

4

Learning activities

this chapter covers...

This chapter describes in detail the range of different methods of learning that you can use in your studies so that you will be able to decide which will suit you best. The areas the chapter covers are:

- *what is meant by 'engaging in learning'*
- *the advantages and disadvantages of learning in groups*
- *different ways of learning as part of a group*
- *the benefits of role play*
- *how working in pairs is both different and the same as working in a group or as an individual*
- *the benefits of having study buddies*
- *how to work effectively on your own*
- *different types of questions and examples and their benefits*
- *the range of ways in which you can learn electronically*
- *the benefits of learning electronically and the challenges you can meet when learning this way*



TYPES OF LEARNING ACTIVITY

getting 'engaged' in your learning

In the last chapter you learned about the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) styles of learning and how to understand and remember information.

We will now describe the different ways of learning that you can 'engage' in.

to 'engage in' learning means becoming involved and interested in it

Different activities use different combinations of the VAK styles. By trying out a range of different types of activity, you can change the mix of VAK styles you are good at using and this may help you to understand and remember new learning better.

The greater the variety of learning activities and methods you use, the more engaged you can be and this will make you more likely to learn. If you keep using the same method of learning it can be hard to keep your attention on what you are trying to do.

If you make a list of different types of learning activity you might come up with something like this:

- learning in groups
- learning in pairs
- learning on your own with paper-based material
- learning on your own electronically with a computer

In the rest of this chapter we will explain in detail:

- the different types of activity
- how to identify which types of activity are best for you

LEARNING IN GROUPS

Most of your learning has probably been in classrooms where you will have taken part in group work as well as working on tasks individually.

Group work allows you to discuss and share information. It also allows you to share ideas and solve problems together with your classmates. Group work involves a mix of visual, auditory and kinesthetic styles.

advantages of learning in groups

Being able to work in groups and teams is important in the classroom and the workplace because it has the following advantages:

- you can discuss problems to find solutions
- you can question what other group members think – you should always do this in a polite and positive way
- you can have your thoughts and opinions questioned by other members of the group – explaining what you think can help you to understand it better
- you can share out tasks
- your strengths can be used by the group
- the group can support you in areas you need to develop
- you can put forward your own ideas
- you can learn to accept criticism from others

disadvantages of working in groups

There are also drawbacks to working in groups. These include:

- some members of the group may not be as interested and engaged in the work as others so they might not work so hard; others might not take a full part in the group work because they are shy, afraid of getting things wrong or prefer to work on their own
- everyone will need to be engaged and working to meet their deadlines if the group is to finish their work on time
- if you only stick to your strong areas during group work and do not get involved in doing new activities – in which you are not so strong – you might miss valuable chances to improve your skills

We will now examine some of the activities you may do in groups.

group discussions



A group discussion is where you and a few other students are asked to discuss a question or problem. Usually you will all discuss the same question or topic in small groups and then tell the whole class what your conclusions are.

Think about the advantages and disadvantages of group work stated above. How do you think that they apply to a group discussion?

the advantages of a group discussion

- discussing a problem will help you to see the problem in different ways as everyone has different viewpoints

- tasks such as note taking and feeding back to the whole class may be shared
- one member of the group will normally take a leader or ‘chairperson’ role
- every member of the group will bring their own strengths to each task so the group will become stronger by combining these strengths

potential challenges with group discussions

- sometimes some students will not get involved in group discussions but will let the conversation go on without taking part much – this is often because they are shy and are not confident enough to speak; it may also be because they do not wish to engage with the topic that is being discussed because they do not like it or do not know about it
- the quality and the number of topics covered in your discussion might be affected if some members of the group do not engage and take part
- some students can hide the fact that they do not like or feel confident in doing certain tasks when they are in a group – it may always be the same students taking the notes, leading the discussion or giving feedback to the class; as a result the students who do not take part will not be able to improve these skills if they avoid practising them
- some members of the group may often criticise other members – this happens in all types of group (including families!); other members must learn to accept criticism – the criticism may in fact be constructive and helpful if it makes people see things from a different point of view!

engaging in a group discussion to improve your learning

Active learners will always have something to say in a group discussion. If you want to actively engage in this type of learning you should do one of the following:

- take part in the discussion by exchanging your ideas and knowledge and do not let one or two people take over the discussion
- if you do not know anything about the subject being discussed, you should ask questions to help you to understand – by asking questions you help yourself to learn and you help those answering the questions to learn because they have to think about how to answer
- take the role of note taker – this will help you to actively engage in the group; summarising the main points in your own words will help you to learn what you have written
- take the role of feeding back from your individual group to the class group – this will ensure that you understand the discussion enough to tell others about what was discussed and agreed

role play

Sometimes a group discussion includes an element of role play.

role play is where members of a group take on different roles to act out a situation

Some students may say that they dislike role play: they feel uncomfortable in an acting role; but fully engaging in a situation by ‘getting into the part’ will certainly improve their learning.

Example:

Role play involving an ethical problem – fiddling the expenses

A line manager asks an accounts assistant to enter a large expense claim in the accounts. The assistant knows that it is a bill for a non-business weekend away for the manager and his partner.

In other words, the accounts assistant knows that the claim is not a business expense and the manager will be fiddling the books and defrauding the business.

What does the accounts assistant do . . .

Do as she is told and do nothing?

Tell the line manager that she cannot fiddle the books?

Tell the line manager that he should not fiddle the books?

Do as she is told and afterwards tell a senior manager?

Whether you are acting out one of the roles or are watching others acting out the roles, you are more likely to understand the pressure that the manager can put onto the clerk because the manager has authority over the accounts assistant.

If you are watching any type of role play, you need to think about how you would feel and what you would say if you were playing one of the roles.

Note that role play:

- uses more in the way of visual and kinesthetic learning styles when compared with simple group discussion because the whole group becomes more involved in the situation which seems so ‘real’
- will encourage the whole group to become more actively engaged in the discussion which follows the role play and so the students are more likely to remember the discussion and understand the underlying concepts

group projects

At times during your studies, you will be asked to work with others on a project over a long period of time. It may be that you will work as a group to find information and to present it to the class at a later date, possibly after a few days, possibly after a few weeks.

When undertaking a project, as a member of a group you will have to decide on roles, take on tasks and discuss the planned outcomes.

The strengths and challenges of group working will encourage and strengthen your personal development.

WORKING IN PAIRS



Working in pairs is a really good way of learning. It is more personal and is more focused on you and your partner. But as in any partnership each partner must be able to get on with the 'other half' and contribute fully. If one person in a pair does most of the work, it usually does not last for long!

Almost all learning activities can be done by a pair:

- a pair is in effect a small group, so many group activities can be done in pairs
- individual type activities can be done working together in pairs
- you may decide to work on a given task independently and then compare answers for confidence
- you may share a workspace but decide that you want to do individual work when you are told to work with someone else as a pair; although this will mean that you will keep each other company, you are likely to learn much more if you actively work together and share the task

Study Buddies

a Study Buddy is a partner – another student – with whom you study

Study Buddies work together – either in pairs or in small groups – to learn effectively by helping each other in a variety of ways:

- meeting up to study outside class at agreed times
- supporting each other by explaining or discussing problems
- taking different areas to research and sharing the results to save time
- testing each other's knowledge

The last bullet point on the previous page – testing knowledge with someone else – is particularly useful because it is very **active** learning. If you think about this type of interaction between two people, it involves all three learning styles:

- **visual** – seeing the learning material on paper or on screen
- **auditory** – hearing the ‘buddy’ ask the question and confirm the answer
- **kinesthetic** – working together and organising tasks, research and notes and planning responses to questions

Testing is a good way of learning and remembering the knowledge parts of the qualification, eg which accounts are expenses and which are liabilities.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Taking advantage of all learning situations is the key to effective learning. Individual study can involve a wide range of activities:

- reading books and journals
- practising questions
- interactive online learning – e-learning

We will now describe these various activities, the various ways in which they use the VAK learning styles, and how students can actively engage in them.

reading books and journals



Reading is a very important way of learning and has been used for thousands of years. The basic reading process – just scanning the page and using your brain to make sense of the words – is **visual** only and **passive**. This process will place the information in your short-term memory only. But actively engaging with the book, journal, or whatever you are reading, can make reading kinesthetic and more effective. You should:

- identify what seems useful and important, making notes on paper or on a computer or tablet
- write key words or summaries of useful sections of the text
- pause periodically to think about what you have read, linking it to what you already know about the topic
- if you own the book or journal, make notes in the margins, and highlight important areas of the text

- take regular breaks when you are reading to allow you to absorb what you have read
- read again what you have written on a regular basis

You will see that these activities have made your reading more **active** and less **passive**. The way in which you have to write notes and think about what you have read and then verbalise your thoughts makes the learning very **active** and will help to place the information in your long-term memory. If you have a Study Buddy you can literally ‘compare notes’. This makes the learning auditory and kinesthetic as well as visual.

The techniques, uses and advantages of note-taking are explained in more detail in Chapter 6 (pages 84-101).

practising questions

When studying accounting and business you will have to do many practice questions as part of your individual learning.

These are likely to include:

- **Simple calculations** – where you are given numbers to practice specific calculations such as calculating the VAT at 20% on an invoice.
Carrying out a simple calculation is essentially a **passive** activity.
- **Problem solving** – where you are given a problem and some information and asked to find a solution. This is different from the simple calculation because you are having to identify the information that you need and then decide how to use the information to get the solution. For example, you may know how to work out the VAT with a settlement discount on an invoice for £1,000, but you may be given an invoice where you have to calculate when and how much to pay from the details on the invoice, taking into account any settlement discount available.
- **Scenario questions** – in a scenario you may take the role of a person working in a firm which is described in full for you. For example, you may be given details of price lists, discount agreements and purchase orders and have to work out how much to charge a customer, calculating the correct amount for an invoice, then issue a credit note for returned goods and subsequently send out a statement.

Problem solving and scenario questions are essentially **active**: you have to think about them and understand what is happening in each situation.

All of these types of individual study are **visual** and **kinesthetic**. To make these types **auditory** you could either discuss the problems with a Study Buddy, or alternatively, read out and record the questions and then play the recording back to yourself.

it is good to make mistakes

Getting questions wrong and then correcting them is an excellent way of learning. You are more likely to retain the knowledge than if you just wait until someone shows you how to do the question. This is because the attempt and correction are active and just being told how to answer the question is passive. Give each question a go, and do not worry if you get it wrong.

interactive online learning – e-learning



Reading a book has been a tried and tested method of learning over thousands of years, but electronic learning – **e-learning**, – is a comparatively new development which has now become accepted as a popular and **active** form of learning.

You learn electronically in a number of different ways:

- researching information – eg using Google
- completing interactive learning modules – ie online ‘lessons’
- taking online interactive tests and quizzes
- doing online puzzles – eg crosswords
- watching videos (eg from YouTube)
- listening to podcasts
- taking part in webinars and online student forums
- reading and writing blogs and watching or creating video blogs or ‘vlogs’

One of the reasons that e-learning is so successful is the way it is usually split into manageable chunks of learning: most information on the internet or available electronically is designed for quick access and quick completion.

researching information

Because of the speed at which you can access information and the choices that you make when researching electronically, the learning in this case is kinesthetic. It may also be visual and auditory, depending on what your research results are.

Look below at one result of an online search for e-learning.

Osborne Books - Online Learning

www.osbornebooks.co.uk/elearning ▼

"Brilliant **books** and **elearning**, proved invaluable for my studies so far." "Excellent **books** and ... WR2 5HP, UK T: 01905 748071 E: books@osbornebooks.co.uk.

Warning! Anyone can put material on the internet; the content is not checked to see if it is correct or has been written by an expert. It is very important that you always check every information source very carefully and only select research materials from sources that can be trusted to be correct.

interactive learning modules

Online learning modules are short lessons which can provide information and also test your knowledge as you go along, when you want, where you want and at your own pace.

The learning styles are both **visual** and **kinesthetic**: you read the information and often have to answer questions. Sometimes the modules include video clips – eg a tutor explaining a topic – which will introduce an element of **auditory** learning (see page 60 for further discussion of video).

Interactive learning modules can be done in pairs or larger groups (eg when the teacher projects the learning module on a screen in the classroom) and will stimulate discussion and increase **auditory** and **kinesthetic** input.

The AAT website www.aat.org.uk/training/study-support has a number of online learning modules for the Units you are studying. The example below (for this Unit) is testing a student's knowledge of the sources of information.

Using information

Where can I find information?

When you are studying eventually you will have to find information on your own. This is one of the most satisfying aspects of learning. Where can you find information?

- Newspapers
- The internet
- Books
- Industry magazines
- Ask an expert

 Select all that apply, then Confirm.

Confirm
Reset



online interactive tests and quizzes

Students are also able to carry out individual study by taking online tests and practice assessments and engaging in e-learning. Getting used to computer-based assessments is an important part of the learning process.

Testing your knowledge – either online or by other means – means that you will find out exactly how much you know. You can learn much by testing yourself and, when you get it wrong, actively thinking about the correct answer, trying to work out why you were wrong.

Here is a sample question from an online practice assessment produced by Osborne Books for the Bookkeeping 1 Unit you will be studying:

osborne BOOKS Lifeline for Learning

Bookkeeping 1 Test One
Q2 of 15

The financial document which is sent by the seller of goods or services and states the amount due to the seller is:

a remittance advice	<input type="radio"/>
a statement of account	<input checked="" type="radio"/> ✓
a delivery note	<input type="radio"/>

Select the correct option.

Am I right? Reset

<<< previous question next question >>>

Tests for the AAT accounting Units are available free of charge from www.osbornebooks.co.uk/elearning

The main advantage of doing tests and quizzes electronically are:

- you can access them at a convenient time for you
- the computer marks the questions and gives you quick feedback
- you can repeat tests and there is often more than one test for each area of learning

Tests and quizzes are **visual** and **kinesthetic** and you actively engage in them. You can get maximum benefit from tests and quizzes if you:

- note down the questions and topic areas that you get wrong and the reasons why
- study those topics again fully
- test yourself again

Remember that these questions may only test a small percentage of each of the topic areas.

If you do find that you still need to develop your skills further in certain areas it is very important that you return to that topic and revise it all in depth so that you will be ready for any question that you may have to answer.

online puzzles

Some people do not think that doing puzzles or games are important ways of learning, but they are actually two of the best ways of doing active learning because they are both **visual** and **kinesthetic**. Sudoku and cryptic crosswords can be very challenging puzzles and are very popular with adults – so remember that puzzles are not just ‘games for kids’.

Crosswords can be set up online as a form of e-learning themed to a specific area of study; they are very helpful because they are:

- **visual** – very often a pattern of words set up in a particular shape can be remembered more easily as your memory will recall **where** the words are and also **what** the words are
- **kinesthetic** – the process of thinking about the possible words and the then filling them in on the screen is active; other activities include pressing a ‘hint’ button to provide some help – and, of course, like any crosswords it can be completed by a group of people discussing the clues and providing possible solutions between them

The example below shows an online interactive crossword available at (www.osbornebooks.co.uk) for AAT Unit Bookkeeping 1.

Check my answers
Solve crossword
Hint
↻

4) The part of the accounting system in which financial transactions are first recorded (5,2,5,5)

9) The type of coding on a financial document which involves both letters and numbers (5,7)

12) The ledger which contains accounts for trade receivable transactions (5,6)

14) Expenses are recorded in the Cash Book of a business on the ____ side (6)

15) Payments received are recorded in the Cash Book on the ____ side. (5)

16) Payments received are recorded in the Cash Book on the ____ side. (5)

17) Payments received are recorded in the Cash Book on the ____ side. (5)

18) Discount given for early payment of an invoice (10,8)

19) Document sent by the seller to a trade receivable stating the amount payable and date due (7)

Down

2) The source of the entry in the VAT Account of the totals of VAT paid on credit purchases (9,3,4)

3) The type of double-entry account which summarises the totals of transactions in other accounts (7,7)

video, YouTube and podcasts

Students are increasingly using **video** to help them learn. The main sources are firstly the learning providers who provide online access through their portals to lectures on video, and secondly the ‘worldwide web’ itself. One video site that is especially popular is YouTube (www.youtube.com) – not only for its entertainment value but also as an aid to learning.

Try doing a search on YouTube for ‘double-entry bookkeeping’ or ‘study skills’ and you will see how much material is available. Good ways to tell whether a YouTube video is of high quality and provides useful information are to see how many ‘hits’ or ‘viewings’ it has received, the comments of other viewers on the webpage – and also to note when it was posted.

Any video, unless it is silent, engages you **passively** in both **visual** and **auditory** styles of learning. You can also make it **kinesthetic** by actively taking notes of the content and discussing it with others. The main advantages of video are:

- they tend to be short and manageable ‘chunks’ of learning
- you can pause the video if you need to, either to go back if you are losing the thread, to ask questions about the content or to write down the main points
- it is sometimes easier to remember information that has been spoken
- you are free to discuss the content at any time if a group of you watch the video together

Podcasts were originally introduced as audio recordings which could be listened to on an iPod, ie ‘on the go’. The content might be for entertainment (radio programmes) or learning materials such as lessons which are available in spoken form for use at home or when travelling. Podcasts are still in use for training purposes and are obviously **auditory** in nature. Nowadays the term ‘podcast’ has been expanded to include video as well as sound.

webinars and student forums

Webinars are online lectures or meetings hosted by one individual or organisation. The number of students may be 1 or 2 or it may be hundreds. You learn in the same way as you would at school or college, but you do it from your own home or when at work. Some webinars allow questions to be entered online and some allow verbal discussions between the presenter and the students, which makes the process more **active**.

Online forums are online ‘chat rooms’ where students can ask each other for help outside lesson sessions. A good online forum can be like having a hundred study buddies ready to help you when you are stuck. The more that you engage with the learning, the more you will learn and retain. An online forum is only as good as its members – but it can be very good.

Chapter Summary

- Engaging in learning means becoming involved and interested in it.
- Using a range of activities will make learning more interesting and help to keep your learning active.
- You can change learning situations to make them have a greater VAK range and to change from active to passive learning.
- Group work helps learning with active discussions and sharing information.
- Everyone in a group must engage to get the most out of the learning situation.
- You must make sure that you strengthen the areas and skills you need to develop by being active and engaging rather than letting other group members take the lead.
- Role play is useful as it brings scenarios to life – if everyone engages fully.
- Working in pairs is a focused way of learning.
- Study Buddies can be very valuable with study help and in motivating you to succeed.
- You can change reading from a passive learning activity to an active one by engaging with the content.
- Problem solving and scenario questions are active and likely to help you learn in the long term – even if they can be challenging activities!
- E-learning is useful, active and convenient.
- A range of e-learning modules, tests and quizzes have been written especially for your AAT units.
- When you get questions wrong in a particular topic, you must go away and study the topic again – do not just learn the answers on the e-learning tests, the questions in the exam may be different to the ones you are attempting.
- Online forums can be like having a hundred Study Buddies.

**Key
Terms**

engaging in learning	becoming involved and interested in your learning
passive learning	a learning process where you learn without thinking about the learning
active learning	a learning process where you learn by actively questioning and thinking about the topic, engaging the brain to problem solve or link to earlier learning
role play	a situation where a scenario is acted out by two or more people, often watched by others, to help everyone understand a problem such as the pressure a manager can put on a member of staff
study buddy	a partner student with whom you study, both of you helping each other to learn
simple calculation	where you are specifically told 'use these numbers to calculate in this way' – this is passive learning
problem solving	where you have some information and have to identify what information to use to solve a problem – this is active learning
scenario questions	where you take on the role of a person working in an imaginary business and have to complete tasks required by the job – this is active learning
e-learning	learning online, either carrying out research or by engaging with interactive learning materials
e-learning modules	online learning modules written for specific subjects or learning situations, including information and quizzes and tests
webinars	online lectures or meetings logged into by anything from two people to hundreds of people
online forums	online chat rooms where students can ask each other for help

Activities

- 4.1** Write in the appropriate columns in the table below whether the activities are:
- (a) Visual, Auditory and/or Kinesthetic (write 'V', 'A' or 'K' or a combination of these letters)
 - (b) Active or Passive (write 'P' or 'A')
- The first one has already been completed for you:

Learning Activity	VAK?	Active or Passive?
Watching a video presentation or film	VA	P
Practising the same calculation (with different numbers) over and over again		
Practice questions that need thinking about		
Reading		
Teacher talking or lecturing		
Working on a problem in pairs		
Research on a computer		
Look at a given computer website		
Demonstration – you are shown how to do something		
You explain or demonstrate to another person		
Research using books and journals		
Group discussion		
Pair discussion		
Scenario or case studies done individually		
Scenario or case studies done in pairs		
Scenario or case studies done in groups		
Multiple choice quiz		
Puzzles		
Checking other students' work		
You give a presentation to the class on your own		
You are part of a group presenting information to the class		
Preparing researched information to present to the class		

There may be more than one correct answer for the questions below which involve option choices.

4.2 If Chelsea does not engage in group work, what are the consequences? ✓

(a) None	
(b) The group work may be delayed or not as good as it could have been	
(c) Chelsea learns less than she would have learned if she had engaged	

4.3 Mary has taken on the role of note taker in a group discussion. Mary is: ✓

(a) Learning actively	
(b) Learning passively	

4.4 If you feed back to the class as a whole, you have to actively think about: ✓

(a) What to say	
(b) How to explain what you are going to say	
(c) Your personal appearance	

4.5 Reading or looking at a webpage can be visual and passive. How can you make it kinesthetic and active? Describe two ways in which you might be able to do this.

4.6 Hugh and his friends are having a discussion about a workplace situation. They decide that they will act out the situation to help them to understand it. Explain how this will improve their learning

- (a) in terms of VAK
- (b) in terms of active and passive learning

4.7 Sarah wants to know about the advantages of having a Study Buddy. What should you tell her? ✓

(a) You feel supported	
(b) You have someone to study with	
(c) None – you think that you prefer to work on your own	
(d) You can do each other's homework for areas that each finds difficult	

- 4.8** Problem solving and scenario questions can be more challenging than other types of question. ✓

(a) True	
(b) False	

- 4.9** Your learning is likely to be deeper and more thorough when you do problem solving or scenario questions. ✓

(a) True	
(b) False	

- 4.10** Patrick is planning to do the AAT e-learning modules for the Study Skills Unit. Patrick can do these modules: ✓

(a) At home	
(b) At college	
(c) Only at a specific time	
(d) At any time that is convenient to Patrick	

- 4.11** Special is doing the AAT's Green Light tests. She finds them helpful because: ✓

(a) They make her think	
(b) She has to get them fully correct to get the mark	
(c) They highlight areas that she needs to study	
(d) They do not help because she finds them too hard	

- 4.12** Usman is taking part in an online forum. Why do you think that he finds it helpful?
Give two reasons why the forum might be able to help develop his learning.

- 4.13** Kit-Chi is listening to a podcast while going home on the train. She knows that it is passive learning but she finds it difficult to write while travelling. What can she do to make her learning active?
Give two suggestions for making her learning active on her daily commute.