# Apprenticeships: How to be an independent learner

## What is independent learning?

University graduates are expected to be independent learners – to demonstrate initiative and the ability to manage themselves and their work. They should not require continuous instruction during their studies, or expect all knowledge to be given to them, or need their work to be constantly monitored. Independent learning – which is also known as ‘self-directed learning’ or ‘autonomous learning’ – is key to employability, postgraduate study and life-long learning.

## What does it mean to learn at university?

A university education is not necessarily about receiving and memorising ‘facts’ in order to provide ‘correct’ answers in assignments. Instead, a university education is more about developing an understanding of your subject and recognising the complexity of ideas and range of conflicting opinions that exist within it. To achieve this, students need to explore new ideas and approaches on their own.  
  
As only about 20% of course study is ‘contact time’ spent in classes, seminars or tutorials, you should use the remaining 80% to develop your studies independently through reading, class preparation, organising notes, writing assignments and following up on tuition. Good time management and planning are, therefore, key to being an independent learner. As a student, this means learning how to:

* Set your own goals.
* Identify your own resources.
* Take responsibility for attending all aspects of your studies and catching-up if any are missed.
* Monitor and manage your time and progress honestly and effectively.
* Produce assignments that meet the assessment criteria on time.

## Key skills

These skills will help you become an independent learner:

* Organisational skills including prioritisation and time management.
* Efficient and effective reading and note-taking.
* Reflection and personal development planning.

## Developing independence

Exploring ideas and making decisions alone can feel a little uncomfortable at first. Reasons for this include:

1. Worrying about ‘getting things wrong’ e.g. misunderstanding instructions.
2. Anxiety about missing something important in the background reading.
3. Difficulty understanding or navigating lots of information.
4. Feeling overwhelmed by new information and practices.

**However, it is important to persevere, and exercise initiative:**

1. Ask specific questions to clarify instructions or assessment criteria.
2. Allow plenty of time for reading, looking up key terms and digesting information and ideas.
3. Develop a system for organising information.
4. Develop a time management system for managing work e.g. dividing assignments into small tasks and setting daily targets to complete them.
5. Self-monitor e.g. listen to feedback, learn from mistakes and adjust your approaches so that they are not repeated.
6. Develop your study skills by reading guides such as this or through booking workshops and/or tuition with the Skills for Academic Success team (S.A.S.).

No one is expected to become an ‘autonomous learner’ overnight, so most programmes allow students to develop the learning skills they need gradually. However, to do so successfully you will need to engage fully in the process and seek guidance as necessary.

Skills for Academic Success (S.A.S.) is here to support your academic development. We offer individual appointments to distance learners (in person or via Microsoft Teams) on all aspects of effective learning and study skills, including maths and stats.

Scan the QR code to book appointments, view our events calendar, watch skills videos and more…

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