

Step 3 Do I have the digital skills to be a distance learner?

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

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

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

- Knowing how to use the internet to assist you in your studies; for example, listening to a podcast or watching a video. You may also need to know how to upload digital files to a course website for assessment or to share with fellow students.
- Knowing how to use the internet to complete research tasks.
- Being able to find your way round a study website. (Nowadays course information is often presented online and there is no guarantee that your study materials will be in printed books.)
- Being able to use word processing packages to present your work.
- Knowing how to write online messages to your tutor or peer group or how to take part in live interactive sessions over the internet (like Skype, message boards or forums).
- Knowing how to submit written materials like assignments electronically, for your tutor to mark and provide feedback.

Activity 3

Duration 20 mins

Read this brief description of a new distance learner, Su Su.

- Su Su has not studied in a while
- she is a bit nervous about what to expect as a distance learner
- her computer is old

- her parents bought her a smart device for her recent birthday and she uses social media to interact with friends
- her course requires her to register online
- her course will require her to exchange emails with her tutor
- her course assumes she can take part in live online sessions
- she will need to upload pictures to share with others
- she will be expected to contribute to student forums
- as part of her assessment she will need to complete online quizzes
- she will have to submit her assignments electronically.

If she was your friend, what advice would you give Su Su about her digital skills, prior to her commencing her studies?

Provide your answer...

Comment

It might be helpful if Jane explored the course website and read material about how to prepare for study. She should look for links, guidance and help online.

While Jane is becoming more confident using social media, she should be aware that becoming a digital learner is a different experience. It might be helpful for Jane to see if there are some short courses to help her learn more about using digital skills for study.

Check that all the software on Jane's computer is up to date (well in advance of the start of her course).

A smart device might be really helpful for Jane to use in a flexible way for some of her study, e.g. sending emails or contributing to student forums while out and about.

Jane might find it better to work on a computer to produce assignments if she has to submit them electronically. It is worthwhile ensuring that her computer is fit for purpose for studying.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed and frustrated with IT issues, so it is best to advise Jane to plan ahead and give herself lots of time.

It might be helpful for Jane to see if there is an IT Helpdesk available or support online, so that she can note down their contact details if she does have an issue or a concern.

Mg Mg's reflections on this activity

"I had some things in common with Su Su like not having studied in a while and being a bit nervous about what to expect as a distance learner. My computer is old too, and I also have a smart phone which I use many times each day. I will also need to exchange emails with my tutor but we don't have the opportunity to take part in live online sessions. I found the advice in the feedback useful but not all of it was relevant to my situation."

Next steps

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

[Get started with online learning](#)

Digital skills: succeeding in a digital world (coming soon)

Now go to [Step 4 Am I ready to learn?](#)