

To ensure adults are adequately prepared for this mode of learning, tutors should:

- check that adults considering online learning have access to the required hardware and software, as well as the required IT skills
- discuss the pros and cons of this type of provision
- be aware that, although the flexibility may be attractive, the social dimension of face-to-face teaching may be less and levels of motivation have to be high

### Using the internet for research and information gathering

Even if a learner is not considering an online learning course, it is almost essential that learners understand how to access, manage and use information gathered via the internet.

Tutors should therefore consider:

- **arranging information literacy sessions informed by, for example, the associated Learning Principles Toolkit article "Information Literacies"**
- if required, running introductory IT classes in the learning centre

### Conclusion

Studying will involve some, if not all, of the above skills and all of these improve with practice. Most adults find that they quickly pick up the required skills and successfully complete their course. Some adults, however, may identify significant weaknesses which could be detrimental to their learning. Pre-course help, advice and guidance can be of benefit and can be offered in a variety of ways, for example, one-to-one help with a specialist adviser, talking to other learners, consulting one of the sources referenced below or attending an access course.

### Further Reading/References

- 1 BBC website [www.bbc.co.uk/learning/better](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/better)
- 2 Cottrell, Sheila (2003). *The study skills handbook*. 2nd edition, Palgrave Macmillan.
- 3 Northedge, Andrew (1990). *Good study guide*. Open University Press.
- 4 Dawson, Catherine (2004). *Learning how to study again: a practical guide to study skills for mature learners returning to school or distance learning*. How To Books.
- 5 Rawlins, Karen (1996). *Study skills for adult learners*. Macmillan Magazines.
- 6 Coyle, Martin and Peck, John (1999). *The learner's guide to writing: grammar, punctuation and spelling*. Palgrave.
- 7 Smith, Pauline (1994). *How to write an assignment*. How To Books.
- 8 Acres, David (1994). *How to pass exams, without anxiety*. 3rd edition, How to Books.
- 9 Van Emden, Joan and Becker, Lucinda (2004). *Presentation skills for learners*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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## Return to Learning

Your job may involve supporting adults who choose to return to learning after a long break. This article describes some characteristics of returning learners and suggests ways to maximise learning potential.



Many of the adults who visit your centre may voice their concerns about returning to learning, especially if they are considering a course of formal study. Adults' ability to learn is affected by many factors including knowledge and experience, both of which they have in abundance. Motivation is another major factor. Adults are usually highly motivated and this greatly increases their learning potential. As adults tend to choose courses that are interesting and relevant to them, they can usually learn to absorb new information and ideas.

Key factors in the welcoming process are therefore:

- maximising the positive features of learning as an adult
- pointing out the huge amount of learning that takes place in day-to-day living
- helping adults identify their potential learning strengths and any potential learning weaknesses
- explaining that people learn in different ways (see Learning Principles Toolkit articles on Learning Styles) and help learners to identify their own preferred way of learning

Learning may involve all or some of the following study skills. Sometimes adults will voice concerns before they begin a course, others will become aware of difficulties once a course has started.

Before starting a programme of study, tutors should:

- discuss the topic of study skills with all adults and offer appropriate assistance
- consider arranging one-to-one help from a centre adviser, linking to an adviser from another appropriate learning centre/college/university or referring to an appropriate written source, for example, book or website
- make arrangements to check with learners a few weeks after the start of the course (it is often particularly useful to check just after the first formal assessment has taken place) if any study skills problems exist, and take appropriate action

### Getting organised

Getting organised is one of the most important (but often for adults one of the most challenging) conditions for successful study. Much is said nowadays about learning being 'fun' and 'enjoyable'. Although this can be true, learning can also be hard work and time-consuming. It involves a personal commitment, which can affect an adult's social and work life. If learning is to be effective, time has to be built in for regular study and this may mean lifestyles have to be altered to allow new patterns to be developed.

To ensure learners appreciate the importance of organisation, tutors should:

- discuss the time implications of the chosen course and ensure that weekly social/work commitments allow enough time for the required study
- discuss the possible places for study, for example, home, work, local library, college/university/learning centre and help the learner identify the best one for him or her

Adults' ability to learn is affected by many factors including knowledge and experience, both of which adults have in abundance



Self-help groups and peer group learning can be very beneficial to the learning process



... a learning programme offered via the internet ... can be attractive to adults as it can offer flexibility of learning options regarding location, time and way of learning

- discuss options regarding study times. Some adults learn best early in the morning, others late at night. Usually study sessions of between 1-3 hours are most beneficial but this doesn't suit everyone
- point out that studying patterns, like learning styles, are very personal and it may take some time for learners to find out which suits them best

## Reading

Adults' reading skills will vary enormously. Some may have left school with low levels of reading skills, some with average levels and others with high levels. Most courses will involve reading to a greater or lesser extent, so it is important to help learners identify problems. Even learners with high levels of skills are likely to find that the TYPE of reading that is required can vary according to their course needs. Learners may have to become proficient in skimming and scanning as well as slow careful reading.

As part of the induction process therefore, tutors should:

- help adults to identify and address any reading needs that will help to improve their learning potential
- discuss the different types of reading that are appropriate for their courses
- draw attention to the fact that many adult learners try to do too much reading and have to learn to be selective about what they read and the way in which they read

## Taking notes

All learners have to learn to take notes as nobody's memory is 100% efficient. Notes have to be taken from written sources and from lectures and a good set of notes is essential for exam revision. Basically, notes are just summaries of the main ideas and facts in a document or a lecture and the skill lies in summarising without losing the important points. Methods of note-taking vary from person to person, the two main ways being:

A) Linear, for example, making notes like this:

### STUDY SKILLS

- 1 Getting organised
- 2 Reading
- 3 Writing
- 4 Taking notes

B) Mind-mapping, which involves describing facts/data/ideas in a visual/interconnecting way, for example:



Adults are usually highly motivated and this greatly increases their learning potential

Tutors should:

- encourage learners to experiment with different ways of note-taking from, for example, a book or a TV/radio programme
- be aware that if low levels of note-taking skills result in learning difficulties, it may be necessary to record lectures or provide extra course handouts

## Writing skills

Most courses will involve learners in writing, for example, essays, reports, projects, reflective diaries. Many adults will be used to writing either from a work or a personal perspective. Others may have left school with low writing levels or may not have had to use this skill for many years.

It is clearly important therefore that tutors:

- help adults identify any writing skills which may affect their learning potential
- help learners check what type of writing skills are required for their courses
- encourage learners to practise their writing skills and if required seek specialist help
- remember that writing can be done by hand, but that nowadays it is being replaced more and more by word processing
- encourage adults to gain basic IT skills before beginning study

## Discussing ideas and asking questions

Discussing ideas and asking questions are also important study skills. Learning should be an active rather than a passive process and adults should be encouraged to question and discuss topics with tutors and other learners. Self-help groups and peer group learning can be beneficial to the learning process.

Therefore, tutors should:

- always stress to adults that, in addition to the course tutor, they are an important learning resource
- encourage learners to learn not just individually but also in groups
- facilitate group learning in the learning centre

## Online learning/blended learning

Many courses will offer all or part of the learning programme via the internet. This type of learning can be attractive to adults as it can offer flexibility of learning options regarding location, time and way of learning. It is likely that this type of learning provision will continue to increase and that in the future larger numbers of adults will choose this option.