

# IDEAL SCHOOLS

## BOOKKEEPING HOME STUDY EXPERTS

# ‘Learning to Learn’ How to Study Smarter Without the Classroom Guide

- Recognise your own learning preferences and use them to your advantage
- Simple techniques to stay focused, organised, and motivated
- Overcome common distance learning hurdles
- Tutor insights and more!



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# Learning to Learn – How to Study Smarter Without the Classroom

Studying without a classroom can feel daunting — but with the right approach, it can also become one of your greatest advantages. Whether you're starting your first course, returning to study after a break, or working towards your final exam, this guide will give you practical tools to learn efficiently, study confidently, and keep making progress.

## Contributors

### **Louise Woodhouse FICB PM Dip**

*Practice Owner, [Adds Up Bookkeeping and Accounting Services](#), and Ideal Schools' Lead Taxation Tutor ICB and AAT*

Louise qualified and worked as a secondary science teacher but found herself teaching maths both in and out of school. She also owned her own property development business. Louise trained with Ideal Schools and won ICB Student of the Year 2018, achieving an average mark of 98% across all her exams. She founded Adds Up Bookkeeping and Accounts Services, based near Gainsborough but operating UK-wide. The practice was nominated for ICB Small Practice of the Year 2020. Louise is our lead Ideal Schools Taxation Tutor for ICB and AAT and won ICB Tutor of the Year 2021. She was also named in ICB's 100 Inspiring and Influential Bookkeepers and won the SME Award for Most Innovative Accountancy Practice in Lincolnshire. In her free time, Louise enjoys comedy and spending time with her family.

### **Ellis Harris-Kijak FMAAT**

*Practice Owner, [FieCo Accountancy & Marketing](#), and AAT Tutor*

Ellis set up a family-run licensed accountancy and marketing agency and tutors AAT and ICB. He volunteers as co-chair at AAT Northampton and has a decade of experience in the finance sector. Ellis is passionate about technology, the future of the industry, and mentoring the next generation of accounting professionals. He believes that impactful businesses balance profit with purpose — championing people, protecting the planet, and advancing equality and opportunity. Ellis was

honoured as AAT Professional Member of the Year (MAAT) 2024 at the Impact Awards. Outside of work, he enjoys travelling with his partner and dog.

### **Elaine van den Akker BA (Hons) PGCE Secondary**

*Marketing, Digital Content & Partnerships, Ideal Schools*

Elaine spent many years in education, teaching Modern Languages and developing teachers, as well as supporting young people. Alongside leadership and assessment roles, including work with national qualifications, she developed strong insight into how people learn and the challenges they face as students. Elaine now leads marketing, digital content, and partnerships at Ideal Schools. She has been instrumental in expanding student support through virtual welcome meetings, tutorial videos, digital cue cards, and webinars, with plans to launch a podcast. She combines her passion for the life-changing potential of education with her skills in communication and engagement, ensuring students and partners get the most from their learning journey. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family, travelling, and attending live music and theatre events.

### **Taking Ownership**

This guide shares a wide variety of study strategies and ideas. Not every tip will suit everyone. Think of these strategies as a springboard to take ownership of your own learning journey. Decide which methods resonate with you and which you can put into practice to make your study experience successful.

It's important to understand that the ultimate responsibility for your progress lies with you. Your tutors are there to support, encourage, and share ideas, but real learning happens when you actively take ownership of your studies.

## 1. Learning Preferences

People learn in different ways. Discovering what suits you best can make studying more effective and enjoyable. Louise explains the three main approaches: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic.

### Visual Learning

Visual learners benefit from seeing information and reinforcing it with notes or templates. Louise recommends:

- Highlight key points and make notes of important sections.
- Use templates and post-it notes around your home for visual reinforcement.
- Use Ideal Schools cue cards for quick revision while the kettle boils or when waiting for the bus.
- Keep materials accessible for regular review.

“I would make templates for everything. Level 2, I had debits and credits templates on the wall, on the kitchen cupboards, on the fridge... If I was cooking, I’d test myself in my head and then check the wall to see if I was correct.” **Louise**

### Auditory Learning

Auditory learners grasp concepts through listening. Louise suggests:

- Listen to study material while walking, commuting, or exercising.
- Use webinars and video content to reinforce ideas.

“Rattling new words around my brain while walking the dog really helped, especially because I wasn’t from a finance background.” **Louise**

### Kinaesthetic/Practical Learning

Kinaesthetic learners learn best by doing. Louise advises:

- Complete exercises, progress tests, assignments, and exam-style questions repeatedly.
- Teach concepts to others to solidify understanding.



“Explaining it to someone else concreted my learning. Study buddy groups, forums, even just talking to friends... If I could explain it, I really knew it.” **Louise**

She encourages experimenting across all learning styles:

“Try them all. You have nothing to lose. You’ve only got everything to gain.” **Louise**

### **Staying Focused: ADHD and Concentration Strategies**

Drawing from her experience supporting her son with ADHD, Louise shares tips to improve focus:

- Make a daily task list including personal and study tasks.
- Create a clear, distraction-free study space.
- Address nagging tasks first to clear mental space.
- Use deadlines and accountability, such as sharing goals with a friend.

“By making a list, I had a focus. Know yourself: if you get that job out of the way, then you can focus on the other jobs on the list.” **Louise**

“People with ADHD work brilliantly with deadlines. Even telling a friend, ‘I’ll pass this by this date—or I owe you a meal’ can work wonders.”

**Louise**

These strategies are flexible. Adapt them to your own circumstances.

## 2. Small Steps That Lead to Big Study Wins

Ellis highlights how manageable, consistent study beats sporadic long sessions:

- Break tasks into small, achievable chunks.
- Engage in daily micro-study; even two minutes counts.
- Spread study sessions over several days rather than cramming.

“One rule I have is the two-minute rule. Every day, no matter what, you must study for two minutes. By the time you’ve done two minutes, you could probably do five, then ten. It prevents books from being left untouched under a stack of papers for a month.” **Ellis**

### **Accountability and Personalised Solutions**

Understanding your personal strengths and challenges allows you to craft creative solutions. Ellis recommends:

- Use apps and technology to overcome obstacles.
- Adapt study routines to suit your lifestyle.

“I have an alarm app that won’t switch off until I scan a cereal box downstairs. By the time I’ve done that, I’ve already overcome my weakness of getting up in the morning.” **Ellis**

“For social media, I’ve got an app block. If I try to scroll outside Saturday 12–6, I have to pay £5. It’s never worth it.” **Ellis**

Customised strategies make study consistent and motivating.

### **Embedding Study in Daily Life**

Study doesn’t have to be long or intimidating. Ellis advises integrating learning into your routines.

- Attach study tasks to daily habits (e.g., practise one double-entry transaction each time you open the fridge).
- Use repetition to strengthen memory.

“If you open the fridge 25 times a day, that’s 25 times you’ve practised double entry without even noticing. Over a month, that’s 775 repetitions.” **Ellis**

Small, frequent practice helps prevent burnout while improving retention.

## **Interactive Learning and Motivation**

Engaging actively makes study enjoyable. Ellis suggests:

- Consider your personal preferences and adapt your study environment.
- Use rewards aligned with your preferences.
- Connect with peers, even virtually, to reduce isolation.

“If you like the outdoors, take a blanket outside and read a few chapters. If you’re an explorer, watch videos to gain different perspectives. If you enjoy luxury treats, have a favourite tea only when studying to give yourself motivation.” **Ellis**

“Reaching out to your group, meeting for a study day, or even a chat on Zoom can make you feel less isolated and more supported.” **Ellis**

## **Exploring Active Learning Strategies**

Active learning can take many forms:

- Summarising notes
- Teaching others
- Mind maps
- Study buddies and peer groups
- Cue cards and textbook exercises
- Online quizzes (ICB Mocks, AAT Green Light, etc.)
- Practice papers
- Speaking to tutors or experts

“Teaching others is a great way to pass on knowledge, but also to reaffirm it in your own mind.” **Ellis**

“Mind maps are great for concepts — not for tax rules in depth — but for seeing the big picture.” **Ellis**

## **Seeking Support and Asking Questions**

Help is always available — reach out early to avoid frustration:

- Contact tutors via phone or email.
- Join private Facebook groups for peer support.
- Ask questions freely — no query is too small.

“Don’t feel ashamed or feel like there’s a silly question. The only silly question there is, is the one that’s not asked.” **Ellis**

“Nothing destroys the vibe like being stuck — so please do reach out.”  
**Ellis**

## **The Importance of Self-Care**

Healthy lifestyle habits improve learning:

- Sleep: 7–9 hours nightly
- Nutrition: Five portions of fruit and vegetables daily
- Hydration: 6–8 cups of fluid daily
- Exercise: 150 minutes of moderate activity per week

“If you study all night but don’t get sleep, you’re less likely to remember that much—your brain needs sleep to make connections.” **Ellis**

“Self-care is really important for academic success. Sleep, hydration, nutrition, and movement all help your brain function and energy levels.”  
**Ellis**

## **Developing a Growth Mindset**

A growth mindset helps you persist through challenges. Ellis suggests:

- Replace “I’m not good at this” with “What am I missing?”
- Swap “I give up” for “Is there another strategy?”
- Turn “I’ll never be smart” into “I’ll eventually learn how to do this.”

“Try and develop a growth mindset. Instead of thinking, ‘I’m not good at this,’ think, ‘What’s going to help me become good at this?’” **Ellis**

Elaine adds:

“It’s really important to think of ourselves as people who can learn how to do things — and that when you hit a barrier, it’s not a case of giving up.”

**Elaine**



“There is no such word as fail; it represents your first attempt in learning.” **Elaine**

### 3. Making Habits Stick

Elaine guides learners through practical strategies for building study habits that last. While willpower helps, long-term habit formation relies on training your subconscious mind.

“Your thinking brain is not your best friend — it’s your subconscious that you want to harness.” **Elaine**

#### **Turn Goals into Routines**

Reframe study as a routine — something automatic rather than a goal to chase. It can take between 218 and 254 days for habits to become ingrained.

“It’s not about perfection — it’s about consistent progress over time.” **Elaine**

Pair new behaviours with existing routines (habit stacking) and schedule study as fixed appointments:

“Make your study an appointment — not something you might do if you feel like it.” **Elaine**

#### **Using the Habit Loop**

Elaine explains the habit loop: cue, craving, response, and reward. By identifying triggers and reinforcing rewards, you can train your brain to associate study with positive momentum.

“Think about what your cue, your craving, your response and your reward are going to be in terms of your study.” **Elaine**

#### **Harnessing Rewards and Dopamine**

Dopamine, the brain’s motivation chemical, reinforces effort. Balance is key — too much or too little affects focus and memory. Regular exercise, good sleep, and routines help. Small rewards, such as ticking goals or enjoying a cup of tea, make studying feel satisfying.

“I kind of became addicted to getting my assignments back marked — that became a dopamine shot!” **Louise**

## Visualising Success

Elaine encourages learners to see themselves as capable and visualise success:

“Think of yourself as capable of learning what you’re trying to learn. That mindset of ‘I’m rubbish at this’ isn’t helping you.” **Elaine**

“Lots of people have gone through these training courses and gone on to be successful. There’s absolutely no reason why you can’t be one of them.” **Elaine**

## 4. Common Hurdles in Distance Learning

**Staying Motivated:** Break study into manageable chunks, set micro-goals, and celebrate progress.

“I joined the Ideal Schools Student Support Forum... I had four study buddies. You don’t want them to get too far ahead, so it spurs you on.”

**Louise**

**Combatting Isolation:** Facebook groups, peer support groups, and tutor feedback help you feel connected.

“Those Facebook groups are there for you to share motivational tips, ask for ideas, and talk about what’s working for you or what isn’t.” **Elaine**

**Time Management:** Incorporate study into daily routines with cue cards and apps.

“Build study into existing habits, like study bites with your morning coffee, cue cards while the kettle boils.” **Elaine**

**Confidence Wobbles:** Reframe frustration and focus on progress, not perfection.

“It’s not that I’m not getting this... It’s about how I’m going to get this.”

**Louise**

“Nobody’s ever asked me what percentage I got in my AAT exams. As long as you’ve got the qualification, that’s all that matters.” **Ellis**

**Exam Preparation Stress:** Templates deepen understanding and reduce anxiety.

“Templates help me really calm down because I think, ‘You’ve got it in front of you, Louise. You can do this.’” **Louise**

“If we could find somewhere in the middle, between ‘only perfection counts’ and ‘that’ll do’ - there’s a happy medium, that’s what to aim for.”

**Elaine**

## 5. Final Thoughts

Never let yourself get to the point that you feel alone and isolated on your study journey. Ideal Schools offers award-winning tutors, supportive communities, and decades of experience helping students succeed. Celebrate progress, maintain a positive mindset, and keep going. Every small step adds up.

“You do not need to tackle these challenges alone.” **Elaine**

### **Q&A Highlights:**

- Time management apps: Ellis recommends Lock Me Out (Android) and equivalents for iPhone.
- Combatting self-sabotage: Identify triggers, remove distractions, share goals for accountability.
- Using Read My Screen: Ensure PDFs are available offline via Mimeo – request access from Ideal Schools staff.

### **Closing Advice from the Team:**

- Self-study builds confidence and professional skills.
- Motivation grows by seeing others succeed through the Ideal Schools Student Spotlight page.
- Education is accessible and transformative.

“Keep going... You’ve got this!” **Elaine, Ellis, and Louise**