



## Book Review: University and You

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### Abstract

This review presents the book *University and You: Strengthening Your Skills and Developing Your Potential*, which is a recent publication offering advice to students who may be new to the context of UK-based university study. This review introduces the layout and main foci of this book and offers an evaluation of its utility as a practical guidebook for students taking their first steps into UK higher education.

### Keywords

1. Higher education
2. Undergraduate students
3. Academic skills development

### AI Declaration

No artificial intelligence elements were used in the preparation of this article.

### Conflict of Interest

Virginia Parker is a DProf (TESOL) student in The International Education and Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of St Andrews, which is also the context where the authors were employed when they wrote this book. However, as a distance post-graduate student, Ms. Parker has not had any professional nor personal contact with either author. Ms. Parker received a complimentary copy of the book as a part of the review process.



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Wilson, C. & Wilson, R. (2025). *University and You: Strengthening Your Skills and Developing Your Potential*. Critical Publishing. 220 pages. ISBN: 9781916925038.

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### Introduction

If you are reading this review in a university journal, I can only assume that you have, at some point in your life, been a new student at an unfamiliar university. Can you recall your first such experience? Looking back nearly 35 years to my first year as an undergraduate, I can remember not being sure of what to expect. I can remember lengthy independent assignments and exams, but not a lot of collaboration, diversity, or understanding the need for social justice. I can also recall not having received much support for the skills needed for success, for wellbeing, or even for basic time management. This university landscape of three decades ago is far different from what current undergraduate students may face.

This book, *University and You: Strengthening Your Skills and Developing Your Potential* by Wilson and Wilson recognises that studying at university is more than just learning the content of the courses. Today's university students are expected to understand who they are as members of a wider community as they develop the skills necessary to succeed in the modern social context. In the Introduction, the authors present this as the book's purpose to the reader directly and clearly:

This book goes beyond traditional study skills books, as mastering study techniques is only one part of the picture for being successful at university. It's important to also look at how you approach university, thinking about your mindset, resilience, how you navigate change and the fundamental skills you will need to undertake this approach. (Wilson & Wilson, 2025, p. 3)

Both authors have extensive experience in UK higher education and student support. This is a comprehensive and interactive skills-based dialogic guidebook, aimed directly at students who are beginning a new university journey.

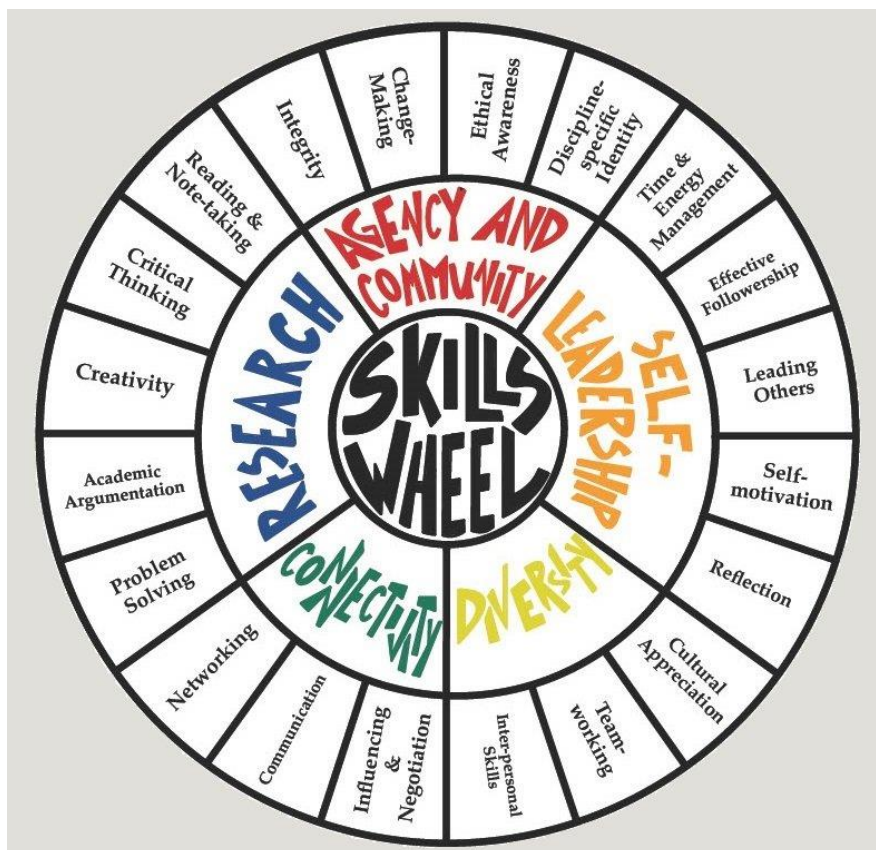
In my own professional context, I work closely with students who are likely to be the author's intended audience: as an advisor in the academic support centre of my university, in any given semester, most of my scheduled contact hours may be spent offering individual language advising and academic support sessions, facilitating workshops, and responding to students' queries about how they can have a successful first year. As I work exclusively with first-year students who are facing this transition from their (Chinese) secondary school context to a (British) higher education environment, it was with a lot of interest that I approached this book.



## Organisation

The book is arranged across 12 chapters, divided into three parts. *Part 1 Where are you now?* situates the reader before their arrival on campus, asking them to consider their motivations for attending university, while also reflecting on their adaptability in a changing world. *Part 2 Where are you going and how will you get there?* makes up the majority of the book and it is here that the main skills are introduced and covered. These skills are necessary practicalities for university study, with each underpinned by relevant theory. Section 4.2, for example, brings in basic principles of cognitive science related to memory as a way to present the science of learning and an activity that focuses on passive and active learning (p 72). From Chapter 5 on, all these skills are mapped to a Skills Wheel (Figure 1), which provides a framework for reflection that carries into the subsequent chapters. *Part 3 What next?* looks towards the future, asking the reader to reflect on and articulate these skills to wrap up the journey of the whole book.

Figure 1



The Skills Wheel (Wilson & Wilson, 2025)

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## Evaluation

*University and You* has quite a few strengths in its approach. Speaking from experience with first-year students, the skills presented in this book are definitely those that are often lacunae or particularly challenging for new university students. These include not just the 'academic skills' of, for example, reading and note-taking, but also the 'soft skills' of team working and cultural appreciation.

As this book appears to be aimed mostly at young adults, the writing style is friendly and dialogic, using 'You' to address the reader, with either 'We' or the authors mentioned by name throughout. This presents opportunities to share anecdotes related to the broader topics, and examples that might be typical of a new university student's context. The language is clear and accessible, with specific or more technical terminology (i.e. imposter syndrome, GANTT chart) defined in a Glossary at the back of the book. The less formal register is balanced with an evidence-based approach, using citations where specific research underpins explanations, recommended methods or concepts. Finally, the reader is encouraged to access the book as they prefer: either to read each part sequentially or to 'dip in' to certain sections, and to take up to several months to work their way through. I found that the 'dip in' idea was certainly facilitated by the E-pub version I read, and the hyperlinks between chapters, themes and topics allowed for easy navigation on a tablet. I also found the physical copy of the book easy to read, with large readable fonts and clear signposting of chapters, sections and tasks, showing that accessibility was also considered in the writing and layout.

This is an ambitious volume, which is perhaps its main weakness. It is comprehensive with quite a lot of information to digest. This could be overwhelming for some students. It is a British publication, meaning that there are certain assumptions of what might be 'desirable' behaviour within that cultural context that could be different in other international universities (i.e. eye contact). While I was able to navigate through both the E-pub and the print editions fairly easily, there were times when the organization of individual chapters could have been more straightforward. Looking for one skill my students certainly need (Writing an Email) led me first to *Part 9 Your Connectivity*, then to *9.3 How to Communicate Clearly*, then to *Barriers to Communication*, then a description of neurotypical communication under *Individual Differences in Communication*, and finally to *Written Communication* and a clear explanation of how to write an email. To remedy this, I found myself relying on the Index rather than the sidebar navigation online or flipping through several pages of the printed book to find what I needed.

It would be remiss not to mention that there is a website [[www.universityandyou.com](http://www.universityandyou.com)] which includes a few comments, a colour version of the Skills Wheel, and an interview with the authors. It would be interesting to see if this could eventually be used as an opportunity to springboard to a more multimodal environment.

## Final Comments

With its blend of instruction on concrete study skills and reflection on citizenship and soft skills, this is an ideal handbook for students in a modern university environment. The depth and breadth of the theory and practical advice from *University and You* would have been beneficial when I first embarked on my undergraduate career over three decades ago. Now, as someone who also works in student support, this book will now be useful for me when



offering guidance to my own students. If you work in an academic support centre, a writing centre, or other student-facing services, this might be a good reference book for you to be able to better help your students as they weather the transition into the world of higher education.