OpenLearn

Succeed with learning

Contents

Week 7: Where next?   104

Week 8: Your plan   123

Introduction and guidance

Succeed with learning is an informal, introductory course for people who want to feel more confident about their learning skills. This free badged course builds on your own qualities, knowledge and skills to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of learning and of your own potential. It introduces some core ideas about learning and academic study, and some planning tools to enable you to take the next step with confidence. You'll use plenty of real-life examples to help with this and give you plenty of opportunities to practise your new understanding and skills.

Part of this practice will be the weekly interactive quizzes, of which Weeks 4 and 8 will provide you an opportunity to earn a badge to demonstrate your new skills. You can read more on how to study the course and about badges in the next sections.

Like most courses these days, *Succeed with learning* has learning outcomes. These are not as complicated as they sound, but are simply what we hope you will achieve by the end of the course. After completing this course, we hope that you will have a better understanding of:

- how learning takes place every day
- the qualities, skills and knowledge you have already
- how to use computers for learning
- how reflection and feedback can help you make the most of your learning
- some important theories about learning
- developing a learning action plan to help you move forward.

Moving around the course

The easiest way to navigate around the course is through the 'My course progress' page. You can get back there at any time by clicking on 'Go to course progress' in the menu bar. From the quizzes click on 'Return to Succeed with learning'.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page, including links to the quizzes, to open it in new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

What is a badged course?

While studying *Succeed with learning* you have the option to work towards gaining a digital badge.

Badged courses are a key part of The Open University's mission *to promote the educational well-being of the community.* The courses also provide another way of helping you to progress from informal to formal learning.

To complete a course you need to be able to find about 24 hours of study time, over a period of about 8 weeks. However, it is possible to study them at any time, and at a pace to suit you.

Badged courses are all available on The Open University's OpenLearn website and do not cost anything to study. They differ from Open University courses because you do not receive support from a tutor. But you do get useful feedback from the interactive quizzes.

What is a badge?

Digital badges are a new way of demonstrating online that you have gained a skill. Schools, colleges and universities are working with employers and other organisations to develop open badges that help learners gain recognition for their skills, and support employers to identify the right candidate for a job.

Badges demonstrate your work and achievement on the course. You can share your achievement with friends, family and employers, and on social media. Badges are a great motivation, helping you to reach the end of the course. Gaining a badge often boosts confidence in the skills and abilities that underpin successful study. So, completing this course should encourage you to think about taking other courses.

How to get a badge

Getting a badge is straightforward! Here's what you have to do:

- read each week of the course
- score 50% or more in the two badge quizzes in Week 4 and Week 8.

For all the quizzes, you can have three attempts at most of the questions (for true or false type questions you usually only get one attempt). If you get the answer right first time you will get more marks than for a correct answer the second or third time. Therefore, please be aware that for the two badge quizzes it is possible to get all the questions right but not score 50% and be eligible for the badge on that attempt. If one of your answers is incorrect you will often receive helpful feedback and suggestions about how to work out the correct answer.

For the badge quizzes, if you're not successful in getting 50% the first time, after 24 hours you can attempt the whole quiz, and come back as many times as you like.

We hope that as many people as possible will gain an Open University badge – so you should see getting a badge as an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned rather than as a test.

If you need more guidance on getting a badge and what you can do with it, take a look at the OpenLearn FAQs. When you gain your badge you will receive an email to notify you and you will be able to view and manage all your badges in My OpenLearn within 24 hours of completing the criteria to gain a badge.

Get started with Week 1.

Week 1: What is learning?

Introduction

Much of the learning we do as adults happens because we want, or have, to learn something. At other times, we learn without realising it, and we may have little control over what happens.

As a child you learn about life from your parents, and maybe as a parent you also learn from watching your children and talking to other parents.

Figure 1 Learning through being a parent or child

You are not an empty container that this course is going to fill with knowledge. Some courses may take this approach, but this one doesn't. As well as introducing you to some useful information and ideas, this course will help you recognise the value of your own experiences and everyday learning.

It will also provide case studies – that is, some examples of real or imaginary people – so that you can look at the issues they face and the ways in which they may learn, before thinking about your own learning.

While studying a course, it is good practice to keep notes and to have these in a fairly ordered way. So why not start now, keeping them in a digital or a paper file? This kind of record of what you are studying, and your thoughts about it, is often known as a 'learning journal'. Jot down your answers to the activities, ideas that particularly interest you and your thoughts along the way. Having a few headings, such as the names and numbers of the activities, will help you find them again later.

Making really useful notes – rather than a jumble of ideas – takes quite a bit of practice. Don't worry if yours aren't perfect to begin with; you will be given guidance and encouraged to reflect on your note-taking methods as you go along.

Watch Jonathan Hughes of The Open University introduce Week 1 and the course:

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week you will:

- have started your learning journal
- understand how you learn every day
- have been introduced to some theories about learning
- understand the difference between formal and informal learning
- have thought about how you learn best.

The Open University would really appreciate a few minutes of your time 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 Everyday learning – what's going on?

This week, the stories of Jim and Angela are presented to illustrate some of the different ways that people learn.

First up is Jim's story. As you read this, see if any aspects of his story might be a part of your experience too.

1.1 Case study 1: Jim's story

Figure 2 Jim

Jim is finding that his work as a carpenter is affecting his health. He is beginning to think that he should find a different line of work, so he has decided to build on what he already knows about computers. He has enrolled in a class, *Introduction to Computers*, at his local college.

Jim takes up the story:

> The class I had signed up for, 'Introduction to Computers', took place at my local college. It was years since I had been there, and it had changed a lot.
>
> Even though I went online and found a map of the campus, I still could not find the building and the room. I asked a man for directions. He said he was the instructor for the 'Introduction to Computers' course, and that he would take me to the classroom. He gave me his name, which I forgot. He also asked me if I had received his introductory email. I had not looked at my email for several days. I think I must have been nervous about starting the course (although I thought that I had been fairly relaxed about it all). I'm always forgetting names – especially of people who are new to me.
>
> When I got to the classroom, I found that it was called something like the 'Learning Resources Centre' and that it was filled with dozens of brightly lit computers. My instructor (I still could not remember his name) led me over to one corner. 'Here's your group,' he said. And he started to introduce me to a dozen people. 'This is Avril, this is Jade, this is Zoë, this is Steve …' I was feeling worse and worse. I had forgotten the teacher's name and now I had even more names to remember.
>
> 'You can use this computer, Jim,' said the teacher. I was really pleased to be able to sit down in front of it so I did not have to talk to any of the people whose names I had forgotten. The teacher gave me a sheet with a word-processing exercise that looked like something I could manage. What a relief this was. It was so much easier than having to talk to these people I had never met before.

However, after a few minutes, I realised that most of the other students in what was supposed to be my group were all talking to each other. Some had met in another course last year and had decided to take this course together. And they all knew each other's names!

I slid slightly further down in my chair and concentrated on the screen in front of me.

Activity 1 In what ways is Jim already a learner?
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

The story you have just read focuses on what happened when Jim went back to college. Have a think about the following questions:

1. What is Jim learning from this new experience?
2. Try to find clues about what he has learned in the past too.
3. Do they get in the way of his learning, or are they helpful?

Jot down your thoughts.

Discussion

There are many points you could have selected. Here are a few. It's fine if you picked different ones.

1. He is learning about computing, especially word-processing. He has also learned who his tutor is and where he will be studying.
2. In the past, he has *learned* carpentry skills. He has also *learned* that he isn't great at remembering names and he maybe gets rather nervous about new things. Did you notice he also already has some computer skills, and could perhaps be self-taught in this area? He has *learned* that he is comfortable using a computer, even if his skills aren't as developed as he would like.
3. So some of these past learning experiences may get in the way a little, some not seem particularly relevant at the moment, but some – such as having already gained some confidence in computing – seem clearly to be a positive influence on his new learning experience.

Jim's story focused on a college course, and so was an example of 'formal' learning. However, some less formal learning was going on too. *Succeed with learning* takes a very straightforward view about learning:

Learning is involved in everything that happens to people and in everything they do.

Most of us will have had considerable experience of classrooms, and some people have great memories of school or college – they have *learned* that it is a good experience.

For others, this experience can be unhelpful or can have quite negative results. They *learn* that they are no good at learning, or that college can be an unpleasant or scary place. This can create a barrier to future learning, causing people to lose confidence in themselves and preventing them from fulfilling their potential.

Can you see how this shows that learning is always shaped by our experiences? It is also shaped by how we think about our experiences. So, if your school experiences led you to

think that you are a poor learner, it may make it feel harder to study the next time you try. But, if you have learned to be a great parent (for example), you may develop enough confidence in your learning ability to think that you could be a successful learner in other areas too.

In the next case study, Angela shows how learning is still going on when courses or college are not part of the story. Read through Angela's story. As you read, reflect on whether you can see features that you can identify with from your own experience.

1.2 Case study 2: Angela's story

Figure 3 Angela

What time is it? Three o'clock? No way! Where has the day gone? I did promise Grace her favourite meal today to cheer her up after her least favourite day at school. I don't think she will ever be an Olympic athlete, even if she does get used to sports afternoon at her new school.

I'm really not too fussy about what she eats. I think if you are, then children can get really picky about their food. What is her favourite at the moment? I suppose it's pizza. I'm not totally happy about this. It doesn't seem much like a balanced meal to me – there's no fruit or vegetables for one thing, and it's high in fat. Maybe I could add a salad to it – that would add some vegetables to her diet.

(Some time later)

'Mum, what are we having tonight? I've been looking forward to my dinner all day. They made us run around the track in this weather! I've been freezing ever since.'

'I've made your favourite, Grace – pizza. I've added a salad – it's good for you.'

'Oh, Mum, I told you that was my old favourite. My friend Shona says it's much healthier to be a vegetarian, so the salad is OK but I can't have pizza – it's got meat on it, doesn't it? I told you last week I wanted to try those veggie sausages. Shona says they're really good.'

'Well, I don't have any of those, but you're in luck! The pizza is tomato and cheese.'

'I guess that will have to do.'

'Is that all the thanks I get?!'

Activity 2 Thinking about Angela's story
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Try to answer the following questions:

1. What clues are there here about what Angela has learned in the past?
2. Do you think she learned these from formal courses or from more everyday learning?

Jot down your thoughts.

Discussion
As with Jim's story, it's likely that your answer will be a bit different from this one. There isn't a right or a wrong answer.

1. Angela's story is about preparing a meal for her daughter. Yet for this seemingly simple task, she draws on a wide range of knowledge.

   She knows what constitutes a healthy diet; having *learned* the importance of fruit and vegetables, and that eating too much fat can be bad for us. She also has *learned* what subject Grace dislikes at school and has wider knowledge about things like the Olympics. Angela has also developed some cooking skills, and has *learned* to listen carefully to her daughter to keep up with her likes and dislikes. She could be said to have *learned* things that enable her to manage her daily life.

2. Angela seems to have gained much of her knowledge simply from living with her daughter and getting to know her, rather than studying formal courses. Probably most of her other knowledge, such as about diets and the Olympics, she has also *learned informally* – from the TV and friends or family – although perhaps she may have taken a formal course in cooking or nutrition.

   Another important point which is highlighted in Angela's story is how we are all learning all the time – it doesn't stop!

2 Thinking about someone else's ideas

Figure 4 Peter Jarvis

If a topic is interesting it will usually attract people to think and write about it. This certainly applies to the topic of learning. This course will introduce you to some of the theories about the ways in which we learn.

When you are studying, it is generally a good idea to read about what other people have already thought about the subject, to help you develop your own opinion in an informed way.

If you are not used to reading about theories, this may feel a bit tricky at first. So just have a go, and then read the comment below each activity – this might stimulate more thoughts.

The first theory to think about was written by Peter Jarvis (Figure 4). Peter Jarvis is an academic who has spent many years writing about why he thinks learning is so important. In the opening to one book, he writes:

> Learning is like food, ingest it and it will enrich the whole human being: unlike food, it is difficult to have too much … the processes of learning are a fundamental stimulus to life itself.

(Jarvis, 2006, p. 3)

Jarvis compares learning with food. Do you think that this is a fair comparison? Do you think that if people do not learn, they will die?

At first, this seems a rather unbelievable thing to say. However, when you consider that if people fail to learn about things that are dangerous, like hot objects or speeding cars, they may put themselves at considerable risk.

Activity 3 What do *you* think?

Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

When you have read about someone's ideas, it is a good idea to step back for a while and have a think about what they might be really saying and whether you agree with them. So read the next sentence and jot down your thoughts.

> What do you think Jarvis means when he says that learning is a 'fundamental stimulus to life'?

Note down your thoughts in your learning journal.

Discussion

Here, Jarvis seems to say that learning can make life stimulating – more satisfying and interesting. It is what keeps us going forward in our lives, perhaps encouraging us to seek new experiences.

Do you agree?

3 Formal or informal?

When people write about the way we learn, there is often a distinction made between what is known as 'formal' learning and 'informal' learning. I expect you can guess roughly what is meant by these terms. Here are some definitions – see if they mean what you thought.

Formal learning mostly refers to the structured courses and workshops that take place in educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities – where the main business is teaching and learning. People, usually with special qualifications, provide learning which often leads to assessments – such as exams – and in turn leads to certificates, degrees or qualifications.

Informal learning is more difficult to define because it covers so many aspects of our lives – like the example of being a parent mentioned earlier. Bringing in some of those people who, like Jarvis, have already thought extensively about this might help. So here is one definition. Informal learning is:

> … the lifelong process by which every individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play: from the example and attitude of families and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally informal education is unorganised, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning – including that of a highly 'schooled' person.
>
> (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, p. 8)

Formal learning has the advantage of offering a structure that can be reassuring to learners, and qualifications that can be useful for gaining work. Some people, though, find a formal structure stifling and relish the opportunity to explore aspects of a topic in their own way and at their own pace.

So, even if they want a qualification, they may choose an online course like this one which provides a combination of the two – a formal course with a badge to recognise an achievement, but one that can be studied at their own pace and away from a formal institution.

'Deliberate learning'

Once you start to look at learning in more detail, you can see that there may also be other differences in the types of learning we do. Sometimes, for example, we set out intentionally to learn new things – to enrol for a course, start an apprenticeship or teach ourselves a language in preparation for a holiday. Coombs and Ahmed call this **deliberate learning**.

'Accidental learning'

In contrast, other learning could be called **accidental** – occurring as a result of something that has happened and where you had no intention of learning at all. An example of this

would be if your house was broken into – you may learn 'accidentally' about how the local police force works.

Although formal learning is often given a higher status than informal learning, one great advantage of informal and accidental learning is that it can take us in unexpectedly interesting and productive directions.

3.1 One person's experience

Figure 5 A celebrity informal learner: Madhur Jaffrey CBE

Madhur Jaffrey is a good example of someone who has successfully combined learning experiences. She is a best-selling cookbook writer and actress, and was a popular television presenter. She has been awarded a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) for her contributions to drama, culture and cuisine – but as a child she never learned to cook.

Madhur travelled to London at age 19 to study drama. As a student, she desperately missed home-cooked food and wrote letters to her mother back in India asking her how to cook different dishes.

Her formal learning was focused on her drama course. However, at the same time, she was informally learning how to cook. As things turned out, Madhur's rather unusual style of informal learning was far more important in her life than the formal learning in her drama course. This combination of learning experiences enabled her to develop more career choices – perhaps we could even say she was *liberated* by her learning.

Can you see how some aspects of Madhur's learning can be seen as deliberate, such as enrolling on a drama course, while some seems to have been more accidental – a result of needing to cook for herself in a new country?

4 Thinking about your own learning

Having thought a little about other people's experiences and ideas about learning, it's time now to have a think about how *you* learn.

Activity 4 Formal or informal?
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

1. Make a note of at least six examples of your own learning that you can think of, in your learning journal.
2. Now decide if they are formal or informal. Maybe they are a mixture of the two like this course? Note down your thoughts.
3. Finally, for each of the examples, note whether you learned alone, or with others.

Discussion

Reviewing the different ways that you learn can help you see both how much you have learned already, and the kinds of learning you prefer. The next activity looks at this in a bit more detail.

---

5 How do *you* learn best?

How do we develop a skill or acquire a particular piece of knowledge? If you break down a learning experience and analyse it in more detail, it can help you think about how you learn best – and you can learn from this for the future.

For example, do you prefer studying on your own or in a more social environment? Maybe it depends what you are learning? If you want to improve your dancing skills, for example, you will probably want to learn with others. However, you may well prefer to learn cooking by yourself so that you can make mistakes privately!

A point you may want to consider when planning future learning is that it is often easier to concentrate when we study on our own, but we gain new perspectives, stimulus and ideas when we learning with others.

Activity 5 Breaking it down
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

1. Think of something you know about, and note down your example in your learning journal.

   (This can be anything at all; for example, it might be how to cook a particular type of food or how to repair a bicycle tyre. It might be one of the topics you chose for Activity 4. What is important is that you choose something that you feel reasonably comfortable or confident about.)

2. Next, try to identify all the different stages of your learning.

   (You might include things like whether you were taught by someone else, whether you found out by reading about it, or whether you picked it up as a result of trial and error.)

   Your notes might look something like this:

   My example is learning to drive a car.

   When I think about it, I learned to do this in many ways. I had a driving instructor who told me what to do. I also had written information about things like where the pedals (the accelerator, brake and clutch) were placed. My father also took me out in the family car. He told me things about driving – these were not always the same as the instructor, so I had to decide which was more helpful. Practice during lessons and with Dad was important.

3. Now try to answer these questions about your chosen example:

- Why did you want to learn this particular thing?
- What did you find was easy to learn, and what did you find was difficult?
- Is this a typical example of how you approach learning something new?
- In what ways is it typical?
- Are there any aspects of your learning in this example that are unusual for you?

Discussion

Thinking about the way you have successfully learned in the past should help remind you that you are not just able to be a good learner, but someone who already has valuable personal qualities and knowledge.

Much of our learning is informal or 'everyday' learning. In some ways, it is precisely this kind of learning that is the most important, as we use it to negotiate our way through life.

6 Reflection

At the end of each week, this course will ask you to reflect on what you have learned, and to have a go at a short quiz based on the learning from that week's study.

This week, before starting the quiz, take a bit of time now to think about the following sentences, and record your thoughts in your learning journal.

- I learn best when...

- What I am most proud to have learned is...

- The most useful thing I have ever learned is...

- The most amazing thing I have ever learned is...

7 This week's quiz

This quiz will help you review your learning on this course so far. You may find it helpful to look back over the week and your notes before you start to remind yourself of what has been covered. You can stop at any time, and come back to the quiz later if you want a break.

When you are learning online you need to use a range of computer skills to get the most out of it. So we are asking you to use (or develop) a few here. Don't worry if this is new to you – you'll be pretty good at it by the end of the course!

Go to:

Week 1 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

---

8 Summary

Well done! You have completed the first week of *Succeed with learning*. In this week you have learned about:

- how we learn every day
- using a learning journal
- formal and informal learning
- the value of reading about other people's ideas
- the reasons for looking at case studies
- Peter Jarvis's ideas about the importance of learning
- how you prefer to learn.

Next week, the course will look at ways of making the most of learning opportunities in your day-to-day life.

You can now go to Week 2.

Week 2: Learning from life

Introduction

Last week you saw how learning takes place every day and how it can be formal or informal, accidental or deliberate. You also thought about some of your own learning experiences and how perhaps you learn best.

This week you will explore some more of the learning opportunities that are all around us. Maybe you are starting to think about this already? The key is to recognise these *as* learning opportunities, and work out how to make the most of them. This includes managing your time well and recognising how your own emotions can influence how you learn.

Watch Jonathan introduce Week 2:

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week you will know more about:

- using everyday experiences
- being organised (including organising your study time)
- learning to change.

1 Using some everyday experiences

You know from Angela's experience in Week 1 that a great deal of learning takes place in our 'ordinary' lives. So this week will start with some of the things you probably do every day, without even thinking that they are tools that help you to learn.

Here is someone else who has thought a great deal about how people learn – Neil Thompson (Thompson, 2005). He suggested that knowledge and skills can be developed in six ways.

Reading

There are many different sorts of book and other written materials that can:

- help us expand our horizons
- provide new insights and ideas
- help us learn techniques that will save us time.

All types of writing can have these effects, including novels and poetry, as well as non-fiction, including self-help manuals, documentaries and biographies.

Asking

Some books, especially those with professional or academic readers in mind, are written in a style that is sometimes hard to understand or appreciate, so it is good to ask other people what they think about the ideas we come across in our reading. Just talking about ideas can help make sense of them.

We all learn a lot by asking other people – inside and outside the workplace – how they tackle things and why they do things a certain way; what they have learned about what works and what does not.

Watching

Figure 1 Watching someone work

There are at least two aspects to watching: watching other people in order to learn different approaches to things, and watching carefully what happens when you do something new and then thinking about why it happened that way.

Often we work on automatic pilot, not really thinking about what we are doing. However, opening up our attention and taking notice of what happens creates useful learning opportunities.

Feeling

Thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviours are all linked. We can use our thoughts to make sense of our feelings and our intuition to guide our thinking.

Talking

Sharing ideas with colleagues, friends, family or members of an organisation you belong to is a good way of learning to understand a range of perspectives on a situation and to challenge your instinctive responses. Regular conversations can also help sharpen your communication and problem-solving skills.

Thinking

Figure 2 Think ahead

Sometimes there does not seem to be enough time to really think about our lives and learning, but Thompson points out that thinking time is an essential, rather than a luxury, for times when you are not busy.

If you put some effort into thinking about crises and planning to avoid them, you can save time on fighting problems in the future. You can be more in charge of what is happening to you rather than feeling at the mercy of unforeseen events.

Combining some of these approaches helps to build a more rounded picture of a topic or of a skill that you are trying to acquire or develop. For example, reading an article in a magazine might lead to talking through the ideas with friends, asking how they might do things differently and why. This in turn might encourage you to think about the way you normally approach similar situations, and then to try a different approach. Further reflection on whether or not it works for you and why (or why not) can be a valuable source of learning.

2 Being organised

Do you agree with Neil Thompson that developing space for thinking is essential if you are going to make the most of your learning opportunities?

Being organised can enable us to make time, and it is an important skill to develop if you are planning to add more studying to what is probably already quite a busy life.

2.1 Organising your study time

One of the most difficult aspects of being a student is fitting in your studying with everything else in your life. Finding enough time can be a challenge – it often means giving up activities you currently enjoy or perhaps negotiating with your family and friends to pass on some of the daily chores to allow you some time to yourself.

It's worth having a think about where you study best too. Many distance-learning students find it useful to identify a corner somewhere as a regular study area.

Figure 3 Where and when do you study best?

Activity 1 Reflecting on and planning your study time
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Think about your experience of studying the first week of this course. Did it take you as long as you had planned? Are there things you would do differently?

Decide how you are going to make use of the time you have available to study the rest of the course. Write your plan in your learning journal. Don't worry, you can change it later – the important thing is to start with a plan.

Discussion

Are you studying at a regular time each day? Or maybe in one go at the weekend? Most of us work better at certain times of day, so have a think about whether you have chosen the best times for you.

If you study a longer course, this will be especially important. So maybe try different patterns to see what is the most effective, and fits reasonably comfortably with the rest of your life.

Effective use of your time underpins all your work in this, and any other, course. Your note taking may be fantastic, but you have to have the time to do it. If you have developed good time-management skills in other areas of your life, you will probably be able to transfer them to studying, as one student, Shehnaz, stated:

Well, when I was a child-minder, I used to have to work with the children – I had to plan my own activities with them. Now that's come into my work as well and, because I had to plan activities for the children with a time limit, that's helped me in my courses, setting aside time to actually complete my assignments.

As Shehnaz discovered, 'being organised' is what is known as a **transferable skill** – that is, one that can be used in a wide range of situations. You are going to come across quite a few of these on this course, so look out for them.

2.2 Time management

Another term for being organised that you may have come across at work is 'time management'. We could also perhaps call it 'self-management', as it deals with how we manage ourselves to do what we want with our lives.

In 1910, the English novelist Arnold Bennett wrote a book called *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*.

Figure 4 Arnold Bennett

In this book, Bennett asks us to think about how much time there is in a day and to be realistic about what we can achieve. He writes:

> if one cannot arrange that an income of twenty-four hours a day shall exactly cover all proper items of expenditure, one does muddle one's life definitely.

> (Bennett, 1910).

The language may seem a bit dated, but can you see Bennett's point? He compares time with money, and sees that both need to be managed similarly. If time is not managed, there are consequences that make our lives harder. Bennett urges the need for a 'minute practical examination of daily time expenditure'.

More recently, John Adair (1999, p. 12) pointed out: 'There is often a gap between what we think we are doing and what we are actually doing.' Most of us can find examples of this; for example, sitting day-dreaming or perhaps finding something has taken a lot longer than we thought. Adair suggests that we should act like scientists to research

where personal time goes. So, for the first activity this week you are being asked to do just this.

Activity 2 Your daily time expenditure

Part 1

Allow about 20 minutes.

Look back over what you did yesterday – or today if you are working on this in the evening. Try to recall how each waking hour was spent, and make a list in your learning journal. Indicate roughly how much time was spent on each item in your list.

Discussion

The more detailed your records are, the more useful they will be – as you will see shortly. Include things like talking to people and making coffee, as well as more obvious blocks of time when you are maybe working or watching TV.

If you can, you may like to repeat the activity for another day, so that you can see whether or not yesterday/today was typical.

Part 2

Allow about 10 minutes.

This is based on Part 1, so make sure you have completed it first. You are going to be asked to reflect on the notes that you have made, so have them to hand.

Look back at the time log you completed in Part 1 of this activity and answer the following questions:

1. What surprises or delights you about your use of time?
2. What puzzles or worries you?
3. Was the day typical or not? Why?
4. What does this evidence say about how you use your time?

Discussion

Doing this activity should make you stop and think. It may have highlighted how many competing demands you have on your time. Studying *Succeed with learning* is likely to be only one of many demands.

However, you might be surprised at what you achieve in a short time. If this applies to you, then you can be pleased with how you already manage your time and yourself. This is a valuable skill.

Do you think that your time record log provides evidence about what kind of person you are and what is important to you?

Your use of time may reflect your personal qualities or values; for example, valuing spending time with people who are dependent on you, or valuing earning more money. However, sometimes it reflects a life we would rather not lead – that we are spending too much time on something that we don't really value.

3 Learning to change

Learning is a wonderful tool to enable us to make changes, and we often choose to learn something *because* we want to make a change – maybe to get out of a rut, find a fulfilling job or simply to feel more confident in ourselves. But it isn't always as easy as it sounds, and we have to learn a bit more about ourselves before we can make the changes happen.

3.1 Comfort zones

Some people are much more open than others to making changes in their lives that lead to (or result from) learning. Even though we are not satisfied with our lives, sometimes it may feel easier to stay within our **comfort zone** than to venture into new territory. Author and life coach Fiona Harrold suggests that we have to:

> get used to feeling comfortable with a little discomfort and a little uncertainty alongside a great deal of positive expectancy. Turn anxiety into anticipation, fear into energy and worry into action.

(Harrold, 2001, p. 281)

Figure 5 Need to move out of your comfort zone?

Harrold explains that excitement and fear produce similar hormones. The more you live within your comfort zone, she adds, the harder it is to distinguish between these emotions because you have not had enough practice. She suggests that:

To live your best life you have to move out of your comfort zone and learn to manage your feelings.

(Harrold, 2001, p. 281)

3.2 Developing emotional literacy

Working out exactly what you are feeling – and what lies behind those feelings – is a part of being **emotionally literate**. It enables you to take more control over your life and not let your feelings block your ability to fulfil your potential.

Susie Orbach, a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, identified three stages of emotional literacy in her book published in 1999. She called these stages: register, recognise and respond. You'll notice that there are three 'r's – so it's easy to remember! This is known as a **mnemonic** – which means something to help you remember.

Have a read through what each of these stages means and see if you can think of examples in your own life at home or work. They are:

- **Register** the emotional dimension in any situation – to recognise, for example, that there is an 'atmosphere' and use it to work out what is going on.
- **Recognise** feelings of your own and their effects on other people, and read other people's emotions accurately by interpreting their body language.
- **Respond** appropriately to your own emotions and to those of other people. Recognise that sometimes it is appropriate to express your emotions and sometimes it is not; think whether it is appropriate to simply sit back and listen, or to challenge other people's interpretation of events.

(Orbach, 1999)

Activity 3 Practising the three Rs
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Work through the following three steps and jot down your responses in your learning journal.

1. Think back to a recent time when you felt a particularly strong emotion. Record (or *register*) that emotion in your learning journal.
2. Now write as much about the feeling as you can (*recognising* the feeling).
3. Next, note whether or not you think you *responded* appropriately.

Discussion
This might feel quite personal – but your notes are just your own!

If you are able to step back and think about the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours, you will recognise that you can use your thinking to help you manage your feelings and to use them constructively.

This way, you can channel your emotions to support your learning rather than letting them get in the way.

3.3 Further techniques for emotional literacy

Here are a few more techniques to help you to develop your emotional literacy.

Keeping a 'mood journal'

You might practise recognising your own emotions – and what leads to them – by keeping a 'mood journal'. (You could include this as a separate section in your learning journal.)

This involves noting how you feel at different times of the day, with different people and in different situations, to see if you can identify any patterns. When are you at your most and least anxious, happiest, annoyed, and so on?

This kind of activity can help you recognise the way in which circumstances influence your emotions, and how your feelings can influence a situation. You can learn how your feelings can interfere with your thinking and how they can enhance it.

Practising emotion recognition

You might practise recognising other people's emotions by making a conscious effort to interpret their body language and check it out with them, by asking with an enquiring tone that invites a response. Even if you are wrong in your interpretation, people are usually glad to be noticed, and it might prompt a discussion that would both add to your knowledge of them and to your interpretation skills.

Understand yourself

If you can spot your own feelings of apprehension, you can question why you are feeling that way and what you can do about it – before you maybe get to the terrified state in which you cannot think straight.

Know your options

Recognising that you have options is another element of emotional literacy. We can allow fear to paralyse us so that we don't see what is possible. Note the feeling, and then work out exactly why you are afraid and do something about it. Remember, too, that to develop, we need to move out of our comfort zone!

Study other people

You might be able to find more productive ways of handling some of your instinctive responses by observing other people, noting the ways in which they respond differently to success and to failure, and asking them how they manage their emotions.

Figure 6 Learn to identify different emotions

Maybe you do all these things already, but everyone probably could do a bit more! The next activity asks you select one of the above techniques to develop your own emotional literacy. It may be a good idea to choose whichever one you do not already do very much.

Activity 4 Practising emotional literacy
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Commit yourself to undertaking at least one of the above suggested routes to emotional literacy over the next few days before you start Week 3.

Take five minutes on each of your chosen days to make a note of your work on your chosen route to emotional literacy in your learning journal.

Discussion
Knowing yourself and really thinking about the reasons why you are experiencing a particular emotion can make a huge difference in managing the impact of your emotions on achieving your goals.

---

4 Reflection

This week, before starting the quiz, take a bit of time to think about what you have learned in this part of the course, and record your thoughts in your learning journal. You may feel, for example, that you have learned a few new things about yourself or that you are going to make a more concerted effort to use the learning opportunities around you. Perhaps you have found the quotations from one of the writers particularly relevant to you?

5 This week's quiz

Well done, you've completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

Week 2 practice quiz.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

6 Summary

You have covered a lot of ideas and thoughts in this second week of *Succeed with learning* – well done for completing it! This week you thought about:

- how to make the most of learning opportunities around you
- how to manage your study time
- how to manage your time and emotions so that they can support your learning and any associated change you may wish to make.

You have also learned about:

- Neil Thompson's ideas about everyday learning
- Arnold Bennett's ideas about managing time
- John Adair's ideas about managing time
- Fiona Harrold's ideas about moving out of comfort zones
- Susie Orbach's ideas about emotional literacy.

Over the next couple of weeks, you will be encouraged to take stock of the qualities, knowledge and skills that you already have so that, later in the course, you can decide the best way to build on these.

You can now go to Week 3.

Week 3: Learning about yourself

Introduction

This week is all about *you*. Learning is an individual experience which is different for each person, depending on the qualities, knowledge and skills they have already developed. So it is important to take an audit of where you are at now, before you move forward.

Week 3 of *Succeed with learning* focuses in turn on qualities, knowledge and then skills, encouraging you to think about what the words mean and what the unique blend is that makes you who you are today.

Watch the following video of Jonathan introducing Week 3:

Video content is not available in this format.
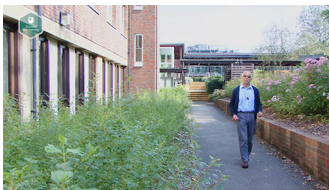
After this week you will:

- have identified your current qualities, knowledge and skills
- understand the idea of 'transferable' skills
- understand the breadth of skills included in the term 'communication skills'
- learned about 'netiquette'.

1 Qualities

A personal **quality** is difficult to explain. One way is to think about the words that you might use to describe someone. These could be words like 'kind' and 'generous' (which most of us would see as examples of positive qualities), or 'deceitful' and 'untrustworthy' (which most people would define as negative qualities).

Some qualities are easier to recognise than others. We might be proud of many of our qualities, but there may be others that we are not proud of and some that we are not really aware of. Many people are too critical of themselves; others a bit too uncritical. But, however you look at it, our qualities are important because they influence our ability learn and to achieve our goals.

Our qualities are shaped by our values; for example, being generous can be linked to an underlying value of the importance of sharing. In contrast, if someone appears to be miserly, they might place a higher value on saving money.

Our qualities are important to other people; they will play a part in shaping how others respond to us. And how other people respond has a big effect on how we all see ourselves.

Although this course encourages you to think positively, it is important to identify anything that might hold you back or get in the way of your learning and try to address it. Do you remember the example of Jim in Week 1? He was nervous about returning to study formally – but he overcame it enough to enrol for a class and start the course of his choice.

Activity 1 Identifying positive qualities
Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

- Make a list of all the positive personal qualities you can think of. Many of these are adjectives (words that describe something or someone) such as 'kind', 'honest' and 'tolerant'. If you can, work on this activity with someone else. Ideas may be more likely to flow if you have someone else's ideas to react to.
- Once you have finished, go back over your list and underline the qualities you think that *you* have. (If you are not sure, put a question mark.)

Discussion
Did you find quite a few? Or did you find it difficult to apply the qualities to yourself? If you struggled with this, then take another look at the first list you created – there probably are some qualities there that really do apply to you, even if just a little.

If you still can't think of many qualities, you could always add *persistence* – because it's clear that you don't give up easily!

1.1 Turning negatives into positives

Often we are more conscious of our negative qualities than our positive ones, especially if we are feeling uncertain and lacking confidence. But have you ever thought that many qualities that seem negative when you first look at them can have another side to them?

Thursday 21 November 2019

For example, someone might see a lack of confidence as a negative quality. But part of this may be that this person is more concerned with listening to what other people say than pushing themselves forward, so another way of looking at this is to see it as a positive quality of attentiveness and concern for others.

Turning negatives into positives may help you find a couple more to add to the list of your positive personal qualities in the last activity. Take five minutes to think about this now, and add them if you discover more.

2 Knowledge

Knowledge is what you know. For example, a plumber knows a lot about taps and bathroom fixtures. But is that all he or she knows? The same plumber might also be self-employed and know a great deal about tax forms. They might have worked in a particular geographical area and know it very well. The mix of what anyone knows is highly individual and depends on the experiences they have had.

Traditionally, learning is about knowing facts and having to absorb and remember information that someone else says is important. You may associate this type of learning with what you did at school, where you might have been told that you had to learn many facts associated with a subject in order to pass an exam.

Evidence of learning is sometimes linked to building an increasingly impressive store of such facts. Television quiz shows tend to make us think that learning is simply about knowing more facts than other people.

Figure 1 The audience waits to be impressed by how many facts the contestants know

The problem with taking this view of learning is that people who seem to know the most facts are seen as being the 'best' learners. While it is great to have a lot of facts at our fingertips, this course aims to help you start to challenge this as the *only* view of learning.

Have you read *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens? Dickens portrayed the facts-obsessed schoolmaster Thomas Gradgrind as having quite a narrow view of learning, when he gave him these words:

> Now what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them … Stick to Facts

> (Dickens, (1854) 1989, p. 1)

Figure 2 Thomas Gradgrind

Of course, it is possible to test some knowledge, especially the more factual information that someone is supposed to have learned. Maybe you are quite good at learning facts yourself? In some areas of life it is very useful; for example, in mathematics, engineering or medicine. But sometimes it can be very difficult to know how much long-term understanding people have acquired.

Anything we learn undergoes complex changes as our brains try to fit it in with what we already know. So, if you ask ten people what they made of the same book or lesson, you may well get ten different answers. Perhaps there are as many ways of understanding something as there are people…

Activity 2 What do you know?
Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

This may be quite difficult, but give it a go. Think about some of the things you know. Try to identify six of the most useful pieces of knowledge you have gained in the last year, then try to identify what each of them is useful for.

Note down your thoughts in your learning journal.

Discussion

You may perhaps have thought about things like factual knowledge needed for work, knowing something about a friend or relative that helped you to make them happy or knowing where to get a cheaper car. Thinking about what you know should help you realise just how much knowledge you already have – so much, that you probably found it hard to focus on just six pieces of knowledge!

---

3 Skills

Skills are the things that you can do. These might include things like being able to ride a bike or cook a meal. One characteristic of skills is that it is often fairly easy to recognise when one is being used; for example, we can tell when we see an experienced cook at work, or taste the delicious food they have prepared, that they have well-developed skills in that area.

So, what skills do you have? Maybe the first things you think about are skills related to a job or something you have had to take lessons to learn, like driving. It's worth thinking about, because one big advantage about defining something as a skill is that it means we can get better at it.

People often think of learning as a means of acquiring skills that are useful for paid work. Of course, aiming to have secure and satisfying work is very important, but there are many other aspects to life that do not involve paid work. These include leisure activities, volunteer roles and caring for children or people who are older or have a disability. The skills of a swimming coach who is an unpaid volunteer may be very similar to those of someone who is paid.

3.1 Transferable skills

Do you remember that 'being organised' was referred to last week as a **transferable skill**? There are many more of these, as you will see as you work your way through the course.

Transferable skills are those that can be developed in one part of life and then used or adapted for another. These include things that we use every day in one way or another, such as communication, being organised, problem-solving and decision-making. Skills you have developed elsewhere may well be very useful for studying. Being aware of these skills is another important skill in its own right.

Activity 3 Your transferable skills
Allow about 15 minutes for this activity.

Which transferable skills do you think you may have? Think about your life at home, at work and in your leisure or voluntary activities. Do you think that you are good at organising, problem-solving, decision-making or communicating with others?

Make a note in your learning journal of any you think might fit, and a couple of examples of how you used them.

Discussion

Most of us use these skills in some way; maybe working on communicating well with our families (like Angela in week one), organising holidays or deciding we are going to return to study. It may feel automatic, but take a step back and think about it. You are using a skill.

For the rest of this week, the focus will be on communication skills – a more complex area than you may initially think, and an extremely important one if you are going to make the most of your learning.

4 Communication skills

You may be interested to know that the word 'communicate' comes from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning 'to give' or 'to share'. So it is clear that the idea of communication has always involved more than one person – there are always those who send a message of some kind and those who receive it. Having good communication skills involves being aware of both sender and receiver.

Communication takes many forms, for example:

* talking
* listening
* body language
* tone of voice
* writing
* sharing ideas or information online.

We often change the way that we speak depending on the circumstances; most of us, for example, watch what we say so as not to offend or upset others. But the verbal or spoken aspects of communication form only a part of what is going on. Whenever someone communicates with another person, they are engaged in a constant process of interpretation to try and make sense of what is going on.

Most of us have some awareness of the impact of body language. We may believe, for example, that politicians can modify their body language so that they do not give away too many clues about themselves. We probably try to make sure that our own body language suits the particular situation we are in. For example, you would probably act differently if you were in the middle of an excited crowd compared with if you were in a public library.

Figure 3 Communication skills are complex and varied

Given the complexity of communication, it is not surprising that we can often get misunderstood or misinterpreted. It is perhaps surprising that so much of our communication does appear to achieve at least some success.

Communication continues most of the time while we are awake. It even seems to go on while we are asleep. When we dream, research suggests that some parts of our brain are communicating with other parts.

Human societies have developed many ways of communicating. Often, these make it possible for one person, or groups of people, to communicate with many others. These people may or may not be present when the process of communication is started. These types of communication include lectures, concerts and the media (such as television, radio, newspapers and the internet).

To summarise:

- Communication takes many different forms.
- Communication uses different channels.
- Communication affects all aspects of life.

Sometimes we feel we are communicating well, only to find that we have been misunderstood – that we haven't really communicated at all.

It has been suggested that:

> The meaning of communication is the response you get.

(O'Connor and Seymour, 1995, p. 18)

What do you think of this idea? Can you think of examples from your own life? It is always important to check the responses of the people you aim to communicate with. Once you

have a reasonably clear picture about this, it is much easier to see where you might want to increase your communication strengths and decrease any weaknesses.

4.1 Online communication skills

The internet offers a wealth of opportunities for communication that most of us use regularly these days. By choosing this course, you are probably aware that it can be a good learning medium too.

The web can be used for individual learning – like this course – or learning with others. Email is a regular part of online learning, course materials can be accessed online and there are often online communities and tutor groups to enable more interaction between students and their tutors.

There are two main ways of communicating online, and these are called **synchronous** and **asynchronous**. (Putting an 'a' in front of a word sometimes creates an opposite in English. The 'a' is known as a prefix. Other examples are 'typical' and 'atypical', and 'moral and 'amoral'.) In this case, the two words can be defined as follows:

- *Synchronous* communication means taking place in 'real time'; for example, via instant messaging or a 'chat' facility.
- *Asynchronous* communication takes place when participants communicate in their own time; for example, by responding to messages that have been posted in an online forum.

If you take part in social networks, you will recognise that these terms could be applied to those too.

Whether you are using the internet for study or personally, it is important to remember you are communicating with real people. Special care must therefore be taken to avoid misunderstandings.

Netiquette

The word **netiquette** (short for 'net etiquette') refers to the rules of good online behaviour. Although the principles of online communication are similar to those for face-to-face conversation, there are important differences too. Some of the principles of good netiquette are outlined below. You may find it useful to make a note of these in your learning journal, especially if you think you might decide to do further online study.

Figure 4 Online you are still talking to people

Good netiquette involves:

- Thanking, acknowledging and supporting people

  People cannot see you nod, smile or frown as you read their messages. So, if they get no acknowledgement they may feel ignored and be discouraged from contributing further

- Acknowledging before differing

  Before you disagree with someone, try to summarise the other person's point in your own words. Then they know you are trying to understand them and will be more likely to take your view seriously.

- Making your perspective clear

  Try to avoid speaking in a dogmatic and an impersonal way, so avoid phrases like 'It is a fact that …' as they leave no room for anyone else's perspective. So, why not start with 'I think …'? When you are studying a course, you may want to present someone else's views; if so, say whose they are, perhaps by a quote and acknowledgement.

- Clearly showing your emotions

  Smileys or emoticons such as **:-)** and **:-(** can be used to express your feelings (look at these sideways). Other possibilities are punctuation (?! #@*!), <grin> or <joke>. Many online forum systems, which you may come across if studying online, allow you to use graphic emoticons to express a variety of emotions.

  Emotions can be easily misunderstood when you cannot see faces or body language. People may not realise when you are joking, and one person's joke may not seem amusing to someone else. You should always be aware of the receiver(s) of your message, particularly as people from widely differing cultures and backgrounds may read what you write online. What you find funny may be offensive to them.

- Avoiding 'flaming'

  If you read something that offends or upsets you, it is very tempting to dash off a reply and hit 'Send' – but don't! Online discussions seem to be particularly prone to such 'flames', and can escalate into a flaming spiral of angry messages. So if you feel your temperature rising as you write, save your message, take a break or sleep on it – don't hit 'Send'.

Figure 5 Online communication can be misunderstood

Increasingly, learning includes interactions with other people in an online 'forum'. So here is some advice for taking part in one:

- Before you write a message, take time to see what is being discussed and how. It is quite acceptable to read messages without posting any yourself (known as 'lurking') – people often do this while they build up the courage to take part.

- Keep your messages short, and keep to one topic per message.

- Respect others, and be careful not to post any messages that may cause hurt or offence.

- Don't give out any personal information that you would not usually share with people you do not know.

- And finally, don't write in capital letters – it looks like you're SHOUTING!

4.2 Using your communication skills

In the next activity you'll think about how you have recently used communication skills.

Activity 4 Communication today
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Draw a table like the one below, with three columns and the headings: 'Activity', 'Example of my communication' and 'Type of communication'.

Now think about what you have done so far today. If you are working on this course early in the morning, think about what you did yesterday.

Write down the first six things you did using any of the communication skills discussed so far. Use a separate line for each activity. For each item, say how communication was involved. Finally, what type of communication were you using?

Below are two examples to get you started.

Table 1 Examples of the ways we communicate every day

Activity	Example of my communication	Type of communication
Made breakfast	Asked my wife if she would like a cup of coffee	Verbal. Used gentle tone of voice.
Drove to work	Raised hand to thank another driver who let me into traffic	Body language

Discussion

By seeing communication in terms of a set of skills, it becomes far more possible to review and to change how we communicate. It is possible to break these skills down into three groups:

- the words, or language, that we use to communicate

- the body language and other non-verbal communication

- the impact of our communication on other people.

4.3 Developing communication skills

If you do decide to study further, you will find that communicating (writing, speaking, listening, communicating online …) is an important aspect of all academic study, and it will be important to be aware of any skills you may need to develop and how to go about doing this.

Author Neil Thompson (1996) has pointed out that it is not just what people say that counts; it is how people say it too. Maybe you noted this in your examples?

So, if someone seems to talk rather quickly, this may be because they are excited, angry or worried. If someone speaks slowly, this may be because they are tired. Or it may indicate a lack of confidence in what they have to say. Similar comments may be made about the pitch of a voice. Thompson suggests that:

> flat, unmodulated pitch can reflect a depressed mood, while high or fluctuating pitch can signal … anger, fear or excitement.

> (Thompson, 1996, pp. 83–84)

Do you notice that Thompson says that the same pitch can signal both excitement and fear? This supports the idea presented last week about moving outside your comfort zone. Look back and remind yourself, if you have forgotten.

Thompson (1996) suggests that quiet speech can indicate a lack of confidence, fear or anxiety, whereas loud speech can suggest aggression or a lack of sensitivity. Loud speech may also be used by someone who is fearful or anxious, so we have to be careful not to make assumptions.

Once you start thinking about body language, you realise how complex it can be. For example, how much eye contact should we make? Too much eye contact can be seen as challenging or threatening and too little eye contact can be interpreted as indicating that someone is not trustworthy. It is important to note that these interpretations can vary from one culture to another, as some see it as polite to avoid eye contact as much as possible.

Let's see what one student, Karen, has to say about her developing communication skills:

> I think I have learned how to read body language when I am speaking to people – I'm more observant. People don't always say how they are feeling, so if you can read their body language, it's easier to pick up on things. I am probably more confident with my questioning. I am listening and taking in the messages I am receiving from people.

Activity 5 Reflecting on your communication skills
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Think of a recent interaction you have had with someone. (This could be one of the situations you have identified in a previous activity, or another one.)

- Write an account, giving as much detail as you can. At this stage of the activity, don't worry too much about the communication aspects of your story.
- Once you have finished writing, put it down for a few moments. This will give you time to think about what you have written.
- Now return to the account you have written and identify any communication skills that you can see in your interaction with the other person.

- Draw up a table like the one below, with three headings: 'My communication skill', 'Confident/unconfident?' and 'Happens when?'
- For each listed communication skill, decide whether it is a skill in which you are confident. Then say on what kind of occasions you notice yourself doing this. An example is given in Table 2.

Table 2 Example of a person's verbal communication confidence following an interaction

My communication skill	Confident/unconfident?	Happens when?
Talking	I tend to speak too quickly – so not very confident	Usually when I think people do not agree with or like what I am saying

Discussion

Our communication skills, or lack of them, can have more effect than we might think. The student quoted above, Karen, hadn't felt confident about picking up people's body language and this had inhibited her from asking questions when she really wanted to learn something. Improving one communication skill had the knock-on effect of improving another.

5 Reflection

This week has involved quite a bit of thinking about qualities, skills and knowledge, with a focus on those that may be useful for future study. Make sure you have a summary of your own positive qualities, transferable skills and range of knowledge in your learning journal. Remember that skills are something you can get better at so, if you find some that you feel should be labelled 'for future development', that's fine – jot these down too.

Don't be too hard on yourself, but do try to be as realistic as you can. Put question marks by things if you are not sure. When you start planning your learning future – in the later parts of this course – you will find it useful to refer back to these.

6 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

> Go to:
>
> Week 3 practice quiz.
>
> Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

7 Summary

This week you have focused on the qualities, knowledge and skills that you already have; in particular one of the main transferable skills – communication. You have also thought about turning what may seem like negative qualities into positive ones. Being aware of all these will help you choose the best learning opportunities for yourself, and make the most of them.

You have learned about:

- the importance of being aware of your own qualities, knowledge and skills
- the idea of transferable skills
- how communication takes many forms
- O'Connor and Seymour's idea about the meaning of communication
- synchronous and asynchronous online communication
- good online communication skills, or 'netiquette'.

Have you noticed that, in this course, you are often asked to reflect on what you have learned? Next week you will be able to explore the purpose and value of reflection, and feedback from others, in helping you to *succeed with learning*.

You can now go to Week 4.

Week 4: Reflection and feedback

Introduction

How did you get on with the last quiz? You may have thought of it just as a test, but it also involved you reflecting on what you had learned in the course so far. Reflecting is a key part of the learning process – that's why there have been reflections at the end of each week's work. It reminds you of what you have been thinking about, and how the ideas may connect. This process can also help you to remember what you have learned.

This week, *Succeed with learning* will be looking at reflection in more detail and encouraging you to think about the value of feedback from others in supporting the development of your learning.

Jonathan introduces Week 4 in the following video.

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week, you will:

- understand the importance of reflection in the process of learning
- understand the importance of feedback in your learning
- have been introduced to some theories about feedback
- be able to apply the Johari Window to show the impact of feedback.

1 Learning through reflection

Many of the activities in this course ask you to think back over things you have already read and see if you understand them or can apply them to your own life. 'Thinking back' in this way is a vital component of what we mean by **reflection**.

Reflection is one of those things that is both really simple and quite complex. It is simple because, like learning, we all do it – it is really nothing more than thinking back over something that you or someone else has done. Reflection can also serve as a guide for future action – we learn from thinking back over our experiences and deciding whether or not to repeat them.

For example, if we have a great meal at a restaurant, we may think we will go back there; if we then remember how rude the waiter was, we may decide not to. Reflecting encourages us to weigh the different aspects of an experience and decide what to do in the future.

Figure 1 Reflecting can help us make the best use of experiences

1.1 Reflection at work

People in many different careers are expected to be reflective about their work. Doctors, social workers, nurses and teachers are all supposed to be what are known as **reflective practitioners**. This means that they are supposed to learn from what went well, and from their mistakes, to ensure that they become better at what they do.

The need for such reflection actually applies to a very wide range of work. Would you like to have your car fixed by a mechanic you know never reflected back about whether they had tightened all the wheel nuts?

The basic starting point is that everyone reflects and, if it is done well, it makes it possible to get much more out of any experience – so that learning is more fulfilling and constructive. A good way of developing your reflection skills is to make yourself aware of the process. The following activity should help you tune into it.

Activity 1 Reflection on today
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Start with an actual experience from today; give it a title in your learning journal and then note down a brief answer to each of the following four questions. The last question perhaps is the most important. Keep your notes fairly short.

1. **Who** was there?
2. **What** was the sequence of events?
3. **Where** did this happen?
4. **When** did things happen?

---

5. **What have I learned** from this?

Discussion

You may have chosen something practical like your journey to work or making a meal. Or you may have chosen something more personal. Either is fine, as long as you have reflected on what you learned and, ideally, how this might affect your future actions.

1.2 Reflecting on your learning

Each of the activities in this course has an element of reflection and, hopefully, when you read our comments, you will reflect a bit further too. Keeping a note of your reflections in your learning journal helps you to both record and consolidate your learning. Using a journal in this way ensures that you capture your thoughts; otherwise there is always a strong possibility that they are lost.

It is a good idea to review your learning journal entries on a regular basis – once a month would be good. This can help you to recognise:

- your progress – as you see that there are things that you used to find difficult, but can now do relatively easily
- recurring themes in your thoughts and actions that may indicate potential areas to develop in the future.

Activity 2 Your learning journal
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Have a look back through your learning journal. Is it a jumble of random notes, or have you organised it into weeks and activities? Are you jotting down your thoughts as well as the key points and the activity answers?

You are now nearly half way through the course, so this is a good time to review and reflect on how you are keeping your notes. See if you want to change things, now that you are probably getting a better feel for the kind of notes you wish to make and how much space they take up.

Discussion

There are many ways of keeping your notes and reflections. You should try and work out what suits you best. How do you think you might want to use them in the future?

This is a good question to ask whenever you make notes. Are they for personal use? Are they to help answer quizzes or write essays? Deciding on the purpose can help you decide what to make notes on and how to order them.

We can gain a lot from thinking back over things by ourselves. It is also valuable, at least occasionally, to think about other points of view or **perspectives**. One way of doing this is by getting feedback from others.

2 Getting feedback from other people

When you were a student at school or college, you probably had at least one or two tutors and fellow students whose views you would value and take on board.

Good teachers, and managers, usually aim to give you constructive feedback; that is, feedback that tells you where you have done well, where you have done less well and how to develop your skills and knowledge.

Feedback from others happens in more informal contexts too. Have you ever been told something about yourself that you didn't know, resulting in you gaining confidence in your abilities? The chances are that the answer is yes.

Getting feedback from another person, of course, isn't always constructive; it can be difficult and even stressful. However, planned well, it can be incredibly useful both in confidence building and in highlighting areas for personal development.

One big advantage of gathering feedback from other people is that they may have a different view of you from the one you have of yourself. Drawing on their perspectives can help you think about yourself in a different way, and open your mind to new possibilities and opportunities.

Here are some ideas from people who have written about the subject.

2.1 Some theories about feedback

Some theories, like that of the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, suggest there are aspects of ourselves that we are only slightly, or not at all, aware of.
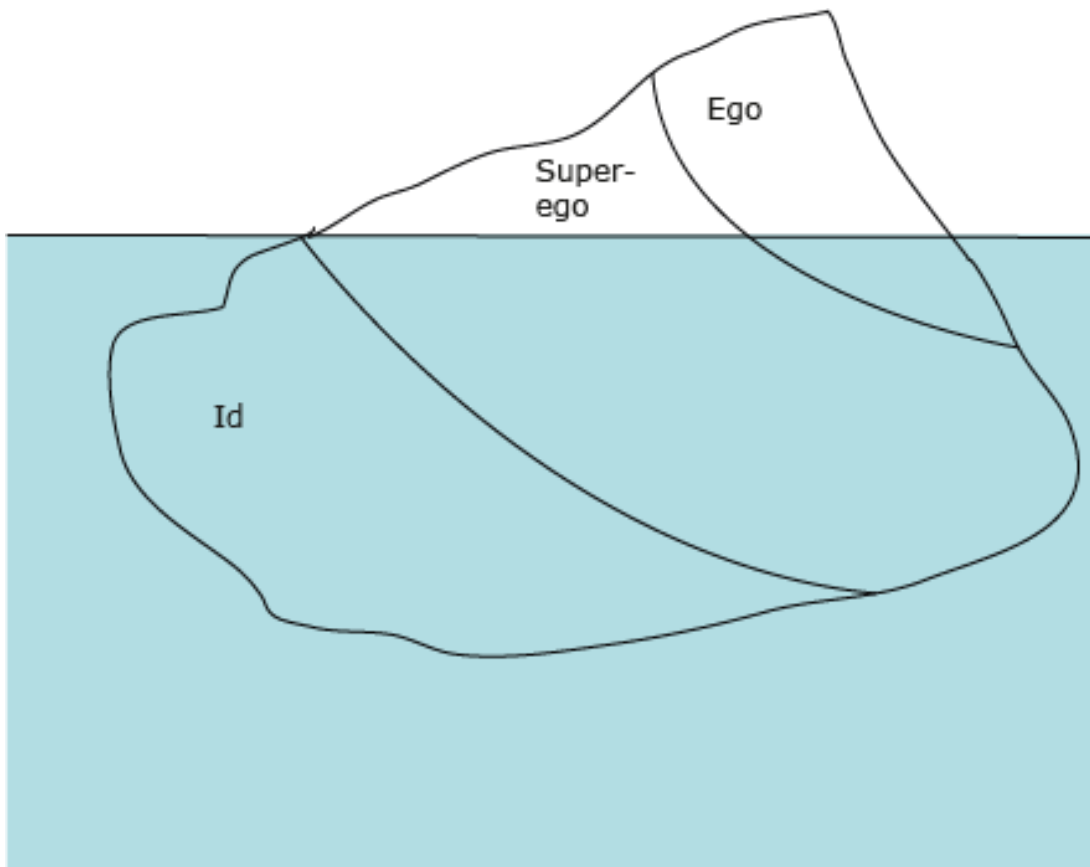
Figure 2 Freud's theory represented as an iceberg

Freud believed that the human personality had three aspects to it; he called these the id, the ego and the super-ego. He also argued that the working of the unconscious part of the mind, those parts under the waterline in the picture of the iceberg (Figure 2), is almost impossible to access. However, these hidden aspects could contain information that might be useful for personal development – and so we need to think about how to access them.

The idea of using feedback builds on the idea that other people, because they have different perspectives, can help us to gather information that would be difficult to obtain if we worked alone.

Figure 3 360-degree feedback

This idea is the basis of what is called **360-degree feedback**. This is sometimes used in workplaces to give someone as wide a picture as possible about how well he or she is doing. It involves asking for feedback from everyone whose views are seen as helpful and relevant.

Maybe you have had this kind of feedback yourself? It is always interesting, but sometimes difficult, to hear your colleagues' or workmates' perspectives on your performance at work.

For this part of the course, in order to see the value of feedback it would be useful to have some feedback from someone on your qualities, knowledge and skills. So the next activity

asks you to start thinking about this. (If you cannot think of anyone, there is an alternative method coming shortly – but spend a little time trying to identify someone first.)

Activity 3 Choosing a trusted adviser or mentor
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Take a few minutes to think about asking someone for feedback, particularly on your qualities and skills and knowledge.

Note down your thoughts about people you might ask. They would be taking the role of a **mentor** – someone with relevant experience who you can trust to advise you, so choose them carefully. It may be a relative or a friend perhaps.

Discussion

If you struggled to think of anyone you would be comfortable with asking for feedback, don't worry – the next section of the course will offer an alternative.

2.2 How can you get another perspective?

There are some well-established approaches that do not need someone else to be present and which are intended to help us think about what other people might have to say about us.

Figure 4 Using the empty chair to gain another perspective

Perhaps the best known is the **empty-chair technique**. This involves imagining that someone is sitting in the 'empty chair' and then imagining what they would have to say to us if they were actually present.

In therapy, this is intended to make up for things that were not discussed in the past, but which should have been. In the context of *Succeed with learning*, you could adapt the empty-chair technique to imagine what feedback on your skills, qualities and knowledge someone you trust would give you.

You have unlimited scope to decide who your mentor might be. You could, for example, take one of the case-study subjects and imagine that they are giving you feedback. Alternatively, you could choose someone for whom you have great respect or affection – even if you do not know them. The point is that the empty-chair technique can help you explore ideas from a perspective that will be different from your own.

2.3 Using your feedback

What do you do with the feedback once you have it? Rather than just make notes about it, in this section you will be introduced to a tool for exploring the impact that feedback can make. This is known as the 'Johari Window''.

The Johari Window is named after its originators, Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram (for some reason there is only ever one 'r' in 'Johari'). An outline of a Johari Window is shown in Figure 5. Have a look at this now. The 'window' covers the four white areas in the diagram; together they look something like the panes of a window – hence its name.
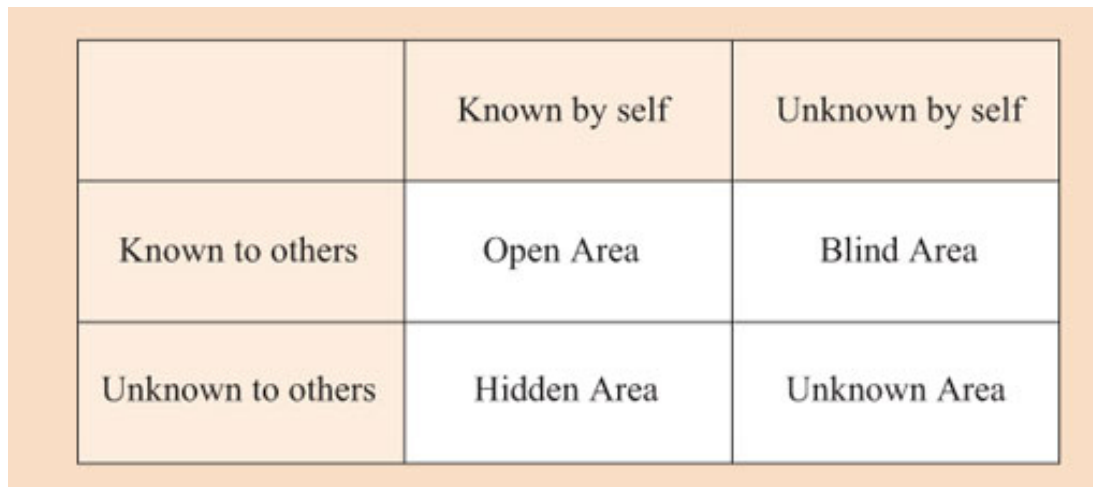
	Known by self	Unknown by self
Known to others	Open Area	Blind Area
Unknown to others	Hidden Area	Unknown Area

Figure 5 'Johari Window'

The **open area**, top left, is for what you know about yourself, and are happy to share with others. An example might be if you are happy to tell someone about the strengths that you bring to your job and some of the qualities you are proud of.

The **blind area** covers what other people know about you, but of which you are not aware. You might, for instance, be unaware that someone finds you supportive, thinks you are great at problem-solving or that you have an annoying habit (and most of us do!).

The **hidden area**, bottom left, is what you know about yourself, but would prefer other people not to know. This could include opinions that you do not want to share with others, as well as any weaknesses that you feel you have – maybe due to a lack of confidence.

In the bottom right-hand corner is the **unknown area**. This represents aspects that are as yet unknown to anyone – both to you and to others. This might include hidden talents, unconscious feelings, or abilities and qualities that have never been brought to the surface – and there will be some of these for us all. In other words, it may represent as yet unknown resources that could help your learning.

The contents of each of these areas changes as we, for example, learn how others see us, gain sufficient confidence in something to share it or discover unexpected skills.

One way of deliberately trying to expand the open area of your Johari Window is to ask other people to tell us what they know about us – in other words, ask them for feedback.

We can reduce the size of the unknown area by looking into ourselves (**self-discovery**), or by finding out about ourselves with the help of others (**shared discovery**).

2.3.1 Using the Johari Window

None of the Johari Window areas are fixed. Their contents change and the window areas change in size as we learn new things about ourselves and when we get feedback from others.

So, now it's your turn to have a go! The next activity shows you how to do it.

Activity 4 Johari Window

Part 1

Allow about 20 minutes.

1. Get a large sheet of paper and draw yourself a Johari Window diagram. You can create one on your computer if you are more comfortable with that. It should look something like Figure 6, with four headings as shown, and have space to write a few things in each box. (You do not have to make it particularly neat as you are going to change it soon by finding out new information about yourself.)
2. Now, looking back through your learning journal, remind yourself of some of the qualities, knowledge and skills you identified for yourself earlier. It would be useful to think especially about those that might be useful for, or affect, your learning. Try to identify at least as many positive ones as those you are less confident about.
3. Enter these into the *open area* and *hidden area* boxes of your Johari Window diagram where they fit best. Remember that the open area is for information you are happy to share (in this case with your mentor); the hidden area contains information that you are aware of, but which you prefer to keep to yourself (for example, perhaps a lack of confidence or a quality you're not too proud of).
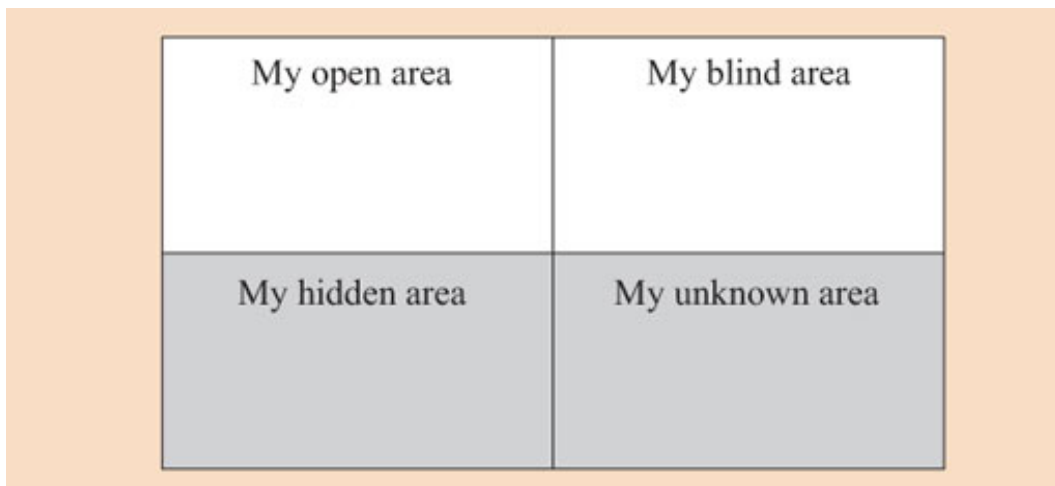
Figure 6 Your Johari Window

Discussion

This is the first step to completing the Johari Window – your own input. You should now put it aside until you do the next activity.

Of course, we may be happy to share specific pieces of information with some people and not others, so you may well want to adapt the contents depending on whom you ask to be your mentor.

But do note that if we share aspects of ourselves with others, it puts them in a better position to give us accurate (and more helpful) feedback; for example, saying you are not confident about something can prompt another person to reassure you about your skills or qualities. So the next stage is to ask your real or imaginary mentor to see if they can add anything to your window.

Part 2

Allow about 30 minutes.

This part of the activity has two options. You should choose just one of these:

- **Option 1: getting feedback from someone you know**

  Show the open area of your completed Johari Window to your chosen mentor. Ask them whether they can add any information about your qualities, knowledge or skills, and write it in your blind area box.

- **Option 2: getting some 'imagined feedback'**

  Choose an imagined feedback-giver to sit in your 'empty chair'. Think about what they might say in response to your current Johari Window open area. Might they add any additional qualities, skills or knowledge, or offer a new perspective? If so, add this to your blind area box.

Discussion

Did you learn anything new?

Once you have seen or heard feedback you can move this information from the blind to the open area because, of course, you and your mentor are now both aware of it and sharing it! (Albeit artificially with an imaginary mentor, but you can still learn from this.)

Perhaps you also decided to reveal something from your hidden area to help you get more useful feedback? If this happened to you, then some information will be ready to be moved from your hidden to your open area too.

While you are studying *Succeed with learning,* whenever you get additional information from your own reflection or from others' feedback, you should revisit your Johari Window diagram. Change it so that it reflects the updated information about your skills and qualities. Perhaps your knowledge is increasing too?

You may want to change it now. If you are not sure what to do, look over this section again.

3 Reflection

You have been doing quite a bit of reflection this week! Some people are more comfortable with thinking about themselves, and discussing their qualities, than others. However you feel about it, you should by now have some very useful notes about yourself – and a diagram – that will provide a firm foundation for building a future learning plan that is *specific to you* later in the course. Check now that your notes will be easy for you to access later.

4 This week's quiz

Now it's time to complete the Week 4 badge quiz. It is similar to previous quizzes, but this time, instead of answering five questions there will be 15.

Go to:

Week 4 compulsory badge quiz.

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

5 Summary

Well done – you are already half-way through *Succeed with learning*! This week you have looked at the importance of reflection and gaining feedback in order to increase your understanding of yourself and your capabilities.

You have learned about:

- the importance of ordering your notes
- what is meant by the term 'reflection'
- reflective practitioners
- Sigmund Freud's ideas about the unconscious mind
- different kinds of feedback; such as 360° feedback, the 'empty chair' technique and the Johari Window.

Next week, the course focuses on some more technical skills – providing you with a practical tool kit for your future studying.

You are now half way through the course. The Open University would really appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future improvement in our optional end-of-course survey, which you will also have an opportunity to complete at the end of Week 8. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

You can now go to Week 5.

Week 5: Learning tool kit

Introduction

This week the course will provide you with a selection of learning tools that are particularly useful for academic study. As well as core tools like effective note-taking and reading skills, the *Succeed with learning* tool kit also includes using mind maps for study, using online information and an introduction to academic referencing.

These topics are introduced fairly briefly, simply so that you are aware of what they mean and how they can be used. You will then be able to explore them further and apply them more fully in any future courses you may choose to study.

Jonathan introduces Week 5 in the following video:

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week you will:

- have started to build a learning tool kit
- understand what is meant by the term 'academic skills'
- be able to use mind maps for your learning and planning
- understand how to use PROMPT to check online information.

1 Academic skills

Some of the skills that are often associated with studying are:

- reading for a purpose
- note-taking
- essay writing
- selecting and using relevant parts of a course
- thinking about ideas and theories
- considering other perspectives
- reflecting on your own learning.

Transferable skills, such as communication, organisational and problem-solving skills are equally useful when you are studying in what we might call the 'real world'.

As you now know, the 'real world' and academic study are not completely separate from each other. Many everyday skills can be useful for becoming a successful student and academic skills can have useful applications in everyday life. Being able to use academic skills in the real world can help you get used to being a student and to see this role as part of who you are – and vice versa.

1.1 Reading, writing and note-taking

Reading and writing are probably the first things you think about when someone mentions studying – whether it is reading and typing online or sitting down with a book and a pen.

Note-taking is an important aspect of academic studying. It is a way of organising the ideas and information we have learned about, and our thoughts and reflections. Most people develop their own personal way of note-taking, and you might have done so already. As long as it works for you, that is fine!

But remember that notes need to be *concise*. There is no point just copying most of the material you are reading and you can waste a lot of time by doing this. They also have to be useful and do what you want them to do. Have a think *why* you are reading something, and what you intend to do with the information you are noting down.

Here are four stages of reading and note-taking, which many students have found helpful:

1 Skimming

Let your eyes run quickly over the text to get the gist – 'skimming the top off' whatever you are reading.

2 Scanning

If you are wanting to answer a quiz or an essay question, think about what you might need for that and scan for relevant areas of the course. Scanning the headings, menus or chapters is a good way to start. Maybe some words are shown in bold or italics because they are seen as special terminology for the subject you are studying.

3 Focused reading

Then return to some of the points you identified in your scan, and read them more closely. Make sure you understand them, and think about how they may relate to each other.

4 Writing down your notes

Now make your notes. You may want to use mind mapping – this is the focus of the next section – or bullet-points to organise your thoughts.

Figure 1 Tools for academic skills

Activity 1 Scanning for this week's activities
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

- Take a quick look through the rest of this week of *Succeed with learning*. Just look out for the activities.
- Make a note in your learning journal about the number of activities and the amount of time they are likely to take.

Discussion
Scanning is a useful way of searching for specific information. You do have to be careful not to be distracted by anything that is irrelevant, though!

1.2 Essay writing

Essay writing is a complex process. However, essays continue to be used in much formal learning. This is because they are seen as a good way to pull together ideas, and to show yourself and others what you have learned and thought.

You do not have to write any essays for this course, but if you do start a course that has this requirement, here are ten tips that you can refer to later. (So why not make a note of them?)

1. Allow plenty of time. (Remember your time-management skills from Week 2? You might want to revisit these for more helpful hints and tips.)
2. Always read the question carefully, picking out the key words.
3. Read all the guidance provided.
4. Use a highlighter (or other method) to identify relevant parts of your notes.
5. Make a plan before starting.

6.   Have an introduction that outlines what you plan to say, then say it, then have a conclusion which highlights the main points from your answer.

7.   Keep focused on the question.

8.   Leave it overnight, and then review what you have written.

9.   Write your final draft.

10.   Submit it on time!

1.3 Reflective writing

For some of the activities on this course, and for your learning journal, you have been asked to write reflectively. The difference between academic writing and reflective writing can be summed up by thinking about the word 'I'.

Academic writing generally aims to develop a more detached, or objective, view of what is being discussed. So you might start an essay saying something like: 'This essay will look at different ideas about learning' rather than 'I am going to write about learning'.

However, it's fine to use 'I' when you engage in personal reflection. Indeed, it is almost impossible to reflect without using 'I'. Using 'I' gives your writing a very personal 'voice' – it suggests that you are focusing on your own thoughts, feelings or actions. For example, you might write: 'I enjoyed learning about my skills – it made me feel more confident.'

1.4 Developing your writing skills

Writing well does take practice, so if you want to develop your writing skills further, you may like to search the OpenLearn website or elsewhere for courses on this subject. In particular, take a look at another badged course, English: skills for learning. For now, this course will look at a popular way to organise your ideas before writing a piece of finished personal writing or a more formal essay – mind mapping.

2 Using mind maps

One technique that many people find helpful is to draw a **mind map** that allows you to explore how all your different ideas could be connected.

Mind mapping was invented and developed by Tony Buzan, an author who has explored ways in which people think and learn. The technique helps open your mind to a broad range of ideas, and record these in a flexible format that can be easily altered and developed. So, as well as organising your thoughts and essay plans, mind mapping can help you to think more creatively and to come up with new ways of looking at things.

A mind map can be produced for any subject or topic. A good way of creating a mind map is to start with a large sheet of paper and coloured pens or pencils. Mind maps usually begin in the middle of the paper with a word, phrase, picture or symbol that represents the topic being explored.

The next stage is to let your mind wander as freely as possible around the topic. Think of some **key words** or **phrases** (there is no right or wrong here), then write them near to the central image or words. Finally, connect each of them to the centre with lines. This is the beginning of your mind map.

Keep adding lines and words (and pictures, if you like), linking them to each of the words or phrases that triggered them – so that your map becomes a network of words and lines.

Mind maps are often very personal – they are, after all, maps of *your* mind. They can be as elaborate or as simple as you wish – whatever you find helpful. Some people like to add a lot of detail, including colour, pictures, page references and examples, while others prefer a simple plan, concentrating on key points.

The figure below is a simple mind map that a student created for an earlier version of this course, reflecting on what they had learned.

Figure 2 Mind map of an early *Succeed with learning* course

Now you have a go.

Activity 2 Looking back and creating a mind map
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Look back through this course and summarise some of the key things that you have studied so far, using a mind map.

• For this mind map, the central theme is 'succeed with learning', so put that in your central bubble.

• Then go back through the course picking out the main ideas and the key points that we have covered. You can approach this how you like, but one way is to **skim read** the pages of the course. Look back at the headings in each week – and use

some of these as key words. Then look over your own notes to see if certain aspects of the course were particularly relevant to you.

- Now draw lines from the central bubble outwards for each of the key things you feel you have learned, and write these down. You can draw more lines and bubbles as you think of more related things that you have learned.

Discussion

You may want to add some comments about how you felt, or other thoughts and ideas that were triggered.

2.1 Further uses for mind mapping

Constructing mind maps can feel strange at first. However, once you get used to the idea, with a little practice you can adapt the method for any aspect of your learning – planning essays, revising or just sorting out your thoughts.

Mind maps are used widely in business as well as education. They can be created with others as well as on your own, so that you can share and stimulate ideas. Maybe you have used them in your place of work?

You can use mind maps in your personal life too. They are particularly useful when you are trying to work out what to do next.

Activity 3 Mind mapping your future
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

For the next activity, try drawing a mind map of the things you would like to do and to achieve. Start with 'My future' in the centre, and see where it takes you! Be as free as you like. Here is an example:
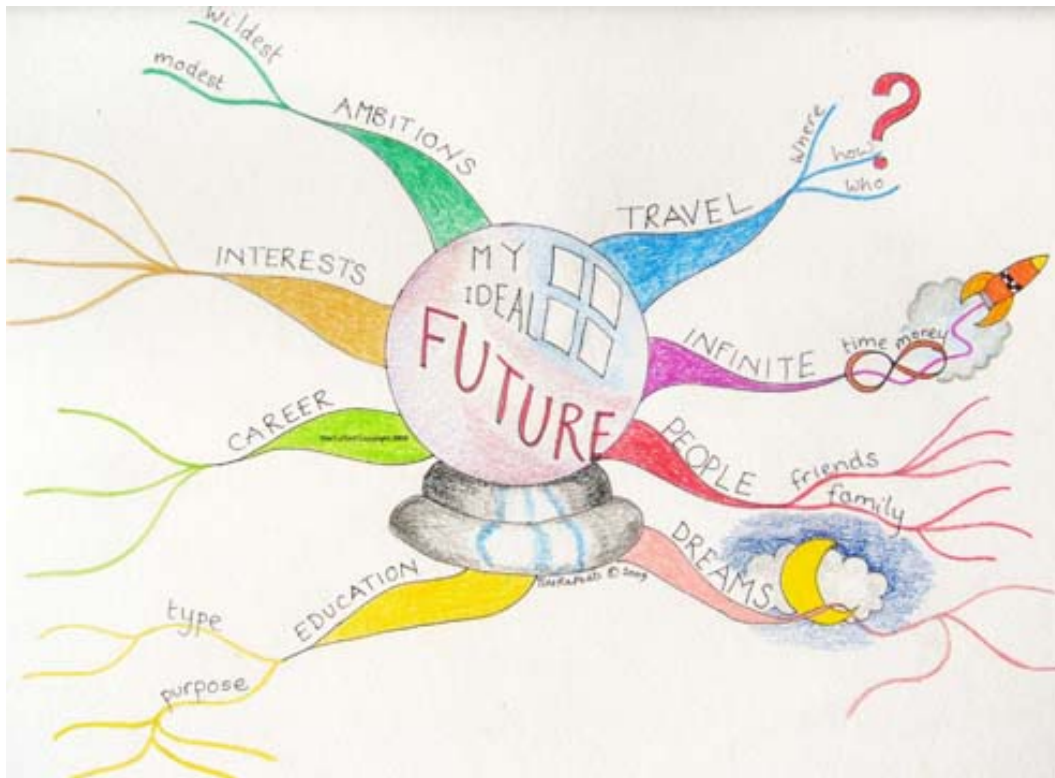
Figure 3 'My future' mind map

Discussion

Did you enjoy the freedom of this activity, or did it feel too unstructured for you?

However you felt, please keep hold of this mind map. It may not seem relevant at the moment, but when you get to Weeks 7 and 8, it will be!

If you prefer using a computer instead of pen and paper, you may be interested in exploring computer-based mind mapping. Several websites offer free, or free trial, mind-mapping tools. If you would like to explore these, type 'mind mapping' into your search engine and see what you can find.

Don't get too absorbed at this point and forget to come back! You can always spend more time exploring later. Maybe 'bookmark' any interesting pages to return to, or add them to your 'favourites'.

2.2 Using mind mapping as a first stage for writing

Mind mapping can just stand alone, but it is often used as a first stage for letting your ideas run freely before putting them into some kind of structure – such as a more formal piece of writing.

There is often a second stage after mind mapping, which involves selecting the best parts of your mind map – or the ones most relevant for a piece of writing – and putting these down in more structured notes. This process can improve your note-taking skills too.

One way to do this is to circle or highlight the most relevant parts of the mind map for the piece of writing you have in mind. Then think about how they could relate to each other.

The final stage is to put them in a logical order in note form, maybe using headings and bullet-points as this course does in places.

You could also practise doing this as a way of reflecting on what you have learned each week.

3 Using information found online

Having found this course, you are probably someone who uses the internet to search for information. You may have used it to search for information about your leisure interests, health issues, to contact friends using social-media sites like Facebook or to look for study opportunities. The web is also a very valuable learning tool – providing virtually limitless access to a huge range of ideas, libraries, courses and people.

But, the more you use the internet, the more important it is to have a way of **evaluating** the information you find.

By evaluating, we mean judging how accurate the information is likely to be. This is especially important because information found on the web is not subject to regulation or quality control. This means that information might be out of date, misleading or even dangerous.

Fortunately, many people have spent time considering how to evaluate web-based information, or websites. A useful checklist has been developed by The Open University so that its students can be fairly sure of the quality of their sources. This is known as the PROMPT checklist.

Introducing the PROMPT checklist

The PROMPT checklist features six evaluation criteria: presentation, relevance, objectivity, method, provenance and timeliness. The words form another *mnemonic* (like Orbach's three 'r's in Week 2) to help you remember. They probably aren't words you use every day, so here's an explanation of each of them in relation to using the internet.

Presentation refers to the appearance of the website. You should ask:

- Is the information clearly communicated?
- Is the website easy to navigate?
- Is the language clear and easy to understand?

Relevance refers to whether the website is really the most suitable for your needs. You should ask:

- What is the information mainly about?
- Does the information match my needs?

Objectivity refers to whether the website is likely to give a balanced view of the topic it covers. You should ask:

- Does the author of the information on the website make their position or any vested interest clear?
- Is the author likely to be biased?
- Is the language emotive or designed to persuade?

Method refers to the information provided that backs up or supports any claims that are made on a website. This might be information about the 'experts' providing the information, or the source of the information. You should ask:

- Is it clear *how* the information was collected?

- If 'experts' are mentioned, are they named?
- Are links provided to any research data?
- Do you trust the information provided and the claims made?

The term **provenance** refers to the authenticity of the website and reliability of the place where the information provided comes from. You should ask:

- Is it clear *where* the information has come from?
- Here, you might consider the website address or URL (uniform resource locator) – academic websites in the UK, like The Open University, usually end with '.ac.uk' and in the USA they usually end in '.edu'.
- Is the author or organisation responsible for the website clearly identified?
- Is the author or organisation likely to be trustworthy?

Timeliness refers to whether the information on a website is likely to be sufficiently up to date for your needs.

You should ask:

- Is it clear *when* the information was produced?
- Does the date of the information meet my requirements (does it matter for my purpose)?
- Could the information be out of date?

4 Referencing

You will probably have noticed that when this course refers to someone who has written something interesting about learning, we have given you their name and some other details in brackets. For example: Allen (2001, p. 24). You probably ignored it! But it is there for a purpose – to let you know whose ideas are being referred to – hence it is known as **referencing**.

So, looking at this example, you can probably work out that the author is someone whose surname is Allen, the year of his book's publication was 2001 and the page of this book referred to is page 24.

In most books or articles that you are likely to come across when you are studying – whatever the subject – you will usually find some kind of referencing. As in the case of Allen above, it is done to show where the information and ideas come from and to acknowledge the contribution of other people to the writer's ideas. It tells the reader (here, you) where they can read more about the ideas presented, if they wish to. It also shows that the writer of the book or article you are reading – or online course in this case – is not trying to pass off these ideas as their own.

At the end of academic books or research papers, you will also find a **reference list** or **bibliography**. This gives fuller details of the books or websites referred to in the piece of writing. It usually gives you information about the place of publication and publisher too. So you may see something like:

Buzan, T. (2006) *The Mind Map Book*, Harlow, BBC Active

This is the book we referred to earlier when talking about mind mapping. 'Harlow' is the place of publication, and 'BBC Active' is the publisher. So now you have enough information to find the book for yourself if you wanted to.

In academic writing, writers try to refer to authors who are generally seen as trustworthy and respected by the academic community. In some ways this resembles how, from a very early age, we begin to judge how much weight to put on evidence, depending on the source it has come from. Suppose your neighbour told you that he knew it was going to rain because a joint in his little toe ached. However, the weather forecast is for glorious sunshine. Which source would you believe? All that academic referencing does is to use a more formal way of showing that the evidence can be relied on.

Websites are referenced in a similar way. One difference is that, in the reference list at the end of the piece of writing, the writer would have to put the web address and the date they accessed it. Why the date? This is because the information on websites can be changed without giving the reader any notice or indication that it has been done.

Figure 4 Look for examples in your reading

You will usually be asked to use this formal way of referencing if you decide to study at degree level. But don't worry – you'll be given more guidance then. All you are expected to pick up from this course are some of the main reasons why it is done. Maybe you could

start looking out for examples of it in your reading, so that it becomes more familiar to you.
The reference lists are usually found at the end of the book or article.

5 Your academic skills

Although many of the academic skills covered this week may be new to you, and take a while to absorb and practise, please do not forget the academic skills you already have. Some you will have had before you started the course, even if you were not feeling very confident about them; others you have been developing.

The next activity is an opportunity to see how transferable to other aspects of life some of these 'academic' skills can be.

Activity 4 How transferable are academic skills?
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

- Draw up a table similar to the one below.
- Identify and note down at least four academic skills that you have used – either on this course or elsewhere.
- Do you remember how academic skills can often be used in the real world too? Try to think of any other ways you could use those skills, and list those in the second column.

Table 1 My academic skills and their 'real-world' applications

What academic skills did I use and how?	What other ways could I use this skill in the 'real world'?
Focused reading: I read the section on PROMPT a couple of times to really try and understand the key points.	My daughter's school has just been evaluated. I want to read the report to understand why the school did not do very well.
Mind mapping: I used this in two activities.	I'm going to use this to help me decide where to go on holiday.

Discussion

Can you see from this activity that academic skills can be very useful in other situations, too? They are often as transferable as the 'real-world' skills. Being aware of this can help them become more natural to you, and studying thus becomes less of a daunting prospect.

6 Reflection

If much of the information this week has been new to you, it might feel a bit overwhelming. Remember it is your *tool kit*, so as long as you know where you have put it, you only need get it out when you need the tools – and using them will become easier with practice. Before you move on, why not look back over your notes and make sure that you have a clear list of all the tools you now have to hand? This will save you a lot of time later, and will help you remember things for the next quiz too.

7 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

Week 5 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

8 Summary

This week, you have been thinking about academic skills, and you will have developed some more of your own. Why not add your new knowledge and skills to the Johari Window you drew in Week 4? You have also seen that developing learning – or 'academic' – skills is not very different from the situation faced by anyone who takes up a new interest or job role. So don't be afraid about getting any of them slightly wrong to start with. After all, trial and error can be a very good way to learn.

You have learned about:

- what is meant by the term 'academic skills'
- different types of reading; such as skimming and scanning
- different types of writing; such as for essays or for reflective pieces
- using mind maps
- evaluating information found online, using PROMPT
- the purpose of referencing.

So you now have an academic tool kit!

Next week you will be introduced to two theories about learning, and thinking about their relevance to your own life. You will also be practising one of your academic skills – note-taking.

You can now go to Week 6.

Week 6: Wider perspectives

Introduction

Welcome to Week 6 of *Succeed with learning*. This week, you are going to focus on some theories about learning, think about their relevance to your own situation and develop your note-taking skills further. Like getting feedback from others, theories of learning offer a range of other perspectives which encourage wider thinking about learning and how to make the most of any opportunities that present themselves.

Learning about other people's perspectives and ideas is also a major part of studying at degree level, and it is one you have already started to do on this course. So, you are well on your way!

Watch Jonathan introduce Week 6 in this video:

Video content is not available in this format.
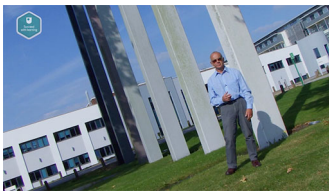
After this week you will:

- understand the value of theories
- know more about learning communities
- know more about different approaches to learning
- have developed your note-taking skills.

1 Why theory might be useful

Drawing on theory opens the possibility of building on ideas that have been developed over many years. They can give you a wider perspective on anything that you are studying, even learning itself, and help you develop your own ideas. The work of Peter Jarvis that you looked at in Week 1 is an example of this.

Often, academic writers like Jarvis try to develop **frameworks**. These frameworks are tools to help us organise or structure information and ideas so that we are able to make more sense of them. You'll come across examples of them this week. Look out for the terms that are presented in bold type – these are key words.

As you might guess, there are many, many theories in existence. You might have heard, for example, of Darwin's theory of evolution or Einstein's theory of relativity. In *Succeed with learning*, not surprisingly, we are focusing on theories about learning.

It is important to keep an open mind as you study these theories, because connections with your own learning experiences may not immediately be obvious, but instead may emerge over time.

But, it is nevertheless important to be critical of any theory you come across. The academic world is based on people challenging and questioning beliefs and theories, and suggesting alternatives – and you can start to do the same. One way to do this is to bring your knowledge and experience of the everyday world to bear. This enables you to see if it fits in with how you see the world and to consider what 'real-world' implications a theory might have.

2 Exploring learning theories

From the many theories of learning, this section focuses on two that may be of particular interest to you as you continue on your learning journey. These are:

- the idea of **learning communities**
- the value of different **approaches to learning**.

But first, how are you going to make your notes? It is important to be systematic about making notes about theories, as you need to be quite precise. You are dealing with other people's ideas, so it is only respectful to use them accurately, and you may well miss some important points if you rush through and just jot down the odd thing.

Activity 1 Making notes about theories
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

- This is an opportunity to practise your note-taking. Read the next section, 'Learning communities', up to Activity 2. Make notes in your learning journal about what you read. You may want to skim read it first – just to get an idea what is there, and then come back and read in a more focused way.
- Note down whose ideas you are reading about, and try to record the key points of their theories. This kind of note-taking should be useful when you come to writing essays or exam answers. (But relax – you aren't going to have to do that here – this is just for practice!)

Discussion
Don't worry if this feels unfamiliar. It's one of those skills that develops with practice. There is further feedback at the end of Activity 2.

---

3 Learning communities

The first theory we are asking you to think about is one put forward by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), who was working in the former Soviet Union.

Figure 1 Lev Vygotsky

In a book published in English in 1978, Vygotsky suggested that learning occurs when people take part in specific activities that are provided by the **society** in which they live. As a result, learning depends on the nature of the society in which that learning occurs. Although, in his book, Vygotsky focused on what children need to learn as they grow up, his ideas can easily be applied to adult learners too.

3.1 The example of St Kilda

Vygotsky argued that it is impossible to understand learning fully without taking into account the effect of living in a particular society, at a particular time. One example of this would be the learning that occurred on the Scottish island of St Kilda – now no longer populated.

The people who used to live on this island needed to collect eggs and to catch some of the birds that nested on the island. These were an important source of food for a population that could be cut off from the mainland by bad weather for many weeks. However, the cliffs where the birds nest often reach more than 1,000 feet above sea level.

Figure 2 Catching birds and eggs for food was a dangerous but important occupation

In order to collect the eggs, a crucial part of the learning needed by St Kildans was how to climb the cliffs so, as a young St Kildan grew up, there would come a point where he or she might be taken out onto the cliffs by an experienced climber.

Perhaps they would start with parts of the cliffs that were not quite as dangerous as others and gradually progress to the trickiest climbs. The point is that St Kildan society provided a framework to enable people to develop important skills and knowledge that were relevant to living in their society. This knowledge was held by the St Kildan society as a whole, and made available to people as they became ready for it.

3.2 Communities of practice

Two more theorists, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991), suggest that when you learn you become involved in what they called a **community of practice**. There are two key words in this term:

- *Community* is used to suggest a group of people with a common interest. This common interest might be a shared hobby, working for the same organisation or living in the same place.
- *Practice* highlights that these people do something together. For example, the St Kildans shared the practice of collecting eggs in a very dangerous place. But it can equally be something much less dramatic, like being a member of a photography club.

Figure 3 Members of a photography club form a 'community of practice'

So the concept of a community of practice refers to the learning that occurs when people, who have a common interest, work together to share ideas and find solutions. Because people are working together, a community of practice can provide opportunities to learn how to do something or to improve and do it better.

Communities of practice can also act as a kind of collective store of wisdom and experience. It is not difficult to imagine the St Kildans telling each other stories that would be full of useful information about, for example, which cliffs were more dangerous after heavy rain. People who are members of a photography club would similarly share experiences and knowledge.

The features of communities of practice can be summarised as:

- a common or shared interest in something
- a group or community of members who interact and learn together
- shared or collective resources that members have developed over time.

Lave and Wenger point out that communities of practice are widespread and can be found at home, at work or in connection with leisure interests. Often people are involved with more than one.

In the example from St Kilda, there were probably different **roles** within the community. There were experienced 'old hands' who were the people who had developed the essential knowledge and skills. They were the people who passed on what they knew to the younger St Kildans, who were just beginning to learn about the difficulties and dangers of working on the cliffs. Lave and Wenger suggest that these kinds of experienced people, who act as the store of knowledge, are central to a community of practice. They are known as **core members**.

There are likely to be others who are on the edge of a community of practice. These will include those who have only just become involved with the community of practice, such as

the younger St Kildans or new members of the photography club. Imagining the community as a circle with the core members in the centre, these new members would be towards the edge – in what Lave and Wenger call the **periphery**. People with only a slight or passing interest in the community of practice, and those moving out of it – perhaps through age or ill health – would also be in the periphery.

Many sports teams would meet the criteria for being a community of practice, as would local gardening groups. You can probably think of other examples from your own life.

Activity 2 Reviewing your notes on the last section
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

Spend a few minutes looking back over your notes on learning communities. Do they make sense to you? Do you think you have all the main points?

Discussion

You should have identified three theorists: Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger. Lave and Wenger's theory had a name – communities of practice; while you probably had to describe Vygotsky's theory a bit more – that what we learn depends on the society in which we live. You might have also noted the three features (or 'criteria') that make up a community of practice, and the example of St Kilda in relation to Vygotsky.

Did you notice some key words which were shown in bold? If you didn't, go back and add them to your notes.

Are you happy with the way you organised your notes? Think about whether you would change it another time.

3.3 Your learning communities

When you are learning new skills with others – including studying formal courses – you could be said to be part of a learning community. In this video clip one student, Karen, describes the nature of her learning community.

Video content is not available in this format.

Does anything surprise you about the people Karen included in her learning community? She included all those who supported her, enabling her to study and be confident that she could do it, as well as her tutor and fellow students. They were all essential elements for her to succeed with her learning.

The next activity is a good opportunity to reflect on how the people in your own life influence your learning and studying.

By the way, in doing this, you are also **evaluating** the relevance and usefulness of communities of practice as a theory; that is, judging how accurate and useful it is. The key features of a community of practice provide a **framework** that you can use to analyse aspects of your own life.

Activity 3 Are there communities of practice in your life?
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

- Firstly, remind yourself of the key features of a community of practice. Then create a table such as that shown in Figure 4.

- In the first column, list up to six 'groups' to which you belong. (Your family or workplace might be one of these, as well as more obvious groups or societies.)

- In the second column, comment on how the people in these groups support your learning. (It can be everyday learning, academic learning, workplace learning … any type of learning.)

- Finally, in the third column, make some notes about whether the groups seem to have any of the three features of a community of practice.

Figure 4 Communities of practice, or not?

Discussion

Well done for having a go at applying a theoretical framework to your own life! How did you get on? Did you find many communities of practice? Don't worry if you are not sure – it isn't always clear cut. The main thing here is that you *start* thinking this way.

This activity might also have reminded you of the difference between learning alone and social learning that you looked at earlier in the course. It highlights the importance of other people around us when we learn, and the different roles they play in our lives.

3.4 A 'health warning' about groups

It can be great to belong to a group, especially if you are a highly respected core member. Other people can look up to you and ask you to share your expertise. The process of moving from being a peripheral member to being a core member can also be very satisfying. However, groups are sometimes defined as much by whom they exclude.

Groups may not just have insiders; they have outsiders who are not seen as part of the group. Often this may not matter. No one can be a member of every group. However, being a member of some groups means that there is access to privileges that are denied to outsiders, who may be viewed as inferior or undesirable.

Figure 5 bell hooks

American author bell hooks (she prefers her name to be given without capital letters) describes the effect of coming from a class and having an ethnicity that can lead to exclusion:

> It was assumed that any student coming from a poor or working class background would willingly surrender all values and habits of being associated with this background. Those of us from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds learned that no aspect of our … culture could be voiced …
>
> I see many students from 'undesirable' class backgrounds become unable to complete their studies because [of] the contradictions between the behaviour necessary to 'make it' … and those that allowed them to be comfortable at home with their families and friends …
>
> (hooks, 1994, p. 182)

As bell hooks suggests, sometimes moving from one group to another can be problematic. It is also common to find that people have preconceptions about you, based on your identity (for example, your class, race, religion, gender, profession or town of origin), and for these preconceptions to make it difficult for you to fit in with a new group of people.

Being aware of how groups work can help you feel prepared and decide how to address these kinds of barriers.

4 Student approaches to learning

It is time now to move on to the second theory. This one has quite a different focus. It looks at the different reasons people decide to learn, and explores some of the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches.

The ideas for this section come from Noel Entwistle. His theory has been chosen because it is based on evidence that has been gathered over a number of years, and so can be seen as fairly reliable.

4.1 Background to Entwistle's theory

Entwistle's ideas draw on those of another theorist, Roger Säljö (1979). In what became known as the Gothenburg study, Säljö interviewed 90 people about their approaches to learning and found that there were important differences in how people saw their own learning.

Entwistle (Entwistle et al., 2001) conducted similar research to the Gothenburg study. He modified Säljö's original ideas and suggested that there are three different approaches taken by learners:

- **Surface learning**

  This is associated with the idea that learning is about memorising facts. When engaged in surface learning, students prefer to be told what to read and what notes to take. A disadvantage is that students taking this approach are also liable to feel that they are drowning in information that contains many separate elements, which seem to have few connections with each other — so they may struggle to make sense of these ideas.

- **Strategic learning**

  With this approach, students are focused on the outcome of their learning. So are often trying to get a high grade in a course by organising their time well, by finding the right conditions for studying and by putting consistent effort into their studies.

- **Deep learning**

  Taking a deep learning approach involves looking for meaning in what you are studying rather than trying to memorise it. With this approach, students are curious and questioning, and are constantly examining whether what they are told makes sense in the light of their past experiences and learning.

Entwistle's three approaches are summarised in Table 1. Have a look at it now, before doing the next activity. There is quite a bit of information there, so do not feel you have to take it all in. When you start applying it to your own life, like many theories, it will probably start to make more sense.

Table 1 Entwistle's three approaches to learning

Deep approach	Surface approach	Strategic approach
Intention – to understand ideas for yourself by:	*Intention – to cope with requirements by:*	*Intention – to achieve the highest possible grades by:*

Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience	Treating the units as unrelated bits of knowledge	Putting consistent effort into studying
Looking for patterns and underlying principles	Memorising facts and carrying out procedures routinely	Managing time and effort effectively
Checking evidence and relating it to conclusions	Studying without reflecting on either purpose or strategy	Finding the right conditions and materials for studying
Examining logic and arguments cautiously and critically		Monitoring the effectiveness of ways of studying
Being aware of understanding developing while learning		Being alert to assessment requirements and criteria
Becoming actively interested in the course content		Gearing work to the perceived preferences of lecturers

(Adapted from Entwistle et al., 2001)

The way that some of these approaches are described suggests that some of them are 'better' than others. Do you think it sounds good to be a 'deep' or 'strategic' learner and less good to be a 'surface' learner? Do note however, that Entwistle's ideas should not be taken as meaning that people always fall into one category or another, nor that any particular approach is inherently good or bad.

4.2 Your approach

The approach you may choose to take depends *why* you are learning something. When your primary need is to pass a course, get a certificate or gain an overview of what others are trying to teach you, strategic learning is useful – deep learning could get in the way. You could get side-tracked by things that you are really interested in, rather than concentrating on the job at hand. If, on the other hand, your main interest is personal development, then deep learning is very useful and more fulfilling.

The real value of knowing about these different approaches is that it opens the possibility of using different approaches for different circumstances. Everyone is capable of becoming a strategic or deep, learner, and surface learning has its uses if you need to retain a lot of new information to pass a test, or only memorise something for a short period of time.

Entwistle's research suggests that when students become more aware of their own approaches, they are in a better position to decide what they are trying to achieve from their studying, and to understand the implications of adopting specific approaches to learning.

The next activity gives you a chance to develop your understanding of Entwistle's theory and see how it may be relevant to you and your learning.

Activity 4 Approaches to your own learning
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

1. Draw a table similar to that shown in Figure 6.
2. In the first column, list at least three fairly recent learning experiences you have had.

---

3. In the second column, identify the learning approach or approaches involved.

4. Now, think about whether you could have used an alternative learning approach. If so, then note this possible approach in the third column.

Example of my learning	What sort of approach (deep, surface, strategic)?	How might I use another approach?
Bus times from Milton Keynes Central to The Open University	Surface	Not sure
Reading for Succeed with learning	Strategic	Could use deep approach if I explored links with other aspects of my life

Figure 6 'Approaches to learning' table

Discussion

Did you find that it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between the different approaches? This doesn't mean that your answer is wrong. Sometimes there is an overlap between the different approaches and this may have been the case for you.

5 Reflection

Studying theories can seem rather difficult at first, but it is very rewarding once you get the hang of it – introducing you to a wide range of perspectives and ideas. Before you finish this week, it would be useful to reflect on some of the theories you have studied so far. These include:

- informal and formal learning
- communities of practice
- approaches to learning.

How relevant did you find them to your own life? Think about which theories helped you reflect on the past, and which ones might be useful in planning for the future – maybe they have all done both? Jot down your thoughts in your learning journal.

6 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

[Week 6 practice quiz](#)

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

7 Summary

This week has focused on studying theories; in particular, theories about learning communities and the different approaches you can take towards learning. You have also practised taking notes on theories and applying them to your own life.

You have learned about:

- the value of theories
- how frameworks can help structure information and ideas
- Lev Vygotsky's ideas about learning communities
- Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's ideas about communities of practice
- Noel Entwistle's ideas about approaches to learning
- the relevance of theories to your own life.

Next week will focus on deciding on a direction for the next stage of your learning journey, and starting the process of planning it.

You can now go to Week 7.

Week 7: Where next?

Introduction

It is time to start focusing on yourself and your learning future. The final two weeks of this course will help you to bring together all that information you have gained about yourself – your skills, knowledge and qualities – and about learning itself, to decide on and plan how you can take more control of your learning in the future.

This week, you will be starting that planning process by using some action planning methods that are often used in both personal life and in business – which can just as effectively help you plan your learning future.

Jonathan introduces Week 7 in this video:

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week you will:

- have a vision for your future
- have learned about action planning
- have applied a technique to help you select the best goal for you
- be able to identify SMART goals
- have set a SMART goal for yourself.

1 Making plans

Sometimes it seems as though the world is divided into two groups of people –those who make plans and those who do not.

Does the idea of having a plan sound a little mechanical? Maybe you prefer to just go along with whatever life brings? Many people hate to be tied down to a specific plan, and you may be one of them! However, for big, important decisions like the direction of our lives, it is useful to balance being spontaneous with more considered planning. Another point about planning is that, if you think about it, most people do it. Often there is little choice in order to balance life's competing demands.

A plan does not have to be written down; it may exist only inside your head. But once you start thinking about how you manage your time – as you already have done on this course – you'll realise that you do a great deal of planning just to get through each day. You probably have some idea about how you are going to manage all the things that are happening in your life over the next few days. Well, that is a plan!

In a quiet moment you might find yourself thinking about what you would like to be doing in the future. You probably carry around lots of other plans too, such as what to do with the children during the next school holiday or budgeting for some new furniture next year. You might already write down some parts of your plans. For example, you might put together a list of all the things you need to do and work through them, checking them off day by day or week by week.

But fewer people develop plans for achieving long-term goals. Longer-term goals are different from surviving the next few days, weeks or months. The goals that this week's study will focus on are not just about getting through a period of your life. They are about focusing on the future.

Before you start planning the future direction of your learning, you might find it helpful to start a separate section in your learning journal or start a separate 'action planning journal', so that you can record the steps that this course will take you through in the development of your plan – and, of course, any thoughts you might have afterwards too.

1.1 Action planning — an overview

The action planning process generally involves the following stages:

- developing a vision
- setting yourself a realistic goal, and checking it is achievable
- working out what you need to do to achieve your goal – breaking the goal down into smaller chunks
- putting the steps in a logical order
- starting work on the small and early steps and then checking things off as you go so that you can see (and celebrate!) what you have achieved
- reviewing the action plan regularly and adjusting it if need be.

This week will focus on the first two stages of action planning, with most of the later stages being completed next week. The last two you will do after you have completed *Succeed with learning*.

The first stage is to think big and to develop a vision that inspires you.

2 Developing a vision

Some people find talk of visions off-putting; others find it liberating and exciting. It does not mean you cannot change your mind about where you really want to be in the longer term, but as the old saying goes: 'If you don't know where you are going, how are you ever going to get there?'

Figure 1 Developing a vision

The first thing you need to do is look back at that mind map you made about your ideal future in Week 5. Some aspects of your vision may be lurking there. If you have a paper version, it would be a good idea to have it to hand. If your mind map is online, have it ready to refer to on your computer – or print it off.

If you are uncomfortable with the idea of visualising an 'ideal life', pause to think about why this may be the case. Do you think that all human beings have the right to explore their talents in order to live as fulfilled a life as possible? If you believe this, then why shouldn't you?

The next few activities will help you get started.

Activity 1 What do I want my life to be like in five years' time?
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Imagine your life as a video. Now fast-forward five years. If you could have a fairy godmother waving her magic wand, what would your life be like? Take your time to let your mind wander freely. Shutting your eyes might help. Think about things like:

- What are you doing?
- Who are you with?
- Where are you?
- How are you feeling?

Make a note of your thoughts in your learning journal or action planning journal, under a heading 'My five year vision'.

Discussion

Did you really 'go for it', and think about what you really want to do, what would excite you? The promise of exciting goals can spur you through the difficult times.

Or did doubt hold you back? If you were not bold and positive, try the activity again and tell your internal 'censor' to be quiet, while you think freely without the usual 'if only' and 'but' interruptions!

Did you find it hard to avoid all the things that might limit your vision? This is a common reaction – there is a natural tendency to limit our visions for the future by thinking about, for example:

- where we are now and what we think we 'deserve'
- what other people might think of us
- moving out of our comfort zones, into unknown areas
- lack of resources – maybe time, money, health or access to support.

There will probably be some obstacles ahead – but for now ignore them. Addressing those is a later stage in the planning process, and there are tools to help.

Another way to develop your vision is to think of yourself in the future, looking back. What would you regret not having done? By thinking about what you would really like to be doing and feeling in the future, you are less likely to end up with as many regrets and thoughts about what might have been.

3 Introducing case studies

There are two new case studies for the final two weeks of the course. Looking at their situations, aspirations and plans might help you to see some of the issues that you may have to deal with too. It is often easier to see ways of sorting out someone else's life rather than our own! Read through the following stories and visions.

You may want to refer back to them for some of this week's activities and for the quizzes at the end of both Weeks 7 and 8, so it might be a good idea to make a note of the number and title of this section or pages so you that can refer back to them easily.

3.1 Case study 1: Mike's story

Figure 2 Mike

Mike has been working for a long time in a job that he hates. During a well-earned holiday with a group of friends, he ends up cooking all the meals and getting lots of compliments, along with questions about why he is not a chef.

These responses really get him thinking about how much he loves cooking. It is something he learned from his mother, but he has been developing his own ideas for some time. Mike begins to ask himself whether he could be a chef. It may not pay any more money than his current job and the hours can be difficult, but at least he would be happy doing it; he would not be constantly watching the clock like he does now – waiting for work to end and real life to begin.

Mike's vision

Mike's five-year vision focused on the type of restaurant he would like to work in – whether it will be big or small, the type of cuisine, which kind of clientele, urban or rural, and so on.

He has always been an outgoing, sociable person, so he does not foresee any need to focus on other elements – if he has to move away from his current circle of friends, he is sure he will make new ones and that the old ones will still visit.

3.2 Case study 2: Charity's story

Figure 3 Charity

Charity has recently moved to a new area and spent her first six months getting her two older children settled into school and after-school activities. Her youngest has just started nursery school and Charity is eager to have some time to herself.

She is beginning to realise that one consequence of devoting time to her children is that she has avoided making decisions about her own life. She recently joined the local-history society in her new town, as history was her favourite subject at school, but was so shy at the first meeting that she felt overwhelmed. She has decided it is time she did something positive toward developing her self-image and self-confidence.

Charity's vision

Charity knows that eventually she will need to get a job to boost the family finances, but she cannot focus on that now. Her five-year vision is being a self-confident person, able to hold her own in conversation; to hold opinions about things that are important to her and not be afraid to debate other points of view; and to have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances with whom she feels comfortable to engage in such discussions.

A real fairy godmother gift would be to have the nerve to stand up in front of an audience to give a talk. She knows this is important in a lot of jobs these days.

Whilst Mike's vision is more clearly work-orientated, did you notice that Charity's vision involves developing a transferable skill – communication? As you know, this is a skill that would be very useful in many aspects of life.

4 Turning visions into goals

If you are going to design a realistic and practical plan for yourself, the first thing to do is to select just one long-term goal as the focus of your planning.

You may find this straightforward. If you have a look at your notes on your vision, and at your mind map about your ideal future, you may be able to identify one long-term goal (at least one year away) that you would really like to start working towards achieving. If so, write this in your learning or action planning journal. If you struggle to choose between a couple of goals, then the following technique may be particularly helpful.

There is a decision-making technique called **PMI** which should be useful either to test the one goal you have selected or to help you to decide between one or two in a shortlist.

PMI stands for **plus, minus** and **interesting**. This is how it works. For each possible goal, do the following:

- Create a table with three columns – 'Plus', 'Minus' and 'Interesting' – similar to Figure 4.
- In the 'Plus' column, write all the advantages for choosing this goal.
- In the 'Minus' column, write all the disadvantages.
- The 'Interesting' column is for thoughts that don't quite fit either of the others, but are possible outcomes of making the decision.
- Now put a rating score by each between 1 and 5, depending on how strongly you feel about them. Those in the 'Plus' column should have a plus sign. Those in the 'Minus' – guess what – have a minus sign. For the ones in the 'Interesting' column, you need to decide whether you see them as positive or negative factors.
- There isn't any really complicated maths here, but you do need to total your scores. If maths isn't your strong point, it's probably easiest to add up all your pluses first and then take each of your minuses off in turn. (In this example, it comes to 14 – 7 = 7.) Or you can work out each column as shown below.
- If your final score is positive, it is fair to say that your goal looks promising. If it's negative, maybe choose a different one. The higher the score, the more promising it is likely to be.

Figure 4 PMI table for going back to college

Activity 2 Using PMI
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

Draw up a PMI chart for the goal you want to test, and put as many comments in each column as you can. Work out your total score. A positive final score should encourage you to take action; a negative score might make you want to think again.

Discussion

It may feel strange putting numbers to decisions such as these, but it can also make you start thinking more objectively about decisions you have to make.

If you are choosing between several goals, repeat this activity for each and then choose the one with the highest score.

5 Setting SMART goals

Having selected a goal that you are keen to achieve, it is time to make sure it doesn't just remain a pipe-dream. How do you check that it is realistic and achievable? Well, you need to think very carefully about exactly what it is you hope to achieve and how you phrase it – vague goals often have vague results! There is another technique to help you do this.

SMART is a popular mnemonic (you know what this means by now!) for shaping goals so that they are really achievable. You may have come across this term at work, as it is often used in business too. There are some slight variations on what the letters can stand for, but here they will stand for:

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**greed
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime limited

Now look at each of these in turn, to make sure you know exactly what they mean in this context.

Specific

You need to be very clear and precise about what you are setting out to do. Have a few attempts at expressing exactly what your goal is. Check that it can be interpreted in only one way.

Measurable

How will you know if you have achieved your goal? You have to be able to measure it – in other words, assess whether or not you have achieved it.

So, try to make sure your goal is phrased in a way that allows you to monitor progress toward your goal. Sometimes this is straightforward; you can 'measure' achievement directly. For example, you can easily tell whether or not you have achieved a qualification – you have the badge or certificate!

Sometimes though, it is not so straightforward. How can you measure, for example as Charity would need to, developments in your communication skills? The best approach is to break them down into small stages, such as:

1. maintain eye contact when speaking with people
2. stop blushing when people notice me
3. contribute to group conversations.

Agreed

You are more likely to achieve your goal if you have people on your side. Do you remember Karen's description of her learning community last week? As she recognised, most successful changes involve the support of others in some way.

If one of your goals is to study – even part-time – you may need to discuss this with family and friends to get them on your side. If you are working, you may need to persuade your manager that it is a good idea too.

Realistic

Be realistic. Achieving new goals may well mean moving outside of your comfort zone. Don't try to push yourself too far too quickly – be honest about your current qualities, knowledge and skills. You also need to think a little about how much support you have available to you and any problems you are likely to encounter along the way. (There is a tool to help you do this too, which you can use to help you draw up an action plan next week.)

Time limited

You need to set target dates for each of your steps and for your final long-term goal. As well as making it measurable, setting yourself a time frame for achieving your goal helps you concentrate. If you say, for example, 'By the end of the year I will have …' or 'In three years' time, I will be …', it may prompt you to set things in motion.

Making goals SMART often seems a logical thing to do, but in practice it can be quite tricky. The next activity gives you an opportunity to think about how to do it.

Activity 3 Recognising SMART goals
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Below are two goals that may be great goals, but are not very SMART. What is missing? How might you rewrite them more SMARTly?

1. I want to get my life in balance.
2. I want to be working with people more by the time I am 40.

Go through the SMART criteria and jot down a few ideas. You may decide that you need to break these down into several shorter goals (or steps) to make them SMART.

Discussion

There are many possible answers to this question. If yours are different from the suggestions below, that's fine. The main thing you should have done is to have made the goals more specific. If you were able to address some of the other aspects of SMART, that's even better!

Here are a couple of suggestions:

1. The person looking for more balance in his/her life might have written something like:

    By the end of the summer, I will have:

- mapped how much time I am spending each week on work, family, friends, the gym and my photography
- encouraged my partner to do the same
- discussed what we have each found out
- agreed what, if anything, we would like to change
- drawn up a plan of how we can help each other out more.

2. The person looking for a career with people might have written:

By the end of the year, I will have talked to a youth worker and a social worker to find out:

- whether or not either of those would be the right job for me (and/or get some other ideas)
- what qualifications and experience I would need to do them
- what sources of funding might be available for training.

5.1 Your own SMART goals

In the following examples, Mike and Charity have made their goals 'SMARTer'. Read through the following and check whether you think that they are addressing each of the SMART criteria.

Figure 5 Case study: Possible SMART goals for Mike

Figure 6 Case study: Possible SMART goals for Charity

Do you think they were SMART? They feel much more clearly defined than earlier, don't they? You can also visualise them being able to tick each small goal off as they achieve them. It's very motivating being able to do that, especially when you get past the halfway point to your final long-term goal, and can increase your confidence when you look back and see what you have already achieved – sometimes much more than you thought you were capable of!

Perhaps some of Mike's shorter term goals could have benefited from a timescale of their own; aiming to achieve them all by the end of the year could mean leaving them all to the last minute and then not having enough time. Charity had some targets for each week and month, which would mean she could see how she was progressing at a much earlier stage.

Activity 4 Writing your own goals in a SMART way
Allow about 10 minutes for this activity.

- Remind yourself of all the SMART criteria.
- Now have a go at rewriting your chosen goal in a SMART way. You may want to start with something like:

  'By [*put a date here*], I will have done/I will be able to …'

- Check that you have covered all the SMART criteria – even leaving one out can limit your chances of success. If it helps to break the goal down further into smaller goals – like the examples above – then do that. This process will be developed further next week when you draw up your action plan

Discussion

It might be a good idea to look back at your notes and recheck that your goal meets all the SMART criteria after a few days – sometimes things seem very simple and clear in our heads, but they really aren't that clear when written down. Waiting a few days allows us to assess them more objectively. You might also want to try running them past a friend or family member.

Next week you will have the chance to finalise the definition of your goal and the steps along the way – so don't worry if you are still a bit unsure of this.

6 Reflection

Did you find one part of this week's study easier than the other? Often people are either at ease with visualising their future or with the practicalities of action planning, but not both. If this applies to you, you may want to make a note of your preference. Does this reflect your qualities, skills or knowledge? It could be any of these – have a think about this and add it to your notes.

7 This week's quiz

Well done, you've just completed the last of the activities in this week's study before the weekly quiz.

Go to:

Week 7 practice quiz

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

8 Summary

This week you have been introduced to some practical action-planning techniques that can be applied to personal development and are useful for planning future learning. You have developed a vision for your future, and set yourself a SMART goal to form the basis of the action plan you will develop next week.

While doing this, you have learned about:

- the process of action planning
- the importance of having a vision
- turning visions into practical goals
- the PMI decision-making technique
- writing SMART goals.

As next week is the final week, you will be able to bring together all the knowledge and skills you have developed so far on this course to help you develop a plan for achieving your goal. You will also be encouraged to reflect on the process of learning.

You can now go to Week 8.

Week 8: Your plan

Introduction

Welcome to Week 8, the final week of *Succeed with learning*. You are almost at the end of the course and your badge is in sight!

This week the course focuses on helping you to make sure that your goal is as realistic as possible and to design your own action plan to achieve it. You will also review your learning from the course as a whole, and think about a range of future learning opportunities.

Watch as Jonathan introduces the final week of the course:

Video content is not available in this format.

After this week you will have:

- drawn up an action plan for your learning future
- learned how to use a force-field analysis to develop your plan
- thought about the resources and options available to you
- reflected on the cycle of learning.

1 Developing your plan

Last week you defined your SMART goal. The next stage is to start looking at all the forces that may influence whether or not you achieve your goal. There is another technique that can help with this, which encourages you to think a bit more widely.

Figure 1 Forces in favour: forces against

1.1 Force-field analysis

Figure 2 Kurt Lewin

In the mid-twentieth century Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist who worked in Germany and America, developed a theory called **force-field analysis** to think about the way in which changes made in the workplace succeed or fail (Lewin, 1947). It can be applied to any action planning process.

Lewin suggests that any attempt to make changes will involve forces in favour of change and forces against it. For change to occur successfully, the forces in favour must be stronger.

This is like a tug of war. If the forces on the left side are stronger than those on the right, then the change can go ahead.

This might not seem much different from the familiar 'pros and cons' idea, but pictures often express ideas more clearly than words. A force-field diagram helps you visualise the relative strength of the different forces, as you will see shortly. It lends itself to thinking about how you can weaken the team on the right, or bring in heavyweights to add to the one on the left.

There will almost always be forces in favour and forces against the changes that you are thinking about. For example, your dream job might feature a higher salary, but it might also involve more travel to work; or you might really enjoy doing the work, but you might not really trust the babysitter to care for your child as well as you do yourself; and so on.

Some forces will be quite significant; others might not have much effect. It is useful, once you have thought about what the main factors are, to estimate how much impact they might have on you achieving your target goal.

In a force-field analysis diagram, you can use arrows to represent the different forces, with the thickness of the arrows indicating the amount of impact. The thin arrows indicate fairly minor factors; the fatter ones indicate major influences (like hulks on the 'tug-of-war' rope).

1.2 Case-study illustration

Do you remember Mike and Charity in the case studies from last week? Have a look at the diagram in Figure 3, which shows a possible force-field analysis of Mike's goal of becoming a chef:
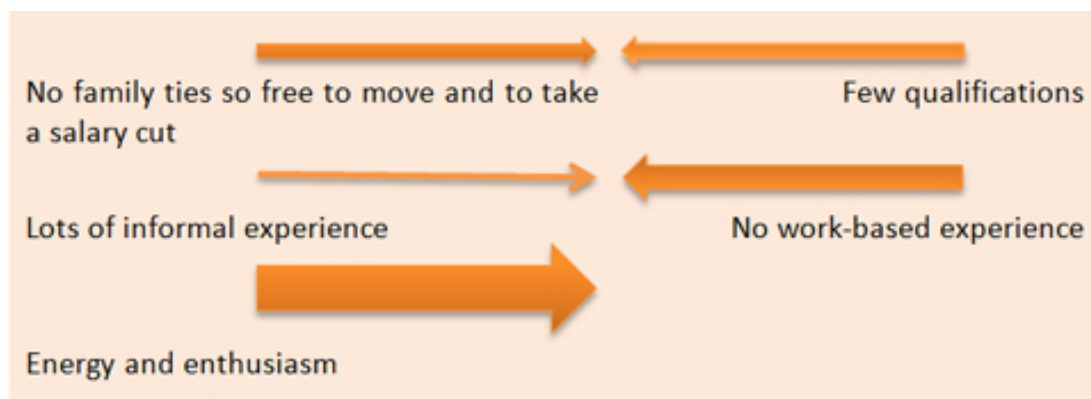
Figure 3 Mike's force-field analysis

The forces for and against you achieving your goal may be already very clear in your head – in which case you can maybe draw a diagram straight away. But it is often useful to draw up a list of helping and hindering factors first, before focusing on how much influence they are each likely to have on you achieving your goal.

Figure 4 shows a list of helping and hindering factors for Charity's goal of building her communication skills:

Figure 4 Charity's list of helping and hindering factors

The advantage of drawing up a list like this is that you can put more detail, while the diagram only has room for a few words for each. Having both is, therefore, ideal. Now, it's your turn. In the next activity, draw up a force-field analysis for your chosen goal.

Activity 1 Your force-field analysis
Allow about 30 minutes for this activity.

- Following the example in Figure 4, make a list of helping and hindering factors for your chosen goal in either your action planning journal or your learning journal – whichever you chose to use.
- Then draw a force-field analysis diagram for your goal, like Figure 3. Use different-sized arrows to show the likely impact of the things that might help and hinder you.

Discussion
Your helping and hindering factors probably fall into three main categories:

- The **resources** you have available – for example, having (or not having) people on your side, money, time, equipment, and so on.
- Your current level of **knowledge and skills** in areas you would like to pursue.
- Your personal **qualities/attributes** – for example, your level of confidence and self-belief; being brave, or how nervous you are about new challenges; being an extrovert or introvert; how healthy you are, and your resilience to cope when things are more difficult than expected.

Most plans have several factors both for and against. These all need to be thought about carefully, and you will be able to work on them further in the next stage in action planning.

This is not to dismiss a range of social factors – such as racism, sexism, ageism and other forms of prejudice and oppression – that can lead to some people having more opportunities in life than others. But for your action plan, you should concentrate on things that you have some control over.

2 Thinking about resources

Do you find that your day-to-day life involves you in so many commitments that it is hard to find the time to do all the things that you would like to do? Instead of listing 'not having the time' as one of your obstacles, an alternative decision might be to 'make time', by temporarily dropping one activity so that you can make room for the new one. Reflect on the time log you kept in Week 2 now, and see where you might make time for working towards your goal.

This is a question of working out your priorities, how motivated you are to achieve one goal rather than another. The more exciting your goal, the more likely you are to find the time to pursue it. If after this you are still saying that you do not have the time, perhaps you need to think again about what your real goal in life might be.

You may also have listed a lack of money as one of the hindering factors. Again, this can be an obstacle, but there are also ways around it. For example, rather than acquiring knowledge and skills through taking formal academic courses, you could find other open educational resources (OERs) like *Succeed with learning*, or you might acquire them through voluntary work, by visiting the library on a regular basis, or by learning from others. Think about how you prefer to learn, as well as your finances, to help you choose.

2.1 People

One of the biggest resources we have is people. Do you remember how Karen valued the support she had in her learning community in Week 6? People can take a range of roles which can all support your learning. They may:

- have the knowledge and skills that we need, and be willing to spend some time to share them
- have the equipment we need – or know somebody else who does – and be prepared to loan them to us or swap resources with us
- inspire us and can act as our role models
- cheer us up when we are feeling down
- have the networks and the know-how to open up opportunities to us
- not be afraid to prod us when we need it, or give us constructive criticism
- have similar values and interests to keep our own enthusiasm going
- concentrate on what can be done, rather than dwelling on the problems, and help us to develop a can-do approach to life
- make us feel comfortable and bolster our sense of self-worth.

Activity 2 Building your sources of support
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

- This activity asks you to think about how other people can help you. Look at the list of support roles above. Now think about who might provide such support for you in achieving your chosen goal; for example, family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, people in organisations that you belong to and people that you might be able to find through your community.

- Jot down any that come to mind, and indicate what kind of support they may be able to provide.

Discussion
Did this activity make you think a bit more widely about the kinds of 'resources' that people can be? If you struggled to identify anyone – or not enough people – you may want to think about getting involved in new activities with new groups of people. Doing this increases the chances of you finding out about these as yet unknown resources.

Your goal probably involves developing both knowledge and skills in some way. So now turn your mind to thinking about how you might go about this. The next section encourages you to think first about informal and then formal routes to learning.

2.2 Informal learning

Workplaces are useful informal routes to learning. You can share ideas and experiences and find shortcuts to what is expected of you, as well as the more formal work-based learning and training programmes that teach you what management wants you to know and do.

You could find further opportunities for learning in this way by:

- joining different social groups or community organisations
- trying out new roles or activities within organisations to which you currently belong – for example, becoming treasurer of a club you belong to or offering to stand in for one of the leaders at your local playgroup when they are on holiday.

In informal learning environments you will come across a wider range of thoughts, feelings and behaviours – which you can observe, 'try on for size' or discuss. You can open your mind to challenging your stereotypes and opinions – and those of others – and learn to value the debate and discussion that arises as a result. You can sharpen your communication skills while also acquiring new knowledge and information about the topic under discussion.

2.3 Formal learning

Formal routes to learning include educational institutions like colleges and universities, and work-based learning such as internships, cooperative education and prior-learning assessment.

Rather than enrol for one long course, it is now often possible to take advantage of modular courses (where you study each unit separately), credit accumulation (where you build up your achievements gradually) and the accreditation of prior learning (recognising what you have learned before and counting this towards a new qualification). You also can transfer from one institution to another and you may be able to mix distance learning (like that offered by The Open University) with more traditional coursework at your local college or university.

So as you can see, there are many opportunities to fit study time around your other commitments, the resources you have available, the time frame that suits you and your

work situation. Plan some time to research these alternatives if you think they may be the right ones for you.

2.4 Free online courses

Learning opportunities are also available through a growing number of free online courses. These range from full online courses, such as this one, to interactive activities and videos. The materials have often been produced by colleges and universities and can be found by searching learning resources such as the following:

- Coursera
- edX
- FutureLearn
- Khan Academy
- Merlot II
- Open Education Consortium
- YouTube EDU.

Of course there are also lots of other free learning resources available on OpenLearn, including further badged courses such as *Succeed with maths*: *Part 1* and *Part 2*, *English: skills for learning* and *Taking your first steps into higher education*.

The web offers great potential for gaining information from others, allowing you to connect with a wide range of people and resources.

Another option is to simply put 'free online courses' into a search engine like Google. You will probably find that this produces 'hits' including OpenLearn, FutureLearn, Coursera, edX and BBC Learning. This shows that there are many such courses available.

You might also like to see if P2PU (Person to Person University) or the Ragged University offer something of interest. If possible, check out what's involved before you start but do not worry if you find out they are not for you after you have started. One of the advantages of a free course is that you can sample it without having to complete it.
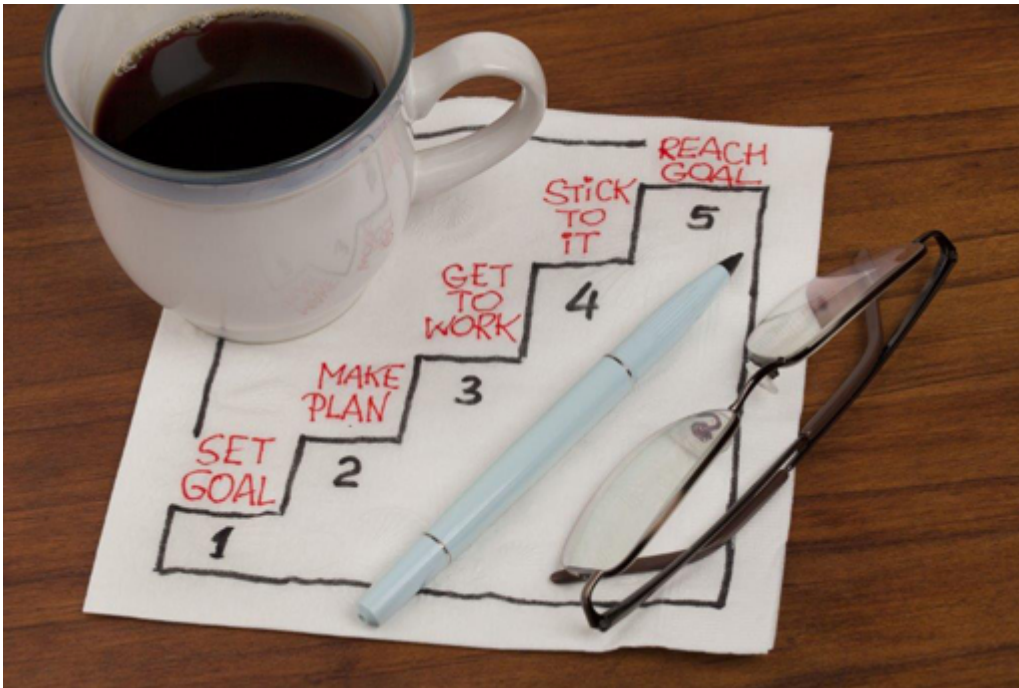
3 Designing your action plan

Figure 5 Steps towards your goal

It is all very well having visions and setting goals, but for them to have a high chance of success it is important to have a clear plan to follow. This does not mean you can't change it later – everyone's circumstances change – but it will help keep you on track.

Developing an action plan usually involves the following process, as outlined last week:

- setting yourself a goal to work towards
- working out what you need to do before you can achieve your goal – breaking the goal down into smaller chunks until you get to a point where you think, 'Yes, that's manageable. I feel I could tackle that.'
- putting the steps in a logical order – some will be dependent on others having been completed first, while some will be more flexible and can be completed at any time
- putting a timetable next to each step to spur you on to achieving that step.

You have already chosen your goal, so working out the 'smaller chunks' is the next logical stage. To help you think about this, here are some of the possible steps towards Mike and Charity's long-term goals from Week 7:

Mike has no experience or qualifications for the restaurant business, so his 'smaller chunks' include finding out what is involved – identifying what qualifications he needs and how he could acquire them, preferably in his home town so that he has the support of friends and family while he does it – and working out the finances. He also has a short-term goal of getting some work experience to help decide whether being a chef would be as fulfilling as he hopes.

Charity decides she would like to confront her shyness by preparing and delivering a presentation to the local-history society. Before she had children, she had been researching her family tree, so this might be something she could talk about. To prepare her, as a first step, she decides she is going to work on her social skills by speaking to people she meets in the school playground while waiting for the children, rather than waiting for others to make the first move.

Did you notice that the steps they plan to take are designed around their own personal qualities, skills, knowledge and resources? Yours should be, too.

So now the next stage for you is to break your goal down into manageable steps – ones that fit with *your* personal qualities, skills, knowledge and resources and that you can tick off individually along the way.

Activity 3 Steps along the way
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Try to think of at least three steps along the way to achieving your goal. The first one should feel like something you can really do in the very near future. Each step might depend on you completing the one before, or it may be free-standing.

Note these in your journal.

Discussion

- Do you see how each step could be seen as a smaller, short-term, goal?
- If you can make each one SMART, the chances of success are even greater.

Now you have all the information for drawing up an action plan for your chosen goal: your SMART goal itself, several steps along the way (preferably SMART too) and you should also have identified all the key helping and hindering factors related to your goal. So, let's go!

Activity 4 Your action plan
Allow about 20 minutes for this activity.

Start a new page in your learning journal and lay out your action plan with the following headings.

My goal:

Date to achieve by:

Steps along the way (with dates):

-
-
-
-

Factors that should help:

Factors that might hinder:

> **How I might deal with the hindrances:**
>
> (Don't forget to think about all the resources available to you, to help you address any hindrances.)
>
> **(You might even want to sign it – as a commitment to yourself!):**

3.1 Working with your action plan

You now have a detailed plan for achieving your chosen goal. Make a point of checking off each of the steps of your action learning plan as you complete them. By doing this, you will be engaging in the process of collecting evidence of your achievements, which can:

- really boost your confidence and motivation
- provide information to add to your Johari Window (from Week 4)
- help you to develop your CV when you are applying for paid or voluntary work.

3.2 Keeping your journal active

It is a good idea to continue to use a journal for ongoing reflection as you work on developing your action plan and as you learn. It can help you look backward by reflecting on your thoughts, feelings and actions about new activities you have tried, and look forward by developing your ideas and plans for new learning experiences.

Sometimes just the act of writing things down can clarify your ideas, and writing down your thoughts and feelings about your learning is valuable in itself – helping you to get things off your chest, to remind yourself to look for solutions to any problems and to celebrate successes.

4 Final reflection – the cycle of learning

Looking at the diagram below, do you recognise that this process has taken place while you have been studying *Succeed with learning*? You have taken stock of your qualities, skills and knowledge; that is, what you had already learned before starting this course. You have considered a range of other viewpoints from people you know and people who have written about learning, and you have thought about their relevance to your life and plans. Then you drew up an action plan to use this learning to help you start a new cycle of learning.
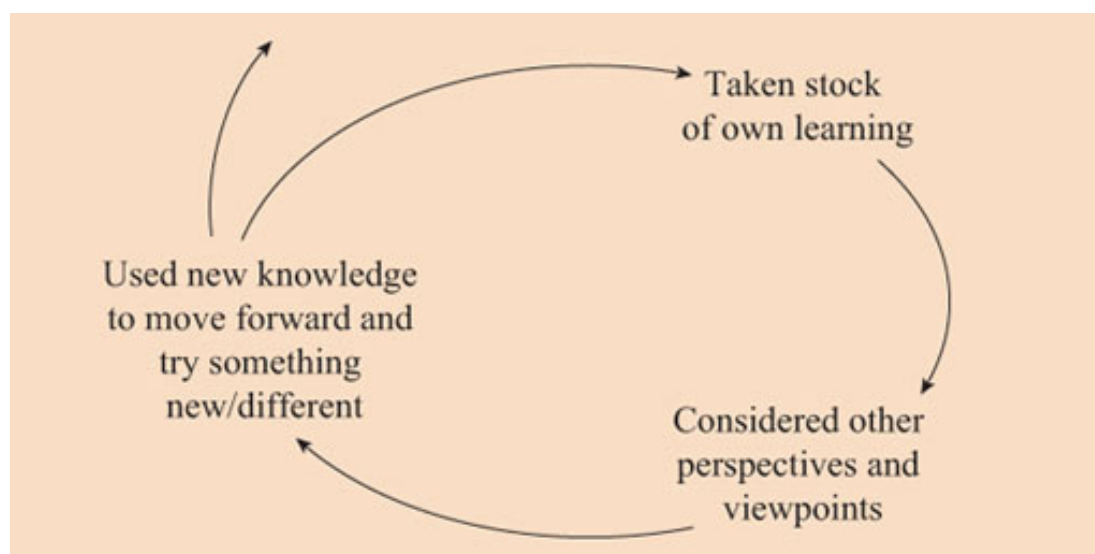
Figure 6 Cycle of learning

Regularly taking stock of what we have learned – about ourselves as well as any topic we choose – and considering a range of other views enables us to keep building on the past and moving forward.

5 This week's quiz

Well done – you've not only come to the end of this week's study, but you've also almost completed the final week in *Succeed with learning*.

To finish up in style and be able to share this achievement with others, if you want to, now complete the Week 8 badge quiz.

Go to:

Week 8 compulsory badge quiz

Remember, this quiz counts towards your badge. If you're not successful the first time you can attempt the quiz again in 24 hours.

Open the quiz in a new tab or window (by holding ctrl [or cmd on a Mac] when you click the link).

---

6 Summary

Congratulations – you have now completed the *Succeed with learning* course!

This week you designed your own action plan to help you achieve your chosen goal, and you learned about:

- breaking down your SMART goal into achievable steps
- Kurt Lewin's idea of a force-field analysis
- the wide range of resources available to you to support your learning
- different kinds of learning opportunities; such as formal, informal and free online courses
- the cycle of learning, and how this applies to you.

This course and its activities have asked you to believe that you are a 'learner', to explore your own learning and think about how it can be used for personal development and change.

You have identified your own unique combination of qualities, knowledge and skills. You can now take these forward in ways that will help you feel fulfilled in whatever you decide to do.

The documents that you have created, such as your action plan and your reflective learning journal, will be useful to you in understanding your achievements, and for sharing your achievements and experiences with other people – either formally (at work, applying for jobs or for further courses) or informally.

You have built a wide range of academic skills and knowledge that will help you in further studies. This could be the beginning of many exciting changes in your life.

Remember to keep reviewing your progress as you continue to learn – so that you keep recording and recognising all your achievements. Do this and you are well set to *succeed with learning*!

Good luck with all your future plans!

If you've gained your badge you'll receive an email to notify you. You can view and manage your badges in [My OpenLearn](#) within 24 hours of completing all the criteria to gain a badge.

Tell us what you think

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 (you may have already completed this survey at the end of Week 4). We'd like to find out a bit about your experience of studying the course and what you plan to do next. We will use this information to provide better online experiences for all our learners and to share our findings with others. Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass on your details to others.

References

Week 1

Coombs, P.H. and Ahmed, M. (1974) *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help,* Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

Jarvis, P. (2006) *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning?*, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society, Volume 1, London, Routledge.

Week 2

Adair, J. and Allen, M. (1999) *Time Management and Personal Development*, London, Hawksmere.

Bennett, A. (1910) *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* [online], http://www.web-books.com/Classics/AuthorsAD/Bennett/How/Home.htm (Accessed 18 October 2006).

Harrold, F. (2001) *Be Your Own Life Coach: How to Take Control of Your Life and Achieve Your Wildest Dreams*, London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Orbach, S. (1999) *Towards Emotional Literacy,* London, Virago.

Thompson, N. (2005) *Working with Young People,* London, Sage Publications.

Week 3

Dickens, C. ([1854] 1989) *Hard Times*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

O'Connor, J. and Seymour, J. (1995) *Introducing NLP*, London, Thorsons.

Thompson, N. (1996) *People Skills: A Guide to Effective Practice in the Human Services*, Basingstoke, Macmillan.

Week 5

Buzan, T. (2006) *The Mind Map Book*, Harlow, BBC Active.

Week 6

Entwistle, N., McCune, V. and Walker, P. (2001) 'Conceptions, styles and approaches within higher education: analytic abstractions and everyday experience' in Sternberg, R.J. and Zhang, L-F. (eds) *Perspectives on Thinking, Learning and Cognitive Styles*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum.

hooks, bell (1994) *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* New York, Routledge.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Säljö, R. (1979) 'Learning about learning', *Higher Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 443–51.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes,* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Week 8

Lewin, K. (1947) 'Frontiers in group dynamics: concept, method, and reality in social science, social equilibria, and social change', *Human Relations*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 5–41.

Acknowledgements

Don't miss out:

1. Join over 200,000 students, currently studying with The Open University – http://www.open.ac.uk/choose/ou/open-content

2. Enjoyed this? Find out more about this topic or browse all our free course materials on OpenLearn – http://www.open.edu/openlearn/

3. Outside the UK? We have students in over a hundred countries studying online qualifications – http://www.openuniversity.edu/ – including an MBA at our triple accredited Business School.