

STUDENT GUIDE

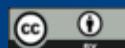
SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE DISTANCE LEARNERS

This Guide proposes Seven Habits of Highly Effective Distance Learners. It was developed by building on what we know from the literature and the results of a research project on the experiences of first-time distance learners in two major university-level distance education providers. The research studied how institutions support distance education and used video diaries to capture the experiences of twenty distance learners over the course of their first semester. Student reflections, recorded in their own words, have been used to provide real examples of insights gained from the sample of first-time distance learners. These insights are presented using the well-known habits of effective people proposed by Stephen Covey (1989).



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Support for this project and the production of this report has been provided by DEHub, funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the DEHub, Australian Government or DEEWR.



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HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE

You need to take responsibility for your study. Proactive students recognise that they are responsible and believe that their efforts will make a difference. They focus their time and energy on their circle of influence; in other words, the things that they can control. When life happens, proactive students are resilient and do not use external conditions to justify passive behaviours. In her own words, Maggie underscores the importance of being proactive:

"I guess make sure it's on your mind — even if you're on top of things. It's so easy for one week to turn in to two; to turn in to three. So just dipping in a little bit all the time is really useful; even for half an hour or an hour just to confirm in your mind, "yea, I do get this chapter, I don't need to worry". Having that permanent awareness that you are doing a course is useful".

HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

You need to be clear about what you are aiming for; and in some cases, what your family or employer is aiming for. Students need to have a conscious vision of and plan for the future and clarity that their study choices will help them achieve that vision. Without the end in mind, distance students can easily find their direction is lost amid other life circumstances. In his own words, Kane highlights the importance of beginning with the end in mind:

"The most important reason I am studying [business] is because there is a driver within me to succeed in life because when I was younger, I was a bit of a misfit and I wasn't very well behaved... Being an accountant or some sort of role in the finance sector is within grasp of myself and my capabilities having spent the last six years in the bank".

HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

You need to think about what is realistic. Students need to identify their existing commitments and should be careful not to over extend themselves. Instead, they should aim for a sustainable study routine that accommodates the ebbs and flows of academic study. Many distance students will need to consider family and employers, and therefore think realistically about where study fits in their competing priorities. In his own words, Ian explains the importance of putting first things first:

"I'm going to go down to three papers next semester and then two over summer school, which will give me the same amount of papers per year but less stress and less pressure and it will be easier to live a more routine life with the kids now they're going to start school and study as well; it won't take over our lives".



HABIT 4: THINK WIN-WIN

You need to be an effective online learner. Students need to be smart about the ways they can achieve their academic goals by blending conventional study methods with the affordances of new digital technologies. Thinking digitally will help to enhance opportunities for productive online interactions with other people and open up a new world of rich and engaging content. In his own words, Nathan understands the importance of developing new skills as a 21st century learner:

"The online environment is very useful. I've managed to work my way around the environment [Stream]; as well as the library website and the online tutorials... It's all new to me but I can see it's a fantastic resource and I'll obviously be making a lot more use of it".

HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND

You need to welcome guidance. Students who think that seeking help is a weakness or an inconvenience need to challenge their preconceptions and embrace sources of academic support on an ongoing basis. Students who willingly accept guidance and constructive feedback stand to benefit from a greater understanding of what is required to succeed. In her own words, Olivia acknowledges the benefit of seeking understanding from others:

"Because I've done two degrees, I think I'm so proficient; why would I need to learn any other techniques? Thinking like that has stopped me reaching out to the learning centre. So I'm glad I've conquered that one. Tomorrow I'm going to talk to them about my essay — I've written hundreds of essays but old dogs can learn new tricks".



HABIT 6: COLLABORATE

You need to develop strong networks. When students use alternative viewpoints as a source of critical reflection, they begin to gain new insight because 'two brains are better than one'. Contact courses and online learning environments provide spaces for students to collaborate with others. Knowledge generation might be with other learners, or equally with colleagues, friends or family. In her own words, Beth highlights the benefit of collaboration:

"My blogs, they've been really good. They've generated some retaliation which has been nice. I got in to an argument about something in a hypothetical sense with a colleague who is doing the same paper and I came away from that with some new views which allowed me to reevaluate my own opinion of the situation".

HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW

You need to stay sharp. Students are often under pressure to uphold responsibilities to study, family and employment; frequently meaning that they de-prioritize their own physical and mental wellbeing. However, students who invest time in to staying fresh and energetic increase their resilience to handle the challenges they face. In her own words, Susan emphasises the benefit of staying sharp:

"I'm in a different head space after seeing the counsellor today. I don't know why, I just feel more relaxed... And the difference in moving house has been amazing. I mean, I went out and just walking down the quayside made me feel so much better... I'm happy and the whole atmosphere is conducive to study".

