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Introduction to the Skills Development Programme

Congratulations on becoming a student! By being accepted for entry as a student you have already demonstrated a certain proficiency in your study habits, knowledge and ability. However, in order to get the most out of your studies, it is important to work at developing your study skills and techniques even further.

Additionally, you need to think beyond the time you will spend as a student. Employers, tutors and students are increasingly recognising the importance of the development of what have become known as 'personal transferable skills' as an essential part of any course of study. These skills are particularly valuable because they can be practised and improved whilst you are a student and then can be applied (or transferred) to a wide variety of workplace situations when you have graduated. Examples of personal transferable skills include problem-solving, group and team work, presentation skills and time management.

The Skills Development Programme has been designed to help you to enhance your academic and long-term career prospects by providing opportunities for you to improve both your learning and study skills and personal transferable skills.

It is worth noting that there is a clear link between study skills and personal transferable skills. For example, time management is a skill which is valuable to both students who have to organise their time and plan their working routines as well as to the workforce of large and small organisations. Furthermore, good communication skills, both verbal and written, are also important in both student and later working life.

We hope that you will make the most of the opportunities provided by the programme. You may well find out quite a lot about yourself, as well as the many ways in which the College can help you. In addition, you should get some useful practice in interacting with other people, for in the skills workshops you need never feel you are working alone; there will always be your colleagues and, if necessary, your Academic Advisers, to talk over any perplexing matters.

➤ Aims of the Skills Development Programme

1. To enable all students to take full advantage of the stimulus and varied demands of the undergraduate programme.
2. To ensure the acquisition of a range of personal transferable skills necessary both for further study and for entry into the job market.
3. To develop in all students an analytical, critical approach to study including the self-realisation of individual strengths and weaknesses.
4. To provide opportunities for the practical application of acquired skills and knowledge in the context of an appropriate environment both inside and outside College.
5. To introduce information and communications technology as an essential study tool and as a means to develop and enhance present Field-specific study skills.

➤ The Structure of the SKILLS DEVELOPMENT Programme

The Skills Development Programme comprises two compulsory Level I modules - the Learning Development module and the Transferable Skills module. The structure of each of these modules is shown below.

Level I Skills Development Programme

Learning Development (Single Module: Semester 1)



Transferable Skills (Single Module: Semester 2)




Learning Development

Study Skills

This module comprises a programme of study skills which you will follow under the guidance of your Academic Adviser.

This module is designed to help you to reflect on your personal learning development and to introduce, encourage and reinforce those skills required for successful completion of a programme of student study. Many of you will have much experience of study which has successfully gained you a place at the College, but you have probably never learned how to study. The Learning Development module provides you with an opportunity to develop new skills and fine tune old ones, in order to get the most out of the modular course. The activities set out in the sections of this workbook have been especially designed to support the learning and study skills components of this module.

In each section, suggested activities are indicated by the icon: 

You will benefit from working through these activities in your own time. Your Academic Adviser may require you to undertake some of the activities as part of your assessment of the module.

Skill areas introduced in Learning Development Module



The learning and study skills component of this module is worth 100% of the total marks for the module. Your Academic Adviser will tell you exactly what assessed work is required of you for this part of the module and also the date for the submission of the work.



Transferable Skills

This module is made up of two elements:

- a. Six Week Option 1 (Weeks 1-6)
- b. Six Week Option 2 (Weeks 7-12)

The Transferable Skills module has been designed to provide opportunities for you to build on specific skills from the Learning Development module so that you can broaden your experience and strengthen your areas of weakness.

The general aims of the Six Week Options are as follows:-

1. To offer you an element of choice in the selection of appropriate transferable skills.
2. To develop one or more of the key transferable skills.
3. To allow opportunity for the acquisition of specialist skills in areas of need or interest.
4. To enable you to have a taste of a skills area where familiarity is lacking.
5. To allow the integration of information technology skills with both general and specialist applications.

The options from which you may choose include:

Computer Skills for Beginners

A foundation level programme designed to enable students to gain basic competence in five of the most commonly used IT applications. Students who complete this course satisfactorily may attempt the CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) qualification operated by OCR with some confidence.

Information Management

- ♦ defining the need for information ♦ initiating the search strategy
- ♦ locating relevant resources ♦ evaluating information

Observation Skills

This transferable skills option is designed to support students in attaining their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Assessing Candidate Performance, commonly known as the D32 award.

▶ Improving your learning skills

It is important for you to recognise how you learn and to be able to identify the learning methods most appropriate to yourself to help make your studies more effective.

The learning outcomes of this section are to:

- ♦ help you identify how you learn
- ♦ identify the learning methods most appropriate to you
- ♦ introduce skills/techniques you may use to make your learning more effective.

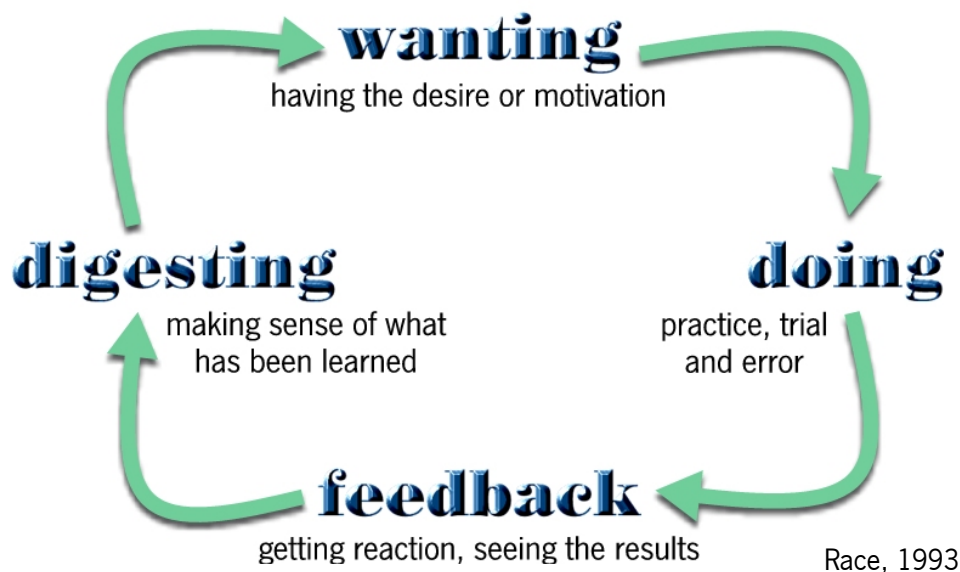
How do you learn?

All of us learn in different ways or respond differently to different learning situations. When the circumstances are right for you, then learning is more effective. Marshall and Rowland (1983) have stated that learning is effective only when;

- ♦ it is important to you
- ♦ it is carried out when you are ready
- ♦ it uses a method that suits you
- ♦ it builds on knowledge you already have

Read chapter 5 Learning and Remembering in Marshall & Rowland (1983) This will expand on these concepts.

Learning theory also suggests that for learning to be effective it must follow the learning cycle shown below.



activity

Listed below are some methods of learning. By which method from this list do you think you learn most effectively? You may have more than one answer. Also, consider those methods which you have experienced but which have not been good learning experiences. Indicate on the list which have been good or bad learning experiences.

	good	bad
♦ Lecture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Trial and error	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Seminar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Getting appropriate feedback	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Role play	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Experiment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Being taught	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Watching others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Learning from mistakes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
♦ Interest in the subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Feedback

Everyone completing this exercise will have come up with a different set of responses. It is likely though that your good experiences of learning will have matched the models given above and involved elements of wanting, doing, feedback and digesting.

As Coats (1991) has stated, it is up to you to develop good learning habits. This will mean deciding :

- ♦ which learning methods work best for you and for what purpose
- ♦ which learning methods fit your circumstances
- ♦ which learning methods make you feel most confident as a learner
- ♦ which learning methods make you feel in control of your learning.

Experiment! Learning should be active and experimental; reflective and adaptive; more about understanding than remembering; should involve talking, thinking and writing; adapting, transforming and applying. (Coats, 1991)

Learning more effectively

In the previous section we introduced some basic learning theory. You are the only one who knows how you yourself learn most effectively.

Whichever way you learn, there are a number of skills or techniques that you can employ to help you learn more effectively. We will introduce you to these skills/techniques here. They include:

- ♦ being creative
- ♦ using a problem solving approach
- ♦ being able to concentrate
- ♦ employing note taking skills
- ♦ asking questions
- ♦ using your existing knowledge
- ♦ techniques for remembering
- ♦ effective reading.

Being creative

Your learning experience can be enhanced by your being creative. You should:

- ♦ welcome new ideas
- ♦ discard pre-conceptions
- ♦ encourage thinking in different ways.

Using a problem solving approach

By analysing a problem, you will make it easier to come up with solutions.

Ask yourself:

- ♦ what is the problem?
- ♦ what do you want to achieve?
- ♦ what are the possible solutions?

It is always important when solving a problem to get as much background information as possible.

Being able to concentrate

For you to be able to learn effectively you need to be able to concentrate.

This means that you must plan your time and study to ensure that you:

- ♦ reduce interruptions
- ♦ minimise distractions - remember distractions can come from you and not just other people.
- ♦ have regular breaks. You will be better able to concentrate in short periods of 30-40 minutes broken up with short breaks
- ♦ are able to focus your attention. You will be better able to focus your attention if you are clear as to your aims. What do you want to get out of learning this topic?

Employing note taking skills

Good notes are a vital aid to your studies and can help you to understand the subject more clearly. Different techniques of note taking can be employed, (see chapter 4).

Asking questions

Approaching any topic by thinking critically in a questioning manner will develop your learning. Open questions that ask, How? Why? What? When? and Where? are the most important to be asking about the subject you are learning. You will find that they help to provide:

- ♦ a structure to your work
- ♦ a focus for your topic.

Using your existing knowledge

Relating new learning experiences to, or building upon, existing knowledge is a good way to improve your understanding of a subject. The key is to relate the new subject to knowledge you already have. How can you do this?

- ♦ produce a 'Mind Map' - writing down all you know about aspects of a new subject (see chapter 4 for more information on Mind Maps)
- ♦ talk to your colleagues. By discussing subjects, it is surprising how much can be gained by the sharing of ideas/thoughts.

Effective reading

Reading is a skill in its own right. Being able to read effectively will help to ensure you are reading the right sort of material and extracting the relevant information from it. When reading you should always be asking questions of the book or journal.

You can read in different ways for different purposes. You may:

- ♦ skim - quickly checking contents, coverage - this will help you to assess the value of the book/journal
- ♦ scan - consider the item in more detail checking for specific information
- ♦ read thoroughly to understand - studying the text in more depth

References

Coats, M. (1991) *Open Teaching Toolkit: Learning how to Learn*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

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