

PART 1 Introduction

Study Tasks in English is intended to enable non-native speakers of English, of intermediate level and upwards, to acquire the skills needed for English-medium higher education study.

To use *Study Tasks in English* effectively, students should have already attained a level of at least 4.5 on the IELTS examination scale, or a score of 450 points on the TOEFL, or the equivalent.

Each unit provides between twenty to thirty hours of classroom material.

A: MAIN FEATURES OF *STUDY TASKS IN ENGLISH*

The principal features of *Study Tasks in English* are as follows:

i) A task-based approach

We believe that there is no single best way to study successfully, and that it is thus important for students to find out for themselves which study techniques suit them best. *Study Tasks in English* is therefore task-based. Whenever possible, students learn about the skills they need and how to use them through a process of discovery and induction, rather than by telling. We believe this helps the learning to be deeper and more personalised. Such an approach also helps the learner to get used to learning more independently – an essential skill in higher education.

However, we also believe it is important that the learners and the teacher should be clear about what the intended major learning points of the tasks are. We have therefore built a degree of structured guidance into the tasks, in order to try to strike a balance between the need to give learners an opportunity to think for themselves, and the need for learning outcomes to be concrete and tangible. In other words, we have attempted to sketch in the overall destination and the general direction of travel, but have left the means of travel and exact itinerary as open as possible.

ii) Study skills AND study competence

Studying can be seen as consisting of two main levels, namely a study skills level and a study competence level. The study *skills* element is made up of individual techniques of study, such as note-taking, skimming/scanning, using a bibliography and so on. The *competence* aspect is a general capacity for

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study, consisting of self-confidence, self-awareness, the ability to think critically and creatively, independence of mind, and so on.

Study competence is the foundation on which mastery of study skills rests. Being able to ask critical questions, for example, is an integral part of study techniques such as revising an essay draft, searching for references, examining statistical data and so on.

Thus, throughout *Study Tasks in English*, the focus is first and foremost on building up study competence. We regard a knowledge of the techniques of study as vitally important also, and this too is therefore a major focus of *Study Tasks in English*. However, in our approach, study skills are always acquired within a framework of study tasks that concentrates in the first instance on building up the underlying cognitive and affective capabilities needed for effective study.

iii) Tone

Learning to study in English can be a daunting task. *Study Tasks in English* therefore frequently includes cartoons and other types of illustrations in order to make serious points in a light-hearted way. Likewise, some of the content and activities are deliberately less academic, especially in the first few units, in order to help the student over the initial 'hump' of grasping difficult concepts and skills. At the same time, we have tried to maintain a sufficiently serious tone throughout, in order to take into account expectations of this kind as well.

iv) Analysis AND synthesis

Most of the units in *Study Tasks in English* concentrate on helping learners to acquire individual skills or sets of them. This is necessary for the sake of clarity and depth of treatment. However, the skills themselves obviously form part of a larger whole, and so it is vital to provide opportunities for learners to put the skills together into larger units as well. In *Study Tasks in English* this is done in two main ways. First, each unit in Parts A and B ends with an application activity, which gets the students actively to draw together the threads of the unit in question. Second, in Part C (*Study practice*), students work through four major study simulations, each of which is designed to consolidate and give further practice, through an integrated study cycle, in the skills studied in other parts of the book.

v) Awareness-building

We believe that it is very important to encourage study skills students to take as much responsibility as possible for their learning. Many of the tasks in *Study Tasks in English* thus take the form of review and reflection activities. Each unit of *Study Tasks in English* ends with a major self-assessment task, to help the learners actively reflect on their level of mastery of the skills which they have focused on in the unit as a whole. There is also a *Study Skills Profile* chart (in Part D), which can be used to help the teacher and the students keep track of and evaluate the students' progress at any point throughout the book.

vi) Use of English

Study Tasks in English provides numerous opportunities for learners to use their English. Although the main purpose of each of the tasks is to help the students to learn how to study, they also involve a great deal of valuable practice in all of the four main language skills. This is because the tasks require the learners to think, to make decisions, to exchange information, to be creative and so on. Thus, working through *Study Tasks in English* should improve not only the students' ability to study, but their ability to use English as well.

However, *Study Tasks in English* is not primarily an English language teaching book. For students who also need to improve their basic knowledge of English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation etc., we would recommend using *Study Tasks in English* alongside appropriate ELT materials.

B: OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

Study Tasks in English is divided into four main Parts:

Part A: General skills (Units 1–3)

These units foster self-awareness about learning and the thinking and questioning skills needed for study. We see these skills as underpinning the use of any of the type of skills covered in the next part.

Part B: Specific skills (Units 4–11)

Units 4–11 develop specific study skills needed for different kinds of study – following lectures, taking part in discussions, using the library, writing notes, and so on. These skills are introduced in such a way as to draw on and further develop skills of the type focused on in Part A.

Part C: Study practice (Units 12–15)

These units consist of four major study simulations, each of which is designed to consolidate and give further practice in applying the skills introduced in Units 1–11.

Part D: Study information

This part consists of:

- 1 a *Study Skills Profile* for the student to assess her/his improvement in study skills attainment as s/he proceeds through the book;
- 2 a *Glossary of Study Terms*, i.e., a list of expressions commonly used in study;
- 3 *Appendices* of task-related material, abbreviations and editing symbols;
- 4 a *Bibliography* of common reference books for study;
- 5 an *Index* of skills.

We regard Part A as essential for the kind of audience for which *Study Tasks in English* has been written. However, in our experience, students' needs with regard to the topics covered in the rest of the book are a good deal less predictable.

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We have therefore tried to err on the side of comprehensiveness rather than narrowness, in terms of the range of topics covered. While we hope that the majority of users are likely to find the whole of the book of value, we have purposely designed it so that students only needing to improve specific skills can dip into it accordingly.

To this end, one of the aims of Unit 1 is to help students to evaluate their present knowledge of study skills in order to know how to make best use of the rest of the book. We also recommend that, throughout the use of the book, the teacher should provide for and encourage negotiation with the students about the choice, sequence and treatment (including adaptation) of the materials. It should also be noted that work involving Part C can be undertaken at any point when it is thought appropriate. There is no need to have gone all the way through Parts A and B first.

C: UNIT STRUCTURE

Parts A and B

Each unit in Parts A and B covers a set of skills related to a main topic (e.g., 'Asking critical questions').

Each of these units is divided into five main sections.

In each of the first four sections, a series of linked tasks is used to build up an understanding of a set of related skills.

In turn, where possible, these sections build progressively one on the other throughout the unit. (It should be noted that this is not always the case, since a skills-based syllabus does not always allow a neat and orderly progression. However, the skills within each of the sections of a unit are all always closely related to those in the other sections.)

Section 5 always takes the form of a *Unit assessment and application*, in which, through a further series of tasks, the students are helped to draw together and review the threads of the unit as a whole.

Part C

Each of the four units in this part involves extensive practice in applying the study skills focused on in the earlier parts, through a series of listening, speaking, reading and writing activities linked by a common academic topic.

Each of these units is divided into five main sections. In each of the first four sections, an aspect of the overall topic is focused on. The tasks in these sections simulate typical academic activities involving the subject matter, such as listening to a lecture, doing follow-up reading and then taking part in a seminar discussion.

Section 5 takes the form of a *Unit assessment*, in which students are encouraged to reflect on their performance in the work of the unit.

D: GETTING THE BEST OUT OF *STUDY TASKS IN ENGLISH*

i) Students' and teachers' roles

Study Tasks in English is intended for classroom use (rather than self-study). The tasks involve the learners in working on their own or in small groups. The role of the teacher is primarily that of a facilitator – managing time, helping students form groups, monitoring group work, helping the learners to assess their progress and needs, setting tasks, and so on. At all times students are required to play an active role in arriving at an understanding of what successful study in English involves.

We recognise that there will sometimes be pressures in the average teaching situation which will make it tempting for the teacher to adopt a more direct, 'telling' approach. However, while this may save time in the short term, the quality of long-term learning is likely to be lower, since the students will not have had an opportunity to think for themselves, to get accustomed to learning independently, and so on. Students need to understand this and other aspects of the rationale behind the approach adopted in *Study Tasks in English*. We therefore recommend that the teacher discusses this point with the students, in order to increase their understanding and, we hope, sympathy with the approach used.

ii) Guidance

A number of basic task types are used throughout *Study Tasks in English*. For example, students are frequently asked to reflect on what they already know about a given study topic, or what they feel they have learned about it after having done a series of tasks. On other occasions, the activities call for discussion with fellow students as part of the process of arriving at a clearer understanding of a study concept or technique. Other tasks involve analysis, decision making, problem solving and creativity of various kinds.

For students to carry out these tasks as effectively as possible, we recommend that appropriate guidance is provided. Thus, for example, the teacher should show the students how to do an unfamiliar activity by working through the first item with them, or by getting a group to model the process for the rest of the class, and so on. This is especially necessary for tasks which involve a way of working or mode of thinking which students may have had little or no exposure to in their previous education (such as co-operative small-group work or self-evaluation, for example). In such cases, try to anticipate potential problems and trouble-shoot them before, during and after the activity, as appropriate. This principle applies equally to subsequent encounters with similar activities, until students clearly show mastery of the processes involved, since it will rarely be the case that these are learned thoroughly enough after only one exposure.

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iii) Academic subject matter

Many of the activities in *Study Tasks in English* involve making use of academic information as a vehicle for mastering the aspects of study in question. It is important to take into account student attitudes to and knowledge of academic content of this kind. Although the role of academic subject matter in *Study Tasks in English* is secondary, it is nevertheless essential that students understand and identify with it to the extent needed for carrying out the task in hand. To this end, it is important before introducing a task involving such information (e.g., in the form of a reading or listening passage) to check for any major factual, conceptual or linguistic gaps in the students' knowledge, and to remedy these appropriately. (It may also be the case that with certain groups of students it makes sense to substitute academic subject matter which is more appropriate in terms of interest, background knowledge and so on, and we recommend that this is done whenever necessary.)

It is also important to take into account the possibility that some students will not be motivated initially by some of the academic subject matter because they feel it is not related to their area of study. In such cases, it is worth pointing out that none of the subject matter in *Study Tasks in English* is highly specialised: it is intended to appeal to and be within the grasp of any student about to enter or already in higher education, regardless of their specialism. It is also usually the case that the work the topics relate to can be approached from a variety of perspectives (e.g., scientific, technological, humanities-oriented, etc.), thus providing scope for students from a wide cross-section of disciplines to contribute their knowledge and ideas. It might also be worth pointing out that, in any case, a wide-ranging interest in information of all kinds is a vital study skill in itself!

iv) Time

Many of the activities in *Study Tasks in English* involve discussion, reflection, preparation and so on, and all this takes time. We have already pointed out that we feel that this is time well spent – learning how to study effectively is a time-consuming process, and therefore there needs to be an adequate minimum amount of time set aside for this purpose. However, steps can be taken to use what time there is as efficiently as possible, as follows:

- assign as much work as possible to be done outside class (e.g., as homework): this encourages independence, as well as saving time;
- be selective in what you cover in *Study Tasks in English*: it is unlikely that every student will need to study all of the book;
- set time limits for small-group work, discussions and so on.

v) Knowledge

It is very important for the study skills teacher to be adequately prepared in terms of his/her own knowledge of what studying in English involves. Having had experience of English-medium higher education oneself is an important source of background information. However, this needs to be complemented by an understanding of the nature of the study process and how it can be

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learned. We therefore recommend that teachers who feel the need to expand their knowledge in this respect should consult the Bibliography of study skills books in the Students' Book (Part D).

Of equal importance is a knowledge of one's students – their study situations, their specialisms, and their perceptions about their study needs, both initially and as they progress. Study skills students are usually adults and will probably have clear views of their own about their priorities, and these obviously need to be taken into account. *Study Tasks in English* tries to create a context for finding out this kind of information and building on it. Thus the greater the interest the teacher has in his/her students' knowledge of and attitudes to study, the more he/she and they will get out of many of the activities in *Study Tasks in English*.

vi) Supplementation

No single book can of itself provide the student with all the knowledge and practice needed in order to prepare adequately for English-medium higher education. There is therefore every likelihood that the teacher will need to supplement some parts of *Study Tasks in English* with additional information and activities. Also, we strongly recommend that students undertake a programme of additional work involving application of the skills learned in *Study Tasks in English*. Only in this way are they likely to give themselves the degree of practice needed. Finally, it should once again be stressed that *Study Tasks in English* is not intended to cater to any significant extent for the language development needs of the learners. Additional material will therefore need to be provided for this purpose, as required.

PART 2 Teacher's Notes

UNIT 1 How do I learn?

The main aim of this unit is to begin to build up the students' awareness of what learning involves, particularly their knowledge of themselves as learners. The unit therefore introduces the learners to some of the basic resources needed for study, the factors that tend to affect success or failure in learning, some basic study management techniques, and an understanding of what they already know about studying and what they still need to learn. In addition, at the end of the unit, the students are encouraged to form a set of personal interim 'study targets'.

1.1 The aim of this task is to familiarise the students with *Study Tasks in English* while introducing skills such as skimming, scanning, and discussion techniques.

1.2 It is helpful for students to keep a record of their assignments and new words in addition to organising their class work and notes for future reference. Exactly how these are organised is up to the teacher and student. What is important is that the records and papers are kept in such a way that they are easily accessible to the student.

2.1–2.5 These tasks are intended to encourage students to consider how they learn best and then how they can use this knowledge in order to develop independent learning strategies.

2.2 It is important to probe and question the students as necessary in order to establish major points about the factors affecting effective learning, e.g., it is not simply a matter of having a good teacher or possessing the necessary capabilities. Students should also be encouraged to discuss and question what is meant by words such as *motivation*, *cleverness* and *success*, or what makes a topic 'interesting', in order to get a deeper and more detailed picture of the factors involved.

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2.3 This activity will be more effective if the students are given paper and coloured markers to make interesting, expressive posters for their 'recipes'. Please note that making posters may well not be a requirement for the study situation the students are preparing for. However, that is not the intention. Rather, it is to provide the students with an activity that will help them to build up a 'rich picture' (i.e., a concrete and memorable image) of their ideas. We recommend that, if possible, the students' posters are put on display in the classroom until they have sunk in.

2.4 Some possible sample answers:

- Know as much as possible about what helps – and what hinders – your learning.
- Know your own strengths and weaknesses as a learner.
- Take positive, concrete action to improve your weaknesses.
- Be aware of all the resources available to you for learning, and use them as effectively as possible.
- Be clear about what you already know and can do.

2.5 Students unfortunately often do not reflect about why they have enrolled in a particular course or what they hope to gain from it beyond 'the government sent me' or 'I need a qualification'. However, it is obviously important that students learn to think about what they will be learning and doing on a course, and how it will meet their own needs, if they are to take responsibility for their learning. This fore-knowledge can prevent a lot of heartache at a later time, and help students come equipped with the right prior knowledge and skills. It also means they arrive confident in knowing what to expect and what they intend to learn – and this knowledge gives them some control over their own learning. It may be worth developing some of these points with your students beyond the actual task. Please also note that before they begin to answer the questions in this task, the students may need to investigate their course in order to find out who it is intended for, what previous knowledge and experience is required, what the course aims and syllabus are, and so on, and time will need to be allowed for this (preferably as homework).

3.1–3.5 Rather than telling students that they should study in a quiet place, get enough sleep and so on (which is not true for all students in any case), the aim of these tasks is to encourage students to look critically at their own study habits in order to see where and how they could be improved if necessary. Discussion is a critical element in this process and should be encouraged with leading questions from the teacher if necessary.

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3.3 The introduction to this activity is not intended to imply that time problems are always the student's fault. For example, it may be that the student is taking too many classes and needs to drop some. Or pressing personal problems beyond the student's control may be a factor. However, research shows that poor time management by students is probably the single biggest cause of difficulty in higher education (see Student's Book page 189). This is not really surprising when you consider that it is probably this element of study – the independent management of one's time – which is more difficult than any other for the student to have experience of beforehand.

3.6

Note If students are currently involved in non-study activities (e.g., work) during most of the week, it will not be possible to do this task in detail. However, it may still be fruitful to have a general discussion of the issues involved.

The type of study plan focused on is only a suggestion, and students may choose to use one they feel suits their needs better. Some students may argue that they cannot keep to a study plan. We sympathise with this position, as neither author writes or follows such a plan, though both do work to some sort of routine. However, we would argue that the process of thinking the week through should be part of the critical examination of study practices which the students undergo. Whether or not students continue to make up and keep to a study plan is essentially a personal matter. However, those students who have difficulty managing time and continually have difficulty completing their work on time might be well advised to establish a study routine and attempt to keep to it.

4.1–5.3 The aim of these tasks is to introduce some of the skills involved in successful study in order to help students assess where they need to focus their study in this course. For students who are not working straight through *Study Tasks in English*, this should help guide them to those parts of the book that are most relevant to their own needs.

4.3 It is important that the students do not feel demoralised by this activity. They should be reminded that they have probably discovered that they already know a lot more than they realised they did. In any case, the main point is *not* that one needs to learn a very large number of techniques, but rather that one should develop the habit of critically assessing what one does and does not know in relation to the task in hand, with a view to taking into account any *major* shortcomings.

Note This activity also provides a good opportunity to introduce the students to the *Study Tasks in English* Study Skills Profile (page 194). This is a list of all the skills covered in *Study Tasks in English*, grouped into general categories (such as 'information-processing skills'), and referenced by Task. The Profile also includes a self-evaluation grid which students can use to assess the relevance of each of the skills to their study situation, their current knowledge of each of the skills and their progress in mastering them as they proceed through the course. The Profile can be photocopied for normal classroom use. We recommend that the students are introduced to the Profile