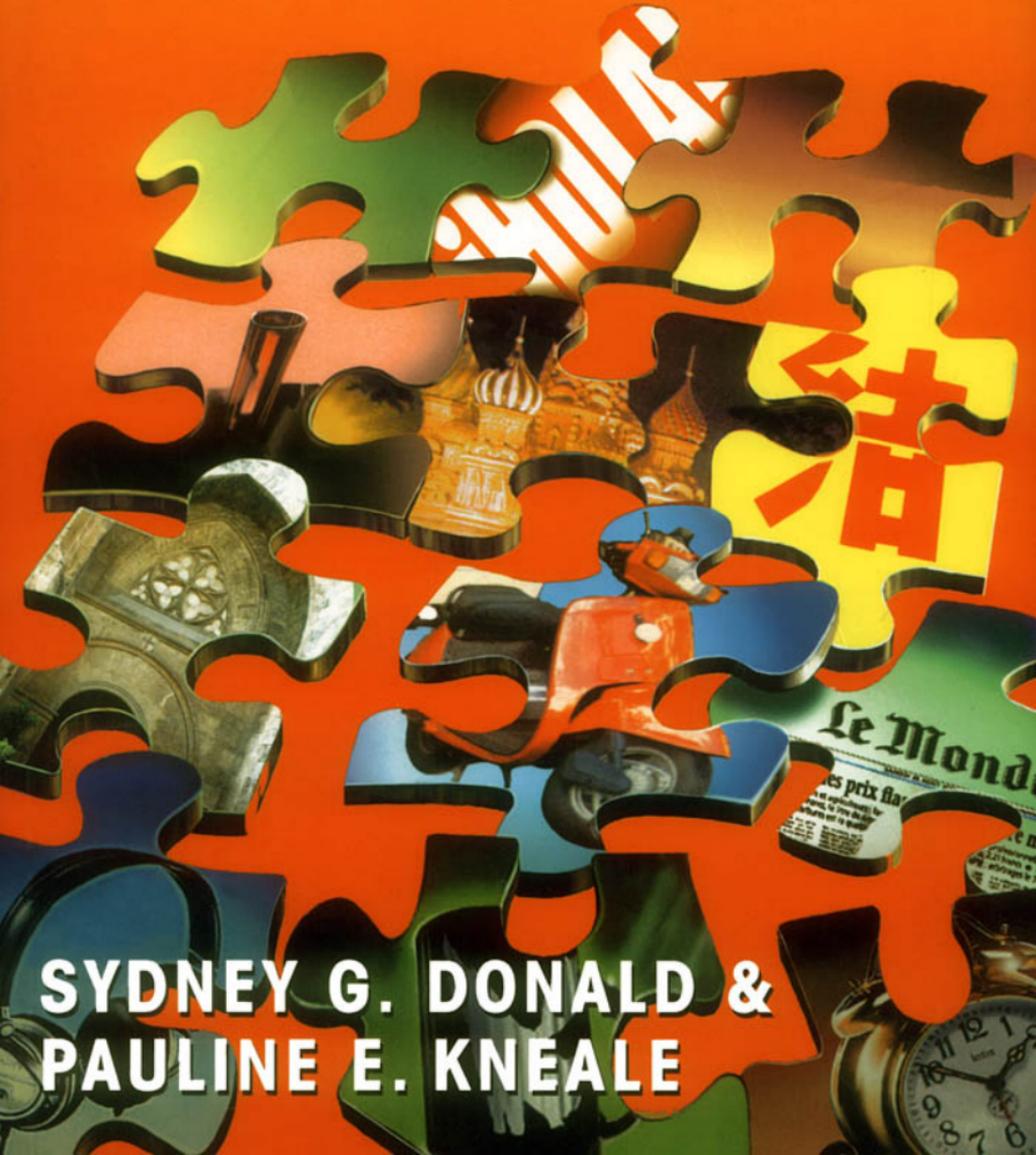


STUDY SKILLS FOR LANGUAGE STUDENTS

A
PRACTICAL
GUIDE



**SYDNEY G. DONALD &
PAULINE E. KNEALE**

Study Skills

for

Language Students

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A PRACTICAL GUIDE

SYDNEY G. DONALD

Senior Lecturer in German, University of Leeds

PAULINE E. KNEALE

Senior Lecturer in Geography, University of Leeds



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Faites nein error. C'est di mega fantástico livre en história du monde. It's stampato en multi-colôre, avec vorsprung durch technik. Recordar, nous sommes ne pas born hier. Morelle: La skillö ist neder miks die L2s.

PREFACE

This book is for undergraduate and masters students who want information about studying and researching modern languages in Higher Education. It is designed to defuse confusion and build confidence as you develop your L2 (foreign or target language skills) and assumes that most students would rather spend extra time honing their colloquial language skills in bistros, Kneipen and trattorias, than in the library. Most people using self-help books or on training courses find that 90+ per cent of the material is already familiar, but the few, new elements make it worthwhile. The 90 per cent increases your confidence that you are on the right track, and the remainder, hopefully, sparks some rethinking, reassessment and refining. The trick with university study is to find a combination of ideas that suits you, promotes your research and learning, and adds self-confidence. As with all texts, not all the answers are here, but who said study would be a doddle? This text is intended for reference throughout your degree; some items will seem irrelevant at first but become important later. There is a real difference between reading about a skill and applying the ideas in your degree. The **Try This** activities are designed to make the link between skills and their practical application, and to give you an opportunity to practise either mentally, or mentally and physically.

We hope you will enjoy some of the humour: this is not meant to be a solemn book, but it has serious points to make. The crosswords follow the style familiar to readers of UK broadsheet newspapers, quick crosswords and cryptic; all the answers have vaguely language related connections. Remember, you should be enjoying studying languages at university, it is supposed to be exciting and it can be fun as well as a challenge.

KEEP SMILING!



Chat up
Librarians

LET'S THINK ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING

Be careful not to let education get in the way of your learning

This book discusses the skills needed to study and do research in languages at university or college. Some of the motivation for assembling it came from a student who said, 'The problem with first year was I didn't know what I didn't know, and even when I thought there was something I was supposed to know I didn't know what to do about it'. University can seem confusing; you are expected to learn independently rather than being taught, but there is limited information about how to learn. This book might help. It is deliberately 'hands-on', making lots of practical 'Try This' suggestions. It aims to add to your self-confidence in your research and study abilities, and save you time by acting as an on-going resource. Rather than worrying about what will happen in a seminar, how to do an on-line search, or reference an essay, look it up and carry on. You are already skilled in many areas like thinking, listening, note-making and writing, BUT reviewing your approach and refining your skills should prove beneficial. The language and tone of the book is deliberately light-hearted, with some games for light relief. There are some terrible jokes, although being written down inevitably diminishes humour, so keep smiling as you groan. Light relief is vital in study. If deep thinking leads to deep kipping, have a coffee, solve an anagram, but remember to go back to thinking after your break!

University is part of life-long learning; you start to control what and how you learn. There is a departmental teaching agenda to follow, and time to explore other avenues. If, in the process, these equip you for later life, that is a bonus.

You have multiple skills already in your L1 (native language) and have decided to study another, L2, (foreign or target language). For a Languages degree, like any other, you need to exploit your current skills and add more. Recognize that a languages degree has two elements:

- **The knowledge element**, including all the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge necessary to enable you to communicate at or near the level of an educated native speaker over an extensive range of topics and in a wide variety of registers, but also a knowledge and understanding of the culture and people who actually speak the language. Learning your L2 is a lifelong process, as languages evolve and change over time. The sheer statistics about languages are pretty daunting with perhaps 6000 different languages being spoken around the globe. Yet in the twenty-first century communication is recognized to be the single most vital factor in conducting business and

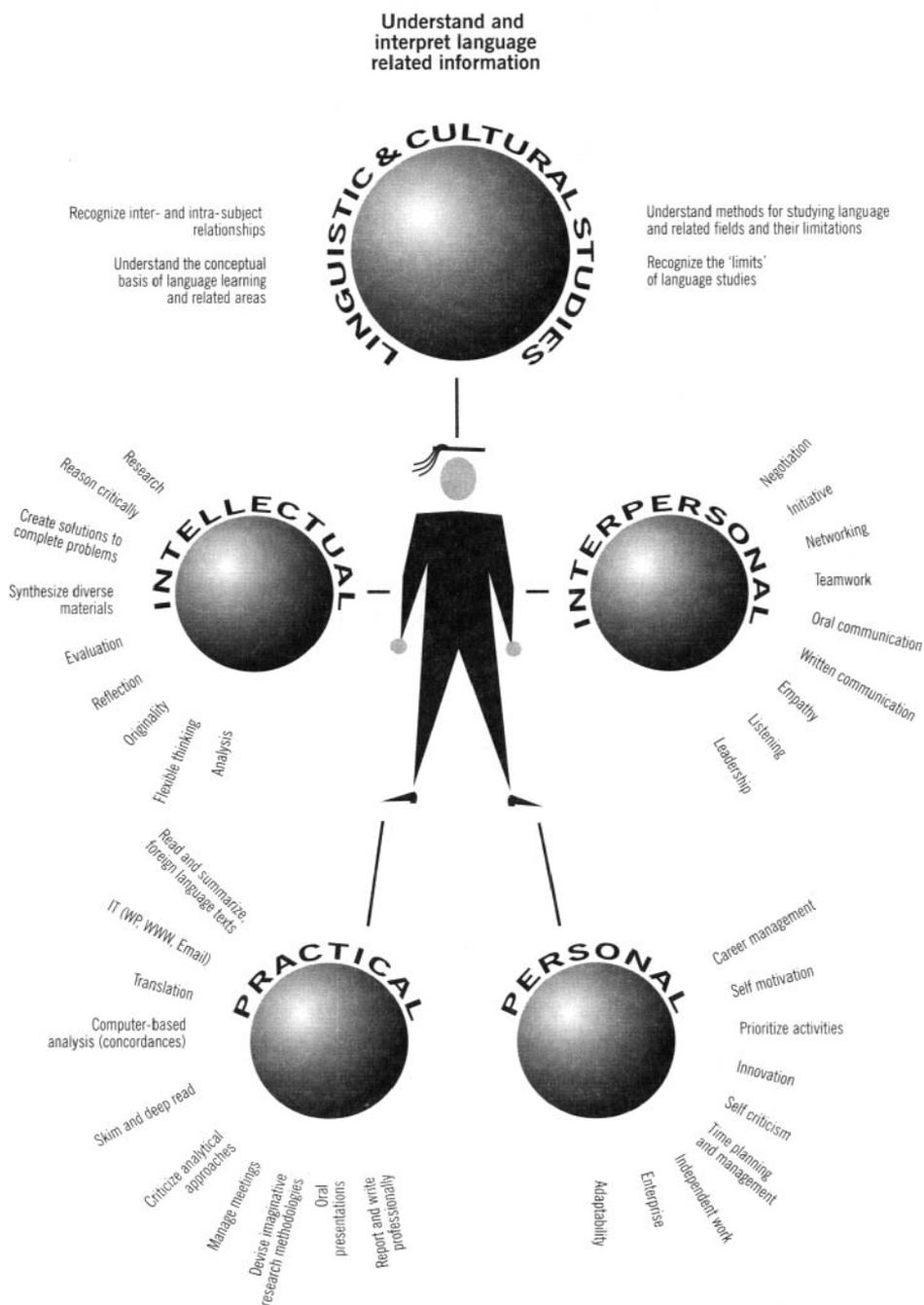


Figure 1.1 Skills and attributes of a Modern Languages or Linguistics graduate.

professional activities of all kinds around the world, and an ability to function in the language of your colleagues abroad, or even more importantly, your competitors, is a truly valuable asset. As Willy Brandt allegedly said: 'I sell to you in English but I buy from you in German'. The scope for learning languages is global because, of course, 'linguists do it world-wide'.

- **The skills element.** Often called *transferable skills*, these enable linguists to be efficient researchers, which will be of long-term benefit in the workplace. Most language students acquire practical experience of the skills and attributes shown in Figure 1.1. Some are absorbed by osmosis whilst others are taught at varying levels of detail.

In the last years of the twentieth century, UK student numbers expanded and the emphasis switched from lecturers teaching to students learning. Self-motivated learning is vital in life, enabling you to keep abreast of developments and initiatives. Employment is unpredictable. Job market and company requirements change rapidly. An employer needs individuals who are flexible about their careers. An effective graduate is someone who sees their career as a process of work and learning, mixing them to extend skills and experience. This is the essence of lifelong learning. The Nuffield Inquiry into Modern Languages (NLI 2000) firmly endorsed the importance of foreign language skills, so your degree course is mega-valuable, combining skills for life and for language.

In the jargon of career management and personal development, the phrase 'transferable skills' is readily quoted. To add value to your degree, you need to recognize and reflect on what you do every day in your course (Chapter 4), and understand where these skills have market value. Employers claim to be happy with the academic skills students acquire, such as researching, collating and synthesizing new material, but they also want graduates with skills like listening, negotiating and presenting. Any strengthening of your skills and experience of skill-based activities should add to your self-confidence and improve your performance as a linguist and as a potential employee.

In addition to traditional language skills, your degree will give you the opportunity to experience the latest developments in information technology including tele-working, surfing the world wide web (www), electronic journals, video-conferencing, tandem e-mail, bulletin-boards, databases, spreadsheets and digital video. University encourages you to get wired, get trained and build your own electronic resource base. The technology may seem daunting but it is fun too. (And if some five-year-old proto-anorak wearer can manage, so can you!)

The importance of graduates acquiring skills as well as knowledge was reinforced by the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), which defined four key graduate skills, and happily, language degrees are awash with them (see Table 1.1). However, these four need some unpacking to show what is involved.

Making Applications, Graduate Careers Information (AGCAS, 1997) lists the self-reliance skills that organizations and companies desire. Most elements involve communication, IT and 'learning how to learn' and are as follows:

Graduate Skills (NCIHE 1997)	In Modern Languages or Linguistics Degrees
Communication	All modules. Oral and written communication in seminars, tutorials, workshops, debates, group work and all assessments.
Numeracy	All modules involving interpreting numerical and statistical information. Data handling in concordances and linguistic studies
Use of Information Technology	Most modules. On-line research activities. Word processing. Modules using graphics, spreadsheets, databases, programming for linguistics and language information systems.
Learning how to Learn	All modules. Taking personal responsibility for learning as an individual, and in group research, projects and dissertation.

Table 1.1 Where to find NCIHE skills in action.

- Communication skills: written and oral, and the ability to listen to others.
- Interpersonal or social skills: the capacity to establish good, professional working relationships with clients and colleagues.
- Organizational skills: planning ahead, meeting deadlines, managing yourself and co-ordinating others.
- Problem analysis and solution: the ability to identify key issues, reconcile conflicts, devise workable solutions, be clear and logical in thinking, prioritize and work under pressure.
- Intellect: judged by how effectively you translate your ideas into action.
- Leadership: many graduates eventually reach senior positions managing and leading people.
- Teamwork: working effectively in formal and informal teams.
- Adaptability: being able to initiate and respond to changing circumstances, and to continue to develop one's knowledge, interests and attitudes to adapt to changing demands.
- Technical capability: the capacity to acquire appropriate technical skills including scheduling, IT, statistics, computing, data analysis and to update these as appropriate.

- **Achievement:** the ability to set and achieve goals for oneself and for others, to keep an organization developing.

By graduation you should feel confident in listing these skills on a *curriculum vitae* (CV), and be able to explain where in the degree these abilities were practised and demonstrated.

This book recognizes that language learners in Higher Education come in a variety of shapes and sizes, each with their own objectives and needs. Examples of students will include:

- Native speakers of English who are studying for a language degree, either as a single-subject, or by combining a language with another subject – e.g. business studies, chemistry, tourism, history or another language.
- Students with little or no prior knowledge of their chosen language on *ab initio* programmes. These involve intensive language studies to bring you up to the level of students entering with A-level or equivalent, in a short space of time, typically one year.
- Students from overseas who are studying a foreign language at a university in Britain.
- Students taking modules in one or more foreign languages as part of completely unrelated degree programmes.

Most of the ideas and suggestions in the book apply to all types of language learner, but first-time, *ab initio* language learners might find Chapter 23 a useful starting point.

1.1 LEARNING ACTIVITIES AT UNIVERSITY; WHAT TO EXPECT, AND SPOTTING THE SKILLS!

Modern Language degrees are usually taught over three years called either Years 1, 2 and 3, or Levels 1, 2 and 3, and most incorporate a fourth year working or studying abroad. The university year is typically divided into 10 or 12 teaching blocks called modules or units, each addressing an aspect of language or some other topic related to the student's particular programme. Language degrees are usually progressive, which means that the standards and difficulty increase each year, and modules in later years build on experience and learning in earlier years. This section outlines the main activities at university and some of the skills practised during them.

Lectures

Believing any of the following statements will seriously damage your learning from lectures:

- In good lectures the lecturer speaks, the audience takes very rapid notes and silence reigns.
- The success of a lecture is all down to the lecturer.
- A great lecturer speaks slowly so students can take beautifully written, *verbatim* notes.
- Everything you need to know to get a first class degree will be mentioned in a lecture.
- Lectures are attended by students who work alone.

Lectures are the traditional teaching method, usually about 50 minutes long, with one lecturer and loads of students. If your lectures involve 100+ students they may seem impersonal and asking questions is difficult. Top tips for managing lectures include:

- ☺ Get there early and find a seat where you can see and hear.
- ☺ Have a supply of paper, pens and pencils ready.
- ☺ Get your brain in gear by thinking, 'I know I will enjoy this lecture, it will be good. I really want to know about ...'; 'Last week s/he discussed ..., now I want to find out about...'
- ☺ Before the lecture, read the notes from the last session, and maybe some library material too. Even 5–10 minutes will get the brain in gear.
- ☺ Look at handouts carefully. Many lecturers give summary sheets with lecture outlines, main points, diagrams and reading. Use these to plan reading, revision and preparation for the next session.
- ☺ Think critically about the material presented.
- ☺ Revise and summarize notes soon after a lecture; it will help you recall material later. Decide what follow up reading is required.
- ☺ Ask questions.

Skills acquired during lectures include understanding language, historical or cultural issues, recognizing research frontiers and subject limitations. They also include, crucially, knowing how to listen, knowing how and when to take notes, and knowing when NOT just to follow the flow of the argument. WITHOUT taking notes.

Tutorials: What are they? What do you do?

Usually tutorials are a 50-minute discussion meeting with an academic or postgraduate tutor and 4–8 students. The style of tutorials varies between departments, but there is normally a set topic involving preparation. You might be asked to prepare a short talk, write an essay, write outline essays, prepare material