Study Skills Guide
Quick Guide

Together Training

Study Skills

When you produce evidence such as written assignments for your qualification, it is really important that the evidence is presented in an appropriate way.

Developing good study skills will help you to produce evidence which is structured, coherent, and meets the brief first time.

Study skills include:
- Organisational skills such as the ability to plan effectively
- Time management skills
- Internet search skills
- Understanding how to sift through and interpret the information you find about topics you are researching
- Note-taking skills
- Writing skills such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and understanding what type of writing is appropriate for the documents you intend to produce

These skills are also useful when planning and undertaking any form of CPD or personal development; they will also help you in the day-to-day tasks you need to complete within your role. If you are working towards a team leading or management qualification, you will find these skills particularly useful as you progress through your career.

**You can find out more here:**
www.skillsyouneed.com

Organisation

Balancing work and home life as well as study is not easy; it is really tempting to have other priorities and set your study aside for another time. Working on your organisational skills will make it easier and help you to stay on
track with your qualification and finish it in good time.

Giving good consideration to seemingly trivial things like where you study and when, can help you maintain a sense of organisation; if you have a timetable and you do your best to stick to it, you will be more likely to achieve your targets and in turn, reduce your levels of stress and anxiety.

Perhaps more importantly, you should maximise the time you have and could consider using apps and digital tools to help you.

You can use digital assistants to help with time management and organisation by helping you to create 'to do' lists and setting reminders when you have tasks to complete.
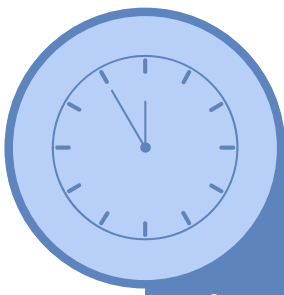
Time management techniques

 If you are really finding it difficult to find the time you need to complete work for your qualification as well as your job and home life, you might try implementing a time management technique. There are many such techniques such as categorising tasks by their importance and urgency or assigning a strict time limit on each task that you do.
You will have to invest some time in figuring out which technique will work best for you but once you do, it will be like having a new lease of life!

For some details about different time management techniques and the personality types they tend to work best for, you can look here:

Nine popular time management techniques

You may also consider making use of a digital assistant or smartphone if you have them; there is no shame in using technology to help you so long as it is not doing your work for you.

Consider using the voice activated features of your smartphone - if you find writing stressful, dictating your thoughts into your phone might be a more productive use of the time you have rather than struggling to write them down. You can always re-organise your thoughts once they are on paper but getting them onto paper in the first place doesn't have to be a struggle. Using the read aloud functions in Word and PDF readers can help you absorb information more efficiently if you prefer to listen than read.

You could also consider using a digital assistant to help you find information on the internet which can be quicker than trawling through the information 'by hand'.

Finding and using sources of information

 To complete work for your qualification effectively, you will often need to learn about new theories and models, and how to apply them to the work that you do. Textbooks are always useful but since most of us now rely heavily on the internet to find information, we need to refine our search techniques so that the information returned is useful. As well as filtering out the rubbish so you don't have to, refined search techniques will save you a lot of time.

1. Have a clear idea of what information you want before you start – vague searches will result in vague results!
2. Give the search engine specific instructions about what you want – think about the difference between asking for "care policies" and "policies around safeguarding in social care in England"...
3. Use refining techniques such as limiting the number of search results to be displayed, specifying the country from which the results are returned and the date of any results returned by year, month or date.
4. Use inverted commas ("") in your search to ensure that only results which contains specific words are included.
5. Use the minus sign (-) to remove certain results. E.g. a search for mini could give you results about the car or about very small things. If your search asks for mini -car, your results will only be about very small things.

Assessing your search results

Once your search has returned some results, you need to understand them – you need to know the information you have found is valid, authentic, current, relevant, and sufficient.

In the age of fake news and misinformation, you need to be able to assess the information you have found and be able to tell the real from the fake.

Top tips for considering the information you have found:

When was the information written?
If it was several years ago, you may want to find something more recent in case the facts have changed – this is a particularly useful approach when looking for information about legislation as it changes more often than you might think.

Where is the information stored?
Websites which end in .gov.uk (official UK government websites), .org.uk (typically third sector organisations) and .ac. uk (academic institutions in the UK) will contain unbiased, factual information which can be relied upon.

This does not mean that all other sites contain unreliable information – just that you need to think about it carefully.

Sites such as Wikipedia and forums can be a useful place to start but you must remember that these sites can be edited by anyone and they are often not regulated for content so you cannot rely on the information contained in them to be factual.

Who wrote the information?
Has it come from a scholarly source such as a professor or doctor? If so, check their academic credentials from another source.

Articles written by experts which have been 'peer reviewed'(that is, reviewed by other experts in the same or a similar field), can generally be considered reliable but remember that a scholarly article often contains opinions and you will need to find other writing on the same topic to form your own, rounded opinion on the topic.

Is there enough information?
To prepare a full answer, you need to make sure that you have accessed a range of opinions and facts about the topic. If your search consistently turns up the same information, you might want to consider changing the terms of your search somewhat.

You can find out more about reliable sources here:
How to Spot Real and Fake News - From MindTools.com

When studying, you are likely to need to read a lot of information but you will also need to filter it effectively by forming links between the information, ideas, and opinions you read and putting them into perspective.

You should understand different writing styles that you are likely to come across

- Academic writing - essays, dissertations, journal articles, and reports
- Journalistic writing - usually in news media, including both online and print media.
- Fiction - based on imagination and including novels, stories, myths, and legends.
- Non-fiction – such as textbooks and biographies.

There may be overlap between different types of writing, for example, academic writing is also classed as non-fiction and there are plenty of people who would describe journalism as fiction!

Different Types of Sources

You will need to know what is meant by, and the importance of, primary, secondary, and tertiary documents and how they may be sourced.

Primary Source
Primary sources are documents, images, or objects that were created at the time of an event. For example, if someone were looking for information about the first PRIDE parade, an eyewitness account of the event would be a primary source; a letter from someone who was there and described it to a friend would also be a primary source. News reports which covered the event at the time would be primary sources.

Primary sources can be excellent sources of information but remember - an eyewitness account is only one person's memory or opinion of what occurred; they still need to be verified with other sources.

Primary sources are not the same as primary research, which is when a person carrying out research questions people about their experiences directly and records their responses.

Secondary Source
A secondary source is information which is written about a primary source. Usually these are books and/or journal articles written about the topic of the primary source using the primary source for information.

If someone were to write a book about the first PRIDE parade, it would likely contain the primary sources we mentioned above. Secondary sources are never written by people who actually witnessed events.

Secondary research is similar in approach, where rather than questioning people directly, a researcher uses the primary research which has already been completed to formulate their opinions on the topic.

Tertiary Source
A tertiary source is usually a compilation of primary and secondary sources. Tertiary sources do not really lend themselves to the type of academic work you will need to do for your qualification.

You can find more information about sources here:

[Examples of Primary Source, Secondary Source and Tertiary Source (notesformba.com)](notesformba.com)
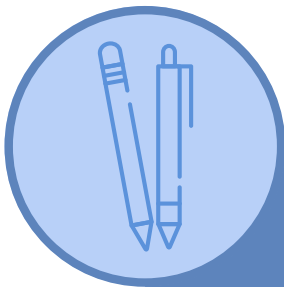
Academic writing skills

When you produce written work for your Apprenticeship, you will need to develop an academic style of writing. Academic writing demands attention to style, the type of language you use, and spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It can seem like a daunting task but effective planning makes a piece of academic writing much easier.

You can find out more about planning here:

Planning and Structuring an Essay - Academic Writing - Writing - Study Skills - 301 - SSiD - The University of Sheffield

Style

Academic writing requires the use of an appropriate style that differs in significant ways from other forms of communication. Using an academic writing style is not just about choosing the right words; it is about setting out your ideas and arguments in a coherent, accessible, and well-evidenced way.

Language

- use more formal vocabulary such as 'state' instead of 'say' or 'discover' rather than 'find out'
- never use contractions such as don't, can't, won't etc
- never use slang or profanity
- avoid exaggeration and overly descriptive language
- avoid using personal pronouns for example 'It could be suggested that...' rather than 'I think...'
- use the passive voice to ensure that you sound objective for example 'A sample was taken' rather than 'I took a sample'
- any facts and/or theories must be backed up by acceptable sources on the subject

Structure

- ensure your piece of writing has a clear introduction, body, summary, and conclusion
- avoid overlong sentences and make sure that you are not repeating yourself– academic writing must be concise
- be specific and use quantifiable evidence where possible for example '100 people' rather than 'a lot of people'
- make sure that you use appropriate headings and sub-headings to signpost your reader to relevant sections

Content

Ensure your writing meets the brief. It is helpful to return to the question several times as you formulate your answers so you can be sure that you have answered it rather than simply spilling every fact you know about the topic onto the page.

When you refer to other sources, you must acknowledge those sources by using Harvard style referencing. This is called 'in-text citation'. Here is a link to a useful website on how to use Harvard style referencing:

[Quick guide to Harvard referencing (Cite Them Right) |Library Services | Open University](#)

It is not acceptable to use sources in your writing without acknowledging them. This is called plagiarism. Awarding Organisations take plagiarism very seriously and it can result in your qualification not being awarded, so it is extremely important that you make sure your sources are acknowledged in your writing.

You must also produce a bibliography at the end of your work. A bibliography is a list of all the sources you have quoted from as well as all the material you have read in order to formulate your answer. You can use this website to help you create a bibliography but remember that you must produce it in alphabetical order:

[Neil's Toolbox: A Collection of Useful Tools and Resources | Neil's Toolbox (neilstoolbox.com)](#)

You must proofread your work and correct any spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. Each time you submit a piece of written work, your learning coach will use a SPaG guide to help you develop these skills. They will point out where you have made a mistake and help you to correct it. Given time and practice, you will develop the skills to do this on your own. If you still have Functional Skills left to do, developing these skills will help you to pass. Many people find it helpful to leave a piece of writing for a day or two before attempting to proofread it as you can come back to it with a fresh pair of eyes.