

Study Skills: the VESPA Mindset

When we start to think about what is required to do well at A level or beyond, a useful starting point is the VESPA model used by Griffin and Oakes. The authors have many years' experience leading a large sixth form and their work summarises their key findings about what it takes to do well

V is for Vision

E is for Effort

S is for Systems

P is for Practice

A is for Attitudes

Vision

One of the most important things that affect our motivation is Vision. If we cannot see why we are doing something we find it harder to motivate ourselves. Sometimes lower down the school our motivation can be that we are scared of a certain teacher, this is less likely to work at A Level. So it is important that you know why you are putting yourself through such demanding courses for the next two years. What is your 'why?' It could be 'I want to study X at a certain university' 'I need Level 3 qualifications for the Police force' or 'I want to understand US Politics better'. Once you have your 'why' then keep a visual reminder close at hand – it could be a screensaver on your phone, it could be a photo on a bedside table. A study by Paunesko et al (2015) found that where high school students had 'purpose interventions' (conversations about their dreams and goals) they experienced an increase in their grades.

Effort

Effort is hard to quantify and it is easy to think that we are working hard if our 2 friends are doing less or to think that we are doing too little if we know someone who does more than us. Griffin and Oakes set out to quantify effort (in terms of how many hours study outside of class each student was doing). Initially when students were asked how hard they were working on a scale of 1-10, most students will answer 6 or 7 but it quickly becomes apparent that different students mean different things by their scores. Hence it was more useful to ask students to quantify the numbers of hours independent study each week. This was recorded and compared to exam results over 3-4 years. Griffin and Oakes discovered the following based on several hundred students

Students doing **under 4 hours a week** on independent study (around an hour per subject) almost always underachieved

Students doing **around 10-12 hours a week** of independent study (3-4 hours per subject) generally got their grades

Some students recorded **20+ hours a week** (6-7 hours per subject). These students tended to get A and A*

So effort matters at A level. You may only have around 15 hours in a classroom each week but treat your A levels like a full time job spending 35-40 hours in total on college related work.

Systems (see study skills: organisation)

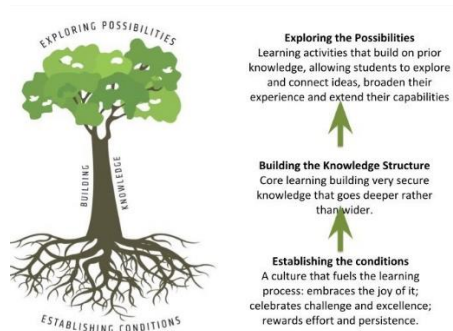
To some extent we will cover this on other guides but it is about having a plan when it comes to reading and note making, time management, a filing system and a calendar for your year!

Practice

To get better at anything there has to be practice. It is why footballers train; it is why bands rehearse. It is the same at A level. Once you have begun to get a grasp on the subject and on what skills you need to show in assessments, there really is no substitute for practice questions. It may well be the least enjoyable part of independent study and you may not be very good to begin with, but there really is no quick fix or magic wand that leads to A level success. Practice, practice, practice.

Attitudes

To some extent this will be covered on other guides (see Dweck and psychology). Our attitudes include beliefs about ourselves, the importance of attendance and deadlines as well as our moral values towards ourselves and others. This is part of the 'culture' that Sherrington talks about in his learning rainforest model. Your attitudes (as well as your systems) are part of the root of the tree. If the root is damaged it is difficult for anything to grow.



(Image via www.teacherhead.com)

Bibliography

Busch, B & Watson, E. (2019) *The Science of Learning*

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Oakes, S & Griffin, M (2016) *The A level Mindset*

Sherrington, T (2017) *The Learning Rainforest*