



## What are digital study skills?

### Practices and strategies for learning with digital media and in digital networks.

Research shows that experienced students are *self-directed* and *self-efficacious*. That is, they organise their own learning, and they believe that their own efforts will enable them to learn. Some habits of effective, self-directed students are:

- look for and access opportunities to learn
- find, access and use learning resources
- participate in learning dialogues, putting forward ideas, listening, and asking questions
- contribute to collaborative activities
- plan and manage time on learning tasks
- make notes and records: save references, draw concept-maps, record events (images, audio, video) and organise these records for later review
- order and re-order content, e.g. building extended assignments from component notes, creating revision materials
- attend and respond to feedback, making any necessary revisions
- monitor progress and plan to reach specific goals
- think about how they learn, ask for help when they need it, and help others to learn - an effective way to deepen understanding

Each of these skills can be developed using digital apps and media, or through online platforms and networks.

## How can digital tools support good habits of study?

A concern with using digital platforms is that the same students who lack confidence in their study skills often also lack digital capital (devices, networks, data, high quality software, functional skills and opportunities to practice). So having to use digital tools can add to existing **inequalities** and disadvantages in learning. This can only be addressed if fundamental issues of digital access are addressed at the same time.

Some students have had **negative experiences** online which makes it harder for them to engage. Other students enjoy being online but see it as a space of informal interaction, so apply informal **rules, roles and language use**. These issues can be addressed by paying attention to how online spaces are **socially defined**. They should be open, inclusive and welcoming. They should also have clear rules, roles, and standards of language that are scholarly and/or professional.

There are some **advantages** to using digital platforms. Practices of successful study can be made:

- more **explicit**: for example by modelling language and rules of interaction, providing step-by-step guides, gamifying new skills such as annotation, referencing or peer review
- more **shared and collaborative**: for example by having students actively share references, concept maps, revision materials, learning tips and tricks, or simply providing spaces for collaboration and informal peer review
- more clearly **scaffolded**: for example using video to break down techniques into component steps, using annotation layers to show how a design or solution has been developed
- **easier to manage**: for example there are apps to help students with note-making, reference management, deadlines and time-on-task, revision, basic productivity... allowing them to focus on what they are studying
- more **various**, so students are more likely to find a medium or format, an app or an interest group that meets their learning needs

As a subject teacher, you may feel that study skills are not your responsibility. But if you want students to get the most from working online, be aware of the skills that can help them, and reiterate their value when you can. It is even more powerful if students share their own study tips, and this can happen naturally if you allow time for feedback after a new activity. *How did you tackle this? What would have made it easier? Where did you go for help? What resources and apps were useful?* Some courses have their own social media groups where students can be encouraged to share apps they find useful for study.

## What digital habits do successful students have?

This is not an exclusive list and you will want to add your own. You could offer it as a checklist for students (and colleagues?) to use and comment on.

### Working productively

- Sync personal and course calendars
- Use note-making apps and/or have good habits of note-taking and file management
- Use reference management software and bookmark useful sites
- Explore beyond the basic functionality of software - post questions, look at online tutorials and how-to videos
- Look for shortcuts and work-arounds to make routine tasks more efficient
- Work effectively across places and devices, using portable drives or cloud services and backing up regularly
- Look into time management/productivity apps
- Set up your work space for comfort and safety: know to take regular breaks when working at a screen

### Collaboration and sharing

- Discuss and share course work online with other students
- Contribute positively in class e.g. asking and answering questions, making points
- Contribute in shared projects and spaces e.g. offer ideas, take notes, manage time, support others, set up processes, summarise, organise
- Join discussion groups and forums, initiate online conversations and interactions
- Give feedback to others e.g. in comments, peer review, informal chat
- Design effective, engaging presentations

### Working with information and media

- Practice information skills (ask library and learning professionals for help, access online workshops) - they are the bedrock of other study skills
- Look for information and learning resources beyond what is offered by the course
- Learn advanced search techniques with catalogues and databases
- Try using different learning media such as podcasts, revision apps, and discover how you learn best
- Practice different kinds of media production - writing, presenting, sketching, making diagrams, recording audio and video, taking photographs etc - to understand media from the inside out
- Know how to find and use openly licensed content

### Thinking with digital tools

- Annotate everything - articles, lecture notes, videos, reports - and keep your notes in a way you can easily use
- Order and re-order content, e.g. build assignments from notes, create revision materials from assignments

- Regularly review bookmarks and references - weed out, prioritise, classify
- Record learning events in the moment, e.g. use screenshots, bookmarks, camera, audio notes, recording pen
- If audio channels work better for you, record audio notes, listen to lectures and podcasts, use automated text-to-speech to read back notes and articles
- If visual channels work better for you, use mind-mapping, diagramming or presentation tools to map topics and plan assignments
- Practice with subject-specialist software - this is how you learn to think like a professional or scholar
- Use your critical skills with digital information: follow up links and references, assess the quality of evidence, follow authors and arguments over more than one piece of writing, research different points of view

### **Making progress**

- Create your own revision materials e.g. flashcards, audio notes, mind maps
- Use a subject specialist simulation, app or game to practice key skills and improve performance
- Use digital tools (sketch, mind-map, timeline, project management app) to plan a project, assignment or longer term goal
- Keep track of grades and feedback; respond to feedback as soon as possible, and keep it so you can review your progress over time

### **Preparing for the future**

- Research the digital skills needed in a chosen career
- Read reviews of subject-specialist software; look for free and open source alternatives
- Review personal digital skills e.g. with the help of a career adviser
- Actively manage online identities and profiles across digital networks
- Join an online professional or academic network; find and follow experts in the field
- Build an online portfolio or start a blog or vlog to showcase your work