

Course Descriptor for the 2018 Academic Skills course

I. Introducing the course

I.1 Introduction

The transition to higher education will challenge you to develop and demonstrate a range of new learning skills and strategies. Compared to learning at school, you will experience a greater emphasis on independent learning, alongside new ways of constructing and sharing knowledge and ideas. Furthermore, the relationship with tutors is likely to be less hierarchical compared to at school, and you will spend more time working in collaboration with your peers, both inside and outside the classroom. The Academic Skills course will ease you into the higher education learning environment, whilst introducing practical approaches that will enable you to produce work of a high standard. The content of the course will be of benefit as you undertake learning and assessment during Summer School, and then beyond into university.

I.2 Learning outcomes

Assuming that you participate fully and actively, by the end of the Academic Skills course you will meet the following outcomes:

Learning outcome 1: Academic resources

You will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of information literacy skills and be able to identify, find and use appropriate academic resources.

Learning outcome 2: Critical thinking

You will demonstrate an understanding of what is meant by critical thinking within an academic setting and will be able to present ideas in the form of academic arguments.

Learning outcome 3: Discussion and presentation skills

You will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of effective oral skills within higher education and will contribute effectively towards class and peer discussion, and team presentations.

Learning outcome 4: Feedback

You will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of feedback in higher education and will show that you have used feedback to inform your approach, where possible, to learning and the preparation of coursework assignments.

Learning outcome 5: Academic writing

You will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of writing effectively at university and will complete work that meets academic conventions, including clarity, precision and structure.

Learning outcome 6: Presenting evidence

You will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of acknowledging information and ideas that have informed your thinking. You will be able to cite sources within written

and oral discussion, as well as in the form of a bibliography or reference list using the Harvard style.

1.3 Learning approaches

The Academic Skills course uses a combination of class-based learning and independent study. Teaching comprises of lectures, tutorials and workshops. You are also expected to undertake study outside of class using the course site at www.leapsacademicskills.net. The combination of tutor-led and independent study replicates what you will experience at university and you will be challenged to manage your time and studies effectively. Although the Academic Skills course requires you to work as an independent learner, there is also a strong emphasis on group work: this will expose you to a range of different perspectives and knowledge that will help you to develop your own learning strategies and ideas.

1.4 Course site at www.leapsacademicskills.net

In order to successfully complete the Academic Skills course, you will need to make regular use of the materials and activities hosted on the course site. The site includes:

- **essential course information** including assessment exercises and how to submit work
- **regular course updates** including details of what will be happening in class and venues
- **quiz questions** where you will test your understanding of lecture themes
- **videos** by Student Tutors and academics sharing their experiences of university work and offering you top tips on approaches to your studies
- **marking exercises** where you will step into the marker's shoes in order to appreciate what represents high quality work
- links to **additional resources** that will help you to prepare for classes

The course site (and wider course) requires you to have basic computing ability, for instance being able to use e-mail and the Internet, and basic word processing skills. Although having access to the Internet away from campus may be useful, you are not expected to have your own computer. There are regular opportunities on Tuesdays and Thursdays (and throughout Summer School) to make use of the IT facilities on campus (please be aware however that, in keeping with the nature of learning at higher education, the onus is on you to manage your time and use of these resources effectively).

1.5 Course ethos

The Academic Skills course provides a safe place to practice where you are encouraged to develop ideas and skills without fear of failure. Each week there will be opportunities for you to test your skills and knowledge in low stakes exercises that are un-graded. By using these resources you will gain feedback, build your knowledge and confidence, and will be better placed to produce high quality work in the two assessment exercises.

2. Practical information

2.1 Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction, Academic Resources, Critical Thinking

Week 2: Discussion and Presentation Skills, Feedback

Week 3: Academic Writing, Presenting Evidence

Week 4: Writing Sessions with RLF Fellows and the Mid-Project Review exercise, RLF one-to-one writing sessions (Fri)

Week 5: RLF one-to-one writing sessions (Mon), Assessment Clinics

Week 6: Individual Writing Assessment deadline (Mon), Team Project presentation (Thurs)

Week 7: Course summary, feedback and marks

This course has been designed so that the first half will focus on the content of the course. For the second half, the focus is on working with experts and you using and practicing the knowledge and skills covered.

Classes (including lectures and tutorials) will take place every Tuesday and Thursday from 5 June to 19 July at Edinburgh University's Central Campus. Full details of timings and venues will be advised on a week-by-week basis on the course website, but will usually be Tuesday 9.30 to 12.30, and Thursday 13.45 to 16.30. An interactive course map showing all the teaching venues we will use can be found at www.leapsacademicskills.net/campus-map.html. As with all summer school courses attendance will be taken at each session.

2.2 The course team

The Academic Skills course is led by Alice Smith with assistance from Jenna Mann and supported by a team of tutors drawn from a range of universities and subject areas (see course site for details). In addition, you will be assigned to a Student Tutor who will offer you support and encouragement each week. As university students themselves, Student Tutors will draw on their own experiences to offer valuable insights into each of the six course themes that we will cover in the course. Your Student Tutor will keep a record of your approach to study and progress each week, however he or she will not be involved in marking any of your coursework. Your Student Tutor will be able to offer advice and encouragement in support of your coursework assignments, but will not be available to look at drafts of your work prior to submission.

2.3 Attendance, regulations, plagiarism and referencing

The Academic Skills course complies with the wider regulations and guidance for Summer School (as per information circulated during Summer School Induction). Attendance at classes (including lectures, tutorials, forums, team meetings) will be recorded by Student Tutors and will be included in your Course Report. As with any higher education course we take plagiarism seriously and advise you to take care to acknowledge any sources or individuals who inform the content of your work. This includes citing references using the Harvard Referencing system. We use the Harvard system as presented by the Open University: <http://www.open.ac.uk/library/help-and-support/referencing-and-plagiarism>.

2.4 Accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to demonstrate his or her full potential on the Academic Skills course. To this end, we have prepared course materials that are designed to offer effective accessibility and usability. All course documentation will be available online in advance of classes where appropriate (should you wish to print or download them) and we will be happy to provide alternative formats on request. If you would like to take notes in class using a laptop we are happy for you to do so.

Where you wish to use any device to record audio we kindly ask that you request the permission of Course Tutors and any students whose voices might be captured. If you experience difficulty accessing materials, or participating in the course more generally, please contact us at the earliest opportunity.

3. Assessment

3.1 How assessment works on the course

The course assessment consists of an Individual Writing Assessment worth 50% and a Team Project worth 50%. The team element will be peer assessed (see below). At the end of the course, Assessment Reports will be prepared based upon your performance within the two assessment exercises, alongside comments reflecting your attitude to study and the progress you have made. Your attendance record will also be included in the Course Report.

3.2 The Team Project (50%)

This assignment will challenge you to work effectively as part of a team of around 4 or 5 students. Full details of this assignment can be found in the **Team Project Brief** on the course site. On Thursday of Week 6 (12 July), your team will deliver a 10-minute presentation that outlines a series of recommendations based around your allocated scenario. The presentation will be followed by approximately 5-minutes of questions.

3.3 The Mid-Project Review

During Week 4 of the course you will present your progress on the Team Project to members of the Course Team. During the team presentation in Week 6 you will be expected to demonstrate how the feedback you received informed your project work. Full details can be found in the **Team Project Brief** on the course site.

3.4 Peer Assessment within the Team Project

After delivering your presentation in Week 6, you will participate in a Peer Assessment Exercise that will determine the allocation of marks across your project team. You will complete the exercise individually and anonymously. Peer assessment is commonly used in higher education to distribute marks between different members of a team.

3.5 The Individual Writing Assessment (50%)

This assignment will be completed individually and is worth 50% of your final course mark. The deadline is Monday of Week 6 (9 July) at 9 am and it is not subject to peer assessment. Full details of this assignment, including assessment criteria, reading list, stylesheet and how to submit the assessment online, can be found in the **Individual Writing Assessment Brief** on the course site.

3.6 Writing Workshop and one-to-one sessions with RLF Fellows

During Week 4 of the course, as well as the Mid-Project Review, you will have a group Writing Workshop with a Writing Fellow from the Royal Literary Fund (RLF). In addition, you will have one-to-one session with a Writing Fellow for individual support with your writing during Week 4 (Fri 29 June) or Week 5 (Mon 2 July). You will need to book an appointment in advance via the course site. This is designed to support the development of your academic

writing skills in advance of the Individual Writing Assessment submission in Week 6, as well as future writing assignments during and beyond Summer School.

3.7 Supporting you in the completion of coursework

Completion of the coursework assignments will not be closely supervised and but there will be scaffolding to support your learning. During the course there will be regular opportunities for you to seek advice and guidance that will feed forward into the completion of your assignments. This will include:

- the chance to ask questions or seek clarification during/after **classes**
- **online quiz questions** where you can test your understanding of course themes
- **marking exercises** in class and online, where you will step into the tutor's shoes in order that you are able to appreciate what we understand to be high quality work
- weekly meetings with your **Student Tutor**
- opportunities to receive constructive feedback during the **Mid-Project Review** and **one-to-one Writing Sessions with RLF Fellows**
- **peer discussion** with your fellow students
- **discussion and emails** with the course leaders

3.8 Final course mark

You will be provided with your percentage mark for the course on Thursday 19 July (assuming you have submitted all your assessments on time). These marks will be subject to final moderation although they rarely change from those provided in class. Alongside the breakdown of marks, you will receive and discuss constructive feedback on your work, with a view to helping you to recognise your own strengths, as well as areas for improvement.

3.9 If you experience difficulty

The Academic Skills course will require you to reflect on the individual learning approaches that are best suited to helping you achieve success within your chosen degree subject. This might include challenging some of the strategies that have worked for you in high school, whilst taking more responsibility in general for your learning. We recognise that it might take a little while to adapt to this new academic environment therefore if you experience difficulty or have other concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at the earliest opportunity. Please bear in mind however that we are bound by the Summer School regulations regarding penalties for late submission and will only grant a deadline extension under exceptional circumstances **and** only when this has been agreed in advance of the submission date.

We look forward to working with you over the next seven weeks.

Alice Smith, Course Coordinator, June 2018

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