UNIT 4: STUDY SKILLS

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define 'Study Skills';
- explain the importance of study skills in learning;
- describe the means to develop effective study skills in learning;
- identify the importance of study skills for distance learning.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In any teaching learning process, there are some ways or techniques which help the learners to grasp or reap the learning outcome in a systematic way. For a distance learner which is known as independent learner in the ODL system, it is necessary to know some basic skills to learn the courses at his or her own pace. In this unit, an attempt has been made to highlight

the various ways in which a learner can also improve his or her learning process. Besides, after going through this unit it will also help the learners to understand the various methods and skills or tactics of learning which will help them to enhance their learning in order to acquire knowledge and information. Some related topics like listening skills, reading skills, effective communication and writing skills and time management skills have also been discussed in this unit. Finally, the learners will learn how study skills are essential for studying in the distance mode.

4.3 MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF STUDY SKILLS

As you know, we need cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy skills for our academic pursuit, whereas aspects like time management and organisational skills and the skills needed to find one's way around a complex structure are also equally important in the process of learning. So, study skills may be defined in its broadest way as one which amounts to all the generic non-course specific skills that a student needs to develop in order to be an effective independent distance learner. In layman's term, 'study skills' are 'the different aptitudes that can be developed in order to improve a learner's capacity to learn'. Distance learning is basically self-learning. So, good use of these skills can lead one to becoming a proficient and effective learner.

Now, the question is why you need to know about Study Skills? The knowledge of study skills will help you to reach the optimum level of your understanding and knowledge by your own efforts and will also motivate you to develop your own independent style of learning. These skills will help you in avoiding poor study habits and lead you to keep your studying in right track. Further, these skills will help you to learn more in less time and enable you to engage yourself in active studying rather than rote learning.

4.4 DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STUDY SKILLS

You might have observed that no two people study in the same way. The method or technique you use for study may not be the same for your

friend or others. People differ in their choice of subjects and abilities. Suppose you love the subject X so while studying that subjects you need not put much special effort. Since the subject is loved by you so naturally you enjoy studying it. But the same thing may not happen to your friend who does not love or has no interest in subject X. For learning the subject X, he has to put special efforts. to study the subject. As a learner your learning is dependent on your ability to study effectively and efficiently. And study skills are instrumental for you to do so. Here, one thing is clear that just mere thinking about study skills will not work for you. In order to develop effective study skills you should keep the following in mind:-

- **A Plan of Study:** It is said that a good plan for anything means that half of the work is done. So, the preparation of the study schedule is the first and foremost task at your hand for effective studying. You can prepare your study planning on a daily basis or weekly or monthly basis. This plan will help you allocate your time properly and allocate timings for different subjects. But you have to remember another important thing that a good plan may also fail if it is not executed properly and sincerely. So, it is important that once you prepare the study plan you stick to it and follow it.
- **Timing of study:** There should not be any fixed prescription in timing of study. Many learners face problems in identifying the right timing of study. Many of them are unable to decide when to study. But it is vital to take a right decision by the learner when to study for effective studying. It is suggested that one should sit for study when she or he feels comfortable physically and mentally and is free from any tension or anxiety. So, you should study when you are relaxed and feel free to study.
- **Place of study:** After knowing the right timing of study you must be eager to know about the place where to study. Many of you might think that for study you need a beautiful study room with all requisite facilities. But in reality for effective study you can study anywhere. The important thing is that when you choose your place for study you keep in mind that it should be suitable for your learning and must be free from any kind of distraction.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Define the term 'Study Skills'.

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Q 2: Write the important points that you should keep in mind for developing your effective study skills.

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4.5 STRATEGIES OF STUDY SKILLS

For improving your study skill you can use different strategies which will facilitate your efforts for effective learning. The different strategies are: thinking skills, SQ3R method, note-taking skills, highlighting text etc. We shall discuss them in detail.

- **Use your thinking skills purposefully:** We all have the ability to think. We can think about different things at the same time. You also definitely have the ability to think and you do think about many things. But do you always use your thinking skills purposefully? Your answer must be in the negative. But it is very important to use your thinking skills effectively for your learning purpose. It will help you to develop your good study skills. So, one must develop his/her thinking skills gradually and use it for his/her learning purpose.
- **SQ3R Technique:** SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review. This five-step strategy will help the learners to become self-sufficient learners in reading the study materials. We shall discuss in detail the SQ3R strategy in the section on reading skills.
- **Taking your note correctly and legibly:** Note-taking is an important skill associated with study skills. Taking note correctly and legibly is important in studying; otherwise, it will be difficult for you to read your

own hand writing after taking down the notes. Your note will be of no use to you if you are unable to use it later.

- **Highlighting a text:** It is observed that students are able to learn faster the text which has been highlighted. So, while you read a text, you should in the process keep on highlighting a text which you consider to be an important one.

4.5.1 Effective Listening

As a learner of distance education you have to attend face-to-face tutorial, academic counselling, teleconferencing, listening to audio-programme, and so on. In all these cases your listening is very important for effective communication. Unless you listen carefully you may not learn effectively or express yourself fully. To learn effectively one should listen effectively. It will help him in developing better communication skills. One should remember that hearing and listening is not the same thing. They are completely different. Hearing is when you experience the sound waves and noise by ears, but listening is when you receive the sound waves and understand it by paying full attention to the words and sentences of the speaker. You can have the ability to improve your listening ability. The following are the ways you can try for improving your ability to listen:-

- **Try to find out the meaning:** As a listener or learner when you attend a counselling or any mode of programmes, pay attention to not only to the words being spoken by the counsellors or speakers but to the thoughts and messages they try to convey. By doing this you will be able to identify the main idea and the context in which the speakers have spoken the words. Further, you have to follow the examples and description very attentively that the speakers have given in their deliberations. It will help you to comprehend each word spoken by the speakers in appropriate terms.

- **Note down the important and relevant points:** When you attend any counselling session along with attentive listening you should note down the important points. Later on you will be able to put together all these points which will be very helpful for you to understand the topic(s) of the counselling sessions. Regarding taking notes, it is advisable to take notes of the relevant points only. If you go for taking long notes then you may miss some important points what your teachers are saying during their class. This may be happen when you try to take note of everything and anything whatever your teachers would say.
- **Concentrate while you learn:** Your concentration level is the determining factor in your rate of learning. Merely hearing the words that is spoken by your teacher will not ensure your effective learning. You have to process the information received from your teacher for effective learning. For this your concentration level during the class is very crucial. Effective listening requires that you concentrate on and pay attention to what your teacher says in his or her lecture.
- **Prepare for the class beforehand:** Your attentive listening in class depends upon your preparation level before the class. It is helpful for you if you read the topic which has already been taught and which is likely to be taught in the next class. If you come to the class in this way it will be easier for you to concentrate on your class, participate actively in the class and to understand better what is being taught.
- **Grow interest in the class:** When you attend the class you should put conscious effort for being interested what is being taught. Otherwise, it may be difficult for you to understand what is explained by your teacher. So, as a student you should always come to the class with the determination that you will give full interest to the subject matter being addressed by your teacher. This is very essential for you to listen more intently and effectively.

- **Observe or follow your speaker minutely:** For a better understanding of the lecture of your teacher you need to observe him very minutely. When your teacher delivers a lecture, follow his non-verbal signs that he sends out when s/he speaks. This will improve your listening ability and reduce your frequency of distractions.
- **List out your expectations from the class:** You are definitely not listening attentively in class if you do not have any expectation from the class. So, always identify your expectations from the class before entering in it. Listen for your identified things as your teacher talks. This process will help you to listen effectively and purposefully in the class.
- **Enter your class with a positive mindset:** Do not enter your class with a fixed opinion on the teacher and the topic to be discussed. Listen positively to what your teacher has to say. If you have entered in class with your fixed preconception on the teacher and the topic to be discussed then it is very difficult for you to listen attentively once your preconception does not match with the proceedings of the class.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Why is note-taking important in learning?

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4.5.2 Effective Reading

As mentioned above the SQ3R method has been a proven way to sharpen study skills. This is a study technique which was discussed by Robinson in 1961. This technique was modified into a system called SQ4R by Thomas and Robinson, 1972 (Glyn and Muth, 1994).

Later, it was further modified by other researchers as SQ5R, SQ5WR and so on. We shall discuss them in detail in the given order.

- **SQ3R Technique: Survey-** When you enrol yourself in a programme of study you are provided with the course materials. After receiving the course materials you tend to open the materials and give a first look at the contents. This is called survey. By this survey you come to know how the programme has been divided into courses, how many courses are there and how many blocks are there in each courses etc. Further, this survey helps you to know the structure of the programme you have chosen. Also, a survey of the content makes you aware about what topics you are dealing with during your study. So, your first bird's eye view of the course gives you an initial idea of your opted course which at later stage helps you in going through it without difficulties.

  Question - Learning is a purposeful activity. So, there is definitely a purpose for reading a particular content of the course material by you. When you are going to read a particular content of your course you should ask yourself questions of five Ws-what, why, when, who and where of the study content. It will also 'explain' the how of a particular subject. And the answers that you draw from these questions will help you in understanding the study content and you will remember it more easily because the process will give you an idea about the contents of the subject. So, whenever you go through a content of your course write your questions in the margins of your course materials and do not hesitate to answer those questions along with your reading. It will help you immensely in your effective self-learning.

  Read - As a learner, your active participation in the study of the course materials is very essential. You also need to develop a critical mind so as to answer questions you have asked yourself in relation to the contents of the subject matter. Moreover, reading

self-instructional materials is not same as reading a book, magazine and newspaper etc. You read the self-instructional materials as if you are interacting with the teacher that has been built-in into the course materials. Read your course materials with a pace convenient for you and try to grasp the main ideas contained in the materials. Try to read everything in the content, including tables, graphs and illustrations as they can be more helpful at times for your understanding the content. It is not advisable to make notes of or underline the word or phrase while you read. At the reading stage, you just read the content to get an idea inherent in the content. After reading through the entire text you may start underlining or marking the important points.

Recite - Reading is always related to retention. As a learner what you have read needs to be retained. Otherwise, reading is meaningless. After reading through a unit or a chapter you should try to recite or mentally recollect the important concepts and information. This will help you to remember what you have read. After reading the unit, you try to develop an overall concept of in your own words and thoughts what you have read.

Review - Review is nothing but a quick repeat of the other four steps we have discussed above. By this process you can assess yourself what you as a learner have achieved while reading the content. You can also review your notes that you have written that help you to clarify the points that you may have found difficult in understanding. The best time to review is when you have finished reading the whole blocks.

- **SQ4R Technique :** This technique denotes the six steps that should be followed in studying a text. These six steps are: Survey, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review. Since we have discussed the other steps except the Reflect, so let us understand what Reflect means.

Reflect - Reflecting means to think carefully and deeply about something. A learner should reflect on the study materials while learning them. It allows him to develop more ideas about the content and the meaning of the text. Reflecting is very useful in remembering information that is contained in the text. Normally, you can start your reflecting on the content of the text during the second phase of your reading the course materials. In this phase you should try to find the relation between what you have read and what you already know. This will help you not only to retain what you have learnt but also to remember meaningful information.

- **SQ5R Technique:** There are seven steps that should be taken in studying a text in SQ5R Technique; these are- Survey, Question, Read, Reflect, Record, Recite and Review. Here, let us understand what Record means. Since all the steps except 'Record' have been discussed we will explain this step here.

  Record - It is very normal that while reading you may come across some difficult sentences or paragraphs or certain words whose meaning you do not know. In such cases, you may note down and make a record of these difficult sentences or paragraph or words for further reference for clarifying your doubts.

- **SQW5R Technique:** SQW5R Technique involves eight steps that should be taken in studying a text; these are: Survey, Question, Write, Read, Reflect, Record, Recite and Review. Here, let us understand what Write means.

  Write - When you survey the course content, there will be some questions you may ask yourself regarding the text you are reading. At the beginning stage you may not have the answer to the questions; so, writing down the questions will be very helpful for reference later on. As you go on reading the text, maybe once, twice or thrice, you will be able to answer the questions by yourself. If you are still unable to answer any question then you may consult your academic counsellor with regard to the

questions and get your doubts clarified.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Explain the SQ3R method in your own word.

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4.5.3 Effective Writing

Being a distance learner your writing skills is very crucial for communicating with your teacher through writing assignments, reports or answering questions in examination. Your ability to write well is your added advantage in the system of distance learning. The more you write well the more effectively you will be able to communicate with your distance teacher. If you want to improve your writing, first identify to whom the writing is directed i.e., the teacher or someone else. Once you identify your target, you can start writing. Create an outline of what you want to write. For example, if you are writing a report, you should create the outline of the report before writing. It will help you to present your matter very systematically and in an orderly manner. To make your writing "reader friendly", use headings, subheadings, bullet points, and numbering whenever possible to break up the text. Also, try to avoid grammatical mistakes in your writing, otherwise, your writing may not convey the appropriate meaning. Always go for proofread twice after completion of your writing- once for grammatical and spelling mistakes and then for content. You can even give your writing to someone who is expert in proofread.

4.5.4 Communication Skills

Your ability to communicate effectively is very essential when you

are getting your doubts clarified by your teacher or while you are discussing an idea with your teacher. Your reading or listening skills would be effective only when you have an effective communication skill. So, you should work hard to be a good communicator. There is no fixed way that can be followed to achieve good communication skills. Here are some suggested ways by which you can try to develop your communication skills:

- Listen attentively to others
- Develop your reading habit
- Maintain a good eye contact whenever you interact with someone
- Begin your communication with short messages
- Never be afraid to ask relevant question
- Speak clearly enough to be heard by the listener.

4.5.5 Time Management

Personal time management skills are very important skills for a distance learner. You may be employed or unemployed or a home-maker or even a fresh student. If you do not use your time judiciously, you will never achieve your learning goals. For better time management you may follow the techniques that are mentioned below:

- Always set a goal for your work
- Always prioritize your work according to its importance moving from the most important to the least important.
- Have a plan for stable study time
- Don't put off work; always stick to the plan you have fixed for yourself
- Prepare a time-table
- Learn to say 'Yes' or 'No' to other things to stick to your plan.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: As a distance learner, your ability to write well is your added advantage in learning. Explain.

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Q 6: Write how will you manage your study time effectively.

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ACTIVITY 4.1

After going through the various strategies of learning skills, how do you feel that the skills that you have learnt during your study will help you to retain the academic progress in your life?

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4.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY SKILLS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Study skills are very essential for the distance learner. In distance education the teacher is replaced by self learning materials which are interactive in nature. As a distance learner, your learning is depends upon how efficiently and effectively you interact with your course materials. So, study strategies or methods play a decisive role in distance learning. If you do not develop proper study skills, you may not be able to go through properly the self instructional materials in an effective manner. Moreover, as a distance learner you have to deal with the audio-visual materials. Here, also, to infer the appropriate meaning out of the content basically depends upon your acquired levels of study skills.

You might be thinking about how to develop your study skills and who will help you in developing the study skills? The answers of these questions lie within the text of the distance education course materials. As told you earlier, distance education course materials are self instructional in nature. The course design itself helps you develop skills for studying. When you go through your course materials you have already come across a sub-theme entitled 'Check Your Progress' or you have been given some assignments related to your course. There you can find some questions being asked to you to check your progress on the topic/unit you have gone through. If you use these questions while reading the text, it will not only help you in understanding the text more effectively but also in developing skills to critically analyse the text. It will also help you note down important points and derive ways to solve a problem being asked in the form of 'Check Your Progress' and assignments. There is also another sub-theme you will come across in your course materials entitled 'Further Readings' where information is given to the learners about the various books/journals/websites etc. that have been referred to while writing the text. You may use these sources also for acquiring better understanding of your course content.

You have been already acquainted with the fact that the distance learning materials contain a few blocks. Each block is divided into units which are further divided into sub-themes. There is also a brief introduction to what the learner will read and learn about while going through the text. The use of 'Let Us Sum Up' at the end of each unit is corporate with a view to helping the learners to put together what they have already read. Moreover, 'Let Us Sum Up' is also useful for the learners to grasp the main points presented in a unit at a glance. So, if you use and incorporate the features that have been discussed above in your study habits then you will be able to develop many important study skills. Of course, for improving your study skills you have to put in your serious and systematic efforts.

Lastly, as a 21st century learner you have to learn through using different digital media and communications tools. As such, digital learning requires learners to master technology as part of their everyday learning. So, in order to succeed in your study in the present age, you must master

the ability to use appropriate technologies to process, analyze and present information efficiently and effectively in the learning process. As a learner of the ICT driven 21st century, you must acquire your information and communications technology (ICT) literacy along with all the study skills discussed above to become a successful learner of the 21st century.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does the use of 'Let Us Sum Up' at the end of each unit of course materials help the distance learners?

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

- Study skills refer all the generic non-course specific skills that a student needs to develop in order to be an effective independent distance learner.
- Distance learning is basically self-learning. As a learner your learning is dependent on your ability to study effectively and efficiently.
- Preparation of study schedule is the first and foremost task to be done for effective studying.
- One should sit for study when she or he is feeling comfortable, physically and mentally, and is free from any tension or anxiety.
- The different strategies for developing the study skills are: thinking skills, SQ3R method, note-taking skills, and highlighting text etc.
- To learn effectively one should listen effectively. It will help him in developing better communication skills.
- Regarding taking notes, it is advisable to take notes of the relevant points only.
- Learner's concentration level, the preparation before the class and the interest level are important factors for effective learning.
- The SQ3R technique was discussed by Robinson in 1961. This

technique was modified into a system called SQ4R by Thomas and Robinson, 1972 (Glyn and Muth, 1994). Later, it was further modified by other researchers as SQ5R, SQ5WR and so on.

- SQ3R stands for initial letters of the five steps- Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review.
- SQ4R stands for initial letters of the six steps- Survey, Question, Read, Reflect, Recite and Review.
- SQ5R stands for initial letters of the seven steps- Survey, Question, Read, Reflect, Record, Recite and Review.
- SQ5WR stands for initial letters of the eight steps- Survey, Question, Write, Read, Reflect, Record, Recite and Review.
- Ability of the learners to write well is considered an added advantage in the system of distance learning.
- A learner's reading or listening skills would be effective only when s/he has effective communication skills.
- Personal time management skills are very important skills for the distance learner.
- A distance learner's learning depends upon how efficiently and effectively s/he interacts with the course materials.
- Distance education course materials are self instructional in nature. Study skills help a learner to go through self instructional materials in an effective manner.
- 'Let Us Sum Up' is useful for the learners to grasp main points presented in the unit at a glance.



4.8 FURTHER READING

1) Biswas, P. (2008). Study Skills and Psychological Skills for Better Performance: A Handbook for the Learner Workshop, IGNOU, New Delhi.

2) Johnson, M. (2004). Enhancing study skills: Developing self-help materials for distance learners. In Brindley, J.E., Walti, C., & Richter, O.Z. (Eds.), Learner support in open, distance and online learning

environments, (pp.117-124). Retrieved from http://www.mde.uni-oldenburg.de/40574.html

3) Nembiakkim, R. (2012). Study Skills: How to Study Better. In the IGNOU's course material of MDE-413: Learner Support System and Services, Block 2, (pp. 25-41), IGNOU, New Delhi

4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. N. 1: Study skill may be defined in its broadest way as one which amounts to all the generic non-course specific skills that a student needs to develop in order to be an effective independent distance learner.

Ans to Q. N. 2: For developing effective study skills a learner should have a plan of study beforehand, choosing the right time of study and also selecting the appropriate place of study.

Ans to Q. N. 3: Noting down the important and relevant points during counselling session will help the learners to put together all these points later on and it will be very helpful for the learners in understanding the topic(s) of the counselling sessions.

Ans to Q. N. 4: The SQ3R method is related to the reading skill. The knowledge of SQ3R will introduce the learner to the subject and assist in his/her learning process. The SQ3R stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review. By following these steps one can effectively proceed in studying a text.

Ans to Q. N. 5: A distance learner normally remains away from the teacher. S/he communicates with the teacher through writing assignments, reports or answering questions in examination. So, more the learner writes well the more effectively will she or he be able to communicate with his/her distance teacher.

Answer to Q. N. 6: For better study time management one should always set a goal for his/her work and arrange the work on priority basis according to the most important. One should prepare a plan for stable study time and always try to stick to the plan that have fixed for him/her. To prepare a time-table for study is very helpful in managing the time

effectively and judiciously.

Answer to Q. N. 7: The use of 'Let Us Sum Up' at the end of each unit helps the learners to put together what have already been read. Moreover, 'Let Us Sum Up' is also useful for the learners to grasp main points presented in the unit at a glance.



4.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A. Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write about the importance of Study Skills for distance learner.

Q 2: Why is highlighting a text useful for distance learner?

Q 3: What is time management skill?

Q 4: How would you like to assess effective writing? Write briefly.

B. Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Effective learning requires effective listening. Explain.

Q 2: Explain the need and importance of SQW5R method.

Q 3: How do you develop your communication skills? Explain.

Q 4: The design of the course materials of distance learning helps the learners to develop their skills for self-learning. Explain how does SLMs help the learners in study?

Q 5: Discuss the various strategies of study skills that makes the teaching learning effective.

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