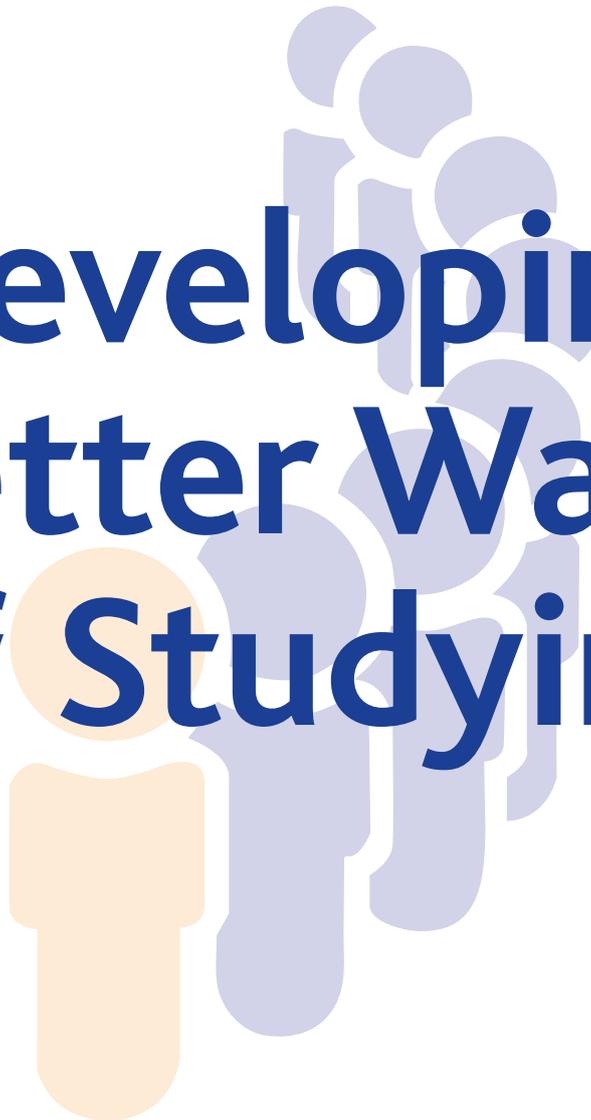


Developing Better Ways of Studying



Name: _____

Developing BETTER WAYS OF STUDYING

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Introduction

Information and skills you will acquire

Getting the most out of this booklet

Developing Better Ways of Studying is one of a valuable and user-friendly new series of easy-to-read booklets created specially to help you develop your skills at work. The materials have been written from actual experience in the workplace. Experts from Workbase Training and Campaign for Learning have pooled their knowledge and experience to involve you in learning new skills and building on those you already have. The booklet is divided into clear *sections*, containing specially devised *activities* and a *mini project*, to allow you to *practise* as you learn.

Developing Better Ways of Studying will enable you to:

- Feel more confident about learning or attending a training course.
- Organise your workload and study time better.
- Listen more effectively on courses or in one-to-one discussions.
- Take notes more effectively on courses or in one-to-one discussions.
- You may want to work your way through the booklet from start to finish or focus on an area of interest.
- Once you have completed the questionnaire on page 4 you will be able to see clearly which topics you need most help with, and which areas you can safely leave out.
- The questionnaire will also allow you to create your own learning plan for which an example and space is provided on page 5.
- You may want to ask your supervisor or another colleague for their views on the areas you could work on, or for help with the activities in the booklet.
- As you may want to use the booklet for future reference, you may want to write the answers out in rough first and then write them in the booklet.

Section I

SETTING GOALS FOR YOUR COURSE OF STUDY

Understanding my goals

When you begin to study a new subject, whether or not it is for work or for a hobby, the amount of information you need to learn can seem very daunting.

The best way to tackle large amounts of information is to decide what your end result or goal is and then plan how you are going to get there.

A goal is: 'something that you are trying to achieve or to reach'

Examples of goals:

- wanting to pass an exam
- learning to drive
- learning word processing
- writing a letter
- getting fit.

Break your goals down

A lot of your goals will probably take a great deal of time and effort to achieve. In order to help you achieve your goals you will need to break them down into chunks of activity. If you don't, it will be very difficult to keep track of what you have achieved as you go along, and to keep motivated. For example:

Goal – To learn a new language over the next two years
Activity – Learn numbers one to ten by Saturday

If your goal is to learn a new language over the next two years, one of the activities which will help you to achieve this is to sit down one evening and learn the numbers one to ten in the new language.

The chunks of studying which help you to achieve your goal will need a timescale. Otherwise your studying will drift and you will become disappointed with your rate of progress.

Set realistic and flexible goals

It is important that the goals you set are realistic. If you set yourself a goal such as getting fit in two weeks, you will not be able to achieve it. You also need to remember that some things may take longer to learn than you had

anticipated. Try to be flexible in the time that you are giving yourself to do things. It is better to achieve part of your goal, rather than skimming over things and achieving nothing.

Activity 1

Your previous learning experiences

Think about anything that you have successfully or unsuccessfully learnt to do either at home or at work and answer the following:

Question	Answer
What was the end result or goal you had to reach?	
Was the subject broken down into chunks? If so, how?	
How long were you given or did you give yourself to achieve your goal?	
Was this enough time? Why/Why not?	
How could you have improved your learning process?	

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 21.

Activity 2

Your future projects

Write down any goal you have for a subject, which you are studying now or will be studying in the future.

Section 2

GETTING STARTED ON YOUR STUDY PLAN

Making the decision to study

The decision to study is an important one – you may have a job, a family to take care of, or other responsibilities. Sometimes the decision to study is not of your choosing – you may need to study as part of your job.

How to study

When thinking about further learning, it is useful to decide how you like to learn and study – what approach suits you, and your circumstances.

Where to study

Decide where you are going to study and create an atmosphere that will encourage you to study.

At home, try to find:

- a space where you can spread your books and papers
- an area where you can work undisturbed (if possible)
- good lighting.

At your local library:

- explore what facilities and books are available
- find out whether there is an area where you can study.

At work:

- find out what facilities are available at work to help people who wish to study.

Open Learning Centres – In many areas, community-based centres are available to use for further study. Find out whether there is a centre in your area, what is available, and whether the topics you want to study are covered. Some workplaces also have centres. Learn Direct (0800 100 900), is a free national helpline giving out information about courses.

Choosing your method of study

Learning in a group – you may decide that you enjoy learning in a group or attending a class regularly. Students are encouraged to participate in discussions and interact with the tutor and with each other. Such learning is often seen as more focussed and disciplined. Discussion in a group can develop your skills and often helps you when difficulties arise.

On your own – you may prefer to study at home using home study materials. You must decide what you want to study and then look to see what training materials are available. These are often called open learning resources.

Technology-based training – this has become popular with the increasing use of computers and the creation of the internet. There are a lot of CD-rom materials available.

Time management

Whatever your reason for studying, whether it's for work or pleasure or both, it is important that you organise your time, to get the maximum benefit from it.

Different methods of studying will require different levels of time management on your part.

If you are studying a subject on your own in your own time, you will need to be far more disciplined about managing your time than if you attend a course and are set work to do. You may still have some tutor support in the form of occasional meetings. At the meetings you will be able to talk about your time management as well as discussing the subject.

If you attend a course your tutor will be doing quite a lot of the time management for you. Nevertheless, you will still need to plan time for learning and doing projects and assignments. Early on in the course, you will probably be told about the amount of study required. If you are not clear, discuss this with your tutor.

How do you find the time you need?

The best starting point for helping you to manage time is to think about how you use your time at the moment.

One way of finding out when is the best time for you to work towards your learning goals, is to create a chart of your typical week, filling in all the activities you normally undertake.

For example, if you work in a 9 – 5 job from Monday to Friday, then setting your study time for a Tuesday afternoon from 3 – 5 is not realistic.

Activity 3

Analysing your time.

List the activities which take up your time at the moment in the activity chart below.

Look at your weekly activity chart and see if there are any gaps which you could use for study.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Urgent and important – setting priorities

Most people lead very busy lives. If you are thinking that you have no spare time at all, go through the activities again and decide which ones are both:

Urgent, i.e. they have to be done very soon.

important, i.e. it is essential to do the activity at some stage.

What happens if you study for some of the time when you would normally be doing activities which are neither urgent nor important? You will find that life still goes on as usual, even if you do not tidy the kitchen cupboards, weed the garden, or go to the pub.

To study effectively, you need blocks of time of at least an hour. Any less than this means that you are not giving yourself enough time to get your thought processes moving.

However, be careful that you still leave some time for relaxation. Do not try to study in every time gap you find. This can create a lot of stress and worry, and can make you too tired to study effectively.

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 21.

Activity 4

Making a study timetable or plan

Choosing your priorities.

Go back to your weekly activity sheet and decide which activities you do which are neither urgent nor important.

Which blocks of time does this free up?

To achieve the goals you have set, you have to find or make time to do the work that is involved. The best way to do this is to have a study timetable or plan.

A study plan can help you to:

- set aside periods of time
- find the best time for study and take into account all your other activities
- make sure that you work regularly
- ensure that your work is not left until the last minute
- cope with unplanned interruptions
- reduce stress and avoid getting overtired.

The chart on page 13 is for you to use to make a study plan or timetable. Use the chart to make a plan for each week of your course or learning activity. You will need to review your plan regularly to see whether you are actually achieving the tasks you have set for yourself.

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 21.

Activity 5

Photocopy the chart on page 13 and fill it in with the amount of time you think you could spend studying. This will be a useful exercise before you start studying, or even if you have begun a course of study and you're finding it hard to find time for all the extra work.

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 21.

	TASKS – Week beginning:
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

Key Learning Points

- Whatever course of study you are following it is important for you to organise and use your time effectively. Self-managed learning, such as these study booklets, requires a greater level of personal time management because, for the most part, you are working on your own.
- To achieve the goals you identified in Section 1 you have to make and plan time to do the work. The first step in doing this is to look at the existing demands on your time to find out where you can create some spaces.
- You need to look at the time you have available to study and discuss this with people you may rely on for support during this period.
- Make a study plan which shows you what tasks you can realistically achieve in the time available. You will need blocks of at least one hour for effective study.
- Don't try to fill every available minute with study. You will study more effectively if you allow yourself some relaxation.

Section 3

EFFECTIVE LISTENING AS A KEY TO LEARNING

Being aware of listening skills

If you are attending a tutor-led course, such as a course at college or in your workplace, listening will be a very important part of the learning process. By listening we are able to learn from the ideas of both tutors and other participants.

Most people think they are listening if they are hearing the words. This is not enough for effective learning. To learn effectively, we need to understand as well as hear.

Listening means concentrating, so that you understand or take in what is being said.

It is difficult for you to assess how good a listener you are, unless you think about your listening habits.

Activity 6

What are my listening habits?

Which of these bad listening habits do you have?

Listening habit	When does this happen?
Thinking about something else when someone is talking to you or allowing yourself to be distracted	
Interrupting someone	
Not listening because someone is boring	
Getting too involved in the details and forgetting about the main points	

continued on page 15

Listening habit	When does this happen?
Just managing to catch the end of a sentence	
Thinking about your answer rather than following what the other person is saying	
Not looking at someone when they are talking to you	
Not asking questions about something you do not understand	
Finishing someone else's sentence for them	

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Practising your listening skills

As with most skills, the most effective way of improving your listening skills is to practise. You do not have to be at work or college to practise your skills. It is just as effective to practise them at home with your friends and family.

Activity 7

Listening to a friend or colleague.

Find a friend, family member or a work colleague to practise your listening skills on. Ask them to talk to you for a few minutes on a topic of interest to them. If it helps you to understand what is being said, you can ask questions.

When the person has finished ask him/her to check how well you have listened by repeating what you heard back to them. Ask the person to give you feedback on whether or not you have left out any important information.

Section 4 DEVELOPING NOTE-TAKING SKILLS

Why take notes?

Note-taking is an important part of the learning process. If you are attending a course, seminar or meeting of any kind it is very easy to sit there and think that you will be able to remember everything which is being said. Experience tells us that people only remember 10–15% of what they hear during these events. This is why it is very important to be able to make good notes. Even if you are working on your own, you may still need to take notes from text books, in order to refer back to them in the future.

We make notes for the following reasons:

- **They help you to remember.** If you are on a training course, participating in a meeting or reading an article, it is difficult to retain all that you have heard or read.
- **They act as a record.** If you take notes at a meeting or during a course then you are recording what took place.
- **They help you to listen better.** Remember, one of the aims of listening is to help you recall information. Making notes helps you to do this.
- **They help you to understand what is being discussed or what you have read.** When you are making notes you are forced to think through what is being said as you write it down. Reducing the information to key points helps you to understand and remember it better.

General note-taking tips – do's and don'ts

People usually take notes for many reasons as they serve a useful purpose. Here are some tips that will help you when taking notes:

- **Do not** use loose paper to write your notes as you might lose them or you might have problems finding the page that follows. **Do** use a spiral bound pad or a bound notebook. If your course is long, i.e. a year or more, it is useful to have a pad for each subject at any one time.
- **Do not** write word for word what the speaker is saying or copy what is written down. **Do** develop your own shorthand, using abbreviations where possible, (**info** for information; **bldg** for building).

- **Do** include the main points when writing your notes – e.g. names, dates, events, decisions, reasons.
- **Do** make your notes brief, concise and clear. The purpose of your notes is to jog your memory.
- **Do** leave some space at the end of your notes as you might want to add something else later.
- **Do** highlight the key points, where possible, if you are making notes from written material such as handouts.
- **Do** get to know how your lecturer or presenter expects you to make notes. Some will give handouts, expect you to highlight the main points and jot down additional points on the handout. Others will expect you to make your own notes, but will help you to draw out the main points by using visual aids such as 33. If in doubt about this ask.
- **Do** go through or write up your notes as soon as possible. If you have left your notes from a meeting for a week or two without writing them up, you might find yourself struggling to understand the meaning of your shorthand or abbreviations!

Types of notes

Linear Notes. Using this method you list the key points under headings and sub-headings. Most written material is organised in the form of linear notes, e.g. newspaper headings and sub-headings, chapters in a book.

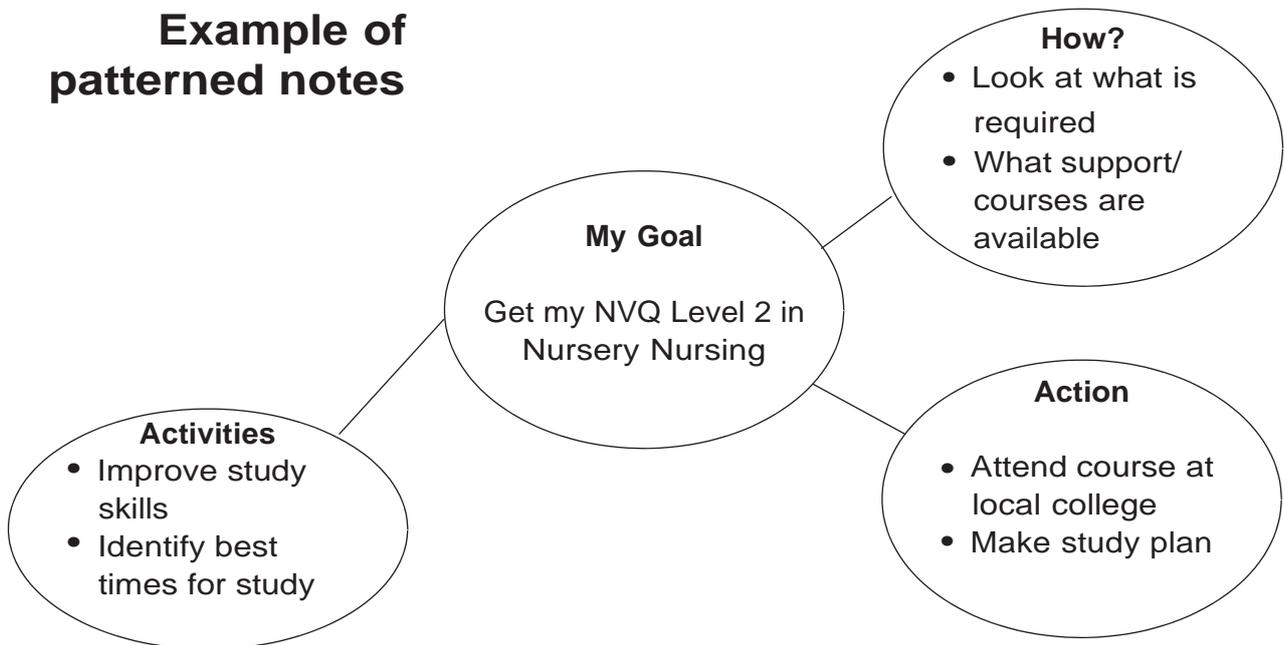
Patterned Notes. These notes are more pictorial in appearance. Using this method you would write the main topic in the middle of the page, then write related ideas around, linking up the different ideas to show how they refer to the main topic. Not everyone gets on with patterned notes. Ignore them if they are not useful to you. Visual notes are sometimes called Mind Maps(TM).

Example of linear notes

My study goals:

1. What is my main goal?
 - To get my NVQ Level 2 in Nursery Nursing by the end of this year
2. How am I going to achieve this?
 - Attending a course at the local college
 - Getting the support of my supervisor, colleagues and family
 - Making a study plan
3. What am I going to do first of all? – Improve my study skills
 - Look closely at how I use my time and decide when is my best time to study

Example of patterned notes



Activity 8

Practise taking linear and patterned notes.

Take a piece of written text from the following:

- a passage from a book
- a work-related document

Read through the written text to get an overview of it, then read it through again highlighting the main points, if possible. Make notes using the linear or patterned styles.

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Activity 9

Taking notes in a meeting.

Choose one of the following situations:

- someone explaining something to you at work
- a meeting or discussion in a work or non-work setting

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Make notes using the linear or patterned styles.

Key Learning Points

- Taking notes is important for a number of reasons: it helps you to remember, to listen better, to understand the information and notes act as a useful record.
- Write in a notebook rather than use loose paper, which is easy to lose.
- Write the main points rather than word for word and try to develop your own abbreviations.
- Read through or write up your notes as soon as you can so that they are fresh in your mind.
- The two main types of note are:
 - linear** – which list the key points under headings
 - patterned** – which start off with the main topic in the centre of the page and then have related points and ideas broadening out from it.

Action Plan

Tick the points you need to focus on to further develop your listening and note-taking skills.

Listening

- Trying to focus on what is being said
- Blocking out thoughts that are not relevant
- Asking questions to help me understand the topic better
- Remembering to focus on the main points or themes
- Not being put off because the topic or speaker is boring
- Looking at the speaker.

Note-taking

- Organising my notes in one pad or booklet
- Reading my notes through as soon as possible
- Identifying the main points
- Writing linear notes
- Writing patterned notes
- Asking questions to clarify points
- Developing my own shorthand.

Identify your two most important points for further development, and set yourself two goals to advance your skills in these areas.

FeedBack toActivities

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 1

From your learning experiences so far, you will see that it is very important not to try to achieve everything at once. You will need to plan what you want to achieve, by breaking the subject down into chunks and giving yourself enough time to cover these.

Learning does not always happen as planned, so you will need to be flexible and give yourself extra time if necessary.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 2

For example, your goal in going through this booklet is probably something like:

‘to learn to study more effectively.’

Other examples of goals are:

Improving my communication skills

Understanding and using the internet

Improving letter writing

Studying my organisation’s health and safety procedures and how they affect the way I work

Brushing up on basic maths.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 3

Do not worry if, at this stage, you cannot see any available spare time. You will at least have a better idea about where your time goes. In the next part of this section we will show you how to use your time more effectively.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 4

Once you have done this exercise, you may find it useful to discuss ideas with the people whose support you may need to study e.g. your partner, children, supervisor, room-mate, parent, friends, etc. If they are aware of the demands on you from the outset, then there is more room for negotiation and there is less likelihood of misunderstandings.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 5

You will see from the plan or timetable that there are some blocks of time when you are free to study. Think about what you are going to do in this time and set yourself specific tasks e.g. doing an exercise, reading a chapter, making notes. Don’t try to be too ambitious, and work within the time available.

FeedBack toActivities

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 6

If you found that you have any of the habits listed, then you may find that they will prevent you from listening effectively.

What can be done to help you to listen more effectively?

The first action you can take is to be aware that you have certain habits which prevent you from listening effectively.

Once you have done this, you need to look at different methods which will help you to concentrate better. Try not to be too hard on yourself, most people can only concentrate for 15–20 minutes.

The following methods are all useful:

1. Taking notes at meetings and tutorials, etc. helps focus the mind and is always useful to refer back to afterwards.
2. Whenever someone is talking to you, practise your listening skills. This exercises the brain and gets you into the habit of following what is being said rather than drifting off into your own thoughts.
3. Always concentrate on what is being said rather than what you are going to say next.
4. Try to remember the main points or theme of what is being said, e.g. if someone is talking about an accident try to follow through what happened. Don't torture yourself remembering dates and lots of detail.
5. Give everyone equal air time, try not to pre-judge the quality of what people will say.
6. If you find something difficult to understand or boring, ask questions on the points that you are not clear about.
7. Try to make sure that you are physically comfortable before lectures or tutorials, e.g. warm, comfortable clothing and not hungry or thirsty. It is difficult to listen or learn if you are distracted.
8. Always look at people's body language and expression and also try to pick up the tone of their speech. These can add a lot of meaning to the words that are being spoken.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 7

Tick the following checklist to see whether you maximised your ability to listen accurately.

When listening did you:

- Try to focus on what was being said?
- Block out thoughts that are not relevant?
- Ask questions to help you understand the topic better?
- Remember to focus on the main points or themes?
- Stay alert by changing your position if necessary?
- Look at the speaker?
- Choose a suitable place to sit?

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 8

You will find from this exercise, that it is not always possible to fully understand something on first reading or when you first hear it.

Making notes helps you to clarify your thoughts.

Check each point you have noted. Check that it:

1. Helps you to understand the piece of writing
2. Isn't just description or extra detail.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 9

Read through your notes and identify points which you found difficult to follow. What were the reasons for this?

There are often many reasons for lack of accurate note-taking, for example, people talking at the same time, straying off the subject, other people not being organised in what they say and talking too fast.

Remember, even the best listeners and note-takers have to go back on points and ask questions.

Do you:

- want to improve your study skills
- think you are too busy to spend time studying
- feel unsure of how you would begin to study
- lack confidence in your ability to go back to learning?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions, you will find the activities and suggestions in this booklet will help you with the following:

- setting realistic and achievable goals for your studying
- organising your workload and time better
- determining the approach to studying which suits you
- improving your listening and notetaking skills.



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