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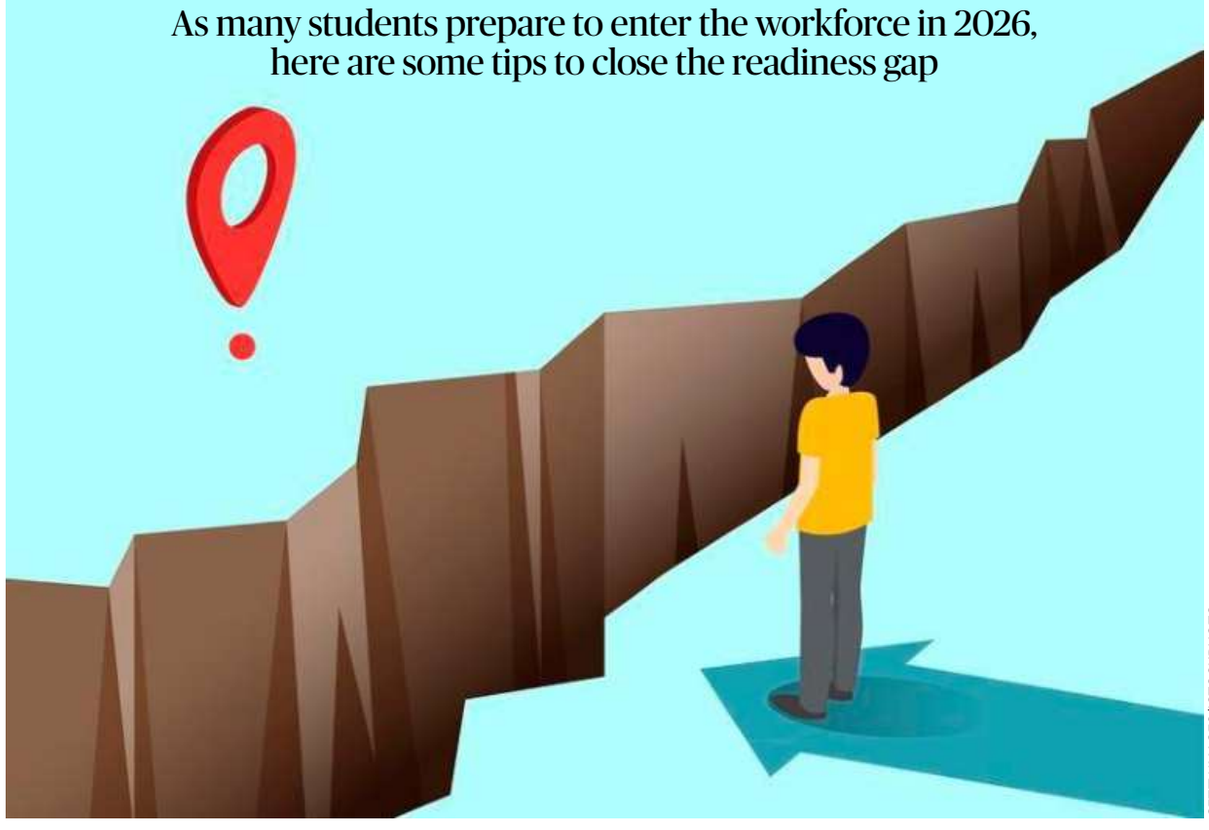
A smooth transition

As many students prepare to enter the workforce in 2026, here are some tips to close the readiness gap



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Ponmythili Muralidharan

In a few months, thousands of final-year students across India will step out of their campuses and into the workplace. Some may already have their placement offers, and many more will receive theirs soon; a moment filled with relief, pride, and the feeling that life is finally moving forward.

Ari and Sri felt the same. After months of interviews, preparation and uncertainty, their offers arrived like a long-awaited victory. But what they did in the days between receiving the offer and joining the organisation shaped everything that followed.

Different ways

Ari moved into the familiar post-offer comfort zone that many students slip into. The interviews were over, the goal had been achieved and the pressure had eased. Ari enjoyed the praise and believed that learning would begin after joining. For many students, the offer letter feels like a finish line.

Sri also celebrated, but in a different way. To him, the offer letter felt like a doorway, not the destination. He spent time reading up on the organisation, understanding its products and services, refreshing important concepts, and completing a short online course related to the role. He reached out politely to a future colleague. Only a few students do this but, when they do, the transition becomes smoother and the first week feels far less overwhelming.

Across organisations, seniors often wonder how new entrants will adapt. This does not come from judgment. It is a mix of curiosity and concern because the workplace they entered years ago looked very different from the one that youngsters today will enter. In my leadership sessions, I hear something consistent from senior managers. They admire Gen Z's intelligence, courage and speed. What they worry about is not whether they can do the job. They wonder whether they will settle in well, learn steadily, and show consistency.

Satya Nadella captures the essence of this when he talks about the value of being a learner. His reminder that the learn-it-all will always outperform the know-it-all is especially relevant to those preparing for their first job. Indra Nooyi often says that the first step to improving an organisation is improving ourselves.

Consistent behaviours

Organisations do not expect mastery on the first day. They look for sincerity, humility, and a willingness to understand how things work. For young professionals, that improvement can begin before Day One. Research from McKinsey in 2023 also shows that even a little preparation before joining helps new employees learn faster, adapt better, and experience less stress in their initial weeks.

Students today constantly hear about productivity hacks, communication styles, and success habits. But early success comes from certain consistent behaviours: listening fully, respecting time, asking thoughtful questions, preparing before meetings, and completing small tasks with care. These habits quietly build trust and create a strong foundation for growth.

Those who begin like Sri often say that they settled in faster, understood the team sooner, felt more confident in meetings, and handled the early days with less stress. Those who begin like Ari are not wrong. They just take a little longer to find their rhythm. The difference is not about talent or capability. It is about the small choices made in the quiet days before joining.

Beginning like Sri does not require intense study. It requires small, meaningful steps. Reading about the organisation, refreshing one important skill, learning the basics of a new tool, completing a short certification, and setting a simple routine can make a young professional feel grounded and ready.

As you prepare to enter your first job, it helps to remember that the offer letter is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning. The days before joining are a chance to build clarity, understand the workplace and prepare your mind to grow. You do not need to prove anything on your first day. Begin quietly and steadily. Let your early actions show that you value the opportunity, you are ready to learn, and you are prepared to begin well. The future that unfolds will be shaped by how you choose to step into it.

The writer is Junior Faculty-Organisation Behaviour and Human Resource at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Sensodyne IDA Shining Star Scholarship
An initiative from Haleon India
Eligibility: First-year Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) students who are enrolled in a government or government-aided college across India and have minimum 60% in the previous semester and an annual family income not exceeding ₹800,000
Rewards: ₹50,000 a year for four years
Application: Online
Deadline: January 20
www.b4s.in/edge/SSPPS5

Science Academies Summer Research Fellowship
A collaborative initiative between the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bengaluru; Indian National Science Academy, New Delhi; and National Academy of Sciences, India, Prayagraj
Eligibility: Students from Class 10 up to PG who are pursuing STEM subjects and have minimum average of 65% in core subjects
Rewards: Guidance of experienced mentors.
Application: Online
Deadline: January 31
www.b4s.in/edge/SASR1

IIIT-Hyderabad Amgen Scholars Programme
A joint initiative from Amgen India and Harvard University.
Eligibility: Students who have completed at least one year of an undergraduate programme by June 7, 2026 and have Maths as a subject and demonstrate proficiency in English.
Rewards: $2,000 plus benefits
Application: Online
Deadline: February 1
www.b4s.in/edge/IHSP1

Courtesy: Buddy4study.com

GREAT Scholarships

The British Council has announced the GREAT Scholarships 2026-27 in partnership with the U.K. government's GREAT Britain campaign. These support Indian students with a proven record of academic excellence to pursue postgraduate studies in the U.K.

For the 2026–27 academic year, 12 PG scholarships are being offered by leading universities across a range of subjects. Each scholarship provides a minimum of £10,000 towards tuition fees for a one-year taught postgraduate course. These are jointly funded by the U.K. government's GREAT Britain Campaign, the British Council, and the institutionsMore at https://shorturl.at/loG7V

What interests you?

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I have a Diploma in Computer Engineering and am working as an IT support engineer. I want to upskill in Cloud Computing and AI to secure new opportunities. Previous attempts at the AMIE and BCA at IGNOU were interrupted by personal and financial challenges, and my Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) certification has expired. How do I progress? Raj

Dear Raj,

Your background in IT support and your understanding of troubleshooting, networks, and system support give you a practical advantage over newcomers and serve as a launchpad for a career in Cloud Computing. The most direct route is to upskill through industry-recognised certifications, which are faster to achieve, respected by employers, and focused on practical skills.

Complete a Foundational Cloud Certification from one of the major cloud providers. The AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner is the most common starting point. Microsoft Azure is a good choice if you are targeting organisations that are heavily invested in Microsoft products. Cloud Digital Leader from Google Cloud Platform is another option, especially in tech and data-centric companies. Next, move on to more technical role-based certifications such as AWS Certified Solutions Architect - Associate or AWS Certified SysOps Administrator – Associate or Azure Microsoft Certified - Azure Administrator Associate. Explore services like Amazon SageMaker, Azure Machine Learning, or Google AI Platform

Don't just study; practice! All major cloud providers offer a free Tier. Use it to build small projects. Launch a virtual machine, set up a simple website hosted in the cloud, and create a virtual network. This will set you apart in job interviews. Finally, integrate AI and Machine Learning. Learn Python for AI/ML. Start with a beginner-friendly course on Coursera, Udemy, or Codecademy, followed by a foundational course like Machine Learning by Andrew Ng on Coursera or Google's AI Essentials or Microsoft's AI Fundamentals (AI-900) certification.

Update your CV to highlight your IT experience in cloud-relevant terms. List your new certifications on LinkedIn and connect with cloud architects, AI engineers, and recruiters. Start a GitHub account and post your small cloud or Python projects.

I am pursuing graduation in Environmental Science and aspiring to prepare for the IFS. Is it possible to do both simultaneously? Vaishnavi

Dear Vaishnavi,

Absolutely. Environmental Science is one of the best undergraduate backgrounds for IFS. Develop a realistic plan depending on your year of graduation. Build strong basics in your subjects, focus on Science, Geography, Economics (NCERT books), read the newspaper daily, and take notes regularly. Join a test series to help you prepare for prelims with mini-tests. Work on concept clarity. If needed, take time off after graduation to prepare for the exam. Be mindful of your goal and work on time management

I am doing B.Com. (Hons) with an ACCA integrated course (final year), but don't want to be an accountant. I am interested in Law and Economics. Should I pursue an LLB after B.Com. Or work for a year and pursue a Master's in Economics? Athish

Dear Athish,

Consider an LLB if you enjoy reading, writing, argumentation, policy, governance, human rights, analytical thinking and working with people, institutions, and systems. LLB opens up careers in corporate and commercial law, litigation and advocacy, policy, research, compliance and so on. Look at a Master's in Economics if you enjoy data research, policy, economics theory, and so on. Career options are research, consulting, corporate strategy, banking and finance and data analytics. You could also combine Law and Economics and explore options in corporate and commercial law, banking and financial regulation, tax law, competition law and IPR. Another option is to use your B.Com for a non-accounting career like policy research, public administration, business journalism, CSR roles in companies and so on. Think about what you enjoy before making a decision..

I hold a B.Voc in Forensic Science, a Diploma in Cyber Security and certifications in Ethical Hacking and Computer Hacking Forensic Investigation. I began a Higher Diploma in Computer Science in Singapore, but could not complete it. Since 2023, I have been preparing for the UPSC exam and am also pursuing an M.A. in Public Administration from IGNOU. What are my options? Maneesha

Dear Maneesha,

If UPSC is your dream, continue with a structured backup. Your background will make you a good fit for law and order, internal security, e-governance, cybercrime policy and other roles. You can also consider a career in cybersecurity and digital forensics in the public and private sectors. An advanced certification in OSCP / ECIH / GCFA / GCIA is optional but powerful and is the fastest path to job security. Look for roles such as digital forensic analyst, cybersecurity analyst, security operations analyst, malware analyst and so on.

You can also combine Public Administration and Cyber Security in Digital Governance and Policy. Career options include digital policy consultant, research associate at think tanks, and e-governance project manager in government and corporate organisations and think tanks. You can consider a Master's in Public Policy (MPP) later.

Finally, if academics interest you, consider an M.Sc. Cyber Forensics or Digital Forensics to be a lecturer in Forensic Science, a lab analyst, cyber forensic examiner, or a researcher in forensic tech labs.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge.

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Beyond coding

In an AI-saturated world, emotional intelligence, communication, and leadership are no longer "soft skills." They are survival skills.

Aditya Guthey

When I began my undergraduate studies in 2004, there was just a single section of Computer Science. My major, Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering, was one among many. Fast forward to 2025, the same institution has 20 thriving sections of Computer Science Engineering, and my own major was gone. This shift is not just a story about curriculum change. It reflects an educational and industrial revolution in the past 20 years.

Between 2008 and 2025, India's IT sector experienced explosive growth. The IT and BPM industry surged from about $60 billion to over $250 billion, employing millions and positioning India as the back office, code factory, and innovation hub of the world. But now comes a new challenge to the foundation of this success story.

Today, Artificial Intelligence is quietly redefining the same systems that once empowered us. AI tools can now code, debug, and design faster than entry-level engineers and experts agree that it is only a matter of time before these systems surpass even some of the most experienced engineers. The efficiency once achieved through human effort is now being replicated and often surpassed by algorithms. The irony is hard to miss. The same technology-driven ecosystem that made us leaders is now at risk of making many of our roles obsolete.

Human skills

Let me offer an example. An engineer was hired to automate manual processes. When he finished, his own role had become redundant. But, he is now able to focus on more strategic tasks, such as growing the business, expanding the customer base, and gaining a deeper understanding of the business itself. These are high-impact activities that require creativity and human judgment. But here is the catch: if that engineer had not possessed those human skills, he would have been out of a job. So, the question is not "Will AI take our jobs?" but "Will we evolve fast enough to create new ones?"

Coding, debugging, and designing are no longer enough. The future belongs to those who can connect the technical with the human; the engineer who understands customers, communicates clearly, and solves problems In this new world, the ability to deeply understand what others want, to read between the lines, and to deliver not just solutions but relevance is crucial. In an AI-saturated world, emotional intelligence, communication, and leadership are no longer "soft skills." They are survival skills.

What is required is a class on Prompt Engineering alongside a course on storytelling and persuasion whereby engineers learn not only how to build technology but also how to translate it into human value. This vision is essential to cultivate "human-aware technologists".

What to do

Do not just solve problems: Understand their human impact. When you are given a technical problem, first ask: Who benefits if this problem is solved? For instance, if you are working on a price prediction model in a data science course, do not stop at "predicting price." Understand how leaders will use it. Will it help them explain revenue to investors? Will it improve profit margins or reduce costs for customers? Keep asking "why" until you uncover the deepest human impact.

Identify and communicate assumptions: Once you understand the human purpose behind your solution, analyse the technical assumptions you are making. Are there data limitations, bias risks, or scalability issues? Then communicate these clearly to your stakeholders. This is where your technical expertise meets business awareness.

Sell ideas and build influence: It is not enough to build a great model; you need others to believe in it. Influence begins when people trust your reasoning. Explain why they can rely on your work, and answer questions in a way that makes sense to them. A logical person needs evidence and data. An empathetic person connects through stories and human examples. Learn to flex your style.

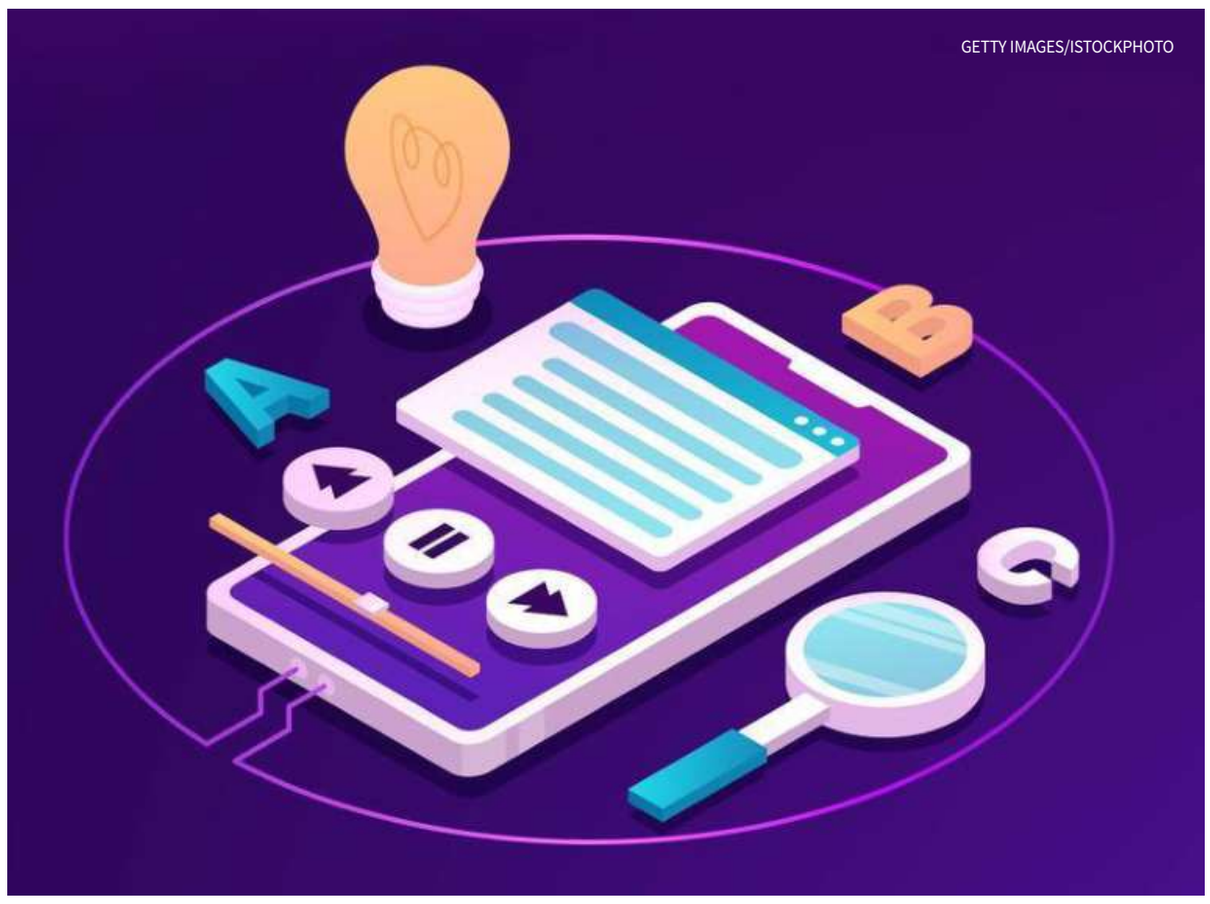
The future will not belong to those who build rockets when the client asks for a bike. It will belong to those who listen, understand, and build exactly what the world needs.

The writer is a global AI and communication coach.

Short but purposeful

In the age of reels and shorts, microlearning offers a way to keep students engaged, one micro-lesson at a time.

Alice Pistono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Today's students swipe, skip, and scroll through information at lightning speed. In this fast-paced attention economy, educators face a new challenge: keeping learners engaged long enough for real understanding to happen. This has led to microlearning gaining momentum as a form of instruction. Research shows that as information supply grows, attention spans shrink. But students today aren't less capable; they're processing differently. Raised in a visual, on-demand world, they learn best through small, purposeful bursts of content. Backed by cognitive science, microlearning uses spaced repetition, breaking lessons into short segments to improve engagement, recall, and understanding without cognitive overload. So here are some tips to use microlearning for the Tik Tok generation

Pre-Class Video Assignment: Before each lecture, share two- to three-minute video introducing the topic; a "trailer" to spark curiosity and provide a mental framework. Keep it short, clear, and aligned with one or two learning goals. These can be used to simplify complex concepts and make them accessible in multiple languages and formats.

Open with a pop quiz: Start the class with one or two quick questions on the pre-class material. The goal is not assessment but activation, getting students mentally present and encouraging recall. Short polls or open-ended questions also minimise over-reliance on AI tools since they rely on immediate understanding rather than external searching.

Learn-apply-revisit: Divide your lecture into short modules; say, 10 minutes of instruction followed by one minute of application. This loop of learn-apply-revisit reinforces memory and keeps attention from drifting. Each segment should be centred around a single learning objective. Build reflection or discussion prompts between sections. End each segment with a "call-back question" to help students connect ideas across topics and build a coherent learning experience.

Reflection moments: Ask students to write down one concept they learnt and one question they still have. This helps consolidate knowledge and gives educators instant feedback on what needs revisiting next time.

Visual anchor: Use one strong visual cue – such as an image, animation, or brief video – to anchor each new concept. Research shows that visuals are processed up to 60,000 times faster than text, and pairing images with ideas strengthens recall. Begin each module with a visual, let it draw attention and build the explanation around it.

When designed properly microlearning transforms content delivery from passive absorption to active participation. Institutes that have adopted this method within flipped classrooms and blended learning models report higher engagement and better retention. Its real strength lies in its ability to meet students' attention patterns without compromising depth. By breaking complex subjects into manageable moments, teachers maintain academic rigour while improving accessibility and focus. In the age of reels and shorts, microlearning offers a way to help students focus , one micro-lesson at a time.

The writer is Director of Brand and PR at JoVE.

Twin forces

Understanding how motivation and discipline work together can change how we pursue our goals

THINK
Aruna Sankaranarayanan

Motivation, especially the intrinsic variety, is often touted as being essential for people's success. The yearning to do something is what gets us going. Without this spark, we may just lie in bed, especially if we believe that what we do isn't impactful. However, while intrinsic motivation is important, we also need to cultivate discipline to achieve a goal. Whether it's losing weight, scaling a Himalayan peak or writing a book, we need to act on our desire to effect change. Discipline enables us to stick it out, especially when the going gets tough.

Yin and yang

In a blog post on *Second Nature*, Tamara Willner says motivation and discipline are the yin and yang of well-being. When we engage in an activity because we find it "personally rewarding", we are intrinsically motivated. So, we may crack our heads over a crossword every morning or go for a run because we find these activities pleasurable. However, there might be days when you are not inclined to run either because you slept in or have more pressing tasks to attend to. This is where discipline plays a part. According to Willner, discipline refers to "training yourself to work in a controlled and regular way".

In a blog post on *Psyche*, Christian Jarrett says that Oleksandr Usyk, a Ukrainian boxer who has been a world champion twice, rates discipline as being key to his success. As motivation is fleeting, we cannot depend on this alone to achieve goals. We also need to inculcate habits that get us there, and discipline helps us form those habits.

Eric Partaker, an executive coach, also argues in a blog post on *EricPartaker&Co*, that motivation may "get you started", but discipline is what sees you through to the "finish line." He reinforces Usyk's point that motivation doesn't last long. That's why we rely on discipline to keep our "commitment to the process."

Work together

But sheer discipline, without motivation, is unlikely to help you climb higher peaks. I'm rarely motivated to clean up my house. However, when I find a room or cupboard looking unduly messy, I muster the discipline to declutter. Neither do I relish the process nor do I set more exacting standards of cleanliness for myself. So, discipline without motivation does not help us rise to new levels. Successful people, says Willner, tend to dip into both the sauces of discipline and motivation.

If I examine my impetus to write or work out, I have to confess that my motivation ebbs and flows. There are days when I feel compelled to put down thoughts on paper and days when I feel I don't have anything compelling to say. Discipline is what helps me chug through periods when inspiration doesn't strike. If I only write on days I feel motivated, then my output would be very sparse. But if I commit to writing a predetermined number of words every day, no matter how I'm feeling, I have something to work on. Then my motivation kicks in and helps me stay on course.

Likewise, my desire to exercise yo-yos from day to day. But since I've managed to make it a habit by repeatedly doing it at the same time every day, I don't even ask myself if I'm in the mood to exercise. I just know it's time to lace my shoes ,and I go through the motions almost on autopilot. Unlike my spring cleaning efforts, there are days when I enjoy my workout and am enthused to push myself by either upping the weights or trying a more challenging routine.

So, motivation and discipline are the twin forces that galvanise and keep us on track to achieve our goals.

The writer is visiting faculty at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and the co-author of Bee-Witched.

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Lead with purpose

Why leadership development must be integrated into academic programmes

Prakash Gopalan

Opportunities, not titles or jobs, are the foundation of leadership. Rather than being seen as a goal reached at the end of a student's journey, leadership should be fostered right from the beginning. It usually develops slowly, through curiosity, support, and an environment that lets students try things, fail, and learn.

Academic institutions are moving away from considering leadership as a collection of discrete activities, such as sporadic workshops or seminars, and are fostering it through four key pillars: early identification, structured mentorship, experiential learning, and recognition frameworks. This lays the groundwork for graduates who can think critically, act morally, and lead with purpose.

Identifying potential

Some youngsters are natural leaders. Their potential manifests early in life. But, for many, it involves training and developing young minds to take the plunge. Student councils, interest-based clubs, and community service initiatives are often the first steps on campuses. Students are introduced to planning, teamwork, public speaking, and accountability through these platforms.

Consider a first-year student assisting with the planning of a campus sustainability project. They gain skills in peer management, progress monitoring, dealing with unforeseen obstacles, thinking on their feet and persevering through periods of low enthusiasm. The outcome is a more realistic and open-minded method of leadership development. Institutions can encourage initiative and empower different voices by rewarding projects led by students or using democratic student governance.

Structured mentorship

However, a student can only go so far with early initiative. Mentoring becomes crucial to transforming potential into performance. Having a teacher, senior, or business professional who can provide direction, criticism, and insight is very beneficial. Alumni mentor networks are highly effective here. Several Indian universities are conducting scheduled programmes where students are matched with alumni who share their experiences and learnings, offer constructive advice, emotional reassurance and, most importantly, candid conversations. To grow and succeed, conversations around "Here's where you stumbled", or "Here's how you can stretch yourself further" are necessary.

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Experiential challenges

Leadership is best learnt by doing. When learners are put in new situations that require critical thinking, improvisation and resilience, it results in actual personal development. Consider a field trip in which students work on digital literacy in rural locations. They need to cope with collaborative work, change instructional methods, local challenges, and address unexpected outcomes. To resolve these practical challenges, they will have to make decisions, settle conflicts, and be accountable not only to instructors, but also to the real stakeholders. This approach challenges institutions to move their students beyond the classroom and into real-world problem-solving through internships, capstone projects or service-learning modules. These messy human experiences, with their setbacks and successes, foster traits like perseverance, adaptability, and purpose that no textbook can teach.

Recognition frameworks

Recognition plays a vital role in encouraging students to take leadership seriously and make it part of their identity. Many universities are now adopting leadership portfolios, digital badges, and co-curricular transcripts to validate student contributions that document progress across projects, reflect on leadership style, and evaluate development. A leadership portfolio may include a record of group work, peer reviews, volunteer positions, experience in managing events, and reflective essays. It can be used as a device of introspection and professional communication, and assist students in defining their story during interviews, applications, or mentorship sessions.

Integrating leadership development into the academic programmes not only brings out only employable graduates but also considerate, involved citizens who are prepared for impact as well as employment.

The writer is the President of NIIT University

Keep it simple

How keeping language simple while teaching can help students

Mugdha Jain


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In many first-year classrooms, two hurdles appear at once: complex ideas and complex English. When students have to untangle long sentences and difficult vocabulary, they cannot pay enough attention to the idea itself. Plain, purposeful English does not dilute thought; it gives thought room to breathe, turns confusion into inquiry, and helps deepen understanding.

Independent thinking

Good readers become independent thinkers. Critical readers look beyond the surface, test claims against evidence and experience, and separate facts from opinions. They use texts to make sense of the world around them. In college, close reading helps students draw sound conclusions and make rational decisions. In the workplace, the same skill enables professionals to assess information critically, make informed choices, and communicate ideas with clarity and conviction. Speaking deserves the same respect as reading. When students practise concise explanations and precise questions, they build professional confidence. This is not about perfect accents. It is about helping someone else grasp a complex point quickly and fairly.

Clarity reduces unnecessary cognitive load. When specific, active sentences are used, working memory is freed for analysis and creativity. Students then wrestle with an idea and not the wording. What follows when language becomes clear?

Faster comprehension: Definitions, lab steps, and case summaries become usable tools rather than puzzles.

Sharper judgement: When a text invites readers to label evidence and opinion, notice trends, and question leaps, they practise the discipline of forming sound opinions.

Technical fluency: Plain English helps students grasp technical terms and use them with precision.

Originality and persuasion: Learners can interpret views in their own words and defend a position with logic.

Let's illustrate this with the example of two classrooms. In a Computer Science lab, the topic is time complexity. The teacher begins with a question: "If we double the number of records, how much longer will search take?" Students try it with small lists on paper. They feel the difference between checking items one by one and jumping to the middle and halving the set. Only then do the names arrive: linear search and binary search. By the time the terms and symbols appear, the idea is already in place, and students can justify an algorithm choice in plain English before they code.

Across the corridor, a Sociology seminar looks at urban employment. The class reads a short op ed and a one page table of recent trend data. Together they tag each line as fact, opinion, or inference. They ask whether the "latest trend" actually supports the claim. Each student writes a memo with a personal conclusion, stated clearly and defended with reasons. The exercise rewards original thinking and logical persuasion, not parroting.

Following a sequence

Plain English is not anti jargon. It is pro sequence. Technical terms earn their place after the meaning is understood. A useful habit is to explain a paragraph from a research article in everyday words, then add the proper terms, and finally restate it in the discipline's register. Moving up and down this ladder strengthens both understanding and professional voice.

The benefits go beyond college. Employers consistently prize graduates who can explain complex ideas simply to colleagues, clients, and communities. Interviews reward candidates who can turn technical detail into plain speech without bending the truth. Teams work better when emails and reports are crisp. Graduates who are comfortable with clear English keep learning, because research feels legible rather than forbidding.

Higher education in India need not choose between rigour and accessibility. We can teach difficult content with transparent language and still demand precise thought expressed clearly. Simpler language learning begins with steady choices: asking "What am I really trying to say?", spotting where a reader might stumble, and deciding which terms are essential. When avoidable complexity is stripped away, the discipline is not diluted. It is illuminated.

The writer is an education expert and author of S.H.A.R.P. Insights English