



Dyslexia and Additional Academic Language Learning
Module 7

Study Skills

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Dyslang Module 7 - Study skills

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Disclaimer

The views reflected in the original version of this module are those of the author, Dr Ian Smythe, and may not reflect the views of the University of South Wales who cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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About this module

This is the seventh module of the Dyslang course for supporting the dyslexic multilingual individual, particularly in the context of learning additional languages. It is designed to be usable as a standalone unit that may be shared with a wider audience, and especially the learner. However, it may be more understandable to those supporting the dyslexic pupil if read in conjunction with the preceding modules.

Aims and objectives

The purpose of this module is to provide an overview of study skills, and highlight some areas that may be of particular use to the dyslexic multilingual student and in particular those learning an additional language.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this section you should be able to:

- Understand the key areas of study skills
- Know how they can be applied to those individuals being taught
- Describe what resources are available.

While many students may automatically acquire study skills, most dyslexic students do not. Therefore, while the emphasis is on those multilingual students learning an additional language, much of what is said here is also applicable to other subject areas. Indeed, some additional material has been added to ensure the student has a rounded knowledge.

As well as being written for teachers, this module has also been written in a manner whereby the teacher will feel comfortable sharing it with the dyslexic student.

Introduction

The Dyslang project is concerned with supporting the multilingual dyslexic pupil, in particular those learning additional languages. In all modules up to this point it has been important to empower teachers with the ability to be aware of and understand the complex issues that surround this subject. However, in the end it is the dyslexic individual who needs the knowledge to improve their skills in order to fulfil their potential.

During the development of the EU funded Dystrain project (2003-2005) partners realised that there were two major objectives:

- 1) To empower teachers by providing them with information about how to support their dyslexic students.
- 2) To empower the students themselves, thereby not only giving support exactly where it was needed, but also ensuring sustainability. This would remove such obstacles as:
 - a) Teachers not having enough time;
 - b) Students constantly needing refresher courses;
 - c) The student always being reliant on the teacher.

For those reasons it was decided to produce an online study skills resource that would be available to both the teacher and the student. Furthermore, if written appropriately, it would also be useful for parents. This module is not about providing research references about what works, because the little that is published is rarely of a quality that can be held up to scrutiny. Much of the most useful advice currently available is written by practitioners who build upon years of experience to provide guidelines of what works and what alternative approaches exist. But rarely can they say “This works because”

For this reason, much of what is quoted here is anecdotal, built on the experience of people such as Jean Auger, the first Education Director of the British Dyslexia Association, Stella Cottrell, author of *The Study Skills Handbook* and currently Director for Lifelong Learning at the University of Leeds, UK, and Patience Thompson, one of the first to introduce study skills into the UK. Indeed, when Patience started to teach dyslexic students in Carmel College in the early 1980s, she was so successful that parents demanded that the non-dyslexic pupils were also taught study skills as the dyslexic pupils were doing better in examinations than non-dyslexic students.

The material discussed here is tried and tested, and should be seen as something that may work with a given dyslexic individual. But there is little “proof” of what works since it is highly individual, and what works for one individual may not necessarily work for another. Indeed, it is often the abilities and enthusiasm of the teacher that can be key to the successful adoption of any one technique.

Since every individual is different, and responds to teaching in different ways, research on the potential impact and effectiveness of any given teaching and learning method in a particular context will be limited.

However, there is plenty of research to suggest that the attitude to study skills does appear to influence academic outcomes. Two examples are:

Gettinger & Seibert (2002) - an article whose purpose is to “describe an information-processing perspective on the contribution of study skills to academic competence, and to identify evidence-based strategies that are effective in helping students to improve their study skills.”(p. 350)

Wolfe (2009) - which “examines current student attitudes toward effective study skills” (p. 1) and discusses some of the background issues.

Much has been written about study skills, and a number of books are listed in **Links and further reading**. The purpose of this module is not to provide an in depth discussion of each and every area that impacts upon learning, but to allow the reader to reflect upon the key areas that impact upon the efficiency of learning with respect to the multilingual dyslexic learner. Where applicable, reference will be given to other resources, with an emphasis on free resources, such as those available through dyslexia related EU projects.

Finally in this part, please note that there is no intention to provide exhaustive information that can be located elsewhere. Also, the focus here will be on non-computer based information. Many of the support methods now have some computer-based format. That will be the subject of the information to be found in Module 9 - Assistive Technology.

Please note that this chapter extends some of the ideas and concepts highlighted in resources for the award winning EU funded dyslexia and study skills project “Dessdys”. Further details of this project can be found in Module 12 - Resources, Videos & Presentations.

7.1 What are study skills?

According to O'Donoghue (2006, p. i), "Study Skills are strategies and techniques that enable you to make the most efficient use of your time, resources, and academic potential. Developing and improving your study skills can help you:

- To make more efficient use of your study time - get more work done in less time!
- To make your learning easier, and help retain what you have learned for longer.
- To feel the work and effort involved is worthwhile; it 'pays dividends'.

Al-Hilawani and Sartawi put it slightly differently:

"Study skills are those skills and habits which are necessary for understanding and retrieving information, and in particular they are the link between comprehension and memorisation." (Al-Hilawani & Sartawi, 1997, cited in Wolfe, 2009, p. 1).

Stella Cottrell, in *The Study Skills Handbook* (2008, p. 1) says

"Study skills don't hatch fully formed, any more than a grown hen pops from an egg. They evolve and mature through practice, trial and error, feedback from others, and reflection as you move through the different stages of your course."

One proposition for the domain of study skills worthy of mention is the following ascribed to McMurry in 1909 by Richardson, Robnolt and Rhodes (2010):

- (a) setting specific purposes for study
- (b) identifying supplemental information
- (c) organising ideas
- (d) judging the worth of the material
- (e) memorising
- (f) keeping an open attitude
- (g) relying on self-direction in learning.

If we are still looking to explain these skills now since they are still not widely taught across Europe, then how much progress has there been in mainstreaming them in the past 100 years?

Therefore, we may consider study skills to be a collection of strategies and activities that can enable students to be more efficient in their learning. They do not guarantee success, but they provide an opportunity that might not otherwise exist. However, they are not some magic switch that will turn one from an ineffective learner to an effective one. Like any skill development, it is important to nurture the skills, to seek ways to improve, and invite constructive criticism.

There are many ways to define and categorise study skills. In this module, we shall consider seven basic areas set out in four sections, but offer signposts to additional reading where appropriate. The main areas to be considered are:

- 1) Reading and writing
- 2) Listening and note-taking
- 3) Memory and time management
- 4) Examinations

Extension Material 7.1 - Study Skills Self-Assessment

Before starting, you may want to do a self-assessment, whether you are a teacher, pupil or parent. There are many types on the internet. Here are just three of many that can be found online:

Study skills self assessment

<http://www.rrcc.edu/success/tips/StudySkillsQuestionnaire.pdf>

Study skills: Self assessment and other notes

<http://www.stmichaels.ac.uk/assets/handbook/study-skills/study-skills-self-assessment-and-other-handy-hints.pdf>

Study Skills Self-evaluation form

http://hsc.uwe.ac.uk/net/student/Data/Sites/1/GalleryImages/doclist/S/Study_Skills_Self-evaluation_form.doc

7.2 Reading and writing

7.2.1 Introduction

Reading and writing may be considered to be core skills, and core areas of difficulty for the dyslexic individual.

Reading

When reading, we are trying to interpret somebody's attempt to communicate ideas to us through the written medium. One of the main difficulties is information overload, trying to process large amounts of information and remember it at the same time. Although this issue is faced by all, dyslexic learners, especially those who are multilingual, may be faced with having to do more processing than others, while also having less memory and cognitive processing ability.

Writing

When writing, you are trying to put your own ideas down in words in a way that makes sense to the reader and conveys the ideas you intended. However, this can be highly problematic for the dyslexic individual as it includes the very tasks they find most difficult: organisation of their ideas, spelling, grammar and reading over what they have written.

On the following pages are a number of ideas that can be considered with respect to reading and writing. These are not exhaustive. They are intended as a starting point. Those already beyond this stage should consult the recommended reading at the end of this chapter, as well as YouTube and other online resources, to find additional material.

7.2.2 Types of reading

There are many reasons for reading, each with its own demands on comprehension. For example, hotel evacuation instructions in case of a fire may appear to require high levels of comprehension. But if there is a diagram, the words are less important. Newspaper articles may be interesting, but in most cases little is lost if you do not understand every word as the consequences are minimal. Reading a text book usually requires comprehension. But if you intend to read it several times (including just before the exam!), first time comprehension is not mandatory. Also, the text often has built in repetition, and assumes the reader will not understand everything. Examination questions, however, need a very high level of comprehension. And even a slight mis-reading can have catastrophic consequences.

In order to learn efficiently, one has to read and comprehend at an optimum level, especially if there is a large amount to read. The three main types of reading to consider are:

- Skim reading
- Scanning reading
- Full text reading

The use of these in order to answer questions in an exam situation is summarised in the table below.

Type of reading	Skimming	Scanning	Reading in detail
Purpose	To get a general idea	To find specific information	To read carefully for meaning
Example	A newspaper article	A telephone directory	An instruction manual
Outcome	You get the main points from the text	You find the section you are looking for	You get confirmation of your understanding

The table is adapted from a short YouTube video entitled “Reading skills for the IELTS test - skimming and scanning” (Web address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbozEcwLhRc>). This highlights how useful the internet can be as a source of information, particularly since the voice-over makes this very accessible to the dyslexic individual.

Skim reading

This involves looking quickly to get a general idea of what the material is about, to identify if it is worth spending more time on it. This could be a newspaper, book chapter or magazine. There are many strategies that can be used, such as reading quickly without caring too much about full comprehension or words you do not know, reading the first and last sentences of paragraphs, to see if there are clues that suggest a need for further reading, and clues that are found in the main visual elements, such as photographs, illustrations or graphs, as well as subtitles and bold text. Given that the dyslexic individual will struggle with reading, especially in a language that is not their first, it is important to provide help in developing this skill. It will depend on the material being read as to where the clues will be found. But this again is part of the learning and strategy development process.

Scanning

This may be seen as a visual task whereby the reader is looking for very specific information with a given purpose, such as a phone number in a directory. It is not necessary to read all the words. It should not be assumed that, because this is really a visual search task, the dyslexic individual will be good at this task. This is not the case since a) not all dyslexic individuals are visually gifted, and b) while visual search skills may be good, there may be visual memory deficits, making it a difficult task to do effectively. However, practice can improve the skills.

Reading in detail

By definition, all dyslexic individuals have problems with this task. The reading can be very slow, and with comprehension being paramount, it may be advisable to use note-taking at the same time. Effective use of the other techniques means that at least the quantity of reading is reduced. This is the long and laborious process that every dyslexic individual hates. But hopefully by using the other methods (skimming and scanning) the quantity is reduced.

7.2.3 Preferences

This section is about the printed word. With increasing amounts of reading being performed on computers and e-book hardware, much attention is given to the potential to make changes within those formats. However, just because it is currently available in a given format does not mean that text cannot be changed prior to printing (e.g. changing the typeface and type size), or scanned and adjusted before printing. Below are several simple ways to improve readability of printed text.

Further details of computer-based adjustments are given in Module 9 - Assistive Technology.

Size

Some books have very small print making them difficult to read. The dyslexic individual usually prefers 12-14pt for easy reading. By using the zoom function on the photocopier, a version that is easier to read may be produced.

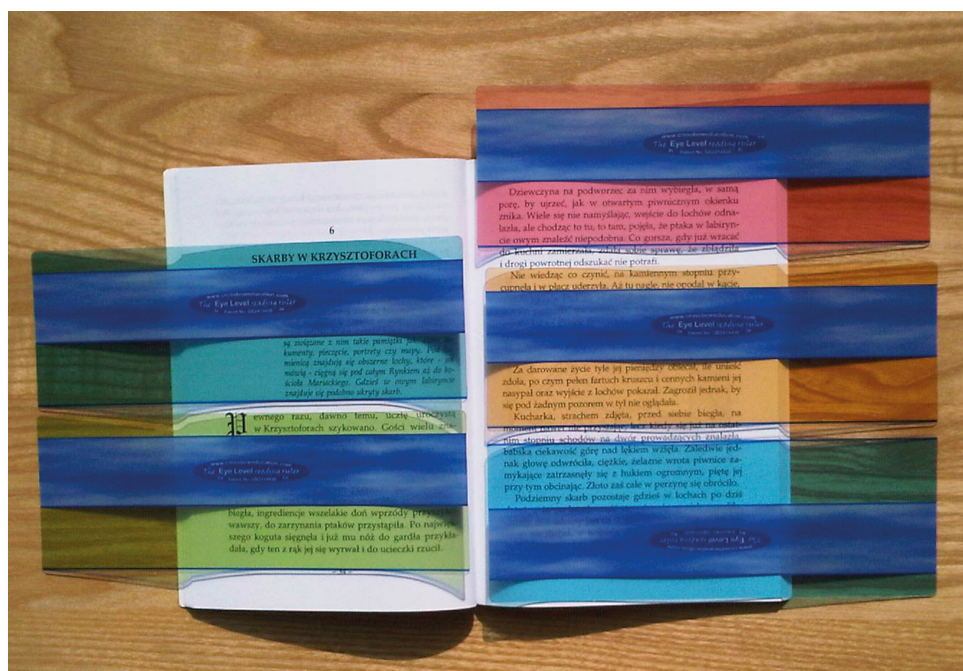
Coloured paper

Modern papers have organic compounds that trap ultraviolet light turning it into visible light and making the paper seem brighter. This can reduce readability of text. Many dyslexic individuals find it easier to read when reading material is printed on pastel coloured paper, such as cream or pale blue.

Coloured overlays

There is much debate about the validity of research on visual issues (variously known as Visual Stress, Scotopic Sensitivity Disorder, Meares-Irlen Syndrome and similar) with regard to dyslexic individuals. However, there is little doubt that many dyslexic individuals do find it easier to read if they have coloured overlays (or very expensive tinted glasses). These overlays are simple sheets of plastic that can be laid on top of a piece of text. For whatever reason (reduced intensity, colour or a concentrated focus) they can have an impact on reading for some individuals.

The coloured overlays shown here are a low cost solution, coming as a set of five in pastel colours. They can be bought from Crossbow Education (www.crossboweducation.com)



7.2.4 Writing – Concept maps

Concept mapping has been shown to be an extremely useful way to help the dyslexic individual (and indeed anybody) move from what can be a jumble of great ideas, to a formal structure that can be turned into an essay. They were first developed by Novak in the early 1970s as an aid to science undergraduates to help them to understand the relationship between diverse concepts. Since then they have been used by many people to help develop ideas, from initial concepts to final presentations. There are many ways that they can be used, and imagination will help demonstrate how they can be applied to language learning. Here are some of the key areas in which they are used. (Note that the term “Mind maps” was popularised by Tony Buzan and the name is now a registered trade mark. The term refers to diagrams that radiate from a central point, as opposed to concept maps that may have cross links.)

Brainstorming

This involves putting your ideas down on paper or the computer, and later beginning to group ideas. This can often provide a good basis of structure. At this stage, the links and relationships between ideas are second to the main ideas. Once the ideas are in place, the links can be added to make the structure.

Memorise for learning and exams

Concept mapping gives the opportunity to demonstrate the links between subjects and areas within subjects. When revising for exams, the technique can be used to map the ideas and provide a visual representation of one’s learning. The very process of making the concept map is a form of revision, and the minimal use of text means it will be easier for the dyslexic individual.

Develop and plan essays

As mentioned above, brainstorming is often the first step in the creation of an essay. Once they have gone from brain to paper (or computer) the next phase is to develop the structure, and some form of hierarchy (sequence) to that structure. The other important aspect for the dyslexic individual is to apply a time-line, e.g. Concept mapping deadline - Draft deadline – Final deadline.

Plan projects

Projects, such as course work, require careful planning, similar to that of essays and presentations. However, in projects the development of time-lines, including milestones, is important.

Draft Presentations

Making a presentation is a linear activity. That is, there is a set of events (e.g. slides presented on a screen) and usually some form of commentary. To get to that point it would have been necessary to brainstorm ideas, build the relationships between them, and then put them into a logical sequence for presentation. This can be achieved by using the individual slides as the repository of ideas, and then changing the order in Slide Sorter view. As well as the traditional (linear) PowerPoint style presentations, there are types that allow a non-linear and more dynamic approach, such as Prezi (www.prezi.com). Although this type may seem more like the way a dyslexic individual works, most dyslexic individuals need structure. Without it, there is a real danger that they may not reach the end of the presentation within their allocated time slot.

Explain to others

For many individuals, concept maps can be a very fast way to understand a concept, since everything is concentrated in one image on one page, the inter-relationship is shown between concepts, and text is minimised. It is often advantageous to create the concept map in front of somebody, as it helps reinforce the concepts.

Learning the basics of Concept Mapping

There are many ways to start to teach, but here are some basic steps that may help you develop a strategy to teach about concept maps and which may help overcome initial reluctance to use them. They should be used in conjunction with the information above.

1) Start simple, with the learner saying ideas and you writing them on small pieces of paper.

This saves the learner from having to do more than brainstorm the ideas, cuts out any writing, and leaves them able to concentrate on the ideas.

2) Put the ideas on the table, and sort them into groups, links, connections and some form of mental mapping.

Try to find ways to encourage the learner to build the links. Remember that you are helping them develop autonomy, and that at some point in the future they will need to do this themselves.

3) Once some structure is in place, transfer it to a single piece of paper and make the links.

This means that you are going from a draft form to a more finished format.

4) Add the links and drawings.

Drawings not only necessitate fewer words, they also make it easier to remember. The process of drawing reinforces ideas while the picture can capture what may take many words to say.

Don't forget that when the concept map is completed, it is still a mind map. The quality of the final output is not only a consequence of the ability to draw out the ideas, but the ability to turn them into a "linear" format - the written essay.

A note of caution on teaching concept mapping

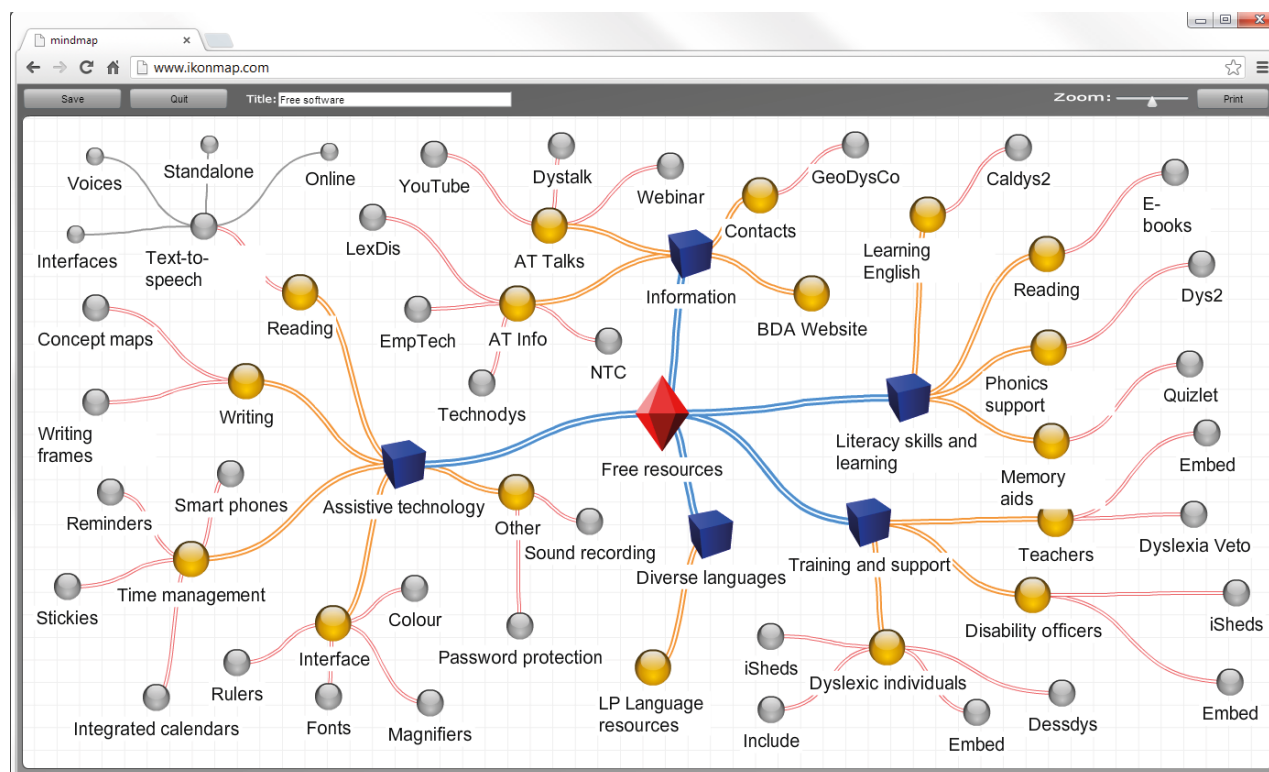
When teaching a subject, it is the student that needs to learn, and their ability that is judged in the exam or through the essay. However, when working one to one on a concept map, it is all too easy to encourage the student to identify the details to put in the map, then tell them what goes where. Helping a student to construct a concept map is of less importance than helping them understand the process, so they can do it with any subject. This may sound obvious, but many forget the difference.

How to make a concept map – a quick guide

- Set up the paper in landscape format.
- Start with a central image or idea, with “sub-topics” appearing on branches or sub-branches from the centre.
- Use pictures, which improves recall as one picture is better than 1000 words.
- Use boxes connected by lines or words on lines for clarity. Write at angles no greater than 45° since above that they are hard to read.
- Use colours for codes and sequencing aids.
- Use different display formats, such as hierarchies, to understand connections.

The visual form of the concept map makes it ideal for dyslexics. The fact that they need so little text is a major help. But do not assume it is an easy ability to learn. It takes perseverance, guidance, and feedback. It takes a desire to succeed, and it needs knowledge in the first place. Remember that it is designed to be an alternative to writing an essay.

Concept maps – Example



Concept maps are used by all sorts of professions, both in paper and electronic formats. Although it is best to master the paper version first, many dyslexic individuals prefer the electronic format as it allows them to “hide” any errors they may make in the process.

7.2.5 Writing plans - writing frames

One of the problems faced by the dyslexic individual is knowing where to start and how to start. There is often nothing worse than being faced with a blank sheet of paper. It does not matter if you are working in your first language, an additional language, or learning a new language, there is no doubt that a few clues to get you started can save a lot of time.

There are numerous approaches to this, many of which are to be found on the internet and through YouTube. Here are three examples:

Questions words

In English, it can be helpful to use six key question words, which are:

Who? – Who are the main characters?

What? – What is happening?

Where? – Where is it taking place?

When? – What is the timeframe of the action?

Why? – Why is it happening?

How? – How does it all take place?

A simple approach is to remind the pupil that their story/essay/homework may begin to take shape if they address these questions in turn. So they could expand on each of the questions, and start to give shape to the contents. This approach helps the pupil focus on the main parts from which they can expand later.

Starting out

This is exactly as it suggests – how to start a story. Giving them a few words, in the language that the essay should be in, will provide a starting point. It can help overcome blockages in the thought process, and lead to at least something being committed to paper. The words provided can be as diverse and as provocative as the context requires, but could include:

Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away.....

Suddenly the lights went out.....

The holiday was going well until

Elephants are normally very calm animals

Basic structure

Many multilingual individuals may come from educational backgrounds where study skills are not routinely taught. Therefore, it is important to explain all parts to the dyslexic multilingual individual. For example, many pupils benefit from an explicit explanation of the structure of text, such as the need to have a beginning, middle and end. That is

Start (opening line, opening paragraph, setting the scene. Example:

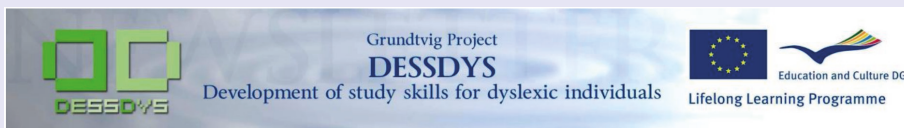
“At the beginning ...”)

Middle (the bit that explains everything, and makes it all fit together)

End (last paragraph, the “punchline”, the part that brings it all together: Example: “In the end ...”)

Writing frames

You will find many examples of writing frames on the internet, including those from Dessdys by Daniela Boneva and Elena Mihova, available through the resources provided in Module 12.



7.2.6 Drafts and proofreading

It is important to consider the process that leads up to a piece of work being assessed. It is demoralising for a dyslexic individual to receive back marked work full of crossings out, errors highlighted and dismal marks. However, there are alternative ways, some of which are teacher-led and some in the control of the pupil. Below are the main ones, but many other ideas can be found online.

Teacher led

Marking scheme and appropriate targets

If a pupil scored 15/20 in a “test” last week and 17/20 this week, you could say that they improved by 13%. If a dyslexic pupil scored 3/20 last week and 4/20 this week, you could say they improved by 33%. By judging the individual against their own standards it can be easier to recognise and subsequently praise any effort and improvement.

Highlighting key errors

Concentrate on the errors that are the most common, trying to identify, where possible, if they may be linked to the structure of their first language. When discussing the nature of the errors, particularly with grammar, talk about similarities and differences with the pupil, and ask them to try to identify why they make particular errors. (See other modules for an in-depth discussion of these issues.)

Using different coloured pens

Although it may sound trivial, just changing the colour of the pen can make a difference. If they come from a cultural background where all their errors were noted in red, then simply changing to green highlighting can make a noticeable psychological difference.

Student led

Presenting drafts

All too often, deadlines are allowed to slip. But due caution should be exercised, particularly if somebody is given (say) six weeks to hand in an essay. There is no logical reason why they should be given an extra week, except in exceptional circumstances. Usually it means they forgot about it, or were so much in fear of failing that they could not even face starting. Therefore, consider having a (formal) contract with the student that you will help them by reviewing the planning and draft stages with fixed dates, and to fail to keep those dates (possibly with a little leniency) will compromise the support. It is not easy to be firm but fair, especially with multilingual dyslexic pupils, but there will be no such leniency in the workplace so why allow them to develop the habit at school? You may be creating a future problem by appearing to be helpful in the short term.

Buddy system

Consider matching the student with a good (but sympathetic) student to offer support and guidance. This benefits both pupils, and the better one reinforces their own knowledge through having to explain certain aspects in a clear way, and often in a way that they had not previously considered. The pupil enjoys the benefit of learning from somebody who has time to concentrate on them, and who came through that same learning process not so long ago.

Using technology

Since so much work is now carried out on computers, it is important that the pupil understands all the strategies that are available to them. For example, in the language being taught, there may be a grammar checker in Microsoft Word that is not available in their own language. This will be further discussed in Module 9 - Assistive Technology.

Proofreading

Many errors made by dyslexic individuals are simple errors which could be removed if appropriate techniques were used. One such technique is to read text backwards. This is good not only for monolingual dyslexic individuals but also multilingual students learning languages. The reason this works is that most dyslexic individuals will read what they think is there rather than what is actually there. As a consequence they make assumptions rather than read the content. By reading backwards, you have less chance to guess the word. Instead you can concentrate at the single word level and be forced to read what is actually there rather than what you think should be there.

7.3 Listening and note-taking

7.3.1 Introduction

Listening and note-taking may be seen as concentrating on key points, extracting significant information and highlighting the important parts. This usually means understanding speech or text, and then re-writing it (or just remembering it) in one's own words. These are skills that take practice, and are not normally learned implicitly by the dyslexic individual. In the following pages, there are a number of suggestions. However, there are many more that may be found on the internet.

Processing overload

Listening and note-taking are skills that require (at least) two processes to be operating at once. For example, the pupil may be trying to listen to a lesson, while also trying to understand it, condense it, and record one section without missing the next section. Listening requires understanding the component words and grammar (not so easy if the person talking is not using your first language) and using short term memory to retain enough information while trying to consolidate and write it down. In the writing process, there is a need to consider handwriting (so you can read it later) and spelling. And of course the speaker does not stop while you are decoding their speech and writing it down. All of these individual components are difficult for the dyslexic individual, even more so when operating in a language that is not their native language.

Many of these skills will only come with practice, facilitated by the considerate teacher who also provides feedback.

7.3.2 Listening

Professional interpreters have the admirable capacity to listen to the speaker, translate and say that translation out loud without missing a word. However, most of us have trouble with multitasking in this way. Even when listening and note-taking, most people switch off from the person talking as they try to write down what they have just heard. The difficulties of the dyslexic individual are magnified many times, made even more difficult if working in another language.

Although the key is usually in the note-taking, one area frequently overlooked is the option to record the lesson/lecture. Recorders used to be specialist equipment but recording can now be carried out through the use of smart phones. However, the permission of the speaker should always be obtained before recording starts. By having that recording, a learner can listen, stop, start, and transcribe at leisure.

Note that while many teachers will permit the use of audio recording, few allow the use of video for fear of appearing on YouTube!

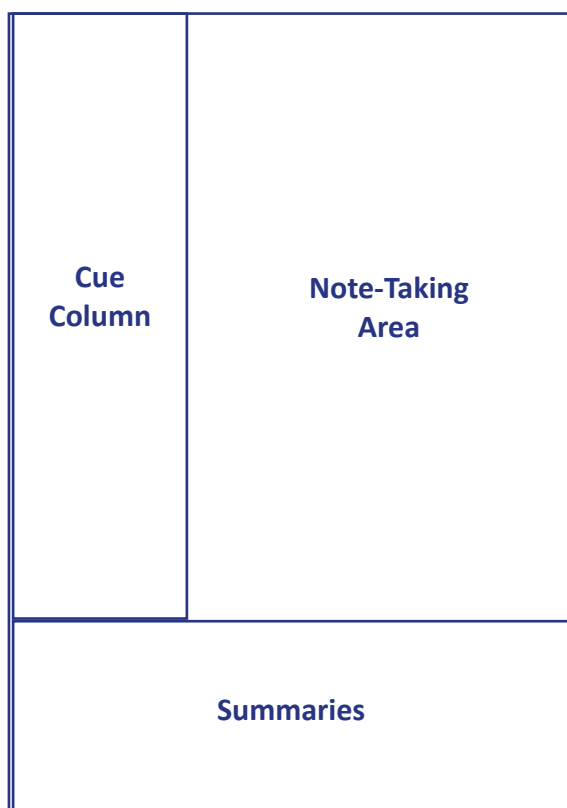
7.3.3 Note-taking

Taking notes may occur (for example, during lessons) when there are several other tasks going on at the same time, all of which may lead to cognitive overload. However, this may also refer to taking notes from a book in the library. Notes are taken in an attempt to collect information from one source (spoken or written) and reproduce it in one's own words. This usually means shortening it considerably. Note-taking during classes, surfing the net, or any circumstances where knowledge needs to be stored, can be seen as an integral part of the comprehension and learning process.

However, some people prefer to draw concept maps of a lecture. Many find that concept mapping provides an ideal way to set out notes about a subject, as it allows easy visual access, and clearly shows the links between components that are not always clear in writing.

The Cornell method of note-taking is one of the most widely used. Developed at Cornell University by Walter Pauk in the 1950s it utilises a page layout as shown in Figure 1. To use this method, make the bottom quarter of the page an area to write summaries of what was written in the main notes area. Writing summaries helps pupils check that they can read the notes and understand what they mean. It also helps consolidate the information. Then on the left is an area for keywords. And that is all it is!

Figure 1 - The basic Cornell Method of Note-taking



Pauk also advocated more explicit note-taking methods, using this layout in conjunction with Record / Reduce / Recite / Reflect / Review.

Figure 2 - The extended Cornell method of note-taking

Cue Column	Record - During class, record as many meaningful facts and ideas as possible in the main column. Reduce - As soon after the lesson as possible, summarise the recorded facts and ideas concisely in the Cue Column. Use key words. Summarising clarifies meanings and relationships, reinforces continuity, and strengthens memory. Recite - Cover the Note-taking Area, using only your jottings in the Cue Column, say over the facts and ideas of the lecture as fully as you can, not mechanically, but in your own words. Then, verify what you have said. Reflect - Draw out opinions from your notes and use them as a starting point for your own reflections on the course and how it relates to your other courses. Reflection will help prevent ideas from being dead and soon forgotten. Review - Spend 10 minutes every week in a quick review of your notes, and you will retain most of what you have learned.
Summaries Best made shortly after the lesson, to summarise the notes above.	

Adapted from “How to study in College” by Walter Pauk, 2001, Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston.

For other note-taking methods see **Links and further reading**.

Annotations

If someone doesn't own a book, then they should try to give it back in the same condition that they received it in. But if they do own it, there is no reason why they cannot write on it, underline, highlight it or do with it as they please. Many individuals are reluctant to do this for fear of what the teacher may say. However, if someone has paid for a book, then it is theirs to use as it suits them. Students can use a combination of highlighting pens and ordinary pens, adopting a colour coding system where possible. They can also use "Post-Its" for writing notes on, and for marking specific pages. Of course these may also be used in books they do not own!

Handwritten notes

For the dyslexic individual it is often difficult to maintain good quality notes since they are trying to work on having legible handwriting, and correct spelling. Add to that another language, and cognitive overload will become an issue for any dyslexic individual. That is why adopting a system, such as the Cornell method, which uses techniques to transcribe notes made in the lesson, is a recommended practice. Rewriting them shortly after they were originally recorded not only helps ensure the notes can be read later (such as just before exams) but also consolidates learning. Without developing such skills, it will be necessary to constantly seek out the good note takers.

Concept mapping

Although many dyslexic individuals use concept maps for planning essays, few use them for note-taking. However, they can be a very valuable tool since they allow the mapping out of details in a non-linear fashion. The problem is that when you do not have control of the flow of information, such as when somebody else is talking, there may not be enough time to think how to transform the talk from a linear (time led) presentation, to a two dimensional drawing. Practice in this area can be very rewarding.

7.4 Organisation and time management

7.4.1 Introduction

Prioritisation is a difficult task for the dyslexic individual. Often there are just too many options available, and knowing which to choose at any one time can be problematic. Add to that a difficulty in knowing how long something will take, plus many individuals will delay starting because as soon as you start you can start to fail, and it is no wonder that most dyslexic individuals have time management problems. The role of the support person, be they the teacher, parent, or friend, is to help identify priorities, to set appropriate time frames, and ensure some sort of monitoring system is in place, but without removing their sense of independence.

7.4.2 Timetables

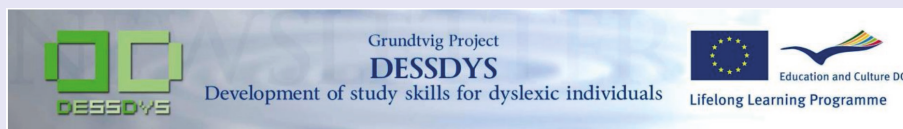
Timetables are always useful, and can not only aid memory, but also solve some serious management issues! They can be used in many contexts, including:

- Daily and weekly school timetables
- Homework (receiving and submitting) timetables
- Daily list for packing bags (e.g. when to carry PE kit)
- Examination preparation.

However, a successful strategy involves not only making these timetables, but also using them, and not losing them. Electronic copies, that can be repeatedly printed, are always useful.

Time management and organisation

You will find many examples of paper-based time management and organisation resources on the internet, including those from Dessdys by Daniela Boneva and Elena Mihova, available through the resources provided in Module 12.



7.4.3 To Do lists

To Do lists are important components of time management, whether paper or electronically based. However, they can only really be effective if they are regularly visited, or if an alarm is attached to them. (See Module 9 - Assistive Technology for further information about technology led versions.)

One format for To Do lists is the paper diary. However, rather than just having entries on a single day, consider the type that has the diary on one side and a blank page on the other side. This means the item 'to do' does not need to be restricted to a single day. It can take an effort to start to use a diary correctly, but a few weeks of perseverance will pay off quickly. As mentioned earlier in this module, sound recorders (e.g. smart phones) can be very useful for creating auditory versions of To Do lists. Here are some possible uses:

- To record homework
- To remember teachers' instructions
- To record ideas before they are forgotten
- To record lessons or parts of lessons
- To communicate between home and school.

There are many creative ways sound recorders can be used for language learning, from teacher-recording, vocabulary tests and pronunciation guides, to self-recording for testing one's own pronunciation.

Time management and technology

Most of the time management tools available now are centred around the technology of the smart phone and/or the computer. These functions include:

- Timers and reminders
- Phone alarms
- Online reminders
- Calendars.

These will be discussed in more detail in Module 9 - Assistive Technology.

7.4.4 Realistic targets

Realistic targets need to be set by both the student and the teacher. These should be relative to their students' own standards and potential, and not necessarily seen with respect to other students.

But the student also has to have a sense that the target can be achieved. It can be demotivating to be asked to learn twenty words, when a realistic level could be six. So why not allow a student to focus on six, and have a better chance of reaching their personal target?

There are many areas in which a student can set targets, not just academic achievement targets. These could include, for example:

- Checking readability and content of notes from the last lesson before starting the next lesson
- (Re)Checking the timetable for the day at breakfast
- Packing the bag the night before
- Phoning a friend to check the homework BEFORE starting it.

And the most important target?

Achieve the targets!

7.5 Examinations

Examinations are the proof of learning that can be used to demonstrate one's skill level to, for example, a prospective employer. Many dyslexic individuals may want to have some qualification as proof of learning, while others may decide that if they have learned adequately, they do not need the formal certificate.

On the following pages are some brief guidance notes which may help preparation for formal examinations.

Examination Terminology

Many points are lost by dyslexic students in examinations not because they do not know the information, but because terminology was used that was different to what they were used to. As part of the preparation process, it is important to explore words that could be encountered in the exams. Subtle differences could make the difference between passing and failing. Here are some examples:

- assess
- compare
- criticise
- discuss
- evaluate
- illustrate
- justify
- review.

The student needs to practise them, to understand them, and to try to see the difference between them.

Exemption from foreign language learning

There will be cases, however, where the dyslexic individual, despite the encouragement of direct teaching and study skills support, may need to consider making alternative use of their time. As explained by Crombie (1999):

"If, however, the learning situation becomes intolerable and students find themselves totally unable to master even the most elementary aspects of a foreign language, then alternatives may need to be considered. Finding a more appropriate alternative within the curriculum could cause major problems for timetabling and supervision, but is very necessary if the stress and frustration felt by an otherwise capable pupil is not to be allowed to adversely affect behaviour and self-image. With imagination and persistence the right alternative can be found and many difficulties overcome."

Extension Material 7.2 - Advice for students on exam preparation

The following section contains advice that may be useful to give directly to students.

Timetables

Make a timetable, several if required!

Never underestimate the requirements of exams. Good preparation starts with revision of a lecture just after the lecture. Making a concise summary of the lecture notes is a good way to start the preparation, and remember all the facts. Make a wall planner working out how much time you have for each subject and when you will work.

- Make a checklist of what you need for the exam and go through it regularly
- Learn about your own learning style
- Check all your notes make sense
- Set out a clear set of aims.

Remember to give yourself breaks and take exercise as well as reward yourself.

Revision

There are many types of reading material that should be revised. Clearly define the areas you need to revise and what you will NOT revise. Attempt to brainstorm (maybe using concept maps) the subject BEFORE you start revision, to establish where the main gaps are. Use cards to make notes. Order them, and make them clear enough for others to use to ask you questions.

Resources include:

- Original lecturer's notes
- Your own notes
- Course reading material
- Internet resources.

Remember that the key to success is planning. This planning should start with:

- Reviewing the structure of the course as this will help remind you of the content
- Skimming through your notes to get a better idea about how much needs to be learnt
- Finding which books relate to the course and asking the teacher which are the most important items to learn.

Checklist - Weeks before the examinations

- Check you have the syllabus well ordered
- Ensure files are easy to read with colour coded notes and diagrams
- Write down key points and say them aloud
- Test yourself, use past papers
- Make sure you have all the right equipment for the examinations.

Day before the examination

- Read through notes to refresh your memory
- Go over important formulae
- Stop looking at past papers
- Stop looking at the whole syllabus for sections you have missed.

Night before the examination

- Try not to do too much - you really will not be able to learn it all
- Get clothes and equipment ready, check times and places of examinations
- Set alarm clock and then relax, sleep well if possible
- Get at least 6 hours sleep.

The Day of the Exam

There are no rules as to what you should do, but there is little more learning you can do that will make a difference. However, if you made some revision cards or concept maps, there is no harm in looking at them. Follow the carefully planned routine, from having breakfast, to leaving with time to spare. Check you have everything you need, from bus fares, to spare pens, and double check the exam room and times. Make sure you leave for the exam in plenty of time. Try to find a way to relieve stress such as listening to music.

The Exam

Here are key principles to remember for the exam:

- Check the time allocated to each question
- Write down things you used in learning the material that might help you remember
- Use concept maps to outline answers to questions
- Preview the questions before you answer anything
- Try to write neatly as you want to win them over!
- Lay out all your equipment, and make sure you are comfortable
- Highlight key words and phrases
- Try rephrasing the question if you do not understand it first time round
- Re-read the questions carefully
- Answer the easy questions first
- Use your extra time for proofreading if possible
- Make sure that you answer what the question is asking you!

Conclusions

It is impossible to do justice to such a huge subject as study skills in a short space. This is an area where skills have to be learned, practised repeatedly, and applied to the given context. Once learned, however, these skills can be used effectively in many contexts, from language learning to subjects such as history and geography, as well as in employment.

There are no secrets to study skills. Indeed, many people like to share their knowledge about how best to learn. Therefore, the recommended resources are available in various places on the internet, including YouTube.

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Pauk, W. (2001) *How to Study in College*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Richardson, J. S., Robnolt, V. J. & Rhodes, J. A. (2010) A history of study skills: not hot, but not forgotten. *Reading Improvement*, 47(2), 111-123. <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Reading-Improvement/233607050.html> [Last accessed 16/11/2013]

Wolfe, A. (2009) *Student Attitudes toward Study Skills*. Paper presentation at Midwest Business Administration Association (MBAA) International Spring Conference and paper published in the proceedings of the Marketing Management Association (MMA) 2009 Spring Conference, Chicago, Illinois. http://alisonwolfe.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Student_Attitudes_Study_Skills1.pdf [Last accessed 16/11/2013]

Links and further reading

General

Hargreaves, S. (Ed.) (2011) *Study Skills for Students with Dyslexia* (2nd Edition). London: Sage Publications.

McMurry, F. M. (1909) *How to Study and Teaching How to Study*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. (Free download from <http://manybooks.net/titles/mcmurryfetext04htsth10.html> Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Note-taking (Wikipedia) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Notetaking> [Last accessed 16/11/2013]

Price, G. & Maier, P. (2007) *Effective Study Skills: Unlock your Potential*. Harlow: Pearson.

Examinations

Hints on Examination Techniques <http://www-personal.une.edu.au/~ecampbe4/ExamTechniques.pdf> [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

University of Southampton – Memory, Revision and Exam Techniques: A Guide for Students [http://www.southampton.ac.uk/edusupport/ldc/docs/Memory revision and exam techniques 2009.pdf](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/edusupport/ldc/docs/Memory%20revision%20and%20exam%20techniques%202009.pdf) [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

UTAS Student Centre – Effective Exam Techniques http://www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/11548/Effective-Exam-Techniques.pdf [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Listening and note-taking

Listening and Note Taking: Tips and Techniques [https://casc.byu.edu/sites/casc.byu.edu/files/Listening and Note Taking B&W.pdf](https://casc.byu.edu/sites/casc.byu.edu/files/Listening%20and%20Note%20Taking%20B&W.pdf) [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Using the Cornell Note-Taking System <http://www.uhv.edu/StudentSuccessCenter/study/pdf/cornell.notetaking.pdf> [Last accessed 31/12/2013]

Posture

University of Illinois, McKinley Health Center – Posture and Study Habits Guide http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu/handouts/pdfs/posture_study_habits.pdf [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Reading and writing

Improving Reading Comprehension [http://www.lwtech.edu/Documents/Administrative/TRiO/Workshop/Textbook Reading Workshop.pdf](http://www.lwtech.edu/Documents/Administrative/TRiO/Workshop/Textbook%20Reading%20Workshop.pdf) [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Skimming and Scanning <http://www.aacc.edu/tutoring/file/skimming.pdf> [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Organisation and time management guides

LearnHigher – Useful websites on time management for students [http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/resources/files/Time management/time_websites.pdf](http://archive.learnhigher.ac.uk/resources/files/Time%20management/time_websites.pdf) [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

Time Management for College Students <http://www.vgcc.edu/CounselingServices/Time-management.pdf> [Last accessed 17/11/2013]

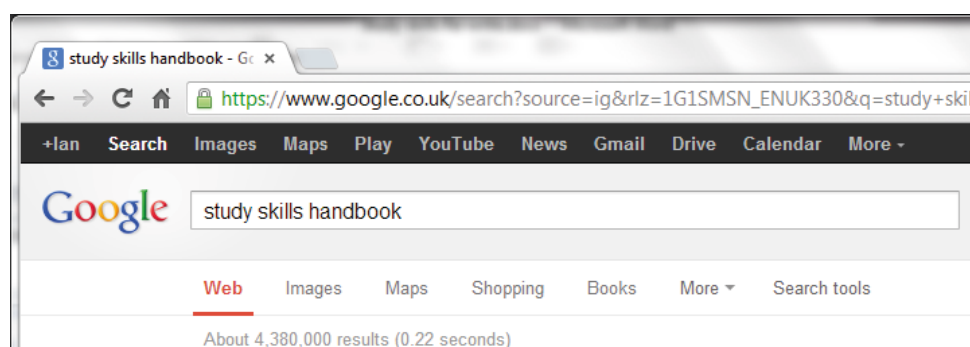
Appendix 1 – Making the most of the internet

The nature of learning is changing rapidly. In the past, the key was a good memory and being able to reproduce in examinations what was written in the school books. Fortunately for the dyslexic individual, today there is greater emphasis on knowing how to obtain information, rather than to retain it. This is most beneficial when the examinations include a large percentage of course work. But many dyslexic individuals still do not know how to find information quickly. Therefore, below are a few tips that have proved to be useful, not just in language learning (for example when asked to write a short essay) but also in other subjects. The tips recorded here demonstrate how to make use of the internet to do further research on particular aspects of study skills.

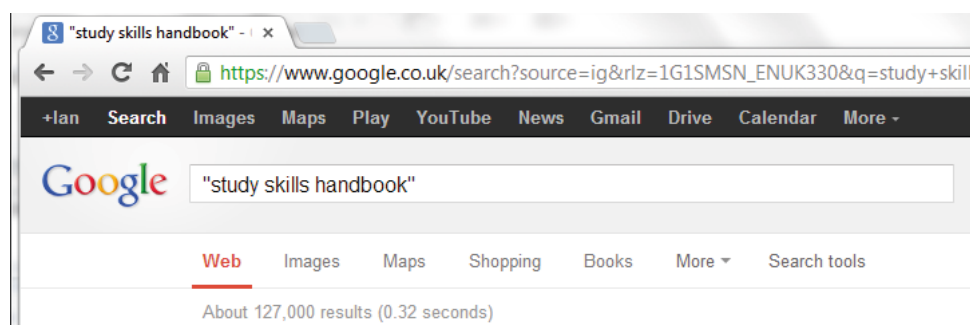
To find a good resource with authority

Often good guidelines are to be found in PDFs since they are either books or university guidelines. To narrow down the search, you can use Google Advance search, or add the words “filetype: pdf”. Note that you can also put quote marks around the words to find a more exact match. Below are results from four approaches.

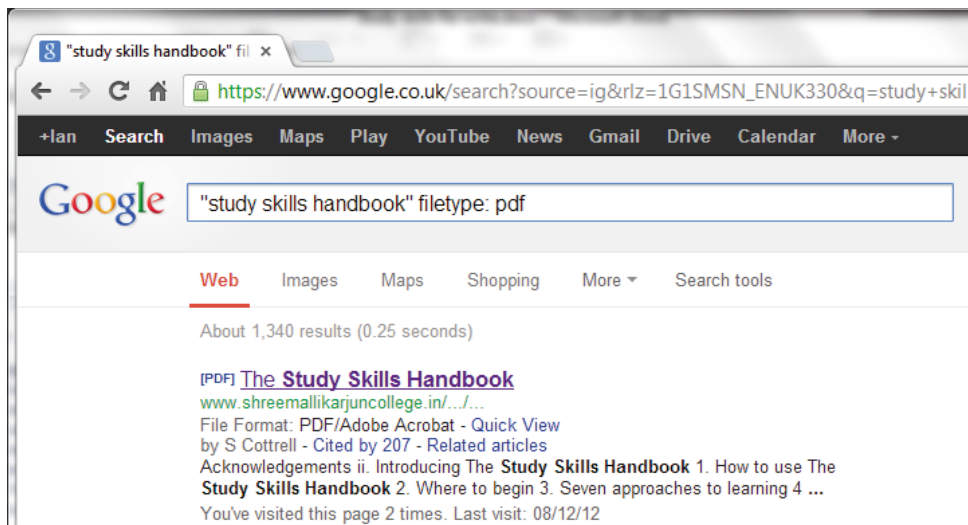
Here is the number of results found by putting in just the three individual words - study skills handbook:



By putting inverted commas around the words, the number of results returned is reduced, but may still be more than what is actually required:



In this third example, the words “filetype: pdf” are added. The search will now return only pdf documents, which reduces the number of results even further:



YouTube is also a very valuable and user friendly tool with plenty of study skills materials and resources.

