

Effective Study Skills for Academic Studies

Introduction: Effective reading, critical thinking, and reflective learning are essential study skills that empower students in their academic journey (Moore, S. 2010). Combined with these study skills, students can effectively apply techniques to optimize their academic experience and beyond. The following essay will delve into the crucial study skills of critical thinking, reflective learning, and effective reading. Exploring how the synergy of these skills enhances students' academic success.

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Nurturing Effective Reading

Effective reading is essential and beneficial in optimising the reader's study. It allows for efficient and selective reading without students wasting time on irrelevant content (Wallace and Wray 2021, p. 27).

For example, research conducted by Thurston, et al. (2020) reveals promising links between reading instruction and the positive impact on students' reading comprehension, overall literacy and reading accuracy. The study not only highlights these benefits but also examined various student behaviours.

The study observed student behaviours in areas such as: Prediction of what happens next in the text read; Clarifying text; Checking understanding through questioning and summarising text that had been read. These observations reinforce the impact that reading as a study skill, can play a pivotal role in the development of a student's academic development, particularly in the areas of literacy and comprehension.

Moreover, Cottrell (2019, p. 213) stresses two critical points. Firstly, reading occupies a significant majority of a learner's independent study time, especially in the context of Higher Education. Secondly, Higher Education brings on more challenging levels of reading, which can present a greater challenge to students.

Accordingly, Bedford and Wilson (2020, p. 28), emphasise the importance of regular practice, to enhance a student's proficiency in reading with comprehension. Similarly, Godfrey (2018) maintains that reading and understanding hold crucial roles in an academic student's journey.

To summarise, it is believed that effective reading is a study skill that plays a significant function for any learner, and as a result should be nurtured and refined to take the students reading abilities to a higher level.

Fostering Critical Thinking

Critical thinking skills are essential for the development of a sharper mind and prepares learners for academic growth by enhancing their ways of thinking.

To delve deeper, Cottrell (2017, p. 3) cites research by Kahneman (2012). Suggesting, people are highly susceptible to making assumptions, often arriving at irrational and uneducated conclusions. Moreover, Cottrell (2019, p. 253) believes that people have unconscious biases that prevent them from reaching objective conclusions. These factors put students within the context of academic study at risk of misinterpreting or overlooking relevant information.

Additionally, Wilson (2020, 1:29) brings our attention to factors such as personal beliefs and opinions that can influence and impede our ability to think critically. Wilson uses the examples of 'The Sponge' and 'Panning for Gold' as two thinking styles (Browne and Keeley, 2015), which align with Kahneman's 'System 1' and 'System 2' for thinking. While 'The Sponge' and 'System 1' lean towards making decisions with minimal mental processing, often prioritising plausibility over accuracy. In contrast, 'Panning for Gold' and 'System 2' counterparts are more rationalised and apply aspects of what critical thinking should resemble, they examine information closely, inspect, and separate relevant and reliable information from the inaccurate.

In brief, this discussion illustrates the importance of critical thinking and how students in academic fields should utilise and develop their ability to think critically. Objectively, as emphasised by Moore (2010, p. 50), it allows learners to delve deeper, question assumptions, and refrain from taking anything for granted.

Cultivating Reflective Learning

Reflective learning not only assists students to focus on their own performance and development by clarifying their thoughts and emotions, but also provides visibility into their retrospective growth which can often be overlooked (Cottrell, 2019, p.101).

A study conducted by Cisero (2006) highlights, how the benefits of reflective writing extended beyond a learner's study. For instance, students shared how the skills gained from the journal assignments prepared them for professional interviews. Cisero further suggests that reflective writing could aid with skill acquisition related to self-reflection and motivation. However, it is important to note that, in contrast, the author emphasises that for participants to benefit from the process, needed to be actively engaged and intentional in completing their reflective assignments.

Similarly, Moon (2004, p. 104), in her comprehensive handbook on reflective learning, recommends the use of frameworks to deepen reflections. Her work highlights that learners may struggle to engage in deeper levels of reflections in their writing. Furthermore, similarly to the findings of Cisero, Moon underscores that learners intentions play a fundamental role in the effectiveness of reflective writing.

With all of this in mind, we can learn from Deveci and Wyatt (2021) that learners, when supported with scaffolding, can benefit, and improve their; analytical and problem-solving abilities, self-awareness and confidence, as well as support their own reflective processes.

This further illustrates the potential and effectiveness as a fundamental study skill that can help students navigate their academic journey, a skill that should most certainly be adopted, developed, and practiced where appropriate.

Conclusion: In summary, effective reading, critical thinking, and reflective learning are indispensable study skills that complement each other. Effective reading streamlines information intake, critical thinking hones analytical abilities, and reflective learning fosters personal growth. Together, they empower students to excel academically and navigate life's challenges. In conclusion, these interrelated skills are fundamental for students, educators, and institutions to cultivate. They equip students not only for academic success but also for lifelong learning and adaptability, ensuring their success in both their educational journey and the ever-evolving world.

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