

PREPARING FOR UNIVERSITY

FutureLearn MOOC

Notes for teachers

Week 2

PRE UNIVERSITY MOOC

The Preparing for University MOOC was developed to equip students for the challenges of the university learning environment. The lessons focus on specific skills while reinforcing skills learnt in previous lessons throughout the 6-week course.

At university instructions are often not as specific as students would like them to be, so instead, students have to tackle questions and learn through feedback and discussion with their peers to understand how they might improve next time. The course is reflective of this process, and involves students completing specific activities with minimal training, taking time to reflect on their own skills, and discussions with teachers and peers.

The following notes will guide you through the series of weekly steps and activities of the Preparing for University MOOC. The notes will explain the rationale behind some of the steps and suggest questions you might ask to your students to guide them through the learning.



WEEK 2: INDEPENDENT STUDY

Activity: Introduction to independent study

STEP 2.1: Working independently

Knowing what you are looking for in a text or in a lecture helps focus work that you conduct independently. Revision, for example, starts in the lecture theatre, taking notes as you revisit material there and then in the lecture. Asking questions about the material, reading round the subject, and asking questions of the material you read, builds your knowledge base and understanding of a subject. The constant revisiting of material and building on your knowledge base is the most effective way of engaging with revision.

You might ask your students:

- What do you think independent study is?
- How can you work independently during a lecture? How about after the lecture is completed?
- What strategies do you currently use to revise? What about these do you find useful?
- What can you do to make your independent study successful?

Activity: Introduction to independent study

STEP 2.2: Thinking about learning independently

In this step, there is a video of a seminar about independent study.

The video covers what the students think independent study is all about and then goes on to relate this to revision, reading lists and motivation.

You might discuss with your students:

- What is the difference between independent study at university and in pre-university environments?
- What are your perceptions of the amount of reading you will be required to do at university?
- What motivates you to work in the pre-university environment?
- What will motivate you when you go to university?

In the video the word 'curiosity' crops up. This links to the video on what lecturers' value in their students from the previous week (step 1.3). Curiosity is something that lecturers' value highly, but it is also something which can motivate a student in higher education (university). In the video students discuss that at school/college the motivation to study is to get the grades to get to university. They raise the idea that curiosity will drive their reading and independent study, motivating them when in higher education/at university.

STEP 2.3: Learning effectively

There are some who argue against learning styles, but whatever the latest views on this, students do relate to this, and it can really help them think about what works best for them. Students should understand that we may have our preferences in the way we learn but we can develop other ways of learning throughout our lifetime.

This step includes a series of questions, based on the VARK system. Students are asked to select the answer which relates to the way they act in certain situations. Most people like a range of strategies but also show a preference for one type over the other.

Activity: Introduction to independent study

STEP 2.4: Analysing the learner style questionnaire

The key thing about this section is that students explore the ways they prefer to receive information. While universities are aiming to be more inclusive by offering multiple ways of delivering information, there are limits to this and different disciplines will deliver material in the most appropriate way for them. So, for students the thing is to discover, if they haven't done so already, how they learn best, and think about how to revise the content in a format that best suits them. This is an excellent step in the revision process to help learning.

STEP 2.5: Revision and lectures

This is about relating the learner style questionnaire directly to lectures and learning materials. You could emphasise the message from the previous week: students themselves need to turn the lecture into a learning experience. By thinking about how they best learn, this can help students think about how they might get the most out of a lecture. It is worth noting that many lectures today are recorded so students have more time to engage with the material. Remind students that taking brief notes supports them when it comes to turning the material into a form which is best for them.

STEP 2.6: Developing material

Before you read anything, you need to ask yourself 'why am I reading this?' Many students believe that looking at contents and indexes of materials are the way forward but that can be very unproductive if they don't have a question to start with. Many students don't ask questions of themselves before they read and need help to learn how to do this. Importantly, we need students to get into the habit of asking themselves 'why am I reading this?' every time they pick up something to read.

Activity: Introduction to independent study

STEP 2.7: Finding information from a text

In this step, there is a video about Bob trying to find information in a large book.

The key is to develop a reading strategy. Students can ask themselves the following:

- Why do I want to read this book?
- How do I read this book?

Starting with these questions also links back to independent study and how this helps motivate students. When students start exploring a subject for themselves, asking questions and seeking out answers, they can become more motivated and more interested in a topic.

STEP 2.8: Thinking about Bob's experience with reading

In this step, we ask students to apply Bob's experience to themselves. Thinking about when they get to university and are faced with long reading lists, the idea of developing a reading strategy is crucial to their success. You might ask students:

- What is your current reading strategy?
- What do you find helpful when reading a text?

Thinking about applying and practicing these strategies when they next read will help them develop this skill and will benefit students as they move into university.

STEP 2.9: Thinking about independent learning and revision

In this step, the video covers what students think about independent learning and revision. Students in the video talk about how difficult it can be. They talk about their approaches to revision and how much information there is. The last student links back to learning strategies. Before researching techniques, he just rewrote notes but then he discovered that it was better for him to make his notes more visual and this helped him.

This video will hopefully encourage pre-university students to try and work out their preferred learning styles, their reading strategies and their approach to revision, before they arrive at university. Taking time to think about these could provide students with a head start.

Activity: Introduction to independent study

STEP 2.10: Preparing to read extra material about the Inequality of Wealth

In this situation, the student has a reading strategy and will now put it into practice. In order for your students to practice, they may have already had questions from the lecture viewed in week 1 (Step 1.14), and perhaps they could find one additional extra reading to carry out the task. Alternatively, you might suggest that the piece in the next step is something on their 'reading list'. Students will need to prepare their strategy and apply it when reading the piece.

STEP 2.11: Reading extra material about the Inequality of Wealth

Students can think about how effective their reading strategy was. They might consider whether any further questions have been raised from their reading of this piece. After identifying any additional questions that came out of reading the text, you might ask students what their next steps would be; what would they do about these questions?

STEP 2.12: After reading

After reading a piece, students need to ask:

- What have I gained from reading this piece?
- How does what I have gained fit within my existing knowledge base or thoughts on the topic?

Students need to ask these questions so that they can process what they have read and integrate the new material with their existing material. This strategy helps students engage with reading at a deeper level.

STEP 2.13: Lecturers' views on independent study

In this video, lecturers talk about the transition from dependence to independence as students go through the transition from pre-university to higher education (university). Independent study is the key to undergraduate study. The lectures provide a starting point for learning and asking questions of the material in the lectures is the crucial first step to independent study. Deep learning comes from using strategies to facilitate learning and reading.

Top tips for this week

Week 2

1. Independent study is about asking your own questions of material and then researching these questions.
2. Discovering things about your own learning style allows you to work out in what situations you might need to work harder.
3. Developing a reading strategy is important to help you cope with the reading required at university. It is important to read with purpose; ask yourself why you are reading the material?
4. Make notes on material you read. This helps you engage with the material and check your understanding of it.
5. After you have read the material, ask yourself further questions: is this useful to me? How does this fit in with my own ideas etc?