



DistanceLearningCentre.com

Learning Materials

Course: Level 3 Diploma

Subject: Study Skills



Recommended reading:

[Recommended reading](#) for this topic is listed in the back pages of these learning materials.

If there is a recommended text for a unit, it will be listed here.



Further resources:

Further resources to deepen your learning on specific aspects of this topic are listed throughout these learning materials.

Further resources such as videos, podcasts or websites will be found throughout the unit material. These additional resources should be accessed to deepen your understanding.



Read and make notes:

Making notes turns reading into studying. Notes should be brief, clear, and helpful.

To help your understanding:

- rewrite or summarise what you have learned (avoid copying what you have read);
- note down any questions your studying has raised, either to ask your tutor, or to develop into further research.

To help you to remember:

- sum things up to improve long term memory;
- write things down to aid motor memory;
- use colour, images, or patterns to help visual memory.

To help you in your assessments:

- record where you will find information (e.g. page numbers);
- keep your notes organised and easy to navigate;



- highlight where further reading and research are needed, including any recommended or further reading;
- use your notes to help you get started on your TAQs.



You will be given plenty of study skills advice and guidance during your course in both the learning materials and during tutorials.

Read the Specification:

- So that you will know the criteria you will be assessed on please read the unit specification in my courses on the Materials page.



The specification for a unit will include a summary of the indicative content that the materials are expected to cover. It will also include a list of assessment criteria that that you are formally assessed on.

Pressing Control on your keyboard and then hovering your cursor over a section allows you to jump to that part of the materials.

Contents

Press **CTRL / ⌘ + Click** in the contents list to go to the relevant page

Introduction	1
1. SWOT Analysis.....	2
1.1 The Steps in a SWOT analysis	3
2. SMART targets and Action Planning	7
2.1 SMART Targets.....	7
2.2 Creating an Action Plan.....	8
2.2.1 Setting Goals.....	9
References	13
Bibliography	13
Recommended reading	14
resources	14
Websites.....	14
Sources and credits.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Image credits.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

The learning materials are broken down into sections with topic headings and topic subheading. This makes them manageable to study, simple to make notes on, and easy to refer back to during an assessment. The first section of the contents page for the Study Skills unit is shown above as an example.

Introduction



In this topic:

Every set of unit materials starts with a summary of what you will learn. This section makes up the introduction. The content relating to the first couple of sections has been highlighted in grey below.

In this topic, you will learn about how to set clear goals for your academic studies, the UCAS application process and applying for employment. You will then learn about setting SMART targets and creating an action plan that will enable you to tackle specific targets to achieve a goal.

You will next explore the transferrable skills that you have acquired from employment and your educational experience, also considering skills that you need to develop / enhance in order to improve your university application and employment prospects.


You will learn how to prepare a university application. This will involve looking at common mistakes (and how to avoid them), learning how to research degrees and choose a course, and how to begin the application process, with a particular focus on preparing your personal statement.

You will explore how to best prepare for a university or job interview, as well as to use reflective models to assess your strengths and areas for development to ensure success in a formal interview setting.

Finally, you will learn how to produce an effective CV that is presented professionally.

1. SWOT Analysis

S Strength	W Weaknesses
O Opportunities	T Threats



Ready, steady, go!

In this section you will learn about the benefits of performing a SWOT analysis to explore your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and the possible threats (obstacles) that you may encounter. This technique is very useful when you are setting specific goals.

At the start of each section there is always a summary of what you will be studying.

SWOT analysis is a tool that has been used for a number of years in Organisations to examine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It facilitates strategic planning because it can provide a valuable all-around view of an organisation.

SWOT analysis is equally as effective and beneficial as a way of setting goals, identifying strengths, and considering any areas for development for an individual.

	Helpful (to achieving your goal)	Harmful (to achieving your goal)
Internal (Personal and within your control)	S Strength	W Weaknesses
External (Opportunities that may not be within your control)	O Opportunities	T Threats

Diagrams or images are frequently used to support learning.

Figure 1 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a way of looking at your attributes by identifying:

- **Strengths** - interpersonal and transferrable skills that give you an advantage over others.
- **Weaknesses** - specific gaps in your skills-base that may put you at a disadvantage to others.
- **Opportunities** - things you are able to take advantage of that will help you to achieve your goals.
- **Threats** - things that may create obstacles to prevent you from achieving your goals.

A personal SWOT analysis can be very useful if you are able to focus on a specific goal (such as securing a place on your chosen degree program at your preferred University, or successfully gaining employment).

It is also a useful tool in allowing you to address a specific problem (such as developing a specific skill or achieving a Distinction in a unit that you do not have a strong background understanding in).

1.1 The Steps in a SWOT analysis

There are 5 stages in a SWOT analysis:

1) Identify the goal that you want to achieve.

This needs to be as specific as possible. You need to be very clear on the time scale that you want to achieve the goal in. You also need to be aware of how you will know that the goal has been achieved.

For example, the goal may be **to secure a place on a degree course at your preferred University**. The time scale for achieving this goal would be within a set number of months after submitting your UCAS application form (in line with the Universities selection deadline). You would know that the goal has been achieved by receiving confirmation of a conditional offer or an unconditional offer either from UCAS or a letter from the University.

2) Identify the strengths that will help you to achieve your goal and also the weaknesses that could create obstacles that you would need to overcome.

It is a good idea to consider;

Knowledge (subject-specific, career-specific)

Interpersonal and transferrable skills (working as part of a team, verbal and written communication, time management, analytical skills, technical skills)

Experiences (past or present employment, relevant work experience, educational)

Support that is available to you (employment support, educational support)

Strengths should be **Internal** (based on the principle that they are personal, freely available to you and within your control).

3) Identify any personal opportunities that could help you to achieve your goal, as well as new opportunities that may open up to you once your goal has been achieved.

In the context of applying for a University course, it would be a good idea to consider;

- Opportunities to gain valuable work experience or shadowing experience within a specific organisation.
- The opportunity to attend University open days and speak with subject tutors and students currently studying the course that you are applying for.
- Any financial incentives such as bursaries or funding that may be available.
- Opportunities that may be available once you have secured an offer on your chosen degree course of study such as career opportunities possible upon completion of an undergraduate degree.

4) Identify any threats

These are external influences that are of concern to you, which may prevent you from achieving your goal. These may be linked to;

- Employment responsibilities (long working hours, financial constraints).
- Family-based responsibilities.
- Meeting the entry requirements for the degree course that you want to study.

5) Finally, as is the case with all personal development activities it is important to Review and Prioritise.

To do this effectively you should consider;

- If the SWOT analysis reflects you and your goal
- If there anything that you have forgotten
- The areas are the most important in each of the four categories of the analysis

It is a good idea to identify one thing from each strength, weakness, list of opportunities and list of threats that you consider to be the most important in allowing you to achieve your goal. It will then be these areas that will form your **priorities for action**.



Handy Hint:

A **SWOT analysis** can be performed for a goal that you want to achieve, and the below grid may serve as a good place to start.



Handy hints give you the opportunity to apply what you have learned, and they will often be followed by a useful resource.

Helpful in achieving your goal	Harmful to achieving your goal
<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I do well? • What skills do I possess that give me the edge? • What resources do I have at my disposal? • What are my greatest achievements? • What are my strongest personal attributes and qualities? 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I struggle with? • What tasks do I tend to avoid? • What are the areas where I lack confidence? • What are the gaps in my skills-base? • What are my limitations?
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What technology is available that will help me to meet my goal? • What contacts do I have who may be helpful? • Can I use my contacts or strengths to gain an advantage? • Will meeting my goal open up new career prospects? 	<p>Threat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my main obstacles? • Could any of my weaknesses hold me back? • What specific commitments (e.g. employment, personal life) have the potential to hold me back? • Will I need to compete with others to reach my goal?
Review	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are my strengths and opportunities a fair reflection of me and my potential? • Have I forgotten any of my strengths and possible opportunities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are my weaknesses and threats a fair reflection of my current limitations and concerns? • Have I forgotten any of my weaknesses and the obstacles that I am likely to face?
Priorities for Action	
<p>Identify what you consider to be the most important strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat to you achieving your goal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State your main Strength • State your main Opportunity • State your main Weakness • State your main Threat 	



SAQ 1:

- a) SWOT is an acronym for what four key characteristics?
- b) When might you need to perform at SWOT analysis?

These are Self Assessed Questions, and you'll find them at relevant points in all of our learning materials. These questions are there to ensure that you fully understand what you have just studied, and also what you need to know to succeed on the unit assessments.



Further resources:



[SWOT Analysis for Students](#)



[The best personal SWOT analysis examples for Students](#)



[Personal SWOT Analysis video clip](#)

Easily accessible further resources (such as website links and video links) are included to develop. Deepen, and stretch your understanding.



In a nutshell:

In this section, we explored how to compile a SWOT analysis to achieve specific goals.

At the end of each section, there is a summary (plenary) of what you have just studied.

2. SMART targets and Action Planning



Ready, steady, go!

In this section, we will learn about setting SMART targets that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time appropriate. We will then explore goals and how to set SMART targets to achieve mid-term and long-term goals through effective action planning.

2.1 SMART Targets

The **SMART model** (shown in **Figure 2** below) was originally developed by Psychologists as a useful tool to help people to set specific targets in order to successfully achieve an overall goal. It is designed on an acronym that describes the key characteristics of a meaningful target and these should be considered when completing an action plan to achieve the overall goal.

S	Specific
M	Measurable
A	Achievable
R	Relevant
T	Timely

Figure 2 SMART targets

The model is based on **5 key stipulations**:

- 1) The target must be **specific**, with a clear idea of what you want to achieve. This may require breaking the target down into smaller steps.
- 2) The target must be **measurable**. To achieve this stipulation, it is important that you have an awareness of the point at which you know that the target has been met. What will you need to be doing during this period and will you have to alter your priorities?
- 3) The target has to be **achievable**. This means that you should not set a target that is beyond your reach or out of your control, do not set yourself up to fail. Setting a series of smaller targets may be the best approach to take to ensure success in achieving the target. If you fail to achieve the target, you may need to consider what you could do differently and set additional targets that will allow you to overcome the obstacles previously faced.
- 4) The target needs to be **relevant** and suitably **resourced**. Here it is important to consider if the target is achievable with the resources at your disposal. You may need to acquire additional resources before the target is able to be met. It may be necessary to find out how additional resources will be accessed and to identify problems that you are likely to face if this is the case.
- 5) Finally, the target must be **timely**. It will be necessary to set a time limit for the target and this will depend on a number of factors that may or may not be within your control. The target may have an external deadline that means that failure to achieve it by a specific date will result in the target not being achieved (e.g. not completing your Diploma in time to be entered for Moderation may result in a university offer being declined). The target may not have an external deadline, but it may be necessary to set a time limit to ensure that another target can be achieved (e.g. passing your driving test by September so that you can travel to your university destination).

2.2 Creating an Action Plan

A **SMART action plan** incorporates the five stipulations (above) for achieving a specific **goal**. **Action planning** is a **process** that is designed to focus your ideas and to decide **specific steps** (targets) that you need to complete in order to achieve a goal over a given time period. Preparing an effective action plan is a great means of enabling you to achieve a mid-term or a long-term goal. When deciding on how to create an action plan you need to consider:

- The overall goal that you want to achieve
- Setting targets that are achievable and measurable
- Prioritising targets effectively
- Documenting specific actions that will aid completing targets
- Setting achievable deadlines for the targets set.



Further resources:



[Mind Tools: Smart Goals](#)

2.2.1 Setting Goals

There are **3 main types of goals** which you can apply to your studies and future aspirations.

- 1) A **long-term goal**: This is something that you hope to achieve in the not-too-distant future. Examples of long-term goals would include:
 - To successfully complete my Access to HE Diploma (whilst meeting University entry requirements).
 - Completing a successful UCAS application.
 - Passing my driving test before my university studies start.
- 2) A **mid-term goal**: This is something that you may want to achieve within a month or two. Examples of mid-term goals would include:
 - Achieving a Distinction in my next unit assessment.
 - Applying for student finance to pay towards my tuition fees.
 - Preparing for and passing my driving theory test.
- 3) A **short-term goal**: This would be something that you want to complete / achieve in a couple of weeks. Examples of short-term goals would include:
 - Reading through my unit materials and completing the related SAQs by the end of the week.
 - Formulating a draft of my Personal Statement
 - Complete my DVLA application form for a provisional license.


The main steps to consider in preparing an action plan for achieving a mid or long-term goal are -

- 1) **Ensuring that the goal is clear.** (What do you ultimately want to achieve?). To be motivating the goal needs to be challenging enough to keep you focused, but not so difficult that you could end up feeling demoralised if it ends up that you are not going to be able to achieve it. The goal should be just outside of your comfort zone so that you are stretched without feeling overwhelmed.
- 2) **Listing Benefits.** This is always a good idea, and it will help you to maintain motivated during periods of self-doubt. Regularly reminding yourself of the rewards that will come from achieving your goal will make the hard work worthwhile.
- 3) **Starting with a target that you will be able to do straight away.** There is little point in having an action plan where the first target will not be completed three months down the line. The first target needs to be doable in a few weeks.

- 4) **Identify clearly, the steps that you will take to meet your goal.** This is where setting a range of **SMART targets** will be required. You would need to think about all of the things that you need to do to bring you closer to achieving your overall goal. Breaking the steps required down into smaller components will make reaching targets feel more achievable. You should also identify the greatest obstacle and consider what could go wrong
- 5) **Arranging SMART targets and applying deadlines.** You should list specific targets chronologically in the specific order that they would need to be completed to achieve your goal. You should also set **start dates** and **planned completion dates** for each target. You could put these dates into your work diary as weekly goals. It is also a good idea to create short-term action plans or make use of a timetable to identify tasks that need to be completed in the forthcoming (next few) days.
- 6) **Reviewing Progress.** This is another important consideration in an action plan. If you have experienced difficulties in completing a target by the deadline that you have set for it, then this should be documented. Evaluating your progress may result in the realisation that you need to tackle a task differently and as such it may result in setting additional actions with new timeframes.


An example of a partially completed Action Plan					
What is my goal? To Choose my future Career after Graduation					
Remember to create	In order to achieve this goal, I will need to complete the following targets :				
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make use of the Prospects planner (https://www.prospects.ac.uk/planner) guidance system to identify jobs that are relevant to my skills and interests. 2. Use the Prospects planner (https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree) to research Professional jobs that I can do with my degree 3. Create a shortlist of Professions that I am well-suited to and will be qualified for. 4. I will use the Alumni Careers Network (https://www.pwc.co.uk/who-we-are/alumni/alumni-careers-network.html) to arrange some days of shadowing for the role of a graduate in the Professions that interests me most from my shortlist. 5. I will make an appointment with a graduate careers adviser to discuss the ideas I have gotten from the above and to narrow my shortlist down to one Profession. 				
My Action plan will start:		1/9/22	I plan to reach my goal by:		31/11/22
Target	Start Date:	Completion date:	Resources	Planned Activities	Evaluation of Progress
1.	1 st September	8 th September	- Prospects planner online resource	- Register an account - Complete the Quiz - Make notes	I managed to complete the Prospects planner quiz by the 3rd of September . This activity has really helped me realise jobs that I am well-suited towards but that I had never considered.
2.	8 th September	14 th September	- Prospects planner online resource - University Prospectus	- Focus on professions that the prospects quiz matched me to - Read through	As a result of work my commitments, I did not manage to complete this target by the deadline suggested task until the 17 th of September.

				careers linked to my degree specialism - Makes notes	
3.					
<p>What problems may I face and how will I overcome these? I have the tendency to procrastinate and now realise that I must take action or miss career opportunities that are open to me as a soon to be graduate. If I am not able to secure suitable shadowing work through the Alumni Careers network, I may have to contact companies directly for help. This is a concern.</p>					



SAQ 2:

- a)** A **S.M.A.R.T** target is an acronym for what five key characteristics?
- b)** What is the difference between a short-term goal and a long-term goal? Include a specific example in your answer.



In a nutshell:

In this section, we explored the five characteristics (S.M.A.R.T) which ensure that a target is meaningful. We also looked at the importance of setting goals and using an action plan in order to set specific targets to achieve a goal.



Let's recap this topic:

In this guide we have looked at why a university application may not be successful, and how you can avoid common mistakes.

We also looked at ways to ensure that you are as well-prepared and well-read as possible for your application and subsequent interview.

We looked at writing your personal statement and briefly looked at the application process. For up-to-date information on this, use the UCAS Application page in your Toolkit (to be accessed by logging into your learner account).

In the penultimate section we learnt about the stages of preparing for a University or job interview.

We looked at the importance of good preparation, to include researching possible interview questions, formulating detailed model answers, and practicing answering them.

We then explored ways to improve and develop your interview skills / question responses, to include the use of reflective models.

Finally we looked at how to create a professional CV that would be of benefit to you when trying to secure a job.



At the end of every topic (which in this case would come at the end of the content on creating a CV in the non-sample materials) there will be a recap of what you've studied. This gives you an opportunity to check that you've covered and understood everything.

References

Gibbs, G., 1988. *Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Further Education Unit.

Rolfe, G., Freshwater, D., and Jasper, M., 2001. *Critical reflection in nursing and the helping professions: a user's guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.



Any reference sources will be listed here (in Harvard Style)

Bibliography

All about Careers (2019) Choosing a University [Online] Available at:
<http://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/choosing-a-university> [Accessed 18/9/19]

DfE (2019) Teaching [Online] Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/apply-for-teacher-training/skills-tests> [Accessed 18/9/19]

Mind Tools (2019) Smart Goals [Online] Available at:
<https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm> [Accessed 17/9/19]

SkillsYouNeed (2017) Interpersonal Skills Self assessment [Online] Available at:
<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ls/index.php/343479> [Accessed 17/9/19]

SkillsYouNeed (2017) What is Psychometric Testing [Online] Available at:
<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/rhubarb/what-is-psychometric-testing.html>
[Accessed 17/9/19]

SkillsYouNeed (2017) Group and Team Roles [Online] Available at:
<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/group-roles.html> [Accessed 17/9/19]

UCAS (2019) [Online] Available at : <https://www.ucas.com> [Accessed 17/9/19]

UCAS (2019) [Online] Available at:
<https://www.ucas.com/connect/videos/ucas/undergraduate> [Accessed 18/9/19]



All literature sources utilised to inform the materials content will be listed here in Harvard Style.

Recommended reading

DistanceLearningCentre.com Resources

[UCAS support page](#) which can be accessed via the tool kit on your learner account



If there is any recommended reading material, it will be listed as a hyperlink here.

Websites

[UCAS.com](#)



Any useful websites will be listed as hyperlinks here.