

1. What is a Skill?

A skill is a special ability or training in a task. A skilled person is a person having enough ability, experience and knowledge to do something well. Therefore, a skill is a learned ability rather than an outcome achieved through luck or chance and can, hence, be relied on securely when you perform an equivalent task again. You can fine-tune skills through practice, feedback and reflection, just as athletes improve their performance by developing underlying skills in movement, breathing and pacing.

2. Definition of Study Skills

We often come across tutors and teachers who tell us that a particular student needs help with study skills. In fact, nobody is born with a natural ability to study. Study skills as learning how to read, taking notes, writing effectively, managing your time and thinking critically, have to be learned.

According to Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics Dictionary, study skills are “the abilities, techniques, and strategies which are used when reading, writing or listening for study purposes. For example, study skills needed by university students studying from English –language textbooks include: adjusting reading speeds according to the type of material being read, using the dictionary, guessing word meanings from context, interpreting graphs, diagrams and symbols, note-taking and summarizing.

Therefore, we may consider study skills to be a collection of strategies and activities that can enable students to be more efficient in their learning. They do not guarantee success, but they provide an opportunity that might not otherwise exist. However, they are not some magic switch that will turn on from an ineffective learner to an effective one. Like any skill development, it is important to nurture the skills and seek ways to improve.

4. The Importance of Study Skills

Let us ask a few questions to see how you might assess some of your skills:

- Do you have high confidence in your abilities to listen effectively in class discussions and lectures?
- Are you able to record an accurate set of lecture notes?
- Can you skim through a complex chapter and get the basic messages quickly and effectively?
- And, looking at the end of the academic year, can you organise a thorough revision of all topics so that you enter the examination room with confidence?

These questions might sound demanding, but that is exactly what studying at upper levels is all about. Many people think that those study skills will come naturally, and then are surprised and disappointed when they don't. In fact, studying well is a skill that needs to be honed through constant practice, just like, say, singing, playing a sport, or becoming proficient with computers. It involves acquiring various habits such as:

- finding regular times for study,
- learning to concentrate,
- learning how to take notes,
- as well as acquiring skills such as how to solve problems and how to write an essay or report to name just a few.

It is because you need to acquire a whole lot of new skills when studying at university that you need to adopt a methodical attitude. This is why we emphasise the importance of this course; study skills.

4. Study Skills Used in Different Situations (*adapted from R.R.Jordan : English for Academic Purposes (1997, pp 7-8)*)

-Lectures/Discussions:

- Listening and understanding
- Note-taking
- Asking questions for repetition, clarification and information
- Speaking with/without notes
- Agreeing and disagreeing

-Private Study/Reading:

- Comprehension and speed
- Scanning and skimming
- Summarizing and paraphrasing

-Reference Material/Library Use:

- Using a dictionary efficiently
- Using the contents/index pages

-Examinations:

Written:

- Preparing for exams
- Understanding questions/instructions
- Writing quickly: pressure of time

Oral:

- Answering questions: explicitly, precisely
- Explaining, describing, justifying