



# Guide to Studying by Distance Learning

by Kiran Kapur

Distance Learning Course Director

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# Your Guide to Studying by Distance Learning

Distance Learning is an increasingly popular way to study. Distance Learning can seem ideal when studying while holding a job and juggling family commitments. However, it does not suit everybody. It requires commitment and determination – many people underestimate the amount of time studying needs or find it hard to keep motivated.

This guide is designed to steer you through the pitfalls and make the most of the advantages of Distance Learning.

## About the Author

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Kiran has worked predominately in Financial Services with expertise in customer relationship marketing and customer communications. As a consultant, she has worked as project manager for companies including Liverpool Victoria, Barclays, London Life and Cazenove.

She is a Fellow at the College where she has taught most modules at Cambridge Marketing College since 1999 and is the Distance Learning Course Director. She is also a CIM examiner.

She is a Trustee of Jimmy's Cambridge, a charity supporting homeless people.



# Getting Started

**“Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”**

Lewis Carroll Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

**“Don’t Panic”**

Douglas Adams Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy

## Some easy steps to get you started:

**01** Scan through the material sent to you.

**02** Read any joining/welcome instructions from your College carefully.  
Many learners don’t and wonder why they miss vital information!

**03** Look at the College’s website for resources you can access, such as Forums or podcasts.

**04** List any key deadlines. Be aware that the college may not chase you for these.  
You are responsible for your submission deadlines.

**05** Contact the Course Director to introduce yourself. Don’t hesitate to get in touch and ask for advice or raise any questions you have: that is what they are there for. Get in contact if you find you are not making the progress you hoped or are unsure what to do next as you progress.

**06** Prepare your Study Plan and start studying.

## Studying strategies – ideas from successful learners

- I stay late in the office three nights a week to study.
- I book a meeting room at lunchtime to study.
- I travel a lot. Hotel rooms are boring, so I study then.
- I have a big wall chart to help me keep track of my studies and deadlines.
- I listen to podcasts in the car on my way to work.
- I reward myself with a chocolate/coffee/drink after an hour's study in the evening.
- Reading around the subject helped make it seem less dry theory and more real.
- I listen to podcasts on my morning run.

## Avoiding excuses not to study



**STOP NOW!**

Place bottom on chair, open text, start learning!

## Learning styles

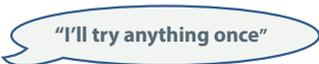
There are many ways of learning. One of the most popular classifications of learning styles was created by Honey and Mumford. They divide learners into four types.

Can you recognise yourself?

### ACTIVISTS **“Do”**

Prefers to do and experience.

Activists are ‘hands-on’ learners who prefer to have a go and learn through trial and error. They love new experiences.



**“I’ll try anything once”**

### REFLECTORS **“Review”**

Observes and reflects.

Reflectors are ‘tell me’ learners who prefer to be thoroughly briefed before proceeding. They prefer to think about what they have learnt and like to take time to study.



**“I’d like time to think about this”**

### THEORISTS **“Conclude”**

Wants to understand underlying concepts and reasons.

Theorists are ‘convince me’ learners, wanting reassurance that a project makes sense. They need models, concepts and facts and like to probe ideas behind things.

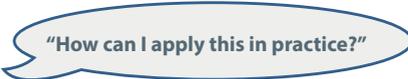


**“How does this fit with that?”**

### PRAGMATISTS **“Plan”**

Likes to try things to see if they work.

Pragmatists are ‘show me’ learners and want a demonstration from an acknowledged expert. They need to be able to see how to put the learning into practice in the real world. They don’t like abstract concepts.



**“How can I apply this in practice?”**

# How learning styles affect Distance Learning

## ACTIVISTS

**Activists** can find Distance Learning frustrating because they want to interact with other learners. If you are an activist learner, you should seriously consider whether DL is the best method for you to study. If you must study by DL, try to find a study buddy to bounce ideas off.

## REFLECTORS

**Reflectors** often enjoy Distance Learning because they have time to absorb information. Their main danger is getting too bogged down with theories, spending time surfing the internet for more information rather than buckling down to studying or writing assignments. If you are a reflector, set yourself start and end times for your studies.

## THEORISTS

**Theorists** like models and applying theories and Distance Learning can be ideal for them. They often find it easier to learn the whole module before starting any assessments.

## PRAGMATISTS

**Pragmatists** need to see a link between what they are learning and the real world. If you are a pragmatist, look for examples, both in your reading and by going outside your learning environment. Remember that you are learning for the future so while you may not be able to apply your learning now, it will be relevant in the future. Pragmatists also need clear guidelines for assessments, so if you are struggling with an assignment, make sure you are clear what is required.

Like all theories and popular psychology, fitting yourself into a box may not be helpful. Most of us have an element of more than one learning style, but it can be helpful to know your strongest style. Your preferred style can change over time.

If you don't recognise yourself from the Honey and Mumford descriptions, you can take an online test at [www.peterhoney.com](http://www.peterhoney.com). This costs £12 and will give you a full report and suggestions for your style.

# Problems with studying

Common problems with studying for Distance Learning are:

## “I keep reading but it’s not going in”

Don’t just read and hope it will go in. You need to read actively: stop at the end of each section and either make notes or say out loud what you have learnt. This ensures you understand it and reinforces your memory.

Pace yourself – don’t try to study for too long at each session

## “I can’t face studying after work”

Listen to a podcast or a listen again lecture.

Read around your subject in relevant journals or magazines. This will help to reinforce your learning.

## “I haven’t done an exam in years. It’s stressing me so much that I can’t concentrate”

This is a surprisingly common problem.

The College has an exam advice video, and podcast and runs exam technique classes in Cambridge.

Do lots of exam practice questions so that you feel more prepared.

Start by doing some sketch answers and ask your tutor to check you are on the right lines – it’s much less daunting doing a sketch answer than a full one.

## “It’s taking so long to learn anything. I feel as though I’m not getting anywhere.”

If you haven’t studied for a while, you need to get back into the habit. Assume the first two to three weeks of studying will be slow. You will speed up in time as you get into the studying routine.

If it’s still a struggle after a month:

- are you trying too hard and studying until you’re too tired to concentrate? Try to study in short bursts.
- check you are reading actively: stop at the end of each section and either make a note or say out loud what you have learnt. This ensures you understand it and reinforces your memory. If there are self test questions, try them.
- Move around – when you’ve read a section, try pacing up and down saying aloud what you’ve learnt. Physical movement can help your concentration.
- Try learning in a different environment, the office, your study, the library. It can be surprisingly refreshing.
- Have a word with your tutor that you are studying the right amount.

## Keeping Momentum

There comes a point when you lose focus. This is often when you have just finished a piece of work and you need to start the next.

- Be aware that the mid-point blues happens to everyone. Accept this happens, and keep going. It will get easier again.
- Waiting for results can be hard and can stop you concentrating. You just have to acknowledge this, and then get on with your studies!
- Sometimes a loss of confidence can make studying difficult. Try setting yourself short-time goals for your studies that you can achieve. The College has a study plan for each module to guide your reading week by week.
- See the tips in “Problems with studying” section. If those don’t help, check with your tutor.
- If you really cannot face studying, it is better to have a short break, than get so fed up that you stop altogether. Give yourself a few days off but SET YOURSELF A RESTART DATE!
- Getting in touch with other learners can make you feel less isolated. Try posting on the College’s LinkedIn Students Group.

## Make the most of your tutor

One of the biggest frustrations of any tutor is that learners in real trouble don’t ask for help. In a classroom, a tutor has some chance of seeing that a student is in trouble. With distance learning, learners with problems can just disappear.

If you don’t understand a theory or model, **ask** your tutor. If you are stuck, **ask** your tutor. If you have trouble memorising something for an exam, **ask** your tutor. If you need some motivation, **ask** your tutor.

Got it yet? With Distance Learning, you are paying for tutor support, so use it. This can be hard if you are used to learning in a culture where tutors are not contactable. The College expects you to contact your tutor when you need help.

Modules assessed by assignments – you owe it to yourself to send your tutor a draft. The quickest way to fail a module is not to submit a draft or to ignore your tutor’s comments on your draft. Don’t worry if your draft is over the word count or you’re not sure it makes sense. Your tutor can help you.

Modules assessed by exams – do some exam practice questions and send these to your tutor for comment. This will help you to discover how much detail is needed and what the examiner is looking for.

Experience shows time and time again that Distance Learners who make use of the support available and especially those who submit work and draft assignments to their tutors are more likely to succeed.

## Dealing with problems

“Life is what happens when you’re busy making other plans”

John Lennon

“Life! Don’t talk to me about life!”

Douglas Adams Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy

Life happens. Sometimes, no matter how good your intentions, life gets in the way. Major life traumas can happen any time, and redundancy, sickness, bereavement can all happen and will disrupt your studying. Don’t keep it to yourself. Tell the College. We are used to helping and will be sympathetic.

Do ask about extending your tutorial support if you need to have more time to complete your studies.

Excuses that are not real problems get less sympathy:

“But I work full-time” (you and all the other learners)

“I’ve been very busy at work” (see above)

“But I’ve been on holiday” (you should have factored that in)

## Final top tips for success

- Put aside set times each week to study (these may be different week to week) and stick to them.
- Don’t waste the time you’ve set aside. Be focused.
- Use your tutor support. You are not alone.
- Enjoy it!

If you haven’t studied for a while and need simple, practical study tips, the Open University offers advice on active reading and developing critical thinking: [www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy](http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy)



# Cambridge Marketing College

## Top Tips

### By Lorna Brocklesby

Having studied the CIM Professional Certificate through Cambridge Marketing College I thought I would put together a list of my top 5 studying resources and tips.

Hopefully this will help current delegates with their qualifications.

#### **1 Read around the subject**

Make sure you are confident about what you're writing about. If you really understand the theories and concepts then it will show in your assessments. The core Study Guides/Companion Guides and handbooks are a great starting point, but if you want more information about a specific topic because it features heavily in one of your assignments then read more resources (other textbooks, articles online).

#### **2 Contact your tutor**

If you have questions about the course syllabus, about further reading, assessment deadlines or queries about your assignment or exam revision, do not hesitate to contact your tutor or the College.

#### **3 CIM webinars**

These are available on the CIM learning zone; they provide guidance from Senior Examiners' on how to approach your assignment or exam. These are really helpful especially for examined modules because they take you through the module syllabus and exam layout.

- There are also Audio PowerPoint presentations to help you prepare for your assignments.

#### **4 Timing**

This may seem obvious but timing is so important. Make sure you give yourself enough time to complete each assessment. Don't leave everything to the last minute, you won't be able to do your best work if you're in a rush.

- If you're worried about timing then the College can provide you with a study plan to keep you on track.

#### **5 CMC Delegate Learning Zone**

Make sure you make the most of the resources on the delegate learning zone! Here you will find the assignments (ready to download), course notes, deadline dates, webinars and the online bookshelf.





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