Advice for International Students

Hi! and welcome to your Engineering degree at Sydney University.

This will be a very interesting and sometimes difficult period of your life. Not only will you be expected to study your degree like everyone else, but you'll be away from your family, friends and culture, and furthermore you'll be doing it in a foreign language!

I have some tips for you to get the most from your degree and your time in Sydney. Please consider this advice carefully because it is based on years of experience with students just like you.

General Advice: You've chosen Sydney University for more than just academic reasons. Be brave and adventurous and you will gain these extra benefits, and it will help your studies.

The most important pieces of advice I can give you are:

- Keep learning English on a daily basis
- Make friends outside of your home culture.
- Use all the resources, student services, clubs and societies you have available to help you.
- Understand Sydney University, its rules, the way it teaches you, your lecturers and tutors, and how to be successful in your studies.

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Feedback: What do you think of this advice? Please tell me what you like and don't like about this advice, and any errors or updates that need fixing. Oh, and any more questions too. Thanks: peter.cafe@sydney.edu.au
A. Ten good Language ideas

For most of you English language will be your biggest challenge. But remember that the reason you are here (and not in a university in your own country) is to learn the language and culture. This will be a springboard to great opportunities and experiences in your future career and personal life.

It is a shocking but true statistic that many foreign students finish their 4 year degree in Australia with worse English than when they arrived. Will this be your sad story too?

I’ve got ten good ideas to boost your language skills:

1. Keep learning

You are in the perfect environment to become an expert speaker of English. What an tremendous advantage this will be for you when you return to your country and start looking for a job!

Don’t ever be satisfied with your current level of English. Every day make one small improvement to your English ability. One way to do this is to have a language book suitable for your level and just read one page each day, and then practise that skill the next day in conversation. It just takes 5 minutes but it has a huge effect over 4 years.

2. Talk

Confidence. How do you get confidence? There is only one way, and that is to talk. Forget about the mistakes you make, you will be amazed at how forgiving people are of your English mistakes. Everyone knows you are learning. People admire you for trying even when you make mistakes. Don’t just rely on your written ability in English. See “Conversation Workshops” below.

3. Make new friends

You really must find friends who are not from your home culture. Fortunately this is easier than you think because there are hundreds of other students from a different country who are looking for friends too. There are also lots of regular Australians who are friendly and want to be helpful. Make a friend ideas.

Don’t be afraid to make new friends. Look for opportunities to do new and interesting things with new people. You may join a club in or outside the university. When making new friends always be positive and outgoing. Be kind and helpful, and listen, because the best way to find a friend is to be a friend.

4. Be brave

It is time for you to take responsibility. You are no longer a child must face this challenge as an adult. Overcome your shyness and fear of embarrassment by being braver than you ever have before.

This time in Australia is a great chance to do lots of new things: this is a very safe country with so much to discover and experience.
5. Smile

The smile costs nothing and can gain you everything.

6. Be Curious

Take an interest in Australian culture, our history, our values, and our rich variety of people. Also our geography, our plants and animals, and our place in the world. What do we do for work, for entertainment, for sport, for leisure and pleasure? What do we talk about? What are our families and homes like? What do we eat?

Go to parties, picnics, barbeques, and any social occasion if you ever get the chance. Offer to help. Listen to people talking, ask polite and curious questions. Drink and eat and work and play with us!

I especially recommend going on bushwalks with an established group.

Maybe you can spot differences with other English cultures and accents, such as England and USA. Language and culture are completely interrelated so the more you understand the culture the more you will understand the language.

7. Trust us

Of course you always have be on the alert to danger and bad people, but Australia is among the safest places in the world and Australians are usually honest and will help you if they can. Also in Australia people say hello to strangers more freely perhaps than in your own country, and if someone is just being friendly and helpful it’s usually quite innocent. Usually there’s no harm in smiling and saying hello. See the Section below for Safety Tips.

8. Do some extra courses

You’ve reached the entry level of English to get into uni: does it end there? No, you haven’t stopped studying English. There are some free workshops here at uni, and some units of study you might be interested in as your “free elective”. There might be extra courses outside the university: Look at “Extra Courses” below.

9. Try to live with people outside of your own culture.

Yes it may be a bit scary, but perhaps you can look around for share accommodation with English speakers, or at least people not from your own country. See “Accommodation” below.
B. Practical Things

What are some practical things you have to get organised to survive in Sydney?

1. Make a friend

Many students feel very lonely away from their culture and family. I have some advice on how to make friends. This will also help you to improve your English.

Get involved in some group on Campus. Join one of the University Clubs. These are cheap, fun ways to do interesting things and meet people. You might have to get your ACCESS card first: but this will pay for itself many times because it gives you plenty of discounts. See below for some useful links and places to meet people. Recommended clubs are Unimates and your Engineering Society (eg SUCES). There are also good social clubs outside of the university.

2. Accommodation:

Accommodation is quite expensive in Sydney. The cheapest accommodation is to find a share house or share apartment. Other ideas are Homestay, On-Campus rooming, or external boarding such as Unilodge.

Try the following links for more information:

- The Sydney Uni Accommodation Service. This is the best place to look for very good advice about living in Sydney and how to find a room.
- The UTS housing service may also be quite useful http://www.ssu.uts.edu.au/housing/. It also has lots of very good advice.
- Share Accommodation: Paid flatmate finder services such as http://www.flatmatefinders.com.au or http://au.easyroommate.com
- Homestay: Info from Sydney Uni and Info from UTS.

3. Job and money

Having a part-time job is a good way to help pay for your expenses and learn some English. However many students don’t get the balance right and working too much causes their studies to suffer and they fail some subjects. Then their pocket-money job ends up costing their parents thousands of
dollars. As a guide try to avoid any job which takes up more than 24 hours per week during term (this includes travel time).

At Sydney University you will have study commitments every week during the semester which will be very time consuming. In addition to lectures and tutorials you need to do assignments and private study every week between 20 and 40 hours extra – sometimes even more.

4. When you have problems

Everyone experiences problems along the way. Try to get help before the problem gets serious. Please be especially aware of anxiety and depression and don’t be afraid of admitting you need help.

Who can I see for help?

- **Failing Subjects**: See advice below about this:

- **Loneliness**: If you want a friend you have to **be a friend**: try harder to be someone people will like: show an interest in others, be helpful and curious, smile and laugh a lot and make people feel like you appreciate them. Watch what other people do which makes them popular and pick up some simple tricks from what you see.

  There are people here just as lonely as you and they would love to have you as a friend. It may not always work the first time, so be braver and try again. There is a link below for places and events to meet people.

  DO NOT just stay in your room or spend or your spare time on-line gaming or such. This will turn the loneliness into depression.

- **Depression, Fear and Anxiety**: These feelings are common in many undergraduates from time to time and usually it’s just a matter of calming down and working your way through it. However occasionally these feelings can become quite strong and have an effect on your studies and personal life. You need to explain your difficulties to the **Director of Undergraduate Studies** or a counsellor at the **University Counselling Service**. See below for helpful links for dealing with personal problems.

- **Illness or accident**: For short term sicknesses or an incident which prevents you from completing an assessment task, use the **Special Consideration System**.

  **Long term and serious issues**: If you have a serious or long term illness or misadventure that affects your performance over an extended period, you must inform us as soon as possible, and not wait till after the exam, or very late in the semester. Contact the **Engineering Student Enquiry Office**.

- **Disability**: If you have a long-term condition which may affect your performance in exams etc you should contact **disability services** for an assessment and to determine what steps should be implemented to assist you.

- **VISA problems etc**: Contact the **International Office**.

- **Student Support Services**: [link to University Student web page](#)
C. Success at Uni

Here are ten hot tips to get through uni:

1. Improve your English. Grow in confidence with English, not just writing but speaking too. Many foreign students fail to participate in their studies because of language barriers: listening, discussing, team-work, and contributing your ideas are all essential parts of completing your degree.

2. Communicate with your teachers (lecturers and tutors). Give them a reason to notice you. Keep them informed if you have any problems. Ask their help if you need it.

3. Go to all classes, do all the assignments, study before all quizzes, sit at the front.

4. Do not rely on what your friends tell you about anything. You will hear them say “You don’t have to go to classes.” or “All you have to do is make a summary.” Double check with your lecturer or someone in authority.

5. Read instructions carefully in assignments and tests. Look for differences between the wording of questions which require a different solution.

6. DO NOT "EXAM CRAM": many students come from places where assessment is 100% on the final exam and they are used to putting all their effort at the end of the semester and being a little lazy during the semester. The easy marks are during the semester in the mid-term quizzes and assignments. Study for these to get good marks and you will magically relieve the pressure at the end of the semester.

7. The Learning Centre and the Maths Learning Centre hold skills workshops. Also keep your ears open for announcements about the Civil Engineering drop-in tutor. These are all free services to support your studies.

8. Other study tips: See Engineering Current Students

9. Be familiar with the policies and procedures of the University. Important advice for Civil undergraduates can be found here.

10. On-line advice for study success from CAPS: CAPS

D. Failing Subjects

Failing a subject happens to many students at some time during their degree. Download “The Rough Guide”, which is a summary of the Civil Degree program. You should see an Academic Advisor or the Director of Undergraduate Studies for academic advice if you need to change your program. For administrative advice or help see Undergraduate Administrative Advisor. The biggest mistake international students make is pretending they can catch up by doing an extra subject next year. This usually causes them to fail 2 or 3 more subjects. We can approve a reduced enrolment for you (18cp per semester) if we believe it is in your best interests (this can be approved for your Visa).

If you start failing subjects you have to accept that your degree will take an extra semester or two.
If you fail a subject

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<th>DO</th>
<th>DO NOT</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ repeat it at the next available opportunity.</td>
<td>✗ enrol in higher level subjects just because your friends are doing them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ seek academic advice about any change in your program.</td>
<td>✗ overload to try to catch up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>✓ use Summer School or Winter School to try to catch up.</td>
<td>✗ pretend to your parents that you are having no problems. This creates bigger and bigger problems as things get worse and you have to face the shame of lying and wasting your parents’ money as well as failing.</td>
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Students at Risk: We have an Academic Progression and Staying on Track program which is designed to help you when it becomes apparent that you are getting excessive failures. There are three stages and if a student gets to Stage 3 we will begin the process of excluding the student. You are advised to consider your situation seriously if you are placed on Stage 1 or 2, and make changes to the way you are approaching your studies.

E. Safety Tips

It is difficult to say who you should and shouldn’t trust (See Trust us above). Use your instinct, but as general guidelines:

- Be suspicious of anyone who approaches you for no obvious reason, perhaps offering you something which you were not looking for. If something seems “too good to be true”, be suspicious.

- People who are trustworthy don’t have to ask you to trust them; they let their actions speak for themselves and they earn your trust. Be wary of people who insist that you can trust them but they haven’t proven it.

- Surprisingly, students from China are more often ripped off by other Chinese. This is because your own culture know you only too well.

Also check out this advice from the International Office (scroll down to Think Before - A Student Safety Initiative, and the Sydney University Student Safety Tips.

F. Sir? Professor? Mate? How to address your teachers

You will hear other students addressing teachers by their first name. Most lecturers don’t mind how you address them. In Australia we are more casual about this formality. To be on the safe side, be more formal when you talk to a teacher for the first time. (Sir, Mr Smith or Dr Brown). Other than that, choose something you feel comfortable with. When I was an undergraduate I didn’t feel comfortable calling the professors by their first name so I often used “Dr John”. Your tutors are usually students also and it is quite OK to use their first names.
G. Dealing with Personal Problems

Many students experience depression, anxiety and fear and other problems during their university years. There are different ways of putting up your hand and asking for help.

🎉 You might want to start with a friendly talk with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (Peter Cafe).

🎉 Self-Help is available on-line. Perhaps you would feel better starting here, at the Self Help area of Student Support. This doesn't involve talking to anyone: just find help privately on-line. There are three sections:
- **Study Issues:** Get organised; procrastination; perfectionism; anxiety; speaking confidently.
- **Lifestyle issues:** Mental and emotional well-being; Eating well; Grief and loss; Proper sleep; Communicating; Culture adjustment; Good friendships; Am I gay?
- **Well-being concerns:** Managing stress and fear; Lift your mood; Uncomfortable feelings; Manage suicidal thinking; Self-harm; Too much internet use?; Whoops with drugs or alcohol.

🎉 Individual Counselling: this is free and confidential. Someone who will listen without judging you, and will help point you in the right direction. Individual Counselling.

🎉 Workshops: join with other students in workshops to deal with some common student issues, such as exam anxiety and study techniques. Workshops.

🎉 Parents: Keep your parents informed of any personal difficulties. DO NOT keep pretending to them that everything is OK.

H. Extra Courses and things to improve your English

You should at least consider the free workshops and self-help (online) available through the Learning Centre. Also in your Civil Engineering degree you have 2 free electives: you might consider studying a subject which will help you understand English or the Australian culture a bit better. Many of these ideas are free, but don’t be reluctant to spend money if you need to improve your English.
a. **Consider** the help available in [The Learning Centre](#).

They have a lot of free workshops throughout the year to help students. Some are for non-English speakers and some are to help you in general study techniques.

Some recommended topics are:

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<tr>
<th>Workshops for English Language and Learning (WELL)</th>
<th>General</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pronunciation Skills (12 hrs over 3 days)</td>
<td>Procrastination and Managing Time (2 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clearer Writing (6 hrs over 2 days)</td>
<td>Exam Preparation (2 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Skills and Working in Groups (3 hours)</td>
<td>Planning an Assignment (2 hours)</td>
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They also have on-line “help-yourself” tools about writing, grammar, speaking and studying.

b. **As a free elective if** you have one available in your degree:

- WRIT1000 - Writing English: Style and Method (Semester 1, Semester 2, Summer and Winter)
- HSTY1089 - Australia: Blood on the Wattle (Semester 2)
- LNGS7275 - World Englishes (Semester 1)
- WORK2218 - People and Organisations (Semester 1)
- WORK2209 - Organisational Analysis and Behaviour (Semester 2)
- ASNS1601 - Introduction to Asian Cultures (Semester 1)
- EUST2607 - Comparing Cultures: Europe and the East (Semester 1)
- HSTY2604 - Popular Culture in Australia 1850-1945 (Semester 1, Summer)
- EDPJ5024 - English in Academic Settings (for non-english students POSTGRADS ONLY) (Sem 1, Sem 2)

c. **Free on-line english learning courses.**

These are offered by CET to improve academic English, note-taking, listening, pronunciation and more.

d. **Paid Workshops:**

Workshops run throughout the year and cost $60 per workshop (1 hour and 45 minutes). A block of 10 workshops costs $500 (2013 prices).

e. **Private one-on-one coaching:**

Initial consultation (through interview, phone or email) is free. A typical 1:1 coaching program consists of a block of 10 lessons with needs analysis, customised learning plan and detailed post-course report. The cost of 10 lessons is $1,170. Single lessons are $130 per hour (2013 prices).
I. Conversation groups or language exchange

Would you like to meet people on a weekly basis for conversation skills? This helps you meet other folks too. People start these from time to time: you might like to begin one yourself, using Facebook to get started and meeting regularly at Manning, Herman’s Bar or for a picnic on the lawn.

Keep your ears open for opportunities to create or join a conversation group.

Some ideas for conversation: practise your speaking; thousands of conversation questions.

J. Meeting People: More Information on Clubs

a. Clubs in Sydney University

Clubs enhance the student experience and help you feel secure and meet people. To become a member of any club you need to get an access card. However you can still attend events without being a member.

BEST CLUBS IN SYDNEY UNI

<table>
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<th>For Civil Engineers:</th>
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<td>SUCE: Organise events that will allow civil engineering students to get to know each other, as well as some of the staff from the school. <a href="mailto:SUCivilEngineers@gmail.com">SUCivilEngineers@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>SUEUA is the faculty society for engineering encompassing all of its various streams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUWIE supports and promotes women in engineering to students at the University of Sydney. The society encourages networking between female engineering students and professional engineers from industry. SUWIE provides both academic and social support to its members. <a href="mailto:bsim1206@uni.sydney.edu.au">bsim1206@uni.sydney.edu.au</a></td>
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EWB: Do something for your spirit. Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Australia works with disadvantaged communities to improve their quality of life, through the education and implementation of sustainable engineering projects. (USYD chapter)
General Social Clubs

Unimates: This is designed especially for international students to meet Aussies and vice-versa. It’s safe and fun. Visit our weekly Coffee and Cakes stall on Wednesday 12:30-2:00 pm on the lawn beside the Biochemistry and Microbiology building and opposite Merewether Building.

Unimates web page Patrick: 0419 847 679 usyd.unimates@gmail.com

Check out all the USYD clubs here: Safe Bushwalking, Anime and Manga, Puzzles, Drama, Dance, Learn Circus tricks, Helping Others, Learn how to talk in public and lots more: and don’t forget to smile.

b. Clubs outside the university (Disclaimer: The university does not endorse any external clubs.)

Outside of the uni you might try meetup.com: just about any interest is catered for here

This group seems genuine and friendly and active: http://www.facetime.com.au

If you are religious you might like to join a church, temple, mosque or whatever.

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