

Study at a distance

If you're new to distance learning this advice sheet offers some ideas about studying in this way.

The content includes:

- Making best use of your time
- Planning your study
- Thinking about progress
- Keeping motivated and on track
- Identifying resources

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How are you progressing?

The ability to think about how you are getting on is an important skill for distance learners. A realistic study plan will take account of all your commitments and provides opportunities for looking back over your progress. A practical approach is to set aside a regular timeslot, perhaps weekly or monthly, to take stock and plan how you will continue. Typical questions could be:

- ...how am I getting along?
- ...am I on schedule?
- ...if not, what can I do quickly and efficiently to get back on schedule?
- ...what feedback have I received and what does this tell me?
- ...what problems have I encountered?
- ...what are my priorities for the forthcoming week/month?

Successful Distance Learners...

- **want** to learn for themselves (not for others)
- are confident at **self-assessment** (how am I progressing? what help do I need?)
- **motivate** themselves to study, despite other commitments
- have **access** to relevant resources (people, publications, IT facilities)

and above all...

- are **well organised**

How do you spend your time?

The Time Audit activity overleaf will show roughly how your time is spent now, and can be used to quantify how many hours a week are likely to be available for study.

The left hand column lists a range of activity areas. After considering each area in turn, write the total number of hours spent on each activity in a typical week in the right hand column. Blank rows are provided for your own headings. The weekly total for all activities should come to approximately 168 – the total number of hours in a week.

Time Audit sheet

Activity	Time spent (number of hours per week)
Work	
Sleep	
Travel	
Cooking/preparing meals	
Domestic chores	
Family	
Exercise	
Private reading	
Relaxation	
Entertainments	
Social life	
	Total = 168 hours

- How will study time for your course fit in?
- How will you prioritise your activities?

A study lifestyle

Answer the following questions in the boxes provided before you start your course.

Questions	Your response
How many modules/courses do you plan to do?	
How many hours does each unit of study involve? (see * below)	
How long do you have to complete this?	
How much time can you allocate to study: In a week? In a month?	
When are you able to study: Evenings? Weekends? Scheduled leave from work?	
At what time of day do you study best?	
How do you prefer to study: Short intensive bursts? Prolonged period of time?	
Where do you prefer to study?	
How organised is your place of study?	

* For example, a Diploma course may involve six modules over two years. Each module may take 100 hours of study over four months. This is

- 25 hours each month
- Approximately 7 hours per week

Taking an overview

Activity: Long-term plan

A long term plan provides an overview of the timescale involved in your study. Important milestones may include coursework deadlines, residential weeks at university or exams. An example is provided below as a guide for you to adapt to your own needs.

Resources to support your study

Distance Learners can draw upon a wide range of resources, human and material, to support their study. Ones to make a note of include:

Loughborough University

- course handbook including aims and learning outcomes
- contact for academic issues
- contact for administrative issues
- central support e.g. Library, IT Services, Student Services

Family and friends

Without their support and encouragement you will find it hard to study. Some areas to consider before you start your course are:

- where and when you will be studying
- how to share domestic chores
- contingency plans for illness
- holiday plans
- financial implications

Community

There may be organisations and businesses that can offer additional information and services, for example:

- local and university libraries
- internet cafés
- photocopying and printing units.

Be clear from the start of the course which libraries you can use and what kind of loan arrangements are on offer – don't wait until the first assignment is due to find this out.

Workplace

Your work colleagues and line manager can be useful resources by providing listening ears and practical advice, for example:

- discussing ideas
- organising financial support
- approving access to resources and equipment
- suggesting project ideas
- supplying mentoring support

Tips for staying motivated

- Maintain links with other students on your course - use email or phone
- Use your time wisely; identify what can be done in short bursts of time
- Identify a mentor, perhaps a friend or workplace colleague, to talk through general issues
- Give your eyes a break: try recording material which you can listen to when you are driving or exercising
- Change your study tactics for variety
- Keep a learning log or diary as a reminder of what you've achieved
- Write down your long term goal and keep it close for inspiration

If the going gets tough keep yourself on track by thinking of...

- your reasons for studying in the first place
- how self-management skills can help all areas of your life
- the sense of achievement from completing your studies

All study advice sheets are also available to view and download on the following website: <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/library/skills/>



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