

LANG
SKILLS



Deafinitely English:

Online materials for teachers of English
as a Foreign Language for Deaf, deaf and
hard of hearing students

Unit 6

Developing Study Skills.
Student's Booklet



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The LangSkills project was funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme (KA2).
The contents of this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the
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1.1. INTRODUCTION

What is this booklet about?

This booklet was created to help you **develop your study skills**. The content is adapted to suit the educational needs of Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing (D/d/hh) learners and it uses lots of culturally relevant examples.

This booklet contains:

- **short informative texts that will help you understand the topics;**
- **practical activities for you to practise what was explained;**
- **handouts you will need to do some of the activities.**

Who is this booklet for?

The booklet was designed for D/d/hh university students who plan to study abroad and wish to improve their English before their visit. You can use it to improve your study skills in general.

Your English should be about B1 or B2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), to use these materials.

How can this booklet help you?

In this booklet, you will get to know more about study skills and learning strategies and how to apply them. Study skills are skills that will help you learn more effectively. By developing effective study skills, you may be able to cut down on the number of hours you spend studying, reduce anxiety about tests and deadlines, and increase your self-confidence. So, mastering these skills will not only improve your performance in school, but also your ability to learn in general – that is something you can benefit from your whole life!

Use this booklet to:

- **learn how to better understand questions in assignments and exams in English;**
- **learn some tips that will help you improve your time management skills;**
- **be encouraged to reflect on your study patterns so you can identify areas for improvement;**
- **get tips on handling distractions.**

1.2. UNDERSTANDING ASSIGNMENT & EXAM QUESTIONS



This section helps you to be better able to answer questions in assignments and exams in English. You will learn about the differences among questions and about how assessments work, including what is expected of you in relation to writing your answers. 👁️

Assessment in post-secondary education

It is important for you to know what assessment you can expect at university level.

Some of the typical methods of assessment are:

- **Assignments:**

- These are usually written pieces of work required by your course tutor.
- They can count towards your final mark or grade.
- Lecturers give you assignment titles/questions, usually at the start of the course.
- The same assignment titles/questions may be in the coursebook, if there is one, or in the syllabus.

- **In-class tests:**

- These are the tests that you do in class.
- You usually get the questions at the time of the exam/test.
- Sometimes you get the questions a little before the test.

It is critical to know how to prepare for them.

Assignments

Hint: Make sure:

- **you understand what you have to do, when the deadline is, how many words your assignment needs to be, etc.**
 - talk to the teacher
 - ask your classmates
- **you understand the questions**
 - select the key words and focus on them
 - answer the questions you are asked, not those you would prefer to answer
 - use colour coding
- **you start your research, if you need to do any, in time**
- **you always make an outline**
- **you proofread the text**
- **you respect the deadline**
 - If you can't meet the deadline, ask for an extension before the deadline.

Exams and in-class tests


Hint: Make sure:

- **you understand what you have to do (how many questions there will be on the test, what is going to be tested, when the test will be, can it be taken more than once, etc.)**
 - talk to the teacher
 - ask your classmates
- **you understand the questions**
 - select the key words and focus on them
 - answer the questions you are asked, not those you would prefer to answer
 - use colour coding
- **you manage your time**
 - wear a watch – phones might not be allowed
 - skim the test first
 - start with the easy questions you can answer quickly.

Analysing exam questions

You can do better in answering exam questions by focussing on:

- the verb used in the question
- the concepts used in the question.

Colour coding can be very helpful, as it helps you focus on the key words and concepts. You can choose one colour to mark the **key verbs** and a different colour to mark the **key concepts**. 

List of the most common verbs used in essay questions.

Verbs	Meaning
state, define, list , name, write, recall, recognise, label, reproduce, recount, describe	Show you KNOW
Example: List the main cause of deafblindness .	
Hint: Write the main ideas briefly, without any lengthy discussion or too specific details.	

Verbs	Meaning
identify, justify , select, indicate, illustrate, represent, reformulate, explain, contrast, classify	Show you UNDERSTAND
Example: Justify the use of cloning to save endangered animals .	
Hint: Give reasons and supporting evidence for your point.	

Verbs**Meaning**

predict, **demonstrate**, instruct, use, perform, solve

Show you **CAN DO**

Example: **Demonstrate** an example of how to **cite information** taken from a **book** in an essay.

Hint: Show how you cite information. Focus only on citing books as stated in the instructions.

Verbs**Meaning**

analyse, identify, differentiate, separate, **compare**, contrast, distinguish between

Show you can **ANALYSE** (take apart)

Example: **Compare** the **deaf and hearing culture** focusing on **space and proximity**.

Hint: Show that you can look for similarities, and possibly also differences.

Verbs**Meaning**

Combine, **summarise**, argue, discuss, design, organise, relate, generalise, conclude, debate, formulate, propose

Show you can **SYNTHESISE** (build up)

Example: Consider the **factors** impacting upon the **interpreting profession**, with particular reference to **ethics, minority rights and access**. **Summarise** your research results.

Hint: Think about all the things that have an impact on the interpreting job. Focus on ethics, on minority rights, and on access. Think about them and write about them.

Verbs	Meaning
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Judge, evaluate, determine, support, **defend, criticise**, select, appraise

Show you can **DECIDE** and make judgements

Example: There are schools where the students receive regular **written and oral evaluations** of their work instead of grades. Some people believe that this is more effective for learning than the grading system. How do you feel about this issue? Use specific reasons and examples to either **defend** or **criticise** this system.

Hint: Show that you can take a point. If you decide to support this point, provide evidence to support your opinion. If you disagree with this idea, point out why this is not such a good idea in your opinion.



Activity 1

Look at the following essay instructions:

A.

More and more people are deciding to stop eating meat and become vegetarians. Do you agree with this idea? Argue for or against becoming a vegetarian. Support your positions with examples.

B.

Describe, in detail, why it is important to develop sign language dictionaries. Use the article reviewed in class as a reference.

Explain what do they want you to do.

1.3. TIPS ON BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS



Being a good time manager is a very important life skill. With so many things to do over the semester, you may easily feel overwhelmed and confused, so it is important to know how to plan and to prioritise your tasks. This section gives you a lot of useful, practical tips you can start using right away. 👁

Good planning is essential. It is a good idea to prepare a **semester plan**, to plan over a longer-term perspective. **Weekly plans** will help you manage more immediate tasks.

1.3.1. Effective planning 1: Prepare your semester plan

It is a good idea to prepare your semester plan at the beginning of each semester. A semester plan clearly shows your due dates all in one place so it is easier to have control over them. It should include all the important due dates, exams, field trips and other relevant activities. 👁

Make sure you include the following:

- **The schedule of your classes**
- **All assignments with their due dates**
- **Any other important school activities**

Here are a few tips that can help you plan for the semester more easily:

You can create your own calendar or try googling for 'semester planner' templates. No matter what format you choose, remember that **a single-page format** is the most effective. It allows you to visualize the big picture of what needs to be completed by the end of the semester.

Highlight the 'big' dates you really must not miss, or you need to do your best on.

Update the plan as soon as anything changes, a field trip gets cancelled, a due date is postponed, and so on, to keep track of the latest changes.

Display your Semester Plan somewhere where you can look at it frequently.

Tick off the assignments you have already completed.

Start in advance. During your 'busy weeks', when you have multiple assignments or exams due, you need to start preparing yourself in advance to make sure you can handle everything on time and have enough time for revising.




Activity 2

Prepare your own semester plan.

Use a blank sheet of paper to start your plan, or use a freely-available online planner (Google for it). Put in all the important things you need to get done by the end of the semester. Highlight the most important ones.

Does it seem helpful for you to have such a plan?

1.3.2. Effective planning 2: Prepare your weekly plan

Now you have your semester plan and you can see the bigger picture of your duties. That is great, but you will also need a more immediate plan to help you tackle the tasks. 

Each Sunday take a sheet of paper (or Google a weekly planner) and write down things you need to get done each day of the upcoming week.

Include the following:

- **Write down each class you have for each day of the week.**
- **Write down all the assignments, events, projects that need to be completed or are occurring that week.**
- **Check your semester plan and the notes from the previous classes to see if you need to include anything else.**
- **Add to your weekly plan any out-of-school activities you'll be taking part in during that week.**

Again, the tips that were given for the semester planning are relevant for your weekly planning, too:

| **A single-page format** is the most effective because you can see everything in one place.

| **Highlight** the most important items.

| Be ready to **update** the plan as the week progresses and new items appear or get cancelled.

| Keep the weekly plan **visible**.

| **Tick off** the assignments you have already completed.

If there are some fairly busy days, consider if you can **reschedule** some of the activities.



Activity 3

Prepare the weekly plan for the upcoming week.

Create your own plan or use a freely-available planner. Put in all the important things you need to do. Highlight the most important ones.

Do you find this strategy helpful? Why, or why not?

Hint: Make sure you leave enough time for relaxing and out-of-school activities. You can't work all the time.

1.3.3. Effective planning 3: Other useful time management strategies

Once you have finished your semester calendar and your weekly schedule, there are several other strategies that will help you accomplish more and make effective use of your time. 👁

These include:

- **Prioritising tasks**
- **Breaking down big tasks**

1.3.3.1. Prioritising tasks

You might sometimes get the feeling that there just isn't enough time in the day to do everything. To reduce these feelings, focus on what you need to do first and consider whether there is anything you can leave out. When you have a lot of work, it is important to prioritise. 👁

Step 1. Write a list of things you need to do

It is always a good idea to write things down, because it is hard to focus on them when they are just swimming around your head. You need to pin them down. Lists or bullet points are very useful for this purpose, because they tell you in a structured way what the tasks are.

Imagine that this is your to-do list for today:

1. **Sign up for a date and time of my presentation on Deaf culture**
2. **Finish the essay that is due in two days**
3. **Shop for birthday cake ingredients**
4. **Borrow the book on conference interpreting I want to use for my essay**
5. **Hard of hearing club meeting**
6. **Buy a new set of highlighters**

You also need to go to your Academic Writing (9:00-10:30) and Spanish classes (11:00-12:30) in the morning, so you know you can start working at 13:30 when you get back from university, after you've had your lunch. You really need to use the remaining time wisely and effectively.

Step 2. Put the tasks in priority order

Make a plan to tackle your tasks in the time you have available.

There are different methods of prioritising commitments. One is the following chart (called the Eisenhower Matrix) that sorts the tasks and projects into four categories:

- **Urgent and important:** You need to do these tasks as soon as possible
- **Important, but not urgent:** Think of when you will do these and put it in your semester calendar.
- **Urgent, but not important:** Delegate these tasks to someone else.
- **Neither urgent nor important:** Drop these from your schedule.

First, you need to write down all the tasks and to-dos that you need to do (see Step 1). Then, using the chart, you sort these tasks into four categories.

To give you an example, your list of to-dos might look like this:

Urgent & important	Important but not urgent
Sign up for a date and time of my presentation on Deaf culture Finish essay (due in two days).	Borrow the book on sign language conference interpreting I want to use for my essay (due in two months) Hard of hearing club meeting today at 18:00.
Not important but urgent	Not important and not urgent
Shop for birthday cake ingredients	Buying a new set of highlighters

Step 3. Follow the order

OK, the chart is ready. Now the important thing is to stick to your prioritised list. Try to avoid distractions and get the urgent and important issues done as soon as you can.

Start with the most urgent tasks and projects that are listed in the 'urgent and important' box.

Make sure you don't forget about the 'important but not urgent' activities, but consider postponing or rescheduling them.

Things that are 'not important but urgent' can sometimes be delivered by someone else. Perhaps a friend or your brother can give a hand?

To-dos that are neither important nor urgent can wait till you have spare time on your hands. Take note, but don't worry about them now.

In the example used above, the strategy would be as follows. Your priority would be to:

- 1. Sign up for your presentation date before the slots get taken.**
- 2. Finish the essay or at least the bigger part of it right after you sign up for the presentation date. Complete or edit it tomorrow.**
- 3. Ask your sister to buy the ingredients, as she goes shopping for food.**
- 4. Then think about rescheduling or rearranging plans:**
 - Skip going to the meeting this week to save time and ask a friend for an update.
 - You know the essay is due in two months, so it is ok to borrow the book next week.
 - Buy the highlighters next week when you are less busy.



Activity 4

Create your own to-do chart.

- Think of the activities that you need to tackle today or in the next two days. Include all your classes, job commitments, etc.
- Then draw an Eisenhower chart. Sort all the activities and duties into the chart.

Do you find this method helpful? Why, or why not?

What other strategies do you use?

1.3.3.2. Breaking down big tasks

A good way to deal with a complex study task is to break it up into small sections. Assignments are less overwhelming if you only need to deal with smaller pieces at a time. It is nice to see individual tasks being ticked off, which gives you the motivation to continue your work. 👁

How do you break down complex schoolwork into small tasks?

Start brainstorming. Think of the different steps you will need to take. For example, if you need to write a 500-word essay about 'Analysing the Deaf culture in the Czech Republic', you can break it into these subprojects:



Now, these subprojects may still seem too big. So you can keep breaking them down. For example:

Write a chapter on Czech Sign Language:

- a. **Look for sources (library, Internet);**
- b. **Mention briefly the number of users, the year of emergence, and the most pertinent laws;**
- c. **Explain the basic differences from the Czech language;**
- d. **Mention some of the institutions that are involved in researching, protecting and spreading Czech Sign Language;**
- e. **Compile the notes into one solid paragraph of about 150 words.**

Deadline: 20 March

You don't have to do all these subtasks in one sitting. You can split them up even more:

Write a chapter on Czech Sign Language:

- a. Look for sources (library, Internet) – ongoing.
- b. Mention briefly the number of users, the year of emergence and the most pertinent laws – by Wednesday 5 March.
- c. Explain the basic differences from the Czech language – by Monday 10 March.
- d. Mention some institutions involved in researching, protecting and spreading Czech Sign Language – by Friday 14 March.
- e. Compile the notes into one solid paragraph of about 150 words. – when b, c, and d are done, by March 19.
- f. Revise – when a, b, c, d, e done, by 20 March.

To apply this strategy, you can try the following:

- Write down all the **action steps** you can think you will need to take.

Hint: If you can't think of all the steps in advance, just write out the next two or three steps. After doing them, you will be able to foresee the next steps.

- Set a **timeline** for completing your tasks.
- Think about the **logical order** of doing the individual tasks. What should you do first, second, next, etc.?
- Complete your project early enough to have some time left for a **final review**.




Activity 5

Take a piece of paper. Think of one project you need to do. Try to break it into smaller sessions.


Do you find this method useful? Why, or why not?

1.4. MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STUDY SESSION



In this section, you will find some tips on organising your study sessions effectively. From organizing your study space, to reflecting on your study habits and handling distractions, to getting enough sleep, these tips can help you sail through the busy exam period more smoothly. 

1.4.1. Reflecting on your study patterns

Do you ever spend time reflecting on your study habits? This is very useful to do from time to time: 

- **It helps you realise what usually works for you.**
- **It tells you if there is anything you need to change about your study habits.**
- **It indicates which study places are the best for you.**

Ask yourself the following questions:

- **What time of day are you most productive? In the morning, afternoon or night?**

Hint: If you can, always try to study during your productive hours. Use the less productive hours for rest, food or doing smaller, mechanical things you don't need to focus much on.

- **What kinds of distractions disrupt your concentration most?**

Hint: Make sure you know what the major distractors are for you and then, try to avoid them (see the next section for some tips).

- **How often do you need to take breaks?**

Hint: Naturally, it is impossible to concentrate fully for five hours in a row. We need to take breaks. Try setting time-framed study sessions, and then take a break. How long should the break be? You need to figure out on your own what works best for you. Start with 30 minutes and see if that was too long or too short for you to stay focused on the task.

- **Do you work well under pressure?**

Hint: If not, then you should never leave revising for an important exam until the night before it.

- **How often do you review your school work? Do you revise weekly, before the next class, or do you leave everything until the exams?**

Hint: Are you happy with your revision system? Do you need to do anything to improve it?

- **Do you learn well in a group?**

Hint: If so, finding a friend who can study with you could work well for you.



Activity 6

Answer the questions above in writing to describe your study behaviour.

Think about the following questions:

- **Do you think your study habits bring you good results at school?**
- **Would you like to change your study habits somehow? How can you do that?**

1.4.2. Handling distractions

You know the situation: You need to be working on your thesis, but there are so many things to deal with. You are browsing the web for sources, but at the same time you find so many interesting things you want to watch and read that are unrelated to the thesis writing. Checking your social media seems very attractive and necessary. Then you start thinking about the upcoming holidays and plan the things you can do. It is your sister's birthday and you want to get her a present, so you start shopping online...



Distractions are everywhere, unfortunately, and saying 'try to avoid distractions' is not really helpful.

Internal study distractions include thoughts and emotions that are making you lose focus on your studies. For instance, you might be imagining that wishing you were out with your friends and family, enjoying yourself instead of revising for a test. Or you might be so worried and anxious about the test that you can't focus and actually study.

External study distractions include technology, social media, your study environment, and other people. Some of your external distractors might be friends who are asking you out, YouTube videos you are eager to watch, or a chair that is too hard to sit on.

So, what can you do about distractions?

- **Put your phone out of reach and set it on do not disturb mode.**
- **Set yourself a clear objective that you want to achieve in each study session.**
- **Work in manageable blocks of time (see the section on 'Breaking down the big tasks').**
- **Allow yourself frequent breaks.**
- **Start well in advance so you don't become stressed and pressured for time if you hate working under pressure.**
- **Schedule time to check your email and social media.**



Activity 7

Take a piece of paper. Write down the things that usually distract you the most when you need to do schoolwork. Be honest with yourself.

Now think what you can do to eliminate these distractions. Take note of that, too.

Hint: Next time you need to do some important schoolwork and you notice that you are again letting yourself get distracted, have a look at your answers.

1.4.3. Finding a suitable study space

You have probably noticed that you do better in some environments and worse in others. This is because different people learn better in different places. Some love studying in a library surrounded by other people who concentrate and enjoy the atmosphere, while others may dislike it because they can't use their favourite chair. Finding a comfortable study space that works for you and allows you to concentrate on your studies is key. Once you've found such a place, do stick with it whenever possible. 👁

Regardless of the place you feel most comfortable studying in, make sure the area is well-lit.

Maybe you have already found your ideal study spot. If not, try answering these questions:

- **Do you prefer to study in public places or at home?**
 - Do you like some buzz around you, or do you prefer a calm, quiet environment?
- **What room is best for homework and studying?**
- **What position is the best?**
 - Do you always sit behind your desk, or do you feel that walking helps you?

- **What things you like to keep in easy reach?**

→ Do you need a mug of tea at your desk? A set of highlighters? Spare sheets of paper? Anything else?




Activity 8

What is your favourite study place?

Answer the questions above to find out.

1.4.4. Finding balance

Let's be real. You can't be studying, note-taking, or revising all the time. You need to find the right balance between school and social life. Eating right, getting sleep, getting exercise and having a social life are very important, too. 

If you are struggling, approach your loved ones and also be sure to ask for help from the relevant person at your school.



Activity 9

Take a piece of paper.

1. **What do you do when you feel overwhelmed with school work? What helps you to relax? List what helps you most.**
2. **With whom do you discuss these feelings?**

One last important piece of advice for you is to stay open and flexible, because despite making every effort, one can't plan for everything. You will need to stay flexible and adapt your plans to the changing situation. Just make sure you get back to your responsibilities as soon as you can.

Good luck!