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11 March 2015

Dear Tom

Thank you for your request for further information on why the numbers of students with hearing loss in Northern Ireland have decreased over recent years and to detail what facilities that The Open University provides for students with hearing loss.

I note that the Research into Transitions Experiences of Young People with Hearing Loss did not include figures for students with a hearing disability studying with The Open University. As such, I have included a table below detailing the number of Open University students in Northern Ireland who have declared having a hearing disability for each of the last five years.

Year	Number of students with Hearing disability (NI)
2009/10	53
2010/11	54
2011/12	55
2012/13	55
2013/14	56
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>273</b>

As you can see from these figures, the number of Open University students with a hearing disability has been steadily increasing over recent years. Interestingly, a much higher proportion of our students have a hearing disability than other higher education providers in Northern Ireland.

Core to the mission of The Open University is being open to people with disabilities. We actively work to remove or reduce as many of the barriers to studying as possible for people with a hearing disability and we have a specialist disability team based in our Belfast headquarters. I have attached a copy of a booklet that details the specific support we provide to students with a hearing disability.

I have also sent a copy of this letter to Action on Hearing Loss for their information. We would be very happy to have a discussion with them about how we can further improve our accessibility to students with a hearing disability and how we can help encourage more people with a hearing disability to engage with higher education in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the Committee finds this information useful. If Members would benefit from having a further verbal briefing on how The Open University supports students with a hearing disability then we would be very happy to provide this.

Yours sincerely

John D'Arcy  
Nation Director



The Open University



# Studying when you are D/deaf

This booklet accompanies the Skills for OU Study website: [www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)

Skills for OU Study

Studying when you  
are D/deaf

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# Skills for OU Study

## Studying when you are D/deaf

Studying when you are D/deaf can present challenges. This booklet contains advice and tips to help you get the most out of your study and make it an enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

This booklet accompanies the *Skills for OU Study* website  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy>





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# 1 Introduction

This booklet is for you, whether you are an Open University student now, or thinking about being one in the future. In it you will find information on what it is like to study at The Open University (the OU) and advice about how to study successfully.

In this booklet we have used the term D/deaf to mean:

- Deaf people who use a signed or visual language as their preferred language – usually British Sign Language (BSL) or Signed Supported English (SSE). They may have acquired deafness early in life
- deaf or hard of hearing people who use a spoken language as their preferred language and who may have become deaf later in life, due to illness, injury or ageing.

Deafness and loss of hearing can affect students in different ways. You may be hard of hearing and new to wearing hearing aids, so your concentration may be affected. You may be a sign language user and need extra time to study because you use an interpreter and a note taker.

At the time of writing, there are about 850 OU students who have a hearing loss of some kind. Whatever your hearing loss the OU is committed to supporting you in your studies. We hope you will find that this guide answers some of your questions, and points you in the right direction for more information, advice and support.

Use the sections you need and write on the booklet or add ideas wherever you like. It's yours to use in the best way for you.

Apart from reading this booklet, you can get helpful advice from:

- an adviser in the disability team at your regional or national centre
- the Open University Services for Disabled Students website at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/index.php>
- the pdf booklet *Meeting your Needs*, particularly the section 'If you are deaf or hard of hearing' <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/assets/myn.pdf>.



To speak to an adviser about studying with the OU, visit the OU directory for contact details of your regional or national centre at <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx>

## 2 Studying and the OU

Many students choose the OU because they like the idea of studying flexibly. You may have chosen the OU because you think some things at a traditional university might be difficult for you – like listening to lectures and taking notes, or working in a group of students where you might not be able to join in the discussion easily.

This section explains what OU study is like, and what you need to think about before you start (see Figure 1).

- Some courses send you books and other printed materials, CDs and DVDs. Other courses have all their material online.
- You learn by studying course material, working on course activities and assignments.
- A lot of this work can be done on your own, but most courses have tutorials where you work face to face with your tutor and other students; on other courses these tutorials are online instead.
- Some courses have residential or day schools.
- For most courses you need a computer and access to the internet

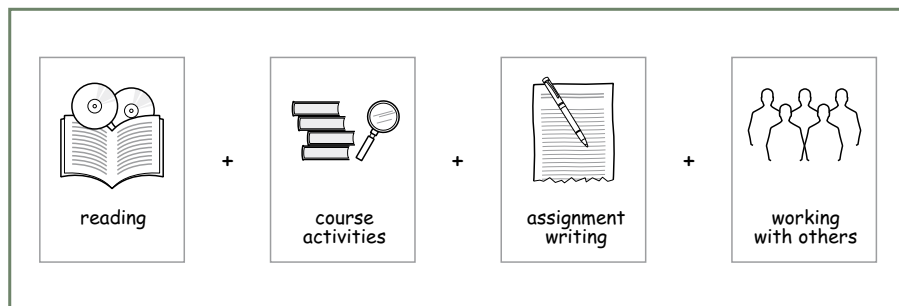


Figure 1 Some of the things you might do during your course

## 2.1 What may help you at the beginning

Start by thinking about the last time you studied. How did you learn and what did you find difficult?

Find out as much as you can about how your course will be taught and what support you might need. For example, what help might you need at tutorials?

- If British Sign Language (BSL) or Signed Supported English (SSE) is your preferred language, you may need communication support from an interpreter.
- If you have some hearing you will need an environment that suits listening and lip reading.
- If you speak but cannot hear, you may need a lip speaker or a note taker, or both.

### Try this exercise

Think about these questions and maybe write down your answers, or go over them with a friend or someone close to you (see Figure 2).

- How do I feel about doing this course?
- Is there anything about studying that worries me?
- Will I take longer to study if I have to read a lot of transcripts or unfamiliar words?
- How will I manage in group activities?
- How will I manage lip reading and taking notes at the same time during tutorials?
- Am I confident with reading and receiving feedback in written English?
- Am I confident in expressing myself and my thoughts in English?
- What communication support do I need?
- Do I need extra time to study or do exams?
- How can I access study materials in audio that are not signed and don't have subtitles?

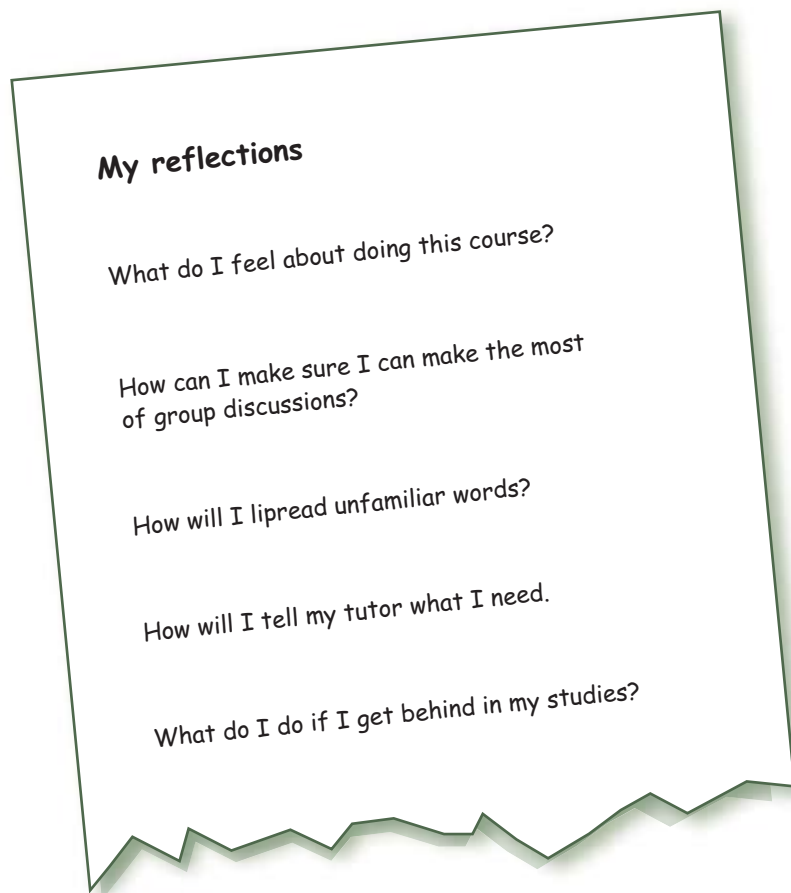


Figure 2 Reflecting on how you feel about studying can help you prepare for your course

Some students worry about managing all the reading. However, many D/deaf students study successfully with the OU and you will find useful tips in this booklet and online to help you survive.

# 3 How the OU can help you

The OU has centres around the United Kingdom. There are several regional centres in England and national centres in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each OU regional and national centre has a team specialising in supporting disabled students.

An adviser can give help and advice about:

- Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA, see Section 3.1), which can be used to pay for communication support
- the alternative formats available for your course, such as transcripts of videos and other audio material and subtitled DVDs
- the equipment that might be useful for you
- how to cope with course assessments
- making sure you take on the right amount of work
- the number of tutorials for your course, and how much you'll need to work with other students
- communicating with your tutor
- revision support and special arrangements for examinations.

Contact the disability team at your nearest regional or national centre to tell them you are D/deaf. If you tell the OU early on, then it makes supporting you much easier.



Go to the OU directory for contact details of your regional or national centre <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx>

*‘I know I live in a hearing world and I can't expect people to know BSL, but it helped a lot when I was able to email and ask advice.’*

Once you have registered for a course you need to confirm the support you need by completing the Facility Request Form (FRF1), available online at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/decide-what-you-need.php>.

## 3.1 Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)

Students who are D/deaf might not think of themselves as disabled. Nevertheless, the Disability Discrimination Act covers hearing loss and, as a D/deaf student, you might be entitled to a DSA.

## Here are some facts about a DSA.

- It is not means tested.
- It is used to help with the extra study costs you have because of being D/deaf. For example, you may need to pay for communication support or a portable loop system.
- If you are eligible for DSA and you are worried about your use of written English, you can ask for a study skills support worker.

### Top tip

Apply for a DSA as soon as possible. The DSA office can help with filling in the form and answer any questions you have.

Not everyone is eligible for a DSA: if you live in the Republic of Ireland or parts of Europe, you cannot apply. The procedure for applying if you live in Scotland is different from in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There is a short quiz you can take to check whether you are eligible for a DSA at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/dsa-eligibility-quiz.php>

### Further information

If you want to talk to somebody about additional needs connected with study, ask to speak to an adviser from your regional or national centre's disability team.

Even if you have not yet registered for a course you can get in touch for advice. Go to <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx> to find out where your closest centre is.

If you are already a registered student, you can also go to StudentHome at [www.open.ac.uk/students](http://www.open.ac.uk/students) for information about personal study records, course calendars, and links to other useful websites such as Services for Disabled Students and Skills for OU Study (your login details will be required).

Registered students can obtain Skills for OU Study booklets, for example, *Reading and Taking Notes* and *Preparing Assignments* from regional or national centres. To see the full list, go to [www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/) and look for 'booklets' in the A–Z (your login details will be required).



There is also useful information at [www.open.ac.uk/learning/when-studying-gets-tough/](http://www.open.ac.uk/learning/when-studying-gets-tough/) (your login details will be required).

# 4

## Choosing your course

Choosing the course that's right for you is very important. You need to find out as much as you can about the courses you are interested in before you register.



Find details about the course you are interested in by using the online prospectus at <http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/>



You can check what sort of accessible materials are available for the courses you are interested in at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/accessible-course-materials.php>

There is no reason why most OU courses cannot be studied by D/deaf students. However, some courses – like those in the Arts and Social Sciences – involve a lot of reading and writing. If English is not your preferred language it is a good idea to get advice from a disability adviser at your regional or national centre.



Go to the OU directory for contact details of your regional or national centre <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx>

### Here are some things to think about.

- Does the course you want to study have subtitled programmes or transcripts of audio material?
- Some Science subjects might involve experiments and assignments that involve sound.
- If you are interested in studying social work or nursing you need to find out how your hearing loss may affect you in these vocational areas. Some courses have compulsory placements; think about the communication support you might need.
- Language courses require you to listen and speak the language you are learning, so check what adjustments are available to the assessments for your course.
- Some music courses are not easily accessible because of the amount of theory and practice you need to understand by listening.

### Top tip

Get as much advice as you can from the disability team at your regional or national centre before you make a decision about which course to study.



# 5 Communicating and working with other people

There are times during your study when you will need to be in contact with some or all of the following people:

- staff in your regional or national centre or centrally at Milton Keynes
- your tutor
- other students at tutorials and online.

## 5.1 The challenges you might face

Being D/deaf may mean you have concerns about the following situations:

- communicating and taking notes during face-to-face tutorials (see Figure 3)
- participating in online tutorials, telephone tutorials or online forums
- communication at residential or day school.

You will have your own tactics and strategies for communicating with people in your work and social life. You should find that these are useful in OU study. Read on for more on how you can overcome difficulties.

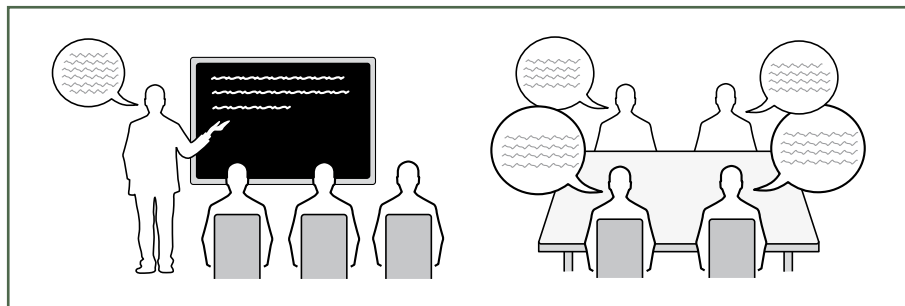


Figure 3 Some courses have tutorials and you will need to listen to the tutor, take notes and sometimes get involved in group discussions

## 5.2 How the OU can help

Let your regional or national adviser know what would be most useful for you. We might not be able to do everything you want but once you tell us what might be useful we will do our best.

*‘I really felt part of the tutorial because my interpreter and note taker were with me from the start. I now realise how much I was missing before, when I tried evening classes without communication support.’*

- We can tell your tutor about the best ways of communicating for you.
- If email is better than telephone, let us know.
- If you want to use texts for talking to your tutor let us know.
- If sharing information and discussing online does not help you, we can find another way.
- If you need communication support for residential school, group work in tutorials or examinations, we can organise this.
- We can organise a note taker for you.
- The OU can provide equipment such as portable personal loops for hearing aid users.

You can let us know what would be useful for you by completing the Facility Request Form (FRF1) form, available online at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/decide-what-you-need.php>

### Top tip

If you mainly use sign language or you need communication support for any other reason, contact the disability team at your regional or national centre for advice about choosing a course. Do this before you register. We need plenty of time to organise communication support for you

## 5.3 Communicating and working with other students

You may need to be in contact with other students when studying, either online – in forums or by email – or in group work.

Not everyone is confident about this, whether D/deaf or hearing. So if you are worried, do contact your tutor or the disability team at your regional or national centre.

*‘I study with my communication support worker, and everyone wants us to teach them sign language! Seriously, we do concentrate but it is important to have fun too when you are learning.’*

If you have studied and worked in groups before, you will know about basic communication tactics. Not everyone you meet will be D/deaf aware so have a think about this list of suggestions:

- try to arrange a meeting with your tutor and support worker(s) before the study starts, to discuss the best way to work as a team
- if you are having problems understanding or making yourself understood, let the tutor know as soon as you can, whether it is online or in face-to-face tutorials
- ask your tutor to send you handouts before the group meets
- don't be afraid to ask questions
- don't be afraid to ask people to repeat what they have said
- if people start talking at the same time and you cannot follow let them know and ask them to speak one at a time
- remember – everybody is there to learn.

# 6 Reading, taking notes and writing assignments

OU courses involve a lot of reading. Not everyone who is D/deaf worries about that, but some students who have BSL or SSE as their preferred language might.

## 6.1 The challenges you might face

Studying often takes more time if you are D/deaf. Having to read transcripts of audio materials, or take a course with unfamiliar words that you may not have seen signed before, can be hard work – particularly if you are taking science or technology courses.

If you are a BSL user, and English is not your preferred language, you might find the following things challenging (see Figure 4):

- reading your course materials in English
- taking notes that are helpful
- writing assignments (essays) and completing assessments.

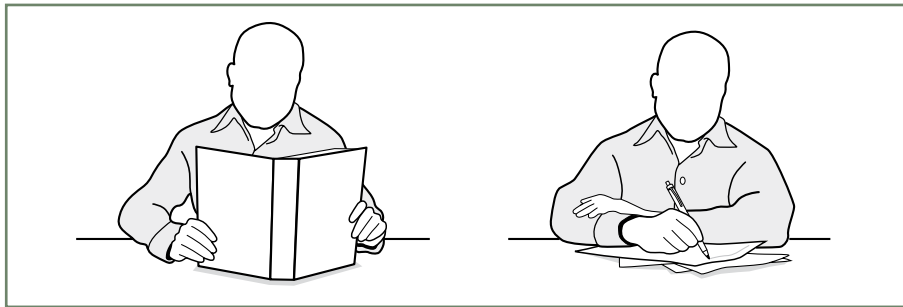


Figure 4 Your course will involve a lot of reading and taking notes. You may also have to write assignments. Think about your strengths and weaknesses and how you will cope

Think about what you could do to cope with lots of reading, and the support you might need to take notes and write assignments. Read on for some useful tips.

## 6.2 How the OU can help you

You are not alone. The disability team at your regional or national centre and your tutor can help you.

- The OU can provide a note taker to take notes for you in tutorials.
- If you have a DSA, a study skills support worker can help with understanding reading materials during study, and with your assignments through the course.
- Your tutor can help with clear English explanations of ideas and theories – it is his or her specialist subject, so don't hesitate to ask for further help.

If you are registered for a course you can visit online forums where you will find other D/deaf students who can share ideas.

## 6.3 What you can do

- If you are not used to taking notes, try to highlight key points in your course materials using a highlighter pen – then make a list of them.
- If it helps you to see notes in pictures rather than words, then draw away!
- Ask your tutor which bits of reading are essential, and which parts of assessments are essential for passing your course, so you can prioritise.
- Talk to the disability team in your nearest centre about strategies that might help you. Go to the OU directory for contact details of your regional or national centre <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx>



### Top tip

The OU wants your experience to be a good one. Let your tutor or the disability team at your regional or national centre know of any difficulties as soon as possible. They are there to help.

# 7 Revision, examinations and ECAs

Most OU courses have a written examination or an end-of-course assessment (ECA). ECAs are like written assignments that can be completed at home rather than in an examination hall on a set date.

Examinations make most students nervous. As a D/deaf student you may need the OU to arrange additional support for you to take your examinations or complete your ECA, so that you can achieve the best results.



Talk to the disability team in your regional or national centre about what strategies might help you. Go to the OU directory for contact details: <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/all.aspx>

## 7.1 The challenges you might face

As with many other students, you might have had bad experiences with exams before. If you struggle with written English and you have a written exam, you will need to think about how you will cope.

- You might not be used to revision and planning how to answer exam questions.
- You might not feel confident reading and writing English if your preferred language is BSL or SSE.
- You may find revising from written course materials and making your own revision notes difficult.
- If your exam includes an oral presentation you will need to think about how you will cope with that.

## 7.2 How the OU can help you

If you need support to take your examination or complete your ECA, make enquiries as early in your course as possible. To request help with an ECA, contact your regional or national centre. For examinations complete a Facility Request Form 3 (FRF3), which is available online at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/request-alternative-arrangements-for-examinations.php>



Some of the alternative arrangements you might want to ask for are described below.

## ECA

- If you need to take part in a presentation or a project you may need an interpreter or communication support worker.
- For language courses, the assessment involves talking to the tutor over the telephone or via a computer in the language you are learning. If this would be difficult for you, ask for a face-to-face assessment instead.



## Examination

- If your preferred language is BSL or SSE, you may want to have an interpreter or communication support worker to support you in your examination.
- If you need help with writing your answers, the interpreter or communication support worker will need extra time with you for translation of the questions and to help you with any spelling or phrasing you are not sure of. Extra time can be given.
- It is also possible for some D/deaf students to do their exams on a computer, sometimes at home with a visiting invigilator.

## 7.3 What you can do

These tips are useful for all students, whether you have a hearing loss or not:

- read the assessment booklet that comes with your course materials or on the course website to make sure you know what to expect
- plan a timetable for revision
- start revising from early in the course
- review notes regularly, even if you think you know what they say
- in the examination, take your time to read the questions
- draft answers and give yourself an amount of time for each question, depending on the total time allowed. So if you have two hours for the exam and five questions worth the same amount of marks, you have roughly twenty minutes per question
- reserve time at the end to check things over
- relax and do your best
- discuss any worries with your tutor before the examination.



The Skills for OU Study website has lots of good ideas for revision and taking exams: see [www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/). Also look out for the pdf booklet, *Revising for Examinations*; under 'booklets' in the A–Z (your login details will be required for that page).



## 8 In conclusion

Studying can be satisfying, rewarding, and give you a real sense of achievement. You can learn new skills and make new friends. It can bring a change in job or lifestyle, in your way of thinking or how you see the world.

‘At first I thought I would find self-study really hard – since losing my hearing my concentration has been badly affected. However, with the help of staff I achieved much more than I expected. I began to enjoy studying again and never thought I would ’



The OU wants to help D/deaf students to reach their full potential. If you are worried about starting a course, or have a problem at any point studying, remember you can contact us.

- The specialist disability teams at regional or national centre are there to help you.
- Your course tutor will listen too.
- Use your study support worker if you have one.
- There are online and paper-based materials to support you and keep you motivated.

We hope you have found some helpful suggestions in this booklet and know where to go to get help from the OU. We wish you every success in your study.

# Glossary

**British Sign Language (BSL)** is a visual–gestural language with its own grammar and vocabulary.

**Communication support workers (CSW)** use BSL or SSE to support D/deaf people, but are not usually qualified interpreters. They sometimes take notes too.

**Disclosure** is the term used for telling the OU about your disability.

**Interpreters** are qualified, registered professionals, who sign what a hearing person is saying and voice over what a D/deaf person is signing.

**Lip speakers** repeat the speaker's words for people who use lip reading. They reproduce the mouth patterns and flow of speech.

**Loop systems** in a room use a microphone to pick up sound and feed it to a wire running around the room. A hearing aid user sits within the loop and switches their hearing aid to 'T', which helps them to hear and reduces background noise. A personal loop system is similar but smaller, and is worn around the neck.

**Note takers** take notes for students, either manually or electronically. The notes are not usually word for word, but give an accurate summary.

**Palantypists** record speech on a machine via a keyboard to a screen. Usually they type word for word.

**Sign Supported English (SSE)** is where a person speaks in English and uses BSL signs at the same time. It is not a distinct language like BSL but a way of visualising English.





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