

Step 4 Am I ready to learn?

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

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

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

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

Take notes – When reading through your learning materials, it is a good idea to take notes. Students tell us they develop their own approaches to making notes. This might be highlighting text in a printed book or on screen, summarising notes on a separate piece of paper or in an electronic document. They may even produce mind maps. One student we knew would use a mini whiteboard to practise her Maths calculations so she could easily rub out any mistakes and take photos of her correct answers.

Learn with others – As a distance learner it is quite likely that you won't meet other students face to face. However, research tells us that learning is most effective when done with other people. Increasingly in distance education, students will interact with one another through the use of technology; for example, through forums, discussion threads and live video streams (like Skype).

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

Demonstrate what you have learned – The ultimate demonstration of your learning will come in your response to assessment tasks. This can include formal report writing, writing essays, presentations, scientific reports and calculations, academic posters, quizzes, portfolios, blogging, contributing to wikis or creative writing.

Activity 4

Duration 30 mins

Read and reflect on Jon Rosewell's article on [Learning styles](#) (2020).

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

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

Provide your answer...

Activity 5

Duration 20 mins

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

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

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

Provide your answer...

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

Provide your answer...

Mg Mg's reflections on this activity

“I have a pragmatist learning style but I think I also have elements of being a theorist too. I guess this is a good thing as it means that I have two styles to learn through rather than one.

Thinking about Kolb’s learning cycle, I can see that I like to plan which reflects my pragmatist style, but that the theorist in me also leads me to draw conclusions. But I think I need to get in touch with the experience of doing something and reviewing it more systematically before concluding. If I do this I will engage with the 4 elements of Kolb’s cycle of learning which will mean that I have had a fuller learning experience.”

Next steps

As a result of reflecting on these learning activities, you may have been thinking about your own English language and number skills. The following free short courses might be helpful for you to explore:

[Am I ready to study in English?](#)

[English: Skills for Learning](#)

[Essay and report writing skills](#)

[Numbers, units and arithmetic](#)

Now go to [Step 5 Do I understand how assessment will help my learning?](#)