

# 1

## Approaching Learning

Ruth Beretta

### Summary Chapter Contents

- Learning in higher education
- Learning how to learn
- Learning styles
- Managing time effectively
- Effective reading and note-taking
- Writing essays and reports
- Using references and bibliographies
- Plagiarism and how to avoid it

### Learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify some of the challenges in successful study in higher education and how you can work to overcome these.
- Identify your preferred learning style and adapt learning strategies to help you make good use of your time and develop your learning skills.
- Use effective reading and note-taking skills.
- Make good use of reading lists and assignment guidelines to produce constructive essays and reports.
- Reference academic writing with a recognized referencing system and avoid plagiarism.

## Introduction – the importance of developing skills for learning for a Foundation Degree

In this chapter we will be focusing on learning for a Foundation Degree (known as a Higher National Diploma in Scotland). Foundation Degrees integrate academic and work-based learning, so are designed to equip you with skills and knowledge relevant to your employment in health and social care. Although it is a qualification in its own right, a Foundation Degree may link with an opportunity to progress to an Honours Degree. Importantly, it develops your ability to exercise personal responsibility and make decisions (QAA 2010); this last point emphasizes the importance of working in your chosen profession in the area of health and social care, being able to use available evidence to support care decisions (see Chapter 5) and also to demonstrate a critical awareness of alternative solutions to problems or issues; in other words, to develop critical practice (see Chapter 4).

Being a critical learner does not mean criticizing and being negative. It means:

- Being constructively critical and evaluative
- Being open to consider all possibilities
- Being reflective
- Being rational and using a reasoned approach
- Being responsible and accountable for your actions. (adapted from Cottrell 2011)

This chapter aims to address the approaches to learning which can assist in your development to become that critical practitioner.

## Learning *how* to learn

When working as well as studying on a course, many of us need to make best use of our time and ensure we develop our skills and knowledge base as effectively as possible. For many people, that means learning *how* to learn. It sounds very straightforward, but often we have memories of previous learning experiences, which may have been negative ones. However, we all have the capacity to develop learning skills and skills of reflection that can improve our time management and make for effective academic and evaluative practice.

It may be useful to spend a few moments reflecting on your own motivation for starting the Foundation Degree and considering:

- Why am I doing this course?
- What knowledge and skills do I already have?
- What knowledge and skills do I hope to gain?
- What has previously helped me to make opportunities for study?
- What may get in my way?
- Am I ready to start taking responsibility for decisions I make?

The answers to these questions will be personal and depend upon your own circumstances. But if you can think ahead to find answers to these questions, you will be better prepared to meet the challenges you may face as your course progresses, both in preparing for your work-based learning experiences and in reflecting on what you have learned. This is why learning how to learn is so important.

In thinking about the challenges ahead, you may well see managing your time effectively as a key area, especially as you are likely to be working as well as studying for your course. You also need to be aware that learning in higher education is likely to include some approaches that may be new to you.

- Use of time:
  - You have much more flexibility in how to use your time. If you decide not to attend lectures, you may not be asked to account for where you have been, so it is up to you how you spend that time.
  - You will be given assignments at the beginning of term which should be produced by a given deadline; you may not be given further prompts about the work, so you need to be organized.
  - There is an expectation that you will use time away from college or university to read extensively around your topic area.
- Approaches towards learning:
  - You can expect a wide range of learning and teaching methods to be used, including the use of educational technologies. These may include virtual learning environments (VLE), wikis and blogs, as well as academic jargon you may not be used to (technologies will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter).
  - Learning in higher education is not just remembering facts; it is about using or applying those facts and evaluating them. Reasoning skills and being able to justify your actions will be important, so that you can link theory to practice.
  - You will be given responsibility for your own learning and it may be up to you to seek tutorial support rather than a lecturer asking to see you at regular intervals throughout the course.
  - You will be expected to read your course handbook and be aware of issues such as regulations regarding handing in work, referencing styles and procedures governing your course.

## Learning styles

We all learn things in different ways and it is important for you to recognize what works best for you.

## How do you learn best?

Think back to an experience when you found it very easy or very enjoyable to learn something. It may have been a household project, something at work or even an experience from school. What was it that made it a good learning experience? Was it the teacher? Was it because you were particularly interested in the topic? Was it the way you were taught?

Now think back to a learning experience that was difficult or unpleasant. What happened that was different to the first experience? Do you think the situation could have been managed differently?

What do these experiences tell you about the way you learn best?

You may have identified that you enjoy learning experiences which actually involve physically doing something. It is much easier to learn how to bake a cake by mixing the ingredients together and watching the mixture satisfactorily rise in the oven than just to read a series of recipes! And having a conversation with a hearing-impaired person teaches you much more about communication skills than any textbook!

You may associate a poor learning experience with an impatient teacher who does not like to be interrupted by questions, or with a period of inactivity. For some topics such as human biology, there is no substitute for learning about body organs and systems to understand how the body works by studying anatomy texts. But it becomes much more interesting when that knowledge is used to inform us about how medications work in the body, or how disease processes attack the body.

On the other hand, you may have associated a good learning experience with a lecture in which you gleaned a great deal by listening to an expert talking about his or her topic area with enthusiasm and then being stimulated to read up on the topic following the lecture. You may have considered a poor experience to be an unstructured session when you were preparing groupwork for a later presentation.

This shows us that there are a number of learning styles and we respond differently to different situations. It has been suggested that we should identify which is our preferred learning style or styles, and aim to use this style as often as possible to maximize our learning. One (of many) ways of looking at this is the VARK model.

### VARK categories

These are categories of learning styles which we may use:

**Visual (V):** This preference means you prefer to use visual information for learning, such as charts, graphs, diagrams.

**Aural/Auditory (A):** This means you prefer to learn by hearing material such as lectures, group discussions, presentations and tutorials.

**Read/write (R):** This means you prefer to learn by seeing information displayed as words, so you prefer to read and make notes.

**Kinesthetic (K):** This means you prefer to learn by movement or by actually doing something, so you would prefer to learn 'on the job' or by role play, or by a mixture of activities in a session.

---

Access the VARK website at [www.vark-learn.com](http://www.vark-learn.com) to identify your learning style and find out how to make the best use of it.

---

## What is the value of knowing your preferred learning style?

If you are aware of your preferred learning style, it can help you to study more effectively by using techniques to help you understand and process information. Some of the tips below may be useful.

If you are a *visual learner* you prefer visual information and remember things best when you have seen them. So, to help you process information:

- Use pictures, charts and maps when possible.
- Use planners, organizers or goal-setting charts.
- Highlight important points by underlining or using a highlighter pen.
- Use models when they are available.
- Read and recopy notes for revision.

If you are an *auditory learner* you learn best by listening or being involved in discussion. So, to help you process information:

- Talk things through as you learn them, in a tutorial group or with friends.
- Read aloud to yourself when possible.
- You may find it helpful to experiment whether you study best with music in the background or in silence.

If you are a learner who prefers *reading and writing* then higher education should be ideal for you! You should be able to process reading text and writing notes and essays, but you may find it useful to:

- Convert graphs, charts and diagrams to words.

If you are a kinesthetic learner, you learn best by *doing something*. So, to help you process information:

- Take plenty of breaks while studying.
- Move around as you learn and revise.

Remember that these learning styles identify your *preference* for learning only. That does not mean that they are your strengths or that you should only consider a single learning style for use in all situations. It is important to work on developing a range of strategies to cope with the variety of learning situations you will encounter. You may well find your learning style will differ depending on the topic you are learning about, and most of us use all four styles at certain times.

## Making good use of your time

Studying for a Foundation Degree means devoting time to study as well as actually working, so you may find that giving yourself enough time to devote to studies is difficult, particularly if you have family or other commitments.

### ACTIVITY

There are many texts that suggest it may be helpful to list all the things you do in a day (including evenings) for the period of a week to help you see where your time is spent. You may want to try this using a table like the one shown in Table 1.1 if you are unsure where study time is going to fit into your life. Make sure you are honest!

**Table 1.1** Record of activities

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
7.00	Ironing	Sleeping					
8.00	Breakfast	Breakfast					
9.00	Children to school	Study day (College)					
10.00	Shopping						
11.00	Coffee with a friend						
12.00	Lunch						
13.00	Reading time						
14.00							
15.00	Collect children						

Completing the table should show you where there is the possibility of making study time and this can then become part of your weekly routine, though of course most of us lead busy lives and sometimes we have to adapt. You also need to think about where you can study and try to find somewhere where you can work quietly with minimum disturbance.

Use any course information provided by your lecturers to help you plan your time. You will need to work out how to meet deadlines for handing work in, as well as keeping a timetable of when you are attending taught sessions and allocating time for private study.

---

## Tips for planning your time

- 1 **Make plans:** Use a planner that you feel comfortable with, such as a diary, Filofax, wall planner or electronic diary to identify important commitments, such as lectures, tutorials, seminar presentations, examinations, assignment deadlines. It may be useful to identify different activities in differing colours and, if you are a visual learner, you may want to hang your planner on the wall or stick it on the 'fridge.
- 2 **Organize your study time:** Organize your planner on a weekly basis depending on your deadlines and schedules. Make a note of when you have lectures and work to attend and decide how you will use unscheduled slots for reading, assignment writing, library visits, etc.
- 3 **Organize your personal and social time:** Make sure you have a balance between work and leisure time. You cannot work if you are too tired and you cannot expect to have no time to relax, so make sure you have time to sleep, exercise, spend some 'quality time' with the family as well as time to study. Completing a table like the one shown in Table 1.1 shows you how much time you spend at work and how much at leisure.
- 4 **Set priorities:** You need to decide which are the most important things to work on and which can be left for a while. Clearly, if you are preparing a seminar presentation for next week, it is more important to be working on that than revising for an examination in three weeks' time.

So, to make the best use of your time:

- **Getting started:** Set yourself clear, realistic goals. Split a big task into smaller, more manageable ones. If there are study tasks you do not like, try putting them at the start of a study session. Get them finished and reward yourself by doing things you enjoy doing.
- **Keeping going:** Try to have variety when you study, so aim not to do the same thing hour after hour. Break up long study sessions with a walk to review your progress and then come back to work feeling refreshed.
- **Know when to stop:** When you have achieved the goal you set for yourself, stop and reward yourself. Take some time to do something interesting but not

- essential. Do not start a new task if you do not think you have time or energy to complete it.
- **Know what gets in your way:** If there are things that get in your way, such as noise, poor concentration, distractions such as the family or housework, be active in overcoming them by choosing where you study and sticking to your schedule.

## Making time for reflection

You may have realized that we have already asked you to take time to reflect on some issues, such as your motivation for starting your Foundation Degree and which is your preferred learning style. Reflecting or giving further consideration to something that has happened in our lives is something most of us do quite naturally and quite frequently. This might be talking over a night out with friends the following day and considering whether the nightclub you chose to visit was the right one for a future trip out, or you might be mulling over whether your holiday destination was good value for money. Soap operas on television expect us to reflect between episodes – giving consideration to the actions by the characters involved and what we can expect to see in the next instalment. Some of the activities shown on reality TV cause reflection even amongst the media, as differing views are raised on what is and what is not acceptable viewing. We do not always refer to this way of thinking and understanding as reflection though.

Practitioners on professional programmes in health and social care use reflection as a means of making sense of the world. We also need to use reflection as a means of integrating subject knowledge with the knowledge we need for practice; it is this that enables us to develop competence in our work. For example, a health worker who has been visiting a client in their home over the past month to dress a leg ulcer will observe the rate of healing and make judgments about what is the appropriate treatment. If the health worker then attends a course on tissue viability and is made aware of a new product or means of dressing ulcers, they would probably explore the available evidence about the product and reflect on whether it is suitable to use with their client. If the rate of healing is speeded up or the ulcer becomes less painful, this has been a helpful therapeutic intervention for the client, brought about by the application of subject knowledge and reflection on practice.

However, anyone who has tried to encourage a confused older person that it is beneficial to drink at least two litres of fluid per day will realize how difficult this can be and that there is considerable skill in ensuring the person remains hydrated and avoids complications of dehydration such as a sore mouth, increasing confusion and constipation. The available evidence would agree that the confused person needs fluids, but will not necessarily provide the answers on how to get the person to drink – much of that knowledge comes with the experience of the practitioner and is based on previous, similar encounters. This is why work-based learning is so important in health and social care. It is for these types of situations that Schön in 1983 considered that



professionals working in areas such as social work and health care tend to describe what they do in terms of providing care or making decisions about care differently to what they actually do, and he suggested this is because working with people and providing care is ‘messy’ with no hard and fast rules to be followed. He further suggested such practitioners use ‘reflection-in-action’ which is ‘thinking on our feet’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ which is when we mull over the situation we were dealing with afterwards. You may find that you not only learn from those that you work with on placement, but also from reflections about your experiences after your placement, especially if you share these with your colleagues or supervisor.

---

Take a few moments to read the difference in the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action thoughts of Manuel, a health care support worker in a rehabilitation unit:

ACTIVITY

#### Reflection-in-action:

Oh goodness, she really is angry – she’s going to disturb all the other patients – should I get her a cup of tea? Let’s get her into the visitor’s room before she screams the place down! Oh no! I think she’s going to hit me!

#### Reflection-on-action:

Poor Mrs Green – she came to visit her husband as she has done every afternoon since he had his stroke, only to be met by the physio who told her he is being discharged later today. She was expecting him home next week once his electric bed has been brought downstairs and a commode delivered for him, so heaven only knows how she will manage him for the rest of this week. I did hear that we need to make some beds ready for acute admissions, but it doesn’t seem fair on Mr and Mrs Green ....

---

## What is the purpose of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action?

This example serves the purpose of demonstrating that the health care team may say they prepare for patients’ discharge and ensure relatives who are caring for them at home are well supported – but in practice, patients may have to be discharged in an emergency to make a bed available for what is seen as a more urgent need.

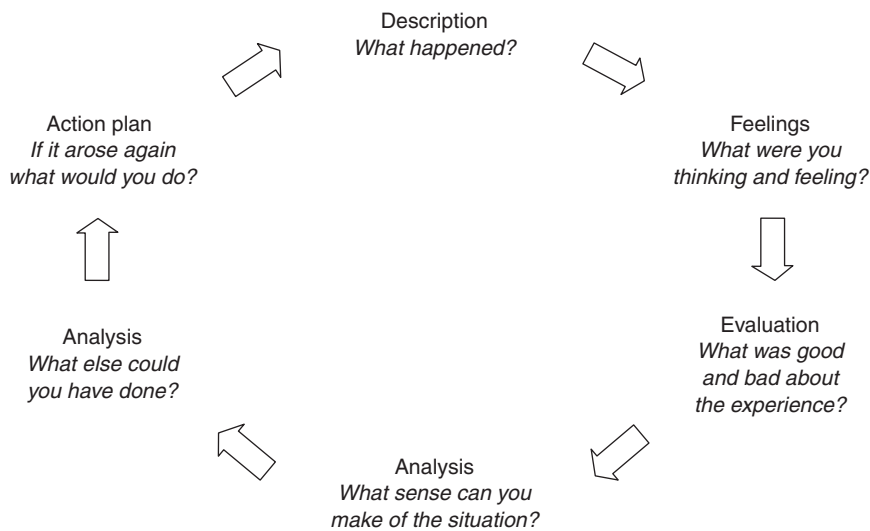
In the example, it shows that reflection-in-action occurs quickly as a whole cascade of thoughts comes into our minds and we try to make sense of what we see and hear and try to make a decision about how to act. The health care support worker’s immediate concern was to make sure the rehabilitation unit was not disturbed by the visitor, so the action was to usher her away as quickly as possible.

Reflection-on-action can take place when there is time and space for it to happen. It helps to explain why situations develop in the way they do and it gives us a chance to consider whether the best course of action was followed and if not, what could have been done differently. It also gives us an opportunity to explore how we feel about that event. Clearly Mrs Green was upset and she need more than just a cup of tea but also an explanation of the situation and reassurance that she would be helped to cope with her husband's impending discharge.

**ACTIVITY**

Can you think of a situation you have been involved in where you perhaps used reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, even though you may have been unaware of it? Was it useful? Or did it leave you with some uncomfortable thoughts?

Authors such as Pearson and Smith (1985) suggest reflection is particularly relevant to work-based learning (sometimes called experiential learning, or 'learning by doing') as it helps us to make sense of that experience. But knowing what counts as an experience can be difficult, which is why using models of reflection can be useful, and one of the most popular is that of Gibbs (cited in Quinn, 1988), who suggests the experience is a description of what happened.



**Figure 1.1** Gibbs' model of reflection

- So how would Manuel make use of Gibbs' model in reflecting on that incident with Mrs Green?
- **Description**: *Apparently, the physio met Mrs Green before she went in to see her husband and told her he was being discharged later that day. Before she had an*

*opportunity to say anything, he was bleeped and he went off the ward. Mrs Green was visibly shaking and crying when I saw her – she was very noisy and starting to shout.*

- *Feelings/thoughts: I thought this was very odd! Mrs Green is usually such a quiet lady, obviously dedicated to her husband – she has never once missed a day visiting. I wondered what on earth had gone wrong and wondered if she was heading for some sort of breakdown herself. I wanted to move her to somewhere where she would not disturb other people and where we could talk quietly – but I also wondered if she was becoming violent so I didn't try to put my arm round her to comfort her in case she hit me.*
- *Evaluation: I think I did the right thing in trying to get Mrs Green to come into the visitors' room with me – but I should perhaps have made sure someone else knew where we were going in case she collapsed or became aggressive. I didn't like this situation – I always felt I got on well with Mrs Green up until then.*
- *Analysis: It seems the physio had made the decision that Mr Green could be discharged without checking with the discharge liaison team whether his home care package was set up, so Mrs Green was really worried that she would not be able to cope with her husband at home and that she would let him down. I felt really uncertain about how to manage the situation – it all happened so quickly and Mrs Green was behaving so differently to how she usually is. It was my instinct to put an arm around her shoulder, so it was strange not doing this.*
- *Conclusion: I don't think I could have done anything differently – unless if I had known that the physio intended to speak with Mrs Green, I would have made sure they went to the visitor's room and asked if they wanted a qualified staff member with them. I should probably also have thought more about my own personal safety and made sure another staff member was with me – but then again, I didn't want Mrs Green to feel overwhelmed.*
- *Action plan: I will suggest to the charge nurse that all the rehabilitation team should have access to our communications book so they can see the state of readiness of the discharge plans. Although I can see now that Mrs Green did not really pose a threat to me, this is a good reminder that I should take the in-house training on managing difficult situations and de-escalation techniques.*

I hope you can see that the use of a reflective model allows an experience or an event to be described and analysed so that some sense can be made of it. However, even in this situation, there is still an element of uncertainty about the course of action taken, but by rationalizing on the actions, this uncertainty can be managed. This is one of the ways in which a critical practitioner can consider different possible actions and make reasoned judgments about actions. And experiences don't just have to be those that occur in practice – it could be something that occurs as a result of attending a lecture, or reading a journal article that prompts you to consider a new way of working, or a comment made by someone.

Price and Harrington (2010) summarize the value of incorporating reflection into practice as:

- Providing an opportunity to celebrate practice – when we reflect on something that went really well
- Providing an opportunity to correct practice

- Understanding ourselves – why did we act in the way we did? How do we feel about something? Do we need to get some support or further training?
- Understanding others – working in a multidisciplinary team can provide many opportunities for conflict if not dealt with in a confident and professional manner
- Understanding the profession – we do not always understand why, for example, budgetary constraints interfere with the opportunity to provide best quality care or why our instincts may not coincide with professional ethics or codes of conduct
- Providing an opportunity to challenge assumptions – you may have been working in your area of practice for some time before embarking on your Foundation Degree: using reflection should enable you to see a ‘bigger picture’ of your work setting.

## What should you study?

Now you have identified space and time for study, it is important to set about studying the right things. Make the most of materials given out accompanying each module or unit of study, such as course handbooks and module guides. You may also find that your course uses Web-based resources, such as Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) like Moodle or Blackboard. Some organizations, particularly the Open University, make extensive use of online learning and almost all elements of the module or course can be accessed from the Web.

Module guides and handbooks will contain learning outcomes or objectives, which you can use to identify the depth and breadth of an area you will study. You will notice that these contain descriptive words such as ‘describe’, ‘analyse’, ‘evaluate’, ‘list’, which should indicate the amount of detail you should give to the topic. (We will cover this area again in looking at essay writing.)

As well as identifying learning outcomes or objectives, the module guide should also provide a list of suggested reading for the module. This will be a list of resources you should aim to be familiar with in order to be able to address the module content and to be prepared for the module assignment. The resources may be a list of books, journals, TV programmes/videos and Web-based materials. Clearly, if a substantial list were provided you could not possibly read all the items, but you should be familiar with the set texts or the recommended texts for the module. You also need to identify which texts you wish to buy to have your own copy, rather than relying on borrowing from the library what are going to be very popular books.

## The set or recommended textbook(s)

The set textbook or recommended texts are important and you should make use of them. Don’t forget that library staff will know the usual books and journals used by your course, so always make the most of the staff by asking questions and seeking their advice on literature searches. You may find that some set texts are so popular you will only find them in the reference section or short-loan section of the library,

so make the most of electronic versions where possible, especially as these are likely to be the most up-to-date versions.

## Where to start finding information for your course

Lecturer notes and reading lists are clearly one of the most important sources of identifying the information you need to find in order to address the course content and be prepared for assignments. You will probably also carry out a Web search using an appropriate search engine (this is discussed more fully in Chapter 3), but you need to take care that Internet sources are relevant and you can trust the academic credibility and author of such articles. You must, though, make use of appropriate books and journals, as Web sources alone are unlikely to give your work sufficient academic ‘depth’.

## Using educational technology and Web-based resources

Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) such as Moodle and Blackboard are increasingly being used in education. Such VLEs can be used by lecturers and students to download module materials, access reading materials and presentations and many also use forums, which can be described as a public mailbox, where information can be placed and discussions can take place online. This means that you can keep in contact with your lecturer and the rest of your student group, even if you are working remotely. You have the opportunity to keep up with module materials by reading in advance of planned sessions, you can swap ideas with other members of your group on a discussion topic and you can work collaboratively to put together a project or a report.

---

What do you think are the potential disadvantages of relying heavily on forums to support your learning?

You may have identified:

- the need to work online for considerable periods, which might prove difficult, especially if you struggle to gain access or have a slow broadband connection
- a conflict with time management as you complete other work as well as online commitments
- not many in the group contribute so the discussion is not as rich as it could be
- the group is so enthusiastic about the forum you struggle to keep up with all the postings and are unsure which ones you can safely ignore (hopefully, your lecturer should be managing this aspect of the forum and should be summarizing the postings at regular intervals).

What are the potential advantages?

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

You may have identified:

- the opportunity for a group discussion or group task which can be contributed to at a time that suits you (forums are identified as *asynchronous*, that is, the conversation is not in real time)
- forums provide evidence that your group is working together, which may be an important learning outcome
- using forums can give a greater depth to discussion about a topic – especially if those posting messages are encouraged to justify their position and reason for making the comment
- it can help you work out a problem through sharing it with colleagues.

Other technologies you may encounter during the course of your Foundation Degree could be:

- **Wiki:** this is a tool for creating and editing documents, as all users can add, delete and edit material. An example that most of us have used is Wikipedia, which is a free online encyclopaedia. You may be asked to contribute to a wiki if your group is preparing a document or report that you all need to contribute to. (One of the reasons Wikipedia is not a respected academic source to use as a reference is that there is no control over who contributes the information, so it cannot be considered to be reliable.)
- **Blog:** a blog is usually a personal webspace that can be used to keep a journal of thoughts and ideas. If it is opened and shared, you can be invited to leave a posting of your thoughts on the topic which can be most valuable in relation to gaining information about people's opinions on a topic.
- **Twitter:** Twitter is a form of social networking where the contributor can write up to 140 characters and reach all those who subscribe to the network.
- **YouTube:** this is a video-sharing webspace which anyone can contribute to. It is a source of a lot of light-hearted entertainment, but the Open University also makes use of YouTube to air some of its materials.

---

## Using texts as supporting evidence for your course

Once you have located a text, you need to evaluate it. Is it worth using your precious library allowance on it?

- Check the introduction and conclusion, which will tell you the purpose and scope of the book and what kind of student it is written for. Is it right for you?
- Is it written at the right academic level? Check for an index, references and bibliography – if any of these is lacking it may not be scholarly enough for your purpose.

- Is the author a known authority on the subject? Is it written from a particular theoretical or ideological perspective? If so, you must be aware of this (check with tutors if you are unsure).
- Was this book recommended by a lecturer? If so, use it – especially if he or she wrote it or edited it.
- What is the date of publication? Is there a more recent edition of the book or is there a journal article with more recent information on the topic? Remember that books contain information that may be two years old before they are even published, but journals may have information that is only six months old.

If you decide to take the book out of the library, you need to make the best use of it you can as quickly as possible. Do not forget that other students on your course may also want to read the book and it can be recalled at any time, reducing the amount of time you can keep it for.

As you read the book, keep the following points in mind, but remember that different strategies work best for different people so try different approaches until you find ones that ‘work’ for you:

- Set yourself a time limit, per page, per chapter, per book. Keep to the time limit by using your watch and your planner to make sure you do not slip behind your schedule.
- Reading the text for the first time means you should ‘skim read’ it. This means you need to train your eyes to see more. Usually when we read, we see only two or three words at a time, but with skim reading, you need to start reading from the middle of the page or in a zigzag so that you are taking in more words at once. Once you get used to this, it is easier to get a sense of what each page is about quickly. Key words will become obvious to you so that you can make a note to go back to that passage to read it in more detail later.
- If you find it difficult to skim read, perhaps because you have dyslexia, you may find ‘ladder reading’ helpful. This is taking the first line of each paragraph to get an understanding of the passage which should then give you a sense of the whole piece.
- Try to avoid going back over a sentence if you are speed reading. Make sure you keep to your time limit.
- Always remember *why* you are reading the book. It is easy to get bogged down in detail and forget the real reason for reading that section. If you come across unfamiliar words, make a note of them and their definitions to help you remember.
- Although it is slower, you may find it helpful to read out loud, particularly if the ideas you are reading about are unfamiliar. Reading out loud helps us to process information more quickly, and as we only tend to remember a tenth of what we read, it is a more active way of absorbing information.
- You may also find it helpful to be asking questions of what you read. What are the main points of this chapter? Is the content believable? Is it of value for my assignment?

## Reading skills

Reading is a vitally important activity in working towards your Foundation Degree and it needs to form a part of your daily schedule. Try also to get into the habit of

always having reading material with you so that you can dip into a book or article at any time, whether you are making a train journey, waiting at the dentist for your appointment, or sitting in the car waiting to collect the children from school. Your reading may also be online, so if you can make use of a laptop, iPad or iPhone, even better!

We have already outlined the importance of using reading techniques to get the most out of library sources as quickly as possible. Five more ways you can improve your reading are as follows.

## Checking your style of reading

Styles of reading can be changed to suit the situation in which we are reading:

- **Scanning, for a specific focus:** This is the technique we use when we are looking for a name in the telephone directory. We move our eyes quickly up and down the lists of names until we see one that looks familiar and then focus in until we find the name we want. In the same way, scan reading means we are moving our eyes quickly over the page until we find words or phrases that match what we are looking for. It may be particularly useful to scan the introduction or preface of a book, the first or last paragraphs of chapters, and the concluding chapter of the book, to see if they are going to be useful to you. Scan the abstract section of a journal article, to see if it is worth reading the whole article.
- **Skimming, for getting the gist of something:** This is the technique we use when going quickly through a newspaper or magazine – we tend to pick out the main points but miss out the details. It is useful to skim read a passage before deciding whether to read it in detail, or to refresh your understanding of a passage after you have read it in detail. We suggested earlier that skimming is important when choosing a book in the library or bookshop and deciding if it is the right one for you.
- **Detailed reading, for extracting information accurately:** This is when you read every word of the text and work to learn from the text. This technique calls for careful reading, so you may find it helpful to skim read it first, identifying if there are any words you are unsure of and may need to use a dictionary for. You can use sticky notes to mark pages you need to concentrate on rereading. Then go back and read it in detail, making sure you understand all the points that are raised.

## Become an active reader

Reading for your course is not the same as reading a novel. You need to be actively involved with the text and making notes to help your concentration and understanding. Some tips to help with active reading are:

- **Underlining and highlighting:** You can do this with your own books or photocopies, but not on borrowed books! Make sure you make a photocopy first and use



a highlighter pen or underline parts of the text you consider to be the most important. If you are a visual learner, you may find it helpful to use different colours for different aspects of your work – but take care you do not end up highlighting whole paragraphs as this is a waste of effort. It is useful to read the text first without a pen in hand to avoid this temptation!

- **Note key words:** To do this you need to record main headings as you read and then add one or two key words for each section of the text. You could do this by writing in the margin of the text or keeping a notebook with you as you read.
- **Questioning what you read:** You need to have some idea of the questions you want the text to answer before you start reading and note these down. You can then add the answers from the text as you read. This also focuses your reading into key areas.
- **Summaries:** Pause after you have read a section and make a note of what you have read in your own words. You can then skim through the section again and fill in any gaps left in your notes.

## Speed up your active reading

We hope you will have realized how important it is to learn from reading. You can train your mind to be active by using the SQ3R technique, which stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall and Review.

### *Survey*

Get together the information you need to focus on your work:

- Read the title to help prepare for the subject.
- Read the introduction or summary to see what the author thinks are the key points.
- Notice the bold face headings to see what the structure is.
- Take note of graphs, charts or tables – they are usually helpful.
- Notice the reading aids, italics, bold face, questions and activities in the chapter – they are usually there to help you remember and understand.

### *Question*

Use the headings in the text as questions you think each section should answer. This means your mind will be actively engaged in trying to find answers.

### *Read*

Read the first section looking for answers to your questions. Make up new ones if necessary.

### *Recall*

After each section, check that you can answer your questions, preferably from memory.

### *Review*

Once you have finished the chapter, go back and see if you can answer all the questions. If not, go back and refresh your memory.

## Spot signposts for reading

As you get used to a writer's style, you should be able to recognize how the writer sets out work to give you a signpost of what is to follow in the text. A couple of examples are:

- 'Three advantages of ...' or 'A number of methods are available ...' should lead you to expect several points to follow.
- The first sentence of a paragraph may lead you to a sequence 'One important cause of ...' followed by 'Another important factor ...' and so on, until 'The final cause of ...'.

You can take advantage of this style of writing when skimming and scanning and use each point as a question in SQ3R.

## Broaden your use of words and vocabulary

You will always come across new words when you are reading and the context in which they are used may not give you enough information to be able to understand them. If you do not find out what they mean, how to use them and how to say them, then you will only ever be able to use words you are familiar with!

You need to be able to use technical words or jargon associated with your subject area. Write the words down, look up their meanings and find out how to pronounce them. To do this, it is worth investing in a dictionary, preferably not a 'concise' or 'compact' one, but one that will not only show you how to spell a word but also give you:

- Alternative definitions
- Derivations (where the word comes from)
- Pronunciation (can be really useful in preparing for a seminar or presentation)
- Synonyms (words that have similar meanings, such as 'shut' and 'close') and confusables (words that seem to be the same but actually are different such as 'affect' and 'effect', 'advice' and 'advise').

You may also find a thesaurus useful as this can help to make the language you use more varied by giving you alternative words with the same meaning. Another way of increasing your vocabulary is by reading a ‘quality’ newspaper at least twice a week and being sure you treat the reading as you would a piece of text, using the techniques above.

## Become a critical reader

We hope that by now you will understand that just reading and making sense of your reading is not enough for the critical learner! The critical learner will be reading and have some questions about the piece of reading:

- What is the overall argument this piece is making?
- Does it conflict or agree with other articles/books you have read?
- What does it use as supporting evidence? Is it reliable?
- Is this actually relevant and useful for my practice? (adapted from Cottrell 2011)

## Taking notes and making use of them

In talking about reading skills, the importance of your being an active learner and using questions and notes to engage with your reading to help your concentration, your understanding and remember more of what you read, has already been identified. The same is true of notes made at lectures and seminars, which should be an active process for learning.

---

Take a few moments to reflect on how you currently make notes at a lecture or seminar. Think about:

- What is achieved by making notes?
  - What uses do you have for your notes?
  - Where and how do you keep your notes after the session?
- 

ACTIVITY

Making notes is going to be an invaluable part of your day at college or university, because they form a vital part of the information you need to acquire from your course. They create some order to your sessions and you probably label them with the session number, the lecturer’s name and the date. They record your progress through lectures and texts, and they provide vital revision notes for assignments and examinations.

You may be a student who does not believe it is necessary to make notes since the lecturer invariably gives a handout for the session and all you have to do is turn up to the session and listen. However, it is rare for a handout to contain all the information

imparted during a lecture and it is very difficult to concentrate on what is being said for up to an hour unless you are actively involved in learning.

## Making the most of lectures

Lectures are used at college or university for two main purposes:

- to give an overview of a subject, which means you need to fill in the detail; and
- to give detailed information on a topic, which means you will need to fill in the background.

In both instances, you will note that lectures will not give you the full amount of information you need to know about the topic area or to prepare for assignments. You are expected to read around the lectures to supplement the information provided by your lecturer.

## Preparing for lectures

Your module guide should identify the order in which your lectures will be delivered to you and any reading associated with each session. Doing some preparatory reading will make it easier for you to follow the lecture and also allow you to judge more easily how detailed your notes need to be.

## During the lecture

Obviously the most important role in the lecture is for you to listen to what is said. However, active learning is the most effective, so note-taking is also important and this means you need to be in a place where you can see and hear what is going on and away from distractions. The skill of note-taking in a lecture is to summarize what has been said or written in a clear, concise form and with no facts left out, so you need to consider the best way of making notes.

### *Be selective*

Note-taking does not mean writing down everything you see or hear. Your notes need to be a summary of essential points of a text or a lecture, so you need to be selective about what you write down.

Notes should help you to:

- Remember what was said.
- Fix information in your mind.
- Use information for assignments.
- Revise when necessary.

### *Find out what the lecture is about*

Apart from the date and title, do not try to write anything at the start of the lecture. Listen to find out what the content is going to be and maybe write down key words and ideas, which do not have to be in complete sentences. This way you have an idea of the direction the lecture will be taking and you can supplement the key words with other notes as the lecture progresses.

### *Find the best way of recording information*

Some students always use 'linear notes', but these are best used when there is progression to the topic area, such as the example shown in the box.

## **Anaemia**

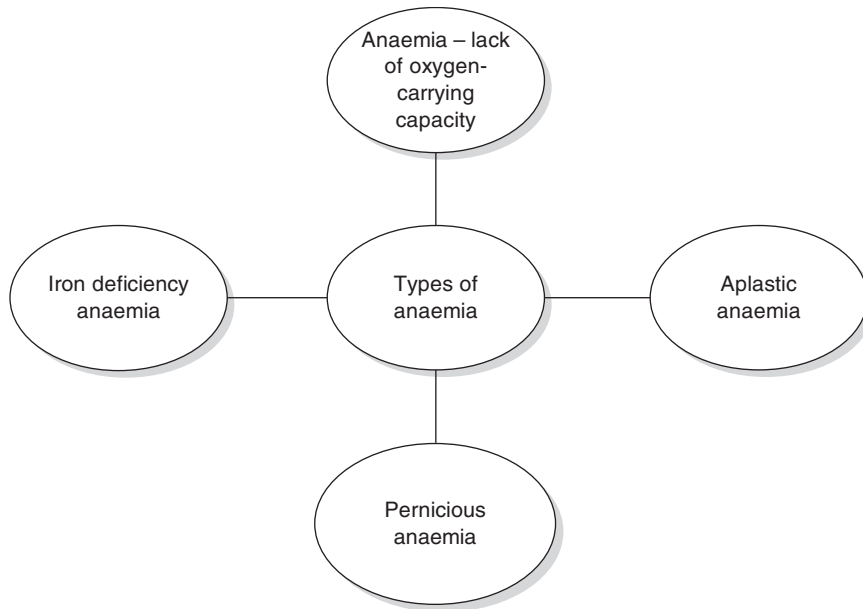
Definition: Anaemia is the lack of oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood

- A. Types of anaemia
- B. Problems caused by anaemia
- C. Implications for care for a person with anaemia
- A. i) Iron deficiency anaemia. Iron deficiency anaemia is ...

Some students find it more helpful to use diagrammatical notes, such as mind maps or spidergrams, as in the example shown in Figure 1.2. These can be particularly helpful to visual learners.

### *Make the most of handouts*

Many lecturers distribute handouts in lectures, often before they start to speak. Some even make them available on the VLE for the module, so you can access them prior to the session. There may be spaces left on the handout for you to fill in your own notes and supplement the lecture slides or it may be left up to you to 'customize' the



**Figure 1.2** Example of diagrammatical notes

notes by using highlighters or pens to pick out key points, to note meanings of words in the margins or to pick out a reference for further reading. This will help you to be an active learner so you will remember you have read the handouts and be able to see the key points of the session straightaway when you come back to them.

## After the lecture

Whichever method of note-taking you use, it is important to do something with your notes and make sure they can be used in the future. If you took notes to extend your memory, you need to be sure you can retrieve the information. It is easy to end up with large piles of notes (a piling system rather than a filing system!) if you store all your notes in the same file or use the same notebook for all modules. After the lecture you should try to:

- Go through your notes within 24 hours of making them, while the lecture is still fresh in your mind.
- Tidy up your notes and make them legible if you need to.
- Pick out key points with highlighters or marker pens and make sure key references can be found.
- Summarize your notes if you need to, especially if you will need to revise these notes for an exam.

- Fill in your notes with examples and facts that you would not have had time to note down in the lecture.
- Follow up any key points with reading and check out issues in your textbooks.
- Check out with your friends any points you do not understand, or ask the lecturer before the beginning of the next session.
- Revise your notes before the following week's lecture so you can be reminded of the topic.

## Writing essays

Writing essays or assignments is a very common form of assessment in higher education. The topic for an assignment is usually set as soon as a new module is launched, with an identification of the required number of words and the academic style needed.

Essay writing gives you an opportunity to:

- Explore a topic in detail by reading widely around a subject.
- Develop skills for producing an academic argument.
- Demonstrate that you can identify and use evidence to support your arguments.
- Tackle a topic in a new and original way.

Clearly, essay writing is an essential skill for all undergraduate students. Many of the problems students encounter arise from either leaving the writing of the essay until far too late in the module, or not really addressing what is required for the essay. The actual sitting down to write the essay comes quite late in the process: there is a considerable amount of preparatory work to be undertaken first.

## Read the question

This seems so basic, but it is really important to appreciate how each word in an essay title makes a difference to the way it is answered. See the examples below:

- 1 Discuss the use of good interpersonal skills in a care context.
- 2 Explain the use of good interpersonal skills in a care context.

The first example expects the assignment to contain arguments for and against the use of interpersonal skills, with examples of how they can affect the relationship with a person. The second example would only expect you to state what good interpersonal skills are and account for them.

So, by misreading or misinterpreting just one word, the assignment content could be completely different and at least 50 per cent of the marks would be missed. Some other key words (sometimes called the 'descriptors') used in essay titles are identified in Table 1.2. It is important you have a good understanding of them.

**Table 1.2** Key words used in essay titles

Account for	Give an explanation of why something is the way it is
Analyse	Examine the subject in detail, breaking it down into sections to identify how and why
Argue	Make the case for something
Assess	Evaluate something, using evidence to support assessments
Comment on	Write explanatory notes, giving a view on
Compare	Consider the similarities (and sometimes differences) between two things
Contrast	Put two things in opposition to expose the similarities and differences between them
Criticize	Make judgements about the merits of theories, supported by evidence
Define	Give the exact meaning of a word, phrase or concept
Describe	Provide a full and detailed account of something
Discuss	Investigate and explore the arguments for and against something
Evaluate	Make an appraisal of the worth of something, supported by evidence
Explain	Interpret and account for something
Illustrate	Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify, or make clear by using examples
Justify	Give reasons for decisions and conclusions
Outline	Give the general principles of a subject
Prove	Demonstrate or establish the truth or accuracy of something, using evidence
Summarize	Give a concise account of, omitting details and examples
Trace	Follow the development or history of a topic

## Make sense of the question

A major part of preparing to answer an essay question is researching around the topic and reading. Therefore, it makes sense to be sure you understand what the question asks you to do.

Here is an example of a question and how it can be made sense of:



*Older adults should be the responsibility of the social care system rather than the health service. Discuss.*

- 1 Firstly, you could put a box around the activity words, by looking at what the question asks you to do. In this case, it is ‘discuss’.
- 2 Then you could underline the key things the question asks you to discuss. In this case it is ‘Older adults’, ‘responsibility’, ‘social care’ and ‘health service’.
- 3 It is important to look at the words that are not underlined to see if it makes a difference if they are not included. In this instance, the word ‘should’ makes a big difference to the meaning of the essay.
- 4 Finally, you may find it helpful to make a grid and as items from your reading uncover issues relating to the different arguments you are making, you can add them to the appropriate square.

## Read for the essay

The previous section identified some tips for reading texts and making notes. In order to prepare for your essay, make sure you do the following:

- Check your guidelines. What is the word limit? What is the hand-in time? Are there any requirements for writing style, font, references, etc.?
- Select materials. Always keep the question in mind as you start to read. Make sure you use lecture notes, handouts and recommended reading.
- Move to more detailed texts. Go on to look at articles in journals, references in handouts, references in selected texts and an Internet search if required.

## Make a plan of the essay

Once you are clear about the essay title and have done some background reading, you are ready to plan the essay. You probably have a number of ideas and planning should help to put these ideas into some sort of logical order before you start to write.

Your ideas may need to be sorted into two sections: argument and evidence.

The *argument* is a summary of your answer to the question. It should develop throughout the essay, with every point building on the one before. The main argument is the core of the essay and will probably only be about five or six sentences. However, each sentence will need to be explained and will need to be supported by evidence. You may also need to introduce arguments that conflict with the sentence, so that you can explain why one view is not as watertight as another.

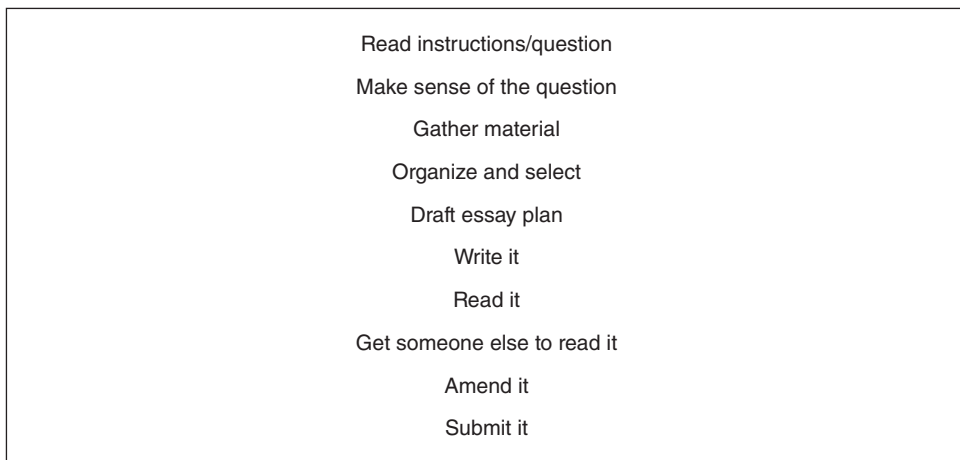
The *evidence* is the material you use to back up your argument. This is the result of your reading and may consist of facts, material from set texts, other people’s

ideas, and so on. The evidence to support your essay and your analysis of it will form the bulk of the essay. However, always remember that it is there to support your argument and you will need to explain why you are introducing it as evidence and its role in the argument. This is known as signposting and can be likened to a barrister identifying why he or she is calling a particular witness to the stand to testify in a case.

The plan can be written however you like – so long as it makes sense to you and allows you to add enough detail to be realistic. Some lecturers will ask to see a draft of a plan to give you advice before you set about writing the essay proper, so it needs to be understandable to them as well. You could write your plan as a mind map – particularly helpful if you are a visual learner. Fill a whole sheet of paper with your ideas of how the essay should be structured and use different colours or highlighter pens to link points. Or your plan could be a series of numbered points with an item of argument and supporting evidence attached to each. Or you could identify each point on an index card, which could contain cross-references to other work or important quotations, and then arrange these in various sequences until you feel you have the order that works best. You can then number the cards before you start to write.

## Write the essay

Finally you are ready to write the essay – or at least, the first draft of the essay. You may find yourself following the route identified in Figure 1.3 before you are happy with a final submission of your work:



**Figure 1.3** Suggested route for an academic essay

### *Style of writing for the essay*

Academic essays usually ask for a formal style of writing which is in the third person: that is, the essay does not use 'I', 'we' or 'you'. It is generally also unacceptable to identify gender. The only exceptions to these rules may be if you are asked to write a personal diary or a piece of reflective writing.

Examples are given in Table 1.3 of unacceptable and acceptable writing styles:

**Table 1.3** Academic writing style

<b>Unacceptable style</b>	<b>Preferred academic style</b>
During this essay, I will discuss three factors which can influence health. The factors I have chosen are diet, smoking and exercise.	During this essay, three factors which can influence health are discussed. These factors are diet, smoking and exercise.
During the assessment interview, the carer should ensure she allows time for the patient to ask questions. If the patient is confused it may be necessary to ask one of his relatives to confirm details.	During the admission interview, the carer should allow time for the person to ask questions. If the person is confused it may be necessary to ask a relative to confirm details.

### What should be the content of an essay?

Academic essays should be made up of three components: an introduction, a conclusion and a main body or the main content.

#### *The introduction*

The introduction has two main functions:

- It focuses the reader's attention on the central themes of the essay and should pick up some of the key words from the essay title.
- It should give the reader some understanding of the order in which you are going to develop your ideas throughout the essay.

This introduction links up with some words from the title of the essay and uses signposting to tell the reader what to expect in the essay.

You may find it preferable to write the introduction at the end, when you have already developed your arguments. To do this, though, you need to be sure you have a good plan to work from.

### *The conclusion*

The conclusion also has two main functions:

- It pulls together and summarizes details of the arguments you have been developing throughout the essay.
- It refers the reader back to the essay title, demonstrating that you have answered what you were asked to answer.

The main rules for the conclusion are:

- Do not be tempted to add new material in the conclusion.
- Do not end your assignment with a quote.
- Do not make the conclusion more than a couple of paragraphs long.

### *The main content*

The main content is the application of the argument and the evidence referred to earlier. Remember that the academic essay is not a narrative: that is, it is not just a series of facts. Your aim is to construct an argument by showing that you can use knowledge, not just have it. This is why it may take some practice and several drafts of an essay before you feel ready to submit it.

The main areas to consider when writing the main content of the essay are:

- 1 **Relevance of the material used:** Make sure you read the title of the essay carefully and make sense of it before you start to search for related reading material.
 

Check your essay guidelines and look to see if the lecturer has given pointers for how you should address the essay or the amount of breadth and depth you should cover.
- 2 **Using written sources:** Writing an academic essay provides written evidence of your ability to research a topic, produce arguments, organize your thoughts in a logical, coherent and critical manner and reach a suitable conclusion. You will not be able to do that unless you carry out wide and critical reading, understanding and evaluating as you read.
 

Make sure you use at least the set text for the essay, but depending on the level of the work, use at least another six sources and relevant, up-to-date journal articles.

Where possible, avoid using direct quotes in your work. Paraphrasing gives you the opportunity to use more than one author's opinion and demonstrates your ability to analyse others' work, not just to copy it.
- 3 **Making a reasoned argument:** Your essay needs to be logical and fluent. Sometimes, your guidelines will advise you that you are allowed to use sub-headings, but most often your work will be a continuous piece of writing. This means it must:

- Make connections between points and points of view.
- Link the discussion to the essay title, the introduction and the main theme of the essay.
- Not be your point of view; it must be supported by relevant evidence.

This really is the importance of using signposts in the essay. If you are making up furniture from a flat pack and do not follow the written instructions in the correct order, you may end up making a wardrobe instead of a table!

Similarly, in our example essay paragraphs will need to be written to address the issues of: what is considered to be an older adult and how this perception has changed over the past few generations; how older people have traditionally been cared for by the family and how the family structure is changing in today's society; what the medical model is and its view of the older adult; what independence for an older person means and the advantages and disadvantages to the older person of continuing to live in the community; and so on. Each topic area needs to be supported by evidence from reading, reinforced and then the next topic area moved to.

You need to read through and check how the meaning of one point relates to another. Does it: Support it? Contradict it? Lead on from it? You can link one to the other by phrases such as:

Consequently, it may be seen that ...

As a result, it can be concluded that ...

which show how one thing occurs as a result of another.

By contrast ...

expresses a change of direction.

However ...

suggests an alternative viewpoint.

Despite the fact that ...

Although it has been demonstrated that ...

give the opportunity to offer additional evidence or suggest there is another way of seeing the argument.

Another helpful tip is to check the first sentence of every paragraph. Does it relate to the question? If not, is it relevant?

- 4 Making sure the standard of presentation is good: Having put so much work into preparing your essay, why risk putting the marker in an instantly bad mood because you had not checked the presentation? Take the time to read through your work, making sure that it makes sense, that the ideas flow logically, that it is interesting, that you have used a wide vocabulary and that the spelling and referencing are correct. Make sure you have used the correct size font, left margins and have an extra copy of your work.

It is worthwhile reading your work aloud to check the length of sentences, to make sure you have used a mix of present tense and any other tense and that you have not made any unintentional repetitions or puns. Many of us use a

spell-checker on the computer but they are no substitute for proof reading your work or getting a critical friend to do so.

### *Keeping your eye on the time!*

Essay writing is time-consuming and is a skill that requires practice. Make sure you allow plenty of time to go through all the stages identified and, if possible, have some sleep before you look critically at your final draft again, before you submit it. And make sure you can rely on your computer and your printer not to let you down – a technical error like running out of ink will not usually be an acceptable reason for late submission of work.

### *Making the most of feedback*

Having spent so much time and effort in preparing an essay, it is surprising how little attention students tend to pay to the feedback provided by tutors or lecturers. Many students simply note whether they have passed or not and take no note of the (sometimes copious) comments made on the script – which often contains really helpful advice on how to improve future work. Receiving an essay back following marking is a good opportunity for reflection – what worked well and what do you need to improve on? Take the time to read the comments through and match them up with the marking criteria; if you cannot understand how the marker arrived at the mark, make sure you ask them to explain.

## Writing a report

Writing a report requires a very different writing style to writing an essay. You may be required to write at least one report during your Foundation Degree, possibly to write up an investigation or an aspect of work-based learning.

A report is different to an essay in three main ways, as shown in Table 1.4.

**Table 1.4** Key features of a report

In purpose	A report needs to conclude with clear recommendations about what action is suggested as a result of the findings; an essay, particularly a discussion, may conclude that further investigation is required
In structure	A report has headed and numbered sections, with an index in front, and may contain one or more appendices; most essays are a continuous piece of writing
In style	A report will always be written in the third person, avoiding 'I' or 'we'; some essays may encourage use of personal pronouns

You will probably be given a standard format for your report to follow, which may be contained in the academic guidelines for your college or university. It is most important that you follow the guidelines, as marks are usually awarded for the layout as well as the content of the report and the ease with which relevant information can be found. That means paying particular attention to headings, subheadings, margins and the spacing of sections.

A typical standard report structure is identified in Table 1.5.

**Table 1.5** Structure of a report

Title page	This shows the report title, author's name, date, the person or organization for whom the report has been written
Summary	The summary needs to be at the beginning of the report to be easily accessible It should be written as an abstract of the whole report (including the conclusion and recommendations) so cannot be written until last
Contents page	This has a particular style – see next section
Introduction	This should be brief – usually only one paragraph. It may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terms of reference</li> <li>• Aims and objectives</li> <li>• Methods of investigation</li> <li>• Background information</li> <li>• Definitions of any key terms</li> </ul>
Main body of the text	This is the substance of the report and should be divided into sections to identify how the investigation was carried out and what are the findings Organize it logically with headings, but keep to essential information only Use figures, graphs, diagrams to explain points
Conclusion	Draw together the findings, avoiding the introduction of new material
Recommendations	Identify the recommendations that appear from the previous chapters and place them in a numbered list. This may be the first section to be read, so it needs to make sense independently
References	List all references used
Appendices	Include any documents or information which add to the reader's understanding of the report

## The contents page of the report

The contents page should be placed after the title page and summary. It should list all sections of the report, including introduction, conclusion, recommendations and appendices. Sections within the main body of the text should be given appropriate headings and identified in the contents page.

Any charts, graphs and tables need to be listed and the appendices should also be identified separately.

There are two main ways to number chapters or sections on the contents page:

- Alpha-numeric

	Page
Summary	1
1 Introduction	2
2 First chapter heading	3
a) Section heading	3
i) Subheading	5
ii) Subheading	6
...	
12 References	50

- Decimal

	Page
Summary	1
1 Introduction	2
2 First chapter heading	3
2.1 Section heading	3
2.1.1 Subheading	5
2.1.2 Subheading	6
...	
12 References	50

## Using references and bibliographies

Citing sources and referencing them are vitally important in any academic work. This means identifying where the evidence supporting your work comes from to ensure both you and the marker of your work can find it again. Failure to reference your work may result in the academic offence of plagiarism, which is discussed later.



### *Citing sources*

You should be provided with academic guidelines from your college or university for the precise way in which you should use references. However, in general, the following types of sources should be cited if used:

- Direct quotes
- Paraphrases – text that has been rewritten but is still essentially drawn from someone else’s work
- Statistics
- Studies
- Theories and ideas
- Interpretations of events that are not one’s own
- Facts that are not common knowledge.

You need to cite your sources in two different places: firstly, the point at which a document is referred to in the text of your work; and secondly in a list at the end of the work. The precise way in which you do this will vary between institutions and you need to find and use the specific guidelines that apply to your course.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking and using another person’s ideas and presenting them as if they were your own. This is regarded in academic terms as stealing. In order to avoid being found guilty of plagiarism, you must be certain that the reader can distinguish your work from the work of others, so it is essential you reference your work accurately.

Plagiarism is not just about copying an assignment from another student or author. It may also refer to items such as audio-visual work, software programs, Internet articles, an electronic journal, graphics, diagrams or a person’s website without acknowledgement of the source.

Therefore, plagiarism includes:

- Submitting work as if it were your own which has been wholly or partially drawn from other sources without citation.
- Work prepared by someone other than yourself, purchased or otherwise.
- Identical or highly similar work submitted by different students; and work originally prepared for submission elsewhere. This means that if you use the same work for an assignment elsewhere on the course, you are plagiarizing your own work!

In each of the examples below, identify:

- a Whether the students are guilty of plagiarism or if there is another reason for their actions.
- b Why you made your decision and what the student(s) should have done.

### Identifying examples of plagiarism 1

- 1 Susie submits her first essay for marking. It uses some large chunks of text from a textbook that the lecturer recommended. There are sections that are copied out word for word without the use of quotation marks. There are no references to the text in the essay but it is listed in the references at the end of the work.
- 2 John, Jason, Jane and Jamilla have worked together on a project and they have been asked to submit an individual account of the work as an assignment. Jane, Jamilla and John submit work with whole sections which are almost identical.
- 3 Mustafa, a final-year student, hands in his dissertation which refers to a large number of sources. He has included many in-text references and quotes. There are several sections which come from an Internet site that has not been referenced.

You may have considered the following:

**Example 1:** Susie has obviously tried to follow the assignment guidelines and has used the text recommended by the lecturer. However, she clearly misunderstands how to cite references, since she has used the material from the book in the text but not used quotation marks or written the name of the author in the text. It is poor academic practice to use lengthy quotations, but if the original author's words are used word for word, they must be acknowledged by a reference.

You may decide that Susie has demonstrated poor academic skills since this is the beginning of her course. She needs to check her academic guidelines on referencing and try to avoid using long quotations in essays.

**Example 2:** Jane, Jamilla and John have not followed the project guidelines, because they were asked to submit individual pieces of work. They have plagiarized because they have submitted identical copies of work.

You may decide that they need more guidance on how to work in a group but to keep their own notes and avoid working on drafting the essay together, before the work is resubmitted.

**Example 3:** Mustafa is a final-year student submitting a dissertation and should therefore be very familiar with academic rules for the submission of work. He has referenced correctly in the text but has made omissions in citing his Internet sources.

At such a stage in the course, Mustafa has no excuse for not referencing correctly. He will be penalized and needs to consult his referencing guidelines before resubmission.

## Summary

- Studying for a Foundation Degree means you need to organize yourself sufficiently well to manage your work time and your study time. You will find it helpful to follow some tips to improve your learning skills and learn how to learn. It is never too late to improve your study skills.
- Learning how to learn includes managing time, developing effective reading and writing skills, identifying how to prepare and write essays and reports, and demonstrating how to cite sources to ensure your work is referenced and avoids plagiarism.
- It is worthwhile taking time to explore your resources for study in terms of time, space and what your course requirements are.
- It is helpful to identify your preferred learning style and try to make the most of your study time by using the resources that suit you best.
- Always read information supplied by your university or college, to ensure you follow guidelines when preparing and presenting written work for assessment.

## Further reading

Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (2003) *Essential Study Skills: The Complete Guide to Success at University*. London: Sage. An excellent and easily readable book brimming with ideas and activities on how to approach studying.

Cottrell, S. (2003) *Skills for Success*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. This book was written primarily to assist students to meet personal development planning requirements. It is full of advice for students in higher education who

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

want to capitalize on their learning experiences and start to prepare for the world of work.

Arksey, H. and Harris, D. (2007) *How to Succeed in Your Social Science Degree*. London: Sage. A thoughtful and insightful book with a focus on the actual experience of being a student.

Oko, J. and Reid, J. (2012) *Study Skills for Health and Social Care Students*. Exeter: Learning Matters. This book is written to support students on Foundation Degree courses.

Many universities and colleges produce their own study skills guidance and advice for students and these are often available to use whether or not you are enrolled on a course with the university. Some noteworthy sites worth visiting are: Southampton University, The Open University, The University of Plymouth and Bournemouth University which has a specific homepage for Foundation Degree students. There are downloadable documents and links to other sites for study skills.