

Lesson: Study Skills

This lesson encourages students to think about their own study skills and ways in which they can be improved.

Level: Intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level B2 and above)

Time: 60 mins

How to use this lesson:

Parts of this lesson can be done at home. Some of the exercises, however, are best done in class. Also allow time in class for discussion of the different aspects of the topic (see suggestions below). At all times, encourage students to offer ideas and suggestions as discussion forms a major part of this lesson.

Teacher's notes

Worksheet A

- 1a This first exercise encourages students to think of their own study skills and any bad habits they may have developed. Allow a couple of minutes for them to tick any of the sentences that apply to them. Encourage them to be as honest as possible.
- 1b Allow a further 2-3 minutes for students to note down any other personal circumstances that interfere with their studying. Be prepared for the fact that some students may not have anything further to add here.

Encourage class discussion about the points students have ticked or noted down. How serious do your students think they are? Which 'problems' are the most common? Elicit as many comments as possible relating to exercise 1b. Don't spend too long going into solutions as these are covered in exercise 2.

- 2 Here, students look at ways to improve their study skills. Students begin by adding any further suggestions to the list, then numbering them. They don't have to number all of them (especially if they don't think the tips are helpful), but tell them to aim for a 'top three'.

Elicit a top three from as many students as possible, noting any tips that seem to recur often. Ask if students found any of the tips to be *bad* or *irrelevant* advice, and why. You could then go through the list one at a time, encouraging a discussion about the usefulness of each tip. Don't forget to discuss students' own suggestions, asking the class to give their opinions on whether these suggestions would help them.

- 3 This exercise is done in pairs. If there is an odd number of students in the class, take part yourself. Students take turns asking each other the questions and making a note of the answers (these should not be detailed – just brief notes).
- 4 If you are short of time, this can be prepared at home. It will give students more time to read through the suggestions, plus they will get some extra writing practice.

If done in class, students might need up to five minutes to think about the key recommendations they are going to make. Remind them of the structures for doing this, pointing out structures that are followed by a past tense (*it would help if you had ...*) or a gerund (*think about ... / try ... / what about ...*).

Allow up to five minutes for students to make their recommendations and to get their partners' responses.

When gathering feedback, remember that this is a perfect opportunity for your students to practise reported speech and reported questions. You might want to refresh their memories about this before they begin (you should be eliciting sentences such as: *I told him that I thought he needed more sleep because I had asked him how much sleep he got and he told me he didn't get enough. He said that he thought I was probably right about that.*)

Elicit as many different responses as time allows.

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Worksheet B

Explain that, for this worksheet, students will be looking at the ways we use the internet for studying.

- 5 This exercise should only take a minute or two. Without going into detailed explanation, ask students if they do any of the things on the list. After 2-3 minutes, ask them to tell you what they do and why. Gather as many ideas/opinions as possible, bearing in mind that the text that follows will go into the subject in more detail.

- 6 This exercise can be done at home or in class.

At home: Students read the text and answer the questions. Encourage them to answer based on the contexts of the words.

In class: Give students up to 10 minutes in order to read the text and answer the questions. They do not need to read in depth at this point. You may wish to tell early finishers to compare their answers with a partner.

Answers

1 a	3 a	5 a	7 a	9 a
2 b	4 a	6 b	8 a	10 b

- 7 Again, this can be done at home if time is short. If done in class, students will need 10-15 minutes in which to read the text again and note down their answers.

Elicit suggestions from a variety of students, dealing with any mistakes or misunderstandings. The wording of their answers will vary but for each question check that they have found the main idea.

Ask students to tell you what they think of the text and whether they consider themselves to be *good* or *bad* internet users.

Suggested answers

- 1 We can't know for sure but we can increase our chances by following certain guidelines.
- 2 The word *established* suggests that the website has been in existence for some time.
- 3 We feel more confident if a writer is named / well-known / linked to a good university or company / has a good position.
- 4 Every organisation has its own viewpoint or bias – you might need to read several different accounts if you are looking for objectivity.
- 5 He warns about finding information that is not supported anywhere else (except maybe by the writer's fans). This information is unlikely to be objective.
- 6 Careless grammar or poor spelling could suggest poor standards throughout. In other words, they may not be concerned with accuracy.
- 7 Out-of-date information may be useless. Old articles may still exist but be irrelevant now.
- 8 Adjectives, especially strong, emotion-filled ones, lead us to believe that the writing has more to do with the writer's opinion than with cold, hard facts.

Follow-up

- Ask your students what improvements (if any) they think they could make to their own study habits based on the information in the lesson.

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Worksheet A

Student's notes

Study Skills Checklist

- 1a. Tick the following sentences that apply to you
- ☐ I spend more time studying than necessary.
 - ☐ I don't spend enough time studying.
 - ☐ I often spend hours revising the night before an exam.
 - ☐ I often study with the TV or radio on.
 - ☐ I often get distracted or feel tired when studying.
 - ☐ I don't pay attention all the time in class.
 - ☐ I don't take enough notes in class.
 - ☐ I sometimes struggle to understand my own notes.
 - ☐ I can't always identify important points in a text.
 - ☐ I find it hard to get started on homework or projects.

1b. Is there anything else that gets in the way of your studies? Perhaps you have to work part-time and you don't have enough time to study, or maybe you've lost interest in a course you're taking. Make a note here:

- 2 Based on your answers to exercise 1, which of the following tips are the best? You can add your own ideas. Number them in order of importance, with 1 as the most important for you.

Tips for effective studying

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choose your best time for studying (e.g early morning). | <input type="checkbox"/> Take more notes. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limit the time you spend studying to short periods of 1 hour or so. | <input type="checkbox"/> Note down the key points only – listen more carefully. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take regular breaks. | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn to identify key points in books. Highlight them. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on a regular time for studying. Do it every day. | <input type="checkbox"/> Study with a friend. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spread out your workload. Don't leave things until the last day. | <input type="checkbox"/> Read your notes more regularly. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Remove distractions from your study space. | <input type="checkbox"/> [Your own idea] _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Get more sleep. | <input type="checkbox"/> [Your own idea] _____ |

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- 3 Find out about your partner's study methods by asking the following questions. Make notes in the spaces provided.

QUESTIONS	YOUR PARTNER'S ANSWERS
How much time do you spend studying? Do you study regularly or only when you feel you have to?	
Do you take notes in class? Are they useful? How often do you read them?	
Can you tell me about the conditions you study in? For example, do you study alone in a quiet room?	
How many hours do you sleep each night on average?	

- 4 After looking again at the tips in exercise 2, choose three recommendations to make to your partner. What does your partner think about your suggestions? Use some of the following phrases for your recommendations:

I think you should ...

Perhaps you ought to ...

Maybe it would help if you ...

Something that might help is if you ...

Have you thought about ...

Why don't you try ...

What about ...

e.g. *I think you should go to bed a bit earlier so you can study in the mornings. In addition, why don't you try ...*

Student's notes

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Worksheet B

- 5 Tick the things on the right that you do when you are using the internet to find information. Why do you do these things?

- ☐ Use a website you have used before
- ☐ Follow a link from another site
- ☐ Click on advertisements
- ☐ Look for popular sites
- ☐ Try to find the writer's name
- ☐ Check the information by looking at several sites
- ☐ Register or subscribe to a site
- ☐ Ask people to recommend sites
- ☐ Consider the reason the person is writing on this site
- ☐ Use forums and message boards
- ☐ Look at the spelling, grammar and presentation of the site
- ☐ Check the date something was written

Student's copy

- 6 Read the article on the next page and choose the best meaning for each of these words. The paragraph numbers are given in brackets.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 reliable (para 2)</p> <p>a something you can trust</p> <p>b something to be suspicious of</p> | <p>6 cross-check (para 3)</p> <p>a ignore</p> <p>b compare</p> |
| <p>2 misleading (para 2)</p> <p>a easy to understand</p> <p>b not to be trusted</p> | <p>7 accurate (para 3)</p> <p>a true or exact</p> <p>b invented or false</p> |
| <p>3 sources (para 2)</p> <p>a places where you find information</p> <p>b experts</p> | <p>8 credible (para 3)</p> <p>a something you can believe</p> <p>b something which is amazing</p> |
| <p>4 trustworthy (para 2)</p> <p>a deserving your trust</p> <p>b doubtful</p> | <p>9 assume (para 5)</p> <p>a suppose</p> <p>b forget</p> |
| <p>5 angle (para 3 heading)</p> <p>a way of looking at something</p> <p>b professional reputation</p> | <p>10 biased (para 7)</p> <p>a looking at both sides in a fair and balanced way</p> <p>b choosing to write about one side of the story only</p> |

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How to tell if information on the internet is reliable

More and more often, we rely on information on the internet to help us with our studies. But how do we know for sure if the information can be trusted? What about those strange-sounding news stories that circulate – can we trust them? Well, the truth is, we can never be sure, but here are some things to check.

Is it from a trusted source? What do you know about the writer?

If the website is an established one – and is popular – there's a better chance that the information is reliable. Look to see if the writer is named, and if he or she holds an important position. Also, is the writer linked to a good university or company? Generally, the more well-known a site is, the more reliable the information is. But this is just a general rule. Sometimes very popular websites and writers publish wrong or very misleading information. Go for sources that you think you can trust. This might mean having to pay for a subscription, although just because a site asks you to pay, it doesn't always mean that their articles are trustworthy.

What's the organisation? What's their angle?

Consider the following: you need to find information about a medicine – who are you going to trust? The company that makes it? Maybe not the best source. The government? Better, but maybe they make money out of it too. Often, you need to cross-check sources like these with people who have used the medicine – they might have a different story to tell. But you can't base your research on the evidence of just a few people on a forum. You have to do a lot of research before you can recognise that something might or might not be accurate, so the more you read, the better. It's also worth mentioning here that a website full of advertisements may not be the most credible place to start your search. Perhaps they're more interested in making money than in presenting reliable facts.

Can you find the same information elsewhere?

If what you find is the only example of this information on the internet, or if it is repeated only by people who have similar ideas, then you are probably looking at the opinion of one person and you shouldn't trust it. Maybe it's an interesting opinion, but it's unlikely to be scientific and well-researched. Beware, because many sites simply copy off other sites. So just because you see it mentioned in many places doesn't mean it's more likely to be accurate.

Is it full of mistakes?

If you can see spelling mistakes or bad grammar, you have two choices: you could assume that English is not the writer's first language, but maybe – just maybe – he or she is an expert in the subject; or you could come to the conclusion that the writer is not very good at spelling and grammar (in which case, you might not want to trust what you read). Of course, great minds are not always good at English but, if you were writing something for the world to see, wouldn't you get it checked for mistakes before publishing? If they're this careless about the presentation, how careful were they with the research?

Is the information up-to-date?

Always check for the publication date, especially if the subject is a fast-moving one like technology or medicine. In cases like these, a ten-year-old article could be worse than useless. One problem to be aware of on the internet is that information can stay there for many years. New and important developments will not be mentioned on an out-of-date website.

Is it biased?

Be aware of writing that has emotional language. Remember to use critical thinking if you see signs that the writer is describing something as good or bad, right or wrong. This is opinion writing, and often doesn't represent the facts fairly. In particular, look out for adjectives that reveal the writer's opinion, such as amazing, incredible, awful or terrible. The more of these words you see, the more biased the writer is likely to be.

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Student's copy

7 Now answer the following questions about the text in exercise 6.

1 According to paragraph 1, can we trust what we read on the internet?

2 What do you think the writer means by the word *established* in the first line of paragraph 2?

3 According to paragraph 2, how can we feel more confident in a writer?

4 What is the main point the writer makes in paragraph 3?

5 What does the writer warn about in paragraph 4?

6 Why should we be concerned about poor spelling and grammar on a website?

7 Why should we check the date of a website or article?

8 Why does the writer mention adjectives in the last paragraph?
