

Transferable Skills

The Faculty of Divinity has, in consultation with the Colleges (through the Directors of Studies in Theology and Religious Studies), identified the ways in which undergraduates reading for the TRS Tripos can acquire and develop certain skills and attributes during their University career. These skills, as well as enhancing academic performance, are of lasting personal and professional value, and are sought after by employers. Students should be encouraged to make good use of the opportunities afforded to them for developing those attributes and acquiring or enhancing those skills and abilities which will stand them in good stead in later life. Many skills are fostered more in the Colleges than in the Faculty, but both have their part to play.

Intellectual skills and Communication skills

Intellectual skills are defined as ‘critical, analytical, synthesising, and problem-solving skills’. **Communication skills** are defined as ‘written and oral’. In the TRS Tripos, as in most of the arts and humanities, these skills are **formally taught** by example, practice, and feedback in lectures and seminars arranged by the Faculty, and in supervisions arranged by the Colleges. Such skills are also **learned informally** through discussion groups, peer-group interaction, and participation in the social and political life of the college and the university.

Formal skills teaching

Lectures teach **intellectual skills** largely by example: paying close attention to texts, synthesising information and views from primary and secondary sources, and offering criticism and analysis of that material. Lectures play a large part in all undergraduate courses offered by the Faculty. A basic introduction to **study skills** (planned reading, note-taking) is included in the Faculty’s **Learning Day** for new students. **Communication skills** are more effectively taught by example and practice (with feedback) than by precept, and this takes place mainly in the context of classes, seminars, and supervisions.

Classes and **seminars** encourage a more participatory approach, presenting students with source materials and/or secondary information, requiring some advance preparation, and inviting critical discussion among the students, with lecturers leading and moderating the discussion as required. Classes and seminars foster the development of **oral skills** — both the articulation of argument and the abilities to listen carefully and to respond constructively — and should if possible provide each student with the opportunity to initiate discussion, as well as to contribute to it. Special subjects offered in Part IIB make substantial use of seminar teaching, and classes are now part of the formal provision for many papers in all three years.

Supervisions in particular subjects, **arranged by the Colleges**, provide the most interactive medium, with students required as a rule to submit in advance essays on a specified topic prepared on the basis of a suitable reading list. The Supervision system requires students to synthesise information and views for themselves from the recommended reading, and encourages them to gather information for themselves from other academic resources. It requires them to analyse this information with respect to specific questions or problems, to produce a reasoned and critical answer or solution, and to present it in a well-constructed and well-expressed **essay**. The Supervisor provides critical feedback on the essay under these various headings, which offers further instruction by example in the art of critical reading, as well as by fostering the strengths and identifying the weaknesses in the student's approach. Students can acquire more varied writing skills through the **long essays** (also prepared under supervision) which are used to assess some papers in Part IIA and Part IIB. Supervisions also foster **oral skills** by inviting students to expand upon, criticise, or defend their arguments in discussion with the supervisor or with each other. The Supervision is perhaps the most effective single medium for the development of both **intellectual** and **communication skills**.

The **content** of the TRS Tripos, which is highly **interdisciplinary** in character, fosters **breadth** in skills acquired, drawing on such cognate disciplines as languages, literature, history, and philosophy.

Examinations foster the skills of **argument** and **writing** under **pressure**, as well as **organisation** of time and rapid processing and **analysis** of material in **revision**.

Informal skills acquisition

Many skills are fostered less formally, though no less effectively, by student participation in the social and political life of the university and especially the Colleges, which are the main arena for the social life and sporting participation of students.. Student participation in Faculty committees affords an introduction to what will be an important part of many students' later lives, as does participation in similar College committees, and in College student bodies (JCR and MCR) and societies (sports clubs, interest groups, etc). Many of the less tangible **problem-solving** skills which employers most value are more effectively learned in these contexts. The respecting and balancing of real and sometimes conflicting interests and priorities, the arts of persuasion, the management of budgets, the organisation of events, the meeting of real-time deadlines, and the solution of pressing problems bulk large in most committee deliberations and society activities, as indeed in everyday life.

Organisational and Interpersonal skills

These skills are not formally taught, but are acquired and fostered by experience of university life in general. The main **organisational skill** is the allocation of time between study and extracurricular activities, but involvement in student bodies and societies involves the organisation of often large and expensive events and the management of budgets which have already been discussed under the heading of problem-solving. **Interpersonal skills** are in many respects interchangeable with communication skills and are fostered in essentially the same educational, social, and political environments discussed in the previous paragraph. However, it should be noted that the content of the TRS Tripos, embracing a wide variety of cultural perspectives, fosters **empathy** with people of other cultures and backgrounds.

Research skills

Students learn basic research skills through the use of **libraries** in the Faculty and their college, and may also access information through the **internet** (see below under computer literacy). Students have the opportunity for a more extended piece of research work if they offer a final year **dissertation**, and their supervisors will ensure that they are inducted in whatever bibliographical or practical **methods** (such as opinion surveys, statistics, or textual criticism) are necessary for the completion of their project

Numeracy

The TRS Tripos does not require a higher standard of numeracy than is required by the University for matriculation.

Computer literacy

The use of computers is not required in the TRS Tripos, but computer facilities are widely available, **primarily in the Colleges**, but also in the Faculty, for **word-processing, email, and web access**. The Faculty and Colleges encourage the use of word-processing for the preparation of long essays and dissertations. The Faculty encourages the use of email for contact with and between students and staff. Formal instruction in computing skills is available for all students who desire it from the **University Computing Service**.

Foreign languages

The TRS Tripos requires almost all students to study a **scriptural language for at least year**, and the Faculty provides **formal classes** in Hebrew, New Testament Greek, and Qur'anic Arabic. Students also have the option of studying Sanskrit through the Oriental Languages Faculty. This fosters the skill of **language-acquisition**. In addition, students may avail themselves of the study resources of the **University Language Centre**.