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# UNIT 1 IMPROVING STUDY SKILLS

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- describe how people learn;
- discriminate among skimming, scanning and intensive reading;
- describe different study strategies; and
- explain the underlying similarities in the varied approaches.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Have you ever asked yourself “How do I learn?” Have you ever tried to think how you remember things best? Do you yourself have to make a conscious effort to learn or do you naturally remember whatever you read and hear? Do you, as a distant learner need to know more about improving study skills than students in a formal college? What are study skills or study strategies? Do they really help to learn better? We shall try and answer some of these questions in the next few pages.

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## 1.2 HOW DO PEOPLE LEARN?

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How do people learn? A famous Sanskrit Shloka states:

“A quarter of our learning comes from our teachers, own intellect and talent provides a quarter. A quarter from the peers and friends, and remaining comes only with time.”

This age old wisdom and the contribution of research on human learning in this century indicates the important role of learning, rather than teaching, on acquisition of knowledge. The emphasis in an open learning system is essentially on learning and learning largely by yourself (Mukhopadhyay: 1996).

Learning is not just memorizing a lot of unrelated information. It means *understanding* concepts and principles, the relationship between ideas and the ability to analyse a situation, to synthesize various bits of information or *evaluate* an event and arrive at a *judgment*. Also learning is not a one shot event. We are continuously learning new things and integrating new knowledge with what we already know by reading, questioning,

listening, thinking and reflecting. However for independent self learners like you, it would not be enough simply to process information. As an efficient learner, you must also learn how to store new information and retrieve it in moments of need (especially when doing assignments or taking an examination). In the next few paragraphs we would concentrate on some of the strategies that facilitate learning and skills that help to “learn-on-your-own”, sometimes also called **study skills**.

**Check Your Progress 1**

State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F):

- 1) We learn everything from our teachers. ( )
- 2) Open learners have more responsibility to learn on their own. ( )
- 3) Learning is nothing but collecting a lot of information. ( )
- 4) We need to integrate new knowledge with what we already know. ( )
- 5) Study skills help learners to learn on their own. ( )

**1.3 READING WITH A PURPOSE**

Before you start reading anything (an article or a book) it is worth while to stop for a moment and ask yourself — Why am I reading this?

You will then notice that one reads for two basic purpose- either for information or for enjoyment.

Can you list some reading materials, which you need for information in column (A) or for enjoyment in column (B)?

Reading material for information A	Reading material for enjoyment B

Did you include text books, references or technical articles for information and story books, and popular magazines for enjoyment?

Now stop for a minute and ask yourself — do I read each and every reading text at the same speed? In the same manner?

Obviously not. You would glance through the headlines of a newspaper or the subheadings of an article to get an overview of what it is all about, stopping to read slowly only what interests you. If you are looking for some particular information, then you would read carefully provided the reading text is related to what you have in mind. You would, however, read differently when you are trying to understand and analyse the author's ideas and words.

These four different styles of reading are:

- a) skimming,
- b) scanning,
- c) intensive reading, and
- d) extensive reading.

- a) **Skimming** is used to gain an *overview or general idea* of what we are reading. When we skim, we do not read each and every word/sentence/paragraph. We gather the main ideas by reading the headings, subheadings, introductory paragraphs, topic sentences and the summary paragraphs.
- b) **Scanning** is used to *locate specific information or facts*. When you look for a word in a dictionary or somebody's telephone number in the directory, you are scanning. When you can, you know the question you are trying to answer. We usually use scanning in locating facts in reference materials — dictionaries, encyclopedias, indexes or tables.

When we read something very carefully *to analyse* the author's ideas and words, to solve a problem or critically review a situation, we **read** the text intensively.

Obviously, we use different strategies depending on why we are reading a particular text.

- c) **Intensive reading** aims to arrive at a detailed and thorough understanding of the text. Material for intensive reading is chosen with a view to developing the student's powers of judgement and discriminative reasoning. Students learn to scan for information, to read with careful attention, and to extract major ideas and arguments.
- d) **Extensive reading** involves reading fluently and in large quantity for pleasure, without any external help. Students are encouraged to read widely on subjects which interest them personally and share what they enjoyed with their fellow students.

**Check Your Progress 2**

Write skimming, scanning or intensive reading with each of the situations given below:

- 1) You want to know the winners of yesterday's Durand Match from the Newspapers.  
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- 2) Your mother is a diabetic patient and you come across an article in a popular magazine— "Hope For Diabetes".  
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- 3) You have to answer a question on laser treatments. You are reading a few reference books before writing the answer.  
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## 1.4 WHAT ARE STUDY SKILLS?

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The process of study involves four operations- perception, comprehension, retention and retrieval. In other words, you should first perceive what is relevant to your needs and select only those areas which are important. You cannot study everything available in every book you can lay your hands on. Once you have decided on areas, which are important, you have to read and understand — or comprehend the material that you have selected — for no learning can take place without comprehension. What is not understood is not learnt. Comprehension is thus imperative in the process of learning. However, mere comprehension is not enough. What one understands now, may also be easily forgotten later. Hence, you, as a student, have to make special efforts to retain what you comprehend. You also have to retrieve all that you learn throughout the year at the time of examination.

In this unit we shall concentrate in detail on the various skills needed for locating and comprehending information. (Skills that can be clubbed together as *Gathering Skills*.) Units 2,3 and 4 give you more information on note making/note-taking so that you can retain/store information for later use. The units on writing summaries concentrate on retrieval skills or presenting ideas/information in a coherent form so that their readers can understand them.

### 1.4.1 Locating Information

How do you go about locating the information you need? You should first of all know the sources available, e.g. books, journals, encyclopaedias etc. Once you have identified the sources, you should make effective use of them.

A major source of information, which we keep consulting often, is the dictionary. We mainly look for meanings of words — but the dictionary also makes available information on pronunciation, grammar, etymology derivations, etc.

You also have to use the library catalogues, which are arranged alphabetically, author-wise and also discipline-wise in the alphabetical order. Once you have located a book, you should be able to use the contents page or the index at the back of the book to decide if it would be useful for you. The index is also in alphabetical order and gives you all the page numbers where a particular subject is mentioned. Having found the topics, you can use skimming and scanning strategies to see if the identified pages are relevant for you.

#### Check Your Progress 3

1) Use a medical dictionary to find out whatever information you can about these words.

a) Disimpaction, Dislocation, Hydro-adipsia, Cardiogenesis.

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b) What possible entries can you find under main entry of **dislocation**?

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2) You have to find out about the following:

a) drugs that causes birth defects in babies

b) Insect stings

Which of the following index entries would be useful for you? Which page number should you go to?

a) Bone 1.92; formation of: ossification 761, structure of the bone 192, bone grafts 193.

b) Birth defects 172, causes of chromosomal abnormalities 275, Genetic disorders 476, Pregnancy drugs in 823.

c) Stress 95.1, associated with hypertension 552, relaxation teachings 867.

d) Stings 947, types of: Insect stings 588, jellyfish stings 607, scorpion stings 893.

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## 1.5 STUDY STRATEGIES FOR BETTER COMPREHENSION: SQ3R

There are many approaches to studying effectively and efficiently — but the most widely used approach is known as **SQ3R** (*Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review*). Let us read in detail about the different steps involved and understand how these steps facilitate comprehension.

**Survey:** This is the phase when you (the learner), look closely at the title, look at different subtitles, read the first and last paragraphs of the text to get an overall idea or gist of the chapter.

**Question:** You should now read through each paragraph, carefully and formulate a few questions the answers of which are what you would like to know.

**Read (R1):** Read through the text to find out the answers to the questions you have framed.

**Recite (R2):** Try to remember the main ideas of what you have read. If only you recite the main ideas and sub-points of different chapters frequently, you would remember things better.

**Review (R3):** Read the questions that you had formulated in step 2 again. Now review the main points and sub-points of different sections to check if you have found the answers to the questions that you had set yourself to answer.

This approach has a two-fold advantage.

- a) You decide by the first two steps why you should read a particular chapter — i.e. you set a purpose for your reading (viz., find the answers to the questions that you would like to know).
- b) Frequent and spaced reciting and reviewing of what you have read in the different sections, has a positive influence on retention.

(In the next few units, we would be talking about note taking — which you would find is a technique for storing information as you cannot remember each and everything by heart. By reviewing at frequent intervals, with the help of your notes what you have read earlier, you will retain better.)

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) What different steps are to be followed in SQ3R approach?  
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 .....
- 2) Write in your own words the purpose of the 3R stages.  
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- 3) Look at the third unit of this block. Using the survey technique, write in two sentences what this unit is about.  
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## 1.6 VARIATIONS OF THE SQ3R APPROACH

There are some variations of the SQ3R approach. In this unit we would look at two of them **PLAN** and **KWL Plus**.

**PLAN** which stand for **Predict, Locate, Add and Note** is a four-step method and a strategy that you can use effectively to study better. Let us look at the steps more closely.

**PREDICT:** By using the title as the main topic, and using subtitles, highlighted words and other clues, make a list of the possible ideas that you would probably read about in the chapter.

**Locate:** Make a tick mark (✓) against the ideas that you are somewhat familiar with and put a question mark (?) against those which are absolutely new concepts/ideas for you. This would enable you to estimate the amount of familiar and unfamiliar concepts that you have to deal with in the next few pages.

**Add:** While you read through the chapter, add words and short phrases to your list to explain items with question marks and clarify items that you have indicated as already familiar. You are thus monitoring your own learning by integrating new information with what you already know.

**Note:** Take notes of what you have learned. You can look at your original list and re-organise your notes either as an outline (as in headings and sub-points) or tables or a visual map. (You will read more about note-taking in the next two units.)

Research studies have found **PLAN** a very effective strategy for studying at all levels. Through repeated use of this approach, you become skilled in monitoring your own reading comprehension, by taking stock of what you already know and identifying and adding what is unfamiliar.

### Check Your Progress 5

How is **PLAN** different from **SQ3R** in its approach? Write in two or three sentences.

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The **KWL Plus** method moves from what one already knows (**K**) to what one wants to know (**W**) and what one has learned (**L**) to the Plus (which requires the construction of a graphic organiser). (You will read more about graphic organizers in Unit 3 of this block.)

Let us go through the different steps in a little bit more detail.

First make three columns in your notebook as shown below:

1) Know	2) Want to know	3) Learned

Now, when you start reading anything new, first spend a few minutes to recollect what you know. List them under the **Know** column.

In the next step, formulate a few questions, the answers of which you would like to know from the reading passage. Write these questions in the **want to know** column. Then while you read the text, keep writing the answers **to want to know** in the **Learned** column.

(You may find it necessary to add new questions and answers as you read and find information that you did not anticipate.)

In the **plus** stage, categorize and arrange all information as a graphic organiser.

(You may also find that the answers to the questions you want to know are not available in the text. You then have to go to some other source.)

The KWL plus approach is different from PLAN in the sense that you, the learner begin by taking stock of what you already know in KWL plus whereas in PLAN you begin by predicting (or **guessing**) what you would probably read in the text. Both strategies are aids to understanding better what you read. Similarly the steps *Want to Know* and *Locate* encourage you, the learner, to make the best use of your previous experience and provokes you to think about what new information, you would like to have. The *Plus* and *Note* steps in the two approaches are aids to memory and help the learner to review what has been learnt.

You will notice that all the three approaches encourage you, the learner, to take charge of your own learning by helping you to look back (think consciously of what you already know) and look ahead (comprehend new information). All strategies help you to integrate old and new information through different techniques.

**Check Your Progress 6**

Use the **KWL Plus** strategy with any unit from the block and write how you found the approach useful.

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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In the unit you have read that:

- Study skills (or study strategies) help you to learn-on-your own. These strategies help you to make the best use of your Reading and Writing skills.
- One learns best by integrating new knowledge with what one already knows.
- Study skills can be subdivided into
  - Gathering Skills
  - Storing Skills
  - Retrieval Skills
- We vary our reading strategies depending on our purpose.
- The most common study strategy is known as SQ3R. Variations of this approach are the PLAN and KWL plus.

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## 1.8 KEY WORDS

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- Predict** : To guess (in advance) what might follow.
- Recite** : First and last paragraph to remember the main ideas of what has been read.
- Retention** : To avoid losing (here to remember).
- Review** : To check if the answers to all questions have been found.

- Scanning** : To read quickly, looking for particular information.
- Skimming** : To read quickly to get the main ideas.
- Study skills** : Strategies that facilitate learning
- Survey** : To get an idea of the chapter by looking at headings/subtitles.
- Variation** : A slightly different form.

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## 1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) F
- 2) T
- 3) F
- 4) T
- 5) T

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Skimming of Headlines/Scanning if interested in more details.
- 2) Scanning for details as to what hopes diabetics might have.
- 3) Intensive reading of reference material.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Open-ended question
- 2) a) Page 823  
b) Page 588

### Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review.
- 2) To read through to find out answers to questions formulated, take stock of main ideas remembered, assess if answers to all questions have been identified.
- 3) To take notes in the form of tables, diagrams and graphic organisers.

### Check Your Progress 5

PLAN encourages intelligent guessing of what is to follow and then assessing if the guesses have been correct by locating necessary information. By adding words and phrases one classifies one's ideas and checks if what one knows is right or wrong. In SQ3R there is no place for guesswork. The Question stage, however, allows the learners to set a reading purpose, which the next three stages help in achieving.

### Check Your Progress 6

Open-ended question