

1 Introduction

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. To understand the significance and implications of studying nursing within a higher education setting.
2. To be aware of the etiquette of studentship.
3. To be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of fear and confidence in study.
4. To appreciate that studying nursing is a dynamic process.
5. To know how to use this textbook to meet the needs of the individual.
6. To understand the responsibilities that students and lecturers have towards each other.

Introduction

Throughout this book we will emphasise the practical nature of studying, which at one level may suggest that we have dismissed the importance of theory. However, this is not the case. We argue that studying comprises a set of skills that can be learnt, practised and brought together as one overall procedure, and that this approach will enhance your chances of success. In this introductory chapter we will outline the method of using this book to advance your study skills and highlight the significance of studying nursing in higher education. Being a student requires a mental attitude and a set of behaviours which are necessary if the process of studying is to be both enjoyable and successful. However, being a student often conflicts with vocational training and we will discuss some approaches to managing these difficulties. Fear and confidence will be examined in relation to these strengths and weaknesses for the student and the etiquette of being both a student and a lecturer will be outlined.

How to Use this Book

You will get the most from this book if you work your way through it from start to finish. However, we have constructed it so that you can dip into specific chapters as you

2 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

require them and to this extent they can be read independently. The book is logically constructed to reflect how you should approach the overall endeavour of studying in a modern learning environment. That is, one needs to address the practical issues of managing the home environment and the adjustments that family and friends will need to make in order to free up your time for study. The technology available to us, to assist us in studying, needs to be learnt and the voluminous amount of literature must be managed. Studying, writing, referencing and passing exams and assignments should be undertaken and the gain in knowledge needs to inform practice developments. Finally, we need to develop our ability to reflect on what we have learnt and contribute to the overall development of the profession. This cycle of learning is a continuous process and once we learn to undertake it effectively it will become a pleasurable endeavour and a rewarding experience.

We have structured the chapters so that they have a balance of text and illustrations to aid learning, and these include an opening box to include a set of 'learning outcomes' to highlight what you should have learnt by the end of the chapter. At the end of each chapter there is a box which asks you to answer some basic questions that you ought to have learnt throughout the chapter, and we provide page numbers so that you can refer to where the answer is in the chapter if needed, and a 'practical session', which sets you a few short exercises to reinforce the learning outcomes of the chapter. We have also employed two symbols throughout the chapters, one based on 'signposts' to guide you on your journey and one entitled 'learning aid' to emphasise the main points.

Chapter 2 is concerned with time management and deals with the difficult issues of learning to study in itself, and learning to study nursing as a profession. We also discuss balancing studying, working and leisure time in relation to the many and varied responsibilities that we have for other people in our lives. We have included a semester study plan that it can be adapted for your own use. In Chapter 3 we outline the difficulties of managing the new information technology that is involved in modern-day studying. As information and knowledge grow, there is an ever-increasing number of sources to be searched and we now have available to us numerous software packages to help us with this. Chapter 4 specifically addresses the difficulties of managing the voluminous amount of literature that has been produced over time and the growing amount that is produced on a weekly basis. We highlight many practical suggestions as to how we can access, manage and critique this growing literature. In Chapter 5 we work through the process and structure of writing assignments, which is commonly a difficult area for students, particularly if they are new to adult study or are returning to study following a long absence. We have included a plan and checklist for writing assignments. Referencing is dealt with in Chapter 6 and this is often incorrectly considered to be either unimportant for students or a question of pedantry. We show how to reference, as well as how to manage references within the construction of written text. We have included the various referencing systems, including the APA system, which is now commonly used throughout higher education. Chapter 7 is concerned with the

process of passing exams and covers this topic from the perspective of anxieties, overcoming them and sitting down to do the exam. We are mindful of the variety of theoretical assessments that students are faced with and we have therefore included OSCEs (Objective Structure Clinical Exams) and problem-based learning. In Chapter 8 we stress the importance of relating theory to practice and show how they can be viewed as separate entities or considered as one conjoint activity. Chapter 9 is a new chapter for this second edition. Its inclusion reflects the growth in students with special needs and considers how their needs can be addressed within the higher education system. Chapter 10, is concerned with the theories of reflection and its importance in modern-day nursing as a process for developing practice. We also mention how we learn from reflection and how we can improve our writing by employing it in our assignments. Finally, in Chapter 11 we deal with the issue of personal professional development and enhancing the standing of the profession of nursing itself.

Why Study Nursing?

Nurses qualifying today do so in the knowledge that they have been successful in a course of study that has met the rigorous academic requirements of higher education. The academic ascent of nurses into colleges of higher education and universities has been a steep learning curve that previous generations of nurses would find hard to imagine. Fundamental to the growing professionalisation of nursing is a will to engage in the academic heart of evidence-based practice. For those of us who are responsible for the delivery of nurse education we must recognise the demands of higher education that nurses face, at whatever level they may be studying. These demands raise a number of issues for both students and lecturers, and we must all begin to address these issues in the quest for improved quality of nurse education.

The reasons for the increased professionalisation of nursing are reflected in the expectations of a changing society as a whole. Nurses, like many others in society, work to develop and enhance their professional knowledge base whilst simultaneously increasing their professional opportunities, status and integrity. This increase in professionalisation is also reflected in the standards laid down by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), which stipulates that all nurses must meet the CPD (continuous professional development) and PREP (post-registration education and practice) requirements. Nurses are also cognisant of the range of pressures from other groups of people. First, there are fellow professionals in medicine and the allied professions who rely on nurses to have an extended knowledge of their particular work. Second, there is also an expectation that nursing often interfaces with, and often overlaps, the work of the other professionals engaged in healthcare delivery. This belief shows the unique position of the nurse as being at the epicentre of the caring professions. Third, the growth of medical technology and medical knowledge places a profound responsibility

4 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

on nurses to continually increase and build upon their own 'reservoir' of knowledge. This is essential if nurses are to continue to be critical members of the clinical team.

Fourth, successive governments since the beginning of the NHS (National Health Service) in 1948 have made an impact on some aspect of the health service, which is still considered to be one of the most highly prized structures of British life. Nurses have been forced to respond to the changing aspirations and beliefs of various governments in relation to healthcare delivery, and many of these changes have affected nurses in very significant ways. For example, consultant nurses, who have high degrees of expertise and responsibility, and are expected to be engaged in both clinical practice and research, have been introduced. Fifth, nurses do not work in a static community where illness and health remain constant. On the contrary, nurses are responding to a changing society with new social diseases such as HIV, and also a rise in some 'old' diseases as in the case of tuberculosis. For nurses to carry out their work effectively, they must have an in-depth knowledge of the causes, effects and treatment of both established and new medical conditions. Finally, and of equal importance, are the changing expectations of the population in general, and in particular when a member of the public becomes a patient. The growth of lay health knowledge amongst the general public, from the literature, the media and the Internet, has given rise to a more informed, discerning and critical society. The implications for nurses are clear and include the need to deliver a high standard of care that is both evidence-based and patient-focused.

Nursing is one of the more recent disciplines to enter higher education, but the rules and regulations, standards and quality, and principles and values of academic life are the same for all courses and for all students. No matter what subject is taught in higher education, the quality of the teaching, as well as the quality of the learning, should be the same. Put another way, a first-class honours in one subject should equate with a first-class honours in another. Thus, the quality of the student is paramount. As some students who wish to study nursing, either those new to nursing or nurses returning to study, may not have had the opportunities to learn how to study in modern higher educational settings, this book will help to address this.

The development of the nursing educational ethos has also included a shift in understanding the relationship between nursing and 'science'. The notion of 'science' involves ideas about logical assumptions, cause and effect, and the production of evidence. In modern-day nursing we are increasingly under pressure to base our practice on evidence rather than tradition, and to be able to explicate rational nursing action rather than engage in ritualistic behaviour. The term evidence-based practice may well be viewed, and abused, as a convenient buzzword by some, but its import cannot be stressed enough in contemporary healthcare settings. It is important for a number of reasons: first, that the delivery of modern healthcare is a rational process, which balances patient needs with available resources, and there is no room for wasteful practices, including nursing care. Second, as professionals, nurses are accountable for their

actions and the public expects them to be highly trained and highly skilled. Furthermore, it is expected that nurses maintain their professional knowledge and expertise through updating and lifelong learning. Third, nursing knowledge needs to be grounded in evidence as our contemporary society is becoming increasingly litigious, and nurses are being made more responsible for the delivery of care. We hope that this book makes the study of nursing a more pleasant endeavour and a more effective enterprise.

Different Students, Different Needs

We begin with the assumption that whatever your reasons for wishing to study nursing, every student of learning who reads any part of this book will be working towards the same objective: a successful outcome. In our experience, we know that the journey to such success can either be chaotic, tortuous and more a question of luck than judgement, or it can be planned, anticipated and enjoyable. This text is about how to achieve the latter. We aim to embrace all students who are studying nursing and we are appreciative of the wide diversity of people embarking on nursing studies, either as new students of nursing, those qualified nurses who are returning to practice after a break in service and those qualified nurses who are now undertaking further qualifications.

This text will be used differently by students, depending upon the experience they have and the course they are attending. For example, it may be that the 'aids to learning' will be more beneficial to those students with the least experience of modern-day study. We envisage that for the most experienced students this book will provide an up-to-date and accessible reference source for study skills and provide practical ideas and innovations to overcome the many problems of studying in contemporary times.

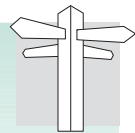
The different levels of expertise, and the experience that students bring, is matched by the many contrasting lifestyles that they have. Indeed, a typical cohort of diploma/degree students is made up of school leavers, graduates, people who have already qualified in one particular occupation such as teaching, those who have been prevented from nurse training because of family commitments, and those students who have worked as nursing assistants and now wish to pursue a nursing qualification. This usually makes the student group rich and lively. There are other differences, for example, gender (unfortunately nursing is still a female dominated profession with fewer than five male students in most cohorts of 100) and culture (regrettably nursing is still underrepresented in ethnic minorities). As authors we recognise the demanding lifestyles led by many people who study nursing. As nursing is predominantly a female profession these may include the responsibilities that many women have as the principal carer within their household, and, where possible, throughout this book we offer practical help for those with wide commitments.

6 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

We recognise that not only does each identified group of people present particular study challenges, but within groups every individual person comes forward with their own needs, strengths and limitations. Furthermore, it is important that students take time to understand themselves and to recognise the particular help that they may need. There is no shame in not knowing something but there is shame in not wanting to learn. For example, in our experience the lack of confidence amongst nurses who are returning to practice is a common theme that runs through most courses, and this is often a major hurdle that must be overcome in order for them to succeed with their assignments, preparing for exams and general course of study.

We are also aware, as are the majority of universities and colleges, that there are a few students who experience specific difficulties in learning. For example, there are people who have dyslexia and require additional or special help from personal and academic tutors. In addition to this we encourage those students to seek advice from the student support service of their own institution. Students often think that because they have a learning need they should keep quiet about it – nothing could be further from the truth! We remind all students studying nursing that those involved in teaching and delivering nursing courses are committed to working with students to ensure that they achieve their full potential (see Chapter 9).

Learning Aid

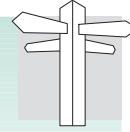


Identify your learning needs and make a plan to address them as soon as you can.
You will gain most from your course if you satisfy your own requirements.

We emphasise that those students who are experiencing any difficulties should see their tutors as soon as possible. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away (see Chapter 9).

As nursing lecturers ourselves we have heard many stories (and indeed we have some of our own stories!) of how some students have achieved their goals, with assignments being handed in with a minute to spare, and some students claiming to have handed assignments in when they haven't! In this text we work with students to give them a smooth and successful passage, at whatever level of study they are at, with the aim of trying to make studying a more enjoyable enterprise. However, we have to address the main fear that all students face, which is failing an assignment or exam. Of course this does happen, and students too usually have a story to tell regarding this, but in this text we will offer numerous strategies that, if undertaken, will make failing less likely.

Early Problems?



Be proactive about any difficulties.
Do not ignore the problem.
Get help.

Nursing Students are Integral to the University Population

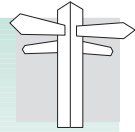
Today's nursing student is one student amongst many other student groups in higher education. Nursing courses in these settings must satisfy the requirements of both the Nursing Midwifery Council and the relevant institute of higher education or university, which have their own set of standards. Not only are student nurses required to meet the national standards, but they are comparable with colleagues in the other disciplines of, say, English, Mathematics, Biology, and so on, and must meet these standards also. Furthermore, the academic standard of a single university or college should be comparable to that of all other academic institutes and reach the required level that is acceptable nationally. What does this mean for students of nursing studies? In Chapter 7 we discuss the criteria that are required for each level of achievement, and we outline what is required from students in order to achieve this. One of the tasks assigned to lecturers in any field of study is to convey to the student the ethos of studying their topic in a higher educational setting, and many students of nursing are surprised at the change in dynamic and the expectations that are placed upon them. The most obvious example of the academic work required from today's students lies in the submission of assignments, which now must be research-led and supported by relevant literature. This is often new to nursing students. Therefore, the use of evidence, and the ability to employ references is a fundamental study skill, which is now crucial for all students in higher education, including students of nursing studies.

The changing dynamic of nurse education often surprises many student nurses, not only those returning to practice, who may not be used to research-led practice, but often new students, who may have the belief that nursing is about being at the patient's bedside and assume that there is little more to it than that. The task of nurse educators is to endorse the view that nursing is about wishing to care for people who are sick but it is also about being a highly skilled and accountable professional. To become such a professional requires rigorous assessments and an ability to communicate to other professionals in an articulate and competent manner. Today, professionalism is at the heart of good nursing, where research-led practice and clear verbal and written communication skills are essential. The changing dynamic of nurse education involves a balance

8 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

between nursing professionalism and academic rigour. This is not an easy task but must be achieved if nurses are to be successful in higher educational settings.

Feel that Nursing is Changing?



- Increased professionalisation.
- Higher expectations of society.
- Increased accountability.

Students new to nursing studies are becoming increasingly involved in different innovations of learning and assessment of students' work. As nurse educators we continually strive to develop teaching and assessing methods that can be built upon the more formal and traditional styles that students are used to. It is important that we deliver a programme that allows students not only to learn 'facts' but to express themselves and learn in a creative and proactive manner. Students will usually come across three styles of teaching and assessing, which they may not be familiar with. First is group work as a style of teaching. Students may be taught in teaching slots of one, two or three hours. A three-hour slot of formal teaching can be arduous for all concerned and is likely to be broken up into smaller sections. Group work usually follows a standard lecture, and for the final hour of the session the class may be asked to break into groups to discuss a particular subject arising from the lecture. For example, the lecture may be on discrimination and stigmatisation and the group work may be looking at the ways in which nurses can work towards reducing discrimination in the healthcare profession. Students need to develop good communication skills in working together to produce a short presentation at the end of the session to their colleagues. New students frequently find these tasks daunting, but in our experience confidence grows very quickly with practice. Second, students may be required to give a presentation as part of a seminar. This may be an individual effort or as part of a group, and the seminar may be part of the module assessment. Speaking in front of people can be a very daunting task for many people, particularly when they are unused to the experience. As mentioned above, the more it is undertaken the easier it becomes, and confidence will increase. Third, 'problem-based learning' (PBL) has found its way into the nursing curriculum because it is a tool that helps nurses prepare for their clinical practice. PBL has been explained as:

An instructional method in which students work in small groups to gain knowledge and acquire problem-solving skills. A major characteristic of PBL is that the problem is presented to the student *before* the material has been learned rather than after, as in the more traditional 'problem-solving approach'. A second notable feature is the context in which students are likely to encounter the given (or similar) problem in real life. (Wilkie, 2000: 11)

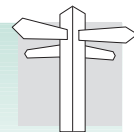
Students may feel a little anxious about, and even hostile towards, 'new' teaching methods and different methods of assessment and we suggest that they take time to discuss their concerns with fellow students and staff. Usually, different methods of teaching come as a welcome change because they allow students to learn in a more creative way. Finally, there are practical exams known as OSCEs (Objective Structural Clinical Exams) and these are becoming increasingly popular in testing students' ability to perform clinical procedures such as reading a blood pressure and taking a blood sample. All of these methods of assessment support, and in some instances replace, conventional means of assessment. However, it is the assignment and the examination that continue to be the foundation of theoretical assessments for nursing programmes. (Problem-based learning and other theoretical assessments are discussed in Chapter 5.)

Being a Student

The common perception of the lifestyle of a student varies considerably. This can range from a student who is perceived to be constantly partying to the studious bookworm burning the midnight oil. Despite this difference of opinion there is one thing that is generally agreed upon and that is at whatever age we start our student days the experience offers a specialness that cannot be captured at any other time of our lives. This belief is rooted in the expectations of student life, where entering a new culture offers the prospect of meeting new friends, facing new challenges, and experiencing new learning opportunities, which will result in a rewarding qualification and a satisfying career. Again, there is a balance to be drawn between study, rest and play, with each one offering the potential for academic growth and development. You should not leave your student days feeling unfulfilled. Maximise your potential in all areas of life.

Want a Student's Life?

Balance between work, rest and play.
You will get out of it what you put in.



Students who embark upon a vocational course, such as medicine, physiotherapy or nursing studies, have a unique experience of carrying the burden of having two 'masters', the college or university of study and the governing body of their chosen profession (see Illustration 1:1).

The additional rules and regulations implemented by professional bodies often cause students to feel stifled, and restrict them from the academic freedom that their non-vocational fellow students appear to have. Nursing students quickly realise that the pressures of the programme to fulfil the stipulated number of hours mean that

10 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

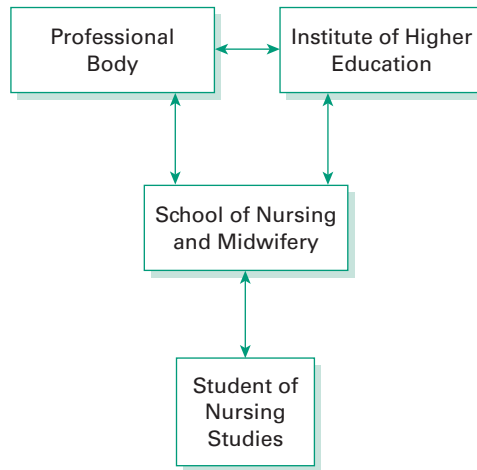
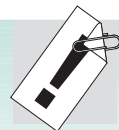


Illustration 1:1 The College Framework in Relation to the Nursing Student

theoretical days in college are packed with lectures, with little time for additional scholarly endeavour or college activities. This disadvantage is further exacerbated by students being away from college for clinical placements, and who may then find it difficult to join college sports teams and social events. Nurses studying in higher education may feel excluded from the main student body. For example, nursing students do not always follow the college academic year and they can be in class when other students are away. To their dismay they frequently find campus banks, libraries, bookshops and cafés closed, and understandably feel undervalued by this. Some nursing courses extend into the evening when the campus is empty, dark and uninviting. Incorrectly, other student groups may feel that nursing is merely a practical enterprise and does not carry academic weight. These issues must be faced if nurses are to feel integrated and valued in college life, and part of this involves engaging with being a student in a mature fashion.

Learning Aid



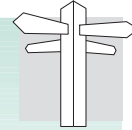
What do you understand by the term student? What do you expect to get out of being a student?

What will you put into it?

The above paragraphs paint a rather arduous picture for nursing students, but there are ways of overcoming these challenges and the sections throughout the book deal with

this. Ultimately, we accept that studying nursing does have difficulties in a higher educational setting, but once these are addressed the rewards of studying nursing are rich, both intellectually and clinically.

A Student of Nursing in Higher Education?



Having to satisfy two masters.
Working around lifestyles.
Intellectually and clinically demanding.

Finally, being a student means, of course, that you have to study. At the outset of your course your knowledge of your subject will be scant, with perhaps only limited knowledge of nursing gained from anecdotes, television, and so on. We would suggest that you consider your mind to be like an empty 'reservoir' at the start of your course and that this 'reservoir' requires to be filled with knowledge. Throughout your course you will learn from being taught in the classroom or lecture theatre and in the clinical areas. However, you will also learn by reading in your own time and it is this reading that contributes significantly to filling the 'reservoir'. Take every spare moment that you can and read. Read books, journals, reports, articles – in fact anything and everything that you can, which is related to nursing. The more you fill your 'reservoir' of knowledge, the more you will have to draw upon when the time comes for your exams or assignments. You are responsible for filling your 'reservoir' of knowledge. No one else is.

Expectations of Students and Lecturers

Students have a wide range of people that they can draw upon from within their college. However, before we discuss the individual relationships you can have with 'significant people' in detail, we have provided an illustration of how the nursing student is part of the school and the college in Illustration 1:1 above.

Unless nursing students have previously undergone a period of study in an institute of higher education, it is likely that their previous formal experience of the student–teacher relationship will have been at secondary school. In these cases student nurses may commence their college programme with the expectations that the relationship that they will have with the lecturer will be similar to that of the teacher–pupil relationship that they remember from school. The reality is, of course, very different and the transition from learning in a school to being an adult student in

12 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

higher education can be a shock for the new student! The result is that lecturers and students can be both surprised and disappointed with each other's behaviour, with each complaining that the other just doesn't know how to be a proper 'student' or 'lecturer'. We believe that this unhappy situation arises because the formal rules and regulations for students, which are explicit in contracts, programmes and module handbooks, do not inform the student of the *unwritten* rules of studentship. These are the informal rules, which students must learn for themselves through error and experience. They are often implicit but can be summarised under the heading of student etiquette, and both knowing and implementing these will give the student a smoother passage through college. Some of these rules can be seen in Box 1:1.

Box 1:1 The Expectations and Etiquette of the Student's Relationship with their Tutors

- Treat your tutor with respect and courtesy at all times; your tutor should do the same to you.
- Make an appointment to see your new personal/academic tutor as soon as possible.
- Don't expect to see your tutor without an appointment, unless you have a problem that requires urgent attention.
- Don't thrust work into your tutor's hand and expect them to mark it immediately.
- Always knock on the tutor's door before entering their office.
- Anticipate and make appointments well in advance of submission deadlines.
- You are expected to see your personal/academic tutor for tutorials; however, it is acceptable to approach another tutor if your tutor is not available.
- Don't expect your tutor to give last-minute appointments to check work that has to be submitted the following day.
- Inform your tutor in advance if possible, if you have to rearrange a scheduled appointment.
- Plan your work before your tutorial, have the criteria of what you want from the tutorial beforehand and stick to the agenda.
- Where possible, submit work to your tutor before your planned meeting. Ensure that you have a copy of the work that you have submitted and also ensure that your work is clear and legible.
- Take notes during the meeting.
- Make an appointment to see your tutor for a follow-up tutorial if required.

The unwritten rules of being a student also extend to how one should behave both in class and within the college as a whole. Whilst some students may be surprised that this information needs to be expressed, other students would not be. We do not prescribe a particular code of behaviour, but rather ask students to reflect on their own actions and ask what they consider to be appropriate behaviour. For example, do students feel it is acceptable for lecturers to chew gum during the lecture? If not, is it acceptable for the students in class to chew? We anticipate that some students will feel that this behaviour is unacceptable from both the lecturer and the student, and others may not. However, it is this type of behaviour that suggests the areas of the unspoken code regarding the etiquette of study in higher education. They are often a question of manners and employing a respect for others.

- Have consideration for your colleagues and lecturer in the classroom situation; consider and reflect if your behaviour is appropriate – for example, eating, drinking, chewing gum, walking out during the middle of a lecture, arriving late and talking during the session.
- As an adult learner, your experience should be both proactive and interactive, and you are therefore expected to read around your subject before and after the lecture.
- It is not acceptable to hawk your work around the school asking every lecturer if they will check your assignment and tell you if it will pass!

Etiquette is a two-way process. We are mindful that this process involves professional standards of the academic institute and the obligations of the student. It is obligatory for the college to provide the highest level of instruction and for the student to engage in their studies. Problems occur when the expectations that each has of the other person's role in the study process are unfulfilled. Knowing one's own role is important, but knowing what can be expected of others is paramount to good study practice.

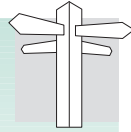
The following points illustrate the major expectations that students can have of the lecturing staff:

- To be treated with respect and courtesy at all times.
- To have access to academic staff and to be able to make appointments with their personal/academic tutor.
- To have access to the college student support department.
- To have support from the clinical setting from named mentors.
- To have access to information on programmes, courses, modules, assessments and examinations.
- To have the module content completed within the designated time.
- To have empathic personal tutors who will deal with personal issues sensitively.

14 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

- To have any issues of grievance taken seriously.
- To have from the lecturer a summary of the tutorial at the end of the session, covering the issues discussed, including any difficulties, progress made, planned work, and, where appropriate, the next tutorial appointment.

Being a Student?



Understand your role as a student.
Understand the roles of others in the enterprise.
Understand that etiquette is a two-way process.
Adhere to formal and informal rules of behaviour.

Fear and Confidence

Both fear and confidence are natural states, which prepare us to respond to a particular situation or event that we face. Without them we would be less prepared and therefore, in evolutionary terms, less likely to survive. They have both physical as well as psychological elements to them, which work together to create the characteristic emotions that accompany them. We should accept both fear and confidence as part and parcel of life and consider that a little bit of both is probably a good thing. Problems are encountered, however, when they become extreme and they then negatively impact on our ability to perform as well as we might like.

What is fearful to one person is not necessarily fearful to another and the situations that create anxiety are usually dependent upon the amount of experience that we have had in dealing with these situations. In terms of studying, it may be that you are new to this in adult life or returning to it after a long period of time, and this is causing you some anxiety. It may be that it is managing your time, navigating the library or dealing with the computers that are creating some degree of fear. In any event, it is usually the sitting of exams that creates the most fear, in most of us. Whatever it is that is causing the most anxiety, the first step to overcoming it is to accept that it is real and important to you. Similarly, the anxiety felt by others is also real and important to them. The worst comment to be heard when someone is expressing their anxiety is 'oh, you'll be all right'. This comment rarely helps to relieve any real anxiety and is more likely to give the impression that the extent of concern has not been grasped. There are some things that you can do to help you overcome your fear and the main one revolves around familiarity. The more you become familiar with something the less fearful you become of it. So, if the library, for example, causes you the greater concern, then

spending more and more time in there, looking for books and searching for journals, will tend to ease the anxiety. At the outset of your course build up a network of 'friends' that you can work with, travel with, have a coffee with, go to the library with, etc., whilst you are at college, and when anxieties build up talk to others about this. Also, learn to listen to others' worries as well. You will probably have been allocated a personal tutor and/or an academic tutor when you started college so you can make an appointment with either of these and talk to them about your anxieties. If it is sitting exams that causes you angst, then we deal with this in Chapter 7. Fear and anxiety are, as we have said, a reaction to something, so the 'something' needs to be addressed. Therefore, tackle the problem head-on, as early as possible, by undertaking a plan of attack on whatever is causing the fear. Box 1:2 outlines the framework for the plan of attack and should be worked through for each area of anxiety that is identified.

Confidence, on the other hand, does not produce all the above negative feelings associated with fear but can be just as incapacitating unless it is controlled. If you approach your study correctly you should come to a stage where you feel confident that you can produce what is required and to a good standard. However, overconfidence can lead to misunderstanding what is needed, not appreciating the difficulties, and underestimating the problem. Overconfidence can lead to arrogance, which in turn narrows the mind and causes a lack of focus. Therefore, getting the balance right is crucial to being an effective student.

Box 1:2 Plan of Attack for Problem Solving

What is the Problem?

- Write down what you think the problem or situation is that is causing you to feel anxious (for example, library, computers, assignments).
- Now write down what specific aspects of the problem or situation are causing you the greatest concern (for example, searching books, word – processing, grammar).

What Would be Your Best and Worst Outcome?

- Write down what you would like as your best outcome (for example, to access the books, produce a neatly presented project, write a good assignment).
- Write down what your worst-case scenario would be (for example, to be unable to find the required books, be unable to use the software, produce bad assignments, look bad in front of others).

(Continued)

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What Resources do I Need to Address the Problem?

- Write down what resources you need to address the problem (for example, a librarian to teach me, someone with knowledge to teach me word-processing, a book that gives me information on writing).

What are the Priorities in Addressing the Problem?

- Write down what needs to be done immediately (for example, speak to the librarian).
- Write down what needs to be done later (for example, contact the IT department).

What are my Options?

- Write down a number of options available to you in addressing the problem (for example, to go to the library, practise accessing books, ask a librarian to teach you, ask a knowledgeable friend).

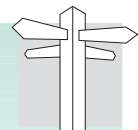
What are my Feelings about Addressing the Problem?

- Write down how you feel about addressing the problem, at this moment in time (for example, anxious but keen to get it sorted).
- Write down how you think you will feel once the problem is addressed (for example, will feel good and pleased).

What am I Going to Do About It Now?

- Write down a priority list of things that you need to do to address the problem (for example, to phone librarian, allocate some time, in your diary go to the library, speak to a friend).
- Tick them off as you do them.

Fearful or Confident?



Both are natural states.

Understand them to control them.

Address fear.

Do not get overconfident.

Conclusions

We conclude this first chapter by reminding our readers to bear in mind three significant issues that are crucial to achieving success in the study of nursing. First, we ask students, irrespective of their level of academic attainment, to take time to consider their own lifestyles and to plan carefully their study time whilst fulfilling their commitments to others. Second, we ask students to think about what kind of student they aspire to be and to work towards their objectives, using all the support and help that is offered from the college and their school. Finally, we appreciate that acquiring study skills takes time, but once the above systems and ideas are understood then the experience of studying nursing will be enjoyable and successful.

SUMMARY POINTS OF CHAPTER 1

- Use the book as an aid to learning.
- The study of nursing in higher education is important for both personal and professional reasons.
- Being a student entails a good attitude towards studying and a set of behaviours to accompany it.
- Fear and confidence are natural responses and should be managed appropriately.
- There is an etiquette involved in the learning experience, which includes both student and tutor.

Test Your Study Skills ...

1. What are the main problems for vocational students in higher education? (see page *)
2. When does fear or anxiety begin to affect your study? (see page *)
3. What are the main problems with overconfidence? (see page 17)
4. What do you understand by student etiquette? (see pages *)
5. What do the learning symbols mean to you? (see page *)

18 STUDY SKILLS FOR NURSES

Practical Session ...

At the outset of your study make sure that you:

1. Organise your stationery for study.
2. Acquire the module handbooks.
3. Obtain a copy of the college rules and regulations.
4. Make yourself aware of the college layout and facilities.
5. Attend the library skills sessions.