

**BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU**

## Studying at a Distance, a Guide for Students

*Christine J. Talbot*

*Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2003, 174 pages*

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*Studying at a Distance, a Guide for Students* by Christine Talbot, the Learning Development Officer at the University of Leeds, is a comprehensive practical book designed to help students study at a distance. The guide offers encouragement and strategies for overcoming the obstacles faced by distance learners. The guide defines terminology, introduces theoretical learning concepts, and teaches study skills. Any student, including traditional face-to-face students, would benefit by following this guide.

The book is presented in a logical format. Each chapter contains "self-study activities," which are designed to engage readers and introduce them to active learning. Talbot identifies active learning as an essential component of distance education. These activities teach study skills as well as help students become aware of their own particular learning styles and needs. Once students are aware of their own learning needs, they will be better prepared to complete courses at a distance successfully.

The first two chapters discuss the personal issues related to distance learning. Chapter One assists students to discover their personal motivation and intended goals for studying. An effective distance learner requires certain personal attributes and skills. Motivation is essential to overcoming many of the potential pitfalls of studying at a distance. Other skills include perseverance, determination, self-discipline, and time management skills.

The second chapter introduces concepts of learning styles so that students can identify their own learning preferences and needs. This chapter briefly introduces a few educational theories about learning. Talbot provides definitions of learning, outcomes of cognitive learning, hierarchies of affective and psychomotor domains, characteristics of learning, and learning processes. Kolb's four-stage Experiential Learning Cycle is used to describe the learning process. "The cycle moves through active experimentation, concrete experience, reflective observation and abstract conceptualization." The guide refers students to a few learning style ques-

tionnaires including the VARK Questionnaire. It is unfortunate that the guide does not include its own questionnaire activity, as such an activity would be fun and informative. Educational theories and learning styles are voluminous topics; however, Talbot streamlines the topic well.

The third chapter demystifies e-learning terminologies and technologies. The "glossary of terms used in e-learning" included in this chapter would be valuable to students unfamiliar with Internet terms. Lack of knowledge of Internet terminology can intimidate novice online students.

Chapter Four explains "the where, the when, and the how" to study. This chapter describes suitable study spaces and time management skills. Chapter Five encourages students to get support from their tutor, their peers, their course administrator, and from their family and friends. Distance students often feel isolated and need to be aware that support is available. Chapter Six describes types of course materials and learning resources.

The seventh chapter delves into more of the how to study. The topics in this chapter include how to work with others, reading skills, notemaking, essay writing, and revising for exams. The "working with others" section is particularly constructive. Distance collaborations present unique challenges. Students embarking on collaborative projects will fare better if they are prepared to make the most of the experience.

One of the longest chapters, Chapter Eight, discusses how to conduct a research project. Usually a research project occurs near the end of a program; most of the guide is geared toward students starting a distance program. Although this chapter includes useful information for research work, it might not be relevant when a student is at the beginning a program. However, the included strategies for literature research are useful for completing course assignments.

The final chapter is about the administration of the course. Students need to be aware of contact numbers, course information, hardware and software requirements for computers, and assessment specifications. A student should receive most of this information when registering for a course.

Studying at a Distance, a Guide for Students is an excellent introduction to studying at distance. Undergraduate and graduate students would benefit from this practical guide. Distance program administrators should include this guide for students in the initial program package. A motivated stu-

dent who follows this guide will have the conceptual tools to succeed as a distance learner.

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