

Key points

We have identified three aspects to learning through study:

- **Taking in new ideas** by making the effort to understand what you read and hear.
- **Working on new ideas** by fitting them in alongside what you already know.
- **Expressing new ideas** by using them to say things of your own.

What are the practical implications of learning in this way?

4.2.3 What do you have to do to learn something?

These aspects of learning are rather like stages in a dialogue that you have with the subject you are studying. You listen or read, think, then speak or write. In the process of participating in this dialogue, your mind adapts to the way the subject works. This adaptation is the essence of the learning you want to achieve.

“ I find learning normally just happens – I dive in, take bits at a time, write notes, and then maybe go over them another time – it’s a gradual process. Writing essays is an important part of learning for my courses. ”

Notice that, for this student, although learning ‘just happens’, he actually takes a very active approach – diving in, taking bits, writing notes and going over. So he is doing a lot, but it does not feel to him like ‘learning’ as a deliberate activity. It is more like finding out and thinking about things, and working out what he wants to say about them.

Notice too that writing plays an important part. Making notes is a key way of working on new ideas. In the process of deciding what to note down you begin to ‘own’ the ideas you have heard or read. Then as you start expressing new ideas in an assignment your ownership increases. That is why written assignments are a key part of learning.

Here is how another student said she learned:

“ Most things I learn come originally from my reading, which I take notes from, and we sometimes discuss in seminars. Often the things I learn most about are essay topics, because the process of structuring and writing an essay helps me to understand the main points of the argument. ”