NEW TO UNIVERSITY?

New students

You’re about to start studying as an undergraduate in higher education in the UK. You know your academic studies are going to be different from what you’re doing now, whether that’s school, college or work. But do you know how they’ll be different?

These pages aim to give you a headstart in preparing for university by helping you to understand what you can expect, what will be expected of you, and how to develop your existing study techniques to meet these expectations. They are organised by four key questions, identified in discussions with first year students about what they wished they’d known before they started at university:

* "How is studying in higher education going to be different to what I'm used to doing?"
* "What does it mean to be an independent learner?"
* "What are tutors looking for in academic writing at university?"
* "How can I manage my workload to get everything done in the time I have?"

For each question there is a page which includes explanations of what is expected from you at university and how this is different from school or further education. There are also activities to help you put the ideas into practice, and build your understanding and expectations.

Who is this guide for?

These pages will be useful to a wide range of students entering higher education in the UK at undergraduate level. You may have been:

* Studying for A-levels, BTEC or NVQ at sixth-form or FE college
* Taking an Access course either as a younger or more mature student
* Undertaking work-based learning at FE or other levels
* Taking a gap year, or coming directly from employment
* Studying or working outside the UK

They aim to outline general principles that can be applied to most subject disciplines. Some suggestions may be more directly applicable to particular disciplines; you will soon get to know how to adapt the guidance yourself to suit your own discipline.

How should I use this guide?

You can use these pages as a complete pre-entry course to prepare for studying in higher education, by working through each area in turn, reading the guidance and completing all of the activities.

Start by finding out "How is studying in higher education going to be different to what I'm used to doing?"

Alternatively, you can dip into the areas you are most interested in. In either case, use the links in the sidebar on the left, or in the first section of this page.

Of course, you can start using the pages or return to them after you have entered university. We have also included links to self-help resources that will help you to develop your study practices as you progress through your degree course.

How is university study different?

You might be thinking, "Okay, I've finished with A-levels or BTEC, now on to something new!" But studying in higher education won't be a
completely new thing. On the other hand, it won't be more of the same either. Rather it can be helpful to think of your previous studies as a preparation for higher education that you will need to build on and develop.

You are likely to be doing many of the same things: for instance:
* writing essays or other written assignments
* reading and making notes
* using references and compiling bibliographies
* listening to a teacher passing on knowledge of their subject

However, you will need to change and develop these practices to help you succeed at a higher level of academic study. Understanding how higher education is different will help you to be prepared for this.

So how is study at higher education level different from further education or A-level? What will your tutors expect from you, and how can you change your practices to meet those expectations?

**More understanding, less describing**

**You will be used to:**
* learning about your subject, and communicating that knowledge in written assignments and presentations.

**In higher education:**
* your tutors will not be looking for proof that you can describe what you know, but rather that you can put what you know to work: to demonstrate your understanding and make your knowledge meaningful. That will mean knowing the major issues and debates and being able to show what your knowledge can tell us about them.

**Being rigorous and critical**

Academic rigour means checking and testing information to assess whether it is free of errors and is backed by accurate and appropriate evidence. It needs to be strong so that it can support your arguments - like making sure foundations will hold a building up.

**You will be used to:**
* looking for ‘facts’ to include in your assignments: identifying something as a fact means that you have already (whether consciously or unconsciously) considered whether it is correct.

**In higher education:**
* you need to consider that people have different ideas about what makes something ‘correct’. You will be expected to compare and test these versions, and consider the contexts that might make them different.

**Proving your points**

Whether you are writing about someone else's ideas or your own, you will be expected to support the points you wish to make with evidence, perhaps from your own primary research or observations, or from your reading. When this evidence is taken from someone else's work (a book, journal article or website, for instance), you need to provide a reference or citation to show the source.

**You will be used to:**
* finding evidence in sources provided by your teacher or tutor and citing them according to a particular system (perhaps in footnotes).

**In higher education:**
* you will be expected to find and evaluate your own sources of evidence, and make sure that they are cited correctly according to the preferred style for your department or discipline. Getting these exactly right seems trivial, but is actually another way that you demonstrate academic rigour in your work.

**Fewer contact hours**

**You will be used to:**
* having the potential for a considerable amount of direct contact with your course tutor, probably as part of a relatively small group.

**In higher education:**
* you may find that there are more than a hundred students in a lecture theatre, with different lecturers each week, for only a couple of hours a week - and there may be little access to
them outside of this time. Even if you are in a smaller group, you will mostly be expected to get on with study without a lot of direct contact with your tutor.

This is because learning at higher education level is conceived as more than just a one-way stream of information from tutor to student. You will be making your own knowledge from a combination of teaching, discussion with tutors and other students in seminars, independent reading and research and lots of thinking!

Motivating yourself and being committed

Studying in higher education is a choice that you make. As your choice, you will be expected to be self-motivated and committed to your studies.

You will be used to:

* being reminded by your tutor or teacher when you have an assignment due, or told by them how to prioritise your workload.

In higher education:

* although you are likely to have a named 'personal' tutor who has an oversight of your activities, they will expect you to organise your own workload and keep on top of your commitments.

However that doesn't mean that there isn't plenty of support available, both from your tutor and from other people in your institution. It's a good idea to get familiar with the sources of information and support that are available as soon as possible, so you have them when you need them.

Think for yourself!

You will be used to:

* asking questions - if you weren't curious about the world, you wouldn't want to study for a degree!

In higher education:

* you will be expected to question everything. That includes everything you read, and even what your tutors tell you. That doesn't mean you need to question your tutors directly, but you will be expected to ask yourself what you think about things, and then to go one step further and work out what it is that is making you think it. Never just accept what you're told - always think for yourself!

Studying independently

One word you will hear a lot is 'independent'. You will be expected to become an 'independent learner' and undertake 'independent study'. But what does it mean?

What it doesn't mean is that you always have to work alone (having a friend to bounce ideas off is good), or that you can't ask if you're not sure about something and can't find the answer (we want you to progress with your learning). A lot of this independence is about organising yourself and managing your studies: keeping track of your study materials and resources and what you need to do; working out how to fit all your academic commitments into the time you have available to do them.

However, being an independent learner also means planning your own research, selecting and evaluating your own materials, and making your own mind up about what you learn, whether it's from your reading or your tutors.

The sections below will help you to understand what we mean at university by independent learning. There are also exercises you can try to practise the skills you will need. These are in Word documents so you can fill in your answers without printing them off if you prefer.

Planning your own research

When you have an assignment to write or some primary research to do, you will usually be expected to work out how to do this for yourself. You may have a suggested reading list, or some guidance on research, but essentially you will need to take decisions about the best way to conduct your research in order to answer the brief you have been given, and be prepared to justify them.

### How is this different from previous study?

* In most academic disciplines, you are unlikely to have a question which has a single correct answer. The main objective of your assignment will usually be to say something interesting and
meaningful about a particular topic, by conducting a detailed examination of an aspect of that topic and setting it in a larger context, including debates and alternative interpretations within your topic.

* You will probably have a reading list and some works may be marked up as more useful, but essentially you will be expected to find and select your own reading. This will depend on how you decide you are going to answer the question, and what you need to find out to do that successfully.

Reading the brief… be sure about what the assignment question or brief is asking you to do - the number one complaint from markers is that the student didn't answer the question. Identify three things: what is the overall topic; what is the particular area you are being asked to discuss; how are you being asked to discuss it.

Deciding on a research strategy… You may already have a basic understanding of your research subject, in which case you can decide on the key areas to discuss and write yourself some questions for each to help guide your reading or data collection. If you're not so familiar with the topic, read something to give you a good basic understanding first - an introductory chapter in a textbook, or brief encyclopaedia article, for instance.

Limiting the scope… One of the important things you will learn in higher education study is how much information there is on any subject - and how little of that you will able to read! It's easy to think that you might miss something if you don't read 'one more text', but how do you know when to stop? A good strategy is to start by reading three texts that give you some different ideas to compare. Use these ideas to make a structure for your discussion, write some draft sections then do any more reading that is necessary to fill in gaps and reinforce your evidence.

Choosing research methods… If you have to do primary research, think carefully about the best way to do this. For instance, in the social sciences, many students go straight for the online questionnaire option, when it might be more appropriate to conduct focus groups or semi-structured interviews. You will need to justify your choice of methods when you write up your findings, so make sure there is a good reason!

Finding, selecting and evaluating sources
You will probably have a suggested reading list to start you off, but you will mostly be expected to find and select resources yourself. Using your institution's library and a variety of online tools, you will find a range of materials on your topic. It's important to consider whether the materials you find are appropriate for the task: are they academically authoritative, for instance, or up-to-date?

How is this different from previous study?
* You will have access to a much larger store of materials - not just books but also journal articles and reports. So you will need to learn to be selective.
* Many of the materials in your university library will have been written for a reader who is working at a much higher academic level than 1st year undergraduate - so you shouldn't expect to be able to understand everything you read.
* You will get better marks if you broaden your reading to include materials that are not on your reading list. But they must be appropriate for academic study and relevant to your topic - so you need to learn to evaluate materials for yourself.

How to use your reading list… Unless you are told that a particular text is essential reading, the reading list is not compulsory. It is there for you to select texts from and as a guide to give you an idea of where to start. In fact, the books on your reading list may be in great demand. If everything on your reading list is out on loan, you will be expected to find additional appropriate reading for yourself.

Bibliographies and databases… These can be a good way to find more reading. If you already have one text on the topic, look at the bibliography to find more texts that might be useful. Your library will also provide access to paper indexes and online catalogues and databases that you can search to find more materials.
E-resources… Many books and most journal articles are now available online. You usually get access to these through your library, perhaps directly from their catalogue, or by using a password on an external website. You may also find some websites useful, especially if you are looking for official statistics or research reports.

Evaluating websites… Websites can be inappropriate as sources for academic work. Always check who has responsibility for the website: if it is a university, or government, or a respected organisation, for instance, it is appropriate. Anyone can set up a website and start publishing information without there being any checks as to whether it is true, so be very cautious. And be wary of Wikipedia! The page you’re reading could have been written by an expert, or by the student in the room next to you - you’ll never know!

Supersize your reading!

It’s not called ‘reading for a degree’ for nothing! You will almost certainly be doing a lot of reading in your time in higher education, so knowing how to get the most from it is a key practice to develop.

How is this different from previous study?

* You are less likely to be told which pages to read in any recommended book - you will have to use the index and contents pages to work that out for yourself.

* If you’ve been told to read with a pen in your hand, now’s the time to put it down. You need to use your reading to develop your own overview and general understanding. Having a pen in your hand makes you more likely to focus on specifics rather than what they are telling you overall.

* You will probably need to read a larger number of texts than you are used to - but you won’t have anyone telling you when to stop! So you have to learn how to have the confidence to stop reading and start writing.

Reading actively… You are more likely to be able to concentrate, and to get something useful out of what you read if you think about your goals before you start. What are you hoping to find out from your reading? What questions do you need answers to? What are you comparing this to? (Another text? Something your tutor has said? Your own ideas?)

Being selective… Unless you are studying a particular text in detail, you will probably not be expected to read a whole book. If you have thought about your reading goals, you can use tools like the contents page and index to find which parts of the text are interesting to you. If you have no index or contents page, skim read until you find something, then read that closely.

How to read a report… If you are reading a scientific or technical report, remember that you are unlikely to need to read it all. Read the abstract first to get an overview; then the introduction and the discussion sections, and the conclusions if they are not in the abstract. Only read the methods and findings if you need to talk about them in detail.

Making notes… You may be used to writing notes in the margins of your texts, but this isn't always the best way to do it in higher education; you will have a lot more texts to read and compare and it can be difficult to find what you've noted. Write notes on separate sheets, and by hand rather than on the computer if possible (lessens the chance of you accidentally cutting and pasting someone else's words), but only pick up your pen when there is something worth noting. And ALWAYS note bibliographic details when you write your notes.

Thinking critically

Critical thinking is a phrase you will hear often in higher education study. It does not mean criticise as in ‘find all the bad things about something’. Rather it means that you should always question what you have learnt, test it to see if it is valid and consider how it can be used in a wider context to say something meaningful about your topic. That doesn't just apply to what you have learnt from your own reading and research, but also from your tutors.

How is this different from previous study?

* You may have been asked to 'compare and contrast' different views. You will need to build on
this to incorporate a broader selection of views, and set them in context.
* You may have been asked to incorporate critical thinking into written work, but now you need to extend that to lecture notes and evaluating texts as being suitable for research.
* If you have been studying in a science discipline, you will now be expected to think critically about your own methods and results as well as other people’s research.

Be sceptical!... Get into the habit of not accepting information without considering why you are happy to accept it. That might be very quick, for instance, ‘because it comes from a source I am sure is authoritative and objective’. Or it might need more thought: 'It's not what I expected to find. But there is persuasive evidence, I've done some further reading and I haven't found anything that contradicts it.' Remember that whoever reads your work will be sceptical too - so make sure you have shown that your research is careful and rigorous by correct referencing or (for primary research) thorough justification of your choice of methodology.

Evaluate and assess... Remember that even scholarly work is not wholly objective. Scholars choose different theoretical frameworks to interpret and measure ideas. They may be writing to convey a particular message, or from a different cultural perspective. Or they may be using a sample that cannot be generalised from, or straightforwardly compared to the sample you are using. Don't just think about what has been written - consider why, and how it works.

Keep asking why... Remember when you were five years old and the annoying kid in your class was giving your teacher a hard time by constantly asking "why?" You need to become that annoying kid now - every time you find yourself making an assumption, ask yourself ‘why?’ Then, when you have the answer, ask ‘why?’ to that as well. Every time you do this, you have to consider and justify your reasoning - that's what critical thinking is about.

Writing academically
You'll be aware that you need to develop your academic writing for higher education - but how? Will you need to use a lot of long words and complicated sentences? Will you be expected to include some original idea that no-one else has ever written about to get good marks?

Actually neither of these are what good academic writing is about. Rather you will need to be able to communicate complicated ideas clearly, know how to support the things you say with evidence, and explain your thinking.

The sections below will help you to understand what we mean at university by academic writing. There are also exercises you can try to practise the skills you will need. These are in Word documents so you can fill in your answers without printing them off if you prefer.

Communicate your ideas clearly
In higher education, you are going to be asked to think about, explain and discuss a complex range of ideas and arguments. You may be bringing together ideas from a number of different scholars that you have read, for instance: or showing what the results of your own primary research mean in the context of a particular problem. In either case, it's important to write clearly so that your reader can be certain that they understand what you're saying, and that you understand what you're writing about.

How is this different from previous study?
* The ideas you're expressing will be more complex than those you have been used to working with, so you may need to spend more time thinking about what you want to say before you start writing.
* You may need to use specialist terms - if you do, it will be important that you understand what they mean and use them appropriately.
* You will need to be more careful and rigorous in your writing: to make sure that your words and phrases convey exactly what you mean to say.
* You will have longer assignments and being accurate will be more important, so you'll need to give yourself plenty of time for proof-reading.
Avoid long, complex sentences... You're less likely to lose track of what you are trying to say if you write in shorter sentences. If you need to link a number of ideas together in a sentence, make sure you separate them with appropriate punctuation: commas, semi-colons, colons and parentheses. More on how to use punctuation.

Longer words don't make your writing more academic... A good piece of advice is to 'write to express, not to impress'. You are looking for the words that will best communicate your ideas. Sometimes these will be long complicated words and sometimes they will be shorter. What you need is the most appropriate words for the job they have to do.

Tip: How would you know if you were using specialist terms correctly? Find a good source of definitions for specialist terms in your subject discipline: this might be a dictionary or encyclopaedia of your topic, or an introductory textbook.

Give your reader signposts... If you tell your reader what you're going to say, they will know what to look out for. Include a few sentences in your introduction on how you are going to answer the question: something like, "This essay will discuss the proposition that Brown's thesis is flawed. The proposition will be examined by first considering x, then looking at y, and finally z. Conclusions will then be drawn about the validity of Brown's thesis." Then start each of your sections with a topic sentence (or sub-heading, in a report) that shows what it is you are going to be discussing.

Watch out for informality and vagueness... You are trying to reduce any possibility of your reader misunderstanding what you are trying to say, so aim to avoid the kind of language that might be interpreted differently by different readers. More on writing formally.

Structuring your work

Structuring your work carefully is another strategy you can use to make your writing clear to your reader. The first step is selecting the information to include in your writing that will make the best argument or discussion. It isn't usually possible to write about everything you will discover about the topic in your research, so choose a few things to discuss in detail that will demonstrate your understanding. You are aiming to show your reader that you can use what you've learned to make a meaningful statement - not that you have read every book in the library!

How is this different from previous study?

* You may have been used to using simple structural frameworks like 'compare and contrast', or 'argument and counter-argument'. These can be limiting - better to consider using a thematical structure where a selection of arguments for and against, or contrasting examples are contained within a single section on one aspect of the topic (see the spidergram below for an example).
* You'll be writing much longer assignments so it'll be more important to plan. This makes sure you don't forget something significant and have ordered your information to 'tell the story' for the reader.

Structuring a report... If you are asked to write a report, you will probably be told which headings you should use to structure your writing. Then you will need to decide which pieces of your information go in which section. See below for more guidance on this.

Structuring an essay... If you are asked to write an essay, you will usually be expected to work out a structure for yourself. You will always need to include an introduction that sets up your discussion and a conclusion that draws your discussion together, but there are many different ways you might choose to structure the main body of your discussion. The important thing is to keep the structure simple (not more than three or four sections), and your discussion focused - remember you can't include everything! See below for more guidance on this.

Make a plan... It doesn't have to be very detailed, but it will help you to stay focused on the topic, and make sure you don't forget something important. There are various ways to plan an essay: pick one that suits you. More on planning an essay.

Check that you've answered the question... The most frequent complaint by markers is that the
student did not answer the question. When you proof read, check that you have shown how your arguments and information are relevant and are building an answer to the question. If you are writing a report, you may be told who the report is for (an imaginary client, for instance). This is part of the assignment brief: when you write, keep this reader in mind.

Using references as evidence and avoiding plagiarism

In higher education study, using references and citations is one of the most important practices, as it makes your work academically valid and shows how it fits into the web of academic knowledge. You will probably already be used to including references to and citations for the materials you have used when researching your assignments, and compiling a list of these as your bibliography. In higher education you will be expected to develop these practices.

* You will be using a wider range of materials which could include journal articles, websites, reports, government papers, laws and statutes and many more, all of which will need referencing.

* Demonstrating academic rigour will be much more important: correct referencing is a key part of this.

How is this different from previous study?

Learn the rules!... they sometimes seem petty, but showing that you are able to follow the rules of referencing carefully and meticulously is one of the ways you show that your work is academic. Find out which referencing style your department uses, and how they want you to use it for in-text citations and bibliographies.

Acknowledge every idea you got from someone else's work... not just direct quotes, but paraphrases, descriptions and references to (e.g. Brown's research on mice showed... (Brown, 2005).) If this makes your work look like a mass of references and nothing else, you probably need to include some more critical analysis!

Use references to support your arguments - not to replace them... if you include a direct quote, always discuss it and show how it helps to build your argument. Try to avoid long quotes (more than a sentence) unless you are really going to discuss every line. You will be marked for your own words, not other people's!

Avoid unintentional plagiarism... You may not mean to use someone else's work without acknowledgement, but the consequences can be the same as if you did (failing the assignment, or the module, or even the course). Practice good note-making - ALWAYS make a note of the details and page number of what you are reading next to your notes on it and mark up direct quotes carefully to distinguish them from your own ideas. If you have a brilliant quote or argument, but you don't know (and can't find out) where it came from to reference it, DON'T USE IT. It's not worth the risk.

Being original

It's confusing when you're told you need to be original in your thinking - but then you're told that you need more references to other people's work too. In higher education, being original is rarely about having a brilliant idea that no-one has ever had before. Rather it means that you will be expected to take different sources of information and think about how they fit (or don't fit) together, so that you can work out your own interpretation and understanding of the topic.

Always start from your own ideas... so that you are less likely to fall into the trap of uncritically believing the first scholar you read. Before you start doing detailed research, take what you know already about the topic, and use it to make an educated guess about the answer to the question or main message about the topic you are researching. Then test that idea against your reading or research.
Your conclusion is for summing up… not for adding speculative ideas with no evidence to support them. If you have a brilliant original idea, and can show how you worked it out and how it fits into the evidence you have, then include it in the main body of your work.

Don't worry!... your work will naturally be original, if you always think critically and have a bit of confidence in your own interpretations and evaluations. If you and your best friend both read the same books and articles, attended the same lectures, and wrote an answer to the same question, they would still both be different and original, provided you do your own thinking and don't uncritically believe other people's ideas.

Managing your studies

One consequence of being an independent learner is that you will have to take more responsibility for organising your studies: what and how you study is individual to every student, so no-one can organise that for you. For instance, you may find that you are timetabled for lab work or lectures every day from 9.00-17.00, and still have to find time for writing up lab reports and completing maths worksheets. Or you may have only a few hours of contact teaching a week, but be expected to do a lot of independent study that you have to organise yourself.

You will probably be used to making timetables and work schedules, and perhaps even setting up a filing system. As being organised will become much more important, it's a good time to check out the ideas in this section to see how managing your workload will be different, and if you could do these things even more effectively. These include exercises you can try to practise the skills you will need. These are in Word documents so you can fill in your answers without printing them off if you prefer.

Planning your time

You will be expected to make sure you have up-to-date information about your academic commitments, and have made sure that you can keep them. That includes lectures, seminars and other teaching sessions, meetings with tutors and assignment deadlines. It's a lot to organise, but if you get on top of it early, you'll have plenty of time for work and play.

How is this different from previous study?

* You're more likely to have a more complex set of commitments that you have to juggle
* You'll also need to spend more time on 'invisible' tasks like laundry and shopping
* You're less likely to have a similar timetable/work schedule to your friends
* You won't have teachers, tutors or parents reminding you to check your schedule

Here are some suggestions to help you plan your time at university.

Use your mobile, computer etc... You're probably used to making paper timetables and using a diary or wall planner, but e-tools like calendars on smartphones and Google, or even programs like Microsoft Outlook can also help in more interactive ways. You can set them to remind you of upcoming deadlines, or add links to resources, maps and contact details, for instance. They're also highly portable - though diaries and wall planners do have the advantage of not running out of battery power!

Tip: What tools are you going to use to help you plan your time? Diary? Wall planner? Phone? Online calendar? Start setting them up by entering term dates and anything you need to remember like important birthdays.

Spread your workload... It is very likely that you will find lots of deadlines for assignments all happening at the same time (usually the end of term). You will be expected to manage this workload yourself - no-one will accept it as an excuse if you don't get them all done. So decide on your own deadlines for starting and finishing work on your assignments, and spread the load.

Decide when you're going to study... You will be expected to build in time for your own independent study. It's easy to keep putting this off - which means that you spend a lot of time feeling guilty about not working, and not enough on getting the job done properly. Make a study timetable and decide when you are going to do reading, seminar preparation or work on
assignments. Then you can enjoy your free time without feeling as if you should be working!

Prioritise your tasks... Everyone does the things that they enjoy first - but the other things may be the ones that get you more credits, or need more time to complete well. Consider the best way to prioritise tasks to get everything done and achieve the greatest success. If you find you're persistently putting off starting a piece of work, talk to someone who can help.

Set achievable targets... It can be hard to keep yourself motivated, so set goals to work towards. It's better to have lots of small, achievable goals ("finish reading this chapter", "write my introduction", "check my references") than big ones ("write my report") that take a long time to achieve and are difficult to pace.

Getting organised
Organised students are happy students, because they are the ones who have the extra time to spend chatting, playing or relaxing, while the disorganised ones are still searching for that one important piece of paper they need. You will have a lot to keep track of when you're studying in higher education, and you will be expected to work out a way of doing it for yourself. Set up some simple systems early and give yourself lots of extra free time.

How is this different from previous study?
* You will need to keep on top on administrative paperwork, and perhaps things like bills, housing and employment contracts, as well as documents relating to study.
* Correct referencing and avoiding plagiarism can be the difference between passing and failing a course, so knowing where to find bibliographic details in your notes and building in extra time for thorough proof-reading is vital.
* You may get a lot of information at the beginning of your course that you don't have cause to think about again until the end of term - by which time it could be at the bottom of the 'filing' pile.

Keep yourself informed... There will be essential information you will need for your studies: for instance, when and where your classes are. Universities provide most of the information you'll need online now, usually general information through extensive websites and information that's more specific to you through Virtual Learning Environments (at the University of Reading, the VLE is called Blackboard). Before you start your course is a really good time to explore your university's website and see what information is available and where to find it.

Have simple filing systems... Box files are an easier option than ring folders for storing paper materials - have one for each module and one for general admin. If you need to carry notes around, use a document folder and empty it once a week. Set up folders for your computer files too, including your emails - avoids the dreaded full inbox and makes important information easier to find.

Set up a study space... If at all possible, it's good to establish a working space where everything you need is close at hand. If you have to use a temporary space, keep all your work essential together in something like a plastic crate, so you can quickly set up a working space.

Get e-organised... It's also a good idea to separate your study and leisure activities online when you need to avoid being distracted - better to turn off social media notifications when you're writing your essay, for instance. You will probably be able to 'bounce' your official university email to your personal email so that you can check all your emails in one place, but you might consider keeping them separate so you can focus on study in study time.

Put it into practice…

- Clear your email inbox, by setting up folders and deleting or filing everything in it. Then think about what folders you might need in the future for emails connected with university (e.g. admin, different subjects, clubs and societies etc).
- Get some box files and start setting them up by downloading any information you have on your course and filing it away. Stick important information like timetables and assignment deadlines inside the lid so you have instant access.
- Have a look at maps of campus and town to get orientated. Better still if you can, go for a walk round campus.

**Making the most of the time you have**

Planning how you use your time is going to be vital in your higher education studies, but using that time as efficiently as possible can give you an extra edge. Everyone has a different way of studying that suits them, so you will be expected to reflect for yourself on what works for you, and what you need to develop to make it work better.

* Get 'study-fit'... Just as if you were embarking on a fitness regime, now's a good time to consider your strengths and weaknesses in study practices. Do you need to improve your punctuation? Learn about referencing? Find a way to focus on study and avoid distractions? Have a look at our Study Guides for self-help guides on these topics and many more.

* Use your best times of day... Everyone has a time of day when they find it easier to concentrate; don't waste this time when you could be doing your most productive studying. For instance, you might be better first thing in the morning, but think that you ought to tidy your room before you start studying. By the time you start, your concentration is poorer and it takes longer to understand what you're reading. So save the tidying for your poor concentration time, and make the most of the good time.

**Spend time to save time...** Making essay plans and writing drafts might feel like using more time. Actually it will save you time in the long term, and make for a better assignment. Having a plan keeps you on track, so you don't waste time wondering what to write next, or going off-topic. Writing drafts gets your ideas down fluently, without having to constantly stop to check and make it perfect.

* Give yourself a break!... No-one does well if they try to study 24/7. For a start, your brain needs time to process the information that you're feeding into it, or it will struggle to make sense of it later. But you also need to stay fit, sleep well and have a social life; you may have other commitments that you need to fit in, like family or paid work.

* Put it into practice... - Do you know what time of day you are at your best? Reflect on how you work and when you find it easiest to concentrate - how will you make sure that you use this time appropriately and don't waste it

- The first thing you are likely to have to do in your studies at university is not write an essay or report, or do a lot of reading. The first thing is likely to be to take notes. So have a look at our guide on effective note-taking (link below) to make sure your notes are useful from the start.

- Set aside a little time to look at the webpages for current students on your university's website - it'll be more difficult to find time once you start your course. Familiarise yourself with the different people on campus who can help you with things like studies, finances, accommodation and just life generally - there will be plenty of them!

**What's next?**

You have reached the last page of this guide on moving up to higher education. If you have worked through all four areas, we hope you have found it helpful and interesting. You will find that some of what you have read will make more
sense once you have started your course, so why
not bookmark the guide to come back to later?

**Don't stop developing!**

To achieve your potential for academic success,
you will need to keep developing as you progress
through your higher education course. Most of
this will happen naturally as you build on your
knowledge and experience of study. However, it's
good to review your practices regularly and make
sure they are still working for you at the academic
level you have currently reached.

Most higher education institutions offer training for
students on different areas of study at different
stages of their academic careers. There might be
online courses that you work through, or
timetabled as part of your subject modules, or
offered centrally as workshops.

If you are a student at the University of Reading,
the Study Advice team offer seminars, guides and
video tutorials to help you develop your study
techniques and get the most out of your time at
university. Or we are always happy to see
students for an individual one-to-one advice
session to talk in more detail about your work -
what you'd like to be doing better, or faster, or
how to respond to comments from markers.

Good luck with your studies - and enjoy your time
in higher education!

This guide reproduces the text of our
LibGuide **New to University?** The online
guide has links to additional information and
can be found at:

https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/freshers

For tips and guidance on other academic
skills, see the Study Advice website at

www.reading.ac.uk/library/study-advice