

TRANSFERABLE
ACADEMIC
SKILLS KIT

TASK

module

1

University Foundation Study

Key Foundation Skills

Course Book

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Garnet
EDUCATION



University of
Reading

Skills Map

Unit 1

What are transferable academic skills?

Identify key transferable skills and understand an overview of the modules in the TASK series.

Unit 2

Skills self-assessment

Familiarise yourself with your existing skills and determine the strengths and weaknesses of your current approach.

Unit 3

How organised are you?

Improve your organisational systems to improve your efficiency.

Unit 4

Time management

Target your time management skills in order to maximise the time you have available and to meet deadlines.

Destination: Key Foundation Skills

What are transferable academic skills?

At the end of this unit you will:

- be able to identify key transferable skills;
- be familiar with the key skills covered in the 12 modules of the TASK series.

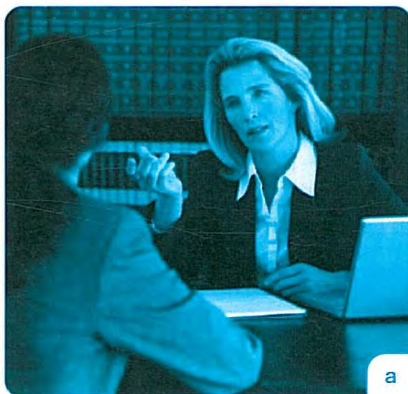
Task 1 Identifying skills

An education at tertiary level provides more than just an understanding of the subject matter. The skills you will develop throughout your course of study are often referred to as transferable skills.

- 1.1** The skills below are examples of transferable skills in the TASK series. Think about their meaning and discuss your ideas with another student.

communication skills working in teams critical thinking skills
research skills IT skills problem-solving skills

- 1.2** Look at photographs a–f. Which of the skills in Exercise 1.1 are needed for each occupation/profession? Discuss with another student, giving the reasons for your choice.



Task 2 Examining micro-skills

It is important to identify what skills are required in a particular situation, but even more important to know what the skills involve. This task will help you understand more about the twelve key skills in the TASK series.

2.1 Think about the six module titles below and what each one might include.

- a) Team-Working
- b) Academic Culture
- c) Examination Technique
- d) Research and Referencing
- e) Introduction to IT Skills
- f) Key Foundation Skills

2.2 Check your ideas by reading the module descriptions below and matching each one to one of the six module titles a-f above.



Module 1

Provides a framework of strategies to help improve organisation and efficiency in an academic environment. Application of these strategies will help development of independent learning skills and maximise their effectiveness.

Module 2

Shows how to adapt to life in British tertiary education; it provides insights into the expectations of fellow students, lecturers and tutors.

Module 4

Demonstrates how to maximise the efficiency of group work to achieve collaborative goals. This module encourages reflection on the different roles played by individuals within a group and provides support strategies for personal contributions.

Module 7

Covers the use of common word-processing and database packages. This module provides a clear framework for the appropriate presentation of a broad range of academic assignments.

Module 10

Helps develop the essential skills of identifying appropriate supporting statements and acknowledging expert opinion. This module covers the key features of direct and indirect quotation, in addition to conventions for preparing a bibliography.

Module 12

Provides a toolkit of techniques to help prepare for a wide range of timed assessments within all fields of academic study.

- 2.3 Choose two modules and study the explanations. Then with books closed, explain what they involve in your own words.**
- 2.4 Think about the other six module titles in the TASK series and what each of these might include.**
- a) Critical Thinking
 - b) Seminars and Tutorials
 - c) Scientific Writing
 - d) Presentations
 - e) Problem-Solving
 - f) Essay Writing
- 2.5 Check your ideas by reading the module descriptions below and matching each one to one of the six module titles a–f above.**

Module 3

Helps prepare for smaller group activities by providing strategies to optimise personal contributions and enhance interaction with both the tutor and fellow students.

Module 5

Highlights the different stages of problem-solving, and provides a structure to help identify appropriate solutions according to context. This module encourages objectivity and offers insights into critical thinking and reasoning skills.

Module 6

Shows how to structure an argument in a balanced, well-researched and unbiased manner. This module provides the tools for identifying fact from opinion, and gives training in how to evaluate knowledge claims and detect bias in others' work.

Module 8

Gives an introduction to the process of academic writing. The focus on title analysis, arrangement of key information and the creation of effective introductions and conclusions will improve the structure and organisation of essays and ensure that they comply with academic conventions.

Teaches the skills for writing scientific reports according to accepted academic conventions. It focuses on organisation, procedures for presentation (including the descriptions of tables and graphs) and guidance on editing and revision.

Introduces the process of researching, structuring and delivering a short talk using appropriate software. This will help develop confidence through the refining of existing communication skills.

Reflect

Student notes for Unit 1

2 Skills self-assessment

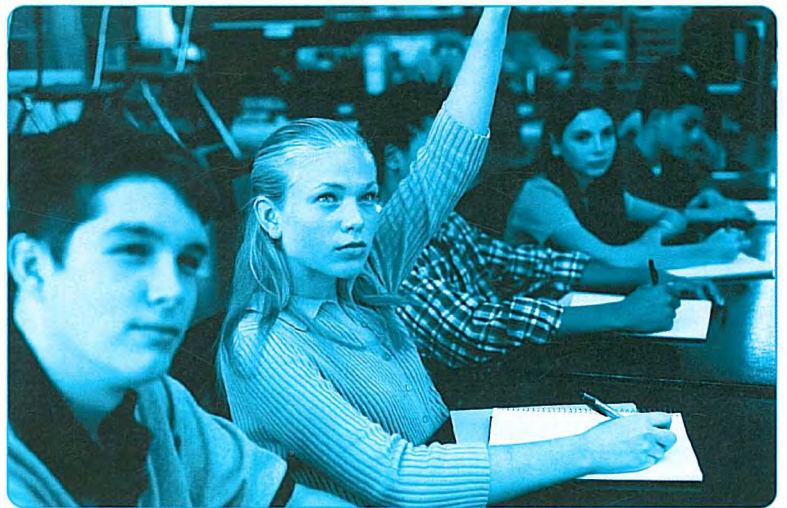
At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- identify your personality type;
- recognise your own learning strengths and weaknesses.

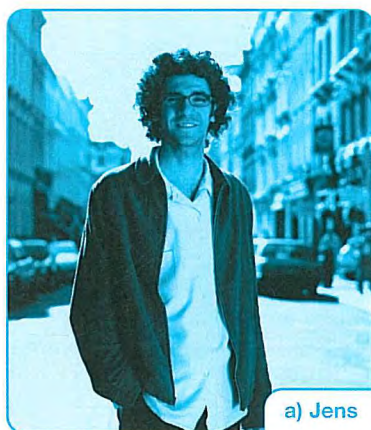
Task 1 Classifying personality types

Different learners have different personality types, which can affect the way they deal with a task or activity. A clear understanding of your own learning style is therefore a good place to start when looking for ways to improve your approach to work and study.

Although the personality of each learner contains a unique range of features, we can gain a lot of useful information by first identifying our basic personality type. One classification divides personalities into four types: action taker, practical realist, cautious thinker and methodical reasoner.



1.1 Match these people with the best description of their personality types.



a) Jens

“ I really don’t like disorganisation. In fact, I’d describe myself as a perfectionist. I always try to use a logical approach to my work and I often notice the flaws in other people’s arguments. ”



b) Khalud

“ I don’t like to waste time. I usually come straight to the point when I express my views. I don’t think there’s any point pursuing an idea unless it’s viable and realistic. ”

“ I’m usually careful not to make rash decisions. I enjoy listening to other people’s views before I give my opinion. I don’t like rushing things, and I probably listen more than I talk. ”



c) Hadi

“ In class I often come up with a lot of ideas on the spur of the moment. That means I end up talking quite a lot! To be honest, I find specific plans and methods a little restrictive sometimes. ”



d) Yuka

1 action taker

I enjoy new experiences and I really get a buzz out of doing new and different things.

2 practical realist

When someone gives me a new idea, straight away, I think about how it will work in practice.

3 cautious thinker

I get a sense of pride out of doing a job thoroughly and properly.

4 methodical reasoner

More often than not, I find solutions using a systematic approach.

1.2 Compare your answers with another student, giving reasons to justify your choices.

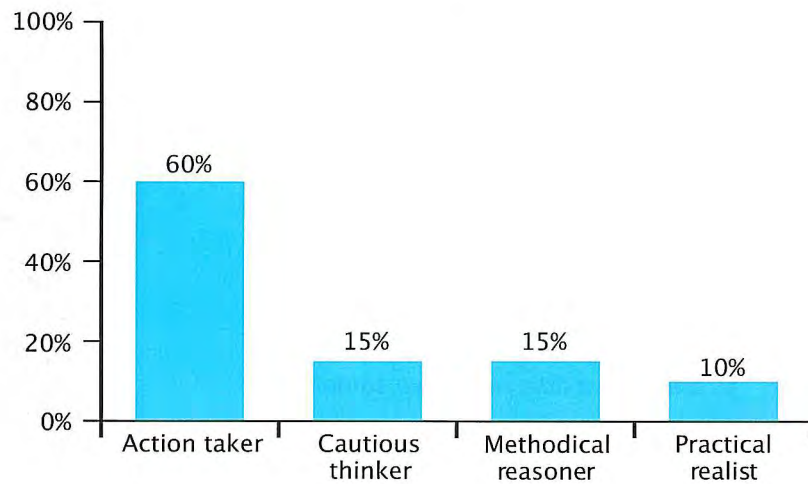
1.3 Think about yourself. What personality type are you? Do you think you are mainly one type or a mixture of types? Use the following questions to help you decide.

- Do you like listening to others?
- Are you good at planning ahead?
- Do you adapt well to new environments?
- Do you like working within a clear framework?

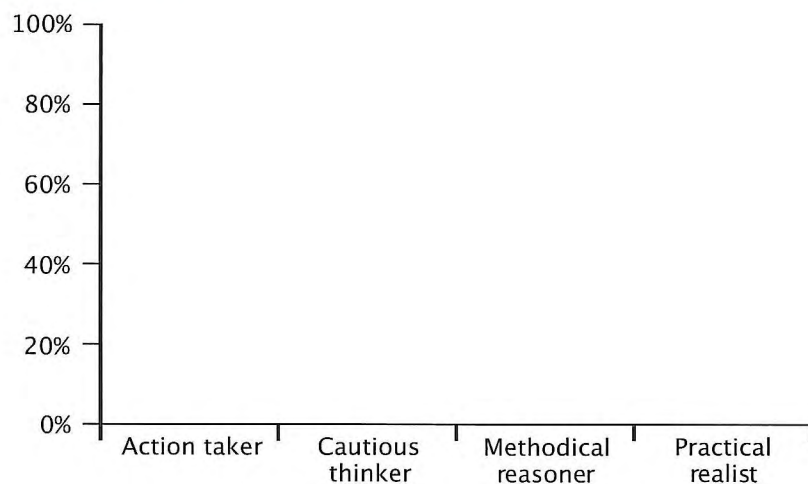
Task 2 Identifying your own personality and learning style

We can understand someone's individual personality by thinking about the different proportions of the basic personality type he or she has.

- 2.1 Look at the example bar chart for Theo, a student from Greece. What does this say about his learning style?



- 2.2 Talk to another student and find out which elements of the personality descriptions from Task 1 best describe his/her learning style. Draw a bar chart to show this. Then compare and discuss each other's charts.



- 2.3 Present to the class what you have found out about your own personality. Let the student you worked with in Exercise 2.2 engage in the presentation.

Task 3 Understanding your strengths and weaknesses

Each learning style has both positive and negative aspects. A clear understanding of how these interact with each other will provide guidance on improving your approach to work and studies.



3.1 Study the characteristics of different learning styles below and decide which might be an advantage (A), a disadvantage (D) or both (B). Think of examples to back up your opinion. Make notes below.

- 3.2 Look back at the assessment that Jens, Khalud, Hadi and Yuka gave of their personality types in Exercise 1.1. Use the information to complete the table with the characteristics from Exercise 3.1.

Learning style	Strengths	Weaknesses
Action taker		
Practical realist		
Cautious thinker		
Methodical reasoner		

- 3.3 Discuss your answers with another student and add any further characteristics you can think of.

You will have another opportunity to explore your learning style if you complete *Module 12: Examination Technique*.

Task 4 Skills audit

- 4.1 Before you continue with TASK, it would be helpful to complete a skills audit.

Think about your strengths and weaknesses within an academic environment. This will provide you with insights into which areas you need to focus on and which other modules to complete.



4.2 Complete the skills audit. Mark an X in the correct place for you.

SKILLS							
Organisation skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Understanding of academic culture/conventions	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Seminar and tutorial skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Team-working	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Problem-solving	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Critical thinking	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
IT skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Essay writing skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Scientific writing skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Research and referencing skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Presentation skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Examination skills	weak					strong	not sure?
	0	1	2	3	4	5	

4.3 In which areas do you feel you need to improve?

Task 5 Addressing your needs

Now that you have completed the skills audit, you can identify the modules in the TASK series which you feel will address your particular needs. Write the titles of the modules that you would find useful below.

Reflect

Student notes for Unit 2

Unit 3 How organised are you?

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- identify factors involved in good organisation;
- analyse your organisational weaknesses and learn how to improve them.

Task 1 Organisation quiz

If you want to succeed academically, it helps to be organised. There is a huge amount of advice available on how to improve your organisational skills, but to benefit you must first be convinced of its value. The place to begin is with an assessment of how organised you are at the present time.

1.1 Find out how organised you are by answering these questions.



Are you ORGANISED?

	often	sometimes	rarely
1 Do you lose things?	☐	☐	☐
2 Do you waste time looking for things?	☐	☐	☐
3 Do you waste time in other ways?	☐	☐	☐
4 Are you late for lectures or tutorials?	☐	☐	☐
5 Do you forget or miss appointments?	☐	☐	☐
6 Do you find it difficult to meet deadlines?	☐	☐	☐
7 Do you forget to do assignments?	☐	☐	☐
8 Do you forget to do background reading for class?	☐	☐	☐
9 Do you forget to bring what you need to class?	☐	☐	☐
10 Do you rely on other people to organise you?	☐	☐	☐
11 Do you mislay your notes?	☐	☐	☐



Check your answers on page 25.

1.2 Work with another student. How similar/different are you? Try to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Task 2 Targeting your weaknesses

You have made the first step to improving your organisation by identifying your weaknesses. Now you need to find strategies for avoiding problems caused by these weaknesses.

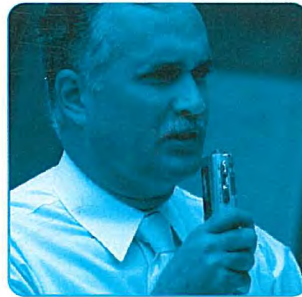
- 2.1** Look back at the organisational weaknesses you have identified. Discuss possible reasons for your weaknesses and ways to avoid them in the future. Make notes in the table, including more than one strategy for each.
- 2.2** Which areas of weakness do you need to target first? Rate the weaknesses you have written in column one from 1 to 5 (1 = most important, 5 = least important). Find another student with similar priorities; discuss the strategies you have each chosen and how you feel your work and studies will improve when you apply them.

Weakness	Reason(s) why	Strategies to avoid future problems
forgetting homework deadlines	poor record-keeping	take notes in a diary or add to agenda

- 2.3** What have you learned about organisational skills from this task? Report your conclusions to the class.

Task 3 Useful aids

There are a variety of systems and support mechanisms designed to help you to be more organised, as well as to make student life easier. They range from simple, low-tech solutions to expensive, high-tech solutions.



- 3.1 Work in pairs or small groups. Decide which items are vital (V) or useful but not vital (U). Add any additional items to the table that you think would be useful. Give reasons for your decisions in column three.

Item?	V or U?	Why/Why not?
alarm clock	U	mobile phone – same function
diary		
watch		
file for each subject		
A4 file paper		
time-table		
electronic organiser		
computer		
calendar		
radio		
digital voice recorder		
mobile phone		
dictionary		
stapler		
plastic pockets		
file dividers		
notebook		
correction fluid		
sticky notes		
hole punch		
reading lamp		
highlighter pens		
?		

4 Time management

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- identify factors involved in good time management;
- analyse your own time management skills and learn how to improve them.

Task 1 What is time management?

The first step towards using your time in higher education constructively is to clarify what is meant by good time management. It is then possible to decide what sort of activities contribute to your own effective management of time.

- 1.1 Work in pairs. Discuss which of the statements a–g best summarises what time management is and explain your reasons.

Time management is ...

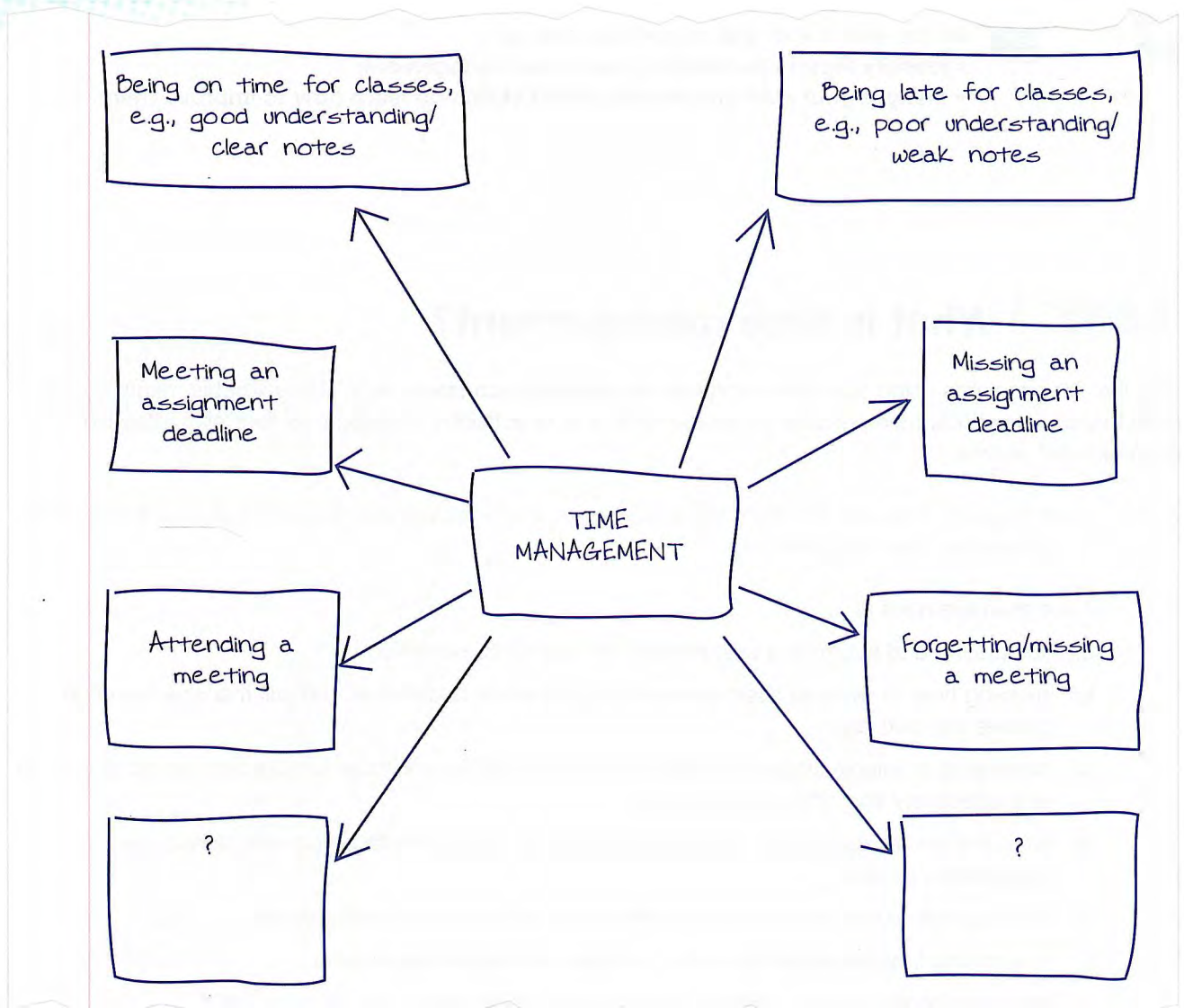
- a) completing and submitting assignments as quickly as possible.
- b) knowing how to write an assignment the night before its deadline and still manage to attend classes the next day.
- c) developing a reliable system to organise and allocate time to tasks or situations so as to use the time effectively and achieve objectives.
- d) foregoing social activities in favour of study for up to one month before and during the examination period.
- e) learning how to use one's time more effectively to accomplish one's goals.
- f) maximising time available to you by studying until late in the evening.
- g) getting a friend or family member to remind you of deadlines and appointments.

- 1.2 Decide which of the other statements give useful ideas for managing time and which statements need changing. Discuss your ideas with other students.

Task 2 Importance of time management

It is useful to identify the ways in which time management affects your life and the consequences of good and bad time management.

- 2.1 Think about which areas of your life as a student could be affected by good or bad time management and what the consequences of this could be. Complete the diagram on the next page with possible consequences and add any other ideas you can think of.



- 2.2 Compare your diagram with another student and discuss similarities and differences. Add any more ideas you have to your diagram.

Task 3 Improve your time management

Now that you have identified potential problem areas, you need to work on maximising effective time use. One strategy is to keep a record of how you organise your time. This raises your awareness of how long you spend on different activities and allows you to adjust and improve your time management.

- 3.1 Use the timetable here to indicate when you are busy. Mark your class times and when you usually eat meals, sleep, do leisure activities, etc. Use a coloured circle to show any deadlines you have. All the times that remain blank can be used to organise your study times outside class time.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
06.00	06.00	06.00	06.00	06.00
07.00	07.00	07.00	07.00	07.00
08.00	08.00	08.00	08.00	08.00
09.00	09.00	09.00	09.00	09.00
10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	10.00
11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00
12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00	12.00
13.00	13.00	13.00	13.00	13.00
14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00
15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
16.00	16.00	16.00	16.00	16.00
17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00	17.00
18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
19.00	19.00	19.00	19.00	19.00
20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00	20.00
21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00	21.00
22.00	22.00	22.00	22.00	22.00
23.00	23.00	23.00	23.00	23.00
24.00	24.00	24.00	24.00	24.00

- 3.2** Compare your timetable with another student. Discuss the differences and comment on how realistic the timetable is. Suggest any improvements you can think of. Copy the improved timetable for each week in the term or semester to help you keep track of what you have to do.

Can you think of a
could you do this?
hours for leisure

Module 1

Web work

Website 1 Free learning styles inventory

You can analyse your own learning style in more depth on this website. This site provides an analysis of your approach to learning and will generate results in graphic form, so you can compare these.

<http://www.learning-styles-online.com/inventory/default.asp?ref=ga&data=gbp>

The questionnaire on this website can be completed online or downloaded for use on paper. Full instructions are provided on the test.

Website 2 Are you a good time manager?

You can test your time management skills on this website. It is part of a health- and welfare-oriented website which considers poor time management as a contributory factor to stress-related ailments. The feedback from this quiz will give you a further indication of the extent to which you need to improve your approach to time management.

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/quiz_time_management?OpenDocument

Complete the questions on the website and click the button to calculate your score.

Extension activities

Activity 1 Peer review

The impression that we have of our own strengths and weaknesses is frequently different to that which others have of us. After you have completed the learning styles assessment and the skills audit, ask a close friend or family member to repeat the exercise on your behalf, but this time, from their perspective. You might be surprised at some of the observations that they make about you. You could find that you have overlooked some important strengths, or that you have disregarded some weaknesses that may need attention.

Activity 2 Study buddies

An organised approach to work both inside and outside the classroom can have an important impact on the extent of your success. However, motivation can sometimes be difficult to maintain, as private study is often a solitary practice. Team up with someone from your group or class and arrange to study together at the same time. Having a study buddy can keep you both on track and relieve some of the loneliness or boredom you may find when you study independently. Having someone to share or challenge your ideas can help confirm understanding of a subject. By arranging to meet at specific times, you might also be more likely to follow your study schedule.

Glossary

Academic conventions (n) Widely used and accepted practices that are agreed on at academic institutions. For example, standard practices in research, academic writing, attendance regulations, etc.

Academic culture (n) The values and beliefs that exist in academic institutions, particularly those which inform and influence *academic conventions*.

Academic writing (n) Writing that students and academics produce. It normally involves research, demonstrates learning or knowledge and follows clear conventions in its style and organisation. For example, essays and assignments, reports, dissertations, theses.

Analyse (v) To break an issue down into parts in order to study, identify and discuss their meaning and/or relevance.

Assignment (n) A piece of work, generally written, that is set as part of an academic course and is normally completed out of class and submitted by a set date to be assessed.

Bias (n) An attitude you have, or a judgment you have made, based on subjective opinion instead of objective fact. It can make you treat someone or something in an unfair way.

Collaborate (v) To work together with another person (or other people) on a piece of work or an assignment.

Communication skills (n) Skills that enable you to listen, talk and write to other people effectively. Good communication skills allow you to make a positive impression, participate well in discussions, and convey ideas clearly.

Critical thinking (n) The academic skill of being able to look at ideas and problems in a considered, critical way in order to evaluate them. It also involves the ability to see links between concepts and develop one's own ideas.

Database (n) A file of electronic information (such as documents, articles, records, statistics and pictures) that is regularly updated. It is usually related to a specific subject and is organised so

that a computer can search and find it quickly (on the Internet or on a CD).

Deadline (n) The date or time that something needs to be completed by. In academic situations, deadlines are normally given for handing in essays and assignments.

Evaluate (v) To assess information in terms of quality, relevance, objectivity and accuracy.

Feedback (n) A response to an activity, process or product that gives information about how successful it was and deals with any problems that arose. (v = **feed back**)

Framework (n) A basic structure that is an outline of something more detailed.

Goal (n) An aim or end purpose that someone tries to achieve or reach.

IT skills (n) Skills connected with using and working with information technology. For example, computer systems and applications.

Key information (n) The most important information given, such as the main points in a lecture, essay or set of instructions.

Knowledge claim (n) Something that is stated as true by a person or people, but is not universally accepted as a fact.

Learning style (n) A style of thinking about, processing and remembering information that you have to learn. Different styles can be classified in a variety of ways. For example, you may be an action taker or a cautious thinker.

Micro-skill (n) A sub-skill that contributes to your ability to master macro-skills, such as reading, listening, writing or speaking. It is useful to isolate micro-skills and work on them individually. For example, to improve your academic writing (macro-skill) you may work on developing the micro-skill of researching.

Objective (adj) (n) 1 (adj) Not influenced by personal feelings or emotions. 2 (n) The aim, or what you want to achieve from an activity.

Organisational skills (n) Skills that enable you to manage the way your study, domestic life and/or social interaction is organised. For example, your ability to keep track of and manage time, activities and objects.

Personality type (n) A classification of someone's temperament and personality traits. These can be classified in different ways. For example, you may be an extrovert personality type or a risk-taker.

Pie chart (n) A graphic representation of amounts or percentages which are shown as segments of a circle (like a pie that has been divided up). It can be used instead of a table in the results section of a scientific writing report.

Presentation (n) A short lecture, talk or demonstration given in front of an audience. The speaker prepares his or her presentation in advance and will often use visual aids or realia to illustrate it.

Research (v) (n) 1 (v) To gather information from a variety of sources and analyse and compare it. 2 (n) Information collected from a variety of sources about a specific topic.

Reference (n) (v) 1 (n) Acknowledgment of the sources of ideas and information that you use in written work and oral presentations. 2 (v) To acknowledge or mention the sources of information.

Self-assessment (n) The process of gathering and evaluating information about yourself in order to decide which areas you need to work on, and/or select for future study or employment.

Seminar (n) A small group discussion led by a tutor, lecturer or guest speaker. Students are expected to take an active part in the seminar.

Skills audit (n) A type of *self-assessment* where someone measures and evaluates which skills he/she has already developed and which ones he/she needs to work on.

Strategy (n) A plan of action that you follow when you want to achieve a particular *goal*. For example, it is possible to have a clear strategy for passing an exam.

Structure (n) (v) 1 (n) A framework or arrangement of several parts, put together in a particular way. 2 (v) In academic terms, to put together ideas or arguments in a logical way for an essay or presentation.

Study aid (n) A device, system or support mechanism that makes study easier or helps you organise your study. For example, electronic organiser, study handbook, highlighter pen.

Team-working (v) Working supportively and co-operatively in a group to achieve a common goal.

Technique (n) A method or way of doing something that involves skill and/or efficiency. For example, it is possible to learn useful techniques for answering exam questions.

Tertiary education (n) Education that comes after secondary education and is usually for students aged over 18. It may involve a university course or another higher or further education course.

Time management (n) The ability to organise your time so that you use it more effectively and efficiently.

Toolkit (n) In academic life, this is a collection of resources, *techniques* or aids that help you to do something. For example, prepare for an exam.

Transferable skills (n) Skills which may be learned in one situation but transferred to others. For example, you may learn *critical thinking* skills at university or college, but also be able to use them in the workplace or in social situations.

Tutorial (n) A small group discussion or one-to-one meeting with a tutor.

Unit 3 Quiz results

- Did you answer 'often' or 'sometimes' to 5 or more? You need to get organised. However, first you must recognise that you are not the most organised person, and you must want to improve your organisational skills.
- Did you answer 'often' or 'sometimes' to only 2 or 3? You are generally well-organised though you have the occasional lapse. You will still benefit from focusing on your weaker areas in order to become more organised.
- Did you answer 'rarely' to all of the above? You are either extremely well-organised or you are deluding yourself! Check your self-assessment with another student. If the result is still positive, be ready to share your successful strategies with others.

TASK

Transferable Academic Skills Kit

is a flexible learning resource that has been carefully designed to develop the key transferable skills that promote students' success in university and college study. Whether you are a student or a teacher, the TASK series provides a tried and tested teaching and learning tool suitable for a broad range of academic disciplines.

A series of supported exercises relates theory to practice and provides students with the tools to develop a framework of skills that can then be used in a wide range of contexts both inside and outside the academic world.

TASK can be followed as a complete course or individual modules can be selected to address specific needs.

Created by members of the academic staff of the International Foundation Programme at the University of Reading, TASK forms a part of the university's skills provision for home and international students at all levels.

The complete TASK series comprises:

1	Key Foundation Skills	978 1 85964 915 2
2	Academic Culture	978 1 85964 916 9
3	Seminars and Tutorials	978 1 85964 917 6
4	Team Working	978 1 85964 918 3
5	Problem Solving	978 1 85964 919 0
6	Critical Thinking	978 1 85964 920 6
7	Introduction to IT Skills	978 1 85964 921 3
8	Essay Writing	978 1 85964 922 0
9	Scientific Writing	978 1 85964 923 7
10	Research and Referencing	978 1 85964 924 4
11	Presentations	978 1 85964 925 1
12	Examination Technique	978 1 85964 926 8
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