Further readings and templates

# Chapter 5: Understanding how to learn at university

## What impacts on the way you learn?

There are a number of factors which can affect the ways you learn, and being aware of these can enable you to maintain a deep approach throughout your studies. Biggs (2001) has noted that learning take place around 3Ps – the **P**ressage (students’ experiences, expectations, abilities), **P**rocess (how a university puts you through a learning process, e.g. lectures, tutorials, assessment) and **P**roduct (the student as a graduate, having been through the university ‘process’ and being a different individual from the one who entered it three or four years earlier).

### Your time – and your ability to manage that time

The time you have available to you will usually have a massive impact on the approach you take and is one of the most important factors affecting your success as a student generally. Consider a situation where you are living at home, have domestic obligations to do (looking after brothers or sisters), have a part-time job to bring in some money, and have to travel to class. In such a situation, there seems to be no time to think, let alone to read. Everything seems to be done on an ‘I desperately need to do this NOW!’ kind of basis, and life seems eternally frustrating.

Arguably the most necessary thing to do in such a situation is to create as much ‘space’ as possible: physical space (a place for you to study) as well as a situation which gives you peace and quiet. For a parent who is studying, this might be after the kids have gone to bed. Or for others, it may be that something that has been part of your life for a while needs to be given up so that you can concentrate on your studies.

Chapter 3 (‘Managing your time’) covers issues of time management: if you haven’t looked through this, then you might need to do so.

### The assessment used for your modules

The assessment strategy used for your modules will affect your behaviour (and by logical argument, your attitude towards your studies). We look in more detail about the kinds of assessments used by lecturers in Chapter 7, but the assessment for one module may be different from that of another module, since these may be designed to assess different ‘learning outcomes’. Regardless of this, the more interesting an assignment is (either because it does or does not involve working with others, or because it asks you to do or not do something practical), the more you are likely to devote time and effort to it. Whether an assessment motivates you is likely to be determined by your own learning style.

### Your previous experience as a student

Your experience as a student, your expectations and what you have heard from others, will have some impact on both your understanding of what you need to do in order to succeed (which is one of the aims of this book) and on your reactions to what you experience. Both of these issues will again impact on your motivation to engage in the process of going through university, and therefore on the approach to learning that you adopt.

That approach may, then, alter as that understanding improves and your expectations become clearer. In addition, the ability you have to succeed may improve as well, as you get feedback from your tutors, as you learn how to study by talking to classmates, and as you find that success in being a student is less difficult than maybe you believed originally. In part, this will be determined by your abilities and what are termed ‘study skills’, but again, the purpose of the book is to help you develop those skills throughout your life as a university student.

Biggs, J. Kember, D. and Leung, D. Y. P. (2001) ‘The Revised Two Factor Study Process Questionnaire: R-SPQ-2F’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71: 133–149.