The Study Skills Handbook
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Palgrave Study Skills

**Titles in this series by Stella Cottrell**
- Critical Thinking Skills (2nd edn)
- The Exam Skills Handbook (2nd edn)
- The Palgrave Student Planner
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Referencing and Understanding Plagiarism
- Reflective Writing
- Report Writing
- Science Study Skills
- Studying with Dyslexia
- Success in Groupwork
- Time Management
- Writing for University

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

However, there are some basic approaches which can start you off on a good footing, help you cut corners, and accelerate the learning process. This Handbook developed out of practical work undertaken with hundreds of students over twenty years. The core of the book has now been used by hundreds of thousands of students and lecturers worldwide, whose varied comments have contributed to this edition of the Handbook.

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

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

- encouraging an understanding that success is not simply about being ‘bright’ or ‘clever’ – good marks, and other kinds of successful outcome, are possibilities for any student
- supporting you to take individual, or personalised, approaches to study – that work best for you
- preparing you for what to expect from Higher Education at university or college
- offering guidance on how to develop effective study habits and a positive approach to study
- providing strategies and techniques for addressing core academic tasks at this level of study
- offering insights on how to tackle study activities that many students find difficult
- developing understanding of how learning, intelligence and memory work – so you can apply that understanding to your own studies
- developing core methodologies and thinking skills needed in Higher Education
- supporting you in identifying skills you have already, which you need as a student and for working life
- providing the resources to help you evaluate, reflect upon and manage your studies.
This is a guide that you can dip into as you need – or use by working through the chapters related to a particular aspect of study. You can do as little or as much as you find helpful. Of necessity, the Handbook focuses on a different aspect of study in each chapter. However, in practice, these are interconnected: developing one area of your study will also help with other aspects.

Finding what you need

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

Copiable pages

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

Using the website

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

Cartoons and page layout

The cartoons and the variety of page layouts act primarily as visual memory-joggers. Even if you cannot draw well, you can use visual prompts such as these in your own notes. The visual distinctiveness of the pages along with the page headers will also help you to find things more quickly within the book. This encourages learning through different senses, too – see page 4 below and Chapter 8 for more details.

The self-evaluation questionnaires

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

Challenging material

If you are returning to study after a few years’ absence, or if there are aspects of study that are new to you or that proved difficult in the past, don’t let these put you off now. It is very common for students to find that material which was difficult the first time around becomes comprehensible when they return to it after a gap. Even students who find academic language and methods unexpected or difficult usually adapt to these quite quickly.

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

Keeping a journal

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

- Browse through the Handbook so you know roughly what is in it. You may not know what to use until you start assignments.
- Read through the Seven approaches to learning used by The Study Skills Handbook (page 4). The Handbook will then make more sense to you.
- Complete the What would success look like for me? questionnaire (page 33). This will help you to orientate yourself as a student.
- Use the Study skills: priorities planner (page 48) to focus your thinking.
- If you are unsure where to begin with a study skill, use the Self-evaluation questionnaire in the appropriate chapter to clarify your thinking.
- Chapters 1–5 cover groundwork and study management approaches basic to the rest of the Handbook. It is generally helpful to gain a grasp of the material in these first.

If you are new to Higher Education …

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

You may also find it helpful, early on, to look at:
- identifying your current skills and qualities (Chapter 2)
- building your confidence in your learning abilities (Chapter 3)
- what will keep you motivated, focused, and help performance (Chapter 4)
- time management (Chapter 5)
- brushing up on reading skills (Chapter 6) and writing skills (Chapter 11).

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

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

Dyslexic students

There are now thousands of dyslexic students in Higher Education. Many aspects of this book are designed with dyslexic students in mind, including:
- the contents
- the use of visual images
- the book’s layout
- the emphasis on structure
- the use of varied and multi-sensory approaches to learning.

Pace yourself

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

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

Everybody learns in their own way

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

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

The Study Skills Handbook uses seven approaches to learning.

1. Learning can be an adventure

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

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

2. Use many senses

The more we use our senses of sight, hearing and touch, and the more we use fine muscle movements in looking, speaking, writing, typing, drawing, or moving the body, the more opportunities we give the brain to take in information using our preferred sense.

The use of several senses also gives the brain more connections and associations, making it easier to find information later, which assists memory and learning. This book encourages you to use your senses to the full and to incorporate movement into your study. This will make learning easier – and more interesting.

3. Identify what attracts you

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

It is within your power to find in any aspect of study the gold that attracts you. For example, visualise yourself on a large cinema screen enjoying your study – or your later rewards. Hear your own voice telling you what you are achieving now. Your imagination will catch hold of these incentives and find ways of making them happen.
4 Use active learning

We learn with a deeper understanding when we are both actively and personally engaged:
• juggling information
• struggling to make sense
• playing with different options
• making decisions
• linking information.

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

5 Take responsibility for your learning

As you will see from Chapter 1, it is generally understood in Higher Education that:
• at this level, it is a good thing for students to take on increased amounts of responsibility for their learning
• and you will arrive with sufficient preparation to be able to study in an independent way for much of the week.

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

6 Trust in your own intelligence

Many students worry in case they are not intelligent enough for their course. Some did not do well at school, and worry that being a good student is ‘not in their genes’. Panic about this can, in itself, make it hard to learn. That is why this book considers ideas about intelligence (in Chapter 3) and stress (in Chapter 14). Many students who were not ideal pupils at school do extremely well at college, following thorough preparation.

7 Personalise your learning

Recognise your learning preferences

Each of us learns in an individual way – though we also have a lot in common. Some theorists divide people into ‘types’ such as visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, or introverted and extroverted – there are lots of ways of dividing people up. The important thing, however, is not to discover which ‘type’ you are but rather to recognise the many different elements that contribute to how you yourself learn best.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enjoy the book
I hope you enjoy The Study Skills Handbook – and your time as a student.
Part A

Managing yourself for study

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

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

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

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

This section, Managing yourself for study, provides background and approaches that help you to build a solid foundation in managing your studies. It helps you to understand the context of Higher Education – and why you are expected to take on such responsibility. As you are expected to take charge of your own learning, it is useful to understand what ‘learning’ is about so that you gain insights into how to do this well. It looks at the range of skills and understandings typically expected of students at this level, so that you can check for yourself whether you are on the right track.
Chapter 1
Success as a student

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

Higher Education involves study at university level, although this may be completed in institutions that are not, themselves, universities. The experience of being a student in Higher Education can be life-changing. Most graduates look back on this time with great fondness. That is because of the unique opportunities to:
• study interesting subjects
• feel stretched intellectually
• explore new ideas
• engage in a wide range of new activities
• find out about yourself, not least how you rise to the challenge of academic study
• consider the kind of person that you want to be in the world
• make friends that will last you for life.

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

Higher level study is different from study at previous levels. This chapter helps you to identify how and why this is the case, and what that means for you as a student. It encourages you to think through what you want from the experience of being a student and to identify things you can do to succeed.
In Higher Education, success lies largely in your own hands. Although help and guidance is provided, it is up to you to take the initiative. This means being active on your own behalf.

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

**Make wise choices that work for you**
Choose...
- the right degree subject
- the right modules or topics for your level
- the right use of your time in class and outside of class to achieve what you want to do.

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

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

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

– Ade, first-year student

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

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

**Self-motivation**
You have to be able to work on your own a lot.

**Openness to working with others**
You will need to organise study sessions with friends.

**Ability to work things out for yourself**
How successful was the 1944 Education Act?

It’s terrible! The lecturers expect us to tell them all the answers!

To cope at this level, you need to be reasonably good at:
- adapting to new people and environments
- surviving in potentially very large groups
- being flexible in your learning style.

**Ability to set goals to improve your work**

Whoopee!!
B+! Next time I want an A!

**Ability to organise your time**
You need to keep track of time. You must:
- know when and where you should be for scheduled classes, events and exams
- know when work has to be handed in
- keep to deadlines for handing in work.

(See Chapter 5.)

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

On second thoughts maybe I do work better indoors, in the daytime.
# Current skills and qualities

## People
- Ability to get on with people from different backgrounds
- Understanding other people's points of view
- Sensitivity to cultural differences
- Dealing with the general public
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Networking
- Managing or supervising others' work
- Teaching, training or mentoring others
- Negotiating and persuading
- Helping others to arrive at decisions

## Activities and tasks
- Creativity, design and layout
- Innovation and inventiveness
- Ability to see the 'whole picture'
- Argument and debate
- Seeing patterns and connections
- Attention to detail
- Searching for information
- Classifying and organising information
- Making decisions
- Managing change and transition
- Setting priorities
- Working out agendas
- Organising work to meet deadlines
- Facilitating meetings
- Reading complex texts
- Computer literacy

## Personal
- Setting my own goals
- Working independently
- Maintaining a high level of motivation
- Taking responsibility for my own actions
- Learning from my mistakes
- Willingness to take risks and experiment
- Assertiveness
- Determination and perseverance

- Consideration of others' feelings
- Caring for others
- Supporting and motivating others
- Understanding others' body language
- Coping with 'difficult' people
- Speaking clearly and to the point
- Audience awareness
- Taking direction from others
- Giving constructive feedback
- Leadership skills
- Other:

- Technological skills
- Using social networking tools
- Working with numbers
- Selling
- Problem-solving
- Quick thinking
- Practical skills
- Understanding quickly how things work
- Seeing practical applications
- Writing reports or official letters
- Languages
- Enterprise and entrepreneurship
- Business and financial skills
- Managing difficult situations, emergencies and crises
- Other:

- Self-reliance
- Recognising my own needs
- Taking care of my health and well-being
- Staying calm in a crisis
- Coping skills and managing stress
- Other:
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