

# Introduction

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Everyone's experience of education is different. However, there are a number of valuable skills that underpin our education. These should help us through all areas of our education and future learning in college, at university, at work or in our own time.



## What are the Key Skills?

Key Skills are:

- **general skills** used to improve your learning and performance. They are needed in education, work and everyday life
- **essential in education** because they help you to demonstrate and communicate your ideas and knowledge
- **essential in employment** – if you have Key Skills certificates, an employer will feel confident about your ability in specific areas, eg literacy. Most people will have several jobs during their lifetime; Key Skills are essential to help you to adapt to different types of job and to remain employable during your working life
- **essential in everyday life** because they are the skills you will need repeatedly. You will need to talk to others, write letters, understand information given in newspapers, books, etc.

The Key Skills qualification was made available from September 2000 and is designed to allow students to demonstrate and improve their proficiency in up to six different areas. The three core Key Skills are:

- Communication
- Application of Number
- Information Technology.

Together these make up the Key Skills qualification. The three wider Key Skills are:

- Working with Others
- Improving own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving.

The first three Key Skills are available at different levels (1 to 5), with each successive level representing a progression from the one before. The last three Key Skills are available from Levels 1 to 3.

Key Skills may be obtained through the study of NVQs, GNVQs, GCE AS/A-levels or the International Baccalaureate. This handbook is concerned with the Communication Key Skill at Level 3. Although explanation for Levels 1 and 2 has been provided for background information, you should aim to achieve Level 3.

## Obtaining your certificates

In order to secure this qualification, you need to provide evidence, either through specially designated tasks or through tasks in courses you are already studying. This evidence should then be collected in a clearly indexed portfolio. There will be an internal assessment of your portfolio. It will be assessed by your teachers and verified (checked) by the examination board. When your portfolio material reaches a satisfactory standard, it will be signed off by the Standards Moderator (external examiner) and you will receive a Unit Certificate.

# Reading

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From the earliest civilisations to the latest technology, the main way of accessing recorded information has been through reading. Most people have developed a range of reading skills during their time at school (many of which they are unaware of mastering). Reading at different levels involves more than simply decoding letters on the page. You navigate texts by using indexes, reference sections or by looking for headings and keywords. Reading also involves identifying writers' intentions, purposes, and opinions, and following often complex narratives or arguments. Reading in order to obtain, summarise or synthesise information allows you to research talks and discussions as well as informing your own writing and production of documents. This kind of reading skill thus supports the Communication Key Skill in other areas.



*Reading at different levels was not always comfortable...*

## Level 1

To achieve Level 1, you should be able to do the following.

### **Obtain advice from others on what to read for different purposes**

You should be aware that you can read texts for different reasons. For example, you may be reading to:

- find out facts
- establish the different opinions that people hold on a given subject
- find out how to do something
- help you come up with your own ideas on a subject.

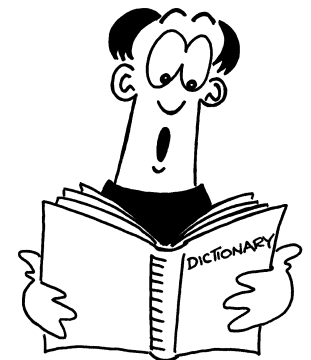
### **Identify the main points and ideas in different types of straightforward material, including images**

This means practising reading a range of different texts, eg letters, books, magazines, newspapers, and identifying the most important points that are being made. For example, a newspaper article may contain lots of background information, but its main purpose is to tell us what has happened.

You should also be able to look at pictures, diagrams, charts, maps, etc to establish what they are illustrating.

### **Use a dictionary**

Using a dictionary to check the meanings and correct spellings of words is an essential skill and a good habit for anyone who is trying to read and write accurately.



*There are all **sorts** of words in here...*

# Your portfolio

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You should now be aware that in order to gain the Key Skills Communication qualification, it is necessary to pass two distinct forms of assessment. One is the examination, which is dealt with in *Part 3* (see page 81). The other involves building up a portfolio or collection of evidence to demonstrate that you have mastered the necessary skills.

## Collecting evidence

Evidence for your portfolio can take a variety of forms. For example, written evidence, graphs, maps, models or drawings, video footage, or recorded evidence from assessors, eg teachers. The last type of evidence is particularly relevant to Key Skills Communication, as it requires you to produce evidence of oral tasks such as discussions.



*There was no way he was going to fail to gather evidence for his portfolio...*

If you have designated Key Skills sessions then it is likely that you will undertake specific pieces of work or a course of study designed to allow you to demonstrate all the required Key Skills. It may be targeted at just the Communication element, or it may allow you to combine Communication skills with Application of Number and Information Technology.

Alternatively, you may be looking at the courses of study that you are following to find opportunities to demonstrate the Key Skills that this handbook discusses.

Whichever form your Key Skills supervision takes, you need to gather evidence of the skills you have mastered and record some details of the tasks you have completed. This is particularly relevant for the oral tasks of discussion and presentation. You can submit either audio or video evidence for these tasks, but you should keep a detailed written record as well.

## Planning sheets

The planning sheets on the following pages can be used to record your achievements. In the space provided, describe how you have achieved each component of the Key Skills course. Each piece of evidence has been assigned a letter from **A** to **L** to help you identify them more easily. (These are used further in the sample assignment on pages 51 to 53.)

When you have completed a piece of evidence, remember to write the date and get your assessor (this could be your teacher) to initial the planning sheet.

## ICT



ICT provides many opportunities for gathering Key Skills Communication evidence. This is particularly true when considering the practical applications of computers and connected technology. Practical applications of ICT which can help to improve your portfolio can be found on pages 79 and 80.

### Discussion

Possible discussion topics include:

- The impact of ICT upon individuals, organisations and society.
- The effects of applications on society and the resulting need for retraining and reskilling humans to cope with changing work practices.
- The impact of external changes on an organisation, individuals within the organisation and on the systems in use.

You could also discuss how different factors have contributed to good design techniques for human–computer interfaces such as cognitive psychology, ergonomics, AI, design of computer input/output devices and software, including speech systems and visual systems.

### Presentation

Possible presentation topics include:

- The social impact of ICT upon individuals – In terms of eroding work/social boundaries through teleworking; the ability to shop from home on the Internet; job satisfaction; ease of tasks; benefits to the disabled and elderly. Illustrations showing how teleworking can be implemented may be used.

- A presentation about how word processing and desktop publishing packages can be used with data from a spreadsheet or database for mailmerges and the benefits of this.
- A description of the ways in which numerical data can be presented graphically and how you can match appropriate types of chart to a given application, task or area.
- The facilities available on modern telephone systems and ISDN, and their limitations for handling data traffic.

### Reading

In the definition, analysis and design section of the project, you are required to explain the user's requirements and how they were obtained. You need to synthesise the key material in order to evaluate alternative approaches to solve the problem.

### Writing

You could describe a wide range of health and safety issues related to working with ICT, and suggest appropriate measures for avoiding health problems.

You are expected to use different forms and styles of writing in your design specification (this may include the method of solving a problem, such as the use of data structures) and documentation (for example, user documentation including images of the interface to the system).

# Practice examination

## Document 1: Pros and cons of GM foods

Genetic modification means copying and transplanting a gene from one organism to another and altering ('modifying') it in a way that cannot come about naturally, for instance, by inserting a gene from an arctic flounder into a plant's genetic code (DNA) to make it frost-resistant. Biotechnology companies use genetic modification to improve a crop's resistance to weeds, to increase yields or speed up growth cycles.

There's intense debate over genetic modification. Some people believe it is tampering with nature and 'playing God'. Another belief is that patenting GM processes will lead to increased commercialisation of nature as companies own the rights to GM patents.

However, GM crops that are pest resistant and give higher yields could provide enough food for the growing world population.

In addition, plants could be modified to produce more nutritious or healthier foods and could be developed to survive in extreme conditions like droughts.

Notes

Pesticides and herbicides may be used less intensively with energy savings from reduced crop spraying.

GM food could have health benefits, such as providing edible vaccines, as well as providing cheaper, better quality and tastier food.

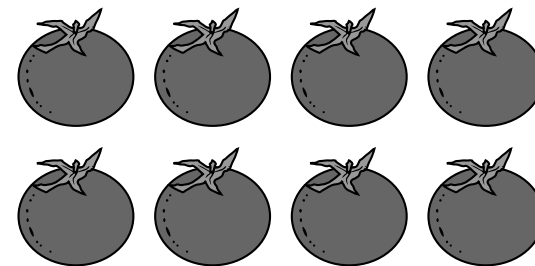
On the other hand, we do not know enough about what will happen to genes inserted into GM crops.

Growing GM crops on a large scale may have implications for biodiversity, the balance of nature, wildlife and the environment.

Genes from GM crops could transfer to non-GM crops and other plants growing nearby.

Animals could be exploited. Research is looking at ways to make animals grow faster and supply organs for human transplantation.

*(Adapted from Which?, March 1999)*



Notes