

The Success Iceberg

“Effort is a function of the intensity, direction and duration of one’s exertions towards a goal.”
— Angela Duckworth

Being successful in higher education is not something that comes without effort. The first week of the trimester gives you an opportunity to remind yourself what you are aiming for at the end of your learner journey, this may help you to stay motivated, but it also gives you a chance to pause and reflect on the kind of learner you are already.

Whether you are new to higher education or have progressed from a previous year of study at university, you have achieved the entry requirements to the year of study on which you are about to embark. You are therefore, by definition, already a successful learner. The question is whether continuing with your existing study habits will be enough to guarantee that you will continue to be successful this year? As you progress through each year of a degree programme the amount of information that you are required to read and recall and the complexity of that information and the depth of knowledge and understanding you need to achieve becomes more demanding.

Reflect on the following questions in relation to your most recent set of results.

- Were these results what you expected?
- Were these results what you deserved?
- Would you like to maintain or improve your performance?

If you want to ensure that your performance remains the same as last year at an even more advanced level of study this year or improves further, then it is time to consider what you will do differently in preparing for the new academic year.

Consider the image on the right hand side. Above the surface of the water the tip of the iceberg is visible. It is easy to see the evidence of other learners being successful since success always leaves clues. However, below the surface is the real foundation that holds up the iceberg. The reasons for learner success are less visible but it is not down to luck. It is all of the hard work over many days, weeks and months.

Let’s go through an exercise to tease this out further. If you are a new student and you completed the Prepare for Success base camp then you have already done this exercise but you may still find it useful to go through it again this week.



Effort is the amount of hard work that you do and this is captured in the notional student effort referred to in the module descriptors. In a study of world class performers Benjamin Bloom noted

that discipline and willingness to put in great amounts of time and effort were significant factors in success.

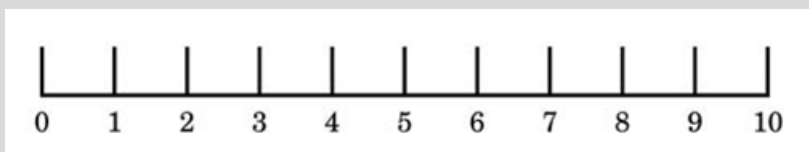
Let's define and examine independent study which is the key to success at university. Independent study includes work and directed reading that you are given by lecturers to complete in your own time, this can be called reactive study, but it also includes additional work that you choose to do yourself because you are interested or curious or want to consolidate your existing knowledge and know more about a topic. This additional work is proactive study. One simple example of your proactive independent study would be making revision and summary notes throughout the trimester that will help you to retain information and turn this into marks in coursework and exams. The balance between reactive and proactive study should change as you progress through your degree and by responding as a learner and changing this balance you can choose to improve your performance.

Look back at the studying you were doing last year or most recently and choose your number beside the effort scale below. Be honest with yourself using the following guidance.

1 means little or no effort

5 means some effort since you worked quite hard

10 is the highest effort meaning as hard as you could have worked



Now answer two additional questions. Firstly how hard were the most successful learners around you working compared to you?

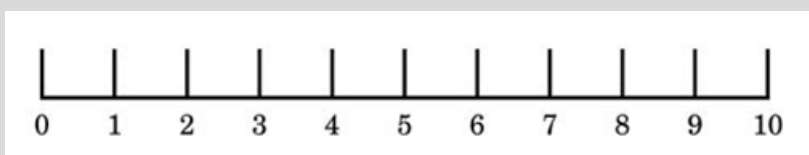
Secondly how hard do you think you will have to work to be successful this year?

Let's take a look at this slightly differently now. This time look back at the time you spent studying last year or most recently and choose your number beside the effort scale below. Be honest with yourself using the new guidance below.

1 means 0-2 hours of independent study per week

5 means 9 hours of independent study per week

10 means 18 hours of independent study per week



In our experience, the best performing students are studying for 15-18 hours per week once they get towards the end of the trimester. How would you compare if you continued your study habits unchanged from last year?