

Alternative Format: Think Like a Second Year Toolkit

Landing Page

Welcome and thank you for accessing this toolkit which has been designed to help support you with your academic skills development during your time at Edge Hill.

Accessibility

Our Commitment to Accessibility

As an Edge Hill student you are part of an incredibly diverse learning community. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students, we have placed accessibility at the heart of UniSkills support, which enables all students to participate.

Alternative Formats

This is an alternative format for the Think Like a Second Year Toolkit.

Welcome from UniSkills

Hello, we are the [Student Engagement team](#) – otherwise known as UniSkills! We are the people you'll meet (in real life and online) through various support channels, as we help you develop your academic skills while studying at Edge Hill University.

Later in the toolkit you will have the opportunity to explore our wider support, but this is your chance to [find out more about the team](#).

Access [this video from your friendly Student Advisor](#). Alternatively, you are welcome to access the video transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF version](#).

Why Should I Complete This Toolkit?

This Think Like a Second Year Toolkit is designed for undergraduate students transitioning from first to second year (often called Level 4 to Level 5). It will help you build on the skills you started to develop in first year, and maybe even discover a few new ones!

As UniSkills Advisors, we know that transitioning between years can sometimes feel daunting. This toolkit has been designed both to encourage you and to equip you with the skills you need to progress with confidence.

Access this [short video](#), featuring one of our friendly academic skills advisors, who will tell you more about the move from first to second year. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF](#) version.

Toolkit objectives:

Upon completion of this toolkit, you will have developed the skills to:

- Demystify the transition from first year to second year.
- Clarify which academic skills are important for you in second year.
- Signpost you to further help and support from the UniSkills team.

Completing this toolkit supports the following [Graduate Attributes](#):

1. Digital Proficiency
2. Resilience
3. Adaptability and Flexibility
4. Critical Thinking

Rest, Review, and Reflect

Rest and Reset

Moving into second year is a big step. Before you rush ahead, it's worth hitting pause. After navigating your first year, it's important to give yourself time to rest and recover.

This might mean switching off from study for a while, taking time to unwind, spending time on hobbies, and/or catching up with friends and family. Remember: rest isn't wasted time - it is necessary in order to return more focused and energised.

Top Tip: If you have had a break between first and second year, why not come along to our Returning to Learning drop-in. For more information, visit your [UniSkills Workshops Page](#).

Confidence Scale

Take a moment to think about how confident you feel studying in second year. Give yourself a rating between 1 and 10, with 1 being 'low confidence' and 10 being 'high confidence'. Reflect for a moment on why you feel like this.

Top Tip: Remember, confidence isn't fixed. Some days you'll feel more sure of yourself than others. Wherever you place yourself on the scale, there's always room to grow, and you can [book a one-to-one appointment](#) with UniSkills at any point to support your progress.

Reflection

A quick think back to your first year now can help you spot what worked, what didn't, and what you'd like to change. This isn't about judging yourself - it's about learning what helps you thrive.

First year is often a time of adjustment, whereas second year brings higher expectations, more independent learning, and assessments that contribute more to your final degree. Reflecting now can help you build stronger habits and avoid repeating challenges.

This isn't about criticising yourself. It's about understanding your learning and making small, realistic improvements.

Activity: Take a moment now to think about what worked well in first year. Explore the list below to give you some ideas.

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- Study habits:
 - Developing a study routine that works for you.
 - Learning how to manage your time more effectively.
 - Using the library and other learning tools more confidently.
- Developing understanding:
 - Learning more about different areas of your topic.
 - Becoming familiar with academic language.
 - Noticing connections between different modules and theories.
- Approaching assignments:
 - Learning more about different areas of your topic.
 - Becoming familiar with academic language.
 - Noticing connections between different modules and theories.
- Personal growth:
 - Learning more about different areas of your topic.
 - Becoming familiar with academic language.
 - Noticing connections between different modules and theories.
- Using feedback:
 - Learning more about different areas of your topic.
 - Becoming familiar with academic language.
 - Noticing connections between different modules and theories.

Now think about what you could have done better in first year. Could you have attended more sessions? Engaged more in lectures? Organised your time more effectively?

Keep this in mind as something to improve in second year.

Review Feedback

Let's think a little more about feedback now. Getting feedback - especially if it is not what you hoped for - can be tough. But it is important to recognise that this emotional reaction is part of the feedback process.

Not all feedback will be positive, and there may be times when you find it challenging. Ironically, those challenging bits are often the ones that help you grow the most. When you can step back, reframe the emotion, and look at the message underneath, that's when real progress happens.

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Understanding feedback as useful guidance, rather than criticism, can help you effectively reflect and action plan (or feed forward) to improve future assignments. Taking action is what will help you progress in your academic journey.

Take some time to explore your [Focus on Feedback Toolkit](#) for more support.

Student View: “Try to keep track of the themes that emerge from your feedback, and review these with every assignment to pick out key areas to focus on and target. One way of doing this is by making a spreadsheet to note down assessment types, grades, and feedback concerns. You could then start tallying the common feedback themes and pick them as a key area to work on in your next assignments” – Lauren, Year 3 BA (Hons) Media.

Top Tip: In addition to the helpful advice from Lauren, it is a good idea also to review the second year marking criteria in your Module or Programme Handbook and compare this with the first year criteria. Use feedback to identify how well you are meeting the marking criteria. Pay attention to directive words such as analyse, critically evaluate, synthesise, justify, and apply. What do you need to work on in second year?

Recap

Your first year is where you build the foundational skills that make second year (and beyond!) much more manageable. So don't forget the essentials:

- Organise your time and your ideas.
- Ensure you know what is expected of you.
- Engage with wider research.
- Find study habits that work for you.
- Use your feedback to help you improve.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Moving Forward

Second year is not about being perfect - it's about becoming a more confident, independent learner. By reflecting on your skills now, you're building a strong foundation for the rest of your degree.

Prepare to Progress

The best way to make real progress in second year is to prepare for it. Even if first year didn't go exactly as you hoped, second year offers a fresh opportunity to reset, rebuild, and strengthen the skills you've already begun developing.

This section will help you to recognise some of the changes and challenges you may meet in second year, and to prepare for them in pragmatic and positive ways.

Moving Up to Second Year

Here we explore how you can get to grips with the key changes you'll encounter in second year - what shifts, what becomes more demanding, and what new expectations you'll be working towards.

Activity: Explore the list below to familiarise yourself with what's coming and to start thinking about how you can adapt your approach.

Marks Count

Grades often now start to contribute to your final degree classification, so your work has a bigger impact. This is not to say your first year did not matter - the skills you built then absolutely do matter. It's just that now they start to count toward your final degree.

Workload Grows

Yes, workload will increase, but so will your ability to handle it! You'll juggle more tasks and deadlines, so planning and time management will be even more essential now.

Complexity Intensifies

Assignments do become more complex, so expect larger word counts, deeper critical thinking, and a greater amount of research.

Independence Increases

Your tutors will still be here to guide you, but there will be more onus on you to decide how, when, and where you complete your work and achieve your goals.

Your Voice is Stronger

You'll start to develop your own ideas, arguments, and perspectives with more confidence. You will also begin to make critical judgements on the perspectives you engage with.

Second year brings new expectations, but it also brings new opportunities. Your workload expands and your assignments become more challenging, yet you're also building the skills to meet these demands head-on. Every step you take builds on the foundations you laid in first year and helps you rise to the challenges of second year.

Finding Your Place

So now you know the expectations, but you might be thinking, “how do I actually make this work in my everyday life?”.

Well, a good starting point is to think about where you study. As you move into second year, your living situation may have changed, so it's worth considering whether your current environment supports your study and focus.

If it doesn't always work for you, you're not limited to studying at home. [Catalyst](#) offers a range of spaces, including [bookable rooms](#) for quieter or group study. You might also try a change of scenery - a local café, park, or any spot that helps you focus. Finding a place that suits how you work can make a real difference and can help you think more intentionally about how you use your time.

Planning

Second year requires stronger time-management and forward planning. You might start by mapping out any assignment deadlines (including time for planning, drafting, and submitting your work). Using a calendar, diary, planner, or digital tools such as [Trello](#) or [Todoist](#) can help. Generative AI can also be useful for drafting timetables.

Whatever tool you choose, the goal here is to help you to stay organised, meet deadlines, and maintain a healthy study–life balance.

For help with planning your actual assignments, do visit the Focus and Planning lesson in your [Academic Writing Toolkit](#).

Top Tip: Remember that whilst second year is definitely a step up, it's still a step-by-step journey. You're not expected to get everything perfect straight away. Mistakes, learning curves, and moments of uncertainty are all part of the process, and support is always available when you need it.

Research Skills – Going Deeper

You may have spent some time in first year gaining familiarity with the research process, and starting to develop skills in finding academic information. In second year, you will be asked to delve deeper into this process - to further refine your use of dedicated search tools in order to find top quality information. This will entail wider and more critical reading.

If you need a refresher on any of these terms, do revisit your [Preparing to Study Toolkit](#).

Top Tip: Remember that your [Reading Lists](#) exist to help you make a start on your research. They are a great platform from which to jump off into wider reading. If you have not accessed them previously, now is the time!

Wider Reading: Why?

You may already be familiar with the Edge Hill online library, [Discover More](#). If you are not, or need help using it, you can visit your [Finding Academic Information Toolkit](#) for guidance.

Much like your Reading Lists, Discover More is a great place to start your research. As you progress, though, you will be encouraged to explore more widely - both within Discover More and further afield. Before we turn to where you might conduct these explorations, it is firstly worth considering why expectations increase as you move forward:

Greater Understanding

You will now be moving beyond introductory material, so need to engage with more reading to help you understand more complex information.

Critical Thinking

An essential component of critical thinking is showing an awareness of different viewpoints, which you will encounter through wider reading.

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Strengthening Skills

Wider reading supports the development of high-level skills such as analysis, synthesis, and application.

Confidence

The more you read, the more fluent you become in the language of your discipline. This makes it much easier to participate and progress.

Better Marks

Wider reading enables critical and independent thinking - skills which are rewarded in higher-grade work.

Preparation for Third Year

Second year can lay the groundwork for your final year research project - engaging in wider reading now can only help.

Activity: Take a moment to think about whether there are any other reasons you might engage in wider research. Consider whether there are any discipline-specific factors. For instance: needing to stay up-to-date with current research; engaging with real-life examples; tracking trends; or simply that you are interested and curious!

Make a note of some of these reasons - they can be helpful reminders if things start to feel overwhelming.

Wider Reading: Where?

Textbooks and eBooks remain essential foundations to your studies, but at this stage you will want to be relying more heavily on journal articles and other, more current, research (e.g. conference papers, government and professional reports, systematic reviews). This is essential in all subjects - even creative and/or interpretive fields - as new scholarship continually reframes what we think and know.

Explore your [Subject Resources](#) pages for lists of appropriate journals, databases, and additional resources. [Google Scholar](#) is also a broad and valuable search tool (just be mindful that some journals are not peer-reviewed).

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Top Tip: you might find a research technique called 'snowballing' useful here. This is where you use one strong academic source in order to find others. This might include looking at the source's reference list ('backward snowballing'), or using the 'cited by' function on [Google Scholar](#) to find who has cited that source ('forward snowballing').

Wider Reading: How?

Building on your use of key words from your Learning Outcomes (LOs) and assignment titles, you will now want to be using synonyms and varied combinations of terms to widen your search. This will include techniques such as "phrasal searching" and using Boolean operators (AND/OR/NOT). Again, access your [Finding Academic Information Toolkit](#) for more information.

Top Tip: Academic databases don't understand full questions in the same way we do. Instead, we need to break a question into key concepts and think of alternative words/phrases for each one. The examples in the following activity show how a single assignment title can be unpacked and turned into an effective search strategy.

Activity: Briefly study the assignment titles below. What key words, synonyms, phrases, and combinations might you use? Move on to our suggestions to check whether you are on the right track.

Titles

"Critically analyse the interpretation of social themes in musical theatre"

"An evaluation of soundtrack influence in animation"

"A comparative study of AI-driven decision-making models"

"Exploring the nurse's role in managing long-term conditions"

"Reflecting on professional identity in teaching diverse learners"

Titles and Search Strings

"Critically analyse the interpretation of social themes in musical theatre"

"Critical analysis" OR "performance analysis" OR "narrative analysis"

AND

Interpretation/understanding/representation/presentation/depiction

AND

"Social themes"/"sociocultural themes"/"social justice"

AND

"Musical theatre"/performance/musicals/"performance studies"/"theatre studies"

"An evaluation of soundtrack influence in animation"

evaluation OR analysis OR critique

AND

soundtrack/score/music/soundscape/"musical cues"

AND

influence/effect/role/contribution

AND

animation/"animated film"/"animated short"/"motion graphics"

"A comparative study of AI-driven decision-making models"

comparative OR "comparative analysis" OR evaluation

AND

AI-driven/machine-learning-driven/algorithmic/data-driven

AND

"decision-making models"/"predictive models"/"intelligent decision systems"

"Exploring the nurse's role in managing long-term conditions"

exploring OR investigating OR evaluating OR assessing

AND

"nurse's role"/"nursing responsibilities"/"nurse-led practice"

AND

managing/"coordinating care"/implementing/overseeing

AND

"long-term conditions"/"chronic diseases"/"persistent conditions"

"Reflecting on professional identity in teaching diverse learners"

reflecting OR examining OR "critical reflection"

AND

"professional identity"/"professional self-concept"/"teacher persona"

AND

teaching/pedagogy/"teacher training"/education

AND

"diverse learners"/"mixed cohorts"/"varied learner group"

Critical Reading

In addition to reading wider, in second year you will be expected to read deeper. In essence, to read more critically.

In your first year, reading is mostly about building a basic understanding of your subject and becoming familiar with core concepts. Whilst you may have been expected to incorporate some criticality, this expectation grows in your second year.

When you are asked to read critically, you are essentially being asked to actively engage with what you are reading. This means interpreting, evaluating, and questioning what you are reading, rather than just gleaning surface information.

For more support with critical reading, do visit the following [UniSkills Toolkits](#):

- Academic Reading Toolkit
- Being Critical Toolkit

Student View: "I found that reading books or listening to podcasts I was genuinely interested in (that also linked to my degree) helped me identify areas I was particularly drawn to, and bridge the gap between my personal and academic life. If something really stood out, I'd take a picture or note it down so I built up a bank of literature to draw on later, reducing the mad rush to find relevant resources when it came to writing!" - Mollie, Year 3 BA (Hons) Counselling and Psychotherapy,

Top Tip: The increased expectations for reading can feel overwhelming, especially in our time-poor world. Please know you are not alone if you feel this. Do visit your [Time Management Toolkit](#) for some practical tips, and remember that the [Student Support and Wellbeing Teams](#) are also always here for you.

Academic Writing – Joining the Conversation

Now that you have explored how to read more critically in your second year, it is time to put those skills to work in your writing. The same habits (questioning, evaluating, and analysing) are still central, but now you need to apply them - to turn your insights into clear, well-developed arguments.

In the next sections, you will explore how to use evidence in more sophisticated ways; how to prioritise depth over breadth; and how to refine your adherence to academic conventions so that your writing feels more accomplished.

Academic View: "When I write, I feel more. When I write, I feel beautiful. When I write, I feel I am finally partaking in reality. It is not because writing is something that I can do well or something that is easy for me. Writing is painfully difficult for me, and it always makes me feel inadequate. Writing is, for me, an experience of both love and hate" – Min-Ah Cho, South Korean theologian.

A Note on Terms

Before exploring the features of critical writing in detail, it's important to clarify the demands of academic tasks to understand exactly what is being asked of you. Explore the table below to discover the correct definitions for each directive term.

Directive Term	Definition
Analyse	Explain and explore.
Evaluate	Weigh strengths and weaknesses.
Discuss	Show balance and other views.
Synthesise	Bring multiple sources together.
Justify	Defend a position.
Critique	Question and investigate.
Apply	Use theory in practice.

More Critical Use of Evidence

In second year, you are expected not only to include sources, but to demonstrate judgement in how you use them. Critical use of evidence is about showing the reader that you are making deliberate choices about which sources to use.

This involves demonstrating depth in your academic writing. However, this shift towards depth does not mean reading less; writing critically still requires reading widely (as we explored in the previous section). What changes at this level is not how much you read, but how you use your reading. Strong academic writing demonstrates critical awareness through careful selection, evaluation, and commentary, rather than through volume alone.

Activity: Explore the list below to identify some key ways you can use your evidence more critically.

- Purpose: use evidence to support, develop, justify, or challenge a point - rather than because it simply seems relevant.
- Comment: explain why something matters/is important, rather than just presenting it.
- Limitations: recognise any shortcomings or oversights in a method or argument.
- Language: choose your words carefully to reflect a critical stance. Visit the [Being Critical](#) section of the [Academic Phrasebank](#) for more information.
- Position: present a well-supported perspective on the topic/issue.
- Context: acknowledge the context of a piece, and how it fits in the wider academic discussion.

More Complex Use of Evidence

The way you are expected to use information also becomes more complex in second year. You are not only expected to identify relevant sources, but also to engage with them. In other words - to join the conversation.

This means that you will usually rely more on paraphrasing than quoting. For more information on this please visit the Quoting and Paraphrasing lesson in your [Academic Writing Toolkit](#).

Two key skills can help you here: integration (bringing together theory, policy, practice, and academic literature) and synthesis (inferring a relationship between sources). The next activity will assist you with solidifying your understanding of these.

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Activity: work through the examples below to help solidify your understanding of these.

Please note: all references are presented in [Edge Hill Harvard Referencing](#) style. Your subject may use a different style, and you should always check in your Module or Programme Handbooks and with your tutor if you are unsure.

Synthesis

Recent scholarship highlights growing uncertainty around how culpability is defined in modern criminal law (Child and Hunt, 2021; Creim and Burrow, 2025; Islahuddin, 2026).

Note: this is classed as synthesis because the example combines three different sources who make the same or similar point.

Integration

Recent research on how genes switch on and off has led to more precise tools for studying this process. For example, scientists have developed new ways to look closely at how RNA and proteins interact (Ducoli et al., 2026), alongside national policies that underscore the role of genomics in informing diagnosis and treatment decisions (NHS England, 2025).

Note: this example integrates academic literature with national policy in order to develop the point being made.

Synthesis and Integration

Studies show that managing training load is vital for improving performance and preventing injuries (Branquinho et al., 2025; Penichet-Tomás, 2024), while evidence also indicates that athletes who build up higher chronic workloads tend to experience fewer injuries than those who train less (Gabbett, 2012).

Note: this example draws together Branquinho et al. and Penichet-Tomás to make the first point (synthesis) which is then integrated with support from Gabbett.

Neither

Revolutions can be influenced by clashes between social groups (Skocpol, 1979).

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Note: This example does not integrate or synthesise sources. It is important to note that this does not automatically make it poor academic writing. However, in this case the source use is weak because the information provided is vague and overly general, with no further detail or explanation. It is also unclear whether the material has been paraphrased or directly quoted, which further reduces its clarity and potentially risks plagiarism.

Neither

Jenkins's concept of participatory culture shows how online platforms encourage audiences to become active contributors, rather than passive consumers, thus transforming traditional media relationships (Jenkins, 2006).

Note: Whilst this paragraph does not use integration or synthesis, it is still a strong example because it shows clear understanding and thoughtful development. This demonstrates that integrating and synthesising sources is not always essential for producing high-quality academic writing; rather, these techniques can enhance it when used appropriately.

Academic Conventions

Finally, second year is the time to really hone your adherence to those academic conventions that may have been new to you in first year. This means ensuring:

- Accurate and consistent referencing throughout, with correct in-text citations and reference lists.
- Clear adherence to presentation and formatting requirements, as outlined in your module or programme guidance.
- An appropriate academic tone and style, with clear expression and effective paragraphing.
- Appropriate and ethical use of Generative AI, if you decide to use it at all. For more guidance, visit your [UniSkills GenAI Webpage](#).

Meeting these expectations helps the focus remain on the quality of your writing, rather than avoidable technical or ethical concerns.

Final Thoughts

We hope that you now feel more confident as you prepare to move into your second year of study at Edge Hill University. Remember that developing your academic skills is an ongoing process, so it's important to balance your ambition with patience and kindness towards yourself as you grow.

As you continue your studies, be sure to revisit your [UniSkills Toolkits](#) - both throughout second year and as you begin preparing for third year.

Access this [short video](#), featuring one of our friendly academic skills advisors, who will share some final thoughts on the transition from first to second year. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a [Word version](#) or [PDF](#) version.

Related Resources

Useful Reading

To learn more about some of the skills that are essential in second year, you might find the following texts useful:

BURNS, T. and SINFIELD, S. 2022. *Essential Study Skills* [eBook]. 5th ed. London: Sage Publications Inc. Available

from: [https://edgehill.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781529785623/epubcfi/6/2\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dcover\]/4/2\[cover-image\]/2%4063:41](https://edgehill.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781529785623/epubcfi/6/2[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dcover]/4/2[cover-image]/2%4063:41) [Accessed 08 April 2026].

HOPKINS, D. and REID, T. 2024. *The Academic Skills Handbook* [eBook]. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Inc. Available

from: [https://edgehill.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781529614398/epubcfi/6/2\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dcover\]/4/2\[cover-image\]/2%4093:36](https://edgehill.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9781529614398/epubcfi/6/2[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dcover]/4/2[cover-image]/2%4093:36) [Accessed 08 April 2026].

Useful Links

Check out your [Preparing to Study](#) webpage, which contains helpful reminders of some of the foundational elements of undergraduate study.

Take some time to also explore your other [UniSkills Toolkits](#).

UniSkills Blogs

UniSkills write regular [blogs](#), including a monthly focus on library resources and academic skills. In these quick reads you can learn about useful resources, how to access them and their benefits to your studies. You might even find us exploring new ways of thinking!

Other Resources

Check out [LinkedIn Learning](#) for access to free, unlimited access to thousands of high quality online courses and video tutorials written by industry experts.

UniSkills Support at Edge Hill University

As well as our toolkits, there are many ways you can access support for your academic skills development. No question or query is too big or too small. Whether you are new to studying or need to refresh or develop skills, we have a range of options for you to access at both graduate and postgraduate taught level.

Webpages

Reach your potential and visit our [UniSkills web pages](#). Find out more about the support designed to help you develop your academic skills and confidence at university and beyond. Whatever your subject or level of study, UniSkills has something to offer.

Workshops and Webinars

[UniSkills workshops and webinars](#) are an opportunity for a deeper dive into a specific skill that will support you on your academic journey. Facilitated by our friendly and knowledgeable Academic Skills Advisors, these sessions provide an informal safe space where you will be supported alongside other students in a small group setting.

Appointments

All students are able to book [a one-to-one appointment](#). Our experienced Academic Skills Advisors can help you develop your academic skills and strategies throughout your time at university. One-to-one support is available on a wide range of topics including academic reading, writing, and referencing, finding information, and preparing your assignment for submission.

AskUs

For any questions across any of our library and learning services, you can [Ask Us](#) online.

Campaigns

Explore our year-round [UniSkills campaigns](#) to enhance your academic journey at Edge Hill. From pre-arrival prep to acing your exams, we've got something for everyone!

Keep in Touch

Library and Learning Services Instagram

Make sure you're following us over on [Instagram](#) for all the latest Library and Learning Services news, events, and support.

You'll discover weekly 'what's on' stories; reminders about upcoming campaigns and events; fun, interactive polls and competitions; hidden treasures from our Archive; and reading for pleasure recommendations.

Library and Learning Services Blog

In the [Library and Learning Services Blog](#) you'll find lots of information, ideas and support curated by a wide range of staff and students from across the service.

Browse through all our useful blogs via the Home tab or visit individual areas of interest via the sub-blog headings along the menu bar.

Your Views Count

Thank you for engaging with this toolkit.

We'd love to know what you thought, and you can share your feedback in our short [UniSkills Toolkit Satisfaction Survey](#). The survey should take you no longer than five minutes to complete.

Your feedback helps us to continually improve our support - thank you!

You have now completed this UniSkills toolkit and can close the window. We hope you found it useful, and we look forward to continuing to support you with your academic skills development.