

GAC003 Study Skills for Independent Learning

GAC Study and Communication Skills

What this module is, and how it is marked

GAC003 is not about a subject. It is about how you study, and it is the module whose habits decide your marks in every other one. Six units cover reflection, time management, the university study environment, independent learning and study strategies.

It is assessed almost entirely by documents you build over the semester rather than by tests. A typical set is a **reflective learning journal** 反思学习日志 carrying the largest single weight, a **semester planner** 学期计划表, a **curriculum vitae (CV)** 个人简历 with a **personal statement** 个人陈述, and ongoing **coursework** 平时作业 for participation and independent study tasks.

- The journal is written in English across the whole semester, a dozen entries or so. It cannot be produced in the last week, and a teacher can tell when it has been.
- △ Nothing here can be revised for the night before. The mark is the work itself.

Reflective learning

Reflection 反思 means looking back at what you did, judging how well it worked, and deciding what to change. It is a skill that is assessed, so it has a shape.

A weak entry says what happened. A strong entry says what happened, what you noticed about your own learning, and what you will do differently.

- **Describe** 描述 the task briefly: what you did and under what conditions.
- **Evaluate** 评价 it honestly: what worked, what did not, and what the evidence is.
- **Plan** 计划 the change: one specific thing you will do next time.
- A **learning style** 学习风格 is a preference, not a limit. Noticing that you follow diagrams more easily than paragraphs is useful; refusing to read paragraphs is not.
- **Multiple intelligences** 多元智能 is the idea that ability comes in several kinds. Use it to find a way in to hard material, not as a reason to avoid a kind of task.

Worked example. Two journal entries about the same lesson.

Weak: "Today we learned about graphs. It was hard. I will study more."

Strong: "In the graphs class I could plot points but I could not explain the gradient in English. I understood the idea in Chinese, so the gap is vocabulary, not mathematics."

I have added gradient, intercept and axis to my logbook and I will re-explain the worked example aloud in English before the next class.”

The second entry names the evidence, separates the real difficulty from the apparent one, and commits to something checkable. That is what earns the marks.

Time management I: planning the semester

Time management is assessed as a document: a planner that maps the whole semester’s deadlines before the work begins.

- Start from **assessment deadlines** 考核截止日期, not from today. Write in every due date for every module first.
- Work backwards from each deadline to a **start date** 开始日期. A report due in week 10 with three weeks of work begins in week 7, and the planner should say so.
- Mark the **collisions** 冲突 where two deadlines land in one week. Those weeks are the whole reason for planning; the rest of the semester takes care of itself.
- Distinguish **urgent** 紧急 from **important** 重要. A task is urgent because of its date and important because of its weight, and the two rarely coincide.

Worked example. Three deadlines fall in week 12: a mathematics project, an English seminar and a science report. Working backwards, the report needs an experiment run in week 9, the project needs data collected in week 10, and the seminar needs rehearsal in week 11. The three tasks do not actually collide. What collides is the *finishing*, and only a planner built backwards shows that in week 8, when it can still be fixed.

Time management II: the working week

A semester plan fails without a weekly habit to carry it.

- A **to-do list** 待办清单 records tasks; a **schedule** 时间表 gives each one a time and a place. A list without a schedule is a wish.
- Study in blocks with a fixed end. A block of 40 minutes with a real break after it beats three unfocused hours, because attention, not time, is the scarce resource.
- **Procrastination** 拖延 is usually avoidance of an unclear first step, not laziness. Make the first step small and specific: “open the paper and write the question in my own words”.
- Protect one **buffer** 缓冲时间 slot each week for what overran. A plan with no slack is a plan that breaks on its first bad day.

The higher education study environment

Western universities expect a way of working that differs from a school classroom, and the module names those differences so they are not a surprise.

- A **lecture** 讲座 delivers material to many students; a **seminar** 研讨课 is a small discussion where you are expected to speak; a **tutorial** 辅导课 is closer supervision of your own work.
- **Academic integrity** 学术诚信 is the rule that the work you submit is yours and every borrowed idea is credited. **Plagiarism** 抄袭 is using someone's words or ideas without a citation, and it is treated as a serious offence, not a formatting slip.
- **Referencing** 引用规范 is how you credit a source. A **citation** 引用 in the text points to a full entry in the **bibliography** 参考文献 at the end.
- A **transcript** 成绩单 records your modules and grades, summarised as a **grade point average (GPA)** 平均绩点. GAC issues one, which is what universities read.
- **Academic advisers** 学业导师 and student services exist to be asked. Using them early is normal behaviour, not an admission of failure.

Independent learning

Independent learning 自主学习 means taking responsibility for what you learn and when, rather than waiting to be told.

- Read **before** the class, not only after. Even a skim turns a lecture from dictation into a conversation you can follow.
- Set your own **learning goal** 学习目标 for a week, and make it observable: "explain the water cycle in English without notes" beats "study science".
- Use the **library and databases** 图书馆与数据库 rather than a search engine alone. A source you can cite is worth more than a source you cannot.
- **Group study** 小组学习 works when each person prepares something to teach. Explaining is the test of understanding, which is why it is worth building into a week.

Effective study strategies, and the CV

The last unit turns habits into two products: better study technique, and the documents you apply to university with.

- **Active recall** 主动回忆 means closing the book and retrieving the answer. Re-

reading feels productive and is far weaker, because recognition is not recall.

- **Spaced practice** 间隔复习 spreads study over days. The same total hours produce more durable memory when they are spread than when they are massed.
- **Note-taking** 笔记 is selection, not transcription. The **Cornell method** 康奈尔笔记法 splits the page into notes, cues and a summary written afterwards in your own words.
- A **CV** lists education, experience, skills and achievements, in reverse date order, on one page, with no photograph unless one is asked for.
- A **personal statement** argues for a course. It says why this subject, what you have already done about it, and what you will do with it.

Worked example. A personal statement opening.

Weak: "Since I was a child I have loved computers very much. Computers are very important in modern society."

Strong: "The first program I wrote sorted my music library by play count. It worked, and it also taught me why the sort was slow, which is what sent me to look up complexity."

The second sentence proves the interest with evidence instead of asserting it, and every strong statement does that.