

Planning for Success



**Planning for successful study in work-based
programmes**



INTRODUCTION



Welcome to Planning for Success. This is your opportunity to start your journey to success on your course. We think you will find it particularly useful if you have not studied for some time.

All you need to do is work through the activities which will help you to:

- reflect on some of the academic skills that you have already developed;
- think about the areas that you may need to work on;
- plan how and when you are going to develop your skills further.

You will need to download this document and save it on your PC where you can work through it electronically by following the hyperlinks. Alternatively, you can print it out and fill it in by hand. Whatever is easiest for you!

What skills are covered?

The skill areas covered in the activities are:

- **Managing your study time** - How, when and where are you going to study alongside all those other work, family and social commitments.
- **Academic Writing** – What are the academic writing skills that you will need for university study.
- **Information (Library) Skills** - How well prepared you are to use the library.
- **Reading** - How confident are you in reading academic text.
- **Verbal Communication** - How do you feel about taking part in academic discussions and presentations.

As you work through the activities, click on the hyperlink and make a note of areas that you feel ok with and those you need to work on. These will then automatically feed into and build:

YOUR SKILLS PROFILE

which you can then use as a starting point for:

YOUR LEARNING PLAN

As a DMU student, you have access to loads of support, so do take some time to find out what is available and how to find it. [Follow the links \(in the grid on Page 17\) to the help for specific aspects of your skills as you work through the activities.](#)

A final note before you get started – you may be feeling a little apprehensive about starting a new course. Don't worry, this is quite common – in fact you will probably find that your fellow students are feeling exactly the same.



MANAGING YOUR STUDY TIME



Students say that the most challenging aspect of learning at university is managing their **independent study** time. The big shock for many students is that this can be **TWO, THREE** or even **MORE** times the time spent in direct contact with university staff in lectures, tutorials or other supported learning situations. In other words, attending a lecture, tutorial or workshop is only part of the picture!

Independent study time is when you:

- Prepare for classes;
- Complete work set by tutors, including assessed assignments;
- Research and read around your subject.

To make the most of your independent study time you need not only to have enough available, but you also need to be comfortable, alert and focussed.

The following activities will help you to plan your week.

Activity 1: A typical week's activities

Estimate the number of hours you spend each day on the different aspects your life, including **the timetabled sessions on your course at DMU**, and find out how much time is left for **independent study**.

	Monday	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Friday	Sat	Sunday
Sleeping							
Cooking, eating							
Childcare							
Travelling							
Using on-line communication eg email, phone, Facebook Twitter							
Working							
Classes at DMU							
Other							
Total							
Subtract totals from 24 to find out what's left in each day for independent study!							

You may be a bit shocked at the small amount of time left for study, but don't give up now!! Rather, use this as an opportunity to take stock of your other commitments and see what changes you can make. The next activity will help you to do just that.

Activity 2: A typical week's activities

The next activity will help you to work out:

- Where you are going to find that much needed study time.
- Where you will use it.

We have already mentioned that you are going to have to spend two or three times studying independently for every hour spent in timetabled classes.

	Yes	No
Have you got enough study time in your week?		
Do you need to think about making changes to your week?		

One hour studying when you are alert is much more worthwhile than three hours studying when you are tired.

	Yes	No
Do you know what time of day is best for you to study? eg early in the morning or late at night?		
Is the time that you already have available in your week, the best time for you to study?		
Do you need to reschedule any activities?		
Can you take study time from work?		
Can you use your lunch breaks?		
Are you prepared to use some of your annual leave?		

Not only should you study at the time which is best for you, but you also need to be in the right environment

	Yes	No
Do you know under what circumstances you work best? Some people need absolute silence, others like a buzz of conversation or music in the background.		
Do you have a suitable space at home for study? Undisturbed? Well lit? Space to leave your books out? Comfortable, preferably at a table or desk?		
Will you use a library for your independent study? The university or your local library offers you an escape from distraction – and silence if you need it.		

BUILD YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Follow this link to make a note in your skills profile of the adjustments you need to make in order to make the most of your independent study time:

 [Go to Managing Time](#)

If completing manually go to the grid on Page 19



ACADEMIC WRITING



The following questionnaires will help you to think about the **different styles of writing** that you will need to use at university and how confident you feel about **managing your writing** at university.

Activity 1: Using different styles of writing

Tick [✓] to show how confident you feel in using these different styles of writing.		Not confident	Quite confident	Confident
		✓	✓	✓
Descriptive or factual writing	Describing e.g. what happened, what something is like.			
	Explaining the main ideas from what you have read.			
Discussing ideas and arguments	Examining a subject from different perspectives.			
	Weighing up ideas and arguments.			
	Backing up your point with evidence from your reading.			
Considering evidence and justifying your interpretation	Explaining how ideas are similar or different.			
	Explaining the significance of different ideas and views.			
	Making a judgement about the value of what you have read.			

Activity 2: Managing your academic writing

Here are some of the things you will need to address – tick to see how confident you are. Don't worry if you find that you do not feel very confident in this area – it will come with practice. There is a lot of support to help you develop and remember that other students will most likely be feeling the same!!!	Not confident	Quite confident	Confident
	✓	✓	✓
Analysing (breaking down) an assignment brief or task.			
Organising your ideas.			
Writing in your own words.			
Writing concisely.			
Justifying your own and others' views and drawing conclusions.			
Referencing your reading and other research.			

Activity 3: Check out your punctuation and spelling

Try correcting the punctuation in the following passage. There are also **three spelling errors** for you to spot.

Remember, this activity only covers punctuation and spelling: correct use of grammar is equally important. Also don't forget that it is unacceptable to use informal language such as 'text speak' in an academic piece of writing!

students often ask how do i use punctuation appropriately there are several ways of using language you need to know this in order to make sure you use the right language when writing for academic purposes a sentence can make a statement ask a question issue a command or shout an exclamation the full stop and comma structure your writing create coherant text and mark pauses in sentences apostrophes show posession for example one students success or several students success it is vital that students use punctuation correctly in addition they need to check their spelling and grammar

Now check this against the [corrected passage](#).

Activity 3: Corrected passage

Students often ask, 'How do I use punctuation appropriately?' There are several ways of using language. You need to know this in order to make sure you use the right language when writing for academic purposes. A sentence can make a statement, ask a question, issue a command or shout an exclamation. The full stop and comma structure your writing, create coherent text and mark pauses in sentences. Using the semi-colon should be part of your academic style; for example expressing more complex ideas clearly. A colon expands upon the first part of a sentence: adding more detail to it. Apostrophes show possession, for example one student's success or several students' success. It is vital that students use punctuation correctly. In addition, they need to check their grammar and spelling.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Follow this link to make a note in your skills profile of areas of your academic writing that you feel ok with and those you need to work on

 [Academic Writing](#)

If completing manually go to the grid on Page 18



INFORMATION (LIBRARY) SKILLS




By information skills, we mean finding the right information and using it appropriately in your work. This might involve using computers and the internet, as well as paper-based materials.

You may have already used information skills for research at school/college, work or at home. However, the scale of what you need to do is likely to be quite different at university. The following questionnaire will help you to identify the research skills you need to work on to become 'information literate'.

	Not confident	Quite confident	Confident
Imagine you have just been given your first assignment ... how would you feel about finding, selecting and presenting information? Simply work through this questionnaire, ticking the relevant boxes	✓	✓	✓
Finding information ... I know how to ...			
• Find the range of information I need for an assignment - books, journal articles and electronic information.			
• Find relevant journal articles using databases.			
Selecting information ... I know how to ...			
• Evaluate information to assess whether it is reliable or not.			
Presenting information ... I know how to ...			
• Cite references and ideas I have used in my work.			
• Compile reference lists and/or bibliographies.			
Now, add up the ticks in each column to give you a rough idea of your level of confidence in information (library) skills.			

BUILD YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Follow this link to make a note in your skills profile of areas of your information skills that you feel ok with and those you need to work on:

 [Information Skills](#)



If completing manually go to the grid on Page 21



READING SKILLS



To help you think about your confidence in reading academic text, read the short piece of academic text which follows and then complete the activities.

Here are a few tips:

- First, read through the passage quickly (skim read) to give you a general idea of the content.
- Then read it again at your own speed.
- Don't worry if you have to read the whole passage, or sections of it, several times.
- You may find it useful to highlight key words or phrases.

Most importantly....

- **Take your time.**

Writing in an academic style

One of the biggest misconceptions that students have about academic writing is that it involves using very long words and complicated sentence structures. Often they imagine they will never quite learn all the 'rules'. It is reassuring to know that even professional authors have similar doubts about their work. When Ian McEwan began writing in the 1970s he often perceived that language was somehow out to trick him: 'I would stare at it suspiciously. Did it really say what I meant? Did it contain an error or ambiguity that I could not see? Was it making a fool of me?' (McEwan, 2002)¹.

The edgy relationship McEwan has experienced with the written word is often shared by students who are attempting to write an academic essay for the first time.

¹ McEwan, I. (2002) *Mother Tongue: A Memoir*. In: Z. Leader ed. *On Modern British Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yet the skills needed to write well are surprisingly straightforward. Quite simply, the key to effective writing is the ability to present an objective and relevant discussion with the use of clear and concise language. With time and practice these techniques can easily improve the quality of a student's work.

Dr Melanie Petch, Lecturer in Writing Support, Centre for Learning and Study Support (CLaSS), De Montfort University.

Activity 1:

There are two sentences in the passage which explain most fully the idea or purpose of the text. Can you identify which these are?

Activity 2

Try summarising the passage in no more than 30 words. You are aiming to:

- show you understand what are the main points;
- leave out unnecessary detail;
- use simple clear sentences;
- use your own words.

Activity 1: Suggested response and explanation

The two key sentences are:

'Quite simply, the key to effective writing is the ability to present an objective and relevant discussion with the use of clear and concise language. With time and practice these techniques can easily improve the quality of a student's work.'

While the first sentence in the passage is important in 'setting the scene', the final two sentences explain the main purpose of the text; that is to reassure students that the skills of effective academic writing can be learned.

Activity 2: A suggested summary

Many students wrongly believe that academic writing must be complex. In fact, the most effective academic writing conveys objective arguments using clear and straightforward language. (24 words)

BUILD YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Follow this link to make a note in your skills profile of areas of your reading skills that you are ok with and those you need to work on



If completing manually go to the grid on Page 19



VERBAL COMMUNICATION

As a student on the UCPD you will be expected to:

- take part in discussions with your lecturers, tutors and fellow students;
- give presentations on your work;

Developing your verbal communication skills will be of enormous value to you both as a student and in your professional or working life. Consider the following scenarios, work through the statements and tick the relevant boxes.

Scenario 1: You have an appointment with your tutor to look at your progress on the UCPD.	Not confident	Quite confident	Confident
How well prepared are you?			
Tick [✓] to show how confident you feel.	✓	✓	✓
I prepare for discussions, including questions that I need to ask.			
I understand that I have a responsibility to contribute to the discussion.			
I ask questions (e.g. if I don't understand something).			
I listen to and think about other people's opinions.			
I make sure that I have available any information that I may need to refer to (eg assignment briefs/ marked assignments)			

Scenario 2: You have to make to a presentation to a tutor and a small group of students.	Not confident	Quite confident	Confident
How well prepared are you?			
Tick [✓] to show how confident you feel	✓	✓	✓
I prepare for presentations – I know what to include and what to leave out.			
I think about the audience that I will be presenting to.			

I structure the presentation in a logical way.			
I practice what I am going to say.			
I speak clearly and without reading word for word from my notes.			
I answer questions from an audience.			

BUILD YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Follow this link to make a note in your skills profile of areas of your presentation skills that you are ok with and those you need to work on



 [Verbal Communication](#)

If completing manually go to the grid on Page 19

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE SKILLS ON YOUR COURSE

You've worked through activities which helped you to think about your confidence in some of the academic skills that you will need as a university student.

Before you look at **YOUR SKILLS PROFILE** and use this to create **YOUR LEARNING PLAN**, we suggest you consider the requirements for **YOUR COURSE** and complete the following **PRIORITY FINDER**.

NB: Have your course/unit guide(s) to hand, for reference.

YOUR PRIORITY FINDER						
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Use the scale: 4 (very); 3 (quite); 2 (not very); and, 1 (not at all)Give your responses in each column.						
SKILL	A	B	C	D	E	F
	How important is this skill on your course?	How quickly do you need to use this skill?	Add columns A and B for each skill	How confident are you in each skill?	Subtract column D from column C	Rank which skills you should prioritise over the next year.
Managing your study time						
Academic Writing						
Information (Library) Skills						
Reading						
Verbal Communication						

To some extent, all of these skills will be developed throughout your course, but prioritising, using this ranking system, will give you a flying start and boost your confidence for your first assignment.

Have a look at the priority finder which has been completed by a typical student, for an idea of how to interpret yours.

PRIORITY FINDER – Student Example						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the scale: 4 (very); 3 (quite); 2 (not very); and, 1 (not at all) Give your responses in each column. 						
SKILL	A	B	C	D	E	F
	How important is this skill on your course?	How quickly do you need to use this skill?	Add columns A and B for each skill	How confident are you in each skill?	Subtract column D from column C	Rank which skills you should prioritise over the next year.
Managing your study time	4	4	8	2	6	1 st =
Academic Writing	4	3	7	1	6	1 st =
Information (Library) Skills	4	2	6	3	3	3 rd
Reading	4	3	7	2	5	2 nd
Verbal Communication	3	3	6	4	2	4 th


So, what does all this mean for our sample student?


The final column shows that in terms of this student's confidence, and the importance of the skills for their particular course, both **managing study time** and **academic writing** would be good starting points for their immediate skill development. **Reading** would also be a good area for them to work on.



Library skills and **verbal communication** are both important for successful study, but this student is already confident. It isn't practical to try and develop everything immediately, so this student may decide to further develop these skills in the longer term.

YOUR SKILLS PROFILE and LEARNING PLAN

As you made notes at the end of each activity, these have been captured to produce the following skills profile. You may want to add to these, before creating your personal learning plan.

YOUR SKILLS PROFILE		LINKS TO GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT	YOUR LEARNING PLAN	
SKILL	Areas that you identified you needed to work on when you completed the activities.		When? Don't aim to address everything at once – look at your priority planner and use that to plan.	What help might you need? From work? From the university? From family and friends?
Managing your study time 	<p>Now go back to Page 7 for the next section on Academic Writing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How you will be taught (Page 23) • How you will be assessed (Page 24) • What is expected from you (Page 25) • How to approach an assignment (Page 27) 		

	Go to academic writing			
Academic Writing 	<p><i>Now go back to Page 10 for the next section on Information Skills</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLaSS website • ASK Gateway 		

	<p><i>Now go back to Page 15 for the next section on Verbal Communication</i></p> <p> <u>Go to verbal communication</u></p>			
<p>Verbal Communication</p> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>CLaSS website</u> • <u>ASK Gateway</u> 		

HOW YOU WILL BE TAUGHT

Studying at university involves a wide range of approaches to learning and teaching – some of these may already be familiar to you, others will be a new experience. Here is a brief description of the most common learning situations that you will come across and tips on how to make the most of these.

LEARNING SITUATION	WHAT MIGHT THIS INVOLVE?	SOME KEY TIPS ON MAKING THE MOST OF THIS ACTIVITY
Lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An overview of a topic.• A starting point for finding out more through your own reading and research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen and make notes that are useful to you.• Ask and answer questions.• Take part in any activities the lecturer introduces.
Group tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In depth consideration of a topic.• An opportunity to test your own understanding and share ideas, opinions and arguments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read around the topic in advance and complete any pre-session activities.• Be prepared to contribute and bring along questions.
One-to-one tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An opportunity to receive feedback, discuss progress and plan further work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare questions.• Take note of feedback and use this to plan how you will improve.
Practicals including laboratory and studio work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An opportunity to apply theory to practice.• Where practicals are part of your course, they will be a significant aspect of your learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn and practise techniques and how to use equipment.• Follow procedures, instructions and health and safety guidelines.• Record results.

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HOW YOU WILL BE ASSESSED

By finding out which forms of assessment are used in your course, you will be in a better position to:

- understand and so feel less anxious about the assessment processes;
- use assessment more effectively to demonstrate what you have learnt.

The following glossary of assessment terms aims to remove some of the mystery that can make assessment more stressful than it need be.

Your course may not include all of these assessment methods and there will also be others that we have not covered – these will be explained to you by your tutors.

Remember if you are unsure about any aspect of assessment used in your course, do ask your tutors.

Forms of assessment

Essay	A piece of writing which: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explores a topic in detail;• is written in a formal style, usually with a word limit;• involves the development and organisation of own ideas.
Report	Writing up of an investigation or a project which: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• uses a formal and concisely structured style, with clearly defined headings; Different subjects have their own conventions and formats – so check what your course specifies.
Project	A systematic process of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• setting goals, carrying out research and applying knowledge to produce specific outcomes;• usually undertaken individually, but also in groups.
Portfolio	An organised way of presenting evidence of your work including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• feedback and testimony from others;• your own self-evaluation and reflection.
Presentation	An individual or group talk which: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provides an opportunity for presentation of eg the outcomes of a project;• may be assessed on the contribution of the whole group or of individuals.
Peer-assessment	This involves students assessing other students: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• often used when undertaking group projects;• a stimulus for thinking about your own performance in relation to other students.
Self-assessment	An opportunity to reflect on your own performance and development. It involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• thinking about the process of learning as well as the final product or performance.

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WHAT IS EXPECTED FROM YOU

As a university student you are expected to take responsibility for and make decisions about, your own learning and personal development. This involves finding the right balance between study, social and family life, voluntary activity and paid work.

Here are some **KEY TIPS** for successful study.

Attend all classes

You may think that missing the odd class is OK!

However ... past students have found that
POOR ATTENDANCE = POOR MARKS in assignments and exams!

Participate

It is not just enough to attend classes – you also need to:

- Prepare for classes.
- Contribute to discussions.
- Ask questions.
- Make suggestions.
- Value what other students say.
- Do any follow up work.

Allocate time for independent study

The importance of managing your study time cannot be emphasised enough. Remember, it is not just about completing assignments – this is the time you need to spend:

- Preparing for classes.
- Making sense of your lecture notes.
- Reading widely and researching your subject.

Plan your work

Reduce the stress of working to deadlines by:

- Making sure you understand what is required - ask if you are not sure.
- Planning ahead – don't leave everything to the last minute.
- Setting yourself realistic targets and trying to keep to them.

Decide where and when to study

- When is the best time for you to study – do you work best early in the morning or late at night?
- Where do you study best? – if you need to be peaceful and undisturbed, try the quiet zones in the Library.

- Don't work for too long at a time – take regular breaks.

Use feedback to improve your marks


Throughout your course you will receive verbal and written feedback from your tutors. Use it to improve your work.

- Listen to your tutors comments on your work in eg tutorials, practicals and labs.
- When you get a marked assignment back – don't just look at the mark ... take a note of any written feedback from your tutors.
- Ask your tutor if you are not sure what their feedback means.

Attend meetings with your Personal Tutor

Use these meetings to:

- Review your progress.
- Plan areas that you need to improve.
- Discuss any areas of concern.
- Seek advice on where to go for further support.

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HOW TO APPROACH AN ASSIGNMENT

Try using this step-by-step approach to your assignments. We have based it on a written assignment, such as an essay or report ... however, it is adaptable to **any** academic task, for example:

- a design
- a performance
- a presentation
- a project.
-

It can be used for group work as well as individual assignments.

Step 1: Understand the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the instructions carefully.• Break the assignment down into manageable chunks.• Ask your tutor if you are not sure.
Step 2: Plan your approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you already know?• What do you need to find out?• Keep the assignment task in focus.• Note the submission date.
Step 3: Collect and record information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a range of resources – books, journals, surveys, reports, newspapers, videos ... not just the internet!• Be selective – don't think you have to include everything.• Note where you found the information (for your references)
Step 4: Produce first draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start by jotting ideas down.• Begin to build your assignment.• Know why you have chosen particular information and ideas.
Step 5: Review first draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check that the evidence supports your argument.• You may need to cut out irrelevant bits.• Check you are answering the question.• You may need to review your draft several more times!!
Step 6: Produce final copy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proof-read for spelling, punctuation, grammar and clarity.• Try reading it aloud – this can help you pick up errors you've missed.• Check the word count and presentation.• Check your referencing.
Step 7: Submit your assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep a copy – for your own reference and just in case the original goes missing!• Get a receipt.
Step 8:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take note of any written feedback ... not just the mark.

Collect your marked assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the feedback and what you can learn from it. • Ask your tutor to explain comments if you are not sure what they mean.
Step 9: Make the most of feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use feedback to help you achieve better marks. • In your next assignment plan to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - include more of what was good in this one; - work on the weaker aspects. • Remember what worked for you and try it again next time.
Step 10: Your next assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the same step-by-step approach in your next assignment.

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