



# ACADEMIC SKILLS MODULE

Cohort 13 Student Guide

**REALISING  
OPPORTUNITIES**  
Working Together | Supporting Talent

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# Introduction

The academic element of the Realising Opportunities (RO) programme is the Academic Skills Module (ASM), which aims to give you an authentic experience of academic work at university. The ASM event(s) are delivered by your host university and are followed by a self-guided online component. The ASM has a subject stream component, which means you'll have the opportunity to attend a first year undergraduate level lecture in one of our four broad subject stream areas which are:

1. Engineering and Physical Sciences
2. Life and Health Sciences
3. Creative Arts and Humanities
4. Social Sciences

The ASM is a great way for you to get an insight into university and learn new skills, all of which will help you succeed in Higher Education. Your host university is really looking forward to supporting you through the ASM sessions and the self-guided component - making sure you have a great experience on the ASM!

**When you applied to the RO programme we asked you to choose which subject stream you would like to attend during the ASM. To see which stream you selected visit the RO student hub.**

**The ASM is a compulsory part of your participation in the Realising Opportunities programme and does not count towards the two events and activities you take part in as an RO student.**

# ASM sessions

The ASM event(s) will be delivered by your host university as either two separate online events or a one day on-campus event - your host university will tell you which ASM delivery method they will be using. All the sessions will focus on developing your transferable skills for Higher Education and your current A Level (or equivalent) studies. The sessions which will be covered are interactive and include:

## Welcome session

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This session will welcome you to the ASM and tell you what to expect from the module.

## Referencing session

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This interactive session will help you develop an introductory understanding of plagiarism, accurate citation and referencing skills – don't worry if you don't know what these are, as by the end of the session you will!

Also by the end of the session you will be able to demonstrate an understanding of research and the importance of finding appropriate academic sources.

The session will cover:

- The benefits and disadvantages of a variety of information sources
- How to combine keywords to perform a search to discover relevant information sources
- How to define plagiarism and discuss the purpose of referencing
- How to accurately reference information sources within your academic work

## Academic Note Taking session

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This interactive session will equip you with the skills you need to be able to take effective notes at university and during your time at school/college.

The session will cover:

- Why take notes?
- Note taking in lectures and other teaching
- Note taking from reading
- Note taking styles
- Note taking principles and tips you can use now

## Academic Lecture (subject stream specific)

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The academic lecture is delivered by a current academic to provide you with an authentic experience of a first year level university lecture in one of our four broad subject stream areas, which are:

1. Engineering and Physical Sciences
2. Life and Health Sciences
3. Creative Arts and Humanities
4. Social Sciences

You will also have the chance at the end of the lecture to chat with the academic and ask any questions you may have about your subject area of interest.

**The academic lecture is also your opportunity to put into practise your newly acquired note taking skills!**

## Academic Note Taking, small group work

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This interactive session will provide you with the chance to reflect, in small breakout groups, on the challenges of note taking during your academic lecture and what can be done to address them.

Student Ambassadors will assist you in:

- Reflecting on your note taking
- Reviewing your lecture notes
- Planning for future note taking

## Round-up and Q&A session

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This session will wrap up everything you have learned from the previous sessions and provide you with information about the next step of the ASM – the self-guided online component. It is also your chance to ask your host university and Student Ambassadors any questions you may have about the sessions you have attended or the self-guided online component.

**In order to check your understanding of the ASM sessions you have attended there will be a short ASM quiz at the end of your event(s). The aim of the quiz is to highlight skills areas you may still require more information about or practice of and if there are any gaps in your knowledge, we can signpost you to some online resources to further help your understanding.**

# ASM self-guided online component

The ASM self-guided online component, which you can complete in your own time, will give you the opportunity to reflect on the skills you learnt during the ASM sessions. For this component of the ASM you will be required to write a short reflective piece based on your ASM experience. Your reflective piece will not be marked or assessed and there is no pass/fail mark associated with it, although you will receive feedback via an ASM Reflective Tutor, who is an academic at your host university.

**In order to complete this compulsory part of the RO programme you must complete your written reflective piece. You will have two weeks from your ASM event (ASM online event 2 for students whose host university is delivering the ASM online) to complete the self-guided online component.**

The self-guided online component can be found on the RO student hub and we have created a handy RO student hub user guide to help you navigate this element of the ASM. There is also an ASM self-guided online component quick guide on page 13 of this guide.

In order to complete the ASM self-guided online component you will need to complete the following:

## Written reflective piece

You will be asked to write a short reflective piece (500 words) based on your experience of the ASM event(s). An ASM Reflective Tutor will then provide feedback on your written reflective piece within 5 working days of your submission.

We're asking you to complete a written reflective piece as reflective writing is a great opportunity to gain self-knowledge, to achieve clarity and better understanding of what you are learning, it's a chance to develop and reinforce writing skills and it's a way of making meaning out of what you study. We're also asking you to do this as an increasing number of students across all disciplines are assessed on the quality of their reflective writing at university, so it is a good skill to have upon entering Higher Education.

**Top tip:** We recommend that you write your reflective piece outside of the RO student hub and cut and paste it into the required box.

### What is reflective writing?

Reflective writing is much more personal than other kinds of academic writing. You will think reflectively every day, but not

usually in the same depth which is needed in good reflective writing. Effectively, reflective writing is:

#### 1. Looking back at something

(for example the ASM sessions)

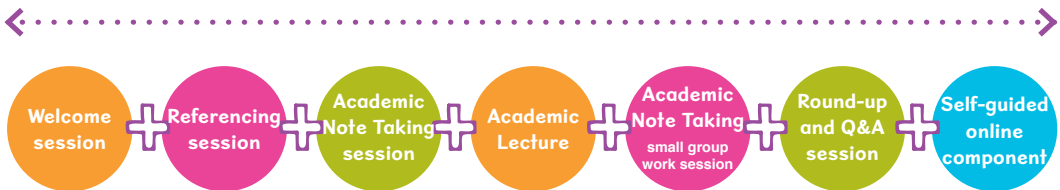
#### 2. Analysing the event

(thinking about it in depth and from various perspectives).

#### 3. Thinking carefully

(what did the event mean to you and how can it help you progress to HE).

## Academic Skills Module



**People can have misconceptions about what reflective writing really is. Below are some of the common mistakes:**

Reflective writing is NOT...	Instead IT IS...
Just descriptions of what happened.	<p>A description of what happened and how you learned from it.</p> <p>For example, 'I was very nervous about the group work aspect of the ASM sessions, as I'm quite a shy person. However, once the session started I realised that other students were nervous too and recognising this helped me overcome some of my shyness and participate more in the session. I know now that my feelings about group work are not uncommon and if I remember this, I will get more out of these types of sessions in the future'</p>
A personal diary where you can say anything and use any language.	<p>Reflective writing requires structure and formal language. Even though this is a personal piece of writing, think of it more as an academic assignment than a personal diary.</p>
A place for self-disclosure – while reflection is personal, you will not get good feedback by merely sharing challenging experiences.	<p>The experiences you share must be used to help your learning and development, <b>AND</b> be appropriate for the audience.</p> <p>Remember, your written reflective piece will be read by a Reflective Tutor from one of the RO universities, so make sure it is appropriate.</p>



Reflective writing is NOT...	Instead IT IS...
<p>A place for complementing the sessions or session leaders.</p>	<p>You can mention the session leaders if they have impacted your experience, but be sure to show what it was about them that worked or didn't work for you. Remember, you will also need to show how you can apply this to your future learning.</p> <p>For example, 'I really enjoyed the academic lecture and being able to ask the academic questions at the end. I asked questions about the two university courses I was considering and their answers helped me decided on which of the two courses to pursue. Being able to speak to an academic and see that they are just normal people will really help me when I start university, as I won't be scared to ask them questions when I need help.'</p>
<p>A place where you write your experiences without looking at them in a critical way and learning from them.</p>	<p>As well as writing about what has happened, you should also write how you have learned from it, what it means to you, and how you will use it in the future.</p> <p>For example, 'The ASM showed me what a university lecture is like, how they are delivered and the amount of information that can be shared by a lecturer. Using the knowledge I learned from the Academic Note Taking session I was able to put into practise my note taking skills during the lecture. However, I thought I was already quite good at taking notes, but doing so during a university level lecture was very different from school. I'm really glad I now know this, as it means I can practise this skill between now and starting university, so I can be more effective taking notes during lectures.</p>
<p>A waste of time</p>	<p>Done correctly, formalising and structuring reflection can help you evidence your personal learning and development, which in turn can help you to communicate your abilities and experiences effectively.</p>

**How to structure your reflective writing**

Reflective writing can take a number of forms and follow various structures. For the ASM reflective writing piece you will follow the **Gibbs Reflective Cycle**.

The Gibbs Reflective Cycle starts at Description and then continues clockwise to Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis and ends at Conclusion. The various steps are explained in more detail below:



## Step 1: Description

During this step, you describe the situation, session or activity in detail, without drawing any conclusions right away. The most common questions that can help create an objective description are:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- What did you do yourself?
- What did other people do?
- What was the result of these actions?



## Step 2: Feelings

This phase is about the feelings that the sessions triggered, as well as what your thoughts were during the sessions, as described in Step 1. The intention is not to discuss your feelings in detail, but to have an awareness of your feelings and how they impacted you. Helpful questions often used are:

- What did you feel leading up to the sessions?
- What did you feel during the sessions?
- What did you feel after the sessions?
- How do you look back on the sessions?
- What do you think other people felt during the sessions?
- How do you think others feel about the sessions now?



### Step 3: Evaluation

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In this step, ask yourself whether the experience (outlined in Step 1) was good or bad. Which approach worked well and in what way? Which approach didn't work as well? In order to still conduct a proper evaluation, the following questions may be helpful:

- What went well during the sessions?
- Why was that?
- What didn't go so well?
- Why was that?
- What was your contribution?
- What contribution did other people make?

It is also worth evaluating bad experiences, because the subsequent steps will help you learn from them.



### Step 4: Analysis

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This phase is about what you have learned from the sessions. Because of the experience, you now know what to do in similar, future situations. This means that both positive and negative things and/or problems you experienced will be written down and analysed individually. After all, people learn from mistakes. This analysis is often done together alongside Step 3.



### Step 5: Conclusion

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This is the point where you take a step back and look at yourself from a distance and ask what else you could have done in this situation. The information gathered earlier is very valuable in this step and can encourage you to come to a good and useful conclusion. The following questions may be helpful:

- To what positive experience did the sessions, situation or activity lead?
- To what negative experience did the sessions, situation or activity lead?
- What will you do differently if the sessions, situation or activity were to happen again in the future?
- Which skills do you need to develop yourself in a similar session, situation or activity?

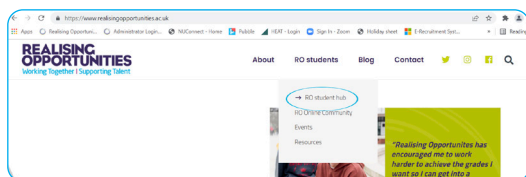
**Watch this short video for more information on the Gibbs Reflective Cycle.**



# Accessing the ASM self-guided online component on the RO student hub

## 1. Getting Started

Once you have attended your ASM event(s), you can log into the RO student hub and complete the self-guided online component. You can reach the RO student hub by clicking on 'RO students' at the top of the RO website and then selecting 'RO student hub' from the drop down menu.

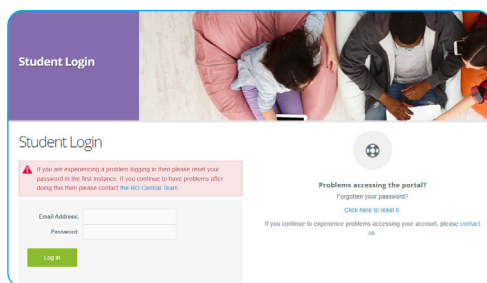


Or click here

Please log in using your email address and password. If you have forgotten your password, don't worry. You can reset this using the link on the right of the login page.

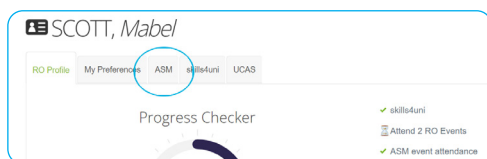
If you are still unable to log in, please check that you are on the Student Login page, and not the Administrator Login page.

The Student Login page looks like this:



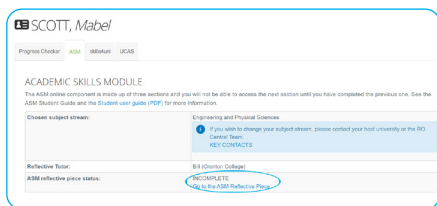
Once you are logged in, you will be able to view your progress checker. This displays your progress through the RO programme overall.

From here, please click into the ASM tab:

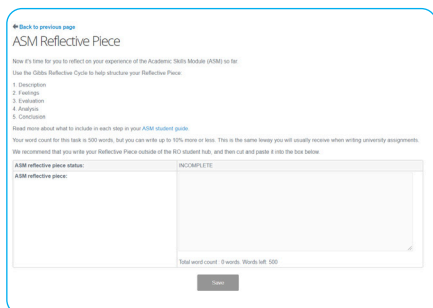


## 2. Written reflective Piece

You will now be able to complete your ASM written reflective piece by following the link circled below:



We strongly recommend that you type up your written reflective piece outside of the RO student hub, and then cut and paste it into the box. For more guidance on how to write your written reflective piece and the maximum length, please make sure you fully read pages 5-11 of this guide.



If you choose to write your reflective piece in the RO student hub you can save your work and come back to it later by pressing 'save'.

In order to submit your written reflective piece, you will need to press the green 'submit reflective piece' button at the bottom of the page.



Your Progress Checker will update to show that you have submitted your work, and you will receive feedback on your written reflective piece from your Reflective Tutor within 5 working days.

You will receive an email letting you know when this feedback is available. You can view your feedback by returning to the ASM tab and clicking 'go to the ASM reflective piece'.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the Realising Opportunities Central Team by emailing [info@realisingopportunities.ac.uk](mailto:info@realisingopportunities.ac.uk).

# Preparing for the ASM

## ASM event(s)

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There is no pre-reading or work to be done before attending the ASM event(s), but you should complete the skills4uni challenge and quiz to help you prepare. You can read more about this later on in the guide.



We would like to remind you that when you gained a place on the RO programme you agreed to uphold and behave in line with the **RO Community Values**, which place great importance on diversity and respect.

Within the RO Community all staff and students:

- recognise that different people bring different perspectives, ideas, knowledge and culture and that this difference brings great strength;
- treat other students and staff with courtesy and respect and respond positively to different needs and circumstances;
- respect the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them in a mature and constructive way;
- respect confidentiality and only use information that is shared for the purposes for which it is provided;
- communicate with other students and staff in ways that are clear, relevant, and respectful

Please remember and adhere to these RO Community Values when attending your ASM event(s).



### Attending your ASM event(s)

The ASM is a compulsory part of your participation in the Realising Opportunities programme. If you are unable to attend your ASM event(s), **you must inform your host university as soon as possible.**

### Technical difficulties

If your host university is delivering the ASM event online and you think you will have issues accessing the online

events either due to data capacities or lack of Wi-Fi, please **contact your host university** as they may be able to help with this. If Wi-Fi signal or equipment is an issue, please contact your host university to discuss your available options.

### Individual requirements

If you have any individual requirements which may make viewing or attending your ASM event(s) difficult, please **contact your host university** to discuss your concerns.



## Self-guided online component

In order to be able to complete the self-guided online component you must have attended your ASM event(s).

You will not be able to access this part of the **RO student hub** until your attendance at the ASM event(s) has been entered by your host university.

### skills4uni

skills4uni is an online challenge which will help you to develop practical study skills to use now and later at university. The challenge includes interactive tasks, videos and information from real university students.

Completing skills4uni is a great way to prepare for the ASM. It can help you develop transferable higher education skills that will help you in your current studies and once you're studying at university. It will also give you a greater understanding of what studying at university is like.

We strongly recommended that you work through the skills4uni challenge **before** you attend your ASM event(s).

## Support available

Throughout the ASM event(s) you will be supported by your RO host university, academics and a team of current undergraduate students who will be there during the group work sessions to help facilitate discussions and answer any queries you might have.

Student ambassadors are also there to ensure you're making the most out of the sessions and to offer their unique perspective on university life.

For the self-guided online component your RO host university and the RO Central Team will be on-hand to assist you with any queries you may have.

### Online live Q&A

You will also have the opportunity to ask questions about the ASM via a live online Q&A session. During the session, you'll be able to get support and guidance from the RO Central Team and staff at the RO Partner universities. We will contact you with the date and time of this session shortly.

# Frequently asked questions

## 1. How do I pass the ASM?

The ASM is not pass/fail. You will be given feedback on your written reflective piece, however, no aspect of the ASM is marked. In order to complete this compulsory aspect of the RO programme you need to attend your ASM event(s) and complete the written reflective piece via the self-guided online component to the best of your ability.

## 2. Can I change my ASM subject stream?

Being able to change your ASM subject stream will depend on how close it is to your event(s). If you wish to change your subject stream, we recommend **contacting your host university** as soon as possible.

## 3. My host university is delivering the ASM online. How do I watch/attend the events?

Your host university will contact you, via email, with instructions on how to login and view your ASM online events.

## 4. Will there be help to get to my on-campus ASM event?

Your host university will send you all the information you need in order for you to visit their campus. If you have any particular concerns, we recommend **contacting your host university**.

## 5. When will my ASM event(s) be held?

Your host university will contact you, via email, with the dates, times and delivery method of your compulsory ASM event(s).

## 6. What do I do if I can't attend my ASM event(s)?

Attending your ASM event(s) is a compulsory aspect of the RO programme. If you are not able to attend your ASM event(s) you must **contact your host university** as soon as possible.

## 7. Who do I contact if I'm having difficulty with the self-guided online component of the ASM?

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If you're having difficulty with the self-guided online component, we recommend that you consult the relevant section in this guide and your ASM student hub user guide in the first instance. If the guides don't answer your question(s) you can either contact your host university or the RO Central Team who will be happy to help.

## 8. What do I do if I don't have a computer at home to complete the self-guided online component?

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We understand that not all students will have a computer they can use at home. The ASM can be completed on a mobile phone, tablet or computer - at home or at school. However, if you don't have access to a computer, please **contact your host university**.

## 9. What happens if I don't complete the ASM self-guided online component?

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Completing the ASM self-guided online component is one of the compulsory aspects of the RO programme. If you do not complete the component before the deadline (the deadline will be given to you in your Round-up and Q&A session) then you will not be able to successfully complete the RO programme and take advantage of extra consideration when applying to RO universities.

## 10. What happens if I don't pass the ASM quiz?

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The ASM quiz is to check your understanding of the ASM sessions you have attended and is not pass/fail. The aim of the quiz is to highlight skills areas you may still require more information about or practice of and if there are any gaps in your knowledge, so we can signpost you to some online resources to further help your understanding.

## 11. Will I meet my ASM Reflective Tutor?

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Your ASM Reflective Tutor will only provide feedback on your written reflective piece and you will not have the ability to discuss the feedback with them or see them in person.



## References

Gibbs, G (1988). *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford.

Toolshero article. Retrieved from <https://www.toolshero.com/management/gibbs-reflective-cycle-graham-gibbs/>

University of Edinburgh article. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.ac.uk/reflection/reflectors-toolkit/producing-reflections/academic-reflections/general-tips>



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