

University study skills

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Students need to make a number of adjustments when starting university. Critically discuss some of these adjustments in terms of skills brought with them, and new skills that must be developed. Draw on relevant SSK12 material in your essay. In this essay it will be argued that even though students may bring with them such skills as competence in writing secondary school essays and reports, good comprehension and grammar and motivation to succeed with them to university, there are other skills they will need to develop as well as refine those they already possess.

The main skills which any new student will need to develop in order to succeed at university are critical thinking, which also includes critical reading, reflective thinking, learning independently and adjusting to the concept of the university culture which has its own languages and behaviours. New students are likely to experience a cultural clash as university possesses its own culture, and sub-cultures. Adjustments will have to be made with students needing to develop bicultural habits. As Kolb asserts, students entering higher education will have to engage in 'learning how to learn' (Kolb 1981).

The lead-up to the first study period, as well as the first study period itself, of a student's beginning in university can be a massive culture shock. Some students may develop the feeling of uncertainty as to whether they have made the right choice about pursuing higher education and whether they are even likely to succeed. This can be observed by reading some of the student comments on the SSK12 Facebook page during the first weeks of the first study period. In other cases we may see students that take on a particular

discipline and after a period of time find that they no longer have a desire to pursue that discipline.

There may be few opportunities for students in these positions to change disciplines. This is primarily due to the fact each discipline has its own sub-culture within the greater university culture. As Kolb has discussed, there are many faculties within the university, each have their own conventions that are unique to themselves such as language, values, ideas and norms (Kolb 1981). This impending transition may be too much for a student who has already had to become acculturated and has potentially experienced a culture shock.

The average individual can be affected by several cultures, for example and not necessarily restricted to, culture of family, culture of the workplace and culture of religion. The culture of university is but one of the cultures that can make a big impact on the individual. Students are faced with a new workload that may come with a pace of instruction that is probably faster and more intense than what they may be used to. There is a potential to feel overwhelmed at first and ways to overcome this may be to develop habits of early preparation, prioritising and time management.

There is an expectation that students need to be self-motivated and independent. There will be some guidance available but the general expectation is that the individual should know their own deadlines and the amount of study that is required. This may take some adjustment for individuals as they may be reeling from the cultural demands that university has already begun to place upon them. If they are studying more than one

subject in their first study period they will have already potentially experienced the distinction in sub-cultures.

For example, Ballard and Clanchy have noted that each sub-culture will have its own language and values and the new student will have to navigate themselves through an unsteady transition between cultures (Ballard and Clanchy 1988). Individuals also need to develop critical thinking as it is a cornerstone of university studies. Warren contends that critical thinking is necessary to university studies as an individual cannot “ process information, form reasoned opinions, evaluate beliefs, construct positions, or articulate a thesis without the use of critical thinking” (Warren 1995, 4).

I can support this through my own experience as critical thinking has been an important component of my university studies to date. One may see, however, that some individuals may have difficulties bringing themselves around to this mode of thinking as critical thinking involves developing an impersonal approach and attempting to put aside any biases that the individual may possess about particular subjects. Critical thinking may also involve critical reading and this may also be a foreign concept to the new student.

One needs to get into the habit of identifying theses in readings rather than just ‘ reading’ – ‘ sorting the wheat from the chaff’, as it were. Once the thesis has been identified the argument then needs to be analysed and criticised. Any evidence within the reading needs to be assessed. Any conclusions reached need to be examined as well as whether they are supported by evidence. Any other alternatives also need to be considered. In short, the individual will need to read more widely than what they may be

used to and in a more analytical fashion. Reflective thinking is another skill that students must develop as it is a valuable tool.

Reflection is integral to learning and assists in critical thinking as it starts with being self-critical in order to learn and improve. As Marshall and Rowland assert, 'thinking about your own thinking, or metacognition, will give you insights into how you go about your learning, and is important if you want to change or adapt study behaviours' (Marshall and Rowland 2006 9). Warren further asserts that 'critical thinking is necessary to learning. One cannot process information, form reasoned opinions, evaluate beliefs, construct positions, or articulate a thesis without the use of critical thinking.

As such, the critical self is integral to learning itself' (Warren 1995). Reflective thinking makes the individual ask themselves what may be working, what is not working and what may require improvement. Some students may already bring a form of this skill with them to university. I can support this through my personal experience in this area. I served in the police force for thirty years and the procedure in the police force was to conduct 'debriefs' of incidents that we were involved in. The police debrief was always framed in the format of discussing what went well and what could be done better.

Every individual involved in that particular incident was expected to contribute. The expectation was that this process would lead to constant improvement in performance. It is a very similar process to reflection within university learning. One method of reflective thinking that students may learn a great deal from is through the keeping of a reflective journal, also known as a learning log. Pavlovich asserts that reflective journals are an

invaluable aid in the development of self-awareness and innerleadership(Pavlovich 2007).

The use of a reflective journal aids in developing the individual as a critical thinker as the very nature of its use forces the user to be critical of themselves and lead to change and improvement. Students will also need to develop the skill of speaking and writing in academic English. This is part of the acculturation to the university culture of which language is a major part. Students will have to learn very quickly to become bicultural. In their written work they will have to learn to avoid contractions and develop the passive voice over the active voice.

Academic English is specific whereas informal English, that the student may be used, to is rather vague. Academic English is also often structured in a cautious manner whereas informal English is often structured in a more definite manner. Using my own personal experience to add support to this, I thought I had a reasonable grasp of formal English having come from the police force where, for example, great care goes into compilation of files for the prosecutors to proceed with, but I have also had to make adjustments and become bicultural through working on my own understanding and application of academic English.

The new student may bring skills with them to university but they will be confronted with the need to refine these skills and indeed develop new skills in order to survive at university. Skills that will need to be developed will include the need for critical and reflective thinking, critical reading and adjustment to independent learning. Students will also have to become

acculturated to university which possesses its own culture and sub-cultures which are separate to what they may be used to.