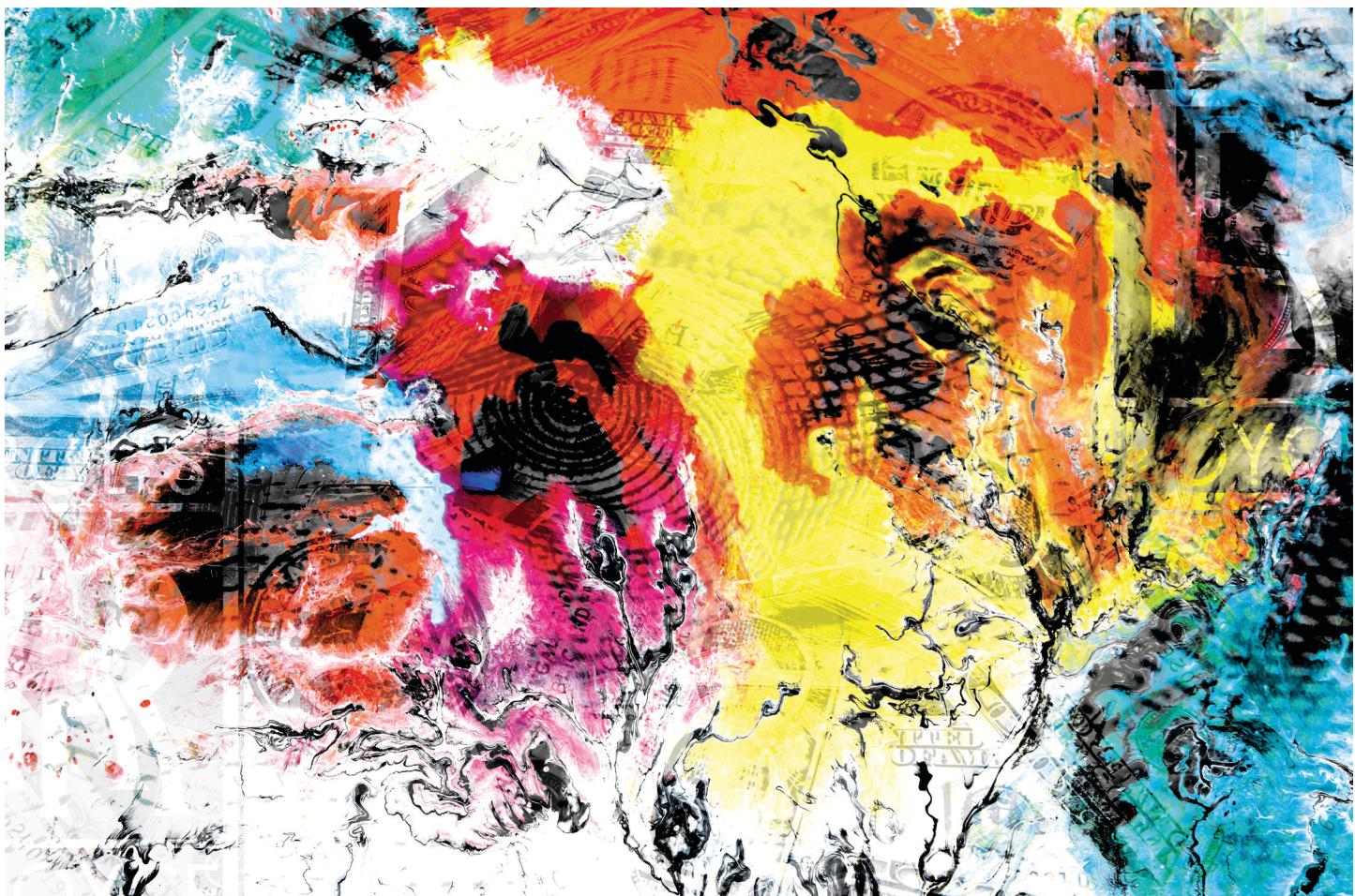




Am I ready to be an apprentice distance learner?



This item contains selected online content. It is for use alongside, not as a replacement for the module website, which is the primary study format and contains activities and resources that cannot be replicated in the printed versions.

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Introduction



The apprenticeship programme is delivered in partnership with your employer and The Open University, which is designed to develop your professional skills, and improve your long-term career prospects, whether you are starting out in your first job, or progressing at work.

Apprentices new to distance learning say they may not feel confident with the skills they already have; this free course will help to support you in becoming a confident distance learning apprentice.

It will guide you through five simple interactive steps to refresh your approach to learning. You will explore useful study skills, time management, assessments, becoming digitally ready, and effectively engagement with course materials.

You will complete the course with an exercise to enable you to reflect on your readiness to be an apprentice distance learner.

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- identify areas of study strengths in preparation for becoming an apprentice distance learner
- explore and reflect on skills that are valuable for distance study
- identify opportunities to further develop your skills as an apprentice distance learner
- understand the attributes of a successful apprentice distance learner

The Open University would really appreciate your feedback, the survey should take around 5 minutes to complete. This is to tell us about yourself and your expectations for the course before you begin, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential, and we will not pass on your details to others.

1 How will I find time to study?



Finding time to study can be challenging while managing work, family life and other commitments. An apprenticeship is a job with a formal programme of training which meets the requirements of the Apprenticeship Standard (in England) or Apprenticeship Framework (in Wales). The time distributed to this training can vary between programmes. The planned training hours will be detailed in your Training Plan once you start the programme.

In England and Wales, this time is called 'off-the-job training.' This is time for you to engage in the learning with the OU during your contracted working hours. There may be a requirement for you to study outside of your contracted working hours, especially when assignments are due. This may also include attending online tutorials in the evening.

Time management is a key skill to develop. You will agree how your time will be structured with your employer. This will include time provided within your work, which can be a set time each week, a set day or be more flexible. You may need to plan more when assignments are due. You may also need to consider how to structure your study time as you can be studying a theory and a work based learning module side by side.

Looking ahead and planning your time is the first step to effective time management.

The study planner on your student home page directs you to the learning materials for each week or group of weeks and tells you what you should be doing and when. You will gain access to your student home page once you are enrolled on the programme.

Activity 1

 Duration 10 mins

As a first activity this will help you to get a sense of off-the-job training. Follow [this link](#) and scroll down to the section titled off-the-job training time explained.

1. Read the section that explains off-the-job training time
2. Click on the flowchart and read the 3 Key Facts

What is the average number of off-the-job-training hours per week for a full-time apprentice over the duration of the apprenticeship?

The [time planner](#) will help you to think about all the things you spend time doing across a week. Try to include everything you do to help you map out the time that you might have available for study. Inevitably, some of you will be incredibly busy

and juggling lots of things, while some of you might realise that you already have time available for study.

Answer

For a full-time apprentice, the average of 6 hours is the number of off-the-job training hours per week.

Now that you have a better understanding of off-the-job training time and your available time for study, it is worth considering how to make your learning time as effective as possible.

One of the things that apprentices tell us is that they worry about being distracted in the precious time they have available for study.

Here are tips that apprentices have shared with us about staying on track when studying:

- Plan your study time so that you have a realistic goal in mind and reward yourself on achieving it. (For example, read this section for 40 minutes before making a cup of coffee.)
- Try to balance your free time and your study time – this will help you to maximise the learning opportunities available to you
- It is good to take study breaks
- Record your off-the-job training, this can be a task for the end of your day
- Take into consideration any other commitments that may impact your study time such as if you care for someone
- Depending on which apprenticeship you are studying you need to consider the entry requirements. If you need to study Functional Skills as part of the apprenticeship you will need to speak to your employer about planning additional study time
- Studying at a distance often means using personal technology, such as your computer or mobile device. Try not to get distracted by text messages, emails, or social media updates. (For example, why not switch off notifications for these things when studying, and turn your mobile to silent or leave it in another room?)
- This might mean having a regular study space at home that you do not have to tidy before you start learning
- If you are studying while travelling as part of your job, make sure you have the relevant materials with you. (Certain materials can be downloaded to smart devices, which means you can access them while on the move.)

Reflection

 Duration 10 mins

Having completed Activity 1, and reading the study tips, are there any other factors you need to consider when planning your study time? You might find it helpful to note them here.

Provide your answer...

We hope that in working through the rest of this course you discover helpful strategies and resources.

2 Do I have the right skills for study?



Having found the time to study it is important to review your study skills. Learning is a journey and apprentice distance learners need to draw on a range of skills to help them on their way. Activity 2 will support you in reflecting on your skills, taking stock, and discovering where you might need to develop new skills.

Apprentices tell us that the skills they need to be successful in distance learning are a mixture of what might be called soft and hard skills. On the soft side, the kinds of things they talk about are self-motivation, dealing with stress and becoming more confident as a learner. On the hard side, which is more likely to depend on the discipline studied, they value being able to take detailed notes, draft essays or manage a busy work schedule.

Activity 2

 Duration 20 mins

What sort of approach best fits your attitude to study? Select five skills from the following list that best match your preferred study approach. Then copy and paste them into the box below.

1. I do not like to give up, I tend to persevere at a task
2. I am confident about reading to learn from different points of view
3. I am curious, I like to learn new things, and then apply this new knowledge
4. I am competent at making useful notes from my study materials
5. Learning can be challenging at times. However, I am confident in my capacity to learn effectively
6. I can write in a structured manner to answer a question
7. I might get stressed at times when learning. However, I know I can manage my time and expectations effectively
8. I can process my learning to address the assessment tasks asked of me
9. I respond to feedback positively, using it to develop myself as a learner
10. I can interpret information from a variety of media (books, spreadsheets, graphs, and audio)

Provide your answer...

What does this suggest?

If you picked even numbers (2, 4, 6, 8 or 10), this suggests you are more confident in what academics refer to as 'hard' discipline skills. If you selected odd numbers (1, 3, 5, 7 or 9), this suggests you are more confident with 'soft' skills.

Do not worry about the outcome of this task as you will need both sets of skills to be a successful apprentice distance learner. Being aware of them is the first step on your study journey – engaging in learning will develop these skills. The apprenticeship will help you in developing these skills.

Next steps

Have a chat with someone at work or at home who knows you well, about your approach to study. Many of us can be overly critical of ourselves and it can be motivating to have an impartial perspective on your skills as a learner.

Based on your response to the activity and your conversation, look at the example below of free Open Learn resources to help you develop more effective study skills. This is a short informal course designed to help you get a taste of what distance learning in higher education is like.

[Developing good academic practice](#)

3 Do I have the digital skills to be an apprentice distance learner?



Studying as an apprentice distance learner will mean that you will need to use a range of digital technologies. Before you start your studies, it might be helpful to reflect on your digital skills.

Technology and education are developing and increasingly go hand in hand. As it is likely you will use a computer or a tablet to study, it is important to ensure that you are confident in your digital skills to help you be an effective learner.

To be an apprentice distance learner, the following digital skills are likely to help you be successful in your studies:

Knowing how to:

- Complete an online application
- Navigate around a website
- Upload and download digital files
- Rename and scanning documents
- Use word processing packages to present your work
- Write online messages
- Use the internet to support you in your studies, for example you may need to attend an induction in the form of an online seminar or to complete research tasks
- Attend and take part in live interactive sessions over the internet such as tutorials and forums
- Watch recordings of sessions or events
- Submit written materials like assignments electronically
- Use the e-portfolio system to record evidence as part of your apprenticeship
- Use webchat and email to communicate
- Use presentation software to present an assignment
- Know how to submit writing material like assignments electronically, for you tutor to mark and provide feedback

Activity 3

 Duration 20 mins

Read this brief description of a new apprentice, Ronald

- Ronald has not studied in a while
- He is feeling a bit nervous about what to expect as an apprentice distance learner
- His apprenticeship requires him to complete an online application
- He will need to complete electronic documents
- He will need to upload scanned documents as part of the online application process
- His apprenticeship will require him to exchange emails
- His employer has provided him with a new laptop
- He has agreed study time with his employer
- He will navigate various study sites and manage a study planner
- His apprenticeship may include taking part in live interactive online sessions
- He will be expected to contribute to student forums
- He will need to record evidence to show his off-the-job training
- He will have to submit his assignments electronically

If he were a work colleague or friend, what advice would you give Ronald about his digital skills, prior to him starting his apprenticeship?

Provide your answer...

Comment

Ronald should check that all the software on his computer has been downloaded and has all the latest updates (well in advance to the start of the course).

It might be helpful if Ronald explored the course website and read material about how to prepare for study. He should look for resources, guidance and help online. While Ronald is becoming more confident using his digital skills, he should be aware that becoming a digital learner is a unique experience. It might be helpful for Ronald to contact the apprenticeship support team and request support to help him learn more about other digital skills resources for study.

Next steps

If you want to know more about how to develop or expand your digital skills, these resources might be helpful for you to explore:

[Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world](#)

[Activities A-Z – Being Digital – workplace skills](#)

[Getting started with the online library](#)

Optional activity



This activity is optional and just for fun. One of the technologies used to share learning and engage with the wider educational community is X, previously known as Twitter.

Short messages can be written and shared easily. If you have an X account use that. If you don't yet have one, it's free and very straightforward to set up.

Your task is to compose a tweet (of no more than 280 characters) in which you write about what you are looking forward to as a distance learner.

Tweet your message to @OpenLearn, using this hashtag: **#ready4distance-learning**.

Congratulations – you have now taken your first step to becoming a digital learner.

4 Am I ready to learn?



Learning at a distance may feel different from learning in a traditional classroom environment. Just as in face-to-face teaching, some online learning experiences include support from a tutor or an educator. However, other distance learning courses will embed the teaching within the material. Because this may be different from how you have studied in the past, this can take a little bit of getting used to. For example, you might not be instantly able to ask the tutor a question to check your understanding; instead, you might ask your peer group on a forum or contact the apprenticeship support team.

The crucial thing to being a successful distance learning apprentice is to engage fully with the teaching materials. Apprentices have shared with us the key approaches that lead to successful learning outcomes. These include:

- read
- take notes
- learn with others
- demonstrate what you have learned.

Read – When you engage with your learning materials it is important to remember that you are reading for understanding and need to digest significant points in the text. You will learn to develop reflective reading skills so that you check your own understanding as you go. Sometimes difficult concepts might need to be read more than once. Your learning materials will be on a screen, but the skills you use to read and understand them are similar.

Studying will include opportunities for you to engage in online learning activities. Being a digital learner can help you develop essential skills for study, work and lifelong learning. For example, modules that teach the skills needed to study in digital environments. Or where most of the module is based on online activity such as software use.

Take notes – When reading your learning materials, it is a good idea to take notes. Apprentices tell us they develop their own approaches to making notes. This might be highlighting text on screen, summarising notes on a separate piece of paper or in an electronic document. They may even produce mind maps.

Research tells us that learning is most effective when done with other people. Increasingly in distance education, apprentices will interact with one another using technology; for example, through forums, discussion threads and live tutorials or webinars.

Learn with others – As an apprentice distance learner you learn through a group-based teaching approach. From time to time, you may be required to attend residential schools

or workshops. You will be able to find this information once you have access to your module website.

Learning with others by using the range of technologies available can be a creative way to check your understanding with your peers or your tutor. Collaboration in this way can help you take on feedback from others and learn from different points of view. You will also enhance the learning of your peers by your comments and feedback.

Demonstrate what you have learned – The ultimate demonstration of your learning will come in your response to assessment tasks. This can include formal report writing, drafting essays, presentations, quizzes, blogging, contributing to work projects.

As part of the apprenticeship programme, you will need to show what you have learned by gathering evidence through your assessment tasks. This may be facilitated by your Practice Tutor who will support you integrate your learning with your professional work.

Activity 4

 Duration 30 mins

Read and reflect on Jon Rosewell's article on [Learning styles](#) (2004).

In the box below, note the learning style that most closely aligns with your own approach to learning.

Example: I am more of a pragmatist because I like to try out new things and just get on with it. I am practical and I can apply what I have learned to my own situation.

Provide your answer...

Activity 5

 Duration 20 mins

In Rosewell's article you will have seen a reference to Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Learning approaches are visually overlaid on Kolb's cycle to describe effective ways of learning. The most successful learners follow a four-step circular approach:

- Experiencing – doing something
- Reviewing – thinking about what has happened
- Concluding – drawing some conclusions
- Planning – deciding what to do in the future.

In the box below note the approaches to learning that you feel most confident with.

Provide your answer...

You might also want to note the approaches to learning you may wish to develop.

Provide your answer...

Next steps

As a result of reflecting on these learning activities, you may have been thinking about your own English language and number skills.

You may need to study Functional Skills as part of your apprenticeship.

The following free short courses on Open Learn might be helpful for you to explore.

[English: Skills for Learning](#)

[Essay and report writing skills](#)

[Numbers, units, and arithmetic](#)

5 Do I understand how assessment will help my learning?



Some apprentices tell us that they had negative experiences of completing assessments at school.

They recall assessment being 'done to them' and often associate it with being punished if they did not do well. As a result, it is not surprising if some apprentices struggle with the idea that assessment is a key element of effective learning.

When coming back to a period of study it is important to think about assessment in a unique way. It is not simply an assessment of what you have learned but contributes significantly to you becoming an effective learner.

The key to effective learning from assessment tasks is your engagement with the feedback you receive. Think of assessment as a tool with which to improve your learning – the feedback you gain is a crucial element in your learning journey. By thinking of assessment as an embedded part of your learning rather than just a test tacked on at the end you are much more likely to become a successful apprentice distance learner.

As part of the apprenticeship some assessment tasks in distance education will be a mixture of formal tasks (such as report writing, essays, presentations, and or exams) and informal tasks (such as quizzes, contributing to forum posts or discussion threads). The apprenticeship has been carefully designed to ensure that, as you work through the modules you can record your evidence on the e-portfolio system and obtain feedback as part of your reviews with your practice tutor. This will include your theory and work based modules.

Often courses have learning aims or outcomes (such as those from this course, which are listed below in Activity 6), and the assessment of a course is designed to help you show what you have learned.

One way to engage with assessment more confidently is to develop self-assessment skills.

Activity 6

 Duration 30 mins

Practice your self-assessment skills by reviewing this course's learning outcomes (listed below) and then considering the extent to which you have met them while working your way through this course.

Course learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- identify areas of study strengths in preparation for becoming an apprentice distance learner
- explore and reflect on skills that are valuable for distance study
- identify opportunities to further develop your skills as an apprentice distance learner
- understand the attributes of a successful apprentice distance learner

Imagine a tutor is going to read your answers and provide feedback, so ensure you are detailed in your response and give reasons for your answers.

Write a short paragraph to complete each line of text in the boxes below.

1. I have identified my study strengths, which are...

2. I have identified opportunities to further develop my skills as an apprentice distance learner. They are...

3. I have explored and reflected upon skills that are valuable for distance study. These are...

4. I understand the attributes of a successful apprentice distance learner. For me this includes...

If you found answering these questions difficult, go back to the 'Next steps' suggestions in previous sections.

Next steps

The following free short courses on OpenLearn might be helpful for you to explore to discover more skills in this area:

[Learning how to learn](#)

[Key skill assessment: Improving your own learning and performance](#)

6 Self-assessment activity



Throughout this short course you have engaged in a range of self-assessment activities to check your readiness to study as an apprentice distance learner.

We hope this course has boosted your confidence while helping you to explore useful skills, discover how ready you are to study, and how to develop your study skills.

Apprentices have told us that the level you start at and how well prepared you are for study makes a significant difference to your study success.

We have one final activity to prepare you for further study.

Activity 7

 *Duration 30 mins*

If you like the idea of becoming an apprentice distance learner engaging in formal study, more information is available on

[The Open University website at Information for apprentices.](#)

View more information about [Apprenticeships: off-the-job training](#)

Now you've come to the end of the course, we would appreciate a few minutes of your time to complete this short [end-of-course survey](#)

References

Kolb, D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall.

Rosewell, J. (2004) 'Learning styles' in *Living with the Net: Using Computing to Enrich Your Life*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2024) 'Information for apprentices' *Off-the-job time explained* Available at: [Information for apprentices | Open University](#) (accessed: 26 March 2024).

Acknowledgements

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