**Book review**

**Salmons, J. E. (2021). *Your super-quick guide to learning online*. London: SAGE.**

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This book forefronts the notion that online learning is disciplined and demanding, but that it can, by virtue of learning extra tech skills, be deemed as a kind of ‘learning plus’. Crucially, Salmons also goes to great efforts to stress how important the connections between staff and students, and student-student, are in making learning online a successful and rewarding process.

Format-wise, each chapter starts with a 60 second summary, providing an abstract of each chapters key points at the very start. Chapters also contain regular reflective prompts and a series of activities and checklists for students to complete at the end of each chapter. The format is really accessible but does also encourage that reflective practice through frequent questioning in the titles. Reading this as an academic staff member, but also a student of numerous online programmes, it offered plenty of food for thought for both those personas of mine.

Salmons, in most chapters, also is clear about the level of responsibility that learners have, as well as staff members, to proactively make their learning work, which is refreshing to see. It is also done respectfully, treating learners rightfully as equal partners in their learning with an equal responsibility for their own engagement.

Some sections, such as those around VARK Learning styles (p.23) and “the power of the marking pen” in relation to assessment, don’t always hit the same tone as above. However, other sections, offer excellent insight into the commonalities and differences between online learning and face-to-face learning. Particular highlights for this reviewer included:

* Discussions around how to learn with differing levels of synchronicity (pp.36-37) will help students to navigate the differences in teaching styles across modular degrees.
* The consideration of academic literacies in relation to strategies like ‘reading trackers’ (pp.44-45) and the walkthroughs of conducting searches for reading resources really bring these skills into the light (Chapter 3). Salmons also goes on to offer some great insight into how students can evaluate these sources too (pp.62-65).

There also some really inspired moments such as frequent discussions of using taxonomies such as Bloom’s famous taxonomy as a student as a vehicle for approaching and dissecting assignments. These taxonomies are often unofficially owned by staff members as teaching devices, so flipping them as a student learning scaffold was a great idea.

The book really emphasizes, at all points, the importance of being a responsible learner and making the most of opportunities to ask questions as those opportunities may be less serendipitous than face-to-face learning. This responsibility is foregrounding at different points, with later sections cleverly offsetting the principles of mutual engagement and co-ordinated efforts against Salmon’s own collaborative knowledge learning model. What goes hand in hand with taking responsibility when learning online and with others is trust and Salmons’ section on this is well-judged, placing an emphasis on what students can personally control (p.109). This emphasis continues into discussions around how to work productively in a team via online mediums.

There are huge ongoing debates around feedback and assessment literacy in students (See Pitt and Quinlan’s comprehensive (2022) literature review or recent work by Carless (2023) or Carless and Nieminen (2022)) and I found the way in which Salmons spoke of feedback and grades, as being equivalent to formative and summative assessment, reductive. We would want all of our students, irrespective of online or face-to-face delivery to see summative grades and the accompanying feedback as formative as well as seeing it as both grades and feedback. The discussions after this about how interpreting feedback via purely online means can often be challenging when things like tone of voice are missing are well handled, however. Again, there is an positive tone to the ways in which students should strive to gain as much feedback as possible throughout their programmes of study as well as some clear and helpful considerations around the importance of self-assessment.

The final chapter offers lots of helpful tips and advice for students around ensuring they maximise the resources at their disposal, optimising both digital and physical spaces to get the best out of their study. This is all done with very careful, regular caveats of working within your means and affordances.

The books keeps a number of key themes and devices in every chapter – 60 second summaries of all chapters, reflective tasks to work through, checklists at the end of chapters to consolidate understanding and positive affirmations throughout. It also reiterates the unique opportunities afforded by online learning and demystifies a lot of things we take for granted as educators but don’t always explain to learners. I particularly enjoyed the sensitively handled push for mutual engagement and for students to take their fair share of responsibility for making their online learning a success. The book is written accessibly and would be, in my opinion, a very helpful resource for students engaging with online learning for the first time.

**References**

Carless, D., (2023). Teacher feedback literacy, feedback regimes and iterative change: towards enhanced value in feedback processes. *Higher Education Research & Development*, pp.1-15.

Nieminen, J.H. and Carless, D., (2022). Feedback literacy: A critical review of an emerging concept. *Higher Education*, pp.1-20.

Pitt, E. and Quinlan, M., (2022). *Impacts of higher education assessment and feedback policy and practice on students: A review of the literature 2016–2021.* Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/impacts-higher-education-assessment-and-feedback-policy-and-practice-students-review> (Accessed 27 April 2023).