

Before You Start

Let's take some time to think about what you bring with you to the enterprise of being a university student. What skills, attributes, expectations etc do you have *now* before you start being a student that may help (or some that may hinder!) your success as a university student?

Overview

There are three parts to this exercise:

[Part One: Three Questions](#)

You are asked to think about and write down your responses to questions covering three main areas: motivation; skills and attributes and expectations. (Note: each main question area has a number of sub-questions).

[Part Two: Seven Skills for Success](#)

Read through this summary of seven factors that are known to help students succeed at university and make notes about how these apply to you at this point in time.

[Part Three: A Final Word](#)

Read this very short section; there are no questions to answer.

Time Allocation

Overall, these activities should take forty five minutes to one hour to complete.

Benefits

We recommend that you take the time to complete these activities now, before you begin to study. These activities will help to prepare you for the journey you are about to undertake as a university student. They may also help you to identify and plan for areas that may cause you some difficulty.

Later, in week six of your first session of study, we will ask you to look back and reflect on what you have written now. The comparison will provide a clear marker for the changes that will occur in that time. This will also be another opportunity to identify and respond to any areas of difficulty.

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Part One: Three Questions

You are invited to consider your answers to the following questions to help you take stock. We invite you to engage with these questions in a spirit of relaxed creativity. There are no right or wrong answers; what you come up with is right for you *at this time*.

Get comfortable and give yourself about thirty minutes free from distractions to do this activity. Note that in each case, there may be a number of possible responses to the questions.

Q1 What's motivating (driving) you to undertake this course of study?

Instructions (to complete this section you can download the word doc in the Download section located in the menu across the top of this page)

Question one has a small "menu" of items in the left hand column to help get you started (eg: "self-improvement"). Place a tick next to the menu items that apply to you. Use the blank spaces in the right hand column to add any additional responses of your own, using your own words.

My motivations for enrolling to study are:

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| Self-improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Making a contribution | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Helping others | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Desire to learn/intellectual curiosity | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Gain meaningful work | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Financially rewarding career | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Change of career direction | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

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Q2 Current personal skills and attributes

There are two parts to this question:

Part 2 a) is an inventory of your skills and attributes.

Part 2 b) is an open question about your life experience and specific skills.

Question 2 a) Inventory

Instructions:

To answer question 2 a) place a tick next to those menu items in the left hand column that apply to you. These are grouped as "helpful/positive" or "possibly unhelpful". You can add any additional skills or attributes in the blank spaces in the left hand column. Use the blank spaces in the right hand column to write specific examples or evidence from your work or personal life for each skill or attribute you have ticked off.

Remember, these skills and attributes are not fixed; they change over time, as you change, develop and your opportunities & circumstances change. We are looking for what is true for you *now*.

My current skills and attributes are:

| Helpful/Positive: | <input type="checkbox"/> | Evidence/Examples: |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Self-reliance | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Persistence | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Creativity and imagination | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Problem-solving ability | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Interpersonal skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Communication skills (written & oral) | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Sense of responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Flexibility | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Teamwork & cooperative skills | | |
| Honesty, ethics, values | | |
| Willing to take risks | | |
| Enjoy learning | | |
| | | |
| Possibly Unhelpful: | | |
| easily distracted | | |
| take on too much | | |
| can lose sight of goals | | |
| hard to sustain motivation | | |
| reluctant to seek help | | |
| get stressed under pressure | | Under stress I tend to: (eg. tense-up; don't listen well; lose confidence) |
| don't attend to details | | |

Question 2 b) Life experience and specific skills

Instructions:

To answer question 2 b), read the question carefully and write your response in the space provided. You can use dot points, full sentences, a combination of the two, or any format you choose. If you need more space to write your response, attach a separate sheet of paper.

Write down, briefly and in the very broadest terms, what you have already learned about yourself and about life in general. Also, write down any specific knowledge or skills that you have acquired through your work and/or personal pursuits.

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Q3 Your Expectations ,What do you think being a university student will be like?

Instructions :

To answer question 3, read each question carefully and write your response in the space provided. You can use dot points, full sentences, a combination of the two, or any format you choose. If you need more space to write your responses, attach a separate sheet of paper.

Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. The aim here is to tease out your expectations, including those you may not be so conscious of.

Perhaps you have had previous experience of being a student, either at school, TAFE or university. What were those experiences like? Were they positive, negative, perhaps a bit of both?

Were there teachers who inspired you? What did they do to inspire you? Have you experienced a teacher who had a negative impact on you? In what way? What was that like? How did it affect your confidence/your learning?

What do you imagine a typical day might be like for you as a university student?

How do you think University might differ from school (or TAFE)?

What kinds of rewards for your efforts do you hope to receive along the way?

That completes Part One. Well done for undertaking and persevering with this task! Your willingness to do this is a good beginning. Please keep your responses to these questions somewhere so you can return to them at a later date.

Now, let's move on to find out what we know about what helps students be successful at university.

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Part Two: Seven Skills For Success

Instructions:

Please read the following information carefully and reflect on how the information might apply to you. Write your thoughts and responses to questions in the spaces provided. You can use dot points, full sentences, a combination of the two, or any format you choose. If you need more space to write your responses, attach a separate sheet of paper.

Introduction

Research shows that one of the single most important ingredients in success at university study is amount of *time on task*. That is, simply, the amount of time students are able to devote to their study. This factor is more important for success than any other single factor, including students' intelligence, university entry score, age or any other factor.

Now, let's look at the seven skills for success. These skills are important because many of them contribute to the all-important factor of *time on task*.

Skill One: Persistence

Successful students are able to sustain the effort; to keep on spending time on task over a long period of time, the three years or longer that it takes to complete a course of study. This requires *persistence*.

Did persistence show up on your list of personal attributes? What have you persisted at in the past?

Hint: if you have learned to read, ride a bike, or drive a car, you have shown persistence! Do you get distracted; are you prone to feeling discouraged when the going gets tough? Don't worry, most of us are, at times. It is important to think about what you have done to help yourself in these situations. Perhaps you have turned to others for support (see Skill Four).

Take a moment to think about this and write down your thoughts.

Skill Two: Motivation

Motivation will naturally vary over time. Successful students are able to reconnect with their motivation when other demands and priorities come along, as they inevitably will. They can see how each little task they do contributes to the bigger goal.

Doing a degree can be like running a marathon; a long journey rather than a quick sprint. The Australian marathon runner, Steve Moneghetti was asked how he runs a marathon. He responded that he has doesn't run marathons ,he picks a landmark a hundred metres ahead of where he is and runs to that, then he picks another one and runs to that, and so on. Setting small goals that contribute to the larger goal can be a useful strategy.

When motivation wanes, you may need to re-connect with your original vision for studying. Bring creativity and imagination to this activity to make it real for yourself, visualise yourself working in the profession in which you are training (hint: you can make visualisation powerful by incorporating sensory details into your visualization, sight, sound, touch etc.).

Take a moment to reflect on your level of motivation now. You may be raring to go, even while feeling some trepidation about the journey ahead. Have you noticed any tendencies or patterns in yourself regarding motivation?

For example, many people regularly start something with great enthusiasm, but when the reality doesn't match their initial expectations, this energy gives way to discouragement or loss of interest, so the project is abandoned.

If you recognise an unhelpful pattern of behaviour, don't judge it; it is good information and a challenge to be overcome. Also, support is available from the University to help with this. In the end, it is your behaviour (what you do) that will be important. If you feel disheartened (by a disappointing mark, for example) will you stop spending time on task, or will you persist and reap the rewards further along the track?

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Skill Three: Organisation

Successful students are able to *organise* themselves well. It is important to be well organized to continue to be able to spend time on task, even when other priorities shift over time. Study routines are important, but when circumstances change, *flexibility* is often required; the ability to plan and rearrange schedules when necessary.

Take a moment now to think about your organizational skills. Can you create and maintain routines for yourself when you need to? Can you work to deadlines? Can you adjust your routines and manage multiple tasks?

Don't worry, these skills can always be developed and the University offers lots of support and resources to students to help in this area. Write down some thoughts about your strengths and weaknesses in area of personal organisation.

Skill Four: Using Personal Support And Helping Resources

Successful students make use of personal support and helping resources. Their friends and family know what they are doing and why. They talk about their journey and let others know what they need in terms of time and other forms of assistance (such as renegotiating household tasks with partners and children; or letting their friends know they won't be up for a big night out just before an assignment is due).

Take a few moments to think about what level of support for your studies you currently have in your family and social network. Are they aware of what you are doing? Do they understand and support your motivations? Perhaps you may need to talk with some people about what you are doing to enlist their support or understanding. Can you make requests of others when you need to?

Many resources are available to assist your learning. The University offers services, web sites and other resources to support you. Some examples are the Library and Learning Skills web sites. More information about these and other resources will be made available to you as you progress through the program.

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Skill Five: Realistic Expectations Of Success

Successful students have realistic expectations of themselves and of the tasks they undertake. They can adjust their expectations in the light of new information, if they need to.

Some expectations are fully conscious and others are more subtle, we are less aware of them. Expectations are important because they can shape our behaviour and the decisions we make.

Here are some examples:

- An expectation of 'Studying will be easy, I'll fit this into my spare time.' may lead to realising that you actually have very little 'spare' time; the behavioural result may be that you do not spend enough time on task with your studies.
- An expectation of 'This is going to be really hard, and I'm not sure if I can do it.' could lead to a number of possible behaviours and outcomes: it may be the spur you need to work really hard at your studies and lead to a good result. Or, it may lead to avoidance behaviour (finding other things to do when you could be studying) in order to avoid the pain of failure, leading to a negative result.

Generally speaking, it is helpful to have expectations that are both optimistic and realistic. Like goals, they should be framed in the positive (what you want to achieve rather than what you want to avoid). Thus, striving towards a pass (or better) grade is a preferable goal (or expectation) than striving to avoid failure.

It is important to have realistic expectations both of *yourself* and of the *task* you are undertaking. However, at this stage, with limited information available to you and perhaps no experience yet of being a university student, it is understandably hard to know what is realistic. For this reason, it will be helpful to pause and reflect on your expectations after about six weeks of studying. By that time, you will have had more experience of what studying is all about.

Skill Six: Reflection

Successful students are *reflective*; they have the capacity to pause and take stock of where they are and where they're headed, and to see what they may need to attend to. They can step back, 'zoom out' and see the big picture.

Think now about your capacity to reflect and take stock of your circumstances. When have you done this in the past?

Skill Seven: Value What You Already Know

It is important that you continue to *value* the skills and knowledge you already have, and don't lose sight of them. Your responses to Question 2 will have elicited the skills and knowledge you already possess.

As a University student, these aspects of yourself can help you enormously, even if they aren't always acknowledged or understood by others.

There may be times in your journey as a student when you feel de-skilled or lose confidence in yourself. At these times, it is especially important not to lose sight of your competencies.

Finally, learning theory tells us that the new knowledge (and skills) you acquire as a student must connect with and build on what you already know if it is to be useful and meaningful to you.

Summary

To summarise, successful students have:

- Persistence
- Motivation
- Organisation
- Support
- Realistic expectations
- Reflect on their experience

Additional to this, successful students have, or develop, a host of more specific *study-related skills* that contribute to their success. These include: note-taking, essay writing skills, referencing, active reading skills and so on. We have not looked at these yet, and we don't need to at this point. These are skills can be learned and developed with practise as you start out on your studies. There are many resources and support available within the University to help you; these will be highlighted as you move through the program.

Part Three: A Final Word

If you have persisted with this task, you have already demonstrated in a small way, many of the skills and attributes that contribute to success: persistence, time on task, reflectivity to name a few. Congratulations!

You will be invited to look back over the thoughts and reflections you have written here at a later date, when you have been on your journey as a student for some time. It will help if you can keep your notes so you can look back over them.

Acknowledgements

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