

Taking stock (1): the skills I have

When to complete: August/September

Recommended time for completion: 2-3 hours

Date completed:

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1. Introduction

This section is the first of three with the title *Taking stock*. These have been designed to help guide you towards making decisions that are right for you and your future, especially your future in education.

Taking stock part 1 provides an introduction to the concept of core skills. You will be asked to consider the skills you have right now and how these might be useful for your studies.

The exercises in this section encourage you to analyse your strengths and weaknesses and identify areas you could improve to help you be successful in your studies. There are no right and wrong answers; everyone will do this differently. You may also work on this by yourself or with your classmates.

2. Find out more

Core skills are included in all of your academic units. You can find out more about them on the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) [website](#).

3. Exercises

The fact you are doing a SWAP East access programme shows that you already have some idea of where you would like to be in the future and, importantly, how to get there.

You may already have a clear idea of how you want to spend the rest of your working life and how you can improve your opportunities through education. Or, you may still need time to think about this, research your options and identify what your interests and skills might be best suited to. The access programme can be seen as an opportunity to have some thinking time to make decisions about how you would like your life to progress from here. Whatever your situation, it's always useful to stop from time to time, reflect on where you are and what you've achieved and put plans in place to move you on to your next goal.

Take your time to work through the Taking Stock exercises below. Your tutor will give you guidance.

Exercise 1

Write down **five successes** you have had in the last few years. These can be successes at work, in your personal life, in your community or in anything else. For example, you might have counselled a friend through a personal crisis; you might have stopped smoking; you might have improved your personal fitness; or you might have received some form of recognition at work for being a good employee. These are all successes.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now read through the successes you have written down.

Do they have anything in common? E.g. They might show you are good with people; they might show you are good at problem solving; or they might show you approach tasks practically.

What common features can you see? (Another way of doing this exercise is to work with a partner. You write down your successes and they look for common features in them. Then discuss together).

Exercise 2

Think about the common features you identified in the last exercise and write down **three or four qualities or skills** you have which will help you pursue your main goal. E.g. If your main goal is to become a teacher, which skills do you have that match those of a good teacher?

	Aim	Your qualities/skills
1		
2		
3		
4		

Exercise 3

You have now identified some of your key skills and strengths. To be successful in your studies it is important to build on those skills and strengths and, at the same time, be able to recognise areas of weakness and find ways of working on them.

In the chart below, rate your abilities in one of the most important core skills: communication. Tick the box which most closely matches how you see yourself – be honest!

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
I am a good listener			
I am a confident speaker			
I am a fast reader			
I prepare carefully			
I write clearly			
I check all written work carefully			
I make sure I understand what is said to me			
I think before I act			

Add up your score.

5 for each always.

3 for each sometimes.

1 for each rarely.

Total score:

Results:

0-19: you need to concentrate on developing and improving your communication skills.

20-29: your communication skills are average. There is plenty of room for improvement.

30-40: your communication skills are excellent!

Do not take these results too seriously, but do take some time to reflect on your responses. All aspects of communication are important. If you are strong in one area but weak in another, now is a good time to work on this. College provides you with a supportive where you can access many sources of help and assistance.

Core skills

Of course, communication skills are extremely important when it comes to being successful in your studies. However, there are other important core skills which should not be overlooked.

Numeracy/maths

Numeracy skills are necessary for coping with the demands of everyday life, including work and study. You will need to be comfortable with numbers, and to be able to use graphs, symbols, diagrams and calculators.

Problem solving

Problem Solving skills are also important in everyday life and are required in order to tackle problems in an effective and appropriate way. This can include tricky issues or problems which arise in the course of your studies, but the same skills will also be relevant in tackling problems in a personal, social, or occupational contexts.

Teamwork

The ability to co-operate successfully with other people in learning and working situations in order to identify and achieve shared goals, will be vital to success in learning. Your SWAP Programme (and university studies if you go) will include elements of group work and class discussion which will allow you to develop your team working skills.

Information technology

This means your ability to use IT to process information in ways which will be useful both in your studies, as well as in your personal and professional life. It does not mean development specialist IT skills!

Exercise 4

How well do you think you currently perform in these four Core Skills? Consider how confident you feel about each of these skills and complete the table below.

Core skill	Needs improvement	Good enough
Numeracy		
Problem solving		
Teamwork		
Information Technology		

If you rated any of the core skills as good enough, rate your ability and confidence in that skill using a scale of 1–5, in which 5 being is the highest level of confidence and 1 is the lowest.

	1	2	3	4	5
Numeracy					
Problem solving					
Teamwork					
Information Technology					

Finally, which of the core skills do you feel most confident in? Which do you think is your weakest? Try ranking the five core skills in relation to your abilities and confidence in each one. Your strongest core skill would be rated 1 and your weakest would be 5.

Communication/Numeracy/Teamwork/Problem solving/IT

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Everyone possesses core skills to a greater or lesser degree. The important thing is to recognise where your strengths and your weaknesses lie, and to seek improvement in those areas where you are not as strong.

4. Developing core skills

If you have recognised the need to work on improving one or more of your core skills, there's no time like the present to get started. Make an action plan (see below). And remember: don't wait until things get on top of you before you ask for help. Use the support available at your college right away. College learning support services are your services and are there for you to access from day one.

5. Support for students with disabilities

It is especially important to access support early on if you think you have a disability of any kind, especially if it is likely to have an impact on your studies. All colleges have learning support staff trained to assess and support students with a range of disabilities. You may also be entitled to special allowances to compensate for your disability. It is far better to get access to help right at the start of the year, rather than after you begin to have difficulties in the middle of your course.

6. Action plan

Now that you have taken stock of your core skills, you should have a clearer idea of where your strengths and weaknesses lie. So now you should think about what steps you are going to take to make improvements.

Look at the following example of a basic action plan and fill in the blank one below for yourself.

I want to improve: <i>numeracy skills</i>
Specifically, I need to work on: <i>maths, especially working with fractions</i>
I will take the following action: 1. <i>Make an appointment with the learning support office at the college.</i> 2. <i>Let my college tutor know I am getting help with this.</i> 3. <i>Complete all exercises set for me by learning support.</i>

I want to improve:
Specifically, I need to work on:
I will take the following action:
1.
2.
3.