Learning Styles

We all have our own preferred learning style. By knowing your own style of learning you can understand how to learn better, and you can also help your tutors or lecturers better tailor their teaching of you.

By understanding your learning style you can develop “learning strategies” to help you overcome differences between teaching and learning style.

There are many models of learning styles. One model looks at how we tend to use our senses to filter information. This model categorises our preferences for learning into:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Read/write
- Kinaesthetic (Doing)

By finding out about your preferred way of learning, you can develop effective and appropriate study skills.

Learning includes skills such as managing time, organising yourself and your environment and your life, managing assignments and exams, taking notes and reading effectively and efficiently.

Learning Strategies

Knowing the physical, environmental and psychological factors that can affect you will help you to manage your study and plan some strategies. While you are studying at LSBU your tutors are responsible for teaching you, but you are responsible for learning. What you learn here about how to learn will greatly enhance your employability. These skills are ones you can learn at university as you learn how to take responsibility for your own learning and put effective learning strategies in place.
Recalling What You’ve Learnt

Learning how to learn is probably the most important skill that you can acquire. However, no matter how well you have learnt something, recalling and using what you have learnt, especially in the pressure of an exam situation, is a skill in itself.

Much of what you learn at university is still assessed by exams. Therefore you owe it to yourself to develop the skills that you need for success in this crucial aspect of your course.

Exams and Revision

There are actually two distinct sets of skills required for exam success - revision technique and exam technique. These are referred to in more details in the Core Skills Survival Guide produced by Skills for Learning.

When it’s all over...

Reflect on your experience while it is still fresh in your mind.

What problems did you experience?
• Were you able to answer the required number of questions?
• Were there questions for which you were not prepared?
• Did you run out of time?
• Did you run out of things to write?

What were the causes of these problems?
• What could you do differently next time?
• Were you well prepared?
• Were there gaps in your revision?
• Did you begin your revision early enough?
• Did you plan your exam time effectively - did you spend too long on any particular question causing you to run out of time on the last one, or even not to answer enough questions?
If your revision planning or technique was poor and you could only answer two questions, that is bad enough. Imagine if you had revised thoroughly and that it was poor time management during the exam that meant that you did not allow yourself enough time to answer each question - how bad would you feel then?

This is a common mistake - if you have to answer three questions in three hours and you only answer two, the maximum that you can score overall is 66% (and that would require obtaining 100% of the marks available for each question).

Assuming you average 65% for each question answered and you answer all three questions, then your overall mark would be 65%. If you only answer two questions then your overall mark would only be 43%. If you half answered the final question your overall mark would still only be 54% (again assuming a 65% average for a fully completed answer).

Generally, the more you have written, the harder it becomes to pick up more marks by writing more. So make a plan and stick to it. A typical example might be as follows:

If you have three hours, you might allow five minutes to read the paper thoroughly and make sure that you understand exactly what each question means before you decide which ones to answer.

(Remember, you must be able to answer the question that is on the paper, not the one that you would like to be there.)

You might allow five minutes at the beginning of each answer to map out a short essay plan identifying the points that you want to include in your answer. You then have fifty minutes for each answer, with ten minutes left at the end to read through your answers and rectify any mistakes, or include any last minute flashes of inspiration.
Personal Development Planning

Library

To get the best information, you will use:
- the library catalogue to find books, DVDs and titles of journals available
- library databases
- library website for journal articles, reports, financial data and for an index to printed or electronic journal articles
- web search engines like Google to search the web. (Beware - you must be selective and critical about what you find.)

Finding information can be fun, but it can be overwhelming, confusing and difficult. To help you through this maze, there are many sessions delivered throughout your courses to help you develop your searching skills. It is very important that you do not miss out on these. Your first term would be a good time to attend the information searching courses.

Communication Skills

Being able to put your message across effectively is an important skills. Whether at university, work, home or with friends, we are constantly involved in the process of communication.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is vital; development of the necessary skills requires practice. Here are some ideas about the main areas of communication:
- speaking
- listening
- writing
- reading
Personal Development Planning

Speaking

Communicating clearly and effectively in speech may be used to inform, influence, guide, teach, persuade and enlighten, so the skill relies on your ability to translate ideas and knowledge into speech.

Communication involves the ability to both organise your thoughts, ideas and information in your head and to compose the sequences of words needed to express them.

At university you will need oral communication skills in the following activities:

- participating in seminars
- group work
- giving presentations
- explaining issues in committees

These activities will provide you with opportunities to develop and demonstrate skills that you will need in your future employment.

Presentation

Most courses will, at some time or another, require you to give a presentation, often as an assessed part of your course.

Giving a presentation needn’t be too painful if you follow some basic rules. Presenting information effectively is a skill you will also use in your future career so it is worth developing your ability and confidence now.

The first step to take is to find out what your tutor wants in terms of the content and the style of the presentation. Your unit guide will contain information explaining the making of your presentation; any additional information should be obtained from your tutor.
Personal Development Planning

The key to good presentations is the planning. You need to prepare a piece of work that is interesting and information to your fellow students and tutor. You can't just read out an essay or report without considering the nature of your audience; your delivery needs to capture their attention.

A presentation is visual and as such you should use visual aids where appropriate. Virtually all rooms will contain a drywipe board and/or an OHP (overhead projector). Use these to your advantage. They can help you explain a complicated idea as many people find visual aids more stimulating than just spoken text.

Think about how you like to have lectures delivered to you. The University also has other equipment available for students to use in presentations such as data projectors, laptops, televisions, still and video cameras, all of which should be available within your Faculty. Ask your tutor for details of how to access these resources.

Remember, a presentation should not be a bad experience and with the right planning it should be enjoyable. Most of the presentations you will give will be in front of your tutor and course mates, and everybody will have to give presentations, not just you. Try to relax and you may even enjoy it. Above all your presentation should be a learning experience; when it is over, ask for feedback and reflect on what went well and what did not.

Group Work

At university you will encounter many situations where you will be expected to work in a group. It may be a part of your course and it may even be an area of work which will be assessed.

Group working skills are particularly valued by employers as many working situations require team work. Group work is a working style which can be particularly effective where the tasks which have to be carried out are complex and require significant use of judgement and decision making. Individuals have their own strengths and weaknesses, their own ways of looking at things and approaching problems.
Group work is effective when individuals’ imagination, knowledge, skills and awareness can be pooled. Sharing responsibility allows greater confidence in decision making, and the decisions themselves are likely to benefit from a diversity of input and have more authority.

Working collaboratively is exciting and stimulating as you spark ideas off your colleagues; there is much satisfaction from achieving a result which is collectively achieved and is beyond the scope of a single individual.

Managing Group Work

Because of the nature of group work, you have got to be able to get along with people. Group work is only effective when the members of the group respect and trust one another.

Working in a group should be a learning experience in itself as you will be with new people whom you can bounce ideas and thoughts off. The very nature of group work involves communication and you have to be able and willing to communicate with the other members. Often problems arise within a group situation because of a lack of communication.

A group situation is also a group responsibility and, when problems do arise, it is up to the group as a whole to correct those problems; addressing problems should not be the responsibility of just one or two individuals.

To ensure the group meets its objectives, it is advisable to use formal processes, eg: recording decisions. This helps to maintain the boundaries between work and friendship. Being too sociable can interfere with the purpose - which is to achieve the assessment task.

Listening

Oral communication is really a two part process, the second part being listening. At university you will be faced with many situations where your effective listening ability is crucial. A good opportunity for effective listening is when a lecturer gives you lots of information in a concentrated time span.
Personal Development Planning

On such an occasion it is important to be able to listen carefully to everything and to distinguish between the most and least important parts.

Listening is part of everyday experience. In a work context, listening may involve trying to understand spoken communication in difficult circumstances, especially when accuracy is expected. Accuracy may take the form of literal accuracy (correctly hearing and recording the words spoken) or accuracy of content (correctly interpreting the words you hear).

Writing

Written communication is another essential skill. It is generally expected that graduates will have well developed written communication skills, as most courses require written course work. However, in many jobs, written communication often makes special demands.

Often the grammatical and constructional quality will have to be especially high as the reputation or ‘image’ of your employer may depend upon presentation. Good presentation is particularly important for anything which is published or distributed widely, even within an organisation.

In relation to instructional or teaching materials, the welfare and safety of other people may be at stake; research reports may effect the profitability of a business, documents delivered to clients may have legal implications, proposals may clinch or close deals.

Usually, there is the further pressure of working to a deadline. Most organisations work to very tight timescales, so the ability to produce well written documents quickly is a requirement of the job.

Opportunities to develop your writing skills at university include:

- writing reports
- essays or dissertations
- student journalism
- creative writing
- compiling personal profile documents
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is using the ideas and/or words of others without acknowledging them. It is a kind of intellectual theft, a serious academic crime. At university you will be engaging with other people’s ideas in texts and in lectures. You are expected to incorporate these ideas in your course work to demonstrate that you have read widely and understood the theories and ideas associated with your discipline. However, you must acknowledge where you got the ideas from. Plagiarism can be deliberate or accidental; either way it is unacceptable. Actions that can be seen as plagiarism include:

• Using too many words and phrases from the original source
• Building on someone’s ideas without citation
• Coping from another source without citing

How to acknowledge the ideas (citation)

You can quote directly from the original source. If you do this you must copy the exact words and put them in quotation marks, and document the source according to a standard documentation style, e.g. Harvard. This includes information taken from the web. Information sheets about the referencing style will tell you how to set out the citations and references, e.g. Help Sheets 28, 29 and 30 from the Perry Library.

You can paraphrase, i.e. put the ideas into your own words. You will still need to acknowledge the source. It is unacceptable just to change a few words; you must summarise the ideas in your own sentence structure and your own words. Quoting and paraphrasing in this way is known as citation.

What to acknowledge

You do not need to acknowledge generally known information, but you must acknowledge ideas that interpret facts. The idea ‘Blair’s plan to implement top up fees is unpopular’ is not a fact but an interpretation, so you need to cite the source.
Personal Development Planning

Why use citation?

- To acknowledge other people’s ideas
- To show you are including other people’s opinions
- To support an argument you are making
- To enable readers to track the material you have used

Remember you are expected to include ‘literature’ in your assignments; you will gain marks for demonstrating that you have used a wide range of sources but if you do not acknowledge these sources you are guilty of plagiarism.

Numeracy

Numeracy, as a general skill, does not imply the use of complex mathematics. Rather, it involves being able to understand quantifiable data when it is expressed in numbers or represented graphically.

If you are studying on a maths based course you will normally have some prior mathematical qualification. However, even if your course does not require any significant ability with numbers, your future employment might.

Virtually all jobs involve handling data of one sort or another, and much of it is quantifiable (stock levels, number of free beds in a hospital, test results in a school class, salary ranges, prices, etc.). Measuring such data, seeing how it changes over time, comparing sets of data with one another, and reporting the results are typical components of organisational activity and especially of management. This kind of data is usually presented in the form of tables, graphs or charts and it is the ability to work with these that lies at the heart of numeracy in jobs rather than the ability to do calculations. Usually computer programs (such as spreadsheet applications) do most of the work involved, so it is the ability to conceptualise numerical data which is crucial.

Of course there are some jobs which demand high level mathematical skills but these will usually require a degree in a numerate subject as an entry qualification and so will be easy to identify when you come to explore occupations in detail.
IT

IT is part of everyday life for most people now. At LSBU computers and other IT are available for all students to use and some faculties have their own computer labs.

You will be required to use computers frequently whilst at university to do things such as prepare reports, write essays, analyse data, and send and receive email. Support is available from the Student IT Services Helpdesk in the LRC and from the labs at Havering and Whipps Cross.

E-learning and Blackboard

E-learning is the delivery of learning materials and communication facilities over an electronic medium. LSBU uses Blackboard, which is a virtual learning environment, enabling you and your tutors to:

• Share learning resources
• Communicate and collaborate
• Evaluate your progress

The Blackboard software runs on the internet, allowing you and your tutors to have flexible access as it can be used on and off campus and at any time of the day or night. In order to access Blackboard you will need a computer and an internet browser.
Personal Development Planning

Sport, Recreation and Employability

The provision of sports facilities and programmes at the University complements the academic demands of study by providing opportunities to deal with stress, help prevent ill health and provide personal development routes.

Employers want to see that their future staff will be healthy and have had a rounded educational experience. Research shows an active person will find themselves with more energy to undertake work and will require fewer days off due to ill health.

Skills Through Sports Courses

The University runs a wide range of courses specifically relating to sports coaching, leadership and administration that are all nationally accredited and recognised. For example, the University is a Sports Coach UK accredited premier centre and as a result delivers generic sports training seminars throughout the year.

Team and Leadership Skills

Students are able to develop their leadership and organisational skills through their involvement in sports teams and clubs. The personal benefits garnered from involvement in all levels of sport are significant, from formal leagues to those wishing to participate at a less serious level.