each other questions. Working with someone else will give you an opportunity to share each other's knowledge and will help you think more deeply.

You could also ask your family or friends to help you by asking you questions or by listening while you talk something through.

Recording

You may find it useful to record some revision. You can listen to it while you are doing something else as well.

Memory aids

You can create ways of learning difficult things by using mnemonics, or memory aids (the word 'mnemonic' comes from the Greek word 'to remember'). Examples of mnemonics include:

- ▶ 'There's a little port left in the bottle', a phrase used by sailors to remind them that the port side of a ship is on the left and the starboard side is on the right.
- ▶ ROYGBIV or Richard of York gained battles in vain as a reminder of the colours of the rainbow.

There is more on memory aids in Topic 22: *Developing your memory*.

Checking your progress

Checking your progress will help you stay actively involved in your revision. Although it may be time-consuming, it is useful to check how well your revision is going from time to time, and to make any necessary changes to your plans. Try this in the next activity.

Activity 3

If you are revising, review the last week or so of your revision and think about how well your revision is going. Use the table below to note how well you are getting on.

Topics that are going well	Topics that are not going so well and why

Feedback

Use the questions below to work out what you can do for any topics that are not going so well:

- ▶ *Can you try different techniques to help you revise (see page 220)?*
- ▶ *Do you need help on anything you don't understand?*
- ▶ *Who can you ask for help?*
- ▶ *Do you need to spend more time on any area?*
- ▶ *Do you need to rethink any of your revision plans?*

It is worth reviewing your progress like this from time to time so that you can change your timetable if necessary, perhaps by giving more time to topics that you are finding difficult.

There is more on reviewing your progress in Topic 27: Checking your own learning.

Final revision

If you have had an organised programme of revision and if you have revised and checked that you understand the work all the way through your course, you should feel fairly relaxed about the exam, and you won't need to try to cram everything into your head at the last minute.

On the night before your exam, you might want to check your revision notes, lists and outlines and listen to any tapes you have made. You will also want to check that you have everything you need in order to do the exam and that you are certain about when and where it is being held.

It's also useful to actually spend a little time relaxing. You can still do some revision, but do something else as well that will take your mind off things.

Key points

- ▶ You need to organise and plan your revision
- ▶ There are techniques to enable you to revise actively and more effectively.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 40, write down:

- ▶ when you plan to start revising
- ▶ the topics you will cover
- ▶ the revision techniques you plan to use.

41

Tackling examinations

Introduction

This topic will help you do your best in exams. It's not about the 'addressing the question' or the finer parts of writing your answers. It looks at how you can make the best use of your time in an exam, reduce exam stress, and increase your chances of doing well in the exam.

You may also want to work through Topic 39: *Planning for assessment*, Topic 40: *Revising*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- ▶ make the best use of your time in exams
- ▶ reduce stress
- ▶ read examination questions properly.

Assessing your own exam style

Read the case study which follows to find out how one learner improved her exam style.

Case study

Sue is 45 and she is studying for an A level in Classical Civilisation. She talks here about how she has improved the way in which she approaches exams, with good results.

‘When I was younger and doing exams at school I never did very well. I used to do lots of revision but then I always spent too long on the first one or two questions and didn’t have time to answer the rest properly. So I lost marks and got low grades.

When I started this A level I decided to approach the AS exam in a much more structured way. I was just as nervous as when I was at school but with the help of my tutor I worked out a plan for the exam and I stuck to it. For example, in the first paper there were two questions so I worked out that I had 10 minutes at the beginning to read through the whole thing and then 37 minutes per question. I stuck to this plan and finished all the questions with 6 minutes left over at the end to read through what I had written. It paid off and I got an A grade. I plan to do the same thing for my A2 paper and hope to get as good a grade for that too.’

It’s important to be aware of how you approach exams. The way you do this may mean that you are not able to give your best performance and there may be small changes to your approach that will help you do better. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 1

Read the statements below and tick any that could describe your typical behavior during an exam (you can tick more than one). Which (if any) of the following is like you?

1. I allocate a certain amount of time to answer each question and keep to my plan. ☐
2. I often run out of time in exams. ☐
3. I always spend plenty of time at the start, deciding which questions are best for me. ☐
4. I always save time for the end, so I can check back over everything I’ve written. ☐
5. I often finish exams with time to spare. ☐

Feedback

Choosing from these statements should help you analyse how you approach exams, and anything you could do to improve the way in which you tackle them.

1. *This is ideal – you should do well in exams providing you have done your revision.*
 2. *This is a very common problem and is due to poor planning of time.*
 3. *This is a good way to start an exam and will keep you calm.*
 4. *This is a very good idea – checking everything you have written in an exam is essential.*
 5. *This is fine, as long as you have really done your best – but perhaps you have answered them too quickly and in not enough depth?*
-

Planning your time

In the exam itself, you need to plan your time carefully so that you have enough time for each question. It is really important to read through all the instructions carefully at the beginning of an exam. Make sure you know:

- ▶ how many questions you have to answer
- ▶ whether any or all of them are compulsory
- ▶ if not, what the options are – for example, how many questions you have to choose from each part of the exam
- ▶ whether separate sections or questions have to be answered on separate sheets
- ▶ where you must write answers if you have to answer on the paper itself.

If the questions have equal marks, give them equal time.

Before you start answering any questions, you can jot down a mini-timetable for each question, like this:

Quick notes on chosen questions	9.00–9.30
Q1	9.30–10.00
Q4	10.00–10.30
Q6	10.30–11.00
Q8	11.00–11.30
Final check	11.30–12.00

Remember that you can't get more than full marks on one question. So, a good pass requires answers to as many questions as you are told to answer. For example, suppose there are 100 marks, the pass mark is 50, and you have to do five questions. If you do three well (say 14 out of 20 for each) you get 42 marks – not enough to pass. But if you can get four out of 20 on the other questions, you would pass.

If you haven't answered enough questions and you can see that you are going to run out of time, use the time you have left to write short notes on the rest of the questions. In this way you should be able to show the examiner more of your knowledge than if you try to write a full answer to just one question.

Activity 2

Imagine you are taking an exam and your plan looked like this:

09.30 First 10 minutes – read through questions and plan answers
 09.40 Start first question
 10.10 Start second question
 10.40 Start third question
 11.10 Start fourth question
 11.40 Start last question
 12.10 Last 20 minutes – read through answers and check
 12.30 Time up

Imagine the time is now 10.40 and you're only halfway through your second question. What would you do and why? Tick the best option below.

Options

1. Carry on with the question – after all, you've got some 'spare' time left at the end of the exam.
2. Leave a gap and move straight on to the next question.
3. Spend a couple of minutes jotting down in pencil the ideas you need to finish the question, then move on to the next one.

Feedback

1. *This is dangerous! You must make sure you have time to attempt all questions as there are only a limited number of marks for each question.*
2. *This is sensible – but option 3 may be even better as it also gives you an opportunity to show the examiner what you know about the unfinished question.*
3. *This is the ideal solution – if you have time to return to the unfinished question you will be able to use your notes to speed things up.*

Reading the questions

When you start an exam, it is essential to read through the questions carefully before you start writing. If some questions are optional, you may also be deciding which questions to answer at this stage.

- ▶ Read each question slowly, more than once.
- ▶ Work out exactly what the question is asking for by underlining or highlighting any key ‘process’ words that tell you how to structure your answer, for example:

analyse	describe
calculate	discuss
compare	evaluate
contrast	prove
define	

- ▶ Underline or highlight key ‘topic’ words that tell you what your answer needs to be about.
- ▶ If there is a choice of questions, read through each one and ask yourself: ‘Is this a good question for me to answer?’
 - If it is good for you, put a tick beside it.
 - If it is no good, put a cross by it.
- ▶ Number the ticked questions from easiest to hardest. Do the easy ones first – this will give you confidence and allow more time for the more difficult questions later.
- ▶ Read through the questions again, making notes for each one, as your thoughts come into your head.
- ▶ When you start answering a question, keep making sure that you are answering the question that has been asked. Re-read the question every few minutes to check that you are still on course and not going off at a tangent. You will not get more marks if you answer a question that has not been asked or provide more detail than has been asked for.

Activity 3

Spend a few minutes thinking how you would approach an essay-style question in order to try to make sure you stick to the question being asked. Note any ideas you have below.

Feedback

You may have different suggestions, but we hope you find these ideas useful.

- ▶ *Spend a few minutes noting down a short plan for your essay, outlining the content, structure and arguments. Then plan out your introduction and conclusion.*
- ▶ *Check that this plan really answers the question and then start writing. Your plan should help you to produce a coherent, logical essay, which starts in an interesting way, goes where it promises to go, and then end with a convincing conclusion.*
- ▶ *If you run out of time and go on to the next question, your plan will help you to refocus if you have time to return to the question.*

Staying calm

However much preparation and planning you have done for an exam, you will probably still be nervous on the actual day of the exam. There are lots of ways of reducing stress in an exam, but first you need to know how you cope with stress. Think about this in the next activity.

Activity 4

Think about a time when you were stressed by a test, exam or an assessment, for example, a driving test, an appraisal at work, or an interview. Make a note of it below.

Now make a note of how you coped with the situation and whether this method was successful in that you managed to stay calm.

If any of your ways of coping were successful, could you use them again when you are feeling stressed by an examination? Make a note of any ways you could use to keep calm in an exam below.

Feedback

You may have come up with some good ideas for coping, such as relaxation techniques or breathing exercises, or getting some exercise or rest before the exam. It can help to compare notes with colleagues or fellow students to see how they cope. Take the isolation out of preparing for an exam by finding out how other people tackle them.

Here are some other ideas to help you avoid feelings of panic during an exam.

- ▶ *When the exam starts, give yourself time to settle in. Write your name and any other necessary information.*
 - ▶ *Read through all the questions carefully, as explained on page 229, before you answer any. This gives you time to adjust to the exam and get a feel for the paper, and it also stops you jumping in before you have worked out which questions are the best ones to attempt.*
 - ▶ *If you start to panic, close your eyes, breathe slowly, and think of something pleasant for a few seconds.*
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Key points

- ▶ Plan your time in exams.
- ▶ Follow the instructions carefully.
- ▶ Read the questions carefully and if there is a choice, choose carefully.
- ▶ Stay calm in exams, using methods that work for you.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 41, write down:

- ▶ how you plan to make best use of your time in an exam
- ▶ what you will do if you get behind schedule in an exam
- ▶ how you plan to reduce stress before and during an exam
- ▶ how you plan to make sure you read through exam questions properly.

42 Tackling assignments

Introduction

For your course, you may have to do assignments, some of which may count towards your final grade. Many people are a bit concerned about tackling assignments and worry that they won't be able to produce what is needed. Providing you follow the instructions from your awarding body, plan your assignment carefully, and seek help from your tutor if you need it, you should not have any problems.

This topic looks at planning assignments and submitting them to your tutor. For more information on writing assignments, you may want to work through Topic 33: *Planning your writing*, Topic 37: *Drafting*, Topic 38: *Editing and redrafting* and Topic 36: *Using and acknowledging sources*. You may also want to look at Topic 6: *Making the most of your tutor*.

Objectives

This topic will help you to:

- plan and submit your assignments.

Starting on an assignment

The next case study describes how one learner approaches her assignments.

Case study

Melissa is 35 and she is working on the Protecting Children unit of the CACHE Certificate in Professional Development.

‘For the course I have to do four assignments. The first three will be read by my tutor and she will email me her feedback. This means I will get plenty of practice in writing assignments before I start the last assignment, which is assessed by CACHE and which is what I am graded on.

I am a bit worried about doing the assignments but I have talked to my tutor about this, and she says she will help me build up confidence by giving me feedback on the first three assignments. She is also going to look at the timetable I have drawn up for giving in my assignments to make sure I can keep on track. For the last assignment, I can have a go at it then send it to her for her comments before I finally submit it. That’s reassuring.’

When you start your first assignment, you may feel a bit daunted. If you follow these guidelines and ask your tutor anything you don’t understand, or you are unsure about, you will soon feel more confident.

1. Read the assignment carefully. Make sure you understand what each part is asking. Look through the grading criteria if there are any so that you know how the marks are allocated and can make sure the amount of work you do reflects this.
2. Make sure you know what resources or information you will need before you start and start gathering what you can.
3. Check the number of words you should write for the assignment – this is called the word count or word limit.
4. Check whether there are any specific requirements for format or layout. For example, do you have to produce the assignment on A4 paper, double spaced? Do you have to include evidence in a ring-binder?

Try using these guidelines in the next activity.

Activity 1

Look at the next assignment you have to do, and make notes on it below.

Write a brief summary of what you are asked to do, making sure you cover what each part is asking.

If the assignment gives grading or marking criteria (what you have to do to get so many marks), make a note of this below.

Make a note of any resources you will need to complete the assignment, e.g. textbooks, information from the Internet.

Check carefully the word count or word limit. The word limit usually doesn't include headings, references or quotations. Make a note of it below.

Check whether there are any other instructions about format or layout and make a note of any below.

Feedback

We hope this exercise will help you to approach your next assignment in a planned and structured way. Making sure you know what you have to do, and you have everything you need before you start, is an essential part of the planning process.

It is very important to follow the instructions for assignments given to you by the awarding body, otherwise you may fail or be referred (referred means you are not given a pass but given an opportunity to try again). For example, assessed assignments that are over the word limit are sometimes referred or the words that are over the word count are not assessed, leading to a lower grade.

If you are not sure about anything on this assignment or other assignments, tell your tutor.

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Planning your assignments

Topic 39: *Planning for assessment* looks in detail at how to plan for assessment as part of your overall plan for study. As part of this process, you can produce a plan for your assignments. Try this in the next activity.

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Activity 2

Using the table below, draw up a plan for your assignments.

- ▶ In the first column, list all the assignments you must do.
- ▶ In the next column, note whether they are to be marked by your tutor or assessed by the awarding body.
- ▶ In the next column, note the date by when you have to send the assignment to your tutor.
- ▶ In the last column, note the date by when you have to send any assessed assignment to the awarding body (if appropriate).

Assignment	Marked by tutor/assessed	Date to send to tutor	Date to send to awarding body if assessed

Feedback

We hope this has helped you plan your assignments. When you are working out your study timetable (see Topic 39: Planning for assessment), make sure you build in enough time for further reading, research, drafting and redrafting and, for assessed assignments, for getting initial feedback from your tutor.

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Submitting your assignments

For most courses you will be given a Study Guide or Assignment Guide which sets out when you should send your assignments to your tutor. Follow this timetable, sending your assignments when you are told to do so.

If you are posting your assignments, you will usually be expected to produce them on A4 paper and they should usually be typed or handwritten in legible handwriting and in ink (pencil is usually not acceptable). Your work must be clearly identifiable, and each sheet should have your name and PIN (your personal identification number as a student) on it, together with the name and number of your study centre. You may be asked to complete a form to accompany the assignment with all these details. You may also need to include a self-addressed envelope for the return of your work.

It is a good idea to make a copy of each assignment before you post it to your tutor. If the worst happens and an assignment is mislaid, you won't have to do all the work again. Send the original to your tutor, not the photocopy.

If you are emailing your assignments, you will need to discuss arrangements with your tutor.

Key points

- ▶ It is important to produce assignments that meet the requirements of your course and/or the awarding body.
- ▶ Read all assignments carefully and follow the instructions.
- ▶ Plan your assignments so that you can make sure you meet the deadlines for submission.
- ▶ Talk to your tutor if you have any questions or uncertainties.

Personal learning plan

Under Topic 42, make a copy of:

- ▶ your assignment timetable.