CQSD
CENTRE FOR | QUALITY SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT

University of Reading

FOCUS ON: TEACHING AND LEARNING

SELF-SCHEDULED STUDY

LEARNING ACTIVITIES FOR SELF SCHEDULED STUDY

Self-scheduled learning activities enable students to have autonomy in their study and have the potential to free up time in the classroom from knowledge acquisition to more active application. Typically, the learning can be sequenced by weeks or topics on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), such as Blackboard or Canvas.

Learning sequences are characterised by allowing students to explore topics at their own pace and often with areas of personal interest. In this mode of learning, students take on the role of self-directed learners, engaging in a process that encourages intellectual curiosity, personal effectiveness, and opportunities to prioritise assessment and group work.

STUDENT INDEPENDENT STUDY

Typically, self-scheduled learning includes a combination of independent activities such as readings and guided screencasts/ videos, alongside practical activities, reflective writing, participation in asynchronous discussion and quizzing. Including flexibility and choice supports diverse learning needs, pacing, and preferences, fostering a sense of ownership, belonging and responsibility in a student's education. Additionally, independent study can equip students with valuable skills such as time management, goal setting, and the ability to synthesise information.

HOW CAN I GET MY STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH THEIR SELF SCHEDULED STUDY ACTIVITIES?

1. **Create an open and safe environment** – foster a community where students can be curious and ask questions freely.
2. **Set a goal for the activities** – activities break up the learning into different components, so that there are opportunities for everyone to participate in a way they prefer, but make sure the purpose is clear and communicate how they build the students up to their learning outcomes.
3. **Choose the correct exercise** – making sure you select the right tools or the right activity (or both) can impact its success, the more relevant the better.
4. **Prepare students for the task** – set expectations, show how preparatory exercises like reading or screencasting directly influence the practical elements, e.g., in the classroom).
5. **Tell students how long they should spend doing an activity** – indicating how long is expected can help students plan time to complete activities around other learning and assessment priorities. Chunk the activities into bitesize components so that they can make progress when they are able.
6. **Where are feedback opportunities built in?** – your students' learning activities should scaffold them to greater autonomy and complexity, including micro or informal feedback on discussions, tests and other activities can take some of the feedback burden away on greater summative assessment.
7. **Try it out and improve** – you may not design the perfect activity or sequence first time, talk to the students, see what works and improve for next time!

Adapted from Vanderbilt University Active Learning Cheat Sheet.

What makes Teaching & Learning:

Scheduled teaching or **synchronous activity** – these are the timetabled teaching hours that you spend with your students, taking the form of lectures, seminars, workshops, or lab work, etc. Guide: Learning Actively in the Classroom.

Self-scheduled study and **asynchronous activity** – these are activities that students are expected to do outside of scheduled teaching hours, and may take the form of reading, videos, independent activities and working on assessment.

Digitally-enabled teaching and learning – activities that are facilitated through technology, either through interactive applications in the classroom or on their virtual learning environment (Blackboard/ Canvas). Guide: Digitally Enabled Learning.

Inclusive learning – designed to include a variety of activities, to provide opportunities for students to engage comfortably in different ways. This also includes ensuring all learning materials are accessible, and that they explore a variety of cultural perspectives. Find out more: Inclusive Learning.

EXAMPLES OF SELF-SCHEDULED ACTIVITY

The table below is not an exhaustive list of activities but do include some that are commonly used for self-scheduled student activity. These activities are largely facilitated by digital tools and technologies available on the VLE, and when used in conjunction with classroom activities make up the digitally enabled learning practice in programmes. Intentionally used and integrated with other activities, the idea is to weave together learning sequences that interact with one another, and scaffold students towards greater autonomous learning and application of their knowledge.

ACTIVITY	FACILITATES	ENABLED BY
Reading	• Knowledge transfer • Wider contextual understanding	• Talis Reading Lists • Libraries • Textbooks
Guided screen casting / video	• Knowledge transfer • Study tutorials (e.g., for software) • Module information (e.g., welcome videos, assessment FAQs)	• YuJa learning capture • YouTube • LinkedIn Learning • Box of Broadcasts
Quizzing	• Students self-appraising their understanding of a topic • Improving performance through practice	• Blackboard Tests • Microsoft Forms • YuJa quizzes
Idea-boards	• Collecting a wide range of ideas and perspectives • Prompting students to reflect on their learning and apply it to an activity	• Padlet • Blackboard Journals • OneNote
Discussion	• Having students communicate their understanding or perspectives • Question & answers	• Blackboard Discussions and Conversations • Microsoft Teams
Reflection	• Metacognition amongst students • Analysing sources of learning • Thinking about skills development	• Blackboard Journals • Microsoft 365 documents • OneNote
Worksheets	• Application of knowledge to problems or questions • Assisted / effective note taking	• Microsoft 365 collaborative or independent documents

For further ideas and technologies, please visit the TEL guide on Learning Activities, you can also find out how to contact the TEL team to discuss options for using digitally enabled activities in your programme and modules. Designing Learning Activities using TEL.

A PROGRAMME LEVEL APPROACH

Supporting students in their independent learning should be managed at a programme level, as this acknowledges that the support required varies between students and at different levels of study. As students progress, it is expected that they will become more autonomous learners, as they have been scaffolded to develop study skills and familiarity with modes of learning and assessment. Taking a programme level approach ensures a consistent experience with common expectations and standards, rather than isolated efforts within modules.

Angela Ruskin University summarises this development through parts in the following way:

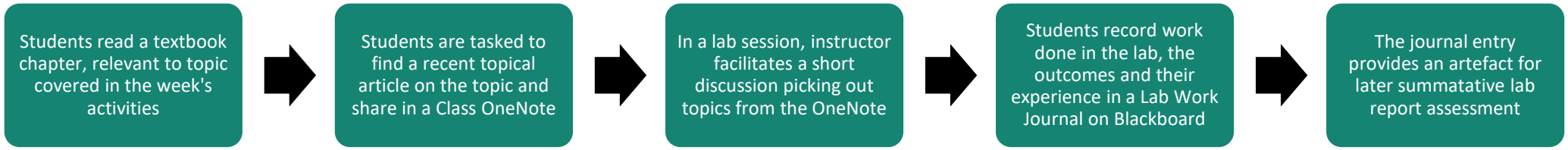
Level 4: Directed Study – independent learning consists mostly of defined tasks that articulate with in-class activities. Appropriate support is closely associated with activities.

Level 5: Guided Study – Independent learning is an explicit part of the curriculum but students have a greater level of freedom in the nature of tasks and the ways that they address them.

Level 6: Facilitated Study – students have considerably more autonomy, and their independent learning is more personal and clearly research related. Students develop professional skills.

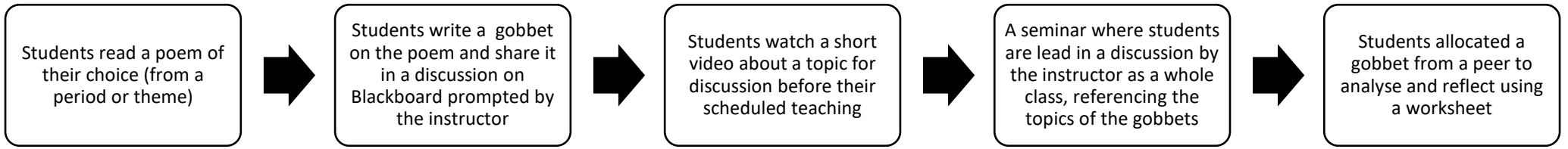
EXAMPLES OF LEARNING SEQUENCES

Sciences



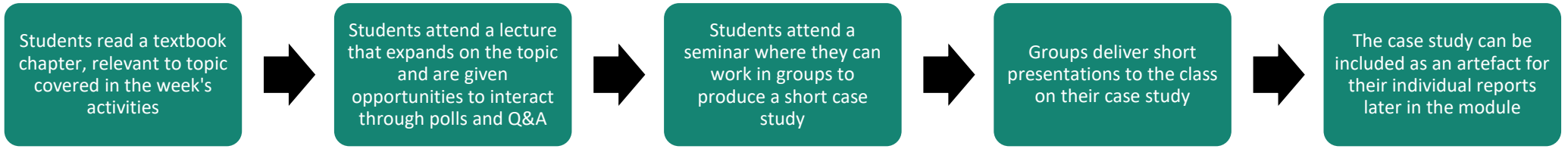
In this sequence, students study before the lab, sharing information with their peers and use time after the practical to reflect and complete a component of their summative assessment.

Literature



Here we are asking students to relate their reading to activity that takes place in the classroom, by asking them to produce something small (the gobbet) which they can get small informal teacher and peer feedback on, supplemented with additional video and podcast listening.

Business



The sequence for this week in a Business course revolves around students reading up on theory and attending a lecture to ask questions, with time then spent in the seminar to work collaboratively on applying the knowledge to a case study. Students then give short presentations to one another and can retain the case study presentation as a component of their later summative assessment.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Self-scheduled learning activities empower students to interact and engage with course materials at their own pace, fostering intellectual curiosity and supporting diverse approaches to learning. To encourage student participation, we can create learning environments where students feel supported, with a sense of belonging to their programme.

To encourage participation, we need to set clear goals, choose relevant exercises, and provide preparatory guidance, whilst incorporating feedback opportunities. Learning design is an iterative process and improvement through feedback ensures a dynamic and inclusive digitally enabled learning experience.

To contact us and explore other guides in our **Focus On:** series, please visit https://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/teaching-resources

References and Further Reading

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