Successful learning: strategies for first years

Presented by

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Academic expectations at university
Academic expectations

Compared with high school, university students:

- receive less guidance
- have more autonomy
- have more distant, impersonal relationships with teachers and the university or faculty
- have larger, more irregular workloads
- have to deal with more implicit expectations
Academic expectations

As a university student, you are expected to:

- know how to find and use information
- think, read and write analytically and critically
- write the right academic genre for an assignment
- manage a large and irregular workload
- attend lectures and submit assignments on time
- motivate yourself
- make your own decisions about how to learn
- actively seek help and information when you need it.
- behave with academic honesty (i.e. correct referencing and no plagiarism).
Academic expectations

Skills audit:

- Look at the list of academic tasks and skills in your handout

- Give yourself a rating of Master, Apprentice or Beginner for each skill.
Academic expectations

Master:

- This skill is one of your strengths
- You have a high level of confidence and experience with this skill.
Academic expectations

Apprentice:

- This is a developing skill.

- You might have some experience but perhaps not at university level.
Academic expectations

**Beginner:**

- You have limited skill in this area.
- You might not have experience in doing this.
- You might not have tried this at University.
Academic expectations

Take 4 minutes to do the skills audit.
Academic expectations

If you are a beginner:

- Have realistic expectations: Don’t expect perfection in the first assignment.
- If you need this skill for an assignment, ask for advice: other students, your tutor and/or your lecturer.
- Do a free Learning Centre workshop.
Academic expectations

If you are an apprentice:

- Have realistic expectations: Don’t expect perfection, but only improvement.

- Set yourself some goals to improve.

- Do a free Learning Centre workshop.
Academic expectations

Love your Unit of Study Outline because it gives you:

- Due dates and instructions for assignments
- Referencing expectations
- Guide to style and format of assignments
- Information about criteria for different grades
- Outline of the content and structure of the teaching
- Contact information for lecturers and tutors
- ... plus more ...
Time management strategies
Reflect on your study preferences

Time for study
Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions

- Do you prefer studying in the morning or evening?
- When is your most productive time?
- When are you most able to concentrate?
- When are you least productive and most distracted?

Now share with the person sitting next to you.
Maximise your study time – study when you are fresh and avoid times when you are distracted.
Planning

Enter all deadlines on your semester planner.

For each deadline:
• work backwards
• identify the weeks/dates when you need to start work on that assignment/test

Use your semester planner as the basis for your weekly planner.

Use your weekly planner as the basis of your study session planner.

Go to tomorrow’s lecture ‘So many books, so little time: Tips for conquering reading and research’ (10-11, in the Bosch Lecture Theatre), for more on planners for time management.
Planning

Planning means:

- Break a large task into steps or chunks.
- Estimate how long each step will take.
- Work out which chunks need to be done in each week.
- Write the chunks in the weekly boxes on your semester planner.
Planning – breaking assignment preparation down into steps

For example: writing an essay

Read and summarise journal articles – 8 hours
Plan essay – 2 hours
Write draft – 3 hours
Revise draft – 2 hours
Write final essay – 2 hours
Format references – 2 hours
Print out – final proof reading and electronic submission - 1 hour
## Example semester planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>LING</th>
<th>FRENCH</th>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Read novel 3 hours</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>LING</th>
<th>FRENCH</th>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read and summarise journal articles – 8 hours</td>
<td>Summarise lecture notes</td>
<td>Read chapters 1-3 and make notes – 3 hours</td>
<td>Write draft of summary 1 hr</td>
<td>Read novel 2 hrs Find 3 articles 1 hr</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>LING</th>
<th>FRENCH</th>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan essay – 2 hours</td>
<td>Study for quiz 2 hours</td>
<td>Write final summary – 2 hrs</td>
<td>Read articles and make notes 3 hrs Plan tutorial presentation 1 hr Develop powerpoint 2 hrs</td>
<td></td>
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<th>LING</th>
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<th>ENGLISH</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write draft – 3 hours Revise draft – 2 hours</td>
<td>Quiz</td>
<td>Read chapters 4-6 and make notes – 3 hours</td>
<td>Write draft of summary 1 hr</td>
<td>Rehearse presentation 2 hrs</td>
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<th>LING</th>
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<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write final essay – 2 hours Format references – 2 hours Print out – 1 hour</td>
<td></td>
<td>Write final summary – 2 hrs</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Break</th>
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<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay 1 due</td>
<td>Summarise lecture notes</td>
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<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study for quiz 2 hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assignment 1</td>
<td>Essay 1</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>LING</th>
<th>FRENCH</th>
<th>BIO</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group assignment</td>
<td></td>
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The University of Sydney
Procrastination

Timewasters

How do you procrastinate?
Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions
- What are your biggest timewasters?
- How can you avoid these?
Now share with the person sitting next to you
  - TV/computer
  - Facebook, IM, Twitter etc.
  - Phone
  - Organising your desk
  - Gaming
  - Daydreaming ... ?
Timewasters

TV/computer

Facebook

Household chores
Timewasters and solutions

- **TV/computer**: Use it as a reward only after finishing a task.
- **Facebook**: Check Facebook as a reward when you finish.
- **Household chores**: Don’t do cleaning or other chores during your study time.
- **Telephone**
- **Texting**: Turn it off!
Goal setting

- Students who set goals are more likely to succeed
- Goal setting can help you to improve academic performance at University

Set SMART goals

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-frame

By 2pm, read 4 journal articles and make a concept map summary of ideas.

Stick to weekly study schedule this week.

Today I will avoid distractions by turning off my mobile while studying.
Effective reading techniques
Reading effectively

Reading for a purpose:

- Why are you reading? e.g.:
  - for an assignment, either written or oral?
  - for a test or an exam?

- The way you read and take notes will be different; e.g.:
  - for an essay assignment or a (short) essay exam, you usually need to identify the main ideas and argument being developed by the author
  - for an exam testing detailed knowledge, you’ll need to see the relationships between the various elements of the system, process, etc., that you are learning about
Reading techniques: Skimming

**Skimming:** gaining a general overview of main ideas, arguments etc.

- Helps you decide if a text is an appropriate source of information and if it is, to determine how much and what you should read more intensively.

- You can apply skimming techniques at all levels of a text:
  - Skim the introductory and concluding chapters of a book, together with the table of contents.
  - Within chapters, skim the opening and closing paragraphs, the headings and subheadings, then skim the first sentences of each paragraph: these ‘topic’ sentences usually summarise the content of the paragraph or the direction it will be leading the reader in.

- Skimming allows you to reflect on and predict what is to follow:
  - Taking a few minutes while skimming to predict content keeps you active as a reader.
  - Skimming also helps you to write briefer notes.
Reading techniques: Scanning

**Scanning: to try to locate specific information**

- **Book:**
  
  use the Contents pages (chapter titles) and/or the Preface/Introduction

  use the index to find, e.g.:
  
  - the name of a particular theorist - the index might provide that without having to scan parts of the text at all
  
  - the main characteristics of a type of plant - find the page number(s) for the plant (or species) and scan the page(s) for the information you require.

- **Journal article:**
  
  use **find** if it is an electronic, searchable version

  let your eyes move over each page in a systematic way until you find the information you want

- **Scanning can be used during the early stages of reading and researching as well as during the later stages to clarify specific points**
Some General Principles for Reading

1. Be selective - you can't read everything so read the key texts in depth and skim some of your other references.

2. Use the information available in the texts to help you decide which texts to read and how much; i.e. use the index, chapter headings, table of Contents, introduction, and so on to help locate specific information.

3. Use your resources - get advice from lecturers as to which texts are the most important and which topics are the most time consuming.

4. Know what you're looking for: have a list of questions you need answers for to enhance your understanding of the material.
Learning and revising ...
Learning tips

For reading/writing learners:

- write summaries of your lectures
- make lists
- write key concepts on post-it notes
- invent mnemonics (e.g. ROYGBIV – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet = Newton’s colours of the spectrum)
- fill an A-Z address book with a glossary of key words, meanings, synonyms, equations, theories, etc., in your subject

For kinaesthetic learners:

- collect pictures/objects that remind you of the key points
- make up real-life examples of abstract concepts, use case studies
- prepare a demonstration, go on field trips, interview people, perform experiments, do computer simulations, …
Learning tips: what kind of learner are you?

For aural learners:
- record key points onto your iPhone and listen
- hold study sessions with friends for discussions
- explain your notes to someone else, listen to others’ explanations
- imagine listening and talking to your tutor
- explain the relationships between concepts/elements

For visual learners: use
- graphic organisers, e.g. SmartArt
- concept maps, event maps, Venn diagrams, flowcharts to explain the relationships between concepts/elements
- key words displayed in colour
- symbols to represent each learning element
Concept map

- Feature 1
- Feature 2
- Feature 3
- Feature 4

Topic

Event map

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- How?
- When?
- Where?
Venn diagram

A

Things in common to A and C

Things in common to A and B

Things in common to A, B and C

C

Things in common to B and C

B
Learning preferences

- Ask the person sitting next to you

- What type of learning style do you prefer?
  - Reading/ writing
  - Kinaesthetic
  - Aural
  - Visual
Revision tips: exams may seem a long way off!!

Advice from British ‘memory champion’, Ed Cooke:

- start early in the semester
- learn in short sessions
- test yourself over a number of weeks, leaving intervals between revision sessions
- don’t leave learning, especially of large amounts of information, till the last minute …

Knowledge building in science

Concept 3
Concept 2
Concept 1

Knowledge building in humanities

Concept 1
Concept 2
Concept 3

https://www.memrise.com/
Revision tips: exams may seem a long way off!!

General revision advice:
- revise in short, timed bursts of activity, then have a short break
- revise when you’re ‘at your peak’ = early in the day? much later?
- revise the most challenging subject areas first, while you’re fresh
- give yourself a reward after a challenging revision session!

For example: Use the pomodoro technique
1. decide on the task to be done (and break it down into intervals).
2. set the pomodoro timer to $n$ minutes (traditionally $n = 25$).
3. work on the task until the timer rings. If you are distracted, record whatever it is, but immediately get back on task.
4. when the timer rings after one ‘pomodoro’, take a short break (3–5 minutes), then continue with the task. Keep track of the number of pomodoros.
5. after four ‘pomodoros’, take a longer break (15–30 minutes), and start again.

http://pomodorotechnique.com/
Preparing for Multiple Choice Question exams

Revise in different ways:

- make summaries
- make diagrammatic representations (e.g. concept maps, spider charts, flow charts)
- make oral explanations/discussions (you can record these and play them back)
- apply your knowledge to new situations
- relate new information to what you already know: make it concrete, make it personal
- move from general to specific information
- work with friends to prepare – and answer – possible questions on the same general topic: preparing questions yourself is a very good way to prepare for the exam
Closing

1. Questions ... ?

2. Please give us your Feedback. Fill in the form and leave it in the box as you leave – thank you!

3. For these slides and a detailed handout (including planners), go to sydney.edu.au/lc and click on Resources

Good luck